

the 'platonism' and the 'humanism' of the schools of St Victor and Chartres in the twelfth century, of St Bernard as an 'anti-dialectician', of the University of Oxford arising suddenly in 1167 at the whim of Henry II.

His brief summaries of the lives and achievements of individuals also involve some naiveties and errors. Boethius cannot be presented tout court as 'the greatest of encyclopaedists'; nor can it be said without qualification that logic had to wait for the arrival of Abelard before it found 'a fertile place to grow'.

The book as a whole is divided into brief sections, of a page or two each, under the headings of 'The Background', 'The New Learning', 'The University: Form and Contents', 'Scholasticism: the Masters and their Schools'. There are some disjunctions. On p 37, at the end of a section on 'The Literature of the Monasteries', we arrive at St Bernard, and are promised a contrast with Abelard, but Abelard does not reappear for nearly twenty pages. The level of technical difficulty increases abruptly on p 64, as we move into the period of Aquinas for a moment. A disproportionate amount of space is devoted to Aquinas himself, as the author acknowledges in his preface.

The translation is on the whole clear, although there are occasional banalities, and it is difficult to see why 'Pierre Abélard' was preferred to the English form. The book is visually attractive. A map and a chronological table, and a series of Latin texts on pp 265-86 as examples of the work of the schools, form a series of useful appendices.

**GEORGE GISSING: CRITICAL ESSAYS** Edited by J. P. Michaux. *Vision & Barnes & Noble*. £11.95

There are several reasons why we find Gissing more enigmatic than our other novelists of similar calibre. He had, as clever, bookish adolescents often have, an intense thirst for beauty and an unusually strong sense of a sacred natural heritage

Dr Piltz's intention is to provide a simple introduction to his subject so as to attract rather than to deter the reader to whom 'mediaeval intellectual concepts' are 'remote'. Where he deals in detail with such topics as 'Porphyry and the universals' or Aristotle's *Ethics*, he is often successful. But he begins from what is arguably a false premiss: that mediaeval philosophers shared a 'uniform terminology', so that 'anyone taking part in a discussion or an argument knew the exact meaning of the terms he used, and so did his adversaries'. He therefore leaves out of account for the crucial period of the eleventh and twelfth and early thirteenth centuries in particular (though not for later centuries), much of what is surely the most significant achievement of mediaeval thinkers: the slow development of philosophical Latin as an instrument of thought and expression, and the work on the nature of language which has been an increasing focus of scholarly interest in recent decades.

His approach is a little apologetic. He has selected those authors he believes to have been most influential, in the hope of showing their relevance to the modern reader's interests. Had he set out to present his material in the confidence that it is of interest today in its own right, his book might have made a useful contribution to the literature. As it is, it has little to add to Gordon Leff's *Mediaeval Thought* or Dom David Knowles's *The Evolution of Mediaeval Thought*.

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stretching back to ancient Greece. Near the end of his life, he was still writing in this vein:

Among the many reasons which make me glad to have been born in England, one of the first is that I read Shake-

spare in my mother tongue . . . As I close the book, love and reverence possess me.

But none of our novelists presents us with such a uniformly sordid world, or leaves us wondering so insistently whether he really believes that life is worth living at all. Though a keen observer with an eye for detail, and a good ear for the nuances of common speech, he seems never, personally, to have learnt anything. There was never a meeting-ground in his mind between his idealism and his disillusion, or between his sense of beauty and his even more highly-developed sense of ugliness. Though he had 'seen it all', he remained always at heart a bemused adolescent. We may say of him what George Santayana said of Shelley:

The cannonade of hard, inexplicable facts that knock into most of us what little wisdom we have, left [him] dazed and sore, perhaps, but uninstructed.

A further paradox is that while he followed more closely than any other English novelist (except perhaps Arnold Bennett) the simple-minded formulae of French naturalism, his work as a whole strikes us as intensely personal, embodying a protest both against life itself and against the misfortunes which were specially his own. This protest (after the very brief early socialist phase) was entirely personal and not social. 'I could never', he wrote, 'feel myself at one with the native poor among whom I dwelt'. Where many writers pretended to be much nearer to the poor in feeling than they really are, Gissing, if anything, pretended to be further away. He took a wife from the streets while others sat in their clubs and wrote sentimentally about the charms of doing so. Like Wells and Bennett he embodies the terrible cynicism of the lower-middle class, determined to emphasize the gulf between them and the poor, and contemptuous of upper-middle class preaching about the harmony of classes. But whereas Wells and Bennett made large fortunes,

and embody the lower-middle class success ethic, Gissing (though never actually quite as poor as he liked to make out) was an obsessed and bitter man, a failure in his own judgment, if not necessarily in ours. Therefore, the terrible bitterness and fear of falling back among the poor and unclassed is far more vivid and frightening in Gissing than in the other two. As John Halperin remarks: 'his novels tend naively to equate good manners and breeding with moral worthiness.' He is one of the few agnostic writers who seem to be altogether untouched with Christian feeling.

The present volume embodies an interesting selection of general essays ranging from the time immediately following Gissing's death in 1903 to the 1970's and a group of specialized essays on *New Grub Street*, supposed by most contributors to be his best book. The personal reminiscences of Austin Harrison who had Gissing as his tutor are of particular interest, bringing out clearly the paradox that while Gissing disliked and distrusted the poor, he was always poorer than he need have been, because he had at the same time a romantic 'Left Bank' view of the true artist chained to his garret. Robert Shafer in 1935 uses him as a text for a diatribe against all progressive and hopeful political views. This would be more convincing if he (or we) were able to regard Gissing as a sane and balanced man. There are two useful essays by Pierre Coustillas and Lloyd Fernando on his complex and contradictory attitude to women. Jerome Shaffer, writing of Reardon in *New Grub Street* aptly says:

When we consider the extent of Gissing's identification with this lonely man, we cannot but be shaken by the terror of the self-appraisal.

Regrettably, there is also a tedious and silly piece by Mrs Leavis denigrating several great novelists under pretence of praising *New Grub Street*. But this should not be allowed to detract from the value of a useful book.

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