

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*.

Volume IX, Number 3
July, 1973

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The Humane Centre: George Gissing’s *The Whirlpool*

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The struggle was prolonged and painful. Throughout 1896 Gissing had pondered a long novel. There had been false beginnings, considerable rewriting, recasting of the material and not until December 18 was the final page complete. He noted in his Diary for the day: “The hardest piece of work I have done yet.” Interruptions had been continual and growing in his mind was concern about his children and the responsibilities of parenthood. On a day of “white frost and bright sunshine” in January 1896 his second son was born. The mother had difficulty in breastfeeding and Gissing interpreted her ensuing mood as the familiar one of “surly revolt and

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Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £1.00 per annum
Libraries: £1.50 per annum

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anger against everyone” (Diary, January 25, 1896). Later in the year he was alarmed at reports of his elder child: Walter had been sent from the discordant domesticity to stay with his aunts and grandmother in Yorkshire. After receiving a letter about the child’s disobedience Gissing noted: “What a terrible lesson is the existence of this child, born of a loveless and utterly unsuitable marriage” (Diary, August 9, 1896).

His own interrupted creative struggles, the struggle of his second born for food, Walter’s

childish troublesomeness and incessant marital quarrels form the background to the writing of Gissing's last major novel. When completed his confidence in the book was large; he wrote to his publisher Bullen who had suggested some minor changes: "I must confess that I rather count upon this book. It is doubtful if I shall do anything better, or anything again so good" (February 8, 1897).

The publication of *The Whirlpool* in April 1897 met with critical commentary which was generally approving but baffling in the variety of contradictory interpretations. Gissing's suspicion of careless reviewers was seemingly justified once again: "Reviewers praise me, but very rarely understand my purpose" (Letter to Eduard Bertz, April 16, 1897). A generalized perception was that money and society had corrupted the domestic relations of the protagonist, Harvey Rolfe. Gissing's scorn for the whirlpool of Mammon and social frivolity was genteelly applauded but some difficulty in understanding the characters was noted. Alma Rolfe could be seen as a believer in simple living and as an artist, whilst the final chapter offering Harvey's views on Imperialism was misread by several scholarly and journalistic reviewers such as H. G. Wells, Dr. Foerster of the University of Zurich and Israel Zangwill. Rapidity of reading a long, complex novel may partly account for reviewers' failures to estimate Gissing's pervasive irony. On the other hand, the author must also be considered responsible for technical faults in the presentation of his material.

In the introductory mass of detail too many characters are named or outlined too quickly and reinforcement of their individual traits is sometimes missing or inadequate. Dickens might have created the Buncombes and their children, sustaining their presence as minor figures with humorous exaggeration. In Gissing's handling they remain shadows on the edge of the whirlpool

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with comic possibilities and structural significance. Mrs. Buncombe, magnificently conceived as a woman who deserts husband and children to follow the lure of the music-hall where she becomes a second-rate singer, is a grotesque foreshadowing of Alma's desire for recognition as a virtuoso violinist; Mrs. Buncombe's children, left to the care of servants and "growing up as vicious little savages" (p. 25),¹ hint at the preoccupation with the nature of education which is later to haunt Harvey Rolfe.

But such blemishes of presentation suggest a more profound structural conflict in Gissing's mind. By looking backwards to Dickens, the novelist whose persistent industry triumphed over domestic discord, Gissing committed himself to the movement and development of a large number of characters and subplots in the manner of the early Dickensian chronicle novel. His impulse, however, tended towards the expository method of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*; by retaining the ponderous structure of the conventional Victorian novel, the impulse toward metaphoric statement about changing conditions of mind is limited; expository dialogue conveying subtle shifts of consciousness becomes excessive and his novelistic intent is concealed beneath swarming realistic details. The presentation, therefore, is a confusing mixture of conventional Victorian narrative and metaphoric transformations. Appropriately, in the history of the English novel, *The Whirlpool* appears after *Our Mutual Friend* but before *The Golden Bowl* and *The Rainbow*.

The central metaphor of the whirlpool was obvious to contemporary reviewers but its implications about the destructive force of speculation are varied, subtle and not immediately discernible even to a present day reader. Gissing's association of financial speculation – "the great legalized game of hazard" (p. 4) – is simple and unoriginal. More subtle, in the series of catastrophes which announce the theme, is association between the failure of speculative

enterprise and the robbery at Hugh Carnaby's home. As Carnaby's housekeeper was involved in the theft and betrayed her calling, so Bennet Frothingham, financier and keeper of other men's savings, has betrayed trust. Beneath the "gay and melodious existence" of the rich, the struggle of "monstrous cruelties and mendacities" (p. 39) is suggested and reaches rapid climax in

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Frothingham's suicide.

Financial and social eddies of inherently destructive speculation sweep into the world of art. The growing power of advertising and the more indirect power exerted by monied influence can launch the pseudo-artists and secure them undeserved success. Alma's name is brought before the public by the gossip column of London newspapers:

From this she might learn (if she did not already know it) that Mrs. Harvey Rolfe was a lady of the utmost personal and social charm; that her beauty was not easily described without the use of terms that would sound extravagant; that as a violinist she had stood for a year or two *facile princeps* amid lady amateurs; that she had till of late lived in romantic seclusion ... for the sole purpose of devoting herself to music; and that only with the greatest reluctance had she consented to make known to the public a talent – nay, a genius, which assuredly was "meant for mankind." (p. 258)

Genuine appreciation and criticism are submerged beneath a mass of ready-made phrases applied indiscriminately. Gissing's own fulminations against facile book reviewers are echoed in his ironic commentary on musical appreciation among the inner circles of the social whirlpool:

The hostess, who played no instrument, but doted upon all, was of opinion that an executant should "aim at mirroring his own nature in his interpretation of a tone-poem"; whereupon another lady threw out remarks on "subjective interpretation," confessing her preference for a method purely "objective." The influential critic began to talk about Liszt, with whom he declared that he had been on intimate terms; he grew fervent over the master's rhapsodies, with their "clanging rhythm and dithyrambic fury." (p. 256)

The outer edges of the speculative whirlpool extend to the Empire. The process of fighting and annexing in the interests of British commercialism arouses Harvey Rolfe's interest but provokes him to outbursts of ironic indignation. His sentiments are expounded at the beginning and close of the novel. At the age of thirty-seven he asserts: "We have to lead the world; it's our destiny; and we must do it by breaking heads. That's the nature of the human animal, and will be

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for ages to come" (p. 14). Five years later, as a result of his experiences, there has come a lessening of intellectual self-confidence and a note of resigned, hard stoicism is sounded as history and prophecy merge in his thinking: "It's a long time since the end of the Napoleonic wars. Since then Europe has seen only sputterings of temper. Mankind won't stand it much longer, this encroachment of the humane spirit... We may reasonably hope ... to see our boys blown into small bits by the explosive that hasn't got its name yet" (pp. 449-50). What is humane

in civilization is seen as only an encroachment upon the destructive, amassing power of the social, domestic and imperial whirlpool. His more youthful proud scepticism has become a collection of “waverings and doubtings” (p. 452) and the man who loved to delve into books, cherishing the seclusion of his library, finally reads “little or nothing” (p. 450).

The parallels between Harvey’s early and late attitudes are carefully made and indicate changes in the protagonist’s consciousness. Experiences as bachelor, husband, father and widower have made their impressions: a central humaneness, for which he has striven and within which he has, sometimes naively, sought protection, has largely disappeared. Gissing’s intention has been to dramatize changes in Harvey’s consciousness under external and internal speculative pressures. His method which, operating within the conventional novelistic structure, is sometimes at odds with his intention is to present a series of “transformations” upon this central theme as in the musical manner of Liszt. Rolfe’s centrality in the novel was stressed by Gissing but the multiplicity of details and – as Henry James remarked² – an inadequate foreshortening and proportioning of the parts to the whole tend to obscure the psychological type he represents. The author’s clearest statement about intention and principal character was made in a letter to H. G. Wells gently protesting his misinterpretation of the book.

In Rolfe I wished to present a man whose character developed with unusual slowness, and who would probably never have developed at all, after a certain stage, but for the change wrought in his views and sentiments by the fact of

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his becoming a father. The early passage of his talk which you quote (about children) is meant to contrast strongly with his way of thinking and speaking in the latter part of the book. As a bachelor, he was largely an egoist, and took the egoistic tone of a certain world. Later he is ripe in that experience which kills the cruder egoism. That he *does* nothing is natural in the man – “Whirlpool” influences embarrass any efficiency there might have been in him. Though the most likely man in my circle of characters (excluding Morton) to be a profitable citizen, that hope is spoilt by his surroundings. “The Whirlpool,” you say, “should be devouring him.” It has devoured only too much of him, as of many another such fellow. (Letter to H. G. Wells, August 7, 1897).

When Harvey Rolfe is introduced at the age of thirty-seven he is a man *between* youth and age. His achievements are minimal, his personal distinction somewhat vague (p. 1). He has known poverty and now relishes comforts obtainable from a modest inheritance. The initial impression conveyed is unclear, as Harvey himself is unclear about his function and purpose in life. Facts about his upbringing and early youth are withheld until later in the novel when, in a time of crucial self-assessment amid the surroundings of his childhood, Harvey reflects upon his life. As a child he had been in “perpetual rebellion against authority” (p. 329) although he had been shown only kindness by the aunt who raised him after his father’s death. His rebelliousness had become adolescent arrogance and he entered on medical studies simply because he had heard his guardian assert he was unsuited for the profession. His period as a rowdy student ended with the inheritance of several thousand pounds at the age of twenty-one and he was able to indulge a taste for foreign travel. But, as he later realizes, “something must have arrested the development of his common-sense. Even in another ten years he was scarcely on a level, as regards practical

intelligence, with the ordinary lad who is leaving school" (p. 332). Having squandered his inheritance by the age of twenty-four he worked in an emigration office preparing false advertising for prospective colonists and advising enquirers, from his considerable ignorance, about the desirability of leaving for new territories. For a decade he fulfilled this gentlemanly but

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unscrupulous role paying the terrible price of a "slow development of brain and character" (p. 23). Only his sister's death and a further small inheritance enabled him to retreat from this modest function in the commercial imperial whirlpool. Over the intervening six years he has distanced himself from the sordidness he has known, bringing a rational organization to his life and fashioning a humane centre from which to judge the phenomena of life around him; but, despite this quiet attainment, he still embodies attitudes and utters sentiments which suggest an underlying immaturity.

It seemed to him an act of unaccountable folly to marry a woman from whom one differed diametrically on subjects that lay at the root of life; and of children he could hardly bring himself to think at all, so exasperating the complication they introduced into problems which defied common-sense. He disliked children; fled the sight and the sound of them in most cases, and, when this was not possible, regarded them with apprehension, weariness, anything but interest. (p. 20)

His earlier life had been characterized by speculative squandering of his energies as student, traveller, and employee; the energies of his thirties were transferred to an inward form of speculation in which the central core of humane rationality was surrounded by self-indulgence in idle conjecture and vacuous theory. Circumstances are to demonstrate the perilousness of such self-deceiving speculation about marriage and children, and Harvey, as the consequence of an unsuitable alliance, is to be forced into painful reassessment.

By the age of thirty-seven he has become a man for whom the present is speculation and not action. His rational centre may see through the pretensions of the Frothingham social milieu and induce him to protest his own pose of "wasting life as strenuously as ever" (p. 89); but the insubstantiality of his conjectures is made evident by the ease and rapidity with which he submits to Alma's seemingly large energies. The man who has convinced himself that he has little aptitude for "sympathetic emotion" (p. 45) and that marriage on an income of less than a thousand pounds a year is an absurdity is swept into domesticity. Ironically the only real mating is between the pretentiousness of his idle theorizings and the social pretentiousness of Alma Frothingham.

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In effect, by fleeing London for an expensively "simple life" with Alma in Wales he tries to continue his circular speculative existence. But two forces operate against this perpetuation. The birth of a son impels him to search for meaning in a life which he now regards as having been fruitless (p. 139) as Harvey begins to feel "the burden of all time" (p. 143) weighing upon him. Secondly, his wife's reawakened musical ambitions draw her inexorably back into the London whirlpool of social chatter among influential and manipulative friends. He is led to conjecture on

his unusual marriage which, in a further self-deception, he is able to convince himself and Alma is an experimental marriage of mutual freedom. Alma, as naive as her husband, remarks: "Harvey and I respect each other's independence – the great secret of marriage, don't you think? We ask each other's advice, and take it or not, as we choose" (pp. 235-6). But the success of such independence relies not on mere "advice" – which in immature beings may be no more than further idle speculation – but on degrees of self-knowledge and shared responsibility, which neither Harvey nor Alma have attained. The expressed illusion "We are in perfect harmony, yet absolutely independent" (p. 248) restates the theme of the internal and external pressures which are separating the couple. Harvey, to whom action is unnatural, is drawn further into the business whirlpool; Alma, obsessed by the dream of becoming a virtuoso violinist and wishing to make her efforts bear fruit as tangible as her father's success, becomes more involved in the social whirlpool.

Mutual freedom within such a marital arrangement requires the exercise of criticism. Neither is capable of this. Alma, so little understanding Harvey's sensitivity about paternity, broods on the false thought that he has already fathered illegitimate children. Raised in conventions of marital possessiveness she is unable to evolve towards the ideal of independence each pretends to have grasped. Further suspicions are nurtured as she thinks:

That no doubt of her fidelity ever seemed to enter his mind, was capable of anything but a complimentary interpretation; he simply took it for granted that she would be faithful – in other words, that she had not spirit or originality enough to defy conventional laws. To himself, perhaps, he reserved a much

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larger liberty. How could she tell where, in what company, his evenings were spent? (p. 254)

Inevitably a realignment becomes necessary, forced by their unpreparedness for mutual independence and by the larger catastrophe of Redgrave's death and Carnaby's imprisonment. Harvey's nightmarish vision of human suffering (p. 325) and Alma's insomnia lead them to a more conventional domesticity. He assumes "the old-fashioned authority of husbands" (p. 382) while she undertakes the supervision of his physical comforts. But this establishment of conventional patterns is a further luckless emotional speculation. In the new domestic atmosphere the stern awareness that no intellectual communication is possible between them becomes inescapable. There is the sad interchange about Harvey's beloved books:

"They're not often disturbed nowadays..."

"But I suppose you like to have them about you?" Alma replied carelessly, as she glanced at the shelves.

"Why, yes, they're good furniture; help to warm the room."

"No doubt they do," Alma replied. "It's always more comfortable here than in the drawing-room" (p. 382).

As compensation, Harvey's sense of responsibility extends increasingly towards his son and a Schopenhauer-like pessimism enfolds him. He speculates on death in childhood and conjectures that there is no reason for sorrow at such death. Such a thought may assist remaking of the rational core – his sense of the humane reborn through the hope of hopelessness. But when soon

afterwards their second child dies his intellectual attitude seems callous and pathetically insufficient to assuage the mother's grief.

Harvey can only retreat into an ever deeper ironic sense of life. After Alma's death he is finally alone with his son amid the security of his childhood environment. The whirlpool has swirled around him and brought, however painfully, a fuller maturity. But the humane centre he has sought to construct and protect has been affected, for the whirlpool is not only an external phenomenon of social and financial speculation but swirls within as an inherently destructive metaphysical reality. Reason has been inadequate to limit either the external or internal

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speculative forces. The latter move more darkly and ironically than ever, making playthings of men and whirlpools of constructive consciousness. The final image of Harvey and his son, holding hands but silent, walking in the evening through the village he had known as a child, may be a narrative transformation of the conclusion to Gissing's youthful essay "The Hope of Pessimism": "The grave will become a symbol of joy... Pity is alone for the living."³

1 - All page references are to the first edition.

2 - Henry James, *Notes on Novelists*, Scribner's, New York, 1914, pp. 436-45.

3 - See *George Gissing, Essays and Fiction*, ed. by Pierre Coustillas, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore and London, 1970, p. 97.

* * * * *

Clara E. Collet and Israel Zangwill: An Unpublished Correspondence

Bernard Winehouse
University of Tel-Aviv

I am preparing a detailed study of the interesting relationship between Gissing and Israel Zangwill (1864-1926), two authors who in the surveys of English Literature are inevitably bundled indiscriminately together as writers of tales of "mean streets." Suffice it, therefore, to review here briefly the facts of this relationship. Gissing and Zangwill met for the first time in 1896. In the same year they met again at Zangwill's home where Gissing's host enjoyed his confidence. Gissing's appreciation of Zangwill's work is on record in a letter he wrote to Clara Collet in which he speaks in lavish terms of *Children of the Ghetto* (1892). Gissing had also read with enthusiasm the novels of Louis Zangwill, Israel's brother. George Gissing, as is well known, was not an easy man to please whether in literary or in other matters. Gissing's influence on Zangwill's writing is apparent in *The Master* (1894) even was there not ample evidence in Zangwill's diaries to explain this literary debt. Zangwill, the indefatigable writer of endless literary causeries and hundreds of book reviews, always spoke warmly of Gissing's achievement as a novelist.

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In his critical biography of George Gissing, Professor Korg speaks of Clara E. Collet as one of the novelist's "closest and most valuable friends."¹ Mabel Collins Donnelly wrote of her as being "altogether admirable" in Gissing's eyes, "one of those strong, capable women he admired

but never married.”² In her biographical sketch of Clara Collet, Ruth M. Adams notes that Gissing’s success as a superb creator of fictional women was an established fact before he met Miss Collet in 1893; “but their friendship assured the precision of his reporting of one aspect of the social scene, that of the work of women with all its ramifications, in the books that follow the initiation of their friendship.” In this article Clara Collet is described as the “final authority”³ on the subject of the working women of her day.

In a letter of 1910, below, Clara Collet speaks of a twenty-year friendship with Zangwill. The present letters, however, are the only items of correspondence between them I have been able to trace. Without doubt it was the women’s rights movement that provided the common meeting ground between Zangwill and Miss Collet. Zangwill, always sympathetic towards the movement, became intimately involved with it from 1903, through his wife Edith, incidentally, a novelist in her own right. He was later to become one of the important speakers for the suffragette cause and wrote many essays on the subject of women’s rights. I have seen dozens of letters from the branches of various women’s organizations pleading with him to speak at their meetings. According to all the anecdotes on the subject he was a brilliant public speaker. In a letter to Zangwill in 1907, Clara Collet spoke of her “profound admiration and gratitude” for his work as a novelist. She had at the time just completed a reading of *The Master*.⁴

The following exchange of letters between Miss Collet and Zangwill is based on a story in *Italian Fantasies* (1910). Zangwill once described this work as “the best and least read”⁵ of his books. Holbrook Jackson, a contemporary admirer of Zangwill’s work, wrote of *Italian Fantasies* thus:

This book, masquerading as a travel-book, is really a confessional, an autobiography, the record of a soul’s adventures amongst master-ideas.⁶

The failure of institutionalized religion had, since *Children of the Ghetto*, been a persistent

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motif in Zangwill’s fiction. It is the “master idea” of *The Carpenter’s Wife: A Capriccio* about which Clara Collet is so enthusiastic in these letters to Zangwill. This story juxtaposes in a series of visions the homely Galilean Jewess, the mother of Christ, with the lavish church cult of the Madonna. Zangwill mourns the loss of Mary’s humanity in the process of her transmogrification from carpenter’s wife to a magnificent madonna designed to serve a popular need.

This story, though occasionally marred by those peculiarly Zangwillian faults of *schmaltz* and long-windedness, succeeds with delicacy and imagination in evoking a domestic vision of Christ’s family. A reading of this fantasy and the relevant New Testament passages will allow these letters to speak for themselves.

4, Vernon Chambers,
Theobalds Road,
W.C.
23 Dec 10

Dear Sir,

May I be permitted to offer a comment on your fantasia “The Carpenter’s Wife” which I

have just read.

Have you noticed that Jesus always holds up the “earthly father” as the image of the heavenly one? He is constantly referring to this everyday fatherly affection as the most beautiful thing he knows. On the other hand he never (so far as I can remember but my memory may be at fault) refers with any appreciation to maternal affection.

Does this mean that, whether we accept the legend or whether we sift out the probably true, Joseph was his son’s ideal of human goodness?

Again, is there any ground, legendary or otherwise, for imagining that Joseph would have spoken brutally of the birth of Jesus to Mary? In all probability, if the legend be rejected, there is no reason for believing that there was ever any suggestion that Jesus was illegitimate. And if the fantasia is based on the legend, may we not take as a true part of it that Joseph was anxious to shelter Mary?

Yours very truly,

I. Zangwill Esq

Clara E. Collet.

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Far End,
East Preston,
Worthing.
Dec 27/10

Miss Clara E. Collet

Dear Madam,

Comments as intelligent as yours are always welcome. Regarding the illegitimacy as probably invented to meet the text, I did not mean markedly to make Joseph refer to it, though I purposely left a little ambiguity. Jesus’s preferential references to “father” may be only those of the Oriental for whom the father is head and priest of the home. Remember the texts about hating your father as well as your mother. If there were any special intimacy of tenderness, would we (not) be left to a mere Sherlock Holmesian deduction? Still your idea would only add poignancy to the maternal tragedy I tried to suggest.

Yours

I. Zangwill.

* * *

4 Vernon Chambers,
Theobalds Road,
W.C.
28. 12. 10

Dear Mr. Zangwill,

Thank you for your kind note. When you speak of the “maternal tragedy” do you accept at all any part of the legend of the mother of Jesus?

Before I ever dreamt of the Gospels being “faked” to fit in with Isaiah, I used to imagine that Jesus really was illegitimate and that his tenderness towards sinning women was due to his mother’s history. Now I greatly doubt whether Mary even went near the Eros. The Mary at the Cross is described as the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of James in the three synoptic Gospels. It is only in the Gospel of St. John that she is said to be the mother of Jesus. Is not Mary’s attitude towards her son entirely an invention of later times? Was not the tragedy the other way round – a son with a wholly unsympathetic mother?

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Although Christianity claims to have liberated women – and I believe it has done a great deal towards it – it has only been by exacting from women as high a standard as from men. Jesus never excuses women on the ground of weakness and economic necessity; still less does he ever exalt womanhood in the positivist manner. But his treatment of them seems to me to make it impossible that his references to his mother were anything more than a refusal to abandon his Father’s work in order to lead a conventional life in Nazareth.

Possibly you are quite right in thinking that Jesus’ views on fatherhood were simply those of an Oriental – or at any rate of a Jew: Isaiah is certainly full of the same feeling. But it is one of those cases where a personal exception would break down the rule. What a curious fact it would be if the Europeans deficient in the ideal of fatherhood were obliged to interpose a Christianised Venus as a substitute for them to approach the Father of whom they stood in awe.

You have been a friend of mine for nearly twenty years; that is my excuse for writing to you in this way. Approaching Jesus from nearly opposite directions we are very near each other in our point of view at present. Much that seems to me peculiar in Jesus you know to be essentially Jewish and can understand more correctly. On the other hand we approach everything concerned with him with more reverence and that in itself will sometimes make us see the truth more clearly. (Not that I often adopt that method in ordinary life).

Yours very truly,
Clara E. Collet.

* * *

Far End,
East Preston,
Worthing.
1/1/11

Dear Miss Collet,

Did you not note I agreed with you so far as to keep Mary away from the Cross? Were she however unsympathetic, too, that would make an even grimmer tragedy. The fact that she tried to get to Jesus at Capernaum seems to argue a certain solicitude. My sole point in the little fantasy

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is her impotence in life compared with her wonderful posthumous position. When Heine dreamed he was “der lieber Gott” he called out to a friend below, “I told you I should be something some

day.” But the Carpenter’s wife did really become “something.”

Of course the actual facts will never be known, nor are they of prime importance compared with the teaching. We get along very well without Shakespeare’s biography. Negatively, however, it is important to reject conceptions clearly invented or unnatural.

With best New Year wishes.

Sincerely yours,
Israel Zangwill.

* * *

4 Vernon Chambers,
Theobalds Road,
W.C.
4 Jan 11.

Dear Mr. Zangwill,

St. Giulia and Female Suffrage has impelled me to send you Miss Lina Eckenstein’s *Women under Monasticism* which has never received a fraction of the attention which it deserves. It is technically out of print; in reality “remaindered.”⁷

No I did not understand that you were discussing the last Passover in your fantasy. The marriage at Cana and the scourging in the Temple in *St. John* are both placed in the early period a year before the end. I thought you were utilising this chronology to secure the maximum effect in the minimum of time. To tell the truth I thought you had invented Mary’s sister, having myself never noticed her alleged existence.

Of course I don’t know a tenth of the references in this volume of essays and must read them as one read the Arabian Nights at ten years of age without spoiling the pleasure by asking you for information.

Shakespeare and Jesus are not quite in the same category. Shakespeare gave us his very best in his work and asks nothing from us in return more than he asks from the meanest creatures. But Jesus makes great demands on us. I don’t believe anything in *St. John’s Gospel* that clashes with

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all the others and this sulky “Woman, what have I to do with thee” seems quite irrelevant in the story; it probably has its origin in the ‘Who is my mother?’ where the question has quite another significance. I don’t think the events of the life of Jesus matter particularly but what he was in himself matters immensely.

But most of all God’s methods with us need defence from falsehood. When we have completely shaken off the legends it is impossible to escape the fear that the best things in life (I mean our ideas of the eternal ideal) are all based on frauds – that in relation to us God has no sense of truth or justice. Of course there is no reason why stage machinery should not be used to produce true impressions but that we should be allowed to waste our worship on stage properties is unpardonable. Roman Catholics never can conceive the possibility of worship of God when once they have lost faith in their own religion and this seems quite natural when one realises that their religion has been based on a fear of God’s punishment. The reverence for the mother of God is a beautiful thing; it is the best part of the Catholic religion but why should God work with us by means of lies?

Now having eliminated Mary the mother of Jesus from any part whatever in the transaction, in a perhaps unjustifiable manner I feel that God is acquitted, that He is not responsible for what is after all not a lie, but a work of imagination. To invent what never was fact is quite different from concealing, or denying, or colouring what has a real existence. Perhaps this is only casuistry.

If the Jews are the chosen people – and I quite believe it – their mission is to convince us that the Creator consciously lets us live in Him. We believe in God but we do not believe in His fatherhood in the sense in which the Jews alone used to believe in it. The teaching of Jesus about human relations stands good if Jesus himself is ignored but was the communion of the Jewish prophets (Isaiah and Jesus) with God merely the perception of the beauty and grandeur of their own conceptions or was it real?

Of course we all *hope* it is true. But do the Jews – who of all people have suffered enough to know what they believe – still have belief in the personal relation apart from any promises of a future to atone for the past?

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Of course you must not trouble to answer all this. Probably I shall find that you have answered it over and over again without my attending to it. These essays are overwhelmingly suggestive and one wants to reply to them. But in reading them again I shall find your answers.

Yours sincerely,

Clara E. Collet.

* * *

Far End,
East Preston,
Worthing.
Jan 5/10 11.

Dear Miss Collet,

I must thank you heartily for sending me Miss Eckenstein's valuable and learned volume, which would certainly have improved my article, had I possessed it. You raise questions that require Volumes even if I could answer them but some remarks of mine on Illusion in Religion you will find in "Dreamers of the Ghetto," (in the Epilogue p. 478).⁸

Sincerely yours,

Israel Zangwill.

* * *

Far End,
East Preston,
Worthing.
Jan 18/12

Dear Miss Collet,

Mrs. Zangwill and I are studying with much interest and pleasure the pamphlet on "Women and Industry"⁹ you were good enough to send me. It seems to me a valuable and original piece of scientific enquiry. If there has not been such an abrupt transition as one had thought, there has at least been a change of view as regards the propriety of "gentlewomen" earning money.

Yours with thanks,
Israel Zangwill.

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- 1 - Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle, 1963), 192.
- 2 - *George Gissing: Grave Comedian* (Harvard, 1954), 147.
- 3 - "George Gissing and Clara Collet," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, XI (June, 1956), 77.
- 4 - June 29, 1907. In the Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem, Israel.
- 5 - "Zangwill Address," *Judeans*, III (New York, 1927), 89.
- 6 - Typescript, p. 14. In the private collection of J. Leftwich, London.
- 7 - *St. Giulia* is an essay in *Italian Fantasies* (London, 1910). Zangwill sees hope for mankind in the moral leadership of women. The modern St. Giulias, the suffragettes, are "in revolt against a social order founded on prostitution and sex-inequality." p. 304. *Women under Monasticism* (London, 1896).
- 8 - "The Christ story might be false, but it has idealised the basal things - love, pity, self-sacrifice, purity motherhood. And if any divine force worked through history, then must the great common illusions of mankind also be divine." *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (London, 1898), 478.
- 9 - This is quite likely one of Clara Collet's own essays but I have not been able to trace it. She published many such articles anonymously.

For permission to quote I am grateful to Mr. W. R. Collet, Mr. J. Leftwich, The Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem. My thanks also to Pierre Coustillas for his generous gesture in "pairing up" the letters of Miss Collet which I had located in the Central Zionist Archive, with the Zangwill replies in the possession of Mr. W. R. Collet.

Recent Publications

Books

- Gissing. *The Paying Guest*, with introduction and notes by Francesco Badolato, Treviso: Edizioni Canova, 1973. XIX + 127 pages; Paperback, 1,500 lire.

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- Gissing. *Six Short Stories*, with introduction and notes by Francesco Badolato, Treviso: Edizioni Canova, 1973. XIX + 161 pages. Paperback, 1,700 lire. The six stories are: "Spellbound," "The Schoolmaster's Vision," "The Fate of Humphrey Snell," "The Light on the Tower," "An

Inspiration,” and “A Victim of Circumstances.”

Reviews

- Anon., *Book Exchange*, November 1972. A review of *George Gissing at Alderley Edge* (Enitharmon Press, second edition).
 - Coustillas, Pierre, “Comptes Rendus,” *Etudes Anglaises*, October-December 1972, pp. 572-73. A review of P. J. Keating’s *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction and Working-Class Stories of the 1890’s*.
 - Badolato, Francesco, “Gissing: Tra primo e secondo romanzo,” *Italia Intellettuale*, October-December 1972, p. 19. A review of *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*.
 - Wright, Andrew, “Reviews,” *The Year Book of English Studies*, 1972, pp. 322-23. A review of *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*.
 - Anon., “Hard Times,” *Times Literary Supplement*, February 2, 1973, p. 112. A review of *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*.
 - B. Hutchison, “George Gissing,” *Book Collecting and Library Monthly*, February 1973, p. 47. A review of *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*.
 - Williams, David, “Novelists with a Social Conscience,” *Daily Telegraph*, March 15, 1973. A review of *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*.
 - Monod, Sylvère, “Comptes Rendus,” *Etudes Anglaises*, January-March 1973, pp. 107-09. A review of *Isabel Clarendon*.
 - Coustillas, Pierre, “Comptes Rendus,” *Etudes Anglaises*, January-March 1973, pp. 109-12. Reviews of *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Women* and Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago*.
 - Anon., “English Fiction,” *British Book News*, March 1973. A review of *Demos* (Harvester Press Edition).
- 20 --
- Lindop, Grevel, “Reviews,” *Notes and Queries*, March 1973, pp. 111-12. A review of *George Gissing; Essays and Fiction*.