

him and them together like figures in an immortal frieze, and given them their only justification—the justification through Art. For our moral feelings, which make us, are aroused by the living, whose life touches and oppresses ours; the dead, with all their past struggles, are more than men—they are effigies. Life is the Purgatory in which we judge and are judged, but Death is a courteous indifferent impresario, who receives all the actors to whom that tragedy has lent a fleeting dignity into the Heaven of changeless Myth.

THE ODD WOMAN

By Winifred Letts

SISTER O'MARA stood in the corridor of the prison hospital. She was talking to Sister Mary-Joseph. The nurse was stout and comely; the nun was tall and graceful. Each woman had the bloom of middle-age, of a life lived in a seemly way. Each was like a flower, blossomed to fulness in its own well-ordered plot. The nurse was the jolly pink cabbage rose of the cottage wall; the nun was the lily reared in the Castle pleausance.

So right, so disciplined, so conformed to the pattern of life was each. Sister O'Mara was always aware of the pedigree and breeding of the nun. It gave her a veneration for Sister Mary-Joseph. She would have called her a saint, a title that she would have grudged to Sister Carmel who was a grocer's daughter.

"She's the bed in the corner, Sister,—Number fifteen; I don't know what to do for her," Sister O'Mara explained. "She won't see Fr. Hurlihy—says she can't make her confession . . . she doesn't repent. The creature! I think she's wandering in her mind half the time. Maybe she thinks she's done sins she hasn't . . . a lot of them do . . . like a sort of pride in their sins."

"But she killed her son," argued the nun.

"Yes, she did that, of course, or she wouldn't be in here. But I must say for her, she's the quietest, most patient little creature we've ever had here . . . and she suffers terribly."

"Is that so? God help her."

"We ease it all we can, but you'd pity her, biting her lips to keep the pain back. An' if she moans at her dressings she'll beg my pardon and cry and promise she'll be better next time. Odd as she is I have to like the poor little creature."

OLD ALCOVE
OSBRIDGE
EVA ERSHAM
EVA SOST

"Do you want me to talk to her, Sister O'Mara?"

"I wish you would, Sister Mary-Joseph. It might relieve her to tell someone her story. She thinks she's going to hell—"

"That's like Religious Mania."

"It may be that. But she won't see a priest. She might talk to you. You've had great experience."

"Take me to her," said the nun.

She paced the ward with the dignity that a king had once admired in the girl who was presented to him.

Sister O'Mara bent over the hard, narrow bed. A little woman lay face down on the small prison pillow. The nurse turned her round with firm hands.

"Margaret Duffy . . . are you awake?"

"Yes, ma'am . . . yes, please, ma'am."

"I've brought you a visitor, Sister Mary-Joseph. You can talk away to her. She's very kind. I'll leave you now. But take the tablet . . . it'll ease that pain a bit. An' see, I'll prop you up so. Isn't that better?"

"Sister, you're too good for the likes o' me."

A little pinch-faced, squint-eyed woman looked up into the nun's serene beauty. Sister Mary-Joseph thought of small rough-headed animals, looking fearfully out from grass and thorns, ready to retreat at a rough voice or raised stick. Her long white fingers stroked the work-grimed, stub-nailed hand on the sheet.

"You've been a very hard worker, Margaret Duffy," she said gently. "I wonder what they called you? Was it Maggie—or Peggy—or what?"

"Cross-eyed Peg, Ma'am—that was what they called me at school. The boys used to shout it after me when I'd go messages up the street."

"You minded that, Margaret . . . it made life hard for you as a little girl? Didn't your mother try and make it up to you?"

"She'd no time, Ma'am. She went out to char every day, ma'am, the way I've done all my life. You wouldn't have time to pity one child above another when you've scrubbed all day and then they're under your feet till night time."

"And your father, Margaret, what did he do?"

"He was on the dole most time, Ma'am, unless he'd get a job now an' again at the road-mending. Then he'd drink it, a real old porter shark the man was—God rest him."

"Had you no-one kind, you poor soul?"

"I had me Aunt, Ma'am. She was rale kind first and last. I'd do her messages an' she'd give me a bit to eat. Her own girls didn't heed her, they were all for the boys an' the Pictures, so someway she took to me that hadn't a boy an' would sit with her."

"And your religion, Margaret? Did you find no comfort there? Couldn't you offer up your troubles, poor child?"

"I never did that, Sister. All I did was beg the Sacred Heart to give me straight eyes like other girls. I asked them all—Our Lady, an' the Little Flower an' I tried Saint Brigid, they do say she's good for the eyes. I'd shut mine and pray, and think when I opened them there'd be a miracle—but never a one an' the boys would shout 'Cross-eyed Peg' as I passed."

Sister Mary-Joseph's clasp was warm on the other's hand.

"But you know, Margaret, in the great world, the world I've known, some people admire a squint. They call it piquant."

"Do they, Ma'am—that's a quare word, I never heard that . . . but *he* did, Ma'am. He said I was like a little foreign cat he picked up in some place, I disremember the name now, but he said it looked at him the way I did and it had blue eyes."

"It was a Siamese cat," explained the nun.

"Maybe, Ma'am. He took it on the boat with him but it got sick and try as he would it died an' he said it squinted up at him an' he thought his heart would burst on him. 'Animals are that innocent,' he said."

"He was a kind man . . . a sailor was he?"

"Yes, that's what he was, Ma'am. He'd keep you listening all day, like the Passionist Fathers at the Mission—with his talk. He'd a quare sort of soft speech. It was Englishy but kinder some way than some you'll hear."

"Perhaps it was Devon. I know the Devonshire speech. It *is* kind, Margaret. And you say he was a sailor?"

"He was, Ma'am, that was how we met."

"Tell me about that, my dear."

"It was one night. I was going to me Aunt. She lived not far off the Quays. They was selling wood blocks in the street an' I got a load an' was trying to carry the lot back when a feller comes an' lifts it off me back. 'Wait, me dear,' he says, 'you be too liddle to carry that'—the way he said it was so foreign like I took him for a sailor. 'Where be you goin'?' says he. So I

tells him the house was near an' he followed me wid the sack. I'd never had a boy an' I didn't know what way to treat one. So I was just for thankin' him kind an' lettin' him go. Then he looks sort of hungry-lookin' into the room. ' 'Tis a nice bit of fire,' says he, 'likely you'll get a blaze now.' 'Would you please come in,' says I, an' there was me Aunt in a clean bib about to wet the tea. Me Aunt was a Christianable sort of a woman an' she was civilized in her ways, so she bid him come in an' sit down an' have a cup with us. 'Twas the flowery cup from the cresser she gave him too—real company style. I was that stupid I couldn't speak, only look at him when he'd not notice it."

"His ship was in port for a time, was it, Margaret?"

"That's what he told us, an' he was a stranger an' lonesome. He sat with us till late, seemingly he lodged at one o' these Seamen's Homes; but he said he'd be back an' maybe I'd go to a Picture with him."

Sister Mary-Joseph smiled into the crooked eyes. She too found some wistful charm in them.

"That was a treat for you, Margaret. You weren't used to Pictures with a nice boy?"

"I was not, Ma'am. I was ashamed of me old clothes, it was a mercy to be in the dark. Then it seemed like Heaven, he holding me hand an' not seeing the way it was black, an' the rents in the old coat I'd tried to cobble up before he came. It was more like dreaming than walking. I'd be thinkin'—'This is like other girls with boys,' an' then I'd say: ' 'Tis better some way, for he's better. He's the only boy I could name to God '."

There was a pause. The little woman stared at the foot of her bed. The nun spoke for her.

"He stayed with you that night, Margaret, it's that you can't tell?"

"It's that I can't tell to priest or angel, Sister, an' say I repent, for I don't. That's why I'm damned. I've said it to the Sacred Heart: 'I can't be sorry more'n if he was my wedded husband for he was that to me,' I've said."

"He told you he'd marry you," Sister Mary-Joseph said, a little wearily, knowing these stories so inevitably.

"He did, an' he meant it. You see, Ma'am, he came back to me Aunt's house an' he lit the candle, for it was all dark an' she'd left a note to say one of the married daughters was sick an' she'd

be off there all night. So the two of us was there alone . . . aye, he said he'd come back an' marry me, but he was sailing next day, an' the sea was so lonesome, he'd say, so cold and dark and big. Someway I thought of him being drowned like a man I'd seen fished out o' the river one day, an' I'd a great pity for him. Maybe in the heel o' the hunt it was that was the end of him. When he lay there sleeping like a child, I'd think of him tossing in a cold sea an' I thought my heart would burst for him. You'd not know it, Sister, you that are so holy, but there's a terrible great kindness you feel for your own man that wants you. He's someway like your child for all he's your man. I'd never known it before nor since but I knew it that night—the kindness an' the pity an' the warmth you can feel, the way you feel for the baby that lies on your heart. Forgive me, Ma'am, I've no business to say this to the likes o' you."

"You can tell me, Margaret. We're not born nuns, you know. We've lived long enough in the world to know . . . many things. Go on with your story. He went off next day, and you were very lonely?"

"I was so, Ma'am. It's a terrible lonesome feeling when a big boat goes off down the river an' all you have is slipping away from you. He gave me all the money he had, an' a handkerchief off his neck an' he said again he'd be back to marry me—oh! he meant it true to God. They'd never believe he'd keep his word. Me Aunt an' all said 'Who'd listen to a sailor?' But he was drowned I believe. I know someway he'd not come back. I went into the Chapel to say a prayer for him an' I lit four candles for him. I was cryin' all the time. Did you ever notice, Ma'am, that if you'd be cryin' an' you'd look at a candle flame it's a crown of thorns you see round it in the light?"

The nun nodded.

"Yes, Margaret . . . I've seen that crown of thorns . . . quite often."

How well she knew the sequence of events, this nun set apart from one life yet knowing the other so well, seeing it in Rescue homes, in Foundling homes, striving to tidy up a world made so untidy by lawlessness.

"Then you found you were in trouble?" she asked in the habitual way she had for such cases.

"If you call it that, Sister. Someways, that's a mortal sin, maybe, I thought it no trouble. I could only think it was his

little child and that it might have kind eyes—like his, and straight eyes—not like mine. I had to work whatever way I was, sick or sorry but I'd talk to him as I'd go home. I'd say: 'Your Daddy'll be back to see you—he'll bring you a present from far away. You'll be Daddy's own boy.' I'd talk that way, foolish like, but I was happy. Even when they all knew an' I got the sack for the way I was I couldn't seem to think meself a bad woman, I was just his wife."

"But Margaret, my dear . . . suppose every girl said that and defied God's law, what would the world be? You should have waited for him. Did you not think the shame it is to a child to be born out of wedlock? When you see all these little foundling children with no fathers they can claim, don't you pity them?"

"I do, Ma'am. Always I'd wonder were their mothers like me?"

"And your Aunt—did she not mind and feel your shame—for an unmarried mother *is* shame to her family. What did she say?"

"Me Aunt, Ma'am? She did mind it, an' me father said he'd break my head, only he was too drunk ever to come look for me. But the Aunt knew I'd work for her an' her own were no good to her, so she said she an' I would stick together an' she'd mind the child while I went out to work. She kept her word too. She came to the hospital when I was took bad an' when I came out 'twas to her I went. It was a boy—just as I knew it would be. An' she took him to the Chapel and called him Jasper for that was his father's name—a real quality name I thought."

The little shock-headed woman fell into silence. She leaned back with her eyes shut; her lips were bloodless. Sister O'Mara came down the ward and bent over her, with firm fingers on the fluttering pulse.

"You'd better rest, Margaret, you're tired. Sister Mary-Joseph will come again. You can tell her more later on. She's very kind, isn't she?"

"God'll bless her," the thin lips whispered.

Then with an effort she sat up, gazing at Sister Mary-Joseph with her strange oblique look.

"Hear the rest, Sister. I can't tell the priest when I'm not sorry, but you'll tell the Sacred Heart for me—Them above will hear *you* . . . you've education, you'd know what way to make them understand," Sister O'Mara nodded her wise grey head,

“Talk away, Margaret,” she agreed, “but drink this first. There you are! Now you’ll feel stronger. Sister Mary-Joseph will hear you out. I must be off with myself.”

The nun bent a coifed head to catch the weak voice.

“It was the child, Sister, he wasn’t right . . . he wasn’t in it, you know the look of them ones? It was long before I could believe he wouldn’t be like other babbies. But I took him to the lady doctor at the Clinic an’ she said he’d never come right an’ I’d best put him in one of these Homes, that I’d get no good of him at all. All the way home I thought of it, carrying him in my shawl. An’ I fancied him in an Institute where there’d be none to love him, an’ they’d have no patience with his ways, for you’d never insense the likes of him. His eyes would roll an’ he’d jabber like a monkey I saw once in a cage. I thought my heart would burst, an’ when I rocked him to sleep I said to God: ‘There’s no saying why an innocent child has a curse on it but if God Almighty doesn’t help him—then his mother must.’ An’ I thought of the man who fathered him that might be tossing in the sea and myself the only one to care and to remember him and his poor, afflicted child. ‘Moryah!’ I said, ‘what way would he be in a Home? It’s love that a babby needs and no-one could love the likes of him but his mother.’ I think, Ma’am, ’tis lack of love kills the childer in these Orphan places. One’s as good or as bad as the other an’ who cares? A babby knows the feel of a kind hand.”

“So you kept the boy, Margaret. God blessed you for that, be sure.”

“Did He, Ma’am? It seemed as if I was the only one to help myself or the child—and me Aunt. She was rale good, she minded him in the house all day. We’d moved to a cottage in a far, quiet part of the town. I worked for her an’ I gave her all I could earn, small as it was. At night I’d go back an’ I’d take Jasper out a walk as best I could for his legs went every way. But the people wouldn’t stare in the dark an’ he’d babble and laugh to see the lights. That was all he noticed.”

“Poor soul! You must have been dead tired after your day’s work.”

“I was so. Times I couldn’t stir for the weariness and I’d sit in the rocker an’ he’d be on my lap like a big babby, an’ him

with a whisker on his chin showing he was a man already. And then—this is the hard part to tell, Sister—”

“Go on, my dear.”

“I’d known a long time I wasn’t right, that I should be in Hospital. I was scrubbing in the Wards every day and the Sister noticed me an’ she’d have the doctor see me whether or no. He got all the truth out of me. You can’t deceive them ones. He said I’d waited too long, I should have seen him a year ago. He told me I’d have to come for an operation—it was my only chance to live. Very kind he was, said they’d have a bed for me an’ he’d open me himself—he that was a big doctor with a great fine motor car.”

“You felt you couldn’t leave the boy, Margaret? So few of us can trust God to look after other people. You had your Aunt.”

“She was grown too old, Ma’am. She’d taken to the bed an’ I was nursing her. I’d have to tie Jasper to the bed leg for fear he’d go to the fire. I saw no way out of it at all. If I went to the hospital what would he do . . . if I died what would he do? Never one minute could I sleep by night . . . twisting it in my mind. I was passing the Chapel next day and I turned in. I told the Sacred Heart the way I was an’ that Jasper would be better dead than in an Institute. I made up my mind that day what I’d do. I was working for a lady one morning a week. She’d go out an’ leave everything round about. Seemingly she was a bad sleeper an’ she left the tablets by her bed. I took a lot from the box and I stole a bottle of whiskey off the sideboard—’twas half empty—but I never stole before, Sister, before God I never stole before, and but for him I never would ha’ done it. But I’d made up my mind how I’d give him all the whiskey and the tablets till he was dead asleep and then put the pillow on his face.”

Sister Mary-Joseph drew a quick breath.

“You killed him—your son?”

“I killed him, Sister, an’ I hoped they’d hang me for it. I told the gentlemen, Judge and all, I’d done it an’ would do it again, only I asked them to kill me too. Why did they spare me that ought to be hung?”

“No . . . no, Margaret. It was a dreadful . . . a fearful mistake. We must let God work out His holy will. Who are we to end life?”

But you tried to take God's place and decide for Him. Now you must offer up your troubles and expect His mercy."

The squinting eyes turned away; the little tousled head twisted on the thin pillow. The weak voice whispered some broken words.

"They can damn me—it won't matter. But ask the Sacred Heart to watch over Jasper."

Sister Mary-Joseph bowed her head.

"I will."

THE POET AS SOCIOLOGIST— GEORGE CRABBE

By Vivian Mercier

ANYBODY who has read Trevelyan's *English Social History* will remember what excellent use he makes of the English poets—particularly Chaucer—in illustrating the social conditions of their respective periods. As I had, like a great many others, first become interested in Trevelyan's subject through reading English Literature at the University—with which, since the days of Taine, a smattering of social history is *de rigueur*—I was on the watch for any "omissions" on his part; omissions, that is, of poems which had given me new insight into particular historical periods. Gay's *Trivia, or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* was one such; I valued it because it paints pictures of *all* the social classes of Queen Anne's and George I's London—not merely of the privileged classes, as Pope's poetry does. Gay, the country lad who has made good in the big city, revels in the wealth and bustle, the size and populousness of London, which was then first beginning to be the mother-city of a great empire, and beginning, too, to look the part. Suddenly, as I read his poem, I saw the point of those comparisons which Pope and his set were so fond of making between Anne's London and Augustan Rome. Before, such comparisons had seemed mere provincial rhetoric, like calling Edinburgh or Cork an Athens; but what with Pope was a convention became with Gay a reality.