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“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
Commonplace Book

“A crazy idea ... All gone off in smoke”: George Gissing and Miss Curtis

MARKUS NEACEY
Berlin

Part One

Gissing in Eastbourne Anno 1888

Henry James once remarked that George Gissing was “quite particularly marked out for what is called in our profession an unhappy ending.”¹ Plainly, misfortune and adversity stand out on the map of Gissing’s short life like a chain of mountain peaks. One thinks of the early death of his father in 1870, his disastrous affair with Marianne Helen Harrison in Manchester, his arrest for stealing in the locker room at Owens College, the veiled period in prison, his struggles in America, his married life with Nell on his return to England, and the woeful financial and critical failure of his first published novel. These episodes marked Gissing for the rest of his life, so much so in fact that he felt himself forever excluded from the possibility of marrying a middle-class woman. In part one of this essay I shall look closely at another significant period in his life, namely the four weeks prior to the death of his first wife, Nell, on 29th February 1888. In part two I shall both introduce some new information about the hitherto elusive Miss Curtis, whom Gissing met during his stay in Eastbourne and later fell in love with, and supply further details about her family. In the light of these discoveries, I shall conclude with a reappraisal of her brief part in Gissing’s life.

What do we know about Gissing’s circumstances and frame of mind as we enter the fateful month of February 1888? It was almost a year since he had penned his last book, *Thyrza*. In the meantime he had made countless false starts, discarded a completed novel, *Clement Dorricott: A Life’s Prelude*, and latterly during the worst winter in years, despite recurring colds and headaches, managed to produce two and a half volumes of *The Insurgents*. Besides his own troubles, he had also been worrying about his

brother's foolhardy decision to give up his job as a solicitor so as to support his family by novel-writing. Algernon's first novel, *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, was currently at proof stage.

Just returned on 4th February 1888 from a short stay with his brother's family in Broadway where he had been recovering from a bad cold, Gissing was none too pleased, his diary reveals, to find a note from John Lane, the manager of Cornwall Residences where Gissing had been a tenant for three years, "requesting me to have my windows cleaned, as the appearance was disreputable!"² He also mentions that he now had a clearer idea of where he was going with *The Insurgents*.

On Sunday the 5th February in a cheery letter to Catherine, Algernon's wife, we learn that Gissing has set about cleaning his windows. Annoyingly a "shrewd"³ wind had covered his fireplace in soot compelling him to engage a plumber to look at his chimney. Then, comparing his own measly dinner to the meaty diet at Smallbrook Cottage, he attributes his recent improvement in health to Catherine's cooking. In another letter to her six days later the mood is very different. Plagued by incessant headaches, he tells her, he has since visited a doctor, who advised him to get away to the seaside. He speaks of taking the "very decided step"⁴ of going to Eastbourne on Monday morning with the intention of working there. These two intimate letters from Gissing to Catherine clearly reveal their mutual fondness for each other. Doubtless, in view of the kind care she took of him at Smallbrook Cottage, Gissing must at times have envied his brother his good fortune in having such a comely (the photo in volume three of the *Collected Letters* confirms this), intelligent, and supportive wife. Only towards the end of his life, following two calamitous marriages and several unreciprocated infatuations with women who might have been considered as fitting partners, would he find a woman of comparable attainments.

A despairing diary entry on 7th February a few days after his first letter to Catherine, explains the sudden decision to flee London:

Two days of blank misery; incapable of work; feeling almost ready for suicide. This evening a little light comes to me. Will it be credited, that I must begin a new novel?⁵

Having discarded *Clement Dorricott*, he now realised that his work on yet another almost completed novel, *The Insurgents*, had been "a terrible waste of time."⁶ After several further attempts to begin a new novel over the next days proved futile, Gissing decided to give up on London and

escape to Eastbourne in the hope of doing better work there. Headaches, sleepless nights, and the inability to produce words despite hours' toiling at his desk had taken their toll.

In the silence of the night, when restful sleep would not come to him, inevitably he must have looked back over the ten years he had been writing. Already, in the face of constant loneliness and hardship, he had written six three-volume novels, not to speak of the lost and discarded manuscripts. For all that, true success had been denied him. Of all his works only *Demos* had made a stir; yet it had brought him little in the way of reputation or financial gain. His last, *Thyrza*, of which he had thought so much, had gone the way of the others, finding few readers outside the subscription libraries.⁷ A serious novelist could scarcely have applied himself with more energy and devotion to his task. And what was his reward? According to Gissing's publishers he should count himself fortunate if he earned fifty pounds for a book. What kind of a wage was that? What kind of a system, which allowed such exploitation? Did he not deserve better? And then there was that other matter, which burdened his mind day and night. Why must he, a young man of letters, be condemned to a life of intolerable loneliness? Why could he not find the companion for life he so yearned for? All these questions he must have put to himself, as he sometimes did in his letters to his German friend, Eduard Bertz. And no matter how long he mulled over them in his mind, he must have felt hemmed in by circumstance. After all, he dared not even contemplate finding love with another woman. For, in his time the bonds of marriage were as iron. Hence, according to Victorian convention, even though living apart from Nell, he was still married and bound to her and must needs support her as long as she lived. And she was still a young woman. No, scarcely in all his days, as his diary testifies, had he felt more wretched, and never had the future seemed more hopeless.

Other than as an act of desperation, then, how else can one understand Gissing's decision to go to Eastbourne? For, in the freezing temperatures and wretched winter weather of February 1888, Eastbourne was not the most prudent choice of escape. As Morley Roberts writes in his fictionalised biography of Gissing, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, "Why he should have selected, in Christmas weather and an east wind, what is possibly the coldest town in England in such conditions, I cannot say."⁸ Gissing had first discovered Eastbourne on Friday, 24th September 1886, after an earlier breakdown had caused him to flee to Brighton for a few days. In a letter to his sister Margaret, at the time, he explains,

I went to Brighton but found the place impossible; a more hideous & vulgar seaside town the mind of man has not conceived. So on Friday morning I walked along eastward, – through Rottingdean, Newhaven, Seaford, to Eastbourne. And here at length was rest.⁹

What did Gissing object to in Brighton? A perusal of a number of contemporary prints by the Victorian photographer Francis Frith, give the clue to Gissing's dislike of "London by the sea." Whereas a view of the Brighton seafront shows a crude architectural arrangement, with here and there the odd elegant building sandwiched between an uneven row of dilapidated boarding-houses or cheap hotels, the parade appears overrun with horse-drawn traffic, holidaymakers, and sideshows. It appears that already by the late 1880s regency Brighton had given way to the garish commercialism and acquired the seediness of character, which Graham Greene describes so well in *Brighton Rock*. In Gissing's own very evocative words in a letter to his sister Ellen "Brighton is simply a lump of wealthy London put back to back with a lump of Whitechapel & stuck down on a most uninteresting piece of coast."¹⁰

So Gissing moved on to the more tranquil Eastbourne where he was to remain for a few days. On his return to London he waxed lyrical to Margaret about its virtues:

Surely there is no more beautiful watering-place. It is handsomely built, with broad, clean streets, almost all of themavenued with fine, thick chestnuts. I could not discover a dirty thoroughfare, & saw no single blackguard, – yet there is a population of twenty-thousand or so. To the east is Pevensey Bay, a splendid sweep to Hastings; immediately west is Beachy Head, a grand chalk cliff, about 600 ft. high, the sea up to the base. Behind, the magnificent stretch of the South Downs.

The calm was wonderful. On the top of the Head I could light my pipe without sheltering the match. I could sit each night on the shore till ten o'clock, feeling perfectly warm & comfortable. It is clear that Eastbourne will in future be my health-resort.¹¹

After Gissing's first stay, in the novel he was writing at the time, he even sent the eponymous *Thyrza* to Eastbourne twice, the second time to recover from a breakdown. Moreover, the hero of the novel, Walter Egremont, follows the very same route Gissing took from Brighton to Eastbourne.

Upon finishing *Thyrza*, Gissing was true to his word, returning to Eastbourne at the end of January 1887 for a short holiday. Although he caught a cold, the town continued to make an excellent impression on him. Indeed he was so taken by the natural beauty of the town and its surroundings that

there was even talk in the autumn of his mother and sisters making their home there. In any event, it seems the lingering memory of these first two, generally happy, stays in Eastbourne decided him to return there. As his holiday correspondence suggests, the place came to represent a kind of safe harbour to Gissing in times of depression.

In the 1880s, “the Empress of Watering Places,” Eastbourne, known by the locals as “Eastbun,” was noted for its spacious parks, avenues lined with trees, and the many fine, new churches, such as the spectacular All Souls in Susans Road which was built in 1883. There were also many girls’ schools, a splendid Town Hall with a 130 feet high tower was opened in October 1886, and the following year golf links were laid out on the Downs behind the town. By 1888 the population had swelled to 29,000. For Gissing the main attractions of Eastbourne, apart from the quiet orderliness of the town, the almost continental appearance of the town centre, and the tremendous sweep of the Grand Parade along the seafront, were Beachy Head and the South Downs which extended towards Lewes and Brighton.

On 13th February, Gissing left for Eastbourne fully intending to stay upwards of a month. He left his flat in the hands of Mrs King¹² in readiness for the invasion of some plasterers. At Victoria station Gissing paid seven shillings and sixpence for an open return ticket and travelled third class on the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway, a journey in 1888 of just under two hours and fifteen minutes according to *Bradshaw’s Railway Guide*. Not for Gissing the comforts of first class travel or a stay at the luxurious Grand Hotel on the promenade, which Queen Victoria enjoyed during a short visit in her jubilee year of 1887. On the contrary, upon arrival at the recently rebuilt Eastbourne Station (an oval booking office was added in the 1930s, otherwise it remains as Gissing saw it), he took two rooms near the Old Town at the far more modest establishment of 27 Brightland Road for ten shillings a week, just a few doors away from where he stayed the previous year. His scrapbook gives an interesting description of his lodgings:

Sitting-room at 27 Brightland Rd., Eastbourne. Looking-glass over mantelpiece, its gilt frame enveloped all round with yellow gauze, – I suppose for protection. On mantelpiece, small clock between symmetrical petty ornaments, which are guarded by a piece of string tied along in front of them. On each side of looking glass hangs a silhouette (one a sharp-nosed girl, the other an old man with high collar & shirt front left white) in deep black wooden frame. Up above mirror an old oil-painting of a ship, the canvas bulging, subject very dirty & obscure. Other pictures: several of

the most horrible German prints (“Flirtation,” two boys in a garden paying attention to a little girl of six; “Jealousy,” another scene bet. same trio; “Trial of Strafford in West. Hall.”; “Trial of William Lord Russell in Old Bailey” &c). Also, an old picture of the Royal Fam. of England in days of Queen’s youth, & an engraving of Destr.ⁿ of Nineveh by John Martin. – On inner window-sill a row of flower-pots, perpetually being knocked down by the curtains & blinds. Round table too big for the room, sofa; side-board supporting dessert plates in a row. Low cupboard, with big tea-tray standing upright on it.¹³

It is worthwhile noting that little in matters of taste and standard have changed at the average Eastbourne guest house since Gissing’s day. His landlady in 1888, Mary Brown, the single occupant of the house, was in Gissing’s words “a poor old single woman,”¹⁴ although in fact only fifty-four at the time. A native of Piccadilly, she was still the lonely occupant three years later in the 1891 census, but by 1901 new people had moved in.

Having engaged rooms, Gissing probably made his way straight up to Beachy Head, as he told Catherine he would do, to “look inland over the dark South Downs, & eastward over Pevensey to Hastings, & southwards over the sea to France!”¹⁵ In recent centuries, this chalk headland about three miles southwest of Eastbourne, which rises to 575 feet at its summit, has been eroding at an alarming rate. In 1813 a large mass of chalk measuring three hundred by eighty feet fell into the sea, and just two years ago another chunk of chalk fell away from the mainland. During the nineteenth century the beach below the cliff was the scene of many a shipwreck. In a letter to Ellen on his second visit to Eastbourne in January 1887, Gissing himself was able to report seeing two wrecks lying “on the shore, remnants of the storm in December.”¹⁶ In more recent decades Beachy Head has become notorious as a final destination for suicides from all over Britain, who come to throw or drive themselves over the precipice. During the summer the *Eastbourne Herald* describes such fatalities almost on a weekly basis. In Gissing’s day the summit was a magnet point for Sunday promenaders and courting couples. Old postcards of Beachy Head from around 1900 show well-dressed gentlemen and their ladies strolling along the cliff top or lounging in the grass. We know from Gissing’s letters that he spent many happy hours of his various stays in Eastbourne roaming upon the cliff. Whether morning or evening, in good weather or stormy winds, there was nothing he found more calming for his nerves than going up to the summit, where once atop he would light his pipe and enjoy the panoramic views across the Downs and out to sea.

That first evening back at his lodgings Gissing dispatched several letters, informing among others Mrs King, his Wakefield family, Algernon, and Morley Roberts of his address. Did he also send Nell his address? Curiously in his diary entry that evening he reports experiencing “bad cold weather,”¹⁷ whereas to his brother he writes of “a glorious sunny & frosty day.”¹⁸ A sweeping comparison of his diary and letters would seem to suggest that his diary served as the deposit of his moodier or sober thoughts and perceptions. However one can detect in these disparities the mood swings to which Gissing was prone at this time.

Gissing slept “poorly”¹⁹ the first night and continued to be in “low spirits”²⁰ the next day, while managing to produce five pages of the first chapter of a new novel. Most likely it was on this Tuesday, 14th February, that he subscribed to Gowland’s Library in Marine Parade so as to read a number of novels by his contemporaries. Originally opened as Fisher’s library in the Sea Houses on Marine Parade in 1796, after a few more changes of hands, it was eventually taken over by T. S. Gowland in 1862. The library building was demolished in 1948, long after it had fallen into disuse, and been superseded by the present Eastbourne public library in Grove Road.

After the 14th February there are strangely no further entries in his diary until the 29th February. Fortunately, his letters give a significant clue to his activities during these two weeks. A letter to Algernon, for example, tells us that Morley Roberts, his closest friend at the time, came to stay for a few days with Gissing in his lodgings on Wednesday 15th. So they did not travel down to Eastbourne together as Roberts falsely writes in his account of this episode. Since they were in the habit of visiting each other on alternative Sundays in those days, more than likely they had met on Sunday 12th as usual, and Gissing had urged Roberts to join him as he was later to maintain in his fictional biography.

If Roberts’ record²¹ of his hardships in his Chelsea lodgings during the winter of 1887-1888 and Gissing’s diary entries for the same period are anything to go by, the two men who met at Eastbourne station on 15th February were very much companions in sorrow. Roberts, having recently embarked upon a career as a novelist after the minor success of his travel book *The Western Avernus* in 1887, was finding the writer’s life a precarious undertaking. Already started upon his bohemian novel, *In Low Relief*, which would not see publication until 1890, like Jasper Milvain in his early career in *New Grub Street*, he was struggling to support himself

on occasional journalistic pieces. Eventually, in a career spanning fifty-five years, Roberts would write in excess of seventy-five books at a rate of one or two a year. Besides writing novels, plays, and short stories, he would assume competence in almost every branch of literature from biography, poetry, and travel books to biology, political philosophy, and sociology, while specialising in the genre of adventure or sea short story *à la* Jack London and W. W. Jacobs. After 1900 Roberts published a volume of short stories almost on a yearly basis for upwards of twenty years. In his fictional biography he mentions suggesting time and time again to Gissing that he try his hand at short stories because “they were the easiest way of making money.”²² It would be five years before Gissing turned to writing short stories seriously and was able to enjoy the welcome financial benefits.

The four or five days Roberts spent with Gissing were of necessity decidedly active days for both of them. The draughty walls of Miss Brown’s house combined with heavy snowfall overnight meant there was little comfort to be found in sitting around the fireplace or wandering around the town centre. As a result, on the Thursday the two intrepid ramblers set out across the snow-covered Downs to East Dean. Gissing, who thought nothing of going for a robust twenty-mile stroll in those far-off days when waiting for the number sixteen bus was considered poor sport, positively glows in his report of “one of the most wonderful walks I ever had. An east wind was blowing so terrifically that in places one could scarcely stand, & the new fallen snow was drifting into heaps of four & five feet deep upon the sunk road, – the wind now & then blowing it in showers across the country.”²³ As this description shows Gissing loved nothing better than to pit himself against the elements, to feel the buffeting wind at his back and the breath of sea air on his face. For one who was at his happiest and most carefree amidst countryside scenes, it is pitifully ironical that he was compelled to spend most of his adult life surrounded by the sounds and smells of an industrial city. In his fictional biography of Gissing, Roberts has left us a humorous account of their excursion and its aftermath:

... we went for a long walk across the Downs to the little village of East Dean. It was blowing a whole gale from the north-east, and it was quite impossible to go near the steep cliffs ... I did not remember many colder days, in spite of my travels, but we persevered, and at last came to the little village and there took refuge in the public-house and drank beer ... The walk back to Eastbourne tried us both hard, for neither of us had been well fed for months, and the wind and snow in our faces made walking heavy and difficult. Nevertheless Maitland [Gissing] was now almost bois-

terously cheerful, as he often was outwardly when he had most reason to be the opposite. While he walked back the chief topic of conversation was the very excellent nature of the pudding which he had instructed our landlady to prepare against a hungry return ... thus we came back to our poverty-stricken den in good spirits. But, alas, the dinner that day was actually disastrous. The meat was grossly overdone, the vegetables were badly cooked, the beer was thin and flat. We were in dismay, but still we said to each other hopefully that there was the pudding to come. It was brought on and looked very fine, and Maitland cut into it with great joy and gave me a generous helping. I know that I tasted it eagerly, but to my tongue there was an alien flavour about it. I looked up and said to Maitland, "It is very curious, but this pudding seems to me to taste of kerosene." Maitland laughed, but when his turn came to try he laughed no longer, for the pudding actually did taste of lamp oil. It appeared, on plaintive and bitter inquiry, that our unfortunate landlady after making it had put it under the shelf on which she kept her lamp gear. We subsided on melancholy and mouldy cheese.²⁴

In a letter to his brother the same day, Gissing voices his dissatisfaction with his novel *A Life's Morning*, which although written in 1885, was being belatedly serialised in the *Cornhill*, referring to it as "sad stuff."²⁵ Two days later to Ellen, his younger sister, he is even stronger in his condemnation of the story, writing, "... the Cornhill story is disgusting me. I fear it gets poorer & poorer; I can only hope that it will very soon be forgotten."²⁶ In later years he would have a far better opinion of his Wakefield novel.

On Friday, 17th February, Gissing and Roberts took a less strenuous walk in icy winds to Pevensey to look at the castle ruins. Upon his first visit to the castle the year before a mightily impressed Gissing referred to it as, "one of the finest ruins I ever saw."²⁷ This time round the weather seemed to have spoilt the view. For in a letter to Ellen on the Saturday, Gissing reports, "The old castle looked rather grim in such weather."²⁸ To this he adds, "I have done no work yet, but Roberts goes to-morrow morning, & I daresay I shall settle down very soon."²⁹ Morley Roberts did return to London on Sunday morning, and not on the 29th February as he was later to insist. In a short note to Algernon that Sunday, Gissing writes, despite the continuing snowfall and the coldness of his rooms, that he is feeling "vastly better in all ways."³⁰ Roberts' companionship had helped him to forget his troubles for a few days.

After this Sunday we do not hear from Gissing again until the 29th February, when in his diary, and in a letter to Algernon, he gives a summary of how he spent the intervening period in Eastbourne. Some scattered diary entries in April and May,³¹ which briefly mention a Miss Curtis, give a clue to his activities, and have resulted in much speculation by Gissing

scholars over the years. As mentioned before, I shall touch upon Miss Curtis and her relationship with Gissing in part two of this essay.

So how did Gissing spend those last ten days of his stay in Eastbourne? What follows, little as it is, is as much as can be gathered from his letters and diary up to the time he departed from Eastbourne. His diary at the end of February tells us that he has “long since given up the idea of doing any work.”³² Instead he began to make use of his subscription to Gowland’s library. Surprisingly he seems to have devoted himself to reading best-sellers. Among others he read Hall Caine’s *The Deemster*, Miss Rhoda Broughton’s *Second Thoughts*, Marie Corelli’s *Romance of Two Worlds*, and Mrs Lynn Linton’s *Ione*. Perhaps Gissing was measuring himself against his contemporaries, though it is more likely that he was trying to get at the bottom of their success. After all, the overnight reputations and phenomenal financial gains writers such as Henry Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mrs Humphry Ward enjoyed, puzzled and irritated Gissing. In a few months Gissing would be appalled by the astonishing sales of Mrs Ward’s new offering, *Robert Elsmere*, and the widespread attention it would receive in the press. But, at least this time, there was some amends in being referred to as “the author of *Thyrza*”³³ in a review of *Robert Elsmere* by William Ewart Gladstone, the liberal opposition leader who was currently between his third and historic fourth term as prime minister. Gissing also found time to read Charles Dickens’ *Martin Chuzzlewit*; however, the “incomprehensible weakness of story”³⁴ disappointed him. There was also time, in his letter of the 29th February, to attempt to allay Algernon’s concerns about his style prior to the imminent publication of his debut novel, *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, which would appear towards the end of March.

From his last diary entry in February we learn that he has been busy taking copious notes for “the old novel”³⁵ and changed some of the details. It would be another three weeks before he finally got started on the novel that was to become *The Nether World*. When Gissing wasn’t reading novels, the coldness of his sitting-room drove him out of doors. One suspects that, in spite of the bad weather, he continued to make forays into the countryside around Eastbourne and up to Beachy Head. For it is on his return from an extended walk to Lewes that he learned of what Morley Roberts was to call “the great news.”³⁶ In his diary Gissing writes,

I broke off this writing [bringing his diary up to date] to go to Lewes, where I spent a snowy afternoon. At 5.30 I was home again. A telegram waited for me. "Mrs Gissing is dead. Come at once." I caught the 7.45 train, and was at 7K by a quarter to 11. Had telegraphed to Roberts who met me at the door, and stayed through the night with me.³⁷

And so, on the last day of February in the leap year of 1888, Gissing departed from Eastbourne, not in the company of Morley Roberts as his friend later claimed, but alone. The morrow would bring confirmation of Nell's death and the release from bondage, which a few weeks before, he could never have dared hope for in his wildest imaginings. All at once, Gissing would find himself facing an uncertain, but more hopeful future.

¹The quotation is found in a letter from James to Sidney Colvin dated 28 December 1903 and published in E. V. Lucas' *The Colvins and Their Friends* (New York, 1928), p. 279.

²Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England. The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks: Harvester Press), p. 21.

³Pierre Coustillas, Paul F. Mattheisen, and Arthur C. Young, ed., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume III* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 180.

⁴*Letters*, III, p. 181.

⁵*Diary*, p. 21.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷What book sales do not show, the national birth register does. For, according to the BMD index, following publication of *Thyrza* the heroine's name enjoyed a new popularity. In the fifty calendar years from 1837, when BMD records began, to 1886 sixty-three girls were given the name Thyrza. From the spring of 1887, when the first edition of Gissing's *Thyrza* appeared, to the spring of 1891 twenty-nine girls received the forename Thyrza, just under half as many as in the previous fifty years. And if we take the period from June 1891, when the one-volume second edition of *Thyrza* was published, to 1897 there were a further thirty-three Thyrzas. In the ten years from 1887 to 1897, then, that makes sixty-two Thyrzas, which is just one less than in the previous fifty years put together. Lord Byron's series of *Thyrza* poems from 1811, which doubtless Gissing would have known of from Sir Francis Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, may also have contributed to the name's revival. Nonetheless, these statistics would have delighted Gissing.

⁸Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1912; London: The Richards Press, 1958), p. 49.

⁹*Letters*, III, p. 59.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹²For Mrs. King see Appendix below.

¹³*Letters*, III, pp. 182-183.

¹⁴*Diary*, p. 21.

¹⁵*Letters*, III, p. 182.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁷*Diary*, p. 21.

¹⁸*Letters*, III, p. 182.

¹⁹*Diary*, p. 21.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Pierre Coustillas, "A Writer's Novitiate: An Unpublished Essay by Morley Roberts" in the *Gissing Journal*, Volume XXIX, Number 3, July 1993, pp. 16-26.

²²*The Private Life*, p. 141.

²³*Letters*, III, p. 183.

²⁴*The Private Life*, pp. 51-53.

²⁵*Letters*, III, p. 183.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 184.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 184.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 185.

³¹See *Diary* entries of 23-24 April 1888, 26 April 1888, 4 May 1888, 8-9 May 1888, pp. 27-28. See also *Letters*, III, letter to Ellen, 27 April 1888, p. 207.

³²*Diary*, p. 21.

³³William Ewart Gladstone, "*Robert Elsmere* and the Battle of Belief" in *Nineteenth Century*, May 1888, p. 787.

³⁴*Diary*, p. 22.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*The Private Life*, p. 53.

³⁷*Diary*, p. 22.

APPENDIX

Mrs King, who was forty-four in 1888, was Gissing's charwoman throughout his occupancy of 7. K. Cornwall Residences from 1884 to 1891. She was born as Sarah Barton in Boxley, Kent, in 1844. Her parents were John Barton and Mary Susans, who married in Linton, Kent on the 11th October 1823. Mary had at least eleven children between 1824 and 1851: three sons and eight daughters, the last when she was an improbable forty-seven (census records are not always reliable, i.e. the 1881 census gives her age as ninety-one, when she was in fact seventy-seven). The children in order of appearance were William (b. 1824), Thomas (b. 1827), Mary Ann (b. 1828), Caroline (b. 1830), Mercy (b. 1831), Ellen (b. 1833), George (b. 1838), Grace (b. 1841), Sarah (b. 1844), Catherine (b. 1847), and Eliza (b. 1851). The family lived on Grange farm in Boxley, and John worked there as an agricultural labourer all his working life until his death in 1872, aged seventy-two. John's life was typical, for not one member of the family was able to rise above his or her lowly origins.

Gissing's future charwoman, Sarah, married James King, a thirty-three year old coachman from Plymouth, towards the end of 1870 in Marylebone. In 1877 Sarah gave birth to a daughter, Florence, and in 1879, to a son, John William. The

premature death of her husband at the age of forty-three in 1880 came at a bad time with two young children to support. The 1881 census reveals that she had now moved to 4 David Street, still in Marylebone, and had been joined by her younger sister, Catherine Barton, a dressmaker, and her elderly mother, Mary. Possibly Catherine, familiarly known as “Kate,” is the Miss Barton whom Gissing mentions in a letter from 1885 as sometimes watering his plants. Florence was the little girl, then eight years old, who on 18th July 1885 brought Gissing a bottle of methylated spirits up to his flat without receiving the customary penny. At the time, with a bad conscience Gissing wrote to his sister Margaret, “I had not a penny to give her. I can’t help it” (see *Letters*, II, p. 321).

Gissing’s frequent mention of Mrs King in his letters and diary, indicates that she was prepared to do all kinds of work such as dressmaking, cleaning windows, and taking in washing, to keep her family afloat. At some point after 1881 she moved to 112 Seymour Place, Marylebone Road, which is the address Gissing gives in his letters. In 1891, after she had ceased working for Gissing, we find Mrs King at 11 York Mansions, East Street, Marylebone. At some time in the 1880s her youngest sister, Eliza, a dressmaker like Kate, had joined the household and all were present when their mother, Mary, died in October 1889 aged eighty-five. Gissing captures her wretched end and the poverty the family had to endure in his scrapbook: “The last months of the life of Mrs. King’s mother, her grumbling in bed from morning to night, making life miserable for the sisters working in the same room, falls away to a shadow. They carry her about like a child. Everything she can get hold of, she secretes in bed. Talks incessantly all day & sometimes half the night, about things that happened 50 yrs. ago. Complains of imaginary hard treatment” (see *Letters*, IV, p. 123). There is little doubt that Mary Barton had a hard life, as did the whole family.

Eight years later, in 1897, Sarah King also died, aged only fifty-three, and Eliza followed her, aged forty-nine, in 1900, leaving Kate to care for the two children. Most likely Gissing lost all contact with his charwoman after moving to Exeter in 1891 and would not have heard the sad news. But at least on parting he gave “Mrs King & company” what he called “enormous final gratuities,” having once felt compelled to provide her with a pension (see *Letters*, IV, p. 257). The 1901 census shows Catherine Barton still living at 11 York Mansions along with her elder sister’s children, and working from home as a dressmaker. At this time Florence, twenty-four, was working as a binder, and John, twenty-two, as a printer’s compositor, both possibly more hopeful career choices.

Two of Sarah’s other sisters died young, Mercy at twenty-six in 1857, and Grace at thirty in 1871. Both were unmarried. Mary Ann married James Perkins, a farm labourer on Grange Farm, in 1859, had six children, and died in 1909, having lived her whole life in and around Boxley. Thomas married Maria Freed in 1857, and they had at least six children all named after his siblings, though not after Sarah. Thomas was a woodcutter in Linton until his death in 1905. Caroline mar-

ried William Henry Abnett, a journeyman bricklayer, in Maidstone in 1861. They lived in Maidstone until his early death in 1880, in what was perhaps fortunately for her a childless marriage. Caroline then moved to Gravesend to work as a housekeeper and died there in 1904. George, a bricklayer in Detling, Kent, all his working life, married Elizabeth Taylor in 1872 and had three children. He lived on into the 1920s. Ellen married William Callaway at the end of 1861 in Plumstead, when she was twenty-eight, and they had a son, William junior, the following year. They lived together in Plumstead for forty-six years, until William's death in 1907. Ellen died two years later at the age of seventy-six, survived by her son, who had since married. If fate was no friend of the Barton family, its most ill-starred member was without question the oldest child, William. In 1847 he married Jane Groves, who hailed from East Peckham. William worked as a brewer's labourer in Boxley and eventually had five children. Two of his children died in infancy, and the remaining three had all flown the parental home by 1871. Jane died in 1883 when William was fifty-nine. After her death, with retirement approaching, things must have gone really bad for him. By 1901 we find William designated as a "pauper" and compelled to suffer the indignity of ending his days as an "inmate" in Sheppey Union Workhouse on the Isle of Sheppey. It was there that he died two years later, no doubt the most unhappy and unfortunate of souls.

George Gissing: "Walks about Ilkley"

ANTHONY PETYT
Wakefield

Introduction

When George Gissing, as a fourteen-year-old schoolboy, visited Ilkley in 1872 the town was entering a period of tremendous growth and prosperity. At the beginning of the Victorian era Ilkley was little more than a poor upland village with very few links to the outside world. It had, however, a long history. Bronze Age people had a settlement on the moors above the present town and their rock carvings can still be seen. In 80 A.D. Agricola built a wooden hill fort there and named it Olicana. This fort was followed by others built in stone and was occupied until the Romans left Britain in the early fifth century. After the Romans left Ilkley had very little to commend it until in 1690 a bathhouse was built near the site of a moorland spring. The water did not have any special chemical qualities but was said

to derive its curative properties from its coldness and purity. This bath-house, White Wells, remained in use until well into the 20th century.

From the 1830s, when communication with the outside world improved, the importance of Ilkley as a Spa town began to grow although its reputation rested more on the use of cold baths than from drinking the waters. In the early 1840s, Hamer Stansfield, the Lord Mayor of Leeds in 1843, had visited a hydrotherapy establishment in Silesia run by Vincenz Priessnitz, who had developed a “water cure.” This involved immersion in cold water combined with physical activity. Stansfield persuaded a Dr. Antoine Rischaneck to come to Ilkley to practise hydropathy using the facilities at White Wells. In 1844 Stansfield built the Ben Rhydding Hydro on the outskirts of Ilkley with accommodation for about 60 patients. It had a shaky start but eventually it was a great success and was extended to accommodate 160 guests. The success of the Ben Rhydding Hydro led to the building of several other large hydropathic establishments and with the coming of the railway to Ilkley in 1865 the prosperity of the town was assured. The railway brought not only those wanting to take the water cure but also people who just wanted a holiday in the pleasant surroundings of Wharfedale. It was not just the better off who came to visit Ilkley, but the working classes from the nearby large industrial towns of Leeds and Bradford, who could now use the trains for day excursions to the area.

Towards the end of the 19th century Ilkley began to decline as a hydropathic resort and the hydros began to place more emphasis on the holiday aspect of a visit to the town. Eventually all the hydros were converted into hotels. The building of residential properties, which had begun in the 1870s increased, and the town is now regarded as a dormitory town for Leeds and Bradford and as a centre for holidays in the Yorkshire countryside.

Why was George Gissing staying in Ilkley in the early summer of 1872? It seems inconceivable that his widowed mother could have afforded to have paid for a holiday for him. The answer to the question can be found in the columns of the local newspaper: the *Ilkley Gazette*. Each week lists of visitors to the town were published, these lists tending to be from the owners of lodging houses rather than the large hotels. The *Ilkley Gazette* was published each Thursday and in the issue of 20 June 1872 we find a party of people from Wakefield staying at Edmund Dobson’s lodging house in Belle Vue Terrace. The party consisted of Henry Benington, his brother Edmund and his wife, John Binks and a Miss Whitlow. The Beningtons were whole-sale and retail drapers and Binks was a corn factor. Binks was

the brother-in-law of the Benington brothers as he had married their sister Isabel. All three men were members of the Society of Friends and all three were friends of the late Thomas Waller Gissing. When T. W. Gissing died in 1870 the Beningtons, Binks and others provided the money for the three Gissing boys to attend James Wood's Lindow Grove School at Alderley Edge, Cheshire. They chose this school presumably because they approved of its ethos but also because James Wood had married Rachel, another sister of Henry and Edmund Benington.

The following week the party was joined by a Mr. and Mrs. Whitlow, also from Wakefield, who were, presumably, relatives of the Miss Whitlow who was already at Ilkley. This couple were Samuel and Margaret Whitlow, who lived a few doors away from Edmund Benington in Bond Street. Samuel was in partnership with his brother Charles Henry as wholesale drapers with premises at 83 Westgate and later at Cheapside, Wakefield. The Whitlows were also Quakers: the name Whitlow occurs many times in the register of the Quaker School at Ackworth and Samuel's two youngest children were educated there. Joining the party of adults was a group of six boys, George, William and Algernon Gissing from Wakefield and A. H. (*sic*) Wood, G. B. Wood and a boy by the name of Wilenski. The last three boys' address was given as Linton (*sic*) Grove, Alderley Edge. All six had been awarded the title of Esq., so one is led to think that they had drawn up the list themselves for the newspaper reporter when he called at the lodging house that week. George Benington Wood and Arthur Syms Wood were the two eldest children of James Wood, headmaster at Lindow Grove School and the nephews of Henry and Edmund Benington and John Binks.

The boy named Wilenski was almost certainly a pupil at Lindow Grove School but he does not appear on the list of boarders at the school in the 1871 census return. George Gissing mentions the name Wilenski in a letter to his friend Arthur Bowes written from Lindow Grove on 12 September 1873. He says in response to something that Bowes must have said to him "You perhaps have not heard that the trial never came off. Wilenski bolted, & is now in Paris." This probably refers to some financial or commercial scandal. The census returns for 1881 reveals just one family with the name

Ilkley Gazette
27 June 1872

Belle Vue Terrace, Ilkley
of Wilenski in the entire country. At 63 Carlton Hill, St. Marylebone, London we find Henry Wilenski aged 28 and described as a merchant living with his wife, Rachel, aged 26. On the 8th of December 1880 Henry Wilenski had married Rachel Joseph, the daughter of the late Simon Joseph, at the synagogue in Gower Street, London. Also living in the house was

Henry's brother, Abraham, a commercial traveller aged 19. He is the correct age to be the boy who was staying with the party at Ilkley. Henry and Abraham's father was Marcus Wilenski, a merchant; perhaps he was the person who had fled to Paris seven years earlier. It is interesting to note that, whilst the brothers were both born in Poland, Henry's wife was born in Manchester.

On 4 July 1872 the *Ilkley Gazette* reveals that only the six boys and Henry Benington remained at the lodging house. No doubt he stayed to supervise the boys and probably to pay the expenses. This holiday was just another example of the kindness shown to the Gissing family. Gissing says in his account that he did all the walks himself with the exception of the walk to Barden Tower described in the last paragraph. He must have obtained the information for this area from a written source. Whether any of the other boys accompanied him on the walks is not known, certainly some of these would have been too difficult for the younger ones. It is highly probable that he did all the walks alone; we know that he liked walking, was interested in natural history and he quite liked his own company.

Gissing wrote up his account of his stay in Ilkley soon after he returned to Wakefield. We know that he had *Black's Guide to Yorkshire* to hand because he refers us to it in his description of the church at Haworth. He may also have had a copy of W. S. Banks' book *Walks in Yorkshire* beside him because the first chapter covers almost the same walks described by Gissing, although Gissing goes into far more detail. We know that there was a copy of Banks' book in the library at the Gissings' home in Wakefield since the author was a great friend of Thomas Waller Gissing who had bought two copies when it was published in 1866. William Stott Banks was a successful solicitor with a good practice in Wakefield and like Gissing's father was a keen botanist and walker. In 1871 he had published his best work, *Walks about Wakefield*. This is an excellent book which deals with the natural and local history of Wakefield and the surrounding area. Sadly it was to be his last work because he died on 25 December 1872. We do not know whether there was a copy of the book in the house at Wakefield, but Gissing would surely have access to one at the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution. It is tempting to think that George Gissing may have been trying to emulate Banks' work in his own account of his stay in Ilkley.

The original manuscript, along with some sketches Gissing made during his stay at Ilkley, is held by the Beinecke Library at Yale University. The text reproduced here with the kind permission of Jane Gissing is an edited

version: the punctuation has been improved, and the sections divided into paragraphs for easier reading.

WALKS ABOUT ILKLEY

PREFACE

The following chapters I wrote shortly after a fortnight's stay at Ilkley, and with the country fresh in my mind. Some people may object that the walks are too long, and particularly that ladies could not attempt them. All I have to answer is that they were never meant for ladies, who should always ride, and only for those gentlemen who have a real love for nature, and who do not mind giving a little toil in return for the very great pleasure they will receive. I myself walked them all, with the exception of the last. I did not go to Barden Tower, on the same day I saw the rest of Bolton, but only because I had not time.

Hoping that anyone who visits this charming country may receive as much benefit, both to mind and body, as I did,

I remain,

Yr &^c

G R Gissing.

Wakefield July/72.

Chapter I Rombald's Moor

Behind Ilkley rises a hill, the summit of which forms a wide tract of moorland known as Rombald's Moor¹ and separates Wharfedale from Airedale. Over this moor many wild and beautiful walks may be found. From Ilkley to the top of the moors is a stiff pull, and there are many places in the ascent which merit the pedestrian's attention.

Walking for about a quarter of a mile in a southward direction from Ilkley, along the base of the hill, we arrive at a deep ravine, on each side rough, dark rocks, in the season covered with many ferns, and a tumbling, boisterous mountain stream flowing down the middle. Arrived at the top of this ravine we continue our ascent and near the top quite unexpectedly arrive at a deep, wild, rocky valley. This is the Valley of Rocks and well

does it merit its name. On either side are the most picturesque groups of rocks, enormous rocks, here and there so placed as to make a hollow sort of cave beneath large enough to stand and walk about inside.

When we have clambered up the opposite side of this valley we have a splendid view of Wharfedale and almost directly below us, Ben Rhydding,² the celebrated hydropathic establishment. Descending now, as if towards Ben Rhydding, we arrive at the celebrated rocks known as the “Cow and Calf.”³ The “Cow,” 50 or 60 feet high, is a precipice forming a sudden end to the moor. The flat top is entirely covered with names of visitors and also many verses of scripture, which tradition says was the work of an old hermit who lived up there, certainly a quiet enough place, I should think, before Ilkley was such a great resort of pleasure-seekers as it now is. The “Calf,” a large rock just below the “Cow,” but not so high, can be mounted by means of holes cut all the way up to place your feet in, all of which are not very safe, and certainly for one of the walking dolls, called ladies,⁴ at the present day, inaccessible. On the top there are a few names. The view of the “Cow and Calf” from the railway is very picturesque, the Calf looking as if the slightest touch would set it rolling off into the valley.

Ascending again, on the top of the hill and at the edge of the moors, we find a series of large holes in the earth extending for half a mile. These were formerly thought to be British dwellings; and certainly, in some cases, the position of the stones piled one above another at the side seems to favour the idea that man had a hand in their construction; but lately some of them have been dug open and the conclusion arrived at is, that they were lime-pits; but, supposing this to be the case, the question yet remains to be solved, how lime-pits got up there. The pits, which are known as Lanshaw Delves,⁵ form a striking contrast to the land surrounding in the kind of vegetation which covers them; for while all around is heather and rushes and Bilberry plant, here is beautiful grass, short and smooth, as if it had been put under a patent garden mower. Standing here we see in the distance a large reservoir, which supplies Otley⁶ with water, and large tracts of moor on and on till we come to flat country.

Chapter II

Rombald's Moor (continued)

Starting from Ilkley and walking up the hillside, past Ilkley Wells House,⁷ after walking for nearly a mile on the moor, brings us to a little wood through which a pathway leads to the rocks known as the “Panorama

Rocks.”⁸ For about a quarter of a mile along the hill-side large rocks are scattered in the greatest confusion, making here and there grand and beautiful groups and everywhere the ground so thickly covered with ferns that, when walking, they often come considerably above the knees – a place in which both artist and botanist might revel. Standing on the top of any of these rocks we have a glorious view of the whole of Wharfedale.⁹ Looking to the North the river takes a sudden turn, and far away along the banks we see Bolton Woods and all the glorious panorama of hills beyond. Southward is the same picture of hills, with the smoke of Otley in the distance, and beyond, Otley Chevin,¹⁰ which bounds the prospect. Opposite us are the Middleton Woods¹¹ and above, in the distance, Beamsley Beacon, that glorious, windy point, which will be described afterwards. Indeed for anyone wishing for a good view of Wharfedale there is no better place than the Panorama Rocks.

Walking on along the hillside, across a meadow or two, we come to another wood, much thicker than the last. As soon as we enter it we arrive at a roaring stream, which, every few yards, by tumbling over the rocks forms a little waterfall. This delightful little glen is known as Heber’s Ghyll, from the fact that the ancestors of Bishop Heber¹² lived at the foot, in the valley. With a little trouble and scrambling we can follow this stream all the way down till it flows into the river, but the nicest part is in the wood, where, as we walk, we see every minute a little waterfall, and below it a deep, dark pool, formed by the constant falling of the water. Below the wood the stream flows beneath the road and then across meadows into the river. There is then a beautiful walk along the banks of the Wharfe as far as Ilkley Bridge.

Chapter III Rombald’s Moor (continued)

Let us start from Ilkley and follow the Keighley road. It leads up past the Wells House, and right away up across Rombald’s Moor, an astonishingly good road considering that you cannot go three yards of it on either side without getting into a bog. As we ascend the view over Wharfedale extends and new ridges of hills appear above the old ones we saw half a mile below. On the right hand side an old stone informs us in characters scarcely legible that we are four miles from Keighley.¹³ And a wild walk most of it is. When we have climbed a good way up, on the right of the road is an old

cross and a little further on along the road we come to a gate from which we get our first peep into Airedale. From this point we can see both Wharfedale and Airedale, but most of Airedale and we see how much wider Airedale is than Wharfedale.

After this we begin to descend and at last reach Keighley, which is a pretty large, smoky, manufacturing town. Most of the inhabitants are millhands and indeed the town altogether is such a one as one would hurry through to get to the country again at the other side. Once out of the town we begin to ascend again and after a tough four-mile walk reach Haworth.¹⁴ There is but one street in this village, and that so steep that it is hard work for human beings to get up, how carts do is a mystery. At the top of this little street is the church and behind it the Parsonage where Charlotte Brontë and her sisters lived and wrote the tales which have made them so famous. In the church is a marble slab on which are recorded the deaths of each of the family of the Brontës. The church itself, by virtue of three inscriptions, lays claim to an absurd antiquity, even the year 600, before Christianity was preached in that part of England (see “Black’s Guide to Yorkshire”). Up behind the church and for miles away stretch wild, windy moors, their silence broken by no sound save that of the Plover or Partridge.

We now start to walk back across Airedale and commence the ascent on the other side. And now we are nearly at the top let us turn round and take one last look at this beautiful valley. Right below us is Keighley in its smoky canopy and farther down the valley we see Bingley¹⁵ and through all the river Aire flowing in a quiet, lazy manner. What a contrast to its neighbour the tumbling, foaming, roaring Wharfe!

Chapter IV Fairy Dell

A walk along the other side of the river, southward, brings us to the foot of a deep, dark valley known by the very appropriate name of Fairy Dell. For no better place could there possibly be for the abode of the Fairies. Cool, shadowy, only disturbed by the merry ripple of the stream over the stones and now and then the strong whistle of some Thrush or Blackbird. Following the stream we pass some of the most delicious spots, now and then the sun glances through the trees and glitters on the water and again we come to spots as dark as if it were night, the trees bowing down almost into the water and on your hands and knees you creep, struggling through Fox-

glove, five feet high, and large flourishing Bracken and Male Fern.¹⁶ But after a splendid walk, or rather crawl (for who can walk in such a place) of more than a mile, we begin to hear a roaring and splashing of a waterfall and after a sudden turn in the stream we suddenly have a most glorious view. Three falls, one above another and a little space between each, the sun glittering, and flashing on the dancing water, and then, down below the lowest fall, a deep, clear, dark pool. How glorious to stand up to the neck in such a pool on this hot summer's day! In spite of our long walk which we have before us we must stay here for half an hour..... "Hello! What? What do you say? Been to sleep! No!" Yes, indeed, lulled by the waterfall we have been to sleep and actually lost an hour. Did I say lost? No, not lost, for when in months to come we are far away in the smoky town, this place will come before our minds like a bright dream refreshing both our minds and bodies.

Walking on through ploughed fields (and this is the worst part of the walk), we at last come out above Middleton Woods. And standing here we have a glorious view. Below us lies Ilkley, shining with its white buildings and far above we see right over Rombald's Moor and the white Keighley road leading away for miles and bringing to the mind unpleasant suggestions of feet worn by stony roads and back scorched with broiling sun. Then comes a cool walk through Middleton Woods but over a road which shakes you to pieces, then over the river and back to Ilkley.

Chapter V Beamsley Beacon

The best way to get from Ilkley onto the Beacon¹⁷ is to cross Ilkley Bridge and go up on the road past Middleton Hall, leaving this on the left. It is a stiff walk up this road on a hot day and by far the most uninteresting part of the walk. When we have got to the end of the long lane leading past the Hall, and out onto the open moors we see a finger post showing the way to Blubberhouses, (which walk we will leave to another day). Standing at the top of the lane, we follow the road on our left hand, which leads along past several farmhouses and then a short way up towards the beacon. Here there is a gate in the wall and many indistinct tracks which lead up to the beacon. But we will take none of these. The best track is that way which sense tells us is straightest onto the top of the beacon. Walking on over the heather we

shall, after a good climb, arrive at the highest point which is marked by a large heap of stones.

From this point the view is glorious. Looking towards the north you see ridges of hills rising one above another till they fade away in the distance. Far away below us lies Ilkley and high above it Rombald's Moor and the hills on the other side Airedale. Up the valley we see the river winding, its banks covered with trees and with hard looking we can discern Bolton Abbey. Looking up the hillside, far above Bolton, we see a large reservoir. In the valley we can see Addingham and the road to Ilkley for miles. Looking south we have an even more extensive view. We see Otley Chevin and hills far beyond it and to the right a large tract of flat country covered with smoke, which shows the presence of large towns.¹⁸ And all this while we have to hold on these stones to prevent being blown away by the wind.

Commencing the descent on the other side we get to the bottom of the beacon much sooner than we got up and pass Mr. Popplewell's house,¹⁹ the highest built house about here and then walking across several meadows we come to a deep, narrow valley, very dark on account of the trees which overshadow it and following the stream, which flows through it, we come to that beautiful little waterfall known as Black Foss. It is a higher fall than that in Fairy Dell and falls straight down, clear of rocks, into the dark pool below. From this fall we can follow the stream down to the river, and just below it is a ferryboat²⁰ by which we can get across the Wharfe and have a pleasant walk back along the road.

Chapter VI Blubberhouses

Let us follow the road up through Middleton Woods, as in the last walk, as far as the finger post and there follow the road it points to. This will lead over the wildest country about Ilkley. We leave the Beacon on our left and for a long time walk over moors to which the eye can find no end. After walking that for about four miles, we get to the highest point and look down upon two villages below us, one is Blubberhouses²¹ (that to the left), and the other Fewston.²² The road leads down into Blubberhouses, which is a pretty little village, in a very wild position. Let us walk on to Fewston which is about a mile off. This is very like Blubberhouses and through it runs the high road to Otley. Striking off on this road we go up hill and down, with all the way a glorious view, till we reach the top of the last hill

and get the first view into Wharfedale. We can now either go on to Otley about two and a half miles farther, or turn off sharp to the right on a road which will lead us direct to Ilkley and as it is getting late, let us take this road. It is a nice road, leading along the banks of the river through Denton Park.²³ Just after passing through the Park we arrive at the stepping-stones, over which we will cross, as they shorten the road a good deal, and we are almost directly in Ilkley.

Chapter VII Bolton

And now let us set off for our last and finest walk. We follow the road up the valley till we get to Addingham²⁴ and after that the country begins to be beautiful. From Addingham a walk of two miles along a beautiful lane brings us to Bolton Bridge. We have now two walks to the Abbey, we can go either over a stile on the bridge and across meadows, or walk along the road. But as there are several interesting things to be seen on the road we will follow this. After we have walked a short distance we come to the Devonshire Arms, a pleasant country inn, generally very full of visitors.

About half a mile past this the pedestrian cannot fail to be struck by an old tree on the right hand side of the road, whose trunk, in one place, presents such a striking likeness of a lion's head and face, that at first sight you would almost think it was carved.²⁵ And a stone which is placed in the mouth by way of a tongue, adds greatly to the effect. We now pass beneath a large, old arch²⁶ which goes across the road and find ourselves immediately at the abbey²⁷ which has been described so often and so well that no description of mine will add to the interest the tourist will take in it. Close by the Abbey are the stepping-stones,²⁸ across the river, fifty-seven in number and at the other side, a little waterfall which falls from the top of the bank into the river.

Let us now go back again to the Abbey side and follow the carriage drive along the side of the river. It is a most glorious walk through thick woods and every now and then a glorious view of the windings of the river; we pass the islands and when we are here, on our left hand in the wood, is the tree known as the Bird's Foot,²⁹ because its roots have grown over a large stone and resemble a bird's foot clasping it. It is now surrounded by a fence to guard it. Shortly after this, as we walk along, we begin to see foam floating down the river and this, together with the increasing rockiness of

the river side, tells us that we are nearing the Strid³⁰ and soon we are at it. There it is, roaring and tumbling down over the rocks, the whole body of the Wharfe going between rocks, so little distance apart that we could almost stride from one to the other. It is a glorious sight!

Leaving the Strid and walking up the bank through the wood we come to a summerhouse from which we have a glorious view of Barden Tower³¹ and the hills beyond. Indeed the country there seems so inviting that we must go. It is a pleasant walk along the river but the Tower is nothing. There is an interesting old inscription in front but no beauty of architecture. We now cross the Wharfe by a bridge, and walk back along the opposite side to that on which we came. From this side the scenery is even more beautiful than from the other. From many places we get a view of the Abbey and wherever there is a view seats are placed. We pass Simon's Seat³², a high hill behind us, and visit the Valley of Desolation³³—a wild place, its desolation contrasting strongly with the surrounding country, we cross the stepping stones again to the Abbey and walk back to the bridge across the meadows to either the Devonshire Arms or the Red Lion Inn³⁴ where we can get a good dinner.

¹Rombald's Moor is an area of moorland overlooking Ilkley, rising to 1,323 feet, said in legend to be the home of a giant but most likely to have been named after the first Norman Lord of Skipton, William de Romille.

²Ben Rhydding was an establishment built in the nearby village of Wheatley in 1844 to provide hydropathic treatments. With the decline in hydropathy it was converted into a hotel and was finally closed and demolished in 1955. Over the years Wheatley lost its own identity and the village itself became known as Ben Rhydding.

³The Cow and Calf rocks do not bear the slightest resemblance to the animals whose name they bear. They are still one of the major attractions of the district.

⁴This seems to be an uncomplimentary remark for a 14-year-old boy to make about young women of the 1870s. Walking dolls were, according to the OED, "mechanically operated dolls that could be made to move their legs," obviously in a very stiff manner. No female in ordinary day clothes could attempt rock climbing at that date.

⁵Lanshaw Delves were thought in the past to have been the remains of an early British village. Now known to be old limekilns used in the 16th and 17th centuries.

⁶Otley is a pleasant market and manufacturing town. In the past it was known for the manufacture of printing presses.

⁷Wells House Hydro was opened in 1856; it had 87 bedrooms and could provide accommodation for 180 visitors. With the decline of the "water cure" the Hydro was converted into a hotel in the 1880s. From 1954 it was a College of Education until it was closed in 1999; the building was then converted into apartments.

⁸Panorama Rocks, so called because of the magnificent view from the top.

⁹A youthful exaggeration. The river Wharfe rises on Cam Fell and flows for 75 miles before joining the river Ouse at Cawood.

¹⁰Otley Chevin is a ridge of high ground rising to 925 feet, overlooking the river Wharfe and the town of Otley.

¹¹Middleton Woods surrounding Middleton Lodge, which was the home of the Middleton family, Lords of the Manor of Ilkley for several centuries.

¹²Reginald Heber (1783-1826) was the son of the Rev. Reginald Heber of Malpas, Cheshire. This branch of the Heber family was only remotely related to the Hebers of Ilkley. Heber was appointed Bishop of Calcutta in 1823.

¹³Keighley is an industrial town known for its worsted goods, textile machinery and machine tools.

¹⁴Home of the Brontë family. The church that Gissing saw in 1872 was demolished in 1879. The new church, consecrated in 1881, is quite different from the old building but the Brontë graves are still in their original positions.

¹⁵Bingley is an industrial town specialising in textiles.

¹⁶George Gissing was knowledgeable about plants from an early age, having accompanied his father on his botanical outings. Bracken and Male Fern are fully described in Thomas Waller Gissing's book, *Fern and Fern Allies of Wakefield*, published in 1862.

¹⁷Beamsley Beacon is one of a string of beacons throughout the area, and rises to 1,244 feet. During the Napoleonic Wars a man was stationed there ready to light the beacon in case of an invasion by the French.

¹⁸The large industrial towns of Leeds and Bradford are both about 15 miles south of Ilkley.

¹⁹A Bradford wine merchant, Benjamin Briggs Popplewell, built Beacon House on this very exposed site in 1848. The site was formerly known as Brass Castle and said to have been the location of a Roman building. It was visible from the road when Gissing saw it in 1872 but now it is completely hidden from view by large trees.

²⁰This ferry, which carried people from Beamsley to Addingham, was operated for many years until a footbridge replaced it in 1892.

²¹There is much disagreement about the origins of the name of this hamlet. It has certainly nothing to do with whale blubber but it is thought that the name derives from the blue colour of the hills during certain seasons of the year.

²²Fewston is a hillside village now surrounded by very large reservoirs that supply Leeds with drinking water.

²³Denton Hall was the home of the Fairfax family.

²⁴Addingham is surrounded by some of the most beautiful countryside in Wharfedale. In the past it was noted for its textile industry; it is now a dormitory town for Leeds and Bradford.

²⁵W. G. Hird in his book *An Illustrated Guide to Bolton Abbey* published in 1882 describes this tree on page 47: "But before leaving the Abbey visitors should see the Lion's Head Tree, near the Hole in the Wall, which is the trunk of an old elm tree bearing some resemblance to the head of a lion, and said to have been very striking formerly." The Hole in the Wall is an entrance made in the high wall surrounding the Priory grounds. No trace of the Lion's Head Tree remains.

²⁶The arch over the road is a remnant of an aqueduct that carried water from the western hills to the wheel of the flourmill at Bolton Priory.

²⁷Bolton Abbey is a misnomer and is in fact an Augustinian Priory founded in the 12th century by William de Meschines. It is the nearby village that bears the name of Bolton Abbey. Most of the priory was destroyed following the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century but the nave of the priory church remains intact and is used as the parish church of Bolton Abbey.

²⁸There are 57 stepping-stones. When they were placed in the river is unknown but no doubt they were provided to allow easy access to the church for the inhabitants on the other side of the river. A footbridge alongside the stepping-stones was built in 1899.

²⁹This tree is also described in W. G. Hird's book: "A little further on the left of the road we notice a curious instance of a tree growing on the top of a large stone, where a want of soil obliged the young tree to send out fresh roots on all sides to penetrate the ground and derive the necessary nourishment to promote its growth, and which has now attained a considerable size. The tree is fenced round to prevent the vile practice of name-carving by ignorant persons—who often in this way do irreparable damage."

³⁰The Strid. At this point the river Wharfe is constricted into a deep trench through the rocks about 60 yards long by 4 feet wide; in places it is more than 30 feet deep. Over the years many foolhardy people have attempted to jump over the Strid, some failed and were drowned.

³¹Barden Tower was built originally as a lodge for the accommodation of the park keepers. In about 1485 the tower was converted into a better residence for Henry, 10th Lord Clifford, who at the age of 60 commanded an army at the battle of Flodden Field. It later fell into disuse and became a ruin.

³²Simon's Seat is a hill rising to 1,593 feet.

³³The Valley of the Desolation was so named after almost all the trees in this valley were destroyed by lightning and floods during a violent storm in 1826. Time has healed the scars but the name still remains.

³⁴This inn no longer exists and is now the site of a farm.

"Gissing earned a reputation as a believer in the doctrine of 'forlorn hope,' no doubt as a result of the abrupt curtailment of his own academic aspirations. [...] Closely related to the loss of hope, is the arbitrariness of life, the fact that a single insignificant incident can trigger a chain reaction that has consequences out of all proportion to the original act, thereby putting an end to hope. Gissing was clearly influenced by this phenomenon and its particular relevance to failure and to the poor." Barbara Rawlinson, *A Man of Many Parts*, Rodopi, 2006.

The Gissings' Wakefield Circle

III – The Banks family

ANTHONY PETYT
Wakefield

Of all the people Thomas Waller Gissing met when he set up in business at Wakefield in 1856 he probably regarded William Stott Banks as his closest friend. They had much in common; both came from relatively humble backgrounds and had progressed through life by reason of their own intelligence and hard work. They were both members of the Liberal party and worked together to improve the lot of their fellow townsmen by serving on several committees, especially those connected with education. They shared an interest in natural history and both men were published authors.

William Stott Banks was a member of an old Wakefield family. His parents, William Banks and Harriet Stott, had married at St. John's Church, Wakefield on 12th February 1815. William Stott, their third child, was born on 9th March 1821 and baptised at Salem Congregational Chapel as were his sister, Eliza Mary born 1818 and his two brothers, George Alexander born 1816 and John Henry born 1825. None of William's siblings are listed with him and his parents on the 1841 census return so it is likely that they died as infants. On the census return, William, the father, was listed as a yarn manufacturer and the family were living in New Street in the centre of Wakefield.

William was educated at the Wakefield Lancasterian School under Mr. Benjamin Fox. The tale is told in Banks's obituary¹ that one day a local solicitor, Mr. John Berry, called at the school and asked Mr. Fox if he could recommend a "sharp boy" to act as his office boy at his premises on King Street. Mr. Fox at once named William Banks. During his time with Mr. Berry, Banks displayed an aptitude for the law and fully justified the recommendation of his teacher. After several years with Mr. Berry, Banks joined the office of Messrs Marsden and Ianson, solicitors and clerks to the West Riding Justices. He remained in that office until the partnership was dissolved and then went to work for Mr. Ianson who had set up a new practice. He continued his legal studies and eventually he articulated himself to Mr. Ianson. In Hilary Term 1851 he was admitted an attorney. Mr. Ianson was so impressed by Banks's abilities that he took him into partnership, a connection that continued until Banks's death in 1872. During the period of the partnership Banks was associated with Ianson in the duties of Clerk to the West Riding Justices, and on the issuing of a separate Commission for the borough of Wakefield he was elected clerk to the Borough's Justices, an appointment he held until his death. Banks was noted for his sound legal judgement, which earned him the esteem of all who knew him.

William Banks was especially interested in the spread of educational opportunities in the town. He was involved with the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution² from a very early date and was its Treasurer from 1846 until his death in 1872. He also served as joint Secretary with W. Newman from 1845 until 1848 and again, solely, from 1862 to 1863. The first Wakefield Mechanics' Institution was founded in about 1825. The meetings were held in rented rooms and over the years they acquired some items of furniture, some technical apparatus and a small library of 160 volumes. The Secretary was Benjamin Fox, the master at the Wakefield Lancasterian School. The Institution struggled on until 1836 when it was disbanded and its possessions were auctioned to cover unpaid rent.

In November 1826 a Literary and Philosophical Society was formed in Wakefield, its aim being to cater for the self-improvement of the well-educated and wealthier classes as opposed to the Mechanics' Institution, which provided mainly for the working-man. This Society was set up by a group of five gentlemen who met at Mr. Walker's house in Northgate for the first year and afterwards in the magistrates' room at the Court House. Its membership never rose above 30 members, who belonged mainly to the medical profession and the church and it is reported that geological questions often clashed with theological opinions and led to some uncomfortable debate. The Society was dissolved in 1841.

A Working Men's Educational Society had been founded in 1840 with the same objects in view as the Mechanics' Institution, i.e. the education and improvement of the working classes. The principal mover was the Rev. John Cameron, minister of Westgate Chapel, and its members, who met in a large room in the George and Crown Yard, were drawn from a wide section of the community. However, the Society only existed for a year.

Then in 1841 the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution was reformed on a new basis with former members of both the Philosophical Society and the Working Men's Educational Society. From the beginning William Banks was one of the leading figures. By the end of its first year the Institution had 248 members of whom 140 were working-men. During that first year twenty-six lectures were delivered on a range of subjects to audiences averaging 140 members. By the end of 1843 the Institution had a total membership of 540 that included 237 working class members. Also included in the membership were 4 corn factors, 7 surgeons, 7 solicitors and one coal master. The Institution was obviously achieving its main aim of attracting members from all sections of the community. During the early

years the meetings were held in a variety of rented rooms, the main venue being a collection of rooms in the Music Saloon Building in Wood Street. In 1854 the Music Saloon was put up for sale³ and at the public auction held on 16th May 1855 there was some competition from the Wakefield Church Institution but the Mechanics' Institution's bid of £3000 won the day. The money for the purchase was raised by various means including a large "Bazaar and Exhibition" held at the Wakefield Corn Exchange on 23rd October 1855. A large amount of money was raised by means of donations, one of the most generous contributors being Daniel Gaskell of Lupset Hall who gave £700. For the rest of the century the Institution went from strength to strength; its membership reached 1000 in 1900. In the twentieth century it started a slow decline mainly because the services it provided such as classes, the library and the savings bank were provided by other agencies. It managed to survive until 1952 when, with only twelve members, it decided to close its doors.

Through the exciting early days from 1841 until his death in 1872 William Stott Banks was heavily involved with the administration of the Institution but he also found time to engage in some of its activities. During the winter session of 1862/63⁴ Penny Readings were held on Saturday evenings and they proved to be very popular. These events were simply poetry recitals for which the audience paid just one penny each. The readings were repeated the following year with an average attendance of 99, the largest attendance being 260, against an average of 186 the year before. Amongst the readers were W. S. Banks and his brother-in-law, Matthew Bussey Hick, the pharmaceutical chemist (who had sold his business to Thomas Waller Gissing in 1856), and Gissing himself. During the 1863/64 session Banks read 14 items and Gissing 13 from such authors as Dickens, Tennyson, Wordsworth and Longfellow. Although a sub-committee was elected to organise a third series of readings no meetings were held.

In 1856 it was decided to form a Natural History department.⁵ Amongst the committee members were John Binks and Thomas Gissing with C. F. Tootal as secretary. It was agreed that "the objects of the department should be carried out by means of fortnightly meetings, excursions, the exchange of specimens and exhibition of objects of interest." The new department commenced operations with about 25 members; some interested in the study of Botany, others in Conchology, Entomology, Geology and Ornithology. One of the first aims was to start a museum of Natural History. Amongst the donors were Thomas Gissing who gave two collections of

plants, one series from Jersey, the other of plants gathered within ten miles of Wakefield. The following year the donations included a collection of British Ferns, many of them collected in the Wakefield area by W. S. Banks. Banks also read a paper on British Mosses whilst his friend Thomas Gissing delivered two papers, one on British Ferns and the other on British Fungi.

As we have seen, Banks received his early education at the Wakefield Lancasterian School. He had done well in life and was anxious to help the school when it ran into difficulties in the early 1850s after the death of Mr. Fox. In 1855 Banks, with a group of like-minded friends including William Milner, John Binks and Henry Benington met together and resolved to put the school back into working order. Banks was elected secretary, a position he was to hold until his death sixteen years later. In 1856 the committee was able to reopen the school, it proved to be a great success and was to continue in existence until 1901. The committee, on which Thomas Waller Gissing already sat by April 1858, met on a regular basis and each year they produced an annual report. In the report for 1860 they recorded that in December 1859 they had staged an “Exhibition of works of Art and Science and other interesting things” with the intention of raising money for the use of the school. The exhibition which ran for eight days was a great success and raised over £86. William Banks and Thomas Gissing worked together to produce a “*Collection of British Ferns and Allied Plants.*” The title page went on to say that the collection had been prepared to be sold for the benefit of the Wakefield Lancasterian Schools. The collection of pressed ferns contained 50 specimens; Gissing contributed the bulk of them but Banks supplied 15, most of which he had collected in the Ilkley district of Yorkshire. Thomas William Marriott, a Wakefield mill owner, bought the collection for an unknown sum. The collection is still in existence and is preserved in the library of Wakefield Grammar School.

William Banks also found time to help other organisations in Wakefield. He was the secretary of the Finance Committee of the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition held in 1865 and a Trustee and Treasurer of the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Arts Institution set up from the profits of the exhibition. He was a member and sometime secretary of the Wakefield Book Society and served on the Clayton Hospital committee. He was a member of the Liberal Party and also of the Church of England but these two bodies do not seem to have taken up a great deal of his time.

In 1865 Banks published his first book, *A List of Provincial Words in use at Wakefield*. It is a very pleasant little book, well researched and obviously a labour of love. Banks exhibited it in the “Stationery, Printing, Bookbinding and Penmanship” section of the Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition held in Wakefield in 1865. The volume was awarded a second-class certificate.⁶ It was a copy of this book that Henry Hick, William Banks’s nephew, sent to George Gissing in 1896. Gissing’s diary entry for Friday, June 12, 1896 reads, “Harry Hick sends me Banks’s ‘Glossary of Wakefield Dialect’; very useful.” This gift followed some discussion between Gissing and Hick on the correct spelling of a Yorkshire dialect word. Banks’s second book *Walks in Yorkshire, in the North West and in the North East* was published in 1866. The two sections were also issued as separate books. The book reflects his love of walking, and of natural and local history. It has a very long list of subscribers who account for 610 copies; amongst them are most of his friends in Wakefield including T. W. Gissing. Two of Gissing’s brothers, George Gissing of Northallerton and John Foulsham Gissing of Liverpool also bought copies. Two well-known subscribers were the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould, who was curate of Horbury, near Wakefield, from 1864 to 1866, and Arthur J. Munby⁷ of the Inner Temple, London. His third book, *Walks about Wakefield*, was published in 1871. This is also very well written and researched and contains much of interest about the history of Wakefield and the surrounding district. Wakefield Historical Publications reissued the book, with the addition of 59 photographs by G. & J. Hall of Wakefield, in 1983.

William Stott Banks was married on 5th January 1850 at Wakefield Parish Church to Susannah Hick, daughter of Matthew Hick, a watchmaker, of York, and sister of Matthew Bussey Hick. At first they set up home in a modest house at Warmfield,⁸ a village about three miles from Wakefield. William Banks, the elder, died soon after the marriage and it seems that his widow was living with William and Susannah at the time of her death in 1853. She is buried in the nearby graveyard at St. Peter’s church, Kirkthorpe.

By the time of the 1861 census William and Susannah were living in a much grander house in Bond Street in Wakefield. It must have been a very sad household because the previous September had seen the death of their firstborn son, William Henry, at the age of 13 months. Susannah was to give birth to a second son, Godfrey, on 20th May 1861 and a third son, Oliver, in the autumn of 1862. Oliver was to die within a few weeks of his

birth on 11th November 1862 and Godfrey was to follow him to the grave on 25th May 1864. On the 1st of May 1865 their only daughter, Dorothy, was born and another son, Alexander, followed her on 20th August 1866 but he was to die on 5th December of the same year. A last child, Roland Campion, was born on 11th May 1868 and he and Dorothy were the only children of the marriage to survive their parents.

William Stott Banks (1821-1872)

During the last few years of his life Banks did not enjoy good health. For a long period in the summer of 1872 he was so ill he could not attend to his business and he was constantly under the care of his physicians. He was eventually persuaded to travel to the continent to take a complete rest in a more advantageous climate. Banks and his wife reached Brussels, intending to travel south, but the state of his health prevented them proceeding further. On the advice of two Belgian doctors he decided to return to Wakefield. Back at home his condition deteriorated and he died about three o'clock in the afternoon of Christmas Day. A post-mortem was held and the cause of death was given as Bright's disease.⁹ Banks's Will was proved at Wakefield in July 1873 and in it he named his nephew, Matthew Milman Hick, who also worked for him as a law clerk, and his friend John Binks as

guardians of his children in the case of his widow dying during their minority. Susannah Banks was well provided for financially as her husband left almost £4000 in property and investments.

Susannah Banks received a great deal of help from her family and friends; her son, Roland, went to live with Mrs. Gissing for a short period after his father's death.¹⁰ She continued to live in Wakefield and still took a part in local activities including being a member of the Ladies Committee of the Wakefield Lancastrian School. However her health deteriorated and she died in February 1874. After her death it seems that her brother, Matthew Bussey Hick of Wakefield and her sister, Arabella King of Clifton near York, cared for her children. Roland was not a robust child and he died, aged eleven, at Chald House, Wakefield, the home of his uncle Matthew B. Hick on 14 February 1880. He was buried at Wakefield cemetery with his parents and four brothers. George Gissing seems to have been quite fond of Roland and mentions him more than once in his letters. When informed of his death he writes to Algernon saying "I was grieved to hear of little Roland, poor little chap. I fear there must have been something constitutionally wrong in that family."¹¹

Dorothy Banks was eight years of age when her mother died and it seems that she was the healthiest member of the family. In 1881 she was a boarder, with her cousin Ellen King, at a girls' school at Standard Hill, Nottingham. The school, which had 22 pupils, was owned and run by a Mrs. Susan Lacey and her daughter Mary. No doubt Susan Lacey's son, the Rev. Thomas Alexander Lacey,¹² who for two years, 1876-1878, had been an assistant master at Wakefield Grammar School, had recommended this school to the family. He also served as a curate at St. Michael's church at Westgate End in Wakefield and would be well known to Matthew Bussey Hick, who worshipped at the church. Seven years later in 1888, Thomas Alexander Lacey then aged 35 and Dorothy Banks, aged 23 were married at St. Philip's and St. James's church, Clifton near York.¹³ At the time of the marriage Alexander was second master at King's College, Taunton. In the 1890s he was a member of the high-church English Church Union and was involved in an attempt to achieve reconciliation between the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, and he journeyed to Rome in 1896 to assist in this effort. A member of the editorial staff of the *Church Times*, noted for his strong views, he was dismissed by the editor in 1920 after he signed a resolution in favour of a reunion between the Church of England and the free churches. He was also one of the editors of the *English Hymnal* to

which he contributed translations of ancient Latin hymns. In 1903 he became chaplain, and from 1910 to 1919 was warden, of the London Diocesan Penitentiary, Highgate. Finally, in 1918, he was appointed a Canon of Worcester Cathedral, and was treasurer there from 1922 until his death at Worcester in 1931. Dorothy must have kept in touch with George Gissing's sisters because in 1926 Ellen Gissing asked Thomas Lacey to provide a preface for her book *The Hidden Life of the Blessed Virgin*.¹⁴

Thomas and Dorothy had six children, three sons and three daughters. Margaret, their eldest daughter, married Canon Robert Henry Hawkins, Vicar of St. Mary's church, Nottingham and their youngest son, Christopher, was appointed Archdeacon of Nyassaland. William and Susannah Banks must have suffered grievously from the death of four sons during their lifetime but they would have been pleased to know about Dorothy's family and the mark they made in the world.

¹Obituary of William Stott Banks, *Wakefield Free Press*, 28 December 1872, page 8, cols. 2 & 3.

²Report of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution for 1885/6. *Retrospect of the Rise and Progress of our Institution* by Dr. T. G. Wright (President).

³Notice issued by the Committee of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution to its Members and the Public.

⁴Report of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution for 1863/4.

⁵First and second Annual Reports of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution, Natural History Department, 1856 and 1857.

⁶One of the judges of this section was the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould. Baring Gould exhibited 12 water colour drawings of Iceland in the Drawing, Painting and Sculpture Section; he was awarded a first class medal.

⁷Arthur J. Munby (1828-1910), barrister and poet but best known for his secret marriage to his servant Hannah Cullwick. Munby's family home was at Clifton, a village on the outskirts of York, which was also home to Banks's wife's family, the Kings.

⁸*White's Directory of Leeds and the Clothing Districts of Yorkshire*, 1853.

⁹Bright's disease or nephritis, a condition that causes inflammation and degeneration of the kidneys.

¹⁰In *Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing*, edited by Pierre Coustillas and published by the Enitharmon Press in 1973, Henry Hick says: "A cousin of mine said that her brother, who had been dreadfully spoiled by a doting father, was sent on his death to live with Gissing's mother, a most kindly and charming lady; he being five years old. Because he was naughty she shut him up in a dark cupboard and he came out all wilted away."

¹¹*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 1, page 241.

¹²*Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹³*Wakefield and West Riding Herald*, 11 August 1888, page 8, col. 2.

¹⁴*The Hidden Life of the Blessed Virgin* was published anonymously in 1926 by S.P.C.K.

Book Review

Emma Liggins, *George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006.

Just as Dickens's London was once described as a city full of folk in which everybody knew everybody, this volume by Emma Liggins, who used to teach at Edge Hill but now lectures at Manchester Metropolitan University, is fraught with references to scholars' and journalists' names past and present which show that if we in turn venture into this essentially feminine world, we shall be on well-trodden ground. Many readers who have some by no means negligible knowledge of the subject, clearly defined by the title, will find in the book a well-informed study of a topic which has already been discussed, in part or as a whole, in a large number of books and articles in the last half-century. The bulk of this material is becoming more and more difficult to embrace, more and more unwieldy, more and more repetitive. Emma Liggins must have been painfully aware of it. She bravely gives her predecessors their due, as can be seen from the number of times she uses phrases like "as So-and-So argues," "So-and-So has done this," or "has done that," "According to X or Y," "W has pointed out," etc. Such phrases give the reader the impression that the author has attempted a very ambitious recapitulation and that her book is largely derivative. Yet the number of books and articles that we do not remember having seen quoted or discussed elsewhere is considerable, and her bibliography is not the least valuable part of this attractively produced volume. Few scholars are likely to have ever read Ethel F. Heddle's novel *Three Girls in a Flat*, *Nobody's Fault* by Netta Syrett or George Paston's *The Career of Candida*, all published in 1896. Finding copies of such volumes has been something of a feat even if some equally scarce novels have been reprinted in the last few decades by minor English and American firms now on the decline like Virago or the Feminist Press.

The book is divided into five chapters as follows: 1 Prostitution and the Freedoms of Streetwalking 2 Industrious, Independent Women: Labour and Leisure for the East End working-girl 3 Barriers to Female Professionalism: Educated Working Women and the Threat of Celibacy 4 White-Collar Work and the Future Possibilities of the Odd Woman 5 From Bach-

el or Girl to Working Mother: Finding a Public Space for the Emancipated Heroine. These divisions are but moderately helpful to scholars who, before consulting the index, would like to know where to find a discussion of a certain professionally defined type of woman, the governess for instance. (The governess is indeed to be found on five pages and is duly indexed—pp. 79, 116, 132, 163, 170—but nowhere do we find any mention of Emily Hood and the only novel in which Gissing introduced a governess, which makes us wonder whether the author knows of *A Life's Morning*.) Most Gissing novels are selected for partial discussion, notably *Born in Exile*, *Demos*, *Denzil Quarrier*, *Eve's Ransom*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *Thyrza*, *The Unclassed*, *The Whirlpool* and *Workers in the Dawn*. But why not *Sleeping Fires* and *Will Warburton*? A few short stories, to be found in *Human Odds and Ends* and *The Day of Silence and Other Stories*, have also supplied some interesting material but the principle which guided the selection is frustratingly mysterious. It is a pity that “A Victim of Circumstances,” “Fleet-footed Hester,” “A Daughter of the Lodge,” and “Miss Rodney's Leisure,” all included in the second collection just named, have been omitted. As regards the selection of short stories (of which Gissing wrote 115), it is difficult to believe that the choice was made rationally.

This remark notwithstanding, the nine-page bibliography will be pronounced by users one of the most useful sections of the book. We are grateful to the author for listing books and articles by writers whose connection with Gissing is still largely obscure, for instance Margaret Bateson, Clementina Black, Elizabeth Blackwell, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Ménie Muriel Dowie (alias Mrs. Henry Norman), Stephen Gwynn, John Law (alias Margaret Harkness), and Emily Pfeiffer. The recent resuscitation of Clara Collet, thanks to Deborah McDonald, and Eliza Orme is also pleasantly confirmed. Invitations to read many practically unknown articles with suggestive titles, such as the anonymous piece entitled “Manly Women” in the *Saturday Review* for 22 June 1889, should not be ignored. However, thorough though the bibliographical enquiry has been in some directions (weekly periodicals is one of them), some items of crucial importance have been overlooked. No one who wishes to write on Gissing and prostitution can afford to ignore *With Gissing in Italy*, co-edited by the present writer. Also, leaving out of a discussion on Gissing and the working woman such a widely reprinted short story as “The Foolish Virgin,” origi-

nally published in the *Yellow Book* for January 1896, amounts to depriving oneself of a valuable source.

Few publications are free from factual errors and the present one, which is a very serious contribution to an important subject in Gissing studies, cannot possibly claim to be an exception. It is easy to offer an assortment of such errors, which reveals an imperfect knowledge of the history of Gissing's publications as recorded in the Rivendale bibliography of his works. At no time was *Denzil Quarrier* issued in two volumes. No third volume of *The Whirlpool* was ever published, nor a second for that matter. "Comrades in Arms" was not originally published in 1896 but in September 1894. Arthur Morrison's collection of short stories, *Tales of Mean Streets*, was first issued in 1894 by Methuen, not by Heinemann in 1896. Edith Sichel is not known to have reviewed *The Nether World*. May Tomalin lived at one time in Canada, not in the United States. Mrs. Humphry Ward respected the correct spelling of her husband's first name. The silly young man who courts Nancy Lord is Samuel Barmby (not Barnby, p. 150). My late co-editor of Gissing's letters spelt his name Mattheisen. Frederic Dolman, the literary journalist, never called himself Fred in print. John Sloan published his book on Gissing in 1989, not in 1987. Surely Gissing's journey to France and Italy in 1888 cannot be called a European tour. There is no character named Sidney Kirkham in *The Nether World*, but most readers of the novels will have recognised Sidney Kirkwood. As for Reardon, no one has ever read of his committing suicide. Whoever wrote the blurb on the back cover should have taken the trouble of transcribing correctly the title of one of Gissing's best known novels, *The Odd Women*, but here the publishers, whose choice of the picture on the front cover deserves our praise, are guilty, and their reader should have standardized such forms as the *Girl's Own Paper* and *Blackwood's Magazine*.

It is to be hoped, despite some of the above negative remarks, that the merits of the book will be recognized and a corrected paperback edition be issued. Discussions of Gissing's female characters have not squeezed the subject dry; perhaps new avenues to a still better knowledge of his life and works will be found. Gissing and classical culture, once explored by Samuel Vogt Gapp, would be worth reconsidering and updating. *Flâneuses* and *flâneurs* in his works have had their day. W. H. Hudson, using one of his favourite phrases, would have said they have been done to death.—Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

In our last number we reported on the commemoration of the battle of the Somme at Thiepval on 1 July, exactly ninety years after the beginning of the attack. Many articles on the event appeared in the British press and a selection was sent us by Mr. Brian Millard of Huntingdon, Cambs., whom we met at Gommecourt on 2 July. The references are as follows: *Daily Telegraph*, 1 July, pp. 1-2. A long article by John Keegan, "Pals to the Death," with six illustrations. *Biggleswade Chronicle*, 30 June, pp. 23 and 2. "At the going down of the sun, and in the morning...we will remember them," with four illustrations. *The Independent*, 30 June, pp. 1-6. Long article by John Lichfield reporting "from the tiny strip of northern France where a quarter of a million men lost their lives in just four months." Map and illustrations. *The Times*, 1 July, p. 34. Three articles and three photographs. "Ninety years ago they marched to a certain death," by Charles Bremmer. "Bloody lesson that was well learnt," by Alan Hamilton quoting Lloyd George's words: "The most gigantic, tenacious, grim, futile and bloody fight ever waged in the history of war." The third article, also by Hamilton, is devoted to Horace Iles, "The Pal aged 16 who was youngest to die." He fell in action on 1 July 1916, the same day as Walter Gissing. Photographs of him and his grave in the Serres Road cemetery are reproduced. At the top of the page is a photograph of a "pals' march" as it was re-enacted on 30 June as part of events to mark the 90th anniversary of the Battle.

Similar items of interest were printed out from various websites. On Telegraph.co.uk can be found an article by Nicola Thomas, "German Visitors honour the dead" with photographs of the Prince of Wales speaking to Henry Allingham, aged 110, and of Prince Charles and Camilla at the Thiepval cemetery. The British Embassy in France published on their site on 12 June an article in which a photograph of the Franco-British Memorial at Thiepval was reproduced. The sites of Guardian Unlimited and Times on line can also be consulted.

The Gissing Newsletter/Journal on Line

Thanks to the efforts of Professor Mitsuharu Matsuoka, who digitized the texts, and H el ene Coustillas, who proofread them, all the issues of the *Newsletter* and the *Journal* published from 1965 to 2000 included are now accessible on line at

<http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/gissing/newsletter-journal/contents.html>

The contents of issues from 2001 to date are listed.

A number of Gissing items ignored in bibliographies have emerged from oblivion in the last few months. The oldest is surely the reprint by Mabell S. C. Smith in chapter XVI of her 1910 book, *Studies in Dickens* (Chautauqua, NY: Chautauqua Press), of a chapter from *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, "Art, Veracity, and Moral Purpose." A German collection of English short stories containing Gissing's "The Justice and the Vagabond," *Short Stories: Die neue Langenscheidt-Lekt ure*, with text in English and linguistic notes in German, was offered on an international website about nine months ago. It was published in the 1930s. Wulfhard Stahl has since then found two variants of this curious item, which also contains stories by Edwin Pugh, John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett among others.

Two Italian publishers, Ilisso and Rubbettino, began to publish a collection of 25 titles on Calabria at 5.90 euros each on 12 July. A new volume is added to the series every Wednesday, each carefully edited with a preface by an Italian writer, the publishers tell us. With two exceptions—*Viaggio in Calabria* by Alexandre Dumas *p ere* (preface by A. Trombetta, who has indeed published many books and articles on Calabria) and *Sulla riva dello Jonio*, that is *By the Ionian Sea*, with a preface by D. Nunnari—all authors are Italian. Gissing's title, no. 17, is scheduled to appear in early November. Whether the translation is the old one by Margherita Guidacci, no one at Rubbettino's has so far been able to say.

A day school on Late Victorian Fiction will be held at Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford (Oxford University Continuing Education) on Saturday, 17 March 2007. Gail Cunningham will discuss the New Woman novel of the 1890s, David Grylls's lecture will be devoted to Hardy's *Wessex Tales*, Robert Hampson will discuss *King Solomon's Mines* and John Sloan Oscar Wilde and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Hazel Bell, who recently compiled an index to the *Ryecroft Papers*, has drawn our attention to a number of references to Gissing in Ralph Pite's recent book, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* (Picador, 2006). They occur on pp. 290-91, 306-07, 381 and 411. The author wrongly writes that Algernon Gissing's books sold "far better" than his brother's, an error due to an extrapolation from an early letter from George to his German friend Bertz. Hazel Bell has also discovered in the *Australian Editor* for Winter 1999 an article on "Editors in Fiction," by Yvonne Rousseau, in which Clement Fadge is gleefully described and Gissing's remark about him quoted with admiration: "To assail an author without increasing the number of his readers is the perfection of journalistic skill."

In recent years very few autograph Gissing letters have been offered for sale at auction or in booksellers' catalogues. In so far as we can judge, prices continue to rise to an alarming extent. The original letter to Henry Hick of 29 November 1895, which was published in the *Collected Letters*, is now for sale at \$5,500.

David J. Holmes, the American antiquarian bookseller, recently had and perhaps still has for sale some autograph Gissing material—four separate pages, one dated Sept. 1st 79 consisting of topographical notes; the second, consisting of seven lines an equivalent of which is to be found on p. 15 of the published version of the diary; a page of preparatory notes for *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*; and a four-line autograph note on C. Velleius Paterculus, author of *Historiae* (19 B.C.-31 A.D.).

Keir Hardie read *Our Friend the Charlatan*. Evidence is supplied by his biographer William Stewart, who quoted him in the Independent Labour Party edition of his book, *J. Keir Hardie*, October 1925 (first published October 1921), p. 201: "The spirits of the living and the dead whom I revere are here. Let the scoffers and the Dyke [Dyce] Lashmars sneer (referring, of course, to the character of that name in Gissing's book)."

We hear from John Spiers that a pamphlet by "Fagin," *Reds on the Green: A Short Tour of Clerkenwell Radicalism*, published by a radical group called Past Tense (London, October 2005), contains some quotations from *The Nether World*. It is available on line at:

www.endangeredphoenix.com

The publishers have a website at www.geocities.com/pasttensepublications as well as an e-mail at mudlark@macunlimited.net

Wulfhard Stahl informs us that Gissing will be more appropriately represented in the next edition of *Kindlers Lexicon* than in previous ones. Besides the biographical entry there will be entries on *Born in Exile*, *New Grub Street*, *The Nether World*, *The Odd Women* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, but the next edition is not likely to appear until 2009.

Recent Publications

Volume

Barbara Rawlinson, *A Man of Many Parts: Gissing's Short Stories, Essays and Other Works*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006. Pp. xviii + 288. €62 or US\$78.

Special Offer

Rodopi have kindly agreed to extend their offer of a 30 % discount to *Gissing Journal* subscribers, valid until 29 September, to 15 November. Subscribers will therefore be able to obtain the book for €43 or US\$57. They are also offered to purchase *A Garland for Gissing* (2001) for €43 or US\$40. Postage not included. Orders to orders@rodopi.nl

Articles, reviews, etc

Nino Anili, "Il grande viaggiatore in un libro di Badolato : Omaggio all'inglese che amò la Calabria," *Il Crotonese*, 21-23 February 2006, p. 18. Review of Badolato's *George Gissing romanziere del tardo periodo vittoriano*. The same book was reviewed by the same author in *Il quotidiano della Calabria*, 3 March 2006, p. 36.

Assunta Scorpiniti, "Sui sentieri del Grand Tour il turista torna viaggiatore," *Calabria*, February 2006, pp. 26-29. A forty-nine-year-old German writer and naturalist, Thomas Raiser, has been visiting Calabria in

the footsteps of the Austrian baron von Riedesel, Henry Swinburne, François Lenormant, Gissing and Norman Douglas. Among the illustrations is the well-known portrait of Gissing by Lily Waldron. Herr Raiser has published a guide book on the Sila entitled *Sila Greca-Sila Ionica: Ein Reisehandbuch* (Edition semplicità) intended for German tourists.

Judith Flanders, "In Brief: Social Studies," *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 July 2006, p. 32. Review of *Consuming Fantasies: Labour, Leisure and the London Shopgirl 1880-1920*, by Lise Shapiro Sanders. The book contains a chapter on *The Odd Women*. According to the *TLS* a book by Judith Flanders, *Consuming Passions: Leisure and pleasure in Victorian Britain* was to be published in August.

Ettore Bruni, "In libreria," *Calabria Sconosciuta*, no. 110, April-June 2006, p. 21. Review of Francesco Bevilacqua's recent book, *Calabria Sublime*, a volume of Gissing interest. On p. 43 of the same number Francesco Badolato's *George Gissing romanziere del tardo periodo vittoriano* is reviewed.

J. C., "Commentary: NB," *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 July 2006, p. 16. Complimentary paragraphs on Gissing's short story "The Muse of the Halls," which we reprinted in our July number, and on the *Gissing Journal*.

J. C., "Commentary: NB," *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 August 2006, p. 14. On London's East End in fiction with a significant mention of *The Nether World*.

Christopher Gray, "Let's bring back the Missing Word," *Oxford Times* (Weekend Section), 25 August 2006, p. 32. With a portrait of Gissing in 1895 by Russell & Sons and a substantial quotation from *The Town Traveller*. Our thanks are due to Dr. Sloan for sending a cutting.

Paul Duguid, "In Brief: Literary Culture," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 September 2006, p. 28. Review of Jonathan Wild's *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture 1880-1939*.

