

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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Book Review: Once More Into Gissing

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Collected Articles on George Gissing. Edited by Pierre Coustillas. Frank Cass & Co., London; Barnes and Noble, New York, 1968.

Students of Gissing will welcome this volume. Ably edited by a leading Gissing scholar, it is made up of sixteen carefully selected articles arranged under three headings. Seven of the selections are “general studies,” three deal with “special influences,” and six present “some views on the major works.” All the articles will not please everyone, but in the main the editor’s wish to “bring new students into touch with the novelist’s works” is admirably served.

The editorial paraphernalia consists of an introduction, a list of Gissing’s works, some well-placed footnotes, and a valuable index. The introduction offers a brief survey of scholarship, which seems to have ruled out a selected bibliography. The list of Gissing’s books may have cancelled an earlier intention to include a chronology of important dates. Unobtrusive editorial footnotes quietly correct a few errors and offer enough information to be tantalizing. The eight-page index turns a collection of articles into a useful reference work.

We are told in the Introduction that Gissing’s achievement has “ceased to excite passion and controversy,” but the recent hubbub in the *Times Literary Supplement* ironically renders that statement premature. Interest in Gissing is running high and still rising, but it seems to have started before 1957. I would place the beginning of the current revival at about 1950, the year Russell Kirk asked, “Who knows George Gissing?” By that time the Gissing manuscripts were available to scholars, and shortly afterward Mabel Donnelly took advantage of them. Into that mass of raw data she plunged headfirst and came up with a book. It was the first honest, earnest, scholarly biography, and though Jacob Korg’s study is better, it no more supersedes Donnelly than Donnelly supersedes Roberts. Donnelly’s book may be erroneous and superficial in places, even “patchy” here and there, but it does not merit the currently fashionable low opinion of it.

The same may be said of Morley Roberts’ book. As dependable biography it leaves much to be desired; yet Roberts’ started purpose was to create a “lifelike sketch,” a genre similar also fiction. As to the tone of the book I for one do not find it “deplorable.” In fact I rather like the tone. It is that of a masculine, half-bawdy storyteller, proud of himself as a man of the world; and it perfectly sustains the book’s semblance of fiction. Properly edited Roberts’ book would indeed be “very useful,” but to those who know Gissing it has always been useful.

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The judgment that Jacob Korg “has helped to make the Gissing revival a plain fact” is indisputable and there are three studies by Korg in the present volume. But one should note that Pierre Coustillas himself is doing much to make Gissing’s reputation secure. His bibliography of Gissing’s short stories, *ELT* (1964), is the necessary and fundamental spadework for future critical studies. His delving into the Manchester episode has turned up new facts for biographers, and his edition of the love letters to Gabrielle demands the careful attention of every Gissing student. Even his footnotes

are pregnant with new information. On page 26 of the present work correcting the statement that Gissing died at St. Jean de Luz, he writes: “Actually, Gissing died at Ispoure, near St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. He was buried at St. Jean-de-Luz.” Most commentators in recent years have given the place of death as St. Jean Pied de Port, but Gissing’s last residence was certainly Ispoure. On June 27th, 1903, a few days before moving there Gissing wrote to Bertz: “I earnestly hope my health may improve at Ispoure.”

Coustillas writes that in America and confronted with starvation, Gissing suddenly “turned to fiction for a living and never after altered his purpose” (p. viii). The statement is true enough, though more than once he thought of turning away from fiction and doing something else. On page 72 of *Collected Articles* Korg remarks that Gissing “was at one time almost ready to give up fiction in order to express his ideas more directly in the form of essays.” Also in the summer of 1885 he considered chucking his career and going back to America. To Ellen he wrote: “I shall, if possible, let the flat and go again to America, where it is possible I might get literary work, though I had rather end all that and work in a healthy way on a farm” (*Letters to Family*, p. 158). He told her that living and writing in London was too hard, but at the time he was perhaps emotionally involved with Mrs. Gaussen and wanted to break away.

Now let examine and comment on some of the articles in this collection. The first by Russell Kirk – with the clever title “Who knows George Gissing?” – is a fairly well informed appreciation published at a time when quite a bit was known about Gissing, but only by a few specialists. As might be expected there are errors here and there, and the major ones are corrected by the editor. Some errors of judgment, however, he does not correct. It is nonsense to say of Gissing that it was fitting for him to “labour for a pittance” and “die abroad, brooding and exhausted, at a time when most men are only beginning to master life” (p. 5). Gissing, who often cried out “damn the nature of things,” would have laughed at that – sardonically.

Then we hear the remark that no “sobersided imitation of sociology” may be found in Gissing (p. 9), but facts prove otherwise. The accuracy of Gissing’s realism, even his method, is consistently corroborated by Charles Booth, foremost social scientist of the time, and Clara Collect, an authority on woman’s work, and after 1893 a close friend of Gissing’s. And what does Kirk mean by Dyce Lashmar “disastrously” overreaching himself? It is true that he loses a fortune which at one time seemed his for the taking, but at the end of the novel he has a pleasant home, a loving wife, and 200 pounds a year. Is that disaster? Also he has been shorn of much of his charlatanism and because of that loss, may eventually do something worthwhile in the world.

The second article, published in 1922, dwells on Gissing as humanist, and it also has something to say about the quality of his realism. Some of Gissing’s descriptions are “so striking as to fix themselves in the consciousness like a vivid dream” (p. 18). To illustrate this statement there is a quotation from an unidentified proletarian novel. It is a passage speaking of evil smells from shop and sewer, of butter melting in the heat and soaking into paper, of rotting fruit flung to

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ragamuffins, of babies’ milk curdling in the heat, and sweets melting “in grimy little hands.” Appealing primarily to the senses, it does earn Gissing the title of realist, or perhaps naturalist.

It reminds one of two passages in *Thyrza*. The first describes the kitchen of Sarah Gandle’s restaurant, a room “some ten feet square, insufferably hot, very dirty,” where Mrs. Gandle from “a great red dripping mass” severes “portions to be supplied as roast beef,” a room where vessels hold “a green substance” called cabbage, “yellow lumps” called potatoes, and where a sink is piled high with dishes awaiting “the wipe of a very loathsome rag” (ch. xxvii). The second passage describes the odors that assail the nostrils of Luke Ackroyd as he walks into “the Little Shop with the Large Heart.” Every article in the shop, under the heat, sends forth an odor which mingles with all the other odors, and the air swarms with flies. On the counter a mass of yellow, melting butter hovers “between avoirdupois and the measure of capacity” (ch. iii).

Here in the second article the author suggests that Gissing was always true to his subject, resisting any pressure “to falsify logical conclusions for the sake of public taste” (p. 18), insisting upon a “faithful presentation of life,” and permitting “flat and uninteresting” endings. To illustrate this point *A Life’s Morning* is cited, but according to Roberts, Gissing was persuaded by James Payn to make “the natural tragic end of the book” a happy ending. To Ruth McKay this “absurdly happy ending, dictated by the publishers,” made the book “a complete failure.” That judgment is perhaps too strong, but the change of ending – if indeed there was a change – reveals that Gissing was not above tampering with his

work.

The quote from *Henry Ryecroft* having to do with “the intelligence of the heart” should be related to that passage in *The Crown of Life* where Gissing sets forth the qualifications of Piers Otway to pursue ideal love. “Indeed,” Gissing writes, “Piers was rich in that least common form of intelligence – the intelligence of the heart. Emotional perspicacity, the power of recognising through all forms of desires one’s true affinity in the other sex, is bestowed upon one mortal in a vast multitude” (ch. xx). Driven by destiny to win the love of his ideal woman, for eight long years Otway practices to make himself worthy, and he is guided by heart rather than head.

The third article, actually an excerpt from Ruth McKay’s 1933 book on Gissing, studies the novelist as “a portrayer of society,” but comments perceptively on Gissing’s use of irony. Earlier Roberts paid recognition to Gissing as a master of irony, and Gissing himself was aware of its central place in his work. He said to Gabrielle in March of 1899, “You know I constantly use *irony*; and this is never understood; it is all taken in the most stupid literal sense.” Even unsympathetic critics are willing to admit that Gissing excelled in irony, but no one to my knowledge has made a thorough study of this. Someone should.

McKay pays tribute to Gissing’s skill as a portrayer of women – “we are amazed at the remarkable collection of women whom he presents” (p. 33). Others, including John Middleton Murry, have been impressed by Gissing’s women: they are indeed a remarkable lot. Marian Yule, however, is not left, after her engagement to Milvain is broken off, “to eke out a frustrated life as her father’s literary assistant” (p. 34); she takes a position at seventy-five pounds a year in a country library. Miriam Baske does not lose her former self “through the reading of Dante;” her spiritual change, running from stern Hebraism to graceful Hellenism and requiring more than three years to complete, has its source in the subtle influences of Italy – she is living in Naples – and the more direct influence of emancipated friends and relatives. Her reading merely reflects the change taking place within, and is not the cause of it. Also Monica Madden is not “a

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mere doll of a girl” (p. 35); displaying strength and stubbornness, she rebels against the doll-house existence her conservative husband tries to impose upon her.

The statement that in all his novels Gissing clung to a belief in fixity of class is sound. Time and again his characters try to climb out of class, but in every instance I can recall they succeed only in bringing suffering upon themselves. Clara Hewett in *The Nether World*, an intelligent working girl who tries desperately to escape class, is punished for the attempt – acid flung in the face – and forced to return. Another example is Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile* as opposed to his sister Charlotte. Peak has visions of rising above the shop-keeping class, but his sister fully accepts it. At the end of the novel Charlotte is “happy in her husband, her children, and a flourishing business,” but her brother, having spent his life chasing rainbows, dies in lonely exile.

The fourth article in this collection is a calm, mature, balanced judgment of Gissing, but it begins with a phrase – “Poor Gissing” – that is now reprehensible. It is no longer fashionable to pity Gissing or to speak of him condescendingly. He was not so feckless in the affairs of life as shallow critics have supposed. He suffered but he produced mightily, more than most men. Also before the end of his life he found in the sordid world the woman who for years had lived in his imagination. He wooed her and won her, and together, living and loving, they found happiness if not peace.

The general study by George Orwell, fifth in this volume, is full of insight. The two were much alike, and Orwell seems to have had a special understanding of Gissing. He says, however, that Gissing “never writes for effect;” Gissing does. Go to that passage in *The Unclassed*, chapter seventeen, and read of Ida Starr’s symbolic bath in the sea at one o’clock in the morning; that is writing for effect. Curiously, Morley Roberts said Gissing was persuaded by Meredith to delete that passage, but contrary to Roberts it is not missing, either in the first edition (1884) or the revised edition (1895).

Article number six, written by one who did not know enough about Gissing touches nonetheless on his theory of love: “Salvation, though only for the few, is to be found in truth and love” (p. 59). Gissing’s theory is most fully presented in *The Crown of Life*, and at the heart of that story is the influence of Gabrielle. The theory, with its basis in Plato, Shelley, Schopenhauer, and Gissing’s own experience, holds that love is “the crown of life,” the supreme blessing for the very few who deserve it, and the one thing that makes life worth living. To miss love is to miss everything, but love in the high sense is very rare: few people are capable of it and to fewer still does it come. When Gabrielle came into

his life Gissing felt blessed beyond all other men; it was a mystery, he thought, and a miracle.

There are some curious inaccuracies in this article. The author suggests that all of Gissing's women want desperately to respect their men, but "the men shrink from doing their duty" (p.60). Does he mean shrink from dominating their women? If so, there are numerous men in Gissing's work who fiercely dominate. Victor Dalmaine in *Thyrza* is a good example. He demands that his wife tailor her life to complement his, merge her identity into his, submit her will to his: "it was his home policy at present, to crush Paula's will" (ch. xxx). It is a case of the male ego subduing completely the feminine will. Reardon did not have the strength to do this, but Rodman in *Demos* brings "the Princess" thoroughly under his thumb, and Mutimer in the same novel takes pleasure in subduing Adela. Furthermore, Lionel Tarrant of *In the Year of Jubilee* is anything but "a man of straw" (p. 63); he demands subjection from Nancy Lord and gets it.

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Few of these men go to the extreme of beating their wives. For some women, however, Gissing seems to have felt that wife-beating was perhaps not a bad thing. "There's a great deal to be said for woman-beating," says Everard Barfoot in *The Odd Women*. "I am quite sure that many a labouring man who pommels his wife is doing exactly the right thing; no other measure would have the least result" (ch. xviii). Rhoda Nunn agrees with him: "I think many women deserve to be beaten, and ought to be beaten." In *The Whirlpool*, Sibyl Carnaby asserts that when a man is too weak to control a woman, she finds ingenious ways to make his life miserable. "It's the fate of men – except those who have the courage to beat their wives" (Pt. II, xi). At the time Gissing was having much trouble with Edith.

Article seven by Jacob Korg is an exploration of that peculiar mixture of moralist and artist in Gissing and how it influenced his social novels. Gissing's "division of purpose" stems from a "professed 'worship of pure art'" on the one hand, and the "hope of accomplishing a moral mission" on the other. In the early novels his allegiance was "divided between social reform and art" (p. 64); he was devoted to Shelley's principle of art, but at the same time wanted to punish society for its complacency, prudery, hypocrisy, and ugliness. Those who represent the Establishment are often treated with contempt, but the outsiders – struggling artists, students, and writers – have his respect. On the whole a true statement. Yet Milvain in *New Grub Street* has little of his sympathy, and there is little affection for Miss Bonnicastle in *The Crown of Life*. An aggressive new woman, she paints "glaring grotesques" until, under the influence of love, she softens and becomes more "womanly;" then the grotesque yields to the graceful.

Part Two of the volume being examined is comprised of three studies of influence – the classics, the Russians and Schopenhauer. Gapp's study is a good one, but he magnifies the influence of the classics upon Gissing. For him the tone of Gissing's mind, the temper of his heart, even the way he stood and walked were all shaped by reading classical literature; experience, heredity, lentil soup and Tottenham Court Road hardly enter the picture. It is a case of riding one's thesis too hard. While Gapp declares that Gissing's somber vision of slum life was the result of his reading the classics, Phelps in the article on the Russians asserts that it was influenced by Dostoyevsky. Both are right, but only partly right, for Gissing's world view was the result of his total experience. The article on Schopenhauer's influence is the best, but there, as in the other two articles, the attempt to prove influence is not always convincing.

In Part Three of *Collected Articles*, Irving Howe leads off with a discussion of Gissing as "the poet of fatigue." The essay is part of his introduction to the 1962 Riverside edition of *New Grub Street*. The "poet of fatigue" phrase would seem to apply only to that book, though Howe seems to give it a general application. It remains one of the "genre of nervous exhaustion," coined by the *Saturday Review* in 1895 for *Eve's Ransom*. Both are facile catch phrases which fail to put the finger on any consistent feature of Gissing's work.

Hanging over *New Grub Street* is an air of dog-eat-dog competition, and underlying that is the frenetic activity necessary to survive. There may "tiredness and staleness," but it is dissipated by the need to keep busy. Gissing's short story "Comrades in Arms" (1894) smacks of the same atmosphere. A woman journalist works to the point of nervous collapse, but in a few days is back on her feet and working hard as ever. When she and the man who has loved her bump umbrellas on the pavement of the Strand, there is time for only a brief hello – then onward.

In *New Grub Street* Marian Yule falls in love with Jasper Milvain and is eager to have him return her love, but when she asks, "Are you sorry I wear my hair short?" it is not – as Howe remarks – an "innocent question." Marian is "a

modern literary girl” and is something of a new woman; long tresses belonged to the old ideal of womanhood, trimmed hair to the new. Marian is thus sounding out Milvain, attempting to discover whether he sympathizes with the changes taking place in woman. She cannot see that he is merely a moral renegade who cares only for money and the comforts it can buy.

The article by V. S. Pritchett is perceptive, though unsympathetic in tone. Some of his general remarks are out of tune with modern criticism of Gissing. He says, for instance, that “Gissing’s failure and his exile are the cause of his fame” (p. 126). Those who know Gissing do not see failure, only superb accomplishment, a stand heroic against forces that have pulled stronger men down. In the next article Jacob Korg writes, “he never lost a gnawing sense of personal duty that drove him to make heroic efforts as a student and as a novelist” (p. 132). The theme of this article on *Born in Exile* may be seen in this quotation: “Its protagonist, Godwin Peak, understands clearly that there is a fundamental opposition between the conventional moral code formed by Christian tradition and the enlightened scientific views he holds. Since he rejects religious belief, he feels that it is logical to reject the moral system based on it as well, for the sake of following a rational, objective morality consistent with scientific truth” (p. 133). Peak, of course, is an “outcast intellectual” created in Gissing’s own image; his frame of mind may help explain Gissing’s own image; his frame of mind may help explain Gissing’s behavior at Manchester. Certainly there is much in the novel that recalls the Manchester episode: “Not a house in Kingsmill opened hospitable doors to the lonely student.” And again, “An impartial observer might have wondered at the negligence which left him to arrange his life as best he could, notwithstanding youth and utter inexperience.”

The article by Greenough White, published originally in the *Sewanee Review* for July 1898, is now a curiosity piece. It suggests that by the end of his career Gissing was winning an audience in America. In November of 1898, when White wrote to him, asking for a complete list of his works and informing him of this article, Gissing was pleased. Also, in typical English fashion, he was amused by the strange-sounding Indian word. To Gabrielle he wrote on November 6: “...the ‘Sewanee Review!’ What a terrible name!” I have heard, though without finding the proof, that Matthew Arnold’s reaction to “Oshkosh” was similar.

The last two essays in this volume, and two of the most interesting, are studies of Gissing’s best-known book, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. They tend to complement each other, for both attempt to classify *Ryecroft* as a particular type of literature. Jackson Cope makes a case for *Ryecroft* as Utopian literature, while Jacob Korg examines Gissing’s *Commonplace Book* to prove that *Ryecroft* to a large extent is confessional literature. Cope argues that in writing *Ryecroft* Gissing was “creating, not editing or reminiscing,” (p. 156). Korg shows that Gissing took the brief entries of his *Commonplace Book* and shaped them imaginatively into the meditations of Henry Ryecroft. Cope suggests that Gissing constructed an ideal English patrician who insists upon the natural while shunning the artificial and mechanical. Ryecroft thus becomes a living, credible embodiment of this ideal, and the voice of England’s best. The first-person “I” refers not to Gissing, or even Ryecroft, but to “modern England’s intellectual and ethical aristocracy” (p. 161). So Ryecroft is mainly a fictional character created by Gissing as a vehicle through which to make an ideal tangible.

While Korg presents proof that Ryecroft in feeling, thought and personality is much like Gissing himself, his position in no way invalidates that of Cope. Why? Because Ryecroft’s “placid resignation” is not Gissing’s, because the tone of “calm melancholy” is not Gissing’s, and because “the quality of Ryecroft’s mind,” though he fervently aspired to it, had eluded Gissing. Writing to Frederic Harrison, Gissing expressed the hope that *Ryecroft* would not be regarded as purely autobiographical, for “The thing is much more an aspiration than a memory” (p. 173). Yet reading the

Commonplace Book one cannot ignore the close similarity between it and *Ryecroft*, and one must conclude with Gissing himself that *Ryecroft*, after all, is “a curious blend...of truth and fiction.”

In recent years “going into Gissing” has become an absorbing past-time for many. *Collected Articles* is an attractive contribution to this revival of interest. It shows conclusively that Gissing merits the attention he is now receiving.

Just Published.

Gissing's *Notes on Social Democracy*, the first of a Gissing Series to be published by the Enitharmon Press of London has just appeared. It is the first reprinting of the three short articles on socialism Gissing wrote for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1880, with an introduction by Jacob Korg. The edition consists of four hundred numbered copies, and may be ordered from Enitharmon Press, 22 Huntingdon Road, East Finchley, London. N. 2. A passage from the introduction says:

Those 1880 articles contain some foreshadowings of Gissing's approaching disillusionment with socialism. After reviewing the aims of the movement, he assures his readers that "the theory of Socialism rests on the purely scientific inquiries of cultured minds." "Social Democracy," wrote Lord Russell in 1896, "is not a mere political party, nor even a mere economic theory; it is a complete and self-contained philosophy of the world and of human development..." This was the attraction socialism had exercised on Gissing. As long as he was able to regard it as an intellectual enterprise, a cultural product, "propagated," as he says, "by literary exertion," and devoted to securing liberty through Parliamentary means, he felt little difficulty in remaining loyal to it. But when he came to know the poor well, observed socialist agitation in London, and saw that democratic power would have unfavorable implications for the culture he was attached to, he acquired a different sense of it.

Later publications announced for the Enitharmon Press Gissing Series are:

My First Rehearsal. An unpublished story by Gissing with an introduction by Pierre Coustillas.

Gissing's Writings on Dickens. A bio-bibliographical study by Pierre Coustillas.

Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing by Pierre Coustillas.

Gissing and Madison Avenue

As readers of *In the Year of Jubilee* know, Gissing considered advertising a serious evil. But perhaps he would not have minded the use of his own prose as advertising copy, if it promoted the sale of books. A recent letter from John Burton of the University of Chicago Press accompanying an advertising brochure is headed by this passage from the *Ryecroft Papers*:

Greater still is the happiness of unpacking volumes one has bought without seeing them...The first glimpse of bindings when the inmost protective wrapper has been folded back! The first scent of books! The first gleam of a gilded title!

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Gissing was not immune to the physical attractiveness of books, and might have liked the handsome "Chicago Collector's Editions," especially the editions of the complete Greek tragedy and the *Iliad*.

Gissing and Orwell.

Mr. Haydock's observation, on page 4 of this issue, that Gissing and George Orwell are "much alike" is given considerable confirmation by the material on Gissing in the newly-published *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (4 Vols., Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1968). The Orwell essay on Gissing reprinted in Pierre Coustillas' *Collected Articles* was written in the summer of 1948 for a periodical named *Politics and Letters* which ceased publication before it could be printed; it appeared posthumously, in 1960, in the *London Magazine*. In it Orwell declares that though there are some of Gissing's novels (including *Born in Exile*), which he has never been able to obtain, he is willing, on the strength of those he has read, "to maintain that England has produced very few better novelists." The statement is qualified, to be sure, by Orwell's definition of the novel as a story of ordinary events, a genre, he admits, in which English writers are not strong. But this does not, he insists, make Gissing any less exceptional.

The index of Orwell's *Collected Essays* leads to a number of Gissing allusions. To Julian Symons, who had mentioned Gissing in a letter, Orwell wrote, "I am a great fan of his," and mentioned that he was writing his Gissing article. Though he does not mention Gissing's Dickens criticism in this article, he observes, in his 1940 essay on Dickens, that Gissing is "the best of the writers on Dickens." In a short article on Jack London, he mentioned Gissing as a far better writer who expressed a similar "social antagonism" to working people. When Anthony Powell asked him to review the 1947 edition of *A Life's Morning* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, he said he was eager to undertake the assignment, but was busy with other tasks – among them his work on *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. "I'm sorry," he wrote, "– I'd much rather have done the Gissing article." (This review, by another reviewer, appeared in *TLS* on February 14th, 1948 under the title, "The Permanent Stranger," and is also reprinted in the *Collected Articles*.)

But the most interesting comment on Gissing appears in another letter to Symons, dated July 10, 1948. Orwell reported that a year or two earlier, Home and Van Thal, the publishers of the 1947 *A Life's Morning*, had asked him to write a biography of Gissing. "It is a job that is crying out to be done," he wrote "...but of course I couldn't do all the research that would be needed." A life of Gissing by Orwell would have been a noteworthy book; to know that it was considered and not written is to be aware of a new void. The biographical materials that have appeared since Orwell wrote have done something to satisfy the need he mentions, but little has been done about another of his complaints: the scarcity of Gissing editions. He said that he had had to write his essay without reading some of the novels because "you simply can't get Gissing's books now." As readers of Miss Dachine Rainer's letter to *TLS* know, this situation still has not been corrected; the majority of Gissing's novels (in spite of the work of AMS Press) are still impossible to secure through ordinary channels.

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Two Letters to a Fellow Invalid.

Pierre Coustillas

In his letter to H. G. Wells dated June 25, 1901, Gissing referred to one of the inmates at the East Anglian Sanatorium: "The most interesting person here is a Miss White, a classical tutor at Newnham – a very vigorous type, who will serve me one of these days. Humorous, erudite, smokes cigarettes – the friend of everybody one can mention." And it is doubtless of the same person that he was thinking when he wrote to Mrs. Wells on the same day: "A young woman with whom I have talked at table seems to be deeply dyed with literary associations – is going to be visited by the Editor of the *Quarterly*. She spoke today of you (H. G. W.), and was loud in praise of *The Wheels of Chance* and *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, intelligent praise, moreover. It is rare to find anyone who prefers those two, and knows why." This young lady who later became Mrs. Wedd is further identified by Royal A. Gettman in his edition of the Gissing-Wells correspondence as Miss Rachel Evelyn White, a lecturer in classics at Newnham College, Cambridge, from 1899 to 1926. Ten years younger than Gissing, she outlived him by forty years and died in 1943 in a country that Gissing would scarcely have recognized as his own. The novelist's diary, discontinuous as it is after 1900, contains no

additional comment on this “new woman” of the better type whose dynamic temper roused Gissing’s sympathetic envy and admiration, and one would naturally enough have pigeon-holed her as a human type that appeared to him and was passed by, for he did not have time to portray her like in the couple of novels he was still to write.

Nevertheless, as the two letters hereafter reproduced testify, Gissing did more than observe Miss White with the cold keen eye of the novelist. When he casually described her in his letters to the Wellses he had been in Nayland but for twenty-four hours; during the one and a half months he spent at the sanatorium their relations developed into friendship, and it may be confidently suggested that his conversations with Miss White on things human and literary helped him to beguile the tedium resulting from enforced inactivity. Her congenial presence to him a beneficent manifestation of the will to live, an impulse which was gradually deserting him. While discussing Wells’s novels with her, he could for a while forget the tangle of misunderstandings between Gabrielle, the Wellses and himself. He could also temporarily banish from his thoughts the prospect of a culinary *mise au point* with Mme Fleury on his return to France.

These two letters from an invalid by the Bay of Biscay to another among the Swiss mountains reflect some of the major preoccupations of Gissing in the winter of 1901-02. As with other correspondents, he vents his scepticism as regards medical lore and oscillates between wild despair and resurgent optimism when he calls up his Ryecroft-like vision of a peaceful home in Devon. He has not yet had time to lament the absence of Gabrielle, away in Paris, acting as sick-nurse to her mother; nor has yet realized that he cannot bear the company of the inmates at the Villa Souvenir. So far he only sees the benefit of change, because he feels stronger and because, despite material difficulties, he can work at his current book – the revision and abridgment of Forster’s *Life of Dickens*.

Two names in the first letter symbolize the union of the present with the past – the two successive exiles in America and in France. Louis Elson was one of his old Boston friends, a musician, lecturer and journalist who had by

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the turn of the century become well known in New England. No doubt the two men had lost contact with each other but it must have been re-established in 1896 when Gissing gave Dr. Zakrzewska and Miss Sprague – other Boston acquaintances of his then visiting London – a copy of one of his own books to give to Elson on their return. At all events, Elson had called upon him at the East Anglian Sanatorium in the summer of 1901, probably after some previous correspondence – a conjecture supported by the fact that Elson’s address, 811 Beacon Street, Boston, is listed in a booklet of addresses amid those of persons whom Gissing had known for years.

The other name he mentioned – Mlle Marie Saglio – reminded him of more recent times. In the autumn of 1900 and again a year later he had visited the Saglios at their home, the château de Tazières, near Nevers and had been welcomed as a guest whom no one in France (apart from Mme Fleury who shared the secret) suspected of not being legally married to Gabrielle. At a date that falls between those of the two letters to Miss White, he sent Mlle Saglio a picture postcard with “every affectionate wish for the New Year,” representing the Place des Palmiers in Arcachon.

Like his copy of *Anticipations* which is inscribed “To George Gissing with affectionate regards from H. G. Wells,” this postcard is still in a private collection. The two letters addressed to Miss White are published with the kind permission of the Provost and Fellows of King’s College, Cambridge, and of Mr. Alfred Gissing, to whom I express my indebtedness and my thanks.

Villa Souvenir,
Arcachon,
Gironde,
France.

Dec 8, 1901.

Dear Miss White,

I had heard with no little vexation, that a relapse of some kind had obliged you to leave England. Hearty thanks for this kind letter, which puts an end to uneasy speculation. It is very difficult to believe that you have anything which

cannot soon and finally be overcome, with proper treatment, and I much hope to have a better report when the thrice-blessed days of spring have come. It is good news that the Sanatorium life at Davos weighs less heavily than that in Suffolk.

For my own part, after a vast amount of irritating consultation and experiment, I have discovered that precisely the *worst* thing for me is cold air. My lungs are getting, they tell me, into a seriously *sclerotic* state; I can hardly breathe at all when the thermometer is low; and, if I designed to kill myself, I could not do better than pursue the theory of open air under all conditions. Dr. Chauffard of Paris, a very good man, on my seeing him a month ago, said I must go south as soon as possible, and advised Arcachon. So far, his advice seems justified; we have a good deal of brilliant sunshine, and air of peculiarly bracing quality – yet not, as in the S.E. of France, over-exciting. I cannot walk (confound it!) but the glimpse I get from my chaise-longue in the garden of the surrounding pine forest has not little charm. Birds sing among the trees, and by way of bass to their melody, old Ocean roars steadily in the distance. So here I must pass the winter, doing such work as seems possible – for work is not forbidden, provided one can do it on a chaise lounge, no easy thing. If I find myself worse instead of better next year, I shall doubtless have the pleasure of writing to you from some genial English work-house.

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My wife wishes me to say how glad she would have been if the doctors had happened to send *you* also to Arcachon; it would greatly have pleased her to meet and talk with you. She is patience itself, but things, as you may imagine, are not very cheerful for her, and your excellent spirits and bright talk would have done her good.

We enjoyed Autun, but should have done so much more if the early autumn weather had not been persistently vile – rain and fog day after day. Moreover, our house was damp, so we got away as soon as possible, and passed a short time with a cousin of my wife's near Nevers – her name is Mlle. Saglio, and she is a niece of M. Edmond Saglio, the editor of the great Dictionnaire des Antiquités, which doubtless you know.

Well, well, enough to have given you this account of myself. Pray send the essay on the Ptolemies when you can. You speak of Elson; I often think with envy of the man's health and vigor and gust of life. At this moment, no doubt, he is tramping with enjoyment about the snowbound streets of Boston – amazed at people who shiver or pant.

With all kindest regards and best wishes,

Sincerely yours,
George Gissing

Wells's "Anticipations" is a very noteworthy book.

Villa Souvenir,
Arcachon,
Gironde,
France

Jan 2, 1902

Dear Miss White,

Many thanks to you for this copy of your paper on Women in Ptolemaic Egypt. It interests me much to see you swimming so easily and gracefully in waters altogether beyond my depth. The thing must have cost you a great deal of hard work, and I am glad to know that people competent to judge thought highly of the results. I have read it with curiosity, and feel less ignorant for the reading.

I earnestly hope that it will not really be necessary for you to spend the winter always in a health resort. You, with

your splendid vitality, your high spirits and aims, would feel too acutely that semi-exile from the scene of your work. But be of good courage. As you know, the doctors are but uncertain oracles. Even I – in middle age and half shattered by a lifetime of miseries – do not abandon the hope that I may some day have a home in England — by choice somewhere in warm, green Devon. I know, of course, that Cambridge is *not* – in the favourite phrase of my doctor here – un climat thérapeutique; indeed, it must be very trying in the cold months, and perhaps is the very fons et origo of your ills. Well, well, if it be forbidden, you will find another work-place, I am sure.

I am glad to hear that you are not being compelled to over-eat. The thing is a mortal mistake, I am convinced. At present, I care little about the weighing-machine; far more important is the thermometer; most important of all, the goodness or badness of one's natural appetite. Eat with gusto, and you are doing well.

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The climate of Arcachon is wonderful. I feel its good effect almost from hour to hour. *I can climb a hill!* It is not impossible that (Paris being forbidden) we may take a little house here for two or three years, and go away in summer – though the summer heat is not at all oppressive. One must have a home. I can't do without Gabrielle's (my wife's) music, and without my library. Impossible to live for ever in hotels and boarding-houses. Our circumstances are complicated by the stupid fact that no English author earns so little money as I do; but *that* won't improve so long as I haven't comfort and quiet.

Now, every good wish to you for the year that has begun. No, no, you are not going to be an invalid – nothing of the sort! Let me know that you progress. My wife thanks you for your kind words à son égard, and joins in my hopes for you.

Sincerely yours,
George Gissing

Reprints

In a letter reprinted in our last number, Miss Dachine Rainer mentioned the AMS Press reprinting of Gissing's novels, and objected to their high prices. For those who can afford them, these reprints are now listed as available in the recent catalogue entitled "Literature" circulated by the publisher. Apparently, only the scarce novels have been selected for reprinting. In most cases the price is ten dollars for each of the original volumes, so that a novel brought out in three volumes is thirty dollars. The catalogue gives the original publication date, suggesting that these books are photographic reproductions of the first editions. It lists the following:

<i>Workers in the Dawn</i>	<i>Denzil Quarrier</i>
<i>Demos</i>	<i>The Odd Women</i>
<i>Thyrza</i>	<i>In the Year of Jubilee</i>
<i>A Life's Morning</i>	<i>Eve's Ransom</i>
<i>The Emancipated</i>	<i>The Paying Guest</i>
<i>Born in Exile</i>	<i>The Unclassed</i> (1896 edition)
<i>The Whirlpool</i>	<i>The Town Traveller</i>
<i>The Crown of Life</i>	<i>Our Friend the Charlatan</i>
<i>Veranilda</i>	<i>Will Warburton</i>

For information, write to AMS Press, 56 East 13th street, New York, N.Y. 10003 or 4 Berkeley Street, London, W. 1, England.

C. C. Kohler, 141 High Street, Dorking, England. Antiquarian and New Bookseller, specializes in Gissing items. He often has scarce and out-of-print books available, and invites all readers interested in Gissing to write for his catalogue and announcements.

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