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

How Poor Was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing’s Income between 1877 and 1888

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In 1891, shortly after it became apparent that his recently published *New Grub Street* was the most popular and esteemed novel he had hitherto published, Gissing made the following grim evaluation of his situation:

Look at my position, with a novel succeeding as “New Grub Street” has done. I cannot buy books, I cannot subscribe to a library; I can only just afford the necessary food from day to day, and have to toil in fear of finishing my money before another book is ready. It is monstrously unjust. Who of the public would believe I am still in such poverty?¹

Gissing was exaggerating; six days later he mentions the purchase of a library subscription to the Exeter Literary Society. Yet, the image of himself evoked in this entry – that of the able and deserving author unfairly beset by degrading economic contingencies – has persisted, available for employment both as a biographical fact and a defining literary theme. Writing in 1908, Paul Elmer More found the “greater Gissing” in “the Epic of Poverty” distilled from Gissing’s own experience of impoverishment in London.² By 1912, Virginia Woolf asserted that Gissing “wrote his best only when he was describing struggles and miseries and noble suffering” and that what the body of his work proves is “the terrible importance of money.”³ In the same year, Frank Swinnerton noted that Gissing “has been thought of as one perpetually in want, a figure of tragic frustration.”⁴

Swinnerton proceeds, however, to claim that this image of Gissing had been “falsely created.” Nor was he the first to voice this suspicion. In 1906, one of Gissing’s former pupils, Austin Harrison called “the story of Gissing starving in garret and cellar ... the fiction of fiction.”⁵ This skepticism about Gissing’s poverty is sustained by Jacob Korg and Michael Collie, the two biographers who have devoted the most attention to Gissing’s economic position. Collie asserts that “except for the low period of disappoint-

ment after the publication of *Workers in the Dawn* in 1880 he was not poor” and Korg describes a steady improvement in Gissing’s situation after a few trying months following his arrival in London in 1877.⁶

Neither Collie, nor Korg, nor any of their predecessors had at their disposal *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, which was published in the years 1990-1997. The first four volumes of this extraordinary resource contain hundreds of details which are invaluable to the study of the economic situation of George Gissing during the years 1877-1888 when, while establishing himself as one of England’s most significant novelists, Gissing obtained a doleful intimacy with “the accursed complication of literary endeavour with the struggle for existence” which he denounced as “one of the most harassing things humanity has ever known.”⁷

After a year spent in the United States, following his expulsion from Owens College in 1876, Gissing arrived in Liverpool on 3 October of 1877 and was soon living in London. It seems likely that between this time and the publication of *Demos* in March of 1886 his income as a private tutor was the mainstay of Gissing’s economy, although this was importantly enriched by the receipt of his legacy in April of 1879 and by his literary earnings.

Of this dependence on tutoring we cannot be entirely certain. A letter from George Gissing’s brother William of 30 October 1877 refers to George’s “present employment” and the editors of *The Collected Letters* have plausibly speculated that this employment could have been *either* work in St. John’s Hospital for its secretary, St. Vincent Mercier, a young man his own age, *or* tutoring him for Matriculation.⁸ Gissing in fact makes three references to this work in his letters, mentioning on 14 March 1878 that he has been “doing a lot of letter-writing &c. for Mercier again, the result of which is a sum of 30s,” reporting to his other brother, Algernon, on 2 May 1878, that he has been clerking for Mercier for a week, with a remuneration of one guinea, and noting on 24 July 1878 that he is doing “little jobs for Mercier at the office” that are “not remunerative.”⁹ Although the word “again” in the 14 March letter suggests that there were likely other instances of this casual employment, none of the references indicates Gissing was ever employed by St. Vincent Mercier in an on-going way, apart from tutoring him. His somewhat wistful reflection in the 24 July 1878 letter that he would “give a trifle to get into some regular position” suggests that such a position never has been his. Given his eagerness to assure his anxious mother and his brothers of his economic stability, it seems unlikely he would not have clearly indicated he had secured steady

employment at St. John's Hospital if this had in fact been the case. It is probable, then, that the "present employment" was the task to which Gissing adhered until November of 1879 – that of tutoring St. Vincent Mercier.

How remunerative was Gissing's tutoring of St. Vincent Mercier? We are never told explicitly, but we can make a reasonable inference. We know that on 22 May 1878 Gissing obtains a second pupil who pays 4/- a week and that on 1 November of the same year a third pupil raises his income to 18/6.¹⁰ Of a fourth pupil we are told on 10 December of 1878 that he pays 4/- a week.¹¹ Since we know that the second and fourth pupil each pay 4/- per week, and since his reference to the third pupil is the most casual of all the references ("Yesterday I got another pupil; so I now have three"), it is likely that the third was also paying 4/- or perhaps 2/- – the amount a student arriving on 20 August 1879 would be paying. If the third pupil paid 4/- a week, Mercier was paying the odd sum of 10/6. It seems more likely, then, that the third pupil paid 2/- and Mercier, 12/6. The plausibility of this inference is somewhat enhanced by reflecting that in *New Grub Street* Gissing at one point observes that Edwin Reardon, at the outset of his writing career, paid 3/6 weekly for rent, 7/- for food and about £5 a year (about 2/- per week) for other necessities: a weekly total of 12/6.¹²

During the last few months of 1877, there is no evidence Gissing had any income beyond the weekly 12/6 he likely received for tutoring St. Vincent Mercier. During this period, Gissing must have lived the abstemious life he attributes to Edwin Reardon in the early months of the latter's literary career. The *Letters* enable a much fuller description of Gissing's income for 1878. During this year he had four pupils; using a method I will describe in detail when dealing with the year 1881, I estimate that during 1878 Gissing earned £40 through tutoring. During this year Gissing also spent some time working for Mercier at St. John's Hospital. His compensation, as we have already seen, was slight; thirty shillings at one point and a guinea at another are the only amounts he mentions. As well, Gissing would have received payment for "The Artist's Child," a short story he published in *Tinsleys' Magazine* in January 1878. Unfortunately, in none of the extant letters does Gissing make any reference to the payment he received for this early work; one assumes the recompense would be comparable to the £6.6s and £8.8s he received in 1884 for "Letty Coe" and "Phoebe's Fortune."

On 9 September of this year, however, a new feature may be glimpsed which complicates not only Gissing's life but also our analysis of Gissing's private economy. In a letter of that date to Algernon, Gissing asserts "After

next *Friday* our address will be 31 Gower Place.”¹³ The other half of the “our” is Marianne Helen Harrison (“Nell” as Gissing normally denominates her) with whom he was living at this time and whom he would marry in October of 1879. Nell was another mouth to feed but Gissing’s statement on 19 February 1879 to the effect that Nell “has just begun to work again” opens the possibility that Nell had been contributing to the Gissing exchequer through much of 1878.¹⁴ We know from a reference in one of William’s letters that Nell was able to sew; perhaps she employed this ability to earn a few weekly shillings that may have enriched the Gissing household by as much as £10 of £15 during 1878. The fact that the letter to Algernon also mentions that the rent at the new dwelling place will be 6/6 per week suggests augmented prosperity. We recall that Gissing would imagine that his character Edwin Reardon would pay only 3/6 in rent on his income of 12/6 while another of Gissing’s fictional creations, Henry Rye-croft, reports that 4/6 per week was “the most I ever could pay for a ‘furnished room with attendance’ in those days of pretty stern apprenticeship,” which closely resemble Gissing’s early London years.¹⁵ One is inclined, therefore, to assume that Gissing’s total income for 1878 was significantly higher than the £40 he earned that year as a tutor. It may have been as high as £65 for a weekly average exceeding one pound.

During 1879 Gissing appears to have had five pupils. He would have received about £25 from Mercier and likely another £10 to £15 from the other four, who paid less and were with him for shorter periods. But this interesting year is broken into two distinct economic units by Gissing’s receipt in early April of his portion of a legacy left by his father’s aunt, Emily Waller.¹⁶ We do not know exactly how much money Gissing received. However, we know that he needed to use part of the money to repay a debt he had incurred to one Robert Petremant while living in the United States and that by 16 June of 1879 only £300 remained.¹⁷ Still, for a person who had recently been surviving on 12/6 a week it was a substantial amount.

During the first three months of 1879, though anticipating the prompt arrival of the legacy, Gissing and Nell continue to live frugally. In early January they move to cheaper lodgings; in February Nell resumes work, and in March the two are attempting to survive on a diet based on lentil soup. However, when the legacy finally arrives in early April of 1879 Gissing’s life immediately takes on a different tone. Very quickly, perhaps within days, he and Nell move to 35 Huntley Street where, for the first time in his adult life, Gissing has two rooms at his disposal.¹⁸ He pays a weekly rent of 12/- – almost as high as his income had been during the first few

trying months in London.¹⁹ Gissing's brother William comes to London to visit for a week in April – possibly at Gissing's expense for William reacts to Gissing's initial invitation by regretting he does not have “the time & money to visit you” (4 April 1879).²⁰ It is also at this time that Gissing resolves to take in hand the issue of Nell's uncertain health. Nell stops working at the end of April and over May and June she spends four weeks with William in Wilmslow in an attempt to improve her health. This measure cost Gissing 7/- weekly for the room in which Nell slept; as well, Gissing forfeited a week's earnings to spend time with Nell at his brother's abode. Such outlays and forfeiture Gissing could not have even contemplated before the arrival of the legacy.

Between April of 1879 and November of 1880, Gissing lived primarily on his legacy – “my £300” as he calls it (16 June 1879).²¹ Deducting the £125 he pays for the publication of *Workers in the Dawn* in early 1880, Gissing had £175 from the legacy to spend on his needs and Nell's. He was still supplementing his income through tutoring, giving instruction to Mercier until December of 1879 and taking on another student in May who paid a mere two shillings a week. As well, he reports in September of 1879 that he receives one shilling for each twelve pages of his correction of a translation of a German work and in September of the following year the *Pall Mall Gazette* pays Gissing eight guineas for some articles on socialism. Therefore, the total amount of money available for living expenses during the April 1879–November 1880 period would include not only the £175 from the legacy, but also £8.8s for the *Pall Mall Gazette* articles and about £40 for tutoring and the translation work (most of this, £25, obtained through his tutoring of Mercier). The total of £223.8s would provide an average weekly income of £2.16s. This is nearly £3 per week, which we will see later is an important threshold for Gissing.

By 13 October 1880, “the gradual exhaustion of my resources is becoming a very serious subject of consideration” for Gissing and by 21 December they are living “from hand to mouth.”²² However, by this time he had made what turned out to be the highly lucrative acquaintance of Frederic Harrison, with whom he exchanged letters in July of 1880 after Gissing had sent the man of letters a copy of his first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn*. Harrison connected Gissing with John Morley, at that time the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* which, as we have seen, would publish Gissing's “Notes on Social Democracy” in September of 1880. Harrison's wife made Gissing known to several wealthy families who were eager to employ Gissing as tutor to their children. Most important, the

Harrisons employed Gissing to tutor their two eldest sons. The latter arrangement, which generally took up Gissing's mornings, provided Gissing with an income of £80 per year through quarterly payments.

Another important consequence of his association with Harrison was that Gissing was placed in communication with Ivan Turgenev who was seeking a correspondent to provide quarterly articles on English affairs for the Russian review *Vyestnik Evropy*. During the years 1881 and 1882 Gissing provided eight such articles, with a remuneration of £8 per article.

In December of 1880, funds from the legacy by now exhausted, Gissing again finds himself relying upon tutoring to gain a livelihood. It might seem like he has simply reverted to the pre-legacy days of 1877 when he first found himself in London. But his clientele is now different: he will be tutoring children from wealthy and cultivated families and his remuneration, we shall see, is considerably greater.

Between December of 1880 and April of 1883 (when he receives a £52.10s payment from Bentley and Company for the never-to-be-published "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies") Gissing's economic life followed a fairly consistent pattern. The mainstay of his income was the steady and substantial remuneration he received from Frederic Harrison for tutoring his two eldest boys – Bernard and Austin. The other reliable source of funds during this period was the Russian review *Vyestnik Evropy*, which paid Gissing £32 per annum during each of the years 1881 and 1882. Apart from the articles in *Vyestnik Evropy*, Gissing had no literary income at all during this period. However, he had other pupils besides the Harrison boys. The most consistent of these were the daughters of Vernon Lushington, the well-known positivist who paid Gissing 5/- for each hour of instruction provided. The Lushington girls began to receive tuition from Gissing in January of 1881 and continued to do so for three years, though with many long breaks. Numerous other youngsters also benefited from Gissing's apparently excellent, reputable and now fairly costly instruction (five shillings an hour seems to have been the standard rate from 1881 and beyond.)

It is difficult to be precise about Gissing's earning as a tutor during this period, for Gissing's letters do not always tell us everything we want to know. As well, occasional observations on Gissing's part about the number of his pupils and the size of his tutoring income can be misleading. For example, at one point (9 April 1881) he mentions that he has a weekly income of £2.5s from tutoring alone; some time later (23 January 1885) he confides to Algernon that the "pupil-business," though "extremely loathsome," is bringing in £5.10s a week.²³ Korg and Collie treat these dis-

closures as if they announce firm income plateaus Gissing could easily maintain; Austin Harrison even assumes that Gissing was able to modify his income and clientele at will.²⁴ This was not the case, however, for tutoring was seasonal. January tended to be Gissing's most prosperous month as "holiday pupils" temporarily enriched his coffers. During the months of May and June a note of foreboding is often found in Gissing's letters as he anticipates the hot and generally payless months of July, August and September during which his wealthy clients vacationed. (For example, on 26 May 1882 he worries aloud to Algernon that "Things begin to look uncommonly serious in every direction," as the Harrisons leave for the summer and he has no other pupils.²⁵)

One cannot achieve an accurate appraisal of Gissing's income as a tutor by merely extrapolating from isolated moments; it is preferable to look at entire years and apply to the examination of a given year inferences derived from a study of Gissing's long experience in this occupation.²⁶ I will illustrate this procedure by examining in some detail the year 1881 – Gissing's first full year as a tutor for children of the leisured classes.

We know from letters of the previous December that Frederic Harrison had made a "quarterly arrangement" for Gissing to tutor his two eldest sons, Austin and Bernard, on week-day mornings.²⁷ On 11 February Gissing informs Algernon that the annual payment would be £80.²⁸ This is very nearly £1.10s per week, so that when Gissing tells Algernon on 13 January that his income is £2.10s per week, it is likely that the additional pound comes from other pupils.²⁹ The same letter also mentions that he has just begun providing instruction for the three daughters of Vernon Lushington. The remuneration at this time is ten shillings per week for two hours of instruction. In December of 1880 Gissing had mentioned another pupil (unnamed) who is likely a "holiday" pupil who continued to receive instruction into January. It is likely that this unnamed pupil provides the additional ten shillings. No other pupils are referred to in the letters of 1881.

We can now attempt to compute Gissing's tutoring income for 1881. From the Harrisons, he of course received £80. We know that the Lushingtons were with Gissing from 13 January to 7 July. On 10 July Gissing tells Algernon rather despondently they will be away until December and on 16 January of 1882 he relates an incident which occurs as he returned "from Lushingtons."³⁰ This suggests that the Lushingtons, who were afternoon pupils for the first six months of 1881, were afternoon pupils in January 1882 and likely in December of 1881 as well. The likelihood that the Lushingtons did indeed return in December is enhanced by our knowledge that

in 1883 there is clear evidence that they left for holidays in July and returned in December. There is considerable probability, then, that the Lushington girls received tuition from Gissing for a total of twenty-seven weeks during 1881 (twenty-three weeks between January and June; four weeks in December). It is not entirely clear, however, at what rate the Lushingtons paid. As I indicated above, they were paying Gissing ten shillings per week in January. However, on 9 April he tells Algernon his teaching income is £2.5s per week which means, since he was receiving £1.10s from Harrison, either that the Lushingtons now pay him fifteen shillings per week or another pupil supplements his income.³¹ Since no other pupil is mentioned it is likely the Lushingtons are receiving an additional hour of instruction for an additional five shillings. The probability of this is enhanced by two facts: in late February Gissing anticipates a £10 quarterly payment from Lushington, which would assume weekly costs of fifteen shillings; in December of 1883 Gissing mentions that the Lushingtons receive instruction “every other afternoon,” which suggests three sessions weekly and fifteen shillings.³² We will not be far wrong in assuming that Gissing received about £19 from Lushington during 1881 (twenty seven weeks at fifteen shillings per week would provide £20.5s but we must remember that in January the Lushingtons paid only ten shillings per week); when we add this to the £80 received from Harrison, allowing only one pound for the unnamed student mentioned only once in January and likely paying ten shillings a week, we find that Gissing earned approximately £100 in total for tutoring in 1881.

His total earned income for 1881 would include the £32 he received for his four articles in *Vyestnik Evropy*. The sum of £132 would provide a weekly average of £2.10s which was likely less than his needs for this year. In late February he mentions that for the past two or three months “we have scarcely ever spent less than £3 per week.”³³ Although Gissing sounds surprised here at the magnitude of his expenditure, the fact is that £3 per week became his typical expenditure after the receipt of his legacy and remained so until the disposal of *The Nether World* for £150 in 1888 prompted him uncharacteristically to proclaim “I am *rolling in money*” (10 October 1888).³⁴ Furthermore, 1881 saw the deterioration in Nell’s health and a concomitant increase in expenses. The £132 income was probably inadequate. In fact, it would likely have fallen short of Gissing’s needs by £20 to £30.

However, 1881 was also the year in which the inheritance due to Gissing’s brother William, who had died in April of 1880, was distributed

among the surviving family members. It is likely (as the editors of *The Collected Letters* have explained) that each of the four surviving siblings received £100.³⁵ We do know that Gissing borrowed twice against this anticipated bequest (once for £10 and once for an unnamed sum) and that on 23 May when the money was dispersed asked for £25 of his portion. Since it is possible that he repaid the first, £10 loan, it would appear that the total amount of the inheritance that Gissing received and spent in 1881 is reassuringly near to the £20 to £30 difference I suggested above between Gissing's earnings and his needs.

The reader will see that determining Gissing's income is especially daunting when we are dealing with his income from tutoring. We often don't know how much a particular student is paying or how long the student received instruction from Gissing. Undoubtedly Gissing tutored pupils for brief periods of time without mentioning them in his letters; in his *Commonplace Book*, for example, he lists among "young aristocrats whom I have had for pupils" the son of Lady Albert Gower, who is never mentioned in the extant letters.³⁶ It is also possible there are cases in which a pupil departed without Gissing having noted the fact. Still, I think his letters enable us to describe Gissing's economic circumstances with sufficient precision to enable a substantial enhancement of our understanding of that strange complex of economic pressures in which the early novels emerged.

Gissing's income in 1882 is almost the same as it was in 1881 and the distribution between teaching and writing is similar as well. But this was a more dramatic year, economically. In March, Gissing reports having ten pupils and although he does not state what his weekly income is at the time, it is likely it would exceed £5. However, it seems likely as well that the stable arrangement he had secured with Harrison was now abandoned. On 26 May he writes that Harrison plans to take his entire family to France for the summer and adds "I expect this means an absence of at least a whole quarter. Things begin to look uncommonly serious in every direction."³⁷ There is no evidence he had any pupils at all during the summer months and on 4 October he observes that the only pupils he has are the Harrison boys.³⁸ On 31 October he has just enough cash to take him to his payment for the Russian article, which he expects will carry him economically until the end of the year.³⁹ Things improve, though, in late November when he begins tutoring the sons of Henry Alexander Giffard, barrister, Q. C., who pays Gissing one and a half guineas per week.

Using the methods explained above, I estimate Gissing's income through tutoring for 1882 at £92; he again received payment of £32 from

Vyestnik Evropy. The total of £124 would again have been significantly less than his needs. The cost of maintaining Nell was likely considerable during this year. He had arranged in January to have her stay with the Miss Wasketts in Battersea but was later obliged to have her remain in a hospital. His complaint on 18 May to Algernon that he would be happy to be relieved of all this anxiety for a payment of £1 a week suggests that his expenditure on her behalf must have approached this figure.⁴⁰ Likely Gissing's weekly expenses continued to average £3 and likely he again had recourse to the portion of the William inheritance he received in 1881.⁴¹

1883 sees a minor turning point in Gissing's economic life. Although he is no longer writing for *Vyestnik Evropy* his literary income in fact rises this year. He earns a guinea from *Temple Bar* for a short lyric called "Song," £2.5s for a descriptive essay entitled "On Battersea Bridge" from the *Pall Mall Gazette* and a resounding £52.10s from Bentley for the manuscript of the never-to-be published novel "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies." His literary income for 1883 is thus £56.

He continues to tutor the Harrison boys; the Lushington girls are with him for five or six months; and he provides instruction for one week to the grandson of Sir Stafford Northcote. Using the aforementioned methods, I estimate he earned about £96 for tutoring in 1883. The total income of £152 which results from these figures virtually averages the £3 weekly he tells Algernon on March of 1883 "would suffice to all my needs."⁴² For the first time since the receipt of his legacy, Gissing is able to meet all of his needs entirely through his earnings and it is notable that a full third of these earnings come from writing.

1884 maintains approximately the same balance between teaching and writing income. Besides receiving £30 for *The Unclassed*, Gissing receives payment for two short stories – "Phoebe's Fortune" (£8.8s) and "Letty Coe" (£6.6s).⁴³ These publications produce a total literary income of £44.14s. Again using the previously described method, I estimate Gissing's income as a tutor for this year to be about £115. His literary income is nearly a third of his total estimated income of £160.

During this year Gissing's student clientele changes significantly. The Harrisons are with him only until July of 1884; thereafter they attend St. Paul's School. The Lushingtons are with him for only a short time and in early April depart permanently. However, in May of this year a new pupil named Walter Grahame begins; Gissing immediately receives a handsome £2.10s per week for instructing Grahame and will maintain this connection until 1888. As well, Gissing meets Mrs. Elizabeth Gaussen (on whom the

title character of *Isabel Clarendon* will be modeled), examining her three children for the price of a guinea each and tutoring her son James from mid-September into the next year.

1885 is perhaps the most Gissingesque year of Gissing's life. He does an enormous amount of work; his recompense is vastly disproportionate to his output; he is forced into enormous self-denial. During this year, he wrote all of *A Life's Morning*, likely the bulk of *Isabel Clarendon*, and a significant part of *Demos*. Yet he received no payment for any literary works during the entire year. In the early part of 1885 Gissing spent an unprecedented amount of time tutoring. He notes in mid-January that he tutors for a full six and one-half hours each weekday and has an income of £5.10s. By the end of January he has another pupil and on 14 February records that he works from 9.30 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. daily.⁴⁴ Supposing this means an additional hour of tutoring each day, with his standard payment of five shillings per hour, this would mean an additional £1.5s with a weekly income during February of nearly £7.

It is likely that during the first two months of 1885 Gissing earned about £50 through tutoring. However, by March he had only two pupils: Jem Gausson who remained only until mid-April and Walter Grahame who continued until early July. This would likely have brought an additional £55 so that in the first half of the year Gissing had already earned more than £100. He had no pupils between the beginning of July and the end of September. Grahame resumed in October, likely bringing in an additional £30 for a total tutoring income of about £135. This is the highest sum Gissing ever earned as a tutor within a calendar year but it is not supplemented in 1885 by any literary income. It is significantly less than Gissing's total earnings for the previous year and well short of the £3 per week to which he had become accustomed. As well, his living costs had increased; at the end of 1884 he had moved into Cornwall Residences where he paid £40 per annum in rent and an additional four shillings per week for charring. It is not surprising that he mentions the "serious state of things" on 3 July when he notes Grahame's imminent departure, describes the absence of pupils as "a grave matter" and by 9 October fears he will soon be "out of my wits for cash."⁴⁵

How did he survive? It is possible that he saved some money from his exceptionally prosperous 1884. As well, he found himself "relentlessly cutting-down odds & ends of leisure" (13 October).⁴⁶ He attends no plays, spends every evening at home, and at one point notes "For three weeks I have not opened my lips, except in entering a shop or speaking to my

servant” (9 August.)⁴⁷ He takes no holidays, except for two likely costless weekends with the Harrisons. Potatoes and tinned meat (a nine pence tin providing him with three meals) become his standard diet and he even experiments with vegetarianism, though this time by buying sixpence meals at a vegetarian restaurant rather than preparing lentil soup. Even his expenditure on books is curtailed, though it is reassuring to note he could not pass up the chance to buy a four-volume edition of Johnson’s *Dictionary* for four shillings. His capacity to endure these privations was no doubt fortified by the knowledge that both *Isabel Clarendon* and *A Life’s Morning* were in publishers’ hands before the end of the year and by his confidence that *Demos*, which he began in early November, “will be *something*, I assure you” (22 November).⁴⁸

The hard work and self-denial would pay off in 1886, which is the real turning point in the allocation of Gissing’s income. On the second of January he received a £50 cheque from Smith, Elder & Co. for *A Life’s Morning* and by the 14 of March he has a £100 cheque from the same firm, this time for *Demos*.⁴⁹ He has at last earned, within a single calendar year and solely through his writings, the average of £3 per week that “would suffice to all my needs.”

He has not yet abandoned tutoring. During 1886 he taught Walter Grahame for about twenty-six weeks and provided instruction to the two sons of the Bishop of Hereford for a brief time. His tutoring income likely added about £70 to his gross receipts bringing his 1886 earnings up to £220. Predictably, Gissing exhibits a bit of extravagance. Barely a week passes between the receipt of the £100 cheque and his arrival in Paris on 21 March where he remains until 2 April, glorying in the popularity of *Demos* and in his respite from economic anxieties. In September he spends a week in Sussex.

Gissing’s literary income for 1887 is less than it was in the previous year: he receives £50 for the publication of *Thyrza* and an additional £50 for the serialization of *A Life’s Morning*. To this £100 he likely added a further £80 or more from tutoring. Besides instructing Walter Grahame for seven months during 1887, Gissing also tutored Harrison’s son Bernard during the last two months of the year.

Early in 1888, Gissing’s first wife, Nell, who had been living apart from him since December of 1882, died. Observing her barely recognizable corpse, Gissing reflected that the troubled Nell might do more for him in death than she had in life. In an economic sense, she did. Gissing was paid £150 for *The Nether World*, the cathartic novel which crystallizes Gissing’s

anguish over the social classes of whom Nell was the principal embodiment. Although in his “Account of Books” Gissing identifies 1889 as the year in which he received payment for *The Nether World*, it is quite clear from his letters to his sister Ellen that the £150 cheque from Smith, Elder arrived in October of 1888.⁵⁰ Although he had no further literary income in 1888, he likely earned at least £40 through tutoring. He gave instruction to Bernard Harrison during January and to Walter Grahame in January and from April to July. His total income for 1888 likely approached £200.

The departure of Walter Grahame in July of 1888 would mark the end of Gissing’s career as a tutor. The £150 he received for *The Nether World* established a new plateau – each of the three novels that followed over the next three years (*The Emancipated*, *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*) earned that amount.⁵¹ Receipts from his writing would easily cover his basic needs. The “accursed complication of literary endeavour with the struggle for subsistence” of which Gissing complained had not disappeared but it had at least become less harassing.

The reader will see that this examination of Gissing’s earnings during his first decade as a writer does not explode any extant myths about Gissing’s economic situation. Austin Harrison’s influential article of 1906, though mistaken in several details, is indisputably correct in its essential claim that it was only in his earliest years in London that Gissing was “the necessitous starving writer convention has depicted him.”⁵² This claim has been accepted in all subsequent biographies of Gissing, with the exception of Morley Roberts’s fictional *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, and it is confirmed by the present study.

During the period we have been examining, Gissing experiences two liberations. In 1879, he is liberated from poverty; by 1888, from pedagogical drudgery. However, when we move from routine notation of the size and sources of Gissing’s income to an examination of the effects of these changes upon Gissing’s sense of wellbeing, we find that both “liberations” are problematical.

Paradoxically, Gissing is more cheerful about his economic circumstances in his first two impoverished years in London than in the more prosperous years that followed. “Since I have been living in London,” he chirpily tells Algernon in May of 1878, “I have seen how very cheaply it is possible to live.”⁵³ He uncomplainingly contents himself with such luxuries as he finds within his reach – books, of course, and the occasional evening at the Lyceum – and reacts rationally to the constraints under which he and Nell live, turning to vegetarianism at one point and at another having Nell

resume work to enable them “to procure a few clothes.”⁵⁴ The greatest anxiety he reports in these years is that he will be obliged to work as a draper’s clerk or to pursue some handicraft.⁵⁵ As his income rises, Gissing becomes more extreme, melodramatic and irrational in portraying the dangers his economic predicament entails. Near the end of 1886 – a year of unprecedented prosperity for Gissing – he refers to himself as “writing for bread, – possibly for starvation.”⁵⁶ A few years later, after he has established the pattern of annual publication of novels which he sold for £150 each, he begins invoking the image of “the Marylebone workhouse, towards which I am drifting.”⁵⁷ (22 January 1890).

Gissing’s liberation from pedagogy had a more obviously ambivalent result, of which Gissing himself seemed only peripherally aware. Early in his career Gissing hoped that his novels would be “my material staff in life” (2 May 1880) and even when tutoring was highly lucrative, he complained “This pupil-business must somehow come to an end before long; it is extremely loathsome” (23 January 1885).⁵⁸ Loathsome though it may have been, the trade Gissing was able finally to abandon in 1888 did not lack advantages: tutoring assured a closer correspondence between effort and recompense than writing could ever secure; it provided access to the social world depicted in *A Life’s Morning* and *Isabel Clarendon*; also, it constrained the pathologically reclusive Gissing to maintain a social life of sorts. The occasional complaints about the drudgery of teaching seem trifling when compared with the anguished reports on his wracking loneliness we begin to observe in 1888, after Gissing has achieved his goal of living by his pen.

What Austin Harrison called “the fiction of fiction” – that of “Gissing starving in garret and cellar” – was likely factual at a psychological level. While Gissing escaped garret itself, he never escaped the garret mentality.

¹*London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 247.

²Paul Elmer More, “George Gissing,” in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 520.

³Virginia Woolf, “The Novels of George Gissing,” in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 534, 531.

⁴Frank Swinnerton, *George Gissing: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1912), p. 35.

⁵Austin Harrison, "George Gissing," *Nineteenth Century*, LX, September 1906, p. 456.

⁶Michael Collie, *George Gissing: A Biography* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977), p. 60; Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 20-26.

⁷*The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 9 vols., 1990-1997), IV, p. 59.

⁸*Letters*, I, pp. 61, 65.

⁹*Ibid.*, I, pp. 80, 86, 98.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, I, pp. 90, 112.

¹¹*Ibid.*, I, p. 133.

¹²*New Grub Street* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), p. 49.

¹³*Letters*, I, p. 105.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, I, p. 154.

¹⁵*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), p. 25.

¹⁶Details about this legacy are explained by the editors of *Letters* in I, p. 114; II, pp. 7 and 211-12.

¹⁷*Letters*, I, p. 180.

¹⁸Biographers have never remarked on this sudden relocation, perhaps because no explicit statement about the timing of this move exists. But the evidence that Gissing moved from his one-room lodgings at 70 Huntley Street to two-room accommodations at 35 Huntley Street almost immediately after receiving the legacy is quite convincing. Writing to his brother on 4 April 1879, William congratulates Gissing on the receipt of the legacy and ambiguously asserts "It will be a grateful change getting two rooms & a little spare linen" (*Letters*, I, p. 164.). At this point, Gissing is living at 70 Huntley Street and there are no letters from any London address until 21 June 1879 when he writes from 35 Huntley Street, indicating he and Nell will be moving once again. However, when William responds to this information he confides that he sees his brother "in my mind's eye, sitting at home, as when I saw you at No. 35" (*Letters*, I, p. 185). Since William's only visit with George in London occurred on 11-20 April 1879 it is almost certain Gissing was living "at No. 35" by 11 April, a week after the arrival of the legacy.

¹⁹The evidence for this is inferential, but firm: when they move from 35 Huntley Street to 38 Edward Street where rent is 9/- a week, he tells Algernon they will be "thus gaining 3/- weekly upon present rent" (*Letters*, I, p. 181).

²⁰*Letters*, I, p. 164.

²¹*Ibid.*, I, p. 180.

²²*Ibid.*, I, pp. 301, 317.

²³*Ibid.*, II, pp. 27, 284.

²⁴Austin Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

²⁵*Ibid.*, II, p. 86.

²⁶The peril of extrapolating from isolated moments is exhibited by Collie when he infers from Gissing's observation in 1884 that he was earning £5.10s weekly from tutoring that he enjoyed "an annual income of between £150 and £200." (*op. cit.*, p. 60). As the present study shows, it is extremely unlikely that Gissing's annual receipts from tutoring ever exceeded the £135 I estimate for 1885.

²⁷*Letters*, I, p. 317.

²⁸*Ibid.*, II, p. 14.

²⁹*Ibid.*, II, p. 1.

³⁰*Ibid.*, II, p. 69.

³¹*Ibid.*, II, p. 27.

³²*Ibid.*, II, pp. 18, 186

³³*Ibid.*, II, p. 18.

³⁴*Ibid.*, III, p. 263.

³⁵*Letters.*, II, p. 7.

³⁶*George Gissing's Commonplace Book*, ed. Jacob Korg (New York: The New York Public Library, 1962), p. 57.

³⁷*Letters*, II, p. 86.

³⁸*Ibid.*, II, p. 100.

³⁹*Ibid.*, II, p. 104.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, II, p. 84.

⁴¹Subsequent years do not show evidence of further recourse to the William inheritance; this substantiates the hypothesis of the editors of *Letters* (II, p. 7) that the approximately £400 of this inheritance were distributed equally among the four surviving siblings rather than being divided between the two surviving sons. Had the latter been the case, Gissing would have received £200, much more than the deficits of 1881 and 1882 would have absorbed.

⁴²*Letters*, II, p. 127.

⁴³Gissing's "Account of Books &c." indicates that he received £6.6s (not £8.8s) for "Phoebe's Fortune" and that the £6.6s he was paid for "Letty Coe" was received in 1891. However, his 27 February 1884 letter to Algernon emphasizes his disappointment at only receiving eight guineas for "Phoebe's Fortune" when he had expected fifteen and on 23 December 1884 he tells Algernon "I have the cheque for 'Letty Coe' from Bentley, – six guineas." *Letters*, II, pp. 200, 278.

⁴⁴*Letters*, II, p. 292.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, II, pp. 313, 319, 353.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, II, p. 356.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, II, pp. 327-328.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, II, p. 368.

⁴⁹In his "Account of Books," Gissing assigns both the £50 he received from Smith, Elder & Co. for the three-volume version of *A Life's Morning* and the additional £50 *Cornhill* paid for serial rights to the year 1888. In his 2 January

1886 letter to Ellen, though, he clearly states that his mail for the day included “cheque for £50 from Smith & Elder, for “Emily” (“Emily” was the title Gissing initially attached to *A Life’s Morning*).

⁵⁰*Letters*, III, pp. 261, 269.

⁵¹For *Born in Exile* Gissing only received £135 because he paid a 10% commission to A. P. Watt for the latter’s assistance in marketing the work; however, Adam and Charles Black did disburse £150 for the novel and it is likely that Smith & Elder would have paid Gissing this amount had he persisted when he originally offered them the novel (letter to Algernon, 7 September 1891, *Letters*, IV. p. 320).

⁵²Austin Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 457.

⁵³*Letters*, I, p. 80.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, I, p. 154.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, I, P. 238.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, III, 68.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, IV, p. 188.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, I, p. 264; II, p. 284.

Bleak House and The Emancipated

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“*What and The Emancipated?*” may be my reader’s first response. What can be the connection between Dickens’s relentless depiction of a climatically-challenged, polluted England, smothered by legal precedent and social patronage, and Gissing’s lighter and swifter portrayal of sunny Italy, land of art, classical ruins, and the opportunities for personal growth conferred by leisure and a private income?

Gissing had already published four novels with aggressively working-class settings when the death of his first wife moved him to write *The Nether World*, a final denunciation of English society’s treatment of the very poor. But Nell’s death and its literary catharsis freed him emotionally and, to some extent, financially, making possible the trip to Italy (October 1888 to February 1889) of which he had long dreamed. Towards the end of that delightful holiday, however, reality began to obtrude again, and Gissing started to worry about the necessary next book. His experiences in Italy would eventually provide theme, setting, tone, and occasional transcribed event. But, as had happened before and would happen again, his

reading too would help suggest character and incident. In the case of *The Emancipated*, it would suggest also an organising structure of two marriages, one markedly more rewarding than the other.

Faced with the task of peopling yet another novel (*The Emancipated* would be his seventh to be published and at least his ninth to be written), Gissing, who would become the first of the very greatest Dickensians, remembered his reading. Mr. Musselwhite—one finds that one does not wish to omit the honorific—is not a major character. C. J. Francis, in fact, wonders what he is doing in the book: “by what logic can Mr. Musselwhite, the wholly conventional, mindless and bored remittance man, be related to the emancipation theme?” He then goes on to give part of the answer, remarking that Musselwhite “is a notable comic creation ... and Dickensian principles of his inherent if irrelevant interest would justify his inclusion, and that of all the other inhabitants of the boarding-house world of Naples” (p. 18). Part of this background of English pension life in Italy, he finally marries Barbara Denyer, a pretentious and mercenary young woman. He is an amiable and ineffectual gentleman, living financially on an allowance from “my brother the baronet,” who has “a place in Lincolnshire” and emotionally on memories of that place, where “he had spent the bloom of his life,” his youth (Gissing pp. 42-43. All future references to this edition).

The most famous baronet with a “place in Lincolnshire” in English literature, and presumably in world literature too, is Sir Leicester Dedlock, significantly named symbol of the need for social change. His wife, at her first appearance in *Bleak House*, “has been down at what she calls, in familiar conversation, her ‘place’ in Lincolnshire. ... My Lady Dedlock’s ‘place’ has been extremely dreary. ... Therefore my lady Dedlock has come away from the place in Lincolnshire” (Dickens pp.11-12. All future references to this edition). The phrase “the” or “our place in Lincolnshire” is used three more times in this second chapter alone. Gissing remembered it: like a comedian with a catchphrase, he uses it, usually in sardonic quotation marks, at least eight times in connection with Mr. Musselwhite (pp. 42-43, 123, 284, 294), once making great play with it, as Barbara Denyer attempts to draw out her inarticulate prey:

During the last few days, Barbara had exhibited a revival of interest in the ‘place in Lincolnshire.’ Her experiments proved that it needed but a moderate ingenuity to make Mr. Musselwhite’s favourite topic practically inexhaustible. The ‘place’ itself having been sufficiently described, it was natural to enquire what other ‘places’ were its neighbours, what were the characteristics of the nearest town, how long it

took to drive from the 'place' to the town, from the 'place' to such another 'place,' and so on. (p. 123)

Mr. Musselwhite's biography and attitudes bear an eerie resemblance to those of *Bleak House*'s Trooper George, character and class gulfs between the two notwithstanding. The former's stories of "his blissful youth," played for faintly scornful comedy, are of "a fox-cub and a terrier; ... of a heifer that went mad; the third, and the most thrilling, of a dismissed coachman who turned burglar, and in the dead of night fired shots at old Sir Grant and his sons. In relating these anecdotes, his eye grew moist and his throat swelled" (p. 44). George Rouncewell, the son of Sir Leicester's housekeeper, also thinks constantly and sometimes moist-eyed of the Lincolnshire Eden of his boyhood. He is guilty at the pain his going for a soldier has caused his beloved mother, long unaware of her son's whereabouts, but tells Phil Squod too "I was born in the country. ... There's not a bird's note that I don't know. ... Not many an English leaf or berry that I couldn't name. ... I was a real country boy once" (p. 326). His final role as a sort of batman to the stricken Sir Leicester brings him back to what he acknowledges as the haven of home. Secondly, both Mr. Musselwhite and Trooper George have fallen into the snares of money-grubbing Londoners: in the case of the former "wily persons who took advantage of his innocent youth, who initiated him into the metropolitan mysteries which sadden the soul and deplete the pocket, who finally abandoned him upon the shoal of a youngest brother's allowance when his father passed away from the place in Lincolnshire" (p. 43); the latter, of course, falls into the clutches of the usurious Grandfather Smallweed. Finally, each self-respectingly feels he cannot go back, Mr. Musselwhite "imagining to himself that he atoned for the disreputable past in keeping far from the track of his distinguished relatives" (p. 43), and George repeatedly expressing his refusal to return to his family, or rather two families, the Rouncewells and the Dedlocks, after what he sees as half a wasted life.

All this is fascinating—it is noteworthy that Gissing is so possessed by Dickens that he does not even change the 'place's' county—but it must be granted as incidental. What, however, is central in organisation and theme is Gissing's borrowing of the treatment of two marriages in *Bleak House* and his recreation of them for his own, very different, novel. I believe it can be shown that the relationship of the two "wards in Jarndyce," Ada Clare and Richard Carstone, is the inspiration for that of Cecily Doran and Reuben Elgar. Similarly, Esther Summerson's marriage to Allan Wood-

court is paralleled by Miriam's to Mallard. Let us take the second and the less important of the two first.

The Emancipated begins with a description of the benighted Miriam Baske in Naples, rigidly sabbatarian (and using her power from afar to enforce attendance at her favoured chapel), censorious, and self-righteous. In the course of the novel she slowly blossoms intellectually, finding pleasure in reading Dante, turning in disgust and shame from the life of dissenting Bartles, and allowing herself to be instructed in artistic matters by Ross Mallard. She blossoms as a woman too: her first marriage to the "wealthy and pious manufacturer" thirty-two years her senior and, moreover, "essentially a coarse man" (pp. 199-200) did not awaken her; in Italy she learns jealousy, that inevitable concomitant of the early stages of sexual love, and we assume that the kiss Mallard eventually gives her in his studio is ardently returned (p. 440). With pain and not unaccompanied by foolish blunder, Miriam sloughs off a stunting past and forms a satisfying relationship with one who has himself, after intense suffering, subdued an enchantment that his reason had rejected. A revealing paragraph in a chapter entitled "Teaching and Learning," with its echo of ll. 11-12 of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 ("I grant I never saw a goddess go;/My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground") shows the progress that Mallard and the previously graceless Miriam have both made:

[Mallard's] glance led him to observe Miriam's gait; its grace and refinement gave him a sudden sensation of keen pleasure. He thought, without wishing to do so, of Cecily; her matchless, maidenly charm in movement was something of quite another kind. Mrs. Baske trod the common earth, yet with, it seemed to him, a dignity that distinguished her from ordinary women. (pp. 321-22)

Finally, Miriam forms a relationship with a man whose life has a purpose. Mallard would deny with his last breath that that purpose has utilitarian value, that he is "serving mankind." His aim is purely artistic: "The one object I have in life is to paint a bit of the world just as I see it" (pp. 95-96).

The Miriam who comes to characterise the "religion of [her] childhood" as "one of bitterness and violence and arbitrary judgment and hatred" (p. 320) would have recognised the girlhood of Esther Summerson, also named for an Old Testament heroine, whose unsmiling aunt "went to church three times every Sunday, and to morning prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and to lectures whenever there were lectures; and never missed." Esther is not allowed to visit the homes of her schoolmates and her birthday is

marked only by incomprehensible condemnation: “It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born! ... pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written.” She reacts by vowing to be “industrious, contented, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and to win some love to myself if I could” (pp. 17, 19, 20).

Esther’s almost unflinching success in this last ambition has been the cause of a certain amount of critical derision, as time and again she flutteringly reports the admiration and praise those she encounters insist on showering upon her. Unlike Miriam, she is not represented as ridding herself with protracted and overt difficulty of the emotional repression of her puritan childhood. She loves Ada Clare and John Jarndyce and Caddy Jellyby and others and is loved by them. The man she eventually marries does not have to contend with jealous suspicion or his choice’s initial untaught inability to help him in life and career. And the life purpose of Allan Woodcourt *is* to serve mankind. He becomes a hard-working doctor in Yorkshire and some of his patients’ gratitude is transferred to Esther. He embraces, in fact, what Mallard had acknowledged as possibly “the highest [vocation] in the absolute sense ... Possibly the life of a hospital nurse, or a sister of mercy—something of that kind—comes nearest to the ideal.” When Mallard speaks of the ubiquity of pain (“In a world where pain is the most obvious fact, the task of mercy must surely take precedence of most others” [94]), Gissing has him nod respectfully to his unknown alter ego, he reminds us of a long-standing Gissingesque debate about art, and he prospectively knits Madeline Denyer’s wretched end and Zillah’s compassion more tightly into the novel’s themes, incidentally providing an answer to another of C. J. Francis’s objections to the novel (“to follow the affairs of the Denyers as Gissing does, even after their pretensions of ‘emancipation’ have been discarded, seems unnecessary” [p. 19]).

If Miriam and Esther both marry successfully men whose lives are dignified by directed and steady effort, both spend much time worrying about a man whose life most conspicuously is not. It is a shared pattern in *Bleak House* and *The Emancipated*, novels that are so incomparable in so many ways, that each heroine appeals to the man she will later marry to try to help the man whose aimless indolence alarms her. Esther asks Allan Woodcourt to be a friend to the increasingly Chancery-obsessed Richard Carstone: “There is nothing Richard wants so much, as a friend. He always liked you. Pray see him when you get [to London]” (p. 550); Miriam,

lamenting the lack of “perseverance” of her brother, says to Mallard, “He speaks to me of you in a way that— He seems, I mean, to put a value on your friendship, and I think you may still influence him” (p. 91). The difference, of course, lies in the responses of the two men, which reflect the very differing literary personalities of their creators. Allan Woodcourt, “more moved than he had been from the first,” replies, “Miss Summerson ... before Heaven, I will be a true friend to him! I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!” (p. 550). Mallard’s response is, “I have very little faith in the influence of one person on another, Mrs. Baske. For ill— yes, that is often seen; but influence of the kind you suggest is the rarest of things” (p. 91).

Obviously, there are important differences between the relationships sketched above: Esther always loves the beautiful Ada, who will eventually marry the wayward Richard, and Miriam sometimes dislikes the beautiful Cecily, who will eventually marry the wayward Reuben; Esther always cares for Richard, who even at the end responds fondly to her, and Miriam sometimes despises Reuben, who indeed comes close to striking his sister at the novel’s close. Evidence for an inspiration for Gissing’s characters and the pattern of their relationship in Dickens’s novel is, however, strong.

A Dickensian inspiration for Reuben Elgar and Cecily Doran is, I suggest, even stronger. Gissing was scathing about Richard Carstone and Ada Clare, the “wards in Jarndyce,” when he came to write his introduction to *Bleak House* for the Rochester Edition:

In Richard Carstone, about whom the story may be said to circle, Dickens tried to carry on a purpose he had once entertained with regard to Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son*, that of showing a good lad at the mercy of temptations and circumstances which little by little wreck his life; but Richard has very little life to lose, and we form only a shadowy conception of his amiably futile personality. Still less convincing is his betrothed, Ada, whose very name one finds it difficult to remember. (pp. 174-75)

He attributes their lack of colour to their “passivity ... the characteristic of all the foremost figures; their business is to submit to the irresistible” (p. 175).

We first meet Richard and Ada when they are introduced to Esther by Conversation Kenge. Richard is an innocent and attractive nineteen-year-old: “He was a handsome youth, with an ingenuous face, and a most engaging laugh; ... he stood by us, in the light of the fire too, talking gaily, like a light-hearted boy” (p. 30). The novel charts his inability to settle to any career while the Chancery suit with its possible immense dispositions

in favour of Ada and himself hovers over him, his gradual descent into monomania, his secret marriage to Ada when Jarndyce asks for reconsideration, his paranoid suspicions of his guardian, his heartbreak at the suit's outcome, all bequests eaten up in costs, his resipiscent asking for forgiveness, his death. Richard is a pathetic figure. But he is never ignoble, never knowingly an unworthy husband for Ada. He never loses the reader's respect.

We first hear about Reuben before we meet him. Mallard speaks of his "going to the devil as speedily as can in reason be expected of a man," mentions "heavy drinking," and predicts eventual suicide even as he acknowledges considerable ability (pp. 9-10). Reuben's first appearance is to his dismayed and somewhat scornful sister, in a scene that makes clear his violent rejection of his religious upbringing and his volatility (he has already lost all his money and abandoned a career in law, now projecting literary endeavour). A carefully nuanced presentation leaves an impression of undeniable male beauty, possibly specious rhetorical force, and a probably infinite tendency to self-deceit.

The ambivalent portrayal continues as Reuben and Mallard travel together. Gissing is careful to give credit to Reuben's admirable qualities: the glittering and brilliant Cecily must not look a fool when she falls in love with him. So Mallard, already gnawed by incipient jealousy, still pays homage to Reuben's higher nature while remembering his sordid past: as Reuben expresses ecstasy at the scenery before him, as he indulges in "literary allusion" and "poetical feeling," Mallard "could scarcely identify him with the reckless, and sometimes vulgar, spendthrift who had been rushing his way to ruin in London" p. (109). But in succeeding chapters Gissing narrates Reuben's consciously ceding to the temptation of seeing Cecily again because "he chose to; because it was pleasant; surely an excellent reason" (p. 135), thus making it more difficult, then, for him, impossible, to keep the promise he had made Mallard to return to Amalfi and get down to serious literary work. He narrates Reuben's engineering of an apparently casual meeting with Cecily, their mutual declaration of love, Mallard's objections in his capacity of Cecily's guardian to marriage before she attains her majority.

Here again there exist direct correlations between Dickens and Gissing. Years of excitement then disappointment grind Richard down ("the uncertainties and delays of the Chancery suit had imparted to his nature something of the careless spirit of a gamester ... About his large bright eyes

that used to be so merry, there was a wanness and a restlessness that changed them altogether” [pp. 204, 722]). Weeks of frustration make Reuben feverish (“His eyes had the unquiet of long-continued agitation, the look that results from intense excitement when it has become the habit of day after day” [p. 213]). Richard Carstone takes his guardian’s cancelling of his engagement to Ada ill (Jarndyce has had troubling experience of Richard by now); Reuben Elgar takes Ross Mallard’s forbidding of his immediate marriage to Cecily amiss (Mallard is frank indeed about the sort of life he sees in store for any spouse of Reuben). Richard, informed by interested legal advisers that his and Jarndyce’s interests in the suit are at variance and, furthermore, sick at heart and no longer able to judge accurately, suspects his guardian of interfering in his life for his own ends. Reuben, who has noticed a love that does actually exist, although it has no role in Mallard’s intervention, suggests to Cecily that Mallard forbids their marriage due to his own love for her (“Does he speak like a man who is disinterested?” [p. 214]).

Here similarities end. Richard and Ada’s falling in love is as curiously sexless as all Dickens’s courtships, and Dickens does not record the details of their clandestine marriage. (Careful readers will, perhaps, be a little quicker on the uptake than Esther.) The terrible fascination of the Chancery suit degrades Richard but Reuben’s weaknesses are innate. He justifies the renewed rudderlessness of his life after the first eighteen months or so of marriage by a spurious fatalism. His lies and ignoble infidelities are unimaginable in Richard’s life, and, of course, in any novel written by Richard’s creator.

If Dickens has besmirched his Richard figure he has transformed the rather colourless Ada for the cosmopolitan better. It is difficult to imagine Dickens’s angel in the house shining in London society, let alone those of Paris, Berlin, or St. Petersburg, or charming M. Silvenoire by the idiomatic fluency of her French (p. 247), or becoming absorbed in a reading of Edgar Quinet when her husband is mysteriously absent (p. 389), or studying Latin or German. Ada may have “rich golden hair” (p. 30) and Cecily may have “hair of dark gold” (p. 22) but the personal, as opposed to the situational, resemblances between the two women end there. We have, then, a Dickensian germ transmogrified by the creative imagination, by the differing gender assumptions (Gissing is a *late* Victorian), and by the wider intellectual horizons of the later writer.

But the general biographical sweep of the two women's lives is undeniably similar. Both leave obscurity to enter a brief period of sunny promise when they fall in love with an apparently promising mate. Both, in fact, sacrifice themselves to disappointing men, the first misguided, the second unworthy. Dickens makes Ada's course proleptically clear in a striking image, which Gissing borrows. Quotation at some length is necessary.

After the public acknowledgment of love between the two cousins, Richard and Ada leave the room:

The door stood open, and we both [i.e., Jarndyce and the narrator Esther] followed them with our eyes, as they passed down the adjoining room on which the sun was shining, and out at its farther end. Richard with his head bent, and her hand drawn through his arm, was talking to her very earnestly; and she looked up in his face, listening, and seemed to see nothing else. So young, so beautiful, so full of hope and promise, they went on lightly through the sunlight, as their own happy thoughts might then be traversing the years to come, and making them all years of brightness. So they passed away into the shadow, and were gone. It was only a burst of light that had been so radiant. The room darkened as they went out, and the sun was clouded over. (p. 163)

When Richard's capacity for steady perseverance in any matter unrelated to Chancery has become questionable and Jarndyce looks at Ada "with something of a shadow on [his eyes'] benevolent expression," Esther remembers this scene: "it was but a very little while since [Jarndyce] had watched them passing down the room in which the sun was shining, and away into the shade" (p. 211). Not far from the end Allan Woodcourt and Esther "were in the very same room into which I had brought my blushing girl, when her youthful lover, now her so altered husband, was the choice of her young heart; the very same room, from which my guardian and I had watched them going away through the sunlight, in the fresh bloom of their hope and promise" (pp. 730-31).

When Reuben begins his attempt to persuade Cecily to run away with him, he significantly says, "Come further this way, into the shadow" (p. 217). After he has exacted from her a promise to elope, "*She issued from shadows into broad moonlight, looked once round, once at the gleaming crags, and passed again into gloom*" (p. 220. My italics).

From the ages of seven to twelve Cecily has lived in fundamentalist darkness with Mrs. Elgar in Manchester, for her father "desired his daughter to pass the years of her childhood with people who he knew would guide her in the very straitest way of Puritan doctrine" p. (81). When Reuben meets her again he is astonished at the change in her, as he

remembers “a slight, pale, shy little girl, fond of keeping in corners with a book, and seemingly marked out for a life of dissenting piety and provincial surroundings” (pp. 69-70). In the interval a minor miracle has happened and this particular brand has been plucked from the burning, to use a famous phrase of the prophet Zachariah in a way to which the young Cecily’s friends and acquaintances would object: the very Mrs. Lessingham whose later complacency will help Cecily ruin her life has given her six years of social polishing and European travel. From this light the egotistic Reuben leads her into the darkness of a miserable marriage.

I have attempted on previous occasions in the pages of this journal to suggest literary inspirations for Gissingesque characters or scenes.¹ Relative poverty obliged Gissing to produce at a rate that exhausted the imagination; that same poverty, combined with domestic chaos, personal shyness, and a claustrophobic disinclination for social intercourse, combined too with a hopeless bookishness, occasionally led the harassed author to remould previous literary works. *The Emancipated* is testimony to the continuing power of Dickens’s novels over Gissing’s imagination. Dickens would himself observe in a letter of 7 September 1852, while he was writing *Bleak House*, that “most writers of fiction write, partly from their experience, and partly from their imagination, and . . . in the work to which you refer I have had recourse to both sources” (qtd. Dickens p. 891). Gissing, fresh from his Italian trip, had recourse to both sources too; and it is noteworthy how his imagination took and recast material from what is arguably the greatest work of his greatest predecessor, rejecting sentimentalities in the portrayal of both sexes, imprinting his own uncompromising views of human nature and destiny.

And, perhaps, weakening the novel in one important way. We have seen quoted above Gissing’s view that *Bleak House* revolves around the story of Richard Carstone. It is indeed the case that the characters Gissing modeled upon Ada and Richard dominate *The Emancipated*. C. J. Francis’s regret at the relegation to second place of Miriam and Mallard—“much more interesting, their personalities subtler, their relationship much more potentially intriguing than [that of] Reuben and Cecily. Despite this they are pushed into second place . . . and the full possibilities in them are not developed” (p. 19)—will be shared by many of the novel’s readers. Perhaps in this case Gissing’s perception of the earlier novel helped have an unfortunate effect on his own later work.

¹“A New Source for *Born in Exile*?”, *Gissing Newsletter*, July 1980, pp. 25-32; “Charles Lamb and *Born in Exile*,” *Gissing Newsletter*, October 1988, pp. 1-7; “‘Feeble Idyllicism’: Gissing’s Critique of *Oliver Twist* and *Ryecroft*,” *Gissing Journal*, July 2007, pp. 26-32.

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The Peregrinations of a Preston Traveller

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Of all of Gissing’s London lodgings, 17 Oakley Crescent, Chelsea, was without any doubt (for reasons explained below) the one on which he looked back with the greatest possible pleasure. He stayed there for twenty months from 9 September 1882 to 10 May 1884, and his correspondence during this period testifies to the comfort and excellent care provided by his landlady and landlord. “I have every attention, & get good cooking. The landlady relieves me of all trouble as to meals, & gives me for dinner at night just whatever she likes...it is really very comfortable...all my home necessities are supplied by the Cowards...The names and numbers of most of my [London] abodes have totally left me. The present one, however, will not so easily be forgotten...There is only one place in the world wherein to live, & that is *Chelsea!*...[I] have had a very pleasant Christmas with the Cowards.” These are some of Gissing’s feelings, garnered from his correspondence, reflecting the domestic happiness he enjoyed while staying with the Cowards.

Pierre Coustillas in a footnote about the Cowards has little to tell us about the people with whom Gissing stayed at Chelsea, but what he does say (“The new rooms were rented from a Mrs. Coward, with whom Gissing established a friendly relationship”) is perhaps more remarkable for what has been omitted than what is stated. What Coustillas has called “a friendly relationship” existing between lodger and landlady, Morley Roberts in a

revealing analysis of Gissing's relations with the Cowards did not hesitate to call an "affair." Here is the passage in question:

One might have imagined, considering his early experiences, that he would have led the ordinary life of man, and associated, if only occasionally, with women of the mercenary type. This, I am wholly convinced, was a thing he never did, though I possess one poem which implies the possible occurrence of such a passing *liaison*. There was, however, another incident in his life which occurred not long before I went to America [March 1884]. He was then living in one room in the house of a journeyman bookbinder. On several occasions when I visited him there I saw his landlady, a young and not unpleasing woman, who seemed to take great interest in him, and did her very best to make him comfortable in narrow, almost impossible, surroundings. Her husband, a man a great deal older than herself, drank, and not infrequently ill-treated her. This was not wholly Maitland's [=Gissing's] story, for I saw the man myself, as well as his wife. It appears that she went for sympathy to her lodger, and he told her something of his own troubles. Their common griefs threw them together. She was obviously of more than the usual intelligence of her class. It appeared that she desired to learn French, or made Maitland believe so; my own view being that she desired his company. The result of this was only natural, and soon afterwards Maitland was obliged to leave the house owing to the jealousy of her husband, who for many years had already been suspicious of her without any cause. But this affair was only passing. He took other rooms, and so far as I know never saw her again. (Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, first edition, pp. 134-36.)

Though we have learned to treat with circumspection what Roberts presents as facts, there seems to be every reason to regard the paragraph above as an adequate record of what was happening at the Oakley Crescent lodgings in the spring of 1884. Roberts confirms Gissing's claim that Mrs. Annie Coward "did her very best to make him comfortable in narrow, almost impossible, surroundings" and in his description of her ("frequently ill-treated...went for sympathy to her lodger...desired to learn French") he emphasizes the very qualities that a man of Gissing's disposition would find irresistible. Though Roberts describes Gissing's landlady as "a young and not unpleasing woman," he fails to give us the exact ages of Mr. and Mrs. Coward. In an attempt to identify the Cowards more fully I have undertaken some genealogical research, which has yielded some interesting results.

If I had always assumed that Gissing was lodging with an older, childless couple, the facts I unearthed proved me wrong. George Mattison Coward, born at Preston, Lancashire, in the summer of 1849, was the eighth and last child of John and Margaret Coward. John Coward (*Blackburn, 1808 – †Preston, 1879) was the owner of a hairdresser's shop at 140

Church Street, Preston, and in the 1871 Census we find George Coward assisting his father as a hairdresser in his home town. However, he cannot have found either the occupation or the familiar environment sufficiently challenging to keep him at Preston, since we find him moving south towards the metropolis and its greener pastures, where in the summer quarter of 1875 (July-September) he married at Kensington, though I have as yet been unable to establish the exact date of his marriage. The young woman of his choice was Annie (Jane) Hopcraft, a flowermaker, born at Marylebone, on 1st April 1857, the daughter of the plasterer George Hopcraft (*Banbury, 1834 – †Leyton, 1909) and his wife Annie. This makes Annie Coward only eight months older than Gissing, which may have increased her attraction for the writer.

In June 1880 the Cowards had their first child, George Lionel Coward, who was born at Chelsea and died at the young age of 20 in the first quarter of 1901 at Leyton, West Ham. A second son, Herbert Hugh, was born at Chelsea, in the second quarter of 1882, so that by the time Gissing moved in with the Cowards (September 1882), Mrs. Coward was a young wife and mother of two young sons, running the lodging-house registered in her husband's name. Herbert became a successful civil servant and was the only Coward to remain permanently in England. Having started his career as a copyist, he married Lillian Rose Hall at Leyton in 1908 and between 1926 and 1933 he resided at 47 Redbridge Lane, Wanstead, only a mile or so removed from the Leytonstone address (682 High Road), where he lived with his mother and brothers in 1901. George Coward, the onetime hairdresser, gave his occupation as "salesman & traveller" in the 1881 Census and in the 1891 Census he had become a "commercial traveller." Three more sons were born to the Cowards, Clive, at Battersea, on 1st December 1884, Frank, born at Forest Gate, West Ham, in the last quarter of 1886, and finally, John Philip, in the third quarter of 1891, at Leyton, West Ham.

The mobility of the Coward family may best be illustrated by giving the reader the various addresses (the list is almost certainly incomplete) in and about London, where we find them between 1880 and 1903.

10, Shawfield Street, Chelsea	1880
17, Oakley Crescent, Chelsea	mid-1882-autumn 1884
67, Rosenau Street, Battersea	Autumn 1884
Forest Gate, West Ham	Autumn 1886
10, High Street, Leyton	Census 1891
682, High Road, Leytonstone	Census 1901

From the 1901 Census we learn that George Coward no longer lives under the same Leyton roof as his wife and the four (remaining) sons. Annie Coward is marked as Head of the family, yet her marital status is given as “married.” She is a self-employed milliner/dressmaker and there is no trace at all of her husband anywhere in Britain. However, in the List of Passengers of SS Tongariro sailing from Liverpool on 23rd December 1898 and bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, we find George Mattison Coward on his way to the New World. We later find him landing at Boston on 12 January. We may be tempted to conclude that after 22 years of marriage little love was lost between husband and wife, and that George’s departure for America offered a welcome relief to Annie from his bouts of drunken cruelty, if we may believe Morley Roberts’ account of their marital relationship.

But again the facts tell us a different story. On 18 July 1903, Mrs. Annie Coward is among the passengers of SS Umbria, bound for New York, where she arrives on 26 July 1903. In the column specifying her destination we read: “Husband G. M. Coward, 1524 Vine Street, Philadelphia, PA.” That her youngest son John does not accompany her on the voyage leads me to the tentative conclusion that the boy had died not long after his ninth birthday. Apparently some time between his own arrival in America (January 1899) and that of his wife (July 1903) the Preston traveller settled on one of the chief thoroughfares of what was then the second largest city of the United States. The reunion of husband and wife was the prelude to their being joined by two of their sons. On his arrival in New York on 18 October 1903, Frank Coward, having made the crossing in the same ship as his mother, gave his occupation as labourer and answered the question about his destination (“Whether going to join a relative or friend; and if so, what relative or friend, and his name and complete address”) as follows: “Parents. 1524, Vine Street, Philadelphia, PA.” Eleven months later, his brother Clive sailed to New York from the French port of Boulogne, arriving on 19 September 1904. Clive’s occupation is given as merchant seaman and curiously, he stated his destination as: “*Friend*. [my italics] George Coward, 1524 Vine Street, Philadelphia.” A careful inspection of the relevant document (“List or Manifest of Alien Passengers SS Blücher”) reveals that instead of “friend” the custom officer had first written “Father.” Why Clive Coward should have changed his mind baffles me. Another question that arises is why, unlike his brother Frank, Clive refers only to his father, as domiciled in Philadelphia. Does this mean that Annie Coward

before a year was out had been disappointed in her hopes of making a new start in America and returned to the mother country? The one suggestive detail that might point in this direction is the death of Annie's father, George Hopcraft, which occurred in the second quarter of 1909 in the district of West Ham, Essex, in which Leyton is situated. Did he die in his daughter's house?

However, after four and half years of living their separate lives, the two Cowards may simply have decided they preferred their independent status, and this may account for my inability to trace any further details of Annie Coward's life and/or death either in America or in Britain. However, there may be among the English and/or American readers of this piece, one or two with a serious interest in genealogical matters, ready to take up the challenge to find out what became not just of Annie Coward, née Hopcraft, but also of her husband and sons.

Despite the fact that after 1904 the movements of the disappearing commercial traveller from Preston cannot be traced, there is some consolation for the readers of Gissing's fiction in that one of George Coward's friends became the model for Mr. Gammon, the town traveller in the novel of that name. This claim is based upon the following entry in Gissing's *Scrapbook*:

Coward's pugilistic friend. Prides himself on getting a situation for everybody, [**Cp. *Town Traveller*, 77.**] and presumes their acquaintance with everything, e.g. Berlin wools, [**Cp. *Town Traveller*, 81.**] and the cork trade. [**Cp. *Town Traveller*, 205.**] His roaring "Cooler" out of window at night. Always would enter his lodgings by the window. Acquaintance with the police; mysterious free admission to Music Halls, etc. [**"Humble Felicity," *Stories and Sketches*, 272.**] The weeping when "Village Blacksmith" was sung. "Blacksmith be damned; he was a wine merchant!" – "Will you walk west?" – Dies and leaves property to a barmaid.

Some of the details from this entry clearly found their way into *The Town Traveller* and served to round out Gammon's portrait as a travelling salesman. I take it that this generally genial character must have been based upon "George Coward's pugilistic friend," but some of the other characters from the novel also seem to owe some of their experiences, inclinations and weaknesses to Gissing's Chelsea landlord and landlady. E.g. on pp. 20-21 of *The Town Traveller* we are informed about the marital experiences of Mrs. Clover and her disappearing husband:

Her life [Mrs. Clover's] had not lacked variety. Married at eighteen, after a month's courtship, to a man of whom she knew next to nothing, she lived for a time in Liverpool, where her husband—older by ten years—pursued various callings in the neighbourhood of the docks...they...struggled with great poverty for several years. This

period was closed by the sudden disappearance of Mr. Clover. He did not actually desert his wife and child; at regular intervals letters and money arrived from him...beyond the postmarks, which indicated constant travel in England and abroad, these letters (always very affectionate) gave no information as to the writer's circumstances. When Mrs. Clover had lived with her parents for about three years she was summoned by her husband to Dulwich, where the man had somehow established himself as a cab proprietor; he explained his wanderings as the result of mere restlessness, and with this cold comfort Mrs. Clover had to be content....One fine day Mr. Clover was again missing. Again he sent letters and money,...without offering any reason for his behaviour....Six years had since elapsed...Clover's letters were still posted in London; money still came from him, sometimes in remittances of as much as twenty pounds. But handwriting and composition often suggested that the writer was either ill or intoxicated. The latter seemed not unlikely, for Clover had always inclined to the bottle. His wife no longer distressed herself. The first escapade she had forgiven; the second estranged her. She had resolved, indeed, that if her husband did again present himself, his home should not be under her roof.

Reading this account of the marital experiences of the Clovers it is hard not to be reminded of the Cowards and theirs. This is the more remarkable as one had thought of *The Town Traveller* as Gissing's most obviously invented work of fiction, which now proves indebted to models from real life, not unlike most of Gissing's other major novels. In this context the location of Mrs. Clover's china shop is similarly suggestive of the strong link between Gissing's fiction and life as he knew it. The shop is situated in "a street off Battersea Park Road," which is the very area to which the Cowards moved when they left Oakley Crescent. It was at 67 Rosenau Road, Battersea, that in December 1884 Clive Coward was born, a stone's throw away from Battersea Park Road. Annie Coward had already conceived her third son when Gissing was rather urgently pressing his brother Algernon to recommend to him the best introduction to the piano, as Mrs. Coward was just beginning to learn "and does not know the best book." He asks for the introduction used by his sisters to be sent to him speedily and adds "*I should be greatly obliged.*" [Gissing's italics.] All would seem to have been sweetness and light between the landlady and her obliging lodger. Then, just over a fortnight later, out of the blue, in another letter to Algernon comes the news: "I am sorry to say that I am about to leave Chelsea." The last thing we learn from the correspondence is that it was Mrs. Coward who found Gissing's new room and that was the last he saw of her. Or was it?

The Gissings' Wakefield Circle

V – The Mackie Family

ANTHONY PETYT
Wakefield

The first member of this family to settle in Wakefield was David Mackie. He was born in 1769 at South Leith, Scotland, the second of the nine children of Alexander Mackie and Margaret Doig. He arrived in Wakefield about 1790 and set up in business as a gardener. He married Rachel Chambers at Wakefield parish church in 1793 and they had a family of three sons and a daughter. The two older sons, David (1794-1859) and Alexander (born in 1796) were in partnership as wool-staplers with premises in Cheapside, Wakefield. The daughter, Rachel (1801-1844) married Joseph Child, a brickmaker of Kirkgate, Wakefield, in 1825. The youngest child, Robert Jefferson Mackie, was born in 1803; he was to become a corn factor and to amass a great fortune. It is interesting to note that the three sons were all baptised at Wakefield parish church whilst the daughter was baptised at Salem Congregational Chapel in George Street, Wakefield. David Mackie died in 1824 and was buried in the graveyard of the parish church but his wife, who survived him until 1847, was interred in the burial ground of the West Parade Methodist Chapel.

Robert Jefferson Mackie, who was to become known to the Gissings, was born on 12 January 1803, and received his education at the Lancasterian School at Wakefield. In 1817 at the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to John Tootall, a corn factor in the town. At the end of his apprenticeship he left the employment of Mr. Tootall because he would not pay him the salary he thought he was worth. With very little capital he set up in business on his own account and it is said he used to walk, there and back, to the various corn markets in the West Riding. As time went by his firm prospered and he was eventually trading with more distant markets which led to him running a lucrative business, and, in due course, in investing his excess profits in other ventures such as coal mining and brick making; he also invested in agricultural properties.

A staunch liberal, he served as President of the Wakefield Liberal Association for many years until he had to resign in 1869 due to ill health. After the incorporation of Wakefield in 1848 he was elected as a town councillor for the Calder Ward and at the first meeting of the Council was elected one

of the four Aldermen for the period up to November 1850. He did not stand again as a councillor but in 1855 he was re-appointed an Alderman, a post he held for one year, resigning on 10 November 1856, and he never again entered the Council. Robert Jefferson Mackie, a non-conformist, was connected with the Wesleyan movement from the time he joined the Sunday school at the age of five, although he was married in an Anglican church at York and all his children were baptised at Wakefield parish church. He attended regularly the West Parade Chapel and over a long period held many important positions in the Methodist church such as Circuit and Society Steward. He was a friend to the poor and was involved with several charitable institutions in the town. Thus he supported the Clayton Hospital in Wakefield and the Crowther Charity that did good work in the area, and also served on the boards of management of the Benevolent Society and the Bible Society. He died in 1872, a very wealthy man with a personal estate of over £100,000. His will provided for the bequest of £250 to two branches of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and £100 to Wakefield Auxiliary Bible Society, then the remainder of his personal estate plus his real estate went to his family, including the large house in St. John's Square, Wakefield which he left to his eldest son.¹ He was interred in the burial ground of West Parade Chapel.

In October 1828 Robert Jefferson Mackie had married Barbara Bownas at St. Michael the Belfry Church in York. They had seven children; all but the youngest son, George William, who was born in 1841 and died at the age of four, would have been known to the Gissing family, more particularly the eldest child, Robert Bownas Mackie; he was born in 1829 and will be dealt with at length later. The second child, Ann Rachel, born in 1831, was to marry a clergyman, the Rev. George Smith, later Rector of the parish of Holmesfield and St. Cross in Suffolk. They had a family of six children. David, the third child, was born in 1832; he led a very quiet life and died unmarried in 1880. His obituary described him as a Churchman and a Liberal but he played no part in public affairs apart from being a magistrate.²

The fourth child and third son, Edward Alexander, born in 1834, was to make quite a mark on the life of the area. He worked actively in the family business but was also involved in local politics, local charities and the Volunteer movement. For several years he was President of the Wakefield Chamber of Commerce and like his father and oldest brother he was for some time President of the Wakefield Liberal Association. When the West

Riding County Council was set up in 1888 he was elected as the representative for the Normanton area. For fourteen years he was the chairman of the General Purposes Committee of the Council. He served on the Wakefield Asylum sub-committee and was a Justice of the Peace for both Wakefield and the West Riding of Yorkshire. In 1904, the year of his death, he was appointed Alderman of Wakefield. His involvement from the beginning with the Volunteer movement in Wakefield led to his becoming Lt-Colonel of the 3rd Administrative Battalion of the West Riding Rifle Corps, and Colonel Commandant in 1869. He was presented with the “Volunteer Decoration” by Queen Victoria in 1891, and after his retirement was made Honorary Colonel of the Corps.

In 1865 he had married Emma Gertrude Dunn, the daughter of Richard Dunn of Heath, a village about two miles from Wakefield. Richard Dunn was a corn merchant with premises in Wakefield. The couple first set up home in the Stanley area, where the first two of their nine children were born. In the early 1870s they moved to the Manor House at Heath and they remained there until his retirement in 1894. After the death of his last surviving brother, John, in 1891, Edward became the sole owner of the family business. For various reasons the business fell into decline and in 1894 it failed completely. After the failure he moved to Scarborough and died there on 19 October 1904. He was buried in Scarborough cemetery.³

Robert and Barbara’s fifth child was their second daughter, Eliza Hannah, born in 1835. In 1879, seven years after the death of her father, the unmarried Eliza bought Cliff Hill House in Cliff Hill Terrace for her own occupation. This house was just a few yards from Cliff Field House, her father’s old property, where she was brought up, and from her brother Robert’s house in St. John’s Square. She lived in the house for twenty-one years, her income deriving from the capital inherited from her father. On her death in 1898 she left the house to her nephew, Edward Dacre Mackie, the eldest son of her brother Col. Edward Alexander Mackie. Edward Dacre Mackie never lived in the house, by then known as 2 Sandy Walk. In 1905 it was let to Margaret and Ellen Gissing for use as a school. The sisters had originally opened their “Boys Preparatory School” in a house in Wentworth Terrace but after a few years they needed larger premises. The school was quite successful for six more years until competition from the newly opened Junior Department of Wakefield Grammar School caused its closure.

The fourth son was John, born in 1836. He was educated, as were all the brothers, firstly at a local school and then at Wesley College, Sheffield. He took an active part in the running of the family business until 1874 when he retired and lived off the income from his private fortune. In 1864 Robert Jefferson Mackie had purchased Cliff House at Crigglestone, a village about five miles south of Wakefield, as a residence for his son John. The purchase included the nearby Cliff Colliery, a fireclay works, many other buildings and a large area of agricultural land. The firm of Robert Jefferson Mackie and Sons ran this business, but John was not involved in the day-to-day management. In 1866 John Mackie married Mary Elizabeth, the daughter of James Ingham of New Mills, Derbyshire, the owner of a highly profitable calico printing works. John and Elizabeth acquired a house in the New Mills district and they divided their time between the two residences.⁴

The increasing demand for coal, bricks and fireclay products in the Crigglestone area led to an increase in the production at Mackie's Cliff Colliery and clay works. This increased production required an expanded work force and the Mackies were obliged to build housing to accommodate it. This in turn led to overcrowding in the two small schools in the area and by 1874 pressure was being applied by the local Education Authority for the provision of another school. The local inhabitants were not happy with the idea of forming a School Board because the building of a new school could only be met by an increase in the local rates. In May 1874 a meeting was held in the area at which John Mackie announced that the Mackie Estate would provide the land for a new school and that he would personally pay for the building and its maintenance. The new school opened in 1876 and within three months there were 200 children on the roll. The building was a great boon to the district, being used as a meeting place for local organisations, a venue for amateur concerts, a Working Men's Institute and a library and reading room. John Mackie interested himself in the religious life of the district. He was a Sunday School Teacher, a lay-delegate to the Diocesan Conference in 1884 and in 1889 he became the President of the Wakefield YMCA. His wife also played her part in the life of the area by founding the Crigglestone branch of the Girls' Friendly Society. All this activity was matched by similar acts of kindness at New Mills, Derbyshire which included the building of six almshouses and a Chapel of Ease. John Mackie died at New Mills on 5 May 1891 and was buried in the churchyard at Disley, Cheshire. In New Mills his life was commemorated by the erection of a public drinking fountain and at Criggle-

stone his widow honoured his memory in three ways. She paid for the building of the church of St. John the Divine, a Chapel of Ease, and the erection of the "Mackie Institute." She also provided a stained-glass window in the parish church of St. James at Chapelthorpe.

Robert Bownas Mackie (1829-1885)

It was Robert Bownas Mackie, the eldest child and son of Robert Jefferson Mackie, who made the biggest mark on the life of Wakefield. He was born on 25 August 1829 and educated locally, possibly at the Wakefield Lancasterian School, and at Wesley College, Sheffield. On leaving school he entered the office of his father's corn factoring business and, possessing an excellent commercial mind, the company was soon prospering as never before. Over the years the firm made vast profits which were invested in other business ventures. Besides his business activities R. B. Mackie was very heavily involved with the religious, political and cultural life of Wakefield and as a result retired from the family company in the 1870s and left the day to day management of it to his brothers.

From a very early date Mackie was a member of the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution, of which he became a Vice President in 1861, then President, a position he held from 1876 until his death in 1885. He was a keen supporter of all of its activities and took part in the Penny Readings during the 1864/65 seasons. He had an active interest in education and supported

enthusiastically the Wakefield Fine Art Institution, serving for many years as a committee member of the governing body and later as the President. The Yorkshire College, which would in time become Leeds University, also found in him a generous friend. For many years he was a Governor of the Wakefield Charities, which happened to be—one of the many parts it filled—the guiding light of the Wakefield Grammar School. Like his brother Edward, he was at one time President of the Wakefield Chamber of Commerce and a magistrate for both Wakefield and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Although brought up as a Methodist, he later gravitated to the Church of England, but his religious leanings were never of an exclusive nature and he would as readily lay the foundation stone of a Methodist chapel and give a large subscription, as he would take part in the religious enterprises of the Anglican Church. He also served on the management committee of the Clayton Hospital, of which he was a generous supporter.

It would be fair to say that his main interest in life was the Liberal Party. When Robert Jefferson Mackie had to retire from the Presidency of the Wakefield Liberal Association in 1869, the Party immediately elected R. B. Mackie in the place of his father. He was to hold the post until his death in 1885 when his brother, Col. Edward Alexander Mackie, succeeded him. At first his political activities were purely of a local nature but eventually he decided to stand for Parliament. His journey to the House of Commons was not an easy one. He first stood as the Liberal candidate for the Wakefield seat in 1874; his opponent was Edward Green for the Conservative Party. Green was elected by a majority of 178 but was unseated after allegations of irregularities during the election. Another writ was issued and this time Mackie faced Thomas Kemp Sanderson who won the seat for the Conservatives with a majority of 187. Six years later at the general election of 1880 Mackie defeated Sanderson and was elected as the Member of Parliament for Wakefield with a majority of 398.

In spite of being an effective and fluent public speaker Mackie very rarely took part in the debates of the House of Commons. He was, however, a useful member of various committees and very rarely missed a vote. In London he formed a large circle of friends and was highly regarded by his colleagues in Parliament. He enjoyed the intimate friendship of Mr. Gladstone, and on one occasion he was invited to accompany the prime minister on a cruise to Scotland. Mackie died after a short illness at his London home on 18 June 1885.⁵ His body was taken back by rail to Wakefield where the Mayor and members of the town council met it at Westgate

station. The funeral, held on 27 June at Wakefield Cemetery, was a very impressive affair; the hearse was preceded by 650 people on foot and was followed by 52 carriages.⁶ He died a very wealthy man; besides his share in the family businesses, he owned much property and had a personal estate of over £65,000. Most of this was left to his family but he also remembered long serving members of his staff, St. John's Church and the Wakefield Auxiliary Bible Society. Wakefield Mechanics' Institution, Clayton Hospital and the Wakefield School of Art were each bequeathed £1,000.

In 1850 R. B. Mackie had married Fanny Shaw, the daughter of a railway contractor, William Shaw, at Zion Congregational Chapel, Wakefield. Fanny Mackie died on 18 June 1853 just four months after the birth of their daughter Edith Grace. When Edith's maternal grandfather died in 1859, she inherited half of his £150,000 fortune, and on the death of her father she was left another enormous sum of money. Edith never married and lived in some splendour in the house in St. John's Square, her needs being met by a staff of nine servants. It is said that she never moved about the house alone; either the butler or her lady's maid, who had to follow her up the stairs to lift her skirts and to carry her pet dog, always accompanied her. In 1934 she moved to a smaller house in Blenheim Road, Wakefield, and although it had 27 rooms she told her friends that she was moving into a cottage.⁷ She died in 1941 aged 88. Like her father she was a very generous person and supported many local charities and institutions during her lifetime and remembered them in her will. In spite of her kindness she was regarded in the town with respect rather than affection.

Thomas Waller Gissing was a friend of both Robert Jefferson Mackie and his eldest son Robert Bownas Mackie. Since both father and son held in turn the post of President of the Wakefield Liberal Association, they were bound to have worked closely with him, especially during the period 1867 to 1870 when Thomas Gissing was the Liberal councillor for the St. John's Ward in Wakefield. Gissing and Robert Bownas Mackie served on several committees together; they were both particularly interested in the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution, the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition of 1865, the Wakefield School of Art, the Wakefield Dispensary and Clayton Hospital. When Thomas Gissing published his book "The Ferns and Fern Allies of Wakefield" in 1862 R. B. Mackie and his three brothers subscribed for nine copies. Mackie also helped Thomas Gissing in a financial way: when Gissing bought the shop and house premises in Westgate in 1865, Mackie acted as one of the securities for a loan of £1,000

and in 1874 he helped Mrs. Gissing in an indirect but crucial way by lending money to J. L. Chaplin to enable him to buy the property from her after she had been widowed. He may also have been one of the group of unnamed men who paid for the Gissing brothers' education after their father's death in 1870. R. B. Mackie certainly respected Thomas Gissing enough to act as a pallbearer at the latter's funeral and his father, Robert Jefferson Mackie, sent his private carriage to follow the hearse.

George Gissing does not mention the Mackie family by name in either his diary or his letters although he does allude to Robert Bownas Mackie in letters to his sister Ellen and his brother Algernon. In a letter to Ellen dated 3 April 1880, following the general election, he says that he is pleased to see that Wakefield had elected a Liberal Member of Parliament.⁸ In 1883 Algernon applied for the post of Town Clerk of Wakefield and he asked Mackie for a reference. Algernon told George about his approach to the M.P. and George remarks in a letter "Doubtless the M.P. will do something sooner or later but such people are fearfully leisurely. They are of course quite unable to realize that cash is an object to anyone."⁹ This is a little unfair in view of the many kindnesses shown by the Mackies to the Gissing family. Robert Bownas Mackie did eventually provide a very complimentary letter of recommendation but Algernon was not awarded the post. George Gissing no doubt visited the Mackies' house in St. John's Square with his father but in those days the house was owned by Robert Jefferson Mackie. Clifford Brook in his book *George Gissing and Wakefield* shows how Gissing used actual places in the town in his Wakefield-based novel *A Life's Morning* and of the five houses he described, members of the Mackie family occupied two. The Mackies' house in St. John's Square became the home of Mr. Baxendale, the town's M.P., and the area was renamed St. Luke's. The villain of the book, Dagworthy, was placed in a house on the "Heath." Heath Common and the village of Heath are situated about a mile from the house in Stoneleigh Terrace where Gissing's mother and sisters lived at the time he wrote the book. Clifford Brook identified Dagworthy's house as the Manor House in Heath village which was occupied by Colonel Edward Alexander Mackie for over twenty years.¹⁰

There are no members of the Mackie family living in Wakefield at the present time. The observant may spot the name on a few foundation stones in the town, and in Crigglestone there is a road bearing the name of Mackie Hill as does the primary school built there some years ago. Robert Bownas Mackie who showed a great interest in education during his lifetime would

surely be pleased to know that the junior department of the Wakefield Girls' High School now occupies his house in St. John's Square.

¹Obituary, *Wakefield Express*, 28 December 1872, p. 5, col. 6.

²Obituary, *Wakefield & West Riding Herald*, 1 January 1881, p. 8, col. 3.

³Obituary, *Wakefield Express*, 22 October 1904, p. 7, col. 7.

⁴Keith Wainwright, *Crigglestone Backtrack-Past Reflections on a Rural Parish*, vol. 4, Wakefield 2004.

⁵Obituary, *Wakefield Express*, 20 June 1885, p., cols. 1, 2 and 3.

⁶Account of funeral, *Wakefield & West Riding Herald*, 27 June 1885, p. 2, cols. 5 and 6.

⁷Kathleen Watson, *Recollections of working for Miss Mackie*, Local Studies Dept., Wakefield Library, box 23, item 39.

⁸*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 1, p. 256.

⁹*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 2, p. 181.

¹⁰Clifford Brook (1922-1992) was the leading expert on the Gissing family and Wakefield. He was instrumental in preserving George Gissing's birthplace in Thompson's Yard, Wakefield. He was the first Secretary and Treasurer of the Gissing Trust. His book, *George Gissing and Wakefield*, was published by Wakefield Historical Publications in 1980; a second (revised) edition was issued in 1992 by the Gissing Trust.

Notes and News

The *New York Times Book Review* for 2 September carried an advertisement for a new book by Elise Blackwell. It reads "Welcome back to New Grub Street: GRUB, a novel," with two quotations. T. S. Eliot once wrote: "Some editors are failed writers, but so are most writers." Joe Queenan advertizes the new volume in consciously controversial terms: "Elise Blackwell conjures up a universe filled with talentless novelists, reptilian publishers, unprincipled agents and brain-dead critics. Thank God this is only a fantasy. Thank God any similarity to real life is entirely fortuitous." The novelist herself willingly acknowledges her debt to Gissing.

Barbara Travins, the daughter of the well-known Gissing collector of the 1970s Alfred Slotnick, has drawn our attention to a broadcast on WNYC, New York Public Radio, on 6 August. On that day, in the series devoted for half an hour to "Underappreciated Literature" in the course of his Leonard Lopate Show, Leonard Lopate had selected George Gissing, who was introduced as follows: "George Gissing was one of the most accomplished British novelists of the late-Victorian era, penning strikingly modern stories populated by shamelessly self-promoting journalists, cor-

rupt preachers, chauvinist husbands, and scheming wives. Biographer John Halperin tells us why Gissing belongs on your summer reading list.” During his interview John Halperin gave a favourable picture of Gissing, mentioning *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women* as his best work and reading a passage from *In the Year of Jubilee*, that dealing with the King’s Cross Station advertisements.

Dennis Shruballs, the W. H. Hudson scholar whose first publications on his favourite author must date back to the 1980s, will soon publish the third title of a trilogy issued by the Edwin Mellen Press. The first title consists of all the unpublished letters that have been traced during his assiduous research. No hitherto unknown letter from Hudson to the Gissing brothers has been discovered by the editor, but some of the 15 mentions of George and Algernon in letters to various correspondents are of biographical interest because George did not keep his diary throughout the period covered by these letters. The two brothers also appear in the second Edwin Mellen title, *The Writings of W. H. Hudson: A Critical Survey*. George only is to be found in *In Pursuit of W. H. Hudson* which is devoted to a thoroughly documented stock-taking of the naturalist’s rambles in the southern counties from 1890 to his death.

Manuel and Christine Huguet have sent us a beautiful paperback reissue of *Cuentos de amor victorianos* (translation and selection by Marta Salís), Barcelona: Random House Mondadori; Debolsillo, 2006), which contains “The Scrupulous Father.” Also among the mail received is a leaflet on the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway which reminds us that for 130 years steam trains have travelled through Eskdale’s scenery towards Dalegarth and the foot of Scafell, the highest mountain in England. From Dalegarth, you can go to Boot, where Algernon Gissing lived about the time when George was trying in vain to finish *Veranilda* at Ispoure. For an evocation of what the railway line was like in the early 1890s, *The Odd Women* should be consulted.

A trivial reference to Gissing has been found by Hazel Bell in Margaret Drabble’s *The Peppered Moth* (Viking, 2001). In this book a student at Cambridge reading English literature in the first half of the 20th century buys books—a Hogarth Press copy of T. S. Eliot’s *Homage to Dryden* and secondhand copies of the works of George Gissing and Mark Rutherford.

We recently found Gissing's name in a book on *The Reading-Room of the British Museum* published by G. F. Barwick in 1929. The author mentions *New Grub Street*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and the volume of *Letters to the Family* on p. 130. Interestingly he adds apropos of *New Grub Street* that Gissing describes in it Mr. Quarmby as "an inveterate chatterbox of the Reading Room and other resorts," adding this about Gissing's source of inspiration: "There were several to whom the description would apply, but readers who frequented the Room in those days will easily remember one familiar figure of jaunty carriage who was ever ready for a gossip, either quietly in the Room itself, or more at ease in the tavern opposite."

Some time ago J. C., alias James Campbell, who is on the staff of the *TLS*, rather cheekily threatened in his weekly columns to cancel his subscription to the *Gissing Journal* if we published more articles like that on Mr. Baker and Miss Yule in our July number. As he also objected to the mention of Chinese and Persian translations of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* and *New Grub Street*, a letter to the editor of the *TLS* was sent in the hope that it would be published. Since it was not, we publish it in the present number:

Sir,

Since the centenary of George Gissing's death in December 2003 when I corrected him about the circumstances of the novelist's death, J. C. has made in the *TLS* various positive remarks about the *Gissing Journal*, its contents and its editor, and they were all read with gratitude. But in the latest number J. C. waxes critical, if not threatening, because he disapproves of an article by a Canadian contributor who is perhaps too fond of the word "space." Let me reply appeasingly, in my modest capacity as editor, by assuring him that I do not like "jargon" any more than he does, that I occasionally feel bound to silence my own dislike of the said jargon (tolerance is and will remain a virtue), and that he will soon find in the *Gissing Journal* articles which will perhaps conciliate his lost favour—one on Gissing as a pacifist, the other about his literary income, which J. C. will be in a position to compare with what he calls his own "miserable Grub Street earnings." Lastly on one point I must unreservedly disagree with my self-appointed censor. A writer's reputation is not to be judged only by the critical reception of his books and his readership in his own country. Gissing's works have been translated into at least fifteen foreign languages. To some people, including myself, it matters to know whether he has found readers in other countries than England. Could J. C. deign to look beyond

the Channel and the Atlantic and refrain from sneering at foreign translations into Persian and Chinese?

Yours sincerely,
Pierre Coustillas

Recent Publications

Articles, reviews, etc.

Christine Huguet, “Comptes rendus,” *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, no. 65, April 2007, pp. 207-10. Review of *George Gissing : The Definitive Bibliography*.

Anon., “Celebrating the first bishop,” *Wakefield Express*, 11 May 2007. Page unknown. W. W. How and *Jude the Obscure* at the Gissing Centre. How made himself nationally famous when he declared publicly that he had thrown his copy of *Jude the Obscure* into the fire—in August! See also a second article on the same subject in the number of the same paper for 25 May.

Anon., “Bishop opens new How exhibition,” *Wakefield Guardian*, 24 May 2007. Page unknown.

Christine Huguet, “Comptes rendus,” *Etudes Anglaises*, April-June 2007, pp. 244-46. Review of *George Gissing : The Definitive Bibliography*.

J. C., “NB: Give us some space,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 August 2007, p. 32. Paragraphs on the *Gissing Journal*. See “Notes and News.”

Akiko Kimura, “The Literary Space of the ‘New Woman’ in George Gissing’s ‘The Odd Women,’” *Bulletin of the Graduate School of Education of Waseda University*, Vol. 16, 2006, pp. 33-46. The same author also published in the same journal (Vol. 17, 2007, pp. 31-44) an article entitled “The Misogynist’s Heroine in George Gissing’s ‘In the Year of Jubilee’ and ‘The Whirlpool.’”

