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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848–1887).

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The principal aim of *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* is to present material by Jefferies that has not been published or reprinted, or that is difficult to obtain, together with articles about Jefferies (commissioned or submitted), items of research and discovery, synopses of talks and lectures, book reviews, information relating to places where Jefferies lived, and correspondence.

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The Coming Voter

(BY A FARMER'S SON)

Richard Jefferies

'The Coming Voter', written for the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* where it appeared in three parts, on 11, 15 and 16 April 1884, was designed to galvanise the Liberals into educating the labourer politically to prevent his falling prey to the traditional methods of manipulation by the rural elite.

The essay was discovered and attributed in 1993 but thought to be in two parts but recent research has found that a third part was published. Parts I and II were originally published in *RJSJ* No.7 (Spring 1998) together with an essay by Diana Morrow in which she explores Jefferies' intellectual and political development against the background of the Third Reform Act.

We republish below the whole extent of Jefferies' 'The Coming Voter' to rectify the omission.

The Manchester Guardian 11 April 1884. PART I.

NOW that the bill for the enfranchisement of the county householders has been read a second time it may be interesting to take account of the voter of the future, and to consider what, if any, are the political or social traditions of the agricultural labourer, what his ideas, and what the influences to which he is most likely to be subjected when he receives the right to vote. Of political traditions it may at once be safely asserted that the labourer retains none whatever. The question in which his immediate forefathers were most deeply concerned was the cheapening of bread. They felt more perhaps than any other class the privations which accompany a dear and scarce loaf. They bore comparatively a small share in the severe party warfare which preceded the abolition of the Corn Laws, but they watched the contest with the keenest appreciation. Hunger is a terrible sharpener of the faculties, and they knew what hunger was. Traditionary stories are still common at the farmstead firesides of the guarded cornricks, of ricks eaten by mice while the cottagers starved, and the numberless miseries of those times. These are not forgotten in the upper country classes, but the labourers seem to have entirely lost sight of the past. Had they been endowed with political rights at the time of the abolition of the Corn Laws doubtless they would have remembered everything perfectly; but having had no voice before or since they have had nothing to keep their memories alive. As things were ordered for them so they submitted, and all they knew of politics or rights (or wrongs) was that now and then they got some ale on condition of shouting. Except here and there an old man, they have forgotten even the threshing machine riots, in which they were for a time partly

triumphant—smashing and burning at pleasure. Even these Jack Cade exploits have passed out of thought. In the cottage there is no history; no ballads transmit the recollections of events; no manuscript chronicle or journal of their own keeping is to be found in the thatched house of the labourer. It is curious that it should be so, since among so many other nations political events are fresh after centuries, and are talked of at the hearths of the poorest. The Scotch have not forgotten their clans, their raids, and border history; nor have the Welsh their ancient extraction. But the Saxon labourer is not of a literary stock, and lives in today and today's labour only. He does not seem to look backwards any more than the plough he follows, and which the instant the team is unharnessed remains perfectly still and motionless. This has been unjustly taken as evidence that the ploughman has little intelligence. But how should he remember history when he has not been permitted to bear the least hand in making that history? Much in the same way, the great majority of women, though so highly educated in these times, have little or no recent historical knowledge, for, having no vote or personal interest, they have not paid heed. If the ploughman had been endowed with political rights when the Corn Laws were abolished and his hunger was stayed, without a doubt his memory would have been fresh enough. He has forgotten his forefathers' hunger. In those days the hedges were carefully searched for herbs to eke out the scanty meal on the cottage table. Salads were gathered from the mounds, and plants were used that are now disregarded. Hunger made the old folk herbalists. The old hedge-herbs, used as sauce or salad, flourish as freely as ever but no one now touches them. Vast importations of American wheat shut up the herbals. Cheap bread in such abundance and for so many years without check has clean swept away the memory of hunger. The carter and the ploughman scarcely listen to the prayer against famine, a word they do not understand. It is remarkable that just at this juncture the grain market should be more than usually well stocked—so well supplied from India, Egypt, and Australia that American grain speculators find their expectations disappointed. Amidst a most plentiful supply of corn it is proposed to extend the franchise to the labourer, who has forgotten the hunger of his forefathers. The first and most essential step in his political education will be to revive those memories, and to put into the hands of every labourer throughout the country a brief relation of the immediate past to take the place of historical tradition. If this be not done we may yet see some strange results of their political ignorance, and efforts at least will not be wanting to induce the new voter to agitate for the very things—for sliding scales and import duties—by which his fathers were brought to the verge of starvation. Here is manifest the danger of keeping a large part of a nation politically ignorant. It is just possible that the labourer might be entangled by some

sophistry into a cry for a modified import duty in order that his wages might be increased. Such a wish certainly exists in the secret heart of a good many agriculturists, nor is it confined to them. City merchants of considerable standing may sometimes be heard expressing a desire for some kind of Protection. Free Trade was established in spite of self-interest. Self-interest still very largely hankers for Protection under some disguise or other, and Free Trade must always depend upon the efforts of the broad-minded and the enlightened. If the city merchant and the agriculturist are sometimes known to utter these views it will not be surprising if the labourer joins them. His last political and social movement of any importance was the agitation for higher wages. His trade union meetings on hilltops were for that purpose. So great a temptation is a possible increase of wages that, in prospect of it, he might be led to barter away his birthright of cheap bread. For, whatever may be the case with other portions of the community, there can be no question that cheap free food is of infinitely greater real value to the labourer than a slight increase of nominal earnings. To supply this defect of political memory and training should be the first effort of those who are anxious that the labourer should reap the full benefit of his new rights. He cannot or will not purchase publications of the kind. They must be given to him, sown broadcast in every cottage at the expense of the well-to-do and better informed. There is one advantage in this absence of historic memory: his mind is without bias, and open to fairly consider anything reasonable set before it. He can now read, he is fond of reading, and is in a receptive frame of mind.

There is, indeed, a very exceptional conjuncture of circumstances in the position of those who are about to receive the franchise. Rights of this kind are usually granted after much struggling, and in other less fortunate countries than ours not till after attempts at revolution. Very great excitement has preceded the passing of Reform Acts extending the voting power in boroughs. An entire absence of such agitation on the part of those chiefly concerned marks the all-important step now about to be taken from all similar changes. No agitation has occurred in the rural districts. However much the suffrage be desired, no vehement outcry has been heard. This calm preceding the franchise is significant of a similar calm to follow it. It is perhaps the very best and strongest argument in favour of the suffrage that there is no evidence whatever of violent passions at work, so that we may be sure the new voters will use their power judiciously. They will not be hurried to extremes, but will listen to and ponder what is said to them. A still more exceptional circumstance lies in the fact that now, for the first time in its existence, the class about to be enfranchised is fairly well educated. Able to read, the labourers can follow and understand all that takes place. Yet they have no personal experience; they are in the position of students full of book

learning, but unacquainted with the real world. Here is, then, a full-grown man, educated, without history, about to have power put into his hands. The mind of the agricultural labourer is to-day like a clean sheet of paper on which nothing has yet been written, but upon which the writing will probably be durable.

The Manchester Guardian 15 April 1884. PART II.

The inhabitants of a rural hamlet are quite in the hands of the landed proprietor. The majority must live in the landlord's cottages, the few that do not are still more or less dependent upon the tenant farmers for employment, and do not care to put themselves outside the pale of those little amenities that are sometimes forthcoming. Either from dread that the few good things of life should become fewer, or in hope of more small doles, those who could perhaps stand aloof are usually as easily managed as the rest. No matter what they may think these people who have no second string to their bow, but must live by agriculture, can only yield in silence and do as they are told. For the most part, not having any high aspirations, they find no difficulty in obedience, caring not at all so long as they get sufficient food. We have often been congratulated on the disappearance of feudalism, and outwardly indeed it is gone. Retainers no longer ruffle down the village street in doublet and hose, with lance or dagger; there is no barricade at the entrance to the village and demand of toll upon goods; the wheat can be taken to the mill without payment of a portion to the lord; cadets of the noble house no more lie in wait at evening in the forest or on the common to fill their empty purses by robbery. The whistle of the train is heard among the cottages though the station is at a distance, and with the first train it was said feudalism was carried away. Closer examination and the ability to read between the lines will demonstrate that the ancient feudal power exists to this day. It is felt down to the smallest detail of cottage life. A girl wishes to improve her position in service, to get a really good place in town; she must then obtain a character from the parish clergyman. This person is really the landlord's chaplain, just as was his predecessor who rode hawking with his lord in the days of King James, and far longer ago than that. The landowner's chaplain is a very great power indeed among the village girls, having so much influence in this way. It is necessary to attend his classes, confirmations, and so forth, in order that his good word may be forthcoming. There is no one else in the village who can give so valuable a character. A farmer is nobody. A substantial man at home, and a man whose word is as good as his bond, at a distance people in good society consider him a better sort of clodhopper. Middle-class people are glad to get servants from farmhouses, but a little higher in society they require, or at least they are much influenced by, a clerical recommendation. In the olden times the lord of the castle did not

march about the manor sword in hand, threatening everyone with violence who did not do as he wished. His will, or his policy, was carried out in its minute details by his retinue, and the case is the same today. It is not to be supposed because the armed retainers have vanished that the policy of the mansion does not penetrate into those peaceful thatched cottages. The policy does penetrate, and most forcibly affects every poor person in the place. The general idea of that policy is that all advantage, success or profit, achieved by man or woman, should emanate from the mansion, or should be only possible under the patronage of the mansion. No monetary gain, of course, accrues to the mansion from this control. The gain is simply one of power. Men and women like power, and sometimes and to some natures the more petty the power the higher it is valued. It is not only the actual owner of the estate who likes such power—perhaps personally he cares not an atom about it, being engaged in more manly pursuits—but there is the lady, the lady's friends, the parish clergyman, the steward, one or two residents in the immediate neighbourhood closely connected by marriage, and all these together form quite a little party. The party has ways of learning every trifling incident that occurs in the village, and can find agents to carry out its wishes in roundabout directions when immediate pressure is not possible. This power is not often vindictive; it is often exercised for genuine good; but it is still a system of complete interference. 'We who sit round our drawing-room table at the mansion must have the mastership; nothing must be done without us; if anyone initiates a reading room or a cottage flower show, or any movement, we instantly step in, and by virtue of our large subscription and by the strength of our prestige take the leadership. We do not expect profit from our efforts, but we insist upon the power, however petty.'

Thus is the feudal policy of the nineteenth century rampant at this hour in the remote hamlets. It penetrates into the least detail of cottage life, as, for instance, in the matter of this recommendation of the landowner's parish chaplain, who stands alone in the village, a species of official, an authority, a central individual to whom application must be made. The position and power of the rural clergy is singular and anomalous. Probably there are no men living, not even the priest in Roman Catholic countries, who wield such undisputed autocratic power in these domestic and social matters as the parish clergy in England, one of whom may be found in every village over that vast area to which the extension of the suffrage will apply. As all the land and three-fourths of the cottages belong to the mansion, there has been no escape from these influences. A man must live in a landlord's cottage or leave the village; if he lives in the landlord's cottage he must bow to the will of those who represent the owner. Not the least little step can be taken without the permission of the lord of the place. If a cottager wishes a piece of allotment ground he must go to the steward, or the steward's agent; in some

districts he must go to the clergyman. If a member of his family be a cripple or require hospital treatment he must go to the clergyman, or approach the mansion through some large tenant farmer who can speak for him, and obtain the patronage of the local great. Now the knowledge that these things are only procurable by favour is eminently calculated to keep the whole village in a condition of subjection. Poor people are careful how they offend the mansion or the mansion-party, because to do so is like cutting themselves off from civilisation. Hospitals, medical or surgical treatment, institutions of all kinds so familiar to residents in London and the great towns, and comparatively so easy of access, are a long, long way from the poor in remote villages. They hardly know the name or situation of these institutions. They have not the least idea of the means of gaining admittance; they have no money to carry them so far. The poor in cities have many friends. Rich people abound and are often very charitable. A poor sufferer has only to get his or her case known, and someone or other will probably step in and assist. Nothing of the sort exists in country places; it cannot be so because there is no class of wealthy residents. Means of communication, too, are still expensive, and the long journey to London or some other great city practically prohibitive. One central authority alone stands, abrupt, solitary, distinct—the mansion—accessible only in certain well-understood if unwritten ways. The tenant farmer can give a card, as it were, of admission; the steward is all powerful; even the lodge keeper can do it; the parish clergyman is the principal representative. But it must be through these. If the poor man be of an independent spirit, and will not humble himself to apply to these, then he is simply cut off from civilisation. If the poor man and the poor man's family do not display a subservient and willing spirit they cannot expect notice to be taken of them. They are not supposed to render any manual service; it is the yielding spirit that is demanded, the acknowledgement of precedence and power. In mediaeval times some of the small cottage occupiers had to do so many days' labour on the domain land of the lord; some had to bring so much payment in kind or produce. The cottager has not to pay a fine of poultry or fruit nowadays for the privilege of the lord's favour and protection; he has only to display the obedient disposition, to show an inclination to ask for and value little favours. Even the schoolmaster in many villages is the nominee of the mansion-party, and there is no end to the ramifications of this kind of interference. Relief in time of sickness or confinement has to be obtained from the Board of Guardians. The guardian of the parish is invariably a tenant farmer, a great right-hand man of the parish clergyman, and often proud indeed to be called in to deliberate with the mansion-party. When the applicant appears before the board the custom is to ask the opinion of the guardian of his parish, 'What is the man's character?' Well, character is an expansive word, and may be

interpreted to cover conduct, independent or otherwise. If the medical man orders relief it cannot be reduced or refused. If not, it depends very greatly upon the word of the guardian of the applicant's parish. Poor people, knowing that sooner or later they may have to ask for assistance, do not like to act contrary to the known wishes of the higher powers in their own parish. Rarely does any vindictive action follow opposition, but they constantly meet with the cold shoulder. Their petitions are not heard; they are passed by.

The lot of the poor is so hard even in its best aspect that they cannot afford to lose the countenance of those thus placed above them. That they hate and detest their own subservience is an undoubted fact. They are never grateful in reality, not for the greatest benefit; they always feel that they have paid for it in tacit obedience. But they have not been able hitherto to escape. Go into the fields and accost a labourer at his work, and ask him what his wages are. A young man may answer at once, being full of the carelessness of youth that has felt no cares. An older man will look you in the face, and hesitate, and scrape his boots against his spade, and ask a question of you first in return. He suspects you may be some kind of agent from some society not popular with his master, the farmer, and the mansion-party; you may be a conspirator against the peace of the village, perhaps trying to start a strike to raise wages. That is to say, you may get him into trouble. It may become known that he has given you information; you may quote him as an authority; it may embroil him with his employer; he may lose the countenance and favour of his superiors. He would much rather you would walk on than try to raise his wages with your interference. If he listens to you he will be passed by and his little petition some day disregarded. He has had experience, and remembers a good many things. By explaining your object, and making him see that it is no more than passing curiosity, you may hear all about it, for he is really very talkative, but cautious at first.

There is feudal policy in the very air that blows over the park. Upon a large property there is a great deal of work to be done—gates to be made or mended, fencing to be put up, sheds to be repaired, walls to be rebuilt, and so on. Employment of this sort is much desired, the payment being secure, and the labour perhaps not always onerous. On some well-wooded estates there is a work-yard, with sawpits, where a number of men are employed all the year round preparing timber. In the covers and plantations there is work for many more. Altogether the maintenance of the place in order requires the labour of enough people to fill a hamlet by themselves. They receive substantial benefit from such employment, and they have no reason to be otherwise than pleasantly subservient. They really have nothing to complain of, but still the fact remains that they are expected to be tacitly obedient to the policy of the mansion-party. They are not expected to do anything, but are to show by their manner a plastic disposition. The village post-office is

practically in the patronage of the governing circle, and the licences of the inns are sometimes at the disposal of the magistrates, when of course the views of the landowners are consulted. The little village shops have to apply to the magistrates for licences to keep petroleum, much used now in cottages. Before these are granted the premises have to be inspected by the police. As for the village constable, a labourer's character is often at his mercy; if the constable be upright it is well; if he be not upright it is very ill indeed. Now the constable's chances of promotion depend very much upon whether he has made himself acceptable to the governing circle or not. The labouring people therefore do not like to put themselves in any position savouring of opposition lest their faults and slips from the path of virtue should one day be remembered by the constable and produced as a black mark against them. There is no actual organisation in this system of control, which permeates the village from end to end. It is all effected by mutual understanding, but an understanding of a distinct and unmistakable character. The influence is so pervading that it seems in the very air. This is the air which the future rural voter breathes; these are the influences which today dominate his whole life.

The Manchester Guardian 16 April 1884. PART III.

The real battle of the franchise will begin after it is granted. Friends of rational progress and freedom must not imagine that all is won when the last division in the House of Commons gives the voting to a million of labourers. This great public step is comparatively easy. It will be effected in the broad light of day, in the sight of the world, a hundred voices proclaiming the event. So far the advantage is chiefly on the side of those who desire progress. Afterwards the conditions will be changed, and every advantage will be found on the side of those interested in resisting progress. For the struggle will become individual—it will be divided into a thousand minute fragments, and carried on in remote places screened from the sight of the world by their insignificance. In these places every position—in military language—is held by the enemy. Five out of six villages have but one large building large enough to contain public meetings—i.e., the school, and this is usually under control of the landed proprietors, and commanded by the parish clergyman. The new voters, therefore, if desirous of listening to a speaker of their own choosing, must wait till the season of the year permits of out-of-door addresses. The orator who wishes to instruct the labourer must be prepared to do so from the front of a wagon on the hillside or the common. Meetings of agricultural labourers had best be so arranged that voters from a number of villages can attend, and a site chosen rather in the centre of a district than one in a particular village. As boys collect about the fortunate lad who has received a new sixpence, and one persuades him to

buy sweets in order to share them, another a boat that he may help to swim it, and a third caps to pop off on his own pistol, but not one suggests to have him save it; so a benevolent crowd of advisers will collect around the ploughman to instruct him in the use of his vote. The squire, the parson, the steward, the tenant farmer, will all be anxious that he should invest his sixpence to their profit. They have the advantage that they are always on the spot, and they possess all the material standpoints of persuasion. They have the land, which represents work; they pay the wages; they own the cottages and can alone grant permission to live; they have the key of civilisation, and can unlock the institutions in the city for their followers. An immense power is thus in their hands, and wealth can organise freely. They can promote cottage flower shows and offer prizes, set cricket clubs on foot and lend fields for playing; they can offer allotments, build reading-rooms and coffee taverns; supply provisions and coals at cost prices; circulate literature, bring down lecturers and give entertainments; give fêtes in the park; distribute materials of clothing, and promote individual wishes in a hundred ways. To give his vote—just to make his mark in the ballot box—is so little, you see—such a mere trifle on the part of the labourer in return for all this! The rival battle will be fought here, and not on the open stage of the House of Commons.

To contend against these influences the party of progress can rely upon one force only. Education is the one and only weapon; yet so mighty is this that not all the weight of gold and land can ultimately prevail over it. The champions of ancient warfare had enchanted swords which cut through armour as if it were made of rushes; today the one enchanted weapon is a book. The new voter can read, and reads better every day; upon this great fact hope must rest and effort concentrate itself in the endeavour to place these enchanted weapons in his hands. The value of education depends entirely upon the ideas supplied after the power to read has been acquired. We do not expect the young gentlemen sent at great expense to our Universities to invent for themselves the principles of science and philosophy. They are not asked to sit in the silence of their rooms and from the depths of their own consciousness to evolve all knowledge. What is not expected of gentlemen brought up with every advantage cannot be justly supposed within the capacity of a carter. Books are put before the wealthy scholar at the Universities, and books must be put before the ploughman. If after having been mainly instrumental in procuring education and the franchise for him the party of progress leave him to himself, then they have simply educated him for the purposes of those who desire retrogression.

The retrograde party, it is certain, are fully alive to the importance of supplying ideas, political and social, to the minds of the new voters. They have a centre, an authority, an establishment, in every parish, however

remote, and the State itself in the shape of the Church supports the propaganda. An authority stands in the midst of every village held up by the State, the landowner, and ancient tradition, and labouring with convinced earnestness. No opposing figure representing another order of ideas is there to meet him. There needs some person, or office, authority, or centre—some organisation in every village—to which the new voters could apply. They require not so much pecuniary assistance as moral support. An organisation should be set on foot having branches in every hamlet. There are towns in every district where headquarters can be fixed, not only for political objects but to afford information, and to lend a helping hand to the labourer. An office to which a labourer may come for information not as a favour, but as a right, if it existed in every market town, would be of the greatest value. Especially, arrangements should be made to give these men legal assistance. At present the labourer is at the mercy of the propertied classes when he enters the Courts. He cannot employ a solicitor, and mere formalities which he has neglected, because he did not know they were necessary, often upset his cause. More frequently he endures injustice because he despairs of redress. Labourers have always had a fixed belief that equity was not meted out to them—a belief arising from the fact that their judges were the landowners, who might be supposed favourable to their own tenants. They have observed, also, that the severest judges are usually clergymen. Rather than appeal to these uncertain authorities the labourer endures his wrongs. But besides such matters there will soon arise civil causes, some not unconnected perhaps with the exercise of the franchise. Under the operation of the Agricultural Compensation Act of last session it would appear that the tenants of allotments or large gardens are entitled to much the same privileges as the tenants of several hundred acres. None of these privileges will fall to their share unless some organisation supplies legal advice. Alone they will not possess the least power of resistance. That part of the Agricultural Compensation Act of 1883 which relates to small tenancies, such as allotments, should be printed and kept for inspection in every office of the organisation, together with various other enactments bearing on village life. Information should also be provided as to the County Court Acts and procedure, for the labourers as a class stagger under debt.

Registration, too, must be strictly watched, and the clauses of the stringent Purity of Elections Act will be useless unless strong hands are prepared to enforce them. Unless, indeed, a special clause in the present bill foresees and provides for the difficulty it would seem as if means existed by which the franchise, though nominally granted, could still be evaded. The regulations require a residence of twelve months prior to the 15th July, and the fact of twelve month's habitation must be proved before a voter is placed on the register. If therefore a man were moved from his cottage before the

expiration of the year of residence he could not obtain a vote. It might happen that the actual residence of much more than a year, if it commenced after the 15th July, might still not be sufficient. This regulation has been felt to be arbitrary in borough registration, many thereby losing votes who possess every other possible qualification. The effect, if no modification takes place, may perhaps be very marked in villages. The great majority of labourers live in the landowners' cottages; the letting of these cottages is at the discretion of the tenant farmers. Of recent years the labouring agricultural population has become more and more nomad from the operation of many causes; so that even without any interference numbers of cottagers will not be able to get votes. They will move on before they have acquired a right to be registered. It would be easy for those who own or let the cottages so to arrange that the cottagers should be moved just before the registration year expired, and so to defeat the purpose of the new Act. Evidently this is a subject which ought to be carefully provided for in the Suffrage Bill; and when that bill becomes law it will be for the organisation which has been suggested to see that its provisions are not evaded. The great necessity of establishing such an organisation to which the labourer could apply for information and legal assistance cannot be too much dwelt upon.

A question arises as to how far the receipt of parish relief should be permitted to cancel the right to vote. Fourteen or fifteen shillings a week is a small sum on which to maintain a family of four or five, or possibly more children. So long as the family remain in fair health it is managed, but long illnesses upset nice economies, and the cottager is driven to the parish for help. Considering the peculiar position of the labourer, it is at least open to discussion as to whether a relaxation of the strict letter of the law ought not to be made in this case. It will be for the suggested organisation to see that he is not deprived of his vote without sound cause. A still more important matter is the secrecy of the ballot in villages. No doubt exists that the ballot box is not so secret as it was designed to be. Where there are thousands of voters their very numbers as they rush in to poll are in a measure protective and cover them from individual observation. The voters in any particular village, even after the extension of the franchise, will be but a few hundreds, and they will not come with a rush to the poll, but will be spread over the whole day of election, appearing as their various occupations best permit. Consequently notice can be taken of each individual voter, and a good guess made on his intentions. From what has been previously described of the feudal conditions still existing in the country, it will be apparent that no other class so urgently requires perfect secrecy in voting, as the agricultural labourer. He is exposed to influences in every direction, and unless fully protected the gift of the suffrage will be in vain.



Joseph Arch began to organise a union of agricultural labourers in the 1870s. Delegates met in London in 1876 to demand equal electoral reform in the country and are shown here signing a petition but it was not until December 1884 that the Third Reform Act was passed. (*Illustrated London News*)

Two Poems

Richard Jefferies

The following verses appeared in the *North Wilts Herald* over the signature of 'Geoffrey' — on 30 June 1866. The poems were later re-published in *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*.

TO A FASHIONABLE BONNET

As nothing strange is stirring,
I cannot write a sonnet,
So just a line I'll pen upon
The fashionable bonnet.
Ah! thing of straw and ribbons gay!
Like tile aside or chimney tun,
Thou keep'st not rain nor wind away,
Nor e'en the midday sun.
Thou keepest parasols in use,
A thing that on my vision jars,
Thus hiding half the light from sight,
For women's eyes are day-stars.
Tho' poised upon a pretty head,
And tho' to deck thee, ladies strive,
They might as well employ their arts
Garlanding a beehive.
Oh! give the girls a handy hat,
That they may look around them,
Unchecked by parasol, or by
The sun that lately brown'd them.
Ah, girls are girls and will be girls,
In spite of matrons gray,
Then why restrain their flowing curls,
When all for freedom pray?

THE BATTLE OF 1866

Reform! reform! there came a trump on beery breezes borne,
Bold Gladstone cried, 'Come list M.P.'s 'tis Russell blows his horn.'
(That horn, 'tis true, is but a shell which Russell drags about;
For like the snail within his shell he can't get on without.)
And Russell rose with his brown bill, his breast with ardour burned,
He hemmed, he heck'd 'twould do no harm, for lo! its edge was turned;
And through the shadows of the night loud o'er the loud debate
There came a voice which sneering said, 'Brown bills are out of date!'

Gigantic figures rise around, and the gas-lit atmosphere
Is broken into circles wide by a voice both loud and clear,
And Russell shrinks within himself, for lo! The hum—'tis He!
The man of epigram is here—to Lowe, bend low the knee;
Sent 14-pounders, 20-pounders whistling 'gainst reform,
Now Rents and Rates, the last reserves, rush headlong to the fight,
Ah! now where is that man of mould, Earl Russell's ancient Bright?

The ministerial flails at work, but Taylor's quite as busy;
Division nears, and Russell brave can't help it, must be (D)izzy.
Ah! 'tis a hard and thankless fate to leave a proud position,
For his magic mace Majority wields for the Opposition,
And gladsome are the cheers that rise—reform's put on the shelf,
The snake, though famed for cunningness, was swallowed down himself.

‘Bent on emptying his note-book in decent English’: Richard Jefferies, naturalistic observation, and English dialect

Richard Coates
University of the West of England

Twenty years ago, I was invited by the Richard Jefferies Society to deliver the 2003 Birthday Lecture, at Aldbourne (*RJS Newsletter*, Spring 2004). This was an honour and a pleasure. Academia being what it became in the intervening years, I made promises to write it up for the *Journal* which I did not deliver on, but I am taking the opportunity of retirement to write up my notes and produce what I hope is a coherent account of my thoughts at the time. I also hope that will count as an apology to the Society.¹

The Birthday Lecture was titled punningly ‘Word life in a southern county’, after Richard Jefferies’ *Wild Life in a Southern County*. I am not a literary scholar, and I cannot take into account much of the literature on Jefferies written by specialist critics. I am a linguist, and what follows is written from the perspective of someone who thinks about language mainly from the historical and social perspectives. Any value judgements expressed are formed directly from my naïve reading of Jefferies’ works and largely unmediated by others’ critical commentary. So far as I am aware, nothing of consequence has been published on RJ’s language-related ideas since 2003, so this paper may not yet be out of time.² The essay will probably read more like expanded notes than a polished narrative. It scratches the surface of a topic that deserves deeper attention with a view to understanding the place of language in RJ’s thinking.

1. *Jefferies the observer*

RJ was primarily an observer, and a communicator of his exceptionally acute observations of natural phenomena. In relation to dialect and Standard English, my judgement is that he was *usually* acute, but unsurprisingly prey

¹ A version of the talk, with the present title, was also given to the conference ‘Writing the West’, Bristol, 11–12 May, 2012.

² He has been celebrated more recently, though, for other late-recognized achievements such as being an ecological pioneer (Morris 2007) and (not unconnectedly) a dystopian novelist (Taylor 2018).

to the accepted wisdoms of his time—unsurprisingly because at bottom his cultural aspirations were in tune with them.

Dialect in his work is used as part of local colour, as if natural and environmental rather than human. There is not a great deal of drama or dialogue in his works, and this extract from *Greene Ferne Farm* is, for him, strikingly unusual in its extent (though there are also others in that book):

Characters: 'Tummas' and a milk-maid 'Rause'.

T. Doan't thee saaay nought; I hearn thee in church like a charm o' starlings.

R. Thee go on to milking.

T. I wunt. Come and zet on my knee.

R. I'll zee thee in th'pond vust, with thee gurt vetlocks uppermost.

T. Aw, wool ee?

R. Eez, ee wooll.

T. Bist a'goin' to haymaking to year?

R. Eez, in the vormeads tomorrer.

T. Zum on um means to gie out and ax for a crownd more. Gwain to strike, doan't ee zee?

(pause)

T. When be we a-goin to do it?

R. What dost mean?

T. Up to church.

R. Get on with thee.

(Geoffrey hears a sound of struggling and some resonant kisses)

T. Wooll ee come?

R. Go on whoam with thee.

(Also quoted by Mark Daniel 2005, to whose author I am indebted for the hint and for the suggestion of the Birthday Lecture.)

2. *Jefferies on dialect and education*

RJ's approach to dialect exemplifies the 19th-century intellectual tension between social progress (including the move towards universal childhood education) and Romantic nostalgia. The latter does not loom large, but there are occasional hints of 'the peasant's revenge', the idea that a smart rustic may from time to time outsmart an urban intellectual.

Speaking in dialect symbolized, or, perhaps better, was an inevitable consequence of, lack of education. Speakers could be viewed as anthropological specimens of the authentic countryman: uncouth but unspoiled. In one sense, in the Victorian era dialect was an uncontested field, in that it was acknowledged to face in two directions. Its positive value was retrospective and nostalgic. It could also be, and was, negatively politicized. It blocked the progress that education promised. The lack of education that it represented was to its individual speakers simultaneously backward-

looking and communitarian (mainly for its adults), constraining and prospectively damaging (mainly for its children).

Dialect speech was viewed principally as a barrier to effective writing, i.e. to writing in Standard English. I have seen a Sussex schoolmaster's notes of the period where attention is ruefully drawn to his efforts to 'inculcate the aspirate' into the speech, and hence the writing, of his charges. He must have been typical not only of his own county.

We can identify three distinct categories of non-standard writing (cf. Coates 2010: 22–24):

a. Regionally coloured writing (RCW)—the product of an attempt to write in which the writer is not (fully) conscious of the features of Standard English, the archetypal dialect of writing, and therefore unwittingly substitutes his or her own dialect features. RCW is not geared to a particular readership. It is found in the diaries of the Sussex labourer John Burgess, for example.

b. Dialect tokenism—in which one writes in Standard English but throws in a few of the most conspicuous regionalisms of one's area, most often into the speech of a character, sometimes as an aid to characterization, but that amounts to indicating the socioeconomic class status of the character in question for knowledgeable (or knowing) readers. This strategy is found in the work of many writers, including Scott, Blackmore and Dickens.

c. Dialect writing proper (amounting to an alternative literacy)—deliberately not writing in Standard English when one could; consciously choosing to express oneself in a non-Standard way in pursuit of some literary or wider cultural goal, such as making claims for the expressive power of another dialect or defending ancient rural values; writing for a like-minded (or at least open-minded) literate readership. This is the technique of 'Tim Bobbin', John Hartley or Lewis Grassic Gibbon, or Wiltshire's own Edward Slow. It was typically two-edged, or potentially so; some practitioners used it as a basis for poking fun at its users.

If you can't help it when you write, you produce RCW, even though the attempt is to produce 'decent' English; the attempt produces writing with a veneer of 'decency', and the veneer is flawed. The alternatives, using dialect for its own sake (i.e. b. and c., tokenism or alternative literacy), have a cost. RJ himself could be unimpressed: 'Dickens made whole books of coarse repellent characters and is to me unreadable.' (*Notebooks*, 1884). RJ did none of these three things systematically—he observed and noted. He was not moved, as his near-contemporary Swinburne was, to write poems in a local dialect.

RJ's view was that of a man of his times. He believed that dialect indicates social position, but also that a veneer of culture is necessary to advance, even

if that veneer may be flawed. It almost inevitably follows that, like other nineteenth-century authors, he uses dialect to portray types, not individuals: those in a state of nature (those who might write, if they did, as category a. writers) and those acquiring the veneer (categories b. and c.). But RJ is not interested in individual people (noted as early as 1891 and 1905 by his biographers P.A. Graham and H.S. Salt) any more than he is interested in individual lambs, leaves or butterflies. He is interested in an aspect of their social credentials.

The remark by his early critic P. Anderson Graham (1891) that he is a ‘half-educated peasant’ is truer to RJ’s own beliefs about himself than it might seem from an apparently intentional insult.

3. *What does RJ do with respect to dialect?*

With very few passages to hint the contrary, RJ is certainly no writer of RCW—he is fully conventionally literate. Neither is for him the ‘grand dialect’ of works such as those of ‘Tim Bobbin’ in Lancashire (i.e. where the whole text, not just the speech of characters, is in dialect). He is not writing for the audience that such works imply, namely insider-locals. He is a typical literary user of dialect as part of local colour, like Scott and Blackmore, but offers few sustained passages, and with little or no dialogue or drama of any sort. Of the three types of dialect writing, he most closely approaches b.: tokenistic and exemplificatory, drawing attention to locally diagnostic words (as for example in ‘Village Miners’ or ‘Clematis Lane’). But he embeds them in his narrative, explaining them or glossing them as a dialectologist would; it is more than mere tokenism. He also draws attention to pithy or paradoxical sayings indicating a kind of acuity in the speaker. He does these things as an observer, rather than using the material to make a point about himself as author to his readership. He adds some metalinguistic observations, i.e. descriptive or analytic remarks about language, to which I will return.

Where he chooses to deploy it, his attention to precision and local authenticity is meticulous. As we might expect, he is a spot-on credible observer and describer of linguistic detail:

vocabulary as in *varty-voids* ‘forty-fold (potatoes)’ in *Amaryllis at the Fair*; *sobbed* ‘soaked’ in ‘Village Miners’ and *sweel* ‘sing (linen)’ in ‘Clematis Lane’; sometimes missed by other authorities, as with *water-colley* ‘dipper’ in the eponymous essay, absent from Lockwood (1984);

grammar in the use of the ‘Somerset’ *to* as in: ‘Audrey looked at us, eating the beech leaves steadily, but would not answer, not even “Where’s your father to?” For in Somerset the “to” is put last, and must never be omitted ...’ (‘Summer in Somerset’);

and phonology, as with *airth* for ‘hearth’ (‘Summer in Somerset’ again), with the *guckoos* as so named by labouring people in Devon (‘By the Exe’), and as in the case of the educated Sussex shepherd in ‘Clematis Lane’ who ‘mispronounced’ only the word *with* (/wid/).

The scare-quoted word is revealing, of course, in that it implies error. RJ knows what is ‘right’, and also that it is unachievable for the many. Most of RJ’s contemporaries would have found that uncontroversial. Peasants cannot pronounce correctly certain words expected of the better-veneered: e.g. *reservoir* (*tezzievoy*, *Notebooks*). For a lengthy list of regional vocabulary used by RJ, see also Daniel (2005), and an article from long ago, Buckley (1880); also more locally Daniel (1976) and Rich (1992).

RJ offers hardly any metalinguistic observations except to note where dialect or accent is allied to social status and intellectual type. A certain ambivalence might be discerned in this (‘Field Words and Ways’):

Most difficult of all to express is the way they [labouring people] say yes and no. It is neither yes nor no, nor yea nor nay, but a cross between it somehow. To say yes they shut their lips and then open them as if gasping for breath and emit a sort of ‘yath’ without the ‘th,’ more like ‘yeah,’ and better still if to get the closing of the lips you say ‘em’ first—‘em-yeah.’ The no is ‘nah’ with a sort of jerk on the h; ‘na-h.’ This yeah and nah is most irritating to fresh ears; you do not seem to know if your servant has taken any notice of what you said, or is making a mouth at you in derision.

But ‘fresh ears’ is the giveaway; there is no hint that the expressions might not be serviceable in their everyday contexts. That said, the intellectual limitations of peasants in a state of nature is unmistakably enshrined in this passage, from the same essay:

‘No bounds’ is another [constant expression]. It may rain all day long, ‘there’s no bounds;’ that is, no knowing. ‘I may go to fair, no bounds,’ it is uncertain, I have not made up my mind. A folk so vague in their ideas are very fond of this ‘no bounds’ ...

There is no Romantic rural nostalgia in that, but neither, I suspect, is there intended to be any satire. The speakers have not begun to acquire the veneer afforded by Standard English and a ‘polite’ accent.

One striking exception to RJ’s policy regarding metalinguistic commentary is in *Notebooks* (1885), where he distinguishes Cambridge *ass* from Oxford *aasss*. Whether he viewed this difference as regional, social or something else might be debated.

It is not that RJ can’t ‘do’ dialect—what he does is resolutely turn down opportunities to indulge it, as here in ‘The Field-play’, where with a light touch he quotes isolated words and one striking phrase, rather than risk depicting his characters as ‘coarse’ and ‘repellent’ by overdoing it:

She pinned her torn dress with a thorn torn from the bushes through which she had scrambled to the hay-field. The gap from the lane was narrow, made more narrow by the rapid growth of summer; her rake caught in an ash-spray, and in releasing it she 'ranted' the bosom of her print dress. So soon as she had got through she dropped her rake on the hay, searched for a long, nail-like thorn, and thrust it through, for the good-looking, careless hussy never had any provision of pins about her. Then, taking a June rose which pricked her finger, she put the flower by the 'rant', or tear, and went to join the rest of the hay-makers. The blood welled up out of the scratch in the finger more freely than would have been supposed from so small a place. She put her lips to it to suck it away, as folk do in all quarters of the earth yet discovered, being one of those instinctive things which come without teaching. A red dot of blood stained her soft white cheek, for, in brushing back her hair with her hand, she forgot the wounded finger. With red blood on her face, a thorn and a rose in her bosom, and a hurt on her hand, she reached the chorus of rakers.

The farmer and the sun are the leading actors, and the hay-makers are the chorus, who bear the burden of the play. Marching, each a step behind the other, and yet in a row, they presented a slanting front, and so crossed the field, turning the 'wallows.' At the hedge she took her place, the last in the row. There were five men and eight women; all flouted her. The men teased her for being late again at work; she said it was so far to come. The women jeered at her for tearing her dress—she couldn't get through a 'thornin' hedge right. There was only one thing she could do, and that was to 'make a vool of zum veller' (make a fool of some fellow). Dolly did not take much notice, except that her nervous temperament showed slight excitement in the manner she used her rake, now turning the hay quickly, now missing altogether, then catching the teeth of the rake in the buttercup-runners.

The dialect is there, almost *sotto voce*, and RJ presents himself as a knowing observer (and translator), an insider to one degree who has become a sympathetic outsider to another, as symbolized in his use of inverted commas.

4. *What did RJ intend and achieve as a writer using dialect?*

RJ is fully aware of the forms of English language, and of their social, intellectual, and educational implications. He is fond of amusing paradox, as when a villager complains that before the Board School came, all the children sounded their aitches, but afterwards they didn't (*Red Deer*, written after a stay in Somerset, in most of which county, along with a swathe of southern Wiltshire, initial /h/ was retained longer locally than in most parts of England; *LAE* map Ph220, Orton et al. 1978). He is not noted for his comic gifts; but just about the only source of humour in his work derives from what dialect offers, used in ways conventional to regional writers of the period. He makes gentle fun of peasants and their comical illogicality; he quotes them as saying that pigs are 'rightly so-called' ('The Country-side: Sussex'),

subverting metaphor and etymology. For RJ as for many other writers, dialect combines otherness with an opportunity for the patronizing detachment which not being a dialect user permits; though in this case one senses the author is smiling alongside, rather than at, the speaker.

He subscribes to the common nineteenth-century idea that dialect words may convey feel or tone more accurately than Standard English ('Village Miners'), and that allies the gift of lexis to instinct (cf. the passage quoted above from 'The Field-play'). That means instinct is closely allied to place—the speaker's environment, where he or she is rooted or hefted.³

5. *Where does RJ stand in relation to language and culture?*

A linguistic-cum-cultural veneer can be acquired to different degrees, and many of RJ's metalinguistic comments are about steps on the path to acquiring it. He believes that one may start as a peasant but acquire the veneer symbolized by shedding of dialect (that is why 'half-educated peasant' is truer to RJ's own self-understanding than it might seem from P. Anderson Graham's apparent insult). No doubt his model in this respect was 'his father, the quiet, thoughtful, peasant philosopher, who would expatiate, now in broadest Wiltshire dialect, now in purest English, on the birds and trees and flowers which he knew so well ...' (Salt 1894: 5). RJ does not dwell on such bidialectalism, a functional specialization of different forms of the same language, which is a pity.

Peasants express illogical thoughts naturally in dialect: dialect = illogical thoughtways = peasant status; hence dialect orders people into types intellectually through the strength of individual's veneer. High culture in general is a veneer ('The best of us are polished cottagers', 'Cottage ideas'), and it can be damaging to one's essence: 'People be so dammed clever these days they daunt know nothin' (*Notebooks*). It is interesting, if unsurprising, that his characters' pithiest sayings are delivered in dialect, as if paradoxical sagacity is the revenge of those condemned never to acquire the veneer.

Of course RJ writes the bulk of his observations in Standard English. He was attuned to Macaulay's notion of the 'imperishable empire' of the English language, meaning precisely the polished Standard form. Locally, it epitomizes the veneer that permits social detachment and informed observation of his peasants, who are described, as by an anthropologist, for the contemplation and judgement of others. RJ offers his belief that dialect represents peasant status *for others*, yet he is reticent about allowing it to fall from the mouths of his own peasant characters.

³ We need not go quite as far as Mary Geoghegan in her poem of 1892 on RJ: 'Things dim and ancient into speech were wrung.'

RJ allows the existence of the state of partial literacy (i.e. not full alternative literacy or 'dialect writing'). Fragmentary RCW is represented in the usage of others: 'Take Notiss. The Public is hereby Invite to the Grand open and Hurdle Rases and Steple-Chaces at Wurdel's End which is to come off on Wensday after old Michelmuss Day. All particlars of the Stewards which is Martin Brown, William Smith, Philip Lewis, Ted Pontin. Illegul Beting is stoped.' (from a printed notice featured in *World's End*, book II, chapter 1). RJ holds the notice to be evidence of the 'primitive' character of the event.

6. *RJ's desideratum is whole literacy*

For RJ the veneer of high culture, represented by Standard English, must be attempted, or one remains forever 'other' both socially and intellectually. His own breakaway from dialect/RCW is complete, and his own prose has no chips or 'flaws' of the dialect type. We must assume he believes his own aspiration: he is a wholly veneered peasant. Edward Thomas, writing on *The Gamekeeper at Home*, noted that RJ had written 'perhaps the first thoroughly rustic book in English, by a countryman and about the country, with no alien savours whatever.' RJ's obituarist Henley (1887) noted: '[He was] bent on emptying his note-book in decent English.' From the perspective of a writer in the early twenty-first century, this is not just a sneer at his having mastered well-turned, if often rather prolix, descriptive prose, but also an acknowledgement of his successful veneering.

Readers will undoubtedly have registered the exquisite detail of his descriptions of natural phenomena such as birdsong. But even with these he can be inclined to use language as his frame of reference; recall that 'the starling has a whole syllabary of his own, every note of which evidently has its meaning, and can be varied and accented at pleasure.' (*Wild Life in a Southern County*). His dialect observations may lack the detail that is demonstrated in the case of natural phenomena, such as spots on living things, which he views as having affinities with language, but 'the language in which they are written has no alphabet' ('The Pine-wood'). His reverence for nature is perhaps most tellingly illustrated in the symbolism of his personified natural characters. Mark Daniel, writing in about 2005, noted the remarkable fact that in *Wood Magic* there are talking animals and flowers that use full Standard English. But they are talking to RJ, and he writes what is audible to him as the addressed person rather than what he observes them saying. They are not speaking for him so he can order them in their places in the peasant world. His veneer is established, and they speak *to* him as his equals, to what he has aspired to and become, not *for* him as subject matter.

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Eric Jones and Richard Coates (right), RJS Birthday Lecture, 18 October 2003, Aldbourne Memorial Hall. Photograph by Len Grugeon.

Concerning Richard Jefferies and English Country Life

George H. Bell

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There are few words in common everyday use which have a wider meaning than the word country. As distinguished from town, it is applied to all places beyond the boundaries of town and city. It is used to designate the suburb, which lies not wholly in the busy world, nor quite beyond it and also that far-away spot, so remote that its inhabitants forget to notice the passage of time or mark the days of the week.

Differing widely as these do, yet is the same word applied to both, and, to judge by their conversation, some men see little difference between them. ‘If it is not town,’ say they, ‘it must of necessity be country.’ To others, however, the word has a narrower meaning and its boundaries are much more circumscribed. Without attempting to define it too minutely it must, to such, possess at least three qualifications before it can claim to be considered a genuine country district. It must lie beyond the sphere of direct influence from city or large town, be free from manufactories, and it should be possible to touch its timber without suffering smoke defilement. If you add to these comparative freedom from ordinary tourists and trippers so much the better. There are still many districts in England which fulfil all these requirements, and may therefore fairly claim to be considered as genuine country districts.

The direct influence of the town is very far-reaching and constantly on the increase. In ever-growing circles it spreads itself year by year, and threatens in time to cover the whole land. The facility of communication between town and country, especially since the advent of the bicycle and motor car, has had a marked effect upon many village communities. They have lost much of their former charm, and, after the manner of hybrids, have a tendency to reproduce the worst characteristics of both progenitors. The planting of even a single manufactory in a rural district at once changes its character, and brings in its train a host of concomitants which are entirely foreign to the true life of the country. However quietly the various manufacturing processes may there be carried on they invariably produce sights and sounds (and smells) which are out of harmony with their

surroundings. To be awakened in the country by a steam whistle is as incongruous as is the tall shaft of a mill chimney or the rattle of the loom shed; and cinder paths would spoil an Elysium. Smoke from a great city is a most insidious nuisance, and many a lovely spot is defiled by it almost unconsciously. The birch bark in Arran will discover the smoke of Glasgow, but the ash tree bole in Borrowdale is, as yet, white and smokeless.

Most of us have ideas on what the country should be, and the word conjures up many and varied pictures. To the city man, worn out with the rush and bustle of his daily life, the prominent thought in connection with it is one of quietness and rest. Here he may for a time cease from his labours and enjoy those quiet sights and sounds which are not to be found in the town. He looks for certain healing qualities in the country, and confidently expects to be refreshed by his sojourn therein. He is frequently tempted to retire to it, only to find in many instances that temporary pleasures pall when they become permanent, and he has to admit that his life has not fitted him for his new environment. The country-bred man who has drifted into town views it with different eyes. He never entirely forgets his boyhood days and his country lore, and retains to the end his interest in country matters. As he journeys from place to place he mechanically notes the condition of the crops, and criticises the cattle. Just as a manufacturer's eye at once detects the 'reediness' in a piece of cloth, and never gets beyond the fault, so a countryman's eye instinctively falls on the faulty furrow and rests there. In springtime he sees the wheat bear witness to the shortcomings of the drill man which through winter have escaped detection. In autumn the scent from the turnip fields has a strange fascination for him, almost sufficient at times to bring him perilously near the poacher's cell. And in summer the growing crops possess an attraction of which he is scarcely conscious when in town. The fields yellow with charlock have no charm for him, and poppy-land, however bright and beautiful it may be, is only, from an agricultural point of view, an abomination. If in his youth his surroundings have been of a sporting turn he never frees himself entirely from them, but from the carriage windows he scans the country over, and detects the hare or pheasant cowering in the grass or stubble, and as he is whirled through the Midlands rapidly calculates the line he should take after hounds—a line which, one may fairly assume, is generally straighter in imagination than ever it was in fact. At times the tyranny of the footpath becomes almost unbearable to him, and he yearns for the freedom of the fields, but the habits of long years are too strong for him, and as a rule his return to the land results in failure.

To many men the country and country life offer no attractions. We all remember the Londoner whose first occupation in the country was to consult a 'Bradshaw' for the next returning train; and Du Maurier's

overworked seamstress thought the country bad enough even in fine weather, to say nothing of it in wet. Her feelings are shared by many who perhaps have not the courage to confess their weakness.

To all who are interested in country matters Richard Jefferies appeals strongly. To the townsman, desirous of acquiring or increasing a country knowledge he is indispensable, whilst to the countryman he recalls past experiences, and in many directions offers fresh information.

There are country districts and country districts. Even granting the qualifications I have named, the country varies largely in its degrees of rusticity. These are mainly dependent upon the nature of the intersecting roads, for of necessity those living near the main roads (the old coach roads) see more of life than their neighbours along the by-roads, and are influenced accordingly. Then come the dwellers by the field-roads, which are still more remote, and, finally, those whose lonely lot it is to live on moor and fell, where visitors are few indeed, and no one comes without set purpose. Of such a region there exists outside it the most superficial knowledge. Its outward features may be familiar, its geography and natural history well known, but the spirit of the country, that invisible essence which flavours its existence no casual visitor can know. You might as well expect an ordinary everyday man to fathom the depths of Wagner or grasp the full meaning of a Turner after a cursory inspection.

Men go for a short summer holiday to some far away spot, and flatter themselves on their return that they know all about it. To know all there is to be known about any place you must live in it, must see it under all conditions, and take ample time over the study of its details.

This is especially so as regards country life. It is as unreasonable to suppose that the country will yield up its choicest secrets to the man who spends only a short time in it as that the globe trotter should really know the various countries through which he rushes. This does not imply that the visitor may not, and possibly often does, see more of the beauties of a place than the dweller himself; but I still maintain that to get all out of the country which it contains you must sojourn in it, and if possible be born and bred in it. 'Bawn and bred in the briar patch Brer Fox, bawn and bred in the briar patch,' said Brer Rabbit, and it is only those who are so born and bred who can be thoroughly familiar with all the intricacies of the locality. I cannot emphasise this too strongly. To know the country thoroughly in all its moods, under all conditions, at all seasons; its people, their manners, customs, habits, superstitions, folklore; its fauna and its flora, a man must be country born. So was Wordsworth, so were Gilbert White, Tennyson, Thoreau, Thomas Hardy and Richard Jefferies.

Before referring more fully to the latter, there is a common fallacy which I may briefly notice. It is that there has been little change in the country

during the past hundred years. The changes of the nineteenth century were quite as much felt in the country as in the town.

The introduction of railways entirely altered its aspect, but paradoxical as it may at first appear, the country in consequence of them became much quieter. The through traffic along the main high roads, which was much greater than we are accustomed to suppose, ceased. We may form some idea of the magnitude of this traffic from the inns in which it was accommodated. Both in their number and the conveniences they afforded for man and beast they indicate an amount of traffic which must have been very considerable. In addition to the coaches running to London, others ran between the large towns, often along the minor roads, and there was a constant succession along the main roads of post-chaises, goods waggons and equestrians. If to these are added the pedestrians and the large droves of sheep and cattle constantly using the roads, it is evident that there must have been plenty of movement at that period in the country.

The introduction of railways rapidly changed all this, but the immediate effect was to produce a period of quiescence. The great traffic along the roads had ceased, and travelling by train had not become common. The period between the introduction of railway travelling and the birth of the bicycle was perhaps the quietest which English country life has experienced for centuries. The roads were then merely used for local traffic, and the countryman had not become accustomed to frequent journeys by rail. Hitherto this fact has not been much noticed, nor its influence upon the country life of the period sufficiently estimated. There was, as it were, a lull in which the country was left to itself, and the intercourse between it and the town was very limited.

Jefferies refers slightly to this in *Round About a Great Estate*, but it is necessary to bear it in mind when reading his books if we are rightly to understand them.

That particular period passed away, but, just as before the demolition of some old building, pictures of it are painted for future generations, so a series of word pictures of rural England in the middle of the nineteenth century have been handed down to us, which for accuracy of drawing, gracefulness of treatment and minuteness of detail are unrivalled. The hour, as usual, produced the man.

John Richard Jefferies, known to all the English speaking world as Richard Jefferies, was born at Coate, near Swindon, in Wiltshire, on November 6th, 1848. He came of a good yeoman stock, and his fore-elders had lived on the Coate farm for generations sometimes as owners, sometimes as tenants. What his boyhood must have been we can gather from *Bevis* and *Wood Magic*, both of which are evidently (and largely) auto-biographical. There is little of note in his early life, with the exception of an attempted trip to the

Continent. This broke down through his ignorance of the French language; and a second attempt, this time to visit America, had a similar result owing to lack of funds.

At the age of eighteen he began work as a journalist on the staff of the *North Wilts Herald*, and from that time until his death in 1887, his pen was never laid aside.

Of a solitary disposition, he wandered much throughout that district which was subsequently to be known as 'Jefferies' Land,' and acquired, during these wanderings, the groundwork of that knowledge with which he was afterwards to delight the world.

Like many another writer, it was some time before he discovered his own particular vocation. For years he thought it was the writing of novels, and he made repeated attempts in that direction. The most devoted of his admirers do not refer with pride to *The Scarlet Shawl* or *Restless Human Hearts*, and only read his later novels, such as *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *Greene Ferne Farm*, or *The Dewy Morn*, for the sake of some of the exquisite descriptions they contain. Jefferies was incapable of working out a plot or manipulating his puppets, and his novels, regarded as novels, can only be considered failures.

In 1872 his letters on the 'Wiltshire Labourers' appeared in *The Times* newspaper, and at once attracted attention as being the work of a man who was thoroughly master of his subject. Had they been judiciously followed up they might have proved the stepping stones to fortune. His biographer (and eulogist), Sir Walter Besant, says of this:

Always throughout the whole of his life Richard Jefferies wanted someone to advise him, and never so much as at this moment. He had this splendid chance and threw it away, not deliberately, but from ignorance and want of aptitude for business.

He continued to write articles on country matters for various magazines and newspapers. Many of these articles were afterwards collected and appeared in book form. In 1878 *The Gamekeeper at Home* was published, and with this book his name is most closely connected. In 1879 *Wild Life in a Southern County* appeared, and in the following year *Hodge and His Masters* and *Round About a Great Estate*, and in 1881 *The Amateur Poacher*.

In 1883 *The Story of My Heart* appeared, the work by which, according to some of his critics he will be known when his books on country life are forgotten. With this opinion I am not at present concerned. The 'story,' powerful as it is, and much as it bears upon Jefferies' life, does not come within the immediate scope of this article. Including his 'Handbook on Reporting,' he published during his lifetime twenty-three works, and after his death two other volumes containing various reprinted articles appeared.

In December, 1881, he fell ill, and from that time until the end, which came on the 14th of August, 1887, his life was one continual struggle against the 'three giants (to use his own words) disease, despair and poverty.'

Many of his finest papers were dictated from a sick bed, when racked with pain and lacking strength to lift his pen. In many ways the last few years of his life bear a strong resemblance to those of Robert Louis Stevenson, but with this in Stevenson's favour, that he was spared the pecuniary troubles and anxieties which bore so heavily upon Jefferies.

He had expressed a wish for his body to be cremated, and his ashes scattered over the Downs, but he was buried at Broadwater, in Sussex, and five years after his death a bust of him was erected in Salisbury Cathedral. It records his name and the dates of his birth and death, and describes him as one 'who, observing the works of Almighty God with a poet's eye, has enriched the literature of his country and won for himself a place among those who have made men happier and wiser.'

I have hurriedly glanced at the main facts of Jefferies' life because they are all fully set forth in the *Eulogy*, where they can be read by those who feel an interest in the man and his work. That this should have been written at all, and written so sympathetically by one who did not know Jefferies personally, is a strong proof of the hold which his books have taken on those who read them.

'I never looked upon the face of Richard Jefferies,' says Besant. 'This, now that it is too late, is to me a deep and abiding sorrow. I always hoped some day to see him, and to tell him face to face what one ought to tell such a man; it is a plain duty to tell the truth to such a man how greatly I admired and valued his work, with what joy I received it, with what eagerness I expected it, what splendid qualities I found in it, what instruction and elevation of soul I derived from it. I have never even seen this man, I was not a friend of his, I was not even a casual acquaintance, and yet I am writing his life.'

I have said that Jefferies' childhood and youth, the period when he was most impressionable, was a peculiarly quiet one in English country life. Although Swindon was situated, on the main line of a great railway, it was not a place which then attracted many visitors. All the Great Western Railway trains stopped there by Act of Parliament, but few travellers went outside the station gates, and the region round about was quiet and thoroughly rural. People no more went for pleasure to Swindon than they go on that account to Crewe or Clapham Junction, and Jefferies was free to wander about the countryside to his heart's content. How he wandered is evidenced by his books, and the object must have been small indeed which escaped his searching, sympathetic glance.

For many generations his people had lived at Coate, and acquired a knowledge of country matters which doubtless was largely transmitted to Richard Jefferies. In him the concentrated wisdom of ages burst forth, and it found expression in his writings.

Turning to his books themselves, they may be divided into four classes. Novels, books of country life, children's stories, and *The Story of My Heart*, which stands in a class alone. The country life books may be again divided into those dealing with a specific subject, such as *The Gamekeeper*, *Hodge and His Masters*, and *Red Deer*; and 'collected essays,' such as *Nature Near London*, *The Open Air*, *The Life of the Fields*.

The Gamekeeper at Home is the book by which he became known, and which must always be closely identified with him. It is the work which comes to one's mind whenever Jefferies' name is mentioned. It purports to describe no particular gamekeeper, although the critic I have previously mentioned seems to think that it is largely drawn from one friendly keeper whom he was privileged to accompany on his rounds. He describes the man himself his house and tools, his caste, his dominions, his subjects, his enemies, with that fulness and precision which prove personal knowledge. Whatever else may be said of Jefferies, he did not acquire his knowledge from books but from his own personal observation and experience.

Of the man himself he says:

In personal appearance he would be a tall man were it not that he has contracted a slight stoop in the passage of the years, not from weakness or decay of nature, but because men who walk much lean forward somewhat, which has a tendency to round the shoulders. The weight of his gun, and often of a heavy game bag dragging downwards, has increased this defect of his figure, and, as is usual after a certain age, even with those who lead a temperate life, he begins to show signs of corpulency. But these shortcomings only slightly detract from the manliness of his appearance, and in youth it is easy to see that he must have been an athlete. There is still plenty of power in the long sinewy arms, brown hands, and bull neck; and intense vital energy in the bright blue eye. He is an ash-tree man, as a certain famous writer would say, hard, tough, unconquerable by wind or weather, fearless of his fellows, yielding but by slow and imperceptible degrees to the work of time. His neck has become the colour of mahogany, sun and tempest have left their indelible marks upon his face; and he speaks from the depths of his broad chest as men do who talk much in the open air shouting across the fields and through the copses. There is a solidity in his very footstep, and he stands like an oak. In brief, freedom and constant contact with nature have made him every inch a man.

Never once for the last thirty years has he tossed on a bed of sickness. This is his secret: It's indoors, sir, as kills half the people, being indoors three-parts of the day, and next to that too much drink and vittals. I never eat but two meals a day breakfast and supper, what you call dinner, and maybe in the middle of the day a hunch of dry bread and an apple. Fresh air, exercise, frugal food and

drink, the odour of the earth and trees, these have given him, as he nears his sixtieth year, the strength and vitality of early manhood.

Among his assistants is his son, who has imbibed the spirit of the woods from his father, and grown up with a gun in his hands. Hence his skill with that weapon and the ease with which he brings down his game when hardly appearing to take any aim.

The keeper's dogs come in for their share of the book, and there is one particularly sensible remark in connection with them: 'I never make them learn no tricks,' says he, 'because I don't like to see 'em made fools of.'

We get some knowledge of the enemies he has to contend with two-legged and four-legged, and close the book with a higher opinion of the keeper than we had to commence with, and appreciate more fully the special difficulties against which he has constantly to contend.

On the whole, there are few men who have had their portraits painted with such fidelity as the gamekeeper, and the book abounds in those graphic touches which bring the scenes described so clearly and forcibly before you that you can recall them at will. Reading the description of the keeper's cottage, you almost sniff once more the smoke of burning roots, an entirely different smell from coal or peat smoke and see the terrible man-trap, just such a one as that which excited the wrath of Sydney Smith.

The Amateur Poacher is virtually a sequel to *The Gamekeeper*, and was published in 1881. It occupies a specially warm place in my affections, for it was the first of Jefferies' books which came under my notice, and which introduced me to many a pleasant hour's reading. Soon after it was published, and probably attracted by the title, I selected it at a library counter in a casual way. But the first chapter riveted my attention, and I read it through from cover to cover the same day. The first chapter is by no means the best in the book, but it is real and vivid. Every man with a liking for his gun remembers with pleasure his first essays in shooting, and is thereby favourably disposed to what may follow. Although the scene of the poacher was some hundreds of miles distant from that part of the country with which the writer was most familiar, yet its men and manners would have done equally well for both districts. I have known the men Jefferies described, and can testify to the accuracy of the portraiture.

The title of the book is fairly descriptive, but there are chapters which deal with the professional poacher as well as the amateur, and Oby and his system may be regarded as typical.

To anyone acquainted with the country justices' court the chapter 'Before the Bench' will be perfectly familiar, and Luke, the rabbit contractor, is another well-known figure in country life.

The description of a day's shooting at Father William's is redolent of fresh air, and the heaving of a gun over the hedge may be of interest here:

Taking his gun a few inches above the trigger guard (and with the guard towards his side), holding it lightly just where it seemed to balance in a perpendicular position, I gave it a slow heave rather than a throw, and it rose into the air. This peculiar feeling, hoist, as it were, caused it to retain the perpendicular position as it passed over the brook and hedge in a low curve. As it descended it did indeed slope a little, and Orion caught it in one hand easily. The hedge being low, he could see it coming, but guns are sometimes heaved in this way over hedges that have not been cropped for years. Then the gun suddenly appears in the air perhaps fifteen feet high, while the catch depends not only upon the dexterity of the hand but the ear to judge correctly where the person who throws it is standing, as he is invisible.

There is one touch of nature in this chapter which will strike a responsive chord in many a reader, and that is the poaching on another man's preserves when already there is game enough on one's own. This is common experience, and is another illustration of the old familiar proverb, 'stolen fruit is always sweetest.'

The chapter entitled 'Ferreting' is the best description of that form of sport with which I am familiar, and Little John is one of its finest exponents. Salt, who is evidently not in sympathy with Jefferies when he has on his sporting jacket, says the theme is scarcely worthy of the artist, and deprecates the shooting of animals at all for sport. There is no doubt that in his later works Jefferies laid less stress upon the pleasures of shooting, and even confessed that more than once after he had taken aim he had lowered his gun in admiration of the beauty of bird or beast. Ferreting is not perhaps a sport upon which one waxes enthusiastic, but to decry all shooting is another matter.

The Amateur Poacher will always be a favourite with shooting men from its exceedingly natural and realistic pictures. It is the work of a man who has experienced what he describes, and at any rate at the time enjoyed it.

In *Red Deer* he described a district and a form of sport known to comparatively few people. Jefferies was perhaps scarcely so much at home on Exmoor as in Wiltshire, but he produced a lucid and interesting picture of this, one of the wildest parts of the country, and enlightened us on the details of stag hunting. It came as a surprise to many to know that probably there are to-day on Exmoor more wild deer than at any previous period in its history, and that deer poaching there is practically unknown.

In *Hodge and His Masters* Jefferies extended his field of observation. Whatever affects Hodge is touched upon. Naturally the farmer comes first, and we have graphic descriptions of many kinds of farmers: old-fashioned, new-fashioned, flourishing and failing farmers. He is equally at home with them as with the gamekeeper, and, whilst he sympathises with their difficulties and their special disabilities, he has many a hit at their faults and

failings. He tells us of the old-fashioned farming people's ideas on caste, which 'in a measure approximate to those among the Hindoos,' and of their patriarchal treatment of their sons. He cannot forbear a jibe at the man who has accumulated wealth in the city and therefore considers himself an authority on agricultural matters. This is very natural, for, whilst the townsman has a tendency to look down upon his country cousin, the feeling is entirely reciprocal, and one hears in the country many a sneer at townfolk and their ways.

In the chapter on the farmers' parliament the old farmer said that the lecturer had made out a very good case. He had proved in the most logical manner that farmers are fools. 'Well, no doubt all the world agreed with him, for everybody thought he could teach the farmer. The chemist, the grocer, the baker, the banker, the wine merchant, the lawyer, the doctor, the clerk, the mechanic, the merchant, the editor, the printer, the stock-broker, the Methodist preacher, the very cabmen and railway porters, policemen and no doubt the crossing sweepers to use an expressive Americanism, all the whole "jing bang" could teach the ignorant jackass of a farmer.'

Not only did he picture the farmer to us, but all the men who encircle Hodge in his work, even to his last masters, the Board of Guardians, and we can follow him in his daily avocations with every confidence that it is no fanciful description we are reading, but one drawn from life, with the warts painted in as well as the beauty spots.

Jefferies has been accused of glorifying, in *Amaryllis at the Fair*, a leg of mutton. 'Was ever leg of mutton so glorified,' says his biographer. So far I have not met with the same charge made against the market dinner at Fleeceborough in *Hodge and His Masters*. 'The dinner itself,' he says, 'is simple enough, the waiters perhaps still more simple, but the quality of the viands is beyond praise. The mutton is juicy and delicious, as it should be where the sheep is the very idol of men's thoughts, the beef is short and tender of grain, the vegetables nothing can equal them, and they are all here, asparagus and all, in profusion. The landlord grows his own vegetables, every householder in Fleeceborough has an ample garden, and produces the fruit from his own orchards for the tarts. Ever and anon a waiter walks round with a can of ale and fills the glasses whether asked or not. Beef and mutton, vegetable and fruit tarts and ale are simple and plain fare, but when they are served in the best form how will you surpass them? The real cheese, fresh salads, the exquisite butter, everything on the table is genuine, juicy, succulent and rich. Could such a dinner be found in London how the folks would crowd thither.'

When he names a florin as the charge for such a meal one concludes that if the country has its drawbacks it also has something to counterbalance them.

Although *Wood Magic*, *Bevis* or the article entitled 'Saint Guido' in *The Open Air* scarcely come within the scope of this article, they contain much that is of interest to grown-ups. They all show that intimate knowledge of Nature's ways which can only be acquired by an earnest and loving student. Nothing in Nature was too small for Jefferies to notice, nothing was trivial. It is interesting to compare *Wood Magic* with Kipling's *Jungle Books*, and to notice the difference in treatment of a subject substantially the same in both books. Kipling divided his book into a number of stories, whilst Jefferies made only one of his; the scene of one lies in India and the other in England, and yet there is a broad similarity in them.

Bevis, written as a book for boys, is to a certain extent autobiographical, and contains some of Jefferies' best work.

Most of us will be inclined to agree with Besant when he says that if Jefferies had written nothing else than his books on country life he would have deserved the gratitude of the English speaking race. But he did much more than this: 'For next he took the step,' says his biographer, 'the vast step across the chasm which separates the poetic from the vulgar mind, and began to clothe the real with the colours and glamour of the unreal; to write down the response of the soul to the phenomena of Nature; to interpret the voice of Nature speaking to the soul.'

And it is of interest to us to remember that this, his latest and highest development, was produced after he had left the country and was living in the suburbs of London. The groundwork was laid in Wiltshire, but the superstructure was erected in Surrey.

In 'Hours of Spring,' the opening article in *Field and Hedgerow*, he writes:

Never was such a worshipper of earth. The commonest pebble, dusty and marked with the stain of the ground, seems to me so wonderful; my mind works round it till it becomes the sun and centre of a system of thought and feeling. Sometimes moving aside the tufts of grass with careless fingers whilst resting on the sward, I found these little pebble stones loose in the crumbly earth among the rootlets. Then brought out from the shadow, the sunlight shone and glistened on the particles of sand that adhered to it. Particles adhered to my skin thousands of years between finger and thumb, these atoms of quartz, and sunlight shining all that time, and flowers blooming and life growing in all, myriads of living things, from the cold still limpet on the rock to the burning, throbbing heart of man. Some-times I found them among the sands of the heath, the sea of golden brown surging up in yellow billows six feet high about me, where the dry lizard hid, or basked, of kin too, to old time.

The pebble stone tells me that I am a soul because I am not that that touches the nerves of my hand. We are distinctly two utterly separate, and shall never come together. The little pebble and the great sun overhead millions of miles away; yet is the great sun no more distinct and apart than this which I can

touch. Dull-surfaced matter like a polished mirror reflects back thought to thought's self within.

He probably reached his highest point in this direction in the article entitled 'The Pageant of Summer,' which first appeared in *Longman's Magazine*. Just one extract from it:

Fanning so swiftly the wasp's wings are but just visible as he passes; did he pause the light would be apparent through their texture. On the wings of the dragon fly as he hovers an instant before he darts, there is a prismatic gleam. These wing textures are even more delicate than the minute filaments on a swallow's quill, more delicate than the pollen of a flower. They are formed of matter indeed, but how exquisitely it is resolved into the means and organs of life! Though not often consciously recognised, perhaps this is the great pleasure of Summer, to watch the earth, the dead particles resolving themselves into the living case of life, to see the seed leaf push aside the clod, and become by degrees the perfumed flower. From the tiny mottled egg come the wings that by and by shall pass the immense sea. It is in this marvellous transformation of clods and cold matter into living things that the joy and the hope of summer reside. Every blade of grass, each leaf, each separate floret and petal is an inscription speaking of hope. Consider the grasses and the oaks, the swallows, the sweet blue butterfly they are one and all a sign and token showing before our eyes earth made into life. So that my hope becomes as broad as the horizon afar, reiterated by every leaf, sung on every bough, reflected in the gleam of every flower. There is so much for us yet to come, so much to be gathered and enjoyed. Not for you or me now, but for our race who will ultimately use this magical secret for their happiness. Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled Immortals. My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer the flowers and the azure sky shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory. Hence it is that a flower is to me so much more than stalk and petals.

Jefferies has been called 'a mere cataloguer,' surely this is cataloguing of a high order, and justifies us in applying to him as to Thoreau the word 'Poet-Naturalist.'

When endeavouring to form an estimate of Jefferies as a writer, what strikes us at first is the many-sidedness of his work combined with its minute thoroughness. Gilbert White has given his charming pictures of Selborne and its natural history, Miss Mitford her delightful stories of Berkshire village life, and Thoreau made us familiar with Walden and its pond; but Jefferies combined the leading features of them all. He drew the inhabitants of the district with the accuracy and detail of a master in portraiture. From the 'juke' to the 'moucher' they are all living before us: the men and women and children themselves, their homes, their habits, and their surroundings. With the solitary exception of the home life of the upper classes, which he had no

opportunity of knowing, he has not missed a single phase of life or a character generally to be found in a rural district. He followed the country folk in their work, in their play, in their sports and in their pastimes, and knew them all intimately, knew them as only one going freely in and out among them could know. For the countryman is reticent, and does not readily open his mind to his fellow men, even to his neighbour, much less to a stranger, for whom he entertains as a rule a decided distrust. But not only was he familiar with the people, he knew the birds and beasts in the same way. By long and close observation he made himself master of their appearance, their habits and their haunts. There is no bird or beast to be found in Wiltshire with which he was not familiar and of which he has not written.

There are many events in the field
Which are not shown to common eyes,
But all her shows did nature yield
To please and win this pilgrim wise.
He saw the partridge drum in the woods,
He heard the woodcock's evening hymn,
He found the tawny thrushes broods,
And the shy hawk did wait for him;
What others did at distance hear,
And guessed within the thicket's gloom,
Was showed to this philosopher,
And at his bidding seemed to come.

He is equally at home with the trees and flowers of his neighbourhood. 'From the cedar of Lebanon to the hissop on the wall' he knew and loved them all. In his articles on 'Wild Flowers' he writes:

Before I had any conscious thought it was a delight to me to find wild flowers just to see them. The various hues of the petals pleased without any knowledge of colour contrasts no note even of colour, except that it was bright and the mind was made happy without consideration of those ideals and hopes afterwards associated with the azure sky above the fir tree. A fresh footpath, a fresh flower, a fresh delight.

And towards the end he wrote:

I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me, how they manage bird and flower without me to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly, day by day, the seed leaves on the mounds in the sheltered places that come so early, the pushing up of the young grass, the succulent dandelion, the coltsfoot on the heavy thick clods, the trodden chickweed, despised at the foot of the gatepost, so common and small, and yet so dear to me. Every blade of grass was mine, as though I had planted it separately. They go on without me orchis flower and cowslip, I cannot number them all; I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet, flower and bud, and the beautiful clouds that go over with

the sweet rush of rain and burst of sun glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill.

When writing of men he was equally at home. He was not satisfied with picturing the outward man; he knew his thoughts, the trend of his mind, his prejudices and his opinions. As we read of his farmers we recall the man who 'stubbed Thornaby waste,' and hear again the tune to which the horses' legs moved: 'Proputty, proputty, proputty that's what I 'ears 'em saay.' It is a far cry from Wilts to Lincolnshire, but the same masterful spirit was found among the farmers in both shires.

There is a tendency among writers, Miss Mitford herself was not entirely exempt from it, to idealise the country. Village life, as a rule, is not idyllic. Without going so far as Hazlitt, and saying that all country people hate each other, there are as many mean things done in country places as in the city slum, and country sights and scenes do not always beget a corresponding moral beauty.

Jefferies knew this, and has written as faithfully of the failings of country people as of their virtues. He wrote 'Bits of Oak Bark,' but he also wrote 'Uptill a Thorn' and the 'Acorn Gatherer.'

Of all nature writers the names of Gilbert White, Miss Mitford, Thoreau, John Burroughs and Richard Jefferies stand out most prominently. Each had their own particular style, all afford delightful reading. Jefferies, more than any of the others, covered the whole ground. He had the patient observation of White, but lacked his sense of leisure and repose. The *Fellow of Oriel* gives us the idea of having nothing whatever to do but note the habits of the particular bird or insect in which he was interested at the moment. As Emerson puts it, the American Colonies might revolt, but that would not affect White's observation of the tumbling of the rook. Perhaps Jefferies has not left us so many idyllic village stories as Miss Mitford, but he has given us full and true descriptions of village life, and has adhered more closely to the actual than has the Berkshire authoress. In many ways he most resembles Thoreau with less of mysticism than the American and more varied pictures of country life. These are rendered all the more readable by the subjects being altogether English. Both Thoreau and Burroughs suffer slightly by being Americans and our having to translate, as it were, their descriptions into English. John Burroughs is perhaps the most robust of the writers I have named, and has much less of sadness and melancholy than Jefferies in his pages. His lines had fallen in pleasanter places, and his subjects had been viewed through brighter coloured spectacles. But Richard Jefferies more than any other covered the whole field and combined the leading characteristics of them all.

We have not had a writer on country subjects with the same comprehensiveness who was at the same time so thorough in his methods and so sympathetic in his treatment. And yet he was not appreciated. There are few more pathetic revelations than the note attached to a set of Jefferies' books (1st editions) in a recent second-hand catalogue. They are all inscribed in Jefferies' own writing to a friend of his, and came into the bookseller's hand uncut. The books of a man who yearned for sympathy and to whom it meant so much!

Most of what Jefferies wrote is perennial; much has changed since his time and passed away altogether, but he occupies an unique position in English literature. As an English writer dealing with English country matters he has not been equalled. He has never had, and probably never will have, a large body of readers, but those who know him best regard him with the greatest affection. They feel that for them he has made the country more beautiful than ever it was before, that he has opened their eyes and caused them to see many things of which they were entirely ignorant, and that he has fully revealed others of which they were only partially aware.

He showed the soul within
The veil of matter luminous and thin;
He heard the old earth's undersong piercing the modern din.
No bird that cleaves the air
But his revealing thought has made more fair;
No tremulous dell of summer leaves but feels his presence there.
So though we deem him dead,
Lo, he yet speaketh! and the words are sped
In grassy whispers o'er the fields by every wild flower said.

A Labour of Love

P.J. Kavanagh

P.J. Kavanagh—broadcaster, writer and poet—gave a version of the following text to the Richard Jefferies Society's Birthday Lecture in the Wyvern Theatre Arts Centre on Monday, 7 November 1977. It was later adapted as below for broadcast on BBC Radio 3/4 on Tuesday, 9 May 1978. The transcript is reproduced with the kind permission of the author and with acknowledgements to the BBC.

The description 'country writer' has always seemed to me very unhelpful when we are dealing with someone whose appeal, because of his quality, is wider than that. After all, the majority of readers live in towns and the phrase suggests a writer who brings them news of a distant, holiday world which they can sigh over for a minute or two, if they want to, before they turn back to the real business of urban living. Even today—especially today—that tag, 'country writer', can put a barrier between a writer and his audience.

I mention this because the rough similarity between the subject-matter of Edward Thomas and Richard Jefferies—which is to say hedgerows, old barns, country characters, and I repeat I speak roughly—makes it superficially natural that the younger man should respond to the work of the older one and, twenty years after Jefferies' death, which was in 1887, that he should write an appreciative book about him; two 'country writers.'

But their temperaments, I should guess, were nowhere near akin. The ecstasy and self-surrender of Richard Jefferies in *The Story of My Heart* (that astonishing, and to some, embarrassingly intense, piece of spiritual autobiography) would be quite impossible for the sceptical and self-conscious Edward Thomas. Jefferies' views, especially the over-hearty, over-simple ones of his early writing, clearly irritated Thomas, even disgusted him, and he doesn't scruple in his biography to call his subject 'silly', 'crude', when he considers him to be so.

No, what fascinates me about the two men is not the apparent enthusiasm they shared for rural matter, but the odd parallels of their artistic developments. For when Thomas describes Jefferies' journey towards clarity, simplicity, mastery, part of the excitement we who love Thomas feel as we read this, comes from our knowledge that Thomas was to take the same path himself and arrive, as an artist, like Jefferies, only a few years before his own death.

Apart from the similarity of their careers there is another subterranean seam of interest in Thomas's book. It is true, of course, that we can learn from it something about Jefferies the man—though writing so near the time he could risk no very startling personal revelations, if he knew any, and if he had wanted to: it is true we can learn a great deal about Jefferies' work, for the biography uses quotations so liberally, page after page of them, it almost represents an anthology, and could be used as such. But above all, we can learn, most revealingly, what one good writer—eventually a great one—considered to be the difference between good writer and bad, and between good writing and the best. I know of no other book where these differences are set out so clearly, with examples. Critics may tell us why one thing is better than another, and Thomas was a good critic. But when a writer, a poet, takes another, beloved poet to pieces and holds him up to the light—for Jefferies at the end, as Thomas says, was a poet—the result is likely to be of practical help, a look inside the workshop.

But before I quote some of Thomas's conclusions about the art of writing, and his use of Jefferies as exemplar of the best as well as, very nearly, the worst, it might be worth saying a few words about Thomas and the circumstances in which this book came to be written.

From a very early age, when he was only twenty-one, Thomas was tied to the treadmill of writing, fast, in order to feed his family. This induced such fatigue and frustration in him that sometimes he feared insanity. He worked as incredibly, almost insanely hard, that Norman Douglas, a contemporary, said of Thomas's life as a literary journalist that as for himself he would sooner have been blacking boots. Then suddenly encouraged by Robert Frost, in December 1914—helped perhaps by the fact that literary commissions were harder to come by, and his world appeared to be breaking up anyway, he wrote his first poem. It seemed to come out whole, in a style not quite like anyone else's, and for the next two years he continued at a great rate, sometimes two poems a day, until the end of December 1916. The following February, he was in France, and two months later, he was dead, on Easter Monday. All his poems crammed between his thirty-sixth and his thirty-eighth year.

It is a wonderful story, a miraculous one, and the similarities with the story of Jefferies are clear to see. Jefferies, too, wrote to order, to please editors, and clearly wrote under pressure, at pace. Where Thomas was tortured by his melancholy and frustration, Jefferies was latterly tortured by his terrible illness, some kind of tuberculosis of the spine that sometimes made it impossible for him to walk, or even stand. Gradually the great last work of Jefferies began to come; two novels, *The Dewy Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and the essays of the last few years. In both men this final flowering came after a long, hard, hard-working apprenticeship.

Thomas wrote of the clarification and refinement of Jefferies' genius in 1907 when he himself was thirty years old. Was it possible he hoped the same might happen to him? I would like to think so, but I doubt it. Thomas's despair was almost wilful in its consistency, though I am sure he could not help it, and I'm sure he saw no light at the end of his tunnel. It is our pleasure to know that there was such a light though Thomas's sense of defeat in no way diminished his joy in the victory of Jefferies.

In fact, this biography was written, of all his books, in the most favourable circumstances. The subject was one he would have chosen himself and he was allowed, as far as I can discover uniquely, a whole year in which to write it. The result, in Q.D. Leavis' words, is 'a classic in critical biography, to stand with Lockhart's Scott and Mrs. Gaskell's Brontë.'

Richard Jefferies was born at Coate, then a small village near Swindon in Wiltshire, the son of a small and failing farmer, in 1848. His disinclination for farm work, his habit of wandering the lanes and fields alone, apparently abstracted earned him the local nickname of 'Loony Dick'. Nevertheless, no-one was working harder, at observation, at the reception of clear impressions of his native place, and so Thomas begin; his book, very properly, with a chapter called 'The Country of Richard Jefferies.' This will serve as an example of all Thomas's country descriptions, excellent at times and at others, to my taste, too flowery—sometimes literally too flowery, as in this sentence about Liddington Hill.

As he (Richard Jefferies) took deep breaths of the air about its harebell, eyebright, clover, bedstraw, scabious and fine grass, his brain was burrowed and sown with the thoughts that ripened in *The Story of My Heart*.

As far as I am concerned a little of that goes a long way. Apart from such botanical litanies Thomas's prose, still, in 1907, contained some of the 'dead rhythms', the literary language unrooted in common speech, which he so detested and struggled so hard to get away from. In the end he did get away from them, but nature notes were what the public expected and here he is still sometimes, though only sometimes, writing for a market that liked 'fine writing' and recognised it only in self-conscious rhythms and over-emphasis. But even in his description of Jefferies' countryside he soon strikes the note that concerns us. Here he is talking of literary matters, even when describing the Wiltshire Down. He says:

Taken separately, the Downs have lines as fair as those of animals: the light wavers on their smooth, and, as it were, muscular sides as it does on the rippling haunches of a horse. Yet they have a hugeness of undivided surface ... They bring into the mind the thought that beauty—whether of a poet's lines, or of a melody, or of a cloud, or of shining water—is the natural and inseparable companion to passionate, bold true-hearted acts and thoughts and emotions.

‘Passionate, bold, true-hearted acts and thoughts and emotions.’ He is claiming for art the highest moral significance. For Thomas is a moralist of course, as was Jefferies and as I believe is every great artist. Thomas then goes on, in two separate chapters, to deal with Jefferies’ ancestors and his boyhood, a careful and detailed job. He always gave his publishers full value for their money. Again, it is the critical asides that stand out. He describes how Jefferies saw the disinterment of a skeleton and how the sight haunted him. He adds:

One sorrowful impression of this kind can furnish an acid by means of which even the joyous things bite deeper into the brain.

How relevant that is to Thomas’s own poetry, not yet written and not yet hoped for. He knows too well the gap between insight and expression however. He says:

Jefferies early possessed such an eye, such an imagination, though not for many years could he reveal some of its images by means of words. In fact, he was very soon to bear witness to the pitiful truth that imagination does not supply the words that shall be its expression; he was to fill much paper with words that revealed almost nothing of his inner and little more of his outer life.

Again, part of the excitement of that comes not only from its truth in application to Jefferies but its truth in application to Thomas. From now on he gets down to the work, beginning at the beginning, the stories published in the *North Wilts Herald*. He is no idolater. He describes them as having ‘much facility and exuberance of trashiness.’ He is short about Jefferies’ early political views as expressed in a pamphlet called *Jack Brass, Emperor of England*.

It is a jaunty, humorously intended by-product of his Conservatism, which served its purpose, if it gave him as much satisfaction immediately as disgust later on.

Of the first novels he writes pages, with pages of quotations—for like all good critics he never blames or praises without giving examples, so the reader can judge for himself. But he sums up his view of these in two cool sentences:

His characters are persons with much leisure for passions ... He is trying to imagine the motives of people who give sovereigns to footmen.

Oddly—or not all oddly, if we abandon the misleading term ‘country writer’—it is the move to the suburbs of London that Thomas believes marks the beginning of Jefferies’ maturity. Jefferies took a huge delight in London, seeing its vastness as an aspect of Nature herself. He said: ‘I am very fond of what I may call a thickness of the people such as exists in London’ and sometimes he used to go there for no purpose, simply to drift where the

crowds took him. Thomas calls him 'one of the great Londoners'. It is not the least of that city's praises that it was part of the culture that made Jefferies' mature work memorable. He notes, above all, an increase of naturalness. This, he regards as the core of Jefferies' excellence. He says:

The observation has fallen into place, and has made a real picture, where there is no detail impeding the whole, nor any struggle with dead words.

He might be talking of one of the best of his own poems. But even about the mature Jefferies, Thomas is cautious:

His judgement ... was uncertain. He had, however, by the constant necessity of moulding language to fit a more and more subtle subject-matter, become the master—the still rather uncertain master—of an easy, delicate, often sweet and, without extravagance, luxuriant style. It was not, I think, developed by much conscious effort, but grew to his use like the handle of a walking stick.

Thomas goes on:

He was now in the main a poet ... the old world of 'Fear God, Honour the Pheasant and Damn the Rest' became dim to him. Something he may have lost but the neighbourhood of pheasants, at least, does little good. I knew a parish of 10,397 souls, of which ten thousand were pheasants and the rest human beings, so miserable—except 17 of them at the big house and the rectory—that they were not even worth shooting, or, as far as was known, eating.

Of *The Story of My Heart* about which he might have been expected to have reservations, he says much, all in praise:

Its movement, its parallel to Shelley's 'Be thou with me, impetuous one!' places it beyond criticism, far within the realms of joy.

The book is a poem, I had almost said a piece of music-prose has rarely reached such a length and yet retained this absolute, more than logical unity. There are passages weak in themselves, which, do but strengthen the force of the whole by their testimony to the writer's honesty. A clever man would have erased them; but, then, a clever man would have rearranged the book and given it an appearance of reasonableness it could not long survive. It is by the tones and gestures of the writer, in his words and ideas and images, that he is to be understood, if he is to inspire where he cannot instruct...

Still he yields no inch falsely to his idol—he admits, in another place, what has to be admitted. 'Something there was in him, perhaps, akin to his uncomfortable humour, which unconsciously repelled—something that creeps into his writings, particularly in the more emphatic parts, and gives us a twinge as at an unpleasant voice.'

Elsewhere Thomas says something interesting about humour, which is reminiscent of Yeats' contempt for the spirit of comedy. He says:

It was not twisted inextricably into the strands of (Jefferies') nature, it was often invisible, and let us be thankful for it, that yet another man of genius has been denied this heaven-descended monkey as a lifelong inseparable companion.

Of the last two marvellous novels of Jefferies—I mean *The Dewy Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*—Thomas gives a full analysis, a huge quotation and their just desserts. At the end of *The Dewy Morn* chapter, he pays Jefferies his greatest compliment.

There are several places where the easy omission of a phrase or two would have cleared away an awkward fault. It is deftness only that is wanting, and Jefferies was never deft.

That last phrase has stuck in my mind since I first read this book. Thomas is praising a writer for not being ‘good’ in the accepted sense, for not being good in the way that caused Thomas himself to be accepted, for in prose Thomas was deft in a way he refused to be in his poetry.

Of *Amaryllis at the Fair* he goes further. ‘Mr. Hardy is far more dramatic, far more psychological and also far cleverer in effects, but he is seldom so right.’

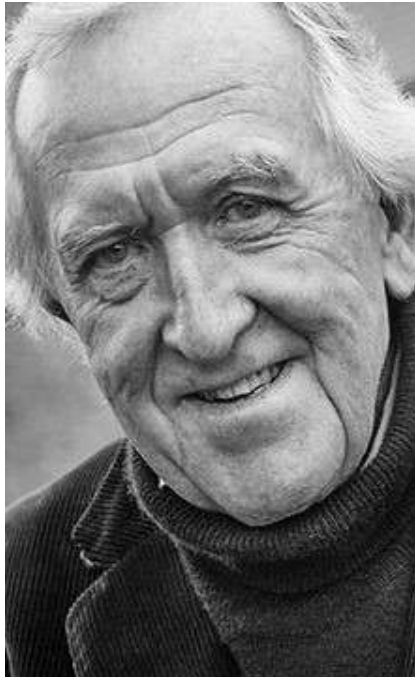
He quotes a short passage from the essay ‘Hours of Spring’ written by a man, not yet forty years old, who would not see another Spring, and after the quotation, Thomas rises to one of his highest flights of eloquence. I would like to end on his words. For he is defining and defending the kind of writer Jefferies was and, surely, in the process, defining the kind of writer he himself wanted to be, and the kind of writer he became, before the end. Here is the quotation from Jefferies:

Nature has no arrangement, no plan, nothing judicious even. The walnut trees bring forth their tender buds, and the frost turns them—they have no mosaic of time to fit in, like a Roman tessellated pavement. Nature is like a child, who will sing and shout, though you may be never so deeply pondering in the study, and does not wait for the hour that suits your mind. You do not know what you may find each day. Perhaps you may only pick up a fallen feather, but it is beautiful, every filament! Always beautiful! Everything beautiful! And are these things new? The ploughman and his team, the lark’s song, the green leaf? Can they be new? Surely they have been of old time! They are, indeed, new—the only things that are so; the rest is old and grey, and a weariness.

Now Thomas takes up where Jefferies left off:

So it ends. How true, how false, how unreasonable it all is! Why is he not working in the slums to improve the lot of men whom the Gods will not help? He does but add to the difficulty and absurdity of life, to lie there ill and poor in the monotonous frost, looking out of the window, all manner of memories, hopes, joys, sorrows coming to his heart as doves to the dovecot. And yet does he not in the end extract more joy than sorrow from it all? Is it not a triumph of beauty and life? It makes for goodness, joy, and beauty in its proclamation that life can endure most dog-like things and yet flourish exceedingly. Always these two truths—the exuberance of nature and the divinity of man. Even if it were all a nightmare, the very truthfulness of the agitated voice, rising and falling in

honest contemplation of common sorrows, would preserve it, since it is rarely given to the best of men to speak the truth. Its shape is the shape of an emotional mood, and it ends because the emotion ends. It is music, and above, or independent of, logic. It obeys some deeper law than that which any model could teach. It really has the effect of music, with its succession of thoughts and images wrought into as real a unity as there is in the 'Ode to a Nightingale.' Some would say the effect is that of religious music, but it rebels against all the gods, against all things except life.



P. J. Kavanagh

Richard Jefferies as a Journalist

There are two articles about Jefferies that mention his poor handwriting and collected by Pitman's *Journal of Commercial Education*. Printed in *The Phonetic Journal*, the first was titled: 'Shorthand and Literary Composition', 9 March 1899; the second on 30 March 1899 titled 'Richard Jefferies as a Journalist'.

The Phonetic Journal.

SATURDAY, 30th MARCH, 1899.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

When those marvellous word-photographs of country scenes, that bore the signature, 'R. Jefferies,' began to make their appearance in the leading English magazines, every reader who was capable of feeling the charm of them, looked forward with delight to whatever else might afterwards issue from the same pen. For the wonderful magic of the thing, the unrivalled minuteness of observation, the microscopic clearness of description, the fascinating skill with which the varied life and activity of a wayside hedge, or an oak, or the beauty of earth and sky on a bright spring morning, were delineated, came as a revelation to most of us. The same scenes that he described, we, too, had gazed upon, but we had been blind to the thousand and one elements that made up the beauty that we only vaguely recognized. Here was a man who seemed gifted with some exceptional insight into external Nature. We felt in his writings the true spirit of the poet, blended with a power of accurate observation never surpassed by the most carefully trained man of science. His place in literature was seen to be unique. And then, suddenly, just as his matchless abilities were getting widely known, we heard of his untimely death. Soon a few of the pathetic facts of his life found their way into the newspapers, and we learned how this brave lover and brilliant depicter of Nature, had been struggling for years against the twin evils of disease and poverty, and how some of his best work had been conceived and written when pain almost incapacitated him from holding a pen. Mr. Walter Besant has at length told the full story of Richard Jefferies' short life. His biographical sketch, entitled, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, shows us the man as he lived and worked, and we see that his character was as noble as his style. The book is worthy of the author and of his subject, and no one can read it without increasing his respect for the man whose genius disclosed to us, in every tiny grass-blade, and every acorn, and every tree-trunk, and every hedgerow, a multitude of

wonderful things that we had never looked for there before. One of the curious circumstances in Jefferies' career was, that he was so long in discovering in what direction lay his real power. His determination to succeed in literature was formed early in youth, and no reverses, no rebuffs, no discouragements, were able to make him swerve in the least from the object of his ambition. But for many years he tried to succeed by efforts for which his genius was unsuited. He wanted to make a name in fiction, and wrote novel after novel, which he found great difficulty in getting accepted by the publishers, though obviously he was perfectly convinced himself of their merits, which, in truth, were inconsiderable. When, ultimately, he produced *The Gamekeeper at Home*, his real powers became manifest, and publishers began to inquire after him, and to offer him work.

Jefferies began his literary career as a reporter on the *North Wilts Herald*. He was then eighteen years of age, and had learned shorthand in order to qualify himself for the post. What degree of skill he acquired as a shorthand writer, Mr. Besant does not inform us, but as his note-books, kept in after years, appear to have been written in longhand, it may be presumed that Jefferies was not a very ardent votary of the new 'brief writing.' His ordinary hand-writing was not all that might have been desired. Indeed, it seems to have been so bad, that even the compositors—long-suffering as they are in the matter of hand-writing—rebelled against it. Mr. Besant tells us that 'his hand-writing was so bad, that when he began to feed the press, the compositors bought him a copy-book and a penholder, and begged him to use it. He did use it, and his hand-writing presently became legible at least, but it remained to the end a bad hand-writing. His note-books, especially, are very hard to read.' At this time he was, we are told, negligent about his appearance, permitting his hair to grow until it reached the collar of his coat. He was over six feet in height, thin, and somewhat bent; and we may picture him as he marched off through the country lanes, hurrying along with his rapid and extensive stride, to attend some village meeting, or an inquest, or a police court at the nearest town, or on some one of the countless journeys hither and thither, that lend so much variety to the life of a country reporter. 'He never carried an umbrella,' writes his enthusiastic biographer, 'or wore a great-coat, nor, except in very cold weather, did he wear gloves.' His connection with the *North Wilts Herald* lasted several years, and he became, in addition, the Swindon correspondent of the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*.

One of his early productions as an author was a book, entitled, *Reporting, Editing, and Authorship*. Mr. Besant says of this book,—which appears to have been published without a date—'I think it appeared in the year 1872,

when he was in his twenty-fourth year.' Dr. Westby-Gibson gives the date of publication as 1873.¹ Mr. Besant is disposed to smile at the book, which he describes as elementary. Indeed, such a work, based on a few years' experience on a country newspaper, was not likely to be marked by breadth of knowledge, or by those other qualities which are to be looked for in any 'Guide to Journalism' that is to prove of lasting value. Yet his biographer is fain to admit that in the pages of his little book Jefferies did set before his readers' eyes the ideal reporter. 'Jefferies was always zealous to do everything that he had to do as well as it could be done.' The young reporter is recommended to acquire a special knowledge of his own district, its trades and industries, topography, antiquities, traditions, etc.; to acquire a good personal manner; to dress well and to cultivate himself so as to be able to talk on all subjects with all men. Jefferies could always write well on anything that he knew thoroughly, and one is therefore not surprised to learn that his chapter on editing 'gives a tolerably complete account of the conducting of a country-town newspaper.' The last chapter—that on authorship—is valuable only as showing what illusions Jefferies entertained at that time on that subject. This book was the only work of the kind that he wrote, although to the end of his life he never dissociated himself from journalism. His first great journalistic success was in the year 1872, when he wrote a long letter on 'The Wiltshire Labourer,' which, after being rejected by one London editor, was sent to *The Times*, in which paper it appeared. It occupied two columns and a quarter in small type, and the editor had a leader written upon it. Mr. Besant reproduces this letter in an appendix, and all who read it will agree with him that for a young man of twenty-four, it was a remarkable production. 'Crammed with facts and information,' clear and strong in point of style, Jefferies' letter attracted considerable attention. He seems at one time to have endeavoured to obtain a post on some London newspaper, but nothing ever came of the attempt. Had his design succeeded, his health would probably have broken down much sooner than it did, and we might never have had those exquisite word-pictures which he gave to the world during the last few years of his short life. Many of those sketches were contributed to the magazines, but they sometimes adorned the pages of the *Graphic*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Standard*, and other journals. To this extent he kept up his connection with the newspaper press to the last, and never ceased to be a journalist.

¹ The following is the full entry in Dr. Westby-Gibson's *Bibliography of Shorthand*:—'Jefferies R. *Reporting, Editing, and Authorship: Practical hints for beginners in literature*. By R. Jefferies. London: John Snow and Co., 2 Ivy lane, Paternoster row. Swindon: Alfred Bull, printer, Victoria street. (1873. 23pp., 1s.).'

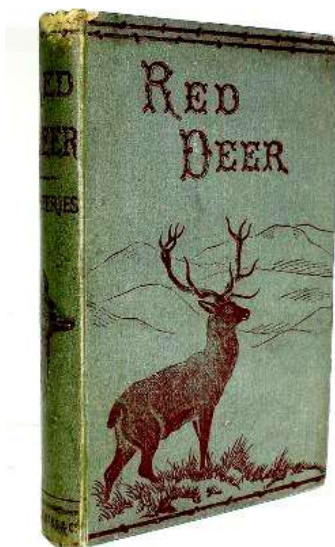
The Red-deer of Exmoor

Unsigned Review

This unsigned review below of Jefferies' *Red Deer* was published in *The Zoologist*, March 1884, a monthly natural history magazine published in London by John van Voorst and edited by James Edmund Harting FLS, FZS.¹

The origins of Jefferies' inspiration to write about deer and stag-hunting are obscure, but he travelled to and stayed in Somerset in June 1883 learning much from Arthur Heal, the Huntsman with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds and from his own observations of the deer. In August of that year he was offering C.J. Longman 'a popular account of the natural history and habits of the wild red deer' which Longman agreed to publish and the book appeared in January 1884.

Red Deer was the least successful of Jefferies' country books and was only briefly noticed. By March Longman had written to Jefferies to report poor sales of the book together with those of *The Story of My Heart*, a combination that persuaded Longman to decline Jefferies' next book, *The Life of the Fields*.



¹ Ed. The extent of the quotes from *Red Deer* were underplayed in *The Zoologist* article—only a few lines of Jefferies' own words were placed in quotation marks. This shortfall has been corrected. The review sits comfortably with Phyllis Treitel's 'Richard Jefferies' Somerset Adventure' article that follows on p.59.

Those who have ever given the subject a thought must sometimes have wondered what there is peculiar about that corner of the West of England which continues to harbour the wild Red-deer when no other part of England affords it shelter. The fact is that the country around Exmoor has not changed with the times, but has remained what it is for ages, a vast uncultivated hilly moorland, a land of mist and heather, resembling nothing so much as a Scotch deer-forest moved south, and therefore as attractive to deer now as it must have been centuries ago when King John hunted in Somersetshire, and flew his jerrfalcon^s at the cranes on its wild wastes.

The moors of the Exe river are not flat stretches of marsh-land, but hills of great height, covered with heather. The term mountains may almost be applied to them; numbers of the ridges are twice the height of Beachy Head, or the Dyke at Brighton; Dunkery Beacon is three times as high. But the conformation of the country is such that on entering it the elevations do not seem very unusual, for as it is all high and raised, the eye has nothing with which to contrast it. When on the moor it appears an immense table-land, intersected by deep narrow valleys, called coombes, at the bottom of which a stream always flows. At some distance apart are ranges of hills rising gradually, and with gentle slopes above the general level of the moor. The curves appear so moderate and the ascent so easy, that there can be no difficulty in walking or riding over them. But on going towards hills which seem only a mile or two away the table-land sinks in a deep coombe, which has to be descended and re-ascended, and the sides are high and steep. Presently another coombe intervenes, and after five or six miles' walking very little progress seems to have been made. At last the slope of the hill is reached, and has now expanded into a mountainous ascent, not to be overcome without much labour and more time. The country is in fact very deceptive, much wider and much more difficult than it looks. The expanse confuses the eye, and will not allow it to judge distances. The illusion is assisted by the smooth outline of the moors without a fence for miles together, and without a visible tree; for the covers are in the coombes, and there are few or no copses on the hills. Nothing breaks up the surface and measures the view. Heather covers the largest part of the ground, which is never ploughed or sown, and where there are no flower-grown meads. One vast breadth of open, wild, and treeless country reaches in every direction, and it is at once obvious why the deer have remained at large since the earliest times, for the land is in the same condition as it was centuries ago. The plough has not touched it, and civilization has not come near. The questions naturally arise, Why has Exmoor remained in this condition uncultivated for so many centuries? Why does it still defy agriculture and improvement?

These questions have been asked and answered in a very pleasantly-written volume² recently published by Mr. Richard Jefferies, the author of

² *Red Deer* by Richard Jefferies. Post 8vo, pp.207, London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1884.

Wild Life in a Southern County, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and other works, which have been already noticed in the pages of this Journal. According to this author, three impedimentary causes present themselves—‘the nature of the soil, the cost of labour, and the character of the climate.’

The soil [he says] consists of a black friable peat, in some places deep, in others shallow. Under a hot sun it becomes dry, but during the winter, and indeed for the greater part of the year, it is soft and watery. Bogs are numerous, and springy places that are almost bogs. Labour must first be expended in clearing the surface of heather, whortleberries, and rough grass. Lime must then be carried up, and the cost of haulage equals the price of the material. When ploughed and laid down to grass, unless broken up from time to time, the ground will revert and yield nothing but rushes. Acres upon acres may be seen covered with rushes where land has been reclaimed, and has reverted to waste. The deer not only lie in the heather, but find abundant shelter in the copses which skirt the coombes. Of late years, owing to the protection afforded them, or rather to the freedom from molestation which they enjoy through the liberal and sportsman-like feeling of the west country farmers, who like to see them hunted legitimately, but not poached, the deer have notably increased in numbers. A few years ago, if seven or eight were killed in a season it was as much as was expected. Once eleven were killed, and it was thought that such a number would never be reached again; but in the season of 1881–82 no less than a hundred and one deer were killed, the slot of the hundredth being mounted in silver, and preserved at the huntsman’s house. He reckons that there are fifty stags in the district, and some two hundred and fifty deer of all sizes. But, besides these, there must be many more out lying in the broad tract of country they now roam over. They are no longer limited to the moors—they roam over a region of which Exmoor forms only a corner [...] With a pencil [...] draw a line on the map from Bridgewater to near Ilfracombe, from Ilfracombe down to Exeter, and again from Exeter up to Bridgewater, enclosing a triangle, each side of which on the map would be about fifty miles, but to ride twenty more, on account of the irregular ground. It is not to be supposed that every acre of this region is visited by the deer, but, either while wandering at will, or running before the hounds, it is crossed and re-crossed, and marked by their ‘slot’ or footprints. They have been killed at the very gate of Exeter city, and recently Tiverton has become a pivot of the hunt.

This country contains a large part of Somerset and Devon, Exmoor and part of Dartmoor, the Dunkery Hills, and the steep Quantocks, besides numerous minor ranges.

The moors of the Exe, the original home of the Deer, are but a corner. There are vast stretches of fertile land in the valleys and plains, cultivated to the highest degree, innumerable meadows, each with its thick hedges and trees; so that with the copses and covers they resemble woodlands. The triangle above described has within it not only moors and hills, but good farming land, a city, and many large towns. The paths of the deer wind round about the rich and enclosed districts, but if chased they frequently go straight across them.

So wide a space may more aptly be called a country than a district, and it is strictly correct to say that the Red-deer are now local. They are the Red-deer of the West of England.

The mode of hunting them as pursued in Devon and Somerset has been so well described by Collins in his *Chase of the Wild Red Deer*, published in 1862, that we need not dilate here upon it, or follow Mr. Jefferies over this portion of the subject, with which he is evidently less familiar. His description, however, of the habits of deer (either as observed by himself or gathered from the huntsman) is extremely interesting, and develops some characteristic traits which would have escaped an ordinary observer.

Stags [he says] carry their necks perpendicular; hinds hold them aslant. In jumping the walls of the country, made of loose flat stones, the stags leap to the top, which is always broad, and then down the other side; hinds regularly climb them, getting their fore feet on the top of the wall, and digging their hind hoofs into the earth and loose stone, and making a sort of step.

The stag drops his antlers in March; but few of these cast horns are found compared to the number that must be shed, and those that are found are more often single horns than pairs. Certainly the extent of the woods is very great, but they are traversed by gamekeepers and others; the moors are crossed by shepherds; and all keep a sharp look-out for horns, which are valuable.

Mr. Jefferies thinks it possible that the stag may drag brambles or branches over the dropped antlers if they chance to grow at hand, but he makes no allusion to the well-known fact that a great many of shed antlers are devoured by the deer themselves, which have been often disturbed while in the act of gnawing them. In the West of England, he tells us that

a good pair of antlers will fetch £5, and as much as £10 has been given for a pair with a remarkable number of points. These prices show that it is not so easy to find a pair of dropped antlers as might be imagined. Many of the horns sold are odd antlers dropped by different stags; these are fitted together, and generally to a hind's head. The stag's head is generally claimed by the master of the hounds, consequently few genuine heads of the red stag come into the market. The weight of the stag varies: twelve score is a good weight; some are not more than nine, but the huntsman has killed at fourteen score or 280 pounds.

On the subject of the food of Red-deer Mr. Jefferies has much to tell us.

They will have the best of everything and roaming about at night select the meadow with the most succulent grass. They enter orchards, too, in spring, for the long grass that grows between the apple-trees, and again in autumn for the apples, of which they are very fond. Turnips are a favourite food, and leaving the moors they wander miles down into the cultivated fields to find them. The stag, as he walks across the turnip-field, bites a turnip, draws it from the ground, throws it over his shoulders, the jerk detaching the fragment he holds between his teeth, and which is the only portion he touches. He takes but one bite at each turnip, casting the remainder aside in this way, and his course can

be traced from one side of the field to the other by the turnips pulled and thrown away after his snatch. In this disdainful manner he damages far more than he actually eats. Hinds eat the turnip down to the ground as a sheep would.

A herd of stags getting into a turnip-field will eat broad patches and paths about it. In a small field they may destroy every root. Potatoes they are very fond of, and get at them by sweeping away the earth with their fore feet. Carrots, too, attract them, and cabbages. They will strip a garden of cabbages in no time as clean as possible. But perhaps the greatest injury is done to wheat. Deer visit the wheat-fields at two seasons. They come as soon as the green leaf shoots up, and nibble it, and are especially fond of it just before the ear appears, when it is full of succulent juice. They return again when the ears are ripe, and lying down in the daytime, when the wheat at its height conceals them, they will eat and destroy many pounds-worth of grain before they are discovered and driven away.

The damage they do to crops is so extensive that without the goodwill of the farmers, stag-hunting could not last a single season. Nothing could demonstrate more thoroughly the enthusiasm which hunting the Red-deer inspires in those who follow it than the fact that the farmers over such an immense breadth of country should unanimously agree to endure these losses. Compensation is of course paid, but even compensation may fail to recoup. Unhesitating goodwill alone can explain the continuance of stag-hunting under such circumstances. Only the noblest sport of all—the chase of the wild Red-deer—could excite a whole country to such generous enthusiasm.

Those who are unacquainted with this part of the West of England would do well to obtain and read Mr. Jefferies' book, from which we have quoted. His vivid description of the appearance and habits of the Red-deer as studied in its last English haunt, with all the natural surroundings which go to charm the eye of an observer, cannot fail to interest even those who do not profess to be naturalists.

Richard Jefferies' Somerset Venture

Phyllis Treitel

The following is drawn from a transcript for a talk by Phyllis Treitel, dated October 1994. The Lecture was given to the Richard Jefferies Society and took place on 13 February 1995 at the Arts Centre, Swindon. The talk included readings, maps and photographs that were not detailed in the typescript.

Red Deer, 'Summer in Somerset', 'The Otter in Somerset', 'The Water Colley', and 'By the Exe' are the five pieces of work that resulted from Richard Jefferies' visit to Somerset. The year was 1883; in 1882 Jefferies had had four expensive operations and had not been able to make much money. He had moved from Surbiton to Lorna Road, Brighton. By 1883, he felt much better and on 15 May (NB XI f.31) had finished the MS of *The Story of My Heart*. On 28 May he posted off the MS to Chatto and Windus, hoping they would publish it. Then he set off for Somerset. On the 15th June returned to Brighton (NB XI f.58). So, between 28 May and 15 June, a maximum of 19 days, he was away in Somerset, leaving Jessie at home with Harold and Phyllis, and expecting the new baby. *Red Deer* was finished by 29 July (NB XI f.58). 'Summer in Somerset' was written, but not published, by September. August and September saw the publication of the other three essays.

There were three men, Comyns Carr, J.W. North, and C.P. Scott, who made this enterprise possible, and who went on to be true friends to Jefferies for the four remaining years of his life. Also, I want to put you, as it were, in a silent helicopter—Jefferies' words are 'drifted like a leaf'—and take you swiftly over the places he went to, to give you some idea of how he might have managed to cover so much in such a short time.

Joseph Comyns Carr, to whom Jefferies gave a copy of *Red Deer*, refers briefly to Jefferies in his own autobiographical book *Some Eminent Victorians*, 1908. He had the sort of successful career in journalism and art that Jefferies might have aspired to in the mid-1870s. Carr was born in 1849 (a few months younger than Jefferies) seventh of ten children, and half Irish. After he left school at sixteen, his father put him in the Stock Exchange but he did not like that and left to read for the Bar. As a barrister he soon found that he could earn more money by writing articles than by appearing in court. In 1873 he fell in love and, on the strength of being made art critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette* he was able to marry. He went on to be the dramatic critic and art critic of various papers, a director of the Grosvenor Gallery, a co-founder of the New Gallery, and Editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*. He was a witty, energetic, popular man, much in demand,

apparently, as an after-dinner speaker. He does not say when he first met Jefferies but it would most probably have been when both of them were writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Carr as art critic and Jefferies as an expert on rural matters.

In 1883, Macmillans decided to launch a new illustrated magazine, *The English Illustrated Magazine* and they made Comyns Carr its editor. One of their schemes was to include in each issue a well-written account of a county, or a particular area, in the British isles, complete with black and white illustrations. For example they did Bath, Cornwall, The Fens, The Lake District, and so on. So Carr had to find someone to write about Somerset and an artist to illustrate it. Probably Carr already knew Jefferies and we know he knew North because he refers to him as 'my friend' in his book, and both of them were friends and admirers of Fred Walker, another painter who died young. North was a painter and illustrator of books and Carr was an art critic so a friendship between them would not be surprising.

North had been living in Somerset since 1865, if not earlier, and his detailed knowledge of the Quantocks, and other parts of the county of Somerset, would have made Carr choose him. Jefferies, of course, did not know Somerset but he had already described Wiltshire, Surrey and Sussex, and North could show him around. Whether this was how it came about is supposition, but Jefferies wrote the text of 'Summer in Somerset' and North did the line drawings.

There is no evidence that North and Jefferies knew each other before the Somerset venture. They might have met in the offices of a London publisher. Jefferies' friends tended to be much older than him. Carr was a year younger, North was six years older, while Scott was just two years older. Nor was North born into the purple, indeed he not only had to support himself, but he supported his father and mother, and paid for one brother's education, and paid the heavy medical expenses of another brother.

There are two or three books about Comyns Carr but there is no book about North. We know a fair amount about him though because he befriended Fred Walker, who was born in 1840 and died of TB in 1875. North, as a bachelor, lodged with a widow, a Mrs. Hannah Thorne, and in 1868 Walker joined North when Mrs. Thorne was the tenant of Higher Halsway Farm very close to a great old house usually referred to as Halsway Court of which she also had charge. Both North and Walker painted this picturesque house which is still standing, though much restored.



Halsway Court by J.W. North



'The Old Gate', oil painting by Fred Walker

When Mrs. Thorne was asked to leave, she rented another large manor house, this time in Woolston, 2 or 3 miles from Halsway (now called Woolston Grange and also much altered) and North and Walker followed her there. After Walker's death in 1875, his brother-in-law used his letters as the basis of a biography and this is how we come to know so much about North's habits. The 1881 census put Mrs. Thorne at Bicknoller, so, unless Mrs. Thorne had moved again by 1883, this must be where Jefferies stayed when he came to join North. Mrs. Thorne is said to have occupied part of Lock's Farm, later called Lock's House.

Charles Prestwich Scott born in 1846 was aged only 26 when he became Editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1872 and remained editor until 1929. *The Dictionary of National Biography* says of him: 'He gave the paper serious standing as a critic of arts and letters and raised it to a leading place as a moral force in world politics.' No letters between Jefferies and Scott are known for the year 1883 so it is not known for certain how Jefferies came to contribute the two articles to the *Manchester Guardian*—'The Otter in Somerset' and 'The Water Colley'. It was, perhaps, through Joseph Comyns Carr. Carr was, by this time, art critic for the *Manchester Guardian* and possibly he negotiated some work for Jefferies with the paper. We do not know of any work by Jefferies earlier than this in the *Manchester Guardian*. Carr may also have been able to advance some of the fee, either for the *Guardian* work or the *English Illustrated Magazine* work towards Jefferies' expenses in Somerset. By February 1884, Jefferies and Scott are corresponding and Jefferies is sending more work.

For Jefferies, starting in Brighton, it meant a longish train journey to Somerset, probably via Taunton. The line from Taunton to Watchet in 1883 had stations at Crowcombe and Stogumber. We know, from the book about Walker, that North used these stations and Jefferies probably got off at Stogumber. From there it is only about 2 miles to Bicknoller. They may have walked, or taken a fly, or got a boy to carry the bag to Lock's farm. If Bicknoller then was anything like Bicknoller now, a pleasanter spot could not be imagined, and they would have had to pass through or near Vellow, which is where Curdon Farm lay—the one drawn by North as the last illustration to 'Summer in Somerset'.

Jefferies' visit probably began with North, using Bicknoller as a base. The places Jefferies mentions in the Quantocks are all within a 4-mile radius of Bicknoller and though he does not even name Bicknoller, it can be recognised from his description.

The cross in the street is at Crowcombe, the cross in a churchyard, with a yew tree and stocks has been identified as at Bicknoller. North, who had painted in the area since 1865, knew exactly what was worth looking at, and

so Jefferies went, as he usually tells us, to Crowcombe, Stogumber, Holford Glen, Wills Neck (and maybe West Bagborough nearby), Woolston, Dunster, Selworthy, Holnicote, Watchet, and probably also Minehead. He must also have gone to Monksilver where Combe Sydenham is—the subject of ‘A Manor House in Deerland’.

Jefferies had nineteen days at most in Somerset and two of them would have been spent travelling there and back. In addition to exploring the Quantocks, he also spent time alone, apparently, looking for the deer, and he passed some days at Exford, where he learned all about the deer from the Heal family, fished, and travelled about again. The dates 6th and 7th June appear in his notebook XI with ‘deer’ against the 6th and ‘trout’ against the 7th; also the address of a hotel in Porlock.

So he arrived on 28 May, probably stayed in Bicknoller with North until 2 or 3 June, that is 6 clear days; then on 4 June he set off for Porlock and the region inland until 7 June when he moved to Exford. He might have stayed there until 12 or 13 June when he returned to Bicknoller to catch his train on the 15th. This is a rough timetable.

When he left Bicknoller he went farther west, in fact right to the Somerset and Devon border which curves in, near the coast, to allocate Lynton and Lynmouth to Devon. It was too far to walk so he may have used a driver with a horse and trap as he refers in ‘Summer in Somerset’ to someone driving away ‘in reckless Somerset style’ (p.38). Here, he was studying not the recognised beauty spots but the deer, their habits, and their favourite country. His notebook for this time mentions a hotel in Porlock, which he might have stayed at, and it also mentions Nicolas Snow of Oare. Snow was a famous and well-loved man of those parts with his own pack of hounds, though he was chiefly interested in fox-hunting. Jefferies’ notebook makes specific reference to Oareford, Mill Hill, and Weir Water. He must have walked here to find deer. Then he encounters Badgworthy Water which forms the county boundary. It gathers up the small streams trickling down the combes, then flows down to join Oare Water at Malmsmead where the two streams join to form the East Lynn river and continue through Brendon to Lynmouth. Jefferies was not seeking out beauty spots here but deer, but Weir Water, Badgworthy Water and Oareford are just about as beautiful now as they could possibly be (see Chapter II of *Red Deer*). In Chapter III Jefferies is on Cloutsham Ball and is gazing on the wild expanses of Dunkery Beacon. Then he goes on to Horner, Horner Wood, Cloutsham village, and finally Sweetry (actually Sweetworthy just as Badgworthy is pronounced Badgery). It is the descriptions of the deer country that Jefferies’ book excels. He did not, in fact, see any deer hunting as no deer, stag or hind, is hunted in June, but the special appeal of the country itself he has caught most faithfully.

We now reach the third part of the tour covering perhaps 7 June to 12 June—6 days all told, and this time he is in Exford, and the country nearby. We have to guess the dates but we know for certain that he was here because he corresponded with one of his hosts. It is likely that on seeing the Quantocks, and talked with the local people, that he discovered how important the deer were. He could see scope for something bigger than an article and decided to write a book and needed guidance. This guidance came from Arthur Heal and his son Fred Heal. Jefferies wrote to Fred on 5 August, after he got back, sending him a book and referring to Arthur and also to Sovereign—one of the best hounds. Jefferies went to Arthur Heal for information because Arthur, from 1871 to 1889 was the Huntsman of the Devon and Somerset staghounds, that is he was a paid servant of the Hunt and had to deal with the hounds, the helpers in the form of harbourers and tufters, and had to lead the way when the Hunt was out. By 1883 he was a legend, never known as Arthur Heal but always, and to everyone, high and low, as Arthur. The kennels were at Exford, then as now a welcoming place on the river Exe, with two hotels. Heal lived at and farmed North Ley Farm just a little farther out of Exford than the kennels, which were near the bridge. [North has drawn Exford from the bridge and much the same view can be seen today except that the church is hidden by trees and there is a garage on the right.] Arthur's son Fred lived with his parents but had his own farm.

Victor Bonham-Carter feels sure that Jefferies actually stayed with the Heals. They were certainly hospitable but it is also just possible that Jefferies stayed at the White Horse. We do not know where but somewhere or other he sat at table and talked to farmers. Although he wrote in his notebook the name of the great rescuer of Exmoor—Sir Frederic Knight MP of Simonsbath—there is no evidence that he met him, nor indeed that he went as far as Simonsbath, but someone must have brought Jefferies and the Heals together. I do not think Jefferies could just have turned up at their door and said 'Tell me all about deer hunting.' Arthur was much too important to be treated like that. A name that appears twice in Jefferies' notebook for this time is that of Mordant Fenwick Bisset M.P. He lived at West Bagborough which is near Wills Neck and is about 5 miles from Bicknoller. Fenwick Bisset, like Arthur Heal, was a legend in his day and for many a day thereafter. He had started up the pack of staghounds years before, and as Master of the Devon and Somerset Stagounds from 1855 to 1881 had, virtually single-handed, raised the Hunt from nothing to something so celebrated that in 1879 the Prince of Wales had come down and hunted with them. I do not see how Jefferies, unknown and from afar, not even a hunting man, can have got so close to the Heals except by the intervention of someone like Fenwick Bisset.

By the time Jefferies got to the Heals at Exford, perhaps a book about deer was on his mind. In his letter to Jefferies, thanking him for the copy of *Red Deer* (16 Jan 1884), Fred Heal said: 'had I known your intentions of doing anything of that sort when you was at Exford I should have taken more pains'. However, Jefferies didn't go to Exmoor in order to write such a book. Had he meant to do that he would have chosen a different time when deer were being hunted.

Judging by his letter to Fred Heal of August 1883, the two of them did some trout fishing. If we add this knowledge to the lengthy and evocative account of the river Barle in the essays, we may conclude that most of the fishing was done in the Barle, though it is the Exe that flows through Exford. The Barle flows near Simonsbath and is seen again in quieter mood at Withypool. Jefferies describes it as it runs past Tarr Steps, as Sir Antony Clare Lees so beautifully shows in his photograph in *The Wessex Landscape of Richard Jefferies*. Perhaps the two young men went to fish at Withypool—it is only a few miles from Exford—and then went on a little way to see the famous stepping stones. Jefferies also mentions Dulverton, and as this is in the same area, and marks the point where the Exe and the Barle join, Heal may have taken Jefferies here too. There is no way of knowing, but it is good to think of Jefferies enjoying his tea with blueberry jam and cream.

After this, his head teeming with information about the deer and his inner eye replete with sights of great beauty, his heart warmed by the kind ways of the people, Jefferies turned back towards Bicknoller, and his host Mr. North. At least in 'Summer in Somerset' he says 'From the Devon border I drifted like a leaf detached from a tree across to a deep combe in the Quantock Hills.' This may be poetic licence, perhaps he went straight home from Dulverton, but it really makes no difference. We can look at the map of north Somerset (for he really only went to the Quantocks and Exmoor) and see the ground he covered, from east to west is only 20 miles, and from north to south only a little more than 10. Home he goes to write the long article for the *English Illustrated Magazine*, the two short articles for the *Manchester Guardian*, and an extra one for the *Standard*. But what he most wants to do is to write his book about the deer he loved so much.

The three shorter articles appeared almost immediately, and the book was written by 15 July and published in January 1884. The only mystery is what happened to 'Summer in Somerset'. It was not published until just after Jefferies' death and it has long been assumed that Jefferies did not write it until quite late. But this is not the case. It was written by September 1883 and was in Comyns Carr's hands. Why did it not appear? My first guess is that Jefferies was paid for it. My second guess is that it was not quite good enough for Macmillans. It was not the plain topographical description they wanted;

it dealt only with part of Somerset; and some of it is frankly padding. My other guess is that the illustrations were not all ready and some of them, when they were ready—not good enough. I hope this does not sound cruel. In the 1860s North had done black and white illustrations of great beauty. He was not good at drawing people but he was wonderful at outdoor compositions. I expect Comyns Carr wanted six or eight of these for his magazine. But they take a long time to do and though Macmillans were paying well for this work, North probably did not want it any more. If we look at his work at this time we see that he was exhibiting water colours at the Old Water Colour Society. He was also exhibiting at the Grosvenor Gallery and the Royal Academy (oils or water colours) and these almost certainly paid better than illustrations.[see ‘Sir Bevis and the Wood Woman’, 1888] If we add the fact that North was about to get married—at the ripe old age of 42—we can see why he may have been half-hearted about the illustrations for this article. Compared with his best work this is sketchy. The Stogumber Mill and Holford Glen pictures are pleasant but the rest really add little to the text. My own view is that Comyns Carr was disappointed. By 1887 he perhaps felt he should publish.

A little more about the three friends: Comyns Carr published two of his essays in the *English Illustrated Magazine*—‘St Guido’ and ‘Walks in the Wheatfields’ and he twice tried to persuade Macmillans to take books by Jefferies—once in October 1884 with *After London*, and later in October 1886 with *Amaryllis at the Fair*.

The Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C.P. Scott published several articles by Jefferies after the Somerset ones but he did much more. Much, but not all, of the correspondence between Scott and Jefferies still exists and more of it is referred to by Walter Besant; this shows that Scott went out of his way, at times when he was very much occupied with his own affairs, to help Jefferies with sympathy, encouragement, advice, visits, a seaside holiday, and finally with straight gifts of cash disguised as loans. It is difficult to add to Scott’s great reputation but the story of his dealings with Jefferies certainly does add to it.

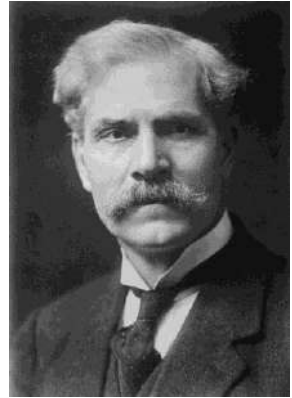
North, too, went on holding out the hand of friendship and though we have only one letter from him to Jefferies there is other evidence that North visited in person at times when it can have been no pleasure to him at all. He paid one visit to Goring which he describes, in his next visit he is too late, and Richard Jefferies is dead. At this point he discovers just how poorly placed Jessie and the two children are and he sets about raising money for a fund which will support them, his words—so eloquent that no one tried to improve on them—were published and a great deal of money was raised.

Introduction to 'Saint Guido'

J. Ramsay MacDonald

This introduction to Richard Jefferies' 'Saint Guido' was published in 1908 by the Independent Labour Party in their booklet, priced at 3d. By that time Ramsay MacDonald (1866–1937) was an MP. There is an acknowledgement that the article is 'reprinted by permission of Messrs. Chatto and Windus from *The Open Air*.'

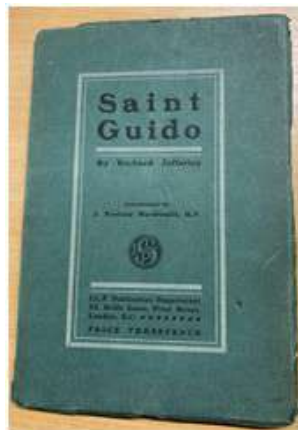
Richard Jefferies was born on the 6th November, 1848, at the farm of Choate [*sic*], in Wiltshire. As a youth he was what men call lazy and slovenly. Although he had as an inheritance from his yeomen ancestry—a craving to get on in the world—he was so constituted that he could not bend his neck to the yoke of drudgery which they who tread the beaten paths of success have to endure. When the busy world was sweating over its labours, Jefferies was 'moonin' on the downs and acquiring that intimate knowledge of nature and her ways which, then all unknown to himself, was to be his pathway to fame.



His literary genius, pushing itself up through the entanglements of his farmer notions of success expressed itself first of all in stories which lamentably failed either to catch the spirit or the method of romance. But a casual letter in 1872—followed by two others—to *The Times* on the Wiltshire labourer as seen through his Tory eyes, gave his genius the first real peep of the work it could do; whilst his removal to Surbiton in 1877, brought him into contact with the struggling, striving and suffering crowd of humanity, and this enriched and deepened the tones and colours of his nature pictures. He burst the bonds of his youthful desire to possess the badges of success which the vulgar value more than they do the reality, and he came to experience that 'exceeding plenty,' that liberty and that dignity, which a man knows so soon as he discovers what is the work which he can best do, and begins to do it. This evolution of the genius of Jefferies is told with affectionate fidelity by Mr. Salt in his various books, and by Jefferies himself in that haunting introspective autobiography in which the march of outward event is as nothing compared with the evolution of inward mood and inspiration—*The Story of My Heart*. Illness overtook him, and penury is the chosen companion of most men in sickness. Through poverty and pain he

went up to immortality. Frail in body and harassed in mind was he who wrote so delightfully of the sun on the downs, of the yellowing wheat, of the wind on the grass, and who awoke anew in the hearts of many the desire to be out in the fields and to live in robustly happy and healthy communion with Nature.

The shadow upon Nature of pain and death, which runs through *The Story of My Heart* like a mournful bar of bass notes recurring through a symphony, lies with the greatest darkness upon humanity. Jefferies brooded under it. It shut out the sun very often from his heart. How little did those who discussed after his death whether Jefferies had any social theories, understand the man. The spirit of Markham's poem 'The Man with the Hoe' and Millet's picture of the 'Gleaners,' is as essentially a part of Jefferies' inspiration as the summer sunshine. There can be no doubt of this after one has read 'St. Guido.' In this auto-biographical vignette—for St. Guido is truly Jefferies himself as Bevis was—Jefferies combines that slumberous joyfulness of the sun and the wind, and that awe for the long long life of nature and its majestically slow progression through centuries and ages, with the crushing sadness of the figure of labour toiling with a kind of bewitched ineffectiveness for a daily crust of bread. In 'Saint Guido,' we have *The Story of My Heart* in epitome, with the human note struck with particular firmness. 'Of course we know,' say the Wheat, 'that the greatest part of your people cannot help themselves and must labour on like the reapers till their ears are full of the dust of age. That only makes us more sorrowful and anxious that things should be different.' Sir Walter Besant wrote that Jefferies would never have been a Socialist, 'but he sympathised with that part of Socialism which claims for every man the full profit of the labour of his hands.' Futile is it, and it almost jars upon one's sense of decency, for the living to claim a knowledge of what the dead would have done under this circumstance and that. But of Richard Jefferies we may justly say that the tragedy of toil—its needlessness as well as its injustice—was pressing itself more and more upon his thoughts, and that he was thinking of it apart from its poetical value in the field during springtime and harvest. Death came to him when he had only seen thirty-seven summers, and this part of his mental evolution was but begun. How it would have ended no one can say. Readers of 'St. Guido' may form their own opinions.



More than a Remembered Moment

Ronald (Ron) Richard Cretchley

Of the more than remembered moment
Tormented and dying, Richard Jefferies wrote:
'No one else seems to have seen the sparkle on the brook,
Or heard the music at the hatch,
Or to have felt back through the centuries.
No one seems to understand
How I got food from the clouds,
Nor what there was in the night.'

And still some say:
'I do not understand.'

One by one we go;
And who can tell or ever know
Whether the mounted moment rides away for ever more,
Or still is stored in heat of breath
Living in the love-sight statuesque?

A time sets:
The fluid of the trivial norm is crystalized;
Something substantial is formed.
Such is the essence of time:
A meeting unsought;
Feelings unthought;
Sweet embrace;
A closeness face-to-face.

As when contiguous sight and sound
Nurtured by some mischievous breeze
Ruffles the water's face
To make our love-sight freeze.

Or sometimes,
After long and somnolent thought
Something stuns us with the truth
We long had sought.

Or when alone
On a hill at night
Wondering at the morning star,
Growing sun-strength dims the pin-prick light.

And so in due gestation time
Which none can know or say,
A more than remembered moment
Like a babe is born
Beside a sun-flecked brook,
Reading time's old book,
In slow processing clouds,
In night's dark ingle-nook.

8 October 1996

On Reading Richard Jefferies in the Open

Gladys Marshall Stevenson

Published in *The Book News Monthly* May 1910, published by John Wanamaker, Philadelphia, which ran from 1882 to 1918. Nothing is known about the writer of the poem.

ON READING RICHARD JEFFERIES IN THE OPEN

OH, thou, the lover of fair fields,
And purpling sunset's pageant long,
We delved anew in thy rich yields,
And drew fresh pleasure from thy song:
Most strangely helpful in this way,
Not only rest from restless men,
And peace and quiet were found today,
But strength renewed to brave the din,
The noise of crowds, the dizzy throng,
Which for the moment pushed aside,
Yet ever must return anon,
And strain new patience in their tide.

Preacher Praise

Frank William Boreham

Frank W. Boreham (1871–1959) was a Baptist minister and journalist with an immense following in the first half of the twentieth century. He was a columnist for the *Hobart Mercury* from 1921 until he died and published more than forty-five books, which the Banner of Truth Trust estimated to have sold twenty million copies, and rated Boreham as one of the twenty greatest preachers. Boreham was awarded an OBE in 1954 for services to Preaching and Literature.

Frank William Boreham was born in Tunbridge Wells and after graduation from Charles Spurgeon's Pastor's College in 1895 accepted a ministry in New Zealand, later moving to Tasmania. One of his main themes was 'Reverence for Life' in which he explored the relationship between science and religion.

The following extract appears in his book of sermons and essays *The Nest of Spears* (London: Epworth Press, 1927). There are references to Jefferies in some of his other books.



Frank W. Boreham

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I am very fond of Richard Jefferies. My old friend J.J. Doke who laid down his life pioneering in Rhodesia, once advised me to sell the clothes from my back, if need be, in order to possess myself of *Field and Hedgerow* and the other treasures that our great naturalist has left us. My only sorrow, as I have read these classics of the countryside, has been that Jefferies hated Churches and ministers. He turned his back on a Church whenever he caught sight of it, and loved to look out upon the sea because there, he said, he could be sure

that the horizon would be disfigured by no steeple. Yet even Jefferies found it impossible to withhold his admiration from the local preacher. In his *Wild Life in a Southern County*, he describes the varied phenomena of a Sussex hamlet. And how can he honestly portray the moving panorama of village life without making some reference to the cottage meeting? He pictures the quaint little room—its old-fashioned furniture and odd assortment of books. There is a Bible among them. Hardly a cottager, Jefferies says, is without his Bible. And no man can interpret that cottage Bible like the local preacher:

The good man has been labouring in the hayfield from dawn till dusk; but at night he faces without any sign of weariness the devout folk who gather to hear him. He open the Bible, and, though he can but slowly wade through the book, letter by letter, word by word, he has caught the manner of the ancient writer and expresses himself in archaic style not without its effect. There is no mistaking the thorough earnestness of this cottage preacher; he believes what he says; no persuasion, rhetoric, or force could move him one jot. Men of this kind won Cromwell's victories, but to-day they are mainly conspicuous for upright and irreproachable moral character, mingled with some surly independence; such men are not paid, trained or organised; they labour from good will in the cause.

Thus Richard Jefferies, scorning the Churches, doffs his cap to the local preacher. I range myself, bare-headed, beside him, and am grateful to have found another point of kinship with a teacher to whom I owe so much.

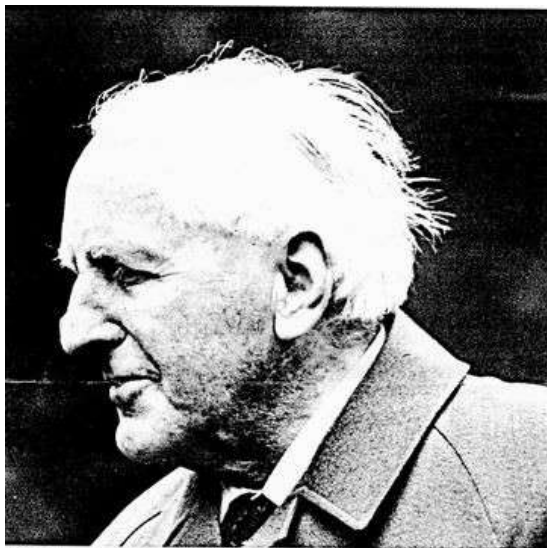


Rev. John Joseph Doke  
1861–1913

# The Betterment of Hodge

*Cyril Wright*

This is the text of a talk on *Hodge and His Masters* given by Cyril F. Wright to the Richard Jefferies Society at the Wyvern Arts Centre, Swindon, on Monday 4 February 1980—the centenary year for the publication of Richard Jefferies' book published by Smith, Elder in 1880. Cyril (1909–1995) was a mainstay of the Society from at least 1964 until his death in 1995.



From 7s. a week wages in 1880 to perhaps a £100 a week in the next round of pay negotiations seems an incredible advance for Hodge in a hundred years. When he wrote *Hodge and His Masters* Richard Jefferies could never have envisaged it, nor the circumstances that have brought it about. The general impression of the agricultural labourer to which Jefferies subscribed was that he was 'slow, solid, sure and stupid,' but that if he had enough enterprise to step out of the lazy inclinations of his class, find himself a thrifty, tidy, industrious wife, and get the utmost yield from his cottage garden, he might manage quite well on the ordinary agricultural wage of the district. And in those days wages varied in different parts of the country, being higher in the north, especially in the proximity of industrial cities where the wages were competitive.

*Hodge and His Masters* was written in weekly instalments for a London paper, *The Standard*, at the onset of the farming depression of the 70's and 80's.

The importation of foreign wheat and chilled meat were the main factors, and things were made worse by an unprecedented succession of cold winters and springs, and wet summers. A few statistics:<sup>1</sup>

1875 First shipment of grain from U.S.A. and first shipment of chilled beef.

1878/9 One of the coldest winters of the century. Jefferies refers to the severe conditions in several of his books.

1879. Very wet summer—many farmers ruined. Stormy winter. In Dec. the Tay Railway Bridge disaster. Price of wheat 43/10d quarter. (in 1854 it had stood at 74/8d quarter.

1880 A good year for weather.

1881 Worst snowstorm of the century. 17 deaths in Berks and Wilts alone.

According to an article in the *Evening Advertiser* 20 people died in the snow within a 20-mile radius of Swindon. 'George Cook, a farm labourer of Walcot Farm drove horse and cart into a drift by Swindon Parish Church. Dug out of snow to his chin, he set off to tell his master, and was found three days later in a ditch 200 yards short of Walcot farmhouse.'<sup>2</sup>

1882/3 Unsettled weather prevailed.

1889 Wheat fell to 29/9d quarter.

During this period, Hodge's wages were hardly likely to rise, though he and his family did benefit from the very thing that was hitting the farmer, the cheap price of imported food. Indeed up to World War One, the average hourly rate of pay was only 3½d for a 58-hour week, and that was not much more than the 3d hour for which the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was agitating in 1872.

The upturn was slow. Between 1941 and 1948. I was doing casual farmwork for around 2/6d an hour; and by 1966 the basic agricultural wage was only 4/8½d an hour or £10.7.11½d for a 44-hr. week.

Wages were lower in winter than in summer. 'A labourer who has any prudence,' Jefferies writes, 'can in fact do very well by putting by a portion of his extra summer wages for the winter. He cannot expect the farmer (or any manufacturer) to pay the same price for a little work and short time, as for much work and long hours.' This may be sound economics, but out of step with the Christian teaching, that regardless of the number of hours he has

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<sup>1</sup> *Agricultural Records A.D. 220–1977*. J.M. Shatton (John Baker). Also consulted, *Agricultural and Rural Society in Britain 1846–1914*, Trevor May (Pamphlet) Museum of English Rural Life, Reading.

<sup>2</sup> 'Tragic Tale of 1881 Blizzard,' *Evening Advertiser*, Swindon.

been called upon to work, the labourer is worthy of his hire. In any case, there was not much left over to put in the Bank, though £20 saved would be of the utmost value to an aged agricultural labourer.

In *Hodge* we are left in no doubt that Jefferies was not enamoured of what he termed Union agitators. The original Cottage Charter he thought reasonable as it had come directly from the labourers themselves. (Read pp. 262-3<sup>3</sup>)

The new Charter however was brought to the cottage door from a distance, thought up by trouble-makers, and in Jefferies' view, smacking of communism. (Read pp.263)

With a Tory readership, Jefferies for all his basic sympathies with the underdog, was not likely to favour these expectations. I think though that today he would applaud the agricultural labourer's record of patiently and persistently exercising the rights won for him by his Union since the days of Joseph Arch, without much recourse to the use of the strike weapon. Indeed it seems to have been Hodge's masters, the farmers, who have demonstrated their grievances far more than their employees.

The close working relationship between Hodge and his masters, the farmers, made striking a personal conflict, which few labourers relished. 'But the kindly old habits are dying out,' reports Jefferies, 'before the hard and fast money system, and the abiding effects of Unionism. At one time it was common for a labourer to have the freedom of the farmhouse kitchen, and on Sundays, a free breakfast.' Even up to the last war, regular and part-time workers, the farmer, and his wife sat down to meals together.

The first 19 chapters of the book, about two thirds of the text, mainly consists of brilliant pen-pictures of those elevated persons to whom Hodge touched his well-worn cap, and upon whom he relied for his livelihood, his patronage, his education, his punishment for wrong-doing, his assurance of a mug of soup and a hard bed at the end, and his final passport to heaven. The later chapters are more concerned with Hodge, his wife and children.

Prof. Keith, whose Introduction and Notes to this book<sup>4</sup> are most detailed and valuable, does not agree with Henry Williamson's arbitrary re-arrangement of the chapters in his two editions of *Hodge*... Though I think Williamson was taking liberties, I am inclined to feel he had a point in mixing them up in a way that showed the inter-relationship of the characters, and their lives.

I don't intend in this talk to dwell on Squire Filbard; Harry Hodson, the farming genius; Cecil the ambitious young farmer; Philip the bicycle farmer,

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<sup>3</sup> Page reference for readings are from the Quartet paperback Edition (1979) of *Hodge and His Masters*.

<sup>4</sup> Introduction and notes to *Hodge and His Masters* by Prof. W.J. Keith, January 1979.

a product of the Agricultural College; or Mrs. — the fine lady farmer, whom Williamson in his 1957 edition, gives the name of Mrs. Thomson-Brown, though for no apparent reason. Nor shall I linger over the parson's wife, or the slightly ridiculous Country Curate; the Solicitor, or the hard-working newspaper editor, except so far as Hodge's life was affected by them.

Here they all are in this rich gallery of endearing portraits of real-life people, each of whom we remember, as Prof. Keith says, as we remember a character in fiction. Indeed *Hodge...* is full of delightful short stories, which a more natural writer of fiction might have filled out into half-a-dozen novels. Be that as it may, Jefferies can never be accused of not giving value for money.

As Andrew Rossabi points out in his Introduction to the Quartet Paperback, and John Pearson in *Landscape and Labour*, the twenty years when Jefferies was writing, was a most significant period in the history of rural life, and *Hodge...* is full of reminders of the great changes that were taking place. Though it cannot be regarded as an authentic textbook, and is therefore rarely quoted in modern works of reference, there are plenty of statistics available for those years, and since then, to substantiate his statements.

The very covers of the First Edition of 1880; illustrate these changes; Vol 1 bearing a gold-stamped design of a ploughman with horses, while the covers of Vol 2 show a steam-plough. Horses were still in common use on farms up to the end of WW2, the universal use of tractors being delayed by petrol-rationing and low output. But by 1965 there were only 19,000 horses on farms, compared to 413,000 tractors, with the driver enclosed on all sides from the weather. I hear now that horses are making a come-back, as the result of high fuel prices. Has the wheel gone full circle?

The steam plough, though cumbersome and dilatory, requiring the transport of coal and water over considerable distances to fuel the twin engines that hauled the ploughing tackle across the fields, revolutionised farming, just as the tractor and the combine-harvester were to do in the middle of our century. Labour-saving machinery—mowers, seed-drills, muck-spreaders, threshing-machines, the steam-plough—was viewed with alarm and hostility by the labourers whose skills with horses and hand processes, and their very livelihoods, were threatened.

From 1851, when 1½ million were employed on the land in the East and West, the rural exodus to the cities had reduced the number to just over a million. Two million acres of arable land were turned over to grass between 1881 and 1901, losing Hodge 60,000 to 80,000 jobs. Some of the workers found more remunerative and promising employment in the towns; others emigrated to Australia, Canada, New Zealand. No doubt many of the friendly New Zealanders whom we met on our recent holiday could trace their

descent from those forced away from the green fields of England by the great depression.

For those who remained, life was hard. Education was coming into the countryside following the Act of 1870, requiring all children to attend school. Jefferies describes the new schools that were opening in the larger villages, which if they did not spell betterment for Hodge at least promised something better for his children. There were some disadvantages in the idea of compulsory education; for one thing 13 and 14-year-old girls were no longer available to look after the very young children while mother went out to do some work, thus stopping a valuable source of income. Unless special provisions were made, children had to truant if they were to engage in such seasonal operations as potato-picking. I have a copy of the Log Book of Haydon Wick School, and there are many entries of such truancies. As late as 1948, I can recall that children were given leave of absence to do such work, the result of friendly relationships with local farmers.

Jefferies is unsympathetic towards the parents who grumbled at having to pay a few pence for their children's schooling, considering they'd been worse off if called upon to pay a heavy rate. It is interesting that precisely at the time that Jefferies was writing *Hodge...* a new school, with a school-house, was erected on land provided by the Earl of Egmont, facing Richard Jefferies' house in Ewell Road, Surbiton, and no doubt to some extent spoiling his view of the fields. It is now closed.

One can reflect today on the wholesale closing down of small village schools, and wonder if it is for the betterment of village children. Also lest we think the farm worker is asking for too much money, we have to remember among other things, the increased cost of school meals, transport and school extras. Nevertheless there is today no country child who does not have the advantages of a Comprehensive education, a great improvement on having to enter a tough world straight from Standard 7 at the age of 14.

The labourer's children are the subject of objective study in Chapter XXII. There is something Dickensian in Jefferies' description of the 4-year-old toddler fending for himself around the farmyard, having been dressed by his mother on a cold morning, and sent out of doors, in hand-down clothes too big for him, with iron-bound boots and naked legs, cheeks plump and firm, round blue eyes bright, hair almost white like bleached straw. He has been making himself happy in the dirt, as a boy should if he is a boy. It is not the nasty unctuous filth of city courts and back lanes. Remembering what Jefferies says about bad sanitation and ventilation, and high infant mortality, Jefferies' acceptance of clean dirt, may sound a bit inconsistent and certainly does not chime with modern ideas about hygiene.

Perhaps the most appealing Chapter, in *Hodge...*, is No. XXI 'A Winter's Morning'. It has all the clarity and vividness of an oil-painting. The fogger

(fodderer) rising with the waning moon, and dressing without the expense of a candle, going out into the frost-covered world, and using the broad hay-knife, sharpened to a nice ty, to cut out a great cube of hay from the rick, and then filling the cribs. I have a fellow-feeling with the fogger. During the time that I worked on farms, I had to try to use the formidable hay-knife, with its cold, right-angled handle, and a very difficult job it is, especially when you are perched on a ladder, and your hands are frozen.

There are some equally realistic portraits of farm characters in this chapter. The milker with his three-legged stool; the carter taking out his loads of manure; the shepherd; the hedger, and the ditcher. Some of their work is straight-forward; some of it is hard and disagreeable. Nowadays the concentrates are dropped automatically into the feeding-troughs; the cows are milked by machinery; the hay is trussed in the fields; a tractor hauls the muck-spreader across the land; the ditch is gouged out by a mechanical digger, and the hedge is cut as straight as a ruler by an electric trimmer. Jefferies might conclude today that Hodge is spoon-fed and feather-bedded.

In the fashionable houses of mid- to late-Victorian England, fashionable young ladies and their Mamas were no doubt still sitting at their embroidery or improving the long dull hours with reading or games of patience. But for the girls from the cottages and small holdings, life was real enough. Better education, the spread of knowledge and ideas through newspapers and magazines; easier transport, the expectation of better money and prospects—all these led Jefferies to the opinion that the girls were acquiring ideas above their station. (Read pp.235–6) The women had a slog of perhaps 5 miles each way to and from the nearest town for shopping, calling in at the local pub for refreshment before hurrying home to prepare meals for their menfolk. The car and the bus have now shortened the travelling time, eased the legs, but increased the expenses. Again it seems that things have turned full circle—the family car has cut out the local bus service, and the price of petrol is reducing the usefulness of the car. So to what extent had Hodge's wife benefited?

As I have said, Jefferies gives good measure to his readers, and it is little surprise to me that people to whom I have introduced *Hodge*... in the new paperback edition, have found it fascinating. 'You needn't apologise for Jefferies,' someone said to me. 'We are enjoying it, and my husband can hardly put the book down.' Comparisons with life and conditions today come naturally—country eating and drinking habits; small-holdings and Land Settlement Schemes; the tied cottage; the use of country cottages as second homes for wealthy townies; country crafts; church-going are a few topics, that arouse discussion, and sometimes antagonism.

What has changed most in the last hundred years—the lives of the rural labourer, or those, of his masters? What are the essential differences

between the milker on his three-legged stool, his forehead pressed against the warm flank of the cow, out on the field or in the shed, and the qualified man who operates a whole range of machines from the feeding-hopper, to the delivery into the milk-tanker? Today's farmer has to fill in his forms, make his intricate calculations, with a whole army of advisers, and run his mechanised holding with the help of one highly-trained man; the gentry of the big house, though finding it hard to keep the place going, are still held in high regard; Agricultural Colleges still turn out well-qualified young farmers; solicitors still earn a respectable income by knowing more about the law than their clients; the country markets, fairs, and auctions still bring them all together.

There have been changes in agricultural methods; no doubt the micro-chip will enable more farm processes to be done at the press of a button, thus putting Hodge at a further disadvantage; fewer people live and work in the countryside; old customs and habits are getting forgotten. These trends were apparent even when Jefferies was engaged in writing *Hodge...* The wonder is that with so much inconceivable advance in science and technology since his day, farms, fields, cottages, villages, have not already disappeared beneath some great concrete and glass structures created by Aldous Huxley or H.G. Wells.

If Hodge, weary after a hard day's work in the fields, and drowsy from too many gulps of strong cider, had gone to sleep beneath a hedge in 1880, and not woken up again until this present year ... well, I must leave it to you to picture his impressions.

For all the surprises that would face him when he first made contact with a fellow human, or saw an aeroplane flying over his head, where he had never before seen anything larger than a bird, perhaps his natural surroundings wouldn't seem very different from this description with which I finish this talk, It is from Chapter XX—'Hodge's Fields,' which also reminds us that in none of his books did Jefferies fail to reveal his joy in the world of nature. (Read, pp.213–214).

# Reminiscences of Richard Jefferies

## By An Admirer

*Unsigned*

Peter Robins found this article by 'An Admirer' of Richard Jefferies in a magazine dated November 1905 and titled *The Young Man*, published by Horace Marshall and Son, London. It was a Christian monthly with a sister magazine—*The Young Woman*. The editor at that time was clergyman and novelist Frederick A. Atkins and the publication ran from 1887–1919.

The article is worthy of reprinting—it is previously unrecorded in bibliographies and, whilst much of the content is known, there are snippets of information that are new and of interest. But there are also some errors—the information was received third hand from a Jefferies' family member. The 'Admirer' was clearly not a Swindonian who knew the Coate area and s/he gives the impression that the Charles Whymper illustrations, taken from *The Gamekeeper at Home* (Smith, Elder & Co., 1880) included in the article, are drawn from life rather than the artist's imagination. For example, the illustration of the Keeper's cottage is nothing like the dear cottage we know so well at Hodson Bottom. Charlie Jefferies is the Admirer's likely source—Richard's younger brother by ten years. There is a column with similar incorrect content about the position of the Methodist-room in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (22 September 1891) and recounted by a 'regular correspondent' who 'a day or two ago ... had a chat with Charles Jefferies'. Charlie was living in Guildford by then.

The article includes reference to an unknown rhyming letter to Jefferies' uncle (probably Thomas Harrild), sent during Richard's teens, with the closing lines that reveal his early interest in Mephistopheles and Faust:

No fairies yet, upon my word, I've seen  
Altho' their rings are on the green.  
Good night! Good night! Mephistopheles and Faust  
Long, long, 'fore this they're gone to roost.

Charlie's boyish escapade stealing sweet chestnuts from the keeper (no doubt from the infamous 'mighty Spanish chestnut' mentioned in the first sentence of *The Gamekeeper at Home*) is unknown along with the thrashing he received with the keeper's 'long bamboo stick' (albeit that Jefferies describes the keeper's ground-ash stick under his arm in *The Gamekeeper*). However the subsequent action described of the keeper indicates his deep affection for Richard when he finds out that Charlie is his brother.

The incident of Jefferies letting the corncrake fly free is also new as well as other details about the children's early life, such as the father accompanying the boys to Chiseldon Church. In his writing Richard Jefferies doesn't mention the badger setts on the Plain and rarely mentions badgers but there would have been plenty around at that time.

There are two errors in the article: Richard died on the 14 not the 15 of August 1887 and whilst one of his favourite places was just outside the Jefferies' farm wall on Dayhouse Lane, where he could glimpse Liddington Hill, it was not opposite the Methodist Mission room, but opposite the little church that his father helped to build. James Lockett Jefferies hated Methodist preaching and the Methodist church was about 500 yards away near the famous milestone at Coate.

The four illustrations included in the article by Charles Whymper are:



THE KEEPER.



THE KEEPER'S COTTAGE.



THE KEEPER'S SON SHOOTING LEFT-HANDED.



THE FOACHER

Amongst English writers of the past two generations it is difficult to name one more intimate with the myriad life of leaves, flowers, trees, birds, insects and animals than Richard Jefferies, the Wiltshire naturalist. From a

boy he had studied it, not merely with a passing glance as he went to and from Coate Farm to Swindon, but with a scrupulous and reverent attention in every available moment of his life. When dire illness prostrated him, then he solaced himself by passing in his review his nature studies. Matthew Arnold has described the men in a brazen prison living who, when

Death in their prison reaches them,  
are

Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.

In the midst of his mortal pain Jefferies lived once again amidst the scenes he loved so well.

Jefferies' parents belonged to the yeoman class—sturdy and independent representatives of a race fast dying out. Though the farm freehold did not extend to many acres, it had belonged to the family for generations, and the descendants, as they successively came into occupation, were naturally proud of their ancestry and tract of land. Adjoining their farm were the estates of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, which were full of ground game and over which the Jefferies family roamed at pleasure. Stretching a few miles distant stood the Downs, whose outlines and features became as familiar to the author of *Wild Life in a Southern County* as those of his friends, whilst a ten-mile walk in another direction brought him to Savernake, which he afterwards so faithfully depicted.

The love which he bore to North Wilts wells out over and over again from the pages of his best works. In fact, he loved that bleak countryside more than words can express. The thatched house, with its old-fashioned garden, the fruitful orchard and pleasant surroundings, appealed to his receptive qualities as no other place could possibly do in his later years. There were two spots in or near the grounds of Coate Farm—I am told by a relative—which proved especial favourites with Richard. One of these was the reservoir supplying the Wilts and Berks Canal, and covering 75 acres of water. Upon its broad bosom he built canoes and rafts, and, like all boys fired with imagination, pictured himself on desert islands or attacked by savages. The natural association lent them selves to these characteristic fancies.

Here also his father taught him to swim at an early age. Richard enjoyed exercise, and, becoming proficient, was proud of his swimming feats. In a rhyming letter to his uncle during his teens he related the fact that his brother Henry and himself had swam across the reservoir. He closed with the lines:

No fairies yet, upon my word, I've seen  
Altho' their rings are on the green.  
Good night! Good night! Mephistopheles and Faust,

Long, long, 'fore this they're gone to roost.

The other favourite spot has been described to me as a little nook in the garden near the Marlborough end of the farm, sheltered from the road by a wall and almost hidden from the farmhouse by a solitary fir-tree. In later years he spent his leisure joyously in this leafy retirement, where he would sit and muse or watch the lazy life by the roadside. Across the thoroughfare and almost opposite stood the Methodist Mission room whose services were so graphically described in *Wild Life*.

Richard Jefferies undoubtedly owed much to his father for the early enlargement of his powers of observation. Sir Walter Besant quotes respecting the latter in the *Eulogy*: 'The garden, the orchard, the hedges, and the fields were always his chief delight; he had planted many a tree round and about his farm. Not a single bird that flew but he knew and could tell its history.' In many ways he imparted this information to his sons. One of the latter has told the writer that when they were out for a walk the father would often stop at the gate of a field, and, to train the observant faculties of the boys, say, 'Let's see if we can find a rabbit.' 'Even now,' the son continued, 'the first thing I do on looking over a field is to search the sides and furrows for this ground game.' Richard undoubtedly had his father in view when he described the farmers glancing along the furrows when they drove to market. 'to note the workmanship and look for game; you may tell from a distance if they espy a hare by the check of the rein and the extended hand pointing.'

Stretching on one side of the farm was Dayhouse Plain, where several badgers made their home. This level highland constituted a pleasant walk for the father and his boys, who endeavoured to secure a glimpse of these crafty animals, now almost extinct in England. On Sundays, too, Mr. Jefferies generally accompanied the boys to Chiseldon Church, which was a four-mile walk across the fields and a path through the Burderop estate. The latter being well stocked with game, afforded many an opportunity to the father to explain the habits of the squirrels, weasels, game, and birds inhabiting the district. On these occasions they would often meet the gamekeeper, and lengthy conversations on subjects congenial to the surroundings followed in the hearing of the boys.

This gamekeeper was destined to figure largely in one of Richard Jefferies' best books. Those who have read *The Gamekeeper at Home* will recollect his portraiture: 'He was an ash-tree man—as a certain famous writer would say—hard, tough, unconquerable by wind or weather, fearless of his fellows, yielding but by slow and imperceptible degrees, to the work of the time....There is solidity in his very footsteps, and he stands like an oak. He meets your eye full and unshirkingly, yet without insolence.'

This forester was on excellent terms with Richard Jefferies, correctly

gauged the latter's extensive acquaintance with forest life, and delighted to open his mind to him. 'One on occasion,' his brother says, 'I went as a boy to the keeper's house in the hope of getting some magpie's feathers, but chose a time when I thought he would not be at home, as only the day before he had thrashed me with his long bamboo stick for helping myself to his eating chestnuts, quite in ignorance of my relationship to Richard. Like most women, his wife was rather inquisitive, and when I preferred my request she wanted to know my name, where I lived, and a hundred other things. As she questioned me, to my boyish horror, her husband came in; but the woman quickly told him of my antecedents and business. Evidently he forgot the previous day's escapade, for he unbended at once. 'You'll stay and have a bite with us he remarked, and, nothing loth, I stayed.'

Though there was nothing precocious about Richard Jefferies as a boy, he was intensely fond of reading, and would study almost every book that came his way. Having exhausted the volumes at home, he would repair to a friend's house in Swindon, and by his permission search through the extensive library. This friendly literary adviser was Mr. W. Morris, of Swindon, proprietor and editor of the *North Wilts Advertiser*, in whose service he afterwards started as a reporter.

In appearance the boy has thus been described: 'He was very tall—over six feet—and always thin. At the age of 17 his friends feared he would go into a decline. This was happily averted—perhaps through his love for the open air. His hair was dark brown; his forehead both high and broad; his features strongly marked; his nose long, clear, and straight. The most remarkable feature in his face was his large and clear blue eye; it was so full that it suggested short-sightedness, yet his vision was especially keen. His face was thoughtful; he walked with somewhat noiseless tread and rapid stride. In manner was always reserved; so much so at times as to appear morose to those who knew him but slightly.'

When out of doors he would sometimes sit down on a bank, and, taking out his notebook, make some shorthand notes or perhaps a sketch of the natural objects surrounding him. On other occasions he would stay for hours in a sitting or crouching posture, watching hares 'drumming each other' or the 'busy throng of insects rushing in hot haste to and fro' in the grass. Time to him was not measured by the clock. He was out in all weathers and at all times of the day and night. Often he would return with some wild-flower, perhaps unknown to him before, which his father was invited to identify. To a great extent these excursions were taken by himself alone. He appreciated silent communion respecting the nature around him, and upon such occasions companions only bored him and hindered the completion of detailed studies.

Richard Jefferies lived under such favourable sporting conditions that he

quickly became a fair shot, and, with gun on shoulder and Juno, the pointer, at heel, he often enjoyed some fairly good sport. But his friends tell you he was more of a naturalist than a sportsman. Just an instance in point. On one occasion his youngest brother and himself were stalking a corn-crake. Richard had the gun and the other the dog. They heard the bird utter its peculiar noise. This sounded near their feet, but knowing it to be deceptive, they looked for it in another part of the field. Presently they sighted it, and Richard was told to get ready. 'Stop a minute,' he said, and instead of preparing to fire watched the bird amongst the grass. At the expiration of what seemed an immeasurably long time to his keen, sportsman like brother, he ultimately exclaimed, 'Now, let the dog loose!' Out went the dog and up went the corn-crake, and Richard quickly took aim; but no, he could not fire. The gun was once more at the easy, and he stood scrutinising the bird, which quickly took wing and escaped from the 'snare of the fowler.'

Jefferies commenced his career as an author at the age of twenty-five, when he issued a handbook to *Reporting; Editing and Authorship*, published by John Snow & Co. Though his first essay issued to the public, there is ample evidence that he wrote several novels before this time. His friends some years previously had recognised the qualities of the young fellow by giving him a room at the top of the house for study. Here he spent many an hour writing and reading. His early unpublished efforts must have proved numerous, for it is within the recollection of the family that the MSS were placed in a box—which they filled—for safety, but unfortunately in course of time these were lost, and probably destroyed.

The reporting handbook was somewhat crude and amateurish. In fact, his first seven literary productions were inconceivably inferior to most of the later ones. For years he imagined himself to possess genius as a novelist, and laboured hard under that delusion. It was a bitter lesson to him. His first novel came out under the title *The Scarlet Shawl*, and in the following year succeeded *Restless Human Hearts*, both published by Tinsley Bros. In each case he had to advance a cheque to cover the possible loss, and from what can be gathered of his early business transactions none of the amounts thus paid were returned. It may be presumed, therefore, that the books were failures.

Jefferies at length perceived the full strength of his own powers. He reluctantly dropped fiction, and painted nature as he knew it in his Wiltshire home. We have seen his admirable fitness for this work. By natural genius, special training, and constant observation he had educated himself as an expert on rural life. He was not only acquainted with farming pursuits and manners, but the whole life of the hedge-side, fields, downs, and lanes had been revealed to him in a marvellously clear manner.

In 1878 he commenced a series of articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the

'Gamekeeper at Home', which attracted much attention. It was owing to their literary style that Mr. Charles Longman made himself known to the author, with whom he remained a fast friend and adviser to the day of the latter's death. The articles were afterwards published in book form by Smith, Elder & Co. One of the editions contains forty charming illustrations by Mr. Charles Whymper, the eminent artist, and by kind permission of the publishers some of these are reproduced with the present article. I have given an extract from the *Gamekeeper* previously, but here is another, descriptive of the poacher:

'A poacher may slink from tree to tree and from thicket and thicket, and, unless the dogs chance to sniff him out, may lie hidden in a tangled mass of fern and bramble, while the keeper passes not ten yards away. But plantations laid out in regular order with broad, open spaces, sometimes with small fields between, do not afford anything like cover for human beings. If a man is concealed in one of these copses, and finds that the keeper or one of his assistants is about to go through it, he must move or be caught, and in moving he has to pass an empty space and is nearly sure to be detected. In a continuous wood of large extent, if he hears the keepers coming he has but to step as rapidly and silently as possible to one side, and often has the pleasure to see them pass right over the spot where only recently he was lying.'

In the following year came *Wild Life in a Southern County*, also published by Smith, Elder & Co. This is a faithful description of his home surroundings at Coate Farm. The minute knowledge that he displayed is intensely interesting. One instance I may quote with advantage. Speaking of wasps, he says, 'If they find something sweet and tempting they stick to it, and swill till they fall senseless to the ground. They are then most dangerous, because unseen and unheard; and one may put one's hand on them in ignorance of their whereabouts. Noticing once that a particular pear tree appeared to attract wasps, though there was little or no fruit on it, I watched their motions, and found they settled at the mouth of certain circular apertures that had been made in the trunk. There the sap was slowly exuding, and to this sap the wasps came and sipped till they could sip no more.'

After these books appeared Jefferies obtained many requests from editors of reviews and magazines for further contributions. He had established his reputation as a writer on country life, and a demand was created for his work. As a consequence his essays appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, *Longman's Magazine*, *English Illustrated Magazine*, *Art Journal*, *Magazine of Art*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *St. James's Gazette*, *Standard*, and many other periodicals. Some of his best writing was published in this fugitive fashion, and it will be remembered that the most charming specimen of his genius, 'The Pageant of Summer', first saw the light in *Longman's Magazine*, now,

alas!, defunct.

My space has gone. I should like to have referred to the tempestuous time of Jefferies' life when tossed hither and thither on the restless billows of doubt and agnosticism. In *The Story of My Heart* he painted marvellous pictures of his innermost soul. Who can read them and remain unmoved by his efforts to free himself from the cobwebs across his eyes? 'Sometimes,' he said, 'I went to a deep, narrow valley in the hills, silent and solitary. The sky crossed from side to side, like a roof supported on two walls of green. Sparrows chirped in the wheat at the verge above, their calls falling like the twittering of swallows from the air. There was no other sound. The short grass was dried grey as it grew by the heat; the sun hung over the narrow vale as if it had been put there by hand. Burning, burning, the sun glowed on the sward at the foot of the slope where these thoughts burned into me. How many, many years, how many cycles of years, had the sun glowed down thus on that hollow? Since it was formed, how long? Since it was worn and shaped, groove-like, in the flanks of the hills by mighty forces which had ebbed... Full to the brim of the wondrous past I felt the wondrous present. For the day—the very moment I breathed, that second of time then in the valley, was as marvellous, as grand, as all that had gone before. Now this moment was the wonder and the glory. Now this moment was exceedingly wonderful. Now this moment give me all the thought, all the idea, all the soul expressed in the cosmos around me. Give me still more, for the interminable universe, past and present, is but earth; give me the unknown soul, of which I know only that when I touch the ground, when the sunlight touches my hand, it is not there. Therefore the heart looks into space to be away from the earth. With all the cycles, and the sunlight streaming through them, with all that is meant for the present, I thought in the deep vale and prayed.

Did Jefferies regain his early faith? That is the question difficult to answer with a straight negative or affirmative, but let us charitably interpret his last words addressed to his wife on August 15, [sic] 1887, as he passed away, 'Yes, yes, that is so. Help, Lord, for Jesus' sake.'

# Cosmic Consciousness

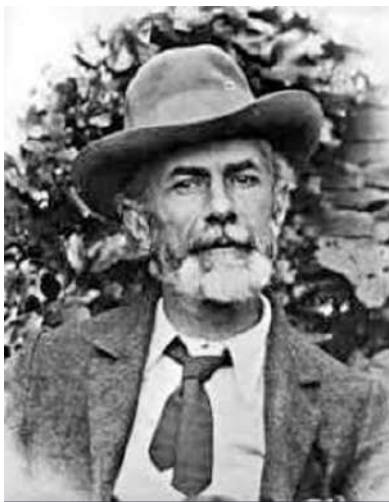
*Edward Carpenter*

Edward Carpenter (1844–1929) was a poet, philosopher, utopian socialist and author of more than thirty-five books. He was an admirer of Jefferies and attended the unveiling of a memorial plaque to Jefferies in Swindon in 1902. Much of Carpenter's writing shows an affinity between his work and those of Whitman, Thoreau and Jefferies, each of whom desired a wider, fuller 'soul-life' and it was the same universal qualities of beauty, tenderness, infinity and mystery in our world that gave each of them a wonderfully rich soul experience.

In the extract below, from Ch. VII 'Rites of Expiation and Redemption' of Carpenter's book *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning*

(London: Allen and Unwin, 1920), Carpenter picks up and expands on Jefferies' meditations on the mystery of life as revealed in *The Story of My Heart*.

Jefferies revived the theme in his essay 'The Pine Wood', published in *The Standard*, 3 Sept 1885 (collected in *The Open Air*), in which he concludes that when the inscriptions of the Assyrian and the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians were translated, no secrets of life were discovered and there was nothing 'but superstition and useless ritual.'



There is a passage in Richard Jefferies' imperishably beautiful book *The Story of My Heart*—a passage well known to all lovers of that prose-poet—in which he figures himself standing 'in front of the Royal Exchange where the wide pavement reaches out like a promontory,' and pondering on the vast crowd and the mystery of life. 'Is there any theory, philosophy, or creed,' he says,

is there any system of culture, any formulated method, able to meet and satisfy each separate item of this agitated pool of human life? By which they may be guided, by which they may hope, by which look forward? Not a mere illusion of the craving heart—something real, as real as the solid walls of fact against which, like seaweed, they are dashed; something to give each separate personality sunshine and a flower in its own existence now; something to shape this million-handed labour to an end and outcome that will leave more

sunshine and more flowers to those who must succeed? Something real now, and not in the spirit-land: in this hour now, as I stand and the sun burns. ... Full well aware that all has failed, yet, side by side with the sadness of that knowledge, there lives on in me an unquenchable belief, thought burning like the sun, that there is yet something found. ... It must be dragged forth by the might of thought from the immense forces of the universe.

In answer to this passage we may say 'No—a thousand times NO! there is *no* theory, philosophy, creed, system or formulated method which will meet or ever satisfy the demand of each separate item of the human whirlpool.' And happy are we to know there is no such thing! How terrible if one of these bloodless 'systems' which strew the history of religion and philosophy and the political and social paths of human endeavour *had* been found absolutely correct and universally applicable—so that every human being would be compelled to pass through its machine-like maw, every personality to be crushed under its Juggernath wheels! No, thank Heaven! there is no theory or creed or system; and yet there is something—as Jefferies prophetically felt and with a great longing desired—that *can* satisfy; and that, the root of all religion, has been hinted at in the last chapter. It is the *consciousness* of the world-life burning, blazing, deep down within us; it is the Soul's intuition of its roots in Omnipresence and Eternity.

The gods and the creeds of the past, as shown in the last chapter—whatever they may have been, animistic or anthropomorphic or transcendental, whether grossly brutish or serenely ideal and abstract—are essentially projections of the human mind; and no doubt those who are anxious to discredit the religious impulse generally will catch at this, saying 'Yes, they are mere forms and phantoms of the mind, ephemeral dreams, projected on the background of Nature, and having no real substance or solid value. The history of Religion (they will say) is a history of delusion and illusion; why waste time over it? These divine grizzly Bears or Aesculapian Snakes, these cat-faced Pashts, this Isis, queen of heaven, and Astarte and Baal and Indra and Agni and Kali and Demeter and the Virgin Mary and Apollo and Jesus Christ and Satan and the Holy Ghost, are only shadows cast outwards onto a screen; the constitution of the human mind makes them all tend to be anthropomorphic; but that is all; they each and all inevitably pass away. Why waste time over them?'

And this is in a sense a perfectly fair way of looking at the matter. These gods and creeds are only projections of the human mind. But all the same it misses, does this view, the essential fact. It misses the fact that there is no shadow without a fire, that the very existence of a shadow argues a light somewhere (though we may not directly see it) as well as the existence of a solid form which intercepts that light. Deep, deep in the human mind there is that burning blazing light of the world-consciousness—so deep indeed

that the vast majority of individuals are hardly aware of its existence. Their gaze turned outwards is held and riveted by the gigantic figures and processions passing across their sky; they are unaware that the latter are only shadows—silhouettes of the forms inhabiting their own minds.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of people have never observed their own minds; their own mental forms. They have only observed the reflections cast by these. Thus it may be said, in this matter, that there are three degrees of reality. There are the mere shadows—the least real and most evanescent; there are the actual mental outlines of humanity (and of the individual), much more real, but themselves also of course slowly changing; and most real of all, and permanent, there is the light ‘which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’—the glorious light of the world-consciousness. Of this last it may be said that it never changes. Every thing is known to it—even the very impediments to its shining. But as it is from the *impediments* to the shining of a light that shadows are cast, so we may now understand that the things of this world and of humanity, though real in their degree, have chiefly a kind of negative value; they are opaquenesses, clouds, materialisms, ignorances, and the inner light falling upon them gradually reveals their negative character and gradually dissolves them away till they are lost in the extreme and eternal Splendour. I think Jefferies when asked that question with which I have begun this chapter, was in some sense subconsciously, if not quite consciously, aware of the answer. His frequent references to the burning blazing sun throughout *The Story of My Heart* seem to be an indication of his deep-down attitude of mind.

The shadow-figures of the creeds and theologies pass away truly like ephemeral dreams; but to say that time spent in their study is wasted, is a mistake, for they have value as being indications of things much more real than themselves, namely, of the stage of evolution of the human mind. The fact that a certain god-figure, however grotesque and queer, or a certain creed, however childish, cruel, and illogical, held sway for a considerable time over the hearts of men in any corner or continent of the world is good evidence that it represented a real formative urge at the time in the hearts of these good people, and a definite stage in their evolution and the evolution of humanity. Certainly it was destined to pass away, but it was a step, and a necessary step in the great process; and certainly it was opaque and brutish, but it is through the opaque things of the world, and not through the transparent, that we become aware of the light.

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<sup>1</sup> See, in the same connection, Plato’s allegory of the Cave, *Republic*, Book vii. [Author’s footnote].

# Richard Jefferies

*G.R. Stirling Taylor*

This is a two-part essay by G.R. Stirling Taylor which was published in the April and May 1924 issues of *The Nineteenth Century and After*. The second part was 'His Philosophy of Life'.

*The Nineteenth Century* was founded by James Knowles in 1877 and retitled after 1901 as *The Nineteenth Century and After*. Published monthly, it carried articles on politics, current affairs and literature. A high proportion of the contributors in 1920 were members of the clergy, the legal profession and the military coming to terms with the post-war world.

George Robert Stirling Taylor was born in 1873 at Forest Hill, Kent with family connections to A & G Taylor, the photographic firm. He was called to the Bar in the Middle Temple in 1902 but did not practice, preferring historical research and writing. Taylor contributed to *The Contemporary Review*, *The English Review* and *Fortnightly Review* as well as writing biographies of Oliver Cromwell, Robert Walpole and historical accounts of London and Canterbury. Politically he was an executive member of the Fabian Society and a supporter of Guild Socialism, which called for a return to the medieval guild system. He died suddenly 3 Nov 1939.

His brother, Will F. Taylor, continuing the family's photographic tradition, was commissioned by Constable to take photographs for *Jefferies' England* (ed. S.J. Looker, 1937) and *Jefferies' Countryside* (ed. S. J. Looker, 1944).

## I. His Study of Nature

When Richard Jefferies died in 1887 there was a general agreement, in those circles that profess thoughtful reading habits, that we had lost one of our most graceful writers on country life; indeed, it was not disputed that rarely in English literature had the poet and the naturalist so intimately and happily collaborated on the same page. His essays, which had appeared for the previous fifteen years in the leading journals, were described as 'quite charming,' and recommended as the most delightful of solaces for leisure hours. Richard Jefferies, in short, was classed as a very superior and more cultured kind of coffee or liqueur, which should be sipped after dinner, when the digestion must not be disturbed by serious undertakings. There were wiser people who knew better, but such was the opinion of the ordinary reading man. And now that, for the moment, Jefferies is no longer a best seller—though he was never really that, of course—or even a regular article of consumption at circulating libraries, the idea has become still more

persistent that he is little else but an essayist on rural topics. It would surely have been a great enough subject for any man to take as his life work. However, the soot-covered aristocracy of the modern towns and suburbs does not acknowledge an equality with the plebeian life of the country, which was Jefferies' hobby.

Rarely or never has the popular verdict of a man of letters been further from the mark. To anyone who will read Jefferies with ordinary care the idea of him as merely a soother of nerves will arouse rippling laughter. There are, indeed, passages of the most restful and purest poetry—if what stirs the emotions can ever be restful. But the restfulness of Jefferies' prose was on the surface; it was a sheen of beauty spun over the face of a raging volcano of passion which surges beneath. On closer examination this essayist of peaceful rural life turns out to be a burning prophet, who is blazing with a desire to set fire to the thought of the world, as smaller, pettier men sometimes set fires to houses in a street riot.

In the conventional phrase, Richard Jefferies threw down the glove of challenge to the modern civilisation of his nation and his age; though the phrase is unhappy, for a glove, is the last thing that this particular prophet would have been likely to have at hand. It would be nearer the truth to say that his challenge was a ploughshare, or, in more pitying mood, a sprig of that wild thyme which was so continually on his pages. At all events, his symbol of assertion would have been some token of the fields and hedgerows of the country lanes. For Jefferies' challenge to the world of town dwellers was a call to cease from their folly; to come out into the meadows once more, where again they might see the sun.

Note the term of the short period when Jefferies lived. He was born in 1848 and died in 1887. His thirty-nine years covered the moment when this island reached the meridian of her career as the greatest commercial nation of the world. The precise years may not be, strictly speaking, the days of greatest economic triumph, but it would be difficult to find any others which better express the final result of the Industrial Revolution. England was intoxicated with its material success, and the period of drunkenness is generally when the day's work is done. They may have made the bulk of their money in the days before Jefferies wrote; but when he took up the pen his fellow-countrymen were in the full flow of their urban festivities.

The people who ruled England had almost forgotten the countryside. The strange thing is that although it is true to say that there was almost as much of the physical country as there had always been—for the towns and mines only covered a comparatively small part of the surface—yet, in the realms of the mind, the town had almost blotted out the country by its smoke.

To repeat, 'the men who mattered' were the people of the town. They were bred, not in villages, and farms, or manor houses, but in slums, or suburbs or

salons. The country, at the best, was a week-end or holiday resort, only to be fled to when one's health could stand the town no longer. The rural manor was a place from which great gentlemen could bring a tradition of power and prestige which enabled them to cut a greater figure on the political stage or in the fashionable West End drawing-room. The country had other parasitic uses; it supplied the metropolis with robust police constables, who could not be bred sufficiently in slums. And if the rural people behaved nicely they could always come to town one fine day and be shown round as our country cousins, and even amuse us by their quaint ways.

To this gross contortion of life Jefferies threw down a passionate challenge. He almost defiantly said that the only things that mattered were all to be found in the country. At least, that is a fair statement of his first principle. Being a very great man, of course, he saw all sides of life, and before we have considered him altogether it will be obvious that, although he wrote so continually of the fields and all that they contained, yet he was certain that man was the highest pinnacle of Nature and easily the lord of creation. He often tells us that beauty is not in the flower, but in the mind of the man that conceives its grace.

Jefferies' philosophy of the supremacy of man in Nature it will be important to consider later; but, first, it is essential to consider his Nature-study side, his minute examination of everything that he could see, or hear, or smell in the country. He seems to have put the fields, and the woods, and the sun, and the sky, and the wind under a miraculously efficient analytical microscope, in order that he might wring the mysteries and the truth of the world from their phenomena. These country things were the basis of his philosophy, his intellectual food, the very foundation of his life; and they are the clue to all the final fruits of his work. Therefore it is necessary to know what Jefferies thought of the country; for, after all, perhaps the popular verdict of the plain man, that Jefferies was mainly a writer of rural idylls, may be very near the truth.

Nine-tenths of literature is concerned with the doings and sayings of men and women; the greater part of its *mise en scène* is within the walls of human houses. If we gathered our whole knowledge of life within a library, from the printed page, we might hastily imagine that existence was a long conversation happening in the drawing-rooms, and offices, and taverns of the city streets. The message of Richard Jefferies was that nine-tenths of the things that matter happens in the open air.

It is all a question of material. Jefferies used the grass and herbs, the movements of light and air, as Balzac, for instance used the actions and dress of men and women. Take Balzac's *Les Employés*, wherein he analyses, on page after page, the smallest data of those strange, futile creatures who sat

on chairs and wasted their lives in the Government offices of Paris, and the dresses and words of their wives and relations at home.

Can anyone say that Jefferies chose smaller or more insignificant matters for his pen? Take a passage from that great ode to the exuberance of life which he named 'The Pageant of Summer':

Steeped in flower and pollen to the music of bees and birds, the stream of the atmosphere became a living thing. It was life to breathe it, for the air itself was life. The strength of the earth went up through the leaves into the wind. Fed thus on the food of the immortals, the heart opened to the width and depth of the summer—to the broad horizon afar, down to the minutest creature in the grass, up to the highest swallow ... Living things leap in the grass, living things drift upon the air, living things are coming forth to breathe in every hawthorn bush.

Or, again, another passage from the same essay:

Still the pageant moves. The song talk of the finches rises and sinks like the tide of a waterfall. The greenfinches have been by me all the while. A bullfinch pipes now and then further up the hedge where the brambles and thorns are thickest. Boldest of birds to look at, he is always in hiding. The shrill tone of a goldfinch came just now from the ash branches, but he has gone on.

Are the characters of this tale of the pageant of summer—and these above are only a fraction of the multitudes of abundant life that flit across its page—are these rural things less vital, less beautiful, less interesting, than the weird scraps of humanity that in Balzac's tale creep into their State bureau at nine in the morning and slip out again at four or five? Do not the players of the summer pageant spend a more commendable day than these?

One often hears it said that one great novelist or another is a great artist and full of brilliancy or amusement, but, after all, he has merely chosen a passing phase of life, a backwater in the world's career. So, goes on the criticism, in a generation or two all that environment will have become unknown to its later readers. So there will be no life in the picture; it will be as unreadable as a book in an unknown tongue. In other words, the novelist in question has hung his story on trivialities which have quickly passed away. He has written of the temporal instead of the eternal.

Richard Jefferies took no such chances as these if, perchance, he desired to live with the immortals. Had he lived a thousand years ago and taken the great Roman Empire for his theme, he might have been cheated of his prize, for the empire of Rome has gone. In another thousand years, perhaps, it maybe that the medieval life has gone so far away that our descendants will no longer be able to read Walter Scott. Will Thackeray pass with the memory of the days of the Georges and Victorians? Is Shakespeare quite certain of eternity when senseless wars and political murders for kingdoms, and deeds like those, become impossible things in a world which may have dismissed

such crudities from the diaries of mankind? A triumphant League of Nations may make *Henry V* a mere penny dreadful.

But Jefferies has played with higher romance. His creatures are the sun and the moon, the violet and the thyme, the birds of the air and the furred folk of the earth. His beloved west wind had seen the rise of Chaldea and the fall of Rome; there is no empire it may not hope to outlive, and no man has wearied of it yet. The sun, that titanic hero of 'The Pageant of Summer', what have the tales of human creatures to show that can equal him? He is not one of the things of today; he is the basis of life. It is clear that Jefferies, like Prometheus, had stolen his fire from the heavens. It perhaps never crossed his mind that thus he might win what men call immortality.

Jefferies is no less certain of his place if he must be measured by the beauty of his subject-matter:

I cannot leave it; ... the endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of these I receive a little ... In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs; the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning.

Are the chatter and wit of the salon more delicious or more sparkling than the sound of summer in full song? Can it produce men who are more noble to look on than the beech or the poplar trees, or women who can talk more graciously than the nightingale, or flit as daintily as the whitethroat? What human lover ever courted with the romance of the blackcap? What mistress was ever as alluring as the gentle dropping melody of the willow warbler? In music, in colour, in light, in scents, in everything that wit of writer can collect on his pages to build up his scene, in all these the rustic has it every time. We can get the measure of his triumph when we put the light of his sun against the gas lamps of his rival in the town.

But it is absurd and unnecessary to set the country world in rivalry against the world of the town. Let it be admitted freely that perhaps there may have been a woman as beautiful as the June rose; it is even possible that there was once a wit who conversed as brilliantly as the garden warbler. That surely is sufficient praise; and in saying it we have not been ungenerous to the beauty or the wit.

It is a very amazing mistake to think that the writer of country essays is limited in the scope of his plots. The man who mistakes one field for the next field should not return to London for more variety; he should go to an oculist to have his sight tested. There are deformed fragments of humanity who cannot distinguish between the song of the thrush and that of a nightingale; they are the same kind of beings who would confuse St. Paul's Cathedral with Westminster Abbey, if they were not on different 'bus routes. The monotony of London life, with a policeman at each elbow and a railway line

to carry you automatically to any destination, with endless rows of houses and a dull repetition of streets, all this puts the town dweller at a grave disadvantage when he is set down in the staggering variety of rural life. He is as helpless as if he were planted in an African forest.

There is a gigantic grandeur about the plots of Jefferies' essays and books. When one has read through *Wild Life in a Southern County* it is almost impossible to argue that a town has any such range of topics to offer, that is if one is only interested in subjects worthy of the consideration of rational men. Of course there are a thousand subjects arising in town life which never appear in the country. There are dozens of desperate evils which threaten the whole life of the cities. The town dweller must be always clamouring desperately for fresh air, more sunlight, less dust, or less noise; drains, epidemics, overcrowded streets, are all urgently fit subjects for his thoughts. But for the moment we are thinking of the beauties and not the indecencies of life. And when it comes to beauties and charms, what can the town bid against the fields?

The morning sun gives a sparkle to the dewdrops that never flashed in the most brilliant of salons. The blush on the cheeks of the flowers needs no rouge; they seek no bottled scents to give them allurements. Is any orchestra so delicate as the song of the birds at sunrise? Is any singer so choice as the nightingale at evensong? Did majestic woman ever equal the rising of the moon? Did any haughty beauty compare with the flaunting setting of the sun? Who would measure, for a moment, the miles of the downs of Jefferies' Berkshire (*sic*) with the London where we measure by feet—or is it inches?

We may argue and wriggle when we get away from the magic of Jefferies' pen, but while we read there is an unanswerable conviction that this man had made out his case. The country seems the only place that is supremely important, the only place that is beautiful, where alone there is an indefinite variety and range of interests and charms. As we read we become more pagan once more. The heavy mantle of centuries of civilisation slips off our shoulders as easily as the wind blows the mists from the hills. We are back to the foundations of man's nature, to those traditional roots of age-long customs and beliefs which still govern our instincts, however vainly we imagine we choose our own way. Of the deepest traditions of mankind the country is the breeding place, and the town is the scene of thoughtless adventures which may be forgotten tomorrow.

Richard Jefferies is so convincing. He has a style that carries conviction. His assertions are apparently as true as his statements of facts. Here we touch the basis of his strength. He can paint his scene with such astonishing accuracy that it is not second-hand literature, but the facts themselves. Once, for example, he describes the journey of an ant; it is only a matter of 10 inches in length, but they are as clear in our eyes as if he had devoted ten

volumes by way of a geological and geographical and botanical survey of the road. There is another essay in which he describes, in precise detail, the flight of a kestrel. There is another, where he draws minutely the offices of a solicitor in a country town; as each visitor enters we instinctively move up a little closer to make room for the latest arrival. In *Hodge and His Masters* Jefferies shows that he uses Nature in no narrow sense, for he clearly gave as much attention to man as his fields. This last-named volume is a series of portraits of human individuals and classes, just as *The Life of the Fields* is an album of portraits of what we, somewhat hastily, call a lower world of plants and beasts.

But one doubts whether Jefferies in his heart drew a very distinct line between these two departments of life, between the human and the world below. There is one suggestive fact, namely, that the first essay in *The Life of the Fields* volume, although it is called 'The Field Play,' has for its centre the figures of big Matt and Dolly. One's first impression on reading this essay is that it is one of the most successful things in English literature. In twenty-five pages we get a gigantic picture, that, in fact, only professes to cover a corner of a little parish; but in imagination it is a redrawing of the big part of life. Dolly, with her laughing eyes, her sun-red cheeks, is enchanting:

No character whatever, no more than the wind; she was like a well-hung gate swinging to a touch; like water yielding to let a reed sway, like a singing flame riding and falling to a word, and even to an altered tone of voice. A word pushed her this way; a word pushed her that. Always yielding, sweet and gentle. Is not this the most seductive of all characters in women?

As for Matt, the mower, he is built of all those strong juices that are nurtured under the sun and the winds. He is the symbol of natural untamed strength:

I wonder whether the man ever thought as he reposed noontide on a couch of grass under the hedge? Did he think that those immense muscles, that broad, rough-hewn plank of a chest of his, those vast bones encased in sinewy limbs—being flesh in its fullness—ought to have more of this earth than mere common men, and still more than thin-faced people—mere people, not men—in black coats? Did he dimly claim the right of strength in his mind, and arrogate to himself the prerogatives of arbitrary kings? Who knows which big processes of reasoning, dim and big, passed through his mind in the summer days? Did he conclude he had a right to take what others only asked and worked for?

This is not the place to tell of the ruthless tragedies that dragged the mighty Matt and the yielding Dolly alike to their dooms. But they are worthy to rank beside those massive dramas that wrung tears from the cloudless sky of Greece. Indeed, Dolly has much of the colour of the pagan of the south. 'Gay she was, as the brilliant poppies who, having the sun as their own, cared for nothing else.' Is that not the essence of paganism in a line? For the moment this essay is mentioned to show that Jefferies did not forget that men and

women were the central figures of the country; he always set them in his landscapes with a sense of perfect proportion. We shall see later on that, by a strange paradox, this man, who has gained the name of being merely a writer of pleasant discourses on plants and birds, put an exceptionally great value to the infinite possibilities of man.

But nevertheless, however highly Jefferies placed the position and possibilities of man, his opinion was based on data drawn from a most minute survey of the country; and those who want to know what Jefferies means must go first to the earth from which he drew his mental nourishment. His more dogmatic treatises, such as *The Story of My Heart*, should come later.

The already quoted 'Pageant of Summer' maybe the most complete summary of all that Jefferies wanted to say in the most perfect form. But the next essay, 'Meadow Thoughts,' the milestone, 'To London 79 miles,' sets him meditating on the difference between country and town, between the so-called 'natural' and the so-called 'artificial' in life. The silence of Nature fascinates him, almost as a snake fascinates its prey. He writes:

To convey a full impression of the intense concentration of Nature in the meadows is very difficult—everything is so utterly oblivious of man's thoughts and man's heart. The oaks stand still—quiet, still—so still that the lichen loves them. At their feet the grass grows and heeds nothing ... A great, broad province of green furrow and ploughed furrow between the old house and the city of the world. Such solace and solitude, seventy-nine miles thick, cannot be painted ... It is necessary to stay in it like the oaks to know it ... That is the silence of the fields. If a breeze rustled the boughs, if a greenfinch called, if a cart mare in the meadows shook herself, making the earth and air tremble by her with the convulsion of her mighty muscles, these were not sounds; they were the silence itself.

Jefferies goes on in this same essay to show how trivial is the knowledge gathered from books beside the learning he gathers from the meadow. He is struck by the fact that it is almost impossible for him either to read or write in the open air. 'The sunlight put out the books I brought into it just as it put out the fire on the hearth indoors; ... an inexpressible thought quivered in the azure overhead; ... the weak and feeble pages, the small fires of human knowledge, dwindled and lost meaning.' Here we see how Jefferies gathered the raw material out of which he constructed the philosophy of life which he most definitely tried to sum up in *The Story of My Heart*. But it was probably never expressed with better skill than in several of his less didactic works. There are many reasons for calling his *Wood Magic* his masterpiece, and on the face of it that book might be passed as a story for boys!

What Jefferies set himself to do was to convince his readers that their conventional valuation of the country and its inhabitants was all wrong.

England had lost all sense of the balance of life. It had almost turned creation on its head—and thereby caused convulsions of the heart and brain—just because a few score of bustling mechanical inventors and financiers saw their way to making fortunes out of factories. Whether this was a necessary, or even tolerable, development cannot be discussed here. The country was being forgotten, anyhow. So Jefferies threw down a challenge to England to a great debate. ‘That this House maintains that the country is altogether greater and more important than the town’ might well have been the terms of the resolution.

And, indeed, it should not be a hard thing to maintain the truth of such terms in their most material sense. For the mind can travel back to the beginning of any history that is worthy of the name of civilisation; and, in all those thousands of years, this great work of the tilling of the soil and the rearing of cattle has been one of the few stable social institutions of mankind—the life of the fields, their herds and corn, their tending of flocks and their reaping of crops, this alone has survived all change. Political parties and their creeds come and go as the shadows race across the fields on a fickle April day; but the countryside of England and its people would not be very strange if a Saxon ghost came back to its ancestral home.

Surely it is something to the credit of a social system that the wisest and most meddlesome of theorists and law-makers seem unable to shake the calm dignity of this eternal fact—the country?

When Richard Jefferies moved his resolution in the great House of Literature he took care to be on the side that possessed the most unanswerable facts. He might have parodied the speech which Benjamin Disraeli made on evolution and the angels, and might have perorated thus: ‘My Lords and Gentlemen, I am on the side of the eternal. I leave to my opponents the flickering and the passing fancies of the towns.’ Jefferies examined the country, and a dozen or so volumes are proof that he found there a multiplicity of life and interests such as no towns can out-number, a range of beauty and joy beyond the reach of the city, and a philosophy of life that it at least as plausible as the theories bred in the academies of Greece.

Having thus suggested the great laboratory in which Richard Jefferies worked, whose roof was the sky, whose elements were the winds of the air and the beams of the sun, we can now more fruitfully consider the philosophy of life which he fused in the hot chambers of his active brain. There are some who say that the countryside must end in a torpor of thought. Jefferies, in his essay on ‘Country Literature,’ wrote: ‘Nothing is so contrary to fact than the common opinion of the agricultural labourer and his family are stupid or unintelligent. In truth there are none who so appreciate information, and they are quite capable of understanding

anything that may be sent to them in print.' It is some evidence of the stimulus of the country that it produced Jefferies from a stock of farmers.

Before turning from Jefferies in the country to Jefferies in the philosopher's study there may be quoted one paragraph from his essay 'The Pigeons at the British Museum' which puts the relationship between these two sides of his in a very clear manner. He tells how he has been irresistibly drawn out of the country to the great Reading Room in search of wisdom. But he is disappointed:

The mind wearies of books, yet cannot forget that once when they were first opened in youth they gave it hope and knowledge. Those first books exhausted, there is nothing left but words and covers; for the rest it is repetition and paraphrase. The grains of wheat were thrashed out and garnered two thousand years since. Except the receipts of chemists, except the specifications for the steam or the electric motor, there is nothing in these millions of books that was not known at the commencement of our era. Not a thought has been added. Continual threshing has widened out the heap of straw and spread it abroad, but it is empty. Nothing will ever be found in it. Those original grains of true thought were found beside the stream, the sea, in the sunlight, at the shady verge of the woods. Let us leave the beating and turning over of empty straw; let us return to the streams and the hills; let us ponder by night; let us ponder by night in view of the stars.

In that one paragraph is contained Jefferies' judgment of the country and the town. In the one he could find the 'original grains of true thought' that could still be the inspiration of man; the town was a place where men were beating empty straw. He may be hastily wrong in this judgment, there may be a saner balance of life in the world, but those who read his books will agree that he makes out an exceedingly strong case for his prejudices.

## II. His Philosophy of Life

The first part of this essay was an attempt to consider the material in which Richard Jefferies worked. As a musician uses sounds, as a sculptor uses stone, so Jefferies handled, as the material for his creations, that very complex mass of sense stimulants which we call 'the country.' It is, indeed, a varied collection of all the sense impressions that can penetrate to the mind of man, a subtly woven texture of sights, and sounds, and scents of varied sorts. Never did an artist handle so many materials in the same workshop. Although he did not claim to have made a new sphere of art, yet Jefferies might well be placed with Wagner, who declared that he had so linked together the separate crafts of music, literature, and scene-painting, that he

had created a new art, which was distinguishable from any of its component parts, and must be judged as a new whole.

In like manner, Jefferies gathered together the very varied sense impressions of country life into a whole which cannot be classed as Nature study, as science, or as rural poetry; it is not merely a history of human rural life, or an analysis of the song of birds or of the colour of flowers. As the open downs of his native place covered a large area of earth than the cramped, window-lit studios of the painters who worked in towns, so Jefferies' art covered a wider range than the great mass of the literature of his day.

So much for Jefferies' material. But the material is only the foundation of the artist's work. The important part is the superstructure which he builds thereon. In other words, the problem is to understand what Jefferies made out of this complex mass of country life, human and inhuman, living and lifeless. The country sights, and sounds, and scents were his date, as it were. What theories did he deduce from them? What did they all amount to when they had passed through the workshop of his mind?

The most important thing about Richard Jefferies is that he composed a great philosophy of life. Of course the 'art for art's sake' school will protest, with the affectation and fine posing that is usual in that 'precious' set, that Jefferies was first and foremost a great artist. Indeed he was. And what, after all, does that mean? The greatest artist is one who succeeds in expressing himself in the clearest manner; the man who does not waste our attention on a single unnecessary note, or word, or line of form; who selects only the necessary words, or sounds, or colours to describe his meaning, so that the attention is concentrated on the essentials alone. But, when all that is said, it is the meaning that is supremely important. It may be no other meaning except that colour and melody or form are the most important things in the world. It may possibly be that the greatest artist may teach that there is no greater logic and reason in life than the thoughtless chatter of a milkmaid or the song of a lark. But, true or untrue, there is always a meaning under the surface of the great artist's art. It will always express the desire that the artist had in his mind when he worked. It will express the object for the sake of which he wrote or drew. It may be the supremely important fact called beauty; it may be only that less important fancy termed a rational argument.

Great art is something that is perfectly expressed: that is something which is stated with such perfect clearness that the meaning is grasped with the vividness and instantaneousness of a lightning stroke. The most important thing to discover is what Jefferies meant to state. What was his philosophy of life?

It is a strange paradox, but this man would seem, at the first glance, to have been wrapped up in the idea that 'Nature' is more important and more beautiful than anything else, at heart was, on the contrary, entirely wrapped

up in the supreme importance of man. Nature had little meaning in his eyes except because of its influence on the mind of the man who regarded it.

When closely analysed there is something heartless about Jefferies' opinion of Nature. It was almost ungrateful to think so poorly of the giver of all those numberless gifts which certainly made him the man he was. He clearly did not believe that the beauties of the woods, and fields, and air, had much, if any, existence outside the mind of man, which he thought supreme. He tells us that he used natural objects in order 'to have from all green things, and from the sunlight, the inner meaning which is not known to them.' Jefferies has no sense whatever of a Divine power outside the human scope; but he is enlarged to a colossal pride when he tries to express the possibilities of the development of man. 'There is an immense ocean over which the mind can sail upon which the vessel of thought has not yet launched,' he writes in *The Story of My Heart*. Then follow these words of magnificent conceit; 'I hope to launch it.'

This the best known of all his writings, *The Story of My Heart*, written down on paper for the first time about four years before he died, although he had been turning it over and over in his mind since he was seventeen, is his nearest approach to a direct statement of his conception of life. With singular and almost dangerous absence of reserve, he lays bare his heart. He knows perfectly well he is taking artistic risks; and the book must be treated with the respect due to the secrets of the confessional box. It is one of the great confessions in the history of man. It is man on his knees before the impenetrable mystery of life. Hemmed in on all sides and driven back on every front, this baffled creature bows down to write a solemn last testament of all he had struggled to say, and had even failed to understand.

There is something so entirely characteristic of Jefferies in the form of this solemn act. He was a man who despised the priest above all. So, for his absolution, this pagan goes to the top of his beloved downs, and on the crest of the hill he flings himself on the grass and, in a delirium of self-abandonment, reveals his heart to the wind, to the sun, and the far-away sea. It is equally characteristic that this confession—it is not, strictly speaking, a confession at all, for it is rather a cry of haughty confidence—is of something that is beyond his hope of reaching. But perhaps confidence in what is beyond hope is not precisely confidence at all.

So this confident confession may even be in substance a haughty cry of despair. But then most of the important things of life are quite uncertain.

Richard Jefferies climbed to the top of the hill, amongst other reasons because he desired to get away from all previous human experiences and laws. He professes to reject all traditions and start afresh. He would then have us believe that he was the first and only pagan one. 'All experience of the greatest city in the world could not withhold me. I rejected it wholly.'

For, in theory, to obey traditions is to fall away from the strict rules of paganism. Of course this declaration that he is defying and ignoring all traditions is half-conscious bluff on Jefferies' part. This beautiful song of paganism which he had written for us (in all his works) was only possible because he had absorbed, perhaps without knowing it, the essence of the culture of thousands of years of man's life. Jefferies may say (or even think) that he is defying all the conventionalities of civilisation. On the contrary, he is one of civilisation's most delicate products.

He defied such merely temporary trivialities as the merchants' and manufacturers' *uncivilisation* of the last few generations in Western Europe and America. But there was no man who ever lived who so whole-heartedly embraced the greatest traditions of the world as did Richard Jefferies. For he accepted the life of man in the fields, the country, with all it contained; and man at the work of producing crops and herding his flocks in the open air is the oldest tradition of the race. It is a tradition which even goes back to the life of the animals which live by hunting their prey.

When Jefferies worshipped the sun and the elements, that was no rejection of tradition. It is the oldest religion of man. 'The sun was stronger than science, the hills more than philosophy,' he tells us. The creed was not new; it was primeval, and preserves the very essence of man's first thoughts. 'Give me fullness of life, like to the sea and the sun; give me fullness of physical life.' Again, he says: 'I burn like a torch.' It is the joy of animal living, which is the main spur of man.

Jefferies persistently refused to concern himself with the affairs of the medieval period, and leapt over it back to the days of Greece and Rome. Herein he is strictly pagan in the narrower sense. Undoubtedly his mind was more in harmony with the hot-blooded Greeks and with the self-reliant Romans than with the intervening saint-worshipping and baron-respecting men of the Middle Ages. Jefferies, as already said, had no conception of a Deity in any anthropomorphic form. To him 'what we understand by the Deity is the purist form of Idea, of Mind'; it is this 'Fourth Idea,' that 'Soul-life,' which is the goal of his most persistent efforts, so he tells us again and again.

So he tell us, and most sincerely does he tell us so, yet with equal sincerity and openness he tears his declaration to pieces before our eyes. From the wildest optimism he slips back, as a man falls from the top of a cliff, into the purest pessimism:

Everything happens by chance. No prudence in conduct, no wisdom or foresight, can effect anything... As Xenophon observed in old times, wisdom is like casting dice and determining your course by the number that appears. Virtue, humanity, the best and most beautiful conduct, is wholly in vain. The history of thousands of years demonstrates it.

Now it is obviously an unwise thing to waste one's years seeking for a great Fourth Idea, or a Soul-life, which depends on nothing but the throwing of dice. 'I conclude that there is an existence, a something higher than soul... more perfect than Deity.' So he writes in his great confessional book. But when he is drawing the wisdom of common man, and not the inspiration of philosophers, he preaches another creed which scarcely fits into this religion of the soul.

In *The Story of My Heart* his prayer is 'That my soul might be more than the cosmos of life.' But turn to that most convincing figure of the miller of Glads Mill (in his novel *The Dewy Morn*), who

was a happy man, for he possessed an inexhaustible fund of stolidity. No nervousness and haste, no running to and fro, no worry and wear and waste, nor any aspiration deep and high after the beautiful or the true. No longing for any man's applause, no sigh for the light in any woman's eye. He was complete in himself, like a tree. If any man could select his fate, what better could he choose than this? To be in strong good health; to have plenty of simple food and a never failing appetite; to sleep like the wall of the mill; above all, to be content. Beauty, what is beauty, forsooth? ... Fortune, what is fortune? Nothing is even a pleasure or a real profit to him who has to labour for it. Truth, ... you die in the pursuit, and the sea beats the beach as it did a thousand years ago. The stolid alone are happy. Yet there drops from the azure heavens a beam of light, and whomsoever that ray touches must follow it to the end, though cheeks grow pale, though shoulders stoop, though ache and pain increase. The path of the gods pursues beauty, but the stolid alone are happy.

This long passage has been quoted, for it is Jefferies explaining himself, perhaps even more self-revealingly than in his formal confession. It shows for one thing, how closely the rural philosophy had gripped his mind. This miller defied all the heart cravings of Jefferies' striving hours, yet he writes for his epitaph, 'The stolid alone are happy.'

Incidentally, one may find some of Jefferies' finest work in this novel, *The Dewy Morn*, though, as a whole, it is a failure as a novel. Jefferies was one of the great artists of the world when he measured himself by the length of an essay; at the wide stretch of a full novel he usually failed to reach perfection. This should be no more surprising that it would be to find that an exquisite worker in jewels was unable to design a cathedral. The hero and heroine of *The Dewy Morn* are lifeless figures; but, on the other hand, the miniatures of the miller, of Cornleigh Cornleigh, the squire, of Godwin, his agent, of old Abner, are nearly masterpieces. Cornleigh is almost more than that. The drawing of his motionless face and passionless character is worthy of Meredith:

Whether Cornleigh Cornleigh saw Felise or not it was impossible to determine. The man was inscrutable. People for years past had asked themselves similar

questions about Cornleigh; if he saw or did not see? ... He seemed to be listening intently, to be pondering profoundly, but never ever came of it ... He pottered about in a way not easily described, because to describe you must mention something, and Cornleigh did nothing to mention.

There is another object in bringing this example of Jefferies' novels into a discussion of his philosophy, for, after an extraordinary display of observation of human character (putting one side, strangely enough, the two chief characters in the plot), the closing scene finds the heroine sitting by her window at early dawn alone, and the conversation takes the form of the flickering of the first beams of light and the first whisperings of the awakening birds. For that was the conservation that the pagan Jefferies knew best. His whole conception of life was country-bred.

But it is in *Wood Magic*, perhaps his masterpiece, that this foundation of Jefferies' philosophy is most evident. On the surface it is a book for children. But if children understand it all, then there are many things known to them that have been hidden from most of the wise. On the whole, one should turn to this book rather than to any other—except, perhaps, 'The Pageant of Summer' and a few other of the Nature studies—for the deepest elements of Jefferies' thought, and for much of his most delicious art.

*Wood Magic* is a book of the adventures of a small boy who lived in a farm-house, and his fellows in arms are the birds, and beasts, and flowers, and trees, and all else that moves in rural places, even the brook and the wind. It is an extraordinarily successful work, so naturally written that the powers of speech and of thought are carried into the lower world without an effort, and we listen without any consciousness of surprise and with a conviction of complete reality.

In this medium of a world unfettered by our human conventions, Jefferies lets his imagination and wit wander with continual charm and with most illuminating wisdom. It is the ideal medium for such an artist, for such a philosopher. It is, in one way, a very brilliant satire on the men and women in the world above. The animals, and birds, and flowers play, as it were, a shadow show of our human follies and tragedies, our wars and our loves. There is that touch of dainty malicious humour which is present in all the great burlesques: and, like them, it has that touch of originality which is not in the copied forms. The animals and the birds of this romance are a delicate blend of the man and the beast which makes them something new in creation. In this world of his own creation Jefferies plays with a freedom which is surely the right of its creator. For they are the puppets of his own fancy; it is a world of his own imagining. There are not many men of letters who have successfully created a new world.

In this new world, as the grasshopper says to Bevis, 'there is always a great deal of talking going on, for the trees have nothing else to do but to gossip with each other.' Bevis cannot understand—being merely a thoughtlessly ignorant creature—why the grasshopper should hop along in such a crooked path, and he is told that it is in order that he may see everything and search out all beauty near his path. As the grasshopper puts his case for crookedness:

'Tell me now, is there anything so beautiful as the sunshine, and the blue sky, and the green grass, and the velvet and blue and spotted butterflies, and the trees which cast such a pleasant shadow and talk so sweetly, and the brook which is always running? I should like to listen to it for a thousand years.' [The stupid ants passed their years in storing up wealth, adds the grasshopper.] 'But then, you see, Bevis dear, they are quite demented, and so led away by their greedy, selfish wishes that they do not even know that there is a sun.'

This little Bevis—the restless symbol of humanity wandering in a lower world of beasts and vegetables that live, but do not read books or write them or ask questions, this figure of humanity striving after the unknown, is continually putting to his humbler friends that most inconsiderate of questions, Why? It is the reed in the brook that brings the matter to a climax, and breaks the truth to Bevis:

'I do not know why,' said the reed; 'there is no why at all. We have been listening to the brook, me and my family, for ever so many thousands of years, and although the brook has been talking and singing all the time, I never heard him ask why about anything ... And the great oak and every one of his leaves (he has had millions of them) have all been talking, but not one of them ever asked why, nor does the sun, nor the stars, which I see every night shining in the clear water down there, so that I am quite sure that there is no why at all.'

It is not many times in English literature that the great drama (is it a comedy or a tragedy?) of man has been summed up in so few and simple words. It seizes the one characteristic that marks man from all the rest of Nature—this mad desire to know 'why.' Have the most learned of philosophers or historians defined man more precisely in their biggest books? And Jefferies expounds it in a soft whispering by a brook.

But he has more to teach than the negative doctrine that 'there is no why at all,' for, in answer to more questioning from Bevis, the brook flows on, as it is most natural it should do:

'My darling, I do not know myself always what I am singing about. I am so happy, I sing, sing, and never think about what it means; it does not matter what you mean as long as you sing ... I sing loudest at night, to the stars, for they are so far away, they would not otherwise hear me ...' 'Why are you so happy?' said Bevis, 'I do not know,' said the brook. 'Perhaps it is because all I

think of is this minute ... Fling me in some more leaves, Bevis. Why do you go about asking questions, dear? Why don't you sing and do nothing else?'

Thereupon Jefferies puts into the mouth of Bevis the ever-respected answer of man to a wise nature that bids him be content to sing and not weary himself with thought:

'Oh, but I want to know all about everything,' said Bevis. 'Where did you come from, and where are you going, and why don't you go on and let the land be dry? Why don't you run on and run all away? Why are you always here? [And the brook laughed in reply.] I do not know where I came from, and I don't care at all where I am going. What does it matter, my love? All I know is that I shall come back again.'

When the brook, in a moment of half-conscious scepticism (which is half human), begins to meditate on its own philosophy of life—'and yet I do not know either if I am really happy when I sing so joyously'—Bevis, with missionary enthusiasm, clutches eagerly at the doubt. 'Stop a little and think about it,' he begs the brook. But the brook is wiser than men; it knows its limitations when men are deceiving themselves with vain hopes. And once more, as the duologue continues, we get the marrow of all philosophy and all history in a few simple words:

'I cannot stop, I must keep running. Nothing can stop; the trees cannot stop growing, they must keep on growing till they die; and then they cannot stop decaying till they are all quite gone. But they come back again. Nor can you stop, Bevis.'

'I will stop,' stamps Bevis.

'You cannot,' answers the brook.

And in these few scraps of conversation between Bevis and the brook are gathered together a great part of the problem of science and most of the mysteries of philosophy. In the whispering of the wind to Bevis on the top of the hill there is, again, more exquisite writing and deep thinking. The wind is eternal, as nothing else in Nature seems so everlasting.

'There never was a yesterday,' whispered the wind, 'and there never will be a tomorrow. It is all one long today ... Come up and drink me.'

'Shall you be here?' said Bevis. 'Are you quite sure you will be here?'

'Yes,' said the wind, 'I shall be quite certain to be here.'

Although Richard Jefferies had a philosophy which reduced life and the world to something scarcely so tangible as a dream or a shadow, although he would appear to advise us to spend our days in worshipping the sun and our nights in prayer to the stars, yet—being a very great man—he was full of paradoxes. And one of the unexpected traits of this man of rural dreaming was that he had a very outspoken creed in political and social science. Perhaps it would be hard to interpret it into the formula of any recognised

political party; but that may well be because the politicians talk in terms of rhetoric and act in ways of futile compromise. So they were not likely to cross the path of such a man as Jefferies, who—being a poet and an artist—was precise in his opinions and clear in his statement of them, and so sincere in his earnestness that he might have looked on compromise as a crime.

Some day a man with the necessary historical knowledge will write a very weighty volume to prove that poets and artists are the really practical men in life, whereas the men and women of the world, the people who busy themselves on committees and in Government offices and parliamentary chambers, are usually given to much sentimental wandering, which leads them very far away from the facts of practical affairs. A mere glance will detect the poet and mystic beneath the public robes of such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Oliver Cromwell, to mention the first three great men of action that cross one's mind.

Certainly Jefferies was a dreamer and an artist. It is therefore not surprising to find that the basis of his political and social creed was that everyone—without any kind of exception—should have a right to all the food and clothing and housing that a decent, well conducted human body could desire, whereas a sentimental politician usually begins his programme with a lot of rhetoric about an amendment of the Constitution, or some other vague thing that does not matter two straws. Jefferies states this fundamental of physical maintenance in several places. It is put as compactly as possible in 'Meadow Thoughts', where he is describing the wealth of Nature:

Seeds by the hundred million float with absolute indifference in the air. The oak has a hundred thousand more leaves than necessary, ... nothing utilitarian—everything on a scale of splendid waste. ... No physical reason exists [he goes on to argue] why every human being should not have sufficient, at least, of necessities. ... Provision, I sincerely trust, will be made that no one need ever feel anxiety about mere subsistence. Let there be some imitation of this open-handed generosity and Divine care.

In *The Story of My Heart* he makes a more precise claim and a more savage attack on any who oppose this primary reform:

Out of thirty-four millions who inhabit this country [he was writing in 1883] two-thirds live within thirty years of that abominable institution, the workhouse. That any human being should dare to apply to another the epithet 'pauper' is, to me, the greatest, the vilest, the most unpardonable, crime. ... It is the well-to-do who are the criminal classes. It matters not in the least if the poor be improvident or drunken, or evil in any way. Food and drink, roof and clothes, are the inalienable right of every child born into the light. If the world does not provide it freely—not as a grudging gift, but as a right, as a son of the

house sits down to breakfast—then is the world mad. But the world is not mad, only in ignorance, kept up by strenuous exertions.

We saw at the beginning that Richard Jefferies was the pagan in revolt against the ‘civilised’ conventions of a Victorian England that believed in money, and breathed the factory smoke that made it. The pagan worshipper of the sun and the birds threw his challenge on the dust-heap of this plutocrats’ paradise. He clearly announced that his fellow-countrymen were

enslaved by ignorance and by interested persons whose object it has been to confuse the minds of men, ... impressing upon all that to work is man’s highest condition. This falsehood is the interesting superstition of an age infatuated with money, which, having accumulated it, cannot even expend it in pageantry. It is a falsehood propagated for the doubtful benefit of two or three out of ten thousand. It is the lie of a morality founded on money only...

One might, were there space, point out that, on this matter, Ruskin and William Morris, with their sense of the value of fine craftsmanship and the honour of labour, should be read as a modification of the hot revolt of Jefferies against the money-makers’ piffle. But there is no room to mention a fraction of the admirable matters which can be discovered in the pages of Jefferies. For example, the large part of *Wood Magic*, which treats of the wars of the animal world and the struggle for the throne of the countryside, is a piece of witty satire that is equal to Voltaire at his best. There is the secret history of the Court life of the dynasty of the Kapchacks, the magpie tyrants, and their love affairs, and their constitutional jugglery. There is the fox who was chosen as king for no better reason than because everyone was afraid someone else would be elected. There is the hawk who was safe among 10,000 finches who hated him for his cruelty.

‘If only they had marched shoulder to shoulder, all together, could kill him with ease,’ [the reed told Bevis]; ‘they could smother the cat even ...’

‘But as they cannot agree, the hawk, and the cat, and the crow do as they like.’

Here is a final line from a writer who has been dismissed as a dreamer; it is what the old toad of the rhubarb patch told Bevis:

‘If you are only going to do a thing, it would be no use if you lived a thousand years, it would always be just the same.’

For this great poet of the country had very matter-of-fact common sense. Just to imagine, for example, if he had been made (by some wild fate) dictator of the London County Council, does anyone believe he would have allowed people to go on covering his beloved sun with chimney smoke, when any scientist knows with a little care it can be stopped? When the world is governed by poets and philosophers things will get done. It is the hard-headed business men of England who have made so much of it into a dust-heap and a smoke cloud. It is poets like Jefferies who would give us the

necessities, and decencies, and beauties of life. The poets see the realities of existence. The men of affairs are continually confused by the trivialities that seem important in the eyes of money-lenders and political adventurers, and such like deformities, who live in cities. The most optimistic can scarcely say that these men have made a great success of their urban world. It is possible Richard Jefferies may be right when he claims that the sun and the sea, the winds and the brooks, the flowers and the birds, are the sanest things in the world. At least, his is a beautiful creed, and very restful to the battered soul of bewildered man.

# ‘One of the Very Greatest of God’s Naturalists’

*Unsigned*

An unsigned essay on Jefferies, prompted by the publication of Edward Thomas’ biography of Richard Jefferies, was published in the November 1909 issue of *Current Literature* (New York), a monthly literary journal that ran from 1888-1925. The writer quotes at length Kenneth Morris, Thomas Seccombe and Henry S. Salt.

Although unsigned, the essay is probably by Leonard D. Abbott (1878-1953), an Associate Editor of the journal, who was born in Liverpool and attended Uppingham School. He emigrated to New York at the age of twenty where he started his journalistic career and, revolting against his upper-class background, pursued the anarchist cause, writing several books on socialism and economics. Abbott was interested in utopian societies which may account for his choice of quoting from Kenneth Morris’ work.

**T**he English poet-naturalist, Richard Jefferies, is gradually coming into his own. For a score of years his name and reputation have been the centre of controversy. Sir Walter Besant admired but patronised him. Henley regarded him as ‘a kind of literary Leatherstocking,’ and said: ‘He thought, poor fellow, that he had the world in his hand and the public at his feet; whereas, the truth to tell, he had only the empire of a kind of back garden.’ Only the other day, so authoritative a literary organ as the London *Athenaeum* registered its conviction that ‘he was not a great writer.’ But the tide of critical feeling is now running overwhelmingly in his favour. A new biography by Edward Thomas has been published in England. A new edition of some of his essays has appeared in this country, supplementing the earlier publications by Thomas B. Mosher. The *Edinburgh Review*, in a lengthy analysis, sums him as ‘the possessor of a gift of the rarest order.’

‘He is to England what Thoreau is to America,’ one critic declares. The characterisation is at the same time suggestive and misleading. With Thoreau’s intense enthusiasm for nature and genius in delineating its moods, Jefferies has indeed, much in common. There is in both an intellectual intensity, a degree of philosophic insight, that belongs only to minds of the first order. At other points, however, the two present contrast rather than likeness. Jefferies is passionate and emotional; Thoreau is rather the cool thinker, Jefferies is utterly pagan; Thoreau is more the Puritan.

The books by which Jefferies is best known are *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Nature Near London*

and *The Story of My Heart*. The most significant fact in his history was his steady advance from natural history to nature-worship. The chief scenes of his activity were Wiltshire County and the city of London.

Kenneth Morris, a theosophical writer in the *Century Path* (Point Loma, Cal.)<sup>1</sup> sees in Jefferies predominantly, a pagan reincarnate:

Sometimes, [he says] one of the great pagans will incarnate in a modern body, and be restrained and bothered by a modern brain; and you will see him shake off layer after layer of modernity and come nearer and nearer to the soul of his ancient greatness; and yet death overtakes him before he has been anything more than a promise for us. He has bloomed, and then the bloom has lightened our skies, but fruitage was not to be; perhaps it would have been too great to be useful at the time, incompatible with our modern vulgarity. Such a man, I think, was Richard Jefferies.

The same writer continues:

Wiltshire in England is a queer country, one would think, for a great pagan to choose for his incarnation; yet there is something about it that is singularly fitting too. It is a dual-natured land essentially. There are fat, comfortable, green lowlands of wheatfields and copses and slow streams; indolent fields, and an unmystical, slow-speaking people. For background to these there are always the austere Druidic Downs—close akin to those other Downs, a little southward from his birthplace, where Stonehenge stands for a monument to the Ancient Wisdom. A world, austere, Druidic, simple, and with no touch of vulgarity; no fairyland, but a land where the wind is always blowing beneath immense reaches of the sky—neither the prairies, nor the Alps, nor the sea gives one such a sense of wide-spreading immensity lavished on all sides. You will still find there, rare in England, oxen yoked at the plough, and good, thatched walls about the farms. Things modern have no place there, and yet you would not lightly call it beautiful; old acquaintance must come first. Nature is reserved and not prodigal of her revelations. Jefferies was of this land and yet not of it; he grew up in it, and out of it. He came to it from elsewhere, ‘trailing clouds of glory.’

And there was London, with its perpetual thunder and pounding and whirl of life; London, where he spent several years, and which he loved and hated; which attracted and repelled and fascinated and set its spell upon him and whose soul and colour he illumined with such magical phases ‘It was not the least of the city’s praises,’ says his biographer, ‘that it was part of the culture that made Richard Jefferies’ mature work memorable.’ That is true; London doubtless helped in the wearing away of the sheaths, but the sword was not forged there. Nor yet in Wiltshire. He was a child neither of the valleys nor of the Downs, except externally. There is no Richard Jefferies’ country but Hy

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. Kenneth Morris (1879-1937) was a Welsh fantasy writer and theosophist who was a staff member 1908-1930 at the theosophist community in Point Loma, California. *Century Path* was the official organ of The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society.

Brasil and the Gwerddonau Lleon and the Purple Islands. His inward man was from sunlit realms and ages; the rainbow and the sunset gleamed through his being, a passion of light and colour.

But if Richard Jefferies was a pagan, as Mr. Morris suggests, he was assuredly pagan with modern feelings and a mystical soul. He was born in 1848, and his early life was spent on a farm-house in the village of Coate. He grew up a dreamer and a solitary, with little or no communion with his fellows. By his father and a friendly game-keeper he was initiated in to the mysteries of wood-craft and nature-lore; he was ever preternaturally sensitive to the language of sky and field. From this boyhood period may be dated the impressions out of which were built some of his most typical essays—his stories of rookeries and rabbit-warrens, his descriptions of Sussex ploughs and harness belfries. ‘Several writers,’ says Thomas Seccombe in the *London Bookman*,<sup>2</sup> ‘have done this kind of thing since, but very few indeed had done it before Jefferies and those few to be found mostly not in England but in France.’

In 1874, young Jefferies married the daughter of a neighbour, and by this time he was beginning to make his mark as a writer. Three letters he contributed to the *London Times* on the subject of ‘The Wiltshire Labourer’ attracted attention. In 1877 he moved to Surbiton in order to be nearer to London.

With this latter date his mature authorship may be said to have begun. He adopted journalism as a profession. The period that followed was one of struggle and suffering. His nature was that of the recluse; with all his talent he could not make a living. He had never been a strong man physically, and as the years passed his maladies increased.

The outward incidents of his life were few. Mr. Seccombe tells us:

His colours were not far sought. He went abroad but once or twice for short visits to Paris or Belgium. He seems never to have been to Wales, Scotland or even in the north of England. The four foci of his intellectual and imaginative life were places as humdrum as Swindon, Surbiton, London and Brighton. But everywhere he went, whether it was ‘into the fields, to take what the sweet hour yields,’ or into Trafalgar Square, Bermondsey or Bloomsbury, he took with him the imagination of a poet, developing rapidly from *Wood Magic*, *The Open Air* and *The Dewy Morn* to *After London* and *The Story of My Heart* into the illumination of a nature-mystic. The revelation of the inner beauty, of the penetralia of Pan, of the ecstasy of light and summer and of the life-spirit became in him, some would say, a kind of momentary hysteria; or others, a variety of religious experience. He had, at any rate, that perfect conviction that the Deity was transpiring in him which characterises all the great mystics. He

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<sup>2</sup> Ed. March 1909. Thomas Seccombe (1866-1923) was a literary scholar and biographer and contributed more than 500 entries to the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

did not of course formulate it in a religious manner, but he felt it as a religion, and, as suffering, nay, physical pain. Much of his best work in *Bevis* and *Field and Hedgerow* was done in agony, when a footstep pained and the slightest jar tormented. On a sick-bed he had those moments of exaltation in which the heavens opened and he had glimpses of beauty and of what the kindred spirit of Shelley calls 'Nature's naked loveliness' which have been vouchsafed to the greatest poets alone.

It was thus that 'one of the very greatest of God's naturalists'—to use Mr. Seccombe's phrase—developed.

In the opinion of Henry S. Salt, an early and sympathetic student of Jefferies, the two best essays of the English poet-naturalist are 'The Pageant of Summer'—a rhapsody aglow with all the fire of Jefferies' idealism—and 'Hours of Spring' in which the contrary picture of wintry desolation is enforced. Mr. Salt records this judgment in his *Richard Jefferies: A Study*, and recommends to those who would rightly understand the sunshine and the shadow, the mingled vein of hopefulness and despondency, that ran through Jefferies' temperament, a comparative study of these essays. A brief quotation from each is here given:

It is in this marvellous transformation of clods and cold matter into living things that the joy and the hope of summer reside. Every blade of grass, each separate floret and petal, is an inscription speaking of hope. Consider the grasses and the oaks, the swallows, the sweet blue butterfly—they are one and all a sign and token showing before our eyes earth made into life. So that my hope becomes as broad as the horizon afar, reiterated by every leaf, sung on every bough, reflected in the gleam of every flower. There is so much for us yet to come, so much to be gathered and enjoyed. Not for me or you now, but for our race, who will ultimately use this magical secret for their happiness. Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled immortals. My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence.

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For weeks and weeks the stark black oaks stood straight out of the snow as masts of ships with furled sails frozen and ice-bound in the haven of the deep valley. Each was visible to the foot, set in the white slope, made individual in the wood by the brilliance of the background. Never was such a long winter. For fully two months they stood in the snow in black armour of iron bark unshaken, the front rank of the forest army that would not yield to the northern invader. Snow in broad flakes, snow in semi-flakes, raining down in frozen specks, whirling and twisting in fury, ice raining in small shot of frost, howling, sleeting, groaning; the ground like iron, the sky black and faintly yellow—brutal colours of despotism—heaven striking with clenched fist. . . . No kindness to man from birth-hour to ending; neither earth, sky, nor gods care

for him, innocent at the mother's breast. Nothing good to man but man. Let man, then, leave his gods and lift up his ideal beyond them.

It was in the *Story of My Heart* however, that Jefferies rose to heights of sheer genius. It marked his passage from naturalism to mysticism. Nothing else that he ever wrote is so sure of immortality. Of this unique work Mr. Salt gives the following luminous account:

The leading thought by which his autobiographical *Story* is inspired is the intense and passionate yearning for what he calls 'soul-life'. Not content with those three ideas which he says the primeval cavemen wrested from the unknown darkness around them—the evidence of the soul, immortality, and the deity—he desires to wrest 'a fourth, and still more than a fourth, from the darkness of thoughts.' He believes that even now we are on the verge of great spiritual discoveries, that 'a great life, an entire civilisation, just outside the pale of common thought,' and that these soul-secrets may be won by a resolute and sustained endeavour of the human mind. This 'fourth idea,' which cannot be formulated in words, since there are no words to express it, is the conception of a possible soul-life which is above and beyond the idea of existence and immortality, beyond even deity itself; a spiritual entity which is even now realised in part by the absorption of the soul, in rapturous moments, in the beauty and infinity of the visible universe. In this we are often reminded of De Quincey; but in Jefferies' case there was a more distinct purpose and a deliberate perseverance in the search after the unknown.

But while the 'soul-life' formed the first portion of what Jefferies calls his 'prayer,' the physical life was by no means forgotten or undervalued. His second aspiration is for perfection of physical beauty, the human form being to him the sum and epitome of all that is impressive in nature. To cultivate bodily strength and symmetry is as real and indispensable a duty as to aspire to soul-life, since to be shapely of form is so infinitely beyond wealth, power, fame, all that ambition can give, that these are dust before it. Seldom have the glories of physical existence—the 'wild joys of living' as Browning calls them—been celebrated with such rapturous devotion as in Jefferies' prose poem. Day and night are declared by him to be too short for their full enjoyment—the day should be sixty hours long, the night should offer forty hours of sleep. 'Oh, beautiful human life!' he exclaims. 'Tears come to my eyes as I think of it. So beautiful, so inexpressibly beautiful.'

We speak of Jefferies as a mystic; but it must not be forgotten that his is the mysticism of not mere visionary of the study or the cloister, but one of the keenest and most painstaking observers that ever set eyes on nature.

It is hardly likely that Richard Jefferies' abstruser writings will ever be popular in the ordinary sense, but 'they will not on this account have failed of their effect,' observes Mr. Salt, 'for by influencing the minds of the finer and more imaginative thinkers—the poets who, as Shelley expressed it, are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world"—his genius will indirectly be a great power in the dissemination of a higher ideal.'

His personality belongs to that rare order which, in spite of blemishes and imperfections, can by some subtle magic quicken the sympathies and touch the heart of the reader; it will live and be remembered long after more shadowy and pretentious personages are forgotten. 'To reflect,' he says, 'that another human being, if at a distance of ten thousand years, would enjoy one hour's more life, in the sense of fullness of life, in consequence of anything I had done in my little span, would be to me a peace of soul.' It is not to be believed that a future and happier society will omit to do honour to the man who wrote these words. For there are few figures more pathetic or more heroic in the annals of our literature than that of this solitary, unfortunate, yet brave-hearted man, who with 'three great giants' against him, as he recorded in his journal, 'disease, despair and poverty,' could yet nourish to the last an indomitable confidence in the happiness of the future race. But with the idealist's failure, he had also the idealist's success, in the assurance that thought itself is reality—that to have felt these hopes and aspirations is in the truest sense to have realised them.'



Image of Leonard Dalton Abbott from *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine De Cleyre—Anarchist, Feminist, Genius* (State University of New York Press, 2005) edited by Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell. ISBN 0-7914-6094-0. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3547521>

‘Why I do not like Richard Jefferies’

L.G. Payne

Critics of Jefferies’ writings during his lifetime often termed him a mere ‘cataloguer of the hedgerows’ and shortly after his death Arthur Quiller-Couch ridiculed his prose in a harsh parody published in *The Speaker*.¹ In the last century, at the centenary of Jefferies’ birth, Geoffrey Grigson was a lone critic among many contributors to a special edition of *Countrygoer*,² judging Jefferies’ work as ordinary and soft, lacking maturity and ‘has always captured the second-rate’. Grigson maintained his opinion in his review for *The Observer*³ of *Field and Farm*,⁴ a collection of previously unpublished essays by Jefferies edited by S.J. Looker. All Grigson could see was ‘drab wordage, carrying so little, lies inert on the page, too, of a supply of notes and pieces apparently infinite’.

More twentieth-century criticism of Jefferies has appeared with the discovery of the address to the members of the London Natural History Society by their President L.G. Payne FZS. This took place on 3 Dec 1946 and was published in *London Naturalist*, No. 26, 1947. The talk examined six naturalists who, in Payne’s opinion, had influenced their lives as amateur naturalists.

Jefferies was included in Payne’s sextet but he found fault with his style, particularly with Jefferies’ omission to follow the traditional Linnaean system of Latin nomenclature.⁵ Jefferies’ work was more poetically inclined and in an essay, not published until 1948, Jefferies had written, ‘I dislike the term “natural history”: lists, classifications, and Latin names, have no meaning to me. They have their purpose, but quite beside my purpose.’⁶ Even Besant, whom Payne cites, gleaned from his writings, ‘I do not gather from any of his works that he was a scientific botanist, entomologist, or ornithologist.’⁷

Payne’s appetite for classification was evident when at the end of his talk he gave his audience the benefit of his opinion, based on his twenty-four-year membership, of how he regarded each of the six naturalists, giving each a distinguishing label, and revealed that Jean Henri Fabre had been the biggest single influence and inspiration in his personal life.

Charles Darwin, the master intelligence.

Gilbert White, the pioneer observer.

Robert Dick, the collector-observer.

¹ *The Speaker*, 30 Sept 1893. Republished in *RJSJ* No.35, 2020.

² *Countrygoer*, Winter 1948. Richard Jefferies Centenary issue.

³ Review headed ‘Stewed Prunes’, 25 Aug 1957.

⁴ Richard Jefferies, *Field and Farm*, Ed. S.J. Looker, (London: Phoenix House, 1957).

⁵ One is reminded of Peter Cook’s sketch beginning, ‘I could have been a judge, but didn’t have the Latin.’

⁶ Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate*, Ed. S.J. Looker, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), ‘Trees in and Around London’ (Looker’s title), p.116.

⁷ Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888) p.221.

Alfred Fryer, the critical observer.

Richard Jefferies, the popular naturalist.

Jean Henri Fabre, the master experimenter-interpreter.

Lawrence Gilbert Payne (1893-1949) worked for Westminster Bank but was an amateur entomologist, botanist and all-round naturalist. He had contributed articles on ferns and toads to *London Naturalist*, led field-trips for the London Natural History Society and kept reptiles and amphibians in a vivarium at his Richmond home



L.G. Payne

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I should like this evening to take a brief glance at the lives of some naturalists of a former time, attempt to trace the influences which, working consciously or unconsciously, fashioned their whole trend and mental direction, seek some humble parallel in our own lives, apply the benefits of any personal observations which may be relevant to justify our existence as part-time naturalists, and our membership of this Society.

Varying considerations have led me to select the following: Charles Darwin, Robert Dick, Gilbert White, Alfred Fryer, Richard Jefferies and Jean Henri Fabre, a heterogeneous but honoured list of names possessing in common and abounding love of Nature.

I claim no original source of information or specialised insight into their lives, but I would suggest the full maturity of biographical appreciation includes reading between the lines in addition to the printed word.

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Richard Jefferies, 1848-1887

We now come to Richard Jefferies, one of the best known of naturalists and writers on the rural scene of his day. Frankly, I do not like Richard Jefferies. I have never been able to appreciate his style of presentation or to account for

his popularity. But that would be a poor reason to omit him, indeed, for that reason I have included him, as it is obvious that so well a name must have a message for this generation of nature lovers.

Richard Jefferies saw the light of day 98 years ago on a Wiltshire farm, a farmer's son but never a farmer. With nothing very remarkable about his farming ancestors he appears to have been favoured neither with predilection or inhibition. His childhood was spent wandering around his father's farm, his early natural history fostered by the material offerings and bucolic lore of his father's labourers. He liked to mooch around alone, just observing, 'poking round the hedges and mooning about the meadows' are the exact words of his biographer. It appears he played neither football nor cricket nor any organised game. He became a tall, lank, shambling youth lounging about the farm full of excuses if his parents asked him to do anything useful. 'You'll have to speak to him,' said Mrs. Jefferies. 'Speak to him,' said the father, 'what's the use? He only looks at you like an old spaniel with his foot caught in a trap.' However, he gradually acquired useful books, with the aid, we are told, of money obtained from the sale of rabbits snared in the fields, and in this way supplemented the rough and ready knowledge acquired colloquially.

I cannot discover if Jefferies ever had any schooling. One imagines that he must have attended at least a village school and obtained some elementary education, but did he? His youthful social environment was undoubtedly unhelpful. In the rural social scale a little above the farm labourers, a little below the prosperous yeoman farmers, and well below the so-called gentry. Thrown on his own resources, with little companionship of his own age, but slowly developing an untutored, unguided ambition to put his thoughts in writing. The story of what, by stretch of a courtesy, may be called his introduction into professional journalism makes amazing and amusing reading which I cannot really detail here, but it concerns the visit of a junior reporter of the *North Wilts Herald* to a neighbouring farm for a story about some pigs, and his subsequent return by short-cuts straight across Farmer Jefferies' standing hay crop, mutual recriminations, and subsequent conversation with Jefferies junior.

Then followed ten years of provincial newspaper work, and the production of a number of novels, some at his own expense, nearly all however apparently hopeless failures. The only bright spot in this period appears to have been a long letter to *The Times*, on the condition of rural labour, to which the paper devoted a leading article. Walter Besant in his *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* expresses the opinion that this publicity should have been the turning of the tide for Jefferies, but that he missed his cue. At the age of 28 Jefferies came to London, irresistibly attracted, not by city life as such, but because he thought he would do better at the hub of things, nearer the

newspapers, the publishers and the stage. In the way of experience or advantage that move availed him little. He pined for the country again, yearned for his youthful environment, and, born of this nostalgia, he produced in three years his best works, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher*, and *Wild Life in a Southern County*.

Within ten years of coming to London he was dead, and the last five or six years of his life were steeped in physical suffering. I think very few of the general public realise Richard Jefferies lived to be only 38. The Victorian frontispiece photograph appearing in most editions of his works suggested an individual twice that age.

Now let us try and look at him and his work as impartially as may be. There can be little doubt that his active nature-observing was over and done with when he came to London at the age of 28, probably long before. To my mind Richard Jefferies' natural history never got beyond the stage of the observant youth's, and factual dates must almost bear corroborative testimony. He knew the English name of common birds and common animals and he observed the obvious about them. But did he go any further? I do not think he could.

Besant states that he had no scientific training; nevertheless, he considers Jefferies to be a greater man than Gilbert White. We, however, need not agree, for we must remember that Besant is admittedly writing a 'Eulogy'.

To me it sometimes seems there is little depth in Jefferies' observations. He kept a 'Diary' which has been much praised. Here is an entry under date May 12, 'Real May day at last, butterfly, small white, tipped with yellowish red.' One hundred years earlier Gilbert White also kept a 'Diary', and under May 14 he records 'Orange Tip, and gives the then accepted scientific name.

In Chapter 3 of *Wild Life in a Southern County* Jefferies refers to 'ruts' overgrown with 'grass', 'the rough tussocky kind', he says. But might we not have been told if it was cock's foot, *Agrostis* or *Molinia*? It is this irritating vagueness which crops up time and time again.

And now I think I can tell you why *I* do not like Richard Jefferies. Besant states categorically, 'Jefferies never laughs'. And that is the secret. He never laughs—in himself nor in his writing. I would say he writes monotonous prose and is prosily monotonous. I will not labour this point and I *will* say that Jefferies still has a great and appreciative public, therefore there is much in his short life and in his writings which must be meritorious. We in this Society may, I think, emulate him up to a point but definitely we should aim to carry on where he left off.

Richard Jefferies as a Descriptive Writer

Irving Muntz

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There is to some minds no more moving figure in the literary history of our country than that of Richard Jefferies; not one that stands out more markedly from his fellows, a form of pathos to all ages. A failure that only begins to be no failure, now when he cannot know it; whose peace was gained at last, only by leaving behind him all he had counted most dear; there is left of him, in these days, nothing but a voice crying passionately from the dark and silence to those who, yet amid song and sunlight, can neither see nor hear, nor understand. It is one more to be added to the subtle ironies of sober fact.

Of all the elements of tragedy that make him pathetic, one lingers yet. Many are over; the harassing struggle for mere livelihood, the torture of a ghastly and lingering disease, the unspeakable sadness of a well-recognised farewell to the earth that was his passion, these are done. His lack of a right appreciation by his country yet remains.

To some of his admirers Richard Jefferies appears to suffer from a general and perpetual misapprehension; no notice of him or his writings, critical or allusive, appears in newspaper or magazine but he is to their thinking wronged anew; until, with those that appreciate him, the interest that arises naturally in a character so unique, join hands with a sense of gratitude ever new and deep and a study of him comes to change from a pleasant intellectual pastime to a protest that is a positive obligation. Those who have never heard of Richard Jefferies, a larger proportion of the educated than it is easy to believe, may be suffered to go unaccused. They may be allowed very

justly the greater grievance. It is with the superficially acquainted that the quarrel lies; with the journalist who knows him by a stray magazine article and sufficiently by hearsay to recognise the name's allusive value; with the hundreds who carry away the pitiable misconceptions derived from a perusal of the aforesaid journalist's paragraphs, and with all those of his admirers who make their admiration valueless by failing to discriminate between the master and the many disciples.

"The mantle of Jeffreys has fallen upon Mr. Robinson," says a reviewer in an illustrated paper, and the statement is about as accurate as the spelling of Jeffreys' name, but it is typical of the journalistic conception. One cannot help thinking that Richard Jeffreys must have had a very large selection of mantles, for they have been falling continually at intervals since his death, and are now numerous enough to cloak any magazine descriptive writer who can tell the blackthorn blossom from the may. This does not necessitate any undue depreciation of present writers, whose essays may be, and often are, like Mr. Robinson's, excellent in their way; but it is time to insist that their ways are not the ways of the Wiltshire solitary, and that, whatever genius may shine in contemporary magazines, the mantle of Richard Jeffreys has not fallen yet.

For the voice of the British Dunderhead, who walketh in darkness, has become too reiterative to be any longer ignored, and it is sheer charity to inform him that Richard Jeffreys is both less and more than the country naturalist, in dubbing him which he thinks to sum him up; how much less he, being no naturalist, will never discover, how much more he must needs develop his poetical faculty to appreciate. Elsewhere, for the purposes of a comparison he was then trying to establish, the present writer has himself called Jeffreys a country naturalist, and the description is true as far as it goes. Its fault is that it does not go far enough. Though sufficiently accurate when his name and nature were introduced solely in support of a passing proposition, it would be exceedingly inadequate as a portrait of the man, were he the subject of a discourse, not merely incidental to it. A far better type of the country journalist is Gilbert White, of Selborne. The sweetest and simplest of naturalist parsons, he is still the best exemplar of that homely scientific spirit that makes its sole laboratory the garden and the fields. His delight was to watch the blackbirds upon his lawn, the slim summer warblers amongst his raspberry bushes, whose fruit he could never find it in his heart to grudge: he was wildly excited at the appearance of a new or uncommon species; he theorised with a child-like curiosity, yet not without acumen, upon the problems of instinct, avian commissariat, and migration; but that was all. It is a far cry alike in time and quality, from Selborne to Coate Farm; from Gilbert White, naturalist parson, to Richard Jeffreys, naturalist, poet, dreamer, all of which he was and something more; and surely farther still,

farther than a man may see ahead, to that oft announced, long lingering genius upon whom his mantle shall in truth descend. Given another clergyman of simple disposition and the homely scientific turn of mind in a zoologically prolific neighbourhood, and you may yet find another White not unlike his predecessor, if only he manage to arise before evolutionary philosophy have reduced biology to mathematics: given another working man with a greater passion for 'beasties' than for his bradawl or his spade, and you may see another Thomas Edward, and welcome him before all are working men in the enjoyment of the blessings of an universal eight-hours day: you might even find another Thoreau, if ever another high-souled but erratic genius should choose to exhibit his originality by playing at Robinson Crusoe in an island desert only by courtesy of his own conceit. You will never find another nature like that so often but so unhappily likened to Thoreau's, which charmed us in the dreamer of Coate Farm.

People seem to read Jefferies, when they read him at all, with a peculiar variety of emotions. Some read him with bewilderment, some with boredom, some with amazement, some with reprobation, some with contempt; some, and they are fewest, with a never fading delight. Few people have a reputation at once so limited and so wide. When his bust was unveiled in Salisbury Cathedral not long ago, there was enough stir in the papers to make one imagine his celebrity to be wider than it really is. One has only to read how he lived in penury through his latter troublous days because his books would not sell, to get a truer insight into the extent of his popularity; and even now, when he is better known and appreciated than ever before, those to whom he is but the shadow of a name are sufficiently numerous to make all mention of him as a celebrity savour of irony. It is, in fact, with the few and not with the many that Jefferies must be content to hold the place that he deserves; to those to whom he appeals he is of such value, that were reputation judged by depth of admiration rather than by number of admirers, he [was] famous beyond measure already. But those who were born blind and live habitually 'dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon' can hardly be expected to go into raptures at his descriptions, for he tells of discoveries in a world where they go groping all their days, but find nothing. They cannot see these things as he sees them and their half incredulity as to the truth of his observations is only overcome at last to be succeeded by complete boredom when their accuracy has been vindicated. His facts do not interest; his reflections seem foolish to them; his whole nature totally inexplicable by that touchstone and test of sanity, comparison with their own. 'I may resent this,' he says, 'but I cannot deny that the argument is very black against me, and I begin to think that my senses have deceived me. ... No one else seems to have seen the sparkle on the brook or heard the music at the hatch or to have felt back through the centuries; and when I try to

describe these things to them, they look at me with stolid incredulity. No one seems to understand how I got food from the clouds, nor what there was in the night nor why it is not so good to look at it from the window. They turn their faces away from me, so that perhaps after all I was mistaken and there never was any such place or any such meadows, and I was never there.' It is this total want of sympathy that bars Richard Jefferies' way to popularity. In the vast majority of people there is no answering string to cry out at the touch of his hands; he pipes to them, but they cannot dance.

Nor are they much more discerning who do read Jefferies with a certain pleasure and then blandly put him in the same category with others, between whom and himself there is a great gulf fixed. Without wishing to detract from the merits of other writers one may roundly assert, indeed it is half the present writer's object to assert, that there is no one in this particular field of literature to approach him. Thoreau, often quoted as a kindred spirit, has missed that poetical dreaminess which casts so rare a glamour over Jefferies' work; while among later writers neither Mr. Warde Fowler nor *A Son of the Marshes*, neither the author of *'Mid Leafy Ways*, nor Mr. Robinson seems to compete very successfully with the author of *The Open Air*. Against their work one has nothing whatever to say; it is usually accurate and often entertaining; some of the writings of most of them deserve high praise. What it seems necessary to insist upon is that theirs is one class of essay and Jefferies' is another; that not all of them together could have written 'The Pageant of Summer,' or 'Wild Flowers,' or 'Meadow Thoughts,' or 'Winds of Heaven,' or 'Swallow Time.'

And to anyone who meditates upon the reasons of Jefferies' pre-eminence, why it is of all the writers upon similar subjects he alone can offer us just what our hearts desire, it becomes more and more evident that it is because he alone among them has the gift of articulate speech. The great majority of men are inarticulate, full of thoughts they cannot utter, plagued with longings that they struggle in vain to express; for it is as natural to average human nature to cry out, to utter something of itself when it is moved, as it is for a dumb animal to cry out if in pain. Many will remember a humorous sketch in *Punch* a year or two ago, representing a furious old gentleman and an inwardly exasperated young lady who had happened to meet upon the platform of a railway station, and had just missed the same train; the last carriage was fading away round the curve. The old gentleman, purple in the face, was indulging in the luxury of a good swear; but the lady, though inwardly quite as annoyed, was naturally debarred from that form of relief. When, however, the old gentleman had concluded, she turned to him gratefully and said, 'Thank you, so much!'

This delicious incident, whether true or imaginary, affords an excellent illustration of a need that is far from being limited to occasions of

annoyance; it is but an example of an almost universal desire to express one's emotions, either personally or vicariously, whenever they reach a certain intensity. And so it is in literature, when we find some writer who expresses our feelings better than we could do it ourselves; whose thoughts we seem to recognise as our own as soon as they are uttered; who, in reality, puts into form truths and feelings that floated only like misty, troublous shapes before our unaided eyes, and articulates in plain words, comforting to read, what we ourselves should never have grasped fully enough to state. We turn to him gratefully and exclaim, 'Thank you, so much!' Half the charm of all literature is the relief of vicarious speech. This one cannot help thinking is a truer explanation of Jefferies' success than that which Mr. Besant seems to favour in his sympathetic *Eulogy*. 'Why,' he says, 'we must have been blind all our lives; here were the most wonderful things going on under our very noses, but we saw them not.' With all apologies to Mr. Besant, one may venture to think that most of Jefferies' admirers saw them and see them very well. The trouble is, that they cannot speak them; the charm of Jefferies is that he can. His claim upon them is not that he shows them what they never saw before and never could have seen without his aid, it is that he can sing what they see aloud; and that so deeply and sweetly that they, stutters as they axe, are well content to be silent.

For it is Jefferies' distinction that he alone of all his class has caught the spirit of Earth. He can put the breath of the morning on paper that others may read and breathe; and the sunlight of the meadow, the chequered shadows of the deep woods, the grey mist of evening—he has found their equivalents in words. Nothing so small that it can escape his notice, nothing so subtle as to elude his powers of description, his birds sing among the leaves of summer; and his catalogues of flowers are no catalogues after all, because, ungathered, they grow upon the banks among the grasses. But if his power of articulation is the immediate cause of Jefferies' pre-eminence, the cause of that power has in turn to be sought for. The fact that some men have a natural faculty of expression, are born fluent of writing as some are born fluent of speech, will by no means suffice to account for Jefferies' pre-eminence. Nothing could be more certain than that he did not exemplify one's idea of a ready writer. His power of expression is not connected with an easy and polished literary style. His constructions are often loose and his sentences bald and unfinished.¹ The more one reads his essays, the more obvious it becomes that he could write only because he could feel, because

¹ A recent author has claimed a high excellence of literary style for Richard Jefferies; but while willingly admitting that passages of great beauty are scattered plentifully throughout his works, I can find no grounds for withdrawing the above remarks.

Earth was his passion; and one is tempted to think that this passion, which was the cause of his unique power of delineating her features, was due in turn to an acute sensitiveness of perception, a certain intense aestheticism that is visible in all his work.

It is, in fact, not in their subjects but in the men themselves that the difference between Jefferies and his rivals lies. Wood and field are with us always, and always the same, for a man to make what he can of them. In Matthew Arnold's words:

Nature is nothing, her power
Lives in our eyes which can paint,
Lives in our hearts which can feel,

and leaving for the present the question how far his deep feeling for nature was due to his aestheticism, or how far the two reacted upon each other, one may say that it is hard to recall any other writer whose very mode of expression throbs with such a depth of emotion upon a similar subject, unless it be the writer of the 'Song of Solomon', or who exhibits such an acute sensitiveness to the subtler earth-phenomena, unless it be Mr. Thomas Hardy. 'For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.' When we read this we can afford to put down most of the later writers, we can stretch out our hands across the centuries, having found something nearer to us; we recognise him, the truer earth-lover, down the dim ages of the past. For this is poetry, and strikes a note that cannot be heard in any of the modern magazine articles, save those of Richard Jefferies; a note that, nevertheless, must be struck before we can be moved as Jefferies moved us. For nature cannot be described in prose; wood and field, hill and dale and sea, nay, the veriest weed-grown ditch beneath the open sky, has something in it to which prose can never do justice, and whether it be optimistic, as in the passage quoted, or as in Chaucer, or as in Shakespeare's stray pastoral lyrics, where it breathes a spirit of the purest joyousness; or pessimistic, tinged, as in Jefferies, with the melancholy of these latter days, the magic touch of deep poetic feeling must cast its spell upon the writer before he can hope to cast any sort of spell upon others. This deep feeling doubtless lies at the root of Jefferies' distinctive art. Any man may, if he has his eyes about him and if he knows their names, catalogue and minutely describe every flower and grass in the most luxuriant hedgerow in the world. And when he has done, we shall know their names and something of the appearance of each individual plant; we shall not see the hedgerow. We shall not be led by any other, through those dreamy ways of thought and poetical musings that are the characteristic of Richard Jefferies; that are so

tender, so fanciful, and so suggestive that we feel him to be more poet than naturalist after all. He does not moralise:

A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

But there have been few, not even the poet Wordsworth, more deeply moved by it. Jefferies drew no lessons from his hedgerow flowers, only wonderings and dreams. You may catch Thoreau moralising like a Dr. Watts. He makes his creatures subserve his moral purposes and reads at times like a glorified copy-book. Jefferies makes them satisfy his aesthetic cravings, and reads like poetry that might move a man to tears.

There is, however, a twofold difficulty to be overcome by any defender of Richard Jefferies' memory. It is in the first place the necessity of adducing quotations in support of remarks that must otherwise bear the semblance of mere assertion; and it is in the second the impossibility of quoting, in contrast, the writings of the less inspired.

Where the author under consideration deals in a certain class of subject, where, for instance, he is a logician whose lucidity is to be illustrated, where he is an historian whose power of dramatic realisation is in dispute, or where he is a maker of shrewd sayings whose epigrammatic faculty is to be displayed, quotations are the easiest and the most conclusive of all evidence that may be brought. But when in the writing under consideration there is nothing intended to be proved, nothing dramatic described, nothing that could conceivably lend itself to epigrammatic expression, quotation is apt to fail as evidence of any sort and to become at once a necessity and a difficulty. It is in fact impossible to do justice to Richard Jefferies in any quotation short of the length of an entire magazine article, which would preclude the possibility of any introductory or concluding remarks. For his descriptions grow upon you as you read, just as the beauty of his subject, whatever it may chance to be—a spring morning, a summer night, an autumn afternoon—grows upon you in reality as you wait alone in the open air to feel it. It is at once the chief difficulty of his reviewer and the best proof of the truth of his art.

Upon the other hand a quotation from one competitor is a poor starting ground for a comparison; yet to pillory an extract from the less inspired would be an invidious and ungracious task, too ungracious to be permissible. It is open to all who desire to make the comparison to purchase one of Jefferies' books (except the more purely practical and agricultural volumes, for Jefferies had a practical side to his nature) and to consider it with reference to one of anybody else's. Much that is in Jefferies will be found equalled by others, but that which is equalled is not Jefferies' best. The

peculiar charm of the latter is so subtle that it evades exact description. But while observation and accurate delineation of detail may be allowed to belong to many, Jefferies included, it is in most cases the writer's sole stock-in-trade; only Richard Jefferies can unite by details into a living whole, can by mere art of phraseology make his pictures live, his winds blow, his birds sing, his flowers bloom; only he can cast that glamour over his painted woods and fields that, defying all actual material surroundings, can transport us more completely, line by line, from the fire-place and the arm-chair to the woods of April or the chill October downs.

But even Jefferies cannot do this in a few lines. His mood, too, varies, being sometimes purely descriptive, sometimes purely meditative, oftener with a happy combination of the two. Quotations, to do him justice, should show him in all moods; they should display his observant eye for detail and his delicate perception of atmospheric and terrestrial phenomena. They should exemplify his passion for beauty and his dreamy meditations, the underlying infinitely tender melancholy that is its only natural fruit. How to do all this in a few pages is an unsatisfactory problem, because it cannot be completely solved, and because to leave it incompletely solved is to fail in one's aim and object. Consider, however, the following extract from an essay called 'Wheatfields.' It is no ordinary work, though almost purely descriptive. It is the result of an intimate acquaintance with the living earth; the work of a man who had lingered many and many a time over the same scenes before he ever thought of speaking at all; and even this is sufficient to make it live a little longer than some others.

How swiftly the much-desired summer comes upon us. Even with the reapers at work before one it is difficult to realise that it has not only come, but will soon be passing away. Sweet summer is but just long enough for the happy loves of the larks. It seems but yesterday (it is really five months since) that, leaning against the gate there, I watched a lark and his affianced on the ground among the grey stubble of last year still standing. His crest was high and his form upright, he ran a little way and then sang, went on again and sang again to his love moving parallel with him. Then passing from the old dead stubble to fresh-turned furrows, still they went, side by side, now down in the valley between the clods, now mounting the ridges, but always together, always with song and joy, till I lost them across the brown earth. But even then from time to time came the sweet voice full of hope in the coming of summer.

The day declined, and from the cold clear sky of March the moon looked down, gleaming on the smooth plain furrow where the plough had passed. ... The evenings became dark, still he rose above the shadows and the dusky earth, and his song fell from the bosom of the night. With the full untiring choir the joyous host heralded the birth of the corn; the slender, forceless seed leaves, which came quietly up until they had risen above the proud crests of the lovers. ... Yellow charlock shot up faster and shone bright above the corn; the oaks

showered down their green flowers like moss upon the ground, the tree pipits sang on the branches and descended to the wheat. The rusty chain harrow lying inside the gate, all tangled together, was concealed with grasses. Yonder the magpies fluttered over the beans among which they are always searching in spring. ... Time advanced again, and afar on the slope bright yellow mustard flowered, a hill of yellow behind the elms. The luxuriant purple trifolium, acres of rich colour, glowed in the sunlight. There was a scent of flowering beans, the vetches were in flower, and the peas which clung together for support—the stalk of the pea goes through the leaf as a painter thrusts his thumb through his palette. Under the edge of the footpath through the wheat a wild pansy blooms. Standing in the gateway beneath the shelter of the elm, as the clouds come over, it is pleasant to hear the cool refreshing rain come softly down; the green wheat drinks it as it falls, so that hardly a drop reaches the ground, and tomorrow it will be as dry as ever. ... It is midsummer, and midsummer, like a bride, is decked in white. On the high-reaching briars white June roses; white flowers on the lowly brambles; broad white umbels of elder in the corner, and white cornels blooming under the elm; honeysuckle hanging creamy white coronals round the ash boughs; white meadow-sweet flowering on the shore of the ditch; white clover, too, beside the gateway. ... Thus the coming out of the wheat into ear is marked and welcomed with the purest colour. ... The elm has a fresh green—it has put forth its second or midsummer shoot; the young leaves of the aspen are white, and the tree as the wind touches it seems to turn grey. The furrows run to the ditch under the reeds, the ditch declines to a little streamlet which winds all hidden by willow-herb, and rush, and flag, a mere trickle of water under brook-lime, away at the feet of the corn. In the shadow, deep down beneath the crumbling bank, which is only held up by the roots of the grasses, is a forget-me-not, with a tiny circlet of yellow in the centre of its petals.

The coming of the ears of wheat forms an era and a date, a fixed point in the story of the summer. ... At noon-day, as the light breeze comes over, the wheat rustles the more because the stalks are stiffening and swing from side to side from the root instead of yielding up the stem. Stay now at every gateway and lean over while the midsummer hum sounds above. It is a peculiar sound, not like the querulous buzz of the honey, nor the drone of the bumble bee, but a sharp ringing resonance like that of a tuning fork. Here the barley has taken a different tint now the beard is out; here the oats are struggling forth from their sheath; here a pungent odour of mustard in flower comes in the air; there a poppy pants with broad petals flung back and drooping, unable to uphold its gorgeous robes. ... In the evening, as the dew gathers on the grass, which feels cooler to the hand some time before the actual deposit, the clover and vetches close their leaves—the signal the hares have been waiting for to venture from the sides of the fields, where they have been cautiously roaming, and take bolder strolls across the open and along the lane. The aspens rustle louder in the stillness of the evening; their leaves not only sway to and fro, but semi-rotate upon their stalks, which causes their scintillating appearance. The stars

presently shine from the pale blue sky, and the wheat shimmers dimly white beneath them.

So time advances till, to-day, watching the reapers from the shadow of the copse, it seems as if within that golden expanse there must be something hidden, could you but rush in quickly and seize it—some treasure of the sunshine; and there is a treasure, a treasure of life stored in those little grains, the slow product of the sun. But it cannot be grasped in an impatient moment, it must be gathered with labour. How many times the horses stayed in this sheltered corner while the ploughmen and their lads ate their crusts! How many times the farmer and the bailiff, with their hands behind their backs, considering, walked along the hedge, taking counsel of the earth if they had done right! How many times hard gold and silver was paid over at the farmer's door for labour while yet the plant was green; how many considering cups of ale were emptied in planning out the future harvest.

Now it is come, and still more labour—look at the reapers yonder—and after that more time and more labour before the sacks go to the market. Hard toil and hard fare; the bread which the reapers have brought with them for their luncheon is hard and dry, the heat has dried it like a chip. In the corner of the field the women have gathered some sticks and lit a fire—the flame is scarce seen in the sunlight and the sticks seem eaten away as they burn by some invisible power. They are boiling their kettle, and their bread too—which they will soak in the tea—is dry and chip-like. Aside on the ground by the hedge is a handkerchief tied at the corner, with a few mushrooms in it. By the copse here now the teasles lift their spiny heads high in the hedge, the young nuts are browning, the wild mints flowering on the shores of the ditch, and the reapers are cutting ceaselessly at the ripe corn. Hares raced about it in the spring, and even in the May sunshine might be seen rambling over the slopes. As it grew higher it hid the leverets and the partridge chicks. Toll has been taken by rook and sparrow and pigeon. Enemies too have assailed it; the daring couch invaded it; the bind-weed climbed up the stalk, the storm rushed along and beat it down, yet it triumphed, and to-day the full sheaves lean against each other.

Scant justice as these mutilated extracts do to the entire essay, it will be seen that it is worth one's notice. A cornfield is more to this man than to most. All the while it grew out of the soil it grew into his heart. It has given him food for many meditative hours; he has grasped it in its entirety; it is to him symbolic of so much, connected with so much, that its placid life beneath the slow changes of the sun has come to affect him as a stirring narrative of incident. To his fancy it is no more the unexciting progress of mere vegetable growth; it has become an epic.

Something of this spirit may be seen again in an essay entitled 'Round a London Copse,' especially in that portion devoted to an exquisite description of a deserted wayside orchard:

There are still in October a few red apples on the boughs of the trees in a little orchard beside the same road. It is a natural orchard—left to itself—therefore

there is always something to see in it. The palings by the road are falling and are held up chiefly by the branches about them and the ivy that has climbed up. Trees stand on the right and trees on the left; there is a tall spruce fir at the back. The apple trees are not set in straight lines. They were at first, but some have died away and left an irregularity: the trees lean this way and that, and they are scarred and marked as it were with lichen and moss. It is the home of birds. A blackbird had its nest this spring in the bushes on the left side, a nightingale another in the bushes on the right, and there the nightingale sang under the shadow of a hornbeam for hours every morning while 'City' men were hurrying past to their train On a bare bough, but lately scourged by the east wind, the apple-bloom appears, set about with the green of the hedges and the dark spruce behind. White horse-chestnut blooms stand up in their stately way, lighting the path which is strewn with the green moss-like flowers fallen from the oaks. There is an early bush of May. When the young apples take form and shape the grass is so high even the buttercups are overtopped by it. Along the edge of the roadside footpath, where the dandelions, plantains, and grasses are thick with seed, the greenfinches come down and feed.

Now the apples are red that are left as they hang on the boughs, from which the leaves are blown at every gust. But it does not matter when you pass, summer or autumn this little orchard has always something to offer. It is not neglected—it is true attention to leave it to itself.

Left to itself, so that the grass reaches its fullest height; so that bryony vines trail over the bushes and stay till the berries fall of their own ripeness; so that the brown leaves lie and are not swept away unless the wind chooses; so that all things follow their own course and bent. The hedge opposite in autumn, when reapers are busy with the sheaves, is white with the large trumpet-flowers of the great wild convolvulus (or bind-weed). ... Without a path through it, without a border or parterre, unassisted and left alone, the orchard has acquired an atmosphere of quiet and stillness such as grows up in woods and far-away lonely places. It is so common-place and unpretentious that passers-by do not notice it; it is merely a corner of meadow dotted with apple-trees, a place that needs frequent glances and a dreamy mood to understand as the birds understand it. They are always there. In spring thrushes move along rustling the fallen leaves as they search among the arum sheaves unrolling beside sheltering palings. There are nooks and comers whence shy creatures can steal out from the shadow and be happy. There is a loving streak of sunshine somewhere among the tree-trunks.

Thus to Jefferies the neglected orchard without the grandeur of remote mountain scenery, without the orderly comfort of a cultivated garden, is yet full of a nameless fascination because it is full of humble but memorable life. His cascade is the quiet trickle in the ditch amid the last year's leaves; his wild beasts are the mouse and the squirrel; his scenic effects are the white blossom of the apple-trees and the red glint of the sinking sun upon fallen palings and grey, withered grass. Such scenes as these are to him ever memorable; they feed his fancy with sweet memories that make his long

winter evenings full of a rich delight; they are what a traveller's past is to him when, an old man, he wanders in the spirit over far distant lands. He remembers a town full of a strange people; southern suns beneath whose mellow shining dark women grew strangely beautiful and languid-eyed; he recalls a surf-beaten coral isle, a brush with the blacks, the ceremony of the crossing of the Line. Jefferies knows nothing of all these, yet he is not destitute; for he remembers many a pleasant gateway, woodland lights and shadows: a haunted, mouldering barn, an orchard, a quiet valley.

There is in 'Haunts of the Lapwing' a passage very typical of his knack of immediately taking his reader out of doors; a knack never quite successfully caught by any other writer.

Sodden leaves lie in the furrow along the side of the copse; broken and decaying burdocks still uphold their jagged stems, but will be soaked away by degrees; dank grasses droop outwards; the red seed of a dock is all that remains of the berries and fruit, the seeds and grain of autumn. Like the hedge the copse is vacant. Nothing moves within, watch it as carefully as I may. The boughs are blackened by wet, and would touch cold. From the grasses to the branches there is nothing anyone would like to handle, and I stand apart even from the bush that keeps away the rain.

It is evidently an unpleasant drizzling winter's afternoon.

But Jefferies has a deeper, tenderer mood than these. If you want to know the man yet better, you must read some such essays as 'July Grass,' where he touches a deeper chord of feelings and in consequence gives us a clearer insight into the secret of his skill; but once again he will suffer the injustice of an abridged quotation:

A July fly went sideways over the long grass. His wings made a burr about him like a net, beating so fast they wrapped him round with a cloud. Every now and then as he flew over the trees of grass a taller one than common stopped him, and there he clung, and then the eye had time to see the scarlet spots, the loveliest colour, on his wings. The wind swung the burnet and loosened his hold, and away he went over the grasses, and not one jot did he care if they were *Poa* or *Festuca*, or *Bromus*, or *Hordeum*, or any other name. Names were nothing to him; all he had to do was to whirl his scarlet spots about in the brilliant sun, rest when he liked, and go on again. I wonder whether it is joy to have scarlet spots, and to be clad in the purple and gold of life; is the colour felt by the creature that wears it?

The fly whirls its scarlet-spotted wings about and splashes himself with sunlight, like children on the sands. He thinks not of the grass and sun, he does not heed them at all—and that is why he is so happy—any more than the barefoot children ask why the sea is there and why it does not quite dry up when it ebbs. He is unconscious; he lives without thinking about living; and if the sunshine were a hundred hours long still it would not be long enough. No, never enough of sun and sliding shadows, that come like a hand over the table

to lovingly reach our shoulder; never enough of the grass that smells as a flower, not if we could live years and years, equal in number to the tides that have ebbed and flowed, counting backwards four years to every day and night, backward still till we found out which came first, the night or the day. The scarlet-dotted fly knows nothing of the names of the grasses that grow here where the sward nears the sea, and, thinking of him, I have decided not to wilfully seek to learn any more of their names either. My big grass-book I have left at home, and the dust is settling on the gold of the binding. I have picked a handful this morning of which I know nothing. I will sit here on the turf, and the scarlet-dotted fly shall pass over me as if I too were but a grass. I will not think. I will be unconscious. I will live.

Listen! that was the sound of a summer wavelet striking the uncovered rock over there beneath in the green sea. All things that are beautiful are found by chance, like everything that is good. Here by me is a praying-rug, just wide enough to kneel on, of the richest gold interwoven with crimson. All the Sultans of the East never had such beauty as that to kneel on. It is, indeed, too beautiful to kneel on, for the life of those golden flowers must not be broken down even for that purpose. They must not be defaced, not a stem bent; it is more reverent not to kneel on them, for this carpet prays itself. I will sit by it and let it pray for me. It is so common, this bird's-foot lotus, it grows everywhere; yet, if I purposely searched for days I should not have found a plot like this, so rich, so golden, so glowing with sunshine. You might pass it by in one stride, yet is it worthy to be thought of for a week and remembered for a year.

The July grasses must be looked for in corners and out-of-the-way places, and not in the broad acres—the scythe has taken them there. By the wayside, on the banks of the lane, near the gateway—look, too, in the uninteresting places behind incomplete buildings on the mounds cast up from abandoned foundations where speculation has been and gone. ... Some of the finest grow by the mere roadside; you may look for others up the lanes in the deep ruts; look, too, inside the hollow trees by the stream. In a morning you may easily garner together a great sheaf of this harvest. Cut the larger stems aslant, like the reeds imitated in old green glass. You must consider as you gather them, the height and slenderness of the stems, the droop and degree of curve, the shape and colour of the panicle, the dusting of the pollen, the motion and sway in the wind. The sheaf you may take home with you, but the wind that was among it stays without.

It is not too much to say that there is nothing like this to be found in other writers. Where then lies his peculiar charm? His passionate sensitiveness to the beauty of earth is the secret of his success; but there never was passion without pain, and it is this that distinguishes him from all who have as yet essayed to follow in his footsteps. Often again, as you read the best of their pages, you will note the accuracy and admire the truth of detail that you have seen before in the writings of a greater than they; but you will look in vain for the passion that worked beneath. These are gayer

spirits, less meditative, palpably less melancholy and disturbed in soul; and looking first at them, and then at those other whose troubled days found miserable ending years ago, you will recognise that another name must be added to the long roll of those to whom genius has sold herself dear.

In truth it should need but little insistence to call attention to Jefferies' pre-eminence. Literary criticism may be expected to be the gift of the more cultured few, but surely every Englishman should know the likeness of his land, and be able to discern the true exponent of her spirit from those to whom she has revealed herself less liberally. For the standing slight to Jefferies' memory, repeated ad nauseam in journalistic malcomparisons, is also a standing reproach to the public that accepts these comparisons so gullibly.

What will make Jefferies live when others are forgotten is that vivifying passion for earth, whose place is taken by mere affection in his disciples. 'Never was such a worshipper of earth,' he cries of himself, in the saddest of all his essays, 'Hours of Spring,' and none who have read largely of his writings will be likely to doubt him. Just to read one single essay, 'Wild Flowers,' ought to make all argument upon this point unnecessary; as if deemed unconvincing it will certainly prove it useless.

I came every day to walk slowly up and down the plain road, by the starry flowers under the ash-green boughs: ash is the coolest, softest green. The bees went drifting over by my head, as they cleared the hedges they passed by my ears, the wind singing in their shrill wings. White tent-walls of cloud—a warm white, being full to overflowing of sunshine—stretched across from ash-top to ash-top a cloud-canvas roof, a tent-palace of the delicious air. For of all things there is none so sweet as sweet air—one great flower it is, drawn round about, over, and enclosing, like Aphrodite's arms; as if the dome of the sky were a bell-flower, drooping down over us, and the magical essence of it filling all the room of the earth. Sweetest of all things is wild-flower air. Full of their ideal the starry flowers strained upwards on the bank, striving to keep above the rude grasses that pushed by them: genius has ever had such a struggle. The plain road was made beautiful by the many thoughts it gave. I came every morning to stay by the star-lit bank. A friend said, 'Why do you go the same way every day? Why not have a change, and walk somewhere else sometimes? Why keep on up and down the same place?' I could not answer; till then it had not occurred to me that I always did go one way; as for the reason of it, I could not tell I do not want change. I want the same old and loved things, the same wild flowers, the same trees and soft ash-green; the turtle-doves, the blackbirds, the coloured yellowhammer sing, sing, singing so long as there is light to cast a shadow on the dial, for such is the measure of his song, and I want them in the same place. Let me find them morning after morning, the starry-white petals radiating, striving upwards to their ideal. Let me see idle shadows resting on the white dust; let me hear the bumble-bees, and stay to look down on the rich dandelion disk. Let me see the very thistles opening their great crowns—I should miss the

thistles; swifts shot through the air with outstretched wings; ... the chaffinch with a feather in her bill; all the living staircase of the Spring, step by step, upwards to the great gallery of Summer—let me watch the same succession year by year. Why, I knew the very dates of them all: the reddening elm, the arum, the hawthorn leaf, the celandine, the may, the yellow iris of the waters, the heath of the hillside. ... Past the shadowless winter, when it is all shade, and therefore no shadow, onwards to the first coltsfoot, and on to the seed-time again. I knew the dates of all of them. I did not want change. I wanted the same flowers to return on the same day, the tit-lark to rise soaring from the same oak to fetch down love with a song from heaven to his mate on the nest beneath. No change, no new thing. ... In vain; the very next year was different, even in the same place—that had been a year of rain, and the flag-flowers were wonderful to see; this was a dry year, and the flags not half the height, the gold of the flower not so deep. Next year the fatal bill-hook came and swept away a slow-grown hedge that had given me a crab-blossom in cuckoo-time, and hazel-nuts in harvest. Never again the same, even in the same place. ... Nothing twice. Time changes and the places that knew us, and if we go back in after years, still even then it is not the old spot; the gate swings differently, new thatch has been put on the old gables, the road has been widened, and the sward the driven sheep lingered on is gone. Who dares think, then? For faces fade as flowers, and there is no consolation. So now I am sure I was right in always walking the same way, by the starry flowers striving upwards on a slender ancestry of stem. I would follow the plain old road of to-day if I could. Let change be far from me; that irresistible change must come, is bitter indeed. Give me the old road, the same flowers—they were only stitchwort—the old succession of days and garland ever weaving into it fresh wild flowers from far and near. Fetch them from distant mountains, discover them on decaying walls, in unsuspected corners; though never seen before, still they are the same; there has been a place in the heart waiting for them.

Again and again he cries it out; he cannot keep silence upon it; it is his passion. 'I cannot leave it,' he says elsewhere. 'I must stay under the old tree in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives, and the south wind calls to being. ... Never could I have enough, whether here or whether lying on the shorter sward under the sweeping and peaceful birches, or on the thyme-scented hills.'

There are countless passages like these, throbbing with lore of earth, written passionately with strained heart; but these must suffice to show something of its intensity. And yet it might serve to sober the self-confidence of those that step so jauntily into his vacated throne, and tend to produce a more critical discernment upon the part of the reviewers, whose motto seems to be '*Le roi est mort, Vive le roi*,' if their attentions were to be called for a moment to Richard Jefferies at an hour when the price demanded of him for the possession of his powers began to be more than ever apparent;

when the deep joy he had had of earth began to yield to the proportionately deep agony of leaving it; when, a dying man, it dawned upon him that he should never see the fields again until he was dead, save through the window only.

I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me, how they manage, birds and flowers, without me to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly day by day. ... Every blade of grass was mine as though I had planted it separately. They were all my pets, as the roses the lover of his garden tends so faithfully. All the grasses of the meadow were my pets, I loved them all. ... Under the wind it seemed to dry and become grey, and the starlings running to and fro on the surface that did not sink, now stood high above it and were larger. The dust, that drifted along, blessed it and it grew. Day by day a change; always a note to make. The moss drying on the tree trunks, dog's mercury stirring under the ash-poles, birds-claw buds of beech lengthening, books upon books to be filled with these things. I cannot think how they manage without me.

To-day through the window-pane I see a lark high up against the grey cloud, and hear his song. I cannot walk about and arrange with the buds and the gorse-bloom: how does he know it is time for him to sing? ... How can they manage without me? For they were so much to me, I had come to feel that I was as much in return to them. The old, old error. I love the earth, therefore the earth loves me. ... They manage without me very well; they know their times and seasons. ... They go on without me—orchis flower and cowslip—I cannot number them all; I hear as it were the patter of their feet; flower and bud and the beautiful clouds that go over, with the sweet rush of rain and burst of sun-glory among the leafy trees. They go on and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill. Nature sets no value upon life, neither of mine, nor of the larks that sang years ago. The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing to the earth; it is bitter to know this before you are dead. ... High up against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife.

This, then, is how he feels it. Nature is his mistress, and, like many true lovers, he loves her to his cost. It is bitter to him; he writes it down for the relief of his soul in words, such as a man may scarce find voice to read aloud. Long ago, loitering beneath the trees, he said, 'I cannot leave it.' He does not say it any more; but his thoughts are still with the old sunny summer days when he lay upon the grass of the hills and 'burnt life like a torch'; the song of the chaffinch filtering through cool vistas of green leaves; the boom of the wild bee about the scented thyme; the white cloud fleeces floating lazily high above him across the melting blue. It is all before his eyes; part of it he can still see from his window, and the song of the lark tinkles faintly through the glass of the pane.

'I cannot leave it!' No use to cry it now. A voice is calling him, 'Away, away,' from the sunny summer and the songs of birds and the 'warm winds

that breathe hotly' with the scent of clover and hay; away, he knows not whither—somewhere—out into the dark! The raven of fate sits on his breast, crying 'Nevermore'!

I know nothing more piteous than this, nothing either that gives so clear an insight into the secret of his art; nothing that could have furnished us with so strong an a priori ground for anticipating an unparalleled success, or can supply a firmer basis for a present opinion of his pre-eminence. When one reads the above quotations it is not hard to guess why he could write as no one else could, or can to this day. Even as his passion for earth was unique so was the result of that passion, his art, unique also. Certain people, judging Jefferies by his words, which he ever cried were too weak for his meaning, have said, 'I feel like that, why cannot I write like it too?' It should, in truth, need but little consideration to perceive their error. What Jefferies wrote was not what he felt; half of it, perhaps, no more. It is not given to any of us to speak all our hearts, and they who feel like Jefferies wrote must feel very much more, as he did himself, before they can hope to emulate him.

'Not everyone that sayeth Lord, Lord!' Not everyone that calls himself a nature-lover is admitted to her innermost secrets; not everyone that loves to hear the birds sing and to see the primroses come out upon an April bank, has learnt the full significance of either.

Transcendent Sound: The Listening Spirit in Richard Jefferies and his Contemporaries

Séán Street

I came to Richard Jefferies in the late 1970s, initially through Edward Thomas's biography, and his personal view of this '... singular man, a discoverer of colours, of moods, of arrangements ... here were most rare, most delicate, most fleeting things ... at once portraiture and landscape.'¹ Then there were the poignant essays in *Field and Hedgerow*, in particular 'Hours of Spring' and 'My Old Village'. As a fledgling radio producer at the time, learning the craft of making documentaries and features for both the BBC and Independent networks, I was attracted to the voice I heard, and by some of the same things that had caught Thomas's eye and ear through passages such as this:

Everything gives forth a sound of life. The twittering of swallows from above, the song of greenfinches in the trees, the rustle of hawthorn sprays moving under the weight of tiny creatures, the buzz upon the breeze; the very flutter of the butterflies' wings, noiseless as it is, and the wavy movement of the heated air across the field cause a sense of motion and of music.²

So wrote Jefferies in *Nature Near London*, first published in 1883, and the words reflect the sonic intensity of his engagement with the natural world, but also on a broader scale, a school of nature writing that sought to grasp something beyond the contentious poles of science and religion, reaching into and beyond consciousness itself. I would like here to place his spiritual writings within the debates triggered by the writings of Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace, alongside some contemporaries—or near contemporaries—of Jefferies, writers who also offered a parallel—and transcendent—alternative to science and orthodoxy. For example, the Argentinian-born W.H. Hudson although at times critical of some of Jefferies' spiritual writings, was himself eloquent on the subject. Here in 1915 is Hudson writing of a windy spring day in Savernake Forest, in a passage that has something of the spirit of Jefferies about it. As his listening grows

¹ Thomas, E. *Richard Jefferies—His Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1909), p.322.

² Jefferies, R. *Nature Near London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), p.6.

more intense, more active and concentrated, the feeling of what he hears becomes almost mystical:

The sea-like sounds and rhythmic volleyings, when the gale is at its loudest, die away, and in the succeeding lull there are only low, mysterious agitated whisperings; but they are multitudinous; the suggestion is ever of a vast concourse—crowds and congregations, tumultuous or orderly, but all swayed by one absorbing impulse, solemn or passionate.³

Another listener, in that very place, might have interpreted the sounds differently, or indeed might not have noticed them in such detail at all. We are like radio receivers, hearing the same signals but playing them out mentally to ourselves in higher or lesser quality. As his senses tune deeper into the wood, Hudson notices perspective:

Through the near whisperings a deeper, louder sound comes from a distance ... Listening, thinking of nothing, simply living in the sound of the wind, that strange feeling which is unrelated to anything that concerns us, of the life and intelligence inherent in nature, grows upon the mind.⁴

In *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies took himself on his own ecstatic personal spiritual journey of which he wrote, in a third-person note: 'He considers the idea of deity inferior, and believes that there is something higher.'⁵ The resulting book divided opinion, as it still does. Hudson felt that, perhaps had Jefferies lived, 'that strain of intense unnatural feeling, which he so strangely misinterpreted, and which in the book just named touches the borders of insanity, would have been outgrown.'⁶ On the other hand, Edward Thomas, in his 1909 biography of Jefferies considered it to be 'a bold, intimate revelation of a singular modern mind in a style of such vitality that the thoughts are as acts, and have a strong motive and suggestive power.'⁷

In the last pages of his own strongly autobiographical 1921 book, *A Traveller in Little Things*, W.H. Hudson was prompted to turn to poetry, in verses inspired by an event in the New Forest, Hampshire. It was here, perhaps, he came closest to the state to which Richard Jefferies aspired, and of which Jefferies wrote so luminously. Hudson recounts the experience: 'When walking there one day, the loveliness of that green leafy world, its silence and its melody and the divine sunlight, so wrought on me that for a

³ Hudson, W.H. 'Spring in Savernake Forest' from *Birds and Man* (London: Duckworth, 1927), p.76.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Jefferies, R. *The Story of My Heart* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1936), p.xiv.

⁶ Hudson, R. *Nature in Downland* (London: J. M Dent & Sons Ltd, 1923), p.14.

⁷ Thomas, E. *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1909), p.323.

few moments it produced a mystical state ...'.⁸ It was a moment of transfiguration, producing in him 'the idea that we are in communion with or in the presence of unearthly entities.'⁹ The poem, entitled 'The Visionary', is in two parts; the first suggests that forces or beings pass through space and time, manifesting themselves when landscape and humankind blend in a heightened state:

...when on the woodland falls
A sudden hush, and no bird sings;
When leaves, scarce fluttered by the wind,
Speak low of sacred things...¹⁰

The second part of the poem describes his experience as he walks through the Forest, listening to birdsong, and gently humming to himself; the wood becomes transfigured in 'radiance white', the grass like 'tongues of emerald flame.' Enraptured by the vision, he sinks to his knees. The moment passes, the Forest resumes itself:

...And pale at first the sunlight seemed
When it was gone; the leaves were stirred
To whispered sound, and loud rang out
The carol of a bird.¹¹

Hudson and Jefferies, in engagements such as this, seem part of a more general movement, perhaps in response to the development of industrialisation during the nineteenth century, finding a living spirit within nature that answered some of the questions posed and contested by science and religion. At times, there are moments when there is a similar ecstatic response to the sound *inside* the generative dynamic of the natural world, present between them, that finds similar expression in a number of other writers in the years around and immediately after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*.

Darwin's book was published in 1859. Jefferies was born in 1848, Hudson in 1841, the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins in 1844. The intensity of Hopkins's engagement with the world of nature in particular chimes with that of Jefferies at its most immersive. Likewise, there is kinship in the work of American writers Emily Dickinson (1830), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803) and Henry David Thoreau (1817).

Jefferies was born four years after Hopkins, and he died at the age of 38 two years before him. For many theologians of the time, the idea of a god *within* things was a complex argument, while for others, such as Hopkins,

⁸ Hudson, W.H. *A Traveller in Little Things* (London: Dent and Sons, 1921), p.256.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.257.

¹¹ *ibid.*

writing in his journal for 3 June, 1866 while a 22-year-old student at Oxford, everything seemed to be present within an intense observation of nature:

The green was softening to grey. The meadows yellow with buttercups and under-reddened with sorrel and containing white oxeyes and puffballs. The cuckoo singing one side, on the other from the ground and unseen the woodlark, as I suppose, most sweetly with a song of which the structure is more definite than the skylark's and gives the link with that of the rest of birds.¹²

Hopkins trained as a Jesuit, but his great spiritual influence came through the teachings of Duns Scotus (c.1265–1308), a Scottish Catholic priest and Franciscan friar, whose doctrine propagated the view that existence is the most abstract concept possible, and can be applied to everything that exists, and he extended this to the very existence of God. Inevitably, this would prove controversial, particularly within some more conservative channels of Catholicism. Hopkins himself was able to reconcile his religious calling with his poetic vocation through his reading of Duns Scotus, particularly in the nature of 'haecceity', which Scotus translates from the Latin, 'haecceitas' as 'Thisness.' Hopkins felt that everything in the universe could be characterised by what he called 'inscape', a distinctive design at the root of individual identity. The power to recognise this leads to an understanding of an object or creature as being subject to an intense thrust of energy, a force which he called 'instress'. Sound is a link, and Hopkins expresses this idea vividly in the sonic world of his sonnet on the kingfisher, the octave pouring its meaning through auditory light:

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes its self; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*¹³

Jefferies, like Hopkins, possessed a unique and acute ability to be a 'receiver' of sound, with a remarkable skill to draw inner meaning from his senses. He was also capable of touching on the mystery of natural sound, a haunting that grows from the strangeness of new and unexplained experience, what Freud would call in a famous essay written in 1919, 'Das Unheimliche.' ('The Uncanny')

¹² Hopkins, G.M., ed. House, H. & Storey, G. *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.138.

¹³ Hopkins, G.M. *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. Mackenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.141.

The loudest sound in the wood was the humming in the trees; there was no wind, no sunshine; a summer's day, still and shadowy, under large clouds high up. To this low humming the sense of hearing soon became accustomed, and it served but to render the silence deeper. In time, as I sat waiting and listening, there came the faintest far-off song of a bird away in the trees; the merest thin upstroke of sound, slight in structure, the echo of the strong spring singing... (& c.)¹⁴

Jefferies often comes back to the ambient sound of nature, and then goes beyond it into what seems to be Hopkins's 'inscape.' He performs with his senses what we today would ask of a parabolic microphone, creating a field recording of a place in the very act of being. These observations sometimes turn into lengthy meditations, as in his essay, 'The Pageant of Summer', where once again, he finds himself deep in woodland. As his listening intensifies and layers under layers of sound begin to come to the surface, ...

...I become aware of a sound in the very air. It is not the midsummer hum which will soon be heard over the heated hay in the valley and over the cooler hills alike. It is not enough to be called a hum, and does but tremble at the extreme edge of hearing. If the branches wave and rustle they overbear it; the buzz of a passing bee is so much louder it overcomes all of it that is in the whole field.¹⁵

He is hearing a sound beneath sound; it is that same mysterious 'noiseless noise in the orchard', to which the American poet Emily Dickinson had referred in a letter from her home in Amherst, Massachusetts, to her mentor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, twenty-seven years earlier. Dickinson's letters to Higginson, among the most important correspondence in American and even world literature, often capture the extraordinary turns of phrase that are more famously to be found distilled in the poems, demonstrating a spiritual understanding of sound with which Jefferies would have felt kinship. Sometimes these phrases jump out of an otherwise conventional paragraph, as here, from July, 1862, shortly after the Dickinson/Higginson friendship began: 'I think you would like the chestnut-tree I met on my walk. It hit my notice suddenly, and I thought the skies were in blossom. Then there's a noiseless noise in the orchard that I let people hear.'¹⁶ Jefferies heard it like this:

The sap moves in the trees, the pollen is pushed out from grass and flower, and yet again these acres and acres of leaves and square miles of grass blades...are drawing their strength from the atmosphere. Exceedingly minute as these vibrations must be, their numbers perhaps may give them a volume almost

¹⁴ Jefferies, R. *The Open Air* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p.92.

¹⁵ Jefferies, R. *The Life of the Fields* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), p.65.

¹⁶ Dickinson, E. Letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, July, 1862. *Emily Dickinson: Letters*. Ed. Fragos, E. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), p.172.

reaching in the aggregate to the power of the ear. Besides the quivering leaf, the swinging grass, the fluttering bird's wing, and the thousand oval membranes which innumerable insects whirl about, a faint resonance seems to come from the very earth itself. The fervour of the sunbeams descending in a tidal flood rings on the strung harp of earth. It is this exquisite undertone, heard and yet unheard, which brings the mind into sweet accordance with the wonderful instrument of nature.¹⁷

There was a communion for Dickinson too within the natural world that she did not find in organised religion; a poem of 1860 expresses her reasons for abstinence from church habits, and as a dissenter, the sources of her personal beliefs:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—

I keep it, staying at Home—

With a Bobolink for a Chorister—

And an Orchard for a Dome—

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice—

I just wear my Wings—

And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church—

Our little Sexton—sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman—

And the sermon is never long,

So instead of getting to Heaven, at last—

I'm going, all along.¹⁸

Place and time: the changing music of the seasons that Emily Dickinson noted with a mixture of pain and wonder, lay within the context of an intimately known environment, but witnessed through intense listening to sound at the very edge of perception.

It was this mix that fuelled the writing of Henry David Thoreau, (1817–1862) who kept a journal that gradually refined itself towards a project he was unable to complete, his *Kalendar*, that would have focused, as everything else did in his life, on the terrain of Concord, New Hampshire. Thoreau belonged to what became known as 'the Concord School' a group of writers and poets that gathered around the essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson during the 1830s. In 1836, two years after he had moved to Concord, Emerson had published an influential essay entitled 'Nature', in which he formulated and expressed the philosophy of transcendentalism, which views the phenomenological world as a form of symbol of the inner life. Thoreau himself was born in Concord, and lived there for much of his life.

¹⁷ Jefferies, R. *The Life of the Fields* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), p.66.

¹⁸ Dickinson, E. 'Some keep the Sabbath going to Church' *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1977), p.153–4.

On 4 July, 1845, Thoreau moved to a hut he had constructed on Emerson's land at Walden Pond, where he remained for two years, two months and two days, until 6 September, 1847, a sojourn from which grew his masterpiece, *Walden*, published in 1854. Thoreau noted that 'this small lake was of most value as a neighbour in the intervals of a gentle rainstorm in August, when, both air and water being perfectly still, but the sky overcast, mid-afternoon had all the serenity of evening, and the wood-thrush sang around, and was heard from shore to shore.'¹⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of Thoreau: 'His power of observation seemed to indicate additional senses. He saw as with microscope, heard as with ear-trumpet, and his memory was a photographic register of all he saw and heard. And yet none knew better than he that it is not the fact that imports, but the impression or effect of the fact on your mind.'²⁰ It was as though the senses became a portal through which the physical world revealed another plain of existence, something running in parallel with everyday consciousness. Surrounding this aura of metaphysical feeling, there was the ever growing sound of the new industries, the scientific studies that would apparently explain everything. And yet...Thoreau, like Jefferies and Hudson, sometimes seemed to move seamlessly between the physical and the etheric within a single experience, a state brought on by an intense 'oneness' with a particular place.

The storm of religious controversy caused by Darwin's great work within orthodoxy is well known and documented. Yet for writers such as Jefferies, Thoreau, Dickinson, Hopkins and Hudson, there was an essence singing in the natural world that took the issue in another and yet complementary direction, and did so with an elegant and lyrical logic. In 1860, Thoreau read Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Later that same year, he caught a cold, which developed into bronchitis. He had contracted tuberculosis years earlier, in 1835, and had suffered from it sporadically thereafter. On 6 May, 1862, he died, aged just forty-four. Asked by a relative shortly before the end, if he had made his peace with God, he is famously said to have replied: 'I was not aware we had ever quarrelled.'²¹

There remained at the heart of it all, a mystery that neither science nor orthodox religion could explain; even Alfred Wallace, who had reached the same conclusions as Darwin, in later life found his search taking him to the realms of spiritualism. At the start and at the end—through a baby's first cry to a dying sigh—we move between portals of sound, and those very first and last faint signals are the most meaningful sounds of all, signifying a key

¹⁹ Thoreau, H.D. *Walden* (London: Penguin Books), p.81.

²⁰ Emerson, R.W. 'Thoreau', in *Nature and Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p.406.

²¹ Thoreau, H.D. *Journal* (New York: New York Review of Books Publishing, 2009), p.xxiv.

turning in a door of entry and departure. ‘Today I have to listen to the lark’s song—not out of doors with him, but through the window-pane, and the bullfinch carries the rootlet fibre to his nest without me’²² wrote Jefferies. On 11 May, 1922, a few months before W.H. Hudson’s passing, radio station 2LO made its first transmission, prior to the start of broadcasts by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) on 18 October, from which time the air would become peopled by the sounds, not only of nature, but of human voices and music, witnesses to ‘live’ experience and the recounting of memory. For many, the coming of this invisible medium brought its own sense of ‘das unheimliche’ as disembodied sounds reached them through the ether. It was this democratisation of thinking, direct expression, and image-making through the power of recording, to which many years later, as a young radio producer, I sought to give expression: those ‘most delicate, most fleeting things’ of which Edward Thomas had written in his biography of Jefferies (dedicated to W.H. Hudson). Thomas, as much as anyone, carried the mystery of nature’s voice forward to a new generation, both in his own work, and in his assessment of Jefferies’ own ‘spiritual autobiography’, *The Story of My Heart*:

It is the supreme proof, above beauty, physical strength, intelligence, that a man or woman lives. Lighter than gossamer, words can entangle and hold fast all that is loveliest and strongest, and fleetest, and most enduring, in heaven and earth...The words remain, and though they also pass away under the smiling of the stars, they mark our utmost achievement in time. They outlive the life of which they seem the lightest emanation—the proud, the vigorous, the melodious words...the things are forgotten, and it is an aspect of them, a recreation of them, a finer development of them, which endures in the written words.²³

It was through this quality that the writers briefly discussed here found themselves capable of expressing their powers of seeing, listening and exploring in terms of humankind, and in so doing, interrogating the issues those discoveries implied. It is part of the job, to be an outsider, just as it is for the poet—or someone holding a microphone—to find new ways of seeing, hearing and saying, and from this either to come to conclusions, or—perhaps more importantly—to ask new questions.

²² Jefferies, R. ‘Hours of Spring’ in *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p.23.

²³ Thomas, E. *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work* (Boston, Little, Brown), p.327.

Book Review

Finding W.H. Hudson

by Conor Mark Jameson

Blake Lee-Harwood

(Pelagic Publishing, 1 August 2023, 360pp., 39 illustrations, £21.99
ISBN: 9781784273286)

What to make of the enigma of W.H. Hudson, a man who seems the very essence of contrariness? A wild Argentinian adventurer who came to England in his thirties and then rarely left the Home Counties. A difficult and highly opinionated individual who nonetheless won the undying affection of some of the most powerful people in England. And a man transfixed by the terror of public speaking who became one of Britain's most influential environmental campaigners.

Any biographer of Hudson has their work cut out to find a consistent narrative that doesn't just lead to exasperation and yet Conor Jameson does a masterly job in bringing together the threads and reconciling some of the contradictions. This account of Hudson's life wisely skips the early years of high drama in Argentina—already well described elsewhere—and focuses on his life in Britain where he rose from penniless immigrant sleeping under bushes in Hyde Park to the friend and confidante of aristocrats and politicians.

A particular focus of this account—and very welcome to me personally as an ex-Greenpeace stalwart—is Hudson's environmental campaigning and his tireless work to end the murderous feather trade that was decimating bird species across the planet. Jameson does an excellent job of taking the reader through the highs and lows of what was to prove a very long (and ultimately successful) campaign. Hudson's grit and determination shines through this account and you get a real feel for the energy he brought to the battle and the inspiration and guidance he provided to others.

Another useful dimension to this account, and one not explored so much by others, is Hudson's working relationships with women. He seems to have been really effective in building professional and equal collaborations with female colleagues in ways that were quite at odds with the contemporary Edwardian male role model. He clearly deeply respected his female co-campaigners and they obviously liked him a great deal. And yet this admirable aspect of Hudson's character does not translate elsewhere—for instance, he was inexplicably opposed to women's suffrage.

Hudson's politics are also hard to fathom. He was a passionate friend of the colourful political radical 'Don Roberto' (Robert Cunninghame Graham, the 'Gaucho Laird') but he was also a social conservative. He could be ferocious in his defence of animals (and particularly birds) but had little to say about some of the hardships of his fellow humans. He knew homelessness through personal experience and yet rarely reflects on poverty.

And this is just yet another example of the infuriating contrariness of the man. He admired his female campaigners for their professionalism and hard work in trying to change English law but he didn't think they should vote for their M.P. He mostly hated towns but loved King's Lynn—not generally considered an outstanding urban environment. He despised people who ate geese but had no qualms about scoffing chicken. And on and on; Hudson simply had to have a strong opinion about everything, and whatever view he settled on was then held with manic tenacity.

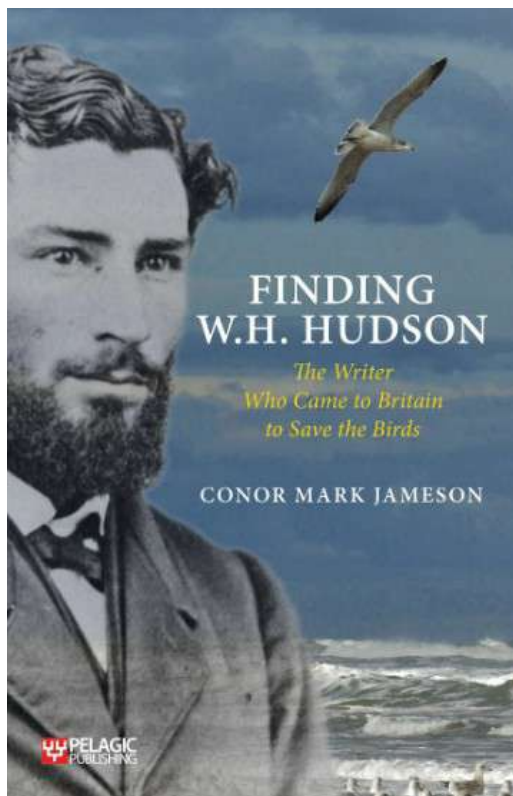
The book also does a good job of outlining the influence of Richard Jefferies on Hudson. It's one of those great mysteries how they never actually managed to meet or correspond despite both being contemporary nature writers living in London. Neither man was particularly good at proactively reaching out to others, and Hudson's passion for Jefferies seems to have evolved only after the other man's death. If Jefferies had lived longer, they almost certainly would have met, but the closest they ever got was to be buried less than 200 yards apart in the same cemetery (and with curiously similar gravestones).

If there's one person missing from the book, or at least only glimpsed, it's Hudson's wife. She was the bedrock of his life in England and rescued him from penury and rough-sleeping. This omission is no fault of Jameson, he does a good job in gathering what evidence exists, but reflects the lack of information to hand; there are no photographs and we have few records of what she was really like. I would argue that there's some blame to be attached to Hudson here; you can read *Afoot in England* and barely realise that she is tramping along beside him for many of the chapters. Hudson was clearly a faithful and considerate husband, but he doesn't seem to have seen his wife as a collaborator in any of his enterprises in the way that he viewed others.

In summary, this is a great biography of Hudson's post-Argentine life and it shows a sure touch in exploring the many sides of a complex and fascinating man. Hudson feels like an almost unique individual—sometimes an Edwardian Chris Packham, steely eyed and unyielding in defence of the natural world, but at other times he comes across as a lovable eccentric who spends his time pottering around other people's stately homes. One moment he completes a huge scientific survey of the birds of Argentina and then the next he negotiates the film rights for his latest novel with Hollywood. He argues with Darwin, lunches with the Foreign Secretary and then dashes off

his next broadside to *The Times* about the horrors of the feather trade. Will we ever see his like again? Alas, perhaps not, he really was quite a character.

All credit to Mr. Jameson for an excellent and entertaining tour of a fascinating life—this book should be in the collection of everyone who has an interest in nature writers, birds or environmental campaigning as well as anyone who fancies a rattling good story with a colourful cast of English eccentrics and Edwardian radicals.



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