

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”  
– George Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*.

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Volume I, Number 3  
June, 1965

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George Gissing: Poet of Fatigue or Fortitude? Part I

by James A. Rogers

Irving Howe in his essay “George Gissing: Poet of Fatigue” (*A World More Attractive*, New York, Horizon Press, 1963) has been one in recent times to sound a refrain long familiar to lovers of Gissing. It is the old assault on Gissing’s solitary engagement with life. George Gissing continues to annoy critics by his refusal to act according to a well-ordered pattern of joy. Gissing infernally ever on the ground! We are told by Mr. Howe that writers like Gissing are “forever on the brink of self-pity . . . deficient in that crude energy, that stock of animal spirits, which anyone had better have who chooses to do his work against the comforts and persuasions of the world.”

Furthermore, we are apprised that such artists can at times “exemplify the notorious intuition of Thomas Hardy that in the modern era men have begun to lose the will to live. . . .” Mr. Howe intimates that Mr. Hardy respected the life impulse and that Mr. Gissing did not. Yet we know that Mr. Hardy respected Mr. Gissing and that the latter identified himself strongly with the master. These are facts of literary history. They should lead us elsewhere than to Irving Howe’s rendering of Gissing as an inferior man and artist.

Morley Roberts submitted a similar portrait of the author over fifty years ago. In *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* he was scrupulous in showing to the world a Gissing full of mawkishness. The self-pity charge against Gissing was officially launched on that occasion. Roberts was also careful in that book about cultivating his own image, a piece of self-preening. The writer rubbed our noses into *his* self while debunking the image of Maitland-Gissing. He was industrious lest we forget that he was a pioneer in a new age dawning, the epoch of the indispensable hero.

Who reads *Maitland* today, a literary hoax, except for taking a bearing or two on Gissing? Or any of the other works of Roberts, moldering in the libraries and archives? H. G. Wells is read, unlike Roberts, but he, too, tipped the lance more than the pen. *Tono-Bungay* is not free from a preoccupation with self. It does not display a self-pity, but it emblazons a self-indulgence. Maybe this is what Wells cared to live by when he accused Gissing of a lack of “social nerve.” Look in Wells’s realistic novels for men who think about others than themselves. They are hard to come by. Ann Veronica’s lover might qualify. Who else?

Insistence by writers upon action is infectious; it can command our assent. But writers are also men. They reveal themselves as humans as well as makers and shakers. They must cope, for better or worse, with their subjective selves. Writers of “crude energy,” possessing “animal spirits,” are no less absorbed with self, or with pity, for that matter, than the writer reputed to be deficient in stomach.

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Self is not the issue. Let this elusive word be hyphenated with what it will. Art is the issue. Test a writer's performance in terms of workable criteria. Let content and style be exposed, not blanketed under personal animus or social challenge. We then learn something, as in the present case. Gissing has the stuff to endure; the flamboyant Wells less so, Roberts not at all.

Despite the passage of years and the indifference of publishers, Gissing persists. He continues to plague our sobriety. He is an astringent and a gadfly pertinent to our day, disturbing for its conformity. He is quite socially nervy, to contradict H. G. Wells. Granted, he can introduce a note of self-pity into his creation. We admit that he can embarrass with, say, Earwaker's parting words on Peak at the conclusion of *Born in Exile*. Still, Gissing has made Godwin Peak's hunger for membership at the top believable and fascinating. It is not sentimental gesture in the novel which occupies the reader, it is the reckless climb. Men have not stopped pushing their way upward.

At the heart of *Born in Exile* are first-rate psychology and writing. The rigors of hypocrisy and the pains of innocence are unerringly set down. Circumstance and morality wrench Godwin Peak from his small seat of power and the reader's sympathy is aroused for a once immoral man. Sympathy is alive during Peak's climb, because the hero in his maneuvering never confuses rationalization with unctiousness. He is too ironic, too honest for a thorough-going impostor.

The goal of upper class serenity in the novel is always less significant than the presence in the story of plain human longing. What Peak wants is normal enough—acknowledgment and warmth. His social chauvinism cannot obstruct for us the appeal of his innate decency. The hero represents a pure strain discernible in Gissing's composition on the whole that some critics are unwilling or unable to recognize. They meet here and there in the author's novels a contempt of common people and they choose to be disenchanted. They do not obtain the essential Gissing. We wonder how *Crime and Punishment* would fare in the face of such a shrugging off. (Part II of this essay will appear in our next number.)

#### Gissing Autograph Material in the Collection of Earl Daniels

by Earl Daniels  
Colgate University  
Hamilton, New York

#### I. Letters of Gissing

(a) To Algernon, from 5 Hanover St. / Islington, N. / Horace, 93

"I must not pretend to write a letter now, as I am driven crazy for want of time for *anything*. Absolutely I shall be bound to change my lodgings, & go to the west end; I spend *four hours* of every day in walking & riding. My novel has not been touched for many weeks, & I see no prospect of time to write my next Petersburg article. By the bye, I have just recd. a cheque for £8 for the first."

The letter is signed George R. Gissing.

Someone has pencilled on the corner as a date "Feb. 21, 1881."

(b) To Algernon, from 29 Dorchester Place. / Blandford Square. N. W. May 26th 1882.

“Harrison went over to France the day before yesterday to discover a home for the whole family during the latter end of the summer. I expect this means an absence of at least a whole quarter. Things begin to look uncommonly serious in every direction.”

“This confounded landlady gets more & more disobliging. I told her the other morning that the Parcels people were going to call for a box, & asked her to let me know when they came. Whereupon she groaned & said, ‘You won’t mind me calling up from the bottom; it’s such a long walk up these stairs!’”

Signed, George R. Gissing

Printed in *Letters* with many omissions p. 115. The *B* of the *Letters* version, with whom GG is thinking of a walk, is written out *Black*. For Black, see *To Bertz*, xxxiii, n.

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(c) To Algernon, 25 Aug. 1882, from 29 Dorchester Place. / N. W. Novel—*Mrs. Grundy’s Enemies* (?)—to be finished on Monday—i.e., 28 August; he asks Algernon’s opinion about a legal detail.

“I am in good spirits at completion of book, but begin another forthwith! Nothing but persistence in these matters. Shall send to Smith & Elder first, I think. The title is “*Now or Never*”—popular but with a philosophical meaning, & a motto from Catullus.”

Signed G. R. Gissing.

(d) To Algernon, “Day after Xmas Day,” from 17 Oakley Crescent. Published in *Letters*, p. 121. Date is 1882. Signed GRG.

(e) To Ellen, 14 Oct. 1883, from 17 Oakley Crescent / Chelsea. Printed with omissions and changes, *Letters*, pp. 134-35.

(f) Postcard to Ellen, from Paris, 3 Oct. 1888. Requests that his mother draw a cheque to pay his rent at 7 K. He has just sent Ellen two books – “French editions of Vergil III & Cicero *De Senectute*. I believe you will find them admirable aids. You thus study French & Latin at once.” Signed G. G.

(g) Postcard to Ellen from Paris, 21 Oct. 1888. In French. About paying charges on things sent from 7 K. Signed G. G.

(h) Postcard to Ellen, from Rome, 20 Dec. 1888. In German. He goes to Florence on the thirtieth. Yesterday he had been at Veii. Signed G. G.

(i) To Algernon, 4 Nov. 1891 from 1. St. Leonard’s Terrace / Exeter. “. . . six more days will see the end of “The Radical Candidate,” which is the length of an ordinary 2 vol. novel. This haste is necessary, for I hear nothing from Watt, & very soon I shan’t have a farthing left.” Reference to a note in the *Bookman* about his new novel.

“. . . I think of trying some short stories. My next long book will perhaps be called ‘Nondescripts.’”

(j) To Robert A. Hamilton, 13 Jan. 1893, from 76 Burton Road./ London SW.

A reply to request for autobiographical material. Gissing lists his books, beginning with *Workers* end ending with *The Odd Women*. In the margin, opposite the title *Isabel Clarendon*, he has written in pencil, “Spectator says – ‘Best book Mr. G. has written.’” Opposite *Demos*, “Published in London anonymously and republished with author’s name.”

“If it be of any interest to you, I may add that the beginnings of my literary career were hard enough to have discouraged most men. In those days, (opinion has meanwhile advanced

very greatly,) I met only with abuse because I tried to depict the world as I saw it. I am told that there still exists a prejudice against me among ordinary readers; though the intelligent people of to-day only charge me with undue timidity in handling the facts of life.”

Signed, George Gissing.

The date, 1893 should be 1894. Gissing has slipped at the beginning of a new year. *The Odd Women* was not published until April 1893.

(k) To Harry, 26 Sept. 1895, from Eversley, / Worple Road, / Epsom. About meeting him. “My wife (reasons for ill health just now) is in a bad state.”

Signed, G. G. Harry may be Gissing’s friend Hick. “reasons for ill health”—Alfred Gissing was born, 20 Jan. 1896.

(l) To Herbert H. Sturmer (?) from Eversley, / Worple Road, [address cancelled and replaced by] Castle Bolton. / Leyburn./ Yorkshire. He will be glad to receive the author’s book “in this holiday time, & thank you for wishing to send it.” Signed George Gissing. [To be continued in our next number.]

### Writing about Gissing

by Joyce Evans

Are the hierophants or even the neophytes of the Gissing cult ever visited by a chill misgiving that one day we shall have nothing more to write about? The Gissing Newsletter has made the answer comfortably clear. A new and inexhaustible source of material has been simply but spectacularly revealed: to write about those who write about those who write about Gissing. Because he is not, as the first editorial reminded us, “among the greatest of writers or the greatest men” the reason for his curiously strong arid limited attraction must be sought in the nature of the attracted.

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What then do we all have in common? Are we all Graecophils? Are we all nostalgic for a pre-industrial society? Do we all believe that “nature has bestowed upon man no sweeter morsel” than boiled leg of mutton? There is no limit to the questions we can ask, the conclusions we can draw. For we need change direction only a little to strike a new vein: to write about those who write about those who write about those who write about Gissing.

### Further Notes on Gissing

by E. F. Matthiason

(Mr. Matthiason, whose article on his father’s acquaintance with Gissing appeared in the April number, has very kindly allowed me to share these excerpts from his letters to me with our readers.— J. K.)

Your book enables me to “place” my father’s association with George Gissing around 1889/91. It would have been after Gissing’s first Italian journey and before his second marriage in February 1891. The meetings, at a coffee shop in Marylebone Road (my father lodged above the shop), were casual in the extreme. My father (when funds allowed) took an evening meal in the shop and Gissing would occasionally drop in for a bit of supper, the two men sharing a table. My father, half-French on the distaff side, had spent much of his childhood in Paris and spoke French like a native. This, of course, would have appealed to Gissing, himself acquainted with the language and lately visiting Paris. Both, moreover, were reasonably well-read in Greek and Latin, finding common ground in the Anabasis or in Virgil’s Aeneid, whichever way discussion might fall. More than once, it appears, they exchanged books, Plumptre’s Aeschylus for

Conington's Virgil, the former now in my possession, with some passages underscored in blacklead, conceivably by Gissing, and with marginal annotations from the original Greek.

M. Coustillas tells me that no allusion to my father was made by Gissing in his diary or in extant letters written by him at the time. This may well be so; my father in 1890 was 23 to Gissing's 32, a gulf wider than would exist between a sixth-form boy at school and his junior in the lower fourth. Gissing, too, was by this time a known and accomplished writer, with half a dozen novels to his credit. . . . I don't imply that Gissing condescended towards the younger, poorer man, but rather that he was little impressed, my father being, as I have said, the most diffident of creatures, shrinking into himself, almost morbidly withdrawn. Gissing would have seen in him a tall, stoop-shouldered fellow, thin to emaciation, fair-skinned as a girl, and with large agate eyes, the dull greenish-grey you often find with red hair. . . . Gissing may have dismissed him as an odd fish, unworthy of mention. He, the rising author (no matter how much he talked of his "loneliness"), had many friends at this period of his life, W. H. Hudson (a man in a thousand), Alfred Hartley, and, above all, the exigent "pushing" (my father's adjective) Morley Roberts. They alone were enough to put a quiet self-effacing indefinite youth in the shade.

Strange, how Gissing would enquire of other literary men, "Have you starved?" My father accepted starvation as one of the penalties of genius, art requiring self-denial of necessity. . . . In my own experience writers as fine as Gissing have created on an empty belly without making a song about it. I think of Edward Thomas, poet and essayist, killed at Arras 1917, who for twenty years starved by his pen. Yet in him, never to be talked about, was a wisdom that could find beauty in those who "bake the bread by which poets live." And my good lamented friend, W. H. Davies, the crippled tramp, who wrote *The Soul's Destroyer* in a Southwark doss-house (fourpence a night in 1913). And Francis Thompson, Latinist and Grecian, sleeping destitute on the Embankment, *The Hound of Heaven* in MS. crumpled within his verminous rags. Gissing, you know, didn't do so badly when all is said and done; at least, not in the material sense. He had his travels abroad, and his patrimony (£500 in the 'eighties was a largish fortune) and never

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one imagines, did he sleep out of his bed. To sleep under a black starry night, with Flanders mud freezing on his khaki, was his firstborn son's lot. The father, in peaceful late-Victorian days, fared better in this respect. [These excerpts from Mr. Matthiason's letters will be continued.]

### Two Queries

by Earl Daniels

Ryecroft (Dutton edition, 1927, pp. 99-100) says that Chaucer speaks of Topsham sailors. Where? The name *Topsham* does not appear in Tatlock's *Concordance*. I suspect Ryecroft-Gissing is thinking of the Shipman, but he came from Dartmouth.

Where did Gissing find the quotation mistakenly ascribed to the *Imitatio* of Thomas A Kempis (Ryecroft, 46)? I suspect he took it, ascription and all, from Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal*, which he and Gabrielle were reading in 1901. Sainte-Beuve writes of M. de Pontchâteau, "Il s'éveillait quelquefois avec ce mot de l'*Imitation* à la bouche; 'In omnibus requiem quaesivi, et nusquam inveni nisi in angulo cum libro.'" The editor of the Pléiade edition points out in a note, "La phrase que S.-B. attribue à l'auteur de l'*Imitation* . . . ne s'y trouve pas. Elle est attribuée par Renan à Thomas a Kempis, qu'il rejette comme auteur possible du livre." See Pléiade edition of *Port-Royal*, III, 239 and 906.

### Some Recent Gissing Publications in Japan, II

by Shigeru Koike

Since writing the article in the first number of the *Newsletter*, I have found, to my great

surprise and still greater delight, that I have many more items to add to the list.

10. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, in two volumes, ed. Nobutaro Nakanishi. Y. Vol. I: "Spring" and "Summer," 1953, 120 yen; Vol. II: "Autumn" and "Winter," 1955, 120 yen. The complete text, with the Japanese version of the author's preface.

11. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Selection), ed. Masao Hirai. 1955. KB. 170 yen.

12. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Selection), ed. Hideo Ogata. 1952. D. 230 yen. The complete original text of the author's preface included.

13. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Selection), ed. Tetsuo Akiyama. Date unknown. SD. 120 yen.

14. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft: Spring* (Complete), ed. Hiroshi Hirohashi. 1961. H. 120 yen.

15. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft: Autumn and Winter* (Complete), ed. Eiichi Sano. 1954. H. 160 yen.

16. *The Poet's Portmanteau and Other Stories*, ed. Seiichi Tanabe. 196~60. A. 150 yen. Contents: The title story, "The Justice and the Vagabond," "The Elixir" and "Humplebee."

17. *Selections from George Gissing*, ed. Yonezo Niitsu. 1954. H. 120 yen. Contents: "Humplebee," "The Poet's Portmanteau," "The Medicine Man," "Raw Material," "The Tout of Yarmouth Bridge," "A Charming Family" and "Fate and the Apothecary."

18. *The House of Cobwebs* (Selection), ed. Takeo Sugimoto. 1954. Y. 120 yen. Contents: The title story, "A Poor Gentleman," "The Scrupulous Father," and "A Daughter of the Lodge."

19. *The House of Cobwebs* (Selection), ed. Masajiro Hamada. Date unknown. O. 200 yen. Contents: The title story, "Christopherson," "The Scrupulous Father" and "Topham's Chance."

20. *A Daughter of the Lodge*, ed. Norio Akamatsu. 1957. E. 160 yen. Contents: "Humplebee," the title story and "Christopherson."

21. *Topham's Chance & The Scrupulous Father*, ed. Hiroshi Hirohashi. 1959. H. 70 yen.

22. *Christopherson and Other Stories*, ed. Eiichi Sano. 1963. B. 200 yen. Contents: The title story, "Topham's Chance," "The Salt of the Earth" and "Miss Rodney's Leisure."

23. *Miss Rodney's Leisure and Other Stories*, ed. Yamamoto and Yasukawa. 1965. AO. 220 yen. Contents: The title story, "The Salt of the Earth," "A Capitalist" and "The Riding-Whip."

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24. *Gissing's Best Short Stories*, ed. Hisashi Kanekatsu, 1954. KB. 150 yen. Contents: "Fate and the Apothecary," "The Pig and Whistle," "Humplebee" and "The House of Cobwebs."

25. *A Victim of Circumstances*, ed. Hiroshi Hirohashi. 1964. H. 80 yen.

26. *A Victim of Circumstances*, ed. Hideo Ogata. 1953. D. 120 yen.

27. *Short Stories in a Duet*, ed. Kyojiro Ito. Date unknown. SD. 80 yen. This book consists of "A Lodger in Maze Pond" and O. Henry's "The Last Leaf."

28. *The Well-Known Stories* (I), ed. Genshiro Mikami, 1963. KO. 170 yen. Contents: "A Poor Gentleman," A. Bierce's "A Horseman in the Sky" and O. Henry's "The Last Leaf."

\* Key to Publishers: For A. and E., see Number 1.

AO: Aoyama Shoten, Daigakumae-dori, Senriyama, Suita-shi, Osaka-fu.  
B: Bunshindo, 442, Waseda-Tsurumaki-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo.  
D: Daigaku Shorin, 4-7-2, Koishikawa, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo.  
H: Hokuseido, 3-21, Kanda-Nishiki-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.  
KB: Kaibunsha, 2-7, Ichigaya-Sadohara-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo.  
KO: Kobunsha, 145, Horinouchi, Toshima-ku, Tokyo.  
O: Osaka Kyoiku Tosho, 6-4, Tanabe-Nishino-machi, Sumiyoshi-ku, Osaka-shi.  
SB: Seibido, 2-10, Ogawa-machi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo.  
Y: Yamaguchi Shoten, 40, Kitashirakawa-Senouchi-machi, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto-shi.

#### Corrections:

1. The dates of the first publication of Items 2 and 3 in the list of Number 1 are 1953 and 1959 respectively.
2. The address of K (Kenkyusha) is now: 1-2, Kagurazaka, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo.

#### Some Unrecorded Editions

by Pierre Coustillas

In the vast field of possible research on Gissing, bibliography should naturally hold a privileged place. Some valuable efforts have been made in recent years, by Joseph Wolff in particular, — see his contributions to *English Fiction* (afterwards *Literature*) *in Transition* — to unearth forgotten articles and reviews from the files of old periodicals, but I have good reason to think that there are still many discoveries to be made. The situation is slightly different as regards the listing of the various editions and impressions of Gissing's works in England and America (Japan is really a special case, since most of his works published there in English were used as text-books for students). Henry Danielson (*Bibliographies of Modern Authors*, 1921), Temple Scott (in Gissing's *Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens*, 1924) and Jacob Schwartz (*1100 obscure points. The Bibliographies of 25 English and 21 American Authors*) have satisfactorily described first English editions. But to the fortune of Gissing's books after their original appearance only two scholars have devoted some attention: Miss Polak in her Diploma in Librarianship of the Post Graduate Library School, University College, London (1950) and Herbert Rosengarten in his recent Oxford Thesis (see *The Gissing Newsletter*, vol. I, No 1, pp. 4-5). Since I read the latter I have acquired some Gissing editions of which I have found no other copies in libraries, public or private, on either side of the Atlantic. Here is a brief description of them which is intended only as a footnote to the above bibliographies:

1 - *The Unclassed*, a remaindered first edition in three volumes bound in one. Red cloth. Chapman & Hall, 1884.

2 - *Human Odds and Ends*. Bell's Colonial Library, 1897, bound by Sidgwick and Jackson, probably not until 1911 when the latter firm reissued the eight books previously in the hands of Lawrence and Bullen. The volume — in red cloth — has the same binding as the Sidgwick and Jackson series.

3 - *The Town Traveller*, "The Minerva Edition of Modern Authors." Library Press, Ltd. Brown cloth. Undated. The pagination is the same as that of the 1927 and 1956 editions by Methuen. This edition probably appeared between 1927 and 1939.

4 - *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, in Harrap's Favourite Books In Leather Bindings. Suede leather. The end-papers represent seascapes. Harrap's list is printed on the verso of the half-title, but the title page gives Constable as publisher. As the pagination is XIV + 298 the book must have been issued in the early 1920's at the latest since, by that time, according to the publisher, the plates of the original edition had become completely worn out and the type was reset and a new edition issued (pp. XIII + 271) on August 1921.

Perhaps I should add a fifth item, alluded to by Gissing in his Diary, though he does not seem to have ever received a copy himself – the colonial edition of *The Odd Women* in red cloth. This was volume VI in Heinemann's Colonial Library of Popular Fiction. It appeared in 1893 and was printed from American plates. The pagination (VIII + 446) is the same as that of the second English edition by Lawrence and Bullen (1894) – i.e., the first in one volume and the later reprints by Sidgwick and Jackson (1911 and 1915).

#### Gissing on the Air

A review of Korg's *George Gissing* was heard on the BBC Home Program's "World of Books," March 27th. The reviewer, Maurice Cranston, gave the main facts of Gissing's life, and praised him for being strong enough to write about the actual world, which he found so inhospitable, instead of escaping into a realm of illusion.

#### Recent Publications

Anon., "Fanfare of Trumpets at Austin," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 15, 1965, p. 300. States that the manuscript of *Workers in the Dawn* is in the University of Texas Library.

Bergonzi, Bernard. Review of Korg's *George Gissing* (hereafter *GG*), *Review of English Studies*, November, 1964, pp. 441-442.

King, Francis. Review of *GG*, *The Listener*, February 25, 1965.

Laski, Marghanita. "The Wet Bird," (a review of *GG*), *London Observer*, March 7, 1965.

Pritchett, V. S. "Grub Street," pp. 62-67 of *The Working Novelist*, Chatto and Windus, 1965 is an essay on Gissing originally published in the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1958.

#### Gissing at the Wake

by Jacob Korg

As V. S. Pritchett intimated in a review of Dubliners in the *New Statesman* in 1941, James Joyce was not unaware of Gissing's work. He read some of his novels, and included him in the vast *dramatis personae* of *Finnegans Wake*. Curious readers are referred to page 527 of Joyce's "allfarraginous chronicle." Joyce did not give Gissing very high marks as a novelist. His opinion of the Master will be the subject of a future note in the *Newsletter*.

#### Publication Announcement



*The Letters of George Gissing to Gabrielle Fleury*, edited by Pierre Coustillas, has been published by the New York Public Library. It contains a hundred letters written by Gissing to Gabrielle between 1898 and 1902. Cloth-bound \$6.50. Paper \$5.00. [A selection of these letters appeared in the *Bulletin* of the Library in Sept., Oct., & November, 1964.] The volume contains a lengthy introduction by the editor.