

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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The Hero as Politician

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[The present contribution is ch. V of Mr. Kurman’s dissertation, “George Gissing’s Heroes,” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at New York University in 1953.]

Although he never personally involved himself in politics after his abortive youthful dabbings in socialism, George Gissing retained throughout his life a keen interest in the political forces of English society and in legislative reform movements. While this interest is subordinated in most of his novels to relatively narrow personal themes, it would be wrong to overlook the social criticism

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and commentary which Gissing injected into so much of his fiction.

Through Golding, Kirkwood and Waymark, for example, Gissing expressed his anger with a society which permitted the existence of poverty in the midst of plenty. He went further by involving Egremont in a plan which had as its goal the intellectual and cultural awakening of the working class. He used Otway to express extended arguments for pacifism and bitter polemics against imperialism.

It is fully logical, therefore, that at least a portion of Gissing’s fiction should use the political

scene as a backdrop to plot developments. Considering the preoccupation of the author with such problems as financial security, marital happiness and artistic recognition, it is just as logical that only three of his protagonists are intimately concerned with politics.

Another factor that perhaps accounts for this limited attention devoted to political matters was the conviction Gissing held that the people most concerned with legislative reform were fundamentally incapable of acting wisely. It can be inferred from such a conviction that political activity among the lower classes is futile:

You have read about the critical state of the German Crown Prince. What a noteworthy fact that, just because he happens to be a man of common sense who would govern reasonably, all Europe is in tremors lest he should die! It shows how rare such a man is among governors; it shows too what unspeakable fools are the masses of mankind, who confess that they cannot do other than be led into quagmires by any ruler who happens to find a pleasure in seeing them there. (*Letters to His Family*, p. 200)

With a social philosophy that combined a strong sense of the need for social reform with deprecation of the political wisdom of the common people, Gissing resolved the problem by advocating through Wilfrid Athel and Denzil Quarrier that men of wealth and intellect serve as legislators to help those who cannot and will not help themselves. His third politically oriented protagonist, Dyce Lashmar, was intended as a satirical warning against the intellectual impostors who substitute superficial gloss and an eclectic smattering of education for sincerity, profound social understanding and integrity.

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Wilfrid Athel, hero of *A Life's Morning*, is the perfect example of the kind of training and background which Gissing felt was essential to the able liberal legislator. A man who has never experienced "one day of grave suffering" (New York, n.d., p. 211) in his life, Athel is a man of leisure who feels an acute need for social activity.

Concerned primarily and at great length with the romance between Emily Hood and Athel, *A Life's Morning* does not examine extensively the development of the hero as a politician. We find him installed as a member of Parliament before we are well aware that he has decided on a political career. What we do see of his motives, however, is revealing:

One part of his nature revelled in the joy of this foretaste of distinction; he had looked forward to it, had laboured for it, its sweetness was beyond all telling. Triumph had been his aim as a schoolboy; he held it fitting that as a man he should become prominent amongst his fellows. This of politics was the easiest way. To be sure, he told himself that it was a way he would once have sneered at, that it was to rub shoulders with men altogether his inferiors in culture, that, had he held to the ideals of his youth, a longer, a wearier course would have been his, and the chance of a simpler, nobler crown. (p. 274).

Conservative in taste and inclination, Athel is liberal in his political views, though he finds it difficult to ally himself with any disciplined group: "To be sure, if names could be taken as sufficient, he was a Liberal, a Radical; but how different his interpretation of such titles from that they bore to men of affairs! Respect for the masses he had none; interest in their affairs he had none

either. On the other hand, the tone of uninstructed Conservatism ... he altogether despised.” (p. 280).

In sharp contrast to Ryecroft and Rolfe, Athel is curious about every phase of human society and is deeply desirous of expressing himself in a socially creative way. There is no phase of knowledge that he scorns or holds in low regard: “My despair is the universality of my interests... My subject is the history of humanity; I would know everything that man has done or thought or felt.” (p. 14)

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His liberalism is demonstrated forcefully when he pierces the rigid class barriers of nineteenth-century England to become engaged to Emily Hood, a simple working-class girl cast out of the mould from which Emma Vine and Jane Snowdon were fashioned. Having seen her lover stand firm against the snobbish opposition of his family, Emily nonetheless feels that she must break the engagement after her father commits suicide following his exposure as a thief. Partly out of embarrassment and partly out of pride, Emily cannot bring herself to explain the situation to Athel, whom she dismisses summarily.

After a trip to the Continent, Athel returns to England, where he makes a successful bid for Parliament after a group of Liberals convince him that men of his progressive stamp are needed to represent the best interests of the nation. He is about to marry a woman of his own class when he is suddenly re-united with Emily. According to Morley Roberts, the contrived romantic ending of the novel was forced on Gissing by his publisher. Certainly, the contrivance of having Athel marry Emily does not emerge out of the plot in a manner that satisfies the reader.

If Gissing did bow to popular taste in refurbishing *A Life's Morning* from tragedy into romance, it was unquestionably a rare instance of departure from realism. The kind of grim tragedy he developed in *Denzil Quarrier* is more in keeping with the way Gissing looked at life. Quarrier is another man of leisure of superior capability who weathers great personal adversity in fashioning a successful political career.

At the beginning of the novel, Quarrier is living an empty existence very similar to that of Harvey Rolfe. A graduate attorney who has never practised law, Quarrier is living on the proceeds of a comfortable legacy and is occupied with no problems more serious than those growing out of his desultory research on the life and customs of the Vikings. He is living with a woman who has long been separated from her husband. Rigid divorce laws prevent her from obtaining the freedom to marry Quarrier, who, in the deepest spirit of ethics, is her husband in every sense of the word except the legal.

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When approached to stand for Parliament, Quarrier is unable to refuse an opportunity to put his energy and talents into the attractive channel of politics, although he realizes that his mode of living with this “wife” Lillian would, if exposed, cause damaging scandal. Although she has deep misgivings about the venture, Lillian does not communicate her deep sense of impending danger to his political career and to their lives because she realizes that his ambitions have been given new tone and perspective by the thrill of political combat.

Once Quarrier becomes involved in his election campaign, Lillian assumes secondary importance to a sense of dedication. His love for her is still vivid and intense, but now it is surpassed by his desire to enter Parliament. Seeking election as a Liberal, his creed is actually non-partisan:

What sensible man swears by a party? There's more foolery than enough on both sides ... but as for the broad principles concerned, why, Radicalism of course means justice. I put it in this way: If I were a poor devil, half-starved and overworked, I should be a savage Radical; so I'll go in for helping the poor devils. (New York, 1892, p. 29)

Quarrier stresses the need for providing basic economic security for working people:

Every man is justified in claiming food and shelter and repose. As things are, many thousands of people in every English county either lack these necessities altogether, or get them only in return for the accursed badge of pauperdom ... I sympathize with the men who think that nothing can go right until the fundamental injustice is done away with. (p. 30)

It is in keeping with the author's philosophy that Quarrier should desire reforms not to equalize and level social classes but rather to assure the continuation of just and proper social and cultural demarcations:

I believe in the distinction of classes; the only class I would altogether abolish is that of the ragged and the hungry. So long as nature doles out the gift of brains in different proportions, there must exist social subordination. The true Radical

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is the man who wishes so to order things that no one will be urged by misery to try to get out of the class he was born in. (p. 32)

The tragic element of the novel is developed in typical Gissing fashion: one tiny link is fastened to another until an inexorable chain of disaster is forged. Basic to the tragedy is the character of the hero, who lacks sound judgment. His first error is to confess to Glazzard, a close friend, the exact status of his relationship with Lillian. Quarrier is quite unaware of Glazzard's own political ambitions and even laughs at hints that such exist. Out of envy, Glazzard violates a confidence and brings Lillian's real husband on the scene to harass Quarrier.

Quarrier also blunders seriously in failing to estimate the depth of despair which Lillian feels when her husband blackmails them. He is so preoccupied with his political career and so determined to overcome the obstacle presented by the blackmailer, that he fails to recognize her sense of guilt at being the cause of endangering his career.

Finally Quarrier does not appreciate that the feminist Mrs. Wade is jealous of Lillian, and feels herself to be a more fit wife for a rising statesman. He leaves the ailing Lillian in the care of Mrs. Wade, who makes no real effort to stop Lillian from committing suicide. The crisis of the novel, though partially melodramatic, is brilliantly developed: Mrs. Wade, by no means a person of vindictive or homicidal temper, is psychologically incapable of preventing Lillian from destroying herself.

Despite this bitter end to his romantic life, Quarrier continues his political campaigning and becomes a successful member of Parliament. Among the bills he presents is a divorce reform measure, which stands as a symbolic memorial to Lillian. While the novel is not notable for structural force or plot development, its hero emerges as one of the strongest protagonists in Gissing. It is rare indeed for a Gissing hero to show the determination and courage of Quarrier, who set his

sights resolutely on a goal and let nothing stand in his way.

Dyce Lashmar, the title character of *Our Friend the Charlatan*, is only vaguely reminiscent of Athel and Quarrier, who, whatever their weaknesses, were sincere and honest. Lashmar is amoral

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and remains from beginning to end unencumbered by any ethical considerations. The charlatan is a satirical representation, rare indeed for Gissing, which is reminiscent in certain aspects of the egoist Sir Willoughby Patterne of George Meredith.

In a restricted sense, Lashmar may be compared to Dick Mutimer and Reuben Elgar, two other male protagonists through whom Gissing levelled social criticism. Each of these three figures is presented as an evil human result of some phase of English society: Mutimer illustrates the danger of taking a worker out of his class, Elgar shows the danger inherent in an excessively rigid education, and Lashmar is the undisciplined and untrained dilettante, an inevitable by-product of mass education.

Having plagiarized a "bio-sociological" theory of social structure, Lashmar convinces a number of persons of varying degrees of intellect and eminence of his brilliance as an original political philosopher of statesman calibre. Through his exposition of this stolen idea, and a series of clever manoeuvres with women young and old, Lashmar comes very close to attaining political success. He overreaches himself, however, and, after the manner of the Elizabethan and Jacobean morality plays, is undone by his own chicanery. As a result he not only fails to attain political prominence, but also finds himself married to the least attractive and poorest of the three women he has courted.

Gissing lumped together in the person of the charlatan virtually all of the character traits he found undesirable. Lashmar is inconsiderate, selfish, wanton in his affections and a shallow parasite of vast egoism. His love of London is described unsympathetically, just as the hostility to the city of Rolfe and Reardon is portrayed sympathetically. To prove his point, Gissing has Lord Dymchurch, the retiring and modest foil to Lashmar, retreat to the countryside to avoid the damage of further association with the industrialized society that produces charlatans.

In such a manner as to make these views seem ugly, Lashmar is shown to be an exponent of Darwinism, agnosticism, feminism and liberalism. It may be more correct to say that Gissing is

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satirizing the gross popularization and misapplication of these concepts by Lashmar. Unmistakable, however, is the moral that Lashmar is "the coming man," a human phenomenon of the era of mass production, mass education and mass culture.

Lashmar is peculiarly effective with women. Starting as an impoverished, superannuated student who does not wish to work for a living, he uses four women as stepping-stones in his brief political career. Three of the women are young enough to be marriageable, and he proposes to each of them for reasons of pure expedience, uncomplicated at any point by romantic stirrings. It is his thought that he will eventually marry the one who best combines wealth, beauty and social prestige. He is punished with typical Gissing irony when the one he marries becomes impoverished while the girl who had been the poorest of the three is the beneficiary of a large legacy.

It is his apparent honesty that makes Lashmar socially dangerous. He "exhaled an atmosphere of sincerity, and persuaded others because he seemed so thoroughly to have convinced himself." (New York, 1901, p. 12). His political expressions have a ring of authenticity and he appears to be a sagacious reformer guilty of nothing worse than egoism and superiority: "Progress does not mean

guidance by one of the multitude, but by one of nature's elect, and the multitude must learn how to recognize such a man." (p. 70)

The charlatan is not a fully developed character study but rather a vehicle for Gissing to expound his social criticism. There is really very little that is praiseworthy in the character of Lashmar as we see him. And in truth, Gissing did not plan that the charlatan be a rounded figure, since his sole purpose in developing the theme was to present what he considered to be a growing social evil.

What is most striking about the hero as politician is that he is capable of facing life and pursuing his social objectives regardless of personal tragedy. These qualities, evident in both Athel and Quarrier, are seldom seen in Gissing and cannot help but give these two heroes more vitality, although the novels in which they appear are admittedly inferior to Gissing's best.

The attitude of Gissing towards politics has the same contradictory element that exhibits itself in his whole range of ideas. While Athel and Quarrier are liberals, they both reflect contempt of the

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masses of people. Both seek to impose good government from above; they strive for reform to overcome social evil, but do not at any point contemplate the political development of the people they seek to help. As politician, the Gissing hero acts in what he deems to be the best interests of the common people and is to that extent a liberal, but he is decidedly conservative in his views of the possibilities of human advancement.

Through Lashmar, Gissing projects an unflattering picture of the ability of the clever charlatan to deceive and confuse even the brightest and best educated segment of the British public. Lashmar spouts plagiarized phrases which win him an admiring drawing-room audience, despite the fact that he is totally incapable intellectually of supporting his alleged theory with concrete recommendations for legislative action. Lashmar fails only because he toys with the affections of too many women, not at all because of his intellectual knavery.

Lashmar, then, provides Gissing with a vehicle for biting commentary on the susceptibility of even the best-informed Englishman.

It is small wonder that Gissing devoted such slight attention to the political field. Athel and Quarrier are portrayed as good representatives of popular interests, but both go into politics late in their careers, after a degree of failure in other, more artistic, endeavours. The politician, as Gissing saw him, was more likely to be a Lashmar than a sensitive, honest Athel or Quarrier. To Gissing, the politician was part of a social structure which he disliked and even feared. He sought political reform, but he did not see how it could readily be brought about in a society that extolled the charlatan and reviled the honest man. The charlatan needs no more equipment than polished manners, a glib tongue and a borrowed idea for political success.

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Review

George Gissing: *Demos, A Study of English Socialism* (The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1972). With an introduction and notes to the text and on the manuscript by P. Coustillas.

Demos was Gissing's first novel to be taken seriously by a large section of the public and by

critics, sociologists and even politicians. Ever since it was published anonymously in 1886, its success was assured. Later, it is true, Gissing was treated shabbily by publishers, their readers, critics and circulating libraries, but *Demos* went through a large number of editions between 1886 and 1929, since when it was absent from the booksellers' stocks until the present handsome volume of the Harvester Press appeared at the end of the last year.

To attempt a review of *Demos* at the present moment involves a consideration of its value as a novel and a study of Gissing's attitude to what he deliberately called English Socialism. In both cases, one must avoid being wise after the event, for so many developments in novel writing have made that medium practically unrecognisable since the later part of the nineteenth century, and so many significant events have come to modify attitudes in all circles towards the working classes and their evolution.

The story of *Demos* is long and complicated, and although the contemporary critics found nothing particular to condemn in its structure, there were some who judged that one character at least was inconsistent and that some potentially interesting actors in the drama had not been studied in sufficient depth but had left the reader with a too vague and fugitive impression. This latter count does not seem valid. When it is realised that the story moves quickly in its 900 pages, with a large *dramatis personae*, Gissing can hardly be reproached for treating some minor characters in an impressionistic style. For instance, there is Mrs. Westlake, sympathetic, to whom the heroine can resort whenever her mind is troubled and who can soothe without intruding her private life into the narrative: the atmosphere she creates suffices to make her memorable. Then there is a Mr. Wyvern,

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vicar of the Yorkshire parish of New Wanley, who had been at one time a curate in the London slums but had had a nervous breakdown and was, at the time referred to, preaching charity at a comfortable distance from his earlier experiences. Many other minor actors are dealt with more or less briefly, such as the snobbish and intriguing Mrs. Waltham, the mother of the heroine and of a younger son who teases his family with Socialist views but becomes more discreet when promoted by his employers. Dickens might have elevated such characters to immortality, but who should blame Gissing for keeping them in proper perspective?

Gissing's handling of the plot of *Demos* was not always convincing. He seemed to fancy that many of his early stories must necessarily hinge on legal tangles such as lost wills, their whereabouts, etc. He was in the habit of consulting his brother Algernon, the failed solicitor, on these points, but whether Algernon gave him bad advice or whether George himself found his solution satisfying, it remains that the device of discovering the lost will in *Demos* is so far from plausible that the present day reader may find its clumsiness too hard to swallow. M. Coustillas in his Introduction attempts to brush this aside by writing: "Not even the manner in which old Mutimer's will is recovered – something of a joke between George and his younger sister – caused a critic's eyebrow to rise." Quite true, but any novel reader at any date, whether cultured or not, is surely entitled to follow the plot with the illusion that he is faced with live persons and credible events.

George Orwell was no admirer of Gissing's prose and quoted two rather excruciating examples in one of his essays. James Joyce likewise mentioned two other sentences which certainly make one shudder. In *Demos* one finds very few of such blemishes. Occasionally a phrase like:

"Mrs. Waltham had made up her mind that there should be a house in London,
with the delights appertaining thereto"

gives the impression of being written in shopkeeper's English, and then there is the hyperbolic:

“Her eyes were moist once or twice, and then no dream of artist soul ever

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embodied such passionate loveliness, such holy awe, as came to view on her countenance”

which to the reader of today might appear less poetical than comical. Yet to pick out such passages here and there is not altogether fair, as Gissing's narrative in *Demos* is usually straightforward and, in the dramatic scenes, very much to the point. His dialogue is always pertinent and at times quite sparkling. *Demos* remains a most readable novel.

Apart from that of Adela, the heroine, the characterisation is rarely at fault. Richard Mutimer, the Socialist orator, who inherits a fortune and later loses it, is well drawn except that the author seems to load the dice against him when it comes to exposing to what extent he is spoilt by money and how, after losing it, he does everything possible to make his wife unhappy while she is doing all in her power to help him in his troubles. Mutimer is shown at his best, however, in his genuine affection for his family: there is his mother, house proud, scornful of upper classes and made unhappy by her son's sudden access to wealth; his sister Alice, evil-tongued and vindictive, with her superficially pretty face and her conceit which earns her the nickname of “the Princess”; and finally, the ne'er-do-well young brother, 'Arry who, in spite of all Richard's guidance and generosity, is a sneak-thief doomed to spend a life in and out of jail. Richard does not deal so kindly with his fiancée Emma Vine, a pathetic little sempstress who works under sweated conditions to keep alive a parasitic family.

On receiving his legacy, Richard decides to start a model factory at New Wanley on land owned by his late relative, and this factory is to provide the workmen with good wages and other substantial benefits, but his inexperience in business, his gullibility and his personal ambition bear threats of failure to the works even before he finds himself dispossessed. After his ruin, he is shown at his worst, returning to Socialist tub-thumping, devising a scheme with his ex-foreman Rodman by which his Socialist friends are to invest their savings in some misty speculation in Ireland. Then Rodman turns out to be a rogue, he has disappeared with all the money, and Richard is faced by an angry mob demanding the return of their subscriptions. His wife supports him to the last and tries to

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save him, but he is chased through the streets by his former Socialist friends, egged on by rival Socialist elements, and he is finally stoned to death in the house where Emma Vine lives. This coincidence brings Emma once again to the fore, but Gissing avoids sentimentalising over her although the critic of the *Spectator* wrote that “we would wish his drift had enabled the author to make Emma Vine, and not Adela Waltham, his heroine.”

The elder Mutimer had let it be known for some years that he was leaving nearly all his property to young Hubert Eldon, the son of a widow living on slender means at New Wanley. Hubert had, however, left for the Continent and had failed for a very long time to send any news of himself either to his mother or to the old man's appeals and entreaties, so finally old Mutimer had decided to alter his will and had made an appointment with his solicitor to carry this out. On the eve of this appointment, Mutimer dies of a stroke in his pew at the parish church. In the absence of the expected will, Eldon has no claim to the estate. He returns to England soon after, and it appears that

he had been involved in a somewhat dubious love-affair with a foreign actress, which had ended in a duel, in which Hubert had been seriously wounded. Adela Waltham, the heroine of *Demos*, had for some time been secretly in love with Hubert, but Richard Mutimer, the hero of the day, feels that it would add to his prestige if he were to marry a young, beautiful, cultured lady like Adela. Her scheming mother reveals to her Hubert's disgrace, exaggerating greatly his iniquity, and Adela accepts Mutimer without great resistance. As his wife, she behaves in a human and intelligent manner, making friends with all the wives and families of the workers in Mutimer's factory, where she becomes very popular. Throughout, her conduct towards Mutimer, whom she does not love, is impeccable, and when poverty returns to him, she acts with the most admirable courage and devotion.

When once the original will is found, Eldon accepts his fortune as his natural right, never taking into account that if his benefactor had survived a couple of days, he might well have been disinherited. He meets Adela by chance, and when she begs him to leave the model factory as it is, he flatly refuses and swears that it will be destroyed to make room for the beauty spot which had

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formerly been in its place. However true it may be that glades of trees are aesthetically superior to chimney stacks, Eldon's dismissal of the staff is unfeeling. He does not like the working man and makes this clear to the vicar, Mr. Wyvern, who replies that he does not want the world to change, and blames the Socialists for their agitation in favour of the workers:

“Changes will come about but not of these men's making or devising. And for the simple reason that they are not sincere... The Proletarian Socialists do not believe in what they say, and therefore they are so violent in saying it ... if the movement continue we shall see miserable examples of weakness led astray by popularity, of despicable qualities aping greatness.”

Eldon and Wyvern part, after the clergyman has assured him that he approves entirely of his destruction of the factory. “He shook Hubert's hand affectionately and left him.”

To return to Adela, she lives in retirement with her mother and has recovered her beauty. She is incensed at the behaviour of some of Mutimer's old political enemies and publishes a letter in the local liberal paper proclaiming his innocence of a number of charges brought against his memory. More than a year after her husband's death, she goes to London to visit Mrs. Westlake. There she meets Hubert Eldon and suddenly, three pages later, she agrees to marry him on his somewhat ambiguous promise that, in spite of their different views, “he will make himself what she would have him.” No wonder the critics of the period thought Adela's decision incompatible with the confidence they had been encouraged to harbour in her firmness and integrity. She had at one time cast Eldon off for his alleged scandalous behaviour, but of this there is no further mention. He had shown himself offensively hostile to her in the matter of closing down the New Wanley works. And now she was to live on the Mutimer riches for the second time. What is disconcerting is that Gissing himself seemed to regard this false happy ending as entirely desirable.

Writers on Gissing have often bewailed his lack of a sense of humour (which Orwell

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denounced as “that curse of English writers”). Nevertheless, the author of *The Paying Guest* and *Will Warburton* possessed a notable sense of comedy. In *Demos*, take one last look at “the

Princess.” She had married the ex-foreman Rodman, who had promptly pocketed her dowry, and Richard Mutimer had been obliged to sue him for its return, as Eldon’s solicitor was pressing for it. Rodman teases her cynically, and every time she weeps he orders her “to turn off the waterworks.” When she asks him to kiss her he replies: “Poor blubbery Princess. Pah! Your lips are like a baby’s.” Rodman is last heard of as being arrested for fraud and bigamy. Poor Princess, no longer a married woman, she accepts the proposal of one Mr. Keene, an oily journalist and shady election agent, whose obsequious courtship leaves one wondering whether his love-making will make her happier than that of the brutal Rodman.

Gissing’s views on Socialism and social questions in general are summed up accurately by M. Coustillas. He was theoretically in favour of all reforms to aid the underpaid workers, to give them proper housing and a decent education, but he felt that the agitators of his time were irresponsible blockheads and that their appeals to the mob for open revolt would serve only to make the workers’ fate a harder one still. He did not like the average working man: his experience, even with some members of his own family, had brought him in touch with vulgar and ignorant characters, with no practical notions of organisation and no particular desire for improvement of the mind – let alone “culture.” Like Mr. Westlake in *Demos*, who after a period of militancy became an arm-chair Socialist and toned down his diatribes when his paper “The Fiery Cross” was renamed “The Beacon,” Gissing continued to be on the side of the oppressed but eschewed all political activity. Perhaps he did not go so far as the Rev. Wyvern, quoted above, but was not wholly unsympathetic to that clergyman’s views. Yet, while Gissing was still alive, the Trade-Unions (which had been legalised much earlier in the century) were taken over by hard-headed leaders who managed without violence to form a parliamentary party which obtained extensive improvements in the workers’ lot. Could Gissing have foreseen that within three years of his death, one of the Socialist agitators of his day, John Burns, was to become a Cabinet Minister? As for the Unions, it

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is better to lower the curtain on their present power and activities, for the spectacle would not be fit for an audience of the shades of Gissing himself, of the Westlakes and the Wyverns, the Eldons and perhaps even the Mutimers. – C. S. Collinson.

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A Discovery: *Will Warburton* as a serial

P. Coustillas

While doing some research at the British Museum Newspaper Library, at Colindale, in February, I was not a little surprised to find this announcement in large type in the *New Age* for December 15, 1904, p. 797:

Mr. Gissing’s Last Novel | Our New Serial | Commences on January 5, 1905 | Will Warburton: | A Romance of Real Life.

There followed a five-paragraph description of the story ending as follows:

The reader feels that the story is in praise of honesty, and his warm sympathies are drawn out towards the struggling middle-class and poor of our great cities.

Their goodness to one another and their hope amid the sordid surroundings of their life, impress him. He sees that the highest type of human love must be fed on virtue, and that the successful life is the straightforward and “simple” one.

Other advertisements appeared in the next two numbers on December 22 and 29, and the serialization of the novel began as announced on January 5, 1905. The story was divided into 23 instalments, the last of which appeared on June 8.

Before Gissing’s death, James B. Pinker had tried to sell to the Northern Newspaper Syndicate the serial rights of *Will Warburton*, but the negotiations had failed partly perhaps through Gissing’s fault. No further mention of the matter occurs in any of the letters and papers of the Gissing circle for 1904-1905.

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The *New Age* dealt generously with Gissing’s work in his lifetime, probably without his being aware of it. Full-page reviews of *The Whirlpool*, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, *The Town Traveller* and *The Crown of Life* appeared in its columns. The latter book in particular was warmly praised, as could be expected in this anti-imperialist journal.

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Letter to the Editor

George Gissing’s Schoolmaster

I have been interesting myself for some time past in James Wood, who kept the school at Alderley Edge which George Gissing attended for a couple of years, and I have now pieced together the outline of his early career and discovered his connection with Mrs. Gissing’s helpful friends; this information comes mainly from the quaker registers of births, marriages and burials, and from the printed lists of scholars published by some of the quaker schools.

If you will look at the list of Subscribers to T. W. Gissing’s “Ferns of Wakefield,” you will notice, along with the names of his solicitors Mr. Banks and Mr. Ianson, and of M. B. Hick, that of Mr. H. Benington. This was Henry Benington, a quaker who kept a draper’s shop in the Market Place, under the style of George Benington & Co., not far from the premises of his fellow-naturalist and tradesman the chemist. Henry Benington had a sister Rachel, and she became the wife of James Wood. So here we have, I think, the precise circumstances which led to George Gissing and his brothers being sent “with the assistance of friends,” to Lindow Grove School at Alderley Edge.

Born about 1834, James Wood was the son of a quaker, William Wood, who had “married out,” i.e. to a non-quaker. Their children did not qualify for “Birthright Membership” of the Society of Friends, and at that time such children were ineligible for admittance to the Society’s boarding schools; but the losses to the Society caused by the rule against marrying out had led to a

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counter-measure – the establishment of schools intended for just such families as the Woods. So James Wood was sent to Rawdon School, near Leeds, established in 1831 for “the children of parents who have forfeited their membership yet come to our Meetings and are in need of a good religiously-based education.” The school lists show him as a scholar there from 1843 to 1849.

In 1851 he became a student at the Flounders Institute, not far from the quaker boarding school at Ackworth, near Pontefract. This was a small teacher-training college which provided a more advanced academic course for intending teachers, and its students had to be “attached by conviction to the principles of the Society of Friends.” I take this to mean that they had to be quakers in good standing, and I draw the inference that James Wood had made a formal application for membership some time between leaving Rawdon and entering the Flounders Institute. The statement in “George Gissing at Alderley Edge” that he had been educated at Ackworth is not correct as regards his schooldays, though it is topographically accurate for his later student period at the Flounders.

Eight years later, on 27th December, 1859, James Wood was married at Wakefield Meeting House to Rachel Benington, daughter of the late George Benington; James was described as a schoolmaster, of Dallas Place, Lancaster. Four of their children were born in Lancaster: George Benington 1860, Arthur Syms 1861, Janet Rachel 1863, (Jan.), Liliias Mary 1863 (Dec.) Then came the move to Alderley Edge, where the remaining three were born: James Herbert 1866, Stanley 1867, and William Stuart 1869. Surely “George Benington Wood” and “Arthur Wood” (p. 10 of “George Gissing at Alderley Edge”) were his own sons.

William Wood, the father of James, had become in 1849 the Secretary of The Retreat at York, the pioneer institution for the humane treatment of the insane, which was founded by a quaker tea-merchant in 1796. The Secretary is reputed to have had a strong sense of good order, refusing to pay a workman who attended one pay-day in his shirtsleeves until he fetched a jacket! After the death of his wife Jane (the non-quaker) William Wood remarried, this time to a Rowntree of the York chocolate firm – a real Quaker if ever there was one – and he died “a Gentleman.”

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I have been struck by the absence in Friends House Library of material relating to James Wood and his school; no advertisements in “The Friend,” where all the private quaker schools advertised, though I did find one notice of his Pupils’ Successes, but not in George Gissing’s years; no obituary notice recounting tireless efforts for the benefit of quaker youth! The other rather surprising feature to me was the burial of his first wife, Rachel Benington, and of himself, in a parish churchyard in mid-Wales.

I am inclined to think that James Wood’s membership in the Society of Friends may have become little more than nominal, having been perhaps entered into partly in pursuance of his desire to train as a teacher. The eventual character of his school was most unquakerly – drill sergeants indeed! – and a search of local quaker archives covering the later Colwyn Bay period has produced no evidence that the Wood family’s quakerism was other than a formality. But James Wood must have been a man of great ability and determination, doing much good according to his lights, and he did give the young George Gissing the chance of a sound academic foundation. Yet if only Rachel Benington had married some other schoolmaster – he might have been a happier boy!

Margaret Kohler

Notes and News

Ueli Annen’s study of Gissing’s short stories will be published in Switzerland later this year and C .C. Kohler will bring out a new edition of *George Gissing: A Study in Literary Leanings*

(1966), with an introduction by P. Coustillas.

Dr. Francesco Badolato reports an unexpected mention of Gissing and his interest in Calabria in *L'Automobile* for March 1972. Dr. Badolato has edited two books by Gissing for Italian secondary schools, *The Paying Guest* and a selection of *Six Short Stories*. Both books will have an introduction and notes.

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P. F. Kropholler has succeeded in tracing the elusive Landor quotation in *Isabel Clarendon*, vol. II, p. 201: "Wakeful he sits, and lonely, and unmoved, | Beyond the arrows, views, or shouts of men." (*Count Julian*, Act V, scene 2).

The *Western Morning News* (Plymouth) for February 27, 1973, carried an interesting article entitled "Japanese Seeks 'Novel' View of Exeter." It reports that Mr. Isamu Masuda, manager of the foreign relations department of Showa Denko, K. K., of Tokyo, one of Japan's largest cable manufacturing companies is planning to visit Exeter this spring. He wrote to Exeter Information Bureau: "The reason for my interest in Exeter is that I have read George Gissing's 'The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft,' and have been fascinated by the landscape and other natural charms of the Exeter area as described in that novel. I would, therefore, be grateful if you would let me know as soon as possible whether the Exeter area in spring is, to a reasonable extent, as Gissing has described it."

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Recent Publications

- *Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing, Together with Gissing's Letters to Hick*, ed. by P. Coustillas, London, Enitharmon Press, 1973, £2.75.
- George Gissing, "An English Coast-Picture," reprinted from *Appleton's Journal*, July 1877, in *Presenting Moonshine*, Oct. 31, 1972, pp. 6-14.
- Gillian Tindall, "Going Gissing," *New Statesman*, Dec. 29, 1972, pp. 981-82. A review of *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* and the Harvester Press edition of *Demos*.