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COMPANIONATE LIVES AND CONSONANT VOICES IN *WE TWO TOGETHER*: THE 1950 DUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF IRISH AND INDIAN REFORMERS MARGARET AND JAMES COUSINS

by

JENNIFER DAVIS COPLAND

Under the Direction of Ian C. Fletcher

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores *We Two Together*, the unique dual autobiography of the reformers Margaret and James Cousins. It places this rich text in the context of the first half of the twentieth century and demonstrates its value as a source for Irish, Indian, gender, and global history. It investigates how the Cousinses represent their efforts to create and maintain a companionate marriage over a lifetime, depict their work as activists for women's suffrage, Indian nationalism, educational reform, and other causes, and recount the impact of cross-cultural encounters on their cosmopolitan lives. *We Two Together* provides insight into the lives of two extraordinary individuals as they witnessed and participated in several key social and political movements in Ireland and India. In bringing attention to this book, I hope that other historians will make use of it and that librarians will preserve the rare copies in their possession.

INDEX WORDS: Margaret Cousins, James Cousins, *We Two Together*, Marriage, Feminism, Activism, Ireland, India, Cosmopolitanism, Cross-cultural encounters

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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December 2012

DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this thesis to my husband and son who have been both patient and generous in their support of my academic pursuits.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Topic and Background

We Two Together was published in Madras, India in 1950 and follows the lives of Margaret and James Cousins. The phrase chosen for the title, *We Two Together*, comes from Walt Whitman's poem "Leaves of Grass," and is a theme repeated by the authors throughout the work. The autobiography is constructed of fifty-eight chapters, totaling seven hundred and seventy pages, with each author contributing individual chapters as well as collaborating on certain chapters. This type of construction allows the Cousinses to focus on their areas of specialty while reinforcing each other's accounts with their own views and recollection of events.

They begin by describing their births, childhoods, educations, and young adulthoods. The rest of the chapters are largely guided by the various movements in which the Cousinses participated and the initiatives they undertook for the betterment of society. This dual autobiography allowed the Cousinses to tell a story of momentous change over the course of their movement from Ireland to England, and finally to India. These larger moves were punctuated by the many trips that took the Cousinses around the world to locations that included Europe, the United States, China, Japan, and the Middle Eastern cities of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Beirut, and Baghdad.

To fully appreciate this work it is important to understand the beginnings of the story's main characters. James Cousins was born, the oldest of four sons, on 22 July 1873, to a Protestant family in Belfast. His father was a sailor and James notes that "there were no servants in our home…Ma cooked, and we cleaned up."[1] The family was able to

afford elementary schooling at the local National School for James and two of his brothers at "sixpence a week...for the lot."[2] James completed his formal education at the age of twelve and half, and in an effort to expand his skills and improve his chances for employment he taught himself shorthand. After several shifts in occupation that included working as the personal secretary and speech writer for the Lord Mayor of Belfast, James moved to Dublin in May 1897 to further his growth as a poet. Margaret Cousins (née Gillespie) was born in the town of Boyle in county Roscommon on 7 November 1878, to a middle-class Protestant family. She was the first born of four sisters and an unspecified number of brothers. Margaret's father was a government official and amid the growing nationalist sentiment in Ireland she recalls, "My father used to get me to read to him the political news of those stormy times…and all my life through I have felt quite at home in politics."[3] Margaret gained her elementary education at a coeducational National School, before attending an all girls boarding school in Derry, and finally moving to Dublin in 1898 to attend the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Margaret and James met in the summer of 1899 and married a few years later in April 1903. Sickly from birth, James became a vegetarian in his mid-twenties for reasons of health and his moral objection to consuming flesh. By contrast, Margaret was always full of energy and enjoyed a strong constitution. Initially Margaret objected to James's vegetarianism, but on the day of their wedding announced that she would be joining her husband in a vegetarian lifestyle.[4] Vegetarianism was not the only signal of their inclination towards heterodoxy.

The rights of women were very important to both James and Margaret and equality is a constant theme throughout *We Two Together*. James's mother claimed that he had been a champion of womanhood since the age of four and as he matured he

realized that "feminine companionship, if it was to outlast preliminary curiosity and novelty and subsequent familiarity, had to offer me more than transient attractions of feature and form."[5] Thus, when he and Margret met, her strong independence and initiative, combined with their mutual love of the arts and nature, made him realize that he had truly found his life partner.[6] The Cousinses' view of gender equality can be seen throughout the book where they frequently make use of terms such as "comrade," "partner," "collaborator," and "companion" to refer to one another; however, they do not shy away from also referring to each other in the more traditional terms of husband and wife. Their views of equality were further demonstrated as members of the Theosophical Society whose First Object is "to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour."

The Cousinses became involved with the women's suffrage movement and with the help of fellow Irish activists Hannah and Frank Sheehy Skeffington they founded the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908. This group would later launch the radical newspaper the *Irish Citizen* in 1912. Their involvement in the cause of women's suffrage was not limited to Ireland and Margaret traveled to London to participate in the militant demonstrations organized by the Women's Social and Political Union.

Through their association with the Theosophical Society and at the urging of Annie Besant the Cousins shifted their lives from Ireland to India in 1915. Margaret initially felt that India was not ready for women's suffrage, but James was persistent in his encouragement and later that same year, after consultation with her peers in India, she helped to establish the Women's Indian Association and eventually the All-India

Women's Conference. These associations championed not just women's suffrage, but a wide range of women's issues including education and the health of women and children.

The Cousins also became involved in the pursuit of Indian independence not long after their arrival in India. While their participation in the nationalist movement in Ireland mainly took the form of pursuing rights for Irish women as part of the larger plan for independence, in India the Cousinses had a more prominent role in the fight for independence. Most notably, Margaret spent twelve months in the Women's Prison in Vellore for her defiance of an ordinance that restricted free speech in December 1932. Their involvement with these movements in addition to their work in Indian education lead to a great understanding of the people of Indian and allowed for "intimate contacts with Hindu domestic life" gained through friendships with colleagues, neighbors, male and female students, and their families.[7]

Argument and Significance

We Two Together provides insight into the lives of a woman and a man, married to each other for some fifty years, as they witnessed and participated in several key movements of the first half of the twentieth century in Ireland and India. These experiences included the rise of feminism and women's suffrage as well as Indian and Irish nationalism. With a large part of their adult lives spent in India, the Cousinses are a prime example of the global circulation of people and ideas in the early twentieth century. The potential applications of this source in the study of world history are great. Through a close reading, comparison, and contextualization, using scholarly histories, I will examine the lives of these two people and their individual choices and relationships to illuminate larger processes taking place in the first half of the twentieth century. The

Cousinses provide a perspective on Ireland and the world as individuals who left the island, but traveled east as opposed to west, unlike so many Irish expatriates who immigrated to the United States. It is important to note that they did not leave Ireland for the purpose of improving their economic situation, but instead traveled to India for the purpose of cultural, spiritual, and intellectual growth.

In one of the book's later chapters Margaret discusses their decision to document their lives and experiences at the suggestion of an undisclosed group of friends. As they discussed in detail whether or not they should proceed with the project there was debate over whether there was anything in their lives that was worth recording.[8] Finally it was decided that they "had been so close to movements that had made history that we could record them with an intimacy that few possessed."[9] This intimate perspective constitutes the great value of *We Two Together* as an historical source. Margaret and James have both been studied and written about separately, but no one has yet to study them within the context of their marriage. Some of the Cousinses' private papers have survived, and other documents, both published and unpublished, do exist, but for the purpose of this thesis my focus will be on the rich text of their dual autobiography.

While perusing the pages of *We Two Together* it becomes clear that the Cousinses lived lives filled to the brim with passion, excitement, and controversy. This work is not only unique in its composition, combining two voices and lives in one text, but also with regard to the intimate details freely shared by its authors. The sheer volume of information in *We Two Together* demonstrates how the Cousinses were willing to dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to the compiling of their experiences in the large number of causes they were part of. These first-hand accounts of the challenges

and opportunities confronted by activists in feminism, education reform, women's suffrage, and nationalism are relevant as these struggles are still faced by many people and nations today. By inserting real people into the story of world history and the great changes of the first half of the twentieth century we can gain a better understanding of the individual choices and motivations that drove these changes forward.

Scholarship

Few copies of *We Two Together* exist. According to WorldCat, only twenty-one copies are held by libraries worldwide. Only one review exists, published in 1951 in the *Dublin Magazine*, which gives the impression that the work disappeared almost as soon as it appeared. Perhaps the rarity of this work has precluded many historians from making more extensive use of this rich and unusual source. Several scholars have referenced it, including Joseph Lennon, Catherine Candy, Kumari Jayawardena, Radha Kumar, Geraldine Forbes, Mary Cullen, and Maria Luddy, but to date no one has focused on the text as an extraordinary source for modern world history. When utilized, the work has mainly been used by these authors to support their research in literary criticism, and the histories of women's suffrage, social reform, and Indian nationalism.

In my effort to contextualize *We Two Together*, it is necessary to consult the scholarship surrounding the movements of which the Cousinses were a part. To familiarize myself with their world I looked at works covering women's rights and suffrage in Ireland and India, Indian nationalism and the decline and fall of colonial rule in India, the changing relationship between the sexes in the early and mid-twentieth century, and cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural encounters. In this section I will provide brief summaries of some of the main works that I have referenced relating to these topics.

The topic of women's rights has received considerable amounts of attention from scholars over the past several decades. To understand the motivations of my two protagonists it is necessary to understand the lives and experiences of the women who interacted with and influenced them. Geraldine Forbes's *Women in Modern India* discusses the topics of reform, education, and women's rights within colonial and post-colonial India. In her introduction she is quick to acknowledge that she limited her focus to literate women as her goal was to "privilege women's personal accounts."[10] Her account of these women illustrates the emergence and growth of social feminism and how Indian women acted as agents of social and political change during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In her discussion of Margaret, Forbes addresses how Margaret worked hand in hand with Indian and European women to help improve the lives and opportunities of women in India. Forbes situates Margaret within the context of her work for the cause of women's suffrage and education in Indian and focuses on her efforts with the All-India Women's Conference and the Women's Indian Association.

Another text vital to my understanding of women's rights in India is Radha Kumar's *The History of Doing*. Kumar covers the women's movement in India from 1800 to 1990 and provides a "selective survey of major campaigns, organizations and figures" that is arranged thematically.[11] She documents the beginnings of social reform, in which men were the primary actors, and follows the increased involvement of women, both independently as well as alongside men. Kumar does not dedicate much of her discussion to Margaret specifically, but mentions her at times in regard to her efforts for the causes of Indian women and her association with the nationalist leader Mohandas K. Gandhi and the theosophist Annie Besant.

To provide an alternative point of view of the women's suffrage movement I have made use of another essay collection, *The Men's Share*, which addresses the role of male suffragists and discusses the changing nature of masculinity in modern Britain. None of these essays speak about the Cousinses specifically, but an essay by June Balshaw on the Pethick-Lawrences is of particular interest as they were close friends of the Cousinses and shared in their progressive views of egalitarian marriage and other social issues. This collection argues that much of the value created by men's involvement in the cause of women's suffrage came from the attention they brought to the questions surrounding the changing understanding of gender roles and relations.

Knowledge of companionate marriage and the shifting relationship between the sexes in the early to mid-twentieth century is key to understanding the Cousinses and the way that they experienced the world. To further my familiarity with this I looked at Phyllis Rose's *Parallel Lives*, which is an examination of five Victorian marriages that aims to encourage readers to question the value of the institution of marriage. Through her examination of these relationships, Rose questions whether any progressive marriage is capable of escaping the influence of patriarchy.[12] I paired her study with Ruth Brandon's *The New Women and the Old Men*, a portrait of progressive couples and their responses to the notorious "woman question." Her group includes Margaret Sanger and H.G. Wells, both of whom make appearances in the Cousinses' lives. She argues that despite the progressive ideals professed by these couples, none of the women in these relationships "managed to live their lives as they would have done had they been entirely free agents."[13] Brandon's couples struggled to make their relationships work as they coped with personal tensions and wider changes taking place around them.

We Two Together provides a window into the inner workings of the movements that helped shape the motivations and choices of activists like the Cousins. I will utilize existing scholarship on these movements to help contextualize the Cousinses' dual autobiography. I hope to promote an awareness of its value for the study of activism, feminism, cosmopolitanism, and cross-cultural encounters and to demonstrate how attention to the experience of individuals in the past can help scholars better understand movements that shaped modern world history.

Sources and Methods

The Cousinses were not unique in compiling their experiences as activists. The Pethick-Lawrences and Beatrice Webb also published works detailing their efforts for the betterment of society. Two things set *We Two Together* apart from other activists' autobiographies. First, it is written as a single unified work as opposed to two distinct autobiographies and second, its authors chose to include a great amount of detail with regard to the mundane elements of life. The details of domestic life link together the larger themes of activism, education, travel, art, and philosophy. While ordinary, these details help to keep the reader grounded as the Cousinses' often-hectic life unfolds on the pages before them. The decision to include these details also demonstrates a balance between their public and domestic lives. For the Cousinses, both public life and domestic life were of equal significance and there are points in the text where it is difficult to delineate one from the other.

As for the book's structure, the Cousinses felt that their lives were too inextricably linked to present them in separate works. Margaret notes that "We could not get away from the realization that our story was one story, even when its shanachies were

as far apart as Madras and Tokyo or Los Angeles, or as apparently separate in conditions as Vellore Women's Gaol and Capri Island."[14] While the text flows from one chapter to the next in a mostly chronological progression, it was not written as such. Margaret was the first to begin and complete her sections, starting on Saint Patrick's Day in 1940 and ending in July 1943. James wrote his portion of the book at a more gradual pace over an extended period of time. By composing this work at the end of their lives, Margaret and James were able to reflect back on their participation in global movements that helped to shape the future of the modern world. The depth of information that they provide concerning their lives together is rich, but *We Two Together* is not without its silences, and there are several times that stories are left unresolved.

An example of the Cousinses' intimate perspective can be seen in James's chapter "The Other Side of Freedom," in which he comments on the unique insight that his wife was able to bring to the discussion on women's suffrage in Ireland due to her experience as a propagandist and prisoner. He goes on to describe his own contributions to the cause, including his work with the *Irish Citizen*, his public speaking, and his petitioning on behalf of his wife and other suffragist prisoners in Ireland. The window he offers into the experiences of the husbands of suffrage activists provides a point of view not often explored in more women-centered works concerning the suffrage movement. This period of the Cousinses' lives helps to illuminate the changing relationship between men and women and the changing view of women's role in society as the suffrage movement gained prominence.

Plan of Thesis

This study is arranged in five chapters. Following Chapter One's Introduction, Chapter Two will investigate how the Cousinses represent their efforts over a lifetime to create and maintain a companionate marriage. What is companionate marriage and how did progressive ideas lead to new models of marriage that differed from long established patriarchal models? How did Margaret's and James's personal views of the relationship between the sexes originate? How were their views of equality demonstrated in their daily lives? How was the nature of their marriage and views of gender relations reflected in their roles as activists and world citizens?

Chapter Three will explore the Cousinses' roles as activists for an assortment of social and political causes, including women's suffrage, education reform, promotion of the arts, and Irish and Indian nationalism. How did the Cousinses discuss their participation in social movements that operated in local, metropolitan, colonial, imperial, and international settings? How did they experience activism as an everyday phenomenon, and how did it impact the other aspects of their lives? What is the role of education in activism, and how did the Cousinses seek to influence the next generation of activists through their work in academic institutions?

Chapter Four will consider the role of cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural encounters in the Cousinses' lives. What did the Cousinses appreciate about India and how did these cross-cultural encounters influence them? Given their respect for Indian culture, how did they challenge Indian customs that they were in opposition to? As true citizens of the world, how did the Cousinses experience cross-cultural encounters during their travels and how did they represent India to others?

Finally, in Chapter Five's Conclusion, I will summarize my argument and reemphasize the significance of this text as a resource for Irish, Indian, gender, and global history.

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[1] James H. and Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh, 1950), 7.

[2] Ibid., p. 6.

[3] Ibid., p. 24.

[4] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[5] Ibid., p. 79.

[6] Ibid., p. 81.

[7] Ibid., p. 331.

[8] Ibid., p. 729.

[9] Ibid., p. 729.

[10] Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

[11] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 1993), 1.

[12] Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 17.

[13] Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and The Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 249.

[14] Cousins, *We Two Together*, 729.

2 THE SMALLEST COOPERATIVE SOCIETY: THE MAKING OF A COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE

In describing his wedding day, James Cousins notes that "I had not even hoped that my assurance to her of complete freedom in all our relationships would be met by any concession from her side. … I had made up my own mind that our marriage would be, on my side, neither a racial expedient nor a personal satisfaction, but a high privilege and spiritual responsibility.''[1] The Cousinses' marriage was one built on mutual respect and affection. By titling their dual autobiography *We Two Together,* Margaret and James chose to define their lives in terms of the love and companionship that they shared in their marriage. Their relationship may seem unremarkable by present standards, but conjugality as ideal and institution was being thoroughly reexamined and in some cases radically redefined during their lifetime. This chapter will explore how the Cousinses represented their marriage in *We Two Together* and how their relationship influenced other aspects of their lives.

The chapter will be divided into four sections, each beginning with a question to be examined. The first section will address the concept of companionate marriage and how progressive ideas led to new models of marriage that differed from long established patriarchal models. The second section will explore the formation of Margaret's and James's personal views of gender relations and their introduction to one another. The third section will examine the ways in which they put their views of equality and companionship into practice. Finally, the fourth section will speak to how their views of marriage and gender relations affected their roles as activists and world citizens.

Introduction to Companionate Marriage

Before the Cousinses' marriage can be discussed in detail it is important to understand the concept of companionate marriage. The gender norms of the Victorian and Edwardian eras generally did not favor the sort of egalitarian marital relationship sought by the Cousinses. According to Jennifer M. Lloyd in "Conflicting Expectations in Nineteenth-Century British Matrimony," companionate marriage was understood to be a marriage based on the shift of "'marriage as an economic relationship to a companionate institution'," but at the time was still "based on wives' deference to husbands' needs."[2] After the turn of the century the concept of companionate marriage shifted again. In her article on companionate marriage in the early twentieth century, Rebecca Davis notes the malleability of the term, which has been largely used to define marriages based on mutual emotional bonds, equal sexual desire where fertility is controlled by means of contraception, and easy access to divorce.[3] These twentieth-century relationships were predominantly a feature of the middle class and were built around the idea of equality between husband and wife and possibility of engaging in the emotional bonds of marriage without the burden of children. These progressive couples were often equally invested in their careers and they supported one another's professional and personal pursuits. In some instances the couples decided that they did not desire children at all, while in other instances they simply wished to delay that aspect of married life.

For the purpose of this study I will employ Davis's definition, which understands companionate marriage as "a union in which spouses intentionally controlled their fertility and embraced a modern egalitarian ideal."[4] Often the cases studied by scholars are in fact unsuccessful examples of companionate marriage such as the marriages of Effie Gray and John Ruskin, H.G. and Jane Wells, and Bill and Margaret Sanger. In these instances one partner was

often forced by various means to abandon their own desires in order to more fully support those of the other. For some women this meant abandoning their desire for children, while others abandoned their social, intellectual, and cultural pursuits.[5] In *We Two Together*, the Cousinses present their progressive marriage as a success and attribute their achievements as activists, artists, and educators to the support and motivation they received from one another. This concept of a companionate marriage based on equality between spouses stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal model of marriage that existed throughout much of the world in which the wife and children were dependents of the husband. To fully appreciate the distinctiveness of their marriage we will now explore the status of women in marriage in Britain, Ireland, and India.

The institution of marriage in Victorian Britain was defined by the idea of separate public and private or domestic spheres and their relation to the corresponding norms of femininity and masculinity. The domestic sphere was comprised of the home and family and was considered the accepted realm of middle class women. Essentially married women were pieces of property who were expected to bear and raise children, manage the household and servants, and be supportive of their husband's pursuits. Men were active in the public sphere, the world of business, the professions, and government. They were expected to maintain their wife and children. These prescribed gender roles often resigned women to many unhappy years spent either in the midst of pregnancy or recovering from it.

Women in Victorian Britain lacked authority not only over their own bodies, but also over their children. A perfect example of this comes from the life of the activist Annie Besant, who separated from her husband Frank Besant, an Anglican priest, in 1873. For five years she fought for custody of her daughter, finally losing her case in 1878 on the grounds that she was a professed atheist.[6] The press covered the custody battle, which drew attention to the fact that

under British law "a wife had no legal claim to her children," while the mistress of a married man had no similar restrictions.[7]

Yet another example of how the legal system reinforced the patriarchal paradigm can be seen in the British divorce laws. In her essay on sexual politics in 1890s, Lucy Bland comments how "at great expense, divorce had been available since 1857 to a husband on the grounds of his wife's adultery alone, while the wife had to prove not only her husband's adultery but additionally either his cruelty or desertion."[8] During this time a growing number of women and reformers sought a more equitable distribution of power within the institution of marriage and cases such as Annie Besant's further thrust these issues into public discourse. Married women gained property rights during the late Victorian era, but women reformers were surrounded by controversy as they pressed for other rights.

The state of marriage in Victorian Britain and Ireland was comparable. The doctrine of separate spheres permeated the Irish middle class. Women, due to their supposedly purer, maternal nature, were held up to be moral beacons in an otherwise sinful society.[9] The teachings and institutions of the Catholic Church, which held authority over a majority of Ireland's population, reinforced this gender order. The supposed moral superiority of women did not, however, translate into legal rights for Irish women in either the church or the state. Despite their many disadvantages, Victorian women managed to create their own forms of power within the spaces that they occupied and eventually organized to fight against the injustices they faced. These groups of women grew into a powerful movement that campaigned for the rights of women not only in Britain and Ireland, but also around the world.

In colonial India the issues of marriage looked somewhat different from those in Britain and Ireland. Indian marriages were often arranged and child marriage was widely practiced. The

reform of child marriage was a cause taken up by a mix of Europeans and Indians. Supporters of child marriage claimed that it was necessary for the preservation of Indian culture and social order. They argued that for a wife to truly feel she was part of her husband's family it was necessary for her to grow up in it.[10] The critics of child marriage scored its questionable morality as well as its physical effects on young girls. The passage of two age of consent acts by the British did not end the controversy. The first in 1860 set the age of consent for all girls, married and unmarried, at 10 years of age, and the second in 1891 further raised the age of consent for all girls to 12 years.[11] It was not until 1929 that the Indian government raised the legal marriage age for girls to 14 years. Indeed, the legal changes may have been trailing indicators compared to changes undertaken voluntarily by sections of the Indian public influenced by religious and social reformers.

Another issue taken up by reformers was the plight of Hindu widows. Like women in Europe, Indian women were economically disadvantaged. Moreover, by tradition Hindu widows of any age faced ostracism after the death of their husbands. They were prevented from remarrying, forced to shave their heads and dress only in white, forbidden from wearing jewelry, abandoned by their families, and considered bad luck by the rest of society.[12] This was especially tragic when the widow was still a child at the time of her husband's death. An act passed in 1856 allowed for the legal remarriage of widows, but it did little to change the prevailing views of these women.[13]

Marriage as a matter of law and as an institution was increasingly surrounded by controversy and efforts for reform from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Among the items of debate in Britain and Ireland were a woman's right to property, her rights in regards to her body and maternity, as well as her rights in divorce. In India efforts were

needed to help change social norms associated with child marriage and the ostracism of widows, without which laws to protect child brides and widows would remain dead letters. Along with these specific targets of reform was the ever present issue of a woman's right to happiness and the freedom to pursue her own desires. As we will see through an examination of *We Two Together*, thanks in part to her choice of husband Margaret Cousins was afforded the freedom to make her own decisions and thus set her apart from so many other Victorian and Edwardian women.

Meeting Margaret and James

The complicated and changing nature of Victorian marriage allowed for spaces for progressive relationships like the one shared by the Cousinses. Margaret and James's shared view of gender roles and their commitment to strive against the conventional problems of marriage added to the success of their relationship. I will examine the formation of these views early in the Cousinses' lives as presented in *We Two Together* and how they were first introduced and eventually joined together in marriage.

Equality is a consistent theme throughout *We Two Together*. James states that his feelings concerning equality between the sexes had always been inherent in his nature, and his mother claimed that he had been a champion of womanhood since the age of four.[14] He does not elaborate on why she held this belief, nor does he recount many specific interactions with women, other than his mother, in his early life. It appears that James preferred to spend his time working and writing. There was only one relationship that he does mention, a brief courtship of and engagement to an unnamed young woman in Belfast. He notes that he enjoyed her company and that their frequent visits together might have led to marriage had it not been for "the discovery of an unbridgeable chasm between the interests of the young lady's mind and my

own."[15] In a later chapter he further expounds on his growing understanding of what he would require in a life partner.

As James matured he realized that "in my growing understanding of humanity and myself, my demands on life were less biological then psychological," and as he moved about in his Dublin social circle he concluded that "feminine companionship, if it was to outlast preliminary curiosity and novelty and subsequent familiarity, had to offer me more than transient attractions of feature and form."[16] It is likely that these opinions were further shaped by James's interactions with the progressively minded members of the Dublin literary community. It is clear that James stood apart from the traditional young men of the time in his desire for true companionship as opposed to simply falling in line with the expectations of middle class matrimony. While he was undoubtedly supportive of the rights of women it does not appear that James made any particular efforts in that arena prior to his involvement with Margaret.

In her first few chapters, Margaret discusses how she began exhibiting her rebellious and heterodox nature early in life. She had a reputation for being wise beyond her years, even as a young child, and claims she was "born a natural egalitarian."[17] She recounts how at the age of eight she first discovered the inequality between the sexes. She had gone out riding on her donkey and when the side-saddle stirrup broke she swung her leg over the saddle and rode home. When her father, whom she describes as "very proper," heard of this from a friend he spanked her soundly for "behaving in such an unladylike way."[18] Thus, an event which comes across as a minor violation of social norms in fact had a profound impact on the way that Margaret would from then on perceive the world.

Margaret goes on to discuss her much loved grandmother who she saw treated as a leader in the prayer meetings they would attend together. These experiences further shaped her

perception of how things ought to be and she is surprised that "in that sphere therefore I was brought up to a freedom of all-round opportunity for women in that little western Ireland country town, a freedom which I missed in great cities regarded as progressive."[19] Margaret goes into more depth in a chapter titled "Freedom." where she describes how she further grew into adulthood after leaving her all female boarding school for the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin. She notes that her former headmistress advised her that she would be more successful if she was less independent, but this was contrary to everything that Margaret found within herself.

She greatly desired to become economically self-sufficient, "always wanted to change things into a better shape," and "never shirked hard work."[20] She believed in a fundamental equality of all human beings and shows resentment at the injustices she witnessed in her own household concerning not only the greater freedoms that were afforded her younger brothers, but also the fact that her mother was never allowed any money of her own. She committed herself to changing "the financial status of wives and mothers … which were the results of circumstances which could and would be changed, and that there was true love and understanding in which the inequalities of sex relationship disappeared."[21]

The story of James and Margaret's meeting, engagement, and subsequent marriage on April 9, 1903 unfolds across two chapters. One tells the story from his perspective and one from her perspective. James references his diary entries from the time and details their initial meeting at the Annual Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Ireland in 1899 and goes on to describe their increasing familiarity and his proposal to her in September 1900 "on a shelf of rock, with white gulls as applauding witnesses and the green sea edged with white at our feet."[22] After his beautiful description of their engagement, James quickly dives into explaining its impact on their psychological and spiritual understanding of themselves.

He notes how he came to recognize "the presence of a considerable admixture of feminine receptiveness and creativeness in my own make-up, and aware of a certain touch of masculine power and initiative in her's that, when I first saw her masterful handwriting, made me brace myself for adventure."[23] This statement provides additional insight into James's perception of gender roles and notions of femininity and masculinity in that he is able to recognize a combination of "feminine" and "masculine" traits both in himself and in his new bride. He sees these as positive attributes, which reinforces his earlier statements about what he was looking for in a partner. He does not deny that there are differences between the sexes, but sees the value in recognizing the differing attributes within oneself. James makes sure to discuss his and Margaret's similar interests, including their love of art, poetry, music, nature and learning. He tells of how as newlyweds they would read together and then host gatherings in their parlor to discuss what they learned with their friends. The Cousinses embodied the Victorian ideal of self-improvement, and their combined lifelong desire to learn is a constant theme throughout *We Two Together*.

Margaret's reflections on the beginnings of their relationship are quite different from her husband's. She comments on how as a young woman she enjoyed the company of young men and, like many young women, she believed that the life of a spinster was a dreadful prospect. However, what Margaret sought in marriage was not a man to support her financially, but "life-companionship with a man whom I would respect and love."[24] She even confesses that "I did not fall in love. I had to be dragged into it."[25] When she first met James, he did not embody the physical characteristics that she had envisioned for her husband, she did not like the fact that he was a vegetarian, and she was sorely disappointed when she first accepted his proposal.

Despite her misgivings, Margaret felt it would be foolish to dismiss what might be her only chance to marry, given her plainness in comparison to her younger sisters' beauty, and decided to give their relationship a chance. Importantly, Margaret notes that "we had not yet awakened to problems of woman suffrage or slum work or child welfare schemes" and thus they spent their time together indulging their mutual interest in gardens, galleries, concerts, lectures, and the like.[26] Margaret refers to James as her "wee North-man" and remarks that he was not the most impressive in regards to his personality "but I was learning to appreciate his depth and purity of thought, his genius in expression, his understanding of the need for every human being to have freedom to grow in their own way."[27] During this time Margaret was completing her musical studies, and upon graduation in 1902 she retreated to the home of her parents to learn the practical skills required of a wife.

Though it took nearly half of their three year engagement, Margaret did develop a deep love for James and upon her return to Dublin they married. It is interesting to note that while James provides a detailed account of their wedding day Margaret does not. Given that she completed her chapters before James completed his there is no way to know if she knew how he would tell the story of one of the most important days of their lives together, but we do know that in her chapter covering their meeting, engagement, and marriage Margret chooses to focus not only on the story of how she came to love James, but also on their shared expectations of their life together. For example, she remarks that at the time of their wedding they enjoyed a mutual happiness and they were committed to remaining happy.[28] She states that, "We were ready for starting the great adventure, the smallest kind of cooperative society, and the most fraught with unknown results from the most intimate and sustained mental and physical relationships possible to humanity."[29] Her description of marriage as a "cooperative society" is prophetic as her

marriage to James is exactly that, cooperative, both in regards to their domestic life and also in their support of each other's personal pursuits.

Living the Companionate Life

The Cousinses' views of equality and companionship played out in their daily lives in a variety of ways. *We Two Together* provides an impressive selection of representations. A recurrent example is their use of terms such as comrade, partner, collaborator, companion, and even "beloved encourager" to reference one another.[30] Despite their progressive attitudes they do not shy away from the traditional terms husband and wife. As one reads through the account of their years together it is impossible to doubt the mutual love and respect that existed between them. By choosing and continuously using terms that underline the cooperative nature of their marriage, the Cousinses reinforce their beliefs in the equality not only of men and women, but also of husband and wife.

In her book *Parallel Lives*, Phyllis Rose argues that marriage is "the primary political experience in which most of us engage" and thus we should pay particular attention to the power relations between spouses.[31] If Rose is correct that every marriage is built around the struggle for power, then the Cousinses did not provide any details of this struggle in their recollection of their marriage. No marriage is perfect, and all couples have their disagreements, but the Cousinses do not present this side of their lives together. Instead, they actively focus on the companionship and cooperation that are the hallmarks of their dual autobiography.

When it came to the day to day details of life, the Cousinses do not appear to have limited themselves to the spheres adopted by the majority of men and women in early twentieth-century society. During their first year of marriage, prior to the start of their activism, Margaret occupied her time teaching and practicing music. Once they became actively involved with the struggle for

women's rights, however, there was no going back. As they took up a growing number of causes, Margaret devoted large amounts of her time to activism. James was always the primary bread winner, but Margaret most certainly worked just as hard for the causes they supported and was never confined within the domestic sphere.

The Cousinses remained childless for the entirety of their lives. James promised from the start of their relationship that any and all decisions regarding children and sex would be left to Margaret's discretion.[32] It is difficult to discern much more concerning the physical relationship that the Cousinses shared. Margaret does address the issue once more in her chapter "The Universe Enters." She briefly describes declining health during the first year of marriage and attributes it to "the problems of adjustment to the revelation that marriage had brought me as to the physical basis of sex."[33] While it was not uncommon for newly married couples to be confronted with anxiety on their wedding night, and the expectations of the marriage bed, Margaret's overall reaction to the realities of sex was fairly intense.

> Every child I looked at called to my mind the shocking circumstance that brought about its existence. My new knowledge, though I was lovingly safeguarded from it, made me ashamed of humanity and ashamed for it. I found myself looking on men and women as degraded by this demand of nature. Something in me revolted then, and has ever since protested against, certain of the techniques of nature connected with sex. Nor will I and many men and women of like nature, including my husband, be satisfied, be purified and redeemed, life after life, until the evolution of form has substituted some more artistic way of continuance of the race.[34]

Given the apparent strength of Margaret's aversion to sex and bearing in mind that these words were composed in the twilight of Margaret's life, it seems possible that the Cousinses did not engage in sexual intercourse. This can be seen in contrast with many other progressive and companionate marriages in which the spouses employed birth control and family planning so that they might enjoy sex while avoiding unplanned pregnancies. It is possible that the Cousinses

shared in sexual relations early on in their marriage and that either one or both of them found the experience unpleasant. As the Cousinses incorporated an increasing amount of Indian philosophy into their lives they adopted the practice of brahmacharya, or self-imposed celibacy, famously promoted by Gandhi as a means of achieving spiritual purity.

The Cousinses' views of sex should not imply that their marriage lacked intimacy. The depth of their love for one another can be seen in the tender reunions they shared after periods of separation and their descriptions of feeling whole only when together. Towards the end of their lives, after Margaret suffered a debilitating stroke, James tells of the growing dependence they had on one another, both physically and spiritually.

> My long intimacy with her thought and her likes and dislikes enabled us to communicate freely. It was different with others. They knew nothing of the surges of deep soul-affection that passed between us. Our unity in the things of daily life was obvious, but only ourselves and a few others were aware of our affiliation with loftier aspects of life. They could not follow her allusions that were familiar to us. "What would I do without you?" was one of her questions. The answer was that she would not have to do without me for any length of time so long as I was alive.

In his usual poetic manner, James underlines the connection that they shared and that they believed stretched beyond the limits of their physical plane of existence.

A lot of time during the early years of the Cousinses' marriage was spent in pursuit of spiritual growth. James first took Margaret with him to hear Annie Besant speak sometime in 1901, but Margaret, a newly realized agnostic, was not impressed "by either her subject-matter or her personality."[35] Later Margaret began reading Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* as she and James began their journey together into the study of Theosophy and the occult. While not yet formal members of the Theosophical Society the Cousinses' beliefs were certainly in line with the society's First Object, "to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity,

without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour." Their attitudes towards equality found new expression in their shared spiritual journey and a future meeting with Annie Besant would be the catalyst for their greatest adventure, their relocation to India in 1915.

A surprising aspect of the Cousinses' marriage is how, despite the fact that they reference themselves as "Two Together" on several occasions, they in fact spent an inordinate amount of time apart while working on separate projects, sometimes on different continents. During these times apart they maintained their close companionship and sought counsel with each other through letters. Much of their travel took place inside India as they went about promoting women's rights and Indian nationalism, raising money for the advancement of education and the arts, and following their religious pursuits. Margaret had traveled by herself from Ireland to England several times early in their marriage to participate in militant suffrage demonstrations, but some of their most dramatic separations occurred when James was asked to organize exhibits and to give lectures on literature, art, and Indian culture at various academic and cultural institutions around the world.

The first of these trips took James to Japan to teach English for nearly a year from May 1919 to April 1920. James did not worry about leaving his wife to her own devices for a year and trusted that Margaret was capable of supporting herself in his absence. In addition to her work for women's suffrage, Margaret needed to earn a living for herself. In an effort to further her goals for women's education, she signed on as the Head Mistress of a girls' school 500 miles away in Mangalore.[36] Her chapter covering this stage of life is titled "A Lonely School-Ma'am" and she readily addresses not only the challenges of living the life of a single woman, but bemoans the challenges of surviving monsoon season. It would seem that some couples might question the toll that twelve months of separation would take on their relationship, but Margaret

argues that "if it was to drive us apart, it was foredoomed to failure: if it was to bring us closer together, it was quite unnecessary."[37] Eventually it was arranged for Margaret to join her husband in Japan, but before the trip could take place James was recalled to his position at the college in Madanapalle. She describes their reunion on the pier by stating "what a joy it was to feel that both ends of life had come together again."[38]

This year of separation was a good preparation for another journey that took James even further away from his beloved. In April 1928, the Cousinses set out on a worldwide tour that took them through the cultural and political centers of Europe, across the Atlantic to the United States, across the country to the west coast, from there to Hawaii, China, and Japan, before finally bringing them back to India nine months later. All the while they expounded the virtues of Indian culture and the cause of feminism. It was not long after their return that James began planning a return trip to the United States to further promote Indian and Celtic arts and culture. In April 1930, James set out on a steamer on his way westward to Europe and New York.

They were separated for another year as Margaret stayed in India to continue her work with the women's movement and the nationalist struggle. Margaret recounts how, "He gave me as usual full freedom to do as I felt right over the increasing political tension in India."[39] It is not likely that many husbands would feel comfortable leaving their wives to their own devices in a country in the midst of political strife, but this is yet another example of the trusting relationship that the Cousinses shared. Margaret eventually joined James in New York in 1931. She had been hesitant to leave India at such a critical time in its history, but concerns about James's health and the promise of a comfortable salary if he stayed an additional year to teach eventually convinced her to make the voyage. Not many couples could withstand the stresses of such sustained separation, but as the Cousinses recount this portion of their lives they do not mention any

negative impact on their marriage. Instead they focus of the joy of their reunions and the sustenance they received from one another's company.

Marriage and Activism

One of the defining attributes of companionate marriages is the spouses' support of each other's personal interests and pursuits. Given the Cousinses' myriad of interests and activities there were endless opportunities for the nature of their marriage to be reflected in their roles as activists and world citizens. One of the first issues that they supported together was women's suffrage. A mutual commitment to gender equality guided the lives of their fellow suffrage supporters Hannah and Frank Sheehy Skeffington, with whom they founded the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908 and launched the radical newspaper the *Irish Citizen* in 1912. The goal of the Irish Women's Franchise League was to insure that any bill presented for the purpose of Irish Home Rule would include language recognizing women's citizenship and their right to the vote. In her chapter "Votes for Women: Ireland 1," Margaret comments on James's commitment to the cause by stating that "my dear husband upheld and helped me, he being as enthusiastic and revolutionary as I was myself."[40]

The Cousinses' involvement in the cause of women's suffrage began in Ireland, but soon stretched beyond its shores as Margaret traveled to London, at the urging of Emmeline Pankhurst, to participate in militant suffrage demonstrations promoted by the Women's Social and Political Union in Britain.[41] Both she and James knew that this would most certainly lead to her arrest and imprisonment and it is a testament to the sincerity of their beliefs that James fully supported his wife's decision, despite the risks associated with militant action. Margaret was imprisoned for the first time in London in 1910 and again in Ireland in 1913 for breaking

windows. Her imprisonment in Ireland was marked by her hunger strike for recognition of suffragists as political prisoners as distinct from ordinary criminals.

At the start of his chapter "The Other Side of Freedom," James comments on the authority and insight that his wife was able to bring to the discussion of women's suffrage in Ireland as a result of her experience as a propagandist and prisoner.[42] He goes on to describe his own contributions to the cause, including his work with the *Irish Citizen*, his public speaking, and his petitioning on behalf of his wife and other suffragist prisoners in Ireland. The window he offers into the experiences of the husbands of suffragettes provides a point of view not often found in histories of the suffrage movement. The essay collection *The Men's Share?*, edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, gives voice to the large number of men, married and single, who participated in and supported the women's suffrage movement, and explores the role of men in what was often seen as a women's fight. Taken as a whole, the book argues that "by their very concern about women's rights and representation these men were nevertheless drawing attention to fundamental questions about male behavior."[43] James and men like him, including Frank Sheehy Skeffington, Richard Pankhurst, and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, were among the number of men who supported their wives' militancy and believed the sacrifices they were making were well worth the cost. James supported women's suffrage not just because Margaret supported it, but because of his own conviction that women deserved equal treatment as citizens.

As the Cousinses shifted their lives from Ireland to India they took the fight for equality and justice along with them. In 1917, upon reading the announcement of the imminent arrival of the Indian secretary, the British cabinet minister responsible for India, for the purpose of talks about the reform of Indian government, James inquired, "What about votes for women?"[44] Margaret initially felt that India was not ready for women's suffrage, but James was persistent in

his encouragement and later that same year, after consultation with her peers in India, she helped establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA). This association championed not just women's suffrage, but a wide range of women's issues. The education of Indian women and the reduction of the alarmingly high rate of infant and maternal mortality were both high on the WIA's agenda.

James was offered an opportunity to teach at the Theosophical College at Madanapalle, which allowed the Cousinses a more intimate view of the lives of the Indian people. Through their daily interactions with their students and neighbors, Margaret and James were able to develop relationships within the Indian community. These relationships placed the Cousinses in direct contact with many aspects of Indian culture, some of which they were in opposition too. The issue of child marriage was one that was especially near to the Cousinses as they saw several of their female students pulled away from education for the purpose of fulfilling a cultural obligation that left them entirely dependent upon their new husband and his family. Margaret remarks that she did not so much object to the practice of arranged marriage or even the payment of a dowry, noting that she grew up observing similar practices in Ireland, but what she was unable to abide was "the forcing of motherhood on little girls."[45] Margaret tells of two specific instances regarding child marriage, early motherhood, and their consequences. One especially bright and promising girl died in childbirth after she had been forced to marry as soon as she reached puberty.[46] Margaret attempted to aid another girl, only thirteen, who was set to be married to a widower of thirty. She spoke to the girl's father, but given the choice of "child marriage or caste ostracism" he chose to follow tradition.[47] These instances made Margaret more determined to work for limitations on child marriage, and James, while not personally

active in some of Margaret's causes, never ceased to support the work that she was doing for the betterment of humanity.

One of the causes that the Cousinses participated in together was the reform and expansion of Indian education. The education of Indian women was an area that had been sorely neglected under British rule and the Cousinses set out to rectify that short coming. In addition to supporting a modified Indian version of modern education the Cousinses also promoted the learning of practical skills. As nearly all Indian women were under the authority of either their husband or their father, they were not allowed much opportunity to become self sufficient. If their husbands died, the social ostracism faced by widows was compounded by their inability to support themselves financially. Margaret, who was fully capable of providing for herself if necessary, started several Homes of Service which instructed women in crafts such as making lace and weaving rattan and provided them with materials. These new skills granted women the opportunity to provide for themselves and for their children either in addition to or in place of their husband.

In an effort to further women's education, Margaret and her co-workers in the Women's Indian Association presented a proposal to the government supporting equal educational opportunities for girls and boys and an increase of the number of training colleges for female teachers. The WIA argued that uneducated wives would hold back their husbands.[48] In the same plan, they proposed to decrease the shockingly high rate of infant and maternal mortality by increasing the number of medical colleges for women as well as allowing local hospitals to certify women in midwifery.[49] These efforts promoted the notion that healthy and educated women could better support their husbands, which would in turn benefit India as a whole.

The Cousinses' desire for equality stretched beyond the oppression of women and sought an end to discrimination based on caste. This activism was not formalized through participation in any specific organization, but took place through their personal interactions with Indians of all castes. Their work in education provided a great opportunity to model their ideas of equality for their students. One instance of this took place in one of the Homes of Service, when a capable female volunteer was rejected by the students for supposedly being of "dancing girl lineage."[50] After much thought and consultation with James, Margaret left the students with the choice of "welcoming the non-caste lady or of losing my services in the Home, perhaps having it closed altogether."[51] In the end the students welcomed the woman into the Home. This demonstrates the Cousinses' commitment to their ideals, in that Margaret was willing to abandon one of her projects if it did not advance equality for all.

Finally, the Cousinses furthered their fight for equality in marriage through their participation in the Theosophical Society. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the society's First Object was "to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour." This included the belief in the innate virtues of womanhood and the notion that Hinduism, whose pantheon "was rich in deified womanhood," offered a great deal to women.[52] Many Theosophists argued that "the Hindu society of the ancient Aryans had provided women with suitable freedoms and opportunities" and that only later did it become corrupted and the state of women declined.[53] Thus, in promoting the spread of Theosophy and its tenets, the Cousinses were not only encouraging others to think beyond the confines of the more prominent religious organizations, but also to embrace the virtues of womanhood and reinstate the rights afforded to them in the past. This restorationist view was held by several prominent

Indians, including Gandhi, who desired to return India to a "golden age" as opposed to advancing it to a new age.

Conclusion

The concept of companionate marriage grew in the middle class during the early twentieth century as questions about gender norms came to the fore. A companionate marriage was a marriage which did not entail one spouse's financial control of the other, which "embraced a modern egalitarian ideal," and which often included the use of contraception.[54] This type of relationship allowed for both partners to follow their own interests and support each others' pursuits. In their studies of progressive marriages, Jennifer Lloyd, Phyllis Rose, and Ruth Brandon have all found that these relationships usually did not remain equal and often led to the desires of one of the spouses superseding those of the other. In their account of their lives together, the Cousinses appear to have avoided the pitfalls associated with companionate marriage. It is to be expected that they experienced difficulties at times during their marriage, but in their dual autobiography they do not recount those instances and instead choose to focus on the harmonious and supportive aspects of their marriage.

In examining *We Two Together*, one can see the centrality of the Cousinses' commitment to gender equality in their representations of living together in a companionate marriage. The very title of their dual autobiography is a tribute to the centrality of their relationship in all of their pursuits. Their progressive views took shape early in their lives as ideas concerning gender, the institution of marriage, and the concerns of women were coming into prominence. These beliefs shaped the nature of their marriage and set the stage for their mutual participation in the public sphere. The Cousinses chose to include the story if their domestic life together alongside the story of the public and professional lives. This decision allowed them to tell the story of how

they developed both as individuals and as a couple, as well as how their relationship impacted their activism and reform efforts. Through their combined efforts as activists the Cousinses were able to exhibit and share their values through participation in the causes of women's suffrage, marriage reform, women's education, and the promotion of Theosophy.

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[1] James H. and Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh, 1950), 83.

[2] Jennifer M. Lloyd, "Conflicting Expectations in Nineteenth-Century British Matrimony: The Failed Companionate Marriage of Effie Gray and John Ruskin," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 87.

[3] Rebecca L. Davis, "'Not Marriage at All, but Simple Harlotry': The Companionate Marriage Controversy," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (2008): 1137-1140.

[4] Ibid., p. 1140.

[5] Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and The Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 250.

[6] Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women in South Asia During British Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 125.

[7] Ibid., p. 125.

[8] Lucy Band, "The Married Woman, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist Sexual Politics of the 1890s," in *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914,* ed. Jane Rendall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 147.

[9] Timothy P. Foley, "Public Sphere and Domestic Circle: Gender and Political Economy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and*

Private Spheres, ed. Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 23-24.

[10] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 1993), 24-25.

[11] Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85.

[12] Mark Bevir, "Mothering India," *History Today* 56 (2006): 19.

[13] Ibid., p. 22.

[14] Cousins, *We Two Together*, 3.

[15] Ibid., p. 12.

[16] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[17] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[18] Ibid., p. 23.

[19] Ibid., p. 23.

[20] Ibid., p. 53.

[21] Ibid., p. 55.

[22] Ibid., p. 80.

[23] Ibid., p. 81.

[24] Ibid., p. 85.

[25] Ibid., p. 86.

[26] Ibid., p. 86.

[27] Ibid., p. 87.

[28] Ibid., p. 90.

[29] Ibid., p. 90.

[30] Ibid., p. 588.

[31] Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 7.

[32] Cousins, *We Two Together*, 89.

[33] Ibid., p. 108.

[34] Ibid., p. 108.

[35] Ibid., p. 87.

[36] Ibid., p. 370.

[37] Ibid., p. 372.

[38] Ibid., p. 380.

[39] Ibid., p. 534.

[40] Ibid., p. 174.

[41] Ibid., p. 174.

[42] Ibid., p. 195.

[43] Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, *The Men's Share* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 30.

[44] Cousins, *We Two Together*, 308.

[45] Ibid., p. 331.

[46] Ibid., p. 331.

[47] Ibid., p. 331.

[48] Ibid., p. 312.

[49] Ibid., p. 312.

[50] Ibid., p. 445.

[51] Ibid., p. 445.

[52] Ibid., p. 611.

[53] Bevir, "Mothering India," 20.

[54] Davis, "'Not Marriage at All, but Simple Harlotry',"1140.

3 THE PATTERN OF LIFE: ACTIVISM AND EDUCATION AS EVERYDAY PRACTICES

When the Cousinses first considered compiling the story of their lives they began by asking themselves what would be the value of such an undertaking. While acknowledging that they "had pioneered for the liberation and elevation of womanhood and for culture and beauty in education and life," Margaret confessed that in the larger scheme of things their successes only addressed a small portion of the immense amount of work that needed to be done.[1] The Cousinses demonstrated a lifelong dedication to the causes they supported and their work permeated all other aspects of their lives. Margaret notes that "we discovered that both separately and together we rarely went anywhere or did anything that was not worth while."[2] When one examines their dual autobiography there are numerous illustrations of the vast amount of their time that was occupied with work for one cause after another.

Margaret mentions that she first gained interest in activist work after reading Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, which was given to her in high school by her father, and states that "it aroused in me a desire to do slum social service."[3] This influential work combined with Margaret's natural tendencies towards egalitarianism set her on a lifelong path of service and reform. James does not mention a specific moment that propelled him towards a life of activism, but when reading about the early years of his life one can discern that he gained an awareness early on concerning the inequalities that existed specifically between the people with money and those without. He acknowledges the growth of this awareness when he tells about a time when his father was out on strike. His young mind tried to understand why "all men I ever heard of were always anxious to be in work" and so "there was something strange in their all

refusing to work at the same time, something wrong."[4] He concludes that "the strike had opened my small mind to problems concerning the relationships of people who had money and people who hadn't, and had to get it by working for the people who had it."[5] This awareness must have played some role in James's eventual decision to live, along with his wife, the life of a reformer and agitator.

The previous chapter briefly explored the ways in which the Cousinses' views of marriage and gender relations influenced their activism and this chapter will further examine the Cousinses as participants in various social movements over the course of their lifetimes. The first section will briefly introduce and discuss the nature of some of the social movements that came to prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and discuss how the Cousinses participated in social movements that operated in local, metropolitan, colonial, imperial, and international settings. The second section will explore how the Cousinses experienced activism as an everyday phenomenon and the impact that their public commitments had on the other aspects of their lives. The third section will examine the Cousinses' role as educators and how they sought to influence the next generation of activists through their work in academic institutions.

The Challenges and Personal Effects of Activism

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of vast social movements and sweeping reforms, many that crossed borders and spanned empires. These movements involved large numbers of people and developed from local organizations and were sometimes sustained over generations. Some of these local groups, specifically the women's suffrage movement, grew into what we now recognize as transnational advocacy networks, which helped to further sustain these movements and set the stage for the social movements of our own times.

In *Activists Beyond Borders*, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink explore what made these "historical precursors" so successful and allowed them to operate collaboratively across the globe. They examine a selection of causes that they identify as being "historical precursors" to these advocacy networks, including the fight for the abolition of slavery, the women's suffrage movement, and the movements to end foot binding in China and female circumcision in Kenya. They argue that at their core these advocacy networks were communication structures that allowed for the exchange of information and operated within political spaces.[6] They note that for these networks to be effective "there must be actors capable of transmitting those messages" and problems must be framed "in such a way that their solution comes to appear inevitable."[7]

These women's suffrage organizations transmitted their message through various means, including speaking tours, pamphlets, letters, and newspapers, which allowed for the development of a "common way of thinking," a "common language," and a "feeling of solidarity."[8] Margaret Cousins spoke on numerous occasions to groups of reformers not only in Ireland and India, but also in England and various parts of the British Empire, the United States, and several European countries. She commented that at a meeting of the Women Voters' League in New Haven, Connecticut she spent time with "their eager members exchanging notes on the progress of women in two hemispheres."[9] The fight for women's suffrage was particularly effective and, according to Keck and Sikkink, "less than fifty years later almost all countries in the world granted women the vote."[10] The desire for the improved condition of women was not limited to the borders of individual countries, but reached out across the world. The well-established advocacy networks of the women's rights movement show how it was possible for two Irish activists in southern India to make a significant impact on the politics of gender and empire on a global scale.

Margaret and James worked with a multitude of organizations, both directly and indirectly, related to the social movements they supported across Ireland, England, India, and elsewhere around the world. The majority of these organizations were involved in work specifically related to women, including the Irish Women's Franchise League, the Women's Social and Political Union, the Women's Indian Association, the All-India Women's Conference, the Women's Trust (Kashmir), the All-Asian Women's Conference, the Women Voters League (United States), the International Council of Women, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Women's Freedom League. These organizations supported causes ranging from women's suffrage and education to improving women's and children's health.

Education was another ever-present theme throughout the Cousinses' lives, with both Margaret and James working off and on as teachers and promoting the inclusion of arts and culture in education, especially in India. Some of the educational organizations that they supported included the All-India Education Conference, the Theosophical Education Trust, and the Society for the Promotion of National Education. In addition to these groups the Cousinses were active in various capacities at academic institutions such as the Theosophical College at Madanapalle, the Indian Women's University at Poona, and the National Girls' School in Mangalore. The involvement in education even stretched into their travels outside of India with numerous requests for lectures and exhibits from academic institutions across Europe, Asia, and the United States.

One of challenges faced by activists that can be seen throughout *We Two Together* is the way space offers obstacles and opportunities for organizing. On multiple occasions Margaret and James had opportunities to travel internationally and promote the causes they supported. These

trips often took place over several months, due partially to their large number of speaking requests, but also to the time intensive nature of travel during this period. Margaret and James traveled extensively within India and faced a variety of challenges associated with travel during their time there. The nature of their work required face-to-face collaboration with other activists and like-minded individuals. This could be problematic in a country as large as India, especially when extreme weather was mixed with unreliable transportation and the often poor quality of rural roads. On one occasion in particular, James tells of "a week-end tour to a Theosophical Conference in Cuddapah, a largish town sixty miles from Madanapalle."[11] What begins as a simple weekend trip became increasingly complicated as the car he was traveling in broke down in the countryside; he was forced to spend one night on the floor of a hut and another on the roof, subjected to the sounds and smells of the town.[12] His return trip to Madanapalle was not an improvement:

> Next morning I descended from the roof at 5 o'clock, and started with the engineer for home; this time by bus as the car would have to await a part from some hundreds of away. Almost at the same place a tyre burst, and gave me an hour and a quarter of naturalist field-study. It did the same an hour later. But we got home, in six hours instead of two.[13]

These challenges could have flustered the most seasoned traveler, but thanks to James's good humor and versatility his roadside delay instead turned into an opportunity to commune with nature.

The monsoon season posed its own challenges. Margaret illustrates this when she describes some of her experiences as the Head Mistress at the Girls School in Mangalore. She arrives at the start of monsoon season and details how "the compound became a lake three inches deep" and as the season progressed the conditions became so bad that she was forced to travel around in bare feet as shoes and sandals "gave up the ghost."[14] Another trip by James, this time

by bus to Trivandrum, during a monsoon was hindered by flooding which washed out sections of the road and made it necessary for him to wade bare foot through the rushing water in his good suit.[15] When it becomes clear that further progress would be impossible, James states that, "this time I had reached desperation, and, even with visions of bronchitis or worse, tramped through the water in shoes and trousers and overcoat as if an amphibian born."[16] Stories such as this, while humorous, might seem inconsequential when considered over the course of a lifetime, but the Cousinses' decision to include these experiences is significant as it allows them to more fully represent the variety of practical challenges activists and reformers faced when they came in India.

Another challenge of space involved communication. Correspondence by mail and telegraph were the primary means of long distance communication during their lives, but not much detail was presented concerning written communication in *We Two Together.* It is known that they both had correspondence with the British activists Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, and Margaret mentions one specific occurrence of this in 1920 when she received what she described as an affectionate letter from Emmeline. Margaret also discusses sending letters "to the press on getting women on the voting roles."[17] In *Activists Across Borders*, Keck and Sikkink highlight the importance of written correspondence between suffragists across the world and its impact on creating a common language and feelings of solidarity. We know that Margaret and James participated in this sharing of ideas, but it is difficult to ascertain the extent of their letter writing from their accounts in *We Two Together*. It could be that such correspondence was so commonplace as to not warrant specific discussion despite their inclusion of other mundane details of life.

Letter writing, while common, was not the Cousinses' only means of long distance communication. When discussing the writing of their dual autobiography, Margaret mentions how fortunate they were in having participated in events that provided them with reasons "worth cabling to Winston Churchill, or H. G. Wells or Pethick-Lawrence about," including a cable sent to both Winston Churchill and the Viceroy of Indian "urging them to release Gandhi" during one of his periods of imprisonment.[18] There were also times when they made use of telegrams while James was away both in Japan and the United States. This method of communication supplanted letters specifically when topics were time sensitive in nature. A unique opportunity presented itself to James while giving a series of lectures on "India, its People and Culture, its Philosophy, its Literature" in Reno, Nevada. During his opening lecture the hall was filled to capacity and "a microphone and accessories were installed" so that his subsequent lectures could be broadcast over the radio to a wider audience.[19] This instance demonstrates how the technology of the first half of the twentieth century aided the cause of reformers by providing a new medium to disseminate their message to the public.

The Quotidian of Activism

Due largely to the intensity of their participation in the social and political movements of the time, the Cousinses experienced activism as an everyday phenomenon. Their work breaking down barriers and building bridges permeated nearly all aspects of their lives. This section will explore the impact of the Cousinses work on their individual lives, especially how they integrated activism into their lives together and how they created a sense of community and sociability in their activism. There were plenty of occasions in which James and Margaret combined their efforts in support of a cause and yet, perhaps more frequently, they divided their time and labor amongst the many causes they supported. Their work sometimes kept them apart

for extended periods of time, but they were able to maintain their marriage despite that separation. James is remarkably candid about the fact that there were periods of time when he suffered from depression and insomnia due to overwork, a feeling of futility over the work he was doing, and his separations from Margaret.[20] This stands out to me because of how willing James was to share an intimate fact regarding his emotional life and states of mind as an activist and reformer. Margaret mentions times when she too felt the burdens of their work and separation, especially during her year of incarceration in Vellore Women's Prison, but she manages to keep a largely positive view of the sacrifices she made. It is easy to understand how people like the Cousinses could become overwhelmed and frustrated when most of their lives were spent fighting against such entrenched institutions as the British Raj and European and Indian social norms.

It is always necessary to find some form of escape from the everyday toils surrounding us and the Cousinses tell us much about their activities beyond their work for education and reform. Margaret and James both enjoyed traveling and spending time experiencing nature. Beyond this they had their own ways of momentarily removing themselves from their social and political efforts. Margaret retreated to the world of her music, memorizing entire piano works and giving recitals. She attended as many musical performances as she could, and cavorted with musical legends like Paderewski and Stokowski. Although he loved music, James found his relief in the writing of prose, poetry, and plays. One such literary distraction began in 1932 while crossing the Atlantic. James describes it as a "meditation on the realities expressed through the Irish myths that was to occupy my creative imagination for the seventh decade of my life (1932-1942)."[21] It was hoped that James might spend an entire year by himself in Capri pursuing this project and recuperating from his long tour of the United States. His trip was cut short however,

when he received a cable announcing Margaret's imprisonment at Vellore. Even in their times of rest, the Cousinses sought to continuously improve themselves through the pursuit of culture and the arts.

One of the things that allowed the Cousinses to accomplish so much over the course of their lives was the incorporation of their activism into their daily lives together. They divided their labor between projects and developed flexibility between life lived in the public sphere and life lived in the domestic sphere. In their account, Margaret appears as the larger of the two personalities. She frequently found herself on stage, behind a podium or pulpit, or occupying other public spaces speaking out on behalf of the rights of women and the people of India. She seems to have had trouble declining any invitation she received requesting her to speak. She was willing to contribute in any way that might be supportive of the cause, a self-sacrificing habit that perhaps could be sustained because of the support of James and others. Her topics were not limited to suffrage and nationalism and she spoke on various occasions on religion and music. During her time in England she frequently preached at the Church of the New Ideal and at one point was requested to present "the opening address of a Summer School of Indian Music."[22] Margaret also contributed by penning numerous articles on behalf of the causes she supported in addition to producing two books on the topic of Asian and Indian womanhood as well as a collection of essays concerning the music of the Occident and the Orient.

James was undeniably a writer to his core, composing countless plays, poetry, and prose works espousing everything from Celtic and Indian mythology to education reform and religion. Compared to Margaret, James's personality was more subdued. He preferred to squirrel himself away next to a window or under a tree to write. That is not to say that James would back down from the opportunity to speak on the topics he felt strongly about. Several times James publicly

spoke on behalf of the suffragists and their husbands, on several occasions while traveling he preached to congregations of the Liberal Catholic Church, and once he mounted the pulpit at the Church of the New Ideal to preach on the topic of "The Eternal Feminine."[23] More commonly, James's public speaking took the form of lectures on the topics of literature, art, and culture. He was frequently invited to academic institutions, museums, and galleries to promote his ideas on Celtic and Indian art, poetry, and the place of the arts in education.

Interestingly, neither Margaret nor James possessed particular ambitions towards leadership. Yet they found themselves in situations where the responsibilities of leadership were thrust upon them at various times throughout their lives. Early on, their energy and passion for reform led them to leadership roles and as they matured their past experience as activists and educators established them as trusted advisors. Margaret's leadership experience covered a broad range of organizations. Some were as small as the Liverpool Vegetarian Society, while others were more prominent. The positions she occupied included a senate seat at the Indian Women's University, her appointment as the first female magistrate in India, and her eventual presidency of the All India Women's Conference. She also filled the roles of secretary and treasurer with various organizations throughout her life, important leadership roles given the fact that the day to day operations of these groups depended on them. Margaret's role as a leader was not limited to acting in an official capacity. An example of this can be found in Margaret's chapter "Fighting for Freedom." She admits that, as the cause of Indian nationalism gained momentum, "I found my own position delicate and difficult."[24] This was due in large part to the fact that "one of the stock arguments against the increasing part that Indians were taking in the political movement was that they only did so because I led them."[25] This belief, regardless of its accuracy, was so detrimental to the cause that Margaret was asked to withhold her name from inclusion on

"telegrams in protest to the Viceroy and the Governor of Madras by the Women's Indian Association," a group which she helped found.[26]

James's experience as a leader was slightly different from that of his wife. His participation in leadership focused more on his role in the academic and arts communities. At the Theosophical College at Madanapalle, James was responsible for leading and shaping some of the young minds of India, which was no small responsibility. He also held the responsibility of raising funds to support the school, which was run under the auspices of the Theosophical Society. This was often an arduous task that required lengthy trips across India in the search for funding. Within the arts community James had a good reputation as a writer, educator, and promoter of the arts. In 1931, upon hearing of the preparations being made for the palace of the new nineteen year old Maharaja of Travancore, James felt compelled to write a letter suggesting that the new palace "would provide the occasion for giving Indian art the place it deserved on the homes of Indian Rulers."[27] A response was not received, but when he traveled to Travancore a year later the letter in combination with his reputation in the arts community led to his introduction to Their Highnesses the Maharaja of Travancore and his mother. He was asked to construct a state art gallery for Travancore, a project that lasted for many years. This project was the start of a close relationship with the royal family of Travancore with James playing the part of artistic advisor to the young Maharaja and his mother. In addition to the benefit that the general public gained through the creation of galleries and museums, there was also a political aspect that existed in the creation of national museums. The creation of these institutions helped to kindle patriotism in the hearts of Indians and helped to further solidify their growing national identity. While different in their nature the leadership of both Margaret and James helped to not

only shape the organizations with which they participated, but also the social, political, and cultural futures of India.

The Cousinses were fortunate to share in a relationship that not only allowed each of them to pursue their own causes and interests, but to also share them and seek counsel and support with one another. The nature of the work which Margaret and James dedicated themselves to created the necessity of developing flexibility between life lived in the public sphere and life lived in the domestic sphere. Even personal choices, such as their adoption of vegetarianism, became part of their public personas as they established and led a number of vegetarian groups. These groups, which were formed not in India, but in urban centers like New York and Liverpool, provided an opportunity to socialize with likeminded individuals as they heralded the moral and health benefits of the vegetarian lifestyle. This blurring of the lines between public and private was compounded by the fact that many of their friends were also activists or practitioners of various heterodoxies. Thus what might be considered time away from their work often involved discussion of reform topics and the like. At times even their vacations would turn into opportunities for activism, as they were frequently invited to speak at local women's and art groups during their leisure trips. This infusion of activism into the quotidian of life did not seem to trouble the Cousinses, who took immense pleasure in these opportunities for interaction that might not have occurred had they occupied themselves in more mainstream pursuits.

With much of their time spent with friends and colleagues working towards reform, it happened that Margaret and James were able to create their own small communities and forms of sociability in their activism. A beautiful illustration of this social network can be seen in Margaret's reminiscence of their departure from England for India.

> Thirty friends saw us to the gangway, a superb mixture of all the heterodoxies, dietetic, political, social, intellectual, aesthetical, religious. A bunch of great crimson carnations was to take us with beauty and perfume to Suez. Sealed letters in a packet were numbered from 1 to 28, one to be opened each morning, giving us the touch of individual and group friendship.[28]

Later in life many of the Cousinses' friends lived spread across India and others resided not only in other countries, but on other continents. Correspondence was, out of necessity, an important part of maintaining those friendships over such great distances, but as mentioned earlier in this chapter, *We Two Together* does not provide a satisfactory account of the Cousinses' correspondence in regards to either their professional or personal relationships. They do, however, recount times during their international travels when they visited with friends and acquaintances that they had met through their artistic and reform work. At times these visits with old friends such as the Pethick-Lawrences and W.B. Yeats occurred alongside more formal events, which included the likes of H.G. Wells, Margaret Sanger, Maurice Ravel, and various activists and politicians.

Conferences presented additional opportunities for sociability and the rekindling of friendships. These annual or biennial events presented a rare opportunity for likeminded friends to come together from across great distances and spend time socializing while still advocating for their causes. The Cousinses frequently attended conferences for the various groups in which they participated, such as the Theosophical Society, the All-Asian Women's Conference, and the All-India Education Conference. These gatherings were important as they allowed for the further sharing of ideas and the building and maintaining of relationships amongst reformers.

Activists as Educators

The Cousinses were ardent supporters of education both in Ireland and in India, even though Margaret's and James's educational backgrounds were marked by differences. Margaret

began her education at a co-educational national elementary school before advancing to the all girls Victoria High School in Londonderry, and then completed her formal education at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin. By contrast, James completed his formal education at a national school at the age of twelve and a half. This difference of background was far less important to the Cousinses than what they shared. Margaret and James were both avid, lifelong learners. This natural proclivity towards learning greatly aided James as he pursued knowledge not only for its own sake, but also to better position himself for employment. The Cousinses' love of learning can be seen throughout their lives as they continuously sought to improve themselves. This love of learning translated into not only employment as educators, but also the promotion of education reform and equal educational opportunities for boy and girls in India.

The Cousinses were also educators in an expanded sense. As experienced and respected activists, they were able to influence the next generation of world citizens and reformers in India and around the world. Margaret and James first became involved with Indian education after Annie Besant fired James from his position with the newspaper *New India* for authoring an article praising the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland. She eventually appointed him as an English teacher at the newly established Theosophical College at Madanapalle. Margaret gained a position teaching English at its associated high school. This placed the Cousinses in a position to influence students both inside and outside the classroom.

The role of an activist is not unlike the role of a teacher. An activist is responsible for educating the public, in order to gain support for changing the prevailing political, social, religious, or economic institutions they are fighting against. James encouraged his students to attend political rallies, noting that "Our one rule was that, while students might if they wished attend political gatherings for information and future experience, they should not, during their

studentship, mar their studies by the mental and emotional stresses of actual participation in politics."[29] James goes on to say how he attended some of these meetings with his students and "gave them an example of reserve which they faithfully followed, until the stupid interning of their 'Mother', Mrs. Besant by the Madras Government brought politics straight into their lives and outraged their deepest emotions."[30] It is interesting that despite the importance of activism, James actually encouraged his students to refrain from active participation in politics and focus instead on their studies. This reinforces the idea that James not only valued education, but also viewed it as an important step towards future activism by his students.

A lot can be learned from examining the way that the Cousinses related to their students and other young people in regards to transferring their knowledge and values. To a certain extent, this interaction served to shape a generation of future activists, but more importantly the Cousinses sought to shape a generation of good human beings based on their notions of equality and spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. During their time in India, specifically while they were in Madanapalle, the Cousinses were able to interact with India's youth in different capacities. James notes that, when he was promoted to vice-principal of the Theosophical College, "Gretta became the 'Mummy' of the girls in the school."[31] In regards to his impact on the curriculum of the college, James explains that "To the fixed curriculum of the Department of Public instruction and of the University of Madras we unofficially added arts and crafts."[32] This seemingly small action not only allowed them to give the students a greater understanding of art, but also a view of "developing hand-crafts whereby a larger number of workers could make a comfortable living."[33] The Cousinses were genuinely invested in the lives of their students and hoped that their efforts would prepare them for the future. Another example of this can be seen in Margaret's efforts to intervene in the early marriages of some of the female students. More than

simply objecting to child marriage as a matter of general principle, Margaret wanted these girls with promising futures to continue their education and be spared the dangers of young motherhood.

The Cousinses were also in a position to share with their students their beliefs in gender and caste equality. Margaret tells of how, while as the headmistress of the Girls' School in Mangalore, she addressed issues of caste inequality among the students and tried to demonstrate the foolishness of caste distinctions.

> The inauguration of periodical visits by the students to their temples brought me up against caste. Non-Brahmin girls could not go. Brahmin girls could only go after changing their clothes, as mixture with lower castes among the students and staff had 'polluted' them. On the first visit, the favoured fifty came en masse to get my blessing; but I refused to let them come near me, as they might pollute me! It was just an Irish twist; but I saw that it brought realization of the stupidity of caste restriction to some of them; and I felt a deep thrill of blessing from invisible hands.

This was one of several times that Margaret came up with creative responses to issues of caste inequality in an effort to demonstrate a different way of thinking to students and young people.

The Cousinses strove to instill notions of gender equality in their students based on a reverence of womanhood they claim once existed in ancient India. Margaret mentions an instance in 1935 when upon their return from a trip to Travancore they were met with "conspiracies by boy students against the girls."[34] Margaret and James lamented the fact that their hard work to promote equality amongst the students had been "frustrated by the male attempt at superiority and exclusiveness."[35] James did not feel this situation was the result of failure in their efforts to promote change, but instead was due to a lack of self-control on the part of a male student "who instead of following the Gandhian way of self-control, which was the true Indian way of brahmacharya, he took the cowardly way of trying to get rid of the agent that

karma provided for showing him his own weakness."[36] One can only imagine the myriad of challenges they faced as educators attempting to promote the practice of brahmacharya amongst teens and young adults within a coeducational institution. This matter does not find a comprehensive resolution, and is one example of stories in this expansive text that leave the reader to ponder the ultimate impact of these instances.

The Cousinses mention how during their time at Madanapalle they would spend some of their leisure time with their students, including holding weekly sing-songs and playing games. These recreations were not only enjoyable, but provided yet another opportunity for teaching and building influence. James tells of one particularly noteworthy evening when the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, who was visiting with the Cousinses at the college, joined their usual group. "When Rabindranath came to the door, we suspended a 'hot potato' game to make room for him on the floor in the center of the crowd. We sang a chorus. I sang an Irish song as a hint that individual contributions to the extemporaneous programme were not excluded. After another chorus Rabindranath asked if he might sing one of his Bengali songs. Leave was granted."[37] The song he sang so stirred his audience that it was requested that he sing it repeatedly with everyone steadily joining in. Later the following evening "under the peepul tree at the back of our home," Tagore presented a translation of the song for the Cousinses as the "Morning Song of India," which became part of the schools "daily dedication."[38]

The Cousinses did not limit their efforts to influencing young people in India. As they traveled to numerous colleges and universities in the United States, they shared their experiences as artists and activists and as Westerners living in India. The Cousinses' sometimes controversial views did not always endear them to the administrations at some of these institutions, but Margaret and James were always eager to share their knowledge and experiences with anyone

who showed interest. One of these ideological or sectarian objections came early in 1931, while James was conducting a speaking tour of the United States. James was attempting to arrange a series of poetry lectures at the University of Southern California. His plans were derailed however, not by anyone amongst the student population, but by "a lady of profound Christian charity warning the President that one of those terrible Theosophists had wormed his way into the University, and would poison it with his evil ideas."[39] Throughout *We Two Together* the Cousinses do not mention any instances of students objecting to either their heterodox background or the content of their lectures. The young minds of America's colleges and universities instead exhibited a thirst for the knowledge that they had to offer. An amusing example of this can be seen in James's anecdote about his visit to Doane College, a small missionary college in Crete, Nebraska. After presenting a formal recitation of his poetry for the students and faculty in the chapel, James tells of how "at 10 at night I was more or less smuggled into the women's hostel to tell them about the women of India."[40] Given that the use of subterfuge was necessary for this impromptu lecture to take place, it might be assumed that in-depth knowledge concerning women in India was not a topic readily supported by the school. Yet it is likely that these young women were preparing for missionary work that would take them to places like Africa, India, or China, and it is possible that this was their first true exposure to Indian culture. Naturally they would have been interested in learning more about Indian women from someone with firsthand experience of living in Indian society.

Conclusion

We Two Together provides insight into the lives of two people who sought to improve the world around them through activism and the promotion of education, culture, and the arts. These efforts involved participation in organizations at the local, national, and international level.

Margaret and James share stories of the challenges they experienced as they traveled and communicated and collaborated between reform and academic organizations in early twentieth century India and beyond. These stories are significant because they give the reader insight into the lives and commitments of these early reformers. They provide glimpses of a history of these movements that cannot always be found in the press or other records of those times.

As their lives progressed, the Cousinses increasingly experienced their activism as an everyday phenomenon. At times it was difficult to delineate where their public lives ended and their domestic lives began. Margaret and James readily share the toll that their intense work took on their health and mental well being, especially as they aged. Eventually the role that Margaret played in the Indian nationalist and women's movements waned as young and capable Indian leaders took their place at the head of the organizations that she supported. This transition of leadership was part of the natural evolution of activist organizations and signaled that early reformers, like Margaret, had in fact succeeded in their goal of preparing the next generation of Indians for the challenges they would face as the age of colonialism drew to a close. The stresses of the Cousinses' work were eased by the support that they provided one another and their shared convictions. The depth of their involvement in these causes was something that the Cousinses cherished and as they reflected on the details of their lives in their dual autobiography they discuss how fortunate they were that their lives were spent on worthwhile pursuits.

The Cousinses were able to share their knowledge and experiences with the young people that they interacted with as educators and as lecturers. Through these interactions they sought to influence the future of society by shaping their students into socially and spiritually enlightened citizens. By preparing the next generation for reformers and activists the Cousinses were able to create a legacy for themselves despite never having any children of their own. Through their

recollection of these interactions one is able to see the divergence in opinion that at times existed between what the Cousinses saw as beneficial information for students and what was seen as inappropriate topics of discussion by academic administrators and other people of influence.

When looking at the way Margaret and James represent their experiences as activists in *We Two Together*, it becomes apparent that the work itself can be considered a comprehensive and ongoing form of activism. By recounting their personal challenges as activists and sharing lessons learned from their efforts for reform they are able to continue spreading their knowledge and values to new generations of readers. This is one reason why it is so important for libraries, museums, and academic institutions to preserve these firsthand accounts and promote their study by students today.

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[1] James H. and Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh, 1950), 729.

[2] Ibid., p. 729.

[3] Ibid., p. 27. Walter Besant was the brother-in-law of Annie Besant.

[4] Ibid., p. 7.

[5] Ibid., p. 8.

[6] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3.

[7] Ibid., pp. 28 and 40-41.

[8] Ibid., p. 56.

[9] Cousins, *We Two Together*, 485.

[10] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders,* 58.

[11] Cousins, *We Two Together*, 621.

[12] The complete story can be found on page 621 of *We Two Together*.

[13] Ibid., p. 621.

[14] Ibid., p. 371.

[15] The complete story can be found on pages 621 and 622 of *We Two Together*.

[16] Ibid., p. 622.

[17] Ibid., p. 613.

[18] Ibid., p. 740.

[19] Ibid., p. 528.

[20] Ibid., p. 511.

[21] Ibid., p. 568.

[22] Ibid., p. 535.

[23] Ibid., pp. 230, 479, 491, 495, 524.

[24] Ibid., p. 535.

[25] Ibid., p. 535.

[26] Ibid., p. 535.

[27] Ibid., p. 613.

[28] Ibid., p. 250.

[29] Ibid., p. 285.

[30] Ibid., pp. 285-286.

[31] Ibid., p. 283.

[32] Ibid., p. 283.

[33] Ibid., p. 283.

[34] Ibid., p. 627.

[35] Ibid., p. 627.

[36] Ibid., p. 627.

[37] Ibid., p. 341.

[38] Ibid., p. 342.

[39] Ibid., p. 529.

[40] Ibid., p. 523.

4 BRIDGE ADDICTS: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE SHAPING OF COSMOPOLITAN LIVES

Towards the end of *We Two Together*, Margaret mentions that "most of our friends (not all) got pleasure out of playing bridge," but she goes on to state that "we were ourselves bridge addicts, trying to build bridges between individuals and classes and between the present and the future." This statement is a lovely evocation of a large part of the Cousinses' life together and illustrates how their efforts as activists stemmed from their cosmopolitan lifestyle and ideas. Their overall goal as activists was to bring about reforms that would allow equal participation by all men and women not only in political arenas, but also in religion and society as a whole. Through these efforts for equality and participation, they pursued an inclusive community that would be a departure from the divisions of race, religion, caste, and gender that permeated the world in the first half of the twentieth century.

This chapter will explore cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural encounters in the Cousinses' lives, how such outlooks and experiences shaped Margaret and James, and how they represent worldliness and diversity in *We Two Together*. After setting the parameters for our discussion by defining cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural encounters, the first section will discuss how the Cousinses experienced and appreciated both India and Indians. How did these cross-cultural encounters influence them? The second section will explore how the Cousinses also challenged certain Indian customs that they were critical of or in opposition to. The third section will approach the Cousins as true citizens of the world who traveled around the globe

sharing their love of India. How did the Cousinses experience different cultures during their travels and how did they represent India to others?

The terms cosmopolitan and cosmopolitanism mean different things to different scholars, depending on their disciplines and arguments. As a concept in political philosophy, it is often taken to signify a way in which "the world should be organized," specifically in regard to "the substantive utopian ideal of a *polis* or polity constructed on a world scale, rather than on a basis of regional, territorial limited states."

[1] For the purpose of this chapter, however, cosmopolitan and cosmopolitanism will be used to describe "a way of being in the world" defined by a lifestyle that seeks out, appreciates, and partakes of a plurality of cultures.[2] Through this lens, the lives of Margaret and James can be viewed as part of a larger movement of cosmopolitan ideas and outlooks that sees the inherent value of other cultures and ways of living.

Another concept of significance for understanding the relationship between the Cousinses and the "other" is cross-cultural encounters. This concept, though frequently referenced by historians, remains ambiguous. No doubt, a malleable meaning allows it to be used for a variety of purposes in a variety of contexts. I will be utilizing it to describe the Cousinses' interactions across cultural boundaries as well as the movement of culture itself between individuals and groups. Cross-cultural encounters, especially in colonial settings, remind us that cosmopolitan ideals are often impeded by unequal power relations between peoples and states around the world. These encounters often involve elements of conflict; at the same time they change all involved parties, whether or not this two-way impact is acknowledged by all of the participants. Changes brought about by cross-cultural encounters can be intimate and personal as well as public and collective.

Cross-cultural encounters throw into relief the way that we understand ourselves in relation to the "other." Identity is formed when one defines oneself in opposition to a sense of otherness. The exchanges that take place during these encounters can lead to a hybridity that comes about through a blending of self and otherness. The Cousinses embodied this hybridity, which can be seen in their adoption of Indian religion and culture and the ways they found to blend various values and practices into their daily lives.

Appreciating and Experiencing India

One of the most historically valuable aspects of the Cousinses' dual autobiography is its representation of the relationships that existed between Margaret and James and the many people of differing cultures that they engaged with on a regular basis. These encounters were important to the Cousinses and make up a significant portion of their lives in India. As we have seen, unlike some Europeans, the Cousinses actively engaged with their Indian neighbors and colleagues as opposed to sequestering themselves within a bubble of colonial European culture. They continuously looked for new things to learn. Indeed, James remarks of his Irish compatriots that "Ignorance of one thing or another was common: the only apparent difference between their ignorance and mine was that they were content with theirs, whereas I accepted mine as a challenge."[3] Thus, when they left Ireland and settled in India, the purpose of their move was primarily to immerse themselves in Indian culture. When viewed as an anthology of cross-cultural encounters, *We Two Together* provides historians with an intimate, firsthand account of two Europeans who opened themselves to the richness of cultures around the globe while sharing their own culture and beliefs with the people with whom they connected. By examining a selection of the Cousinses' cross-cultural relationships in the realms of education, activism, art, and religion, I seek to illuminate this two-way exchange of culture and ideas.

These encounters helped shape who Margaret and James became over the course of their lives and influenced the work as artists, activists, and citizens. As educators, some of the most interesting relationships the Cousinses formed existed between them, on the one hand, and their students and their students' families, on the other hand. The relationship between teacher and student is a special one. It offers the opportunity to influence both the student and his or her family, and they in turn may exert some degree of influence on the teacher.

One instance of this involved James's work with India's first Boy Scout troop, which formed at Madanapalle College in 1915.[4] Three scouts, all brothers, chose to protest the British government in India on the occasion of the visit of General Baden-Powell, the Chief Scout, to Madras. Instead of attending an event celebrating his visit, they chose to return home, much to the disapproval of their parents.[5] James muses that "I preserved the countenance of a college principal, behind which there was a congenital rebel who gave them an unofficial cheer for their pluck. Parental protest at the unannounced arrival of a consignment of returned family soon reached me, and I learned what a number of unpleasant adjectives could be affixed to my name. And there the matter appeared to have ended."[6] However, this was not the last time James would have contact with this particular family. Several months later James ran into the three boys and their father again. James recalls that "all the father could manage to say was: 'I did not understand.' Which is, when one comes to think of it, all that ever is to be said in human separations."[7] This story is significant because it demonstrates how James, through interacting with his students, was able to influence not only the three brothers in question, but also to shape their father's understanding of their act of non-cooperation. Despite his statement in the previous paragraph of his opposition to student participation in political matters, James does not appear to truly object to the boys' act of non-cooperation. It is possible that this signifies that, regardless

of his "official" stance on student non-participation in politics and protest, deep down James approved of his students thinking and acting in accordance with their conscience.

One of Margaret's most interesting cross-cultural encounters as an activist came in 1932, when she was sentenced to one year of incarceration as a political offender in Vellore Women's Prison. Political offenders were sometimes granted more freedom than ordinary prisoners and Margaret, being the consummate reformer, was not content to leave her surroundings be. She worked diligently to create garden spaces at the prison, "conduct classes in civics, singing and needlework," and "succeeded in getting a piece of ground leveled and the equipment for badminton."[8] She wanted to improve life in the prison, not only for her own benefit, but for the physical, mental, and spiritual well being of her fellow inmates. These women became an adopted family for Margaret. They celebrated birthdays, festival days, and other special occasions together. Margaret tells how on her wedding anniversary "my fellow prisoners awakened me with songs and flowers" and later that day "they had a recital of poems by Rabindranath Tagore and James H. Cousins, followed by tableaux and dances."[9] Despite the challenges of imprisonment and her long separation from James, which at times she found unbearable, Margaret was able to sustain herself in prison through the relationships she developed with her fellow inmates and her efforts to improve the quality of life for women in the prison.

Margaret's time in prison provided many opportunities for cross-cultural interactions. On another occasion, "at the festival of Pongal (harvest) in the middle of January, in a prison cell, we did puja (worship). Two babies were enthroned as representatives of deity. And I, an Irish Methodist, was accepted as a kind of high priest robed in my best saree." This instance is significant on two accounts. First, Margaret's fellow prisoners, whom we are led to believe are

mostly Indian, readily accept her into the most personal aspects of their lives. Second, while we know that Margaret was a proud member of the Theosophical Society who partook in the worship of Hindu deities, she continued to refer to herself as an Irish Methodist. Clearly Margaret had no difficulty accepting that she could retain these multiple identities without feeling the need to abandon one for the sake of another. This viewpoint is essential to understanding the Cousinses' practice of a cosmopolitan lifestyle and can also be seen in several references James makes concerning his own beliefs and religious identity.

Another touching story that Margaret shares tells of one of the Indian women she befriended through activities with a group titled the Weaker Sex Improvement Society, a name she strongly opposed. This woman, whom she calls "Auntie," was a wealthy Brahmin lady who died during the influenza outbreak in 1917 and "in her dying moments she called out for her 'sister Margaret.'"[10] According to Margaret, "The Brahmin lady, that everyone loved for her kindly spirit, passed to Swarga (heaven) from the arms of her Irish sister – an utterly unorthodox thing to do, and probably very rare, since the touch of one outside her caste was pollution. But love and mutual respect and confidence have a way of driving bullock carriages through outworn conventions."[11] As illustrated in this deeply intimate moment, such relationships showed the Cousinses the flexibility of "tradition" and "custom" in a changing India.

As a writer, James sought to spread awareness of the beauty and wisdom found in Asian art and literature, while at the same time sharing his own knowledge of Celtic art and literature. The promotion of Indian art within India was a major motivation for James, who found that many Indians lacked knowledge and appreciation of India's artistic past. As his own consciousness of modern Indian art grew, James desired to increase the world's awareness of the thriving community of contemporary Indian artists and the works that they were producing.

James's foray into Indian art began not long after his arrival in India, when he published an article discussing the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta. After reading the article, the group's President, Sir John Woodroffe, invited James to Calcutta for the Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Society. This trip was significant in two respects. First, it provided James with firsthand exposure to the new Indian art being produced through the "reawakening of a gifted nation to recognition of its artistic past."[12] Second, it introduced James to the Tagore family. James met the Tagore brothers, Abanindranath and Gogonendranath, both artists, as well as their uncle, the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore. With their help, James came to understand the magnitude of the artistic movement taking place in India. At the conclusion of the exhibition in Calcutta the members of the Society requested that James exhibit their paintings in Madras, and "the first exhibition of modern Indian painting in South India was given in the rooms of the Young Men's Indian Association, Madras, from February 19 to March 4, 1916."[13] This event ignited James's passion for Indian art, both new and ancient, and was his first step on a quest to spread knowledge and appreciation of Indian art.

This quest consisted of the creation of galleries and museums for promoting Indian art, most notably during James's time as the Art Advisor to the Government of Travancore, as well as the organization of speaking tours that took James around the world. James's work for Trivandrum's government art museum often occurred far from the city. Under the patronage of the Maharaja, James traveled across India and beyond collecting artistic treasures for the museum. When the princely family took a two-month trip to Bali and Java, James was invited along "as 'guide, philosopher, and friend.'"[14] This tour gave James an opportunity to acquire a large number of pieces of art for the museum, and he notes that "we managed, by the end of the tour, to send a dozen cases of Javanese, Balinese, Sumatran and Chinese works of art in metal,

porcelain, wood and textiles to Trivandrum, to be admired by many thousands of visitors in the Museum Annexe."[15] James's work on the government museum in Trivandrum reflected a high degree of mutual trust and respect. The Maharaja and his mother shared their love of art with James, and they sought his counsel on issues related to art, politics, religion, and philosophy as they traveled together.

James's influence in Travancore stretched beyond his relationship with the royal family. The establishment of the museum created a public space for the appreciation of Asian art, but Indian religious art was often only seen in temples. This meant that appreciation was limited to the highest levels of Hindu society. By exhibiting casts of temple sculptures, the museum brought this art to all kinds of Indians and foreigners. In his role as Art Advisor, James was also in a position to "rescue" long forgotten art from decay and ruin. One instance of this began with a tip from the Superintendent of Archaeology "that a wall-painting would be found in a small unused palace some sixty miles north of Trivandrum."[16] What they found was a mural fourteen feet in length and eleven feet high depicting a story from Hindu mythology that James describes as an "event of cosmic significance, a variation of the struggle between good and evil."[17] Since it was unrealistic to relocate an entire wall from a distant palace, a replica was created to hang in the museum in its stead. In a sense, James and his coworkers were producing, or at least making visible, the very culture that he and Margaret were intent on encountering in India.

Religion provided another avenue for engaging in cross-cultural encounters. James claims to have always had an "interest in humanity; its amazing variety," which perhaps explains his openness to a wide variety of interpretations concerning religion.[18] In his chapter "Religious Revolution," James acknowledges the significance of a specific chain of events that took place while visiting Travancore on the occasion of the Maharaja's birthday. The Maharaja, "after the

Hindu manner of giving gifts instead of receiving them, in acknowledgement of the gift of life, on the annual celebration of one's birthday, proclaimed the opening of the Government controlled temples of the State to all classes of Hindus irrespective of caste or no caste."[19] Margaret and James were both curious as to whether the official proclamation granted access only to outcaste Hindus or if perhaps it could be applied to others as well. James includes the text of the proclamation in his chapter and italicizes the two words that stimulated his curiosity. It reads, "There should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth *or religion* on entering or worshiping at the temples controlled by Us and Our Government."[20] These two words call into question the long standing tradition that one could not simply choose to be a Hindu, one had to be born into the faith.

After further investigation of the full intention of the proclamation, it became apparent that it allowed for the inclusion of non-Hindus in temple worship. James felt a strong compulsion to "have the universality of the Proclamation demonstrated and not allow it to remain a theoretical possibility."[21] However, this was not a matter of simply arriving at a temple and strolling in. The proclamation had to be officially published and ceremonial arrangements made. Even Mahatma Gandhi heard of the Maharaja's actions and traveled to Travancore to celebrate the joyous occasion. Before he officially committed to the act, James wired Margaret to seek her counsel, and she left the final decision to him.

James makes clear that "neither fear of consequences here or hereafter on the Christian side nor hope of consequences on the Hindu side had any place in my decision to qualify for entry into the temples of Travancore."[22] The temple officials were open to James's desire to enter into Hindu fellowship and during the ceremonial preparations noted that James "had been known as a 'white Brahmin' for many years, and that the fire ceremony for spiritual purification was not

necessary." This speaks to the depth of acceptance and respect that James had achieved during his time in India.

Once he entered the temple James was greeted by a large congregation and recalls, "I was in complete possession of myself, unintimidated by peculiarity, though keenly aware of the historical significance and world-wide importance of the event."[23] Before the formal ceremony began, James made a statement before those present explaining the complexities of his spiritual journey through life that brought him to this moment. He concluded by stating, "If my reception into the religious community of Hinduism was contingent on my denying the validity of other faiths as ways to the spiritual life and light, the proposed ceremony might be dropped; if otherwise it might proceed."[24] The officials agreed that no such denial was necessary and, once the ceremony had concluded, James was given the Hindu name Jayaram, selected for him by Her Highness the Maharani, and meaning "victory to the light." This event was significant not only as a special moment in James's life, but for all practitioners of the Hindu faith and for India as a society. Through this account James illustrates the cultural hybridity that he achieved through his lifelong study of religion and his acceptance of the Hindu faith, while still retaining his belief in some of the "universals of Christianity."[25]

James discusses the various reactions to these events, which were covered in the press in the United States and elsewhere in the British Empire as well as in India. The reactions ranged from congratulations to condemnation, but in his usual style James was not swayed by those he regarded as spiritually shortsighted. In his insistence that for him to be a part of the Hindu community he had to be allowed to maintain his openness to the truths found in other faiths, James demonstrates the belief of a cosmopolitan rather than a convert.

Opposition to "Degrading" Customs

The Cousinses' cross-cultural encounters and relationships were not limited to the worlds of Indian social reform and nationalism. As much as the Cousinses respected Indian culture, there were certain customs that they believed went against the basic tenets of the Hindu faith and degraded Indian society. In their effort to live ethically, they were compelled to fight injustice where they found it. As discussed earlier, Margaret was a staunch objector to child marriage and young motherhood, practices against which she fought both privately, with the families of some of her female students, and publicly, by advocating for a legislative prohibition of child marriage. While she was not always able to prevent her students from falling victim to this custom, such instances further solidified her resolve to bring the practice to an end regardless of the length of the fight.

The Cousinses also found occasion to fight against the practice of animal sacrifice by some of the communities around Madanapalle. James recounts the story as follows,

> At Madanapalle I had, by request, to head a movement against animal sacrifice at religious festivals. Hindus were agitated at intervals by the sacrifice of buffaloes in public places by Mohammedans. But there were Hindu villages where sheep were sacrificed, and attempts had been made to induce the villages to give up the bad practice. In the end we prevailed on the chief offenders to reduce to two goats and a hen that time, as a step towards giving it up altogether.[26]

The Cousinses were not the initiators of this conflict, but as they did not belong to either community they were in a position to help ease the communal tension. What they looked for in Indian culture were the virtues and truths that they believed had been embodied by the earliest Hindu practitioners. Among these was a reverence for the inherent virtues of womanhood, as well as a purity of spirit that came from respecting the lives of all living creatures.

As lifelong egalitarians, the Cousinses also took issue with the idea of caste distinctions. During their time at Madanapalle, Margaret and James hosted rooftop dinners in the moonlight where "caste was forgotten in good comradeship and high aspiration."[27] They always looked for opportunities to lead by example, in this instance by socializing with a mixture of classes, and these actions affected not only their young students, but also the adults with whom they interacted. The Cousinses' love and respect for India and its culture provided them with the credibility necessary to call out India's social shortcomings without being seen merely as European interlopers. They felt solidarity, as Irish rather than British people, with the people of India, and their critiques of Indian society were in line with the beliefs of many Indian reformers.

The Cousinses as Citizens of the World

Through an examination of *We Two Together*, it becomes apparent that Margaret and James were very literally citizens of the world. They traveled around the globe, both together and separately, for the dual purposes of sharing Indian and Irish culture with the world and learning more about the cultures they visited. Their travels, which included trips to Europe, the United States, China, Japan, and throughout the Middle East, were themselves a series of cross-cultural encounters. The Cousinses actively sought out opportunities to meet people and learn about their lives and how they expressed themselves creatively.

While in Japan, James was able to partake of Japanese art in a variety of mediums. He appreciated the love that the Japanese people held for artistic pursuits but he comments that, "There were elements is the life of Japan as I saw it which puzzled me…some of these objects, while exquisite as regards material and craftsmanship, were hideous in subject – masks, for instance, in ivory, wood or clay, representing vile demoniacal countenances."[28] This example shows that simply because the Cousinses shared an appreciation for the "other" they did not

always understand the motivations behind certain aspects of a society's culture. James also comments about his dislike of the growing influence of Western culture and style in Japan. This is a conviction mirrored by Margaret during her visit to Baghdad in 1932.

On her way back to India after her second trip to the United States, Margaret traveled though the Middle East. She "wanted to make personal contacts with the women of western Asia of whose fine qualities I had read much in magazines."[29] During this trip she visited Jerusalem, where she visited "the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the place of the Crucifixion, the Mosque of Omar, Gethsemane, Kedron, the Hebrew University: and ended in a fine meeting of the Jewish Women's Association."[30] From Jerusalem she traveled to Beirut, where "at a tea-party of 40 in a private home I told of India and her women."[31] Margaret's next stop on her Middle Eastern tour was Baghdad, where among other activities she attended a women's conference and was received by the Queen of Iraq. She comments that she was "annoyed by the irrelevant and ugly westernization in bobbed hair and European dress" of the queen and her daughters.[32] Margaret intended to continue on to another women's conference in Tehran, but her plans were derailed by illness on the road there. Instead she returned to Baghdad and from there traveled to India, first to Karachi and then all the way back to home in the south. This excursion allowed Margaret further knowledge of the world and its cultures through her interactions with Jewish and Muslim women, and in turn to share with them her knowledge of India and her hopes for the future of all women.

During their trips to the United States, Margaret and James were able to take in some of the unique aspects of American culture. While in Colorado, James "came on books of American Indian legends and poetry, and noticed challenging similarities of the idea that suggested comparative studies not only with Irish mythology but with the Indian Puranas" and made a

point of visiting the Red Indian Museum of the Smithsonian Institute.[33] They also traveled through the U.S. south to Tallahassee, Florida to lecture at the public women's college. During their visit, Margaret and James were invited to vespers at a public black college. James comments on the oddity of being "the only white people in a hall of some 700 negroes."[34] His hosts asked him to speak on the topic of students in India. He was glad to do so, explaining that "I felt it was an occasion not to be set aside by modesty or timidity, and that I could pass on to them my interpretation of the kindly feelings the students, and indeed the entire population of India, had for the coloured people of America."[35] In response to this testimony of friendship, the choir presented them with "a number of real negro spirituals."[36] This experience illustrates the two-way exchange that takes place during cross-cultural encounters. Moreover, it provides a striking example of the Cousinses' involvement in challenges to racism and colonialism that were bringing together people of color around the world long before decolonization and desegregation.

The cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural encounters that defined much of the Cousinses' lives in fact speak to the larger worldwide debate concerning the nature of modern times. Throughout the colonial world, oppressed peoples were beginning to rise up to fight for their independence and there were many questions about the future role of these cultures in an increasingly interconnected world. The social and political changes taking place in Asia led to a growing curiosity about Asian culture, which in turn led to an increase in the circulation of information about these cultures. Truth and insight were mixed with fabrications and misrepresentations about India and "the East." One of the most infamous works of the time was Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, which, while presented as a work of considerable research into the nature of Indian society and culture, was in fact imperialistic in its support for British rule in

India and bigoted in its assessment of Indians as physically and morally degenerate. This work was extremely influential, despite the many protests made by both Indians and Westerners against its portrayal of India. In their role as activists and educators, the Cousinses were well-positioned to represent India and Indians to the rest of the world. This meant facing head on the assumptions many people held in regards to Indian society. Misconceptions about India were pervasive in the United States, and James notes that during his lecture tours in America he repeatedly found great interest in his "first-hand information on everything, in spite of Katherine Mayo."[37] The Cousinses fought against these misconceptions and prejudices, so common during the first half of the twentieth century, and their dual autobiography explores their efforts to confront these inaccuracies and educate their American and European audiences.[38]

As truly global citizens, the Cousinses were two of a growing number of intellectuals who looked beyond notions of Western superiority and the "white man's burden" to seek the wisdom and knowledge that could be gained from the East. This worldwide intellectual movement promoting a cosmopolitan outlook and way of life linked Margaret and James with other like minded individuals throughout their travels. As immigrants, Margaret and James took part literally as well as figuratively in the movement of people and ideas during the twentieth century. What separates them from many of the Irish men and women who chose to leave their homeland is that, instead of traveling to the United States in search of economic opportunity, the Cousinses traveled to India in pursuit of spiritual and intellectual development. To them, these intangibles were far more valuable than the physical comforts they could have attained through other pursuits.

Conclusion

The Cousinses' presentation of their cross-cultural encounters in *We Two Together* underlines the importance they placed on relationships with people of differing cultural and religious backgrounds and the impact that such encounters had on shaping them as individuals and as a couple. Their detailed accounts of encounters, some of which were quite quotidian in nature, offers another view of the first half of the twentieth century, a period often seen as one in which people were rigidly separated by color, race, and religion. The intimate nature of the cross-cultural encounters recorded in *We Two Together* takes us well beyond conventional accounts of large-scale social, economic, and political change in these years. These experiences suggest a new perspective on the experiences of participants in movements pushing for changes that would become much more pronounced in the second half of the century.

The collection of encounters examined in the first section of this chapter was chosen because they present a sample of experiences that the Cousinses shared during their time in India. Experiences like Margaret's time in the Vellore Women's Prison and James's participation in the opening of the Hindu temples in Travancore speak to the way that they practiced their cosmopolitan lifestyle and their ability to retain multiple identities. The Cousinses' various heterodoxies provided them many opportunities over the years to actively seek out and appreciate the "other." This included their study and promotion of Eastern literature and art both within Indian and abroad. Their interest in art and literature allowed Margaret and James to share their cross-cultural knowledge with others as they passed on their appreciation of Indian culture to audiences across Europe and the United States. These travels in turn provided them with additional opportunities to learn more about other cultures in the places they visited.

We Two Together presents a three-dimensional world in a two-dimensional medium. The realities of these encounters and relationships were undoubtedly more complex than the text represents. However, the growing interest in cross-cultural encounters as a way of understanding world history reminds us of the significance of the details that can be found in the individual lives of historical actors. If Margaret and James had not decided to travel to India in search of cultural and spiritual enlightenment, then perhaps the Indian women's movement would have taken a different path and women's suffrage might not have been implemented until much later. By understanding an individual's motivations in their personal life as well as in the public arena, historians can better comprehend the complexities behind the major events and movements that have shaped world history.

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[1] Jeremy Waldron, "What is Cosmopolitan?," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000): 228-229.

[2] Glenda Sluga and Julia Horne, "Cosmopolitanism: Its Pasts and Practices," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 3 (2010): 370.

[3] James H. and Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh, 1950), 48.

[4] Ibid., p. 285.

[5] The complete story can be found on page 286 of *We Two Together*.

[6] Ibid., p. 286.

[7] Ibid., p. 286.

[8] Ibid., p. 548.

[9] Ibid., p. 587.

[10] Ibid., p. 299.

[11] Ibid., p. 299.

[12] Ibid., p. 263.

[13] Ibid., p. 266.

[14] Ibid., p. 639.

[15] Ibid., p. 677.

[16] Ibid., p. 684.

[17] Ibid., p. 685.

[18] Ibid., p. 48.

[19] Ibid., p. 641.

[20] Ibid., p. 641.

[21] Ibid., p. 642.

[22] Ibid., p. 643.

[23] Ibid., p. 644.

[24] Ibid., p. 645.

[25] Ibid., p. 645.

[26] Ibid., p. 650.

[27] Ibid., p. 283.

[28] Ibid., pp. 352-353.

[29] Ibid., p. 576.

[30] Ibid., p. 576.

[31] Ibid., p. 577.

[32] Ibid., p. 577.

[33] Ibid., pp. 524 -525.

[34] Ibid., p. 554.

[35] Ibid., p. 555.

[36] Ibid., p. 555.

[37] Ibid., p. 528.

[38] For a powerful historical analysis of the worldwide controversy surrounding Mayo's book, see Mrinalini Sinha's *Specters of Mother India*.

5 CONCLUSION

In their unique dual autobiography, *We Two Together*, Margaret and James Cousins recount the experiences that shaped their lives together including their companionate marriage, their work as reformers, and their cross-cultural encounters as they developed an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook on their times. Thus this valuable primary source provides insight into the lives of two citizens of the world during the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century. Unlike almost all other personal accounts written by activists and advocates of the same period, *We Two Together* stands apart due to the nature of its composition. By combining two lives and two voices into a single account, Margaret and James were able to discuss from different yet complementary perspectives their participation in Irish feminism, Indian nationalism, and several other important movements of the first half of the twentieth century.

For the Cousinses, a successful marriage was like a work of art. Their dual autobiography was in many respects a guide to the creation of their masterpiece. The Cousinses' relationship was central to both of their lives and it is an ever-present theme in *We Two Together*. Both Margaret and James claim that their progressive beliefs regarding gender relations were inherent in their nature from an early age and led to their desire for a marriage based on companionship and equality. Their views of relationships between men and women and the institution of marriage not only influenced their lives together, but also influenced the nature of their activism. They spent much of their lives, in India as well as Ireland, promoting women's rights. One of the distinguishing features of their dual autobiography is the fact that, unlike comparable personal accounts of the time, they chose to recount their lives in a holistic fashion, intermingling their domestic life together alongside their public and professional lives. As a

result, *We Two Together* provides a rich tapestry of details concerning the Cousinses' motivations for creating a companionate marriage and their efforts over the course of a lifetime to sustain and maintain it.

The Cousinses continually sought to develop themselves ethically, intellectually, and emotionally and encourage the growth of those around them. At the same time, they worked to improve the world around them through activism and advocacy on a larger scale and the promotion of education, culture, and the arts. They present examples of the challenges faced by reformers in India and share the successes of their efforts. Margaret and James experienced activism as quotidian, as a matter of everyday life, and at times in the text it is difficult to distinguish between their public and private lives. Both of them were deeply committed to making social change on several fronts and this text illustrates the sacrifices they willingly made for these causes. As educators and lecturers, the Cousinses took care to transfer their knowledge, wisdom, and values to the next generation of reformers, both in India and abroad. The Cousinses continue to influence the world through *We Two Together*, which itself functions as an ongoing form of activism as well as a testimony of two engaged lives.

In 1916 the Cousinses traveled to India, under the patronage of Annie Besant, for the purpose of pursuing their interest in the cultures and religions of Asia. As purposeful practitioners of a cosmopolitan lifestyle, the Cousinses were able to engage with their Indian neighbors, students, and colleagues and developed close relationships with many of them. The Cousinses' appreciation of Indian religion and art presented them with many opportunities not only to increase their own knowledge, but also to share their love of Indian culture with others. As much as the Cousinses appreciated India, there were certain aspects of Indian society that they were critical of and that they felt had to be challenged. Chief among these were the

imposition of marriage on children and the discrimination directed at people of the lower castes and outcastes, known today as dalits. The Cousinses were from Ireland, of course, and could have approached these questions as outsiders who were "modern" and therefore knew better. However, they chose to struggle to change Indian society by invoking social and religious ideals that they believed existed in ancient Hindu societies. Right or wrong, they were not alone in making this choice. It took Gandhi, who opposed the oppression of dalits, a long time to question caste itself.

Through their travels to numerous countries across several continents, the Cousinses became truly citizens of the world. These journeys presented opportunities for Margaret and James to grow through learning about the peoples and lands they visited. These experiences ranged from attending performances of Noh theater in Japan to reading Native American legends in Colorado and visiting the Red Indian Museum of the Smithsonian Institute.[1] The Cousinses' willingness to seek out and appreciate the "other" allowed them to truly engage with the world around them and to establish lasting relationships based on mutual respect. This approach to cross-cultural encounters was the basis for their own efforts to contribute to the world around them, whether it was by presenting lectures on Indian culture and Irish poetry, or establishing local Theosophical Society lodges and vegetarian groups, or taking an active part in campaigns for Indian social reform.

As the study of world history moves forward to explore more deeply the individual dimension of cross-cultural encounters, access to texts like *We Two Together* is vital. It provides an intimate account of not only key moments in the world history of the first half of the twentieth century, but also the accompanying individual circumstances and changes of people who helped make this history. The unique construction of this dual autobiography allows for insight into the

domestic and public lives of two reformers who touched a wide range of significant causes and movements. By studying their account, one can gain a better understanding of a still largely uncharted history of the movement of ideas as well as the networks of people engaged in reform around the world in the first half of the twentieth century. By drawing attention to the richness of Margaret and James Cousins' *We Two Together*, it is my hope to encourage not only more researchers to consult it, but also more librarians to preserve their copies of this rare text for the future of scholarship.

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[1] James H. and Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh, 1950), 524-525.

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