George Gissing at Work

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Published by ELT Press


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EXTRACTS

1, 2, 3

Novel & Drama

"Im Roman wie im Drama sehen wir menschliche Natur und Handlung. Der Unterschied beider Dichtungsarten liegt nicht bloss in der äussern Form, nicht darin, dass die Personen in dem einen sprechen, und dass in dem andern gewöhnlich von ihnen erzählt wird. Leider viele Dramen sind nur dialogirte Romane, und es wäre nicht unmöglich, ein Drama in Briefen zu schreiben. — Im Roman sollen vorzüglich Gesinnungen und Begebenheiten vorgestellt werden, im Drama Charaktere und Thaten. Der Roman muss langsam gehen, und die Gesinnungen der Hauptfigur müssen, es sei auf welche Weise es wolle, das Vordringen des Ganzen zur Entwicklung aufhalten. Das Drama soll eilen, und der Charakter der Hauptfigur muss sich nach dem Ende drängen, und nur aufgehalten werden. Der Romanheld muss leidend, wenigstens nicht im hohen Grade wirkend sein; von dem dramatischen verlangt man Wirkung und That."


[In the novel as well as in the drama, it is human nature and human action that we see. The difference between these sorts of fiction lies not merely in their outward form; not merely in the circumstance that the personages of the one are made to speak, while those of the other have commonly their history narrated. Unfortunately many dramas are but novels, which proceed by dialogue; and it would not be impossible to write a drama in the shape of letters. —But in the novel, it is chiefly sentiments and events that are exhibited; in the drama, it is characters and deeds. The novel must go slowly forward; and the sentiments of the hero, by some means or another, must restrain the tendency of the whole to unfold itself and to conclude. The drama, on the other hand, must hasten, and the character of the hero must press forward to the end; it does not restrain, but is restrained. The novel-hero must be suffering, at least he must not in a high degree be active; in the dramatic one, we look for activity and deeds.]

Feasting at Marriages

"Unter allen Festen ist das Hochzeitsfest das unschicklichste; keines sollte mehr in Stille, Demuth und Hoffnung begangen werden als dieses."

Do. V.13

24
[Of all festivities, the marriage-festival appears the most unsuitable: calmness, humility and silent hope befit no ceremony more than this.]

Experience

"Alles, was uns begegnet, lässt Spuren zurück, alles trägt unmerklich zu unserer Bildung bei; doch es ist gefährlich, sich davon Rechenschaft geben zu wollen. Wir werden dabei entweder stolz und lässig, oder niedergeschlagen und kleinmütig, und eins ist für die Folge so hinderlich als das andere."

Do. VII.1

[Everything that happens to us leaves some trace behind it, everything contributes imperceptibly to form us. Yet often it is dangerous to take a strict account of that. For either we grow proud and negligent, or downcast and dispirited; and both are equally injurious in their consequences.]

Notes

It is characteristic that the first three entries are in German and from Goethe. Gissing learnt German at Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge, Cheshire (1871-1872), and at Owens College, Manchester (1873-1876); he was more interested in German than in French at the time. In his recollections Henry Hick noted that in their Manchester days "George talked of German and said what a wonderful language it was, and he repeated some verses." Whereupon Hick objected that he did not understand the language. "But," Gissing replied, "listen to the music of it" (pp. 8-9). He expressed his admiration for Goethe in his correspondence on many occasions, but nowhere more clearly than in a letter to his brother Algernon of April 24, 1881: "Heavens, what a man that Goethe was; certainly no one comes between Shakespeare and him" (LMF, p. 96, Berg Coll.).

It was in the Boston Public Library at the end of 1876 that he began to read Goethe in a fairly systematic way. His American notebook contains six quotations from the German writer in the original, among them: "Only the law can give us freedom," "It vexes men that truth is so simple," and "Against stupidity, even the Gods fight in vain," which he later quoted in a letter to Algernon of March 9, 1879 (Berg Coll.). While in Waltham, Massachusetts, a few months later, he sent a copy of Goethe's Gedichte to Algernon (Sotheby's Catalogue of July 7, 1927), and only a few days before he wrote down the three entries above, he exhorted his brother to imitate him: "I particularly wish you to take up German. I am glad to say that I now read it almost as easily as English, and I do not suffer a week to
pass without getting through some Goethe or Lessing, or other German classic" (letter of March 27, 1880, misdated in LMF, p. 64, Yale). In the late 1890s he recorded in his Commonplace Book that "a thorough knowledge of Goethe, Heine and a few of the Germans" was one of his "modest intellectual ambitions."

In these three entries we catch a first glimpse of the catholicity of Gissing's interests. The budding novelist fervently transcribes a theoretical statement on two literary genres which helps him to clarify his own artistic aims. The moralist in him approves of Goethe's criticism of a social convention (the wedding festivities), while the recorder of human experience fascinated by the building of human personality draws from the third quotation a lesson in self-control.

The common denominator is Goethe's quiet determination to analyse and understand, then to pass judgment; also human nature in its relation to the world, whether in actual life or in its artistic representation. Gissing did not care for marriage-festivals: his three unions, licit or illicit, first with the street-girl who had been the instrument of his disgrace in Manchester, then with a working-girl he did not love and only expected to become a decent housewife, and finally with a French bourgeoise he could not publicly acknowledge as his wife, were all contracted on the sly. In none of the three cases was there any reason for exultation. By the time he wrote these three entries his sensibilities had been grievously scarred by experience, and his attitude in daily life wavered between painful shyness and pride in singularity. Goethe's wisdom was balm to his wounds and fuel to his creative power.

4

Prayer

"Nous lisons que le Seigneur dit à Moïse: 'Laisse-moi, afin que ma fureur s'embrase,' et à Jérémie: 'Cesse d'intercéder pour ce peuple et ne me fais point obstacle.' Par ces paroles, le Seigneur déclare lui-même manifestement que les prières des saints mettent, pour ainsi dire, à sa colère un frein qui l'enchaîne et l'empêche de sevir contre les coupables dans la mesure de leurs fautes. La justice le conduit naturellement à la répression, mais les supplications des fidèles fléchissent son cœur, et lui faisant, en quelque sorte, violence, l'arrêtent malgré lui. [. . .] Le Seigneur ordonne de ne pas prier pour les impies. Le juste prie malgré la défense du Seigneur, et il obtient de lui ce qu'il demande, et il change la sentence du juge irrité."

Abélard to Héloïse. III.
(An amazing commentary on the force of prayer; the essence of the Christian religion. Its immorality could scarcely be surpassed.)

[We read that the Lord said to Moses: "Let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them," and to Jeremiah: "Therefore pray not thou for this people nor stand thou in my path." By these words the Lord himself makes it abundantly clear that the prayers of the godly act, as it were, as a bridle on his wrath and prevent it from raging against sinners in proportion to their sins. Justice naturally demands restraint, but the intercession of the faithful touches his heart and restrains him, as it were, forcibly, against his will. [. . .] The Lord forbids prayers to be offered up to him on behalf of the ungodly. The just man, however, prays despite the Lord’s interdiction, and he obtains his request and alters the sentence of the angry judge.]

Notes

Abélard and Héloïse figure nowhere in Gissing’s published writings; nor do they in his correspondence. He cared little for medieval thought, although Abélard, who has been called the knight errant of dialectics (Michelet) and was viewed in the nineteenth century as a precursor of rationalism, might have held some attraction for him. Rather than to any short-lived interest in the twelfth-century theologian and philosopher, this entry testifies to his lifelong determination to unmask sophistry and to criticise what he would have called spiritual imposture. Abélard’s positing that man can communicate with a supraterrrestrial being in a personal relationship must have provoked his intellect in the same way as Margaret Gissing’s comments on his attitude to Christianity in Born in Exile (Commonplace Book, p. 48). But while he was content to shrug his shoulders after reading his sister’s inept remonstrance, Gissing here denounced the baneful moral consequences of Abélard’s spiritual jugglery.

The French translation quoted here is that by M. Gréard, originally published by Garnier frères, the Paris publishers, in 1869, and reprinted four times in the 1870s.

5, 6, 7, 8

Faults

"What are faults, what are the outward details of a life; if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptations, true, often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it, be forgotten?"

Carlyle. Hero-Worship. II.

27
Prophet & Poet

"The Vates Prophet, we might say, has seized that sacred mystery rather on the moral side, as Good and Evil, Duty and Prohibition; the Vates Poet on what the Germans call the aesthetic side, as Beautiful, and the like."

Do. III.

Immorality

"Without hands a man might have feet, and could still walk: but, consider it, —without morality, intellect were impossible for him: [a thoroughly immoral man] could not know anything at all! To know a thing, what we can call knowing, a man must first love the thing, sympathize with it: that is, be virtuously related to it."

Do. III.

Sovereigns

"Without sovereigns, true sovereigns, temporal and spiritual, I see nothing possible but an anarchy; the hatefullest of things."

Do. IV.

Notes

In his early twenties, Gissing was greatly attracted by Carlyle, whose vituperative style and forceful thinking fitted in with his radical instincts. Carlyle's appeal to him was also partly due to his being an exponent of and commentator upon German culture. A letter to Algernon Gissing of September 18, 1884, links Goethe with Carlyle: "It is to me an excellent sign that you appreciate Lewes's Goethe [. . . ] Read now all Carlyle's Essays bearing on Goethe; they will keep up your zeal. And then you will come to Goethe himself, who is not to be lightly approached" (MacGregor Library, University of Virginia). His letters of the 1880s bristle with allusions to Carlyle, whose name was a significant feature in his mental landscape. On February 26, 1880, he noted with pleasure that "to a certain petition some years ago Carlyle signed himself 'A writer of books'" (letter to Algernon, Yale). When Algernon began to give lectures on political subjects locally, George made a suggestion to him: "Look, by the bye, into the article on Parliament in Carlyle's 'Latter-Day Pamphlets,' for a few good ideas on the whole subject of Parliamentary government" (January 30, 1881, Yale). He had been reading this title earlier in the month, finding in it "admirable ideas on parliamentary institutions, etc", and was delighted to come across Carlyle's famous
definition of the British public— "twenty-seven millions, mostly fools" (letter to Algernon, January 16, 1881, LMF, pp. 88-89, John Spiers).

When Carlyle died on February 4, 1881, Gissing read the obituary articles devoted to him in the press. A week later Algernon received these comments: "I have just risen from the memoir of Carlyle in the Times. I know well with what interest you will read it. It is an account of a life's work which gives one new supplies of energy, fresh spirit to attack the day's work and make it a worthy link between the efforts of yesterday and to-morrow. Does it not seem now as if all our really great men were leaving us, and, what is worse, without much prospect as yet of any to take their place[?]" (letter of February 11, 1881, LMF, p. 92, John Spiers).

Just as he found in the contemplation of Dickens's life an unfailing source of energy, so he regarded Carlyle as a prestigious influence and went on to express his intellectual allegiance to him: "What a frightful thing would be a living generation utterly made up of mediocrities, even though the honest and well-meaning exceeded the charlatans!" He regretted that Carlyle had been buried at Ecclefechan, and not in Westminster Abbey, for "the nation has a right to construct a Temple out of the graves of the greatest men." When in the following May he read in the Standard that the King of Denmark had dissolved the Lower House in his country because not a single useful bill had been passed by its members in six months, he commented to Algernon: "Now how that would have rejoiced Carlyle!" Gissing's temporary Positivist opinions oddly coincided with Carlyle's reactionary demand for order and efficiency (letter to Algernon of May 15, 1881, LMF, p. 98, John Spiers).

The only explicit reference to On Heroes and Hero-Worship occurs in a letter of November 9, 1881, to Margaret Gissing (LMF, pp. 104-05, Berg Coll.), who was then eighteen: "Good that you have read Hero-Worship,—a book to be read many times and deeply pondered over." That Gissing was thinking of himself when he transcribed entry 5 can hardly be questioned. He liked to think his self of the moment was unrecognizably different from his former self. "I am beginning to have a literary past; in meeting the young writers of to-day, I feel a veteran," he wrote to Bertz in 1894. "And how strange a thing it is when, in walking about the streets of London, I pass the streets where I lived in those days of misery! Of course that man and I are not identical. He is a relative of mine, who died long ago; that's all" (letter of November 24, LGB, p. 191). Entry 6 echoes his belatedly recorded half-belief in manicheism and his exalted vision of the poet's role, on which he had written an eloquent passage in Workers in the Dawn (1880). Entry 7, in which Carlyle attempts to build a bridge between intellectual capacity and perception of good and evil, is interesting in that Gissing may conceivably have been tempted, when pondering these words, mentally to cross the bridge in a sense opposite to that suggested by Carlyle, and to see morality where there is intellect. As for the last entry, it accords better with Henry Ryecroft's meditations than with Gissing's. For sovereigns he had, on the whole, little love. Queen Victoria was no exception.
As a footnote to this first series of Carlyle entries it is appropriate to recall that it is no doubt Gissing's vivid interest in Carlyle's work that accounts for his admiration for the achievement of "the German Carlyle," Jean-Paul Richter.

Reformation of the World

"If thou ask [me] therefore, [. . .] What is to be done? allow me to reply: By thee, for the present, almost nothing. Thou there, the thing for thee to do is, if possible, to cease to be a hollow sounding-shell of hearsays, egoisms, purblind dilettantisms; and become, were it on the infinitely small scale, a faithful discerning soul. Thou shalt descend into thy inner man, and see if there be any traces of a soul there; till then there can be nothing done! O brother, we must if possible resuscitate some soul and conscience in us, exchange our dilettantisms for sincerities, our dead hearts of stone for living hearts of flesh. Then shall we discern, not one thing, but, in clearer or dimmer sequence, a whole endless host of things that can be done."

Aristocracy

"Such blessed Parliament and, were it once in perfection, blessed Aristocracy of the Wisest, god-honoured and man-honoured, [the present Editor] does look for, more and more perfected,—as the topmost blessed practical apex of a whole world reformed from sham-worship, informed anew with worship, with truth and blessedness!"

Formulas

"Formulas, too, as we call them, have a reality in Human Life. They are real as the very skin and muscular tissue of a Man’s Life; and a most blessed indispensable thing, so long as they have vitality withal, and are a living skin and tissue to him! No man, or man’s life, can go abroad and do business in the world without skin and tissues. No; first of all, these have to fashion themselves,—as indeed they spontaneously and inevitably do. Foam itself, and this is worth thinking of, can harden into oyster-shell; all living objects do by necessity form to themselves a skin."
Aristocracy

"A High Class without duties to do is like a tree planted on precipices; from the roots of which all the earth has been crumbling."

Do. Book III.8.

Work

"But above all, where thou findest Ignorance, Stupidity, Brute-mindedness, [. . .] attack it, I say; smite it wisely, unweariedly, and rest not while thou livest and it lives; but smite, smite, in the name of God! The Highest God, as I understand it, does audibly so command thee; still audibly, if thou have ears to hear. He, even He, with his unspoken voice, awfuler than any Sinai thunders or syllabled speech of Whirlwinds; for the SILENCE of deep Eternities, of Worlds from beyond the morning-stars, does it not speak to thee? The unborn Ages; the old Graves, with their long-mouldering dust, the very tears that wetted it now all dry, —do not these speak to thee, what ear hath not heard? The deep Death-kingdoms, the Stars in their never-resting courses, all Space and all Time, proclaim it to thee in continual silent admonition. Thou too, if ever man should, shalt work while it is called Today. For the Night cometh, wherein no man can work."

Do. III.12.

Reward

"Was it thy aim and life-purpose to be filled with good things for thy heroism; to have a life of pomp and ease, and be what men call 'happy,' in this world, or in any other world? I answer for thee deliberately, No. The whole spiritual secret of the new epoch lies in this, that thou canst answer for thyself, with thy whole clearness of head and heart, deliberately, No!"

Do. Do.

A New Religion

"I am weary of this sick croaking for a Morrison's-Pill religion; for any and for every such. I want none such; and discern all such to be impossible. The resuscitation of old liturgies fallen dead; much more, the manufacture of new liturgies that will never be alive: how hopeless! Stil­litisms, eremite fanaticisms and fakeerisms; spasmodic agonistic posture­makings, and narrow, cramped, morbid, if forever noble wrestlings: all this
is not a thing desirable to me. It is a thing the world has done once, —when its beard was not grown as now!"

Do. III.15.

Wealth

"The wealth of a man is the number of things which he loves and blesses, which he is loved and blessed by!"

Do. IV.5.

Notes

*Past and Present* was one of Carlyle's books Gissing liked best. In a letter of June 1, 1881, to Algernon he praised the passage which appears here as entry 13: "There is much fine poetry in the book. Read Chap XII, Book III, on 'Reward,' —a marvellous prose-poem. In fact I chiefly like to think of Carlyle as a poet. His mission was to inspire with a lofty enthusiasm; scarcely at all to give men a practical direction" (John Spiers). This was indeed a turning-point in his appreciation of Carlyle; already the writer's social message was losing in his eyes much of its interest. At all events, to the end of his life, *Past and Present* remained vivid in his mind. The Reverend Wyvern alludes to the book when he remarks in Ch. XXIX of *Demos* that he approves of the "substitution of human relations between employer and employed for the detestable 'nexus of cash payment.'" Henry Ryecroft contemplates the possibility of becoming an owl-eyed pedant (Winter XVI), recalling Carlyle's phrase: "Valiant Wisdom escorted by owl-eyed Pedantry."

In his *Commonplace Book* (p. 40) Gissing listed *Sartor Resartus* among his favourite books, and his diary and correspondence attest to a lasting, if decreasing, attachment to Carlyle, whose biting expressions he was apt to use when he himself waxed vituperative. In the same place he comments on an astounding quotation from a letter of Newman to W. G. Ward: "How can one help thinking of Carlyle's 'no more brains than a rabbit'?" Another phrase of Carlyle's—"exodus from Houndsditch," by which he meant the freeing of Christianity from the garb of Old Testament dogma—recurred at least three times under Gissing's pen, in his scrap-book as a subject for an essay, in *The Whirlpool* (Part III, Ch. I) and in *Henry Ryecroft* (Winter XXII).

His interest in Carlyle was kept alive by his move to Chelsea in early September 1882. He soon realized that his lodgings in Oakley Crescent were very close to the Scottish writer's former home, which he liked to walk past. When a statue in memory of Carlyle was raised on the Embankment he devoted a sonnet to it:
Carlyle's Statue

A patch of garden by the river-side,
With seats where children cluster; to and fro
Upon the stream the fretting steamboats go,
And barges this or that way with the tide.
A Statue, with lined forehead and sad-eye'd,
Rear'd mid the walk, sits gazing on the flow,
Beholding not its freightage, swift or slow,—
Marking but how the eternal waters glide.

Time is not. Though the wasting hours are toll'd
From this church-tower, which spoke to him of old,
When the dim street hard-by his footsteps trod.
Alike the mom, loud noon, or twilight pale,
Or when night comes, with infinite peace, to veil
The sad eyes gazing on the darkened flood.

He was pleased with his performance: "I believe it to be one of the best things I have yet written. I am penning a good deal of verse just now, and shall doubtless some day alarm the country with a volume of very heterodox description" (letter to Algernon, May 3, 1883, and unpublished poem, Yale). Books and articles of Carlyle interest he readily perused or deliberately sought. For instance, we find him reading Froude's Life as well as Jane Carlyle's letters in June 1883 and, incidentally, urging his sister Margaret to ponder on Carlyle's biography of Schiller (letter of November 23, 1881, Berg Coll.) and on the chapter entitled "Natural Supernaturalism" in Sartor Resartus, which, he said, expressed exactly his own position with regard to the universe (letter of September 15, 1883, LMF, p. 132, Berg Coll.).

Gradually, however, Carlyle's writings became for him a matter of memory rather than a stimulus. A letter of May 11, 1885, to Algernon (Yale) contains a reference to Goethe's last words as quoted by Carlyle, and another of August 25, 1887, to his sister Ellen offers a passing remark to the effect that "Old Carlyle's gospel of the miraculousness of everything about one," which mirrors Goethe's pantheism, "is, in truth, obvious enough, but one needs perpetually to be reminded of it" (LMF, p. 198, Berg Coll.). After rereading Sartor Resartus on holiday at Seascale he relished his friend Bertz's article on "Carlyle als Berufsschriftsteller" in the Deutsche Presse for November 1888, but his appreciation soon became more discriminating. Witness his relating to his brother on September 19, 1891: "Am reading (for the first time), Carlyle's Cromwell. Carlyle as a mere prophet is now (humour aside), little palatable to me. But as a historian he remains de-
lightful.—I hope to buy the four volumes of his life, some day, in Longman's Silver Library (3/6 each). One of the best and most entertaining biographies in existence, all twaddling clamour notwithstanding" (LMF, p. 323, Pforzheimer Library).

After that his diary offers a number of significant references. In October 1893 he reread Froude's biography, which he borrowed from the Brixton Public Library. He recorded visits to Carlyle's house in Chelsea in 1894 and 1895 (when it became a museum), dipped into The French Revolution in 1898, and turned once more to Sartor Resartus in late 1899, passing a glowing comment on it in a letter to Bertz, yet sighing: "If only Carlyle had more closely adhered to that doctrine of philosophic idealism! His influence would probably have been deeper and more lasting." All the while his own publications were studded with casual references to the man who played a major part in his intellectual development: Isabel Clarendon (Vol. II, Ch. VI and XV), Thyrza (Ch. XXVIII and XXXV), Born in Exile (Part I, Ch. III), The Whirlpool (Part III, Ch. 1), Our Friend the Charlatan (Ch. XVI) and Henry Ryecroft (Winter XVIII, XX and XXII) all pay some form of homage to Carlyle. In this last book he acknowledges that his dislike of science was nourished by his reading of Carlyle.

All these entries are echoed in Gissing's works and correspondence. Throughout his adult life he denounced charlatans and egotists, and saw his time as one of shallow ideals; his fiction is one long plea for sincerity. Wisdom, in his eyes, largely consisted in keeping oneself apart, an attitude which, in September 1885, he regretted William Morris had chosen not to adopt. There is a statement in a letter to Algernon of November 3, 1880, which strikes a note perceptible in entry 9: he says that he is determined "to show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society [...] to preach an enthusiasm for just and high ideals in this age of unmitigated egotism and "shop"" (LMF, p. 83, Yale). Both his wish that his country might be ruled by an aristocracy of the intellect, and his distrust of a hereditary aristocracy which has ceased to be conscious of its duties, have counterparts in entries 10 and 12. The emptiness of some words and formulas, in literary criticism for example, was a recurring subject of complaint in his correspondence and commonplace book, and the personal applicability of the final words in "Formulas" scarcely requires elaboration—poverty had hardened his heart. Ignorance and stupidity, as denounced in entry 13, he would always gladly have a tilt at. A clever attack upon imposture or foolishness was a treat to him. In this respect the writings of his friend Edward Clodd afforded him matter for intellectual delight. After reading Clodd's presidential address to the Folklore Society in 1895 he commented to him: "With no little gusto I have read your concluding remarks on 'psychic' superstitions. That kind of thing is hard to speak of with suavity" (May 5, 1895, The Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd, pp. 34-35). Clodd's devastatingly critical review of Farrar's book on The Bible: Its Meaning and Supremacy (1897) drew a typical remark from his pen: "As always, your blade twinkles merrily whilst doing execution. I had a laugh now and
then, and the thing did me good" (November 6, 1897, ibid., pp. 46-47). Carlyle's attack on the resuscitation of old liturgies and on the manufacture of new ones (entry 15) calls to mind Gissing's assault on ritualism in his first novel, Workers in the Dawn, and the subject of his discarded story, "Among the Prophets", which he wrote during the winter of 1899-1900, but decided not to publish. Ultimately, his old admiration for Carlyle probably helped to predispose him in favour of Nietzsche.

The last sentence of entry 13 (from St. John, 9:4) remained a favourite saying of Gissing’s. Early uses of it, in a slightly different form, can be found in letters to Algernon of May 2, 1880 and May 4, 1881 (LMF, pp. 68 and 97, Yale and Berg Coll. respectively).

17

Pity, Pardon & Love

"Là où il y a beaucoup à plaindre, il y a beaucoup à pardonner; et là où l'on trouve à pardonner, sois certain qu'il y a quelque chose à aimer."

George Sand. "Consuelo."

[Where there is much to pity, there is much to pardon, and where there is much to pardon, you may be sure there is something to love.]

Notes

At this stage of Extracts from my Reading Gissing reread his American Notebook (Yale), from which he transcribed entries 17 to 25. The old notebook contains a number of George Sand quotations besides the present one. On the inside cover, he wrote four titles by the French writer: Lettres d'un voyageur, Mauprat, François le Champi and Valvèdre. The quotations come from the second and fourth titles as well as from Indiana, Jacques and Consuelo. They are almost exclusively concerned with love. Young Gissing, after his expulsion from Owens College, found much in George Sand's writings to justify or excuse his behaviour. Her romanticism, so out of keeping with Victorian conventions, he viewed as a liberating power.

There is abundant evidence of his interest in George Sand in the diary and correspondence from the mid-1880s to his last years. He acknowledged his large debt to her (and to Balzac and Turgenev) in his literary apprenticeship, and did his best to make his relatives read her works. After lending La Petite Fadette to William, he was more successful with Ellen than with Algernon, to whom he wrote on May 26, 1887: "I shall ever deplore your hesitation before the world's greatest novelists, Balzac and George Sand" (Berg Coll.). Algernon had no use for Continental litera-
ture. The following February George did send some "village stories" by George Sand, hoping that Algernon might take a few hints from them, but there is no evidence they were much help, nor that Margaret, to whom he once posted a volume containing "Le Chêne parlant" and "La Fleur sacrée," took to la bonne dame de Nohant.

In an important letter of August 20, 1886, Gissing related to Ellen how he read ten or a dozen of George Sand's novels in the Boston Public Library. "Is not Consuelo purely delightful? It is a study of the artistic nature. How glorious is all that free, joyous, southern life! What a poetry is in the book! What a sweet musical style! George Sand is a right splendid woman. I have just been reading some volumes of her letters, and those of her later years made me think of Goethe, so calm and wise they are—indeed she resembles Goethe in many ways" (LMF, p. 184, Berg Coll.). Ellen did read the three volumes of Consuelo and the Lettres d'un voyageur. Repeatedly Gissing praised George Sand's style: "I hope Consuelo is some comfort to you. It carries one off into a sort of fairy land" (letter to Ellen of October 28, 1886, Yale).

The parallel between George Sand and Goethe reminds us that Henry James, in his essay on George Sand which first appeared in the New York monthly, The Galaxy (July 1877), wrote of "George Sand's analogy with Goethe." Henry James wrote there that "in form 'L'Histoire de ma Vie' greatly resembles the 'Dichtung und Wahrheit.' There is the same charming, complacent expatiation upon youthful memoirs, the same arbitrary confidences and silences, the same digressions and general judgements, the same fading away of the narrative on the threshold of maturity." Henry James called her "nothing if not philosophic," saying that her books "have a great deal of wisdom." Her mind, he wrote, was "open to all things, nobly accessible to experience." Though James did not say so, this was, as Gissing will have realized, tantamount to saying that her mind was similar to Goethe's. Gissing, who clearly knew Henry James's essay on Musset, which appeared in The Galaxy the previous month (June 1877), may reasonably be deemed to have known this essay on George Sand; The Galaxy is mentioned, with the editor's name and professional address, at the beginning of the American Notebook, obviously in Gissing's Chicago days (March-July 1877).

Gissing's diary shows him reading again various George Sand titles in 1888: La Dernière Aldini, François le Champi, Le Péché de M. Antoine, Elle et Lui, Lettres d'un voyageur. When staying in Paris in October of the same year, he attended a lecture by Francisque Sarcey on François le Champi. At Brixton he had a portrait of George Sand in the drawing-room and taught his infant son to recognize it. Late diary jottings attest that he read Mariéton's volume on George Sand and Musset in October 1898 and her letters to the poet in August 1900. Clearly his enthusiasm for her work was a lasting one. In his own works she appears in The Emancipated (Part II, Ch. II), Denzil Quarrier (Ch. IV) and in the short story "A Lodger in Maze Pond."
"Aimer est le grand point; qu'importe la maîtresse? Qu'importe le flacon pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse?"

A. de Musset.

[Loving is the main thing; what does the mistress matter? What does the bottle matter, provided one has drunk of it?]

Notes

This entry also occurs in the American Notebook, where it is followed by three other Musset entries—two well-known quotations ("C'était dans la nuit brune . . .", "Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux . . .") and an equally famous anecdote: "Someone at French Academy said 'Musset s'absente trop.' Another rejoined: 'Il s'absinthe trop.'" Like George Sand, Alfred de Musset appears in a letter to Ellen of August 2, 1885 (LMF, p. 160, Berg Coll.), in which Gissing listed the great writers in various languages to whom he intended to keep. The present entry, however, was very likely made in 1880.

There can be little doubt that Gissing owed his interest in Musset to Henry James's essay "Alfred de Musset," which first appeared in The Galaxy in June 1877. In that essay James quoted the present entry and the three other Musset entries in Gissing's American Notebook. James also wrote on other French writers favoured by Gissing, notably Balzac.

Musset's pagan romanticism, his apology for love, his extreme sensitivity and scant concern for the laws of society had no equivalent in the poetry of the Victorian age unless one thinks of Swinburne. He had therefore much to offer to a young man who had so openly defied morality. In the poet who had written that "great artists have no country" Gissing was prepared to see a standard bearer of artistic freedom well worth following.

"The thing, call it what name we will, is simply the enabling ourselves whether by reading, observing, or thinking, to come as near as we can to the
firm, intelligible law of things, and thus get a basis for a less confused action and a more complete perfection than we have at present."

Matthew Arnold.

Notes

Of the six quotations on cultural matters from Matthew Arnold entered in the American Notebook, this is the second. The others are concerned with literary criticism, with culture as "a fresh and free play of the best thoughts upon our stock notions and habits," which "places human perfection in an internal condition." Although there are comparatively few references to Arnold in Gissing’s papers, there is no doubt that he read him with gusto and was influenced by him. In a letter of January 19, 1879, to Algernon he wrote: "Articles by Frederic Harrison, Richard Congreve, Swinburne or Matthew Arnold you should never miss" (LMF, p. 40, John Spiers). Harrison asked Arnold to read Gissing’s first published novel, in which Culture and Anarchy is alluded to, but there is no evidence that Arnold complied with his request. Later, in the days of Thyrza, Gissing became acquainted with an agnostic parson, Charles Anderson, who—he noted with pleasure—corresponded with Arnold. Two diary entries are relevant: on July 4, 1895 he visited Arnold’s grave at Laleham, and he had a curious dream about him on the night of April 29-30, 1902.

Matthew Arnold is among the more frequently mentioned authors in Gissing’s novels. In Workers in the Dawn (Ch. VII) and Thyrza (Ch. XV) the familiar phrase "sweetness and light" is quoted; so is "sweet reasonableness" in The Whirlpool (Part I, Ch. XII) and the essayist himself appears in In the Year of Jubilee (Part IV, Ch. I), The Crown of Life (Ch. XXXV), Our Friend the Charlatan (Ch. XXVIII) and in the short story entitled "The Pessimist of Plato Road," as author of the phrase "the fitness of things."

Cora Robey’s thoughtful article, "In the Year of Jubilee: A Satire on Late Victorian Culture" (Tennessee Studies in Literature, Vol. XVII, 1972, pp. 121-27) established a link between Arnold’s exposition of misdirected mid-Victorian pride and Gissing’s commentary on the so-called intellectual "progress" of England in the 1880s. Gissing’s lifelong commitment to culture certainly deserved to be seen in the context of Arnold’s struggle for cultural development.
20

Life & Death

τίς δ' ἢ δὲν, εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἐστὶ καθάνειν,
tὸ καθάνειν δὲ ζῆν;

Euripides.

[Who knows if life is death, and death life?]

Notes

Gissing began to study Greek at Back Lane School, Wakefield, and after his father's death in 1870 went on with the subject at Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge. Greek was again one of the subjects he read at Owens College, Manchester, under Professor J. G. Greenwood, who was also the Principal. During his four academic years there he won several Greek prizes. His American Notebook contains references to Euripides in notes taken from Frederick Apthorp Paley's The Iliad of Homer, with English Notes (2 vols., 1866), as well as the present entry. In a letter of August 2, 1885, to his sister Ellen he included Euripides among the Greek writers on whom he intended to concentrate (LMF, p. 160, Berg Coll.). According to Morley Roberts, "among the Greeks his chief joy was the tragedians, and there was no single play or fragment of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that he did not know almost by heart" (The Private Life of Henry Maitland, Ch. XIII). Gissing remembered the author of Iphigenia at Aulis in Thyrza (Ch. XXXV) and his Fragments in New Grub Street (Ch. XXVII).

This quotation from Euripides reminds one of Morley Roberts's comments in The Private Life of Henry Maitland (Ch. V) on Gissing's failure to understand metaphysics. Doubtless, late in life Gissing found the discussion of metaphysical questions unrewarding. Still, his thirst for encyclopaedic knowledge in his youthful days knew no bounds, and his early interest in some ancient and modern philosophers is on record. Whatever Euripides may have meant exactly by this question on life and death, it gave Gissing food for thought. It is doubtful whether he would have troubled to write down Euripides' words in 1900, having by then come to the conclusion that time could not be more "solidly wasted" (his own phrase) than in pondering such a question.

21

God

"The pure spirit of man that men call God."

Swinburne.
Both in the American Notebook and in the manuscript of Extracts from my Reading this quotation appears in a slightly distorted form: "The pure spirit of man, which men call God." It must have appealed to him strongly as it was in keeping with his agnosticism and positivism. Gissing at the time was responding to Swinburne's republican ideas as much as to his verse. In his letter of January 19, 1879, to his brother Algernon, George said he should never miss an article by Swinburne. In 1883 his enthusiasm was unabated. Referring to Ruskin he remarked: "Yes, I go with him very far, and can always exult in the mere glory of his English, which is in prose what Swinburne is in verse, the most artistic work of the day" (letter of May 12 to Margaret Gissing, LMF, p. 126, Berg Coll.). When the English Illustrated Magazine began publication, he read a poem by Swinburne in it and invited his brother to "notice Swinburne's peculiar habit of rhyming on an adjective, whereof the noun succeeds in the following line" (September 29, 1883, Yale). The presentation copy of The Unclassed which he sent to Swinburne in June 1884 was an obvious token of admiration, perhaps also of gratitude if Swinburne did read, as he expressed himself willing to, the verse which Gissing intended to collect and about which he had requested the poet's opinion in October 1883. We next find Gissing reading Selections from Swinburne on June 30, 1888, and in the mid-1890s Studies in Prose and Verse and Swinburne's book on Ben Jonson. However his estimate of the poet's later production had fallen sharply by 1888. An entry in his Commonplace Book (p. 31) reads like a wholesale condemnation: "I am utterly aweary of Swinburne's poetry (1888). A glance at his recently pubd. selection shows me how far I have travelled since I delighted in him. His verbosity is crushing. Just one or two pieces ('Itylus' for example) I am fond of, but even these solely for the metre. Fifty years hence, Swinburne will be as good as forgotten. He has not a thought in all the range of his work." In an informal assessment of English literature, he concluded, for Eduard Bertz's benefit, that "Swinburne has fallen into meaningless verbosity, and there is no one else whatever" (March 26, 1890, LGB, p. 105). Still, when a journal asked him "Who should be Laureate?" after Tennyson's death, he unhesitatingly supported Swinburne (Idler, March 1895, pp. 404-05). He had two more opportunities to state his opinion of the poet, in his anti-war article "Tyrtaeus" (Review of the Week, November 4, 1899, pp. 6-7), a condemnation of Swinburne's and Kipling's warlike poetry, and in the review which the Times Literary Supplement asked him to write of a Swinburne article on Dickens (July 25, 1902, p. 219). In Gissing's short story, "The Honeymoon," the bride, Phyllis, chooses to spend her honeymoon with Waldron in Sark. "Phyllis had been reading Swinburne; she dreamt of green seas roaring upon cliffs of granite—ideal music for the commencement of a wedded life which she was determined should at all hazards avoid the humdrum, the vulgar, and exhibit a union of souls preserving their vital freedom." She has written a three-volume novel which her practical husband demands her to suppress at proof stage. "An escapade of this sort would shame us," he sternly observes. "I have a
serious career before me, and can't afford to be ridiculous." Swinburne's influence has fostered Phyllis's "girlish conceit and silliness."

22

Obscenity

"Obscenity, which is ever blaspheming against the divine beauty in life."

Shelley. Defence of Poetry.

Notes

The scarcity of references to Shelley in Gissing's correspondence does not betoken any lack of interest. He had in childhood found the works of the poet on his father's shelves (Edward Moxon, 1867: copy signed "TWG" in Alfred Gissing's library in 1971). This volume is one of those Henry Ryecroft has in mind in Summer V of his Private Papers; a quotation from it appears in Spring VIII.

The present quotation, which can be read as a reconciliation of Shelley's idealism and Victorian prudery, originates from the American Notebook. It is in harmony with the well-known passage in Workers in the Dawn in which the heroine, Helen Norman, relates her "mind-growth" and pays homage to Shelley as well as to Comte and Schopenhauer (Ch. XIV). In a letter of February 3, 1882, Gissing encouraged his sister Ellen to read the romantic poet: "I have vast faith in imaginative literature of all kinds. If the choice had to be made I would rather have a girl well acquainted with Dickens and George Eliot and Shelley and Browning than with all the science in all the textbooks" (LMF, p. 108, Berg Coll.). During his first trip to Rome he visited Shelley's grave in the Protestant cemetery and copied the inscription in his diary (December 1, 1888). On August 14, 1889, he read some Shelley and jotted down in his Commonplace Book (p. 24) some remarks on capital punishment suggested partly by his reading of Shelley, partly by the condemnation to death of Mrs. Maybrick. The death of Tennyson prompted him to place the author of In Memoriam above Shelley, not absolutely but as regards his chance of securing a place among the Immortals (letter to Bertz of November 3, 1892, p. 163). On June 20, 1896, his friend George Whale took him after an Omar Khayyám dinner to see the cottage near Marlow where Shelley lived. The last diary jotting concerning Shelley occurs on November 23, 1897, when the ecstatic contemplation of a sunset at Taranto "kept [him] thinking of Shelley's 'pale purple even."

Besides Workers in the Dawn and Henry Ryecroft, several other novels offer Shelleyan references. In Demos (Ch. XXI) Stella Westlake reads the verse of Shelley and the prose of Landor to Adela Mutimer, and "it was as though she had hitherto lived in deafness." We next meet, in Thyrza, the idealist Walter Egremont, who at

41
twenty-two published a volume of poems "obviously derived from study of Shelley" (Ch. II). A volume of Shelley's poetry is used symbolically in Part I, Ch. X of *The Emancipated*. Tarrant, the protagonist of *In the Year of Jubilee*, consciously borrows Shelley's "One word is too often profaned" in a letter to Nancy (Part VI, Ch. VI). This confirms, in connection with the present entry, that Gissing's mind readily associated the twin Shelleyan notions of purity and profanity. Also in character is Dyce Lashmar's rejection of Shelley in Ch. XV of *Our Friend the Charlatan*. The romantic poet would have deserved a mention in Ryecroft's discussion of puritanism, in which Milton and Cowley, then De Quincey and Landor, are opposed (Winter XXII).

23

*Good & Evil*

"For any particular action whatever in itself is neither good nor evil; what we are now doing, —drinking, singing, talking, none of these things are good in themselves, but the *mode* in which they are done stamps them with its own nature; and that which is done well, is good; and that which is done ill, is evil."

Plato; Banquet (Tr. Shelley.)

(So it is that Protestantism was advance on R. Catholicism, inasmuch as former denied efficacy of mere Works and demanded Faith. Plato of course means the *spirit* in which things are done. It is quite possible that what men call a crime may often, from the higher standpoint, be a virtuous act.)

*Notes*

Gissing certainly began to read Plato in the original as a student at Owens College, but he may have first read the *Banquet* in Shelley's translation, which is the source of the present entry, transcribed from the American Notebook. His comment is only to be found in *Extracts from my Reading*. Yet the quotation in itself throws sufficient light on Gissing's reasons for noting it down. He was obviously thinking of his own transgression in Manchester—stealing was apparently evil, but a theft committed in the name of social justice could assume the colour of a "virtuous act." This implied meditation on the nature of good and evil is worth associating with his treatment of the theme of robbery for seemingly noble purposes in the early American short stories, "Twenty Pounds" and "Joseph Yates' Temptation" among others. In *Demos* the Reverend Wyvern reads Plato, whom Gissing also mentions in his travel book *By the Ionian Sea* (Ch. IV).
In the first two lines of his gloss Gissing seems to misapply the religious distinction between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, a distinction which is itself too general to be useful. He was at the time under the influence of Positivism and his mind feasted on the patterns, real or imaginary, observable in the history of mankind.

24

Error

"Thou wilt not find any means of enlightening him whom God delivers over to error."

Koran

Notes

This entry—again a transcription from the American Notebook, with a change from "discover" to "find"—is one of the very few manifestations (outside the context of his enthusiasm for Schopenhauer) of Gissing's interest in Oriental religions and literature. It links up naturally with the Roman Catholic doctrine of invincible ignorance. More prosaically, Gissing viewed some forms of error and ignorance as instances of the limitations of human nature. "On an ungenerous soil it is vain to look for rich crops," he observed in Henry Ryecroft (Spring XXII).

The Koran is one of the books Emily Hood reads in A Life's Morning (Ch. V).

25

Degradation of Genius

"But when the ethereal portion of a man of genius is obscured, the earthly part assumes an influence the more uncontrollable, because the character is now thrown off the balance to which Providence had so nicely adjusted it, and which, in coarser natures, is adjusted by some other method."

N. Hawthorne. "The Artist of the Beautiful."

Notes

Although Thomas Gissing's copy of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse (London: George Routledge, 1851), which was still in Alfred Gissing's library in 1971, may have been on his son's shelves by the time he entered the present quotation in Extracts from my Reading, the quotation was copied from the American Notebook.
This apology for the behaviour of the man of genius whose "ethereal portion" is (temporarily?) obscured doubtless attracted Gissing's attention for autobiographical reasons. His own lapse may have seemed to him a minor instance of the phenomenon recorded by Hawthorne's sensitiveness.

There is some evidence that he was familiar with the works of the American novelist, as he was with those of the other Transcendentalists. Gissing had a special sympathy for Hawthorne, whose scepticism and working methods somehow resembled his own. His remarks about him are made in a manner which suggests that the two men might have found much to appreciate in each other. With his Puritan inheritance and his deep sense of guilt, Hawthorne was an unhappy man born at least a hundred years too soon, as Gissing arguably was. Their works are riddled with guilty secrets, with characters who, though bold enough when they yield to their deeper impulses, are burdened with a moral handicap. Hawthorne's work betrays his morbid concern with personal behaviour and responsibility, and this must have touched Gissing, whose own early morbid shyness was one of his least enviable characteristics. But his pity for the American novelist would seem to imply that he was conscious of his own stronger will power and artistic boldness. There is none of Hawthorne's basic ambiguity and sense of decorum in Gissing's work. Both men were concerned, in their own way, with the question of the relationship between morality and art, but Gissing's was the robuster personality.

In a letter to his sister Ellen dated March 14, 1882 (Yale), Gissing noted that he had been reading a Life of Hawthorne, "author of Twice Told Tales,"—doubtless Henry James's volume in the English Men of Letters series (1879)—which he had found very interesting. For some unknown reason there are many signs of curiosity about Hawthorne in his papers and correspondence for the year 1888. His Commonplace Book (p. 58) records his reading of Hawthorne's American Notebooks and his disappointment at coming across English place-names transplanted into an American context. "One feels cheated, and in a peculiarly depressing way. I have this feeling in reading Hawthorne's Note-Books. Indeed my sensation throughout is one of pity for the poor fellow, who had to feed his soul on such raw material." To Ellen again he sent this appreciative judgment of Hawthorne, following upon one of Crabbe, the Suffolk poet: "Besides his exquisite style, there is in Hawthorne an independence of conventional view which makes his work very valuable to all who are reading for the maturing of their thought [his sister was twenty-one]. One does not easily get weary of him" (August 30, 1888, LMF, p. 222, Berg Coll.). He was then reading The House of the Seven Gables, after a reperusal of The Blithedale Romance in June. When some months later he came across a ludicrously irrelevant estimation of Hawthorne in the Corriere di Napoli, he was amused: "Poor Hawthorne! Of whom is the man thinking?" he commented to Bertz (letter of November 9, 1888, LGB, p. 18) after noting the anecdote in his diary. His Commonplace Book testifies to a fresh reading of Hawthorne's American Notebooks in 1892. An entry for August 12, 1841, in which the author of The Scarlet Letter deplored the brutifying effect of manual labour in his brief stay at Brook Farm, is praised by
Gissing as a "good refutation of a vulgar idealism" (p. 37). The passage became the basis of Autumn XVII in Henry Ryecroft.

The affinities between the two writers are especially noticeable in their summaries of plots and their projects. They had in common a fascination for deterioration in human affairs, a delight in ironical endings, and a sensitiveness to their own position as outsiders which developed into notable interest in victims of circumstances. The following quotation from Hawthorne's American Notebooks will serve as a reminder of his wry response to what Gissing called the malignity of matter: "Two persons might be bitter enemies through life, and mutually cause the ruin of one another, and of all that were dear to them. Finally, meeting at the funeral of a grandchild, the offspring of a son and daughter married without their consent—and who, as well as the child, had been the victims of their hatred—they might discover that the supposed ground of the quarrel was altogether a mistake, and then be woefully reconciled" (The Portable Hawthorne, ed. Malcolm Cowley, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 612).

With this entry the series of nine successive entries which Gissing transcribed from his American Notebook comes to an end. The date at which he did this cannot be determined with certainty, but it was definitely before early May 1881, at which time he received from America the belongings he had left there as a pledge for part of his passage home. An entry from the Dispatch for March 31, 1878, on p. 34 of the notebook establishes that he had brought it back in his luggage in the autumn of 1877. Indeed the four entries from Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe (58 to 61) confirm that the American entries were transcribed some time before April 24, 1881.

26

Proselytes

"There is nothing so humiliating as to have one's original views on any subject repeated with approval by one incapable of really understanding them."

GRG.

Notes

This is the only personal entry in Extracts from my Reading. Whatever gift for aphorism and original thought Gissing had, may be judged more appropriately from his Commonplace Book and his novels. This entry illustrates his intellectual hypersensitiveness as well as his difficulty in getting on with other people under the ordinary circumstances of life. It should be bracketed with this complemen-
tary confession: "More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me. I cannot even read aloud decently when I have not perfect confidence in the hearer's ability to understand" (Commonplace Book, p. 23; entry probably made at Wakefield in the summer of 1889 when he was writing The Emancipated).

Somehow Gissing's words also have a prophetic aspect. Repeatedly he was embarrassed by the judgments of friendly commentators who praised his works in the press for reasons which seemed to him inappropriate. When he asked Smith, Elder in the 1880s to cease sending him press notices of his novels, he had in mind hostile judgments dictated by narrow-mindedness and preconceived notions about the art of fiction, but also well-meant pieces which left out what seemed to him essential in his work. In particular he had no respect for those anonymous critics who were blind to his fine irony—was there a single reviewer of the first edition of The Emancipated who understood the title in its full sense?—or who wrote what he called "jejune stuff." This stance of his further accounts for the sharply contrasted impressions he gave to those who knew him only casually. He could be a brilliant talker if he felt himself to be in the company of intelligent educated people who understood him perfectly, but he would look like a wet bird (the phrase was used by Austin Harrison in his recollections of Gissing) when in the presence of society people whose small talk bored him. This is what H. G. Wells meant when he wrote that Gissing had "no natural customary persona for miscellaneous use" (Experiment in Autobiography, London: Cresset Press, 1934, Vol. II, p. 569).

27

Mutual Affection

"So ganz gleich in unsem Neigungen. Die Rose war seine liebste Blume; welche Blume war mir über die Rose?"

Schiller. Die Räuber.

[So alike in our dispositions—the rose was his favourite flower; what flower was to me dearer than the rose?]

Notes

It is unclear when exactly Gissing read Schiller's Die Räuber, but there is profuse evidence that Schiller was uppermost in his mind in 1880-1882. From September 1881 to April 1882 five letters to Margaret encouraged her to "read away
at Schiller" in the original and to go through his Life by Carlyle. "The man was a noble nature, far above every meanness and vulgarity, and his poetry is the finest embodiment of idealism which the world possesses. Read all his ballads first; they are the easiest in language. Then take up the Lied von der Glocke, one of the most glorious poems ever written, but a little difficult. Make use of the translations in the bookcase whenever absolutely necessary, and, in any case, after reading a poem, read the translation for the sake of comparing it with your own version. Would it be too much to try a verse-translation yourself now and then?" (November 9, 1881, LMF, pp. 104-05, Berg Coll.). Margaret seems to have progressed. On April 16, 1882, her brother was still egging her on: "Peg away at Schiller right womanfully, and, if possible, do a little at 'Faust'" (Berg Coll.).

In Workers in the Dawn (Vol. I, Ch. XIV) Helen Norman reads Schiller at Tübingen.

Genius & Method

"I doubt if men of method, who can lay aside or take up the pen just at the hours appointed will ever be better than poor creatures."

W. Scott’s Diary. June 4th 1826.

Notes

Like Dickens, with his astounding energy and industry, Scott appealed to Gissing for his staying power (see letter to Algernon of July 19, 1888, LMF, p. 221, Yale). But his implicit praise here of inspired, as opposed to mechanical, work comforted Gissing who, unlike Trollope, was no writing machine. Scott the writer, even Scott the money-maker, was, like Balzac, a model and an inspiration. The 1865 edition of the Life of Walter Scott which was still in Alfred Gissing’s library in 1971 may have been bought either new by Thomas Gissing or second-hand by George.

Appreciative references to Scott are limited to the first fifteen years of Gissing’s career. A list of books to be read, compiled in childhood, contains The Lady of the Lake, and there is no doubt that he read a substantial part of Scott’s fiction as a boy. On August 13, 1879, he could not resist a first edition of Quentin Durward (3 vols., 1823) offered at one shilling. The following June he passed this glowing comment on The Antiquary, which his seventeen-year-old sister Margaret was reading: "It is a capital book, all the better that it depends for its interest on fine character-drawing, rather than upon mere exciting incident" (June 25, 1880, LMF, p. 76, Berg Coll.). He encouraged her to read both Scott’s novels and his verse, and named Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, The Antiquary, and The
Pirate as his own favourite titles (October 7, 1885, Berg Coll.). When he re-read Redgauntlet in August 1883, it struck him that, Scott being "very strong in romantic situations," he must take a hint from "the old fellow," and "try to find parallel kinds in modern city life" (letter of August 23, 1883, to Algernon, LMF, p. 129, Berg Coll.). In the mid-1880s Scott still appeared to him one of the really great men in English literature, one worth concentrating upon. Algernon read him for his style and George rejoiced in this at first, but quickly realised that Scott's influence on a budding novelist might well prove more dangerous than profitable (November 11, 1883, Yale).

A succession of diary entries from June 14 to July 26, 1890, show that after giving up Peveril of the Peak, which he found "too feeble," he read The Fortunes of Nigel, Woodstock, Redgauntlet, and St Ronan's Well. On November 20, 1892, he turned to Scott for apparently the last time, perusing his journal at the Birmingham Public Library and perhaps coming across the remark he had noted in *Extracts from my Reading* about a dozen years before. Although he nowhere says so, it seems that he outgrew his taste for Scott after this bout of reading the older novelist's minor fiction.

Allusions to Scott are pretty evenly scattered in Gissing's works from his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (Arthur Golding makes sketches of subjects from Scott), to *Henry Ryecroft* (Spring XX), with, in between, *New Grub Street* (Ch. XXXIV), *The Odd Women* (Ch. XVI), and a short story, "The House of Cobwebs."

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*The World*

"Ah! mon ami, je m'en vais enfin de ce monde, où il faut que le coeur se brise ou se bronze."

Chamfort to Sieyès

[Ah, my friend, at last I am leaving this world where one has to be either broken-hearted or hard-hearted.]

*Women*

"The Italian woman only believes in the sincerity of her lover when he is disposed to commit a crime for her; the English woman when he is disposed to be downright mad in her behalf; the French woman when he is disposed to render himself silly and ridiculous for her sake."

Chamfort. Caractères et Anecdotes.
Notes

Nowhere else in his papers and correspondence does Gissing mention the well-known French epigrammatist Nicolas-Sébastien Chamfort (1741-1794). The wit of the two quotations, characteristic of late eighteenth-century thought in France, appealed to his love of pointed sayings, of which the American Notebook offers some instances bordering on the gratuitous, for instance this bit of French buffoonery, with its untranslatable phonetic culmination:

Un vieux duc (le meilleur des époux)
Demandait (en lui tâtant le pouls)
A sa vieille duchesse
(Qu’un vieux catarrhe oppresse)
"Et ton thé, t’a-t-il ôté ta toux?"

Gissing was highly responsive to brilliant use of language. Many of his favourite authors were language artists, and in his appreciation of striking maxims, finely wrought poems and beautiful prose (that of the old essayists especially) we can safely discern his delight in savouring a form of beauty inaccessible to the vulgar.

31, 32

Originality in Poetry

"As the pathetic participates of an animal sensation, it might seem that, if the springs of this emotion were genuine, all men possessed of competent knowledge of the facts and circumstances, would be instantaneously affected. [. . .] There is also a meditative, as well as a human pathos; an enthusiastic as well as an ordinary sorrow; a sadness which has its seat in the depths of the reason, to which the mind cannot sink gently of itself, but to which it must descend by treading the steps of thought. And for the sublime, —if we consider what are the cares that occupy the passing day, and how remote is the practice and course of life from the sources of sublimity, in the soul of man, can it be wondered that there is little existing preparation for a poet charged with a new mission to extend its kingdom, and to augment and spread its enjoyments?"

Poetry

"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science."

Do. Pref. to 2nd Edit. of "Lyrical Ballads."

Notes

In Thomas Gissing's library there was a six-volume set of Wordsworth's Poetical Works published in the year of George's birth. This set, which was in Alfred Gissing's possession in 1971, was, like the works of Shelley mentioned in connection with entry 22, available to the future novelist in his childhood. It is authenticated by Thomas Gissing's initials "TWG." George's admiration for the Cumbrian poet lacked the depth of his father's, although his familiarity with Wordsworth's thought and verse can hardly be questioned. A letter of September 22, 1879 (Yale), shows him buying the Ecclesiastical Sonnets for 2d. "Wordsworth is growing more the fashion every day," he commented. Indeed, he devoted much of his time to the study of Wordsworth in the winter of 1879-1880: the phrase "obstinate questionings," which occurs in Vol. I, Ch. XIII of Workers in the Dawn, is a muffled echo of "Intimation of Immortality." About a year later he recommended Margaret to read Wordsworth's shorter poems. Naturally his holidays in the Lake District with the sons of his patron Frederic Harrison in August 1884 revived literary recollections, not to speak of family memories (his father had married at Grasmere in homage to Wordsworth). He saw the poet's two successive homes as well as his grave and recited to himself scraps of half-forgotten verse. A year later, reading Crabb Robinson's Reminiscences, with its many stories about Wordsworth and the other Romantics, gave him distinct pleasure. A Commonplace Book entry of 1889 (p. 23) then introduces an abrupt critical note: "What a gross absurdity is the moral lesson of Wordsworth's 'Resolution & Independence'! How can a man strengthen himself by the example of another whose needs & capacities have nothing in common with his own? How can a fiery-hearted youth see an example to be imitated in a bloodless old fellow bent double with infirmities?" This was about the time he read John Morley's introduction to the new edition of Wordsworth's works, and six months after a fresh perusal of The Prelude. What he thought of F. W. H. Myers's study of Wordsworth (1881), which he borrowed from the Exeter Public Library in May 1891 (Diary), is not on record.

At least six of his novels contain Wordsworthian echoes. After Workers in the Dawn, already mentioned, allusions occur in The Unclassed (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. III: Maud Enderby has that "sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused . . . "), Isabel Clarendon (Vol. II, Ch. X: "plain living and high thinking" and Ch. XVI: "years that bring the philosophic mind") and Thyrza (Vol. II, XI: the place "that is among the lonely hills"). In The Whirlpool (Part II, Ch. 1) he used again the phrase "plain living and high thinking," and referred to Wordsworth.
three times in *Our Friend the Charlatan* (Ch. VIII and XXVIII: "man of hope" and "wise passiveness").

Behind the first quotation lies Gissing’s fundamental belief in a class-differentiating relationship between the intellect and the emotions, while the pessimistic note sounded by Wordsworth as to the appeal of original poetry to the average reader foreshadows a well-known statement of Gissing’s at the death of Tennyson on the estimation in which poetry is held by the lower classes (Edmund Gosse, *Questions at Issue*, 1893, pp. 325-31). Nor could Wordsworth’s definition of poetry fail to please the young Gissing, with his enthusiasm for art and praise of intuitive knowledge.

33, 34, 35, 36

*Revealed Religion*

"Ich kann überhaupt nicht begreifen, [. . .] wie man hat glauben können, dass Gott durch Bücher und Geschichten zu uns spreche. Wem die Welt nicht unmittelbar eröffnet, was sie für ein Verhältniss zu ihm hat, wem sein Herz nicht sagt, was er sich und andern schuldig ist, der wird es wohl schwerlich aus Büchern erfahren, die eigentlich nur geschickt sind, unseren Irrthümern Namen zu geben."

Wilhelm Meisters Lehrj. VII.6.

[I, for my share, cannot understand how men have made themselves believe that God speaks to us through books and histories. The man, to whom the universe does not reveal directly what relation it has to him; whose heart does not tell him what he owes to himself and others,—that man will scarcely learn it out of books; which generally do little more than give our errors names.]

*Friends*

"Freunde können und müssen Geheimnisse vor einander haben; sie sind einander doch kein Geheimniss."

Do. VIII.5.

[Friends may and must *have* secrets from each other, for they *are* not secrets to each other.]
Happiness

"Der Mensch ist nicht eher glücklich, als bis sein unbedingtes Streben sich selbst seine Begränzung bestimmt."

Do. Do.

[A man is never happy till his vague striving has itself marked out its proper limitation.]

Earnestness

"Denn der Ernst, der heilige, macht allein das Leben zur Ewigkeit."

Do. VIII.8.

[ForEarnestness, holy Earnestness, alone makes life eternity.]

Notes

The first three entries in Extracts from my Reading establish that by April 1880, Gissing had read Wilhelm Meister, and the present four show that he read it again the following year. He noted Goethe's thoughts because they coincided with his own to a remarkable degree. Their profound wisdom acted as a balm for his private sorrows, encouraged him in his censure of displays of religion in his family circle, and reconciled him with himself. He said as much himself some years later in 1886, when comparing George Sand with Goethe (letter to Ellen, August 20, 1886, LMF, p. 184, Berg Coll.). The entry on religion harmonizes perfectly with his many statements on the subject in his private papers, his correspondence and his works, while the entry on happiness foreshadows the resignation with which his last books are fraught. Henry Ryecroft expressed himself like a disciple of Goethe when he wrote: "The mind which renounces, once and for ever, a futile hope, has its compensation in ever growing calm" (Spring XX). As for the entry on friendship, Gissing's relations with Eduard Bertz, from whom he concealed his second marriage for some seven years, are a very good illustration of it.

His diary shows that he read part of Wilhelm Meister again between February 21 and 29, 1892.

37

Living in Harmony with Nature

"Everything harmonises with me which is harmonious to thee, O Universe. Nothing for me is too early or too late which is in due time for thee.
Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, O Nature; from thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee all things return."

Marcus Aurelius. IV.23.

Notes

It is appropriate that the strain of resignation which informs this extract from the Meditations should reappear in two of Gissing's works in which an important character is at last at peace with the world. Lord Dymchurch, in Our Friend the Charlatan, quotes Marcus Aurelius on two occasions (Ch. IV and XV), as does Henry Ryecroft, in Autumn XIII and XIV; indeed Autumn XIII amounts to a discussion of the present entry. But some twenty years after this entry was made Gissing/Ryecroft could no longer accept Marcus Aurelius's arguments without demur: "Granting that I am compelled to acknowledge a scheme of things which constrains me to this or that, whether I will or no, how can I be sure that wisdom or moral duty lies in acquiescence . . . I see no single piece of strong testimony that justice is the law of the universe; I see suggestions incalculable tending to prove that it is not."

Buckle's "Civilization." Vol II C.1. p. 82.

Notes

While in Boston Gissing took some notes from Ch. II of H. T. Buckle's History of Civilization in England (2 vols, 1857-61), and his correspondence with his brother Algernon from January to March 1879 shows that he possessed a copy of it and was busy studying it in the latter month. A "Gissing Family Commonplace Book" (Yale) contains this very quotation in George's hand, his sole contribution. Reading Buckle in 1879 was part of a wide-ranging history-reading scheme which he mapped out with the encouragement of his new friend, the German socialist Eduard Bertz.
In this quotation he obviously found support for his own action, that of "a mouthpiece of the advanced Radical party," as he called himself on June 8, 1880 (letter to Algernon, LMF, pp. 73-74, Yale). No wonder that in Denzil Quarrier (Ch. IV) Buckle's book seems dangerous to the more conservative inhabitants of Polterham.

The Enemies of Truth

"Ce n'est pas l'erreur qui s'oppose aux progrès de la vérité. Ce sont la mollesse, l'entêtement, l'esprit de routine, tout ce qui porte à l'inaction."


[It is not so much error which checks the spread of truth, as weakness, obstinacy, routine, anything which disposes men to passivity.]

Notes

Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) appears nowhere else in the corpus of Gissing's writings published or unpublished, and it is clear that it was the reading of Buckle's History of Civilization in England (entries 38 and 40) which sent him to Turgot. In his second volume, pp. 320-21, Buckle refers to the Frenchman and quotes from his Oeuvres, Vol. II, p. 52: "Tous les âges sont enchaînés par une suite de causes et d'effets qui lient l'état du monde à tous ceux qui l'ont précédé." He then mentions "the captivating prospects which [Turgot] held out of future progress." The passage transcribed by Gissing comes from the same volume. Like the preceding, the contents of the present entry harmonize with Gissing's thoughts as expressed both directly (to his brother Algernon in January 1879) and indirectly (through such radical characters as Arthur Golding, Samuel Tollady and William Noble in Workers in the Dawn).

Poetry and Science

"There is, in poetry, a divine and prophetic power, and an insight into the turn and aspect of things, which, if properly used, would make it the ally of science, instead of the enemy. By the poet, nature is contemplated on the side of the emotions; by the man of science, on the side of the under-
standing. But the emotions are as much a part of us as the understanding; they are as truthful; they are as likely to be right. [..] If the man of science despises their teaching, so much the worse for him. [..] And I cannot but regard as the worst intellectual symptom of this great country, what I must venture to call the imperfect education of physical philosophers, as exhibited both in their writings and in their trains of thought. [..] The magnificent generalizations of Newton and Harvey could never have been completed in an age absorbed in one unvarying round of experiments and observations. We are in that predicament, that our facts have outstripped our knowledge, and are now encumbering its march. [..] And I can hardly doubt, that one of the reasons why we, in England, made such wonderful discoveries during the seventeenth century, was because that century was also the great age of English poetry. The two mightiest intellects our country has produced are Shakspere and Newton; and that Shakspere should have preceded Newton, was, I believe, no casual or unmeaning event. Shakspere and the poets sowed the seed, which Newton and the philosophers reaped. Discarding the old scholastic and theological pursuits, they drew attention to nature, and thus became the real founders of all natural science. They did even more than this. [..] They taught the men of their generation to crave after the unseen. They taught them to pine for the ideal, and to rise above the visible world of sense. In this way, by cultivating the emotions, they opened one of the paths which lead to truth. [..] Since the seventeenth century, we have had no poet of the highest order, though Shelley, had he lived, would perhaps have become one. [..] The real culture of a great people, that which supplies each generation with its principal strength, consists of what is learnt from the generation immediately preceding. [..] Our age, great as it is, and, in nearly all respects, greater than any the world has yet seen, has, notwithstanding its large and generous sentiments, its unexampled toleration, its love of liberty, and its profuse, and almost reckless, charity, a certain material, unimaginative, and unheroic character, which has made several observers tremble for the future. [..] That something has been lost is unquestionable. We have lost much of that imagination, which, though, in practical life, it often misleads, is, in speculative life, one of the highest of all qualities, being suggestive as well as creative. Even practically, we should cherish it, because the commerce of the affections mainly depends upon it. It is, however, declining; while, at the same time, the increasing refinement of society accustoms us more and more to suppress our emotions, lest they should be disagreeable to others. And as the play of the emotions is the chief study of the poet, we see, in this circumstance, another reason which makes it difficult to rival that great body of poetry which our ancestors possessed."

This and the two preceding entries must have been made within a few days at most, some time in 1881. Buckle's attempt to reconcile poetry and science, the emotions and understanding, pleased Gissing all the more as he was himself committed on the side of the poets, whom Buckle places before "physical philosophers." His concern with what was to be called in the present century "the two cultures" appears as early as his anonymous contribution to the Owens College Magazine for January 1876 ("Our Shaksperean Studies," pp. 2-6), in which he wrote in an optimistic strain: "In these days of gloomy estrangement between so-called 'Science-men' and 'Artsmen,' what goes on in the domains of the one is generally as much a matter of utter indifference to the other as if it had transpired in some remote world. This estrangement, of course, is only temporary; that sooner or later it will vanish, we must believe; but at present it is fostered to a deplorable extent by certain palpable errors connected with our sudden awakening to the necessity of becoming as a people educated. In the meanwhile it behoves everyone to do his utmost towards obliterating the line of demarcation." The author of Henry Ryecroft had by the end of the century moved away a great deal from the position expounded by Buckle (see the oft-quoted passage on science in Winter XVIII). A diary entry shows that Gissing took up Buckle again in September 1889.

41, 42

Materialism & Spiritualism

"On a jusqu'à présent appelé spiritualistes ceux qu'on aurait dû appeler matérialistes, et matérialistes ceux qu'on aurait dû appeler spiritualistes. En effet, corporifier une abstraction, n'est-ce pas être matérialiste? De l'être Dieu extraire l'idée loi, n'est-ce pas être spiritualiste?"

Saint-Simon.

[Until now people have called spiritualists those whom they should have called materialists, and materialists those whom they should have called spiritualists. Does not giving corporeality to an abstraction amount to being a 'materialist?' Does not inferring from a corporeal God the idea of law amount to being a 'spiritualist?']

Revolutions

"Quand le gouvernement viole les droits du peuple, l'insurrection est pour le peuple le plus sacré des droits et le plus indispensable des devoirs."

Article 35 of the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme."
[When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for
the people the most sacred of rights and the most imperative of duties.]

Notes

These two entries should probably be connected with Gissing’s Positivist activ­ities, as both Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), one of whose disciples was Auguste Comte, and the French Declaration of Human Rights, would normally be discussed at the meetings attended by Gissing in 1881. The letter to Algernon of April 24, 1881, supplies a likely background for such entries. Pierre Laffitte, the head of all Positivist associations, was to visit London, and Gissing was to see him at Frederic Harrison’s on May 5. He was at the time preparing a lecture on "Practical Aspects of Socialism," and the French quotations given above would not have been out of place in the reading the subject involved (LMF, pp. 95-96, Berg Coll.).

43

Petty Details

"Les petites considérations sont le tombeau des grandes choses."

Voltaire.

[Petty details are the graves of great undertakings.]

Notes

Of the few references to Voltaire by Gissing, this is apparently the earliest, although he had doubtless read some of the French writer’s works before 1881. Voltaire’s trenchant rationalism and incisive style were a source of "onward help" to Gissing in the days of his apprenticeship. He feared the truth of the present entry might all too well be verified in his own case. The petty details of life—for instance, the inevitable domestic chores or, some years later, the nerve-racking interruptions of his irascible wife—were a source of constant irritation to him. That he had in mind his mother’s excessive absorption in the material activities of daily life when he copied Voltaire’s words is also very likely. A letter to Ellen Gissing of September 13, 1888, might carry Voltaire’s words as an epigraph: "Is it worth sacrificing [. . .] human progress and peace for the sake of making sure that there is nothing in the kitchen that might not be better? Is it really?—No, but then of course the inhabitants of a house must unite in recognizing that the mind is of more account than the body. Mother would grant you that hypothetically, but we know sadly enough that her practice is in precisely the opposite direction" (More Books, November 1947, p. 334).
In *Demos* (Ch. V) "sundry works of Voltaire" are found in Richard Mutimer's library by the side of cheap reprints of Malthus, Robert Owen, Volney's *Ruins* and Thomas Paine.

44

*A Great Life*

"Une grande vie, c'est une pensée de jeunesse réalisée par l'âge mûr."

Alfred de Vigny

[A great life is the carrying out in middle age of an idea conceived in youth.]

Notes

Just as it is unlikely that Gissing found the preceding quotation in Voltaire's correspondence with A. M. Damilaville, so it is doubtful whether these words came straight from *Cinq-Mars*, where Vigny actually wrote: "Qu'est-ce qu'une grande vie sinon une pensée de la jeunesse réalisée par l'âge mûr." No other sign of Gissing's interest in Vigny can be discovered. It was the definition of "a great life," not its author, which led him to note this aphorism. In his early correspondence he repeatedly expressed his aims and ambitions. He was determined to illustrate Vigny's words with his own achievements.

Gissing may well have transcribed Vigny's words when reading the works of Auguste Comte. It is established that he first read Comte in late 1878 (an often-quoted letter of November 9 to his brother Algernon in the Berg Collection gives an account of the Frenchman's *Philosophie Positive*), and his enthusiasm was revived after his encounter with Frederic Harrison in the summer of 1880. Comte had used the Vigny quotation as an epigraph to his *Politique Positive*, and Gissing probably first saw it on the title page of the book. But it is also a well-established fact that Frederic Harrison had taken for himself the same motto, and indeed used it when asked for his autograph (See Martha S. Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison: The Vocations of a Positivist*, Oxford, 1984). So it is quite possible that Harrison quoted it in a conversation with Gissing and that this led to its being transcribed in the present notebook in 1881.
Excerpts 45, 46

**45**

**Death**

"Homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat."

Spinoza.

[A free man thinks of nothing less than death.]

**Notes**

A letter of March 27, 1880, to his brother William (LMF, p. 66, Yale) shows that Gissing was familiar at the time with Spinoza's thought, if not with his works. "Did it ever occur to you to study Philosophy of any kind? I wish you could get a peep into that world. I suppose you know the names of Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, etc?" Spinoza was one of the philosophers to whom he occasionally turned. Some time in 1889 he wrote in his *Commonplace Book* (p. 59): "Spinoza defines joy as the passion in which the mind is incited to its highest power of thought; grief, as that which reduces thought to its least active." The entry in *Extracts from my Reading* was certainly in his mind when he wrote to Edward Clodd on January 19, 1897: "Unlike Spinoza's wise man (to whom you refer) I am in danger of meditating a good deal more on death than on life" (*The Letters of George Gissing to Edward Clodd*, p. 42). It appears in English, not in Latin, and with comments, in Henry Ryecroft (Autumn XII): "The free man, says Spinoza, thinks of nothing less often than death. Free, in his sense of the word, I may not call myself. I think of death very often; the thought, indeed, is ever in the background of my mind; yet free in another sense I assuredly am, for death inspires me with no fear." Spinoza's maxim is the starting-point of this essay on death, one of the most elegiac in mood. It comes appropriately between essays on metaphysics and the Stoics, and is judiciously placed in the book, at the end of "Autumn."

**46, 47**

**Tolerance in Religion**

"Warum wollen wir in allen positiven Religionen nicht lieber weiter nichts, als den Gang erblieken, nach welchem sich der menschliche Verstand jedes Orts einzig und allein entwickeln können, und noch ferner entwickeln soll, als über eine derselben entweder lächeln oder zürnen? Diesen unsern Hohn, diesen unsern Unwillen, verdiente in der besten Welt nichts, und nur die Religionen sollten ihn verdienen? Gott hätte seine Hand bei allem im Spiele, nur bei unsern Irrthümern nicht?"

Lessing. —Vorbericht to "Erz. des Menschengeschlechts."
[Instead of mocking them or making them the object of our anger, why do we not content ourselves with seeing in all revealed religions simply a process whereby human understanding in any time and place is enabled to develop and to continue developing? Is there really nothing in the whole wide world that deserves our scorn and anger, except these religions? Is it really good enough to hold God personally responsible for everything except our errors?]

Perfection of Mankind

"Nein, sie wird kommen, sie wird gewiss kommen, die Zeit der Vollendung, da der Mensch, je überzeugter sein Verstand einer immer bessern Zukunft sich fühlt, von dieser Zukunft gleichwohl Bewegungsgründe zu seinen Handlungen zu erborgen nicht nöthig haben wird; da er das Gute thun wird, weil es das Gute ist, nicht weil willkürliche Belohnungen darauf gesetzt sind, die seinen flatterhaften Blick ehedem blos heften und stärken sollten, die innern bessern Belohnungen desselben zu erkennen."

Lessing. § 85 "Erz. des Menschengeschlechts."

[No, it will come, it will surely come, the stage of perfection, when man, the more convinced his understanding feels of an ever improving future, will nevertheless not need to borrow motives of action from this future, for he will do what is right because it is right, not because arbitrary rewards are attached to it, which formerly were intended simply to fix his unsteady gaze, and to strengthen it to recognize the inner, better rewards of right-doing.]

Notes

These two passages from Lessing's *Education of Mankind* (1780) are a good illustration of the type of intellectual enquiry Gissing was conducting in the late 1870s and early 1880s, in particular after he became acquainted with Frederic Harrison and joined the Positivist Society. This book of Lessing's (1729-1781), like many others by Auguste Comte, Buckle, Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, attempted to survey and assess the past development of mankind and to predict its future course. It satisfied Gissing's desire to place his observations as a novelist within a wide historical and philosophical framework. Education and revelation, according to Lessing, are one and the same thing, the one with regard to the development of the individual, the other with regard to that of mankind. Revelation can give man nothing that his reason may not master. Hence the principle of natural religion reflected in entry 46. The idea of mankind going through a series of phases or ages is close enough to that of Comte's philosophical system, and Gissing was capable, in theory, of viewing religion in this panoramic way, but not in actual life when he was confronted with foolish demonstrations of piety. To the prospect
of mankind's eventual perfection so eloquently phrased by Lessing in entry 47, Gissing was soon to react in his essay on "The Hope of Pessimism." However, this was only a temporary attitude. In his article on "George Gissing and the Goethe cult," Patrick Bridgwater comments: "Gissing shared Lessing's belief in moral perfectibility and shared the classical ideal of doing good out of one's love of virtue. It is hardly surprising that Lessing's rationalistic view of religion and belief in the perfectibility of man caught his attention, for these were both subjects close to his heart" (British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies, Autumn 1982, p. 173).

Two references to Lessing mark the zenith and nadir of Gissing's interest. In a letter of March 27, 1880, to Algernon, in which he noted the ease with which he now read German, he added: "I do not suffer a week to pass without getting through some Goethe or Lessing, or other German classic" (LMF, p. 64, a letter misdated March 20, Yale). A diary entry for March 25, 1892, recorded his having "tried to read a play of Lessing's, but failed through blank lack of interest." In between he had called one of his liberal-minded characters in The Emancipated Mrs. Lessingham. Perhaps he did so with a purpose. When put to the test her progressive ideas concerning the education of girls in general and her niece Cecily in particular prove no efficient safeguard against the potentially dangerous romantic impulses of human nature. She makes a stand against restrictions—these being associated antiphrastically with her name—but her teaching has no positive effect worth praising.

Future of Women

"En rendant les femmes de plus en plus propres à leur vraie destination générale, je suis convaincu que la régénération moderne les rappellera plus complètement à leur vie éminemment domestique, dont le désordre inséparable de la grande transition les a, je crois, momentanément écartées à divers égards secondaires. Le mouvement naturel de notre industrie tend certainement à faire graduellement passer aux hommes des professions longtemps exercées par les femmes; et cette disposition spontanée n'est, à mes yeux, qu'un exemple de la tendance croissante de toute notre sociabilité, à interdire aux femmes toutes les occupations qui ne sont pas suffisamment conciliables avec leur destination domestique, dont l'importance deviendra de plus en plus prépondérante. Cela est bien loin, comme vous savez, de leur interdire une grande et utile participation indirecte à l'ensemble du mouvement social, qui seulement n'a jamais pu être conduit par elles, même quant à l'essor essentiel des opinions et des mœurs qui les intéressent spécialement. Toute autre manière de concevoir leur position, et, par suite, leurs devoirs et les nôtres, serait réellement aussi contraire pour le moins à
leur propre bonheur qu'à l'harmonie universelle. Si, de l'attitude de protecteurs des femmes, les hommes passaient envers elles à la situation de rivalité, elles deviendraient, je crois, fort malheureuses, par l'impossibilité nécessaire où elles se trouveraient bientôt de soutenir une telle concurrence, directement contraire à leurs conditions d'existence. Je crois donc que ceux qui les aiment sincèrement, qui désirent ardemment le plus complet essor possible des facultés et des fonctions qui leur sont propres, doivent souhaiter que ces utopies anarchiques ne soient jamais expérimentées.


[In fitting women more and more for their lot in a general sense, I am sure that the modern reform movement will restore them more completely to their predominantly domestic life, the disorder of which (inseparable as it is from a period of great change) has, I believe, momentarily caused them to go astray in several secondary respects. The natural growth of our industry is certainly tending to cause jobs traditionally held by women to pass gradually to men; and in my view this spontaneous proclivity is but one example of the growing tendency in the body social to debar women from all occupations which are not readily reconcilable with their domestic functions, these being destined to prevail more and more. This is a far cry, as you know, from debarring them from playing a considerable and useful indirect role in the social movement as a whole, which has simply never been led by them, even in respect of the development of the ideas and customs which are of particular interest to them. Any other way of understanding their position and consequently their duties and ours, would really be just as antagonistic to their own happiness as it would be to the general harmony of society. If, after being the protectors of women, men became their rivals, women would be made very unhappy, I believe, by the impossibility, as it would inevitably soon turn out to be, of withstanding such competition, directly antagonistic as this would be to their very natures. I therefore believe that it must be the wish of those who genuinely love them and who passionately desire the fullest possible development of the faculties and functions which are proper to them, that these anarchic utopias may never be tried out.]

Notes

John Stuart Mill’s *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1865) was one of the books prized by the London Positivists to which Gissing had access. He had been attracted to Comte’s philosophy in the year after his return from America, and his letters to Algernon for the period 1878-1881 contain long passages on Positivism. The present entry is an extract from Comte’s correspondence before he became acquainted
with Clotilde de Vaux, a crucial influence on his views about women in his later life. It reveals no easily definable resemblance to Gissing's ideas on the emancipation of women. By and large Comte's thoroughly conservative point of view fits in with Ruskin's doctrine as expressed in "Of Queen's Gardens" (1865), according to which man was "the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender." Ruskin saw woman's intellect as predestined "for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision," and her wisdom naturally conceived "not for self-development, but for self-renunciation" (The Complete Works, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., n.d., Vol. 12, pp. 59-60). Comte's opposition to allowing women to work is also at one with the prevailing English notions of his time, it being thought then that working outside the home would "unsex" women. John Stuart Mill's On the Subjection of Women (1869) was to fight such pernicious and outmoded notions, of which numberless echoes occur in the early and mid-Victorian novel. Although it was far too complex to be summed up in any single statement he made on the subject, Gissing's own attitude was certainly closer to Mill's than to Ruskin's. It can be seen at its boldest in a letter to Eduard Bertz of June 2, 1893: "My demand for female 'equality' simply means that I am convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the misery of life is due to the ignorance and childishness of women. . . . Among our English emancipated women there is a majority of admirable persons; they have not lost a single good quality of their sex, and they have gained enormously on the intellectual (and even on the moral) side by the process of enlightenment, that is to say, of brain-development" (LGB, p. 171).

Comte and Positivism appear at some length in Vol. I, Ch. XIV of Workers in the Dawn. Helen Norman acknowledges the part played by the French philosopher in her mental development. A brief mention of him occurs in Vol. I, Ch. III of Isabel Clarendon.

49, 50

Self-Perfection

"Gleich sei keiner dem andern; doch gleich sei jeder dem Höchsten.
Wie das zu machen? Es sei jeder vollendet in sich."


[Let no man be like another, but let each be like the Highest. How this is to be achieved? By each being perfect in himself.]
True Love

"Das ist die wahre Liebe, die immer und immer sich gleich bleibt,
Wenn man ihr alles gewährt, wenn man ihr alles versagt."

Do. do. 32.

[True love is that which always remains the same, whether its wishes are
granted or denied.]

Notes

Of these two quotations which show the young Gissing once more in quest of the
absolute through his then favourite writer, the second retained its appeal for
him. He used it as an epigraph to Summer in the early version of "An Author at
Grass." Neither the revised version which appeared in the Fortnightly Review,
nor the final version entitled The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft carried any epi-
graph, apart from that on the title page, "Hoc erat in votis."

Entry 49, coming so shortly after the quotations from Lessing, again testifies to
Gissing's preoccupation with the perfectibility of man, a notion which he had also
found in Carlyle.

51

Fools

"Thôricht, auf Bess'rung der Thoren zu harren!
Kinder der Klugheit, o habet die Narren
Eben zum Narren auch, wie sich's gehört!"

Goethe. Cophtisches Lied.

[It is foolish to expect fools to be cured! Children of wisdom, be content
to take them for the fools that they are.]

Notes

That Gissing was too often fascinated by foolishness was bad for his mental peace.
His intellectual acuteness made him highly vulnerable. The present entry was
doubtless noted with approval, also with envy of Goethe's wisdom and sane detach-
ment. He succeeded at times in reaching this desirable state, but never for long.
An instance is offered by a letter to Algernon written about a year after this
entry: "I watch and observe myself just as much as others. The impulse to regard
every juncture as a 'situation' becomes stronger and stronger. In the midst of
desperate misfortune I can pause to make a note for future use, and the afflic­tions of others are to me materials for observation" (July 18, 1883, LMF, pp. 128­29, Yale).

Gissing's novels and short stories offer a rich gallery of fools viewed from a variety of angles and in a variety of situations: objectionable, vapid fools like Orlando Whiffle in Workers in the Dawn, pitiable fools like the Madden sisters in The Odd Women or Miss Jewell in "The Foolish Virgin," intellectual fools of the University Extension type such as May Tomalin in Our Friend the Charlatan, and many other varieties.

52, 53, 54

Deceiving the People

"Sage, thun wir nicht recht? Wir müssen den Pöbel betrügen;
Sieh nur, wie ungeschickt, sieh nur, wie wild er sich zeigt!
Ungeschickt und wild sind alle rohe Betrogner;
Seyd nur redlich, und so führt ihn zum Menschlichen an."

Goethe. Epigramme. 56.

[Tell me, are we not right? We must deceive the people; look how stupid, look how savage they are! Those brutally deceived are always stupid and savage; try being honest, and thereby convert them to humanity.]

Apostles of Freedom

"Alle Freiheits-Apostel, sie waren mir immer zuwider;
Willkür suchte doch nur jeder am Ende für sich.
Willst du viele befrein, so wag' es, vielen zu dienen.
Wie gefährlich das sey, willst du es wissen? Versuch's!"

Goethe. Epigramme. —51

[Apostles of freedom were ever distasteful to me; every man jack of them seeks power for himself. If you would set many men free, have the courage to serve many. Wouldn't that be risky? Don't ask, just try it!]

65
Popularity


Do. Epig. 15.

[The demagogue has his disciples and sways the crowd, while the man of sense is loved by a few individuals. Miraculous pictures are mostly bad pictures. Things of the spirit and of art do not exist for the mob.]

Notes

Belated but significant homage to these Venetian Epigrams can be found in a diary jotting for March 13, 1892: "Read Goethe's 'Epigramme,' in which I have always delighted." The definition of man as "ein erbärmlicher Schuft" (a miserable scoundrel), in Ch. XXVIII of The Unclassed, comes from the same source. The distrust of apostles of freedom and demagogues, and the blindness of the mob to "things of the spirit and of art" are in line with Gissing's usual attitudes, notably as reflected in Demos and Henry Ryecroft.

Custom

"Custom is not only, as the proverb says, a second nature, but is continually mistaken for the first."

J. S. Mill

Notes

On Liberty is one of those books that Gissing thought to be indispensable to his intellectual apprenticeship. More than once he inveighed against the crippling power of habit and lent his own impatience to the partly autobiographical hero of Born in Exile, whose friend Buckland Warricome is awarded Mill's Logic as a prize. "An idiotic choice!" he complains petulantly. "They might have known I had it already" (Part I, Ch. I). Mill's Political Economy may have been read by Gissing in the late seventies, as he refers to it in Workers in the Dawn (Vol. III, Ch. IV). On June 27, 1892, he borrowed Mill's Autobiography from the
Exeter Public Library and deplored in his *Commonplace Book* (p. 37) that the writer never mentioned his own mother.

### 56

**Originality**

"Ursprünglich eignen Sinn,  
Lass' dir nicht rauben.  
Das, was die Menge glaubt  
Ist leicht zu glauben."

Goethe.

[Do not let yourself be robbed of your own view of things: what the mob believes is easily believed.]

### Notes

Nowhere else apparently does Gissing mention these *Zahme Zenien* which express Goethe's thought at the end of his life. The anti-democratic view expressed here was to be voiced more than once by Gissing in his periods of sombre mood. Goethe's belief in the power of an aristocracy of the intellect bent on emancipating the masses from the slough of ignorance is, as noted previously in connection with entries 9 to 16, a credo to which Gissing responded. His ideas on the subject are at their clearest in a letter to Bertz of May 1, 1892, at a time when he was trying in vain to produce a successor to *Born in Exile*: "Society is being levelled down, and with strange rapidity. Democracy scarcely pretends to a noble aim; it is triumphing by the force of its appeal to lower motives. Thus, I am convinced, the gulf between the really refined and the masses grows, and will grow, constantly wider. Before long, we shall have an Aristocracy of mind and manners more distinct from the vast majority of the population than Aristocracy has ever been in England. It will not be a fighting Aristocracy, but a retiring and reticent; scornful, hopeless" (*LGB*, pp. 151-52).

### 57

**Result of Effort**

"Si quis, tota die currens, pervenit ad vesperam, satis est."

Petrarch. "De vera sapientia."

[If, after a hectic day, a man safely reaches evening, it is enough.]
This Petrarch quotation in Latin, which harmonizes better with the thought of the world-weary Ryecroft than with that of his creator at the age of twenty-four, anticipates by some three years Gissing's enthusiastic discovery of Petrarch's works in Italian. Two undated letters to Algernon and Ellen written on the same day in 1885 (Berg Coll.) relate the anecdote of his purchasing by chance a copy of Petrarch's works which had belonged to Mark Pattison.

The present entry is quoted at the end of Vol. III, Book V, Ch. I of *The Unclassed*, but it was left out when the novel was revised for the 1895 one-volume edition. At this point of the narrative, Julian Casti, whose shrewish wife Harriet is by then an intolerable burden, has gone home after walking past the gate of Tothill Fields Prison, where Ida Starr is serving a term for theft (of which she is guiltless). Casti's physical sufferings, together with his indignation at the injustice of society, drive him to philosophic despair which, however, culminates, with the quotation from Petrarch, in resignation: "Hope for nothing more than ultimate rest; pant and yearn and aspire, for so is it ordained you shall, but remember that the toil is vain, and the reward frustration. Suffer in silence. 'Si quis tota die currens pervenit ad vesperam, satis est.'"

The same quotation from Petrarch occurs, with equal fitness, as an epigraph to "Winter" in the unpublished version of "An Author at Grass." The tone of resignation previously noted in the commentary on Spinoza's maxim (Autumn XII) links up nicely with this epigraph which suggests the ultimate phase of man's life, when having reached the day's end is *per se* an achievement worthy of self-congratulation.

In addition to this entry, brief references to Petrarch in *Workers in the Dawn* (Vol. I, Ch. II) and *Born in Exile* (in a semi-jocular context, in Part III, Ch. I; Part IV, Ch. II; Part VI, Ch. I) also attest to his knowledge of the poet, as does an unpublished entry in his *Commonplace Book* (MS, p. 13):

"Alma real, dignissima d'impero,
Se non fossi fra noi scesa si tardo!"

(Queenly soul, most worthy to reign, hadst thou not descended among us so late), from Sonnet CCLXVII, "In Morte di Madonna Laura."
The Present

"Jeder Zustand, ja jeder Augenblick ist von unendlichem Werth, denn er ist der Repräsentant einer ganzen Ewigkeit."

Goethe, in Eckermann 3rd Nov. 1823.

[Every situation—nay, every moment—is of infinite worth; for it is the representative of a whole eternity.]

The World-Problem

"Der Mensch ist nicht geboren, die Probleme der Welt zu lösen, wohl aber zu suchen, wo das Problem angeht, und sich sodann in der Grenze des Begreiflichen zu halten."

Do. 15th Oct. 1825.

[Man is born not to solve the problems of the world, but to find out where the problem lies, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible.]

The Study of the Ancients

"Man spricht immer vom Studium der Alten; allein was will das anders sagen als: Richte dich auf die wirkliche Welt und suche sie auszusprechen; denn das thaten die Alten auch, da sie lebten."

Do. 29th Jan. 1826.

[People always talk of the study of the ancients; but what does that mean, if not: turn your attention to the real world, and try to express it—for that is what the ancients did in their time.]

Freedom

"Nicht das macht frei, dass wir nichts über uns anerkennen wollen, sondern eben, dass wir etwas verehren, das über uns ist. Denn indem wir es verehren, heben wir uns zu ihm hinauf und legen durch unsere Anerkennung an den Tag, dass wir selber das Höhere in uns tragen und werth sind, seinesgleichen zu sein."

Do. 18th Jan. 1827.
[Freedom consists not in refusing to recognize anything as being superior to us, but in respecting anything which is superior to us; for, by respecting it, we raise ourselves up to it, and, by our very acknowledgment, prove that we bear within ourselves something higher, and are worthy to be on a level with it.]

Notes

A letter to Algernon Gissing of April 24, 1881 (LMF, pp. 95-96, Berg Coll.) points to a likely date for these four entries: "I have read a great deal of German these holidays, especially Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe [. . .] I stayed at home and was happy with my writing and old Eckermann." Gissing found here stimulus in his struggle with time—even late in life he was morbidly dissatisfied with himself when a day had slipped by without his having achieved anything worthwhile by the end of it. His consciousness of living every moment of his life as a fraction of eternity worked in two opposite ways: it gave him a breadth of vision which in turn gave much spaciousness to his fiction, but if it assisted the artist it crippled the man by making him often unduly displeased with his own behaviour and performances.

With Goethe's attitude to the problems of the world Gissing finally concurred. Henry Ryecroft in particular refuses to vex his mind with useless meditations on man and the universe. They certainly both restrained themselves "within the limits of the comprehensible." But if Gissing came to accept Goethe's view of freedom on the metaphysical plane, there is much evidence of his rejecting it when applied to political and social matters.

For Goethe, the intellectual pure and simple, he had unbounded admiration, and he extended his sympathy for the man to the writer's contemporary Vaterland. Piers Otway, in The Crown of Life (Ch. XXI), speaks an autobiographical language.

Words

"Vor allem haltet Euch an Worte!
Dann geht Ihr durch die sichre Pforte
Zum Tempel der Gewissheit ein;
Denn eben wo Begriffe fehlen,
Da stellt ein Wort zur rechten Zeit sich ein."

Faust.
[Above all hold fast to words. Then you will pass through the doorway into the temple of certainty; for where ideas most clearly fail, a word comes opportunely into play.]

Notes

In Ch. XXVIII of Our Friend the Charlatan the first sentence of this entry is quoted in an ironical context in the midst of Lord Dymchurch's interior monologue. He has heard that the eponymous charlatan, Dyce Lashmar, has brazenly misappropriated from a French book the much discussed bio-sociological theory which he has been parading as his own. This disappointment, coming on the heels of an unhappy love-affair in which the girl to whom he proposed, May Tomalin, proved to be a fraud, causes the poor, scholarly, unpractical peer to lapse into cynicism: "Lashmar, perhaps, was mere sophist, charlatan, an unscrupulous journalist who talked instead of writing. Words, words! How sick he was of the universal babble! The time had taken for its motto that counsel of Mephisto: Vor allem haltet euch an Worte! And how many of these loud talkers believed the words they uttered, or had found them in their own minds?"

Gissing's first reading of Faust probably dates back to his college days in Manchester. In early 1882 he sent a copy of the play to his elder sister with warm encouragement: "Of course you will find it rather more difficult than what you have been reading, more difficult not only in language but in thought. But everyone must know Faust, —the finest literary production since Shakspere, without a doubt" (January 1, 1882, Berg Coll.). He reverted to the subject on April 16 (Berg Coll.).

63

Effect of Duty

πλείων χρόνος
δὲι μ’ ἄρέσκειν τοῖς κάτω τῶν ἐνθάδε.

Antigone. 74-5

[Banned on earth, but by the dead commended.]

Notes

A letter to Algernon Gissing of June 19, 1881 (LMF, p. 99, Yale) establishes the approximate date of the present entry. In the evening he read "50 lines of Sophocles—at present the Antigone." The location of the lines quoted here shows that he had only just started. The notion of posthumous revenge, or of being
approved of by some mute agency was sweet to Gissing. He certainly found comfort in it in his darkest moments—a form of self-pity on which he wrote with pathetic insight in Henry Ryecroft. Sophocles (see letter of August 2, 1885, to Ellen, LMF, p. 160, Berg Coll.) was one of the Greek authors on whom he wished to concentrate, life being too short to read everything. The sonorous solemn tone of Sophocles and more generally of the Greek dramatists was gladly accepted by Gissing, who delighted in scanning the choruses of ancient plays. Solemnity he associated with the past, but Reardon, in New Grub Street, assuredly does not give the lie to his creator’s literary taste when he praises a lighter passage from Homer.

64

Critics

"Vor den Wissenden sich stellen,
Sicher ist’s in allen Fällen!
Wenn du lange dich gequälet,
Weiss er gleich wo dir es fehlet;
Auch auf Beifall darfst du hoffen,
Denn er weiss wo du’s getroffen."

Goethe: Westöstlicher Divan.

[Facing the critic is safe in either case: though you may have agonized for ages, he’ll know at once where the trouble lies: and you can hope for praise as well, for he will also know when you have scored a hit.]

Notes

This poetic view of the function of criticism is poles apart from Gissing’s many statements on English literary critics. The publication of Workers in the Dawn the year before had shown him that the practice of criticism often proved disappointing for the authors of the books reviewed. He failed to see the justice of some critical remarks, notably those concerning his picture of the upper classes. On the whole, however, Goethe’s optimism (in this poem from the Westöstlicher Divan) with regard to literary criticism must have seemed sadly misplaced to Gissing if he reread this entry towards the end of his career. The blindness of English critics to many of his strong points, and their praise of things which left him indifferent send us back to what he observed in entry 26, as well as to an entry on p. 34 of his Commonplace Book, where Théophile Gautier is reported to have written: "Critiques et louanges me louent et m’abîment sans comprendre un mot de ce que je suis." So here too Goethe’s view of things represented an ideal from which the realities of Gissing’s life differed sharply.
Effect of Love

"God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!"

Browning. "One Word More."

The Use of Art

"For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that—
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out."

Browning. "Fra Lippo Lippi."

Notes

Thomas Gissing had, possibly among others, three volumes of Browning in his library, *Lyrics, Romances, Men and Women; Paracelsus, Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day, Sordello* and volume II of the Poetical Works: Tragedies and Other Plays, all published in 1863 and signed "TWG." George was familiar with them and with at least part of their contents. In his prentice days we find him quoting some lines from *Sordello* in his American Notebook:

God has conceded two sights to a man:
One of man's whole work, time's completed plan,
The other of the minute's work, man's first
Step to the plan's completion.

The first reference to Browning in the correspondence available seems to be in a letter of June 1, 1881, to Algernon (John Spiers): "By the bye, do you know much of Browning? I have got a volume of selections from him, which I know by heart, and I must by degrees obtain all his works. He is a man that grows upon one. Yet I doubt whether he would suit you, being intensely modern, and often all but unfathomable." On November 23 of the same year he mentioned the foundation of the Browning Society in a letter to Margaret. Together with Algernon he probably attended one of its meetings on the following Friday (*LMF*, p. 106, Berg Coll.). He also urged Ellen to read Browning, at the end of a passionate apology for
women's education (February 3, 1882, LMF, pp. 107-08, Berg Coll.). From Florence, after seeing the church of San Miniato, he invited her to read "One Word More" from which entry 65 is quoted, which testifies to his familiarity with the poem (December 31, 1888, Pforzheimer Library).

Entry 65 can be viewed as an acknowledgment of Browning's psychological acuteness. Gissing himself, as a close student of the psychology of love (see entry 5 on p. 57 of his Commonplace Book), made similar observations. The entry on the superiority of art to nature goes far to explain the relation between the two in Gissing's world, which Gillian Tindall discussed at some length in The Born Exile: George Gissing ("The Rural Dream"). One of her intelligent yet debatable claims is that Gissing was such a highly cultured and bookish person that he saw nature through its pictorial representation in paintings, a claim which causes her to minimize the intensity of Gissing's response to nature, as distinct from its artistic renderings. Born in a sooty industrial town for which he had little affection, Gissing, it is true, discovered many natural beauties through books, with black and white illustrations, because his parents' scanty means did not allow him any chance of visiting beautiful sites in England or abroad which he had heard described and of which he had seen paintings or photographs. But his response to the loveliness of scenery, once he was able to spend some of his income on travelling, was enthusiastic, sometimes heartbreakingly so, and one feels that, had he not been socially handicapped, his impressive culture, artistic as well as literary, would have been still more impressive. His response to nature was as eager as his response to its pictorial representation. His letters, whenever he was travelling abroad, are the best possible evidence of his love of landscapes, and as one would expect, he reacts vehemently against the defilement of beauty spots at home and abroad by rampant industrialism. His novels and short stories, from the American bread-winning tales to his historical novel Veranilda, offer a wealth of descriptive passages, and not a few of his characters are artists whose attitudes to their art is invariably a test of their personal values. His landscapes are finely integrated with the developments of his narrative; his characters' reactions to their environment are an index to their personalities. Among his more memorable word-paintings are those of the Niagara Falls in Workers in the Dawn, of the Lake District and Sussex in Thyrza, of Surrey in A Life's Morning, of the Neapolitan countryside in The Emancipated, of a sunset over Athens in New Grub Street, of North Wales in The Whirlpool, and of the Yorkshire dales in The Crown of Life, while his more carefully considered meditations on art and nature occur in The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft (Summer II and XXV, Autumn IV and Winter XXIII). Gissing's views on the relationship of art to nature were remarkably personal even though they took in much that was part and parcel of the national artistic consciousness of his day. Their complexity is indirectly attested by the opposite statements of Browning and Landor in entries 66 and 68 regarding the primacy of nature over art and vice versa. Gissing, one feels, would have been prepared to subscribe to both views.
Wisdom

πολλῷ τὸ φρονεῖν εἰδαμονίας
πρῶτον ὑπάρχειν.

Antigone 1348-9.

[The greatest part of happiness is a wise heart.]

Notes

If Gissing adhered to his plan of reading 50 lines of Sophocles every evening recorded on June 19, 1881 (see entry 63), he must have reached the present passage in the Antigone in late July. This assumption cannot anyway be very wide of the mark since a Yale-held letter to Algernon of August 13, 1881, reads in part: "In my spare hours I am entirely given up to Greek at present, reading right through the Anabasis—a delightful book, when read at long breaths—and Sophocles' Antigone." Sophocles' remark on happiness must have struck Gissing at a time when difficulties with his wife were becoming worse and worse. He had so far been more quixotic than wise. The entry remained vivid in his mind. He used it as an epigraph to Spring in the original, unpublished version of "An Author at Grass" (Pforzheimer Library). This epigraph, had it been preserved, might have been interpreted as a kind-hearted reproof addressed by middle age and experience to youth and its errors. Young Gissing was blessed with good qualities, but not with "a wise heart," and he rarely tasted happiness. Sophocles he mentioned in Thyrza (Ch. XXX) and New Grub Street (Ch. X), where Reardon and Biffen scan a chorus in the Oedipus Rex.

After this, Gissing made no entry for a period of about seven months.

Epitaph

"I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;
Nature I loved, and, after Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

W. S. Landor.
Walter Savage Landor was one of Gissing's favourite writers. He read him over and over again, encouraged his friends to read him, and quoted him in his works and correspondence. He had in his library a copy of the Camelot Classics edition of *Imaginary Conversations*, with an Introductory Note by Havelock Ellis (London: Walter Scott, 1886; Coustillas Coll.), in which, besides correcting misprints, he marked in pencil favourite passages. This, for instance, from "Lord Bacon and Richard Hooker": "We often do stand in need of hearing what we know full well, and our own balsams must be poured into our breasts by another's hand" (p. 125). Or these words from "Lord Brooke and Sir Philip Sidney": "Goodness does not more certainly make men happy than happiness makes them good" (p. 158). A copy of John Forster's biography of Landor (London: Chapman & Hall, 1879) with a catalogue of advertisements dated June 1884 bound in, which was in Alfred Gissing's library in 1971, almost certainly belonged to his father.

Gissing's correspondence offers a number of allusions to Landor in 1882-83, and the letter he wrote to his sister Ellen on March 14, 1882, must have preceded or followed closely the present entry since it reads in part: "At present I am reading one [a Life, probably that by Sidney Colvin, published in 1881] of Walter Savage Landor, of whom I fear you know nothing. I will write for you some very significant lines which he wrote to be his own epitaph. [Quotation of the four lines, which are cited by Colvin.] The third line of this is glorious, the image perfect. I want to buy the man's works, but they are not to be obtained under two or three pounds" (Yale).

He quoted the same lines in a letter to Gabrielle Fleury of September 9, 1898, as some of the lines that were oftenest in his mind (LGF, p. 59). In some editions of Landor, the second line reads: "Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art."

Gissing's lasting attachment to Landor had roots which can be traced to specific aspects of Landor's life and work. He was something of an aristocratic republican, much devoted to the classics, and lived for years in Italy, a country which in the early 1880s Gissing longed to visit (in *The Unclassed* the two principal male figures discuss Italy passionately). His was a strong personality which combined clear-cut opinions on many subjects with a fine sensibility and subtle understanding of the human heart. Landor's friendship with Dickens and John Forster may have endeared him a little more to Gissing, although the satirical portrait of Landor as Boythorn in *Bleak House* can hardly have roused his admiration. This and the other Landor entries in *Extracts from my Reading* show Gissing's fondness for Landor's acute sense of form, whether in verse or in prose, and for his style, now epigrammatic, now formal and convoluted.

Despite its conventional contents and imagery, Gissing admired this stanza on several accounts. First, epitaphs he always found fascinating—a college essay on
"The Morality of Epitaphs" testifies to this, as do the various passages on death in The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, where he looks back upon life from the painless immobility of the grave. Second, the dignified, pagan acceptance of death, the sense of an ending combined with the relish of past enjoyment of nature and art, and of life tout court, appealed to his artistic temperament. Lastly, the image in the third line conjured up much that was lacking in Gissing's own life. His liking for this particular verse therefore reads like a disguised lament.

69

Enthusiasm

"Quand une fois on a tourné l'enthousiasme en ridicule, on a tout défait, excepté l'argent et le pouvoir."

Corinne.

[Once one has put enthusiasm to ridicule, one has done away with everything except money and power.]

Notes

The only reference to Mme de Staël's Corinne (1807) in Gissing's correspondence occurs in a letter of April 16, 1882 (LMF, p. 112, Berg Coll.), to his sister Margaret. He had probably been reading the book shortly before: "If you are free in that department [French], and could possibly make time, I wish you would go through Madame de Staël's Corinne. It is a story of Italy, bright and warm with the sunshine of the glorious country, and written in a wonderfully eloquent style." This highly romantic story in which the physical and cultural atmosphere of Italy reacts on the protagonists was bound to appeal to Gissing at the time when, like Julian Casti in The Unclassed, he dreamt of visiting the land of the Romans which he had so fondly imagined since his childhood. Mme. de Staël's defence of enthusiasm at the expense of money and power was in harmony with the more optimistic thoughts of the younger Gissing, just as entry 67 foreshadowed the weary creator of The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft. The subject of Corinne was echoed in The Emancipated, but Gissing treated the theme of the mutual destructiveness of northern ideals and routine and southern spontaneity and vivacity in a way that was all his own, as E. M. Forster did after him in Where Angels Fear to Tread.

77
Symbolization of Nature

"Flowers, for example, that are so pathetic in their beauty, frail as the clouds, and in their colouring as gorgeous as the heavens, had through thousands of years been the heritage of children—honoured as the jewellery of God only by them, when suddenly the voice of Christianity, countersigning the voice of infancy, raised them to a grandeur transcending the Hebrew throne, although founded by God himself, and pronounced Solomon in all his glory not to be arrayed like one of these. Winds again, hurricanes, the eternal breathings, soft or loud, of Aeolian power, wherefore had they, raving or sleeping, escaped all moral arrest or detention? Simply because vain it were to offer a nest for the reception of some new moral birth, whilst no religion is yet moving amongst men that can furnish such a birth. Vain is the image that should illustrate a heavenly sentiment, if the sentiment is yet unborn. Then, first, when it had become necessary to the purposes of a spiritual religion that the spirit of man, as the fountain of all religion, should in some commensurate reflex image have its grandeur and its mysteriousness emblazoned, suddenly the pomp and mysterious path of winds and tempests, blowing whither they list, and from what fountains no man knows, are cited from darkness and neglect, to give and to receive reciprocally an impassioned glorification, where the lower mystery enshrines and illustrates the higher. Call for the grandest of all earthly spectacles, what is that? It is the sun going to his rest. Call for the grandest of all human sentiments, what is that? It is, that man should forget his anger before he lies down to sleep. And these two grandeurs, the mighty sentiment and the mighty spectacle, are by Christianity married together."

De Quincey. Opium Eater

Talent and Genius

"Talent and genius are in no one point allied to each other, except generically,—that both express modes of intellectual power. But the kinds of power are not merely different, they are in polar opposition to each other. Talent is intellectual power of every kind, which acts and manifests itself by and through the will and active forces. Genius, as the verbal origin implies, is that much rarer species of intellectual power which is derived from the genial nature—from the spirit of suffering and enjoying—from the spirit of pleasure and pain, as organized more or less perfectly; and this is independent of the will. It is a function of the passive nature. Talent is conversant with the adaptation of means to ends. But genius is conversant only with ends. Talent has no sort of connection, not the most remote
or shadowy, with the moral nature or temperament—genius is steeped and saturated with this moral nature."

De Quincey. — Autobiog. Sketches, — note.

Notes

Gissing’s interest in De Quincey was partly inherited from his father, who had on his shelves a copy of the fourteen-volume set of collected works published by James Hogg & Sons of Edinburgh (1853-1860). Thomas Gissing’s initials appear in some of the volumes of this set, which was still in the hands of the family (Alfred Gissing) in 1971. That it passed into George’s hands is suggested by an undated letter from him to Algernon written in January 1887 when the sharing of Thomas Gissing’s library between his children was being discussed (Berg Coll.). And there is no reason to doubt his wishes were complied with by his brother and sisters. Volume XIV has corrections in his own hand.

A letter to Margaret Gissing, dated October 4, 1882, in the Berg Collection contains an allusion to De Quincey with which the above entries must have been contemporary: "Have you read De Quincey’s ‘Autobiography’? Strange and delightful book, and written in wonderful English." He read and reread De Quincey more for his style than for his ideas, though in the present extracts he may have relished both. The fact that in a letter of September 23, 1883, to Algernon (LMF, p. 134, Berg Coll.), De Quincey is placed alongside Landor and Tennyson is significant: "Do make time for De Quincey’s autobiographical writings, and the Suspiria de Profundis. Unsurpassed writing there." Towards the end of his life he put De Quincey "mentally [...] on a somewhat lower level" than Landor (LGB, March 11, 1900).

Two entries in his Commonplace Book are concerned with De Quincey, one with his singular use of the word "towards," illustrated by examples from volume VII of the works, the other with his determination to avoid cacophony (essay on "Protestantism"). The former was made in 1887, the latter probably in 1896. A number of diary jottings show that his interest in this writer remained pretty steady in mid-career. From 1889 to 1895 we see him rereading the essay on style, perusing the biography by David Masson, the translation of Kant’s Idea of a Universal History, Japp’s De Quincey Memorials, and various works the titles of which he did not trouble to record. When he lay ill at Cotrone and the quinine he took in dosi fortii on the Italian doctor’s recommendation gave him visions, he naturally thought of De Quincey’s Confessions. In the works De Quincey appears only in Isabel Clarendon (Vol. II, Ch. IX) and in Henry Ryecroft (Winter XXII), and on both occasions he is associated with Landor, in discussions of style and puritanism.
Nature and Love

"Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass to-day might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love."

George Eliot.

Notes


The earliest references to George Eliot appear in his American Notebook with one quotation from "The Choir Invisible" and two from Romola. While in Boston he read Daniel Deronda, which was just out, and urged Algernon to read it at the first opportunity (November 13, 1876, LMF, p. 16, Berg Coll.). In a letter to his fourteen-year-old sister Ellen on women's education he observed that "if the choice had to be made I would rather have a girl well acquainted with Dickens and George Eliot and Shelley and Browning than with all the science in all the text books. These writers show you what is meant by life and teach you to distinguish the good and the bad in it" (February 3, 1882, LMF, pp. 107-08, Berg Coll.). Some months later he expressed his delight to Margaret on hearing she was reading Romola: "It is a magnificent book, and gives you a good idea of George Eliot's combination of imaginative power and solid culture" (July 12, 1882, Berg Coll.). The Italian setting must have largely accounted for his enthusiasm. On the very day of George Eliot's death he had bought a copy of the book to give Bertz as a Christmas present (letter to Algernon, December 23, 1880, Yale), doubtless because Italy often had pride of place in their literary conversations.

What appealed to Gissing in the present quotation was essentially George Eliot's identification of unconscious memory as a linking element between temporally
distant moments of physical enjoyment of nature. Mental perception and appreciation may be triggered by the recurrence of specific physical sensations. What George Eliot attempts to describe here corresponds to that "trick of mind" analyzed by Henry Ryecroft, notably in Summer III, where he discusses how the memory functions independently of the will. (See the debate on the subject in the Gissing Newsletter for January and July 1970 as well as April and July 1971.) In another context ("The Old School," Dinglewood Magazine, December 1897, pp. 2-4, reprinted in George Gissing at Alderley Edge, 1969) Gissing connects childhood memories with physical perceptions. To him warm summer days were inseparable from his reading of the Classics. A letter to Bertz of March 11, 1891, concludes as follows: "It is such a morning as I have seldom known in England. A sky of profound blue, without a speck of cloud. Only the faintest breeze. I hear the clucking of fowls, and the twittering of birds in the trees about. Divine weather! Where is my Homer? Let us have a page of the Odyssey" (LGB, p. 169).

Gissing’s copy of Romola (1878), with his signature on the title-page, is in private hands. It was sold at the Parke-Bernet Galleries on September 23, 1969 (sale no. 2891, item 134).

73

Happiness of Death

"Agnoscere solis
Permissum est, quos jam tangit vicinia fati,
Victurosque dei celant, ut vivere durent,
Felix esse mori."

Lucan. IV. 517.

[None but those whom the approach of death already overshadows are suffered to know that death is a blessing; from those who have life before them the gods conceal this, in order that they may go on living.]

Notes

This solitary entry devoted to the Latin poet Lucan (39-65), who was the nephew of Seneca, fits in with Gissing’s thoughts at a time when, elated by his reading of Schopenhauer, he wrote his essay on "The Hope of Pessimism." Like Lucan, he often saw death as a blessing; in "The Hope of Pessimism" he calls it "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

Lucan’s epic poem Pharsalia, or De bello civili, which relates the war between Caesar and Pompey, is quoted twice in Henry Ryecroft: in Spring IV, "[Discite,]
quam parvo liceat producere vitam" ([Hence you may learn] how little it costs to prolong life), and in Autumn XIII: "[Victrix causa deis placuit,] sed victa Catoni" ([The conquering cause pleased the gods,] but the conquered one pleased Cato). The former quotation is one of the unpublished entries in the *Commonplace Book* (MS, p. 12).

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**Suicide**

"It is a brave act of valour to contemn death; but where life is more terrible than death, it is then the truest valour to dare to live."

*Religio Medici*. I. Sect. 44.

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**Notes**

Replying to an enquiry from *Pearson's Weekly* (June 30, 1894, p. 797) concerning his tastes in literature, Gissing declared that his preference in English reading was for the old authors, the grave, leisurely men, Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, the essayists, and Samuel Johnson. In *Isabel Clarendon* (1886) Bernard Kingcote shares Gissing's taste: "He [Sir Thomas Browne] is one of the masters of prose. I wish I could read you one or two things," he says to the unliterary Isabel, who of course has never heard of him (Vol. I, Ch. VI). Kingcote himself was born in Sir Thomas's city—Norwich. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* is quoted by Earwaker in *Born in Exile* (Part II, Ch. II).

Gissing's diary for August 26, 1895, refers to his re-reading of *Religio Medici*, while in his *Commonplace Book* (p. 38) he marvelled that Sir Thomas had written the book before he was thirty. *By the Ionian Sea* (Ch. I) contains a somewhat unexpected allusion to Browne's love of music, in the form of those barrel-organs which Gissing delighted to hear, whether in London or in Naples.

This entry on suicide is a natural companion to the preceding quotation. If anything, this transcription of it was a manifestation of self-pity, a feeling to which he openly confessed in *Henry Ryecroft*. 

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82
Religion

"Wer Wissenschaft und Kunst besitzt, Der hat Religion."

Goethe.

[Anyone who possesses science and art, has religion too.]

Notes

This second quotation from the *Zahme Zenien* might have served as an epigraph to any of his studies of spiritual narrow-mindedness, especially *The Emancipated*. In certain moods Gissing was inclined to dissolve religion into a broad, tolerant view of the universe. The present aphorism tallies with a thought expressed with some impatience in his *Commonplace Book* (p. 47): "The one thing which most excites me to irresistible laughter, when I get a good view of it, is the existence of religious prejudice. To think that people will loathe you, because you cannot enter in their way of thought with regard to the Universe!"

Man

"Os homini sublime dedit, coelumque tueri
Jussit, et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus."

Ovid. Metam.

[(The creator) gave man an uplifted face and bade him look at the sky and raise his countenance aloft to the stars.]

Notes

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was familiar to Gissing from his school days, and he may well have used the poem for teaching purposes with his private pupils in the late 1870s and in the 1880s. The phrasing of the passage, with its pagan flavour, was to him as arresting as its symbolical meaning. The end of the second line—"erectos ad sidera tollere vultus," is quoted in the ironical sketch entitled "Two Collectors" (*Human Odds and Ends*, 1898, p. 192). The Latin words occur in an evocation of the youthful days of Alfred Wormwald, a broken-down middle-aged bookseller's collector whose hopes of a better life are ephemerally revived when a request reaches his
employer for a copy of the little volume of verse he once published amid general indifference. Gissing quietly satirizes the illusions of Wormwald about himself and the world at large, and describes him as he was in his youth: "In those days he had a fine head of hair, a beaming eye, ripe lips that smiled seductively or with disdain. If hunger pinched him, he did not much care. It was natural to him to walk with gallant mien—erectos ad sidera tollere vultus."

Ovid was one of Gissing's favourite Latin authors. In the summer of 1889 he read "old Ovid" in Guernsey, "and to do so under such a sky half brings back the indescribable feeling of being in Italy" (letter to Ellen, August 29, 1889, LMF, p. 285, Yale). Quotations from what he read there and on his return (in particular the Heroides and Tristia) found their way into his Commonplace Book (p. 34). In his diary (August 25, 1889) he noted sarcastically that while he was reading Ovid's Amores, his sister Margaret was busy with "some dirty little pietistic work." A later entry (November 29, 1889) records that he was then reading some Ovid and Persius, and again some Ovid on June 29, 1896; but he deplored the fact that he was not reading more Greek and Latin.

In The Whirlpool (Part III, Ch. II) Morton knows his Ovid—"Medio tutissimus" (a middle course is best), he suggests—and so does Daniel Otway in The Crown of Life (Ch. VI), who observes that associating with intelligent girls and women emollit mores (humanizes character).

77

Beauty

"The most powerful of all beauty is that which reveals itself after sympathy, and not before it."

"Daniel Deronda" Chap. XXII

Notes

As was noted with regard to entry 72, Gissing first read Daniel Deronda on publication in late 1876. The present entry points to a new, possibly partial reading in 1882. His great admiration for George Eliot's work did not abate in the mid-1880s. When Algernon Gissing began his apprenticeship as a novelist, George recommended him to read with much care all he could possibly get of George Eliot (November 11, 1883, Yale). His warm appreciation of the works extended to their author's courage in private life. Indeed her free union with the philosopher and critic George Henry Lewes, her stand against conventional morality, may have coloured his opinion of her novels. "Did you read the ‘Woman’s Protest’ about George Eliot in the P[all M[all] G[azette]?” he wrote to Algernon on January 31,
Here is the ascetic point of view put very frankly and honestly. It makes one sad." He explained to Margaret that he placed George Eliot above Trollope and even above Jane Austen because she was a novelist of character, not a novelist of manners, and he contended that we read her, not to know how her characters live, but "what or who they, individually, were" (letter of August 9, 1883, Berg Coll.). Two years later he wondered whether Margaret had "read and thoroughly digested all George Eliot? You will find her a wonderful support" (October 7, 1885, Berg Coll.). He succeeded in making both his sisters read Romola that autumn, after which he urged Margaret to pass on to Adam Bede: "It contains much of George Eliot's best work, and throughout the style, the English, is admirable. [. . .] Mrs Poyser you will enjoy; her sayings are excellent" (November 22, 1885, Berg Coll.).

Interest in and admiration for George Eliot were supported in those years by his living near to her last home in Chelsea. She is significantly mentioned twice in Isabel Clarendon (Vol. II, Ch. II and VI). Her star, however, was soon to be eclipsed by that of Charlotte Brontë, the turning-point probably being the reminiscences of the latter related by George Smith to Gissing. "A great and glorious woman! George Eliot is miserable in comparison!" he wrote to Bertz on April 17, 1887 (LOB, p. 6). Shortly before he had expounded a similar view in a letter to Margaret (LMF, p. 191, Berg Coll.). Two and a half years later he reverted to the subject in a letter to Algernon: "Madge has just been reading 'Daniel Deronda,' and I glanced into it again. It is heavy, heavy; imaginative light is lacking [. . .] Fifty years hence, she will be put far below Charlotte Brontë as a poet and an artist. Her vast intellectual power must of course always be recognized, but that is another matter" (September 11, 1889, Berg Coll.).

We next find George Eliot the subject of discussion between the feminist Mrs. Wade and the timid Lilian in Denzil Quarrier (1892). Mrs. Wade, whose extreme views are not to be mistaken for Gissing's own, exclaims: "What a miserably conventional soul that woman has!" and she brushes aside Lilian's astonishment that a woman notable for her common-law marriage should be called conventional. The Odd Women (1893) contained a reference to George Eliot at the manuscript stage, but A. H. Bullen, Gissing's publisher, asked him to suppress it because George Eliot's husband, the banker Cross, was still alive and might resent it. The allusion very likely concerned her private life, not her artistic achievement, which, by another swing of the pendulum, he was again to view more favourably in later life. A letter to Algernon Gissing of August 4, 1894, offers this short tribute: "George Eliot's rare conscientiousness appears on every page of the book you mention. Of course the truthfulness of her country folk has never been surpassed" (LMF, p. 339, Berg Coll.).

Other interesting references to the author of Middlemarch (a novel Gissing was familiar with, as is testified by an allusion to the disastrous marriage between Dr. Lydgate and Rosamund Vincy in a letter to Bertz of September 11, 1889) occur.
This statement by George Eliot, which accords so well with her philosophy of life, once more shows Gissing in quest of wisdom. It implies a recognition of the superiority of reason to passion, or at least an acknowledgment that love, if based solely on a spontaneous response to beauty, cannot be as strong and enduring as when it is preceded by sympathy regardless of any aesthetic feeling. The idea expressed here is echoed or implied in a number of Gissing stories, for instance in *Isabel Clarendon*, *The Emancipated*, and *The Crown of Life*.

78, 79

**Religion**

"Denn die Religion ist nichts anderes als die erste, darum kindliche, volkstümliche, aber befangene, unfreie Natur- und Selbst-Anschauung des Menschen."


[For religion is nothing else than man's primitive and therefore childish, popular, but prejudiced, unemancipated consciousness of himself and of Nature.]

**God**

"Gott ist eine Thräne der Liebe, in tiefster Verborgenheit vergossen über das menschliche Elend."


[God is a tear of love, shed in the deepest secrecy, over human misery.]

**Notes**

"With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree," wrote George Eliot (who had translated his *Wesen des Christenthums*); so it is only logical for Gissing's next two entries to come from Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Familiarity with his work and ideas must be viewed as an example of Gissing's interest in the history of spiritual thought, which was at its height in the late 1870s and early 1880s, that is, when he would discuss literary and philosophic matters passionately with Eduard Bertz. A letter to Algernon Gissing of January 26, 1879 (*LMF*, pp. 42-43,
John Spiers), shows him reading Strauss's *The Old and the New Faith*, "a grand book," and busy studying "the principal religions which the world has seen." His encyclopaedic reading on the subject was conducted in a spirit of intellectual emancipation.

These two quotations from *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841) were made from a copy of the second enlarged edition (Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1848) which Bertz had given him. Its provenance appears on the front endpaper: "Eduard Bertz Tübingen 27.12.76" (copy in the late Alfred Gissing's library). He was certainly reading it again in the autumn of 1882: a letter of October 31 states that his "work at present is limited to the reading of a little German philosophy and theology with now and then an elegy of Propertius" (to Algernon, Yale), and the next entry in *Extracts from my Reading* is a quotation from Propertius.

The first quotation sums up Feuerbach's views on religion. He goes much further than Hegel, and carries to an extreme the consequences of Strauss's criticism of Christianity in his *Life of Jesus* (also translated by George Eliot). Equating the human spirit with the divine, as did some of his predecessors, amounted, in the eyes of Feuerbach, to equating man with himself. Man cannot transcend his own self; when speaking of God he is merely projecting his noblest thoughts onto the universe. Gissing found in Feuerbach, brilliantly expressed, what he himself had come to think independently.

The second quotation appears in German in Part V, Ch. I of *Born in Exile*, where its use by Bruno Chilvers, a charlatan, should not mislead us as to Gissing's spiritual convictions when he wrote the novel. A former school-fellow of Godwin Peak, and now a careerist in the Church, Chilvers behaves constantly as if he were on the stage, pronounces his Latin "in the new-old way, with Continental vowels," revels in the use of such words as "nullifidian," "morbific" and "renascent," and in quotations from foreign works. His doctrinal position is as extravagant as his behaviour. "Less of St Paul, and more of Darwin!" he exclaims. "Less of Luther and more of Herbert Spencer!" His quoting an unchristian German author in the original is therefore superbly in character.

80

*Memory of the Dead*

"Tu tamen amisso non nunquam flebis amico; Fas est praeteritos semper amare viros."

Propertius. III.v. 35-6.

[Yet thou, when thou hast lost thy friend, wilt sometimes weep for him; undying love is the due of the loved and lost.]
As observed apropos of Feuerbach, the parallel between the passing mention of the elegies of Propertius in a letter of late 1882 and the present entry enables one to date the latter. The association of love, loss and grief by the Latin poet strongly appealed to Gissing, as is confirmed by his copying out of some sepulchral inscriptions in the Museum at Naples in 1888. We see him in the same mood in Isabel Clarendon, with its epigraph from Musset: "C'était plus qu'une vie, hélas! c'était un monde! Qui s'était effacé!" He was reading Propertius at about the time he was writing his ambitious essay on "The Hope of Pessimism." The poet's words must have irresistibly turned his thoughts to his father, to whose memory he was so passionately attached that in his forties he still had obsessional dreams of him "twice or thrice a year" (Commonplace Book, p. 26).

The Only Goods

"Crave thou no dower of earthly things
Unworthy Hope's imaginings.
To have brought true birth of Song to be
And to have won hearts to Poesy,
Or anywhere in the sun or rain
To have loved and been beloved again,
Is loftiest reach of Hope's bright wings."

"Soothsay" — Rossetti.

It was a visit to the Rossetti collection at the Academy in February 1883, from which he went home "delighted beyond all utterance," that started his phase of devotion to the poet. He had been reading William Morris's Earthly Paradise as well as articles on Rossetti in the current numbers of the Contemporary Review and the Cornhill Magazine, and of course the poet had died the year before. His own address since September 1882—17 Oakley Crescent, Chelsea, S.W., now 33 Oakley Gardens—was close to Rossetti's former home at 16 Cheyne Walk, and his letters of the period are fraught with allusions to the literary and artistic associations of the surroundings. "Looking over northwards," he proudly wrote to his sister Margaret on February 27, 1883, "I see the fine row of old Queen Anne houses called Cheyne Walk, where numbers of interesting people have lived" (LMF, p. 125, Berg Coll.). A letter of the same day to Ellen attests that he attended several exhibitions of Rossetti's paintings. They naturally sent him to the artist's poetic work. Later in the year he delighted in an illustrated article on Rossetti.
in the first number of Macmillan's *English Illustrated Magazine* (letter to Algernon of September 15, 1883, *LMF*, p. 132, Yale). In between he had been unable to resist the May number of *Portfolio* with two plates from Rossetti (now, together with his own copy of the article in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, in the Coustillas Coll.), and relatives of his friend John George Black had sent him from Germany, at his request, the Tauchnitz edition of Rossetti's poems (letter to Algernon, May 23, 1883, Yale). His correspondence for 1883-84 points to strong artistic and poetic interests, at the core of which were Rossetti and William Morris. It is hardly surprising therefore that Rossetti should appear in *The Unclassed* (Ch. XXVI contains a rhapsodic passage on his poems which Maud Enderby reads on Waymark's recommendation), *Isabel Clarendon* (in Ch. VI of Vol. II Rossetti's home is mentioned in a description of Cheyne Walk), more obscurely in *Demos*, where the phrase "dreamed against a distant goal" is quoted anonymously (Ch. VI), and in *Thyrza* (Ch. VI) with a discreet citation from Sonnet 46 of *The House of Life*. Quite properly all the echoes from Rossetti are to be found in romantic contexts. Rossetti's poems temporarily bring to a close the old antagonism in Maud Enderby between spirit and flesh; they restore her morbid mind to quietness through their rendering of "the rapturous purity of ideal passion," but her ascetic strain is ultimately to prevail. Maud's response to Rossetti's sensuous apprehension of physical experience is intended to represent one extreme phase of her. More subdued, the other celebrations of the artist and poet keep to the topographical and verbal registers.

After the mid-1880s Gissing clearly lost much of his interest in Rossetti, although the publication of *Thyrza* brought him in touch with a former schoolfellow of Rossetti, the Rev. Charles Anderson, and he read Joseph Knight's Life of the poet in 1893 (*Diary*; Gissing's copy is in Alan Clodd's collection). Ultimately Rossetti remained in his mind inseparable from his Chelsea days. Among subjects for essays in his scrapbook, one finds "Chelsea Embankment, Rossetti" in a lengthy list of "very varied reminiscences always stirred in me by English sunshine."

The present lines were in harmony with the artistic credo of the young Gissing, with his belief in the supremacy of art, its moral and consolatory powers being associated in his view with Shelley on the one hand, Schopenhauer on the other, and somehow tinctured with an epicurean idealism which he particularly relished in Edward Fitzgerald's free rendering of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám*.

**A Good Wish**

"Gratia, fama, valetudo contingat abunde
Et mundus victus, non deficiente crumena."

[May favour, fame and health fall to him in abundance, with a seemly living and a never-failing purse.]

Notes

Gissing's love of Horace's work is best summed up in this Commonplace Book entry made sometime in 1902: "Perhaps the supreme moment of my life was that when I woke one night in Rome, & lay with a sense of profound and peaceful possession of what for so many years I had desired. Before going to bed I had read Horace. Never have I been so free of temporal cares (in soul, that is to say) & so clearly face to face with the ideal of intellectual life" (p. 65). To anyone who is aware of his passionate love of culture, these words cannot fail to be interpreted as a supreme homage. Horace was to him an example of "what may result from education." "Think of all that was at stake," he observed in another entry, "when that brave father of Horace—macro pauper ajello—decided not to be content with the school of Flavius at Venusia, but to send the boy to Rome!" (Commonplace Book, p. 66). The emotional link with Horace is obvious enough here, and is emphasized by the recollection of what Gissing had Henry Ryecroft say of his 'good and wise' father, a thin disguise for his own father. Furthermore he associated Horace with the pleasant intellectual labours of his youth, when his life still followed a straight course. In an often-quoted letter to Ellen of August 2, 1885 (LMF, pp. 160-61, Berg Coll.), he listed Horace, together with Virgil and Catullus, as one of "the really great men" to whom he was determined to keep, since "life is too short." Possibly at Wakefield, but beyond any doubt at Owens College, Horace's prose and verse had figured among his set books, and less than a year after his return from America we find him supplying his younger brother with notes on the Satires in connexion with an examination (letter to Algernon, June 8, 1878, John Spiers).

At the time he entered the above quotation in Extracts from my Reading his interest in the Latin poet was as strong as ever. In his first novel, Workers in the Dawn, Edward Norman has "an exquisite little copy of Horace" by him as a breakfast companion (Vol. I, Ch. II), and Helen later assures Mr. Heatherley, the nonconformist minister, that she "can read Virgil and Horace with tolerable ease" (Vol. II, Ch. II). When Waymark, in The Unclassed, expounds his literary theories to his friend Casti, he declares that his book will not be virginibus puerisque (Ch. XV). The allusion is in the first instance to Stevenson's book of 1881 in which the object of a liberal education is discussed, but the origin of the phrase was certainly uppermost in Gissing's mind when he wrote it. As will appear from comments on subsequent entries, Gissing had a thorough knowledge of Horace's works; he went on quoting him in many of his books and could not but think of him while in Rome in 1888. Horace is cited several times from memory in the Gissing-Bertz correspondence, and when for health reasons Gissing had to go and live in the south of France in 1902, Horace was among the authors whose works he chose to take with him, "about fifty volumes carefully selected."
The "good wish" recorded here involves wishes which were at best partly fulfilled during Gissing's short life: the favour he never courted and rarely received; the fame, if that is the word, which only came posthumously; the health which was a boon he only relished once he had lost it. As to the "never-failing purse," he probably had it in mind when he wrote those angry words in *A Life's Morning* (Ch. V): "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."

83

**Consolation**

"Dabit Deus his quoque finem."

*Aen. I.*

[Of these things too heaven will grant an end.]

**Notes**

The notion of consolation was a crucial one to Gissing, and it is doubtful whether all the intellectual and unintellectual ways to it which he devised from the days of his class-conscious childhood to the time of his semi-exile in France were more than temporary expedients. He accused himself of self-pity—a feeling occasionally to be read between the lines of these *Extracts*—and intellectual arrogance, but with what heaven could offer he would have no truck. The only heaven his mind could envisage was the pagan heaven of the ancients, to him a purely abstract concept. It is but poor solace to reflect that all the afflictions of human life will sooner or later come to an end. Gissing readily associated Virgil with Sunday and repose, and he wrote movingly on the subject of the ultimate consolation in *Henry Ryecroft* (Autumn XII): "There is no such gratulation as *Hic jacet.* There is no such dignity as that of death." The fact that the notion of consolation was crucial to Gissing may help to explain the attraction for him of Nietzsche, who is also centrally concerned with what he calls "metaphysical solace."

Gissing's knowledge of Virgil parallels his knowledge of Horace. He began to read his works early, possibly as a schoolboy in Wakefield, and listed him in 1885 among the writers he intended to study thoroughly. His enthusiasm is mirrored in his first two novels: in *Workers in the Dawn*, Helen Norman, as we know, and Mr. Tollady read Virgil; in *The Unclassed*, Julian Casti evokes the subject of *The Aeneid* when revealing to his friend Waymark his ambitious plan for an historical novel relating to the siege and capture of Rome by Alaric (Ch. IX). In the case of Virgil—not an exceptional one—he tried to fire others with his own enthusiasm.
He sent Ellen a copy of Book I of *The Aeneid* in January 1888 after convincing her the year before that she must undertake the study of Latin. From Paris he sent her a French translation of Book III in October, and expressed his satisfaction on September 29, 1889 (letter in the Berg Collection), that "the Virgil begins to be easier." When he saw oxen in a street in Naples, he was immediately reminded of Virgil. So quite appropriately Virgil appears in the Calabrian context of *By the Ionian Sea* (chapters on Cotrone and Squillace). When he was sure his correspondent would understand or relish a quotation from or an allusion to the Latin poet, he gladly indulged in that pleasure. Characteristic examples are found in his letters to Eduard Bertz. As soon as he arrived in Naples, he sent him a postcard conveying his intense emotion: "My window looks over Posilippa [sic] and Vergil's Tomb. Impossible, impossible to imagine it!" (October 31, 1888, *LGB*, p. 12). Tennyson, as noted in the Introduction, he saw as a worthy successor of Virgil and Theocritus.

Gissing's copy of Virgil's *Opera*, with a Commentary by John Connington (London, 1865) in three volumes, is in private hands. It was awarded to him as first prize in Latin in 1873-74 and has the Owens College presentation bookplate (see Parke-Bernet sale no. 2891 of September 23, 1969, item 133).

84

**Pessimism**

\[
\text{μὴ φῶναι τὸν ἀπαντά μυκᾶ λόγον: τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φωνῇ,} \\
\text{βῆναι κεῖθεν δὲν πέρ ἤκει,} \\
\text{πολὺ δεύτερον, ὡς τάχιστα.}
\]

Oedip. Col. 1225 &c.

[Not to be born at all is best, far best that can befall a man; next best, when born, with least delay to trace the backward way.]

**Notes**

This third Sophocles entry was made shortly after the completion of the well-known essay on "The Hope of Pessimism" in the autumn of 1882, at a time when Gissing was despairing of ever making his way in the literary world. The essay, however, was a derivative of Schopenhauer, not of Sophocles.

Evidence of interest in Sophocles occurs mainly in the diary in 1888 and 1889. When Gissing ceased giving Greek lessons to Walter Graham, whom he regarded as the best pupil he ever had, he gave him as a keepsake a copy of R. C. Jebb's
"superb edition" of the Antigone (Diary, July 16, 17, and 24, 1888). While in Paris in the autumn he saw a performance of Oedipe Roi (October 15), and later in Rome noted his impressions of the statue of Sophocles in the Lateran Museum (December 28). He subsequently read the Philoctetes in Athens and on the boat from the Piraeus to Brindisi. A significant allusion which testifies to great familiarity with Oedipus Coloneus occurs in a letter to Bertz of December 14, 1889, in which he related the story of his attending a lecture on the Philoctetes at the University of Athens (LGB, pp. 90-91).

85, 86

Wedded Life

οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ἡε κραΐσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἡ δὲ ὀμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν ὀικον ἕχοτον
ἄνηρ ἢ δὲ γυνὴ.

Odyssey. VI.182.

[For nothing is greater or better than this, when man and wife dwell in a house in one accord.]

Motto for Unhappy Man

οὐς τινας ἵμεῖς ἵστε μάλιστ’ ὄχέοντας όιξίν
ἀνθρώπων, τοῖσιν κεν ἐν ἀλγεσιν ἰσωσαίμη.

Odyssey. VII.211.

[Whomsoever ye know among men who bear the greatest burden of woe, to them might I liken myself in my sorrows.]
Homer, like Shakespeare, means life to Reardon; that the time-serving Milvain rejects the Greek poet in Ch. I sets him in perspective and announces the central theme of the novel, the corruption of art by trade: "We talk of literature as a trade, not of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare."

Throughout his career Gissing stuck to his view of Homer as the paradigm of literary excellence. He discovered him with delight in his school days, read him of his own free will in America (his American Notebook contains some twenty pages of notes on Homer and the *Iliad*), and went on reading him till his death (Homer appears in at least thirty-seven diary entries). His attachment to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* led him to write with reverence and emotion about their author. "He is the fountain-head of most modern poetry," he commented in a letter of May 21, 1886, to his sister Ellen. "He has the world all fresh before him, and no fear of not being original. To read him is like standing in the light of sunrise and seeing the world renewed. Of the Greeks he was the Bible, —the philosophers quote him as moderns do from the Jewish Scriptures. When you have read Homer, your thought will be enriched with knowledge of an era of human history" (*LMF*, p. 181, Berg Coll.). More moving still is this *Commonplace Book* entry made about a year later: "Nothing in literature affects me so powerfully as certain passages in Homer. The Hector & Andromache, the scene where the horse addresses Achilles, the mourning of Andromache, &c, always bring tears, howsoever often I read them. Shakespeare not often affects me in that way. Modern pathos has for the most part lost its power over me" (p. 29). To his sister Margaret, a narrow-minded provincial young lady, he confessed his devotion to Homer in a way which was intended to give her a shock: "Homer, —well, one cannot speak of him, only think" (letter of April 12, 1887, *LMF*, p. 191, Berg Coll.). He knew that his elder sister could not, indeed would not, think of the pagan poet. Just as in *New Grub Street* appreciation of Homer is the touchstone of a true understanding of literature, so it was, Gissing thought, a sufficient criterion for banishing the Goncourt brothers from the confraternity of authors he respected: "Nothing of more significance in the journal of the Goncourts than those quarrels with St. Victor about Homer. Their utter inability to appreciate Homer, (& the classical poets in general,) their saying that they would rather read *Adolphe*, is the key to all that is unsatisfactory in their thought & their production. The men lack poetry; their observation has therefore merely arid results" (*Commonplace Book*, pp. 30-31). His own experience convinced him that the teaching of Greek at school should begin with the *Odyssey*. Here again, when recording some of his impressions late in life, his tone was touchingly sentimental: "I always remember my 1st reading of the *Odyssey*, how warm & human it seemed, how near & yet how richly practical, compared with the *Iliad*. Of course the poetry is easier to understand. I was strongly impressed by the picture of Penelope descending into the hall & there, veiled, leaning against a column. All seemed to me overshed with golden light" (*Commonplace Book*, pp. 65 and 69).
In these two quotations from the *Odyssey* we have one of the many keys to the admiration Gissing felt for Homer. He found in the Greek poet an elemental rendering of human life combined with a humanity which overpowered his own intellect and emotions, together with an ideal of virtue divested of all the unsavoury accretions of modern, predominantly Christian civilization, which again partly explains the appeal of Nietzsche to him. Complicated as Gissing's personality was, his fundamental requirements were very simple ones. He was very much attached to the notion of the home; except in childhood, until his father's death in 1870, he never had a home worthy of the name. A good wife in it, a wife capable of understanding and sympathy, and a carefully selected library, were about all he would have liked to see in his home, with the possible exception of a dear friend who paid an occasional visit. The vision, offered by Homer in the first quotation, of domestic harmony in a simple, comfortable house (for the epithets are implicit), was a vision which always lay at the back of Gissing's fiction; and this unattainable goal, watched from afar for years and barely reached even at the end of his life, fed both his inextinguishable idealism and his ever-renewed disenchantment. The simplicity of the image called forth by Homer's lines was for Gissing an antidote to the restlessness of modern life which he was to describe in *The Whirlpool* (1897). The burden of woe borne by man in the second quotation was felt by him to be a link with the poet of ancient Greece who had so deeply sensed the miseries of the human condition. As in the case of Schopenhauer, the fact that he found in Homer an anticipation of his own predicament should not lead us to underestimate the intellectual value he attached to the author's words independently of their application to his personal situation. On various occasions Gissing expressed his sympathy for his fellow creatures' sufferings: "I do not love the people—true. But my passion of sympathy for the suffering poor." "Why is it so painful to me to see even a blackguard humiliated?" (*Commonplace Book*, pp. 54 and 67).

At the time he made these two entries he had already paid homage to Homer in *Workers in the Dawn*. The heroine, Helen Norman, who learns Greek, exclaims: "If a mere translation could inspire such a sonnet as that of Keats, what must Homer in the original be!" (Vol. I, Ch. XIV), whereas the hero, Arthur Golding, who once read aloud to Mr. Tollady a translation of the *Odyssey*, allows his imagination to wander off to a Greek altar on seeing a thin stream of smoke ascending from a chimney (Vol. III, Ch. III). When he entered the above entries Gissing was teaching Greek to some private pupils. "It is an ambition of mine," he had written to his brother Algernon on March 13, 1881, "to read Homer and the Greek tragedians as easily at least as I read Goethe, and I think I am at length on the road thither" (*LMF*, p. 95, John Spiers).
Life a Game

Σκηνὴ πᾶς ὁ βίος καὶ παίγνιον ἢ μάθε παίζειν,
τὴν σπουδὴν μεταθείς, ἢ φέρε τὰς ὀδύνας.

Palladas. Epigram.

[All life is a stage and a play: either learn to play, laying your gravity aside, or bear with life's pains.]

Notes

This epigram is one of the many representations in literature of human life as a stage, and Shakespeare's own rendering of the idea has somewhat obliterated Palladas' ironical statement.

Nowhere else in Gissing's works and private papers does Palladas appear. But as Palladas, a Greek writer of epigrams who lived at Alexandria in the early fifth century A.D., occurs in The Greek Anthology (Loeb Classical Library), a book with which Gissing was familiar, it is reasonable to suppose that he found him in it. The half-title page of his copy of the Anthologia Graeca survived in Gabrielle Fleury's papers (Coustillas Coll.); it reads at the top "George R. Gissing/Nov. 1880." In Henry Ryecroft, The Greek Anthology is listed among Ryecroft's reading at the British Museum in Spring XVII.

The fierceness and vigour of this last Greek poet of any real stature in the crumbling pagan world, to say nothing of his deep pessimism, could not fail to appeal to the author of Workers in the Dawn and (by now) "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies." Young Gissing derived some comfort from such philosophical pronouncements as this epigram by Palladas, but, as he admitted in Henry Ryecroft, stoicism proved of limited value in his own case. The letters he wrote to his friends in the last few years of his life are interspersed with gloomy references to his health and circumstances. Thus in a letter to C. F. Keary of January 18, 1903: "I still struggle on in the old way, writing for a score of readers, and paid in proportion. It did not matter much when one was in good health, but it does matter rather seriously when working hours are cut down to about two a day" (Coustillas Coll.).
extracts 88,89

88,89

subjects of art

"hast du nicht gute gesellschaft gesehn? es zeigt uns dein buchlein
fast nur gaukler und volk, ja was noch niedriger ist.
gute gesellschaft hab' ich gesehn; man nennt sie die gute,
Wenn sie zum kleinsten gedicht keine gelegenheit giebt."

goethe. epig. 76.

[have you seen no society folk? your little book portrays hardly anything
but tricksters and riff-raff and worse. i have seen society; it is called
society when it occasions not even the shortest of poems.]

habit in love

"neigung besiegen ist schwer; gesellet sich aber gewohnheit,
wurzelnd, allmahlig zu ihr, unuberwindlich ist sie."

do. vier jahreszeiten 25.

[inclination alone is difficult to overcome; married to habit, with its
spreading roots, it is invincible.]

notes

like entries 52 to 54, entry 88 is a quotation from the venezianische epigramme
written by goethe between 1790 and 1795. it shows the poet in a bitter and
satirical mood, and gissing found it suitable as an epigraph to the unclassed
(1884), the novel to which he was now turning his attention. entry 89, an extract
from the vier jahreszeiten, surely has less autobiographical significance
concerning the transcriber, unless it should be viewed as an acknowledgment of the
lastingness of human love, an ideal which, except in his letters to gabrielle
fleury, he was rather inclined to refute than accept.

after the unclassed, his next published novel, demos, was again to have an
epigraph from goethe. his reading of german literature was still both an essential
occupation and an intellectual pleasure. a letter to algernon of september 18,
1884, obviously written some time after the above entries, contained enthusiastic
encouragement to read goethe. algernon was invited to pass from george lewes's
goethe to Carlyle's essays on the german poet, then to "goethe himself, who is not
lightly to be approached" (mcgregor library, university of virginia). when algernon
embarked on his career as a novelist, george gave him a piece of advice: "it
was goethe's practice to throw into a work of art each stage of life's experience;
I believe everyone who writes has to do the same." (December 9, 1887, McGregor Library, University of Virginia).

In this last quotation about Goethe lies the key to a thorough understanding of the German poet's influence on Gissing as well as the secret of the permanent vitality of Gissing's work. He was as good as his word, throwing into every novel his whole experience of life. Writing, for him, meant perpetual artistic, emotional and intellectual commitment. That his presence, in the form of his total experience, is to be felt in his works not only did not trouble him, but seemed to him a requisite of good artistic work. His personal theory of realism takes this into account, as stated earlier. It is no wonder therefore that, considered as a whole, these Extracts encapsulate his experience. Furthermore, Goethe's "practice" sums up the basic difference between literature which finds readers after its author's death and literature which falls into irrecoverable oblivion. Morley Roberts, for one, ignored Goethe's practice and is remembered only as the friend and biographer of Gissing and W. H. Hudson. His picture of artistic bohemia in In Low Relief (1890) compares poorly with Gissing's representation of literary life in New Grub Street.

Ritual

"Vis deos propitiare? Bonus esto. Satis illos coluit quisquis imitatus est."

Seneca. Ep. XCV.

[You would win over the gods? Then be virtuous. He who imitates them, is worshipping them sufficiently.]

Notes

This is an extract from the collection of 124 letters of Seneca (c. 4 B.C.-65 A.D.) to his friend Lucilius, procurator of Sicily and poet. They are moral essays on life, dealing with such themes as happiness, the supreme good, the terrors of death, and riches. As the present quotation indicates, they are persuasive, not dogmatic in tone; they reflect a vast and deep experience of life and combine elements recognizably stoic, epicurean and Christian. Seneca's wisdom and practicality prevent him from aiming at objectives which are altogether too lofty. Gissing aimed his sights lower still. He certainly had Seneca in mind when discussing the value of stoicism in Henry Ryecroft.
The only other reference to the Latin philosopher and tragedian that has been traced in his writings is an unpublished entry in his *Commonplace Book* (MS, p. 12): "Seneca ('De Clementia') reflects 'quantum periculum immineret, si servi nostri numerare nos coepissent,' that is, "how great would be the impending danger if our slaves should begin to count our number" (1.24.1).

**Places**

"Places are too much

Or else too little, for immortal man,—

Too little when love's May o'ergrows the ground,

Too much, when that luxuriant robe of green

Is rustling to our ankles in dead leaves."

*Aurora Leigh*. Bk VII.

**Notes**

The earliest mention of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning in Gissing's correspondence seems to occur in a letter he wrote to his sister Margaret on October 4, 1882, not long before he transcribed the above lines in *Extracts from my Reading*. There is no doubt, however, that he had been familiar for some years with Mrs. Browning's verse; nor should we hesitate to admit that the advice he gave was conditioned by Margaret's personality. He made a point of suggesting a piece which would suit her intellectual level. After recommending Coleridge, Cowper's *Task,* and Jean Ingelow (this poet's works were in Thomas Gissing's library), he ventured to add: "Mrs. Browning is of course to be read, and re-read, and read yet again. Have you come across the 'Romance of the Swan's Nest'? Glorious little piece, that!" (Berg Coll.). "Aurora Leigh," the source of the present entry, is alluded to in another letter to the same correspondent of October 7, 1885 (Berg Coll.). He was content to say that Margaret should read the poem very thoughtfully. When it became Ellen's turn to read "Aurora Leigh," she asked him to explain a certain passage, which he did on November 22, 1886 (Berg Coll.). That his admiration was greater than one suspected can be seen in another letter to Margaret of April 12, 1887, while he was reading *Villette* again. Charlotte Brontë, he observed, "is the greatest English woman after Mrs. Browning" (*LMF*, p. 191, Berg Coll.). No wonder, then, that when he arrived in Florence in the winter of 1888-1889 one of his first visits was to the Casa Guidi. A decade later she was selected by him for special praise in his correspondence with Gabrielle Fieury. "She is England's greatest woman-poet," he wrote (letter of August 26, 1898, *LGF*, p. 49.). Time had not
altered his opinion, and he sent Gabrielle a copy of selected poems by Mrs. Browning.

In view of Gissing's enthusiasm, it is strange that no echo of her verse has been identified in his own work, surely an exceptional case as the prose of his novels, contrary to what some commentators have stated, abounds with echoes from the poets, playwrights and prose-writers of England, let alone echoes from the Bible. It is also a fact that he mentioned Mrs. Browning only in letters to women.

The general truth so poetically expressed by Elizabeth Barrett-Browning makes one wonder whether, at the age of twenty-five, Gissing did not occasionally feel among the class of men for whom "places are too much." The provisional title (taken from Schopenhauer) of his current novel, "The Burden of Life" (The Unclassed), would seem to suggest that this was the case sometime in 1883.

Servitude

\[\text{Gissing's letters and papers are studded with allusions to Homer and the Odyssey. Among his projects which failed to materialize was "a paper on the very varied reminiscences always stirred in me by sunshine": it would have included recollections of the days when he studied Homer (Scrapbook, Pforzheimer Library). He was}\]

\[\text{Extract 92}\]

\[\text{Servitude}\]

\[\text{For Zeus, whose voice is borne afar, takes away half his worth from a man, when the day of slavery comes upon him.}\]

Notes

This quotation, which Pope translated "Whatever day/ Makes man a slave, takes half his worth away," is the passage Reardon has in mind when he says to his wife in Ch. XV of New Grub Street: "You remember the line of Homer I have often quoted about the demoralising effect of enslavement." Poverty, he naturally adds, "degrades in the same way." This was one of Gissing's favourite quotations, the truth of which he had tested in America and in his early London days. The theme crops up in many of his books, in particular Workers in the Dawn, The Nether World and The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft (where, though in another context, Homer is referred to in Spring X, Summer V and XXVII, and Winter XV).

Gissing's letters and papers are studded with allusions to Homer and the Odyssey. Among his projects which failed to materialize was "a paper on the very varied reminiscences always stirred in me by sunshine": it would have included recollections of the days when he studied Homer (Scrapbook, Pforzheimer Library). He was
a good propagandist for a better knowledge of Homer’s work in his own family: we find him preparing notes on the *Iliad*, Book XXIV, for Algernon in June 1878 because his brother had to study this particular book for an examination; in 1886-1888 we see him urging his sisters to read the Greek poet in translation, reading him himself fairly regularly, and reading a book of the *Odyssey* to Margaret during a stay at Wakefield.

93, 94, 95

*Posthumous Fame*

"The voice comes deepest from the sepulchre, and a great name hath its root in the dead body."

Landor. "Epic., Leont. & Tern."

*Heart & Eye*

"The heart reflects a fuller and a fairer image of us than the eye can."

D: d:

*Mortality*

"It is better to repose in the earth betimes than to sit up late; better, than to cling pertinaciously to what we feel crumbling under us, and to protract an inevitable fall. We may enjoy the present while we are insensible of infirmity and decay: but the present, like a note in music, is nothing but as it appertains to what is past and what is to come. 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."

Landor. "Aesop & Rhodope."

*Notes*

Gissing was busy reading Landor in the autumn of 1883. In a letter of September 8 to Algernon (Yale) he wrote: "I myself read very much for the mere study of style and phraseology." He recommended Shakespeare’s sonnets and the Old Testament, adding that he had "just read Forster’s Life of Landor, and am beginning the latter’s works. Here, again, is English such as perhaps no man but Shakespeare ever wrote. If I find I have to give a year to the seven big vols., I shall not
grudge the time." Clearly he had found a set of *The Works and Life of Landor* in eight volumes, edited by John Forster, the first volume being an abridgment of the Life first published by Forster in 1869. On September 23, 1883, he reported to the same correspondent that he had got through the first volume, and was now reading the *Imaginary Conversations*; he quoted with admiration entry no. 95 in *Extracts from my Reading*: "This is perfect prose." The two preceding entries are doubtless examples of what he calls "marvellous passages" (*LMF*, p. 133, Berg Coll.). The recent reissue of the *Imaginary Conversations* in five volumes (London, 1883) is mentioned in another letter to his brother dated October 18, 1883 (Yale). Entry 93 on Posthumous Fame is marked with a vertical line in the margin in his own copy of *Imaginary Conversations*, p. 285 (see entry 68). The entry on Mortality, like entry 68, is quoted in his correspondence with Gabrielle Fleury (September 15, 1898, *LGF*, pp. 64-65).

In *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), Vol. II, Ch. IX, he has Mr. Meres quote Landor: "Thank heaven that you can live," the literary man says to Ada Warren, "'Beyond the arrows, shouts, and views of men'." And in October 1886 he sent his sister Margaret a volume of selections from Landor, probably similar to his own Camelot series volume (letter of October 26, Berg Coll.).

96

Method in Imaginative Work

"For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all."

Spenser. Introduction to "Faerie Queene."

Notes

Edmund Spenser was one of the English poets, knowledge of whom Gissing once placed among his intellectual ambitions (letter to Ellen Gissing, August 2, 1885, *LMF*, p. 161, Berg Coll.), but ten days later he deplored in a letter to his elder sister that one takes down Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser too seldom from one's shelves (*LMF*, p. 165, Berg Coll.). This is fairly characteristic of his attitude to Spenser. He recommended the Elizabethan poet to Ellen (letter of November 4, 1885, *LMF*, p. 173, Berg Coll.) partly because Spenser, together with Milton, "was everything to Keats," whom he was currently reading, but Spenser occurs infrequently in his books and papers. A comparatively late diary jotting records that
he read "a little 'Faerie Queene'" on April 10, 1892—not unexpectedly a Sunday—but this seems to be the last time he tried to reread Spenser.

He probably first read him in a copy purchased by his father, *The Works of Edmund Spenser* (London: Routledge, Warne & Routledge, 1861), with a printed label "T. W. Gissing," which used to be in Alfred Gissing's library. At the end of his first session at Owens College, Manchester, he was awarded a five-volume set of *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, edited by J. Payne Collier, S.F.A. (London: Bell and Daldry, 1862), which was also in Alfred Gissing's library. A label stuck on the front endpaper read: "Owens College/Manchester/Session 1872-3/To George Robert Gissing/This Book was adjudged as/the English Poem Prize by/A. W. Ward Professor." In *Born in Exile*, Earwaker, repeating the author's experience, wins a five-volume edition of Spenser as a prize for his poem "Alaric" (Gissing's own prize poem was "Ravenna"), but he does not care for it as he already has a copy. Gissing had another copy, signed "George R. Gissing/1877" on the title page: the one-volume Globe edition of the *Complete Works*, edited by R. Morris (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869). This is now in the Coustillas collection; the present entry is not marked in it.

This volume bears testimony to the catholicity of his tastes on his return from America, and the present entry, which was not made until the autumn of 1883 at the earliest, should be read as an oblique declaration from Gissing that he regarded his own novels primarily as works of art, not as mere records of things observed. The omniscience of the artist was to him at once an aim, a method and a comfort. "I believe a novelist would make the best biographer," he wrote to Clara Collet on November 28, 1895, "I wish I had someone's life to try my hand upon" (Robert Collet). And, more importantly, he noted in his *Commonplace Book* (p. 69): "The art of fiction has this great ethical importance, that it enables one to tell the truth about human beings in a way which is impossible in actual life." Spenser's judgment on the basic distinction between the poet's work and the historiographer's has a parallel in the dual character of Gissing's fiction. One aspect of it—the faithful sociological rendering of the reality he observed around him—is based on his enquiries into facts like those he recorded in his scrapbook. The other, which is purely imaginative, partakes of the nature of the poet's imaginings within the framework of the socially and humanly possible. There is no originality in this combination *per se*; the originality of Gissing's work of course derives from his personality, his culture and experience.

"Character is Fate."

Novalis.
Notes

This aphorism is a paraphrase from Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Part Two), where the German writer actually wrote "dass Schicksal und Gemüt Namen eines Begriffes sind," that is, "Fate and Character are different names for the same thing." Had Gissing quoted direct from Novalis, he would presumably have given the quotation in German, or failing that, in its proper English form. He more likely quoted from an English source, but probably not from George Eliot who, in *The Mill on the Floss* (Book VI, Ch. VI) cited Novalis as saying that "Character is destiny." In fact, Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher of the late sixth century and early fifth century B.C., had expressed literally the same notion. Whatever construction may have been put on the aphorism from Heraclitus onwards, Gissing's work offers abundant evidence that he viewed personal fate largely as an offshoot of heredity, though fate also had in his eyes sociological dimensions which were inseparable from the new developments of English society since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

The quotation appears without quotes in "A Song of Sixpence," a sketch which was reprinted in *Human Odds and Ends* (1898). The context is once more markedly ironical. Miss Withers, the main character, is a woman of "not more than forty" who gives piano lessons in a lower-class district, and the story is an account of personal and social decline. Gissing makes fun of those philosophers who minimize man's responsibility for his own acts. "Of course, it was not merely by stress of misfortune that Miss Withers had fallen so low. Character is fate, but of necessity we attribute to mortals a share in the shaping of their own ends" (p. 226).

It is worth noting that Thomas Hardy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) gives the quotation in the same form as Gissing ("Character is Fate, said Novalis"), but the date of publication of Hardy's novel rules out the possibility of Hardy having been Gissing's source for the present entry. In the copy of the novel he gave to Gissing (Coustillas Coll.) the passage is not marked, but the recipient must have felt the phrase had lost much of its originality, hence perhaps his treatment of it in "A Song of Sixpence," which was written in September 1895.

98, 99

Past Joy

"Un souvenir heureux est peut-être sur terre
Plus vrai que le bonheur."

De Musset: "Souvenir."

[On earth a happy memory is perhaps more real than happiness itself.]
A Moment of True Life

"Malheureux! cet instant où votre âme engourdie
A secoué les fers qu'elle traîne ici-bas,
Ce fugitif instant fut toute votre vie;
Ne le regrettez pas!"

Do. do.

[Unhappy man! That moment when your dull soul shook off its earthly fetters, that fleeting moment was your life; do not regret it!]

Notes

Manifestations of interest in Musset’s life and work range from Gissing’s American period to his settling in France. As we saw apropos entry 18, he read Musset (or at least Henry James’s essay on Musset) in 1877, and Morley Roberts tells us in The Private Life of Henry Maitland that his friend viewed Musset and Murger in the light of that French bohemianism which so often featured in their literary conversations in the 1880s. The Commonplace Book contains an oblique reference to this in a short discussion of the character of Fanny Bolton in Pendennis: "Great God, compare her with a grisette of Murger or Musset! Are the latter purely idealistic? I wish it were possible to decide that ever-recurring question" (p. 31). About the time he entered these two quotations he was reading Musset’s poetry, which supplied him with the motto for Isabel Clarendon. The three passages come from the same poem, "Souvenir." Musset’s romanticism appealed to him in a compelling manner until his second marriage, which transplanted him from the hinterland between the slums and the world of Mrs. Gaussen (the "model" for Isabel Clarendon) to the unromantic, matter-of-fact world that was born of his union with Edith Underwood. The quest for happiness is considered from a variety of angles in his fiction, and these two entries have a flavour which is reminiscent of passages not only in Isabel Clarendon, but in Born in Exile, where Musset’s grisettes crop up in a conversation on matrimony (Part II, Ch. II). Gissing responded both to the moods of Musset’s verse and to its sad music; Musset’s prominent place in the romantic period, his licentious life, and his poetic fluency roused in him an interest which was at once intellectual and personal. One feels he would have liked to share some of his experiences, and it was certainly of Musset among others that he was thinking when he deplored he had not been born French. Musset and George Sand were inseparable in his mind from the first (see American Notebook and diary entry for October 11, 1888): their romantic liaison evoked a mode of life with which the humdrum conventional existence of the English middle classes had little connection, and Gissing’s choice between the two would have been quite unequivocal.
Interest in Musset was suddenly revived when Gabrielle Fleury told him on July 26, 1898, of her friendship with Mme. Lardin de Musset, Alfred's sister. This led him to read Paul Mariéton's book on George Sand and Musset, Une Histoire d'amour, the following October. A visit to Mme. de Musset, shortly after his honeymoon with Gabrielle, was one of the first pleasant events of his life in Paris. Meanwhile various allusions to Musset found their way into his current novel, The Crown of Life (1899). Further diary entries record his reading of Comédies et Proverbes and his attending a performance of On ne badine pas avec l'amour at the Théâtre Français. Doubtless Musset was discussed again in the summer of 1901 when the poet's sister came to stay with the Fleurys and Gissing at Saint-Honoré-les-Bains. Other appreciative references occur in the correspondence with Gabrielle Fleury and Eduard Bertz, and a more casual allusion in one of the autobiographical short stories, "A Lodger in Maze Pond" (reprinted in The House of Cobwebs).

Unhappy Marriages

"It often happens that, if a man unhappy in the married state were to disclose the manifold causes of his uneasiness, they would be found, by those who were beyond their influence, to be of such a nature as rather to excite derision than sympathy. The waters of bitterness do not fall on his head in a cataract, but through a colander; one however like the vases of the Danaïdes, perforated only for replenishment. We know scarcely the vestibule of a house of which we fancy we have penetrated into all the corners. We know not how grievously a man may have suffered, long before the calumnies of the world befell him as he reluctantly left his house-door. There are women from whom incessant tears of anger swell forth at imaginary wrongs; but of contrition for their own delinquencies, not one."


Notes

This entry, which is marked with a cross on pp. 35-36 in Extracts from my Reading, must have been made a short time after entries 93 to 95 (pp. 33-34). Gissing transcribed these words of Landor after he had separated from his first wife, and they aroused painful memories. He was well aware that the blame for his own conjugal unhappiness would have been laid at his own door by most people acquainted with his quixotic attempt to redeem Nell. He knew that Nell was an inveterate liar who went about airing calumnies about his treatment of her, and that her drinking companions were all too ready to believe any discreditable report about him she might spread, or that, at least, if they suspected her of insincerity, they had no sympathy for a man who had been weak enough to attach such a woman to
himself. Of the daily attrition of married life with such a partner as Nell, and of her capacity to admit her wrongs, Gissing's correspondence for the late 1870s and early 1880s offers a wealth of examples. The subject is dealt with imaginatively in *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*. The shrewd analysis of the Arthur Golding-Carrie Mitchell and Julian Casti-Harriet Smales relationships amounts to fictional illustrations of Landor's text.

101

*Change of Love*

"A man in love with one woman, and in all but absolute consciousness, behind the thinnest of veils, preparing his mind to love another, will be barely credible. The particular hunger of the forceful but adaptable heart is the key of him. Behold the mountain rillet, become a brook, become a torrent, how it inarms a handsome boulder: yet if the stone will not go with it, on it hurries, pursuing self in extension, down to where perchance a dam has been raised of a sufficient depth to enfold and keep it from inordinate restlessness."

G. Meredith: *The Egoist*. Chap. XXXVII.

*Notes*

Considering Gissing's great interest in the literature of his time, it is strange that no mention of George Meredith should appear in his correspondence and papers until 1884, the year of the present entry. It is well known that Meredith, in his capacity as manuscript reader for Chapman & Hall, read Gissing's second published novel, *The Unclassed*, which was completed in December 1883 and published six months later. A letter of June 12, 1884, to Algernon Gissing reads in part: "I have found, by the bye, that Chapman's reader, who talked with me so sympathetically about the book, was no other than George Meredith. It is an excellent thing to have got his good word. His own novels are of the superlatively tough species [. . .]. See, for instance, the beginning of 'Diana' in the current *Fortnightly* (LMF, p. 138, Yale). Very likely this personal contact with Meredith prompted Gissing to read or re-read some of his novels, in particular *The Egoist*, from which the present considerations on love are quoted. He admired the older novelist's psychological subtleties, the amount of intellectuality invested in his fiction, and the originality of his style; but he regretted his obscurity.

Only a long article could do justice to the complex relationship between the two writers; it would have to take into account their published and unpublished correspondence, their various meetings in London and at Box Hill, their opinions of each other's works, and the many allusions to Meredith, the man and writer, in
Gissing’s diary, to say nothing of their common admiration for German writers like Goethe and Heine. It was mainly in 1884-1885 and again from 1895 (the year of the famous Omar Khayyám Club dinner at the Burford Bridge Hotel) to 1899 that they were in touch. Meredith read *Isabel Clarendon* for Chapman, and he it was who suggested that the book be reduced to two volumes. Naturally, Meredith’s name recurs fairly frequently in Gissing’s letters to Edward Clodd (a common friend), to Eduard Bertz, with whom he conducted a markedly intellectual correspondence, and to Gabrielle Fleury, whom he understandably wished to show that he was respected by the greatest living English novelist. He also tried to encourage his old friend Henry Hick to read the grand old man, probably with moderate success. Most significant of his high consideration for Meredith’s literary achievements may well be his references to him in letters to his elder son Walter (Yale). He wrote in this strain in a letter of May 15, 1896, Walter being then four and a half years old: "On Tuesday I went over to Box Hill, and had tea with George Meredith in his beautiful garden. I enjoyed it very much and I am to go and have dinner with him before long. When you grow up, and are able to read books, you will be glad to talk to me about George Meredith, and what he looked like, and what he said."

The only Gissing novel containing a reference to Meredith is *The Crown of Life* (Ch. XXI). Four lines from "The Last Contention" are quoted in an eminently flattering context.

**102**

*Realism*

"If we are now to do anything great, good, awful, religious, it must be got out of our own little island and out of this year 1846, railroads and all: if a British painter, I say this in serious earnestness, cannot make historical characters out of the British House of Peers, he cannot paint history; and if he cannot make a Madonna of a British girl of the nineteenth century, he cannot paint one at all."

*Ruskin. Mod. Painters. Vol. I.122 (1846).*

**Notes**

Ruskin was one of Gissing’s favourite contemporary essayists in the 1870s and 1880s. His cultural influence was a genuine intellectual comfort to the struggling novelist. Of all Ruskin’s works it was *Modern Painters* which he read most attentively, making copious notes from the volumes in his *Commonplace Book*. That he had a copy seems very likely, though it was probably not the unsigned four-volume set (New Edition. George Allen, Orpington and London, 1897) which the late
Alfred Gissing had in his library. Early letters mention Ruskin in a spirit of not uncritical admiration. On June 7, 1880, he wrote to his brother Algernon: "You should read Ruskin's article in *Nineteenth Cent*², though I don't altogether agree with it. It is finely written as far as language goes" (Yale). And on October 13 of the same year we find him urging his brother to read a letter from Ruskin to the Glasgow students in the *Daily News* of that day: "What in the Devil's name have you to do with politics?" it began (Yale). Further evidence that he delighted in Ruskin's candour occurs in a letter of May 12, 1883, to his sister Margaret, which offers the most explicit account of his interest in Ruskin. After recommending *Unto This Last*, he made this confession: "Yes, I go with him very far, and can always exult in the mere glory of his English, which is in prose what S'vinburne is in verse, the most artistic work of the day. His worship of Beauty I look upon as essentially valuable. In that he differentiates himself from Carlyle, whom else he closely follows. It matters little that his immediate schemes are impracticable; to keep before the eyes of men the *ideal* is the great thing; it does its work in the course of time" (*LMF*, p. 126, Berg Coll.). Other letters to members of his family in 1883-1884 show that he followed Ruskin's activities closely and that he deferred to Ruskin's opinions regarding the conservation of nature. For instance when in August 1884 he visited Bonscale, near Ullswater, and saw a great stream defiled by mill-refuse, he observed that "Ruskin should lift up his voice" (letter to Algernon, August 12, 1884, *LMF*, p. 144, Yale).

The date of the present entry can be inferred from a passage in a letter of October 26, 1884, to his brother (*LMF*, p. 150, where it is misdated, Berg Coll.) in which he says he is "just engaged upon *Modern Painters*." He liked the "Ruskinisms of thought and diction," but jibbed at the "theological mode of regarding aesthetic questions." What pleased him particularly in the passage he transcribed was the notion that artistic inspiration may and must be drawn from contemporary reality. He saw in Ruskin's statement ample justification for the realistic novels he was writing, in which idealism was nonetheless conspicuous. Wasn't Ida Starr, in *The Unclassed* (1884), "a British girl of the nineteenth century" turned into some sort of madonna? As for Ruskin's admiration for the British House of Lords, Gissing certainly did not share it any more than his father had done. If the Forties were remarkable in any way, it was rather for the development of railways, duly noted by Ruskin, and for political and social movements such as the Free Trade and Chartist movements, than for the composition and activities of the Upper House.

**Wearisome Narration**

"*Le secret d'ennuyer est celui de tout dire.***"

Voltaire.
[The secret of being wearisome is to spell everything out.]

Notes

The art of expression through implication, of indirect and discreet assertion, was currently being learnt by Gissing in his fiction. This quotation from Voltaire will have been noted because it offered an authoritative confirmation of his thoughts of the moment. When his brother decided to try his hand at fiction and requested advice from George, the latter observed, among copious technical suggestions: "The secret of art in fiction is the indirect. Nothing must be told too plumply. Play about your facts and intersperse them with humour or satire" (letter of November 9, 1883, George Gissing on Fiction, ed. Jacob and Cynthia Korg, London: Enitharmon Press, 1978, p. 27). Or, as he said to the same correspondent on September 7, 1884, "you must take for granted your reader's knowledge" (ibid., p. 35).

It is uncertain whether Gissing was actually reading Voltaire in the autumn of 1884. He may have come across this quotation in a book by another author. The French writer appears obliquely in Ch. VII of A Life's Morning, which was written in 1885 but published in 1888, when we read that Emily's "first duty was to tend the garden of her mind."

104, 105

Taste

"I have seen a man of true taste pause for a quarter of an hour to look at the channellings that recent rain had traced in a heap of cinders."


Sport

"I know not of anything more destructive of the whole theoretic faculty, not to say of the Christian character and human intellect, than those accursed sports in which man makes of himself, cat, tiger, serpent, chaetodon, and alligator in one, and gathers into one continuance of cruelty for his amusement, all the devices that brutes sparingly and at intervals use against each other for their necessities."

Mod. Painters II.86.
Gissing was obviously busy for some time with *Modern Painters* late in 1884. Indeed for over a year his correspondence had bristled with Ruskin’s name. The last reference for a while occurs in an unpublished letter of December 8, 1884, to Algernon Gissing, his comment being sparked off by a press report: "What a delightful lecture of Ruskin’s on Plumage of Birds! He is right in all he says about our civilization: I see that more and more clearly" (Berg Coll.). Nor did he consider that after this spell of reading he had done justice to *Modern Painters*. The "bald analysis" of the book to be found in the Commonplace Book was made in mid-1887.

Entry 104, which emphasizes the capacity for aesthetic observation in the cultured man and implicitly contrasts it with the matter-of-fact turn of mind of the uneducated, was bound to win Gissing’s approval at this stage of his career, when his new contacts with upper-class circles, mainly friends of Mrs. Gausson, were prompting him to cultivate art for art’s sake. The ending of the essay "On Battersea Bridge" is connected with this entry. The narrator is watching a magnificent sunset over the Thames in autumn, and after a while moves towards a man who, like him, had been leaning on the parapet and watching the scene. The man whom the narrator had taken to be a kindred soul, a sun-worshipper perhaps, notices his appeal, looks at him in a friendly way, then nodding downwards says gravely: "Throws up a deal o’ mud, don’t it?" (Pall Mall Gazette, November 30, 1883, p. 4).

Entry 105, which expresses a hostility to sport reminiscent of Wilkie Collins’s attack in *Man and Wife*, doubtless roused sympathy in Gissing who, Morley Roberts tells us in the fictionalized biography of his friend, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, detested sport, which he equated with violence. A character worth regarding in the light of this Ruskin quotation would be John Yule the elder in *New Grub Street*.

As will appear later, allusions to Ruskin in Gissing’s works somewhat unexpectedly coincide with his mid-career. The only references that have been identified in the works of the 1880s occur in Ch. I and Ch. XXX of *Thyrza*: Annabel Newthorpe reads *Sesame and Lilies*.

"The workman hath in his heart a purpose, he carrieth in mind the whole form which his work should have; there wanteth not in him skill and desire to
bring his labour to the best effect; only the matter, which he hath to work on, is unframable."


Notes

This excerpt from The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity goes some way to substantiate the claim Gissing once made that among his favourite authors were the old essayists. His tastes in this respect more or less coincide with those of Mr. Vissian, an inveterate booklover in Isabel Clarendon. Richard Hooker (c. 1554-1600) was a native of Heavitree, in Devon, and Gissing, as his diary testifies, visited this village more than once in his Exeter days. That he was full of sympathy for this Anglican divine and sturdy apologist of the via media between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism is apparent in Born in Exile (Part IV, Ch. III), as well as in The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft (Summer III). In the latter book he wrote: "Sitting in my garden amid the evening scent of roses, I have read through Walton's Life of Hooker; could any place and time have been more appropriate? Almost within sight is the tower of Heavitree church—Heavitree, which was Hooker's birthplace. In other parts of England he must often have thought of these meadows falling to the green valley of the Exe, and of the sun setting behind the pines of Haldon. Hooker loved the country. Delightful to me, and infinitely touching, is that request of his to be transferred from London to a rural living—'where I can see God's blessing spring out of the earth.' And that glimpse of him where he was found tending sheep, with a Horace in his hand. It was in rural solitudes that he conceived the rhythm of mighty prose. What music of the spheres sang to that poor, vixen-haunted, pimply-faced man!" C. J. Sisson, in The Judicious Marriage of Mr. Hooker and the Birth of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1940), disposed of the story of Hooker's unfortunate marriage; but Gissing will have identified with Hooker on that score too.

Gissing's diary shows that he read some Hooker on December 12, 1890, shortly before moving to Exeter, while the Commonplace Book, in the final section ("Some Remarks of G. G." in the hand of Gabrielle Fleury), has an entry which was the source of Summer III of the Ryecroft Papers: "Hooker's desire for a country living where he might see 'God's blessing spring out of the earth.' This feeling in one's garden" (p. 68).

Like various other entries in Extracts from my Reading, this passage from Hooker reflects Gissing's permanent artistic preoccupations. Hooker's view that the artist's work is largely determined by his temperament, but that the choice of one's subject is "unframable," harmonizes with the main idea expressed in the short essay on "The Place of Realism in Fiction." It is worth noting that in his homage to Shakespeare in the Ryecroft Papers (Summer XXVII) Gissing analyses the
poet's achievement in concrete terms reminiscent of Hooker's vocabulary. *The Tempest* is "ripe fruit of the supreme imagination, perfect craft of the master hand."

107

*Return of Love*

a) "Amor, ch'a null' amato amar perdona."

Inferno. C. V.

[Love, which permits no one who is loved to love in return.]

b) "Amor mal volontier perdona
   Che non sia al fin sempre amato chi ama."

Pulci. Morg. Magg. C. IV.

[Love is unwilling to permit that one who loves be not always loved at last.]

Notes

When Gissing compiled a list of his cultural ambitions in 1885, he mentioned Dante among the Italian authors of whom he wished to acquire a thorough knowledge (letter of August 2 to Ellen, *LMF*, p. 160, Berg Coll.), and he confirmed this in his *Commonplace Book* sometime about 1896-1898 (p. 26). In the letter to his sister he wrote: "I read a canto of Dante every day, and derive vast satisfaction from it." He had begun to learn Italian earlier in the year as he wanted to read Dante in the original. His copy of *La Divina Commedia* (3 vols., Avignone, 1816), signed "George Gissing 1885," contains many pencil marks in the margin, especially in the *Inferno* (Vol. I) (Coustillas Coll.). The present Dante entry, which is quoted in *The Emancipated* (Part I, Ch. IX), is pencilled in this way. In the novel Cecily Doran, the emancipated girl, asks Miriam Baske, the puritan: "How far have you got? This pencil mark? 'Amor ch'a null' amato amar perdona.'" The quotation is nicely inserted in the psychological and geographical context.

The date of this entry can be deduced with some accuracy from Gissing's correspondence of the summer and autumn of 1885. "Dante I am engaged with at present, and he is glorious," he wrote to his sister Margaret, hoping she would take up Italian before long (August 12, *LMF*, p. 164, Berg Coll.). The next day he said to his brother that he had just finished the first three cantos of the *Inferno*: "Ye Gods,
what glorious matter! It is preposterous to read it in a translation though Cary is as good as any translator could be. But the metre, the music, all is gone, and so much depends upon it. I rejoice in this new faculty: I shall go right through the Commedia, and can finish it, I think, by Christmas. I feel to have gained a new sense, a new power" (August 13, 1885, LMF, p. 165, Berg Coll.). He therefore reached Canto V, of which this is line 103, in mid-August. By October 9 (letter to Ellen, LMF, p. 171), he was approaching the end of the Inferno, and so had not quite stuck to his plan to read one canto a day. Dictionary work, he had to admit, was still indispensable, but it was speedily repaid. He was so enthusiastic about Dante that, on completing his first reading of the Inferno, he read it over again, learning many passages by heart. By November 5 (letter to Algernon, LMF, p. 174) he was at the middle of the Purgatorio, and within sight of the end by Christmas. Considering that he revised Isabel Clarendon, wrote A Life's Morning, and began Demos during the latter half of 1885, he could well be satisfied with himself in retrospect.

Dante was his passion of the mid-1880s, but he never forgot him: the poet's name is to be found in twelve of his books beginning with Workers in the Dawn (Vol. I, Ch. XI; Vol. II, Ch. II) and The Unclassed (Ch. VI and XXVIII of the revised version), at a time when he could only have known Dante through his translators.

Of Luigi Pulci (1438-1484), the author of Morgante Maggiore, also present in this entry, only one other quotation has been traced in Gissing's works and papers. It consists in an unpublished entry from his Commonplace Book (MS, p. 13), citing lines 7-8, stanza 88, Canto IV, of Morgante Maggiore:

"Vero è pur che l'uom non possa
Celar per certo l'amor e la tossa"

which means: "It is quite true that man cannot altogether suppress his love or his cough." It can safely be asserted that Pulci had become familiar to him through Leigh Hunt's Stories from the Italian Poets, which he recommended to his sister Ellen in a letter of November 22, 1885 (LMF, p. 173, where the last two paragraphs are misdated; Berg Coll.).

Monna Lisa

"La Gioconda is, in the truest sense, Leonardo's masterpiece, the revealing instance of his mode of thought and work. In suggestiveness only the Melancholia of Dürer is comparable to it; and no crude symbolism disturbs the effect of its subdued and graceful mystery. We all know the face and hands
of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that cirque of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least. [. . .]

The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years man had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which 'all the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed? All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as St. Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands."


Notes

That Gissing was familiar with the work of Walter Pater is established by a letter of October 6, 1878, written from 31 Gower Place, London, to his brother Algernon (Yale), in which he recommended an "exquisite" article on Lamb by Pater in the current number of the Fortnightly. In a letter of February 29, 1885 [sic], to the same correspondent (McGregor Library, University of Virginia), he noted that "this new book of Pater's seems to be extremely interesting; I wish I had means of reading it." This was Marius the Epicurean, which he did read shortly afterwards (see entries 117 to 119). Although in the late 1890s he still noted among his "modest intellectual ambitions" (Commonplace Book, p. 26) "a thorough knowledge of the Renaissance," his interest in the period had by then considerably decreased, as is testified by his letter of February 13-14, 1889, to Eduard Bertz (LGB, p. 50). But the Renaissance was uppermost in his mind at the time he made the present entry: "I am busy with the Art of the Renaissance just now; it does me good in detachment from the vulgarities of the day" (letter to Algernon, of September 22, 1885, LMF, p. 168, Berg Coll.).
Some three years later, he could feast his eyes on Renaissance paintings in the Louvre and in Italian galleries, and his Diary records his having seen paintings and drawings by Leonardo. The entry for October 12, 1888, connects Pater and Leonardo and indirectly shows that Gissing's edition of The Renaissance was the second (1877), since the first carried no illustration: "Then to Louvre, and spent an hour in the Salle des Dessins (I, II, III). In room II noted 389 and 391, two marvellous studies of drapery by Da Vinci,—examples of his search after perfection. 386: a head by Da Vinci, used as a frontispiece to Pater’s ‘Renaissance.’" Two days later, when again in the Salle des Dessins, he observed that a portrait by Dürer offered "a strange sort of caricature of the Da Vinci smile." Though he had been an admirer of Dürer since childhood, the comparison with Leonardo may have been prompted by his recollection of the passage he had transcribed in Extracts from my Reading.

The part which Mona Lisa played in Gissing's inspiration for his novel Eve's Ransom has been brilliantly demonstrated by Adeline R. Tintner in "Eve Madeley: Gissing's Mona Lisa" (Gissing Newsletter, January 1981, pp. 1-8). This new interpretation of a novel which has baffled most commentators and prompted some inept judgments provides a vital link between Leonardo, Pater, and Gissing's ironic, discreet study of an elusive type of new woman.

Originality

"On exécute mal ce qu'on n'a pas conçu soi-même."

Words of Charlotte Corday before the Convention.

[One is always a poor executant of conceptions not one's own.]

Notes

In August 1885 Gissing observed that his Dante studies led him to the Renaissance, and it was actually while reading the essay on Winckelmann in Walter Pater's Renaissance that he came across this quotation from Charlotte Corday (1768-1793), the young woman who stabbed Marat to death in his bath. Pater quotes the sentence out of context, arguing that the words are "true in their measure of every genuine enthusiasm," and Gissing obviously applied them mentally to the field of artistic creation. In actual life Charlotte Corday's words were spoken in reply to Montané, the President of the Tribunal Révolutionnaire when he asked her who had prompted her to commit this murder (July 13, 1793). The minutes of the trial were printed in the newspapers of the period, and reprinted in various books, including Marie-Anne Charlotte de Corday d'Armont, by Chéron de Villiers (Paris, 1865) and

While the notions of originality in and enthusiasm for one’s artistic work were important to Gissing, there must have been in Pater's "Winckelmann" much else that was no less close to his heart: Winckelmann’s deep understanding of the ideal of Greek art, Hegel’s and Goethe’s acknowledgement of his influence on them, even his dislike of teaching, which he found so depressing. More generally, the essay will have powerfully reinforced Gissing in his own "aesthetic paganism" and the sadness which flowed from it.

Philosophy

"But a taste for metaphysics may be one of those things which we must renounce, if we mean to mould our lives to artistic perfection. Philosophy serves culture, not by the fancied gift of absolute or transcendental knowledge, but by suggesting questions which help one to detect the passion, and strangeness, and dramatic contrasts of life."


Notes

The motivation for this entry can be found in Gissing’s correspondence some two years before he transcribed Pater’s pronouncement. "I am by degrees getting my right place in the world," he wrote to his brother on July 18, 1883. "Philosophy has done all it can for me, and now scarcely interests me any more. My attitude henceforth is that of the artist pure and simple. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied and reproduced artistically" (LMF, p. 128, Yale). "The only thing known to us of absolute value is artistic perfection," he had declared to his elder sister in the spring (letter of May 12, 1883, LMF, p. 126, Berg Coll.). Gissing shared Pater’s view that philosophy serves culture, and that we had better dismiss metaphysics from our lives if we are to be in harmony with ourselves and the world. His essay on "The Hope of Pessimism," written in the autumn of 1882, marks the acme of his interest in metaphysics. After that, whatever remained of it was kept alive by his continuing interest in Schopenhauer, in whose work no sharp distinction between metaphysics and moral philosophy is to be found.
Love

"Two hearts, like two correspondent concave mirrors having a common focus, while each reflects and magnifies the other, and in the other itself is an endless reduplication by sweet thoughts and sympathies."

Coleridge, in letter to Crabb Robinson.
(Memoirs of latter, I. 361.)

Notes

Thomas Waller Gissing used to have on his shelves a copy of Coleridge's Poems, edited by Derwent and Sara Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon & Co., 1863) and marked "T.W.G." on the endpaper, in which his son probably read Coleridge for the first time. (This copy was in Alfred Gissing's library in 1971.) Letters of December 12, 1881, and January 1, 1882, to Margaret (Berg Coll.) indicate that his sister transcribed for him one of Coleridge's poems, "a model of sweetness and perfect expression," from their father's volume. Later in the year he invited Margaret to "give as much attention as possible to Coleridge" (October 4, 1882, Berg Coll.), but it was not until 1885 that the poet's name figured more solidly in his correspondence. He turned to Coleridge again after reading Crabb Robinson's Reminiscences in three big volumes, and this led to his suggesting to his younger sister that she read "The Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan" (July 27, 1885, Berg Coll.). In Ch. IV of The Private Life of Henry Maitland Morley Roberts reports how fond Gissing was of much of Coleridge and quotes some lines of Coleridge to his son which his friend used to read aloud.

It was in a letter of Coleridge to Crabb Robinson that he found this definition of love, one among a dozen or so in Extracts from my Reading. The optical approach to the emotions must have struck Gissing as comparatively original. He explored the subject in all his novels, not a single one of which dispenses with love interest, and has an interesting entry in his Commonplace Book on "the reverie of a man in love" (p. 57).

Enjoyment

"Do thy day's work, dare
Refuse no help thereto,—since help refused
Is hindrance sought and found. Win but the race—"
Who shall object 'He tossed three wine cups off,
And, just at starting, Lilith kissed his lips?"'

Browning: Ferishtah’s Fancies. p. 73.

Gissing’s interest in Browning remained pretty steady in the 1880s, but it is clear that he soon learnt to discriminate between the earlier and later poems. Many of the later works he thought tedious, and in few of them did he find any improvement in word or thought. *Men and Women* contained the kernel of the poet’s moral and artistic creed. This is what he explained to his sister Margaret on May 12, 1883 (letter in Berg Coll.). There are various signs in his letters to his sisters that he encouraged them to read and reread Browning. For instance he sent them a copy of *Balaustion* which he had borrowed from the Grosvenor library in the spring of 1886. When Catherine Gissing, Algernon’s wife, in turn dipped into Browning, he rejoiced and explained yet again why he valued him so much (letter of October 14, 1886, Yale). Chancing some years later upon an article on the poet in the *Corriere di Napoli*, he had mixed feelings: Browning was not a poet for the Italians, "there is not brain enough in all Italy to suffice for reading him" (letter to Ellen of January 7, 1890, Carl H. Pforzheimer Library).

Gissing had a thorough knowledge of Browning’s work, but, as in the case of Meredith, he deplored his obscurity, obscurity in poetry being, he thought, a contradiction in terms. His diary shows him reading Browning on holiday at Seascale after completing *The Nether World*, perusing *Asolando* after its author’s death, and reading aloud "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" to Edith Underwood at the time he was courting her, an experience he revived with Gabrielle Fleury. We also see him borrowing from a local library in the early 1890s minor works of Browning he had not read so far, but his silence about him in the last decade of his life may well have meant loss of enthusiasm. At all events quotations from Browning came readily to his pen. Besides a passage from "Rabbi Ben Ezra" in a letter to Gabrielle Fleury of August 18, 1898, Browning allusions or quotations can be found in the following works: *The Unclassed* (Ch. VII of the revised version), *The Emancipated* (Part II, Ch. IV), *Born in Exile* (Part II, Ch. II and IV), *In the Year of Jubilee* (Part II, Ch. IV), *The Crown of Life* (Ch. XX and XXII), *Our Friend the Charlatan* (Ch. XI, XX and XXII) and *Will Warburton* (Ch. X).

In the first (unpublished) version of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Gissing used as an epigraph to Autumn two lines from "Cleon" which he had copied in his *Commonplace Book* (unpublished entry, MS, p. 13):

"Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,
Within the eventual element of calm."
The passage quoted in this entry offers a key to Gissing's highly positive response to Browning's poetry—he found in it a reconciliation of "idea and experience" conveyed through spontaneous, rugged verse and expressing joyous confidence in life. Because Browning "looked upon earthly life as a testing ground that prepared the soul for its future experience," Jacob Korg wrote in The Poetry of Robert Browning (1971), "he took an intense interest in both the events of daily life and the activities of the spirit as it worked its way towards its destiny." As in the case of Meredith, Browning's optimism did not antagonize Gissing: he saw it as something alien to his own nature but, because it was invested in distinguished intellectuality, he was quite prepared to respect it. Though himself impervious to such a belief, he stood and marvelled, accepting "our manifold nature."

113, 114

Prayer of Socrates

"Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward be at one. May I reckon the wise to be the wealthy, and may I have such abundance of wealth as none but the temperate can carry."

"Phaedrus."

Politicians

"All those mercenary adventurers, whom the world calls Sophists and rivals, do but teach the collective opinion of the many, which are the opinions of their assemblies; and this is their wisdom. I might compare them to a man who should study the tempers and desires of a mighty strong beast who is fed by him—he would learn how to approach and handle him, also at what times and from what causes he is dangerous or the reverse, and what is the meaning of his several cries, and by what sounds, when another utters them, he is soothed or infuriated; and you may suppose further that when, by constantly living with him, he has become perfect in all this which he calls wisdom, he makes a system or art, which he proceeds to teach, not that he has any real notion of what he is teaching, but he names this honourable and that dishonourable, or good or evil, or just or unjust, all in accordance with the tastes and tempers of the great brute, when he has learnt the meaning of its inarticulate grunts."

Plato: Republic Bk. VI.
These two passages were transcribed shortly after August 2, 1885, on which day Gissing wrote to his sister Ellen that, concurrently with Dante, he was reading Plato (LMF, p. 160, Berg Coll.). Part of entry 113 soon afterwards found its way into Ch. V of A Life's Morning, in which Emily Hood's prayer is for "beauty in the inward soul," and the whole of it, slightly reworded, into Ch. XII of Demos, where Wyvern quotes it to Hubert Eldon. The first allusion is made unobtrusively in a retrospect of Emily's life, while the second illumines both the parson's culture and the serious conversation he is having with his young friend. As for entry 114, Martin Blaydes reads it in full to Breakspeare and Lashmar, in a rephrased version, in Ch. X of Our Friend the Charlatan. Breakspeare, the middle-aged journalist, and Dyce Lashmar, the charlatan, have called on that odd, ale-drinking, Bible-quoting old fellow Martin Blaydes, who is given to bouts of eloquence on any subject that tempts his fancy. After a colourful tirade on women he reads from a book the passage quoted by Gissing, teasing Breakspeare, to whom Plato's words are supposed to apply.

Gissing read Plato occasionally. Thus in a letter to Ellen of August 25, 1887, he noted: "I am spending this week over a dialogue of Plato. Next time I have a holiday, I shall read to you some Plato—especially the speech of Socrates at his trial. It is one of the most inspiring things I have discovered in the world's literature" (LMF, p. 198, Berg Coll.). While in Greece, on December 7, 1889, he bought the Symposium in the Haupt and Sauppe series (see entry 161) and fell to studying it immediately (letter to Eduard Bertz of December 14, 1889, LGB, p. 89, and diary). Short diary jottings show him reading Platonic dialogues in 1890, 1891, and 1900.

Plato was one of the Greek authors he would sometimes discuss with his friend Morley Roberts during those long conversations of which an echo occurs in New Grub Street in the form of the bohemian gatherings of Reardon and Biffen. There is a copy of Plato's Apology of Socrates, Crito, and Phaedo, "from the text of Bekker; with the Latin version of Ficinus; and notes by Charles Stuart Stanford, A.M." (new edition, London: Whittaker and Co.) which is a reminder of this mutual interest. This copy, signed "M.C. Roberts/ 2.12.82" bears the inscription "Morley Roberts/ to/ George Gissing/ 8.3.90" (Coustillas Coll.). By then Gissing was just back from Greece.

The wisdom of the prayer of Socrates, and the distrust of "those mercenary adventurers" in whom Gissing chose to see politicians, correspond with two essential notions in his own works: he valued those mortals who can possess their souls in quiet (Henry Ryecroft, Spring IV), just as he fought shy of the populace and its leaders. Both notions found expression in Demos, Denzil Quarrier, Our Friend the Charlatan and Henry Ryecroft among other books. To him the populace at large remained demos to the end.
Opinion and the Vulgar

"Il faut souvent un vrai courage pour persister dans une opinion juste en dépit de ses défenseurs."

Ampère. "Voyage Dantesque."

[It often takes real courage to persist in upholding a just opinion, its supporters notwithstanding.]

Notes

Gissing noted in his Diary (October 4, 1889) that he was reading *La Grèce, Rome et Dante*. His copy (Coustillas Coll.), signed "George Gissing/ 1885" on the inside of the front fly-leaf, was bought at the time he was learning Italian and reading Dante. The sentence quoted here is marked by a vertical line in pencil in the margin of p. 211. At the beginning of his "Voyage Dantesque," Ampère observed that it had become fashionable to read and study Dante; he deplored this fashion, regretting the time when Dante and Shakespeare were called barbarians. So to persist in admiring Dante despite his present-day admirers, he argued, requires some courage, as it does to remain a Christian, notwithstanding the arguments of some apologists and the faith of some believers. The elitist note sounded in this passage appealed to Gissing, whose thought in entry 26 is akin to that of Ampère.

In *Born in Exile* (1892), Part III, Ch. II, he has Mr. Warricome quote the same words to Godwin Peak while holding Ampère's *La Grèce, Rome et Dante* in his hand, making the same mistake (*un* for *une opinion*) as in *Extracts from my Reading*. This, together with Mr. Warricome's wrongly situating the passage "at the beginning" of the book, signifies that when writing his novel at Exeter in 1891, Gissing consulted his commonplace book and not the volume on his shelves, which contains no misprint in which his error might have originated. Martin Warricome, a gentleman of the old school who dabbles in scientific activities, has been for years trying to reconcile traditional Christianity and the new scientific discoveries which relegate Christianity to the rank of myth. His heart's sympathies are contradicted by his brain's findings, and he has recently been having long earnest discussions on the subject with Godwin Peak, his son's former schoolfellow at Whitelaw College, a young man of humble origin but of considerable intellectual ability. Peak has published anonymously a savage satire on current apologetics, but (this is the love interest of the novel) on rediscovering the Warricomes in Exeter has decided to win Sidwell Warricome's hand by entering holy orders. At the point in the narrative where he quotes Ampère, Martin Warricome's naiveté has been subtly yet definitely established; however, he has just scored unwittingly against Peak, although the latter is more than a match for him. Martin has
observed that the anonymous article cannot be by Huxley, because if it were, he would have signed his name, and his English is better. Peak cannot contradict this without revealing the authorship of the article and his imposture, thereby causing his own plans to collapse. Martin, who though naive is no fool and not lacking in humour, is fully aware of the feeble, if not foolhardy attempts of certain apologetists to defend Christianity, and Ampère's clever remark makes the point brilliantly. Peak's bright intellect cannot fail to relish the aphorism per se—how often have good causes, not to speak of bad ones, been spoilt by poor or ludicrous arguments! "The aphorism," Gissing comments, "had so many applications from his own point of view." Richly satirical it is indeed. On the one hand Peak sees that it applies to himself, who pretends to defend traditional views, when in fact he has pilloried them in his article. On the other hand, he is amused by Martin's failure to realize that, in Peak's eyes, he is very much in the same position as those feeble apologetists from whom he is so anxious to distinguish himself. The reader shares Peak's delight entirely because he can place himself in the hero's complex position and fully realize Martin's blindness to the situation in which both he and his interlocutor are deeply involved.

Conscientious Revolt

"Le blasphème des grands esprits est plus agréable à Dieu que la prière intéressée de l'homme vulgaire, car, bien que le blasphème réponde à une vue incomplète des choses, il renferme une part de protestation juste, tandis que l'égoïsme ne contient aucune parcelle de vérité."

Renan.

[The blasphemy of great minds is more agreeable to God than the self-interested prayer of the common man; for, although blasphemy involves a response to an incomplete view of things, it contains a portion of legitimate protest, whereas egoism contains not one crumb of truth.]

Notes

There is no mention of Joseph-Ernest Renan (1823-1892), the French writer and philosopher, in Gissing's correspondence in 1885, but it is easy to account for his interest. Such books as Vie de Jésus (1863), Histoire des origines du christianisme (1863-83) and Prière sur l'Acropole (1883) belonged to the type of historical-philosophical literature in which he delighted in his twenties. Renan's rejection of Christianity, his part-scholarly, part-poetical vision of history, and his enchanting style, could not fail to appeal to a young man who had
read Feuerbach and Strauss with admiration. The only other references to Renan on record are to be found in the diary. The motto to *The Nether World* is a quotation from a speech by the French writer delivered at the reception of Jules Claretie into the French Academy. Gissing came across it in the *Figaro* just in time for the printers of his novel to use it. He read *L'Abbesse de Jouarre* "with no great delectation" in 1892 and the correspondence between Renan and his sister in 1897.

**117, 118, 119**

*Our Past*

"He learned that the object, or the experience, as it will be in memory, is really the chief thing to care for from first to last, in the conduct of our lives."

Pater. "*Marius the Epicurean.*" Vol 1. p. 48.

*Idealizing one's Life*

"He was acquiring what is ever the chief function of all higher education to teach—a system, or art, namely, of so relieving the ideal or poetic traits, the elements of distinction, in our every-day life—of so exclusively living in them—that the unadorned remainder of it, the mere drift and débris of life, becomes as though it were not."


*The New Cyrenaicism*

"Not pleasure, but fulness of life, and 'insight' as conducting to that fulness—energy, choice and variety of experience, including noble pain and sorrow even—loves such as those in the exquisite old story of Apuleius; such sincere and strenuous forms of the moral life as Seneca and Epictetus—what form of human life, in short, was impassioned and ideal."

Pater: "*Marius the Epicurean.*" Vol 1. p. 162.

*Notes*

Gissing was reading *Marius the Epicurean* in October 1885 shortly after the book's publication. A letter of the 7th to his sister Margaret (Berg Coll.) quotes entry 118. As he often did, he noted passages which, for him, had a personal signifi-
cance. Since the days when his quixotic behaviour in Manchester had landed him in jail, he had more than once reconstructed his past and had used the phantoms of his memory in a number of American short stories published in the Chicago papers. Doubtless idealizing his misdeeds helped him to bear the burden of remorse. He was later to say that his old boyish self and his self of the moment were two different persons; he could not recognize himself in the former figure, the "débris of life" to which Walter Pater refers.

Cyrenaicism—the Socratic doctrine of Aristippus of Cyrene—was a doctrine of practical hedonism which terminated in Epicurism. The new Cyrenaicism, as defined by Pater, amounted to a humaner stoicism. Gissing, who, like his character Julian Casti in The Unclassed, dreamt of writing a literary work inspired by late Roman times, and was familiar with the period in which Marius the Epicurean was set, was much interested in this historical novel, and eventually almost realized his own project, Veranilda, as only a very few chapters were missing at his death.

120

Attainment

"Che seggendo in piuma
In fama non si vien, nè sotto coltre:
Senza la qual chi sua vita consuma
Cotal vestigio in terra di se lascia,
Qual fumo in aere ed in acqua la schiuma.
E pero leva su, vinci l’ambascia
Con l’animo che vince ogni battaglia,
Se col suo grave corpo non s’accascia."

Inferno XXIV.47.

[For sitting on feather cushions, or lying under a coverlet, men come not into fame; without which whoso consumes his life, leaves such vestige of himself on earth, as smoke in air or foam in water. And so arise: overcome thy anxiety with the spirit which wins every battle, if with its heavy body it sink not.]

Notes

As previously stated (entry 107a), Gissing was reading the Divine Comedy fairly regularly in the summer and autumn of 1885, and this entry was made in October. The passage is marked in pencil on p. 193 of his copy. He quoted some lines from it in The Crown of Life at the end of Ch. IX, after two more quotations from the Divina Commedia (for details see The Crown of Life, ed. Michel Ballard, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978, pp. 333-34), and in a short story collected in The
House of Cobwebs, "A Lodger in Maze Pond." In the novel the last two lines are quoted by Jerome Otway, a man imbued with Italian culture, in a letter to his son Piers, after his banishment by Irene Derwent. He invites him to pursue his purpose in life with the spirit evinced by "the old Florentine, who knew so many things; among them, your own particular complaint," that is, frustrated love. The fine rhythm and sonorities of the quotation give Jerome's tender counsel a nobility which cannot fail to be felt by the hypersensitive Piers. In "A Lodger in Maze Pond," the Italian words "il fumo in aere ed in aqua la schiuma" are quoted by a weak character, Shergold, with fine irony directed at himself. His hopes of being released from an imprudent offer of marriage, after he has realized his mistake, vanish "as smoke in air or foam in water." Dante is also present in Ch. II, XIII, XIV, and XVIII of The Crown of Life. Other allusions to and quotations from the Italian poet occur in the two novels he wrote in succession in the autumn of 1885 and the winter of 1886, A Life's Morning (Ch. II, V, XIII and XXII) and Demos (Ch. XIII).

The ideal of steady work conducted with determination and enthusiasm in the hope of ultimate fame had been his since childhood and had been fostered by his father. We find an amusing expression of it in those cartoons he drew of himself and his two brothers when they were still youngsters—wasting one's time he already regarded as a crime. At the time he entered these few lines from Dante, he was working with extraordinary zest, and was soon to enjoy his first success with Demos, which was published in late March 1886.

The People

"O stormy people, unsad and ever untrewe,
And undiscreet, and chaunging as a fane,
Delyting ever in rombel that is newe,
For like the moone aye waxe ye and wane;
Ay full of clapping, dere y-nough a jane,
Youre doom is fals, your constaunce yvel previth,
A ful gret fool is he that on yow leevith."

Chaucer: Clerkes Tale. 57.

Notes

In a letter of August 2, 1885 (LMF, p. 161), mentioned several times previously, Gissing declared that it was one of his literary ambitions to acquire a thorough knowledge of Chaucer's works. Six years earlier he had bought the Aldine edition of the poet in six volumes edited by Richard Morris (new and revised edition,
undated), "the best extant," he told Algernon in a letter of March 27, 1880 (LMF, pp. 64-65, where it is misdated, Yale): "Really one ought to have Chaucer at one's fingers' ends, if only for his influence on one's English style." The mention of Chaucer in *Workers in the Dawn* (Vol. I, Ch. XIII) may be regarded as a form of homage.

The text of this entry is pencil-marked on p. 309 of Vol. II of Gissing's copy (Coustillas Coll.; the title page of Vol. I is inscribed "G R Gissing/ Ap. 79."). It is significant that he transcribed it when he was beginning to write *Demos*, which, *mutatis mutandis*, offers as distrustful an image of the people as these seven lines from "The Clerkes Tale." Twice recently he had introduced Chaucer into his work: in *Isabel Clarendon* (Vol. II, Ch. XV) and in *A Life's Morning* (Ch. III). In the former book Mr. Vissian quotes from "The Legende of Goode Women":

"And sworen on the blosmes to be trewe"

(a line also pencil-marked in Gissing's copy), calling it "one of the sweetest lines in all English poetry."

The novelist's diary and a letter to his sister Ellen of March 30, 1891 (Pforzheimer Library), show that he undertook a rereading of Chaucer in 1891 (March 30 to April 10). How much he perused is not known, but perhaps it was at that time that he pencilled in his copy, with a double vertical line, the following passage from "The Merchant's Tale" (lines 285-87):

"for alwey
I warn you wel it is no childes pley
To take a wyf withoute avisement."

Chaucer appears in varied contexts in three of Gissing's later works. Alexander Otway readily quotes the poet (*The Crown of Life*, Ch. VII), though he is a man of no real culture. May Tomalin is satirized for trying to make the poor she patronizes read Chaucer and his *Canterbury Tales*; she fails to see that her form of cultural philanthropy is hopelessly inadequate (*Our Friend the Charlatan*, Ch. XI and XIV). Henry Ryecroft has a great liking for Topsham, the Devon village. "Of course," he observes, "the association with old Chaucer, who speaks of Topsham sailors, helps my mood" (*Summer XII*).
Excerpts 122, 123

122

_Fate_

_Durat in extremum, vitaeque novissima nostrae_
_Prosequitur fati, qui fuit ante, tenor._

Ovid: _Heroides VII. III._

[The lot that was mine in days past still follows me in these last moments of life, and will pursue me to the end.]

_Notes_

Final confirmation of Gissing's familiarity with Ovid's works is offered by a short entry in the hand of Gabrielle Fleury at the end of his _Commonplace Book_ p. 68), where he is reported to have noted that in _Fasti_, Book I, Ovid uses the plural form _hordia_, which the poetaster Bavius reproaches Virgil for having used.

Few quotations from Ovid could have found in Gissing a deeper personal echo than these two lines from the _Heroides_. Ovid was banished by imperial edict to Tomi, on the western shore of the Black Sea; he died there in 18 A.D. His poem "Ars Amatoria," which offended the emperor's susceptibilities, sealed his fate. Gissing was not mistaken in thinking that his own fate (the title he chose for this entry is a word that readily came to his pen) was largely conditioned by his early misbehaviour at Owens College. "Fate" was one of the discarded titles of "The Quarry on the Heath" (first published in _George Gissing: Essays and Fiction_, ed. Pierre Coustillas, 1970). The word also occurs in the titles of two short stories of the 1890s, "The Fate of Humphrey Snell" and "Fate and the Apothecary."

This entry invites a _rapprochement_ with entry 97, "Character is Fate," for it was his own quixotic character which he considered to have fashioned his destiny.

123, 124

_Prudence in Speech_

"Sempre a quel ver ch' ha faccia di menzogna
De' l'uom chiuder le labbra quanto puote,
Però che senza colpa fa vergogna."

_Inferno_. XVI.124.
[To that truth which has an air of falsehood a man should always close his lips, so far as he is able, lest, though blameless, he incur reproach.]

Purity

"Della mondizia il sol voler fa pruova,
Che tutto libero a mutar convento
L’alma sorprende e di voler le giova."

Purgat. XXI.61.

[Of purity the will alone gives proof, which fills the soul, all free to change her cloister, and avails her to will.]

Notes

These last two Dante entries, from the Inferno and the Purgatorio respectively, can only have been made a few weeks at most after entry 120. Gissing’s correspondence shows that, after working his way through each part of the Divina Commedia with a dictionary at hand, he made a new reading. Both passages are marked in pencil in Gissing’s copy, as are others which he did not trouble to transcribe. They are all concerned with human behaviour in general and reflect his interest in norms by which to judge his characters. That he occasionally went through his Dante is deducible from the comparatively frequent allusions to the poet after the mid-1880s. To the quotations previously referred to should be added mentions in Thyrza (Ch. VII and XXX), The Emancipated (Part I, Ch. III, IV, XIII; Part II, Ch. VII), New Grub Street (Ch. I and XV, in which Reardon, at the time he was writing On Neutral Ground, "went solidly through the Divina Commedia, a canto each day," as did his creator), By the Ionian Sea (Ch. VI), Henry Ryecroft (Summer XI, which contains a reminiscence of Dante’s angels) and "The Foolish Virgin," collected in A Victim of Circumstances (1927).

The diary records the purchase of Dante’s Vita Nuova on December 18, 1888, in Italy, and some rereading of the Purgatorio in September 1889, while the letters to Eduard Bertz mention Etna as a vision that reminded him of the Mount of Purgatory, and the presence of Dante in Meredith’s library (LGB, pp. 81 and 205).

Selfish Man

"L’homme qui n’aime que soi ne hait rien tant que d’être seul avec soi."

Pascal: Pensées; V I. p. 138.
[He who loves only himself hates nothing so much as being alone with himself.]

Notes

Whether this maxim was actually transcribed from Pascal's *Pensées*, or happened to be quoted in some other book Gissing was currently reading, is a point which cannot be settled, although the latter is more likely to have been the case. His interest in seventeenth-century France was limited. Neither the French moralists of the period, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, for instance, nor the leading playwrights, such as Corneille and Racine, who gave so much prestige to the French stage, appealed much to him. Classicism left him comparatively indifferent. The Ryecroft section on Port-Royal, which offers the only reference to Pascal in the works, was a late addition resulting from Gissing's stay at the Château du Chasnay in the autumn of 1901. Then it was that he read Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal* and wrote Autumn VIII, alluding to "Pascal, with his genius and his triumphs, his conflicts of soul and fleshly martyrdom."

126

*Object & Subject in Art*

"Jacobi had objected to 'immorality' of Wilhelm Meister. Thereon Schiller writes: 'Könnte er Ihnen zeigen, dass die Unsittlichkeit Ihrer Gemälde nicht aus der Natur des Objects fließt, und dass die Art wie Sie dasselbe behandeln nur von Ihrem Subject sich herschreibt, so würden Sie allerdings dafür verantwortlich sein, aber nicht desswegen weil Sie vor dem moralischen, sondern weil Sie vor dem ästhetischen Forum fehlten. Aber ich möchte sehen wie er das zeigen wollte."


[If he could show you that the immorality of your paintings does not come from the nature of their subject-matter, and that the way in which you treat it is but a reflection of yourself, you would admittedly remain responsible for it, but only in the sense that you had been found lacking not before the moral forum, but before the aesthetic one. But I should like to see how he would set about showing that.]

Notes

The correspondence between Goethe and Schiller (1794-1805) was one of Gissing's favourite books. His two-volume copy in German (Stuttgart, 1870) was presented to him by Eduard Bertz in 1880, when the latter was living at Tottenham; it has an
eight-line inscription in gothic handwriting, and many passages are pencil-marked in the margin. Such is the case with the present entry (Coustillas Coll.). "I am reading now the correspondence between Goethe and Schiller," he had written to his brother Algernon some years before he entered Schiller's words in his notebook, "which you know Bertz gave me. It is a delightful book, wonderfully inspiring. The men help each other in every one of their projects, their mutual frankness is beautiful to see" (May 9, 1880, Yale). No doubt Gissing agreed with what Carlyle wrote in his 1831 essay on Schiller, which takes the form of a review of this correspondence: "One valuable quality these letters of Schiller and Goethe everywhere exhibit, that of faith; whatever we do learn from them, whether in the shape of fact or of opinion, may be relied upon as genuine [. . .] this Correspondence [. . .] shows us two high, creative, truly poetic minds, unweariedly cultivating themselves, unweariedly advancing from one measure of strength and clearness to another."

The relationship between art and morality was uppermost in Gissing's mind for years, at least until he found publishers who were prepared to print his novels without interfering with the artistic rendering of his material, that is, until he turned to Lawrence & Bullen in 1891. *Workers in the Dawn,* "Mrs. Grundy's Enemies," and *The Unclassed* met with vigorous opposition from several firms, Bentley's in particular, while *A Life's Morning* was sorely handled by James Payn in his capacity as reader for Smith, Elder & Co. Gissing repeatedly claimed greater freedom for the artist, and was attacked in *Punch* (January 3, 1885, p. 1) for having dared to do so publicly.

Now at the time of the present entry his views on art and morality were largely coloured by his German reading. In Goethe he found an artistic model who on the levels of matter and form was remarkable for his wisdom and self-control. In Schiller he found a writer who was more concerned with morality. Schiller was the champion of liberty; to him the theatre was to be a school for virtue, where self-respect, respect for others, and human dignity were to be taught. Gissing identified with both Goethe and Schiller.

More generally he was full of admiration for them because, in their correspondence, he could, as it were, watch them analyzing their thoughts. No doubt his appreciation was increased by his knowledge of the European political context in which the correspondence must be viewed. His intellectual delight in reading the two volumes reminds one of his pleasure in imagining Gladstone and Tennyson travelling together in their holidays: "Singular thing, the first poet and the first statesman of the day, two old fellows, going about in that way; and it probably never happened before. Gladstone said rather a fine thing of Tennyson in a speech on their return. 'His work has been on a higher plane than my own, and his name will live when mine has been long forgotten,' and I doubt not it is true, for, after all, art is the highest product of human life" (letter to Ellen of October 14, 1883, *LMF*, p. 134, Colgate University).
The Goethe-Schiller correspondence appears again in Gissing’s diary for March 7 and 8, 1892, half a dozen years after the present entry, and is celebrated briefly in Henry Ryecroft (Autumn II) as "a book worth rising for." It was apropos of this correspondence that he asked in his diary: "Do other people re-read books to the same extent as I do?" (June 8, 1888).

1. The inscription reads:

"Wenn auch der Held sich selbst genug ist,  
Verbunden geht er doch geschwinder; 
Und wenn der Ueberwundne klug ist,  
Gesellt er sich zum Ueberwinder."

Dem teuren Freund,  
George R. Gissing  
Tottenham, 1880  
von seinem  
Eduard Bertz

The four-line quotation comes from Goethe (Zahme Xenien, IX): "Even if your hero is self-sufficient, he will make more rapid progress in company with another; and if the vanquished has any sense, he will ally himself with the victor." It provides memorable testimony to the friendship between Gissing and Bertz and the Goethe-inspired intellectual cooperation on which it was based.

127, 128, 129, 130, 131

Don Quixote

"Don Q[uixote] [. . . ] becomes a substantial living allegory, or personification of the reason and the moral sense divested of the judgment and the understanding. Sancho is the converse. He is the common sense without reason or imagination; and Cervantes not only shows the excellence and power of reason in Don Q[uixote], but in both him and Sancho the mischiefs resulting from a severance of the two main constituents of sound intellectual and moral action. Put him and his master together and they form a perfect intellect; but they are separated and without cement; and hence each having a need of the other for his own completeness, each has at times a mastery over the other. For the common sense, although it may see the practical inapplicability of the dictates of the imagination or abstract reason, yet cannot help submitting to them."

Coleridge. Literary Remains.
Humour

"In the simply laughable there is a mere disproportion between a definite act and a definite purpose or end, or a disproportion of the end itself to the rank or circumstances of the definite person; but humour is of more difficult description [. . .]. Humour does not, like the different kinds of wit, which is impersonal, consist wholly in the understanding and the senses. No combination of thoughts, words or images will of itself constitute humour, unless some peculiarity of individual temperament or character be indicated thereby, as the cause of the same. [. . .] And this indeed is the origin of the word, derived from the humoral pathology, and excellently described by Jonson:

'So in every human body,
The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood,
By reason that they flow continually
In some one part, and are not continent,
Receive the name of humours. Now thus far
It may, by metaphor, apply itself
Unto the general disposition:
As when some peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his effects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluctions, all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour.'

Hence we may explain the congeniality of humour with pathos. [. . .] We respect a humourist, because absence of interested motive is the groundwork of the character, although the imagination of an interest may exist in the individual himself, as if a remarkably simple-hearted man should pride himself on his knowledge of the world, and how well he can manage it; and secondly, there is always in genuine humour an acknowledgment of the hollowness and farce of the world, and its disproportion to the godlike within us [. . .] Wherever a finite is contemplated in reference to the infinite, whether consciously or unconsciously, humour essentially arises."

The Study of Masterpieces

"In energetic minds, truth soon changes by domestication into power; and from directing with discrimination and appraisal of the product, becomes
influencive in the production. To admire on principle is the only way to imitate without loss of originality."


Poetry

"A poem is a species of composition, opposed to science, as having intellectual pleasure for its object, and as attaining its end by the use of language natural to us in a state of excitement, —but distinguished from other species of composition, not excluded by the former criterion, by permitting a pleasure from the whole consistent with a consciousness of pleasure from the component parts; —and the perfection of which is, to communicate from each part the greatest immediate pleasure compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole."

Coleridge. Lit. Remains.

Fancy

"Fancy is the faculty of bringing together images dissimilar in the main by some one point or more of likeness, [as in such a passage as this]:

'Through gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily prison'd in a jail of snow,
Or ivory in alabaster bound;
So white a friend ingirts so white a foe.'
(Venus and Adonis)"

D: d:

Notes

This bout of Coleridgean reading has left no trace in Gissing's correspondence unless we assume, as we do, that he made no entry for over a year in Extracts from my Reading, from the autumn or early winter of 1885 to the spring of 1887. At all events a letter of May 31, 1887, to Ellen (Berg Coll.) lists Coleridge (Table-Talk and Lectures on Literature) among an impressive number of authors he has read recently. What he sought and found in Coleridge's prose works were elements for a philosophy of literature, definitions of literary moods, the symbolical significance of myths and allegories. Don Quixote was at once a reminder and an incentive to him—a reminder because it could not fail to rouse the memory of a poem he
had written in childhood on Cervantes' hero (the manuscript is in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library), an incentive because it fostered his desire to learn Spanish that he might read *Don Quixote* in the original, an achievement of 1902 remembered in *Henry Ryecroft* (Winter XVII).

Coleridge and Cervantes are to be found together in *Workers in the Dawn* (Mr. Tollady, Arthur Golding's fosterfather, read *Don Quixote* as a child, Vol. II, Ch. VI; Arthur reads to Carrie the first three verses of "The Ancient Mariner," Vol. III, Ch. I), while Coleridge's phrase "the devil's yule" is quoted in *Isabel Clarendon* (Vol. II, Ch. II). The next chronological landmark in the Coleridge terrain would seem to have been a literary conversation with Morley Roberts in which the poet's relations with James Gillman were discussed (Diary, April 20, 1889). The outcome was a semi-comic poem in ten stanzas in which Gissing expressed a wish that he might encounter a Gillman. The poem, which was printed with comments by Roberts in Ch. VII of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, and again by Edward Clodd in his *Memories*, could not fail to be in Gissing's mind when he wrote Ch. XV of *New Grub Street*. Shortly after the publication of this novel, while staying at Clevedon, he went to see Coleridge's cottage and the old village church (Diary, July 7, 1891). Naturally enough the poet and his dwelling are given a passing salute in *The Odd Women* (Ch. I), a story partly set in Clevedon. In between Coleridge had put in a casual appearance in *Denzil Quarrier* (Ch. XVII) and *Born in Exile* (Part I, Ch. III, in which Joey Peak butchers a verse from "The Ancient Mariner," and Part IV, Ch. III). The diary shows that when, in 1894, J. D. Campbell published his Life of the poet, Gissing promptly borrowed a copy from the public library, as he did the first volume of Coleridge's correspondence in the following year. Two further allusions occur in "A Lodger in Maze Pond" and "The Elixir," short stories collected in *The House of Cobwebs* and *A Victim of Circumstances* respectively.

132, 133

*Ignoble Jesting*

"The chief bar to the action of imagination, and stop to all greatness in this present age of ours, is its mean and shallow love of jest and jeer, so that if there be in any good and lofty work a flaw or failing, or undipped vulnerable part where sarcasm may stick or stay, it is caught at, and pointed at, and buzzed about, and fixed upon, and stung into, as a recent wound is by flies, and nothing is ever taken seriously nor as it was meant, but always, if it may be, turned the wrong way and misunderstood; and while this is so, there is not nor cannot be any hope of achievement of high things; men dare not open their hearts to us, if we are to broil them on a thorn fire."

*Modern Painters. "Of Imagination Penetrative."*
Poetry

"Poetry is the suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions."

Mod. Painters. Part IV. Cap. 1.

Notes

As noted apropos of entries 104 and 105, Gissing immersed himself again in Modern Painters in mid-1887, when these two passages were transcribed. Signs of interest in Ruskin are not lacking between the two sets of entries. In July 1885 he bought Chesneau’s The English School of Painting, with a preface and notes by Ruskin, whom he quoted with amusement in an undated letter to his brother (LMF, p. 166, [19 July, 1885], Berg Coll.).

The idealism which is here so candidly expressed pleased Gissing for the same reason that he relished Samuel Johnson’s vituperation of hypocrisy and other evils of the age. Ruskin’s attack upon the meanness of most Victorian art (and literary?) criticism was balm to Gissing’s frayed nerves. More than once his work, still gaining in assurance as it was at this stage of his career, had been attacked anonymously in the columns of dailies and weeklies. The nobility of Ruskin’s feelings in an "age of unmitigated egotism and ‘shop’" was to him as unfailing a source of energy as John Forster’s account of Dickens’s extraordinary career as a writer. He himself had ceased writing verse, but the aim of poetry as defined by Ruskin was one from which he never swerved in his prose works.

Devotion to Ruskin went on for some years. On arriving in Florence in late December 1888, he saw in a bookshop near the Arno "a whole series of the American reprints of Ruskin’s works" so reasonably priced that he rushed into the shop and purchased four volumes straightaway (letter to Ellen of December 31, 1888, LMF, p. 270, Pforzheimer Library). He had some pleasant opportunities to see that Ruskin was well-known in Italian artistic circles, and referred freely to him in his correspondence with Eduard Bertz, sure as he was that allusions to Ruskin would not be wasted on a highly educated German (see, for instance, the comparison with Gladstone in LGB, p. 48, or the tribute he paid to him at his death). The Italian section of his diary contains many references which testify to a detailed knowledge of Ruskin’s work, and again Ruskin was in his mind when he visited the Acropolis.

Besides Thyrza, three novels of the 1890s offer significant side glances at Ruskin: The Odd Women, in which Widdowson’s view of woman is coloured by his reading of the essayist, In the Year of Jubilee (Part I, Ch. VII) and Sleeping Fires (Ch. XIII).
"Les meilleurs livres sont ceux que chaque lecteur croit qu'il aurait pu faire."

Pascal. Pensées 1.3.

[The best books are those which every reader believes he could have written himself.]

Notes

As in the case of entry 125, there is no record in Gissing's correspondence and papers that he was reading Pascal when he copied this short quotation, one of five or more on a favourite subject of his. He did his best to follow the precept which underlies Pascal's statement; writing for his best readers, he aimed at clarity of thought and expression, and with a power of conviction which forces one to see things from his characters' points of view. As noted before, some of his later thoughts on the art of fiction are to be found in his essay on "Realism in Fiction," reprinted by Jacob and Cynthia Korg in their very useful volume George Gissing on Fiction (1978), but the obviously approbatory transcription of Pascal's aphorism is worth considering in the light of the advice Gissing gave to his brother Algernon some years before, in 1883, when Algernon was still only toying with the idea of emulating his brother. This advice also appears in the volume just mentioned, and it is so sound and pertinent that one wonders how it was that Gissing did not produce, even then, novels better than The Unclassed, on which he was currently engaged. "The secret of art in fiction," he observed on November 9, 1883, in a way which could not have been disapproved by Henry James, "is the indirect. Nothing must be told too plumply. Play about your facts and intersperse them with humour and satire." This after showing his keen awareness of such problems as the balance between narrative, description and dialogue, the way of introducing characters and of handling antecedents, the role of background characters, and the like. By 1887 he had certainly put to profitable use the instruction implicit in Pascal's Pensées, even though Pascal did not have in mind the art of fiction, which in his day seemed to have culminated with romances such as L'Astrée or Le Grand Cyrus.
The Human Lot

οὐ μὲν γὰρ τί ποῦ ἐστίν ὀἰκουρωτέρον ἄνδρος
πάντων ὅσα τε γαῖαν ἐπὶ πνεῖει τε καὶ ἔρπει.

Iliad XVII.446-7.

[Of all the things that breathe and move upon earth, there is perhaps none more wretched than man.]

Notes

This pessimistic aphorism from the Iliad (XVII, 446-47) is repeated almost literally in the Odyssey (XVIII, 131-32): "For verily there is no creature more afflicted than man, of all that breathe and move upon the earth." An anticipation of Gissing's gloomiest thoughts, it found its way into The Emancipated (Part II, Ch. IX) in a most appropriate context, during a visit of Mallard to the Vatican Museum, where the Jupiter of Otricoli is said to look as though he had just uttered Homer's words. Quotations and allusions to Homer which have not been identified in the preceding notes occur in Isabel Clarendon (Vol. I, Ch. V), Thyrza (Ch. XXX), A Life's Morning (Ch. I), Sleeping Fires (Ch. VI), The Whirlpool (Part II, Ch. IV and Part III, Ch. VI), The Crown of Life (Ch. VII) and By the Ionian Sea (Ch. XVII). The letters to Eduard Bertz and to Gabrielle Fleury incline one to believe that he took an emotional delight in quoting or alluding to the great epic poet in whose works he certainly found those characteristics which Matthew Arnold, in his lectures "On Translating Homer," defined as rapidity, plainness in thought and diction, and nobility. Like so many readers from Aristotle onwards, Gissing yielded to the charm of Homer's poetic art of illusion, and to his capacity for giving life to characters and inanimate things alike.

His main tribute to the Greek poet is to be read in Henry Ryecraft (Winter XV), where he offers a translation of Odyssey XXIII, 190-201, with glowing comment. When in 1900 a magazine editor asked him for an original contribution, it was this particular section, then unpublished, that he sent in (The Student, January 1901, pp. 36-37).
Motto for a Present

Theocritus' Idyll XXVIII, from which these two lines are transcribed, consists of a poetic epistle accompanying the present of a distaff to the wife of a friend; the scene is laid in Sicily, the poet being probably a native of Syracuse. This idyll, which, like the others, is full of freshness and vivacity, enables us to catch a glimpse of the old country life of Magna Graecia in the third century B.C. It pleased Gissing to find here an idealisation of friendship at a time when he himself, poor and lonely, only had one friend he saw regularly (Morley Roberts), apart, that is, from relatives on whom he could rely for occasional assistance, but who hardly shared his artistic and intellectual aspirations. The presents he could afford to make or was glad to receive were remarkably few. More generally, the quotation testifies to his passionate attachment to spiritual values and rejection of material and commercial ones.

No mention of Theocritus can be traced before 1887. The epigraph to Thyrza, published in April of that year, is an excerpt from the Idylls, which he translated thus in a letter to his sister Ellen of May 14, 1887 (LMF, p. 193, Colgate University): "But we heroes are mortals, and being mortals, of mortals let us sing." A letter to Algernon written on July 24, 1887, helps us to date the present entry approximately: "I have just finished a complete reading of Theocritus, of which I am rather proud. His vocabulary is very stiff" (LMF, p. 197, Yale). This statement is confirmed by a letter to Ellen of July 1 (Yale) in which he had scribbled with great satisfaction: "Reading much Greek [. . .] Am deep in Theocritus and living by 'the Sicilian Sea.'"

On leaving for the Continent in the autumn of 1888 he hoped he would be able to go even further than Italy. "I wonder whether I shall get to Sicily?" he wrote to his sister-in-law, Catherine Gissing. "It will be very cheap and very easy, and one ought to see something of the country of Theocritus, (whom, with Horace, I carry in my bag)" (letter of October 19, 1888, Yale). But he had to spend his
money sparingly and reckoned he must choose between a trip to Sicily from Naples and visits to Rome, Florence and Venice on his way back to London. When in Venice he thought with nostalgia of the old temples he had seen at Paestum. "The Temples that heard the voice of Greeks! [. . .] The South is what I shall always long for. Rome, of course, glorious Rome, and all that lies beyond. Next I must see Sicily, where there are finer Greek ruins even than those of Paestum. One of the aims of my life now is to read Thucydides and Theocritus in Sicily" (letter to Ellen, February 5 to 8, 1889, LMF, p. 279, Pforzheimer Library).

His plan did not materialize, however. To the end Theocritus remained for him a standard of excellence. Thus he viewed Tennyson as a worthy successor of Theocritus, or again one of the many reasons why Daudet appealed to him, was that he was capable of quoting the Sicilian poet. When Gabrielle Fleury, in 1898, sent him a present of honey, a poetical gift, to him its scent recalled the old world—"the world of Homer, of Theocritus, of Virgil" (August 18, 1898, LGF, p. 46). His last two timid tributes to Theocritus were paid in By the Ionian Sea (Ch. III and XVII) and Henry Ryecroft (Autumn XVII).

Four Proverbs

(a) "Il est aisé d’aller à pied, quand on tient son cheval par la bride."

[It is easy to go on foot when one is leading one’s horse.]

(b) "Prends le premier conseil d’une femme, et non le second."

[Take a woman’s first piece of advice, and not the second.]

(c) "Compendia, dispendia."

[A short cut is a waste of time.]

(d) "Magna civitas, magna solitudo."

[A great city means great loneliness.]
Gissing made sparing use of proverbs, most likely because he thought that a good many of them express platitudes or prejudices, or sacrifice too much sense to verbal effect, but the more cogent reason may be that he disliked dressing his own thoughts in anonymous, often threadbare clothing. The nearest approximation to proverbs in his works can be found in his use of Biblical or Shakespearean phrases sanctioned by age-long practice. P. F. Kropholler's article, "Some Notes on Quotations and Literary Allusions in Gissing" (Gissing Newsletter, October 1975, pp. 11-14), throws some light on this point. If he ever had a taste for proverbs, it was when he was embarking on his literary career and reading somewhat eclectically in the Boston Public Library. The source of the four proverbs quoted above is unknown, but they may well be the result of a working session at the British Museum, in the course of which he happened to consult a book of proverbs, about the time he was trying to produce a successor to Thyrza. One such collection, A New Dictionary of Foreign Phrases and Classical Quotations, by H. P. Jones, published in 1900, contains all four proverbs: (a) and (c) in a fuller form ("Il est [bien] aisé..." and "Compendia [plerumque sunt] dispensia"); (d) is a translation of a line from a Greek comedy, meaning "The Great City is a great wilderness." A similar volume is likely to have been available in the late 1880s.

One may imagine that Gissing did not write down the first of these proverbs without a touch of self-pity, and that personal experience was ample justification for unmitigated approval of the fourth. In the second he no doubt recognized the attitude of a man who had been a victim of the wiles of woman. By the time he transcribed this proverb, he had learnt that neither the first piece of advice nor the second was to be taken when it came from his wife. As for the third proverb, it would have met with the approval of Bernard Kingcote who, in Isabel Clarendon, refuses to take a short cut when faced with the choice between a short new road and a long old one (Vol. I, Ch. 1).

138, 139

Commerce

"Trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business."

Thoreau —"Walden."

Study of Classical Languages

"It is worth the expense of youthful days and costly hours, if you learn
only some words of an ancient language, which are raised out of the trivialness of the street, to be perpetual suggestions and provocations."

Thoreau — "Walden."

Notes

Except for these two quotations, the only reference to Henry David Thoreau in Gissing's works and papers seems to occur in a letter of April 15, 1888, to his sister-in-law, Catherine. It consists of a reminder that "Thoreau’s method of existence ended in consumption" (Yale). He had read *Walden* a few weeks or months before. The first quotation reflects Thoreau's double hostility to commercial activities and to institutional religion—an essential aspect of his philosophy—and we need not labour the point that Gissing, though for other reasons and in a different way, also distrusted trade and the turn of mind which often went hand in hand with it in the Victorian age, as well as all forms of religion and worship. His work offers many examples of narrow-mindedness ascribable to religious influence, the most notable occurring in *The Emancipated*. More specifically this first passage may be read as an allusion to his experience of sanctimonious commercial publishers. As regards the second quotation, such a keen supporter of classical languages and literatures as Gissing could not but approve warmly of its contents. In his case, as in Thoreau's, classical culture was an alienating factor.

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Criticism

* ἡ τὰρ τῶν λόγων κρίσις πολλῆς ἐστὶ πείρας τελευταίου ἐπιγέννημα.*

Longinus. VI.

[Literary judgment is the ultimate product of great experience.]

Notes

This is an extract from a Greek work entitled *Longinus on the Sublime*, attributed to "Dionysius Longinus" and dating from the first or second century A.D. Gissing had certainly come across admiring references to this treatise in Pope and Gibbon, with whose works he was familiar. It has been praised for its clearness of expression, the felicity and interest of its illustrations—taken for the most part from Homer, Plato and Demosthenes—and for the soundness of its criticism. Gissing naturally concurred with the above remark on criticism. He would have denied the
anonymous reviewers of his novels in contemporary newspapers and journals that "great experience" of life necessary to sound literary judgment. In a letter of May 14, 1887, to his sister Ellen, he lamented apropos of Thyrza: "Alas, how little these reviewers comprehend (apprehend, I should say) of my real meaning" (LMF, p. 193, Colgate University).

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Ceremony and Good-breeding

"As ceremony is the invention of wise men to keep fools at a distance, so good-breeding is an expedient to make fools and wise men equals."

Tatler, No. 30.

Notes

The last words of this entry are quoted in Born in Exile (Part IV, Ch. II), apropos of Marcella Moxey, a character capable of independent thought and an enemy of compromise, as Steele's definition of polite intercourse. In Gissing's copy of The Tatler (4 vols., 1813, Vol. III missing, Coustillas Coll.), the passage concerned is pencil-marked in the margin of p. 226.

A collation of the diary entries and Commonplace Book entries about the Tatler establishes that the above quotation was transcribed in 1888, probably on or shortly after February 5, that is, when he took up again the reprint of the old periodical. The Commonplace Book entry (p. 31) from No. 38 of the Tatler would thus correspond to a second reading session dated June 29, 1888 in the diary, and the second Commonplace Book entry (p. 41) to a third reading session which, according to the diary, extended from April 21 to May 1, 1889, at which time a letter to Ellen confirms that, together with the Frogs of Aristophanes, Cicero's Letters and Boswell, he was reading the Tatler (LMF, p. 284, Berg Coll.).

Ceremony and good-breeding are alike evocative of a world—that of society drawing-rooms—in which Gissing felt ill at ease and looked miserable, especially before he had made his mark in literature and gained confidence accordingly. The testimony of Austin Harrison ("George Gissing," Nineteenth Century, September 1906, pp. 453-63) is worth comparing with Gissing’s own meditations on society life (Henry Ryecroft, Summer XIII).
"Τῶν πάνων πωλοῦσιν ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ γάντη οἱ θεοί.

Xen. Mem. II.1.20, quoted from Epicharmus

[The gods sell us all good things at the price of troubles.]

Notes

Epicharmus, a Greek comic poet of Sicilian origin who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., was known to Gissing through Horace (Epistles, II, 1, 157-58), Theocritus (who wrote an epigram for Epicharmus’ statue) and Xenophon. That all good things in life must be paid for certainly proved true in Gissing’s case.

Xenophon turns up in a variety of places in Gissing’s writings; first in a letter to Algernon of August 13, 1881 (Yale), in which he says that in his spare hours he is "entirely given up to Greek at present, reading right through the Anabasis—a delightful book when read at long breaths—and Sophocles’ Antigone," then in another letter to his brother dated October 10, 1885 (Pforzheimer Library), telling him that he is reading Virgil, Livy, and Xenophon with his morning pupil. Two Commonplace Book entries (pp. 30 and 36) from Anabasis IV, 7 and IV, 1 respectively dating from 1887 and 1893, were turned to good account in Henry Ryecroft (Summer IX). The diary records a slow reading of Oeconomicus in Holden’s edition from March 18 to June 12, 1893. His impressions of this treatise on the management of a household and estate are to be found in a letter to Bertz of August 24, 1893: "Xenophon’s ‘Oeconomicus’ is my latest reading in Greek. A delightful little dialogue [between Socrates and Ischomachus]—so fresh and sweet. It is like a breath of air from Hymettus" (LGB, p. 175). Besides throwing some light on its author’s tastes and activities, this treatise reflects the condition of agriculture in about 400 B.C. and Xenophon’s notion of what kind of relations should prevail between a man and his wife.

Therefore Xenophon was uppermost in Gissing’s mind about the time he moved with his wife and son from Exeter to Brixton, where at 76 Burton Road he could mentally compare Xenophon’s lessons in household management and good taste with Edith’s violent practices. He had a marked partiality for Xenophon, who was in his own recollections associated with the hot summer afternoons at Joseph Harrison’s school in Wakefield (Scrap-book).
Priesthood

"A Pity which redeems worlds—nay, absolves Priests."

"Villette" p. 406.

Notes

References to the personality and works of Charlotte Brontë, as opposed to Emily and Ann, abound in Gissing's letters and personal papers, and, as in the case of Meredith, only a full-length article could examine in depth the significance of the example set him by Charlotte Brontë in his career. As a Yorkshire figure, she was respected and admired in the Gissing family, and George's intense interest in her never waned. Like Meredith, and like Gissing himself, she was a brilliant linguist and was familiar with both French and German literature. It is characteristic that this entry was made on a Sunday—June 17, 1888 (see diary)—a day on which he usually concentrated on the classics, if, that is, he read at all. He was then completing Vol. II of his current novel, The Nether World, and sought stimulus in Villette as he might have done in Forster's Life of Dickens.

In Thomas Waller Gissing's library there used to be The Professor in an 1867 edition, with the owner's initials written in pencil, as well as Mrs. Gaskell's biography of the novelist, also in an 1867 edition, and both volumes were still in the possession of his grandson Alfred in 1971. The books had been familiar to George, who by 1880 seemed to have read all her works. To his sister Margaret he wrote on January 13 of that year: "So you have read Shirley. It is, on the whole, certainly Charlotte Brontë's best book. She seems happier in it than in the others, though she was miserable enough at times while writing it. I think perhaps Caroline Helstone is a better drawn character than Shirley herself, though the latter is very delightful" (LMF, pp. 54-55, Berg Coll.). Even before this comment on Shirley, a passing allusion to Haworth and Jane Eyre in a letter of May 2, 1878, to Algernon testifies to familiarity with the story of the Brontës (LMF, p. 29, Berg Coll.).

His enthusiasm for Villette did not manifest itself until the mid-1880s. It broke out in a letter of September 26, 1884, to Ellen, in the early days of his acquaintance with Mrs. Gaussen. "It is a noble book, full of wonderful character study, and with pages of English prose which will stand comparison with anything in the language" (LMF, p. 149). He commended especially the chapter which describes Lucy Snowe's lonely life during the holidays at the school, together with the ending, which was altered at the bidding of the pater familias.
He read the novel again in April 1887, and his correspondence of that year is studded with references to it. Thus to Margaret he said on April 12: "Charlotte Brontë I find more and more valuable. She is the greatest English woman after Mrs. Browning. George Eliot is poor in comparison with her. No page of her is without genius, and she wrote a style such as you find in no other writer. She strengthens me enormously" (LMF, p. 191, Berg Coll.). His interest in Charlotte Brontë increased when his publisher, George Smith, of Smith, Elder & Co., entertained him with his recollections of the Brontë sisters dating back to the late 1840s. He only wished Smith were a little more respectful (see the letter of July 3, 1887, to Ellen in LMF, pp. 217-18, Stanford University). By that time he no longer thought Shirley Charlotte's best novel. "Yes," he wrote to Ellen on May 31, 1887, "Charlotte Bronte is the finest personality in English fiction, beyond doubt. No woman (except George Sand) ever wrote such marvellous prose. 'Villette' is her finest work; throughout the writing is sustained a wonderful pitch" (Berg Coll.). It was about that time that he noted in his Commonplace Book (one of four entries) that in no modern writer had he "such intense personal interest as in Charlotte Brontë." Of course emotional interest partly accounted for his deep sympathy. This appears in a moving passage in a letter to his sister Ellen after she had visited Ann Bronte's grave: "Strange to think of Charlotte Brontë having stood on the spot,—at the time of course regarded by those with whom she had dealings as an insignificant stranger. These revenges of Time are very palatable to me. I think of such cases with a sort of exultation over oblivion,—a rebellious triumph over the world's brute forces" (August 30, 1888, LMF, p. 222, Berg Coll.). When on his return from his first trip to Italy, he travelled back through Brussels and spent a day there, his thoughts were full of Charlotte Brontë (Diary, February 28, 1889). Villette remained, with The Ordeal of Richard Feverel and The Return of the Native, one of his favourite novels (Pearson's Weekly, June 30, 1894, p. 787).

This fine quotation on pity must have reminded Gissing of the analysis of pity in The World as Will and Idea (Book IV, §67), where Schopenhauer argued that "all true and pure love is sympathy, and all love which is not sympathy is selfishness." It will also have reminded him of his own Schopenhauerian essay, "The Hope of Pessimism," all the more forcefully as, in the context of Charlotte Brontë's novel, love is at this stage threatened by the intervention of a priest wishing to separate the lovers, and in Gissing's eyes love was a much nobler force than the bigotry of the Roman Catholic clergy, or indeed of ministers of any denomination. The pity called forth by Charlotte Brontë is that of God, a pity more potent than any sin, including the sins of meddling priests, who like all sinners will be absolved. Gissing obviously responded to the beauty of the feeling, the feeling of a poet, whom he viewed with great intellectual admiration coloured by personal emotion.

Allusions to Charlotte Brontë's personality and work are comparatively few in his novels. In Ch. XIV of The Unclassed Waymark has Ida Starr read Jane Eyre, while
in *Born in Exile* Peak readily grants to Earwaker that Charlotte Brontë was a genius (Part II, Ch. II). In the same novel, Sidwell Warricome observes that "in *Villette*, which she had just re-read, Charlotte Brontë makes a contrast between the City and the West End, and greatly prefers the former" (Part III, Ch. V). Wisely Nancy Lord, though she feels an urge to write fiction, does not deem herself a Charlotte Brontë or a George Eliot (*In the Year of Jubilee*, Part VI, Ch. V). Henry Ryecroft mentions Charlotte Brontë's unfair treatment at the hands of her publishers, Smith, Elder & Co., who dealt just as unfairly with Gissing himself (Autumn XXII).

As a footnote to this entry it is appropriate to record that Gissing's copies of *Jane Eyre* (1878), *Shirley* (1885), and *Villette* (1885), all with his signature on the title page, are in private hands (Parke-Bernet sale no. 2891 of September 23, 1969, item 131). An article by J.W.M. Bemelmans, "A 'Permanent interest of a minor kind': Charlotte Bronte and George Gissing's *The Unclassed*," appeared in the *Bronte Society Transactions*, Part 95 of the Society's Publications, No. 5 of Vol. 18, 1985, pp. 383-91.

**144**

*Encouragement*

"Non, si male nunc, et olim
Sic erit."

Horace. Od. II.10.

[Though now they may, be sure of this: things will not always go amiss.]

**Notes**

This entry, which is quoted in *Henry Ryecroft* (Winter XXV), doubtless expresses a temporary victory of hope over experience. In the book it occurs in an important section in which Ryecroft discards his pessimism now that "the dark days are drawing to an end" and evokes "the true-born son of England, his vigour and his virtues yet unimpaired." The epigraph to the whole book—"Hoc erat in votis"—also comes from Horace.

No date is offered by the diary for this entry or for entry 145b, but it is reasonable to suppose that Gissing reread the *Odes* in conjunction with the Latin lessons he gave to Walter Grahame, his last pupil (see diary for April 9, 1888). At all events, shortly afterwards, while in Rome and Florence, he carried his Horace with him (letter to Catherine Gissing of October 19, 1888, Yale), and on
seeing the Tiber was immediately reminded of the poet's epithet for it—flavus. The later diary entries in which Horace is named seem to suggest that, caught as he was in the whirlpool of modern life, he found it difficult to concentrate on Latin (May 3, 1891, January 17, 1892 and June 29, 1896). Over the years he tried repeatedly to rouse Ellen's interest in Horace, particularly in the Odes. "These are my favourite poems in all Latin literature," he wrote to her on March 7, 1891 (Yale).

Immutability of the Past

a) μόνον γὰρ αὐτοῦ καὶ θεὸς στερίσκεται. 
   ἀγένητα ποιεῖν ἄσοι ἂν ἤ πεπραγμένα.

   Agathon, apud Aristot. Eth. 6.2.

   [Of this alone even a god is deprived: to undo whatsoever has been done.]

b) "Non tamen irritum,
   Quodcumque retro est, efficiet neque
   Diffinget infectumque reddet,
   Quod fugiens semel hora venit."

   Hor. Od. III.29.

   [What is gone, Jove will not, cannot turn to nought; nor cancel, as a thing undone, what once the flying hour has brought.]

Notes

Gissing probably never read the surviving fragments of the works of Agathon, the Athenian tragic poet of the fifth century B.C. Nor do we have evidence of much interest in Aristotle. In the Nicomachean Ethics he found a study of the quest for happiness, the latter consisting in a life of contemplation—contemplation of philosophic truth—from which pleasure, honour and wealth are excluded. Such a life is attainable by man through reason.

Was Gissing reading Aristotle and Horace simultaneously in 1888, or did he come across the quotation from Agathon in a footnote to his edition of Horace's Odes? The answer is uncertain. In any case, his pleasure in contemplating the immuta-
bility of the past could only be a mixed one. His own past with its unremovable
stain was an obsession of which not even comparative fame could cure him. It
prompted him to make a number of decisions which smacked of self-mortification and
were further handicaps in his tormented life. On a strictly personal plane,
therefore, the past was unalterable, an ever-present burden. But there is abun-
dant evidence that contemplating the immutability of history gave him deep mental
satisfaction in the hours of his greatest personal harassment. The past, as he
confessed in the last lines of By the Ionian Sea, was to him a refuge: "As I
looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly
amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten."

146

Literary Freedom

"Oui, répondit Pococurante, il est beau d'écrire ce qu'on pense; c'est le
privilège de l'homme."

"Candide." Chap. XXV.

[Yes, replied Pococurante, it is a noble thing to write what one thinks; it
is man's privilege.]

Notes

It was during his second stay in Paris that Gissing bought a copy of Candide
(Diary, October 12, 1888), but there is no evidence that he read Voltaire's
philosophic tale immediately. An entry made in 1891 in the Commonplace Book
(p. 25)—"'Travaillons sans raisonner,' dit Martin, 'c'est le seul moyen de rendre
la vie supportable'" (Candide, Ch. XXX: "'Let's work without stopping to think,'
said Martin, 'it's the only way to make life bearable'")—probably dates from a
second reading.

The quotation in Extracts from my Reading is a reply from the wealthy Venetian
senator to Martin, who has just caught sight of his English books. "To write what
one thinks," that is, what one thinks freely, is in the context a reference to
free-thinking and its opposite, Grundyism. In Italy, Pococurante goes on to
observe, people write only about what they do not think—an allusion to the tyranny
of the clergy. In Part V, Ch. I of Born in Exile, Pococurante's words are used as
the epigraph of an imaginary book by "a modern of moderns" who defies English
prudery. On reading it, Gissing's alter ego, Godwin Peak, feels "his nerves
thrill in sympathetic response." In its review of the novel, the Saturday Review
deplored that the characters made free with the contents of the author's commonplace book, and, repeating Pococurante's words, commented that what is "beau" to the writer may be anything but "beau" to the reader, who fortunately retains the privilege to skip. Gissing thought this review "surpassed in abusive misrepresentation anything I have come across, concerning my own work, of late years" (letter of June 19, 1892, LGB, p. 157).

**The Generous Nature**

"Es liegt in meiner Natur, das Grosse und Schöne willig und mit Freuden zu verehren, und diese Anlage an so herrlichen Gegenständen Tag für Tag, Stunde für Stunde auszubilden, ist das seligste aller Gefühle."

Goethe. "Italienische Reise" (Verona)

[It is in my nature to reverence greatness and beauty, and to be in a position to cultivate this disposition day by day and hour by hour, by means of so many glorious sights, is the most blissful of feelings.]

**The Author's Necessary Egoism**

"Man muss schreiben, wie man lebt, erst um sein selbst willen, und dann existirt man auch für verwandte Wesen."


[In the first instance one must write as one lives, for one’s own sake; but then one also exists for others similarly minded.]

**Living in the Present**

"Auch habe ich dieses Jahr unter fremden Menschen Acht gegeben, und gefunden, dass alle wirklich klugen Menschen mehr oder weniger, zärter oder gröber, darauf kommen und bestehen, dass der Moment Alles ist, und dass nur der Vorzug eines vernünftigen Menschen darin bestehe, sich so zu betragen, dass sein Leben, in so fern es von ihm abhängt, die möglichste Masse von vernünftigen, glücklichen Momenten enthalte."

"Ital. Reise." 12 Oct. 1787.-

(Cp. Pater. p. 43.)
Extracts 147, 148, 149

[This year I have also noticed, while living among strangers, that all truly wise men in one way or another come to and insist upon the idea that the present moment is all-important, and that the point of being intelligent is to conduct oneself in such a way that one's life contains (insofar as this depends upon oneself) the greatest possible number of happy moments.]

Notes

On the inside back cover of his Commonplace Book Gissing put Goethe's *Italienische Reise* first in a list of favourite books (*Commonplace Book*, p. 40). He bought his copy in Paris on October 9, 1888, a few weeks before going to Italy, and read it from October 15 to 22. On p. 66 of Part I he was delighted to read that Goethe's desire to visit Italy had assumed very much the same form as his own longing, as expressed in *The Unclassed*. It "had become with him an illness [...] he could not bear to look at a Latin book" (*Commonplace Book*, p. 59). The whole last paragraph of Goethe's entry for October 12, 1786, describing his feelings is marked with a double line in pencil in Gissing's copy (signed "George Gissing. ! Paris. 1888.", Coustillas Coll.). Comment on the book also occurs in letters to his sister Ellen of October 10 and 17, 1888 (Yale), and to Eduard Bertz of November 9, 1888 (*LGB*, p. 18), as well as in *The Emancipated* (Part I, Ch. II, where Mrs. Lessingham reads Goethe's travel book) and in *Henry Ryecroft* (Autumn XIX). In both books we have echoes of Gissing's own impressions on first reading the *Italienische Reise*.

These three extracts are duly pencil-marked in Gissing's copy on p. 28 (Part I), and pp. 48 and 52 (Part III). They again show his admiration for Goethe's wise and noble nature. A hint of narcissism can also be traced here. In noting entry 147 he could not but be aware that his diary and letters since he had arrived in Naples, if not earlier, might produce on those who read them impressions similar to Goethe's feelings. On the necessary egoism of authors he was also in full agreement with him and entry 149 eased his conscience—his letters to his mother and sisters contained self-conscious allusions to the cheap living conditions on the Continent, so that his relatives might not think, in accordance with their puritanical temperaments, that he was indulging his own cultural interests in an irresponsible manner.

A final celebration of Goethe was to find its way into *Henry Ryecroft* where, in addition to the passage mentioned above, three sections refer to him congenially, Spring XII, Autumn II and VII.

The comparison suggested by Gissing in brackets at the end of entry 149 concerned entry 117 from *Marius the Epicurean* which occurs on p. 43 of the manuscript of *Extracts from my Reading*.

150

**Consistency**

"Prima enim sequentem honestum est in secundis tertiisque consistere."


[For it is honourable for a man who is seeking the first place to settle for the second or third.]

**Notes**

When this entry was made Gissing had been familiar with Cicero's works for some twenty years, since he began to learn Latin at Back Lane School, Wakefield. His American notebook contains an obscure note about him, while the correspondence for the spring and summer of 1878 shows him studying *De Officiis* with a pupil and sending notes to his brother Algernon on *De Divinatione*. Ten years later, when he was in Paris, a diary jotting records the purchase for Ellen of an interlinear translation of *De Senectute* (October 1, 1888). During his stay in Naples, the sight of the little island of Nisida reminded him (November 7, 1888) of a visit paid there by Cicero to Brutus, and he stood admiringly in front of a bust of Cicero in the Capitoline Museum a few weeks later (December 16, 1888). A letter to Ellen of April 24, 1889 (*LMF*, p. 284, Berg Coll.), and the diary for the end of the same month, show him at work on the writer's letters, very likely at the time when he made the present entry. An echo of this was heard in due course in Henry Ryecroft (Spring XIII): Ryecroft's edition of Cicero, we are told, consisted of podgy volumes in parchment, with notes by Graevius, Gronovius and others. Ellen followed her brother's advice, and his letters to her of March 7 and November 7, 1891 (Yale and Boston Public Library), express his delight that she could now read *De Amicitia* without a translation. "It is a good example of old Cicero's rather commonplace, but eloquent and pleasing writing," he commented in the former letter.

Few references to Cicero have been traced in the works. Nisida is evoked for its historical associations in the first chapter of *The Emancipated*, as it was in the diary. Harold Biffen in *New Grub Street* aptly quotes from *Paradoxa*, I, after a fire has destroyed all his belongings except the manuscript of *Mr. Bailey, Grocer*: "omnia mea mecum porto," and Henry Ryecroft ends Summer XXII with a Ciceronian
warning: "videant consules." Predictably, it is in Veranilda that Cicero is most frequently mentioned: his name occurs in Ch. XIII and XXVI, while two phrases of his ("micare digitis" and "vita umbratilis") are quoted in Ch. IV and XIII.

151

Perverse Memory

"Discit enim citius meminitque libentius illud,
Quod quis deridet, quam quod probat et veneratur."

Hor. Ep. II. 1. 262-3.

[For men more quickly learn and more gladly recall what they deride than what they approve and esteem.]

Notes

As previously noted, Gissing carried his Horace to Rome in 1888. His Commonplace Book has two quotations from Epistle I (pp. 32 and 59), one of which is dated December 8. So the present entry, which he transcribed from Epistle II, would seem to have been made a few days later. Horace's note on the relationship between feelings and memory confirmed his own observation, the findings of which were illustrated in the vicious lower-class characters of his early novels, Joseph Snowdon and Clem Peckover in The Nether World for instance. This view fitted in with the remark of his reported by Gabrielle Fleury, that "if I hold any religion at all, it is Manicheism" (Commonplace Book, p. 68).

Allusions to Horace unrecorded in the preceding entries on the poet occur in a number of works. In Isabel Clarendon (Vol. II, Ch. VI) rendering an ode of Horace or solving a quadratic equation is regarded as a test of mental ability. Ch. IX of New Grub Street is entitled "Invita Minerva," a borrowing from Ars Poetica, 385: "Tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva," that is, "You will say nothing, do nothing, unless Minerva pleases." Bruno Chilvers, the ecclesiastical careerist, quotes "Excepto quod non simul esses, caetera laetus!" ("Except for your presence I was happy") from Epistles I, 10, 50 in Born in Exile (Part V, Ch. I), a quotation to be found in the Commonplace Book, p. 32. In The Whirlpool (Part III, Ch. II) Morton's pedantry leads him to murmur: "Multa renascentur quae jam cessidere," that is, "Many things that have dropped out of use will one day be revived" (Ars Poetica, 70). Alexander Otway is fond of quoting Horace (The Crown of Life, Ch. VII). But, as might be expected, it is in The Emancipated, because of the Italian setting, and in Henry Ryecroft, a summing-up of Gissing's favourite intellectual excursions, that Horace's presence is mainly noticeable. (For details, see the notes to the Harvester critical edition of the novel and to the Aubier-Montaigne bilingual edition of the volume of essays.)
"After so many have coldly repeated that vice leads to misery, is there no generous man who will proclaim aloud that misery leads to vice?"

Landor. "Romilly & Wilberforce."

Notes

Gissing fell to reading Landor again in 1889 after his stay in Florence, during which he went to Fiesole and may have seen Landor's villa. His diary for March 26-30 shows that he bought *The Pentameron* in the Camelot series and read it immediately. A jotting for October 30 also shows that he was re-reading *Pericles and Aspasia*, of which he bought a copy on October 3, 1892.

The present entry probably coincides with a diary notation on December 1, 1890, that he "read some Landor." He was then finishing *New Grub Street*, he used the present quotation within a few lines of the end. Jasper Milvain, the unscrupulous yet generous man of letters, is at this stage basking in the sunshine of professional success and conjugal bliss; he quotes freely from memory: "It has been repeated often enough that vice leads to misery; will no man declare that misery leads to vice?" Gissing's inaccuracy seems to have been deliberate. In *Sleeping Fires* (Ch. V) he has Langley lend his copy of *Pericles* to Louis Reed. The last reference to Landor in his correspondence occurs in a letter to Eduard Bertz (March 11, 1900, *LGB*, p. 276), in which he observed that the only prose writer comparable to Ruskin is Landor, "whose best pages are glorious. De Quincey [sic], too, [...] has a great deal of noble prose, but, mentally, he is on a somewhat lower level." In *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* he again recalled Landor and De Quincey together in his section on puritanism: "Landor saw it as a ridiculous trait that English people were so mealy-mouthed in speaking of their bodies; De Quincey, taking him to task for this remark, declared it a proof of blunted sensibility due to long residence in Italy" (Winter XXII).

Gissing gave a copy of Landor's *Selections* (1894 edition) to his sister Ellen with an inscription facing the half title. This copy, which is in private hands, was sold at the Parke-Bernet Galleries on September 23, 1969 (sale no. 2891, item 128).
Progress of Ill in Life

"Optima quaeque dies miseris mortalibus aevi
Prima fugit; subeunt morbi, tristisque senectus,
Et labor, et durae rapit inclementia mortis."


[Life’s fairest days are ever the first to flee for hapless mortals; on creep diseases, and sad age, and suffering; and stern death’s ruthlessness sweeps away its prey.]

Notes

A passage in an unpublished letter from George to Algernon, dated March 26, 1891 (John Spiers), may help to date this entry approximately: "Herewith I send the passage of Virgil—the whole of it, with a free translation—done chiefly for my own amusement. It is noticeable that this idealization conflicts with the general tone of the Georgics, which is distinctly practical and rather tends to the expression of hardship." Gissing probably had the present entry in mind when he wrote in this strain to Algernon. Virgil’s description of the human lot echoes such pessimistic views as those of Sophocles (entry 84) and Homer (entry 135), and they accord with Gissing’s own yearning for the "happy finis." In his early thirties he feared that the pattern of life sketched by Virgil might apply to his own case. The first part of the quotation certainly did by the time he transcribed the passage. As a note in his Commonplace Book testifies, he looked back upon his childhood as his life’s fairest days (pp. 22-23).

Next to Horace, Virgil was Gissing’s favourite Latin poet. A scene in Ch. XXXVIII of The Unclassed speaks for itself; when Casti, on his death-bed, wishes his friend Waymark to read him a passage likely to soothe, he asks for those lines in the Georgics which glorify Italy. About the time Gissing was writing this, he was studying the poet’s work both for his own intellectual delight and for the private lessons that were still his main source of income (see for instance the letter to Algernon of October 10, 1885, in the Pforzheimer Library).

Evidence of a ready knowledge of Virgil abounds in the works, especially after the first visit to Italy. In Thyrza (Ch. II) Annabel Newthorpe reads Virgil eagerly, but with difficulty; she quotes from the Aeneid in Ch. XXX. More muted echoes occur in The Emancipated (Part II, Ch. III and VII), New Grub Street (Ch. XXIII and XXXVII), where he is quoted by Alfred Yule and, ironically, by Jasper Milvain, and Born in Exile (Part I, Ch. III and Part VI, Ch. III). "O mihi praeteritos referat si Jupiter annos!" exclaim both Godwin Peak and Henry Ryecroft (Winter
XVI), words which had found their way into the *Commonplace Book* (unpublished entry, MS, p. 28). Jessica Morgan repeats "a long bit of Virgil" in her delirium: she has overtaxed her brain (*In the Year of Jubilee*, Part IV, Ch. VI), and Mr. Nangle in "An Inspiration" stands before Harvey Munden "quantum mutatus" (*Human Odds and Ends*). Irene Derwent stops short of quoting Virgil, but Arnold Jacks, the imperialist, readily understands her allusion to a well-known passage in the *Aeneid* (*The Crown of Life*, Ch. X). Lashmar, in *Our Friend the Charlatan*, quotes Virgil twice (Ch. VI and IX), once to himself. But as might be expected, it is in *Veranilda* that allusions to Virgil, explicit or not, are most frequent. Ch. I contains separate references to his tomb and to the day of his birth, Eclogue I, 1 is quoted in Ch. IV, so is the phrase "ship-wrecking Scylaceum" from *Aeneid* III, 553, in Ch. XXV, which he had used in *By the Ionian Sea*, and Virgil also appears in a list of authors of pagan times (Ch. XXVI). Lastly, an unpublished entry in the *Commonplace Book* (MS, p. 14) reads: "Vixi, et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi. Aen. IV. 653," that is, "I have lived, I have finished the course that Fortune gave."

### Authors & Readers

"No one will ever relish an author thoroughly well, who would not have been fit company for that author had they lived at the same time. All others are mechanics in learning, and take the sentiments of writers like waiting-servants who report what passed at their master's table, but debase every thought and expression for want of the air with which they were uttered."

"Tatler." No. 173.

### Notes

In view of Gissing's lukewarm interest in eighteenth-century literature, his persistent taste for the *Tatler* is something of an oddity. Still, to him, the appeal of the old journal would seem to have been basically moral, lying in its humane values, which once more underlines the paradoxical fact that he regarded literature from a moral point of view and, at the end of his life, was not indeed above prudishness in his literary judgments (see for instance *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Winter XXII). In his way he was very much the Victorian.

This entry may date from a partial rereading which he recorded in his diary during the last weeks he spent in his lodgings at 7K Cornwall Residences (December 14 to 19, 1890), or possibly from a slightly later period when he again dipped into Addison's and Steele's essays.
The relationship between authors and readers was naturally often in Gissing's mind, and we consequently find a number of miscellaneous remarks on the subject in his correspondence and diary. He wrote, he said, for his best readers, an intention which Harold Child acknowledged in the anonymous *Times* obituary when he described Gissing as "one who valued his artistic conscience above popularity, and his purpose above his immediate reward." Like all authors, he received letters from unknown, and as a rule admiring, readers. That they at times praised him for reasons he thought foolish disturbed him. Thus when one Philip Bergson wrote to him about the last words of *Thyrza* and lauded him for artistic qualities which made him a worthy successor of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Euripides, he was as much annoyed as amused to see that someone could express such literary opinions, and as it turned out, misunderstand what he wrote. "Last night," he confided to his new friend Clara Collet on August 19, 1893, "I had a letter (typewritten) from a man unknown to me who solemnly adjures me to explain the meaning of the last lines of 'Thyrza.' He suggests a conjectural emendation; thinks there may be a printer's error. As he is good enough to think the book 'one of the most remarkable of the century'—poor man!—I must send a solemn reply" (Robert Collet). If not solemn, his reply was kind enough, showing nothing of his unease; it is a fair specimen of his attitude to readers (August 19, 1893, University of Texas). But, however demanding he may have been, he was not always disappointed. The Traverses of Weybridge, for instance, would seem to have fulfilled the conditions stated by Steele in this entry.

**Inflexible Virtue**

"Summum crede nefas animam praeferre pudori,
Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas."

Juvenal.

[Count it the greatest of all sins to prefer life to honour, and to lose, for the sake of living, all that makes life worth living.]

Notes

Juvenal's works were familiar to Gissing from his Wakefield days onwards and he doubtless used them with his private pupils in the late 1870s and in the 1880s. Nevertheless only five open references to the great satirist of the vices, abuses and follies of Roman life have been traced in his writings. Much like Hogarth's paintings, Juvenal's *Satires* pleased him on account of their bitter irony and harsh realism. Young Gissing admired their power of invective and grim epigrammatic vigour; also their sympathy for the poor. As time passed he seems to
have retained most of his admiration for a writer whom, however unconsciously, he regarded as one of his predecessors in that he candidly exposed the seamy side of life. The present quotation points to a moral indignation which Gissing, until he realised the virtues of art for art's sake, largely shared.

In the Commonplace Book (p. 68) he offered a free translation of the same entry in the style of Alexander Pope:

What baser than to purchase breath with shame,
And live, when all is lost, but life's mere name!

A second Commonplace Book entry, which was doubtless made in 1896 or 1897, records two common misquotations of Juvenal, which indicates familiarity with the Latin text. One of them proves to have been a self-correction, for he had written in the last chapter of The Unclassed: "Sic [instead of Hoc] volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas!" that is, "I will it, I insist on it! Let my will stand instead of reason" (Sixth Satire). A third Commonplace Book entry is unpublished (MS, p. 12): "Tunc prurigo morae impatiens, tum femina simplex" (Sixth Satire, 327), which means: "And now impatient nature can wait no longer: woman shows herself as she is." The hackneyed maxim from Satire X, "mens sana in corpore sano," is referred to unpedantically in Henry Ryecroft (Autumn XVI). In between, as has been shown by Adeline R. Tintner in her article, "New Grub Street and Juvenal's Satire III: 'Free Play Among Classic Ghosts'" (Gissing Newsletter, July 1982, pp. 1-23), he had written his most Juvenal-like novel of literary life.

156

Childhood

"Homo malus, puer robustus."

Hobbes.

[What in a man is evil, in a boy is a sign of strength.]

Notes

The fact that Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is quoted without any reference may mean, as in the case of Charlotte Corday (entry 109), that Gissing found the quotation in some other author, for there is no evidence available that he ever read Hobbes or planned to read him. Still, Hobbes's deliberate attempt to view rationally the nature of man and society, the considerable effect of his writings upon philosophers and scientists, his reputation as a liberator from ignorance and superstition could not be unknown to Gissing. One can easily imagine him applauding such
forceful and lucid thoughts as the following in *Leviathan*: "They that approve a private opinion, call it opinion; they that dislike it, heresy; and yet heresy signifies no more than private opinion," or "the Papacy is not other than the Ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof."

The present entry is quoted by Morton in *The Whirlpool* (Part III, Ch. II) in a conversation with Harvey Rolfe on the education of boys; no doubt Morton speaks for Gissing when he adds "our civilisation is doing its best to change that." As Clara Collet testified in a letter to Morley Roberts (November 23, 1904, Berg Coll.), Gissing was then much troubled by the difficulties involved in his son Walter's upbringing.

157

*Philosophic Heights*

"Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem; [ . . . ]
Suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri,
Per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli;
Sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
Edita doctrina sapientum tempia serena,
Despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
Errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae."

Lucretius II.1-10.

[Sweet it is, when on the great sea the winds are buffeting the waters, to gaze from the land on another's great struggles; not because it is pleasure or joy that anyone should be distressed, but because it is sweet to perceive from what misfortune you yourself are free. Sweet is it too, to behold great contests of war in full array over the plains, when you have no part in the danger. But nothing is more gladdening than to dwell in the calm regions, firmly embattled on the heights by the teaching of the wise, whence you look down on others, and see them wandering hither and thither, going astray as they seek the way of life.]

**Notes**

Gissing's diary and a letter to Eduard Bertz help to establish the date of this entry. He began to read *De Rerum Natura* on March 20, 1892, and read it on and off during the spring. It was on March 21 that he read the first 200 lines of Book II of the philosophic poem from which this quotation was transcribed. It seems possible that he went through the poem at least twice in succession since, though
he finished Book III on April 2 and began Book IV the next day, he wrote to Bertz on May 1 that he was "reading Lucretius steadily, and have got through more than half. It requires an effort of the mind, but the reward is undeniable" (LGB, p. 152). The notion of a steady reading invites the theory that between April 3 and May 1, he had finished the six books, and begun to go over the whole poem afresh. The diary entry for May 23 refers to his reading 100 lines of Lucretius. However, he may equally well have put Lucretius aside during April, reading the work steadily when he was reading it at all (but not at all during much of April).

It is no wonder Gissing derived great satisfaction from the study of De Rerum Natura, the work of a poet gifted with a scientific and inquiring turn of mind who was a disciple of Epicurus. Lucretius developed a remarkably modern and perceptive theory of the world according to which the atoms, infinite in number and eternal, form into masses from which the universe is built up. He saw the universe as functioning according to this system, and relegated the gods of popular religion to the sphere of superstition; he represented the soul as mortal and dying with the body, and defined pleasure and pain as the sole guides to conduct, pleasure being the calm which results from absence of pain and desire (of Schopenhauer) as well as freedom from care and fear. It is this spirit which prevails in the present entry: its contents come very close to some aesthetic statements made by Gissing in his correspondence, notably in his letter of July 18, 1883, to his brother (LMF, pp. 128-29, Yale). Some passages in "The Hope of Pessimism," which he wrote in the autumn of the preceding year, express similar feelings.

158

Love

"Bocca baciata non perde ventura, anzi rinnuova, come fa la luna."

Boccaccio

[Lips that have been kissed do not lose their chances; they renew themselves like the moon.]

Notes

Boccaccio and Dante were the two Italian poets Gissing named in his list of "really great men" he was "determined to keep to" (letter to Ellen of August 2, 1885, LMF, p. 160, Berg Coll.). When he first read Boccaccio is unknown, but the mid-1880s seem a likely period. At all events it must have been before 1890 as the present entry is quoted at the very end of The Emancipated, which was published in late March of that year. The quotation functions as a hopeful conclu-
sion at the close of a novel in which foolishness and imprudence have been chastened. Cecily Doran, whose blind love for Reuben Elgar has come to a disastrous end, is being discussed by two level-headed middle-ground characters, Edward and Eleanor Spence, after the news of Elgar's death under shady circumstances in Paris:

"I am heavy-hearted, not for him, but for Cecily's dead love [says Eleanor to her husband]. We all have a secret desire to believe love imperishable."
"An amiable sentiment; but it is better to accept the truth."
"True only in some cases."
"In many," said Spence, with a smile. "First love is fool's paradise. But console yourself out of Boccaccio. ‘Bocca baciata non perde ventura; anzi rinnuova, come fa la luna.’"

The quotation could hardly suggest more discreetly and poetically that Cecily will now have a chance of starting life anew, with the benefit of experience.

159

Curse of Poverty

\[\textit{Exei vοσον πενια, διδάσκει δ’ ἀνδρα τὴ χρεὰ κακὸν.}\]

Eur. Elect. 375 (Oxford)

[Poverty is plague-struck, schooling men to sin through need.]

Notes

Euripides was one of the Greek tragedians whom Gissing read and re-read. Two Commonplace Book entries dating back to late 1887 or early 1888 refer to the Phoenissae concerning allusions to money in the play and to the use of rhyming lines, while the diary establishes that he studied Andromache with his pupil Walter Grahame in 1888, and read the Hippolytus for his own pleasure in July 1891. During his first stay in Italy, he saw various busts of Euripides and twice noted his resemblance to Tennyson.

On the subject of poverty and its consequences Gissing is an acknowledged authority in Victorian literature, and this quotation from Euripides, which expresses a basic truth in the history of mankind, might serve as an epigraph to the whole of his work, from Workers in the Dawn to Veranilda. Because its transcription im-
plies a keen awareness of social inequalities, it invites one to take gingerly those critical judgements which stress Gissing's deep-rooted conservatism.

160

Death Inexorable

[Alone of the gods Death desires no gifts, nor would you accomplish anything by sacrificing or pouring libation, nor has he any altar, nor is he honoured with paeans. Persuasion stands aloof from him alone of the gods.]

Notes

Something of the sublimity, dignity and eloquence which Quintilian commended in Aeschylus was inherited by Gissing when he described or referred to death, the subject of this thoughtful entry. Aeschylus delights in sonorous language, and so did Gissing, particularly in "The Hope of Pessimism." His own memorable statement on death is not lacking in force and dignity: "There is a grandeur in the fact of death. That which I tremble at thinking I must do, he who is no more has done. He has passed, too, along the way trodden by such august feet!" (Commonplace Book, p. 25).

Only in his writings and correspondence up to mid-career do we find Aeschylus's name. He doubtless first studied the great tragic poet in Harrison's classroom in Wakefield, and was sufficiently interested to proceed independently in Boston. His American notebook contains a quotation from him and a note from Paley about Aeschylus having borrowed from Homer. In 1885 he listed Aeschylus among the Greek authors on whom he intended to concentrate (letter to Ellen, August 2, LMF, p. 160, Berg Coll.). While in Greece he recorded with combined pleasure and dismay his discovery of the Eumenides' well, the scene of Aeschylus's play, which had become an "ordure-ground" (diary, December 11, 1889). Graphic details about this discovery are given in a letter to Bertz of December 14 (LGB, p. 89). He probably re-read passages from Aeschylus occasionally until the end of his life, but the only explicit mention of this is in a diary jotting for December 21, 1892: "50 11. Homer, and 50 Aeschylus." A similar paucity of references is to be found in the
novels themselves. In Ch. I of Denzil Quarrier, the eponymous hero tells his common-law wife that at the Poltheram Grammar School Glazzard read Aeschylus and Tacitus while he himself was toiling away at Eutropius and Greek declensions.

161

Love

a) τοῦ ὅλου οὖν τῆς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ διωξεῖ ἐρωτήματα.

Plat. Symp.

[Love is the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole.]

b) [ἐρωτ.·] ζηλωτὸς ἀμοίροις, κτητός ἐμοίροις.

Symp.

[(Love is) enviable to those without a share in it, desirable to those blessed with a share.]

Notes

As already noted, Gissing bought his copy of the Symposium at Athens on December 7, 1889, and read it immediately. So this double entry necessarily points to a new reading some time between 1893 and 1895. His diary shows various reading sessions devoted to Plato—the Phaedo on August 28, 1890, the Protagoras on November 13, 1891, and an unspecified work on August 10, 1900. Morley Roberts, in The Private Life of Henry Maitland (Ch. XIII), confirmed that Plato was a favourite author of his friend, and this from an early date. Samuel Vogt Gapp observed in his George Gissing, Classicist that "in the third chapter of Workers in the Dawn he has the philanthropic clergyman, Edward Norman, answer his daughter’s questions about religion in terms of the Platonic philosophy and with a direct use of the Socratic method. The first artistic efforts of Arthur Golding, the hero of the novel, are said to show ‘some likeness to those ideas of the animal world in the existence of which Plato and his disciples put their faith’" (Vol. I, Ch. VII; p. 102 in Gapp’s study). Further Platonic references are to be found in his later books. In a sketch, "The Medicine Man," published in Human Odds and Ends, Dr. Bobbett, "like the wise man of old, though in a somewhat different sense [. . .] knew that he knew nothing"—a transparent allusion. Plato’s visits to the schools of Taras, the future Taranto, are remembered in Ch. IV of By the Ionian Sea, while
we read in *Veranilda* that Theodahad was "a scholar, deeply read in Plato," and that Decius "had lately completed certain translations from Plato, left unfinished by Boethius" (Ch. II and XIII).

162

**Individuality**

"Men's names should not only distinguish them: a man should be something that all men are not, and individual in somewhat beside his proper name. Thus while it exceeds not the bound of reason and modesty, we cannot condemn singularity. *Nos numerus sumus* is the motto of the multitude, and for that reason are they fools."

Sir T. Brown[e]. "Vulgar Errors." I.5.

**Notes**

The approximate date of this entry seems to be supplied by Gissing's diary, which records that he was rereading *Religio Medici* on August 26, 1895. He may well have passed on from this book to *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (or *Vulgar Errors*), as he often read or reread several books by the same author in quick succession. The dates of the last three entries in *Extracts from my Reading* support this assumption. Even more safely can we assert that Gissing had perused *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* before 1891, since he had quoted the above passage in Part II, Ch.II of *Born in Exile*, a novel in which the protagonist is an inveterate egotist who rejects the motto of the multitude recalled by Sir Thomas Browne. His having transcribed this quotation in his notebook after using it in his novel may be interpreted as a sure sign of Gissing's approval—loss of individuality was to him (as to Nietzsche) a token of degeneration. Many of his letters of the 1870s and 1880s to his sisters contain encouragements to educate themselves and thus cultivate their own personalities. Conventionality, as he insisted for as long as Margaret and Ellen were amenable to cultural and spiritual improvement, was synonymous with mediocrity.

In *Born in Exile* the quotation is read from a copy of Browne’s book by Earwaker, the protagonist's old schoolfellow, during a conversation early on in the novel. They have been discussing human behaviour, in particular that of the bouncing, word-loving Malkin from whom a telegram arrived shortly before. The quotation functions in several ways. It connects with the previous discussion of Malkin’s extraordinary behaviour in that Malkin’s singularity, though on the face of it laughable, is justified in the eyes of such an earnest thinker as Sir Thomas Browne. After the jocular comments on Malkin’s conduct, Earwaker and Peak keep to the same subject, but place their discussion on a philosophical level. The passage also reads like a justification before the event of Peak's own singular
conduct, for it leads Peak to encourage the prudent Earwaker to give up his monotonous job as a journalist and cease writing articles which conform to the opinions of the newspaper proprietor, rather than to his own conscience. Once more we can observe here Gissing’s clever use of quotations en situation. The quotation, while preserving its original sense, is made to signify considerably more by the narrative context.

163

Miserable Mankind

ἀνδρευτικός ἦκαν ἕφρασις εἶς τὸ δυστυχεῖν.

[(A) Man, sufficient reason for unhappiness.]

Notes

Although this seems to be the only time Menander appears in Gissing’s papers, correspondence, and writings, it is likely that the Attic poet (c. 342-292 B.C.), on account of his influence on modern comedy, was well-known to him. The melancholy occasionally expressed by Menander in his many plays is to be found here at its darkest, repeating an idea expressed by Sophocles (entry 84) and Homer (entry 135).

164

Excessive Intimacy

"Si vitare velis acerba quaedam,  
Et tristes animi cavere morsus,  
Nulli te facias nimis sodalem.  
Gaudebis minus, et minus dolebis."

Martial XII.34.

[If you wish to shun some bitterness and to beware of sorrows that gnaw the heart, to no man make yourself too much a comrade: your joy will be less and less will be your grief.]
The diary entry for September 8, 1895, gives a clue as to when Gissing may have transcribed this quotation. On that day he read a little Martial, very likely prompted to do so by F. St. John Thackeray's *Anthologia Latina*, a copy of which he had purchased two days earlier. Though Martial is of course present in the *Anthologia*, this quotation does not come from it (nor do those from Lucretius and Juvenal for that matter), but it is quite likely that on September 8, 1895, he passed from the newly acquired anthology to his copy of Martial. (Gissing's copy of the *Anthologia Latina* was given by Gabrielle Fleury to Morley Roberts in memory of his friend. See *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, Ch. XIII).

Martial's advice with regard to excessive intimacy Gissing had certainly followed, the only two bosom friends in the days of his direst poverty being Morley Roberts, a witness to his misfortunes at Owens College, and Eduard Bertz, whom he had seen almost every week during the composition of *Workers in the Dawn*. Still, Gissing's natural shyness prevented him from behaving with complete freedom even in their company. His closest friend in the 1890s was Clara Collet, and there is no evidence that he ever told her the whole story of his Manchester days. Only when he left Edith temporarily in February 1897 did he write to Miss Collet about his first marriage, giving a wrong date for it. One of his misfortunes was that he could never confide unreservedly in anyone, neither in his relatives nor in his successive wives. The situation looks all the more pathetic in retrospect, as it is now clear that many people, literary or otherwise, whom he came to know, were acquainted with the disaster that had overcome him at college.

Evidence of familiarity with Martial can be found in his diary for February, March, and September 1891 as well as in his letters to Bertz. On two occasions, May 9, 1896, and September 8, 1901, he quoted "Quid prodest? Nescit sacculus ista meus," that is, "What does it profit me? My purse knows nothing of that" (*LGB*, pp. 219 and 299). This line had previously found its way into his *Commonplace Book* (unpublished entry, MS, p. 29) with a reference "XI.3." Three of his works contain quotations from the Latin poet: *Born in Exile* (Part II, Ch. III), *In the Year of Jubilee* (Part III, Ch. II and VII) and *Henry Ryecroft* (Autumn XX and Winter I).

**Melancholy**

"Medio de fonte leporum
Surgit amari aliquid, quod in ipsis floribus angat."

Lucr. IV.1124.
Extract 166

[From the very centre of this fountain of delights wells up some bitter taste to choke them even amid the flowers.]

Notes

As was made clear for entry 157, Gissing had read the whole of De Rerum Natura in 1892, but was clearly prompted by the Anthologia Latina to open his copy of the poet's works again; it is from the latter that the quotation is taken. This disenchanted statement of course agrees with his dominant mood.

166

Poverty

"Haud facile emergunt quorum virtutibus obstat
Res angusta domi."

Juv. III.164-5.

[It is never an easy matter for a man to rise when poverty stands in the way of his merits.]

Notes

Like the previous entry, the present one was very likely made shortly after Gissing bought the Anthologia Latina. This purchase prompted him to turn to Latin authors intensively for a time. Besides, his handwriting shows no evolution in the last three entries of Extracts from my Reading.

Gissing's life was an illustration of this maxim of Juvenal's, and he more than once undertook to offer variations on its truth in his novels and short stories. He had come across the same idea in Samuel Johnson's poem "London," which is in imitation of Juvenal's Third Satire (see David Grylls, "The Annual Return to Old Grub Street: What Samuel Johnson Meant to Gissing," Gissing Newsletter, January 1984, pp. 1-27). Boswell quotes the line concerned in his Life of Johnson which Gissing once listed among his favourite books (Commonplace Book, p. 40):

"Slow rises worth by poverty depress'd."