

THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

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

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George Gissing at College

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On May 31st, 1876, George Robert Gissing, an eighteen-year-old fourth-year student at Owens College, Manchester, England, was caught by the police in the act of stealing money in the college cloak-room: a succession of thefts had resulted in police intervention, marked money had been planted, and a watch kept. Gissing was convicted and imprisoned, and on June 13th his expulsion was decided upon by the college Senate (1). All this is well-known; as, too, that the need for extra money had grown out of Gissing’s involvement with a young prostitute whom later, after a year’s retirement to the United States, he married. It seems an obvious inference from the letters to him from a college friend, John George Black, in 1876 (made public in 1963) (2) that the Principal, at

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the college enquiry, was not without justification for alleging a life of “immorality and dissipation”: the letters certainly support the later pronouncement by Gissing himself (or, at any rate, by his contemporary Morley Roberts) that it was a “cruel and undesirable thing” that “at the age of sixteen” (in fact, at something less than fifteen – in 1872) he ‘should have been turned loose in a big city, compelled to live alone in lodgings, with nobody interested in [him] but those at the college.’ (3) Though to have had even “those” interested in him, at a college of not many more than four hundred students, may seem enviable to those who have been through a modern “mega-university,” none the less (and notwithstanding his high scholastic achievement at a more than local level and his enduring devotion to classical and classic literature), the general impression left by the early Gissing story is of a scholastically “grinding” and withdrawn four years in a culturally meagre environment – at (according to Jacob Korg (4), who somewhat misleads) a “primarily scientific institution.” (The institution was to become in 1880 the first constituent college of a new, federated university – the Victoria University – but not until 1904 the independent Victoria University of Manchester). Gissing’s celebrated prize of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* was, after all, a pre-college award; and his father is known to have encouraged wide and serious reading from the boy’s very early days.

However, the *Owens College Magazine* has preserved in print a number of “papers” or essays by teachers and others at the college, and these considerably contradict any such impression by their quality and by their number. An idea of their range and character sufficient for the present purpose will perhaps be given simply by listing some of the titles – with the reminder that university

Honours Schools of English would not for a long time come into being. John Finlayson's (5) "Richard Crashaw and John Henry Newman: their Poetic Kinship" (May and June, 1874) and his "Milton and Modern Culture" (April, May and June, 1875); C. H. Herford's (6) "Tennyson and Browning" (April, 1873) and his "Hamlet" (April and May 1874); the unsigned comparison of Thackeray and Dickens entitled "Beatrix and Estella" (February, 1873), with a rejoinder and a

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counter-reply in succeeding issues; and the ten-page review of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" (January, 1875) when "Gareth and Lynette" was published: a reader of these would not be surprised at Matthew Arnold's viewing the college with respect – a respect evident in a letter from him to the Principal, A.W. Ward (7), written about a month before Gissing's detection. On April 26th, 1876, Arnold wrote from Cobham in support of the campaign for independent degree-awarding status for the college:

"...I have read the pamphlets you sent me, and even before I read them I had come to the conclusion that it would be well to constitute Owens College a University for the North-West of England.... I was much struck with what is said....about the inconvenience of the want of *rapport* between your teaching and the degree examinations of the London University, which your students attend: I can well believe it.

I shall say no more, for I am not sure whether it is of any use to say even this, but I should be sorry not to have declared my strong desire to see the establishment of a Manchester University.

Believe me,

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Arnold." (8)

T. H. Huxley, also, wrote on this occasion, and expressed strong reservations about full degree-awarding status; but as a famous exchange between him and Arnold testifies, it was for priority of "the natural sciences" in education that Huxley pleaded, against Arnold's advocacy of "humane letters" (9). Although Arnold was a governor of the college (nominated in 1870, for five years, by the Lord President of the Privy Council) and a second cousin of Ward's, his critical rigour is not likely to have been weakened by either missionary zeal or personal favour – and his faith in a *Manchester* institution will hardly have been implicit (10).

That intellectual activity was not confined to routine instruction and required study is evident. Gissing's poem "Ravenna" (of twenty-one Spenserian stanzas), which won the annual poetry prize in 1873, was also printed in the magazine (11). The poem is well-known to Gissing scholars, though

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(it is deducible) only from its having been reprinted (in slightly, and convincingly, corrected form) by his son A. C. Gissing in his *Selections* (12). Researchers into Manchester records, in these respects, seem not to have gone back beyond the obituary appreciation by A.S.W. (13) in the *Owens College Union Magazine* (14) of January, 1904 (which, however, does not mention the poem): they have consequently missed the other poem by Gissing, "To Truth" (which is reproduced with this present article) in the January, 1875 issue (VII. 142-143) (15). Announcements and reports of Union "papers" and debates, and of the Shakspeare Society meetings, reinforce this view; as do some

thoughtful and critical accounts of the lecture and tutorial provisions at Cambridge and Oxford, and of the procedures and the quality of Oxford Union debates – accounts sent back by students who had moved on to studies at those universities. There *was* cultural life at Owens for Gissing to have participated in, the Magazine shows: it shows also that he did not refuse, or simply fail to enter into it. Though the references to him are neither extensive nor numerous, they will perhaps be allowed to have significance for his biography, if not also for the criticism of his work.

On November 12th, 1875, at the First Ordinary Meeting of the Owens College Union, “Messrs. Gissing and Morant (16) were elected editors of the magazine”; Gissing being appointed also to the Union Committee (January, 1876; VIII.i).

On November 26th, 1875, at the Second Ordinary Meeting of the Union, Gissing is mentioned as speaking in the debate following a paper read by Mr. Chiswell, B.A., on “The Life and Poetry of Sir Walter Scott.” (January, 1876; VIII.i).

On December 3rd, 1875, at the Second Ordinary Meeting of the Owens College Shakspeare Society, Professor Ward in the chair, “the last act of *Twelfth Night* was read, and was followed by a paper by Mr. Gissing on that play. The essayist attempted to disprove Mr. Fleay’s theory of *Twelfth Night* having been made up of parts written at two distinct periods of Shakspeare’s career. (March, 1876; VIII.ii).

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On February 11th, 1876, at the Sixth Ordinary Meeting of the Union, “Mr. Crabb read his paper ‘On the Ornamental in Education’ – at the end of which he moved: ‘That the present system of education is mistaken, insomuch as it has not for a leading idea the equable cultivation of all the faculties of the human mind’....” “The debate was opened by Mr. Gissing” and “the resolution was carried without opposition” (though, it is added, “owing to various causes, perhaps the excitement of the impending election among others, the meeting was a small one, which is much to be regretted.”) Earlier in the issue (March, 1876; VIII.ii) Gissing is listed as winner of the Shakspeare Scholarship.

On February 18th, 1876, at the Sixth Ordinary Meeting of the Shakspeare Society, “Mr. Herford being unable to attend, his paper on ‘The Humour of Shakspeare’ was read by Mr. Gissing”; and Gissing is named as taking part in the subsequent debate. (March, 1876; VIII.ii).

On March 3rd, 1876, at the Seventh Meeting of the Shakspeare Society, “the first four acts of King Henry IV, part II, [*sic*] were read, the principal parts being taken by Messrs. Swanwick, Osler, Black, Gissing, and Bateman.” (May, 1876; VIII. iii).

In view of Gissing’s friendship with Black (17) it may be worth recording also that on March 17th, 1876, at the Eighth Meeting of the Shakspeare Society, “Mr. Black read an essay on ‘Shakspeare and France, with special reference to Voltaire.’” (May, 1876; VIII.iii).

There are no further references, and neither Gissing’s name nor Morant’s is in the list of former editors printed in the *Owens College Union Magazine* of November, 1903 (XI, N.S., no. 88). Other names are given for the year concerned. In the magazine issues themselves the editors are not named.

Godwin Peak, the hero of Gissing’s novel *Born in Exile* (1892), attends a college undoubtedly modelled by the author on Owens; and “Peak is myself – one phase of myself,” Gissing wrote to Eduard Bertz in 1892 (18). But he added, “I described him with gusto, but surely I did not, in depicting the other characters, take *his* point of view?” “Indeed,” he says, “it seems to me that the tone of the whole book is by no means identical with that of Peak’s personality; certainly I did not mean it to be so.” If the salvaging of items from the College magazine has its obvious biographical

point, the resulting information reveals also new differences between the “stern ‘sweater’” Godwin Peak (who “did not subscribe to the Union”) and Gissing himself, and thereby not only re-emphasizes the particular warning implied by the novelist in the letter to Bertz (and expressly uttered by his son Alfred Charles) (19) but also offers a reminder of the never too well-known slipperiness of inferences from fiction to fact and from facts to fiction.

The purely biographical point becomes sharply apparent when the four letters from John George Black are set alongside the College magazine appearances of the two youths. In the first letter Black apologizes with vehemence (and with some circumstantiality of description) for having had sexual intimacy with the girl Nell some days previously in complete unawareness of his friend’s affection for her. In the next he provides the addresses of some suitable lodgings in Southport, the seaside resort some forty miles from Manchester, for the use of Gissing and Nell during the Easter vacation. In the third he describes in detail, with a somewhat anxious matter-of-factness, the emergent symptoms of a suspected venereal infection. In the last he retails several enquiries made concerning Gissing’s absence from classes (he was still in Southport) at the start of the new term by Professor Ward and others, including a “Signor Tollero, uomo fantastico e jocoso” (“loquitur quasi per nasum”), not identified by Coustillas but unmistakably Thomas Northcote Toller (20), Lecturer in English Language. The letters are dated February 30th, March 23rd, March 26th and April 11th – though Black’s dating is (obviously) open to correction, and the second and third letters are post-marked March 22nd and March 25th (21) respectively.

#### Notes

- 1 - Extracts from the minutes are given in Arthur C. Young, ed., *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz, 1887-1903* (London, 1961), XIX-XX; and, more fully, in Pierre Coustillas, “George Gissing à Manchester,” *Etudes Anglaises*, XVI (1963), pp. 255-261.
- 2 - In Coustillas, “Gissing à Manchester.”
- 3 - Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, Morchard Bishop, ed. (London, 1958), p. 28.

- 4 - Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle, 1968), p. 11. Korg speaks (with seeming justification) of a psychologically compulsive habit of overwork, but says nothing of any more outgoing side. Incidentally, he describes the motto “Arduus ad Solem” in some of Gissing’s prizes as the motto of his *school*: it was (and still is) part of the armorial bearings granted in 1871 to his *college*.
- 5 - John Finlayson (1840-1906): employé of the Bank of England who, in the middle 1860s, as “a zealous attendant at evening classes,” “attracted the attention and interest of Dr. Ward by his mature literary culture” and became a constant part-time participant in College and University cultural life. He bequeathed a large part of his library to the University. (Obituary notice by C. H. Herford, *Manchester Guardian*, October 30th, 1906).
- 6 - Charles Harold Herford (1853-1931); a member of the teaching-staff, himself formerly a student at Owens, who became Professor of English Language and Literature at University College, Aberystwyth, and then first holder of the separate Chair of English Literature at Manchester. Described in *D.N.B.* as “the most accomplished English scholar of his age,” he was an early champion and translator of Ibsen.

- 7 - Adolphus William Ward (1837-1924); Professor of History and English at Owens, then Principal; and, later, Vice-Chancellor of the Victoria University. In 1900 became Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge. An editor of the *Cambridge Modern History*, he conceived (and shared the editing of) the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, and did much other distinguished literary and historical work. His five-volume translation of Curtius's *Griechische Geschichte* (1868-1873) was reviewed, volume by volume, by Arnold in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.
- 8 - *Letters in support of the proposed establishment of Owens College as a university* (no place, 1876): this pamphlet is bound up with numerous related pamphlets in a volume held by the University of Manchester Library.
- 9 - See "Science and Culture" (1880), *Collected Essays by T. H. Huxley*, III (London, 1905), and Arnold's reply in "Literature and Science," *Discourses in America* (London, 1885).

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- 10 - That his deliberations had not been hasty is evident from the references to Owens College in the report, *Schools and Universities on the Continent* (1868), which he made to the Schools Enquiry Commission (*Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, R. H. Super, ed. (Ann Arbor, 1960-), IV, pp. 326-7).
- 11 - February, 1874; VI.ii. The same issue contains official announcements of his Victoria Entrance Exhibition and the renewal of his Junior Oxford Locals Exhibition. In the previous (January) issue: "The Editors beg to announce that the February number will contain Mr. Gissing's prize poem 'Ravenna.'"
- 12 - *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative from the Works of George Gissing* (London, 1929).
- 13 - Augustus Samuel Wilkins; Professor of Latin, 1869-1903, Professor of Classical Literature, 1903-05; died 1905.
- 14 - The title from 1894.
- 15 - Both poems were reprinted (with much inaccuracy) by O. E(llis) and H.B.C(harlton) in *A Selection of Verses from the Manchester University Magazine, 1868-1912* (Manchester, 1913); a volume which seems to have been overlooked.
- 16 - J. Sydney Morant, author of the 1875 Prize Poem.
- 17 - Apparently not of long standing: see the first of the letters in Coustillas, "George Gissing à Manchester." No other Gissing, G.R.G. or Black appears in the official lists of students.
- 18 - Arthur C. Young, pp. 152-153.
- 19- In his *Selections...*, p. 18.
- 20 - Assistant lecturer in English and History, then (1875) the first Lecturer in English Language and, in 1880, appointed Smith Professor of English Language. He revised and enlarged, and later added a supplement to Bosworth's *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.
- 21 - This second discrepancy is not noted by Coustillas – whose transcription from the MSS is not wholly accurate, and whose prefatory account of events referred to in the letters seems to be slightly incorrect.

#### Postscript

After this article left my hands the *Gissing Newsletter* (IV.4) appeared with Charles E. Yenter's checklist of Gissing's periodical publications. It should be pointed out that item 3 on that

list, "Our Shakespearian Studies," is unsigned in all three copies of the issue held in the Manchester University Arts Library. It would be useful to have Mr. Yenter's evidence for the authorship. The style would permit the attribution but not compel it; and Gissing was not sole editor.

Also: Sir Alfred Hopkinson contributed a foreword to the Ellis-Charlton *A Selection of Verses...* (see note 15 above) but did not edit the volume.

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TO TRUTH

Firstborn of Wisdom, Truth,  
Thou virgin-spirit pure, that dwell'st alway  
In fairest regions of eternal day,  
Clad with immortal youth;  
All powerful as thou art,  
Accept this hallowed joy in trophies won, –  
These fluttering hopes of strife not yet begun, –  
The humble sacrifice of one poor heart.

Thou hast ere now unveiled  
Thy face in fitful vision to the bard  
Who strove to make his nameless longings heard,  
But without thee had failed.  
One gleam from thy bright eyes  
Shot forth with melting melodies that stole  
Through all his being, and his ravished soul  
Hath blossomed in rich song that never dies.

Not the warm summer's breath  
Is gentler, kindlier, when it softest blows;  
Yet thou art stronger than all mortal foes,  
And stronger far than Death.  
No forced obedience thine;  
But where the rapture-breathing Love doth rest  
O'ershadowed with high thoughts it likes thee best,  
Thou late, to shed the light of dawn divine.

The crowd may pass thee by,  
And fan their heart's flame to ignoble gods;  
The fool, though thinking to have won thee, plods  
Darkly, a living lie;  
E'en some may fiercely hate,

Striving in wordy war, shrill echo's jest; –  
In vain: they rouse no hate within thy breast;  
Thou wait'st in pity till their rage abate.

This shall not ever hold.  
The blazing splendours of a thousand noons,  
The mellow glories of a thousand moons,  
Not, not in vain have rolled.  
New years with wisdom teem;  
The world looks ever forward to its prime;  
And thus it shall be, till the end of time  
Shall see the honour of thy name supreme.

G.R.G.

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#### Editor's Note

Professor Lees's article raises several questions to which I feel answers should be given. First, while it is natural for him to suppose that "researchers into Manchester records [...] seem not to have gone back beyond the obituary appreciation by A. S. W. in the *Owens College Union Magazine* of January, 1904," I wish to say that some of these researchers have long been aware of the numerous references to Gissing in the magazine. The lack of reference in print by modern scholarship to some of Gissing's activities at Owens College, does not invariably betray ignorance. I, for one, have gathered material from the sources used by Professor Lees and from others for a booklet on the subject which lack of time has kept me so far from getting ready for publication. The second point concerns the authorship of "Our Shakespearian Studies." The evidence called for by Professor Lees is provided by a galley proof of the article corrected in Gissing's hand and held by Yale University. Incidentally, the "Checklist of Gissing's Periodical Contributions, 1872-1877,"

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compiled by Charles E. Yenter leaves out two short stories which very few persons have read, "A Terrible Mistake," signed G. R. Gresham (*National Weekly*, May 5, 1877, p. 10) and "The Artist's Child," also signed G. R. Gresham (*The Alliance*, June 30, 1877, pp. 476-77). Lastly, with regard to the inaccuracies in the transcription of the letters from John George Black, it seems that the blame is to be laid on Black's handwriting, the compositors of *Etudes Anglaises* and of course myself. In letter I, para. 1, "for you" should be inserted after "affection has sprung up in me" and in the third paragraph from the end "bitterly" should be replaced by "utterly." In Letter IV, para. 4, "homo" should read "uomo," whereas in the second paragraph from the end, it would seem that for "getting out" should be substituted "setting out." Also the sailor looks w. (i.e. with) a match not for a match. I stand corrected and record the discrepancy between the date written by Black at the top of his third letter (26 March) and that of the postmark (25 March). The mistake may after all have been the post-office clerk's, not Black's but in any case our view of Gissing at Manchester cannot be affected thereby. Nor by the fact that Matthew Arnold cannot have written to A. W. Ward *qua* Principal in 1876, as Professor Lees tells us, since J. G. Greenwood was Principal of Owens College

from 1857 to 1889. But it is not altogether superfluous to remark that Gissing was not “compelled to live alone in lodgings” in Manchester when he entered Owens College in 1872. It appears that he boarded at Lindow Grove where his brothers were still at school, probably until 1875, and only went to Manchester on the days when he had lectures to attend. This can be deduced from various unpublished documents and has been confirmed to me authoritatively by Mr. Alfred Gissing.

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### Gissing's Characters and their Books

P. F. Kropholler

The merest glance at Gissing's correspondence is sufficient to show his interest in books. As for his novels, there cannot be many novelists in whose work books play such a great part. Few writers have described with such zest the joys books can bring. In *New Grub Street* he investigated the literary life in all its aspects. Ryecroft is, of course, unthinkable without his books. In “Christopherson,” one of his most successful stories, he presents the love of books that deteriorates into bibliomania. *Thyrza* contains his most pathetic portrait of a bookish man who is prevented by circumstances from satisfying his passionate longing for books. In *A Life's Morning* Gissing even hints that women can be made more attractive by books. Wilfrid Athel thought that “a woman never looked more graceful than when walking with her head bent over a book.”

What we might call the highest type of bookish men are those characters who have become experts on a certain aspect of literature. Curiously enough, none of these are specialists in the academic sense. Thus, Denzil Quarrier is enough of an expert to write a book on the older literature of Scandinavia but he seems to have picked up his knowledge in a haphazard fashion during a stay in Northern Europe. Old Jerome Otway (*The Crown of Life*) has a deep knowledge of Dante but he is practically self-taught. Biffen and Reardon (*New Grub Street*) are intimately acquainted with the classics. Their formal training, however, seems to have stopped at a grammar school level.

Very often Gissing introduces a character by commenting on his or her reading habits. In *The Whirlpool* Harvey's life-story is revealed by a description of his bookcase. On the top shelf are the books he inherited from his father, as well as his own schoolbooks. The lower shelves successively show the French novels representing “a frothy season when he boasted a cheap Gallicism, and sneered at all things English” and finally we arrive at the core of his library, solid and expensive works.

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In *Will Warburton* the extrovert Godfrey Sherwood loves the literature of romance and adventure, Mallory, Froissart and the Icelandic sagas. In *In the Year of Jubilee* the simple-minded Mary reads a volume of an old magazine.

A man's character may also be brought out by a lack of interest in books. Hugh Carnaby (*The Whirlpool*) is a kind of man-of-the-world character. He “had never bent over books since the day when he declined the university.”

Character development can also be illustrated by a change in a person's reading. It is a sign of Monica's growing independence in *The Odd Women* when after her marriage she wants a change from her husband's orthodox books. Egremont (*Thyrza*) loses some of his brooding characteristics in the U.S.A. and his favourite reading becomes Walt Whitman.



On the whole the more attractive characters – even the minor ones – are those who read good literature. As may be expected, the characters who are at least partly self-portraits such as Biffen and Reardon (*New Grub Street*), Ryecroft, and Peak (*Born in Exile*) are book-lovers.

Harder characters either do not read at all or read practical books. Lee Hannaford (*The Crown of Life*) reads military books. The description of Mutimer's character (*Demos*) is almost wholly based on his bookcase, which is filled with antiquated philosophers and economists of the "extreme" school, a collection "of pathetic significance." The thoroughly hard-headed Dalmaine (*Thyrza*) is interested only in books on law and economics.

Again and again we come across descriptions of interiors which go to show that for Gissing books were an indispensable element of a well-furnished room. If an otherwise pleasant room contains no books it even calls for special mention. In *Denzil Quarrier* we are told about the "agreeable warmth" of Mrs. Wade's room and that though "there was no great collection of books." In *The Crown of Life* the sympathetic character Mr. Jacks feels bound to explain that he has not many books in London when he notices that Piers Otway – characteristically – first looks at the

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shelves on entering the room. In the last chapter of *The Odd Women* Gissing describes some arrangements concerning Widdowson's furniture. His "books would go back to London," a striking remark which shows to what extent books formed part of a man's house and life in Gissing's mind.

Good books are obviously an educative force. In *The Whirlpool* Harvey uses fairy tales to bring up his young son. Egremont (*Thyrza*) wants to educate the workers of Lambeth by offering them a free library. In *Born in Exile* even a breezy extrovert like Malkin thinks of educating the girl Bella by "suggesting books for her reading."

Lovers, too, may be united by books. In the first chapter of *A Life's Morning* Emily and Wilfrid have an enthusiastic discussion about books, a first hint of their later affection. In the next chapter Beatrice violently disapproves of Wilfrid's tastes in reading, which is a fundamental indication that they may not be suited to each other.

Tarrant's declaration to Nancy (*In the Year of Jubilee*) is to a great extent introduced by their interest in books. Their crucial meeting is on an afternoon when Nancy goes to the library. Here she meets Tarrant. Nancy would have liked to take out a novel but to impress Tarrant she chooses a scientific book by Helmholtz. At the same time Gissing reports a silly conversation between two "loudly-dressed women" about "pretty books." Their amusement at this talk helps to bring Nancy and Tarrant together. During a walk in the country Nancy is becoming embarrassed. She tries to hide this by opening her book. Tarrant objects to this and brings up Keats, who is practically unknown to Nancy. He asks her to read some Helmholtz. By way of contrast he quotes Keats. This leaves them both deeply moved and Tarrant comes very near to declaring his love.

Conversely, a disagreement about books is a stage in the growing estrangement between Widdowson and Monica (*The Odd Women*). The former advises *Guy Mannering* but Monica insists on something with a "yellow back."

Very often unhappy or lonely people find comfort in books. Again Gissing's novels contain

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plenty of examples. Annabel (*Thyrza*) “bent herself to books with eagerness” in “the shock of her sorrow.” Monica (*The Odd Women*) “found more attraction in books as her life grew more unhappy.”

In contrast with the benefits of reading good books Gissing more than once comments on the bad influence of newspapers. In *Thyrza* Gilbert Grail remarks that the Sunday paper is now the “working man’s bible” and Egremont whole-heartedly agrees: “The newspaper is the very voice of all that is worst in our civilization.” Samuel Barmby (*In the Year of Jubilee*) makes great play of some classical authors, but since boyhood he had probably read no books at all. “Much diet of newspapers rendered him all but incapable of sustained attention.” It is true newspapers encourage “skimming,” which Gissing called “the intellectual disease of our time” in *The Whirlpool*. When Ryecroft reflects on the likelihood of another war he exclaims: “If by any chance newspapers ceased to exist.”

Sometimes we are given the impression that the ideal existence would be an obscure life in the country among books. Ryecroft is, of course, the supreme example. In *The Crown of Life* we are introduced to two elderly ladies who live very much like two female Ryecrofts. Considering they play only a very minor part in the novel they are described in remarkable detail. They live “beyond sound of railway whistle,” possess an “excellent library” and may “betray an intimate knowledge of some French or Italian poet scarce known by name to ordinary educated people.”

Walter Allen (in *The English Novel*) remarked on reading Gissing’s early working-class novels that at times they leave the impression “that the sole end of life was that men and women should read.”

There is, of course, some truth in this statement but it is only part of the picture. No one knew better than Gissing that the most passionate reader may experience boredom and even disgust in the presence of books. In an early novel like *Thyrza* we read that Grail’s books “gathered dust” after his dream had been shattered. Similarly, though for different reasons, Piers Otway (*The Crown of Life*)

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lost his delight in books after meeting Irene.

In *Born in Exile* Peak originally despises his own relatives for their lack of intellectual interests. As a rather pedantic young man he exhorts his brother to read: “Force yourself to stick hard at solid books for two or three hours every day. If you don’t, it’s all up with you.” Returning home as a mature man, however, he finds his relatives “no longer offended him, and he willingly recognized the homespun worth which their lives displayed.”

*New Grub Street* contains a particularly impressive description of a huge library “threatening to become a trackless desert of print.”

Even Ryecroft, the book-lover “par excellence” remembers “afternoons of languor, when books were a weariness.”

Such feelings of dejection as regards books are neither common nor typical in Gissing’s work but their tone expresses a deeply felt mood.

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Recent publications will be listed in the next number. As to forthcoming publications they will include a new edition of *Born in Exile* with an introduction by Walter Allen. The book is announced by Messrs. Gollancz for March 1970.

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