

THE GISSING JOURNAL

“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
 – George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

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Contents

Clara Collet’s Clairvoyance, <i>by Bouwe Postmus</i>	1
Scattered Critical Responses to Gissing in Four Chicago Papers, <i>by Robert L. Selig</i>	33
An Eerie Incident in Gissing’s Life, <i>by Pierre Coustillas</i>	39
Notes and News	42
Recent Publications	43

-- 1 --

Clara Collet’s Clairvoyance

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In March 1892 Ellen Gissing sent her brother an account of a lecture given to the London Ethical Society on “The Novels of George Gissing.” The lecturer’s name was Clara Collet (1860-1948) and a good year later, characteristically, it was she who proposed that they should meet. It was not until July 1893, however, that Gissing paid his first visit to the woman who was without any doubt the most intelligent, loyal and useful friend during the last ten years of his life.

On leaving the North London Collegiate School in 1878, Clara Collet became an assistant mistress at Wyggeston Girls’ Grammar School in Leicester, where she remained for eight years until 1885. She then read for an MA in Mental and Moral Sciences at University College London, graduating in 1887 as one of the first women in the field. Before very long she was to combine the duties of a teacher with those of a researcher through contributing to the mammoth sociological inquiry into the prevalence of poverty in London, set up and supervised by Charles Booth, the first fruits of which were collected in *Labour and Life of the People*, vol. 1, *East London*,¹ edited by Charles Booth and published by Williams & Norgate in 1889.

In 1891 Clara Collet was appointed one of the four Assistant Commissioners to serve on the Royal Commission on Labour. Clearly she owed the appointment to the reputation she had gained for herself as one of Booth’s outstanding social investigators. The head of the Commission, “H. J. Mundella, became President of the Board of Trade the following year and at once appointed Clara Collet to a post as Labour Correspondent with special responsibility for

women's industrial conditions."² Thus she embarked on a long and most successful career as a civil servant, not retiring until the 1920s.

-- 2 --

Given Clara Collet's social conscience and lifelong interest in literature – she expressed the ambition of becoming a writer in an early diary, perhaps inspired by her aunt's example – it is not hard to understand that she felt drawn to the novels of George Gissing, based upon extensive research of the social conditions prevailing in the urban centres of his day, and showing a special empathy for the lot of working women. She had first formulated her views of Gissing's work in an article for the *Charity Organization Review* ("George Gissing's Novels: A First Impression," October 1891, pp. 375-80) and returned to the subject in the lecture ("The Novels of George Gissing") delivered at Essex Hall, on February 28, 1892. Her familiarity with Gissing's works must have awakened in her a desire to meet the author in the flesh, whose concerns and sympathies were so obviously her own.

When they did finally meet, in July 1893, it was truly amazing how soon she managed to break down the barriers of reserve and inhibition so typical of Gissing's conduct. They agreed to dispense with empty formalities and polite indirection³ – she had already sent him her photograph – and before two months were out she surprised him by her wonderfully generous offer of financial assistance with the educational costs of his son Walter, if he should ever break down as a result of the unbearable domestic tensions, and by November he signed himself in his letters to her "Always yours." There is no other example in the whole of Gissing's correspondence of such a rapid growth of easy familiarity. She, alone of all of Gissing's friends and acquaintances, became a frequent visitor at his Epsom home, which was out of bounds to the others because he was ashamed of his unlettered wife's unpredictable moods. At first their friendship seemed to be primarily based upon Gissing's need of a sympathetic and intelligent ear, by way of compensation for his wife's habitual nagging and domestic inadequacies. Clara Collet was the first genuinely intellectual companion he found after Bertz's return to Germany and Edith's hateful presence was a daily reminder that intellectual companionship was all that he could hope for, chained as he felt by the manacles of his second (disastrous) marriage. For her part, Clara Collet, always supremely rational and quietly efficient, may initially have been drawn to the novelist Gissing, but it is not unthinkable that after a while she was tempted to get a little honey from this real friendship with the man Gissing for whom she really cared,⁴ more perhaps than for the writer.

The frequency of their contacts (epistolary and in the flesh) in the first four years of their friendship is high and constant.⁵ Things apparently started to become more complicated once

-- 3 --

Gissing decided to leave Edith for good in the autumn of 1897. He went to Siena to begin work on his book on Dickens and after a brief stay in Naples he travelled in Calabria, the scene of his attractive travel-book *By the Ionian Sea*. By the middle of December 1897 he found himself in Rome, where he stayed until April 1898. Instead of returning straight to England, he visited his German friend Bertz in Potsdam and he finally got back to London seven months after he had left.

Gissing's decision to leave England for such a long spell at the very moment that he had regained an important part of his freedom, is open to a number of interpretations. The most neutral of which is that he simply needed to put space between himself and his wife in an attempt to confirm his sense of the new-found freedom. But from Clara Collet's point of view it may have looked as if he were running away from her, afraid as he may have been of a new series of amatory complications. The pattern was not new: this was precisely what he did in

1877, when he disappeared overnight from Waltham, Mass., after he had become entangled with one of his High School pupils.

The frequency of Gissing's letters to Miss Collet during the seven months' absence unmistakably begins to fall off, as it had begun to do after the spate of letters (six) he wrote to her in February 1897, when he ran away from home and was forced to confess his own foolish culpability as to the breakdown of his marriage(s) in the crucial letter of February 17. And four days later he writes with characteristic clairvoyance: "Something in my nature seems always drifting me away from ordinary intercourse."⁶ And indeed the drifting apart⁷ had started in earnest with Gissing's departure from Epsom, followed by his self-imposed exile in Devon and the decision to go to Italy in the autumn. In fact, we find him writing to her from Budleigh Salterton already in May: "Whether we shall ever meet again, who can say!"

In her book *Seductions* Jane Miller, Miss Collet's great-niece, remarks on Clara's destruction of Gissing's letters to her written between February 10, 1898 and 22 July 1899 and postulates a link with Gissing's first meeting with Gabrielle Fleury, which she [Miller] dates 10 February 1898. That date is incorrect. Gabrielle Fleury presented herself to Gissing at Dorking, five months later, on July 6, 1898. It is obvious that the destruction of the letters could not have resulted from Gabrielle's appearance as a rival. One is rather inclined to the conclusion that the coolness in their relationship was finally due to Gissing's reaction to Clara's sending him her diary, which he received in Rome in late February 1898. To Gissing the gift of such an intimate document may have signalled Clara's determined bid to reestablish their former intimate

-- 4 --

footing, with even a hint of marriage, in case the agreement of separation should come through, which Gissing was actively canvassing at the time. In addition, Miss Collet's opening her diary – construed as an act of self-revelation – might be regarded as a barely veiled invitation in turn to let her in on the secrets of his early years. The only offhand "explanation" of his marital problems he had offered so far had come in a letter⁸ to her about a year before, around the time of his flight from Epsom caused by his wife's outrageous conduct. Apparently his sensitivity on the question of his disastrous marriages was so extreme that he neither would nor could add to the summary acknowledgement of his own imbecility. To avoid further undesirable complications, he must have made it quite clear to her after the reception of her diary that he would not reciprocate her self-revelation.

Although there is no reference in Gissing's *Diary* to any contact with Clara after February 26, 1898, until his return to London in April, it would be too rash to conclude that their friendship had by then suffered irreparable damage. There was, however, more to come. Gissing's social life at Rome in the month of March was hectic: H. G. Wells and his wife joined him and there was a wide circle of acquaintances that demanded his attention. One of these new friends may have been more directly responsible for deepening the rift between Clara Collet and himself. Her name was Mrs. Rosalind Williams, *née* Potter (1865-1948),⁹ and she quickly charmed and bewitched Gissing, despite the unfavourable impression she first made on him: "loud; bullies waiters; forces herself into our conversations."¹⁰ She stayed in Rome for only one week, but Gissing accompanied her on visits to the Medici Gardens, the Vatican Sculpture Galleries and the Colosseum. It seems significant that on his return to London Gissing first visited Mrs. Williams (dining with her on April 22) and only called on Clara Collet the next day.

Gissing's visit to her on April 23, 1898, was remarkable for a number of reasons. To begin with, he had never called on Miss Collet on her home ground: it was his first visit to 36 Berkeley Road, Crouch End, and he had come on a special errand. He wanted to make quite sure that there would be no further misunderstanding between them and he realized that after so many letters, he needed to tell her in person. All of their previous meetings had been either on neutral ground or at Gissing's home in Epsom. Thus far Miss Collet had been the visitor, this

time their roles were reversed. Weak-willed George Gissing had made up his mind to act.

-- 5 --

His repeated and unequivocal refusal to discuss the zealously guarded details of his youth, possibly coming on top of discreet hints about another woman in his life, made it clear that she had no option but to accept the painful truth: Gissing was not interested in her as a future wife. Therefore it makes sense to date Clara Collet's disappointment to this time, their relationship suffering further damage at the arrival on the scene of Gabrielle Fleury in July of the same year.

This account of the chronology and quality of the growing, if temporary, distance between Miss Collet and Gissing is at odds with the portrait of the relationship painted by Jane Miller.¹¹ Her examination of the friendship assumes a frankness on Gissing's part about his past, which hardly squares with his lifelong habit of concealment. It is possible that, as an intelligent reader of Gissing's novels, she guessed and suspected the nature of his sexual misalliances, but there is no real evidence, either in the letters or in the *Diary*, that he ever fully confided in her. Until Miller comes forward with such proof, it seems safer to play down Miss Collet's role as a mother confessor. Confessions there may have been, but only up to the point where he kept the darkest secret of his life. In this context, we must admit to some puzzlement when Miller mentions as a fact that "George Gissing wrote to [Miss Collet] *at least* once a week for ten years"¹² (my italics). The sum total of Gissing's known letters to Miss Collet from 1893 to 1897 is 131. If Miller's claim were correct one would have expected at least twice as many, viz. 260. It simply beggars belief that half the letters dating from this period have gone missing.

To support her argument that her great-aunt knew about Gissing's early life, Miller refers to a story written by Clara Collet and signed with her pen name Clover King. It is one of two stories she is known to have written, the other one entitled "Over the Way" had appeared in the periodical *Home Chimes* in May 1891, under the same pseudonym. When Clara Collet came to visit the Gissings on December 14, 1895 she brought with her these two examples of her attempts at writing short stories. Gissing's verdict is found in the letter of December 18, 1895: "I am very glad to have read these two stories of yours. It is amusing that Robinson [the editor of *Home Chimes*] accepted the piece of mere romanticism, & would have nothing to do with the bit of real life. Well, it is *nearly* life, the second...Very odd that you should have dealt with such a subject. You wrote with great fluency..."¹³ Though the unpublished story "Undercurrents" cannot be dated exactly, the fact that it was submitted to Robinson's editorial eyes tells us that it was written some months before January 1894, since the final issue of *Home Chimes* appeared

-- 6 --

in that month. Further, there is the strong probability that Miss Collet offered the two stories at the same time, say, early 1891 at the latest, which made it easier for the editor to keep the "romantic" one and reject "the bit of real life" as less suitable for his readership. An additional reason for suggesting 1891 as a likely date of composition for "Undercurrents" is the fact that in that year she entered upon her new job as Assistant Commissioner, and her novel duties would necessarily leave her less time and inclination to think of, let alone practise, writing as a career. That is the very point that Gissing makes in the same letter: "But we know that story-writing would never have satisfied you; & *what a remarkable instance of a rare fitness of things that you were so promptly put into just the right place!*"¹⁴ (my italics).

Thus 1891 seems both logical and plausible as the year in which "Undercurrents" was written, long before Gissing and Miss Collet were to meet, so that there is every reason to agree with Gissing's judgment that it was "[v]ery odd that you should have dealt with such a subject." He must have been as struck in 1895 by the analogies and parallels of his own experiences with those of Frank Rust, the weak, Gissing-like hero of "Undercurrents," as Jane Miller was almost

one hundred years later. Such echoes from Gissing's sad existence with Nell Harrison, his first wife, in the cellars and garrets in the Tottenham Court Road district, as one may care to hear in "Undercurrents" are accidental and probably owe more to Miss Collet's curious faculty of foresight and intimate knowledge (acquired through numberless interviews as part of Booth's great investigation) of certain specimens of London's "victims of circumstances" than on anything else. One is inadvertently reminded of what Gillian Tindall, apropos of *Workers in the Dawn*, called Gissing's ability to "[make] his novel into the most curious pre-recognition of what was actually to come to pass."¹⁵

Miss Collet's treatment of the theme of professional (middle-class) women's hopes and aspirations is an early reflection of one of the central preoccupations of the last decade of the nineteenth century. The New Woman¹⁶ had begun to emerge with a distinct identity and a good deal of progress had been achieved in the range of professional opportunities and the redefinition and emancipation of her sexuality. In some respects "Undercurrents" may be seen to anticipate Gissing's treatment of "the Woman Question" in *The Odd Women* (1893), but it merits to be read in its own right, as a story that reveals how hard it is for the old (romantic) habits to die down. Marian Bligh's tearful surrender to Frank Rust at the end of "Undercurrents"

-- 7 --

emblemizes the power of the currents pulling her in the direction of conventional marriage, despite her previous, though slightly qualified, commitment to the Cause.

The whereabouts of the original MS is unknown, but a rather poor photocopy is held by the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick Library, Coventry.¹⁷ It is here published for the first time (with silent correction of occasional slips of punctuation) and should be of great interest both to Gissing's readers and to those who are primarily interested in New Woman fiction.

¹This book was well known to Gissing, who studied it in December 1890, copying passages from it in his Scrapbook, with a view to using the material in his novels. In fact, Gissing's continued interest in this most important piece of social investigation is proved by an *Athenæum* review of the final volume of Booth's *Life and Labour in London*, dating from the last year of his life (August 22, 1903) and preserved among the notes and cuttings making up his *Scrapbook*.

²Jane Miller, *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture*, ch. 3: "An Odd Woman," London: Virago, 1990, p. 75.

³See letter to Clara Collet, 11 August 1893: "...with you, heaven be thanked, one may fearlessly deal in the veracities, as T[homas] C[arlyle] has it." *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas, vol. 5, Athens, Ohio: Ohio UP, 1994, p. 126.

⁴See Miller, pp. 87-88.

⁵In 1893 Gissing wrote at least 22 letters to Miss Collet, hers to him numbering nine. In addition there were nine visits and two presents sent. Total number of contacts: 44. In 1894: 25 letters/notes to Miss Collet, 9 letters to Gissing, 12 visits, 2 presents sent. Total number of contacts: 48. In 1895: 32 letters to Miss Collet, 8 from her to Gissing, 11 visits, one present. Total number of contacts: 52. In 1896: Gissing wrote 32 letters/notes to her, Miss Collet writing nine letters to him, they met five times. Total number of contacts: 46. These figures are based upon the diary entries and the letters published in the *Collected Letters*, and must be used with caution, yet they seem to represent a reliable approximation of their contacts.

⁶Letter to Clara Collet, 17 February 1897, *Collected Letters*, vol. 6 (1995), pp. 236-38.

⁷In 1897 Gissing is known to have written 20 letters to Miss Collet, six of them in the month of February, arising out of his leaving Edith and Epsom. She asked him to destroy her

letters to him, written since the beginning of the domestic crisis in February.

⁸17 February 1897: "I can set your mind at rest. Here is the explanation: not once, but twice, have I made an ass of myself. My first wife was a hopeless drunkard, & died miserably in 1881 or 2, I forget the year. This will seem to you incredible. Is there another such imbecile walking the earth?"

-- 8 --

⁹She was a younger sister of Beatrice Webb, *née* Potter (1858-1943). The latter was one of the leading social reformers of the day whose social and professional interests closely resembled Miss Collet's. They both worked for Charles Booth and corresponded off and on through their lives. (See Miller, p. 90.)

¹⁰*Diary*, p. 487.

¹¹See Miller, pp. 92-98.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹³*Collected Letters*, vol. 6, pp. 68-69.

¹⁴Letter of 18 December 1895.

¹⁵*The Born Exile*, London: Temple Smith, 1974, p. 81.

¹⁶See Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, London: Macmillan, 1978, p. 10.

¹⁷MSS. 29/3/13/4 (1-41). Autograph in Miss Collet's hand, signed Clover King, her pen name.

Undercurrents

'It makes one quite hopeless for one's kind. Who will believe us when a girl like that goes straight to the enemy at the first encounter?'

'What has happened, Miss Douglas?' asked Miss Jenner, establishing herself in Marian Bligh's basket chair by the fire and stirring the tea which her hostess had just handed to her. 'Why, Miss Murray, how do you do? I have not seen you for an age. Milk and sugar? Why, I never noticed I hadn't any. Thanks. You are looking rather pale. But then you always would be pale I should imagine. It is a healthy pallor. How long is Miss Murray staying with you, Marian? You must make her come to our next People's Concert. I am sure you are musical Miss Murray. I can see it in your eyes and we shall be so glad for anything you can give us. We would rather have something popular, but still they do appreciate classical music more than one would expect that class of person to do. And now who is the traitor, Miss Douglas?'

'Kate Gavin,' replied Florence Douglas. 'She is engaged to be married.'

'She is not the first lady doctor who has done that, you know,' said Miss Jenner reflectively. 'I shall never do it myself, and I am quite willing to admit that no one ever asked me to. And I must say that it would be extremely inconvenient to have a man in the house who was perpetually wanting me or the servants to attend to him. It would have to be the servants because really when I come back from my rounds I want a good rest. I just lie on the sofa and shut my eyes and forbid anyone to speak to me for a good hour and a half. How Dr. Mary Smith manages to find time to attend to her children as she does I cannot make out. But then her husband is a doctor too and it is almost as good as having an assistant, you know. In fact Dr. Charles Smith is quite equal, superior perhaps even, to his wife. And I'm sure Mrs. Smith is

-- 9 --

devoted to the cause; and her husband is quite a friend to us all now. He is quite in favour of women doctors if they are always taught by women and only attend women. I must say I shall

always feel grateful to women who attract men in the medical profession and make converts of them.'

'But Kate Gavin is not going to marry a medical man. She is going to throw herself away on a man in the Stock Exchange,' said Florence Douglas, in a tone expressing withering contempt. 'And she is not going to practise after all those years upon years she has spent in working for her degree. She is going to throw it all up and just devote herself to the happiness of one wretched man. *One* man! Just think of it. A whole career sacrificed in order to look after the meals and soothe the temper of one person whose only work in life is to make money.'

'Perhaps she prefers happiness to a career,' said Maggie Murray, flushing a faint pink as Florence Douglas left off violently working her rocking chair in order to gaze at this sentimental friend of Marian Bligh's. Marian had two rooms in Gower Street and she and her three visitors were sitting round the fire, Maggie and herself toasting muffins to which Florence and Miss Jenner did ample justice. Miss Jenner was a comely and kindly lady doctor of mature years and portly dimensions. She was very popular with mothers and babies and her lady friends always wound up their mimicry of her rambling discourses with 'But it's a shame to laugh at her. She is such a dear old thing.' Florence Douglas was a tall stately woman of thirty, who having inherited five hundred a year from her father, a solicitor, was able to spend her time in deep researches into the literature of mediæval England.

'Happiness! Good Heavens, but that is the very thing that makes the affair so disheartening,' ejaculated Florence. 'That a girl with such talent, who has always professed a real enthusiasm for science, who ought to know better, should disgrace us all by preferring to be a man's housekeeper to developing her faculties. Will people ever believe that a woman has her own work to do in the world, that she ought not to be a mere appendage, if girls like Kate Gavin turn out no better than other women who are only fit "to suckle fools and chronicle small beer."'

'If she prefers that kind of thing, do you want her to pretend that she does not, in order to prove a theory?' asked Marian Bligh going to the table and buttering another muffin.

'Marian, you are the worst of them all. You get everything you want, have absolute freedom, mix with men and do men's work, enjoy yourself, are perfectly happy and then practically turn round on women who are trying to get recognition in the same way as yourself and say "Better stay where you are and do as your mothers did before you, you poor foolish things." I have no patience with you. You ought to help a woman strike out a new line for herself and not hinder her.'

-- 10 --

'But when she does not want to strike out a new line as in the present case, why should we force her to pretend she does?' persisted Marian.

'I am not angry with her for throwing herself away if she prefers it, but for being such a poor creature as to prefer it. As though any man were worth the sacrifice. And how do you know but that some girl whose heart is bent on a medical career and who would be willing to give her whole life to the profession will be refused the means to qualify just because her parents see that the Gavins' money and Kate's time have been absolutely squandered and wasted.'

'I don't know about that, Miss Douglas,' said Miss Jenner. 'If a woman is going to have babies she is none the worse for having had medical training, and she can turn her knowledge to account in a great many ways besides ordinary practice. A great many ways. Do you know I think I will just go round and congratulate Miss Gavin and tell her what useful work she might do in her spare time by giving advice in the afternoons at mothers' meetings. Good bye, Miss Murray; be sure you come on Saturday evening. Mind you bring her, Marian. Good bye, Miss Douglas, and do you know I think you a little underrate what a married woman can do. I do, indeed. And some husbands are very considerate to their wives. It is not all one sided. It really is not. And then there are the children; they count for a good deal, my dear. Good bye, Marian, till

next Saturday,' and comely Miss Jenner beamingly departed.

'Just as though London were not swarming with children,' said Florence impatiently. 'If I were fond of children, I should adopt one or two. There is no need for extreme measures.'

'It is wonderful how difficult it is to find a genuine *bona fide* orphan on both sides,' said Marian, laughing. 'You would be sure to have a parent turning up some time or other; just when you had "learned to know it well and love it," it would be claimed back by its loving father.'

'Marian, you are a time server and a trimmer. If you did not defend the cause better by your actions than your words, I would abandon you for ever. But I have no fear that you will ever put your intellect at a man's feet just to be used that his may seem more brilliant. Domestic bliss will never content you. Good bye, my child.' Florence bent down and kissed her aggravating friend, shook hands with Maggie Murray and left the two alone.

Marian sat down in the easy chair and Maggie, seating herself on a footstool by her side, rested her head on Marian's knee. The two girls, as they would have called themselves, although they were both close upon thirty, remained silent and still. Marian passed the tips of her fingers lightly over the curls of Maggie's hair; the action never failed to soothe Maggie's nerves. She was the first to break the silence.

'What does Florence Douglas live for, Marian? What is there in her life to satisfy her?'

-- 11 --

'Middle English,' said Marian smiling. 'What more could mortal woman desire?'

'Ah! but seriously. She is human and must have affections. Whom has she to love or to work for? What good does she do to anybody with her Middle English? What is this career she talks so much about that she feels no need of loving and being loved? Oh! Marian what Dead Sea fruit all our honours and successes are. Would not she have been a better and a happier woman if she had devoted herself to one wretched man? Haven't we all been following a will o' the wisp which will land us some day in a slough of despond beyond all extrication?'

'Poor old Maggie! Have you had a very tiring term of it at school this autumn?'

'It is not what I have had that tires me. It is what I have not had and never shall have that makes me sick of everything. Marian, why did we never learn at Newnham that we should be women some day, not merely sponges to absorb knowledge and give it out again. Why were we such fools as to imagine that the study of science for its own sake would ever, could ever satisfy us? How many men are satisfied with merely intellectual life? Why do we learn what makes life worth living so much later than other girls?'

'Would it have made a positive difference in your life if you had known it, Maggie?' said Marian.

'I don't know,' said Maggie slowly. 'I could have stayed at home for a few years, but I should have had to teach eventually. It would have been degrading to begin teaching just because I was a failure in the marriage market, and I could only have been a mere teaching drudge, if I had not been to Newnham. And yet it would have made a difference. At least I should not have been deluded into choosing husks instead of wheat. It is better to know what is the highest in life, even if one has the lowest, than to be blind to it, to blaspheme as Florence Douglas did just now.'

Marian flushed to the roots of her hair. 'You need not be quite as hard on us Maggie, even though you have come out of Egypt. Are you quite sure that it is the highest in life you want? Or that it is because it is the highest that you want it? Florence Douglas has always been true to herself. Are you sure that in your present mood you would be as true under temptation?'

Maggie raised her delicate refined face from Marian's knee and looked at her in astonishment. 'I never said a word about you, Marian. You never talk like Miss Douglas. And what do you mean about my being true under temptation?'

'I don't know what I mean,' said Marian quickly. 'But I don't spend my time worshipping

the Madonna any more than Florence. What is best for most women is not necessarily best for the few. And if the maternal is the highest in women, it does not follow that its highest

-- 12 --

expression is in marriage. The class teacher who loves her pupils who have no blood relationship with her is more a mother than the wife who cares for no children but her own. If the instinct is there it is there and will assert itself none the less healthily because we think nothing of it. If we haven't it, pity us if you like, but don't accuse us of blasphemy.'

'Don't scold me, Marian. I did not mean anything really. Only I am so tired and weary of never seeing anybody but teachers and schoolgirls and never belonging to any home, that I was simply relieving myself by saying anything that came into my head. Do you think I would have disgraced myself by confessing that I wish I were married, if you were the kind of person I was declaiming against?'

Marian had recovered her temper. She hardly knew why she had lost it but she could never be angry long, when that sweet pathetic looking face was turned towards her. She bent down and kissed it. 'Well, whatever you do, Maggie, don't go and exchange a negative kind of unhappiness for a positive misery. Now let us get ready for this conversazione affair.'

The conversazione was of the literary and scientific order. Maggie Murray, who lived the conventional life of the modern high school teacher and whose only form of recreation was going to tea with a fellow teacher, or to a public meeting or concert occasionally, and who rarely had an opportunity of showing how well evening dress became her except at the school At Homes, felt a pleasurable excitement in the thought of the mild amusement in store for her that evening. Marian, who had no good looks to speak of and who had a varied intercourse with her fellow creatures in the ordinary course of her everyday work, rather grudged the time and the money that had to be spent in such tame diversion. But for the fortnight that Maggie was to stay with her, she had heroically accepted every invitation to crushes that had been sent to her and, when at the end of an hour and a half Maggie interrupted her in the middle of a review and asked for her approval of her dress, Marian admitted that were she as pretty as her friend she would be glad of any excuse for enjoying the effect of a beautiful form in an artistic setting. She put away her work, changed her dress and drove away with her friend in a hansom cab with much the same feeling as a rather unimportant matron must have when she is chaperoning a young lady whose social success is likely to heighten her own value.

People were wandering about in the usual aimless way when they arrived, looking at engravings, bending down over microscopes or talking to acquaintances to whom they had nothing to say. The first familiar face that welcomed Marian's appearance was that of a young demonstrator at University College. His greeting was warmer than usual, conveying to Marian his sense of gratitude for the favour she was going to grant him in introducing him to the pretty girl who was with her. He eagerly undertook to show Miss Murray the wonders of insect life by

-- 13 --

the aid of the microscope, and Marian paying no heed to his really interesting explanations looked round the room to discover the possibilities of the evening. A genial professor of classics, who had come up with his wife for a week in London, a very erect and somewhat dried up lawyer to whom success had come too late for happiness and whose sole object in life was improvement in the administration of the poor law, and a very dignified Charity Commissioner gave promise to Marian herself of a feast of reason if not a flow of soul. The prospect did not seem a very inspiring one. A voice at her side interrupted her researches and turning a little she found Frank Rust standing by her. He was a young scientist who had gained more than usual distinction at Cambridge and from whom great things were expected. He had been extremely

successful as a University Extension lecturer and had for some time held a science lectureship at one of the London colleges. Marian Bligh disliked him but could have given no satisfactory reason for her dislike. It was no case of Dr. Fell however. She knew quite well what she disliked in him. She disliked the mouth which was never firmly closed, she disliked the limp moustache which partly concealed its weakness. She disliked the greenish grey eyes which never met her own and were always casting furtive glances. Many people thought Frank Rust handsome, Marian considered him a most repulsive looking person and thoroughly distrusted him, and it was with some difficulty that she responded to his friendly greeting that night with the politeness which he had never done anything to forfeit. After a few remarks about the topic of the day, he suddenly said: 'Is that young lady in the cream silk and lace and holly berries a friend of yours?'

'Yes,' said Marian brusquely feeling at once what was coming.

'What a charming face she has,' he said quickly. And as Marian made no answer he added: 'Does she not remind you a little of that Madonna of Raphael's in the National Gallery? You know the one I mean.'

'I know nothing of art,' said Marian hastily, 'and I never can distinguish one of those insipid faces from another.' She knew perfectly well the picture which she was libelling by her sweeping criticism. Frank Rust's comparison had filled her with apprehension.

'Will you sink your dislike of me so far as to introduce me to her, Miss Bligh?' For the first time in Marian's experience of him, his eyes met hers steadily and it was Marian who dropped hers ashamed and disconcerted.

She made no attempt to deny the charge; she bowed assent and led the way to the other end of the room to which young Frost had taken Maggie.

'Mr. Rust – Miss Murray.'

Maggie Murray and Marian Bligh looked at the same face but saw two different men. Marian saw a weak mean creature whom she despised touched by the dawn of a love and reverence which she respected against her will. Maggie saw a good-looking, clever-faced man

-- 14 --

whose eyes expressed an unqualified admiration for herself which promised a pleasant evening to the discontented little man.

Marian left them to themselves. Whatever might follow, it was not for her to interfere by word or deed. She had no right to damn a man because he had the misfortune to have a weak mouth and shifting eyes.

Frank Rust stayed by Maggie's side the rest of the evening. Her sweet voice and gentle ways completed the conquest that the face giving promise of such tenderness and charity had begun. Before she went away he had ascertained her plans for the next fortnight and had little difficulty in extracting from her an expression of gladness that he also was engaged to be at the same places as herself several times within those few days.

Hardly a day passed without her meeting him. Maggie made no secret to Marian of her enjoyment of his admiration, although she was somewhat disappointed that Marian would never say a word about him or discuss him in the free way in which the two girls criticized and compared their opinions of all the other men they met. Silence was the only means by which Marian could maintain her neutral attitude. All her friends admired Maggie, but they none of them showed any inclination to enter the lists against Frank Rust. Few men over thirty fall in love with a woman at a moment's notice, and Marian, who would have seen Maggie married to her dearest friend without a pang, was feeling inwardly miserable as she saw that every day was bringing Maggie nearer to the inevitable consummation which Marian so devoutly deprecated. Maggie knew quite well what was coming. She liked being worshipped and admired by Frank and was quite willing to accept the consequences. She loved the adoration that was offered her,

which aroused in her a warm feeling towards the adorer which by many women is mistaken for love of the man himself instead of love of the homage he pays. She was no coquette. She accepted all Frank Rust's attentions simply and straightforwardly and, if Frank dreaded the time when the final test must be put, it was not so much from fear of refusal as from a sense of shame at the thought of his own unworthiness and of Maggie's entire ignorance of his true character.

It was the last day but one of Maggie's visit. The two girls had had lunch and Marian was settling down to work, when Maggie, who had been moving about restlessly, at last stood still and, looking down at the fire with her hand on the mantelpiece, said awkwardly: 'Marian, shall you be in all the afternoon?'

'Why?' said Marian, turning around and looking puzzled.

'Oh, nothing in particular,' said Maggie, in a way; and then with a desperate effort: 'Mr. Rust asked if he could see me alone this afternoon and I said yes.'

'Very well,' said Marian, as though such a visit were quite a matter of course, 'I can work at the British Museum quite as well for this. Let us have one last half-hour's chat and then I will go.'

-- 15 --

Maggie curled herself up at Marian's feet in her favourite position. She was feeling a little nervous and also a little important, but she was troubled with no doubt or perplexity as to this change which seemed impending. She did not want Marian's advice, but she wanted Marian's sympathy, and Marian would not speak.

'What do you think of Mr. Rust, Marian?' she said at last tentatively.

'The important question is what do you think of him,' said Marian. 'Have you quite made up your mind Maggie? Are you sure that you will be happy with him?'

'He seems to think he would be very happy with me,' said Maggie with a little laugh, 'and I am not a very exacting person; and the trials and tribulations of married life seem almost pleasurable in comparison with teaching for one's daily bread and the uncertainty of its lasting out until the morrow. Why should I doubt that Frank Rust will make me happy?'

A curious feeling of compassion for Frank came across Marian. She was more selfish and self-absorbed than Maggie Murray, and yet she could not have accepted any man in such a spirit as this.

'And you are quite sure that you can make him happy?' she asked. Maggie looked at her with amused amazement and with a spice of superiority. 'Why, Marian, he worships the ground I tread on.'

'You think he will always be content to give and you to take?'

'What a horrid way of expressing a charming relationship,' said Maggie. 'Am I so selfish as you seem to imply even to people who don't care for me? Is it likely that I should give nothing back to those who love me?'

'Suppose he left off worshipping the ground you tread on' – Maggie looked incredulous – 'or suppose that he had a long illness, or lost his money and took to drink, or forged somebody's name to a cheque in a fit of despair, or disgraced himself some way or other, how should you feel towards him then?' said Marian, bringing her catalogue of possible crimes to a speedy close as she foresaw the wrath impending o'er her devoted head.

'What right have you to insinuate such things against Mr. Rust,' said Maggie indignantly. 'What have you heard against him that justifies your suggesting such things?'

'I have not heard anything against him,' said Marian meekly. 'When you marry a man you have to take him for better for worse and I only wanted to help you to think out how you would like to take him for worse. If you can't imagine such things about him, that is a very good sign that you won't have to be tried in such a way. Still he must have faults of some kind or other, and it is surely better to consider them and how they might affect you before irrevocably

binding yourself. Perhaps you care for him so much that his faults don't seem faults to you. At any rate,' she added as she rose from her seat, 'you have my benediction, dear, on whatever you

-- 16 --

choose to do. I think I shall go to the British Museum to get through as much of that article as I can before dinner. I shall not be back to tea.'

Maggie dreamed on, not much affected by Marian's warning. It was so pleasant to be loved, to be the first in a man's thoughts. Frank Rust had no common talent too, and the Newnham girl, who had taken a second in the same tripos as Frank, knew enough of the subject to be aware that his talent bordered on genius. She foresaw a delightfully interesting social circle and pictured a restful home of which she herself was the centre and the sun. She felt that she could be everything to Frank that he could possibly desire and had no doubt whatever that she loved him. She felt a not unpleasant tremor of excitement and a slight flutter at her heart as a step was heard on the stairs, and it was with some trepidation that she managed to turn an unconscious face to greet Frank Rust as he came in and closed the door. Then, as her glance met his and saw the soul of the lover which had leaped into his eyes, to her amazement and confusion a wave of repulsion swept over her whole being and left her aghast and terror stricken at the ordeal before her. The whole fabric that she had raised in her dreams fell to the ground. For the first time she realized that he was asking her to give herself to him and that the surrender was impossible, although by every act and speech of hers to him she stood committed.

It was with difficulty that she forced herself to touch the hand held out to her; every nerve in her body seemed to be dragging her from him. Her awkwardness and silence did not strike Frank as strange. He too was trembling and swayed by a tempest of emotions, love and hope and shame. He longed to kiss the hand that barely touched his before it was withdrawn, but until he had told her what he had braced himself to tell her he did not dare. Hesitatingly and with no eloquence to help his cause, but all unwitting of the change that had been worked, he at last managed to begin.

'You know, it must have been plain to you,' he stammered, 'that I have come to-day – that I wished to ask you to marry me.'

Then there was a long pause. Maggie was helpless and speechless. What could she do? How could she tell him, as she must tell him, that she had not known her own mind and that she could never be his wife. He would think she had been trifling with him, that she was a flirt. She used to think it must be rather pleasant to have a great many lovers who had all to be kindly rejected and henceforward to content themselves with the offer of friendship. The reality was terrible to her. She was perhaps wrecking a man's life and, as for friendship – why, the idea was impossible. She felt abjectly, miserably guilty towards the man before her.

'I know that I have nothing to offer that is worthy of you,' he said at last. 'Nothing except that – Miss Murray, I love you with all my heart and soul. I love you so much that although I am

-- 17 --

a coward I will force myself to speak the truth, not to deceive you in any way as to the kind of man I am, even though I lose you by it. I am not a brave man, Miss Murray. I am a coward. I have done some despicable things, some horrible meannesses which may make you despise me when I tell you of them.'

'Don't tell me of them,' cried Maggie imploringly. It was she who must confess to him, not he to her. Perhaps he misunderstood her, for he continued. 'I must tell you. For although I love you – indeed I love you, Miss Murray, although I tell you this – I know that I am a hopeless coward, that over and over again I shall be tried and tempted and fail where other men would fear nothing and feel no temptation. I dare not say to my wife that she will never be disgraced

by her husband, and yet if you loved me well enough to face the danger, dear, it would give me a strength that I have never had before. I must confess what I am before I ask you to give yourself to me.'

'No, no. You must say nothing more to me,' said Maggie in an agony of distress. If there had been a moment's doubt, these words sealed his fate – 'disgraced by her husband.' Now looking at him in the new mood which possessed her, she saw in his face everyone of the possibilities that Marian had suggested to her. But she had felt no doubt since he had entered the room. She did not love him, never could love him and she must tell him so before he humbled himself further.

'Mr. Rust, I don't know what you will think of me or how you will ever forgive me, when I tell you what I must tell you now. I meant to marry you; I have not flirted or trifled with you. I was not consciously to blame in thinking I could marry you. I was selfish throughout. You loved me and I liked to feel that you did. I am nine and twenty and no one ever made love to me before and I was as ignorant as a child of seventeen of what it all meant. When you came in just now and I knew you were going to ask me to marry you, I suddenly knew that I did not love you, that even in – in prosperity I could not love you. Don't think all women are treacherous because I have been so false.' She could no longer restrain her tears; burying her face in her hands, she laid her head on the table and wept bitterly. All the light had faded out of Rust's face. He understood her and knew, too, that there was no hope. If she did not love him there was an end to it all. Knowing himself to be weak beyond the weakness of ordinary men, his ideal had been a wife, who knowing him would yet love him and be all-merciful to him, some one to whom he would never be afraid to confess himself and who would believe in his penitence and strengthen him with her strength. That would never be. No one who understood him and knew his faults would ever love him, and to be found out after marriage would be to accomplish and accelerate his moral ruin. He did not blame Maggie. Her distress pained him and in a few minutes his own despair seemed a normal state of mind, about which nothing need be said or thought. He spoke

-- 18 --

quite calmly after the first moment of the shock.

'You have not been false, Miss Murray. I believe every word you say, except that you were selfish. That I know is untrue. I shall think none the worse of women for having known you. Not that my opinion of them can matter much. I have nothing to complain of. You have told me the truth and that is all you could do. Good bye.' He did not wait for any formal leave taking, but left the room before Maggie could answer him.

When Marian Bligh returned some hours after she found a woe-begone tearful person prostrate on the hearth rug. Maggie willingly poured forth the tale of her sorrows. She would faithfully guard Frank Rust's secret from every one else, but the longing for sympathy at the moment was too strong for her to be able to maintain any reticence with Marian. She had undergone a strong revulsion of feeling. To Marian's unexpressed wonder Rust's confession seemed to have rendered permanent an aversion which might otherwise have been only transitory. She herself was deeply moved by his avowal. While Maggie was singing her *Te Deum* for having escaped a terrible fate, Marian was regretting her scornful treatment of Maggie's lover and wishing with some inconsistency that time and circumstances would bring the two nearer again.

II

Nearly two years had passed before Maggie Murray came to London again, and then she came for good, as she expressed it. She had obtained an engagement in a London high school and was boarding with some friends of Marian's in Mecklenburgh Square. Marian was in her

old quarters, but both were too busy to see much of each other for the first few weeks of the term. It was not till the end of the first week in October that Maggie found herself with a free evening and went to Gower Street on the chance that Marian might also be disengaged. But she met her just coming out of the house when she arrived. Marian was going to a University establishment in the south east of London which had just been started and which was opening the session by a kind of variety entertainment.

‘At least,’ said Marian, ‘you can amuse yourself in a variety of ways. There is a fine arts exhibition in one room and Pepper’s ghosts in another, a concert in the hall and two lectures in different parts of the building. Will you come? I wish you would.’

Maggie thought she would. There would be several people there whose names she had frequently heard mentioned with deep respect, whom she revered accordingly. She often reproached Marian for her lack of enthusiasm and of any tendency towards hero worship, and Marian admitted that she liked men much better than philanthropists.

-- 19 --

‘What are the two lectures on?’ asked Maggie, when they were nearing their destination.

‘I hardly noticed them,’ said Marian. ‘I never listen to a lecture if I can help it. Stay, I remember now. One is a lecture on Modern Republics and the other is an oxy-hydrogen limelight affair by Frank Rust, the opening lecture of a University Extension course which he is going to give at several places in London.’

‘Do you ever see him now?’

‘I meet him now and then, but we never speak to each other. He generally avoids me, I think. We never liked each other, you know.’

‘When does his lecture begin?’

‘At eight. Shall we go? They say he is a splendid lecturer. I think I should rather like to hear him. One never does a man like that justice unless one hears him on his own ground; and I am so ignorant of natural science that we never talked about anything that interested either him or me. We may as well go.’

‘Very well, I don’t mind,’ said Maggie, ‘but don’t sit near the front.’

They could not have done so if they had wished it. The room was more than half full already, and by eight o’clock there was only standing room. Frank Rust came in preceded by the chairman of the local committee, who happened to be one of the members of the council of the college at which Rust was now assistant professor in his special branch. The chairman introduced the lecturer to the audience in very eulogistic terms.

‘Marian,’ whispered Maggie, ‘is he good looking or is he not? I think he looks rather nice, much better than I have been imagining him.’

‘I think he has improved,’ answered Marian. ‘In his way he is good-looking. – But I don’t like his way,’ she added to herself.

But she liked his way of lecturing, heartily as she disliked lectures in general and popular lectures in particular. The study of the minutely small, so essential in natural science, was almost impossible to her, and had she attempted it her teachers would probably have pronounced her to be deficient in intellect. But the broad questions raised by natural science interested her intensely, and Rust’s lecture, although in no way attempting to grapple with such problems, suggested them to the listener, and to Marian at least gave evidence of a depth of philosophical thought with which she had never credited him. He seemed too to have true oratorical power very rare in academic lecturers, unaccompanied by any tendency to indulge in mere rhetoric. He was completely in touch with his audience notwithstanding its heterogeneous composition.

He had been lecturing about three quarters of an hour, and the burst of applause consequent on the exhibition of an exquisitely beautiful slide had just subsided when a shrill

voice made itself heard throughout the room.

'That's my 'usband, that is. My! ain't he a toff? Three cheers for Frankie.'

-- 20 --

Every one turned round. Standing on a form to which she had pushed her way after the lecture had begun was a pretty girl of about eighteen, dressed like a respectable factory girl and obviously and completely drunk. Two girls behind her wearing the plush hat and feathers of the lower class of factory girl were giggling at their companion's demonstration.

With the same simultaneous movement the audience turned again and looked at the lecturer. They beheld a marvellous transformation. Instead of the brilliant lecturer, glowing with a white heat of enthusiasm, they saw a half paralysed, frightened creature, with no power of self-control, abjectly and shamefully ashamed. The chairman, Mr. Thorold, startled out of all precedent, rose and asked in a low voice, which was however distinctly heard by all, whether Rust knew the girl. For a few breathless seconds the audience suspended judgement. 'God help him to speak the truth,' prayed Marian in a passion of pity for him.

He failed. 'I have never seen her before,' he said hoarsely, and the scale was turned against him. Some one at the back hissed and the whole of the working class portion of the audience took up the sound and rose to a man amid an uproar of cat calls, cries of 'shame' and 'chuck him out.'

'You had better go at once,' said Mr. Thorold peremptorily in a low voice, and Rust went, the handle of a thick clasp knife just missing him as he went into the ante-room.

Mr. Thorold with difficulty obtained silence. Then with a quick wit for which Marian blessed him, he told the audience that he could not expect Mr. Rust to remain before them after the insult offered him in their groundless refusal to believe his word. The lecture must be considered as terminated, and he hoped Mr. Rust would accept his sincere apology for the discourteous treatment which he had received at their hands.

Maggie Murray and Marian Bligh left the room as soon as possible. The original cause of the disturbance was nowhere to be seen. Maggie was nervously afraid of coming face to face with Rust and hurried Marian to the station. The scene had been a shock to both. Not a word passed between them until they reached Gower Street and Maggie had gone in to supper with Marian. Then for a little while they settled down into their old position by the fire.

'Marian, did you ever in all your life come across such a contemptible being?'

'It was hard on him, Maggie, surely. It was cowardly, but at the moment he was hardly responsible for his actions. Maggie, would any one, would you yourself have told the truth had you been in his place?'

'How could I have been in his place? I am not thinking of the lie, but of the shameful truth. To remember that I ever degraded myself by thinking for a moment of marrying a man who could amuse himself with a girl like that and then cast her aside. I care nothing about what he

-- 21 --

said. That mean face of his told the truth.'

'Maggie, you are cruel. Have you no pity for him? With all his genius, ruined for life and exposed so mercilessly!'

'You worship intellect, Marian, till you forget morality,' said Maggie with vehement indignation. 'He deserves no pity. I could pity the girl he has ruined and brought so low. She, poor thing, might easily think that despicable man a demi-god. I might pity her, poor child. Why, he made me believe that he loved me, too. He placed me on the same level. A pretty face; that was all your genius cared for in a woman. If he were not too base for a thought, I should hate him for having made me despise myself.'

Marian was silenced. She knew nothing of the facts. She could not defend Frank Rust nor would the excuses that occurred to her have been any extenuation in Maggie's eyes. Hers was a morality which marked no distinction between grey and black. She opened fire on Marian again from another side.

'You talk of his being exposed. Why should you care so much about his disgrace and think so little about hers? The woman always bears the disgrace. Why should not the man? If women like you tolerate such men, what hope is there that society will ever be made purer?'

For some time Marian made no answer. Then she said slowly: 'I cannot answer either you or myself satisfactorily, Maggie. I only feel sure of this. That if I am able to understand a man's feelings and pity and recognize good in him, there is no need – it would be wrong, to stifle that sympathy. If I feel more pain for poor Frank Rust just now than for that poor child, it is because I know him better and because I believe that at this moment he suffers more than she does. Don't let us speak of it any more.'

Two days after this Marian unexpectedly came across Frank Rust. She had an appointment at Bow and on her way back, as she was walking towards Mile End Gate, he turned the corner of a side street into Bow Road. He had evidently intended to walk in the opposite direction to Marian, but seeing her coming towards him, paused. 'To face me or to know that I am walking behind him, he does not know which is worse,' thought Marian, but without any hesitation she decided the question. She bowed to him and, as he raised his hat, held out her hand.

'Which way are you going, Mr. Rust? Can you come part of the way with me?'

As she spoke his expression altered. She had been struck with the dejection that was manifest in his whole gait and bearing, but also with the entire absence of the nervous timidity which she had half expected to see. It had been the look of a man who has encountered the worst and has nothing more to fear. He had met her look openly enough. As she spoke, the old

-- 22 --

expression came back and his eyes moved restlessly. He said nothing but walked with her and Marian, half regretting her impulsive action which had been prompted by a strong desire to let him know that he had one friend at least, found it difficult to break the ice. But she divined the cause of the change. He believed she knew nothing of what had befallen him, and with more charity than she had once shown him she attributed the expression that she knew so well to the guilty consciousness of an honest man who is sailing under false colours.

'Mr. Rust,' she said at last, 'I wanted to speak to you because' – she broke off, unable to explain herself, and then went straight to her point. 'I was at your lecture the night before last.'

'Then you must have the satisfaction, Miss Bligh,' he said, quietly, 'of finding that your judgment of me was correct.' He had regained his self-possession and might almost be said to be at ease.

'You are not quite fair to me, Mr. Rust,' said Marian. 'If I have been unjust to you, you are equally unjust to me.'

'Unjust!' he exclaimed quickly. 'You have never been unjust to me, Miss Bligh. You rated me at my true worth. Don't think I do not know myself. You may find it difficult to believe it, Miss Bligh, but I always speak the truth to myself; even though I disown my own wife before others,' he added bitterly.

'Your wife!' said Marian, standing still.

'My wife,' he repeated. 'Why, what did you imagine?' he began haughtily and then broke off with a sad laugh. 'But I have no right to mount the pedestal of injured innocence, because there is one crime I have not committed – yet.'

'I *am* glad,' said Marian with such intensity and genuine relief that Frank Rust looked at her with the kind of scientific curiosity with which he would have regarded a strange biological specimen.

‘Why?’ he asked; and Marian felt somewhat disconcerted.

‘Because I am glad to find I have done you great injustice, Mr. Rust. In spite of what you say, I have always misunderstood you and I am very sorry for it, especially if it stands in the way of our being friends now.’

He listened to her with indifference. ‘It matters little to me now,’ he said, ‘what people may think of me. Thank you for saying that, Miss Bligh, but even if I had friends they could give me no consolation. I cannot say the worst has come, but it will not be long before it does and no power can save me. You will soon be glad again that we were not friends.’

‘Why should the worst come? Why do you despair so soon?’

‘Why? A stronger man than I might despair when he finds himself deprived of his means of livelihood without hope of recovery, with a wife who –. My poor little Mollie!’ he said huskily. ‘If there were any hope for her, there would be something to hold fast to.’

‘Have you been married long?’ asked Marian.

-- 23 --

‘We met each other last autumn,’ said Rust, almost unconscious that he was speaking to Marian. ‘It was through those semi-philanthropic meetings got up to bring the classes in contact with the masses. She was only a child, just seventeen and she fell in love with me – the only person who ever cared for me since I was born. I knew that I was a fool, that such a marriage was absurd and sure to be regretted by both of us, but I had not the courage to tell her so or to try to persuade her to forget me. Nor should I have it if I were in the same position again. She was living in a home for working girls at that time, and if I thought about it at all I concluded that she was an orphan, until about three months after we were married I came home to our cottage at Bow and found my wife with her mother, both – as you saw her the other night. Her mother had been in Colney Hatch for several months, insane through drink. She had been out a few days, cured for a time, had found out where Mollie was staying and had celebrated the event. She is such a gentle, loving-hearted girl, and yet she is doomed, a victim of hereditary disease.’

‘Are you sure it is so hopeless?’ asked Marian. ‘If you could take her away from her old surroundings and watch over her, she might be cured. She is so young and you say she cares for you.’

‘Even before this happened, I could not do that. I cannot be always with her, and “taking her from her old surroundings” means depriving her of every friend she has and giving her nothing to supply their place. She would drink out of sheer despair. Affection counts for everything in the lives of weak people like Mollie and me, Miss Bligh. I have often envied you your indifference to the good opinion of your neighbours. A friend more or less is of no account to you, while I am grateful even to a dog for wagging his tail at me.’

‘But could not one of her friends be trusted to live with her and look after her?’ said Marian, keenly sensitive to the reproach but too proud to admit it.

‘I have tried that and it has failed, and now the question is how I can support her alone even.’

‘Why is that difficult now? You have your professorship, even though your University Extension work may come to an end for a time.’

He looked at her with surprise. ‘How could I retain my professorship after showing myself so unworthy of any one’s respect. Thorold would have called upon me to resign if I had not done so at once.’

‘But surely they will not accept your resignation?’ exclaimed Marian.

‘Not accept it! Why, how could I now face my class again?’

‘You must face them. We cannot in this world hide ourselves away from our fellows because we have been in the wrong. We must work with them and live down the past. You did a

very cowardly thing; I will not attempt to extenuate it. But most men placed in such a position would find it difficult to do right. Everyone interpreted your action wrongly. You are too honest

-- 24 --

to lie successfully and we all thought the worst about you. But beyond that falsehood, told under great provocation, you have done nothing to be ashamed of, nothing for which you ought to lose your post at the College. If they know the facts they will certainly refuse to accept your resignation.'

Rust made no reply and they walked on in silence for several minutes.

'Those are kind words,' he said at last. 'If the Council allow it, I will not shrink from going on with my work at the College, but they will not see the matter as you do. My father certainly does not. He wrote this morning disowning me henceforth, because of my marriage. I am not too honest to lie successfully; I am not brave enough even to be a good liar. I have disgraced my family, first by my marriage and its concealment and then by its disclosure. I have only been found out in this falsehood, but if the Council do not know my record, I know it, Miss Bligh, and I have often felt that I had no right to be received and hold up my head among honourable men. If it were not for Mollie I should be glad to end the whole thing.'

'Is your mother living?' asked Marian, ignoring his last suggestion.

'Yes,' he said with a sigh. 'She is a great sufferer. She was seriously injured at my birth and – well, she could not forget it; it was always painful for her to have to see me; I have caused her nothing but pain ever since. Neither she nor my father will ever be able to forgive this last blow and I do not wonder at it. If your brother married a factory girl like Mollie, you would not so easily forgive him as you can forgive me, Miss Bligh.'

'I suppose not,' said Marian; 'but I should admire his generosity even if I condemned his folly, provided that he did not know –' She hesitated and he completed the sentence.

'The story of her mother. It may seem strange, Miss Bligh, but the knowledge of certain forms of nature often acts upon me with more force than any of the motives which ought to influence me. I could not bear to hurt poor Mollie by not seeming to care for her, and yet if I had only known of that hereditary curse, nothing would have prevented me from telling her the truth. She of course thought nothing of it as affecting herself. And now that she is expecting to become a mother she is sore at the horror that I feel at having caused one more wretched being to drag out a miserable existence. God help them both! Miss Bligh, the best thing that can happen to me is to be turned out of the College and to work as a labourer so long as Mollie and my child are any the happier for my living and then to shuffle off this mortal coil.'

'That would probably be the easiest, so far as this life is concerned,' said Marian quietly, 'but it is not the noblest and I hope for better things from you. You have great gifts and notwithstanding all the past I believe you are true and honourable at heart. You failed in childhood to win the affection which would have overcome your timidity, and constitutional

-- 25 --

nervousness developed into habitual moral weakness instead of being outgrown. You have as high a standard as the best among men and you feel your shortcomings more keenly than we most of us do and that makes you weaker still in some ways. You must make a fight for it, even if you are destined to fail in the end. You will be a better man if you attempt to make the best use of your talents than if you sink them all in order to escape from the eyes of men. You have a fearfully hard burden to bear, and you may not hold a high place in men's esteem; but your faults are not those that people imitate and so long as people will learn from you, you are bound to give them your best. If you fail and fall, you will nevertheless win the fight by never giving it up. And you must let your friends help you in any way they can.'

Frank drew a long breath. 'I have no friends, who can help me, Miss Bligh, but all my life I shall be grateful to you for those words and remember them. I will try to deserve them.'

'I am your friend,' said Marian, 'and you will find that you have others. Will you let me take you to my friend, Miss Jenner and tell her about your wife. She is a doctor, the kindest hearted woman in the world and will help your wife as I think no one else could do. She would perhaps be afraid of me, but no one is ever afraid of Miss Jenner. She lives in Gloucester Place. Come there with me now. Or would you rather I went to her alone and sent her to see your wife?'

They had reached Aldgate Station, and Marian paused there for Frank's answer.

'If you will let me I will go with you. But Mollie will never be afraid of you, Miss Bligh, when she knows what you have done for us. You have made life worth living again.'

III

Another year had gone by bringing joy and happiness to Maggie Murray, pain and struggle to Frank Rust. To Marian Bligh experiences as complex as her own complex nature. Miss Jenner had justified Marian's praise of her. The bare facts of Mollie's story were sufficient to arouse her active sympathy and she lost no time in seeking out the poor little wife. The girl's sweetness, pretty ways and adoration of her husband completely won Miss Jenner's heart, and Mollie was easily persuaded to submit herself to her new medical adviser. A trained nurse was found to be her companion and her guardian from the deadly enemy which pursued her; she was a bright, sensible woman and Mollie took to her at once. But from Marian Bligh's advances she drew back with cold reserve, never showing her dislike however in Frank's presence on the rare occasions when Marian's name was mentioned between them. The College council had refused to accept Frank's resignation, a member having received from Marian a full statement of the facts. Rust had only this small income to live on, his allowance from his father having been

-- 26 --

withdrawn and his engagements as a University Extension lecturer being cancelled; but this was enough for the simple mode of life he led with his wife. In spite of the nurse's surveillance and Frank's tender care of her, life was a hard struggle to Mollie at this time. She loved her husband passionately and had never doubted that her love was returned. A visit from Marian one afternoon when Frank also happened to be at home had brought a new misery into her life. She had left the room to arrange some household matter with the nurse and after a somewhat prolonged absence had returned and found her husband discussing a recent scientific discovery with Marian. His eagerness and enthusiasm and Marian's evident appreciation and comprehension of his conversation chilled the uneducated wife to the heart; the breaking off from the subject when they perceived her made the pain still keener. She was jealous of Marian and of Marian's class. Never before had any act or word of her husband's given her the least hint that she was lacking in anything that he could wish for in a wife. She had his confidence in everything that she could understand, in his money matters for instance, and it had never dawned upon her that the great interests of his life were entirely outside her comprehension. Every day she brooded over those new ideas and by this new light became convinced that Frank had given up everything for her sake without loving her. She had ruined him, she told herself, and grew desperate in the belief. The craving for drink to drown the thought became uncontrollable and she succeeded in eluding the nurse's vigilance. The outbreak was followed this time by a mad remorse and self-hatred. She contrasted herself with Marian and for a time almost lost her reason through the agony of self-loathing. Frank's tenderness to her was redoubled as he saw her suffering, ignorant though he was of the cause. Marian had quickly divined Mollie's feelings towards her and no longer went to see her. And yet, if Mollie could

have understood Marian, her heart would have been set at rest. But neither Frank nor Mollie could have guessed that Marian, fearless and self-sufficient, regarded both of them with a reverence by no means foreign to her nature, but totally unsuspected by her friends. She knew through Miss Jenner that Frank had never uttered a word of reproach to Mollie, that he always showed himself absolutely unselfish with regard to her. Marian felt that in his place she would have hated Mollie as a perpetual drag on ambition. Mollie would have died for Frank. Marian knew herself to be absolutely incapable of such selfless affection for anyone. The Christlike power of loving was not hers; she recognized it humbly in the two who looked upon her as far above them.

But the end was drawing near. Mollie lived but a few days after the birth of her child and in those last moments was too weak to think of anything but the love which her husband lavished on her. Dark as the future would have been for both of them had she lived, thankful as he was for her sake that the hopeless battle was over, Frank wept bitter tears for the woman who

-- 27 --

had bound her life with his and whose affection for him was an ineffable blessing to him. Miss Jenner took the baby home with her. It was a puny wizened little thing and as the months went by, the dread deepened that intelligence would always be wanting. Frank never spoke about it, but he never deceived himself. He fancied and his two friends confirmed him in his fancy that the child had a special preference for being with him and he clung to that hope.

It was at Miss Jenner's that one autumn day Marian Bligh found him alone and told him the news of Maggie Murray's engagement. Frank was interested in the event but clearly unaffected by it. For first it must be confessed that as Marian was telling him about it he was principally occupied in studying Marian herself. He had never seen her in her present mood. Had he ever seen her at all, he wondered to himself. She had seemed in earlier days coldly just; then he had learnt that with her justice was strongly tempered with mercy, and in the last few months he had discovered her to be unfailing in sympathy with him. So far he had only thought of her impersonally, in relation with his sore trials and cares. Of her as an individual apart from himself he had hardly thought, any more than a beggar studies the character of an almsgiver. She had entered into his life; she had never asked him to enter into hers. He remembered now a remark that had been made about Marian a long time before, that she knew everyone and never let any one know her. To-day she had come expecting to find Miss Jenner and brimful with mischievous enjoyment of Maggie's latest development. Frank's depressing influence was not enough to damp her high spirits. Marian's normal condition was a happy one. Frank had only seen her in her graver moods. But even with him her innate cheerfulness was asserting itself. Perhaps too she was somewhat relieved at his indifference to Maggie's engagement. She told him the details looking up at him with a fan in her hand to shield her face from the fire.

'You know, or perhaps you don't know, that Maggie is extremely proper and therefore it is perfectly delightful to me to find that the affair was begun in a manner which to me seems extremely improper. How do you think she made his acquaintance? In a second class carriage of the Metropolitan Railway and they were – never – introduced! Isn't it shocking?' Marian looked with mirthful eyes at Frank. She never had to complain now that he could not look her in the face.

'Very,' he said, wondering why he had never noticed what beautiful eyes Marian had.

'They were both season ticket holders and they always came back by the same train, all the way. Don't you think that was very funny, considering that the trains go so often that most people would not be particular to a minute or two? Well, every day, Maggie read the *Pall Mall*

-- 28 --

Gazette and he read the *St James Gazette*, and they thought mean things of each other. He always asked her if she would like the window shut and she always said she preferred it open. One day a ticket inspector got in and Maggie found that she had neither her season ticket nor her purse. Of course He intervened and rescued the distressed damsel. He lent her a shilling and was with difficulty persuaded to take back the change. The next day the distressed damsel repaid the money with thanks and they made a few remarks on the weather. They didn't get much further for a few days and then He said in that musical voice of his so full of gentle irony: 'I hardly dare ask you if you would care to look at the *St James's*.' And Maggie answered sweetly: 'Thank you so much. Perhaps you would like to see the *Pall Mall*?' Then for a week or two it became the regular thing for each to cut the paper, lend it to the other and take back their own again before parting at King's Cross. It would not have done at all for them to read their own paper and go home with that of the other. I hope you see the delicate distinction because Maggie seemed to think it a very important one.'

Frank smiled assent. He was thinking how young Marian looked and how well her green cloth dress suited her clear fresh complexion.

'Of course they naturally began to compare opinions on the topics of the day. They did not quite match each other, but Maggie began to find the *Pall Mall* hysterical and he admitted that the *St James's* was cynical. He took to buying the *Globe* and she bought the *Echo*; the funny thing was that he rather liked the *Echo* and she much preferred the *Globe*. They met one night at Toynbee Hall and she found that he was a barrister with a soul and he discovered that she taught his cousins at the high school. After that it became pretty plain sailing and last week he proposed to her in an empty compartment on the way home. And Maggie is so killingly funny and serious about it all.'

'I hope he is worthy of her,' said Frank earnestly.

'She thinks him perfection. Maggie loves to look up and worship and she may do it to her heart's content with Mr. Reginald Duncombe. He really is rather nice, and I daresay after he is married he will leave off being such a prig. Just now he is too 'precious' for anything; but Maggie regards that as only a proper self-respect expressed through a poetic medium.'

'Don't all good women like to look up to their husbands?' asked Frank sadly. 'I am sure you would.'

'Theoretically, yes,' said Marian. 'But Maggie believes in heroes, I don't. At least I don't believe in the existence of the kind of hero she imagines.'

'You are afraid she will be disillusioned?'

'Oh no, not at all. Mr. Duncombe is a strictly honourable, upright man, I should imagine. He will never do anything that he does not think right; only everything he wants to do he will think right.'

'You are right; integrity is everything,' said Frank.

-- 29--

'Excuse me, you are wrong,' said Marian, rising and putting her hand on his arm. 'Unselfishness and loving action are greater still.'

'Is any man unselfish? And would you of all women marry anyone you could not trust?'

'Never. But I attach a different meaning to the word trust from that which you give it.'

He looked at her questioningly, but she did not explain herself further.

'I hope you will marry some day,' he said gravely, 'but I know no one worthy of you. But whoever he is, you will help him to become worthy of you. You strengthen everyone who really knows you.'

'No one does really know me,' said Marian. 'Why do you wish me to marry? I find life quite worth living as it is. Should I be any happier if I married?' She would not let him see that her eyes had filled with tears at his words.

'I was looking at it more from a man's point of view, if you will forgive me for saying so,' said Frank very gravely. 'You told me once, do you remember, that the easiest life was not the noblest; and if you married a man who was not worthy of you, your life would be much fuller, your best qualities would be brought out and your fertilizing power would be greater than if you remain unmarried.'

'Why do you call that a man's point of view? I call it a woman's. But it would be a dreadful thing to marry a man just to round my experience and to help myself to realize myself *à la* T. H. Green. Dreadful for him as well as for myself.'

'I meant that a man generally assumes that marriage is the happiest lot for a woman and that men need wives like you and the race such mothers.'

'Most certainly I shall not marry for the good of the race. Being a woman, you see, generalities do not appeal to me. And I have always been quite content with my lot.'

'The strange thing to me is that no man in particular has induced you to change that lot.'

'That is a man's speech, certainly,' said Marian laughing. 'It may be read, too, in so many ways. Perhaps Mr. Rust, like you, they had all hoped I should marry some one else.'

Frank tried to smile, but the attempt was a dismal failure. He took her hand, bent down and kissed it. Marian flushed slightly, but gave no other sign of perturbation.

'I think it is very probable I shall marry,' she said looking up at him. 'I do not know my own mind sufficiently to let matters come to a climax, but when, if ever, it is settled you will give me your congratulations?'

He did not answer. The floodgates had been opened and the rush of feeling was too strong for him to battle with it. If Marian had any conception of the love and jealousy which possessed

-- 30 --

him and of his conviction of its hopelessness and selfishness, she was cruel to him.

'You will not miss my friendship so very much now, if my husband has to leave England?'

'I shall miss it very much,' he said, gaining the mastery over himself. 'But if you are happy, nothing else matters. You have been more than a sister to me and you must not expect me to feel less than a brother at losing you.'

'Then like brother and sister we will make the best of the time that is left to us. You will come here to Miss Jenner's dance next week, won't you? I shall be there too. Good bye, and tell Miss Jenner I called.'

Frank dreaded that dance all the next week. He feared lest some word or look of his should betray his secret to Marian and imperil the friendship which was the strength of his life. Even if she left Europe it would be something to have a line from her now and then, and he might forfeit this small consolation if she knew he had dared to fall in love with her. And then again came over him that terror of himself, the old cowardice which had been for a little while charmed away by Marian's spell. The future looked blacker than ever because a faint light had been shed in the present. When he entered the dancing room Marian's keen eyes noted a return of the old timid bearing and nervous glance. He did not come near her either, although during the dances whenever she looked in his direction she found his gaze fixed on her. She went to him at last herself and held out her hand.

'Won't you ask me to dance?' she said coolly. 'I have kept three for you and if you don't want them my character for veracity will be at stake.'

'Is this waltz free?' he said giving her his arm, and the next instant they had joined the dancers.

'How very silent you are,' said Marian as they sat down for a little while. 'If you have nothing else to say, you might tell me I look nice or try to find some more original and more truthful compliment.'

'You always look nice,' he said gravely. 'To-night you look almost beautiful and quite

charming.'

Marian laughed. The naïveté of the confession caught her fancy.

'What a difference dress makes,' she said smiling. 'Even plain people like me can deceive the world a little by it.'

'It is not merely dress,' he said. 'You are never plain, but to-night it is you, not your dress, that are looking so well.'

It was quite true. Marian's golden brown masses of hair shone more brightly than usual in the brilliant lights of the room, her diaphanous light green dress and her pearls set off her lovely complexion, her strongest point perhaps; but it was her face that had a new beauty and meaning.

-- 31 --

Her deep blue eyes shone with a depth of feeling that was rare in her. She was in a mood that to Frank seemed dangerously fascinating.

'Ah! he is here,' she said, 'and I have made up my mind.' She was looking at him as she spoke and saw the gray pallor which came over his face. If she had not known before, she dimly felt now what he was suffering.

'Come into the nursery,' she said. 'That is your own domain and we can talk it over there.'

He followed her upstairs. Marian gave the nurse permission to go down and look on at the dancers. Frank looked down at the little morsel of humanity in lethargic slumber, for whose clouded life he was responsible. He turned away with a sigh, saddened but strengthened to meet the ordeal before him. Marian was looking at him very gravely, her hand resting on the high fire guard.

'Frank,' she said putting her hand on his arm, 'you are sorry to think of this marriage, are you not?'

'For my own sake, Marian.'

'You do care for my friendship?'

'It has been salvation.'

'But you have never cared for me? I can tell my husband that you never had any feeling towards me but that of gratitude?'

'I have never hoped for anything more than friendship from you. To have thought of anything else would have been an insult to you, Marian.'

'And you do not love me?'

'Marian, I could not help loving you. There is no reason why I should not love you, for I never expected anything in return. Until last week I never asked myself whether it was love that I felt for you or not, and when I knew that it was, it could make no difference.'

'Frank, if you loved me why should you expect nothing in return? Why not you as much as any other man?'

'Marian, dear, you do not mean it, but you are torturing me by asking these questions. Is it not enough for me to know that I must go on fighting against my folly and weakness alone, that for me a wife's love and help are impossible without making me realize more the happiness that a better man may claim?'

'Forgive me, Frank. If I have tormented you, I had to do it. Kiss me and I will promise never to do it again.' Marian's soft arms were round his neck, her eyes full of a tender softness were raised to his. Bewildered he made no response. 'If you do not want to marry me, Frank, there is no one else.' Then the truth slowly dawned upon him. He bent down and kissed her on the lips with the earnest solemnity of a man admitted to a sacrament. She drew back her hands, trembling and burning.

'Marian, dearest,' he said, taking them in his own. 'I believe you. I bless you for it, but I am not so base as to accept the sacrifice. You are winning for yourself a name and reputation,

and as you told me your life's work satisfies and absorbs you. If you married a man whose talents lay in the same direction and whose work would add a lustre to yours, you would perhaps never regret the old days when you were free. If you married me, your high spirit and self-respect would be constantly wounded by association with my weakness. You pity me and would give me everything which could do nothing for you. We should both fail, Marian. In marriage there must be something given on both sides. You do not need my affection and love, which is all I have to give, and you could never give affection to a man whom you did not respect. I can take pity from my friend, but to my wife, I must be able to give something which she needs. You would grow to despise a husband whom you could not trust, and I am too much of a man to endure contempt from my wife, even though it be deserved.'

'Now hear my side,' said Marian. 'You are right and you are wrong. I could not care for a man I did not respect. I need as much as any other woman to look up to my husband and to be able to trust him. It is quite true that marriage in the abstract has little attraction to me, that hitherto my work and present mode of life have satisfied me completely, that the thought of married life terrifies me a little. And it is more a part of my nature to want to reverence goodness in others than to care about being loved by them. So far you understand me a little; but you do not know yourself; you will never see yourself as I see you. Mollie loved you; and you loved her because she needed your love; she brought out the best that was in you. You were the richer, were you not, for the claims she made on your affection? You were glad because she needed you and because you could give her yourself. You need me even more than Mollie needed you. If I feel that I can satisfy that need, are you giving me nothing in giving me the chance of living in some one else, in being unselfish as I now shall be if you refuse to take what I alone can give you and can give to no one but you? I must trust and reverence my husband. But what does that mean more than that I must be certain that his ideal is a high one, and that fail as he may, he is trying to live up to it manfully, however much handicapped he may be by nature. Frank, I trust you absolutely and respect you far more than I respect myself. Life is strong in me, love is stronger still in you. We need each other. You will give the most.' She broke off with a sob.

'Marian, it will be the prayer of my life that you may never regret the sacrifice. If you believe in me, I must believe in myself.'

'It is no sacrifice,' said Marian, with glowing eyes. 'I love you.'

Clover King

Scattered Critical Responses to Gissing in Four Chicago Papers

Robert L. Selig
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Except for three Chicago newspapers with unusually strong book review departments – the *Evening Post*, the *Times Herald*, and the *Tribune* – that city's papers tended to relegate George Gissing to mere brief notices, even though he began his fiction writing there. Nevertheless, four other not-especially-literary papers sometimes provided arresting comments about his work and reputation. Two of the most sour of all Chicago notices came out in the

Times – a morning paper that had flourished through sensationalism in the 1860s and '70s under the eccentric Wilbur F. Storey but had so declined afterwards that by 1895 it had to sell its assets to the *Times Herald*. More favorable reviews appeared in the *Inter Ocean* – a highly political morning paper begun in 1872 with the ridiculously partisan motto of “Republican in Everything, Independent in Nothing.” A third short-lived paper ran only a single but highly positive Gissing notice – the *Chronicle* (1895-1907) – a partisan Democratic organ run by Horatio Winslow Seymour, who later became well known at the *New York World*. Finally, the newspaper that, in 1877 under Melville E. Stone, had published six unsigned Gissing stories – the evening *News* – forgot this personal connection yet two decades later gave an accurate account of where he lived now and under what conditions. Curiously enough, the *News* also reviewed very favorably one of Gissing’s least impressive novels, *The Town Traveller*. By the end of his life, in short, he had gained considerable recognition among the press of the city where he had started his career as a writer of fiction.¹

¹On the *Chicago Times*, see Donald Abramoske, *The Chicago Daily News: A Business History, 1875-1901*, diss., University of Chicago, 1963, pp. 5-7. On the *Inter Ocean*, see Bessie Louise Piece, *A History of Chicago; vol. 3: The Rise of a Modern City, 1871-1893* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 414. On the *Chicago Chronicle*, see Louise Seymour Jones, “Horatio Winslow Seymour, 1847-1920,” an unpublished biography of Mrs. Jones’s father at the Chicago Historical Society, written in 1948, pp. 35-63. On the *Chicago Daily News* and its connection with Gissing, see George Gissing, *Lost Stories from America: Five Signed Stories Never Before Reprinted, a Sixth Signed Story, and Seven Recent Attributions*, edited with an introduction and commentary by Robert L. Selig (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 11-13. See also

-- 34 --

Winiford Gregory, *American Newspapers 1821-1936: A Union List of Files Available in the United States and Canada* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1937).

“Literary Brevities,” *Chicago Times*, 27 February 1892, p. 6

Denzil Quarrier, by George Gissing, published by Macmillan & Co., New York and London, is an entertaining story of English life, in which a man of force and character meets a shy, modest, timid young woman, whose relations had persuaded her to marry a young fellow who, as they came out of church, was arrested for forgery, convicted, and sent to prison. English law, it seems, would not annul marriages for the felony of one of the parties. The hero and heroine when they meet love, and they live together, unknown to friends of either, as husband and wife. One friend of his, and he thinks his best, only knows the secret, but he, jealous of political success which he wished for himself, but which falls to the other, sets the now liberated husband on the track, and the terrified woman, thinking she is about to ruin the future of the man she loves, drowns herself. A year or two later the hero learns who betrayed him and the book ends with his remark: “Now I understand the necessity for social law.” And the reader, startled at such a bald non sequitur, asks why? What social law? That sustaining marriage? If so, how? Or is it the social law that forbade his killing such a despicable false friend? But that is legal as well as social law. What then? Give it up. It is an entertaining story as such, but if designed to prove anything for or against marriage, is pro tanto a total failure.

“Literary Brevities,” *Chicago Times*, 20 May 1893, p. 12

A thoroughly English novel is *The Odd Women*, by George Gissing. It is the story of a family – six sisters – left to their own devices and resources by the sudden death of their father,

a country physician with little means. Under the pressure of necessity they go out into the world to make their living and succeed in making the most utter of failures in everything they attempt. They lack that quality known as "capability." They make one feel sorry for them all the time, and withal there is a constant impression in the mind that they ought to have done better and known better. The story is a mild one and not of extraordinary merit or demerit. It is published at \$1 by Macmillan & Co. of New York.

"*Sleeping Fires.* – By George Gissing. (New York: D. Appleton & Co.),"
Daily Inter Ocean, 11 April 1896, p. 10

This is a short tale of a man who, otherwise fortunate, is compelled to expiate by suffering a youthful sin. It separated him for years from the only woman he could love, and made him an aimless wanderer on the earth. Though he is permitted to extenuate his fault by the usual specious arguments of society, the reader cannot but feel that the punishment of his folly was a just one, and as inevitable as just.

-- 35 --

"Charles Dickens, a Critical Study. – By George Gissing. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.)," *Inter Ocean*, 2 April 1898, p. 10

A work of genuine, thoughtful criticism is a rare thing in these days of helter-skelter bookmaking, and should be welcomed with appreciative praise. The great army of Dickens' lovers will greet this book with enthusiasm, while those who do not admire the works of Dickens (for there are such!) should read it, for they will learn much from its clear, discriminating judgments. Mr. Gissing knows both the work and the author of whom he writes, and having studied well, writes from the deep fount of his knowledge. He has studied the writings of Dickens through the light of that author's ardent personality, and also through the conditions and history of his time. So remote has now become the age which gave him birth and shaped his character, not only in time but in mental and social progress, that the career of Dickens and his writings may be regarded, partly at least, from the standpoint of posterity. It is admitted that so great a change has come over the theory and practice of fiction that the works of Dickens are now regarded as in many respects antiquated. Being antiquated, however, is not necessarily to be condemned. A careful study of the writings of Dickens shows, as Mr. Gissing says, that "he is a born story-teller of a certain day and a certain class." And his limitations are frankly admitted by this critic, his extravagances, his frequent weakness of judgment, his feeble plot construction, but these in no way set aside his wonderful power of characterization, his vivid imagination, his overflowing humor, his tender pathos, his marvelous power of satire. Granting all the imperfections found by exacting critics, we can but admit the correctness of the estimate which Mr. Gissing gives of the immortal author of *Pickwick Papers* as follows: "Nature made him the mouthpiece of his kind, in all that relates to simple emotions and homely thought. Who can more rightly be called an artist than he who gave form and substance to the ideal of goodness and purity, of honor, justice, mercy, whereby the dim multitudes falteringly seek to direct their steps? This was his task in life, to embody the better dreams of ordinary men; to fix them as bright realities for weary eyes to look upon. He achieved it in the strength of a faultless sympathy; following the true instincts which it is so unjust – so unintelligent – to interpret as mere commercial shrewdness or dullness of artistic perception. Art is not single, to every great man his province, his mode. During at least one whole generation Charles Dickens, in the world of literature, meant England. For his art, splendidly triumphant, made visible to all mankind the characteristic virtues, the typical shortcomings of the homely English race."

“*Veranilda*. A Romance of Old Rome by the Late George Gissing,”
Inter Ocean, 18 February 1905, p. 7

E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, have published in this country a posthumous novel by George Gissing, with the title *Veranilda: a Romance*. The epoch of the tale, the sixth century,

-- 36 --

the age of Justinian and Belisarius, is a time of which the general reader knows almost nothing and the student of history little. The scene is Rome and central and northern Italy, and of this country he made a careful study in his Italian travels.

Not only was Gissing cut off at the age of 46 before this romance was in type, but he did not live to bring it to a natural close. It is printed from the unfinished manuscript. There were no adequate materials to show how he had designed it to end, and it was out of the question to supply what he was not permitted to complete. Yet it is not in any sense a preliminary sketch. So far as it goes it is complete, and is finished in the best style of the author. The real climax of the story has been written: the two or three missing chapters add a pathetic touch to the book, rather than mar it.

The hero of the story is Basilius, a noble young Roman: the heroine is Veranilda, a granddaughter of King Theodoric. Hero and heroine meet and love. The young Roman would wed the girl, despite the fact that she was under the menace of the Roman law and that he would then be in peril from all who served the Emperor.

Then the girl is abducted under mysterious circumstances. Basil seeks her in vain. Marcian, his bosom friend, finds the girl and seeks to win her for himself by telling her that Basil is false to her. Basil appears, kills Marcian, casts off Veranilda, believing her to be false. Ultimately they are reconciled, after Basil has joined Totila, the King of the Goths, who is advancing on Rome.

Frederic Harrison, in an introduction, says that he believes *Veranilda* to be the most important book produced by the dead author. At any rate, it is in a new vein and shows to advantage Gissing's gift for local color, his insight into spiritual mysticism, and his really fine scholarship and classical learning. One gets a vivid picture of a little known period of the history of the Eternal City. It was a troublous time. To the reign of the gothic Emperor Theodoric has succeeded the temporary domination of the Byzantine conquerors. There were two religions and no man's life or property was safe. Mr. Gissing's pages are thronged with a great variety of characters – Goths and Romans, men and women, noble and slave. There are the patrician Romans, the beautiful and attractive Princess of the Amal line, and the scheming woman of pleasure, the King of the Goths slowly and surely nearing Rome; rapacious Huns and treacherous aliens; the corruption of the Roman court; the turmoil of the times.

Veranilda is a broad canvas. One much prefers it to George Gissing's gloomy portrayal of contemporary English life and considers it the most likely of any of his books to live.

“Literary Notes and Gossip,” *Inter Ocean*, 1 April 1905, p. 8

George Gissing is very little known in this country, but *By the Ionian Sea* is generally considered by English critics to be his best work. This book has just been imported by the Scribners published in a cheaper edition, and it should serve as an excellent introduction of a very interesting man to the American public.

-- 37 --

“Some Studies in London Life,” *Chicago Chronicle*,
28 November 1898, p. 10

The Town Traveler – the last word spelled with two *ls*, however – by George Gissing (Frederick A. Stokes & Co., New York), is a story which, in respect of some of its characters and of the picturesque way in which they are drawn, will remind some readers of Dickens, yet of a Dickens with an entirely up-to-date suit of clothes on, and his hair in the most formal modern “cut.” “The Traveler” himself is a “commercial traveler” with a “short circuit,” a city salesman, in fact. He is a breezy, good-natured fellow, not above a little comparatively innocent duplicity on occasions, but with a fund of honest chivalry at bottom.

Most of the characters are taken from humble life, the hard-working and not over-neat landlady of a London boarding-house – her “slavey” of all work – a young woman with a temper, whose occupation is to sell programmes in a theater; the quiet, well-meaning wife of a man who “disappears” at intervals and who helps herself by keeping a china shop, are examples. The man who “disappears” turns out to be a man who had married humbly and later comes unexpectedly into a title and fortune, but who, though he conceals that good fortune, cannot help going back sometimes to his patient family.

The complications of the story grow out of the efforts of some interested and some disinterested persons who scent this mystery, to unravel it, and they are treated with consummate skill to the end of illustrating some of the more or less hidden undercurrents of English life. The reader will rather resent the fact that the mystery is not unraveled just in a way to do “poetic justice,” but the outcome is quite in the vein of real life. The style is crisp, original and picturesque and though the tale is sometimes a little obscure in its flow the reader’s interest is not allowed to flag.

“Among the Writers,” *Chicago Daily News*, 19 March 1896, p. 4

George Gissing, a young novelist and short story writer now much praised in England, is a very accomplished man. He has traveled much and speaks a number of languages. He lives at Epsom and seldom visits London. He is described as extremely handsome, with auburn hair and mustache and large, intelligent eyes.

“About Writers,” *Chicago Daily News*, 22 May 1896, p. 4

George Gissing is an English novelist with fifteen books to his credit and a reputation as a man of keen discriminating touch, full of protest against the shams and conventionalities of life and capable of sharply spearing objectionable fads and conditions with his pen. Judging from his books, which picture the lower classes, one would say that he was unhappily married to an unappreciative wife with a large number of unpleasant women friends and relatives; that he

-- 38 --

disliked children, had no sense of humor, and had been unassociated with any really happy man or woman in the whole course of his existence, all of which is probably untrue.

“Glances at New Books,” *Chicago Daily News*, 24 November 1899, p. 7

George Gissing has always been impressed with the sad side of life. He has given us pastels and sketches of London, gray, foggy, hopeless, appalling; he writes as though his heart was wrung with the grimness of existence.

To an appalling degree he is a victim of the malady of never taking this world as a joke.

But his novel, *The Crown of Life*, while serious enough to sustain his reputation, has a hint of lighter moments, though the hero plods from the first page through to the last in a maze of torturing emotions, disappointments, and whimsies. Briefly, Piers Otway, aged 21, falls in love with a beautiful girl rather above him in station, and does not tell her so till eight years later, when she marries him. Many things happen in between, such as Irene's engagement to a rising young politician and the breaking off of the marriage because she does not love him, though she is fond of no one else; Piers's long exile to Russia, where he engages in business; his vacillation, his offer of marriage to Irene's cousin, Olga, who happily runs off and marries a jealous Italian, and many minor events having no bearing on the main thread. One sees there is no special plot – indeed, Mr. Gissing belongs to that vast school of writers who scorn anything so conventional as a plot, and perhaps they are right and come nearer the realistic story for the lack.

The character sketching is keen and clever. There are so many typical people shown, some briefly, but all intensely. There are Piers' disreputable brothers, David and Alexander – and David, by the way, represents all that is despicable in his class; there is poor, weak Mrs. Hannaford, Eustace Derwent, brusque Miss Bonnicastle and the butterfly Mrs. Borisoff, with her wit, eccentricities and calm appropriation of the good things in life. The peculiar harmony noticeable in the novel arises from the fact that Mr. Gissing simply created these characters and let them go. They wrote themselves and the story and there is not one sentence, one situation, which is forced. That is the highest praise that can be given the story. The significance of the title lies in the heart of Piers, who gropes blindly for what to him is the crown of life, the love of the woman who alone in all the world is best fitted to supplement his life. Marrying any other, he realizes, he loses what is best in himself, yet Piers is an exceedingly human young man and there are times when he can contemplate even that with equanimity. But the gods are kind and Mr. Gissing leaves him happy:

[A quotation follows from the conclusion of the novel.]

(*The Crown of Life*, by George Gissing. Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York)

[Professor Selig's work on this article was facilitated by a Scholarly Research Award from Purdue University Calumet.]

-- 39 --

An Eerie Incident in Gissing's Life

Pierre Coustillas

The incident was very much an international affair. The parties involved in it were English, French, German, Swiss and Italian; the incident proper occurred in Switzerland in September 1899, but it must be viewed against an Italian backdrop with a tragedy in which a German tourist died in February 1898.

The documents with which the story is reconstructed largely speak for themselves, but they were hard to come by and they could not have been put together without patient international collaboration: Xavier Pétremand, Gissing's great-grandson, supplied the basic story from his grandfather's papers; Mme Fleury's notebook, owned by the present writer, revealed the address of Mme Recordon's pension, which was confirmed by Baedeker's guide to Northern Italy; Francesco Badolato succeeded in tracing a report in a Roman paper; and Domenico Russo procured the death certificate which throws light on the victim and his wife. The eeriness of the incident is coupled with a mystery concerning Alfred Gissing's source – he quotes from an account, presumably in French, which Gabrielle Fleury must have

communicated to him in the mid-1930s, that is when Alfred was writing a Life of his father, and the original of which has been either mislaid or destroyed.

Chronologically the story begins on 12 February 1898 in Rome, where, after leaving England – and his wife – in the previous autumn, Gissing had settled once he had completed his critical study of Dickens in Siena, and visited the shores of the Ionian Sea. He was a regular visitor at the Vittorio Emanuele Library, where he collected material for his long-planned historical novel, and he went there as usual on that particular day. His diary records the anonymous tragedy he witnessed: “On my way to the lib[rary] this morning, as I passed Via Mazzarino, I saw a little crowd round something on the pavement, and heard a passer-by say: ‘Si è buttato qui’ [He has thrown himself here]. Approaching, I saw an old man lying dead, with a stream of blood from his skull—an old grey-bearded man, decently dressed. His face perfectly placid. They threw a sheet over him, and carried him off in a vehicle. I must look for a report in paper. Seems to have been suicide, from 2nd storey.” Next day, he concluded the story in a few words: “I learn from the paper that the suicide of yesterday was a German baron, ill of fever; done in delirium.”

-- 40 --

Apparently Gissing let the tragic event drop out of his mind – no further echo of it appears either in his private papers or, in some recognizable form, in his fiction – but the memory of it still dwelt with him. So much so that, one day, some nineteen months later, as he was staying with Gabrielle Fleury and her mother in Switzerland, words escaped him that were overheard by Gabrielle. Her account of the circumstances is quoted by Alfred Gissing as follows:

On the 19th Sept., 1899, during our stay at Locarno, I wanted to show George Cannobbio and the admirable Villa Badia at which my mother and I had passed a month two years before. I wished to take him by a Roman road which, from a certain point, crossed the upper part of the estate. We were already on the estate and had been ascending for a moment in silence, the day being magnificent, when suddenly, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, George muttered, ‘That poor man who threw himself from the window! He had not the look of suffering.’ Greatly astonished by such an abrupt and tragic recollection in the midst of that enchanting landscape, I asked him what was the meaning of the exclamation and to what it referred. Like one awakening from a dream he replied: ‘Oh, I have never spoken of it to you! Well, on my last sojourn at Rome, when I was going to the Library, I saw a crowd in the street and approached. There lay an old man who had just thrown himself from a second-floor window. He was hardly yet dead, but his eyes were wide open and he did not appear to suffer.’ For my part I was still surprised that this recollection should have risen in George’s mind at such a place and on such a day, both of which suggested anything but melancholy thoughts.

In the afternoon we called upon the proprietress of the Badia [Mme Charles Recordon, Villa Badia, Cannobbio, Lago Maggiore] and I asked her for news of the people with whom we stayed at her house two years previously, and enquired especially after the Baron and Baroness von Loeper – delightful people to whom we were particularly attached and who left the Badia at the same time as ourselves, on their way to Rome where they were going to spend the winter. We had had no news of them since the beginning of the following year. In reply to my enquiry Madame Recordon (the proprietress) exclaimed: ‘Oh, then you have not heard of the calamity which has happened! Well, the Baron von Loeper was taken seriously ill with malaria. He was thought to have recovered, and his wife made preparations for their departure for Germany, when, happening to leave him alone in his room for a moment, she found upon returning the window open and the room empty. The Baron had had another attack of

fever, under the influence of which he had jumped out of the window.' George thereupon exclaimed: 'There! It was *he* of whom I spoke this morning and whom I saw on the ground! I can now recall the name given in the newspapers on the following day. I made a

-- 41 --

note of it in my diary, and will show it to you when we return to Locarno!"

It is difficult to know in what Roman newspaper Gissing had read a report of the German baron's death, but it is likely that the dailies which printed one all drew from the same source. The following is a translation of the story in *Il popolo romano* of Saturday, 12 February:

Suicide. Baron von Loeper, a German major from Dresden, aged sixty-one, had been living in lodgings with his wife at the *pensione* Boos, 6 Via Mazzarino, since November 20. He was a congenial man; for about two weeks he had been very ill, suffering from a pernicious fever, which was the cause of serious troubles. Yesterday, at 9.30 a.m., while with his wife in their room, the poor man opened the window and suddenly jumped out, falling down in the street. You may imagine the distress of his poor wife. Mr. Boos's son and the servants of the *pensione*, as well as constable Vittorio Montemeri and his assistant Giovanni Mansato rushed up; they picked up the suicide, who was still breathing and put him into cab no. 37, driven by De Desideri Domenico, and took him to San Antonio Hospital. However, the unfortunate baron died on the way there. At the hospital, Dr. Lodi and Dr. Censi could only confirm death, caused by a major fracture at the base of his skull. (p. 3)

The death certificate adds a few details which would be useful to anyone who might wish to know more about the baron. His first name is given as Rodolfo, his occupation as *pensionato* and his "civil status" as "married to Anna von Bark."

As one looks at this official document, with its cold, administrative approach to human affairs, which constitutes a link between the living baron whom Gabrielle had met at Cannobbio and the dying baron whom Gissing had seen in Rome, a passage in the letter to Gabrielle of 12 September 1898 occurs to one – the passage about Herzen whom, as Mme Fleury's notebook testifies, Gabrielle's parents had met, and whom Gissing, unaware of this, introduced as a background figure into *The Crown of Life*: "These frequent meetings of our minds are really wonderful, are they not?" At the time he wrote this, the plural he used was probably justified in his opinion by other coincidences between their tastes, opinions, and the like, e.g. the coincidence of Gabrielle being a friend of the Funck-Brentanos, who were well-known to Gissing for the part they had played in Bertz's life during his exile in Paris. But now, on 19 September 1899, reality was certainly much stranger than fiction and "wonderful" was no longer the right word to describe this new coincidence. The incident savoured of the gruesome.

-- 42 --

Notes and News

Mr. Sydney Lott, who contributed recently to this journal, reports that he has been in touch with Wordsworth Editions, by now well-known as publishers of classics selling at £1, and that *New Grub Street* will be added to their list next March.

Peter Ackroyd's novel *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, which was published last autumn in England by Sinclair Stevenson, has now been reissued in paperback by Minerva at £6.99 (*Observer*, Review Section, July 30, p. 17). The novel is also available in America under the title *The Trial of Elizabeth Cree* (Doubleday /Nan A. Talese, \$22.00). A long review of it by James Wood was published in the *New York Review of Books* for 21 September 1995, pp. 49-50. Its title, "Little Guignol," conveys a fair idea of the reviewer's approach. He is essentially bent on analysing Ackroyd's specific variety of melodrama and his determination to "blur the separation of the real and unreal." Like Ackroyd, who again mentioned Gissing in his *Times* review of Margaret Drabble's biography of Angus Wilson (May 25, p. 38), D. J. Taylor is fond of alluding to his favourite author whenever an opportunity occurs (see the *Times Literary Supplement* for 21 July, p. 3). Gissing's name also frequently appears in publications connected with Wakefield. Roger Grainger, in *St. John's Church, Wakefield: The Story of a Christian Congregation 1795-1995*, a booklet printed by George Alderson & Co, of Horbury, shows his awareness of the social contacts between the Mackies and the Gissings.

The *Dorking Advertiser* for 28 September 1995 carried an article on the exhibition organised by the Dorking Library about the literary past of the town and the surrounding district. Gissing, whose works on display were *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*, could be seen in the company of Defoe, Sheridan, Keats, Fanny Burney, Dickens, George Eliot, and E. M. Forster. The leaflet on Gissing gave an adequate summary of his activity during the year he spent at 7 Clifton Terrace, deploring that *The Crown of Life*, the novel he wrote there, should be out of print ("Last chance to enjoy display of literary past," p. 4).

Raymond Triquet, a former lecturer at Lille University and an authority on cynology or dogdom, read a learned yet entertaining paper on the description of dogs in French and English literature at the 39th colloquium organized by the Société francophone de cynotechnie in

-- 43 --

Toulouse on 25 and 26 May 1994. Like the editors of Gissing's scrapbook, he wonders what were Gissing's sources for the dog lore turned to vivid account in *The Town Traveller*. Perhaps Vero Shaw's *Illustrated Book of the Dog* (1881), Lee's *Modern Dogs* (1896) and Stonehenge's *The Dog in Health and Disease* (1859).

Jacob Korg writes: The BBC episode of "Rumpole of the Bailey" seen in Seattle on 7 September featured Victorian fiction. First, we learned that the murdered woman was a reader of Victorian novels. The repeated entry of "Arthur Morrison" in her appointment book meant nothing until the resourceful Rumpole turned to a reference source and learned that the name was that of the English novelist who had written *A Child of the Jago*. Presto! The man who discovered the corpse, but who denied knowing the victim, was named Jago. Hence, the Morrison entries indicated the victim's clandestine meetings with this man. We will not divulge the outcome of this discovery, but wish to notify our readers of something even more cogent. The murdered woman's address – mentioned several times in the dialogue – was given as 30A Gissing Mews! It was appropriately described as a derelict neighborhood. The *Journal* gives a nod of appreciation to John Mortimer, the gifted author of the Rumpole epic.

* * *

Recent Publications

Volumes

Bouwe Postmus (ed.), *The Poetry of George Gissing*, Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995. Brown cloth. xiv + 186 pages. ISBN 0-7734-9148-1. For price, see *Journal*, Oct. 1994.

Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Seven 1897-1899*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995. Off-white paper-covered boards with a grey tape binding and, on the spine, gilt titling on dark green panel. Dark green dust-jacket with pattern in light green. ix + 438 pages. \$70.00. ISBN 0-8214-1123-3.

Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume One 1863-1880*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995.

-- 44 --

Uniform with the above. lxiv + 335 pages. \$70.00. ISBN 0-8214-0955-7. Second impression, revised.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Kester Freriks and Geerten Meijsing, *De Palmen van Amsterdam: Briefwisseling*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 1993. Correspondence between two leading Dutch writers. Mr. Meijsing is well known for his keen interest in Gissing. He has written on his life and work on several occasions and translated *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* into Dutch. More can confidently be expected from him. This volume contains sixteen passages on Gissing.

Annarita Del Nobile, "Viaggio e scrittura: Il tragitto ideologico di George Gissing in Italia," *Tracce*, trimestriale di ricerca letteraria, XIII, nos. 35-36, June-September 1994, pp. 56-59. Publisher: Edizioni Tracce, Via Vittorio Veneto, 47, 65123 Pescara, Italy.

Robert L. Selig, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Spring 1995, pp.75-77. Review of Vols. 3 and 4 of the *Collected Letters*.

Shigeru Koike, "A Good Day for Reading," *Tokyo Shimibun*, 9 July 1995, p. 9. This widely circulated Tokyo daily carries a column with this title every Sunday. Professor Koike chose to discuss *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

Mihoko Takeda, "Between Emancipation and Restraint, Parts I and II," *Eigo Seinen* (The Rising Generation), July and August 1995, pp. 192-94 and 256-58. We shall publish an abstract of this article on *The Odd Women* in a later number.

Shizuko Kawamoto, "The New Women of the Fin de Siècle, Part VI," *Eigo Seinen*, September and October 1995, pp. 298-300 and 362-64. Another article on *The Odd Women*.

Martha S. Vogeler, "Book Reviews," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 38 (1995), no. 3, pp. 363-66. Review of Vol. 6 of the *Collected Letters*. On pp. 384-87 Jim Barloon praises William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940*, in particular its study of *The Whirlpool*.

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Information for Contributors

The Gissing Journal publishes essays and notes on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with biographical, critical, bibliographical and topographical subjects. They should be addressed to the editor, Pierre Coustillas, 10 rue Gay-Lussac, 59110 La Madeleine, France.

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