

“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
 – George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

Volume XXXII, Number 2

April, 1996

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A Distinguished Acquaintance of Gissing’s at Ciboure Arthur Brownlow Fforde

Pierre Coustillas

Until recently little enough was known of Gissing’s stay at Ciboure, the small fishing harbour adjoining Saint-Jean-de-Luz, from July 1902 to June 1903. He now kept his diary very irregularly and wrote down but few details about his social life. Correspondence with his relatives and friends was becoming infrequent; having to make a living by his pen, he concentrated on work as much as his health allowed. More numerous than those to any other correspondent at this time, his letters to his literary agent, James B. Pinker, are a faithful mirror of his professional activities, but of his non-literary occupations he said little to anyone. Rarely did he suggest that the trio he formed with Gabrielle Fleury and “Maman” enjoyed a pleasant and varied social life, that of the English colony. Yet, to some extent, such was the case. The

discovery in 1990 of Gabrielle's informal Recollections of the four and a half years she spent as his common-law wife and of a large batch of consolatory letters which she received in the few weeks after his death was instrumental in altering the picture reflected until then. It is now clear that the Gissing-Fleury trio were by no means exiles communicating with the rest of the world by mail only. They made friends with a number of English and French people, and Arthur Brownlow Fforde was one of them.¹

Who was he? Ideally one would like to reconstruct the process of their mutual acquaintance and esteem, but no document available throws the slightest light on the subject. When Gissing left Arcachon on 24 April 1902 and settled temporarily at the Pension Larréa in Ciboure, the only persons he knew he would meet, because Gabrielle had somehow been in touch with them, were two elderly sisters, Marie-Thérèse and Marie Isabelle Batézat. Contact was promptly made through them with a former teacher of classics in Saint-Nazaire,

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M. Jean-Baptiste Genty, who spent part of the year there with his wife and musical daughter. Then, after a few weeks in Paris, having returned with Gabrielle and her mother and taken his quarters in the Villa Lannes on July 2, he gradually came to know some of the numerous members of the English colony, who must have heard fairly quickly, through their modest weekly newspaper, the *Saint-Jean-de-Luz Gazette*, that a foremost English novelist had settled among them. Assuredly Fforde was one of the first in the English-speaking community with whom Gissing established a friendly relationship. The diary entry for 25 July, a "magnificent day, but hot," which shows him in the morning adding one page of about 1,000 words to the manuscript of his current novel *Will Warburton*, gives a brief account of their pleasant encounter: "In afternoon, to see Mr Ford [*sic*], retired Indian, at his house above the Ascain road, where he lives with consumptive son. Nice fellow. Played on the pianola." Of their next meetings nothing specific is known, but that they often saw each other until Fforde left for Dublin, probably in the late spring of 1903, is implied in Gabrielle's Recollections. Only once does he appear in Gissing's correspondence, in a letter to W. H. Hudson of 5 October 1902 on literary matters: "I have re-read *El Ombú*, and with increased pleasure; it has also given delight to an intelligent man here, an old civil Indian, called Forde [*sic*]." To anyone familiar with his uncommonly high expectations where new acquaintances were concerned, the laudative epithets used on the two occasions will not seem casual praise. He had indeed met a remarkable personality, at once engaging and cultured, as he liked his friends to be.

When Arthur Brownlow Fforde met Gissing in the summer of 1902 he was indeed a retired civil servant who had been living at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, essentially for climatic reasons, for perhaps a couple of years – at all events, he was listed in the census returns for 1 April 1901 as an Irishman residing at the Villa Stockholmetchea together with his son Herbert, aged 23, a twenty-five-year old chambermaid, Françoise Arambourou, and a cook of twenty-six named Gracieuse Baremdeguy. Born on 25 September 1847, most likely in Ireland, where his father Arthur William Fforde was at the time Chief Engineer to the Londonderry and Enniskillen Railway, he had made a distinguished career in the Revenue Survey, Bombay, in which he had held the following offices successively: Assistant Superintendent, Poona and Nasik Survey, 1884, Assistant Superintendent Gujerat Survey, 1884-1897, and Deputy Superintendent Deccan Survey, 1897-1899. In that last year he had retired as Survey and Settlement Commissioner and

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Director of Land Records and Agricultural Presidency of Bombay. His experience of life had little in common with Gissing's, whose geographical knowledge of the world was limited to the United States and Western and Southern Europe, and to whom the Empire was not so much

associated with the will to civilize as with a determination to conquer and exploit. He had once refused to reply to a public enquiry, conducted by the *Minster*, about the future of the British Empire, and his friends, notably Morley Roberts and H. G. Wells, let alone the faithful readers of his novels, were aware that he looked disapprovingly upon any form of expansionism. But Gissing was a gentleman, and he could draw a line between conquest and administration; as an artist, the variety of human experience was food for his inspiration and, if he could be a brilliant conversationist, he was also a good listener. With men of Fforde's capacities he had had few contacts outside intellectual circles.

Arthur Brownlow Fforde descended from a family who had made a reputation for themselves through their care for public welfare. Arthur William Fforde (1821-1886), his father, had held important civil engineering posts in Ireland, then, a decade after his marriage in 1846, in India, where he was Chief Engineer on the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway from 1855 to 1860. He constructed the Taptee Bridge, designed and built the Sassoon Dock in Bombay, and ultimately became Consulting Engineer for the Bombay municipality in 1878. Doubtless Gissing did not hear of such details, but he is bound to have been told some basic facts about his new friend's background and personal situation, of which Gabrielle, in her *Recollections*, gives evidence that she was not totally ignorant either. To all appearances a widower by the end of the century, Arthur Brownlow Fforde had married in 1869 Mary Carver Pope, daughter of the Reverend George Uglow Pope, a Briton who served for many years as a missionary in India, then, one of his descendants wrote in 1976, "went to Oxford, where in addition to teaching at the Indian Institute and Greek and Latin, Hebrew and other languages to students, he became the main authority on Telegu and Tamil." Four children had been born of this union between Arthur and Mary, two of whom became known personally to Gissing and Gabrielle. The eldest, Arthur Brownlow (1871-1953), was like his father an Indian Civil Servant at the turn of the century. His promising career was to be cut short by recurring dysentery in 1915, at which time he had been offered the post of Inspector General of Police in Lucknow. "A very charming, clever, if inevitably somewhat disappointed man," his grandson said of him when applied to for information about his family. Of Kate (1873-1961), the second child,



Arthur Brownlow Fforde

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Gissing understandably tells us nothing, since he ceased keeping his diary before he met her. To him and Gabrielle, who mentions her in her *Recollections*, she was known as Mrs. Last, but to her father she was Kits or Kitty, as he calls her in his letter of condolence to be published in the final volume of Gissing's *Collected Letters*. By all accounts a sweet person, she had married one Walter Last in 1896, but fate was cruel to her, as she was widowed in 1908. The third child, Cecil (1875-1951), made the most brilliant career of all as a lawyer in Dublin, India and South Africa, and was knighted for his achievements in 1930. The youngest child, Herbert William (1878-c. 1938), was the one whom Gissing met on 25 July 1902. Having suffered from measles at an early age, he was deaf, yet described as very musical and very clever, but his constitution remained weak throughout his life.

Unexpectedly, there was a strong cultural link between Fforde and Gissing. This may have been in Gissing's mind when, in his letter to Hudson, he noted that he had lent Fforde the presentation copy of *El Ombú* he had received shortly before. Not only was Fforde a lover of good literature, he had made his mark as a writer of fiction; however, Gissing would have had

little chance of knowing about this at the time of publication, as most of the volumes had appeared under Indian imprints. Anyone familiar with the early editions of Kipling's works published before he came over to England in 1889 will find nine of Fforde's paperbound volumes listed with them, some of which were illustrated by himself. In fact, with typical Victorian reticence, he began by placing his manuscripts under a pseudonym, calling himself Ivan O'Beirne, the name of a maternal uncle of his. His first title on record was *The Colonel's Crime, a story of to-day, and Jim's Wife* (Allahabad: Wheeler & Co, 1889), a volume of 111 pages which was no. 7 in A. H. Wheeler and Co's Indian Railway Library. *Doctor Victor: A Sketch* (No. 11) and *Major Craik's Craze* (No. 17) appeared under the same pseudonym in 1891 and 1892 respectively. A full list of his publications in the 1890s shows that concealment of authorship could be an aid in the case of a prolific writer who wrote too quickly for a single publisher. So, early on, Fforde decided to publish also under his name. One wonders whether he had read Kipling's youthful tales, those that appeared in the Lahore *Civil and Military Gazette* and the Allahabad *Pioneer*, and were collected in the first six numbers of the Indian Railway Library, from *Soldiers Three* to *Wee Willie Winkie*. Probably he had. The titles of his own stories could almost have been borrowed by his more famous contemporary, witness *The Subaltern*,

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The Policeman, and The Little Girl, No. 10 (1890), which was followed by *The Trotter: a Poona Mystery* (1890), No. 12, and *The Maid and the Idol; a tangled story of Poona*, No. 15 (1891). Then Ivan O'Beirne took over, before Fforde brought out under his own name a final batch of Indian stories, *That Little Owl*, No. 24, *The Sign of the Snake*, No. 27, and *The Phantoms of the Dome*, No. 28, these last two spilling over into the Meteor Library in 1895. Had he written himself out? Was he tired of writing? No one can reply on the author's behalf, as none of these titles is any longer seen in second-hand booksellers' catalogues. At all events this was a sufficient achievement on which to base an informal discussion of the art of fiction with an established writer, then considered with George Meredith and Thomas Hardy as one of the first three living English novelists.

Short of forming a personal opinion on the artistic value of these works which aimed, like Kipling's early stories, at entertaining an Anglo-Indian audience with narratives inspired by local life, one can at least reflect the assessments of two reviewers reprinted as advertisements in successive volumes. They give some idea of the nature of the plots and atmospheres, unsurprisingly overlooking aspects of the stories that testify to their author's culture, for instance the presence on title pages or at the beginning of chapters of epigraphs by Virgil, Shakespeare, Shelley or Rossetti. The *Saturday Review* praised both *The Subaltern, the Policeman, and the Little Girl*, and *The Trotter* with their charming illustrations by the author, the former a love story, the latter being defined as "an amusing extravaganza dealing with the exploits of an extremely gifted burglar in Poona." A long passage from the *Manchester Examiner* on the same two stories throws more light on A. Brownlow Fforde's subjects and artistic capacities:

"They are both stories of Anglo-Indian life, and are eminently readable. In the first the chief event is a flood at a small out-station. The description of the scene and of the methods adopted for rescuing the Europeans from their perilous situation is highly amusing, and affords abundant proof of Mr. Fforde's playful fancy. The hero of the second book is a pseudo-archaeologist and philologist, who, by forging letters of introduction, has succeeded in obtaining an entrée into the best Anglo-Indian society. Several mysterious burglaries are committed, and the police are baffled in their efforts to find any clue to the thief. He is at last discovered in the act of committing a robbery, and his identity is established by a flash-photograph taken by Major Bridger. Of course, the

burglar proves to be none other than the learned traveller who had been knicknamed ‘The Trotter.’ Mr. Fforde is a vivacious writer, and possesses a considerable fund of humour.

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His treatment of the commonest incidents makes them interesting, and his pictures of Anglo-Indian life have a fitting place in the series which comprises Mr. Rudyard Kipling’s humorous sketches.”

Indeed the “trotter,” or globe-trotter, the bugbear of Anglo-Indians, had been depicted in a similar light in “A Friend’s Friend,” in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. It would have been interesting to have Kipling’s opinion of his rival’s work in the Indian Railway Library, whose subjects, settings and characters so resembled his own, but did he record it?

A further link, of a very different nature, was forged between Gissing and Fforde during the few months they lived within walking distance of each other, at Ciboure and Saint-Jean-de-Luz respectively. Gissing was fond of animals – cats and dogs. So was Fforde, it would seem. He had a nice, well-behaved, black and white little dog called Beejy, who must have recognized in Gissing a friend of the canine species, and a problem arose when the time came for Fforde and his son Herbert to leave the Basque country for Ireland. Continental dogs being unwelcome visitors to the British Isles, Beejy had to find a new master, and he did. Gabrielle’s Recollections offer an image of the four human friends and Beejy during the farewell scene at the railway station, Beejy being rebaptized Bijou, though Gissing, who relished giving nicknames to men and animals, also occasionally called him Bije, MacBije or even little Mac. Charming anecdotes about the dog and his new master and mistress’s attachment to him, together with a touching account of the animal’s behaviour at the time of Gissing’s death at Ispoure, and shortly after it when, in the Saint-Jean-de-Luz cemetery, he led Gabrielle to his second master’s grave, will be found in an appendix to volume 9 of the *Collected Letters of George Gissing*. For a few more years Bijou was to be petted by his mistress, who liked to recall Gissing’s fondness for him and to report his latest “feats” in her correspondence with Clara Collet.

Whether Gissing and Fforde corresponded after the latter left France cannot be ascertained, but it is not unlikely. The fact that Gissing wrote into his address book the address that Fforde regarded as his most reliable, that of Henry S. King & Co., 9 Pall Mall, S.W., bankers and East India and army merchants, is at least indicative of a mutual intention to keep in touch. Fforde read *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and certainly watched for references to Gissing’s name in the newspapers that came his way. So his sadness may be imagined when, on 29 December 1903, he saw that his friend had just died “near Saint-Jean-de-Luz,” as most English

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newspapers put it. Doubtless in the next few weeks and months he met Gissing’s name more than once in print, so numerous were the assessments of his life and works in the press, from dailies to weeklies and monthlies.

The last known link in the chain of friendship is the letter of condolence Fforde sent to Gabrielle, who preserved it together with about fifty others which reached her from France, England, Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Tactfully he put off writing until the time when he was sure that the flow of messages of sympathy had decreased to a trickle. The following extracts from his four-page letter, dated 18 March 1903 [*sic*], speak for themselves.

You know how fond I was of your husband. He attracted me as no other man has done, &

my affection for him was very strong indeed. His face, as I saw him last, has haunted me, for I had a feeling that I should not see him again, and all along I have been uneasy about his health. Nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to have seen you both in England. Kits & I have often & often talked of you & him & wished you could have been with us. He was such a dear fellow, not only because of his profound knowledge & intellect, but because of that nameless attraction & sympathetic nature of his. I liked him from the first day I met him. The more I knew him the stronger the liking grew. I cannot tell you how much I felt his death, & the sense of its injustice. That he should be taken & others of us left, who are no good in the world. It has seemed to me that he felt he had not long to live. In "Henry Ryecroft" there is that note of resignation in spite of the sweetness & exquisite delicacy of the book. The dear fellow – I cannot think of him at any time without a feeling that I had not seen enough of him while I could. [...] I wish I could have looked in his face once more, & I cannot now think of him without tears. I am so sorry for you. But words are of so little avail. You have – as I have – the sense of "injustice" at his loss. It is a wrong sense, – though one cannot help feeling it. He was a wonderfully happy man considering his constant ill health & suffering, but he never could have been perfectly happy without health. Nor could you, nor I, nor any but those who find a sort of comfort in being ill & who have no intellect to use when they are well. What are you going to do[?] St Jean is not the place for you. Not only is it too full of memories but it is not the climate for you. Kitty is at Alassio just now – Italian Riviera – & later on goes to some place above Montreux. If you go to Switzerland you must see her. She is better, but not yet quite well. Are you likely to come over to England in the Summer? If so please let me know & I will try to meet you in London. I have been here since November and am very well indeed, far better than I have been for years. The climate is usually grey & rainy, except for the past fortnight which has been very fine & dry. But it is a very healthy place

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& bracing & equable. All the people have rosy cheeks & look strong & well. [...] Please write & tell me about yourself, & do not allow yourself to despair. There is still brightness in the world, & we make our own darkness.

A warm and intelligent letter, brimful of sympathy and dignified resignation, perhaps the best that Gabrielle received after Gissing's death, and chronologically the last of those she preserved. A fitting conclusion to an impressive series of messages in which the dominant note is one of revolt against the cruelty of fate.

When he wrote this letter, from a temporary address, Arthur Brownlow Fforde, then in his fifty-seventh year, still had almost three decades to live. Little information is available about those later years, but two major events are on record. In 1916 he published a novel with a fine title, *An Outraged Society* (G. Allen & Unwin), "Dedicated to Kate who has helped me so much," which one would like to have a chance to read.² Sometime about 1925 he married again, and settled with his wife, Mabel Griffiths, at Magagnosc, near Grasse, in the Alpes-Maritimes. A portrait of him by his wife's sister, Gwenny, was treasured by his daughter Kate. We reproduce it here. It shows in 1925 a fine figure of a man such as one had been led to imagine after reading Gissing's words on him and his own soulful letter to Gabrielle Fleury. He died in his home, the Villa Fforde, at Magagnosc, on 4 February 1933, and to all appearances, was buried in the Grasse region. It is a lucky chance that the publication of Gissing's Collected Letters should give one an opportunity to draw him from oblivion.

¹As will be seen subsequently, the spelling of the surname varied in the family according to branches and generations.

²The review of it published by the *Athenæum* ("Fiction," April 1916, p. 194) gives an unclear idea of its contents. English society, it would seem, is outraged by the unconventional behaviour of an Australian squatter. "The story of evasion and pursuit runs smoothly, with a sudden culmination rather prettily told."

[Warm thanks are due to the various persons whose assistance was vital while the material for this article was being collected: Linda Greenwood, Irish and Local Studies Librarian, Belfast Public Libraries; the Reverend J. Mayne, of Downpatrick; Patrick Forde, of Seaforde, Co. Down; and more particularly Arthur John Brownlow fforde, of Godalming, Surrey, who answered many questions with genial promptness and supplied the portrait of his great-grandfather.]

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**Between Emancipation and Restraint – Reading the Body
in *The Odd Women***

Mihoko Takeda
Nagoya Junior College

[The following is an abstract of an article originally published in the well-known Japanese monthly journal *Eigo Seinen*. For bibliographical details, see our October 1995 number, p. 44.]

George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) is an experimental novel by its theme as well as by its way of representing the female body in its discourse. The "odd" in the title means "sole" or "unpaired" and has a negative implication, especially when used to qualify unmarried women; that is those women who fail to accomplish their "natural" duties as wives and mothers, those whose evil negligence of women's roles should be remedied. Gissing is brave enough not only to address the problem of the so-called "surplus women" – a phenomenon about which W. R. Greg's essay "Why Are Women Redundant?" published in an 1862 number of the *Westminster Review* aroused such controversy – but also to be very much on the side of the feminists in the novel. By insightfully exploring the psyches of five "odd women," four of whom willingly or unwillingly remain single while the fifth is mismated, the novel focuses on the dilemmas with which are confronted the women who are struggling for freedom and independence. Gail Godwin's 1975 version of the novel, entitled *The Odd Woman*, unfortunately suggests that such issues are still major ones in contemporary society, thus implying that either women's circumstances have not changed much, or that Gissing was a century ahead of his time.

In those days of the nineteenth century when the sciences or pseudo-sciences were very popular, the body was an object of scrutiny not only in medical discourses but also in literary ones. The influence of such scientific theories as those of phrenology, invented by Franz Joseph Gall, or of the physiognomical studies of Johann Caspar Lavater and others could be traced in *The Odd Women*, especially in Everard Barfoot's way of looking at Rhoda Nunn. Everard, a so-called "New Man" and a counterpart of the "New Woman" represented by Rhoda, one of the heroines of the novel, scrutinizes her features when he meets her. By reading what her body signifies, Everard "long[s] to see further into her mind," "to probe the sincerity of the motives she profes[s]e[s]," and "to understand her mechanism" (114). Similarly, the structure of the novel

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in which this semiotics of the body prevails provokes the readers to read the bodily signs of the characters in the way Everard reads Rhoda. It is directly relevant that the medical gaze of the period focused on hysteria, on mental illness, more than any of the other pseudo-sciences.

Hysteria had long been thought to be a “female malady,” the very name of which derived from the Greek *hysteron*, or womb. Studies on hysteria were started by Jean-Martin Charcot, who experimented with hypnosis, then taken over by Bruer, the mentor of Freud, and ultimately by Freud himself. As Stephen Heath puts it, the movement from Charcot to Freud can be summarized as a shift from seeing to listening. And Freud’s and Bruer’s studies of Anna O’s case based on “the talking cure” suggest that the so-called hysterics were neither weak nor mentally deficient, as was once thought, but rather “people of the clearest intellect, and strongest will.” After all, hysteria was a form of “protest that social conditions made unspeakable in words,” and was instead signified by bodily symptoms.

Because of the popularity of mental disorder, late Victorian novels contain many hysterics as heroines – among others Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), a certain female narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Alma Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* (1897) and Monica Madden in *The Odd Women*. Significantly, for some reason or other, these heroines refuse to conform to the Victorian image of the ideal woman as the “angel in the house.” So it is appropriate to read the hysterical body of Monica Madden, and thus to gain a deeper comprehension of her unconsciousness, but also of the late Victorian English culture which gave rise to this so-called disease.

Gissing himself saw signs of “sexual anarchy” in those last decades of the nineteenth century during which the feminist campaigns of the New Woman challenged the sexual ideologies, and the trial of Oscar Wilde for homosexual practices blurred the borders between sexual differences. Onto this state of affairs were grafted crises in class and race relations which paralleled the crisis of gender, because women, laborers, and people in the British colonies demanded independence and equality. In *The Odd Women*, Monica embodies the transgressive power to transform the social and cultural borderlines of gender and class. And, through his representation of her, Gissing seems to show how problematic and uncertain is the idea of the “nature” of women, especially in the midst of such social changes.

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Monica’s hysteria – the semiotics of her body – subverts the two types of discourses which construct the “natural” woman. The first one, which Greg emphasized in his article “Why Are Women Redundant?”, concerns her “natural” duties as wife and mother. Monica marries the unattractive Widdowson simply because he can offer her a way out of her low-paid hard work at a draper’s shop. Although she is the daughter of a middle-class doctor, she has to earn her own living after his death, like her two spinster sisters, Alice and Virginia. In the beginning, she is a rather conventional girl, no feminist at all, and is thus afraid of entering Rhoda’s “old maid factory,” but she begins to reason and to think; and she courageously protests against the “natural” duties of wedlock which her husband tries to impose upon her. To be sure, her rational assertions, which are the outcome of her association with Rhoda and Mary, and the physiological repulsion she feels for him bring home to us the fact that such a discourse is not natural, but rather a social construct.

Another discourse, which is unconsciously undermined by Monica’s body itself, is one that naturalizes heterosexual love. In *The Odd Women*, as Nina Auerbach points out in *Communities of Women*, “relations between women take on a quiet primacy that makes of them a more fundamental motivating force than ‘natural’ love between the sexes.” Monica’s attitude towards female fellowship with them might seem very ambivalent; she longs for romantic love

with a man and wants to escape from the world of odd women. But her unconsciousness makes it clear that fellowship with women is of greater importance to her. Even her hysterical love for Bevis seems to spring from the fear of losing the support of women: "Perhaps the reason was that she felt more hopelessly an outcast from the world of honourable women, and therefore longed in her desolation for the support of a man's love" (281). Obviously her feeling towards Rhoda could be a kind of homosexual love. In the triangular relationship between Rhoda, Everard, and herself, we might be led to think that Monica loves Everard, because she behaves as though she loved him more than her husband and lets the detective mistakenly assume that Everard, not Bevis, is her lover. But, as a matter of fact, Monica considers her conversation with Everard valuable as an opportunity to talk "about Rhoda"; as she remarks to Everard, "a woman [i.e., Rhoda] may be as much a mystery to another woman [i.e., Monica] as she is to a man [i.e., Everard]" (223), and she dares to confess to Rhoda: "My interest in Mr. Barfoot was only on your account" (359). Isn't this clearly a confession of love?

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As is shown in Freud's studies on Dora's case, hysteria is often linked with homosexuality or bisexuality. In the process of struggle between Freud's heterosexually-oriented discourse and Dora's silenced homosexual desire for Mrs. K. which her hysterical body eloquently reveals, Freud was forced to admit that "the hysteric identifies with members of both sexes, cannot choose one sexual identity." This lesson which Freud learned from Dora's unconsciousness teaches us that any discourse that naturalizes the romantic heterosexual love is fiction. And in Gissing's text, it is Monica's body itself that exposes its fictionality to us, when we try to read and listen to what her hysterical body expresses. Thus, her body becomes a political body with the power to threaten the ideologies which support the Victorian patriarchal society.

In the final analysis we should nonetheless observe that Gissing's attitude towards feminism and female sexuality is a very complex one. On the one hand, we are impressed with his intuitive apprehension of women's agony and anxiety, but on the other hand, we can not but think that the tone of his references to some types of women who bring male victims to ruin sounds too severe. Obviously his views on women are contradictory; therefore it seems inevitable that he should be called a feminist by some scholars, and a misogynist by others.

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Shan F. Bullock: Gissing's Admirer and an Ingenious Short Story Writer

Masahiko Yahata
Beppu University Junior College

In three issues of the *Gissing Journal* (October 1992, January and April 1994), Robert L. Selig mentioned the life and work of a Northern Irish novelist, Shan F. Bullock (1865-1935), and introduced his reviews of Gissing's novels.¹

Coincidentally, I too had been making research on both novelists, but I never suspected that there was any connection between them. Therefore I was delightfully surprised to learn from Selig's articles that Bullock read Gissing's novels so extensively and passed favorable comments upon them.

I discovered Bullock when I came upon an article about him in *Lost Fields*, a supplement to the May 1992 issue of a monthly magazine devoted to politics and the arts in Northern Ireland, entitled *Fortnight*. This supplement featured six Ulster novelists, including Bullock, whose books are scarcely read to-day but deserve wider recognition and more adequate discussion.² I was so much interested in Bruce Stewart's assessment of Bullock's career³ that I resolved to make further research on him.

Although Bullock was born in a Protestant family in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, he developed a strong sympathy with the Catholics. He changed his given names, John William, to a Catholic name, Shan F. It derived from "Shane Fadh's Wedding," a story in William Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830).⁴ In his autobiography, *After Sixty Years* (1931), Bullock himself recognized his sympathy with the Catholics. He "preferred their company," found it easier to portray them in a book, and went on to say:

They seemed more picturesque and homely and lovable, were less worldly and aggressive, had a sense of humour all their own and a habit of kindness, too; they had more stories and told them better, knew little yet had great old knowledge, were very poor and somehow rich. Perhaps, in a word, they charmed because they were real Irish.⁵

When Bullock described the drilling and fighting of the Catholic and Protestant militias in his novella, "The Awkward Squads" (1893), he gave a more vivid description of the Catholic squads. Their drilling, arguments and quarrels are really "picturesque."

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However, although Bullock developed a sympathy for the Catholics in this way, he also called himself a "poor child of a world between two gate-houses."⁶ According to John Wilson Foster, these "two gatehouses" stand for England and Ireland, Protestant and Catholic.⁷ On many occasions, Bullock tried to give a faithful picture of his troubled province with impartial views of both communities. For instance, his primary intention in "The Awkward Squads" was to criticise severely the extreme wings of both communities, the Oranges and the Fenians. He caricatured both squads, showing how "awkward" and cowardly they were. Thus the Fenian squads were drilling in a ruined castle one day, when they saw the Orange squads approaching the castle. They hid in the ivy behind the walls and let the Oranges enter the castle. Then some of the Fenians dropped out of the ivy with a thud. Whereupon both Oranges and Fenians ran away. But, finally, the day came when they had to meet and fight. Bullock drew the funniest caricature of the battle. The weapons of the Fenians were heavy sticks, those of the Oranges gun-butts and belt-buckles:

It was a glorious fight, worthy of the tradition of old Ireland, manfully

fought, stubbornly endured – a fight which abundantly proved that Irishmen are still able to settle their little difficulties, whether social or political, by force of their own right arms.

May the Awkward Squads never meet in a worse cause!⁸

Bullock expressed his admiration for Gissing's novels, saying that "as pictures of certain grades of London life they have permanent value."⁹ I believe that Bullock's novels also have permanent value as pictures of the chaotic state of life in Ulster, i.e. of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics. And I also believe that his novels should be studied by all who are concerned about this particular problem, as much as Gissing's novels are "to be studied by all who care for literature."¹⁰

Let me consider another short story by Bullock which is better structured and more ingenious in its faithful portrayal of his home province. It is entitled "A State Official" (1893). Its setting is a small County Cavan village, Raheen, and the protagonist a postmaster called Dan. An old Protestant came to live in a farmhouse from which the Catholic owner, a widow, had been evicted. Although the Catholic villagers boycotted this old man, Dan tried to keep company with him and neglected their warning not to talk or do any deal with him, and he rebuked them with these words: "Ye call it a cause to leave a man without a bite to eat or a dud to wear, or a soul to cross words with!"¹¹ Then every villager placed a boycott upon Dan, too.

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Overwhelmed by loneliness, he entered other people's houses without permission and loudly vented his political opinions. One day, as his impudent behaviour was more than they could tolerate, a party of men with blackened faces broke into his house and one of them fired a gun toward the roof. The shock was such for Dan that he had a heart attack, and the next day he left the post-office.

This story seems to be regarded as Bullock's masterpiece. It was selected for inclusion in *Irish Short Stories* (1948) and, a few decades later, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991).¹² But if I had to select those of his short stories that bear closer resemblance to Gissing's, I would opt for those in *Ring o' Rushes* (1896), a collection in which is depicted another aspect of life in Ulster, the deprived or impoverished state of the people. Robert Selig points out that one of these stories, "The Emigrant," could well have come out of Gissing's own *Human Odds and Ends* (1898).¹³ "They Twain" is another.

It is concerned with the marriage of a seemingly arrogant man, Martin Hynes, and the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, Jane Fallon. Martin needed a large dowry from Jane's father in order to pay off his debts. When Jane heard her lover disputing the dowry with her father and calling her "the heifer," she decided to break her engagement. She told Martin and her family of her decision, but none of them would hear of it. As the wedding day drew near, she became more sullen and miserable. On the appointed day she refused to show up at the ceremony. Instead she went weeding in her little garden patch, dressed in her work-a-day garments. Her family, the guests and Martin came hurrying up to her. Then the bridegroom took her hands and said, "[L]ook me in the face and answer the truth. Here before all of us say that ye won't marry me."¹⁴ She was so struck by his manliness and found him so handsome that she finally agreed to marry him.

Another story in the collection, "They that Mourn," might have been included in Gissing's *A Victim Circumstances and Other Stories* (1927). There was once a poor old couple living in a small market town. Their son had emigrated to the United States and lived in Chicago. This couple, who look so pitiable, worked very hard for weeks to produce a few pounds of butter, which brought them a small sum when they sold it at the market. Out of the money, the husband, Tim, was allowed sixpence for his own use. He was going to spend it on tobacco, a weekly

newspaper, a pair of bootlaces and a glass of porter. While he was wondering whether he should give up the newspaper and have two glasses of porter, a neighbour came up to him with a

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message from the post-office, advising him that there was a letter for him. When he had the letter in hand and saw the Chicago post-mark, he did not doubt that it was from his son, Padeen. It was two years since he had received his son's last letter, with which a photo of him as a successful businessman and a money order had been enclosed. This new letter, however, was from Padeen's oldest friend saying that he had died of typhus. On learning of their son's death, the woman left off shopping, and the husband gave her back his sixpence.

This pathetic story reminds me of those "victims of circumstances" in Gissing's "One Way of Happiness" and "The Fate of Humphrey Snell."

I agree with Selig's view that "Bullock's short stories and novels resemble Gissing's in the tendency to emphasize defeat and frustration."¹⁵ But, at the same time, I notice a vital difference between them. Certainly Gissing's characters are defeated and frustrated, but I find "hope" in some of them. Hope can be detected not only in his long novels like *The Unclassed* and *A Life's Morning*, but also in such short stories as "Humplebee," "Christopherson" and "The Schoolmaster's Vision." Humplebee is a defeated hero in that he was dismissed from Mr. Chadwick's office, deceived by a swindler and lost his new job, too. But his fiancée never gave him up, and so he determined to begin a new life with her. "Christopherson" is another defeated hero because he spent his fortune on books, became impoverished and lost his London abode. When seeing the huge mass of his books, his relative in the country refused to accommodate him and his wife. This made Mrs. Christopherson ill. Eventually, however, the relative allowed them to bring a few volumes with them and live in her home. Dr. Donne in "The Schoolmaster's Vision" was frustrated in his humdrum, tedious teaching job. Then he became captivated by one of his pupils' widowed mother and ran away from his school. But, hearing that she was to marry again and that she was leaving her son to the care of relatives, he shook off his illusion and resolved to pursue his routine patiently, believing that it would lead to success.

These stories indeed appeal to me because they seem to show that even a defeated and frustrated man can lead a happy life if he does not lose his honesty and sincerity. Bullock stated that "[to] think of Gissing as a humorist, except of the grimmest and most unconscious type, [is] like thinking of flowers in an East End slum."¹⁶ Certainly the above-mentioned stories look grim, pathetic, and even depressing in some ways, but Gissing's true message in them was one of sympathy, warmth and hope. Had he written nothing more than such really grim novels and

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short stories as *Workers in the Dawn*, *New Grub Street*, "The Day of Silence" and "The Light on the Tower," he could not have enjoyed the worldwide reputation he enjoys to-day. He would be read and discussed by only a handful of enthusiasts, exactly as Bullock is.

Bullock's humour is no less grim than Gissing's and we can hardly find any hope in his characters. John Wilson Foster aptly points out that Bullock's lack of sympathy with his own characters "drains his fictional world of warmth and life, despite the quirky humor."¹⁷ I suspect that this accounts for his failure to attract as many readers as Gissing. In a tribute to his fellow-writer's memory, Bullock referred to him as "Poor Gissing."¹⁸ Certainly Bullock's own life was not so rough and eventful and he lived longer than Gissing. He may also have lived a happier life. Yet, nowadays, while almost every book by Gissing can be read in new editions, virtually all Bullock's books are out of print. In view of which, I feel inclined to say in turn "Poor Bullock."

However, some of Bullock's short stories, including those I mentioned above, remain so

“valuable as social history”¹⁹ and they are so ingenious in their plots and realistic descriptions that I hope they will eventually receive due and lasting recognition.

¹Respectively, “Gissing and Shan F. Bullock: The First Reference in the Chicago Press to Gissing’s Chicago Fiction and Adventures,” pp. 1-6; “The Critical Response to Gissing and Commentary about him in the *Chicago Evening Post*,” pp. 26-37 (first instalment), and pp. 15-22 (concluded).

²The other novelists featured were Michael McLaverty (1904-1992), Janet McNeill (1907-), Forrest Reid (1875-1947), Lynn Doyle (1873-1961) and George A. Birmingham (1865-1960).

³“A Confusion of Strains,” pp. 14-16.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 14

⁵London: Sampson Low, 1931, p. 34.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷“Bullock, Shan F. (1865-1935),” *Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature*, ed. by Robert Hogan (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 129.

⁸*The Awkward Squads and Other Stories* (London: Cassell, 1893), p. 120.

⁹“Shan F. Bullock Estimates Art of Late George Gissing...,” in Robert L. Selig’s “The Critical Response to Gissing and Commentary about him in the *Chicago Evening Post*” (concluded), p. 16.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*The Awkward Squads and Other Stories*, p. 157.

¹²*Irish Short Stories*, ed. by George A. Birmingham (London: Faber, 1948), pp. 212-24; *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Vol. II (Londonderry: Field Day, 1991, rpt. 1992),

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pp. 1066-1070. The general editor is Seamus Deane, and the story was selected by one of the editors, Augustine Martin.

¹³“Gissing and Shan F. Bullock,” p. 5.

¹⁴*Ring o’ Rushes* (New York: Stone & Kimball, 1896), p. 88.

¹⁵“Gissing and Shan F. Bullock,” p. 5.

¹⁶“Shan F. Bullock Estimates Art of Late George Gissing...,” p. 15.

¹⁷*Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature*, p. 130.

¹⁸“Shan F. Bullock Estimates Art of Late George Gissing...,” p. 15.

¹⁹*Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature*, p. 130.

[I would like to express my thanks to Professor Robert L. Selig who answered my inquiries and helped me to complete this article.]

A Forgotten Assessment of *Veranilda*

[Bibliographies rarely include PhD. theses because they are rarely accessible to the general reader. As a rule, in the distant past, they were not printed, and only the candidates and their universities held copies. However, there were exceptions, and the recent discovery of a copy of a University of Pennsylvania thesis, printed under the title *Ancient Rome in The English Novel*, by Randolph Faries, 2d (Philadelphia, 1923) shows that interesting work, even though it was never available in bookshops, was sometimes privately printed – and promptly forgotten. The copy in question was once the property of Haverford College, from whose library it was

apparently borrowed only once – in 1933. Did Samuel Vogt Gapp, the author of a still useful PhD. thesis, *George Gissing, Classicist*, also “presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania,” know of his predecessor in the field of Gissing studies? If he did, he chose not to list *Ancient Rome in the English Novel* in his bibliography. It is perhaps a pity, for Faries wrote at some length on *Veranilda* in an appreciative manner. The pages we reprint here come after passages devoted to a number of novels that were known to Gissing: *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *Hypatia*, *The Gladiators*, *Ben Hur*, and *Marius the Epicurean*. Randolph Faries was a pioneer. - P. C.]

George Gissing in *Veranilda* (1904) seems to be the first author of a novel of Roman life to derive much inspiration from Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Gissing resembles Pater in his exact scholarship, his love of Greek things, and his estheticism. *Veranilda* was to have in it the love of the classics, but is unfinished. Yet it is evident that only a few chapters at the end are missing, and what we have of *Veranilda* is finished with Gissing’s finest and most delicate

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touches. The late Mr. Frederic Harrison says of Gissing in the preface to *Veranilda*, that in this novel, “his poetical gift for local color, his subtle insight into spiritual mysticism and, above all, his really fine scholarship and classical learning had ample field.” Mr. Harrison considers *Veranilda* “far the most important book which George Gissing ever produced,” and most readers of Gissing will concur in this opinion. Though the subject-matter of *Veranilda* is somewhat different from that of *Marius the Epicurean*, there is much similarity between the two books in the way subjects are presented, and at times Gissing’s purity of style approaches that of Pater. In many respects *Veranilda* is the greatest novel of its kind. Not only does it show thoroughness and accuracy in scholarship, but it has very genuine characterization and atmosphere. The spirit of *Veranilda* is the spirit of the time it describes, – the spirit of disillusion, unrest, and uncertainty amid scenes of strife, sorrow, and decay. Yet there are gleams of hope to be found in Gissing’s great novel, which portrays life in and near Rome in the “Era of Justinian.” While the outward, physical life of fallen Rome is portrayed accurately, as it would appear to the eye, the special excellence of *Veranilda* lies in its exact reproduction of the spirit of the time with which it deals. In this respect it probably excels any other historical novel in English – bar none, – and deserves a high position as pure literature. Moreover in his portrayal of life in the past, Gissing has not failed to establish its connection with life of the present; realistic effect is never lacking in *Veranilda*. Yet even when portraying life in the most general terms, Gissing continually shows the same selection and preference for the esthetic, the same search for the beautiful, which marks the work of Walter Pater in *Marius the Epicurean*.

The plan of *Veranilda* is more complete than that of most historical novels; it deals chiefly with real historical characters and actual historical events, yet there is not too much formal history in the novel. It was carefully written after a most thorough study of the best modern writers (especially Gibbon), who deal with the age of Justinian and Belisarius, and of the remains of the literature of the time. The scene is Rome and Central and Southern Italy, and local color is obtained not at second-hand, but from the author’s direct observation of the places he describes, and a careful review of extant documents concerning them. Gissing had spent some time travelling in Italy and *Veranilda* may be considered his most original novel. In selecting the scene and the time of *Veranilda*, Gissing evidently intended to write a novel which should convey a sense of Rome’s former greatness. The center and source of power of the

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Roman Empire had shifted to Constantinople, though even here the power of Rome was none

too strong. Felix Dahn's two novels, *A Struggle for Rome* (1876), and *The Scarlet Banner* (1894), deal with the same period with which *Veranilda* deals; *The Scarlet Banner* being concerned with the overthrow of the Vandal king, Gelimer, by Belisarius. *A Struggle for Rome* is like *Veranilda* in its subject matter, since it is concerned with the struggle between the Ostrogoths and Belisarius, and mentions some of the same characters that appear in *Veranilda*. The characterization of Totila, the Gothic king, especially suggests *Veranilda*. But while *A Struggle for Rome* is Dahn's greatest novel, it does not appear that Gissing was so much indebted to it in *Veranilda*, as to original historical sources. The period with which *Veranilda* deals comes somewhat after the true end of Pagan Rome.

Gissing preserves a fine unity of effect in making the events of his story center about Rome, and not about Constantinople. "The Eternal City" lies there as of old, and its inhabitants cannot shake off the feeling that it still is "eternal." The wise Justinian is to them a foreign tyrant, under whose governor they are harshly oppressed. The great commander Belisarius, though he has temporarily defeated the Goths, has now left Italy, and is no longer thought of as deliverer of Rome; the fame of Totila is spreading. Throughout this book, with its descriptions of ruined towns, ruined families, and the ruins of the City of Rome itself, one feels the former greatness of Rome. Everywhere is decay, everywhere is to be seen a dying out of the best elements of Roman civilization. Many of the scenes which form the setting for the principal action in the story are typical of this lingering death of the great city. While everywhere the old Rome is dying out, is there springing up anything new to take its place? Even though the novel is incomplete, one can see that the author means to show conclusively that the Goths will furnish new life, and new strength, to Rome and to civilization.

In *Hypatia*, Kingsley had portrayed "the dying world" of Rome, especially in the chapter headed by that phrase. In *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater had pointed out the coming downfall of Rome in several different ways. He had said, for example, that the Germanic tribes, whom Marcus Aurelius defeated, were merely the advance guard of a vast body of wandering tribes destined to overrun the Roman world. Marcus Aurelius in his triumph over the Germans, appeared to Marius, "chiefly as one who had made the great mistake," as a man who had failed. "The most Christian" Stoic Emperor, in pursuing his thoroughly Roman policy of enforcing

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worship of the gods with an iron hand at Rome, and ruthlessly subjugating peoples on the frontiers of the Empire, had failed to save Rome from becoming more and more a nation of "coarse, vulgar people," an Empire that failed. In *Veranilda* we see the impressive remains of that great failure. Its psychology, like that of most of Gissing's work, is the psychology of failure. As the decayed condition of his old home appears to be symbolic of failure to Marius, near the end of *Marius the Epicurean*, so all through *Veranilda* the decay of material things seems to symbolize the downfall and death of "Eternal Rome." Yet the gleams of hope, which appear through the gloom, are symbolic of a new life. While no such large contrast is made in *Veranilda*, as is made in *Hypatia*, the hope of Christianity in a failing world is made very real.

Aside from the scene depicting the murder at the villa, there are few sensational scenes in *Veranilda*. Moreover, in most of the scenes of importance, it is noticeable that only a limited number of people appear. The greater part of the novel is pitched in a minor key. There are countless incidents of importance, whisperings, doubts, uncertainties; trivial words often have a hidden meaning, trifling actions assume great importance. The remains of Rome's grandeur are suggested in the character of Flavius Anicius Maximus, a worthy descendant of an ancient and noble family; and his sister Petronilla serves to keep before our minds something of the uncompromising pride of any descendant of an old Roman family. A similar pride appears in the characters of the Deacon Leander and Vigilius. But more fitting messengers of God are the holy Abbott Benedict and his monks. The scenes about the monastery are drawn with a masterful

touch; one feels the genuine influence for good, which the holy Abbott has over Basil, and the real help which he gives to Basil, in the difficulty with which Basil is confronted. St. Benedict appears as a man who leads a genuinely spiritual life, with insight enough to solve all of Basil's difficulties.

Veranilda herself is a truly radiant figure, and it is in justice that the novel is named for her. She does not often appear upon the scene, it is true, but the sincerity of her character and her overwhelming loveliness are drawn with convincing strokes. Her innocence at all times, especially when in Marcian's power, and her faith in those into whose care she is entrusted, are points of strength in her character, not of weakness; and she proves herself truly great in her forgiveness of Basil. In his delineation of character especially, Gissing has at times equalled the exquisite touches of Pater. How little is told of St. Benedict or of Veranilda, yet how definitely

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their characters are impressed upon the reader! Veranilda is beyond question, the character who best represents beauty of body and soul, in the novel of Roman life, and, I believe, surpasses Pater's Marius in representing a "soul naturally Christian." In any case, one feels that in *Veranilda*, as in *Marius the Epicurean*, there always exists the esthetic conception of an inseparable connection between physical and spiritual beauty. Gissing followed Pater in showing that the life of Rome could be portrayed as being far from entirely physical and material; and he showed more definitely than Pater, that Roman life could be presented in the form of a novel, with realistic effect, yet with the exercise of a discriminating selection of the finer elements of subject matter, and in a style delicately fitted to portray these finer elements.

**Gissing in the *Boston Evening Transcript*
His Interview by Joseph Anderson**

Pierre Coustillas

Ever since the publication of Gissing's diary in 1978, if not earlier for those scholars who read or consulted it in the Berg Collection, it has been known that an interview of him, which he revised before it was printed, was published in the *Boston Evening Transcript* on 13 June 1896 (p. 24). Considering that this interview has remained buried where it enjoyed an ephemeral life, in the newspaper itself, and that the letters in which the interviewer and his work were mentioned have now been printed in Volume 6 of Gissing's *Collected Letters*, it seems appropriate to make the interview easily available.

Who was Joseph Anderson, the interviewer? He is known essentially as the brother of Mary Anderson (1859-1940), the once famous American actress whose career was a short one, since she retired from the stage at the age of twenty-eight. Mary published two books – *A Few Memories* (1896) and *A Few More Memories* (1936) – in which she gave an account of herself and occasionally mentioned her brother "Joe," who was three years her junior. Since Gissing's diary and correspondence show us Joseph living in London in 1896-1897, it may reasonably be supposed that he was the correspondent of the *Boston Transcript* in England. His article on Gissing and his work is of special interest in several respects – it testifies to a good general knowledge of the subject; it was written by a man who met Gissing and immediately wrote

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down his personal impressions, and it is apparently the only article about himself that Gissing

was asked to revise and approve of. So Anderson's report must be regarded as more reliable than that of John Northern Hilliard, the American journalist of Rochester, N. Y., in the *Book Buyer* for February 1898.

The circumstances under which the article was written can be summed up briefly. Some time in April 1896 Gissing was asked for an interview by Joseph Anderson. They met on 1 May and had lunch at the Café Royal, a well-known restaurant in Regent Street which Gissing visited on other occasions. "Very decent young fellow," he noted in his diary. He received, revised, and returned the article on 21 May, and was thanked for his assistance on 2 June. On 1 July he received a copy of the printed version from Julia Sprague, his old Boston friend, and another from Anderson himself on 1 August. Letters to Algernon, Ellen, Bertz and Clara Collet (4, 7, 9 and 24 May) give some details about the encounter. Obviously Anderson had come across articles on Gissing in the American press shortly before. He assured him that his reputation was growing in the United States, that he was becoming "popular" there. There was some truth in this, but Gissing observed that he did not yet see the consequences of this new popularity. "A very decent fellow, intelligent & cordial," he wrote to his brother. Apparently the article attracted some attention – it was reprinted in an abridged form under the title "George Gissing: The Novelist of the Masses," in *Current Literature* for August 1896, p. 98.

Novelist and journalist were to meet on two more occasions. On 9 January 1897 they came across each other in the British Museum Reading-Room, and Anderson told Gissing that he spent his days there "to save a fire at his lodgings." On 4 February they again chanced to meet in the same place. Gissing's diary tells us that Anderson "introduced me to his brother-in-law, [Antonio de] Navarro [Papal Chamberlain, F.S.A., K.C.S.G.], husband of the famous Mary. It surprised me to see an insignificant little man, darkish, straight-haired, with regular features – nothing notable. We went and had tea together. Only good thing about the man was his firm hand-grasp." A few days later Gissing was driven away from home, and chance contrived no other meeting between him and the young American. Whether Anderson wrote again on his acquaintance still has to be determined. Nothing is known of his career. American reference books being silent about him, it may be surmised that he settled in England, in the shade of his sister and brother-in-law who, by the mid-1890s, had made their home in Worcestershire at the

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Court Farm, Broadway, an old house that still stands on the north side of the main street, only a few hundred yards away from the churchyard where so many of Gissing's maternal relatives, Bedfords, Russells and Shailers, are buried.

George Gissing as he is.
The First Capable Novelist of the English Masses.

His Parentage and His Home – A London Man Par Excellence – Quoted by Serious Students as
a Sociological Authority – A Steady Growth in Power and Fortune.

Mr. George Gissing lives among the Surrey hills in the village of Epsom, not far from the racing ground known as Epsom Downs, where for these many generations the famous Derby has been run. For one week in the year, particularly for one day in the year, this village becomes the national pivot. Thousands upon thousands of Londoners, and thousands upon thousands of Englishmen, Scotchmen and Irishmen, to say nothing of the other nations of the earth, cluster here like many swarms of bees upon a single little tree. But for the rest of the year, Epsom is a silent, almost sleepy, village. In this place Mr. Gissing now does all his work, and it was here that what we consider his masterpiece, was written.

It is a familiar picture to see Mr. Gissing and his little boy walking through the woods and

lanes and over the hills of the pretty country round about Epsom. Though he has lived in the country for some years, Mr. Gissing is distinctly a London man. He is the higher type of Londoner, that there is no mistaking. London is written in the very cut of his clothes, the half-sad, far-reaching glance of his eyes, in the peculiar calm and earnestness of his face. Having said so much, it may be well to finish the portrait. His figure inclines to give one the impression of height. His long hands suggest flexibility of nature. His face is composed, among various elements, of two essentials – spirit and intellect, and two smaller traits, cleanly-cut humor and a most sensitive perceptive faculty. His slender auburn moustache has had all the gold in it burnt to the surface by exposure to sun and wind. His dark, wavy hair grows back from the brow, giving an open frankness to the keen features beneath it. There is experience written in every lineament, tolerance in each line, charity over all. It is an unusual face and uncommonly attractive. Mr. Gissing's father, who died in 1870, was a noteworthy man. He was one of the most energetic and serviceable of the inhabitants of Wakefield. He was a thorough character – earnest, alive, responsible. He was an able botanist, and collected a very fine

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herbarium, publishing during the later decades of his life various works on the flora of his native shire of York. From him George Gissing learnt fortitude and perseverance, and in these he has far out-grown the watchful trainer of his youth. His conversation gives the taste of sweetness, and the brawny outlines of his thought are as distinct as they are distinguished. Mr. Gissing is a man capable of adjusting himself to persons of smaller capacities than his own, and betrays no visible marks of casually calling down from his natural altitude.

Some years ago, the *Spectator* said of the writer: "Whether Mr. Gissing does or does not ultimately attain a high place in imaginative literature, there is no doubt that *Workers in the Dawn* is a very powerful work....Unfortunately it is the world of poverty and misery, and the dark side of human nature with which Mr. Gissing is best acquainted. Vice, with the dire effect it produces on human beings, both physically and morally, when generation after generation lives and dies without a hope or even wish for anything better, is drawn with terrible reality." As years go on the fibre of his work grows rapidly closer, and when we come to *In the Year of Jubilee* we arrive at the fullest expression of his art. This is his last important work, for he has published only two short stories since its appearance, two years ago, *The Paying Guest* and *Sleeping Fires*. Both compactly wrought, display the artist's touch. In his later work no ragged edges are visible, no forgotten scaffolding mars the clean outline of his literary fabric. The grain is as solid, the surface as polished, the body as enduring as oak.

It was in the year 1880 that the *Spectator* left the question of Gissing's reaching a high place in imaginative literature open. That question is certainly no longer an open one. There is no shadow of doubt that his place in literature will become permanent as well as high. He deals with an epoch and with a large phase of life: he deals with truth. What is the truth of the tendencies of our time? What is the truth hidden under the externals of everyday life among the million? Mr. Gissing gives us some beginnings of this truth. The great statistician of the metropolis, Mr. Charles Booth (who must not be, as he has so often been, confused with the Salvation Army Booth), alludes in his work on *London Life and Labor* to the faithful portrayal of this life by Gissing. He is, indeed, one of the rare living novelists who is not misleading, or, just now, perverting, to the immature mind. Blackmore and Henry James alone have Gissing's truthfulness of touch and authority. James alone, great as his power of delineation is, excels him in searching and minute grasp of detail, yet not in grasp of character. Gissing is a slow grower in

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fame, but there are no mushrooms of fame. He is young, but he has already built his pyramid in

enduring granite. It is a pyramid that will mark the confines and borders of a far-spreading desert of nineteenth century existence to future generations. The desert in which his pyramid stands is the bleak waste of the lower middle class of England – particularly of London. The lower middle class: the term is scarcely understood yet, though millions are embraced within its limits. Eight centuries ago the lower middle class did not exist except in the villeins and vassals of the great nobles; classes were fewer. Five centuries ago the forefathers of the present lower middle class might have been found in the worst class of tapsters, weavers, joiners, tinkers and petty tailors. A few centuries later this class budded forth into bumptious men and pretentious wenches: the men quoted Latin badly, turned their hands to barbering – villanous trick – teaching as well as practising mustard-making, beer-brewing, soap-boiling, chimney-sweeping, tooth-pulling and a complexity of the then crude and vulgar crafts, some of which have since developed into fortune wheels, some into sciences. Then we come to our own time, when people whose precursors were once bondslaves, villeins and vassals have come to keep a servant themselves, and to use some of the semblances of refinement – small tradesmen with piano-playing wives and daughters: of such is the lower middle class of London largely made up.

Mr. Gissing is the first writer to deal capably and from a serious point of view with this class. Dickens saw what was grotesque in this vast multitude of humanity, and was able to seize upon it as a vital medium for his genius for caricature to play upon. But as we observe the life for ourselves, though it is ever changing, it is, and must have been only forty years ago, less jovial and more real than Dickens pictures it. To-day it is handled with complete sincerity and merciless impartiality by Mr. Gissing. Going beyond what he has written in his books, he has said to the writer that he arrived long ago at an inevitable ending-point, in summing up the lower life of London. He says he is convinced that its members are morally, mentally and bodily the most squalid human beings on the face of civilisation. It is a large admission for an Englishman to make, but there can be little doubt of its absolute truth. This and other searching studies of life, always regarded with flexible observation, but with resolute judgment when conflicting elements have been balanced, constitute Mr. Gissing a high magistrate of our times, pronouncing an unbiased judgment upon a particular stratum of society. And how has he become a judge? Is he self-constituted, or has nature, in league with accident, thrust him upon

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the tribunal seat? Probably neither; a glance at his life will tell the story, and each one may form his own conclusion.

In 1878, at the age of twenty, George Gissing found himself in the streets of London, a stranger, with a few shillings in his pocket. He had come with a resolve. He would make a name by writing. He came from the town of Wakefield in the north of England – the town over which the halo of Goldsmith's "Vicar" still hangs. He found a poor lodging near Tottenham Court Road – a cheap and rough quarter of London. There he began the career of a writer, or in synonymous words, the struggle for life. He wrote much, but only a little was accepted from the pen of a mere boy. He was proud. He would toil for a month to earn a pound with his brains in preference to laboring a fortnight to earn the same sum with his hands. If he fought the fight, he should win the laurel. If he yielded to comfort, he should never rise, for he knew the parable of serving two masters. He struggled on and on, often going hungry, at one time being reduced to living in a cellar at a rental of two shillings a week. Year in and year out he saw the weight of the odds that were heaping up against him, and was forced to turn the education which he had obtained at Owens College, Manchester, to use, by teaching a few pupils. In these he was fortunate, for besides meeting agreeable persons, his compensation helped him to subsist and gave him time to observe, to study mankind and to write. This was the life that he lived. In poor surroundings, himself, his mind, however, inhabited no stuccoed nor sham-plastered building of

narrow limits, but the warm and vast outdoor temple of humanity, where he roamed at large with the sky and the murky clouds of London for his roof. His hunting grounds were in the north and towards the east of the great city. It is a popular mistake that he has treated of life in the East End. There, the lowest and the lower forms of life are found, but of these Mr. Gissing but rarely treats. Today in London there is the criminal, the low, the lower, the lower-middle and some six or eight higher classes, beginning with the great middle class. He has been impressed by these layers of social, mental and moral forces which are as distinctly marked in English life as the rich top soil of the earth is from the gravel, the rock and the coal from the clay, the lead from the silver, and the copper from the gold. The writer, but a few days ago, alluded to the great recent increase of readers in America of our author's works. Mr. Gissing said he did not himself know of it yet, though it had been hinted to him by the press. "I could understand," he said, "that though local knowledge might give me readers in England, I feared that the general

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sordidness of my subjects would deter people in other countries to whom the social conditions of this London life are necessarily unfamiliar." One can see how his question might be unanswerable to a modest writer of a simple and straightforward character, when speaking of his own work; but to the merest outsider, the solution of the question is easy. Americans thirst for genuine information and the wide-awake national mind is quick to detect truth from falsehood. Gissing's work carries conviction, and seems to gush out from some fountain of authority. The American reader does not know why it is so, but it lies in this important fact: Mr. Gissing does not give forth the superficial scintillations of a man who has merely glanced at a phase of life. He has lived for years in the very thick of the life he tells of, and has become saturated by the reality. In reading one of his pages, neither the honest nor the acute reader has to be told that the matter before him is sincere. Carlyle says that to convince another, one must be overwhelmingly convinced oneself. It can be said that Mr. Gissing is convinced. He does not think loosely. He knows what he thinks, and says what he means. These qualities are great factors in his increasing success in America. Allusion has been made to Gissing's masterpiece. There are few readers who would dissent from the judgment that *In the Year of Jubilee* is entitled to that rank. And the author himself considers it so. In some of this writer's books, especially the earlier ones, the construction is not so perfect, but here we have an absolutely harmonious work of art. The philosophy, the exquisite English, the independence, delicate humor and refined irony of the author entitle him, in the opinion of the writer, to a place beside the half-dozen best novelists of his time.

Joseph Anderson.

* * *

Book Review

The Poetry of George Gissing, edited by Bouwe Postmus. Studies in British Literature, Volume 17. Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.

This edition of *The Poetry of George Gissing* presents in an attractive bound volume the 33 poems in Gissing's manuscript notebook at Yale, *Verses by G. R. Gissing: 1869 to [1882]*, together with 24 additional poems from a variety of manuscript and published sources. The editor has provided an Introduction and useful notes. The poems themselves date from 1869

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when Gissing was 11, to 1900, although only three of the pieces were written after 1884 – the light-hearted “The Humble Aspirations of G. G., Novelist,” which he sent to Morley Roberts in 1889; “The *Lotus* on a sunny reach,” inveigled out of him during a holiday outing with Edward Clodd and other male friends in 1895; and “The Bedstead of Odysseus,” a translation into blank verse of *Odyssey* xxiii, 190-201 for inclusion in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903). One must conclude that Gissing’s aspirations as a poet were finally supplanted by his ambitions as a novelist during the writing of *Isabel Clarendon* at 7 K Cornwall Residences.

The poems are mainly juvenile pieces, among them “Ravenna,” his winning entry for the Owens College English Prize Poem in 1873, and the interesting “The Last Sigh of the Moor” which failed to win the following year. Gissing’s poems do not give evidence of a great poet in the making, but some of the verses composed between 1882 and 1884 do display increasing confidence and technical skill, notably the oddly titled “Danger?” which concludes the notebook. The poem is dated “Sunday evening. July 23. 1882.” We know that at that time Gissing was separated from his troublesome first wife, Nell, and at work on his never-to-be-published novel, “Mrs. Grundy’s Enemies.” The influence of Browning can be felt, in particular the Browning of “The Lost Mistress,” but Gissing has learned much, and allows the stanzas, like the suppressed feelings they express, to mount towards the playful ambiguity of the final line:

Say that, to feelings purely blended
I yield, and touch your lips;
Would modesty and faith offended
That kindly smile eclipse?
Or would your heart, divining duly
How mine would urge defence,
Allow the impulse, born more truly
Of spirit than of sense?

Another success is “The Death of the Children.” In the following concluding lines of the sestet, the gloomy vision of arrested play at the poem’s opening is answered in the consolatory “by toil unworn,” which prepares for the final subtle revaluation of the wintry death by fire:

And should they sorrow, that, by toil unworn,
The dear ones rest so early, the kind fate
Spare them the heat and burden of the noon?

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In spite of these occasional successes, it seems unlikely that Gissing would have found a truly individual poetic voice. He admired some of the coming poets of his generation. He praised John Davidson’s *Fleet Street Eclogues* and *Ballads and Songs*, for instance, and enjoyed Kipling immensely. “No one since Burns has set the vulgar speech to such irresistible melody,” he wrote of Kipling to Clara Collet in November 1896. But his own practices seem conventional, even sentimental. With the exception of “Carlyle’s Statue” and “The Death of the Children,” one finds little of the gritty social realism of his novels – the basis, one suspects, on which Gissing was most likely to have discovered a distinctively modern voice and idiom.

The main interest of this edition of Gissing’s poetry may well lie in its contribution to our understanding of Gissing’s life. Particularly interesting are the poems written in 1876, the year of Gissing imprisonment for theft and subsequent departure for America. Pierre Coustillas has already made available the *Six Sonnets on Shakespearean Heroines* (1982) – the first two written in Wakefield in August 1876, the others in Boston, Mass. This edition adds 7 more pieces from the same period. The most suggestive of these are “A Farewell” and “The Two

Gardens,” both from the notebook. “A Farewell” would seem to express Gissing’s mood on the eve of his departure for America and looks forward to a reunion with his love in the new world:

In yon’ new world I seek a home
Far, far from England’s shore;
Wait but a while and thou shalt come,
With me to weep no more!

In “The Two Gardens” the garden of seasonal decay is contrasted to the garden of the heart, where the flower of love never withers. It is questionable how far conventional verse forms can support a strictly autobiographical interpretation, but the poems clearly add a great deal to our understanding of Gissing’s state of mind during a period in his life for which there is little documentary material. One is grateful to Bouwe Postmus for this useful addition to Gissing studies. It is such a pleasure to be able to hold all of Gissing’s poems in one’s hand.

There was one interesting bibliographical detail not recorded in the notes. Gissing’s last published poem “The Bedstead of Odysseus” appeared originally in *The Student: The Edinburgh University Magazine* (New Century Number, January 1901) in an article “The Bed of Odysseus.” This was, in effect, Winter XV of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* with some

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variant readings, including “Lightly closing” for “Tightly closing” in line 7 of the translation – presumably a misprint.

John Sloan, Balliol College

Notes and News

The publication of Gissing’s *Collected Letters* is drawing to an end. Volume 8 is now ready at the publishers’, and will soon be available either direct from Ohio University Press or from booksellers. The galley proofs of volume 9 have been read and the illustrations for it have been selected. Doubtless after the whole edition is completed, unknown or unlocated letters will occasionally be offered for sale in antiquarian booksellers’ catalogues, but unless such letters emerge in large numbers – a very unlikely prospect – there will be little hope of ever seeing a tenth volume published by Ohio University Press. No attempt has yet been made to count the letters that are known to have been preserved (because quotations from them have appeared in auction or booksellers’ catalogues), but the originals of which have not been discovered. Still the editors are convinced that dozens of letters, a substantial proportion of them partly printed in the 1927 volume, and duly reprinted in the *Collected Letters*, will eventually emerge from oblivion. While we are reasonably sure that we have published all Gissing’s letters to James B. Pinker, we know that some of those to W. M. Colles are still missing. Letters to most members of the family – Margaret Bedford Gissing, Algernon, Catherine, Ellen and Walter, possibly also Margaret – will undoubtedly surface either singly or, more likely, in small batches. But is it reasonable to hope that the correspondence with A. J. Smith, the Henry Normans, Rosalind Travers and George Whale will some day reach some institutional library where they could be photocopied or transcribed? Probably not. In a number of cases profitable contacts have been made with descendants (grandsons and great-grandsons as a rule) of Gissing’s correspondents, but with one notable exception, the sought-for letters had been sold and, in one interesting case, although transcriptions of some letters had been preserved, they turned out to be copies of letters which had found their way to the Beinecke Library. So even though the age of major

discoveries is past, we can confidently look forward to the emergence of some more Gissing letters, known in part or altogether new. But at what price will they be offered?

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The prices of first editions are higher than ever, it would seem. Jarndyce's recent catalogue of XIXth Century Fiction contains four three-deckers: *Demos* (£650), *The Nether World* (John Quinn's copy, £1,200), *The Emancipated* (£900), and *New Grub Street* (second edition, £300). Copies of three three-deckers by Algernon are also described in the same catalogue: *A Village Hampden* (presentation copy to Martin Stewart, signed on 21 June 1890, £500), *A Masquerader* (£250), and *At Society's Expense* (£350). In America, the Boston Book Annex offers a Gissing collection of about 170 items, ranging from three-volume editions through scarce American editions to biographical and critical works of the last few decades for \$28,000. David Holmes in Philadelphia sells a collection of material concerning three Gissing books, *The Paying Guest*, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, and *The Town Traveller* for \$4,500.

B. P. Postmus, of the University of Amsterdam, has practically finished editing Gissing's memorandum book, held by the Huntington Library since 1961. The first entries were made by Gissing when he visited Edward Clodd at his seaside home (Whitsun 1895) and the last concerns the flat which the Gissing-Fleury trio rented at Boulogne-Billancourt, a Paris suburb, in June 1902. Very few indeed are the entries which do not yet make full sense. The connection between this memorandum book and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* was established in the introduction to the French translation of this title in 1966, but a large number of other entries, which would be regarded as obscure even by most specialists, have now been elucidated. The book will contain an introduction and over 300 notes. Meanwhile editorial work on Gissing's scrapbook is progressing satisfactorily.

A notice may occasionally be more significant than a long review. Thus the three lines devoted by *Nineteenth-Century Literature* to the revised edition of *George Gissing* in the Twayne English Authors Series at least show that the editor of that journal is aware that the status of Gissing in late Victorian fiction has been upgraded in the last few decades: "Revised to accommodate the wealth of Gissing materials – letters, editions, critical works – that has appeared since the first edition of this work in 1983. Selig's guide brings us up-to-date with an increasingly highly regarded author."

The Wakefield Express for 9 February 1996, p. 14, reported an event that is to affect a building to which Gissing's memory is linked. Under the title "Massive boost for arty projects"

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the article related how "two prestigious arts projects scooped National Lottery awards to the tune of £733,200." One of the grants will enable Public Arts, an independent charity organisation which promotes arts in the community, to purchase and refurbish the Orangery, Back Lane, which dates back to the 1760s. This building, which a hundred years ago was called Back Lane School, will become the new headquarters of the arts charity. There Gissing was the pupil of Miss Mary Susan Milner, then of the Rev. Joseph Harrison until his father's death in December 1870. It is no wonder that a member of the Gissing Trust wished the Trust were eligible to apply for Lottery money.

Recent Publications

Volume

Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds.), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Eight, 1900-1902*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996. Off-white paper-covered boards with a grey tape binding and, on the spine, gilt titling on dark green panel. Dark green dust-jacket with pattern in light green. xlix + 444 pages. \$70.00. ISBN 0-8214-1144-6.

Articles, reviews, etc.

F. B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: His Life and Friends*, London: Macmillan, 1992. Gissing appears on pp. 202-03, 209, 244-45, 246.

Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell, and the Victorians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. A revised edition of the 1990 text, but the passages on Gissing are unchanged.

William B. Thesing (ed.), *British Short-Fiction Writers, 1880-1914: The Realist Tradition*. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 135. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994. Contains an essay, "George Gissing," by Donald E. Hall, in which the short stories from 1876 to 1903 are discussed. This essay will be reviewed in a forthcoming number of the *Journal*.

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Martha S. Vogeler, *Choice*, September 1995, p. 120. Review of Robert L. Selig's *George Gissing* (revised edition, 1995).

Anon., "Recent Books," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, December 1995, p. 420. Notice of Robert L. Selig's *George Gissing*.

Charles Swann (ed.), *Collected Essays of John Goode*. Introduction by Terry Eagleton. Keele: Keele University Press, 1995. Contains a bibliography of John Goode's writings, a number of which were devoted to Gissing. The 1968 essay, "Gissing, Morris, and English socialism," published in *Victorian Studies*, is reprinted. Gissing is discussed in other essays, the references of which have never been given in this journal. A review will be published in a subsequent number.

Russell Kirk, *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995. Kirk's lifelong interest in Gissing is reflected on pp. 38, 42, 109, 152, 156, 167, 289, and 339.

Michael Hollington, *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*, Robertsbridge, East Sussex: Helm Information, 1995. 4 vols. In the first, under "General Estimates, 1870-1945," pp. 562-72, Chapter 8 of *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* is reprinted.

Robert M. Cooper, *The Literary Guide and Companion to Northern England*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995. Passages on Gissing in Wakefield and Manchester will be found on pp. 140 and 293.

Masahiko Yahata, "Hanji to akuto," *The Bulletin of Beppu University Junior College*, No. 15,

January 1996, pp. 47-53. Japanese translation of "The Justice and the Vagabond."

Dennis Shruballs, "A Rural Scribe in Old Somerset," *The Somerset Magazine*, February 1996, pp. 17-20. An essay on W. H. Hudson, with allusions to Gissing and "The Fate of Humphrey Snell."

Annette R. Federico, "Book Reviews," *English Literature in Transition*, Volume 39 (1996), No. 2, pp. 228-31. Review of *George Gissing* in the Twayne series.

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Springtime in Northumberland

More years had sped, and spring was again upon the moors, – a brilliant, fitful spring, as best becomes this spoilt darling of the year. Under soft, cloudless skies had the first curlews arrived, only to be silenced a week later by deep snow and a wind from the north-east, brandishing its glittering sabre over the heads of all that had ventured to take a rash step into his territories.

But by the end of April all was for a time placid and genial again. Daisies and celandines peeped forth from the bent at the summons of the skylarks to behold the fleecy cloudlets, which passed now and then between them and the sun. The bog-myrtle, with little opening catkins, gave its spicy fragrance to the breeze, and to the voice of lark and curlew were added those of the travelled and more fastidious songsters.

Under such conditions Bygate relaxed his grim old visage into a smile, and the sober fir trees, who so well sustained his darker humours at the back, did their utmost to accommodate a funereal rigidity to these more spirited requirements. There were already enough lambs on the brae to make the sunlight plaintive with their cries, and all the little sounds of the farm life spread far in the noonday stillness. On one morning of particular splendour, Sibbald had paused on the crest of Yardhope, his boundary line at the back, to look around. He did still occasionally in these days, for with his later life he had found a confirmation of his imaginative fervour. For a few moments he banished from his mind the state of markets, the prospective washing and shearing of the sheep, the drilling of the turnip crop, and looked upon the face of the earth and sky as an inspiring spectacle which claimed a peculiar affinity with something in his own soul. The very lightest breeze played about him, whispering round the edge of his cap, bringing and carrying away the buzz of an adventurous fly, but in no way asserting itself in opposition to the universal calm. His house he could not see, for the belt of fir trees interposed. But little Angryhaugh of vital memories was there in the crease on the opposite slope, the wide green valley with its river dancing in the sun, lying between, and elsewhere the two or three other remote dwellings that dotted this part of the dale. Gradually the man's mind travelled to human things; thrust upon him, perhaps, by way of contrast to this placid scene. Episodes in his own past life and those of his family rose before him, and he marvelled. It seemed strange to him now that in a universe of order such as this, man alone should be instinctively and inevitably prone to the construction of a huge edifice of disorder upon it.

From the last chapter of Algernon Gissing's *The Scholar of Bygate* (1897).

Subscriptions

The Gissing Journal is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October. Subscriptions are normally on a two-year basis and begin with the January number.

Rates per annum are as follows:

Private subscribers: £10.00

Libraries: £15.00

Single copies can be supplied as well as sets for back years.

Payment should be made in sterling to *The Gissing Journal*, by cheque or international money order sent to:

The Gissing Journal
7 Town Lane, Idle, Bradford BD10 8PR, England.

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Information for Contributors

The Gissing Journal publishes essays and notes on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with biographical, critical, bibliographical and topographical subjects. They should be addressed to the editor, Pierre Coustillas, 10 rue Gay-Lussac, 59110 La Madeleine, France.

This journal is indexed in the *MLA Annual Bibliography*, in the Summer number of *Victorian Studies* and *The Year's Work in English Studies*.

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