

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 XVIII, Number 1

January, 1982



Who are all these good-looking and happy people? The best-dressed group of 1981? No, they are participants at the Gissing Symposium held at Wakefield last September. STANDING (left to right): John Halperin, Gillian Tindall, John Goodchild, Peter Keating, C. J. Francis, Frank Woodman, Mr. Bird, Jacob Korg, Malcolm Allen, Pierre Coustillas, Michel Ballard, Ros Stinton, David Dowling, David Grylls, Patrick Parrinder, Douglas Hallam, Kate Taylor, Terry Wright, Francesco Badolato, John Harrison, Rick Allen, Clifford Brook. SITTING (left to right): Anne Peel, Elizabeth Foster, Cynthia Korg, Chris Kohler, Kelsey Thornton, Tricia Grylls, Maria Chialant, Mabel Ferrett, M. Clarke, P. Clarke.

The *National Weekly*:
A Lost Source of Unknown Gissing Fiction

Robert L. Selig
Purdue University Calumet

Undiscovered Gissing fiction most certainly awaits whoever can find an 1877 file of the *National Weekly*. This highly ephemeral Chicago publication at times carried the alternate titles of *Carl Pretzel's Weekly* or *Carl Pretzel's Illustrated Weekly*. The only library known to possess any holdings of it, the library of the Chicago Historical Society, has one issue apiece from 1875, 1876, 1878, and 1880 but none from the year when Gissing lived in that Midwestern American city. His only extant story from the *National Weekly* – “A Terrible Mistake” (5 May 1877, p. 10) – survives in a page of the paper kept by Gissing himself. In *Notes and Queries* of October 7, 1933, the bookseller M. C. Richter first reported this story's existence, and Yale's Beinecke Library now owns Gissing's personal copy.

In 1979 Pierre Coustillas and I had our interest attracted to the *National Weekly* by an entry in Gissing's *Commonplace Book*:

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, 59110-La Madeleine, France,
and all other correspondence to C. C. KOHLER,
12, Horsham Road, Dorking, Surrey RH4 2JL, England.

Subscriptions:

Private Subscribers: £3.00 per annum
Libraries: £5.00 per annum

There has come into my mind an odd incident in my literary experience in America. I wrote some stories for a man who combined the keeping of a dry-goods store with the editing of a weekly paper – and had always, by the bye, to wait about in the shop and dun him for payment due. I told him one day that I had finished a long story for serial publication, and asked him if he would have it. One of his chief inquiries was ‘Do you tell the *ends* of all characters?’ An odd requirement with him, as I saw, a *sine qua non*.¹

Because we knew that a story apiece had already turned up in Chicago's *National Weekly* (“A Terrible Mistake,” 5 May 1877) and Chicago's weekly *Alliance* (“The Artist's Child,” 30 June 1877), Gissing's remarks about “a weekly paper” transferred our attention from the city's big

dailies to these two obscure periodicals. We concluded from his use of the word “always” that he had certainly published more than a single story and indeed at least three in either the one or the other little paper. Although we failed to locate the *National Weekly* for 1877, we did find the *Alliance* for that same period, and we discovered in separate issues two unknown Gissing stories: “A Mother’s Hope” (12 May 1877) and “A Test of Honor” (2 June, 1877).² As a result, we theorized that the *Alliance* was, in fact, the unnamed paper alluded to in the *Commonplace Book* entry. The possibility remained, however, that our discovery of the two new *Alliance* stories had sprung from scholarly good luck and that the entry had referred instead to the more obscure publication – the *National Weekly*. In that case, further unknown Gissing fiction still awaited whoever could find that elusive paper.

A few weeks later in 1979, I tried to resolve the question once and for all by attempting to establish which of the two Chicago weeklies had an editor who managed a “dry-goods store” – the

-- 4 --

tight-fisted man amusingly described in Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*. I knew that this account could not possibly fit the *Alliance*’s chief editor, the Reverend David Swing (1830-1894), who combined a career as a Chicago clergyman with his essentially honorific position as the paper’s main editorial writer of – editorials taken, in fact, from his own weekly sermons. Admittedly, Swing had passed through a wide range of professional experiences: Professor of Latin and Greek at Miami University of Ohio; preacher at Chicago’s Westminster Presbyterian Church, where he defended himself successfully in a lurid heresy trial for alleged Unitarian tendencies; and, from 1875 on, minister of Chicago’s well-known Central Church. Yet he had certainly never kept any kind of shop.³ But the *Alliance* did list on its masthead a managing editor named H. L. Ensign. I resolved to find out if that man had been, indeed, Gissing’s dry-goods proprietor and stingy part-time editor. At the Chicago Historical Society, I consulted an annual business register appearing throughout the 1870s and ’80’s – *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago*. Although it did cite one Hermon L. Ensign as the paper’s business manager, neither he nor his working address appeared within the specialized listing of dry-goods stores. No such entry appeared, in fact, from 1874 to 1884. Next I investigated the *National Weekly*’s chief editor, C[harles] H[enry] Harris (alias “Carl Pretzel”) (1841-1892), and found him duly recorded in the *Lakeside Directory* as his newspaper’s editor. But neither Harris nor his business address appeared within the dry-goods listings of the entire decade. At this point, my research seemed to have reached a dead end.

A few weeks ago, I resumed my investigation of Chicago’s *Lakeside* annuals. Now, within the general section, I looked under the titles of the weeklies themselves, as well as under the names of

-- 5 --

the editors and managers. Within one volume and one volume alone – the 1877-78 *Annual*, roughly coinciding to Gissing’s Chicago stay – I found an unfamiliar listing beneath the *National Weekly*: J. M. Hill, “proprietor.” Apparently this proprietor lasted only about a year and then disappeared from the scene. In the personal name section, I found two J. M. Hills – James M. Hill, both of them. The *Directory* described the first one as a “lawyer,” so that he did not at all fit Gissing’s account. But the second man did: James M. Hill, “manager,” though the listing failed to say just what he managed. Yet it gave a key piece of information about him, his business address as manager – 141 Clark. My remaining task seemed simple enough; if I could find a Chicago dry-goods store under that same address, I would then have proved that James M. Hill was the part-time newspaper man and dry-goods keeper whom Gissing “had always” had to “dun” for his “due” writer’s payments. I

would have established, beyond any doubt, that Gissing had published more than his single known story in the pages of the *National Weekly*.

In the actual event, however, the final stage of the search involved the greatest difficulty. Each issue of *The Lakeside Annual Directory* listed many dry-goods stores, and, although I combed through all of them from 1874 to 1884, I could not find one that matched Hill's business address – 141 Clark. Blocked in this direction, I decided to follow another line of reasoning.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *dry goods* as “a name (chiefly in the U. S.) for the class of merchandise comprising textile fabrics and related things: articles of drapery, mercery, and haberdashery (as opposed to groceries).” After an unsuccessful search under “drapery,” “mercery,” “haberdashery,” and assorted American synonyms, I conjectured that Gissing, as an Englishman in Chicago, might have had a vague notion of just what *dry goods* meant and might perhaps have used

-- 6 --

the term loosely. I began to think of broadly related headings and to investigate them each. Finally, in *The Lakeside Annual Directory* of 1876-77, I found the following entry under “Clothing (retail)”: “Boston Square Dealing Clothing House, 141 Clark.” And in the same volume's personal names section, I found confirming evidence: a listing for James M. Hill as “salesman Clark corner Madison.” In the 1877-78 edition, I had already found him in the higher position of “manager.” Clearly, by the time of Gissing's stay in Chicago, Hill had become manager of the “clothing house” at 141 Clark. He was, indeed, the “dry-goods” man and part-time newspaper editor described in the *Commonplace Book*. I could now conclude that Gissing had published at least two unknown short stories in Chicago's *National Weekly* and perhaps even a serialized longer piece of fiction.

The problem remains, however, of finding the vanished issues from 1877 of this elusive and ephemeral little paper. A few known details will suggest the difficulty. The *National Weekly* or *Carl Pretzel's Weekly* or *Carl Pretzel's Illustrated Weekly* first came out in 1874, only three years before Gissing arrived in Chicago, and the paper may not have lasted beyond 1880. It and its creator, publisher, and editor – Charles Henry Harris – survive as little more than footnotes in the history of Chicago journalism. An obituary in the *Tribune* lists Harris's less-than-world-shaking achievements; a Chicago printer and publisher for thirty years; one of the publishers, briefly during 1873, of the *Chicago Daily News*; a Republican politician but not an officeholder; a thirty-second, though not a thirty-third, degree Mason.⁵

In the few extant issues of his own weekly paper, Harris bills himself as “‘Carl Pretzel,’ for several years celebrated as a grotesque German writer and humorist...”⁶ “Grotesque German” here refers to burlesque German-American – a mock patois later used by Rudolph Dirks for his well-known comic strip the *Katzen jammer Kids* in William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*

-- 7 --

(1897 and after). From 1872 to at least 1873, Harris had already used this broadly humorous dialect in *Carl Pretzel's Magazine Pook* [*sic*], published in New York City but printed in Chicago.

In *Carl Pretzel's Illustrated Weekly* itself, Harris serves up a parody of Edgar Allan Poe's “The Raven” in heavy-handed German-American: “Der Raven (Ous Fly [Housefly])” (III, 6 July 1878, 7). In the single extant issue of 1880, the weekly has shifted its emphasis from humor to politics, but even here a certain clownishness remains, as Harris publicizes his own campaign to win the nomination of the Republican Party for Coroner of Cook County. He quotes a joking endorsement of himself from the Harvard, Illinois, *Independent*: “He would make any common corpse laugh to life. Elect the old boy.”⁷

Most issues of *Carl Pretzel's* or the *National Weekly* seem far more likely to have ended up in a nineteenth-century wastebasket than in permanent literary holdings. Although the few extant issues do contain short stories and even a serialized novel or novella, the paper consists mainly of scrappy anecdotes, crude German-American jokes, and tasteless weekly features. Indeed, the "Prospectus" in 1876 promises a directory for the sex-starved and the lovelorn:

. . . New details will be continually introduced. One of these will be the publication of lists giving the names of the MAIDS and BACHELORS in every *Western city* and town. Correspondence is now solicited on this very subject. Send on, everybody, a list from your place, giving the number and residence of all the unmarried demoiselles and messieurs, and aid the *Illustrated Weekly* in its grand work of making these forlorn maids and bachelors better acquainted with each other.⁸

-- 8 --

Such an ephemeral little paper may well have survived only in the four scattered numbers given to the Chicago Historical Society by a now-vanished citizen and a now-vanished printing house. If other issues still do exist, they may conceivably belong to some private collector with a taste for faded oddities or to some American library that has never bothered to catalogue these apparently trivial items. But one fact stands out clearly; in the *National Weekly's* Spring or perhaps Summer issues for 1877, George Gissing published at least two unknown works of fiction – works lost and buried now for more than a century.

¹*George Gissing's Commonplace Book: A Manuscript in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library*, ed. Jacob Korg (New York, New York Public Library, 1962), p. 52.

²Pierre Coustillas and Robert L. Selig, "Unknown Gissing Stories from Chicago," *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 12 December 1980, pp. 1417-18.

³For a detailed account of Swing's various careers, see Joseph Fort Newton, *David Swing Poet-Preacher* (Chicago: Unity Publishing, Abraham Lincoln Centre, 1909).

⁴"Clothing (retail)," *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago: Embracing a Complete General and Business Directory*, comp. Thomas Hutchinson (Chicago: Donnelley, Lloyd, 1876-77), p. 1141.

⁵"Funeral of Charles Henry Harris," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 May 1892, p. 6.

⁶"1876 Prospectus," *Carl Pretzel's Illustrated Weekly*, II (5 February 1876), p. 10.

-- 9 --

⁷*National Weekly: Illustrated Political Journal*, VII (11 September 1880), p. 6.

⁸*Carl Pretzel's Illustrated Weekly*, II (5 February 1876), p. 10.

Gissing's Friendship with H.G. Wells

John R. Harrison
Oxford

In many ways, it was the start of a most curious and unlikely friendship when George Gissing and H. G. Wells first met on 20 November 1896 at a dinner organised by the Omar Khayyám Club;¹ yet these two quite different sorts of men and authors had much in common. Both Gissing and Wells came from the lower middle class: Gissing's father owned a moderately successful chemist's shop in Wakefield, Yorkshire, and Wells's father half-heartedly kept a small china shop in Bromley, Kent. Both had been voracious readers as children and eager students, and had won scholarships to their respective universities – in 1872, Gissing went to Owens College (now Manchester University), while, in 1884 (the year in which Gissing's second novel, *The Unclassed*, was published), Wells began his studies at the Normal School of Science in South Kensington. Like Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile*, they both distinguished themselves academically, outstripping “competitors who had every advantage of circumstance.”² Yet both were eventually forced to leave without a degree:³ whilst Wells simply failed to concentrate on his studies largely because of his expanding literary interests, Gissing's tragic involvement with a young prostitute resulted in his expulsion from college and a period of one month in prison with hard labour. Both had attempted to

-- 10 --

subsidize their efforts to write through teaching; Gissing as a private tutor in London during the late 1870's and early 1880's, and Wells in a small academy in North Wales in 1887, and in two schools in London between 1889 and 1893. Both men were avowed atheists, and were, or had once been, declared socialists. Although his attitudes quickly changed during the early 1880's, Gissing had, like his character, Helen Norman, in *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), been converted to Positivism, or the “religion of humanity,” while Wells, as a student at South Kensington, wore a red tie to symbolize his faith in socialism. Both men had experienced poverty and hardship: Gissing's daily menu during his early years in London consisted of bread and dripping, and “a bowl of soup made from a penny packet... Occasionally, a plate of beef at a cab-man's shelter.”⁴ As a student at South Kensington and later as a struggling writer and teacher, Wells was often forced “to sustain himself on one meal a day, generally a piece of fish or a few sausages fried over an open gas jet in a little shop ... which catered for the homeless and the nearly penniless.”⁵ Both had lived in garrets in the most depressed sections of London, and had escaped to the Reading Room of the British Museum in order to work in warmth and comfort. Finally, both had experienced unhappy marriages, as well as married for a second time (though with very different consequences).

Although they talked only briefly at the Omar dinner, Wells seems to have been immediately attracted to “Gissing's good looks and air of distinction,”⁶ though it is unlikely that Lovat Dickson is correct in his view that Wells was drawn to Gissing's “romantic appearance” by “what he would certainly have known of Gissing's dramatic history as a lover.”⁷ What Wells did learn of Gissing's past, which was always kept a fairly well-guarded secret while the latter was alive, he no doubt learned only *after* they had become close friends. Furthermore, in a letter to Edmund Gosse shortly

--11 --

after Gissing's death, Wells makes it clear that he did not see in Gissing's life "A story of magnificent and artistic vice."⁸ Wells was, however, acquainted with Gissing's work (he had, in fact, reviewed three of Gissing's novels for the *Saturday Review*),⁹ and was no doubt anxious to meet this older and more established author, who was widely respected, yet read by few.¹⁰ Gissing was equally attracted to Wells, and had already shown an interest in his work. In a letter to Henry Hick on November 29, 1895, Gissing discusses *The Time Machine* (1894-5)¹¹; and, in his diary, he noted on February 5, 1896: "Read a volume of short stories by H. G. Wells."¹² Gissing was as much drawn to Wells by the aura of success that was beginning to accumulate about the young author as he was by Wells's vivacious personality and sense of humour.¹³ Of their first encounter Gissing noted in his diary:

Wells amused me by rushing up, after dinner, introducing himself hurriedly, (only a minute, as he must go), and telling me that, when he first read *New Grub Street*, he himself was living in Mornington Road, poor and ill, and with a wife named Amy!¹⁴ Queer coincidence... I rather liked Wells's wild face and naive manner. As usual, not at all the man I had expected.¹⁵

When, shortly after the Omar dinner, Gissing received a most "amusing," "enspiriting," and "alluring invitation" to visit Wells at his home in Worcester Park, Gissing noted in his diary that Wells "seems the right kind of man."¹⁶ This favourable impression was soon confirmed when Gissing made his first visit on December 16, 1896: "Liked the fellow much. He tells me he began life by two years' apprenticeship to drapering. Astonishing, his self-education. Great talent."¹⁷ It

-- 12 --

was, in fact, as much their common experience with poverty as it was their admiration for each other's work that initially drew the two authors together. Gissing saw Wells as being near to "his ideal of the brotherly man of letters"¹⁸ because, like Gissing himself, Wells was a self-made man; he had not entered the literary profession as one of those "carpet-authors," who simply wrote at leisure with complete "parental approval and ready avuncular support."¹⁹ Gissing's reply to Wells's first letter, in which he (Gissing) described how his health "was ruined in garrets and basements, some fifteen to twenty years ago"²⁰ no doubt reminded Wells of *New Grub Street* and thus his own struggles against hunger, poverty and illness.²¹ Furthermore, Gissing's allusion, in the same letter, to his unhappy marriage to Edith Underwood (his second wife),²² perhaps made Wells recall his unhappy first marriage, and consequently all the more eager to see Gissing and have a "real interminable gossip."²³ Indeed, Wells replied by saying: "I want to see you now much more than I did. ... I've a sort of feeling that this should have happened before."²⁴

There is no evidence to suggest that Gissing ever resented Wells's success or his work as a journalist; for Gissing clearly recognized that Wells possessed that multilevel creativity denied to Jasper Milvain. Indeed, Gissing frequently marvelled at Wells's "variousness" – his ability to write interesting articles and reviews while, at the same time, producing such diverse books as *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, which was considered too macabre by most reviewers, and the whimsical and humorous *Wheels of Chance*. After reading an article by Wells in the *Fortnightly Review*, Gissing wrote to Henry Hick that it only "increased my wonder at the natural powers of the man..."²⁵ Gissing admired the originality and "astounding ingenuity" of Wells's stories and scientific romances. As he wrote to Wells about *The Invisible Man* (1897): "You owe allegiance to no man." Most of all, Gissing admired the power of Wells's descriptive writing – his ability to lift the

reader's imagination to a level where he not only surrenders disbelief, but actually wills belief, "resulting in a verisimilitude which no one can rival." In what proved to be his last letter to Wells, Gissing wrote: "I *like* your vivid presentment of the commonplace and its blending with the marvellous; I *like* it as I like no fiction of to-day."²⁷ Indeed, Gissing once told Wells that he was so "delighted" with *The War of the Worlds* (1898) that he "devoured it at a sitting."²⁸ Furthermore, Gissing undoubtedly saw expressed, in many of Wells's science romances, his own doubts about the future of mankind and about the benefits of science for a humanity which did not appear prepared for them. In a letter to Wells, Gissing seems to echo the epilogue to *The Time Machine*²⁹ when he writes: "... come what may, folly and misery are sure to be the prevalent features of life..."³⁰ Gissing also shared Wells's concern, as expressed in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Invisible Man*, that science, if not properly controlled or understood, might mean the reverse of progress:

I hate and fear "science" because of my conviction that, for a long time to come if not for ever, it will be the remorseless enemy of mankind. ... I see it bringing a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance "the thousand wars of old," and, as likely as not, will whelm all the laborious advances of mankind in blood-drenched chaos.³¹

Gissing seems to have enjoyed sharing vicariously in Wells's success – a success which had persistently avoided Gissing himself: "...oddly as it may sound," Gissing once told Wells, "I have a real delight in the achievements and the success of those whom I personally like."³² While in Rome in December 1897, Gissing noticed that *The War of the Worlds*³³ had been favourably reviewed in a local newspaper, and immediately wrote to Wells: "In the joy of my heart I drank three great bottles

of wine, and was carried home in a sad state – seriously it is a great thing to be written and read of in Rome."³⁴ When, a few months earlier, there had been a favourable review of *The Plattner Story and Others* in the *Daily Chronicle*, Gissing wrote to Wells: "Ah, but you are an enviable man! With your gusto for work, your happiness, your capabilities, what may you not do!" While Gissing seemed to revel in his friend's continued success, Wells, for his part, greatly valued the support and admiration of an older and more established author. Of course, Wells himself was prepared to help and encourage Gissing in any way that he could, for he believed that all Gissing required was to be put into "such circumstances as would at last give his very fine brain a fair chance to do good work."³⁶

Although Gissing refused to accept any financial assistance from Wells,³⁷ he gratefully acknowledged an article he (Wells) wrote entitled, "The Novels of Mr. George Gissing," for the *Contemporary Review* in August 1897. However, while Gissing told Wells that his article was "admirably written" and displayed a considerable critical ability, Gissing found some of Wells's remarks about his work distressing, if not offensive, though he did not say so directly: "... I read with peculiar interest," Gissing wrote, "and at times with peculiar feeling."³⁸ Like many contemporary critics, Wells failed to perceive that Harvey Rolfe's endorsement of Kipling's view of existence in the final chapter of *The Whirlpool* was meant to be taken as ironic.³⁹ As Gissing tactfully explained to Wells:

In that last talk with Morton, I never meant to suggest that Rolfe tended to the “Barrack-room” view of life. In all he says, he is simply expressing his hopeless recognition of facts which fill him with disgust. ... He talks with a little throwing-up of the arm, and in a voice of quiet sarcasm.⁴⁰

Gissing also objected to Wells’s assertion that *The Whirlpool* amounted “very nearly to a flat

-- 15 --

contradiction of the ideals” expressed in *The Emancipated* when, in fact, as Gissing pointed out, “the ideals of one book are precisely those of the other.” But perhaps what wounded Gissing most deeply was Wells’s seemingly indirect attack on Gissing himself and his personal values when he (Wells) asserted that Harvey Rolfe’s character reflects a “change that is sweeping over the minds of thousands of educated men. It is the discovery of the insufficiency of the cultivated life and its necessary insincerities...” Yet, far from discovering the “insufficiency of the cultivated life,” Rolfe, in fact, achieves, at the conclusion of the novel, the Rycroftian ideal of a “refined withdrawal from the tumult and struggle for existence.” As Gissing himself explained to Wells: “I have a conviction that all I love and believe in is going to the devil; at the same time, I try and watch with interest this process of destruction, admiring any bit of sapper-work that is well done.” Wells, who was already beginning to show signs of what Arnold Bennett later facetiously referred to as an “incurable and amazing modesty,”⁴¹ replied by saying: “I think I see your point on Rolfe and Morton – but I always give myself the benefit of a delay before I admit an error.” Such serious misinterpretations of his work no doubt disturbed Gissing and made him realize that Wells misunderstood him in many ways. Nevertheless, Gissing accepted Wells’s criticism graciously and told him that he had “spoken as it behoved you to do.” “I have,” Gissing added, “always been dreadfully conscious of the immaturity discoverable in all my work; the worst of it is, I cannot hope with you that I shall make much more progress.⁴² I lack the vital energy that would justify such a hope; what I have is frittered away in mean and sordid cares.” Gissing was becoming increasingly irritated by his wife’s domestic failings and foul temper; in fact, he was to leave her shortly after he wrote this letter. Furthermore, Gissing was faced with both serious financial difficulties and very poor health; and, as a result, periods of “far too intensive literary activity would alternate with phases of exhaustion.”⁴³ Indeed, when Wells

-- 16 --

wrote that “the *genre* of Gissing’s novels is nervous exhaustion,”⁴⁴ he was indirectly referring not just to the books themselves, but to the circumstances under which they were written.

Royal Gettmann attempts to justify Wells’s apparent coldness, and even hostility, towards Gissing in his *Experiment in Autobiography*⁴⁵ by claiming that Wells was simply “weary of the Gissing problem,” for his attempt “to enhance Gissing’s reputation and his prolonged efforts to help Gissing’s brother [Algernon], sons, and widow [Gabrielle Fleury – his common-law wife], had met with petty objections and interference.”⁴⁶ While this might help to explain (though hardly justify) the reason why Wells expressed a similarly cold and distant attitude in what was intended to be his preface to Gissing’s unfinished romance, *Veranilda*,⁴⁷ it does not adequately explain why Wells, when he came to write his autobiography some thirty years after Gissing’s death, should have continued to view both Gissing’s life and work so unsympathetically. I would suggest that part of the reason for Wells’s underlying hostility towards Gissing – both *before* and after the latter’s death – was because Wells saw in him the personification of the rigid social attitudes and rules of behaviour which had characterized the Victorian era and which Wells himself had personally

rebelled against. The two authors were, of course, of different generations: while Gissing, in January 1901, confessed to feeling “a little gloom over the cheerless close of the Victorian reign,”⁴⁸ Wells once remarked: “Queen Victoria was like a great paper-weight that for half a century sat upon men’s minds and when she was removed their ideas began to blow about all over the place haphazardly.”⁴⁹ Partly because of his upbringing and partly because of his education, Gissing always remained fastidious both in his speech and in his personal demeanour; he “was very English,” Austin Harrison recalled.⁵⁰ Indeed, Wells himself marvelled at how successfully Gissing managed to lead a “double life” during the early eighties – how he (Gissing) would leave the

-- 17 --

cramped misery of his single room, where Nell (Gissing’s first wife) remained sick and drunken, in order to enter – both as tutor and guest – “spheres in which bishops’ wives are not unknown.” As Wells pointed out, the contrast between these two existences often led to amusing situations: “... he [Gissing] has described to the present writer a conversation upon the decay of butlers with one of these ladies. She asked him how *he* managed. But, indeed, he dispensed with a butler’s attentions. It will be incredible to every level-minded reader, but, as a matter of fact, he maintained this fair appearance. ...”⁵¹ Wells would seem to have forgotten this incident when he later claimed that Gissing had absolutely no “*persona* for miscellaneous use.”⁵² Because Gissing, despite his relatively impoverished circumstances, was always able to maintain the air and manner of an English gentleman, Wells, who either “could not, or would not, act the part,”⁵³ seems to have approached Gissing, as he did Henry James, with a certain feeling of resentment towards his “dignity, finish, and perfection.”⁵⁴ Perhaps Gissing himself was alluding to this when he wrote of his friendship with Wells: “... I notice, indeed, that he is just a little too deferential at moments.”⁵⁵

Wells’s attitude towards Gissing was also largely influenced by the very considerable differences in their formal education. While Wells, through studying science first at the Midhurst Grammar School and then at South Kensington (“the most modern and advanced of colleges then in existence”)⁵⁶ was trained to look to the future, Gissing, due to his passionate interest in Latin and classical literature (which had been instilled in him during his early days at Harrison’s Back Lane School in Wakefield)⁵⁷ pursued an education in the “ancient tradition”; he looked not to the future, but to the literary man’s traditional retreat – the past. At the age of thirteen, shortly after his father’s death, Gissing was sent, with the help of some of the Wakefield townspeople, to Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge, Cheshire. Lindow Grove appears to have been, at least in terms of the

-- 18 --

period, a very good institution, with “an honourable record of distinctions won by its pupils.”⁵⁸ Its headmaster, James Wood, was a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher, and a great admirer of Dr. Arnold of Rugby. Wood emulated the best public schools by emphasising the importance of both mathematics and languages, particularly Latin. As an old master of the school remarked in 1898: “The qualities of mind that go to make a capable Latin Scholar are the very qualities that ensure success in any career of life.”⁵⁹ Although he was particularly drawn to Latin, English, and French, Gissing studied all subjects with an equal zeal. “He was speedily the prodigy of the school,” Wells remarked, “a lonely prodigy, living overmuch among books...”⁶⁰

The portrait Wells came to paint of Gissing was that of the archetypal academic, of one who remained totally out of touch with everyday life: “... he, who was so copiously intelligent in the things of the study, misunderstood, blundered, was nervously diffident, and wilful and spasmodic in common affairs, in employment and buying and selling, and the normal conflicts of intercourse.”⁶¹

While this may be partly true of Gissing, it, in fact, more aptly applies to Wells himself; for it was Wells, not Gissing, who was often “wilful and spasmodic” in “the normal conflicts of intercourse.” Furthermore, Wells was undoubtedly aware that Gissing was far from incompetent when it came to common everyday affairs; for their correspondence shows that it was Gissing who made all of the necessary arrangements for the Wellses’ trip to Rome in 1898. It is also curious that Wells should have expressed such an unsympathetic attitude towards Gissing’s studious habits when he too, at the Midhurst Grammar School, had devoted almost every moment of the day to his studies, even to the point of refusing “to read novels or play games.”⁶² Yet, as Wells himself points out, the carefully worked out plan that adorned his bedroom wall for the purpose of making the utmost use of his time, which he called his “Schema” and later included in *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900),

-- 19 --

was not evidence of “an acute and concentrated mind”, but of “a discursive and inattentive brain.”⁶³ It is quite possible, therefore, that Wells harboured a certain feeling of resentment towards Gissing, the true scholar, whose “immoral behaviour,” rather than simply a lack of concentration, at Owens College had cut him off from “that clear course to a learned distinction which his quality and inclination alike indicated for him.”⁶⁴ Indeed, Wells, despite having later received a B. Sc. degree, seems to have felt pangs of remorse about his failure at South Kensington, which, in *Tono-Bungay* (1909), he attempts to justify by saying:

After all, those other fellows who took high places in the College examinations and were the professor’s model boys, haven’t done so amazingly. ... Not one can show things done such as I, following my own interest, have achieved.⁶⁵

However, the fact that George Ponderevo (the hero of the novel) temporarily abandons his science and his ideals to make a cynical fortune in commerce, may suggest that Wells to some extent saw his own failure in scientific studies and his desperate, spectacularly successful, switch to writing in a similar light.⁶⁶

Gillian Tindall writes that “it is a temptation to feel, with Wells, that the classical scholarship of which he [Gissing] was so proud represented a rather sterile nineteenth century tradition. ... and that [Gissing] used it less as an enrichment to his life than, like Ryecroft, as an obscurantist retreat.”⁶⁷ To a certain extent this is undoubtedly true; yet it is curious that such an imaginative individual as Wells should have failed to appreciate Gissing’s desire – especially when depressed by uncongenial circumstances – to seek a refuge in the past⁶⁸ when Wells himself, like his *Time Traveller*, often escaped from the present into the future. Furthermore, until he was almost sixteen, Wells had frequently escaped from his inhibiting environment through reverie: “... I liked

-- 20 --

especially to dream that I was a great military dictator like Cromwell, a great republican like George Washington or like Napoleon in his earlier phases.”⁶⁹ Wells, in fact, never really grew out of these imaginary feelings of grandeur, of seeing himself as a natural leader of men; for, as his prophetic writings show, beneath his impatience with the social ills of modern society and his visions for the improvement of mankind as a whole lay an equally strong desire to dominate the reconstruction himself.

Wells believed that Gissing was “horribly mis-educated” and described the kind of schooling he received as “a vast collection of monumental masonry, a pale cemetery in a twilight, through

which new conceptions hurry apologetically on their way to town finding neither home nor sustenance there.”⁷⁰ Because of his scientific training, Wells was totally unable to comprehend Gissing’s classicism, unlike Morley Roberts, who, having had a classical education himself, was able to write from a much more sympathetic, and perhaps truer, point of view about this aspect of Gissing’s personality. Wells could neither appreciate classical literature nor could he see the necessity of being able to read it in the original (for “translation had now placed all the wisdom of the past at a common man’s disposal, [and] scarcely a field of endeavour remained in which modern work had not long since passed beyond the ancient achievement”).⁷¹ As Gillian Tindall has suggested, Wells quite possibly “resented the way in which Victorian snobbery turned an acquaintance with Ovid into the mark of a gentleman.”⁷² Indeed, this certainly comes through in Wells’s autobiography when he writes: “Gissing was ... unsubtle and secretly haughty ... he hardly troubled to hide from me his opinion that I was absolutely illiterate.”⁷³ (It is worth recalling here what proved to be Wells’s last letter to Henry James: “. . . You may take it that my sparring and punching at you is very much due to the feeling that you were ‘coming over’ me...”)⁷⁴ However, though Gissing was a pedant in some ways, and though he was no doubt amazed by the enormous

-- 21--

gaps in Wells’s education, he appears to have been always tactful with Wells, in fact, Wells himself had come closer to the truth when he wrote in 1904 that Gissing was always “genial, conversational, and well-meaning.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, as Lovat Dickson has suggested, Wells certainly must have enjoyed “drinking in” from Gissing’s cultivated mind “some of the education he [Wells] had missed or had got only from his reading.”⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Wells whose education had left him virtually “vowel-shy in every language,”⁷⁷ undoubtedly found a “secret amusement” in playing upon his philistinism, as in deliberately mispronouncing classical names: “. . . Socrates rhymes with Bates for me,” remarks George Ponderevo in *Tono-Bungay*. “The little splash into Latin made during my days as a chemist washed off nothing of the habit.”⁷⁸ While it is perhaps true that Gissing’s classicism “is somewhat inaccessible to us today,”⁷⁹ it is none the less easy for us to see his point of view when – eager to share the delights of Rome with Wells – he receives a letter from the latter saying:

I’m not coming to Rome a sight-seeing. I don’t care a triturated damn for all the blessed oil paintings in the world, and precious little for the sculpture ...⁸⁰

That Wells was quite incapable of appreciating “art for art’s sake” is made clear in *The New Machiavelli* when Richard Remington (one of Wells’s most autobiographical characters) tells the reader: “Beauty is the salt of life, but I take my beauty as a wild beast gets its salt, as a constituent of the meal...”⁸¹

Gissing’s letters and diary, on the other hand, are peppered with various accounts of his responses to paintings and sculpture – an interest stimulated no doubt by his own fondness for drawing. His early sketches “show remarkable precocity and support the suggestion that Gissing might have made a good career in fine art if he had followed his early preference.”⁸² Indeed, his

-- 22 --

account of his last Italian journey, *By the Ionian Sea* (1901), includes some of his own illustrations. Austin Harrison claimed that “all forms of beauty” affected Gissing with a “keen, almost ecstatic pleasure”: “I have seen him sit, when my mother was playing Chopin or Bach, with tears welling in

his eyes ...”⁸³ Gissing and Wells were, therefore, men of entirely different sensibilities; whilst Gissing could “quite break down” over the death of his favourite cat,⁸⁴ Wells appears to have been incapable of any such emotion. Anthony West (Wells’s illegitimate son by Rebecca West) recalled how, as a young boy, he had once placed a few heads of snapdragon in his treasure box hoping to “find them there in their bright prettiness whenever I wanted to look at them.” But when he discovered them dead and decaying a few days later he “screamed with dismay ... taking refuge from H. G.’s incomprehension under a gate-legged table....”

I remember [my father] lifting the edge of the table-cloth to peer in at me where I crouched, still screaming in grief and fear, and muttering “I just don’t understand you.”⁸⁵

As Pierre Coustillas has pointed out, Wells’s behaviour towards Gissing occasionally showed him to be both impatient and something of a bully – “more than once the older man’s discretion and delicacy had helped to bring to a smooth conclusion a debate hotly started by the younger writer. ... In truth, Gissing had often chosen ... to regard only the better side of his friend’s personality.”⁸⁶ Indeed, that the relations between Gissing and Wells were not always “full of friendly antagonisms” is made clear in a letter Gissing wrote to Wells shortly before he and Jane were to meet Gissing in Rome in March 1898:

It is almost too good to be true ... our having a second spring holiday all together. ... Let us do our best not to quarrel. It would be a hateful thing to have disagreeable memories of Rome, due to such a cause. (p. 92)

-- 23 --

This would seem to suggest that while Gissing may have unintentionally made Wells feel “absolutely illiterate,”⁸⁷ Wells undoubtedly must have let Gissing know that he considered him “horribly mis-educated,” “unscientific and unanalytical.”

That Wells should have maintained that Gissing possessed little, if any, interest in modern science is rather surprising,⁸⁸ especially since Gissing, upon learning that Wells had studied biology under T. H. Huxley, must have undoubtedly told him of his deep and abiding respect for Huxley’s work.⁸⁹ Gissing admired Huxley, as he did Edward Clodd, and, of course, Wells himself, for helping to bridge the gulf between science and literature.⁹⁰ In a letter to Clodd in March 1902, Gissing wrote:

Huxley was a great “cloud-compeller.” He did, to a wonderful extent, let in the light. And let us be grateful that such a man, standing in the name of science, stood no less in that of literature...⁹¹

Gissing no doubt acquired his respect for men who were able to combine an interest in both science and literature from his father, the poet-botanist-chemist. Indeed, Gissing’s diary shows that he shared his father’s interest in natural science, and that he was as impressed with Grant Allen’s ability to name 40,000 plants as he was appalled by Thomas Hardy’s ignorance of the simplest “wayside flowers.”⁹² Throughout the Nineties Gissing dabbled in scientific books, particularly in 1891 when he made himself more familiar with both geology and evolution before writing *Born in Exile*, which, of course, discusses the antagonism between science and religion.⁹³ In 1899, Gissing also wrote a novel, *Among the Prophets*, in which, like Wells in *Love and Mr. Lewisham* a year later,

he satirized the spiritualist craze that existed at the turn of the century. Only the subject of the book is known as Gissing became dissatisfied with it and had the typescript destroyed.⁹⁴

-- 24 --

I would suggest that the primary reason why Wells preferred to view Gissing as a narrow-minded classicist was not because Gissing had absolutely no interest in, or knowledge of, science but because Gissing, as we have already seen, both distrusted and feared modern science, while Wells, on the other hand, gradually came to fear not science itself, but science in the hands of irresponsible persons, which is why, beginning with *Anticipations* (1901), he envisaged a scientific élite which understood the dangers of modern technology yet was capable of mastering them. Science had essentially saved Wells from a career as a draper's assistant and had offered him an opportunity to develop his own individual talents. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should see in science the possible salvation of all mankind. *Anticipations* roughly marked Wells's transition from an explicit pessimism to an overt optimism concerning "the fate of *Homo sapiens*." This shift in attitude can also be found in a lecture Wells gave before the Royal Institution with the significant title, "The Discovery of the Future" – which was published in *Nature* in February 1902. Recalling his old fear that humanity was headed for extinction, Wells remarked:

That of all such nightmares is the most convincing. And yet one doesn't believe it. At least I do not ... [for] I have come to believe in certain other things, in the coherency and purpose in the world and in the greatness of human destiny. Worlds may freeze and suns may perish, but I believe there stirs something within us now that can never die again.⁹⁶

After having received a copy of this lecture, Gissing immediately wrote to Wells praising him for the "eloquence" of this "fine passage"; yet he also admitted that he had failed to

grasp your meaning when you say that "there stirs something within us now that

-- 25 --

can never die again." Of course I put aside the vulgar interpretations of such words ...⁹⁷ Anyhow, your declared belief in the "coherency and purpose" of things is pleasant to me. For I myself cannot doubt for one moment that purpose there *is*. On the other hand, I do doubt whether *we* – in any sense of the pronoun – shall ever be granted an understanding of that purpose.⁹⁸

A week later, Gissing again wrote to Wells telling him that Edmund Gosse had "missed the mark" in what he had said about "The Discovery of the Future."⁹⁹ "Right or wrong as to details," Gissing writes, "you certainly do not lose sight of the human demand for happiness – many people would say you took too much account of it". That Gissing himself believed Wells "took too much account of it" is made clear in a letter to Edward Clodd: "In his lecture to the Royal Institution, [Well] goes, I think, altogether too far, talking about 'eternal' activities of the spirit of man, and defying the threats of the material outlook."¹⁰⁰ Wells undoubtedly realized, and perhaps secretly resented, that Gissing could not share his optimism about the future of mankind (the reader is reminded of Gissing's remarks, after having read *Anticipations*, that he cared very little about the future, for, "come what may, folly and misery are sure to be the prevalent features of life ...") – an optimism

which rested largely on Wells's own success and improving health, of which Gissing himself was not unaware: "This optimism ... well becomes you," Gissing writes, "in the full healthy exercise of your life and your powers." No longer prepared to take the pessimistic view himself, Wells was unwilling to tolerate it in others, as is not only reflected in his recollections of Gissing the man, but also in his treatment of Gissing the author. Indeed, as early as August 1897, Wells had remarked: "People say that much of Mr. Gissing's work is 'depressing,' and to a reader who *accepts* his postulates it is indisputable that it is so."¹⁰¹

-- 26 --

Regardless of how he may have come to regard Gissing after his death, Wells was certainly a sincere and devoted friend during Gissing's lifetime. Indeed, when Wells learned that Gissing was dying in late December 1903, he rushed to his friend's bedside in the south of France despite being unwell himself. Although he left the day before Gissing died,¹⁰² Wells always remembered "that sickroom acutely ... I had never yet seen anyone dying or delirious."¹⁰³ That Gissing's death left a lasting impression upon Wells is made clear in his vivid description of Uncle Ponderevo's death in *Tono-Bungay*.¹⁰⁴ While Gissing's comparatively short appearance in Wells's long life was a relatively minor, yet significant one, the influence of Wells's personality on Gissing's later years was both soothing and humanising. Wells declared that Gissing was essentially a "damaged joy-loving human being," who "craved to laugh, jest, enjoy, stride along against the wind, shout 'quaff mighty flagons.'"¹⁰⁵ Wells believed that it was Gissing's love of laughter that served as the "great link between us." Indeed, when Wells was suffering from a serious recurrence of his kidney ailment in August 1898, Gissing wrote to Jane Wells:

I regard HG as the friend of a lifetime; I can't do without him; he *must* be his old self again. My debt to his kindness, his good humour, his wit, is infinite.¹⁰⁶

Gissing was attracted to Wells for the same reasons that made Wells, the author, so successful – his good humour and wit. As Bernard Shaw once recalled, Wells "was so amiable that, though he raged against all of us [i.e. the Fabians] none of us resented it ... Nothing could abate his likeableness."¹⁰⁷

Gissing also seems to have enjoyed experiencing vicariously the comfort and happiness of the Wellses' home, which frequently served as a temporary refuge from his unhappy marriage and the

-- 27 --

strains of writing and overwork. In his diary he noted on January 9, 1897: "Days too miserable to chronicle; ceaseless quarrel and wretchedness ... looked in at Wells's, Worcester Park, and stayed till midnight ..."¹⁰⁸ While struggling over the initial stages of *The Crown of Life* (1899), Gissing wrote to Wells:

I labour all day long, and thank Heaven for the chance of doing so – dreading the slightest interruption. But, as I know it will not last without some sort of change to help me, I shall come over to you on Saturday ... No comment or objection, I *entreat* ... it is fatal to me not to have my own course just when I am fretting through a bit of imagination.

Shortly after a visit from the Wellses in April 1897, Gissing, who had been feeling both depressed and unwell, told them that their visit did him no end of good, that it was "the kind of thing that

sends a man back to work with exultant spirits.” As Gissing wrote in *Will Warburton* (1905), laughter “is an unspeakable boon to the man capable of it in all but every situation ...”

Gissing also seems to have greatly enjoyed the company of Jane Wells, who, as both an intelligent and dutiful wife, embodied those qualities that constituted his ideal woman. After receiving a “delightful” portrait of Jane, Gissing wrote to Wells: “The good smiling little face! May it smile, and look just as youthful for many a long year to come!” That Jane was equally fond of Gissing is made clear by the way in which she carefully nursed him back to relative health in late May 1901: “... Jane set to work and fed him up – weighing him carefully at regular intervals – with marvellous results.”¹⁰⁹ Gissing’s deep and abiding respect for Jane is nowhere more apparent than in a letter he wrote to her whilst Wells was seriously ill in August 1898:

-- 28 --

I shall not urge you to bear up through it all; *you* have no need of such idle phrases. In the last letter I had from him, H. G. spoke of you as the “unfailing chum,” and he could have no better nurse beside him.

It is also significant that Gissing should have met his “crown of life,” Gabrielle Fleury, in the Wellses’ home at Worcester Park,¹¹⁰ for Jane’s presence and example must have, consciously or unconsciously, intensified Gissing’s feelings that, in Gabrielle, he had finally found his ideal woman, his own “unfailing chum.” Indeed, in a letter to Wells (30 July 1898), Gissing described Gabrielle in terms that could have equally applied to Jane; for not only did Gabrielle have a fine “domestic sense,” but she also possessed “a mind of rare delicacy, emotional without emotionalism, sensitive to every appeal of art, and rich in womanly perceptiveness ...”¹¹¹ A few weeks later Gissing wrote of his relationship with Gabrielle: “To me one of the happy features of the story is that it is connected with Worcester Park.”

¹The Omar Khayyám Club was founded in 1892 and held an annual dinner. Gissing had also attended the 1895 dinner when George Meredith was the guest of honour.

²*Born in Exile*, 1892, p. 49.

³Although he left South Kensington without a B. Sc. degree, Wells later passed, in 1889, the Intermediate Science Examination with honours in zoology and gained the diploma of Licentiate of the College Preceptors. The following year he was awarded the B. Sc. degree from London University, with honours in zoology and geology.

⁴*The Rediscovery of George Gissing*, John Spiers and Pierre Coustillas, National Book League, London, 1971, p. 26.

-- 29 --

⁵*H. G. Wells: His Turbulent Life and Times*, Lovat Dickson, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 55.

⁶This is made evident by the way in which Wells later recalled Gissing’s personal appearance and bearing: “His features were clear cut and regular, his eyes dark blue, and his hair, which was brown

with a pleasing reddish tinge, flowed back from his forehead very handsomely. He had quite distinctly a presence.” “George Gissing: An Impression”; originally written as a preface to *Veranilda*, but rejected by Gissing’s family; published in the *Monthly Review*, August 1904, and reprinted in *George Gissing and H. G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship and Correspondence*, ed. by Royal A. Gettmann, London, 1961, pp. 260-77.

⁷Lovat Dickson, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁸*George Gissing and H. G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship and Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-29; hereafter abbreviated as “Letters”.

⁹*Eve’s Ransom* (April 1895); *Sleeping Fires* (January 1896); and *The Paying Guest* (April 1896).

¹⁰Gissing, who was nearly ten years older than Wells, had already written, with the exception of *The Whirlpool* (1897), his best novels: *Thyrza* (1887), *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), *Born in Exile* (1892), and *The Odd Women* (1893).

¹¹*Henry Hick’s Recollections of George Gissing*, Pierre Coustillas (ed.), London: Enitharmon Press, 1973, p. 23.

¹²*London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, Pierre Coustillas, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979, p. 402; hereafter noted as *Diary*. Gissing had probably read *The Stolen Bacillus, and Other Incidents*, though *Select Conversations*

-- 30 --

with an Uncle, Now Extinct, and Two Other Reminiscences was also published in 1895.

¹³Only in his fifth year as a professional writer, Wells had already earned over one thousand pounds, whilst Gissing, after sixteen years of publishing novels, had earned, for the year 1896, slightly less than three hundred pounds. By the end of 1896, Wells had published the following books: *The Time Machine* (1894-5), *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The Wheels of Chance* (1896), and two collections of short stories.

¹⁴Wells’s second wife, Amy Catherine (Jane) Robbins.

¹⁵*Diary*, p. 427.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 428.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 429.

¹⁸*Letters*, p. 34.

¹⁹*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), Everyman’s Library (London: Dent, 1964), p. 164.

²⁰*Letters*, p. 34.

²¹Throughout the 1890's Wells suffered from weak lungs and a bad kidney. Indeed, as late as 1900, he was having his house at Sandgate specially designed because he feared he would "presently have to live in a bath-chair and be wheeled from room to room." See *Experiment in Autobiography*, 1934, p. 300.

²²"... I have," Gissing writes to Wells, "never yet asked mortal (*sic*) to come and see me here – and probably never shall. For which, let my friends be grateful." *Letters*, p. 35.

²³*Letters*, p. 37.

-- 31 --

²⁴*Letters*, p. 36.

²⁵*Henry Hick's Recollections of George Gissing, op. cit.*, p. 35.

²⁶*Letters*, p. 64.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 224.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁹The narrator says of the Time Traveller: "He, I know – for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time Machine was made – thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end."

³⁰*Letters*, p. 196.

³¹*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, op. cit.*, p. 204.

³²*Letters*, p. 202.

³³*The War of the Worlds* was serialised in *Pearson's Magazine* from April to December 1897.

³⁴*Letters*, pp. 68-69.

³⁵In a letter to Eduard Bertz (24 November 1894), Gissing writes: "I am beginning to have a literary past; in meeting the young writers of to-day, I feel a veteran." *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, Arthur C. Young (ed.), New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961, p. 191.

³⁶*Experiment in Autobiography*, 1934, p. 576.

³⁷By 1899, Wells had all the money he needed to build his new house at Sandgate, as well as a surplus of one thousand pounds. He offered to loan Gissing some money in April of that year, but Gissing refused to accept the offer, saying that he could never bring himself to touch "that blessed hoard of yours... [which] is too wonderful for envy." *Letters*, p. 136.

³⁸*Letters*, p.47.

³⁹In a letter to Bertz (16 April 1897), Gissing writes: "Reviewers praise me, but very rarely understand my purpose." *Letters to Bertz*, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁴⁰*Letters*, p. 48. Gissing told Bertz: "You, of course, knew the passage was ironical? ... I thought the meaning was unmistakable to any intelligent person." *Letters to Bertz*, p. 268.

⁴¹*Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells: A Record of a Personal and a Literary Friendship*, Harris Wilson (ed.), London, 1960, p. 61.

⁴²Wells had written: "... admirable as his work has been, he is still barely ripening and ... his best has still to come ..." This is, to say the least, a rather careless remark to make of one who had been writing novels for nearly twenty years. "The Novels of Mr. George Gissing" is reprinted as Appendix C in *George Gissing and H. G. Wells*, pp. 242-59.

⁴³"George Gissing: An Impression," *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁴⁴Wells's review of *Eve's Ransom*, *Saturday Review*, 27 April 1895: reprinted as Appendix A in *George Gissing and H. G. Wells*, pp. 234-37.

⁴⁵The final paragraph on Gissing begins: "So ended all that flimsy inordinate stir of grey matter that was George Gissing."

⁴⁶Introduction to *George Gissing and H. G. Wells*, p. 9. After Gissing's death, Wells worked with Edmund Gosse to help obtain government pensions for Gissing's two boys, Walter and Alfred.

⁴⁷*Veranilda* was published posthumously in 1904. A squabble had broken out between Wells and the Gissing circle when his preface was rejected by Gissing's family, who considered it to be tactless, irresponsible, and vicious, which, in many ways, it was. The bitter dispute that resulted revealed the latent animosities that had always existed between Wells and Gabrielle Fleury – Gissing's common-law wife. Refer to "The Stormy Publication of Gissing's *Veranilda*," Pierre Coustillas, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. 72, No. 9, November 1968, pp. 588-610.

⁴⁸*The Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd*, Pierre Coustillas (ed.), London: Enitharmon Press, 1973, p. 72. In 1902, Gissing wrote to J. W. T. Ley, who was organizing a Dickens Society in Bristol: "I am old-fashioned enough to regret many of the features of English life which the new time is sweeping away, and, if only on that account, I should earnestly hope that Dickens may long be held in the hearts of our people, he who was old-English to the core, and loved every pleasant memory of the days gone by." *Gissing's Writings on Dickens*, Pierre Coustillas, Enitharmon Press, London, 1969, p. 12.

⁴⁹*The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells*, Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, London, 1973, p. 101.

⁵⁰“George Gissing,” Austin Harrison, *George Gissing Critical Essays*, Jean-Pierre Michaux, London: Vision, 1981, p. 31.

⁵¹“George Gissing: An Impression,” *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁵²*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 569.

-- 34 --

⁵³G. B. Shaw, “The Man I Knew,” *The New Statesman and Nation*, August 17, 1946, p. 115.

⁵⁴*Henry James and H.G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship, their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and their Quarrel*, ed. and intro. by Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, London, 1959, p. 264.

⁵⁵*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, p. 118. Wells enters the pages of *Henry Ryecroft* as “N—.”

⁵⁶*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 83.

⁵⁷While visiting Rome in 1888, Gissing wrote to his sister, Margaret: “The ruins are very fragmentary but nearly all have been identified and one walks amongst places that have been familiar to one’s imagination since Harrison’s Back Lane School.” Quoted in Clifford Brook’s *George Gissing and Wakefield*, Wakefield Historical Publications, 1980, p. 19.

⁵⁸*George Gissing at Alderley Edge*, Pierre Coustillas, Enitharmon Press, London, 1969, p. 3.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁰“George Gissing: An Impression,” *op. cit.*, p. 263. Wells’s information concerning Gissing’s early education came largely from T. T. Sykes’s article, “The Early School Life of George Gissing” (*Cheshire Daily Echo*, 29 January 1904), for Wells refers to Sykes’s remark that Gissing played hockey with “madness and vigour.” Sykes’s article has been reprinted in *George Gissing at Alderley Edge*, pp. 19-24.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁶²*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 171.

-- 35 --

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴“George Gissing: An Impression,” *op. cit.*, pp. 263-64.

⁶⁵*Tono-Bungay*, 1909, p. 152.

⁶⁶It is worth recalling that Wells always coveted a Fellowship of the Royal Society; and he took enormous satisfaction in successfully submitting, at the age of seventy-eight, a scientific thesis for the degree of Ph. D. at London University.

⁶⁷Gillian Tindall, *George Gissing: The Born Exile*, 1974, p. 261.

⁶⁸In a letter to Edward Clodd in June 1903, Gissing wrote: "For the moment I turn with disgust from modern life, whereas those old times call to me with a pleasant voice." *Gissing's Letters to Edward Clodd*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁶⁹*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 100.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 572.

⁷¹*The New Machiavelli*, 1911, p. 74.

⁷²Gillian Tindall, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁷³*Experiment in Autobiography*, pp. 570-71.

⁷⁴*Henry James and H. G. Wells*, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁷⁵"George Gissing: An Impression," *op. cit.*, p. 264. Ellen Gissing wrote of her brother: "... some writers today speak of 'priggishness' as being one of his objectionable qualities, but they do not know the whole man. His knowledge was no mere affectation, and his desire to instruct others was free from all thought of self..." "George Gissing, a Character Sketch," Ellen Gissing, *George Gissing: Critical Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷⁶Lovat Dickson, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁷⁷*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 91.

-- 36 --

⁷⁸*Tono-Bungay*, p. 32.

⁷⁹Gillian Tindall, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁸⁰*Letters*, p. 77.

⁸¹*The New Machiavelli*, p. 245.

⁸²*The Rediscovery of George Gissing*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁸³*George Gissing, Critical Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵*H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Bernard Bergonzi, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1976, p. 8.

⁸⁶"The Stormy Publication of Gissing's *Veranilda*," *op. cit.*, pp. 591 and 602.

⁸⁷Wells was no doubt overly sensitive about the quality of his early education. Furthermore, in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Gissing in fact praises Wells for reading “as many old books as new.”

⁸⁸Refer to p. 571 of *Experiment in Autobiography*.

⁸⁹In a letter to Wells in February, 1902, Gissing wrote: “Clodd has sent me an excellent little book of his on Huxley, just published. You would like it, I think.” Long before he had met Wells, Gissing had read Huxley’s *Science and Culture* (1881) and *Evolution and Ethics* (1893). Refer to Gissing’s *Diary*, pp. 254, 362 and 397.

⁹⁰In a letter to Edward Clodd on 19 January 1897, Gissing wrote: “You are very happy in your section on Huxley [in *Pioneers of Evolution from Thales to Huxley*]; which, by the bye, reminded me how strongly you resemble him in the blending of literary culture with scientific attainment.” *Gissing’s Letters to Clodd*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

-- 37 --

⁹¹*Gissing’s Letters to Clodd*, *op. cit.*, p. 81. Clodd had sent Gissing a copy of his book, *Thomas Henry Huxley* (1902), in February of the same year.

⁹²Refer to Gissing’s *Diary*, pp. 375, 388, 400 and 410. Austin Harrison claimed that Gissing’s knowledge of flowers and plants “was extraordinary ... He picked up a little plant and explained its life and structure with the scientific knowledge of a botanist.” *George Gissing, Critical Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁹³In February 1891, Gissing familiarized himself with Sir Charles Lyell’s work on geology and Hugh Miller’s *The Testimony of the Rocks*, and read Grant Allen’s *Evolutionist at Large*.

⁹⁴Refer to Gissing’s *Diary*, pp. 521-3 and 525-6.

⁹⁵Roslyn Haynes has pointed out that Wells’s attitude to science passed through four stages: from “a vote of no-confidence, through a grudging acceptance ... to a wholehearted approval..., and finally to an almost mystic reverence ...” *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future*, London, 1980, p. 80.

⁹⁶Quoted in *The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells*, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁹⁷A few months earlier Gissing had criticized Wells’s reference to “God” as the recognition of “an effect of purpose in the totality of things.” Gissing told Wells: “I have grown to shrink utterly from the use of such terms, and, though I admit perforce a universal law, am so estranged by its unintelligibility that not even a desire to be reverent can make those old names in any way real to me.” *Letters*, p. 197. In a letter to Edward Clodd (1 March 1902), Gissing wrote that Wells’s reference to “God” probably meant “nothing more definite than the referential hopefulness which is natural to every thoughtful and gentle-hearted man.” *Letters to Edward Clodd*, p. 82.

-- 38 --

⁹⁸*Letters*, pp. 203-04. This attitude underlies the philosophy Gissing had worked out twenty years

earlier in the unpublished essay, "The Hope of Pessimism."

⁹⁹Gosse had written: "I am sure that the weak spot in all Utopias is the insufficient consideration of man's instinctive determination to be happy. You prophets of the future are so occupied with the useful that you forget that it is only in individualism that we can be happy." *Letters*, p. 205n.

¹⁰⁰*Gissing's Letters to Clodd*, p. 82.

¹⁰¹"The Novels of Mr. George Gissing," *op. cit.*, p. 253. My italics.

¹⁰²Gissing, who was delirious during most of Wells's two-day visit, died of double pneumonia on 28 December 1903.

¹⁰³*Experiment in Autobiography*, pp. 579-80.

¹⁰⁴Refer to *Tono-Bungay*, pp. 451-63. Like Gissing, Uncle Ponderevo dies of pneumonia in a small town in the south of France near the Spanish frontier.

¹⁰⁵*Experiment in Autobiography*, pp. 569-70. While this may seem out of character, Gissing's sister, Ellen, remarked that "there were times when he could be a gay companion – even an uproariously mirthful one ..."; and Austin Harrison recalled: "Gissing, the sad man, had the zest of life, and with it its joy. At times he would laugh so uproariously that my father ... would come in to see what was amiss." *George Gissing, Critical Essays*, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 23.

¹⁰⁶*Letters*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁷G. B. Shaw, "The Man I Knew," *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁸*Diary*, p. 432.

¹⁰⁹*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 577.

-- 39 --

¹¹⁰On 23 June 1898 Gissing received a letter from Gabrielle requesting permission to translate *New Grub Street* into French; wishing to confer with her, Gissing asked Wells if he could meet with her at Worcester Park, for Gissing felt it was "impossible for a lone man to entertain a strange lady" in the privacy of his own home. (*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 576)

¹¹¹*Letters*, p. 110. However, whilst Morley Roberts described Gabrielle in rather glowing terms, Wells appraised her quite differently, and no doubt unjustly. "Your estimate of Gabrielle is ridiculous," writes Wells upon publication of Roberts's fictionalized biography of Gissing in 1912. "She was a tiresome weak sentimental middle-class Frenchwoman who wrote her letters on thin paper ..." "The Stormy Publication of Gissing's *Veranilda*," *op. cit.*, p. 609.

Henry Ryecroft on the B.B.C. Radio 3.

The fortune of each of Gissing's books considered individually is something of a mystery. Why *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, which was by far his best-selling title until the second world war and remained, with *New Grub Street* as a runner-up, his most frequently reprinted and most readily mentioned work until the mid-1960's, suddenly went out of favour is difficult to account for. To this reader at least, the book has an extraordinary complexity – autobiographical, philosophical and artistic – which still has to be given full justice. But some signs of a return to comparative favour have been noticeable of late. Besides one or two scholarly articles we shall soon have in both hardback and paperback a new edition published by the Harvester Press, and it seems that another firm is contemplating another edition.

A significant landmark in this revival of interest is the recent programme on the B.B.C. Radio 3 which consisted in readings of the book in an abridged form by Ronald Pickup. The programme was produced by John Cardy and the abridgment done by Derek Parker. Several correspondents –

-- 40 --

Mr. and Mrs. A. Spencer Mills, Mr. Clifford Brook and Mr. John Spiers – kindly sent the relevant pages of the *Radio Times*, and a letter to the producer brought interesting additional information. Derek Burden was able to record the first instalment and part of the fourth.

Here are some details, now of historical interest:

1 - Sunday, October 25, 3.45pm. SPRING: A pension, a snug cottage, hedgerow flowers to delight the eye, this for Ryecroft is the ideal if unexpected retirement.

2 - Friday, October 30, 8.5pm. SUMMER: Ryecroft cultivates his garden, discovers merit in observing the Sabbath and rejoices that he reads Shakespeare in his mother tongue.

3 - Sunday, November 1, 6.5pm. AUTUMN: A meal of wild berries, a book-lined room snug against bad weather, Ryecroft savours these and other delights that country life and a good pension bring to a philosophical mind in a prematurely tried body.

4 - Tuesday, November 3, 9.40pm. WINTER: Inclement weather round his beloved Devon cottage reminds Ryecroft of London fogs and London miseries but the past is past and, conscious of a rounded life, he waits in tranquillity for whatever is to come.

The readings lasted seventeen to eighteen minutes. It is to be hoped there will be a repeat of this programme in the not too distant future. Perhaps, as there is a great demand at the moment for concert interval readings of this kind on Radio 3, a similar programme might be contemplated with selections from *By the Ionian Sea*, another unfairly neglected Gissing title in the last twenty years – Pierre Coustillas.

Notes and News

Mrs. Spencer Mills, whose interest in Gissing derives from her research on foreign travellers in southern Italy, Edward Lear in particular, has sent a note on this subject. She observes that Gissing's passionate curiosity about Magna Graecia may have been stimulated by his reading of

such travel narratives as those by Henry Swinburne (*Travels in the Two Sicilies*, Vol. I, 1783; Vol. II, 1785; second edition 1790; French translation by La Borde, Paris, 1785; German translation by J. R. Forster, Hamburg, 1785), Richard Keppel Craven (*A Tour through the Southern Province of the Kingdom of Naples*, London, 1821) and Craufurd Tait Ramage (*The Nooks and Byways of Sicily: Wanderings in Search of its Ancient Remains and Modern Superstitions*, Liverpool, 1868; new edition edited by Edith Clay, *Ramage in South Italy*, Longman, 1965). To these titles should be added Edward Lear's *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria*, originally published by Richard Bentley in 1852 and reissued by William Kimber & Co. in 1964, a delightful travel book translated into Italian by Ernesta and Albert Spencer Mills under the title *Diario di un Viaggio a Piedi: Calabria 1847* (Parallelo 38, Reggio Calabria, 1973; second edition 1976). Some of the books on southern Italy read by Gissing are on record in his diary which shows his familiarity with Francois Lenormant's *La Grande Grèce* (Part I, 1881; Part II, 1884, unfinished because of the writer's death the year before) and with Baedeker's guide to *Southern Italy and Sicily*, which by 1900 had reached its thirteenth edition, and of which Mrs. Spencer Mills has a copy. If Gissing was stimulated by Bourget (see Diary entry "for 1 November 1895) and Lenormant, he in turn, with *By the Ionian Sea* (1901), stimulated Norman Douglas, whose *Old Calabria* (1915) is now a classic. Good literature, however, often fails to attract notice outside the country where it was born: *By the Ionian Sea* was not translated into Italian until 1957, and Douglas's book was similarly unknown to the Italian public for decades (first translation by G. Lanzillo and L. Lax, Milan, Martello, 1962).

John Hammond, the former secretary of the H. G. Wells Society, reports that John R. Harrison, of Oxford, read a paper on Wells and Gissing at the Rye Weekend Conference, "Reassessing H. G. Wells," which was held on 27th-29th November 1981.

The Harvester Press, which has just published critical editions of *The Town Traveller* and *Will Warburton*, announces that *Demos* (ed. P. Coustillas, 1972, paperback 1974) is again available in

hardback. The paperback reissue of this title, with some corrections by the editor, will be available in March together with *Henry Ryecroft* (hardback and paperback). A new paperback edition of *The Nether World* is also announced. The next titles from the same publishers will probably be *A Life's Morning*, *The Paying Guest* and *Veranilda*.

More unexpected but equally welcome is the latest announcement from the Harvester Press that, owing to the continuing demand for *Isabel Clarendon*, a new edition of the 1969 reprint, edited by Pierre Coustillas, will be published in one volume in May or June 1982.

Eric and Joan Stevens, the London booksellers (74 Fortune Green Road, London NW6) will publish early in 1982 a limited hand-printed edition of six poems by Gissing. These unpublished sonnets which are devoted to Shakespearean heroines, were written in the summer of 1876. They will be preceded by a short introduction by Pierre Coustillas.

The Enitharmon Press is to bring out shortly a study of *Gissing and Germany*, by Patrick Bridgwater, priced at £6, while the Presses Universitaires de Lille will publish a selection of Gissing's short stories in translation in January 1982. A translation of *The Odd Women* will be

available from the same publishers later in the year.

Recent Publications

Volumes

The Town Traveller, edited and with an introduction and notes by Pierre Coustillas, The Harvester Press, 1981. Blue cloth, gilt titling. The editorial material includes a bibliographical note on the various editions of the novel, a 22-page introduction, a study of the manuscript, notes to the text and a bibliography of articles about the novel.

Will Warburton, edited and with an introduction and notes by Colin Partridge, The Harvester Press, 1981. The Editorial material contains an important study of the manuscript. No copy had been

-- 43 --

received by December 20th, but the publishers said the book would be available by the time the present number of the *Newsletter* appeared.

George Gissing and Ivan Turgenev, including two letters from Turgenev, by Pierre Coustillas, London: The Enitharmon Press, 1981. £3.75. Orange wrappers. Limited to 250 copies.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Norman Page (ed.), *Dickens : Hard Times, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend*. A Selection of Critical Essays. London : The Macmillan Press, 1979. Contains several references to Gissing and reprints his comments on *Hard Times* (pp. 201-02).

Helen McNeil, "New Worlds," *New Statesman*, 12 September 1980, pp. 19-20. Review of *The Odd Women* and the three other titles reissued by Virago simultaneously.

Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930*, London : The Macmillan Press, 1980. Pp. 167-71 are devoted to Gissing, who appears more briefly on other pages.

Robin Barrow, "English Fiction," *British Book News*, June 1981, p. 370. Review of *George Gissing: Critical Essays*.

Michael Collie, "Book Reviews," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Summer 1981, pp. 74-77. Review of Gissing's diary.

Anon., "Scholars Embracing Art of Gissing," *Wakefield Express*, 4 September 1981, p. 10.

-- 44 --

Pierre Coustillas, "Gissing and Crackanorpe: a Note on their Relationship," *Notes and Queries*, October, 1981, pp. 421-22.

R.S.P., "Reviews," *Critical Quarterly*, Autumn 1981, p. 90. Review of *George Gissing: Critical Essays*.

Elizabeth Harwick, "Back Issues," *New York Review of Books*, 17 December 1981, pp. 6, 8, 10 and 11. Contains several passages on Gissing.

Julian Symons, "Enterprising Missionary," *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 December 1981, p. 1456. Gissing appears in this review of Walter Allen's *As I Walked Down New Grub Street*.

James Hepburn (ed.), *Arnold Bennett: The Critical Heritage*, London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. Contains a number of allusions to Gissing.

John Goode, "Reviews of Books," *Urban History Yearbook 1981* (Leicester University Press), pp. 234-35. A review of the *Diary*.

Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920*, London: Methuen. This is a paperback edition of the book originally published by the Harvester Press in 1979. No effort has been made to correct the misprints and factual errors of the first edition.