

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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Pierre Coustillas on the steps of 33 Oakley Gardens, Chelsea, London at the unveiling of the George Gissing plaque

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G. L. C. Blue Plaque for Gissing

C. C. Kohler

At lunchtime on Thursday, 12th June, in hot sunshine and in front of a sizeable crowd, Professor Pierre Coustillas unveiled one of those familiar shiny blue G.L.C. plaques at 33 Oakley Gardens in Chelsea. The plaque reads “George Gissing | 1857-1903 | Novelist | lived here | 1882-1884.”

Everyone at the ceremony enjoyed this splendid occasion. It was a time to meet old friends, to put faces to people who had hitherto sheltered behind letters and to make new friends. Publishers of Gissing gossiped with librarians, writers on Gissing met their readers and subscribers to the *Newsletter* clambered on posh Chelsea cars the better to take photographs. Many people had made arduous journeys to be in Chelsea on this brilliant summer’s day, but I think that their travelling was rewarded with good talk and a feeling of fellowship as London, following Wakefield and Paris, paid homage to Gissing.

I don’t know whether or not the “Phene Arms” was a pub when Gissing lived opposite, but we lengthened our enjoyment by adjourning to an upper room in the pub afterwards for a snack lunch and wine. One stalwart group continued their homage by toasting Gissing in all the other Chelsea pubs. They were last seen lurching towards Kensington in the early evening.

The media were present which was nice although one has to be philosophical about the rather rude notice in the following day’s *Times*. I suppose that “any publicity is good publicity” and it’s pleasing to be able to report that excellent stories appeared in the *Financial Times*, *Wakefield Express*, *Chelsea News*, *London Post*, *Marylebone Mercury*, *Fulham Chronicle*, *Westminster and Pimlico News*, *Mayfair News* and *Hammersmith News and Fulham Post*. The radio served us well with an advance announcement of the ceremony on London’s new commercial radio station and a feature talk by Ann Williams which will be going out on the BBC External Services.

Your contributor was too busy fussing over last-minute details to meet everyone present but did meet Mr. J. F. C. Phillips and Mr. W. Smith from the Greater London Council, Dr. and Mrs. Hooper who are the current tenants of No. 33 Oakley Gardens, novelist Gillian Tindall and her publisher Maurice Temple-Smith, publishers Alan Clodd and John Spiers, author and journalist Anthony Curtis and his wife, Ros Stinton from Birmingham Public Libraries, Ann Williams and Tim Harrison (son of Austin and grandson of Frederic Harrison) from the BBC, Clifford Brook from Wakefield, Mrs. Margaret Wood and her husband from Oxford, Mr. F. J. Woodman, Bill West, Mr. Smith from Leytonstone and booksellers, Noel Bolingbroke-Kent, Lyn Elliott and Michele Kohler.

All good junketings should have “Apologies for Absence.” Our apologies were distinguished and understandable. Alfred Gissing from Switzerland, Shigeru Koike from Japan and Francesco Badolato from Italy.

We all thought the ceremony was great fun but then we are prejudiced.

Mr. Phillips, the “Blue Plaque” man at the G. L. C., said that this unveiling ceremony was one of the best that he had ever attended. If this was so then much of the credit must go to Professor Coustillas for his absorbing speech. The full text is printed below.

Unveiling of the Gissing plaque
at 33 Oakley Gardens, Chelsea
12th June 1975, 1 pm

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The man whose name we are commemorating to-day lived in London for some twenty years in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; he wrote about twenty-five novels and a hundred short stories, most of which are set in London. He was a Yorkshireman who came to London, circuitously, via America. He knew what starvation meant and was not ashamed of it – he lived on peanuts in Troy,

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in New York State, and on bread and dripping in the Tottenham Court Road district. He was a born writer, devoted heart and soul to his art. There were many ups and downs in his forty-six years of existence – emotional, intellectual, moral, artistic and even geographic. He died in southern France, near the Spanish border, and if he was a true Briton in many ways, his artistic ideals and achievements connect him with the Continent. This perhaps may serve as an excuse, doubtless a feeble one, for my addressing a group of English people to-day about one of their fellow-countrymen. I am aware of the paradoxical position I have allowed myself to be placed in; I am also sensible of the privilege I have been granted.

In a hundred years or so of literary criticism George Gissing's literary status as a novelist has been defined in a great variety of manners. Epithets and phrases have flowed freely from the pens of commentators, professional or otherwise. He has been called a permanent stranger, a kill-joy with clear eyes, a black sheep in English literature. Some see him as the poet of fatigue, others as the poet of fortitude, and his friend Clement Shorter once referred to him as the stormy petrel of English letters. He was all that and a good many other things. His relevance to-day is as great as it was in his lifetime. In his remarkable series of novels on the working class and the middle class of this country, he never tired of denouncing social injustice; if he was an apostle of pessimism, he was also an apostle of education and culture, which he regarded as the only source of progress. His pacifism has earned him the esteem of all those who place international co-operation above the satisfying of national greed. The passing of years has proved, alas, that his prophecies of world-wide conflicts were all-too-justified: "I see science," he wrote in 1900, "bringing a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance 'the thousand wars of old,' and, as likely as not, will whelm all the laborious advances of mankind in blood-drenched chaos." At a moment in the history of Britain when national self-complacency was carried to extremes, his deflationary voice

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sounded salutary warnings, dictated by modesty, wisdom and reason. Satire was not – in his works – incompatible with pity. The sight of human suffering never left him indifferent. From the grimy windows of his London lodgings, he could see surprisingly far and wide around him. If he was primarily a novelist, a portrayer of society, a man who used his intelligence to dissect social life, he was also a humanist in love with Latin and Greek antiquity, with the sunny shores of the Mediterranean; and when he was weary of the present, the romance of the past offered him a sweeter refuge than the uncertainties of the future. His best-known novel, *New Grub Street*, is compulsory reading for all aspirants to literary fame; *The Odd Women*, a story concerned with the new woman, discusses woman's liberation seventy years before the phrase was coined. But the most characteristic part of his work, he claimed in 1895, is that which deals with a class of young

men distinctive of his time – well educated, fairly bred, but without money. The problem of deserving, frustrated youth is still with us. Gissing's successors in this respect were George Orwell and John Wain. He was the angry young man of his day.

Of all settings and backgrounds, London holds the first place in his novels. Just as there is the London of Dickens, there is such a thing as the London of Gissing. He was, C. F. G. Masterman said in 1904, "the writer through whose work London first became articulate." Because of his cultural commitment, the place fascinated him as a centre of learning and communication and light, but he responded mostly to the alienating factors of urban existence: the notion of separateness in aggregation obsessed him to the end. An actor in it at first, when he lived in Islington and the streets on either side of Tottenham Court Road, he became essentially an observer in the nineties when he watched London with increasing detachment, material and mental, from Brixton, Epsom and finally Dorking. Many areas of London live in his work, Lambeth in *Thyrza*, Camden Town in *New Grub*

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Street, Bayswater in *The Odd Women*, Islington in *The Nether World*, Camberwell in *In The Year of Jubilee*. In the early nineteen hundreds, when his health and matrimonial difficulties had made it necessary for him to settle in France, he revisited London and saw it with nostalgia because, inevitably, he had come to equate London with his own pathetic youth and the bulk of his writings. One must therefore congratulate the Greater London Council on its initiative in commemorating Gissing's fruitful, though on the whole unhappy, years in London. There are plaques bearing his name in Wakefield, his native place, and in Paris, where he spent a couple of years at the turn of the century. It is only right that London should also pay a tribute to him. And the choice of Chelsea is, I think, especially fortunate.

He lived in this house, which used to be 17 Oakley Crescent, from September 1882 to May 1884. He was then in his middle twenties, "a struggling man," as he recalled with a touch of self-pity, "beset by poverty and other circumstances very unpropitious to mental work." But he liked Chelsea more than any of his former and later London abodes, and he waxed enthusiastic about his new home in his correspondence with his brother and sisters. Thus after a month in this house, he wrote, "I am now in most admirable lodgings, receiving perfect attendance (cooking and everything) all for the same sum, which at the last place only assured me discomfort." This sum was, by modern standards, incredibly low – only seven shillings a week. And Gissing, who had a congenital distrust of landladies, had nothing but praise for the young woman, Mrs. Coward, who acted in this capacity for his benefit. If a piece of gossip is to be trusted, her solicitude extended to matters extraneous to the usual lodger-landlady relationship. But whatever the case may be, he greatly enjoyed his stay in Chelsea. This was partly owing to the literary and artistic associations of the place: his letters of the period bristle with the names of Carlyle, whose house was still empty and sad-looking after his death, of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Maclise and George Eliot. He would

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often go out for walks in Battersea Park and, in the summer, go up the river by steamer to Putney or Richmond. "For a few pence," he noted, "one has a delicious sail, and the cobwebs of the week are satisfactorily blown away from one's brain." The cobwebs must indeed have been pretty thick for he worked hard in this house. Here it was that he wrote *The Unclassed*, his second published novel, while his previous book, *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies*, was being bowdlerized by George Bentley, the prudish publisher, who was so frightened by Gissing's realism that he never issued the book. Here also he wrote his last article for the *Messenger of Europe*, the St. Petersburg monthly patronized by

Turgenev, as well as a few essays, short stories and poems. And in addition to all this he gave lessons to the sons of Frederic Harrison, the Positivist leader, and the grandson of Sir Stafford Northcote. On appointed days, his friend Morley Roberts would come to see him and they would read together some Homer in the original Greek and their favourite English poems. But there can be too much of a good thing. As time passed, he came to know his landlord and landlady so well, they took up so much of his time, that he complained his work was at a standstill. He could only save himself by exile. So off he went, with his manuscripts and his shabby wardrobe to Milton Street, near Regent's Park.

Gissing surely little dreamt, when he bade good-bye to Chelsea, as a budding novelist still unknown to the general public, that his stay in Oakley Crescent would be commemorated as that of Carlyle is in Cheyne Row, and that of George Eliot in Cheyne Walk. The Gissing enthusiasts in Britain and throughout the world will feel grateful, as I do, to the persons who have, in their various capacities, made the erection of this plaque possible. On behalf of the novelist's descendants and of the unacknowledged Gissing confraternity, I wish to thank warmly Mr. J. C. Swaffield, Director-General and Clerk to the Greater London Council, Mr. John Phillips, Historical Research Assistant, also the Cadogan Estates, the ground landlords, Dr. and Mrs. Hooper, the present owners

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of the house, my friend Chris Kohler whose interest in George Gissing threatens to be even more overwhelming than my own, and all of you who have come today. Gissing was a man of commendable modesty, a man who, as *The Times* put it at his death, "valued his artistic conscience above popularity, and his purpose above his immediate reward." Justice is being done to him today. So with homage to him and to his work, I feel honoured and gratified to unveil this plaque.

Pierre Coustillas

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Two Gissing Letters in the Wake Forest University Library

Bruce Garland
Winston-Salem, N. C.

Having read *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* I lost my status of being one of Christopher Morley's "thrice fortunate" – the expression he applies to those who have not read Ryecroft because of the joy to come when they finally read it. (I fully realize my fondness for Ryecroft labels me an amateur.) But, when it comes to Gissing letters there is a good chance we all may be thrice fortunate. You can imagine my pleasure when I became twice thrice-fortunate upon finding two Gissing letters in the Wake Forest University Rare Book Collection, one previously published (not from the original), the other previously unpublished.

Letter number one, addressed to Dr. Henry Hick, is not new to those familiar with *Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing* in the Enitharmon Press Series; it is the first one in the book (p.15). In preparing the book, the editor used typescripts of the letters held by the British Museum. The Wake Forest letter was purchased at Sotheby's by G. H. Last for 4 guineas and eventually found its way into a first edition of *Henry Ryecroft* which was purchased by Wake Forest from El

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Dieff in 1954.

Letter number two, addressed to George's sister Ellen, has never been published. It was offered for sale in 1935 for £3, again by G. H. Last. Wake Forest received the letter along with Morris Parrish's copy of the first edition of *New Grub Street* as a gift from Charles Babcock, who had purchased both for \$125 from Seven Gables Bookshop in 1937.

24 Prospect Park,
Exeter.

Feb. 5, 91

Dearest Nellie,

Many thanks for the money, and for the first proofs of "New Grub Street."

The marriage is put off, owing (I am told) to the illness of her sister. But there is a great deal of unsatisfactory selfishness being exerted with the object of keeping the girl at home as long as possible.

However, you know my character in such matters. I will have a date appointed, and, if that be overpassed, the whole affair shall come to an end.

The marriage, if marriage there be, will be performed, of course, at the office of the Sup^t Registrar for St. Pancras. Marriage is a legal contract, as it concerns the world; as it concerns the individuals, it has nothing to do with the sanction of any person or community.

My love to you, dear. I enclose 12 stamps to pay for various items of postage.

Ever yours,

George.

The money Gissing refers to is assumed to be his own (his sister acting as banker). He probably had the money and proofs sent to his home in Wakefield because that was his only safe address during this period. The proofs evidently read better than the manuscript, for in a letter to

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Algernon dated February 17, 1891, Gissing wrote: "*New Grub Street* goes through the proofs, and I am astonished to find how well it reads. There are savage truths in it" (*Letters to His Family*, p. 315). And he remarked to Eduard Bertz: "I will confess to you that I am pleased with the proofs of 'New Grub Street': it is certainly a much better book than I thought" (*Letters to Bertz*, p. 118).

The marriage referred to is, of course, the marriage to Edith Underwood. Jacob Korg reports that about the middle of 1890 Gissing seemed to give up hope of ever becoming the famous author he so desired to be, and he wrote in his diary that he would not be able to do any good work until he was married (*George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, p. 150). George met Edith on September 24, 1890, and an October 1, 1890 entry in his diary reads: "A fresh beginning once more. It will be *New Grub Street* after all." In a postcard of December 6, he informed Algernon that his story was just finished (*Letters to His Family*, p. 311). Korg writes of this period: "It was apparently as a result of this friendship [with Edith] that *New Grub Street* prospered at last. Begun on the first of October, it was completed, with incredible speed, early in December. This meant that Gissing averaged some four thousand words a day, and the result was one of his best novels" (p. 151).

There seems little doubt, then, that Gissing's romance with Edith Underwood helped him get through *New Grub Street*, but, as the letter indicates, the setting of the wedding date was not as

easy.

Gissing's diary entries describe the days leading up to the letter:

3 Feb. 91: Letter from Edith saying her sister is ill and wanting to put off marriage. Of course I suspected this. Replied saying I will put it off for a week till Feb. 17th, and no longer.

4 Feb. 91: Received first proofs of "New Grub Street" and corrected.

5 Feb. 91: Letter from Edith making it quite uncertain when she can leave home...Wrote to Nellie

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and to Edith, telling the latter that I shall cease correspondence until she gives a final date for the marriage.

In the letter to Nellie, Gissing kept his sister abreast of his romance stating his position firmly: "I will have a date appointed, &, if that be overpassed, the whole affair shall come to an end."

Writing in his diary on February 13 he again voiced similar sentiments: "Letter from Edith saying marriage can be shortly. Replied that the day must be Feb. 25th or never."

Gissing was not forced to set another deadline, and the marriage was performed on February 25th at the office of the Registrar for St. Pancras, London.

Smith, Elder paid Gissing £150 for *New Grub Street*, and his comprehensive journal entries reveal he only made another six pounds that entire year. Still, he ends the letter to his sister by noting the enclosure of 12 stamps in compensation for the money she spent in past correspondence.

People Gissing Knew: II – H. H. Champion

Pierre Coustillas

Gissing's relations with Henry Hyde Champion have already been broached in the *Newsletter*. In the issue for January 1972, I gave a short account of them, quoting from Gissing's correspondence with Champion, and promising to throw further light on their casual, yet significant, intercourse. Had not Champion left England for good in 1893 and settled in Australia, his writings on Gissing would not have been overlooked so persistently for seventy years. His minor role in the early days of English socialism is duly recorded in some books concerned with working-class politics, but once he went to live in Melbourne his activities as a man of letters passed unnoticed in

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England. *Who's Who* ignored him for many years, while a figure of comparable stature, Robert Blatchford – he also a socialist and a man of letters with pleasantly eclectic tastes – was accorded an entry. Champion's life would be worth writing, overlapping as it does literature and politics, in England and Australia. *Who Was Who* gives a few useful facts.

He was born on January 22, 1859, the elder son of Major-General J. H. Champion and Henrietta Urquhart, who herself was the daughter of Beauchamp Colclough Urquhart, of Meldrum and Byth. A sense of tradition must have prevailed in the family since he was sent for his education to Marlborough College, then to the School of Royal Marine Artillery at Woolwich. After this he

served in the Royal Artillery during the Afghan War in 1880 (this earned him a medal), then as Adjutant at Portsmouth. It was probably towards that period – the early eighties – that he married Elsie Belle Goldstein, a lieutenant-colonel's daughter. What made him turn from the Navy to politics is not known, but what is certain is that from the early eighties onwards he had nothing more to do with military life, and he made a name for himself on the political scene. He resigned his post as Adjutant in 1882 owing to his disapproval of Gladstone's Egyptian policy and soon became first Honorary Secretary of the Social Democratic Federation, which was founded in 1884. This was the year when *The Unclassed* appeared, and Champion related in a review of *Henry Rvecroft* how he came to read what he thought was Gissing's first novel: "I was at the time well-known to the late James Leigh Joynes, an Eton master who threw up his appointment to come up to London as a journalist. He dropped on 'The Unclassed' ... which he made me read. I was immensely struck by it, and often as I have read it again, have never altered my opinion that this book would outlive all its competitors. It was true to life, and, though I did not know it then, contained more than one life-like presentment I was thereafter to meet and recognise. I made Joynes write to the author and thank him for his great gift."¹

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Literature and politics engaged Champion's attention simultaneously. He became part-owner of the Modern Press and in this capacity published first editions of Bernard Shaw and Ibsen. Several socialist papers like *To-Day*, *The Christian Socialist* and *Justice* as well as a variety of pamphlets issued by the Social Democratic Federation also came from the Modern Press. Champion was valued by his friends as an able propagandist and as a man who had a first-hand knowledge of the business side of printing. It was the socialist more than the printer and budding literary critic who first attracted public notice. When William Morris, who had been treasurer, seceded from the S.D.F. with the majority of its members, Champion did not follow him, but remained with H. M. Hyndman, John Burns and Herbert Burrows. Possibly the darkest moment in his career occurred the next year, at the general election of 1885, when his name was bandied about in the press in connection with "Tory gold." Two last-minute S.D.F. candidacies turned out to have been paid for indirectly by the Tories, with a view to splitting the anti-conservative vote. A man called Maltman Barry, formerly connected with the International Working Men's Association, but later a Tory agent, had paid the money to Champion who had in turn passed it over to the S.D.F. without mentioning its origin. Early in 1886, when agitation on behalf of the unemployed culminated in the riot of February 8, Champion and the S.D.F. were again prominent in the news; tried for sedition, he defended himself, and though the jury deplored that he and Burns had used inflammatory language greatly to be condemned, he was acquitted.

In the next few years we find him supporting Keir Hardie at a by-election in Mid-Lanark in 1888, at a time when he was editing the *Labour Elector*; then, by the side of John Burns and Ben Tillett, in the London dock strike which saw the victory of strikers in the late summer of 1889; assistant editor of the *Nineteenth Century* for two years; and an Independent Labour Party candidate in 1892 with a score of 991 votes in Aberdeen South. Lastly we see him associated with a new

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venture *The Novel Review*, for which he commissioned Morley Roberts to write an article on Gissing,² now available in the Critical Heritage volume.

It is easy enough to ascertain how many times Champion and Gissing met. Champion made conflicting statements on this question after the novelist's death, but Gissing's diary records only

two meetings at a month's interval, and it would be unreasonable to suppose that there were others. On November 30, 1893, he noted that he received a telegram from Roberts, asking him to dine at the Authors' Club, and it is clear that this was the occasion of his first meeting with Champion, otherwise he could hardly have observed that Champion surprised him "favourably." No other entry concerns the Socialist politician until the 29th of December, on which day another telegram reached him, from Champion himself this time – this was his last night in England, and they had dinner together with Roberts at the New Travellers' Club in Piccadilly. (Roberts, between times, had eloped with his future wife, Mrs. Hamlyn, to Genoa, and he was just back from Italy.) Champion's own account does not conflict with Gissing's short diary jottings. It reads: "In the year 1892 I had staying in my flat at 172 Strand (now gone, and a wide street in its place), a mad poet named John Barlas, for whose good behaviour Oscar Wilde and I had gone bail. He had shown his contempt of Parliamentary reforms by proceeding to Westminster Bridge and emptying six barrels of a revolver at the tower of the House of Commons on the last night of 1891. What, indeed, could be madder than that? He was naturally 'run in,' was quite sensible when tried, and let off, by Mr. de Rutzen, the police magistrate at Westminster, who seemed rather pleased at the names of those who went bail for him. Barlas was a poet, and, what was worse, seemed to know other poets by the score. Among those who came to see him was Morley Roberts, and he and I became great friends. He was always speaking of Gissing, whom I had wanted to see ever since his first book, 'The Unclassed,' was published, ten years earlier. I wrote him a note, I remember, thanking him greatly for his book,

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but he never replied. Then I saw him. On my last night in England they came – Gissing, Roberts, and W. A. Mackenzie (of 'Rowton House Rhymes' fame) – to dine at my club in Piccadilly, and a glorious time we had."³

When Gissing heard from Champion again early in 1896, the former socialist orator was editing a Melbourne newspaper, perhaps *The Age*, on which *Who Was Who* informs us that he was a leader writer. Some correspondence must have passed occasionally after that, about which Gissing's diary, with so many important gaps after February 1897, has nothing to say. In 1899 Champion founded a literary monthly, entitled *The Book Lover*, which was intended for the average reader. It was a well-informed journal, unpretentious and eclectic, yet original and useful since there was no equivalent to it in Australia at the turn of the century. Together with the journal, and at the same address – 239 Collins Street, Melbourne – Champion founded the Book Lover's Library, where, according to an advertisement on the front page of the April 1903 issue, one could subscribe to *Punch* for 17s.6d. a year. The annual subscription to *The Book Lover* was considerably cheaper, 2s.6d., so cheap indeed that one wonders how the journal could pay its way. It must nonetheless have been something of a success – anyway it lived into the nineteen twenties. Champion was a highly enterprising man, a born organiser too. When politics ceased to absorb his energy, editing was not enough to satisfy him. His struggle against exploitation assumed a new form. Historians of the profession of letters will remember him as the founder of the Australasian Authors' Agency.

Champion's generous comments on Gissing's later works as well as his affectionate delight in recalling his memories of him after 1903 testify that here was an ideal author for him. Like Blatchford, he does not seem to have been much disturbed by the anti-democratic strains in *Demos* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. He belonged to the minority of critics who liked *The Crown of Life*, perhaps mainly for the very reasons which accounted for most critics' cool attitude.

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“‘The Crown of Life’ is another step forward and will increase Gissing’s reputation. Ostensibly it is a love story from cover to cover, but a love story of no ordinary kind. It is also much more than a love story, for we have discussed in it in a masterly and impartial manner, in a manner to interest the most frivolous, the questions of Imperialism, the destiny of Russia, and an indictment of the militarism of the age. Nor are these topics introduced in other than an artistic way; they are the natural outcome of the characters of the story. As in Gissing’s other works, the historian of the future will find in ‘The Crown of Life’ valuable materials and testimony, when he comes to write the social history of the nineteenth century.”⁴

The publication of *Our Friend the Charlatan* gave Champion a new opportunity to express his faith in Gissing’s greatness: “I rank him, as a novelist, with the best of them,” this after mentioning the names of Meredith, Hardy and – typically enough at the time – Mrs. Humphry Ward. “That he is not appreciated, as I deem he should be, by the present generation of readers does not influence me at all. His time will come, for there is that in his writings which makes for permanency. No other novelist has so well depicted the social characteristics of the age in which we live, held up a mirror to the time. This quality alone would render his work valuable, but it has other high qualities. His characters are all true to type, are real living human beings.... He has command of a literary style which is in itself a distinction.... If any reader doubts this, let him put on his list of books to be read the following three of Gissing’s novels, written respectively at the beginning, middle and during the latter period of his career, *The Unclassed*, *The Emancipated*, and *The Whirlpool*. I have no fear of the result. He will thank me for the advice.” And he went on to compare *Our Friend the Charlatan* to Robert Grant’s *Unleavened Bread*, Meredith’s *Egoist* and Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon*.⁵

The first instalment of “An Author at Grass” in the *Fortnightly*, then the publication of Forster’s *Life of Dickens*, abridged and revised by Gissing, were granted a few laudatory paragraphs

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in the August and December 1902 numbers. And when *Henry Ryecroft* became available in Constable’s Colonial Library, Champion hailed it as the sort of book “which we feel at once has become part of us, and we buy it and remain constant readers of it until the end of life.”⁶ It was over a year since he had received news from Gissing. “I have heard from indirect sources that his health, never very good, is threatened, and that may be the meaning of many passages in the book.... There are very few people in England that I shall, on my return, more warmly greet, and I hope that health and life will be spared him for many a year.” They were not to be. The next article about Gissing was an obituary signed M., which may well stand for Joseph Woolf, the Melbourne solicitor whose letter to himself Champion had passed on to Gissing late in 1895: “What on earth have the critics been thinking about? I have just finished Gissing’s ‘Unclassed,’ and it has been a revelation to me.” After this, the author of the article confirms indeed that, having finished reading the story, he wrote to Champion about it. He saw Gissing as essentially a novelist of London, and a man before his time in his description of it as the reviewers of George Moore, Israel Zangwill, Edwin Pugh and Arthur Morrison among others tended to forget. In the same number of the *Book Lover* Champion himself recalled the man and quoted at length from three letters sent him from 1896 to 1902. In the following months he reviewed *Veranilda* and *Will Warburton* as favourably as the earlier books, but he seems to have ignored *By the Ionian Sea* and *The House of Cobwebs* though they appeared in Unwin’s and Constable’s Colonial Library respectively. When Roberts published *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* in 1912 Champion was clearly embarrassed: “I met a lady in a train yesterday and asked her what she was reading. ‘Oh, Henry Maitland’s Life,’ said she, tremulously. ‘What a book! Is it really true about Gissing?’ That is what all will ask. All I can say is that all the salient facts are of my own knowledge true, and, though I may differ here and there as to the interpretation

of them, Morley Roberts has very honestly given you his view of them.”⁸ If echoes of the literary

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quarrel about the book reached Champion from England, he chose to ignore them.

These are only a few of the landmarks extant in the relations between Champion and Gissing and his works. There doubtless remain a good many other references to the novelist to be unearthed from the files of the *Book Lover*. It would be interesting to know the whereabouts of Gissing’s letters to Champion, and to look for reviews of his novels in the Melbourne daily, *The Age*. This is a task that awaits some Australian scholar. When Champion died on April 30, 1928, obituaries must have appeared in the Melbourne papers, and they too might be worth consulting.

1 - *Book Lover* (Melbourne), “Comments,” April 1, 1903, p. 326.

2 - “George Gissing,” *Novel Review*, May 1892, pp. 97-103.

3 - *Book Lover*, February 1913, p.16. – John Evelyn Barlas (1860-1914), author of a few collections of verse is briefly mentioned in the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, 1800-1900* (1969).

4 - *Book Lover*, January 1900, p. 2.

5 - *Ibid.*, September 1901, p. 98.

6 - *Ibid.*, April 1, 1903, pp. 325-26.

7 - *Ibid.*, February 1, 1904, pp. 14-15, and “George Gissing, an Appreciation,” p. 20.

8 - *Ibid.*, February 1913, p. 16.

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Letter to the Editor

Beware of the Don

Dear Sir,

In a recent number of *The Times Literary Supplement*, a letter by Mr. Geoffrey Grigson complained that “academics with comfortable academic salaries and pensions are allowed by lazy,

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timid or insecure literary editors to push out writers who live by writing or have no salaries or pensions!” He went on to quote from a leading article in the same paper by a professor which he described, quite correctly, as “blown up with stifling clichés.” The economic question has, of course, nothing to do with me or with the *Gissing Newsletter*, to which contributions are rightly voluntary and unpaid. However, in the April number of the *Newsletter* I came across announcements of two forthcoming books on George Gissing, both by University professors (including a Doctor), one of which was described as covering “the writer and the city” and the treatment of women, marriage and “identity.” I feared, while reading this, that modish words like “environment” and “communication” would follow closely on the heels of the other specimens, but although we were mercifully spared this, I could not help remembering Mr. Grigson’s attitude and an earlier letter of his in which he deplored the habit of calling an ever increasing number of academics by the title of Doctor.

I have been reading for a long time reviews in literary, or semi-literary, periodicals by

academics, many of them Doctors. It is only natural that purely specialist books should be reviewed by specialists who frequently happen to be working in universities, but one can sympathise with Mr. Grigson when he denounces the encroachment of dons in the field of writing that is primarily of a literary nature. I have read some informative and very entertaining reviews by academics, but others have been niggling and pedantic, and there are also examples of intolerable academic arrogance. The worse type could be described, to borrow outrageously from Edward Lear, “the Don with a nubilous prose.”

The fear I wish to express is that Gissing may soon be “taken over” by the latest literary faddists. Surely, many of us are already tired of environment, identity, communication and the writer and the city. We have before this had Marxists and Freudians nibbling at Gissing, and the next stage risks being the fashionable, but I hope ephemeral, criticism and judgment by means of

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numerical calculation. I should hate to think of Gissing’s writings being fed into computers which will tell us the proportion of the word “love” to that of “sex,” or something equally silly and boring. Statistics may have their uses but an overdose of them can be lethal.

The Gissing revival is a positive and important event and is due, I think entirely, to the happy initiative of the founders of the *Gissing Newsletter*. When that publication first appeared, only one of Gissing’s novels was on current sale, and since then we have seen the entry of *New Grub Street* into the Penguin English Library and the issue of *The Nether World* in the Everyman’s Library. Many further reprints have been published, particularly those in the very handsome but rather expensive volumes of the Harvester Press; the Enitharmon Press has also done much to make Gissing’s name better known. This must be scored as a triumph for the *Gissing Newsletter* and its creators – all professors but, thank goodness, not de-humanised. Books about books and books about authors are in the natural order of things, and those relating to Gissing, his life and his works have been so far mostly interesting and relevant and have helped to encourage readers like myself to enjoy his writings. May I appeal to you and your colleagues to protect us from new modish experiments by critical analysts whose claws are all ready to fix on a new victim. In other words, let us not throw Gissing to the dons!

Yours etc.,
Victorian
(name and address supplied)

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Errata

A few errors crept into Clifford Brook’s article on *A Life’s Morning* (April 1975). Not all of them could be easily corrected:

- p. 4, l. 5: the canal is of course the Wakefield and Barnsley canal.
- p. 6, l. 33: T. W. Gissing became honorary librarian of the Mechanics’ Institute in 1868.

- p. 7, l. 22: "land" should read "lane."
- p. 8, l. 15: "hall" should read "hill."
- p. 9, ll. 20-22: should read: "though not strictly in St. Luke's [St. John's] – the Belgravia of the town [there is, now, Belgravia Road in St. John's] – they of course spoke of it as if it were."
- p. 11, l. 2: R. B. Mackie was M.P. for Wakefield from 1880.
- p. 12, l. 7: Mr. Brook meant that conscientious objectors held at Wakefield prison were recognised because they did not wear hats, and were abused for their beliefs.

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Notes and News

Gillian Tindall gave a lecture on Gissing at the City Literary Institute last February. She has just published a new novel, *The Traveller and His Child* (Hodder and Stoughton, £3.75).

Professor Martha Vogeler, who has completed a full-length biography of Frederic Harrison, has edited, with a critical introduction, a reprint of Harrison's *Order and Progress* for the Harvester Press (£8.00). This is a collection of twenty-one essays exemplifying the power and intellectual

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force of Positivism. Professor Vogeler is now working on a critical biography of Austin Harrison, who was Gissing's pupil in the early 1880's. As *The Times* and Reuters correspondent in Berlin and Vienna until 1905 he warned insistently of the growing German threat to Europe, and continued his campaign in London as editor of the *Observer* until he was replaced by J. L. Garvin. As editor of the *English Review* from 1910 to 1924, succeeding Ford Maddox Ford, he politicized this important monthly while maintaining its literary merit.

In the Year of Jubilee, *The Unclassed* and *Our Friend the Charlatan* which are soon to be republished by the Harvester Press, will also appear under the Fairleigh Dickinson University Press imprint, in America.

A ceremony took place in the Istituto Geographico de Agostini in Milan on May 20, on which day Dott. Francesco Badolato published his translation of Gissing's short stories, *Un'Ispirazione ed altre novelle* (EDIPEM). The volume was presented by the editor of the series, Professor Geno Pampaloni and Dr. Badolato. It is pleasant to record this new token of Dr. Badolato's congenial struggle to make Gissing better known in Italy. Together with Maria Teresa Chialant, he has been writing steadily for some years, contributing review-articles to a number of journals, especially *Italia Intellettuale*. Dr. Badolato reports that a revised edition of the Italian translation of *Thyrza* (1939) will appear shortly. His own book, which has not yet reached the north of France, will be described and reviewed in a forthcoming number of the *Newsletter*.

Mr. Jeffrey Cooper, the editor of *Four Decades* (of Poetry 1890-1930) invites contributions to this new journal, which is being established to serve the needs of scholars and others concerned

with twentieth-century literature in English. He says: "Considerable interest is being shown in the foundations of modern poetry, and we believe this journal will fulfil a need by providing scholarly articles and bibliographies. Contributions on all aspects of poetry in English, including translations,

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within the period covered are now being sought. *Four Decades* will appear quarterly, the first number to be issued in January 1976. For further information in U.K. and Europe: 160 Milton Street, Southport, Merseyside, England; in North America: 231, Lonsmount Drive, Toronto, Ontario M5P 2Y9, Canada."

Dr. G. Krishnamurti communicates the following note about the activities of the Eighteen Nineties Society: "Formed to bring admirers of the work of Francis Thompson into association in 1963, the Society widened its scope in 1972 to embrace the entire artistic and literary scene of this most vibrant decade of the 19th Century: the decade of Impressionism, Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism and of high achievement in all the arts, including theatre and book-illustration. The Society mounts Literary Exhibitions on appropriate occasions, such as 'The Eighteen Nineties: A Literary Exhibition,' in 1973. Its activities include arranging lectures and Poetry Readings. Its Journal appears annually and includes Biographical, Bibliographical and Critical articles, and Book Reviews. It is supplied free to the members and is not for public sale. The Society is also hopeful of compiling an annual annotated bibliography of material of interest to students of the 1890's. Permanently on the Agenda of the Society is the eventual acquisition of a house, preferably having association with Francis Thompson or any other 1890's figure to be used as a Research Centre and Museum and for building up a Library by the Society. Membership: £2.50 or U.S. \$7.00 renewable in April every year. All correspondence to the Hon. Secretary:

Dr. G. Krishnamurti,
3 Kemplay Road,
Hampstead,
London, N.W.3.

The Society is planning to publish a series of monographs on neglected writers and book-illustrators of the 1890's. The first volume, scheduled for publication this summer will be: *Olive Custance, her*

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Life and Work, by Brocard Sewell (limited edition of 500 numbered copies, £1.50). Olive Custance (1874-1944) was a minor poet of the 1890's whose name appeared frequently in *The Yellow Book*. She married Lord Alfred Douglas in 1902."

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Recent Publications

Volumes

- Samuel Vogt Gapp, *George Gissing: Classicist*, Folcroft Library Editions, 1972. A reprint of the 1936 edition issued by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Limited to 150 copies. Dark red

cloth. £7.50.

- Oswald H. Davis, *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings*. Introduction by Pierre Coustillas. Dorking: Kohler & Coombes, 1974. £3.00.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Anon., "Etudes nationales et régionales," *Revue Française de Science Politique*, August 1974, p. 874. A review of the Harvester *Demos*.
- Francesco Badolato: "Gissing visto dalla Critica," *Ausonia* (Siena), September-December 1974, pp. 84-86. A review of *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* and the Harvester *Demos*. A notice of *Politics in Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, also by Francesco Badolato, appears in the same number.
- Maria Teresa Chialant, *Annali-Anglistica* (Istituto Orientale di Napoli), 1974, no. 3, pp. 235-41. A review of *The Born Exile*.
- Anthony Burgess, *English Literature, a Survey for Students*, Longman, 1974. First edition 1958.

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Gissing's works are discussed briefly on pp. 209-10.

- John Halperin (ed.), *The Theory of the Novel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. Walter Allen's essay, "Narrative Distance, Tone and Character," deals with *New Grub Street* among other Victorian and twentieth-century novels.
- John Lucas, *Arnold Bennett: A Study of his Fiction*, London: Methuen, 1974. Gissing appears on pp. 18-21, 148, 164 and 195.
- Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, London: Croom Helm, 1974. *New Grub Street*, *Born in Exile* and *In the Year of Jubilee* are discussed.
- Harry Blamires, *A Short History of English Literature*, London: Methuen, 1974, pp. 381-82.
- Fraser Harrison (ed.), *The Yellow Book: An Anthology*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1974. "The Foolish Virgin" is reprinted on pp. 198-225.
- J. C. K. Laker, "A Literary Selection," *Kidderminster Shuttle and Stourport Courier*, January 17, 1975. A notice of the Harvester reprint of *Sleeping Fires*. The same notice appeared in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard* and the *Marlborough Times and Standard* on the same day.
- Anon., "Bibliography," *International Review of Social History*, 1975, no. I, p. 140. A notice of the Harvester *Demos*.
- Colin Partridge, "Book Reviews," *Victorian Studies*, March 1975, pp. 355-56. A review of *The Born Exile*.

- W. Van Maanen, "George Gissing, Escapist," *Neophilologus*, April 1975, pp. 301-05. A review of *The Born Exile*.
- Anon., "The Times Diary: Chelsea Fan," *The Times*, June 13, 1975, p. 16. An account of the Gissing plaque unveiling ceremony.

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- A. C. [Anthony Curtis], "Gissing Honoured," *Financial Times*, June 13, 1975, p. 3. A photograph of Maurice Temple-Smith, Gillian Tindall and Pierre Coustillas appeared in the same paper on June 19, p. 28.
- Janice Elliott, "Fiction: The Agony of Being Jane," *Sunday Telegraph*, June 15, 1975, p. 18. A review of an American novel entitled *The Odd Woman*, by Gail Godwin (London: Cape, 1975, £3.50), whose heroine is fascinated by Gissing's *The Odd Women*.
- Anon., "Professor Unveils Plaque to George Gissing," *Chelsea News*, June 20, 1975, p. 38. The same article appeared on the same day in nine other papers – the *London Post*, the *Marylebone Mercury*, the *Fulham Chronicle*, the *Westminster and Pimlico News*, the *South Kensington News*, the *Paddington Mercury*, the *Kensington News and Post*, the *Mayfair News* and the *Hammersmith News and Fulham Post*.
- Clifford Brook, "Chelsea Plaque to Gissing," *Wakefield Express*, June 27, 1975, Second section, p. 1.
- Sylvère Monod, "Comptes Rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, April-June 1975, pp. 234-36. A review of the Harvester *Demos*.
- Saul Cohen, "Sherlock Holmes/George Gissing," *The Baker Street Journal*, June 1975, pp. 94-97. This journal is edited by Julian Wolff, M.D., 33 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10023.
- Jeffrey Meyers, *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell*, London: Thames & Hudson, pp. 49, 75, 88, 170.

