

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

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

– George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

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January, 1965

Editorial

This unlikely periodical has been launched in the conviction that there is a small number of readers scattered about the world whose interest in George Gissing and his work transcends reasonable limits. Most of us do not believe that he is amongst the greatest writers or the greater men. But we have noticed that his readers are often willing to grant him a degree of attention, even enthusiasm, that they acknowledge to be out of proportion to his literary achievements. That is the Gissing mystery, the heart of darkness of the Gissing cult. The *Gissing Newsletter* is the outgrowth of a series of personal encounters that took place in England in the summer of 1964. The four of us whose names appear as the editorial board had been corresponding on Gissing matters, in some cases, for years. Then, in the summer of 1964, I spent some time working at the British Museum, and had the long-awaited opportunity of meeting Mr. Coustillas and Mr. Koike. We had various rendezvous and collations at and around the Museum, in the heartland of the Gissing country, and decided to embark upon the present publication as a means of channeling the information we had been exchanging by letter. Some weeks later, I visited Mr. Rosengarten, and recruited him as well.

The *Gissing Newsletter* is a thoroughly informal enterprise. It has no means of support; it floats in mid-air. It will appear quarterly (when convenient), and will be circulated free. A complete list of the present “subscribers” appears in this issue. Anyone who wishes to join this select group has only to write to me.

We invite contributions. Our editorial policy is, I believe, the simplest and soundest to be adopted by any journal. We will publish every contribution submitted to us, sooner or later, without exception. We ask only that contributions be germane, and very short; substantial articles on Gissing should, we feel, go to less specialized publications, where they will find a wider audience. – J. K.

In Gissing's Footsteps, I

by Pierre Coustillas

Last summer, among various other activities connected with Gissing, I carried out a project I had long had in mind – hunting, not only in England but also in France, for some of the houses where the novelist had lived.

I tried my luck in London first. That some of Gissing's houses were still extant seemed very likely, since the Librarian of the Wakefield City Library had gathered, for the 1953 Exhibition, a small collection of photographs of places which Gissing had occupied, and had even sent some by way of thanks to the Yale University library for the loan of various documents. And indeed, though I did not venture as far as 55 Wornington Road, W. 10, near Westbourne Park Station, or 76 Burton Road, Brixton, I succeeded in finding a good many of those that are still standing.

Colville Place, which Gissing used for the setting of one of his early short stories, was destroyed during the second world war, and Gower Place was pulled down owing to the University of London extensions, but the building which stands at 70 Huntley Street looks old enough to date back to the late 1870's and the garret at the top may well have been that which Reardon (speaking for his creator) alluded to in *New Grub Street* as visible from a certain place in Tottenham Court Road. It is the last of a row of similar houses, but unlike the others, it has a new coat of paint, which makes it look more respectable.

According to the documents in the Wakefield City Library, 5 Hanover Street is now 60 Noel Road, but though I went to the latter address, I found a house quite different from that which was photographed some ten years ago. Only an enquiry at the Cadastral Office would enable one to settle one's doubts. At Chelsea, Oakley Crescent has been renamed Oakley Gardens, but No. 17 is, to all appearances, very much what it must have been. So is 62 Milton Street, now Balcombe Street. The shabby building stands at a crossroads in a semi-slum area, the ground floor being occupied by a ladies' hairdresser named Joseph.

Of all Gissing's abodes in London, the most distinguished was – and remains – 7K Cornwall Mansions (formerly Residences) near Baker Street Station and within hearing distance of the bell of Marylebone workhouse. It is a five-storeyed building with two entrances numbered 1-12 and 14-26. After a few years, Gissing found the place depressing enough, an opinion which tends to be confirmed by the fact, which he heard of some time later, that his successor in the flat had committed suicide.

It was chance, rather than deliberate intention, which brought me to Dorking, where Gissing lived for about a year at 7 Clifton Terrace, at a time when he was separated from his second wife. Early in 1964, I happened to have been corresponding with a young and very

active local antiquarian bookseller about some elusive editions of the Master's works – Mr. C. C. Kohler, of Pathways, Westhumble. When he manifested some interest in Gissing, I mentioned that, oddly enough, he had stayed near his own residence at the turn of the century. Mr. Kohler went to the office of the local newspaper and arranged for a paragraph to be inserted, asking whether among the old residents of the town, anyone happened to have known Gissing. This was very unlikely, since he was in those days dodging his wife, and stayed much at home, using his mothers' and sisters' address at Wakefield when writing even to his closest friends. It was therefore most improbable that he should have sought acquaintances among the local people.

As we had expected, the paragraph in the *Dorking Advertiser* brought no results worth considering but, when I went to Dorking in the summer, I met the proprietor of 7 Clifton Terrace, an individual the like of whom I have never met in England. Mr. Kohler had previously arranged with him that I should visit the house, but somehow, when we turned up, he had changed his mind. That I was a Frenchman roused in him an old prejudice – he had had some French lodger in the past and for some reason that I don't know of, had got on very badly with them. By a generalization typical of some old-fashioned, jingoistic people, I became *persona non grata*. Anyway, hardly had we passed the gate when the man popped out of the house and greeted us with a series of verbal missiles which were clearly intended to discourage further progress on his territory. "Go out, go out!" he roared, adding epithets which would have caused a Victorian maiden to blush. So we had no choice but to retreat quietly.

He remained standing with his arms akimbo on his doorstep, defying the wide world in mute rage, and he is still there, cutting the same figure, on the photograph I took of him, to add to my collection. Not that I particularly wished to pay him the slightest tribute, but, as obviously he would not move as long as he saw us, I could not photograph the house without the man. Thinking again of this boorish, foul-spoken individual, I like to imagine how Gissing would have greeted the anecdote – with a boisterous laugh or scornful silence, as the spirit moved him.

Fortunately, in contrast with the chilling encounter in Dorking, we can look back upon another to a place where Gissing himself had made his way more than once – Flint Cottage, Meredith's house at Boxhill. There we had been welcomed like friends, genially allowed into the room where the grand old man received his visitors, and shown a few documents of antiquarian value. Flint Cottage is a National Trust and consequently has been kept in good repair. A photograph in J. A. Hammerton's book on Meredith (1909) shows that the house has suffered no appreciable change.

(This account of our intrepid correspondent's adventure will be continued in our next number, with some visits to sites in France.)

Some Recent Gissing Publications in Japan

by Shigeru Koike

It is a surprising fact (surprising even to Japanese scholars) that many of George Gissing's works, especially his essays and short stories, have been introduced to university students in Japan through the textbooks used for drill in English. Most of these books are very modest in format, and limited in circulation. They are published by small firms, and edited by scholars who are interested in the novelist, but not always well informed about the recent developments in Gissing studies. (Some of them, alas, still believe that Gissing visited Jena.) These books generally have short introductions written in Japanese, and notes, mainly linguistic, in either Japanese or English, or both. Here is a list of some of the most important now available: (The subject of Gissing's popularity in Japan is covered in Mr. Koike's "Gissing in Japan," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. 67, no. 9, Nov., 1963, pp. 565-572.)

1. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, ed. Sanki Ichikawa, 1921; revised ed., 1957. K. The complete text, with the exception of the author's preface, which is, curiously enough, omitted. 450 yen. (There are at least two other text editions of the *Ryecroft Papers*.)
2. *The House of Cobwebs*, two vols., ed. M. Ichikawa *et al.* Date of first ed. unknown. N. Contents, Vol. 1: "The House of Cobwebs," "A Daughter of the Lodge," "A Charming Family" and "A Capitalist" (220 yen); Vol. 2: "A Poor Gentleman," "Humplebee," "Christopherson" and "Fate and the Apothecary" (180 yen).
3. *The Scrupulous Father and The House of Cobwebs*, ed. M. Okada, date unknown. N. 180 yen. (There are at least four other selections from *The House of Cobwebs*.)
4. *The Paying Guest*, ed. T. Ueda, 1936. KS. 120 yen.
5. *A Victim of Circumstances and Other Stories*, ed. S. Kuno, 1930. K. Contents: The title story, "One Way of Happiness" and "The Elixir." 170 yen.
6. *The Light on the Tower*, ed. R. Nakagawa *et al.*, 1962. S. Contents: The title story, "The Fate of Humphrey Snell" and "The Schoolmaster's Vision." 120 yen.
7. *Spellbound*, ed. T. Matsunami, with "The Fate of Humphrey Snell." 1955. E. 60 yen.
8. *A Life's Morning*, abridged and edited by N. Jimbo, 1961. A. The original text is drastically abridged within 75 pages. 120 yen.
9. *By the Ionian Sea*, selected and edited by U. Miyagi, 1953. SS. Chapters I-VII, IX, and XII are selected. 160 yen.

Key to publishers:

A: Apollon-sha, 209, Seiryu-cho, Imadegawa-agaru, Kawara-machi, Kyoto.

E: Eihosha Ltd., 1-8 Kanda-Misaki-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.
K: Kenkyusha Ltd., 2-1, Fujimi-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.
KS: Kinseido Ltd., 3-21, Kanda-Jimbo-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.
N: Nan-undo Ltd., 2-29, Nishi-Kanda, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.
S: Shohakusha, 1-16, Iida-machi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.
SS: Sekkei-shobo, 554, Yukigaya, Ota-ku, Tokyo.

Prices are as of summer, 1964, and subject to alteration without notice. One pound is equivalent to 1,008 yen; one dollar to 360 yen; one franc to 73 yen. Mr. Koike welcomes further inquiries.

There are two casual allusions to Gissing in recent numbers of the *NY Times Book Review*. The reviewer of Stanley Weintraub's *The Yellow Book* refers to the Gissing story in it on October 25. And in his review of *A Measure of Independence* by John R. Tunis, Gerald W. Johnson refers to Tunis as "a George Gissing who learned at last to make money and who therefore can look back on New Grub Street with tolerance and humor." By what intervention of fate we know not, this review appeared on November 22, Gissing's birthday.

An Oxford Thesis on Gissing

by Herbert Rosengarten

The full title of this thesis, recently submitted for the degree of B. Litt., is "The Relations between Author, Publisher and Public at the end of the Nineteenth Century, with particular reference to the writings of George Gissing;" and the primary intention has been to build up a composite picture of the world of letters in this period, using Gissing's experience as a means of illustration. The many factors influencing the composition and publication of a novel are each examined in turn; the attitude of authors towards the literary "market": the several levels of popular tastes; the power of the circulating libraries, and the decline of the three-decker; the nature of the relationship between authors and publishers, and their conflicting views on literature and taste; the growing complexities of publishing agreements, and the thorny question of payments; and finally the difficulties facing a serious writer in a world where mediocrity and "the mob" reigned supreme.

Gissing's letters, diaries and novels all lend themselves remarkably well to an examination of these questions, and indicate that, far from being the helpless artist depicted by

Morley Roberts, he was reasonably well acquainted with the technicalities pertaining to authorship. Although he never overcame his distaste for the business side of literature, he learned how to bargain with publishers, to make use of agents and editors, to establish himself as a professional by contributing to mass-circulation periodicals; and his writings abundantly illustrate the constant struggle between his artistic conscience and his awareness of the need to produce “good, coarse, marketplace stuff for the world’s vulgar.”

Gissing’s literary career thus presents a useful focus for a study of the problems which beset the serious author during this period of transition, and of the various influences affecting his work. However, the student of Gissing will find little with which he is not already familiar, for all the biographical material has been taken from printed sources, with the exception of some interesting details kindly provided by Pierre Coustillas. Nor is there any attempt at a critical re-assessment of Gissing’s writings: his work is discussed only in relation to such questions as the range of popular taste, or the effect of publishers’ demands (though some attention is given to the difficulties he encouraged in writing one-volume novels, after the decline of the three-decker). The main use of this thesis to a Gissing scholar is that it brings together many facts concerning the publishing history of Gissing’s books – facts which are all well-known, but inconveniently scattered. There is also a “Complete Bibliography of Gissing’s Printed Writings,” the completeness of which is arguable, but which may be useful as a rough guide to the various editions of the novels and short stories.

Recent Publications (From January, 1964.)

- Adams, Ruth M. Review of Korg’s *George Gissing* (hereafter *GG*), *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXIII, 2 (Spring, 1964), p. 254.
- Anon. “Gissing: Preview of Modern Individualism” (a review of *GG*), *Trace*, Winter, 1964, p. 341.
- Anon. “Downland Gleanings from Back Streets.” *Dorking Advertiser and County Post*, July 3, 1964, p. 14. (see “In Gissing’s Footsteps,” this issue).
- Coustillas, Pierre and Paul Goetsch. “George Gissing: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings about Him: Foreign Journals (Supplement II),” *English Literature in Transition*, VII, 1 (March, 1964), pp. 14-26.
- Coustillas, Pierre. Review of *GG. Etudes Anglaises*, XVII, I (Jan. – March, 1964), pp. 86-87.
- . “Gissing’s Short Stories: A Bibliography” with introduction and notes. *English Literature in Transition*, VII, 2 (June, 1964), pp. 59-72. Enumerates collections, gives individual stories listed by year of publication with annotations, and includes a list of translations and reprints published in Japan.

- . Ed. "Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury: A Selection." *Bulletin of the New York Public Literature*. Part I, Vol. 68, No. 7. (September, 1964), pp. 433-461. Part II, Vol. 68, No. 8. (October, 1964), pp. 525-548. (See also "Forthcoming Publications.")
- Gerber, Helmut E. "The Steady Stream," a comment on Gissing studies in "The Editor's Fence," *English Literature in Transition*, VII, 1 (March, 1964), pp. v-vi.
- Gissing, George. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Foreword by Cecil Chisholm. Everyman's Library, 1964. Dent (London) and Dutton (New York).
- . "The Foolish Virgin," reprinted in *The Yellow Book: Quintessence of the Nineties*, ed. Stanley Weintraub, Doubleday Anchor (New York), 1964. paper.
- Gordan, John D. "New in the Berg Collection, 1959-1961." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, January, 1964, pp. 6-7. A description of materials recently added to the Berg's unparalleled Gissing collection. These include Gissing's copies of the short stories published in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1877, a copy of *Workers in the Dawn* in a variant binding, and the letters to Gabrielle Fleury currently appearing in the *Bulletin* under the editorship of Mr. Coustillas.
- Haight, Gordon S. "Gissing: Some Biographical Details." *Notes and Queries*," June, 1964, pp. 235-236.
- Kelvin, Norman. Review of *GG*. *Western Humanities Review*. XVIII, 2 (Spring, 1964), pp. 184-185.
- Korg, Jacob. "George Gissing," a review of research in *Victorian Fiction*, ed. Lionel Stevenson, Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. 401-413.
- Murphy, Jim. Review of *GG*. *The News-Register* (McMinville, Oregon). January 19, 1964.
- Wolff, Joseph. "George Gissing: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings about Him." *English Literature in Transition*, VII, 2 (June, 1964), pp. 73-92.
- Wood, Frederick T. A paragraph reviewing *GG* in "Current Literature, 1963, II Criticism and Biography," *English Studies* (Amsterdam), August 1964, pp. 344-345.
- Young, Arthur C. Review of *GG*. *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, XVIII, 4 (March, 1964), pp. 399-402.

Forthcoming Publications

- Coustillas, Pierre. A bilingual edition of *Ryecroft* (French and English) with introduction and notes, to be published by Aubier-Editions Montaigne, Paris.
- . "Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury, Part III," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, November 1964.
- . *Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*. The New York Public Library. The entire

series, to appear as a separate publication.

Young, Arthur C., ed., *Demos*, to be reissued by Dover Publishing Company in 1965.

Work in Progress

Koike, Shigeru – A Japanese translation of *New Grub Street*.

Young, Arthur C. and P. F. Mattheisen, eds. – A collected edition of Gissing's letters.

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Our next number will contain reviews and discussions of recent publications.

Mailing List

The following lists those who, we have reason to believe, would wish to receive the Newsletter regularly. This first issue is also being sent to a number of others, such as the editors of related periodicals, and interested friends. Those who would like to be put on our regular mailing list are invited to request it. Readers in England, Europe and Japan may be able to secure copies from the editors there who will have a limited number of copies for local circulation. Their home addresses appear below, marked with an asterisk.

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