

Chapter One

1919

“They shall walk in white for they are worthy.”

—Revelation 3:4 (quoted in Emily Malbone Morgan’s *Adelyn’s Story*, p. 12)

I take wings through the night and pass through all the wildernesses of the worlds, and the old dark holds of tears and death—and return with laughter, laughter, laughter:

Sailing through the starlit spaces on outspread wings, we two—O laughter! laughter! laughter!

—Edward Carpenter (*Towards Democracy*, p. 14)

Grace Hutchins and Anna Rochester first met in August 1919 at the annual conference of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross (SCHC).¹ An Episcopal laywomen’s organization, the SCHC gave Rochester and Hutchins two indivisible freedoms: the freedom to form a committed partnership with each other and the freedom, indeed, the necessity, to devote themselves to creating a more just society.

The conference was held, as always, at the retreat site of the Companions, north of Boston, and this year’s theme was “Internationalism: A Consideration of the Social and Religious Forces that Make for It.” Discussions were heated, as the Companions, none of whom was even yet recognized as a voter in the US Constitution, debated the advisability of establishing a League of Nations.

Both Hutchins and Rochester were raised devout Episcopalians. As young adults, both had joined the Socialist Party and with the onset of World War I had become pacifists. When they met in 1919, they found themselves on the same side of the SCHC debates and discovered that they both supported Paul Jones, the bishop of Utah, who had been censured by the Episcopal House of Bishops for speaking out against the United States’ entry into the war. They also found a shared interest in the newly formed Church League for Industrial Democracy (CLID).

Anna Rochester’s mother had died in January 1919, after many years of ill health, leaving her only child financially comfortable but adrift. In June, Rochester left her position as editor with the US Children’s Bureau, giving the retreat site as her forwarding address: Adelynrood, South Byfield, Massachusetts.² On August 18, a day before her thirty-fourth birthday, Grace Hutchins came in from New York, where she was teaching the New Testament at the New York Training School for Deaconesses. Although first Rochester, and



Figure 1.1. Anna Rochester and Grace Hutchins at Adelynrood, ca. 1921

then Hutchins, would leave the Companions a decade later, as if shedding an ill-fitting coat, their lives and work remained profoundly shaped by the strengths and visions of this small group of women.

“To Develop the Companionship Life”

Hutchins and Rochester both came to develop the Companionship life,³ a life that fostered consecrated work and unrestricted love designed to bring about a new social order. The Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross was (and still is) devoted to intercessory prayer, thanksgiving, and simplicity of life. The *Manual of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross* reminds members that “Companions shall seek to practice and to encourage systematic intercession for the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth.”⁴ From the beginning, the Companionship was far more than just a social organization. The organization’s founder, Emily Morgan, enjoined the Companions to “realize that we are organized for companionship as well as intercession, but for companionship on a higher plane, and with a higher bond of union than the mere ordinary social relationships of the world.”⁵

Although the names of most early Companions will not be familiar to readers today, some members are still recognized for their brilliance as catalysts of social change: they included Vida Dutton Scudder, a Wellesley English professor who worked to establish the first College Settlement for Women on Rivington Street in Manhattan’s lower east side; Scudder’s life partner, Florence Converse, a radical novelist, poet, and assistant editor at

The Atlantic Monthly; Ellen Gates Starr, a founder of Hull House and activist in the strikes of women textile workers in Chicago; Helena Stuart Dudley, head of Denison House in Boston; and Mary Simkhovitch, director of Greenwich House in Manhattan.⁶

Rochester had met Vida Scudder and Florence Converse at a summer resort in Shelburne, New Hampshire, in 1904. Scudder had made every effort then to convince Rochester of the importance of labor unions. It took four years, but finally, in 1908, Rochester signaled her agreement and accepted an invitation to join the Companions, where Scudder was in charge of probationers. For more than fifteen years, Rochester's ideas and activities paralleled those of Vida Scudder, and even later the two women remained connected, despite political differences.

At the time the Society was organized, women were encouraged to serve as missionaries, deaconesses, and members of the Women's Auxiliaries,⁷ but they were not allowed leadership roles in the governance structures of the Episcopal Church. The small group grew quickly as women recognized that here was a place where they might actively engage their Christian principles in a community of like-minded women. Because the SCHC was not formally affiliated with the church, members were free to engage in discussions of theology and its relation to social practices—as well as to organize, design, and construct their own retreat center—without having to submit to the church hierarchy. By 1919, there were 406 members and probationers in the spiritual community.

As Companion in charge of probationers, Vida Scudder shaped much of the Companions' thinking through lists of recommended reading. Among the books on Scudder's lists were Edward Carpenter's *England's Ideal and Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*.⁸ These volumes, along with Carpenter's other writings, offer us one of the most direct avenues to the meanings of Hutchins and Rochester's lives.⁹ Speaking to members of the middle class, Carpenter argued for simplifying one's life, enjoining them to divest themselves of



Figure 1.2. Main room, Adelynrood, early twentieth century

the material conventions produced by industrialism in order to avoid living off the labor of others. "It cannot be too often remembered," he said, "that every additional object in a house requires additional dusting, cleaning, repairing, and lucky are you if its requirements stop there."¹⁰ What's more, Carpenter pointed out, much of the household labor is done by women: "Woman is a slave, and *must remain so* as long as ever our present domestic system is maintained. I say that our average mode of life, as conceived under the bourgeois ideal of society, cannot be kept up without perpetuating the slavery of woman."¹¹

Carpenter's point that ownership of things tends to enslave people—either oneself or someone else—became a key element in the Companions' concern for a "reconciliation of classes." How could the classes be reconciled if Companions themselves perpetuated the class system by hiring servants? Although a few workers were hired to maintain Adelynrood, members did much of the housework and gardening themselves, taking pleasure in their self-reliance.

The Companions were, thus, a new form of social organization, devised by women, one that fostered the independence of members, independence especially from the traditional family structure in which women were wards of men, first of their fathers and then of their husbands—and where a daughter's lack of a husband by a certain age was sure to constitute a family crisis. Although married women were welcome, the SCHC was founded and run, at least for the first twenty to thirty years, primarily by single women like Grace Hutchins and Anna Rochester. The unmarried members, moreover, were those most likely to be out in the world as deaconesses, missionaries, and settlement workers.¹² They were the ones working with the labor unions and writing articles and books explaining the problems of industry. They were the active committee members, passing around petitions, seeking a new trial for labor leader Tom Mooney¹³ or organizing conferences to promote church unity. They had, in short, translated their lives from the isolation of traditional families to the active construction of the Kingdom of God but within the supportive context of a community of women. This active construction meant puzzling out new ways of being in the world.

The Kingdom of God on Earth

During 1919, one of the most serious issues before the membership was the Pittsburgh-based steel strike. Union members had voted in August to strike on September 22. At the heart of public discussions of the strike was the question of reform versus revolution. Local papers had been stirring up antipathy toward the strikers by claiming that they were revolutionaries and wanted nothing less than the ownership of the mills by the workers. Central to the strikers, however, was the question of the closed shop and the eight-hour day. The union was not asking for a closed shop; the mill owners, however, *were*, in the sense that they not only maintained a so-called open shop but also reserved the right to discharge any union members, thus, in essence, creating a shop closed to unionists. Hours for steel workers ranged from miserable to inhuman; blast furnace employees, for instance, were required to work seven-day weeks and twelve-hour days. Yet the strikers knew that they were up against the "interlocking machinery of mill, town, county and state."¹⁴

It was conditions such as this colliding with a theology seeking to establish the Kingdom of God on earth that had prompted Vida Scudder and others to form the Church League for Industrial Democracy in May 1919. Scudder made a practice of organizing and affiliating herself with Episcopal organizations such as the CLID and the SCHC that were free from the control of the more conservative church hierarchy. Three Companions,

Ellen Starr, Mary Simkhovitch, and Vida Scudder, were among those signing the original call to organize the CLID. Anna Rochester added her name shortly thereafter and began organizing a chapter in New York.

If the Kingdom of God on earth was understood to be constructed of love, it was not meant to be simply a two-way street between God and individual humans but a multidirectional network, extending throughout humanity, creating the foundation for new forms of social organization. In the years to come, Hutchins and Rochester would build their partnership upon this foundation.

“A Love that Purifieth the Soul and Exalteth Desire”

The implications of this new understanding of love were profound and far-reaching. By 1919, the Companions had a long history of shaping their lives with this new understanding and expanding upon it in their writing. In her 1903 historical novel of medieval life, *Long Will*, Florence Converse developed Will Langland, the author of *Piers Plowman*, into the novel's protagonist. Will said to his daughter, who was briefly smitten by the attentions of a knight:

But hark, Calote: this love of knights and damosels is not the one only love. Read thy Reason in the Romaunt,—and she shall tell thee of a love 'twixt man and man, woman and woman, that purifieth the soul and exalteth desire; nay, more: Reason shall tell thee of a love for all thy fellows that haply passeth in joy the love for one. The King's Son of Heaven,—He knew this love.¹⁵

Converse echoed here Edward Carpenter's words in *Towards Democracy*, published in 1883. First condemning the effects of capitalism, Carpenter said, “Wealth is slowly and visibly putrefying and putrefying the old order of things.”¹⁶ He called out: “Lovers of all handicrafts and of labor in the open air, confessed passionate lovers of your own sex, Arise!”¹⁷ And in a gesture pointing to a transformative same-sex love as the source of social renewal, he exclaimed: “I who desired one give myself to all. I who would be the companion of one become the companion of all companions.”¹⁸

Six years earlier, in 1897, Converse had described such a love that “purifieth the soul and exalteth desire” in *Diana Victrix*, a semicloaked version of her commitment to Vida Scudder.¹⁹ Scudder's autobiographical²⁰ novel, *A Listener in Babel*, is also about love, beauty, and persuasion, and it resonates with the language and ideas found in both Plato's *Phaedrus*²¹ and Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*.²² In the novel, published in the same year as Converse's *Long Will*, Scudder expounded on the “quest for Reality” that was to define her life.²³ Like Converse and Carpenter, Scudder argued for love that reaches beyond the limits of one man and one woman. Scudder ended *A Listener in Babel* with a type of same-sex alliance as well, although it was closer to Carpenter's vision than to Plato's: the main character, Hilda, decided to live with two young working class women and work in factories, learning skills which she aimed to use to establish a cooperative.

In the work of both Scudder and Carpenter as well as in the lives of Hutchins and Rochester, we find attempts to fuse a Platonic *eros*, or desiring love, with New Testament *agape*, or sacrificing love. This meant both a recognition and a celebration of same-sex desire and a channeling of that desire away from personal gratification and into the work of creating of a society based upon love and collectivity rather than individualism and greed.



Figure 1.3. Florence Converse, ca. 1910

Carpenter's larger vision, drawn from Plato, Walt Whitman, and H. M. Hyndman, author of *England for All*, was of a socialist society to include clearly, in his words, "homogenic love."

Carpenter explained what he meant by "homogenic love" in his 1912 book *The Intermediate Sex*, a book that undoubtedly would have been read by Anna Rochester, Vida Scudder, and Florence Converse, among others. In it, Carpenter offered an extended argument in favor of same-sex devotion. Above all, Carpenter emphasized the naturalness of this love (which he, following some Continental sexologists, frequently called Uranianism) and, indeed, the benefits to society offered by those who were engaging in work motivated by love. "I think myself," he said, "that the best philanthropic work—just because it is the most personal, the most loving, and the least merely formal and self-righteous—has a strong fibre of the Uranian heart running through it."²⁴

Carpenter's categories were based upon emotional engagement rather than sexual activity. "It would be a great mistake," he insisted, "to suppose that their attachments are necessarily sexual or connected with sexual acts. . . . and to confuse Uranians (as is so often done) with libertines having no law but curiosity in self-indulgence is to do them a great wrong."²⁵ Most important, Carpenter believed that "the Uranian people may be

destined to form the advance guard of that great movement which will one day transform the common life by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external ties which now control and confine society."²⁶

However many Companions may have privately identified themselves as "Uranian" or as belonging to the "intermediate sex," we have no way of knowing. It is unlikely that many spent time making such distinctions. Most were more interested in their work and in maintaining the cohesion of the group. Carpenter's construction of same-sex love describes for us a culture that flourished at the turn of the century, a culture that celebrated the social value of same-sex love and reversed the social condemnation traditionally accorded "spinsters."

Certainly Florence Converse's message that the Kingdom of God will not be constructed on the exclusive love of one man for one woman reflected the social organization of the Companions. Companions instead drew from their religious heritage to describe the emotional closeness they experienced. Emily Morgan said to the membership in one of her annual letters: "To me, the greatest features of our annual conferences have been the strong, even spiritual friendships which have grown out of our association together"²⁷ "Spiritual friendships" denotes friendships based upon a belief in a divine source of love and dedicated to celebrating that love and to the spiritual growth of both parties.²⁸

The close friendships and partnerships between members were affirmed within the Companions just as they were recognized in other liberal women's organizations at the time.²⁹ When Companion Ethelwyn Upton died in November 1920, the New York Chapter expressed "its sympathy with especially Miss Gaylord" as well as with Miss Upton's relatives.³⁰ As the writings of Florence Converse, Vida Scudder, and Edward Carpenter indicate, these partnerships were rarely attempts to emulate heterosexual marriage. They were expansive, open to including others in communities of like-minded souls. Vida Scudder and Florence Converse, for instance, brought Helena Stuart Dudley into their home after she retired from her position at Denison House. Likewise, Anna Rochester and Grace Hutchins made a place for Lucie Myer in their Greenwich Village apartment. Companions' partnerships, Hutchins and Rochester's chief among them, were outward looking, supportive of each person's independence, and built on a need for work and companionship in the larger world. Nonetheless, it had not yet occurred to them that their freedom to establish such partnerships came from their independent incomes. Nor did they foresee the ways in which the partnerships built in the context of the SCHC would be diminished, erased, or misread by a society preoccupied with categories and pathologies.³¹

"Intercession and Labor"

In January 1919, Anna Rochester asked in the SCHC Intercession Letter that members give thanks with her "for a long, rich companionship with her mother; for the blessing of friendship and affection; for the beauty and consolation of the Eucharist; for the crumbling of the old social order in European countries." She also sought prayers "for all who disagree with accepted teaching, and especially for Anna, Companion, humility, sincerity, courage, imagination, loving kindness."³² Already, Rochester was pushing at the limits of the Episcopal Church.

At the conference that summer, Rochester chaired a panel on "The Aim of Revolutionary Labor," with Ellen Gates Starr, Mary Emily Bruce, Margaret Shearman, and Helena Stuart Dudley explaining their positions on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Marxism, the English Labor Movement, the Lawrence strike, and the Bolshevik

Revolution in Russia. Closing the panel, Rochester asked the Companions to consider that “the very charges that are brought against the revolutionists, the revolutionist is bringing against the present order,—Violence. He points to the millions of lives lost in the war. Cruelty? He can tell of cruelties in our industrial system. The revolutionist asserts that the evils of his movement are incidental to the struggle towards an order based on justice and brotherhood, while in the present rule, those evils are inherent and permanent.”³³ This calculus informed her work for the rest of her life.

After spending the summer of 1919 at Adelynrood, Rochester returned to the empty family home in Englewood, New Jersey, from which she began to attend classes at the socialist Rand School and worked to organize the New York chapter of the CLID. The purpose of the latter organization was to bring together “for intercession and labor” Episcopalians who were committed to making “justice and love” the prevailing motives for social change.³⁴ The group grew quickly, because people were feeling a sense of urgency. The Bolshevik revolution had taken place only two years before, and Russia was still struggling against counter-revolutionary forces. World War I was just ending as well, and a red scare loomed in the United States. One of Rochester’s first recruits was Grace Hutchins. Hutchins and Rochester were now working together in both the SCHC and the CLID.

Still teaching at the New York Training School for Deaconesses, Hutchins, too, was straining against Episcopal limits. Specifically, with respect to deaconesses, the question was one of authority. Whereas the vow of obedience to the bishop is the last vow in the rites of ordination for clergy, it was the first for deaconesses.³⁵ Although societal pressure was building for women’s suffrage, women’s rights within the church lagged. In 1916, a committee on constitutional amendments had tabled a motion to grant women the right to serve as deputies to the General Convention, calling the motion “inexpedient.”³⁶ The next General Convention was scheduled for October 1919, and Rochester and Hutchins were hoping that the Episcopal Church, along with the rest of the country, would offer women the opportunity to serve alongside men.

Until such time, they poured their energy into the SCHC. At the Companion Conference of 1919, the New York Chapter of the SCHC agreed to take charge of the following summer’s conference, and Rochester volunteered to be a member of the planning committee, along with Mary Simkhovitch, Adelaide Case, and others. The theme was to be “Sacrifice: A Creative Force.” It was no accident that this theme emerged from the conference discussions on internationalism. Some Companions had protested that the topic had been too worldly, too concerned with material conditions and not central to the mission of a religious society. The fact that a conference on “Sacrifice” followed one on “Internationalism” exemplifies the dialectical thinking that Vida Scudder and others practiced. Sacrifice was not simply a private practice engaged in by religious zealots, Scudder said, but would be the linchpin of the new social order, as “the individual joyously surrenders all claim to special privilege, and finds in subordination his true liberty.”³⁷ By this, she did not mean an institutionalized inequality, but rather its opposite, insisting that “the ethics of inequality have proved on inspection always unsatisfactory, progressively rotten.”³⁸ Although Scudder did not dwell at length on questions of personal relationships in her explication of Christian socialism, *Socialism and Character*, she advocated strongly for love as a “discipline, the fiercest and most compelling in the law of self-subordination and the subjugation of desire that life affords.” Nonetheless, she signaled her own choice by placing a dedicatory letter “To Florence Converse, Comrade and Companion,” at the beginning of the book, thereby demonstrating in her own partnership the synthesis of the

two disparate movements—socialism (“comrade”) and Christianity (“Companion”)—that she sought to unite.

Both Hutchins and Rochester spent the next several months working together on the conference program, drawing closer to each other, continuing to define for themselves and others what it meant for women to live sacrificial lives without reproducing women’s traditional roles. Neither one had been raised in a household that “joyously surrender[ed] all claim to special privilege.” Quite the contrary. Yet while this year, 1919, brought them onto the same path of intercession and labor, each had begun the journey years before.