

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 VI, Number 2
April, 1970

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George Gissing and Christopher Morley

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The American essayist and poet Christopher Morley (1890-1957) presents an inexhaustible record of devotion to the spirit and work of George Gissing. One can take up the Morley canon almost at random and pick up the Gissing thread. It is fascinating to confront the name and art of the English author as they arise in various designs: Gissing memorialized as a very special street in Brooklyn in *The Haunted Bookshop* (1919); Gissing applied in name to an adventurous and wayward canine in *Where the Blue Begins* (1923); Gissing analyzed in a criticism of *The Odd Women* in an early *Saturday Review of Literature* (1927); Gissing incarnate in poetry, fiction, and

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Subscriptions

Private Subscribers: 12/6 per annum (\$1.50)
Libraries: 25/- per annum (\$3.00)

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essay from the pen of a master craftsman, a latter-day Dr. Johnson, who in his American milieu adhered to Grub Street and its literary twists and pangs. Morley lifted “a Ryecroft and soda” to the acidic Englishman and his writing scene.

It is strange, at first sight, to observe Christopher Morley’s enjoyment of George Gissing. Educated conventionally, the American-bred intellectual experienced Oxford after Haverford in Pennsylvania. He climbed the rungs of an American success story upon his return to his native land. He carried in his pocket his privately-financed *Eighth Sin*, a book of poetry put out by Blackwell

while he was a Rhodes Scholar. Life progressed smoothly for the ebullient, gifted youth. Gissing sweated to produce and promote his first work. Behind him was a severed education and existence, and the denial of middle-class professional fruits. Morley lived with an echelon of angels. He even married the right girl. Grub Street was a terrain he cut an easy swath through. He worked as a newspaperman, but he was not critically hampered either by the Establishment of his day or the war-like times through which he passed. By 1920, at the age of thirty, he had published several volumes, emerging as a creative spokesman in the literary atmosphere of the East.

Ten years later, with the publication of *John Mistletoe*, Morley had forgotten neither pain nor killing. He speaks in that autobiographical fiction of a real-life reporter Steve O'Grady who walked with the ghost of George Gissing. Steve died at the same age as his ghostly companion – forty-six. The coincidence is uncanny for the reader knowing Gissing. Uncanny for such an audience is Roger Mifflin's memory in *The Haunted Bookshop* of a young Englishman killed in France in 1915.(1) Among the myriad echoes of Gissing in that novel, there arises the specter of the English author's young son slaughtered in the Great War. The Gissing pattern breaks out even when not planted. Christopher Morley may in his luck and happiness have considered Grub Street "perhaps the most exciting place of breadwinning known to the civilized man," but he was attuned, nonetheless, to the travails of Gissing and his like.(2) He stayed during his entire career in communion with the personality and fate of the one who most painfully put Grub Street into prose

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art. It is not strange after all to see Morley at home with Gissing. He hankered after an elusive grain. What goaded him was the theatricality of Steve O'Grady, the sharpness of George Gissing, the great distinctiveness of the two men: "But there are not enough Steves and Mr. Gissings. And so the respectable who are in the majority keep me respectable and dull and aching and wishing."(3)

The Haunted Bookshop is a mine of Gissing lore. After a half-century, the novel remains sturdy and perceptive, despite its bow to old-fashioned melodrama. The story's backbone is the character Roger Mifflin, the simple and passionate bookseller. A pure spirit, hostile to the universe that works outward from Gissing Street, Mifflin is in link with giants of the past. Bound in leather, they haunt his crusty premises. Announced on street signs in the neighborhood – Thackeray, Twain, Hazlitt, Butler, Carlyle, Whittier, others – they are channels leaving Gissing Street, the heart of the action. It is on Gissing Street where the haunted bookshop reposes and it is always back to Gissing Street that the reader is returned, wherever else he may be led by the author. For the *aficionado* of Gissing, it is a spin of charm to be whirled through this area. He is forever meeting the exile of Wakefield. The literary world to-day is being urged to recognize the incisive note of George Gissing, and it is a pleasantry to wander along a street named after him and to attend the Gissing Street movie palace and to run one's finger down a list of favored books, resting at its termination with a Gissing work, *The House of Cobwebs*.(4) In *The Haunted Bookshop* one constantly moves in a Gissing track and is in sunny adjunct to the scene occupied by Roger Mifflin.

The novel draws close on occasion to actual situations in *New Grub Street*. A get-together of Mifflin and cronies during one evening is remindful of the conversing between Biffen and Reardon, or Reardon and Milvain:

Mifflin - A fig for the ordinary rules of commerce! I came over here to Gissing Street to get away from them. My mind would blow out its fuses if I had to abide by the dirty little considerations of supply and demand. As far as I am concerned, supply *creates* demand.

Gladfist - Still, old chap, you have to abide by the dirty little consideration of earning a living, unless someone has endowed you? (5)

Is the name Mifflin suggestive of a combination of Milvain and Biffen? It is to this reader. Christopher Morley is playing an interesting game in *The Haunted Bookshop*. He has created his own peculiar work, but set up Gissing in it as chief ghost. I meet the word “ignoble” at the start of the narrative and Gissing moves into focus.(6) Morley uses his Gissing materials seriously as well as playfully. He is out to support the author’s thesis of a superior culture. The term “ignoble” has an unmistakable ring in Gissing. Its echo is unavoidable in Morley. Roger Mifflin is a man dedicated to books and to high esthetic purpose. For him to live otherwise is to be ignoble.

Roger conjures up the world of Charles Dickens in the same manner as Gissing. The bookseller is called “an incorrigible visionary” by his wife. He is chided for his romantic feeling for the England which Dickens portrayed. Roger admits his weakness, but says: “And yet something went out of the world when Victorian England vanished, something that will never come again. Take the stagecoach drivers, for instance. What a racy, human type they were! And what have we now to compare with them? Subway guards? Taxicab drivers?”(7) The fact that Roger lives in downtown Brooklyn in 1918 does not deter him from shrugging off the ordinariness of his surroundings and wishing for a gayer horizon. He is a quiet man but he responds to ribaldry. He is at one with Gissing who in *Charles Dickens* says: “Never is Dickens more joyously himself than when he tells of stage-coach and posting-vehicles. He tried his hand at a description of the railway, but with no such gusto, no such success. His youth belonged to the pre-locomotive time, the time of jolly faring on English roads – jolly in spite of frost and rain, and discomforts innumerable.”(8)

Roger Mifflin is more than romantic. He is anti-war and states his position emphatically. He underscores German militarism as an enemy of man. He attacks the blindness of such an attitude as that which a despotic Englishman states in *New Grub Street*: ‘If Germany would shut up her schools

and universities for the next quarter of a century and go ahead like blazes with military training there’d be a nation such as the world has never seen.”(9) The results of Prussian efficiency stare Roger in the face. Such a Germany he will not tolerate, as he examines the possibility of peace in the post-war world. The bookseller presents a dichotomy. He fixes his eyes on what he believes are eternal verities. He also grapples with the ugliness of the modern period. The cops and robbers atmosphere of *The Haunted Bookshop* overlays a dynamic of totalitarianism and espionage. The Nazis are never far away from the shop on Gissing Street. What lies beneath the surface of *New Grub Street* erupts on the pavement in Morley’s novel. Roger Mifflin is Gissingesque in thought and temperament. When words like “occluded,” “crepitant,” “asymptote” hit me, I recall Gissing’s pedantry. The vocabulary emanates from Morley, however, not from his creation Roger. The bookseller is simpler than some words strewn around him. When Roger attacks war, I recall Gissing’s steel.

When a young suitor in *The Haunted Bookshop* exclaims of his lovely target: “Damn it, what right has any girl to be as pretty as that? Why – why, I’d like to beat her!” this reader recoils from a bad memory.(10) Such an enthusiasm for woman-handling is a version of the franker finger-itching often to be found in Gissing’s young men. Edwin Reardon contemplates beating up his wife in *New Grub Street*, but he withdraws from the offensive thought. He is as “amazed” at himself as Morley’s young hero seems to be when he views his tendency. Masculine behavior in *The Haunted Bookshop*,

at least on the part of the swain, is in the Gissing fashion. The young suitor peers at his beloved from a secret vantage point, reminding me of Reardon and of others in Gissing's work. The hero of *Eve's Ransom* rents a room directly across the street in order to spy on Eve. Morley's man follows the same course in order to keep tabs on his beloved. (11) The similarity appears to be cheerful copying.

The Haunted Bookshop shows a partiality for a number of authors, but for none so openly as for Gissing:

As they sat round the fading bed of coals, Roger began hunting along his private shelves. "Have you ever read any Gissing?" he said.

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Titania made a pathetic gesture to Mrs. Mifflin. "It's awfully embarrassing to be asked these things! No, I never heard of him."

"Well, as the street we live on is named after him, I think you ought to," he said. He pulled down his copy of *The House of Cobwebs*. "I'm going to read you one of the most delightful short stories I know. It's called 'A Charming Family.'"(12)

Roger does not get to read the short story to his guest. But he signals his fervor to the reader. Christopher Morley had a keen appreciation of George Gissing, building him warp and woof into the fabric of one of America's most popular tales.

In *Pipefuls* (1920), a collection of essays, Roger Mifflin is met again in "Meditations of a Bookseller." Roger gravitates to the posture of Henry Ryecroft:

What a fascination there is in good prose – "the cool element of prose" as Milton calls it – a sort of fluid happiness of the mind, unshaken by the violent pangs of great poetry. I am not subtle enough to describe it, but in the steadily cumulating satisfaction of first-class prose there seems to be something that speaks direct to the brain, unmarred by the claims of the senses, the emotions. I meditate much, ignorantly and fumblingly, on the modes and purposes of writing. It is so simple – "Fool!" said my Muse to me "look in thy heart and write!" – all that is needful is to tell what happens; and yet how hard it is to summon up that necessary candor. (13)

As I read on, I find Roger's attitude resolving into the following components: a serenity and intellectual activity as against agitation and emotional involvement; a long, detailed analysis of a thought, namely, that good prose flows from fidelity to self; and the support of a quiet self as a personality pattern. This disciplining makes for a more subdued Roger than the one we encountered in the novel. Henry Ryecroft could not have argued with the development.

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In another essay in *Pipefuls* there appears an obituary to a man named Silas Orrin Howes, an old Brentano hand. Silas was a man who "loved, above all, those writers who can present truth with a faint tang of acid flavour, the gooseberry jam of literature as it were." It is needless to ask whether Silas liked George Gissing. He was constitutionally a Gissingite. "As one looks back at that quaint,

honorable life, one is aware of a high, noble spirit shining through it; a spirit that sought but little for itself, welcomed love and comradeship that came its way, and was content with a modest round of routine duty because it afforded inner contact with what was beautiful and true. One remembers an innate gentleness, and a loyalty to a high and chivalrous ideal.”(14) He invites comparison with characters from, say, *The Nether World*. Silas Orrin Howes was no proletarian, but he embodied the selflessness and fruitless courage of a Sidney Kirkwood and a Jane Snowdon. Morley, in picturing Silas, aligns himself with muted and defenseless beings.

That the American writer is saturated with Gissing is shown again and again. An essay called “Three Hours for Lunch” singles out Robert Cortes Holliday, a dear friend of Morley, who wrote with a “Gissingesque appreciation of the humours of landladies and all the queer fish that shoal through the backwaters of New York Lodging houses.”(15) Holliday is apparently a key figure in a consideration of the Master’s influence in America. Special attention is called to him here and elsewhere in the work of Christopher Morley. He is a person not to be neglected. For those readers who are intimate with the rigors of Gissing’s friendship with an active contemporary, a prize awaits in the essay “Passage from Some Memoirs.”(16) It is a delightful account of two young men out on their Manhattan lunchhour, who careen around Union Square and its byways, ending up at a local bookshop, where each exults over his find – one youth clutching a volume by Morley Roberts and the other a title by George Gissing. The young men vie in excitement, much as the two English authors must have done in their sparring decades before in London. It is warming to watch, and to remember the situation to which the New Yorkers bear some resemblance.

Thus is it with *Pipefuls*. *John Mistletoe* (1931) is next and raises an odd and dramatic issue.

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It is autobiographical fiction in which we are introduced by the hero to the constellation Orion – “Orion, for which he always had a notable regard.” With the hunter pushing across the sky, a pond glistening below, a dog nuzzling nearby, the author creates strokes which are basic to his emotional attitude now. Morley is intrigued by the constellation, he loves the small pond, he draws in utter intimacy to the dog. All three have a relevancy to George Gissing. The dog is named directly after Gissing:

Christopher Morley had a real dog named Gissing, and the real Gissing’s story had almost as many crises as that of his namesake. “He was called Gissing,” says Morley in the Essay of that title, “because he arrived, in the furnace man’s poke, on the same day on which, after long consideration, we were united in holy booklock with a copy of *By the Ionian Sea*.” He was a dog of no particular breed, and his master’s adjectives for him are “haphazard” and “synthetic.” In “Birthday Poem for a Dog” he is “Brown as a November tree,” allowed to “scud among the trees,” chasing “all the sticks in Roslyn woods.” He chased sticks thrown for him into the pond where the tadpoles were found, and this pond was ever after known as Gissing’s. (17)

The dog Gissing, celebrated as early as in *Where the Blue Begins*, was a long-time companion of the author.

John Mistletoe testifies to Morley’s deep emotion about the four-legged creature:

But when you begin to write about actual living, instead of nice fantastical stuff, you are immediately embarrassed; it all sounds very humble. If you admit that

one evening (you remember that cool evening in April when there were more stars than lonely people knew what to do with?) you sat down in the kitchen with a dog and a plate of frankfurters and said to yourself, this is unquestionably one of the most beautiful evenings I have known, – well, it isn't the kind of

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thing that goes well in print. A mature dog is excellent for conversation. Anyone who has ever sent the family away for a holiday and lived alone with the dog and the icebox, understands why old virgins soliloquize to their cats and canaries. No one, moreover, appreciates the very special genius of your conversation as a dog does.(18)

This is more “fantastical” composition than anything he could have had in mind. It is a straight admission of serious loneliness and of a terrible need for attention. What is it George Gissing once said? – “More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.” Morley, famous, comfortable, protected, was no less craving of a special sentiment.

There is a poignancy in his naming his dog Gissing and in his having a close, tender tie with the animal. The man who once gave over a *Bowling Green* column to a cat named Pushkin could be depended upon to dub a dog Gissing. But the aura that hung over the dog was not won by the cat. The dog was rare. Morley spoke of the “dogged weariness” with which George Gissing wrote his three-deckers. The pleasant American appreciated the exhaustion of the English author saddled by convention and need. Not merely the style and psychology of Gissing made him attractive to Morley. The latter was taken by the plain, day-to-day heroics of his predecessor. Christopher Morley thought so highly of George Gissing that he named his dog for him. Greater praise hath no man. It is a praise that tells a lot about Morley in addition to the man he respected.

Perhaps more than any other American writer, Christopher Morley in his lifetime sang Gissing's name. He promoted his image in so many different ways. Ebullience coming up against gloom could be a demolishing agent. This was not so with Morley. Perception guided him as well as levity. When levity came into play, it was accompanied by regard for the idealism and artistry in Gissing. Morley, in reviewing *The Odd Women*, can allow that the novel's inept beginning “moved me to audible mirth,” but once “we can push beyond the deplorably comic effect of his opening passages, we begin to perceive his strong pity.(19) The mirthful Morley defends the downcast

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Gissing. “Gissing's usual instincts were far from festive. I love to remember that when he first went to Paris one of his earliest pilgrimages was to the Morgue.” (20) One can imagine Morley being tickled by the picture. Still no one was more warmly disposed to the actor.

The Ironing Board (1949), published after another Great War, presents Morley undiminished in his feeling for the Englishman. The essay “Bronzino's Mixture,” old-fashioned in its newsman's reminiscing, tells of Morley dashing into a bookshop on behalf of a friend who has not yet read *Ryecroft*. There he is balked by Bronzino, the bookseller, who will permit no highhandedness on the Gissing issue. In fact, he intends to reread that very night his one copy of *The House of Cobwebs*, a volume Morley adores. Not only doesn't Bronzino have a copy of *Ryecroft* to sell, but he refuses to let go of the short stories. Morley is puzzled. At least, he hoped to endow his friend with the one book. How can Bronzino absorb a rereading of *The House of Cobwebs* when he has only just recently gotten through a first reading? How? How! That is the secret of Bronzino's drink, a quaff

to tempt the Gissing fan and the ardent reader. The reward? “Those dim, desiccated, despondent stories! The lurking, lugubrious laughter!”(21) In these two alliterative outbursts is a wealth of Gissing criticism.

Gentleman’s Relish (1955), published near the end of Morley’s life, gives us the maximum Morley, not the essayist or fictionist, but the poet. It is as a poet foremost that he cared to be remembered. The poem “Orion Bears His Pack” revives Morley’s sky comrade, the hunter who is viewed above Gissing Pond:

Outside my kitchen steps he wambles on,
The hugest hobo pattern of our sky:
Sirius, Betelgeuse, and Procyon
Are corners of the pack he bears so high –
A burden any bindelstiff to crack:
I marvel for him, evenings of clear show,
Heaving still, on overtoppled back,
The cumbered bottomless bag of human woe.

But rank imposes heavy stars on shoulders:
He sags, he vanishes down westbeyond,

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Whistled and cheered by neutralist beholders
And fluting freshman frogs in Gissing Pond.
His cosmic rucksack, overload of earth,
Cinched tight, and three-star buckled at the girth.(22)

The lines are in sympathy with conflicts and images born of George Gissing.

“A Lodger in Maze Pond,” from the classic esteemed by Morley, has in it the disclosure “He bore the burden for three more years, then his wife died.” After this appears a contrast of metaphors. The widower on a holiday in Italy is seen posed between Maze Pond and Lake Como.(23) The Italian setting might have proven to be an escape from a guileful woman waiting to submerge him back at Maze Pond. But Shergold, the doomed man, vanishes to London and to eventual disaster. Maze Pond is a witness to his end. Christopher Morley once noted the statement of D. H. Lawrence, “The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it. (24) Lawrence’s rule might well be employed with respect to Morley. “Orion Bears His Pack” stands as a beautiful and significant sonnet. Set in heaven, it is yet a song to terrestrial man. And the more that man is explored, the more is the poem readable. Its matrix is extended and made completer. It is not merely a lovely overflow of feeling. It is an eloquent testimony to the human condition, as seen in Gissing’s short story and in the entangled story of Gissing himself.

Notes

- 1 - Christopher Morley, *The Haunted Bookshop*, New York, (1919) 1955, p. 15.
- 2 - ———, *Pipefuls*, Garden City, N.Y., 1920, p. 98.
- 3 - ———, *John Mistletoe*, Garden City, N.Y., 1931, p. 209.
- 4 - *The Haunted Bookshop*, pp. 43, 23.
- 5 - *Ibid.*, p. 45.

- 6 - *Ibid*, p. 27.
 7 - *Ibid*, p. 78.
 8 - George Gissing, *Charles Dickens*, London, (1898) 1902, p. 38.
 9 - —, *New Grub Street*, New York, (1891) 1926, p. 22.

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- 10 - *The Haunted Bookshop*, p. 95
 11 - *Ibid.*, p. 130.
 12 - *Ibid.*, p. 169.
 13 - *Pipefuls*, p. 68. Also see *John Mistletoe*, p. 348, for language spent on, of all things, seaweed. The prose is finely honed, not dissimilar to treatments of nature in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.
 14 - *Pipefuls*, p. 95. See also *John Mistletoe*, p. 148, for a reference to Silas Orrin Howes and Ryecroft.
 15 - *Pipefuls*, p. 182. See also *The Ironing Board*, pp.176-178, for a further discussion of Holliday and his work.
 16 - *Pipefuls*, pp. 188-193.
 17 - Helen Mck. Oakley, *Christopher Morley on Long Island*, Roslyn, N.Y., 1967, p. 6.
 18 - *John Mistletoe*, p. 70.
 19 - Christopher Morley, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, vol. 3 (May 14, 1927), p. 821.
 20 - —, *The Ironing Board*, Freeport, N.Y., (1949) 1968, p. 27.
 21 - *Ibid.*, pp. 104-107.
 22 - Christopher Morley, *Gentleman's Relish*, New York, 1955, p. 70.
 23 - George Gissing, *The House of Cobwebs*, ed. Thomas Seccombe, London, (1906) 1914, pp. 241-264.
 24 - *John Mistletoe*, p. 435.

Addendum to George Gissing at College (*Newsletter*, V. 2.)

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 University of Manchester

Gissing was caught in the act of theft on May 31st, 1876, and on June 6th was convicted of the offence and sentenced to one month's imprisonment. He was expelled from college on June 13th. The following references to a relief-fund in his aid appear in the correspondence-file for 1876 of the College Registrar, J. Holme Nicholson:

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10th July (to Dr. Greenwood, the Principal) (1). "... I will take charge of the Gissing Fund if the subscribers think proper to send the subscriptions to me – Broadfield has paid me his."

15th July (to the Principal). "I shall be glad to receive the Gissing subscriptions. I have already got £22 in hand."

18th July (to Herbert Phillips Esq., 35 Church St.) "I have to acknowledge the receipt of your cheque towards the fund which Dr. Greenwood is raising in aid of G. R. Gissing, lately a student of Owens College. / I shall probably hear from Dr. Greenwood on Friday in what manner the funds I have received are to be applied.'

In letters apparently prior to 15th July, R. C. Christie, Esq., and W. H. Houldsworth, Esq., are thanked by the Registrar for contributions of five pounds each to the fund. Christie had been one of the first professors at Owens; Houldsworth, Broadfield and he were all members of the College Council and the Court of Governors.

Professor Coustillas has reason to believe, I understand, that the fund had been initiated by a certain Rev. S. A. Steinthal, but the fullest information in print is in *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1912), by Morley Roberts, formerly a fellow-student and friend of Gissing's. Roberts refers to one of his "own Friends ("afterwards fifth wrangler of his year at Cambridge"), the son of "Rev. Mr. Wolff, the Unitarian minister at the chapel in Broad Street," and tells us that the son, "Edward," "induced his father to interest himself in Henry Maitland's future." "Mr. Wolff," he continues, "and several other men of some eminence in the city did what they could for him. They got together a little money and on his release sent him away to America..." (p. 32, 1958 ed.). The editor of the 1958 edition, Morchard Bishop, provides a key to the fictitious names originally employed by Roberts in his account, but "Wolff" is not one of those identified. Despite A. C. Ward's statement in the bibliography of his *George Gissing* (London, 1959) that Roberts in his 1923 edition had re-instated the true names of persons who had died since his book appeared, there can be no doubt

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that the "Rev. Mr. Wolff" was in fact the Rev. S.A. Steinthal, although Steinthal had died in 1902.

Steinthal, son of a naturalized German immigrant of 1809, was to become a well-known, much-respected local personage as minister of the Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, in the centre of Manchester – being in 1876 newly co-minister with the Rev. William Gaskell, widower of the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell. His eldest son, Alfred Ernest (later at Trinity College, Cambridge, and placed *third* wrangler in the Tripos) was one year behind Gissing as a student at Owens, having been Gissing's successor as winner of the Junior Oxford Locals Exhibition. (His career at Owens closely resembled that of Gissing in its scholastic brilliance, but Steinthal went on to become a prominent local professional man, a member of the University Court and Council and Treasurer to the University).

Whether or not the Principal's raising of a fund was due to a suggestion from Mr. Steinthal, it looks as if the funds referred to by the Registrar will have formed part of the provision of "a little money" mentioned by Morley Roberts. As Steinthal was also Secretary of the "Manchester Domestic Mission for (Undenominational) Ministry amongst the Poor," his benevolent initiative could have been more certainly presumed, it may be supposed, than that of the college principal or even of other local "Christian laymen," as Christie and Houldsworth are described in connection with another enterprise of the same decade – the establishment of a Church of England students' residency: whatever the exact facts of the matter, there is some degree of tribute to Gissing in a sympathy thus *officially* demonstrated by the principal himself.

Mr. Steinthal, moreover, resided (in Nelson Street) within a half-mile of the college and Gissing's lodgings (2) in Grafton Street (a street *still* lodged in by students at Manchester, though in process of being demolished) were part-way to the Steinthal house. Steinthal is likely to have had a

fair knowledge of the character and circumstances of the young man involved in the scandalous case when he reckoned Gissing worthy of his assistance. (3)

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Notes

- 1 - In his endnote to my original article the Editor was, of course, right in correcting my slip of tongue in designating A .W. Ward as "Principal" at this time. I would also note that Professor Coustillas in his *Les Carnets d'Henry Ryecroft* shows that Gissing's Gibbon prize was gained at *college*, not at *school*. I had not been able to see Professor Coustillas' edition when I reproduced in my article the common misinformation.
- 2 - On June 23rd of the same year, the Senate recommended to the College Council "That a list of registered lodgings be kept at the College... that no lodgings shall be placed on the list, or otherwise recommended to students or their parents, the keepers of which shall not have undertaken to furnish the Principal with any information he may from time to time require concerning the students who may be their lodgers..."
- 3 - Letters from the University archives, having come to my attention through the interest of Dr. Stanley Roberts, Deputy Librarian, are used here with the kind permission of the authorities and at some trouble to the custodian of such documents. Other information is drawn from the *Manchester Directory* issues of the time and from cuttings filed at the Manchester Central Reference Library.

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Review

Notes on Social Democracy, by George Gissing. With an Introduction by Jacob Korg. London: Enitharmon Press, 1968. £1.2.6. Enitharmon Gissing Series No. 1.

The publication of Gissing's three articles on Social Democracy in this attractive booklet is an event that should have been commented upon in the *Newsletter* at an earlier date. It was all the more welcome for its unexpectedness. Even the few persons who were in the know some months before the book appeared and who had time to get used to the idea of the project, felt there was something bold about it. So much of Gissing is out of print or in print at fancy prices that the first need may

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reasonably seem to be the reprinting of all the novels and short stories in moderately priced editions. Yet everyone should rejoice to see the first number of this series which, when all the numbers announced have appeared, will probably add more to our knowledge of the man and his works than some more imposing volumes issued in the fairly remote past.

Few people must have had an opportunity to read this contribution of Gissing's to the *Pall Mall Gazette* before the publication of the present edition. It would even seem that some of the critics who referred to the articles with an air of authority never troubled to read them. This is assuredly the only way to account for the disturbingly recurring statement that Gissing, on the invitation of John Morley, wrote two articles for his evening paper and then refused to have anything more to do with journalism, for indeed there were three articles and not two. The obvious

objection to this, prompted by generosity, would be that when they were reprinted in the weekly selection from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, entitled the *Pall Mall Budget*, the three articles became two – thus making the error apparent only. But when we read that the articles were unsigned, doubts vanish completely – we hold the proof that they have been mentioned and commented upon unread for in both the daily and weekly editions of the paper the concluding article is signed “G.” Jacob Korg’s presentation of the articles does not insist on such material details; yet the very existence of this little book should set things right. To find a file of the *Pall Mall Gazette* for consultation was admittedly difficult, to procure a copy of the present booklet is easy enough, though I should advise potential buyers to act quickly if they do not wish to come a day after the fair. The whole text is here, faithfully transcribed by the editor and tastefully printed by the Daedalus Press.

After an introductory paragraph on the circumstances of publication, Jacob Korg connects Gissing’s notes on social democracy with the early novels – *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed* and *Demos*, remarking that “while the articles on socialism are primarily factual, they are also a valuable indirect indication of the state of Gissing’s political attitudes during a period of intellectual

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retrenchment.” He analyses the decreasing political and social commitment from the time of the novelist’s meeting with Bertz to the autumn of 1885 when he deplored William Morris’s participation in Socialist meetings. Jacob Korg is certainly right in seeing in “these 1880 articles ... some foreshadowings of Gissing’s approaching disillusionment with socialism.” Already, *Workers in the Dawn* revealed an ambiguous position and that “division of purpose” – political involvement versus devotion to art – which in some form or other lasted at least until *The Nether World*. Gissing’s contacts with the Positivists, and more particularly with their English leader Frederic Harrison, contributed to restore for a time the zeal which Eduard Bertz had roused in his friend. So the importance of these articles lies in the fact that they show us a socialistic Gissing, which none of the novels does as clearly – not even *Workers in the Dawn*, unless we choose to see the author’s own views in the working-class scenes only, an interpretation which is open to the charge of arbitrariness. They also show us the author’s outlook on the German political scene, and more generally his interest in a country whose civilization and literature still appealed to him as much as those of France and Italy. It is appropriate here to recall his gradual loss of interest in Germany in the eighteen-nineties, in spite of his steady and profitable correspondence with Bertz, until his visit in April 1898 gave a *coup de grâce* to his Germanism and inspired him with the main theme of *The Crown of Life*.

I referred above to the current view (borrowed *en bloc* from the testimonies of Frederic and Austin Harrison, whose knowledge of Gissing the man was detrimental to their appreciation of Gissing the artist) that the author would hear no more of journalism after his short-lived collaboration with John Morley. Although this is belied by the eight quarterly contributions to *Vyestnik Evropy* which followed immediately, it may seem to imply that Gissing had no faith in his capacity as a writer of solid articles for newspapers and reviews. If such had been the case – which is very doubtful – the present articles indirectly reflect Gissing’s masochism, for indeed they rather tend to prove that he could have made a career as a journalist. They evince qualities which would have been appreciated by any responsible editor. They are well-documented, well-balanced and

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written in a style that is pleasantly free from the glibness and the urge to show off which are two of the plagues of modern journalism. I may add that John Morley was not unappreciative of their

qualities. In an unpublished letter, dated September 4, 1880, which I discovered recently, he wrote to Gissing: "I much like the calm style of these Notes." The letter in question requires our attention for another reason. After acknowledging the articles, Morley made two suggestions. He asked Gissing to insert in the early portion "a good paragraph giving us a concrete graphic picture of a meeting of one of the London clubs: tobacco, style of speech, etc" and, after the enumeration of the articles of the Socialist programme, to add some lines "pointing at how near we approach to socialism in England with our Poor Rates, our vast system of factory legislation, compulsory education etc." A rereading of the first article shows that Gissing complied with Morley's requests. The political demands of the German Socialists he had listed as follows: "universal suffrage with secret voting; direct legislation by the people; the establishment of a national militia in place of the standing army; perfect freedom of speech; universal free education; a progressive income tax in place of all other taxes; fixed hours of labour; sanitary control of workmen's dwellings and of manufactories, &c." The passage which Gissing added in compliance with Morley's wishes indicates that he was rather less optimistic than his employer as regards the progress which had materialized under Victoria's reign. It reads like a half-hearted addition: "We may notice, in passing, that legislation has already secured to the English operative such of these reforms as more immediately affect him in his every-day labour; whilst our poor laws, theoretically, embody something like a Socialist principle. Compulsory education we have, but our individualism still holds out against making it universally free, thus leaving the monopoly of higher culture to those who can afford to purchase it." In these two sentences we plainly recognize an allusion to the various Factory Acts which tried to improve the working conditions of the labouring classes from the eighteen thirties onward, but through the reticence in acknowledging the profit to be derived from the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act we see the man who had read *Oliver Twist* and possibly

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Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips* – the man also who was to allude almost morbidly to the prospect of ending his life in the workhouse. And the second sentence implies a personal reflection on the days when he was a student at Owens College, when his presence was only guaranteed by his various scholarships. Had he been only a little less brilliant, the College door would have been closed to him because his mother could not have afforded to pay the fees. The author of *Born in Exile* was, doubtless unconsciously, making a promise to his readers.

A booklet which supplies material that only a handful of people have so far been privileged to study and which offers a picture of Gissing at a time when he was still hesitating between social commitment and the solitude of the ivory tower, cannot be overlooked by anyone interested in the author. Both introduction and text make it, in the bookseller's language, "a very desirable item."

P. Coustillas

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Recent Publications

- Coustillas, Pierre. *George Gissing at Alderley Edge*, London, Enitharmon Press. Limited edition: 250 copies. 32s.6d.
- Coustillas, Pierre. *Gissing's Writings on Dickens*. Together with two uncollected reviews by George Gissing from *The Times Literary Supplement*. London, Enitharmon Press. Limited edition: 275 copies. 30s.
- Goode, John, and Lelchuk, Alan, "Gissing's *Demos*: A Controversy," *Victorian Studies*, June 1969,

pp. 431-40.

Rogers, James A., "The Art and Challenge of George Gissing," *Dissertation Abstracts*, June 1969, p. 4501A.

Spiers, John, and Coustillas, Pierre, "A George Gissing Bibliography," *Book Collecting and Library Monthly*, November 1969, pp. 221-24. Third part of the article.

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