

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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On the Authorship of “Some Recollections of George Gissing”

(*Gentleman’s Magazine*, January 1906)

Pierre Coustillas

For reasons that seem at first fairly convincing, it has been commonly assumed that the anonymous article “Some recollections of Geroge Gissing” contributed to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of January 1906 (CCC, pp. 11-18) is the work of Arthur Henry Bullen. W. H. Hudson thought so when he read it fresh from the press (W. H. Hudson, *Men, Books and Birds*, p.65) and Samuel Vogt Gapp in the bibliography of his *George Gissing, Classicist* made the same suggestion. Indeed, Bullen was then editor of the revived magazine, he had known Gissing well over the years 1891-98, he had published eight of his books, and it was natural that he should refrain from signing an article of his in a journal he edited.

Unfortunately for this hypothesis, a careful reading of the text shows that it is untenable. Bullen did not first meet Gissing in Surrey; he could not have written that “for one long summer it was my good fortune to see him nearly every day, to know him in varying moods, and to become his close friend.” They first saw each other at Exeter in 1891 and some months before the publication of *Denzil Quarrier*, whereas the author of the article became acquainted with Gissing in 1899: “I well remember when he made a bid for popularity with *The Town Traveller*, he asked me, as a personal favour, not to read it, giving as his reason, ‘You like my books.’” As they walked along the Surrey lanes or sat in a garden together, Gissing would tell of his travel experiences by the Ionian Sea. Now Bullen is not known to have listened to such words about *The Town Traveller* but merely to the novelist’s bashful admission that he had deserted Lawrence and Bullen because he could not bring himself to extort from them the last penny in advance of royalties on his novel.

Besides, the unsigned review of *The House of Cobwebs* which appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in June, 1906, pp. 527-531, is undoubtedly by the same hand as the recollections. Twice the earlier volume of short stories, *Human Odds and Ends*, is praised and the second time at the expense of the book under review. Now my notion of Bullen's character cannot be reconciled with that of a publisher running down a book by an author on his list after his client has gone (posthumously) to another publisher, and writing up the volume he himself

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brought out in the past. Bullen respected Gissing's memory too much to indulge such objectionable fancies.

Those were broadly speaking my views on the matter until chance assisted me in finding what I believe to be the real author of the article and the review. In going through the files of the *Daily Chronicle*, I came across the following letter to the editor under the title "George Gissing" in the issue for 31 December, 1903, p. 7:

Sir, George Gissing is dead, and so a notable figure has passed away from the literary world – a figure that was unique, alike in its strength and its weakness, and whose place will not be filled. He has left lasting work behind him, for though they may never appeal to the general taste, *New Grub Street*, *The Nether World*, *The Unclassed*, *Human Odds and Ends* are great books, and will outlive a number of popular reputations. "A prophet hath no honour," etc, may be said of many, but it was especially true of Gissing. In France his writings were valued at their true worth; he was accepted as a younger Zola, and spoken of affectionately as "le jeune maître," – a title which gave him great satisfaction, for the lack of recognition hurt an author who was sensitive to the point of morbidity at this want of success. Of his domestic sorrows we must not speak; of his cruel struggles he has hinted in *New Grub Street* (for he figures in the story); yet there is a side of his character which does not, unhappily, come out in his books, but that I was privileged to learn through one long summer holiday spent in the country, when I met George Gissing almost every day, and grew to know the man apart from the author.

His was a refined and sympathetic nature, into which the iron of his early experiences had bitten deeply, and in speaking of those back years he once described to me a certain house in a London street where he had touched the lowest depths of despair. "It was an old house with a little balcony, and you can still see it as you walk up; – but I turn my head away whenever I pass the end of the street, for I cannot bear to look at that window." Such a speech shows the man as he was, with the touch of romance and idealism of which so small a hint was ever given in his books, but which made him say one day, when speaking of heroines – what they should and

should not be: "I have never put my ideal woman into any book". Perhaps it would have been better if he had, as it would have been if he could only have written his stories as he told them, full of human interest, without the enforced restraint, so evident in his writing. *By the Ionian Sea* was told to me and to other friends, and, good though it is in its published form, how much of the original beauty has been lost in the writing only we who heard can tell. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and the charm of his voice made his reading of poetry a delight to listen to. Of his kindness to young writers I can speak with the deepest gratitude; no trouble was too great for him to take to help a newcomer, and his letters of counsel were as wise as they were kind. Now he is gone, and for some of us the world to-day is a sadder place because George Gissing is dead.

Yours etc.

Dec. 29

Noel Ainslie

Now, the resemblances between this letter and the article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* are striking. The circumstances of the first meeting are identical, and, indeed, described in nearly the same terms. In both texts, Gissing is made to confess that he has never drawn his ideal woman in one of his heroines; in both the commentator regrets that Gissing did not write as he

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talked and prefers the spoken account of the journey in Calabria to the relation of it made in *By the Ionian Sea*. The same books are selected as most significant: *New Grub Street*, *The Nether World*, *The Unclassed*, *Human Odds and Ends* and, naturally enough, the selection is commented upon in the longer text. On the whole, we twice are left with the impression that the earlier books were more engaging than the later ones and that the man who was even more attractive than his books. Finally the words about "young writers" in the letter can be paralleled with this sentence in the article: "I can remember so many acts of kindness to a young author; so many sage suggestions, so much ripe advice, and kindly painstaking criticism."

If one is not by now convinced that Noel Ainslie wrote "Some Recollections of George Gissing," a look at his only three novels recorded in the British Museum Catalogue will offer some further temptation to give in. The first two – *An Erring Pilgrimage* (1896) and *Among Thorns* (1898) – were published by Lawrence and Bullen. The third one, *The Salvation Seekers* (1901), shows that Ainslie like Gissing went over to Methuen when he changed publishers, a fact Ainslie must have noticed when, disobeying Gissing's advice, he read *The Town Traveller* in the late summer of 1898. As Ainslie, in the nature of things, must have known his publisher

Bullen personally, it is not surprising that he should have turned to him in 1906 when Bullen had practically given up publishing for editing. He was sure that the editor would be interested in such an article as he had written. Bullen who still had books by Gissing on his hands would even indirectly benefit by the publicity made by the article.

When did the two novelists meet? Probably shortly after Gissing's return from the continent in April 1898 and more likely after he had settled at Dorking in May. Free from the hateful presence of Edith, he seems to have met many people in the summer – Bullen, for one, he met more frequently than ever. Two passages in Ainslie's writings on Gissing may eventually help us to circumscribe the period when the two men held converse in the Surrey lanes. On the one hand, Ainslie declared in his review of *The House of Cobwebs* that it was he who suggested to Gissing that he should write the short story "Fate and the Apothecary." They visited the shop together and saw the man who became the unfortunate hero. Now the Diary shows that the story was written on June 6 and 7, 1898. On the other hand, the reference in the letter to the *Daily Chronicle* to Gissing's popularity in France, to his being "spoken of affectionately as 'le jeune maître,'" may have been inspired by talks that took place a little later in the summer. Gissing knew by that time both Gabrielle Fleury and (only through correspondence) Halpérine-Kaminsky, who addressed him as "cher Maître" when he wrote to ask him his opinion about Tolstoi's *What is art?* (See *The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, p. 47.)

But when all this is said, one would like to know something about Noel Ainslie. He presumably played in Gissing's life a role comparable with that of Franklin Matthiason in the previous decade – that of an acquaintance with interesting reminiscences to offer. In the case of Matthiason, as much light as can be hoped for has been thrown. May someone rise and tell us what sort of a man Noel Ainslie was – a Gissingite up to a certain point who was perhaps cured of novel-writing by the perusal of *New Grub Street*.

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Italian Translations of Gissing

Francesco Badolato

Gissing's works were introduced to Italians rather late compared with other countries. However, when Italian translations of Gissing were published they were well received by discriminating readers.

The first Gissing novel that appeared in Italian was *Thyrza*, translated by Elisa Baruffaldi. The Italian title is *L'Amore di Thyrza*. It was published as long ago as 1939, by the Casa Editrice

Sonzogno, Milano, on October 30th. The book contains 636 pages, octavo, and is in grey cloth. Because it was published at the beginning of the second World War, it is rather difficult to get the reviews of this Italian edition. In fact, the publisher Sonzogno, to whom I applied for information about the reviews of this book, replied as follows: "We inform you that all the collections of reviews of our books before August 1943, were completely destroyed during the bombing in August 1943. We are therefore sorry that we can't help you with your request."

I was able to get a copy of this book about two years ago from an antiquarian bookseller. It seems to me to be an excellent translation and worth reprinting. Such a reprint would need an introduction, which would take account of recent critical and biographical studies of Gissing. Thus there would be available to Italian readers a more complete picture of Gissing as a man and as a writer.

Miss Baruffaldi did not write a preface to the Italian edition, and it is natural to wonder what interested her especially in this novel. Perhaps she noted in *Thyrza* that the working-class girl was sacrificed to Egremont who belonged to the upper class.

In 1955, after a lapse of sixteen years, another novel was published by the Unione Tipografica Editrice Torinese, Torino. This was *Born in Exile (Nato in Esilio)*, with translation and introduction by D. and A. Pettoello, and a reproduction of Mrs. Clarence Rook's portrait of Gissing, dated June 8, 1901, signed by Gissing and Wells, and erroneously attributed to Wells in the book. The introduction is on pp. 5-18. The book is in stiff wrappers, octavo, and has 574 pages. It has been included in the series "I Grandi Scrittori Stranieri", No. 197. The price was 1,400 lire. A second edition came out in 1959. Being well translated, this novel found many readers.

In 1957, two more of Gissing's books were translated: *By the Ionian Sea* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. The first is very interesting for Italians for it contains "notes of a ramble in Southern Italy." The Italian title is *Sulla riva dello Jonio*. The translation by Margherita Guidacci is a good one and many Italians have learned of the interest that Gissing had in visiting this land which is at the crossroads of two civilizations – the Greek and the Roman. The translator wrote a useful fourteen-page introduction. Naturally, some information is not up-to-date and there are some mistakes, e.g. on the place of Gissing's death. Gissing died at Ispoure, near Saint-Jean-pied-de-Port and not Saint-Jean-de-Luz. He was buried in this latter place. But the mistake is hardly due to any fault of Miss Guidacci: it was only known later when critics threw new light on Gissing's life.

The book is published in pictorial covers by Licinio Cappelli, Bologna, in the series "Universale Cappelli – Lettere e Arti" and is listed as No. 8. It contains 155 pages, and is priced

at 200 lire. A second edition is dated June 1962. This volume was reviewed in the following periodicals: *Il Turismo nella Stampa*, Roma, December 1961; *Corriere di Reggio*, Reggio Calabria, June 9, 1962; *La Fiera Letteraria*, Roma, October 14, 1962; *Prospettive Meridionali*, Roma, December 1962; *Brutium*, Reggio Calabria, January-March 1963; *Calabria Letteraria*, March-May 1963; *Corriere di Calabria*, April 27, 1963; *Rassegna di Cultura e Vita Scolastica*, Roma, November-December 1963; *Il Borghese*, Milano, June 4, 1964; *Il Gazzettino dello Jonio*, Siderno, June 13, 1964; *Il Messaggero*, Roma, January 27, 1965; *Cronaca di Calabria*, Cosenza, September 12, 1964.

The second translation which appeared in 1957 was that of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. The Italian title is *Il Giornale Intimo di Henry Ryecroft*, translation and preface by Jole Pascarelli, and it was published by Edizioni Paoline, Milano. In the introduction, which is three pages long, the translator concludes by saying that this book of Gissing “è la poesia in prosa delle piccole cose, soffuse di umanità e sentimento” (it is the poetry in prose of little things, suffused with humanity and sentiment).

Twenty-six sections of the original have been omitted. They are as follows: Spring (Primavera): sections V, VII, XI, XIV, XX; Summer (Estate): sections VI, XIII, XV, XVII, XIX; Autumn (Autunno): sections II, III, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIV, a half of section XV is translated; Winter (Inverno): sections VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XIX, XXII.

Perhaps a case can be found for eliminating these sections but I think that the best solution would have been to make no cuts. In short, it is an abridged translation but one which seems very good to me. The book had a great success, eight editions being printed, and it has been included in the Collana “Maestri” – I grandi scrittori di tutti i tempi – section “Prosa morale.”

These four volumes are among the most important of Gissing’s works. *Thyrza* gives a vivid picture of working class life in late Victorian England; *Born in Exile*, as professor Korg says “is an important spiritual document, and the only novel by Gissing that can be called European in character”; *By the Ionian Sea* somehow materializes the dream behind all the author’s realistic novels; and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* which bears a motto by Horace, *Hoc erat in votis* (*Satires*, II, 6, 1), is the book that Gissing claimed as one of his most important. Of all his novels it is that which has been most often translated into various languages.

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Publication Announcement

As our Readers know, most of Gissing's novels have been out of print for many years, and while *New Grub Street* has recently appeared in a number of inexpensive editions, prospects for the reprinting of others have not seemed very bright. But a recent advertisement from AMS Press announced the reprinting of all the novels except *Isabel Clarendon*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street* and *Sleeping Fires*. These reprints are apparently to be produced by photo-offset from the first editions. For further information, write to AMS Press, 56 East 13th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003.

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Some Notes on Gissing's Style in *Born in Exile*

P. F. Kropholler
Paris

Most readers of Gissing have agreed that his style has a character all its own. Re-reading *Born in Exile* recently I collected some notes on the features which contribute to give a page of Gissing's its distinct flavour. I chose *Born in Exile* because Gissing wrote it when he was exactly mid-way in his career and we know it is a novel to which he devoted special care.

It has, to my knowledge, never been observed that Gissing's style contains a fairly heavy classical element. A count of the first chapter shows that out of 5,200 words 24 per cent are of Greek or Latin origin which incidentally compares with 28 per cent for Johnson. Moreover, the Latin element contains an unusual number of fairly uncommon words which may be almost unintelligible for readers unacquainted with Latin. Thus he speaks of "nigritude", "intenerate", "colloquial attendants," "a nictitating membrane" and "vulgar sequaciousness." In this respect Gissing was not unlike his own Bruno Chilvers, who interlarded his speech with words like "nullifidian", "renascent" and "morbific".

H. G. Wells mentioned the frequency of the word "noble" (or rather "ignoble") in Gissing's work. In *Born in Exile* "ignoble" is used with reference to a face, a varlet, nurture, temptations, mourning and trickery. The use of "blackguard" and its synonym "ruffian" is also striking. I counted at least nine instances in *Born in Exile*.

"Ignoble" sometimes occurs in a negative context, such as "by no means an ignoble face," which takes us to another characteristic of Gissing's style, namely the use of a negative in order to express a somewhat diffident statement. The hero's face was of "no uncommon stamp." He

had the air of a gentleman of “no unwonted ease” and he aimed at “no vulgar profit.” Even as a boy Peak was “no common lad” though at that time his clothes were “no fashionable specimens of tailoring” and on Mrs. Warricombe he made “no very favourable impression.” At Peckham Rye “no hand of common landlady” appeared in the arrangement of his lodgings and his bread came from “no ordinary baker’s.”

According to Mr. Korg verbosity is one of Gissing’s worst stylistic faults. Indeed, he had a tendency to say “made quiet answer” for “answered quietly”. Thus, *Born in Exile* abounds with sentences like: “a sky which made threat of snow”, “domestic circumstances made assault upon his nerves,” “Mr. Moxey made sober expression of good wishes,” “he made proffer of this advantage.” This is related to the use of somewhat roundabout expressions, such as “he gave earnest ear,” “the examination had whispered presage,” “he bestowed contemplative scrutiny,” “the yew tree cast solemn shade.”

This lends a certain abstract character to the style, as does also the omission of the article where its use would make the expression more definite or concrete, e.g.: “a show of broadest Anglicanism,” “he responded with friendly invitation,” “he leaned forward with earnest, anxious face,” “with apprehensive glance.”

Gissing liked to refer to his characters by their occupation. For instance, Earwaker is continually mentioned as “the journalist” or “the man of letters,” even if he does not appear in that capacity. Moorhouse is often “the mathematician,” Buckland is “the Radical.”

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If I had to sum up Gissing’s style in *Born in Exile* I should say it is nothing if not fastidious. The generally careful style, his avoidance of colloquialisms, the reserved and sometimes indirect expression, the occasionally recherché vocabulary, the obvious distaste of what is ignoble or ruffianly, all these contribute to an effect of refinement and an almost aristocratic detachment.

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Our Italian Journey

Part IV

Hélène Coustillas

(This is a continuation of Mrs. Coustillas’ account of the vacation trip which she and Dr. Coustillas made through Italy in August and September of 1965 to visit sites related to Gissing. At this point in the narrative *Les Coustillas* are staying in Taranto.)

We went in search of the Galeso one afternoon, in what we thought was the right direction, North-East of the town, but couldn't find it. As we came back into the town (along the same streets as on the way out) I looked up and saw "Via Galeso." So we decided to try again next morning, since we obviously had been in the right direction. We had passed, a short way out of the town, a field in which I had noticed a clump of reeds, but from the road and beyond these, not the slightest trickle of water was visible. So next morning, when we reached the spot, we asked a roadmender who happened to be about, if he knew of the Galeso: "Oh yes, just there beyond the reeds." We could hardly believe it! The country was almost flat, and the place so near to the sea, you couldn't think it possible for a stream to start flowing there. However, we went round by a smaller road, then a track across the field, and suddenly came on a young Italian – busy washing his car with water from the Galeso! There it was, a stream of the clearest water, some yards wide. We first went upstream, the rivulet, with watercress floating in it, becoming narrower and narrower, and disappearing completely and unexpectedly under the reeds.

Impossible to say where it starts exactly. The reeds have been surrounded by a low concrete wall, and the banks of the stream have also been lined with concrete for about a hundred yards from the oozing reeds. A footbridge crosses it, on which were standing some young Italians watching two boys bathing in the pellucid water of a small pool. We stood there too, for a while, and one of the young men, noticing we were foreigners, asked us if we knew English, and then proceeded to explain that this was a famous stream in Virgil's time. He was delighted both to air his English and to hear we knew about the Galeso and had come not by accident, but very specially to see it.

We then followed its short course to the sea. It can't be more than 800 or 1,000 yards long. It widens progressively to about 8 or 10 yards, the sea dyeing it its own blue for the last hundred yards before it flows into the Mare Piccolo. Little boys were having a bathe, and a goatherd driving his flock of beige smooth-haired goats among the reeds growing on the bank. Coming silently up the Galeso on a flat rowing boat two men were busy collecting nets. A narrow path follows the stream to the sea, shadowed by eucalyptus and pine-trees which close the view on both sides. The sun was shining brilliantly, and except for us and the few people mentioned before, there was nobody about. It was peaceful, secluded, very romantic, and to us haunted, we

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must say, far less by Virgil than by Gissing. The Galeso flows into a quiet recess of the Mare Piccolo and from it we watched for a while the old town across the water, curving, yellow-tinted,

between the two blue expanses of sky and sea.

We turned regretfully away from the pleasant spot and made our way to Brindisi, driving through rolling and very attractive country, the “trulli” country. Whereas from Naples to Taranto there were practically no houses scattered about the countryside, here among low-trimmed, bright green vines, and tall silvery olives (magnificently tended), growing on dark brown ground, each vineyard or orchard carefully shut in by low grey stone walls, rose innumerable small, square white houses, without almost any openings except the door, not flat-roofed as in other parts, but crowned by two, three or more cones of dark grey stone, in appearance rather like slates but much thicker, with sometimes a cross whitewashed on the stone – these cones are not necessarily of the same height over the same house. They look fairy-like somehow, and there is over the whole landscape an atmosphere of neatness, of patient and skilful labour done lovingly, each little white and grey house with its own surrounding checks of brown, silver and green orchards and vineyards, the symbol of peace and activity. So on we went, through Martina Franca, Locorotondo, Ostruni, Carovigno and San Vito dei Normanni, sleepy little towns under a blazing sun, to Brindisi. We spent most of our time in the harbour, watching a car-ferry preparing to sail for Greece, gazing in the distance at the old Aragonese Castle which stands at the entrance – and serves, I believe, as a lighthouse – but cannot be visited as it is included in a military zone. Quite near the quay, up a long flight of steps, we found a kind of tiny square on which rise the two carved columns which marked the beginning of the Via Appia. We drove out of the town to see the Adriatic rolling on to a white sand beach, along a very flat shore. Then back to Taranto along a straight road – something worth noticing in Italy! – often lined with dark yew-trees between more olive orchards.

(To be continued)

Manuscripts Invited

Contributions to the *Newsletter* are always welcome, and can generally be published without much delay. The most convenient length is between one thousand and two thousand words, but longer articles can be divided into segments for publication. Short notes and announcements of recent publications and activities are particularly useful. Contributions should be sent to J. Korg, Department of English, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98105.

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I specialize in Gissing books, and always have interesting titles in stock. Your inquiries are

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