

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

“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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The Unclassed

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The casual reader may well receive an impression of *The Unclassed* which might confuse an overview of Gissing’s development, for he is most likely to lay hands on the revised and shortened version; the same applies to *Thyrza*. In each case, Gissing’s revisions involved very little actual rewriting of the books, in the sense of improving and changing; his work on them was almost entirely cutting and eliminating. He removed a number of scenes and conversations that were unnecessary, mainly in that they were repetitive or reinforced effects already sufficiently made. In short, he was removing the evidences of “padding,” though

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whether this original verbosity was forced on him by the need to fill three volumes or was more simply the result of taking the traditional long novel as his artistic model is hard to say. At least, in later years he was sufficiently aware of the failing to reduce it. However, what is perhaps more significant critically, Gissing in each case of revision turned his attention to a sub-plot, a typical sensation-novel digression, which was irrelevant in the sense not only of not being directly involved in the main action – which is, after all, what we mean by “sub”-plot – but of contributing nothing to the theme.

In the cutting of *The Unclassed*, the most noticeable change was the reduction in scope, from three chapters (Book IV, Chaps I-III) to about one and a half in the revised edition (Chaps. 18-19) of a narration of the history of Maud Enderby’s parents. He could not have easily removed the sequence entirely, for the characters have some influence on the plot, in changing

Maud's situation, and more importance in influencing her ideas; consequently he had to retain the artificial contrivance first of their absence from their daughter's life and then their return; but he did remove much about them which could be dispensed with, including the unnecessary mystification caused by the significant but unexplained appearance of the father in the background near the beginning of the novel – a typical “sensation” trick. Oddly, there remains in the revision as well as the original what appears to be a “loose end” or undeveloped effect of the same kind. I refer to Ida's menacing follower, Edwards, who having loomed forebodingly a couple of times disappears entirely as though the writer had forgotten what he intended; this I expect is like many other things the consequence of uncritically reproducing the “effects” of sensation writing.

Conveniently appearing parents, and various mysteries about the parentage and other antecedents of characters, are familiar turns of sensation plotting, of the same genre as legacies and other arbitrary changes in financial situations, and used for the same purposes for their inherent interests of surprise and sentiment, and for their power of instantly changing situations. Gissing's liability to these trite contrivances is evident not only in his earliest works, though as

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one might expect they are more prevalent there. The first seven novels and also *In the Year of Jubilee* contain byplay with wills and legacies. In *The Nether World* occurs the reappearance of no less than two generations of missing progenitors, first the stock figure, the newly-rich colonial (grandfather), then the equally stock bad-penny troublemaker (father). There is a secret mother-relationship in *In the Year of Jubilee*, a secret marriage in this and in *Denzil Quarrier*; a secret father-relationship in *Sleeping Fires*; also many other kinds of sensational effects in various places. These things do not seem to be consciously included, as they often were by the unabashed sensationalists, to give life to a collection of material impossible to unify by theme. Rather do they seem merely to be additions intended to fill up space. In some cases, – for instance Totty Nancarrow's inheritance in *Thyrza*, – the contrivances affect only minor characters, and add nothing to the main plot. Only in some cases are the melodramatic tricks of central importance, and then they serve largely to accomplish changes that could have occurred in any case as the result of the operations of character and circumstance, and which would have been much more convincing had no element of chance been arbitrarily introduced. Gissing seems simply not to have realised that in copying these tricks he was damaging the appearance of verisimilitude and losing the opportunity for much closer relationship between character and action; not, at least, until he wrote critically on Dickens – an exercise which may very well have clarified his ideas.

The Unclassed's contrivances include a legacy, an unexpected return on investment, the affair of the Enderbys just mentioned, and yet another mystification in which Woodstock, guardian of Waymark, is also the grandfather of Ida, but keeps this secret for no very good reason. Such connecting of a character to several others by arbitrary linkages reminds us of Waghorn in the previous book, and is all of a piece with the pattern of coincidences which pervades both novels, such as the meeting by accident in later life of Harriet, Maud and Ida who were at school together. Note that chance itself is not necessarily coincidence: it would rationally connect all characters if the school fellows had simply remained in contact; it would be an everyday and natural process for a group of persons to come together accidentally; the

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improbability arises when the author wants it both ways. The reader then may choose which he thinks is the greater improbability, that a group of characters already related should meet by chance, or that a group of chance-met characters should turn out already to be related. This is

not entirely a frivolous distinction: one's view depends on preferred structural concepts, the first that which sees a novel as a developing plot, the second which sees it as a "realistic" pattern of ordinary events. The point perhaps is that Gissing is trying to have the benefit of both plans at once.

This is the usual uncertainty between sensational habit and thematic and realistic intent. Other failings of *The Unclassed* support the criticism. There are Dickensian eccentrics of the usual kind, with their physical peculiarities and habits of speech, not necessary to the theme or action – though of these O'Gree may be considered, through his affair with Sally, related to theme and influential on Waymark's attitude to Ida. It is worth noting that Gissing seems guilty of a certain casualness when presenting effects well authenticated by fashion in fiction; this can lead, in handling something so familiar as a Dickensian comic figure, to careless lapses not really typical:

"No, no, my friend,' returned Egger, in his very bad English." (Book VI, Chap. V)

There are melodramatic effects which seem gratuitous, such as the suicide of Mrs. Enderby and Maud's foreboding of it. There are strained and artificial situations, such as the introduction of Ida to Harriet by Waymark and Casti – this seems a little improbable for the persons, done for reasons of plot. There is a general improbable tidying-up of situations at the end. Many things in this novel seem naive, for instance Gissing's dealing with slums: no longer is there shrill protest as in *Workers in the Dawn*, yet placing the blame for social injustice solely on the money-grubbing of a landlord is actually less sociologically perceptive, more Dickensian and moralistic. Rather similarly, criticisms of the school in which Waymark and others teach, and of its pupils, seem so subjective as to take no account of the possibility that the fault lay in the incompetence of the complainers themselves as teachers.

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If all these things are the consequences of imitation, habit, carelessness, and so on, and are in some degree outside the main critical considerations, this novel like *Workers* has a more harmful structural fault: that is, a confusion of themes. The reader may in retrospect decide that one theme has emerged as the major one: to some extent that major theme has indeed begun to emerge as a structural principle during the story; but it is not absolutely clear that Gissing knew that this was happening, or knew how to make good use of it to provide unity.

The theme which may seem to emerge is the state of mind of the philosophically disillusioned man, Waymark, the balancing natural virtue of the prostitute, Ida, and the complexities of sexual attraction between them. All this may well be illustrated by the interaction between the two and Maud, whose presence stimulates the philosophy and supports the sexual dilemma. A large part of the book does indeed consist of scenes between them, and a fair proportion of other scenes have a reinforcing function. Were this all, the book would be a neat and complete work of art. But Gissing seemed unable to write this only – and not just because of the padding necessary to fill three volumes, though no doubt that had its influence. Probably he did not realise that such unity was desirable. So we find not only the excrescences of sensationalism, but also a multiplication and diversification of intention. The whole story of Julian Casti and his wife, incorporating the personal marital experience of Gissing, themes of discord, poverty, uncongenial living, etc., is strictly an independent subject, even though Gissing has tied it into his main plot at a number of points (notably where Harriet's false accusation leads to Ida's imprisonment) and has connected it thematically by way of discussions between Casti and Waymark. Because of these connections, one may possibly think of it as being integral with the main action, but reflection must show that its removal would cause few changes. Similarly, discussion of the life of the low-paid schoolteacher, interesting though it is in itself – informatively Gissing is always interesting – is an arbitrary inclusion; Waymark and

his fellows might have been of any other profession, indeed by the end of the book are of other professions. Slum life, poverty, the slum landlord and his tenants, – one can hardly expect to

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find Gissing at this stage of his ideas avoiding an opportunity to animadvert on these, which much occupied his mind; but they are not relevant; this is not a slum novel.

It is this lack of discipline, of any awareness of the need for such discipline to keep him from digressing on to any subject of importance to himself, which allows the addition to what is properly the story of Waymark (a part of Gissing) that also of Casti (another part), and with him the two evil women, Harriet and Mrs. Sprowl. In a sense these female figures – presented as always with great power and unforgettably – create a balance with Maud, and Ida, two types of good woman. In that these latter are idealisations, and the former inverse idealisations, all of them emerging from the complexity of the author's feeling on the subject, they do form an intelligible opposition. Intelligible, that is, in terms of Gissing's work as a whole. Unfortunately, this is not a meaningful pattern in the structure of *The Unclassed*. Had Waymark in his thoughts about women been drawn three ways instead of two, had knowledge of the contemptibility of Harriet been influential on him, then all objections would be stilled. But it is not so. He is torn only between Ida and Maud; Harriet has only a mechanical influence on anything that concerns Waymark, apart from some rather obvious reflections on the nature of respectability and the like.

The title of the novel, one of his most intriguing, might be argued to enclose in different senses the prostitutes, the déracinés, the abysmally poor, and might be stretched to cover most of the characters (but in what sense is Maud unclassed?) In this it is witty. But, alas, the invention of a title which comprehends all only suggests, it does not create, a unity.

In Waymark Gissing has taken some forward steps in the development of the introspective character. "Waymark had a good deal of frank talk with himself before meeting Ida again on the Sunday. Such conversation was, as we know, habitual." (Book IV, Chap. V). The author could scarcely more simply, and with more perceptive irony, have outlined the nature of the tormented déraciné intellectual that was to recur so often in his fiction. Waymark is not yet Godwin Peak, but he is so much less superficial, so much less merely a vehicle for abstract thoughts, than Arthur Golding; so convincingly really personally confused and

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troubled, and that confusion so communicated to us, that there can be no comparison with the previous novel. But there is a problem of intention here which Gissing has not solved.

It is not certain what is the major theme, even after some of the minor digressions have been eliminated: whether it be the complex of ideas surrounding Ida's prostitution and Maud's virtue on the moral scale, and Waymark's determinism and Maud's puritanism on the philosophical (these not being independent considerations of course), all contemplated objectively; or whether it be the twists and turns of Waymark's indecision contemplated subjectively. If the latter be the case, then much which is included is irrelevant. It is scarcely necessary to pursue those concrete experiences which give rise to Waymark's world-view beyond a definition of his reaction to them; their real existence is of no importance, only the mind which conceives them. In this sense Ida and Maud need not exist outside Waymark's view of them, except sufficiently to make us doubt its accuracy; it is reasonable that they should be, as in some degree they are, just idealised projections of Waymark's needs, just as Sidwell Warricombe and her father are projections of Peak's, not to be known in their reality until he, the observer, has adjusted to that reality. But here, while there are tantalising glimpses of the possibilities along these lines, Gissing has not yet perceived them; or perhaps it is that he has

not come to any terms with his own idealising; at any rate, I repeat, this is not yet *Born in Exile*.

The lives and thoughts, the separate existence, of Maud and Ida are developed as that of Sidwell simply is not in the later novel. They cannot be reduced to mere projections of Waymark's, and therefore the element of idealisation in them begins to bother us. This apart, it becomes evident that our main action must be considered to be an objective contemplation of the moral-philosophical issues, with the three main characters presumably having equal importance in it. Certainly Gissing does spend some time on the reactions of Ida and Maud, the turns of their ideas as well as Waymark's. From this point of view Ida's past has an argumentative relevance, not a merely symbolic or personal one: the affairs of the Enderbys, and the influence of her parents' fate on Maud, are also relevant.

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On such an approach, however, we find ourselves struggling over the idealisation and "unrealities" (by which we mean failures in conviction arising from the idealistic separation from the probable) of these characters. Ida is the obvious crux. For half the novel, she is a most promising creation. From her first introduction as a schoolchild we are made conscious, more by action than statement, of her strength and independence of personality and the simple deprivation of social values from which she suffers and which make credible much of her subsequent action. Her later appearance as a (successful) prostitute is convincing; her first meeting with Waymark in the street is one of Gissing's triumphs – unembarrassed, as he is at his best, by what was for the time most daring material, he presents the most lively, even witty, and natural conversation; perfectly catching the cool, mildly flirtatious condescensions in the address to each other of a man-about-town and a high-class street-girl who are not intending any business relationship, while conveying the strengths and weaknesses of both characters. Subsequent scenes develop the relationship quite credibly; we recognise the prostitute's need for friendship and respect, the complexity of Waymark's reactions to her ranging from desire through admiration to curiosity (not of the simplest kind), and we understand how Ida's force of personality would maintain control of the relationship on the level at which she wants it. There are not lacking further strokes of insight, such as Ida's reaction to Waymark's complaint that he cannot further their relationship for lack of money – it is, of course, an unintended insult (considering her profession) and the process by which this stimulates in her a hitherto suspended desire for respectability is subtly conceived. This is the sequence which culminates in her cleansing bath by moonlight – a symbolic *scene*, rare in Gissing, though symbolic acts by the characters are less uncommon.

None of the stages by which Ida regenerates herself through the rest of the book are strictly improbable, given the character thus established. But something after this goes wrong with the motivation. Had Ida's story been continued as one of a person's finding herself, establishing herself in society along acceptable lines (with, one would hope, an element of sardonic awareness consistent with the worldly knowledge so far displayed); using the aim of

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marriage with Waymark as an achievable target in that process, while knowing his failings – this could have been an admirable study – I fall into the critical pitfall of composing the novel the author could have written, instead of the one he did; but this speculation indicates at least the possibilities inherent in the subject. As it is, something goes wrong. For one thing, after this point Ida is seen largely from without, through Waymark and Casti; her actions seem to be appropriate more to their idealistic daydreams about her than to her character as we have come to know it; the motivation attributed to her becomes the simple sentimental one of love and admiration for Waymark, not entirely objectively justified. In short, she tends after this towards

a stock sentimental concept of the sinner reformed, and her conduct no longer reveals the critical intelligence that had been potential in her.

She becomes much more the manifestation of Waymark's ideal sex-object, combining physical desirability with excess of virtue and nobility, than a fully realised character. It hardly needs repeating that artistic creation has been confounded by involvement with Gissing's own dream of what his wife might have been, rather than what she was. The handling of moral values in the situation now becomes less perceptive. Early in the novel Gissing, in describing the relationship of Ida's prostitute mother with her child, had stated with simple clarity the case against superficial respectability:

“Her mother ‘bad,’ indeed! If so, then what was the meaning of goodness? For poor Lotty's devotion to the child had received its due reward herein, that she was loved as purely and intensely as any most virtuous parent could hope to be; so little regard has nature for social codes, so utterly is she often opposed to all the precepts of respectability.” (Book I, Chap. III).

– but the story of Ida's reform breathes “respectability,” and Waymark seems to accept those values, so that his internal battle with puritanism loses a great deal of its force, in that Ida ceases to be the moral opposite to Maud which the conflict requires.

After all these criticisms, however, there can be no denying the improvement of this novel over the last. As these comments have sufficiently shown, there is a good story at the kernel of

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it, with characters conceived in depth and with much more subtlety. There are many scenes, though not all in the same mode nor always at the centre of the action, showing imagination and power that Gissing was not greatly to surpass in later works: I would recommend, in addition to those already mentioned, the introductory chapter; most of the scenes involving Harriet; and the chapter entitled “Bondage” (in revision, “Slimy's day”). In this last, note the believability of Waymark's reflections, and the atmospheric effectiveness of the street children's songs as compared with those in *Workers*.

Some characters, as we saw, still are Dickensian types, and with the more complete ones there is still a tendency to commence with a set description and a character sketch; the phrase “physiognomical study” occurs; but despite this they are generally revealed by stages in action and words, and are capable of surprising rather than occupying fixed positions.

Most evident is improvement in structure. Most of the bad habits of *Workers* are still to some extent present, and will continue to beset many more of Gissing's novels. Nevertheless, although the characters and scenes still are numerous, they are not introduced arbitrarily when needed to expand, nor dropped when used, in the same casual episodic manner. Instead they are introduced in a steady stream during the first third or so of the novel and worked with in various combinations from then on; a simple enough plan one would suppose, but evidence of a great deal more control and forethought. Appropriately there are far fewer surprises in the action, a much greater proportion of forecasting what is going to happen given the interaction of the characters – a stronger enchainement, in other word; because of this many scenes become pregnant with suggestion and possibility instead of standing by themselves. In place of continual sensations, there are defined and meaningful climaxes toward which the action moves with reasonable rhythm – Ida's decision to reform, her arrest and imprisonment, the revolt of Slimy and its effect on Waymark's thinking, with other minor climaxes. The expectation created by this rhythmic movement is unfortunately rather disappointed by the perfunctory and sensational ending, but up to that point it has added considerable drive to the story. When focus

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and point-of-view change, as they do from time to time, it is not an arbitrary shift of attention in the episodic manner but rather to take another view of the same subject; and when a character disappears from the action for a while, it is not merely artificially so that the author can get on with something else, but a consequence of the action that has significance for the future; for example, the absences of Maud or Ida from Waymark's immediate vicinity have functions in the process of his developing feelings. We may note particularly that the on-and-off nature of his love affairs with these two girls is composed of genuine movements of feeling, not of the meaningless and unnecessary misunderstandings customary in sensation.

Oswald Davis speaks of "a sober almost stiff relevance to the propulsion or purpose of the tale..." (p. 23). This critic appears to be happier with more casual structures, what he calls "the normal Gissing masonries." However, his comments are usually to the point, if sometimes over-generous. There is a degree of stiffness, a sense of obvious over-organisation, for once: it comes from Gissing's too enthusiastic use of a technique of ironic juxtaposition the possibilities of which he has no doubt just perceived. Both between successive chapters and, commonly, between the two halves of one chapter, there is a tension of contrast and comparison in character, theme and setting. During the major action there is of course continual opposition of Maud and Ida and what they represent to Waymark, but the technique runs also throughout the book and encompasses all subjects at some point.

Continual comparison is effective and stimulating, but undeniably when used so deliberately, so inevitably, the process comes to seem self-conscious and mechanical. After this book Gissing had always this technique at command and used it constructively and with tact to embody in structure his oppositions, of ideas and social classes in particular. More perhaps than anything else in *The Unclassed* this shows the change from *Workers in the Dawn* – where contrasts indeed there were, but irregular and sensational and of an obvious kind, as poverty with riches. For more reasons than one we may wish that the intervening *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies* had not been lost.

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People Gissing Knew: I – Robert Eustache

Denise Le Mallier

An earlier article which I wrote for the *Newsletter* ("Gissing Scenes and People," April 1968), was devoted to Gissing's and Gabrielle's visit to Le Chasnay, Nièvre, the home of her cousins the Eustaches, in October 1900. I am now asked to write about Robert Eustache, who was my father, and this is a delicate and far from easy task. A daughter may be prejudiced in one way or another and find it difficult to keep a fair balance between her natural feelings and the plain truth.

Presumably, the impression George Gissing retained of Robert Eustache was merely that of a genial and pleasant host. But, had he known him better, he no doubt would have discovered in this host something more; for, in spite of appearances, the two men had certain traits in common. True, their lives had been in complete contrast. Robert Eustache, some four years Gissing's senior, was comfortably settled in life, fairly wealthy, blessed with sound health and in possession of a fine house and a loving and helpful wife. Gissing also had a loving helpmate, but he was poor, ailing, and more or less a wanderer. Notwithstanding these differences, he and Eustache were both artists and idealists, men of culture, endowed with deep, refined feelings, and both were liberal-minded.

Robert Eustache had Norman blood in his veins and was the last descendant of a ship-owning family which had been in that line of business since 1635. His own father, Charles

Eustache, died while still in his forties. His mother, who died at his birth, he had never known; he was brought up by her family, who were iron masters in central France. His grandfather, Emile Martin, who was an inventor, had been a member of the government in 1848, and had done much in favour of the working classes. The moral training he gave his grandson was to influence him throughout his life.

After his parents' and grandparents' death, Robert Eustache found himself at the age of 19 (the age when Gissing was struggling against his first misfortunes), living alone in Paris, a youth of independent means, unhindered by his guardians and free to follow his tastes and

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fancies without constraint. These led him to study painting in the Atelier Bonnat where he acquired a certain talent and came into contact with more than one distinguished painter of the period – among others, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas and an English artist, Alfred Elias, who was to remain his friend.

Shortly afterwards he associated with a former schoolmate, Henri Menier, the rich son of a chocolate manufacturer, who owned a yacht and an island in Canada. With him, he toured about the world, visiting many parts of Europe, America and Africa. Later, he was to travel again by himself to Egypt where he made friends amongst the Arabs and found the best subjects for his brush and palette – a life such as Gissing would have dreamt of and which he well might have envied.

But no life is entirely devoid of cares and troubles and Robert Eustache had his share of them, both financial and sentimental. He was no spendthrift but he had invested important sums in Ferdinand de Lesseps' latest enterprise, the digging of the Panama Canal, which, as is well known, resulted in serious losses for many Frenchmen. Fortunately, Henri Menier had given him an important position in the exploitation of Anticosti (1), a place which does not seem to have much interfered with the enjoyment of his bachelor days. However, as the years went by, he began to feel his solitude.

Reading through the charming and original verses he used to write then – he was also something of a poet – one finds several short poems dedicated to a young cousin he had loved since her childhood and whose family, partly English, was the cause of the engagement being postponed indefinitely. A story of the Romeo and Juliet type, but, happily, with a less tragic ending. In 1899, Robert, now aged 45, was at last able to marry his cousin and they settled in her old home of Le Chasnay, embellishing it with many works of art he had collected over the years.

Then, Robert Eustache's mode of life underwent a complete change: painting was put aside, there were no more travels to distant lands; he became what was called a "gentleman farmer." The expression was inadequate, for he did things thoroughly. Studying agriculture in books and periodicals both French and English, and putting theory into practice, he turned in a

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few years into one of the most active and enlightened farmers of the district. He introduced modern methods, modern machinery, bred prize cattle and struggled tirelessly against routine. His wife, who loved nature and the country above all things, could not have been for him a better companion.

I was born about 3 months after Gissing's visit to Le Chasnay and cannot remember my father before he was nearing fifty. Robert Eustache was a tall, fine figure, somewhat heavily built, with strong regular features and dreamy blue eyes. Of fair complexion, he wore a beard not unlike that of King Edward VII, all the fashion then.

Kind, outwardly calm and easy going, he was nevertheless strong-willed and masterful

and, if annoyed, could fly into a violent temper, the sort of temper that blows itself out as quickly as it has started. He had a lively sense of humour and was popular for his flashes of spontaneous wit. Generous, hospitable, perfectly unaffected and very outspoken, he could tolerate no injustice, no compromising with honesty or truth. A broad-minded liberal, he was far from permissive in the sense the word has now.

During World War I, having passed the age of soldiering, he proved his patriotism in doing more than his share for the army and his country but this would be too long to relate. On the other hand, his ideals were those of a pacifist and he dreamt of an age when, social classes being levelled and frontiers abolished, all men would fraternize and there would be no more wars.

So here we come to the contact Robert Eustache should have had with Gissing. Unfortunately, only a few of the writer's novels had found their way to the Chasnay bookshelves amongst the lighter fiction my parents used to read for relaxation in the evening. There were *The Whirlpool*, *A Life's Morning*, probably *New Grub Street*, but no book of Gissing's that would have most appealed to my father, like *Demos* for instance, in which his sympathies would have gone more to Richard Mutimer than to Hubert Eldon. The pacifist theme in *The Crown of Life* would have met his approval and *The Nether World* have reminded him of his favourite French author, Zola. But, unlike Zola and unlike Gissing the agnostic, Robert Eustache had a deep-rooted religious faith which never forsook him. He was, however,

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an unconventional believer, an admirer and disciple of Marc Sangnier, editor of *Le Sillon* and, for that reason, often at odds with the practising Roman Catholics of his time, who disapproved of his "advanced ideas." For him the only religious book that counted was the New Testament, and its teaching was to be followed, barring everything else. Active and enterprising, unflinching under difficulties, he took a prominent part in many social works, accepting no denials, fearing no rebukes. In his last years, when ill health kept him much indoors, he was engaged on a translation of the Gospels from the Latin Vulgate. For Robert Eustache could have been a man of letters. His knowledge was extensive: he spoke and wrote English, knew the German, Italian and Arabic languages and was, like Gissing, a keen Latin scholar.

He remained, however, an artist – even in cooking! His robust appetite was also that of a gourmet and he would sometimes monopolise the kitchen and indulge in concocting the most complicated and tasty of "recherché" dishes. Perhaps it was a good thing this did not often happen, because then the meal was sure to be served at least an hour late!

To the end of his life, he wrote much and to a purpose: letters to the Ministry of Agriculture, articles for the newspapers, letters to various personalities, in favour of this, or in protest against that. Of course, his position and fortune were great assets; no doubt Gissing would have thought so. But, at least, Robert Eustache knew how to use them to do good.

Some of his ideas, it must be confessed, bordered on Utopia and, had he lived to see in what exaggerated and distorted fashion they have materialized to-day, he might, like Gissing, have changed his mind. But most of what he professed is now accepted by all sensible people; his creeds, stigmatized in the past, are now considered orthodox.

Looking back over the years, I can still see my father, as he sat reading or writing, late at night in his study, by the light of his paraffin lamp, his writing-table littered with a confused mass of papers that no one was allowed to touch but among which he always knew where to find what he wanted. After his death it was my lot to sort those papers, putting many a precious one away, destroying not a few. Soon the table looked tidy and clean. But with the vanishing of

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dust and disorder, something else had gone from that room – a soul.

(1) The isle of Anticosti, in the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, produced pine wood for paper manufacturing, fish for preserves, also sable and blue fox skins.

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Review

Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing, Together with Gissing's Letters to Hick and The Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd, Enitharmon Press Gissing Series Nos. 3 and 7, both edited and with Introductions by Pierre Coustillas, London, 1973.

The revival of interest in George Gissing, long almost forgotten and disdained, particularly by those who had never read any of his works, may be said to have started in earnest some ten years ago. His novels were at the time all out of print and very difficult to procure. If you had asked the average "man of letters" for information, the reply would probably have been that Gissing was a late Victorian pessimist, a prophet of gloom, one whose books had not survived his early death in 1903. But ten years ago was the age of re-assessment of writers who were no longer fashionable. It was the age of reprints, and Victorianism had ceased to be a dead subject. Looking back, how can one be surprised that Gissing, whose vivid portraits of his contemporaries and his extensive knowledge of both the middle-classes and the London slums, must sooner or later be resuscitated and studied for his unique contribution to our literature?

This revival was preceded by volumes of Gissing's letters to H. G. Wells and Eduard Bertz, both the work of American scholars. As so much Gissing material has found its way into American University libraries and private collections, it is only natural that such books were well documented. They whetted the appetites of those small groups of Gissing's admirers spread out over Britain, the United States, Italy and, surprisingly, Japan. Then arrived on the scene a remarkable *animateur*, a young French professor, Pierre Coustillas, who after choosing

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Gissing's life as a subject for his thesis at the Sorbonne, has devoted all the rest of his available time to a gigantic research into every possible source of information on the author, his life and his works.

M. Coustillas was in at the start in 1965 of the *Gissing Newsletter*, which is still issued regularly to subscribers, and when the first editor Professor Jacob Korg decided to hand over his editorship, it was to Pierre Coustillas that he bequeathed his succession. In 1968, Alan Clodd, the grandson of the Victorian scientist and humanist, began publishing through his Enitharmon Press a "Gissing Series" which by early 1974 will have reached its eighth number. The series started with a slim volume in a paper cover, but as time went on the books became longer and more substantial, being now issued as "hardbacks." To give some evidence of the success of this venture, two of the items have run into second editions, and others are out of print and difficult to come by.

The letters to Henry Hick, to which are added a few pages of his own recollections of Gissing, fill many gaps in the author's life story between 1895 and his death. Hick had been at school with Gissing in Wakefield and later had done his best to dissuade his friend from disgracing himself at Owens College, Manchester. His father, Matthew Bussey Hick, had taken care of Gissing after his release from prison and had helped him to go to America. Gissing had since then often visited the father, who was living in retirement at Wakefield, and although he had not seen Henry for a long time, they met again in 1895, when Henry Hick was practising as

a doctor at New Romney in Kent. The renewal of this friendship led Gissing to exchange visits with Hick, and he later consulted him in regard to his own health. Hick was an able general practitioner, and it turned out finally that all his diagnoses and all his advice had been sound. By 1897, Gissing had introduced Hick to H. G. Wells, and he eventually became the latter's regular medical adviser.

Correspondence and conversations between Gissing and Hick are particularly interesting, as Gissing confided to his friend many details of his life at home with his hysterical wife, Edith. Later, Hick was one of those who saved Gissing from the over-dainty *cuisine* of Mme Fleury in

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Paris and helped him to regain his normal weight on a plentiful diet of dishes which he ate with enjoyment. M. Coustillas guides the reader by introducing each letter with a few most helpful remarks showing Gissing's movements during the intervening periods.

The letters to Edward Clodd demonstrate how delighted Gissing was to have found a friend who was both a notable intellectual and unhampered by Victorian taboos. His attitude to Gissing was one of deep human understanding, and they were very much of the same mind in regard to politics, religion and social questions, and to literature in general. Clodd was a banker and took his profession seriously, but he was a most generous and genial host. Some of the week-end parties at his house at Aldeburgh, where writers like Grant Allen and Clement Shorter were among the guests, were to Gissing the most cheering of memories. Gissing's tone in his letters to Hick and Clodd showed his warm feelings towards both, and although the former was less cultivated than the latter, Gissing never wrote down to him, always sent him his books as they were published and enjoyed conversing with him.

Each of these good friends accepted Gissing's marital complications without a murmur, and it is a miracle that on both sides of the Channel Gissing managed to avoid the kind of scandal which people lapped up with such glee, a habit which has become still more poisonous in our present permissive age. These collections of letters help to show that although Gissing claimed to have but few friends, those few were all faithful to him throughout the last years of his troubled life.

As an appendix to the Letters to Edward Clodd, there is a short sketch, "Across the Pyrenees" by Gabrielle Fleury, translated by Mme Denise Le Mallier. These pages, which appeared in the *Gissing Newsletter* (vol. VI, nos 3 and 4), contain evidence of Gabrielle's liveliness and native shrewdness, notwithstanding an occasional small but pleasant trace of naivety. What a change for Gissing, and what a tragedy that he was to survive this journey to the Pyrenees by only a few months! - C. S. C.

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Recent Publications Volumes

- George Gissing, *An Essay on the Four Seasons (The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft)*, Tainan, Tah Chien Cultural Enterprise, 1969. Paperback. This Chinese translation, which was sent to the editor by Mr. Koike, is now out of print. It is annotated and followed by a post-face in which Gissing's life and career are reviewed briefly.
- George Gissing, *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study*, Scholarly Press, 1972. A reprint of the American edition issued by Dodd, Mead in 1904.

Anthologies, articles, reviews etc.

- Ian Fletcher (ed.), *Selections from British Fiction 1880-1900*, Signet Classics, 1972. Contains extracts from *Demos* and *The Odd Women*, and Gissing is discussed at some length in the Introduction.
- Anon. *The Year's Work in English Studies*, 1970, London, John Murray, 1972. On p. 334 the Gollancz edition of *Born in Exile* and *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction* are reviewed, together with Robert Selig's article on *New Grub Street (Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, September 1970).
- Jacob Korg, "George Gissing: A Survey of Research and Criticism," *British Studies Monitor*, Summer 1973, pp. 5-33. A masterly essay which will be indispensable until a revised edition of *Victorian Fiction* is published.
- A. T. Davies, "Reviews," *East London Papers*, Summer 1973, pp. 73-74. A review of the Harvester Press edition of *Demos*.
- George Gissing, "A Terrible Mistake," *Presenting Moonshine*, vol. II, no. 8, August 1973, pp. 20-24. A reprint of an early short story which has never been published in volume form.
- Bryan Hulse, "Book Reviews," *Dickensian*, September 1973, p. 191. Review of *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*.

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- Joseph Wolff, "Reviews," *English Literature in Transition*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1973, pp. 232-33.
- Anon. "Yours, Hick and Clodd," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 12, 1973, p. 1212. A review of the Gissing/Hick and Gissing/Clodd volumes in the Enitharmon Press series.
- Anon. "Book Reviews," *Reprint Bulletin*, Fall 1973, pp. 38-39. A review of *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study*, Scholarly Press, 1972.
- Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Chatto & Windus, 1973. Contains a number of references to Gissing.