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

An Introduction to Gissing's "The Hope of Pessimism"

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I. "The Hope of Pessimism": The Problem of its Antecedence

"The Hope of Pessimism" – George Gissing's only philosophical essay – was written at 17 Oakley Crescent where Gissing had moved on 13 September 1882. Its twenty-eight manuscript pages were likely written rather hurriedly for Gissing's first reference to the article occurs in a letter of 20 September and on 6 October he tells his brother Algernon "the pessimistic article is finished."[1]

"The Hope of Pessimism" is a mysterious anomaly in the Gissing canon. He wrote nothing else like this essay; its central concerns are not anticipated by previous published works; the letters preserved from the months and years preceding its composition in no way prepare us either for the aggressive dismissal of Comtean Positivism which is the most conspicuous theme of the essay or for the endorsement of Schopenhauerian Pessimism with which the essay concludes.[2] Accordingly, almost all of the few scholars who have commented on this essay have focused on its prospective qualities – explaining how its vigorously articulated pessimism anticipates the general sense of despondency and disillusion found in the novel by which it was immediately succeeded – *The Unclassed* – and in the later novels as well.[3]

The pages that follow attempt a retrospective examination of "The Hope of Pessimism," seeking to explain the provenance of this baffling utterance in Gissing's earlier thought, writing, and action.[4] Such an undertaking – though necessary if we are to situate this essay within the current of Gissing's life and oeuvre – meets a perplexing difficulty at the outset: most of the points of contact between "The Hope of Pessimism" and Gissing's earlier work are antithetical, for the essay is largely a recantation. In particular, the assertion in "The Hope of Pessimism" that the world is essentially evil and the accompanying claim that future generations will experience increasing material scarcity and social anarchy contrast sharply with the confident radicalism of the earlier Gissing who believed that egalitarian transformations

in English and other societies were imminent and that his own writing might forward this devoutly wished consummation. To locate "The Hope of Pessimism" within the life and oeuvre of George Gissing requires therefore not only an acquaintance with the earlier, radical, period in Gissing's ideological formation but also an understanding of the peculiar private circumstances which precipitated the dissolution of his radicalism. The third section of this essay will explore the dissolution of Gissing's radicalism; to an examination of this radical phase itself we will turn first.

II. The Radical Gissing

The radical phase of his own career was not the brief and shallow flirtation Gissing attributes to Osmond Waymark in *The Unclassed*, although scholars have sometimes mistakenly assumed that Waymark's bemused dissection of his "days of violent radicalism" accurately describes Gissing's own experience.[5] Gissing's radicalism, as we shall see, was deep and thorough and his radical period was of considerable duration; indeed, throughout the London years preceding the composition of "The Hope of Pessimism" (1877-1881) Gissing saw himself as one of the Workers in the Dawn, an "earnest young [person] striving for improvement in, as it were, the dawn of a new phase of our civilization" (2 January 1880).[6]

Even as a teenager, Gissing imagined that if he crossed "the glorious ocean" and migrated to "the glorious West" he would think of his erstwhile countrymen as "struggling, toil-worn creatures" confined to an island nation that was "[c]hoked with smoke and swamped with rain."[7] Involuntary though his migration to the United States in 1876 may have been, "the glorious West" initially nourished his reformist inclinations. He had barely arrived in Boston before he began pluming himself about "[o]ur democratic notions," which forbid class division in the seating arrangements of trains and allow "a workman to go up & slap his master on the back & ask him how he is" (5 October 1876).[8] He took a keen interest in the deadlocked Presidential election of 1876 and eloquently praised the democratic amenity of social relationships in the school at Waltham, Massachusetts where he briefly taught. He was especially impressed with the US system of public libraries: he noted that the "signature of a respectable citizen suffices to procure you a ticket," he exclaimed that the authorities will even "*purchase* a book if you apply for one which the Library does not contain," and he revelled in the fact that each library contained a reading room "where all the best papers & periodicals of the world are procurable" (9 November 1878).[9]

The democratic attitudes he exhibited while living in the USA did not desert Gissing upon his return to England in October 1877; rather, they mature

into an increasingly comprehensive analysis that connects the specific social ills of Victorian London with larger historical processes. The relatively few letters we possess from this period show that while Gissing expresses his annoyances at specific institutions and events (such as the deplorable condition of London libraries, the ignorantly bigoted Burial Bill, ongoing restrictions of the franchise, and the persistence of that "extraordinary relic of the past" known as the "Lord Mayor's show") he is searching for a larger synthesis (9 November 1878).[10] This synthesis emerges about a year after his return to England when he begins to focus his critical attention on two matters he saw as intimately intertwined: the Church of England and national education. He researched these matters with some care; in fact, it was through this study that he first became aware of his eventual friend and patron Frederic Harrison, the leader of the London Positivists and, according to Gissing, the "great man" on the issue of Church of England funding (6 February 1879).[11] Gissing's conclusion was that the great and illegitimate wealth of the Church robs the state of funds that should be directed towards "the so sorely needed national education" and enables the Church to enslave the minds of the populace with "superstition" (6 February 1879).[12] This forestalls the emergence of "popular education," which Gissing consistently proclaims to be essential for "all schemes of social improvement" (26 January 1879).[13]

Besides displaying an alert critical awareness of domestic issues, the letters of this period also reveal a not entirely negligible interest in international politics, always marked by the pacifism and anti-imperialism that Gissing maintained throughout his life. ln early 1878 he took considerable interest in the then-unfolding Russo-Turkish War. Stating that he "used to be strongly pro-Russian" he goes into considerable detail about the posturing of the Russians and Turks and the threatened involvement of England in a letter to Algernon of 12 February.[14] With his uncle William Stannard he attends a "riotous meeting in Hyde Park" on 24 February which attracted thousands of peace demonstrators who were unable to do anything, Gissing regrets, "owing to some hired blackguards of the government faction" (28 February 1878).[15] At the commencement of the Second Afghan War later in the year, Gissing comments rather sneeringly about the Queen piously calling Parliament after "war had been irresponsibly rushed into" rather than before (5 December 1878).[16]

The radicalism evident in these comments soon led Gissing to a tentative form of action. Early in 1879 he began to attend secularist lectures at working men's clubs, even going so far as to write a letter to the editor of the *Echo*, which, in Gissing's opinion, had misrepresented the position taken by one George William Foote in a lecture Gissing had attended (19 February 1879).[17] On 22 March 1879 Gissing himself delivered a lecture to the Notting Hill Gate Progressive Club on the topic "Faith and *Reason*."[18] Exuberant about his

"immense success," he contemplated further lectures of this kind, as well as readings and recitations at working-class organizations. He also tried at this time to nudge his brother Algernon into some form of political activity; already in June 1879 he applauds him for a letter he wrote to the *Wakefield Express* and by early 1880 he is urging upon Algernon as a "public duty" that he take on an effective role in the "good cause" of the Wakefield Mechanics' lnstitution.[19]

Ultimately an intellectual, Gissing also seeks a conceptual framework to co-ordinate his observations about domestic and international events, and to guide his own – and, significantly, his brother Algernon's – participation in political life. The first distinct glimpse of this framework is to be found in a letter to Algernon of 9 November 1878 in which he extolls the "Philosophie Positive" of Auguste Comte not only for its "wonderful *résumé* of all human knowledge" but also for its practical value as a "theory of social life" that promises one day to deliver us from "the state of social anarchy into which we are at present plunged."[20] Although Gissing did not describe himself as an adherent to Positivism until 9 May 1880 and did not join the Positivist Society until 3 November 1880, the essential kernel he extracts herein from Comte – that an understanding of the history of human knowledge would redeem the world from its presently prevailing social anarchy – would shape Gissing's thinking for nearly three years. The initial influence of Comte was abetted by an acquaintance Gissing made shortly after his first encounter with the French thinker: in January 1879 Gissing met Eduard Bertz, an erudite German immigrant who had found refuge in London from Bismarck's anti-socialist witch-hunt.

An important effect of Gissing's adoption of a Comtean orientation is an enthusiastic devotion to and advocacy of historical study. "We must know our histories," he tells Algernon at the commencement of his own historical investigations in January 1879, "... the history of deeds & the history of the thoughts which were at the root of them" (26 January 1879).[21] Two years later he still writes "History is my special undertaking just now" (6 March 1881) and in between writes "I must read diligently every kind of work distinctly bearing on human history" (2 May 1880).[22] He advises Algernon in December 1879 to "acquire by degrees a very thorough general knowledge of the history of the world" (7 December 1879) and he counsels his 17-year-old sister Margaret that she will need to acquire "a general idea of *all* European history before you can appreciate the parts" (10 July 1881).[23] It is crucial to understand that Gissing's enthusiasm for historical study was no mere casual curiosity. Its motivation is ultimately political: it was to reconcile Gissing's scholarly with his ideological inclinations and to fuse both in his self-identification as an engagé artist and intellectual. It is no coincidence therefore that this enthusiasm, which began with Gissing's first exposure to Comte in

November 1878, would flourish until the summer of 1881 when Gissing's interest in political issues suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

The sure indicator of the seriousness in this endeavour is Gissing's theoretical self-consciousness. "Whatever you do," he tells Algernon in the course of a commentary on the younger brother's antiquarian dabbling, "have a *theory* in your work" (7 December 1879).[24] Gissing's own theory of historical study is quite fully worked out. He was determined, first, to obtain a general overview. This objective is exhibited by such phrases as "a very thorough general knowledge of the history of the world" and by such book titles as *Sketches of the History of Man* by Lord Kames, *History of the Roman Republic* by Jules Michelet, and *A History of European Morals* by William Lecky (7 December 1879).[25] The broad overview would serve the obvious function of enabling one to "*see the place of one's special study in the whole scheme of human knowledge*" (9 May 1880).[26] The other, more central, function would be that of enabling one to see the current of human history, the patterns that emerge from past occurrences and the likely direction of future human development. As a novelist, he points out, he wished to understand "the history of society" but Gissing was no historical materialist and believed consistently that "the history of deeds" could not be understood without acquaintance with "the history of the thoughts which were at the root of them" (7 December 1879; 26 January 1879).[27] Ultimately one could know "the laws by which the mind of man is governed" so that the student of history may, through "an intimate knowledge of the past," obtain an understanding of those

> general rules which shall enable us in a certain sense to predict the future, & so to lead our political, social & individual lives more in consonance with reason. Just as there is a Science of Astronomy, & men can predict eclipses &c, just so we believe that there is a science of human life, that the total of the world's history is already fully planned out, & that we are able to learn sufficient of the rules of this new Science to see for some distance into the mists of the future" (2 May 1880; 9 May 1880).[28]

Understanding the direction of history was important for Gissing ultimately because it provided a political ethic. Hitherto, sociological and political discourse has either been trammelled by "the most miserable empiricism" or else has made vapid appeals to Divine Revelation, attempting to look at each institution and practice "*ab initio*" (30 January 1881).[29] For Gissing, though, "the highest outcome of modern thought" was the "great theory of *development*" that enables us to pass judgement upon institutions and practices on the basis of their coherence with and their appropriateness to the phase of development obtaining at a particular time and in a particular place (30 January 1880).[30] When we look closely at Gissing's numerous acerbic comments about contemporary England we see that they are not random expressions of dismay and irritation but consistent applications of his Comtean

conviction that the current of historical development is the criterion upon which social and political judgements are to be based. On Lord Mayor's Day of 1878, Gissing declares that the office of mayor "seems now-a-days to be of no very great importance" and adds that "[t]he Lord Mayor's show seems an extraordinary relic of the past, lingering on after all its significance has departed" (9 November 1878).[31] Learning that Algernon had been studying monasticism, he observes that monasticism "was a strange phase in human development, a phase which had its use, like everything else, & passed away" (9 May 1880).[32] When he calls for the immediate disestablishment of the Church of England he justifies his demand on the grounds that the Church is "an anachronism" and that the "dogmas of religion" had provided answers to the riddles of existence which had once sufficed, "but *only* till Science had grown sufficiently to dispense with the aid of a blind faith & to find natural laws for itself" (6 February 1879; 9 May 1880).[33] Gissing reacted angrily to the harassment accorded Charles Bradlaugh for his refusal to take a religious oath upon his election to Parliament, stating that "we are by several generations too old for such offensive puerilities" (13 March 1881).[34] He was especially incensed at the vulgar denunciation of Bradlaugh administered by the Wakefield lawyer with whom Algernon was articling, who, Gissing opined, represents "what England must have been in the year of grace 1500" (21 November 1879).[35]

Gissing readers are well aware of the reclusiveness into which he eventually settled, an art-for-art's-sake insistence on the necessary detachment of the artist from the hurly-burly of life exhibited in his revolted shudder at William Morris's entanglement with a London police officer: "Why cannot he write poetry in the shade? He will inevitably coarsen himself in the company of ruffians" (22 September 1885).[36] While this valorization of the artist's necessary disengagement is a quite consistent feature of Gissing's thinking in the years following "The Hope of Pessimism," it is wholly discontinuous with the attitudes about art and society Gissing displays in the years preceding its composition. Just after completing *Workers in the Dawn* Gissing tells Algernon that the novel is "very greatly directed to social problems, principally the condition and prospects of the poorest classes" (3 November 1879).[37] In the explanatory letter he asked Algernon to circulate in Wakefield in hopes of dampening the hostility of whatever public response the novel might elicit, he states that it is not really a novel so much as an attack on certain features of "our present religious & social life" (8 June 1880).[38] Later that year he would state that he would never write a book that does not expose the "hideous injustice" of contemporary society and he would tell his sister Margaret that it will be a great part of his life's work "to preach the fostering of *ideals*" (3 and 27 November 1880).[39] During the last three months of 1880 and the first several months of

1881 he was at work on a novel with a "distinctly Socialistic flavour" for which a passage of Robbie Burns was to serve as an epigraph (3 October 1880).[40] In the three or four years preceding the composition of "The Hope of Pessimism" Gissing consistently saw himself as an engagé intellectual writing to serve an emancipatory process.

Almost all of the writing Gissing did between his return to England in 1877 and his composition of "The Hope of Pessimism" is consistent with a politically activist understanding of his vocation as a writer. *Workers in the Dawn* is a work of impassioned social critique; the three essays on socialism he published in 1880 in the *Pall Mall Gazette* provide a sympathetic treatment of an ideology whose intellectual depth and substance Gissing is at pains to emphasize; and the other completed novel of the period, "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies," very likely sustained the impatient tone of social criticism found in *Workers*. He also wrote eight quarterly articles for *Vyestnik Evropy* (beginning the first in December 1880) reporting on political events in the United Kingdom. Among the never-published literary tasks to which Gissing devoted some attention during this period are (1) a secular catechism for children, modeled on a German book he had obtained from Bertz, (2) a "little book" decrying "the present state of society," which he describes in a letter to Ellen on 14 March 1882, (3) a lecture on "The Practical Aspects of Socialism," and (4) the aforementioned novel of "Socialistic flavour."[41] During this period Gissing also composed several non-ideological works of fiction including "All for Love," "The Last Half-Crown," and "The Quarry on the Heath" but these unpublished and rather pallid ventures constitute only a small portion of his literary work at the period and he likely regarded them as potboilers, outside the scope of his more serious literary endeavours.

The politically engaged orientation of Gissing's writings and his self-image at this time were firmly integrated with his circle of acquaintances. Upon his settling in London in 1877, Gissing made contact with the families of two married sisters of his father. He felt no ideological affinity with William Paul Rahardt, the husband of his aunt Maria, but his association with William Stannard, the decorator married to his aunt Ann, connected him with some London radicals, including members of the Progressive Club where, as noted above, Gissing lectured in March 1879. As we have already seen, Gissing made the acquaintance of Bertz shortly after his initial, energizing, encounter with the writings of Comte. Through Bertz he met Johann Most, an important anarchist thinker (the alleged originator of the phrase "propaganda by deed"), whom he would later say "I know very well personally" (4 May 1881).[42] His cousin Willie Stannard (son of his aunt Ann) considered Gissing's connection with Most to be of sufficient importance for emphasis decades later in his correspondence with Alfred Gissing.[43] After sending Frederic Harrison a copy

of *Workers in the Dawn* in July 1880, Gissing of course became an intimate acquaintance of the eminent Positivist and through Harrison became known to John Morley, Vernon Lushington, Professor Edward Beesly, Kegan Paul, and James Cotter Morison. During this period he was living in evident amity with his working-class wife Nell Harrison whose virtues undoubtedly strengthened Gissing's belief in the human worth of the working classes and whose failings might very well have disposed him to see the deleterious effects of the English social system. Gissing not only began to see himself as an engagé writer – he had collected about him a community which would re-enforce this self-conception.

And Gissing's social circle at this point made him, for the first time in his adult life, economically viable. Barely two months after making the acquaintance of Harrison, Gissing received an eight guinea payment from the *Pall Mall Gazette* for three articles on socialism which resulted from his acquaintance with John Morley, the editor of the *Gazette* and friend of Harrison. (Morley encouraged Gissing to supply other contributions but Gissing could eschew these because he was no longer desperate for work.) Shortly after this, in November 1880, another Positivist acquaintance, Edward Beesly, initiated the communication with Ivan Turgenev which led to Gissing's providing *Vyestnik Evropy* with quarterly articles which would earn Gissing £32 annually. He soon began tutoring Harrison's sons (receiving quarterly payments amounting to £80 annually) and Lushington's daughters (for a lesser but still considerable sum). "I am at last in possession," he reports to Algernon at the end of 1880, "of an assured income which is at all events quite enough to live upon at present" (23 December 1880).[44]

Gissing at this point, in late 1880, had realized in a modest way the aspiration of every intellectual: a combination of economic security and ideological independence within a milieu of friends and family members which supported both his independence and security. The rarity of this achievement will likely be ratified by the reflections of every reader of these words, and is further supported by comparison with all other periods in Gissing's life where loneliness, familial tensions, publishers' caprices, and market tyranny rob him of one or another of the principal components of this brief utopic moment in his still young life.

The relative coherence of the life Gissing was living at this time in London did not include his immediate family, his mother and his siblings in Wakefield, who were as distanced from him ideologically as they were geographically. It is notable, though, that Gissing tried to use his own recently developed radical ideology as a conceptual structure into which his family would be integrated. In the letter in which he announces to Algernon his adherence to Comte he tries to draw him into his thinking by invoking the memory of their free-thinking father

with his "perfect lack of prejudice, & openness to all new truths" (9 May 1880).[45] Evidently he would like to see his own Positivism, and eventually Algernon's, as part of a coherent family history. On the same day, he writes jointly to Margaret and Ellen, praising their recently-deceased brother William "who always thought so little of himself & was so anxious for the comfort & happiness of others" and advising them that "there is nothing like forgetting oneself & working for the good of others. It is the only way to be happy" (9 May 1880).[46] Again, Gissing is trying to connect the past and the future of the family, and again the unifying value is a Positivist one: "working for the good of others" echoes "*vivre pour autrui*" which has been called "the simplest summary of the whole moral code of Positivism."[47] Somewhat later, in a letter in which he calls the Religion of Humanity the "emotional side" of Positivism, he claims that this religion has a "vast influence" upon him and that as a result of its influence "I can feel this enthusiasm for the Race to be a force perfectly capable of satisfying the demands usually supplied by creeds" (11 February 1881).[48] Perhaps he is exaggerating when he calls this influence "vast" but it seems likely he hoped his new adherence would bring all facets of his life, including his familial relationships, into an encompassing unity.[49]

His wife, Nell, was included in this unity. On 16 May 1880, Gissing and Nell attended an organ recital at the Albert Hall and he explains the same day to Algernon that tickets were issued by the Sunday League and that "whenever such [events] are advertised I go on principle."[50] The principle is that "[t]he Sunday League subsists for the not-unmeritorious object of obtaining the opening of Museums &c. on Sunday, as a countervail to the Public Houses" (16 May 1880).[51] In this particular case, and one expects there were others like it, Gissing is able to see his relationship with his lower-class partner as something integrally related with a larger historical process to which the Sunday League is making an important contribution. Events such as these might have been on Gissing's mind when he states that Positivism "gives one an entirely new spirit in all human matters, makes you understand *why* you follow such & such a course, indeed points your course to you at every juncture" (30 January 1881).[52] Even negative experiences could be encompassed by Gissing's "religious" persuasion, as we see when Robert Petremant's tardiness in shipping his belongings from America elicits the declaration, "I think it is time the Religion of Humanity, or something of the kind, got well to work in the world. Conscientiousness seems to becoming [*sic*] a terribly rare thing" (17 January 1881).[53] In contemplating the large social evil of the slums of London, Gissing's reaction is surprisingly similar: "Nothing will remedy such things [as the misery exposed in the opening chapter of *Workers in the Dawn*] save the inculcation of a humanitarian enthusiasm which shall successfully oppose the growing egotism of the time" (19 June 1881).[54]

The zenith of his confidence in the motivational power of the Religion of Humanity occurs in his reaction to the May 1881 meeting in London of various religious societies. As he reflects in *Vyestnik Evropy* on the vastly successful fund-raising that occurs at these events, he comments wryly, "It is wonderful to spread the gospel to the inhabitants of the Azores, but this in no way improves the position of the 90,000 destitutes who swarm London, and anyone who is in any degree acquainted with the life led in the impoverished quarters in London cannot think without bitter laughter and great dissatisfaction of those thousands of pounds which are spent to send missionaries to China and Africa."[55] In a letter to Algernon prompted by the same event, he confides his prophetic confidence that "in times to come the mere enthusiasm of humanity will inspire generosity & self-sacrifice in no respect yielding to this of the religionists."[56]

One would expect that a young politically engaged intellectual who was in addition a voracious reader would develop a political ideology and that that ideology would be in a state of constant development. This is certainly the case with Gissing. The liberalism he inherited from his father disposed him to sympathize with social victims, to deplore institutionalized injustices and to be skeptical about imperialism. His friendship with Eduard Bertz, his association with Harrison and the other Positivists, as well as his own observations and reading led him towards increasingly pointed and radical political attitudes in 1880 and early 1881. In late 1881, as we shall see, Gissing's politics suffered, not a swerve to the right but something of a collapse. Somewhat like Wordsworth, who reports in "The Prelude" that after long meditation he "[y]ielded up moral questions in despair," Gissing reaches a point where he believes that it is futile to challenge the established political order.[57]

Although Gissing concedes to Algernon that his articles for *Vyestnik Evropy* did not express the "full flavour of my opinions," the three hundred plus pages of text these articles constitute is by far Gissing's most extensive piece of political writing and is therefore a logical first stop for any tour of Gissing's ideology.[58] These articles, it must be noted at the outset, are entirely about English parliamentary politics in the time of their composition and the political thought they express is therefore enclosed within the constraints of parliamentary discourse of the period. Nevertheless, these articles clearly indicate the ideological direction in which the young Gissing was moving between 1880 and 1881.

All of these articles show that Gissing clearly prefers the English Liberals to the Conservatives. He is consistently scathing in his treatment of the Conservative Party, especially of Disraeli whose jingoistic imperialism he constantly deplores. Gissing also shows unremitting disdain for the House of Lords, regarding its members as lazy and complacently self-interested. His attitude towards the Liberals, especially towards William Gladstone (who was

Prime Minister throughout the period of these articles) is one of critical admiration. His fourth article (5 October 1881), begins with glowing encomium to the Liberal leader, enthusing over the intellectual stamina he demonstrates in his management of the Irish Land Bill; one senses in later articles, though, a weary regret as he describes Gladstone's perhaps reluctant promotion of repressive measures to deal with Irish atrocities and his resort to force to defend European interests in Egypt. The member of parliament for whom Gissing shows the most admiration is John Bright, the acknowledged leader of the Radicals who left Gladstone's cabinet in July 1882 when the British bombarded Alexandria. He shows guarded admiration for another Radical, Charles Bradlaugh. Gissing felt that Bradlaugh's atheism was merely the pretext for his being constantly debarred from taking his parliamentary seat and that the real reason for his exclusion was that he was part of the "Radical element" of his party, embodying democratic aspirations abhorrent to all Conservatives and to many Liberals.[59] When Gissing says anent *Workers in the Dawn*, that he is the "mouthpiece of the advanced Radical party" it is no idle rhetorical flourish.[60] Gissing found something wanting in the Liberal Party and found he could identify comfortably only with the "advanced Radical" element within it.

How advanced was Gissing's radicalism? Was Gissing ever revolutionary? The somewhat surprising answer to the latter question is "yes." In December 1879, having learned from Bertz of the "barbarous tyranny" obtaining in Germany he predicts "a fearful revolution sooner or later" of which, he adds, he would be "heartily glad" (21 December 1879).[61] In November 1880 he reports to Algernon that at a meeting of the Positivist Society Harrison had expressed hopes for a "truly *social* revolution" in Ireland and a few months later Gissing explicitly takes the side of the "Home Rulers" and frankly states that he himself would not be sorry to see an "open Revolution in Ireland" (11 November 1880; 16 January 1881).[62] Reacting in May 1881 to the assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia he carefully explains to Algernon that "peaceful reform [has …] extremely little chance" in Russia, and that those who are really to blame for the violence in that country are not the desperate perpetrators but the ruling families themselves "who resolutely obstruct political & social development" (15 May 1881).[63] Between 1879 and early 1881, Gissing was becoming increasingly inclined to support revolution, even if it entailed substantial violence.

During these years Gissing's attitude towards socialism moved from reservation to virtual endorsement. During the first two years of his residence in London, he was far from being a socialist. The derisive comments his brother William makes to him about communists and socialists in December 1878 only prompt Gissing to regret his brother's "sadly Conservative principles" and elicit nothing in the way of a defense of left-wing politics (4 and 8 December 1878).[64]

In the following year, he constructs the revolutionary socialist John Pether in *Workers in the Dawn* as a pathetic caricature. In 1880, however, he moves towards a more respectful attitude towards socialism, as is shown especially in his "Notes on Social Democracy." Demanding a "cultured Radicalism," (a phrase he uses in an endorsement of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 January 1881), he pronounces the writings of Marx, Dühring, Scheffel, and Adolf Wagner to be "scientific inquiries of cultured minds [whose]... convictions regarding the evil of our present economic system are the result of historical and practical knowledge which commands respect."[65] At the same time, some of the rhetoric of his *Vyestnik Evropy* articles indicates sympathetic familiarity with socialist thinking. In discussing critics of Gladstone's Irish Land Bill he refers acidly to "ultra-Conservatives," who consider "as 'pillage' every measure which has been designed to protect the poor from the rich."[66] He refers to free-market extremists as "the still influential representatives of the school of rigid political economy... [who]... are prostrating themselves before their own science and worshipping her with complete disregard to the outrages being performed in her name."[67] Soon afterwards, he would be telling Algernon that he had begun writing a novel with a "distinctly Socialistic flavour" (3 October 1880) whose motto would be the stanza from Robbie Burns,

> See yonder poor, o'erlabour'd wight,
> So abject, mean & vile,
> Who *begs a brother of the earth*
> *To give him leave to toil*.[68]

This was no momentary freak. He would continue to work on his "Socialistic novel" for several months and on 24 April 1881 tells Algernon that he is at work also on a lecture to be entitled "Practical Aspects of Socialism."[69]

When the case of Johann Most, the London-based German émigré anarchist who had defended political assassination in his *Freiheit*, was taken up by the Positivist Society on 4 May 1881 Gissing tells Algernon rather proudly that he "certainly knew more of the Socialist matters than anyone there," adding "the man Most I know very well personally."[70] It is possible that besides knowing more about socialism than any other attendant of the Positivist meetings, Gissing was in fact the member most favorably disposed. Like many other Positivists, Gissing was inclined to appreciate the aims of socialism while doubting the capacity of the working class for governance. His largely supportive "Notes on Social Democracy" articles had concluded on a note of painful scepticism about the likelihood that "[h]uman beings who live from day to day under much worse conditions than our cattle reared for slaughter" would be "found possessed of that self-reliance, self-control, [and] self-respect" a socialist state presupposes.[71] However, by the autumn of 1881, this scepticism

seems to have relaxed. Describing the annual meeting of the Trade Union Congress in his 5 October 1881 submission to *Vyestnik Evropy*, he approvingly emphasizes the rising prestige of trade unions in England and is at pains to stress the maturity and responsibility evinced by speakers at the Congress. He draws attention to the "parliamentary committee" of the Congress, whose function it is to acquaint Parliament and the Government with the interests of workers when legislation affecting them is under consideration; he mentions the Congress's denunciation of the attempt on President Garfield's life and all types of "political murder"; he appreciatively notes the appointment of a working-man as "sub-inspector of factories and workshops" and seems especially impressed that infiltrators at the Congress were expelled, not by force, but by an appeal to local police authorities, thus avoiding any wound to "the dignity of the Congress in the eyes of the public."[72] When we recall that the only major reservation about socialism Gissing had expressed in his "Notes on Social Democracy" concerned working-class capacity for responsible governance, this rather enthusiastic detailing of the integrity, maturity, and probity of the leaders of the Trade Union Congress suggests that Gissing's sole reservation about socialism had all but disappeared.[73]

III. The Volte-Face

It remains to explain why a man who had been writing a novel of "distinctly Socialistic flavour" in 1880 and 1881, who had also planned a lecture on "Practical Aspects of Socialism" and waxed eloquent in his praise of the general achievement of the British trade union movement as shown by the behavior of its leaders in the Trade Union Congress of 1881, would write so bitterly about every form of worldly optimism the very next year in "The Hope of Pessimism" and would go on to excoriate socialism in his 1886 novel, *Demos*.

To understand this volte-face, we must reconsider the circle of intimates and acquaintances which, as we have seen, supported Gissing's understanding of himself as a radical engagé intellectual. Principal among these were his wife, Nell; his closest friend, Eduard Bertz; Frederic Harrison; and the various Positivists whom Gissing had met through Harrison. In July 1881 Nell moved to Hastings, beginning a process of disintegration from which Gissing never recovered. Nell's move, which was intended to improve her health, ends what had been an almost continuous cohabitation which began in 1877 and is really the first in a series of separations which lead to the definitive parting of the couple in December the following year. Later in the month, Bertz would move to the United States.[74] The Harrisons by this time were vacationing in the Mediterranean and the letters preserved from this period contain no evidence of socializing with any of the Positivist circle with whom he had been

significantly involved in the previous year. In September, however, Algernon moves to London, remaining there until May 1882, with only one relatively brief interruption. As Gissing tells Margaret on 18 September, he and Algernon "get along together famously, & see a good deal of each other."[75] The gap left by the departure of Nell, Bertz, the Harrisons and the Positivists was filled largely by Algernon. If we are to make sense of the collapse of Gissing's radicalism which occurs between the summer and autumn of 1881 and the composition of "The Hope of Pessimism" in September 1882 we must pay some attention to this rather perplexing younger brother who, I suspect, has a greater importance in Gissing's swerve away from radical politics than has ever been theorized.

Algernon was very important to Gissing, partly because he provided a link with the Wakefield family and partly because Gissing was able to fantasize Algernon into an ideological confidant and acolyte. For Gissing, the correspondence of Goethe and Schiller, revealing the two giants "help[ing] each other in every one of their projects" with a "mutual frankness [that was] … beautiful to see" was the paradigm of intellectual epistolary intercourse; it prompted Gissing to hope that in their letter-writing he and Algernon would "try to see into the depths of each other's mind, & learn to recognize the impulses originating there in the outward circumstances of our active lives" (9 May 1880).[76] Even when William – who was a year older than Algernon – was still alive Gissing claimed to feel nearer to Algernon than to William, regretting William's conservatism and forlornly hoping that Algernon was "more liberal" in his tendencies (8 December 1878).[77]

Accordingly, Gissing encouraged every attempt by Algernon to engage himself in public discourse and applauded every hopeful sign of Algernon's liberalism. When Algernon writes a letter to the *Wakefield Examiner*, when he joins the Wakefield Mechanics' Institution, and again when he joins the Wakefield Literary Society, Gissing is prompt and generous in his praise. "[P]eg away at the Mechanics people," he tells him when he joins the Mechanics' Institution, assuring him that it is a "public duty" to provide a "little publicity in a good cause" (9 May 1880).[78] He is even more enthusiastic about Algernon's involvement in the Literary Society, which was Wakefield's Liberal debating club. Learning that Algernon had spoken at the opening meeting of the Society, he confidently applauds him for exploding the "preposterous asininities of the ubiquitous 'Philistine'" and assures him that "it is one's duty to tell people what one believes to be the truth, even though the chance of changing their prejudices may appear infinitesimal" (15 November 1880).[79] Deeply engaged in Irish issues through his membership in the Positivist Society and his work with *Vyestnik Evropy*, Gissing strongly urged his brother to take the side of the victimized Irish in a future debate, sending Algernon one of his contributions to

Vyestnik Evropy with its abundant evidence "that Irishmen have a right to adopt almost *any* means to obtain justice" (17 January 1881).[80] We do not know whether this debate ever took place, but we know of another debate which constitutes the summit of Gissing's project of radicalizing his younger brother. In November 1880 he suggests as a debating topic the resolution "[t]hat, the principle of hereditary authority having become an anachronism in English politics, it behoves us to prepare the way for a more rational system of government" (22 November 1880).[81] Such a debate did occur some months later and the *Wakefield Free Press* reported that "Mr. Gissing opened a debate," taking the affirmative which was defeated.[82]

Algernon's participation in the Wakefield Literary Society and his occasional letters to local newspapers might dispose one to think that Gissing was relatively successful in nudging Algernon towards a liberal position and that he was hampered only by the younger brother's timidity. In fact, though, the ideological gulf between the brothers was profound; while the elder brother saw himself as an "advanced Radical," Algernon's penchant for designating the Gissings as a "family of consequence" and his eagerness to discover or construct for his family an ancestral pedigree of some kind were likely proof against any radical political inclinations (Letter from William, 24 January 1880).[83] If the two brothers did in fact see "into the depths of each other's minds" each would have observed a great deal to deplore.

Differences over religious questions likely intensified, perhaps even founded, the divide. Algernon's opinions were "the opinions of a Christian" while George cherished his carefully ruminated agnosticism throughout his adult life.[84] In the letter of 9 May 1880 in which Gissing announces to Algernon his embrace of Positivism he acknowledges "the strangeness in which my intellectual course clothes itself to your eyes" and he later assures him that "to convert you is not my object. I only wished you to sympathize with me, & believe *I* was genuinely convinced" (16 May 1880).[85] He attempts calmly to expound the postulates of his persuasion. Positivism, he says, does not propose answers to questions about the origin of life and the ultimate destiny of human beings, questions for which "an absolute answer" is "impossible for human intelligence."[86] Instead, it embraces the more manageable question of how we are to conduct "our political, social & individual lives" and answers this through intense reflection on the course of human history.[87] Subsequent letters show that Algernon confused his brother's position with "dogmatic Atheism" and Gissing is obliged to insist again that Positivism "neither affirms nor denies on such subjects as immortality" (11 February 1881).[88] Algernon was evidently inclined to connect religious persuasion with moral soundness, driving Gissing to assert that "*condemnation* of opponents … is a word out of my vocabulary" and to advise

his brother "*don't confound intellectual error with moral depravity*" (16 and 9 May 1880).[89] There is no evidence that Algernon ever moderated his religious position and much to suggest that his attitude towards his brother's secularism was positively hostile.

As Pierre Coustillas has noted, religious disagreement between the brothers "crystallized" over the case of Charles Bradlaugh – the frequently elected and debarred atheist radical Member of Parliament for Northumberland.[90] Besides illuminating the contention between the brothers, George's letters on this issue exhibit a sly but ineffective strategy for securing Algernon's concurrence. George assumed – with obvious disingenuousness – that Algernon would accept his position. When the lawyer to whom Algernon was articled – William Henry Stewart – made an intemperate public denunciation of Bradlaugh, Gissing opportunely made use of the easy target Stewart constituted, belittling the lawyer and smuggling in an endorsement of Bradlaugh, "a man to whom Stewart is not worthy to act as shoe-black" (21 November 1879).[91] A few months later he ventures to state that "I admire [Bradlaugh] … for his consistency" but Algernon apparently retorted with the assertion that he could not "'find a point to admire' in Bradlaugh" (3 and 9 May 1880).[92] The elder brother retreats somewhat, conceding "I myself don't go with him in everything," but tries still to bring Algernon to his side by drawing his attention to Bradlaugh's sincere attempt to support his theories "consistently without fear of Mrs. Grundy" (9 May 1880).[93] When this strategy fails, his references to Bradlaugh become more oblique; he advises Algernon to read the House debates on the Bradlaugh matter to see "the terrible result of following your theories to their logical issues"; he praises a speech made on Bradlaugh's behalf by John Bright, contrasting Bright with the individual who "begged the House not to permit the air to be 'polluted by the breath of an Atheist'"; when the courts determine that Bradlaugh has no right to affirm instead of taking the oath he storms "We are by several generations too old for such offensive puerilities" (25 May 1880; 23 June 1880; 13 March 1881).[94] Gissing seems to be losing his confidence that his brother is susceptible to rational persuasion, abandoning argument and resorting to dismissive outbursts.

Perhaps the most revealing contention between George and Algernon Gissing emerges from the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, which had occurred in March 1881. The German émigré Johann Most, as we have seen, defended the assassins in the German-language *Freiheit* which was published in London and called for further assassinations of European leaders. Most was put on trial for inciting assassination, convicted, and sentenced to sixteen months imprisonment. With the trial pending in April 1881, Gissing wrote in *Vyestnik Evropy* that English public opinion opposed the prosecution of Most partly because "absolute freedom of the press in political arguments is a right

which Englishmen obtained by means of a hard struggle" and partly because "[l]ong experience has taught us that to hinder anyone's right to speak is not only useless, but harmful."[95] Gissing sent a copy of his article to Algernon, expecting no doubt that he would share his view of the "scandalous proceeding."[96] As was noted above, he writes proudly of his own performance at the Positivist meeting which considered the Most case, pointing out that he knew more about socialism than anyone else present and that as the only member who could translate German fluently he was called upon to read passages from the *Freiheit* (4 May 1881).[97]

Algernon was evidently unconvinced by Gissing's defense of Most. Gissing's reply on 15 May 1881 to what must have been a forceful condemnation on Algernon's part of left-wing politics in general shows how sharp and intransigent were the differences between the two brothers. He observes that Algernon's "remarks on Socialism & kindred movements were trenchant" and proceeds with the insulting admission that "I always regret hearing you speak in the vein of the average British Philistine."[98] He proceeds with a patient explanation that as a Positivist he favours peaceful reform, that "very much should be endured before violence is resorted to," and that the intransigence of Russian authorities who "resolutely obstruct political & social development" makes violence inevitable.[99] One senses though, as in the case of the disagreement about Charles Bradlaugh, that Gissing realizes that resistance to Algernon's aggressive passivity is futile. He reiterates Positivist dogma largely to preserve his own sense of intellectual dignity, perhaps also hoping that in some distant future Algernon will graduate to a larger view.

While always showing a brotherly patience and restraint in dealing with points of contention between himself and Algernon, Gissing frequently lapses into patronization. He tends to attribute their disagreements to Algernon's lack of experience and knowledge. So, he says with respect to *Workers* that "I thought at the time of your reading it that you had too little experience really to understand its scope, & I am convinced that you will yet come to read it a second time with much more sympathy" (19 June 1881).[100] His advice to read widely so as to "keep off that abominable narrowness of view which stifles provincial minds" suggests that Algernon does not read as widely as he might and that his society is not, as he put it later, "intellectual enough" (21 November 1879; 16 May 1880).[101] In the letter in which he declares his adherence to the philosophy of Comte, he concedes "[p]erhaps you will not accept all this just now. Never mind; some day you will. Only think of it without bias" (9 May 1880).[102] Discussing Algernon's apparent belief in the supernatural, he airily asserts that once his brother has had the opportunity "of reading any really good book on the historical value of Biblical records … I know well that you will change your standpoint" (11 February 1881).[103] He

considers Algernon's current position to be "a certain stage, by no means, I am convinced, a final halting place."[104] The faint praise with which he damns Algernon's ideological position is the assurance that "[y]our letters of late have shown me that, in political & social matters, you are capable of moving in a Positivist direction" (11 February 1881).[105] The generally patronizing tone is occasionally sharpened with gestures of cosmopolitan superiority. On 20 August 1880, flushed with the social triumphs accruing from his acquaintance with Harrison, Gissing writes, "All this town talk must sound strangely, like echoes from a far-off land, in your Northumbrian retreat."[106] The anticipation of Algernon's residence in London raises the elder brother to a flourish of cosmopolitan pretension in which he assures the young provincial "that London air will so affect you that your views on many important points will be essentially modified" (3 October 1880).[107]

Less than a year later, the ideological efficacy of the London air would be put to the test: in late August 1881 Algernon moved to London to prepare for the Bachelor of Law degree examination, remaining there – with a brief interruption in January – until April of 1882. As was noted above, it was at this time that Nell had left for Hastings, Bertz had emigrated to the United States and Gissing's connection with Harrison and other Positivists became more tenuous. The ensuing vacuum would be filled largely by Algernon.

It is safe to assume that the combination of the immense ideological gulf between the two brothers and the patronizing attitude of the elder towards the younger would generate some powerful tensions. One would have expected of course that to the extent that there was a contest between George and Algernon the older brother would have prevailed, given his superiority in age, experience, learning and general intelligence. This seems, however, not to have been the case. Although we have no immediate account of the day-to-day conversational sparring that must have occurred at this juncture – their geographical proximity obviating the need for epistolatory exchanges –, we can measure the consequences of their interaction by comparing the letters written to Algernon in the months following this extended dialogue with those written before Algernon's long sojourn in London. When this comparison is made, it is evident that it is George's attitudes, not those of Algernon, which changed most significantly.

In comparing the two groups of letters, one notes first an important change in Gissing's tone. The breezy self-confidence of the cosmopolitan intellectual condescendingly illuminating the wet-behind-the-ears acolyte disappears entirely. There are no more brash pronouncements on national and international issues, no more demolitions or encomiums of public figures, no smug recitations of the latest desiderata of the Positivist Society. On the contrary, Gissing mentions a lively disagreement with Harrison about attitudes towards

social prejudices and even flatters Algernon with the observation that Harrison was insensitive to the "fine shades of humour" to which Algernon was apparently attuned (14 February 1883; 3 May 1883).[108] Algernon does not move into Harrison's ideological orbit as one would have expected; rather, George moves away from his erstwhile mentor.

These letters also show a marked change in Gissing's attitude towards Nell, who is the subject of the only two letters Gissing wrote to Algernon during this stretch of time – the letters of 16 and 19 January 1882, written while Algernon had returned briefly to Wakefield following his first, unsuccessful, attempt at the Bachelor of Law examination. These two letters exhibit a hostility and suspicion concerning Nell (accusing her of lying and suggesting she may have been surreptitiously obtaining gin) not seen in any previous letters. It is possible of course that Nell's behavior had deteriorated or else that Gissing had spontaneously become more unsympathetic and judgmental; it seems more likely, however, that months of close association with Algernon caused him to see Nell through Algernon's censorious eyes. One should not dismiss the possibility that Gissing's entire philosophical reorientation begins with an acceptance of Algernon's evaluation of Nell.

Nothing is so remarkable about the letters Gissing writes to his brother after the long stay in London than the almost complete disappearance of any attempt to engage Algernon's interest in political issues. The only substantial comment he makes on a political event concerns the Phoenix Park murder of 6 May 1882; but he mentions this event only to explain that such sensational public events "don't greatly affect one," that it is only during unusually stirring historical periods such as the French Revolution that public events draw one outside of "mere private troubles & annoyances" (7 May 1882).[109] Whereas previously Gissing had frequently used the Bradlaugh débâcle as an occasion to make an ideological point, his only reference to him after the Algernon visit is his report on a conversation he had overheard in a cafe in which some anonymous know-it-all had pronounced upon the significance of the shape of Bradlaugh's head (10 March 1883).[110] What had been previously a subject of urgent ideological contention has been neutralized into a joke. Although the events in Parliament continued to be an important subject of his articles for *Vyestnik Evropy*, they are no longer of sufficient importance to merit reference in Gissing's letters to Algernon, with the single telling exception of his noting in August 1883 that the extension of the sitting of the House will prolong the London season and cause further delay in the publication of "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies" (23 August 1883).[111] Of the specifically political importance of this event, he shows no interest.

These letters reveal in fact that Gissing no longer saw the public sphere as a site of authentic action. His hope that Algernon would be a radically liberalizing

force in Wakefield life through such things as letter-writing and debate, is replaced by the more modest desire that his newly-articled brother would quietly rarefy the cultural atmosphere of his milieu by embodying Arnoldian values. A revealing instance is Gissing's conspicuous shift in attitude concerning a newspaper project the two had discussed over the years. When this subject was first raised in January 1881, ideological objectives eclipsed pecuniary considerations: pointing to the *Pall Mall Gazette* as the model of "our most cultured Radicalism" he had assured his brother that the success of the project depended significantly on Algernon's grasp of Positivism to which "the future" belongs (30 January 1881).[112] By 1883, Gissing insists that the eight-page weekly they hope to start be "[i]ndependent in politics, taking one side or the other," depending on the issue at hand and he is absolutely candid about hoping that on his investment of the fifty guineas he will soon receive for "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies" he will expect a return of £3 weekly.[113]

Gissing's intellectual interests have also changed conspicuously. His championship of Comte is succeeded by an admiration for Schopenhauer as he shifts his attention from historical study (which he had always associated with an emancipatory project guided by Positivist assumptions) to a preoccupation with religious and philosophical texts. When he advises Algernon in October 1882 to "apply your mind to the wider sense of things & have a struggle with the problems of life" he is thinking of metaphysical contemplation, not capitalist exploitation, as he recommends that Algernon read Kant or a book about the German metaphysician (6 October 1882).[114] Besides Schopenhauer and Kant, he mentions that his reading includes St. Augustine's *Confessions* and *Natural Religion* by Sir John Robert Seeley. He tells Ellen "I am … burying myself in philosophy & theology, getting abstruser every day" (4 October 1882).[115]

As his intellectual interests moved from historical study to religion and metaphysics, his attention to political matters is replaced by a heightened and enlarged interest in the arts. He attends plays frequently now and spends even more time at art galleries than at theatres. An aesthetic strain becomes apparent in his thinking. Shortly after Algernon had returned from London in the Spring of 1882, he reacts to a panoramic landscape he had seen at the Academy, with the un-naturalistic comment that "I can't really say whether I can't derive more positive pleasure from a fine picture of such things than from the reality," adding that the desire to directly experience what art has idealized for one springs from a "shallow philosophy" (7 May 1882).[116] By the following year, his thought sharpened no doubt by his perusal of Schopenhauer, he declares rather theatrically "My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure & simple. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied & reproduced artistically" (18 July 1883).[117]

IV. "The Hope of Pessimism"

The composition of "The Hope of Pessimism" begins in late September 1882, about half a year after Algernon's long stay in London, by which time the full effect of Algernon's visit and the ideological reorientation which followed upon it would have had time to settle. The essay was not published in Gissing's lifetime, the author apparently adhering to his own declaration immediately after its completion that "I shall not even try to get it published, seeing that it has developed into nothing more nor less than an attack on Positivism."[118] However, he mentions twice in his letters that he is anxious for Algernon to read it "as I want you to understand this matter" (6 October).[119] It is very likely that Algernon did read "The Hope of Pessimism" and not improbable to suppose he was the only person in Gissing's lifetime who ever did. Nor was this fortuitous: Gissing wanted it thus. It is reasonable therefore to read the essay as a message to Algernon – a message which signals among other things that Gissing had accepted many of the arguments with which the younger brother had plied him during the eight-month visit and had as well integrated these within the aggressive secularism he was not at all inclined to abandon.

The result is not, however, a compromise. Rather, Gissing articulates an intensified formulation of his own secularism while embracing a radicalized version of the puritanical ethics of Algernon and the other Wakefield Gissings. He forces these extremes to meet in the world-view of Schopenhauer – whose asceticism Gissing sees as the authentic recrudescence of primitive Christian morality; whose metaphysics he regards as the culminations of modern skepticism concerning the truth-claims of Christianity.

Accordingly, Gissing's opposition to religion – his refusal, as a consequence of the discoveries of modern science to accept Christian revelation as a source of truth – is reasserted even more firmly and with a greater air of finality than it had been in the letters he had written to Algernon before the latter's residence in London. This is not surprising; in these earlier letters, written when he entertained hopes of gently shepherding Algernon into the Positivist fold, Gissing avoided gratuitous offense and stressed that Positivism withholds pronouncement on such issues as the origin of the universe and the ultimate fate of human beings. Knowing such diplomacy was futile, Gissing now bluntly declares what he likely always believed: that the fundamental claims of the Christian religion are untenable in current "intellectual conditions" and that consequently "that old faiths are failing us, passing away without hope of restoration to the hearts and consciences of men."[120] It is likely that in the conversations between the brothers Algernon had noted an inconsistency between the rigorous skepticism of the older brother's treatment of traditional belief systems and his docility with respect to Positivist dogma. It is

unsurprising therefore that in "The Hope of Pessimism" the skepticism with which Gissing discredits the "old faiths" is now extended into an acerbic critique of the new faith he had previously urged his brother to adopt. The Religion of Humanity (or "Agnostic Optimism" as he usually terms it in this essay) is as obviously a delusion as is revealed religion.

Gissing identifies two false assumptions upon which the new faith rests, one of which he finds extremely dangerous. The first, the more innocuous of the two assumptions, is the Comtean claim that humanity, having surpassed the metaphysical stage of its mental evolution will learn to permanently rest content in the awareness that metaphysical speculation is profitless and futile. Gissing quite calmly and reasonably suggests that the very success of scientific inquiry in extending the frontiers of human knowledge will make speculation about the unknowable more tantalizing and tenacious. He adds that since metaphysical viewpoints are not hereditary it is mistaken to assume that the agnostic attitude of contemporary science will prevail through all future generations.

Gissing deals much more energetically with the second, the more dangerous, of the assumptions he sees underlying the Religion of Humanity: the claim that if the metaphysical stage were ever fully surpassed, if humanity lost all awareness of the possibility of a righteous God and a compensatory afterlife, an age of world-transforming altruism would inevitably succeed. With an almost evangelical earnestness, Gissing retorts that a world bereft of any metaphysical horizon would see the prevalence of a brutal egotism which would intensify precisely the worst features of the present age – "the predominance of commercial competition, with its doctrine of 'Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost.'"[121]

The worldly optimism proposed by the Religion of Humanity is, he concludes, as baseless as the otherworldly optimism of traditional religion is untenable. The future belongs, therefore, not to Positivism – as he had previously assured Algernon – but to pessimism: a frank acceptance of "the eternal truth that the world is synonymous with evil" and that "[o]ur bodily frame is a house of torment, and the seat of lusts which obscure the soul."[122] The hope Gissing finds in the eventual universal adoption of a pessimistic understanding of the human condition is that we will all learn to bestow upon one another the tenderness our shared victimhood warrants, that our solicitude will eventually extend itself to the unborn whom we will cease to generate, so that ultimately "a childless race will dedicate its breath to the eternal silence, and Mercy will have redeemed the world."[123]

(Gissing makes one concession to worldly optimism, stating that the optimism of the artist who contemplates "the object without the disturbing consciousness of self" is the only optimism justified in the light of reason. In artistic contemplation, he asserts, "good does prevail over evil."[124] It is

understandable that Gissing, a very hard-working artist, would seek to reconcile his own strenuous activity with his otherwise uncompromisingly pessimistic evaluation of human life and to assure Algernon that his artistic work would not be stultified by his newly acquired philosophical orientation. Still, this valorization of artistic activity is left as an undigested tangent to the essay as a whole and it is difficult to reconcile the claim that in artistic activity "there is excellence in the sum of things" with the over-arching premise of the essay: "the eternal truth that the world is synonymous with evil.")[125]

It is easy to overlook the fact that Gissing's adoption of Schopenhauer's pessimism is determined in part by an important residue of his days as a radical. In those days he had gained some acquaintance with the ideas of Karl Marx – perhaps through his conversations with Bertz – and had gone so far as to speculate in his "Notes on Social Democracy" that "if commercial enterprise proceed in its present path, before long capital will be gathered into the hands of a few immensely rich traders, all the small masters being reduced to mere 'hands'"[126] By the time he wrote "The Hope of Pessimism" Gissing had set aside any hope that an intensified concentration of wealth would incite the social revolution Marx had anticipated. However, he takes it for granted that the negative core of Marx's analysis of capitalism is valid, asking the reader to imagine "another generation or two of the social strife which every day grows more bitter" as wealth is "accumulated in the hands of yet fewer capitalists, and the immense majority toiling desperately for mere subsistence."[127] In such circumstances, he goes on, the typical citizen will "brood himself into frenzy over the social wrong which holds him, as it were spell-bound, a mere famishing onlooker at the world's banquet."[128] In these grim conditions, Gissing supposes, a philosophic orientation which assumes that a share in "the world's banquet" is the only solace available to the average human being as a compensation for the "burden of breath" is bound to encourage the vicious competitiveness advocates of the Religion of Humanity had naively assumed their persuasion would counteract.[129] In the socio-economic environment Gissing assumes awaits future generations, the ethical effects of the Religion of Humanity would be disastrous. A radically different ethic, an ethic of self-denial, is called for.

Gissing derives the self-abnegatory ethics which befit this bleak world-view from Schopenhauer to whom we owe "the metaphysical explanation of egotism."[130] Egotism springs from the affirmation of the will to live, but "the final triumph of mind, the highest reach of human morality, the only hope of the destruction of egotism" is the suppression of the will to live through "the practice of the severest asceticism."[131] Schopenhauer's asceticism is "the true successor of pure Christianity" and, as Gissing renders it, it is vehemently puritanical, decidedly so with respect to sex.[132] He praises original, pessimistic, Christianity for its championship of "a prophet whose birth from a virgin

mother, and whose own virginity, symbolized that renunciation of the world of flesh which was the strait and narrow way to the kingdom of heaven."[133] He asserts that "[o]nly with the absolute extinction of every lust of the flesh can sin cease to be" and predicts a future time in which "[t]o create a being predestined to misery will come to be deemed a crime, even as the passion concerned is recognized as a sin."[134]

The denunciation of sex – I don't think the phrase is too strong, given both the conceptual structure of the essay and its rhetoric – is an intriguing component of the essay. Gissing had just resumed cohabitation with Nell after a separation of several months, welcoming her to his premises at 17 Oakley Crescent where he praised the attendance of his new landlady, Mrs. Coward, with some fervour. It has been convincingly argued that Gissing would eventually have an affair with Mrs. Coward.[135] If the latter supposition is true, it is likely that even as he was writing "The Hope of Pessimism" he was troubled by the clamorousness of his own sexuality and sought to expiate his disturbing concupiscence through a theoretical condemnation.

Algernon – perhaps the only reader of the essay in Gissing's lifetime – was likely unaware of any susceptibility his brother may have harboured about the sexual allure of Mrs. Coward. He would have been all-too-aware, though, that it was his brother's sexual impulse which led to the marriage with Nell which both his mother and he deplored. If the denunciation of sex is one of the messages Gissing wished to convey to Algernon (and perhaps through Algernon to their mother) it is not the only feature of "The Hope of Pessimism" which would have mollified the puritanical traditionalism of the Wakefield Gissings. In deriding the utopian hopes of Agnostic Optimism, Gissing appeals to orthodox anxieties of the ethical consequences of religious unbelief. His declaration that "if there is one general principle of human nature justified by the observation of all times, it is, that to make this present life of ours an end in itself is equivalent to the discouragement of just those virtues which altruism pre-supposes" would have been reassuringly familiar to the Church-going members of the Gissing family.[136] He provides a more specifically Christian backing for his position when he states that no set of secular values will ever equal "the moral force of that religion which summed itself in the injunction that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us; for that such was the will of the Father which is in Heaven" and he even quotes the *Book of Common Prayer* to ask "Will not envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness keep riot in his heart and brain?"[137] Through the back door of unbridled skepticism, Gissing arrives at an ethical position which, if it were any way shocking to the orthodox, it would be shocking for its severity, not for its license.

All of his letters to his younger brother reveal that Gissing valued Algernon as an interlocutor and in the midst of even the thorniest disagreements was

always anxious to sustain the conversation. In the light of this, it is not surprising that Gissing would shape his thinking in such a way as to enable a *modus vivendi*, however *outré*, which would keep Algernon in the conversation without the sacrifice of his own most basic attitudes and values. "The Hope of Pessimism" is the result. While preserving his fierce opposition to conventional religious belief, Gissing makes many concessions to claims Algernon undoubtedly advanced in assailing his brother's secularism. He concedes that the agnostic attitude currently prevailing among advanced thinkers might merely be a stage and not a final resting place, even conceding that the metaphysical stage Comteans so smugly assumed they had surpassed might return. He acknowledges that no secular persuasion will ever achieve the moral force of Christianity and grants that ascetic self-denial is the highest conceivable ethical condition. The very oddity of the essay – its combination of a fierce, extreme and anachronistic puritanism with absolute trust in the conclusions of modern science and the socio-economic prognostications of Marx – reveals nothing so clearly as that between Algernon's traditionalism and George's iconoclasm the differences were so great that only a very singular shared world-view could encompass both dispositions.

"The Hope of Pessimism" is not the only Gissing text which proposes Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy as a meeting point between religious skepticism and puritanical Christian ethics. In *The Unclassed*, the novel he wrote after composing this essay, the skeptical and iconoclastic Osmond Waymark courts the attractive and extremely puritanical Maud Enderby. When Maud confides to Waymark the puritanical world-view her narrow-minded aunt had imposed upon her, he states that some of her phrases are exactly those of Schopenhauer and that her doctrine is "simply Pessimism, with an element of dogmatic faith added."[138] Whether this declaration expresses Gissing's attitude towards Algernon's world-view we cannot know. However, the care with which he wrote this essay (especially in the light of his realization that he would never attempt to publish it) along with his eagerness to have Algernon read it, suggest that Gissing hoped that Schopenhauer's pessimism would somehow resonate with Algernon's puritanism and enable at least a continuation of the conversation. A project which failed in its fictional undertaking – Waymark's relationship with Maud Enderby breaks down – was relatively successful in life: Gissing maintained an amicable relationship with his younger brother.

[1] George Gissing. Letter to Algernon Gissing, from 17 Oakley Crescent, Chelsea S.W., 20 September 1882, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library; *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, eds. Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, Pierre Coustillas (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 9 vols., 1990-1997), Vol. II, p. 103.

[2] Indeed, on the only previous occasion in which he had written about both Comte and Schopenhauer – the chapter "Mind-growth" in *Workers in the Dawn* – Gissing has the erudite Helen Norman dismiss his pessimism as "the least valuable part of Schopenhauer's teaching," finding Schopenhauer's "wonderfully strong sympathy with the sufferings of mankind" to be the most valuable part of his teaching and, for her, the perfect preparation for the embrace of Comte's Positivism (George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, ed. Pierre Coustillas. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985, p. 215).

[3] Markus Neacey examines the effect of Schopenhauer on *The Unclassed* in "The Hope of Pessimism and the Will to Live in *The Unclassed*," *Gissing Journal*, 34:1 (January 1998), pp. 8-17; Gisela Argyle writes about the presence of Schopenhauerian ideas in *The Whirlpool* in *Germany as Model and Monster* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2002), pp. 135-140; Patrick Bridgwater examines Schopenhauerian themes in *The Unclassed*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, and *Isabel Clarendon* in *Gissing and Germany* (London: Enitharmon Press, 1981), pp. 36-57.

[4] Debbie Harrison has attempted such a retrospective examination in "The Triumph of Schopenhauer's Pessimism over Comte's Positivism in George Gissing's Early Writings," *Literature Compass*, 9:11 (November 2012), n.p. Her conclusion, that "Pessimism was always the dominant force in Gissing's life" and that the "philosophical volte face [embodied in "The Hope of Pessimism"] was inevitable from the outset," is not, in this writer's opinion, supported by the careful study of the years preceding Gissing's composition of this essay undertaken in the pages that follow.

[5] Raymond Williams makes this erroneous identification in *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 178.

[6] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 229.

[7] "On Leaving England," *An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing*, ed. Bouwe Postmus (Wormerveer, NL: Stichting Uitgeverij Noord-Holland, 1999), pp. 199-200.

[8] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 46.

[9] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 115.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 147.

[12] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 149-150.

[13] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 145.

[14] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 74.

[15] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 78.

[16] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 131.

[17] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 153-154.

[18] Pierre Coustillas, "William Gissing Stannard, Memorialist: History and Legend: A Rambling Commentary," *Gissing Journal*, 47:1 (January 2011), p. 23.

[19] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 183, 268.

[20] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 115. In his "Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy*" (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1960), p. 28, Harry Preble suggests that Gissing was first drawn to Positivism because he saw in it a solution "to the evils of the existing social system." It is more likely, though, that it was Comte's synthesis of human knowledge which initially attracted Gissing to Comte.

[21] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 144.

[22] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 21; Vol. I, p. 265.

[23] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 224; Vol. II, p. 52.

[24] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 224.

[25] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 224, 161; Vol II, p. 4; Vol. 1, p. 159.
[26] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 270.
[27] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 224, 144.
[28] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 265, 269.
[29] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, pp. 12, 9.
[30] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 9.
[31] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 115.
[32] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 271.
[33] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 149, 269-270.
[34] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 23.
[35] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 219.
[36] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 349.
[37] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 215.
[38] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 281.
[39] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 307, 314.
[40] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 301.
[41] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 145; Vol. II, pp. 76, 30; Vol. I, p. 301.
[42] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 32.
[43] Pierre Coustillas, "William Gissing Stannard, Memorialist: History and Legend: A Rambling Commentary," *Gissing Journal*, 47:1 (January 2011), p. 17.
[44] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 319.
[45] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 270.
[46] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 267.
[47] Debbie Harrison, "The Triumph of Schopenhauer's Pessimism over Comte's Positivism in George Gissing's Early Writings," *Literature Compass*, 9:11 (November 2012), n.p.
[48] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 14.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 272.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, pp. 11-12.
[53] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 4.
[54] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 47.
[55] Harry Eldon Preble, "Gissing's Contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy,*" Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1960, p. 243.
[56] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 46.
[57] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, XI, l. 305.
[58] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 37.
[59] Preble, p. 345.
[60] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 282.
[61] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 226-227.
[62] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 308; Vol. II, p. 3.
[63] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, pp. 34-35.
[64] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, pp. 128-130, 132.
[65] "Notes on Social Democracy – I," *Pall Mall Gazette* (9 September 1881), p. 10.
[66] Preble, p. 190.
[67] Preble, p. 186.
[68] *Collected Letters,* Vol. I, p. 301.

[69] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 30.
[70] *Collected Letters,* Vol. II, p. 32.
[71] "Notes on Social Democracy – III," *Pall Mall Gazette* (14 September 1881), p. 11.
[72] Preble, pp. 281, 284.
[73] Debbie Harrison's claim that "[al]most immediately" after Gissing was drawn to Comte "his belief in the capacity for the poor to achieve progress" is, in this writer's opinion, imprecise ("The Triumph of Schopenhauer's Pessimism over Comte's Positivism," n.p.). He began to read Comte in November 1878 but, as we have seen, the zenith of his confidence in the capacity of the working classes for governance occurs fairly late in 1881.
[74] Preble correctly points out that "Gissing's radicalism declined after Bertz left England for America," but does not observe that Bertz's departure is but one aspect of the disintegration of the circle which provided emotional support for Gissing during his radical period. Preble, p. 14.
[75] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 60.
[76] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 271, 268.
[77] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 132.
[78] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 268.
[79] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 309.
[80] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 4.
[81] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 312.
[82] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 24, note 1.
[83] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 235.
[84] In his letter to Algernon of 11 February 1881, Gissing uses the phrase "opinions of a Christian," apparently quoting from one of Algernon's letters to him, *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 14.
[85] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 269, 273.
[86] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 269.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 14.
[89] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 273, 271.
[90] Pierre Coustillas, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing, Part I: 1857-1888* (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 2011), p. 167.
[91] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 219.
[92] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 266, 271.
[93] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 271.
[94] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 276, 285; Vol. II, p. 23.
[95] Preble, p. 207.
[96] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 32.
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 34.
[99] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 34-35.
[100] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 47.
[101] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 219, 273.
[102] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 271.
[103] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 14.
[104] *Ibid*.
[105] *Ibid*.
[106] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 296.

[107] *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 301.
[108] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 116, 132.
[109] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 80-81.
[110] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 124-125.
[111] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 153.
[112] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 9, 11.
[113] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 126.
[114] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 103-104.
[115] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 102.
[116] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 82.
[117] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 146.
[118] *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 103.
[119] *Ibid*.
[120] George Gissing, "The Hope of Pessimism," Manuscripts Department, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, p. 3.
[121] MSS, p. 27.
[122] MSS, pp. 18, 22.
[123] MSS, p. 28.
[124] MSS, pp. 26-27.
[125] MSS, pp. 27, 18.
[126] "Notes on Social Democracy – I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 September 1880, p. 10.
[127] MSS, p. 18.
[128] MSS, p. 19.
[129] MSS, pp. 19, 5.
[130] MSS, p. 21.
[131] MSS, pp. 22, 21.
[132] MSS, p. 27.
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] MSS, p. 28.
[135] See Bouwe Postmus, "The Peregrinations of a Preston Traveller," *Gissing Journal*, 43:4 (October 2007), pp. 27-32.
[136] MSS, pp. 16-17.
[137] MSS, p. 19.
[138] George Gissing, *The Unclassed* (Victoria, Canada: ELS Edition, 2010), p. 279.

A Note on the New Transcription of "The Hope of Pessimism"

Gissing wrote "The Hope of Pessimism" in September-October 1882 and made no attempt to publish it. It remained unpublished until 1970 when Pierre Coustillas included it in *George Gissing: Essays & Fiction* published by The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore and London. The essay has not been published since. The Coustillas version of "The Hope of Pessimism" contains a number of mostly very minor errors in transcription. However, there are a few instances of inaccuracy which are likely to confuse the reader. I will mention one example: Gissing states that the metaphysical instinct will never subordinate itself to "a

realistic philosophy" and goes on to caution against "desiring such subordination." The Coustillas transcription mistakingly transcribed "desiring" as "deriving," leaving Gissing's position somewhat less clear. I am hopeful that the correction of such errors – a task made easier by the advice of Hélène Coustillas and the editorial attentiveness of Markus Neacey – as well as the annotations I have included will make this important component of the Gissing canon more accessible and more acceded.

Further Note

Although she has no wish to minimize the highly unpleasant presence of faulty transcriptions in her husband's editing of *Essays and Fiction*, Hélène Coustillas would like to point out that the conditions under which he had to work in New York in 1961 and 1962 were not the easier ones scholars enjoy at the present day. At the Pforzheimer Library which then held a large Gissing collection, Pierre had to transcribe by hand, in pencil (compulsory), from opening to closing time for several months, the MSS of the material that later was included in *Essays and Fiction*. Unfortunately he had no photocopies from the library afterwards to check the accuracy of his transcriptions. Nor could he rely in those days on the internet for tracking easily the sources of Gissing's mostly short but unidentified quotations. This is not meant as an excuse, just as an explanation.

The Hope of Pessimism[1]

Since man began to reflect on the ultimate problems of his existence, deep-pondering minds have found an unfailing source of wonder in the unconscious optimism of humanity. The strange spectacle of generations of beings endowed with discourse of reason, looking before and after, yet permitting themselves to be lured on through all the woes of existence by merest ignes fatui;[2] never blest, but always to be so;[3] forthwith forgetting the bitterness of the aftertaste of one joy when another arises to tempt them; each in practice thinking all men mortal but himself, and, as often as not, urging to quicker flight the hours which stand between him and his end; – this makes wise men marvel; over this, now as of old, your Heraclitus sheds tears, whilst your Democritus falls a-laughing.[4] Hence, too, the enthusiasm of the founders of religions, men who saw through the outward show of things and were fired with zeal to deliver their fellows from the bondage of the apparent. The aspiration after the knowledge of a perfect God derives its strength from a recognition of man's own imperfection; the longing for a future life is the hope of recompense hereafter for the miserable failure of existence on earth. To the chosen few these truths are ever in sight; the world at

large only accepts them under constraint. The mass of men are, for the greater portion of their time, under the dominion of blind instinct, the instinct which whispers that they must cleave to life as to their dearest possession. In their reflective moments they will fully acknowledge the vanity of all that they pursue; but, though even their every-day discourse abounds in proverbs and quotations testifying to the hardship of the human lot, they continue to be in practice victims of their delusions. For them Hope still thrones in the glory of each day's dawn; reflection is a labour all the less frequently and reluctantly performed that it is believed to be a duty; the strange comedy goes on now as ever for him who has eyes to see it, and man still plays such tricks before high heaven as may make us weep if we are lachrymose, laugh if our elements so dispose us.[5]

Optimism is of course a term of varying application.[6] That unconscious optimism of which I speak has reference merely to the life of the present world. Take your average European in his rare moments of introspection, and he is an optimist in a wider sense of the word, this time consciously so, inasmuch as he would most probably confess a faith which endows the human spirit with a heritage of eternal blessedness beyond the grave. By the same operation his stand-point relative to worldly life is entirely altered; in this respect he is now a pessimist, that which was previously his good he repudiates as evil. His favourite utterances are mere condemnations of all which he before set himself most persistently to pursue; the earth is a vale of tears, an abode of misery, a furnace through which his soul has to pass that its righteousness may be tested. With Sir Thomas Browne he says of the world, "I count it not an inn, but an hospital; a place not to live in, but to die in."[7] This is the view of him who adheres to pure Christianity, which in its essence is pessimistic. Optimistic religions there have been: the religion of Hellas, Judaism, Islam. An optimist, moreover, both for this world and that to come, is your modern rationalistic Christian, who, by the adulteration of his creed, seeks to find the Kingdom of God already upon earth, and maintains that all which is, is good. The difference is not great between him and the Pantheist, for whom the world is divine, and his faith consequently one of cheerful interpretations.

One other scheme for the conduct of life on optimistic principles it has remained for our own times to develop, and the circumstance of its having sought establishment under the form and title of a religion recommends it to the attention of all who, awake to the fact that old faiths are failing us, passing away without hope of restoration to the hearts and consciences of men, look darkly wondering into the world's future, and speculate anxiously as to the effect upon men's every-day life of intellectual conditions so different from those under which modern civilization grew to consistency. In the Religion of Humanity[8] we are presented with a creed essentially optimistic. Here there is no comparison

instituted between the imperfection of the present world and the glory of one which is to come; on the contrary, the unconscious optimism of the average man is embraced as a philosophical sufficiency, the scientific doctrine of evolution is made to yield a principle of beatitude, and the very agonies of existence are turned to the service of an all-hoping, all-enduring faith.

Founding itself, as it does, on the solid-seeming accretions of human knowledge, seeking its guarantee in the most obvious tendencies of what we call modern progress, declaring itself tolerant with the tolerance of scientific investigation, making its supreme appeal to what has ever been confessed the noblest of man's instincts, that of self-forgetfulness in devotion to others' good, – this Agnostic Optimism[9] with justice proclaims itself the first serious attempt to replace the old supernatural faiths by a religion consonant with the new intellectual attitude, and as such demands serious and reverent investigation of its authority. A religion, as the word has hitherto been understood, must serve a twofold purpose; it must, on the one hand, supply an explanation of being, on the other, present a guarantee for human morality. Hitherto, moreover, it has been deemed essential that it should perform these offices in the strength of a supernatural revelation, otherwise it lost its title of religion, and became mere philosophy. The new faith would abolish the distinction, confessing that religion in the old sense is no longer within our reach, and that philosophy must needs assume the diviner garb and utter its earthly wisdom from the seat of the vanished oracles.[10] The twofold service is still to be performed, but in a different way. For it is assumed that, in discarding supernaturalism, we have learned the truth that knowledge of the absolute is incompatible with the conditions of our being. Hence, when we ask for an explanation of the universe, we are referred to the book of Science, in other words bidden to study the co-ordination of the facts of human consciousness, beyond which we cannot go.[11] And when we seek the sanction for the ethical system propounded to us, we are answered partly by deductions from the apparent course of social development, partly by an appeal to those sentiments of good and evil which we must be content to regard, and speak of, as intuitive.[12] Thus, in the new religion, man is the beginning and the end; in himself is precept and sanction; moreover, in himself is the reward.

For, with reward we can by no means dispense, any more than our intellect is capable of getting outside the relationship of cause and effect.[13] Refine your reward until, to gross perceptions, it assumes the character of a punishment, none the less it is there, set up before you, made the object of your pursuit. An agnostic philosophy developing itself into religion can, in the nature of things, present but one reward, and that the simplest of all, being nothing else than the pleasure of a good conscience. For what else is the joy of self-perfecting in altruistic thought and performance? The inward pleasure derivable by a

philosopher from the possession of what he deems a good conscience will naturally assume nobler forms than the same pleasure in beings of less large discourse; to his reflective mind the consequences of a good action extend themselves in ever-widening circles till they touch the very limits of humanity, and, in fact, he attains to the conception of that subjective immortality which is to replace the heaven of old creeds.[14]

Here, it can scarcely be doubted, we face the last stronghold of philosophical optimism. Demolish this, prove it a mere phantasm without solid foundation in the depths of human nature, and pessimism alone remains to us, conscious and consistent pessimism, with or without that degree of solace which will suffice to persuade men into still submitting to the burden of breath.[15] Indulgence in prophetic forecast of the ultimate phases of man's life on earth may be resigned for an amusement to those who have no better occupation for their time; for those who acquiesce in the broad conclusions of our men of science regarding the material world, the cyclical future of the human race must remain the most insoluble of problems. But in discussing the probable issues of a struggle between optimism and pessimism for the possession of man's soul, we are but giving attention to a matter of immediate and pressing concern.[16] To what extent of time our conclusions may be held to apply rests an unresolved doubt; that the struggle has commenced in earnest and will assume ever greater importance in the minds of the generations which shall succeed us, is the general consent of thinking men. Further than this in assertion we may not go. Whether, the present period of questioning transition over, the guiding spirit of civilization will once more be found in the conclusions of philosophy (or a religion, call it as you will,) which can claim the allegiance of the foremost races,[17] even for a space; or whether, the leading-bands of supernaturalism cast aside, the world is henceforth given up to the license of individual opinion, sceptic being the only common denomination under which the majority can unite; this we have again no means whatever of determining. In the meantime, the lists are thrown open. Let him who is so happy as to have convinced himself come forward to the contest with others' reason. The problems before us are old as human thought, yet as free to the mind's investigation as though they were now for the first time proposed. And if perchance some seeker after light discern what seems to him a hope-inspiring ray, far-off, dim-shining in the black void which is our intellectual firmament, shall he not direct thitherwards the eyes of other men, if haply they too may find solace in the vision?

To say that agnostic optimism is nothing more than what we call mankind's intuitive common-sense, seized upon and expanded to a coherent system by philosophic consciousness would seem like anticipatory justification of its claim to acceptance, at all events would seem so to those who are practically earnest in their search for a new religion, who are more deeply impressed with the vulgar

needs of vulgar humanity than solicitous for the logical completeness of abstract speculations. The very obviousness of its applications makes it especially attractive to practical, energetic minds, as also, – for a season, – to less easily satisfied intelligences, enticed by the prospect of rest from the never-ending search of unattainable truth.[18] It is the philosophy of cheerful resignation; more, it applies to the totality of life that principle of making a virtue of necessity which is the wise man's best resource in daily details. Granting that we cannot rise to a perception of the absolute, that we are hopelessly imprisoned in our universe of phenomena, then let us not only accept these limitations, but make it a characteristic of moral excellence to resolutely shut the mind against yearnings for transcendental flights, and dedicate every thought to this so solid-seeming earth on which we tread, grapple with its material difficulties, study its conditions, enter into its transient joys and sorrows as though they were the be-all and end-all of human consciousness.[19] The mass of mankind do not even possess the power of rising to abstract considerations.[20] Such a thing as philosophical idealism is altogether beyond their intelligence. In a word, they are unquestioning *realists*; for them the world has an absolute, objective existence; they cannot so much as comprehend the existence of a doubt in the matter. And the majority are right. We will accept this common-sense attitude of theirs, base our ethical system thereon, and thus assure for our creed their ready comprehension. But it would not do to stop here. We recognize in man the religious instinct, for all our realism, but we hold that hitherto it has been wasted upon imaginary divinities. We will no longer look up to the heavens when we worship. This spirit of man, the highest that we can know, we will dignify with divine titles, will in fact worship. Is it not a law of nature that the individual is of no account in comparison with the race, – "so [*sic*]careful of the type she seems, So careless of the single life"?[21] This, too, we will accept and convert to a means of moral good; we will extract from it our doctrine of altruism, by virtue of which I lose sight of my individual desires in a longing to make others happy, thus consciously co-operating with the blind natural law, which makes me of no account save in so far as I minister to the preservation and exaltation of Humanity.[22] Herein also is utilized the renunciative instinct; all men will own, theoretically, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Perfection in self-sacrifice has made saints under the old dispensation, no less will it do so under the new; the only difference being that this sanctity will have its roots no longer in the love of God but in the love of Man. Thus, equipped with these intellectual and moral safeguards, we will face life with cheerful courage. Do not the vast majority of mankind go about their every-day occupations in a spirit of, at least, contentment, often of absolute light-heartedness, when they could give you no satisfactory reason for their hopeful mood? This fact we will lay hold on as evidence that life is essentially a good and not an evil; on the strength of it we

will be optimists. “Though nature, red in tooth and claw with ravine, shriek against our creed,” we will maintain that the soul of the world is goodness, that all things work to noble ends, that life is the supreme blessing, and death, which puts an end to our joyful labours, the one dread foe.[23]

We see, then, that Agnostic Optimism bases its hope of universal acceptance as a new religion on two assumptions. The first of these is, that it is possible to eradicate from the human mind that instinct which Schopenhauer calls *das metaphysische Bedürfnisz*,– that standing revolt of the intellect against its circumscribed conditions, which has given birth to every form of supernatural religion, and has been hitherto the prime motive of philosophical inquiry.[24] Man, it is taken for granted, will discover that the last attainment of philosophy consists in frank acceptance of his limitations, and will find rest in a realistic interpretation of the universe; the metaphysical stage will have been passed through, and, in the positive stage which shall succeed, the light-hearted study of phenomena will find no interruption from the troublesome consciousness of insoluble problems ever lurking in the rear.[25]

The second assumption is, that such universal realism, and the optimism supposed to go hand in hand therewith, are compatible with that altruistic morality (practical, and not merely in theory,) which is relied upon as the future hope of the race. When we have ceased, – it is urged, – to peer into the clouds after impossible explanations of our being; when we have convinced ourselves of the purely natural sanctions of morality; when we have learned to regard the earth as our true and only home, and one capable of being made delightful to all creatures; then, and not till then, will our hearts overflow with the single love of Humanity, and “to live for others” be recognized as at once the noblest moral theory and the highest practical blessedness.[26]

In opposition to these postulates, I should like to endeavour to show that, so long as human nature remains as now we know it, the metaphysical instinct can never acquiesce in subordination to a realistic philosophy; secondly, that, so far from desiring such subordination, we should do our utmost to cherish and strengthen the metaphysical tendencies of the human mind, seeing that in such tendencies alone, inevitably leading to the universal acceptance of a pessimistic philosophy, is at present discernible a hope of the better order of the common life of men.

One thing we may perhaps begin by conceding, namely, that a point has been gained in the recognition of the fact that religion and philosophy are henceforth one and inseparable, the two names merely indicating different phases of the same thing, the intellectual and the moral.[27] It is a gain to openly confess this; that the truth is not for the first time felt is evident when we reflect how, in eras of prevailing supernaturalism, the wise man has generally ended with making a

religion of his philosophy, whilst the mass of men have at all times made a philosophy of their religion. Perhaps the best thing, under such circumstances, would be to discontinue altogether the use of the word religion, and allow philosophy, which has absorbed the function of religion, henceforth to possess a supreme jurisdiction without even a rival in name. But we are met at once with the question: what is philosophy? Aristotle notes that philosophy has its origin in wonder, and herein provides us with a sufficient definition.[28] The average man sees nothing to wonder at in the universe; its existence is for him its explanation. The philosopher wonders at everything he sees; and it becomes the task of his life to seek an explanation of this being of his and all which it supposes; he has no rest from the questions: Whence, whither, wherefore? Filtered through the intelligence of successive ages, the questions reduce themselves to one simple interrogation; the modern philosopher asks with Kant: What *can* I know? Upon the answer which his reason supplies depends his view of the universe. But for our agnostic optimist all such speculation falls under the somewhat contemptuous title of metaphysics, and the study of metaphysics characterizes for him an earlier stage in the history of human development than that which it is his happiness to have attained. He has ceased to trouble himself with the question: What *can* I know? and holds that it is the philosopher's duty to confine himself to the inquiry: What *do* I actually know of the laws of this world of matter? He confines himself to what the Germans call *Realwissenschaften*, and a completed system of such sciences, a co-ordinated view of all human knowledge, crowned by a self-consistent theory of the operation of the faculties whereby such knowledge is obtained, – for him constitutes Philosophy, the philosophy which, in contradistinction to all those hitherto held, he calls the Positive.[29] But, strangely, considering the rigidly scientific attitude assumed, he takes it for granted that this Philosophy of his is the final stage of speculation; makes such a conclusion tributary to his hopes. The spirit of our modern science is vehemently and dogmatically agnostic. Accordingly, we will not be content with demonstrating how all previous stages of thought have led up to this, which we may safely and scientifically do, but we will take it for granted that evolution henceforth means the strengthening and confirming of this actual condition. Because the human mind is passing through an agnostic and realistic stage, therefore agnosticism and realism will one day become its essential qualities, final conditions of its operation. The easy application of evolutionary symbols and analogies involves these theorists in an error of proportion. One might as well confidently assume with Sir Thomas Browne that one face of Janus holds no proportion to the other; 'tis too late to be ambitious; the great mutations of the world are acted, and our generations are ordained in the setting part of time.[30] Because intellectual activity is for a season turned away from the ultimate problems of existence and given up to the study of the laws of

phenomena, to what it pleases us to call the study of actually existing things, this is surely no argument to prove that metaphysical speculation has therefore had its day and ceased to be. Nay, for that matter, if one is disposed to prophesy, does it not seem far more probable that the mind, after long and strenuous exertion in the pursuit of natural science, will, by dint of the very vastness of its attainments, in consequence whereof it strikes, so to speak, every moment against the barriers of the unknowable, become, Faust-like, weary of the vanity of its course, and turn to seek for truth by an altogether different way, so that mysticism, or something of the kind, may prove the true evolutionary outcome of agnostic realism?

Or, to put the same error in another way. Apparently it is taken for granted that, in virtue of the scientific principle of heredity, the prevalence of dogmatic agnosticism in one generation guarantees the prevalence of the same characteristic in the generation which succeeds. But philosophical views are not hereditary; were it so, the mind would be fixed forever in one construction of the universe. What a man does inherit from the generation which gives him birth is a certain accumulation of positive knowledge with intellectual capacity to avail himself thereof, and, in his turn, to add to the possession before transmitting it again. The mode in which a man shall make use of this heritage is, of course, in the earlier stages of his mental growth, greatly decided by the instruction he receives; but, were there no possibility of ultimately outgrowing these influences, then, with all our present knowledge, we should still be adherents of fetishism or some such primitive philosophy. Every man must work out his own salvation. The mere renewal of generations is a constant danger to the persistence of a given form of faith; for the individual, no less than the race, has his systematic development, one stage of which is necessarily that of metaphysical inquiry. Nor is it difficult to give reasons for the belief that this stage will, as time goes on, come to be of more and more importance, rather than of less and less, as agnostic optimists hope and believe.

Suppose we try, in the first place, to realize what is meant by an agnostic world. That is to say, a world educated out of the bondage of supernaturalism, and so completely trained in the methods of philosophical inquiry, as to have finally recognized the limits of the human intelligence, to have definitely acquiesced in a system of *relative* realism. To put it concretely, a world in which the average man has quite mastered the *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, and fully appreciates all its moral and intellectual consequences.[31] For, short of this we may not stop. To assert that agnosticism of a kind sufficient for all practical purposes will ensue upon a conscientious rejection of supernatural faiths is simply to ignore that property of human nature, by virtue of which the mind not sufficiently self-conscious to grasp the reasonings of philosophy will, in spite of itself, entertain views of existence identical with those whereon are based the

old religions. Gather your audience of intelligent, but only half-educated, working men, and convince them that modern science has overthrown belief in revealed religion.[32] Well, so far you may prevail; so far you *have* prevailed through large masses of the population. But do you flatter yourself that these minds have become in the true sense of the word agnostic? Far from it. In all probability, the best of them have reached the stage of pantheism; but be sure that not one but, consciously or unconsciously, holds still a teleological theory of the world, in all likelihood has still his anthropomorphic ideas of the deity. In very deed, if one thinks of it, you have only succeeded in bringing them to the threshold of metaphysical consciousness, to that phase of thought in which names stand for things. Cast one of your disciples into the midst of severe mental trouble, or even afflict him with bodily anguish not easy to be borne and threatening death, – and see whether his agnosticism be more than skin deep.

But we will pass over this initial difficulty, the difficulty which must lie in the pathway of every reformer who would have the masses of the people leap at a bound to a height of intellectual refinement which, in himself, represents ages of slow development. We will also say nothing, at present, of the circumstance that the direction of modern civilization seems becoming more and more unfavourable to the hope of anything like such universal culture, inasmuch as the struggle for mere existence becomes daily more and more all-absorbing and leaves to the vast majority less and less leisure and inclination for abstract study. Let us repeat the supposition, that we have progressed so far as to see before us a truly agnostic world. This means, undoubtedly, a world advanced in the study of the "real" sciences to a point which we can hardly conceive, and, as already said, a world which has criticized the conditions of pure reason and recognized its limits. Is it not evident that, to such a reflective world, the circumstance of life, the totality of phenomena, will constitute a source of wonder as inexhaustible as to the most philosophic minds of our own day? Is it not in accordance with that fundamental human nature which seems unalterable by such lapses of time as we are at all justified in speaking of, that, the more clearly we recognize the limits of our knowledge, and the more able we become to view life objectively, in the philosophical spirit, all the more wonder-inspiring will our position appear to us? Is it not, then, self-contradictory to take it for granted that a problem which must perforce grow to our consciousness ever more present, ever more tantalizing, will possess ever slighter influence on the minds of men, so that they will be able to put it aside calmly, as an importunate suitor whom they have once for all decided not to listen to? In earlier ages, when men were as yet children in knowledge, the searching mind was able to find rest in a very simple explanation of the world's origin; though the metaphysical instinct was already operative, consciousness of the mind's processes was still undeveloped, and it seemed quite satisfactory to explain the creation of the

universe on the analogy of a design conceived by the human brain and executed by human hands. Such an explanation no longer suffices. Your very Philistine makes a mock of the first chapters of Genesis, holding that a belief in such stories is incompatible with the dignity of his intellect, and untroubled by the circumstance of his having no more credible theory to substitute for that which he discards. Your average scientifically-cultured man trains himself in evolutionary modes of thought, and delights to pursue the course of development into the dark backward and abysm of time, till some dimly-imaged act of spontaneous generation links for him the space between nothingness and being.[33] Is he nearer to an understanding of the principle of life, to a sufficient comprehension of the sum of things? Lay your Philistine and your man of science on a bed of sickness, and let their conscious eyes read the expression of relinquished hope in the faces of those about them; which of the two sees the further into the dark ahead of him, or derives the more strength from the philosophy which guided his active hours? The Philistine, in all probability, sinks into the anguish of despair, and at the last quiets his wretched soul in frantic acceptance of the faith he had contemned. The man of science acts his part better, preserves his self-respect in the face of a ruining world, but none the less confesses to himself the futility of his investigations, and even in the pangs of dissolution must smile at his own life-long credulity. Both have recognized the vanity of the mood in which man says to himself that the present life shall be his all-in-all; the dogmatic realism of both has yielded to the convincing metaphysics of death.[34]

No; natural progress does not consist in diminution of self-consciousness; we have but to reflect for a moment on the history of the human intellect to acknowledge that the very opposite is the truth, that the metaphysical instinct strengthens with the advance of civilization, spite of the superficial tendencies of a passing era. Far from content with once for all recognizing that all they know is that they can know nothing, men will find the consciousness of their strange, dread environment of shadows ever more present with them, till at length the intellectual phase of their nescience subordinates itself to the moral phase, and they will assert that they know nothing save that they are miserable. And herein, from the earthly point of view, lies the hope for our race, – a paradox which will establish itself now that we come to consider the second assumption of the agnostic optimist.

That universal realism, and the optimism supposed to go hand in hand therewith, are compatible with an altruistic morality. – This is putting it negatively; it is only necessary to assert that optimistic realism is the sole permanent foundation of such morality in order to make evident the grievous instability of a religion which should base itself on such an association. Surely, if there is one general principle of human nature justified by the observation of

all times, it is, that to make this present life of ours an end in itself is equivalent to the discouragement of just those virtues which altruism pre-supposes. I know it may be urged that I am here misrepresenting the position I assail; that I am confusing the individual life with that larger life of the race which the altruist is supposed to always have in view. Not in his own poor day-to-day existence is he to find the nutriment of his soul, but in the contemplation of that noble entity, the human race, which, as an object of devotion, is held to be capable of awakening and satisfying every religious instinct. Alas, and can we really persuade ourselves that man will ever worship man in spirit and in truth?[35] Granting that Humanity is the highest we can ever know, that it is vain to seek after another God, are we not too fatally conscious of the distance between the utmost human goodness and that ideal which we are capable of conceiving? In very deed, it is not Humanity which the new religion makes the object of its worship, but an ideal embodiment of man's noblest faculties and attainments, a terrene divinity such as will never find its avatar in human flesh. Better to abandon the figure, and acknowledge that our only guide is in our own good instincts. And how ineffectual such guidance proves is sufficiently attested by the union of the highest degree of civilization yet attained with the most flagrant social misery the world has ever seen. Far be from me the cynical temperament which delights in disparaging the grander possibilities of man's nature. "[H]ow noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!" Yes, and for all that but "the paragon of animals."[36] Can we, pray you, with our rationalistically established scheme of altruism get beyond the moral force of that religion which summed itself in the injunction that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us, for that such was the will of our Father which is in Heaven? And, if even that religion has failed, then by dint of what marvellous conceit, in consequence of what amazing hallucination, do we dare to hope that our painfully excogitated philosophy will approve itself the very water of life, a spring of final regeneration for all mankind!

Lay to our souls what flattering unction we may, we shall not escape from the eternal truth that the world is synonymous with evil.[37] If indeed it is true that the metaphysical instinct was but an element in an evolutionary stage which humanity is leaving behind, and if indeed the state of things which we see around us is the foreshadowing of an age of universal realism, which shall have no spiritual guidance save in the contemplation of the virtues of ideal Man, then let us rejoice that we have been born thus early and that our eyes will have closed before the final establishment of the era of Agnostic Optimism. Imagine the intensifying through another generation or two of the social strife which every day grows more bitter; imagine wealth accumulated in the hands of yet fewer capitalists, and the immense majority toiling desperately for mere

subsistence; then conceive the utter annihilation of all hopes of a future world, of all belief in a rewarding and avenging God, with the prevailing religion one which makes Man its supreme being, the earth its scene of final blessedness, and appeals to the unselfish instincts as the sole guarantee of morality.[38] Do we not already recognize on every hand the one great and obvious result of such tendencies, in the strengthening of the natural forces of egotism? Let a man say to himself: This is my first and last existence; here on this earth must I find the development of my faculties, reap the delights of my senses, if ever I am to do so; it is now or never with me, miss this my one chance in all eternity and far better that I had never been; – suppose this impressed upon his mind as a vehement conviction, does it not perforce follow that he will set himself with desperate determination to win what he deems his just share in the enjoyments of life? Will he not brood himself into frenzy over the social wrong which holds him, as it were spell-bound, a mere famishing onlooker at the world's banquet? Will not envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness keep riot in his heart and brain?[39] Of what use to point such a man to beautiful ideals, to preach to him the holy joys of self-forgetfulness, to bid him worship Humanity? Verily, if, as all men must, he arrive at his conception of humanity at large from a study of his own inner life, he will feel little inducement to fall in adoration before the altar of the race.

Did the supporters of the new religion make its universal acceptance dependant upon the prior success of a social revolution, the outcome of which was to be the establishment of a just order, we could then very well concede the logical strength of their position, think what we might of the calculations on which they based their hopes. But it is distinctly asserted[40] that the only reasonable prospect of such new social order depends upon the operative influence of the Religion of Humanity.[41] So it is to be feared that we shall wait long for our Utopian constitution. For, if agnostic realism is obviously fraught with every greatest danger to the common weal, a religion of earthly optimism is the very last instrument wherewith one would seek to counteract the threatening ill. For optimism of this kind is but egotism under another name. To the agnostic optimist life is something good in itself and for its own sake; the mere circumstance of birth into the world endows with a right to a share in the world's happiness. Let this constitute a man's creed, and, consciously or unconsciously, he will inevitably make it his first object to secure possession of his birthright. The social results which directly issue from such a conviction in the individual are only too plain before our eyes. Hence this scheme of commercial competition tempered by the police-code, to which we are pleased to give the name of a social order. The motto of our time is: Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost. We will not listen to any of your socialistic nonsense, not we; let every man fight his way through life as best he

can, one up, another down. The competitive system, depend upon it, is the grandest outcome of civilization. It makes us robust and self-reliant; we expect no mercy in the battle, and accordingly give no quarter; the strong man will make his way; for the weak are there not workhouses and prisons?[42] We are a growing population; our great problem is, how to make the food of two keep three alive; it is patent that we cannot stand upon ceremony, must e'en push our best to get a place at the board. Does not science – the very newest – assure us that only the fittest shall survive?[43] If we tread upon a feeble competitor and have the misfortune to crush the life out of him, we are merely illustrating the law of natural selection. A man must live, we suppose? – This is the spirit of the time, the outcome of realism and devotion to the life of the world. How, in the face of such a state of things, are you to begin converting people to the doctrine of altruism, your medium nothing better than a philosophy of Agnostic Optimism? Whence the moral force which is to inspire men with the enthusiasm of Humanity? The man who can pin his faith on the conviction that life on earth is the highest attainable good, and, doing so, can yet sacrifice his share in this good for the sake of a fellow-being, is cast in heroic mould; and are we justified in taking it for granted that the spread of the new religion would make such heroism the common attitude of men?

We owe to Schopenhauer the metaphysical explanation of egotism. It is the outcome of what he calls *die Bejahung des Willens zum Leben*, the affirmation of the will to live, as opposed to that *Verneinung des Willens* with which alone genuine self-forgetfulness is compatible.[44] Now optimism directly encourages the affirmation of the will to live, consequently cannot but encourage egotism, let sophists argue as they please. For Agnostic Optimism, as already said, is the restatement in terms of philosophical consciousness of the spirit which unconsciously possesses and actuates the mass of men. That this spirit is prevailingly egotistic no one will be found to deny. It is so, simply because it represents the instinct by virtue of which every living thing clings to life with the utmost energy of its nature, and finds the goal of being in the propagation of its kind. The very cattle led to slaughter are optimists, in precisely the same way that man is an optimist when he gives himself unreflectingly up to the current of active life. Are we to suppose that human progress consists in the strengthening of this tendency, and not rather in its final counteraction by the supreme powers of the intelligence? We know that instinct can be overcome by reason; a man may, in a solitary instance, be capable of sacrificing his life at the prompting of reason, even though life seem to him an absolute good; or he may go further than this, and, by the practice of severest asceticism, prove that the conquest of instinct has become the habit of his life, that he has attained to *die Verneinung des Willens*. Life is no longer a good to him; he is a Pessimist. And this is the

final triumph of mind, the highest reach of human morality, the only hope of the destruction of egotism.

Can it really be necessary to argue against an optimistic view of human life? Has not the general voice of the wisest of all ages borne witness to the weariness of being, the sighing of unnumbered generations made mute protest against the burden of breath? We enter the gates of life with wailing, an anguish to the womb which brings us forth; we pass again into the outer darkness through the valley of ghastly terrors, and leave cold misery upon the lips of those that mourn us. The interval is but a feverish combat, the commonplace of moralists. Those brief intervals of rest which nature grants we embitter for each other by the inexhaustible envy of our hearts. Our passions rack us with the unspeakable torment of desire, and fruition is but another name for disillusion. Every epoch of existence feeds on the vision of some unattainable joy; from the rising to the going down of the sun we lament for that which we have not, and our nightly dreams mock us with a visioned happiness. We make unto ourselves idols of our vain beliefs, and rend each other for the supremacy of a name. From the ancient battle-field of earth goes up the reek of the blood of peoples, spilt that one man might lie in purple, or for the glory of gods that are not. Our bodily frame is a house of torment, and the seat of lusts which obscure the soul. The aching of a limb frustrates the keenest intellectual delight; disorder in a fragment of the brain sinks the philosopher below the beast. We lay our selfish plans as though for an eternity of life, and fate mocks the bitterness of our disappointment. We inherit but by the offices of death, and every possession to which we succeed puts us in mind of our own mortality. Each generation builds upon the grave of that which went before; the whole earth is but the cenotaph of vanished hopes; and, in the words of the golden-tongued preacher, "You can go no whither but you tread upon a dead man's bones."[45]

In losing that larger hope which is the foundation of religious optimism, we are deprived of the only solace which could prevail against the misery of being. Well did Christianity insist upon the saving efficacy of faith, in the light whereof evil could show as a means of final good, and the daily martyrdoms of earth gleam under the fore-vision of the promised crown. This faith lost, sin and suffering and the last agony of death are to our reason inexplicable. Science comes with its doctrine of determinism to realize the image of a relentless Fate, which brings into existence but to torture and then destroy. Man becomes conscious that to represent himself as tempted of evil is a reversal of the truth; evil is the essence of his being; of good he is cognizant, but can only approach it in proportion as he denies himself, un-wills the instinct of life. The foremost religions of the world, Buddhism and Christianity, alike recognize this, vouched

for as a truth by that inner persuasion, that subjective proof, which is our only revelation.

Physical anguish and the misery of sin all men inherit; he who has experienced the second birth of philosophical consciousness endows himself with a yet deeper woe, for him "but to think is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despair."[46] He is the spiritual alchemist, seeking to extract from the inadequate elements of the mind the gold of absolute knowledge, and forever overcome by a perception of the vanity of his endeavour. His eye, piercing the veil of things which seem, would penetrate to that which is; his despair is in the discovery that subject and object presuppose each other, and that if he would view this mutual relationship from without he must first transcend the conditions of his intelligence. The insoluble problem meets him on every hand and in a multitude of forms: the chain of causation without beginning or end, the meaning of force, the origin of matter and its infinite divisibility, the boundlessness of space, the eternity of time. Look up to the sky above you, and try to reconcile that logical necessity of belief in infinitude with that finite practical understanding which stubbornly revolts against the conception; in the effort the brain reels and the heart is sick, an immense self-pity takes possession of the imprisoned soul. Let us nourish this self-compassionate mood, hold desperately to it, strive to make it the familiar companion of our thoughts, – for herein lies what we may call the tangible issue of metaphysical speculation, the root of future good in the intercourse of man with man. Consider the lot of humanity from the first conscious thought, who knows how far back in time, to that moment, beyond the interval of unimagined ages, when the earth shall circle in its contracting orb, the grave of thought. No words can give utterance to the sadness of such a contemplation, a sadness which must increase as mankind becomes more reflective, though the mind may gird itself against the onset of insidious fears, and the heart seek to find a joyous music in its own strong throbbing. From the earliest times men have sought to get at the significance of their strange, dread fate; one generation has solved it thus, another in another way; all have found a momentary solace and strength in the visions which their faith conjured up for them, and all, as we now believe, rested their hopes on foundations insubstantial as a ray of sunlight. In the grave was the goal of all their striving, and Death laughed as he stilled with cold hand the fever of their foreheads. For us, the offspring of a later day, not even thus much happiness is allowed; we may not deceive ourselves with the visionary heritage of a life to come, still less with the hope of solving in this world the enigma of our destiny. The sphinx stands before us with ever more inexorable face, propounding a riddle which we listen to with ever deeper despair. We, too, shall find peace in the dissolution of being, and our minds shall rest from their anxious toil; but the last moment of consciousness is saddened by the thought that we depart with

our task unaccomplished, hopeless of success forever. We cry for light, and, even as we speak, the eternal darkness envelops us. Generation shall succeed to generation, and race step in the footprints of race, and the incident of a human death-bed will still symbolize the triumph of woe. Then, in the lapse of cycles, will come the day when the last human soul has ceased to dash itself against the barriers of the unknowable, and the last prayer from human lips has wasted itself upon the unpitying void, and the great tragedy will have found its close.

In the pity of it we must find our salvation. The compassion which each man first feels for himself, let him extend to his fellow-sufferers. But this compassion, as it is the divinest feeling of which our nature is capable, so can it only be the offspring of that metaphysical consciousness which Agnostic Optimism would fain repress as vain and obstructive of the future hope. Suppose all men so far intellectually trained as to be capable of fully and intensely realizing the pathos of the human lot, this deeper pathos which goes so much beyond our every-day griefs, and indeed gives to such their significance, – were it not inevitable that their souls should be forthwith possessed by an overpowering mutual pity? Let us have done (they would say,) with making our poor little day so full of bitterness for each other. Let us see into the dark places of our brother's soul, and strive to solace him with sweetest sympathy. Not as a hardy, self-sufficient being, ripe to cope with circumstance, as a strong warrior competent against the odds which face him, as a conqueror marching on with front to the stars, – not thus let us regard man, for thence comes the hardening of the heart against him, the insistence on one's own miserable claims, the prevalence of the spirit of combat; so have we come to use that phrase, "the battle of life."[47] No; rather cultivate our perception of man's weakness, learn thoroughly the pathos inherent in a struggle between the finite and the infinite. We are shipmates, tossed on the ocean of eternity, and one fate awaits us all. Let this excite our tenderness. Let us move on to the great gulfs hand clasped in hand, not each one's raised in enmity against his fellow. So will the agony of the last drowning moment be lightened by the thought that we have not lived in vain. Save our brother we could not, knowing not, alas, how to save ourselves; but our last word to him was one of kindness, and on his anguished face we still recognize the gleam of gratitude.

"Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."[48] Sadness is the twin-sister of wisdom, and comes to us hand in hand with her. Upon the face of him that looks into the heart of things there rests the shadow of a great mystery, and the revelation which to the wise comes thus directly makes itself at certain seasons a presence in the being of the most unreflective. The world-old ballads chanted by "the spinsters and the knitters in the sun," the legends sacred to the cottage hearth, those melodies which linger through centuries in the homely corners of the earth, all bear a

character of melancholy; they embody the philosophy of the unconscious.[49] All music, indeed, – music, which is the most perfect utterance of the deepest truth,– lives by the spirit of sadness, and is a summoner at the gate of tears.[50] This universal sense of pathos in the most secret places of our nature is the unconscious expression of the truth whereon Pessimism founds its creed. Our existence is something which should not be; the vehement desire of its continuance is sin. There is, in truth, only one kind of worldly optimism which justifies itself in the light of reason, and that is the optimism of the artist. The artistic mind, as Schopenhauer demonstrates, is *das reine Subject des Erkennens* [*sic*], the subject contemplating the object without the disturbing consciousness of self.[51] In the mood of artistic contemplation the will is destroyed, self is eliminated, the world of phenomena resolves itself into pictures of absolute significance, and the heart rejoices itself before images of pure beauty. Here, indeed, good does prevail over evil, and there is excellence in the sum of things. Herein is one explanation of the optimism of the Hellenic religion: it was the faith of a people of artists. The thought did not go behind phenomena, and instinct embraced the world in the artistic sense. The earth was the abode of loveliness and delight; life was a hymn to the spirit of beauty; the state ensuing upon death was a negation, a horrid absence of the active joy which possesses all things under the sun; better to be a live beggar than a king among the shades. Optimism in the religion of the Jews represented a moral error, was the outcome of a spirit of aggressive egotism; and one might say the same of Islam. Christianity, basing itself upon the recognition of original sin, was consistently pessimistic, and embodied in a noble symbolism those truths in the return to which lies the only hope of man's ultimate salvation.

Christianity in its modern form of optimistic protestantism is a delusion and a snare. In accommodating itself, step by step, to the growth of material civilization, this so-called religion of Christ has directly encouraged the spirit of egotism which inevitably accompanies an optimistic faith; its latest outcome is the predominance of commercial competition, with its doctrine of "Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost." What has the Christianity of to-day in common with the *Imitatio Christi*, what in common with the teachings of a prophet whose birth from a virgin mother, and whose own virginity, symbolized that renunciation of the world of flesh which was the strait and narrow way to the kingdom of heaven?[52] It is in the pessimistic philosophy as developed by Schopenhauer that we find the true successor of pure Christianity.[53] In former times the world had to be taught the lesson of salvation through the medium of a myth; hereafter, the developed understanding of mankind will grasp it in the abstract form. The establishment of the kingdom of righteousness can only ensue upon the destruction of egotism, and egotism only perishes together with optimism, together with "the will to live." Only with the

absolute extinction of every lust of the flesh can sin cease to be; only with the final cessation of conscious life can evil disappear from the earth.

That kingdom will be long to come; but we may well, without offence to the most practical, anticipate that time when, in consequence of a prevailing consciousness of the pathos of human fate, compassion will so far weigh against egotism as to abolish the system of competitive greed, and make no longer socially applicable that terrible phrase: the battle of life. In the divine strength of Sorrow will this victory be achieved, even as of old was achieved the victory of the Cross. The prospect of happiness on earth is a chimæra, but peace and good-will may prevail to an extent not easy as yet to realize, and thereby suffering man be strengthened under the burden of life. Death, too, persistently regarded as a consummation devoutly to be wished,[54] will lose a portion of its terrors: –

> "Nec mihi mors gravis est posituro morte dolores."[55]

The grave will become a symbol of joy; those who have departed will be spoken of as the happy ones, and the tears of the mourner will be checked by his better reason. Pity is alone for the living. – Unless by the eye of faith we may look onward to that day when compassion will extend itself to generations yet unborn. To create a being predestined to misery will come to be deemed a crime, even as the passion concerned is recognized as a sin. And so, perchance, where the condemnation of reason could not overcome, the dictates of emotion will be strong to chasten; a childless race will dedicate its breath to the eternal silence, and Mercy will have redeemed the world.

[1] Gissing wrote this essay at 17 Oakley Crescent where he had moved on 13 September 1882, resuming cohabitation with his wife, Nell, with whom he had not lived since January.

[2] In medieval Latin the phrase means literally "foolish fire." It is the approximate equivalent of "will-o'-the-wisp."

[3] Typifying the intertextuality of this essay, the preceding phrases allude to Shakespeare ("discourse of reason"), Shelley ("looking before and after"), and Pope ("never blest, but always to be so").

[4] Heraclitus was known as "the Weeping Philosopher"; Democritus, as "the Laughing Philosopher."

[5] William Shakespeare: "but man, proud man/... Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven/As makes the angels weep," *Measure for Measure*, II, ii, 117-122.

[6] Gissing tends to use the word "optimism" to indicate a belief in the essential goodness of reality, rather than a disposition to expect prosperous outcomes. Correspondingly, "pessimism" for Gissing consistently refers to a belief in the essential evil of reality.

[7] Thomas Browne: "I count it not an inn but an hospital; and a place not to live in, but to die in," *Religio Medici* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1950), p. 115.

[8] This is the first of the only two occasions in which Gissing uses this phrase.

[9] Gissing is evidently referring to the Religion of Humanity which he inexplicably renames.

He will use the term "Agnostic Optimism" seven times in the essay – he uses "Religion of Humanity" only twice.

[10] Gissing was well aware that Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism, believed that one day he would proclaim his own "earthly wisdom" from the pulpit of the Notre Dame Cathedral.

[11] Schopenhauer writes in *The World as Will and Representation* that "[science] never aims at the inmost nature of the world; it can never get beyond the representation; on the contrary, it really tells us nothing more than the relation of one representation to another," *The World As Will and Representation* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969), Vol. I, p. 28.

[12] In a letter to Algernon of 9 May 1880, Gissing had written that the "Positive Philosophy" tells us that through "an intimate knowledge of the past" we can deduce the rules which enable us "to lead our political, social & individual lives more in consonance with reason," *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), Vol. I, p. 269.

[13] Gissing's casual use of this comparison indicates his familiarity with the ideas of Immanuel Kant who had remarked in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* that it was the problematization of the relationship between cause and effect, of which he became aware after reading Hume, that had awakened him from his "dogmatic slumber" (Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, transl. and ed. by Gary Hatfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, revised edition, p. 10).

[14] Shortly after the death of their brother William, Gissing wrote to Algernon "The immortality of man consists in this reflection – that not a word we utter, not a thought we think, not a battle we win, not a temptation we yield to, but has, & *must* have, influence upon those living in contact with us, and from them, like the circles spreading in a pool, extends to the whole future human race," *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 265.

[15] Gissing had planned to entitle his next novel "The Burden of Life."

[16] Gissing's dismissal of long-term speculation ("the cyclical future of the human race") and his endorsement of an issue "of immediate and pressing concern" parallels his disdain for fantasy literature and his valorization of naturalistic fiction.

[17] It is likely that by "foremost races" Gissing meant the people of Europe. Writing to his brother Algernon on 17 February 1879, Gissing had asserted that a major reason for the predominance of Christianity was the fact that "it happened to grow up in Europe, where the most intelligent part of the human race lives," *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 152.

[18] Gissing may have been thinking of London Positivists he knew, especially his highly energetic and practical mentor and patron, Frederic Harrison.

[19] Gissing's friend Eduard Bertz had given him a copy of *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant in 1879. Kant claimed in this influential work that the structures we think we perceive in the world around us are in fact the structures of human consciousness. It is notable that eighty years earlier the poet-philosopher S. T. Coleridge found Kant's claims inspiring as they pointed to the creativity of the human mind. Gissing characteristically savoured the negative implication of Kant's thinking – that we cannot escape the enclosures of human consciousness.

[20] Gissing's estimate of the intellectual capacities of ordinary people was always very low. In January of 1879, when Gissing was contemplating dispensing the treasures of Positivist thought through a series of lectures to working-class men, he comments on "the deplorable state of the intellect of 999 out of every 1000 men, that utter absence of receptivity, that absolute lack of formulative power which renders the assault of a new idea as little effective as that of a cannon-ball against a feather-bed," *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 145.

[21] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, section LV.

[22] Although he quotes Tennyson, Gissing was likely influenced here by Schopenhauer who wrote that nature "treats individuals only as means, and the species alone as the end," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, p. 564.

[23] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, section LVI: slightly altered from the original "shriek'd against his creed."

[24] The metaphysical need.

[25] The best known of all of Comte's doctrines was that of the three stages: that in each branch of knowledge humanity passes through three stages – "the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive," *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, transl. by Harriet Martineau (London: George Bell and Son, 1896), p. 27.

[26] "Vivre pour autrui" was a popular summary of Positivist ethics.

[27] In speaking of Positivism in a letter to his brother Algernon, Gissing had distinguished between "its *intellectual* side" and "its emotional side, the so-termed Religion of Humanity," *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 14.

[28] "For it was because of wonder that men both now and originally began to philosophize." Aristotle, *The Metaphysics* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 9.

[29] Real sciences.

[30] In the fifth chapter of *Hydriotaphia, or Urn-Burial*, Browne writes gloomily "We cannot hope to live so long in our names, as some have done in their persons. One face of Janus holds no proportion to the other. 'Tis too late to be ambitious. The great mutations of the world are acted, or time may be too short for our designs," Sir Thomas Browne, *The Major Works* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 308-309.

[31] In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant believed he had achieved a "Copernican Revolution" in metaphysics by showing that time, space and causality are categories of the human mind, not objective features of the external world. It followed from Kant's argument that the human mind can never know unmediated reality.

[32] Gissing is writing here from the experience of the "immense success" of his lecture on "Faith and *Reason*" which he delivered to a Radical Club in Paddington on 22 March 1879. His plan for future lectures to working-class clubs did not materialize. *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 163.

[33] The unacknowledged quotation is from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I, ii, 61.

[34] In *The Emancipated* (1890) the agnostic Madeline Denyer does lie on "a bed of sickness" anticipating her death. She tells Cecily Elgar she does not know what will happen after death but that "It matters nothing to me. All I have to do is to die, and then whatever comes will come," (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), p. 404.

[35] The ironic allusion is to *John*, 4:24.

[36] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 310-315.

[37] Schopenhauer consistently stated that evil is positive – we experience it immediately and directly – while good, the temporary suspension of evil, is merely negative. "[J]oys certainly lie to the desire in stating that they are positively good, but... in truth they are only of a negative nature, and only the end of an evil," *The World As Will and Representation*, Vol. I, p. 375.

[38] In his "Notes on Social Democracy – I" Gissing had written: "If commercial enterprise proceed in its present path, before long capital will be gathered into the hands of a few immensely rich traders, all the small masters being reduced to mere 'hands,'" *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 September 1880, p. 10.

[39] From "The Litany, or General Supplication" of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

[40] In an influential article published in *Nineteenth Century* in March 1881, Frederic Harrison had stated that the inculcation of a Positivist belief system was a matter that lay "deeper than all

social reforms, before all political institutions, before all forms of government, more vital than any burning question whatever," *The Creed of a Layman* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 221.

[41] The second, and last, time this phrase occurs.

[42] In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge asks rhetorically about precisely these two institutions when pressed by two charitable gentlemen for a Christmas donation.

[43] Herbert Spencer coined the phrase "the survival of the fittest" to describe "the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life," *Principles of Biology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), p. 457.

[44] Negation of the will.

[45] The preacher whom Gissing quotes is Jeremy Taylor and the quotation is from "The Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying," *Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 470.

[46] The exact quotation from Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" is "but to think is to be full of sorrow/And leaden-eyed despairs" (st. 3. ll. 7-8).

[47] The title of Charles Dickens's fourth Christmas book (1846).

[48] Ecclesiastes, 7:3.

[49] Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II, iv, 45.

[50] Schopenhauer had written "[t]he composer reveals the innermost nature of the world, and expresses the profoundest wisdom in a language that his reasoning faculty does not understand," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, p. 260.

[51] The pure subject of knowledge.

[52] The anonymously written fifteenth-century devotional classic *De Imitatione Christi* (the authorship is attributed to Thomas à Kempis) extolls the contemplative side of Christianity.

[53] Schopenhauer explicitly identifies his own brand of pessimism with Christianity when he writes "Let no one think that Christianity is favourable to optimism; for, on the contrary, in the Gospels world and evil are used as almost synonymous," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, p. 326.

[54] From Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, I, ll. 8-9, Hamlet's soliloquy.

[55] "Death is not grievous to me, for by death shall I lay aside my pains," Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, III, 471.

***

Chit-Chat

In 1858, after a thorough investigation by its commissioners, the Academy of Science of Paris finally approved the merits of the Galvano Electric Chain originally patented in 1850 by its Prussian inventor Isaac Lewis Pulvermacher (1815-1884). The commissioners' report stated "that it was the best apparatus for imparting electricity to the human body [and] … one of the most important and useful portable remedial agents they had ever employed, especially in cases of chronic tic douloureux, rheumatism, gout, neuralgia, headache, lumbago, sciatica, &c." That same year Pulvermacher opened a large establishment at 37 Oxford Street, London, and, according to the *Barnsley Chronicle* of 1 January 1859, "appointed Mr. T. W. Gissing, chemist, of the Corn Market, Wakefield, to be agent for the sale of these extraordinary chains."

The Continuing Story of the Coward Family

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The chief motive for my attempt to find as much information as I could about George and Annie Coward was originally to throw some light on the period from September 1882 to May 1884, when George Gissing lived as a lodger in their house at Chelsea. My special interest was the possibility of an amatory involvement of Gissing with his landlady, as first suggested by Morley Roberts in 1912.[1] When ten years ago I published my first article on the Coward family,[2] I was forced to conclude that I had been unable to find out what became of George and Annie Coward and their five sons after 1904. With the help of the Ancestry genealogy site I have recently undertaken (challenged by the editor of this journal) another quest for additional information about the Cowards, whose results will be presented in what follows.

One of the major obstacles to my search in 2007 was the unavailability of the 1911 Census records on the internet and it should therefore surprise no one that this time I turned with great expectations to that particular genealogical goldmine.

In the 1911 Census (2 April 1911) we find Frank and Annie Lofting at 20 Litchfield Avenue, Stratford East, London. Frank Lofting's age was registered as 56 and the age of his wife Annie was given as 53.

Frank Lofting was born on 17 December 1854, in Brompton, London, baptized in Holy Trinity, Brompton, on 1 April 1855. He died on 27 December 1938, at Whitely Village. His first wife was Martha Lofting, née Fancutt, born in February 1855, St. Paul's, London, and baptized in St. Clement Danes, Westminster, on 30 May 1856. Frank and Martha were married in the first quarter of 1877, at Lambeth. Martha died on 29 March 1910 at 20 Litchfield Avenue, Stratford, London. Their youngest son, the insurance clerk Alfred Fancutt Lofting (27 July 1887, Lambeth, London – 18 August 1983, Romford, Essex) left an estate with a value of £60,839.

Frank Lofting falsely claims he married his second wife quite soon after the death of his first wife, as he answers the question in the 1911 Census about the number of "completed years the present marriage has lasted" with "one." That this answer is incorrect is immediately apparent from the *England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915* in which the marriage is not registered until the first quarter of 1911.

However, the most striking feature of the information concerning the Lofting family is the reference to two stepsons of the head of the family. Their entries:

– Clive Coward, stepson, single, age 25, seaman in the merchant service, born in Battersea, London.

– John Philip Coward, stepson, single, age 19, shipowners' clerk, born Leytonstone, Essex.

This then leads us to the irrefutable conclusion that Frank Lofting's second wife was none other than Annie Jane Hopcraft, born in Marylebone, London, on 1 April 1857,[3] who by her first marriage, became the wife of George Mattison Coward, christened on 27 July, St John's, Preston, Lancashire. From her first marriage onwards Annie Jane Hopcraft took her husband's surname and became known either as Annie Jane Coward or simply Annie Coward.

After her second marriage to Frank Lofting Annie Coward changed her name to Annie Lofting, with one curious exception: in the *Civil Registration of Death* we find Annie J. Lofting, birth date: abt 1856, date of registration: Dec. 1926, age: 70, and Annie J. Coward, birth date: abt 1856, date of registration: Dec. 1926, age: 70. There cannot be any doubt that these two different names refer to one and the same person. It seems likely that their respective trades may have contributed to their getting to know one another. Frank's trade is variously described as hosier, clothier, or outfitter's assistant, while Annie Coward (who before her first marriage was employed as a flower maker) usually styled herself as milliner or dressmaker.

George Coward, Annie's first husband, never returned to his native land. The onetime member of the Clarence and Avondale Masonic Lodge at Leytonstone (1892-1896) died at Philadelphia in the Pennsylvania Hospital on 21 September 1908, the cause of death being *Phthisis Pulmonalis* (pulmonary tuberculosis). He was buried on 24 September 1908, in the Odd Fellows cemetery in Philadelphia. On his death certificate his civil status is stated as "married." His last address was 1212 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, only a five minutes' walk from 1524 Vine Street, where he was joined by his wife in 1903.

Turning to George and Annie's sons now, we knew already that George Lionel Coward (2nd quarter 1880, Chelsea – 1st quarter Leytonstone, 1901) the eldest son, died early, at the age of twenty.

Herbert Hugh Coward (2nd quarter 1882, Chelsea – October 1946, Woodham Ferrers, nr Chelmsford) in the summer of 1908 married Annie Stephenson[4] (26 June 1880, Jamalpur, India – 8 January 1976, Woodham Ferrers). He at first worked in the civil service, but later became a banker in the city of London. Upon his death he left the considerable sum of £7,299 to his two children, Dorothy Coward (30 November 1909, Wanstead – November 2002, Chelmsford), spinster, and Hugh Coward (10 May 1911,

Wanstead – July 1993, South Woodham Ferrers, Essex), a dairy farmer. In the summer of 1940 Hugh Coward married Evelyn D. Dowling (1918, Chelmsford –?). When their mother, who outlived her husband by thirty years, died, she in turn left to her children the not insignificant sum of £13,487.

Clive Coward, the third son (1 December 1884, Battersea – 2nd quarter 1966, Stondon Massey, Essex), lived a long and successful life as a master mariner on the world's seas. Starting as a carpenter's apprentice (1901), he soon became a seaman in the merchant service, qualifying as a second mate in 1909, first mate in 1912 and finally, as first mate on 28 June 1912. Some time in the thirties he bought Soap House, in Stondon Massey, six miles north-west from Brentwood in Essex. The large, early 17th century house, now listed, with an estimated current value of £1,439,000, must have been far too large for a bachelor and this may explain why Clive was joined by his youngest brother, John Philip Coward (3rd quarter 1891, Leytonstone – 5 January 1962, Stondon Massey). During World War I John held the rank of acting sergeant, in the 5th City of London Batallion (London Rifle Brigade), and was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Of his career after WWI little is known, but like his brother Clive he remained unmarried. Upon John's death in 1962, he left a sum of £9,653 to his niece Ruth Lily Byford, née Coward (16 February 1911, Stroud Green – 3 July 1985, Keymer, nr Hassocks). She was the daughter of his brother Frank Coward.

On Ruth Lily Byford's death in 1985 she left an estate with a value of £92,368. A large chunk of that money may have come to her through her two uncles, Clive and John Philip Coward.

Frank Coward, George and Annie Coward's fourth son, was born in the last quarter of 1886, at Forest Gate, Essex and died in March 1929, at Brighton, aged 42. After the visit to his father in Philadelphia (October 1903 – August 1905), he returned to Leytonstone (UK). His occupation: commercial traveller (like his father before him) in robes and dresses. In the 1st quarter of 1910, in Islington, he married Lily Agnes Ellen Summerhays (7 October 1887, Portsmouth – 13 February 1966, Hove, Sussex). After their marriage Frank and Lily lived at 88 Uplands Road, Stroud Green, Hornsey North. Their daughter Ruth Lily Coward married Philippe A. Byford in the summer quarter of 1933 at Brighton, Sussex. After Frank Coward's death she married again (as Lily A. E. Coward), first Alexander Hewlett in 1950 at Hove, Sussex and later in 1955, in Hove, Sussex (as Lily A. E. Hewlett), Ernest Leche (1900, St Helens, Lancs. – Hove, 1956). Upon her death in 1966 she left an estate valued at £12,824 to her daughter Ruth Lily Byford and her Brighton solicitor, Ernest James Neale (1881-1967).

One of the more remarkable conclusions of my genealogical inquiry into the Coward family must be that Annie Coward, a mother of five sons, had only three grandchildren: Dorothy (1909-2002), Hugh (1911-1993) and Ruth Lily (1911-1985). Annie's decision to return to England after her farewell (?) visit to her estranged travelling husband in America must certainly have been hastened by her responsibilities as the mother of her youngest son John, who had been left in the home country at the age of twelve. It would seem unlikely that her sons and grandchildren were ever told about her infatuation with a great English novelist in the first years of her married life with the Preston traveller. The blue plaque on the wall of 33 Oakley Gardens[5] is there to remind us of one of the happiest periods of Gissing's life, under the same roof with Annie Coward.

33 Oakley Gardens with the GLC Plaque (Bouwe Postmus)

[1] See: Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912) pp. 135-136.

[2] Bouwe Postmus, "The Peregrinations of a Preston Traveller," *Gissing Journal*, 43:4 (October 2007), pp. 27-32.

[3] The frequent alternative for Annie's date of birth is "last quarter of 1856."

[4] In my 2007 article I mistakenly identified Lillian Rose Hall as Henry Hugh Coward's wife.

[5] In 1882 the name of the address was 17, Oakley Crescent, Chelsea, S.W.

Book Review

Markus Neacey, *The Gissing Journal: A History and Index of the First 50 Years (1965-2014).* Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2016. Pp. 296. ISBN 9780957223158. HB £40/PB £20.

Markus Neacey's attractively produced *The Gissing Journal: A History and Index of the First 50 Years* is a model of its kind. In his introduction to the volume Neacey traces the development of *The Gissing Journal* from its origins in January 1965 as *The Gissing Newsletter* under its founding editor, Jacob Korg, from 1969 to 2013 under the editorship of Pierre Coustillas, then to the end of 2014 under Malcolm Allen. Coustillas's 44-year service as editor and author (of an astonishing 322 items, as Neacey points out) is rightly allocated centre-stage in this lucid, synoptic account of the development of the *Journal* over this period. In effect Neacey's narrative can be interpreted as a significant contribution to our understanding of the major trends in Gissing studies over half a century during which time we have witnessed, in Neacey's words, Gissing's "transition within the literary canon from a marginal figure to a more central one."

Neacey describes how the idea for a journal devoted to George Gissing was hatched in conversations which took place in summer 1964 between three leading Gissing scholars from the US, France, and Japan: Jacob Korg, Pierre Coustillas, and Shigeru Koike. As Korg recalled in his editorial for the first number of *The Gissing Newsletter*

> [w]e had various rendezvous and collations at and around the [British] Museum, in the heartland of the Gissing country and decided to embark upon the present publication as a means of channeling the information we had been exchanging by letter.

Korg enunciated the "simplest and soundest" of editorial policies for a journal: "[w]e will publish every contribution submitted to us, sooner or later, without exception." For Neacey this is a "formula … that has served the *Journal* so well throughout these years" and which "owes its success to the editor's readiness at all times to accept contributions from academic scholars, independent scholars, and general Gissing readers alike." In an era of academic specialisation such hospitality to the academic and non-academic Gissing enthusiast was both distinctive and admirable.

But Neacey's account of the early days also makes clear that the editors' mission was also informed by "a new rigorous and authoritative standard of scholarship" to Gissing's output, all too aware that, up to that point, Gissing's works were "accompanied by the introductions of supposedly expert critics who, having read just a few of his books and possessing a shallow and

erroneous knowledge of his life, regarded him as a failure and could not appreciate his originality as an artist." At this point in the mid-1960s, the study of and interest in Gissing seemed propelled by academics who, somewhat earlier than their English counterparts, had seized on his literary importance and had already helped to prompt interest in their own countries: the original subscribers to the *Newsletter* numbered eight in England and a further 13 from America, France and Japan.

This is an absorbing account of the growth of a literary reputation in which Coustillas now emerged as the leading force. He assumes the editorship of the *Newsletter* in 1969 and in the same year produces the first authoritative edition in the Harvester Press series of Gissing's novels (*Isabel Clarendon*). Twelve further editions appeared between 1972 and 1979, with Harvester publishing Coustillas' edition of the *Diary* in 1978. This was a landmark volume of particular importance for the present writer. Neacey expertly records the trends and highlights through the decades up to 2010: the crucial editions (the *Letters*, *Short Stories*, *Essays*); the key bibliographical and biographical works; the major discoveries of hitherto-unknown short stories, novelistic "false starts"; key biographical facts about, for example, the "Owens College/Veiled Period" and the Chicago experience; "Gissing's connections with other writers or acquaintances," such as H. G. Wells, John Davidson, Shan F. Bullock, John Wood Shortridge and B. B. Dunne; reports of exhibitions, symposia and conventions and of the series of international conferences on Gissing (Amsterdam, London, Lille, and York); the particular perspectives brought to the study of Gissing by scholars in Italy, Japan, and Sweden; topographical explorations of places associated with Gissing, from London to Wakefield to Italy (Hélène Coustillas's vivid 1965 travelogue, "Our Italian Journey," undertaken with her husband, Pierre, is a particular pleasure); the presence of Gissing in the university curriculum and the teaching of his work in the classroom.

Neacey is particularly adept at identifying the particular contributions to Gissing scholarship in the pages of the *Journal* by notable scholars and Gissing enthusiasts, such as C. J. Francis, Clifford Brook, Bouwe Postmus, Martha Vogeler, Francesco Badolato, Wulfhard Stahl, Robert L. Selig, Constance Harsh, David Grylls, Christine Huguet, Simon James, and others too numerous to mention – all the while leant collegial encouragement by Coustillas himself, as I can personally acknowledge.

However, the main purpose of the volume is to provide a comprehensive index to the *Journal*, sub-divided into a Subject Index (160pp), an Author Index (57pp) and an Annual Index (39pp). As the publisher, George Gorniak, acknowledges, readers "will have a huge task to try and track down all the articles on any one topic related to Gissing and his times" and so the

index aims "to make sense of all this accumulated wealth of articles and reviews." Electronic (although non-searchable) access to the *Journal* has been made possible through the work of Mitsuharu Matsuoka which has resulted in making available the complete texts of the *Newsletter/Journal* from 1965 to 2008 (http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/gissing/newsletter-journal/contents.html). Armed with Neacey's index, readers can now browse, purposefully, throughout this archive up to 2014.

The Author Index lists both "contributors of articles" and "authors whose original works such as essays, interviews, reviews, stories, poems, or letters appear either alone or within an article." Within this index we find Gissing himself, as represented by 38 entries which include unpublished stories, essays, letters and other miscellaneous writings turned up by scholars and newly brought to the attention of readers, at the time of publication. Here the listing of items offers evidence of a salient feature of the evolution of Gissing scholarship: the discovery and accumulation of scattered writings gradually collected in later, key scholarly, editions – many of them under Coustillas's husbandry.

We can see Neacey's procedures at work by taking at random one item – Pierre Coustillas' s excavation of the short story, "Joseph," a version of which he first tracked down in *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* in 1977. This article is entered in the Author Index (p. 224) under "Gissing, George" as "'Joseph': A Forgotten Gissing Story of the Mid-Nineties," XXIV, I (January 1988), 7-14. It is also listed in the Subject Index (p.128) under "Gissing, George and the Short Story" where in this category we discover a further 51 entries on this topic.

It is the Subject Index, of course, which sets the greatest challenge to any indexer but also offers the greatest scope to "make sense" of the material. In his introduction to this index Neacey writes that it "contains every article published in *The Gissing Newsletter* and *The Gissing Journal* between 1965 and 2014." He has identified 49 collective "subject headings" which relate to a "major area of Gissing scholarship" – from "Gissing, George and Alderley Edge" to "Gissing, George and Writing." Some items are cross-referenced to one of these headings, so that, for instance, "Smith, Elder and Company" also appears under "Gissing, George and Publishers/Publishing." We find that "Address Book" is cross-referenced to "Gissing, George and London"; "Pessimism" to "Gissing, George and Philosophy," "Socialism" to "Gissing, George and Politics," "Free Union" to "Gissing, George and Marriage." While the choice to cross-refer "Environment" to "Gissing, George and the Working Classes" may be debatable, there is little doubting the value for the Gissing scholar of discovering a total of 46 items from the *Journal* placed under this heading. Indeed for the Gissing reader and researcher the grouping of items under these capacious subject headings is the index's most valuable feature

and compelling evidence of Neacey's knowledge, diligence and judgement in the process of selection. I can personally attest to the extent of Neacey's thoroughness by noting that under "Orme, Eliza," there appears my own *Gissing Journal* review of the *Collected Letters, Volume Seven*, *1897-1899* (July 1996) in which a relatively brief reference is made to the appearance of this helpful solicitor in Gissing's life at a time of crisis in his domestic affairs. The index displays a further three *Journal* items which readers interested in her role in Gissing's life can follow up.

Celebrating sixty years of the Society of Indexers in the *Guardian*, earlier this year, its Honorary President, Sam Leith, stated that a good index should offer "a cunningly devised series of magical shortcuts that can … save a scholar many hours of work." For his fine work of scholarly conjuring we are grateful to *The Gissing Journal*'s current editor in the almost certain knowledge that he is, even now, updating his files.—William Greenslade (University of the West of England, Bristol)

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Notes and News

Over the years Google has digitalised millions of books and made them available mostly in limited view on the Google Books page. A recent search threw up a reference to a quarterly journal *The Downside Review* which was established by monks in 1880 to provide a forum for the scholarly discussion and debate of a wide range of topics, including monastic history, theology, philosophy, scripture studies and spirituality. I located the article entitled "The Teachings of George Gissing" by J. E. Harting (*Downside Review*, July 1905, 24:2, pp. 217-221) at the Internet Archive Digital Library. The short article discusses the philosophy of Henry Ryecroft who Harting considers to be Gissing himself. James Edmund Harting (1841-1928) was educated at the magnificent Downside Abbey in Radstock near Bath, hence his association with the journal. As Harting was a naturalist who wrote books about falconry and ostriches, one would expect that he was known to W. H. Hudson. Indeed they were friends as Hudson reveals in his introduction to *The Book of a Naturalist* (1919).

Recently I was delighted to discover that Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life* was published on 1 December 2016 as a Penguin Classic. Disappointingly, the book has no introduction or scholarly apparatus at all. It was, however, promptly treated to a positive review by Charlotte Tuxworth-Holden in the online version of the *Times* (see "Recent Publications" below).

Vivian Gornick, the American critic, published her memoirs two years ago entitled *The Odd Woman and the City* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2015). In her 2014 *Paris Review* interview Gornick says:

> You know *The Odd Women* by George Gissing? I used to read that book every six months for years because Gissing had gotten it right. He nailed it. The Odd Woman, the woman who just can't make her peace with being in the world as the world is — which, essentially, comes down to living in a world in which people are not any more real to you than you are to them — at almost any other time in history she has been a lonely figure indeed. In order to think things through, that Odd Woman has always needed lots of company. And now she's got it.

In another interview with *The New York Times* she explains further, "It's a book in part about that feeling of futility that can sneak up on anyone late on a certain afternoon." In her 2008 collection of critical writing *The Men in My Life*, Gornick's first essay is about Gissing and his female characters. She finds herself especially drawn to Rhoda Nunn and confesses at one point that "What's more, I recognized myself as one of the 'odd' women. Every fifty years from the time of the French Revolution, feminists had been described as 'new' women, 'free' women, 'liberated' women – but Gissing had gotten it just right. We were the 'odd' women."

The film of Peter Ackroyd's 1995 novel *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* entitled *The Limehouse Golem* was released in Canada in September 2016 at the Toronto Film Festival. It stars Olivia Cooke as Lizzie Cree, Douglas Booth as Dan Leno, Bill Nighy as John Kildare, Morgan Watkins as George Gissing (he looks nothing like him), and Edythe Woolley as Nell Gissing. Staying with films, it was pleasing to find Emma Thompson, the renowned English actress and star of several Merchant Ivory productions of E. M. Forster's novels, praising Gissing in a recent interview for *Westword* which was celebrating 25 years since the filming of *Howards End*. Whilst discussing Margaret's transformation into Mrs Wilcox at the close of *Howards End* with Vanessa Redgrave and the director James Ivory, the interviewer remarked:

> There are hints along the way to this transformation, but by the end, Margaret has turned into Mrs. Wilcox, in a way. The film begins and ends with a quiet woman: The opening scene is Ruth Wilcox walking through her garden quietly. In the final scene, Margaret barely says a word. We don't quite get the sense that she's lost her soul, but we feel like something has been lost, even if we don't quite know what it is.

To this Emma Thompson responded:

> That's well put. You don't quite know what it is, but it's something, surely. Maybe it's something because there wasn't anything for her at that time. Where would she have gone? What would she have done? There's a very, very good book by George Gissing, called *The Odd Women*, which is about women who tried to be independent at that time,

> and the difficulties that they got in, and how ostracized they were. They were true outsiders. And we forget that. Forster's one of the greatest writers for women — just an extraordinary proto-feminist, really. It's a most remarkable book, and his understanding of the trap that women were in, this curious relationship between the Wilcoxes and Margaret — it's just so beautifully drawn.

May we hope one day that there will be a film of *New Grub Street* or *In the Year of Jubilee* to name two novels that would make excellent drama.

In other entertainment news, Christopher Douglas, the creator of Ed Reardon in the popular radio 4 series, recently adapted *New Grub Street* for the same station. Episode 1 of the two-part programme was broadcast at 3.0 p.m. on 28 August 2016 in a 58-minute broadcast and Episode 2 at 9.0 p.m. on 3 September. Douglas played Gissing, Sam Alexander Edwin Reardon, and Henry-Lloyd Hughes Jasper Milvain. Marian Yule was played by Olivia Hallinan and Dora Milvain by Victoria Brazier in what has been a well-received recording. Those not aware that the nobel-prize-winning playwright, Harold Pinter, also adapted the novel in 2002 for radio, can now listen to the three-part serial at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kS-n_F1S8to.

Another offering on Youtube is Ridings FM radio station's "G is for Gissing," in their alphabet series "The A to Z of Wakefield District." This is a four-minute video short showing Gareth Webb leaving the recording studio to reveal what is great about living in the Wakefield area. In this particular video he visits the George Gissing Centre in Thompson's Yard and meets the curator Pat Colling. She calls it one of Yorkshire's best kept secrets. Gissing admirers can see the video at http://www.ridingsfm.co.uk/features/atoz/george-gissing/.

The critic, biographer, and novelist D. J. Taylor is known for his frequent references to Gissing in his articles. The 31 October 2015 edition of *The Independent* carried an article in which he took issue with the cult English novelist, Martin Amis, son of Kingsley, who had a week before attacked the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, in the *Sunday Times* for being "uneducated" and "humourless." Taylor remarked that: "No doubt to a man who achieved a 'congratulatory' first at Oxford and published his first novel at the age of 23, two A-levels and retirement from the educational process at the age of 18 is a bit of a come-down." He then posed the question, "If Mr Corbyn is under-educated, then what does it mean to be 'educated' in the early 21st century?" He went on to add that

> most onlookers would probably concede that the modern view of being "educated", whatever it is, represents a substantial falling-off from the standards of the later 19th century. There is, for example, a celebrated passage in *Jude the Obscure*, in which Jude Fawley – a self-taught stonemason keen on taking holy orders – reckons up the amount of knowledge he has managed to accumulate. The list includes two books of *The Iliad*, Hesiod, Thucydides, the *Greek Testament*, three books of Euclid, information about the

> early Church Fathers "and something of Roman and English history." A subsequent daydream about "Livy, Tacitus, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes…" is only cut short by the arrival of the woman who will start blighting so many of his hopes.

As if that were not enough flak to send Amis running for cover, Taylor brought Gissing into the argument as follows:

> And, by the measure of the late-Victorian age, Jude is scarcely "educated" at all. The novelist George Gissing […] who quitted formal education at the same age as Mr Corbyn, was a terrifying polymath who spent his leisure reading the classics and philosophy, and embarked on feats of reading that would leave his modern-day equivalents ashamed by their lack of intellectual frills.

As Taylor points out Gissing's accomplishments really do put our modern idea of being "educated" into perspective.

On 26 October last year from 2.0 p.m.-4.0 p.m., Jenny Pedler of Footprints of London, which organises literary walks in the city, gave a tour starting and finishing at Farringdon Station entitled "The Nether World: George Gissing's Clerkenwell." In her description of the walk Pedler writes:

> *The Nether World* is George Gissing's ultimately bleak portrayal of working-class life in Clerkenwell in the 1880s. Although the slums have gone, many of the streets and locations described in the novel can still be found today. On this walk we'll recreate the atmosphere of Victorian Clerkenwell with readings from the novel as we follow the fluctuating fortunes of its characters "amid the squalid and toil-infested ways of Clerkenwell."

Further to this Tom Ue draws attention to a short piece about the recent Penguin edition of *New Grub Street* by the writer and cultural critic, Reneysh Vittal at https://blog.oup.com/2017/02/new-grub-street-starving-artist/. Entitled "New Grub Street and the Starving Artist" the article compares Gissing's description of the writerly life and Victorian London with the almost hopeless situation the modern literary aspirant or artist faces in the big city today.

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Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *Fuochi Sopiti* [*Sleeping Fires*], translated into Italian by Claudia Iannessa. Ariccia, Rome: Aracne editrice, 2014. Pp. 132. ISBN 9788854876286. £9.

W. H. Hudson, *A Shepherd's Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2016. Pp. 240. ISBN 9780241273357. £8.99.

Silvia Albertazzi, "Il trionfo delle eccentriche," *Il Manifesto-ALIAS*, 19 March 2017, VII, no. 11, p. 1. Review of *Le donne di troppo* [*The Odd Women*], translated into Italian by Vincenzo Latronico. Milano: La Tartaruga, 2017.

Giulia Blasi, "*Le donne di troppo* di George Gissing," *Il Tascabile*, 21 March 2017, online review at http://www.iltascabile.com/recensioni/donne-di-troppo-gissing/.

James Campbell (J.C.), "NB.: Making Up," *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 April 2017, p. 40 (refers to the upcoming round table at UCL devoted to *Born in Exile* and the current sale of Alfred M. Slotnick's Gissing collection).

Rachel Cooke, "On Novels about Single Women: *The Odd Women* by George Gissing," *Wall Street Journal* (online), 19 March 2017, n.p.

Jason Finch, "The Peripheries of London Slumland in George Gissing and Alexander Baron," in *Literature and the Peripheral City*, eds. Ameel Lieven, Jason Finch, and Markku Salmela. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 56-74.

Rebecca Hutcheon, "Reading and Misreading the Country House in the Novels of George Gissing: The Dangers of Fiction," *English Literature in Transition*, 60:3 (2017), pp. 341-358.

Stefano Manferlotti, "Gissing, un inglese tra Italia ed Ellade," *Il Mattino*, 16 July 2014, n.p.

Michael Peterman, "The Shepherd's Life: Memoir is a Delightful Surprise," *Peterborough Examiner* (online), 22 February 2017, n.p. Review.

Elisabeta Rasy, "Rhoda, la protofemminista," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 19 February 2017, n.p. Further review of *Le donne di troppo*.

Charlotte Tuxworth-Holden, "*A Shepherd's Life* by W. H. Hudson," *Times* (online), 17 December 2016, n.p. Review.

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Tailpiece

(We offer as a tailpiece a contemporary review of the 1898 first edition of *The Town Traveller* revealing one critic's reaction to Gissing's comic novel. Obviously, as the title suggests, the author of this piece was not acquainted with the abundance of humour and satire to be found in many of his short stories.)

A New George Gissing

"The Town Traveller." By George Gissing. London: Methuen & Co. 6s.

There is a sufficiently solid basis of the Old Gissing in this New Gissing to save us, in the first flush of surprise, from doubting the identity of our author. On the whole, the book may be best described as Gissing in a New Humour. That fraction of the universe wherein he has so effectively imprisoned his genius is, as before, made to fill the field of our vision, but the intensity of angry and bitter emotion usually inherent in his work is here entirely absent. There is a sort of rollicking feeling about "The Town Traveller" that makes us imagine Mr. Gissing must have enjoyed himself immensely in the task of writing it. And yet we suspect that he meant it quite seriously. Melodrama though the book may appear from one point of view – melodrama written with a twinkle in the author's eye, indicating that both he and the reader are superior to that sort of fare, but that both may enjoy it unashamed, their interest in its plot and passion purged by their common awareness that the thing is nonsense all the time – yet it has a strange unique character. For it is melodrama constructed of Gissing units! And then there is the possibility of its not being melodrama at all! If these statements puzzle the reader, we must set the blame on Mr. Gissing's shoulders. We simply pass on the state of mind "The Town Traveller" has produced in us. For, on looking into the plot and carefully thinking about it, we came to the conclusion that the whole thing might well be a faithful transcript from life, certainly not less faithful than anything he has written.

In any case the production is an extraordinary literary phenomenon, both in itself and as a unit in Mr. Gissing's output. Putting aside the melodramatic aspect, there are subtle yet distinct points of difference between Gissing as we know him and the Gissing before us. The episode of the missing word competition by which Christopher Parish wins over five hundred pounds, and, as a logical consequence, the hitherto unencouraging Polly Sparkes, is a piece of most admirable humour, tying together these two loose strands and bringing the book to a well-rounded finish such as Mrs. Henry Wood herself might

have approved. Humour, indeed, is lavishly introduced, yet everywhere it is of a singularly realistic character – which points to a change of perception on Mr. Gissing's part rather than of manner and method. This change of perception is also indicated in the vigour with which he now paints the immense *joie de vivre* of the inhabitants of those grimy regions to which he has restricted his vision. However, the strangest thing of all about "The Town Traveller" is its lurking, elusive touch of fantasy, a quality hard to associate with the component elements of the book. Yet it is unmistakably there. Humour! A sense of the *joie de vivre*! Fantasy! What may Mr. Gissing not have in store for us?

Nevertheless, we fear that those who do not usually find Mr. Gissing pleasurable reading will not take kindly to his present work, its new and strange qualities notwithstanding. For background, atmosphere, and characterisation are the same as usual, and it is not everybody who will brave the depression induced thereby for the sake of a cold intellectual admiration of our author's performance. It is true no one has done Gammon – the Town Traveller – half as well as Mr. Gissing. A figure of marvellous originality, he is yet a veritable living type, but like all the other characters, he harmonises wonderfully with the general atmosphere of depression into which everything and everybody, even Mr. Gissing's style, seem to merge. There seems to be a want of flexibility, of *nuance,* in his manner, which greatly helps this general effect, and we cannot help thinking that it is the result of his self-restriction. Mr. Gissing has published, perhaps, a score of books, and though we admire the tenacity with which he sticks to his ground, we must deplore it all the same. We cannot believe that a man of his commanding abilities would not find inspiration in a wider outlook over the human spectacle. The world of Gammon and Polly Sparkes does not comprise the whole of life, and a great mind ought not to rest within such limitations. The novelist of genius is he who strives with an eager, unresting vision to pierce and comprehend life in every part and every degree, so that his life-work in its entire range should be a microcosm of humanity.

Anon., *Outlook*, Vol. 2:34, 24 September 1898, p. 242.

Subscriptions

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Information for Contributors

The Gissing Journal publishes essays, book reviews and notes on Gissing and his circle. Contributions may deal with bibliographical, biographical, critical, and topographical subjects. They should be sent as a Word document to the editor, Markus Neacey, either by email to forfarmarkus@fastmail.co.uk or by post to:

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