Maria Pasqua



Based on family diaries and letters, Maria Pasqua tells the story of a beautiful, unhappy woman who achieved fame in Paris as a child, and whose later life consisted of a hopeless and frustrated longing to return to the scenes of her childhood. Born in 1856, Maria Pasqua was blessed with an exceptional and unfading beauty. From an early age she was modelling for artists in Rome. When six her father took her to Paris where she was adopted by the Comtesse de Noailles, a member of the Baring family. The Comtesse was domineering and eccentric on the grand scale. She had an invincible faith in the salubrious benefit of the breath of cattle, and would keep a cow tethered to every ground floor window so that its wholesome breath could infuse the room. When she married a doctor turned country gentleman some twenty years her senior, Maria Pasqua, whilst still subject to the constant interference of the Comtesse, found herself cocooned within enervating routine of a typical country house of that time. Madgalen Goffin has written a haunting and entirely delightful memoir which combines, to extraordinary extent, humour, vitality and a most attractive sympathy for the tragedy of life. The book has an interesting genesis. The first draft was written by Magdalen Goffins mother, who sent it to Evelyn Waugh: he was haunted by what he considered to be a unique and poignant story, and the suggestions he made for its improvement and presentation proved invaluale when Madgalen Goffin herself took up the task following her mothers death. Mrs Goffin has made a work of great beauty and interest, intesely sad but artistically vigorous; the moral seems to be that we tamper at our peril with basic affections and can stunt, in a sense kill the heart, by the sort of desertion Maria Pasqua had to bear: sold, as she was, out of happy penury into plushy, eccentric slavery.

Isabel Quigly. Financial Times Books of the Year 1979 The book is beuatifully written in an unobtrusive way . . . The whole thing is like a piece of quiet music, drawing no attention to itself, yet insisting its way into the memory. I do not expect to ahve such a pleasantly haunting book to review for many a long year. Robert Nye, The Scotsman Mrs goffin is descended from both the exile and her captor so that pity for Maria is balanced by an acute sense of Philips solitude, silence and constraint. What in part is a lament becomes also a kind of hymn to the solid, stuffy, monotonous pleasures of English country life; and it is this subtle equivocation which makes Maria Pasqua like Petita, a classic of its kind. Hilary Spurling, Observer

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