

The Woman Who Saved the Children

The Woman Who Saved the Children

A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb
Founder of Save the Children

Clare Mulley



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To my three wonderful daughters, Millicent Eglantyne,
Florence Minerva and Hester Eve – symbols of
universal human potential and very lively little
girls in the here and now.

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Foreword



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Eglantyne Jebb became the child's greatest champion in the aftermath of World War One. In 1919 she and her sister Dorothy founded an emergency relief fund for the starving children of Europe. The International Save the Children Alliance is now the world's largest independent organization for children, with staff working in partnership with thousands of local organizations, supported in different ways by millions of people, to improve the lives and life-chances of children in over 120 countries. But Eglantyne's legacy went even further when she drafted a pioneering statement of 5 children's rights and responsibilities in 1923, getting it adopted by the League of Nations the following year.

Eglantyne's achievement in putting children's welfare on the world's agenda ranks as one of the great triumphs of humanity and yet although celebrated around the world after her death, her own remarkable story is now almost forgotten. Published to coincide with the 90th anniversary of Save the Children, and the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this biography restores that balance, showing just how important a contribution one

person with the right combination of imagination and determination can make.

Eglantyne's memory lives on today with Save the Children working around the world to address children's basic needs, such as education and health. But much remains to be done: 75 million children do not go to school and one mother dies in childbirth every minute of every day. Thank you for supporting Save the Children by your interest in this book about a remarkable lady.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal
President, Save the Children UK

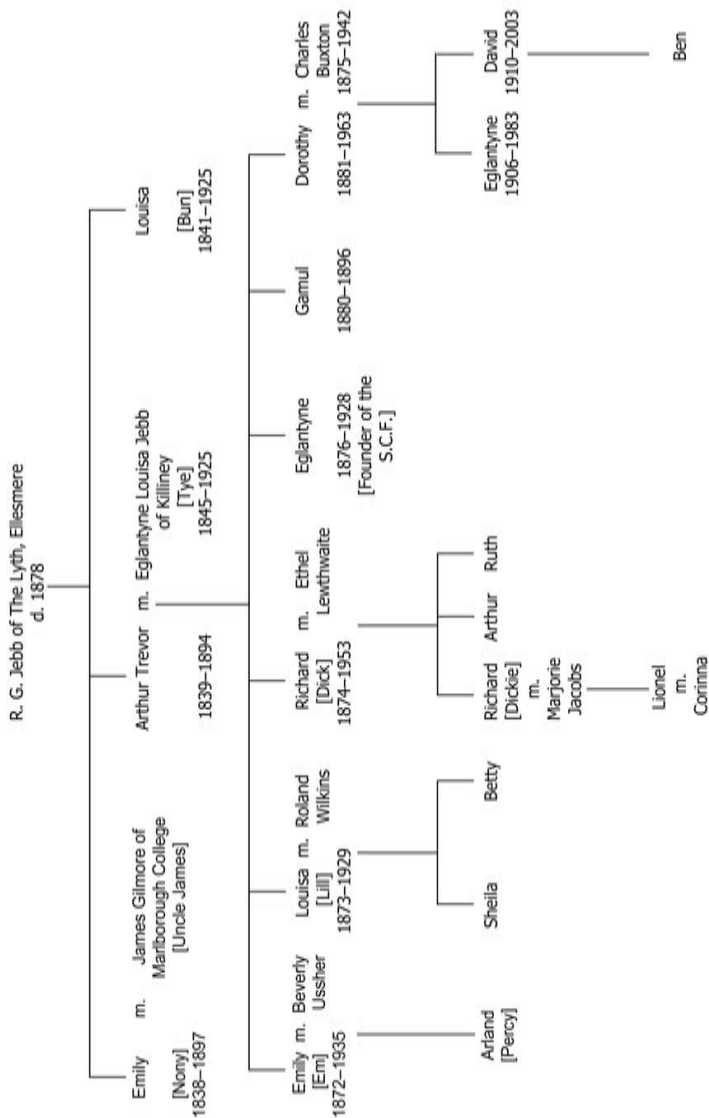
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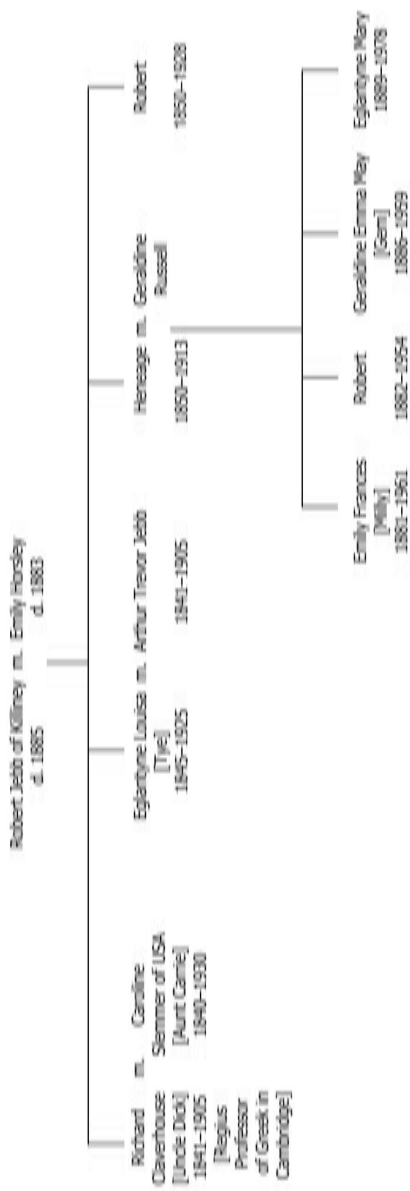
as well as Dr Michael Tunbridge, former President of the British Thyroid Association and author of M.P.J. Vanderpump and W.M.G. Tunbridge, *Thyroid Disease: The Facts*, 4th edition (OUP 2008); and Sam Dimmock, Programme Director – ‘Get ready for Geneva’ at the Child Rights Association of England for specialist advice. Also to my agent Andrew Lownie for believing in a book on a charitably minded ‘spinster in a brown cardigan’, and finally to my friends Rodney Breen, Dido Davies, Nicole DeSouza, Sheila Gower-Isaac; Lisa O’Connell, Jude Rudolf, Alison Pavier, Anna Rawlinson and Lucy Ward. Thank you.

Family Trees

Shropshire Jebbs referred to in this book



Anglo-Irish Jebbs referred to in this book



Illustrations

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Cast of Principal Characters

LADY ABERDEEN (1857–1939): President of the International Council of Women from 1893; member of the Association of Save the Children; Patron of the NSPCC.

GUSTAVE ADOR (1845–1928): Swiss politician; President of the Swiss Confederation 1919; President of the International Red Cross; member of the Honorary Committee of the Save the Children International Union 1920.

MOSA ANDERSON (1891–1978): Translator for ‘Notes from the Foreign Press’, replacing Dorothy as Editor in c.1919. Later Charlie and Noel Buxton’s secretary; member of the Save the Children Council 1933–1967.

HIS HOLINESS, POPE BENEDICT XV (1854–1922): Pope 1914–1922. Benedict XV declared the neutrality of the Holy See at the start the First World War, supported a negotiated settlement, and later contributed so generously to aid and reconstruction appeals that funds had to be borrowed for his own funeral. Eglantyne dubbed him the ‘Children’s Pope’.

ARTHUR C. BENSON (1862–1925): Essayist, poet and journalist. Son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Arthur Benson was close friends with Marcus Dimsdale at Cambridge, where he was a distinguished academic and later Master of Magdalene College. His best-known writing is the words to ‘Land of Hope and Glory’.

LADY SARA BLOMFIELD (1859–1939): Humanitarian, writer, prominent member of the British Baha’i movement in the 1920s, and early Council Member of the British Save the Children Fund.

CHARLES RODEN BUXTON (1875–1942): Humanitarian, politician and scholar. Great grandson of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton who brought the bill to emancipate slaves in 1833. Charlie married Eglantyne’s sister Dorothy in 1904. First a

Liberal, then from 1917 a Labour MP. He survived a Turkish assassination attempt during a diplomatic mission in 1914. Having campaigned for a negotiated peace, he joined the Society of Friends in 1917, and after the war wrote with great insight about the risks of a one-sided exploitation of victory. He supported Save the Children, but saw his own contribution as primarily political. Among other, later roles he served as Secretary to the British Labour Delegation to Russia in 1920, and a member of the British Delegation to the League of Nations in 1924 helping secure endorsement for the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. He died in 1942, aged sixty-seven, still with a Turkish bullet in his lung.

DOROTHY FRANCES BUXTON, née JEBB (1881–1963): Eglantyne's younger sister, and co-founder of Save the Children. Joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1915. Active in the Liberal Party until she joined Labour in 1917, the same year she joined the Society of Friends. Her 'Notes from the Foreign Press' inspired the Fight the Famine Council in 1918, leading to the launch of the Save the Children Fund in 1919. As well as writing several books, in 1935 she interviewed Göring, later Second-in-Command of the Third Reich, to urge restraint in the treatment of civilians, and during the Second World War she fought for the welfare of German prisoners of war and the refugees who fled to Britain from the Nazis. Her children described her as a 'devoted but bad mother'. Dorothy died in 1963, a vibrant and campaigning eighty-two-year-old.

NOEL EDWARD NOEL-BUXTON (1869–1948): Charlie's brother, high-profile Liberal, and later Labour MP, and philanthropist. Founded the Macedonian Relief Fund with Charlie in 1913, survived an assassination attempt during a diplomatic mission to Bulgaria in 1914. Treasurer of the Fight the Famine Council in 1919; President of Save the Children 1930–1948.

ÉTIENNE CLOUZOT (1881–1944): Chief of the Secretariat of the International Red Cross; General Secretary of the Save the Children International Union from 1920; member of the Save the Children Council 1922–1931. Eglantyne's ally in drafting and promoting the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

LADY KATHLEEN COURTNEY (1881–1973): Honorary Secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1911, and leading figure in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and Serbian Relief Fund. A contemporary of Eglantyne's at Lady Margaret Hall, and member of the Fight the Famine Council in 1918 when her brother-in-law, Lord Parmoor, became its President. Later an active supporter of Save the Children, and important figure in the League of Nations Union.

ARCHBISHOP RANDALL DAVIDSON (1848–1930): Archbishop of Canterbury 1903–1928. Davidson initially rejected a call to support Save the Children in 1919, but later helped to co-ordinate the international church appeal and became an influential supporter of the Fund.

VICTORIA DE BUNSEN, née BUXTON (1874–1953): Sister of Charles and Noel Buxton, and Lill's Newnham College friend and travelling companion through Asia Minor in 1902. Visited the Balkans in 1907, publishing an essay on the developing regional conflict. An active supporter of the Fight the Famine Council and Save the Children.

ELSBETH DIMSDALE, née PHILIPPS (c.1872–1949): Daughter of the Reverend Canon Sir James Erasmus Philipps, twelfth Baronet and Prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral. Left Oxford with first-class honours the year Eglantyne went up, and became the first woman to hold a research fellowship at Cambridge where she founded the Women's University Club. Married Marcus Dimsdale in 1902. Later worked for the Ministry of Health, and undertook considerable voluntary work with Cambridge County Council and Poor Law Board. Following the death of her baby in 1912 she co-founded the Papworth Tuberculosis Colony, the Cambridge Midwifery and Nursing Association, and threw herself into a campaign to eliminate TB from the milk supply, work for which she was later awarded the CBE.

MARCUS SOUTHWELL DIMSDALE (1860–1919): Second son of the sixth Baron Dimsdale, distinguished classical scholar and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Eglantyne fell in love with Marcus at the turn of the century, but he married Elsbeth Philipps in 1902.

DR FRÉDÉRIC FERRIÈRE: Swiss doctor and long-serving delegate of the International Red Cross, whose 1918 reports from Vienna inspired Eglantyne and Dorothy. Founding board member of the Save the Children International Union in 1920.

SUZANNE FERRIÈRE: Frédéric Ferrière's niece, Assistant Secretary to the International Save the Children Union committee, and Eglantyne's close friend and 'international sister' in Geneva. Dedicated her life to the protection of civilians, helping to draw up the influential draft Tokyo Convention, and becoming one of the three women to sit on the International Committee of the Red Cross during the Second World War.

DOROTHY GARDINER, née KEMPE (1873–1957): Eglantyne's closest college friend, author and active supporter of the settlement movement. She and Eglantyne

lost touch after 1913 when Dorothy married Thory Gage Gardiner, later Canon of Canterbury.

JAMES GILMORE (UNCLE JAMES): Eglantyne's uncle, married to her father's sister Nony. Maths master at Marlborough College, Wiltshire.

LEWIS BERNARD GOLDEN (1878–1954): Russian-born British businessman, correspondent for the *Daily Mail*, and officer at the British Ministry of Information. First Secretary General of the British Save the Children Fund 1919–1937.

BARBARA BODICHON AYRTON GOULD (c.1886–1950): Secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Labour politician 1939–1950.

JANE HARRISON (1850–1928): Cambridge Classics scholar, feminist, Dorothy's friend and tutor, and a friend of Margaret Keynes and her set on the edge of the Bloomsbury Group.

ARCHIBALD VIVIAN HILL (AV) (1886–1977): Physiologist who, when just thirty-seven, shared the 1922 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine. AV married Margaret Keynes in 1913, ending her and Eglantyne's intimate friendship. Succeeding indirectly from Eglantyne's uncle Richard, AV became MP for Cambridge and Oxford Universities, and played a crucial humanitarian role in arranging sanctuary for Jewish scientists in the years before the Second World War. Margaret and AV's four children, and many of their grandchildren, also became distinguished academics.

MARGARET HILL, née KEYNES (1885–1970): Cambridge social worker. Eglantyne's 'dearest and best' friend between 1906 and Margaret's marriage to AV Hill in 1913. Her brother was the economist John Maynard Keynes, and Marcus Dimsdale was a distant cousin. After the First World War Margaret became a local Poor Law Guardian, Alderman of her Borough Council and President of the National Council of Women. Her role in pioneering affordable residential care for the elderly left homeless after the Second World War earned her a CBE in 1957. She died in 1970 after a life of compassionate public service. As her biographer commented, Margaret 'inherited much of her temperament, and her particular abilities from her mother, but she took her first inspiration from the life of Eglantyne'.¹

MAUD HOLGATE: Bursar at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and lifelong friend of Eglantyne's.

ARTHUR TREVOR JEBB (1839–1894): Eglantyne’s father, conservative country landowner, barrister and sensitive soul who was passionate about history, rural affairs, the written word and his six children.

CAROLINE JEBB (AUNT CARRIE), née SLEMMER (1840–1930): Vivacious American widow who married Eglantyne’s uncle, Richard Claverhouse Jebb, helping establish them among the Cambridge elite in the 1870s. Also famous as Gwen Raverat’s ‘Aunt Cara’ in her family memoirs, *Period Piece*.

DOROTHY JEBB, see Dorothy Frances Buxton.

EGLANTYNE JEBB (1876–1928): Champion of children’s welfare and rights. Co-founder of the Fight the Famine Council 1918 and Save the Children 1919; founder of the Save the Children International Union 1920; author of the Declaration of Children’s Rights 1922, as endorsed by the League of Nations 1924.

EGLANTYNE LOUISA JEBB (TYE) (1845–1925): Eglantyne’s inspirational mother, and founder of the Home Arts and Industries Association.

EMILY JEBB (AUNT NONY) (1838–1897): Arthur Jebb’s older sister. Married James Gilmore, maths master at Marlborough College, Wiltshire.

EMILY JEBB (EM), see Emily Ussher.

(ARTHUR) GAMUL JEBB (1879–1896): Eglantyne’s younger brother, died while at boarding school aged just sixteen.

GERALDINE EMMA MAY JEBB (GEM JEBB) (1886–1959): Eglantyne’s favourite cousin, daughter of Tye’s younger brother Heneage. Eglantyne took on the history and literature education of Gem and her younger sister Eglantyne Mary Jebb in 1903. Gem became Principal of Bedford College, and Eglantyne Mary the Principal of the Froebel Institute.

LOUISA JEBB (AUNT BUN) (1841–1925): Arthur’s younger sister, and Eglantyne’s more radical aunt. A strident, agnostic Liberal, Bun was a firm supporter of women’s rights and franchise, and inspired and supported many of the Jebb children’s early dreams and activities.

LOUISA JEBB (LILL), see Louisa Wilkins.

SIR RICHARD CLAVERHOUSE JEBB (1841–1905): Tye’s elder brother. One of the elite Cambridge ‘Apostles’, appointed Chair of Greek in 1889, and gained international respect as the leading Greek scholar of his day. Elected

Conservative MP for the University in 1891, a post retained through three elections, which he used to support women's higher education and suffrage. Received his Knighthood in 1900.

RICHARD JEBB (DICK) (1874–1953): Eglantyne's elder brother. An authority on Empire and Colonial Nationalism, publishing several influential books and a column in the *Morning Post*. Withdrew from public life when defeated as a Reform candidate in the 1910 General Election. His grandson, Lionel Jebb, continues to live at The Lyth with his wife Corinna.

TYE JEBB, see Eglantyne Louisa Jebb.

FRIEDA JONES: Fictional heroine of Eglantyne's only completed social novel, *The Ring Fence*, started around 1908. Frieda's experience of settlement work, love of riding, guilty enjoyment of socialising, and passionate support for farming co-operatives and social justice in general, was based on Eglantyne.

FLORENCE ADA KEYNES (1861–1958): Daughter of the Reverend John Brown of Bunyan's Chapel, she married the Cambridge economist John Neville Keynes, and had three children, John Maynard, Margaret and Geoffrey. A leading Cambridge social worker, both as a Poor Law Guardian and with the Charities Organisation Society, she provided Eglantyne with her first great social projects: producing a register of Cambridge charities, and running a pioneering boys' employment registry. Later the first female Councillor of Cambridge Borough Council, and its Mayor in 1932.

JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES (1883–1946): Margaret's elder brother, pioneering economist and British Deputy Chancellor representing Britain at the Paris peace talks. Having supported the movement towards a negotiated peace, Keynes proposed lifting the post-war economic blockade and providing loans for European economic reconstruction. He lent his support to the Fight the Famine Council among other organisations, and his 1919 *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* became the classic criticism of the European peace treaty.

MARGARET NEVILLE KEYNES, see Margaret Hill.

HENRIETTA LESLIE: Suffragette and journalist with the militant anti-war paper the *Daily Herald*. Translator for 'Notes from the Foreign Press' during the First World War, she became Save the Children's first community fundraising co-ordinator.

WILLIAM ANDREW MACKENZIE (1870–1942): Artist, journalist, writer of detective stories, the Pope's representative on the British Save the Children Council, and the Save the Children International Union's Treasurer, and Secretary General 1920–1939. He became Eglantyne's great friend, staunchest professional ally, and the executor of her will.

MARY PALEY MARSHALL (1850–1944): Social economist and lecturer, married to the leading economist Alfred Marshall, her former tutor at Newnham College, Cambridge. A friend of Florence Keynes to whom she introduced Eglantyne in 1902.

GEORGE MEWES: *Daily Mirror* cameraman who filmed the Russian famine and Save the Children's feeding centres in 1921. The pioneering footage was shown at fundraising events and in cinemas across Britain as part of the charitable sector's first comprehensive multi-media marketing campaign.

DR HECTOR MUNRO (1870–1949): Founder of the Munro Motor Ambulance Corps attached to the Belgian army in 1914, afterwards joining the Army Medical Corps. Awarded three war medals. Surgeon, consultant in psychotherapy and pioneer of 'nature-cure' methods in medicine, socialist and supporter of women's rights. Returning to his Harley Street clinic after the war, he counted George Bernard Shaw and G.K. Chesterton among his paying patients, as well as running free evening clinics.

GILBERT MURRAY (1866–1957): Classical scholar, friend of C.K. Ogden, and supporter of the 'Notes from the Foreign Press' during the First World War. Member of the Fight the Famine Council, and Save the Children association. He played a key role helping to found Oxfam after the Second World War.

FRIDTJOF NANSEN (1861–1930): Norwegian Arctic explorer and scientific researcher; Ambassador to the UK 1906–1908; High Commissioner for the Repatriation of Russian Refugees, lending his name to the 'Nansen passport'; League of Nations High Commissioner for Famine Relief in Russia 1921–1923. Received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922.

C.K. OGDEN (1889–1957): Linguist, philosopher, writer. Before the First World War Charles Kay Ogden was a second-hand bookseller and editor of the intellectual university weekly, the *Cambridge Magazine*, in which he published Dorothy's 'Notes from the Foreign Press' from October 1915 until the Armistice.

SIR CHARLES ALFRED CRIPPS, LORD PARMOOR (1852–1941): Conservative, then Labour, MP; President of the Fight the Famine Council in 1919; later an influential supporter of the League of Nations and the international Save the Children movement. He married Marian Ellis in July 1919.

MARIAN CRIPPS, LADY PARMOOR, née ELLIS (1878– 1952): Philanthropist and political activist. Leading member of the Society of Friends; President of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Marian joined Eglantyne to serve as the two Honorary Secretaries of the Fight the Famine Council in 1918. She married Lord Parmoor in July 1919.

EMMELINE PETHICK-LAWRENCE (1867–1954): Campaigner for women’s suffrage and peace, initially with the Women’s Social and Political Union, and later with the Women’s International League. Emmeline was sympathetic to Save the Children, but doubted significant funds could be raised.

COLONEL HENRY LIONEL PILKINGTON (c.1857–1914): Decorated Boer War army officer who met Eglantyne when he became Secretary of the Agricultural Organisation Society in 1914.

JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD (1886–1937): British politician and twice Prime Minister in 1924 and 1931. He supported the ‘Notes from the Foreign Press’ during the First World War, became a member of the Fight the Famine Council in 1918, and firm supporter of Save the Children thereafter. In 1924 he supported the League of Nations’ endorsement of The Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

GWEN RAVERAT, née DARWIN (1885–1957): English wood engraver and author. Charles Darwin’s grand-daughter, and Eglantyne’s distant cousin through the marriage of her aunt Caroline Slemmer to Eglantyne’s uncle, Richard Claverhouse Jebb. Gwen and Eglantyne were Cambridge friends for some years, Gwen producing the rent map for Eglantyne’s social survey of the city in 1906. Married the French artist Jacques Raverat in 1911.

MAUDE ROYDEN (1876–1956): Suffragist and Christian pacifist until the Second World War. A contemporary of Eglantyne’s at Oxford, Maude supported the settlement movement, and became an active campaigner for peace, aid, reconstruction and women’s rights, through the Union of Democratic Control; the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom – of which she became founding Vice President in 1915; the Fight the Famine Council; and Save the Children.

EVELYN SHARP (1869–1955): Author, journalist and suffragist. Refused a passport to attend the 1915 conference of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace, but covered Eglantyne's 1919 trial and became a committed supporter of Save the Children.

CHARLOTTE TOYNBEE (1840–1931): Oxford social worker, and widow of Arnold Toynbee, the economics historian whose commitment to breaking down class barriers inspired the settlement movement. Devoted to the welfare of children in National Schools, Charlotte encouraged Eglantyne's ambitions to teach, and they remained good friends thereafter.

EMILY USSHER, née JEBB (EM) (1872–1935): Eglantyne's eldest sister who moved to Ireland on marrying Beverly Ussher. Em wrote a number of books including a popular novel about the fight for Irish independence published in 1921. Her son, Percy, became the respected author and critic Arland Ussher.

LORD WEARDALE (1847–1923): Liberal politician, pacifist, philanthropist and the first Chair of the British Save the Children Fund 1919–1923.

LOUISA WILKINS (LILL) née JEBB (1873–1929): Eglantyne's elder sister. Governor of the Agricultural Organisation Society, and founder of what became the Women's Land Army, for which she received an OBE. She turned down the offer to become Director of the women's branch of the Board of Agriculture. Having separated from her husband, Roland Wilkins, she lived with her two daughters until she died of cancer, a few months after Eglantyne, in early 1929.

ELIZABETH WORDSWORTH (1840–1932): Founding Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, which Eglantyne attended 1895–1898. A great niece of the romantic poet William Wordsworth, her own niece, Ruth, became one of Eglantyne's lifelong friends.

RUTH WORDSWORTH: One of Eglantyne's closest college friends, Ruth stayed in regular contact with Eglantyne throughout her life.

Chapter 1

Imagining Eglantyne, 2009–1876



*The world is not ungenerous,
but unimaginative and very busy.*

Eglantyne Jebb, 1920

To succeed in life, we must give life,' Eglantyne Jebb wrote as she searched for the way to give her life meaning. But Eglantyne did not 'give life' in the literal sense by becoming a mother. Despite social expectations she never married and she was not fond of children, the 'little wretches' as she called them, 'the Dreadful Idea of closer acquaintance never entered my head'. Eglantyne chose to give her life to the pursuit of children's welfare and human rights from a strategic distance. In doing so she helped to save the lives of millions of children left starving in Europe and Russia after the First World War. She also permanently changed the way the world considers and acts towards children. Her legacy, found both in the work of Save the Children, the world's largest independent

Self-portrait of Eglantyne losing important papers from her folder, Cambridge, c.1906

international children's development agency, and the recognition of children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, now helps to protect the lives and support the life chances of millions of children around the world. This is giving life on a big scale, and yet despite helping to shape the modern world so dramatically through the lives of our children and the relationships between our generations, Eglantyne is all but forgotten today.

The biographer also gives life indirectly, if in a much more modest way. I first came across Eglantyne when working as a struggling corporate-fundraiser for Save the Children. The difficulty with raising funds was not with the charity's UK and international programmes, which being both innovative and effective screamed out for support. The problem was that so many people had stopped listening. The proliferation of children's charities and international development agencies repeatedly approaching the same donors meant that the concept of 'giving fatigue' was itself getting rather tired. Feeling somewhat brow-beaten after a few unsuccessful weeks of proposal writing I found my faith in human nature restored by a reassuring line that Eglantyne had written eighty years earlier: 'the world is not ungenerous, but unimaginative and very busy'. That's it, exactly. Her words had a startling immediacy for me, and soon an uncanny ability to make even the most recalcitrant potential donors reconsider their priorities and spare a moment to be generous. Eglantyne's genius was to catch people's imagination, enabling them both to empathise with the human issue, and believe that they could contribute personally to a meaningful solution. She was, in short, inspirational. It was therefore surprising how absent she now seemed to be from the organisation aside from a paragraph on the website; a meeting room name; one photo on an office wall; an archive fact sheet; and her Smith Corona Portable typewriter, 'such a bad one' she had once moaned, now permanently parked in the archive.

The photograph must have been a Save the Children publicity shot; it fits the bill so perfectly. Eglantyne looks sober and handsome, if

slightly uncomfortable, sitting posed at her desk. Except for a few wayward strands, her white hair is pulled back and pinned up, her lace collar sits softly over her smart dark jacket, and she gazes calmly down at her work, pen in hand. It must have been a wet morning; the shadow of rain is clearly cast on to the window-shutters and the light streaming in is diffused, lending a softness to the image which emphasises the femininity of this dignified campaigner for children's welfare. Despite her concern for children's rights, there is no touch of the suffragettes here. This photo hung above my manager's desk: two admirable women sitting behind dignified piles of papers. My manager also epitomised the consummate feminine professional; a wonderful fundraiser, she was utterly organised, appropriately witty and marvelously persuasive with the great and the good. Most of us thought she was pretty much perfect, if anything perhaps slightly too perfect. Was she a modern reflection of this feminine, dedicated Eglantyne?

Inevitably a degree of distortion takes place when a single photograph comes to represent a whole life, a whole person, so it was good to see the pleasingly eccentric fact sheet, 'Thirty-four things you didn't know about Eglantyne Jebb', compiled by Save the Children's archivist. Like all good lists this one demonstrated a certain eccentricity in its composition as well as in its contents. Eglantyne, I learned, was 'extremely warlike' when a child, and as an adult often forgot where she was going and left her luggage behind on trains. She was a 'shy furtive beauty' who loved rock-climbing and dancing, wrote bad romantic novels, endured failed romantic hopes, and was not, at least at first, that great a fundraiser. Hurray: a flawed heroine after all. I began to feel a growing sense of empathy, affection and curiosity.

Later I found another image of Eglantyne to stick above my own desk. It is a self-portrait in pen and ink, a small scratchy picture that she once sketched on the edge of a letter to a friend. Eglantyne here is a woman in motion, head up, eyes forward, striding down a street. Two feet in sensible shoes, although with trailing laces, appear at either end of her long plain skirt, pulling it into a taut triangle as

she powers ahead. Her hair is still up, but here pinned under a flat black Edwardian hat, a bit new woman, nothing too fashionable but perfectly acceptable. A long thin umbrella is tucked under her long thin arm along with a huge sheath of papers from which several sheets fly loose to drift unnoticed in her wake. It is not well drawn, but the better for that; it is Eglantyne knowingly, happily, imperfect. It is tempting to take this self-portrait as the real picture, but of course the truth is that there is not a single picture of anyone. Almost certainly, the more an image appeals to, or reflects, the observer, the less likely it is to represent the whole contradicting set of human truths that makes people so intriguing.

In 2001, showing remarkably less dedication to the cause than Eglantyne, who never had children, I stopped working to have a baby; now seemed a good time to idly find out more about this perfect-imperfect woman. Just two years after Eglantyne's death her younger sister Dorothy co-authored the first biographical sketch of Eglantyne in her history of the early years of Save the Children. The book was called *The White Flame* after the nickname Eglantyne earned from admiring colleagues and supporters for her intense passion for her work towards the end of her life, and the quote on the title page read: 'Her greatness was the greatness of the spirit.'¹ All in it is a short and not impersonal portrait. A few other personal memoirs, some profiles in obscure anthologies as a Shropshire History Maker or a contender for canonisation, and a respectful biography, the wonderfully titled *Rebel Daughter of a Country House*, written by an aid worker who knew the Jebb family, soon followed.² Eglantyne has since made a good press hook for several Save the Children anniversaries and, in some ways a thoroughly modern woman, she now has an online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry and her own page on Wikipedia.

A digest of these various biographical sources provides a useful chronology, presenting Eglantyne's life as short but full of endeavour and achievement. Fiercely intelligent and passionate about her social mission, Eglantyne experimented bravely with career and voluntary

work. Defying the law and often the more conservative ideas of her own colleagues and supporters she evolved the temporary Save the Children grant-giving 'Fund' into a permanent and pioneering development agency. Full of charm and charisma she won over the Pope and the miners, the British aristocracy and the Bolshevik government, the prosecution at her trial for distributing information not cleared by government censors, and the fledgling League of Nations in Geneva. Publicly she was a huge success; her achievement in promoting both Save the Children and the applied concept of children's universal human rights is undeniable. But personally the story is less clear. A compulsive writer, she failed to publish any of her novels and sometimes seemed to blur the distinction between reality and fantasy. Like all female students of that era she was not allowed to graduate, and she lasted less than a year in both of her paid jobs. She was repeatedly disappointed in love, quickly lost her health and more than once seemed to lose her mental grip.

This suggests some intriguing questions: What motivated Eglantyne? An intelligent and strikingly beautiful woman, why had she never married? Did she want children of her own, and was the fact that she was never a mother relevant to her passion for her cause? Or was her interest in children impersonal, and if so why? Were her regular illnesses, her emotional highs and lows, and the vivid imagination that was vital to her visionary work, in any way linked? And why did she often seem to wear such dour clothes? Who was this inspirational spinster in a brown cardigan and what, exactly, was going on in her head? The various published 'lives' of Eglantyne tend to focus on what she did rather than who she was, her 'doing' rather than her 'being'. When her being was considered she was often presented, dead unmarried and childless at the age of just fifty-two, as having martyred herself for her cause. 'She offered herself up as a sacrifice for her ideals,' Ramsay MacDonald, the then British Prime Minister, eulogised in a speech to mark Save the Children's tenth anniversary. Even her obituaries carried this theme, presenting

Eglantyne as a ‘saint’, ‘humanity’s conscience’, and as having ‘lived on a different plane from ordinary mortals’. But the trailing laces and bad novels suggest she lived on the just the same plane as the rest of us. I suddenly wanted to release Eglantyne from the ‘tyranny of achievement’.

But just as I gained the time to find out more about Eglantyne by leaving work, I began to lose my sense of empathy by having a baby. Worse, I began to feel the antithesis of Eglantyne, who never had children and dedicated her life to the cause. This was irritating. Many modern biographers confess to a natural sense of connection with their subject. I compared my life to Eglantyne’s and found some happy similarities; we were both well educated and middle class, and not at first particularly gifted fundraisers. On the flip-side Eglantyne was an independent single woman who never had children, seemed to suffer from some kind of bipolar disorder, dabbled with spiritualism, became an opportunist human rights monitor and developed an international social movement of global significance. I was a stressed new mum. On the face of it there was not much to work on. However the seeming contradictions in Eglantyne’s life did strike a chord: here was a not obviously maternal woman giving up her freedom to devote herself to promoting children’s welfare. Ironically I was sneaking away from childcare to gain the time to work on my own project. I was almost an anti-Eglantyne, a sort of Ms Hyde to her Dr Jebb. I took some comfort in the romantic biographer Richard Holmes’ belief that ‘the true biographical process begins precisely at the moment ... when this naïve form of love and identification breaks down. The moment of personal disillusionment is the moment of impersonal, objective recreation.’

Holmes, like many other respected biographers, deliberately set out to find his subjects, in his case first retracing the steps of Robert Louis Stevenson through southern France in ‘an act of deliberate psychological trespass’. I decided that it was time to go out and find Eglantyne.