

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*.

Volume XIV, Number 4
October, 1978

-- 1 --

The Gissing Session at the MLA

A special Gissing session will be held at the December meeting of the Modern Language Association in New York. It is officially called “George Gissing and Women” and will be scheduled for 4.30-5.45 p.m. on December 29th in the room called “Gibson A” at the Hilton Hotel. The session will be chaired by Professor Jacob Korg and the panellists will be Professors John Halperin, Coral Lansbury, Robert Selig and Pierre Coustillas. The papers will respectively deal with “Gissing, Marriage, and Women’s Rights: The Case of *Denzil Quarrier*,” “Gissing and the Female Surrogate,” “The Gospel of Work in *The Odd Women*: Gissing’s Double Standard,” and the novelist’s correspondence with his feminist friend Clara Collet.

The four papers will be published as a supplement to the *Newsletter*.

Editorial Board

Pierre Coustillas, Editor, University of Lille
Shigeru Koike, Tokyo Metropolitan University
Jacob Korg, University of Washington, Seattle
Editorial correspondence should be sent to the editor:
10, rue Gay-Lussac, 59-La Madeleine, France
and all other correspondence to: C. C. KOHLER,
12, Horsham Road, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2JL, England.

Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: £1.50 per annum
Libraries: £3.00 per annum

-- 2 --

Alice Ward and the Gissings

R. D. Best

When my cousin Alice Ward (“Alys Hallard”) died in 1939 I arranged to have a number of her papers sent over from Paris to my office; for I had always thought that, although as a writer she

would not have considered herself as of the first order, her life, especially as regards her work for the rightful place of professional women in society, was remarkable and some day should be written up.

In our family, "Auntie" Alice was a favourite. She would appear, from time to time, trailing clouds of Parisian culture and gaiety, to give my brother and self French lessons during holidays and generally entertain us all with lively talk of the Lyceum Club and literary friends.

The papers lay untouched until 1973, when a fire at the office made it necessary to do something about them. Accordingly, I got to work sorting, classifying, and getting into touch with people who might be interested and would help me. I was fortunate and in thanking them my thoughts turn particularly to Mrs. F. Thompson-Schwab, President of the Lyceum Club of London, and to the late Mrs. Mary Burgoyne, another leading member of the club. But during these researches I was continually faced with the question: What was to be the "end product"? Through Miss Dorothy McCulla, Librarian of the Local Studies Dept. of the Birmingham Reference Library, who had greatly helped and encouraged me, I was put in touch with Pierre Coustillas. It was he who suggested this essay. His scholarship and help have made it possible.

Though few Gissing scholars know more than a few factual details about "Miss Ward," as she is always referred to in the Gissing diaries from 1899, she was one of the people who knew him quite well in later life, and one who liked him and his work. She saw him under various conditions – in Paris and in Central France. She was, furthermore, a close friend of his third wife, Gabrielle Fleury.

-- 3 --

photo of Alice Ward 1859-1939

-- 4 --

verso of photo, blank

-- 5 --

I

Owen Street, Tipton, a small town in the Black Country near Birmingham, was the birthplace of Alice Ward (1859 -1939). In amenity and appearance it has little in common with No. 80 Rue Bonaparte, Paris, overlooking the Place St. Sulpice, where she lived and worked for so many years. In emigrating at the age of 23 was she repelled by her surroundings?

Parallel to Owen St. is Bloomfield Rd., in which was situated the once famous Bloomfield Iron Works of her grandfather, Joseph Hall (our common ancestor). Starting as a foundryman, he showed himself to be, in many ways, a remarkable character. He was not only a capable man of affairs, but an originator in the sphere of iron production, his chief invention being an improvement in "iron puddling," the object of which is to remove the impurities from crude iron. There came a time in his life when he felt impelled to express himself in writing. Lacking in education, he nevertheless wrote readable letters to the papers, books and pamphlets, and even experimented in verse, helped by a rhyming dictionary. He also wrote and published an account of the discovery which made his fortune. (1) Were, perhaps, some of Joseph Hall's genes working in Alice Ward?

Her father, Thomas Edwin Ward, married Joseph Hall's daughter Mary (1817-1880). On Alice's birth-certificate his occupation is given as "draper" and one supposes that they lived above

the shop in Owen St., Tipton. He seems to have been an educated man. Amongst his papers is a poem addressed to his fiancée. On its merits as verse, I am not competent to comment, but it is written in a fine sloping hand.

Hall's genial and robust personality was remembered and often talked about by those grandchildren who knew him in the flesh. Lucy Best, his daughter and my grandmother, inherited something of his gift for practical invention and used it for solving domestic problems. For instance,

-- 6 --

she had made an iron plate to regulate the draught under an open fire-place and thereby saving coal.

In the 1860s Joseph Hall had built two attached houses in Handsworth, Birmingham, to accommodate himself and the Bests. At times, Joseph Hall's daughters must have forgathered, together with his grandchildren, including Robert Best and Alice Ward. She later became close to him and, as we shall see, more than once turned to him for advice.

Joseph Hall died before my time, but Lucy Best impressed me, then a small boy, as a benign old lady.

Alice had two brothers. Their hand-writing does not compare well with that of their father. One ran a small engineering workshop. Neither showed much distinction nor came clearly into focus during her lifetime.

The same cannot be said of her two sisters, Sarah and Lucy, whom I remember well as women of strong character. On the death of their mother they lived in several modest houses in the less affluent districts of Handsworth, Birmingham. Sarah was reputed to be an invalid but nevertheless lived long. She must have run the house and earned some extra income by typing. Lucy kept herself and helped the finances by working as a sales-woman in Ferney's draper's shop, New St., Birmingham. None of the sisters married.

Of Alice's schooling we know little. Her friend, Constance Smedley, author, playwright, illustrator and co-founder of the Lyceum Club for professional women (2) wrote: "She was my mother's friend. I knew her when I was a student at the King Edward's High School and the School of Art." (3) Constance was sixteen years younger than Alice who, however, might also have gone to King Edward's. Her letters and leanings indicate that she was well-educated.

Alice lost her father when she was eight and her mother thirteen years later. She decided then to leave home and live, first, in Celle near Hanover and then in Paris, where she spent most of her life. In 1903 she helped to found the Paris Lyceum Club and, according to Constance Smedley, "knew everyone in Paris and there was no literary salon where she was not a welcome and

-- 7 --

honoured guest." (4) Amongst her many friends was Mlle Hélène Favre de Coulevain ('Pierre de Coulevain') through whom, as we shall see, she was introduced to Mlle Gabrielle Fleury and, in turn, to George Gissing.

These then are the bare facts of her background and life up to the time of her friendship with the Gissing. We must now fill in the outline.

II

The year 1880 must have constituted a turning point in her life. Her mother died in August of that year and her 21st birthday had taken place in February. The family were now alone. One wonders what, if anything, they inherited from their grandfather Joseph Hall. They were probably

then forced by economic circumstances to move. Lucy and Sarah must have decided soon what they were going to do and where to live. As for Alice, it did not take her long to make up her mind. Her interests lay in the sphere of languages and literature.

Accordingly she decided to study, first, German and chose a 'finishing school' or pension for ladies in the small town of Celle or Zelle, N.E. of Hanover. Why did she choose this obscure place? Is it possible that in 1880 the town was better known than now through its connection with the House of Hanover? Queen Victoria was a Hanoverian. Sophia, the granddaughter of James 1st of England, was the mother of the Duke of Celle, the Elector of Hanover, who became George 1st of England.

From her letters one learns that she had embarked on a course of serious study, but not so much of the German language as of European history. She wrote for copies of Carlyle and consulted my father, who had studied in Germany. "I can't tell you," she continued, "what a comfort it is to have talks with Robert Best, who is so clear and knows what is best to do."

-- 8 --

III

That she was in Paris before March 4th, 1885 is clear from the certificate signed by R. Emery referred to below. It is often difficult, however, to pin down the exact time of happenings as so many of her letters are either undated or only give the month and not the year, but at some time after 1888 she was to sustain another tragic loss, namely that of her fiancé, Charles. We do not know his surname. At the time of her death, Constance Smedley wrote:

Her love of France and adoption of the country arose from her betrothal to a young French soldier. On his death she took up her residence in Paris to fulfill the duties of a daughter to his parents and with her pen to act as an interpreter and mediator between the intensely exclusive French literary circles and the more open and accessible English. (5)

She kept three letters from "Charley," as he signs himself. The tone of them is affectionate, though he uses the formal "vous."

The first is from Paris, dated 11th May, 1887. So at some time before this date she met the "French soldier," but where and how? It refers to her giving him German lessons and discusses the poet de Musset. He did not want to pass an opinion about some difference which had arisen with one of her sisters. He asks her to come to Paris and continues in English "Do come! do! do!"

The second letter is from Arras, where he was serving, and dated Sept. 16th, 1887. They compare notes on the subject of obedience. In principle neither liked it. But, wrote "Charley," "when serving with the regiment I always obey without the slightest hesitation." There was nothing he would not sacrifice for France "... to give to our country the grandeur and lustre that a miserable crowned coward caused to be lost eighteen years ago." He is solicitous about her catching cold and breaks off to go on guard duty.

The third and last letter is dated May, 1888. No address is given. He assured her that he was

-- 9 --

plotting nothing with (a certain) Meyer, not even as regards going to some horrible country. But if that occurs he would warn her. This Meyer worked for himself and had already much to do in

arranging his own affairs.

Evidently he *did* go to “some horrible country” (Brazil) where he died. But when? It is difficult and puzzling to determine the exact dates of this and other events at this time. Obviously he must have died after May 1888 and before her next stay in England which, from the report quoted below started some months before October 1889, also, before her undated letter telling her sister Lucy about the aftermath of the tragedy. The letter is written on mourning paper; the address, 79 Avenue Malakoff, Paris.

She had been to the *Messe des Morts* (doubtless 2nd November 1888) in the Greek Church for the Memorial Service for the Czar. She continues,

Tomorrow I am going to Bry [Bry-sur-Marne, a suburban town E. of Paris]. I went last Monday. It was so sad, poor little mother was broken-hearted. I am so glad I came for she told me it was a great comfort to see me.

Charles had been very attentive and used to bring a carriage to fetch her to the station for Bry. He appears to have been either in, or going to, Brazil (Rio) and had asked his mother to burn Alice’s letters “lest anything should happen.” He was expecting promotion and he would have a splendid position at the end of the year, “but it seems so much worse that he should have lost his life for the sake of getting a position.” It appears that he went to the business when he was too ill to speak. Alice had hoped so much that there would be a message. “It does seem the hardest part of all that I shall not have just a word.”

In a poignant passage she wrote:

If only I felt *sure* of anything beyond it would not be so hard but the cruelty of it

-- 10 --

seems to have taken away my faith. I do not know what I should have done if I could not have come here, it was the only thing that kept me up. I felt somehow that I must come and that he would have wished me to go to his mother.

Alice mentioned that amongst those who felt his loss deeply was a certain Mlle Emery, who may have been the R. Emery who had signed a certificate (4 March 1885) stating that Alice had stayed in her Pension for some time to perfect her French conversation. “She speaks fluently and can teach young girls,” R. Emery wrote. The address was: Villa Beaucour, 248 Fg St. Honoré.

IV

In October 1889 she was evidently back in Birmingham, for a Report on the French Examination of that date is written in English and in an English handwriting. It is signed unclearly, but probably, “JHP.” It appears to be a report of an examination, by an examiner, on the girls Alice was then teaching, for the report concludes, “Upon the whole, I think you should be pleased with the change of teacher for the girls are certainly on the right road.” The school might have been located at “The Hollies,” Soho Park, Handsworth, the address given by Miss Moberly, who signed another hand-written report dated Sept. 12th, 1891. This was to the effect that “Miss Deakin has much pleasure in testifying to the abilities and character of Miss Ward who for twelve months occupied the post of French mistress in her school.” Miss Ward, it went on, was efficient, punctual, kind, and gentle and a good disciplinarian. She had succeeded the late Professor Loreille (of Mason

College) and must have been possessed of good teaching powers to have been successful with her pupils. (Mason College is referred to below.)

Alice, then, probably remained in Birmingham between 1889 and 1891.

V

At some later date in the early nineties she moved back to Paris and installed herself at 92 Rue

-- 11 --

de Longchamp, judging by a letter to her sister, in which we encounter the first signs of her attitude to money. Alice wrote that Heinemann's had at last written accepting *Petit Bob* (by "Gyp," the pen name of the Comtesse de Martel), which she had translated. Alice goes on to ask for a loan of £25 from her sister to pay for a copyright rather than sell it; she was trying to arrange for royalty payments. She would have benefited on *Bijou* (also by Gyp) if she had been the sole owner of the copyright.

She was enjoying life. She used to tell me of her bicycling excursions with a Chinese lantern hanging from the handle-bars after sundown. At some point she wrote:

My little trip to Chartres did me a lot of good and I have come to the conclusion that there must be Gypsies amongst our ancestors and that I have inherited the taste for rolling about from place to place not knowing what roof would shelter me each day. I have never enjoyed any luxurious journey so much as the few *days on the road* from here to Chartres arriving at small villages and finding queer little cafés and funny hotels with most primitive sort of bedrooms.

During the eighteen nineties she was establishing herself as an author and translator. She had charm, wit and considerable ability, as I remember. According to Constance Smedley: "She penetrated literary fastnesses where no other English author gained entry." (6) We shall return later to more detailed particulars of her work and publications.

VI

It was during the '90s that she met Gabrielle Fleury and, through her, George Gissing himself. In the Memorial Essay quoted below, Alice tells of her introduction to his works through a lecture by a Mlle Blaze de Bury. To get her story into focus we have to be reminded of certain dates. Some of Alice's seem to be inaccurate. According to M. Coustillas this lecture was reported in the *Times*

-- 12 --

of 27th December, 1894. There is nothing to say whether she had met Gabrielle by then; but in the Memorial Essay she describes her first meeting with Gissing, introduced by a very dear French friend whom "she had known for a number of years" and whom she had told about *New Grub Street* which was published in 1891. M. Coustillas' records suggest that this meeting took place four and a half years after the Mlle Blaze de Bury lecture, i.e. 1899. We can only guess when, and how, Alice and Gabrielle actually first met.

After his death in 1903, Alice evidently contemplated a book about Gissing of which she drafted Chapter One, headed "In Memoriam." She wrote that he was extremely reserved, had few

friends, and felt that even those who knew him thoroughly did not really understand him at all. He rarely allowed himself to be drawn into an argument, and he never cared to try to convert others to his way of thinking.

“Those who care to know me better,” he said, “will find me in my books.”

This, thought Alice, was very true. She then refers to the immense consequences of apparently trivial things and tells of a call by a “Madame de C”. This lady may well have been Mlle H el ene Favre de Coulevain (Pierre de Coulevain), whose books Alice had translated and who was probably her closest friend.

On the day in question (i.e. 25th December, 1894) we discussed English literature in her drawing-room. Mme de C. asked me whether I would care to go with her the following day, to hear Mlle Blaze de Bury’s lecture on George Gissing. (7) I accepted and was ashamed to own that I, an English woman, did not know George Gissing and had never read one of his books....

Mlle Blaze de Bury’s lecture was admirable and so my friendship with Madame de C. had twofold consequences.

-- 13 --

In the first place, thanks to her, I had gone to the lecture and was afterwards inspired to read Gissing’s other books for the first time.

In the second place, a very dear friend of mine [i.e. Gabrielle Fleury] whom I had known a number of years and whom I had told about “New Grub Street” came to ask if I would lend her one of Gissing’s books and tell her whether his novels had been translated in French. I lent her “New Grub Street” and promised to write to the English publishers on her behalf to find out whether she might have the French rights of this book as she liked it and wanted to translate it.

She then went to England to obtain permission from George Gissing to translate “New Grub Street” in French.

According to M. Coustillas the negotiations for the French translation of *New Grub Street* took place in July 1898. During the period July 1898 to May 1899 Gabrielle translated this and a number of short stories which achieved publication in leading French journals. Alice reported these activities in *Literature* on two occasions. The information which she gave (partly erroneously by the way) appeared anonymously.

Gissing’s papers show that he met Alice for the first time in the late Spring of 1899. Her draft tells how, after an interval during which she had no news of Gabrielle, to her amazement on returning home on her cycle, one afternoon, Alice found her at her door *with George Gissing*, whom she introduced as her husband.

He carried my cycle upstairs for me and then we all dined together and spent a delightful evening in the flat.

-- 14 --

“Your *Whitelaw College* and *Whitelaw* were very like *Mason College* and *Birmingham*,” I said to George Gissing, “the description would fit exactly.”

“It *was* Mason College and it *was* Birmingham,” he said, laughing heartily, and delighted to find his description had been so accurate. He told me that he had stayed some time in Birmingham, living in Moseley, one of the near suburbs, and that Mason College, and the attitude of the Birmingham people had interested him.

Throughout England the Birmingham people have the reputation of being “town proud” and, in the following lines, we had a very apt description by George Gissing, of an assembly on prize day, at Mason College.

“The note of the assembly was something other than refinement; rather its high standard of health, high spirits, and comfort... the characteristics of capitalism. Decent reverence for learning, keen....

Here the manuscript ends. This “Life” was never published.

M. Coustillas has made some interesting comments on the Mason College-Whitelaw dialogue, the College and associated happenings being described in the first chapter of *Born in Exile*. M. Coustillas believes that in stating that “Whitelaw College” was meant to be Mason College, Birmingham, Gissing deliberately misled her – she had, he suggests, quite unwittingly touched on the sore point in his past (since Whitelaw stands for Owens from which he was expelled and sent to prison). This talk, as we have seen, took place in the summer of 1899, by which time, according to his diary, he had spent a fortnight in Moseley, Birmingham, during the autumn of 1892. But the novel was only published that year and the chapter about Whitelaw College was written the year

-- 15 --

before; so when they discussed the novel in 1899 Gissing knew about Birmingham and Alice could not possibly have detected the untruth – she almost invited it – so M. Coustillas suggests; and he may well be right. At the same time, we must bear in mind that when Gissing wrote *Born in Exile* he may have had Birmingham in mind even though he had never been there. Whitelaw College is placed in a “money-making Midland town, Kingsmill” (note the ‘ing’s, ‘i’s, and ‘m’s). We are dealing with fiction and an imaginary town. But even so, M. Coustillas is certainly right in the thought that, after his traumatic experiences, he would have tended, subconsciously, to shy off too close association with Owens College. (8)

In another typescript, *George Gissing in France*, Alice wrote: “I shared the general opinion of those English people *who had not read Gissing*, that he was a somewhat gruesome writer and a great pessimist. After hearing the lecture ... I read the book and was amazed to find what a fine novelist he was.”

Various friends – she continued – asked me for further details about the author; but I could tell them nothing. I did not even know anyone who had met George Gissing. I pictured him to myself as an old man with a long white beard, living like a hermit and revelling in his work.

A year or two later [actually four and a half years later] Gissing came with

a mutual friend, to call on me. Instead of the old man with the long white beard, I saw a man between thirty and forty [actually forty-one]. He was well built, with square shoulders and a singularly expressive intellectual face, with remarkable observant eyes. His brown hair was very thick and rather long giving him the look of a poet. He was extremely amused at the idea I had of him and we laughed at the white beard I had arranged for him to have. I was very much struck by the gentleness of his voice and his unlikeness to any Englishman I had ever met. He reminded me much more of an Italian.

-- 16 --

From the time that he came to live in Paris, I saw a great deal of him. It was his custom to go out for a walk every day, after luncheon. He thought over what he was going to write, during this walk, and then began to work again about four o'clock. He was living a very short distance away so that he very frequently called. He brought me various English reviews and books, took my *Spectator* and any other literary papers I might happen to have and then generally went on to the Bois de Boulogne.

VII

Alice continues:

Madame Lardin de Musset, the sister of Alfred de Musset, gave some delightful little dinners in honour of Gissing. She was one of the most charming women imaginable and, although about eighty years of age, she was far more interesting and entertaining than the majority of society women of half her age. She looked a true *grande dame* and her beautiful white hair, softening her expressive face, gave her just the touch needed in the midst of her old-world home. Her rooms were full of souvenirs. The graceful lines and perfect finish of the furniture proclaimed it to be of another epoch than ours, whilst the colouring which time has given to the whole setting could never be obtained in modern houses. In the drawing-room Landelle's fine portrait of Alfred de Musset had the place of honour. Madame de Musset's devotion to the memory of her brother was most touching. She was surrounded by souvenirs of him and her anecdotes about him were most amusing and interesting. A visit to Madame de Musset was always a literary treat. She had read the best literature of many countries; her memory was excellent and she had a gift for summing up briefly the story of a

-- 17 --

novel. Her criticisms were reliable, and she always seemed to see both the strength and the.... [Here the typescript referring to Madame de Musset's dinner parties ends].

VIII

Among Alice's papers are three typescripts of another article, *The Evolution of George Gissing*.

She wrote:

As very few men or women knew George Gissing intimately, very few knew of the tragedies in his life. These tragedies, due to the wild impulsiveness of his nature in his youth, had left their mark on him for ever. They had not made him morose, cynical or misanthropic. They had worked on him as the fire in a crucible, purifying any dross in his nature and leaving him the most large-hearted, tolerant and intensely sympathetic man possible. They made of him a man who was the very soul of honour and rectitude and, consequently, the most loyal and perfect of friends.

At the time I first knew him, I knew nothing of the tragedies in his life. I saw and felt that he had been through the fires of adversity and that he had come through them bravely. I admired his large-heartedness, the absence of anything petty or mean in his character, his scorn of superficiality. In all our intercourse, I never heard him utter a word detrimental to any friend or acquaintance of his. The private life of those whom he called friends was to him sacred. He considered himself bound in all loyalty, to respect the trust and confidence which they had placed in him....

“Let those who really care to know me, find me in my books,” he said himself, and there is something so lovable in Gissing’s nature that those who

-- 18 --

care to try to find him there will soon learn to recognise him, and will be amply repaid for the search they made.

In literature, whether an author’s writings be subjective or objective, the man’s own nature is betrayed in his works. Gissing portrays men and women of the lowest class of society admirably. These men and women are true to life. They are vulgar, sordid, scarcely human, and yet, in the telling of the story there is nothing coarse. Another writer may tell of the same class of people, but as the writer is, so is the story and the telling of it may be revolting. At a very impressionable age, Gissing saw much of the underworlds of London. The pity of what he saw entered into his very soul as he wrote of it.

After knowing Gissing – Alice continues – it interested me to follow his own evolution by means of his books. With what I knew of his story, it was doubly interesting. The key-note I found in his very earliest book: *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) (...) I read it from his own copy, the only one he himself possessed. It was full of his corrections in the margins, and whole pages of it were marked in pencil for pitiless deletion. In his riper years Gissing felt how young he had been when he brought out that novel.

Alice goes on to refer to the break in his career as a student, his stay in America and return to England and London. She returns to consideration of his novel, *Workers in the Dawn* and suggests that an author’s first book contains more of his own real feelings than any subsequent work. She tells how the story opens on a Saturday night, in one of the lowest districts of London and quotes Gissing: “The one evening in the week which the weary toilers of our great city can devote to ease and recreation in the sweet assurance of a morrow unenslaved.” She considered that his description

of that Saturday night market was intensely graphic and realistic, with its street scenes, the gin palaces, stalls, flaring naphtha lamps, the ugly words and the terrible cockney accent. "The pity of it all is," Gissing said later, "that it is so sordid and so ugly and that these poor people should not even know of the beauty they are missing."

In the rest of the typescript, she continued to summarise *Workers in the Dawn* and passed on to *The Unclassed* (1884) commenting on the characters and happenings and relating them to his own life.

Evidently she intended to continue in this way, but the work was never completed.

(To be continued)

- 1 - Joseph Hall, *Iron Scrap*, London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1864. He also wrote *The Iron Question* (London, Hamilton, Adams & Co. 1857). See John W. Hall, *The Life and Work of Joseph Hall, The Inventor of the Modern System of Puddling* (Stourbridge, The Staffordshire Iron and Steel Institute, Monk & Moody, 1916). Some years ago I read a publication by the British Council on British Inventions in which Joseph Hall's discovery was described. Efforts by the Birmingham Reference Library to obtain a copy have so far been unsuccessful. Another British Council publication by the late Mr. Sherwood Taylor on *British Inventions* makes no mention of Joseph Hall. See also my *Brass Chandelier*, Allen & Unwin, 1940, pp. 22-25.
- 2 - Constance Smedley's first novel seems to have been *An April Princess* (1903). She was still publishing books in the 1930s. Among her novels were *Conflict* (1911), *The Daughter* (1908), *Mothers and Fathers* (1911), *The Magnolia Lady* (1932). She also wrote some works of a religious nature. In her book, *Crusaders* (1929), she tells of the part Alice played in forming the Paris Lyceum Club. Her father was a Birmingham chartered accountant, the chairman and

director of several companies and Hon. Sec. of the Birmingham Hospital Saturday Fund. He interested himself in the theory that Francis Bacon was the author of the plays attributed to William Shakespeare. Her husband, Maxwell Armfield, was a Birmingham artist of distinction.

- 3 - From a letter to the *Birmingham Post*, January 21, 1939.
- 4 - From a letter to the present writer, dated January 21, 1939.
- 5 - *Birmingham Post*, January 21, 1939.
- 6 - Constance Smedley to the present writer, January 21, 1939.
- 7 - Gissing read the report of the lecture in the *Times* and made some comments on it in his correspondence.
- 8 - Owens College, Manchester was opened in 1851, whereas Mason College, Birmingham was founded in 1880. Both resulted from bequests by wealthy business men "for the purpose of affording students who were unable, on the grounds of expense, to resort to Oxford or Cambridge, an education equally high class with that given at these centres." Both seem to have combined the curriculum of a University with that of a technical high school. Both were later incorporated in the local Universities or given university status. John Owens (1790-1846) was the son of a prosperous merchant. He discountenanced any religious tests for students. Josiah Mason (1795-1881) was almost entirely self-educated (see *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edit., 1910).

* * * * *

-- 21 --

“A Freak of Nature”

The Last Missing Short Story Identified

Pierre Coustillas

A year ago, (*Newsletter*, October 1977, pp. 21-22) I reported the discovery of “Joseph,” a story Gissing wrote on March 9, 1896 and published in *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, as well as the identification of another story for which he had received £4.2. The only short story that remained to locate, I concluded, was “A Freak of Nature,” which the writer’s papers and correspondence show to have appeared in the *London Magazine* – a magazine of which no record seems to be extant anywhere except in Gissing’s Account of Books (*Colophon*, 1934, Part XVIII) and in letters to Colles and to the editor of the magazine itself. “A Freak of Nature” could not be recovered, I then thought, until the present owner of the manuscript chose to share his knowledge with other Gissing enthusiasts.

By great good luck, the MS has now turned up as a result of the wide-ranging enquiry necessitated by the compiling of the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (a forthcoming Mansell publication), and I am very grateful to Miss Pamela White, one of the compilers of the *Index*, for letting me know of the surfacing of the MS at the University of Kansas. A glance at a xerox of this document, for which I am glad to thank Miss Ann Hyde, Manuscripts Librarian, showed that the story was no other than one on record since 1964, “Mr. Brogden, City Clerk” (*Harmsworth Magazine*, February 1899), but of which no mention seems to have been made by Gissing in any letter or notebook. The story was probably retitled by the editor of this periodical, as was the case with “Simple Simon” (*Idler*, May 1896), which was reissued in the *Harmsworth Magazine* (December 1900) under the title “Vegetarianism v. Love. The Story of Simple Simon.” As Gissing had sold all British rights, it is reasonable to think that he would not necessarily have been informed

-- 22 --

of any new publication of his work.

There remains to reconcile (1) the fact that Gissing repeatedly refers to the *London Magazine* in 1895 and wrote to its editor Beckles Willson (1869-1942) on April 20, 1895, and (2) the fact that no magazine of that name can be traced for that year. The explanation is probably offered by some details in Gissing’s letters to Colles, his agent, and to Beckles Willson. These letters make it clear that the *London Magazine* was a Harmsworth publication and that Harmsworth, incidentally, did not like to deal with literary agents. So it would seem that the *London Magazine* was not yet launched in 1895 even though an editor had been appointed and material for the first few numbers was being purchased. For reasons which appear neither in Beckles Willson’s publications nor in the biographies of Harmsworth, the launching of the magazine was almost certainly postponed. When the plan materialized in July 1898, the journal bore Harmsworth’s name, and Gissing’s story appeared in it before long under a new title. It had been bought and paid for and was after all used only with some delay. Gissing’s correspondence with Colles contains no reference to the story after the spring of 1895, and probably he forgot all about it. The title which Harmsworth had first thought of using for his magazine was eventually used in 1903 when the *Harmsworth Magazine* became the

London Magazine (a portrait of Gissing and some flattering comment on his work appeared in the September issue for that year). But as he was living in France at the time, it is not likely that Gissing heard of this any more than of the appearance of “A Freak of Nature” under a new title three and a half years before. Had he known of this belated publication, he would have made it a point to secure the relevant number of the magazine, as he did on other occasions, with a view to publishing companion volumes to *Human Odds and Ends*.

Tokyo Encounter

Sandra S. Enzer
Hofstra University

Even in our jet age, opportunities for Gissingites based continents apart to meet and exchange ideas are rare indeed. Having completed a dissertation on Gissing’s short stories during this past year, I was somewhat curious about contemporary attitudes toward him in Japan. A recent trip provided the chance to meet in Tokyo with Shigeru Koike and two other Gissing specialists for a memorable afternoon and evening of lively discussion and reminiscence.

Upon hearing that I was in Japan, Professor Koike graciously invited me, along with my husband, who was teaching at Rissho University, and our young friend and interpreter, Masako Kano, to his offices at Tokyo Metropolitan University. Refreshed by cooling fans and excellent Kirin beer on this sultry July day, we conversed for several hours and viewed the Gissing collection amassed by Professor Koike which contains many bilingual editions and translations. Then, at Professor Koike’s generous invitation, we travelled with him by taxi through the teeming Tokyo rush hour to the Chinzan-So, an elegant dining spot set in the midst of a luxurious garden. Joining us there were Professor Eiichi Sano, who has published an annotated edition of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, and Professor Osamu Doi, who has translated *New Grub Street* into Japanese.

This festive occasion proved to be more social than academic. It’s not easy to attend to serious talk while being plied with sake and beer and attempting to swirl thin slices of beef and vegetables into a boiling cauldron set into the center of the table (a feast called Shabu-Shabu). Nevertheless, we did happily reminisce in turn about our earliest exposure to Gissing and the qualities that endeared him to us. Then we offered toasts not only to Gissing himself, but also to Kiichi Hirata, who in the early years of the 20th Century had introduced Gissing to the Japanese. Touched by the

-- 24 --

master’s artful and understated impressions of nature, Hirata had considered *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* his favorite book, and it is still the best known of Gissing’s works in Japan today.

Judging from our colloquy, however, it appears that the strong resurgence of interest in Gissing that has been apparent in Europe and America in recent years has not yet been felt in Japan. Professor Doi showed me a copy of examination questions based on “Miss Rodney’s Leisure” which he had administered that day to his students and indicated that he planned to teach *The Odd Women* this fall, but he implied that students now find it harder to identify with Gissing than in the past. Perhaps the gradually increasing interest in Women’s Studies in Japan will help awaken students to a renewed appreciation.

In any case, there are still a good many Gissing admirers among the older generation. A few days earlier, for example, we had been entertained by Professor Yukio Sase, of Rissho University,

who has published two short histories of English and American literature. Professor Sase not only proclaimed his great fondness for *Henry Ryecroft*, but he presented me with the Masao Hirai bilingual edition of that work. I was also delighted to receive from Professor Sano his edition of *Henry Ryecroft*, and from Professor Koike, Japanese editions of *The Light on the Tower* and *By the Ionian Sea*. (In return, I exchanged photocopies of several Gissing stories as they had first appeared in the periodicals of the 1890's).

Considering Gissing's appreciation of the contemplative moment and his love of quiet natural beauty, it was most appropriate that as darkness approached at the Chinzan-So, our party meandered through the twilight gardens to view the magic of myriad fireflies aglow in the delicate waving grasses. Sequestered, however briefly, from the clamor of the bustling city just beyond the walls of this oasis, I mused about Ryecroft's gentle benediction on "some silent few, who go their way amid the still meadows, who bend to the flower and watch the sunset."

-- 25 --

The hour had come for farewells. Suffused with good feelings and with a sense of spiritual renewal, we thanked our new friends, bade them goodnight, and re-entered the other world.

* * * * *

Book Reviews

Michael Collie, *George Gissing: A Biography*, Folkestone, England: Dawson & Sons; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977, £7.

Coming after the biographies by Morley Roberts (*The Private Life of Henry Maitland*), Mabel Collins Donnelly (*George Gissing, Grave Comedian*) and Jacob Korg (*George Gissing: A Critical Biography*) this is the fourth full-length life of Gissing. What does it add to our knowledge of the writer? Is it reliable? Does it offer a new interpretation of his life that is coherent and convincing? These are questions one naturally asks oneself before opening the book. At all events, it becomes obvious after a few pages that what has been attempted here is a commentary on Gissing's life and career rather than a biography in the usual sense of the term, but no exception can be taken to this. Oswald Davis's critical study is a rambling, highly idiosyncratic essay on the works, and it makes pleasant reading even though it is hardly the book one would recommend as an introduction to Gissing. Mr. Collie's book might have been an up-to-date biographical equivalent.

For such a commentary to be of value it must be based on correct factual information and eschew fanciful theories born either of a frantic quest for novelty or a vain desire to question solidly established facts. The present work signally fails to meet this twofold requirement. Its only good points are that it reads well – despite some misprints and several disastrously erroneous quotations and it is free of that ideological or psychological jargon which has marred some recent work on

-- 26 --

Gissing. Like other writings by the same author – his recent *Bibliography* and his article entitled "How George Gissing Disappeared" (*English Studies in Canada*, Winter 1975) – this biography is remarkable for its gratuitous theories, its poor scholarship, its innuendoes and self-destructing statements supported by a pathetic determination to contradict his predecessors at all costs. The image of Gissing that we get is not a pleasant one: he is depicted as an arch-egotist, a most

ungenerous person, a tyrant whose wives were almost systematically right, a writer who knew nothing about publishing and so on and so forth. Mr. Collie denies that Gissing was a novelist whose works were to a certain extent inspired by his own experiences and he lends those critics who have pointed out some autobiographical aspects in the stories such a simplistic notion of the epithet “autobiographical” that his arguments are not worth refuting. The trouble throughout is that the biographer does not have the shadow of a new document to produce, that he misreads Gissing’s manuscripts and fails to give facts correctly.

The two crudest blunders – on to which are hung tiresome theories – concern Gissing’s two wives, Marianne Helen Harrison and Edith Underwood. The first blunder springs from the biographer’s hostility to Morley Roberts, whose book is pilloried for the wrong reasons. Mr. Collie will not have it that Nell was the girl with whom Gissing was involved in the Manchester episode because – he ignorantly asserts – Roberts is the sole authority for this. No one in the last hundred years ever questioned it, least of all Gissing’s family, who would certainly not have let Robert’s statement pass uncontradicted in 1912 if it had been sheer calumny. Mr. Collie’s theory is belied by a number of documents – William’s letters to George, the family’s papers and indeed Gissing’s own diary, which he has consulted but paraphrased tendentiously so as to suit his fancy. On p. 91 of the book, we read in the account of Gissing’s visit to the room in which Nell lay dead: “He found her few clothes, photographs from the time of their married life [incidentally the diary reads: “a photograph of myself, taken 12 years ago”], her pawn tickets and his letters to her.” One word in

-- 27 --

the diary, of crucial importance, explodes the whole theory: “all my letters, away back to the *American* time.” All the comments on *Workers* – a forced attempt to disprove the obvious – collapse as a consequence.

The second blunder arises from an attempt to construe Malkin’s ludicrous plan to educate and marry fourteen-year-old Bella Jacox (in *Born in Exile*) as an autobiographical element (one of many self-contradictions in the volume). The biographer refuses to believe that Edith Underwood was twenty-three when she married Gissing in February 1891 therefore, he insists, she must have been fourteen. Her father (this is another contradiction) is presented as both hostile to the marriage (that he was is obvious) and scheming to marry off his fourteen-year-old daughter to Gissing (who was so blind that he could not see she was so young, yet – another contradiction – deliberately planned to marry a girl of that age). The truth is as plain as could be: all the elements concerning Edith’s birth and age contained in Gissing’s diary and correspondence are confirmed by her birth certificate (no. 138, for the year 1867, registration district of Pancras, sub-district of Camden Town).

The jejune attempts to establish that early drafts of *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile* were written in the eighties are similarly devoid of all foundation. Affirmation is not synonymous with evidence. As regards the second of these titles, Mr. Collie is misled by the fact that the name of Peak(e) had been used by Gissing in his never completed story, “The Insurgents,” early in 1888. The novelist often used in his published work names he had already used in discarded, unfinished tales, and this is a commonplace example well-known to students of Gissing’s papers. Another untruth to be nailed to the counter concerns the revised and unrevised versions of the novels: we are invited to believe that an important reason why Gissing “disappeared” between the First World War and the early sixties is “the repeated republication of unrevised or shoddily edited texts.” Now from

-- 28 --

Gissing’s death to the present day, all new editions of his novels have been reprinted from the

revised editions, when any. The only exceptions are some AMS editions (1968-69) of *Thyrza* and *The Emancipated* which are still available as three-deckers bound in one volume. No responsible critic will be prepared to assert that the few misprints in the editions which appeared during the period 1914-1964 can account in any way for his so-called "disappearance."

A characteristic example of the scholarly treatment of Gissing's correspondence is offered by the long quotation from a letter to Ellen relating a visit to the house of George Smith, his main publisher until 1891. This letter, mistakenly dated 3 July 1888 and printed with various (significant) omissions and misprints in the 1927 volume of family letters, on pp. 217-19, is redated 30 July 1889 by Mr. Collie who, by omitting a personal pronoun, makes us think for a moment that it was Gissing who told Smith the stories about Charlotte Brontë. Besides, the letter is said to be in the McGregor Collection, University of Virginia Library. This is altogether wrong: the original of the letter quoted is in Stanford University and the correct date is 3 July 1887, as the allusion to *Thyrza*, published in April of that year, made it likely from the start.

A *catalogue raisonné* of the errors of all kinds in the book would make tedious reading. The following list, a lengthy one by any standards, is not exhaustive, but it may help a few readers:

(1) names of persons and characters, addresses, etc: p. 34, Marion, for Marian, Yule; p. 37, Biffin for Biffen; p. 40, Oswald instead of Osmond Waymark; p. 43 and index: "A Town Idyl" is not a separate work, as the index implies, but a chapter in *Workers*, p. 43-44, the Gissings lived at 5 Hanover Street, not Square, so the remark about the cul-de-sac is unfounded; p. 45, Arthur Norman is in fact Arthur Golding; p. 52 ff. Paul Rohart, actually William Paul Rahardt, is not a man Gissing had previously known in Wakefield, but one of Gissing's uncles, as is made plain by the

-- 29 --

unpublished correspondence Mr. Collie claims to have consulted; p. 76, Houghton Hall should be Broughton Hall, and Jean is a misreading for Jem, Gaussen; pp. 85 and 178, the letter to Miss Sichel is not in the Pforzheimer Library but in the Berg Collection; p. 96 Jack Barclay for Bartley, Scanthone for Scawthorne; p. 100, Castellanse for Castellammare, p. 104, the Quadrilaterals in the plural is meaningless; p. 106, Chiddingford for Chiddingfold; p. 110, Aybrigg for Agbrigg; p. 113, it was Bourget, not Bertz, who married; p. 128, the Clarence, where Gissing dined with Bullen, has become the Clarendon; p. 129, Harriet, a character in *The Unclassed*, is made a character in *Workers*; p.130, Madge is said to be the youngest of the Wakefield Gissings; p. 133, the flat in Brixton was definitely not sublet; p. 135, L. J. for L. F. Austin; p. 143 ff. Clara Collett for Collet; p. 150, Paolo for Paola, Aleric for Alaric; p. 153, a confusion in the Dorking addresses and Mrs. Broughton for Boughton; p. 164: Mr. Collie has strange notions about the altitude of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port; p. 170, Couhans for Couhard.

(2) dates and misdated events: p. 8, Gissing did not have two children in 1895; p. 9, he had no house in Brixton in July 1895, he lived in Epsom; p. 10, Hardy's *Tess* did not appear in 1892 but in 1891; similarly *Jude* was published in 1895, not in 1894; p. 13, the newspaper photograph alluded to of "Mr. Gissing being seen off at Victoria Station," and slanderously purported to represent a light-hearted Gissing leaving his wife and children in September 1897, is in fact a photograph taken by Harold Frederic at Marlow railway station on 21 June 1896 (Gissing had attended an Omar Khayyám dinner at Marlow the day before); p. 17, "the plaque placed at Wakefield by Gissing enthusiasts a few years ago" was indeed put up in 1932 (see *The Times*, March 17, 1932, p. 11); p.24 ff. the chronology of Gissing's career at Owens is erroneous; p. 31, Mr. Collie marvels that the final letter from Black to Gissing, dated 11 April 1876, "does not give the impression that any great

crisis had arisen”, apparently forgetting that there was no crisis until young Gissing was arrested at the end of May; p. 50, the separation between George and Nell is dated in a way which contradicts a statement on p. 44; p. 56, we are invited to believe that George and Nell only lived two years together, and their relationship – as well as that between George and Gabrielle – is primly styled “friendship”; p. 71, Gissing is erroneously said to have ceased tutoring in 1885 and to have written early drafts of *Born in Exile* and *New Grub Street* in 1881-82; pp. 71-72, the recapitulation of Gissing’s literary achievements is not to be credited; p. 78, George is said to have seen Nell again in 1886 whereas he had been said, on p. 56, never to have seen her again after they separated, but on p. 91 we are told that at the time of her death he had not seen her “for about four years” and the climax of confusion is reached on p. 109 when Mr. Collie, forgetting when Nell died, writes that George “had not seen her for four or five years: the last time seems to have been 1886”; p. 78, Morley Roberts did not leave England for several years in 1887, as is testified by Gissing’s diary and correspondence; p. 78, Gissing did not give up his lease of 7K at Christmas 1891, he was then living at Exeter, a married man again and a father; p. 79, a contradiction with pp. 71-72 with regard to the date of publication of *Isabel Clarendon*, and a wrong date for the publication of *A Life’s Morning*; p. 86, *Demos* was published by the time *Thyrza* was begun; p. 111, *Born in Exile* was not finished in the spring of 1891; p. 128, one fails to see how the revision of *Isabel Clarendon* (on February 12, 1896) and of *The Emancipated* (on December 11 and 12, 1892) could remind Gissing of Nell; p. 129, the relations with Bullen are implicitly misdated – surprisingly enough they lasted until Gissing’s death; p. 130, *The Odd Women* was composed between 18 August and 4 October 1892, not before; p. 132, Roberts, Walter Grahame and Gissing’s mother are involved in a frightful spatial and temporal mess: Grahame visited Gissing in March 1893, not 1892; Roberts accompanied Gissing, Edith and the baby to Paignton in May 1893; Gissing took his wife and child, and his

mother not to Paignton, but to Burnham in May 1893; p. 134, the second edition of *In the Year of Jubilee* appeared in August 1895, not early in the year, and the sketches for Jerome were published, not written, in May and June 1895; *The Paying Guest* was not composed in the late summer of 1895; p. 143, an innocent reader would believe that Ruth Adams wrote her article on Gissing and Miss Collet shortly after the writer’s death; p. 146, no first draft of *By the Ionian Sea* was written in 1897, nor is it accurate to state that “Among the Prophets” and *Our Friend the Charlatan* were written in 1899; besides, p. 164 contradicts p. 146; p. 152, it is doubly wrong to assert that on his return from Germany in 1898 Gissing “went as usual to spend a few weeks in Wakefield”; pp. 166-67, that “almost two years” had passed between April 1900 and May 1901 taxes one’s understanding; p. 171, *Ryecroft* appeared in the *Fortnightly* in 1902 and 1903; p. 172, that it took Gissing “a couple of weeks” to write “Topham’s Chance” is fiction of fiction.

(3) a number of quotations contain flagrant errors: pp. 8-9, the unnamed archdeacon, F. W. Farrar, is made to say exactly the reverse of what he wrote; p. 27, the quotation from *Henry Maitland* contains two errors; the Harrison letter on p. 68 contains one; p. 121 “the heat of the city” is a mistake for the “heart” of it; p. 136, “concerned” for “convinced”; “conservatism” for “conservation”; “we can treat the forces of nature” should read “we can trust...”; “how” for “now” makes a quotation meaningless.

(4) factual errors, unwarranted opinions and deliberate exaggerations: p. 7, Meredith's house at Box Hill, though small, cannot be described as "tiny"; p. 8, Mr. Collie would be at a loss to prove that during the eight or ten years before 1895 Gissing "had alternately sold and repurchased, pawned and redeemed his dinner jacket"; the epithet "naturalistic" cannot be applied to *Demos* and *The Nether World* without important reservations; p. 9, no careful biographer would write that "whenever he could escape from his house in Brixton with his dinner jacket and two or three books

-- 32 --

in his suitcase, he was perfectly happy"; p. 10, Gissing did not settle in Dorking in 1898 because Meredith's home was in the vicinity; no one will be prepared to believe that Meredith influenced *The Unclassed* again in 1895 because Gissing met him at the Burford Bridge Hotel; p. 11, the so-called "strong similarities" between *Tess* and *The Nether World* are unconvincing; p.11, "unsubstantiated anecdote" simply means that Mr. Collie arbitrarily refuses to believe his predecessors; p. 17, the description of the birth-place is invalidated by Clifford Brook's articles; p. 19, it is wrong to assert that Gissing did not retain a single childhood friendship; p. 25, another gratuitous statement: "Events showed that he got to know not just one but a good number of girls during his first year at Owens College and that he had a well-established reputation for philandering"; p. 31, how can it be asserted that there are no prisons in Gissing's novels? If those in *The Unclassed*, *Demos* and *The Whirlpool* do not suffice, perhaps the American short stories could have been mentioned; as for criminal actions in his fiction there are many; p. 34, in his attempt to account for Gissing's sudden departure from the Waltham High School, Mr. Collie is wide of the mark – he is obviously ignorant of some crucial documents; p. 44, Mr. Collie's defence of Nell is remarkable: "it is not ... crime to avoid your husband's friends or to take to the bottle when a man like Morley Roberts decides to pay a visit" – an argument all the more singular as Nell and Roberts never met; p. 45, who will believe that there is no evidence of any kind that Nell was a prostitute in 1876-77 after reading Black's letters?; p. 49, after taking to task Jacob Korg and the present writer for describing Nell as a prostitute addicted to drink and fully irresponsible, and for comparing her with Carrie Mitchell in *Workers*, Mr. Collie makes this characteristic confession which knocks the bottom out of his shockingly documented biography: "How closely the story of Carrie Mitchell resembled that of Helen Harrison we shall probably never be able to tell"; p. 52, a climax is

-- 33 --

reached: "Elsewhere in the correspondence there are hints that he did in fact beat both wives (he told his sister on one occasion that he had stopped using the stair rod!)". This statement, if it is to be credited, must be substantiated; p. 56, the passage on sexual abstinence is again sheer invention; p. 57, when we read that Gissing could not recognise Nell when he saw her after her death, we have fresh evidence that the Diary has been carelessly read; p. 58, the notion that Gissing should have tested out the idea for a book on either of his wives is uproariously funny; p. 58, "on the basis of unrevised juvenilia" is, in the context, both groundless and meaningless; p. 60, Gissing's income in the years of his first marriage is made to look much bigger than it was; a distortion of a contrary nature is later produced for the nineties; p. 62, the notion that "the Wakefield family exerted absolutely no influence upon him" is obviously untenable, and indeed flatly contradicted by Mr. Collie himself subsequently; p. 62, when Harrison befriended Gissing and employed him as a tutor for two of his sons, he could not have accepted Gissing's past for the simple reason that he was ignorant of it; p. 65, denying all feeling of guilt and masochism in Gissing amounts to a downright incomprehension of his character; p. 66, the idea that "the divisions between people in England

were characteristically English, not universal” cannot be entertained seriously; pp. 76-77, the remarks on George, Ellen and Mrs. Gaussen, considering Mr. Collie’s selective footnotes, must be regarded as idle and slanderous; p. 82, the remarks on five of Gissing’s critics betray a desire to distort their intentions; p. 91, it was not from Roberts that Gissing heard of Nell’s death; p. 92, Gissing did not add a chapter to vol. III of *The Nether World* after completing the book; here is an obvious confusion with *Born in Exile*; p. 93, it is uncritical to say that the relationships between the characters in *The Nether World* do not depend upon exterior contrivance but simply upon people’s feelings for each other; p. 107, “a second £50 for the next 1,000” is a misreading of the

-- 34 --

memorandum of agreement for *The Emancipated*; p. 112, Gissing’s correspondence shows that far from encouraging him to court Connie Ash, his sisters did their best to discourage him; p. 119, the comments on the non-fictional aspect of *New Grub Street* are contradicted by all those of knowledgeable commentators, John Gross and Bernard Bergonzi in particular; p. 122, it is simply not true that Gissing was apolitical, and absurd to write (p. 129) that his professional successes reduced his chances of being reconciled with Edith; p. 129, if Mr. Collie can write that Gissing never fully acknowledged to himself that he had married an uneducated person, the reason is once more that he has not read the diary carefully; p. 134, the passage on the winter of 1893-94 is a twaddling attempt at dramatising a situation which was not yet dramatic; p. 135, the “warm friendship with Edmund Gosse” is yet another invention – the two men were nothing more than acquaintances; also, Gissing did not stop in Italy on his way back from Greece in order to consult a doctor; the so-called convalescence in Wakefield is not to be credited either; p. 136, no emphysema was diagnosed in 1894, and the idea that Edith managed the house and nursed him and that Gissing “went away for periods only to return” is a grotesque falsification of facts; p. 137, the juxtaposition of the passage on “sexual anarchy” (letter to Bertz of June 2, 1893) and of the projected stay on the continent (letter to Roberts of March 5, 1895) is one of many innuendoes; p. 138, “the year of terror” was not 1896, but 1897; p. 139, the so-called understandings with Margaret Gissing and with H. G. Wells are purely imaginary – here as in dozens of other cases, Mr. Collie substitutes his opinion for unknown facts or facts which do not fit with his theories; p. 139, the financial difficulties of 1896 (only due to a misreading of Gissing’s accounts, and a confusion between 1896 and 1897) were certainly not a prime cause of the breakdown of Gissing’s marriage; p. 143, the sums mentioned in connection with *The Town Traveller* should be considered cautiously, also the information borrowed from Ruth Adams’s article; p. 144, Gissing did not give the copyright of

-- 35 --

Born in Exile to Clara Collet, she purchased it from Bullen, who had purchased it from A. & C. Black; p. 149, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* was of course not written from memory; p. 150, Gissing was not carried back to his hotel unconscious; p. 152, the remark on “Evil German bed” was surely not his only comment on his visit; p. 154, Gissing did not “forget” to say one word to his son when Edith visited him with Alfred; p. 160, “his bureau, his revolving chair and his lamp” were not the only possessions he eventually took to Paris; p. 162, the remark on Meredith and Normandy is gratuitous; p. 163, contrary to Mr. Collie’s assertion there is some record of the Gissings’ stay in Switzerland; p. 172, Roberts was definitely not present at Gissing’s death.

If the reader passes on to the notes, the bibliography and the index, he finds that the spelling of R. A. Gettmann has been reformed, also that of the Johns Hopkins Press, that a number of articles are referred to with page numbers but without dates. The entry for Jacob Korg’s important essay in

Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research (ed. Lionel Stevenson), Harvard U. P., 1964, is listed as follows: “George Moore (and) George Gissing’, *Victorian Fiction*, 27, p. 388”; the reference to Arthur C. Young’s articles on *Veranilda* and Gissing’s death are equally meaningless. “An East Coast Picture” should be “An English Coast Picture.” The sources of the quotations are not all given.

The only impression any informed reader will feel after struggling through this second volume of Mr. Collie’s on Gissing is that it is the most misleading and carelessly written so far on the novelist. The list of gross blunders and glaring inaccuracies given above is sufficient in itself to lead to the conclusion that this inglorious production is a sad example of intellectual chaos.

P. Coustillas.

George Gissing, *The Emancipated*, edited and with a new introduction by Pierre Coustillas, Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1977, £6.95.

The Emancipated has always appeared to me the most unjustly neglected of all Gissing’s

-- 36 --

novels. It attracted, when first published, a few favourable reviews, but others deplored its anti-religious bias or repeated the stale accusation that the author was an unrepentant pessimist. The book was clearly not a commercial success. Gissing wrote it after returning from his first visit to Italy, when he was looking back at the first bright vision of that country, full of historical and artistic treasures, and full of an animated and colourful population. From personal experience, I could well imagine his mood at the time, and could follow his characters in their different impressions of the scene and how it affected their lives in the unfolding of a long and intricate story, which can still be read with pleasure. One must naturally think of the plot with due regard to the period, for there are some situations which would seem incredible, or just artificial, to the present-day reader and some characters with mentalities which, in our permissive age, might be regarded as simply obsolete. Yet, with such a change in so many conditions of life during the last eighty odd years, are there not still a number of people who are in need of emancipation – if it be only intellectual?

In his informative introduction to this handsome new edition of the novel, Pierre Coustillas reveals that Gissing’s sister Ellen took offence because one of the book’s heroine, Miriam Baske, appeared to be a caricature of herself. Gissing had little difficulty in dispelling this misunderstanding, and I should be inclined to look upon Miriam as a very likeable character who, after being brought up in the most puritanical and narrow-minded of dissenting families, and after her first impression of Italy as the equivalent of Sodom and Gomorrah, had the courage later to see life more rationally and to allow her own hidden nature to develop so that she became sensitive towards beauty, freedom and truth.

The story has several lines of development. We have young Cecily Doran, a charming girl staying in Naples with her aunt, Mrs. Lessingham, who is all in favour of emancipation for the young. Cecily’s guardian, the painter Mallard, is not much older than herself. He is becoming infatuated with Cecily, but she agrees, with a minimum of reflection, to elope with the irresponsible

-- 37 --

(and impecunious) Reuben Elgar, who is Miriam Baske’s brother. Elgar turns out to be a cad who makes his wife miserable, while Mallard and all others concerned are left with no option but to

wash their hands of the whole affair. This first episode is thus not a very good advertisement for emancipation. Then we have Mrs. Denyer and her three daughters who are staying at the same boarding-house as Cecily's aunt. Their allowance from the father is suddenly cut off owing to his financial ruin, and they are obliged to return to London and rent a house in which they take in lodgers. One of the daughters, Madeline, is half promised to young Clifford Marsh, an art student who is described as a "young man of promise." Miss Barbara Denyer is adored in silence by shy Mr. Musselwhite, but she ignores him: he is too awkward to join in all the chatter at the boarding-house, and nobody seems to want to accompany him on his solitary walks in Naples. Poor Mr. Musselwhite – he is living on a mean allowance from his rich brother and is so self-effacing that he might be described in modern jargon as a "non-person." A sensible couple named Spence are also staying in Naples: both are highly cultured, and it is they who eventually accompany Miriam Baske on visits to famous classical sites and help her to appreciate Paestum and other great relics of the past.

Many of the scenes in this novel, if patently satirical, are enlivened by comic situations and brisk dialogue. We have some valuable clues to Gissing's own feeling toward art. He takes the trouble to examine Michael Angelo's great ceiling in the Vatican mainly for its technical and anecdotal features, but the real magnet which attracted him to Italy was historical and archaeological. He clearly preferred the Roman Forum to Florence's great treasure-house of Renaissance painting, sculpture and architecture. His hero Mallard, like many British artists of the period, had knowledge of impressionism, but he painted rugged northern landscapes which were exhibited at the Royal Academy and usually placed in obscure corners. When his Norwegian canvas is inspected by a lady

-- 38 --

and her young daughter, the latter asks "Where is that, mama?" to which the reply is "Oh! Land's End, or some such place," and turning to another exhibit, the lady exclaims "*Do* just look at that *sweet* little creature playing with the dog! Look at its collar! and that ribbon!" Contrasted with Mallard, we have the "young man of promise" Clifford Marsh, referred to above. He shows his friends a sketch-book containing some "impressionist" landscapes consisting of a few brush strokes in bright colour. Very few of the British tourists in Naples can admire these efforts, and we have from them a series of comic evasions or downright disapproval. It is true that geniuses like Turner could actually evoke a whole atmospheric landscape with just such apparently careless brushwork, but Clifford Marsh was no Turner. Gissing makes him finally join his stepfather's firm. He is seen later as a flourishing businessman beginning to develop a paunch: long since has he neglected Madeline Denyer, who is dying of a spinal complaint brought on by an accident.

The neglected Mr. Musselwhite calls on the Denyers in London and informs them that his brother has died and that his nephew, who has inherited the family's fortunes, is far more generous and has increased his uncle's allowance threefold. Moreover, the nephew has no children, and our Mr. Musselwhite becomes automatically the heir to the baronetcy. Why should we be astonished that henceforth Miss Barbara treats her faithful admirer with more warmth and that her mother approves the match?

An amusing and lifelike character is Mr. Bradshaw, a rough Northern businessman. He has had a summary education, but he is determined, while in Italy, to find out why its famous monuments are so admirable. He turns up with a Murray's Guide, and a friend had advised him to take also a "Classical dictionary." After a brief study of the latter, he asks Spence "Do you mean to tell me that that's the kind of stuff boys are set to learn at school?" When Spence confirms this, Bradshaw exclaims "No wonder the colleges turn out such a lot of young blackguards." Spence agrees but

adds: "It has always been one of the most laughable inconsistencies in English morality. Anything you could find in the Dictionary is milk for babes compared with several Greek plays that have to be read for examinations."

Towards the end of the story, we find Cecily in great distress, Reuben still incorrigible, and Miriam Baske in London with the Spences. Mallard tries to help Cecily but discovers that his movements are being spied on by Miriam. He then recalls certain incidents in Naples which suggest that Miriam's feelings towards him were ill concealed behind her apparently frigid demeanour. He is more flattered than indignant at this discovery, and she finally falls into his arms in a scene which makes very good comedy. Perhaps it was not the excitement at seeing historical ruins and broken columns which converted her to such sensitivity, or, what a bold American reviewer later terms, sensuality.

I have written possibly too much about the humorous note in this absorbing novel, but may it come as a relief to its more tragic moments. One contemporary critic complained that, among those characters posing as emancipated there was "no common ground of action furnished by opinions concerning the Church and the Bible," because some acted unwisely and one other at least was a blackguard. Surely, however, Gissing's object was to show the different effects of emancipation on a variety of characters, and his novel was not in any sense an anti-clerical diatribe. Another critic laid it down that "novels, no less than poems, should obey the Horatian mandate to be 'sweet.'" Finally, there is the assertion that "novel readers in general are not likely to relish the substitution of mental analysis and reveries for plot and incidents." At first sight this prophecy may appear simply laughable, say to admirers of Joyce and Beckett, but is it not too terribly true for the present flood of detective, espionage and science fiction and for our ever flourishing romantic "thrillers"?

C. S. Collinson.

Notes and News

Largely because it is a set book for two competitive examinations in France, *New Grub Street* has been reprinted twice this year in the Penguin Library edition. The French translation, *La Nouvelle Bohème*, has also been reprinted.

Wulfhard Heinrichs, of Hanover, Western Germany reports that he has discovered a reprint of the well-known story "A Charming Family," in *A Seven Seas Sampler: A Collection of Short Stories by nineteenth-century British authors*, edited by Margaret Stewart, Berlin (GDR): Seven Seas Publishers, 1961, pp. 208-230. Another volume of interest is *Arthur Morrison und die Cockney School: Slum und Proletariat in der englischen Literatur von 1890-1900*, Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1978. Wulfhard Heinrichs also mentions a German article which the *Newsletter* failed to record when it appeared ten years ago: "Notes on the Evolution of the Bildungsroman in England," by Nina Diakonova, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, XVI (1968, no. 4), pp. 341-51.

Gissing's short story "Spellbound" is being included in the new edition of *The Literature of England*, a high school textbook published by Scott Foresman & Co., of Glenview, Illinois.

The American publishers Norwood Editions have reissued some old studies of Gissing, the

volumes by Ruth Capers McKay and Samuel Vogt Gapp as well as John D. Gordan's Catalogue of the 1954 New York exhibition.

The Northeast Victorian Studies Association announces a conference on "Victorian Mythologies," 20-22 April, 1979 at the University of Rhode Island. For programme information address Catherine Stevenson, Dept. of English, University of Hartford, West Hartford, Conn. 06117.

* * * * *

-- 41 --

Recent Publications

Volumes

- Jacob and Cynthia Korg (eds), *George Gissing on Fiction*, London: Enitharmon Press, 1978, pp. 119, £4.20. Brown cloth, yellow dust-jacket. This book includes "The Coming of the Preacher," and the College essay "The English Novel of the Eighteenth Century," as well as a number of shorter writings.
- Pierre Coustillas (ed.), *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978, pp. vii+617, £28.00. Blue cloth, pictorial dust-jacket, with a very uncommon portrait of Gissing (1895); and another portrait (1888), as a frontispiece. Contents: Introduction (pp. 1-14); Gissing's Diary; Notes; Who's Who in the diary; Index of Gissing's Writings; Index of Persons.

Articles, reviews, etc.

- Richard J. Dunn (ed.), *The English Novel: Twentieth Century Criticism*, vol. 1, Defoe through Hardy, Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1976. This is a bibliography of books and articles on a selection of novelists. The Gissing section lists material on *Born in Exile*, *Demos*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, general studies and bibliography.
- Frank Wells, *H. G. Wells: A Pictorial Biography*, with an Introduction by Frank Swinnerton, Jupiter Books, 1977. Contains a few references to Gissing and a photograph of him which is slightly different from that in *Experiment in Autobiography*; also a portrait of Mrs. Popham, Wells's friend, with whom Gissing corresponded in 1901.

-- 42 --

- Carlo Pagetti, *La Nuova Battaglia dei Libri* (The New Battle of Books: The Debate on the Novel in England at the end of the 19th century), Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1977. Ch. VI deals with Gissing and the contradictions of the committed writer (pp. 217-41). The book contains many other passages on and allusions to Gissing.
- James Redmond et al. (eds.), *The Year's Work in English Studies*, vol. 56 (1975), London: John Murray, 1977. Gissing appears under "Nineteenth Century Prose Fiction."

- Peter Keating, "English Fiction," *British Book News*, May 1978, p. 415 (review of *The Whirlpool*) and July 1978, p. 657 (review of *The Emancipated*).
- Sylvère Monod, "Comptes Rendus," *Etudes Anglaises*, April-June 1978, pp. 235-37. Review of *Our Friend the Charlatan*.
- Bridget O'Tootle, "Daring to be Equal," *Times Literary Supplement*, June 9, 1978, p. 644. Review of Lloyd Fernando's 'New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel, with passages on Gissing.
- Anon., "A Literary Selection," *The Free Press* (Pontypool, Monmouthshire), June 16, 1978. Review of *The Emancipated*.
- Anon., "Recensioni e segnalazioni." *Tuttoscuola*, June 21-July 5, 1978, nos. 58-59, p. 48. Review of *Gissing: The Salt of the Earth*, ed. Francesco Badolato.
- Anon., *Choice*, June 1978, p. 543. Review of Michael Collie's *George Gissing: A Biography*.
- Pierre Coustillas, "Replies: Periodicals of the 1890's," *Notes and Queries*, June 1978, p. 244.
- Gabriele Armandi, "Nel 75° Anniversario della Morte: Gissing in Calabria," *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 5, 1978, p. 7.
- 43 --
- Richard M. Dorson, "The Founders of British Folklore," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 14, 1978, pp. 786-87. Contains two paragraphs on Clodd and Gissing.
- Jacob Korg, "George Gissing," in *Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research*, ed. George H. Ford, New York: The Modern Language Association, 1978. An important survey of Gissing scholarship from 1962 to about 1975.
- William Haley, *Books and Bookmen*, July 1978, pp. 61-62. Review of *The Whirlpool*.
- Anon., "Historic House Rescue Bid," *Yorkshire Evening Post*, September 27, 1978, p. 1.
- Kate Taylor, "Trust to Preserve Home of Talented City Family," *Wakefield Express*, September 29, 1978, p. 4. With a photograph of nos. 2-4 Thompson's Yard and a portrait of Gissing in 1895. Also a shorter article on p. 3, "Plan to repair Gissing home."