

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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-- 1 --

Autograph Gissing Material in New Zealand

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The Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington contains, among its remarkable variety of material, some Gissing items of bibliographic interest which, though noted elsewhere, merit a more detailed description.

The most important is the manuscript of *Our Friend the Charlatan*, under its original title “The Coming Man,” beautifully bound in red morocco by Wallis.¹ It consists, excluding prelims, of 116 pages of text and one page of material to be substituted for cancellations. The Prefatory Note is identical with that in the printed version, with the exception of the title, which was obviously altered

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-- 2 --

at the proof stage. The date of completion is, however, precisely indicated, “St. Honoré, Aug. 29, 1900.”²

Gissing’s minute handwriting required 425 pages in the printed version, yet it remains surprisingly legible, except where his smaller cancellations remain obstinately obscure. Minor items of substitution occur in names; “Lady Arabela” (?) becomes Lady Susan Harrop (p. 4),³ “Halliday” becomes Breakspeare (p. 76). The printed text at times varies from the manuscript, with the omission for instance of the superfluous adjective in “She gave her [white-gloved] hand” (p. 144).

There are, however, three major cancellations, the first two occurring in chapter 10, the third in chapter 26. Chapter 10 is largely concerned with the society hostess Mrs. Toplady and her cynical interest in the progress of Dyce Lashmar, the “coming man.” The first cancellation occurs on MS p. 36, pp. 129-30 in *Our Friend the Charlatan*, between “Like everybody else this evening, she [Constance Bride] was in good spirits” (p. 129) and “Also with Mr. Kerchever the old lady had had an afternoon talk” (p. 130):

The sense of social inferiority did not trouble her; rather, in looking upon the ladies present, she enjoyed the reflection that not one of them had half her intellect or her practical ability.

Even Mrs. Toplady displayed animation and talked of other things than the state of her health. In the privacy of the afternoon, Lady Ogram had made ample amends to her for rudeness at luncheon, had spoken of her troubles with genuine kindness, and flattered her by seriously asking her opinion of Lashmar’s powers. Mrs. Toplady at once declared an enthusiastic faith in the young politician. Her house was open to him, she hoped to see him very often; she would make him acquainted with a world of people, every one of whom was sure to recognize and proclaim his distinction.

“A friend of his,” said Lady Ogram, “is Lord Dymchurch. Do you know him?”

“Oh, very well,” cried the other, mechanically. She added, “That is, I have met him. Friends of mine are very intimate with him.”

Mrs. Toplady had never heard Lord Dymchurch’s name, but it was a point of pride with her to know everyone who had a place in society.

-- 3 --

“If I am in town next month,” continued Lady Ogram, “arrange for me to meet him, will you?”

“Of course I will; of course – I thought you had no intention –”

“I may be in town for a week or two presently.”⁴

Between tea and dinner, Lady Ogram had had a long talk with Mr. Kerchever.

The passage is important in its greater explicitness as to the confidence of Constance Bride, Lady Ogram’s eventual heir, in her own powers, and in the comparative refinement of Gissing’s depiction of Mrs. Toplady in the final version, which is a good deal less obvious and more delicately ironic.

The same process is to be seen in the second cancellation, a substantial narrative between “After all, he liked her [Constance Bride]” (p. 141) and “Later in the morning he saw Constance wheeling forth her bicycle” (p. 141):

They two, as usual, were alone together at breakfast-time, and Dyce began a humorous account of the evening he had passed; but, in the middle of his story, to the surprise of both, there entered Mrs. Toplady. Pausing just within the room, she stood with a singular smile, her head sentimentally drooping to one side. To their salutations, she responded with a languorous amiability. Oh, how well she had slept! And what a calm, bright, delicious morning it was! What were their

plans? Should she be in the way if she joined them? To this, Constance made a curt reply; for her part she had to work as usual. So Mrs. Toplady made an appointment with Lashmar for ten o'clock, in the garden. Dyce prepared himself for infinite boredom, but he was rather surprised than bored by the strain in which his companion talked to him as they paced the alleys. All at once she had become deeply interested in him, almost tenderly anxious about his future. And, as though by natural transition, she began to speak of her married life, which, she declared, had been "a dream of happiness." Had not her husband died whilst still young (fifty-three was Mrs. Toplady's age) he would have left a name in the annals of his country, and he used to say that it was to her he owed the steady purpose of his existence. Intelligence and earnestness had always characterized her; these were the qualities above all requisite in the wife of an ambitious man. Happily, Mr. Lashmar did not need admonition on this subject; he was not led

-- 4 --

astray by glittering superficialities; he could read women's characters. And now let her say that she counted on seeing him in Pont Street very soon. He was to come whenever he liked, as one of the intimates, and she would take care that he made useful acquaintances. His career would henceforth be her ceaseless concern; it gave a new object to her declining and woefully burdened life.⁵

The depiction of Mrs. Toplady is here much broader, and far more in the nature of caricature – "Intelligence and earnestness had always characterized her; these were the qualities above all requisite in the wife of an ambitious man" – and one wonders whether Mrs. Toplady herself might not be used as yet another matrimonial bait for Lashmar.

The third cancellation concerns the treatment of Lashmar's visit to Constance Bride after Lady Ogram's funeral, when he attempts to restore himself to the heiress's favour. Constance has summoned him by letter, and the cancellation occurs after the ironic "His real wooing had not yet begun, and Constance merely reminded him of that, with all gentleness" (p. 369):

So, in the afternoon, he once more drove up to Rivenoak and once more followed the servant into the drawing-room. There sat Constance Bride, behind her the marble bust, which shone very white in contrast with her garb of mourning. Lashmar observed that she looked well in this attire; he had never seen her rise with such an easy grace, with such calm dignity. He took her hand, and pressed it. Constance did not smile; her expression was gravely courteous, and when she invited him to be seated, it was with a soft voice perfectly under control.

"I was sorry not to be able to speak a word yesterday," Dyce began, with a constraint for which he had not prepared himself. "At the cemetery, I saw that you didn't feel able –"

"I think it's better not to talk at such times," said Constance.

"Certainly. Are the Amyses still here?"

"No. They returned to London in the evening."

"For the present, you remain?"

"For a little while. Of course there are many things to be seen to – I go on with my secretaryship."

Lashmar smiled. He was holding his resplendent silk hat, and wanted to put it down, but his muscles would not act on the suggestion.

“In a few days, no doubt,” he said, “you will be free to make your own plans?”

“Most likely.”

Constance betrayed a little nervousness, and Lashmar took courage. He succeeded in laying aside his hat; then, fixing his look on the face before him, he began to say what he had in mind.⁶

The modifications in the final version lie in the less dramatic juxtaposition of Lady Ogram’s bust and her denatured successor, the reduction of dialogue, the excision of the near-comedy of the “resplendent silk hat,” and the insistence on Constance Bride’s self-control. In all, a gain in consistency of tone.

The second item of bibliographic interest is the copy (Vols. I & II) of *Isabel Clarendon*, already noted by Pierre Coustillas in the Introduction and Appendix⁷ to his critical edition, 1969. Volume I is bound in black cloth, with a blank front cover, the spine simply bearing ISABEL CLARENDON | I, while Volume II conforms to the description in Michael Sadleir’s *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Vol. I, p. 142, without the half-title page. Both volumes show the signs of the removal of labels from the front covers one would expect on ex-libraries copies.

The verso of the front cover is inscribed in pencil: 1st edition rare | George Gissing’s own copy | (see autograph letter cutting) | with his corrections for a new edition | . There is no annotation in the second volume. As Professor Coustillas notes, the author’s manuscript additions are confined to the verso of the half-title page, the title page itself and the sixteen pages of text in Volume I on which he made his abortive attempt at revision. Gissing’s meticulous attention to the chronology of the publication of his work is illustrated by the order in which he inscribed his novels; *Denzil Quarrier* (1892), he originally placed between *The Unclassed* (1884) and *The Emancipated* (1890).

The “autograph letter cutting,” presumably enclosed in Volume I, is entirely unrelated to any revision, being dated May 8th, 1893. It is in fact a letter from Gissing to C. W. Tinckam, proposing that Gissing take up the tenancy of 76 Burton Rd., Brixton, and its collocation with *Isabel*

Clarendon seems quite random. There is no other letter from Gissing in the Turnbull Library, and the pencilled inscription, apparently by a hopeful bookseller, must have been a trap for the unwary.

Nevertheless, the letter does have some intrinsic interest. It is in response to C. W. Tinckham’s reply to Gissing’s advertisement for accommodation in Dalton’s Weekly Advertiser. Written from 1 St. Leonard’s Terrace, Exeter, it gives an insight into the image Gissing wished to project of his domestic situation and professional requirements:

Our child (a boy) is 18 months old. On his account I wish to find a house where there is a possibility of taking the air without always going into the public ways ... I think I may say that we are very quiet people: the nature of my work makes quietness necessary. I want to be within, say, ten minutes’ walk of the new reading-room... Proximity to quiet and domestic people would greatly add to our comfort, – as also the possibility of remaining for some time in the same abode.

Simple requirements, yet with pathetic overtones.

These items, coupled with more than a score of first editions, excluding Colonial editions, make the Turnbull Library's holdings an important collection for the compilation of any definitive bibliography.

- 1 - The invoice referring to the manuscript of "The Coming Man" is also held by the Alexander Turnbull Library. Turnbull bought it, bound, from Robson & Co., 23 Coventry St., Piccadilly in 1915 for £75. Algernon had sold it, unbound, to Frank Redway for eleven guineas two years before.
- 2 - The date of Gissing's letter to J. B. Pinker. See J. D. Gordan, *George Gissing, 1857-1903: An Exhibition from the Berg Collection*, New York, 1954, p. 38.
- 3 - Page references in round brackets refer to *Our Friend the Charlatan*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1901.
- 4 - MS p. 36.
- 5 - MS p. 39.
- 6 - MS p. 100.
- 7 - George Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, ed. P. Coustillas, 1969, Vol. I, pp. xxxii-xxxiii, Vol. II, pp. xvii-xviii respectively.

-- 7 --

I am most grateful to Mr. A. G. Bagnall, Librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library, for access to the documents to which reference is made in this article.

* * * * *

Reviews

Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century. Essays edited with an Introduction by John Lucas. (Methuen, London, 1971).

This book attempts to examine how some of the greatest nineteenth century English writers chose to confront political issues in their works. Although the collection does not include any specific articles on George Gissing himself (unlike a companion volume *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth Century Fiction*), it does contain some quite detailed discussions of his work among an attractive group of essays by John Goode, William Myers, David Howard and the editor himself, on such authors as Dickens and George Eliot, Meredith and William Morris.

John Lucas's essay on "Conservatism and Revolution in the 1880s" deals most fully with *Demos* in considering the reaction between politics and three novels published in 1886. Mr. Lucas argues lucidly and persuasively that various events such as the popularity of Henry George's works and the foundation of the Democratic Federation created a considerable fear of social anarchy

among conservatives, and that Disraeli's death in 1881 "marked the beginning of the movement to revivify the party." An attempt was made, partly based on the ideals of the old "Young England Movement," to create a government which would occupy the middle ground between fossilized toryism and radical liberalism.

W. H. Mallock, it is argued, was the clearest exponent of this philosophy in such works as *Social Equality* of 1882 and his novel *The Old Order Changes* of 1886, but both Henry James' *Princess Casamassima* and Gissing's *Demos* seem to share Mallock's feeling that much of the passion for democratic revolution was based upon envy of the rich, and all three authors tried to

-- 8 --

show the integral identification of the aristocracy with culture. Indeed Mr. Lucas asserts that "it is Gissing's case that all political ideas of a radical nature are at bottom rationalisations of egoism," and he has little difficulty in exposing the limitations of Gissing's art here, especially in his treatment of Mutimer and Adela. The argument that emerges from Mallock, Gissing and James seems to be that the pressures for change are real and menacing, but that revolutionary politics are pernicious. "All ... have some concern with the possible social revolution that the 1880s seemed to threaten, and ... all the novelists endorse the worth of inherited values which they feel will be destroyed in the portending cataclysm."

Though Mr. Lucas is (rightly) critical of some areas of *Demos*, he gives full weight to the pained insights which led to Gissing's novel. Though Gissing seems to feel that the working-man was wrongly incited to action, he knew too much about the activities of slum life to ignore how hideous its sufferings were. However inadequately Gissing accounts for the dangerous state he sees England as being in, he does not undersell the potential of vast change, and the restoration of Wanley at the end of the novel is seen by Mr. Lucas as less "a gesture of hope than of despair."

The only exception in *Demos* to Gissing's thesis that we should never "trust the thoroughness of the man who is a revolutionist on abstract principles" seems to be Mr. Westlake. This dreamy idealist, misguided yet sublime, in Gissing's view, owes a good deal to William Morris, of course, and it is fitting that the last essay in a collection on nineteenth century literature and politics should be a discussion by John Goode of William Morris's literary achievements, compared very largely with those of Gissing and Thomas Hardy.

Mr. Goode argues that the imaginative literature of the years of Morris's socialism are a formal response to problems which were theoretically insoluble except in terms of metaphors which were unsatisfactory and intractable in the actual historical situation.

Thus Gissing shows "a remarkable effort to assimilate the social actuality with which he is confronted, and a final incapacity to face up to its implications in formal terms," and he is only able

-- 9 --

to "create characters in terms of withdrawal or absorption. Because of this, his working-class hero necessarily has to be portrayed as becoming bourgeois because engagement with society must be seen either in terms of condescension (the philanthropist) or conquest."

The distinctive achievement of Gissing's later fiction, in Mr. Goode's view, is that he is able to present this dichotomy as a subjective viewpoint which leads to the defeat of the protagonist. This argument is developed through a lengthy analysis of Reardon's experiences in *New Grub Street*, where "Gissing's understanding of the epistemology of this defeat is profound." But, inevitably in Mr. Goode's view, the insights which Gissing tries to portray, seek a style which goes beyond that of the individual consciousness. Though at his best Gissing was able to dramatise the

failure of confrontations between protagonists and the social order, William Morris was able to go much further. In order to do this, however, realism had to be transcended, and Mr. Goode concludes his essay by trying to demonstrate that Morris did this successfully through such works as *A Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*, where the dream-technique is used.

It is obvious from my attempts to summarise the arguments of these essays that they are both difficult and disturbing. They make assumptions about literature and society which not everyone will find acceptable. They reveal signs of the growing impatience with the current conventions of literary criticism to carry forward meaningful dialogue, but for which no more adequate vocabulary at present exists. They are often critical of Gissing's novels, and show little interest in the minutiae of his private life. But their insights are often acute and challenging, and they are never mean. This is a book for those who care about literature and politics as well as George Gissing. But it is partly a sign of his stubborn durability that the problems raised by his novels still go on demanding answers.

Dennis Butts, Berkshire College of Education, Reading.

Un'Ispirazione ed altre novelle, by George Gissing. Edited and translated by Francesco Badolato. Como, 1970.

Gissing's work has been little known in Italy, even among those who read English; the only books of his which have been translated are *Thyrza* (1939), *Born in Exile* (1955), *By the Ionian Sea*

-- 10 --

(1957) and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1957). To Italians who do not read English Gissing's short stories have so far been unknown, but this state of things is being remedied now that Dr. Francesco Badolato has translated eight of them: "An Inspiration," "A Victim of Circumstances," "The Justice and the Vagabond," "A Daughter of the Lodge," "A Charming Family," "The Scrupulous Father," "One Way of Happiness," and "The Foolish Virgin."

There have been two editions of the book – the first one, dated July 1970, with front cover reproducing "Ragazza al balcone" by Antonio Trifoglio, was limited to 178 copies; the second one, issued in October 1970, with front cover design by Ettore Negroni, consisting of 800 numbered copies.

The introduction gives a useful and concise account of Gissing's life and work, together with a helpful list of his books. Dr. Badolato emphasises that, although the stories were written about seventy years ago, their themes are still of great interest to-day.

On the whole the translation is literal. Sometimes the resources of the Italian language enable Dr. Badolato to improve, as it were, on the original. For example, in "An Inspiration" Harvey Munden and Laurence Nangle become very friendly by the end of a dinner and Dr. Badolato very felicitously describes the development of their relationship by passing from the formal *Lei* to the familiar *tu* (a subtlety which is impossible, of course, with the English *you*).

In "A Victim of Circumstances," the description of the landscape is very melodious:

Dal lato opposto era situata Glastonbury, con i tetti rossi delle case, e sopra di essi si elevavano le belle torri antiche di San Giacomo e San Benedetto, raggruppate ai piedi di quell'alto colle conico chiamato il Tor, il quale con i resti delle chiese antiche risplendeva intorno su una pianura ampia molte miglia. Verso nord la vista era chiusa dalle verdi Mendips, bellissime nel cambiamento delle luci e delle ombre. Ad occidente, lontano, su un orizzonte piano, luccicavano le acque del fiume Severn. (p. 46).

In the Italian text “lontano” has been put between commas, while the original reads: “In the west,

-- 11 --

far upon a flat horizon, ...” The additional comma emphasises the distance, giving sharper relief to the view from Wirral Hill extending before the artist’s eyes.

I should also like to quote an interesting passage from “The Justice and the Vagabond” in which the translator ably brings out the psychology of a typical Gissing character:

Sua moglie era una donna di piccole vedute e di forte volontà; ella lo guidava in ogni dettaglio della sua vita, riservatamente, gentilmente, senza fargli sospettare neanche un momento che li vincolo matrimoniale lo tormentava, o anticipando la possibilità di conflitti tra gli scopi di lui e i suoi.

Mrs. Rutland apparteneva a una famiglia di provincia, e valutava sopra tutte le cose il suo locale prestigio; quando andò a Londra ella si associò con quegli amici della campagna il cui fascino li aveva portati verso la città. Se ella trascorse una vacanza all'estero fu soltanto per ampre dei suoi retrospettivi vantaggi al suo ritorno a casa. Ella riguardava ogni cosa da un rigido punto di vista provinciale. (pp. 81-82)

If the translator had kept close to the original of the last sentence (“She regarded everything from a rigidly provincial point of view”), his rendering of it would have been: “Ella riguardava ogni cosa da un punto di vista rigidamente provinciale,” which would have been perfectly right. But Dr. Badolato preferred to use the adjective “rigido” instead of the adverb “rigidamente,” thus stressing the mentality, the outlook, the habit of the character.

Among Italian writers of short stories Renato Fucini, who was Gissing’s contemporary, is the one who most resembles him. Like Gissing, he generally reveals his feelings – sympathy for his fellow men and women, sorrow at man’s wickedness stemming from ignorance, pity for human suffering. Both Gissing and Fucini use a form of realism, that of *intimismo*; in other words, their concern is to explore the thoughts and motives of their characters. And they are both primarily interested in portraying humble people.

The book is attractively produced and the translation is satisfactory. There are some misprints but they are not seriously misleading. By introducing some of Gissing’s best short stories to Italian readers, Dr. Badolato has performed a valuable service.

M. Teresa Chierici Stagni, Liceo Cremona, Milan.

-- 12 --

Enitharmon Press Gissing Series, Nos. 5 and 6 (continued from the April 1972 number).

Gissing East and West: Four Aspects brings together some articles previously published and adds to them Mr. C .C. Kohler’s reflections on his experiences in buying and selling Gissing’s books. It is an odd fact that Gissing is a more prominent figure within the field of English literature generally to Japanese minds than to English or American ones. The situation approximates that of Byron who has one sort of reputation in Anglo-Saxon countries, and a very different one on the Continent. With respect to Gissing, Mr. Shigeru Koike, in an article reprinted from its 1963 appearance in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, explains how this odd state of affairs

came about. Early in the twentieth century, a Japanese scholar named Tokuboku Hirata felt in the *Ryecroft Papers* a spirit closely resembling one found in classical Japanese literature, consisting of a love of nature, sensitivity to the changing seasons, a taste for rural seclusion and a devotion to the past. Translations of parts of *Ryecroft* began to appear in Japan in 1909. In the twenties, when the book appeared in the “Kenkyusha English Classics” Series, it became a favorite text for students of English, and its popularity in the schools was insured when it began to appear frequently in examinations. “Why was there such a huge demand for the book?” asks Mr. Koike. And he answers: “Its beautiful and natural style, neither too easy nor too difficult, neither too plain nor too luscious, could serve as the very touchstone for appraising the young pupil’s understanding of the English language, and besides, the pupils, on their part . . . found it very refreshing and even fascinating.” The situation Mr. Koike describes seems to correspond to my own experience with Pierre Loti’s *Pêcheurs d’Islande* as a high school French text. I still have fond memories of Loti’s skillful descriptions of the sea and fishermen’s lives, but I have had to revise the impression, inadvertently created by the inclusion of the book in our curriculum, that Loti was one of the giants of French literature.

The perhaps disproportionate importance Gissing had in the minds of Japanese students of English did not last very long. It is fascinating to learn that the growing nationalism of Japanese life in the late twenties led to *Ryecroft*’s being banned from the schools. Mr. Koike reports that this

-- 13 --

development ushered in a second stage in *Ryecroft*’s Japanese reputation, a time when thoughtful readers found the social criticism it contained pertinent to the increasingly threatening times in which they lived. A book-length study of Gissing was published in 1933 by Masanobu Oda, a critic who felt a strong devotion to him. Oda was the first Japanese to take any real notice of Gissing’s novels, but he did not consider them successful. “He writes in the introduction,” says Mr. Koike, “that he would like to recommend Gissing’s novels, not because they will give the readers any pleasure, but because they will give them pain, and enlighten them, teaching them something of the world.”

The history of Gissing in Japan up to the 1960s, says Mr. Koike, was very largely a matter of the popularity of *Ryecroft*, but more recently his other work has begun to attract attention. Translations of *The House of Cobwebs* and *New Grub Street* have appeared, and a number of the other short stories have been translated, some of them by Mr. Koike himself.

The brief statement, “Gissing and I” by Giichi Kamo, a historian of science, supports Mr. Koike’s contention that Gissing has won a distinct position in the Japanese consciousness of English literature. Beginning, as most readers do, with the *Ryecroft Papers*, Kamo passed to Gissing’s novels of poverty, finding in them a clearer sense of the meaning of the industrial revolution than in economic analyses. Like many others, Kamo feels less interest in Gissing’s work for its own sake than in Gissing’s character as it expresses itself through his revulsion at social conditions and his efforts to maintain standards of beauty and decency in a world hostile to them.

The other two essays in this volume are quite different, being about Gissing’s books in the most physical sense. Mr. Kohler tells how he and Mr. Coustillas were first brought together by a common interest in the problem of collecting Gissing. In the process of gathering Gissing items, they developed an extensive knowledge about Gissing publications, a field in which they had few predecessors. In his capacity as a dealer in rare books, Mr. Kohler undertook to supply Mr. Coustillas with materials, read the novels himself, found that there was a ready market for them,

and became a convert. He gives some interesting details about supply and demand, mentions some of the rare Gissing items bibliophiles ought to watch for, and lists parts of his own enviable collection, which includes a set of first editions, complete except for *Isabel Clarendon*.

Everyone interested in Gissing will be curious to learn how the *Newsletter*'s editor conceived and developed an interest which led him to become Gissing's foremost exponent. Mr. Coustillas's essay, "Collecting George Gissing" is essentially a history of this interest which gives a good deal of bibliographical information. The story begins in academic groves, with a university report on *Demos* – an unusual beginning on two counts, for Gissing was not, in those days, much stressed by universities, and most readers find their way to him through *Ryecroft*. After reading all the Gissing materials available in libraries, Mr. Coustillas found himself watching for Gissing titles in the bookshops he visited. This was the beginning of a long effort which has resulted in what is surely a unique collection.

Mr. Coustillas is certainly correct in saying that the emphasis of his collection is unusual. Unlike most collectors, who limit themselves to first editions or other specialities, he set himself to acquire *all* the editions and forms of publication in which Gissing's work appeared, including colonial editions, translations and serials. This policy is made feasible only by the special conditions of Gissing bibliography. The number of publications is not impossibly large, though it is varied, active and sufficiently extensive, embracing translations in Japanese and Italian, and editions from Australia. Mr. Coustillas shares with the reader a number of problems he has encountered in his world-wide search for Gissing publications, and some of the solutions as well. He has a complete set of first editions (with the exception of *Workers in the Dawn*), and the account of how he acquired the rare *Isabel Clarendon* is a notable story in itself. Mr. Coustillas reports that by January, 1970, after twelve years, he had gathered 400 items.¹

He also says something of the feelings which motivate this diligence. Gissing, he feels (and it is an attitude one detects in all of his Gissing work) is a writer who has never been accepted at his true worth, and who will not be known as he deserves to be without active support from those who

appreciate him. He speaks for many Gissing readers in reporting a sense of identification with him: "an unusual extent, one feels on personal terms with him; there is no barrier of literary coolness between him and his readers. Such a period and such terms of intimacy I have always sensed with the sureness of instinct. Besides, in many a domain, political, social, intellectual, spiritual, I share his opinion and, although in a lesser degree, am able to adopt his attitudes."

Mr. Coustillas mentions one of his forerunners among Gissing collectors, Mr. George Matthew Adams of New York, and I should like to digress briefly to mention my own meeting with him. Mr. Adams' well-known article on collecting was written at a time when the development of Gissing bibliography may be said to have been in its infancy. Though I have completely forgotten who directed me to him, I went to see Mr. Adams in the early days of my Gissing work, and talked with him in the office of the newspaper syndicate he owned, which was located, I think, on Madison Avenue. Like many others, Mr. Adams had first been drawn to Gissing for personal reasons. He told me that he admired Gissing because he too had contended with poverty, and knew what it meant for Gissing to succeed as he had.

One of the important activities Mr. Coustillas has carried on in advancing our knowledge of Gissing has been that of rescuing unpublished work held in manuscript by various libraries in the United States, and putting it into print in carefully edited form. His most notable achievement along

these lines is *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, a volume published two years ago by the press of Johns Hopkins University. But his first venture into this field was the publication of the short story, "My First Rehearsal" in *English Fiction in Transition* in 1966. The sixth Enitharmon Press Series volume consists of this story, another called "My Clerical Rival," and an informative introduction placing the two stories in the record of Gissing's work and relating them to his other short fiction.

Gissing wrote numerous short stories late in his career, became known among editors for his ability with them, and turned them into a good source of income. But his first attempts with the form were hardly successful. He began his career as a writer of short stories under the motivation of

-- 16 --

immediate need, during his penniless sojourn in Chicago. The handful of stories he placed with various newspapers in Chicago earned him enough money to prevent actual starvation, and after he had returned to England and was waiting for *Workers in the Dawn* to be accepted in the winter of 1879-1880, he tried to repeat this by writing five short stories and submitting them to magazines. English magazines proved to be harder to please than American newspapers, however, and none was accepted or published in Gissing's lifetime. The first of the five was published in 1923, two appear in *Essays and Fiction*, and the remaining two are published in this volume, "My Clerical Rival" for the first time.

The two stories are casual efforts, and contrast sharply with the desperate seriousness of the novel Gissing had just completed, but they show much improvement over the American short stories. They are deft, economical and readable, and do not profess emotive or sociological ambitions they are unable to fulfil. The first is about a young man who hopes to become an actor, but is bilked by a *tricheur* who purports to be a theatrical manager. The second is about a student visiting the country who makes the mistake of thinking that the local curate has proposed to the girl he loves, instead of her mother, and prematurely leaves the field, only to learn the correct state of affairs six months later.

Although Gissing does some pleasant things with character and atmosphere in these stories, his plots are thoroughly transparent, and their denouements totally unsurprising. This may well account for their failure to achieve publication. However, they do have a significant quality not found in Gissing's other work – a tone of gentle self-mockery and regretful perception adopted by a relaxed first-person narrator telling about his mistakes. In his novels, of course, Gissing invariably employed a third person style of narrative. But the quietly effective use of the first person in these stories makes one wonder whether he might not have found other ways of maintaining a personal tone if he had continued to develop its possibilities.

Jacob Korg, University of Washington

1 - 500 items, including a first edition of *Workers in the Dawn*, in June 1972. – Ed.

-- 17 --

Notes and News

The *Durham University Journal* for March 1972 contains a very interesting critical article of *Thyrza* by the editor of the journal, J. W. Blench. Of all Gissing's working-class novels, *Thyrza* is Mr. Blench's favourite. In his conclusion, he gives the reasons why *Thyrza* is, in his opinion, a better book than *Demos* or *The Nether World*: "First, the story itself is more natural and convincing than those of the other two, which are more artificially contrived moral fables. Then again, *Thyrza*

expresses a more balanced and sympathetic view of the working-class. The view in *Demos* is too hostile and tendentious; the scales are weighted too heavily against Richard Mutimer, and the caricatures of the socialist agitators are too broad. In *The Nether World* the view is excessively dark; in this novel Gissing was affected by the recent death, in squalid circumstances, of his first wife, and his picture of the misery and horror of life in Clerkenwell is too unrelieved in its gloom. On the other hand, in *Thyrza*, he recognizes a more significant presence of elements of good feeling and behaviour among the poor – and not merely in the exceptional people. Furthermore, his attitude to those higher in the social scale is more realistic and critical than in *Demos*, where the Eldons and Adela do not fully justify his rather naive approval of them. The fruitful contrasts between the classes, which give richness to *Thyrza* are lacking in the exclusively proletarian milieu of *The Nether World*. The general view of society in *Thyrza* is more mature than the rather unbalanced reactionary attitudes of *Demos*; it is more hopeful than in the despairing *The Nether World*. Indeed the grinding and excessive pessimism of *The Nether World* is artistically unpleasing, and the book is too overwhelmingly depressing to allow one to return at all frequently to it. In contrast, *Thyrza* is an attractive novel; tragic it certainly is, but its real elements of beauty give it a lasting appeal.”

Mr. Dennis Butts reports that at its annual conference, at Easter, 1971, the Society for Teachers of English, meeting at Culham College, near Oxford, explored the theme of “Literature and Society at the end of the nineteenth century.” Among the speakers were such well-known Victorian specialists as John Goode and Professor Ian Gregor, and a most stimulating paper was

-- 18 --

delivered on George Gissing by Michael Irwin of the University of Kent, with particular reference to *New Grub Street* and *Demos*.

George Gissing: The Critical Heritage, by Colin Partridge and Pierre Coustillas, has now passed the proof stage and should be appearing in the autumn. The Letters from Gissing to Hick are also in the press.

Gillian Tindall, who was recently in Gissing’s footsteps in the Basque country, reports that the house in which Gissing died at Ispoure is for sale. Any Gissingite interested?

Recent Publications

Books

- *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, New York, Haskell House, 1970. A reprint of the 1927 edition.
- *The House of Cobwebs and Other Stories*, Freeport, N.Y., Books for Libraries Press, 1971. A reprint of the 1906 edition containing Secombe’s Introductory Survey.

Articles, Reviews, etc.

- Keech, James M., “Gissing’s *New Grub Street* and the ‘Triple-Headed Monster,’” *The Serif*

(Quarterly of the Kent State University Libraries), March 1970, pp. 20-24. As the title indicates, this article discusses the function of the three-volume novel in Gissing's story.

- Badolato, Francesco, "Isabel Clarendon," *L'Italia Intellettuale*, July-September 1971, pp. 24-25. A review of the now out-of-print Harvester Press edition.
- Gerber, Helmut E., "Coustillas Reports on Gissing," *English Literature in Transition*, vol. XIV, no. 3, 1971, p. 4.

-- 19 --

- Culler, A. Dwight, "Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century," *Studies in English Literature*, Autumn 1971, pp. 763-65. A review of *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*.
- Yenter, Charles E., "Morley Charles Roberts 1857-1942," *Presenting Moonshine*, December 1971, pp. 17-23. A detailed bibliography in which Gissing appears a number of times.
- Williams, Ioan, ed., *Meredith: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, pp. 8, 523-24. Reproduces extracts from Gissing's correspondence concerning Meredith.
- Green, Roger Lancelyn, ed., *Kipling: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. Item 33 is the well-known article "The Voice of the Hooligan," by Robert Buchanan, in which an anti-jingo extract from *The Crown of Life* is quoted.
- Seymour-Smith, Martin, *Fallen Women*, Panther Books, 1971, pp. 167-69, 178. Deals with *The Unclassed*.
- Ware, Thomas C., "Jerusalem Artichokes in Gissing's Garden: A Postscript to the Allegorical Reading of *The House of Cobwebs*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, Winter 1972, pp. 86-89.
- Badolato, Francesco, "Lo Scrittore George Gissing," *Chiarezza* (Cosenza), January-February 1972, p. 10.
- Anon., "Reprint Reviews," *The Reprint Bulletin* (New York), January-February 1972, p. 16. A review of *Isabel Clarendon*.
- Coustillas, P., "L'Exposition Gissing à Londres," *Etudes Anglaises*, January-March 1972, p. 187.
- Blench, J. W., "George Gissing's *Thyrza*," *Durham University Journal*, March, 1972, pp. 85-114.
- Keating, P. J., "The Secret People and the Victorian Novel," *Books* (National Book League), Spring 1972, pp. 19-24.