

The Gissing Journal

Volume XLIII, Number 1, January 2007

“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
Commonplace Book

“A crazy idea...All gone off in smoke”: George Gissing and Miss Curtis

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Part Two

The Curtis Family

On 23 April 1888 George Gissing made the following entry in his diary:

To-day took a sudden idea to go down to Eastbourne,—solely to look in at 13 Church Street. Got there at 3.30, and left again by the 5.30. A long talk with Miss Curtis.¹

This is Gissing’s first mention of Miss Curtis, whom he had met in February, in either his diary or his letters. Coming fifty-four days after he abruptly ended a short stay in Eastbourne upon hearing of his wife’s death, the above entry is an astonishing revelation, the more so because of the intervening silence concerning Miss Curtis. Yet this should not seem surprising as Gissing had good reason not to mention her in his private papers. Certainly, as he was still married to Nell at the time, any thoughts of love would have seemed futile to him. Furthermore, in conversation and in correspondence with his family—all the extant letters from the period February to July 1888 are to his family apart from two fan letters—he simply was not in the habit of disclosing his most private thoughts and feelings. A year later in his *Commonplace Book* he wrote, “I never in my life exchanged a serious confidence with any relative,—I mean, concerning the inner things of one’s heart and mind.”² One can therefore assume that, had Nell not met with a premature end, the Gissing scholar would never have known about Miss Curtis’s brief part in his life.

After Gissing’s return visit to Eastbourne on 23 April, Miss Curtis’s name occurs four more times in his diary up to 9 May, once each in connection with a Mrs. Thornborough and with a Mrs. Walker.³ There are also several cryptic allusions to Gissing’s Eastbourne holiday in two letters

to his sister, Ellen.⁴ Otherwise this is all that can be gathered about Miss Curtis and her kin from his private papers. Previous attempts to trace her, such as Pierre Coustillas's in the 1970s and Sydney Lott's in the 1990s, were hindered by the proliferation of errors one finds in the 1891 census. Moreover, both assumed that Mrs. Thornborough and Mrs. Walker were Miss Curtis's aunts—owing to a misleading entry in Gissing's diary for 4 May 1888, where he refers to "Mrs. Walker, whom Miss Curtis mentioned to me as being her aunt."⁵

Until now, as nothing was known about her, not even her first name, Gissing biographers have almost completely ignored Miss Curtis, even though for a few weeks she was a prospective second Mrs. Gissing. In order to remedy this situation and to do Miss Curtis full justice, I recently embarked on another attempt to discover her identity. Possessing merely the names from Gissing's diary and the knowledge that 13 Church Street was a tobacconist's, I turned to Pierre Coustillas who provided the following entry from Kelly's Directory of Sussex for 1887:

Thornborough, Alfred Gustavus, tobacconist, 8 Church St. ... (Old Town)

This was promising information, for it was highly probable, the name being so uncommon, that Alfred was related to Mrs. Thornborough just a few doors away at 13 Church Street. Next, using various websites on the Internet which have digital images of the British census from 1841 to 1901 to aid me, I made a start with the 1891 census. But, after extensive searches were carried out for a Miss Curtis living in Eastbourne or elsewhere in 1891, neither she nor the Thornboroughs could be found. A further search in the 1881 census proved to be just as fruitless.

Then, when it seemed an absolutely hopeless undertaking, a general search for Alfred G. Thornborough threw up an address in Clapham. Alfred was listed as a visitor and, living at the same address with him, were a Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Curtis, her two sons, Arthur and George, and her daughter Bella. Could this be Gissing's Miss Curtis? In 1881 she was in her twelfth year, and as she would have been in her nineteenth in 1888, it appeared eminently possible. But where was Mrs. Thornborough and what happened to Mrs. Curtis after 1881? Had she died by 1888 and left her children in Mr. and Mrs. Thornborough's charge? Was Mr. Thornborough her brother or no relation at all? He was referred to as a commercial traveller, which suggested less hopefully that he was just a lodger. Now it became essential to prove that the combination of Curtis and Thornborough at the same address was not an incredible coincidence, but that these were the same people who had occupied 13 Church Street, Eastbourne in 1888.

Against expectation a further search for Bella in the 1871 census produced a new contender for Gissing's Miss Curtis, namely her sister, Charlotte, who was seven at the time, and would have been twenty-four in 1888. But why wasn't she at the Clapham address in 1881? Had she married or died in the meantime or had she gained employment elsewhere? With the accumulation of data, there were more and more questions demanding answers. There was nothing for it, but to return to the 1891 census because it was the nearest in date to 1888. Now supplied with birthdates and birthplaces for Mrs. Curtis, Bella and Charlotte, I had good reason to be hopeful of finding them (even if Curtis is an extremely common English name). Even so, after countless more searches the Curtis family could not be traced. Of course, there were a number of plausible explanations for not finding them in the 1891 census: Bella or Mrs. Thornborough might have died, then again, Bella might have left home to take up a living-in job, or, a more likely explanation, she might have married and appear under a different surname.

As research on the census was at a standstill, I decided on an alternative, if improbable, way of locating the Curtis family. An earlier search of the Births, Marriages, and Deaths index had produced the information that an Alfred Gustavus Thornborough had died at Chichester in 1888 aged forty-one. The 1881 census gives his birthdate as 1847, so I knew I had the right person. But when and why had Alfred moved to Chichester? Had he broken ties with the Curtises? The only way to answer these questions was to find out more about him. To do this it was important to locate his grave, that is, if there was one still to be found. Renewed research on the Internet unearthed a website devoted to compiling data from headstones in Sussex. An e-mail was promptly sent to the compiler to search for Alfred Thornborough. The next day a reply came with an inscription for an Alfred Gustavus Thornborough of North Street, Chichester. At last here was a step forward. But was there any likelihood that Bella and Mrs. Thornborough had moved to North Street with Alfred and would still be found there three years after his death?

As no street number was given, it became necessary to call up every North Street address in the 1891 census. 120 street numbers appeared on the monitor. Downloading and trawling through the digital images of 120 households would take days. Where to start? Since the street was divided into various ecclesiastical parishes, and St. Peter the Less, which ran from numbers 20 to 50 North Street, appeared on Alfred's grave inscription, I decided to start with the first of these addresses. And then, quite amazingly,

there they were! Previous attempts to find Miss Curtis had failed simply because her name had been misspelt. She appears as Bella Curtes, and living at a tobacconist's shop at 20 North Street in Chichester together with a Mrs. Thornborough, who was none other than her mother, the former Mrs. Curtis. Birthdates and birthplaces all matched up, so there could be no doubt that these were the same people who had lived in Clapham in 1881 and at 13 Church Street, Eastbourne, in 1888. Bella is referred to as a shop assistant. So, after all, she must have been the Miss Curtis who served Gissing at the tobacconist's in Church Street. Another search of the BMD Index furnished the information that an Alfred Gustavus Thornborough had married in 1886. The marriage certificate was ordered and when it came showed that he had married Sarah Elizabeth Curtis on 23 June 1886. His death certificate revealed that he had died of phthisis on 6 December 1888. The person who registered the death was Bella Curtis, stepdaughter.

I

To avoid taking the reader down every highway and byway explored in the search for Miss Curtis and her kin, what follows is all that as yet could be discovered about her and her family. Bella's great-grandfather and great-grandmother on her father's side were John Curtis (b. 1791) from Stepney, and Fanny Wilson (b. 1791) from Covent Garden. They married in Marylebone in 1814 and had at least nine children: John Edmund (b. 1816), Herman (b. 1818), Mary Adelaide (b. 1820), Charles George (b. 1821), Lionel (b. 1822), Frank Allan (b. 1823), Rosamund Dorothea (b. 1825), Clara Fanny Montrose (b. 1829), and Cornelia (b. 1833). During these years the family was based in and around Marylebone, Paddington, and St. Pancras, just as Gissing would be sixty years later. It would seem, however, that the family spent some time abroad in the early 1830s, as Cornelia was born and christened in Rome. In time the Curtises would prove to be great travellers. They were also a relatively long-lived family for their day: seven of the nine children lived beyond their seventieth birthday.

The two exceptions were John and Lionel. John, who was born in Bloomsbury, studied law and became a barrister. In 1840 he married Jane Juliet Wilson (b. 1808) from the East Indies. In 1845 their only child, John Edward Louis, was born in Paris. Six years later they were living with their son and his seventeen-year-old nursemaid, Nancy Perkins (b. 1834), at 32 Albany Street, just a short distance from 38 Edward Street, where Gissing lodged twenty-eight years later. In 1844 John's younger brother, Lionel, married Jane Juliet's younger sister, Jessie Francisca Wilson (b. 1817). In

1851 they were also living in St. Pancras and likewise with a six-year-old son, Lionel junior. Inside two years tragedy struck both households: in 1852 Lionel, employed at the time as a clerk at the Great Western Railway, died aged thirty, and a year later John's wife, Jane, died at forty-five. What followed was a fascinating development, for John, a barrister, no less, took the astonishing step of marrying his son's nursemaid! Nancy Perkins became the second Mrs. Curtis in 1855, and gave John four further children: Jonlet (b. 1856), Eva (b. 1858), Ada (b. 1862), and Walter (b. 1863). John died at fifty-two in 1868, while his son from his first marriage, John Edward Louis, also died prematurely, aged forty-nine in 1885. Lionel's wife, Jessie, died in 1879, after which time Lionel junior emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand. He was still known to be there in 1906, the year in which Nancy died.

Bella's paternal grandfather, Herman Curtis, who was undoubtedly an impressive individual and something of a patriarch in later life, was born in London in 1818. Upon leaving school he followed a career as a merchant seaman attaining the rank of captain. His will, a self-important and long-winded document, states that he was a retired captain in Her Majesty's Auxiliary Forces. He is also referred to in the 1841 census as a wine merchant. Hence he was well set-up in life long before he was thirty. In 1839 he married Charlotte Stanley Winters from Woolwich. Their first child, John Edward, Bella's father, was born two years later. At the time, the family was living at 19 Carlton Terrace in Paddington. In 1843 the family kept on the Paddington house (a clear sign of their affluence), while moving to 29 Queen's Row, Walworth, where Charlotte bore five daughters: Charlotte Stanley (b. 1843), Amelia (b. 1848), the twins Julia and Jessie Kate (b. 1849), and Rosamund Fanny (b. 1852). By 1856 the family was back at 19 Carlton Terrace, where their last daughter, Mary Gertrude, was born the same year. At some time in the 1860s the family made one last move, establishing itself at 37 Springfield Road, Hampstead. This would be the family home for the next six decades (today the building serves as a Royal Mail delivery office). From the 1850s Herman worked as an accountant, his wife later alongside him. On removal to Hampstead he took upon the role of deputy manager of the manors belonging to the see of London, while retaining a colonial function as a retired captain. After forty-two years of marriage, Charlotte died in 1881 at seventy-five. Captain Curtis, as he liked to be called, lived on in Hampstead as the head of the family for another twenty years. Upon his death on 30 January 1901, he had

five surviving children and thirteen grandchildren. To them he left copyhold property in Hanwell and Ealing, and an estate valued at £4183.7.9.

Of Bella's six aunts on her father's side, only Mary Gertrude and Rosamund Fanny married. Julia, Jessie's twin sister, died aged sixteen in 1865. Mary married Clifford Gibaut Parker (b. 1857), who became the family solicitor, in 1877. They set up house at "Clovernook," in Highbury Station Road, and had three sons: Arnold (b. 1878), Herman (b. 1879), and Edward (b. 1883). Meanwhile Rosamund, an art teacher, stayed on in Hampstead until she married the artist William Permeanus Cornish (1854-1908) in 1894, when she was forty-two. The three remaining sisters were what Gissing would have called "odd women." Spinsters all their lives, Charlotte and Amelia were teachers of music, and Jessie a schoolteacher. Jessie was struck down by illness around the turn of the century, and was staying in 1901 at a private convalescent home in Hove. She died in Hampstead on 3 December 1902, leaving an estate worth £2462.12.3 to her sister, Amelia. Now in their fifties and fairly well off, Amelia and Charlotte stayed on in Hampstead. Amelia died in 1913, while Charlotte, the last of Bella's aunts, lived on into the 1920s.

John Curtis's first-born daughter was the same Mrs. Adelaide Walker Gissing refers to as Miss Curtis's aunt. In fact she was her great-aunt. Born Mary Adelaide Curtis in 1820 in London, she was the most adventurous of the female Curtises. So well travelled was she that she evades the census completely. Her career can only be gleaned from a few literary allusions to her writings and travels, from her will, and from her connection to the most distinguished member of the Curtis family. This latter was her younger brother by one year, Charles George Curtis, at whose side she spent the greater part of her life. At some time in the 1840s Mary married Robert Walker, a wealthy man. However, by 1856 she was widowed and probably childless.

The early years of her brother, Charles George Curtis, are also rather obscure, but it is known that he attended Merton College, Oxford from 1840 to 1844. He gained his BA there in 1844. In 1845 he entered the church as a deacon, and the following year became a priest and a London chaplain. From 1845 to 1855 he was assistant master at Charterhouse School in the City of London. The 1851 census shows him sharing accommodation with his fellow assistant master, Christopher Cookson, in the Deacon's House. The following year he got his MA.

On leaving Charterhouse in 1856, Charles left England for Turkey, accompanied by Mary, as a Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG)

Missionary at Constantinople. Reverend Curtis was given the responsibility of establishing a church “for the estimated 500 to 600 resident Anglicans outside the grounds of the new and palatial British embassy” in Pera, Constantinople.⁶ This was an immense undertaking in the aftermath of the Crimean War. Nevertheless, Reverend Curtis proved himself equal to the task. Under his leadership a subscription fund of £25,000 was raised for the building of the church and in 1857 a competition was held to find an architect, in which there were forty-six entries. The first prize went to William Burges, an admirer of romantic medievalism. Burges’s failure over the next six years to produce a suitable design for the proposed church led to his replacement in 1863 by George Edmund Street, who had come second in the original competition. A design was quickly forthcoming and work started the same year.

Prior to this in 1860 Reverend Curtis was sent on a temporary mission to Thessaloniki. Mary travelled with her brother and in the summer of 1861 they made a lengthy tour of the interior of Macedonia. An inveterate and intrepid traveller, Mary was also a talented portrait painter with something of a name in the English community. It was her reputation which gained her access to Sultan Abdulmecid of Constantinople, whose daughter she ultimately painted under the most exacting of conditions:

One of her models was the daughter of Sultan Abdulmecid, most probably Fatma Sultan. As it would be contrary to the rules of orthodox Muslim society that a lady would visit a painter’s studio, or expose her portrait in any way to be seen by men, it became necessary to execute the whole work within the harem, even to the last finishing touch of varnishing and framing—a labour of difficulty and fatigue rarely undertaken by a lady artist in the case of very large canvases. So Mrs. Walker stayed at Fatma Sultan’s summer palace on the Bosphorus for five or six months and one of the ground floor rooms was converted into a studio. The portrait was painted three times over before it was finally pronounced as finished, as the varying taste of the imperial lady wandered amongst the different articles of dress, jewellery, or furniture, which she took a sudden fancy to see represented. According to Mrs. Walker these pictures when finished would rarely, if ever, be seen by persons competent to judge the merits of a painting. As the features of women are veiled, so also, according to orthodox custom, a female portrait must be hidden from the gaze even of male servants. The ultimate fate of the picture is either to lie hidden away in some dark closet, or if too large, and destined to remain in one of the sitting rooms, curtains are fastened on to the frame. Since the portrait of the Sultana was quite large it was eventually honoured with a large curtain of silk. After some years Mrs. Walker was summoned once more, this time to the winter palace of the same Sultana who wished her to repaint the dress of the portrait according to a new fashion book just received from Paris despite the fact that the large canvas was varnished and considered finished years ago.⁷

Mary was even accorded the honour of receiving a commission by the ruling Turkish Sultan, Abdul Aziz, to paint his portrait. This painting was exhibited in the Ottoman Room at the 1867 Paris Exposition.

It was during this period of her life, moreover, that she began to explore the Balkans, making journeys through Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. Her various travels are related in the following books: *Through Macedonia to the Albanian Lakes* (1864), *The Outback. A Historical Album* (1866), *Eastern Life and Scenery, with Excursions into Asia Minor, Mytilene, Crete, and Roumania* (1886), *Untrodden Paths in Roumania* (1888), and *Old Tracks and New Landmarks: Wayside Sketches in Crete, Macedonia, Mitylene* (1897). As modern critics are now beginning to appreciate, Mary Adelaide Walker belongs to that select group of pioneering Victorian lady travellers, who undertook perilous journeys into regions completely off the beaten track. Referring to the dangers inherent in such journeys, Magali Bergia writes,

They occupy a large part in the writings of some women, like Lady Elgin or Mary A. Walker, who wrote concerning Macedonia, "A lady cannot venture to take a walk in the fields unless accompanied by a servant, with a whole arsenal of weapons in his belt." ... Mary Adelaide Walker is a particularly interesting traveller for a number of reasons: her sojourn in the East was of an exceptional length; she undertook a great number of journeys during her residence; she visited regions situated off the tourist routes, which to our knowledge she was the first woman to describe; she was endowed with artistic talents and regularly sketched the sites she visited; finally, she has left us an extremely prolific record of her travels. (My translation from the French)⁸

In his recent book *Romania Revisited* Alan Ogden marvels at Mary's pluckiness on an incredible later journey she made through Romania in 1888, when she was sixty-eight:

A remarkable English woman, Mary Walker, travelled here in 1888 and recorded her journey in *Untrodden Paths in Romania* ... [Referring to a close shave with death he had while crossing a wooden bridge] This was but a mere hiccup, though, compared to the adventures of Mary Walker and her companions. When they visited the nearby Durau Monastery, they returned by rafting down the Bistrita River. Caught by a sudden torrent of a rainstorm high in the mountains, their raft capsized and "we reached Piatra in a fearfully limp and helpless condition." As an afterthought, she added: "I have, unexpectedly, collapsed." ... She pressed ahead with her two companions in an ox cart and arrived at Secu Monastery on a small tributary across the valley from Neamt. The ladies were the first English visitors to Secu and there was mutual fascination.⁹

Over one hundred years later Alan Ogden followed the exact route Mary took on her way to the Durau monastery.

In 1862, upon returning to Constantinople from Thessaloniki, Reverend Curtis continued his missionary work in the English community. Six years later the English Crimean Memorial Church (the present-day Crimean Church) in the new High Gothic style, which at that time was much in vogue in London and seaside towns such as Eastbourne, was eventually unveiled by the Bishop of Gibraltar on 22 October 1868.¹⁰ Reverend Curtis took up quarters in the vicarage and there he spent almost thirty years as the Chaplain of the Memorial Church. In the 1870s, at a time when the Turkish problem was once again occupying the government, he cultivated an interest in Anglo-Turkish politics, contributing pamphlets and articles on the subject to the English press. He even wrote a book on Turkish-Armenian relations which, following the Turkish massacres in Bulgaria, and the murder of the German and French consuls by Muslim fanatics at Salonica on 6 May 1876, the Conservative foreign secretary, Lord Derby, advised the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, to read.¹¹

Throughout the remaining years of his life the chaplain increasingly devoted himself to his long-held interest in archaeology. In 1878 he gave a lecture on “Constantinople According to the Greek Anthology” to the British Literary and Mechanics’ Association at Galata. A year later he became the Canon of Gibraltar. In 1885 he and his Greek colleague, Stavraki Aristarchis (1809-1893), received acclaim as the first scholars to decipher correctly the inscription on the bronze doors of the famous southwest vestibule of St. Sophia. Modern scholars still hold to their reading of the monogrammatic script. From 1887 to 1891 he published *Broken Bits of Byzantium*,¹² the result of thirty years’ study of Byzantine sites in and around Turkey. The book includes sixty sketches by his sister. Canon Curtis died suddenly of sunstroke on 13 August 1896 aged seventy-five. His death was a great loss to the English community in Pera and Galata, of which he had been one of the most prominent members for forty years. *The Times* printed a short obituary a few days later. In his will he left to his surviving brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, £24193.14.0.

Despite her brother’s death, Mary remained in Turkey along with her sister, Clara, who had joined them at an earlier date. Born in 1829, Clara Fanny Montrose Curtis spent her early life in England, living at one time with her brother, Lionel, and later around 1861 working as a governess in Hampshire. As her whereabouts cannot be traced in later censuses, one suspects that she joined her brother and sister in Constantinople in the 1860s. The year after Canon Curtis’s death, Mary made further explorations in Macedonia and Crete, and in the same year brought out her last book of

travels. Both sisters returned to England in 1901. Mary took up permanent residence at 2 Ennismore Gardens, Salisbury Road, Dover. Clara moved into nearby 12 Harald Terrace. Mary fell seriously ill in the spring of 1904, and finally succumbed on 28 September 1905, aged eighty-five, bequeathing £543.18.8 to her family. Clara died a year later of a heart attack, aged seventy-seven, on 18 October 1906. She left £505.3.7 in her will.

The last of the Curtis brothers, Frank Allan, was born in 1823. In 1850 he married Emma Bass (b. 1824), from Ashbourne in Derbyshire. At this time he was working as the head clerk at the London Life Assurances Office. The marriage produced two children: Reginald (b. 1854) and Emily (b. 1859). By 1861 the family was living in Clapham; then they moved to 26 Kildare Terrace in Paddington. A prosperous career as an actuary eventually enabled Frank to move his family into a country lodge at Farnborough, where he lived the life of a gentleman. His wife died in 1892. His last address was 3 Ennismore Gardens, next door to his sister, Mrs. Walker, and there he died in retirement in 1905. His son, Reginald, married and had several children, while his daughter, Emily, remained single. After 1901 she joined her Aunt Clara at 12 Harald Terrace in Dover and was still there in 1913.

Bella's two other great-aunts, Rosamund and Cornelia Curtis, had diametrically opposite lives. Whereas Cornelia was a spinster aunt, Rosamund enjoyed a long marriage, albeit overshadowed by recurring tragedy. In 1853 when she was the joint-owner with Clara of housing property in St. Pancras, Rosamund married Arthur Cleveland Wigan (b. 1816), a professor of music. They had five children: Francis (b. 1855), Leonard (b. 1857), Arthur (b. 1859), Basil (b. 1861), and Edith (b. 1864). Throughout this period they lived in Folkestone. In 1872 Arthur junior died, aged thirteen. In 1880 the family moved to 11 Randolph Gardens, Dover. Two years later the sole daughter, Edith, died aged eighteen. In 1887, Leonard, by now a civil engineer, married Mary Annie Louise Jennings in Goole. But more misfortune followed: in 1893 Francis died at thirty-eight, and in 1899 Leonard died at forty-two. Thus the couple saw all their children, except Basil, buried before them. In 1901 Arthur died aged eighty-five. Within a year Rosamund was also dead. She was seventy-seven.

Cornelia was born in Rome in late 1832 and christened at the British Chaplaincy on 19 March 1833. Most of her life she spent flitting about from place to place. She appears in the 1861 census living with her mother, Fanny, a widow by then, at 3 Raglan Place, Upper Sandgate Road, Folkestone. Fanny was the proprietor of several houses and running a lodging-

house. She died in Kent in 1868. Cornelia then moved back to London in the 1870s and lived for a time at 13 Park Terrace, West Ham, taking care of her nephew, Walter, John Edmund's son. When he went to sea in the early 1880s, she left West Ham for another address. She reappears in 1891 at a boarding house in Dover. What seems on the outside a sad, lonely life came to an end in her seventieth year at 31 Randolph Gardens, Dover, on 3 March 1902. So it was that between 1902 and 1906 all four of Bella's great-aunts died in Dover.

The convergence of the Curtis and Hamstead families is a story of that mid-Victorian ideal: social mobility. For Bella's grandfather and grandmother on her mother's side belonged to a social class far below the Curtises. Whereas the Curtis family could count two lawyers, a gentleman actuary, a merchant captain, a reverend, a barrister, a travel writer, and several music teachers among its numbers, the Hamsteads were predominantly farm labourers, carmen, dressmakers, and servants. Bella's maternal grandfather, Robert Hamstead, born in Rickmansworth in 1814, married Sarah Putman (b. 1816) from Watford on Christmas Day, 1834. They had nine children: Harriett Ann (b. 1836), Theodosia (b. 1837), Sarah Elizabeth (b. 1839), Lisera (b. 1841), Mary Ann (b. 1843), Robert (b. 1845), George (b. 1848), James (b. 1849), and Olive (b. 1853). Two children died in infancy, Theodosia in 1838 and Lisera in 1843, while Robert junior perished at thirteen. The eldest, Harriett Ann, married Henry Middleton (b. 1835), a chimney sweep from St. Albans in 1859. They had five children: Elizabeth (b. 1860), Harriett (b. 1864), the twins, Agnes and Henry (b. 1871), and Sarah (b. 1872). Henry died in 1888, by which time Henry junior had also become a chimney sweep, and the daughters had married or left home to take up employment as servants. Harriett lived on into the new century. By contrast her sister, Mary Ann, remained single and died aged thirty-nine in 1882. Their brother George, a carman, married Thursa Batt (b. 1849), a dressmaker from Market Lavington, in 1868, and had two daughters, Thursa (1870-1871) and Lydia (b. 1876). George died in 1892. Four years later Lydia married Charles Wyatt, a laundry stoker, and settled down with him in Camberwell. Thursa senior, however, ended her days as an inmate in Paddington Workhouse Infirmary.

The youngest Hamstead boy, James, a farm labourer like his father, stayed in Watford, where he married Eliza Stoneman (b. 1847) in 1870. A daughter, Louisa, was born to them in 1880. Eliza died in 1890 and James the following year. Louisa married in 1907. In contrast to the foregoing Hamstead siblings, Olive and Sarah enjoyed a certain upward mobility and

long lives. Olive, who was employed as a servant around 1871, married Richard E. Poole (b. 1855), a travelling actor from Manchester, in 1872, and had five children: Flora (b. 1873), the twins Thomas and Robert (b. 1877), Beatrice (b. 1879), and Olive (b. 1883). Although the family established itself in Liverpool, later censuses show that acting commitments compelled the couple to farm out their children to their relatives in London (George Moore's 1884 novel, *A Mummer's Wife*, gives an excellent account of the travelling actor's life in late-Victorian England). So nine-year-old Olive junior shows up living with her Aunt Harriett in Ealing around 1891. Richard Poole died in 1901.

Where Olive had risen in society through marriage to an actor, Sarah Hamstead made a headier climb up the social ladder. She was born in Rickmansworth in March 1839 and christened there a month later. In 1859, she married John Edward Curtis. Brought up in comfortable circumstances, he was the only son of a thriving property owner, and respectably employed as a clerk at the Office [of the] National Society. Sarah, by contrast, was the daughter of a manual labourer, and had been working as a pin maker since she was twelve. Despite her social inferiority, whether willingly or not, she was welcomed into the Curtis family home at 19 Carlton Terrace, Paddington, where her first child, Charles, was born in 1860. Her own parents were also based in Paddington: Robert Hamstead had thrown in his job as a farm labourer to become a stonemason. Sarah bore a second son, Arthur, in 1862. The following year the family moved to Clapham where she had three more children: Charlotte in 1864, George in 1867, and finally, Bella Alice Mary, who was born on 3 June 1869 at 4 Williams Terrace, Avenue Road, Clapham. Her father, referred to as an accountant on the birth certificate, registered her birth on 12 July 1869. Within two years he was dead, and Sarah was left with five young children to support. Necessity, no doubt, compelled a return to her parents' home at 134 Praed Street, Paddington. Sarah was by now employed from home as a dressmaker. By 1881 the family was living at 11 Avenue Road in Clapham. Bella's maternal grandparents had remained in Paddington, where at sixty-seven Robert was working as a wharf labourer. After a long life of physical labour, he died in 1890, and his wife in 1892. Of Sarah's children, only Arthur, George, and Bella were still at home. Charles and Charlotte had flown the family nest. The last member of the household was a visitor, Alfred G. Thornborough.

As Alfred was no relation and not described as a lodger, this was rather a dubious arrangement for a Victorian household. Was he already the man of the house? If so, one assumes that the delay in marrying—they did not

wed until 1886—was occasioned by Alfred’s constant comings and goings as a commercial traveller. Nonetheless the marriage was solemnized at St. Peter’s Church in Croydon on 23 June 1886 and Alfred became Bella’s stepfather. Significantly, Bella was the last of the children still living with her mother when the happy couple returned to the flat above Alfred’s tobacconist’s shop at 68 South End, Croydon. Soon after the family moved into premises at 20 North Street, Chichester. A further move occurred probably in 1887 to 8 Church Street in the Old Town area of Eastbourne. Then prior to George Gissing’s stay in Eastbourne in February 1888, presumably in the autumn of 1887, Alfred transferred family and business just along the road to 13 Church Street. It was at this address, a tobacconist’s shop, that Gissing would shortly make the acquaintance of Bella Curtis and her mother, Mrs. Thornborough.

To follow Bella’s destiny beyond the point at which she belongs irrevocably to Gissing’s past is no easy task. What is known is that her stepfather, Alfred, died on 6 December 1888 in North Street, Chichester, and she registered his death. Whether this means she and her mother, widowed for the second time at forty-eight, were already living at 20 North Street is unclear. The Eastbourne directories list an A. G. Thorough, tobacconist, at 38 Church Street in both 1889 and 1890, and not in 1891, at which date the census places them in Chichester. Since the initials fit, and “Thorough” is obviously a spelling mistake, this would suggest that they had moved into 38 Church Street and continued to live in Eastbourne up to 1890 and then made the move to Chichester. As North Street is given as his address on his death certificate, one supposes that Alfred ran two shops and had two addresses, one in Eastbourne and one in Chichester.

According to the 1891 census Sarah Thornborough, a tobacconist and confectioner, was living at 20 North Street with her daughter Bella, a shop assistant. Her eldest daughter, Charlotte, appears as a nursery maid to the Priestman family at Derwent Hill in Ebchester, Durham. Why she was working so far afield is not known. Around 1891, Bella met Henry George Napper (b. 1871) from East Wittering, who was a lodger at 1 West Palland Street in Chichester and working as a corn merchant’s assistant. On her twenty-fourth birthday, 3 June 1893, Bella married Henry Napper at St. Paul’s Church in Thornton Heath. Among those present at the wedding were her paternal grandfather, Herman, and her brother, Arthur. As was proper, two addresses are given as place of residence on the marriage certificate: 22 Carew Road, Thornton Heath and 72 North Street, Chichester. Henry’s father, George (b. 1847), a blacksmith and innkeeper of “The Oak”

at East Wittering, hailed from Portsmouth, whereas his mother, Mary Ann (b. 1840), came from Tetford, Lincolnshire. Their other children were Florence (b. 1867), Gertrude (b. 1869), Beatrice (b. 1877), Thomas (b. 1879), Daisy (b. 1880), Ethel (b. 1881), and Archibald (b. 1883). Although a relatively uncommon name, "Napper" was at this time prevalent in Chichester, Selsey, East and West Wittering, and Portsmouth.

Bella's brother, Arthur, who had married Stuart Margaret Catherine Irving (b. 1862) in 1886, was based at 20 Carew Road and employed as an insurance clerk. The marriage appears to have been childless. Bella's eldest brother, Charles, an instrument manufacturer, was also located in Thornton Heath at 27 St. Paul's Road. Charles had married Louisa Gouldstone (b. 1862) in 1883 in Marylebone. They eventually had six children: Ethel (b. 1884), Charles (b. 1885), Dorothy (b. 1889), Hilda (b. 1891), Dudley (b. 1894), and George (b. 1898). Both families were still at the same address early in the new century. Bella's youngest brother, George, married Elizabeth Roberts (b. 1864) in Wandsworth in 1885. They had three children, Alice (b. 1888), Florence (b. 1889), and William (b. 1890), and were living at 15 Victoria Terrace, Emmerdale Road, Lewisham, where George worked as a bootmaker's clerk.

Soon after marrying, Henry and Bella Napper made the move to Richmond in Surrey, where their first child, Doris Maud Napper, was born on 14 March 1894. On 23 September 1895 Bella gave birth to a son, Leslie Raymond Napper. In the 1901 census the children appear living with their grandmother, Sarah Thornborough, and her widowed sister, Harriett Middleton, at 8 Station Road, Selsey. Bella, now thirty-two, and Henry were resident at 101 Kew Road, Richmond. Henry was both manager of a corn merchant's and a dairyman. Also with them was Bella's sister, Charlotte, who was working for her brother-in-law as a dairy shop assistant. The telephone book for 1906 still gives their 1901 address and both H. G. Napper's trades. After this date Bella and her husband vanish from official records. They are not recorded in the telephone book for 1907 or any others published on the Internet. Neither can they be traced in historical directories nor in the death register. As for Bella's mother, Sarah Thornborough, she died on 13 December 1913 at West Wittering, aged seventy-three. Bella's brother, Arthur, then resident at 39 Carew Road, Thornton Heath, registered the death.

II

Gissing's brief association with Bella Curtis is only documented in his diary and alluded to cryptically in two letters to his sister Ellen. If Bella was already living in Eastbourne in January 1887, in which case at 8 Church Street, she and Gissing could have made each other's acquaintance then, and this would go some way to explaining why he returned to Eastbourne a year later. However, this is pure speculation, as the exact date at which the family moved to Eastbourne from Chichester cannot be established. One suspects that they first met on or shortly after 13 February 1888, when he visited the nearest tobacconist's to his lodgings at 27 Brightland Road, which was at 13 Church Street. Here he received his first glimpse of Bella, as she it was who probably served him from behind the shop counter. As need be Gissing must have made several trips to the shop over the course of his fortnight stay in Eastbourne, and small talk must have gone beyond the commonplace remarks usually exchanged between shop assistant and customer. Whatever may have occurred, Gissing warmed towards Bella, and so much so that he was already on visiting terms with her and her mother by the time he left Eastbourne on 29 February 1888. One presumes this because he would hardly have made the lightning visit to see Bella in person on 23 April without having previously introduced himself in the conventional Victorian way.

But what was Gissing thinking of at the time? After all, in late February he was still married, and the prospect of getting a divorce, or of his wife dying, would have seemed as remote as only to be dreamt of by an incorrigible optimist, which Gissing certainly was not. What developed between Gissing and Bella in Eastbourne was inevitably nothing more than a harmless friendship, a mutual regard for each other which was never allowed to overstep the mark. Gissing would have seen their relationship in this light and had to conduct himself accordingly because he would have had no other choice, even if he had wished it otherwise, which he most probably did. It was a dilemma that had plagued his thoughts ever since he separated from Nell at the end of 1882, for he had never ceased to long for female companionship. How then did it come to the point that Gissing was presenting his visiting card before he left Eastbourne? Was he received into the household as a friend, and not as a prospective husband for the daughter of the house? As a literary man on holiday in the area, he would have been regarded by Bella's family, which also had literary connections, as a welcome diversion to the usual teatime society.

But who was Bella Curtis and what was it that attracted Gissing to her? As her family history pretty clearly discloses, Bella belonged to the poorer relations. Her mother's side of the family, the Hamsteads, were unskilled labourers, whereas her father's side, the Curtises, were high-ranking professionals. Although the Curtises received Bella's mother into their fold after she married their only son, they would have regarded her as a woman from an inferior class. After all her sister's husband was a chimney sweep! Bella's father died in 1871 when she was two, after which date Mrs. Curtis took her children to live with her parents. From this time Bella's family seem to have lost touch with the wider Curtis circle. Only her paternal grandfather, Herman, plays any part in her life, appearing at her wedding. None of Bella's great-aunts or great-uncles mentions her or her siblings in their wills.

At the time Gissing first met Bella she was eighteen and a half, and he in his thirty-first year. She had evidently left school three or four years earlier and had engaged on a new phase of her life as a working girl, while he was on the way to becoming one of the foremost novelists of his day. She was currently dwelling with her mother and her stepfather above a tobacconist's shop. Her three older brothers and elder sister had either found employment elsewhere or married. During her short life she had moved home constantly and as a result probably had few intimates. One likes to imagine that she did her name the full honour it deserves. As Gissing was a true admirer of beauty, this would appear so. Most definitely Gissing would have seen in her a girl on the threshold of adulthood, whose mind he could still shape and whose behaviour he could influence to his heart's desire, just like Nell when he first met her. More than anything, perhaps he saw in her the personification of his beloved "Thyrza."

At any rate, in the weeks after returning to London at the end of February 1888, weeks filled with gloom in the aftermath of Nell's death, when his spirits were at their lowest ebb and his work at a standstill, he was not able to forget the young woman he had got to know, if fleetingly, in Eastbourne. Even though there is no mention of her in Gissing's letters or diary until 23 April, once the cloud hanging over him had dispersed and he had made a start on *The Nether World*, he found that he could think of Bella again, and, wonderful prospect that it must have seemed to him, quite untrammelled by the marriage bonds which had formerly burdened him. So it was that in time thought of Bella intensified, provoking the sudden desire to see her again some seven weeks after leaving Eastbourne. That his thoughts were wending that way emerged in a letter to Ellen on 15 April

1888, in which he writes: “Gloomy & dolorous days those must have been for you,—that week here. By the bye, we never once spoke a word of Eastbourne. I was at a low ebb just then.”¹³ Without revealing what occurred in Eastbourne to his sister, Gissing nonetheless appears to be preparing the ground for a future admission. Eight days later on Monday, 23 April 1888, he was finally ready to renew contact with Bella, as he describes in his diary:

Nothing done since last Thursday. A vile change in the weather again; rain and fog. To-day took a sudden idea to go down to Eastbourne,—solely to look in at 13 Church Street. Got there at 3.30, and left again by the 5.30. A long talk with Miss Curtis.¹⁴

The matter-of-fact tone here, coming after mundane comments about his work and the weather, belies the underlying passion and decisiveness required to set oneself upon such a speculative venture as to rush off to Eastbourne and back in a day to seek a private interview with an unmarried teenage girl. The first sentence describing his inability to work for the past four days, betrays the direction of his thoughts during this time. In any event Gissing saw Miss Curtis and everything seems to have gone off well. This is corroborated the next day in his diary entry for 24 April. He writes, “Sent ‘Thyrza’ to Eastbourne, and wrote a letter to Mrs. Thornborough, explaining.”¹⁵ But what does Gissing mean by the word “explaining”? Could he have found Miss Curtis alone the day before, and consequently deemed it necessary to explain his visit to the absent mother, or does he mean something else? In short, did he reveal that he was previously married? One would expect a decent and honest man to disclose the truth about his past to his intended wife. Gissing was a decent and honest man, but in his case the past and Nell’s role in it were something he found himself unable to divulge even to his closest friends. Perhaps he didn’t do the “explaining” about the past in his letter, but later in his final talk with Miss Curtis. Whether he did or not will never be known.

Two days after posting the book, he notes on 26 April, “Two lines from Miss Curtis, acknowledging ‘Thyrza.’ Put me into a good humour. Got to work again, by heaven’s mercy, and re-wrote four pages.”¹⁶ Receipt of this letter certainly put the wind in his sails. In a letter to Ellen on 27 April, Gissing declares,

What do you think? I went to Eastbourne & back last Monday, impelled by a crazy idea of which perhaps I shall tell you more some day. A sort of wild hope had somehow sprung up in me. I don’t know,—we shall see. Are you not working too hard. Do rest as much as possible when lessons are over. Love, & love again, & always love to you, my dearest, George.¹⁷

What a remarkable letter this is coming from Gissing. So buoyant is he, that he can scarcely hold himself back from telling all. Even the salutation is high-spirited. Evidently, Gissing is contemplating making a marriage proposal. One suspects he wasted no time in replying to Bella's acknowledgment of *Thyrza*, as the next days find him anxiously watching for the postman. On Wednesday, 2 May 1888, some five days after receiving "two lines" from her, he observes in his diary, "No letters whatever coming for me just now. I notice that there is periodicity in the arrival of my letters."¹⁸ After a few more days have elapsed without any missive arriving from Eastbourne, Gissing's good cheer of a week ago has given way to impatience and an attack of nerves. On 4 May he writes, "Feeling out of sorts. Wrote a page, then broke down.—Got from library: Vernon Lee's 'Juvenilia,' and 'Eastern Scenes' by Mrs. Walker."¹⁹ Barely able to stop thinking about Miss Curtis, he is driven to obtaining her great-aunt's most popular travel book. To his brother the same day, he writes,

I am working under many ills. Practically it is decided that I *let* 7.K. early in the autumn, & leave London for at least a year. Don't quite know whither I shall go, but all sorts of things are in the balance at present.²⁰

Once again in his dealings with his family, despite referring obliquely to the matter, Gissing avoids making any disclosure about Miss Curtis. All the same the passage is pretty revealing of his present state of mind. Evidently, Gissing has convinced himself he is in love with Bella and wants to marry her, but having heard nothing from her since 26 April, he is feeling increasingly frustrated. As he freely admits, everything is up in the air with him, and until he can attain a resolution to his affair with Bella, one way or the other, he feels unable to commit himself to any definite plan for the future.

On 8 May, and with still no word from Bella, Gissing gives vent to his love agony in his diary:

A day of blankest idleness and misery. In morning to Bank of Engd, to change notes, mother having sent me £20. Afternoon to Grosvenor, where I got vol. I of Hardy's "Wessex Tales," and vol. II of Vernon Lee's "Juvenilia." Read them both in an hour and a half, then paced my rooms in agony of loneliness. This becomes intolerable; in absolute truth, I am now and then on the verge of madness. Thought of Miss Curtis, and longed, longed that she too might have thought of me. This life I *cannot* live much longer; it is hideous.²¹

Whereas previous mention of Miss Curtis in his diary was muted, here, for the first time, Gissing gives impassioned voice to his feelings for her. The following day, on Wednesday, 9 May 1888, no longer able to wait for Bella to call him to her, Gissing dashed off to Eastbourne to seek the all-decisive

interview. The result of this venture he describes succinctly in his diary, "To Eastbourne—and back. All gone off in smoke. Never mind; the better perhaps."²² From one day to the next, then, it was all over with Bella. But why would she, the stepdaughter of a shop owner, reject the marriage proposal of a presentable young man, who was, moreover, an established novelist? A letter Gissing dispatched to his brother the same day, apparently after seeing Bella, gives some idea as to what the essential objection to their union would have been. He writes,

It is clear that in London I shall never meet with congenial people, yet I might if I settled for a while in some local centre. I don't know; perhaps the difficulties would be just as great. I suppose lack of religious conformity shuts one out from the society of such places.²³

It would appear from this that Bella spurned Gissing on religious grounds. As her great-uncle was the long-standing resident canon in Constantinople, there is every reason to assume that she and her mother were regular churchgoers. In all likelihood Gissing's agnosticism and the fact of his previous marriage told against him. Thus they went their separate ways, and Gissing never saw Bella again.

For all that, he did not easily forget her or her rejection of him, for the end to the "wild hope" which had so recently "sprung up" in him, came as a terrible blow to Gissing. As a result his diary makes painful reading over the next few months. The day after his return from Eastbourne, on 10 May, there is a definite morning-after feeling, as he admits to "a day of wretchedness, of course."²⁴ Three weeks later, on 3 June, there is much soul-searching going on as he declares, "Death, if it came now, would rob me of not one hope, for hopes I simply have not."²⁵ Just over a week later, on 11 June, an expression of the most profound despair escapes him: "A magnificent day," he writes, "but cannot enjoy it. I never enjoy anything now—*never anything*."²⁶ The mood was still upon him on 17 June:

I have lived in London ten years, and now, on a day like this when I am very lonely and depressed, there is not one single house in which I should be welcome if I presented myself, not one family—nay, not one person—who would certainly receive me with good will. I wonder whether any other man would make such a statement as this with such absolute truth.²⁷

By now, because of his guilty secret, Gissing saw himself doomed to a life of solitude. For, inevitably, coming so soon after he had allowed himself to imagine that with Nell's death the past had "buried its dead,"²⁸ Bella's recent refusal to marry him had confirmed Gissing in his belief that he

could never hope to win the heart of a respectable woman. The crisis reached its zenith on Sunday, 1 July 1888:

A day as thoroughly wasted as any in my life. Took a pill last night, and I suppose that accounts for headache. An hour in the Park in the morning; the rest of the day did not stir. Doing what? Absolutely nothing; not even reading. Took up a vol. now and then, but could not attend to it. Walked from one room to the other. Lonely, lonely, lonely. Weather bright, but almost cold.—To bed at nine.²⁹

Never was a Victorian writer so revealing of his most intimate thoughts and feelings as Gissing in these diary entries. So telling and poignant is his description of his misery that one almost enters the scene. Here, yet again, he seems literally paralysed by heartache and loneliness. Fortunately, within three weeks he had finished the writing of *The Nether World*, by which time he was beginning to develop a healthier perspective on his future. For, scarcely more than three months after seeing Bella for the last time, not only was he starting upon his first extended journey through Southern Europe, but also upon a new phase of his life.

But what of Bella after she closed the door on Gissing forever? Did she follow his career? One would like to think so. Did she keep the few letters and the copy of *Thyrza* he sent her? Was she among those silently mourning his death, when the news came from France at the end of 1903? Later, when her children were grown up, did she tell them about the famous writer who had asked her to marry him? More than this, did she treasure his memory, the memory of a man who had briefly loved her, until her own dying day? Surely, she did.

When all is said and done, one cannot help wondering what might have been, if, instead of Edith Underwood, Bella had become Gissing's second wife. Certainly, he would have entered into a fairly distinguished family, even if Bella represented the poorer side. Although religious differences would have hampered social intercourse, doubtless Gissing's phenomenal industry and acute intelligence would have won him the friendship of Bella's worldly grandfather, Captain Herman Curtis. He might even have come to know Mary Adelaide Walker and Canon Curtis. Only good could have come of contact with people of this ilk, especially when he himself was a member of the family. On the domestic front, one suspects Bella would have provided Gissing with the homely comforts, and the stability he needed, and more importantly, arranged the proper atmosphere for his writing. She would have protected him from the noises and disturbances which so often upset him and frustrated his creativity. She would have given him the love and loyalty he so yearned to find in life. And she would have been

there for him in good and in bad times. Indeed he would have found in Bella a ballast against all the evils of the world. In course of time, with Bella at his side, he would have been able to come out into the world, as he was never able to do with Edith. And in his loneliest moments, he would have known that there was one house he could always go to, and one person he would always find waiting for him there. That said, it was not to be, alas! For like “Thyrza,” Bella was to remain “one of the most beautiful dreams” Gissing ever had, but nothing more.³⁰

¹Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England. The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 27.

²Jacob Korg, ed., *George Gissing's Commonplace Book* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962), p. 23.

³*Diary*, p. 27. See entries for 23 April, 24 April, 26 April, 4 May, 8 May, and 9 May 1888 for mention of, or allusion to, Miss Curtis; see entry for 24 April 1888 for mention of Mrs. Thornborough; and see entry for 4 May 1888 for mention of Mrs. Walker.

⁴Pierre Coustillas, Paul F. Mattheisen, and Arthur C. Young, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1886-1888*, Volume Three (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), pp. 203-04, 206-07. See letters to Ellen, 15 and 27 April 1888.

⁵*Diary*, p. 27.

⁶Geoffrey Tyack, “The Crimean Church in Istanbul,” *Cornucopia*, Issue 25, Vol. 5, 2002, p. 80.

⁷Inankur Zeynep, “The Changing Image of Women in 19th Century Ottoman Painting,” *English Journal of Oriental Studies*, IV, 2001, No. 23, pp. 3-4.

⁸Magali Bergia, “‘This Nectar and Ambrosia of Life’: Frederike [sic] Bremer and Women Travel writing about Greece in the Collections of the Gennadius Library (1687-1870)” in *Diplôme de Conservateur de Bibliothèque: Rapport de Stage* (Athènes: La Bibliothèque Gennadius, 1998), pp. 67 and 93. The passage reads in the original: “Ils occupent une grande place dans les écrits de certaines femmes, comme lady Elgin ou Mary A. Walker, qui écrit à propos de la Macédoine : ‘A lady cannot venture to take a walk in the fields unless accompanied by a servant, with a whole arsenal of weapons in his belt.’ ... Mary Adelaide Walker est une voyageuse particulièrement intéressante à plusieurs titres : son séjour en Orient fut d’une durée exceptionnelle ; elle entreprit un grand nombre de voyages durant sa longue résidence ; elle visita des régions situées en dehors des routes touristiques, qu’elle est à notre connaissance la première femme à décrire ; elle était dotée de talents artistiques et dessinait régulièrement les sites qu’elle visitait ; enfin elle nous a laissé une littérature de voyage assez prolifique.”

⁹Alan Ogden, *Romania Revisited: On the Trail of English Travellers 1602-1941* (Romania and Oxford : The Centre for Romanian Studies, 2000), pp. 83-84, 89, and 92.

¹⁰Tyack, pp. 76-82.

¹¹See Arman J. Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question: From the 1830s to 1914* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2003), p. 57. See Charles George Curtis, *For Turkey's Armenians: The Armenians and the Eastern Question* (London, Chapman & Hall, 1876).

¹²Charles George Curtis, *Broken Bits of Byzantium* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1887-1891).

¹³*Letters*, p. 203.

¹⁴*Diary*, p. 27.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Letters*, p. 207.

¹⁸*Diary*, p. 27.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Letters*, p. 207.

²¹*Diary*, p. 28.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Letters*, p. 209.

²⁴*Diary*, p. 28.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), pp. 17-18.

²⁹*Diary*, p. 35.

³⁰*Letters*, p. 77.

THIRD INTERNATIONAL GEORGE GISSING CONFERENCE

“WRITING OTHERNESS: THE PATHWAYS of GEORGE GISSING’S IMAGINATION”

LILLE, FRANCE

27-28 March 2008

(Thursday & Friday following the Easter weekend)

SECOND CALL for PAPERS

The efforts of scholars in the last half-century have served to confirm George Gissing’s ranking among the major writers of fiction of his age. The steady flow in recent years of multifaceted comment on his writings speaks for itself, and the impressive amount of unpublished material made available over the last two decades is providing invaluable new clues to his artistic practices. Interestingly, Gissing’s growing pertinence is not merely that of a leading exponent and translator of late Victorian culture. His art is also increasingly regarded as rooted in his recognition of separateness, understood as aesthetic gesture as much as theme. Papers are therefore sought on all aspects of Gissing’s contacts and/or confrontations with the Other, on his receptiveness to and negotiation of, ego-threatening novelty, to be defined in a variety of ways: cultural, intellectual, ideological, artistic. Discussions of his (mis-)representation of the defamiliarized self in his

fictional constructs and personal writings, are also invited: the venue being Lille in France, Gissing's last homeland, papers on the correlative issue of his reading of Englishness and foreignness will be most welcome.

Advisory Committee: Professor Pierre Coustillas (University of Lille 3); Professor Constance Harsh (Colgate University); Dr Christine Huguet (University of Lille 3); Dr Simon J. James (Durham University); Dr Emma Liggins (Manchester Metropolitan University); Dr Diana Maltz (Southern Oregon University); Dr Bouwe Postmus (University of Amsterdam); Dr John Sloan (Harris Manchester College, Oxford).

Proposals (200-300 words), together with brief CV, should be sent to Christine Huguet (Conference organiser) at the following e-mail address:

christine.huguet-meriaux@univ-lille3.fr

Deadline for submission of proposals: 4 June 2007

Conference Venue and Enquiries: Maison de la Recherche, Université Charles de Gaulle-Lille 3 (CECILLE Research Centre, University of Lille, with the academic support of IES, University of London). The website used for the conference is

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The Gissings' Wakefield Circle

IV – The Hick family

ANTHONY PETYT
Wakefield

Matthew Bussey Hick came to Wakefield from York in the mid-1840s. He set up in business in the town as a chemist and druggist although the exact location of his shop is unknown. In 1849 he married Mary Archer and two months later he announced in the *Wakefield Journal*¹ that he was moving his business to bigger and better premises in Westgate. Despite calling himself a pharmaceutical chemist he gave great prominence to his other lines of stock. These included “coffee, genuine teas, spices, pickles, Crosse & Blackwell’s jellies, Schweppes’s soda water, horse and cattle medicine, paints, oils and colours.” Four years later, in a very large advertisement in the *Wakefield Journal*,² he placed more emphasis on his stock of drugs and chemicals. He drew especial attention to his “celebrated Cough Lozenges”

which he confidently recommended for the treatment of Whooping Cough, Winter Coughs, Croup, Influenza and Asthma. He also sold his “invaluable pills” for Tic Doloieux³ and Toothache, along with all the popular patent medicines. Besides he had opened a book-selling and stationery department and was able to arrange printing and bookbinding for his customers. Hick was at the same time the local agent for the Standard Life Assurance Company, a position he was to hold almost to the end of his life.

Matthew Bussey Hick was born on 27 July 1822 at York. He was the second child and elder son of Matthew Hick and Mary Bussey. His father was a watch and clockmaker with premises in Minster Gate, York.⁴ He was baptised, as were his brother and sisters, at the medieval church of St. Michael le Belfry in the shadow of York Minster. There were six children in the family of whom the eldest was Arabella, born in 1821. In 1842 she married Joseph King, a dental surgeon, at York. Joseph must have been successful because eventually they set up home in the prosperous village of Clifton on the outskirts of York. They had a family of ten children all of whom seem to have done well in life. Amongst them was their second son, Robert Henry (1848-1909), who was a land agent and farmer at Easby near Richmond in North Yorkshire. Algernon Gissing lodged with Robert King and his family during the short period he was employed in a solicitor’s office at Richmond in 1885; they remained friends for many years. Two of Joseph and Arabella’s sons entered the dental profession. Arthur, born in 1861, was in practice at Guildford, Surrey and Thomas Edward (1851-1924) had his home and dental surgery at 17 Lendal, York. It was at these premises that George Gissing’s mother had some extensive treatment to her teeth in the autumn of 1888. Joseph and Arabella also had four daughters, the third of whom, Edith Annie (1859-1940), was to marry her cousin, Dr. Henry Hick, the son of Matthew Bussey Hick.

Matthew and Mary Hick’s other son, Henry, was born in 1824 and was also a pharmacist. The 1881 census return lists him as living with his wife and son at Pickering Terrace, Clifton, near York; his occupation was given as “surgeon’s dispenser.” Their second daughter, Elizabeth Staines Hick, was born in 1825. She must have died young; her baptism is the only record we have of her. The third daughter, Susannah (1826-1874) married William Stott Banks,⁵ a solicitor, at Wakefield Parish church in 1850. They had six children of whom only Dorothy, born in 1865, was to survive childhood. She married Rev. Thomas Alexander Lacey in 1888. The Hicks’ fourth daughter and youngest child was Esther, who was born in 1830. She

married one Charles Demaine; they emigrated to Australia and settled in Melbourne.

By 1851 Matthew Bussey Hick's shop was doing very well and we have seen that he had branched out into lines of business other than that of a dispensing chemist. In August of that year he placed an advertisement in the *Wakefield Journal* announcing that he was taking over the drysalting business of Mr. Hallilay.⁶ William Hallilay was his wife's uncle, who had premises in Chald Lane at the bottom of Westgate. This business, which produced chemicals used in the dyeing industry, had been started in the early eighteenth century by John Hallilay, the father of William. It was this John Hallilay who had built Chald House. William had five sons but they were all following other careers and did not want to enter the chemical business. Matthew Bussey Hick built up the business and became a fairly large manufacturer of copperas⁷ as well as operating his own dye works. Within a few years of the acquisition of the Chald Lane factory he found that the pressures of work were too great and he decided to sell the pharmaceutical business in Westgate. The shop and the living accommodation above were taken over by Thomas Waller Gissing in 1856. Hick was to be a good friend to Gissing and his family for the rest of his life.

Apart from his business activities Matthew Hick played a part in the social and political life of Wakefield. He was a staunch Conservative and Anglican. Whilst living over the chemist's shop in Westgate he attended the parish church and was an active member of the Church Institution. From a very early date he was a member of the committee and from 1852 to 1856 he held the position of lay secretary. In 1865 he was elected to the committee, with the highest number of votes. When he moved with his family to Westgate Common he started worshipping at the newly built St. Michael's Church.⁸ He was a Sunday school teacher for many years and eventually became the senior churchwarden. All his family were involved with the church in some way or other. In February 1880, following a sale of work at the church, three of his children, Gertrude, Ethel and Milman took part in the musical entertainment given in the evening. Matthew was particularly interested in young people and a folding screen in the Boys' School commemorated his work there. When, in 1886, the Church of England held its annual Church Congress in Wakefield, Matthew Bussey Hick was on the general committee. His name also appears in the list of guarantors of the Congress. Two years later Wakefield parish church was raised to the status of a cathedral and the town became a city and the centre of a newly created diocese. Hick also belonged to the Wakefield Lodge

(495) of the Freemasons, into which he was initiated as early as 1854, and joined besides the Unanimity Lodge (154), acting as its Master in 1869-70.

Matthew Bussey Hick was a member of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution from 1845 and he served on the committee from 1847 until 1849. He does not seem to have played a very active role in the Mechanics' Institution and he let his membership lapse during the three years, 1857-60, when he was a Conservative Councillor for St. John's ward and for a few years after. At that time the members of the Mechanics' Institution tended to support the Liberal cause whilst their "rivals" at the Church Institution were mainly Conservative voters. In 1858 he is recorded as contributing two specimens to the Natural History Department.⁹ His gifts, an example of petrified wood and a piece of mahogany which had once contained a bee's nest, display a fascination with natural curiosities rather than an interest in natural history. During the 1863/4 season he read four pieces at the Penny Readings held at the Mechanics' Institution,¹⁰ of which he was a member throughout the 1880s, although he never seems to have held office again.

M. B. Hick
1822-1905

For 38 years he served on the governing board of the Clayton Hospital and Wakefield Dispensary. In 1879 he was a member of the committee that organised the second Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition which was held to raise funds for the extension of the Hospital. His son, Matthew Milman Hick, was one of the general secretaries of the committee. Also for

many years the West Riding Chamber of Agriculture had Matthew Bussey Hick for its secretary.

One of his great passions in life was the theatre and especially the plays of William Shakespeare. When he launched a bookselling department at his chemist's shop in Westgate in 1853 the most expensive item he had for sale was "*Notes and Emendations to the text of Shakespeare's Plays from early manuscript corrections, in a copy of the folio of 1632, in the possession of J. Payne Collier, Esq.,*" Price 14s. One wonders whether he sold the book or did it find its way onto his own bookshelves? It is interesting to note that of the four pieces he gave at the Penny Readings at the Mechanics' Institution in 1863 two of them were by Shakespeare. Matthew Hick attended the Wakefield Theatre regularly and he made many friends amongst the leading dramatic actors of the day. During his time as secretary of the Church Institution in the 1850s he was instrumental, with others, in bringing such actors as Fanny Kemble and William Charles Macready to give readings to packed audiences in the Wakefield Corn Exchange.¹¹ Not content with just being a theatregoer he decided to set up a company of young people to perform the plays of Shakespeare and other leading dramatists. This group was named "The Tragedians of the City"; they rehearsed and performed in a theatre Hick had improvised in one of his buildings in Chald Lane. The group achieved such a high standard under his management that in 1894 they were able to stage performances of Bulwer Lytton's play "The Lady of Lyons" to very large audiences at the Corn Exchange.

Matthew Bussey Hick married Mary Archer on New Year's Day 1849 at Thornes church. Mary was 23 years of age, the daughter of John Sanderson Archer (1795-1840), a solicitor with practices in Ossett and Dewsbury. Her mother was Margaret Hallilay, the daughter of John Hallilay, a dyer with premises at Westgate End, mentioned above. Soon after the marriage Matthew and Mary moved into the house over the chemist's shop in Westgate. They were to remain there until Matthew sold the business to Thomas Waller Gissing in 1856. They then moved with their growing family to a house in Milton Street on Westgate Common and by the time of the 1871 census they were well established in Chald House near to the chemical and dye works at the bottom of Westgate.

Matthew and Mary had nine children, three sons and six daughters. Their first child, Matthew Milman, was born in December 1849. He was educated locally and was then articled to his uncle, William Stott Banks, of the solicitors' firm of Ianson and Banks. He duly qualified as a solicitor and worked for several years in Wakefield but following a sexual scandal he

emigrated to Australia. He died at Melbourne in 1886. Their second child, also a son, born in 1851, was named Archer. He probably received some of his early education at Harrison's school in Back Lane but in February 1865 he and his younger brother, Henry, transferred to Wakefield Grammar School. He was B.A. of Trinity College, Dublin. He had been involved with St. Michael's church for most of his life, holding the positions of reader, sacristan, member of the choir and Sunday school teacher. Archer was said to be bright, animated and cheerful in spite of having indifferent health. In 1876 he suffered an injury whilst playing football from which he never fully recovered and he died quite unexpectedly in 1878.¹³ At the time of his death he was probably assisting his father in the family business.

Henry Hick as
a young man

Their third child and third son was Henry, who was born in September 1853. On leaving Wakefield Grammar School, he studied medicine at Leeds University and after qualifying worked in a practice at Darwen, Lancashire. By the time of the 1881 census he was established in his own practice at New Wortley, a poor suburb of Leeds. As noted above, he married his cousin, Edith Annie King (1859-1940), in 1884, at St. Olave's Church, York; they were to have a family of two sons and three daughters. Four years after his marriage, following a breakdown in his health, he moved to a country practice at New Romney, Kent where he remained until

his retirement. He died at Whitby, North Yorkshire in 1932. Along with his brothers he was a boyhood friend of George Gissing and his brothers, they attended the same school for a short period and their parents were close friends. Inevitably the ties were loosened as the boys grew older and they moved to different schools and colleges. When Henry Hick was working at Darwen he visited George Gissing at Manchester on a few occasions. It is thought that Henry tried to persuade Gissing to break off his relationship with Nell Harrison but as we know his advice and that from others fell on deaf ears. For many years there was no contact between the two men but in 1895 they renewed their acquaintance, which lasted until Gissing's death in 1903. The account of this renewed friendship is well chronicled by Pierre Coustillas in his book *Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing*.¹⁴

Of Matthew and Mary's six daughters, two of them died young. The second, Margaret Esther, born in 1856, died aged 21 in 1879. Their sixth daughter and youngest child, Amy Helen, lived for only four months, dying on 20 December 1867. The eldest daughter, Mary, was born in 1855 and probably educated at a local school. After her mother's death in 1879 she acted as her father's housekeeper. She was described as such in the 1881 census when the family were living in Cliff Terrace, not far from Thompson's Yard. Ten years later when they had moved a few yards to 22 Cheapside she was described as a boarding-house keeper. This venture cannot have been a success as the 1891 census return lists only Matthew, Mary and Ethel Hick and a single domestic servant. Sometime during the 1890s a fire occurred in the premises but not serious enough to warrant a mention in the local press.¹⁵ During this period Mary had met William Henry Smith, who was the manager of the Wakefield branch of the York City & County Bank at 66 Westgate. They married at Wakefield Cathedral in May 1895 and set up home in Doncaster where Henry Smith was then working. They did not have any children.

The third daughter, Gertrude, was born in 1861. In 1881 we find her living at 9th Avenue, Wortley, with her brother Dr. Henry Hick, presumably acting as his housekeeper. Living in a medical establishment prompted her to enter the nursing profession. She appears to have progressed well and by 1899 was matron at Kettering Hospital in Northamptonshire. At some stage in her career she met Dr. Josiah Oldfield, a charismatic man with many interests, whom she was later to marry. Oldfield was born in Shropshire in 1863.¹⁶ He was a pupil at Newport Grammar School and then went on to read theology at Oxford, graduating in 1885. Whilst at Oxford he met and befriended Mahatma Gandhi, who was probably instrumental in persuading

him to become a vegetarian. This interest in dietary matters led him to study medicine and he obtained his medical diploma at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. During this period he had also been studying law and he was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in June 1892. Oldfield later became a member of the Fruitarian Society whose devotees lived on the "produce of harvest field, garden, forest and orchard, with milk, butter, cheese, eggs and honey." He was appointed warden and senior physician to the Lady Margaret Fruitarian Hospital at Doddington in Kent. Here the convalescents and visitors lived in a variety of chalets, lodges and cottages; they followed the fruitarian diet and were able to lead a healthy lifestyle in the countryside. They were also said to indulge in "sun and air baths, grass baths and dew baths," which led to rumours amongst the locals of "goings on" at the hospital.

Dr. Oldfield was said to be a dedicated physician and philosopher with a tremendous personality. He published more than thirty books during his lifetime, mainly on dietary subjects. He was a leading campaigner against the death penalty and in 1901 he founded the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment. His compassionate attitude to his fellow creatures led him to humanitarian action in WWI. He raised and commanded a casualty dressing station and was mentioned in dispatches. His last book, *Popular Guide to Fruitarian Diet and Cooking*, was published in 1952. He died at Doddington the following year aged almost ninety.

Josiah and Gertrude were married at Wakefield Cathedral on 29 September 1899. The officiating clergy were Rev. Professor Mayer of Cambridge and Rev. Canon Oldfield, prebendary of Lincoln and brother of the groom. The best man was Trimbakrai Jadavai Desai, a "Hindoo of high caste and dressed in the court costume of his State." The newspaper devoted more space to the description of this costume than they did to the bride's attire. In 1902 twin daughters were born but the couple were not compatible and the marriage broke down soon after. Gertrude moved back to Yorkshire and at the invitation of the Wakefield historian, Dr. J. W. Walker, she managed the laundry on his Chapelthorpe Hall estate a few miles from Wakefield. She lived at first in a small cottage in the village but in 1910 Dr. Walker built her a large stone house not far from the laundry. Her daughters, Josie Margaret and Irene Dorrien, attended the Wakefield Girls' High School. In 1920 Gertrude left Chapelthorpe and moved to Liverpool to be near her daughter, Irene Dorrien, who was studying dentistry at the university. It is not known when Gertrude died.

The Hicks' fourth daughter, Ethel, was born in 1865. She was a gifted musician and was to earn a living from giving music lessons. She was a friend of George Gissing's sisters, especially Ellen, who shared her love of music. Matthew Hick encouraged his daughter and no doubt helped her when she arranged an amateur concert at the Mechanics' Institution in February 1894. There were songs by Ellen Gissing and others and Ethel played several piano pieces. Ethel also gave piano lessons to George Gissing's eldest son, Walter, during the time he was living in Wakefield with his grandmother and attending his aunts' school. It was Ethel who suggested to George Gissing that her brother, Henry, might be prepared to have Walter to stay with him in New Romney for a few weeks during the summer of 1898. Ethel died, unmarried, at Wakefield in 1929.

Elizabeth Hick, born in 1863, was the fifth daughter and turned out to be the youngest child in the family since Amy Helen, the sixth daughter, died aged 4 months in 1867. She married Ninian Bannatyne, a master mariner, at St. Michael's church, Wakefield in March 1889. They set up home in Cheshire, where their two children, Ninian and Naomi, were born. In 1901 Elizabeth was back in Wakefield, living at 18 Bond Street and providing a home for her father and sister Ethel. She left Wakefield again some time before her father's death in 1905 and went to live in Liverpool. Her son, Ninian Roy, married Jette Campbell and they emigrated to Canada. Her daughter, Naomi Gertrude, married her cousin, Godfrey Hick, the son of Dr. Henry Hick. Elizabeth died in 1951.

Matthew Hick was a public-spirited man and he was worried about the effect that chemical manufacturing was having on the environment. He cooperated fully with a commission that had been set up in 1866 to investigate the pollution of the rivers Aire and Calder.¹⁷ During his examination he explained the process of manufacturing copperas, but was adamant that it did not cause any pollution to the rivers. He did admit that the dye works below his copperas manufacturing premises did cause pollution and added that he did not know of a dye works in Yorkshire that did not cause any. Hick was so concerned about the problem that in 1876 he successfully sued the proprietors of a dye works in Alverthorpe for polluting the river above his premises. He won the case and was awarded £50 plus costs. In the early days he had been very proud of his product and had exhibited an example of green copperas at the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition in 1865. He was awarded a 1st class certificate.¹⁸

1879 was a terrible year for Matthew Bussey Hick; his wife died in August, aged 56, just eight months after the death of his son Archer. He left

Chald House and by April 1881 he was living in Cliff Terrace, nearer the centre of Wakefield. He was still listed as a copperas manufacturer, but production at the works was slowing down because of lack of demand. This was due to the use of different, better and cheaper products in the dyeing industry. When he first started the production of copperas it was fetching £15 per ton, but by the late 1860s it was only bringing £3 to £4 per ton. Production finally ceased and after that Matthew derived most of his income from his insurance agency.

Matthew Bussey Hick was a very compassionate man, always ready to help others. He showed great kindness to the family of his old friend Thomas Gissing after the latter's death in 1870 and he helped his widow and children on numerous occasions. There can be no doubt that he would have been aware of the possible future difficulties George Gissing was facing in 1875/6 due to his alliance with Nell Harrison. Surely his son Henry had explained the situation to him. After the terrible events of June and July 1876, whatever his own views were, he did not hesitate to go to Manchester and meet Gissing when he was released from prison and no doubt he gave what help and support he could. Hick also visited Gissing in London after he had returned from America and was living in poverty with Nell in an alley off Tottenham Court Road. Gissing always remembered Hick's kindness to him and his family and occasionally sent him a copy of his latest book. He also tried to visit him whenever he visited Wakefield.¹⁹

By 1905 Matthew Hick had given up most of his business pursuits, he was 83 years of age and was becoming more frail with the passing years. About that time he had left his own home in Wakefield and henceforth lived with his daughter, Gertrude Oldfield, at Chapelthorpe. On 6 October of that year he had gone to spend a weekend at Harrogate and whilst preparing to return home on 9 October he died as a result of a heart attack. His death was announced in Wakefield²⁰ by the tolling of the Town Hall bell, an honour given to all former and serving councillors. His body was brought from Harrogate by train on 11 October to Westgate Station where the Mayor of Wakefield and other dignitaries met it. The funeral service was held at St. Michael's church, his coffin being carried into the church by six of his former Sunday school scholars. He was interred in the family grave at Wakefield cemetery.

Matthew Bussey Hick did not die a wealthy man. His Will reveals that he left just under £2500 that was to be shared between his five surviving children. He doesn't seem to have owned any of the houses and business properties he occupied in Wakefield. He appears to have led a comfortable

life doing the best for his family and friends and also indulging his various interests such as the theatre. Matthew died well loved by his family and highly respected by the general community.

¹*Wakefield Journal & West Riding Herald*, 16 March 1849, p. 1, col. 1.

²*Ibid.*, 16 April 1853, p. 4, col. 4.

³Tic Doloreux is a spasm of the muscles of the face.

⁴*Baines's Yorkshire Directory*, 1823, vol. 1, p. 87.

⁵See article about W. S. Banks in *Gissing Journal*, vol. XLII, no. 4, October 2006, pp. 29-37.

⁶*Wakefield Journal & West Riding Herald*, 29 August 1851, p. 4, col. 1.

⁷Copperas, or sulphate of iron, was used as a mordant in the dyeing industry.

⁸St. Michael's church was opened in September 1858 and consecrated on 27 May 1861.

⁹*Second Annual Report of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution Natural History Department*, 1858, p. 6.

¹⁰*Report of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution*, 1864, p. 9.

¹¹*Wakefield Journal & West Riding Herald*, 16 April 1853, p. 1, cols. 3 & 4.

¹²Matthew Henry Peacock, *History of the Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth at Wakefield*, Wakefield: W. H. Milnes, 1892.

¹³*Wakefield Journal & West Riding Herald*, 14 December 1878, p. 8, col. 2.

¹⁴London: Enitharmon Press, 1973.

¹⁵George Gissing mentions this fire in a letter to Henry Hick dated 6 January 1896. See *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 6, p. 76.

¹⁶*Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁷*Third Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the best means of preventing the pollution of rivers (Aire and Calder)*, vol. II, 1867.

¹⁸*Catalogue of the Wakefield Industrial & Fine Art Exhibition*, 1865. In the "Furniture, Woodwork and House Decoration Section" Hick exhibited a specimen of "Pyrographic art, being a process of burning wood to supersede painting, graining etc" for which he was awarded a 1st class certificate.

¹⁹George Gissing's diaries and letters record several visits to Matthew Bussey Hick.

²⁰Obituary, *Wakefield Express*, 14 October 1905, p. 8, col.7.

Book Reviews

Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880-1939* (Palgrave: Basingstoke and New York), 2006, pp. 211.

This is one more book partly devoted to Gissing which can be regarded as a belated homage to him on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of his death, and readers of this journal will remember having come across its author's name in our January and April 2003 numbers. As in recently published volumes we have reviewed, Gissing is seen in historical, social and

literary context, the whole of chapter 3 being a discussion of his fictional clerks. And the phrase “in context” sometimes means more than the average present-day reader can naturally guess, because much of the context has become blurred. Some affinities between a minority of Gissing’s characters like James Hood or a host of young men in his short stories on the one hand and Wells’s little men on the other have been noted by some perceptive critics. Similarly Edwin Pugh, whom Ernest E. Baker in his history of the English novel called a slum novelist and who sent Gissing a copy of his 1898 book *Tony Drum*, was aware of following Gissing’s example and consequently of being part and parcel of the “context.” Again the notion of “context” is relevant in the case of William Pett Ridge, a garrulous and at times mendacious fiction-spinner, whose low-brow comments on *The Whirlpool*, quoted in this book, reveal an abysmal incomprehension of its author’s originality and of the art of serious fiction in general. “It is in *The Whirlpool*,” he wrote disparagingly in *A Story Teller Forty Years in London*, “that a young couple having, after a sufficient number of tribulations, contrived to get married, go to live for two agreeable years in Wales; these years Gissing deals with in hurried pages, and then brings the pair back to London, and to all the discomforts of home.” Here and not infrequently elsewhere in Dr. Wild’s book we realise in what strange company Gissing finds himself. Vincent Brome would have agreed who dismissed Pett Ridge’s achievements summarily: “[He] was a writer unaware of the wider implications of what he wrote.” If it is clear that the very subject of this exploration of clerkdom may lead one to consider third rate literature, though not necessarily, it matters to rejoice that Dr. Wild’s quest has led him to cross the path of a writer rediscovered by Robert L. Selig while seeking responses to Gissing’s work in the Chicago press, namely Shan F. Bullock, who has been recognized as one of his sincere admirers. “A good dozen of [his novels],” Bullock wrote in the *Chicago Evening Post* in early 1904, “are in the first rank of fiction.” His own *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk* (1907) would apparently deserve to be revived.

Dr. Wild’s inventory of Gissing’s clerks is not a perfunctory one. He traced a variety of types not only in the novels, notably *A Life’s Morning*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women*, but also in the main collections of short stories from *Human Odds and Ends* to *Stories and Sketches*. So we are given an opportunity to renew our acquaintance with a number of texts which no recent critical study has mentioned: “A Capitalist,” “A Freak of Nature” (perhaps unwisely the Tragara Press edition of

this story has been ignored although Loanhead is quite accessible from Edinburgh!), “Humplebee,” “The Pessimist of Plato Road,” “The Salt of the Earth,” “The Scrupulous Father,” “Simple Simon,” “The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge,” “Under and Umbrella” and “A Well-Meaning Man.” Now unquestionably there are clerks in all these stories and anyone who reads Dr. Wild’s comment on them without having read or reread previously the stories themselves will naturally be inclined to agree with him. Unfortunately the quiet analysis offered by the critic conceals a theory which is clearly expounded elsewhere in the book. It is disarmingly simple—until 1893, the year in which Lawrence and Bullen published *The Odd Women*, Gissing was sympathetic to clerks, as is Mrs. Baxendale in *A Life’s Morning*. After that date, which also coincides with his return to London and its suburbs, Gissing, still according to Dr. Wild, became critical of clerks in general, and much is made in the book of the critical reception of *The Town Traveller* in the *Daily Chronicle*, of the correspondence which followed the publication of the review, and of the article which the *Speaker* published on the whole affair. This so-called changed attitude is not proved by a close examination of Gissing’s short stories published after 1893. As examining the stories at length is impossible in a review, a few examples will of necessity suffice to show how unfair the critic’s method is in each of them. In “Humplebee” the eponymous young hero is a victim of both his condescending school chum, whose life he heroically saved as he was drowning and of his braggart of a father. After the last episode of the story which shows Humplebee to be a victim of circumstances, the narrator sighs in sympathy: “He had to begin life over again—that was all.” In “The Salt of the Earth” Thomas Bird is another victim of his familiars’ grossly unfair treatment of him who blames himself most unjustifiably for other people’s indelicacies. In “A Well-Meaning Man” Robert Winter, far from being scornfully looked upon by the narrator is yet another victim of a crook, and so on and so forth. “Under an [not “the”] Umbrella” is fraught with compassion for the poor lovelorn clerk humiliated by a rival. The impression given by clerks as Dr. Wild sees them in the post-1893 stories is systematically tendentious and Gissing’s intentions are disturbingly warped.

Another limit of the usefulness of this book appears in the bibliography. The nine volumes of *Collected Letters* should have been consulted, not the first volume only (see p. 199 of the book under review, where it appears that after 1880 only the obsolete volume of *Letters to the Family* was turned to any account though complemented by the equally obsolete collection of letters to Edward [sic] Bertz). Instead of applying his ideology, borrowed

from Raymond Williams, to the case of Gissing, we think that Dr. Wild would have been well advised to read the later short stories and *The Town Traveller* more carefully and to ponder the testimony of Gabrielle Fleury concerning humble people like those he described in the six stories commissioned by Jerome K. Jerome for *To-Day*: “The *simple-minded* don’t weary me; only the pretentious get on my nerves.” Philip Dolamore, the addle-pated protagonist of “The Pessimist of Plato Road,” is a good example which should prompt any sensible critic to praise Gissing for having the courage of his convictions and not shying at the prospect of telling the truth about pretentious folly. Surely the anonymous commentator of the *Speaker* (a weekly that Gissing apparently did not read on that occasion) was right when he rebutted the accusations hurled at Gissing by some comically immature minor clerks and made fun of their misplaced delicacy.

It is also a pity Dr. Wild has not read the perceptive appreciation of *The Town Traveller* by the Manchester journalist and novelist Allan Noble Monkhouse, whom Gissing once met at Mrs. Henry Norman’s home. Monkhouse, who had a sense of humour and could call a spade a spade, never missed an opportunity to praise this minor yet clever and highly significant Gissing novel. But short of tracing all Monkhouse’s articles on Gissing in the *Manchester Guardian* and elsewhere, notably in the *Manchester Quarterly*, he could have pondered the wise unsigned leader published by the *Daily Chronicle* on 29 September 1898. Over a hundred years after it saw the light, it still reads like the most sensible comment to be found on this singular episode in Gissing’s life. It reads like a plea for intelligent response to satirical literature before the few decades when ideologies with names ending in -ism attempted to strangle free criticism.

A potentially interesting question with which this volume is deliberately not concerned is that of female office clerks in London between 1880 and World War II. Perhaps a study of this ill-defined subject is being currently written by some English or American academic critic, but whether this is the case or not, a volume which for a hundred years has been practically ignored by historians of society is Clara Collet’s *Educated Working Women* (1902). Its sub-title, *Essays on the Economic Position of Women Workers in the Middle Classes*, gives a key to its contents. In the present book female clerks are merely alluded to on a number of pages.

As regards literary sources on the subject Arlene Young’s volume on *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women* (1999) would be much more than a point of departure. And if material is sought in Gissing’s works the pupils of Mary Barfoot and

Rhoda Nunn would be worth considering, as would be the daughter of the lodge in the short story of that name. But a richer source for any researcher would be Deborah McDonald's recent book on Clara Collet, which contains plenty of promising material.

If ever Dr. Wild's volume is reprinted, a few misprints should be corrected: p. 46 Winter, not Winder; p. 178 The Day, not Days of Silence; p. 199 Eduard, not Edward Bertz (except on the title page of *The French Prisoners*); p. 201 G. H. Lewes, not Lewis for George Eliot's companion; *passim*: Phillpotts needs a double l. Perhaps also, as the author of the long anonymous review of *In the Year of Jubilee* in the *Spectator* (9 February 1895), which Gissing methodically tore to pieces in a letter to Morley Roberts, is now known to be James Ashcroft Noble, a few readers might like to compare the views he expressed there with those expressed in other (signed) reviews of Gissing's novels.

Meanwhile this attractively produced book with its few illustrations can be recommended to those of Gissing's admirers who can bear reading ideologically biased criticism of some of his works. This critical study, although its author had predecessors duly noticed by Paul Duguid in his *Times Literary Supplement* review (1 September 2006), unquestionably breaks new ground, and it is likely to prove a valuable starting-point for further research on Gissing's lower-class and middle-class characters. To most readers it will be something of a consolation to find that Dr. Wild quotes approvingly these words of Pierre Bourdieu, which apply to Gissing beautifully: "Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the 'mood of the age' produces a derealization of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time ... they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism." — Pierre Coustillas.

Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1181.

In the "Preface" to his *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918*, Philip Waller declares his uniting themes to be the behaviour and standing of authors, the public's responses, and the images created in the emerging world of best-sellers and the literary mass market. Waller's mammoth volume is in effect a literary historian's informative and entertaining analysis of the world of Gissing's "new grub street" — a world combining high-mindedness and resentments, moral earnestness and ex-

ploitation in what Waller describes as “the first and only literary mass market.” Waller tells us that his work was “once much longer,” and that “considerable areas have been truncated or excluded altogether,” but, as it stands, the study is comprehensive, and will undoubtedly be accepted as a defining literary history of the period.

That said, the many references to Gissing in the volume will be read with a mixture of disappointment and frustration by Gissing scholars. Gissing makes his first appearance early on in the chapter on bibliophiles, which quotes his account in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* of his happy discovery and purchase of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* for 1s. per volume. However, Waller’s concluding remark – that “Like every Gissing story, the happiness did not last” (p. 21) – sounds the keynote of his recurrent references to Gissing. Thus the next entry records that “A habitually glum George Gissing was made even glummer” by the perception in 1894 that publishers seemed disposed “to give up the 3-vol. publication altogether” (p. 34). “Pessimism came naturally to George Gissing, the Victorians’ antidote to Samuel Smiles,” Waller comments in the context of Gissing’s anti-democratic anxiety and low sales (pp. 60-61). The chapter on “Literary Advice and Advisers” is more even-handed. On the negative side, the statement that “*T.P.’s Weekly* wanted to dispel the gloom from the lower-middle classes which Gissing’s fiction had cast round it,” is accompanied by the equally negative quotation from Douglas Goldring’s *Reputations* to the effect that Gissing’s characters “bore the motto ‘please kick me’ suspended round their necks” (p. 89). However, on the positive side, there is reference to Arnold Bennett’s recommendation of *Thyrza* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in *Literary Taste* (p. 104). Page 129 reports Meredith’s £150 and John Morley’s £1,000 a year as readers for Chapman & Hall and Macmillan respectively, “if the gossip about their salaries heard by George Gissing at the Savile Club in 1896 was accurate.” Page 139 quotes C. F. G. Masterman’s review of *Robert Thorne* as “a more accurate and less indignant interpretation of lower middle-class life in London than the novels of George Gissing.” The chapter on the formation of the canon notes Gissing’s speculation in *Ryecroft* about the effect of Trollope’s autobiography on his literary reputation (p. 199). And the very interesting account of “The Commemoration Movement” documents the fact that in 1912-13, C. H. Herford organised a lecture series and subscription to place a memorial to Gissing at Owens College, Manchester (p. 237). One of the least satisfactory of Waller’s chapters, on “English Literature’s Foreign Relations,” states baldly that France was an “escape from a second wife and a grave-

yard for George Gissing” (p. 282). As one would expect, the account of “Advertising and Self-Advertising” contains several references to Gissing’s novels, including *In the Year of the Jubilee* (sic), but even here Waller cannot resist pejorative epithets – for example, on page 353, Gissing is referred to as “the doleful drudge.” Negative epithets pile up again in the chapter on “Literary Properties and Agencies” with Gissing caricatured as “a literary mendicant” with “a genius for misery” who was “no easy man to market” (pp. 623-24). Waller also quotes Gissing’s views on best-selling writers, such as Hall Caine and Marie Corelli (p. 757), and the final reference to Gissing in the volume is to his negative response to George Moore’s *Esther Waters* (p. 988).

It might appear from this notice that there is little of value in Waller’s study. It should be said, however, that *Writers, Readers, and Reputations* is a notable achievement, particularly in its account of the spectacularly successful careers of some of the best-selling authors of the period. Waller provides real insight into what makes for contemporary popular success. However, from the viewpoint of Gissing specialists, the volume would have been greatly improved if it had taken note of more recent Gissing criticism and scholarship, not least the Ohio University Press nine-volume edition of the *Collected Letters* (1990-1997). The signs are that many of the evaluative literary attitudes of this study were formed in the 1980s when, as the “Preface” tells us, the book was conceived.

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Notes and News

Maria Teresa Chialant, who is well known to the Gissing community and teaches at the University of Salerno, has edited a big paperback entitled *Viaggio e letteratura* for the Venetian publisher Marsilia (May 2006). This fat, closely printed, tome consists of twenty-six essays on travel writing—only five of which are in English—preceded by the editor’s introduction. None of them is devoted to Gissing but the one by John Paul Russo, “In the Footsteps of Norman Douglas and Edward Hutton” (pp. 349-65), is the nearest approximation to an evocation of *By the Ionian Sea*. One feels that Russo, had he been allowed more space, would gladly have availed himself of opportunities to call up the work of Gissing’s predecessors: Henry Swinburne, Richard Keppel Craven, Arthur J. Strutt, Edward Lear, Craufurd Tait Ramage and Janet Ross among others.

We have received a very interesting letter from Crotona about what may perhaps be called Gissing's posthumous life there. The writer is Prof. Carlo Ripolo and his letter updates the information we collected in June 2002, when we attended the symposium on Gissing and his memorable stay in the town in late 1897. Among the abundant news he sends us is the very recent publication of a volume by Umberto Franzè, *Amare Crotona: Immagini della città dal 1860 al 1960*, which contains references to Gissing and reproductions of old photographs, one of them showing the Albergo Concoridia early in the twentieth century, another being a photograph of Gissing. The publisher is Media Print Tipografia and the published price 22 euros. Another novelty is the Museum of the Archeological Park of Capocolonna which was formally opened last August. (Has a brochure or guide book been published? we wonder.) In one of the rooms, straight on the wall, the following extract from one of Gissing's letters to his son Walter has been reproduced in large characters in Italian translation thus: "Vicino a questa città ci sono i resti di un tempio greco: una grande colonna alta 26 piedi, che si erge sulla punta del promontorio di Cotrone; posso vederla da qui, sebbene sia distante sei miglia." And underneath: "George Gissing al figlio. 26 novembre 1897."

Professor Ripoli has also sent photographs he took in Siena of the streets with which Gissing and the writing of his critical study of Dickens are associated. It seems that nobody there, except the purchasers of Francesco Badolato's collection of Gissing's letters from Italy and Greece, is aware of Gissing's busy and fruitful stay in the town. However, the houses in which he lodged, in the Via della Sapienza, formerly Via delle Belle Arti, and in the Via Franciosa, to all appearances have not much changed since his time. Short of discovering anything really new about his stay in Siena, Carlo Ripolo has enquired into the history of the two streets. He has found interesting details in recently published topographical books on Siena.

The number of literary anthologies containing extracts from Gissing's works slowly but steadily increases. The two latest discoveries are *English Short Stories of the Nineteenth Century*, selected and introduced by Heinz Bergner (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969) and *A London Christmas*, compiled by Marina Cantacuzino (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989). The first volume contains "Two Collectors," the second two passages from *The Unclassed*.

During the Heritage Open Days, Wakefield, 7-10 September 2006, visitors were invited to see the Gissing Centre at 2 Thompson's Yard, Westgate.

A nicely produced leaflet prepared by the Wakefield Civic Society was available on the occasion.

The British Library and Oak Knoll Press have published a very attractive and highly informative, illustrated volume entitled *Out of Print and Into Profit: A History of the Rare and Secondhand Book Trade in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Giles Mandelbrote, a British Library Curator of British Collections 1501-1800. This clothbound volume of over 400 pages contains articles by Chris Kohler (“Making Collections”) and Michèle Kohler (“The British Trade and Institutional Libraries”), a general index, an index of books and an index of booksellers. Gissing appears twice: on p. 155 (sale of the Pforzheimer Gissing Collection to the Lilly Library) and p. 286 (apropos of Walter T. Spencer’s now dated volume, *Forty Years in my Bookshop*, which carries one or two anecdotes about the Gissing brothers).

We shall publish a review of Barbara Rawlinson’s important book on Gissing’s short stories, essays and other works in our next number.

Recent Publications

(compiled with the assistance of Christine Huguet)

Volume

George Gissing, *Sulla riva dello Jonio*, Ilisso Edizioni and Rubbettino Editore, 2006. Translation by Margherita Guidacci, originally published by Cappelli in 1957, preface by Domenico Nunnari. Pictorial hard cover. Euros 5.90. The front cover features a detail of “Pini al tramonto” by E. Citriniti.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Alice Jenkins, Juliet John and John Sutherland, *Rereading Victorian Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000). Contains a chapter by Ralph Pite, “Place, Identity and *Born in Exile*,” pp. 129-44.

Lise Shapiro Sanders, “The Failure of the Romance: Boredom, Class and Desire in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* and W. Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, Spring 2001, pp. 190-228.

- Scott McCracken, "From performance to public sphere: the production of modernist masculinities," *Textual Practice*, Spring 2001, pp. 47-65. Mainly about Gissing and Dorothy Richardson.
- Michele Russo, "Recensioni," *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, January 2003, pp. 137-40. Review of *A Garland for Gissing*.
- Robert D. Butterworth, "The Professional Adrift in the Victorian Novel: (2) *New Grub Street*," *Victorian Newsletter*, Fall 2003, pp. 17-22. The first article in the series was about *Agnes Grey*.
- Veronica Spencer, "The Barbarians are at the Gates: City Speech and Violence in Masterman and Gissing" in *The Image of the City in Literature, Media, and Society*, ed. Will Wright and Stephen Kaplan (Pueblo, Co: Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, University of Southern Colorado, 2003).
- Molly Youngkin, "'All she knew was, that she wished to live': Late-Victorian Realism, Liberal-Feminist Ideals, and George Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee*," *Studies in the Novel*, Spring 2004, pp. 36-78.
- Aaron Matz, "George Gissing's Ambivalent Realism," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, June 2004, pp. 212-48. A remarkable article on *New Grub Street*. Dr. Matz is the author of a Ph.D. thesis entitled "Satire in the Age of Realism, 1860-1910."
- Gerald Schmidt, "George Gissing's Psychology of 'Female Imbecility,'" *Studies in the Novel*, Fall 2005, pp. 329-41. On *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*.
- Margaret E. Mitchell, "George Gissing's Moral Mischief: Prostitutes and Narrative Resolution," *Studies in the Novel*, Winter 2005, pp. 410-29. Also on *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*.
- Paul W. Nash, "Reviews," *The Library*, June 2006, pp. 213-14. Review of *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*. An unconsciously amusing piece of vapid pretentiousness and exemplary incompetence.
- G. Rulli, "Recensioni," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 7 October 2006, pp. 101-02. Review of *George Gissing, romanziere del tardo periodo vittoriano*.

- J. C., "Commentary: NB," *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 and 29 December 2006, p. 20. The anonymous columnist mentions Gissing again flatteringly: "Sesquicentenary stakes are at least as rich [as centenaries]: Joseph Conrad, George Gissing and the poet John Davidson, were born in 1857." On p. 40 of the same number, in "Author, Author New Year Special," readers are invited to identify 34 quotations. No. 12 is about Mrs. Boston Wright, the editor of *The English Girl*, whom Jasper Milvain mentions in chapter 8 of *New Grub Street*.
- Irene Iarocci, "Un appassionato interprete dei mutamenti del mondo," *L'Observatore romano*, 16-17 October 2006, p. 11. Review of *George Gissing, romanziere del tardo periodo vittoriano*.
- Hazel Bell, "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft," *Indexer*, October 2006, pp. 149-50. Same text, without the index, as that published in our July number.
- Andrew Radford, "Unmanned by Marriage and the Metropolis in Gissing's *The Whirlpool*," *Victorian Newsletter*, Fall 2006, pp. 10-18.
- Anon., "RSVP Bibliography 2003-05," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Fall 2006. Items 198, 276, 297 and 553. The second of these articles (Ruth Livesey, "Reading for Character," *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Vol. 9 (2004), no. 1, pp. 43-67) is said to examine how women reformers investigated and represented poverty through their responses to Gissing's novels in the *Charity Organisation Review*. The other three have already been listed in this Journal.
- Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* (London: Picador, 2006). As announced in our October number, Gissing appears on pp. 290-91, 306-07, 381 and 411.
- Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Various passages on Gissing. See John Sloan's review in this number.
- Francesco Badolato, *La Calabria vista da tre illustri viaggiatori* (Barzago (Le), Italy : Marna, 2006). The three travellers were François Lenormant, Gissing and Norman Douglas. This 112-page illustrated volume

with a preface by Vincenzo Versace, President of the Associazione Culturale Calabro-Brianzola, and an introduction by Domenico Crisafio, contains eleven chapters on places visited by the three men, notably Sibari, Crotona, Catanzaro, Reggio Calabria, Cosenza and Squillace—as far as Gissing is concerned; also chapters on Gissing and Pavese, and on Gissing and the paparazzi as well as an appendix which consists of papers that were read at the symposium in Crotona on 2 June 2002 by Pierre Coustillas, Francesco Badolato and Domenico Marino, the great-grandson of the genial gardener whom Gissing met in the Crotona cemetery. The symposium had been organized by Dr. Antonino Anili, the then President of the local Rotary Club. Among the illustrations are portraits of the three travellers, of Calabrians in traditional costumes, photographs of Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) and of the two plaques commemorating Gissing's stays in Catanzaro and Crotona, as well as a photograph of Dr. Riccardo Sculco. The last page is a list of Dr. Badolato's published works in volume form.

John Betjeman, *Trains and Buttered Toast: Selected Radio Talks*, ed. Stephen Games (London: John Murray, 2006). Significant evidence of Betjeman's interest in Gissing is revealed through a radio talk he gave in August 1944 (pp. 143-44).

Michele Russo, "La scrittura come viaggio metaforico in *New Grub Street* e *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* di George Gissing." An essay in *La letteratura vittoriana e i mezzi di trasporto: dalla nave all'astronave*, ed. Mariaconcetta Costantini *et al* (Rome: Aracne, 2006), pp. 253-59.

Matthew Reisz, *A Booklover's Companion* (London: The Folio Society, 2006). Contains an extract from *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Ryecroft's purchase of a copy of the first edition of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*) and a passage from the short story "Christopherson."

Wulfhard Stahl, "Besprechungen," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, Band 124 (2006), Heft 2, pp. 386-93. A review article covering a number of books by and about Gissing published in the last few years: the Italian translation of *New Grub Street*; *George Gissing – New Explorations into his Fiction*; *George Gissing: Voices of The Unclassed*; Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of *Collected Works of George Gissing on Charles Dickens*, and *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography*.

