

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY MAITLAND

MORLEY ROBERTS

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

This book was dictated by J. H. mostly in my presence, and I consider it well worth publishing. No doubt Henry Maitland is not famous, though since his death a great deal has been written of him. Much of it, outside of literary criticism, has been futile, false, and uninstructed. But J. H. really knew the man, and here is what he said of him. We shall be told, no doubt, that we have used Maitland's memory for our own ends. Let that be as it may; when there is no proof of guilt, there may well be none of innocence. The fact remains that Henry Maitland's life was worth doing, even in the abbreviated and censored form in which it now appears. The man was not eminent, only because he was not popular and did not live long enough. One gets to eminence nowadays by longevity, self-praise, or bad work. While Maitland starved, X or Y or Z might wallow in a million sixpences. In this almost childishly simple account of a man's life there is the essence of a literary epoch. Here is a writing man put down, crudely it may be, but with a certain power. There is no book quite like it in the English tongue, and the critic may take what advantage he will of that opening for his wit. At any rate we have a portrait emerging which is real. Henry Maitland stands on his feet, and on his living feet. He is not a British statue done in the best mortuary manner. There is far too little sincere biography in English. We are a mealy-mouthed race, hypocrites by the grave and the monument. Ten words of natural eulogy, and another ten of curious and sympathetic comment, may be better than tons of marble built up by a hired liar with his tongue in his cheek. In the whole book, which cannot be published now, there are things worth waiting for. I have cut and retrenched with pain, for I wanted to risk the whole, but no writer or editor is his own master in England. I am content to have omitted some truth if I have permitted nothing false. The reader who can say truly, "I should not have liked to meet Henry Maitland," is a fool or a fanatic, or more probably both. Neither of those who are primarily responsible for this little book is answerable to such. We do not desire his praise, or even his mere allowance. All who are interested in the art of letters and those who practise in the High Court of Literature, will perceive what we had in our minds. Here is

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life, not a story or a constructed diary, and the art with which it is done is a secondary matter. If Henry Maitland bleeds and howls, so did Philoctetes, and the outcry of Henry Maitland is most pertinent to our lives. For all life, even at its best, is tragic; and there is much in Maitland's which is dramatically common to our world as we see it and live in it. If we have lessened him at times from the point of view of a hireling in biographic praise, we have set him down life size all the same; and as we ask for no praise, we care for no blame. Here is the man.

The full manuscript, which may possibly be published after some years, is, in the meantime, placed in safe custody.

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CHAPTER ONE

It is never an easy thing to write the life, or even such a sketch as I propose to make, of a friend whom one knew well, and in George Gissing's case it is uncommonly difficult. The usual biographer is content with writing panegyric, and as he must depend for his material, and even sometimes for his eventual remuneration, on the relatives of his subject, he is from the start in a hopeless position, except, it may be, as regards the public side of the life in question. But in the case of a man of letters the personal element is the only real and valuable one, or so it seems to me, and even if I were totally ignorant of Gissing's work I think it would yet be possible for me to do a lifelike sketch of him. I believe, moreover, that it is my duty to do it, although it may be painful to those connected with him. Yet soon after his death many came and asked me to write his biography. It was an understood thing that of all his friends I knew him best, and was certainly the chief authority on his career from the Owens College days up to his final break with his second wife. But in 1904 there were many obstacles to my doing this work. His two sons were young. His sisters and his mother were still alive. I say nothing of the wife herself, then being taken care of, or of a third lady of whom I must speak presently. Several people came to me with proposals about a book on George Gissing. One of the partners of a big publishing house made me a definite offer for it on behalf of his firm. On the other hand one of his executors, Miss Collet, a most kindly and amiable and very able woman employed in a great accountant's office in the city, who had done very much for George Gissing in his later life, begged me not to do the book, or if I did it to hold it over until her responsibilities as executrix and trustee for the sons were at an end. But it is now nearly nine years since he died, and I feel that if I do not put down at once what I knew of him it never will be written, and something will be lost, something which has perhaps a little value, even though not so great as those could wish who knew and loved George Gissing.

There is no doubt that many people will accuse me of desiring to use his memory for my own advantage. "My withers are unwrung." Those who speak in this way must have little knowledge of the poor profit to be derived from writing such a book, and the proportion of that profit to the labour employed in it. On three separate occasions I spoke to Gissing about writing his biography, and it was an understood thing between us that if he died before me I was to write his life and tell the whole and absolute truth about him. This he gave me the most definite permission to do. I believe he felt that it might in some ways be of service to humanity for such a book to be written. Only the other day, when I wrote to Miss Collet concerning the biography, she answered me: "If I seem lacking in cordiality in this matter do not attribute it to any want of sympathy with you. I am not attempting to dissuade you. George Gissing was sent into hell for the purpose of saving souls; perhaps it is a necessary thing that his story should be written by all sorts of people from their different points of view." Once I proposed to him to use his character and career as the chief figure in a long story. He wrote to me, "By all means. Why not?" Had I not the letter in which he said this I should myself almost doubt my own recollection, but it is certain that he knew the value of his own experience, and felt that he might perhaps by his example save some from suffering as he suffered.

No doubt very much that I say of him will not be true to others. To myself at any rate it is true. We know very little of each other, and after all it is perhaps in biography that one is most acutely conscious of the truth in the

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pragmatic view of truth. Those things are true in George Gissing's life and character which fit in wholly with all my experience of him and make a coherent and likely theory. I used to think I knew him very well, and yet when I remember and reflect it seems to me that I know exceedingly little about him. And yet again, I am certain that of the two people in the world with whom I was best acquainted he was one. We go through life believing that we know many, but if we sit down and attempt to draw them we find here and there unrelated facts and many vague incoherencies. We are in a fog about our very dear friend whom but yesterday we were ready to judge and criticise with an air of final knowledge. There is something humiliating in this, and yet how should we, who know so little of ourselves, know even those we love? To my mind, with all his weaknesses, which I shall not extenuate, Gissing was a noble and notable character, and if anything I should write may endure but a little while it is because there is really something of him in my words. I am far more concerned to write about George Gissing for those who loved him than for those who loved him not, and I shall be much better pleased if what I do about him takes the shape of an impression rather than of anything like an ordinary biography. Every important and unimportant political fool who dies nowadays is buried under obituary notices and a mausoleum in two volumes a mausoleum which is, as a rule, about as high a work of art as the angels on tombstones in an early Victorian cemetery. But Gissing, I think, deserves, if not a better, a more sympathetic tribute.

When I left Bedford Grammar School my father, being in the Civil Service, was sent to Manchester as Surveyor of Taxes, and his family soon followed him. I continued my own education at Owens College, which was then beginning to earn a high reputation as an educational centre. Some months before I met Gissing personally I knew his reputation was that of an extraordinary young scholar. Even as a boy of sixteen he swept everything before him. There was nobody in the place who could touch him at classical learning, and everybody prophesied the very greatest future for the boy. I met him first in a little hotel, not very far from the College, where some of us young fellows used to go in the intervals of lectures to play a game of billiards. I remember quite well seeing him sit on a little table swinging his legs, and to this day I can remember somewhat of the impression he made upon me. He was curiously bright, with a very mobile face. He had abundant masses of brown hair combed backwards over his head, grey-blue eyes, a very sympathetic mouth, an extraordinarily well-shaped chin although perhaps both mouth and chin were a little weak and a great capacity for talking and laughing.

Henceforth he and I became very firm friends at the College, although we belonged to two entirely different sets. I was supposed to be an extraordinarily rowdy person, and was always getting into trouble both with the authorities and with my fellows, and he was a man who loathed anything like rowdiness, could not fight if he tried, objected even then to the Empire, hated patriotism, and thought about nothing but ancient Greece and Rome, or so it would appear to those who knew him at that time.

I learnt then a little of his early history. Even when he was but a boy of ten or eleven he was recognised as a creature of most brilliant promise. He always believed that he owed most, and perhaps everything, to his father, who must have been a very remarkable man. Henry never spoke about him in later life without emotion and affection. I have often thought since that Gissing felt that most of his disasters sprang from the premature death of his father, whom he loved so tenderly. Indeed the elder man must have been a remarkable figure, a gentle, courtly, and most kindly man, himself born in exile and placed in alien circumstances. Gissing often used to speak, with a catch in his voice, of the way his father read to him. I do not remember what books he read, but they were the classic authors of England; Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Tennyson. Some seem to imagine that the father had what is called a well-stocked library. This was not true, but he had many good books and taught his son to love them. Among these there was one great volume of Hogarth's drawings which came into George Gissing's personal possession, only, I think, when he was finally domiciled in a London flat, where he and I often looked at it. It is curious that even as a boy Hogarth had a fascination for him. He sometimes copied these drawings, for as a child he had no little skill as a draughtsman. What appealed to him in later days in Hogarth was the power of the man's satire, his painful bitterness, which can be equalled only by the ironies of Swift in another medium. Although personally I admire Hogarth I could never look at him with anything like pleasure or, indeed, without acute discomfort. I remember that Gissing in later years said in his book about Charles Dickens: "With these faces who would spend hours of leisure? Hogarth copied in the strict sense of the word. He gives us life and we cannot bear

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it."

Gissing's family came, I think, from Worcester, but something led the elder Gissing to Wakefield and there he came in contact with a chemist called Hick, whose business he presently bought. Perhaps the elder Gissing was not a wholly happy man. He was very gentle, but not a person of marked religious feeling. Indeed I think the attitude of the family at that time was one of free thought. From everything that George said of his father it always seemed to me that the man had been an alien in the cold Yorkshire town where his son was born. And Gissing knew that had his father lived he would never have been thrown alone into the great city of Manchester, "Lord of himself, that heritage of woe." Not all women comprehend the dangers that their sons may meet in such surroundings, and those who had charge of George Gissing's future never understood or recognised them in his youth. But his father would have known. In one chapter of the *The Whirlpool* there is very much of Gissing. It is a curiously wrought picture of a father and his son in which he himself played alternately the part of father and child. I knew his anxieties for his own children, and on reading that chapter one sees them renewed. But in it there was much that was not himself. It was drawn rather from what he believed his father had felt. In *The Whirlpool* the little boy spends an hour alone with his father just before bedtime, and he calls it "A golden hour, sacred to memories of the world's own childhood."

Gissing went to school in Wakefield and this school has been called a kind of "Dotheboys Hall," which of course is absolutely ridiculous. It was not, in fact, a boarding-school at all, but a day school. The man who ran it was called Harrison. Gissing said he was an uneducated man, or at any rate uneducated from his point of view in later years, yet he was a person of very remarkable character, and, taking it all round, did very good work. A man named Christopher started this school and sold it to Harrison, who had, I believe, some kind of a degree obtained at Durham. The boys who attended it were good middle class and lower middle class, some the sons of professional men, some the offspring of the richer tradesmen. Upon the whole it was a remarkably good school for that time. Many of the boys actually left the Grammar School at Wakefield to attend it. George Gissing always owned that Harrison took great pains with his scholars, and affirmed that many owed him much. As I said, the general religious air of Gissing's home at that time was not orthodox. I believe the feminine members of the family attended a Unitarian Church, but the father did not go to church at all. One example of this religious attitude of his home came out when Harrison called on his boys to repeat the collect of the day and Gissing replied abruptly that they did not do that kind of thing at home. Whereupon Harrison promptly set him to learn it, saying sternly that it would do him no harm.

For the most part in those early days the elder Gissing and his son spent Sunday afternoon in the garden belonging to their Wakefield house. Oddly enough this garden was not attached to the dwelling but was a kind of allotment. It has been photographically reproduced by George Gissing in the seventh chapter of the first volume of *A Life's Morning*. Very often George Gissing's father read to him in that garden.

One of Gissing's schoolfellows at Harrison's school was the son of the man from whom his father had bought the druggist's business. The elder Hick was a friend of Barry Sullivan, and theatrically mad. He started plays in which George always took some part, though not the prominent part which has been attributed to him by some people. Nevertheless he was always interested in plays and had a very dramatic way of reading anything that was capable of dramatic interpretation. He always loved the sound of words, and even when first at Manchester he took down a German book and read some of it aloud to the younger Hick who did not know German and said so. Whereupon Gissing shook his fist at him and said: "But Hick, listen, listen, listen doesn't it sound fine?" This endured through all his life. At school he used to read Oliver Wendell Holmes aloud to some of the other boys. This was when he was thirteen. Even then he always laid stress on beautiful words and loved their rhythm.

His father being a poor man, there would have been little opportunity for George Gissing to go to Manchester and to its great college if he had not obtained some scholarship. This became even more imperative when his father died. He did obtain this scholarship when he was somewhere about sixteen, and immediately afterwards was sent over to Manchester quite alone and put into lodgings there. At his school in Wakefield he had taken every

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possible prize, and I think it was two exhibitions from the London University which enabled him to go to Manchester. The college was a curious institution, one of the earliest endeavours to create a kind of university centre in a great provincial city. We certainly had a very wonderful staff there, especially on the scientific side. Among the men of science at the college were Sir Henry Roscoe; Schorlemmer, the great chemist; Dittmar, also a chemist, and Balfour Stewart, the physicist. On the classical side were Professor Greenwood and Professor Augustus Wilkins, who were not by any means so notable as their scientific colleagues. The eminence of our scientific professors did not matter very much, perhaps, from George Gissing's point of view, for from the day of his birth to the day of his death, he took no interest whatever in science and loathed all forms of speculative thought with a peculiar and almost amusing horror. Mathematics he detested, and if in later years I ever attempted to touch upon metaphysical questions he used to shut up, to use an American phrase, just like a clam. But on the classical side he was much more than merely successful. He took every prize open to him. In his book *Born in Exile* there is a picture of a youth on prize day going up to receive prize after prize, and I know that this chapter contains much of what he himself must have felt when I saw him retire to a modest back bench loaded with books bound in calf and tooled in gold.

Of course a college of this description, which was not, properly speaking, a university, could only be regarded, for a boy of his culture, as a stepping-stone to one of the older universities, probably Cambridge, since most of my own friends who did go to the university went there from Manchester. I do not think there was a professor or lecturer or a single student in the college who did not anticipate for George Gissing one of the brightest futures, so far as success at the university could make it so. It is possible that I alone out of those who regarded him with admiration and affection had some doubt of this, and that was not because I disagreed as a boy with any of the estimates that had been formed of him, but simply because for some reason or another he chose me as a confidant. Many years afterwards he said to me with painful bitterness : "It was a cruel and most undesirable thing that I, at the age of sixteen, should have been turned loose in a big city, compelled to live alone in lodgings, with nobody interested in me but those at the college. I see now that one of my sisters should certainly have been sent with me to Manchester."

One day he showed me a photograph. It was that of a young girl, aged perhaps seventeen he at the time being very little more with her hair down her back. She was not beautiful, but had a certain prettiness, the mere prettiness of youth, and she was undoubtedly not a lady. After some interrogation on my part he told me that she was a young prostitute whom he knew, and it will not be exaggerating my own feelings to say that I recognised instinctively and at once that if his relations with her were not put an end to some kind of disaster was in front of him. It was not that I knew very much about life, for what could a boy of less than eighteen really know about it? but I had some kind of instinctive sense in me and was perfectly aware, even then, that George Gissing had about as little of it as anybody I had ever met up to that time, or anybody I could ever expect to meet. It may seem strange to some that even at that time I had no rigid moral views, and extremely little religion, although I thought about it sufficiently to become deliberately a Unitarian, refusing to be confirmed in the English Church, very much to the rage of the parish clergyman, and with the result of much friction with my father. Yet I had some wisdom and did my best to get Gissing to give up this girl. He would not do so, and the thing went on, so far as I am aware, for the best part of a year. He did all he could, apparently, to get Marianne Helen (Nell) Harrison to leave the streets. He even bought a sewing machine and gave it her with this view. That was another sample of his early idealism.

This was in 1876, and the younger Hick, who was three years older than Gissing, had then just qualified as a doctor. He was an assistant at Darwen and one day went over to Manchester to see George, who told him what he had told me about this Nell Harrison. He even went so far as to say that he was going to marry her. Dr. Hick, being older, and knowing a little of life through his own profession, did not approve of this and objected strongly. Afterwards he regretted a thousand times that he had not written direct to Gissing's people to tell them of what was going on. Yet, although he was the older man, he was not so much older as to have got rid of the boyish loyalty of one youth to another, and he did not do what he knew he ought to have done. It is only fair to say he was still very young. He found out later that Gissing had even sold his father's watch to help this girl. This affair

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was also known to a young accountant who came from Wakefield, but with whom I was not acquainted, and also to another man at the college who is now in the Government Service. So far as I remember the accountant was not a good influence, but his other friend did what he could to get Gissing to break off this very undesirable relationship, with no more success than myself

I have never understood how it was that he got into such frightful financial difficulties. I can only imagine that Nell must have had, in one way or another, the greater portion of the income he got from the scholarships he held. I do know that his affection for her seemed at this time to be very sincere. And out of that affection there grew up, very naturally, a horror in his sensitive mind for the life this poor child was leading. He haunted the streets which she haunted, and sometimes saw her with other men. I suppose even then she must have been frightfully extravagant, and perhaps given to drink, but considering what his income was he should have been able to give her a pound a week if necessary, and yet have sufficient to live on without great difficulty. Nevertheless he did get into difficulties, and never even spoke to me about them. I was quite aware, in a dim kind of way, that he was in trouble and looked very ill, but he did not give me his fullest confidence, although one day he told me, as he had told Hick, that he proposed to marry her. I was only a boy, but I was absolutely enraged at the notion and used every possible means to prevent him from committing such an absurd act of folly. When we met I discussed it with him. I suppose I wrote him a dozen letters begging that he would do no such foolish thing. He would wrong himself, and could do the girl no possible good. My instincts told me even then that, instead of being raised, she would pull him down. These letters of mine were afterwards discovered in his rooms when the tragedy had happened.

During that time in 1876, we students at Owens College were much disturbed by a series of thefts in the common room,, and from a locker room in which we kept our books and papers and our overcoats. Books disappeared unaccountably and so did coats. Money was taken from the pockets of coats, and nobody knew who was to blame for it. Naturally enough we suspected a porter or one of the lower staff, but we were wrong. Without our knowledge the college authorities set a detective to discover the offender. One day I went into the common room, and standing in front of the fire found a man, a young fellow about my age, called Taylor, with whom I frequently played chess he was afterwards president of the Chess Club at Oxford and he said to me: "Have you heard the news?" " What news?" I asked. " Your friend, George Gissing, has been stealing those things that we have lost," said he. And when he said so I very nearly struck him, for it seemed a gross and incredible slander. But unfortunately it was true, and at that very moment Gissing was in gaol. A detective had hidden himself in the small room leading out of the bigger room where the lockers were and had caught him in the act. It was a very ghastly business and certainly the first great shock I ever got in my life. I think it was the same for everybody who knew the boy. The whole college was in a most extraordinary ferment, and all the Manchester people who took any real interest in the institution.

Professor Greenwood, who was then the head of the college, sent for me and asked me what I knew of the matter. This was because the police had found in Gissing's room letters from me which referred to Nell Harrison. I told the professor with the utmost frankness everything I knew, and maintained that I had done my utmost to get him to break with her, a statement all my letters supported. I have often imagined a certain suspicion, in the minds of some of those who are given to suspicion, that I had myself been leading the same kind of life as George Gissing. This was certainly not true; but one or two of those who did not like me and there are always some even threw out hints that I knew Gissing had been taking these things. Yet after my very painful interview with Professor Greenwood, who was a very delightful and kindly personality though certainly not so strong a man as the head of such a place should be I saw that he gave me every credit for what I had tried to do. Among my own friends at the college was a young fellow, Edward Wolff, the son of the Rev. Mr. Wolff, the Unitarian minister at the chapel in Broad Street. Edward was afterwards fifth wrangler of his year at Cambridge. He induced his father to interest himself in George Gissing's future. Mr. Wolff 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. He was met on coming out of prison by Dr. Hick's father, who also helped him in every possible way.

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It seemed to me then that I had probably seen the last of Gissing, and the turn my own career took shortly afterwards rendered this even more likely. In the middle of 1876 I had a very serious disagreement with my father, who was a man of great ability but very violent temper, and left home. On September 23 of that year I sailed for Australia and remained there, working mostly in the bush, for the best part of three years. During all that time I heard little of George Gissing, though I have some dim remembrance of a letter from him telling me that he was in America. It was in 1879 that I shipped before the mast at Melbourne in a Blackwall barque and came back to England as a seaman.

CHAPTER TWO

A psychologist or a romancer might comment on the matter of the last chapter till the sun went down, but the world perhaps would not be much further advanced. It is better for the man's apology or condemnation to come out of the drama that followed. This is where Life mocks at Art. The tragic climax and catastrophe are in the first act, and the remainder is a long and bitter commentary. Gissing and I seldom discussed his early life. Practically we never spoke of Manchester though we often enough touched on ancient things by implication. His whole life, as I saw it and shall relate it, is but a development of the nature which made his disaster possible.

So I come back to my own return from Australia. I had gone out there as a boy, and came back a man, for I had had a man's experiences; work, adventure, travel, hunger, and thirst. All this hardened a somewhat neurotic temperament, at any rate for the time, till life in a city, and the humaner world of books removed the temper which one gets when plunged in the baths of the ocean. During some months I worked for a position in the Civil Service and thought very little of Gissing, for he was lost. Yet as I got back into the classics he recurred to me at times, and I wrote about him to my own friends in Manchester. They sent me vague reports of him in the United States, and then at last there came word that he was once more in England; possibly, and even probably, in London. Soon afterwards I found in the Athenaeum an advertisement of a book entitled *Workers in the Dawn* by George Gissing. As soon as I saw it I went straightway to the firm that published it, and being ignorant of the ways of publishers, demanded Gissing's address, which was promptly and very properly refused for all they knew I might have been a creditor. They promised, however, to send on a letter to him, and I wrote at once, receiving an answer the very next day. He appointed as our meeting-place the smoking-room of the Horse Shoe Hotel at the bottom of Tottenham Court Road. It was probably one of the most curious meetings that had ever taken place in such a locality. We met late at night in the crowded smoking-room, and I found him very much his old self, for he was still a handsome and intelligent boy, though somewhat worn and haggard considering his years. He told me, chuckling, that I looked like a soldier, which was no doubt the result of some years on horseback possibly I walked with a cavalry stride. We sat and drank coffee, and had whiskey, and smoked, until we were turned out of the hotel at half-past twelve. It was perhaps owing to the fact that I was ever the greater talker that he learnt more of my life in Australia than I learnt of his in the United States. He was, in fact, somewhat reserved about his adventures there. And yet, little by little, I learnt a great deal it was always with him a case of little by little. At no time did he possess any great fluency or power of words when speaking of his own life.

It seems that friends had given him some letters to writers and others in New York, and he made the acquaintance there of many whose names I forget. I recollect only the name of Lloyd Garrison, the poet. Gissing told me that once Lloyd Garrison got him to go home with him about two o'clock in the morning to hear a sonnet on which Garrison had been working, as he affirmed almost with tears, for three whole months. As Gissing said, the result hardly justified the toil. Among his new friends were some of artistic and literary tendencies who had made a little club, where it was de rigueur at certain times to produce something in the form of a poem. Gissing showed me the set of verses with which he had paid his literary footing; they were amusing, but of no great importance. So long as Gissing's money lasted in New York he had not an unpleasant time. It was only when he had exhausted his means and had to earn a living by using his wits that he found himself in great difficulties, which were certainly not to be mitigated by the production of verse. But Gissing never pretended to write poetry, though he sometimes

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tried. I still have a few of his poems in my possession, one of them a set of love verses which he had put into a book but omitted on my most fervent recommendation. I believe, however, that there is still in existence much of his verse, if he did not destroy it in later years when circumstances, his wanderings and his poverty, made it inconvenient to preserve comparatively worthless papers. And yet, if he did not do so, it might now be of no small interest to men of letters.

When his means were almost exhausted he went to Boston, and from there drifted to Chicago. With a very few additions and alterations, the account given in *New Grub Street* would contain the essence of Gissing's own adventures in America. It is, however, written in a very light style, and is more or less tinged with humour. This humour is purely literary, for he felt very little of it when he was telling me the story. He certainly lived during two days, for instance, upon peanuts, and he did it in a town called Troy. I never gathered what actually drove him to Chicago: it was, perhaps, the general idea one gets in America that by going west one goes to the land of chances, but it certainly was not the place for George Gissing. As he relates in *New Grub Street*, he reached it with less than five dollars in his pocket, and with a courage at which he himself marvelled, paid four and a half dollars for a week's board and lodging, which made him secure for the moment. This boarding-house he once or twice described to me. It was an unclean place somewhere on Wabash Avenue, and was occupied very largely by small actors and hangers-on at the Chicago theatres. The food was poor, the service was worse, and there was only one common room in which they ate and lived. It was at this time, when he had taken a look round Chicago and found it very like Hell or Glasgow, which, indeed, it is, that he determined to attack the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. The description he gives of this scene in *New Grub Street* is not wholly accurate. I remember he said that he walked to and fro for hours outside the office of the paper before he took what remained of his courage in both hands, rushed into the elevator, and was carried to an upper storey. He asked for work, and the accessible and genial editor demanded, in return, what experience he had had of journalism. He said, with desperate boldness, "None whatever," and the editor, not at all unkindly, asked him what he thought he could do for them. He replied, "There is one thing wanting in your paper." "What is that?" asked the editor. "Fiction," said Gissing, "I should like to write you some." The editor considered the matter, and said that he had no objection to using a story provided it was good; it would serve for one of the weekly supplements, because these American papers at the end of the week have amazing supplements, full of all conceivable sorts of matter, "litter," good, bad, and indifferent. Gissing asked if he might try him with a story of English life, and got permission to do so.

He went away and walked up and down the lake shore for hours in the bitter wind, trying to think out a story, and at last discovered one. On his way home he bought a pen, ink, and paper, which they did not supply at the boarding-house. As it was impossible to write in his bedroom where there was, of course, no fire, and no proper heating, it being so poor a place, he was compelled to write on the table of the common room with a dozen other men there, talking, smoking, and no doubt quarrelling. He wrote this story in a couple of days, and it was long enough to fill several columns of the paper. To his intense relief it was accepted by the editor after a day or two's waiting, and he got eighteen dollars according to *New Grub Street*, though I believe as a matter of fact it was less in reality. He stayed for some time in Chicago working for the *Tribune*, but at last found that he could write no more. I believe the editor himself suggested that the stories were perhaps not quite what he wanted. The one that I saw I only remember vaguely. It was, however, a sort of psychological love-story placed in London, written without much distinction.

The account Whelpdale gives in *New Grub Street* of his visit to Troy is also fairly representative of Gissing's experiences. It was there that he lived for two or three days on peanuts, now and then buying five cents' worth in the street at some Italian peanut stand. In *New Grub Street* he calls them loathsome, and no doubt they soon do become disagreeable. A few are rather pleasing, more than a few are objectionable; and when anybody tries a whole diet of them for a day or two there is no doubt "loathsome" would be the proper word. After that he worked a few days for a photographer, and then, I think, for a plumber, but of this I remember very little. It is quite certain that he never earned enough money in America to enable him to return to England, but who lent it to him I have no idea. To have been twenty-four hours with no more than a handful of peanuts in his pocket was no doubt unpleasant, but, as I told him, it seemed very little to me. On one occasion in Australia I had been rather more

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than four and a half days without food when caught in a flood. Nevertheless this starvation was for him one of the initiation ceremonies into the mysteries of literature, and he was always accustomed to say, "How can such an one write? He never starved."

Still, to have been hard up in Chicago was a very great experience, as every one knows who knows that roaring city of the plains. Since that time I got to know Chicago well, and was there "dead broke." Thus I can imagine the state that he must have been in, and how desperate he must have become, to get out of his difficulties in the way he describes. The endeavour to obtain work in a hustling country like the United States is ever a desperate proceeding for a nervous and sensitive man, and what it must have been to George Gissing to do what he did with the editor of the Chicago Tribune can only be imagined by those who knew him. In many ways he was the most modest and the shyest man who ever lived, and yet he actually told this editor: "I have come to point out to you there is a serious lack in your paper." To those who knew Gissing this must seem as surprising as it did to myself, and in later years he sometimes thought of that incident with inexpressible joy at his own courage. Of course the oddest thing about the whole affair is that up to that moment he had never written fiction at all, and only did so because he was driven to desperation. As will be seen when I come later to discuss his qualifications as a writer this is a curious comment on much of his bigger work. To me it seems that he should never have written fiction at all, although he did it so admirably. I think it would be very interesting if some American student of Gissing would turn over the files of the Tribune in the year 1877 and disinter the work he did there. This is practically all I ever learnt about his life on the other side of the Atlantic. I was, indeed, more anxious to discover how he lived in London, and in what circumstances. I asked him as delicately as possible about his domestic circumstances, and he then told me that he was married, and that his wife was with him in London.

It is very curious that I never met his first wife. I had seen her photograph, and on several occasions was in the next room to her. On those occasions she was usually unfit to be seen, because she was intoxicated. When we renewed our acquaintance in the Horse Shoe Tavern he was living in mean apartments in one of the back streets off Tottenham Court Road not very far from the hotel and, indeed, not far from a cellar that he once occupied in a neighbouring street. Little by little, as I met him again and again, I began to get some hold upon his actual life. Gradually he became more confidential, and I gathered from him that the habits of his wife were perpetually compelling him to move from one house to another. From what he told me, sometimes hopefully, and more often in desperation, it seems that this poor creature made vain and violent efforts to reform, generally after some long debauch. And of this I am very sure, that no man on earth could have made more desperate efforts to help her than he did. But the fact remains that they were turned out of one lodging after another, for even the poorest places, it seems, could hardly stand a woman of her character in the house. I fear it was not only that she drank but that at intervals she deserted him and went back, for the sake of more drink and for the sake of money with which he was unable to supply her, to her old melancholy trade. And yet she returned again with tears, and he took her in, doing his best for her. It was six months after our first meeting in Tottenham Court Road that he asked me to go and spend an evening with him. Naturally enough I then expected to make Mrs. Gissing's acquaintance, but on my arrival he showed some disturbance of mind and told me that she was ill and would be unable to see me. The house they lived in then was not very far from Mornington Crescent. It was certainly in some dull neighbourhood not half a mile away. The street was, I think, a cul-de-sac. It was full of children of the lower orders playing in the roadway. It being Saturday night, their fathers and mothers sat upon the doorsteps, or quarrelled, or talked in the road. The front room in which he received me was both mean and dirty. The servant who took me upstairs was a poor foul slut, and I do not think the room had been properly cleaned or dusted for a very long time. The whole of the furniture in it was certainly not worth seven and sixpence from the point of view of the ordinary furniture dealer. There were signs in it that it had been occupied by a woman, and one without the common elements of decency and cleanliness. Under a miserable and broken sofa lay a pair of dirty feminine boots. And yet on one set of poor shelves there were, still shining with gold, the prizes Gissing had won at Owens College, and the painfully acquired later stock of books that he loved so much.

As I came in by arrangement after my own dinner, we simply sat and smoked and drank a little whiskey. Twice in the course of an hour our conversation was interrupted by the servant knocking at the door and beckoning to

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Gissing to come out. In the next room I then heard voices, sometimes raised, sometimes pleading. When Gissing returned the first time he said to me, "I am very sorry to have to leave you for a few minutes. My wife is really unwell." But I knew by now the disease from which she suffered. Twice or thrice I was within an ace of getting up and saying, "Don't you think I'd better go, old chap?" And then he was called out again. He came back at last in a state of obvious misery and perturbation, and said, "My dear man, my wife is so ill that I think I must ask you to go." I shook hands with him in silence and went, for I understood. A little afterwards he told me that that very afternoon his wife had gone out, and obtaining drink in some way had brought it home with her, and that she was then almost insane with alcohol. This was the kind of life that George Gissing, perhaps a great man of letters, lived for years. Comfortable people talk of his pessimism, and his greyness of outlook, and never understand. The man really was a hedonist, he loved things beautiful beautiful and orderly. He rejoiced in every form of Art, in books and in music, and in all the finer inheritance of the past. But this was the life he lived, and the life he seemed to be doomed to live from the very first.

When a weak man has a powerful sense of duty he is hard to handle by those who have some wisdom. I had done my best to induce him to give up this woman in the early days, long before he married her, when he was but a foolish boy. Now once more I did my best to get him to leave her, but cannot pretend for an instant that anything I said or did would have had any grave effect if it had not been that the poor woman was herself doomed to be her own destroyer. Her outbreaks became more frequent, her departures from his miserable roof more prolonged. The windy gaslight of the slums appealed to her, and the money that she earned therein; and finally when it seemed that she would return no more he changed his rooms and, through the landlady of the wretched house at which he found she was staying, arranged to pay her ten shillings a week. As I know, he often made less than ten shillings a week, and sometimes found himself starving that she might have so much more to spend in drink.

This went on for years. It was still going on in 1884 when I left England again and went out to Texas. I had failed to make a successful attack upon the English Civil Service, and the hateful work done afterwards caused my health to break down. I was in America for three years, and during that time wrote fully and with a certain regularity to Gissing. When I came back and was writing *The Western Avernus*, he returned me the letters he had received from me. Among them were some, frequently dealing with literary subjects, addressed from Texas, Minnesota, Iowa, the Rocky Mountains, British Columbia, Oregon, and California. In his letters to me he never referred to Nell, but I gathered that his life was very hard, and understood, without his saying it, that he was still supporting her. I found that this was so when I returned to England in 1887. At that time, by dint of hard laborious work, which included a great deal of teaching, he was making for the first time something of a living. He occupied a respectable but very dismal flat somewhere at the back of Madame Tussaud's, in a place at that time called "Cornwall Residences." It was afterwards renamed "Cornwall Mansions," and I well remember Gissing's frightful and really superfluous scorn of the snobbery which spoke in such a change of name. As I said, we corresponded during the whole of the time I was in America. It is, from any point of view, a very great disaster that in some way, which I cannot account for, I have lost all his letters written to me previous to 1894. Our prolonged, and practically uninterrupted correspondence began in 1884, so I have actually lost the letters of ten whole years. They were interesting from many points of view. Much to my surprise, while I was in America, they came to me, not dated in the ordinary way, but according to the Comtist Calendar. I wrote to him for an explanation, because up to that time I had never heard of it. In his answering letter he told me that he had become a Positivist. This was doubtless owing to the fact that he had come accidentally under the influence of some well-known Positivists.

It seems that in desperation at his utter failure to make a real living at literature he had taken again to a tutor's work, which in a way was where he began. In his marriage certificate he called himself a teacher of languages. But he loathed teaching save in those rare instances where he had an intelligent and enthusiastic pupil. At the time that I came back to England he was teaching Frederic Harrison's sons. Without a doubt Frederic Harrison was extremely kind to George Gissing and perhaps to some little extent appreciated him, in spite of the preface he wrote in later years to the posthumous *Veranilda*. Gissing was not only tutor to Frederic Harrison's sons, but was also received at his house as a guest. He met there many men of a certain literary eminence; Cotter Morison, for

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instance, of whom he sometimes spoke to me, especially of his once characterising a social chatterer as a cloaca maxima of small talk. He also met Edward Clodd, with whom he remained on terms of friendship to the last, often visiting him in his house at Aldeburgh, which is known to many men of letters. I think the fact that Edward Clodd was not only a man of letters but also, oddly enough, the secretary of a great business, appealed in some way to Gissing's sense of humour. He liked Clodd amazingly, and it was through him, if I remember rightly, that he became socially acquainted with George Meredith, whom, however, he had met in a business way when Meredith was reading for a firm of publishers at a salary of two hundred a year.

Nevertheless, in spite of his making money by some tutorial work, Gissing was still as poor as a rat in a cellar, and the absurd antinomy between the society he frequented at times and his real position made him sometimes shout with laughter which was not always really humorous. It was during this period of his life that a lady asked him at an "at-home" what his experience was in the management of butlers. According to what he told me he replied seriously that he always strictly refrained from having anything to do with men-servants, as he much preferred a smart-looking young maid. It was during this period that he did some work with a man employed, I think, at the London Skin Hospital. This poor fellow, it seemed, possessed ambition and desired to rise in life. He wanted to pass the London matriculation examination and thus become, as he imagined, somebody of importance. Naturally enough, being but a clerk, he lacked time for work, and the arrangement came to between him and Gissing was that his teacher should go to his lodgings at seven o'clock in the morning and give him his lesson in bed before breakfast. As this was just before the time that Gissing worked for Frederic Harrison, he was too poor, so he said, to pay bus fares from the slum in which he lived, and consequently he had to rise at six o'clock in the morning, walk for a whole hour to his pupil's lodgings, and then was very frequently met with the message that Mr. So-and-so felt much too tired that morning to receive him. It is a curious comment on the authority of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* which many cling to as undoubtedly authentic, that he mentions this incident as if he did not mind it. As a matter of fact he was furiously wroth with this man for not rising to receive him, and used to go away in a state of almost ungovernable rage, as he told me many and many a time.

After my return from America we began to meet regularly once a week on Sunday afternoons, for I had now commenced my own initiation into the mystery of letters, and had become an author. By Gissing's advice, and, if I may say so, almost by his inspiration most certainly his encouragement I wrote *The Western Avernus*, and, having actually printed a book, felt that there was still another bond between me and Gissing. I used to turn up regularly at 7K Cornwall Residences at three o'clock on Sundays. From then till seven we talked of our work, of Latin and of Greek, of French, and of everything on earth that touched on literature. Long before seven Gissing used to apply himself very seriously to the subject of dinner. As he could not afford two fires he usually cooked his pot on the fire of the sitting-room. This pot of his was a great institution. It reminds me sometimes of the gypsies' pot in which they put everything that comes to hand. Gissing's idea of cooking was fatness and a certain amount of gross abundance. He would put into this pot potatoes, carrots, turnips, portions of meat, perhaps a steak, or on great days a whole rabbit, all of which he himself had bought, and carried home with his own hands. We used to watch the pot boiling, and perhaps about seven or half-past he would investigate its contents with a long two-pronged iron fork, and finally decide much to our joy and contentment that the contents were edible. After our meal, for which I was usually ready, as I was myself practically starving much of this time, we removed the debris, washed up in company, and resumed our literary conversation, which sometimes lasted until ten or eleven. By that time Gissing usually turned me out, although my own day was not necessarily done for several hours.

Those were great talks, but they were nearly always about ancient times, and of the Greeks and Romans, so far as we strayed from English literature. It may seem odd, and it is odd until it is explained, that he took very little interest in the Renaissance. There is still in existence a letter of his to Edward Clodd saying how much he regretted that he took no interest in it. That letter was, I think, dated from Siena, a city of the Renaissance. The truth of the matter is that he was himself essentially a creature of the Renaissance, a pure Humanist. For this very reason he displayed no particular pleasure in that period. He was interested in the time in which the men of the Renaissance revelled after the rediscovery and new birth of learning. He would have been at his best if he had

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been born when that time was in flower. The fathers of the Renaissance rediscovered Rome and Athens, and so did he. No one can persuade me that if this had been his fate his name would not now have been as sacred to all who love literature as those of Petrarch and his glorious fellows. As a matter of fact it was this very quality of his which gave him such a lofty and lordly contempt for the obscurantist theologian. In my mind I can see him treating, with that irony which was ever his favourite weapon, some relic of the dark ages of the schools. In those hours that we spent together it was wonderful to hear him talk of Greece even before he knew it, for he saw it as it had been, or as his mind made him think it had been, not with the modern Greek who is perhaps not a Greek at all – shouting in the market–place. I think that he had a historical imagination of a very high order, even though he undoubtedly failed when endeavouring to use it. That was because he used it in the wrong medium. But when he saw the Acropolis in his mind he saw it before the Turks had stabled their horses in the Parthenon, and before the English, worse vandals than the Turks, had brought away to the biting smoke of London the marbles of Pheidias. Even as a boy he loved the roar and fume of Rome, although he had not yet seen it and could only imagine it. He saw in Italy the land of Dante and Boccaccio, a land still peopled in the south towards Sicily with such folks as these and Horace and Theocritus had known. My own education had been wrought out in strange rough places in the new lands. It was a fresh education for me to come back to London and sit with Gissing on these marvellous Sunday afternoons and evenings when he wondered if the time would ever come for him to see Italy and Greece in all reality. It was for the little touches of realism, the little pictures in the Odes, that he loved Horace, and loved still more his Virgil; and, even more, Theocritus and Moschus, for Theocritus wrote things which were ancient and yet modern, full of the truth of humanity. Like all the men of the Renaissance he turned his eyes wistfully to the immemorial past, renewed in the magical alembic of his own mind.

Nevertheless, great as these hours were that we spent together, they were sometimes deeply melancholy, and he had nothing to console him for the miseries that were ever in the background. It was upon one of these Sundays, I think early in January 1888, that I found him in a peculiarly melancholy and desperate condition. No doubt he was overworked, for he was always overworked; but he said that he could stand it no longer, he must get out of London for a few days or so. For some reason, which I cannot for the world understand, he decided to go to Eastbourne, and begged me to go with him. Why he should have selected, in Christmas weather and an east wind, what is possibly the coldest town in England in such conditions, I cannot say, but I remember that the journey down to the sea was mercilessly cold. Of course we went third class, and the carriages were totally unheated. We were both of us practically in extreme poverty. I was living in a single room in Chelsea, for which I paid four shillings a week, and for many months my total weekly expenses were something under twelve shillings. At that particular moment he was doing extremely badly, and the ten shillings that he paid regularly to his wife frequently left him with insufficient to live upon. I can hardly understand how it was that he determined to spend even the little extra money needed for such a journey. When we reached Eastbourne we walked down to the sea front with our bags in our hands, and then, going into a poor back street, selected rooms. It was, perhaps, due to what he and I often called "the native malignity of matter," and his extreme ill luck in the matter of landladies which pursued him for ever throughout his life in lodgings, that the particular landlady of the house in which we took refuge was more than commonly incapable. The dwelling itself was miserably draughty and cold, and wretchedly furnished. The cast wind which blows over the flat marshes between Eastbourne and the Downs entered the house at every crack, and there were many of them. The first night we were in the town it snowed very heavily, and in our shabby little sitting–room we shivered in spite of the starved fire. We sat there with our overcoats on and did our best to be cheerful. Heaven alone knows what we talked of, but most likely, and very possibly, it may have been Greek metres, always his great passion. Yet neither of us was in good case. We both had trouble enough on our shoulders. I remember that he spoke very little of his wife, for I would not let him do so, although I knew she was most tremendously on his mind, and was, in fact, what had driven him for the moment out of London. Of course, he had a very natural desire that she might die and have done with life, with the life which must have been a torment to herself as it was a perpetual torture and a running sore to him. At the same time the poor fellow felt that he had no right to wish that she would die, but I could see the thought in his eyes, and heaven knows that I wished it fervently for him.

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The next morning we went for a long walk across the Downs to the little village of East Dean. It was blowing a whole gale from the north–cast, and it was quite impossible to go near the steep cliffs. The snow was in places two feet deep, and a sunk road across the Downs was level with the turf. I think now that none but madmen would have gone out on such a day. Doubtless we were mad enough; at any rate we were writers, and by all traditions had the right to be mad. But when we once got started we meant going through it at all events. I did not remember many colder days, in spite of my travels, but we persevered, and at last came to the little village and there took refuge in the public–house and drank beer. Gissing, with his extraordinary mixture of fine taste and something which was almost grossness in regard to food, loved all malt liquors I think partly because he felt some strange charm in their being historically English drinks. The walk back to Eastbourne tried us both hard, for neither of us had been well fed for months, and the wind and snow in our faces made walking heavy and difficult. Nevertheless Gissing was now almost boisterously cheerful, as he often was outwardly when he had most reason to be the opposite. While he walked back the chief topic of conversation was the very excellent nature of the pudding which he had instructed our landlady to prepare against a hungry return.

He was always peculiarly fond of rich, succulent dishes. A fritto misto for instance, made him shout for joy, though he never met with one until he went to Italy. With what inimitable fervour of the gastronomic mind would he declare these preferences Dr. Johnson said that in a haggis there was much "fine, confused feeding," and Gissing undoubtedly agreed with him, as he always said when he quoted the passage. In many of his books there are examples of his curious feeling with regard to food. They are especially frequent in *New Grub Street*; as, for instance, when one character says: "Better dripping this than I've had for a long time . . . Now, with a little pepper and salt, this bread and dripping is as appetising a food as I know. I often make a dinner of it." To which the other replies: "I have done the same myself before now. Do you ever buy pease–pudding?" and to this the Irishman's reply was enthusiastic. "I should think so! I get magnificent pennyworths at a shop in Cleveland Street, of a very rich quality indeed. Excellent faggots they have there, too. I'll give you a supper of them one night before you go." I had often heard of this particular place in Cleveland Street, and of one shop where they sold beef, kept by a man whose pride was that he had been carving behind the counter for thirty years without a holiday.

And now we were hurrying back to Eastbourne, Gissing said, not because it was cold; not because the north–cast wind blew; not because we were exposed to the very bitterest weather we remembered; but because of an exceedingly rich compound known as an apple pudding. He and the wind worked me up to an almost equal expression of ardour, and thus we came back back to our poverty–stricken den in good spirits. But, alas, the dinner that day was actually disastrous. The meat was grossly overdone, the vegetables were badly cooked, the beer was thin and flat. We were in dismay, but still we said to each other hopefully that there was the pudding to come. It was brought on and looked very fine, and Gissing cut into it with great joy and gave me a generous helping. I know that I tasted it eagerly, but to my tongue there was an alien flavour about it. I looked up and said to Gissing, "It is very curious, but this pudding seems to me to taste of kerosene." Gissing laughed, but when his turn came to try he laughed no longer, for the pudding actually did taste of lamp oil. It appeared, on plaintive and bitter inquiry, that our unfortunate landlady after making it had put it under the shelf on which she kept her lamp gear. We subsided on melancholy and mouldy cheese. This disappointment, however childish it may appear to the better fed, was to George Gissing something really serious. Those who have read *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, without falling into the error of thinking that the talk about food in that melancholy book was only his fun, will understand that it was a very serious matter with Gissing. It took all his philosophy and a very great deal of mine to survive the tragedy, and to go on talking as we did of new words and the riches of philology. And as we talked the wind roared down our street in a vicious frenzy. It was a monstrously bad time to have come to Eastbourne, and we had no compensations.

It was the next night that the great news came. In spite of the dreariest weather we had spent most of the day in the open air. After our dinner, which this time was more of a success, or at any rate less of a tragic failure, we were sitting hugging the fire to keep warm when a telegram was brought in for him. He read it in silence and handed it over to me with the very strangest look upon his face that I had ever seen. It was unsigned, and came from London. The message was: "Your wife is dead." There was nothing on earth more desirable for him than

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that she might die, the poor wretch truly being like a destructive wind, for she had torn his heart, scorched his very soul, and destroyed him at the beginning of his life. All irreparable disasters came from her, and through her. Had it not been for her he might then have held, or have begun to hope for, a great position at one of the universities. And now a voice out of the unknown cried that she was dead.

He said to me, with a shaking voice and shaking hands, "I cannot believe it I cannot believe it." He was as white as paper; for it meant so much not only freedom from the disaster and shame and misery that drained his life—blood, but it would mean a cessation of money payments at a time when every shilling was very hard to win. And yet this was when he was comparatively well known, for it was two years after the publication of *Demos*. And still, though his books ran into many editions, for some inexplicable reason, which I yet hope to explain, he sold them one after another for fifty pounds. And I knew how he worked; how hard, how remorselessly. I knew who the chief character was in *New Grub Street* before *New Grub Street* was written. I knew with what inexpressible anguish of soul he laboured, with what dumb rage against destiny. And now here was something like freedom at last, if only this were true.

The message came so late at night that there was no possibility of telegraphing to London to verify it even if he had been sure that he could get to the original sender. It was also much too late to go up to town. We sat silently for hours, and I knew that he was going back over the burning marl of the past. Sometimes he did speak, asking once and again if it could be true, and I saw that while he was still uncertain he was bitter and pitiless. Yet if only she were really dead . . .

We went up to town together in the morning. In the train he told me that, while he was still uncertain, he could not possibly visit the place she lived in, so he begged me to go there straight and bring him word as to the truth of this report. I was to explore the desperate slum in the New Cut in which she had exhausted the last dreadful years of her life, and upon leaving him I went there at once. With Gissing's full permission I described something of the milieu in *Maurice Quain*. On reaching the New Cut I dived into an inner slum from an outer one, and at last found myself in a kitchen which was only about eight or nine feet square. It was, of course, exceedingly dirty. The person in charge of it was a cheerful red-headed girl of about eighteen years of age. On learning the cause of my visit she went out and brought in her mother, and I soon verified the fact that Nell Gissing was dead. She had died the first bitter night we spent at Eastbourne, and was found next morning without any blankets, and with no covering for her emaciated body but a damp and dragged gown.

Presently the neighbours came in to see the gentleman who was interested in this woman's death. They talked eagerly of the funeral, for, as Gissing knew only too well, a funeral, to these people, is one of their great irregular but recurring festivals. At Gissing's desire I gave them *carte blanche* up to a certain sum, and I think they felt that, as the agent of the husband, I behaved very well. Of course they knew all about the poor girl who lay dead upstairs, and although they were honest enough people in their way, and though the red-headed girl to whom I first talked worked hard in a factory making hooks and eyes, as she told me, they seemed to have no moral feelings whatever about her very obvious profession. I myself did not see the dead woman. I was not then acquainted with death, save among strangers. I could not bring myself to look upon her. Although death is so dreadful always, the surroundings of death may make things worse. But still, she was dead, and I hastened back to Gissing to tell him so. It was a terrible and painful relief to him; and when he was sure she was gone, he grieved for her, grieved for what she might have been, and for what she was. He remembered now that at intervals she used to send him heart-breaking messages asking to be forgiven, messages that even his unwisdom at last could not listen to. But he said very little. So far as the expression of his emotions went he often had very great self-control. It is a pity that his self-control so rarely extended itself to acts. But now he was free. Those who have forged their own chains, and lived in a hell of their own dreadful making, can understand what this is and what it means. But he did go down to the pit in which she died, and when I saw him a day or two later he was strangely quiet, even for him. He said to me, "My dear chap, she had kept my photograph, and a very little engraving of the *Madonna di San Sisto*, all these years of horrible degradation." He spoke in the almost inaudible tone that was characteristic of him, especially at that time. We arranged the funeral together, and she was buried.

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If only all the misery that she had caused him could have been buried with her, it would have been well. She died of what I may call, euphemistically, specific laryngitis. Once he told me a dreadful story about her in hospital. One of the doctors at St. Thomas's had questioned her, and after her answers sent for Gissing, and speaking to him on the information given him by the wife, was very bitter. George, even as he told me of this years after, shook with rage and indignation. He had not been able to defend himself without exposing his wife's career.

CHAPTER THREE

There are many methods of writing biography. Each has its advantages, even the chronological compilation. But chronology is no strong point of mine, and in this sketch I shall lay but little stress on dates. There is great advantage in describing things as they impress themselves on the writer. A portrait gains in coherency and completeness by temporary omissions more than it can ever gain by the empty endeavour to handle each period fully. In this last chapter I might have endeavoured to describe Gissing at work, or to speak of his ambitions, or even to criticise what he had already done, or to give my own views of what he meant to achieve. There is authority for every method, and most authorities are bad, save Boswell - and few would pine for Boswell's qualities at the price of his failings. Yet one gets help from him everywhere, little as it may show. Only the other day I came across a passage in the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* which has some value. Reporting Johnson, he writes: "Talking of biography, he said he did not think the life of any literary man in England had been well written. Besides the common incidents of life it should tell us his studies, his mode of living, the means by which he attained to excellence, and his opinion of his own works." Such I shall endeavour to do. Nevertheless Johnson was wrong. Good work had then been done in biography by Walton, whose *Lives*, by the way, Gissing loved; and Johnson himself was not far from great excellence when he described his friend Savage in *Lives of the Poets* in spite of his want of colloquial ease. There came in then the value of friendship and actual personal knowledge, as it did in Boswell's *Life*. I can only hope that my own deep acquaintance with Gissing will compensate for my want of skill in the art of writing lives, for which novel-writing is but a poor training. Yet the deeper one's knowledge the better it is to simplify as one goes, taking things by themselves, going forwards or backwards as may seem best, without care of tradition, especially where tradition is mostly bad. We do not now write biography in England as Romain Rolland wrote that of Beethoven. Seldom are we grieved for our heroes, or rejoice with them. Photography, or the photographic portrait, is more in request than an impression. However, let me resume in my own way, having to be content with that, and caring little for opinion, that fluctuant critic.

Long as our friendship existed it is perhaps curious that we never called each other. except on very rare occasions, by anything but our surnames. This, I think, is due to the fact that we had been at Owens College together. It is, I imagine, the same thing with most schoolboys. Provided there is no nickname given, men who have been chums at school seem to prefer the surname by which they knew their friends in the early days. I have often noticed there is a certain savage tendency on the part of boys to suppress their Christian names, their own peculiar mark. And sometimes I have wondered whether this is not in some obscure way a survival of the savage custom of many tribes in which nobody is ever mentioned by his right name, because in that name there inheres mysteriously the very essence of his being and inheritance, the knowledge of which by others may expose him to some occult danger.

I said above that from the time I first met Gissing after my return from Australia, until I went away again to Texas, I was working in the War Office and the India Office as a writer at tenpence an hour. The pay was exiguous, and my prospects worth nothing. Yet when I came back from America and found him domiciled at 7K Cornwall Residences, my economic basis in life became even more exiguous, whatever hope might have said of my literary future. I was even poorer than Gissing. He lived in a flat and had at least two rooms and a kitchen. Yet it was a horrible place of extraordinary gloom, and its back windows overlooked the roaring steam engines of the Metropolitan Railway. No doubt my own apartment, when I took to living by myself, was superior in cheerfulness to 7K. Shortly after my return to England, I hired a single room in Chelsea, put in a few sticks of furniture given to me by my people, and began housekeeping on my own account on all I could make and the temporary ten

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shillings a week allowed me by my father, who at that time, for all his native respect for literature, regarded the practice of it with small hope and much suspicion. I know that it greatly amused Gissing to hear of his views on the subject of the self-revelations in *The Western Avernus*, which dealt with my life in Western America. After reading that book he did not speak to me for three days, and told my younger brother, "These are pretty revelations about your brother having been a common loafer." At this Gissing roared, but he roared none the less when he understood that three columns of laudation in one of the reviews entirely changed my father's view of that particular book.

I should not trouble to say anything about my own particular surroundings if it were not that in a sense they also became Gissing's, although I went more frequently to him than he came to me. Nevertheless he was quite familiar with my one room and often had meals there which I cooked for him. Of course at that time, from one point of view, I was but a literary beginner and aspirant, while Gissing was a rising and respected man, who certainly might be poor, and was poor, but still he had published *Demos* and other books, his name was well-known, and his prospects, from the literary, if not from the financial point of view, seemed very good. I was the author of one book, the result of three years' bitter hard experience, written in twenty-six days as a *tour de force*, and though I had ambition I seemed to have nothing more to write about. From my own point of view Gissing was, of course, very successful. His flat with more rooms than one in it was a mansion, and he was certainly making something like a hundred a year. Still, I think that when he came down to me and found me comparatively independent, he rather envied me. At any rate I had not to keep an errant wife on money made with infinite difficulty. He came to see me in Chelsea in my very early days, and took great joy in my conditions. For one thing I had no attendance with this room. I was supposed to look after it for myself in every way. This, he assured me, made my estate the more gracious, as anyone can understand who remembers all that he has said about landladies and lodginghouse servants and charwomen. He chuckled over the list of things I bought : a fender and fire-irons, a coal-scuttle, a dust-bin, and blacking brushes. He found me one day shaving by the aid of my own dim reflection in the glass of an etching which I had brought from home, because I had no looking-glass and no money to spare for one. We frequently went together over the question of finance. Incidentally I found his own habit of buying cooked meat peculiarly extravagant. There is still a book among my papers in which I kept accounts for my first three months in Chelsea to see how one could live on ten shillings a week, which Gissing assured me was preposterous riches, even if I managed to make no more.

Naturally enough, seeing that we had been friends for so long, and seeing that he had encouraged me so greatly to write my first book, he took a vast interest in all my proceedings, and was very "joyous," as he would have said, to observe that I could not afford sheets but slept in the blankets which I had carried all over America. I seek no sympathy on this point, for after all it was not a matter of my being unable to afford linen; it is impossible for the average comfortable citizen to understand how disagreeable sheets become after some thousands of nights spent camping in mere wool, even of the cheapest. It took me years to learn to resign myself to cold linen, or even more sympathetic cotton, when I became a respectable householder.

In the neighbourhood where I then lived there is a great artistic colony, and as I already knew one or two artists, I soon became acquainted with all the others. Many of them were no richer than myself, and as Bohemia and the belief that there was still a Bohemia formed one of Gissing's greatest joys, he was always delighted to hear of any of our remarkable shifts to live. It is an odd thing to reflect that A. D. McCormick, Frank Wynne, Albert Croft, three other artists whose names I now forget and I once had a glorious supper of fried fish served in a newspaper on the floor of an empty studio. The only thing missing on that particular occasion was Gissing's presence, but, of course, the trouble was that Gissing would seldom associate with anybody whom he did not know already, and I could rarely get him to make the acquaintance of my own friends. Yet such experiences as we were sometimes reduced to more than proved to him that his dear Bohemia existed, though later in his life, as one sees in Henry Ryecroft, he often seemed to doubt whether it was still extant. On this point I used to console him, saying that where any two artists butt their foolish heads against the economic system, there is Bohemia; Bohemia, in fact, is living on a course of high ideals, whatever the world says of them. At this hour there are writers learning their business on a little oatmeal, as George Meredith did, or destroying their digestions, as I did mine and George

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Gissing's, on canned corned beef. Even now, perhaps, some writers and artists are making their one big meal a day on fried fish.

One Sunday I missed going to Gissing's, because he was then out of town visiting his family, but I had a tale for him on his return. It seems that I had been writing, and had got so disgusted with the result that I could not possibly stay in my room, so determined to go round to my friend Mack. No sooner had I made up my mind on this subject than there was a knock at the door, and presently in came Mack himself. I said promptly, "It is no good your coming here, for I was just going round to you." Whereupon he replied, "It is no good your coming to me because I have no coal, no coke, and nobody will give me any more because I owe for so much already." I replied that I was not going to stay in my room in any case, and affirmed that I would rather be in his studio in the cold than where I was. Whereupon he suddenly discovered that my scuttle was actually full of coal, and proposed to take it round to the studio. This seemed a really brilliant idea, and after much discussion of ways and means my inventive faculty produced an old portmanteau and several newspapers, and after wrapping up lumps of coal in separate pieces of paper we packed the portmanteau with coal and carried it round to the studio in Manresa Road. This appeared to Gissing so characteristic of an artist's life that it seemed pure Murger.

In one matter Gissing and I were at that time much alike. From most points of view there can hardly have been two more different men, for he was essentially of the study and the cloister, while I was far more naturally a man of the open air. Nevertheless, when it came to journalism we were both of the same mind. While I was away from England and he was teaching Frederic Harrison's sons, Harrison introduced him to John Morley, then editing the Pall Mall Gazette, who offered, no doubt seriously, to use as much matter as possible if Gissing would supply him with something in journalistic form. Apparently he found it too much against his natural grain to do this work, and I was now in the same predicament. It is true that I had something of a natural journalistic flair which he lacked, but my nose for a likely article was rendered entirely useless to me by the fact that I never could write anything until I had thought about it for several days, by which time it was stale, and much too late from the newspaper point of view. However, Gissing occasionally did a little odd journalism, for I remember being with him before I went to America, when he received the proofs of an article from the St. James's Gazette, and picking up Henry Ryecroft one may read: "I thought of this as I sat yesterday watching a noble sunset, which brought back to my memory sunsets of a London autumn, thirty years ago. It happened that, on one such evening, I was by the river at Chelsea, with nothing to do except to feel that I was hungry, and to reflect that, before morning, I should be hungrier still. I loitered upon Battersea Bridge - the old picturesque wooden bridge, and there the western sky took hold upon me. Half an hour later I was speeding home. I sat down, wrote a description of what I had seen, and straightway sent it to an evening paper, which, to my astonishment, published the thing next day - 'On Battersea Bridge.'" I have never seen that article since I saw the proof of it, but there was something so characteristic in it that I think it would be worth some one's while to hunt up the files of the St. James's Gazette in order to find it. For while he was leaning over the bridge, enjoying the sunset, there was also a workman looking at it. The river was at a low stage, at least three-quarters-ebb, and on each side of it there were great patches of shining mud, in which the glorious western sky was reflected, turning the ooze into a mass of most wonderful colour. Gissing said to me, "Of course I was pleased to see somebody else, especially a poor fellow like that, enjoying the beauty of the sunset. But presently my companion edged a little closer to me, and seeing my eyes directed towards the mud which showed such heavenly colouring, he remarked to me, with an air of the deepest interest, 'Throws up an 'eap of mud, don't she?'"

Sometimes when Gissing came to me in Danvers Street he used to go over my accounts and discuss means of making them less. I think his chief joy in them was the feeling that some of his more respectable friends, such as Frederic Harrison, would have been horrified at my peculiarly squalid existence. In a sense it was, no doubt, squalid, and yet in another it was perhaps the greatest time in my life, and Gissing knew it. In the little book in which I kept my expenses he came across one day on which I had spent absolutely nothing. This was a great treat for him. On another day he found a penny put down as "charity." On looking up the book I see that a note still declares that this penny was given to a little girl to pay her fare in the bus. This beneficence on my part necessitated my walking all the way to Chelsea from Hyde Park Corner. Yet Gissing assured me that, compared

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with himself at times, I was practically a millionaire, although he owned that he had very rarely beaten my record when all expenditure on food was but three-and-sixpence. One week it actually totalled no more than one-and-elevenpence, but I have no doubt that I went out to eat with somebody else on those days unless it was at the time my liver protested against the life I led, and gave me such an attack of gloom that I went to bed and lay there for three days without eating, firmly determined to die and have done with the literary struggle. This fast did me a great deal of good. On the fourth day I got up and rustled vigorously for a meal, and did some financing with the admirable result of producing a whole half-crown.

Whenever Gissing came I cooked his food and my own on a little grid, or in a frying-pan, over the fire in my one room. The fire cost me on an average a whole shilling a week, or perhaps a penny or two more if the coal, which I bought in the street, went up in price. This means that I ran a fire on a hundredweight of coal each week, or sixteen pounds of coal a day. Gissing, who was an expert in coal, assured me that I was extremely extravagant, and that a fire could be kept going for much less. On trying, I found out that when I was exceedingly hard up I could keep in a very little fire for several hours a day on only eight pounds of coal, but sometimes I had to let it go out, and run round to a studio to get warm by some artist's stove - provided always that the merchant in coke who supplied him had not refused any further credit.

At this time Gissing and I were both accustomed to work late, although he was just then beginning to labour at more reasonable times, though not to write fewer hours. I used to find getting up in the morning at a proper hour quite impossible. Probably this was due to some inherited gout, to poisonous indigestion from my own cooking, or to a continued diet of desiccated soups and "jungle" beef from Chicago. However, it seemed to Gissing that I was quite in the proper tradition of letters while I was working on a long novel, only published years afterwards, which I used to begin at ten or eleven o'clock at night, frequently finishing at six o'clock in the morning when the sparrows began to chirp outside my window.

As a result of this night-work I used to get up at four o'clock in the afternoon, sometimes even later, to make my own breakfast. Afterwards I would go out to see some of my friends in their studios, and at the time most people were thinking of going to bed I sat down to the wonderfully morbid piece of work which I believed was to bring me fame. This was a rather odd book, called *The Degradation of Geoffrey Alwith*. It has no claim whatever to any immortality, and from my point of view its only value lies in the fact that there is a very brief sketch of Gissing in it. He is described in these words: "Will Curgenvin, writer, teacher, and general apostle of culture, as it is understood by the elect, had been hard at work for some hours on an essay on Greek metres, and was growing tired of it. His dingy subject and dingy Baker Street flat began to pall on him, and he rose to pace his narrow room." Now Will Curgenvin, of course, was Gissing, and the dingy Baker Street flat was 7K. " 'Damn the nature of things,' as Porson said when he swallowed embrocation instead of whiskey!" was what I went on to put into his mouth. This, indeed, was one of Gissing's favourite exclamations. It stood with him for all the strange and blasphemous and eccentric oaths with which I then decorated my language, the result of my experiences in the back-blocks of Australia and on the Pacific Slope of America. In this book I went on to make a little fun of his great joy in Greek metres. I remember that once he turned to me with an assumed air of strange amazement and exclaimed: "Why, my dear fellow, do you know there are actually miserable men who do not know - who have never even heard of - the minuter differences between Dochmiacs and Antispasts!" That, again, reminds me of a passage in *New Grub Street*, which always gives me acute pleasure because it recalls Gissing so wonderfully. It is where one of the characters comes in to the hero and wants his opinion on the scansion of a particular chorus in the *Oedipus Rex*. Reardon lays hold of the book, thinks a bit, and begins to read the chorus aloud. Whereupon the other one cries: "Choriambics, eh? Possible, of course; but treat them as Ionics a minore with an anacrusis, and see if they don't go better." Now in this passage the speaker is really Gissing, for he involved himself in terms of pedantry with such delight that his eyes gleamed. No doubt it was an absurd thing, but Greek metres afforded so bright a refuge from the world of literary struggle and pressing financial difficulty.

"Damn the nature of things!" was Porson's oath. Now Gissing had a very peculiar admiration for Porson. Porson was a Grecian. He loved Greek. That was sufficient for Gissing. In addition to that claim on his love, it is obvious

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that Porson was a man of a certain Rabelaisian turn of mind. and that again was a sufficient passport to his favour. No doubt if Porson had invited Gissing to his rooms, and had then got wildly drunk, it would have greatly annoyed Gissing; but the picture of Porson shouting Greek and drinking heavily attracted him immensely. He often quoted all the little stories told of Porson, such as the very well-known one of another scholar calling on him by invitation late one evening, and finding the room in darkness and Porson on the floor. This was when his visitor called out "Porson, where are the candles, and where's the whiskey?" and Porson answered, still upon the floor, but neither forgetful of Greek nor of his native wit.

When any man of our acquaintance was alluded to with hostility, or if one animadverted on some popular person who was obviously uneducated, Gissing always vowed that he did not know Greek, and probably or certainly had never starved. His not knowing Greek, was, of course, a very great offence to Gissing, for he used to quote Porson on Hermann:

The Germans in Greek Are sadly to seek. Not one in five score, But ninety-nine more. All save only Hermann, And Hermann's a German." Of course a man who lacked Greek, and had not starved, was anathema - not to be considered. And whatever Porson may have done he did know Greek, and that saved his soul. Gissing often quoted with glee what he declared to be some of the most charming lines in the English language : I went to Strasburg, and there got drunk With the most learned Professor Brunck. I went to Wortz, and got more drunken With the more learned Professor Ruhnken." But if the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. I never saw Gissing drunk in his life. Indeed he was no real expert in drinking. He had never had any education in the wines he loved. All amateurs of the product of the vine will know how to estimate his actual qualifications as a judge, when I say that Asti, Capri, and especially Chianti seemed to him the greatest wines in the world, since by no means could he obtain the right Falernian of Horace, which, by the way, was probably a most atrocious vintage. As it happened I had been employed for many months on a great vineyard in California, and there had learnt not a little about the making and blending of wine. Added to this I had some natural taste in it, and had read a great deal about wine-making and the great vintages of France and Germany. One could always interest Gissing by telling him something about wine, provided one missed out the scientific side of it. But it was sad that I lacked, from his point of view, the proper enthusiasm for Chianti. Yet, indeed, one knows what was in his classic mind, from the fact that a poor vintage in a real Italian flask, or in something shaped like an amphora, would have made him chuckle with joy far more readily than if a rich man had offered him in a bottle some glorious first growth of the Medoc, Laffite, Latour, or Haut-Brion. But, indeed, he and I, even when I refused indignantly to touch the Italians, and declared with resolution for a wine of Burgundy or the Medoc, rarely got beyond a Bourgeois vintage. Nevertheless though aspiring to be his tutor in wines I owed him more than is possible to say in the greater matters of education. My debt to him is really very big. It was, naturally enough, through his influence that while still in my one room in Danvers Street I began to read again all the Greek tragedies.. By an odd chance I came across a clergyman's son in Chelsea who also had a certain passion for Greek. He used to come to my room and there we re-read the tragedies. My new friend never met Gissing, for Gissing rarely came to my room save on Sundays, and those days were reserved specially for him. But whenever we met, either there or at 7K, we always read or recited Greek to each other, and then entered into a discussion of the metrical value of the choruses - in which branch of learning I showed proper humility, for in prosody he was remarkably learned. As for me, I knew nothing of it beyond what he told me, and cared very little, personally, for the technical side of poetry. But it was not easy to resist Gissing's enthusiasm, and I succumbed to it so greatly that at last I was really interested in what appealed so to him. Heaven knows, in those days I did at least learn something of the matter.

We talked of rhythm, and of Arsis or Ictus. Pyrrhics we spoke of, and trochees and spondees were familiar on our lips. Especially did he declare that he had a passion for anapests, and when it came to actual metres, Choriambics and Galliambics were an infinite joy to him. He explained to me most seriously the differences between trimeter Iambics when they were catalectic, acatalectic, hypercatalectic. What he knew about comic tetrameter was at my service, and in a short time I knew, as I imagined, almost all that he did about Minor Ionic, Sapphic, and Alcaic verse. Once more these things are to me little more than words, and yet I never hear one of them mentioned as one does occasionally when one comes across a characteristic enthusiast - but I think of George Gissing and his

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gravely beatific lectures to me on that vastly important subject. No doubt many people will think that such little details as these are [not] worth nothing, but I shall have failed greatly in recording Gissing if they do not seem something in the end. These trifles are, after all, touches in the portrait as I see the man, and that they all meant much to him I know very well. To get through the early days of literary poverty one must have ambition and enthusiasm of many kinds. Enthusiasm alone is nothing, and ambition by itself is too often barren, but the two together are something that the gods may fight against in vain. I know that this association with him, when I was his only friend, and he was my chief friend, was great for both of us, for he had much to endure, and I was not without my troubles. Yet we made fun together of our squalor, and rejoiced in our poverty, so long as it did not mean acute suffering; and when it did mean that, we often got something out of literature to help us to forget. On looking back, I know that many things happened that now seem to me dreadful, but then they appeared but part of the day's work.

It rarely happened that I went to him without some story of the week's events, to be told again in return something which had occurred to him. For instance, there was that story of the lady who asked him his experience with regard to the management of butlers. In return I could tell him of going out to dinner at houses where people would have been horrified to learn that I had eaten nothing that day, and possibly nothing the day before. For us to consort with the comfortably situated sometimes seemed to both of us an intolerably fine jest, which was intensified by the difference of these comfortable people from the others we knew. Here and there we came across some fatly rich person who, by accident, had once been deprived of his usual dinner. It seemed to give him a sympathetic feeling for the very poor. But, after all, though I did sometimes associate with such people, I was happier in my own room with Gissing, or in his flat, where we discussed our Aeschylus, or wrought upon metres or figures of speech - always a great joy to us. Upon these, too, Gissing was really quite learned. He was full of examples of brachylogy. Anacoluthon he was well acquainted with. Not even Farrar, in his Greek Syntax, or some greater man, knew more examples of chiasmus, asyndeton, or hendiadys. In these byways he generally rejoiced, and we were never satisfied unless at each meeting, wherever it might be, we discovered some new phrase, or new word, or new quotation.

Once at 7K I quoted to him from Keats' Endymion the lines about those people who "unpen their baaing vanities to browse away the comfortable green and juicy hay from human pastures." All that evening he was denouncing various comfortable people who fed their baaing vanity on everything delightful. He declared they browsed away all that makes life worth while, and in return for my gift to him of this noble quotation he produced something rather more astounding, and perhaps not quite so quotable, out of Zola's Nana. We had been talking of realism, and of speaking the truth, of being direct, of not being mealy-mouthed; in fact, of not letting loose "baaing vanities," and suddenly he took down Nana and said, "Here Zola has put a phrase in her mouth which rejoices me exceedingly. It is a plain, straightforward, absolutely characteristic sentiment, such as we in England are not allowed to reproduce. Nana, on being remonstrated with by her lover-in-chief for her infidelities, returns him the plain and direct reply, 'Quand je vois un homme qui me plait je couche avec.'" He went on to declare that writing any novels in England was indeed a very sickening business, but he added, I really think we begin to get somewhat better in this. However, up to the last few years, it has been practically impossible to write anything more abnormal about a man's relations with women than a mere bigamy." Things have certainly altered, but he was himself one of those who helped to break down that undue sense of the value of current morality which has done so much harm to the study of life in general, and indeed to life itself. His general rage and quarrel with that current morality, for which he had not only a contempt, but a loathing which often made him speechless, comes out well in what he thought and expressed about the Harold Frederic affair. There was, as everybody knows, a second illegitimate family. While the good and orthodox made an effort to help the wife and the legal children, they did their very best to ignore the second family. However, to Gissing's great satisfaction, there were certain people, notably Mrs. Stephens, who did their very best for the other children and for the poor mother. Gissing himself subscribed, before he knew the actual position, to both families, and betrayed extraordinary rage when he learnt how that second family had been treated, and heard of the endeavours of the "unco' guid" to pretend they did not exist. But such actions and such hypocrisy are characteristic of the middle class in this country, and not in this country alone. He loathed their morals which become a system of cruelty; their greed and its concomitant

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selfishness: their timidity which grows brutal in defence of a position to which only chance and their rapacity have entitled them.

Apropos of his hatred of accepted morality, it is a curious thing that the only quarrel I ever had with him showed his early point of view rather oddly. Among the few men he knew there was one with whom I was a little acquainted, who had picked up a young girl in a tavern and taken her to live with him. My own acquaintance with her led to some jealousy between me and the man who was keeping her, and he wrote to Gissing complaining of me, and telling him many things which were certainly untrue. Gissing, having ruined his own life for ever and ever by his relations with a woman of this order, had naturally built up a kind of theory of these things as a justification for himself. This may seem a piece of extravagant psychology, but I have not the least doubt that it is true. Without asking my view of the affair he wrote to me angrily, and declared that I had behaved badly. He added that he wished me to understand that he considered an affair of that description as sacred as any marriage. Though he was young, and in these matters no little of a prig, I was also young, and of a hot temper. That he had not made any inquiries of me, or even asked my version of the circumstances, so angered me that I wrote back to him saying that if he spoke to me in that way I should decline to have anything more to do with him. As he was convinced, most unjustly, that his view was entirely sound, this naturally enough led to an estrangement which lasted for the best part of a year, but I am glad to remember that I myself made it up by writing to him about one of his books. This was before I went to America. It was a grief to me that we did not meet during this estrangement for any of our great talks, which, both then and afterwards, were part of my life, and no little part of it. Often when I think of him I recollect those line of Callimachus to Heraclitus in Cory's Ionica:

"They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
I wept, as I remembered, how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky."

CHAPTER FOUR

In the last chapter I quoted from Boswell, always a favourite of Gissing's, as he is of all true men of letters. But there is yet another quotation from the same work which might stand as a motto for this book, as it might for the final and authoritative biography of Gissing which will perhaps some day be written. "He asked me whether he had mentioned, in any of the papers of the Rambler, the description in Virgil of the entrance into Hell, with an application to the Press; 'for,' said he, 'I do not much remember them.' I told him, 'No.' Upon which he repeated it:

"Vestibulum ante ipsum primisque in faucibus Orci,
Luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae;
Pallentesque habitant Morbi, tristisque Senectus,
Et Metus, et malesuada Fames, ac turpis Egestas;
Terribiles visu formae: Letumque, Labosque."

'Now,' said he, 'almost all these apply exactly to an author; all these are the concomitants of a printing-house.'" Nevertheless, although cares, and sometimes sullen sorrows, want, and fear, still dwelt with Gissing, a little time now began for him in which he had some peace of mind, if not happiness. That was a plant he never cultivated. One of his favourite passages from Charlotte Bronte, whose work was in many ways a passion to him, is that in which she exclaims: "Cultivate happiness! Happiness is not a potato," and indeed he never grew it. Still there

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were two periods in his life in which he had some peace, and the first period now began. I speak of the time after the death of his first wife. The drain of ten shillings a week which must seem so absurdly little to many had been far more than he could stand, and many times he had gone without the merest necessities of life so that the poor alien in the New Cut should have money, even though he knew that she spent it at once upon drink and forgetfulness. Ten shillings a week was very much to him. For one thing it might mean a little more food and better food. It meant following up his one great hobby of buying books. Those who know *The Private Papers* know what he thought of books, for in that respect this record is a true guide, even if it should be read in most respects with caution. Yet although he was happier and easier, it is curious that his most unhappy and despairing books were written during this particular period. *A Life's Morning*, it is true, was done before his wife died, and some people who do not know the inner history of the book may not regard it as a tragedy. In one sense, however, it was one of the greatest literary tragedies of George Gissing's life, according to his own statement to me.

At that time he was publishing books with the firm of Smith, Elder and Company, and knew James Payne who read for them. It seems that Payne, who had naturally enough, considering his period, certain old-fashioned ideas on the subject of books and their endings, absolutely and flatly declined to recommend his firm to publish *A Life's Morning* unless Gissing re-wrote the natural tragic end of the book and made it turn out happily. I think nothing on earth, or in some hell for men of letters, could have made Gissing more angry and wretched. If there was one thing that he clung to during the whole of his working time, it was sincerity, and sincerity in literary work implies an absolute freedom from alien and extrinsic influence. I can well remember what he said to me about Payne's suggestion. He abused him and the publishers; the public, England, the world, and the very universe. He almost burst into tears as he explained to me what he had been obliged to do for the sake of the great fifty pounds he was to get for the book. For at this time he only got fifty pounds for a long three-volume novel. He always wrote with the greatest pain and labour, but I do not suppose he ever put anything on paper in his life which cost him such acute mental suffering as the last three chapters which were written to James Payn's barbaric order.

After his wife's death he wrote *The Nether World*, *The Emancipated*, *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*. It is a curious fact, although it was not always obvious even to himself, and is not now to anybody but me, that I stood as a model to him in many of these books, especially, if I remember rightly, for one particular character in *The Emancipated*. Some of these sketches are fairly complimentary, and many are much the reverse. The reason of this use of me was that till much later he knew very few men intimately but myself; and when he wanted anybody in his books of a more or less robust character, and sometimes more or less of a kind that he did not like, I, perforce, had to stand for him. He owed this to me, and once he was not at all sure how I should take it. As a matter of fact the most life-like portrait of me ends as a villain, and, as he had touched me off to the very life in the first volume, it did make me feel a little sorer than I acknowledged. I leave the curious to discover this particular scoundrel. It was only natural that my wild habits and customs, the relics of Australia and America, afforded him amusement and matter for study. On one occasion they cost him, temporarily, the very large sum of three pounds. As he said, he used to look upon me as a kind of hybrid, a very ridiculous wild man with strong literary leanings, with an enormous amount of general and unrelated knowledge and, at the same time, as a totally unregulated or ill-regulated ruffian. This was a favourite epithet of his, for which I daresay there was something to be said. Now one Sunday it happened that I was going up to see him at 7K, and came from Chelsea with two or three books in my hand, and a pair of spectacles on my nose. I carried an umbrella, and no doubt looked exceedingly peaceful. As a result of this a young man, who turned out afterwards to be a professional cricketer, thought I was a very easy person to deal with, and to insult. As I came to York Place, which was then almost empty of passers-by, I was walking close to the railings and this fellow came up and, pushing past rudely, stepped right in front of me. Now this was a most outrageous proceeding, because he had fifteen free feet of pavement, and I naturally resented it. So making a little longer step than I should otherwise have done I "galled his kibe." He turned round upon me, and using very bad language, asked me where I was going, who I thought I was, and what I proposed to do about it. I did not propose to do anything, but did it. I smote him very hard with the umbrella, knocking him down. He remained on the pavement for a considerable time, and then only got up at the third endeavour, and promptly gave me into custody. The policeman, who had happened to see the whole affair, explained to me, with that civility common among the custodians of order to those classes whose dress

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suggests they are their masters, that he was compelled to take the charge. I was removed to Lower Seymour Street and put in a cell for male prisoners only, where I remained fully half an hour.

While I was in this cell a small boy of about nine was introduced and left there. I went over to him and said, "Hullo, my son, what's brought you here?" Naturally enough he imagined that I was not a prisoner but a powerful official, and bursting into tears he said, "Oh, Oh, please, sir, it warn't me as nicked the steak!" I consoled him to the best of my ability until I was shortly afterwards invited down to Marlborough Street Police Court, where Mr. De Rutzen, later Sir Albert De Rutzen, was sitting. As I had anticipated the likelihood of being fined, and had no more than a few shillings with me, I had written a letter to Gissing, and procuring a messenger through the police, had sent it up to him. He came down promptly and sat in the court while I was being tried for this assault. After hearing the case Mr. De Rutzen decided to fine me three pounds, which Gissing paid, with great chuckles at the incident, even though he considered his prospect of getting the money back for some months was exceedingly vague. It was by no means the first time that he had gone to the police court for copy, which "is very pretty to observe," as Pepys said, when after the Fire of London it was discovered that as many churches as public houses were left standing in the city. That such a man should have had to pursue his studies of actual life in the police courts and the slums was really an outrage, another example of the native malignity of matter. For, as I have insisted, and must again insist, he was a scholar and a dreamer. But his pressing anxieties for ever forbade him to dream, or to pursue scholarship without interruption. He desired time to perfect his control of the English tongue, and he wanted much that no man can ever get. It is my firm conviction that if he had possessed the smallest means he would never have thought himself completely master of the medium in which he worked. He often spoke of poor Flaubert saying: "What an accursed language is French!" He was for ever dissatisfied with his work, as an artist should be, and I think he attained seldom, if ever, the rare joy that an artist has in accomplishment. It was not only his desire for infinite perfection as a writer pure and simple that afflicted him. It was the fact that he should never have written fiction at all. He often destroyed the first third of a book. I know he did so with one three times over. This, of course, was not always the result of the cool persuasion that what he had done was not good, for it often was good in its way, but frequently he began, in a hurry, in despair, and with the prospect of starvation, something that he knew not to be his own true work, or something that he forced without adequate preparation. Then I used to get a dark note saying, "I have destroyed the whole of the first volume and am, I hope, beginning to see my way." It was no pleasant thing to be a helpless spectator of these struggles, in which he found no rest, when I knew his true destiny was to have been a scholar at a great university.

When one understands his character, or even begins to understand it, it is easy enough to comprehend that the temporary case with regard to money which came after his wife's death did not last very long. The pressure of her immediate needs and incessant demands being at last relaxed, he relaxed his efforts in certain directions and was presently again in difficulties. It will seem very extraordinary to all but those who know the inside of literary life that this should have been so. A certain amount of publicity is almost always associated in the minds of the public with monetary success of a kind. Yet one very well-known acquaintance of mine, an eminent if erratic journalist, one day had a column of favourable criticism in a big daily, and after reading it went out and bought a red herring with his last penny and cooked it over the fire in his solitary room. It was the same with myself. It was almost the same with Gissing even at this time. No doubt the worst of his financial difficulties were before I returned from America, certainly they were before his wife died, but never, till the end of his life, was he at ease with regard to money. He could not attain the art of the pot-boiler by which most of us survive, even when he tried short stories, which he did finally after I had for some years pressed him to attempt them.

In many ways writing to him was a kind of sacred mission. It was not that he had any faith in great results to come from it, but the profession of a writer was itself sacred, and even the poorest sincere writer was a sacer vates. He once absolutely walked all the way to Chelsea to show me a well-known article in which Robert Louis Stevenson denied, to my mind not unjustly, that a writer could claim payment at all, seeing that he left the world's work to do what he chose to do for his own pleasure. Stevenson went on to compare such a writer to a fille de joie. This enraged Gissing furiously. I should have been grieved if he and Stevenson had met upon that occasion. I really think something desperate might have happened, little as one might expect violence from such a curious apostle

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of personal peace as Gissing. Many years afterwards I related this incident to Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa, but I think by that time Gissing himself was half inclined to agree with his eminent brother—author. And yet writing was a mission, even if it was with him an acquired passion; but his critical faculties, which were so keenly developed, almost destroyed him. There can be no stronger proof that he was not one of those happy beings who take to the telling of stories because they must, and because it is in them. There was no time when he was not obliged to do his best, though every writer knows to his grief that there are times when the second best must do. And thus it was that James Payne so enraged him. All those things which are the care of the true writer were of infinite importance to him. A misprint, a mere "literal," gave him lasting pain. He desired classic perfection, both of work and the mere methods of production. He would have taken years over a book if fear and hunger and poverty had permitted him to do so. And yet he wrote Isabel Clarendon, Demos and A Life's Morning, all in seven months, even while he read through the whole of Dante's Divina Commedia for recreation, and while he toiled at the alien labour of teaching. Yet this was he who wrote to one friend: "Would it not be delightful to give up a year or so to the study of some old period of English history?" When he was thirty—six he said: "The four years from now to forty I should like to devote to a vigorous apprenticeship in English." But this was the man who year after year was compelled to write books which the very essence of his being told him would work no good. Sometimes I am tempted to think that the only relief he got for many, many years came out of the hours we spent in company, either in his room or in mine. We read very much together, and it was our delight to exchange quotations, or read each other passages which we had discovered during the week. He recited poetry with very great feeling and skill, and was especially fond of much of Coleridge. I can hear him now reading those lines of Coleridge to his son which end:

"Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple—tree, while the night
Smokes in the sun—thaw; whether the eave—drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon."

And to hear him chant the mighty verse of the great Greeks who were dead, and yet were most alive to him, was always inspiring. The time was to come, though not yet, when he was to visit Greece, and when he had entered Piraeus and seen the peopled mountains of that country Homer became something more to him than he had been, while the language of Aeschylus and Sophocles took on new glories and clothed itself in still more wondrous emotions. He knew by heart a hundred choruses of the Greek tragedies, and declaimed them with his wild hair flung back and his eyes gleaming as if the old tragedians, standing in the glowing sun of the Grecian summer, were there to hear him, an alien yet not an alien, using the tongue that gave its chiefest glories to them for ever. But he had been born in exile, and had made himself an outcast.

Those who have read so far, and are interested in him, will see that I am much more concerned to say what I felt about him than to relate mere facts and dates. I care little or nothing that in some ways others know more or less of him, or know it differently. I try to build up my little model of him, try to paint my picture touch by touch; often, it may be, by repetition, for so a man builds himself for his friends in his life. I must paint him as a whole, and put him down, here and there perhaps with the grain of the canvas showing through the paint, or perhaps with what the worthy critics call a rich impasto, which may be compiled of words. Others may criticise, and will criticise, what I write. No doubt they will find much of it wrong, or wrong—headed, and will attribute to me other motives than those which move me, but if it leads them to bring out more of his character than I know or remember, I shall be content. For the more that is known of him, the more he will be loved.

It was somewhere about this time that I undertook to write one of two or three articles which I have done about him for periodicals, and the remembrance of that particular piece of work reminds me strongly of his own ideas of his own humour in writing. There have been many discussions, wise and otherwise, as to whether he possessed any at all, and I think the general feeling that he was very greatly lacking in this essential part of the equipment of a writer to be on the whole true. Among my lost letters there was one which I especially regret not to be able to quote, for it was very long, containing perhaps two thousand words, which he sent to me when he knew I had

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been asked to do this article. Now the purport of Gissing's letter was to prove that every one was wrong who said he had no humour. In one sense there can be no greater proof that anybody who said so was right. He enumerated carefully all the characters in all the books he had hitherto written in whom he thought there was real humour. He gave me a preposterous list of these individuals, with his comments, and appealed to me in all deadly seriousness to know whether I did not agree with him that they were humorous. But the truth is that, save as a talker, he had very little humour, and even then it was frequently verbal. It was, however, occasionally very grim, and its strength, oddly enough, was of the American kind, since it consisted of managed exaggeration. He had a certain joy in constructing more or less humorous nicknames for people. Sometimes these were good, and sometimes bad, but when he once christened them he kept to it always. I believe the only man of his acquaintance who had no nickname was George Meredith, but then he loved and admired Meredith in no common fashion.

In some of his books he speaks, apparently not without some learning, of music, but there are, I fancy, signs that his knowledge of it was more careful construction than actual knowledge or deep feeling. Still, he did at times discover a real comprehension of the greater musicians, especially of Chopin. Seeing that this was so, it is very curious, and more than curious in a writer, that he had a measureless adoration of barrel organs. He delighted in them strangely, and when any Italian musician came into his dingy street or neighbourhood, he would set the window open and listen with ardour. Being so poor, he could rarely afford to give away money even in the smallest sum. Pennies were indeed pennies to him. But he did sometimes bestow pence on wandering Italians who ground out Verdi in the crowded streets. Among the many languages he knew was, of course, Italian; for, as I have said, he read the *Divina Commedia* easily, reading it for relaxation as he did Aristophanes. It was a great pleasure to him, even before he went to Italy, to speak a few words in their own tongue to these Italians of the English streets. He remembered that this music came from the south, the south that was always his Mecca, the Kibleh of the universe. Years afterwards, when he was in the south, and knew Naples and the moving crowds of the Chiaia long before I had been there and had listened to its uproar from the Belvedere of San Martino he found Naples chiefly a city of this simple popular music. Naples, he said, was the most interesting modern city in Europe; and yet I believe the chief pleasure he had there was hearing its music, and the singing of the *lazzaroni* down by Santa Lucia. *Funiculi, Funicula*, he loved as much as if it were the work of a classic, and Santa Lucia appealed to him like a Greek chorus. I remember that, years later, he wrote to me a letter of absurd and exaggerated anger, which was yet perfectly serious, about the action of the Neapolitan municipality in forbidding street organs to play in the city. Sometimes, though rarely, seeing that he could not often afford a shilling, he went to great concerts in London. He spoke in *The Whirlpool* as one not without instruction in musical subjects, but I fancy that musical experts might find flaws in his technical knowledge. Nevertheless he did love music with passion.

He was a man not without a certain sensuality, but it was his sensuousness which was in many ways the most salient point in his character. As I often told him, he was a kind of incomplete Rabelaisian. That was suggested to me by his delighted use of Gargantuan epithets with regard to the great recurrent subject of food. He loved all things which were redolent of oil and grease and fatness. The joy of abundance appealed to him, and I verily believe that to him the outstanding characteristic of the past in England was its abundant table. Indeed, in all things but rowdy indecency, he was a Rabelaisian, and being such, he yet had to put up with poor and simple food. However, provided it was at hand in large quantities, he was ready to feed joyously. He would exclaim: "Now for our squalid meal! I wonder what Frederic Harrison, or good old Edward Clodd would say to this?" When I think of the meagre preface that Frederic Harrison wrote in later years for *Veranilda*, when that done by H.G. Wells afterwards published separately did not meet with the approval of Gissing's relatives and executors, I feel that Harrison somewhat deserved the implied scorn of Gissing's words. As for Edward Clodd, he often spoke of him affectionately. In later years he sometimes went down to Aldeburgh to visit him. He liked his house, and was much at home in it. It was there that he met Grant Allen, and Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson, whom he declared to be the most interesting people he saw in Aldeburgh at that time.

I am not sure whether it was on this particular occasion, perhaps in 1895, that he went to Essex with a great prejudice against Grant Allen. The reason of this was curious. He was always most vicious when any writer, who

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obviously lived in comfort, complained loudly and bitterly of the meagre support given him by the public, and the public's faithful servants, the publishers. When Allen growled furiously on this subject in a newspaper interview Gissing recalled to me with angry amusement a certain previous article in which, if I remember rightly, Grant Allen proclaimed his absolute inability to write if he were not in a comfortable room with rose-coloured curtains. "Rose-coloured curtains!" said Gissing contemptuously, and looking round his own room one certainly found nothing of that kind. It was an extraordinary thing, one of the many odd things in his character, that the man who loved the south so, who always dreamed of it, seemed to see everything at that period of his life in the merest black and white. There was not a spark or speck of colour in his rooms. Now in my one poor room in Chelsea I had hung up all sorts of water-colours acquired by various means from artists who were friends of mine. By hook or by crook I got hold of curtains with colour in them, and carpets, too, and Japanese fans. My room was red and yellow and scarlet, while his were all a dingy monochrome, as if they sympathised with the outlook at the back of his flat, which stared down upon the inferno of the Metropolitan Railway. But to return to Grant Allen. Gissing now wrote: "However, I like him very much. He is quite a simple and very gentle fellow, crammed with multifarious knowledge, enthusiastic in scientific pursuits. With fiction and that kind of thing he ought never to have meddled; it is the merest pot-boiling. He reads nothing whatever but books of scientific interest."

It was at Aldeburgh, too, that he met Clement Shorter who induced him to write twenty papers in one of the journals Shorter conducted. They were to be of more or less disreputable London life. Some of them have been reprinted in his volumes of short stories. There is certainly no colour in them; in some ways they resemble sketches with the dry-point. After he had once been on the Continent, and had got south to Marseilles and the Cannebiere he learnt to know what colour was, and wrote of it in a way he had never done before, as may be noticed particularly in one paragraph about Capri seen at sunset from Naples. In this sudden discovery of colour he reminded me, oddly enough, of my old acquaintance Wynne, the now justly celebrated painter, who, up to a certain time in his life, had painted almost in monochrome, and certainly in a perpetual grey chord. Then he met Marvell, the painter, who was above all things a colourist. I do not think Marvell influenced Wynne in anything else, but from that day Wynne was a colourist, and so remains, although to it he has added a great and real power of design and decoration. It is true that Gissing never became a colourist in writing, but those who have read his work with attention will observe that after a certain date he was much more conscious of this prismatic world.

In those days our poverty and our ambition made great subjects for our talks. I had myself been writing for some years with no more than a *succes d'estime*, and sometimes thought that I would throw up the profession and go back to Australia or America, or to the sea, or would try Africa at last. But Gissing had no such possibilities within him. He maintained grimly, though not without humour, that his only possible refuge when war, or some other final disaster made it impossible for writers to earn their difficult living, was a certain block of buildings opposite 7K. This, however, was not Madame Tussaud's as the careless might imagine, but the Marylebone workhouse, which he said he regarded with a proprietary eye. It always afforded him a subject for conversation when his prospects seemed rather poorer than usual. It was, he declared, very handy for him when he became unable to do more work. No doubt this was his humour, but there was something in this talk which was more than half serious. He always liked to speak of the gloomy side of things, and I possess many letters of his which end with references to the workhouse, or to some impending, black disaster. In one he said: "I wish I could come up, but am too low in health and spirits to move at present. A cold clings about me, and the future looks dark." Again he said: "No, I shall never speak of my work. It has become a weariness and toil nothing more." And again: "It is a bad, bad business, that of life at present." And yet once more: "It is idle to talk about occupation by now I have entered on the last stage of life's journey." This was by no means when he had come towards the end of his life. However, the workhouse does recur, even at the end, in a letter written about two months before his death. He wrote to me: "I have been turning the pages with great pleasure, to keep my thoughts from the workhouse." Those who did not know him would not credit him with the courage of desperation which he really possessed, if they saw his letters and knew nothing more of the man.

CHAPTER FIVE

The art of portraiture, whether in words or paint, is very difficult, and appears even less easy as I attempt to draw Gissing. Nevertheless the time comes when the artist seems to see his man standing on his feet before him, put down in his main planes, though not yet, perhaps, with any subtlety. The anatomy is suggested at any rate, if there are bones in the subject or in the painter. As it seems to me, Gissing should now stand before those who have read so far with sympathy and understanding. I have not finished my drawing, but it might even now suffice as a sketch and seem from some points of view to be not wholly inadequate. It is by no means easy to put him down in a few words, but patience and the addition of detail reach their end, it may be not without satisfaction for "with bread and steel one gets to China." It is not possible to etch Gissing in a few lines, for as it seems to me it is the little things in his character with which I am most concerned that give him his greatest value. It is not so much the details of his actual life, but what he said, and the way he seemed to think, or even the way he avoided thinking, which I desire to put down. And when I say those things he wished not to think of, I am referring more especially to his views of the universe, and of the world itself, those views which are a man's philosophy, and not less his philosophy when of set purpose he declines to think of them at all, for this Gissing did without any doubt. Goethe said, when he spoke, if I remember rightly, about all forms of religious and metaphysical speculation, "Much contemplation, or brooding over these things is disturbing to the spirit." Unfortunately I do not know German, so I cannot find the reference to this, but Gissing, who knew the language very thoroughly and had read nearly everything of importance in it, often quoted this passage, having naturally a great admiration for Goethe. I do not mean that he admired him merely for his position in the world of letters. What he admired in Goethe was what he himself liked and desired so much. He wished for peace, for calmness of spirit. He did not like to be disturbed in any way. He would not disturb himself. He asked people to be reasonable, and thought this was a reasonable request to make of them. I remember on one occasion when I had been listening to him declaiming about some one's peculiar lack of reasonableness, which seemed to him the one great human quality, that I said: "Gissing, what would you do if you were having trouble with a woman who was in a very great rage with you?" He replied, with an air of surprise, "Why, of course, I should reason with her." I said shortly, "Don't ever get married again!" Nevertheless he was a wonderfully patient and reasonable man himself, and truly lacked everything characteristic of the combatant. He would discuss, he would never really argue. I do not suppose that he was physically a coward, but a dread of scenes and physical violence lay very deep in his organisation. Although he used me as a model I never really drew him at length in any of my own books, but naturally he was a subject of great psychological interest to me. Pursuing my study of him I said, one day, "Gissing, what would you do if a man disagreed with you, got outrageously and unreasonably angry, and slapped you in the face?" He replied, in his characteristically low and concentrated voice, "Do? I should look at him with the most infinite disgust, and turn away."

His horror of militarism was something almost comic, for it showed his entire incapacity for grasping the world's situation as it shows itself to any real and ruthless student of political sociology who is not bogged in the mud flats of some Utopian island. Once we were together on the Horse Guards' Parade and a company of the Guards came marching by. We stood to watch them pass, and when they had gone he turned to me and said, "Mark you, my dear man, this, this is the nineteenth century!" In one of his letters written to me after his second marriage he said of his eldest son: "I hope to send him abroad, to some country where there is no possibility of his having to butcher or be butchered." This, of course, was pure reason pushed to the point where reason becomes mere folly, for such is the practical antinomy of pure reason in life.

It was in this that he showed his futile idealism, which was in conflict with his real pessimism. That he did good work in many of his books dealing with the lower classes is quite obvious, and cannot be denied. He showed us the things that exist. It is perfectly possible, and even certainly true, that many of the most pessimistic writers are in reality optimists. They show us the grey in order that we may presently make it rose. But Gissing wrote absolutely without hope. He took his subjects as mere subjects, and putting them on the table, lectured on pathology. He made books of his dead-house experiences, and sold them, but never believed that he, or any other

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man, could really do good by speaking of what he had seen and dilated upon. The people as a body were vile and hopeless. He did not even inquire how they became so. He thought nothing could be done, and did not desire to do anything. His future was in the past. The world's great age would never renew itself, and only he and a few others really understood the desperate state into which things had drifted. Since his death there has been some talk about his religion. I shall speak of this later, on a more fitting occasion; but, truly speaking, he had no religion. When he gave up his temporary Positivist pose, which was entirely due to his gratitude to Frederic Harrison for helping him, he refused to think of these things again. They disturbed the spirit. If I ever endeavoured to inveigle him into a discussion or an argument upon any metaphysical subject he grew visibly uneasy. He declined to argue, or even to discuss, and though in later life he admitted that immortality was perhaps possible, I defy any one to bring a tittle of evidence to show that he ever went further. This attitude to all forms of religious and metaphysical thought was very curious to me. It was, indeed, almost inexplicable, as I have an extreme pleasure in speculative inquiry of all kinds. The truth is that on this side of his nature he was absolutely wanting. Such things interested him no more than music interests a tone-deaf man who cannot distinguish the shriek of a tom-cat from the sound of a violin. If I did try to speak of such things he listened with an air of outraged and sublime patience which must have been obvious to any one but a bore. Whether his philosophy was sad or not, he would not have it disturbed.

His one interest in religion seemed to lie in his notion that it was a curious form of delusion almost ineradicable from the human mind. There is a theory, very popular among votaries of the creeds, which takes the form of denying that any one can really be an atheist. This is certainly not true, but it helps us to understand the theological mind, which has an imperative desire to lay hold of something like an inclusive hypothesis to rest on. So far as Gissing was concerned there was no more necessity to have a hypothesis about God than there was to have one about quaternions, and quaternions certainly did not interest him. He shrugged his shoulders and put these matters aside, for in many things he had none of the weaknesses of humanity, though in others he had more than his share. In his letters to Wells, there are a few references to Wells' habits of speculation. I think it was somewhere in 1900 or 1901 that he read *Anticipations*. By this time he had a feeling of affection for Wells, and some admiration for him. His references to him in *The Private Papers* are sufficiently near the truth to corroborate this. Nevertheless his chief feeling towards Wells and his work, beyond the mere fact that it was a joy to him that a man could make money by doing good stuff, was one of amazement that any one could be deeply interested in the future, and could give himself almost wholly or even with partial energy, to civic purposes. And so he wrote to Wells: "I must not pretend to care very much about the future of the human race. Come what may, folly and misery are sure to be the prevalent features of life, but your ingenuity in speculation, the breadth of your views, and the vigour of your writing, make this book vastly enjoyable. The critical part of it satisfies, and often delights me. Stupidity should have a sore back for some time to come, and many a wind-bag will be uneasily aware of collapse."

It is interesting to note, now that I am speaking of his friendship for Wells, and apropos of what I shall have to say later about his religious views, that he wrote to Wells: "By the bye, you speak of God. Well, I understand what you mean, but the word makes me stumble rather. I have grown to shrink utterly from the use of such terms, and though I admit, perforce, a universal law, I 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." So later he said that he was at a loss to grasp what Wells meant when he wrote: "There stirs something within us now that can never die again." I think Gissing misinterpreted the passage, which was rather apropos of the awakening of the civic spirit in mankind than of anything else, but he went on to say that he put aside the vulgar interpretation of such words. However, was it Wells' opinion that the material doom of the earth did not involve the doom of earthly life? He added that Wells' declared belief in the coherency and purpose of things was pleasant to him, for he himself could not doubt for a moment that there was some purpose. This is as far as he ever went. On the other hand, he did doubt whether we, in any sense of the pronoun, should ever be granted understanding of that purpose. All this shows that he possessed no metaphysical endowments or apparatus. He loved knowledge pure and simple, but when it came to the exercises of the metaphysical mind he was pained and puzzled. He lacked any real education in philosophy, and did not even understand its peculiar vocabulary. However vain those of us who have gone through the metaphysical mill may think it in actual products, we are all aware that it helps greatly to formulate our own

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philosophy, or even our own want of it. For it clears the air. It cuts away all kinds of undergrowth. It at any rate shows us that there is no metaphysical way out, for the simple reason that there has never existed one metaphysician who did not destroy another. They are all mutually destructive. But Gissing had no joy in construction or destruction; and, as I have said, he barely understood the technical terms of metaphysics. There was a great difference with regard to these inquiries between him and Wells. The difference was that Wells enjoyed metaphysical thinking and speculation while Gissing hated it. But Wells took it up much too late in life, and about the year 1900 made wonderful discoveries which had been commonplaces to Aristotle. This would not have mattered much if he had regarded it as education. However, he regarded it as discovery, and wrote books which inspired debates, and apparently filled the metaphysicians with great joy. It is always a pleasure to the ironic spirit to see clever people show that they are not equally clever in every direction.

It is curious how this native dislike of Gissing to being disturbed by speculative thought comes out in a criticism he made of Thomas Hardy. He had always been one of this writer's greatest admirers, and I know he especially loved *The Woodlanders*, but he wrote in a letter to Dr. Hick something very odd about *Jude the Obscure*. He calls it: "a sad book! Poor Thomas is utterly on the wrong tack, and I fear he will never get back into the right one. At his age, a habit of railing at the universe is not overcome." This criticism is wholly without any value as regards Hardy's work, but it is no little side-light on Gissing's own peculiar habits of thought, or of persistent want of thought, on the great matters of speculation. His objection was not to anything that Hardy said, but to the fact that the latter's work, filled with what Gissing calls "railing at the universe," personally disturbed him. Anything which broke up his little semi-classic universe, the literary hut which he had built for himself as a shelter from the pitiless storm of cosmic influences, made him angry and uneasy for days and weeks. He never lived to read Hardy's *Dynasts*, a book that stands almost alone in literature, and is to my mind a far greater book than Goethe's *Faust*, but if he had read it I doubt if he would have forgiven Thomas Hardy. He always wanted to be left alone. He had constructed his pattern of the universe, and any one who shook it he denounced with, "Confound the fellow! He makes me unhappy." The one book that he did read, which is essentially a disturbing book to many people, and apparently read with some pleasure, was the earliest volume of Frazer's *Golden Bough*; but it is noteworthy that what interested him, and indeed actually pleased him, was Frazer's side attacks upon the dogmas of Christianity. He said: "The curious thing about Frazer's book is, that in illustrating the old religious usages connected with tree-worship and so on, he throws light upon every dogma of Christianity. This by implication; he never does it expressly. Edward Clodd has just pointed this out to the Folk-lore Society, with the odd result that Gladstone wrote at once resigning membership." This was written after Gladstone died, but it reads as if Gissing was not aware that he was dead. Odd as it may seem, it is perfectly possible that he did not know it. He cared very little for the newspapers, and sometimes did not read any for long periods. It is rather amusing that when I proved to him in later years that he had once dated his letters according to the Positivist Calendar, he seemed a little disturbed and shocked. Still, it was very natural that when exposed to Positivist influences he should have become a Positivist, for among the people of that odd faith, if faith it can be called, he found both kindness and intellectual recognition. When his mind became clearer and calmer, and something of the storm and stress had passed by, he was aware that his attitude had been somewhat pathologic, and did not like to recall it. This became very much clearer to him, and indeed to me, when another friend of ours, a learned and very odd German who lived and starved in London, went completely under in the same morbidly religious way. His name was Bertz. He remained to the day of Gissing's death a very great friend of his, and I believe he possesses more letters from George Gissing than any man living greatly owing to his own vast Teutonic energy and industry in writing to his friends.

In London Bertz came to absolute destitution. It then appeared that he owned a collie dog, which he found at last impossible to feed, even though he starved himself to do so. Gissing told me of this, and introduced me to Bertz. On hearing his story, and seeing the dog, I went to my own people, who were living in Clapham, and asked them if they would take the animal from Bertz and keep it. When I saw the German again I was given the dog, together with a paper on which were written all Don's peculiar tricks, most of which had been taught him by his master and needed the German language for their words of command. Soon after this Bertz fell into even grimmer poverty, and was rescued from the deepest gulf by some religious body analogous in those days to the Salvation Army of the present time. Of this Gissing knew nothing, until on going down the Strand he found his friend giving away

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religious pamphlets at the door of Exeter Hall. When he told me this he said he went next day to see the man in his single room lodging and found him sitting at the table with several open Bibles spread out before him. He explained that he was making a commentary on the Bible at the instigation of one of his new friends, and he added: "Here, here, is henceforth my life's work." Shortly after this, I believe through Frederic Harrison or some one else to whom Gissing appealed, the poor German was given work in some quasi-public institution, and with better fare and more ease his brain recovered. He never mentioned religion again. It was thus that Gissing himself recovered from similar but less serious influences in somewhat similar conditions. For some weeks in 1885 I was myself exposed to such influences in San Francisco, in even bitterer circumstances than those from which Bertz and Gissing had suffered, but not for one moment did I alter my opinions. As a kind of final commentary on this chapter and this side of Gissing's mind, one might quote from a letter to Wells: "Seeing that mankind cannot have done altogether with the miserable mystery of life, undoubtedly it behoves us before all else to lighten as we best can the lot of those for whose being we are responsible. This for the vast majority of men a few there are, I think, who are justified in quite neglecting that view of life, and, by the bye, Marcus Aurelius was one of them. Nothing he could have done would have made Commodus other than he was I use, of course, the everyday phrases, regardless of determinism and then one feels pretty sure that Commodus was not his son at all. For him, life was the individual, and whether he has had any true influence or not, I hold him absolutely justified in thinking as he did." There again comes out Gissing's view, his anti-social view, the native egoism of the man, his peculiar solitude of thought.

CHAPTER SIX

To have seen "Shelley plain" once only is to put down a single point on clear paper. To have seen him twice gives his biographer the right to draw a line. Out of three points may come a triangle. Out of the many times in many years that I saw Gissing comes the intricate pattern of him. I would rather write a little book like *Manon Lescaut* than many biographical quartos lying as heavy on the dead as Vanbrugh's mansions. If there are warts on Gissing so there were on Cromwell. I do not invent like the old cartographers, who adorned their maps with legends saying, "Here is much gold," or "Here are found diamonds." Nor have I put any imaginary "Mountains of the Moon" into his map, or adorned vacant parts of ocean with whales or wonderful monsters. I put down nothing unseen, or not most reasonably inferred. In spite of my desire to say little about myself, it is necessary to speak sometimes of things primarily my own. There is no doubt it did Gissing a great deal of good to have somebody to interest himself in, even if it were one of no more importance than myself. Although he was so singularly a lonely man, he could not always bury himself in the classics, or even in his work, done laboriously in eight prodigious hours. We talked for ever about what we were going to do, and there was very little that I wrote, up to the time of his leaving London permanently, which was not discussed with him. Yet I knew that he was wholly dissatisfied with much I wrote. When I was still living in Chelsea, he came to me one Sunday in a very uneasy state of mind. He looked obviously worried, and was for a long time silent as he sat over the fire. I asked him again and again what was the matter, because, as can be easily imagined, I always had the notion that something must be the matter with him, or soon would be. In answer to my repeated importunities he said, at last: "Well, the fact of the matter is, I want to speak to you about your work." It appeared that my affairs were at the bottom of his discomfort. He told me that he had been thinking of my want of success, and that he had made up his mind to tell me the cause of it. He was nervous and miserable, though I begged him to speak freely, but at last got out the truth. He told me that he did not think I possessed the qualities to succeed at the business I had so rashly commenced. He declared that it was not that he had not the very highest opinion of such a book as *The Western Avernus*, but as regards my story-writing he felt it was bound to be a failure. Those who knew him can imagine what it cost him to say as much as this. He would have preferred to destroy half a book and begin it again. Naturally enough I found what he said very disturbing, but am pleased to say that I took it in good part, and told him that I would think it over seriously. As may be imagined, I did a great deal of thinking on the subject, but the result of my cogitations amounted to this: I had started a thing and meant to go through with it at all costs. I wrote so to him later, and the little incident never made any difference whatever to our affectionate friendship. When I come to speak of some of his letters about my later books it will be seen how generous he could be to a friend

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who, for some time then, had not been very enthusiastic about his own work. I always believed that it was he and not myself who was at the wrong kind of task. Fiction, even as he understood it, was not for a man of his nature and faculties. He would have been in his true element as a don of a college, and much of his love of the classics was a mystery to me, as it would have been to most active men of the world, however well educated. I did understand his passion for the Greek tragedies, but he had almost more delight in the Romans; and, with the exception of Catullus and Lucretius, the Latin classics are to me without much savour. There is no doubt that in many ways I was but a barbarian to him. For one thing, at that time I was something of a fanatical imperialist. He took no more interest in the Empire, except as literary material, than he did in Nonconformist theology. Then I was certainly highly patriotic as regards England, but he was very cosmopolitan. It was no doubt very strange that he should have spoken to me about my having little faculty for writing fiction when I had so often come to the same silent conclusion about himself. I did not dare to tell him so, for if such a pronouncement had distressed me a little it would distress him very much more. Yet I think he did sometimes understand his real limitations, especially in later years, when he wrote more criticism. The man who could say that he was prepared to spend his years from thirty-six to forty in a vigorous apprenticeship to English, was perfectly capable of continuing that apprenticeship until he died.

He took a critical and wonderful interest in the methods of all men of letters, and that particular interest with regard to Balzac, which was known to many, has sometimes been mistaken. Folks have said, and even written, that he meant to write an English *Comédie Humaine*. There is, no doubt, a touch of truth in this notion, but no more than a touch. He would have liked to follow in Balzac's mighty footsteps, and do something for England which would possibly be inclusive of all social grades. At any rate he began at the bottom and worked upwards. It is quite obvious to me that what prevented him from going further in any such scheme was not actually a want of power or any failure of industry; it was a real lack of knowledge and of close contact with the classes composing the whole nation. Beyond the lower middle class his knowledge was not very deep. He was mentally an alien, and a satiric if interested intruder. He had been exiled for the unpardonable sins of his youth. It is impossible for any man of intellect not to suspect his own limitations, and I am sure he knew that he should have been a pure child of books, for as soon as he got beyond the pale of his own grim surroundings, those surroundings which had been burnt, and were still being burnt into his soul, he apparently lost interest. Though two or three of these later books have indeed much merit, such novels as *The Whirlpool* and *The Crown of Life* are really failures. I believe he felt they were. Anthony Hope Hawkins once wrote to me apropos of something, that there were very few men writing who really knew that all real knowledge had to be "bought." Gissing had bought his knowledge of sorrow and suffering and certain surroundings at a personal price that few can pay and not be bankrupt. But while I was associating with almost every class in the world he lived truly alone. There were, indeed, long months when he actually saw no one, and there were other periods when his only friend besides myself was that philosophic German whose philosophy put its lofty tail between its legs on a prolonged starvation diet.

As one goes on talking of him and considering his nature there are times when it seems amazing that he did not commit suicide and have done with it. Certainly there were days and seasons when I thought this might be his possible end. But some men break and others bend, and in him there was undoubtedly some curious strength though it were but the Will to Live of Schopenhauer, the one philosopher he sometimes read. I used myself to think that it was perhaps his native sensuousness which kept him alive in spite of all his misery. No man ever lived who enjoyed more acutely than himself things that were even remotely enjoyable, though his general attitude towards life was like his attitude towards people and the world. For so many good men Jehovah would have spared the Cities of the Plains. So in a certain sense the few good folk that he perceived in any given class made him endure the others that he hated, while he painted those he loved against their dingy and dreadful background. The motto on the original title page of *The Nether World* was a quotation from a speech by Renan delivered at the Academie Francaise in 1889: "La peinture d'un fumier peut etre justifiee pourvu qu'il y pousse une belle fleur; sans cela, le fumier n'est que repoussant." The few beautiful flowers of the world for George Gissing were those who hated their surroundings and desired vainly to grow out of them. Such he pitied, hopeless though he believed their position, and vain though he knew their aspirations to be. In a way all this was nothing but translated self-pity. Had he been more fortunate in his youth I do not believe he would have ever turned his

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attention in any way towards social affairs, in which he took no native interest. His natural sympathy was only for those whom he could imagine to be his mental fellows. Almost every sympathetic character in all his best books was for him like the starling in the cage of Sterne the starling that cried, "I can't get out! I can't get out!" Among the subjects he refused to speak of or to discuss was one that for a long time greatly interested me, and interests me still I refer to Socialism. But then Socialism, after all, is nothing but a more or less definitive view of a definite organisation with perfectly recognised ends, and he saw no possibility of any organisation doing away with the things he loathed. That is to say, he was truly hopeless, most truly pessimistic. He was a sensuous and not a scientific thinker, and to get on with him for any length of time it was necessary to suppress three-quarters of the things I wished to speak about. He was a strange egoist, though truly the hateful world was not his own. It appeared to me that he prayed, or strove, for the power to ignore it. It is for this reason that it seems to me now that all his so-called social work and analysis were in the nature of an alien tour de force. He bent his intellect in that direction, and succeeded even against his nature. He who desired to be a Bentley or a Porson wrote bitterly about the slums of Tottenham Court Road. With Porson he damned the nature of things, and wrote beautifully about them. I remember on one occasion telling him of a piece of script in the handwriting of the great surgeon, John Hunter, which ran somewhat like this: "Damn civilisation! It makes cats eat their kittens, sows eat their young, and women send their children out to nurse." I think that gave him more appreciation of science than anything he had ever heard. For it looked back into the past, and for George Gissing the past was the age of gold. In life, as he had to live it, it was impossible to ignore the horrors of the present time. He found it easier to ignore the horrors of the past, and out of ancient history he made his great romance, which, truly, he never wrote.

It is odd that a man who was thus so essentially romantic should have been mistaken, not without good reason, for a realist. In one sense he was a realist, but this was the fatal result of his nature and his circumstances. Had he lived in happier surroundings, still writing fiction, it would have been romance. And, curiously enough, I doubt if any of his ideas concerning women were at all romantic. His disaster with his first wife was due to early and unhappily awakened sex feeling, but I think he believed that his marrying her was due to his desire to save somebody, whom he considered to be naturally a beautiful character, from the dunghill on which he found her. This poor girl was his first belle fleur. In all his relations with women, it seems as if his own personal loneliness was the dominating factor. So much did he feel these things that it was rarely possible to discuss them with him. Nevertheless it was the one subject, scientifically treated, on which I could get him to listen. In the first five years of my literary apprenticeship I began a book, which is still unfinished, and never will be finished, called Social Pathology. So far as it dealt with sex and sex deprivation, he was much interested in it. In all his books there is to be found the misery of the man who lives alone and yet cannot live alone. I do not think that in any book but *The Odd Women* he ever made a study of that from the woman's side. But it is curiously characteristic of his sex view that the chief feminine character of that book apparently knew not love even when she thought that she knew it, but was only aware of awakened senses.

One might have imagined, considering his early experiences, that he would have led the ordinary life of man, and associated, if only occasionally, with women of the mercenary type. This, I am wholly convinced, was a thing he never did, though I possess one poem which implies the possible occurrence of such a passing liaison. There was, however, another incident in his life which occurred not long before I went to America. He was then living in one room in the house of a journeyman bookbinder. On several occasions when I visited him there I saw his landlady, a young and not unpleasing woman, who seemed to take great interest in him, and did her very best to make him comfortable in narrow, almost impossible, surroundings. Her husband, a man a great deal older than herself, drank, and not infrequently ill-treated her. This was not wholly Gissing's story, for I saw the man myself, as well as his wife. It seems that she went for sympathy to her lodger, and he told her something of his own troubles. Their common griefs threw them together. She had obviously more than the usual intelligence of her class. She desired to learn French, or made Gissing believe so; my own view being that she desired his company. The result of this was only natural, and soon afterwards Gissing was obliged to leave the house owing to the jealousy of her husband, who for many years had already been suspicious of her without any cause. But this was only a passing affair. He took other rooms, and so far as I know never saw her again.

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While I was in America he was living at 7K, and in that gloomy flat there was an affair of another order, an incident not without many parallels in the lives of poor artists and writers. It seems that a certain lady, not without importance in society, and the wife of a rich husband, wrote to him about one of his books, and having got into correspondence with him allowed her curiosity to overcome her discretion. She visited him often in his chambers, and though he told me but little I gathered what the result was. So far as I am aware, these were the only two romantic or quasi-romantic incidents in Gissing's life until towards the end of it. When I came back from America he certainly had no mistress, and beyond an occasional visit from the sons of Frederic Harrison, he received no one but myself. His poverty forbade him entertaining any but one of his fellows who was as poor as he was, and the few acquaintances he had once met in better surroundings than his own gradually drifted away from him, or died as Cotter Morison died. Although he spoke very little about these matters of personal loneliness and deprivation I was yet conscious, from the general tenor of his writing and an occasional dropped word, how bitterly he felt them. It had rejoiced my unregenerate heart in America to learn that he was not entirely without feminine companionship at a time when the horror of his life was only partially mitigated by the preference of his mad and wretched wife for the dens and slums of the New Cut. This woman of the upper classes came to him like a star, and had been a lamp in his darkness. I wonder if she still retains within her heart some memories of those hours.

I have not been able to discover whether some of Gissing's ancestors were German. He thought this was so, without having anything definite to go upon. If it were true perhaps his Teutonic ancestry made him turn with joy to the German ideal of woman, that of the *haus-frau*. If little or nothing were known about him, or only so much as those know who have already written of him, it might, in some ways, be possible to reconstruct him by a process of deductive analysis, by what the school logicians call the *regressus a principiatis ad principia*. This is always a fascinating mental exercise, and indeed, with a very little light on Gissing's career, it should not have been difficult for some to build up a picture not unlike the man. For instance, no one with a gleam of intelligence, whether a critic or not, could read some portions of the chapter in Charles Dickens: A Critical Study on "Women and Dickens" without coming to the inevitable conclusion that Gissing's fortune with regard to the women with whom he had been thrown in contact must have been disastrous. Although Dickens drew certain offensive women with almost unequalled power, he treats them so that one becomes oblivious of their very offensiveness, as Gissing points out. Gissing's own commentary on such women is ten thousand times more bitter, and it is felt, not observed, as in Dickens' books. He calls them "these remarkable creatures," and declares they belong mostly to one rank of life, the lower middle class. "In general their circumstances are comfortable . . . nothing is asked of them but a quiet and amiable discharge of their household duties; they are treated by their male kindred with great, often with extraordinary consideration. Yet their characteristic is acidity of temper and boundless licence of querulous or insulting talk. The real business of their lives is to make all about them as uncomfortable as they can. Invariably, they are unintelligent and untaught; very often they are flagrantly imbecile. Their very virtues (if such persons can be said to have any) become a scourge. In the highways and byways of life, by the fireside, and in the bed-chamber, their voices shrill upon the terrified ear." He adds that no historical investigation is needed to ascertain the truthfulness of these presentments. Indeed Gissing required no historical investigation, he had his personal experience to go upon; this, indeed, is obvious. Still, one cannot but feel, in reading this indictment, that something might be said upon the other side, and that Gissing's attitude was so essentially male as to vitiate many of his conclusions.

A few pages further on in this book he says "Another man, obtaining his release from these depths, would have turned away in loathing; Dickens found therein matter for his mirth, material for his art." But Gissing knew that Dickens had not suffered in the way he himself had done. Thus it was that he rejoiced in the punishment which Mrs. Joe Gargery received. Gissing writes "Mrs. Joe Gargery shall be brought to quietness; but how? By a half-murderous blow on the back of her head, from which she will never recover. Dickens understood by this time that there is no other efficacious way with these ornaments of their sex."

Having spoken of Dickens it may be as well to dispose of him, with regard to Gissing, in this chapter. It seems to be commonly thought that Gissing wrote his book about Dickens not only with the sympathy which he expressed,

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but with considerable joy in the actual work. This is not true, for he regarded it essentially as a pot-boiler, and did it purely for money. By some strange kink in his mind he chose to do it in Italy, far from any reference library. He wrote: "My little Dickens book has to be written before Christmas, and to do this I must get settled at the earliest possible date in a quiet north Italian town. I think I shall choose Siena." On what principle he decided to choose a quiet north Italian town to write a book about Dickens I have never been able to determine, as he had no overwhelming love of North Italy, which was for him the Italy of the Renaissance. Indeed, he actually disliked the work, and had no desire to do it, well as it was done. It is, however, curious, to me, in considering this book, to find that neither he nor any other critic of Dickens that I have ever read seems to give a satisfactory explanation of the great, and at times overwhelming, attraction that Dickens has for many. And yet on more than one occasion I discussed Dickens with him, and in a great measure he agreed with a theory I put forth with some confidence. The great charm of Dickens lies not wholly in his humour or even greatly in his humour. It is not found in his characterisation, nor in his underlying philosophy of revolt, although almost every writer of consequence is a revolutionist. It results purely and simply from what the critics of the allied art of painting describe as "quality." This is a word exceedingly difficult to define. It implies more or less the characteristic way in which paint is put upon the canvas. A picture may be practically worthless from the point of view of subject or composition, it may even be comparatively poor in colouring, and yet it may have an extreme interest or surface. One finds the same thing in Dickens' writings. His page is full. It is fuller than the page of any other English writer. There are, so to speak, on any given page by any man a certain number of intellectual and emotional stimuli. Dickens' page is full of these stimuli to a most extreme degree. It is like a small mosaic, and yet clear. It has cross meanings, cross lights, reflections, suggestions. Compare a page of Dickens with a page, say, of Thackeray. Take a pencil and write down the number of mental suggestions given by a sentence of Thackeray. Take, again, a sentence of Dickens, and see how many more there are to be found. It is this tremendous and overflowing fullness which really constitutes Dickens' great and peculiar power.

But all this is anticipation. Not yet was he to write of Dickens, for much was to befall him before he went to Italy again. He was once more alone, and it might have been prophesied that this loneliness would not last long. I have often regretted not foreseeing what might have been foreseen if I had considered the man and his circumstances with the same fullness which comes to one in later years after Fate has wrought itself out. Had I known all that might have been known, or done all that might have been done, I could perhaps have saved him from something even worse than his first marriage. Yet, after all, I was a poor and busy man, and while living in Chelsea had many companions, some of them men who have now made a great name in the world of art. The very nature of Gissing and his work, the dreadful concentration he required to do something which was, as I insist again, alien from his true nature, forbade my seeing him very often, or even often enough to gather from his reticence what was really in his mind. Had I visited him without any warning, it would have utterly destroyed his whole day's work. But this solitude, this enforced and appalling loneliness, which seemed to him necessary for work if he was to live, ate into him deeply. It destroyed his nerve and what judgment he ever had which, heaven knows, was little enough. What it means to some men to live in such solitude only those who know can tell, and they never tell. To Gissing, with his sensual and sensuous nature, it was most utter damnation.

By now he had come out of the pit of his first marriage, and gradually the horrors he had passed through became dim to his eyes. They were like a badly toned photograph, and faded. I did foresee that something would happen sooner or later to alter the way in which he lived, but I did not foresee, and could not have foreseen or imagined what was actually coming, for no one could have prophesied it. It was absurd, impossible, monstrous, and almost bathos. Yet it fits in with the character of the man as it had been distorted by circumstance. One Sunday when I visited him he told me, with a strange mixture of abruptness and hesitation, that he had made the acquaintance of a girl in the Marylebone Road. Naturally enough I thought at first that his resolution and his habits had broken down and that he had picked up some prostitute of the neighbourhood. But it turned out that the girl was "respectable." He said: "I could stand it no longer, so I rushed out and spoke to the very first woman I came across." It was an unhappy inspiration of the desperate, and the first act in a prolonged drama of pain and misery. It took me some time and many questions to find out what this meant, and what it was to lead to, but presently he replied sullenly that he proposed to marry the girl if she would marry him. On hearing this, I fell into silence, and

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we sat for a long time without speaking. Knowing him as I did, it was yet a great shock to me. For I would rather have seen him in the physical clutches of the biggest harpy in the Strand knowing that such now could not long hold him. I had done my best, as a mere boy, to prevent him from marrying his first wife, and had failed with the most disastrous results. I now determined to stop this marriage if possible and ventured to recall the past and the part I had played in it when I implored him to have no more to do with Nell Harrison long before he married her. I reminded him of the relief it had been when his first wife died, but nothing that I could say seemed to move, or even to offend him. His mind recognised its truth, but his body meant to have its way. He was quiet, sullen, set even when I told him that he would repent it most bitterly. The only thing that could at last get him to agree to was that he would take no irrevocable step for a week.

I asked him questions about the girl. He admitted that he did not love her in any sense of the word love. He admitted that she had no great powers of attraction, that she seemed to possess no particularly obvious intellect. She had received his advances in the street in the way that such girls, whose courtship is traditionally carried on in the open thoroughfare, do receive them. But when he asked her to visit him in his chambers she replied to that invitation with all the obvious suspicion of a lower-class girl from whom no sex secrets were hidden. From the very start the whole affair seemed hopeless, preposterous, intolerable, and I went away from him in despair. It was a strange thing that Gissing did not seem to know what love was. If I have not before this said something about his essential lack of real passion in his dealings with women it must be said now. It is quite obvious that he had a boyish kind of passion for Nell Harrison, but it was certainly not that kind of passion which mostly keeps boys innocent. Indeed those calf loves which afflict youths are at the same time a great help to them, for a boy is as naturally as coy as any maiden. If by any chance Gissing, instead of coming into the hands of a poor little harlot of the streets of Moorhampton, had fallen in love with some young girl of decent character and upbringing, his passions would not have been so fatally roused. I think it was probably the whole root of his disaster this should have occurred at all. Possibly it was the horror and rage and anger connected with the first affair, combined with the fact that it became actually sensual, which prevented him from having afterwards what one might without priggishness describe as a pure passion. At any rate I never saw any signs of his being capable of the overwhelming love which might in other circumstances drive a man down to hell, or raise him to heaven. To my mind all his books betray an extreme lack of this. His characters in all their love affairs are essentially too reasonable. A man wishes to marry a girl, not because he desires her simply and overwhelmingly, but because she is a fitting person, or the kind of woman about whom he has been able to build up certain ideas which suit his mind. In fact the love of Godwin Peake for Sidwell Warricombe in *Born in Exile* is somewhat typical of the whole attitude he had towards affairs of passion. Then again in *New Grub Street* there is the suicide of Biffen which throws a very curious light on Gissing's nature. Apparently Biffen did not commit suicide because of his failure, or because he was half starving, but because he was weakly desirous of a woman like Amy not necessarily Amy herself. In Gissing's phrase, he desired her to complete his manhood, to my mind the most ridiculous way of putting the affair. It is in this that Gissing showed his essential lack of knowledge of the other sex. A man does not captivate women by going to them and explaining, with more or less periphrasis, that they are required to complete his manhood, that he feels a rather frustrated male individual without them. And if he has these ideas at the back of his head and goes courting, the result is hardly likely to be successful. Gissing never understood the passion in the man that sweeps a woman off her feet. One finds this lack in all his men who live celibate lives. They suffer physically, or they suffer to a certain degree from loneliness, but one never feels that only one woman could cure their pain, or alleviate their desolation. At times Gissing seemed, as it were, to be in love with the sex but not with the woman. Of course he had a bitter hatred of the general prejudices of morality, a thing which was only natural to any one who had lived his life and thought what he thought. It is pleasing to note that his favourite poem in the whole English language was perhaps the least likely one that could be picked out. This was Browning's "*Statue and the Bust*," which is certainly of a teaching not Puritan in its essence. The Puritan ideal Gissing loathed with a fervour which produced the nearest I have ever seen in him to actual rage and madness. He roared against it if he did not scoff. He sometimes quoted the well-known lines from the almost unknown Brathwaite:

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Where I saw a Puritane—one Hanging of his Cat on Monday, For killing of a Mouse on Sunday." I remember very well his taking down Browning when I was with him one afternoon at 7K. He read aloud a great portion of "The Statue and the Bust," and we discussed it afterwards, of course pointing out to each other with emphasis its actual doctrine, its loathing of futility. It teaches that the two people who loved each other but never achieved love were two weaklings, who ought to have acted, and should not have allowed themselves to be conquered by the lordly husband. Gissing said: "Those people who buy Browning and think they understand him oh, if they really knew what he meant they would pick him up with a pair of tongs, and take him out, and burn him in their back yards in their back yards!" It strikes one that Gissing, in his haste, seemed to think that the kind of bourgeois or bourgeoisie, whom he imagined thus destroying poor Browning with the aid of tongs, possessed such things as back-yards, and, perhaps, frequented them on Sunday afternoons. But he had lived for so many years in houses which had not a garden, or anything but a small, damp yard behind, that he began to think, possibly, that all houses were alike. I roared with laughter at his notion of what these prosperous Puritans would do. It suggested to my mind a picture of some well-dressed woman of the upper middle-class bringing out "The Statue and the Bust" with a pair of tongs, and burning it in some small and horrible back-yard belonging to a house in the slums between Tottenham Court Road and Fitzroy Square. And yet, although he understood Browning's sermon against the passive futility of these weak and unfortunate lovers he could not, I think, have understood wholly, or in anything but a literary sense, the enormous power of passion which Browning possessed a knowledge of. This lack in him is one of the keys to his character, and it unlocks much. When I left him after he told me about this new affair, I went back to my own rooms and sat thinking it over, wondering if it were possible even now to do anything to save him from his own nature, and the catastrophe it was preparing. Without having seen the girl I felt sure that it would be a catastrophe, for I knew him too well. On reflecting over the matter it did seem to me that there was one possible chance of saving him from himself. It was a very unlikely thing that I should succeed but at any rate one plan might be tried. I have said that we rarely spoke of his early life, and never of what had happened in Manchester. Nevertheless I was fully aware that it dominated the whole of his outlook and all his thoughts in any way connected with ordinary social life, especially with regard to intercourse with those who might know something about his early career. At this time I do not think that he blamed himself much for what had happened. Self-esteem has great powers of repair. Men die many times in life and are born again, and by this time he must have looked on the errant youth who had been himself as little more than an ancestor. He himself had died and risen again, and if he was not the man he might have been, he was certainly not the man he had been. Yet he was perpetually alive to what other people might possibly think of him. The real reason for his almost rigid seclusion from society was his very natural fear that some brute, and he knew only too well that there are such brutes, might suddenly and unexpectedly expose his ancient history. It is true that even in our society in England, which is not famous all the world over for tact, it was not very likely to happen. But the bare possibility that it might absolutely dominated him. It requires very little sympathy or understanding of his character to see that this must have been so. No doubt it was mainly from this cause that he considered he had no right to approach women of his own class, seeing that he had declassed himself, without telling the whole truth. But this was quite impossible for him to do, and I knew it. In some cases it would have been wise, in some unwise, but George Gissing was unable to do such a thing. The result was this sudden revolt, and the madness which led him to speak to this girl of the Marylebone Road, whom I pictured, not inadequately, in my mind. At the first glance it seemed that nothing could possibly be done, that the man must be left to "dree his weird," to work out his fate and accomplish his destiny. And yet I lay awake for a very long time that night thinking of the whole situation, and at last determined to take a step on his behalf which, at any rate, had the merit of some originality and courage.

Years ago in Manchester, when he was a boy, before the great disaster came, Gissing had visited my uncle's house, and had obviously pleased every one he met there. He was bright, not bad looking, very cheerful and enthusiastic, and few who met him did not like him. Among those whose acquaintance he made at that house were two of my own cousins. In later years they often spoke of him to me, even although they had not seen him since he was a boy of seventeen. I now went to both of them and told them the whole affair in confidence, speaking quite openly of his character, and the impossibility he discovered within himself of living in the desolation which fate had brought upon him. They understood his character, and were acquainted with his reputation. He was a man of genius, if not a man of great genius, and occupied a certain position in literature which would one day, we all

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felt assured, be still a greater position. They were obviously exceedingly sorry for him, and not the less sorry when I told them of the straits in which he sometimes found himself. Nevertheless it seemed to me, as I explained to them, that if he had been lucky enough to marry some one in sympathy with him and his work, some one able to help to push him forward on the lines on which he might have attained success, there was yet great hope for him even as regards money. Then I asked them whether it would not be possible to stop this proposed outrageous marriage, which seemed to me utterly unnatural. They were, however, unable to make any suggestion, and certainly did not follow what was in my mind. Then I opened what I had to say, and asked them abruptly if it were not possible for one of them to consider whether she would marry him, if the present affair could be brought decently to an end. They were both educated women, and knew at least two foreign languages. They were accustomed to books, and appreciated his work.

No doubt my proposal sounded absurd, unconventional, and perhaps not a little horrifying. But when I have had anything to do in life I have not been accustomed to let convention stand in my way. Such marriages have been arranged and have not been unsuccessful. There was a real possibility of such a marriage as I proposed being anything but a failure. Our conversation ended at last in both of them undertaking to consider the matter if, after meeting Gissing again, they still remained of the same mind, and if he found that such a step was possible. I have often wondered since whether any situation exactly like this ever occurred before. I found it very interesting, and when at last I went back to Gissing I felt entitled to tell him that he could do much better than marry an unknown girl of the lower classes whom he had accosted in desperation. But he received what I had to say in a very curious manner. It seemed to depress him profoundly. Naturally enough, I did not tell him the names of those who were prepared to renew his acquaintance, but I did tell him that I had been to a lady who had once met him and greatly admired his work, who would be ready to consider the possibility of becoming his wife if on meeting once again they proved sympathetic. He shook his head grimly, and, after a long silence, told me that he had not kept his word, and had asked Edith Underwood to marry him. He had, he said, gone too far to withdraw.

There is such a thing in life as the tyranny of honour, and personally I cared very little for this point of honour when I thought of his future. It was not as if this girl's affections were in any way engaged. If they had been I would have kept silence, bitterly as I regretted the whole affair. She was curious about him, and that was all. It would do her no harm to lose him, and, indeed, as the event proved, it would have been better if she had not married at all. Therefore I begged him to shut up the flat and leave London at once, even offering to try and find the money for him to do so. But, like all weak people, he was peculiarly obstinate, and nothing that could be urged had the least effect upon him. I have often thought it was his one great failure in rectitude which occurred at Manchester that made him infinitely more tenacious of doing nothing which might seem in any way dishonourable, however remotely. I did not succeed in moving him, with whatever arguments I plied him, and the only satisfaction I got out of it was the sense that he knew I was most deeply interested in him, and had done everything, even much more than might have been expected, to save him from what I thought must lead to irreparable misery. Certainly the whole incident was remarkable. There was, perhaps, a little air of curiously polite comedy about it, and yet it was the prelude to a tragedy.

It was soon after this, in fact it was on the following Sunday, that I made the acquaintance of the young woman who was to be his second wife, to bear his children, to torture him for years, to drive him almost mad, and once more make a financial slave of him. We three met in the gloomy sitting-room of 7K. My first impression of this girl was more unfavourable than I had expected. She was the daughter of a small tradesman but little removed from an artisan, and she looked it. In the marriage certificate her father is described as a carver, for what reason I am unable to determine, for I have a very distinct recollection that Gissing told me he was a bootmaker, probably even a cobbler. I disliked the young woman at first sight, and never got over my early impression. From the very beginning it seemed impossible that she should ever become in any remote degree what he might justifiably have asked for in a wife. Yet she was not wholly disagreeable in appearance. She was of medium height and somewhat dark. She had not, however, the least pretence to such beauty as one might hope to find even in a slave of the kitchen. She possessed neither face nor figure. And this was she that the most fastidious man I knew was about to marry. I went away with a sick heart, for it was nothing less than frightful catastrophe, and I had to stand by and

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see it happen. He married her on March 20, 1891, and went to live near Exeter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

For many months after he left London I did not see Gissing, although we continued to correspond somewhat irregularly. He was exceedingly reticent about the results of his marriage, and I did not discover definitely for some time to what extent it was likely to prove a failure. In some ways it was a relief to me that he should be living in the country, as I always felt, rightly or wrongly, a certain feeling of responsibility with regard to him when he was close at hand. Marriage always takes one's friends away from one, and for a time he was taken from me. But as I am not anxious to write in great detail about the more sordid facts of his life, especially when they do not throw light on his character, I am not disturbed at knowing little of the earlier days of his second marriage. The results are sufficient, and will presently appear. For Gissing remained Gissing, and his character did not alter now. So I may return for a little while to matters more connected with his literary life.

I have before this endeavoured to describe or suggest his personal appearance, but whenever I think of him I regret deeply that no painter ever made an adequate portrait of the man. He was especially interesting-looking, and most obviously lovable and sympathetic when any of his feelings were roused. His grey eyes were very bright and intelligent, his features finely cut, and at times he was almost beautiful; although his skin was not always in such a good condition as it should have been, and he was always very badly freckled. For those who have never seen him a photograph published in a dull literary journal, which is now defunct, is certainly the most adequate and satisfying presentment in existence. On a close inspection of this photograph it will be observed that he brushed his hair backward from his forehead without any parting. He had a curious way of dressing it about which he was very particular. It was very fine hair of a brown colour, perhaps of a rather mousy tint, and it was never cut except at the ends at the nape of his neck. Whenever he washed his face he used to fasten this hair back with an elastic band which he always carried in his waistcoat pocket. On some occasions, when I have stayed the night at 7K and seen him at his toilette, this elastic band gave him a very odd appearance almost as if he wore, for the time being, a very odd halo; but as his hair was so long in front it would otherwise have fallen into the basin of water. He told me that once in Germany a waiter entered the room while he was washing his face, and on perceiving this peculiar head-dress betrayed signs of mixed amusement and alarm. As Gissing said, "I believe he thought I was mad."

His forehead was high, his head exceedingly well shaped but not remarkably large. He always wore a moustache. Considering his very sedentary life his natural physique was extremely good, and he was capable of walking great distances if he were put to it and was in condition. Seen nude, he had the figure of a possible athlete. I used to tell him that he might be an exceedingly strong man if he cared to take the trouble to become one, but his belief, which is to be found expressed in one passage of *The Private Papers*, was that no one in our time could be at once intellectually and physically at his best. Indeed, he had in a way a peculiar contempt for mere strength, and I do not doubt that much of his later bodily weakness and illness might have been avoided if he had thought more of exercise and open air.

In no way was he excessive, in spite of his jocular pretence of a monstrous addiction to "strong waters" as he always called them. He did love wine, but he loved it with discretion, although not with real knowledge. It was a case of passion and faith with him. I could imagine that in some previous incarnation were there such things as reincarnations he must have been an Italian writer of the South he loved so well. A little while ago I spoke of the strange absence of colour in his rooms. On re-reading *The Private Papers* I find some kind of an explanation, or what he considered an explanation, of this fact, to which I myself drew his attention. He seemed to imagine that his early acquaintance with his father's engravings inspired him with a peculiar love of black and white. More probably the actual truth is that his father's possible love of colour had never been developed any more than his own.

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His fantastic attempts at times to make one believe that he was a great drinker, when a bottle of poor and common wine served him and me for a dinner and made us cheerful, were no more true than that he was a great smoker. He had a prodigious big pot of tobacco in his rooms in the early days, a pot containing some form of mild returns which to my barbaric taste suggested nothing so much as hay that had been stored next some mild tobacco. It was one of my grievances against him that when I visited his rooms hard up for anything to smoke, which frequently occurred in those days, I was almost unable to use this poor weed. But it was always a form of jest with him to pretend that his habits were monstrously excessive. One of his commonest forms of humour was exaggeration. Many people misunderstood that his very expressions of despair were all touched with a grim humour. Nevertheless he and his rooms were grim enough. On his shelves there was a French book, the title of which I forget, dealing without any reticence with the lives of the band of young French writers under the Second Empire, who perished miserably in the conditions to which they were exposed. This volume contains a series of short and bitter biographies, ending for the most part with, "mourut a l'hospital," or "se brula la cervelle." We were by no means for ever cheerful in those times.

I have not said very much, except by bitter implication, of his financial position, or what he earned. But his finances were a part of his general life's tragedy. There is a passage somewhere at the end of a chapter in *A Life's Morning* which says: "Put money in thy purse; and again, put money in thy purse; for, as the world is ordered, to lack current coin is to lack the privileges of humanity, and indigence is the death of the soul." I have been speaking wholly in vain if it is not understood that he was a man extremely difficult to influence, even for his own good. This was because he was weak, and his weakness came out with most exceeding force in all his dealings with publishers and editors. For the most part he was atrociously paid, but the fact remains that he was paid, and his perpetual fear was that his books would presently be refused and that he would get no one to take them, if he remonstrated with those who were his taskmasters. In such an event he gloomily anticipated, not so much the workhouse, but once more a cellar off the Tottenham Court Road, or some low poverty-stricken post as a private tutor or the usher of a poor school. Sometimes when we were together he used to talk with a certain pathetic jocosity, or even jealousy, of Coleridge's luck in having discovered his amiable patron, Gillman. He did not imagine that nowadays any Gillmans were to be looked for, nor do I think that any Gillman would have found Gissing possible. One night after we had been talking about Coleridge and Gillman he sat down and wrote a set of poor enough verses, not without humour, and certainly highly characteristic, that ran as follows :

THE HUMBLE ASPIRATION OF G. G., NOVELIST

" Hoc erat in votis."

Oh, could I encounter a Gillman
Who would board me and lodge me for aye,
With what intellectual skill, man,
My life should be frittered away!

What visions of study methodic
My leisurely hours would beguile!
I would potter with details prosodic,
I would ponder perfections of syle.

I would joke in a vein pessimistic
At all the disasters of earth;
I would trifle with schemes socialistic,
And turn over matters for mirth.

From the quiddities quaint of Quintilian
I would flit to the latest critiques;
I would visit the London Pavilion,
And magnify lion-comiques.

With the grim ghastly gaze of a Gorgon
I would cut Hendersonian bores
I would follow the ambulant organ
That jingles at publicans' doors.

In the odorous alleys of Wapping
I would saunter on evenings serene;
When the dews of the Sabbath were dropping
You would find me on Clerkenwell Green.

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At the Hall Scientific of Bradlaugh I would revel in atheist rant, Or enjoy an attack on some bad law By the notable Mrs. Besant.

I would never omit an oration Of Cunninghame Graham or Burns; And the Army miscalled of Salvation Should furnish me frolic by turns.

Perchance I would muse o'er a mystic; Perchance I would booze at a bar; And when in the mind journalistic I would read the "Pall Mall" and the "Star."

jvever more would I toil with my quill, man, Or plead for the publishers' pay. Oh, where and Oh, where is the Gillman, Who will lodge me and board me for aye?

Now as to his actual earnings. His first book, *Workers in the Dawn*, was published by Remington. So far as I am aware it brought him in nothing. The book, naturally enough, was a dead failure; nobody perceived its promise, and it never sold. I do not think he received a penny on account for it. He got little enough for *The Unclassed*, which was published in 1884, the year I went to America, and was dedicated to me, as the initials M.C.R. on the dedication page of the first edition testify. At that time I still retained in signature my second initial. This book was published by Bentley, and it was through it that he first made acquaintance in a business way with George Meredith, then quite a poor man and working for the firm as a reader.

In *The Unclassed* as a manuscript there was a chapter, or part of a chapter, of a curiously romantic kind. It was some such theme as that which I myself treated in a romantic story called "The Purification of Dolores Silva." *Ida Starr*, the idealised heroine of the streets, washed herself pure of her sins in the sea at midnight, if I remember the incident rightly, for I never actually read it. It appears that George Meredith was much taken with the story, but found his sense of fitness outraged by the introduction of this highly romantic incident, which seemed out of tone with the remainder of the book and the way in which it was written. He begged Gissing to eliminate it. Now as a rule Gissing, being a young writer, naturally objected to altering anything, but he knew that Meredith was right. At any rate, even at that period, the older man had had such an enormous experience that Gissing accepted his opinion and acted upon it. He told me that George Meredith came downstairs with him into the street, and standing on the doorstep reiterated his advice about this particular passage. He said in the peculiar way so characteristic of him, "My dear sir, I beg you to believe it, it made me shiver!" That passage is missing in the published book.

The Unclassed had a kind of *succes d'estime*. Certain people read it, and fewer people liked it. It was something almost fresh in English. Nevertheless he made little or nothing out of it. Few, indeed, were who made money out of Chapman and Hall. The business was run by Frederick Chapman, known in the trade as "the liar," a man who notoriously never spoke the truth if a lie would bring him a penny. After *The Unclassed* came *Isabel Clarendon*, which was obviously written under the influence of Tourgeniev. So far as I am aware this influence has not been noted, even by so acute a critic as Thomas Seccombe, but I was at that time a great reader of Tourgeniev, partly owing to Gissing's recommendation and insistence upon the man, and recognised his flavour at once. Gissing openly acknowledged it, a thing no writer does without very strong reason. This book, of course, was not a success. That, I believe, was the last work he published with Chapman and Hall. So far as he was concerned the firm had not been a success. He was still compelled to earn his bread and cheese and rent by teaching.

Although Tourgeniev was the earliest great influence upon Gissing, his effect was very largely that of form. So far as feeling was concerned his god for many years was undoubtedly Dostoevsky. That Russian writer himself suffered and had been down into the depths like the modern writer Gorki, which was what appealed to Gissing. Indeed he says somewhere: "Dostoevsky, a poor and suffering man, gives us with immense power his own view of penury and wretchedness." It was Gissing who first introduced *Crime and Punishment* to me. There is no doubt, when one comes to think of it seriously, a great likeness between the modern Russian school and Gissing's work, and that likeness is perhaps founded on something deeper than the mere community of subject which shows

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itself here and there. One notes something essentially Slav-like in Gissing's attitude to life. He was a dreamer, rebellious and unable. If, indeed, his ancestry was partly Teutonic, he might have been originally as much Slav as German.

In 1886, while I was still in America, he began *Demos*. At that time, just when he had almost done the first two volumes, there occurred the Trafalgar Square riots, in which John Burns, Hyndman, and Henry Hyde Champion were concerned. Fool though Gissing was about his own affairs, he yet saw that it was a wonderful coincidence from his point of view that at this juncture he should have been dealing with labour matters and the nature of the mob. Some rare inspiration or suggestion led him to rush down with the first two volumes to Smith, Elder Co., where they were seen by James Payne, who said to him, "Give us the rest at once and we will begin printing now." He went home and wrote the third volume in a fortnight while the other two volumes were in the press. This book was published anonymously, as it was thought that this would give it a greater chance of success. It might reasonably be attributed to any one, and Gissing's name at that time, or indeed at any time afterwards, was very little help towards financial success. Now I am of opinion, speaking from memory, that this book was bought out and out by the publishing firm for fifty pounds. To a young writer, who had never made so much, fifty pounds was a large sum. In Gissing's exaggerated parlance it was "gross and riotous wealth."

Having succeeded in getting hold of a big firm of notable and well-known publishers, he dreaded leaving them, even though he very soon discovered that fifty pounds for a long three-volume novel was most miserable pay. That he wrote books quickly at times was no guarantee that he would always write them as rapidly. For once in his life he had finished a whole volume in a fortnight, but it might just as well take him many months. There are, indeed, very few of his books which a great part was not destroyed, re-written, and sometimes again destroyed and again re-written. Nevertheless he discovered a tremendous reluctance to ask for better terms. It was not only his fear of returning to the old irremediable poverty which made him dread leaving a firm which was not all it might have been, but he was cursed with a most unnecessary tenderness for it. He actually dreaded hurting the feelings of a publishing firm which had naturally all the qualities and defects of a corporation. The reason that he did at last leave it was rather curious. It shows that what many might think a mere coincidence may prejudice a fair man's mind.

As I have said, he had been in the habit of selling his books outright for fifty pounds. After this had gone on for many books I suggested to him, as everything he wrote went into several editions under the skilful management of the firm, that it might be as well to sell them the first edition only and ask for a royalty on the succeeding ones. This would never have occurred to him, and he owned it was a good idea. So when *Thyrza* was finished he sold the first edition for forty pounds, and arranged for a percentage on succeeding editions. He went on with the next book at once. Now as it happened, curiously enough, there was no second edition of *Thyrza* called for, and this so disheartened poor Gissing that he sold his two next novels outright for the usual sum.

One day when I was with him he spoke of the bad luck of *Thyrza*, which seemed to him almost inexplicable. It was so very unlucky that it had not done well, for the loss of the extra ten pounds was not easy for him to get over in his perpetual and grinding poverty. When we had discussed the matter he determined to ask the firm what they would give him for all further rights in the book. He did this, and they were kind enough to pay the sum of ten pounds for them, thus making up the old price of fifty pounds for the whole book. Then, by one of those chances which only business men are capable of thoroughly appreciating, a demand suddenly sprang up for the story, and the publishers were enabled to bring out a new edition at once. Some time later it went into a third edition, and, I believe, even into a fourth. Now it will hardly be credited that Gissing was very sore about this, for he was usually a very just man, but when I suggested, for the hundredth time but now at the psychological moment, that the firm of Lawrence and Bullen who were then publishing for me, might give him very good terms, he actually had the courage to leave his own publishers, and never went back to them.

I have insisted again and again upon Gissing's weakness and his inability to move. Nothing, I believe, but a sense of rankling injustice would have made him move. I had been trying for three years to get him to go to my own

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publishing friends, and I have heard his conduct in the matter described as obstinacy. But to speak truly it was sheer weakness and nervousness. The older firm at any rate gave him fifty pounds for a book, and they were wealthy people, likely to last. My own friends were new men, and although they gave him a hundred pounds on account of increasing royalties, it was conceivably possible that they might be a failure and presently go out of business. His notion was that firm he had left would then refuse to have anything to do with him, that he would get no one else to publish his work, and that he would be thrown back into the ditch from which he had crawled with so much difficulty. It is an odd comment on himself when he makes one man say to another in New Grub Street: "You are the kind of man who is roused by necessity. I am overcome by it. My nature is feeble and luxurious. I never in my life encountered and overcame a practical difficulty." He spoke afterwards somewhat too bitterly of his earlier publishing experiences, and was never tired of quoting Mrs. Gaskell to show how Charlotte Brontë had fared.

In *The Private Papers* he says: "Think of that grey, pinched life, the latter years of which would have been so brightened had Charlotte Brontë received but, let us say, one-third of what, in the same space of time, the publisher gained by her books. I know all about this; alas! no man better." There was no subject on which he was more bitterly vocal. Mr. George Smith, the senior partner of Messrs. Smith, Elder and Company, I knew myself, for after I wrote *The Western Avernus* it was read by Payne and sold to them for fifty pounds. When this bargain was finally struck Mr. George Smith said to me: "Now, Mr. R., as the business is all done, would you mind telling me quite frankly to what extent this book of yours is true?" I replied "It is as true in every detail as it can possibly be." "Then you mean to say," he asked, "that you actually did starve as you relate?" I said "Certainly I did, and I might have made it a deal blacker if I had chosen." He fell into a momentary silent reverie and shaking his head, murmured "Ah, hunger is a dreadful thing; I once went without dinner myself!" This was a favourite story of George Gissing's. It was so characteristic of the class he chiefly loathed. Those who have gathered by now what his satiric and ironic tendencies were, can imagine his bitter, and at the same time uproariously jocular comments on such a statement. For he was the man who had stood cursing outside a cook-shop without even a penny to satisfy his raging hunger, as he truly relates under cover of *The Private Papers*.

It is an odd, and perhaps even remarkable fact, that the man who had suffered in this way, and was so wonderfully conscious of the absurdities and monstrosities of our present social system, working by the pressure of mere economics, should have regarded all kinds of reform not merely without hope, but with actual terror. As he owned, he had once been touched by Socialism, probably of a purely academic kind; and yet, when he was afterwards withdrawn from such stimuli as had influenced him to think in terms of sociology, he went back to his more natural despairing conservative frame of mind. He lived in the past, and was conscious every day that something in the past that he loved was dying and must vanish. No form of future civilisation, whatever it might be, which was gained by means implying the destruction of what he chiefly loved, could ever appeal to him. He was not even able to believe that the gross and partial education of the populace was better than no education at all, in that it might some day lead to better education and a finer type of society. It was for that reason that he was a Conservative. But he was the kind of Conservative who would now be repudiated by those who call themselves such, except perhaps in some belated and befogged country house.

A non-combative Tory seems a contradiction in words, but Gissing's loathing of disturbance in any form, or of any solution of any question by means other than the criticism of the Pure Reason, was most extreme. As for his feelings towards the Empire and all that it implies, they are best put in a few words he wrote to me about my novel *A Son of Empire*: "Yes, this is good, but you know that I loathe the Empire, and that India and Africa are an abomination to me." To anticipate as I tell his story I may quote again on the same point from a letter written to me in later years when he was in Paris: "I am very seriously thinking of trying to send my boy to some part of the world where there is at least a chance of his growing up an honest farmer without obvious risk of his having to face the slavery of military service. I would greatly rather never see him again than foresee his marching in ranks; butchering, or to be butchered."

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This implies, of course, that he failed for ever to grasp the world as it was. He clung passionately and with revolt to his own ideas of what it ought to be, and protested with a curious feeble violence against the actual world as he would not see it. It is a wonder that he did anything at all. If he had had fifty pounds a year of his own he would have retreated into a remote cottage and asphyxiated himself with books.

The most painful thing in all his work was what he insisted on so often in New Grub Street with regard to the poor novelist there depicted. The man was always destroying commenced work. Once he speaks about "writing a page or two of manuscript daily, with several holocausts to retard him." Within my certain knowledge this happened scores of times to Gissing. He burnt a quarter of a volume, half a volume, three-quarters of a volume, a whole volume, and even more, time and time again. He did this because he fancied nervously that he must write, that he had to write, and therefore began without adequate preparation. It became absolutely tragic, for he began work knowing that he would destroy it, and knowing the pain such destruction would cost him, when a little rest might have enabled him to begin cheerfully with a fresh mind. I used to suggest this to him, but it was entirely useless to advise him. He would begin, and destroy, and begin again, and then only partially satisfy himself at last when he was in a state of financial desperation, with the ditch or the workhouse in front of him. Moreover, he suffered, as most writers suffer, from a periodical feeling that he could do no more, that he had come at last to the end of his tether.

In this he never seemed to learn by experience. It grew out of a native futility, which was all the odder because he was so peculiarly conscious of a certain kind of futility exhibited by our friend Bertz. He used to write to Gissing from Potsdam at least a dozen times a year. These letters were almost invariably read to me. They afforded Gissing amusement and real pleasure and yet great pain. Bertz used to begin the letter with something like this: "I have been spending the last month or two in deep meditation on the work which it lies in my power to do. I have now discovered that I was not meant to write fiction. I am therefore putting it resolutely aside, and am turning to history, to which I shall henceforward devote my life." About two months later Gissing would read me a portion of a letter which began: "I have been much troubled these last two months, and have been considering my own position and my own endowments with the greatest interest. I find that I have been mistaken in thinking that I had any powers which would enable me to write history in a satisfactory manner. I see that I am essentially a philosopher. Henceforth I shall devote myself to philosophy." Again, a month or two after, there would come a letter from him saying: "I am glad to tell you that I have at last discovered my own line. After much thought I am putting aside philosophy. Henceforward I devote myself to fiction." This kind of thing occurred not once but twenty or thirty times, and the German for ever wrote as if he had never written anything before with regard to his own powers and capabilities. One is reminded forcibly of a similar case in England, that of J. K. Stephen.

As I have been speaking of New Grub Street, it may be observed that Gissing was frequently writing directly of himself in that book. It is noteworthy that in this, one of his most successful novels, he should have recognised his own real limitations. He says that "no native impulse had directed him to novel-writing. His intellectual temper was that of the student, the scholar, but strongly blended with a love of independence which had always made him think with detestation of a teacher's life." He goes on to speak of the stories which his hero wrote, "scraps of immature psychology, the last thing a magazine would accept from an unknown man." It may be that he was thinking here of some of his own short stories, for which I was truly responsible. Year after year I suggested that he should do some, as they were, on the whole, the easiest way of making a little money. I had amazing trouble with him because it was a new line, but I returned to the charge in season and out of season, every Sunday and every week-day that I saw him, and every time I wrote him a letter. We were both perfectly conscious that he had not the art of writing dramatic short stories which might be popular. When one goes through his shorter work one discovers few indeed which are stories or properly related to the conte. They are, indeed, often scraps of psychology, sometimes perhaps a little crude, but the crudeness is mostly in the construction. They resemble rather possible passages from a book than short stories. Nevertheless he did fairly well with these when he worked with an agent, which he arranged finally and at last on continued pressure from me. I notice, however, that in his published volumes of short stories there are several missing which might be preserved. I do not know whether they are good, but two or three that I remember vaguely were published, I believe, in the old Temple Bar. One

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was a story about a donkey. which I entirely forget, and another was called "Mr. Quy." It concerned a poor man, not wholly sane, who lived in one room and left all that room contained to some one else upon his death. On casual search nothing valuable was found, but the heir or heiress discovered at last on the top of an old cupboard Quy's curious name written large in piled half-crowns.

It may have been noticed by some that in the little "Gillman" set of verses which I have quoted he spoke of his "Hendersonian bores." This perhaps requires comment. For one who loved his Rabelais and the free-spoken classics of our own tongue, Gissing had an extreme purity of thought and speech. No one, I think, would have dared to tell him a gross story, which did not possess remarkable wit or literary merit, more than once. His reception of such tales was never cordial, and I remember his peculiar and astounding indignation at one incident. Somehow or other he had become acquainted with an East End clergyman named Henderson. This Henderson had, I believe, read *The Nether World*, or one of the books dealing with the kind of parishioner with whom he was acquainted, and had written to Gissing. In a way they became friends, or at any rate acquaintances, for the clergyman too was peculiarly lonely. He occasionally came to 7K, and I myself met him there. He was a man wholly misplaced, in fact he was an absolute atheist. Still, he had a cure of souls somewhere on the other side of the Tower, and laboured, as I understood, not unfaithfully. He frequently discussed his mental point of view with Gissing and often used to write to him. By some native kink in his mind he used to put indecent words into these letters. I suppose he thought it was a mere outspoken literary habit. As a matter of fact this enraged Gissing so furiously that he brought the letters to me, and showing them demanded my opinion as to how he should treat them and the writer. He said: "This kind of conduct is outrageous! What am I to do about it?" Now, it never occurred to Gissing in a matter like this, or indeed in any matter, to be absolutely outspoken and straightforward. He was always so afraid of hurting people's feelings. I said: "It is perfectly obvious what to do. My good man, if you don't like it, write and tell him that you don't." This was to him a perfectly impossible solution of a very great difficulty. How it was solved I do not exactly remember, but I do know that we afterwards saw very little of Mr. Henderson, who is embalmed, like a poor fly, in the "Gillman" poem.

It was characteristic, and one of the causes of his continued disastrous troubles that Gissing was incapable of being abruptly or strenuously straightforward. A direct "No," or "This shall not be done," seemed to him, no doubt, to invite argument and struggle, the one thing he invariably procured for himself by invariably trying to avoid it.

New Grub Street was written, if I remember rightly, partly in 1890, and finished in 1891, in which year it was published. He was married to his second wife in March 1891, shortly before this book came out. In the third volume there is practically a strange and bitter, and very remarkable, forecast of the result of that marriage, showing that whilst Gissing's instincts and impulses ran away with him, his intellect was yet clear and cold. It is the passage where the hero suggests that he should have married some simple, kind-hearted work-girl. He says, "We should have lived in a couple of poor rooms somewhere, and we should have loved each other." Whereupon Biffen here Gissing's intellect exclaims upon him for a shameless idealist, and sketches, most truly the likely issue of such a marriage, given Gissing or Reardon. He says: "To begin with, the girl would have married you in firm persuasion that you were a 'gentleman' in temporary difficulties, and that before long you would have plenty of money to dispose of. Disappointed in this hope, she would have grown sharp-tempered, querulous, selfish. All your endeavours to make her understand you would only have resulted in widening the impassable gulf. She would have misconstrued your every sentence, found food for suspicion in every harmless joke, tormented you with the vulgarest forms of jealousy. The effect upon your nature would have been degrading." Never was anything more true.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Whatever kind of disaster his marriage was to be for Gissing, there is no doubt that it was for me also something in the nature of a catastrophe. There are marriages and marriages. By some of them a man's friend gains, and by others he loses, and these are the more frequent, for it is one of the curiosities of human life that a man rarely

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finds his friend's wife sympathetic. As it was I knew that in a sense I had now lost George Gissing, or had partially lost him, to say the least of it. Unfair as it was to the woman, I felt very bitter against her, and he knew well that it was so. Thinking of her as he did, anything like free human intercourse with his new household would be impossible, unless, indeed, the affair turned out otherwise than I expected. And then he had left London and gone to his beloved Devonshire. How much he loved it those who have read *The Private Papers* can tell, for all that is said there about that county was very sincere, as I can vouch for. Born in a grim part of Yorkshire, and brought up in Wakefield and Manchester, that rainy and gloomy city of the north, he loved the sweet southern county. And yet it is pleasing to recognise what a strange passion was his for London. He had something of the same passion for it as Johnson, although the centre of London for him was not Fleet Street but the British Museum and its great library. He wrote once to his doctor friend: "I dare not settle far from London, as it means ill-health to me to be out of reach of the literary 'world' a small world enough, truly." But it was most extraordinarily his world. He was a natural bookworm compelled to spin fiction. And yet he did love the country, though he now found no peace there. With his wife peace was impossible, and this I soon learnt from little things that he wrote to me, though for the first few months of his marriage he was exceedingly delicate on this subject, as if he were willing to give her every chance. I was down in Devonshire only once while he was there with his wife. I went in a steamship to Dartmouth, entering its narrow and somewhat hazardous harbour in the middle of the great blizzard which in that year overwhelmed the south of England, and especially the south of Devon, in the heaviest snow drifts. When I did at last get away from Dartmouth, I found things obviously not all they should be, though very little was said about his wife. I remember we went for a walk together, going through paths cut in snow drifts twelve or even fifteen feet in depth. Though such things had been a common part of some of my own experiences they were wonderfully new and exhilarating to Gissing. I did not stay long in Devon, nor, as a matter of fact, did he. For though he had gone there meaning to settle, he found the lack of the British Museum and his literary world too much for him, and besides that his wife, a girl of the London streets and squares, loathed the country, and whined in her characteristic manner about its infinite dullness. Thus it was that he soon left the west and took a small house in Epsom, about which he wrote me constant jeremiads.

He believed, with no rare ignorance, as those who are acquainted with the methods of the old cathedral builders will know, that all honest work had been done long ago, that all ancient builders were honourable men, and that modern work was essentially unsound. He had never learned that the first question the instructed ask the attendant verges on entering a cathedral is "When did the tower fall down?" It rarely happens that one is not instantly given a date, not always very long after that particular tower was completed. I remember that it annoyed him very much when I proved to him by documentary evidence that a great portion of the work in Peterborough Cathedral was of the most shocking and scandalous description. But these facts do not excuse the modern jerry-builders, and the condition of his house was one, though only one, of the perpetual annoyances he had to encounter.

Yet, after all, though pipes burst and the roof leaks, that is nothing, if peace dwells in a house. There could be no peace in Gissing's house, for his wife had neither peace nor any understanding. She was an uneducated woman. She had read nothing but what such people read. It is true she did not speak badly. For some reason she was not wholly without aspirates. Nevertheless many of her locutions were vulgar, and she had no natural refinement. This, I am sure, would have mattered little, and perhaps nothing, if she had been a simple housewife, some actual creature of the kitchen like Rousseau's Therese. It is my opinion that Gissing was really incapable of a great passion, and I am sure that he would have put up with the merest haus-frau, if she had known her work and possessed her patient soul in quiet without any lamentations. If there was any lamenting to be done Gissing himself might have done it in choice terms not without humour. And indeed he did lament, and not without cause. On my first visit to Epsom after his return from Devon I again met Mrs. Gissing. She made me exceedingly uneasy, both personally, as I had no sympathy with her, and also out of fear for his future. It did not take me long to discover that they were then living on the verge of a daily quarrel, that a dispute was for ever imminent, and that she frequently broke out into actual violence and the smashing of crockery. While I was with them she perpetually made whining and complaining remarks to me about him in his very presence. She said: "George does not like the way I do this, or the way I say that." She asked thus for my sympathy, casting bitter looks at her husband. On one occasion she even abused him to my face, and afterwards I heard her anger in the passage

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outside, so that I at last hated her and found it very hard to be civil.

By this time I had established a habit of never spending any time in the company of folks who neither pleased nor interested me. I commend this custom to any one who has any work to do in the world. Thus my forthcoming refusal to see any more of her was anticipated by Gissing, who had a powerful intuition of the feelings I entertained for his wife. In fact, things became so bad that he found it necessary to speak to me on the subject, as it was nearly impossible for him to let any one enter his house for fear of an exhibition of rage, or even of possible incivility to the guest himself. As he said, she developed the temper of a devil, and began to make his life not less wretched, though in another way, than the poor creature now in her grave had made it. Naturally, however, as we had been together so much, I could not and would not give up seeing him. But we had to meet at the station, and going to the hotel would sit in the smoking-room to have our talk. These talks were now not wholly of books or of work, but often of his miseries. One day when I found him especially depressed he complained that it was almost impossible for him to get sufficient peace to do any writing. On hearing this the notion came to me that, though I had been unable to prevent him from marrying this woman, I might at any rate suggest that he should take his courage in both hands and leave her. But I was in no hurry to put this into his head so long as there seemed any possibility of some kind of peace being established. However, she grew worse daily, so at last I spoke.

He answered my proposal in accents of despair, and I found that he was now expecting within a few months his first child's birth. Under many conditions this might have been a joy to him, but now it was no joy. And yet there was, he said, some possibility that after this event things might improve. I recognised such a possibility without much hope of its ever becoming a reality. It was a vain hope. It is true that for a time, the month or so while she was still weak after childbirth, she was unable to be actively offensive; but, honestly, I think the only time he had any respite was before she was able to get up and move about the house. During the last weeks of her convalescence she vented her temper and exercised her uncivil tongue upon the nurses, more than one of whom left the house, finding it impossible to stay with her. However, he was at any rate more or less at peace in his own writing-room during this period. When she again became well I gathered the real state of the case from him both from letters and conversations, and saw that eventually he would and must leave her. Knowing him as I did, I was aware that there would be infinite trouble, pain, and worry before this was accomplished, and yet the symptoms of the whole situation pointed out the inevitable end. I had not the slightest remorse in doing my best to bring this about, but in those days I had trouble enough of my own, and found it impossible to see him as often as I wished ; especially as a visit from me, or from anybody else, always meant the loss of a day's work to him. Yet I know that he bore ten thousand times more than I would have borne in similar circumstances, and I shall give a wrong impression of him if any one thinks that most of his complaints and confessions were not dragged out of him by me. He did not always complain readily, but one saw the trouble in his eyes. At last it became evident that he would and must revolt. It grew so clear that I wanted him to do it at once and save himself years of misery, but to act like that, not wholly out of pressing and urgent necessity but out of wisdom and foresight, was wholly beyond George Gissing.

It was in such conditions that the child was born and spent the first months of its life. Those who have read his books, and have seen the painful paternal interest he has more than once depicted, will understand how bitterly he felt that his child, the human being for whose existence he was responsible, should be brought up in such conditions by a mother whose temper and conduct suggested almost actual madness. He wrote to me : " My dire need at present is for a holiday. It is five years since I had a real rest from writing, and I begin to feel worn out. It is not only the fatigue of inventing and writing; at the same time I keep house and bring up the boy, and the strain, I can assure you, is rather severe. What I am now trying to do is to accumulate money enough to allow of my resting, at all events from this ceaseless production, for half a year or so. It profits me nothing to feel that there is a market for my work, if the work itself tells so severely upon me. Before long I shall really be unable to write at all. I am trying to get a few short stories done, but the effort is fearful. The worst of it is, I cannot get away by myself. It makes me very uncomfortable to leave the house, even for a day. I foresee that until the boy is several years older there will be no possibility of freedom for me. Of one thing I have very seriously thought, and that is

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whether it would be possible to give up housekeeping altogether, and settle as boarders in some family on the Continent. The servant question is awful, and this might be an escape from it, but of course there are objections. I might find all my difficulties doubled."

I do not think that this letter requires much comment or illustration. Although it is written soberly enough, and without actual accusation, its meaning is as plain as daylight. His wife was alternately too familiar, or at open hostility, with the servant; none could endure her temper. She complained to him, or the servant complained to him, and he had to make peace, or to try to make it mostly in vain. And then the quarrel broke out anew, and the servant left. The result was that Gissing often did the household work when he should have been writing. He was dragged away from his ordinary tasks by an uproar in the kitchen; or perhaps one or both of the angry women came to him for arbitration about some point of common decency. There is a phrase of his in *The Private Papers* which speaks of poor Hooker, whose prose he so much admired, being "vixen-haunted." This epithet of his is a reasonable and admirable one, but how bitter it was few know so well as myself

In this place it does not seem to me unnatural or out of place to comment a little on Rolfe, the chief character in *The Whirlpool*. He was undoubtedly in a measure the later Gissing. His idea was to present a man whose character developed with somewhat undue slowness. He said that Rolfe would probably never have been developed at all after a certain stage but for the curious changes wrought in his views and sentiments by the fact of his becoming a father. It must be obvious to anyone, from what I have said, that Gissing himself would hardly have remained so long with his second wife after the first few months if it had not been that she was about to become a mother. The earlier passages in *The Whirlpool* where he speaks about children, or where Rolfe speaks about them, are meant to contrast strongly with his way of thinking in the later part of the book when this particular character had children of his own. The author declared that Rolfe, as a bachelor, was largely an egoist. The truth of the matter is that Gissing himself was essentially an egoist. I once suggested to him that he came near being a solipsist, a word he probably had never heard of till then, as he never studied psychology, modern or otherwise. However, when Rolfe grew riper in the experience which killed his crude egoism, he became another man. Gissing, in writing about this particular book, said: "That Rolfe does nothing is natural to the man. The influence of the whirlpool that is London and its draft on the man's vitality embarrass any efficiency there might have been in him". Through the whole story of Gissing one feels that everything that was in any way hostile to his own views of life did essentially embarrass, and almost make impossible, anything that was in him. He had no strength to draw nutriment by main force from everything around him, as a strong man does. He was not so fierce a fire as to burn all kinds of fuel.

I remember in this connection a very interesting passage in Hamley's *Operations of War*: "When a general surveying a map of the theatre finds direct obstacles in the path he must advance by, he sees in them, if he be confident of his skill in manoeuvring, increased opportunities for obtaining strategical successes. . . in fact, like any other complications in a game, they offer on both sides additional opportunities to skill and talent, and additional embarrassments to incapacity." But then Gissing loathed and hated and feared obstacles of every kind. He was apt to sit down before them wringing his hands, and only desperation moved him, not to attack, but to elude them. He played no games, and despised them with peculiar vigour. Thus he never learnt that a passive defence must inevitably lose. There is a passage in one of his letters to Wells about a certain Evans, mentioned with a note of exclamation, and thus kindly embalmed: "Evans, strange being! Yet, if his soul is satisfied with golf and bridge, why should he not go on golfing and bridging? At all events he is working his way to sincerity."

The long letter I quoted from above was written, I believe, in 1895, when the boy was nearly three years old. I have not attempted, and shall not attempt, to give any detailed account month by month, or even year by year, of his domestic surroundings. It was a wonder to me that the marriage lasted, but still it did last, and all one knew was that some day it must come to an end. The record of his life in those days would be appalling if I remembered it sufficiently, or had kept a diary as no doubt I ought to have done or had all the documents which may be in existence dealing with that time. That he endured so many years was incredible, but still he did endure, and the time went on, and he worked; mostly, as he said to me, against time, and a good deal on commission. He wrote:

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"The old fervours do not return to me, and I have got into the very foolish habit of perpetually writing against time and to order. The end of this is destruction." But still I think he knew within him that it could not last. Had it not been for the boy, and, alas, for the birth of yet another son, he would now have left her. He acknowledged it to me if he could not fight he would have to flee.

This extraordinary lack of power to deal with any obstacle must seem strange to most men, though no doubt many are weak. Yet few are so weak as Gissing. I have heard the idea expressed that there was more power of fight in Gissing than he ever possessed, and on inquiry I have learned that this notion was founded on a partial, or perhaps complete misunderstanding of certain things he expressed in the latter part of *The Whirlpool*. Towards the end of the book it seems to be suggested that Gissing, or Rolfe, tended really towards what he calls in one of his letters a "barrackroom" view of life. Some people seem to think that the man who was capable of writing what he did in that book really meant it, and must have had a little touch of that native and natural brutality which makes Englishmen what they are. But Gissing himself, in commenting on this particular attitude of Rolfe, declared that this quasi or semi-ironic imperialism of the man was nothing but his hopeless recognition of facts which filled him with disgust. The world was going in a certain way. There was no refusing to see it. It stared every one in the eyes. Then he adds: "But what a course for things to take!"

Rolfe in fact talks with a little throwing up of the arm, and in a voice of quiet sarcasm, "Go ahead I sit by and watch, and wonder what will be the end of it all." This was his own habit of mind in later years. He had come at last and at long last, to recognise a state of things which formerly he could not, or would not, perceive; and he recognised it with just that tossing of arm or head, involuntary of course. I do not think that at this time he would have seen a battalion of Guards go by and have turned to me saying: "And this, this is the nineteenth century ! " He once wrote to Wells, what he had said a hundred times to me: "I have a conviction that all I love and believe in is going to the devil. At the same time I try to watch with interest this process of destruction, admiring any bit of sapper work that is well done." It is amusing to note that in the letter, written in the country, which puts these things most dolefully, he adds: "The life here shows little trace of vortical influence." Of course this is a reference to the whirlpool of London.

In 1896 I was myself married, and went to live in Fulham. I understood what peace was, and he had none. As Gissing had not met my wife for some years I asked him to come and dine with us. It was not the least heavy portion of his burden that he always left his own house with anxiety and went back to it with fear and trembling. This woman of his home was given to violence, even with her own young children. It was possible, as he knew, for he often said so to me, that he might return and find even the baby badly injured. And yet at last he made up his mind to accept my invitation. Whether it was due to the fact that he had accepted one from me and I often fancy his wife had a grudge against me because I would not go to her house any more I do not know, but when he came I found him in the most extraordinary state of nervous and physical agitation. Though usually of a remarkable, if healthy, pallor, he was now almost crimson, and his eyes sparkled with furious indignation. He was hot, just as if he had come out of an actual physical struggle. What he must have looked like when he left Epsom I do not know, for he had had all the time necessary to travel from there to Fulham to cool down in. After shaking hands he asked me, almost breathlessly, to allow him to wash his face, so I took him into the bathroom. He removed his coat, and producing his elastic band from his waistcoat pocket, put it about his hair like a fillet, and began to wash in cold water. As he was drying himself he broke out suddenly: "I can't stand it any more. I have left her for ever." I said: "Thank heaven that you have. I am very glad of it and for every one's sake don't go back on it."

Whatever the immediate cause of this outburst was, it seems that in that afternoon the whole trouble came to a culmination. The wife behaved like a maniac; she shrieked, and struck him. She abused him in the vilest terms, such as he could not or would not repeat to me. It was with the greatest difficulty that I got him calm enough to meet any one else. When he did calm down after he had something to eat and a little to drink, the prospect of freedom, which he believed had come to him once more, inspired him with pathetic and peculiar exhilaration. In one sense he was happy that night. He slept in London.

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I should have given a wholly false impression of Gissing if any one were now to imagine that I believed that the actual end had come to his marriage. No man knew his weakness better, and I moved heaven and earth in my endeavours to keep him to his resolution, to prevent him from going back to Epsom on any pretext, but all my efforts were vain. In three days I learned that his resolution had broken down. By the help of some busybody who had more kindness than intelligence, they patched up a miserable peace, and he went back to Epsom. And yet that peace was no peace. Gissing, perhaps the most sensitive man alive, had to endure people in the neighbouring houses coming out upon the doorstep, eager to inquire what disaster was occurring in the next house. There were indeed legends in the Epsom Road that the mild looking writer beat and brutalised his wife, though most knew, by means of servants' chatter, what the actual facts were.

It was in this year that he did at last take an important step which cost him much anxiety before putting it through. His fears for his eldest child were so extreme that he induced his people in the north to give the child a home which would be free from the influence and example of the mother. His wife parted with the child without any great difficulty, though, of course, she made it an occasion for abusing her husband in every conceivable way. He wrote to me in the late summer of that year: "I much want to see you, but just now it is impossible for me to get to town, and the present discomfort of everything here forbids me to ask you to come. I am straining every nerve to get some work done, for really it begins to be a question whether I shall ever again finish a book. Interruptions are so frequent and so serious. The so-called holiday has been no use to me; a mere waste of time but I was obliged to go, for only in that way could I have a few weeks with the boy, who, as I have told you, lives now at Wakefield and will continue to live there. I shall never let him come back to my own dwelling. Have patience with me, old friend, for I am hard beset." He ends this letter with: "If the boy grows up in clean circumstances, that will be my one satisfaction."

Whether he had peace or not he still worked prodigiously, though not perhaps for so many hours as was his earlier custom. But his health about this time began to fail. Much of this came from his habits of work, which were entirely incompatible with continued health of brain and body. He once said to Wells: "Visitors I fall sick with terror in thinking of them. If by rare chance any one comes here it means to me the loss of a whole day, a most serious matter." And his whole day was a very long day. No man of letters can possibly sit for ever at the desk during eight hours, as was frequently "his brave custom" as he phrased it somewhere. If he had worked in a more reasonable manner, and had been satisfied with doing perhaps a thousand words a day, which is not an unreasonably small amount for a man who works steadily through most of the year, his health might never have broken down. He had been moved in a way towards these hours, partly by actual desperation; partly by the great loneliness which had been thrust upon him; very largely by the want of money which prevented him from amusing himself in the manner of the average man, but chiefly by his sense of devotion to what he was doing. One of his favourite stories was that of Heyne, the great classical scholar, who was reported to work sixteen hours a day. This he did, according to the literary tradition, for the whole of his working life, except upon the day when he was married. He made, for that occasion only, a compact with the bride that he was to work half his usual stint. And half Heyne's usual amount was Gissing's whole day, which I maintain was at least five hours too much. This manner of working, combined with his quintessential and habitual loneliness, made it very hard, not only for him, but also for his friends. It was quite impossible to see him, even about matters of comparative urgency, unless a meeting had been arranged beforehand. For even after his work was done, it was never done. He started preparing for the next day, turning over phrases in his mind, and considering the next chapter. In one point I was very useful to him, for I suggested, as I have done to others, that my own practice of finishing a chapter and then writing some two or three lines of the next one, while my mind was warm upon the subject, was a vast help for the next day's labour.

Now the way he worked was this. After breakfast, at nine o'clock, he sat down and slaved till one. Then he had his midday meal, and took a little walk. In the afternoon, about half-past three, he sat down again and wrote till six o'clock or a little after. Then he worked again from half-past seven to ten. I doubt if there is any modern writer who has ever tried to keep up work at this rate who did not end in a hospital or a lunatic asylum, or die young. To my mind it shows, in a way that nothing else can, that he had no earthly business to be writing novels and

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spinning things largely out of his subjective mind, when he ought to have been dealing with the objective world, or with books. Gissing used to write three or four of his slips, as he called them, which were small quarto pages of very fine paper, and on each slip there were twelve hundred words. Whether he wrote one, or two, or three slips in the day he took an equal length of time.

Among my notes I find one about a letter of his written in June 1895 to Mrs. Hick, declining an invitation to visit Dr. Hick's house, though such an interlude, no doubt, would have done him a great deal of good. He says: "Let me put before you an appalling list of things that have to be done. (1) Serial story (only begun) of about eighty thousand words. (2) Short novel for Cassell's to be sent in by end of October. Neither begun nor thought of. (3) Six short stories for the English Illustrated neither begun nor thought of. (4) Twenty papers for The Sketch of a thousand words each. Dimly foreseen." Now to a man who had the natural gift of writing fiction and some reasonable time to do it in, this would seem no such enormous amount of work. For Gissing it was appalling, not so much, perhaps, on account of the actual amount of labour if it had been one book but for its variousness. He moved from one thing to another in fiction with great slowness.

All this time his health was not satisfactory. I shall have something to say about this in detail a little later. It was his own opinion, and that of certain doctors, that his lungs were really affected by tuberculosis. Of this I had then very serious doubts. But he wrote in January 1897: "The weather and my lung are keeping me indoors at present, but I should much like to come to you. Waterpipes freezing a five-pound note every winter to the plumber. Of course this is distinctly contrived by the building fraternity."

But things were not always so bad as may be gathered from a casual consideration of what I have said. In writing a life events come too thickly. For instance in 1897 he wrote to me: "Happily things are far from being as bad as last year." It appears that a Miss Orme, about whom I know nothing but what he told me, interested herself with the utmost kindness in his domestic affairs. Part of his letter ran: "Miss Orme has been of very great use, and will continue to be so, I think. This house is to be given up in any case at Michaelmas, and another will not be taken till I see my way more clearly. Where I myself shall live during the autumn is uncertain. We must meet in the autumn. Work on I have plans for seven books."

CHAPTER NINE

What dismal catastrophe or prolonged domestic uproar led to the final end of his married life in 1897 I do not know. Nor have I cared to inquire very curiously. The fact remains, and it was inevitable. Towards the end of the summer he made up his mind to go to Italy in September. He wrote to me: "All work in England is at an end for me just now. I shall be away till next spring looking forward with immense delight to solitude. Of course I have a great deal to do as soon as I can settle, which I think will be at Siena first." As a matter of fact the very next letter of his which I possess came to me from Siena. He said: "I am so confoundedly hard at work upon the Dickens book that I find it very difficult to write my letters. Thank heaven, more than half is done. I shall go south about the tenth of November. It is dull here, and I should not stay for the pleasure of it. You know that I do not care much for Tuscany. The landscape is never striking about here, and one does not get the glorious colour of the south." So one sees how Italy had awakened his colour sense. As I have said, it was after his first visit to Italy that I noted, both in his books and his conversation, an acute awakening passion for colour. It grew in him to the end of his life. He ended this last letter to me with: "Well, well, let us get as soon as possible into Magna Graecia and the old dead world."

I said some time ago that I had finished with the Victorian novelists, and yet I find there is something to say of Dickens. It is not against the plan of such a rambling book as this to put it down here and now. When he went to Siena to write his book of criticism it seemed a very odd choice of a place for such work, and indeed I wondered at his undertaking it at any price. It is obvious to all who understand his attitude towards criticism of modern things that great as his interest was in Dickens it would never have impelled him to write a strong critical book

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mostly about him had it not been for the necessity of making money. Indeed he expressed so much to me, and I find again a letter that he wrote to Mrs. Wells, with whom he was now on very friendly terms, "I have made a good beginning with my critical book, and long to have done with it, for, of course, it is an alien subject." No doubt there are at least two classes of Gissing's readers, those who understand the man and love his really characteristic work, and those who have no understanding of him at all, or any deep appreciation, but profess a great admiration for this book, which they judge by the part on Dickens. Probably Andrew Lang was one of these, judging from a criticism that he once wrote on Gissing. I know that I have often heard people of intelligence express so high an opinion of the Charles Dickens as to imply a lack of appreciation of his other work. The study is no doubt written with much skill, and with a good writer's command of his subject, and command of himself. That is to say, he manages by skill to make people believe he was sufficiently interested in his subject to write about it. To speak plainly, he thought it a sheer waste of time, except from the merely financial point of view, just as he did his cutting down of Forster's Life of Dickens. This, indeed, he considered a gross outrage, but professed his inability to refuse the "debauched temptation" of the hundred and fifty pounds offered him for the work.

It would be untrue to suggest that he was not enthusiastic about Dickens, even more so than I myself save at certain times and seasons. Dickens is a man for times and periods. I cannot read him for years, and then I read all his novels one after the other. What I do mean is that Gissing's love of this author, or of Thackeray, would never have impelled him to write about them. Yet there is much in the book which is of great interest, if it were only as matter of comment on Gissing's own self. The other day I came across one sentence which greatly struck me. In it Gissing asks the reader to imagine Charles Dickens occupied in the blacking warehouse for ten years. He says: "Picture him striving vainly to find utterance for the thoughts that were in him, refused the society of any but bores and rascals, making perhaps futile attempts to succeed as an actor, and in full manhood measuring the abyss which sundered him from all he had hoped for." On coming to this passage I put the book down and pondered for a while, knowing well that as Gissing wrote these words he was thinking even more of himself than of Dickens, and knowing that what was not true of his subject was most bitterly true of the writer. There is another passage somewhere in the book in which he says that Dickens could not have struggled for long years against lack of appreciation. This he rightly puts down to Dickens' essentially dramatic leanings. The man needed immediate applause. But again Gissing was thinking of himself, for he had indeed struggled for many years without any appreciation save that of one or two friends and some rare birds among the public. I sometimes think that one of Gissing's great attractions to Dickens lay in the fact, which he himself mentions and enlarges on, that Dickens treated of the lower middle class and the class immediately beneath it. This is where the great novelist was at his best, and in the same way these were the only classes that Gissing knew well. There is in several things a singular likeness between Dickens and Gissing, though it lies not on the surface. He says that Dickens never had any command of a situation although he was so very strong in incident. This was also a great weakness of George Gissing. It rarely happens that he works out a powerful and dramatic situation to its final limit, though sometimes he does succeed in doing so. This failure in dealing with great situations is peculiarly characteristic of most English novelists. I have frequently noticed in otherwise admirable books by men of very considerable abilities and attainments, with tolerable command of their own language, that they have on every occasion shirked the great dramatic scene just when it was expected and needed. Perhaps this is due to the peculiar *mauvaise honte* of the English mind. To write, and yet not to give oneself away, seems to be the aim of too many writers, though the great aim of all great writing is to do, or to try to do, what they avoid. The final analysis of dreadful passion and pain comes, perhaps, too close to them. They feel the glow but also a sensation of shame in the great emotions. There are times when Gissing felt this, though perhaps unconsciously. It is at any rate certain that, like so many people, he never actually depicted with blood and tears the frightful situations of which his life was so extraordinarily full.

In an interesting passage of this book Gissing declares that great popularity was never yet attained by any one deliberately writing down to a low ideal. Above all men he knew that the artist is necessarily sincere, however poor an artist he may be. So Rousseau in his Confessions asserts that nothing really great can come from an entirely venal pen. I remember Gissing greatly enjoyed a story I told him about myself, While I was still a poverty-stricken and struggling writer my father, who had no knowledge whatever of the artistic temperament,

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although he had a very great appreciation of the best literature of the past, came to me and said seriously: "My boy, if you want money and I know you do, why do you not write 'Bow Bells Novelettes'? They will give you fifteen pounds for each of them." I replied, not I think without a tinge of bitterness at being so misunderstood: "My dear sir, it is as much a matter of natural endowment to be a damned fool as to be a great genius, and I am neither."

I have said that Gissing was most essentially a conservative, indeed in many ways a reactionary, if one so passive can be called that. The only actual revolutionary utterance of his mind which stands on record is in the Charles Dickens. It is when he is speaking of Mr. Casby of the shorn locks. He wrote: "This question of landlordism should have been treated by Dickens on a larger scale. It remains one of the curses of English life, and is likely to do so till the victims of house-owners see their way to cutting, not the hair, but the throats, of a few selected specimens."

It may seem a hard thing to say, but it is a fact, that any revolutionary sentiment there was in Gissing was excited, not by any native liberalism of his mind, nor even by his sympathy for the suffering of others, but came directly out of his own personal miseries and trials. He had had to do with landlords who refused to repair their houses, and with houses which he looked upon as the result of direct and wicked conspiracy between builders and plumbers. But his words are capable of a wider interpretation than he might have given them.

If I had indeed been satisfied that this departure of Gissing's to Italy meant the end of all the personal troubles of his marriage, I should have been highly satisfied, and not displeased with any part I might have taken in bringing about so desirable a result. But, knowing him as I did, I had very serious doubts. I was well aware of what a little pleading might do with him. It was in fact possible that one plaintive letter from his wife might have brought him back again. Fortunately it was never written. The woman was even then practically mad, and though immensely difficult to manage by those friends, such as Miss Orme and Miss Collet, who interested themselves in his affairs and did much more for him at critical times than I had been able to do, she never, I think, appealed to her husband. But it was extraordinary, before he went to Italy, to observe the waverings of his mind. When he was keeping his eldest boy at Wakefield, supplying his wife with money for the house, and living in lodgings at Budleigh Salterton, he wrote giving a rough account of what he might do, or might have to do, and ended by saying: "Already, lodgings are telling on my nerves. I almost think I suffer less even from yells and insults in a house of my own." He even began to forget "the fifth-rate dabblers in the British gravy," for which fine phrase T. E. Brown is responsible. Gissing ought to have known it and did not. It was this perpetual wavering and weakness in him which perplexed his friends, and would, indeed have alienated at last very many of them had it not been for the enduring charm in all his weakness.

But he was now out of England, and those who knew him were glad to think it was so. He was, perhaps, to have a better time. Nevertheless he wrote to his friend Hick: "Yes, it is true that I am going to glorious scenes, but do not forget that I go with much anxiety in my mind anxiety about the little children, the chances of life and death, etc., etc. It is not like my Italian travel eight years ago, when save for cash I was independent. I have to make a good two hundred a year apart from my own living and casual expenses. If I live I think I shall do it but there's no occasion for merriment." Yet if it was no occasion for mere merriment it was an occasion for joy. He knew it well, and so did those who understand the description that Gissing gave in New Grub Street of the sunset at Athens. It is very wonderfully painted, and as he describes it he makes Biffen say: "Stop, or I shall clutch you by the throat. I warned you before that I cannot stand these reminiscences." And this reminds me that when I wrote to him once from Naples, he replied: "You fill me with envious gloom." But now, when he had finished his pot-boiler of Siena, he was going south to Naples, his "most interesting city of the modern world," and afterwards farther south to the Calabrian Hills, and the old dead world of Magna Graecia.

As a result of that journey he gave us *By the Ionian Sea*. This book is of itself a sufficient proof that was by nature a scholar, an inhabitant of the very old world, a discoverer of the time of the Renaissance, a humanist, a pure man of letters, and not by nature a writer of novels or romances. Although Gissing's scholarship was rather wide than

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deep save in one or lines of investigation, yet his feeling for all those matters with which a sympathetic scholarship can deal intense and true. Once in Calabria and the south he made, and would make, great discoveries. In spite his poverty, which comes out so often in the description of his conditions upon this journey, he loved everything he found there with a strange and wonderful and almost pathetic passion. I remember on his return how he talked to me of the far south, and of his studies in Cassiodorus. One incident in *By the Ionian Sea*, which related somewhat differently from what he himself told me at the time, pleased him most especially. It was when he met two men and mentioned the name of Cassiodorus, whereupon they burst out with amazement, "Cassiodorio, why we know Cassiodorio!" That the name should yet be familiar to these live men of the south gratified his incomparable historic sense, and I can well remember how he threw his head back and shook his long hair with joy, and burst into one his most characteristic roars of laughter. It was a simple incident, but it brought back to him the past. Of all his books I love best *By the Ionian Sea*. I always liked it much better than *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, and for a thousand reasons. For one thing it is a wholly true book. In *The Private Papers*, he falsified, in the literary sense, very much that he wrote. It needs to be read with a commentary or guide. But *By the Ionian Sea* is pure Gissing; it is absolutely himself. It is, indeed, very nearly the Gissing who might have been if ill luck had not pursued him from his boyhood. Had he been a successful man on the lines that fate pointed out to him; had he succeeded greatly – or nobly, as he would have said at the University; had he become a tutor, a don, a notable man among men of letters, still would he have travelled in southern Italy and made his great pilgrimage to the Fonte di Cassiodorio. Till he knew south Italy his greatest pleasure had been in books. That he loved books we all know. There, of a certainty, *The Private Papers* is a true witness. But how much more he loved the past and the remains of Greece and old, old Italy, *By the Ionian Sea* proves to us almost with tears.

I think that Gissing was perhaps not a deep scholar, for scholarship nowadays must needs be specialised if it is to be deep. He had his prejudices, and hugged them. The hypothesis of Wolf concerning Homer visibly annoyed him. He preferred to think of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as having been written by one man. This came out of his love of personality the great ones of the past were as gods to him. All works of art, or books, or great events were wholly theirs, for they made even the world, and the world made them not. Though I know that he would have loved in many ways such a book as Gilbert Murray's *Rise of the Greek Epic*, yet Murray's fatally decisive analysis of the Homeric legend would have pained him deeply. On one occasion I remember sending to him, partly as some reasonable ground for my own scepticism, but more, I think, out of some mischievous desire to plague him, a cleverly written pamphlet by a barrister which threw doubt upon the Shakespearean legend. He wrote to me: "I have read it with great indignation. Confound the fellow! he disturbs me." But then he was essentially a conservative, and lived in an alien time.

CHAPTER TEN

What he suffered, endured, and enjoyed in Magna Graecia and his old dead world, those know who have read with sympathy and understanding. It was truly as if the man, born in exile, had gone home at last so much he loved it, so well he understood the old days. And now once more he came back to England to a happier life, even though great anxieties still weighed him down. Yet with some of these anxieties there was joy, for he loved his children and thought very much of them, hoping and fearing. One of the very first letters I received from him on his return from Italy is dated May 7, 1898, and was written from Henley in Arden: "You have it in your power to do me a most important service. Will you on every opportunity industriously circulate the news that I am going to live henceforth in Warwickshire? It is not strictly true, but a very great deal depends on my real abode being protected from invasion. If you could inspire a newspaper paragraph . . . I should think it impudent to suppose that newspapers cared about the matter but that they have so often chronicled my movements, and if by any chance the truth got abroad it would mean endless inconvenience and misery to me. You shall hear more in detail when I am less be-devilled." All this requires little comment. Every one can understand how it was with him.

Later in the year he wrote to me: "My behaviour is bestial, but I am so hard driven that it is perhaps excusable. All work impossible owing to ceaseless reports of mad behaviour in London. That woman was all but given in charge

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the other day for assaulting her landlady with a stick. My solicitor is endeavouring to get the child out of her hands. I fear its life is enangered, but, of course, the difficulty of coming to any sort of arrangement with such a person is very great. . . . Indeed I wish we could have met before your departure for South Africa. My only consolation is the thought that something or other decisive is bound have happened before you come back, and then we will meet as in the old days, please heaven. As for me, my literary career is at an end, and the workhouse looms larger day by day. I should not care, of course, but for the boys. A bad job, a bad job." But better times were perhaps coming for him. The child that he refers to as still in the hands of his mother was his youngest boy. Much of his life at this time is lost to me because much happened while I was absent in Africa, where I spent some months. I remember it pleased him to get letters from me from far-off places such as Bulawayo. He always had the notion that I was an extraordinarily capable person, an idea which had some truth if my practical capacities were compared with his strange want of them. By now he was not living in Warwickshire; indeed, if I remember rightly, on my return from Africa I found him at Godalming.

When I left Cape Town I was very seriously ill, and remained ill for some months after my return home. Therefore it was some time till we met again. But when we did meet it was at Dorking, where he was in lodgings, pleased to be not very far from George Meredith, who indeed, I think, loved him. As I think I have said, it was through Gissing that I first met Meredith. For some reason which I do not know, Gissing gave him a book of mine, *The Western Avernus*, with which the old writer was much pleased. Indeed it was in consequence of his liking for it that he asked me to dine with him just before I went to Africa. Gissing was not present at this dinner, he was then still in Warwickshire; but Meredith spoke very affectionately of him, and said many things not unpleasing about his work. But probably Meredith, like myself, thought more of the man than he did of his books, which is indeed from my point of view a considerable and proper tribute to any writer. Sometimes the work of a man is greater than himself, and it seems a pity when one meets him; but if a man is greater than what he does one may always expect more and some day get it. It was apropos of Gissing, in some way which I cannot exactly recall, that Meredith, who was in great form that night, and wonderful in monologue as he always was, more especially after he became so deaf that it was hard to make him hear told us a characteristic story about two poor schoolboys. It appeared, said Meredith, that these boys, who came of a clever but poverty-stricken house, did very badly at their school because they were underfed. As Meredith explained this want of food led to a poor circulation. What blood these poor boys had was required for the animal processes of living, and did not enable them to carry on the work of the brain in the way that it should have done. However, it happened that during play one of these boys was induced to stand upon his head, with the result that the blood naturally gravitated to that unaccustomed quarter. His ideas instantly became brilliant so brilliant, indeed, that a great idea struck him. He regained his feet, rushed home, communicated his discovery to his brother, and henceforward they conducted their studies standing upon their heads, and became brilliant and successful men. Meredith and George Gissing had one thing tremendously in common, their love of words. In my conversation with Meredith that day I mentioned the fact that I had read a certain interview with him. I asked him whether it conveyed his sentiments with any accuracy. He replied mournfully: "Yes, yes no doubt the poor fellow got down more or less what I meant, but he used none of my beautiful words, none of my beautiful words!"

It does not seem to me unnatural to say something of George Meredith, since he had in many ways an influence on Gissing. Certainly when it came to the question of beautiful words they were on the same ground, if not on the same level. I have met during my literary life, and in some parts of the world where literature is little considered, many men who were reputed great, and indeed were so, it may be, in some special line, yet Meredith was the only man I ever knew to whom I would have allowed freely the word "great" the moment I met him, without any reservation. This I said to Gissing and he smiled, feeling that it was true. I remember he wrote to Hick about Meredith, saying: "You ought to read Richard Feverel, Evan Harrington, *The Egoist*, and *Diana of the Crossways*. These, in my opinion, are decidedly his best books, but you won't take up anything of his without finding strong work." And "strong work" with Gissing was very high praise indeed.

By now, when he was once more in Surrey, we did not meet so infrequently as had been the case after his second marriage and before the separation. It is true that his living out of London made a difference. Still I went down

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sometimes and stayed a day with him. We talked once more in something of our old manner about books and words, the life of men of letters, and literary origins or pedigrees, always a strong point in him. It was always a pleasure to Gissing when he discovered the influence of one writer upon another. For instance, it was he who pointed out to me first that Balzac was the literary parent of Murger, as none indeed can deny who have read the chapter in *Illusions Perdus* where Lucien de Rubempré writes and sings the drinking song with tears in his eyes as he sits by the bedside of Coralie, his dead mistress. This he did, as will be remembered, to obtain by the sale of the song sufficient money to bury her. From that chapter undoubtedly sprang the whole of the *Vie de Bohème*, though to it Murger added much, and not least his livelier sense of humour. Again, I well remember how Gissing took down Tennyson ever a joy to him, because Tennyson was a master of words though he had little enough to say and showed me the influence that the "Wisdom of Solomon," in the Apocrypha, had upon some of the last verses of "The Palace of Art." No doubt some will not see in a mere epithet or two that Solomon's words had any connection with the work of the Poet Laureate, whom I nicknamed, somewhat to Gissing's irritation, "the bourgeois Chrysostom." Yet there is no doubt that Gissing was right; but even if he had not been he would still have taken wonderful joy in finding out the words of the two verses which run: "Whether it were a whistling wind, or a melodious noise of birds among the spreading branches, or a pleasant fall of water running violently, or a terrible sound of stones cast down, or a running that could not be seen of skipping beasts, or a roaring voice of most savage wild beasts, or a rebounding echo from the hollow mountains; these things made them to swoon for fear." But he loved all rhythm, and found it sometimes in unexpected places, even in unconsidered writers. There was one passage he used to quote from Mrs. Ewing, who, indeed, at her best was no small writer, which he declared to be wonderful, and in its way quite perfect. "He sat, patient of each succeeding sunset, until this aged world should crumble to its close." Then, again, he rejoiced when I discovered, though no doubt it had been discovered many times before, that his musical Keats owed much to Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess."

It would be a very difficult question to ask in some examination concerning English literature, what book in English by its very nature and style appealed most of all to George Gissing. I think I am not wrong in saying that it was undoubtedly Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*. That book possesses to the full the two great qualities which most delighted him. It is redolent of the past, and those classic conversations were his chief joy; but above and beyond this true and great feeling of Landor's for the past classic times there was the most eminent quality of Landor's rhythm. I have many times heard Gissing read aloud from "Aesop and Rhodope," and have even more often heard him quote without the book the passage which runs: "There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave; there are no voices, O Rhodope, that are not soon mute, however tuneful; there is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last." Gissing knew, and none knew better, that in a triumphant passage there is triumphant rhythm, and in a passage full of mourning or melancholy the accompanying and native rhythm is both melancholy and mournful. How many times, too, I have heard him quote, again from Landor, "Many flowers must perish ere a grain of corn be ripened."

All this time the wife was I know not where, nor did I trouble much to inquire. Miss Collet and Miss Orme looked after her very patiently, and did good work for their friend Gissing, as he well knew. But although he rejoiced to be alone for a time, or at any rate relieved from the violent misery of her presence, I came once more to discern, both from things he said and from things he wrote to me, that a celibate life began again to oppress him gravely. It was many months before he at last confided in me fully, and then he did it only because he was certain that I was the one friend he possessed with whom he could discuss any question without danger of moral theories or prepossessions interfering with the rightful solution. Over and beyond this qualification for his confidence there was the fact that I knew him, whereas no one else did. To advise any man it is necessary to know the man who is to be advised, for wisdom in vacuo or in vitro may be nothing but foolishness. Others would have said to him, "Look back on your experience and reflect. Have no more to do with women in any way." No doubt it would have been good advice, but it would have been impossible for him to act on it. Therefore when he at last opened his mind to me and told me of certain new prospects which were disclosing themselves to him. I was not only sympathetic but encouraging. It seems that in the year 1898 he first met a young French lady of Spanish origin with whom he had previously corresponded for some little time. Her name was Gabrielle Fleury. She belonged to a very good family, perhaps somewhat above the haute bourgeoisie, and was a woman of high education and

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extreme Gallic intelligence. As I came to know her afterwards I may also say that she was a very beautiful woman, and possessed, what I know to have been a very great charm to Gissing, as it always was to me, a very sweet and harmonious voice was perhaps the most beautiful human voice for speaking that I have ever heard. Years afterwards I took her to see George Meredith. He kissed her hand and told her she had beautiful eyes. As she was partly Spanish she knew Spanish well. Her German was excellent, her English that of an educated Englishwoman. It appears that she came across Gissing's New Grub Street and it occurred to her that it should be translated into French. She got into correspondence with him about this book, and in 1898 came over to England and made his acquaintance. It is interesting to know that on one other occasion Gissing got into correspondence with another French lady, who insisted emphatically that he was the one person whom she could trust to direct her aright in life a notion at the time not a little comical to me, and also to the man who was to be this soul's director.

When these two people met and proved mutually sympathetic it was not unnatural that he should tell her something of his own life, especially when one knows that so much of their earlier talks dealt with New Grub Street and with its chief character, so essentially George Gissing. He gave her, indeed, very much of his story, yet not all of it, not, indeed, the chief part of it, since the greatest event in his life was the early disaster which had maimed and distorted his natural career and development. Yet even so much as he told her of his first and second marriages for he by no means concealed that he was married very naturally engaged her womanly compassion. Adding this to her real and fervent admiration of his literary powers, his personality and story seem to have inclined her to take an even tenderer interest in him. She was certainly a bright and wonderful creature, although not without a certain native melancholy, and she possessed none of those conventional ideas which wreck some lives and save others from disaster. Therefore I was not much surprised, although I had not been told everything that had happened, when Gissing wrote to me that he contemplated taking a very serious step. It was indeed a very serious one, but so natural in the circumstances, as I came to hear of them, that I made no strictures on his scheme. It was no other than the proposal that he and this new acquaintance of his should cast in their lot together and make the world and her relatives believe that they were married. When consulted I found it difficult to give advice. What was advisable for the man might not be advisable for his proposed partner. He was making no sacrifice, and she was making many. Nevertheless, I hold the opinion that these matters are matters for the people concerned and are nobody else's business. The thing to be considered from my own point of view that is, the happiness he might get out of it was whether Gissing would be able to support her, and whether she was the kind of woman who would retain her hold upon him and give him some peace and comfort towards the end of his life. In thinking over these things I remembered that the other two women had not been ladies. They had not been educated. They understood nothing of the world which was Gissing's world, and, as I knew, a disaster was bound to come in both cases. But now it appeared to me that there was a possible hope for the man, that such a step might end in happiness, or at any rate in peace. That something of the kind would occur I knew, and even if this present affair went no farther yet some other woman would have to be dealt with some day even if she did not come into his life for a long while. Gabrielle Fleury, at any rate, was really beautiful and accomplished, essentially of the upper classes, at least the upper bourgeoisie, and, what was no small thing from Gissing's point of view, a capable and feeling musician. Of such a woman Gissing had had only a weeks' experience many years before. I thought the situation promised much, and raised no moral objection to the step he proposed to take as soon as I saw he was strongly bent in one direction. I felt sure that anything whatever which put a definite obstacle in the way of his returning to his wife was to be encouraged. It was, in fact, absolutely a duty; and I care not what may be made upon my attitude or my morals.

That Gissing would have gone back to his wife eventually I have very little doubt, and nothing but disaster and new rage and misery would have come of his doing so. For these reasons I did everything in my power to help and encourage him in a matter which gave him extreme nervousness and anxiety. He said to me that the step he proposed to take early in 1899 grew more and more serious the more he thought of it. Again, I think there was no overwhelming passion at the back of his mind. Yet it was a true and sincere affection. But there were many difficulties. It appears that the girl's father had died a few months before, and as there was some money in the family this fact involved certain serious difficulties about the future signing of names when all the legal questions concerned with the little property came to be settled. Then he asked me what sort of hope was there that this

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pretended marriage would not become known in England. He said: "I fear it certainly would." When reflecting on the innumerable lies and subterfuges that I indulged in with the view of preventing anybody knowing of this affair in London, I can see that he was perfectly justified in his fears, for when the step was at last taken I was continually being asked about Gissing's wife. Naturally enough, it was said by one set of people that she was with him in France; while it was averred by others, much better informed, that she was still in England. I was sometimes requested to settle this difficult matter and I found it so difficult that at times I was compelled to tell the facts on condition that they were regarded as absolutely confidential.

He and Gabrielle did, indeed, discuss the possibility of braving the world with the simple truth, but that he knew would have been a very tremendous step for her. The mother was yet living, and played a strange part in this little drama a part not so uncommonly played as many might think. She became at last her daughter's confidante and learned the whole of Gissing's story, and, although she opposed their solution of the trouble to the very best of her power, when it became serious she at last gave way and consented to any step that her daughter wished to take, provided that there was no public scandal.

Many people will regard with horror the part that her mother played in this drama, imputing much moral blame. There are, however, times when current morality has not the value that is commonly given to it, and I think Madame Fleury acted with great wisdom, seeing that nothing she could have pleaded would have altered matters. Her daughter was no longer a child; she was a grown-up woman, not without determination, and entirely without religious prejudice, a thing not so uncommon with intellectual Frenchwomen. Assuredly there are some who will say that a public scandal was better than secrecy, and in this I am at one with them. Still there was much to consider, for there would certainly have been what George himself called "a horrific scandal," seeing that the family had many aristocratic relatives. Gissing, in fact, stated that it would be taking an even greater responsibility than he was prepared to shoulder if this were done. He wrote to me asking for my opinion and counsel, especially at the time when there was a vague and probably unfounded suggestion that he might be able to get a divorce from his wife. It appears that more than one person wrote to him anonymously about her. He never believed what they told him, nor do I. From some points of view I may have been very unjust to his wife, though I have tried to hold the balance true, but I never saw, or heard from Gissing, anything to suggest that she was not all that she should have been in one way, just as she was everything she should not have been in another. Seeing that Gissing would have given ten years of his life and every penny he possessed to secure a divorce, it is certain that he absolutely disbelieved what he was told. In fact, if he could have got a divorce by consent or collusion he would have gladly engaged to pay her fifty pounds a year during his life, whatever happened and whatever she did. But this could not be said openly, either by myself or by him, and nothing came out of the suggestion, whoever made it first.

I proposed to him one afternoon when with him that he should make some inquiries as to what an American divorce would do for him. Whether it were valid or not, it might perhaps make things technically easier and enable him to marry in France with some show of legality. At the moment he paid no attention, or seemed to pay no attention, but it must have sunk into his mind, for a few days afterwards he wrote to me and said: "Is it a possible thing to get a divorce in some other country as things are? a divorce which would allow of a legal marriage, say in that same country? I have vaguely heard such stories, especially of Heligoland. The German novelist, Sacher Masoch, is said to have done it – said so by his first wife, who now lives in Paris." Upon receiving this letter I reminded him of what I had said about American divorces, and gave him all the information that I had in my mind and could collect at the moment, especially mentioning Dakota and Nevada as two of the United States which had the most reasonable and wide-minded views of marriage and divorce. He wrote and thanked me heartily, but quoted from a letter of Gabrielle which seemed to indicate, not unclearly, that she preferred him to take no steps which might lead to long legal processes. They should join their fortunes together, taking their chance as to the actual state of affairs being discovered afterwards. His great trouble, of course, was the absolute necessity of seeming, out of regard for her relatives, to be legally married. Besides these connections of her family, she knew a great number of important people in Paris and Madrid, and many of them should receive by custom the *lettres de faire part*. With some little trouble the financial difficulties with regard to the

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signing of documents were got over for the moment by a transfer of investments from Gabrielle to her mother. On this being done their final determination was soon taken, and they determined, after this "marriage" was completed, to leave Paris and live somewhere in the mountains, perhaps in Savoy; and he then wrote to me: "You will be the only man in London who knows this story. Absolute silence it goes without saying. If ever by a slip of the tongue you let a remark fall that my wife was dead, tant mieux; only no needless approach to the topic. A grave responsibility mine. She is a woman to go through fire for, as you saw. An incredible woman to one who has spent his life with such creatures. . . . I have lately paid a bill of one pound for damage done by my wife, damage in a London house where she lived until turned out by the help of the police. Incredible stories about her. She attacked the landlord with a stick, and he had seriously to defend himself. Then she tore up shrubs and creepers in the garden. No, I have had my time of misery. It must come to an end."

In the first part of this letter which I have just quoted he says, "She is a woman to go through fire for, as you saw." This expression does not mean that I had ever met her, but that I had seen sufficient of her letters to recognise the essential fineness of her character. I urged him once more to a rapid decision, and he promised that he would let nothing delay it. Nevertheless it is perfectly characteristic of him that, having now finally decided there should be no attempt at any divorce, he proceeded instantly to play with the idea again. No doubt he was being subjected to many influences of different kinds, for he sent me a letter in which he said that it seemed to be ascertained that an American divorce and remarriage would satisfy French law. If that was so, he would move heaven and earth to get all the necessary details of the procedure. He had written to a friend in Baltimore who knew all about such matters, but he implored me to find out if there were not some book which gave all possible information about the marriage and divorce laws of the separate States of North America. He asked: "Do you really think that I can go and present myself for a divorce without the knowledge of the other person? The proceedings must be very astounding." His knowledge of America was not equal to my own, much as I had spoken to him about that country. The conduct of divorce courts in some of the United States have long ceased to astonish anybody. He told me, however, that he had actually heard of American lawyers advertising for would-be divorcers, and he prayed devoutly that he could get hold of such a man. I did my best for him on the subject, and no doubt his friend in Baltimore, of whom I know nothing, on his part sent him information. It seemed, however, that any proceeding would involve some difficulties, and on discovering this he instantly dropped the whole scheme. He wrote to me afterwards, saying: "It is probable that I leave England at the end of April. Not one syllable about me to any one, of course. The step is so bold as to be really impudent, and I often have serious fears, not, of course, on my own account. You shall hear from abroad. . . . If some day one could know tranquillity and all meet together decently."

After many qualms, hot and cold fits, despondency, and inspirations of courage, he at last took the decisive step. In May he was in Paris, and I think it was in that month that the "marriage" took place. I am singularly ignorant of the details, for he seemed to be somewhat reluctant to speak of them, and do not even know whether any actual ceremony took place or not, nor am I much concerned to know. They were at any rate together, and no doubt tolerably happy. He wrote me nothing either about this subject or anything else for some time, and I was content to hear nothing. They spent the summer together in Switzerland, moving from Trient, near the Col de Balme, to Locarno, on Lago Maggiore. He wrote to me once from the Rhone Valley saying that as a result of his new domestic peace and comfort, even though it were but the comfort of Swiss hotels, and owing to the air of the mountains, which always suited him very well, he was in much better health than he had been for years past. His lung, the perpetual subject of his preoccupation, appears to have given him little trouble, although, knowing that its state was attributable in some measure to emphysema, he wrote to me for detailed explanations of that particular complaint. During the whole of this time, the only honeymoon he ever had, he was, however, obliged to work very hard, for he was in ceaseless trouble about money. In his own words, he had to "publish furiously" in order to keep pace with his expenses. There was his wife in England, and there were also his children to be partially provided for. But for the time things went well with him. There were fears of all sorts, he told me, but they were to be forgotten as much as possible. He and Gabrielle returned to Paris for the winter.

During this time, or just about this time, when the South African War was raging, I wrote for a weekly journal which I used to send regularly to Paris with own contributions marked in it. This temporary aberration into

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journalism so late in my literary life interested him much. He wrote to me: "In the old garret days who would have imagined the strange present? I suppose you have now a very solid footing in journalism as well as in fiction. Of course it was wise to get it, as it seems more than probable that the novelists will be starved out very soon. With Europe in a state of war, which may last for a decennium, there will be little chance for story-tellers." Then, in spite of his new happiness, his inherited or acquired pessimism got the worst of him. He adds: "I wish I had died ten years ago. I should have gone away with some hope for civilisation, of which I now have none. One's choice seems to be between death in the workhouse, or by some ruffian's bullet. As for those who come after one, it is too black to think about."

No doubt this was only his fun, or partly such. There is one phrase in Boswell's Johnson that he always loved to quote; it is where Johnson declares that some poor creature had "no skill in inebriation." Gissing perhaps had no skill in inebriation when he drank at the fountain of literary pessimism, for when he did drink there his views were fantastic and preposterous. As a matter of fact he was doing very well, in spite of the workhouse in Marylebone Road, from which he was now far enough. There might be little chance for story-tellers, yet his financial position, for the first time in his life, was tolerably sound. One publisher even gave him three hundred pounds on account for a book which I think was *The Crown of Life*. For it he also received five hundred dollars from America; so, for him, or indeed for almost any writer, he was very well paid. Little as the public may believe it, a sum of three hundred pounds on account of royalties is as much as any well-known man gets unless by chance he happens to be one of the half-dozen successful writers who are rarely the best. At my earnest solicitation he had at last employed an agent, though, with his peculiar readiness to receive certain impressions, he had not gone to the one recommended, but to another, suddenly mentioned to him when he was in the mood to act as I suggested. This agent worked for him very well, and Gissing was now getting five guineas a thousand words for stories, which is also a very fair price for a man who does really good work. It is true that very bad work is not often well paid, but the very best work of all is often not to be sold at any price. About this time I obtained for him a notable bid for a book, and he wrote to me: "It is good to know that people care to make offers for my work. What I aim at is to get a couple of thousand pounds safely invested for my two boys. Probably I shall not succeed and if I get the money, what security have I that it will be safe in a year or two? As likely as not the Bank of England will lie in ruins." After all, I must confess that he was skilful in the inebriation of his pessimism, for to me these phrases are delightful, in spite of the half-belief with which they were uttered.

During the later winter of 1900 he wrote to me from Paris that he proposed to be in London for a few days the spring of 1901, but much depended on the relation, which seemed to him highly speculative, between the money he received and the money he was obliged to spend. Apparently he found Paris anything but cheap. According to his own account, he was therefore in perpetual straits, in spite of the good prices he now obtained. He added in this letter: I hope to speak with you once more, before we are both shot or starved." This proposal to come across the Channel in the spring ended in smoke. He was not able to afford it, or was reluctant to move, or more likely reluctant to expose himself to any of the troubles still waiting for him in England. So long as his good friends who were looking after his wife, and more or less looking after his children, could do their work and save him from anxiety, he was not likely to want his peace disturbed by any discussions. When he had decided not to come he sent me a letter in which one of the paragraphs reads: "I am still trying to believe that there is a King of England, and cannot take to the idea, any more than to the moral and material ruin which seems to be coming upon the old country. Isn't it astounding that we have the courage to write books? We shall do so, I suppose, until the day when publishers find their business at an end. I fear it may not be far off." At this moment, being more or less at peace, and working with no peculiar difficulty, he declared himself in tolerable health, although he affirmed he coughed a great deal. It seemed to me that he did not think so much about his health as he had done before and was to do later, and he displayed something like his old real nature with regard to literary enterprise. It was just about this time that he reminded me of his cherished project for a story of the sixth century A.D. This, of course, was the book published after his death, *Veranilda*. He had then begun to work upon it, and said he hoped to finish it that summer. This cheered him up wonderfully, and he ended one letter to me with: "Well, well, let us be glad that again we exchange letters with address other than that of workhouse or hospital. It is a great demand, this, to keep sane and solvent I dare hope for nothing more." Occasionally in his letters there seemed to be slight indications

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that he was perhaps not quite so happy as he wished to be.

During that summer my wife and I were in Switzerland, and he wrote to me, while we were on the Lake of Geneva, from Vernet-les-Bains in the Eastern Pyrenees. By this time Gabrielle and I, although we had never met, were accustomed to send messages to each other. It was a comfort to me to feel that he was with some one of whom I could think pleasantly, and whom I much wished to know. We had, indeed, arranged to meet somewhere on the Continent, but that fell through, partly because we were obliged to return to England earlier than we had proposed. Although we did not meet, and though I had some fears for him, I was tolerably happy about him and his affairs, and certainly did not anticipate the new crisis which was approaching, nor the form it would take.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was Gissing's custom to rely for advice and assistance on particular people at certain crises. In some cases he now appealed to Wells; in very many he appealed to me; but when his health was particularly involved it was his custom to relapse desperately on his friend Dr. Hick. He even came to Hick on his return from Magna Graecia, when he had taken Potsdam on his way home to England.' He had gone there at Bertz's strong invitation and particular desire that he should taste for once a real Westphalian ham. It is a peculiarly savage and not wholly safe custom of Germans to eat such hams uncooked, and Gissing, having fallen in with this custom, though he escaped trichinosis, procured for himself a peculiarly severe attack of indigestion. He came over from Folkestone to Hick in order to get cured. The ham apparently had not given him the lasting satisfaction which he usually got out of fine fat feeding. It seems that Hick and Gissing had been friends from the time that Gissing's father bought his chemist's business from the doctor's father. For they had been schoolfellows together at Harrison's school in Wakefield. Nevertheless it was only in 1894 that they renewed their old acquaintance. Dr. Hick saw him once at Ewell, soon after a local practitioner had frightened Gissing very seriously by diagnosing phthisis and giving a gloomy prognosis. On that occasion Hick went over Gissing's chest and found very little wrong. Technically speaking, there was perhaps a slight want of expansion at the apex of each lung, and apparently emphysema at the base of the left one, but certainly no tubercular mischief.

I speak of these things more or less in detail because they played so great a part in the drama of his life—as, indeed, it does in most lives. It is not the casual thing that novelists mostly make of it. It is a perpetually recurring cause. Steady ill-health, even more than actual disease, is what helps to bring about most tragedies. Hick made his diagnosis, with which I agree, though there is something else I must presently add to, it, he took him to London, that he might see a better physician, in order to reassure Gissing's mind fully. They went together to Dr. Prior Smithson. I never noted that it was Gissing who introduced me to Rivers.' When Hick had arranged this visit Gissing wrote to Wells saying: "I am coming up to town to see a scoundrel specialist in diseases of the lung, who is as likely as not to upset all my plans of life. But don't be afraid of my company you shall have no pathology. There will be with me an old schoolfellow of mine, a country surgeon, in whose house I am staying at present. He would think it very delightful to meet you." They did meet upon that occasion, when Dr. Smithson confirmed Hick's diagnosis and temporarily did a great deal to comfort Gissing. From my own medical knowledge and my general study of Gissing, combined with what some of his doctors have told me, I have come to the conclusion that he did not suffer from pulmonary tuberculosis, but that it was practically arrested at an early stage. However, even arrested tuberculosis in many cases leaves a very poor state of nutrition. That his joy in food remained with him, though with a few lapses, points strongly to, the conclusion that at this time tuberculosis was certainly not very active in him. He always needed much food, and especially food which he liked and desired. To want it was a tragedy, as I shall show presently. In 1897 when he went down to Salcombe he reported to Hick a great improvement in health, saying that his cough was practically gone, and that of course the wonderful weather accounted for it. He ate heartily and even walked five miles a day without fatigue. He added: "The only difficulty is breathing through the nose. The other day a traction engine passed me on the road, and the men upon it looked about them wondering where the strange noises came from. It was my snoring! All the nasal cavities are excoriated! But I shall get used to this. I have a suspicion that it is not the lung that accounts for this difficulty, for

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it has been the same ever since I can remember." By this he probably meant merely that it had lasted a long time. There was, perhaps, a specific reason for it. From Salcombe he reported to Hick that he had recovered a great deal of weight, but that for some time his wheezing had been worse than ever when the weather got very bad. He wrote: "Then again a practical paradox that frenzies one, for sleep came when bad weather prevented me from being so much out of doors!" All this he did not understand, but it is highly probable that at that time he had a little actual tubercular mischief, and a slight rise of temperature. As frequently happens, enforced rest in the house did for him what nothing else could do. But his health certainly was something of a puzzle. In 1898, when he was in Paris with Gabrielle, he saw a Dr. Piffard, apparently not a lung specialist, but a physician of high standing. This doctor spoke rather gravely to him and told him that he was working very much too hard, for he was still keeping up his ridiculous habit of writing eight hours a day. He said that there was a moist spot in the right lung, with a little chronic bronchitis, and that the emphysema was very obvious. He had, too, some chronic rheumatism, and also on the right side of his forehead what Gissing described as a patch of psoriasis. Psoriasis, however, is not as a rule unilateral, and it was due to something else. This patch had been there for about a year, and was slowly getting worse. Dr. Piffard prescribed touching him under the right clavicle with the actual cautery, and for the skin gave him some subcutaneous injections of an arsenical preparation. He fed him with eggs, milk, and cod-liver oil, ordering much sleep and absolute rest. During this treatment his cough had that he felt really better. The and own easier, and his sleep become trifling, his breathing was sed. He also lighthad much increa very good. His stre ed that he saw a slight amelioration in the patch declar is, I think, that nearly of so-called psoriasis. The truth to his being made to all this improvement was due ch of his ill-health was rest and cat. No doubt very mu although there was the result of his abnormal habits, thing he had something else at the back of it. For one . se necessary rarely taken sufficient exercise~ the exercl ever played for his really fine physique. Certainly he n n his life after he left Hinkson's school in Mire a game i otball was a mystery to fields. Cricket he knew not* Fo is true that him, and a brutal mystery at that. It aside5 for he occasionally he rowed in a boat at the sc did so at SalcOmbe when his eldest boy was there with him, but any kind of garne or sport he actually loathed. It was a Surprise to me to find out that Rivers, while he was at Folkestone.I actually persuaded him to take to a bicycle. He even learned to like it. Rivers told Hick that he rode not badly, and with great dignity; and as Rivers rode beside him he heard him murrjnur cc Marvellous proceedings ! Was the like ever seen P---

However, the time was now coming when he was to appeal to Hick once more. In igoi he had proposed to come over to England and see me, but he said that the doctor in Paris had forbidden him to go north rather indicating the south for him. He wrote to me "Now I must go to the centre of France-I don't think the Alps are possible-and vegetate among things which serve only to remind me that here is not England. Then, again, I had thought night and day of an English potato, of a slice of English meat, of tarts and puddings, and of teacakes. Night and day had I looked forward to ravening on these things. Well, well !" But he did at last come back to England for some time.

There is no doubt that the feeding in his French home was not fat, or fine, or confused feeding. Probably the notion of a Scotch haggis would give any French cook a fit of apoplexy. Just before he did come over from Paris, Hick had a letter from him which was much like the one he wrote to me: "Best wishes fo r the merry, merry time-if merriment can be in the evil England of these days. I wish I could look in upon you at Christmas. I should roar with joy at an honest bit of English roast beef. Could you post a slice in a letter? with gravy?" Hick said to his wife when he received this letter: "Why, this is written by a starving man!" Although I heard from him comparatively seldom, I had always been aware of these hankerings of his for England and English food. He did not take ndly to exile, or to the culinary methods of a careful French interior. Truly as he loved the Latin countries, ere was much in their customs which troubled him reatly, and the food was his especial trouble when he as not being fed in Italy with oil and Chianti. I find occasional melancholy letters of his in which he in in dithyrambs about the fine abundance of feeding in England eggs and bacon and beer. There was no doubt he was not living as he should have lived. At any rate, it was about this time although I did not know it, as I was either in the North of England or abroad, I forget which that he came once more to Hick, and was found standing on his doorstep tolerably early in the morning. According to the doctor, on his arrival from Paris he was in the condition of a starved man. The proof of this is very simple. At that time, and for long after, Wells was living at Folkestone, and as Hick's house was at that time full he was unable to entertain Gissing for long, and it was proposed that he

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should stay for a time at Folkestone. When Hick examined Gissing he was practically no more than a skeleton, but after one week in Wells' house he picked up no less than seven pounds weight. There were then no physical signs of active mischief in the lungs except the incurable patch of emphysema. Although this sudden increase of weight does not entirely exclude tuberculosis, it is yet rather uncommon for so rapid an increase to take place in such cases, and it rather puts tuberculosis out of court as being in any way the real cause of much of his ill-health. Now of all this I knew very little, or next to nothing, until afterwards. Although aware that he was uneasy about many things, I had not gathered that there was anything seriously wrong with him except his strong and almost irresistible desire to return to England. I know now that his reticence in speaking to me was due to his utter inability to confess that his third venture had almost come to disaster over the mere matter of the dining-table. I knew so much of the past that he feared to tell me of the present, though he could hardly have imagined that I should say anything to make him feel that he had once again been a sad fool for not insisting good-humouredly on having the food he wanted. But he was ashamed to speak to me of his difficulties fearing, perhaps, that I might not understand, or understand too well.

Now he and Gabrielle lived together with Madame Fleury. The old lady, a very admirable and delicate creature of an aristocratic type, was no longer young, and was typically French. She was in a poor state of health, and lived, like Cornaro, on next to nothing. Her views on food were what Gissing would have described as highly exiguous. She stood bravely by the French breakfast, a thing Gissing could endure with comfort for no more than a week or two at a time. Her notions as to the midday meal and dinner were not characterised by that early English abundance which he so ardently desired. After a long period of subdued friction on the subject it appears that his endurance of what he called prolonged starvation actually broke down. He demanded something for breakfast, something fat, something in the nature of bacon. How this was procured I do not know; I presume that bacon can be bought in Paris, though I do not remember having seen it there; perhaps it was imported from England for his especial benefit. However pleasing for the moment the result may have been to him from the gastronomic point of view, it led Madame Fleury to make, as he alleged, uncalled-for and bitter remarks upon the English grossness of his tastes. As he was certainly run down and much underfed, his nerves were starved too, so he got into one of his sudden rages and practically ran away from France. I suggested not long ago that he was in a way an intellectual coward because he would never entertain any question as to the nature of the universe, or of our human existence in it. Things were to be taken as they stood, and not examined, for fear of pain or mental disturbance. It was a little later than this that Wells said acutely to Hick: "Why, the man is a moral coward. He stands things up to a certain point and then runs away." So now he ran away from French feeding to Hick's doorstep, and Hick, as I have said, sent him to Wells with the very best results, for Mrs. Wells took a great interest in him, looking on him no doubt as a kind of foolish child of genius, and fed him, by Hick's direction, for all that she was worth. As soon as he was in anything like condition, or getting towards it, he was unable to remain any longer at Sandgate and proposed to return once more to France. This, however, the doctor forbade, and, thinking that a prolonged course of feeding and rest was the one thing he required, induced him to go to a sanatorium in the east of England. At this time Hick had practically no belief whatever in the man being tuberculous, but he used Gissing's firm conviction that he was in that condition to induce him to enter this establishment. It was perhaps the best thing which could be done for him. He was looked after very well, and the doctor at the sanatorium agreed with Hick in finding no evidence of active pulmonary trouble.

Gissing kept much, or most, of this from me it was very natural. He wrote to me from the sanatorium very many letters, from which I shall not quote, as they were after all only the natural moans of a solitary invalid. But he forbade me to come to him, and I did not insist on paying a visit. I was quite aware, if it were only by instinct and intuition, that he had no desire for me to discover exactly how things had been going with him in France. Nevertheless I did understand vaguely, though it was not till afterwards that I discovered there had been a suggestion made that he should not return there, or, indeed, go back to the circumstances which had proved so nearly disastrous. I do not think that this suggestion was ever made personally to him, although I understand it was discussed by some of his friends. It appears that a year or so afterwards when he was talking to Miss Collet, she told him that it had been thought possible that he might not return to France. This news he received with much amazement and indignation, for certainly he did go back, and henceforth I believe the management of the kitchen

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was conducted on more reasonable lines. He recovered his normal weight, and soon weighed actually twelve stone. As a matter of fact, even before he left the sanatorium, he protested that he was actually getting obese.

After these experiences at Sandgate and the east of England, he was perfectly conscious that he owed very much both to Hick and Wells. In fact he wrote to the doctor afterwards, saying that he and Wells had picked him out of a very swampy place.

It was in 1902 that Gissing and Gabrielle took up their abode in St. Jean-de-Luz under the Pyrenees. From there he wrote to me very frequently, and seemed to be doing a great deal of work. He liked the place, and, as there was an English colony in the town, had made not a few friends or acquaintances. By now it was a very long time since I had seen him, for we had not met during the time of his illness in England; and as I had been much overworked, it occurred to me that three or four days at sea might do something for me, and that I could combine this with a visit to my old friend. I did not, however, write to him that I was coming. Knowing his ways and his peculiar nervousness, which at this time most visibly grew upon him, it seemed best to say nothing until I actually came to Bordeaux. When I reached the city on the Gironde I telegraphed to know whether he could receive me. The answer was one word only, "Venez," and I went down by the early train, through the melancholy Landes, and came at last to St. Jean by way of Bayonne. He met me at the station which, by the way, has one of the most beautiful views I know and I found him looking almost exactly as he had looked before, save that he arranged his hair for the time to hide a fading scar upon his forehead, the result of that mysterious skin trouble. We were, I know, very glad to meet.

I stayed at a little hotel by myself as he could not put me up, but went later to his house. It was then that I at last met Gabrielle. She was a very beautiful woman, tall and slender, of a pale but clear complexion, very melancholy lovely eyes, and a voice that was absolute music. I could not help thinking that he had at last come home, for at that time my knowledge of their little domestic difficulties owing to the warring customs of their different countries was very vague, and she impressed me greatly. And yet I knew before I left that night that all was not well with Gissing, though it seemed so well with him. He complained to me when we were alone about his health, and even then protested somewhat forcibly against the meals. The house itself, or their apartment from the foreign point of view was quite comfortable, but did not suggest the kind of surroundings which Gissing loved. There is, save in the best, a certain air of cold barrenness about so many foreign houses. The absence of rugs or carpets and curtains, the polish and exiguity of the furniture, the general air of having no more in the rooms than that which will just serve the purposes of life did not suit his sense of abundance and luxury.

Blake has said, if I quote with accuracy: "We do not know that we have enough until we have had too much," and this is a saying of wisdom as well concerning the things of the mind as those of the body. He had had at last a little too much domesticity, and, besides that, his desires were set towards London and the British Museum, with possibly half the year spent in Devonshire. He yearned to get away from the little polished French home he had made for himself and take Gabrielle back to England with him. But this was impossible, for her mother still lived with them and naturally would not consent to expatriate herself at her age from her beloved France. It had been truly no little sacrifice for her, a very gentle and delicate woman even then suffering from cardiac trouble, to leave Paris and its neighbourhood and stay with her child near the frontier of Spain, almost beyond the borders of French civilisation.

I was barely a week in St. Jean-de-Luz, but during that time we talked much both of his work and of mine. Once more his romance of the sixth century was in his mind and on his desk, though he worked more, perhaps, at necessary pot-boilers than at this long pondered task. Although he did not write so much as of old, it was almost possible to get him to go out with me, save now and again for half an hour in the warmest and quietest part of the day. He had developed a great fear of death, and life seemed to him extraordinarily fragile. Such a feeling is ever the greatest warning to those who know, and yet if he had been rather more courageous and had faced the weather a little more, it might have been better for him. During these few days I became very friendly with Madame Fleury and her daughter, especially with the latter, because she spoke English, and my French has never been

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fluent. As I say he gave me a copy of his new book, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. It is one of those odd things which occur so frequently in literary life that I had myself in a way given him the notion of this book. I had developed the idea of such a book to him upon my own account, when I purposed vaguely to write a short life of an imaginary man of letters to whom I meant to attribute what I afterwards published in Albany. Perhaps this seed had lain dormant in Gissing's mind for years, and when at last he wrote the book he had wholly forgotten that it was I who first suggested the idea. Certainly no two books could have been more different, although my own plan was originally much more like his. In the same way I now believe that my story "The Purification" owed its inception without my being aware of it to the suppressed passage in *Born in Exile* of which I spoke some time ago. This passage I never read; but, when Gissing told me of it, it struck me greatly and remained in my mind. These influences are one of the great uses of companionship among men of letters. As George Gissing used to say: "We come together and strike out sparks."

As I went north by train from St. Jean-de-Luz to Bordeaux, passing ancient Dax and all the sombre silences of the wounded serried rows of pines which have made an infertile soil yield something to commerce, Gissing's spirit, his wounded and often sickly spirit, was with me. I say "sickly" with a certain reluctance and yet that is what I felt, for I read *The Private Papers* with great revolt in spite of its obvious beauty and literary sincerity. Life is hard and bitter enough to break any man's spirit, and I felt that Gissing had been through a fire not many men had known, yet as I read I thought, and still think, that in this book he showed an undue failure of courage. If he had been through so any disasters yet there was still much left for him, or should have been. He had not suffered the greatest disaster of all, for since the death of his father in his early youth he had lost none that he loved. The calculated dispirited air of the book afflicted me, and yet, naturally enough, I found it wonderfully interesting; for here was so much of my lifelong friend, even though now and again there were little lapses in sincerity when he put another face on things, and pretended, even to himself, that he had felt in one way and not in another. There is in it only a brief mention of myself, when he refers to the one solitary friend he possessed in London through so many years which were only not barren to him in the acquisition of knowledge.

But even as I read in the falling night I came to the passage in which he speaks of the *Anabasis*. It is curious to think of, but I doubt if he had ever heard that some modern scholars refuse to believe that Xenophon wrote this book. Most assuredly had he heard it he would have rejected so revolutionary a notion with rage and indignation, for to him Xenophon and the *Anabasis* were one. In speaking of the march of the Greeks he quotes the passage where they rewarded and dismissed guide who had led them through very dangerous country. The text says: "When evening came he took leave of us, and went his way by night." On reaching Bordeaux I surprised and troubled the telegraph clerk at the railway station by telegraphing to George Gissing these words in the original Greek, though naturally I had to write them in common script. Often-times I had been his guide but had never led him in safety.

When I reached England I wrote him a very long letter about *The Private Papers* and in answer received one which I may here quote: "My dear old boy, it is right and good that the first word about Henry Ryecroft should come from you. I am delighted that you find it readable. For a good ten years I had this book in mind vaguely, and for two years have been getting it into shape. You will find that there is not very much reminiscence; more philosophising. Why, of course, the solitary friend is you. Good old Bertz is mentioned later. But the thing is a curious blend, of course, of truth and fiction. Why, it's just because the world is 'inexplicable' that I feel my interest in it and its future grows less and less. I am a little oppressed by 'the burden of the mystery'; not seldom I think with deep content of the time when speculation will be at an end. But my delight in the beauty of the visible world, and my enjoyment of the great things of literature, grow stronger. My one desire now is to utter this passion – yet the result of one's attempt is rather a poor culmination for Life."

During this year, and indeed during the greater part of 1902, I was very ill and much troubled, though I worked hard upon my longest book, *Rachel Marr*. I therefore wrote to him very seldom until, in the beginning of the following spring, I was able to send him the book. I was conscious through all my working years that I had never actually conquered Gissing's utmost approval. For I knew what his enthusiasm was when he was really roused;

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how obvious, how sincere, and how tremendous. When reflecting that I did at last conquer it just before he died I have a certain melancholy pleasure in that book of mine, which indeed in many ways means very much to me, much more than I can put down, or would put down for any one now living. Were I now doing a life of myself rather than a sketch of him, I should certainly put in the letter, knowing that I should be forgiven for inserting it because it was a letter of Gissing's. It was, indeed, a highly characteristic epistle, for when he praised he praised indeed, and his words carried conviction to me, ever somewhat sceptical of most men's approval. He did even more than write to me, for I learnt that he spoke about this book to other friends of his, especially, as I know, to Edward Clodd; and also to George Meredith, who talked to me about it with satisfaction when I next met him. Nothing pleased Gissing better than that any one he loved should do good work. If ever a man lived who was free from the prevalent vices of artistic and literary jealousy, it was Gissing.

But now his time was drawing to an end. He and Gabrielle and Madame Fleury left St. Jean-de-Luz in June, 1903, and went thirty miles farther into the Pyrenees. He wrote to me a few days after reaching the little mountain town of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. The change apparently did him good. He declared that he had now no more sciatica, of which disease, by the way, I had not previously heard, and he admitted that his general health was improving. St. Jean-Pied-de-Port is very picturesquely situated, and Gissing loved it not the less for its associations in ancient legend, since it is not very far from the Port or Col de Roncesvalles, where the legendary Roland was slain fighting in the rearguard to protect Charlemagne's army. He and Gabrielle once stayed a night at Roncesvalles. If any man's live imagination heard the horn of Roland blow I think it should be Gissing's. And yet though he took a great pleasure in this country of his, it was not England, nor had he all things at his command which he desired. I find that he now greatly missed the British Museum, which readers of *The Private Papers* will know he much frequented in those old days. For he was once more hard at work upon Veranilda, and wrote to me that he was greatly in want of exact knowledge about the procedure in the execution of wills under the later Roman Empire. This was a request for information, and such requests I not infrequently received. He often referred to me about points of difficulty, even when he was in England but away from London. At that time, naturally enough, I knew nothing whatever about wills under the Roman Empire, but in less than a week after he had written to me it is highly probable that I knew more of them than any lawyer in London who was not actually lecturing on the subject. I sent him a long screed on the matter. Before this reached him I got another letter giving me more details of what he required, and, since this is certainly of some interest as showing his literary methods and conscientiousness, it may be quoted. He says: "And now, hearty thanks for troubling about the legal question. The time with which I am concerned is about A.D. 540. I know, of course, that degeneration and the Gothic War made semi-chaos of Roman civilisation; but as a matter of fact the Roman law still existed. The law still existed. The Goths never interfered with it, and portions have even been handed down. Now the testator is a senator. He has one child only, a daughter, and to her leaves most of his estate. There are legacies to two nephews, and to a sister. A very simple will you see no difficulty about it. But he dying, all the legatees being with him at the time, how, as a of fact, were things settled? Was an executor appointed? Might an executor be a legatee? Probate, I think, as you say, there was none, but who inherited? Still fantastic things were done in those times, but what would the law have dictated? Funny, too, that this is the only real difficulty which bothers me in the course of my story. As regards all else that enters into the book I believe I know as much as one can without being a Mommsen. The senator owns property in Rome and elsewhere. I rather suppose it was a case of taking possession if you could, and holding if no one interfered with you. Wills of this date were frequently set aside on the mere assertion of a powerful senator that the testator had verbally expressed a wish to benefit him. . . . It is a glorious age for a romancer." As a full answer to this letter I borrowed and sent to him Saunders' Justinian, and received typically exaggerated thanks.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Now again we were but correspondents, and I do not think that in those days when I had so much to do, and had also very bad health, I was a good correspondent. Gissing, though he sometimes apologised humorously, even nervously, for writing at great length, was an admirable letter writer. He practised a lost art, which he admired in

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Chesterfield and Madame de Sevigne, and often drew sharply etched portraits of people whom he knew at St. Jean-de-Luz. He had a curious habit of nicknaming everybody. These nicknames were perhaps not the highest form of art nor were they always even humorous. He had a peculiarly verbal humour in these matters. Never by any chance, unless he was exceedingly serious, did he call any man by his actual name. Hudson, my lifelong friend, whom he knew very well, and whose books he admired very much for their style, was always known as "The Hudsonian," and I was referred to by a similarly formed name. To the three of us who met together wherever we could there was presently joined an artist, happily still living, and it was Gissing's jest to name us "the Quadrilateral" after the four fortresses of Lombardy : Mantua, Peschiera, Verona, and Legnano. Which of us represented the master power of Mantua remained undetermined. These are matters of no consequence, but they show the man in his familiar moods and therefore have a kind of value as if one were to show a score of photographs or sketches that were serious and then insert one where the wise man plays the child, or even the fool. There was not a person of any importance in St. Jean-de-Luz, although nobody knew it, who did not rejoice in some absurd nickname.

However he went further than mere nicknames, and there is in one letter of his to Wells a very admirable sketch of a certain personage: "One of the most cantankerous men I ever came across; fierce against the modern tendencies of science, especially in England: an anti-Darwinite, etc. He rages against Huxley, accusing him of having used his position for personal vanity and gain, and of ruining the scientific and industrial prospects of England; charges of the paltriest dishonesty against H. and other such men abound in his conversation. X., it seems, was one of the original students of the Jermyn Street School of Mines, and his root grievance is the transformation of that establishment brought about, he declares, for the personal profit of Huxley and of the clerks of the War Office! You, he regards as a most valuable demonstration of the evils resulting from the last half-century of 'progress,' protesting loudly that every one of your books is a bitter satire on Huxley, his congeners, and his disciples. The man tells me that no scientific papers in England will print his writing, merely from personal enmity. He has also quarrelled with the scientific societies of France, and now, being a polyglot, he writes for Spain and Germany the, only two countries in Europe where scientific impartiality is to be found."

In another letter of his he says: "By the bye, an English paper states that Henley died worth something more than eight hundred pounds." One might imagine that he would then proceed to condole with him on having had so little to leave, but that was not our Gissing. He went on: "Amazing! How on earth did he amass that wealth? I am rejoiced to know that his latter years have been passed without struggle for bread."

The long letter about the Roman Empire and Roman law, from which I quoted in the last chapter, was dated August 6, 1903, and I did not hear again from Gissing until November 1. I had written to him proposing to pay another visit to the south-west of France in order to see him in his Pyrenean home, but he replied very gloomily, saying that he was in evil case, that Gabrielle had laryngitis, and that everything was made worse by incredibly bad weather. The workhouse still the workhouse was staring him in the face. He had to labour a certain number of hours each day in direly unfavourable conditions. If he did not finish his book at the end of the year sheer pauperdom would come upon him. In these circumstances I was to see that he dreaded a visit from any friend, indeed he was afraid that they would not be able to stay in St. Jean-Pied-de-Port on account of its excessive dampness. According to this pathetically exaggerated account they lived in a thick mist day and night. How on earth it came to be thought that such a dreadful country was good for consumptive people he could not imagine; though he owned, somewhat grudgingly, that he himself had gained strength there. He told me that as soon as the eternal downpour ceased they were going down to Bayonne to see a doctor, and if he did no good Gabrielle would go to the south of France. Finally, he was hanged if he knew how it would be managed. He ended up with: "In short I have not often in my life been nearer to an appalling crisis." At the end of this dismal letter, which did not affect me so much as might be thought, he spoke to me of my book, Rachel Marr, and said: "I have been turning the pages with great pleasure to keep my thoughts from the workhouse."

Those will have gathered very little of Gissing who imagine that I took this au pied de la lettre. Gissing had cried "Wolf!" so often, that I had almost ceased to believe that there were wolves, even in the Pyrenees. All things had

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gradually become appalling crises and dreadful disasters. A mere disturbance and an actual catastrophe were alike dire and irremediable calamities. And yet, alas, there was more truth underlying his words than even he knew. If a man lives for ever in shadow the hour arrives at last when there is no more light; and even for those who look forward, one would think with a certain relief, to the workhouse, there comes a day when they shall work no more. I smiled when I read this letter, but, of course, telegraphed to him deferring my visit until the rain had ceased, or laryngitis had departed from his house, or until his spirits recovered their tone on the completion of his great romance. One could do no other, much as I desired to see him and have one of our prodigious and preposterously long talks in his new home. I do not think that I wrote to him after this lamentable reply of his, but on November 16 I received my last communication from him. It was three lines on a postcard, still dated from St. Jean-Pied-de-Port. He referred in it once more to my book, and said: "Delighted to see the advertisement in --- to-day, especially after their very base notice last week. Hurrah! Illness and struggle still going on here." The struggle I believed in, but, as ever with one's friends, one doubted if the illness were serious. And yet the catastrophe was coming.

At this time I was myself seriously ill, and had been in bed for nearly a fortnight. During the early days of my convalescence I went to my club, and got this telegram from Wells: "Have received following telegram from Gissing, 'Henry dying. Entreat you to come. In greatest haste.' I cannot go, can you?" This message to me was dated Sandgate, where Wells was then living. Now at this time I was feeling utterly unfit to travel. I hardly knew what to do, but thought it best to go home and consult with my wife before replying to Wells. Anxious as she was to do everything possible for Gissing, she implored me not to venture on so long a journey, especially as it was in mid-winter, just at Christmas-time. If I had not felt really ill she would not have placed any obstacles in my path. She would, indeed, have urged me to go. After a little reflection I therefore replied to Wells that I that I was myself very ill, but added that if he really could not go I would. At the same time I telegraphed to Gissing, or rather to Gabrielle, saying that I was ill, but would come if she found it absolutely necessary. I do not think I received any answer to this message, a fact one easily understands when one learns how desperate things really were; but on December 26 I had another telegram from Wells, and found that he had gone to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port in spite of not being well. He wired to me: "No nurse. Nursing help may save Gissing. Come if possibly can. Am here but ill." Such an appeal could not be resisted. If Wells was ill at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port it now seemed my absolute duty to go, whatever my own state of health.

I left London that night by the last train, crossing to Paris by way of Newhaven and Dieppe in order to get at least three hours of rest in a recumbent position in the steamer, as I did not at that time feel justified in going all the way first class and taking a sleeper. I did manage to obtain some rest during the sea-passage, but on reaching Paris early in the morning I felt exceedingly unwell, and at the Gare St. Lazare found at that hour no means of obtaining even a cup of coffee. I drove over to the Quai d'Orsay, and spent an hour or two in the coffee-room waiting for the departure of the express to Bordeaux. III as I was, and full of anxiety about Gissing, and now about Wells, that journey was one long nightmare. I had not been able to take the Sud Express, and when at last, late in the evening, I reached Bayonne, I found that the last train to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port in its high Pyrenean valley had already gone hours before my arrival. While on my journey I had again telegraphed from Morcenx to Wells or to Gabrielle asking them to telegraph to me at the Hotel du Commerce, Bayonne, in case I was unable to get on that night, as I had indeed feared. although I was unable to get accurate information. On reaching this hotel I found waiting for me a telegram, which I have now lost, that was somehow exceedingly obscure but yet portended disaster. That I expected the worst I know, for I telegraphed to my wife the news in code that Gissing was dying and that the doctor gave no hope.

If I had been a rich man, or even moderately furnished with money on that journey, I should have taken a motor-car if it could have been obtained, and have gone on at once without waiting for the morning. But now I was obliged to spend the night in that little old-fashioned hotel in the old English city of Bayonne, the city whose fortress bears the proud emblem "Nunquam polluta." I wondered much if I should yet see my old friend alive. It was possible, and I hoped. At any rate, he must know that I was coming and was near at hand if only he were yet conscious. How much I was needed I did not know till afterwards, for even as I was going south Wells was once

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more returning to Paris on his homeward journey. As I learnt afterwards, he was far too unwell to stay. In the morning I took the first train to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, passing Cambo, where Rostand, the poet, makes his home. On reaching the town where Gissing lived I found no one waiting for me, though, naturally enough, I thought it possible that unless Wells were very ill he would be able to meet me. It was a cold and gloomy morning when I left the station, and hired a small boy to show me the house in which Gissing lived on the outskirts of the little Pyrenean town. This house, it seems, was let in flats, and the Gissings occupied the first floor. On entering the hall I found a servant washing down the stone flooring. I said to her, "Comment Monsieur se porte-t-il?" and she replied, "Monsieur est mort." I then asked her where I should find the other Englishman. She answered that he had gone back to England the day before, and then took me upstairs and went in to tell Gabrielle that I had come.

I found her with her mother. She was the only woman who had given him any happiness. Now she was completely broken down by the anxiety and distress which had come upon her so suddenly. For indeed it seems that it had been sudden. Only four or five days ago Gissing had been working hard upon "Basil," the book from which he hoped so much, and in which he believed so fervently. Then it seems that he developed what he called a cold, some slight affection of the lungs which raised his temperature a little. Strangely enough he did not take the care of himself that he should have taken, or the care which one might have expected him to take, considering his curiously expressed nervousness about himself. By some odd fatality he became suddenly courageous at the wrong time, and went out for a walk in desperately bad weather. On the following day he was obviously very ill, and sent for the doctor, who suspended judgment but feared that he had pneumonia. On the day succeeding this another doctor was called into consultation, and the diagnosis of pneumonia was confirmed without any doubt. But that was not, perhaps, what actually killed him. There was a very serious complication, according to Gissing's first physician, with whom I afterwards had a long conversation, partly through the intermediary of the nurse, an Englishwoman from Bayonne, who talked French more fluently than myself. He considered that Gissing also had myocarditis. I certainly did not think, and do not think, that he was right in this. Myocarditis is rarely accompanied with much or severe pain, while the anguish of violent pericarditis is often very great, and Gissing had suffered most atrociously. He was not now a strong man, not one with big reserves and powers of passive endurance, and in his agony he cried aloud for death.

In these agonies there were periods of comparative ease when he rested and was quiet, and even spoke a little. In one of these intermissions Gabrielle came to him and told him that I was now actually on my way. There is no reason, I think, why I should not write what he said. It was simply, "Good old R-." I By this time Wells had gone; but before his departure he had, I understand, procured the nurse. The last struggle came early that morning, December 28, while I was at the Bayonne hotel preparing to catch the early train. He died quietly just before dawn, I think at six o'clock.

I was taken in to see Gabrielle, who was still in bed, and found her mother with her. They were two desolate lonely women, and I had some fears that Gabrielle could hardly recover from the blow, so deeply did his death affect her. She was always a delicate woman, and came from a delicate, neurotic stock, as one could see so plainly in the elder woman. I did my best to say what one could say, though all that can possibly be said in such cases is nothing after all. There is no physic for grief but the slow, inevitable years. I stayed not long, but went into the other chamber and saw my dead friend. The bed on which he lay stood in a little alcove at the end of the room farthest from the window. He looked strangely and peculiarly intellectual, as so often happens after death. The final relaxation of the muscles about his chin and mouth accentuated most markedly the strong form of his skull. Curiously enough, as he had grown a little beard in his last illness, it seemed to me that he resembled very strongly another English writer not yet dead, one whom nature had, indeed, marked out as a story-teller, but who lacked all those qualities which made Gissing what he was. As I stood by this death-bed knowing that he had died at last in the strange anguish which he had feared, it seemed to me that here was a man who had been born to inherit grief. He had never known pure peace or utter joy as some even of the very humblest know them. I looked back across the toilsome path by which he had come hither to the end, and it seemed to me that from the very first he had been doomed. In other times or some other age he might have had a better fate, but he was born out of his time and died in exile doubly. I put my hand upon his forehead and said farewell to him and left the room, for I

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knew that there was much to do and that I had to do it.

Gabrielle was most anxious that he should not be buried in St. Jean–Pied–de–Port, of which she had conceived a natural horror. There was at this time an English clergyman in the village, the chaplain of the English church at St. Jean–de–Luz, about whom I shall have something to say later. With him I concerted what was to be done, and he obtained the necessary papers from the mairie. And all this time, across the road from the stone house in which George Gissing lay dead, I heard the sound of his coffin being made in the little carpenter's shop which stood there. When all was done that could be done, and everything was in order, I went to the little hotel and had my lunch alone, and afterwards dined alone and slept that night in the same hotel. The next day, late in the afternoon, I went down to St. Jean–de–Luz in charge of his body. During this journey the young doctor who had attended Gissing accompanied me part of the way, and for the rest of it his nurse was my companion. At St. Jean–de–Luz, where it was then quite dark, we were received by the clergyman, who had preceded us, and by a hearse, into which we carried Gissing's body. I accompanied it to the English chapel, where it remained all night before the altar. I slept at my old hotel, where I was known, as I had stayed there at the time I last saw Gissing alive. In the morning a service was held for him according to the rites of the English Church. This was the desire of Gabrielle and Madame Fleury, who, if it had been possible, would have desired to bury him according to the rites of the Catholic Church. Gissing, of course, had no orthodox belief. He refused to think of these things, for they were disturbing and led nowhither. Attending this service there were many English people, some who knew him, and some again who did not know him but went there out of respect for his name and reputation, and perhaps because they felt that they and he were alike in exile. We buried him in the common cemetery of St. Jean–de–Luz, a place not unbeautiful, nor unbeautifully situated. And while the service went on over his grave I was somehow reminded of the lovely cemetery at Lisbon where another English man of letters lies in a tomb far from his own country. I speak of Fielding.

I left Gabrielle and Madame Fleury still at St. Jean–Pied–de–Port, and did not see them again before starting for England. They, I knew, would probably return to Paris, or perhaps would go to relatives of theirs in Spain. I could help them no more, and by now I discovered that my winter journey, or perhaps even my short visit to the death–chamber of George Gissing, had given me some kind of pulmonary catarrh which in my overwrought and nervous state seemed likely, perhaps, to result in something more serious. Therefore, having done all that could be done, and having seen him put in the earth, I returned home hurriedly. On reaching England I was very ill for many days, but recovered without any serious results. Soon afterwards some one, I know not who it was, sent me a paragraph published in a religious paper which claimed Gissing as a disciple of the Church, for it said that he had died "in the fear of God's holy name, and with the comfort and strength of the Catholic faith." When some men die I there are for ever crows and vultures about. Although very loath to say anything which would raise an angry discussion, I felt that this could not be passed by and that he would not have wished it to be passed by. Had he not written of a certain character in one of his books "that he should be buried as a son of the Church, to which he had never belonged, was a matter of indignation"? That others felt as I did is proved by a letter I got from his friend Edward Clodd, who wrote to me: "You have seen the report that the ecclesiastical buzzards have got hold of George Gissing in articulo mortis and dragged him into the fold."

My own views upon religion did not matter. They were stronger and more pronounced, and, it may be, more atheistical than his own. Nevertheless I knew what he felt about these things, and in consequence wrote the following letter to the editor of the paper which had claimed him for the Church: "My attention has been drawn to a statement in your columns that George Gissing died in communion with the Church of England, and I shall be much obliged if you will give to this contradiction the same publicity you granted, without investigation, to the calumny. I was intimate with Gissing for thirty years, and had every opportunity of noting his attitude towards all theological speculation. He not only accepted none of the dogmas formulated in the creeds and articles of the Church of England, but he considered it impossible that any Church's definition of the undefinable could have any significance for any intelligent man. During the whole of our long intimacy I never knew him to waver from that point of view.

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"What communication may have reached you from any one who visited Gissing during his illness I do not know. But I presume you do not maintain that a change in his theological standpoint can reasonably be inferred from any words which he may have been induced to speak in a condition in which, according to the law of every civilised country, he would have been incompetent to sign a codicil to his will.

"The attempt to draw such a deduction will seem dishonest to every fair-minded man; and I rely upon your courtesy to publish this vindication of the memory of an honest and consistent thinker which you have, however unintentionally, aspersed."

Of course this letter was refused publication. The editor answered it in a note in which he maintained the position that the paper had taken up, stating that he was thoroughly satisfied with the sources of his information. I knew what those sources were and wrote a letter in anger to the chaplain of St. Jean-de-Luz, which, I fear, was full of very gross insults.

Seeing that the paper refused my letter admission to its columns, on the advice of certain other people I wrote to a London daily saying: "As the intimate friend of George Gissing for thirty years, I beg to state definitely that he had not the slightest intellectual sympathy with any creed whatsoever. From his early youth he had none, save for a short period when, for reasons other than intellectual, he inclined to a vague and nebulous Positivism. His mental attitude towards all theological explanations was more than critical, it was absolutely indifferent; he could hardly understand how any one in the full possession of his faculties could subscribe to any formulated doctrines. No more than John Stuart Mill or Herbert Spencer could he have entered into communion with any Church."

Of course I knew, as any man must know who is acquainted with humanity and its frailties, that it was possible for Gissing, during the last few poisoned hours of his life, to go back in his delirium upon the whole of his previous convictions. He knew that he was dying. When he asked to know the truth he had been told it. In such circumstances some men break down. There are what people call death-bed repentances. Therefore I did my best to satisfy myself as to whether anything whatever had occurred which would give any colour to these theological lies. I could not trouble Gabrielle upon this particular point, but it occurred to me that the nurse, who was a very intelligent woman, must be in a position to know something of the matter, and therefore wrote to her asking her to tell me all she knew. She replied to me about the middle of January, telling me that she had just then had a long talk with Mrs. Gissing, and giving me the following facts. It appears that on Monday, December 21, Gissing was so ill that a consultation was deemed necessary, and that both the doctors agreed that it was impossible for the patient to live through the night, though in fact he did not die till nearly a week afterwards. On Thursday, December 24, the chaplain was sent for, not for any religious reasons, or because Gissing had called for him, but simply because Gabrielle thought that he might find some pleasure in seeing an English face. When the clergyman came it did indeed have this effect, for Gissing's face lit up and he shook him heartily by the hand. At this moment the young doctor came in and told the clergyman privately that Gissing had no chance whatever, and that it was a wonder that he was still alive. It is quite certain that there was no religious conversation between the clergyman and the patient at this time. The nurse arrived at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, and insisted on absolute quietness in the room. The clergyman simply peeped in at the door to say good-bye, for at that time Mr. Wells was in charge in the bedroom. The chaplain did not see Gissing again until the day I myself came to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, when all was over. While Gissing was delirious it appears that he chanted some kind of Te Deum repeatedly. To what this was attributable no man can say with certainty, but it is a curious thing to reflect upon that Veranilda was concerned with the time of Gregory, and that Gissing been studying most minutely the history of the early Church in many ecclesiastical works. According to those who heard his delirious talk, it seems that all he did say had reference to Veranilda, the book about which he had been so anxious, and was never to finish. At any rate it is absolutely certain that Gissing never accepted, even in delirium, the offices of the Church before his death. Before I leave this matter I may mention that the chaplain complicated matters in no small degree before he retired from the scene, by declaring most disingenuously that he had not written the notice which appeared in print. Now this was perfectly true. He did not write it. He had asked a friend of his to do so. When he learnt the truth this friend very much regretted having undertaken the task. I understand that though the editor

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refused to withdraw this statement the authorities of the paper wrote to the chaplain in no pleased spirit after they had received my somewhat severely phrased communication. It is a sad and disagreeable subject, and I am glad to leave it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Forever on looking backwards one is filled with regrets, and one thing I regret greatly about George Gissing is that, though I might perhaps have purchased his little library, the books he had accumulated with so much joy and such self-sacrifice, I never thought of this until it was too late. Books made up so much of his life, and few of his had not been bought at the cost of what others would consider pleasure, or by the sacrifice of some sensation which he himself would have enjoyed at the time. Now I possess none of his books but those he gave me, save only the little *Anthologia Latina* which Gabrielle herself sent to me. This was a volume in which he took peculiar delight, perhaps even more delight than he did in the Greek anthology, which I myself preferred so far as my Greek would then carry me. Many times I have seen him take down the little Eton anthology and read aloud. Now I myself may quote:

Animula vagula, blandula,

Hospes comesque corporis,

Que nunc abibis in loca

Pallidula, rigida, nudula

I believe his library was sold in Paris, for now that Gabrielle had no settled home it was impossible to carry it about with her. Among these books were all those beautifully bound volumes which he had obtained as prizes at Manchester College, and others which he had picked up at various times in the various bookshops of London, so many of which he speaks of in "The Private Papers his old Gibbon in quarto, and some hundreds of others chosen with joy because they appealed to him in a way only a book-lover can understand. He had a strange pleasure in buying old copies of the classics, which shows that he was perhaps after all more of a bookman than a scholar. He would have possessed such a copy of Lucretius as is on my own shelves, which has no notes but is wonderfully printed, rather than the newest edition by the newest editor. He was conscious that his chief desire was literature, not scholarship. Few indeed there are who know the classics as well as he did, who read them for ever with so much delight.

Gissing, for an Englishman, knew many languages. His Greek, though not extraordinarily deep, was most familiar. He could read Aristophanes lying on the sofa, thoroughly enjoying it, and rarely rising to consult Liddell and Scott, a book which he adored in the most odd fashion, perhaps because it knew so much Greek. There was no Latin author whom he could not read fluently. I took to him often a difficult passage in Juvenal and Persius, and rarely found him at fault, or slow to give me help. French he knew nearly as well as a Frenchman, and spoke it very fluently. His Italian was also good, and he spoke that too without hesitation. Spanish he only read; I do not think he often attempted to speak it. *Don Quixote* in the original was a favourite book of his; and his Italian can be judged by the fact that he read Dante's *Divina Commedia* almost as easily as Virgil. German too was an open book to him, and he had read most of the great men who wrote in it, understanding even the obscurities of Titan. I marked down the other day many of the books in which he chiefly delighted, or rather, let me say, many of the authors. Homer, of course, stood at the head of the list, for Homer he knew as well as he knew Shakespeare. He was a convinced Homeric unitarian, but here his conservative prejudices had their way. His adoration for Shakespeare was, perhaps, excessive, but the less said of that the better, for I have no desire to dilate on the general English over-estimation of that particular author. I do, however, understand how it was that Gissing worshipped him so, for whatever may be thought of Shakespeare's dramatic ability, or his characterisation, or his general psychology, there can be no dispute about his having been a master of "beautiful words." Milton he loved,

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and sometimes read his sonnets to me. Much of "Lycidas" he knew by heart and some of "II Penseroso." Among the Latins, Virgil, Catullus, and Tibullus were his favourites, although he took a curious interest in Cicero, a taste in which I was never able to follow him. I once showed to Gissing in the Tusculan Disputations what Cicero seemed to think a good joke. It betrayed such an extraordinary lack of humour that was satisfied to leave the Disputations alone henceforth. The only Latin book which I myself introduced to Gissing was the Letters of Pliny. They afterwards became great favourites with him because some of them dealt with his beloved Naples and Vesuvius. Lucian's Dialogues he admired very much, finding them, as indeed they are, always delightful; and it was very interesting to him when I showed him to what extent Disraeli was indebted to Lucian in those clever jeux d'esprit "Ixion in Heaven," "Popanilla," and "The Infernal Marriage." In the Golden Ass of Apuleius he knew the story of Psyche almost by heart. Petronius he read very frequently; it contained some of the actual life of the old world. He knew Diogenes Laertius well, though he read that author, as Montaigne did, rather for the light he throws upon the private life of the Greeks than for the philosophy in the book; and he frequently dipped into the Deipnosophist. Occasionally, but very occasionally, he did read some ancient metaphysics, for Plato was a favourite of his not, I think, on account of his philosophy, but because he wrote so beautifully. Aristotle he rarely touched, although he knew the Poetics. He had a peculiar admiration for the Stoic Marcus Aurelius, in which I never followed him because the Stoic philosophy then seemed to me peculiarly inhuman. But, after all, among the Greeks his chief joy was the tragedians, and there was no single play or fragment of Xschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that he did not know familiarly. Among the Frenchmen his great favourites were Rabelais and Montaigne and, later, Flaubert, Maupassant, Victor Hugo, Zola, Balzac, and the Goncourts. As I have said before, he had a great admiration for the Russian writers of eminence, and much regretted that he did not know Russian. Once he attempted it, but put it aside. I think Balzac was the only writer of importance that he read much of who did not possess a style; he owned that he found him on that account at times almost impossible. Nevertheless he did read him, and learnt much from him; but his chief admiration among the French on the ground of their artistry was for Flaubert and Maupassant. Zola's style did not appeal to him; in fact in many of his books it is little better than Balzac's. Gissing's love of beautiful words and the rhythms of prose was as great as that of Meredith; and no doubt his adoration of Shakespeare was founded on the fact that Shakespeare still remains the mighty enchanter in the world of phrases. He read English very deeply. There was little among the fields of English prose that he did not know well; but again he loved best those who had a noble style of their own, notably Sir Thomas Browne. If a man had something to say and did not say it well, Gissing read him with difficulty and held him at a discount. That is why he loved Landor at his best, why he loved Meredith, and why he often adored Hardy, especially in Hardy's earlier works, before he began to "rail at the universe" and disturb him. I think among other living writers of English fiction I can hardly mention more than one of whom he spoke with much respect and he was Henry James. As he was a conservative he was especially a conservative critic. He found it difficult to appreciate anything which was wholly new, and the rising school of Celtic literature, which means much, and may mean more, in English literature, did not appeal to him. He lived in the past, even in English, and often went back to Chaucer and drank at his well and at the everlasting fountain of Malory. So, as I have said, he loved old Walton. Boswell he read yearly at least, for he had an amazing admiration for old Johnson, a notable truth-teller. The man who could say what he thought, and say it plainly, was ever his favourite, although I could never induce him to admire Machiavelli, for the coldness of Machiavelli's intellect was a little too much for him. The pure intellect never appealed to Gissing. I think if he had attempted The Critique of Pure Reason he would have died before he had learnt Kant's vocabulary. Yet I once gave him a copy of it in the original which I could not read myself. The only very modern writer that he took to was Walt Whitman, and the trouble I had in getting him to see anything there was amazing, though at last he succumbed and was characteristically enthusiastic.

What he wanted in literature was emotion, feeling, and humour literature that affected him sensuously, and made him happy, and made him forget. When one looks back at his books it is strange to think how much he loved pure beauty, though he found himself compelled to write, only too often, of the sheer brutality of modern civilisation and the foulest life of London. Yet by nature he loved satire, and his own mind was essentially in some ways satiric. His greatest gift was perhaps that of irony, which he frequently exercised at the expense of his public. I remember very well his joy when something he had written which was ironically intended from the first word to

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the last was treated seriously by the critics. He was reminded, as he indeed reminded me, of Samuel Butler's *Fair Haven*, that book on Christianity which was reviewed by one great religious paper as an essay in religious apologetics. This recalls to my mind the fact that I have forgotten to say how much he admired Samuel Butler's books, or those with which he was more particularly acquainted, *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*. Anything which dug knives into the gross stupidity of the mass of English opinion afforded him the intensest gratification. If it attacked their religion or their vanity he was equally delighted, and when it came to their hypocrisy in spite of the defence of English hypocrisy made later in *The Private Papers* he was equally pleased. In this connection I am reminded of a very little incident of no particular importance which occurred to him when he was upon one occasion at the Royal Academy. That year Sir Frederick Leighton exhibited a fine decorative panel of a nude figure. While Gissing was looking at it a typical English matron with three young flappers of daughters passed him. One of the girls stood in front of this nude and said, "Oh, mamma, what is this?" Whereupon her mother replied hurriedly, "Only a goddess, my dear, only a goddess! Come along only a goddess." And he quoted to himself and afterwards to me, from "Roman Women": "And yet I love you not, nor ever can, Distinguished woman on the Pincian!" If I remember rightly, the notable address to Englishwomen in T.E. Brown's poem was published separately in a magazine which I brought to him. It gave great occasion for chuckling. I have not attempted to give any complete catalogue of all Gissing's reading, but think what has been said will indicate its reach. What he desired was to read the best that had been written in all western languages; and very few men have read so much, although he made, in some ways, but little use of it. Nevertheless this life among books was his true life. Among books he lived, and among them he would have died. Had any globetrotting Gillman offered to show him the world, he would have declined, I think, to leave the littoral of the Mediterranean, though with a book-loving Gillman he might have explored all literature.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

There have been few men so persecuted by Fortune as to lead lives of unhappiness, lighted only by transient gleams of the sun, who are yet pursued beyond the grave by outcries and misfortune, but this was undoubtedly the case with Gissing. Of course he always had notable ill luck, but it sprang from his nature as well as from the nature of things. When a man puts himself into circumstances to which he is equal he may have misfortunes, and sometimes disasters, but he has not perpetual adversity. Gissing's nature was for ever thrusting him into positions of which he was not master. His disposition, his very heredity, seems to have invited trouble. So out of his first great calamity sprang all the rest. He had not been equal to the stress laid upon him, and in later life he was never equal to the stress he laid upon himself. That is what ill luck is: an instinctive lack of wisdom.

His ill luck began early. It lasted even beyond the grave. Some men have accounted it a calamity to have a biography written of them. The first who said so must have been English, for in this country the absence of biographic art is rendered the more peculiarly dreadful by the existence in our language of one or two masterpieces. In some ways I would now very willingly cease to speak, for nearly all is written that was in my mind and I have spoken nothing which is not truly in his defence. As I declared in the very first chapter, he declared he had an earnest desire that if anything were written about him after his death it should be really true. Still there are some things yet to be put down, especially about *Veranilda* and its publication. He left this book unfinished: it lacked some few chapters dealing with the final catastrophe. It fell to the executors to arrange for the publication of the incomplete book. As Gissing had left no money, certainly not that two thousand pounds for which he vainly hoped, there were still his children to consider; and it was thought necessary, for reasons I do not appreciate, to get a preface written for the book with a view, which seemed to me idle, of procuring it a great sale.

It appears that Wells offered to write this preface if it were wanted. What he wrote was afterwards published separately. The executors did not approve it, again for reasons which I do not appreciate, for on the whole it was an admirable piece of work. Yet I do not believe Wells was sincere in the view he took of *Veranilda* as a work of art. In later years he acknowledged as much, but he thought it was his duty to say everything that could possibly be said with a view to imposing it on a reluctant public. In this article the passage mainly objected to was that

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which speaks obscurely of his early life at Manchester College, and refers as obscurely to his initial great disaster. The reference was needed, and could hardly be avoided. Wells said nothing openly but referred to "an abrupt, incongruous reaction and collapse." This no doubt excited curiosity in certain people, but seeing that so many already knew the truth, I cannot perceive what was to be gained by entire silence. However, this preface was rejected and Mr. Frederic Harrison was asked to write another. This he did, but it was a frigid performance. The writer acknowledged his ignorance of much that Gissing had done, and avowed his want of sympathy with most of it.

Naturally enough, the trouble growing out of this dispute gave rise to considerable comment. As some theological buzzards had dropped out of a murky sky on Gissing's corpse, so some literary kites now found subject to gloat upon. Nevertheless the matter presently passed. *Veranilda* unhappily, was no success; and if one must speak the truth, it was rightly a failure. It is curious and bitter to reflect that when he was dealing at the last in some kind of peace and quiet with the one chosen subject, that he had thought of for so many years and prepared for so carefully, it should by no means have proved what he believed it. There is, indeed, no such proof as *Veranilda* in the whole history of letters that the writer was not doing the work that his nature called for. Who that knows *By the Ionian Sea*, and who, indeed, that ever spoke with him, will not feel that if he had visited one by one all the places that he mentions in this story, and had written about them and about the historical characters that he hoped to realise, the book might have been as great as or even greater than the shining pages of *By the Ionian Sea*? It was in the consideration of these things, while reviving the aspects of the past that he felt so deeply and loved so much, that his native and natural genius shone. In fiction it was only when rage and anger and disgust inspired him that he could hope to equal anything of the passion which he felt about his temperamental and proper work. Those books in which he let himself go perfectly naturally, and those books which came out of him as a terrible protest against modern civilisation, are alone great. Yet it is hard to speak without emotion and without pain of *Veranilda*. He believed in it so greatly, and yet believed in it no more than any writer must while he is at work. The artist's own illusion of a book's strength and beauty is necessary to any accomplishment. He must believe with faith or do nothing. Gissing failed because it was not his real work.

In one sense the great books of his middle period were what writers and artists know as "pot-boilers." They were, indeed, written for an actual living, for bread and for cheese and occasionally a very little butter. But they had to be written. He was obliged to do something, and did these best; he could do no other. He was always in exile. That was the point in my mind when I wrote one long article about him in a promising but passing magazine which preened its wings in Bond Street and died before the end of its first month. This article was called "The Exile of George Gissing." There is something of the same feeling in much that has been written of him by men perhaps better qualified in many ways than myself had they known him as well. I have spoken of the able criticism Thomas Secombe wrote of him in the preface to the book of short stories which was published after Gissing's death. In the *Fortnightly Review* Arthur Waugh wrote a feeling and sympathetic article about him. Morris Colles wrote not without discernment of the man. And of one thing all these writers seemed tolerably sure, that in himself Gissing stood alone. But he only stood alone in the best work of his middle period. And even that work was alien from his native mind.

In an early article written about him while he yet lived I said that he occupied a high and solitary place, because he belonged to no school, and most certainly not to any English school. It was impossible to imitate, and no one could truly even caricature him. One great characteristic of his best work was that he founded it on deep and accurate knowledge and keen observation. Yet its power lay in a bent, in a mood of mind, not by any means in any subject, even though his satiric discussion of what he called the "ignobly decent" showed his strength, and, indirectly, his inner character. His very repugnance to his early subjects led him to choose them. He showed what he wished the world to be by declaring and proving that it possessed every conceivable opposite to his desires. It was pointed out some time ago, but may be insisted upon again, that in one sense he manifested an instinctive affinity for the lucid and subtle Tourgeniev. There is no more intensely depressing book in the entire English language than *Isabel Clarendon*. The hero's desires reached to the stars, but he was not able to steal or take so much as a farthing rushlight. Not even *Demetri Roudine*, that futile essence of futility, equals this, Gissing's literary child of bitter unattainable ambitions. These Russians indeed were the writers with whom Gissing had most

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sympathy. They moved what Zola had never been able to stir in him, for he was never a Zolaist either in mind or method. No man without a style could really influence him for more than a moment. Even his beloved Balzac, fecund and insatiable, had no lasting hold upon him, much as he admired the man's ambitions, his unparalleled industry, his mighty construction. For Balzac was truly architectonic, even if barbarous, though his constructions are often imaginary and his perspectives a blotted mystery. But great construction is obviously alien from Gissing. He wanted no elaborate architecture to do his thinking in. He would have been contented in a porch, or preferably in a cloister.

I have declared that his greatest book is *Born in Exile* I mean his greatest book among his novels. To say it is a masterpiece is for once not to abuse the word; it is intense, deeply psychological, moving, true. "L'anatomia presuppone il cadavere," says Gabriele D'Annunzio, but *Born in Exile* is intolerable and wonderful vivisection. Yet men do bleed and live, and the protagonist in this book in much, in very much, George Gissing bleeds but will not die. He was born out of the leisured classes and resented it with an incredible bitterness, with a bitterness unparalleled in literature. I know that on one occasion Gissing spoke to me with a certain joy of somebody who had written to him about his books and had selected *Born in Exile* as the greatest of them. I think he knew it was great. It was, naturally, an ineffable failure from the commercial point of view.

On more than one occasion, as it was known that I was acquainted with Gissing, men asked me to write about him. I never did so without asking his permission. This happened once in 1895. He answered me: "What objection could I possibly have, unless it were that I should not like to hear you reviled for log-rolling? But it seems to me that you might well write an article which would incur no such charge; and indeed, by so doing, you would render me a very great service. For I have in mind at present a careful and well-written attack in the current *Spectator*. Have you seen it? Now I will tell you what my feelings are about this frequent attitude in my critics."

Gissing's views upon critics and reviewing were often somewhat astounding. He resented their folly very bitterly. Apropos of a review of one man's books he wrote: "I have also, unfortunately, seen the — . Now, can you tell me (in moments of extreme idleness one wishes to know such things) who the people are who review fiction for the —? Are they women, soured by celibacy, and by ineffectual attempts to succeed as authors? Even as they treat you this time they have consistently treated me one continuous snarl and sneer. They are beastly creatures — I can think of no other term."

It was unfortunate that he took these things seriously, for nobody knows so well as the reviewers that their work is rarely serious. Yet, according to them the general effect of Gissing's books, especially *In the Year of Jubilee* was false, misleading, and libellous, and in essence caricature. One particular critic spoke of the "brutish stupefaction of his men and women." and said, "his realism inheres only in his rendering of detail." Now Gissing declared that the writer exhibited a twofold ignorance first of the life he depicted, and again of the books in which he depicted it. Gissing went on to say: "He — the critic speaks specially of *In the Year of Jubilee* so for the moment we will stick to that. I have selected from the great mass of lower middle-class life a group of people who represent certain of its grossnesses, weaknesses, etc., peculiar to our day. Now in the first place, this group of people, on its worst side, represents a degradation of which the critic has obviously no idea. In the second place, my book, if properly read, contains abundant evidence of good feeling and right thinking in those members of the group who are not hopelessly base. Pass to instances: 'The seniors live a . . . life unglorified by a single fine emotion or elevating instinct.' Indeed? What about Mr. Lord, who is there precisely to show that there can be, and are, these emotions and instincts in individuals? Of the young people (to say not a word about Nancy, at heart an admirable woman), how is it possible to miss the notes of fine character in poor Peachey? Is not the passionate love of one's child an 'elevating instinct'? nor yet a fine emotion? Why, even Nancy's brother shows at the end that favourable circumstances could bring out in him gentleness and goodness."

There indeed spoke Gissing. He felt that everything was circumstance, and that for nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand circumstance was truly too much, as it had been for him. It appears that the critic added that the general effect of the novel was false; and Gissing replied that it would be so to a very rapid skimmer of the book,

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precisely as the general effect upon a rapid observer of the people themselves would be false. He was enraged to think that, though people thought it worth while to write at length about his books, they would not take the trouble to study them seriously. He added: "In this section of the lower middle class the good is not on the surface; neither will it be found on the surface of my narrative."

In this letter he went on to say something more of his books in general. Apropos of a paragraph written by Mr. Payn about his work as a whole, he said: "My books deal with people of many social strata; there are the vile working class, the aspiring and capable working class, the vile lower middle, the aspiring and capable lower middle, and a few representatives of the upper middle class. My characters range from the vileness of 'Arry Parsons to the genial and cultured respectability of Mr. Comberbatch. There are books as disparate as *The Nether World* and *The Unclassed*. But what I desire to insist upon is this, that the most characteristic, the most important, part of my work is that which deals with a class of young men distinctive of our time well-educated, fairly bred, but without money. It is this fact, as I gather from reviews and conversation, of the poverty of my people which tells against their recognition as civilised beings. 'Oh,' said some one to Butler, 'do ask Mr. Gissing to make his people a little better off.' There you have it."

And there one has also the source of Gissing's fountain of bitterness. He went on to say: "Now think of some of these young men, Hubert Eldon, Biffen, Milvain, Peak, Langley, Hilliard, Mallard. Do you mean to say that books containing such a number of such men deal, first and foremost, with the commonplace and the sordid? Why, these fellows are the very reverse of commonplace; most of them are martyred by the fact of possessing uncommon endowments. Is it not so? This side of my work, to me the most important, I have never yet seen recognised. I suppose Payn would class these men as 'at best genteel, and not so very genteel.' Why, 'ods bodikins! there's nothing in the world so hateful to them as gentility. But you know all this, and can you not write of it rather trenchantly? I say nothing about my women. That is a moot point. But surely there are some of them who help to give colour to the groups I draw." The end of the letter was: "I write with a numbed hand. I haven't been warm for weeks. This weather crushes me. Let me have a line about this letter."

The sort of poverty which crushed the aspiring is the keynote to the best work he did. He knew it, and was right in knowing it. He played all these parts himself. In many protean forms Gissing is discerned under the colour and character of his chosen names; and so far as he depicted a class hitherto untouched, or practically untouched, in England, as he declares, he was a great writer of fiction. But he was not a romantic writer. There were some books of romance he loved greatly. Often and often we spoke of Murger's *Vie de Boheme*. I do not think there was any passage in that book which so appealed to him as when Rodolphe worked in his adventitious fur-coat in his windy garret, declaring genially: "Maintenant le thermometre va etre furieusement vexe." Nevertheless there is no doubt that he knew, and few knew so well, the very bitter truth that Murger only vaguely indicated here and there in scattered passages. In the *Vie de Boheme* these characters "range" themselves at last; but mostly such men did not. They went under, they died in the hospital, they poisoned themselves, they blew out their brains, they sank and became degraded parasites of an uncomprehending bourgeoisie.

I spoke some time ago of the painful hour when Gissing came to me to declare his considered opinion that I myself could not write successful fiction. No doubt he was correct, though he was correct for other reasons than those he gave. It is odd that I never returned the compliment, for though I knew he could, and did, write great fiction, I knew his best work in other circumstances would not have been fiction. Out of martyrdom may come great things, but not out of martyrdom spring the natural blossoms of the natural mind. That he lived in the devil's twilight between the Dan of Camberwell and the Beersheba of Camden Town, when his natural environment should have been Italy, Rome, or Sorrento, is an unfading tragedy. Only once or twice in his life did a spring or summer come to him in which he might grow the flowers he loved best and knew to be his natural destiny. The greatest tragedy of all, to my mind, is that final tragedy of *Veranilda* in which at last, after long years of toil in fiction while fiction was yet necessary to his livelihood, he was compelled by his training to put into the form of a novel a theme not fit for such treatment save in the hands of a native and easy story-teller.

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I have said nothing, or little except by implication, of the man's style. In many ways it was notable and even noble. To such a literary intelligence, informed with all the learning of the past towards which he leant, much of his style was inevitable; it was the man and his own. For the greater part it is lucid rather than sparkling, clear, if not cold; yet with a subdued rhythm, the result of much Latin and more Greek, for the metres of the Greek tragedies always inspired him with their noble cadences. Though he was often bitter, especially in his employment of irony, of which he is the only complete master in English literature besides Samuel Butler, he could rise to heights of passionate description; for here and there a sense of luxury tinges his words with Tyrian purple and this in spite of all his sense of restraint, which was more marked than that of almost any living writer.

When I think of it all, and consider his partly wasted years, it is a matter of wonder how it was that he induced himself to deal with the life he knew so well; but while the commercialism exists which he abhorred as much as he abhorred the society in which it flourishes, there seems no other practicable method for a poor man of letters to attain speech and yet to live. I often declared that fiction as we wrote it was truly diagnostic of a disordered and unnecessarily degraded form of civilisation; and he replied with deep feeling that to him the idylls of Theocritus, of Moschus, the simple tragedies, the natural woes and joys of men who ploughed the soil or worked at the wine-press, were the truest and the most vivid forms and subjects of Art. Neither before his death nor after did he attain the artist's true and great reward of recognition in the full sense that would have satisfied him even if he had remained in poverty. Nevertheless there were some who knew. There are perhaps a few more who know now that he is gone and cannot hear them. Popularity he never hoped for, and never will attain, but he has a secure place in the hierarchy of the literature of England which he loved. He appeals now as he appealed while he lived, not to the idle and the foolish, not to the fashionable mob, but to the more august tribunal of those who have the sympathy that comes from understanding.

THE END