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"More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me."

Commonplace Book

"At Cemetery found a delightful guardian": The Croton Gardener Identified

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Travel narratives have two essential functions. On the one hand, to record and communicate the traveller's experiences, their novelty and originality, to express the pleasure of discovering a world which has so far been only visualized through previous writers' accounts; on the other hand, to stimulate the reader's curiosity, to whet his appetite for strangeness, exoticism, or adventure. The film of the traveller's impressions unrolls and the reader is content to watch and listen. Such are in the main the attitudes of giver and receiver where contemporary narratives are concerned. With the passing of time, a fresh curiosity may spring into existence. It is tempting to retrace the steps of a traveller who in former times was more concerned with the past than with the present. His own journey comes to assume a biographical dimension which was largely alien to his original plans. So it rests with archeologists of memory, always eager for footnotes, to throw light on the consciously vague recordings of the traveller's impressions.

Foreign travellers who have followed Gissing's footsteps in the deep Italian South in 1897 have been anxious to immerse themselves in the successive atmospheres which he so suggestively recreated in 1899, first in Paris, then in Switzerland, when he prepared his book. He himself had a copy of François Lenormant's *La Grande Grèce* in his luggage. His followers, carrying one of *By the Ionian Sea*, have used it as a guide to his own adventures. One sees them all in a line, Norman Douglas, Henry James Forman, H. V. Morton, not to mention more recent visitors of lesser note from half a dozen countries, and one feels inclined to continue the quest for identification of the ephemeral acquaintances--generally anonymous people--mentioned by Gissing. Coriolano Papparazzo, the Catanzaro hotel keeper, whose name, through an extraordinary process, has become an international

neologism, is the best known. He has so far revealed only part of his secret. But what about, for instance, Eduardo Caruso of the Taranto Museum, what about the *padrona* of the Albergo Concordia, whom Gissing's book made famous, or about the director of the Museo Civico at Reggio? Their identification is still imperfect. Or again, what about the genial man whom Gissing met in the cemetery at Cotrone?



Giulio Marino, the guardian of the Cotrone cemetery

The passage about him and the environment in the author's diary is short but suggestive: "At Cemetery found a delightful guardian, man who had travelled thro' Europe as servant to a gentleman of Cotrone. Been 9 years at the Cemetery, and has turned it from a waste into a garden. Tremendous geraniums--9 species, he said. Rosemary, splendid roses, and huge bushes of snapdragon, which he called Bocca di leone. Several mortuary chapels around; most of graves marked by a mere wooden cross. As in Greece, skull and cross-bones universal. A fine marble slab to a Lucifero; in Greek style--the scene of parting; a little owl at bottom (civetta) which the guardian said is very common here. Gave me a great bunch of flowers." Who was this "man of behaviour and language much more refined than is common among the people of this region"?

In 1998 and 1999 vain attempts were made by a group of Gissing scholars to find his name on some tombstone in the by now very large cemetery by the sea. Their sole ally in their difficult quest was Norman Douglas's classic book, *Old Calabria*, first published in 1915, but actually a picture, historical, geographical and cultural, of that remote part of Italy as it was between 1907 and the date of publication. Douglas, it was thought, was a good guide, and while full of praise for the highly positive improvements that had occurred in Cotrone in a decade, it was a gloomy account he had to give in some respects: "Death has made hideous gaps in the short interval. The kindly Vice-Consul at Catanzaro [Pasquale Cricelli] is no more; the mayor of Cotrone [Marquis Anselmo Berlingieri, a name misspelt by Gissing and other English travellers], whose permit enabled Gissing to visit that orchard by the riverside, has likewise joined the majority; the housemaid of the 'Concordia,' the domestic serf with dark and fiercely flashing eyes--dead! And dead is mine hostess, 'the stout, slatternly, sleepy woman, who seemed surprised at my demand for food.' [...] And what of Gissing's other friend, the amiable guardian of the cemetery? 'His simple good-nature and intelligence,'" wrote Gissing, "greatly won upon me. I like to think of him as still quietly happy amid his garden walls, tending flowers that grow over the dead at Cotrone." A vision that was still truthful when Gissing wrote his book, but was no longer so by the time it appeared. "Dead," Douglas noted mournfully. "Dead like those whose graves he tended; like Gissing himself. He expired in February 1901, [...] and they showed me his tomb near the right side of the entrance; a poor little grave, with a wooden cross bearing a number, which will soon be removed to make room for another one."

Research rested there for decades--until a few months ago contact was fortuitously made with a great-grandson of the *giardiniere-custode* whose engaging personality had pleased Gissing so much that he devoted several paragraphs to him in his volume of haunting recollections. A meeting of the well-known cultural association Italia Nostra was the occasion of the first contact between the Italian co-author of the present article and Dr. Domenico Marino, an archæologist who currently holds a post in Basilicata. Dr. Marino initiated his own researches after the death two years ago of his father Giulio Marino, who had on many occasions told him of his own grandfather, the homonymous Giulio, having met the English writer in the Cotrone cemetery, a meeting which had given him much satisfaction. The archæologist had the story uppermost in his mind when, for professional reasons, he had to study *By the Ionian Sea and Old Calabria*. The coincidences between the testimonies of the two foreign writers and what he knew through family tradition were arresting. Research into the history of the Marino family was now in order.



The cypress by which Giulio Marino is said to have been buried.

Gissing's friend, Giulio Marino, who was baptized in Catanzaro in 1844, but may have been born the year before, was the son of Domenico Marino and Isabella Frijo. About fifty-three when he met Gissing, he was married to Francesca Maria Scalise, born in Cirò in 1857, and they had six children, the eldest being, like his grandfather, named Domenico. This Domenico Adalberto (1880-1968), who married Carmela Scerra, was in turn the father of four children, one of whom was Giulio (1924-1999), the archæologist's father. As he himself told Gissing, Giulio had been valet to a local gentleman, who very interestingly yet misleadingly, was Baron Luigi Berlingieri (1816-1900), mayor of Cotrone in 1882 and from 1883 to 1887. According to Augustus Hare in his *Cities of Southern Italy and Sicily* (1883), the Baron was with Baron Barracco, also a Calabrian, one of "the richest proprietors in Italy" (p. 349). However, contrary to appearances the Baron was no relative of the man of whom Gissing gave an unflattering portrait, another aristocratic Berlingieri, Marquis Anselmo Berlingieri (1852-1911), whose *permesso*, given condescendingly, has become a by-word for superfluous, worthless authorization. In a way that appeals to one's sense of justice, Gissing let fly in various ways at this particular Berlingieri, who was in office from 1896 to 1899. For instance, he approvingly reports that the poor illiterate woman to whom he showed the miserable scrap of paper bearing the mayor's scribbles ignored her employer's instructions. Then on meeting the handsome, distinguished gardener, he has his say fairly bluntly about the obscurantist *sindaco*: "I rang a bell at the gate and was admitted by a man of behaviour and language much more refined than is common among the people of this region; I felt sorry, indeed, that I had not found him seated in the Sindaco's chair that morning." So, once more, as after the encounter with the aged woman at the entrance of the orchard, he has a swipe at the local dignitary. To the foreign visitor, servants could be more intelligent and respectable than their betters. The parting shot is to be found in the conclusion of chapter IX, where Gissing echoes "a sudden clamour in the street, [...] the angry shouting of many voices," those from "a crowd of poor folk [who] had gathered before the Municipio to demonstrate against an oppressive tax called the *fuocatico*," that is hearth-money. "*Abbass' 'o sindaco*," Gissing seems to be shouting with the demonstrators.

So Gissing's sympathy for Giulio Marino was somehow increased by his contempt for the main representative of local authority. Little more is known of the poor man whose grave Norman Douglas was invited to behold. The exact date of his death is 9 February 1901, by

which time Gissing, still awaiting the publication of his travel book, was writing in Paris his satire of religious crazes and other forms of charlatany. Giulio's wife survived him by over twenty years, dying on 19 July 1922, and her grave can be seen¹ in the Crotone cemetery on the right hand side, only a few yards away from the place where the more conventional grave of Giulio is said to have been, that is, at the foot of a stately cypress. Giulio is remembered locally as a man who had travelled much with his employer--the photograph of him we reproduce is said to have been taken in Switzerland, probably in 1889. In over a decade, with remarkable skill and care, he changed the floral aspects of the cemetery, an impressive one to present-day visitors--beyond recognition. He it also was who planted for the municipal authorities a great many trees along the main streets of the town from 1888 to his death. He lived in the Marina di Porto, afterwards Viale Cristoforo Colombo, in a house known as Casa Suriano, which is no longer extant. His great-grandson Domenico treasures his memory, as he does the books by Gissing and Douglas that commemorate this worthy ancestor of his. His copy of *Old Calabria* is one of an uncommon edition, which like the first, is extremely scarce. It contains thirty-two illustrations, like the first edition--photographs taken by the author--and among them are one of Roman Masonry at Capo Colonna, another of the Cemetery of Crotone which shows the *campo santo* practically as Gissing must have seen it, and a most striking one of "The Modern Æsaros" on which the famous river impresses one as extremely different from the stream to be seen by the early twenty-first century visitor.

It is especially fortunate that the gentle gardener should at long last be properly identified in 2001, exactly one hundred years after his death and after the publication of a book in which he is so warmly commemorated. Together with Dr. Riccardo Sculco, who tended Gissing at a time when his life was in the balance, he is one of the two most engaging figures that fate placed in his way during his eventful stay in Cotrone, now more aptly renamed Crotone.

¹It is no. 213 and reads: A / Scalise M. Francesca Ved. Marino / Madre affettuosa ed esemplare / M. il 19 7 1922 / I figli addoloratissimi / Posero

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