

CHAPTER III
"LIVING-IN"—PERSONAL

PART TWO

"LIVING-IN"

"He has no freedom and no responsibility. He is politically and socially a child with rations instead of rights. Treated like a child, punished like a child, washed and combed like a child . . . forbidden to marry like a child. Such men dread freedom and responsibility as a weak man dreads a risk or a heavy burden."—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, preface to *John Bull's Other Island*.

Chapter III

' LIVING-IN '—PERSONAL

" LIVING-IN " goes back many years. It originated at the time when the apprentice lived with the family. I have before me the copy of one of those quaint indentures which conveyed the apprentice from his parents to his master.

" This Indenture Witnesseth that — of his own free will and also with the consent and approbation of his father doth put himself apprentice to John Banks General Draper etc., Arundel, in the County of Sussex, to learn his art and with him after the manner of an apprentice to serve from the 1st day of March 1898 until the first day of March 1902 unto the full end and term of four years from thence next following to be fully complete and ended during which term the said apprentice his Master faithfully shall serve his secrets keep his lawful commands everywhere gladly do he shall do no damage to his said Master nor see to be done of others but to his power shall tell or forthwith give warning to his said Master of the same he shall not waste the goods of his said Master nor lend them unlawfully to any he shall not contract matrimony within the said term nor play at cards or dice tables or any other unlawful games whereby his said Master may have any loss with his own goods or others during the said term without licence of his said Master neither buy nor sell he shall not haunt Taverns or Playhouses nor absent himself from his said Master's service day or night unlawfully but in all things as a faithful apprentice he shall behave himself towards his said Master and all his during the said term and the said John Banks in consideration of the true and faithful service to be performed by the said apprentice as aforesaid and covenant agreements here and after continued on the part and behalf of the said — to be observed and perform his said apprentice in the art of General Drapery etc., which he useth by the best means that he can shall teach and instruct

or cause to be taught and instructed and the said — the father doth hereby covenant and agree with the said John Banks to find the said apprentice with sufficient food lodgings wearing apparel and medical attendance and for the true performance of all and every the said covenants and agreements either of the said parties bindeth himself unto the other by these presents in Witness thereof the parties above named to these Indentures interchangeably have put their hands and seals the 1st day of March and in the sixty-first year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady



Brown (a shop assistant) gives Jones his card and asks him to "drop me a line."

Queen Victoria by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen Defender of the Faith and in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety-eight and the said John Banks doth hereby agree to pay the said apprentice 1st year two shillings 2nd year three shillings 3rd year four shillings 4th year five shillings."

Though dated 1898 that document smells of very ancient usage and links up the nineteenth century with all the centuries that have gone before. It is printed and written upon parchment and has affixed a 2s. 6d. stamp.

When the Truck Act of 1831 was passed (which insisted that the worker be paid his wages in the current coin of the realm and not in kind) shop assistants were not recognised as permanent wage earners and so were not included in the definition of trades to which the Truck Act applied.

Every apprentice reasonably expected to become his own master. Money was often bequeathed for that purpose. Thus we read: "John Haddon, draper, of Coventry, by his will dated 1518, bequeathed £100 to be distributed among the men of the drapers' fellowship in loans of £5 each to enable them to buy wool and cloth." I actually touched the fringe of this sort of bequest. For when I was out of my apprenticeship I received £5, as all the other apprentices did when their time was up, by the will of the late proprietor. I say I received it—part of it was taken from me as I will tell presently.

Literature has many illustrations of this boarding and lodging of the apprentices with the family. No one who has read *The Three Musketeers* will forget the pathetic case of Porthos, that big round jovial man who so loved good things to eat, having to endure sitting through dinner with the apprentices to the linen drapers, desperately trying to show he was enjoying the meagre scraps and sour wine they perforce enjoyed, in order to try and cajole from the linen-draper's wife the cost of his outfit for the wars.

At first in those days of highpads, footpads, and other spivs who ranged like wolves on the outskirts of all large towns, the tradesman lived above his shop and his appren-

tices with him. But a time came when a house for the employer was taken away from the business premises and he came into town on horseback, in a trap, or even in carriage and pair. The staff in the shop increased with the prosperity of the business, rooms over the shop no longer sufficed to house them all. So other premises were taken in a cheaper neighbourhood or buildings were erected specially to house or warehouse them. Thus came the “living-in” system: that system by which the employer paid his staff partly in current coin of the realm and partly in board and lodging. It became a condition of employment that he (or she) “lived in.” Men grew old “living-in.” They went from one berth to another carrying, so to speak, their home, their only home, a tin box, with them. Until at last, splay-footed, weary and worn, sucked dry, these old men of sorrows of the drapery trade went—who knows and who cared where they went?

“Living-in” became a condition of employment and because it was a condition of being employed at all it became subject to all manner of abuse. Shop labour was cheap and plentiful. Retail trade was expanding rapidly. Fortunes were being made rapidly. Advertisements appearing in the Irish and Welsh papers, the *Christian World*, etc., enticed thousands of young men to seek their fortunes in the bigger centres. In my time long queues formed up outside drapery establishments on Tuesdays and Fridays (engaging days), before 11 a.m. and after 5 p.m. I can see them now with myself among them. I have a photograph of myself taken at that time for the purpose of “cribbing” by post. It shows a clean-shaven, round, unsophisticated type of face with eyeglass on a black cord, with top hat, frock coat, umbrella. In that very long queue all of us were dressed like that. Not many with an unsophisticated type of face (I was to lose mine with time) and no other with eyeglasses and black cord, but certainly all with top hats, frock coats and umbrellas.

Maybe it was outside William Whiteley’s at 39, Westbourne Grove, that the queue would form. Eventually you would enter the presence of that remarkable man. I can see him now, short and stocky, slightly bow-legged, with a

rather large head, bald in front with white hair bushy at the top and back and with long white whiskers at the sides, otherwise clean shaven; eyes large but bloodshot rather badly at the lower lids; dressed in frock coat, polo collar and white tie. His formula when engaging was the same for all—



The Free Englishman

"Good morning, young man" (spoken as if through his nose), "I have vacancies in my linen, furnishing, oriental, dress and country order departments—supposing I was to engage you. We close each evening at 6.30 p.m. in the winter and 7 p.m. in the summer, with 2 p.m. on Saturdays. We ask for no references, we give no references, there is one moment's notice on either side. You will have good food, a beautiful bed to lie upon, there are no fines or deductions



His Indenture Witnesses
 of his own free will & also
 doth put himself Apprentice to John Banks

to learn his Art and to be bound for the term
 until the 1st day of March

unto the full End and Term of 3rd years
 which Term the said Apprentice his
 where gladly do he shall do no damage
 or forthwith give warning to his said
 nor lend them unlawfully to any he
 Dice Tables or any other unlawful
 during the said Term without Licence
 Playhouses nor absent himself from his
 faithful Apprentice he shall behave he



And the said John Banks to
 to be performed by the
 agreement here and a
 the said Edward Joseph

his said Apprentice in the Art of General Draper
 that he can shall teach and Instruct or cause to be taught

and the said Walter John Car
 the said John Banks to bind the said
 apparel & medical attendance

And for the true performance of all and every the said Conditions
 other by these Presents Indentures whereof the Parties above named
 the 1st day of March

Lady Queen Victoria by the grace of God of the united
 and in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred
 and the said John Banks doth freely agree to pay
 1st year two shillings and 6th year two shillings

The Amount of the Money or the Value of any other matter or thing given or agreed to be
 given with the Apprentice by way of Premium must be truly inserted in words at length
 otherwise the Indenture will be void and double such amount or value forfeited.

John Banks

That Edward Joseph Carn
with the consent and approbation of his father
John General Draper etc Wounded in the
of Sussex
of an Apprentice to serve from the 1st day of March 1898

Years from thence next following to be fully complete and ended. During
ter faithfully shall serve his ~~master~~ ^{parents} keep his lawful commands every
his said Master, nor see to be done of others but to his Power shall tell
ter of the same he shall not waste the Goods of his said Master
ll not contract Matrimony within the said Term nor play at Cards or
whereby his said Master may have any loss with his own goods or others
said Master shall neither buy nor sell he shall not haunt Taverns or
d Master service day or night unlawfully But in all things as a
Towards his said Master and all his during the said Term
consideration of the true and faithful service
d apprenticeship as aforesaid and covenant
continued on the part and behalf of
rn to be observed and perform

which he useth by the best means
instructed ~~feeding~~ ^{feeding} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~said~~ ^{said} ~~Apprentice~~ ^{Apprentice} ~~sufficient~~ ^{sufficient} ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~Drink~~ ^{Drink}
~~the~~ ^{the} ~~father~~ ^{father} ~~doth~~ ^{doth} ~~hereby~~ ^{hereby} ~~covenant~~ ^{covenant} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~agree~~ ^{agree} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~reference~~ ^{reference} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~sufficient~~ ^{sufficient} ~~food~~ ^{food} ~~lodgings~~ ^{lodgings} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~dwelling~~ ^{dwelling}
and Agreements either of the said Parties bindeth himself unto the
to their Antecessors interchangeably here for their Heirs and Heirs
and in the sixty-first Year of the Reign of our Sovereign
Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland QUEEN Defender of the Faith
and ninth - eight
said apprenticeship
a foreshallings 4th year five shillings

Walter John

Edward Joseph Carn

of any kind whatsoever. What is the lowest possible salary you will take ? ”

There is a story about one applicant asking for £40 a year. Whiteley said : “ I cannot afford to pay you that.” So the anxious candidate said : “ I will take £30 sir ! ” Said Whiteley : “ Young man, I asked you for the lowest possible salary ; good morning ! ”

End of the season sacking was common throughout the drapery trade and the flood of unemployment, with the terror involved, kept shop workers in that state of servility considered necessary to discipline them. What it certainly did do was to keep wages low. And this could not be remedied as long as “ living-in ” remained as the condition of employment. The kind of food, both as regards quantity and quality, was in the hands of the employer ; the kind of lodging, again, was in his hands. Its value depended entirely upon the whim of the employer or his sense of what was right and proper. Was there not an employer, Rendell of Bradford, who told the Truck Committee he did not believe in “ hot water ” for his staff to wash in, let alone to bath in ?

It was bad enough when the employer in person did the supervising, but when he placed the responsibility in the hands of a deputy who might be given so much per head to run the whole place, then the likelihood of abuses was increased. Apart from these abuses there were vital principles involved. Assistants were never free from their business. They were just as likely to be sacked for what they did after working hours as what they did in working hours. They had to keep to regulations, morning, noon and night. They led institutional lives, some of them all their lives. They could not vote and in the nature of things they could not marry. They were helots in their native land.

I was orphaned at nine years of age and brought up in the Warehousemen, Clerks and Drapers’ School. It was a school entirely supported by the wholesale and retail drapery trade. It was a good school ; it is now a magnificent and excellent school, in every sense a credit to, and worthy of, the great drapery trade. I left that clean and wholesome place on the top of Russell Hill, Purley, Surrey, in

1894 to be hawked round the City of London. " Who wants a nice fat apprentice ? " A look at me was enough. None did apparently, for they made several attempts at getting rid of me. At last I was landed at Samuel Lewis's, The Holborn Silk Market, Farringdon House, Holborn Bars.

The interview was with a tubby, oily, Pecksniffian sort of person, who at first glance could be taken for the very personification of business benevolence—drapery business benevolence. He patted me on the head and said : " So, my boy, you want to be a draper do you ? Well, it is a good trade. You can get on. The proprietor of this business came to London from Wales thirty years ago to seek his fortune. His old mother gave him sixpence and three buns. He spent the sixpence, he ate one of the buns and kept the others until he had made his fortune. And there," said he, pointing to some things in two frames hanging on the wall, " there are the buns to prove it." I was thrilled, duly impressed and, full of awe, said, " Yes sir ! "

That night I found myself along with half-a-dozen other young shavers in a small dirty room with six beds packed very close together, covered with coarse red and black counterpanes. The ceiling was very low and could be reached easily by stretching our young arms. Both walls and ceilings were bare, grimy, and splotched. The two windows, being curtained with dirt, needed no other obscuring. The naked gas jet had a wire cage over it. The boys undressed or dressed sitting or standing on their beds—there was so little room otherwise. But there was no bed for me ; I had been overlooked. The steward with one eye, who was one of the porters, said I must sleep with one of the others. I refused. I had never done that before. He brought up from somewhere a blanket and a pillow. I lay down with them on the floor between two of those crowded beds. The gas was turned out at the main at 11.15. One of the boys lighted a piece of candle and they hunted for bugs on the wall, cracking them with slipper heels. They stuffed cracks in the wall with soap. When standing about and above me they lifted up their night-shirts and asked will this pass, will this pass, I thought

my sensitive heart would break. I sobbed through that dismal night.

H. G. Wells told me how, after two years of "living-in," he ran home to his mother. I could not run home; I was an orphan. But I got used to it. What cannot be cured must be endured.

The late proprietor's son and daughter were not of age, so the business was in charge of three persons—one in the counting house, who engaged me; one I was now to be placed under, who was buyer of the silks; and the other, a buyer of the dresses (to the uninitiated, dress material by the yard), who looked exactly like a stage farmer, with fringe whiskers, red handkerchief, square jacket with poacher's pocket, and a flat black felt hat like a clergyman's—black pats they call them in Wales. These three were called "the firm." My buyer—I will call him Tommy Peters—had white hair and a long white beard. What sort of collar or tie he had on I could not tell you. I never saw them; I don't believe anyone else did. He had a habit of putting his gold-rimmed eyeglasses sideways but upright in his mouth, twiddling them to and fro. He was a bully, swore like a trooper, and knew the silk trade from A to Z.

I was cashier in the desk in the glass-roofed silk department. There were twenty men in that department; four of them were old men who slept out but had their meals in. They were paid 20s. a week with "spiffs." The "spiffs" in the silks were very good. Those who had good "connections," as the regular customers were called, did very well for those days. You see, a dress length of silk ran to 13 yards; a blouse length 6 yards. "Spiffs" varied from a farthing to as much as twopence a yard. When a whole family of daughters was brought in to be fitted out with silk for dresses one had a "good line," as we used to say. The premiums, entered up on a small slip of paper called a premium card (charged to the assistant at twopence each), had to be signed for by the buyer or shop walker when he signed the customer's bill at the end of the sale transaction. On one occasion, when I had become a salesman behind the counter, and was serving a stage connection of mine, she asked if the material was all silk. Now that material was

1s. 7½*d.* per yard (with a penny a yard on it), and very gaudy; quite good for stage wear, but I don't believe it contained one thread of silk—so I ventured to say: "No, it is not *all* silk, madam; it contains some jute." Tommy, passing by, heard me and, handling the material in that fond and caressing way one handled silk, said: "He don't know nothing at all about it ma'am; it is silk, all silk, bee-u-tiful silk." She had 13 yards. I took up my premium card to be signed for 1s. 1*d.* Said Tommy, "I think I've earned that premium, mister"; and he tore the card to pieces, so I lost all that was on it. And then he went on: "Damn your eyes, mister, if you could talk to the customers as you talk to the fellers behind the counter you'd make a damn fine salesman, mister." The bully! The drapery trade of those days was full of them.

Well, I was cashier. I got 2s. 6*d.* a week with 7½*d.* deductions. The deductions were made up as follows:

Early Closing Association	..	..	2 <i>d.</i>
Boot cleaning	..	..	2 <i>d.</i>
Kitchen	..	..	2 <i>d.</i>
Library	..	..	1½ <i>d.</i>
			<hr/>
			7½ <i>d.</i>

My boots were never cleaned. The kitchen charge was for having extras cooked, which I bought and paid for myself. These additions were necessary, for all I got for breakfast and tea was bread and butter, and tea from the urn. The waiters would make a useful sum "on the side" by selling to the staff bacon and eggs and other luxuries. I found afterwards this was a common practice in nearly all "living-in" places. As for the library, the staff had no control over that, which was in the hands of the firm and they gave no accounting. There were a few old books in the bookcase—Smiles's *Self-Help*, and so on—never any additions—and some newspapers. Well, the deductions left me with 1s. 10½*d.* per week, and out of that I had to make up "till" deficiencies, which at the start were too frequent. So I was not well off—but I garnered an income

elsewhere. The whole trade believed in discipline and the fear of the sack not being thought sufficient, other penalties were brought into play. There were books of rules and fines for breaking each of them. I will amplify these later on. But at Holborn Bars the fines went to pay the dissecting clerks in the counting-house, those who had to separate the items on each bill to the credit of the respective departments. There were fines for putting a wrong date on the duplicate ; for putting the wrong department against each item of sale ; for not putting on the amount tendered by customer ; for wrong addition ; for illegibility, etc. So the counter-men used to give me sixpence a week each to look over the duplicates and hand back those needing correction. The clerks, their income dwindling, resented such sudden perfection by the sales staff in making out bills. There were two staff dining-rooms. In one, besides a bare table, there was a sort of shelf fixed against the walls round the room. This, too, was bare. There were only stools to sit upon, so that at dinner-time the room was packed. The other room contrived a double debt to pay—a sitting-room by night, a dining-room by day. In it were heavy yellow wooden chairs. The nearly empty bookcase, desperately trying to look like a library, stood despondently in a corner.

Looking back on all this, I can't say that the food served at dinner was at all bad. For the mutton came from Wales (there is none better, I believe, in the whole world), and was delivered by rail in basketwork containers every Wednesday. But it was roughly, almost savagely served, and as savagely gulped by the ravenous assistants.

You see, they were allowed only 20 minutes for dinner and 15 minutes for tea—from bank to bank as the miners say—that is, from the time they left the counter to the time they got back. And at that, mind you, they were liable to be called down to serve customers—leaving their meal only partially consumed. The speaking-tube would whistle, and a voice say : " Two wanted for the dresses " ; and down two dress men would have to go. The speaking-tube was literally a tube, running from the shop up the walls to the dining-room, stuffed with a whistle at each end. The

speaker would remove his whistle and blow, and at the other end the listener had to be careful or he might get a puff in the ear. There were fines for not being back on time. For the apprentices who were late (boys will be boys the world over) there was the rasping tongue of Tommy who, walking after you, would say: "Damn your eyes, mister! Been on 'oliday, or did you 'ave a kipper for your tea, mister."

Tommy had a remarkable sense of humour. Once an assistant not long up from Wales asked for the following day off. "A day orf, mister, what do you want a day orf for, mister?" "I want to see the 'Derby,' sir!" "See the 'Derby,' do you, mister? Certainly, mister, you can have the day orf. You'll want something to spend, mister, so go to the counting-house and get your money; and you'll want something to stand on, so take your blooming box with you, mister."

Supper was bread and cheese and beer, served when the shop shut at 7 p.m. Then we came down and did the clearing up; folding up the silks, and hooking up the wrappers over the shelves and display tables. No department was allowed to go until all had been cleared. The "silks" was always the last because of its enormous display. We were lucky to be out by 8 p.m.; often it was 9. The cashier's job was to sprinkle the floor lightly with water and sweep without causing a dust—and without causing mud, either, a more ticklish job than it sounds. When sweeping I still keep the broom close to the floor without jerking it upwards, because that causes the dust. Once Tommy crawled up on me. "Less dust there, mister; don't you know how to sweep yet, you blasted German you?" "I'm not a German." "Oh! What are you then, mister?" "I was born in this country." With withering contempt he replied, "You—blooming—half-breed!"

But Tommy had his moments. The second Christmas I was there the custom of closing over a longer period than the Christmas Day and Boxing Day came into practice, so all the staff were going away to friends or relations for the festivities. Tommy came to me in the cash desk.

WASHING DAY!



"Where are you going to for the 'olidays, mister?"
 "Here, sir!" "Stopping here are you, mister? Why's that, mister?" "Got nowhere else to go, sir." "Poor little beggar! 'Ere, mister"—handing me 5s.—"and don't tell anyone I give it you, mister!"

Poor old Tommy. He was a creation of his day and generation. At last he died in Charterhouse as one of the brethren there. He and his school left a terrific task for us young folk to do, but they gave us the guts and, without intention, created in us the will to do the job.

But the day of the junior staff was not over when the shop was shut and the staff had gone to the "living-in" quarters. All had to take it in turns to do door duty. At the top of the stairs in Castle Street, leading to some of the sleeping quarters, was the lavatory. There was no bath anywhere on the premises. One could get a bath for 1s. at a hairdressers up the road. If you had no shilling you kept unbathed. Mostly you kept unbathed. Unless you lived at Castle Street. Then you could use the lavatory, for it had a zinc floor and a row of six basins let into a zinc shelf. So with your hands, or some vessel or other—whatever was handy—you could swill yourself down with cold water. There never was hot water, summer or winter. That lavatory was open to the gaze of the street, and many a small group of the fair and frail would watch from below the almost alfresco ablutions of some strapping hairy son of Gwalia.

Round about Castle Street were the abiding places of many of the frail and not so fair. Occasionally the police made raids. Then there were minor riots, police whistles going—scraps! Out would come truncheons, blood would flow, helmets were scattered on the roadway and police as well as their objectives lying about wounded or unconscious. We would stand or sit in the doorway whilst the shemozzle went on. But so solicitous were the firm about the moral welfare of the apprentices that they were not otherwise allowed off the premises at all at night, except on Saturdays, when they had to be in at 9 p.m. This so-called moral safeguard was to be one of the defences put up by employers of the "living-in" system, when we subjected it to continuous attack.

But, of course, you could not keep young people immured like that. We got out in various ways. Some of the older apprentices who had the money would seek adventure with prostitutes, and would come back and tell the rest all about it. Some caught disease in that way, and we would hear all about that, too.

Next morning there would be "squadding" at 7.30. Hurriedly the youngsters would stuff their nightshirts into their trousers, slip on a jacket and rush across a narrow

swaying bridge, flung in the open air above the glass roof of the silk department connecting the sleeping quarters of the apprentices with the shop. We were fined if we were late. “Squadding” consisted of dusting, getting down wrappers, folding them, and putting them away, getting up paper and string and placing them; then to breakfast; after which we washed and dressed and were down at the desk or wherever it was, by 8.30 a.m.

On Sundays bedrooms had to be vacated by 10 a.m.; then they were locked up, and no one could get into them until 9 p.m. at night, when the door leading to them was unlocked.

One Sunday I attended a Hyde Park demonstration for an eight-hour day.

Eight hours' work and eight hours' play,
Eight hours' sleep and eight bob a day,

was the current jingle for thousands of Trade Union demonstrators who thronged the Park, along with bands and flying banners. But it came on to rain. I got wet through. I got in a horse bus at Marble Arch, but the leaking bus roof dripped more water upon my already soaking clothes.

Back in quarters I could not get into the bedroom to change my clothes. The door was locked and there was no one to open it. I had to sit in those clothes until 9 p.m. I contracted rheumatic fever. A week later it was Bank Holiday. The doctor had given me medicine and, of course, some opening pills. I lay alone in the bedroom with six beds in it, which led out of a larger room with eight beds in it, from which opened the W.C., zinc floor, and wash basins. I wanted to go to the W.C., but I could not move. I shouted. But no one was about.

At last, perspiring profusely, I crawled out of bed. In agony, slowly I crept across those two floors. Slowly I slithered across that zinc floor and relieved myself. But I was spent. I lay there literally unable to move. At last a porter came, wondering if I needed anything. He picked me up and carried me to my bed—“Poor little beggar,” sounded from the depths of his pity.

I was sent to the Royal Free Hospital in Gray's Inn Road,

and after ten weeks came back to Holborn Bars. It was in respect to that sojourn in the hospital the "oily one" sent for me after I had received my £5 when out of my time. Said he, seated on a high stool at a high desk in the counting-house: "Are you honest?" I was taken aback. I was not sure—for there were things . . . "I think so, sir!" "Then, why don't you pay for those eggs we sent you when you were in the hospital!"

Now, in case you think what I have written shows a life of unmitigated gloom let me assure you that we, like young folk of all times in all climes, made our own fun. I have before me now the syllabus of "The Farringdon House Mutual Improvement Society" for seasons 1898-99. There were debates, essays, chess and draft tournaments, socials, etc., each week from November to April, finishing up with the annual dinner, when staff and firm met as if they had never seen one another before, and said nice things about one another which nobody really believed.

Why have I gone into so much detail about that phase of personal experience? It is because I so want to leave with you a picture of the realities of "living-in" which a mere catalogue of abuses cannot possibly give. Having that picture before you, you will understand better the revelations of the *Daily Chronicle* and the "Departmental Committee on the Truck Acts," from which I am now going to quote.

Chapter IV

“LIVING-IN”—IMPERSONAL

IN the year 1898 there appeared each week in the *Daily Chronicle* a series of articles called “Life in the Shop.” They were an exposure of the “Living-in System,” and were written by the Industrial Correspondent, and based largely upon material which had been collected by Miss Margaret Bondfield.

Miss Bondfield was apprenticed to the drapery, and was still employed in the trade when she made contact with the Women’s Industrial Council. The Council induced her to continue employment in the trade, but for short periods in a number of houses, during which time she was to note down all that went on, conditions under which the staffs worked, and so on. It was an under-cover operation of the greatest importance to the future of shop life. I wish to take this opportunity to pay a very belated, but nevertheless heartfelt tribute to a piece of fine public-spirited work performed by a very noble woman, who was afterwards to become the first woman in the history of this country to be a Cabinet Minister of His Majesty’s Government.

To say the articles were a bombshell to the drapery trade is to put it mildly. I was just out of my apprenticeship at the time, and I can recall vividly how eagerly we looked forward each week to those exposures. We sent in to the *Chronicle* pieces of information from our experience, and I know assistants from other houses did the same, so that they had at their disposal much material to supplement that furnished by Miss Bondfield.

My quotations must be severely curtailed to what is germane to the case. The Commissioner says: “The assistants in the majority of cases have no homes and no outlook. They live a sort of institution life, subject to a code of laws and sumptuary regulations, eat what is given to them in hasty mealtimes from which they are liable to be called away,

sleep in the institution dormitory, are subject to dismissal from work and lodging at a moment's notice."

Now here is a point to note. When you left, you lost your "home," such as it was, as well as your job. Before looking for a new job you looked for a lodging. Can you appreciate the anxiety of the girl who could not know how and where to look for a place to sleep that first night she was sacked, with little in her pocket after settling all her bills?

Says the Commissioner: "The young men who 'live-in' have no votes, and I have never heard they are ardent politicians."

Perhaps I had better clear up that point about voting right away. In 1897, 170 shop assistants employed at Maples, in Tottenham Court Road, were struck off the register of voters. In 1912 assistants "living-in" were in Dublin allowed a vote by the revising barrister, which, on appeal, was cancelled because their "living-in" quarters were a sleeping place and not a home.

At the Truck Committee in 1907, Mr. W. A. Sergeant, the immaculate managing director of Peter Robinson's, didn't think much of the vote anyway. This is what he said:

"In the case of young men of between 21 and 25—unmarried—have they the franchise?" "No, I think not. I believe that a man occupying a single room can have the lodger vote."

"That is just the difficulty, because in the way you have explained probably there may be two or three of them together in one room?" "Yes, and then they would not get it; but that is not much because we ourselves as directors have no vote."

The Industrial Commissioner went over a great establishment in South London. There is a long, detailed account of the visit. "Everything in this house bore traces of care and thoughtfulness, and the hours were good. But it was still an institution, and no amount of kindness on the part of the firm could turn it into a home. There was the usual rule that no pictures must be hung on the bedroom walls, and there were the usual three or four people to a room, and there was a notice on the stairs, 'No needlework

to be done in the bedrooms.' The home-feeling and freedom were not and could not be there. . . ." "The assistant who marries does so at his peril and keeps it secret. He visits his wife once a week, and spends the rest of the time in



A Dublin firm of drapers have dismissed an assistant after sixteen years' service for getting married; and in Yorkshire an assistant was refused a reference on leaving the employment of a tradesman who had several marriageable daughters

barracks. If the secret leaks out he is discharged. These secret marriages are by no means uncommon. Only this week I was talking to a man who had lived the two lives whilst employed in a great West End house. There were others in the same shop whose secret had leaked out amongst

the assistants. One of these men who had presumed to defy the regulations of the trade heard a rumour that the firm suspected him. He left at once, hoping he might be in time to avoid getting his reference spoiled. The other day the shop-walker at an Islington firm was discharged for marrying without leave."

The reason for the regulation is not far to seek. If the marriage is consented to by the firm there is a bed vacant. And the very careful draper, like Nature abhors a vacuum.

Mr. W. A. Sergeant (and I like to quote him because he not only was speaking for the West End firms at the Truck Inquiry, but in himself was the very doyen of all the drapery trade) was tall, handsome, beautifully dressed in a closely buttoned frock-coat, with a beguiling guardsman's moustache, a very splendid affair. When he spoke his speech was rounded and had an equivalent dignity which however was never as wise as it sounded and as he looked. At the Truck Committee he answered some questions on this subject of marriage. He had no objection to the employees getting married if they were making sufficient money. "I would rather they go elsewhere and get married; we do not want people in our employ like that." "That is a fair bit of Paternalism, is it not . . . ?" "It tends to make them—well, certainly not honest."

I now quote from the house rules of one of the largest shops in London, as given by the *Daily Chronicle* Industrial Commissioner, because it gives the tone and atmosphere of the kind of institution in which those who "lived-in" passed their lives:

"HOUSE RULES

"(1) The house door is closed at 11 p.m., Saturdays at 12 p.m. The gas will be turned out fifteen minutes later. Anyone having a light after that time will be discharged.

"(2) Assistants sleeping out without permission will be cautioned twice and discharged at the third offence.

"(6) Assistants are requested to see that their looking-glasses, drawers, and washstands are in good condition

when they first use them, as they will be held responsible for any damage afterwards.

"(7) Any article cracked or broken must be paid for at once.



John Bull: Are you going to put 'em on, my lad?

"(8) Bedrooms must be left tidy. No pictures, photos, etc., allowed to disfigure the walls. Anyone so doing will be charged with the repairs.

"(9) Brushes, bottles, etc., must not be left about the

room, but put away in the drawers. Anything so left will be considered as done with.

" (11) No assistant to enter any bedroom, but her own.

" (14) Any young lady being unwell must give her name and department to the housekeeper before 9 a.m., and must in all cases see the house doctor, who will be paid from the medical fund. Any objecting to this must leave the premises until recovered. No other doctor will be allowed to enter the house.

" (16) All apprentices and assistants are expected to subscribe 6*d.* to the medical fund per month, payable in advance.

" (21) Hot water can only be had on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings.

" (23) No flowers to be put in water glasses or bottles."

The heartlessness of that " No flowers " !

The Industrial Commissioner has much to say regarding food. I will quote only one or two paragraphs :

" The chief complaint, however, is not so much that the food is insufficient, as that it is coarse, monotonous, badly cooked, and badly served."

" In many houses the assistants know what the dinner will be to-morrow, to-morrow week, to-morrow month, to-morrow year."

" A disciplinary feature of some establishments—I have the names of three in my mind—must not be omitted. I mean the rule that nothing is to be left on the plate at dinner. An ex-assistant who occupies a good position in the City was discharged for leaving a second helping of pork. Another assistant was told he must pay a fine of 5*s.* for leaving some meat on his plate. He refused and was thereupon discharged. His brother, who had been three days as an apprentice in the house, was packed off with him. For both these cases I can vouch. In establishments of this class you dine as well as work under the shop-walker's eye."

The Commissioner also deals extensively with fines and deductions. Again I must quote a few extracts only :



*The draper-apprentice and his
employer.*

Above: The Author

Below: William Whiteley

This from a rule book of a North London draper: “ In many of the foregoing rules the fines are not stated. The amount to be inflicted will be left to the discretion of the shop-walkers and buyers according to the seriousness of the offence.”

I quote one or two rules regarding fines from another North London firm :

“ For exceeding time at meals and at time of washing hands, *2d.*

“ A customer must not be allowed to leave the shop unserved unless the shop-walker has been spoken to by the assistant, *6d.*

“ Assistants must introduce at least two articles to each customer, *2d.*

“ No matches or candles allowed in bedrooms, *6d.*”

Then there is that beautiful “ Rule No. 1 ” of a very high-class draper of Knightsbridge, who would not deign to any fine as low as tuppence. Their fines were *2s. 6d.* each, such as these I quote :

“ For being absent after permitted luncheon interval without leave, *2s. 6d.*

“ For using matches or lighting paper, *2s. 6d.* Second offence dismissal.

“ For sleeping out without obtaining a signed docket, *2s. 6d.* Second offence dismissal.

“ Every employee is expected, in addressing members of the firm, not to omit altogether the customary terms of respect. The proper use of the word ‘ Sir ’ is in no sense derogatory, as is proved by the usage of Parliament and the ordinary amenities of society. Anyone habitually disregarding this hint will not be allowed to remain in their employ.”

With this I must leave the *Daily Chronicle's* exposures of the “ Living-in ” System, except for one quotation which has reference to one of the eccentricities of William Whiteley. As I have already stated (or as he did for me) they had no fines. Instead there was each day a “ late list ” exhibited in a glass case. In this was given the name of the offender, with his department, his excuse, and Whiteley's comments scrawled thereon in red ink.

Name of Late-comer	Excuse	Remarks
Jones (Cabinets)	Unwell	No, he is not—lazy fellow
Smith (Silks)	Illness at home	Clear him out
Robinson (Drapery)	Relation ill	Fine excuse
Williams (Hosiery)	Lost the train	Yes, and will lose head, too, if not careful.

Did drapers actually defend the "Living-in" System on the ground that it protected the morals of their assistants? Yes, they did. The employer fatuously thought that the way to deal with this sex business in their employees was to bottle it up. Herd the males in one pen, the females in another, lock the doors on them if they are in, against them if they are out at 11 p.m. each night, and there you are. It was as simple as that. Well, there was no other safeguard unless you regard a list of rules and regulations as such. They could go where they willed on Saturday and Sunday nights, with no questions asked provided the formality of a signed book or docket was complied with.

When I left William Whiteley's one of the things he said when I told him one of the objects of the Union was the abolition of "living-in," was: "Young man, do you realise the grave moral responsibility that rests upon your shoulders in regard to that matter?" I let him have a straight reply as to what went on in his own establishment, and I could tell him plenty. But in retrospect I feel that the question hardly came well from a man who a few months later was shot dead in the dress department by an illegitimate son. . . .

In 1901 there was a debate on "living-in" at the Drapers' Chamber of Trade. Mr. Barber, from Fulham, said he was disturbed at the moral consequences, because if they lived out "they would wander aimlessly about the streets after the shop was closed."

Dr. John Clifford, at Westbourne Park Chapel the next

night, thundered at him : “ How does Mr. Barber know the young people are wandering—aimlessly ? Does Mr. Barber think he can make people moral by putting them behind doors and bolts ? We are temptable beings, and if we were all locked up in Wormwood Scrubs we should still be temptable beings. Who is this Mr. Barber ? He ought to be put in a monastery and kept there.”

A statement put before the Truck Committee by Miss L. A. E. Deane, one of H.M. Lady Inspectors of Factories, said : “ One of the main arguments put forward in favour of the ‘ living-in ’ system is that it is absolutely necessary for the protection of the women and the discouragement of immorality. That is the reason, almost invariably, given me for it by employers.”

In September, 1906, Mr. John Lawrie, the managing director of William Whiteley’s, in an interview in the *Kensington News*, said : “ On the ground of morality alone there can be no doubt about it being the best system.”

This moral argument had therefore to be met and combated, as indeed it was. In his evidence before the Truck Inquiry Committee in 1907, Mr. B. B. Evans, of Kilburn, then chairman of the executive committee of the Drapers’ Chamber of Trade, rather disposed of these moral considerations. To him it was mainly a matter of cost :

“ At all events may we be relieved from considering that there will be any dislocation of the finance of the business or any trouble in that sense ? Provided the assistants were prepared to accept in addition to their present salaries an amount equal to the prime cost to the employer of their ‘ living-in.’ . . .”

Let me deal with this “ prime cost ” question. Mr. Sergeant repeatedly said “ we give the assistants board or board and residence free of charge.” In this he was supported in 1899 by two judges in the Court of Appeal. An assistant named Lane, supported by the Union, who was getting £30 a year “ living-in,” sued his employer, A. H. Bull, of Reading, in lieu of notice, for that part of his wages represented by his food and his lodging. The employer contended that it did not form part of his wages, and in

this the judges upheld him on the grounds that assistants who live in were in the same position as domestic servants.

That part, the "prime cost", varied tremendously from house to house.

In December, 1906, at the West London Police Court, a caterer in the employ of John Barker and Co., Kensington, was charged with stealing "£3 and other moneys belonging to his late employers." The money taken formed part of what the caterer got from supplying the staff with extra food such as bacon, eggs, sausages, jam, etc. The defending solicitor said (and this was borne out by one of the firm's directors) that the caterer had a free hand in the matter of catering for the assistants "*so long as the cost did not exceed 9d. per head per day.*"

Four meals for ninepence was pretty cheap even for those days. So much for "prime cost." We were to do battle upon that very point later on.

In April, 1906, Mr. Herbert Gladstone, the Home Secretary, set up a committee to inquire into the operation of the Truck Acts, and under pressure from the Union the terms of reference were extended "further to consider and report whether the practice of shop assistants and certain classes of workpeople being lodged and boarded by their employers gives rise to abuses needing remedy by an extension of the Truck Acts or by other action of the State."

Briefly, the majority of the committee ultimately reported in favour of inspection, whilst the minority report, signed by Mrs. Tennant and Mr. Stephen Walsh, M.P., was in favour of its abolition. And that was that, for nothing was ever done about it. . . . But although no Government ever did anything, shop workers did. They rebelled and did what the committee had not the will to do—they ended it.

In June, 1907, Miss Margaret Bondfield, Mr. Frank Tilley, and I gave evidence before the committee on behalf of the Union. Our case and examination thereon occupies 42 pages of the "Minutes of Evidence." It would be some job to condense it, and I am not going to try. I propose only to extract one or two points that Miss Bondfield made, and then give a few extracts from the employers' side. For, be it understood, we gave the names of firms in our evidence,

much of which was from our own experience, but much more gathered from the membership all over the country. Our statements were sent out by the committee to each firm named, and they were asked to give rebutting evidence. Try and imagine the flutter in the “ living-in ” dovecots at that invitation. Imagine the refurbishing which went on all over the place. Baths were actually put in, in some places. There never was anything like it before, and the activity has been exceeded since only during World War I, when, in order to get out of paying excess profits tax, employers slapdashed the whitewash brush freely, replaced broken furniture, and indulged in much “ busyness ” in “ living-in ” quarters, to the wondrous delight of assistants.

But most firms named did not come forward to give rebutting evidence.

Miss Bondfield was asked :

“ Of course dismissal means ejection from the premises ? ”

“ Yes. We tested that in regard to the case of one of our people who was dismissed from a large house in Stratford . . . He had been forcibly ejected, his coat was torn from the collar right down to the tail in the violent struggle when they ejected him. . . . The advice of our solicitors was that the man had been legally ejected because his right to enter the building ceased on the expiry of his notice.”

She agreed that in the case of women “ those circumstances are of much more serious gravity.” In answer to a question, she said : “ The sitting-room of a business house is usually a most dreary place, very much like the waiting-room of a railway station.”

“ I take it that your contention is simply that the ‘ living-in ’ system is no moral check ? ” “ Exactly, and that everything that might conceivably happen to a girl in lodgings might equally happen to her ‘ living-in.’ ”

“ We roughly estimate that there would be between 400,000 and 450,000 affected by the ‘ living-in ’ system.”

The evidence of Mr. Ernest Debenham, of Debenham and Freebody, is so emphatically in favour of abolishing the system that I need make only a single quotation. They had

practically done away with it for eighteen months and "the staff is better for it generally."

Mr. Frederick Lang, of Cook, Son and Co., of St. Paul's Churchyard, speaking of the assistants sleeping at Stamford Street (a rather notorious street in the Borough of Southwark in those days) admitted, that "of the 410 assistants, only from 150 to 200 were in to supper at night."

"With regard to these young men who are not in your house to time at night, at what time would you fix it that they should be shut out?" "The door is shut at 11.15 p.m.; if they ring the bell at 12 o'clock it is not often we should open the door and let them in." He admitted "it was quite possible we should not know" if they were out.

The evidence given by Mr. Rendell, of Bradford, deserves to be read in full. This was the gentleman who, sued by the local sanitary inspector for having a carcase upon his premises unfit for human consumption, appealed and got off on the ground that the meat was not exposed for sale; it was there for the staff. Mr. Rendell chose to give his explanation of the case to the committee, and it occupies one-and-a-quarter columns.

"Now the committee has heard you because they wanted you to express the thing in your own way, but we would like to know whether you mean to represent that that carcase which was seized was fit for human food or unfit for it?" "It was fit for human food. It was for me personally. It was not for my assistants. *I should not give lamb to the assistants.*"

Here is another question and answer:

"Can you defend a system of boarding 30 young women from week-end to week-end with no bathroom for their accommodation at all? . . ." "We have never been asked for a bathroom."

He admits, under close questioning, that in the yard of the "living-in" quarters there were kept two cows, two horses, some fowls, a cat and a dog. Questioned as to whether "any disagreeable smell" arose, he at first says "No, not that I know of"—but afterwards admits—"No, not unless the wind happened to come that way, when there might be."

So, reluctantly, I must leave Mr. Rendell and the Truck Committee evidence, putting before you finally only one choice extract from the witness on behalf of the West End of London employers:

Mr. W. A. Sergeant was asked: “ The desire has been expressed to us that they should have . . . a life not of freedom merely, but of responsibility accompanied by seclusion ? ” “ It seems to me to be rather a new idea that seclusion would be a good thing. It may be in some cases ; there may be a few men who are fond of study, and they may not have the opportunities, but as a rule they are not that sort of men at all in our trade.”

Let me just add a piece of evidence taken on affidavit. It arose in connection with actions for libel brought against me by certain Merthyr drapers, which I will deal with later on. Because of the evidence we were ready to produce, Jones, of Manchester House, sought to withdraw from the action without paying our costs. He appealed to the Court of Appeal at the Royal Court of Justice on November 30th, 1912, and he did not succeed. He had to pay all our costs as a condition of withdrawing the action.

But in the course of the appeal his counsel quoted from our defence. Here is what he said: “ The bedrooms of the shop assistants in the plaintiff’s premises were kept in such a filthy condition that they are infested with fleas and bugs. In the summer of 1911 an attempt was made by the plaintiff’s servants to disinfect the beds by pouring paraffin on the mattresses, but the attempt was unsuccessful. There is only one water closet for the male assistants, and when the shop is closed this is inaccessible. The water closet for the female assistants gives an offensive smell, and so on. There is only one bathroom available for over twenty assistants, both men and women, and it is infested with rats. In some cases one bed only is provided for two male assistants, and in some cases one bed only for two female assistants.”

That then is my indictment of the “ Living-in ” System, which controlled the working and leisure life of 450,000 shop workers of the country. It stood as a barrier against the raising of wages and the development of culture.

So huge and awful seemed the task confronting them that at first the Union shrank from demanding its complete abolition. It called only for improvement. Thus Sir Charles Dilke's Bill, introduced on behalf of the Union in 1896, five years after the National Union's formation, stipulated that: "Every shop and every place where sleeping accommodation is provided for employees shall be kept in a cleanly state, and shall be ventilated in an efficient and suitable manner."

In 1898 for the first time a call was made for its total abolition. The articles in the *Daily Chronicle* had a profound effect, but shop workers were not yet ready for revolt, nor would they be ready for some years. They were to go on seeking improvements, even being prepared to hand in notices for that purpose, but not to abolish the system. The call for abolition was to grow with the years, and with the experience that "improving" was but trifling with the problem. All the same, the mere exposure of their wrongs at the capable hands of the *Chronicle's* Industrial Commissioner moved them deeply and gave them hope. The existing state of things was not after all inevitable. They did not, to quote *Kipps*, "have to crawl along a blooming drain pipe until we die."

But the system was centuries old and so had deep roots in custom and usage. Could it be uprooted? They doubted their strength and their employers loomed so powerfully large. The world and its responsibilities frightened them. There was that petition sent to Miss Bondfield upon the occasion of a meeting against the system in Queen's Hall, in February, 1908, asking that their votes might be considered as in favour of the continuance of the system, which caused Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who spoke at the meeting, to say: "The women who signed that document were women who had forgotten how to live." But Mr. Shaw was wrong—those girls had never known how to live.

There is no man-built institution, however, which cannot be levelled to Mother Earth again by men determined to bring it down. The French people, in revolt against hundreds of years of feudal privilege, hurled their bodies

against the Bastille, that symbol of all ancient wrong and domination over them, and brought it to the ground in spite of its embattled might; and now their children's children dance upon the site every 14th of July.

There were those who, hating the system with every fibre of their being, determined to hurl themselves at it. And hurl themselves at it they did.

THE POINT OF VIEW.



LADY SHOPPER to Friend, after an hour's inspection and no purchase:—"These places are so convenient for a rest, my dear, this hot weather."

THE ASSISTANT:—D—!!!

Chapter V

HOW "LIVING-IN" DIED OUT

WHEN I was apprenticed I was told by some friends : " If ever you are in doubt or trouble go and see Dr. Parker at the City Temple. Your father knew him and he will help you." So being very sore and hurt by some of my abominable experiences, I plucked up courage and saw the great preacher after service one Sunday morning. He advised me to pray. Somehow I didn't think it would do much good. Something else was needed to meet the situation, but what, I did not quite know. So, like the young man in the Scriptures, I departed sorrowful, not because I had great possessions, for I had none.

Later on a group of us were to meet Dr. Clifford on " living-in " problems. God bless that great and worthy man ; he knew what to do. He said to us : " Only you can win your own freedom ; you must work and agitate, and be prepared for hard words, hard knocks, and to sacrifice yourselves. I will help you. You can have my chapel for a meeting, and I will speak for you." We went on our way rejoicing. Rejoicing because of the hard knocks, hard words and sacrifice which he promised ? No, but because at last we saw a way, because the end of that way in the very far distance was glowing with the bright and shimmering rays of hope.

In June, 1901, we took Dr. Clifford's Westbourne Park Chapel. To advertise the meeting, on the prior Saturday afternoon, thirteen of us from William Whiteley's hired sandwich boards from the Church Army, off the Edgware Road, and pasted posters on them, and with boards both back and front we paraded dressed in top hats and frock coats along Oxford Street and the West End of London. I don't think we stopped to consider what risks we were running. We felt we were doing something right, to hurt and damage some evil thing we hated very much indeed.

Oh! yes, we knew what we were doing took courage, for we were frightfully shy over it and huddled together for comfort and failed to conform to the regulation that sandwichmen must keep 30 paces apart, for we should have felt very lonely 30 paces apart. Yes, it roused London all right, especially drapery London. When shortly afterwards I entered the employment of Peter Robinson's, assistants from all over the house came into the silk department to shake my hand.

We had cast lots for places, and it fell to Duncan Davies from the drapery department to head the procession. So, as was right, to him went the only reward, when a dear old lady stopped him and gave him threepence, saying: "Poor young man, I've seen hard times myself."

But the meeting! What a meeting! The Drapers' Chamber of Trade met the day previously and debated "living-in," and lots of them came to that meeting, including Mr. Barber. The chapel was packed, doors and passages crowded, hundreds turned away. We saw the employers there and singled them out for our attention, and when, stroking his long white beard, the great Dr. Clifford spoke, and, like Jupiter, hurled his thunderbolts at them, how our young hearts rejoiced and we were afraid no longer for, lo and behold, the fearsome idols we found had clay feet. Better for them had they stayed away from that meeting.

I date the beginning of the end of the "living-in" system in this country to that meeting. Some of those who "lived-in" flung their bodies at the fortress and it fell. It took a long time a-falling, but it fell.

What surprises one, going back over more than fifty years of reports, records and journals dealing with the struggle of shop workers from darkness into light, is its spasmodic nature. That is what makes it so dramatic—the long periods of inactivity or relaxation.

This struggle against "living-in" did not go forward as a railway track is laid piece by piece with mathematical precision. It was gauged by expediency. When you think about it you will see that it must be so, for the factors which govern it are so varied and beyond immediate control.

Press, pulpit, public, Parliament even may be stirred, as indeed they were, to try and remedy a great wrong—but the persons directly concerned—did they even so much as consider it a wrong?

After that meeting in Dr. Clifford's chapel, with Mr. Evan Griffiths, a drapery employer, in the chair, the opinion of the assistants could not be questioned. That meeting was organised by the shop assistants themselves. From that time forward there are protest meetings and demonstrations all over the country. Chapels are taken, addresses are given at adult schools and Pleasant Sunday Afternoons. It is a time, lasting for years, of ceaseless if fretful agitation.

But the day of attack had not yet come. One reads of exposure following exposure. Cardiff seethes with indignation because some young ladies are locked out on returning from a branch picnic; some thirteen assistants in Dublin strike because the housekeeper refuses them tea at 6 p.m. on a Sunday after a special church service; the assistants at the Co-op. in Treorchy are in revolt, not against the system, but because of the unsatisfactory food supplied; Croydon asks for action because two young ladies are locked out and a friendly policeman locks them in the railway station waiting-room all night.

Fires occurring in "living-in" premises fan the indignation. They are constantly reported, some of them fatal, and in all cases those who lived above the premises are rendered homeless, workless, propertyless, penniless. At Shrewsbury and Plymouth, hundreds are thrust desolate upon the world; lives are lost at Westminster Bridge Road, Bow Road, Blaenau Festiniog, Lower Camden Street, Dublin, and in Camborne, Cornwall. Later in London there was a spate of fatal fires, culminating in the fire at Barker's, of Kensington, in 1912, when five young ladies lost their lives. I will deal later on with this fire risk and the steps we took in regard thereto.

As I have previously remarked, all the first attempts were at mending and not ending the system. Early in 1905, the staff of Edwards and Co., of Swansea, called for the Union's intervention, and concessions were won. The same year

similar negotiations were effective with John Barnes and Co., Finchley Road, and R. O. Davies and Co., Porchester Road. In October, 1906, all but a strike occurred at Roper and Co., the Bon Marché, Kilburn, mostly among the girls. They secured closing at 2 p.m. on Saturday instead of 5 p.m.; abolition of all fines and deductions for library, doctor, and boot cleaning; provision of a "relish" occasionally for breakfast, and something extra for apprentices.

That same year brought news of a victory of another kind. One of those fires just referred to burned out the "living-in" quarters of Todd Burns and Co., of Dublin, so that whilst rebuilding took place the staff had perforce to live out. The premises being rebuilt and completed, "living-in" quarters and all, the staff were told to come back, but remembering the spider and the fly and being by now web-conscious they refused. Being out they stayed out. Free men do not willingly go back to serfdom.

Now begins the attack direct. In November, 1906, negotiations with Bevan and Lloyd (grocers), of Bridgend, South Wales, were opened to secure the complete abolition of "living-in" for their seven assistants. In February, 1907, they were successfully completed with 13s. per week in lieu of board and lodging. Gallant little Wales celebrated the very first victory for the Union on this important matter. In April of that year they recorded the Union's first strike. The town was Neath. The firm was J. D. Llewellyn and Son (grocers and confectioners). The strike was for an adequate sum in place of board and lodging.

The "prime cost" claim of the Drapers' Chamber of Trade was challenged and battled with. Actually the issue was, in the result, indecisive. The strike was one of those successful failures.

It will, at this juncture, help a better understanding of the narrative if I try to give the atmosphere of that wonderful year, 1907. In 1906 the Truck Committee was set up, and the publicity in regard thereto, with debates in the Commons, charged the scene with interest and expectation. "Living-in" had become news again, and daily papers, as well as trade Press, were liberal with reports. The Union

evidence was given in June, 1907. Employers' associations, very bothered, were debating what to do about it. In 1906 T. Spencer Jones, the editor of the *Shop Assistant*, commenced those articles on "The Moral Side of Living-in," which were to have so profound an influence on public opinion, especially in religious circles. Spencer Jones, like so many Welshmen, had a fine sensitive nature. Injustice, wherever found, hurt him as a personal wound. Again, like so many sons of Gwalia, he loved freedom passionately. He had a keen journalistic sense, and his writing had that vibrancy which earnestness alone can give. A grocer himself, he knew the conditions of "living-in" in Cardiff when he with a few others ran the *Shop Assistant* as a private venture. When he came to London to be the full-time editor of that weekly paper, he was brought closer in touch with the evil thing in its larger dimensions.

The editor of a paper learns a lot that ordinary people wot not of. People write to him confidential letters. Lord Northcliffe told me once that he always read his newspaper correspondence. So Jones got to know things, and sometimes he was moved so deeply that I have known him to be on the verge of emotional breakdown as he related some of the things brought to his notice, or which he had gone out to see, for he was taken to many of those dens where assistants were housed. When, therefore, the drapers of London, many of them Welshmen like himself, grandiloquently defended "living-in" because of its moral safeguards to young people in the modern Babylon, his indignation boiled over into those famous articles. They were issued in 1907 as a pamphlet and nearly 100,000 were sold.

The wind of discontent swept every corner of shop life. The greatest and most enthusiastic meetings ever held by the Union took place in the autumn, from Aberdeen to Plymouth. And people paid to attend them. The year ended with a conference at Toynbee Hall, London, between the drapers, the Union, and some public men, presided over by Lord Hugh Cecil. In the meanwhile, Derry and Toms, and Grose Brothers, of Walworth Road, announced the abolition of "living-in." D. H. Evans, of Oxford Street,

allowed over 100 men to live out, thus joining Debenham and Freebody who abolished the system the year previously. During the year the Union, by negotiation, sometimes with the threat of withholding labour, secured the abolition at John Lewis, draper, Tonypandy, South Wales; at Daniels and Co., drapers, Kentish Town (with a strike to follow as I will relate); at a pawnbrokers in Oxford; Read and Shaw, drapers, Newcastle-under-Lyme; Allan and Williams, drapers, Longton, Staffs; Brookfield's, drapers, Stafford; Cussons, of Hull, grocers, with two shops; J. Daniel and Son, grocers, Pontypool, South Wales; Peglers Stores, South Wales, with nineteen branches, and lastly the Treorchy Co-op.

Negotiations took place with Morgan and Co. and James Howell and Co., of Cardiff, the largest drapers in South Wales, with 500 employees between them, but as in both houses the women petitioned the firms against living out (at one firm the housekeeper actually held a prayer meeting for the purpose) the negotiations at that time failed. They were to win their freedom a few years later. About this time was published *Kipps* by H. G. Wells, which was largely a personal experience of "living-in," and a play by Cicely Hamilton, called *Diana of Dobson's*, was staged in the West End of London and showed all over the country. Lena Ashwell played the leading role, and there was a realistic scene of a girls' "living-in" dormitory.

Such, then, was the atmosphere in which the staff of J. D. Llewellyn and Son was to fight, in which the first strike against "living-in" took place. Part at least of the story deserves to be told.

J. D. Llewellyn was Mayor of Neath, an alderman and a J.P. He employed twenty-one in staff, including general manager, four apprentices, and two nephews. Neath is a tidy little market town cupped in the hills near the coast between Bridgend and Swansea. Whilst sanction was being sought of the National Executive to open negotiations to secure the abolition of "living-in" for six of the staff affected, the employer called in three of them and said he wanted them to live out, and offered 10s. a week in lieu of board and lodging. They asked for time to think it

over. He gave them until the following morning, when he would require either their consent or their notices. The head office of the Union wired back instructions to stand firm for 13s. The issue was thus joined. J. D. Llewellyn refused for a month to answer letters, until the Trades Council intervened, when he refused their offers of conciliation or the suggestion of arbitration, saying, "Having conducted my business for thirty years without the interference of third parties, I am not disposed to accept any of the alternatives." Thirteen of the staff gave a fortnight's notice. We were never to give that notice again. The parents of two of the apprentices would not let them leave. Seven of them who lived out, one with sixteen and two with twelve years' service, came out in support of the six. Three of them were married men. The firm put up notices, "This shop and premises to let—apply within." Two uniformed commissionaires came down from London to guard the premises.

J. D. Llewellyn was one of those men who had had his own way so long that he hated interference. "I came from the gutter and I will go back to the gutter sooner than give way," he said. We were to meet with his type again. In short, the matters at issue were the principle of the "prime cost" of "living-in" and the recognition of the Union. Looking back on that struggle, which ended "living-in" in that establishment though not securing Union recognition, I am still struck by the splendid spirit of those men—especially the married men—who had so much to lose, yet stuck doggedly by their comrades who were demanding the right of living their own lives. No wonder the spirit displayed by them in the receptive atmosphere of that time, whirled through the movement—stirring the membership as the warm winds in spring-time. This was revolt. The first open rebellion of shop workers against the ancient thralldom. If sacrifice is the soul and spirit of heroism, then heroism was displayed in that struggle—yes, and the whole movement cheered, from Land's End to John o' Groat's it cheered, and messages—Llwyddiant u'r Achos (Success to the Cause)—poured in constant stream to give them courage. One of the strikers,



Sandwich-board parade, advertising a meeting at Dr. Clifford's Chapel. Duncan Davies is leading with P. C. Hoffman third

with headquarters' sanction, opened a shop and trade was diverted to it.

The staff stood together to the close, when it was agreed no further service could be secured by continuing the struggle. So they retired publicly at the largest meeting ever held in the market-place, before thousands of people singing hymns of triumph as if 'twere a great victory. As, indeed, it was—the struggle itself was a great victory, to bear rich fruit in due season.

Now about the strike at C. and A. Daniels (drapers), Kentish Town, in July of that same year, 1907. In May the firm agreed that "all adult male employees live out with 13s. allowance; one hour for dinner and half-an-hour for tea; wages to be paid weekly; all fines to be abolished, and contribution to the Early Closing Association to be optional." But in July the firm advertised for young men to live in or out, so twenty-four out of the eighty-four staff ceased work. Mr. B. B. Evans, the Chairman of the Executive of the Drapers' Chamber of Trade, giving evidence before the Truck Committee, being asked what the facts of the strike were, said: "I know that it is in consequence of the employer refusing to acknowledge the Union and to sign a document agreeing that under no circumstances will he ever engage, in the future, a male assistant to live in. Now that is a straight answer, that is the truth. I have that from the proprietor himself."

After sixteen weeks, conciliation by the Vicar of Haverstock Hill secured a settlement. John Turner, who had charge of the dispute, commenting on the fight, wrote: "When the history of the long-drawn-out struggle of the shop assistants of this country comes to be written, let the men who fought in this engagement be remembered with pride."

From this period onward "living-in" is abandoned by firm after firm. Jones and Higgins, Peckham, and Jeremiah Rotherham (wholesale textiles) announce the abolition of fines. Warwick House (high-class drapers), Birmingham; Swan and Edgar's (drapers), Regent Street; Reynolds and Co., largest drapers in Newport, Mon.; Morrell and Son

(grocers), Bradford; all voluntarily renounce "living-in." Arding and Hobbs, Clapham Junction, employing 700, after a fire and consultation with staff, decide to let their people go. Selfridges, interviewed about the Neath Strike, say they will have no "living-in" at their new store. Seccombes, of Cardiff, decide they will not have it at their new store in Pontypridd. Negotiations with McIlroy Bros., of Hanley, and David Evans, of Llanelly, win complete abolition for men and women with agreed allowances. Many smaller places abandon it without any announcement. So it is evident that the progress up to this time is fairly substantial. The hated system is tottering.

The movement in South Wales formed an anti-"living-in" committee, which had for its object one thing only, the sweeping away of the system from the Principality, and so creating a White Wales—Gwalia Wen. They were to gather funds, keep a record of all "living-in" places, together with details of conditions, distribute literature systematically to those places, and hold meetings. Actually, the work done by that committee, being purposeful and continuous, was very successful. Substantially it achieved its objective.

Following the victories in Hanley and Llanelly, the break came at Merthyr. The preparations had been long in the making, and the majority of the shop workers in the district had joined the Union when, in November, 1911, a meeting of 2,500 people in the Drill Hall, at which Keir Hardie was the chief speaker, set a match to the material ready to flare. I must dwell on that struggle a little because of its far-reaching consequences. Negotiations were opened with two firms, Roger Edwards and Son and J. Jones and Son, in February, 1912, and eventually the whole of the drapery trade of the district was involved.

Roger Edwards was a man of over 80 years of age, with a long beard and always at his desk in the shop. He was very deaf. It was at his place the staff ceased work after the situation had become impossible. They won the point they came out for—abolition of "living-in." But the old chap twice afterwards went back on his signed undertaking.

Signed agreements were reached with four firms in Merthyr and Dowlais, and it was agreed at a conference between the drapers who had "living-in" and ourselves, that individual firms should be waited on and any exceptional cases should be dealt with on their merits.

We had reached the point when we could publish a "fair list" of twenty drapers and milliners in Merthyr and Dowlais where "living-in" no longer existed, and three only were left to be dealt with, when the National Coal Strike burst upon us. The district lived on coal. It ate coal; it was clothed and sheltered with coal. So when there was no coal there was no trade.

Could we call upon the staffs of the three remaining firms to strike? That was the crucial question. To strike would be ineffective. The employers would be glad they would have no wages to pay. On the other hand, delays were dangerous. It was agreed to risk delay, for the Coal Strike would, it was thought, only last two weeks. But it lasted six weeks in June and July. And we were undone. Employers backed down from their undertakings; they got at the staffs and broke their spirit. They were all working short time by means of staggered hours. One staff, which had by secret ballot almost unanimously voted in favour of negotiations being opened, signed a letter to the local paper stating, "We strongly resent the unwarranted and unsolicited interference of paid agitators."

The twisting and lying of employers can be dealt with as long as the workers are loyal, but when they turn on you, you are helpless. We attempted to save the situation with outside help. Shop workers came from all over South Wales, and we held a huge procession through the town, with bands and banners looking gay and splendid in the sunshine. The football field was taken for the meeting, and Keir Hardie made a special visit and spoke from the grandstand. It seemed as if the whole town and district were there. But the damage had been done. We finished with two draper firms only keeping their signed undertaking. Two employers, Roger Edwards and J. Jones, served writs for libel on Keir Hardie's paper, the *Merthyr Pioneer*, and myself.

The Union, as debenture holders, foreclosed on that property, and so saved it from any consequences of the action, and it was able to carry on. The object of the drapers, openly declared, was to ruin that "Bloody German," for they hated me like poison. If those actions were successful all of them would take similar steps, and the Union in paying up would be bled white. It was a pretty scheme, but it did not pan out as they expected.

Unfortunately, however, they did succeed in separating the actions. Jones wanted to retire, and as we would not let him unless he paid our costs, he appealed. If they had both been tried together at the same court there might have been a different result. As it was, Roger Edwards got a verdict of £250 and costs against the *Pioneer* and myself. The *Pioneer* was taken care of and I went bankrupt; "and so the poor dog had none."

The drapers of Merthyr issued an appeal for funds to the employers of South Wales because "Hoffman has been adjudged bankrupt" and the *Pioneer* "has no available assets." Had the Union been successful, they urged, "the next proposal was the securing of a minimum wage for all persons. As a result of this action we are convinced that further agitation on these lines will be obviated for some time." They were wrong, for within a few months "living-in" was to be almost swept away from the South Wales area, and in seven years those same drapers were to agree with the Union upon wage rates, as well as the abolition of "living-in."

It is to be noted that they did not state they were fighting to preserve the moral uprightness of their employees but against the establishment of minimum wage rates. With the appeal they sent out a reprint of a leading article from *The Drapers' Record*. It was a violent attack upon myself which did not matter one bit, but it was untruthful to say as they did that "charges of this nature never do materialise at close quarters."

Meanwhile, in Hanley, at Teetons, another strike had won the abolition of meals-in (there was no sleeping-in) with the establishment of minimum wage rates. This was later

on to shape the pattern of many agreements. The fixing of minimum wage rates comes more and more upon the scene until, with "living-in" out of the way, it dominates it.

In December the staff of Affleck and Browns, drapers, Manchester, secured the abolition of "living-in", with 13s. instead and 7s. for those having dinner and tea only.

In November comes news of the beginning of the end in South Wales; they had had a tussle in Cardiff to get the big firms of Morgans and Jimmy Howells to toe the line, but they finally succeeded. At Swansea, lightning strikes had to be resorted to with two firms. On Monday, December 22nd, 1913, at 3 p.m., organiser Hughes blew on a football referee's whistle and out they came. Said he: "I shall never forget these brave men and women, bare-headed, leaving their positions behind the counter, going straight across the street formed up in twos. Loud cheers were given by a huge concourse of people. The girls, with their aprons on and scissors hanging down the side of their skirts, greatly impressed the crowd, and 'Bravos' were forthcoming from all sides."

The strike went on over Christmas. But they won. The epic struggles of the splendid men and women of Neath, Kentish Town, and Merthyr were justified. David Evans, Ben Evans, Lewis Lewis, Richard Lewis, James Bros., T. Lewis and Meylers were overcome. Terms most excellent were secured: all out by March 1st, 1914, after which date no one to be engaged to live-in. Men to receive 13s. 6d., women 12s. 6d., instead of board and lodging. David Evans, at their Cardiff branch, try to go back on their undertaking, a strike takes place, and the try-on is nipped in the bud, not without much difficulty, for Cardiff has a more patrician atmosphere than Swansea.

South Wales, at last free of the "living-in" system, can proudly entitle the little country "Gwalia Wen."

Staffordshire has swept its borders clean; in the North it was almost unknown, and in Scotland only one house had "living-in"; and when from Leeds, in 1914, came the news that Marshall and Snelgrove's and the Grand Pygmalion had decided to dispense with the system, then we knew that the end was nigh.

Now I must travel back a while to relate how the long catalogue of fires at drapery establishments played their grim and tragic part in blazing a way for freedom.

Drapery establishments are full of combustible material. Those housed above them slept over tinder boxes.

I have already given a short list of places where fires occurred, ending with that at Camborne in 1906, where two assistants lost their lives, and concerning which questions were asked in the House of Commons. There followed, in 1909, Hunts, Hammersmith, where the staff had narrow escapes; in 1910, at Arding and Hobbs, where 300 lived-in at the burned-out premises; B. B. Evans, Kilburn, on a Thursday (early closing) afternoon; Skinner and Son, Herne Bay, in the day-time; Walkers, Belfast, one life lost; Williams Ltd., Accrington, day-time, three assistants' lives lost; Morley and Lanceleys, Brixton; Wallace Hughes, third fire in three weeks, one dead, four injured; Beattie and Company, Chatham; and in December the same year, Dennis Paine, Maidstone, one life lost. In 1911 fire broke out at the premises of L. B. Lewis, Morrison, South Wales, at 11.30 on a Saturday night, when assistants did not have to be in until 12; and in 1912, at John Barker's, Kensington, when five girls lost their lives. Thus there were fifteen fires in seven years that we have a record of, six of them with fatal results.

At Wallace Hughes, the assistants were members of the Union, and so were represented by the Union's solicitors at the inquest. Several things throwing light on "living-in" were revealed at that inquest. There was a fire chute, but it was never examined; the staff were not shown how it worked, and not one of the girls caught in that fire trap knew how to use it. There was no night watchman; any-one could enter the premises; the girls were given latchkeys for which they deposited 1s. Now that latchkey business had in its time played upon the nerves of the defending drapery employers dreadfully. The story was a very old one in the drapery. A girl asking for a rise is told, "No, miss, we cannot give you a rise, but we can give you a latchkey." The Rev. R. J. Campbell and Father Bernard Vaughan got the story and made much of it. I never did

think a deal of it myself, for if girls wanted to add to their income that way, they did not need a latchkey for the purpose, when all they had to do was to sign a book or a docket or just simply sign nothing but stay out.

Anyway, here was the latchkey actually cropping up at a coroner's inquest. Very awkward! It was brought out, too, that the L.C.C., though it had powers of inspection, as I will show later, failed to use those powers.

The coroner's jury at the inquest arising from the John Barker's fire, in their verdict, said: "They were strongly of the opinion that no employees should be allowed to sleep over premises which do not conform to the requirements of the L.C.C." At the inquest a director of John Barker's said that the previous April the premises were inspected by the L.C.C., and suggestions were made as to means of escape. They had not been carried out.

Before, however, dealing with the culpability of the L.C.C. and the drapery employers, let me remind you of what fire meant to shop assistants who lived in. A Press correspondent, reporting on the Arding and Hobbs fire, said: "The condition of the employees, many of them quite young girls, is very pitiable. None of their personal effects could be saved and many of them were seen for some time running about wildly in Ilminster Gardens and without hats and coats."

Here is my own comment written at the time: "Three hundred are homeless, helpless, quite distracted. Why? Because of the fire? No! *Because they lived in!* If they had lived out, in lodgings or at home, the fire would have destroyed their hats and coats, maybe, it would have destroyed the business and rendered them unemployed. So—but they would have had shelter, they would have had a place to lay their tired, bewildered heads. Their little all, their few treasures and belongings would not have been snatched from them. Think of the assistants suddenly so placed, literally helpless. Think of the young girl, like some poor scared bird, knowing not where to turn for help and aid. If she had lived out she would have known where to go—to her home or her lodgings where kind comfort would have awaited her."

If you get that picture, as I hope you can, you will understand how we in the drapery hated " living-in " with an undying hate. I expressed my feelings at the time of the Wallace Hughes holocaust, when, after three weeks of terror between the fires at that establishment, Annie Lattimore jumped from a window and was killed. I wrote :

In Memory of
ANNIE LATTIMORE
Killed by the
Living-in System
at Brixton
on September 11th, 1910

With smoke and crackling fire distraught
A leap thou gav'st, 'mid piteous cries,
And lifeless lay—is all for naught
To Mammon's god this sacrifice?
No! That which drove thee to thy doom
Will kindle in our hearts such flame
As, fiercely burning, shall consume
Each barrack hell and feudal shame.

In 1905 the Drapers' Chamber of Trade joined with the London Chamber of Commerce in opposing the fire clauses of the L.C.C. Building Act (Amendment) Bill and raised £1,000 for the purpose. Mr. W. Morford, managing director of Swan and Edgar's, said if passed the Act would " bring ruin to hundreds of traders." In 1910 an attempt was made by the Halifax Corporation to deal with means of escape from fire in shops, as well as taverns, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, schools, boarding-houses and common lodging-houses—but such was the trade opposition that " shops " was struck out of the Bill in the Commons.

Interviewed by the *Morning Post*, in August, 1910, a prominent draper said: " I hope no regulations will be

made for they will probably mean a lot of expense and, in my view, it is unnecessary!"

I can understand, though not excuse, the objective indifference of L.C.C. officialdom, but I cannot understand or excuse the opposition of draper employers to proper means of escape for their employees forced to live above their precious tinder boxes.

A deputation from the Union to the L.C.C. Building Acts Committee revealed that little had been done to see that its own by-laws were carried out by shopkeepers. Out of the 50,000 buildings to which the 1905 Act applied, only 527 had been put in order.

With the assistance of the architects' associations, whom we contacted, and Mr. Phillimore (L.C.C.) we got hundreds of places where assistants lived-in put right. It cost those short-sighted, close-fisted, hard-hearted drapers hundreds of thousands of pounds. It touched them in the tenderest part of their anatomy—their pockets. It was one more smashing blow at "living-in."

What the growing enlightenment of the times, public agitation, the revolt of the shop workers, and blazing fires had left of the system got another pounding from rationing and other difficulties which war brought in its train.

Rationing and price control were not introduced during the first World War until 1917, when coupons had to be given up for all meat meals in restaurants and places where food is consumed. This gave "living-in" places a first-class headache. In fact, a situation almost Gilbertian developed. Employers pushed the assistants out to live, and assistants in many cases, resisted—they resisted because of the altogether ridiculous sums offered.

A strike took place at Swears and Wells, Regent Street. It was a house doing a very high-class trade. They catered for the children of the crowned heads of Europe. But crowned heads were not doing very well at that period, 1918, and so trade was not good. That and rationing played havoc with the food. So the Union was called in to deal with the matter. The staff wanted the abolition of feeding-in—they slept out. The firm offered, instead, that the staff could themselves do the catering.

I reported to the managing director the acceptance of this offer, when he showed me the door, saying he wanted no outside interference, and gave notice to six men and four women. Five of those dismissed had no less than 150 years' service in the firm between them. The whole staff ceased work, staff superintendent, buyers, assistants, apprentices, porters and packers : it was a major event in the West End of London. For the Queen of Roumania to be kept waiting in her carriage outside the shop with no assistant running to serve her was a sensation.

The girls rushed round to their friends in other West End houses, and at night, though there had been no other intimation, a huge meeting pledged solidarity with them. The heaven was indeed working in the lump. Attempts to undermine the staff's loyalty to one another were unavailing and in forty-eight hours it was all over. The staff were all re-instated, and the terms already given were agreed to, excepting that the sum put at the disposal of the staff was 6s. per head for providing dinner and tea.

" Living-in " was now being starved out. Harrods give 10s. a week instead of dinner and tea. John Barker's insist upon all meals out, even for those who are left sleeping-in—for housing becomes a difficulty with no building going on for five years. Sharmans (drapers), Brighton, agree to 15s. 6d. for buyers, 12s. 6d. window-dressers, shop-walkers, and first hands, assistants 10s., instead of meals in. Rylands and Faudel's textile warehouses in the City of London agree to abolish " living-in ", with 20s. instead of board and lodging and 10s. for board, and so it goes on all over the country.

In August, 1919, after several conferences, the Wholesale Textile Association, representing the bulk of the warehouses in the City of London with 30,000 employees, agreed with the Union upon the following in respect to " living-in " : " The ' living-in ' system to be retained, but those who wish to live out shall have the option of doing so after giving one week's notice in writing. That the allowance for board be 10s., 20s. for board and lodging. When on holidays an allowance to be made of 10s. in addition to

wages for those who board in, and 12s. 6d. for those who have board and lodging. Employers will recommend members of the Association that from those who live-in a committee be appointed to act with representatives of the firm in regulating 'living-in' conditions." In April, 1920, a similar agreement was arrived at nationally with the Drapers' Chamber of Trade, though board allowance was 12s. 6d. In 1920 Peter Robinson's abolished the system, and in 1926, at Jeremiah Rotherhams 180 employees won "sleeping out."

With regard to the amount fixed for board and lodging, which is still that of the Wages Council to-day, there is this to be said. Once you consider the sum in relation to a minimum scale of wages, the "prime cost" disappears. The employer wishes to make the sum as high as possible so that he has a lesser money wage to pay, the employee desires it to be as small as possible so that he can be paid a higher money wage. The 20s. is the result of this conflict.

In 1935 the staff of Cook, Son and Co. (St. Paul's Churchyard) and Jeremiah Rotherhams (Shoreditch), both textile warehouses, obtain 10s. a week instead of dinner and tea. But Cooks sack the shop steward, Mr. A. Pratt. The Union takes the case to court, claiming that as Pratt is a packer he is a manual worker and comes under the Truck Act and is entitled to a remittance of all moneys illegally deducted from his wages. The Lords agree on appeal and Pratt recovers £397 10s. The firm thereupon locks out those of its employees who will not sign a document providing that the firm could deduct from their wages for food supplied and that they would forgo the right to recover for past deductions. A settlement is reached by the firm agreeing to pay £3,202 to the twenty-eight persons concerned and a Bill is rushed through Parliament to prevent in future retrospective recovery for Truck deductions.

Reading back, over those fifty years, I have been captivated by the romantic story unfolded page by page. Truth, indeed, is stranger, more virile, more moving than fiction. To think that men and women, boys and girls, endured so much without question; to know they did not think a change ever possible; to realise how they feared to try

and make it possible and at last achieved that which, to them, was impossible: Is not that an epic equal to any in our ancient island history! As I write these lines, I lift my head and salute all those who were sacrificed upon the long rough road. If you seek their monument, look around you—"Si monumentum requiris circumpice," as says the inscription on Wren's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral. Look around you and resolve that you will hold precious and secure the liberties they have won.



*Then (as now) some employers fancied an aristocrat
or two serving behind their counters.*