

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*.

Volume XII, Number 1
January, 1976

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Recollections of Margaret and Ellen Gissing

Compiled by Pierre Coustillas

with the assistance of Clifford Brook

As time passes fewer and fewer people remember the Gissing sisters and their Preparatory School, which they founded at Wakefield in George’s lifetime and closed down shortly before World War I. The following reminiscences by four of their former pupils should therefore be of special interest. Margaret and Ellen Gissing are known to scholars almost exclusively through George’s own correspondence and papers; other people’s impressions are bound to modify, perhaps

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Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £1.00 per annum
Libraries: £1.50 per annum

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even correct, the picture we form of them. In April 1975 Clifford Brook, who knows more about the Gissings in Wakefield than anyone else, interviewed Mr. H. B. Webster of Roger Drive, Sandal, Wakefield, and wrote down a summary of the interview. This was communicated to Mr. John Horsfall, of Westfield House, Westfield Grove, Wakefield, who in turn gave his impressions, which Mr. Brook transcribed and showed to Mr. Horsfall for correction and approval. The third piece consists in extracts from a letter of Mr. Robert Levens of Oxford to Pierre Coustillas, while the fourth and fifth pieces are by the late John Kilburn, who spent his life in Wakefield. “The Gissing Family in Wakefield” appeared in the *Wakefield Express* on February 21, 1953, p. 6, and was

recovered recently by Clifford Brook, who was given a copy of it by Mr. John Goodchild, the museum curator of Cusworth Hall, Doncaster. "Some Notes on the Gissing Family in Wakefield" is a transcription of a short memoir sent by the late John Kilburn to Pierre Coustillas in 1964. Naturally, as the five items cover practically the same ground, a number of repetitions occur. Some conflicting statements have also been allowed to stand. Warm thanks are due to Mr. Webster, Mr. Horsfall, Mr. Levens and Mrs. Kilburn for their kind permission to print the following reminiscences. The editor is also grateful to Gillian Tindall, the novelist and critic, who put him in touch with Mr. Levens.

I

Mr. H. B. Webster:

I became a pupil at the Boys' Preparatory School in about 1908 and stayed there until it closed in 1911, when I and many others transferred to the junior department of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Wakefield. It had opened in 1910, attracting many boys who would otherwise have attended the Misses Gissing's school.

There were fifty pupils in the school and our uniform was a blue cap with the letters BPS in

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white upon it. The boys were taught in two classes, one each by the two sisters. "Little Giss" [Margaret] taught the younger pupils – who started at eight years of age – usually after attending a pre-preparatory school in the same area. Her sister, "Big Giss," also known as Nellie, taught the older boys. One classroom was upstairs and the other on the ground floor. Those of us who lived near to the school went home for lunch and so saw little of Mrs. Gissing who acted as housekeeper, and it was only if I was kept behind after school for misbehaviour that I met her.

Both the sisters, who dressed in long skirts with high-necked blouses and chokers, could keep order without effort, just as if it were part of their nature, and the only punishment was to be kept in after school. Lessons were mainly reading, writing and arithmetic – but a Miss Little came in to school to play the piano for singing lessons and not only did we go to play soccer and cricket on a field behind the Bede Home (off College Grove Road) next to where the new games field for the grammar school was being laid out, but, also, we went to a building in Howard Street where Ernest Haley, who had a sports shop in Westgate, instructed us in Swedish drill.

I don't remember George Gissing's name being mentioned but there were two nephews of the ladies amongst the pupils – I think that one was called Alwyn [a son of Algernon's].

When we changed schools it seemed so different to be taught by masters and we noticed how modern the new building was, and how different the new desks were from the old forms we had sat upon at the preparatory school where we wrote with slate pencils on slates.

After I left the school I didn't keep in contact with the two sisters, who went to live in Leeds, but I remember an occasion during the war. I had just left the Marconi building in Leeds, where I had trained and qualified as a radio operator for the Merchant Navy and was wearing my brand new

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uniform. There I met Little Giss and tears came to her eyes as she said "No, not you Harry"; obviously a reference to her surprise that I was old enough to be called up for war service. By then (June 1917) several of the boys whom I had known at her school had been killed in action.

II

At the beginning of his interview with Mr. Horsfall, Clifford Brook read his notes on Mr. Webster's reminiscences. Mr. Horsfall replied:

Firstly, I disagree with Harry Webster on two points: Nellie played the piano for singing lessons and Miss Little only gave private piano lessons there; and Mrs. Gissing was not the housekeeper, because she was past it due to age – there was a housekeeper called Lizzie.

At the time when I was a pupil at the Boys' Preparatory School in Sandy Walk, my family lived at Oulton (six miles from Wakefield) and so I was a weekly boarder; at first with one other boy called Crichton, and later with two brothers, Dick and Jack Garrett. I played cribbage and solitaire with Mrs. Gissing who wore a lace cap which Nellie made and wired for her. I remember joints of meat being cooked on the spit in the kitchen. At meal-times the sisters would sit at opposite ends of the table and I can remember an occasion when one of them read aloud from a book and the other tut-tutted disapprovingly about it. I don't know whether it was a new reprint of a book of George Gissing as I don't recollect that his name was ever mentioned. I did my prep in a classroom and slept upstairs in a bedroom at the right-hand side of the house, with Mrs. Gissing's bedroom next door, between mine and the classroom in which Nellie taught. Mrs. Gissing had a book about ferns in her bedroom and when she showed it to me there were ferns interleaved in it. [I wonder if Mr. Horsfall is wrong here? T. W. Gissing wrote two books on the subject; one of them,

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"Ferns and Fern Allies of Wakefield," has coloured illustrations of fern leaves in it and when I saw a copy of it today, for the first time, my initial impression was that they were actual specimens. Mr. Horsfall is adamant that they were pressed leaves.]

Nellie would march us to the football field and umpire the games. She would blow the whistle like billy-ho, and when you think about it she was very modern. Although the two sisters were close friends they had very different views on religion. Nellie was low church and attended the cathedral, but Margaret was high church and went to St. Michael's; she would take me there on Wednesday evenings. [So both sisters were members of the Church of England.] I don't recollect Mrs. Gissing going to church. [Mr. Horsfall didn't stay there at week-ends!] To show how different the sisters felt about the matter: on Ascension Day the whole school went to a service at the cathedral in the morning, and then as if to compensate, Mr. Love, the vicar of St. Michael's, would come to the school in the afternoon, and we also had a cricket match then. Mr. Love often came to the house.

We had French lessons at the school and I can remember identifying pictures from the book which we used.

I did shopping for the Gissings and would go fetch treacle, after breakfast, from Moorhouses' shop where it was sold from a barrel. We used the treacle on our porridge.

Alfred Gissing stayed at the house during his school holidays and I think that he played the violin. But I think that he attended a school elsewhere.

Nellie and Margaret came to stay at this house (Westfield House) on occasions after they left Wakefield; Margaret stayed here as late as the 1930's; and I believe that Mrs. Gissing died at my aunt's house at Sleights near Whitby.

III

Mr. Robert Levens contributed the following informal reminiscences in a letter which, of

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course, was not intended for publication. He first says that he learnt from *The Born Exile* “all sorts of things which I did not know about the Gissings – including the Christian names of the sisters whose school I attended from age 7½ to 9½, but who were known to us simply as Big Gis and Little Gis. However, I have lately been going over papers left by my mother and found that she had kept all my school reports, and it is clear from these that Margaret was Little Gis, the shorter and more formidable, and Ellen, taller, white-haired and more graceful, was Big Gis who took the two higher forms in one room upstairs, while Little Gis took the two lower forms downstairs. It was not a big school, and I remember a time when the top form consisted of only one boy. The reports sometimes give the number of boys in the class, and in one of them I was 1st out of 6, a fairly typical number. I must have graduated to the care of Big Gis towards the end of my 2 years, but not surprisingly I find that my sharpest recollections are the earliest, first impressions being the most indelible. For instance, I have very clear memories of my first day at the school in the spring of 1908. I was nearly 7½ and a very precocious boy, having already read so much that my eyes were affected and I had to be rationed! Little Gis put me in the front row with the other new boy whom she addressed as Smith: he at once said “Mother says Please will you call me Ticken Smith,” thus establishing himself in my eyes as what the Americans would call a cissy, which he undoubtedly was. Little Gis’s first question to me was “Is the world round or flat?” I asserted that it was round, and she asked me how I knew; I was not equipped with the stock answer about a ship’s hull disappearing over the horizon, so I thought for a moment and said that if the earth was flat you could see right along it, which seemed to serve the purpose well enough. Then I had my first Latin lesson and learnt *mensa*, not stopping to protest, like Winston Churchill, at the vocative. [The legend is that when told that this was how you would address a table he said “But I never do.”] Looking back now I can see that academically I must have been one of the brightest pupils who came their way, but

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they had the sense not to let me know it; but their reports give the game away. I suppose this is why I was in the school only two years and one term; at 9½ I went to the Grammar School along with Kilburn and a boy named Richard Hermon, who was going on to Haileybury, though I was several years younger than either. We three were put in the top form of the Junior School for a year, then I was given a double move into the 4th form of the school proper and moved up rapidly to the sixth form where the headmaster could have me under his eye, and don’t remember coming across either of them again. So I see Kilburn in my mind’s eye as he was at the age of about 13, and the picture is a very clear one. In contrast with myself, who had to walk a mile to school, making a rather hurried lunch at home, he lived in a big house in Sandy Walk almost opposite the school. I remember him as a pleasant, placid type, raised by his seniority and temperament above the prevailing level of gang warfare.

Incidentally my rapid progress up the Grammar School did not have the intended result. It merely showed my parents that I was ahead of my age-group with the result that in 1914 I left the Wakefield school and won a scholarship to Rugby. But that is my personal history and irrelevant to the Gissings except in so far as the grounding I received at the Gissing school must have been pretty good. Of course I must have been of more concern to the Misses Gissing than I realised at the time, and in one of the family letters I have been re-reading I notice that one of them, when I was sitting for an entrance scholarship (which I got) to the Grammar School, walked all the way to our house to find how I had got on. I saw them only once that I can recall after leaving the school. You will no

doubt know when they gave up teaching and went to live in Leeds. In 1918 when I was at Rugby I came home to sit for a Wakefield City Scholarship which helped to take me to Oxford. The exam was in Leeds and for most of a week I had to go there by tram every day (10 miles). It must have been on one of these days that I had tea with the Misses Gissing after my exam, and the fact that I

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did so suggests that we had kept in touch.... I was far too young at the time (I was the Gissing sisters' pupil) for any literary interest, and it was only years later that I read *Demos* and some other novels and some of the published letters. George was already dead when I entered the school and I remember Algernon only as a wraithlike figure wandering about the house; that he was married I had no idea. I can add only two items from my memories. First, though my family, being Scottish, was very speech-conscious and thought the Yorkshire speech prevalent around us barbaric, it never occurred to me that the Misses Gissing were not "ladies," meaning that they were not well-spoken; of course this is not to say that a practised ear could not have detected their speech as local. All the same I was utterly surprised to learn that their father was a Wakefield shopkeeper. They must have been well brought up and educated to master so many subjects. The other point may not be of direct concern to you, but it is symptomatic of the period. The school must have had a reputation for violence and "ganging up," because I recall that shortly before my first term, when I had just acquired, and was proudly wearing, the blazer and cap with the monogram BPS, I said to the teen-age nursemaid who was giving my younger brother and sister an airing in their pram, "You'll have to look out for yourself now there's a Gissing boy in the house"! But this reputation was not confined to one school. My elder sisters were given bicycles in the hope that they would reach their school unmolested, but they were regularly knocked off them by Grammar School boys.

IV

"The Gissing Family in Wakefield," by the late John E. Kilburn (1953).

It is fifty years ago this year since the death of George Gissing and steps are being taken in the city to honour the memory of one of Wakefield's most illustrious men of letters.

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The first thing I recall hearing about George Gissing was indirectly through my father in early boyhood. The late Mr. M. B. Hick, who was a personal friend of Gissing's in the last decade of the last century, inspired and trained a group of people who were known as the Tragedians of the City of Wakefield. They had a Theatre in Chald Lane where they put on Shakespeare and other drama.

My father told me how he remembered Mr. Hick returning from London dejected and anxious about Gissing. He had found him living in complete poverty in a basement room in the Tottenham Court Road district. Gissing had married a slatternly and altogether incompatible wife and Mr. Hick described the apartment, strewn with intimate articles of domestic life, with Gissing's desk in the corner and above it a few rough deal boards nailed to the wall holding his beautifully bound School Classical prizes.

After the Gissing family left the chemist's shop where George was born at the top of Westgate, they resided for some time at Belle Vue and Gissing describes his visits home and how he enjoyed walking in the open air on Heath Common. A little later his two sisters, Ellen and Margaret, with

their mother, removed to Wentworth Terrace where they opened a Preparatory School for Boys.

This school rapidly grew in esteem and when I had the privilege of attending, it had been removed to a larger residence in Sandy Walk, adjoining Sunny Lawns. There are many old pupils, including a small handful still in Wakefield, who look back with gratitude and affection to the years they spent under the kindly instruction of the two Gissing sisters. There was a great dignity and almost Victorian discipline about school-days in that quiet old house.

It was the duty, on occasions, of one of the senior boys, if there was a doubt about the fitness of the weather for playing games, to go out into Sandy Walk or the garden and return and give a

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report to Miss Ellen in front of the class. I remember once when this duty fell to me and I described the morning as a perfect prelude to a game of football in the afternoon. When I had finished, Miss Gissing looked through the large windows facing across the railway as it enters Westgate Station to where heavy rain clouds were building up over Lupset pastures, where now is built the Estate. "I think your anxiety for good weather must have outrun your discretion this morning," I was told. I had had a lesson to be more careful in my observation of nature, but how many times in later life was "my anxiety for fine weather" to outstrip my discretion.

At times some of us would stay to dinner, when Mrs. Gissing, who was then about 80 and a charming old lady, would preside at the head of the table. On the wall behind her was a striking portrait of George, of whom she sometimes spoke very proudly. George Gissing was born about the middle of the 19th Century, and it is rather odd and frightening for anyone now in middle life to recall that they dined with his mother.

With the opening of the Junior Department at the Grammar School in 1914, the numbers at the Boys' Preparatory School declined and the family then removed to Leeds where for some years the elder sister, Ellen [she was, in fact, the younger], coached University students. Later, they removed to a house at Aysgarth, in Wensleydale, where Margaret Gissing died.

After this, Ellen, who spent a good deal of her later years lecturing for the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, went to live at Barbon, in Westmorland, in a small bungalow – where she was joined by her nephew, Alfred, George's son – and where she died.

The last time Miss Ellen came to Wakefield was to unveil the memorial tablet to her brother at the entrance to his birthplace, which is now Boots chemist shop at the top of Westgate. She was introduced on that occasion by the late Mr. John Bywater, who was one of her pupils.

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The novels of George Gissing are perhaps not everybody's meat, but he was a great writer, a great scholar, and it is well to know that this cultured and charming family who were for long resident in Wakefield, are not to be forgotten.

V

"Some Notes on the Gissing Family in Wakefield," by the late John E. Kilburn (1964).

I attended the Preparatory School carried on by Ellen and Margaret Gissing from 1906 to 1910 when it was discontinued. In his young days my father was friendly with M. B. Hick, the father of Dr. Hick who was G. G.'s friend, who sold T. W. Gissing the chemists business in Westgate where

George was born. M. B. Hick founded and directed a group known as the Tragedians of the City of Wakefield which travelled the area giving performances of Shakespeare. My father told me how Mr. Hick in those early days would periodically visit London to look up G. G. and was usually most depressed by the conditions under which he found him to be living. This was in the early days with his first wife.

I do not remember George ever being referred to at the School but of course we had not much interest in him at that time. Algernon's two sons, Roland and Alwyn, were at the school most of the time I was there. They are both, I believe, in Canada, Roland, the elder, a painter thought well about. Walter seemed to come and stay for fairly long periods and I think took some lessons. We boys were given the impression that he was a delicate boy and I think we were asked to treat him as kindly as we could and with consideration.

The Gissing sisters were very well thought of and very "genteel." Ellen was the more deeply religious but both attended Wakefield Cathedral regularly. We had a Missionary Society at School and contributed to the upkeep and training of a boy in Uganda named Francis Sembuiagi (or so it was pronounced).

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I seem to recall that the sisters would occasionally receive letters which obviously disturbed them at the time. They were very annoyed indeed when Morley Roberts published *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* giving the Manchester details. The book was widely read in Wakefield at the time.

In 1910 the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School opened a Junior Department and this rather hit the Gissings' Prep School. They shortly after went to live in Leeds near the University and coached students for some years. A lady who attended one of my Lectures in 1953 informed me she was having tea with them on the afternoon that the telegram arrived announcing that Walter had been killed. From Leeds they went to live at Aysgarth in Wensleydale and at this time Ellen travelled a good deal for the S.P.C.K. Margaret died at Aysgarth. After this Ellen and Alfred went to live at a small house at Barbon in Westmorland on the fringe of the Lake District. Alfred, who was trained as an architect, designed the house, but I believe it was practically the only house he did build. Shortly before Ellen died she came to Wakefield and unveiled the plaque to her brother on the shop front in Westgate.

In all the vast change of to-day you can still follow many of the local scenes described in *A Life's Morning*, written at the time the family lived at Agbrigg. I have heard it said that on a visit, or visits, to Wakefield, G. G. paid much attention to a lady named Connie Ash and it was once thought he might marry her. Perhaps this was after the first wife died. I have never been able to confirm the story but I can remember a family of the name living in St. Johns when I was very young.

In George's time the Grammar School at Wakefield was in poor shape with I believe only about 30 pupils. George therefore went to the Rev. Harrison's establishment in Back Lane to which most of the professional gentlemen at that date sent their sons. In 1912 the Grammar School had about 250 pupils, now about 900.

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A Gissing Influence

Jacob Korg
University of Washington

The Odd Woman by Gail Godwin (Knopf, New York, 1974) is a masterly and delightful novel in its own right. But those who have read Gissing's *The Odd Women* will enjoy it a shade more than those who haven't.

The Gissing novel is not a source or model for *The Odd Woman*, but figures in it as a thematic element of solid, if minor, importance. *The Odd Woman* has as its heroine Jane Clifford, a professor of English at a midwestern University, who is thirty-three, unmarried, unliberated, and involved in an affair with a married man, and who regards her general situation with a concern verging at times on desperation. As she winds up the term's chores at her University, goes to her home town for her grandmother's funeral, has a tryst in New York with her professional lover, Gabriel Weeks, runs the gauntlet of a women's lib group in Chicago, and ultimately gets back to her campus, Jane's lively recollections and speculations take us back and forth over her life and its social context. All of this is centered on female consciousness. Jane thinks a great deal about her grandmother, her great-aunt, her mother, her sister, a colleague and a liberated friend, a collection of women who represent a varying repertory of feminine roles. Their fates include old-fashioned seduction and desertion, widowhood, unhappy marriage, divorce, and modern versions of adultery and professional independence.

Jane herself, we learn on the first page, likes to be in control. But she shows little self-determination, varying instead between a reasonable openness to suggestion and a hopeless, hysterical incompetence.

We often laugh at Jane, but are never tempted to take her for a mere clown. The main source of her difficulties is her insistence on maintaining a firm respect for herself, even at times when it is hardly justified. She does some wonderful small things. She never doubts that she wants to see her

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grandmother in her coffin, though others hesitate. When an old man offers her Drambuie, she expresses enthusiasm and drinks it, though she hates the stuff. But her good qualities always lead her astray on big issues. She could have married a satisfactory young Englishman during the year she spent in Europe on the trip financed by her grandmother, but rejected his mother's command that she become a naturalised Briton. She could have enjoyed a last night with Gabriel in the New York hotel instead of enduring the torments of liberated females in midwinter Chicago, but she refused to accept his casual treatment. Her appetite for experience and her imagination also betray her. In her loneliness, she lets herself go in a wild orgy of sexual fantasy and food. She sets her mind on a handsome stranger on a plane. When she is compelled to spend a day by herself in New York she falls apart. Most troubling of all, she remains obsessed with curiosity about Gabriel's wife, and torments herself with fantasies about her.

Obviously, *The Odd Woman* does not parallel Gissing's novel, except in its general theme. Godwin's characters, settings and style belong to the contemporary American fictional manner. Her men are only observed, but her women have dimensions as mothers, lovers, daughters, that Gissing does not touch. Their vocabularies include words that Gissing's men do not even think. There are no matching characters, Jane Clifford does not have Rhoda Nunn's dignity, does not face her problems, and her relation to the female liberationists is entirely different. She thinks (and demonstrates) that she has some gifts as a pornographer, a trait that is sufficient to mark her off from any woman Gissing would have depicted. The militant woman in Godwin's novel is a brassy, violent creature, very different from Gissing's school-mistress Mary Barfoot, and her women's magazine is shamelessly strident, not at all like the serious, discreet training and employment office run by Miss Barfoot. Gabriel Weeks is a sensitive, vulnerable fellow, an art historian specializing

in the Pre-Raphaelites who does not resemble Everard Barfoot at all, and the problems he creates for his mistress are very different from those that confront Rhoda. There is nothing in Gissing like the academic environment or the Southern family house that provide Godwin with her major settings. The comedy of sex and marriage interleaved with the comedy of academic pretension and duplicity belongs to a recognizable current genre, of which Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tates* is another recent example.

Gissing comes into all this because the story is entertainingly authenticated by allusions to the details of Jane's profession, which are frequently introduced with disarming deadpan comedy. There is an MLA meeting where the lecturer displays his cynical wit at the expense of his subject, and where female job applicants are eyed by lascivious interviewers. We observe professors dealing with borderline papers on Blake as a visionary poet, and hear about married academics grading their papers in bed together while munching snacks. Jane's doctoral thesis, "The Theme of Guilt in George Eliot," and her lover's monograph, *Lessons in Love by Three Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, make a marvellous pair, but they are also devastatingly plausible. Gissing is one of the authors to whom Jane refers her problems. More often, she looks to George Eliot for inspiration, wondering, for example, whether Gabriel's new project, an elaborate classification of the varieties of love, is not like Casaubon's Key to All Mythologies.

The Odd Women enters the story as a book Jane has to re-read in preparation for a course on Women in Literature – British section. Her motives in taking it up are not of the purest.

She had chosen Gissing for an opener because of his unrelenting pessimism. It was one of the few nineteenth-century novels she could think of in which every main female character who was allowed to live through the last page had to do so alone. The book's ending depressed her utterly, and she was eager to fling it

into a classroom of young women (and men?) who still believed they would get everything and see how they would deal with Gissing's assurance that they certainly would not.

When a colleague asks if it is any good, she replies:

"It's a tough little book. Inelegant, maybe, but I like it. It will work well in the course. What I like about Gissing is that he lets his characters think. They come to horrible ends, most of them, but they keep track of themselves so beautifully along the way. And he writes women well. He doesn't keep the sexual-ironic distance of many male writers when writing about female."

The edition she is using is specified as the Norton paperback, and the handsome woman on the cover plays some part in her thoughts. She plans to read it on the plane trip while going home to her grandmother's funeral, but her attention wanders after she reads the blurb on the back cover (accurately quoted at length), and it becomes useful in helping to ward off the unwelcome attentions of the man in the next seat.

He was startled: he looked slightly distasteful of this dialogue. It was not what

he had expected, registered his face, so openly. This dame was slightly crazy, saying these things, holding a book on her lap called *The Odd Women*; now what kind of a book was that?

When she returns to *The Odd Women* after arriving at her mother's house, Jane finds herself responding to it on a personal basis.

She still rooted for the two women for whom some chance of love was still

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possible. The other three she grew impatient with out of despair ... what hope for Monica's two older sisters, eating their meal of rice at a table measuring three by one and a half feet in Lavender Hill, the hair of one falling out, the other becoming an alcoholic? She did not wish to dwell with them longer than absolutely necessary as she herself lay in her young married sister's cast-off room, every other woman in this house warming herself against a man. When Monica Madden, who was still young and pretty, met the older Widdowson, a bachelor with money, in Battersea Park, Jane thought furtively, as she had thought the last time she read this novel: Oh, go ahead and marry him. Why not? Maybe in this reading it will come out better. Perhaps he will have learned his lesson and won't hound you literally to death with his jealousy. And you will have learned to be more discreet, to value a good home. Likewise, Jane counseled Rhoda Nunn, the young spinster career woman with whom she most identified: Stop playing this feminist power game with Everard Barfoot. You've proved your admirable point – that in the nineteenth century you are able to forgo the legal form of marriage to preserve your independence. And he has proved he loves you enough to give up his prized bachelorhood and marry you. Why not get married and do more interesting things than destroy your love with ideologies?

Jane wonders whether Rhoda is right to repudiate the ideal love advocated by novelists. In spite of Gissing's skepticism about it, and her own intention of bringing her class to disillusionment, she does not absolutely write off the possibility of such an experience.

That is, of course, one of her major problems, and it presents itself in the next stage of the story, when she meets Gabriel in New York. While staying with him in a hotel, she finishes *The Odd Women*, and is simultaneously forced to realize the impossibility of an ideal communion with

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Gabriel. As she analyzes Gissing's novel, she outlines the careers of the various women, and characterizes the fate of each in a phrase. Ruminating over her own past, she scores out each of these phrases, one by one, rejecting them as possibilities for herself. She will not do what Mary Barfoot has done: "Finding fulfillment through others," nor follow Rhoda's course of "Sublimation of personal desires and furies into a 'cause.'" All that is left for her, apparently, is what happened to Monica, "Compromise – Rebellion against one's own compromise – death". In this way, she reads her own life through the medium of Gissing's novel. Then, in a mood of desperation, she goes on a disastrous shopping trip which culminates as she strips herself to the skin in a fitting-room,

determinedly examines her body fore and aft in the mirrors, and reflects that it will ultimately be reduced to an ashy, unrecognizable relic to be found by some future archeologist.

Ultimately, Jane finds her way out of the labyrinth of her tormenting emotions and back to her college. As the novel ends she is seen trying to live with her mistakes, going back to her routine. This is signaled by the information she gives a student: that the course will begin with *The Odd Women*.

While trying to get through her New York day without Gabriel, Jane takes refuge in the Public Library on Fifth Avenue, of all places. Trying to think of something to do there, she looks up the actor who is thought to be her great-aunt's seducer, and goes to see him, but all of this turns out to be a dead end. To the Gissing student, the visit to the Library could have only one significance. Godwin, apparently unconsciously, has placed her character fifty yards and one locked door away from the Berg Collection, which possesses the manuscripts of the letters and diaries in which Gissing exposed his innermost feelings. One would expect her to march her heroine out of the catalogue room and down the corridor to the left, to the door of the Berg Collection, where, after

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introducing herself to the curator, Dr. Szladits, she would have spent the afternoon poring over the papers of the author whose novel she was preparing to teach. We can see her marvelling that so sure and dispassionate a book as *The Odd Women* could have emerged from the tormented personality she discovers in these documents. Learning of Gissing's marital troubles, she leaps at the truth about her lover's wife, and understands that Gabriel says nothing about her because he is desperately unhappy with her. She also suddenly sees that she is his salvation, that his calm exterior conceals suffering which only she can allay. Noting that the woman with whom Gissing found happiness was called Gabrielle, a counterpart of her own lover, she is encouraged enough to forgive Gabriel when he breaks his appointment with her, to subdue her pride, to wait for him, and to find the love she had always hoped for. In this way, with Gissing's aid, the curtain of *The Odd Woman* would have come down on a happy ending of a kind he would never have written himself.

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Checklist of George Gissing's Appearances
in Mosher Press Publications

Bruce Garland
Winston-Salem, N. C.

Thomas Bird Mosher chose the books he published with loving care. An occasional piracy now and then seemed justified when one beheld the end product – a privately printed book, simply beautiful and beautifully simple. Gissing was among those authors honored by Mosher's selection.

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I - Books by Gissing

A. 1914. *Books and the Quiet Life*.

950 copies Van Gelder, 25 Japanese vellum. Hatch no. 609.¹

B. 1920. *By the Ionian Sea*.

700 copies Van Gelder, 25 Japanese vellum. Hatch no. 677.

C. 1921. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

700 copies Van Gelder, 25 Japanese vellum. Hatch no. 688.

D. 1922. *Books and the Quiet Life*.

950 copies Van Gelder. Hatch no. 699.

E. 1928. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

500 copies Van Gelder. Not listed in Hatch.

II - Books containing references to, or quotations from, books by Gissing.

A. 1912. *Amphora*.

925 Van Gelder, 50 Japanese vellum. Hatch no. 560.

B. 1913. 2nd edition of above (some copies bear 1914 on title page).

925 copies Van Gelder. Hatch no. 617.

C. 1919. 3rd edition of above.

450 copies Van Gelder. Not listed in Hatch.

D. 1922. 4th edition of above.

925 copies Van Gelder. Not listed in Hatch.

E. 1920. *A List of Books in Belles Lettres issued in Choice Limited Editions* (Mosher Press Catalogue). Hatch no. 681.

F. 1926. *Amphora*. 2nd Collection of Prose and Verse.

925 copies Van Gelder. Not listed in Hatch.

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III - Gissing's appearances in *The Bibelot*. A Reprint of Poetry and Prose for Booklovers, chosen in part from the scarce editions and sources not generally known. 1895-1914. 20 volumes. (There is also a reprint known as *The Testimonial Edition*, New York. Wm. H. Wise Co., 1925. 20 volumes plus one index volume. Volume and page numbers are from the reprint).

Vol. XVIII, 217: note by T. B. Mosher.

Vol. XVIII, 218: quotation from *Thyrza*.

Vol. XIX, 163: quotation from *By the Ionian Sea*.

The place of publication for all of the above (except the *Bibelot* reprint) is Portland, Maine.

¹Hatch no. refers to *A Checklist of the Publications of Thomas Bird Mosher of Portland, Maine*,

1891-1923. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1966, by Benton L. Hatch, ed.

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Gissing in the *Yorkshire Weekly Post*

P. Coustillas

Research in the press, especially dailies and weeklies with no indexes, is time-consuming and, as often as not, frustrating. But it may also produce astonishing results. Thus, during a recent session in the Reading Room of the Newspaper Library at Colindale, I was led to consult one of the Yorkshire weeklies at the time of Gissing's death. Obituaries are always interesting, either for the information they contain or the ignorance they betray, and an author's reputation is an odd mixture of other people's knowledge and ignorance. In the national as well as in the provincial press, an obituary notice may be followed by letters to the editor which no biographer can ignore safely. The *Yorkshire Weekly Post* offered no such correspondence, no biographical revelation, but it gave a

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bibliographical hint of some importance.

About eighteen months ago, while rummaging among Victorian and Edwardian periodicals at Colindale, I chanced upon *Will Warburton* in serial form in the *New Age* at the time it was edited by A. E. Fletcher, and I little suspected then that the *Yorkshire Weekly Post* would also have serialized Gissing's last completed novel. Neither his correspondence with Pinker nor the papers left by the novelist's friends, acquaintances and agents seem to contain the slightest clue to negotiations with the Yorkshire paper. The serial ran in twenty instalments from January 7 to May 20, 1905, and was therefore completed by the time Constable published the story in volume form in June 1905. It was announced in the obituary which appeared on January 2, 1904: "Shortly before his final illness we secured for *The Yorkshire Weekly Post* the serial rights of a story upon which Mr. Gissing was engaged until he left England for the benefit of his health." This was a muddled statement about the writer's health and work, yet a most useful clue to the Gissing student. Another paragraph also contains an allusion worth clarifying: "Mr. George Gissing was an occasional visitor to his native city, which figures as the scene of one of his earlier works. Some feeling was caused by what were considered caricatures of some local politicians of former times, but Mr. Gissing assured our Wakefield correspondent years ago that there was no such intention in his books." The allusion obviously concerns *A Life's Morning*, and some details about it may well be waiting to be exhumed from the *Yorkshire Post* or its weekly edition in 1888 or 1889.

A paragraph under the heading "Court and Personal" published on January 9, 1904, p. 14, reflects the publisher's and the literary executors' hesitations about the order in which *Will Warburton* and *Veranilda* were to appear: "The late Mr. George Gissing's novel *Will Warburton*, the *Athenæum* says, will be published early this year by Messrs. Constable. The same publishers

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have also arranged to publish *Veranilda*, a novel on which he was engaged to the last, but at present it is not known whether it is complete."

Nathaniel Wedd's well-known article in the *Independent Review* for February 1904 was commented at some length in the issue for February 13, p. 7, under the title "Culture in Practice:

George Gissing as a Novelist.” As the second part of the article shows, the commentator was tempted to use Gissing’s works as a peg on which to hang his own political and philosophical message: “The two things that Gissing saw most clearly and emphasized with the greatest wealth of illustration are the vital importance of culture and the degrading effects of poverty on all above a certain low level of spiritual development. Both these items of his creed are, as treated by him, something new in social criticism. In theory, of course, we have long learned of Matthew Arnold to pay at least lip-service to culture; and as for education, is it not the favourite theme of every political platform? Are not Lord Rosebery and Mr. Chamberlain at one, at least on the need of fighting the foreigner with increased efficiency in instruction? But we realise what culture and its absence mean in practice far more vividly from Gissing’s pictures, alive as they are with the very breath of reality, than from any essays of the moralist, writing in the study and dealing with abstractions; while the education for which politicians clamour has little in its nature, and nothing in its aims, in common with education as Gissing understood it. What Gissing meant by education was the development of the feeling for the beautiful, the cultivation of interest in the things of the mind for their own sake. For this culture he found the readiest instrument in the study of Greek, and of the great civilisation which Hellenised Rome imposed on the world. What is wanted is to Hellenise the barbarians. Seek first the things of the mind, and the evils of society will disappear. The social order is the outward expression of the character of the people; as long as that character is savage,

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society will remain as we see it, a pandemonium of triumphant commercialism. This is the Anglo-Saxon’s great defect; indifference to the beautiful, hatred of ideas that cannot be turned to immediate profit, contempt for intellectual things, stamp our civilisation as at least undeserving to survive in its present form.”

The last item of interest I found in the *Yorkshire Weekly Post* for 1904 was an article by Morley Roberts, entitled “Off the Beaten Track” (October 15, p. 5). In it he related a trip he made to Italy one January in the nineties, and described such places as Naples and Monte Cassino. Gissing is not mentioned, but his own unpublished correspondence with Roberts provides further details about this Italian trip. Among other things Gissing recommended Roberts a restaurant of which he had glowing recollections, the Giardini di Torino.

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Book Review

Kanteki-shô – With Gissing, by Yukio Otsuka. Published by Daisan-Shobo, Tokyo, 1975, XV + 211 pp. + index, 1,500 yen.

In Japan *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* has enjoyed so great popularity among the students and the intellectual reading public at large (not particularly the specialists of nineteenth-century English literature) for more than half a century, and so many translations and annotated textbooks have been issued, that the publication of one more book about *The Ryecroft Papers* may seem an event which deserves no special mention whatever. But this book can claim a unique place in Gissing bibliography in our country.

Strictly speaking, it is no translation or annotated text-book, but a selection of the passages

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which Professor Otsuka found most impressive in *The Ryecroft Papers*. He translated them into Japanese and, after each of them, put in commentaries of his own which fill far more pages than the text. But those commentaries, it must be emphasized, are not linguistic explanations or annotations; nor are they “objective” statements about the literary or social background. They are very personal and quite original records of his own impressions and associations evoked by the particular passages he chose. “I wrote these commentaries,” the author says in his preface, “as freely as if I were rambling among the trees along with Gissing, talking together. The result may have been my own essay under the pretence of Gissing’s. But, as André Maurois aptly says, with reading it is the same as in Spanish inns, where we find nothing but what we have brought in ourselves.” In my opinion the result was his own essay, as original and charming as Henry Ryecroft’s, or Gissing’s.

The subtitle may remind the reader of Alain’s *Avec Balzac*. I am not quite sure whether Professor Otsuka thought of Alain in his choice, but Maurois’s aphorism just cited, and frequent references to Henri-Frédéric Amiel, Anatole France, Montaigne and Vauvenargues show that he is well read in French literature. Indeed, he is particularly interested in the tradition of French moralists, whom he has treated in one of his many published books, and of whose works he has given many translations. His extensive knowledge of “essais” by French men of letters makes his commentaries very instructive and sometimes challenging to us: for example, his comparison of Ryecroft’s *Private Papers* with Amiel’s *Journal intime*, and his commentary on the eighth chapter of Autumn where Gissing recorded his observations on Sainte-Beuve’s *Port-Royal*, to give only a few among many.

A scholar of comparative literature, too, the author is as well read in Japanese literature, both classic and modern, as a casual glimpse into the index may convince the reader. And it is a

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delightful duty for the reviewer to add that the author has been so successful in his choice of the title *Kanteki-shô*, which it is almost hopeless to render into English in its entire implication; the nearest equivalent would be “a selection of essays in the mood of leisure and serenity.” But “leisure and serenity” might as well be replaced by the Latin word “otium,” since the original Japanese phrase gives a peculiar classical ring even to the native reader. Professor Otsuka told me he did not know that the original title Gissing intended to adopt was “An Author at Grass,” but he detected in the text the atmosphere of being “at grass,” as if by mystic communion, and, putting it into a graceful Japanese phrase, adopted it as a title for the book of his imaginary ramble and conversation with Gissing. – Shigeru Koike.

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Notes and News

Thanks to Dennis Butts, who volunteered the information that Andrew Lang had contributed to the *Morning Post* and the *Daily News*, the press cutting discovered by Alfred Slotnick (“The Bookman’s Character”) could easily be traced to its origin. Lang’s piece on *Ryecroft* and his view of life appeared in the *Morning Post*, on October 9, 1908, p. 7. It was followed by no correspondence.

Alfred Slotnick further reports that he has in hand Gissing’s postcard to Henry Hick dated December 27, 1897. The text in the Enitharmon volume was printed from the typescript held by the British Library. The original “cartolina postale” bears the Rome postmark and Henry Hick’s address

is given as New Romney, Kent, Inghilterra. The illustration shows the Campidoglio, that is “The Capitol,” as Gissing added under the picture in brackets. Mr. Slotnick has also found a letter to one W. James Winkle, dated “Villa Lannes | St. Jean de Luz | France | May 24, 1903.” To a request for

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a portrait of himself Gissing replied that Messrs. Russell & Co. or Messrs. Elliott & Fry could supply copies of photographs taken by them. He refused to give any details of his literary life, but made the admission that he “began to publish, much too early – (when I was 22).” His work, he said, is his autobiography, “which those may read who care to do so.”

Mr. Alan Bridgman of Westhayes, New Road, Teignmouth, Devon, kindly draws our attention to a number of books in which Gissing appears. A few of these volumes are doubtless known to some of us, but they do not seem to have been listed in bibliographies. First, there is the *Literary Year Book 1897*, which gives a short account of the novelist’s career and contains an unusual portrait of him. That there is such a thing as Gissing’s London was recognised by the anonymous writer of the biographical notice in this volume: “The most characteristic of these works have done as much as any novels of our time towards teaching the indifferent half of London what the other and different half is doing and saying; and this is the praise that Mr. Gissing would probably most care to receive.” Mr. Bridgman also mentions Arthur Waugh’s *Reticence in Literature*, which contains an essay on Gissing originally printed in the *Fortnightly Review*; H. W. Nevinson’s *Rough Islanders*, St. John Adcock’s *London Memories*, Sisley Huddleston’s *In My Time*, Austin Harrison’s *Pandora’s Hope*, Wilfred Whitten’s *A Londoner’s London* and C. Lewis Hind’s *More Authors and I*. In connection with the article on H. H. Champion and Gissing which recently appeared in the *Newsletter*, Mr. Bridgman comments: “My father was one of the founders of the West Ham branch of the Social Democratic Federation and managed to persuade H. M. Hyndman to come along and support them. My Parisian Aunt was a friend of Harry Quelch, editor of *Justice*, and was a contributor. Just after the end of the 1918 war my father took me along to see Hyndman at his home in Well Walk, Hampstead, where he kindly autographed the two volumes of his memoirs and

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afterwards invited us to take tea with him and his secretary who followed him in death soon afterwards. A very memorable occasion for me... Incidentally my father attended the second and third Internationals as delegate of the SDF, at Stuttgart and Amsterdam, but they did not prevent war as ardently hoped.”

Librarians and Gissing enthusiasts may like to know that an index to the first fifteen years of *English Literature in Transition* (1957-1972) is available from the editor of this journal, Helmut E. Gerber, Department of English, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, 85281. Payment (\$5.00) must accompany orders.

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Recent Publications

Volume

- Gissing, George, *Charles Dickens, a Critical Study*, New York, Haskell House, 1974. Blue-green cloth. This is a reprint of the unrevised 1903 impression published by Blackie, not of the Gresham edition of the same date, which incorporates Gissing's corrections.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- James H. Pickering (ed.), *Fiction 100: An Anthology of Short Stories*, New York, Macmillan, 1974. Contains "The House of 'Cobwebs,'" pp. 371-81 and a biographical entry on Gissing, p. 1035.
- A. H. Watkins (ed.), *The Catalogue of the H. G. Wells Collection in the Bromley Public Libraries*, Bromley, London Borough of Bromley Public Libraries, 1974. Contains a number of Gissing and Hick items.

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- Dorothy B. Litt, "George Gissing," *American Reference Book Annual 1974*, Item 1386.
- B. G., "Bibliographical Notes: Two Gissing Letters," *Wake Forest University Library Newsletter*, May 1975, pp. 12-14.
- Anon., "Wideawakefield," *Yorkshire Life*, June 1975, p. 30. Contains a photograph of Gissing's native place and some comments.
- C. J. Francis, "Reviews," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, June 1975, pp. 122-24. A review of Joseph Wolff's bibliography and of *The Born Exile*.
- Anon., "Born Outsider," *Economist*, October 4, 1975. A review of Adrian Poole's *Gissing in Context*.
- John Goode, "Books: Good for Gissing," *Times Higher Education Supplement*, November 14, 1975.
- Bernard Bergonzi, "A Master of the Moribund," *Times Literary Supplement*, December 12, 1975, p. 1476. A review of *Gissing in Context*.
- Jerome H. Buckley, "A World of Literature: Gissing's *New Grub Street*," *Harvard English Studies*, No.6, 1975. pp. 223-34.
- Yukio Otsuka, *Kanteki-shô: With Gissing*, Tokyo, Daisan-Shobo, 1975. See Shigeru Koike's review in the present number.
- Richard Freedman, *The Novel*, New York, Newsweek Books, 1975, pp. 38, 39, 117.

- Pierre Coustillas, "Conrad and Gissing: A Biographical Note," in *Studies in Joseph Conrad* (ed. Claude Thomas), a volume published by the Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier, France.