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**Gissing's Contemporaries on Gissing :
An Unconventional Celebration**

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Celebrations of the centenary of Gissing's death have so far focused on his reputation at the present moment with occasional backward glances at the ups and downs it went through after he was dramatically carried away by disease on 28 December 1903. Nobody, it would seem, has been much concerned with the progress of his career from the days of his apprenticeship in America to the publication of the fourth impression of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the last he was to be aware of. Perhaps the subject was not thought suitable for a commemorative article. Perhaps also, some analysts would argue, the volume devoted to Gissing in the Critical Heritage series offers a detailed answer to any question that can be asked about the reception of his works in his lifetime.

Unfortunately such a view of things cannot bear examination. The archaeology of Gissing criticism was not completed by 1970, that is when the preparatory work for the Critical Heritage volume had to cease. Nor is it at an end now that a new century runs its course; dozens of forgotten articles and book reviews unknown to bibliographers like Joseph Wolff in his 1974 secondary bibliography of Gissing's works have been exhumed from the innumerable files of newspapers held by the Newspaper Library at Colindale and the Library of Congress. In a sense the history of Gissing criticism is still largely unwritten, and the present supplement to the centenary number of the *Journal* is only a modest participation in an almost endless enquiry.

Of the reviews reprinted below practically none is likely to have been known to Gissing, which is a pity as they are almost uniformly positive appraisals of his work. He often blamed his critics for their blindness to the specificity of his writings and he was right, but he was insufficiently aware of the honourable exceptions that research has brought to the fore. Reading the present selection might have cheered him up in his darkest hours. The number of items might have been multiplied by ten, or the selection might have been restricted to the commonly acknowledged major works, but as all methods are more or less arbitrary, it has been thought better to take into account the whole of the author's fiction from *Workers in the Dawn* to *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, giving for each book one or two hitherto unknown critical responses.

A special feature of this selection is the light it throws on the role, so far unacknowledged, played by Arnold Bennett in the more positive evaluation of his contemporary's work. Much of Bennett's early literary criticism appeared anonymously or under pseudonyms such as Barbara or Sarah Volatile, and it remained unidentified until Anita Miller, a Bennett scholar as well as a publisher who had access to Bennett's papers, published her annotated bibliography of his works in 1977. Seven of the nine reviews he wrote are collected here, and they reveal their author's increasing esteem for a fellow novelist, whom he never met and mainly knew through their common friend H. G. Wells. If Bennett was, in our opinion, unfair to certain aspects of *The Whirlpool*, he was quite enthusiastic about *Our Friend the Charlatan* and *By the Ionian Sea*, which he reviewed together for both the *Academy* (22 June 1901, items 141 and 144 in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, their authorship then still unrevealed) and *Hearth and Home* in glowing terms. These four pieces, which appeared within a fortnight and, since Bennett did not review *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, read like a farewell to a favourite author, are worth pondering in the light of Bennett's correspondence with Wells, edited by Harris Wilson in 1961. The present-day reader, confronted on the one hand with the letters that Wells and Bennett exchanged about Gissing, on the other hand with the reviews and articles they both published on their older fellow writer, can hardly fail to relish the game that was being played by the two younger men, a game which Harris Wilson, a poorly informed editor, could not fully understand and consequently explain in appropriate footnotes. On 1 June 1901 we find Wells asking Bennett to read *By the Ionian Sea* and adding: "I would be glad indeed if for once Gissing could have a shout. The book deserves it mightily and if it does not get it—Gissing may perhaps never hear a shout." Meanwhile, unwilling to seem to comply with Wells's pressing request, Bennett was reading both *Our Friend the Charlatan* and *By the Ionian Sea*, and preparing to give more than a "double shout," indeed a quadruple one in the *Academy* and *Hearth and Home*. On 3 June he deliberately misled Wells: "I am sorry to hear of Gissing's illness [he was still at Spade House, prior to following a cure in the East Anglian Sanatorium]. I was in town last week, and could have arranged to review his two books then, but never thought of it. [...] Living out here [Hockliffe, Bedfordshire] I am somewhat at a disadvantage in that respect. But I am sending to Hind [editor of the *Academy*] to tell him Gissing is on my mind. There is a rhapsodic essay on him (Gissing, not Hind) in my new book [*Fame and Fiction*]." Then, in the same letter, Bennett waxed enigmatic again: "Touching Gissing, do you think he will ever get a real 'shout'? I think not. What matter? The consciousness of the man who has written *Demos* must be a fairly satisfactory possession." By great good luck Gissing's response to Bennett's "rhapsody" originally published in the *Academy* (16 December 1899) has been preserved: "It was rather more intelligently done than usual, but like everybody's writing on this subject, showed an imperfect knowledge of my later work" (letter to Clara Collet, 29 December 1899). If he had been a reader of

Hearth and Home, he would have found some compensation in Bennett's reviews of his books in this little known weekly. But chance willed it otherwise.

May the present selection of reviews contribute to do Gissing's works greater posthumous justice. As was noted by Bouwe Postmus, to whom these texts were communicated for possible comment, some of these early responses are singularly powerful. "One would dearly like to know the name of the reviewer of *The Whirlpool* for the *Daily Chronicle* of 10 April 1897. He or she was getting so frighteningly close to Gissing's darkest secret ['What a terrible lesson is the existence of this child, born of a loveless and utterly unsuitable marriage,' diary entry for 9 August 1896] with his or her opening paragraph that it seems to betray an uncanny affinity with the writer's life and work. There are plenty of other illustrations of the fact that Gissing was often well served by his reviewers, who proved eminently capable of appreciating the singular qualities of this extraordinary novelist."

Workers in the Dawn

Unsigned Review, *Daily News*
29 July 1880, p. 6

Workers in the Dawn is an extraordinary book, and we should think Mr. George R. Gissing, the writer of it, is not an ordinary man. With the intention of giving his readers some idea of the depth and extent of depravity which exists in the heart of our social system he has written the history of Arthur Golding [...] Mr. Gissing has evidently seen a great deal of the life of the London poor and can describe powerfully and graphically. The tone of the book is bitter and resentful; the style, often illiterate, is redeemed only by its intensity of earnestness. It is not easy to care much for the hero, who is morally weak, but Mr. Gissing's meaning has been to show how much men and women have to strive against who endeavour to rise from social degradation, how little society does to help them, and how unwisely and wrongly that little is done. His politics are radical of course, Socialist some would call them, his tone pessimist rather than hopeful. The "Workers in the Dawn" are a young lady who tries to do some good among the lowest class, and dies from exhaustion in the effort, and an active Nonconformist clergyman, whose character and energy the author respects, though he rejects his religion. The painful nature of many of the scenes which are described without a touch of ideality, and the tone of bitter frustration over the whole story, make it a sad one. It is not, however, without grim humour, and passages are here and there deeply interesting, and written with a certain rough eloquence.

The Unclassed (revised edition, 1895)

Unsigned Review, *Speaker*

4 January 1896, p. 23

Mr. George Gissing has strayed far beyond the limits of conventional propriety in *The Unclassed*, and we do not doubt that he must have given offence to many of his readers by doing so. Yet, despite this fact, *The Unclassed* is a notable and, in some respects, a noble piece of work. Though it goes down into depths which are better left unsounded by the average man and woman, there is not a trace in it of the uncleanness of thought and suggestion which attaches to so much of contemporary fiction. The story, though it deals with a class which tradition associates with untrammelled passion and unlimited self-indulgence, is absolutely pure, and, indeed, almost stern in tone. There may be something exaggerated in the character of Ida Starr, the daughter of a fallen woman, who follows in her mother's footsteps of shame. But, for all that, it is a noble character, and it is difficult to believe that it may not be a real one as well. The story turns upon the fortunes of an usher in a London school, named Waymark, and, like all Mr. Gissing's stories, it deals with the sad, shady side of life, with people of narrow means, in whose breasts their better thoughts and hopes are constantly at war with cruel necessity. Mr. Gissing knows this side of life like a book, and he paints it for us with extraordinary power and fidelity. In most of his works he allows the shadows not only to predominate, but gradually to close in upon the characters, finally enveloping them in the gloom of night. In *The Unclassed* he has happily avoided this mistake, and though the atmosphere of the book is grey throughout, it never becomes absolutely black. Strangely enough, the sunshine of the story, such as it is, is provided by Ida Starr, the outcast of the streets, who, purified by love and sorrow, works out her own redemption and that of others with it. We have seldom read a more touching story than this, nor have we ever read one which, dealing with unconventional themes, furnishes a better justification of its author's choice of characters and topics.

Demos

Unsigned Review, *St. Stephen's Review*

17 April 1886, p. 34

Demos is a tale of English socialism by a new writer, and it is a success. I believe I am right in saying that this is unprecedented. Of all novels the political novel is the hardest to write; of all political novels, those which deal with Radicalism present the most difficulties. But three writers of the past half century have chosen a socialist as hero, and in each case the novel proved unpopular. Charles Kingsley

and George Eliot wrote of democracy as democrats, and the incongruous became fused in the fire of their sympathy. The author of *Demos* has no sympathy with democracy, and that he should have succeeded is little short of marvellous. But he has, and his book will rank as one of the best novels of the year. The studies of Mutimer, his wife, are faultless, and the subsidiary characters have a happy knack of interesting us. We see each distinctly, and feel that they are living folks. The plot is old as the hills—the girl who loves one and marries another, the lost will, the designing villain with two wives and six names, all have been before us from time immemorial; but for all that Rodman and Alice amuse us and disgust us as much as Mr. Westlake and Stella attract and elevate us. Hubert Eldon, the first walking gentleman of the book, is the least satisfactory figure in the book; he loves Adela in a shadowy sort of way, from first to last, and in the end marries her, but he is decidedly commonplace. The author of *Demos* is best with the women. Old Mrs. Mutimer and Emma are really clever, and Alice is an original study of a very common type. The style of *Demos* is good, only I would warn the writer against attempting too closely to follow George Eliot in her use of such scientific words; “parergon” may exactly express what the author has in his mind, but it is an ugly word for all that. For a first work the novel is surprisingly strong, and shows close observation, and no small power of description. In short it is an excellent book in every way.

Unsigned Review, *Westminster Review*
July 1886, p. 291

Demos is an unusually good novel: a great variety of characters, of all classes and of both sexes, are admirably delineated. Richard Mutimer, the representative of socialistic democracy, is a careful and finished study. Each successive development of his disposition and tendencies, brought out by unexpected changes of fortune, is clearly the logical outcome of given circumstances on a given idiosyncrasy. Several others among the persons represented are no less skilfully and successfully portrayed. In female character the author of *Demos* is singularly successful: of this, the wife, the mother, and the sister of Mutimer—women from types utterly diverse from each other—afford a striking proof. The plot, too, is good, the incidents naturally produced, the *dénouement* likely, and at the same time powerful and dramatic. What the author’s opinion may be on the “social question” is not perhaps of great importance from the purely literary point of view from which we regard works of fiction; but he is certainly not a socialist, nor even an ardent democrat.

The average novel is such a poor, ill-favoured thing that, by comparison, a book like *Demos* appears to be almost a great work. It has many faults; but it has great merits. The author, who elects to remain anonymous, is, to begin with, remarkably well acquainted with his subject; he has, moreover, the judicial mind, and is incapable of misdirected enthusiasm; he knows his men and women by heart, but he handles them with an impartial sternness of purpose which, in these days of prejudice and special pleading, is uncommon enough to have something of the charm of novelty. Another good point about him is that, unlike the run of modern novelists, French and English alike, he is sparing of commentary and elucidation; he loves to make his people explain themselves; out of their own mouths are they presented, and by their peculiar actions are they beatified or damned. Yet another quality of his work is sincerity; it is his aim to speak the truth, and to speak it of all and sundry; he is not afraid to convict his heroine of weakness, nor does he in any way incline to dissemble the good side of his wicked heroes. Last of all, it is to be noted that his sympathies are altogether with moral and intellectual beauty; he has given us a couple of heroines—one lovely, elegant, accomplished, well-born; the other poor, lowly, plain, forsaken, disappointed—and if one be preferable to the other (which is doubtful), that one is not the fairer and the more obviously heroic. It is plain, indeed, that he is a writer to whom we may look for much, and not be disappointed. It seems unquestionable that *Demos* is a first book; it is certain that first books fuller of promise and performance are few.

The subject is Socialism, and Socialism as it exists in working London. From a cheap suburb do the personages proceed; and they have the characteristics of their circumstances. They have their good points, of course; but the impression they produce is eminently one of “underbredness” and vulgarity. They are the children of *Demos*, true scions of the mob, incapable of simple, single-minded devotion to an ideal; vain, jealous, egoistic, narrow; ambitious above all of personal pre-eminence; practising Socialism and the gospel of humanity, not for honour’s sake or on the inspiration of faith, but, whether consciously or the reverse, simply as a form of the Struggle for Existence. Dick Mutimer [...] is a strong man in his way, and in his way by no means a bad fellow. But he is what his environment has made him; vulgarity cleaves to him as an hereditary odour, at his highest he is no better than a fireman in promotion; he is a type of subaltern humanity, and could never be anything stronger or better; as compared with his discarded sweetheart, Emma Vine, or even with his bitter, unrelenting, stanch old mother, he is almost abject. Beside the sweet and patient virtue of the one and the soured implacable honesty of the other his best qualities are seen to be contemptible. It is by the heart alone that social regeneration is possible; it is in the heart alone that the essential elements are generated. This the author of *Demos* has seen; and this he has discovered to his

public with an intimacy of knowledge and a fulness of illustration that should secure his book the attention of every intelligent man and woman in the country.

Isabel Clarendon

Unsigned Review, *Morning Post*
28 July 1886, p. 2

The author has keen perception of character and much power of analysis. His plot is involved, and indeed is scarcely deserving of the name, but with the exception of the mysterious and introspective Ada Warren, his personages, although often gloomy, are lifelike. There is a marked contrast between Mr. Gissing's manner of appreciating animate and inanimate nature. For the most part he paints men and women with the pitiless pessimism which is frequently the outcome of intelligent experience, while his descriptions of the beauties of landscape are fresh and enthusiastic. Kingcote's arrival at Winstoke, his first view of the cottage, which is to be the scene of so much misery and happiness, and the meeting with the genial rector have the quaint simplicity of a page out of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, whereas other portions of the novel are entirely of the modern school. The most forcible portrait of the book is that of the self-tormentor Kingcote. His love for the bright but superficial Isabel, her temporary subjugation by his stronger nature, and the gradual estrangement of these ill-assorted lovers, are portrayed with artistic and subtle realism. The author eloquently illustrates Kingcote's words. "The tragedy is not where two who love each other die for the sake of their love; but where love itself dies, blown upon by the cold breath of the world, and those who loved live on with heart made sepulchres."

Thyrza

Unsigned Review, *Illustrated London News*
14 May 1887, p. 561

The orphan daughter of a workingman in Lambeth, fair, delicate and pensive, Thyrza Trent lives with her sister, both employed at a hat-maker's. They are good girls; the sweetness and purity of their mutual confidence are delightful. The habits and manners of the industrial classes in that neighbourhood are truthfully described, in a most friendly spirit; and the portraiture of individual characters is excellent. That of Gilbert Grail, a middle-aged bachelor, modest, grave, and studious, with a passion for literature, drudging at a candle factory, is one of the finest with which we have become acquainted. Into this world of honest and humble toil

comes a true gentleman, a noble fellow, Walter Egremont, the son of a rich Lambeth manufacturer, with schemes of lectures, reading-room, and library, for the social benefit of the people. Our sympathies are strongly engaged in the welfare of these persons. The frank and cordial relations between Egremont and Grail, when the latter is appointed superintendent or librarian of Egremont's new institution, are full of promise. But love comes in the way: to both men Thyrsa is lovely. It is sad that her engagement to worthy Gilbert should be broken by a natural preference for one nearer her own age, his superior in rank and culture; yet she is childlike and innocent; nothing occurs to mar the purity and delicacy of the sorrowful story. Indeed, she grows to moral strength, overcoming her despair, while Egremont, who is a man of high principle, and has a wise friend in Mrs. Ormonde, goes away to America, and subdues his passion by work. The author of a tale so noble in its aim can do without much praise for literary talent; but merits it, nevertheless, by the firm drawing of the characters, the judicious connection of incidents, and the quiet simplicity of the dialogues, with a general air of true refinement in dealing with familiar scenes of common London life.

Unsigned Review, *Glasgow Herald*
24 May 1887, p. 10

This story is so intensely human, it appeals so simply and so directly to the heart, involves such a profound sadness, mixed with deep pleasure, in its perusal, that the reader shrinks from pointing out, or even noticing, its defects. The characters are not mere "creations," they are living, loving, suffering men and women, who take hold on our sympathies, as much as if we met them in everyday life. The author—it is hard to say whether the story is written by a man or by a woman—enters into the feelings of his characters as truly as a great actor identifies himself with the *rôle* he plays. His sympathies are evidently with Egremont, the generous, restless-minded, unstable idealist; yet Egremont is not altogether a character to be admired. Noble in purpose, eager and unselfish in carrying purposes into action, he fails more through his own restless fickleness than through the want of the practical faculty which so often characterises the idealist. But there is something really fine in Egremont's identifying himself with the workingman on whose behalf all his schemes are started. The descriptions of the group of men who are interested in his schemes are such as could only be given by one who is thoroughly acquainted with the subjects of intellectual progress among working-men. Luke Ackroyd, Bower, Bunce (the unhappy sceptic), Grail, in whom one cannot but feel the deepest interest, are all drawn with a masterly hand. It is easy to see the view our author takes of the burning questions of the day—the enfranchisement of the workingman, first as a workman and then as a thinking being. Between the socialist overturning of all things and the refining and spiritualising process of the idealists he would take a middle course. But no political questions are thrust upon us in

Thyrza; it is only as they are connected with the course of the story they are touched on. The feminine part of the book is so delicate, so subtly analytical, yet so tender, that the trace of a woman's hand in the character drawing here seems unquestionable. *Thyrza* is exquisitely portrayed, and her love-story is one of the saddest and most beautiful that was ever penned. Lydia, in her strong, noble, unselfish womanhood, is, if not equally lovable, at least equally admirable, and the devotion of the sisters to each other is touching in its truth to nature. Even the minor feminine characters—Paula Tyrrell, and in a different sphere Totty Nan-carrow and Mary Bower—are true to this life. The two most unsatisfactory characters—and yet they, too, are types of their kind—are Mrs. Ormonde and Annabel Newthorpe. Annabel is one of those girls whom a man would term “incomprehensible.” She rejects Egremont in the first instance because she thinks she does not love him; then she discovers, when Egremont has forgotten her in his passion for another, that she does love him; and finally, changing once more, she accepts him, simply because “if she does not marry him she never will marry another,” though, she assures him, she does not love him now. This conduct seems slightly inconsistent on the part of so very intelligent and sensible a young lady. The occasional gleams of humour throughout the story, such as the description of Harold Emerson, the self-styled poet, whose epic is to revolutionise the world, brightens the prevailing tone of earnestness, almost of sadness, which makes *Thyrza* a book rather to be mused over than skimmed for the whiling away of an idle hour.

A Life's Morning

Unsigned Review, *Graphic*
5 January 1889, p. 19

George Gissing's novel, *A Life's Morning*, is altogether a work which more than maintains its author's now recognised reputation for vigour and vividness of portraiture. In the present instance, he draws less upon what looked like observation and experience, and more upon imagination, than in his former stories; but the characters are fully as lifelike, and as interesting, as heretofore. And Mr. Gissing deserves additional and exceptional credit for his heroine, Emily Hood. She is literally a heroine of a thousand; because, when required to sell herself into a loveless marriage by way of the usual sort of self-sacrifice, she—a pattern to all heroines hereafter—utterly repudiates the bargain, and refuses to ruin the life of her lover out of that self-conscious, not to say selfish, spirit of martyrdom which has somehow come to do duty for real duty in conventional fiction. We only wished that she could have maintained her sanity when she was next tempted to forget her real duty; but she must be allowed the excuse of a very recent recovery from brain fever, and one piece of strong good sense on the part of a heroine is

doubtless sufficient for a lifetime. The remaining characters of the same sex are also far superior to the general run of novelists' women, both as portraits and as subjects deserving portrayal, and help to revive any waning respect for the womanhood of fiction. The men also, while less complex, are on the whole strongly drawn; and if the hero himself is comparatively weak and conventional, he is quite sufficiently sympathetic. The story is a good one as a field for play of character, and is not without an interest of its own, independently of its *dramatis personæ*.

Unsigned Review, *Scottish Review*
April 1889, p. 446

Mr. Gissing is giving ample evidence of his claims to be regarded as an artist of much more than average ability. In *A Life's Morning* the promise of *Demos* is sustained, and we have in it a study of human character and a plot both of which are admirably worked out. The three principal characters are sharply contrasted, and the life's morning of two of them, though opening with much trouble, breaks out at last into a clear sunshine, whose brightness is tempered by the sadness of painful memories. Beatrice, whose life's morning is just as troubled as that of Wilfrid and Emily, disappears somewhat unsatisfactorily. In fact, the winding up of the story is the one unsatisfactory thing about it. There is, of course, the inevitable marriage, but Beatrice vanishes, and one knows not whether into misery or into joy. A little more, too, might have been said in order to reconcile the apparent contradictions in her character.

The Nether World

Unsigned Review, *New York Daily Tribune*
18 June 1889, p. 8

The Nether World reminds us in some things of *Germinie Lacerteux*, that grimly realistic novel of the slums in which the brothers de Goncourt collaborated. The nether world is the world of the poor of London. Mr. Gissing has evidently studied the milieu with patient care, for he describes it in every detail with an elaborate naturalness exceeding in cautious precision the descriptions of Charles Dickens, though showing nothing of that great author's picturesque and fascinating powers. Over the whole dreary scene hangs a depressing and malodorous atmosphere. The penury, squalor, ill-health, coarseness, lack of privacy, sordid greed, and grinding labor which condition the existence of the poor in great cities, cannot, indeed, be expected to evolve much sweetness and light. Mr. Gissing neither over-colors nor undercolors his pictures. They are entirely free from the radical vice of all Zola's

writing but they are none the less melancholy. If the reader is made to feel that in these pages the like of workmen and workingwomen is shown forth, almost for the first time without any attempt at exaggeration, and without sentimentalism either, he is also made to feel that after all, the life so revealed does not lend itself to the purposes of fiction; that it is too "set" and "gray"; too deadly dull, save for the excitement of hunger, thirst and cold; too hopelessly dependent and circumscribed; too wholly unintellectual and prostrate—to furnish anything in the shape of amusement. The more faithful to facts a book of this kind is, indeed, the greater must be its failure as a novel. It may make people reflect, and that it is certainly calculated to do; but it will not help them to pass away a leisure hour by titillating their imagination or ministering to the common love of adventure and excitement. The sad story is told with much power and sincerity, but it is too much in one key, too deeply and continuously shaded, too destitute of life and relief. It may be recommended to thinkers without hesitation, but novel-readers are apt to find a few pages of the melancholy chronicle more than sufficient for them.

Unsigned Review, *New York Times*
16 September 1889, p. 3

Mr. Gissing's work is to be looked at in a serious light. It is a study of the very poorest class in London. The elements of fiction found in *The Nether World* may or may not be well compounded. There is complexity in the double plot which runs through the romance, for, though Clara and Sidney are described with a master hand, the characters of Michael Snowdon, Scawthorn, Jane, and Mr. Hewett are less understandable, more difficult to appreciate. There can be no trouble, however, in seizing at once on the traits of Clem Peckover, Bob Hewett and Pennyloaf Candy.

Mr. Gissing belongs to the realistic school, and is impressed with the higher aims of what is the natural, the only method. He feels no possible inclination toward pruriency. The pictures he draws, well and forcibly, stand out strongly enough on his canvas and want no coarse details. He never could have written so powerful a story, descriptive of life in the slums, without having made a careful study, not that which skims over the surface, for he has been at the very bottom of it all. He must then have known more, much more, than those who go in such dismal abodes of the poor intent on gaining some scant literary harvest. He has not sought for the eccentricities, the amusing side of misery, nor has he catered to those people who find a fund of enjoyment in such description. There was a House of Commons of half a century ago which rippled over with laughter when Richard Cobden told them that women were starving to death because they made 3d. a day sewing breeches while a pound of bread cost 4d. The merry side of Clerkenwell Close or Shooter's Gardens, of the dark alleys, the many festering dens of London,

Mr. Gissing fails to discover. *The Nether World* is the most distressing of stories. We have had lately in the United States some opportunity of judging of the condition of the London poor. Leading English revisers have published long accounts of their absolute distress. Fiction has dealt with the matter, but in an amateurish way. Mr. Gissing knows more about the absolute condition of the London slums than Mr. Besant, and he tells what he knows. He does not go out of his way, as does Zola or Moore, to bring out the repulsive side of it. He is even on his guard about its licentiousness. He does not parade what he sees, as if they were discoveries. This is a story where the downfall of men and women is told as a natural sequence. It is cause and effect, and when the sadness of the scenes is most impressive, the reader thinks—bearing in mind the logic of it—“How could it be otherwise?” The minds of these unfortunates are as diseased as are their bodies. Here is a description of a visit paid to Hanover street: “On all the doorsteps sat little girls, themselves only just out of infancy, nursing or neglecting bald, red-eyed, doughy-limbed abortions in every stage of babyhood, hapless spawn of diseased humanity, born to embitter and brutalize yet further the lot of those who unwillingly gave them life.”

What is it that ruins this London poor, just as it does New York’s indigent classes? It is the vice of alcohol. And how are we to help it? Aside from what are normal cravings for stimulants come the abnormal manners brought about by want of proper food and miserable surroundings. The alcoholic vice is contagious, and must continue until conditions of life are changed, and when that change is possible God only knows. Someone who had been more successful than others in a London mission wrote that without “the passion for patience” all hopes of ameliorating these conditions would be impossible. It is the drinking habit which seems, then, to be the most constant among the characters Mr. Gissing presents, and this inevitably leads to damnation. The author has his say in regard to English amusements for the lower classes, and we are fast adopting them. The end of it is that nowhere can be found “any amusement appealing to the mere mind, or calculated to effeminate by encouraging the love of beauty.”

The Nether World shows how Clara [a mistake for Jane] and Sidney fought for a higher life, a better, nobler phase of existence, and did not reach it. “He, with the ambitions of his youth frustrated, [was] neither an artist nor a leader of men in the battle for justice. She, no saviour of society by the force of a superb example; no daughter of the people, holding wealth in trust for the people’s need. Yet to both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own.” It is likely that sorrow came to both the man and woman, and disappointment, for what were these two who tried to fight against “those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world.”

The Emancipated (revised edition, 1893)

Unsigned Review, *Scotsman*
16 December 1893, p. 12

Novel readers know very well by this time that the name of Mr. George Gissing on a title page is a safe indication that something solid and impressive is sure to come after it. Nor does the story *The Emancipated* disappoint this expectation. The merit of the story lies too deep down in psychology and the study of the hearts of men and women to be possibly brought to the surface and exposed in such a notice as this. But those who know Mr. Gissing's work may be able to infer what this story is like from an indication of the course of the plot. The central figure is a young woman, bred under the new or emancipated educational dispensation—that one which looks to joy rather than sorrow in giving the best discipline for life. She grows up, and marries a brutal fellow, a lazy scoundrel who neglects her; and the result is that they separate, or rather, that he leaves her. He himself has been brought up under the old dogmatic educational system in a Puritan family; and his sister's story runs as a second or contrasted story alongside the other. This girl, at first, living under the dictates of a narrow religious ideal, in the end marries an artist. The bringing about of these changes is done slowly and naturally, and show such a knowledge of the procedure by which the characters of men and women are shaped to what they are that the book is deeply interesting throughout and, at the end, leaves a strong impression of power upon a reader's mind.

Unsigned Review, *Daily Telegraph*
29 December 1893, p. 6

The announcement that George Gissing is about to give a new work of fiction to publicity invariably arouses pleasurable expectation in the breast of the discriminating novel reader, who confidently looks forward to the enjoyment of an intellectual feast, and is never subjected to disappointment by this fertile and thoughtful novelist. Mr. Gissing's latest one-volume story, *The Emancipated*, is in every respect worthy of the author of *The Odd Women*, to the remarkable value and importance of which in relation to one of the salient questions of the day we called public attention at the time of its production. *The Emancipated* teems with masterly delineations of character, and the skein of its plot has many threads, which are carefully kept distinct from one another, and never allowed to drift into a more or less perplexing tangle. They illustrate, in different individualities, the processes, suggested by the title, of enfranchisement from the trammels of superstition, prejudice, and tradition that have so long hampered thought and action alike among English men and women of the middle classes. With admirable impartiality Mr. Gissing has shown how disastrous, as well as how beneficial, may be the effects of

intellectual emancipation; how in one case it may harden and embitter the disposition, and in another exercise a softening, sweetening, and mellowing influence. These contrasts are strikingly exemplified in Reuben Elgar, whom the enfranchising process plunges into gloomy unbelief and brutal egoism, and in Miriam Baske, his sister, to whom it brings breadth of perception, love of beauty in art and literature, and the rare capacity of toleration, as far as human passions, impulses, and foibles are concerned. There is abundant food for salutary reflection in *The Emancipated*.

Unsigned Review, *Guardian*
21 February 1894, pp. 290-91

The Emancipated is a title to stimulate curiosity; and under this title Mr. George Gissing has written a very clever novel capable of satisfying a good deal of curiosity if it can satisfy nothing else. The first question the innocent reader asks is "Emancipated from what?" and the first answer to be given is "From Puritanism." That answer must serve provisionally. What exactly Mr. Gissing means by "Puritanism"; with how wide or how narrow a connotation he uses the term; how far he thinks it altogether a good or happy, safe or sane state of things for man or woman to be emancipated; whether in truth he is not laughing in his sleeve at the emancipated—these are the points upon which he exercises our curiosity from the beginning to the end of the book. One thing, however, is clear: Mr. Gissing takes it for granted that the intellectual development of an educated man or woman is not complete until he or she has learned to live without religious beliefs. This book assumes more completely and more quietly than any other novel we have ever read that Christianity is an exploded superstition. It starts from this point as from an accomplished, accepted fact—Christianity is gone, but Puritanism remains. Of the novels of agnostic tendency that come so fast from the press, the majority are either controversial works cast in a fictitious form, which it is impossible to answer because they say too little and assume too much, or lyrical fragments whose note of despair is at once their excuse and their refutation. But Mr. Gissing's novel belongs to neither of these classes. It is not an attack upon the faith, and it is certainly not a doubter's cry of distress. It is an uncommonly clever novel of the photographic class, in which the *dramatis personæ* are so ingeniously grouped and disposed of, that, by the time the final settlement is to be made, nobody is left in front of the stage except the two who are at the conventional crisis that is satisfied by auspicious marriage. Those, whose needs of heart and soul transcended the author's resources of consolation, have either slipped out by the convenient side-door of premature death, or they are eclipsed by the comfortable figures of more fortunate persons. By these means, what we may call the internal failure of the plot is sufficiently disguised to escape notice in a casual reading. But a critical reader—and the novel is well worth reading with critical attention—cannot avoid the

conclusion that the fault of the book as a work of art is that for its most ambitious ideas and its fairest creations it provides no successful issue. Of the two pairs of lovers whose destinies make the romance of the story, it is the pair who least represents the legitimate ideals of the book who achieve happiness. These are Ross Mallard, the artist who is convicted by his friends of retaining a Puritan conscience in spite of his intellectual emancipation, and Miriam Baske. Miriam Baske is the only person in the novel who even "seems to have" any religion, and the story of her "emancipation" makes the thread of subtlest interest in the book. Reuben Elgar and his wife Cecily—he the natural child of emancipation and she its most carefully cultivated product—very soon make shipwreck of life and love. The education of Cecily is really the great experiment of the novel, and it is impossible to believe that the author altogether intended that its outcome should turn the irony of the book upon itself. To all but the "emancipated" it will be a damning fault in Cecily that she is absolutely without spiritual sense. However, the author plainly considers that he has created an altogether satisfactory heroine. She is intended to be the real thing, the ideal emancipated woman, and her misery is the fault of the age she lives in. With the exception of Cecily, every personage in the book—and there are many—is a perfect study of unmistakably real character.

New Grub Street

Unsigned Review, *Manchester Examiner and Times*
16 April 1891, p. 2

Those who are acquainted with Mr. George Gissing's previous works will find in the title of his latest novel a sufficiently clear indication of its scope and treatment. He has won an audience by various powerfully sombre presentations of the seamy side of life in general, and now he gives us an equally powerful novel and, if possible, still more sombre presentation of the seamy side of literary life in particular. Of the intellectual and emotional force of the book there can be no doubt whatever, for weak or insincere work could not by any possibility be so profoundly depressing. Mr. Gissing writes as only a man could write who believed that he was telling not merely the truth, but the whole truth—that the side of life which he depicts is not merely one side but the only side. The new Grub-street, like the old Grub-street, is the abode of struggling authorship, and it is inhabited by just two classes—the men whose failure demands contempt modified by pity, and the men whose success demands contempt unmodified by anything. There is not a doubt in the world that there have been many such careers as those of Edwin Reardon, Alfred Yule, and Harold Biffen, who, with genius, or talent, or culture, or industry, fall by the wayside and are trampled under foot because they lack a thick skin, a flexible conscience, and all the arts—innocent, doubtful, or dark—which, if assiduously practised, often command success. It is equally certain that such other careers as

those of Jasper Milvain and Mr. Fadge, to whom everything that will ensure gain or its equivalent is morally possible, are still more numerous—but Bohemia, or New Grub-street, is libelled when its total population is supposed to be represented by these two classes. This, however, is comment upon M. Gissing's point of view rather than criticism of his workmanship, and the latter has never been firmer, stronger, and, within the author's scope, more relentlessly veracious than it is here. The story of the Reardons, husband and wife, is a masterpiece of grim, realistic presentation; and the clever, versatile, outspokenly self-seeking Jasper Milvain is a portrait which bites itself into the imagination and the memory. *New Grub Street* is not a book for those who like "cheerful reading," for it is throughout painful, but its painfulness is equalled by its power.

Unsigned Review, *Morning Post*
11 May 1891, p. 2

Powerful writer as Mr. Gissing has shown himself to be, there is no doubt that *New Grub Street* is yet cleverer than its predecessors. The tendency of the work is of a kind that will probably give rise to a variety of appreciations, but there can be no question as to the remarkable ability of these scathing pictures of what the Germans call the "Kehrseite" of literary life. Mr. Gissing, unlike the majority of authors with a purpose, never allows the exposition of his theories to stifle the human interest which, whatever may be said to the contrary, is the most essential element in the novel. Thus while Jasper Milvain embodies the ideas of the mercenary character that throughout the book is attributed to successful contemporary literature, the pathos of the tragedy enacted between the dreamer Reardon and his practical, but coldly intellectual wife, could not be surpassed by the strongest writer of the purely emotional school. Very touching also is the picture of Jasper's victim, Marian, the dweller "in the valley of the shadow of books," whose devotion both to father and lover is so cruelly rewarded. *New Grub Street* is, perhaps, hardly a work that will attain the not always desirable goal of wide popularity, but it is one that displays to the greatest advantage the many and varied gifts of its talented author.

Denzil Quarrier

Unsigned Review, *Globe*
10 February 1892, p. 3

Mr. George Gissing's latest fiction is on very different lines to those of Miss Yonge's [*That Stick*, reviewed just above Gissing's novel]. It deals with wider interests and with characters less conventional. Its background is political; its fore-

ground is occupied by the history of a couple of people—a man and a woman—who have ventured to live for one another without the formality of a legal tie; who, indeed, have flown in the face of the law, inasmuch as the woman is the wife of another man. That man proved to be a libertine and a criminal, but the fact does not make his wife's devotion to her lover any the more defensible. So Mr. Gissing shows how Nemesis overtook the guilty pair. Denzil Quarrier is fool enough to tell Eustace Glazzard the story of his professed marriage with Lilian. By and by, when Denzil comes athwart the political ambitions of Glazzard, the latter reveals to Lilian's husband her whereabouts, and then there is chaos. The book is eminently clever—both as a mere story, the interest being well preserved, and as a picture of provincial life, the foibles of small country politicians being hit off with a pointed pen. One is sorry for the fate of Lilian, which casts a gloom over the work; but no other ending to the tale was possible under the circumstances which the novelist had created.

Unsigned Review, *Beacon* (Boston)
20 February 1892, p. 3

The name of George Gissing is not a familiar one to readers of fiction on this side the Atlantic, but if the novel called *Denzil Quarrier* is a fair specimen of his talent, his future productions will be eagerly looked for. Mr. Gissing is a realist of the uncompromising type. There is something almost pitiless in his method; and yet he shows us men and women under the sway of great passions, and he has a vein of humor that is worthy to be spoken of as Rabelaisian in its sardonic breadth and vigor. Mr. Gissing is dramatic, too, in giving his characters full scope for self-portrayal in speech and action, and he seems to scorn the descriptive accessories that have made the fortune of many a less capable artist. Denzil Quarrier is the average young middle-class Englishman. Possessed of resistless energy and a certain restlessness of temperament he has served for a time in the navy, studied law, and then taken up Scandinavian literature, upon which last-named subject he is engaged, as the story opens, in writing a book. In his journeys to Sweden he has met Lilian Allen, a governess in the family of a Stockholm merchant, and has made love to her. She reciprocates his attachment, but there is an obstacle: she is already married. It appears that her husband is a defaulting clerk whom she had been forced by her relatives into marrying, and at the church door the officers of the law laid their hands upon him and she has never seen him again. The result of the situation—given a girl of yielding temperament and a resolute man—may easily be imagined. Lilian goes with Denzil as his wife, and he loses no opportunity to scoff at what he calls “conventional morality.” Returning to England he stands for Parliament in his native borough, a Radical stronghold, and Lilian is of immense service to him in helping to get votes. But Denzil has a friend to whom alone he has

confided the secret regarding Lilian, and the ambition of this friend he has unwittingly blighted by putting himself up as a candidate for the House of Commons. The friend is a Judas, hunts out Lilian's husband, and brings about a train of events that lead to a tragic ending. The last word of the story is uttered by Denzil. "Now," he says, "I understand the necessity for social law."

Born in Exile

Unsigned Review, *Bookseller*
3 June 1892, p. 515

A novel with a hero, in the ordinary sense of the word, Mr. Gissing has never written, and his latest work is practically a character-study of a man who in actual life would be regarded as an unsufferable prig. This despite the fact that Godwin Peak is a man of unusual intellectual power. The son of a man who by sheer force of character and intellect rose from the humblest origin to a position of comparative respectability in the social scale, he inherits all his father's ability, and also, unfortunately, his father's peculiarities of temperament. Uncouth, sensitive, reserved, conscious of intellectual power but unable to direct it, and chafing against an uncongenial environment and the limitations imposed by poverty, those who are familiar with Mr. Gissing's somewhat pessimistic treatment of his subjects will not be surprised that Godwin's life drifts into shipwreck. Moral cowardice leads him to give up his College career, because he fears ridicule, owing to an illiterate uncle setting up as a tradesman in the town. He then goes to London, works at a chemical manufactory, dabbles in journalism, and mixes with some of his old college friends. His cardinal sin is that, while holding, and even publishing, heterodox views, he becomes recreant to his convictions and goes in for holy orders for the sake of social position, and with the hope of marrying a girl to whom he has become attached—one can scarcely say he loves her. His duplicity, however, leaks out, with the result that he is ostracised by the social circle he hoped to enter, and he ends his life as he began it, "in exile." It is scarcely necessary to add that the story is powerfully written, contains many admirable studies of character, and is a fine example of Mr. Gissing's subtle, analytical method.

The Odd Women

Unsigned Review, *World*
27 September 1893, p. 28

Mr. George Gissing is not an enlivening novelist. It is his purpose to make us think, to catch us and hold us tightly in the full face of facts of the stern and undeniable

kind. He makes us uncomfortable, for our good; because, wriggle as we may, we have to learn at some time what life is to the majority, and the sooner and more thoroughly we do learn that grim lesson, the better our chance of acquitting ourselves within our measure of a responsibility whose penalties are not to be evaded. Never was there so much fact in fiction as the author of *The Odd Women* puts into his works, which have an attraction even for readers who like their novel-reading of the lightest. This is a story of the struggle for life of the surplus half million of women in England—who cannot have husbands to provide for them, even if all were for the theoretical best in our social arrangements—and of how it struck Miss Rhoda Nunn, a remarkable person. “The pessimists call them [the half million] useless, lost, futile lives. I naturally, being one of them myself, take another view,” says Miss Nunn. “I look upon them as a great reserve. When one woman vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world’s work. True, they are not all trained yet; far from it. I want to help in that—to train the reserve.” The story of the girl who is rescued from the misery of a shopwoman’s life (of which a grim picture is drawn), but too late to prevent her from committing herself to a miserable marriage as a way of escape, is painfully interesting.

Unsigned review, *News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina)
30 April 1893, p. 5

“The Odd Women” of this story are the great unmarried; those for whom no “helpmeets” are found. The heroine of the novel declares: “My work and thought are for the women who do not marry—the ‘odd women’ I call them. They alone interest me.” The social problem involved in the existence of this class is one of deep importance, and calling imperatively for solution. Mr. Gissing discusses it in this novel with extraordinary freedom from conventionality, with searching analysis and with unusual insight into the complexities of human character and motive. His men and women are creatures of flesh and blood, not lay figures or puppets. They think and feel and act for themselves; at times it would almost seem that they act independently of the author’s will and purpose. We cannot help suspecting that the final outcome of the wooing of Everard and Rhoda was not precisely what Mr. Gissing at first intended it to be. But both characters are faithful to the law of their being, and the result, though unexpected to the reader, is philosophically true. The novel is very realistic—even Mr. George Moore not often surpassed the frankness of some of its scenes. But it is a strong, virile and thoughtful story, dealing with a great question fairly and rationally, and to the intelligent reader it is profoundly interesting.

In the Year of Jubilee

[Arnold Bennett], *Westminster Gazette*
18 January 1895, p. 3

In the Year of Jubilee is, we think, beyond all doubt Mr. Gissing's best novel. It merits, indeed, not a little of the same kind of eulogy which was bestowed about this time last year upon Mr. George Moore's *Esther Waters*. It is more consciously artistic than that book; it is not in the same sense original; nor does it achieve the same kind of moral impression as Mr. Moore's tragic picture of a devastating vice. Nevertheless it brings to a description of lower middle-class life in London very much the same kind of knowledge and observations which Mr. Moore brought to his description of life below stairs and life in the public-house. If anyone wished to know what life is at the present moment in England for the large body of people who support themselves by shopkeeping on a small scale or by business on a still smaller scale, who live in the minor suburbs and cherish humble ambitions after society and culture, he could do nothing better than read this book. No one has treated this class adequately since Dickens, and even he was not always proof against the temptation to cheap satire which their condition so easily offers. Mr. Gissing cannot create types like Dickens, but he takes his people seriously, and he gives us a picture of their life which is always sympathetic and in its total result essentially refined. The mixed elements in their society are fully observed and well brought together. Bores and bounders and earnest striving people; young women who attend lectures and pass examinations (or fail to pass them); other young women who might have been good housemaids and are execrably vulgar "ladies"; good, quiet men and good-natured loud men—all these sorts and many others pass through Mr. Gissing's pages, and most of them do their parts without obvious caricature. The story, moreover, is simple and human; life, Mr. Gissing understands, is in its elements the same here as elsewhere, except perhaps that it is made a little more pathetic by the difficulty which the half-educated find in living with the wholly uneducated, by the struggle which some wage against slender means and low ideals, and the ambition which others cherish to rise above their class, while their tastes remain far below it.

Mr. Gissing takes Camberwell for the scene of his story, and, as he describes it, it is a kind of lesser Clapham. Here it is that Stephen Lord lives with his son Horace and daughter Nancy; here also Arthur Peachey, a good, plain, and rather stupid man with an incredibly vulgar wife, whose two sisters board in the same house, and rival Mrs. Peachey in every quality except the violence of her temper. Nancy and her father being people of reasonable refinement who object to these ways, are regarded as hopelessly "stuck up" by this second household, but their pride is lowered when Horace Lord is captured by the worst of the two sisters. Stephen Lord, with the idea of protecting his children from themselves, makes a will which prevents either of them marrying until they are twenty-six years old on pain of forfeiting their property, and, having done that, dies. [summary of the

novel] The story is enriched with numerous sketches of character, each representing some fresh shade or grade in the society which Mr. Gissing describes. There is Miss Morgan, the hysterical and weak young lady who gets brain fever in trying to pass the London Matriculation examination; Samuel Barmby, most worthy man, a great bore, and light of suburban debating societies; Mr. Crewe, the rollicking, good-natured advertising agent; the vulgar Beatrice French, partly redeemed by good nature; and the hateful Fanny French, who is Horace Lord's undoing, and to whom Mr. Gissing allows no redeeming virtue.

The end of the book is, perhaps, its least satisfactory part. In particular, we cannot think why Mr. Gissing should have followed the modern Keynote or Discord fashion and thought it necessary to invent a new modification of the marriage contract. In the first two volumes the relations of Lionel and Nancy are drawn with great skill and no little subtlety. Lionel's natural insolence, which leads him to take liberties with a girl whom he thinks below him in social station, and the good impulse which leads him to make amends by marrying her straight off, are well conceived. So also are Lionel's flight and their final reconciliation. But there is nothing in the case to justify his proposal or Nancy's acceptance of it that she should live as a married woman with her child in one house, while he kept a bachelor establishment in another and paid her occasional visits. All this simply mystifies us. It explains nothing, solves nothing, unless Mr. Gissing wishes us to believe that Lionel was ashamed of his wife—an interpretation which he expressly disclaims. We can only suppose that Mr. Gissing has been led into it by an over-wrought anxiety to find some other ending than the usual "happy ever after." As a matter of fact the conventional ending would here have been more artistic, and have saved us from a bewilderment at the close which just mars an unusually good book.

Unsigned Review, *Commercial Advertiser* (New York)
24 July 1895, p. 8

In the Year of Jubilee by George Gissing, is a novel of uncommon power and fine insight. It is by far the most interesting novel of the year. This opinion, first voiced by Mr. Gladstone ["Mr. Gladstone in Retirement. Studies in the Life of an Octogenarian IV," *Westminster Gazette*, Special Edition, 2 April 1895, p. 1], is one with which it is impossible to disagree. Indeed, it is difficult to praise the book too highly. During the last year there have been so many novels which were not admirable. So many women have written with abnormal gravity of gangrened people and unpleasant things; the royalist-conspirator and the dark, designing Jesuit have come to the fore again far too conspicuously, and the psychological novel has gone on its desolating way.

In the Year of Jubilee is a decidedly pleasant contrast. It is a healthy, wholesome story of intensely human people. It would have been to the taste of Darwin, who liked all novels which did not end happily—"against which a law should be

passed.” To tell the story of the book, even to introduce the characters—the Lord family, the Peacheys and Frenches and the unheroic hero Tarrant—would be to rob the author of his due. *The Commercial Advertiser* recommends the book most heartily and reiterates the statement that it is the best novel of the year.

Eve’s Ransom

Review by Barbara [i.e. Arnold Bennett], *Woman*
1 May 1895, p. 7

Mr. George Gissing’s new novel, *Eve’s Ransom*, although full enough in all conscience, of “the tears of things,” is not so hopeless in tone as most of his previous books, and for this his admirers will doubtless be thankful. The hero of *Eve’s Ransom*, one Hilliard, was a young man of the Midlands, whose natural instincts towards refinement were embarrassed by an uncongenial and exhausting occupation, an income of two pounds a week, and a widowed sister-in-law and her child. Suddenly he receives a sum of £400 odd, and his sister-in-law marries again. He is free, and he determines to “live” for the first time. Of course, he goes to London; people invariably book for Euston or King’s Cross when it is a question of “life.” For a short period he duly and artistically “lives,” both in London and in Paris, and then he meets Eve Madeley, whose photograph has long interested him, and falls in love with her.

Eve is a shop-girl, and she has innocently entangled herself with a married man. Under circumstances too complicated to describe, Hilliard uses his worldly goods to extricate her and the married man from a serious difficulty. His four hundred pounds have by this time very much dwindled, but he obtains a promising situation in an architect’s office (architecture has always been his hobby), and his bliss is rounded by Eve’s promise to marry him. A delightful ending, you say. Yes, but you forget that we are reading George Gissing. It is not George Gissing’s habit to ladle out vulgar slab felicity with a trowel in this manner. Eve conceives a passion for another man, Hilliard’s dearest friend, and leaves her first betrothed in the ditch. Such is life, you know! The book is perfectly convincing, and the characters of Hilliard, Eve Madeley, and her friend Patty Ringrose, are all carefully-studied creations. I should like to say more about Eve. She is one of the most life-like women Mr. Gissing has ever drawn. All she does and all she says is unerringly “right!” She doesn’t merely live; she glows with life.

[On p. 18 of the same number, “Barbara” also signed the following paragraph.]

Of all the apostles of hopelessness that ornament the end of the nineteenth century, Mr. George Robert Gissing is surely the most pessimistic, unless it be Herr Max Nordau. Mr. Gissing studies the lower middle class. He puts it under the microscope; he knows all about the East End, Walworth and Fleet Street; he loves to

describe these salubrious neighbourhoods; he is intimate with the grocer, and the baker, and the candlestick-maker, and the sons of one or other of these gentlemen are usually his heroes. The wonder is that with material so prosaic Mr. Gissing can produce novels of such absorbing interest. His first book, *A Life's Morning*, came out in 1888 [sic]. *Eve's Ransom*, his latest and most cheerful production, is reviewed in another column.

Sleeping Fires

Review by Barbara [i.e. Arnold Bennett], *Woman*
5 February 1896, p. 7

In *Sleeping Fires* Mr. George Gissing, chronicler of lowest Suburbia, has given us something in a new vein. For one thing, much of the action passes not in London, but under the sunny skies of Greece, and for another, the characters occupy good positions in life, and are not harassed by either narrowness of means or an insufficient acquaintance with the customs of etiquette. Mr. Gissing propounds a problem in morality and decides it characteristically. His two women are well drawn, and also his young man; his archæologist I do not believe in. The careful style and the close analysis which have been marked in all Mr. Gissing's books are not wanting here, but the story left me cold—at least chilly. If he would please me, let Mr. Gissing write another *Nether World*, that was a masterpiece.

Unsigned Review, *Newcastle Daily Leader*
6 February 1896, p. 6

Mr. George Gissing has broken new ground in *Sleeping Fires*. He has up to now been the painter of suburbia. He has told us what sort of lives are lived in Clapham, Brixton, and the Camberwell New Road. There has been abundant cleverness in his work, but little cheerfulness. In *Sleeping Fires* he carries us to Athens, then back to London, then to Athens once more. He has altogether dropped the suburban people for the time being, but he has not dropped any part of his talent in the process. Indeed, scarcely any of his books have been so easy and graceful in style as this. The characters are little more than sketches, of course. The brevity of the book makes that inevitable. But Mr. Gissing's manner of sketching character is firm, crisp, decisive, and convincing. *Sleeping Fires* is almost a pleasant book and that is more than Mr. Gissing has led us to expect. Altogether it is a little work that will certainly add to the author's popularity, if not to his reputation, which is already high.

Unsigned Review, *Times Weekly Edition*
28 February 1896, p. 179

Mr. George Gissing has seldom written such a sympathetic story as *Sleeping Fires*. The tale opens in Athens, and we could wish, were it possible, that it never left “the fair, and shining, and sacred” city of the Violet Crown. Mr. Gissing is free from the natural and besetting sin, in such a scene, of prolonged description, yet, with a delicate touch or two, he sets before us Greece, and the Aegean, and “the holy and delicate air.” It is no great fault that the scene rather dominates the persons, for Mr. Gissing’s Athens is really a scene, and not scene-painting.

The Paying Guest

Unsigned Review, *Philadelphia Record*
31 January 1896, p. 6

A new novel by George Gissing is always a delight. Whatever else he may fail to do, this young British novelist invariably makes his readers think—and think to some purpose. He has hit upon a peculiar mission. In his earlier London romances he exploited certain grim and sombre phases of middle class life in the great capital. Then in *Eve’s Ransom* he hit upon the problem of the employed, the yearning of the daily drudges of the world’s industrial treadmill for at least one draught of unadulterated life, one spell (however brief) of unalloyed leisure to live and enjoy the sunlight and Vanity Fair. At last in *In the Year of Jubilee* he became the critic of middle-class education in Great Britain. The same lessons he teaches, half-satirically, half-tenderly, in regard to this foreign aspect of the popular struggle for education is not without great value and force, despite varied conditions in connection with the educational aspiration of a certain American multitude. Mr. Gissing exposes many follies and crimes of so-called popular education; in this he does a worthy service; it is only a matter of regret that he does not with equal emphasis reveal the other side of the movement—its deep and invincible earnestness and hope. Still Mr. Gissing is not always pessimistic, as the critics delight to declare: on the contrary we would not call him so much a pessimist as a negative optimist. He paints in sombre colors, but not against a comfortless background. Indeed, we are prepared to defend the strange love-romance of *Eve’s Ransom* with its frail sweet-heart and jilted lover as a philosophy of human contentment in its ultimate moral. On the other hand, his new work, *The Paying Guest*, which has been heralded as his “first comedy,” impresses us as being one of the most gloomy and unhopeful works from his pen. True, this little Surrey skit is a comedy on the surface and satirizes in that spirit the grotesque ambitions of mock suburban life, only fourteen miles from town. It relates the sad experiences of a young couple

with polite, well-bred pretensions who had hoped to eke out a small income by means of a "Paying Guest," euphemism for a privileged lodger. The guest—a young woman—proves to be the biggest kind of a contract, and not only ruins the house, but almost breaks up the household. The incidents and situations are here of a purely comic kind, however; but in the half-vulgar young heroine, her totally vulgar family and her three-quarters vulgar lover Mr. Gissing has returned to his theme of the education of the British middle classes. The picture, despite its ludicrous aspects, is a most depressing one. Gissing is, nevertheless, a novelist well worth knowing, and he has risen steadily in British estimation. Were it not for his peculiarly London atmosphere and conditions he would certainly prove a greater success in America than he is probably ever destined to be. A new long novel from his pen, *Sleeping Fires*, is announced by Appleton's for February, and he is at work on still another long romance. Among his other works not already mentioned are *The Unclassed*, *The Odd Women*, *New Grub Street*, *Thyrza*, *Demos* and *The Nether World*.

Unsigned Review, *Academy*
29 February 1896, p. 173

Mr. Gissing's new story will surprise many of his admirers; I trust it will not alienate them. It is very short, and very amusing. As a rule, his novels are lengthy and lugubrious, the reader not objecting to these sombre qualities because of the gripping power and notable sincerity evident on every page. Strength and truth are again apparent; the lightness of touch, the "fun" of the new story are the astonishing revelations. Yet there is pathos in the book for those who have eyes to see, pathos none the less real because only hinted at. Miss Derrick, the paying guest, is drawn by a master hand. No doubt the prosaically worthy couple at "Runnymede" found her a great nuisance while she stayed with them at their magnificently named suburban villa. One can feel a good deal of sympathy for them, but they who interpret the story acutely will think still more kindly of the unfortunate young woman. Even Mr. Gissing will find it hard to equal *The Paying Guest*. It is a subtle study of human nature, an excellent bit of writing and composition.

Unsigned Review, *The Times*
29 May 1896, p. 13

The Paying Guest is a lively little comedy of suburban villadom. A young couple, living rather beyond their means, in an evil hour advertise for a boarder. The young woman who answers the advertisement has many faults, but she is frank enough,

and they have warning sufficient of the troubles in store. Miss Derrick makes no secret of her strength of self-will and that she is leaving a vulgar home on account of incompatibility of temper. Moreover, she is decidedly good-looking and evidently attractive, for it appears that she has sundry ineligible admirers. The comedy comes in with the embarrassments of Mrs. Mumford, who has the responsibility but none of the authority of a chaperon. The outspoken Miss Derrick consults her, not only on her toilette, but on her love affairs. Mrs. Mumford must interview aspirants in her drawing room, and she is the involuntary *confidante* of surreptitious meetings which awaken her apprehensions and shock her delicacy. The vulgar mother makes descents on the small villa, and there are violent scenes behind thin partitions which are more entertaining to the parlourmaid than the mistress. Then the green-eyed monster steps in to complicate matters, and Mrs. Mumford figures with insufficient reason in the character of the outraged wife. Perhaps it was a blessing in disguise when, in a sharp lovers' quarrel, Miss Derrick upset a paraffin lamp and burned out the contents of the elegant drawing room, for that brings matters to a crisis. The piquancy of the little story—and piquant it certainly is—is in the clever delineation of the headstrong, underbred girl, the child of nature and the child of freedom, as an admiring countryman in *Martin Chuzzlewit* remarked of Mr. Hannibal Chollop. Her heart appears to have been as warm as her temper, and had she been brought up in what Jeames called “the upper suckles,” and finished off in a fashionable boarding-school, her manners and deportment might have left little to desire.

The Whirlpool

Unsigned Review, *Daily Chronicle*
10 April 1897, p. 3

The chief and most lasting impression which Mr. George Gissing's work always makes upon us is that of the supreme importance of life's trivial things. After closing one of his books we feel afraid to do anything, even the most apparently indifferent thing—to light a cigarette, to whistle the dog, to scribble an acceptance of an invitation—in case it should be the first step towards some harrowing tragedy, some squalid catastrophe. It is from the gadflies of life, not the dragons, according to the Gissing philosophy, that one has most to fear. A man, sensitive and unmarried, will do well to leave Mr. Gissing's books unread, else he is likely to be fearful of trusting himself to go out alone. The dread will be upon him that he will meet some quite unsuitable young woman, fall in love with her, incontinently propose, and make straight the way to a life-long repentance. That Mr. Gissing's is not a true view of life we should hesitate to declare; but it is a very terrible one, and he sets it forth with convincing and almost brutal realism.

In the matter of rewards and punishments, too, his theories are firm based upon the rock of experience. In his representations of life the sinners suffer, truly, but it is the small sinners who come to grief, the feeble, tepid, timid offenders, those who lack strength to err boldly. The downright wicked, the splendid liars, the out-and-out conscienceless, move serenely along to worldly success and social victory. Mr. Gissing fully recognises the futility of "vain virtues" and the failure that lies in wait for the gingerly sinner.

From a literary point of view, Mr. Gissing's most remarkable characteristic is his skilful use of small detail. He is not photographic. He is too true an artist to let the camera usurp the lawful functions of the brush; nor does he ever offend his readers with unexpurgated note-book. He uses a note-book, but he uses it like an artist, and not like a reporter. In short, he selects his detail, and presents his readers with only just so much of it as is needful to create a vivid, a faithful, and a memorable impression. He tells us a great deal about his characters—much more than most authors of the first rank tell us; but when we carefully consider what he tells us, we invariably find that even the most apparently inessential revelations have a direct bearing upon the realisation of character. His details do not muddle, they help us.

He is fully alive to the part that money plays in the affairs of men. He recognises that questions of the banking account occupy men and even women's thoughts as largely as dilemmas of the heart. He demonstrates, just as experience itself demonstrates, how frequently action is restrained and restricted and desire thwarted by limitations of income. In a word, he gives us life itself. It is as impossible to skip passages in his novels as it is to skip events in one's own existence. That perhaps is why, absorbing though the interest one takes in his books is, one never wants to read them a second time. The memory of them serves. Who would live his life over again?

The Whirlpool deals with the careers of a largish group of men and women of the educated and fairly well-to-do middle class. Every character is portrayed in Mr. Gissing's usual powerful and masterly way. We know them all; but gradually we find our interest centering around Harvey Rolfe and Alma his wife; and as the story develops we find everything else becoming subordinate to the characterisation of these two. Rolfe is in no way an extraordinary personality. He is close on forty when we first meet him, and he has never done or said anything to mark him out from the common ruck. He is as far as any of us from being the ideal hero of a novel or a drama. But Mr. Gissing so presents him as to claim our attention for him at once, and to hold it all through. In life we pass such a man by; art—the art of George Gissing—compels us to fix our eyes upon him and to watch and wait for what may come. That is art's triumph. Alma, his wife, has more of distinction. One feels that things will happen to her, that she will cause emotions, not always of the pleasantest. She is the victim of a wayward disposition which mistakes itself for the artistic temperament. Now, to have the artistic temperament is to be a worry to one's self and a grievous burthen to one's friends, but to think that one has it and to

have it not is a thing still more portentous of trouble. Alma had ideals, but she followed none of them with determination. They were all will-o'-wisp ideals. She had social views, but held none firmly. She lacked both the "robust conscience and the Viking spirit," as Hilda Wangel has it. The Viking blood in her ran thin, and the conscience was flabby. She was capable of sinning only those puny sins which bring suffering to the sinner, and never success to his plans. She challenges her enemy, Sibyl Carnaby, to a duel to the death (of reputation), and at a critical moment of the fight breaks down in hysterics. Thus she, a comparatively "good" woman, works far more woe in the story than either Sibyl or Mrs. Strangeways, two very unmistakeably "bad" ones. Her virtues were as vain as her vices were ineffectual. Sibyl Carnaby deceived her husband, to the furthest extent of deception, and yet led the man a comfortable and even a happy life. Alma's infidelities fell a long way short of criminality, but yet Rolfe grieved not for her loss, and she was the immediate cause of murder.

Further we will not attempt to tell the story; its title is admirably chosen and it is scarce possible to present a "whirlpool" in outline. Not even Mr. Gissing's genius could make a bare sketch of it interesting. We take it for granted that everyone who has read any of the author's previous works will read this. Those who have not could hardly be introduced to Mr. Gissing under more favourable auspices than his new novel presents.

Review by Barbara [i.e. Arnold Bennett], *Woman*
21 April 1897, pp. 8-9

Somehow *The Whirlpool*, though it is a sad enough book, does not leave us with that final impression of despair which Mr. Gissing's works are wont to produce. It ends upon a note of solemn peace and chastened content, and we feel that after all fate is not blind, and that happiness (of a sort) comes to those who have deserved it. But this grateful effect is brought about, to my mind, at the expense of art. Mr. Gissing had an actual desire to end his story well, and he has done so in the only possible way, by accidentally killing his heroine. Now I am glad that Mr. Gissing's budding optimism should have overcome the artist in him. It is better that a man of his fine intellect and imagination should, after a period of persistent pes-simism, begin to see life roseately, than that one of his novels should be flawless. Not that he does yet see life quite *roseately*. Grey and black are still his colours, but a faint, beneficent tinge of crimson is not wanting. For this, thanksgiving.

The whirlpool (what there is of it) is the maelstrom of upper middle-class life in London—where financiers, swindlers, artists, libertines, and a few honest men swing, more or less helplessly, round and round in the futile, never-ending race for "position." We are shown first a quiet, sane, studious man, Harvey Rolfe, a bachelor of means. He hugs his independence, and at once we know that he will

surely make an impossible marriage. Alma Frothingham is the daughter of a ruined financier. She is beautiful, and plays the violin rather better than an amateur, rather worse than a genius. She is tormented by an artistic temperament, and by certain inherited instincts, and though she has fine aspirations, she happens to be exactly the sort of woman to exasperate a man whose leading quality is balance. The Almas of the world ought never to marry, and why the Harvey Rolfe should fall in love with them is a mystery. We follow the wedded fortunes of these two through a maze of petty incidents, each trivial, but each inevitably hastening disaster. Rolfe and Rolfe's wife could never be long happy together, and the right thing would have been to leave them, at the end of the book, facing a vista of infelicity; but Mr. Gissing has chosen not to do this. His compassion for the admirable Harvey would not permit it, and so Alma is permitted to take an accidental and highly inartistic overdose of chloral.

The character of Alma is possibly the best thing that Mr. Gissing has done. I have seen Alma many times at St. James's Hall, at vegetarian restaurants, at schools of art, and adrift in Continental cities. There are hundreds of her in London—ineffectual women; women whose very birth-right is an impulsive futility; fitful, feverish women. Mr. Gissing exposes and expounds her with rare courage and lucidity. The portrait is convincing and complete, save only on one side—the artistic. Although Alma was a violinist of exceptional gifts, the musician in her is constantly passed over. Even when she makes her *début* as a professional, not a single word is devoted to the analysis of her feelings *qua* executive artist before the concert. A grave omission! Since five-sixths of all the trouble in the book springs from the fact that Alma is a musical artist, it seems inexcusable that the purely musical part of her should be so completely ignored. The psychology of the typical musician is surely not beyond the province of the novelist. However, apart from this point, Alma is a striking success.

Harvey Rolfe is less life-like. Mr. Gissing has drawn him before, and with greater effectiveness. One likes him, admires his sanity, but one sees him through a veil which refuses to be rent. There are crowds of other characters in the story—Felix Dymes, the song-writer; Hugh Carnaby, the lion caught in the spell of an enchantress who is quite the wickedest woman in the book; Cyrus Redgrave, “man of the world”; Morphew, type of youthful folly; Mrs. Abbott, the self-sacrificing woman; and so on: all playing their proper parts, but not, it must be said, constituting precisely a “whirlpool.” Mr. Gissing has failed to paint a large picture; instead, he has painted a succession of small ones.

As a whole, the book contains the best work he has ever accomplished. His style, though it will never be lyric, continues to improve, and he fashions his sentences and paragraphs with something more than the old loving attention to detail. I would he could contrive to lose that trick of writing with one eye on the upper middle-class public. Whenever a character deviates (be it only in the matter of dressing for dinner) from the standard of manners adopted by the great upper middle-class, Mr. Gissing carefully and apologetically sets down the deviation.

The fact is, he is obsessed by the bugbear of decorum, as decorum is understood in Notting Hill and Bayswater.

Unsigned Review, *The Times*
13 August 1897, p. 8

Mr. Gissing has a faithful and appreciative public of his own, but we doubt its being a very large one. His tales are generally so depressing, not to say pessimistic, that tender-hearted folks—who are numerous among novel readers—avoid them. They feel certain that his heroes and heroines will have “a bad end,” and a suspicion, generally but too well justified, that their lives will not be agreeable in the meantime. Mr. Gissing no doubt draws from his own experience of life; but if so, as Captain Gronow remarks of the Dandies, he has had no luck. In *The Whirlpool* things are not quite so bad, because his characters are in a better position than usual. They have at least plenty to eat and drink and the ladies have tailor-made clothes, even if they do not pay for them. Though he does not permit them to enjoy themselves in a wholesome way, which seems too much to expect, their surroundings are not sordid. We have been lately informed on scientific authority that people do not commit suicide so often in the winter months, because they see more of one another, which begets geniality; but though the people in Mr. Gissing’s book are very numerous and constantly in one another’s society, they are not more cheerful on that account. It is the being in the Whirlpool (of dissipation) that destroyed them. Mrs. Rolfe is the leading lady in the piece, and naturally comes in for the larger share of misfortune, whereas Mrs. Carnaby, who is not better than she should be, does for herself, as the phrase goes, “exceedingly well,” escaping the crime of being found out, in a manner that must have cost the author a pang, for he is not one to spare any woman, whether good or bad, the consequences of being born in this vale of tears. He has little more story to tell than Canning’s Knife-grinder, but the telling of it is so skilful and the situations so well described that we cover the whole ground—450 pages of small print—with scarcely any sense of fatigue. We are too conscious, however, throughout that we are in the hands of a very clever writer, who is compelling us to make acquaintance with persons of an exceptional and by no means agreeable type, whom he would have us believe are ordinary members of society. Mr. Felix Dymes, for example, and Mrs. Strange-ways (well named, indeed) are monstrosities one would expect to see on a magic lantern slide rather than in a London drawing room.

Human Odds and Ends

Unsigned Review, *Daily News*
26 November 1897, p. 9

Mr. George Gissing is a curiously close observer. His intent study of human nature is almost entirely confined to that of the English middle class. *Human Odds and Ends* is a series of stories and sketches dealing with the trials and aims of members of that vast section of society. He flashes the somewhat cold light of his penetrating insight into strange spiritual nooks and crannies, and reveals the aims and deceptions of a laborious, usually sordid and snobbish, multitude, the large majority of whose members lead lives of tragic dullness, at once precarious and pretentious. We see portrayed in these pages successful and defeated journalists, writers of books, teachers, and other professional men and women—Bohemians who, because of their temperament, or from lack of character, have failed in the strenuous struggle for existence; others again who have reached to the summit of their calling, and yet have lost all zest in life, their spirit swamped in the triviality and vulgarity of their surroundings. It is all done to the life. The impression left by this amazingly real presentation is at once depressing to the emotions and intellectually stimulating. Sometimes, as in the strong and reticent sketch “A Day of Silence,” Mr. Gissing gives us a glimpse of a more dignified tragedy in the life of the labouring classes, simpler, saner, more appealing in its sorrowful sincerity. The picture, indeed, of the joys of the middle class is more depressing than that of its struggles and failures. Much in the volume reads like notes and jottings to be further amplified. If this book has not the significance of Mr. Gissing’s more sustained achievements, admirers of his work, and they are numerous and increasing, cannot afford to overlook it.

The Town Traveller

Unsigned Review, *Saturday Review*
17 September 1898, p. 387

The Town Traveller has been conceived in a more cheerful mood than that in which the contemplation of the life of the lower middle classes usually leaves Mr. Gissing. He has hitherto been content to show us this life working itself out to squalidly tragic issues, and it would seem to indicate a not premature enlargement of his horizon that he should at last have determined to reveal the quaint humour that may well lurk under the sordid exterior of life in the Kennington Road. The gain, we think, is not the reader’s alone, for Mr. Gissing here shows a suppleness and freedom which have not always been conspicuous in his work. The character of Mr. Gammon, the “town traveller,” is built up with extraordinary sympathy, and Polly Sparkes, the shrewd, vulgar and ferociously virtuous girl who sells pro-

grammes at a theatre, is a masterpiece of observation. Mr. Gissing indeed is at times apt to finish his drawing too highly, to assure his reader that there is no deception with a thought too much emphasis. This is perhaps an excellent fault, and at least his characters have an excellent seeming of vitality. With the possible exception of Greenacre, who puzzles the reader as completely as he puzzled Mr. Gammon, all the people in this book are figures of amazing alertness. The plot though light is ingenious, the humour spontaneous, and the author's mental attitude towards phases of life with which he has nothing in common is curiously and pleasantly genial.

Review by Sarah Volatile [i.e. Arnold Bennett], *Hearth and Home*
29 September 1898, p. 749

No one would have suspected that Mr. Gissing, author of all the most depressing novels of modern times, possessed a secret inclination towards the farcical, the jolly, the frankly amusing. It seems incredible. Yet *The Town Traveller* has clearly been written with an intention to amuse. And it does amuse. Dozens of episodes in the history of Mr. Gammon the town traveller, and Mrs. Bubb the lodging-house landlady, and Polly Sparkes the programme-seller, and Mrs. Clover of the china shop, are really funny, and prove that Mr. Gissing can find food for laughter when he goes forth into the Kennington Road in search of material. Mr. Gammon is a delightful and very original character, but I think that the author has given most pains to Polly Sparkes—as vulgar a little hussey as ever wore a white apron and took sixpence from you for a bill of the play. Her adventures, sentimental, tragic, and otherwise, have been contrived not only with full knowledge of the type, but with an extraordinary ingenuity. *The Town Traveller* is, of course, at its basis, sordid—for Mr. Gissing seems to confine himself strictly to one stratum of society—but I will guarantee it not to be depressing; indeed it is exhilarating. That Mr. Gissing should have unbent so far as to write such a book is a good sign, for it argues that he has achieved the success which has long been his due. Perhaps he will not count this volume among his serious work. Yet, in one way, it is just as serious, artistically, as anything he has done. And, in any event, it is well for him to make us laugh occasionally.

Unsigned Review, *Cosmopolis*
October 1898, p. 84

This novel is, in treatment at least, and in the author's mental attitude, a welcome and interesting respite from the weary sadness that pervades most of its predecessors. It is not that the author has ventured on fresh social ground; we have in this book, as of old, an elaborate and, in the end, convincing study of London's

lower middle-class life, its vulgarities and meannesses, its gross or silly ambitions. But the general tone of the book is cheerful, at times almost boisterous, and, on the whole, one cannot but be grateful for the serenity and detachment Mr. Gissing has shown in the management of his puppets. We are not on the side of those who think that the seriousness of the book is impaired thereby; on the contrary, we believe this not unsympathetic cynicism to be bracing, and morally persuasive.

The Crown of Life

Unsigned Review, *Morning Post*
16 November 1899, p. 3

Mr. George Gissing is perhaps the most distinctive writer of the day. There is no one quite like him, either in subject or treatment. If his range is somewhat limited, within it his people startle by their actuality. He writes of life as one who has learnt its lesson in a hard school. The absence of humour seems less due to a deficiency in its sense than to a conviction that the human struggle is too grim a topic for amusement. His books might be written by a Richardson, who had graduated in the New Grub Street about which Mr. Gissing has written with such power. As time goes on it is interesting to note a less uncompromising pessimism. There is not the same insistence on the duty of being miserable. It certainly makes for pleasure in literature when so stern a realist concedes a happy end. Piers Otway is a type of character Mr. Gissing knows with a thoroughness almost uncanny. A creature of to-day, we see him with all his weaknesses—to many an intolerable personality none the less, because so human. Drawn to women, and yet so afraid of them—wavering between passion and ideality. The book is the story of a lad handicapped by birth and circumstances, in love with a woman apparently out of his reach, struggling to ultimate success. Mr. Gissing will never be a “popular” author, but he will always command the attention of those who understand the interest of life as it is.

Unsigned Review, *Saturday Review*
2 December 1899

A novel by Mr. Gissing is always worth reading ; but the reader must be at least thirty, better forty, and the iron and ironies of life must in some degree have entered his soul. Let him be poor, lonely, frustrated, disillusioned, half compassionate and half contemptuous of himself and others, and he will gloom in melancholy satisfaction over Mr. Gissing’s pages and say “Such is life as I also know it.” This is the kind of man who enjoys a Gissing novel; but we are somewhat afraid he will hardly rank *The Crown of Life* amongst the masterpieces of melancholy. Piers

Otway and Irene Derwent were a pair of lovers who had no more right to happiness than Romeo and Juliet. She spoiled her own prospective unhappiness with the young "Imperialist," who would have annexed her as unsentimentally as he would, say the Transvaal, by refusing to look at the new house and going off to Paris. It was inexcusable; not because she thereby raised the question as to how long a young woman is entitled to keep up an engagement, but because she thereby brought the otherwise hopeless Piers on the scene again to make him and herself happy against all the canons of the Gissing logic of life. Only one hope for unhappiness do we perceive. We know from Mr. Gissing that some people may love more than is necessary for happy marriage; and as excess often leads to reaction we feel justified in having our doubts about Piers. In all other respects we find what we are accustomed to in a novel by Mr. Gissing: a strong story, a profusion of secondary characters, distinct, clear-cut types; the sinister Hannaford with his collection of bloodstained war relics, his wife who has grown to loathe him, Olga the neurotic daughter, Kite the anæmic artist of genius, Miss Bonnicastle the vigorous designer of advertising posters. The book leaves off on a characteristic Gissing note. We are parting from the hero at the moment when his "lyric love" is at last triumphant: "All at once he thought amid his triumph of those unhappy ones whom the glory of love would never bless; those men and women born to a vain longing such as he had known doomed to the dread solitude from which he by a miracle had been saved. His heart swelled, and his eyes were hot with tears." This touch is perfect.

Unsigned Review, *Graphic*
20 January 1900, p. 98

In *The Crown of Life* Mr. George Gissing has made what is in most important respects a notable departure from his former methods. And as is by no means always the case with new departures, his new method is a great improvement upon the old. In point of style alone he and his readers are to be congratulated upon his having successfully thrown off certain obscurities and other mannerisms that were threatening to become inveterate; indeed a greater amount of matter, interesting in itself, has seldom been presented with equal force, directness and lucidity. The story has three distinct but unseparable aspects. In the first place it is the simplest of love tales; in the second, a piece of exceedingly complex portraiture; in the third, the mutual bearings, requiring exceptional insight to perceive, of private lives and public affairs. That Piers Otway, when a mere lad, fell in love with Irene Derwent at first sight, and remained constant to an unrequited love for eight in-creasingly hopeless years till, all of a sudden, life won its crown—that is the story in its simplicity. That one apparently so incapable of constancy, so impatient, so impulsive, so easily impressionable, and so sensuously tempered, should have carried such constancy across the gulf between boyhood and manhood—that is the plot in its complexity. And all this in the highest degree sympathetic and con-

vincing. But the main interest of the work will be found in the handling of matters at present uppermost in men's minds—Imperialism in theory and practice, and War, and Race, and so forth, which are talked about as real men and women do talk about them, only with much more sharpness of wit, and hardness of hitting. As a dish of political heterodoxy the novel is mentally stimulating; and, if all that be skipped (though that is unlikely), every essential element of interest remains. *The Crown of Life* is unquestionably its author's best work, so far.

Our Friend the Charlatan

Review by E. A. Bennett, *Hearth and Home*
4 July 1901, p. 374

Mr. Gissing's new novel, *Our Friend the Charlatan*, is, in a word, fine. It deals, very ironically, with that portion of middle-class society which calls itself "serious." In the circle dominated by Lady Ogram, the wealthy and terrible old widow who played at philanthropy as at a game, all the people talk about helping the nation at large, improving the general lot, advancing culture, and so on. They are all full of "schemes" and theories. The hero, Dyce Lashmar, our friend the charlatan, has a theory of humanity which explains everything. He is very proud of his theory, and expounds it with delight, and it certainly assists him in his career of a political adventurer. Nevertheless, he simply stole the theory from a Frenchman, and ultimately he was found out by one of the women whose protection he had sought for and utilised. There are more women in the book than men. Besides Lady Ogram, there is Constance Bride, her secretary, a formidable young dame, genuine, but hard in her judgments, and unconsciously devious in some of her actions. Constance is perhaps the best drawn woman in the story, unless it be Iris, the "womanly" woman, the youngish widow who doesn't pretend to have intellect and only wants to be a woman and to round off the life of some man. Dyce Lashmar she adores; she privately lends him money; and in the end when the death of Lady Ogram (dramatically-treated, this death) has robbed him of his prospects, Dyce Lashmar marries Iris Woolstan—and bullies her, too. Then there is May Tomalin, the pert "cultured" chit from the provinces, called, through a distant relationship to Lady Ogram, to a dazzling social career, and then flung back on her native heath as a punishment for a foolish indiscretion. May Tomalin, with her sociology, her Chaucer, her gorgeous *hauteur*, is exposed by Mr. Gissing with calm malice. If one had not met such girls, one would be inclined to say "overdrawn." But it is not so. May Tomalins exist, not only in the provinces, but in London. The portrait of Lord Dymchurch, foil to the charlatan hero, a modest, ingenuous, refined and apparently futile soul, is admirably done. The ultimate settlement of his destiny is really noble.

Mr. Gissing convicts his characters out of their own mouths, and this is especially true of May Tomalin and Constance Bride: [here is quoted a passage at the

end of chapter V, a dialogue between Constance and Dyce, from "I see no reason" to "to be delivered from it."]

The fellow gives himself away in every sentence, utterly unable to realise that no people other than moral and intellectual quacks ever talk as he talks. Poor Dyce!

Unsigned Review, *Literary News*
September 1901, p. 260

Mr. Gissing is distinctly felicitous in the choice of title for his latest book, says the New York *Commercial Advertiser*. "Our Friend the Charlatan," he says, by way of familiar introduction, quite sure that we shall all recognize the hero as an acquaintance of long standing. And while we may not altogether agree with the author in the justice of the term "charlatan," we feel that we do know the Dyce Lashmar of his story very well indeed. He is not by any means the smooth, plausible hypocrite which we expected at the outset to find, but rather a man endowed with an unfortunate obliquity of moral vision and an unbounded capacity for self-deception. Starting in life with all the outward qualifications for success—a pleasing presence, a contagious enthusiasm, an air of sincerity that carries conviction—he lacks those finer moral qualities and that steadfastness of purpose which are the prime requisites of achievement. He is one of those men who are quick to catch another person's viewpoint, deftly swerve around to it, adopt it as their own and enlarging upon it burst into flights of lyric eloquence that convince the listener that here at last is the "coming man." At the outset of the story Lashmar has just read and absorbed a new theory of government by a French writer, "the bio-sociological theory," and brooded over it, tried it on some of his friends with marked success, and ended by making it his own—so much his own that it seems to him that to acknowledge the real source of the theory would be "a flagrant injustice to himself." This theory opens up the possibility of a new career, just at a time when his father's straitened circumstances have cut short one source of his revenue and his one pupil's departure for boarding-school interrupts another.

It really makes very enjoyable reading to see how deliberately and irrevocably Mr. Gissing's clever hero over-reaches himself. And when, coupled with his duplicity in love, comes the revelation of his indebtedness to the French author for all his high-sounding eloquence, all his visionary schemes for revolutionizing English politics in accordance with this wonderful "bio-sociology" came to an end, and, shorn of greatness and robbed of his coveted heiress, he is forced to fall back upon the humble fortune and freckles of Iris Woolstan, one feels that the fitness of things has been well preserved. Mr. Gissing is one of the few writers to-day whose books are worth a leisurely and careful reading; and *Our Friend the Charlatan* is distinctly one that it is a pleasure to linger over and to discuss.

Mr. Henry Harland waxes enthusiastic in writing of *Our Friend the Charlatan*: here is a book every movement of which is thought and felt and wrought. Of how

many contemporary works of fiction could the same be said? And it is wrought in a manner that compels attention—you will hardly put the book down till you have finished it. And then—you will not send it to Bookseller's Row. You will place it on your shelves, above the shelf on which you have placed Zola, below the shelf on which you have placed Turgéneff—but near Turgéneff, in the same corner of your book-room.

By the Ionian Sea

Review by E. A. Bennett, *Hearth and Home*
4 July 1901, p. 374

Another volume by Mr. George Gissing which I have received is *By the Ionian Sea Notes of a Ramble in Southern Italy*. This, though a short book, makes a stately quarto, and it is magnificently illustrated in colours by Mr. Leo de Littrow, and in black and white by an unnamed artist, who may be Mr. Gissing himself. *By the Ionian Sea* is one of the most charming travel-books that I have read for years. It records the observations of a man who knows how to observe at once with knowledge, impartiality and sympathy: a man with an eye ever keen for the "human interest" of the scenes which it surveys. It is a model travel-book, and will, I hope, inspire its readers with a disgust for the huge and slabby tomes which professional travellers are wont to put forth—more like lumps of raw beef than literature. Mr. Gissing started from Naples, and after a short sea voyage to Paola, crossed the "instep" of Italy to Taranto, and then followed the coast as far as Reggio, which is opposite to Sicily. The districts which he traversed are little known. The hand of the speculator has not sown them thick with Hotel Metropoles, and they retain that charm which is the negation of a good hotel; also, and chiefly, they teem with relics of the classic ages. It was these latter which drew Mr. Gissing south of Naples.

Unsigned Review, *Daily Telegraph*
21 June 1901, p. 6

It is difficult to exaggerate the rare charm with which Mr. Gissing's account of his wanderings in Calabria is instinct; it is also difficult to define it. Even those who do not share the author's particular interest, at once classical and sentimental, in the land of Magna Græcia will be galvanised into responsive warmth by his delighted enthusiasm in the localisation of old sites, such as Sybaris and Croton, Tarentum and the Galæsus, or by his sudden pleasure at the unexpected recognition of a Greek word in the country dialect. The passion with which the ancient classics inspire devotees is deep-rooted, but it is not always combined with the glow of poetic feeling, the sensuous perception of the beautiful which give warmth and colour to

the shores of the Ionian Sea as depicted for us by Mr. Gissing. But even if the distant echoes which mean so much to him fail to awake any answering notes in our mental emotions, we lose only a portion of the delight which awaits us in these pages. It is a fascinating picture of quaint intimate experiences in the villages of southern Italy, full of a passionate pleasure in the loveliness of the scenery, each detail of which is noted with tender appreciation, teeming with impressions of men and things, touched with a sympathy which is curiously lacking in the author's keen analysis of his fellow men and women to be found in his fiction. And yet we owe not a little of the enjoyment of the book to this same incisive dissection by the author. It enables him to present to our eyes vivid sketches of the characters with whom he came in contact, adding a human interest to the scenic attractiveness of his pages. It is a book for friendship rather than for superficial acquaintance; its fascination increases with more intimate knowledge; it is a store-house of varied information as well as a poetical appreciation.

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft

Review by Henry Murray, *Sunday Sun*
15 March 1903, p. 1

This last book of Mr. Gissing is—with a difference—very much like those which have preceded it. It could have come only from the pen of a writer who, having known the sordid life of the New Grub Street by personal knowledge, has won through it and passed into a fairer region. It is a sad utterance, and a pessimistic one, but its sadness and pessimism are, contrasted with those of his former books, as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine. It tells the story—if story it can be called—of the declining years of a literary hack, who, after fifty years of compulsory but honest and never merely perfunctory toil, seeing before him nothing but a sad vista of failing powers and consequent dependence, finds himself rescued from that dismal prospect by an unexpected legacy of £300 a year. As we read the book, Henry Ryecroft's personality gradually unfolds itself, we get first to like and then to love him, as we read in these scattered pages of observation and reminiscence the history of his purgatorial past and the diary of his quietly happy present. Mr. Gissing has succeeded perfectly in maintaining throughout the effect he aims to produce; the self-portrayal of the gentle, timid, scholarly recluse, who, never having had either the trick or the opportunity of expressing his inner self during his long years of sordid literary toil, vows on his emancipation never again to write a line for publication, but, unable altogether to forego the wonted use of the pen, jots down, with perfect candour and simplicity, the thoughts of every day. The prevailing note of the book is one of quiet contentment with things as they are—a rather dull and bovine kind of contentment, as that of a beast of burden who, having toiled all through the long, hot day, slowly relishes his mouthful of cool

grass in the deepening twilight which precedes the long night's sleep; or of Tennyson's Lotus-eaters in the land "wherein it seemed always afternoon":•

Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence; ripen, fall and cease;
Give us long rest or death; dark death, or dreamful ease.

Like Keats, in the calmer mood which diversified the poignant anguish of his sense of failure, Ryecroft is "half in love with easeful Death." [quotation of second paragraph from Autumn XII about country churchyards and death]

We learn how hard and bleak had been his earlier years, how dull and hopeless of any distinction his later life, from many brief hints scattered about his pages. Here is an illuminating passage:• [quotation of first paragraph from Autumn XV about making a meal of blackberries]

There is a deep, true, underlying pathos in this little passage which is very touching. Ryecroft tells the incident as happening to himself, but the touch of self-pity evident in its relation has nothing maudlin or unmanly. The sorrow that such cheap joys should be so rare, that millions of others will pass through life without ever feeling the keen sense of personal gratitude which, in his brief hour of rural liberty, thrills him as he recognised for the first time unfettered Nature's kindness, though unspoken, is still expressed; the poor individual pariah, Henry Ryecroft, speaks for the race.

Henry Ryecroft, you see, has been through the mill. He has known all that poverty can teach. He has known the time when the difference of sixpence in the weekly rent of his garret room represented a couple of meals. He has known what it was to stand outside the cheapest kind of eating house, and to envy the newsboy, the dock labourer, the sandwich-man battenning within upon the roast and boiled cagmag, whereof the odour is, to the well-fed, as the veritable reek of Tophet. He has known the fierce battle between brain and belly which none can know but the poor scholar in a great city, who is confronted by the choice between purchasing a coveted volume or a loaf of bread. He has known what, to a refined and delicate nature, is far and away the greatest horror of all—what it is to herd with the ignorant, the vulgar, the unwashed, the sordid of thought and squalid of speech. One of his vividest memories is of having once found sixpence in the street. He tells how, years later, in his days of wealth, he repaid that loan from the hand of friendly circumstance. [quotation of fourth, fifth and sixth paragraphs from Spring III about the little lad who had lost sixpence]

Looking back, in the calm of settled prosperity, on these sorrows and privations of his youth—endurable, since it was in youth he suffered them, and the splendid future of success and fame youth finds it so easy to believe in, so impossible to win, lay before him, beckoning him on—he remembered how there came upon him the slow, dull ache of defeated ambition, as year after year slipped by without bringing the eagerly coveted opportunity, and to that again the vivid anguish of that horrible sense of failing power, of “the consummation coming, past escape,” when the tired brain and wearied hand would be incapable of further effort, when the capital of thought and energy would be finally dissipated. An unexpected turn of fortune’s wheel has saved *him* from that last sordid act of the long tragedy, but what of the others, who are condemned to play it out? [quotation of the whole of Spring XVIII about unsuccessful authors]

“With a lifetime of dread experience behind me, I say that he who encourages any young man or woman to look for his living to ‘literature’ commits no less than a crime.” I have written the same warning myself a dozen times, and have spoken it at least a hundred, and have been gravely informed, in print and *viva voce*, that such an utterance branded me as “a traitor to my craft.” The phrase is a fine one, and sounds very noble and convincing, no doubt, but it has left me quite untouched, and just as anxious as I have been for many years past to save any hopeful young person I can from voluntarily plunging into the Inferno of letters. Any candid and unprejudiced person who knows the facts of the case will support Mr. Gissing’s statement, which is one and the same in spirit with similar warnings spoken and written by scores of writers who, like himself, have met with far more than an average success in the pursuit of literature. I am not counselling any literary aspirant who may read these lines to forego the pleasures of literary composition, or the delights of literary fame.

Both are great, and it is quite possible that the first-named are the greater and the better worth having. Walter Besant, who had a good deal more than the average good fortune in the literary life, declared that the keenest pleasure his life had yielded him had come from the writing and perusal of his first efforts, and that the biggest cheque from a publisher, or the most eulogistic “notice” from the pen of a critic, had given him less delight than he had found in gloating over the dim and undefined possibilities of the virgin manuscript. Those joys are certainly the purest of all that fall to the lot of the literary artist, and they are by far the commonest. For, though I have no great love for my fellow scribes—and least love of all, as a rule, for those who have attained to any great measure of what the world calls “success”—I do most potently believe, and most joyfully proclaim, that they are—at starting their careers—among the most cleanly enthusiastic, and therefore among the most loveable of human beings. Not one youthful scribbler in a hundred, I verily believe, has a thought for the possible monetary value of his outpourings. He writes, pretty generally, from a pathetic belief that he has something to tell the world. If he is particularly young and ignorant, he may perhaps think that he has something to say that has never been said before—that his own particular artistic

Pan's pipe yields a note of emotion not to be found in the gamut of any previous singer from Chaucer to Tennyson. Only a harsh and grudging critic of human nature would stigmatise this belief as "vanity." For, unless the writer is to sink, knowingly and willingly, to the level of a mere penny-a-liner, it must, more or less, abide with him, long after the dreams it begot have melted and disappeared. And—here I get back to Mr. Gissing's utterance—it is not easily possible to keep that beautiful and puerile faith alive after a certain time spent in the literary marketplace. No doubt, great literature has been written, and will again be written, by the merely professional penman, by the man whose butcher's bill and house rent are paid for by the practice of writing. But, when I read a really fine book from the pen of a literary hack, I cannot help wondering how much finer it might have been written at leisure, or even—best condition of all—had its every passage been penned in the intervals of labour of another kind.

If this article should be so fortunate as to be read by any young person with literary aspirations, I will address him personally, as thus: "Go on reading, go on thinking, go on writing, but—if you can find bread for yourself on any other highway trodden by the feet of man—beware of that which leads to the literary market. If you are moderately robust, drive a cab, 'conduct' an omnibus, break stones for your native parish, but, robust or sickly, leave literature alone as a profession. Its prizes are few, and for the most part not particularly worth having; its blanks are many, and there are none blanker to be found. If you fail as a professional writer—and the most youthful vanity and hopefulness combined must needs recognise that the odds are hugely in favour of that hypothesis—the failure is complete, final, and terrible. If you fail as an amateur, your vanity will suffer, but your office, or farm, or shop will yet remain to you, and yield you and yours at least the daily crust. And you will have—which the literary failure cannot have—the sense that you occupy a natural and necessary place in the economy of life, and have a right to exist, a right based on the performance of natural and necessary labour."

Unsigned Review, *Independent* (Boston)

9 April 1903, pp. 853-54

I am glad to be able to say that one of our living novelists has just been giving to the world a piece of work about the success of which it is safe to make a confident prediction. This book is called *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. I have always been a great admirer of Mr. Gissing's works and I do not think he has ever given to the world anything better than is to be found in this volume. [summing up of Ryecroft's life as related in the Preface]

The book is one of the most remarkable that have appeared in English literature for many years. The whole idea is original. [descriptive analysis of the contents of the book] I do not know whether the ordinary novel reader will be greatly taken by such a book, for it has actually no story to tell and the element of love has nothing

to do with its creation. It is the study of a human soul, and as such must be welcomed or left unread. But I can venture to say that the book will find close readers and appreciative admirers among the educated public everywhere. It may seem a strange sort of comparison to make, but I cannot help saying that this Ryecroft story reminds me sometimes of the writings of Rousseau. There is nothing in it of the morbidness too often to be found in the writings of "the self-torturing sophist," as Byron called Rousseau, but there is much of Rousseau's deep feeling and poetical eloquence. I have no doubt that many readers will at once begin to conjecture that Mr. Gissing is to some extent autobiographical, and is revealing to the world some passages from his own experience. I cannot offer any opinion on that subject and I am quite content to accept the volume as the product of the author's imagination and as a sympathetic and thoroughly artistic embodiment of a human soul.

Obituary by C. F. G. Masterman: George Gissing

Daily News, 30 December 1903, p. 5

A few hours ago I was expressing, in a summary of the literature of 1903, my gratitude and admiration for "Henry Ryecroft," one of the few living books of the year. To-day comes the news that its author has joined "the unanswering generations of the dead." One's whole being revolts against such a bitter bludgeoning of fate. Readers of that great work, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, will remember the restrained but indignant satire of the end. After the unendurable years are over, when life has emerged into afternoon, with a prospect of light at eventide, a few dispassionate sentences tell of a sudden chance chill, a few days' struggle, and then the end. So it has been with George Gissing. A long struggle against heavy odds, the experience of the worst, public neglect and private tragedies, had at last given place to something like hopefulness and fame. Recognition, long deserved, had at length arrived, some of the crudest of life's cruelties had vanished, a benigner outlook, a softer, kindlier vision of the "farcical melodrama" of man's existence had been apparent in these later months. And now to himself, as to his own hero, seeking a scanty harvest of peace at the last, the end has come. The words sound strangely prophetic. "We hoped"—so he wrote of Henry Ryecroft—we hoped it would all last for many a year; it seemed, indeed, as though Ryecroft had only need of rest and calm to become a hale man." "It had always been his wish to die suddenly... He lay down upon the sofa in his study, and there—as his calm face declared—passed from slumber into the great silence."

This is not the time to tell of the details of that storm-tossed life, of the tragedy which lay behind that arduous literary toil and coloured all the outlook upon life with such a haunting greyness and desolation. Some day for the edification or the warning of the children of the future the full story will be told. All that it is neces-

sary to know at the present is contained in those books in which the author under the thin veil of fiction is protesting out of his own heart's bitterness against the existence to which he has been committed. "For twenty years he had lived by the pen. He was a struggling man beset by poverty and other circumstances very unpropitious to work." "He did a great deal of mere hack work: he reviewed, he translated, he wrote articles. There were times, I have no doubt, when bitterness took hold upon him; not seldom he suffered in health, and probably as much from moral as from physical overstrain." The tyranny of this nineteenth century Grubstreet drove his genius into a hard and narrow groove. He could have developed into a great critic—witness his illuminating essay on Dickens. There was humour in him all unsuspected by the public till the appearance of *The Town Traveller*. And a keen eye for natural beauty and a power of description of the charm and fascination of places, and a passionate love of nature and of home were only made manifest in *By the Ionian Sea*, and the last and greatest volume. He remains, and will remain, in literature as the creator of one particular picture: the painter with a cold and mordant accuracy of certain phases of city life, especially of the life of London, in its cheerlessness and bleakness and dusty futility in the years of Imperial complacency and rejoicing at the end of the nineteenth century.

Mr. Gissing rarely if ever described the actual life of the slum. He left to others the natural history of the denizens of John-street and the Jago. The enterprise, variety, and adventurous energy of those who led the predatory existence of the beast would have disturbed with a human vitality the picture of his dead world. It was the classes above, in their ambitions and pitiful successes that he made the subject of his genius: the matrix of which is composed of the characteristic city population, with its severance from nature and its life cramped into days of monotonous routine. With a marvellous artistic power and detachment he constructs his sombre picture, till a sense of almost physical oppression comes upon the reader, as in some strange and disordered dream. There are but occasional vivid incidents; the terrible vitriol throwing in *The Nether World*; the struggle of the socialists in *Demos*, as if against the tentacles of some slimy and unclean monster; the particular note of revolt sounded in *New Grub Street*, when the fog descends not merely upon the multitude who acquiesce, but upon the few who resist. But in general the picture is merely of the changes of time hurrying the individuals through birth, marriage, and death, but leaving the general resultant impression unchanged. "Vanitas vanitatum" is written large over an existence which has "never known the sunshine nor the glory that is brighter than the sun"; in which human life apprehends nothing of its possibilities of sweetness and gentleness and high passion; where the energies, rude or tired, flaming into pitiful revolt or accepting from the beginning the lesson of inevitable defeat, end all alike in dust and ashes.

"Her object," said Mr. Hutton, of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, "is to paint not the grand defeat, but the helpless entanglement and miscarriage of noble aims, to make us see the eager stream of high purpose, not leaping destructively from the rock, but more or less silted up in the dreary sands of modern life." I have often

thought this might serve for a verdict upon all Mr. Gissing's most characteristic work. To produce this result he had, indeed, to cut out great sections of human activity. The physical satisfaction in food and the greater physical satisfaction in drink; the delight in the excitement of betting, an election, an occasional holiday; the illumination that comes to a few at least from a spiritual faith or an ideal cause; even the commonest joy of all, "the only wage," according to the poet, which "love ever asked":

A child's white face to kiss at night,
A woman's smile by candlelight.

- all these, if introduced at all, appear merely to relieve for a moment the picture of the desolation of the life of the incalculable millions of London's bewildered inhabitants. Mr. Gissing has set himself a legitimate artistic effort: the representation of modern life in a certain aspect, seen under a certain mood. It is London not in the glories of starlight or sunset, but under the leaden sky of a cold November afternoon. The third of Henley's *London Voluntaries* seems the characteristic outward scene of Mr. Gissing's gaunt picture of the inward desolation:

The afflicted City seems
A nightmare labyrinthine, dim and drifting,
With wavering gulfs and antic heights, and shifting,
Rent in the stuff of a material dark,
Wherein the lamplight, scattered and sick and pale,
Shows like the leper's living blotch of bale:

- a vision not even possessing the sense of magic and mystery of twilight and gathering night, but simply raw and cold and wretched, with a wind scattering the refuse of the gutter, and a few old tramps and forlorn children shivering, too hideous and grotesque even to evoke compassion—such is Mr. Gissing's vision of London.

It was because we saw in the later works an escape from this insistent and hideous dream, and a promise of a warmer, saner outlook upon human development and desire, that we feel as a kind of personal outrage the news of Mr. Gissing's death. For skilled, artistic craftsmanship he held the first place in the ranks of the younger authors of to-day. He was only forty-six years old. The later books seemed to open possibilities of brilliant promise. The bitterness had become softened. The general protest against the sorry scheme of human things seemed to be passing into a kind of pity for all that suffers, and an acceptance with thankfulness of life's little pleasures. The older indignation had yielded to perplexity as of a suffering child. With something of that perplexity—with a question on his lips still unanswered—George Gissing passes from that world of shadows which he found so full of confusion and pain.

