

LUCY POLLARD



Margery Spring Rice

Pioneer of Women's Health in the
Early Twentieth Century



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/>

© Lucy Pollard



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work; to adapt the work and to make commercial use of the work providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Some of the material in this book has been reproduced according to the fair use principle which allows use of copyrighted material for scholarly purposes.

Attribution should include the following information:

© Lucy Pollard, *Margery Spring Rice: Pioneer of Women's Health in the Early Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0215>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0215#copyright>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Any digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0215#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-881-5

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-882-2

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-883-9

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-884-6

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-885-3

ISBN Digital (XML): 978-1-78374-886-0

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0215

Cover image: Margery pushing a young friend along the Crag Path in Aldeburgh, New Year, 1968. Drawing by Christopher Ellis (1968). Photograph: the author (2020).

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

2. Independence (1907–1912)

Margery had been independently-minded since her teenage years. Though she had lived away from home during her education in Stratford, and subsequently in Paris, going to Cambridge allowed her much greater scope to develop autonomously. There were family links with both Newnham and Girton, the only two Cambridge options for women at the time: her aunt Millicent had been involved with the founding of Newnham and her aunt Elizabeth's close friend Emily Davies was the founder of Girton.¹ There is no evidence for why Girton was chosen by (or for) Margery.

The Cambridge in which she arrived in 1907, as one of a cohort of forty-four Girton students, was a place where the academic opportunities for women were highly restricted. Although the two colleges had been founded more than three decades earlier, there had been almost no progress in terms of women's circumstances as students: they were not members of the university and they could not gain degrees. They could attend lectures only by courtesy of individual lecturers and their access (and that of the women teaching them) to the University Library was restricted to the hours of 10am to 2pm. The successes of Girton's Agnata Ramsay (top student in Classics in 1887) and of Newnham's Philippa Fawcett, Margery's cousin, (who in 1890 was ranked above the Senior Wrangler) had brought no change to entrenched male attitudes. The dogged and painstaking work of advocates such as Emily Davies and Henry Sidgwick had been no more successful, and, by the early years of the twentieth century, some of the zeal had gone out of the campaign. Women were formally allowed to be examined, have their names listed in class lists, and receive certificates: this was the sum of their rights. The

1 Elizabeth served on the House Committee of Girton in its first incarnation as the Cambridge College for Women, in Hitchin. She helped to raise money for the college, as well as giving money herself.

inadequacy and illogicality of the arguments used by their opponents are laughable, but nothing would shift the university: by the end of the century, degrees were open to women at London, Durham and the Scottish universities, but at Cambridge the proposal had been turned down in 1888 and 1897. Shamefully, it was not until after World War II that women in Cambridge could graduate, nearly thirty years after Oxford, which itself was hardly in the vanguard.²

The restrictions were not only academic but also social. It was a new experience for most of the women at Girton to be living away from home, but their social lives were still governed by strict rules. Emily Davies, an unbending character who did not deal easily with views that opposed her own, had been determined that her students should be irreproachable in their conduct, so Girton students were chaperoned whenever they were, or might be, in the presence of men. The same policy was pursued by Davies's successors as Mistress of the college, including (in Margery's day) Constance Jones, who was also a lecturer in Moral Sciences. One student had got into trouble because she had been seen walking in the college gardens with a man who was revealed to be her brother. The result of this policy was that non-academic activities, such as music and drama, took place within the college — Margery was on the committee of the college debating society in the spring of 1909 — and intense, often lifelong friendships were formed. Constance Jones, in a little book of memoirs, described life in college as offering an opportunity 'to combine social intercourse and solitude in a way not often met with'. Every member of the college had a bedroom and a study while there were communal gardens, a dining hall and libraries. Students were encouraged to manage their time well: 'Girton aimed at being the abode of disciplined freedom — at giving the girl students the same kind of life and teaching that have helped to make Cambridge and Oxford what they are in the life of men — a home of "sound learning and religious education," of intellectual honesty and search for truth, of practical efficiency and sanity of outlook'.³

2 The first women in England to be awarded degrees graduated from London University in 1880. In Scotland, the first female students matriculated at Edinburgh in 1869, the same year that Girton was founded; however, no female Edinburgh students were allowed to graduate until 1893. Oxford started awarding degrees to women in 1920.

3 Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones, *As I Remember: An Autobiographical Ramble* (London: A. & C. Black, 1922), p. 69.

Rather surprisingly, for someone who was more oriented towards action than reflection, Margery chose to study Moral Sciences. The only extant comment we have about this in her own words is found in a letter to her mother from Girton, dated 7 February 1909, in which she says that she loves Moral Sciences because it is about how people feel and think. Perhaps she was also influenced by the Mistress who was, herself, a distinguished philosopher who had gained a first in her Tripos exam in the late 1870s. Miss Jones was known for her interest in, and kindness to, students and had begun her teaching career while she was a research student, giving logic classes to prepare students for the ‘little-go’ exam (the preliminary exam that students had to pass). In his introduction to her book, Dean Inge wrote of her: ‘it is hard to say whether she was more admired for her brains or beloved for her heart’.⁴

Jones’s memoir describes the contents of the Moral Sciences Tripos in 1875, which, at that time, included: political philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, ethics, logic, physiology, aesthetics and economics.⁵ The only piece of direct evidence for Margery’s studies is an essay she wrote in 1908 on higher education for women. Surprisingly, given her heritage — her aunts’ part in the fight for medical education for women and for women’s suffrage — as well as her own independence of mind, the argument of the essay is that men and women are different and should be differently educated. Women need a much broader education than men, she writes, because their most important role in life is to be intelligent companions to their husbands and to educate their own children. The ‘equal but different’ and ‘women’s place in the home’ arguments seem such an unlikely attitude for her to take that the reader can only wonder whether she was writing tongue-in-cheek or whether she had been set an assignment to argue for something she did not believe in. However, there is no indication that this is the case.⁶ Perhaps the essay reflects a general dissatisfaction with the Tripos curriculum. Perhaps, also, Margery’s generation of students was showing its disillusion with the fierce aspirations to equality of the first Cambridge women: it is true that the fight for equality of women students with men

4 Ibid., p. v.

5 Ibid., pp. 52–53.

6 Among suffragists there was a wide range of views about women’s place: Millicent Fawcett, for example, disapproved of state assistance for women on the grounds that they might feel it absolved them from their responsibilities for their children.

went through a quiet period between 1900 and 1914.⁷ It may be, also, that there was an element of rebellion against the expectation of a life of public service: Margery was certainly determined to enjoy herself at Cambridge. However, if the views expressed in her essay were genuinely held by her at the time, she certainly did not live by them later: when she came to have children of her own, they were mostly brought up by nannies while she pursued a public life in which she worked tirelessly for the cause of less privileged women.

Perhaps, though, the most important aspect of university for her was just what Harry had predicted: the making of friendships, which went along with the loosening of ties to home, particularly to her mother. In Girton, she became part of a close-knit group, in which the most dominant figure was undoubtedly Eileen Power, later to become an eminent and ground-breaking mediaeval historian. Eileen was the oldest of three sisters born in 1889, 1890 and 1891 to a Manchester stockbroker and his wife. The emotional and financial security of her earliest years fell to pieces when her father was convicted of forgery and sent to prison. Under the huge shadow of this scandal, Eileen's mother Mabel and the girls were taken under the wings of Mabel's father and sisters. When Mabel died from tuberculosis in 1903, the girls remained with their maternal family, but moved to Oxford. This backstory, which Eileen rarely talked about, strengthened the ties between the three sisters and, perhaps, made them wary of marriage. All three were intellectually gifted and achieved distinguished careers.⁸

The best picture of the friendship between Eileen and Margery is found in the letters that Eileen wrote after they left Girton, particularly between 1910–1911, when Eileen was studying in Paris. She laughs at Margery, who having been slim as a child was now growing fat, addressing her by one of her nicknames — 'O hefty bargee' — and referring to her as 'Your fair & portly self' and 'you old comfort'.⁹ However, Eileen also tells her she is the only person to whom she can say anything about anything. In the same letter she writes that she loves Margery's letters in spite, or perhaps because, of the 'ungrammatical sentences & ungainly phrases' and the 'luxurious labyrinth of mixed

7 Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge* (London: Gollancz, 1975), p. 142.

8 Maxine Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power 1889–1940* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

9 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 7 April 1910.

metaphors'. While the letters are full of gossip about their friends, Eileen also discusses her difficulties with finding the right subject for her thesis and Margery's decisions — and indecisions — about the future. They also considered writing an opera together, lyrics by Eileen and music by Margery. When another of their Girton friends, Catriona (Kate) Robertson, becomes engaged to Margery's brother Ronald, Eileen gives a lively account of a rendezvous to which Ronald fails to turn up, leaving Eileen with a distraught Catriona on a station platform. Ronald eventually appears and Eileen writes that she still has a sore hand from his hearty handshake. Eileen thought that Margery's talents lay with people rather than with words: 'you have got lots of observation & a wonderful power of drawing lines'.¹⁰ She appreciated Margery's gifts of 'combined sanity & sympathy',¹¹ her fearlessness, and her belief that 'valour is the better part of discretion'.¹²

The third person in the close triangle of friendship at Cambridge was Margaret Jones, who was studying history at Newnham. The story transmitted in the Garrett and Jones families to their grandchildren's generation was that large taxi fares were run up for the journey between Girton and Newnham as Margery and Margaret pursued their friendship. Margaret was the youngest but one of the eight children of Canadian parents who had met, married and settled in England. Mary Jones, *née* Ross, was the granddaughter of Robert Baldwin, lawyer and politician, and sister of Oscar Wilde's close friend and executor, Robbie Ross. There was plenty of money in the family thanks to the land grant made to the Baldwin family, an area that became the west end of downtown Toronto. Augusta Ross, Mary's mother, had brought her daughter to England in the hope that as an heiress she would make a good marriage, but Mary put paid to this plan by falling in love with a clever but impoverished captain in the Royal Artillery, Charles Jones.¹³ Charles, who had been in his thirties when he married his teenage bride, came to suffer from

10 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 15 August 1910.

11 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 19 October 1910.

12 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 18 August 1910.

13 The Joneses were Empire loyalists who had emigrated to Canada from the United States, leaving all their assets behind. The Rosses had come to Canada as economic migrants from County Antrim in Ireland. Robert Baldwin's grandfather (also Robert) emigrated from County Cork in Ireland partly for economic reasons but also because he was alarmed by the revolutionary unrest in Ireland at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

diabetes and was advised to go somewhere with a warm climate since at that date (and until the isolation of insulin in the early 1920s) it was an incurable disease. He chose Algeria, but died there of pneumonia in 1896. When Margery came into their circle, Mary held matriarchal sway over her family in a large house — Jesmond Hill, in Pangbourne, Berkshire — which they had built in the last years of the nineteenth century. Margery was made welcome there and, in time, came to have a close relationship with Mary, in whom she found she could confide more easily than she could in Clara. The family — cultured, well-travelled and politically aware — were convinced suffragists,¹⁴ which helped Margery to feel at home among them. They also had a penchant for nicknames: Margaret was called ‘Puppy’ (which later morphed into ‘Pikey’), her mother was ‘Muz’, and it was the Jones family who gave Margery her nickname of ‘Bargee’ (which later became ‘Margee’).

The Joneses were (like Sam and Clara) not a religious family. When Margaret’s sister Petica was married at the British consulate in Rome in 1909 to Donald Robertson, she got into a dispute with a cousin who berated her for not having a religious ceremony. She closed the argument by telling him firmly that she was an unbeliever. Although Petica, in particular, suffered from poor health, all the sisters enjoyed hypochondria to varying degrees and their letters are full of angst about minor health problems. Perhaps this was partly as a result of boredom: they were intelligent women who (with the exception of Margaret) did not have the opportunity of an excellent education — a gap which they dealt with in different ways. Petica’s education was expanded by marrying an academic, while Lilian (known as Gil) was a voracious self-educator through her reading. Margery described Lilian as ‘awfully clever, — no superficiality about it either’.¹⁵

Muz was a strong and self-willed woman who had caused two hiccups in her husband’s professional career: once by persuading him to resign his commission because she was not prepared to go to India, and subsequently, by hating Newcastle, where he was working

14 At the time of the 1911 census, Margery was staying with the Jones family. She and three of the Jones sisters gave ‘suffragist’ as their occupation on the census form. For the suffragist campaign against the 1911 census, see: Jane Robinson, *Hearts and Minds: The Untold Story of the Great Pilgrimage and How Women Won the Vote* (London: Doubleday, 2018), p. 132; Jill Liddington and Elizabeth Crawford, *Vanishing for the Vote: The Story of the 1911 Census* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

15 Margery Spring Rice, *Diary 1910–11*, 16 October 1910.

for Armstrong's, insisting they return to London where he obtained employment in Woolwich Arsenal, holding various roles there until he retired in 1880.¹⁶ She did — at least up to a point — believe in education for her daughters,¹⁷ although when it came to books she, herself, as her youngest daughter Emily (nicknamed Topsy) wrote of her, was 'a tremendous skipper, and all her life leafed through books without reading more than a paragraph here and there'. However, Topsy added, her mother was down-to-earth, intelligent, trustworthy, good-tempered 'and on the whole open-minded'.¹⁸

Margery fell in love with the whole family, but found Muz particularly sympathetic. As far as her own family went, she loved her father as deeply as he did her, but relations with her mother always had their tensions. Margery thought this a result of their marked differences as people: in her 7 February 1909 letter from Girton, in which she explains why she loves Moral Sciences, she says she thinks Clara (unlike herself) is not interested in individuals. For Margery, physical and emotional activity was much more important than intellectual. In 1907, one of her friends had written, in some unspecified crisis:

All I can say is that you must not take anything your mother says too literally. Remember that her temperament and yours are totally different. She is extremely highly strung & apt to exaggerate all her emotions [...] with you it is different: & when you say a thing you mean it to the letter.¹⁹

While there may be some truth in this, it is also undoubtedly the case that Clara and Margery were alike in that they were both very strong-willed and opinionated, and that must have exacerbated the conflict between them. Margery was also trying to move away to some extent from the closeness of family life — she needed to separate herself from Clara. Sam recognised that relations between Margery and Clara were not always harmonious, but came down firmly in support of Clara. In May 1909, just as she was coming to the end of her second year in Cambridge, he wrote to her:

16 Charles's brother-in-law, married to his sister Mary, was Charles Wright Young, who also worked at Woolwich.

17 Petica, unlike Margaret, was not sent to university because Muz thought that she was pretty enough to make a good marriage.

18 E. B. C. Lucas, unpublished memoirs.

19 Violet Price, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 4 May 1907.

I am very sorry if I hurt you — but I had to do it. You argue your case well [we do not know what case she was arguing] but it won't do. I am very glad that you have determined to look at things in general through the spectacles of people who are older, & who therefore unless they are fools must be wiser, than yourself. I am sure that will conduce to your happiness & comfort & well-being. What you say about Mother is very sweet to me. She is as you say 'grand' in an emergency. You have it in your power to make an immense addition to her happiness and I believe I am justified in hoping that you intend to do it.²⁰

While the strict rules of chaperonage at Cambridge pulled one way, pulling in the opposite direction were contemporary ideas about personal fulfilment for women, and if the rules discouraged the development of relationships between men and women students that did not mean that everyone abided by the rules. In Margery's case, such relationships were described ironically by Eileen as a 'maelstrom of disgusting amours' although we know little about what they actually amounted to.²¹ In 1919, another Girton student, Florence Roma Muir Wilson (writing as Romer Wilson)²² was to publish a roman à clef, *If All These Young Men*, in which a thinly disguised Margery ('Amaryllis') and Puppy ('Everett') and four other Jones sisters all feature. Eileen certainly had no difficulty in identifying all the characters when the book came out. For Margery, however, although there were probably several fleeting affairs of the heart at Cambridge, one of the results of her friendship with Puppy and her introduction to the Jones family was that she fell deeply in love with Puppy's brother Edward.

When Margery came down from Cambridge with an upper second (she had only taken Part 1 of the two-part Tripos, but this was regarded as a degree, and she was to obtain her MA in 1928),²³ she was uncertain what to do. We know something about her life in the autumn of 1910 from a (very short-lived) diary that she kept. She had dithered about a career, wondering whether to follow her brother Harry to art college but eventually deciding to train as a factory inspector. However, the diary

20 Sam Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 2 November 1909.

21 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 8 August 1910.

22 In a letter to Stella Benson dated 16 February 1930, Margery's second husband Dominick mentions Wilson's death and says that he had not seen her for eleven years 'because she was so nasty about Margery'.

23 Although a woman could not graduate, she could receive a 'titular' BA degree, which could be converted into an MA for a fee after a certain period of time.

suggests that she did not take this very seriously — singing lessons seem to have been more important than going to work. At this stage of her life, as is not unusual for a woman in her early twenties, she comes across as someone whose first priority was to enjoy her life and take as much as it offered her — relishing the arts, the opportunity to travel and her friendships. Although Eileen Power's biographer writes that Margery was 'like Eileen in her passion for causes. She took up crusades, and dominated and bullied her friends into matching her own energy in pursuing them', there is no evidence yet of any deep commitment to any particular cause.²⁴ Margery does not even mention the big suffrage demonstration that took place on 18 November, when Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Emmeline Pankhurst led a deputation to H. H. Asquith, who refused to see them.

During October and November that year, Margery worked at the Industrial Law Committee as a preliminary to her training as a factory inspector. This resulted in her being asked to give lectures — firstly, on 23 November, to a group of women in East London; secondly, a few days later, to the Women's Liberal Association in Lewisham; and thirdly, on 6 December in Wembley (in this instance, Margery unfortunately does not tell us either her audience or her subject, only that she was 'dead-tired' when she got home).²⁵ Days, or half-days, of work were interspersed with lunch and tea parties, gallery-visits, singing or German lessons and lectures. In the evenings, there were sometimes dinner parties or trips to concerts or the opera — in the middle of October, she saw *Tristan und Isolde*, conducted by Thomas Beecham, with Puppy (who was working as a teacher in London) and Edward. 'It is impossible to write of Tristan. The last act is something too fine for words', she recorded, but she was disappointed by the singers being out of tune in the second act duet.²⁶ There were long weekends at Pangbourne, with the Jones family, and in Cambridge. By November, work seems to have faded even more into the background: she visits a sick woman referred to the Industrial Law Committee by the Home Office, but is dismissive of the woman's needs, as her husband is employed. On 9 November, she writes in her diary that work is interesting but that she finds it hard to concentrate. On 18

24 Berg, *A Woman in History*, pp. 41–42.

25 Margery Spring Rice, *Diary*, 6 December 1910.

26 Margery Spring Rice, *Diary*, 20 October 1910.

November, she heard that she was to be offered the part of a Valkyrie in the Spring Wagner Festival in Leeds: 'I am mad with excitement about it' (in the end, nothing came of this, though she attended a few rehearsals). There was also an unrealised plan to go to India. It is possible that at this stage of her life, she was reacting to the single-minded pursuit of more serious goals by older women in her family (her aunts Elizabeth and Millicent in particular) by determinedly pursuing social and cultural pleasures.

Much of Margery's social life was shared with members of the Jones family (particularly Puppy and Edward) but she gives no clue yet that Edward is anything other than a good friend. If anything, she seems more attracted to Kingsley Game,²⁷ another friend of Puppy's, of whom she says 'I could never have believed a man capable of such depth of understanding for a woman as he has. But then he adores me'.²⁸ The first real indication of Edward's importance to her comes in the entry for 4 December, when she was again in Pangbourne for the weekend. During a walk with Puppy and her sister Hilda, she and Edward 'split off, — came in awfully late for lunch, & had a perfectly glorious walk. We talked hard all the time[,] religion — politics, & ourselves, — subjects of eternal interest. I am inclined to believe that he is in love with me; I wonder. In the evening Puppy & I sat in Hilda's room & discussed It!!'²⁹ Early in December, she met Kingsley in Puppy's London rooms, with her permission, which makes it sound as though Puppy already regarded him with interest on her own account: she was to marry Kingsley in 1919 (and the ups and downs of their relationship crop up in Eileen's letters from time to time). On this occasion, Margery commented, 'he makes me appreciate Edward all the more'. She heard (she does not say from whom) that Edward had been discussing her with his sister Lilian: 'He does think of it, my

27 Arthur Kingsley Game, born 1890, had overlapped at Cambridge with Puppy and Margery, studying at Caius and graduating in law in 1911. There are persistent hints in letters and memoirs that Margery and Kingsley had an affair, which resulted in a long estrangement between her and Puppy, but I have not been able to date this.

28 Margery Spring Rice, *Diary*, November 1910.

29 Throughout her life, Margery was inclined to sprinkle her writings with commas followed by dashes: the habit, together with the vigorous handwriting that was characteristic of her from youth into old age, make the pages of her letters immediately recognisable.

God, — how exciting it all is'.³⁰ In a subsequent diary entry, Margery expresses that she 'can't help counting on it & dreaming of it',³¹ though at this stage, she wants to keep it to herself, and hopes her parents are not discussing it.

Plans had been laid for Margery to travel to Paris in mid-December for a month to improve her French, learn cooking, and visit Eileen Power, who was studying there. On 14 December, she said goodbye to Edward, and two days later she set off to catch the ferry, only to be thwarted by a gale so strong that the ship was unable to sail. Knowing that there was a fancy-dress dance at the Slade that evening, to which Edward was going, she hurried back to London to persuade Harry to take her. Harry refused at first, on the grounds that there would be too many girls, but was eventually persuaded to agree. By the end of the party, in the small hours, Margery and Edward were engaged. A few days later, she travelled to Paris.



Fig. 7. Margery as a young woman, around the time of her engagement to Edward. Photograph: family archives (c. 1910).

30 Margery Spring Rice, *Diary*, 8 December 1910.

31 Margery Spring Rice, *Diary*, 9 December 1910.



Fig. 8. Mary Jones with seven of her eight children. 'Puppy' is the baby, Petica leans against Mary and Edward is on the far right. Photograph: family archives (c. 1888).

Charles Edward (always known by his second name), the fourth of the eight Jones children and the oldest son, adored by his sisters, was almost nine years older than Margery. He had started to study at Merton College, Oxford, in 1897: he passed his first-year Classics exams as well as the compulsory scripture paper and then switched to mathematics, but, for unknown reasons, did not complete his degree. He had held a commission in the Warwickshire regiment between 1900 and 1905, which had taken him first to Malta, then to a post in the camp for Boer War prisoners on Bermuda, and finally to Gibraltar, though he did not see active service. His great passions were walking and climbing, so he used his leaves for walking holidays in Spain and Sicily with his friend Ronald Rose. In 1905, when the regiment was due to be sent to South Africa, Edward decided to resign his commission (though remaining an army reservist) in favour of working as a bill-broker in the firm of Allen, Harvey and Ross in the city of London where his boss would have been his uncle, Muz's brother, Alec Ross.

Edward was a good foil for Margery — a man with a strong sense of honour and duty, and a quiet, reserved, steady personality that contrasted with her volatility and outspokenness. In his sister Lilian's words, 'he hides his light under a bushel & [...] it can only be discovered by the right people or person'.³² The word that occurs more often than any other when his name is mentioned in letters is 'gentle'. Family and friends were generally delighted to hear of their engagement. Sam and Clara had set off a few days earlier for a holiday in Portugal, from where Clara wrote that Edward would get a 'good, devoted if somewhat headstrong wife'.³³ Sam was more expansive:

Since I wrote you last a chorus in praise of Edward has reached me from those who know him much better than I do. So I am confirmed in my hope & belief that you have chosen wisely & well. I hope when we get home we shall give him as warm a welcome as his family have given you.³⁴

Aunt Theo, in her down-to-earth way, refused 'to sing Glory Hallelujah' until she knew more about Edward and, even then, not until Margery had been married for a year and a day and was in a position to say that her husband improved on acquaintance.

One friend, writing in French, thought that Margery had 'trop d'esprit'³⁵ but also all the qualities needed for being loved and for making Edward happy. Another, Violet Price, who was living in Chile, was a little more uncertain: 'In spite of your level-headed remarks, I can feel you are genuinely fond of Edward. But [...] is this enough?'³⁶ Margery's own letters to Edward from Paris, however, are intense and passionate, and there is little doubt that she was deeply in love with him and felt she had found her soulmate. Writing to him on 20 December, she refers to herself as 'a conceited little Egoist', who 'wonders how you, — with your intense reserve, — your intense dislike of gush, — & your intense shyness of your own feelings, — would welcome the ineloquent, unvarnished, sincere outpourings of her foolish young soul'. Would Edward be shocked at her capacity for passion, she

32 Lilian Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 3 January 1911.

33 Clara Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, undated [December 1910].

34 Sam Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 27 December 1910.

35 Name illegible, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 31 December 1910.

36 Violet Price, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 14 January 1911.

wondered? Eileen showed her pleasure in the engagement by asking whether it would make her Edward's 'first fiancée once removed'.³⁷ She looked forward to following 'your matrimonial aeroplane circling round the Eiffel tower of convention till it totter bewildered on its foundations'.³⁸ As well as encouraging Margery's aspirations to remain independent and keep her own interests, Eileen wrote that she would never forgive Margery if she swore to obey Edward, but 'I think that you will always be happy (whatever you do) out of sheer force of character'.³⁹ Eileen recognised that she herself did not find it easy to make relationships with men, but she was generous in her recognition of Margery's happiness.

The exchange of letters between Margery, Clara and Edward over the Christmas period demonstrates that the engagement brought out all the old tensions and resentments between mother and daughter. Margery felt that Clara was expecting her to sacrifice all her interests to Edward's, just as (in Margery's eyes) Clara had sacrificed hers to Sam's and her children's. 'I have seen such an awful lot of it, — & it's so degrading' she wrote to Edward. She felt she was being treated like a child and that she and her mother had not 'an idea in common'. Clara did not value Margery's Cambridge experience and was completely out of sympathy with her liberal political views; this resulted in Margery's refusal to discuss anything important with her mother. 'There is not much spirit of compromise in either Mother or myself'. And yet, Margery recognised that she, herself, had behaved ungenerously in the past, 'when I was the vilest creature that ever stepped [sic] the earth'.⁴⁰ On a more mundane level, Clara and Margery's brother Douglas also assumed that she would return from Paris at once, to welcome Sam and Clara home from Portugal, when she was actually enjoying herself in Paris too much to be prepared to return early, in spite of missing Edward. Edward poured oil on troubled waters:

I understand your being irritated by your mother's letter to you; but I think the attitude you say you have adopted the last two or three years is the only possible one. After all people can't help getting rather

37 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 6 January 1911.

38 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 23 April 1911.

39 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 6 November 1910.

40 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Edward Jones, 25 December 1910.

old-fashioned as they grow older, & one of the signs thereof is a tendency to indulge in platitudes.⁴¹

When Margery suggested that after their marriage each of them should, on occasion, go away alone, he replied 'I absolutely agree with your idea about sometimes going away without the other. I am sure there is no greater mistake than the Siamese twins attitude!'⁴² During their marriage, they followed the advice they had given themselves. 'I am not going to be a cabbage', she wrote in her diary on New Year's Eve.

Margery, who was twenty-three, and Edward, thirty-two, were married on 28 April 1911, at St Stephen, Walbrook, by Robert Laffan. She had written to Muz: 'I have dropped into a regular nest of dear people, whom I love for their own sakes, as well as for Edward's'.⁴³ Some compromises must have been made, in the light of Margery's view that showy weddings were vulgar and that the meaning of marriage was not to be expressed 'by orange-blossom & white satin & a priest'.⁴⁴ One Garrett relative was disappointed that there were no bridesmaids but appreciated the 'sumptuous banquet' given by Sam and Clara for family and friends after the couple had left for their honeymoon near Llanthony Abbey in Wales.⁴⁵ Margery's cousin Roger Gibb, who had a gift for teasing her affectionately, wrote: 'The City of London must mark this as a red-letter day. In a couple of hours you have been married and Balfour and Asquith have appeared on the same platform and spoken in favour of international arbitration'.⁴⁶ Not wanting to be 'Mrs Jones', Margery did not discard her own name, but added Edward's to hers.

It is fascinating to speculate whether, in a culture in which women were not expected to know much about their own bodies, Margery and her friends knew anything about sex. Marie Stopes' *Married Love*,

41 Edward Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 29 December 1910.

42 Edward Jones, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 1 January 1911.

43 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Mary Jones, 22 December 1910.

44 Margery Spring Rice, letter to Edward Jones, 25 December 1910.

45 Clara Garrett, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 2 May [1911]. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson had been married 'without millinery and almost without cookery' (Jo Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 217): Margery may have emulated her as regards a hat, but certainly not as regards food.

46 Roger Gibb, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 28 April 1911. Asquith, Liberal Prime Minister, and Balfour, leader of the Conservative Party, both delivered speeches at the Guildhall in favour of President Taft's proposal for a general treaty between the US and the British Empire, concerning international arbitration. The treaty was signed in August 1911.

which offered a revelation described by Naomi Mitchison as ‘a light in great darkness to many of us, though a light shining through a lantern which was possibly not in the best taste’,⁴⁷ was not published until 1918.⁴⁸ There is no way of knowing whether Margery had read Henry A. Allbutt’s popular pocket-sized guide for married women covering pregnancy and child-rearing, *The Wife’s Handbook*, first published in the year of Margery’s birth and in print for several decades afterwards. The forty-fifth edition, published two years after Margery’s marriage, takes a patronising attitude to women and their sexuality: Allbutt advises, for example, that women in poor health should ‘avoid too frequent sexual connections. Of course a little may be beneficial’. He includes a chapter suggesting various ways of preventing conception, such as inserting a quinine-soaked sponge into the vagina before intercourse, but the book also includes numerous advertisements for ‘the best and most reliable Preventives’ and a ‘Descriptive Price List (Illustrated) of Neo-Malthusian Appliances and Hygienic Requisites’.⁴⁹ The emotional and psychological aspects of sex do not come into his picture.

We do not know, either, whether Clara had told Margery anything. Perhaps her aunt Elizabeth, who, by 1910, was at the end of her distinguished medical career, and to whom Margery always felt close, had spoken to her. However, Jo Manton, in her biography of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, recounts that contraception was never mentioned at the London School of Medicine for Women: ‘A young woman doctor, being interviewed for her first assistantship, was asked for her views on birth control. She replied tentatively that she had always thought large families rather jolly, and was relieved when this appeared to be the right answer’.⁵⁰ Margery had no sisters and neither of her two great friends

47 Naomi Mitchison, *Comments on Birth Control* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), p. 31.

48 Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, in their survey of sexual attitudes between 1918 and 1963, produce evidence that middle-class women were generally better informed about sex than working-class women: Szreter and Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918–63* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 251–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511778353>

49 Henry A. Allbutt, *The Wife’s Handbook*, 45th ed. (London: George Standring, 1913), pp. 4, 40, 62. See also Kate Macdonald, ‘Women and Their Bodies in the Popular Reading of 1910’, *Literature and History*, 22 (2013), 61–79 (p. 73), <https://doi.org/10.7227/LH.22.1.5>. Macdonald points out that various newspapers and magazines carried coded advertisements for contraceptives, but again we have no idea whether Margery might have seen these.

50 Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson*, p. 284.

was married. Her eldest sister-in-law, Ethel, had married Squire Sprigge, a doctor and medical journalist, in 1905, but Ethel and Margery did not know each other well at the time of the latter's marriage. Another sister-in-law, Petica, had married a classical scholar, Donald Robertson, in 1909, but she and Margery did not become close until after Margery's marriage. Although there had clearly been flirtations and infatuations among her Cambridge friends, there is no suggestion that anything went further. Social attitudes and conventions made it difficult for a man and a woman to be alone together: even when they were engaged, Margery could have lunch in Edward's rooms, or go out to dinner with him, but could not have dinner in his rooms. That sex was certainly discussed among her friends is clear from hints in Eileen's letters: before the wedding, she asks whether Margery has found a woman doctor (possibly for contraceptive advice, although doctors themselves were often ignorant in that field, something Margery herself was to take up the cudgels about two decades later), and a few days after the ceremony, she writes 'Has IT come off yet?'⁵¹ Margery appears to have told her that a Victorian bed and Edward's sore throat had caused a delay. Eileen may not have had personal sexual experience but she told Margery that it was hard to write about her thesis subject — Edward II's wife Isabella of France — without being obscene. Furthermore, on one occasion, she went with Edward's youngest sister Topsy (who was at school in Paris) to see a film about the white slave trade, commenting that it was lucky Topsy had not led a sheltered life.

Whatever the beginnings of the marriage were like, Margery became pregnant almost at once. Eileen hoped the baby would be a girl, but it is unclear whether Margery shared that view, although Eileen was to write later 'I know how much you always wanted a daughter'.⁵² Charles was born in March 1912, and over the next three years, Margery bore two more children: Isabel in May 1913 and Ronald in June 1915. They were living in London, at 38 Brunswick Gardens (north of Kensington High Street and about two and a half miles from her family home in Nottingham Place) where she had at least two servants, a cook and a maid, in addition to a nurse or nanny. While her energies were expended on her children — although much of the hard work was

51 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 4 May 1911.

52 Eileen Power, letter to Margery Spring Rice, 21 July 1914.

done by the nurse — and her social life, she also found time to be an active member of the Women’s Liberal Federation⁵³ and to join her aunt Millicent Fawcett in suffrage activities. From 1912 to 1914, she was on the executive committee of the London Society for Women’s Suffrage. Early in 1912, she was one of twelve members of the Garrett family to be present at a National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies fund-raiser in the Albert Hall.⁵⁴



Fig. 9. Edward Jones with Charles. Photograph: family archives (1912).

Although as a teenager Margery had declared herself a socialist, this was based on an abstract idea of socialism and constituted an act of rebellion against her family, and she quickly returned to the Liberal fold. While she had a social conscience, it was to be another two decades before she found a cause that truly exercised her capacity for hard work and

53 This was an umbrella group linking local Women’s Liberal Associations. It had been founded a few years before Margery’s birth, by Sophia Fry, and aimed (not very successfully) to appeal to working-class as well as middle-class women. Krista Cowman, *Women in British Politics, c.1689–1979* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 80–81, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-26785-6>

54 Elizabeth Crawford, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and Their Circle* (London: Francis Boutle, 2002), p. 260.

organisational skills, her ability to persuade or cajole other people into action, and her empathy with those whose lives presented an enormous contrast with her own. At the time of her marriage in 1911, the war that was to change lives in unimaginable ways was only three years over the horizon.

