

**THIRTEEN
ALL TOLD**

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Thirteen all told by Beatrice Harraden

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BEATRICE HARRADEN

**THIRTEEN
ALL TOLD**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

IN VARYING MOODS

HILDA STRAFFORD

THE FOWLER

KATHARINE FRENHAM

THE SCHOLAR'S DAUGHTER

INTERPLAY

OUT OF THE WRECK I RISE

THE GUIDING THREAD

SPRING SHALL PLANT

THIRTEEN ALL TOLD

BY
BEATRICE HARRADEN

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CALIFORNIA

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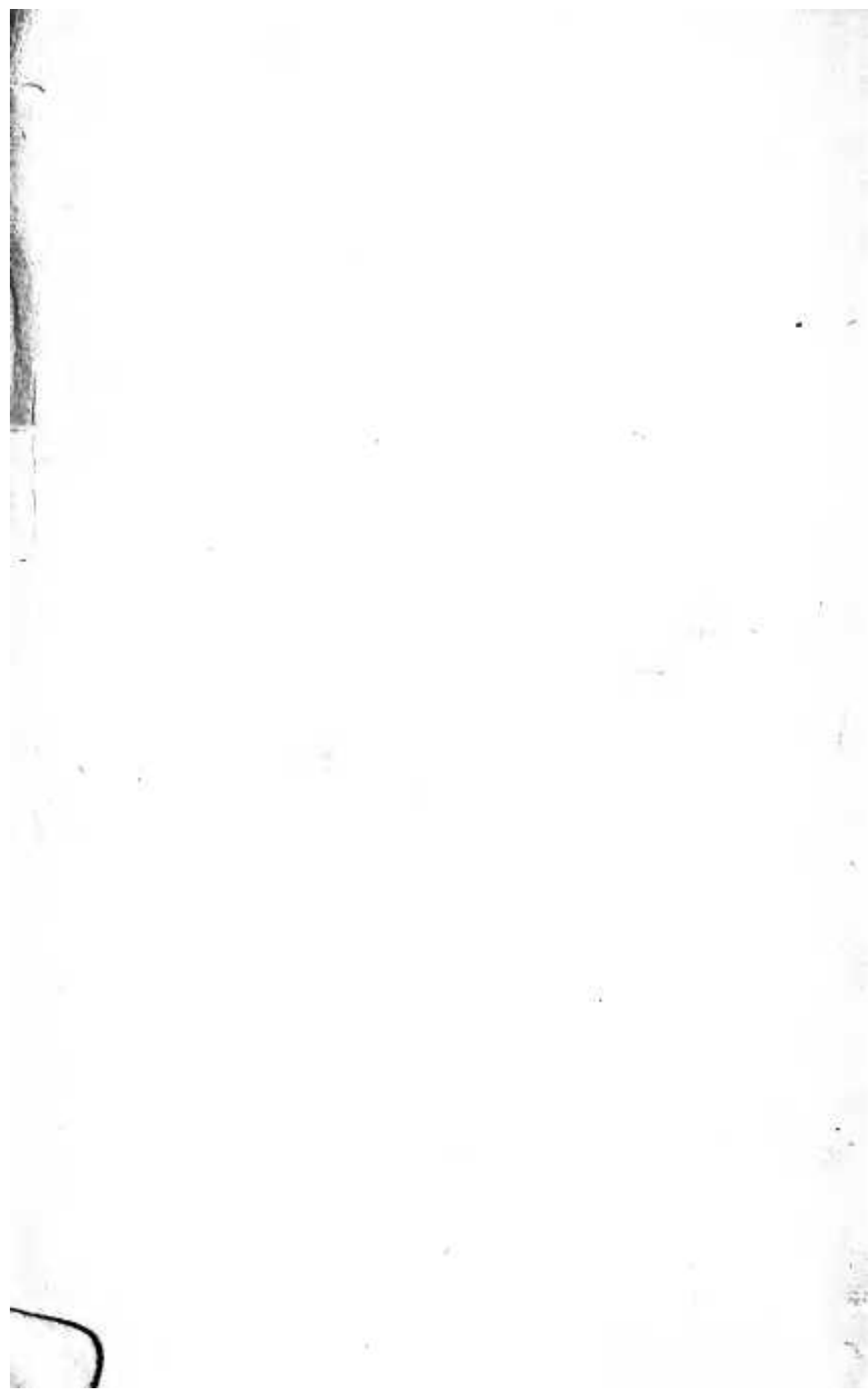
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THIRTEEN ALL TOLD

THE ENCHANTED HOUSE

I

IT was a curious thing how Wilberforce Keith hankered after that house in St. John's Wood. It was all the more curious because never before in his life had he wanted a house. A couple of rooms, a few good books, a piano, a violin and his liberty constituted his idea of what was necessary for the enjoyment of life.

Certainly not a house with all its awful and terrifying responsibilities and its puzzling limitations. Puzzling, because the greater the space, the more rigid the limitations. He had always noticed that. It was as if Abstract Space had said: "If you attempt to make me concrete, you'll lose me—you'll lose the sense of me."

That immense house of Eridge's, for instance. You could feel the walls pressing on you, the ceilings high enough in all conscience, yet bearing down on your head. You simply couldn't breathe. The wonder was that you got out alive. And a still greater wonder that anyone remained alive there, year in, year out. A small house was safer because it attempted no rivalry with an Abstract Idea. The walls didn't press against you; the ceilings, however low, didn't rest on your head, for the simple reason that you weren't expecting Space.

You were, in fact, outside Space, independent of it, unconcerned with it. And therefore, free!

But as for wanting to buy or rent any house, big or small, well, he had invariably said: "Never," until he noticed that house in St. John's Wood.

He had seen it first on a wet and windy night, and very little of it had he seen—just a glimpse through the outer gate. That's all. It was detached and surrounded by a high wall; but at the very moment when he was passing, the gate was thrown open, and he caught sight of the garden and dim lights from the house, which stood well back, secluded, mysterious, peaceful, final.

A young woman had opened the gate. She called back to someone in the house:

"It's raining hard. Don't come out. See you to-morrow for the last time here. It's awful that the board's going to be put up. I shall come and tear it down. Well, so long! What a night!"

She strode off and was soon out of sight. She was equipped for the roughest weather, and wore a sou'-wester hat and a green oilskin coat. He remembered also that she carried an electric torch which she switched on for a moment, whilst she stopped to take something out of her pocket and look at it, probably an address, for she said aloud:

"Idiot that I am. Of course, it is Campden Hill, and not Camden Town. Whatever was I thinking of?"

But that did not concern Wilberforce Keith. What did concern him were her previous words: "*It's awful that the board is going to be put up. I shall come and tear it down.*"

So the house was to be let. A board was going to be put up, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the next day. Anyway, the house was to be let. And he'd been told that direct at the moment of passing—he of all people who had never hungered after a house. The news made such an impression on him, that when he arrived at the end of the road, he turned back and passed the house again. He even stood for a minute or two outside it, regardless of the rain and wind. Not being equipped with oilskin coat and sou'-wester, he became drenched, but indifferent, so obsessed was he with the significance of the