

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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-- 1 --

Gissing Day at the Sorbonne

Sylvère Monod
University of Paris

On the 14th of March, 1970, an event took place which was so obviously an item of Gissing news that it would have been mentioned earlier in the *Newsletter* but for its editor’s modesty. George Gissing’s life and works were publicly discussed for five hours on the occasion of Pierre Coustillas’s completing his State doctorate.

The new regulations of the French doctorate make it possible to acquire this degree on the strength of a series of works, published or unpublished, instead of having to write one thesis or even two theses for that specific purpose. Of course the new dispensation is not going to be applied indiscriminately. It is necessary for the series of works to possess both substance and unity. But no

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-- 2 --

criterion that one could possibly think of would have prevented the imposing mass of Pierre Coustillas’s studies of Gissing from fully qualifying him for a State doctorate under the new system.

Indeed, the only difficulty we were faced with was that of choosing from his many publications such books and articles as could be interestingly discussed in the course of one afternoon. Eventually Pierre Coustillas presented to his examiners six articles and three books (his French edition of *Ryecroft*, and his editions of the *Letters to Gabrielle Fleury* and of *Collected Articles on George Gissing*), in addition to his monumental biography of Gissing (in 750

typewritten pages). This was originally intended to form the first half of his thesis. But there was no reason to keep him waiting for his doctorate when he had already done so much more than the average French scholar.

The examiners were Professors Louis Bonnerot, Germain d'Hangest and Sylvère Monod (all three of the Sorbonne), Lucien Leclair (of Caen) and Jean Noël (of Rennes). Professor Bonnerot had been elected chairman of this examining board.

The afternoon began, according to our custom, with Pierre Coustillas's own history of his research, since his interest in Gissing was awakened in 1952. As the readers of the *Newsletter* know, this interest not only has never flagged but has kept increasing in intensity and fruitfulness. The most striking aspect of Pierre Coustillas's introductory speech was his constant reference to his work in progress and his future publications on Gissing.

Sylvère Monod, because he had supervised the thesis, was the first of the examiners to speak. He explained that, since there was so much valuable work to be discussed, he himself would deal exclusively with the typewritten biography and leave the books and articles to his colleagues. He asked questions about the chances of ever seeing such a detailed biography of Gissing published either in France or in England, and suggested ways of curtailing it without harming it; he criticized Pierre Coustillas's excessive partisanship, exemplified in his never suggesting that Gissing bore any responsibility for the failure of his marriages, and in his attitude to H.G. Wells. The candidate's

-- 3 --

replies generally confirmed his perfect mastery of his subject and the mature deliberation of all his major decisions. S. Monod, whose minor objections were inspired by the wish to see the biography in print as soon as possible, praised it highly, both for the scholarly thoroughness of the investigations on which it rests, and for the warm sympathy and the narrative talent which make many of its parts deeply moving.

Lucien Leclair paid a similar tribute to Pierre Coustillas as a Gissing scholar and as a writer, before he made some comments on stylistic and bibliographical points.

Jean Noël dealt with the edition of *Ryecroft* and discussed Pierre Coustillas's introduction and translation. The only deficiency he deplored in the introduction was the lack of any synthetic definition of the nature of that fascinating book. About the translation, which he admired, he raised one interesting point: how far is it legitimate for a translator working in the late 1960s to coin deliberate archaisms of language, in order to be faithful to the period-flavour of the original? Jean Noël then spoke more briefly of the *Letters to Gabrielle Fleury*, in which he approved of the editor's policy unreservedly and which he thought a very useful book.

Germain d'Hangest discussed the six articles on Gissing and made a very elegant and interesting contribution by drawing attention to what seemed to him characteristic of the dual nature of Gissing's personality: Gissing was both a Victorian and a sensualist, or, as Pierre Coustillas puts it in the title of one of his articles, both Bohemian and bourgeois. G. d'Hangest found confirmation of this fact in the short story "My First Rehearsal," ably edited by Pierre Coustillas.

Louis Bonnerot, as chairman, spoke last. He expressed his eager desire to see the biography published in French, in a reduced version supplemented by a critical study. In spite of some minor cavillings about questions of dates and editions – Professor Bonnerot is a great authority on all bibliographical matters – he expressed admiration for Pierre Coustillas's work, both in the *Ryecroft* edition and in the *Collected Articles*. L. Bonnerot, who is a sincere and discriminating lover of Gissing, and who had been closely associated with various stages of Pierre Coustillas's research,

-- 4 --

rejoiced in the present revival of interest in George Gissing, to which the candidate's work has contributed most significantly.

At the end of the examination, Pierre Coustillas was awarded his State doctorate with the highest honours, and was publicly complimented by the unanimous examiners. The afternoon had been constantly animated. To have seen five, or perhaps it would be hardly premature to say six, French professors of English literature discussing his work with passionate interest, would no doubt have gratified Gissing himself if he could have watched or imagined such a scene. In any case, it was indeed a great Gissing day.

George Gissing

ISABEL CLARENDON

In 2 volumes, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1969

When faced with a novel by Gissing published over eighty years ago, probably in a very small edition, and never reprinted, readers of today must estimate its merits from several angles. As a picture of Victorian society, is it of considerable interest otherwise than as a period piece? How does it fit in with other Gissing works written before and after this one, and how does it affect historically his development as a novelist? M. Coustillas's erudite introduction supplies the most reliable guidance for answering these questions, but it is preferable to examine this introduction after having read the novel and formed our own opinion as to its value as an entertainment and as a work of art.

Throughout the story of *Isabel Clarendon*, it requires only a minimum of literary knowledge to detect two influences which governed the author as regards style and character building. Meredith is clearly responsible for the occasional false flourish, the archaisms, the apostrophising of the reader. The principal character could not have been conceived without some familiarity with Russian fiction and particularly with that of Turgenev. Meredith was a master of the English

-- 5 --

language and a poet, whose novels were fashionable in Victorian drawing-rooms, but he was a deplorable model for a young man seeking his path towards becoming a daring and original novelist. It is to Gissing's lasting credit that in *Isabel Clarendon* he must have determined to check his enthusiasm for the senior writer and to allow but a few of the latter's irritating mannerisms to invade his prose. It was nevertheless what might be termed "a very near thing," for his manuscript was scarcely out of his hands when he became dithyrambic over Meredith's most tiresome novel, *Diana of the Crossways*, which he described as "right glorious" and "Shakespeare in modern English," whereas it is a tedious exhibition of bombast and verbal trickery and is moreover an apology for treachery. The Meredithian microbe was never completely expelled from Gissing's style – even in his most mature work, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, we catch him resorting to such insufferable expletives as "go to!," "'twill do" and "quotha"!

So much for Meredith's style and his peculiarities, which Gissing mercifully managed to keep under reasonable control, and let us turn to Turgenev. The character of Bernard Kingcote, the hypersensitive and pessimistic hero, was perhaps one of the first in an English novel to derive from the main trend of mid-nineteenth century Russian fiction, from which melancholy, susceptibility,

morbid jealousy and introspection are inseparable. Gissing made Kingcote plausible, but the English reader's impatience with some of his moods and impulses may be partly due to the fact that hardly any clue as to what were the events leading up to his state of mind when the story opens is ever disclosed. Turgenev was a novelist of great experience, and he had a more subtle and deeply human understanding of the behaviour of his characters than could be expected of Gissing when he wrote *Isabel Clarendon*, but nothing could be so inept as the view of a contemporary critic who summed up Kingcote as "a miserable invertebrate creature, given over to morbid selfishness and puling despair."

In spite of these influences, Gissing contrived his situations with commendable originality. The conflict between Kingcote and Isabel, the warm, charitable, affectionate heroine, whose love

-- 6 --

just failed when she was called upon to make the sacrifice of all the pleasures of opulent society, is skilfully rendered, and one dares not think of the kind of existence the couple could have led if they had reached a positive agreement.

There is one other major character in the book, Ada Warren, the illegitimate daughter of the late Mr. Clarendon, who grows from an ugly, sullen, resentful child into an independent self-taught intellectual, becoming more tolerant as her budding physical charm begins to flower. This is a fine conception, and all the minor characters are neatly drawn and relieve the plot of too much continuous intensity.

Gissing, who had, just before writing the novel, had experience of life among the "upper ten" and had not genuinely enjoyed it, was still not in his natural element when describing the somewhat hot-house atmosphere in which Isabel and her associates lived. It would, however, be a mistake to see a purely autobiographical note or mere daydreaming in the story, as Gissing's own benefactress, Mrs. Gaussen, was happily married, with several children, and Gissing's wife Nell was still alive in 1886.

If Meredith might have been a pernicious model for Gissing as a novelist, he was clearly a man of keen critical judgment. When he said to Gissing that he "was making a great mistake in leaving the low-life scenes [and] might take a foremost place in fiction," he was expressing a view that many readers of *Isabel Clarendon* will have found out for themselves. As Kingcote is called away suddenly from the sumptuous and perfumed comfort of Knightswell and reaches sordid Camden Town, as he is confronted with the redoubtable landlady Mrs. Bolt, and finds his sister Mary in such dreary and unappetising lodgings, then paradoxically the reader can feel a puff of fresh air enter the story and see that Meredith's words were very much to the point.

Contemporary reviewers of *Isabel Clarendon* followed mainly the aristocratic and religious taboos of their time and consequently did not recommend the book, except in one or two cases which showed that there were critics who had the courage to preserve their independence and to analyse a story without prejudice. Since those days, writers on Gissing have not come to any helpful agreement as to *Isabel Clarendon's* place in his entire output. Ruth Capers McKay, who wrote

-- 7 --

some excellent pages on the author's work, described it as "undoubtedly one of the best of all his novels," to which Oswald H. Davis and J. Middleton Murry concurred. Yet this is surely a wrong judgment: *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Women* and *In the Year of Jubilee* are obviously superior as narrative and as works of art. Allowances must, of course, be made for all such purely personal appraisals. Did not Gissing himself dismiss Arthur Morrison's excellent story,

A Child of the Jago, as “poor stuff” and, although he was writing in friendly sympathy with the authors, it is hard to acquit him for his exaggerations on *Diana of the Crossways* and, above all, on Morley Roberts’s *Rachel Marr*, one of the most indigestible chunks of boredom ever served up to a long-suffering public. So we must make our own choice, and the problem remains where we must place *Isabel Clarendon*, not only in Gissing’s development as a novelist but also as a story worth reading and enjoying at the present moment.

This was the fourth of Gissing’s novels to be published but only the third to be written. After *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*, proletarian by nature and deliberately provocative, it was his first attempt to deal with a more sophisticated and relaxed world. It was followed by two novels which hovered between two worlds, that of the working-class and that of the upper middle-classes. The first, *Thyrza*, contained some fine writing, spoilt perhaps by writers’ devices of a far too well worn type (the overheard conversation and the opportune death of the heroine), and the second, *A Life’s Morning*, which simply cried out for frustration at the end but which the publisher’s reader, James Payn, himself a mediocre novelist, persuaded Gissing to conclude artificially by making the young patrician and the humble governess marry and live happily ever after. At this stage, a reader of the 1880s might well have been embarrassed to give a confident assessment as to what position the author was to occupy in the history of English fiction. There followed, however, *The Nether World*, in which Meredith’s advice was followed to the letter – a veritable masterpiece describing life in London’s slums, with character drawing firmer than ever and events dramatic and pathetic without a trace of sentimentality. Gissing was then a novelist to be reckoned with and could tackle any themes or situations for which he possessed the necessary background. *Isabel Clarendon* is,

-- 8 --

therefore, a novel written during a transition period which, retrospectively, appears of some importance to Gissing’s ultimate reputation as one of the best English novelists at the end of the nineteenth century.

Is *Isabel Clarendon*, in M. Coustillas’s words, a novel that deserves to live? Without comparing it with Gissing’s other novels, it can stand on its own feet and provide an interesting plot, clever characterisation, lively dialogue and good entertainment. It is better than the bulk of English novels appearing at the same period, and it is at least a relief from some present day jig-saw puzzle fiction and that kind of fashionable pornography which is usually gratuitous. The answer to M. Coustillas is that *Isabel Clarendon* deserves to live.

We welcome then this handsome set of two volumes, the enterprise of its publishers and M. Coustillas’s impeccable editorship and introduction.

C. S. C.

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Across the Pyrenees

[On August 15, 1903, at the time when he was living at the Maison Elguë, Ispoure, Gissing made an excursion to Roncesvalles, across the Franco-Spanish border. As Mme Fleury was then in tolerable health, Gabrielle was able to leave her mother alone at home and accompany Gissing on his trip. He gave Edward Clodd a short account of it in a letter dated October 17, 1903, which was published in Clodd’s *Memories*. He also referred to this excursion in a letter to Thomas Hardy of September 20, 1903 which appeared in *English Literature in Transition*, vol. IX, No. 4, 1966. On their return,

Gabrielle wrote in French an essay, some twelve pages long, describing what she called “Une Enjambée sur les Pyrénées.” The following is a translation from the original, which is not known to have appeared in any French journal. Had it been published it would probably have been slightly revised with a view to making it more compact and suppressing a few repetitive passages. The essay, which is signed “‘Marian Yule’ (Gabrielle Fleury-Gissing),” has been translated by Mme Denise Le Mallier. P. C.]

-- 9 --

Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port is celebrating its annual festival. Since yesterday evening, the little old city, encased in its sixteenth-century ramparts, has been invaded by a joyous and noisy crowd. People have poured in by train, by stage coach, in carts, or riding those lovely Pyrenean horses, fine and nimble as the Basque race itself, or on mules, whose harnesses are adorned with widely striped material. The men wear short pleated coats and dark blue berets. The women are clad in their gayest frocks, their masses of hair surmounted by smart little black silk bonnets, a lasting souvenir of the Basque women’s ancient head-dress.

St-Jean-Pied-de-Port (named in the Basque language *Domanié*), was in olden times an important city, but part of it was burnt by the Saracens, and what remains is now a village called St-Jean-Le-Vieux, about a mile distant from the present town. Later, St-Jean-Pied-de-Port became the capital of lower Navarre, and its position at the foot (*pied*) of the port – or passage – of Roncesvalles gave it strategic importance. It was fortified and, under the reign of Louis XIV, Vauban built the Citadel which still dominates the town.

To-day, 15th August, the whole population will gather after High Mass outside the ramparts, under the blazing southern sun, its fierce rays barely veiled by the light haze which is a feature of this region. But the “Esplanade” is bordered by shady trees, and a great many people will press that way towards the “Fronton,” a high wall used for the game of *pelota*, the glory and passion of the Basques. There, the opposing teams of French and Spanish Basques will, as at each local “fête,” and hour after hour, rival each other in agility, supple strength and skill, while frantically cheered by the admiring crowd.

At a comparatively early hour, we take our places in the “*Courrier d’Espagne*,” or stage coach, that goes from Saint-Jean to Roncesvalles and Pamplona. The games of *pelota* have not yet begun but already the twang of a rustic fiddle, interminably repeating a feeble little tune, accompanies the “*saut basque*” (Basque leap), a traditional dance, more primitive but less graceful than the *fandango* which is danced in other parts of the Basque country. We cross the river that flows below the church and the old dilapidated houses picturesquely grouped around it. Were it not a religious

-- 10 --

festival and a day of public rejoicing, the washerwomen, crouching on the bank, would be rinsing their clothes in the stream, unheeding of the obvious danger of typhoid germs. At a turn in the road, we pass beyond the walls through an antique and now chainless gateway. Looking back to our left, we see the old town behind its girdle of stone, its houses seemingly piled on top of each other as if to witness our departure. Then comes a long descent between farm-houses festooned with vine, and we reach the open country, hilly and opulent with trees and greenery, and finally the river Arnéguy, whose course we shall follow constantly, while mountains bar the horizon on either side.

Our driver is a worthy old Basque, frank and jovial, who sings as he goes along, mixing

fragments of hymns with popular refrains. Shortly before reaching Arnéguy, he points with his whip to the right where the Spanish frontier lies on the opposite bank of the river, while, on the left bank, we are to remain on French territory nearly as far as Val Carlos. Arnéguy, the last village before the Spanish frontier, has a poor, almost miserable aspect. But there also, a “fête” is in full swing, and the shrill and artless music of the local band fills the narrow street through which we pass. Our thoughts, naturally, turn towards the tragic event which, at the very same date, took place at Roncesvalles in the year 778. We wonder if, in choosing August 15th for the local festivals of all this region, the Basques did not wish to commemorate their great victory over the rear-guard of the Emperor Charlemagne. In truth, this supposition is contradicted by all the learned philologists, scholars and historians, who affirm that the Basques have no historical traditions and that the events which fill our memories have left no powerful trace in these parts. Nevertheless, the coincidence in dates is strange and we cannot help noting it with interest.

The coachman whips up his team to climb a stiff ascent of the road, and the international bridge over the Nive is crossed. We are in Spain, and this is at once noticeable by the imposing number of customs officers of all ranks who surround our coach in order to pry into every corner of our suitcases, an inspection as annoying as it is useless.

-- 11 --

We have been travelling for two hours when we reach the town of Val Carlos (the Basque name is Luzaïde). Here the houses stand out dazzlingly white (as in all the Basque country) on a sort of bright green promontory at the foot of which flows a torrent. Val Carlos is a watering station where the Spaniards come in summer in search of comparatively cool air. Here we alight for lunch and afterwards change our coach for the Spanish one, a dreadful omnibus where passengers are packed tight in the suffocating heat without regard whatever for the number of places indicated on the vehicle. Passengers are stacked on the steps and even on the shafts; they would be bundled onto the backs of the four mules if the need arose. We refuse to submit to the torture of travelling inside the coach and particularly to see nothing of the view during the long journey, and, after much arguing with the coachman, whose jargon is a curious mixture of Basque, French and Spanish, we are allowed to climb onto the top of the omnibus and sit, or rather half recline, on a pile of luggage. Of course, we are running some risk of being thrown out over the heads of the mules at the first heavy jolt, but luckily the road goes uphill most of the way and is rarely fit for galloping.

Almost immediately after leaving Val Carlos, the valley suddenly narrows. We are entering the gorges, narrow and wild, with their formidable rocks of greyish green towering above our heads and their vertiginous precipices with the torrent foaming in their depth. Here, in this dark and sinister setting, very appropriate to such an event, one could readily imagine – if history and legend allowed it – the crushing of Roland’s rear-guard by the huge boulders rolled down from the heights by the Basques in ambush there. But both history and legend forbid this fancy, and we must remember that this road is not the one followed by Charlemagne on his way to Spain or back. Neither did the Black Prince, who in the fourteenth century went from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Roncesvalles and Pamplona, go through Val Carlos, nor even, at a more recent date, did Marshal Soult and the Duke of Wellington travel that way. They all took the old route, the great Roman road from Dax to Pamplona, which crosses the Port of Cise east of Val Carlos but is now abandoned except by mountaineers and lovers of historical memories. Yet nothing prevents us from

-- 12 --

imagining that these rugged rocks of Val Carlos still retain in their cold depths the echo of Roland’s

horn, when, overcome by the number of his assailants, with all his companions dead around him, Roland climbed to the top of the hills and blew his horn with such a blast that it burst at the side, and that Charlemagne heard it from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port which he and the bulk of his army had reached.

While we are recalling these events, the defiles have been passed, and the deep and narrow gorge has widened. All around us are thick forests of oak and beech. Everywhere, there is running and limpid water, unfortunately used in many places for factories which in some cases spoil the face of nature. We seem to be now at the centre of some verdant bowl and feel that we must somehow climb over the edge of it. The road goes up in zigzags, twisting and turning and indefinitely describing the same large circles so that we see repeatedly the same landscape and appear not to be advancing at all. Still, we continue to mount imperceptibly, and at last reach the final halt before the highest pass. Once more, as at all preceding stopping places, coachman and passengers alight to drink a glass of wine, not before inviting us, with true Spanish courtesy, to partake of this refreshment.

The mountain air is light, keen and invigorating; we feel we are reaching the summits, and indeed we shall soon be at an altitude of 1, 000 metres. The tinkle of the bells of the flocks can be heard as the evening closes on that vast solitude, so silent now, yet doubtless so clamorous on that same day, nearly twelve centuries ago. Again we start on our journey, and after half an hour of mountain road amid splendid beech-trees and rocky country, we reach the summit, the famous Col d'Haneta, or Roncesvalles. From there, the view spreads on one side over all Val Carlos and its tangled mass of mountains, as far as eye can see, while on the other side, we look upon the heights surrounding Roncesvalles and extending towards Pamplona. Here we meet the ancient road of Port de Cise. Before us rise the melancholy ruins of the chapel built by Charlemagne and dedicated to the Holy Saviour in memory of those who died in the fatal struggle. And it is here, according to tradition, that Roland, the hero and one of the victims of the battle, breathed his last in a desperate

-- 13 --

effort to call Charlemagne to the rescue by blowing his famous horn. A rapid descent through a forest of beeches, so dense that the place we are bound for, though near, is entirely hidden; then, suddenly, in front of us, we behold the ancient Collegiate, the "Real Casa de Roncesvalles," second abbey of Spain. Alas! the roofs have been covered with hideous modern zinc which disfigures them horribly! The plateau of Roncesvalles spreads before us, and we are astonished to find its appearance so gay and so full of poetry. Remembering the terrible battle which raged at this spot, one expects to be faced with a forbidding and sinister landscape, yet it is precisely the opposite which confronts us. The plateau, which is at a height of 980 metres, stretches for some distance, and the high ground which surrounds it appears to consist of mere hillocks, green and wooded and by no means austere. The large grassy meadows, with their fine trees, through which runs a peaceful stream, evoke the scene of some idyll rather than of a bloody battle. We have come here at the very hour at which, on 15th August 778, Charlemagne himself arrived, at the setting of the sun, when the approaching night casts a sweetly melancholy shadow over all the land. What a dread sight must have met the eyes of this great king, that of a battlefield strewn with the dead and the wounded, with all the wreckage of overturned waggons and all the remains of the fighting and looting which followed the surprise attack of the enemy. This we can hardly visualise in the calm which reigns over this gentle countryside. The coach, having turned round the Monastery and passed through the village – if such a name can be given to the scanty group of poor little cottages which composes it – stops in front of the last house. It is the *posada*, the only inn of Roncesvalles. We alight there in the midst of pigs gambolling freely in front of the door; and, as we enter, we are halted by the

characteristic odour of all Spanish inns: a strange and rather sickening smell of spices mixed with that of rancid oil, the traditional and unavoidable accompaniment of Spanish cooking. For proof of this, one has only to observe that in the Spanish tongue the word *rancio* serves to glorify good oil as well as a good Christian, indiscriminately. Both moral and culinary qualities are extolled by the same word *rancio*.

-- 14 --

Not so long ago, this *posada* was more primitive, and, therefore, more picturesque than it is now. At one end of the house, on the gabled outside wall, you can still see over the single window two carved escutcheons with the cross of the monks of Roncesvalles, dated 1620, but the wall itself, built in chequered black and white stone, has been uniformly covered with a coating of plaster which spoils the effect. Inside it used to be the real old Spanish inn, with its huge kitchen occupying almost all the ground floor and its central fire-place where were grouped as many little cooking-pots as the innkeeper had guests, but it has been entirely modernised and is now like all other kitchens, with a cooking stove similar to any other cooking stove. It even possesses the advantage of electric light, as the district is now electrified. And this ultra-modern feature seems something of an anachronism in a country where, barring this exception, life, habits and ideas belong so much to the Middle Ages. When visiting it, one feels carried back into the past still more than by mere distance, and separated by centuries from the present age.

Let us, however, seek some consolation: modern improvements have not wholly penetrated into every nook of the *posada*. The rough and ready girls who act as serving maids in the rustic dining-room and lay, or rather fling onto, the table the necessary objects with a clatter resembling that of a fight, are not so far removed from the manners and customs of their medieval grandmothers. Their hands, no doubt, ignore the use of soap and water, and the most elementary pieces of table-ware must seem to them prodigiously superfluous! On the other hand, the simple white-washed rooms are clean and so are the beds. The fare is copious, and good in spite of the rancid oil! Next morning we are served small cups of excellent Spanish chocolate flavoured with cinnamon, with thin slices of bread and the usual glass of water accompanied by "esponga," a sort of meringue tasting of lemon which instantaneously melts in the glass.

Soon after breakfast we set off to explore the neighbourhood. Reaching the water's edge, we follow its course upstream along a grassy vale flanked by woody hills and closed to the north by Mount Altobiscar, which seems more imposing there than anywhere else. It was in these parts that Roland's rearguard, laboriously climbing the slopes in long single file made necessary by the steep-

-- 15 --

ness of the terrain, and loaded with the booty plundered in Spain, was attacked without warning by the enemy in ambush and forced back with great losses, first into the valley, then onto the plain between Roncesvalles and Brugnete, where the battle presumably took place. The Saracens probably hastened then from Pamplona to help the Basques who had started the fight; and the Franks, led by Roland, lord of the Brittany Marches, very inferior in number to their enemies, were, after prodigies of valour, entirely annihilated. The Basques and the Saracens had time to capture the booty of the Franks and disperse before the arrival of Charlemagne, who never quite recovered from the shock and sorrow of such a disaster.

Retracing our steps in this vale of ghostly memories, we proceeded to the Collegiate. Originally, its vast buildings and the old church rising above them had not been destined solely to religious use. Founded in 1127 by Don Sanche de la Rosa, Bishop of Pamplona, the Collegiate of

Roncesvalles served first of all as a refuge for the numerous pilgrims who, throughout the Middle Ages, flocked there on their way to Santiago de Compostela and who found there a blessed shelter against the cold and the packs of hungry wolves which infested the countryside during the winter. The Collegiate is now the residence of twelve Augustine canons, whose prior is appointed by the King of Spain himself, and his authority is absolute. He governs the convent and, without any outside control or interference, administers its wealth which, we are assured, is enormous. All Roncesvalles belongs to him as well as most of its surrounding land. Until quite recently, he still possessed a whole street of London, one of the many “Cross Streets” of the capital. The treasury of the Collegiate contains numberless jewels of gold and embroidery, gifts of foreign Kings or Princes of Navarre. Our Lady of Roncesvalles is also presented for our veneration. This is a miraculous image of the Virgin, who is said to have appeared on this very spot to a village child at some vague and half forgotten date of the Middle Ages. Owing to a certain trick of light, the eyes of the Virgin, set in brilliants, seem to be filled with tears. We feel almost pained to find that here, at Roncesvalles, this image possesses for the inhabitants more interest and more glory than the heroic event of 778.

-- 16 --

Roland, Charlemagne and all that concerns them seem of little importance, just good enough to attract foreign tourists.

We are then shown in the sacristy of the convent what may pass for Roland’s mace and that of his companion Olivier, as well as Bishop Turpin’s velvet slippers. Roland’s burst horn and his mighty sword Durandal used to be suspended on the cast-iron gates of the choir. These have since disappeared and so has the stone which the hero, near his death, cut in two with one stroke of Durandal in an unsuccessful effort to break his trusty sword. The stone was first placed on the road to Brugnete in front of the fountain called Fontaine de Roland, where tradition has it that “Charlemagne’s nephew” quenched his thirst and bathed his wounds. After that, we are told, it was removed and placed on the threshold of the Chapel of the Holy Ghost. This chapel, not far distant from the posada, is said to have been built over the tombs of Roland and his companions. It is a very simple and primitive structure, square-shaped with little arches, and inside it is another square monument which may well be the tomb itself. Every year, masses are celebrated in this chapel for the souls of those who died in the battle.

As we come out of the chapel, we are accosted by a swarthy carabinero who, with a certain air of mystery, proposes some sort of bargain. Such trading, coming from an official so near the frontier, seems suspicious and smacks of contraband. However, with smiles and apologies to you, most honest carabinero, we at last succeed in understanding the name of the simple product you are trying to sell. We feel fully reassured! “Bon pour le sang et l’estomac” (good for circulation and digestion). The advertisement is no lie: camomile tea is good for one’s digestion and this harmless, nay, beneficent *camomille* has been grown in the worthy man’s tiny garden where mountain air has endowed it – who knows? – with some special virtue.

(To be concluded)

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-- 17 --

Concerning Henry Ryecroft’s “Trick”

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Walter Pater's story "The Child in the House" could have provided Gissing with all the groundwork necessary for the "trick" of recall which Mr. A. H. Griffing interestingly shows him using in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* though, of course, what Gissing observes is not simply a literary device but an actual phenomenon of life which would be noticed by anyone of alert consciousness. "The Child in the House" was first published in August, 1878, in *Macmillan's Magazine*, and later in *Miscellaneous Studies* in 1895 – according to the 1928 Macmillan edition prepared for the press by Charles L. Shadwell, from which the following is taken (abridged, however):

How insignificant, seem the influences of the sensible things which are tossed and fall and lie about us, so, or so, in the environment of early childhood. How indelibly, as we afterwards discover, they affect us; with what capricious attractions and associations they figure themselves on the white paper, the smooth wax, of our ingenuous souls, as "with lead in the rock for ever," giving form and feature, and as it were assigned houseroom in our memory, to early experiences of feeling and thought, which abide with us ever afterwards, thus, and not otherwise. The realities and passions, the rumours of the greater world without, steal in upon us, each by its own special little passage-way, through the wall of custom about us; and never afterwards quite detach themselves from this or that accident, or trick, in the mode of their first entrance to us. Our susceptibilities, the discovery of our powers, manifold experiences... belong to this or the other well-remembered place ... and irresistibly, little shapes, voices, accidents – the angle at which the sun in the morning fell on the pillow – become parts of the great chain wherewith we are bound.

One notices the word "trick": and it appears again in a later, related passage – "was it some mere trick of heat in the heavily-laden summer air?"

-- 18 --

It would be interesting to learn what precise acquaintanceship Gissing had with Pater's work; particularly as the notorious "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* appeared in 1873, the year after Gissing's becoming a student at Owens College and two years or so before his calamitous immersion in "experience" of a kind which Pater's appeal for "experience itself," for its own sake, seemed alarmingly to encourage – and probably did. To whatever extent an adolescent's adventuring in Manchester may be thought of a piece with the rarefied philosophy of the Oxford don, it is obvious that Gissing's resulting behaviour was not; and Reuben Elgar in *The Emancipated* shows plainly Gissing's mature distrust of a cheapened form of Pater's prescription for the undying "hard, gemlike flame." But Pater's adoration of classical literature can hardly not have spoken to Gissing and his absorption in the Renaissance and with Art must surely have thrown their echoes into the novelist's letters and work through firsthand as well as secondhand contact. Waymark in *The Unclassed* and *Ryecroft* itself are enough to support a conjecture that "The Child in the House" had a hand in Gissing's "trick": their testimony to an enduring Paterian strain in their author is strong – though the strain is importantly modified by, one might suppose, the sobering reality with which Gissing's experiences continually confronted him.

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New Books

Born in Exile. A new edition with an introduction by Walter Allen. Gollancz Classics. 1970. 487 pp. 50s. An announcement in the April and June numbers of *Books and Bookmen* read: "Gissing's greatest achievement. Gissing exposes the hidden nerve of Victorian anxiety in a way that no other novelist has done." A fine volume in brown cloth, to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of the *Newsletter*.

George Gissing: Essays and Fiction. Edited with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas. The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970. 266 pp. of which about 80 consist of editorial matter. \$8.50 or 81s. Contents: "The Hope of Pessimism," "Along Shore," "All for Love," "The Last Half-Crown" "Cain and

-- 19 --

Abel," "The Quarry on the Heath," "The Lady of the Dedication," "Mutimer's Choice," "Their Pretty Way." There is a selected bibliography and an index. The portrait of Gissing reproduced as a frontispiece has not hitherto been published in any book by or about the author. Volume bound in green cloth with gilt titling,

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Other Recent Publications (in chronological order)

Monteiro, George, "Harold Frederic: an Unrecorded Review," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, First Quarter 1969, pp. 30-31. A letter from Wells to Gissing identifies Frederic as the author of the review of *The Whirlpool* in the *Saturday Review*; Frederic's comments in the review suggest that Gissing's novel was a source for his own *Market-Place*, 1898.

Schaefer, William D., "Recent Books: British Fiction," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, September 1969, p. 250. A review of Coustillas' *Collected Articles on George Gissing*.

"Book of the Week: The Odd Women," *Jersey Evening Post*. An anonymous review of the Blond edition.

Coustillas, P., and Spiers J., "Readers' Queries: George Gissing," *Notes and Queries*, October 1969, p. 381. Concerns the bibliography in preparation.

Swinerton, Frank, "Where they Sank or Swam," *The Sunday Telegraph*, November 16, 1969. A review of the new edition, edited by P. J. Keating, of Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, with various allusions to Gissing.

"New Imprint," *The Bookseller*, December 20, 1969, p. 2984. On the Harvester Press and Gissing.

Badolato, Francesco, "Antologia Gissingiana," *Italia Intellettuale*, November-December 1969, pp. 8-11. A review of Coustillas' *Collected Articles*, analyzing the contents of all the pieces reprinted in the book.

Chialant, Maria Teresa, "Dickens, Gissing e Orwell," Istituto Universitario Orientale (Naples), *Annali*, Sezione germanica, XII, December 1969, pp. 373-394.

-- 20 --

Watson, George (editor), *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, Vol. 3, 1800-1900, Cambridge University Press, 1969. The material concerning Gissing covers col. 1000-1004. An account of this will appear in a forthcoming number of the *Newsletter*.

Dyson, A. E. (editor), *Dickens: Bleak House*, a Casebook, London, Macmillan, 1969, pp. 91-98. A passage reprinted from *The Immortal Dickens* (1925), which incidentally has been reprinted by Kraus of New York, in a handsome clothbound edition, at \$10.50.

Dickson, Lovat, *H. G. Wells, His Turbulent Life and Times*, London, Macmillan, 1969. References to Gissing on pp. 73-75, 257, 282.

Cazemajou, Jean, *Stephen Crane (1871-1900), Ecrivain Journaliste*, Paris, Didier, 1969. References to Gissing on pp. 216, 217, 234-35, 258.

"In Streets Mean and Narrow," *The Times Literary Supplement*, January 1, 1970, p. 5. A long review of *A Child of the Jago* with many references to Gissing.

"The urge to move 'back to nature,'" *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, February 7, 1970, p. 4. Deals in part with Gissing and Ryecroft.

Yenter, Charles, "Workers in the Dawn," *Presenting Moonshine*, March 1, 1970, pp. 13-15. A bibliographical study.