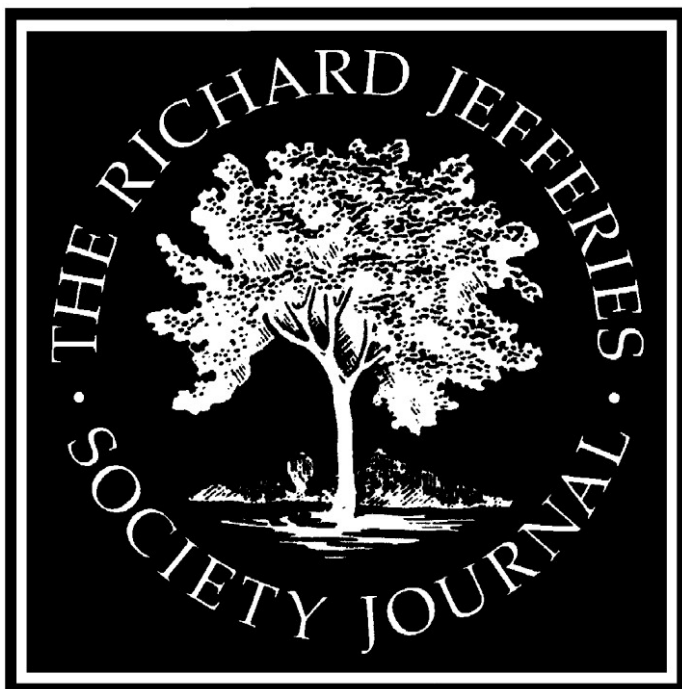




NUMBER 40

2025

75th anniversary of the Richard Jefferies Society

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 *Journal* is the official organ of the Society. Some copies, up to No. 31, are available for £2.50 (postage included), along with other Society publications, from the Hon. Secretary. Free electronic downloads of the *Journal* can be obtained from the Society's website. From 2017 the *Journal* was published as a book and is available at £6 a copy.

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.

Future submissions, preferably in electronic format, should be sent to Rebecca Welshman at the above email address and should be no more than 3,500 words unless previously discussed with the Editor. MSS and correspondence for publication will be acknowledged but cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The current Editors are Peter Robins and Jean Saunders.

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Editorial Comment

Peter Robins & Jean Saunders



The Richard Jefferies Society has reached a significant date this year: this is the 40th edition of the Society's *Journal* and the 75th anniversary since the Society was founded. This is also the first editorial comment and the final edition of the *Journal* to be edited by us. We will be handing over the production of the *Journal* to Rebecca Welshman.

The first *Journal* was published in 1992 thanks to Phyllis Treitel and Hugoe Matthews (both sadly missed) who selected material and organised production whilst Arthur Stafford designed the logo on the front cover that has been used for 33 years. There were mixed feelings expressed amongst Council members about the publication. Cyril Wright was convinced that a *Journal* would not last—he believed that there wasn't sufficient material to use. But we beg to differ. The publication has grown from a pamphlet of 32 pages, to a paperback of 150 pages that has provided a good mixture of articles with an interest for everyone. There are still plenty of articles to find, we hope. We have had the benefit of the Internet and have been able to uncover many previous articles by and about Jefferies that were impossible to find before.

Harold Adams, the founder of the Richard Jefferies Society had this to say about why the Society came into being:

The Richard Jefferies Society was founded at a public meeting held at the Town Hall, Swindon, on Tuesday, 13th June, 1950. It has sometimes been suggested that the foundation of this Society was directly influenced by the temporary interest in Richard Jefferies, generated by Swindon Corporation during the Centenary Celebrations held in the year 1948. This is not quite all the story. I have always had a great love of the countryside and of the beauties of nature. I

delighted in the pleasures of walking through the fields and woodlands, and early in the 1940s, I happened across the book *Wood Magic*, by Richard Jefferies. I enjoyed this work so much, and this later led me to the delights of *Bevis*, *The Story of a Boy*, followed by the joys of reading *The Jefferies' Companion*, being selected essays introduced and edited by Samuel J. Looker.

These books really opened my eyes to the wonder of the natural life of the fields, and over a long period of time, the thought occurred to me that very great pleasure might be derived by people meeting together who had a similar love of nature and the countryside, and who enjoyed reading the wonderful essays of Richard Jefferies, and admired the circumstances of his life and work.¹

Harold was not wrong and whilst the Society was strongly Swindon-based in the early days, albeit that Samuel Looker was the first President, the organisation grew and reached an audience worldwide rising to a peak of 414 members in 1991. That being said Harold was not the first person to suggest that an appreciation club should be set up to honour Jefferies. This letter, from Charles Farr, was published in the *Salisbury Journal* on 28 April 1894.

A SUGGESTED RICHARD JEFFERIES' CLUB

To the Editor of the Salisbury and Winchester Journal.

SIR—Doubtless the 'Poet-writer' on Nature, and that nature too which woke and enlisted his genius, have many warm admirers and ardent students in South Wiltshire. Some love Nature more for having first loved Jefferies. Others—and possibly this is the larger company—love Jefferies because of having first known Nature. The master is gone; his memory and Nature remain. His name and worth are worthily perpetuated in the charming bust in the great Cathedral, and his books speak his praises. True, his writings are not uniformly guides, but the alley is infinitesimal. Time will deplete the alley, and mellow the gold. But Richard Jefferies will be honoured most when, and in as far as, Nature is better known and enjoyed as the result of his influence. I am writing to venture the suggestion that it would be an additional honour to Salisbury, as well as to the memory of the great prose-singer of Nature, if a Jefferies' club or society were established in the city. It might be made to embrace residents throughout South Wilts, or simply Salisbury and neighbourhood. Its purpose might be chiefly the study and popularising of Jefferies' books and teachings; but especially the intelligent and systematic study of the phenomena of rural life. Such a study of the flowers and plants of Wiltshire alone would prove both a joy to those who shared the labour, and a possible public service. There are both ladies and gentlemen in Salisbury in every respect capable of giving practical shape to this suggestion.

I am, &c., Charles Farr, Broadchalks

¹ *The Richard Jefferies Society Museum—Coate Farmhouse: A Guide to the Birthplace, and its Surroundings with Notes on the Life, Writings, and Associations of Richard Jefferies (1848–1887)* by the Richard Jefferies Society (Arts & Recreation Committee, Borough of Thamesdown, 1977).

No follow up was found in the local newspapers regarding Farr's suggestion but it was well known that there was some friction between the Salisbury folk and the people of Swindon who felt that those in the North of the county had done nothing to immortalise the memory of Jefferies whilst those in the south had already ensured that the marble bust of Jefferies, placed in Salisbury Cathedral, would be a living dedication to the great writer.

According to the Society's records I am the longest standing member (*writes Peter Robins*) having joined in 1970. When I left school at 16 in 1962 I joined a Fleet Street photographic agency and the 'Alere Flammam' (Feed the Flame) plaque in Red Lion Court became a familiar sight. I was unaware of its significance until a few years later when I began to read Jefferies.



Membership in 1970, numbering 112, was understandably centred on Swindon, rather distant for a London member to attend meetings, but I did make the 1971 Birthday Lecture given by Henry Williamson. Frances Gay (Chair) was most welcoming to 'outsiders' and we corresponded regularly about Jefferies and other matters until her death in 1974. In a letter to me of 24 Mar 1972 she confided,

It is an excellent thing that people living outside Swindon should be showing such interest [in Jefferies]. Here we have kept doggedly on and more or less regarded by the local folk as stubborn propagandists of ideas connected with a writer they have little interest in.

In the spirit of outreach espoused by Mrs. Gay, at the 1987 centenary of Jefferies' death Kingston Heritage Centre mounted an exhibition about his years at Tolworth, bringing together my text and photographs of the paths and lanes familiar to Jefferies. This was later distilled into 'Richard Jefferies at Tolworth' published in *RSJ Journal* No 6 (1997).

Jean invited me to join her in 2014 and since then we have added some letters, undiscovered essays and reviews, to the knowledge gathered by George Miller, Hugoe Matthews, Phyllis Treitel and Andrew Rossabi. Disappointingly we haven't found the missing Jefferies notebooks or interpreted the idiosyncratic shorthand in the ones available. Jefferies' early poetry of the bible published in *Broad Churchman* (1873) also eludes us. Only one new photo has come to light in the last decade but identity remains unconfirmed.

The greatest advance was when Jean built our website in 2006, maintaining and adding to it since. More recently Jean has organised Zoom lectures and meetings, drawing members from far and wide.

This is our last *Journal*. We believe that we have fulfilled the main aim of the *Journal* outlined on page 2 and hope that readers have enjoyed the contents.

We hand over to a new editorial team to 'feed the flame'.

A Great Agricultural Problem

Richard Jefferies

First published in March 1878, *Fraser's Magazine*, pp.365-373 and signed Richard Jefferies.

It is high time that the attention of all English tenant-farmers and all English landowners—who are equally interested—should be drawn to the rapidly increasing imports of French agricultural produce. A trade has grown up, silently and yet speedily, which threatens before long to interfere with the position, of farming in this country. If it continues to develop at the same rate, the English cultivator must be driven out of the market; and while the principle of free competition has firmly established itself, still, at the same time, that is no argument in favour of calmly closing our eyes, and refusing to modify the practice of farming in order that our neighbours may reap the benefit of their superior acuteness. In plain words, if the English farmer does not awaken and bestir himself, he is likely to be beaten at his own business; and he should recollect that in these days an industry once lost does not readily return. A vast and continuous stream of French cheese, French butter, French eggs, vegetables, etc. is pouring day after day across the Channel. We read that 'our artillery and baggage waggons are largely horsed with animals from France,' and in many counties farms are worked with cart horses imported from the opposite shore. At the same moment we are told that the live stock in this country has decreased; that beef had better be abandoned for mutton; that turnips, upon which crop so much of our farming is based, are a mistake; that corn-growing is a failure, the farms crying out for tenants; in short, that grazing pure and simple, i.e. apart from breeding, and the dairy for sending milk to London, are the only profitable sections of the business of agriculture now remaining. The drift of which is, that farming in the old style and old meaning of the word, can only be successfully carried on in those countries where, as in America, there are vast regions of cheaply rented land, from which both corn and meat can be raised with little outlay; that in countries like ours, where the area of the soil is limited, and the pressure of pecuniary burdens placed upon it enormously high, where population increases with marvellous rapidity, and constantly tends to mass itself in cities, the only profitable farming possible is that which is somewhat contemptuously called the 'kitchen garden' system. If this be so, then these importations of cheese, butter, and so on, must not be looked upon as merely minor matters to be safely dismissed from thought,

while we rest under the ample shadow of the short-horn. They must be regarded as a premonitory sign of the future, and not altogether of evil augury. For it cannot possibly be that an increase of population, which means an increased demand for food, can be fatal to the class whose business it is to supply that food; it must rather act as a positive benefit, if only—and here is the point—they will manage to meet the altered conditions. They are nearer to our great cities than their French competitors, consequently the transit is quicker and cheaper, and there is no sea passage, so that the advantage really lies with them if they will seize it. But for some years now they have supinely permitted the trade to pass out of their hands.

That this is a fact, may be ascertained by inquiring at the shops in any ordinary provincial town. Ask for butter, and you are supplied with what the grocer will candidly confess is Brittany. Now Brittany butter, as we shall see presently, is one of the poorest kinds that leave the Continent—that is, speaking in a general sense; there may be one or more special brands—yet poor or moderately good Brittany butter is purchased in preference, and forms the mass of the grocer's store. If asked if he has any butter made in the vicinity, he will reply that he has indeed a very small quantity sent in weekly from one or two farms, but it is wholly absorbed by three or four of his customers who are high up in the local social scale. He has also a little butter of secondary quality made in the neighbourhood; he cannot recommend it: you taste it and are disgusted. Practically, therefore, the butter supply of the town comes from abroad. Yet you are in the midst of a beautiful dairy country, green meadows with running brooks that cattle love are all around, and the cattle are there too, yet there is no butter. Why is it? Well, the milk goes to London. But surely *all* the country cannot send its milk to London—there must be an end to the quantity required some day. He has cheese? Yes, he has cheese, i.e. American or Canadian; of cheese made in the locality none; people do not like it; this is not one of those special districts where a special cheese is made, and as for the old thin cheese, why the foreign make sells three times as readily. Now change the scene to London, and proceed to a provision dépôt in any of the leading thoroughfares.

In the window will be seen the words Gruyère, Gorgonzola, Parmesan, Roquefort, Camembert, Brie, Bondon, etc., prominently displayed. A huge Gruyère with a piece cut out to exhibit its texture, several Roquefort cheeses cut in half to show the blue mould beloved by the epicure, piles of little Camembert creams, these are artistically stacked to draw customers to the door. Step in, and you are presented with a card of prices, upon which will be found a long list of French, Swiss, Italian, and German cheeses. They have Cheddar? Oh, yes; but an inspection quickly satisfies the visitor that it is not of English manufacture. Cheddar can be got, but it is not here ready for sale.

Further inquiry will elucidate the fact that of the cheese eaten in London pretty nearly one-half comes from America and the other half from the Continent. Stilton holds its own; Cheddar, too, when it can be got; but the mass of the cheese is foreign. Neither is it a matter of price, for much of the Continental cheese *is* the reverse of cheap; the favourite Roquefort, for instance, is two shillings a pound. It is the same with the butter. Here are the finer sort of Brittany (frequently sold as Dorset), fine Normandy brands, butter from Milan, if we look to the southern points of the compass; butter from Denmark, if we look to the north. In short, in this provision dépôt there is everything but English cheese and English butter. Stay, here is some Devonshire cream, some New Forest and York cream—delicacies these, of course; but as with the cheese and butter, so with the creams—Neufchâtel cream competes with them on equal terms. Then with eggs; everyone knows that really first-class new-laid eggs are often all but unprocurable—they were recently selling at 2½*d.* each, about their weight in copper. French eggs are depended upon now by all the cooks in the kingdom for pastry, frying, and every purpose short of the breakfast table. They are so much cheaper, they are easily obtained, and they are on the whole of very good quality. So much for the produce which is generally associated with the dairy, but which it appears the English dairy does *not* now supply.

Next look at the despised kitchen garden, and we may add the orchard. To Covent Garden, and to similar establishments in the great provincial cities, comes asparagus in the middle of the winter, green peas, lettuces, young potatoes, etc., etc., and all from France. These, perhaps, our climate will not permit us to grow at the same season; but this excuse will not hold good with apples. The orchards, for the most part, even in those counties usually supposed to be devoted to the culture of the apple, are, we are assured, practically left to themselves to decay or flourish as they choose. We have seen, in the country, the grass under the apple trees literally hidden with the fallen fruit which remained till partially rotten, and was then flung carelessly together in heaps to be ground into rough cider or cast to the pigs. We bought, last autumn, Blenheim-orange apples in London shops at three-halfpence each, a price which should surely make it worth while to carefully gather this crop. The result of the neglect to do so is visible in the immense importation of foreign fruit of all descriptions, and especially of preserved and dried fruits, and, it may be added, preserved vegetables. The list of preserved fruits so imported fills several pages.

Now, reflecting upon the very serious fact that the butter and cheese trade of this country is already, to a great extent, absorbed by French and Continental producers, it is clearly of the highest importance to obtain the fullest information as to the source of the supply and the reasons why it has

supplanted home manufacture. Mr. Richardson's recent volume,¹ which enters into a minute description of the breeds of French cattle and methods of farming, contains, perhaps, the best materials for an estimate of this kind which has yet been placed in the hands of the public. His information is avowedly derived both from personal knowledge and from the official records of agriculture, which in France are furnished by every local authority. These local returns are of a more detailed character and not so strictly tabular as is the case with our own Governmental figures; they are more of the nature of reports such as would be furnished if two or three leading gentlemen in each parish were requested to write an account of what was going on around them. When to a study of these materials a wide personal experience and an intelligent method of arrangement are brought to bear, it is easy to see that the result must be valuable. The one mistake Mr. Richardson has committed is the attempt to condense too large a mass of matter into a comparatively small compass; he does not allow himself time or space to exhaust the many interesting subjects upon which he treats; but he has presented us with a series of authentic figures and facts not otherwise accessible, for which every student of the great changes agriculture is undergoing must be grateful.

To proceed direct to the points under consideration, it appears, from Mr. Richardson's statistics, that, in 1876, 600,000 cwt. of butter came to England from France. In the same year the total import of foreign butter was 1,700,000 cwt., of the value of £9,700,000. It follows that 'we draw considerably more than one-third of our foreign butter supply from France. The most important house for this export trade—the commission upon whose business in London is said to be worth £8,000 a year—is managed by a woman, and thoroughly well managed too.' These are figures which concern us directly; but there are others which concern us almost as much indirectly. It must be recollected that there are other countries besides England which consume this article; so that our dairymen, when they lose the trade at home, also lose the business they might obtain abroad. In Russia the possibilities of trade attached to the excellent qualities of such cheese as the famous Stilton are fully appreciated. The process of making Stilton, Derby, and Cheddar cheese has been studied in England by Russian agents, and these varieties are now manufactured at Moscow, and specimens have been exhibited at Continental shows. Countries requiring cheese will be supplied from somewhere; and if England declines to supply it, other nations will take her natural place.

¹ *The Corn and Cattle Producing Districts of France* by G.G. Richardson. Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878.

A very great share of this butter business now falls into French hands. Besides the 600,000 cwt. sent to England, other nationalities took over 200,000 cwt. 'This exportation is made to various countries—to Belgium as well as to England—and nearly 3,000 tons go to South America and the West Indies.' The value of the total export reached £4,000,000, and, mark, 'This enormous manufacture leaves all the buttermilk, skim-milk, and manure, at home for the benefit of the country.' The practice now fast becoming universal in England of selling the milk off the farm, of course wastes all those secondary products. We are therefore losing, first, the money paid by English consumers in the great towns for butter, which now goes into foreign hands; secondly, the possible export trade which should, in part at least, be ours; and finally, we are wasting the products which are derived from buttermilk, etc., and the fertilising value of the manure which follows its consumption. Besides the French butter, we import vast quantities from America. And it is not a little remarkable that while we import from the United States in the north, France exports to the south of that continent, as, for example, to Rio Janeiro. Briefly, England, hitherto regarded as the finest dairy country in the world, is daily becoming dependent upon Continental and Transatlantic supplies of dairy produce; while France not only manufactures sufficient for home consumption, but exports to us and to the West. Is not this an extraordinary state of things?

Since so much of the butter now used throughout the country comes from Brittany, a few particulars as to the state of the manufacture there will be interesting. The total butter production for the province is estimated at £1,300,000 per annum.

Over a wide area, we are told, 'the manufacture of butter is yet very imperfect. The churns are of the upright form. . . . Few farms have any proper dairy attached to them, and the milk is kept and the butter made in the kitchen, which is, over a large portion of Brittany, the sleeping and living room of all the inhabitants of the farm.' Eaten immediately, the butter is good, but 'the system is bad for any butter that has to be kept, as it soon turns rancid; and as the large dealers who purchase for export have to knead it and wash it over again, it loses in this process very much of its flavour and ten per cent of its weight.' The salt added amounts to ten per cent of the weight. Machines are in use for kneading and washing it, worked by steam, and turn out from 2 to 6 hundredweight per hour. All this does not sound prepossessing; yet, the butter must have good intrinsic qualities, or it would never command so wide a sale. But the point of these facts lies in this, that, even with imperfect manufacture, this butter surpasses a large proportion of our own home-make, and is purchased in preference. How very inferior,

then, must the English process be—or, rather, how much must this very important industry be neglected!

The finest French butter is made in Normandy; the quantity, too, is large, and the care expended great. 'In Le Bessin, near Isigny, there are farms that sell £1,000 worth of butter yearly;' and in view of the predominance given in this country to the shorthorn, it is curious to read that in that district, which takes the lead as to butter, 'the opinion of the farmers is, that the smallest cross of the shorthorns would reduce the yield of milk from twenty quarts a day, which they get now from a newly-calved cow, to fourteen or fifteen.' First-class shorthorns have, however, yielded more than this, up to twenty-eight and thirty quarts daily. 'The brand at Isigny that makes the highest price is that of M. Demagny. In 1876 his minimum price for salted butter was £7. 7s. per cwt., and his maximum £10. 10s., taken at Isigny; his sales during the year reached £160,000, mostly for export to the Brazils.' In winter Isigny butter realises from 3s. to 3s. 6d. per pound wholesale by auction in the Paris market! Such a price will seem incredible to English dairymen. Here is the secret: 'The care in the manufacture at Isigny is something excessive, and much of the superiority of the butter is attributed to this. The hand never touches the butter, it is always beaten up in cloths; the utensils are of marvellous cleanliness, and if a drop of milk or cream falls on the floor it is at once sluiced away.' Next to Isigny comes the butter made at Gournay, in the Seine Inférieure, which in Paris reaches 2s. a pound. In Neufchâtel in 1873, 3,300 tons of butter were made, averaging on the spot £120 per ton, a total of about £400,000.

The statements in an address delivered at a meeting in London by Mr. Allender, the managing director of the Aylesbury Dairy Company, and who has also personally inspected the French butter districts, taken in connection with the above, are full of pregnant meaning. He says: 'Gournay, a great centre for Normandy butter, is a sight to see on market day. Now, the land is not better than we have in England, neither are the cows. Why do we have to pay the millions a year we do for dairy products, when our own land might produce so much more by better management? . . . English butter, even from our best districts, except from just a very few special farms, is fast becoming a thing to avoid.' It would seem as if the true course of the English dairyman should be to establish a reputation for a speciality in butter—a fine brand, like the Isigny—rather than for mere quantity. But how very far behind he is in this particular, which depends in a great measure upon the making up (as shown at Isigny), is obvious when we learn, upon the best authority, that in the whole of England and Ireland there were recently but two automatic circular butter-making machines in use, and one of these was at the Aylesbury Dairy Company's factory in London. Yet this machine is common

all over the north of Europe, and even in cold and distant Finland, which one would hardly suppose to be a country of progress. The system of setting the milk in ice-water, which causes the cream to rise with extraordinary rapidity, and ensures its perfect sweetness—a system now employed almost everywhere on the Continent, is also all but practically unknown in this country. Clearly, therefore, there will be much to learn before this great industry can be revived, and the English farmer must no longer look upon the foreigner with contempt.

French and Continental cheese sells in London, not because of cheapness, for much of it is expensive, but on account of its superior flavour. English farmers, finding that there was no sale, or rather no remunerative sale, for the thin poor cheese they had made from time immemorial, and which was beaten out of the market by the American article, gave up the occupation in disgust, and gladly sold their milk. The French farmer competes with the cheap American sorts by establishing a reputation for special qualities, and experience has shown that this course is successful. Should not a lesson be learnt from this? The great Gruyère, for instance, is as well known in London now as Double Gloucester, and its manufacture has been attended with the happiest results in the increased prosperity of the agriculturist. The French Gruyère cheese (there is also an important Swiss make) comes from Franche Comté, and is the produce of the small farmers on the slopes of the Jura range. Writing of the system pursued, Mr. Richardson says:

As the cheeses weigh three-quarters of a hundred-weight, and are as big round as a cart-wheel, the milk from many cows is required to make one. No farmer has sufficient milk at one time, few indeed having as many as three cows, and it takes three hundred quarts to make a cheese. The inhabitants of the village therefore unite, and each sends in what quantity he can to the general factory. The amount he sends is put to his credit, and on the balance of the sales being made up, he receives an amount of money in proportion to the quantity of milk he has supplied. In 1854 there were 1,250 factories in the two departments of the Doubs and the Jura, producing cheese to the value of £480,000. Now (1876) the amount is quite up to £1,200,000, and the quality is considered equal to that of the Swiss Gruyère.

Now there are places in England where great commons are still to be found, fed off by the cattle of the burgesses of the adjacent town, who have the right to turn out two or three cows to graze. The system has been severely condemned, and the majority of the old common lands have been inclosed—that is in itself a different question. But did we ever hear of an English district where there were a number of small farmers combining together in this way, and thereby obtaining for themselves a reputation for a special product in far distant countries, while at the same time putting,

money in their purse? There is scarcely a village, states Mr. Richardson, which has not got its factory, and this manufacture 'brings comfort to a district in which, until its extension, the people were sunk in misery.'

It does not follow that we are to slavishly imitate; it may be that the processes by which many foreign cheeses are produced are scarcely practicable here; but is there no originality, no invention amongst us, no power of modification? The cheese known as Bondon, which obtains an extensive sale in England, is made in Neufchâtel (Seine Inférieure), and this again brings comparative wealth to the inhabitants. The annual make reaches 4,500 tons, of the value of £270,000. These small cheeses are turned out by machinery at the rate of 1,200 per hour. The soil of Neufchâtel over wide-areas is poor, a large part is covered with forest, and the population is but 81,000, who derive an income from the cheese and butter of £10 'per head for every man, woman, and child, besides the value of the calves, the skim milk, and the whey.' The Brie cheese is another kind well known in England; it weighs about a pound, and three quarts of milk are used in the manufacture; the price wholesale is from 1s. to 1s. 3d. per pound. The total production is about £400,000 worth—£4,000 worth are often sold on a single market day. There is a species of Brie which is made from much richer milk, and sells retail at over 2s. per pound. The Camembert now seen in every shop in London comes from Normandy, and it must be a profitable manufacture, since one of the largest makers, M. Cyrille Payncl, can pay for his 500 acres of grass £3. 10s. per acre. This gentleman in 1875 sent 9,090 dozen of this tiny variety to Paris, which were sold for £3,000. Roquefort cheese, which is now so common in the windows, can hardly be compared with any English produce because it is made from the milk of ewes. It is none the less important to know the large profit that must arise from this business. From each ewe it is calculated that 24 lbs. of cheese are yearly obtained: this is a low average, and whole flocks may be found which yield 55 lbs. per head. Roquefort in London is sold at 2s. a pound. In one case 8 cwt. of cheese was made from the milk of thirteen ewes; 'the cheese from each ewe sold for 30s., the wool for 4s. 6d., and the lamb, sold at a few days old, 4s. 6d.,' i.e. a total revenue in a single season from a single sheep of £1. 19s. About 3,500 tons of this cheese are made in the neighbourhood of Roquefort. The mode of manufacture is curious in the extreme, and it is matured in caves through which a cold draught passes. For the interesting details Mr. Richardson's book should be consulted.

The foregoing facts suggest some very serious questions, which the English farmer will do well to consider. Why is it that French farmers can make a brand of butter selling at 3s. a pound? Why is it that on the one hand a race of the smallest of small farmers can send out a noble cheese which has

a sale hundreds of miles from its place of origin, and a farmer with 500 acres, a large holding for France, paying 70s. per acre, can put £3,000 worth of cheese in the market? Why is it that agriculture in France becomes more flourishing every year, the common labourers saving money, while in England there is constant complaint and restlessness? The fault here is generally traced to the high price and scarcity of labour; but the same difficulty is experienced across the Channel. Throughout France the cry is that the population does not increase as it should do, and 'if society at large is disgusted by the small increase of the people, the farmers feel it more acutely and directly.' There is a distinct transfer of labour from the country to the towns. Every effort is made by prizes offered at provincial shows, etc., to induce labourers to remain at farm work, but in vain; they still drift to the cities, leaving the farmers shorthanded. 'At times of pressure farmers must offer high wages to get their work done: as much as from 3s. 6d. to 5s. a day (it must be recollected that money is relatively of higher value than in England), with board in addition.' The men used to be thankful to sit down with the farmer and partake of his fare; now the farmer's food is not good enough, and they insist on better than their employer eats. Further, 75 per cent of the agricultural labourers, either personally or through their parents, possess an interest in a small piece of land which renders them far more independent than ours are. Add to this that the conscription for the army takes away just the prime of the young men, and it is clear that the position of the French farmer in respect to the labour question is, if anything, worse than that of the English. Another oft-quoted argument in explanation of the productive power of France is derived from the subdivision of land. Mr. Richardson does not bear out this view. He says:

No life is so hard as that of the peasant working his own land; and the change from such toil—which, at the year's end, by the most niggardly starvation system of living, leaves less money than could be lived out of easy work and good living in towns—will perhaps tend to take the children of peasant proprietors out of the old groove.

In one commune of 2,080 acres there are 270 proprietors, but there are 5,348 lots; and each owner has about 20 minute estates, all separated from each other.

At Estrées St. Denim, in Oise, the lots had got so small that each holding was only about thirteen square perches. The owners agreed to have the land put together, and set out in lots of from half to three-quarters of an acre, and then sold to the highest bidder (only previous owners to bid?); the value was doubled, trebled, and in some instances decupled.

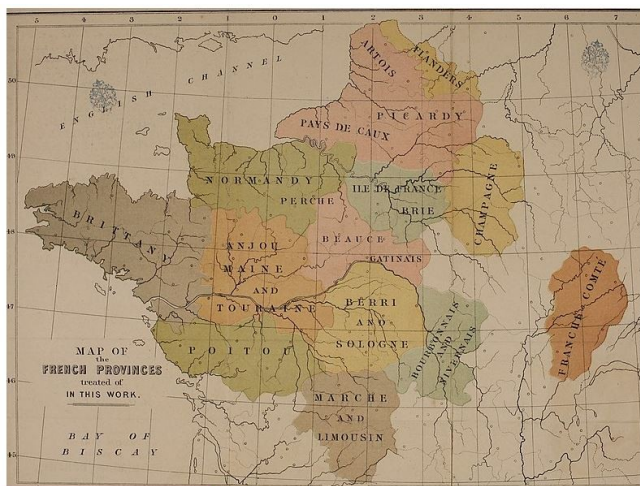
Nevertheless^{2*} these small holdings pay; but it does not follow, when the accompanying drawbacks are considered, and the difference in the temperament of the English peasant allowed for—as also the climate, for ours is not so suitable for the fruit, which is a great staple in these garden-farms—that they are desirable on a large scale in this country. One cause of the prosperity of French farmers appears to arise from their immense capacity for work, personal labour, which is shared in by their wives and families. Yet even this trait is departing: the daughters of French farmers, no more than those of English, care for farm labour. Those young men who settle in or inherit farms there find a difficulty in getting wives: the girls are shy of the farmhouse life because of its attendant work. ‘It seems that farmers do not find their daughters willing to lead the lives their mothers have led.’ That remark is as applicable to English rural communities as to French. So that there is not such a wide divergence as might have been supposed between the general conditions of farming in the two countries.

It would almost seem as if France was non-progressive, since machinery has made but little way. Mowing and reaping machines are slowly coming into use because mowing is so much dearer than formerly; but one of ‘our large English firms has taken a steam thrashing-machine from show to show for the last four years, without getting an order for a single one.’ Yet the actual progress has been marvellous. Before the great Revolution the description of the country, left by an English agriculturist who examined it, is a perpetual repetition of ‘sandy wastes,’ ‘barren heaths,’ marshes, etc. In Normandy he did not see a well-cultivated acre in the whole province. ‘He little thought,’ writes Dronyn de l’Huys, ‘how largely Great Britain would become dependent on this same country for much of its food.’ In 1745, a loaf made of heather was laid before the King, with the remark that that was what his subjects were living on. It has been estimated that the annual value of French agricultural produce has increased £100,000,000 in the last twenty-five years. It must be recollected that France grows her own corn, and sends no money out of the country to purchase bread.

Is there not here a great and weighty problem? It is clear, to put the practical phases foremost, that every pound of butter and cheese imported into England from the Continent is a direct loss to English agriculturists, and will soon be felt by landowners who hitherto have found their sheet anchor in grass. The French farmer, who keeps his buttermilk, whey, and consequent manure at home, must do more good to the land than his English competitor, who sells off his milk and loses all those sources of further fertility.

² * [This ‘Nevertheless’ is worth noting.—ED.]

The example of France proves one most important fact—that the ‘old countries,’ as distinguished from the backwoods, prairies, and gigantic sheep-walks of the South and West, are *not* exhausted. There is fertility sufficient in them still, and productive power enough to support great populations, and even to export to the West itself. This is encouraging, while it proves at the same time that the land in England does not yield what it might be made to do. It appears that the success of French agriculture compared with ours is not due to any extraordinary difference of legal conditions; good results are equally obtained from large and small holdings and, among the leading agriculturists there, attempts have been made to check the minute subdivision of land. Indeed, it would seem as if the only real reason why a large estate is not cultivated so closely as a little garden plot, is the amount of capital it would require. It is tolerably certain that in some way or other our farming system is deficient in its practical management, quite irrespective of legislative enactment, otherwise the prospect of profit would draw more capital to it. For the reason that farming in France is carried on under conditions of soil, labour, taxation, etc. far more nearly approximating to those in this island than exist in the United States or any other great agricultural country, its present state and progress are deserving of special study. As affording a mine of facts, figures, and apt illustrations conveying a vivid idea of what is passing in the territory of a rising agricultural competitor, Mr. Richardson’s book should be thoughtfully perused. It must not be forgotten that the question of the future of the huge populations massing themselves in Europe is in effect the question of food.



Map of French Provinces in *The Corn and Cattle Producing Districts of France*

The Rating of Personal Property

Richard Jefferies

This letter, dated 18 April and sent from 'Coate Farm', was published in the *Standard* on 23 May 1872. Dr. Rebecca Welshman collected the letter in *Agriculture and the Land* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp.16-17.

SIR,—The opponents of the scheme for rating personal property allege the difficulty of localising it; and there is an indefinite but none the less powerful opposition arising from the want of precedent. If it had been the custom to do so for centuries, as it has been the custom to rate the land, no objection would be raised. The following items, however, extracted from a poor-rate made in the year 1687, show that our forefathers found no difficulty in localising personal property, and that it actually was their practice to rate such property for the relief of the poor:

A tax made for the poor in the parish of Swindon of Ano 1687, and ye same to be collected as often as ye necessity of ye poore require:

Thomas Goddard Esq. Item for tithe os. 8d.

Mr. Thomas Vilett, for tithe 1s. 8d.

Both these gentlemen were laymen. The Vilett family (now Rolleston) were the lay rectors of the parish. These paid a rate upon the tithe they received. Now it certainly does appear that an income from tithe is precisely the same as an income from funded property. And here we find the income from tithe rated to the relief of the poor furnishing the requisite precedent. There was no difficulty in localising income from tithe. Why should there be a difficulty in localising income from any other kind of property? Mr. Lowe appears to rely chiefly upon the income tax for his Indian rubber budgets; he finds no difficulty in localising that, at least in so far as collection goes. The vast works of the Great Western Railway here have recently been rated at a much higher figure than formerly, and in so doing the increased amount of traffic was taken into consideration. That traffic passes between London and Bristol, yet the income from it was localised to pay rates to the Highworth and Swindon Union. There is no difficulty in discovering to what parish an inmate of the workhouse belongs or where he has gained a settlement; what difficulty can there be, then, in discovering in what parish the rate derived from personal property should be applied? In point of fact it actually is done at the present moment. If a man from illness, for instance, becomes an inmate of the workhouse, and, as is often the case, he is found to possess a little funded property, or £20 or £30 in a bank, he is informed that he must

repay the cost of his maintenance. If a man's father, from age, falls upon the workhouse, and the son is found to possess property in a bank or elsewhere, or to possess an ascertained income from any source, he is informed that he must contribute from that property or income to the support of his parent. And if he neglects to do so the magistrates issue an order upon him to pay 1s. 6d. or 2s. per week according to the circumstances. What is this 1s. 6d. or 2s. a week but a rate upon personal property? In these cases there is no difficulty in localising it.

—I am, Sir, faithfully yours,
Richard Jefferies.

Coate Farm, Swindon, April 18 [1872].

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### A note from the Editors about Coate Farm



The Ellett family 'Coate Farm', 1910

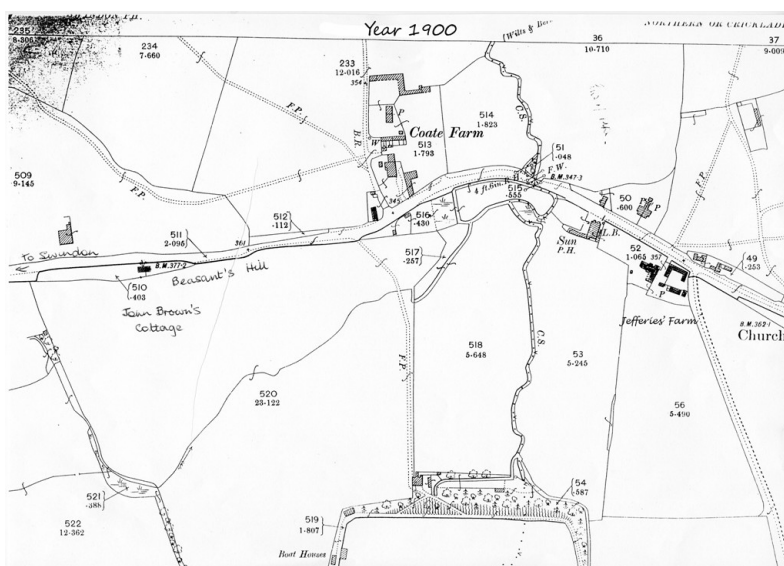
Edward Thomas opens *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1909) with: 'Richard Jefferies was born at Coate Farm ... on November 6, 1848.' To be pedantic, he was not born at Coate Farm, but on a smallholding at Coate. Censuses merely place the Jefferies family at Coate and early maps do not name the buildings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See more in the next article.

Richard Jefferies' father wrote in a letter to Dr. Rake, dated 26 Nov. 1896: 'Snodshill was the name on my Waggon and cart, he [Richard] styled it Coate Farm it was not worthy of the name of Farm it was not Forty Acres of land'.

There is no mention of Coate Farm on Jefferies' birth certificate and 'Coate Farm' does not appear on any census until 1901 when the Ellett family (Emma, a farmer and widow) is recorded as farming there. This farm was named on a map of 1900 (and not before, albeit the buildings appear unnamed on earlier maps). The buildings no longer exist and the land now forms part of Coate Roundabout, and some 200 yards distant from the Jefferies' farm.



Emma Ellett died at Coate Farm in 1916 and probate gave her assets as £1687 2s 7d. Her son Reginald (born 1878) and daughter Emma Elizabeth (born 1879) were still running Coate Farm together on the 1921 census. At the time of the 1939 register Reginald had married in 1922 but remained at Coate Farm as a dairy farmer. His unmarried sister had moved to Croft Road, Swindon by then and she died in 1944.

So Richard Jefferies only gave his home address as Coate Farm before the 'new' Coate Farm was thus named on censuses and maps. No doubt, he wished to convey some importance attached from where he wrote his letters. Nonetheless Coate Farm will remain in the history books as Richard Jefferies' birthplace and home.

## A Brief History of Jefferies Farm

*Jean Martin*

In 2013 Jean Saunders contacted volunteers who were conducting a Wiltshire Buildings Record Farmstead Project to enquire whether the Jefferies' farm at Coate would be a suitable candidate for study. Clive Carter undertook the survey and Jean Martin the research that led to the publication of a report in July 2013. This extract is taken from pp. 21–22.



Andrews and Drury's map, 1773, indicates a building at the junction of the Days and Badbury Wick road and the Coate—Commonhead road where the Jefferies' farm is located.

## History from the Documents

An Abstract of Title produced for James Luckett Jefferies in 1868 traces the property back to the mid-eighteenth century. James' grandfather Richard Jefferies, baker of Swindon, purchased the property in 1800 paying Thomas Herring, Yeoman, £1,100 for a house, outbuildings and land at Coate. The house may be one of the buildings on the eastern side of the brook in

Andrews & Drury's 1773 map of Wiltshire. The Abstract indicates Richard Jefferies had purchased a core holding of approximately 12 acres with additional smaller parcels of land. He sold c. 10 acres to the Canal Company in 1822, in 1845 his sons John and James shared 36 acres of mostly pasture and meadow land.

The Abstract of Title describes the property as formerly part of Badbury Manor; until the mid-sixteenth century the estate was owned by Glastonbury Abbey then passed into secular ownership. By 1700 the manor had passed into the hands of the Mellish family of London; they sold the manor to John Stone, before 1718. A Deed of 1719 indicates the holding that became Jefferies Farm was already detached from the Manor; a property, unnamed but with similar acreage, closes and boundaries was sold by Stephen Lawrence of Broome to Richard Goddard of Swindon. Thomas Herring of Liddington had acquired the property before 1763 when his widow Mary (who had a life interest in the property) and their son Henry entered into a mortgage agreement with Thomas Villet.

The landholding was probably tenanted for much of the eighteenth century. According to the 1719 Deed the 'messuage or tenement was... in the several tenures of John Robinson and Richard Haggard ... formerly in the tenure of one Robert Well and since of Robert Kempton'. In the early eighteenth century land on the northern side of the Marlborough—Swindon Road was occupied by a Richard Haggard. A mortgage assignment in 1764 notes John May as the Herring's tenant.

The Badbury Manor Court Book recorded Quit rents on an intermittent basis, from 1748 a Robert Moore was paying 6s. 6d. per annum for the 'Herrings' property he was followed by Thomas May in 1751 and John May in 1761. Thomas Herring was paid the rent in 1792, the next payment recorded was by Richard Jefferies in 1803. By 1812 Jefferies was making an additional payment of 3s. 2d. for the 'Stamps' ground. These two payments were to remain in force with the last payment in 1932 by Swindon Corporation. John May was listed as a Juror of the Court in 1751 and James Jefferies as a Tithingman from 1840.

Richard Jefferies' will had left the residue of his estate to be divided amongst his children James Jefferies, Fanny Jefferies and John Jefferies 'and to their heirs for ever equally divided held same as tenants in common'. Fanny died intestate in 1825 and her portion passed to her brother John; James died in 1850 also intestate and again his share went to his brother. When John died in 1867 his will made provision for his two daughters charged on 'his real estate'; to settle the legacies his son James had to mortgage the Coate property.

# PARTICULARS

ALL THAT

## FREEHOLD & COMPACT ESTATE,

Situate at Coate, in the Parish of Chisledon, Wilts,

Within two miles of the Market Town of Swindon, how and for many years in the occupation of Mr. JAMES JEFFERIES,

COMPRISING A COMFORTABLE

## DWELLING-HOUSE,

Containing Sitting Room, Parlour, 4 Bed Rooms, and 2 Attics, Dairy, Good Cellar, and the usual Domestic Offices, together with

## ORCHARD, GARDEN,

STABLES, CONVENIENT CATTLE SHEDS, AND YARDS,  
AND SEVERAL CLOSES OF

## RICH PASTURE LAND,

Containing 36a. 1r. 25p., or thereabouts, as follows :

| No. on Title Map | NAME                                                   | STATE       | QUANTITY. |    |    |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----|----|
|                  |                                                        |             | A.        | R. | P. |
| 210 <sup>a</sup> | Upper Stamps Ground ... ..                             | Pasture ... | 1         | 3  | 18 |
| 208 <sup>b</sup> | Lower Stamps Ground ... ..                             | Ditto ...   | 1         | 3  | 18 |
| 220              | Road Ground, Cow Pen, and Rack Yard ... ..             | Ditto ...   | 5         | 1  | 14 |
| 225              | Little Axe, (commonly called Little Hawke) ... ..      | Pasture ... | 1         | 3  | 34 |
| 225A             | Double Mound round ditto, and Withy Bed ... ..         | ... ..      | 0         | 3  | 20 |
| 226              | Great Axe, (commonly called Great Hawke) ... ..        | Pasture ... | 9         | 0  | 30 |
| 211 <sup>c</sup> | Sieris Marsh ... ..                                    | Ditto ...   | 4         | 3  | 22 |
| 126              | Hogstead, Cow Shed, and Yards adjoining ... ..         | ... ..      | 0         | 1  | 39 |
| 123              | Home Ground, (commonly called the Ferne Ground) ... .. | Pasture ... | 5         | 0  | 11 |
| 126              | Little Ground ... ..                                   | Ditto ...   | 1         | 1  | 27 |
| 127              | The Meadow ... ..                                      | Ditto ...   | 3         | 1  | 19 |
| 129              | Withy Bed adjoining the Brook ... ..                   | ... ..      | 0         | 0  | 13 |
| TOTAL ... ..     |                                                        |             | 486       | 1  | 25 |

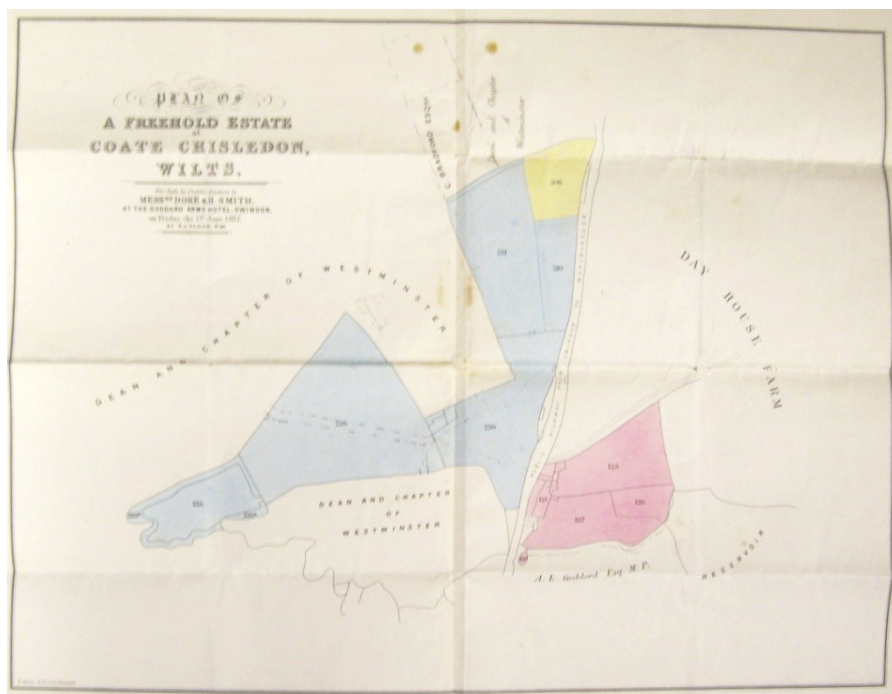
N.B.—Nos. 208, 210, 211, are now thrown together and form one reid.

Land Tax, £7 4s. Apportioned Tithe Rent Charges, £4 7s. 8d, payable to Vicar of Chisledon. Quit Rents, payable to Lords of the Manor of Badbury, 6s. 6d, and 5s. 2d. per annum.

The Estate lies almost in a ring-fence, and adjoins the Public Highway Gate Turnpike Road from Swindon to Hungerford and Marlborough) and Property of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, and Trustees of the late John Stone, Esq.

The Dwelling-House, with a slight outlay, might be converted into a genteel Family Residence.

Possession will be given on the 11th day of October next.



From the auction catalogue for 1 June 1877. The house and farm did not sell until 1878.

James Jefferies sold his farm in 1878 to John Thynne acting as agent for the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, a decade later some 10 acres including the house and outbuildings were sold by them to Jonathon and William Gosling [the pink area on the map above]. In 1903 Jonathon Gosling leased the property to Edward Ferris, an Auctioneer and Valuer with premises in Swindon. On Gosling's death in 1915 the farm was sold to Job Lawrence employed as Keeper of the reservoir by the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal Company. Following Job's death in 1922 the property was again sold this time to Percy George Herring, a farmer. Later in the 1920s the farm was acquired by Swindon Corporation<sup>1</sup>. Maps and plans provide some indication of alterations to buildings and farm layout. The farmhouse appears on plans produced for the proposed Coate Water (1822) and Tithe Map (1845) and property sale (1877) but no clear outline is available until the sale in 1877 when both farmhouse and courtyard layout is shown. Successive maps confirm this layout up to and including an OS map of 1943. By 1970 only the farmhouse and southern range of outbuildings remained with the courtyard area being used as a riding school.

# A French Naturalist

*Peter Robins*

The demise of the Marquis G. de Cherville was reported in *The Leisure Hour*, May 1898, a Religious Tract Society publication, in the section 'Over-Sea Notes'. The contributions to this foreign news slot were attributed to 'From our own correspondents.'

Gaspard Pecou, Marquis de Cherville (1821-1898), was descended from a noble family and came rather late to journalism in the 1850s, contributing to newspapers and periodicals about country matters, angling and hunting as well writing a few novels. More than thirty books were published including *Au Village, legends et croquis rustiques*, 1887 ('In the Village, Legends and Rustic Sketches'), *Les Contes de ma campagne*, 1891 ('Tales from my Countryside') and *Le Monde des champs*, 1898 ('The World of Fields'). Only one of his books, *Les Aventures d'un chien de chasse*, 1862, was published in English the following year by Routledge, Warne & Routledge, London, as *The Adventures of a Sporting Dog*.

The writer of the tribute paragraph below felt his work was undervalued as the French were indifferent to 'nature'. We have published a similar opinion in *RJS Journal* No33 (2018) in a 1913 essay 'The French Point of View' by Edith Sichel who stated that 'To the French, the love of Nature for Nature's sake is no part of their daily lives, as revealed at least in their literature.' It's possible Edith Sichel supplied the piece to *The Leisure Hour* as she was journalistically active at this period.

By the death of the Marquis G. de Cherville has disappeared an ever Benthustastic and ever observing student of nature, whose worth in France was very much what Richard Jefferies was in England. He wrote of woods and fields and their life with the utmost realism—in the better sense of the word—and made common things interesting to those who had never thought of them before, by simply drawing them into view without pretending to teach. As a poetic colourist, however, De Cherville was distinctly inferior to Jefferies whose glowing imagination gave such an artistic quality to his work. The French naturalist's knowledge was probably wider and fuller, for his experience was much longer than that of his English contemporary, but although a polished writer he had not the Englishman's originality. Nevertheless his valuable and extensive contributions to the literature of rural life and natural history were not appreciated in France as they deserved to be. The French, although they have a great love of sunshine, green leaves and flowers, and quite a passion for open-air festivities, take but a languid interest in the study of nature. They know far less than the English

about common plants and animals, and their general indifference to such matters is the more remarkable because they can claim some of the most celebrated naturalists. M. de Cherville had to write largely upon practical agriculture and gardening in order to reach a sufficient number of readers, but he always contrived to relieve the dryness of technical subjects with charming touches of observation and feeling. He was for many years a regular contributor to *Le Temps*.



# Richard Jefferies ‘under happy circumstances’: the five years at Surbiton, and their importance to him

*Phyllis Treitel*

This paper, dated April 1986, formed the basis of a talk given to the Richard Jefferies Society by Phyllis Treitel on 2 February 1987. More information and articles by Jefferies have come to light since then.

It is happenstance that the Editors selected this article for the 2025 *Journal* before we learnt of Lady Treitel's death on 1 May 2024. May it act as another tribute to her and to her dedication to Richard Jefferies and the Society.

Richard Jefferies is full of contradictions: this is one of the many reasons why we go on finding him so fascinating. One of the most intriguing contradictions is that he could write so much that was sparkling and cheerful, at a time when he was as unfortunate as he himself, and writers such as Walter Besant have indicated. The sad details of his last years are so well known that their sombre colours have come to stain the whole of his adult life. Yet the writings themselves suggest that there must have been better times. As I looked through Jefferies' notebooks and other papers for the years from early 1877 to early 1882, in other words the five years that he lived at Surbiton, I was compelled to think that if ever Jefferies was happy as an adult it was then. There is a good case for saying that he had a happy childhood, a time that we may fix as ending when he started work at the age of seventeen (March 1866). For the next ten years, in numerous ways, his affairs were unsatisfactory; we know, because he wrote to his Aunt Ellen and told her of all the ups and downs in his fortunes. After he married, the letters to her seem to have ceased, and he made very little comment anywhere else on the years that I want to discuss. In spite of that, an accumulation of evidence exists to justify a claim that his years at 2, Woodside, Surbiton were happy.

He had married in July 1874. For most people marriage introduces a time of delight, but Richard and his wife Jessie spent the first few months of their married life lodging with his family at Coate Farm, and this cannot have been an ideal beginning. The farm was not prospering, indeed agriculture was not prospering, and Jefferies' own earnings were small and uncertain. Jessie became pregnant, and early in 1875 the young couple moved to rented accommodation in Swindon at 22, Victoria Street. I do not think they moved

away from the farm as early as October 1874.<sup>1</sup> Jefferies was hoping at this time to make his fortune with a novel, but though he worked diligently at this, he was not successful; the book, *Restless Human Hearts*, was published but made no money.

He did, however, sell several articles on farming matters in 1875. The baby was born in May of that year and the little family must have been very short of money and forced into a standard of living that was not to their liking. Now, in one of his letters to his Aunt Ellen, Jefferies had hinted that he would like to get work near her so that he could live with her in Sydenham.<sup>2</sup> This is what he now arranged. How the move came about we do not know but he did spend most of 1876 living, presumably for nothing, with his widowed aunt in Sydenham.<sup>3</sup> Jessie had to do the best she could in Swindon. Just what Jefferies himself was doing this whole year has hitherto been something of a mystery. Edward Thomas in his biography of Jefferies stated [p.102] 'A great part of 1876 was spent at Sydenham. . . He must have gone up to find a suitable house near London, yet at the edge of the country, and to make sure of his journalistic connections.' One gets a picture of Jefferies wandering about viewing properties, but this cannot have been so since his letter to Oswald Crawford [see footnote 3] makes it clear that as late as December 1876 he still expected to be living at Sydenham in the spring. But in 1909 Thomas had little more to go on; his list of Jefferies' work for 1876 contains only three items, suggesting that not much work was being done and that Jefferies was taking it easy at Shanklin Villa. Recent discoveries force a very different conclusion. Many more articles are now known to have been published than the three cited by Thomas. Many of these have been discovered recently by John Pearson and listed in his book *Landscape and Labour*; a few more have been found since. In addition, Dr Pearson's work on the 1876 notebook, the one that so defeated Samuel Looker, has revealed in painful detail that Jefferies was making strenuous and persistent efforts that year to break into the London literary world.

By the start of 1877 he had succeeded, yet in spite of the progress he made, we have Jefferies' own words to assure us, if we were still in any doubt, that his year at his aunt's was not a happy one; indeed, how could it be? In his autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, he states [p.72] 'A bitterer time still

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<sup>1</sup> See Samuel Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies; Man of the Fields*, 1964, p.101.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Ellen Harrild dated 'Sunday 1868', BL Add. 58822. The letter begins: 'I arrived safely at Coate'.

<sup>3</sup> See letter quoted by Oswald Crawford, *The Idler*, Oct. 1898 at pp.294-5. Writing to him in December 1876, from Wiltshire, Jefferies said: 'I have spent the greater part of the year near town, I expect I shall be there in the spring most of the time. I stay in Sydenham Park at Shanklin Villa where if you should be in England I should be glad to meet you.'

came when it was necessary to be separated from those I loved . . . In the course of slow time happier circumstances brought us together again, and, though near London, at a spot where there was easy access to meadows and woods.' There, he has said it, 'happier circumstances'. It is these circumstances that I want to set before you and explain what it was about them that made these five years, both personally and professionally, so happy and so satisfying for Jefferies.

It is somewhat artificial to separate the personal and the professional; they were, for Jefferies, closely intertwined, but the separation helps to make clear how momentous the move was. It is easier to start with his personal life, and to go first to his own new family consisting of himself, Jessie and the now 18-month-old Harold. They were re-united. They had been together under one roof for part of 1875 but that had been in Swindon, away from fields and trees. To add to that sorrow had been the misery of feeling a failure and of that failure being observed and commented on by all around. Now, in Surbiton, they were together and away from critical comment.

Even if he had had no wife and child, Jefferies would still have needed to distance himself from Swindon and the taunts and jeers about which he was later so ready to tell the world and for which searchers after local material about him have found so much evidence. In theory, one's friends and relations supply strength and encouragement in time of need. In fact, Jefferies' family and neighbours did supply both from time to time, but the need went on too long. He felt guilty and they lost hope. His own sensitivity to adverse comment made things worse. It was time to move away.

He was also sensitive about the failure of his father to make a success of the farm. No matter what explanation he found for the failure, and he found several, it did his father no credit, and since Jefferies had inherited a strong family pride, what hurt the family hurt him. He would have liked to have helped his parents. Failing that, he could at least remove himself and thus take one charge off them. Presumably there was still, in 1876, a supposition that the farm might be kept on. If, by 1877 when he moved, it was already clear that the farm would have to be sold to meet debts, then his move to London did not just take his burden off them, it took the anxiety of the forthcoming calamity off him. Since he could not prevent it, he could at least stay away; there is not much doubt that the actual selling up would have distressed him deeply.

It may sound callous to move away to London just when your family is in trouble; it might even suggest that there was a break with the family: no one seems to be able to decide how many times, if at all, Jefferies went back to

Coate.<sup>4</sup> But there was no lasting break; on the contrary, as I would like to show, mutual respect did not truly thrive between the parties until they had ceased to be in daily contact.

Part of the evidence is to be found in an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 2 May 1879 called 'The Fields in April'. It was reprinted in *Chronicles of the Hedges*. Jefferies set out in detail his observations of birds and flowers and he stressed that it was in a district near London. Towards the end he said: 'It may be interesting to compare them with the following, taken some sixty miles to the westward.' There followed a similar, but shorter group of observations of what can only be Coate. Looker states that Jefferies was being sent nature bulletins by a member of his family.<sup>5</sup> I would go farther and suggest that the member was his father. I think that, although the farm was sold in 1878, James and Elizabeth Jefferies did not leave it until 1879. I think that they had no source of income and paid no rent, continuing at the farmhouse 'on sufferance'.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that they received money from Richard (and possibly from others too), the money from Richard being offered as payment for the reports. If this was so then not only did Jefferies not leave his parents to their fate, he actually tried to help.

What evidence is there for such payment? The only piece I have lies in the letters that James Jefferies sent to Dr Rake on 19 and 21 November 1896.<sup>7</sup> In the former letter he says: 'I paid a visit to London when the Great Agricultural Show was held at Kilburn. My son was living at Surbiton he got me there and kept me three weeks or so it was before I left the farm at Coate he had a lot of information of me which he wrote in his Book Round About A Great Estate ...' The next letter to Dr Rake, of 21 November, thanks him for his very great kindness. Dr Rake must have asked if Mrs Jefferies (I assume that he meant Jessie, since he did not refer to his own wife as Mrs Jefferies) received anything from Jefferies' publishers. Because James Jefferies' letters have little punctuation it is not always clear what they mean although he is so direct, but what he says in reply to this assumed question is 'if Mrs Jefferies received anything from Publishers she could very well afford to make me a present I do not remember ever having one since my son's illness,

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<sup>4</sup> He may have gone back in 1879 as Edward Thomas suggested in his book, *Richard Jefferies*, 1909. Thomas noticed, in the chapter titled 'The Cuckoo Fields' in *Round About a Great Estate*, that Jefferies claimed to have heard the cuckoo as late as 14 July in that year and Thomas assumed from this that Jefferies must have been in Coate then. But much of the descriptive matter in *Round About a Great Estate* is based on observations near Surbiton, and nothing certain can be deduced from this reference.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Looker, ed. *The Nature Diaries and Notebooks of Richard Jefferies* 1948, p.139.

<sup>6</sup> See unpublished fragment, originally part of *Amaryllys*, BL Add. 58816 for the source of this supposition.

<sup>7</sup> Letters from James Luckett Jefferies to Dr Theodore Rake, BL Add. 58822.

when I was staying with them at Surbiton just commenced their prosperity.' It is this slender evidence which suggests to me that Richard had, on at least one occasion, given his father a 'present'. I am simply guessing when I suggest that the reports from Coate which were incorporated into the newspaper articles, formed the justification for the presents.

Quite apart from the nature reports and the present, James Jefferies' letter mentions the other strong reason for asserting that though Richard had liberated himself from the cares of Coate he had not broken with the family there, or if he had, they were reconciled by 1879. For as James Jefferies says, he went to stay with his son at Surbiton. We do not know when he arrived. The show opened on 30 June. James may have arrived on 21 June since Richard's notebook for that day includes the words: 'Change in the village in 10 years—every singly house altered.' It also said: 'Wintry June. Howling wind like winter—gloomy sky, everything late.' The Kilburn Show was something of a disaster. True the royal princesses came on the opening day, and the Queen herself later, but it rained and rained so that the thousands of people who came tramped through the mud because there were not enough duckboards and had a miserable time. Richard's notebook for 16 June had said 'Changed winter dress for summer, at last' and the change may have less to do with the weather than the fact that he was having his photograph taken.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the photograph was to give his parents. Rain or not, the two Jefferies, father and son, had plenty to occupy them. It is clear from the notebooks that for the rest of his stay in Surbiton, James Jefferies was steadily disgorging all his memories of farming life. Richard was noting it all down, to transform it all later into the loving, glowing account that was *Round About a Great Estate*. It suggests the greatest possible mutual regard. Richard had left Coate behind: he had in no sense repudiated his father.

Unfortunately, it does not follow from this that Jefferies had quite come to terms with the wasting away at Coate of what would have been his, the eldest son's inheritance. From his father he had acquired strong dynastic feelings, and though he hides or quells them temporarily, in the end they rise up to be examined in *Amaryllis at the Fair*. That he was in no sense indifferent to the loss of the land appears from a notebook entry for June 1878 [NB p.42]: 'No cards, hounds, horses, no cob to ride on, not a 2/- bundle of asparagus, or barrel of oysters, not a single bottle of champagne, absolutely nothing, yet £1 a day for 10 years muddled ... It is impossible. Yet he did it.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Edna Manning, *Richard Jefferies; A Modern Appraisal*, 1984, frontispiece.

<sup>9</sup> Notebook II June 1878, BL Add. 58818.

So much for the personal gains to Jefferies from moving away from Wiltshire. What can we say about Surbiton at that time and what sort of life did Richard and his wife enjoy there? The house they lived in still stands, though it is hard to recognize. It was not distinctive but, as we shall see, its position more than made up for any shortcomings. In later years Jefferies looked back on it, as on so many things, with disdain. In March 1884 he wrote in his notebook: ‘The apartments at S. [Surbiton] the dreadful heaviness of them.’<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, to begin with, the little family only rented part of the house and later took over more. There is, in the papers at the British Library,<sup>11</sup> Jefferies’ copy of one of the leases of 2, Woodside. This copy is dated 24 February 1880 and may be a new lease, the first one having run out. It shows that the house belonged to Sarah, Mary, and Jane Waters of Kingston on Thames, and that the rent was £28 per year. His daily routine we can learn from Walter Besant’s book,<sup>12</sup> Besant having learned the details from Jessie, after her husband’s death. He had a light breakfast at eight and worked until about 11.30. He then went out for a walk, came back to lunch, his main meal at 1.0, and after that, slept for an hour by the fire. Another walk was followed by tea at 5.0 and more work in his study until 8.30. Supper was at 9.0 and bed by 11.0. This regular routine must sometimes have been broken because his articles and notebooks give us other details, especially about the night sky, and of course he went to London. He had to go to London to call on his publishers but there were visits for pleasure. His notebooks mention the ballet, his articles and stories make it clear that he went frequently, at one time, to the Royal Academy,<sup>13</sup> and at least once he went to the opera. His notebook for 29 October 1881 has a bare mention of Don Giovanni; since the Italian Opera Company was giving a performance of Don Giovanni on that Saturday afternoon it seems fair to conclude that Jefferies, and we hope Jessie, were in the audience. Like W.H. Hudson, Jefferies did not approve of pets, but he, or it may have been Jessie, had a cat. He even mentioned it in one of his very matter-of-fact pieces for the *Livestock Journal*. This took the form of a letter on the subject of infestation, and in it he claimed that his neighbour, whose land abutted on Jefferies’ garden, had said to him how pleased he was to see ‘my cat catch two or three mice a day.’<sup>14</sup>

This brings us again to the situation of 2, Woodside, the semi-rural nature of which was such a consolation to him. Reading his essays and notebooks

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<sup>10</sup> Notebook XII., BL Add. 58818.

<sup>11</sup> BL Add. 58817.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, 1889, p.170-1.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Sipping the Season’, *World*, 7 June 1876; ‘The Nude in London’, *World*, 12 June 1878.

<sup>14</sup> *Livestock Journal*, 27 Sept. 1878, p.25.

one can tell how well the area suited his needs, but we have no need to guess because he tells us himself. The essays in his book *Nature Near London* are almost all about Surbiton and the country round; in its Preface he states:

It is usually supposed to be necessary to go far into the country to find wild birds and animals in sufficient numbers to be pleasantly studied. Such was certainly my own impression till circumstances led me, for the convenience of access to London, to reside for awhile about twelve miles from town. There my preconceived views on the subject were quite overthrown by the presence of as much bird-life as I had been accustomed to in distant fields and woods.

In the essay 'Flocks of birds', which forms part of the book, he unbuttons a little further and says:

The first spring I resided in Surrey I was fairly astonished and delighted at the bird-life which proclaimed itself everywhere.

Most of those essays, first published in the *Standard*, appeared in 1880; a few came out in 1881 and one in 1882, but the book itself, and presumably the Preface, appeared in 1883, after Jefferies had moved to Brighton. They suggest, as do so many of the essays written at Surbiton, that the area, both close to the house and further afield, was full of delights. Yet in this same Preface, Jefferies explains why he does not identify the places he describes. Fortunately, an alternative version of the essay 'Round a London Copse' exists and was published after his death by Charles Longman.<sup>15</sup> It was called 'The Spring of the Year' and was re-published by Edward Thomas in his book *The Hills and the Vale* in 1909. It contains the same material as 'Round a London Copse' but the presentation is more relaxed, Jefferies seems, in a literary sense, to have his jacket off. It is an essay that repays reading for the steady picture it gives us of Jefferies and his family using the garden of number 2, and the house, as a lookout for birds. He mentions numerous places by name too: Worcester Park, Cooper's Field, Tolworth Common, (this was just across the road from his house) The Red Lion Inn and Red Lion Lane, Clay-gate Lane, St Matthews Church, the Hogsmill Brook, Cockrow Hill, Southborough Park, Long Ditton Road, the Thames at Kingston Bridge, the Wandle at Wimbledon, Tolworth Court, the Ewell Road, Roxby Farm, Chessington Lane, Bone's Gate, Oakhill Path, the Waffrons, and finally, back to the Thames at Messenger's Eyot. You can't be much more specific than that.

The situation of his house had one more important advantage: it was on the railway line to Waterloo and it was near several other places of interest. If he had to go to London, a short walk over Waterloo Bridge brought him to

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<sup>15</sup> *Longmans Magazine*, June 1894.

the Strand and the streets roundabout where his publishers had their offices. If he wanted distraction, Surbiton was near the Thames, it was near Kew, which he enjoyed for its quiet, it was near Hampton Court, and all the places mentioned earlier. He even went to the Derby at Epsom, though more for the spectacle than the racing.<sup>16</sup>

These, then, were the 'happier circumstances' that Jefferies referred to in *The Story of My Heart*. James Jefferies had unerringly put his finger on it when he said that this time marked the commencement of 'their Prosperity', short-lived though it turned out to be. In other words it was a good time for Jefferies personally. In a special and limited sense, the time at Surbiton also coincided with Jefferies' professional fulfilment. The only book of Jefferies examined here so far has been *Nature Near London*, but it had had a string of illustrious predecessors. Jefferies' output even now, 100 years after all this time, amazes one. The list of his essays, articles, and stories has always been long; it gets longer as more and more unsigned pieces are recognised and brought to light. I want now, to concentrate on Jefferies' writing and the effect of these five years on his fame and fortune.

We must go back a little. Until about February 1877 when Jefferies moved into 2, Woodside, he had been working for the *North Wilts Herald*. Since he had spent 1876 with his aunt at Sydenham we must assume that his work, such as it was, for this newspaper was on a freelance basis. He was, in 1876, earning very little money. Given only the information that Thomas had in 1909, one might consider Jefferies' move to London somewhat rash. We have seen, however, that he had published more in 1876 than had been suspected and, in addition, he had made an arrangement beginning in 1877 and extending into 1878 that Thomas did not know of, to write an article a week for a paper called *The Livestock Journal and Fancier's Gazette*. For each of these he was paid a guinea and a half—enough for the week's rent and a pound a week over; not enough to live in any style but a good foundation. His third big novel, *World's End*, that he had been working on for the whole of the winter of 1876-7, came out early in 1877, but was a failure, and he never attempted that sort of book again. He despised the market at which he was aiming it. So what were the Jefferies living on? To begin with, although he gave up novels, he had not given up fiction. Some years earlier he had written the story of Maximin, a commander who takes his men into battle and leads them, through every kind of adverse terrain, towards a promised land. John Pearson discovered this story and has written about it.<sup>17</sup> It was

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<sup>16</sup> 'Trees in and around London' in Looker, ed. *The Old House at Coate*, 1948, p.127.

<sup>17</sup> John Pearson, unpublished thesis: 'Richard Jefferies, an edition of newly discovered work', University of Exeter, 1980.

eventually published in instalments in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1876 and 77. Jefferies also supplied short stories to a publication called *London Society*, only two of which were signed. These two were later reprinted by Vizetelly—‘Kiss and Try’ and ‘Out of the Season’.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that as many as six more articles or stories in *London Society* may be by Jefferies, though they are not signed. One is entitled ‘A Midnight Skate’;<sup>19</sup> another, ‘St Valentine’s Lottery’, concerns a young artist, Frank Hilary.<sup>20</sup> We first come across the young man out of doors in February, enjoying that brief warm spell that sometimes arrives to help us through the winter, and the description of this opening scene could only have been written by Jefferies. The stories must have brought in money but no increment to his reputation, indeed they may have postponed further Jefferies’ discovery of what he could do best. These stories were not all: Pearson has found articles in *Graphic*, *Globe*, and *World*, for the year 1877 that were not previously known as well as more articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a paper to which Jefferies had been submitting work on a small scale since 1870. And there have been other items. In the light of this new knowledge the move to London does not seem rash at all.

From the point of view of Jefferies and his fortunes, the most significant of these publications was the evening paper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*. It was owned by the incomparable George Smith, and its editor, from its founding in 1865, had been the equally renowned Frederick Greenwood. Smith was a rich man who also owned the publishing firm of Smith, Elder and Co. It is often assumed that Smith made his money out of these two publishing ventures but, though neither enterprise ran at a loss, he in fact made his money out of more mundane products, the chief of which was the table water, Apollinaris. Smith also had a large share in the Aylesbury Dairy Company which operated from Swindon. Publishers like to publish journals as well as books; the journals help to spread the load of work and the inflow of funds. A journal is also useful for advertising the firm’s books to the reading public, and serves as a nursery for new authors. Frederick Greenwood prided himself, justifiably, on his skill in spotting and bringing on talent. He was especially tender towards Jefferies. In an article in *Country Life*, written in 1904, he said, in an attempt to account to himself and to the world for the fact that Jefferies had never become truly popular: ‘while admiration for him as a writer does not lessen, neither does it seem to

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<sup>18</sup> *London Society*, vol. 30, 1876, pp.237-40; *ibid.* vol. 31, 1877, pp.97-104.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* vol. 30, 1876 Xmas number, pp.57-62.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* vol. 31, 1877 pp.170-80.

extend. As one of those who shared his hopes before they were fully justified. I confess that I have never understood that limitation.'

Greenwood's technique was to get a young man to write him anything he liked about a subject that really interested him. In this way the best would emerge and from it Greenwood could make his judgement. Just when Greenwood tried this out on Jefferies is not clear, but it may have been at the end of 1876 because we know, from Jefferies' letter to Oswald Crawford in December of that year, that Jefferies was thinking out the material that was to take the form, late in 1877 and after, of *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *The Amateur Poacher*. Greenwood himself was fond of long country walks and he loved to read good descriptions of them: he was responsible for setting Jefferies' feet on this path. He had written descriptions of nature before, he had written about rural people before, he had written stories in instalments before, but he had never before gathered all three ingredients together, and neither had anyone else.

This unheralded beginning marked a fairly abrupt change in Jefferies' professional life and set him on the road towards his very special fame and his ultimately dubious fortune. It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that the fresh direction of Jefferies' writing was a direct outcome of his deliberate move to Surbiton. It was not just that in 1876 he came to London: what also matters is that he marched away from what had hitherto been his place and his people. That place, Coate, Chiseldon, Liddington, the downs, Savernake, and those people, his father and mother chiefly, but also his aunts and cousins, had been his all-in-all. They were the origin of all his strong feelings, both joy and sorrow, but they were also a restriction and a limitation. Without them he would have had nothing to write about. So long as he was there, among them, and aware of their intolerance of what he was attempting to achieve, he simply could not see them clearly and so could not conjure them into literature. Once settled in Surbiton, a place that minded its own business, he could turn and look his place and his people in the face. The turning and writing synchronised. It was an act of liberation, a thaw after an icy spell, an illumination after much groping in the dark. It changed everything.

The articles that formed the five 'country' books, the famous five, are still, even at this distance, something of a surprise. What attracted people to them was their charm, and still does. Yet, how can this charm be explained? Several of his more factual articles, to say nothing of later fiction, (I am thinking of things like Chapter XXI of *Amaryllis*) are so pungently bitter that we would know that all had not been well for Jefferies in Wiltshire, even if he had not said so in letters and notebooks. So how did he achieve that early buoyancy? In part the light touch in these five books can be put down to

technique: Jefferies had set out to write in what he himself called 'a chatty style' in order to please his readers. But there is more to it than this; the child that in the essay 'My Old Village' sat at the old hatch as happy as a king and watched the sparkle on the brook seems quite to dominate in these early books, it is his hand that seems to be guiding the pen, his feet that tread the springy turf. Jefferies in Surbiton was free, he had escaped, he was away; from where he stood in his comfortable suburb, Coate and his times there looked good. It was an irony that his presentation copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home* reached his mother just as the farm around which it is written passed from her possession.

The happy meeting between Richard and his father in 1879 has already been described; James Jefferies had finally admitted defeat over the farm and, at the age of nearly 62, decided to follow one of his sisters to Bath and earn a modest living as a gardener. In no sense disgraced by this in his son's eyes, he passed on his knowledge, not so that his son could be a farmer but so that he could write about it for others. Richard, who had also been seen as a failure, was no longer a disgrace but a success. No wonder that *Round About a Great Estate* has such mellow tones. Yet James, in his letters to Rake, put his finger on another important puzzle—the one posed above, how could Richard write so temptingly about what was nothing but a failure. His actual words were: 'how he could think of describing Coate as such a pleasant place and deceive so I could not imagine, in fact nothing scarcely he mentions is in Coate proper only the proper one was not a pleasant one . . .'<sup>21</sup> He scorned the farm as being only 40 acres and so not worth the name of farm. His son got round this problem by permitting his readers to think that the estate he wrote about was a large one, perhaps ten times the size of his father's. It was not until the more general of the five books, *Hodge and His Masters*, that the romance begins to fade away and we begin to rub against the real world.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* provided Jefferies' passport to this long awaited success in the person of its editor Frederick Greenwood. One only wishes he could have come to the rescue sooner. From a letter to Greenwood dated 29 March, and assumed to be from 1878, we learn that Jefferies had received a great deal of advice and encouragement from this and that he had felt able to take that advice: 'I feel the articles would never have been written had it not been for your kindly encouragement, and in addition they have had the benefit of your literary knowledge in the elimination of unnecessary phrases and various other ways.'<sup>22</sup> In a letter to Jefferies dated merely 10 March but sent in 1878 or possibly 1879 Greenwood told him off for trying to write in a

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<sup>21</sup> James Jefferies to Dr Rake 21 November 1896.

<sup>22</sup> Letter reproduced in J.W. Robertson Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette*, 1950, pp.186-9.

‘tricky flashy manner’,<sup>23</sup> perhaps in a manner similar to that used in the novel *World’s End*. Greenwood also tried to help him place a novel with Bentley by writing to Bentley for him. The letter, dated 23 September 1878, recommended a ‘novel of Country Life’.<sup>24</sup> The title is not given but it sounds like *Greene Ferne Farm*. Bentley did not publish it. But Jefferies was grateful to Greenwood. He is said to have sent him copies of every edition of *The Gamekeeper*.<sup>25</sup>

He may have shown his loyalty in a more self-sacrificing way. The facts are these. Greenwood was very valuable to Smith as editor of the *Pall Mall* but his political leaning in the 1870s was noticeably towards the Tories, especially Disraeli. Smith did not share this tendency. In 1878 Smith’s daughter married and two years later Smith transferred the ownership of the *Pall Mall* to his new son-in-law Henry Yates Thompson. Greenwood was asked to be less partisan. Greenwood regarded this as interference with his editorial freedom and on 1 May 1880 resigned, taking some of the staff with him. On 31 May he presided over the first copy of the new journal the *St. James’s Gazette*. Jefferies’ first article for it appeared in June and many more followed, but he did not cease to write for the *Pall Mall*. What did happen, was that after *Greene Ferne Farm*, which was already, in May 1880, being printed by Smith Elder, no more of Jefferies’ books were published by that house. We have no evidence that the initiative for this change came from Jefferies. The rupture may have come about on purely commercial grounds, or it may be that Jefferies had decided that he could no longer do business with George Smith for personal reasons, but it can have done no good to Jefferies. Cassell, to whom he went next, were not straightforward with him though they paid him £150 for *Wood Magic*.<sup>26</sup> George Smith, it must be added, bore Jefferies no grudge: he was one of Jefferies’ referees, though not, as far as we know, at Jefferies’ request, when he made his appeal in 1886 to the Royal Literary Fund.<sup>27</sup>

By 1880, Jefferies was doing extremely well. As the list of his books shows, three new titles came out in that year, and for *Hodge and His Masters*, Smith paid him £300,<sup>28</sup> the most he was ever to get. He must have felt he could keep this up for ever. Editors were approaching him for work, not he them, and the editor of a literary dictionary, who came to Jefferies asking for

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<sup>23</sup> Looker and Porteous, p.112.

<sup>24</sup> Robertson Scott, p.190.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.264.

<sup>26</sup> Copy of Agreement, BL Add. 58827.

<sup>27</sup> Archives of Royal Literary Fund.

<sup>28</sup> George Smith to Jefferies, 22 Jan. 1880. BL Add. 58822.

biographical details, was politely rebuffed.<sup>29</sup> In September 1879 he went to Brighton for about a month,<sup>30</sup> part holiday, part work. In 1880 he went away again, this time to Eastbourne, staying at 28 Devonshire Place.<sup>31</sup> From there it was a short journey to Pevensey Castle. At Pevensey Jefferies wrote the first notes for what was later to be his autobiographical book *The Story of My Heart*. Entries in his notebooks indicate that he had been preparing in a tentative way for some time to express his thoughts about the experiences he had had on the downs when he was about 16 and continuously since. Of their importance to him there was no doubt; the misgivings came when he tried to find a vehicle for expressing them. Towards the end of *The Story of My Heart* he described how at last he was able to begin: 'At last, in 1880, in the old castle of Pevensey, under happy circumstances, once more I resolved, and actually did write down a few notes. Even then I could not go on, but I kept the notes and in the end, two years afterwards, began this book.'<sup>32</sup> I quote this sentence, from which my title has been taken, to show that in 1883 when he was writing it, Jefferies himself was ready to admit that 1880 at least had been a happy time. And not simply happy; it was a time when he had such confidence in his skill that he could attempt this most difficult and demanding enterprise. Later still, he looked back again, pitying his own error: under the heading 'Experiences' he wrote in his notebook in January 1887:

I cannot look back on the past of my life without dread. Bridge rail at Syd. my high hopes that twelve months and then the next time there and then the five years. Always trying to strip away and begin again: at Surbiton and would have done so again after 'well' if I could, and would now.<sup>33</sup> [He had written the word 'well' in his notebook for 5 January 1883.]

Those words were written long after he left Surbiton. In 1880 and early in 1881 he is still fit and well, surprisingly so, for one who was working very hard indeed. The five Wiltshire books, dealing with 'my place' and 'my people' were followed by two books that went straight into book form: *Wood Magic* and *Bevis*. These books were, one might say, an attempt to write about himself, and both books have continued to find favour ever since they appeared, in spite of flaws in both. The first copies of *Bevis* appeared as

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<sup>29</sup> Letter to H.J. Nicoll, quote in bookseller's catalogue of G.M. and R.C. Davies, item 113, July 1980.

<sup>30</sup> Notebook VI 8 Sept. 1879, BL Add. 58820; Jefferies arrived on the 8th, J [Jessie] on the 5th, see entry for 5 Sept.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Smith to Jefferies, 9 Sept. 1880, BL Add. 58822.

<sup>32</sup> *The Story of My Heart*, 1979. Quartet edn. p.134.

<sup>33</sup> Notebook XIX Jan.-Feb. 1887. BL Add. 58820. ff.60-61.

Jefferies packed up and left Surbiton to begin the next phase of his life, in Brighton, stripping away and beginning again, but he was not finished with Surbiton. The essays that were collected to form *Nature Near London* have already been examined, but only for clues as to Jefferies' attitude to Surbiton as a place to live. Their literary significance was not examined but it must be. Edward Thomas devotes the whole of his Chapter X to the subject of the essays that Jefferies wrote about Surbiton, the new place that was not 'my place', and draws attention there to the view that these essays are of a different kind from the earlier Wiltshire books. He notices less exuberance, 'the eye that sees and the mind that broods over it is changed. . . Thoughts have troubled and checked it.' I am not sure that I agree, though I do agree with the next observation 'the new surroundings are not a part of him as were the old.' This is important; the new surroundings have nothing to do with his memories, painful or joyous. He is therefore more objective and there is, in spite of much loving and moving expression, not so much rapture. Since at the time he was writing these essays his energies were also taken up with *Wood Magic*, which is partly a study of himself, and then with *Bevis* and *The Story of My Heart* which were even more an examination of himself, it is not surprising, indeed it is reassuring, that Jefferies could respond so well to that much-despised entity, a London suburb. His work, hitherto, had consisted of three main kinds: the sort of business-like journalism that he sold to the *Livestock Journal*; the stories about the well-to-do, which he could sell but which never grew into anything worthwhile; and the country books like *The Gamekeeper* which were an undoubted success but which could not go on for ever. It would have been a poor look-out for him as a professional writer if he had not had this new vein of material to mine. It led ultimately, but after he had left Surbiton, to such golden offerings as 'Wild Flowers' and 'The Pageant of Summer'. It was very important.

There was a price to pay. Physical separation from Wiltshire and from the unsuccessful farm freed Jefferies to follow two more profitable paths: one, just described, was writing creatively about his present milieu, whatever it was; the other was writing creatively about what he had left. These were gains, but there was a corresponding loss. The first was separation from agricultural life. Though he went on writing essays and articles and pieces of semi-fiction on the subject of the agricultural labourer, he gradually lost touch, and his expressed views acquired a journalistic, second-hand flavour.<sup>34</sup> The other loss, which anyone who must write to live is the first to lament, was subjects about which it was possible to feel passionately.

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<sup>34</sup> e.g. 'The Wiltshire Labourer', *Longmans Magazine*, Nov. 1883.

Jefferies interested himself in various other matters, including what he called 'the labour question' and what we would probably call 'socialism' but he lacked wide knowledge of it. As a result he was unable to write with authority on the subject of the agricultural labourer after about 1880. Entries in his notebooks show that this lover of children was deeply upset and angered by tales of neglect and cruelty to children reported in newspapers, though he touched on it only in 'Bits of Oak Bark'. It was probably not a subject that his editors cared for and so was never developed. After he had left Surbiton, impoverished and beaten back by illness, much of his anger and passion was turned inward to examine this undeserved misfortune.

He was unaware of this in 1880, when he sat in the sun at Pevensey, and felt strong enough to begin his autobiography; his future still looked good. A new baby, Jessie Phyllis, was born in December. Early in 1881 he began writing for *Land*, a new magazine from Cassell, the firm that was publishing *Wood Magic*. He was feeling sufficiently optimistic to consider starting his own paper, and obtained estimates from a printer for the cost of production. He began to write for *The Times*, and received a cordial response to his approach to the editor of the *Saturday Review*.<sup>35</sup> He was writing *Bevis*, and thinking about the portrayal of Felise for the novel that was to become *The Dewy Morn*. In fact all seemed rosy, until a faint hint of trouble to come slipped into an essay for the *Standard* in September 1881. He was talking about frosty weather and said: 'to those who are well, every step is bracing . . .' and from this hint we must assume that he was already not well. In December he was really ill and had to undergo an operation which, not being successful, had to be repeated three more times. It was a terrible blow to him although he finished *Bevis* and sold it to Sampson Low in January 1882 for £100, having fared none too well with Cassell. Someone must have advised him to move his home, perhaps to distract him from his adversities. He must in any case by mid-1882 have come to associate Surbiton with illness and would have wanted to leave. He had long been attracted to Brighton and to the seaside generally, and there he went in June or July of 1882. There were triumphs and joys aplenty to come but the 'happy circumstances' would never be quite the same again.

### Postscript.

On 9 March 1986 Hockley Clarke<sup>36</sup> and Peter Robins visited the Surbiton lanes once so regularly trodden by Jefferies, beginning at Tolworth, in Robins' words, 'a drab busy interchange on the A3.' He went on:

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<sup>35</sup> BL Add. 58822 (letter dated 26 July 1881)

<sup>36</sup> Hockley Clarke was President of the Surbiton and District Bird Watching Society, author of

Just off a dual carriageway was a deserted road, which Hockley pointed out was where Jefferies walked and wrote about in essays collected in *Nature Near London*. Here he watched trout in the Hogsmill stream and described Tolworth Court Farm and its huge barn.

Today, the road leads to some playing fields and then bends to exit on to the same dual carriageway. It is therefore deserted, but bears evidence of suburban fly-tippers and is a likely haunt of courting couples at night. A stream runs on both sides of the road, meandering around the tin cans and plastic bags. Hard to believe trout swam here. The bridge Jefferies used to observe the fish is gone. The barn was burned down by drunken hooligans turned out from 'The Toby Jug' on a Saturday night, some years ago. One building of the farm and a few corrugated sheds are all that is left. A lone horse in a muddy field neighed at us in desperation.

The lane was once tree-lined, but one side has been felled, perhaps as a consequence of Dutch elm disease, and only stumps remain. I imagine it was beautiful a hundred years ago, and it gave me pleasure to spot a long-tailed tit hopping among some fallen branches.

Phyllis Treitel  
April 1986



Tolworth Bridge 1909 (postcard)

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several country books and admirer of Jefferies, writing a Foreword to an edition of *Nature Near London*. He also published a magazine, *Birds and Country*.

# Richard Jefferies' Exmoor Summer

*Berta Lawrence*

First published in the *Exmoor Review*, 1987, pp.60–2. With thanks to the Exmoor Society for permission to reprint the article.

In 1884 Richard Jefferies' book *Red Deer* was published, one of the most memorable books ever written about Exmoor. Very poor, not yet recognised as one of the greatest English nature-writers, Jefferies was mortally ill, suffering from a rare tubercular disease for which there was no effective treatment. He died only three years later. That year, 1887, saw the publication of one of his finest essays, 'Summer in Somerset', an offshoot of his research for *Red Deer*.

He was already ill when he came to West Somerset in 1882 to gather information for *Red Deer*, discovering such a wealth of material that he wrote three essays out of it as well as his book. He came in June, in a season of glorious weather and enjoyed a blessed respite, almost the last, from his long ordeal of suffering. The writing he produced absolutely glows with his joy in the West Somerset landscape spread under a blazing sun. With a strange resurgence of strength he covered this landscape mostly on foot. Over miles of Exmoor he was guided by the famous huntsman from Exford called Fred Heal who had encyclopaedic knowledge of the red deer, their life, their places as well as the sport of stag-hunting. All Fred Heal's practical knowledge went into the book: 'one of the closest and most factual descriptions of the Red Deer' wrote Henry Warren. This framework of fact is clothed with Jefferies' own poetical and naturalist observations, with his perception and delight. Quick with life, his 'run-nable stag' rises before our eyes from his bed of fern. 'He is lying down but immediately gets up and looks straight across at me. His horns in velvet, are as high as his ears but his coat is in perfect condition, a beautiful red-gold colour.' Up at Cloutsham he sees another 'standing in the fern beside a bush with his head down as if feeding. The great oakwoods were about him and the sunlight fell on the golden red of his coat.' The round hill Cloutsham Ball, setting for many 'meets' of stag-hunters, he likens to 'a skull cap of green velvet imitated in sward.' He visited Cloutsham Farm where Sir Thomas Acland entertained his hunt guests, admiring its thatched roof and commending Sir Thomas for favouring thatch so much on his estate, even for his own house Holnicote at Selworthy. In 'Summer in Somerset' Jefferies shows us Holnicote House, 'one of the last thatched houses of a landed proprietor,' facing a lawn where

squirrels played in the evening light while from a neighbouring meadow the corncrake called 'crake-crake', a sound now vanished from the English countryside. A perceptive study of the corncrake appears in *The Water Colley*.

As he tramped over Exmoor that glorious summer it was not only the red deer that fascinated Jefferies. The ancient land itself drew him with its peculiar features and their special legends, particularly the swelling barrows associated locally with long-dead chieftains and their buried treasures such as gold-hilted swords and pots of gold coins as well as with curses laid on men who dared disturb them. Ghosts haunted such places along with black dogs and other phantom-beasts. Rumbling of ghostly war-chariots and tramlings of fighting-men might be heard on legendary battle-sites—so local inhabitants informed him. He fastened also onto stories belonging to times nearer his own; tales of sheep-stealers, smugglers and highwaymen who included the famous Tom Faggus seized at the Exebridge inn.

Jefferies was fascinated by Dulverton where carts passed through lanes between closely-packed cottages and small shops that delighted him. The town's presiding spirit was 'the brown Barle running over red rocks' filling the streets with its voice. No one ever painted such a picture of the Barle as Jefferies did in his 'Summer in Somerset' where he captures the river's shifting sounds and multiple colours as it courses between rocky slopes planted with oakwoods filled with 'the June colour of oaks, a glow of yellow under green'. The picture includes the 'stone buttresses and stone planking' of Tarr Steps, used by horned sheep and red deer as well as man.

In *Red Deer* the chapter 'A Manor House in Deer Land' was inspired by a visit to Monksilver and the manor house Combe Sydenham. The romantic red sandstone house had features that delighted him: 'Drake's cannon-ball' and its associated legend of Drake's bride Elizabeth; the tower hung inside with toying fleeces; the chain of fish-ponds that attracted poachers. In the heavy heat of June he walked into the Quantock country where at Bicknoller, Crowcombe and Stogumber the 'genius loci' inspired him to create those poetic and colour-filled word-landscapes found in 'Summer in Somerset'.

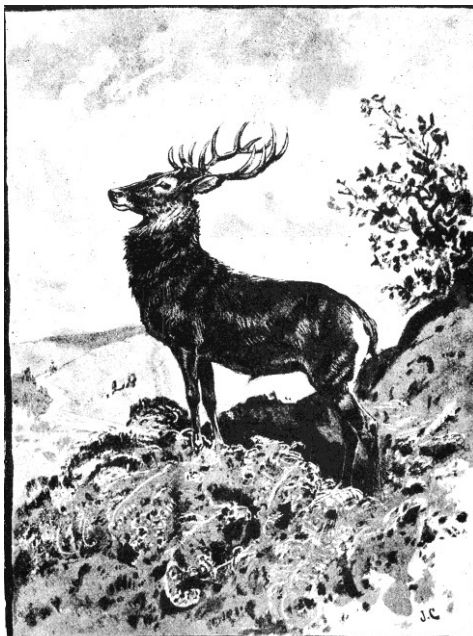
These summer travels included exploration of the wooded Horner Valley which created a fine description of Horner Mill, then active but now silent. A hunted hind had killed herself on its iron wheel. At Dunster his attention was caught by the Castle mill close to the sparkling Avill. He stood watching the trout, the dancing midges, the cloud of mill dust. Today this mill, long out of use, has been expertly restored, thanks to the National Trust, by Mr. Capp who lives there; it is as active as Jefferies saw it in 1882. At Dunster he was told about the wassailing of cider-orchards and of 'the old orchard songs,' of which one or two survive. Over at Williton, and a glimpse of the

so-called Mother Shipton's tomb in the woods. At Selworthy he climbed through Sir Thomas Acland's woods on Selworthy Hill where, he writes, his ears filled with the sea's surge, until he could view dark Dunkery and the sunlit sea and headland.

It is reasonable to assume that when visiting the Monksilver and Dunster area Jefferies stayed with the artist William North at his lodgings in a farmhouse at Woolston (Bicknoller parish). North illustrated 'Summer in Somerset' and Jefferies refers to 'my friend' who accompanied him to several places. A friend indeed, in Jefferies' last months, and to his widow given hospitality at Beggearnhuish.

As Henry Warren wrote—there is no 'special pleading' in *Red Deer*. Jefferies wrote in a hard practical way of the practices and techniques of stag-hunting demonstrated by Fred Heal. There is no pity in his description of the swimming stag lassoed by boatmen. Yet the essay 'By the Exe' reveals a more humane spirit and makes a protest against otter-hunting with appeals for the otter's conservation. His study of the otter is full of life and movement, as is that of the amusing Ousel or Dipper in 'The Water Colley'. These two essays provide a gallery of riverscapes and landscapes around Exe and Barle and wonderful pictures of their wild life: herons, vipers, salmon, trout, corncrakes, magpies, stoats. Jefferies observed stoats living in the walls of loose stones. His disciple Henry Williamson wrote a good story about such a stoat. The descriptions of Exmoor's wild flowers—corn marigolds, yellow Welsh poppies, cuckoo flowers—make Jefferies' modern readers envious.

'Summer in Somerset' published posthumously, may have been written during his last illness when he remembered that golden interlude on Exmoor.

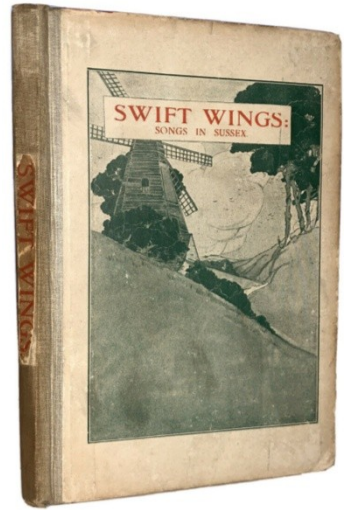


'Proud as a Spanish noble'—  
illustration by John Charlton in Jefferies' *Red Deer*.

# Richard Jefferies

*Victor Benjamin Neuburg*

Victor Benjamin Neuburg (6 May 1883 – 31 May 1940) was an English poet and writer. This poem, dedicated to Jefferies (incorrectly spelt), was published in his second book of poetry: *Swift Wings: Songs in Sussex* (Stepping: The Vine Press, 1921) on page 8. The *Graphic* (12 March 1921) called the book a 'pæan of Sussex in thirty-four poems. There are songs of scenery... and of Sussex men like Richard Jeffries (*sic*). described as "a hapless Greek ..." The book is beautifully produced, with a cover by Beatrice Linda Stanborough.' Neuburg owned The Vine Press. Neuburg's son Victor Edward wrote an introduction to a Macdonald Futura edition (1981) of *Toilers of the Field*.



Richard Jeff[e]ries

A hapless Greek, loathing Art's usurpature  
Of beauty in the world; who loved the lure  
Of fields and hills and seas, with eyes too pure.

To bear our hideous mask, flat in inflature  
Of folly and filth. His was the candidature  
For the old life, when the world's heart beat sure  
Against the sunny sky, in the mature  
Worship of Beauty, soul and veil of Nature.

Bitter our world was to him, who saved still  
The Golden World of eld, the mystic Hill  
Of Olympus, navel of the Ægean Sea.

What was his portion in our baser part?  
Death. And what slew him? This: he broke his heart  
Against the eternal rock of Ecstasy.

# Richard Jefferies: 1848–1948

D.E. Marshall

First published in *The Contemporary Review*, No.995, November 1948, pp.299–303.

Joy is always attractive and infectious, and this year, 1948, falls on the centenary of a writer whose joy—a strong joy and radiance won against adversity—is a prominent quality in his writing, and of whom a fellow-writer has said: ‘He enjoyed, simply and passionately, his own life and the life of others, and in his books that enjoyment survives.’

Richard Jefferies was born in November, 1848, at Coate Farmhouse, near Swindon. In 1887, after five years of illness, during which he contrived with magnificent courage to complete thirteen books, he died at Goring, near Worthing. His life was uneventful; only his inner life was unusual and exciting, and of this we have not any complete or entirely satisfactory record. Such record as we have is to be found in his writings, especially in *Bevis*, *Wood Magic*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and *Field and Hedgerow*. There are also some notebooks in manuscript, but eight of the twelve have disappeared. Two books of selections are now published.

Jefferies has ensured for himself an enduring place in English literature for the quality of his prose, his mysticism, the fullness and attractiveness of his writing about Nature. Along with W.H. Hudson and Gilbert White he may be considered to be among the three greatest writers on Nature. His greatness lies principally in his combination of realism and romance, seen, for instance, in the second section of ‘One of the New Voters’: his spirit of intense joy despite the constant struggle with the three giants of disease, despair and poverty, his ‘Englishness,’ his interpretation of the English countryside and country people, and his ‘radiant vision’ which he had the ability to make real to others. ‘Wild Flowers’ illustrates well these features.

It is interesting to note that in his short life of thirty-eight years Jefferies completed the material for twenty-two books: W.H. Hudson, who lived from 1841 (this seems now to be the settled date of his birth, those of 1846 and 1861 being now discarded) completed twenty-four published books. Hudson and Jefferies make a fascinating contrast, the former owing nothing to the earlier author. Perhaps had the two men met, neither would have felt fully at ease with the other, although admiration and companionship would not have been lacking. Both have made a unique contribution to our literary heritage. Edward Thomas is, perhaps, the nearest in his personality and work to Jefferies, and yet there are immense differences; nor did Jefferies’ writings influence Thomas’s ideas or style to any noticeable degree.

There is, and will remain, a degree of mystery around the rich, strong personality of Jefferies. He has not found any biographer with as long and intimate a knowledge as Morley Roberts had of Hudson. And, like Hudson, Selous, and most of the other Nature writers, Jefferies was remote, reserved, secretive, sensitive. Also he was sensuous ('Every spot of colour is a sort of food') and most tender. More conflict has gathered round his personality than around that of Hudson, who was, or rather appeared to be, less complex. This conflict is due, in part, to the period in which Jefferies lived and the new ground he worked on. But perhaps it is also due to the extraordinary contrast between his outward life and his writings, together with his intense intellectual and spiritual development, his growth into a poet. Today the legend of his hysteric melancholy has almost died, although as recently as 1939 this legend was accepted by an author. Would Jefferies have clarified his personality for his readers had he lived longer?

From his own books we can ascertain the authors and works which were his favourites. However, none of these, except Homer, the early English Herbals, Darwin, and Goethe's *Faust* have made any appreciable difference to his work. His genius lies in the originality, strength, and sincerity of his personality as expressed in his books. How, while living so solitary and hard a life, he managed to develop his thought and to achieve an exquisite English style in his later works is a problem. It is a fine achievement. Doubtless from his father and a few relatives and friends he obtained some stimulus. Only in the last year did he come to know White's *Selborne*.

Essentially Jefferies is a writer who has hewn out a style suitable to his needs. It is charged with vigour, vitality, and sincerity. His English is perspicuous, appropriate, and often persuasive. His vivid detailed descriptions let us see the person or event without any strain. After about 1881 a marked lyrical quality is added. He has a curious way of repeating words and phrases. Thus: 'A thousand thousand bubbles rising to the surface would whiten the stream—a thousand thousand succeeded by another thousand thousand—and still flowing.' Rarely does he fail to split an infinitive; but was not this common in the last century? Often his constructions are loose, and weaknesses, such as the separation of the relative word or clause from its antecedents, occur frequently. His education, his ill-health, his being forced to produce articles to maintain himself and his family may in some measure explain them. Words he chose with very great care. Since some extracts from his field notebooks have recently been published, it is possible to see how accurate his writing is, and how, in some instances, he worked up his material.

His work falls into two divisions. In the first period he wrote objectively, crisply, as a countryman and a farmer's son about the country and daily life

there; *The Gamekeeper at Home* is a sample of this. From 1881 the change is distinctively shown. His imaginative powers have grown, his work now being shot through with the vision which was not only within him but which had become articulate. The prose-poet, the mystic find utterance. 'Nature and Eternity' and 'Hours of Spring' illustrate the later phase. Henry S. Salt wrote in 1894 of his style: 'As a master of language Richard Jefferies is equalled, at his best, by few contemporary writers and surpassed by fewer still, so perfectly melodious are his sentences, so full of tender gravity, so simple, yet so subtle in their structure and modulation. .... Jefferies is a great lover of the refrain ... it is a habit to haunt and circle round and revisit some special phrase or cadence, whose repetition may serve as a suggestive undertone to his melody.' Again and again occur the ideas and subjects which absorbed him. Hudson wrote that 'The sense of beauty is God's best gift to the human soul,' and Jefferies' passionate search through the world for beauty proves that he had a very great share in this gift. How much rapture it brought him! From his autobiography we know how engrossed he was with the subjects of immortality, prayer, soul-life, the fullest, wisest use of human life, the planned elimination of foolish, childish improvisation in human affairs, and his abhorrence of conventionalism, insincerity, and purely surface existence. He had a deep appreciation of the individual; his values in human existence were those of the great thinkers through the ages rather than of the commercial-minded person. His perception of the illusion of time, of the oneness of past and present, of Now being Eternity, is expressed repeatedly; it runs through *Wood Magic* and *The Story of My Heart*.

Social conditions shocked him, and he tried to make the public realise the hardness of the life of the country worker. Of art he writes again and again, and much of interest and fascination is contained in these ideas; for him this is another way of reaching to Nature. The sun, the wheat, the movements and habits of animals, the play of shadows on surfaces, the stars, the wind, birds, wild flowers, colour, clouds, cows, hills, downs, light, the observing of Nature in a narrow locality—these are some of the topics to which he returns again and again. In examining his way of treating these subjects it is possible to see how much he could extract from any experience, how much he observed. His dissatisfaction with the daily trivialities of life ('Life is so little and so mean,' he exclaims) and a keen realisation of the littleness of the finite increased and galled him more and more. Both by temperament and by his circumstances he was a revolutionary, in spite of his external compliance with conventions.

Hudson and Gilbert White had a much wider intellectual background. Moreover, they lacked the mystical element, although by some Hudson is considered a mystic. And they had not the background of an unhappy home

life during youth. However, this would seem to have dated only from about his fifteenth year, and his early marriage gave him again the happiness of a congenial family circle. Yet judging by *Amaryllis at the Fair* the wounds made by the friction and incompatibility between his parents were deep.

His mysticism, most familiar from his *Story of My Heart*, but occurring in his work from 1881, even in *Wood Magic*, may be said to have the four marks described by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Passages in *Bevis*, such as the chapter about the Zodiac, morning in the tropics, and many pieces throughout this story bear witness to his having always been subject to mystical states. His preoccupation with immortality, eternity, prayer, soul-life, his longing for union with the Infinite, are matters absorbing the attention of the mystics of any age. So intensely and longingly did he look at natural phenomena, as if, by patience and desire, he would wrest the secret of life and of the Deity from it. This is an essentially religious attitude. In his greatest lyrical outpourings he suggests a vision of the world which reminds us of that of Dame Julian of Norwich when, in the fourteenth century, she saw the world as a hazel nut. He had a joy greatly in excess of that of the average person and which effectively helped the bearing of his sufferings. His mystical writings faintly suggest Richard Rolle of Hampole and St. Augustine, both in the matter and in the ecstatic quality, and certain paragraphs suggest Shelley.

About his religion much has been written, most of it speculative, for he and his family were reserved. Some of his statements are rather contradictory, but this is understandable in a young man finding his way alone in the deepest channels of thought. In his notebooks he wrote: 'I am an infidel'; yet it is uncertain whether his attitude was a permanent one or if it expressed a passing mood. Many strong personalities have repudiated orthodox religion, and Jefferies lived during a period when agnosticism aroused stronger interest than it does today. Perhaps he was an agnostic rather than a pantheist or an atheist. But no one will ever know with certainty. *The Story of My Heart* is an incomplete statement. What would have been the difference if the work had been written in old age? It is illuminating and fascinating to contrast Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago* and his *A Hind in Richmond Park* and, from a different angle, St. Augustine's *Confessions* with Jefferies' autobiography and his last essays.

Why did he not write poetry? one often asks oneself. Having fashioned so melodious a prose style it would seem normal to compose lyrics. But the two poems which have been published cannot be regarded as good or great poetry. Was it lack of ear or of music, because Jefferies can be very unmusical in his prose? Was it lack of knowledge, of wide acquaintance with poetry? Was it lack of technique or of interest? It is known that he cared for *Faust*

and for Dryden, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Homer, and the early English ballads. With Hudson, whose prose is on a very high level, the same failure occurs with his few published poems, which are very inferior.

In comparing Jefferies' work with that of Selous, Gilbert White, Waterton, John Clare, Charles G.D. Roberts, and other Nature writers, we see immediately the deference. He has a different and a more splendid style and matter than any of these. He is, perhaps, nearest to Whitman, whose writings he appreciated. There is some affinity between W.H. Davies and Jefferies, and D.H. Lawrence is thought to be mentally akin.

By some Jefferies is regarded as a philosopher and a prophet, but it seems extremely doubtful if he so thought of himself. Neither his circumstances nor his temperament or talent fitted him to be this. He was dogmatic because he felt strongly. He penetrated deeply into the human misery he saw about him, he diagnosed the cant and insincerity which, possibly because of social conditions of the last century, were more widespread than at present. The essence of his thought is the expressing of his personal vision of life, the making clear and concrete the delight he felt in Nature and the simple, lasting things of life, and his sharing with readers the results of his rare powers of observation. The most attractive and enduring gift he has is his sense of the newness and freshness of everything, the beauty contained in each separate blade of grass, each wild flower, the loveliness of the dew on the grass, the movements of the hare, the song and life of every bird and insect—the enchanting rapture of existence, if we will but look and watch with quietude. As he has written: 'Fir tree tops joy in seeing—living the problem. I cannot understand the problem, but it is a great delight to feel and live it looking at the tops of the firs.' And in one of his finest essays, published posthumously in *The Hills and the Vale*, he says: 'Light and colour, freedom and delicious air, give exquisite pleasure to the senses; but the heart searches deeper, and draws forth food for itself from sunshine, hills and sea. Desiring their beauty so deeply, the desire in a measure satisfies itself. It is a thirst which slakes itself to grow the stronger. It springs afresh from the light, from the blue hill-line yonder, from the gorse-flower at hand; to seize upon something that seems in them, which they symbolise and speak of; to take it away within oneself; to absorb it and feel conscious of it—a something that cannot be defined, but which corresponds with all that is highest, truest, and most ideal within the mind. It says, Hope and aspire, strive for largeness of thought. ... No system, no philosophy yet organised in logical sequence satisfies the inmost depth—fills and fully occupies the well of thought.'

# The Queen's Dolls' House Library

*Peter Robins*

**I**n 1921 a dolls' house was commissioned for Queen Mary by Princess Louise who had persuaded Edwin Lutyens to design it. Artists and craftsmen of the time took three years to complete the model using a 1:12 scale. Princess Louise suggested a library of miniature books as part of the furnishings and invited 200 authors to contribute a new or previously published work and 170 agreed including Conan Doyle, A.A. Milne, J.M. Barrie, Hardy, Kipling and Somerset Maugham. The dolls' house was exhibited at the 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition as a showcase for British craftsmanship and is now on display at Windsor Castle.

The Anglo-Irish poet, playwright and author E [Ernest] Temple Thurston (1879-1933), not much remembered now but the author of 40 books, 17 of which were adapted for films, contributed an original poem 'When the Day Ends', about the pleasures and comforts of books, in which he mentions Jefferies. This was gathered in *The Book of the Queen's Dolls' House Library: Vol. II*, edited by EV Lucas (London: Methuen, 1924, limited to 1500 copies).

Below are three stanzas from the five-page poem. The poem was reprinted with the title 'Company' in Thurston's *Poems 1918-1923* (London: GP Putnam's Sons, 1923). Others in this collection concern ploughing, harvesting and English birds.

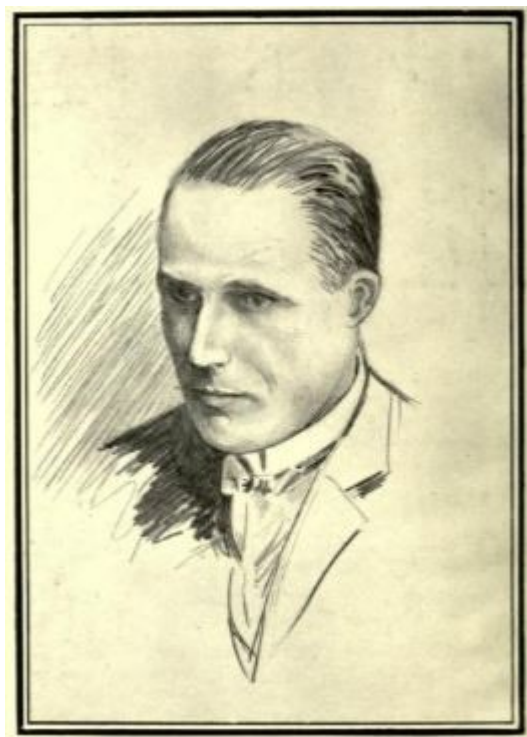
There are places too, as well as times,  
Where all one's thoughts run in rhymes  
And in sweet note  
With the friend in the pocket of one's coat.

I like to take down from their shelves  
Those—what does Dobbin call them?—dumpy twelves—  
The little books that need no bringing,  
But just come along with you singing  
Your song. Your companions, you their debtor  
Because they sing it a thousand times better.

Think of Jefferies on the Sussex downs!  
Far from the noise of towns  
Lying beside you on that short grass of high hills,

With a lark above that fills  
Heaven to give them all their music there  
And still leaves notes trembling in the air

To make your Heaven before it's due,  
And the voice of Jefferies there with you,  
That even placid voice which tells  
With all the simple chime of three church bells  
Such wonders as you never could reveal,  
Not in the compass of a cathedral peal.



E. Temple Thurston

# Richard Jefferies

*Edward Thomas*

This essay was first published in *Temple Bar* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd, Feb. 1906), new series No. 2, pp.97–108. Thomas is introduced as the ‘Author of *Horae Solitariae*, *Oxford*, etc.’ The article was then expanded, mainly to include quotes from *The Dewy Morn*, in Edward Thomas’s edited book two-volume work: *The Book of the Open Air* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), vol. II, pp.127–136. The text reproduced below is from the extended version.

## TEMPLE BAR

NEW SERIES, No. 2

FEBRUARY, 1906

*Richard Jefferies*

BY EDWARD THOMAS

*Author of “Horae Solitariae,” “Oxford,” etc.*

Among the earliest things which I can remember well is the North Wiltshire country, and the satisfaction of feeling that it was the country of Richard Jefferies. I was proud to find Ramsons in a hollow near Bassett Down—Jefferies had not found it, as he confesses somewhere; and to hear a labourer call the Marsh Marigold ‘water bubble’ and ‘crazy’—Jefferies had said that the people were ignorant of so common a flower. Several years passed before I could believe that he was dead, and I remember thinking that a tall, lean man who ran well with the V.W.H. hounds—he had a glorious view halloo—was Jefferies, though that was as late as 1892. I expected to see him as a man might expect to see Pan in Arcadia, resting sometimes from heat or rain in an old church at Wroughton, or Wanborough, or Lydiard Millicent, I used to think of him, and repeated with funny religious fervour the words at the end of *The Amateur Poacher*:

Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, whose twelve hours somehow have become shortened, into the sunlight and the pure wind. A something that the ancients called divine can be found and felt there still.

Even the 'lardy cakes' from a village baker's seemed finer food because Jefferies had known them and deplored their increasing rarity. Anything good or pleasant that I noticed in that countryside seemed to belong by right to him: as when in, February, while the roads were heavy, I heard a little village girl say that it would be a good thing when the cuckoo came and picked up all the mud and made a clean Spring. Not many of the people knew his books: fewer still knew anything of the man; and what they knew was not easily accessible. Country people do not formulate and announce their tastes and affections. They know their native fields, but do not talk of them any more than two hundred years ago men wrote of them. I think that some of them thought of Jefferies as a priest who was not to be vulgarly discussed, but that others held him to be an heretical interpreter who had disclosed too much. I never met one who was ready to make money or glory out of reminiscences or even inventions. One who had been at school with Jefferies would not say a word to satisfy the enthusiasm of a timid and youthful inquirer. Perhaps there were not any obvious things to reveal. Readers of the *Eulogy* guess as much. Jefferies was hardly of a nature that ran much risk of events and adventures. Those who really knew him would probably not undertake to explain or supplement what his books tell us. And now I daresay that is best. He shall be one of the few modern men who have escaped publicity and not renown. He shall be as Sir Thomas Browne is—a man whom only his books prove to have existed—who preserved the mystery of authorship, and may one day come to be as mythical as Virgil seemed to be to the Middle Ages. In mythopoic times he would probably have been a wood god in a few generations, or have had a statue as the genius of the little willowy River Ray. As he says of farmer Iden in *Amaryllis at the Fair*—'It was his genius to make things grow—like sunshine and shower; a sort of Pan, a half-god of leaves and boughs, and reeds and streams, or sort of Nature in human shape, moving about and sowing Plenty and Beauty.'

And yet Jefferies is a personality. I do not mean that he had a tricky, suave, and apparently intimate style; he had not: at his best, he was apt and direct; but he could, and many times he did, write abominably without caring at all. Nor do I mean that it is easy to get to know him and like him through his books: it is not easy to know him, and not always possible to like him. But I mean that in reading any one of his books I have always had a sense of a man behind it, of a man whom to know would be to set a higher value than ever upon his work. What is more—readers are always receiving hints that the man is great, and that his work is sometimes hardly more than a faulty gospel by a not always careful or precise listener to the prophet's words. In the end, readers should come to have an admiration for the personality of

Jefferies which it is not a simple matter to trace; and in its turn this admiration will compel them to set a value upon his ordinary work which is sometimes not easily to be justified.

Certainly, this sense of Jefferies' personality is not due to anything I have read by other men about his life. He was born at Coate (pronounced something like Court and something like Cart) near Swindon, in 1848: his father being the last of his family to own Coate Farm. Apparently the family was odd, reserved, independent, and unsuccessful. From the age of four until the age of nine he lived at Sydenham with an aunt, and was at school there. Then he went home, and was at a Swindon school. But all that we know of his childhood is that he 'read everything,' that he was much out of doors, and that he was sensitive, not strong, but masterful, and of a quick temper that easily passed into tenderness. At sixteen he and another boy ran away, and spent a week in France—intending to go on and walk to Moscow; returning to England, they tried to get to America, but failed: we have only the pitiful and senseless outline of a good tale. He continued to read and to draw; one room at Coate Farm was given up to him. It is likely that reading was to him an adventure that was good for its own sake. He liked it; he must have absorbed much; but, though Besant says that 'it is evident from his writings that he had read a great deal,' he became the least bookish of writers. He sought out what suited him rather than the beautiful, and his few quotations and derived passages seem to be entirely his own. He had no kind of literary admiration; a book was life and it helped him to express his own life. Between the years 1869 and 1877 he became a reporter to *The North Wilts Herald* and other local papers, and did other journalistic work. He wrote a history of Swindon. He wrote stories which were not so romantic as they prove him to have been. He wanted to be a London journalist: he sent novels to the publishers. His health was bad; but in the worst times he believed in his own 'ultimate good fortune and success'. In 1872 he wrote his excellent letter on the Wiltshire labourers to *The Times*: in 1873 he wrote for *Fraser's* on 'The Future of Farming.' In 1874 he married, and in the same year began publishing novels at his own expense. But he went on writing practical country essays, and then suddenly found that it was easy for him to describe the country. From that time most of his work was devoted to the country books which we know. He lived in the country or at Surbiton, moving rather often. He met with a fair literary success—that is to say, he was busy, uncomfortable, and poorer than his neighbours, during the best years of his life—until the long illness before his death in 1887. He had few friends, but of the nature of his intercourse with them there is little sign. He walked and wrote and suffered. Probably he was brought up in a conventional religious way; but was apparently a man who had no understanding of religions; his

reported death-bed prayers are only painful, and not surprising in their irrelevance. This is nearly all that has been told about Jefferies, and it is certainly one of the most astonishing failures among biographies to show us—which is their business—the life out of which the books arose.

If we knew more of the outward life of Jefferies we should have at least one advantage: we should be able to understand *The Story of My Heart* more completely. As that wonderful autobiography now stands, it is somewhat incoherent and imperfectly intelligible. The only English book which can be compared with it is Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and that is simpler and less equivocal by far. Jefferies' book is almost incapable of thorough analysis as a symphony; and perhaps it is fairest to read it as a boy reads it at the age of nineteen or twenty, since in that way the excrescences lose their importance and the most difficult pages are volatilized so as to have something like a due part in the result. The most noticeable thing in the book is perhaps the writer's independent emotion and thought, the frank and brave impressionism of his view of life. He claims himself 'to have erased from his mind the traditions and learning of the past ages, and to stand face to face with nature and the unknown.' He is an isolated human being looking at Nature with the help only of genius and of ancestors who had looked at it incuriously for generations. He does not say, as he might have done, that Wordsworth's view or his contemporary Tennyson's view was this or that, and that he differs from them or goes beyond them here or there. He leaves books behind him, and goes out on to the Downs, a more lonely man than was ever there before. He becomes 'lost' and 'absorbed into the being or existence of the universe,' and he prays that he may have something from sea and earth and sky by which his soul may be enlarged. He strives after some secret (which he believes to be hiding there) by which the human form 'may achieve the utmost beauty.' He wishes to reach a mode of life in which the mind and soul can be more continuously and fittingly employed than they now are: and 'to furnish the soul with the means of executing its will, of carrying thought into action.' As a field for this new life, he believes in 'a nexus of ideas of which nothing is known.' There are passages in his discourse that will remind readers of M. Maeterlinck of *The Buried Temple*. But he is opposed by Nature. Lonely himself, he imagines an equal loneliness for mankind. Nature is 'distinctly anti-human'; many of its parts, as for example, the creatures of the sea, 'call up a vague sense of chaos; chaos which the mind revolts from.' In his fine, ironical romance, *After London*, the inexhaustible strength and hostility or indifference of Nature are suggested by his descriptions of the relapse of men and fields into barbarism.

In his fine *The Story of My Heart* he dreams far forward of man journeying lonely and with his fate in his own hands. And yet his sympathy with the

universe is extraordinary. It is no wonder that he was remote from religions of the past, for he seems at times to be on the edge of a religion entirely new. Except Shelley, no one so much as he was aware of the universe. He says himself that he was 'conscious of the earth, the sea, the sun, the air, the immense forces working on'; his soul 'was as strong as the sea, and prayed with the sea's might'; and 'earth and sun,' he says, 'were to me like my flesh and blood, and the air of the sea life.' We might almost think that he has

The cloudy winds to keep  
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye,

and is indeed a minister of Nature.

He seems to have thought some things inhuman even in the works of men. Pictures are 'flat surfaces'; they have nothing to do with the advance of mind of which he dreams. But 'the knee in Daphnis and Chloe and the breast'—'the glowing face of Cytherea in Titian's Venus and Adonis'—'Juno's wide back and mesial groove'—'Cytheria's poised hips unveiled for judgment'—these things were related to the forces of the world; they were to him as 'the outcry of the hunted hare' to Blake; they called up the same thirst which he had on the grass, in the sun, and by the sea. The marble men and women of Greece had something of himself and of what he longed for.

'These were they,' he says, 'who would have stayed with me under the shadow of the oaks while the blackbirds fluted and the air swung the cowslips. They would have walked with me among the reddened gold of the wheat. They would have rested with me on the hill-tops and in the narrow valley grooves of ancient times. They would have listened with me to the sob of the summer sea drinking the land. They had thirsted of sun, and earth, and sea and sky. Their shape spoke of this thirst and desire of mine—if I had lived with them from Greece till now I should not have had enough of them. Tracing the form of limb and torso with the eye gave me a sense of rest ...'.

The Venus Accroupie in the Louvre recalled the loveliness of Nature. He says that the light and colour of summer air were to him 'always on the point of becoming tangible in some beautiful form,' while the statue in turn expressed the colour and the light and 'the deep aspiring desire of the soul for the perfection of the frame in which it is encased.' In the presence of that statue, too, the thought of something beyond the old forms of life returns; 'the conception of moral good,' he says, 'did not satisfy one while contemplating it'; and though he cannot name his new ideal good, he thinks that it will in some way be associated with 'the ideal beauty of Nature.'

The brow of Caesar keeps him to the same theme. The conspirators destroyed 'the one man filled with mind.'

They should have tried to keep him alive; their act interrupted a divine curve of intelligence which Jefferies seems to connect with the progress he desires. It amazes him that in twelve thousand years men have not built a house or filled a granary for themselves, or organized themselves for their own comfort. He still hopes for a time when 'no one need ever feel anxiety about mere subsistence', dreaming of great spaces of ease and happiness in which men may capture the beautiful and good. Yet he is himself greedy of physical life, and envies Ninus and Semiramis and Nero, and the American lumbermen felling trees. 'Fulness of physical life,' he dares to say, 'causes a deeper desire of soul-life.' He wishes to be always with earth and sun and sea and star. The contour and curve and outline of an ideal human form 'indicate immortality.' Death and disease do not sadden so much as they anger him; yet he hopes.

Such is the personality which we must feel in reading Jefferies if we are to know the true worth of his books. *The Story of My Heart* is the key to the rest; for in it he shows us the value which he sets upon things; it is a lexicon from which we learn the meaning of words in his vocabulary. He was one of the great ones who now and then rediscover those ancient matters—the mortality of man and the strangeness of the world. All his books are full of them, if they are read aright. A little thought or personal confession comes in the midst of what seems to the careless reader to be dull and undigested observation, and it shows the man and casts a rich shadow over the writing round about. *Amaryllis at the Fair* is full of them. *Amaryllis* is a fine novel which is probably not much longer to be neglected because it is unlike Besant's. If it is to be neglected, I see no use in all our modern reading of Lamb and Borrow and the Elizabethans. In Jefferies' sympathy with all life, he comes near to Blake; in his sense of the visible world, of earth and sea and sky, in which men are placed, he is with Mr. Hardy. But nobody so much as he continually reminds us that Nature truly lives. He never condescends to it, never treats landscape as a mere picture, though there are pages in which weariness or necessity has made him appear to be a sportsman or a naturalist. He never intrudes upon Nature in style or thought.

How could he, when he had achieved that harmony with her which gives the opening chapters of *The Dewy Morn*, for example, a religious sensuousness? If there is any book in which the rapture of love appears so clearly to be part of the divine rapture of 'Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood' as in the passages which I am going to quote, I do not know it.

She was bathing in the beauty of the morning—floating upheld on the dewy petals. A swimmer lies on the warm summer water, the softest of couches, extended at full length, the body so gently held that it undulates with the faint

swell. So soft is the couch it softens the frame, which becomes supple, flexible, like the water itself.

Felise was lying on the flowers and grass, extended under the sun, steeped in their sweetness. She visibly sat on the oak trunk—invisibly her nature was reclining, as the swimmer on the sun-warmed sea. Her frame drooped as the soul, which bears it up, flowed outwards, feeling to grass, and flower, and leaf, as the swimmer spreads the arms abroad, and the fingers feel the water. She sighed with deep content, dissolving in the luxurious bath of beauty.

Her strong heart beating, the pulses throbbing, her bosom rising and regularly sinking with the rich waves of life; her supple limbs and roundness filled with the plenty of ripe youth; her white, soft, roseate skin, the surface where the sun touched her hand glistening with the dew of the pore; the bloom upon her—that glow of the morn of life—the hair more lovely than the sunlight; the grace unwritten of perfect form—these produced within her a sense of existence—a consciousness of being, to which she was abandoned; and her lips parted to sigh. The sigh was the expression of feeling herself to be.

To be! To live! To have an intense enjoyment in every inspiration of breath; in every beat of the pulse; in every movement of the limbs; in every sense!

The rugged oak-trunk was pleasant to her. She placed her hand on the brown, stained wood—stained with its own sap, for the bark had been removed. She touched it; and so full of life was her touch that, it found a pleasure in that rude wood. The brown boulder-stone in the lane, ancient, smoothed, and ground in times which have vanished like a cloud, its surface the colour of old polished oak, reflecting the sun with a dull gleam—the very boulder-stone was pleasant to her, so full of life was her sense of sight.

There came a skylark, dropping over the hedge, and alighted on a dusty level spot in the lane. His shadow shot a foot long on the dust, thrown by the level beams of the sun. The dust, in shadow and sunshine—the despised dust—now that the lark drew her glance to it, was pleasant to see.

All things are joyously beautiful to those who feel themselves to be; but it is only given to the chosen of nature to know this exceeding delight .....

With her soul grew her love; this purest love, and yet strongest of passions. Her young limbs became stronger, her young chest broader, her shoulders and her back finer: a firmer pulse throbbed in her veins. So the soul enlarged as day after day of musing passed, and those long half-conscious reveries which are to the soul as sleep to the frame. She rejoiced in the morning and the sunrise, and felt the glowing beauty of the day; she saw the night and its stars, and knew the grandeur of the earth's measured onward roll eastwards, the hexameter of heaven.

She saw these things because at her birth love was born with her; the flame was lit with her life, and must burn till the end...

His immense, simple personality is at one with the oak and the grass as if he were somehow involved in their beauty and life. He seems to be conscious of all life that is about him, down to the plants in the arch of a bridge which

is lit by reflection from the water. His merely physical sight is wonderful; he has confessed that it was sometimes painful not to be able to cease to see. In *Bevis*, the boys' book for all who admit to being or having been boys, he says of Bevis that he never forgot the sun and stars; he 'lived not only out to the finches and the swallows, to the far-away hills, but he lived out and felt out to the sky.' Even if that book were not the only boys' book which is without a trace of condescension in matter and manner, it would be invaluable as a proof of Jefferies' observation.

No other writer leaves us with such a sense of his infinite riches as Jefferies. A book like *Wild Life in a Southern County* seems almost to exhaust a broad strip of English country, and yet it exhausts Jefferies no more than the fields. Hardly a sentence is given to anything but fact. If he did not set everything down, I feel that all Nature was at his right hand. But, at the same time, no other great writer surely had a fainter vocation. He was so steeped in life that it was an effort, and a painful one, to write. His Amaryllis envied neither the great musician nor the great painter; she was 'a passive and not an active artist by nature;' so was he. He says that could he choose, he would go on seeing beautiful things, and not writing. He calls Nature formless; he likes to point out how many fields an artist could make nothing of; and often he seems to have deliberately reproduced this formlessness which (out of compliment) he has called inartistic. There are pages, in *The Gamekeeper* and *Nature Near London* and other books, which were forced out of him by his need of a certain income. Some of his transitions are inexcusable except on this ground. He must often have been offended by paper and pen, as he tells us that the sun was offended. 'The sunlight,' he says, 'put out the books as it put out the fire.' Yet his big, simple moods will seem to a true lover to enchant his least perfect pages. For he was like the oak tree, which has but three or four moods—when it is bare, when the buds glow, when it is green, when it is ruddy, when it is dead. These moods are all important to him, and to the tree, and therefore they are beautiful. But the beauty is not always quite human. It is as if he wrote with clay and not with ink. He did not desire the little beauty that is far withdrawing from Nature, and often inspired not so much by its true strangeness as by mere novelty. He would omit nothing by choice. He would seem to have been Nature's advocate, and to have striven to say all. Of course he failed. But his effort, is one of the most splendid things recorded in written words, and we have only to read such things as the opening of 'My Old Village' to admit that among his other gifts, Nature had given him a great manner, the manner of perfection.

## Reviews of *The Dewy Morn*

From glowing reviews and damnable criticism it is no wonder that Richard Jefferies requested that the original manuscript should not be given to a Tory reader. Even in his Introduction to the 1982 Wildwood edition of *The Dewy Morn* Laurence Lerner remarks that 'it is clear from all three of [Jefferies' late novels] that Jefferies had no competence as a story-teller.' At the time of publication by Richard Bentley on 25 August 1884, *Vanity Fair* described the novel as 'written from end to end in a kind of English which cannot be imitated, and has rarely been equalled for beauty.' Over 50 years later, the respected literary critic Q.D. Leavis wrote in *Scrutiny* (March 1938): 'In *The Dewy Morn* he goes further than any Victorian novelist towards the modern novel—I mean the novel that seems to have significance for us other than as a mirror of manners and morals; I should describe it as one of the few real novels between *Wuthering Heights* and *Sons and Lovers*.' The reviewer for the *Academy* (6 September) writes: 'All the charm which normally distinguished Mr. Jefferies' transcripts from Nature will be found in *The Dewy Morn*. The same keen appreciation of rural scenery, the same intense delight in bird and flower life, which the author has accustomed us to in his works dealing directly with country life are present here. But the narrative of the love passages between her and Martial Barnard is altogether charming. The smell of the fields and the song of the birds are with us all through.' 'It is for its beautiful word pictures of rural scenery that *The Dewy Morn* will be chiefly read,' wrote the reviewer for *Society*. There were also reviews in 1884 in the *Athenaeum* (6 September), *World* (4 September), *Spectator* (4 October), and *Saturday Review* (18 October). Edward Thomas wrote (*Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1909), p.253): '*The Dewy Morn* shows more sides of the mature or maturing Jefferies than any of its predecessors—his passion for beauty and humanity, his sensuous and spiritual view of Nature and women, his hatred of oppression, his impatience of delaying reform, his belief in Fate, his growing curiosity about human character.'

Here follow some of the reviews that were published in 1884 and then again in 1891 when the two-volume set was printed in one volume by Richard Bentley and Son.

*PALL MALL GAZETTE*—12 September 1884, p.4-5.

Mr. Richard Jefferies is a true beauty-worshipper, and he never lacks beautiful words wherein to clothe his thoughts and record his observations. All he tells us about outward nature is full of grace and insight. He interprets and explains her with keen and loving observation, extricating and holding up to our sight numberless little delicate beauties of form, colour, and movement, which we have seen indeed a hundred times but never noted. He is a painter of beautiful landscapes; of every form of lower life. When he

passes out of this region and takes us into his portrait gallery he is less fascinating. The minute outward observation of shape and colour which reveals and individualizes the flower or bird seems to obscure and degrade when applied to men and women. Inasmuch as *The Dewy Morn* contains less landscape and more portrait, it will not rank as one of Mr. Jefferies's best books. Felise, the heroine, is a beautiful animal, strong, fleet, and sound of limb. Four pages are devoted to a description of her knees in particular, and reflections on knees in general. She is a maiden of the idyllic type; indeed, the whole story is idyllic, except where Mr. Jefferies leaves that serene height to grapple with questions of the day. These mingle with the story; Felise's lover, Martial (an unsatisfactory young man, who leaves the whole burden of love-making on her hands), is an unsuccessful farmer; his landlord, 'Cornleigh of Cornleigh,' is a bad, and let us hope a rare, specimen of a landowner, perfectly heartless and headless; the steward, Robert Godwin, who administers the estate, is a stone dressed up to look like a man, and employed to grind the faces of the poor. Are these people drawn from nature with the same careful hand as the forest life and the sunsets? Perhaps not; for the 'condition-of-England question' is apt to make men impatient and unjust, and Mr. Jefferies may in his haste have caught up the blacking-brush by mistake. But his perception of the diseases of the body politic is quick and sensitive, though the language of his alarm is vague and declamatory, and his sympathy with the 'uneasy classes' is warm, loving, and comprehensive. Side by side with the main story runs a sad picturesque little episode of cottage life, very tragic in its termination. Mr. Jefferies is an adept at painting the stolid countryman, and the miller who helplessly watches the drowning man and woman, without being able to frame a single suggestion for their relief, is a happy effort in this line. 'Get a rope—quick!' shouts the man in the water. 'A raup?' 'Yes, a rope.' He turns and walks slowly away, remains absent for many minutes of horrible suspense, returns, looks down at the pair still struggling, pauses, and then says. 'Thur bean't no raup.'

Mr. Jefferies's chief charm, perhaps, among all others is that he paints England for us: claiming for us our own national inheritance of loveliness, and proving to us our wealth of form and colour in city and country alike. Here is a brilliant picture of summer beauty—'It is one of loveliest August mornings when the idle thunder booms at sea, while over the cornfields the sun shines with increased brilliance. The sky over the wheat is blue; in the distance some large clouds stay motionless. After each burst of heavy sound, too distant to cause uneasiness, the sun seems to glow fiercer, the warm haze thickens, the rich blue sky is richer, the insects in the air vibrate their wings more rapidly, and a shriller hum arises; butterflies are busier, and in the wheat the reapers bend, cutting at the yellow straw. Instead of uneasiness

the thunder increases the sense of luxurious, tropical sunlight, colour, and glowing life. All things appear aware that the lightning will not approach—it will remain miles at sea—and they throb and pant with pulses quickened by the discharge of electricity.’

*THE MORNING POST*—Saturday 13 September 1884, p.6.

In *The Dewy Morn* Mr. Jefferies has produced another powerful psychological study rather than a novel, in the usual sense of the word. True, towards the end of the work there is more movement, and several sensational incidents are found in its latter pages. It consists, however, in the main of the minute analysis of a passionate woman’s heart, whose earnestness and complete absorption in the one feeling that overpowers her throws a veil over what would otherwise be the too unwomanly manifestations of a very ardent nature. It nevertheless requires the witchery of the author’s glowing style to blind the reader to the credulity of the passably sensuous portrait of Felise Goring. It goes against the grain that this lovely creature should for so long a time pour out in vain the treasures of her affection at the feet of so irresponsive a being as Martial Barnard. It is also humiliating to the fair sex that the only character in the book invested with the slightest amount of ideality is precisely that of the lover. Mr. Jefferies makes too large demands on the reader’s willingness to follow where he leads, and in no way adds to the merit of the story in insisting on the assertion that a man of Martial’s age and habits could for long months delude himself with the belief that his admiration for Felise was but another phase of his love of the beautiful, that in her he only saw the perfect picture, at which ‘he could gaze without emotion.’ The licence of the poet is, however, almost illimitable, and a poet in many senses the author shows himself to be. His word-painting is beautiful and full of colour. The scene of Felise at the bath in the lonely wood is not unlike a canvas of Titian, in which the place of the modern nymph is occupied by the Goddess of Love. Side by side with the history of the two lovers is a very forcible exposition of the state of agriculture, and of the agricultural classes under the laws that now regulate the tenure of land. Cornleigh Cornleigh is of a density so difficult to invent that he would seem to be drawn from nature. He and his wife Letitia are so exceptionally odious that the putting forward these two personages as representatives of the landlord class weakens instead of strengthening the cause that the writer eloquently pleads. The agent, Robin Godwin, although with some exaggeration, is powerfully drawn. Mr. Jefferies grasps his subject with boldness and vigour, and his manner of treating it is both forcible and imaginative.

*ST JAMES'S GAZETTE*—17 September 1884, p.7.

Inditing a sonnet to a mistress's eyebrow is accepted as a very common thing indeed, though it would not be easy to mention an instance; but writing a rhapsody about a woman's knees, or about the knees of a woman, to speak generically, is a decided novelty, of which an instance is to be found in this semi-poetical semi-prosaic story contained in two easy volumes. Nor is it in this little matter alone that the author displays indisputable originality: he is nothing if not original—in style, method, idea, and incident. It has seemed good to him to tell a story of love; how Felise Goring, contrary to the traditions of her sex, made initiative love to Martial Barnard so unmistakeably that he could or should not have failed to see it with considerably less than half an eye. It is she who cuts the initial of his Christian name on the bark of a tree, or at any rate a part of the initial, so as to produce a very suggestive combination of lines; whereas, from the days of Virgil, and even Theocritus, to the present time, if their eclogues be not misremembered, it has always been the enamoured swain who, though he may have no penknife wherewith to make incisions in trees, caused the woods and forests to resound with *Amaryllis*. Felise, moreover, lady as she is, runs on foot with the harriers, as ladies are not wont to do; but then it is not very lady who can run as she can run, like Atalanta. And so it comes to pass that Barnard sees her and she sees him, after the fashion rendered familiar by the silly song about 'Esau.' Now Barnard at the time has the misfortune, as generally or very often in such cases, to be engaged to a very nice, and eligible in some respects, but on the whole commonplace young lady; a young lady as unlike Felise as a dowdy mortal, sedate and passionless, might be unlike Venus attired by the Graces and glowing with love for Mars. Barnard therefore has to dissimulate. He has to pretend, being a loyal gentleman at heart, that he only admires the beautiful, graceful, ardent Felise as if she were a picture, while he remains faithful to his pretty but uninteresting Rosa; and he pretends all this—for a while—even to himself. But it is not necessary to tell a wicked world that this sort of thing cannot long continue; that poor Rosa will turn at last, and, if resentment and violence be foreign to her nature, will 'have a good cry' and then tell her laggard lover he is free. Meanwhile Felise cherishes her love for Barnard to the utmost capacity of her ardent nature. Here is a condition of things which an artistic writer of novels would have made much of; upon which he would have kept the reader's attention constantly fixed; and which he would have managed so that the two principal personages and their history should occupy the most conspicuous places in the rest of the narrative, until they were either extricated from the network of complications or overwhelmed in the ultimate catastrophe. Now the truth must be told; and the truth in this

case is that Mr. Jefferies, with all his merits, is not an artistic story-teller. He makes scarcely any capital out of the story in a labyrinth of remarkable and sometimes grotesque events, descriptions, comments, and apophthegms; and he ends with a sudden jerk, after a couple of terrible scenes, of which one is very good indeed and the other extravagant enough for the wildest melodrama. He has native humour and a wonderful knowledge of nature, whether human or other; and as long as he deals with what he is so incomparable a master of, we accept his discourse with silent gratitude and admiration—contented that he should be regarded as ‘not a arguin’ with us, but a tellin’ us.’ When it comes to writing a romance, however, we humbly submit that he is by no means at his best.

*THE GRAPHIC*—20 September 1884, p.307.

All who enjoy exquisite descriptions of Nature given by one who not only loves her—that is not altogether so unusual—but knows her, will make at once for *The Dewy Morn* (2 vols.: Bentley and Son), by Mr. Richard Jefferies, author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and will in nowise be disappointed—to do so would be only repeating what has been said over and over again. But should any extract be made from his works, which they would well bear, the account of Felise’s run up Ashpen, in the opening chapters of the present work, must be by no means omitted. The picture is large and full, but every touch is firm and true. When we speak, however, of Mr. Jefferies’ work as well as bearing the process of extraction, we do not speak in a complimentary sense altogether. A great percentage of *The Dewy Morn* might, for example, might have been left out as mere repetition, and a good deal more as spoiling, by a jarring element, what should have entirely fulfilled its opening promise as likely to prove the most charming of love idylls. No doubt Mr. Jefferies feels strongly and bitterly about the rights and wrongs, social and political, of the agricultural poor. Indeed he sees apparently none but the shadows, and is therefore impelled to prophesy. Possible it was part of his purpose to contrast the ideal with the actual. But the mere fact that there can be any doubt about this shows that the purpose is not carried out effectively,—a controversial pamphlet, however able, does not do to interleave with pure poetry. But, apart from this grave constructive error, little fault, beyond a certain one-sidedness, can be found with either element. Human nature, especially rustic human nature, has seldom if ever had a closer student or picturesque exponent. His leading character, Felise, is however ideal altogether—so entirely a classical nymph that her warm and passionate pursuit of the man whom she wishes to make her lover must be judged by no more everyday standard than the loves of a goddess in the mythology. Her description also is a triumph of word-painting. The character

of Mr. Godwin, the hard and miserly man who goes mad of his one romance, is an admirable and effective study. On the whole, in *The Dewy Morn* Mr. Jefferies is so frequently at his best that it seems strange and ungracious to call the book unsatisfactory on the whole. Yet that is the effect, unquestionably. It is a succession of broken pictures: or rather it is like a piece of music written in no settled key.

*THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS*—27 September 1884, p.302.

Mr. Richard Jefferies, as we all know, is a delightful chronicler of country sights, of the beauty that lies in the fields and hedge-rows, of the aspects of the clouds, of the glory that is upon the lonely hills. In *The Dewy Morn*, a novel, 2 vols. (Bentley), the characteristics abound with which we are familiar in his earlier works. There is the same loving and skilful hand in the delineation of natural objects, the same fine sense of colour, the same delicate sympathy with the ‘fellow mortals’ that haunt our woods and moors. In a novel it is, however, essential that human interest should predominate. Scenery must be subsidiary to character. Several personages figure in these pages, but on two only, Felise Goring and Martial Barnard, is the attention strongly concentrated. The heroine is a girl of rare beauty and exquisite form, and on her face and shape the writer dwells with the feeling of the artist; so, also, does Barnard, whose admiration in the earlier stages of the narrative is, if one can believe him, wholly artistic. Any other woman, he thought, if as beautiful, would have suited him as well to look at. Any other man, however, would not have suited Felise, who falls ardently in love with Barnard at first sight, and is under no restraint in the expression of her passion. If Barnard would only gaze upon her face, she thinks its beauty would win him; but at first, having a prior obligation to another woman, the efforts of Felise seemed to fail in their object. Her conduct will strike the ordinary reader as essentially unmaidenly; but then the ordinary reader, perhaps, is not expected to understand, as Mr. Jefferies does, what conduct is justifiable in ‘a natural woman.’ Girls, however much they may desire to be married—and there is nothing unfeminine in the wish to have a husband and a home—have to wait until they are asked; but Felise could not wait. ‘She would not submit; she would not wait to the burden of “He cometh not.” She would force circumstances to her will, and mould her fate in her hands. The precipice was perpendicular, yet she would scale it. It was natural for a woman to attempt the impossible. The strong limbs, the deep chest, the intense sense of life within her, urged her to the effort, and promised success . . . If she failed, she would be utterly broken; if she failed, the end would come quickly. She could not live without her love.’ The purpose of the heroine is thus clearly seen at the outset, and how it was accomplished must

be left to the reader to discover. As a story, *The Dewy Morn* is weak in plot and wanting in probability. Short though the novel be, it has many digressions and reflections which one feels inclined to skip, and it is in the descriptions of external nature alone that the author shows the cunning of his hand.

JOHN BULL—13 September 1884, p.597.

If we mistake not, in *The Dewy Morn* Mr. Jefferies makes his first appearance as a novelist, and we cannot congratulate him on that appearance. The best part of the book is to be found in the series of rustic pictures which it presents. These are marked with all the literary skill, the vivid reality, and the acuteness of observation to which he has accustomed us. But the framework on which they are hung is most unsatisfactory, and the exaggeration and bad taste which mark the author's delineation of his imaginary personages are in strong contrast with the truthfulness with which he depicts the lower world of animals and the sights and scenes of outward nature. Felice (*sic*) herself is a most unprepossessing young lady, and what we cannot but regard as her mere animal passion for Martial Barnard is repulsive in the extreme; while the same may be said of the gusto with which Martial dwells on her physical charms. Cornleigh of Cornleigh is a gross caricature, and Robert Godwin one of those faultful monsters whom the world ne'er knew. The tone of the book is thoroughly objectionable to those who do not desire to inflame enmities, and Mr. Jefferies' political views are not likely to commend themselves to readers. Nor is there sufficient artistic merit in the story to make them overlook his crude Radicalism and his sneers at the Church. Indeed, when he tries to harrow is with what he considers a powerful situation, in which Robert Godwin, Felice, and a highly-trained steed are the main performers, the effect borders more on the ludicrous than the thrilling. We hope that for the future Mr. Jefferies will continue himself to his proper *métier*, and not again aspire to change his position from an admirable writer of descriptive articles to that of a very bad novelist.

TRUTH—18 November 1884, p.761, by Jessie Raine.

I would by no means advise you to order Mr. Jefferies' novel, *The Dewy Morn*, which is as much the worst as *The Life of the Fields* is the best of his books. *The Dewy Morn* is dull to deadliness; but it is something worse than dull, besides. To me, at least, it is nothing less than a repulsive book. Mr. Jefferies seems to regard men and women as mere animals, and revels in animal descriptions of their feelings and of their persons. Fancy three pages

and a half given to the description of a girl's knee, after this fatuous fashion! 'The knee is so very human, so nearly sorrowful in its humanity; sorrow seeks its knees, sadness bends on them, love desiring in secret does so on its knees. Human life is centred in the knee. In the knee we recognise all that the heart has experienced. Beautiful knees, the poise and centre of the form! Were I rich, how gladly I would give a thousand pounds for a true picture of the knee! However indifferent the person may be—the individual—to see the knee is to love it for itself,' etc. For three and a half foolish fustian pages! 'I only wish the gentleman has seen a lion' said Johnson of someone who talked for an hour of a flea.

*THE GRAPHIC*—19 December 1891, p. 727.

The publication of what is presumably the latest work of Richard Jefferies (I vol: Bentley and Son) is to be regretted. That is commonly the case with posthumous publications; but there are special reasons for regret in the case of *The Dewy Morn*. Despite the healthy ring of the title, it is anything but a wholesome novel. However full of charm the method of Richard Jefferies beyond all question was when applied to landscape, it is, to say the least, inappropriate to woman in swimming costume; still less to the psychological treatment of the passion (to speak euphemistically) of a young girl for a young man, of whom she knows nothing, and who avoids or repels her advances as long as he can. Nor is the villain of the piece a healthier study; Robert Godwin's 'love' for Felise is of the sort which culminates in fiendish cruelty. His crowning achievement is to bind her with ropes so that she cannot move hand or foot, and then to goad her favourite horse to crush her face with its hoof. Of course he is prevented; but that does not modify the repulsive brutality of the situation. Nor is the novel improved by saturation with politics. Mr. Jefferies was evidently an almost fanatical devotee of the Ballot Act, and, to a hitherto unsuspected extent, a believer in the existence of a feudal systematic oppression outside the regions of claptrap and superstition. His example of a Squire merits a place in a museum of monstrosities rather than in what professes to be a picture of rural England: and—strange that such a thing should be said of Richard Jefferies—many of his scenes are grotesquely impossible. That there are some charming sketches of nature, as distinct from human nature, need not be said. But they are fewer than he has accustomed his admirers to expect, and bring into stronger relief a work which, as the perversion of a great talent, can only be regarded with sorrow.

# An Introduction to *The Dewy Morn*

Rebecca Welshman

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**1**884 was a prolific year for Richard Jefferies. While living in Brighton he published *Red Deer* in January, *The Life of the Fields* in June, as well as making more than monthly contributions to a wide range of popular periodicals, some of which would form the 1885 collection *The Open Air*. In 1884 a remarkable article in *The Gentleman's Magazine*—a prominent and long-established periodical that was a forum for political, social and archaeological issues<sup>1</sup>—cited Jefferies as being eligible for consideration for entry into the 'Literary Ring.' The article cites several authors who have 'sprung of late into fashion,' and places Jefferies' prose writing alongside that of major social commentators, and political and literary figures of the late nineteenth century. The article states that—

Cardinal Newman would [...] obtain not a few votes, and Kingsley, Mr. Matthew Arnold, Mr. Gladstone, John Stuart Mill, Mr. Richard Jefferies, and Mr. John Morley would [...] win loudly-expressed admiration.<sup>2</sup>

Digital searches for Jefferies' name in the periodical press reveal that he is mentioned more in 1884 than in any other year in that decade<sup>3</sup> and suggests an unprecedented level of notoriety.

*The Dewy Morn* was published in August 1884, the month after the Jefferies family had moved to Eltham, and was Jefferies' seventh novel. Set within the locale of the fictional Wiltshire town, Maasbury, it is predominantly a love story between the beautiful Felise Goring and farmer and landowner, Martial Barnard. In a letter to Jefferies in 1884 Bentley states that 'the book, only making two volumes, can hardly do more than bring itself home, even if it meets with a fairly good sale, as nothing short of three can stand the advertising of the present day.' However, an announcement for the book in *The Daily News* and in *The Academy* comments on the production of *The Dewy Morn* in two volumes as being 'a number which

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<sup>1</sup> Jefferies contributed an article titled 'Village Miners' to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in June 1883.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 256:1840 (1884:Apr.) p.413.

<sup>3</sup> In *British Periodicals Online Collections I and II* 'Jefferies' appears 91 times in 1884, only 13 times less than the 104 times he is mentioned in 1887, the year of his death.

seems to be growing in favour as compared with the orthodox three,' and asks, 'when shall we come to a single volume?' As in other instances during his career, Jefferies had ambitious ideas which were ahead of his time but not quite the professional competence to execute them.<sup>4</sup>

The notebooks<sup>5</sup> show that *The Dewy Morn* was mainly written in the months of August to November 1883. Yet although the novel was developed over a period of years, it is probable that parts relating to Felise in the first volume were written considerably earlier. In their *Bibliographical Study*, George Miller and Hugoe Matthews identify parts of *The Dewy Morn* to have originated from material written from as early as 1878.<sup>6</sup> Jefferies' notebooks certainly suggest that he had conceived the character Felise, along with other parts of the plot, long before the majority of the book was written. An idea that Jefferies was to include in the book is mentioned in the notebooks of April 1878, in which he refers to 'my ideas of the human body—as the knee and its beauty: the shoulders, and the artists' sense in it.' This idea is later developed in the bathing scene in *The Dewy Morn*. Miller and Matthews also state that the title page of the manuscript in the British Library has Jefferies' Surbiton address at the top, which means that Jefferies began work on this final draft before leaving there, in June or July 1882. The title itself is *Wild Thyme: an Upland Story*, but *Wild Thyme* has been crossed through and *The Dewy Morn* written above. It is thus quite possible that Jefferies began work on the new *Dewy Morn* much sooner than the notebooks suggest—somewhere between the first reference to the idea in 1878 and 1882.

Different to Jefferies' earlier and later work, *The Dewy Morn* is one of Jefferies' most unique and insightful novels. Less ambitious in terms of plot than his early fiction—*The Scarlet Shawl*, *Restless Human Hearts*, and *World's End*—which were weakened by Jefferies' sensational style, *The Dewy Morn* focuses on relationships and events within the regional rural area. As Jefferies said of *The Dewy Morn* in his letter to William Tinsley the publisher, 'I have never written anything of the kind before—it is totally different from my other novels.' Jefferies' potential as a novelist had already been recognised in reviews of *Greene Ferne Farm*, published earlier in 1880. One such article in the *Westminster Review* in 1880 stated that 'his characters are firmly drawn and individualized'<sup>7</sup> and that the photographic quality of his scenes resembled the work of George Eliot. Yet while Eliot's scenes,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, in Jefferies' notebooks his ideas for a new newspaper and his designs for flying machines.

<sup>5</sup> Jefferies' remaining notebooks are archived at the British Library (MS 58818).

<sup>6</sup> George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), p.417.

<sup>7</sup> *Westminster Review*, 57:2 (1880:Apr.) p.604.

described as 'justice without mercy' were criticized for their harshness, Jefferies was commended for 'toni[ing] and soften[ing] his outlines,' his work being described as 'justice with mercy.' The entry for Jefferies in the 1995 volume *Nineteenth Century Literature Criticism* states that *The Dewy Morn*, along with *Hodge and his Masters* 'made ample amends ... for the narrow individualism of his earlier years' during which his literature expressed a 'certain harsh intolerance about his attitude towards his fellows.' The January 1885 edition of *Time Magazine* lists *The Dewy Morn* in its 'Best Books of the Past Three Months,' under the heading 'fiction'; a list of 21 titles that placed Jefferies alongside other popular novelists, such as George Manville Fenn and Grant Allen.

Although predominantly a love-story the book addresses larger social problems of the late nineteenth century, which were part of the Great Agricultural Depression, including poverty; homelessness; the agricultural labourer's right to vote; the county franchise; the rights of tenant farmers, and the falling price of crops. The competence with which Jefferies incorporates these issues into his narrative is indicative of the extent to which he had studied and written about agriculture and social problems. An element of his career that is often overlooked in favour of his nature writings, Jefferies' contributions to agricultural journalism were remarkable. Although it was his letters to *The Times* about the Wiltshire Labourer in 1872-3 which first gained Jefferies national exposure as an agricultural commentator, his earlier contributions to periodicals indicate that he was writing about these issues long before. Between 1877-8 he wrote weekly articles for the *Live Stock Journal and Fancier's Gazette* on subjects such as 'America and the Meat Market'; 'The Value of Grass'; 'Pasture and Stock'; 'The Study of Stock'; and 'The Labourer and his Hire', and he contributed regular articles to both the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *St James's Gazette* on similar subjects. His experience as a reporter for the *North Wiltshire Herald* between 1867-1871 allowed him to develop a strong critical faculty and an acute eye for detail. Unfortunately he was never fully able to lose this critical objectivity in his novel writing, and thus he could never fully emotionally engage his readers in a way that more practised and experienced authors could.

However, by the time that *The Dewy Morn* was published, Jefferies' periodical contributions had placed him in an eminent position alongside other social commentators and agricultural writers of the late nineteenth century, including Thomas Hardy, William Thackeray, and Charles Dickens. In *The Dewy Morn* Jefferies makes an important contribution to understanding how the political consequences of agricultural problems affected the everyday lives of people in the countryside. Throughout the

novel the barrenness and disillusionment of poverty is juxtaposed against the wealth and abundance of the natural world. As he writes of Martial—

[he] was at the end of his resources, and had not cash to pay the reapers labouring in the wheat, while Love and Time were idle, the sun glowed, and the distant thunder rolled in from the sea. (p.229)

In the heart-rending depictions of the labourer, Abner, whose ‘aged and helpless parents were to be turned into the road,’ Jefferies passes poignant commentary on the hypocrisy of the law concerning coffins for poor people:

In London the coffins of the ‘pauper’ dead (let the word ‘pauper’ be accursed!) have been seen to tumble into the stony street; a heap of the dead carted at once, like the carcasses of animals, till they broke down the carriage. What terrible folly our boasted self-government of boards is capable of—this uttermost folly of destroying respect for the dead to save a few miserable shillings!

Abner Brown was by nature loyal and true – of that ‘grit’ and character Nelson’s worthies were made. He was willing to work and to laugh in his work, and to serve with faithful service for three score years and ten. (p.250)

In *The Dewy Morn* Jefferies achieves his long-held ambition of incorporating the sublime, meticulously written prose which characterised *The Story of My Heart* into the form of a novel. His earlier attempts at this approach (eg: *Restless Human Hearts* and *World’s End*) were weakened by the complexity of the plot and his inability to effectually dramatise the events. In *The Dewy Morn* the plot centres on Felise who is consistently represented in close association with the elemental beauty of the landscape. She is robust, healthy, and a strong swimmer. In her pursuit of Martial she walks for miles at a time through his fields and along the streams that thread the land, often in constant inner dialogue with the beauty of the landscape. The development of Felise’s character almost certainly relates to the articles which Jefferies was working on during the same year.<sup>8</sup> In the bathing scene the beauty of the human form is compared to that of the natural world—

The dew upon her knees, wet from the limpid water, glistened in the sunshine. Till this instant he had never met anything that answered to the poetry—the romance—in his heart. Full as he was of the deepest admiration of beauty, till this moment he had never seen it. [...]

Before those beautiful knees he could have bowed his forehead in the grass, in the purest worship of beauty. They were sacred; a sense of reverence possessed him. [...]

His breathing became so low it seemed to have ceased. It was like the first view of the sunlit sea, never again experienced, never forgotten; a moment of

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, ‘Beauty in the Country’, written in 1884, and collected in *The Open Air*.

the most exalted life. This wondrous loveliness purified and freed his soul from the grossness of material existence. (p.70)

That Martial's appreciation of Felise's beauty could transcend ordinary experience, and yet still be part of it, was imperative to Jefferies, who wished his work to be read and understood by a wide audience. As Reverend James Johnston wrote in 1888, Jefferies' work was gaining a 'wide popularity' not least because Jefferies 'belonged to that infinitesimal minority of mankind who inherit a prophet's inspired permission to divine nature's sights and sounds.'<sup>9</sup> In his notes for *The Dewy Morn* Jefferies wrote that 'a beautiful woman is the visible representation of something higher than any expression has yet been found for—of a truth higher than the truth of scientific reasoning—of that something which the ancients felt when they represented the immortal in human shape.' It was in 1885, the year after the publication of *The Dewy Morn*, when extracts from Jefferies' work were first collected in the *Chambers's Graduated Readers* series alongside the works of Macaulay, Ruskin, Kingsley, Thackeray, and Dickens as well as 'the older English classics.' The unique quality, sensitivity and accessibility of Jefferies' prose lent itself to collection— more so than some of his contemporaries who wrote on rural subjects, such as Thomas Hardy.

In poignant contrast to the noble Felise who is responsive to the sights and sounds of the natural world, is her long-term admirer, Robert Godwin. Jefferies writes of Godwin's insensitivity to nature—

The thoughts which flow from the contemplation of the azure, the noble hope of sunrise, the god-like promise of the stars, were to him non-existent; as he could not see the things that suggested the thought, so his mind was blind to the thought itself. (p.96)

Godwin's detachment becomes the antithesis to the rapturous inner responses of Felise to her surroundings, as well as a symbolic reminder of the stoic, inhuman response to nature that was a feature of the industrial age. Even during his most extreme emotional experience Godwin is closely associated with the machine—

He contrived it: he fastened himself to the leathern bed of torture; he turned the screws; he stretched the sinews of his limbs upon the rack; while his spectre—his double—watched the writhing of the victim—of himself. (p.212)

Throughout the novel Jefferies suggests that there is potential for reconciliation between the anonymity of the industrialised world, which had begun to threaten the traditional ways of agriculture, and a more soulful

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<sup>9</sup> Rev. James Johnston, 'Richard Jefferies.' *Young England* (London, England), [Thursday], [March 01, 1888]; p. 141; Issue 78.

response to nature. Unlike Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in which the mechanised threshing-machine is presented as being irreconcilably different to the spontaneous and dynamic nature of the imaginative human mind, in *The Dewy Morn* the threshing-machine is 'inarticulately human'—

From afar came the hum of a threshing-machine, winnowing out the fresh corn from the ear. A hum that sank to a mournful note and rose again—a curve of sound. There is something inarticulately human in the cry of the threshing-machine. Wheat and bread—labour and life—the past of the sowing, the future of the uncertain autumn, hazy and deepening into the gloom of winter. In the glow, and light, and heat of to-day, forget not that the leaves shall fall and the stubble be beaten by the rains and whitened by the snow; yet hope on, because the sunlight and the flowers shall assuredly succeed again. Inarticulately expressing the meaning of the years and the rise and fall of time, the low hum stretches itself across the wide fields of grain. (pp.241-2)

Jefferies recognised that mechanisation did not necessarily mean loss of identity or tradition. Rather, for agriculture to progress it was necessary to embrace designs which eased the load of human labour and increased the yield of crops. The divide between the natural and the mechanical was perhaps not so great—the design of the machine was, after all, a product of the human mind— and thus the noise of the machine 'stretches itself' across the fields as might a rumble of thunder or a gust of wind.

When considering the ambition of *The Dewy Morn* it is important to remember that Jefferies was a sceptical agnostic writing in a late-Victorian society that was becoming increasingly secular. The form of the novel, in a different way to poetry, afforded a new form of cultural space within which to present alternative reactions to and explanations of religious experience. Arthur Rickett wrote in 1906 that Jefferies 'Loved the earth, not as some have done with the eye or ear only, but with every nerve of his body.'<sup>10</sup> Jefferies wrote with the recognition that the Christian vision of the Romantic poets of the preceding century could no longer hold in a world that was increasingly being recognised as faulty. Industrialisation did no longer promise the progression or success of the human race as it had done so during the eighteenth century. Within this newfound sense of instability the Victorian novel became a sort of holding ground for discussion of larger social, political and spiritual concerns. *The Dewy Morn* is no exception. Perhaps not so professionally crafted as some of the more widely recognised novels of its time, *The Dewy Morn* nevertheless embraces the complexities of human experience which characterised the late nineteenth century. In anticipation

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur Rickett, *The Vagabond in Literature* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1906), p.144.

of early Modernist literature,<sup>11</sup> in which the relationship between men and women and the natural world are closely affiliated, Jefferies develops the Romantic notion that contemplation of nature facilitates lucid, transcendent thought and incorporates this into the more mundane reality of the agricultural world—

A creaking of wagon-wheels went by in the narrow lane, it was a load of yellow sheaves, heavily jolting over the ruts, crushing the rushes that had grown in the way, the sheaves brushing against the wild clematis still flowering high up the bushes. She could see the top of the load above the hawthorn and hazel, slowly ascending the hill by the wood.

‘He cannot love me.’ (242)

The origin of the title, *The Dewy Morn*, is not clear from Jefferies’ letters or notebooks. The phrase can, however, be identified in the work of Shakespeare and Lord Byron. In Shakespeare’s ‘The Passionate Pilgrim, VI’ there is a stanza titled ‘Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn’. Lines 1-4 read—

Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn,  
And scarce the herd gone to the hedge for shade,  
When Cytherea, all in love forlorn,  
A longing tarriance for Adonis made.<sup>12</sup>

The phrase also occurs in Byron’s ‘Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,’ published between 1812 and 1818, and later in the poetry of Robert Pollock, published in 1827, in the collection titled *The Course of Time: A Poem in Ten Books*. In both instances the lines read—

The morn is up again, the dewy morn,  
With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,  
Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,  
As if the living earth contain’d no tomb.

In *The Dewy Morn* there is also suggestion that Jefferies might have read and been influenced by the work of philosopher, writer and composer, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. An article in *Temple Bar* describes Rousseau thus: ‘what he strongly felt and indrew, that he strongly painted and outgave; and hence he is the interpreter of Nature—her gentle, loving, worshipping interpreter.’ The description is not unlike depictions of Jefferies and identifies Rousseau as one of the earliest poets who began a ‘Romantic Revival’ during the nineteenth century. Whether simply coincidence or perhaps an indication that Jefferies had read Rousseau, one of the heroines of *Restless Human Hearts* is called Heloise, maybe or maybe not after the heroine of Rousseau’s

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, first published in 1915.

<sup>12</sup> William Shakespeare (1564–1616). The Oxford Shakespeare: Poems. 1914.

pioneering novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, an historical story about a French nun that explores the credence of the moral values of authenticity and autonomy. Certainly in *The Dewy Morn* Jefferies experiments with the idea of Felise standing apart from moral judgement, suggesting that her nymph-like attitude and her harmony with the natural world can transcend the implications of improper conduct. The character of Felise was an early prototype of the new modern woman, emerging from the constraints of mid nineteenth-century patriarchal society, and represents the interest which Jefferies developed during the mid to late 1870's in the position of women in society.

In his 1947 introduction to the combined edition of *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *The Amateur Poacher*, David Ascoli wrote that—

It is not as a visionary or a novelist or a social philosopher that Jefferies is likely to endure; for in each of these guises he fell victim to his own spiritual confusion, and though he could speak with the tongue of men and angels, he lacked the virtue of humanity and is therefore no more than a tinkling cymbal.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the reviews of *The Dewy Morn* recognise Jefferies' descriptive powers in writing about nature, rural landscape and country life. However, all agree that to a large extent the book fails as a novel, the plot being seen as the main weakness. The *Athenaeum* writes that Jefferies can describe, analyse but not dramatize, while the *Spectator* deems him to be a clever, observant writer with some rhetorical ability but no craftsmanship as a novelist. The review in the *Spectator* expresses concern about Felise, who is 'pure,' but 'scorns all restrictions and maidenly reserve' from the intensity of her passion, which is incongruous with the noble nature assigned to her. She is 'a beautiful animal, and nothing more' from whom 'in real life every man of refined feeling would pray to be delivered.' Jefferies was well known to the readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which the *Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and *Round about a Great Estate* were serialised between 1878–80. Jefferies continued to contribute regular articles to this paper until his death in 1887. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, however, did not consider *The Dewy Morn* to be one of Jefferies' best books. Although a superb 'painter of beautiful landscapes and every form of lower life,' the reviewer maintained that Jefferies was essentially unable to portray men and women. Jefferies is seen as warm and sensitive in his sympathy with the poor, yet he is also 'impatient and unjust,' and 'the language of his alarm is vague and declamatory.' However, a retrospective review of Jefferies' work

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<sup>13</sup> Ascoli (ed), *The Gamekeeper at Home and The Amateur Poacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p.xix.

in the *Academy*, in 1897, considers, quite fairly, that there are different types of novels, and that Jefferies' work can be considered upon its own merits—

Is there not the poetical novel as well as the novel of manners? We ask; and where will you find the relation of the countryman to the soil he treads, and to the air he breathes, better recorded with living realism and living poetry than in *Greene Ferne Farm*, *The Dewy Morn*, *After London*, and *Bevis*?<sup>14</sup>

Although *The Dewy Morn* is brimful of meticulously crafted description, and Jefferies does all he can to encourage his readers to identify and sympathise with his heroine, Felise, the presence of nature dominates the narrative throughout. The characters are so closely affiliated with their rural landscape that it is almost impossible for them to act independently of the natural world. Those who live in the town, such as Martial's fiancée, Rosa, tend to be more wooden and single-dimensional than the rest. The slow unfolding of events, in a rhythm akin to that of nature itself, is slowed further by Jefferies' patient explaining of characters' thoughts and feelings. This causes the actions of the characters to be secondary to the unfolding of their thoughts and thus the plot lacks the narrative drive needed to effectively present the dramatic events which Jefferies contrives. A review in the *Northern Echo* in 1884 states that—

the beauties of the hill and dale, cloud and sunshine, flower and tree are painted as few but this writer can paint them, and these pictures alone constitute a charm which will recommend the book to many readers; but throughout we are conscious of a want. Nature is there—beautiful, bewitching terrible; but only nature. Nothing deeper, nothing more enduring. We get no nearer the hidden meaning underlying all life, all death, for all these beautiful phrases.<sup>15</sup>

The reviewer adds, perhaps rather unfairly, that 'when brought face to face with trouble, suicide is the only refuge which suggests itself to his characters.' Jefferies' notebooks show that his focus on beauty and the Platonic Ideal, which perhaps overshadows the plot, was fully intentional. Jefferies writes that: 'Felice [Felise] draws beauty from everything for her love. The reader should be so much interested, in love with the heroine, that every little thing she does is pleasant to read of, and that 'difficulties, jealousies, poverty, [are] all overcome by Felice's exceeding love. That they make love is all.'

For reviewers writing during the 1880's the book would have seemed obscure and essentially lacking the dramatic intensity needed to sell popular fiction. Yet when we consider the book in its broader social and literary

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<sup>14</sup> 'Jefferies and his Critics', *Academy*, 1288 (1897:Jan.) p.38.

<sup>15</sup> *Northern Echo*, (15th September, 1884).

context it is possible to see that Jefferies was writing at a time when the novel was in a form of transition between late Victorian realism and the more reactionary form of the Modernist novel. Although *The Dewy Morn* was criticised for its simplistic plot, it seems that this simplification allowed Jefferies to concentrate on the relationships between the male and female characters. More than simply offering a picture of rustic charm the novel makes acute observations of and sensitive insights into the subtle nuances of thought and feeling between man and woman. This approach to authorship, in which the dramatic plot is almost secondary to the emotional plot, places Jefferies among the late nineteenth century precursors of Modernist literature. By the early twentieth century the domestic realism of the Victorian era had become increasingly adapted to embody changing and expansive trends, such as psychology and reactionary literary alternatives in a secular world which no longer credited the existence of God. The nature symbolism that Jefferies employs in *The Dewy Morn* boldly anticipates the perceived threat of the mechanical age, in which the position of humankind is forced into humbleness. There is, reminds Jefferies, no time to waste—

Martial had told her all, manfully laying bare the recesses of his heart; warned thereto by his experience of the millpool, which told him not to trifle longer with the shadow on the dial. While we linger—while we stay—the shadow slips from the edge of the disk into universal night. (p.242)

The suggestion in *The Dewy Morn* that mankind was losing contact with nature remains poignant, if not more so in light of current ecological concerns. Yet there is time, Jefferies reassures, to achieve ‘a beautiful inner life’ (p.96) and to realise ‘thoughts which flow from the contemplation of the azure, the noble hope of sunrise’ (p.96)—we have only to observe more closely, and more sensitively, the beauty of the natural world and nurture our inner responses to it. As was written of Jefferies in the *London Quarterly Review* in 1896—

To recall his name is to recall the myriad beauties of Nature in all her tenses of the seasons; in a thousand conditions of life and sky and atmosphere; in countless phases of growth and blossoming. To know him is to approach nearer the heart of the flower, the mystic concave of the sky, and the elusive verge of the horizon.

The message of the wind and the voice of the bird become clearer; the missive of the bud and precept of the falling leaf, no one has rendered more lovingly, more faithfully than he.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Idyllists of the Country Side: Being Six Commentaries concerning some of those who have Apostrophised the Joys of the Open Air’, *London Quarterly Review*, 27:1 (1896:Oct.) p.196.

*The Dewy Morn* is perhaps to be best remembered for its attempt to make tangible the often complex dynamics of thought and feeling between man and woman and between humans and the natural world in the form of a novel of rural life—an accessible medium that was widely recognised and understood. In the novel, perhaps more so than in any other of his works, Jefferies achieves a unique synthesis between immersion in a quiet inner world of observation and feeling and the expression of the outer natural world, which is more dynamic and unpredictable—what he termed in his essay ‘Absence of Design in Nature’ ‘divine chaos.’ The result was an early Modernist novel, the merits of which were only fully appreciated after his death in 1887. For Jefferies the man and for Jefferies the author *The Dewy Morn* was a novel of implicit sacrifice, identifying the interpreter of nature to occupy a lonely position. Jefferies once wrote of himself in his notebooks that ‘it is impossible to have friends and love nature,’ and that one can only ‘be essentially alone.’ It is perhaps this loneliness that ultimately causes the love story in *The Dewy Morn* to be unconvincing; as Jefferies wrote in his notebook in April 1884, ‘I feel as if outside life and everything, as if it were a mere show.’ Yet although Jefferies’ novels might not have truly got inside the emotional complexities of ‘life behind the show’ they harnessed an elemental energy—a quintessential insight into the relationship between nature and mind—that could elude even the most gifted writers. As expressed in the *Academy*, in a review of Jefferies’ *Land*—

What does it matter that the novelists say Jefferies’ novels are not novels, and the British public thinks they are chapters of natural history? .... He was the poet of the great downs and the depths of the English woods. Let that be his epitaph. It is enough.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Jefferies and his Critics’, *Academy*, 1288 (1897: Jan.) p.38.

# The Last Will and Testament of John Jefferies

It is well known that the Will of Richard Jefferies' grandfather was the spiral to virtual bankruptcy for his father. John Jefferies' Will was made out only seven months before he died on 12 April 1868 but why was it seemingly so vindictive? What could have happened between father and son? One can only guess but it does make you understand why Richard Jefferies painted Granfer Iden as such a despicable man. According to an article by Frances Gay for the *Swindon Review* 1955 James Luckett Jefferies paid the money to his sisters the day after the Will was proved (12 July 1868) and the day after that he took out a mortgage for the farm at Coate for £1,500. By 1871 he had paid the interest but nothing off the principal and had taken up another £100. Several loans later, he owed £2,750 by 1877. No doubt, if James Luckett Jefferies had inherited the farm outright, his lack of business acumen would have led to his eventual downfall. Was John Jefferies teaching his son a lesson? Why did James' sisters not help him out more? Martha Hall, in particular, did not need the money. James must have felt abandoned by his family.

**T**his is the last Will and Testament of me John Jefferies of Swindon in the County of Wilts. Baker. I bequeath a legacy of Eight hundred pounds to my daughter Fanny Cox a Widow, and also a legacy of Five hundred pounds to my daughter Martha Hall the wife of William Hall of Swindon aforesaid Gentleman, the same several legacies to be paid within Twelve Calendar months next after my decease, and together with interest on such several legacies at the rate of Four pounds for every One hundred pounds by the year from the time of my death until payment. And I charge the same several legacies upon and out of the real estate given by me to my son James Luckett Jefferies. As to my real Estate, I dispose of the same as follows. I devise to my said Son James Luckett Jefferies and his heirs and assigns, all that my messuage tenement or dwelling-house and the buildings yard garden Orchard thereto and land and all my real Estate situate and being in the parish of Chiseldon in the County of Wilts. Subject to and charged with the legacies by me given to my said daughters Fanny Cox and Martha Hall and with interest thereon until payment as above mentioned. I give and devise all that my messuage garden and premises with the appurtenances situate in or situate in Wood Street in Swindon aforesaid (adjoining to and on the East side of my other dwelling house now occupied by the Misses Hall) which are

now tenanted by M<sup>r</sup> Thomas Newbould Bott<sup>1</sup> and partly used for the Post Office unto my said daughter Fanny Cox and her heirs and assigns. I give and devise all my other messuage garden and premises with the appurtenances also situate in Wood Street and tenanted by the Misses Hall (being the house and the premises next adjoining to the one occupied by Thomas Newbould Bott and partly used for the Post Office) unto Martha wife of the said William Hall and her heirs and assigns. I give and devise all that my messuage Shop Bakehouse Buildings yard and premises situate in the High Street in the town of Swindon and now in my own occupation. And also the pieces of Garden Ground in or near Short Hedge<sup>2</sup> in the said town of Swindon now occupied partly by myself and partly by William Read<sup>3</sup> unto my daughter Eliza the wife of George Sewell and her heirs and assigns. I also bequeath unto my said daughter Eliza Sewell all the fixtures and fittings of and in the said messuage Shop and premises so devised to her. And also all and every the Stock in hand which shall be in and about the same messuage shop and premises at the time of my decease for her own absolute use. I also bequeath unto my said daughter Eliza Sewell the use of my own household goods furniture and effects whatsoever (not before given to her absolutely) which shall be in and about my premises at the time of my death for her own use during her life. I bequeath all the rest residue and remainder of my personal Estate and Effects, whatsoever and wheresoever, subject to the payment thereof of my just debts funeral and testamentary expenses, and also after the decease of the said Eliza Sewell the household goods furniture and effects bequeathed to her for her life unto and to be equally divided between my said children James Luckett Jefferies Fanny Cox and Martha Hall. I appoint my son James Luckett Jefferies also my Sons in Law William Hall and George Sewell to be joint Executors of this my will and hereby revoking all other wills by me made do declare this to be my last. In witness whereof I the said John Jefferies the Testator have to this my last Will and Testament contained in two sheets of paper to this second and last sheet thereof set my hand this eleventh day of September in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty seven—

Signed and declared by the said John Jefferies the Testator as and for his last Will and Testament in the presence of us who in his presence at his request and in the presence of each other all being present at one and the same time have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Newbould Bott's son married Florence Hall (Martha Hall's daughter).

<sup>2</sup> Now Devizes Road.

<sup>3</sup> William Read (1816–1880) born Stratton, lived in Wood Street (1861 & 1871 censuses). Surveyor.

John Jefferies  
W<sup>m</sup> Foote Swindon Wilts Solicitor  
Henry Bizley his Clerk

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John Jefferies died on 12 April 1868. The Will was proved at the Principal Registry by the oaths of James Luckett Jefferies the Son, William Hall and George Sewell the Executors to whom probate was granted on 12 June 1868. His effects were set as £1,000.

**JEFFERIES John.**

Effects under £1,000.

12 June.

The Will

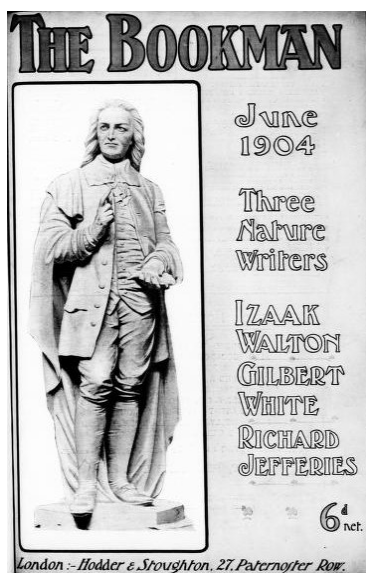
of John Jefferies late of Swindon in the County of Wilts Baker deceased who died 12 April 1868 at Swindon aforesaid was proved at the **Principal Registry** by the oaths of James Luckett Jefferies of Coate in the Parish of Chiseldon in the County aforesaid Farmer the Son William Hall of Swindon aforesaid Gentleman and George Sewell of Swindon aforesaid Grocer the Executors.



The grave stone for John Jefferies and his wife Fanny at Christ Church, Old Swindon

# Three Nature Writers: Walton, White and Jefferies

G. Forrester Scott



This article was published in *The Bookman*, June 1904, Vol. 26, Issue 153, pp.84-88.<sup>1</sup> It was accompanied by illustrations and photographs which are, in the main, too poor in quality to reproduce in full here, albeit some have been included. The front cover, pictured left, shows Izaak Walton's statue at Winchester Cathedral.<sup>2</sup> In 1904 there were no known images of Gilbert White but two small sketches of him were discovered in 1914 in White's own copy of Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad* which was presented to him on his graduation in Oxford. W. Strang's etching of Jefferies was included in the article along with Walter Besant's description of him in the *Eulogy*:

His hair was dark-brown; his beard was brown, with a shade of auburn; his forehead both high and broad; his features strongly marked; his nose long, clear, and straight; his lower lip thick; his eyebrows distinguished by the meditative droop; his complexion was fair, with

very little colour. The most remarkable feature in his face was his large and clear blue eye; it was so full that it ought to have been short-sighted, yet his sight was far as well as keen. His face was full of thought.

This edition of *The Bookman* also includes brief reviews of some Jefferies' books [p.2]:

*The Gamekeeper at Home*: 'Delightful sketches. The lover of the country can hardly fail to be fascinated whenever he may happen to open the pages. It is a book to read and keep for reference, and should be on the shelves of every country gentleman's library.' —*Saturday Review*.

*Round About a Great Estate*: 'To read a book of his is really like taking a trip into some remote part of the country, where the surroundings of life remain very much what they were thirty or forty years ago. Mr. Jefferies has made up a very pleasant volume.' —*Globe*.

*Wild Life in a Southern County*: 'A volume which is worthy of a place beside White's *Selborne*. In closeness of observation, in power of giving a picture far beyond the power of a mere word-painter, he is the equal of the *Selborne* rector—perhaps his superior.' —*Athenaeum*.

*The Amateur Poacher*: 'We have rarely met with a book in which so much that is entertaining is combined with matter of real practical worth.' —*Graphic*.

<sup>1</sup> [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_bookman\\_1904-06\\_26\\_153/page/104/mode/zup](https://archive.org/details/sim_bookman_1904-06_26_153/page/104/mode/zup)

<sup>2</sup> The images used in the article related to Izaak Walton were taken either from *The Compleat Angler* or from *Izaak Walton and His Friends* by Stapleton Martin (1904),

# The Reader.

## THREE NATURE WRITERS.

By G. FORRESTER SCOTT.

The writing of books about Nature is held, in the main, to be one of those accomplishments by which the moderns indemnify themselves for the want of some of the lost arts of the past. With due distinctions, there is no question that Nature, in a particular sense, has only received due appreciation within the last few generations of readers and critics. This particular sense, while quite recognisable enough for practical purposes, is not altogether easy to define. It does not mean mere natural history; for that might take us back, through the late Rev. J.G. Wood to Aldrovandus or Pliny himself: nor does it mean description of scenery such as Gilpin gives, or rural polity such as makes up a large part of Fuller's 'Worthies.' Perhaps it would be best described as prose (this distinction is important) which inverts the ordinary proportion between man the actor and the background of lower life he moves against. In the true Nature-book the protagonists are the sea and sky, hills and woods, the beasts and birds and flowers; but while man and his arts take the lower place, they are not forgotten: over all the happiest description and searching observation of the shows of earth, over the 'minute obeisances of tenderness' made to the plants and the creeping things, there comes the mind of the maker, infusing into all, with a hundred varying degrees of imagination and pictorial power, the melancholy and the humour of human life.

There are three English writers who stand by themselves as types of this school of Naturalists; who, taken together, show its progress and its tendency. The first two are established by the judgment of that literary court from which lies no appeal; the last, if as yet of scarcely enough terms' standing for the final decision, is assuredly the man, if anyone of our time be worthy, to stand with the acknowledged masters. The first of the three is Izaak Walton, the second Gilbert White, the third Richard Jefferies. From Walton's birth to the death of Jefferies is almost three centuries: the differences and the points in common in the characters of the three and of their work, stretched over such a length of time, are perhaps as instructive as any comparison in literature of the second rank; and the coming down of the succession to our own day—with sufficient signs that the stock is still fruitful—give it the interest of a living force and developments yet to be.



Izaak Walton [illustrated left] may be taken without much question as the founder of the line, without going further back to Dame Juliana Berners or Barnes and the *Treatyse of Fysshynge with an angle*, some of whose descriptions of riverside delights may be the germ of *Piscator's honeysuckle-hedge* and the sycamore that sheltered him and his scholar from the smoking shower. Walton was born at Stafford, on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1593; his father, Jervis, seems to have been a yeoman. In the current of Izaak's easy-flowing life, it is only at intervals

that we find any record: of his upbringing little or nothing is known; but it is probable that he was apprenticed to a relation in London, who was a mercer or draper. In 1624, as shown by a deed of that date, he was joint occupier with John Mason, a hosier, of a house on the north side of Fleet Street, near Chancery Lane [illustrated right by E.H. New].



*From a drawing by E. H. N. w.*

**Greengate Street,  
Stafford.**

Walton was said to have been born in the timber house on the left.



Upon this evidence it has been generally held that he was a shopman trading on no large scale; but there was a family tradition, John Major says, that he was a wholesale linen-draper and Hamburg merchant. The character of his acquaintance and

connections rather supports the more generous theory. In 1626 he married Rachel Floud, a descendant of Archbishop Cranmer. George Cranmer, his wife's uncle, had been the pupil of Richard Hooker, and it is probable that from him Walton obtained the facts for the *Life of Hooker*, which was published in 1665. Rachel dying in 1640, the widower, some seven years later, married Anne Ken, half-sister to the great Bishop. During his life in London, Walton became the close friend of Dr. Donne and Sir Henry Wotton, of Dr. Morley and Dr. Sanderson, Bishops respectively of Worcester and Lincoln. In 1662, again a widower, he left London and went to live with Dr. Morley, who had been translated to Winchester: his daughter Anne married Dr. Hawkins, a prebendary of the Cathedral, in whose house Walton died in December, 1683. Besides the 'Angler,' Walton published a collection of the *Reliquæ* of Sir H. Wotton, an Eclogue on the Restoration, and the *Lives* of Donne, Herbert, Sanderson, Wotton and Hooker. *The Compleat Angler, or the Contemplative Man's Recreation*, the pillar of his fame, the right ancestor of all the country-books, first appeared in 1653: it went through five editions before 1676, in which year it was reprinted with the addition of the Second Part, by Charles Cotton. The book, after its first success, seems to have fallen on some neglect; after eighty years it was re-introduced by the Rev. Moses Browne, perhaps at the instance of Dr. Johnson, who at one time himself thought of editing the *Lives*. In 1760 appeared Sir John Hawkins' edition: Major's, in 1823 (which was said to have 'Waltonised the land'), and Sir Harris Nicholas led the way to the multitudinous reprints of to-day. The main charm of the *Angler* lies perhaps in its quality of serenity, in its presentation of a world that appears fair and at peace, neither from mere short-sightedness nor from amiable shutting of the eyes (for the *Lives* show fully what the idyllic character of the *Angler* might obscure, Walton's masculine grasp of human character in light and dark), but by a gift of transmuting power, 'the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart,' as Charles Lamb called it, declaring further that the book 'would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it; it would Christianise every discordant passion.' 'Such sweet religion,' he says again, though the subject be baits and hooks and worms and fishes.

And it is a sweetness that never becomes fulsome; there is always an infusion of delicate humour to quicken the whole, like the bottle of sack added to the milk and sugar in that 'drink like nectar; indeed, too good for any body but us Anglers,' made in the woodbine arbour at Tottenham High Cross. There is another reason, perhaps, for the way in which the old fisherman has taken possession of the earth in some of its kindest aspects: a reason to which Wordsworth's 'Meek Walton's heavenly memory' gives the clue; that inner prerogative by which a man 'possesses what he has with a

meek and contented quietness; such a quietness as makes his very dreams pleasing both to God and to himself.' This pure serenity of temper and occupation of the beauty of the world are the chief elements to be kept in mind for making a parallel between the three great Naturalists. A second point to be noted is Walton's position as an accidental or amateur author. The *Angler* was altogether a parergon. 'In writing it,' says the Address to the Reader, 'I have made a recreation of a recreation'—'I write not to get money, but for pleasure, and this discourse boasts of no more.' Not achieving authorship until he was past fifty, Walton is one of the most notable of that order of unprofessional literary men, the men of one book, the *seri studiorum*, whose significance as a class has perhaps not yet received its full appreciation. The very style of the book owes something to this emancipation; entirely simple, perfectly adapted to the conveyance of the thought, it flows as smoothly as the curves of Shawford Brook, to break here and there into the freshets of those choice songs, or to deepen in the expression of sane piety that gives thanks for 'flowers, and showers, and stomachs, and meat, and content, and leisure to go a-fishing.'

Gilbert White, the second in the succession, was even more than Walton *homo unius libri*; but no one would think of calling *The Natural History of Selborne* a parergon. The book was not published until White was sixty-five; but it was the work of his life; into it went, besides the natural history of the place and a view of one side of English rural life in the eighteenth century—a side that needs to be set as a counterpart against Crabbe's strong drama—into its placid chapters went the whole character of the man. More appropriately even than Walton, he might have used Walton's words, 'The whole discourse is, or rather was, a picture of my own disposition.'

The choices and the chances of life which formed that disposition, which made White a most winning virtuoso instead of a lovable humanist, like Walton; the uneventful days which led his gift of observation, an enthusiasm as true if less catholic than the older man's, into its stricter channel, make but a short chronicle. Gilbert White, born at Selborne, near Alton, in Hampshire, on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1720, was the eldest son of John White, and grandson of an older Gilbert, who was Vicar of the parish. He went to school at Basingstoke, and thence to Oxford, entering at Oriel, from which he took his Bachelor's degree and was ordained in 1743. Next year he became Fellow of his college, and in 1752 was Senior Proctor. Soon afterwards he settled in his native village—not as its Vicar, as a too common mistake has it, but taking occasional duty, and at one time acting as curate-in-charge of Selborne and of the next parish of Farringdon. Thenceforward the equable, self-contained life ran smoothly to the end, its greatest undertakings the

yearly journeys to Ringmer and Lambeth, its notable events the coming of the swallows, the hibernation of Timothy the tortoise, the brewing of Brother John's beer from *hordeum nudum*. White was never married: people with a taste for a particular kind of sentiment have provided him with an unrequited attachment for Miss Mulso, who afterwards became Mrs. Chapone. He appears to have been an admirable uncle to a tribe of sixty-three nephews and nieces, a faithful correspondent to old friends, as well as to his companions in science, Pennant and Barrington, and entirely contented with his lot. There is a note of regret, perhaps as near to a thought of repining as his sound hexis could admit, in the words of a letter to Pennant in 1767, 'It has been my misfortune never to have any neighbours whose studies have led them towards the pursuit of natural history, so that for want of a companion to quicken my industry and sharpen my attention, I have made but slender progress in a kind of information to which I have been attached from my childhood.'

In 1788, but four years before his death, after much doubt and under some instance from his friends, he published the *Natural History* as a quarto volume, together with the *Antiquities of Selborne* which usually accompanies the better-known work. It appears to have had a sufficiently encouraging reception from the critical public to which it at that time appealed. In 1802 Dr. Aikin brought out an edition in octavo; in 1813 followed one by the Rev. J. Mitford; later issues by Jardine, Brown, Jenyns, Bennett, Bell, and others, variously illustrated and annotated, speak of the ever-growing interest in the work, the fashion which has sifted out the last scraps of diary and letter, and has made Selborne one of the pilgrimage-places of the world. The pilgrimage is one that may be made with less chance of disillusion for the faithful than attends the visiting of some other shrines. Though a branch railway has lately been made, with a station 'East Tisted for Selborne,' at the very turning where White used to post a mounted guide to convey his London visitors from the coach road to his house, yet the intervening two miles of hilly lane are perhaps not much better travelling than they were in the old days. As seen from the village street 'The Wakes' shows little but the alterations and additions of later tenants; but the cottages, the church, the Plestor, the Hanger, seem to have suffered slight change during the last hundred years. Given the right conditions of season and weather and of personal humour, the visitor who meditates under the churchyard yew, after his search for the hardly discoverable grave, or turns to look back from the Alton road at the village lying close and small under the 'Zigzag,' may without much effort reconstitute the past and breathe something of the deep serene which, as it was Izaak Walton's, was the secret gift of Gilbert White.



1. The Zig-zag Path at Selborne. Photo by W.T. Green, Winchester.
2. Portrait of the Honourable Daines Barrington, Rischgitz Collection
3. Gilbert White's Grave. Photo by W.T. Green, Winchester.
4. 'A Letter to Pennant.' From a drawing by E.J. Sullivan. As no authentic portrait of Gilbert White exists, the artist has been obliged to draw on his imagination, taking as a guide the various descriptions of the author's personal appearance and the family portraits. (Reproduced from *the Natural History of Selborne* by kind permission of Messrs A. Constable and Co.)
5. Portrait of Thomas Pennant, Esquire. Rischgitz Collection.
6. The Interior of Selborne Church. From a drawing by Herbert Railton. (Reproduced from *The Natural History of Selborne*, by kind permission of Messrs. A. Constable and Co.)
7. Selborne Street. Photo by W.T. Green, Winchester.
8. Gilbert White's House, 'The Wakes,' at the present time. Photo by W.T. Green, Winchester.

Serenity, of all things, is not the gift of the last descendant of the line. Richard Jefferies' work stands, it may be, too near us yet for a wholly fair judgment: it is not for us to say how the unrest, the underlying melancholy, the burden of a sad science, qualities of our time, reflected from mind to mind of all the crowd about us, may appear in the fresh perspective of another hundred years. But—to take first the points where the modern is least like his predecessors—it is clear that Jefferies' charm is not to be sought in the repose of the completed mind, rounded out under kindly stars; his vintage has not had the precocious mellowing of a whole life-time of its author's care. Jefferies was no dilettante, but altogether a professional writer; his work was not a parergon of leisured taste, but task-work of no easy sort. Dying before he was forty, he left a body of work at least seven or eight times more in amount than the *Compleat Angler* and the *Natural History* put together. He was a journalist; and whatsoever journalism may have done or may yet do for literature, it loses the use of that particular scale of things enjoyed by a man who can afford to make his working-day one with the term of his life. Richard Jefferies was born at a farm at Coate, between Swindon and Marlborough, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1848. His schooling, up to the age of fifteen, he had at Sydenham and at Swindon. About the farm at Coate, and on the Wiltshire downs, he found his peculiar gift of insight and his province of the open air. He was a great reader, and when little more than a boy began to make ventures in literature. In 1872 his 'Wiltshire Labourer' appeared in the *Times*, and the year after he first reached the attention of the public by articles in *Fraser's*.

During the next ten or twelve years he produced, scattered through various newspapers and magazines, or collected in book form, *The Gamekeeper at Home* (1878), *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), *Hodge and His Masters* (which first appeared in the *Standard*), *Field and Hedgerow*, *Nature Near London* (1883), *The Life of the Fields* (1884), *The Story of My Heart*, and others—in all some fifteen volumes. He suffered continually from ill-health, and in his thirty-eighth year, worn out by various sickness, and perhaps by the earlier struggles of his career, he died at Goring, a village near Worthing, on the Sussex coast, on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1887.

There are one or two surface similarities between Jefferies and his foregoers. All the three were South Country men: Walton knew the chalk downs at Winchester as well as White knew the more eastern range, the 'chain of majestic mountains' which he passed on his journeys into Sussex, and as Jefferies knew the heights pictured in 'The Breeze on Beachy Head' or 'The Southdown Shepherd.' All the three were sportsmen: Walton's angling-rod is the pretext for all his meadow wanderings; White was 'intent on field diversions' when he and his dogs were defeated by that strange abundance of

gossamer; Jefferies maintains that 'to those who live much out of doors a gun is a natural and almost a necessary companion.' But such qualities in common only serve to make the fundamental differences the more marked. There is no need to insist upon divergences of style, to compare Walton's instinctive grace or White's 'learned' polish with Jefferies' rougher working method, his long pages of the historic present, his too frequent sentences where the sense jumps the tumbled construction. But wide as is the distance between Walton's contemplation of 'the lilies that take no care, and those very many other various little living-creatures,' and White's observation as 'a stationary man' of 'the wonders of the Creation, too frequently overlooked as common occurrences,' it is as nothing to the gap between either and the outlook of Jefferies upon 'the something beyond the philosophies in the light, in the grass-blades, the leaf, the grasshopper, the sparrow on the wall.' Not only is his analysis of sensible Nature, carried on through chapters of simple enumeration, penetrating and comprehensive beyond any other description of the kind in literature, but it leads sooner or later to the personal expression—the 'picture of my own disposition,' as Walton said—which belongs very definitely to our own age. It is a disposition sad beyond the power of words, beyond the effort of hope in 'The Pageant of Summer'—'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. . . ' It is sometimes oppressed at the thought of the vast spaces of being, as at the significance of the tiny empty snail-shells by the source of the brook in the coombe: 'If time is measured by the duration of life, reckoned by their short spans, eternity upon eternity has gone by.' Or it loses its grasp of things in the sense of the mystery of the world; a mystery which Jefferies' power, altogether unlike Loti's magical certainty of suggestion, can only tell us of, and is quite unable to bring before us. There are in almost all Jefferies' work touches of half-felt discord, a sense of discrepancy between the fine and true observation which should have been the business of a happy life, and the interludes of melancholy reflection; between the love and understanding of country matters and the ineluctable grasp of London and the work it would have from him. There are few less profitable things than the making of imaginary re-arrangements of destiny and speculations in the might-have-been: it is vain, in the present comparison, to guess what would be the work of Gilbert White condemned to Grub Street at twenty, of Izaak Walton racked by those pains the missing of which he called a new mercy; but it is perhaps allowable, if it is in a way even less wise, to reverse the case, and to think of Richard Jefferies as free from the galley and the chain, to surmise of the work he might have done with health and wholesome ease, adding to his own keen perception of beauty the enduring grace, the deep-laid serenity of the happier men.

1. The Bust of  
Jefferies at  
Salisbury.  
Photo by K.  
Targett.

2. The House  
at Coate,  
where Jefferies  
was born, on  
November 6<sup>th</sup>,  
1848.  
(Reproduced  
from *Jefferies’  
Land*, by kind  
permission of  
Mr. Arthur  
Young).

3. The House  
in Victoria  
Street,  
Swindon,  
where Richard  
Jefferies lived  
after his  
marriage in  
1874.  
(Reproduced  
from *Jefferies’  
Land*, by kind  
permission of  
Mr. Arthur  
Young).

4. Richard  
Jefferies at the  
age of 22  
(Reproduced  
from *The Early  
Fiction of Jefferies*, by kind permission of Mr. Arthur Young).

5. The Grave of Richard Jefferies at Broadwater, near Worthing. Specially photographed for *The Bookman* by W.C. Bristow, Worthing.

6. The House at Goring, near Worthing, in which Richard Jefferies died on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1887. Specially photographed for *The Bookman* by W.C. Bristow, Worthing.



# Richard Jefferies

*Henry Williamson*

Henry Williamson was the President of the Richard Jefferies Society from 1965–1974. He died three years later aged eighty-one. This article about Richard Jefferies was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* for their June 1937 issue but was heavily drawn from Williamson's opening chapter in *Richard Jefferies: Selections of his Work, with details of his Life and Circumstance, his Death and Immortality* that was published by Faber and Faber Ltd., July 1937. © Henry Williamson Literary Estate, reprinted with permission.

I  
THERE was once a poor man who in moments of inspiration believed himself to be a prophetic thinker and writer of the world. The world did not think so. He died half a century ago, worn out at the age of thirty-eight. During the later part of his life he was ill as well as poor; and two years before his death he lived in perpetual agony. Some doctors thought his illness was imaginary; that he was a hypochondriac; that the wasting away of his body and the perpetual pains he suffered were due to hysteria. Actually he suffered from tuberculosis of the lungs and intestines, and the intestines were ulcerated as well. Also he had fistula, which is a most torturing thing. All during his life he was working; and the theme of his work was the creation of, the burning hope for, a better, truer, more sunlit world of men.

Richard Jefferies was the son of a Wiltshire farmer. He was a genius, a visionary whose thought and feeling were wide as the human world, prophet of an age not yet come into being—the age of sun, of harmony. He was derided in his father's house, upbraided for idleness and stupidity; considered 'loony' by the neighbours. Since a man can be truly friends with his peers only, Jefferies was friendless to his life's end.

During his boyhood and youth he lived at Coate Farm, in the parish of Chisledon [former spelling of Chiseldon], near Swindon. The farm lay under the chalk downs. Behind the farmhouse were trees, and then a broad sheet of water, with reeds and rushes and wild fowl, and two islets near the shore. Pike lived in there, with roach and rudd and perch, and other fish. From his boyhood memories of this place the best boys' book in England was written—*Bevis: The Story of a Boy*.

After his death, there was some controversy about whether or no he died a Christian. His life's work was indignantly attacked in the *Girls' Own Paper*. This was stupid; and it was wicked. Stupidity is the same thing as

wickedness, or the devil, to this modern age of half-sun. It was wicked because it denied and persecuted the truth of heaven. During his lifetime Jefferies had to fight against much un-understanding; and it wore him to an early death.

The affinity of Jefferies with Jesus of Nazareth is patent in nearly all his work. If Francis of Assisi is a little brother of the birds, Jefferies of Wiltshire is a little brother of Jesus, of the sun, of clarity, of all things fine and natural and designed and efficient. Jefferies saw with paradise-clearness.

The century that slew him passed away, and still he remained insufficiently esteemed. The following is typical. Thirty-three years after his death, when I was a reporter in Fleet Street, I was talking to an old literary gentleman about Jefferies. It was in Carmelite House, then the home of Lord Northcliffe's newspapers. It was a wearing life, for men of sensibility. The old chap was a special writer for an evening paper; he was a scholar whose writings were famous to a small circle only, and to first-edition collectors. He was always violently bitter about the British public. 'Don't try and write for a living; keep pigs,' was his immediate reply to the young aspirant who approached him timidly in the little room, always lit by artificial light, where he worked. He waved hand and arm in a sweep of derision of the whole building. Then he began rolling Latin verse off his tongue. His tie was always askew around his tall 1890 collar. Red-faced, big-headed, he looked like a monk with his long white bobbed hair almost touching the shoulders of his cloak.

I felt it a privilege to hear this famous writer talk like that. I had bought some of his books, but had dipped into them only, and never finished them. The famous prose did not stand out of the pages. One day, meeting him again in the corridor, I dared to ask if he liked the works of Richard Jefferies. 'Jefferies? A mere cataloguer of sights and sounds,' he replied, and had nothing more to say, and I knew then what I had suspected, that he had not that *something* that marks out a writer of genius from the writer who is scholarly, pretentious, literary, whose work is a gilt of borrowed gold, imitation of poetic vision. (This was probably youthful intolerance; for he was a passionate writer.) When I saw him coming along a passage, I used to turn away and hide. He had called my Jefferies a 'mere cataloguer.'

During the sixteen years that have passed since the advice to keep pigs (advice which I am ready to take now) I have collected various opinions of Jefferies by other writers, with the intention of quoting them in an essay on his work, to show why those derogatory or disprizing remarks were merely an indication of a lack in the writers themselves: such lack going hand-in-hand with their non-success as writers with the general public. But it is not worth doing.

The works of D.H. Lawrence, another writer who has much in common with Jefferies, contain many portraits of his detractors or non-appreciators, all of them arising from Lawrence's own tortured sensibility. Such writing is a mistake. It is not truly creative. The writer should shine on his characters with the serenity of the sun.

## II

Jefferies was born two, perhaps three, generations before his time. In May 1925, nearly forty years after his death, I made a journey to his birthplace, and stared at the farmhouse where he had been born, at the gable window from which he had looked when writing his first pages. I walked round the broad or lake, and thought how much smaller it was than in *Bevis*. It had been made into a public bathing place, with huts and rails and diving boards; but the fish were still there. There was talk of turning the farmhouse into a Jefferies museum, for a memorial. Soon nothing, I thought, would be left of the place as he knew it, except in those pages of his which glowed and shone with ancient sunlight.

While I was musing thus, standing in the roadway before the farm, an old woman came out of a small cot of tarred wood, obviously the work of a labouring man, and scrutinized me. The little black house stood under a hawthorn, then in pink blossom. 'Come to see the house where Loony Dick was born, have ye?' she inquired. We talked for some time. She was remarkable for her vivacity and straight way of looking at things. Years before the war she had adopted a foundling or waif from the Union or workhouse; raised him as her own child, found him a job when grown up; and then the war came, and killed him. What she could not make up her mind about at the moment, she told me, was whether or not to adopt another 'chiel'. There were plenty of 'm about, she declared, since the soldiers had gone. Was she too old, did I think? I said surely not, that she had many years to live. Don't ye be too sure, she said, and defied me to guess her age. 'Sixty?' I said. 'Git out,' she replied; 'I knew Loony Dick as a boy, didn't I tell 'ee just now? "Moony Dick," some called him. A lazy loppet, he was, too. A proper atheist. Lots of folks asks me if I have read those books. Why should I read them? I know it all as well as he. He can't tell me anything new. I've had to work all my life. Why should I read in books what most folks knows already?'

(After his death, a relative wrote of Jefferies as a boy, 'Dick was of a masterful temperament, and though less strong than several of us in a bodily sense, his force of will was such that we had to succumb to whatever plans he chose to dictate, never choosing to be second even in the most trivial thing.')

All the strain and desperation in much of Jefferies's writings, and his sickness and premature death, can be traced to the human surroundings of his childhood, youth, and early manhood. Those who called him, to his face, Loony Dick or Lazy Loppet, who laughed at his aspirations and derided his early efforts to be a writer, were to him so narrow and warped and ruined that he could say nothing to them. The poor boy with the instincts of an aristocrat shut himself away from them; he lived in books, and wandered on the downs, spreading himself in the air and grass and sky until he was recharged with vitality and hope, and made eager once again for a fuller, a happier life for all the warped and ruined human minds he saw about him in both the slums of Swindon and his own hamlet.

After he had left school, the young Jefferies, a mixture of indolence and sharp imperiousness, got a job on a local paper, the *North Wilts Herald*. At night he wrote novels and romances in the seclusion of the gable room, which had a pear tree trained against the outer wall. *Cæsar Borgia*, or *The King of Crime*; *Verses on the Exile of the Prince Imperial*; *Fortune*, or *The Art of Success* (he sent this to Disraeli, who returned it with a tactfully insincere letter); *Only a Girl*—how he worked, burning candle after candle into midnight and dawn.

Work on a country newspaper is good training for a young writer. There is not the hurried pressure and thwarting of nervous energy as in supplying small and often silly news stories for Fleet Street newspapers; there is no perpetual callousing and humiliation of feelings, no distortion of truth in the manufacture of 'news.' A country newspaper is usually tactful, kindly, and its detail truthful. The meticulous gathering of names and facts of the little things of country life—the more names the better for the circulation of the paper—may be dull at times; but it is not degrading. And the young Jefferies was fortunate in having a sympathetic editor who believed that his young reporter had a distinct talent for writing.

This editor's belief was justified when, at the age of twenty-four, Jefferies wrote a long letter to *The Times* in London; and *The Times* printed it in full, several thousand words, about the Wiltshire Labourer. It was read and discussed in Swindon; the writer became a local figure. His chance! He found himself, suddenly, to be an authority on agriculture.

Imagine the tall, loose-limbed young man striding home from Swindon, paler than usual, the large blue eyes in the softly brown-bearded face almost lifeless in the reaction of excitement, entering his father's house with an added lassitude of his drooping mouth and narrow shoulders, to stand about, silently, almost dully, and say casually, 'My letter's in.' 'What letter, Dick?' asks his mother, ironing on the kitchen table. 'In the paper.' 'The *Standard*? It's early this week, isn't it?' 'No, not that. I mean *The*

*Times*.' His mother glances at it, and puts it down, while her son waits like a hawk for what she will not say. She says she is too busy just now, but will read it later; and he goes up into his room beside the cheese loft, and flops down in his chair, and feels more desperately than ever the awful deadness and dullness of house life and 'civilized' people. They will never understand. After supper he has violent indigestion, and cannot write a word of the new novel.

But he has begun. One day they will know what their son *is*.

### III

In those days, before compulsory schooling taught almost everyone to read, there were in England newspapers and periodicals which were written almost entirely by knowledgeable, or professional, writers. Among them were *Fraser's Magazine*, the *New Quarterly*, the *Standard*, the *Graphic*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Fortnightly*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Longman's Magazine*, the *National Review*, *The English Illustrated Magazine* and others. The editors of these papers and magazines, attracted by the letter in *The Times*, began to ask for and to print Jefferies's essays. A London evening newspaper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, published a series of his articles, anonymously, under the title of *The Gamekeeper at Home, or Sketches of Natural History and Rural Life*; and then another series, *Wild Life in a Southern County*. When these were reprinted in book form, Jefferies was acclaimed as a writer in the class of White of Selborne, and a public of discriminating sportsmen and country people began to look out for everything he wrote.

He was married now, to the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, and had a son. After the wedding the young couple had lived at Coate Farm, but soon found that life there was not possible; the ideas of the old people smothered the inspiration of the young author. So they took rooms in Swindon. Then, to be nearer editors, they moved to the suburbs of London, first to Sydenham and then to Surbiton. He worked every day; and the work of this period was always on a high level—informative and of the authentic countryside. Sometimes it was inclined to be static; for he had to write every day to support wife and family. It was then that other lesser writers began to use the label 'cataloguer.'

Most young writers who have had a sudden success ease up for a while, and thereby lose their form. Not so Jefferies. He wrote as before, novels and essays. In a recent critical appreciation of Jefferies, by a living writer who is also a Wiltshire man, I was shocked to read the opinion that all the Jefferies novels could be 'thrown into the wastepaper basket.' But there are some beautiful things in the novels, even in the very early ones, when Jefferies was

writing of scenes or incidents he had observed. Most of the early novels have scenes and characters based on what he had read in boyhood and youth; novels based on the fictional idiom of the day, and therefore blind or conventional writing. But among the novels are the exquisite *Greene Ferne Farm*, and *The Dewy Morn*, and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, one of the most lovely calm and balanced novels of country life and people in our literature. There is a naturalness, a bloom on *Amaryllis* which is not to be found in any of the novels of Hardy or the books of Hudson; and Hardy in the authenticity and detail of his country scenes is in the very rare first class with Shakespeare.

What is meant by the term 'very rare first class'? Let me try to explain this as a thing occurring in certain men and women; and why it happens. This is only what one man thinks, remember; it may be true only in part, or it may be wholly wrong. Nevertheless, it may indicate why the lives of so many men of genius are tragic. This is my belief:

The base or foundation of a first class talent is eyesight. The man who sees more, who perceives quicker than his fellows, is of larger intelligence only by reason of that superior sight. Some people, educated unnaturally, seldom see for themselves; they don't know why things happen in the way they do: that every effect has a cause. An observant person is never stupid. Wisdom is the essence of observation.

The first-class writer always has first-class eyes. Often he is solitary from his companions in youth because they do not see so quickly or so widely as he does; and therefore do not think so quickly, or so plainly; and tend to ridicule what to them is not usual or ordinary.

It is as wretched for a slow-seeing person to be with a quick-seeing person, after the fact of difference has been established, as it is for the quick one to be with the slow one. Jefferies knew no one like himself, so he kept by himself. The derision and smallness of his fellows sealed him away from them; he was forced into solitude, where his enlarged and numerous faculties watched the actions of other life—clouds, grass, birds, fish, and natural men. He began to perceive why things happened; and reacted violently from conventional religion because it did not perceive how things happened. He judged religion by its ordinary exponents: the unintelligent mediocrity, men with minds spoiled in early life. In his lonely meditations on the downs he thought about the people in the houses and fields below, and wondered how their lives could be made happier. In such solitude it was inevitable that he should strain to perceive or discover the meaning of life: to strain after that meaning, to try to force his thought through space to a definite meaning.

Later, the sight-records of what he had seen in those early days were used for reproduction on paper.

In the world of men speech came before writing: sound of words before sight of words. The first-rate writer always has a fine ear. He may be deaf in later life; but when young he must have *heard* acutely, as well as have *seen*, unconsciously to prepare the quality and substance of his writing. He writes by ear, balancing his sentences, sometimes automatically but usually deliberately, for their *inner* music, which is the essence of life. It is an alchemic process, a spirit arising from a blend of transmuted sight-records and ear-records.

If you consider a moment, sight is responsible for almost all of the human world as it is to-day. So is sight the foundation of nearly all literature. (Mr. Robert Graves, himself a fine, austere poet, once declared that Keats had an unusually developed sense of taste—‘And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon.’)

Some of the villagers in Ham, where I lived during the first decade after the World War, possessed copies of an old romantic novel with most of its scenes laid on the coast and country of North Devon. Someone lent me a copy, and I read first the descriptions of those places in the district I knew. They were accurate, and yet somehow they were insufficient, unsatisfying. It was not the style, which was no better and no worse than that of a hundred other novels of its period. The descriptions were somehow so bare, so colourless, although the fields were green, the sea was blue, the sands yellow, and so on. The book was pallid, unsunned. In my youthful intolerance I scorned the book; until I learned that the author had been blind from birth.

All writing of the first class comes from exceptional sight and hearing; and insight arises from stored physical impressions of sight and sound. Those who observe quickly and vividly hold us with their detail, which is fresh and vivid; and they hold our attention because, being quick and vivid, their stories or pages have a flow which carries the reader. Now the rare first-class writer has, in addition to keen sight and hearing (it may be because of them), feelings or emotions which are equally keen. He has the keenness of a wild animal. He is natural. He is an authentic animation of the sun.

And because he is wild, natural, it is probable that he will be repressed and thwarted and made miserable in helpless childhood. This may cause him to be an ineffectual rebel, a liar, a bit of a thief, deceitful—if he has parents or mentors who, themselves victims of a repressive and unnatural upbringing, are without true or natural understanding and sympathy. Part of his natural integrity will thus be maimed; and that part will grow inwards, and perhaps mortify, and be the source of desperately sad resurrectional poetry and dream and vision later in life. This is what happened to Shelley, to Byron, to Francis Thompson, to Shakespeare (who outgrew his Hamlet), to Jefferies, to D.H. Lawrence, among many others in our literature.

It can be said of all of them, facilely, superficially, that they have a dual or multiple personality; but the truth, or cause, is as written above. Jefferies has two distinct styles. One of them is straightforward and concrete: the style of a natural man. The other is a candent, and often incandescent, flow of words driven from him, as he wrote, by his *dæmon* (in Shelleyan language): the *dæmon* being his repressed or mortified self. It is this part of a man that strives to reach to God: the death, or mortification, in him striving to overcome his life.

Because of these two distinct styles, both of them authentic, Jefferies has two kinds of reading public. The one appreciates his straightforward descriptions of country scenes and characters, such as are to be found in *The Amateur Poacher*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and *Hodge and His Masters*; and this kind of reader does not like *The Story of My Heart* and the later essays wherein he wrote about himself and his own feelings. And there is the second kind of reader, who is pathologically akin to Jefferies, who prefers his introspective, sensuous writings to his matter-of-fact chapters.

It is always dangerous for a writer to write about himself and his own feelings; but when there is an intensity and power behind them he produces a flow, a blend of sensuous records with emotion; and this is called poetry.

If circumstances or fate permits the metaphysical poet to outgrow the effects of his early mortifications, and through natural love, accompanied by hard physical work (the natural life), to reassert himself to himself, he will become one of the rare first class, like Shakespeare, who, by virtue of his own experiences, real and imagined, understood all human actions and characters with clarity and the sweetness of truth. The rare first-class writer is then a universal representative of humanity, having attained wisdom by trial and error, by discarding parts of his earlier self through struggle and self-searching, and, above all, by self-criticism. So he achieves natural harmony: and thenceforward will have no regard for his writings,—as a butterfly has no regard for the caterpillar,—but wish only to live happily; and, if he writes at all, will write only for money. Jefferies had just become a writer of the rare first class when the struggle broke him.

#### IV

Such men are born leaders of men; but early circumstance drives them within themselves, and out of that inner mortification, from their own slain image, they strive to re-create the world. A visionary poet is a frustrated man of action. The natural poet, a very rare thing, is joyous and therefore the friend of all, the born leader, the truly civilized man. The visionary poet, the philosopher striving that future men shall not suffer in childhood as he suffered, the little brother of Jesus (the man of sorrows and acquainted with

grief), writes, out of his enlarged and maimed senses, that children of the future shall be happy: that the sun shall shine on all men equably.

Richard Jefferies, the Wiltshire farmer's son, perceived this; and formulated much of it into words half a century before the World War, by whose glare and shock men began to perceive, beyond the faults of their past lives and education and upbringing and conventions and limitations, the idea of a new world, a natural world, a world wherein men would be happy because of the new wideness of thought arising, phoenix-like, from the mortifying battlefields. Of this world there have been many prophets, whose thought arises into life from faraway centuries and civilizations; and the greatest of them is Jesus of Nazareth. This was the realization of Richard Jefferies during the last days of his life: the attar of his wisdom.

Thus for the mind of Jefferies.

And of the dying man himself, what can be said? He wrote, in his last year,

Three giants are against me—disease, despair, and poverty.

My wearied and exhausted system constantly craves rest. My brain is always asking for rest. I never sleep. I have not slept now for five years properly, always waking, with broken bits of sleep, and restlessness, and in the morning I get up more weary than I went to bed. Rest, that is what I need. You thought naturally that it was work I needed; but I have been at work, and next time I will tell you all of it. It is not work, it is *rest* for the brain and the nervous system. I have always had a suspicion that it was the ceaseless work that caused me to go wrong at first.

It has taken me a long time to write this letter; it will take you but a few minutes to read it. Had you not sent me to the sea in the spring I do not think that I should have been alive to write it.

An artist friend [J.W. North] has described his physical end in words that can hardly be read, by those who love Jefferies's work, without tears.

It was in the early summer, two or three months before his death, that I saw Jefferies for the last time alive. He had then been living at Goring for some short time, and this was my first visit to him there. I was pleased to find that his house was far pleasanter than the dreary and bleak cottage which he had rented at Crowborough. It had a view of the sea, a warm southern exposure, and a good and interesting garden: in one corner a quaint little arbour, with a pole and vane, and near this centre a genuine old-fashioned draw-well. Poor fellow! Painfully, with short breathing, and supported on one side by Mrs. Jefferies and on the other by myself, he walked round this enclosure, noticing and drawing our attention to all kinds of queer little natural objects and facts. Between the well and the arbour was a heap of rough, loose stones, overgrown by various creeping flowers. This was the home of a common snake, discovered there by Harold, and poor Jefferies stood, supported by us, a yard or so away and peered into every little cranny and under every leaf with eyes well used to such a search

until some tiny gleam, some minute cold glint of light, betrayed the snake. Weakness and pain seemed forgotten for the moment—alas! only for the moment.

Uneasily he sat in the little arbour telling me how his disease seemed still to puzzle the doctors; how he felt well able in mind to work, plenty of mental energy, but so weak, *so fearfully weak*, that he could no longer write with his own hand; that his wife was patient and good to help him. He had nobody to come and talk with him of the world of literature and art. Why couldn't I come and settle by? There was plenty to paint. Though Goring itself was one of the ugliest places in the world, there was Arundel, and its noble park, and river, and castle close by. I must go and see it the very next day, and see whether I could not work there, and come back every day and cheer him. I was the best doctor, after all.

Poor fellow! I did not then know or believe that he was so utterly without sympathetic society except his devoted wife. It was so. I am one of the dullest companions in the world; but I had sympathy with his work, and knowledge, too, of his subjects. Well, nothing would do but that I must go to Arundel the next day, and Mrs. Jefferies must show me the town. 'He would do well enough for one day. A good neighbour would come in, and with little Phyllis and the maid he would be safe.'

Therefore we went to Arundel (a short journey by train), and on coming back found him standing against the door-post to welcome us.

I have seldom been more touched than by my experience of that evening, finding, amongst other things, that he had partly planned and insisted on this Arundel trip to get us away so that he might, unrebuked, spend some of his latest hard earnings in a pint of 'Perrier Jouët' for my supper.

Do you know Goring churchyard? It is one of those dreary, overcrowded, dark spots where the once-gravelled paths are green with slimy moss, and it was a horror to poor Jefferies. More than once he repeated the hope that he might not be laid there, and he chose the place where his widow at last left him—amongst the brighter grass and flowers of Broadwater.

He died at Goring at half-past two on Sunday morning, August 14, 1887. His soul was released from a body wasted to a skeleton by six long weary years of illness. For nearly two years he had been too weak to write, and all his delightful work, during that period, was written by his wife from his dictation. Who can picture the torture of these long years to him, denied as he was the strength to walk so much as one hundred yards in the world he loved so well? What hero like this, fighting with Death face to face so long, fearing and knowing, alas! too well, that no struggles could avail, and, worse than all, that his dear ones would be left friendless and penniless. Thus died a man whose name will be first, perhaps for ever, in his own special work.

# Richard Jefferies

## Naturalist and Idealist

*Henry D. Shawcross*

Published on 7 December 1909, Shawcross's essay was tucked away in *Transactions of the Burnley Literary and Scientific Club*, Vol. XXVII. The club, founded in 1873, comprised of 243 members in 1909, each paying 10s subscription. The essay rubbed shoulders with other contributions in that issue such as 'A Walking Tour of the Tyrol,' 'The Renaissance' and 'Dr. Johnson'.

Henry Douglas Shawcross was born in 1884 at Burnley, Lancashire, and was a grandson of Henry Houlding, a prominent Victorian poet of that town. At sixteen he joined the *Northern Daily Telegraph* contributing to its weekly edition prose and verse on a variety of subjects. His main interest was natural history, an esoteric pursuit in the heavily industrialised towns of East Lancashire dominated by textile manufacturers, but foundries, tanneries, rope-works and collieries flourished there. Shawcross found inspiration elsewhere and travelled in Yorkshire, Northern Ireland, the Lake District and the Hodder Valley in his native county.

In April 1914 a book of prose and verse by Shawcross, *Nature and the Idealist*, was published posthumously by Sampson, Low, Marston and Co., for the author had died of pneumonia the year before at the age of twenty-nine. In one of his collected essays he described himself as,

Nature lover, I am impatient of the city's endless toil and hurry, hater of the modern spirit with all its artificiality and love of hectic excitement in business and in pleasure; despiser of the increasing tendency to rush and hustle from place to place, seeing many things but observing nothing, one who only wishes to linger among the recesses of some green and shady lane and who is content to be an unhurried walker, dreaming as my feet make lingering steps in the quiet byways.

**T**he story of Richard Jefferies' life is simple and sad. He was born in 1848, the son of a yeoman farmer of Coate, in Wiltshire. As a boy he gave no special promise. He had an inborn love of books, and became an eager and wide, though somewhat indiscriminate, reader. He spent much of his time in wanderings in the fields, during which he was making extensive observations of nature. His literary genius did not mature till long afterwards. As a young man he was occupied for a time in journalistic work at Swindon. He tried fiction, but failed. Through the medium of a chance letter to *The Times* he caught the public ear, and in a little while he found some success and recognition. He married and settled down in London, and there he began to write the series of rich, warm, and exquisitely beautiful essays on country

scenes and aspects of nature by which he is best known. In these essays Jefferies brings, as perhaps no other writer does, the very atmosphere of the country-side to his readers. It is very sad that at the very period when Jefferies' genius reached its greatest heights and most beautiful expression he was slowly sinking to a premature death. Always delicate, almost incessant ill-health afflicted him during his residence in London; yet it was in the darkest hours of his life that his work took on an immortal loveliness.

In 1881 he fell ill of a painful internal malady in which he lingered for six years, dying in 1887. He worked to the last, dictating when he could no longer write. He lies buried in a secluded spot on the south coast, his grave within sound of the everlasting voices of the sea which he loved so well.

Richard Jefferies was more than a son of the soil in the narrow sense of the words: he was a veritable child of the earth in the wider sense, a man who entered fully into the spirit of earth and sky and sea. His whole soul was enraptured with the delight and beauty of the outside world. Nature was to him full of inexpressibly beautiful thoughts. In his essay on 'Meadow Thoughts' he likens the inexpressible thoughts quivering in the azure overhead to the swallows hovering yet not alighting. He tells us in beautiful words of the sublime extravagance of nature, saying that prodigality and superfluity are stamped on everything she does: 'There is no natural lack. Wherever there is lack among us it is from artificial causes which intelligence should remove.' Jefferies was an intent observer of the habits of the creatures of the open air. He acquired also a deep knowledge of the details of the life and customs of the country people. His *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Round About a Great Estate*, and *The Gamekeeper at Home* are full of interesting records of natural history and rural life, and will be of permanent value because of their faithful representation of the conditions of the English country life of the period. In these books Jefferies struck a new note. They are full of interest to the countryman whose life is passed in the surroundings they depict; but they are of equal interest to the townsman to whom the country-side is as yet an unopened book. Jefferies was both botanist and naturalist, but he had the gift of conveying to the ordinary man his deep knowledge of nature gained through these media in plain and simple English without recourse to technical terms. Here then is the first thing we owe to Jefferies. He made the country, and nature as a whole, intelligible and simple to the ordinary man.

These earlier books are untroubled by speculative thought, or reflection upon the problems and mysteries of life. Later, after he has left the scenes of his youth, and come into sharp contact in London with the hardships of life, there comes into his work a deeper and more personal note, and he often invests the happiness of nature with something of a human feeling for the

joy and sorrow of life. In his essay 'Hours of Spring', this new poetic interpretation of nature is seen at its fullest.

Side by side with this more personal interpretation of nature, there comes yet a wider and broader human feeling into Jefferies' writing. In all his later work there is a profound sympathy with the aspirations of the common people, whose struggle for existence, he considered, prevented their enjoying to the full the beautiful, glorious, joyful world which he knew so well. In his little idyllic story 'St. Guido', he expresses his indignation against the short-sighted, jealous and selfish infatuation of the people for things that are worthless. The whole of Jefferies' later life displays the struggle of a temperament which was utterly antagonistic to the spirit of his age. He rebels against the fight for mere existence, so bitterly and oppressive to the thoughtful and sensitive mind. More and more the human note comes into Jefferies' work, which at the same time takes on a new beauty and a new impassioned fervour. But though his new feeling of divine discontent with the unhappy lot of large masses of the human race becomes more and more strong, it never overshadows his perception of the intense joy there is in existing life, and he paints vivid pictures of nature, full of light and colour and sunshine. 'The Pageant of Summer' is one of his writings of the kind. Jefferies expresses his belief that ultimately the spirit of the sunshine, the flowers, and the azure sky will become interwoven into human life. He carries this idea further in his 'Sunshine in a London Square', where his optimism finds definite expression. 'To look backwards...there is sadness; today in the thick cloud there is unrest; but forward in the broad sunlight there is hope.'

In *The Story of My Heart* are epitomised the conclusions to which Jefferies' thinking brought him, and the ideals after which he yearned. There is no truth in the allegation which had been made, that this book was not a genuine self-revelation, but something written wildly and at random, under stress of physical pain. The book contains Jefferies' strongest and most beautiful work, and from it alone can we adequately learn the philosophy of his life. In it he contradicts some of the opinions held in his earlier years. Its avowed purpose was to persuade people to abandon traditional theories and well-worn grooves of thought, and enter upon another and larger circle of ideas. Jefferies appears to have seen two things; first, a beautiful world to be enjoyed; and second, a people anxious for the fullest and most joyful life, yet in some unaccountable way failing to enter upon the glorious heritage awaiting them, to which he endeavoured to point new pathways. He strongly attacks superficial thinking, the habit of thinking along accepted lines of theory. But although the message of the book has a profound social bearing, the book itself is wholly a personal revelation. It is, as Jefferies himself

described it, 'the autobiography of a soul'. It is the record of the struggle of man's soul with the mystery of things. It is a book which gives the complacent, self-satisfied mind many a rude shock; it shakes to the very foundations the pretentious but hollow structure of dogmatism and formalism. He sets himself deliberately to efface from his mind all learning of the ages, all long-stored traditions, and all the accepted rules of thought; it is a final and supreme rejection of orthodoxy. To him only three discoveries made by man were of importance—the existence of the soul, the idea of immortality, and the idea of deity.

Constantly throughout *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies has his social ideal in view, and urges the application of his teaching to the future good of the race. He lays great emphasis on the duty of the individual to the common fellowship of humanity. He possessed a boundless belief in the possibilities of the race; any change for the better must come through ourselves, and we must change our whole mode of thought. Jefferies taught that everyone should do something to forward the future ideal. To the social reformer he is a source of continual inspiration and courage, for he lifts all movements for reform and improvement above the narrow limits of party interests, and shows them to be at one with the mighty irresistible tide of progress which flows through all the ages.



# Robert Nichols: Poet and Playwright

*Peter Robins*

Sixteen poets of the Great War are commemorated in a memorial stone in Westminster Abbey, Robert Nichols being one of them. He served on the Western Front as a second lieutenant with the Royal Field Artillery, including the battle of Loos, but was invalided home with 'nervous lack of control' in October 1915.

His first collections of poetry, *Invocation* (1915) and *Ardour and Endurances* (1917) achieved popular success. After three years as Professor of English Literature at the Tokyo Imperial University in the early Twenties he moved to Hollywood, writing plays, screenplays and novels. Later he moved around Germany, Austria and France and in June 1940 was on the last ship to carry British refugees from the Côte d'Azur. Robert Nichols died aged 51 in 1944 and is buried at Lawford, Essex.

In the following extract from his lengthy Preface, in fact a fragment of autobiography, to his play *Guilty Souls* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922) he recalls his early literary influences, including Richard Jefferies.

I read Richard Jefferies' *Story of My Heart* and in one day I seemed to spring up complete from top to toe. Everything Jefferies put forward in this book, which I still consider profound and beautiful and necessary reading for every growing girl or boy, seemed to me the very truth of truth. No book, save one<sup>1</sup>, ever made such an impression on me as this.

I was eighteen when I read Richard Jefferies. I turned, if I may put so bold and ambitious a name upon it, consciously pagan in a day. Day and night during the time that I was ceasing to be a boy, day and night when to the very brink of the war, the ideas of Richard Jefferies were my ideas. During those three years I lived a prodigious life; indeed, I may say that I had no sense of real personality until that period, and that I regard the self I then discovered as basically my essential self. My life became a miracle to me. By day I discovered the world, colour, light, the wind, the freshening of the waves, intoxication of the senses, and of the soul, by night, reading into forbidden hours, the spirit and mind of man disclosed themselves to me in an extraordinary hotch-potch of books that ranged from W. B. Maxwell to Flaubert. Especially I cultivated all that was considered 'gloomy' and

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<sup>1</sup> After being invalided home from the front, he read *Confessions of Saint Augustine* which had a similar influence on his thinking as Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart*.

‘morbid.’ I had a taste for the bitter—the sign in the young of a healthy soul. “For if this is the truth,” I said, “let me have it. My religion is to experience all—very well, then, let me have to worst, so that I do not deceive myself with artificial paradises.”



Robert Nichols

### EPITAPH

Ask not how it came I died  
Whom no power on earth could save,  
But know that this man was crucified  
Who speaks to you from the grave.

Ask not whom the grass overgrows;  
Was his purpose sure or unsure?  
Happy alone who knows  
His purpose and can endure.

1914

From Nichols' first collection, *Invocation* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1915).

# ‘Sweetest of All Things’

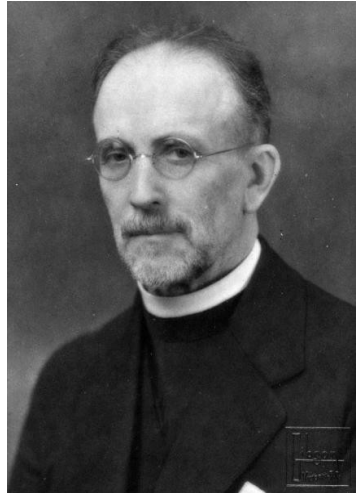
Robert Connell

Robert Connell (1871-1957) was ordained into the Church of England in Canada in Calgary, Alberta, in 1896, married Jane Hodson two years later and served in various parishes including a two-year spell in California. In 1901 they moved to Victoria at the southern end of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where the mild climate was a relief from the prairie winters they had endured in Alberta.

Connell was born in Liverpool of Scottish parents and emigrated to Canada aged seventeen surviving with various jobs until his calling as a priest. But in 1923 he gave up parish work but remained active in church affairs. Meanwhile, he taught art and botany at schools in Victoria and began contributing a column on nature and geology to the *Victoria Daily Times*, later the *Victoria Daily Colonist* through the 1920s, 30s and 40s. The two papers merged in 1980 as the *Victoria Times Colonist*.

In 1932, Connell joined the League for Social Reconstruction as a fervent believer of the social gospel movement and was active in British Columbian politics until the end of the decade.

His article below, ‘Sweetest of all Things’, published 7 March 1937 in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, is an example of the many that were published and is Connell’s ode to springtime in Victoria, strongly reflecting his own cultural roots and his reverence for Jefferies. In another column published on 3 March 1928 in the *Victoria Daily Times*, almost a decade earlier, he had revealed that he had first discovered Jefferies in 1899. Commenting on *The Story of My Heart* he wrote, ‘I found myself reacting with increasing interest to one of the most extraordinary documents of modern days.’



Robert Connell, circa 1925

I am going to write today about our wild plants in general and flowering ones in particular. I shall not treat them descriptively or in detail, but as objects of pleasure, sentiment and knowledge to be cared for and truly honoured and respected, as well as loved. I am moved to do this because in recent months there has been born in the city a new society whose object is to interest the public in the conservation of our native plants, to stir up a feeling in favour of legal protection where necessary, and to crystallize that feeling in such measures as may ensure the protection and preservation of

our wild flora. The aim of the Society for the Preservation of Native Plants of British Columbia is so excellent that I propose to show some reasons why it should be supported by all lovers of wild nature, and indeed by all sensible people without exception, a support that is sure to be given by those who appreciate what flowers mean to us all.

There is a sentence in Jefferies' book *Nature Near London* which may well furnish a starting point. Writing of Kew Gardens in London (his words are equally if not more true of us who live in Victoria) he describes the gardens as "A great green book whose broad pages illuminated with flowers lies open at our feet." In writing this he likely had in his mind, I think, one of those beautiful old missals which the ancient monks delighted in beautifying with charming little pictures from the world of Nature and man, coloured with an exquisite richness that makes them the rivals of jewels.

Now suppose yourself to be in possession of one of these by lucky purchase or inheritance. It is certain that you would not only refrain from tearing or cutting out the pictures and prevent your children from doing so, but you would preserve it carefully so that your enjoyment of it, and the enjoyment of those who should succeed you, would be perennial. But in the 'great green book' of nature we are liable to be careless and indifferent, or even to be wilfully destructive, often preferring to attain the brief triumph of a car filled with dogwood branches or a vast bundle of fawn lilies or lady-slippers to the annual pleasure we and thousands more may get from the restraint of our predatory instincts.

In Great Britain, I believe, the systematic and intensive gathering of certain wildflowers, such as the daffodil or Lent lily, has led to a very serious diminution, if not extermination, of their numbers in some districts. This, of course, is due to the demands of the London market. Many plants, however, do not suffer from the free picking to which they are subjected. The worst that can happen is the diminishing of the amount of seed produced, but the plants are such profuse bloomers that nature has probably all she requires.

### Indirect Assaults

My opinion is that wildflowers generally suffer more from the indirect effects of men's activity than from his direct assaults. Thus in agricultural districts grazing by cattle and still more by sheep and goats is a very serious factor in flower existence. I think there can be a little doubt that the scarcity of wildflowers along our road sides is the result of excessive and close pasturing in the days before by laws prohibited it. It must be remembered that one reason why the danger is great from this cause is that we have a comparatively long dry summer and when, years ago, cattle roamed the countryside about Victoria in no small numbers, the herbage was in

consequence very closely cropped. Then the carving out of farms and later the extension of suburban areas are forces before which certain wildflowers and trees tend to disappear.

Thirty years ago the handsome blue lily variously known as *Hookera*, *Brodeia*, and *Triteleia douglasii* was to be found in the vicinity of Victoria. For many years I have not come across it except in one restricted spot some miles to the west, and there during the excavation of a building the excavated soil of the basement was distributed over the whole of the area occupied by the flower. The beautiful orchid known as the mountain lady-slipper or moccasin flower, bearing from 1 to 3 blossoms with large purple-veined white sacks, grew many years ago in the Oak Bay district, but has long been extinct. The amazing growth of the alien broom has been responsible for the extinction of wildflowers over large areas. I think particularly of one moist and shady hollow where the sweet-scented white violet grew: today and for many years past the whole of that delightful nook has been occupied by a coarse thicket of broom, to the obliteration of violets and all other flowering plants. This is an example also of the very local character of certain very pretty and interesting plants, a character which, unless some knowledge and care is exercised, leads only too easily to their total extinction.

The preservation of our native flora deserves our support because of the contribution flowers make to the natural beauty of the countryside. Compare a piece of forest road in winter with the same in spring, when the dogwood's sprays break against the sombre greenery of the evergreen trees and the light and foamy bitter cherry flowers are overhead. Compare the forest floor in the resting period, with its brown carpet of needles, with the same expanse brightened with starry wood-anemones or sprinkled with the pink and white star-flowers, overhung by the sweet scented lady-slippers or the delicate little bells of the twin-flowers whose perfume attract one long before the glossy mats are seen. The arbutus is a delight in winter, but what shall we say of it in summer, with its myriads of creamy flowers? Look at the transformation of our lakes when the golden pond lily rises above its gleaming leaves and the shores are gay with violets and speedwell, forget-me-knot and wild roses, and the air is full of the aromatic odour of the sweet-gale.

Jefferies, in the passage from which I take my title, says: "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 over us, and the magical essence of it filling all the room of the earth. Sweetest of all things is wildflower air."

## Love of Country

Then the preservation of our native flora is bound up with love of one's country, for I am sure that to everyone to whom affection for his native or adopted soil is a real thing, the trees and flowering plants are no trifling ingredient in his sentiment. The wild flowers of Britain are inseparably connected with the land through its folklore. There is a history of the people written in the familiar, colloquial, and provincial names that seem to have sprung up as naturally as the plants themselves. The ancient and undying superstitions, the old religious habits of thought, the simple human needs and affections are all reflected there. There are names that are older than the Reformation, others older than Christianity itself. Some express the loves of lads and lasses; some tell of quaint ideas of healing based on the Doctrine of Signatures. The countryman's playful humour and his fears of the unknown are found in these old-fashioned names that every child learns and that long pre-date the learned titles of systematic botany.

We know more today—but perhaps we feel less.

Down in California they have a very handsome violet: the children call it 'Johnny jump-up'. In Oregon the same name is given to our common yellow violet of grassy places, distinguished by its hairy leaves. The name is not an American invention, but was brought across the Atlantic from England, where the name under such forms as 'Jack-behind-the-garden-gate' and 'Jump-up-and-kiss-me' is applied to the wild heartsease or pansy. Two other village names for it are 'Three-faces-in-a-hood' and 'Love-in-idleness', which you will remember Shakespeare uses:

A little western flower,  
Before milk-white, now purple with loves wound,  
And maidens call it Love-in-Idleness.

We have our children's names for native flowers, and I can imagine one who has grown up here exiled in some far-off land recalling the flowers about the Upland's and Mount Tolmie by the old fashion names of his schooldays rather than the scientifically correct ones of the student. Thus our lilies and shooting-stars, our satin-flowers and sea-blush, our milkmaids and blue-eyed grass, and a host of others of whose local names I am ignorant, or which are unnamed because little known, will have their place in the hearts of our people and be part of their tradition of affection for our beautiful country, and should therefore be fostered and preserved.

## Pleasures in Names

Jefferies, in another interesting note, says:

The first conscious thought about wild flowers was to find out their names—the first conscious pleasure—and then I began to see so many that I had not previously noticed. Once you wish to identify them there is nothing that escapes, down to the little white chick-weed of the path to the moss on the wall.

Here is where we pass from the common and colloquial name to the scientific. It is not so alarming a passage as it may sound. For as Jefferies suggests, it opens up an amazing vista of discoveries. There is no valid reason why the scientific knowledge of plants should dry up the springs of sentiment. In my own personal experience, the result of such knowledge has been exactly the reverse: I love plants and their flowers better than I ever did, and never weary of them. A knowledge of their scientific names opens up the door to acquaintance with their family relations, their habits, their life history, their place in the vast panoramic picture of Life and its development, and their wonderful services to men and to all animal nature.

The idea of a botanist as a dry-as-dust collector of dried specimens may be true of some individuals—I have never had the opportunity of meeting them. Instead, the history of botany shows us men of deep feeling, indeed almost childlike sensitiveness. Linnaeus on his knees thanking God for the beauty of the gorse may be a legend such as gathers about great men, but such legends have a substratum of solid truth, and the lives of the great botanists show them to have been, so far as I can recall, singularly susceptible to the wonder and charm of their field of study.

Of John Ray, an Englishman of the seventeenth century and the founder of modern botany, it is said that 'his leisure was that of a student; he loved to observe nature, to study the little gems of the garden and the country.' Nor can he be said to be devoid of deep feeling who says that in every field of botanical study 'we find ourselves at once on the shore of human ignorance', and that man is the 'one animal capable of the reverent study of nature.'

## Buttercup as Example

As an example of the advantage of some knowledge of systematic botany in opening up our powers of observation and extending our knowledge, we may take the buttercup.

To most people a buttercup is just a buttercup. But let one understand botanically the buttercup flower and it soon becomes obvious that there are several kinds or species of buttercups, so sufficiently marked off from each other as to be easily identified when once recognized. There is the common buttercup of grassy places: western buttercup. Along the borders of woods

and thickets is another whose flower is so inconspicuous that only an interest in buttercups is likely to attract us to it. This is Bongard's buttercup. In ditches and low places in May we find another very handsome species which, instead of the hooked pistils of the meadow variety, has straight ones. It is the straight-beaked buttercup.

In lower land we find the water-plantain spearwort whose leaves, instead of the usual deeply cut or lobes form, are long and narrow or lance-shaped. Still another slender-leaved form is found in the creeping lesser spearwort, common about the wet edges of lakes and swamps and remarkable for its creeping habit and its rooting from runners, something after the manner of a strawberry plant.

In June the ditches and low places are often brilliant with the large golden flowers of the creeping buttercup, which also spreads by runners but has deeply lobed dark green leaves. And in spring, on the surface of ponds and in quiet reaches of streams, you may come across sheets of tiny floating white flowers, the blossoms of the water crowfoot or buttercup, which has a little broad-lobed leaves on the surface and finely-divided ones below. The last three species, while native here, are also found wild in the British Isles. We have also a stranger buttercup in the European meadow buttercup, which apparently came here in the early days. It differs from our western buttercup in not having the sepals turned down when the flower is open.

Now all this ability to distinguish correctly comes from botanical knowledge, and it introduces one to a wonderful field for study and investigation regarding the habits and haunts of plants, their relations to these haunts and their neighbours in them, how they adapt themselves to their surroundings, and so on. It is of more importance than we might think at first that even from a scientific point of view our native flora should be preserved, for the greater part of all the knowledge we have of the nature of our cultivated plants today—knowledge which has brought about and will continue to bring about wonderful adaptations of plant life to human life and its varying needs—is the direct result of the work of scientific botanists in their different fields of research.

### Sense of Beauty

In the development of a stronger feeling for the preservation of our native plants I think the sense of beauty—or perhaps I should say the artistic sense—should have a place. With regard to many flowers and trees we can sympathize with the pleasure of Jefferies when he was young, and perhaps no one grudges a child the bunch of wildflowers it has gathered, unless they have either been so picked as to kill the plant or are being wastefully treated. Education will overcome these faults. What Jefferies says is this:

Before I had any conscious thought it was a delight to me to find wildflowers—just to see them. It was a pleasure to gather them and to take them home, a pleasure to show them to others, to keep them as long as they would live, to decorate a room with them, to arrange them carelessly with grasses, green sprays, tree bloom—large branches of chestnut snapped off, and set by a picture perhaps.

I quote this because it shows in him something of that sense of the beautifully-arranged which the Japanese not only delight in but have developed into a principle of ornament. It is the very opposite of our large masses of gathered flowers, such as people often find pleasure in with the first fawn-lilies of spring, the crowded dishes of lady-slippers, and the inartistic branches of flowering shrubs and trees so often seen. As a recent writer, Frederic de Garis, says in his book *Their Japan*: 'The skill of the Japanese in flower arrangement is known the world around. There are several schools of flower arrangement that vary in their details, but the underlying principles of these schools are not widely different.' In the illustrations he shows an arrangement of shrub branches and thistles, another of a mountain-lotus, one flower and a small piece of branch, a third of thistles, Chinese bell-flower, and micanthus, and a fourth of a maple branch and wild chrysanthemums. The significant thing is the simplicity and the lack of crowding—quality rather than quantity. The receptacle is also an important feature. So beautiful are growing things that they provide the best model for our arrangement.

If we could only get both grown-ups and children to see the tastelessness and ugliness of a great mass of closely compressed flowers, often half wilted. And if we could get boys to see the foolishness and the silliness of trying to see who can get the largest number of lilies on a spring Saturday, we should have accomplished much. After all, education is what tells in life—the education that instils principles of conduct and is concerned with the love of nature and of our country, and the beauty of God's countryside. I wish the Wild Plants Preservation Society every success in their endeavours to preserve for ourselves and for generations to come our flowering plants, shrubs and trees—our glory and our delight.

# ‘The Summer Psalms of Richard Jefferies’

Arthur Harvie

Arthur Harvie was a Unitarian Minister in Northampton and contributed this essay to the 20 August 1904 issue of *The Inquirer*, a penny weekly bearing the strapline ‘A Journal of Liberal Religious Thought and Life.’ He also reviewed books for the publication.

In *RJS Journal* No.32 (2017) we republished Harvie’s ‘Richard Jefferies: the Tender Mercies of a Great Naturalist’ which had been published in *The Humane Review*, 7 July 1901.

Sadly, he died prematurely from a heart attack at the age of 36 in 1905.

That most of the Sacred Scriptures of the world are anonymous and ancient, should not hinder our appreciation of those written in our own day by men and women whose biographies are on our library shelves. The nature-hymns which are preserved in the book of Hebrew Psalms are majestic and inspiring; manifestly the work of observant and reflective minds; their simple truthfulness appeals to every generation, and the religious teaching which they include gives them a first place in the literature that nourishes man’s higher life: We cannot even guess at their authors, we can but admire their beauty and gratefully profit by their ministrations.

Scattered throughout the writings of our greatest naturalist—Richard Jefferies—are poems in prose, which quite justify the application to them of the title Psalm, and which will not suffer by comparison with anything that has hitherto borne that name; nor does the fact that their author’s pathetic life story lies open before us in the least diminish the sacredness of the Scripture he has left.

The great secret of the power of the older writings is their originality; some few men were not afraid to go back upon themselves and upon nature, and write the truth, in love, concerning both; when a modern author does the same he commands attention. Jefferies knew no masters, he imitated no one’s style, aimed at nothing beyond setting forth what he saw and felt in the world he loved, and succeeded in leaving word-pictures which in themselves would guarantee our language an earthly immortality. A word-picture, however beautiful, is not necessarily a psalm, and the name of Jefferies would have had no place in our religion, were it not that to beauty and accuracy is added loving insight and a revelation of the deep meanings hidden in familiar experiences.

Every season has received our author’s lavish attention, and fortunately he cannot be said to have a favourite time of the year, any more than he has a

favourite flower or bird. No one, Lowell not excepted, has said such good words for winter; spring and autumn have equal shares in his attention, while the flood season of the earth's glories receives its full appreciation in those Summer Psalms which we can easily select for ourselves from his handful of volumes, and compare if we will with those that sing the praises of the earlier and later months. It would be good for us if we could put ourselves under a vow to read month by month or season by season some of these priceless essays chosen as appropriate 'Lessons for the Day,' and forming, when grouped together, a modern 'Shepherd's Calendar.'

'Love of nature,' although an expressive phrase, hardly conveys that feeling of community of spirit between the writer and the natural world which is more beautifully illustrated in his summer psalms than anywhere else in Jefferies' writings. It is indeed love of nature, but of the ecstatic kind, love that strives to share its very being with the beloved: 'I wish,' he says in 'The July Grass,' 'I could do something more than gaze at all this scarlet and gold and crimson and green; something more than see it, not exactly to drink it or inhale it, but in some way to make it part of me that I might live it.' It is the sympathy and love out of which this desire is born that, manifesting itself on every page, lifts these utterances out of the sphere of mere cataloguing into the realm of inspiring meditation. The personal element in such sentences as the following from 'Pageant of Summer' does not in the least detract from the power of their appeal. We see more clearly expressed than by our hands has been possible a thought that has haunted us in many a sunlit hour:—

I cannot leave it; 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. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird, from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. 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. Feeling with them, I receive some, at least, of their fulness of life. Never could I have enough, never stay long enough, hour after hour, and still not enough. The exceeding beauty of the earth, in the splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal.

Real affection for everything in which the first rose of June, 'the sweetest, the dearest rose', goes straight to the heart. The grasses are to be gathered if you will, but first of all to be admired. The interest to the 'dear' swallows we are bidden be tender, 'for they symbol all that is best in nature, and all that is best in ourselves.'

Before this intensest of observers nothing passes unnoticed; he confines himself to neither school of description, he is at one time accurate with the accuracy of the impressionist, and at others precise with the detail of a Meissonier. The wondrous purple tints of the sky that heralds the dawn in midsummer days again flush the zenith for us as we sing the psalm entitled 'Wheatfields,' while in 'The Coming of Summer' every inch of the abandoned (not neglected) orchard, and every blade of grass on the sward by the side of the Long Ditton road, seems photographed before us. The midsummer hum sounds through all until the song of birds manages to overcome it. When we do not hear their voices we are not allowed to lose sight of the busiest of the summer workers. Thrushes, whitethroats, chaffinches, thread their way through trees, fields, hedges; and over sunlit slopes, now and then a kingfisher flashes across the page, drawing a rainbow streak that startles our eyes, doves greet us in the woods, and the lark's song is continually pouring down upon us from skies that life pulses greet us on almost every page; humblest insects are watched with loving memory and the singer's art alone support. To the swallow, summer's portent and symbol, a separate essay is devoted, and to read 'Swallow-Time' removes all doubt as to the author's place among naturalists. The nightingale and the blackbird add continually to the music of these psalms, and never for a moment do we feel the air undisturbed by throbbing murmurs or fanning wings, or rippling waves of harmonious notes.

As one might expect, flowers and trees are exquisitely painted, a few words in some cases, but then just the right ones, words which reveal both close observation and a full devotion; now and then delightful lines of description, which will always recur to the mind when such trees or flowers form the subject of our hours of thought on sacred things: The corn and ripening fruit—the practical side of summer, if we may use the accepted but not unchallenged phrase—are not omitted from the wondrous word-pictures painted by this master of English prose as he lay on his couch of anguish, separated by many miles and many years from the scenes he loved; the story of the wheat and its significance for the needs of the body as well as of the soul is beautifully told on two occasions; we almost faint beneath the heat of the relentless sun as we watch his reapers attack the serried ranks of the standing corn, and glad are we also when the long battle is over and the 'full sheaves lean against each other.'

The inner meanings that these Summer Psalms make plain to us are at least three—the lavishness of the season, the absence of haste, and the secret of the joy that human hearts find in the full tide of summer. 'From the littleness, and meanness, and niggardliness forced upon us by circumstances, what a relief to turn aside to the exceeding plenty of Nature!', he says in

‘Meadow Thoughts,’ and in verse after verse he conveys to us the torrent of gorgeous life which the summer-season witnesses on every hand; the earth gives without limit, that men should starve upon its surface is cruel irony. A wealth of foliage, of song, of movement and of life manifests itself throughout; the immeasurable power and productivity of this sun-governed world command our thought. So, too, does the apparent ease with which all moves along. There is much of activity but nothing of hurry, a great deal is done, but it is done at leisure; restfulness abounds but nowhere is impetuosity, instead thereof a calm progression, ‘hastelessness’ describes it, and everything is lengthened with the lengthening days.

The secrets of Nature are revealed to her most devoted lovers, to those who forsake all and have none other before her; upon the lips of these few she sets a seal and they cannot babble her mysteries in the market even if they would. Richard Jefferies companied with the great god Pan, and accordingly when he came amongst men he was stricken with silence and a great reserve. What he succeeded in telling was but a fraction of what he knew, the most sacred oracles he kept inviolate. He tried to explain to those who would listen to the inmost meaning of our joy in summer, and his psalms deepened in significance. The mystery of the transformation of matter it is which charms us: we are watching in these summer days what was the cold dead, crystallized matter changing into life, flowing in sap, bursting forth into leaf, being exquisitely woven into the fairy filaments that make the wings of the dragonfly, and in watching the miraculous change, from rock to flower, from crystal to feather lies, whether we recognise the fact or not, the great pleasure of summer and its unending suggestiveness also.

It may be said that nature is best read first-hand; it is even so. Doubtless the same ‘open-air’ surrounds us as surrounded Jefferies in his lonely life at Coate, the same ‘life of the fields’ is before us, and similar fields and hedgerows invite our inspection; ‘the July grass’ comes to us also with the ‘wheatfields’ and the ‘swallow-time’; ‘meadow thoughts’ might be ours if we would; ‘wild flowers’ are to be had for the searching, and the ‘pageant of summer’ is even now passing us by; so also are the facts of the world, of humanity and God lying open first-hand before those who still find pleasure and profit in the three times fifty hymns of the old Hebrew collection. Not all who have eyes and ears see and hear aright, and because our hearts are often dull and we do not appreciate the glories of our own countryside, God has sent us, in the disguise of him who died seventeen years ago, a sweet singer in Israel whose psalms shall cheer our way.

# ‘Jefferiesian Warblings’

## *Unsigned review*

After Jefferies’ premature death, writers and publishers scrambled to fill the publishing void, issuing poorly-written volumes of little consequence, often published by Elliot Stock. The review below, ‘Disciples of Jefferies’, appraising three of them, published in *The Scots Observer*, 17 August 1889<sup>1</sup> is typical of the period.

A year earlier the monthly magazine *Knowledge* published in its issue of 1 March 1888 a review of another title published by Elliot Stock, *By Roadside and River* by H. Mead Briggs, remarking, ‘Richard Jefferies has had of late many imitators. For some years past the public has been liberally supplied with a class of book of which *By Roadside and River* is an example.’ Condemning the author’s poor command of written English the writer continued, ‘The reader is irritated and perplexed by some atrocious solecism, some wanton dislocation of a trite expression, even if he escapes the puerile essays in metre with which the book is plentifully studded.’

In a contrasting review to the one published below of Watson’s *Sylvan Folk* in *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* (No. XIX, 1889) the critic commented:

The late Richard Jefferies possessed a certain power of picturesque description which captivated the public; and, as usual, a host of imitators have been for some time clutching at the hem of his garment in the hope of acquiring the entire mantle of his inspiration—but in vain; for an attempt at writing crisply or epigrammatically too often ends in twaddle or bathos.

Two years later, ‘nature’ books continued to be issued with the reviewer of another of Francis A. Knight’s books, *The Rambles of a Dominie* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co, 1891) concluding, ‘We have determined that we must at length protest against the multiplication of little books in imitation of Jefferies, since the abundance of them is overwhelming.’

## DISCIPLES OF JEFFERIES

*By Leafy Ways: Brief Studies from the Book of Nature.* By FRANCIS A. KNIGHT. London: Elliot Stock.

*Haunts of Nature.* By H.W.S. WORSLEY-BENISON. London: Elliot Stock.

*Sylvan Folk: Sketches of Bird and Animal Life in Britain.* By JOHN WATSON. London: T. Fisher Unwin.

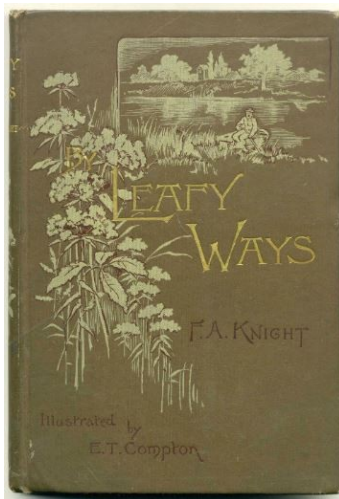
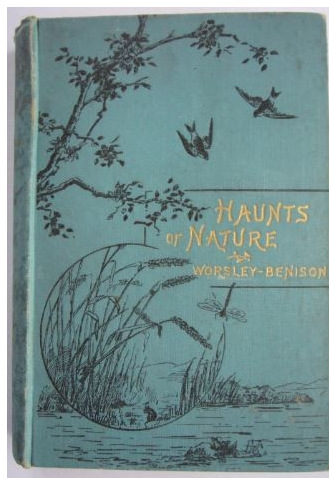
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<sup>1</sup> Ed: The weekly, edited by WE Henley, was published in Edinburgh but moved to London in 1890 changing its name to *The National Observer*.

Had Jefferies never written *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, such books as those under review would never have existed, at least in their present form. The authors and a host of others of the same 'school', but further down the scale of merit, would probably not have remained silent. Genuine love of sylvan scenes and sympathetic interest in the phenomena of bird-life would have still led them to woods and waters, and their observations and reflections would have found expression of some kind. For the form adopted they are indebted, however, to Jefferies, who has consequently to answer for much.

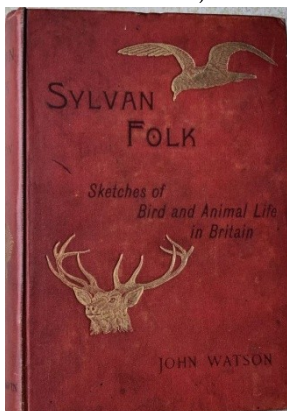
What may be termed 'Jefferiesian warblings' are now an established feature of periodical literature, and the naturalist editor appears to have become as essential a member of any daily and weekly newspaper staff of the least pretensions as the fighting or the funny editor is of the American press. And on the whole they do their work well, for they grind out a fluffy kind of 'stuff' that at any rate smacks of the country. It is an elaborate attempt to apply the methods of Elia and Montaigne to the treatment of natural history subjects; and while in Jefferies the work showed profound knowledge and charming spontaneity, in ninety per cent of his followers it sometimes betrays superficiality, and occasionally even gross ignorance and laboured imitation. In fact, there is much artistic method in these prose warblings, and the greatest dunce of the 'school' is very careful not to fall into the errors of the pastoral poets of the last century, who had a happy way of making perfectly free with the phenomena of careful and most methodical Mother Nature.

To do the Jefferiesians justice they generally contrive to keep within the range of the probable, even the actual; and if few of them—very few of them, indeed—have ever added a single fact to the noble 'cairn of observation' laboriously piled from age to age by eminent naturalists, or enriched the world by a single great thought, they have done much good in the way of popularising delightful and suggestive subjects of scientific study and



poetic reflection. These general observations apply to the three works enumerated, with this qualification, that ignorance is not a characteristic of any of them. Mr. Knight's method is the most deft, and betrays the trained hand of the practical journalist. He heads one of his chapters 'Sabrina fair,' and it is all scenes on the river Severn. Mr. Knight sees a great deal in a very short time and within a very limited space, but, as if not satisfied with recording what he saw, he furnishes the narrative with some moral and historical reflections in the most approved Jefferiesian style. What, for example, could be more characteristic than the remarks on pp. 78, 79, where we have an artistic arrangement in natural colour and historical illumination. The 'moral mixture' is served up very liberally by this school of naturalists, perhaps in the prettiest manner by 'E.F.B.'<sup>2</sup> in observations on the Sunflower in *Days of a Garden*.

Mr. Benison's work is a supplement to his popular *Nature's Fairyland*. The best chapters deal with that much abused and ignorantly persecuted little animal the mole, and the still more insignificant gnat.



Mr. Watson has caught the Jefferiesian method admirably, and he has certainly employed it in spreading before his readers great stores of close and most acute observation. Perhaps the bit of word-painting about 'bird-drama' illustrates the truth of these encomiums as well as any other portion of his delightful *Sylvan Folk*.

If readers desire to compare the very 'superior' style of modern writers on birds with the 'matter-of-fact' jottings of old-fashioned naturalists in words of force and beauty as did Wordsworth, we should readily have believed him; and more than that, we should have modified our estimate of him. A noble sentiment nobly expressed is convincing by whomsoever it is written. As Mr. Patmore says, 'a man's words never belie him'; and only the prejudiced will stamp a wise or tender phrase as hypocrisy because its author's sentiments have not always been dictated by wisdom or tenderness like White of Selborne, Letter 98 in the immortal collections may be read alongside this piece of description. Our tastes may be a little antiquated, but even now we prefer White to Jefferies and Jefferies to Watson, although the latter is the most gifted and reliable of the new school of prose warblers.

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<sup>2</sup> Ed: Eleanor Vere Boyle, *Days and Hours in a Garden* (London: Elliott Stock, 1884). See *RJSJ* No.33 (2018) for EVB illustration of 1893 edition of *Wood Magic*.

# The Forward Life of Jessie Phyllis Jefferies 1880-1958

*Jean Saunders*

Phyllis was born on 6 December 1880 in Surbiton to thirty-two-year-old Richard and twenty-seven-year-old Jessie Jefferies. In common with her father and her brother Harold,<sup>1</sup> Phyllis was not known by the first name on the birth certificate. Little is recorded about her life including education, and if she acquired any skills or artistry. In the early 1870s, before her mother married, Jessie was a governess and may have helped at her half-sister's school at Spencer Road, Northampton. Phyllis could have been home-educated by Jessie.

The best and, possibly, only description of Phyllis's personality came from her cousin Christine Billing.<sup>2</sup> At the opening ceremony of the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate on 24 June 1960, Christine talked about the Jefferies' family and Coate farm. The two cousins were only a year apart in age and were good friends all their lives. Christine said:

Phyllis was a good companion—sometimes a really charming one—with an adventurous spirit & a boyish sense of fun, caught partly from her tall brother Harold. But, like her father, she had a difficult side to her nature & she would have gloomy moods in which nothing seemed to interest her. As years went on these moods became more frequent... She was a Jefferies in her love of beauty & of the joy of out-door life, but she was practical, clear-sighted, business-like & capable & helpful to all in trouble (she had no sympathy with idle dreamers or with any kind of sentimentality).<sup>3</sup>

The Jefferies family had been living at 2 Woodside Terrace near Tolworth/Surbiton for three years at the time of Phyllis's birth. Brother Harold was five-and-a-half. There is no baptism record for Phyllis nor entry in Jefferies' notebook to mark the event but a notice is published in the 'births' column of the *Standard* dated Wednesday 8 December that reads:

JEFFERIES—Dec. 6, at 2, Woodside, Surbiton, the wife of Richard Jefferies of a daughter (Jessie Phyllis).

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<sup>1</sup> (Richard) Harold Jefferies was born in Swindon on 30 June 1875 and died in Canada on 3 November 1942. He was known affectionately as Toby or Bobby as a young boy.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Emily Billing was born in Guilford on 24 December 1881 to Sarah (Jefferies) and Robert Billing. Christine died in Seaford 4 May 1967.

<sup>3</sup> The full-transcript of the talk by Christine Billing is published in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 21 (Autumn 2011), pp.11-14.

Richard's notebook No. IX reveals that Harold went to school for the first time on 18 October 1880. He recalls that 'I was sent to Kindergarten school at Surbiton, but did not last long there. I had my knuckles sharply rapped with a slate for inattention, and when my father heard about that he promptly took me away.'<sup>4</sup> Richard could not abide injustice but he was also firm. Harold added that 'he got such a lecture' from his father for making a noise in the playroom beneath Jessie's bedroom where baby Phyllis was sleeping.<sup>4</sup>

Would a new baby bring visitors to the house? About 5 months before Phyllis was born Richard's childhood friend, Frederick Harrild,<sup>5</sup> moved to a house that was just under a mile away from Woodside with his new wife Edith Warner Baxter.<sup>6</sup> Richard's Aunt Ellen Harrild<sup>7</sup> would have had good reason to visit the area to see her two nephews. No doubt Richard's parents would have paid a visit; Jessie's parents were deceased.<sup>8</sup> The year before Phyllis was born James Luckett Jefferies<sup>9</sup> had stayed with his son and family for 3 weeks and had attended The Kilburn Show with Richard on 4 July 1879.<sup>10</sup> However, it was a common complaint from Phyllis's grandmother, Betsy Jefferies, that Richard 'does not tell us any of his doings—suppose we shall hear when anything comes out in public. Today 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. is little Philis Birthday—12 months—Richard's little girl.'<sup>11</sup>

The Jefferies' family also employed a live-in general domestic servant; listed on the 1881 census as nineteen-year-old Martha Hayes, born in Baydon Wiltshire. She must have been a great help to the family.

Richard was busy writing articles mainly for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Standard* at the time and was completing *Wood Magic*. He was not in the

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<sup>4</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father* by his son Richard Harold Jefferies (Worthing Cavalcade: 1944), p.21.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Harrild 19/2/1854–19/3/1937) was a son of Horton Harrild Snr, Thomas Harrild's brother.

<sup>6</sup> Edith was born in Lewes in 1859 and was a granddaughter of John Baxter. She married Frederick Harrild on 30 July 1880 in Kingston, Surrey.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen (Gyde) Harrild was born 24 August 1825 Islington and died 24 Aug 1911, Sydenham. Richard Jefferies lived with his aunt and Uncle Thomas Harrild from around the age of four to nine only returning to Coate for holidays. His sister Sarah lived with her aunt too for many years even whilst married to Robert Billing.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Jefferies and Jessie Baden married on 8 July 1874. Jessie's mother, Emma Baden, died on 9 November 1873 whilst her father, Andrew, died earlier on 28 July 1864.

<sup>9</sup> James Luckett Jefferies was born on 8 December 1816 in Somerstown and died on 24 December 1896 in Bath.

<sup>10</sup> See *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* by Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel (Oxford: Petton Books, 1994), p.120.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Jefferies née Gyde to her niece Sarah Jane Gyde, 6 Dec 1881, addressed from 13, Bath Wick Street, Bath. Elizabeth, known as Betsy, was born in Islington in 1817 and died in Bath on 21 July 1895.

best of health, having undergone four operations to treat his anal fistula. Woodside was known to be on poorly-drained land and the houses were damp. This would have prompted the move to Sussex, whilst living near the sea and the downs would be an added attraction.

By July 1882 the Jefferies family had moved to ‘Savernake’, Lorna Road, Hove where the family stayed for two years. Both Harold and his father<sup>12</sup> mention the aquarium. Harold writes ‘Father frequently treated us to a visit to the Aquarium, which was a great delight, especially ... at feeding time’.

On 18 July 1883, Richard Oliver Launcelot was born. This birth was also announced in the *Standard* on Friday 20 July, but the son was un-named:

JEFFERIES—July 18 at Savernake, Lorna-road, West Brighton, the wife of Richard Jefferies, of a son.

With the birth of a new baby, Jessie would have been busy. Phyllis was just two-and-a-half, whilst Harold had just reached his eighth birthday.

Betsy Jefferies writes to her niece about this in 1883: ‘I have just seen a book advertised of Richard’s tittle *The Story of My Heart*. You will see in the times list of new works. He is now better in health but very delicate—they have another baby-boy, the name of Launcelot Oliver. We seldom hear from them. I am vexed to say the little girl is name Philis—she is a very pretty child.’<sup>13</sup> So, at least, Betsy has seen her granddaughter but is, perhaps, ‘vexed’ that Phyllis wasn’t named after her. There are no known Phyllises in the Jefferies, Gyde or Baden families or amongst friends and other relations. Possibly Richard named her Phyllis after the mythological Greek princess whose name meant green leaves or foliage. The inspiration for the name Launcelot might be easily guessed!

Then came the move to 14 Victoria Road, Eltham, probably on 4 July 1884. There is only one mention of Phyllis in her father’s known notebooks. She wants to set free a nail that Harold has given her and which she didn’t want! ‘Toby div me this/nole (nail). I doesn’t ant/him (bobbing down & dropping/it under the table)— I going to/let him be loosed.’<sup>14</sup>

It was in Eltham, eight months after the move, that baby Oliver died of meningitis on 16 March 1885. This was a tragedy that hit his father very hard. There are no entries in his notebooks at this time and Harold describes the ‘agonised expression on father’s face . . . [that] haunted my mind for many years.’<sup>15</sup> Harold only remembers himself and his mother in the coach to

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<sup>12</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father*, op.cit. p.22 and Richard’s Notebook X entry for July 1882..

<sup>13</sup> The letter sent to Sarah Jane Gyde is merely dated 1/83. The month isn’t indicated. Betsy has moved to 48 New King Street, Bath, which is where both Betsy and James Luckett died.

<sup>14</sup> This was written around 20 July 1884 (NB XIII folio 68)

<sup>15</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father*, op.cit., p.20.

attend the funeral service at Eltham Church. Baby Oliver was buried in St John's Churchyard, in a common grave that once bore a wooden cross. Perhaps it was a conscious decision to keep the grave basic but a common grave suggests that Richard could afford no more at that time.

There is a photograph at the British Library (BL 58828), pictured below, that shows a young Phyllis (about 3 years old?) sitting on her grandfather's lap. The picture is undated but taken by photographers in Lee Green and Eltham. James Luckett looks very well for a man who must have been about sixty-seven at the time.



By June 1885 Richard reported in a letter to C.P. Scott that he had been seriously ill.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Kidd had advised him to move and the family were staying in temporary accommodation in Rotherfield before moving to The Downs, in Crowborough the following month. The Downs was a somewhat bleak and isolated stone cottage set in lovely rolling hills. Harold remembers an incident there when he was chasing Phyllis: 'She fell and cut her hand rather badly on a piece of glass. Howls and tears of course followed, and I was ordered to my room. Later father appeared and lambasted me pretty smartly, but I am sure that it hurt him more than me.'<sup>17</sup>

By 21 November 1886 the family moved again to Sea View, Goring after spending a few days at Peacock House as paying guests at the Hide farmhouse nearby. Jessie acquired the maid from Peacock House—(Sarah) Jennie Moss born in 1871 in Dover; just a child herself.

Phyllis was just six years and eight months old when her father died (at 02.30 hours, Sunday 14 August 1887) and her abiding memories of him must have been as an invalid in a bath-chair. In her young life Phyllis had watched her father suffer from all the ill-effects of tuberculosis spreading into his lungs, digestive system and spinal cord and this memory of his suffering and pain must have been a permanent scar for her too.

J.W. North recalls arriving just after he died:

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<sup>16</sup> *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, Walter Besant (London, Chatto and Windus, 1888), p.333. The book was dedicated to 'The Widow and the two children of Richard Jefferies'.

<sup>17</sup> *Richard Jefferies: My Father*, *op.cit.*, p.21.

... I went yesterday, expecting once more to speak with him. I found him lying dead, twelve hours dead. I saw him with Mrs. Jefferies and their little Phyllis. A pitiful sight to see them kiss the poor cold face!<sup>18</sup>

After her father's death, along with her mother and Harold, Phyllis stayed with J.W. North at Beggarnhuish House, Somerset although her cousin, Christine Billing recalls:

I do remember most distinctly the day of Uncle Richard's funeral.<sup>19</sup> To my great surprise I found my mother crying, & soon afterwards she went away in a black dress after telling my sister & me to take care of little Phyllis, who had just come to stay with us. Little Phyllis was wearing a black dress too, her fair hair was flying about her shoulders & there was a very rueful expression on her round face. I was only a puny little child & I felt something was very wrong, so I sat down on the nursery floor & howled. That did have the good effect of giving the other two, who were a little older, the amusement of bullying me. Helen,<sup>20</sup> always a person of resource, brought out the wooden horse on wheels, which was one of our great treasures, lifted Phyllis on to it & pushed her towards me with great vigour. Nearer and nearer they came, both looking so vindictive that I was frightened & howled louder. So the game became really amusing.<sup>21</sup>

Phyllis's Uncle Charles (Jefferies) married Louisa Reeve on 29 May 1889 in Guildford (where they lived until death). There is no record to show Jessie and Phyllis attending the wedding but it would seem likely.

Harold was enrolled at Dulwich College in January 1889 finishing his studies in December 1891 whilst. Phyllis started at James Allen's girl school on 11 May 1889 and left in April 1892. Phyllis was finally baptised at Saint John the Evangelist church in East Dulwich on Saturday 24 August 1889. The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Kenneth Maule Ffinch.<sup>22</sup> The date of the baptism is just 10 days after the second anniversary of her father's death on 14 August. Their address was 3 Townley Park Villas, Lordship Lane, Dulwich Rise. From there they moved to 158 Avenue Road, Mill Hill Park, Acton. *The Toilers of the Field* was published by Longmans in 1892 and Jessie had given Phyllis an inscribed copy with the Acton address. Why Acton? The only connection appears to be that Tom Cox lived nearby with his family. Tom was the youngest of the Cox brothers and Richard's cousin, who grew up at Snodshill Farm, Coate. He was just two years younger than Jessie and they

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<sup>18</sup> Besant, *op. cit.*, p.360.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Jefferies was buried at Broadwater cemetery, Worthing on 20 August 1887.

<sup>20</sup> Helen Elizabeth Billing was Christine's older sister, born in Guildford on 22 Jan 1878.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 3 and *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 21 (Autumn 2011), p.11.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Maule Ffinch was born in 1865 (in Tisbury, Wiltshire) and was ordained by the Bishop of Rochester as a deacon on 11 June 1888 and a year later as a priest on 11 June 1889. Saint John the Evangelist in East Dulwich was his first appointment and he was only there from 1888 to 1890.

too would have been childhood friends.

Phyllis's grandmother died on 21 July 1895 only to be followed by her grandfather eighteen months later on 24 December 1896. James Lockett Jefferies did leave a will, dated 30 July 1895 (just 6 days after the death of Betsy). Probate was given as £154 (worth about £20,000 in 2020) and his assets, after expenses deducted, were to be divided equally to his children Charles, Sarah and Henry (in the USA). There is no record whether Jessie and Phyllis attended their funerals in Bath, but it seems unlikely. Leaving nothing to his son Richard's family does suggest that Jessie might not have kept in touch with her parents-in-law either and that she was deliberately excluded.

By 1901, there was another of the many moves in Phyllis's life—this time to Clarence House, 257 Chesterfield Road, Ashford. Harold emigrated to Canada and arrived in Nova Scotia on 14 April 1905 after spending nearly three years working for his uncle Robert Billing as a proof-reader and, before that, he was at sea as a midshipman.

On Thursday, 18 April 1901 Jessie and Phyllis met Thomas Mosher (the American publisher) and his wife in London.<sup>23</sup> In her letter dated 2 January 1945 to Looker Phyllis remembers 'having lunch at the Hotel Cecil with them, he would have given my brother a push in his publishing business but Harold would not go to America, he knew New York very well & hated it!'. Jessie also remembers the occasion in her letter to Mosher dated 4 January 1902 written to thank him for sending her some sets of his Jefferies' publications: 'What pleasure it would have given my Husband could he have foreseen his work would have been admired & appreciated in your country... Phyllis & I often talk of the pleasant time we spent with Mrs. Mosher & yourself in London...'<sup>24</sup> This meeting led to Jessie parting with an autographed manuscript of Jefferies' poem 'My Chaffinch' for £5 that her son-in-law Robert Billing negotiated and organised.<sup>25</sup>

The next move, after Harold emigrated to Canada, was to Oakleigh, Chiddingfold, Surrey. Sixteen-year-old Ellen Lawrence from Hambledon, Surrey is recorded as the servant on the 1911 census. Chiddingfold is just eleven miles from Guildford where Jessie's brother- and sister-in-laws, Charles Jefferies and Sarah Billing, lived with their families. At the time of the census Phyllis was visiting friends near Torquay at Wykeham Lodge,

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<sup>23</sup> 'Richard Jefferies launches an American Collector's Passion' by Philip R. Bishop, *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No.33 (2018), p.134. See also 'Finding Work for Harold Jefferies' by the editors in the same edition, p.139–140.

<sup>24</sup> Jessie's letters are in the archives of Houghton Library, MS Am 1096-753.

<sup>25</sup> Billing had advertised the MS available to the public in a front page advertisement placed in *The Athenaeum*, 17 Nov 1900.

Lincombe Hill Road, Tormoham, Newton Abbot—the home of widowed Beatrice Harvey (aged 59) and her two unmarried daughters Emily (39) and Alice (36). The relevance of the visit is not apparent.

While Jessie and Phyllis were living at Chiddingfold, Surrey, they joined some of the excursions organised by George Avenell for the Field and Camera Club and Selborne Society.<sup>26</sup> In 1911 Phyllis gave Avenell a copy of the large paper limited edition of *The Toilers of the Field*, published in 1892, but the occasion is unknown,<sup>27</sup> possibly to celebrate Avenell's promotion or a parting gift before Jessie and Phyllis moved to Cornwall.

There is little evidence to go on for the next five years but Phyllis's Aunt Sarah Billing died on 16 November 1913. This would have been a huge wrench for her Uncle Thomas Billing and her dear cousins Helen and Christine.

By 1916 Phyllis and Jessie were living in Perranporth, Cornwall. Phyllis married Alfred Hargrave on 24 April 1916 in St. Piran's church, Perranzabuloe. It seems that the newly-weds lived with Jessie at Glen Cottage, until they built Overdale at Cox, just down the road and where they all moved. This was confirmed by the 1921 census.

It is curious to ponder on how Phyllis and Alfred met as he was born in Didsbury south Manchester, on 30 October 1866, and, until 1901, remained in the Lancashire/Cheshire area apart from going to school in Hertfordshire. Alfred was fourteen years older than Phyllis and his father, Henry, was a 'Provision Merchant' (1871 census) and 'glass manufacturer' (1861 census). It is likely that Henry also dealt with cheese manufacture in Manchester employing his sons Alfred and Joseph who ran the business until 1900 when the partnership came to an end and Henry had died. Censuses enter Alfred's occupation as 'Provision Salesman' (1891), and, by 1901, a 'retired manufacturer' living with his widowed mother and sister Caroline at 11 Willes Terrace, Leamington. Brother and sister continued to live at this address (1911 census) and it is where Caroline stayed until her dying day. Their mother Mary died on 29 August 1901 and probate was granted to Caroline (£968 4s. 8d).

Alan Herrick, the son of Jessie's sister Alice, recalls staying with Aunt Jessie at Bearley, Warwickshire around 1915–16. This might well be the case as Alfred Hargrave owned a property at Bearley that is mentioned in an article in the *Midland Daily Telegraph* dated 18 December 1924. This reported that Alfred's sister, Caroline Susan Hargrave, had died at Ingleside, 11 Willes Terrace, Leamington on 27 October 1924. She left the bulk of her property to Alfred and Phyllis. Net probate was put at £5,459 16s 9d. So for some reason

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<sup>26</sup> *Swindon Advertiser*, 2 Sept 1904, 23 Sept 1904.

<sup>27</sup> 'Discoveries', George Miller, *RJS Autumn Newsletter* 2015.

Jessie and, presumably, Phyllis were staying with Alfred Hargrave just before they moved to Cornwall. Alfred was baptised as an Anglican on 11 March 1913 at St Mary's Church. Leamington Spa. His father came from a Quaker family who do not believe in baptism and, perhaps he decided to go through with the ceremony for Phyllis and Jessie's sake.

Around 1918 Phyllis's nephew Bevis, aged nine, came to live with the Billing family in Guildford. He was Harold's first son but fourth child, and had been sent to England to be educated, possibly at Dulwich College where Harold had attended. Bevis sailed back to Montreal on 23 September 1925—he was with the Billings for about seven years. Christine Billing remembered Bevis in her will by leaving him £500.

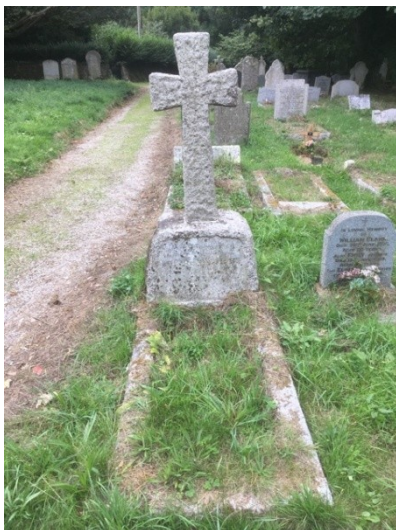
And so life went on peacefully in Cornwall and between the date of the 1921 census and The Electoral Register of 1922, Jessie had moved from Overdale, Cox to her own home at Penlue (a six-bedroom house), Perranporth. Of interest, on the same Electoral Register, is the name Caroline Hargrave, staying at Penwortha, Perranporth. Could this be Alfred's sister who kept or rented a holiday home nearby? On her death two years later, Caroline was still living at the Hargrave family home at Leamington and Alfred still had the house at Beardsley. At the time of the 1921 census (19 June) Phyllis and Alfred were recorded visiting Jessie at Penlue.

Jessie died in July 1926 and was buried in St. Piran's churchyard. She left a will leaving her furniture and personal belongings to Phyllis, but all other effects and future royalties were to be split equally between Phyllis and Harold. Probate was set at £377 8s. A possible example of an auction sale was one which took place at Hodgsons on 12 July 1928 where thirteen autographed or first editions of her father's writing took place. Copies of *The Dewy Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair* were dedicated to Jessie 'with all the author's love' whilst *After London* was dedicated to 'Jessie and Harold'. Five titles were specifically dedicated to Aunt Ellen—*Restless Human Hearts*, *World's End*, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Bevis* and *Nature Near London*.

Alfred died in February 1933 and was also buried at St. Piran, the parish church where he married Phyllis. Phyllis chose the same grave design for both her mother and husband but were separated in the churchyard. Alfred's memorial reads: 'Sacred to the memory of Alfred Hargrave who passed away Feb 5th 1933'. Jessie's memorial reads: 'In Ever Loving Memory of Jessie Jefferies widow of Richard Jefferies who passed away July 12th 1926'.

Christine Billing remembered that Phyllis ‘had sad times nursing her mother & her husband unto their deaths & then came years of loneliness after both had gone.’<sup>28</sup>

Probate for Alfred amounted to £130 12s. 2d, which was not a fortune, but Caroline Hargrave’s will left £2,000 in trust for Phyllis, if widowed, of which one quarter was to go to Alfred’s cousins in Canada. Phyllis should have been comfortable for some time if this was the case.



Alfred Hargrave’s grave



Jessie Jefferies’ grave

In 1933, Phyllis went to Canada staying with her brother Harold. Perhaps she visited Alfred’s cousins too. When she returned to England in 1934 she gave the address of her dear Uncle Robert Billing in Guildford ([28?] Arncliffe, Nightingale Road) where his unmarried daughters Helen and Christine remained. Christine Billing recalls: ‘Little Phyllis & I were . . . great friends. As young girls we had some splendid holidays in Cornwall, climbing over rocks, scaling cliffs & doing many things that would have horrified our



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<sup>28</sup> Christine Billing’s talk dated 24 June 1960, Coate Farm, published in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 21 (Autumn 2011), pp.12.

parents had they known anything about it.<sup>27</sup> This might also explain why Cornwall was chosen as the destination for Jessie and Phyllis to live.

1934 was also the year that her Uncle Charles Jefferies died in Guildford.

There are few photographs of Phyllis but the one to the right was dated 1936.

The 1939 register lists Phyllis as still living on her own at Overdale in Cornwall but Guildford was clearly a second home for Phyllis. Not only the Billings but her younger cousin Dorothy, born in 1890 (the daughter of Uncle Charles), lived there too. Dorothy had married Reginald Herbert, a local Guildford man, on 10 August 1919 and they had two girls, Joyce (born 1920) and Nancie (born 1923)<sup>29</sup>.

Phyllis's dear Uncle Robert Billing died on 24 February 1940 (aged 91). Probate was granted to his two daughters. His effects amounted to a substantial sum of £23,238. 19s 7d. (worth over £1.3 million in 2020). The girls left Guildford to live in Seaford, Sussex about eight years later. Christine Billing was a teacher at a girls' residential school—St. Winifred's, Sutton Avenue, Seaford—at the time of the 1921 census and clearly loved Seaford that was to become her final home with Helen.

Samuel Looker mentions that he corresponded with Phyllis for over 25 years.<sup>30</sup> Her letters to him, collected by the Richard Jefferies Society, date from around 1941 to 1956 and are incomplete. Phyllis writes clearly but with no full-stops or year of the letter included.<sup>31</sup> Most of the earlier letters relate to exchanges of newspaper articles whilst Looker sends books by and about her father that Phyllis does not own. He buys four of Jefferies' notebooks from her for £20 that Phyllis first mentions in a letter dated 19 July [1942]: 'I am thinking of sending four more notebooks to Messrs Hodgson but perhaps you would like to buy them as I think you purchased some I sent to their sale a short time ago, these are the last ones I have. I know you make such good use of them & appreciate them... Life is so uncertain & I have no one to leave them to & should not like them



<sup>29</sup> For more information about Charles Jefferies, see the account of Nancie D Jefferies Cator in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, No. 5 (1996), pp.7–13.

<sup>30</sup> *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields*, by Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous (London: John Baker, 1964), p.xviii.

<sup>31</sup> The letters have been transcribed and the text can be downloaded from the Richard Jefferies Society website on the publications page.

to fall into unappreciative hands.’ A few days later she writes: ‘I do not like parting with these little books at all but feel they would be safe in your hands especially if you will leave them to the nation... I sometimes feel perhaps I ought to destroy them & not put them in the market at all but these times are hard for everybody.’

She was thinking of her brother Harold (pictured right) in Canada when she wrote this. He had ‘a large family of seven’ that she tried to help.

On 14 September [1942] Phyllis writes to say that she has had two cousins staying with her—no doubt referring to Helen and Christine Billing. She writes regularly to report that she is staying with them. Looker had requested information about the family and wanted to borrow a photograph of Harold, which is likely to be the one reproduced in the Worthing Cavalcade publication pictured on the previous page.

On 3 November 1942 Harold died. In her letter to Looker dated 14 January [1948] Phyllis writes: ‘you cannot think how much I still miss his weekly letters, I could always write just as I felt to him for we loved the same things.’ Christine Billing noted Phyllis’s loss too: ‘Another blow was the death of her brother Harold, for though he lived in Canada they understood one another & corresponded regularly.’<sup>27</sup> The closeness was evident for Harold also named his first child Jessie Phyllis who was born on 9 September 1907.

Phyllis and Looker continued to exchange letters regularly. Around 1943 she expressed her dislike of Henry Williamson because: ‘The comparison drawn by Williamson is more than ridiculous, can you compare a gentle mystic [her father] with a raving lunatic! I feel like writing a scorching letter to him, I have always disliked him & his writings, he is odious!’ She was obviously referring to Williamson’s comparison of her father with Hitler in his biography of *Richard Jefferies* (London: Faber & Faber, July 1937).

In September 1944 Phyllis mentioned her father’s manuscript material and letters that Looker was keen to see. She described it as ‘very difficult to read & to sort’. Over a year later Looker’s first meeting with Phyllis finally takes place. He writes: ‘I came to the cottage of Richard Jefferies’ daughter on a late November afternoon’.<sup>32</sup> Eventually Looker takes away assorted manuscript material to sort out. On 8 May [1947] Phyllis writes:

Dear Mr. Looker

It is most kind of you to send the cheque. I never thought of such a sum & hesitate to accept it, you must not send any more. I do not think that we are a mercenary family but my mother used to say that though my brother & I had a rather lofty disregard for mere cash we were very fond of the things that only money could buy!

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<sup>32</sup> *Richard Jefferies: a Tribute* (Worthing Cavalcade, 1946), p.27.

However my tastes are extremely simple, which is fortunate

I know my father was very interested in flying & felt sure it would soon develop & studied & watched the wonderful flight of seagulls, my mother has often spoken of this

I am most interested to hear of letters from my grandfather & hope you will be able to get them he was an extremely clever & thoughtful man & I am afraid the picture of Farmer Iden, wonderful as it is, stresses the rather eccentric side too much & gives rather a wrong impression.

Yes, my father spent much of his time at Sydenham with my great-Aunt Ellen Harrild, a most sweet & understanding soul, who always believed in him, her husband, great uncle Tom, was also a great help & very attached to his nephew

As to the 1887 note books I do not really know but imagine my father was able even then to write short notes himself

The Red Folio book I do not know anything about

Also I am not certain if he ever went back to Coate if so I think it was a brief visit.

I so often wish his mantle had fallen on me for while I have an internal love of nature & perhaps some of his powers of observation I have only a very halting pen

No one here really cares for walks so I am always alone but often feel his spirit with me

I like your introduction to *Field & Hedgerow* very much indeed, I think you read it to me when you were here I always think *Field & Hedgerow* a collection of lovely essays

It is nice for you to have a daughter at home housekeeping is a difficult task now especially I think for one alone

With kind regards & renewed thanks

Yours sincerely

Phyllis Hargrave

So Looker must have bought the manuscript material and papers and the cheque he sent amounted to £250 which Phyllis acknowledges with a stamped receipt on 3 July 1947.

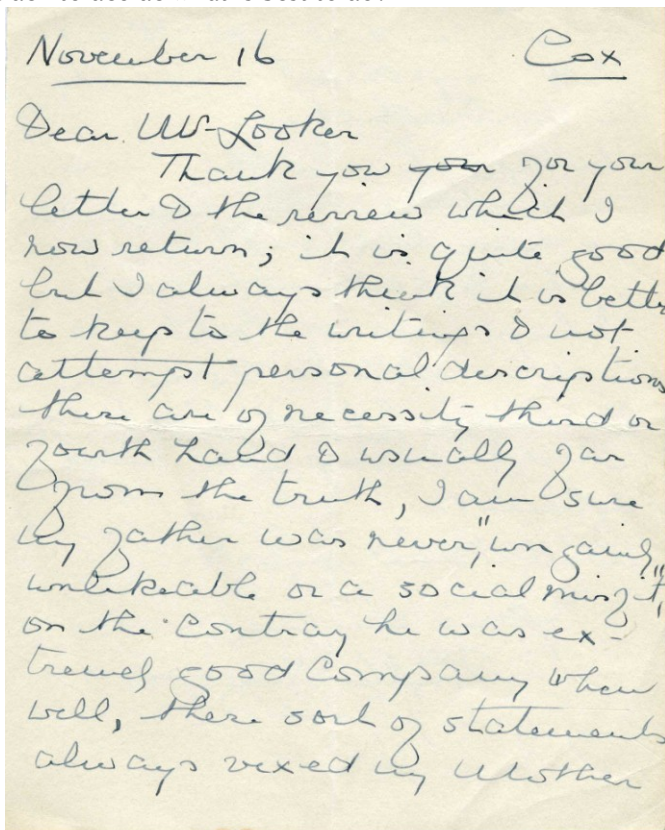
Looker sent Phyllis a copy of his edited version of *The Story of My Heart*. A letter from Phyllis dated 13 October [1947] appreciates the result and comments:

My Mother and I often talked about this book & she felt that much of it, the pessimistic parts, would have been re-written had the author lived longer for as he himself says, in spite of this experience he remained an optimist.

A review of the book must have followed. Phyllis writes on 16 November [1947] (see image of the first page of this letter below): 'it is quite good but I always think it is better to keep to the writings and not attempt personal descriptions these are of necessity third or fourth hand & usually far from the

truth, I am sure my father was never "ungainly, unlikeable or a social misfit", on the contrary he was extremely good company when well, these sorts of statements always vexed my mother though she did not think them important enough to contradict.' Looker is planning to meet Phyllis the following week if his health is okay.

Correspondence is then more related to the 1948 centenary celebrations for her father. Perhaps there is some concern about the look of her father's grave. Phyllis informs Looker on 8 March [1948] that her Uncle Robert 'paid a small sum yearly, about £2 I think, to have the grave kept in order but I do not think anything has been paid since then, except after my brother died, when I paid about £4 to have his name put on the kerb. I should really be very glad if the town could look after the grave in perpetuity & the centenary seems a suitable time to make such an arrangement. May I leave it to you and Mr. Odell to decide what is best to do?'



November 16 Cox

Dear Mr. Looker

Thank you for your letter & the review which I now return; it is quite good but I always think it is better to keep to the writings & not attempt personal descriptions there are of necessity third or fourth hand & usually far from the truth, I am sure my father was never "ungainly, unlikeable or a social misfit", on the contrary he was extremely good company when well, these sort of statements always vexed my mother

A sample of Phyllis's hand-writing from her letter to Looker.

Phyllis's next letter, 21 March [1948], is written from Guildford where she is staying with Helen and Christine again. It seems that Looker had sent her his introduction to the planned Lutterworth Press edition of *Field and Hedgerow*. Phyllis says 'Both my father & mother were very reserved. I would not care for too much of the personal note & I feel the same.' and she requests that some of the wording is removed.

The focus of her next letter is addressing where Phyllis might stay for her father's 1948 Centenary Celebrations in Swindon. A postcard from Phyllis announces on June 3<sup>rd</sup> [1948] 'I have not been able to hear of any rooms in Chisledon, Coate, or neighbourhood so it looks as if we shall not be able to come. We could be in an hotel in Swindon but do not know of anything about them & I so much prefer the country, shall be disappointed as we cannot come, in haste.' She writes on 12 October 1948:

I hope to go to Seaford on the 19<sup>th</sup> & may stay until Nov 8<sup>th</sup> & shall then be able to go to Worthing & hear your talk on the 6<sup>th</sup>. I should like to hear Richard Church at Swindon but cannot manage that. I think I told you I wrote to Clifford Dymont and found fault with his broadcast on RJ.<sup>33</sup> I enclose his reply for you to read & pronounce judgement on, it does not impress me somehow!

Phyllis's cousins Helen and Christine Billing moved to Seaford from Guildford. There is a letter from Christine to Looker dated 8 August 1948 from Dendra, Seaford. Phyllis did attend the celebrations in Worthing. The local branch of the English Association organised several events that included a wreath-laying ceremony at her father's grave on 6 November 1948 that was reported in the *Worthing Gazette* on 10 and 12 November and in the *Worthing Herald* on 12 November—all articles included the photograph (right) that shows Phyllis with Samuel Looker watching the Mayor (Councillor L. Bental) place the laurel chaplet. Laurel was one of Jefferies' least favourite bushes but a similar wreath was put on his grave when he was buried. The words on the card read: 'Let not the eyes grow dim: look not back but forward.'



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<sup>33</sup> There was a talk on Richard Jefferies by Clifford Dymont broadcast on the BBC Home service on Wednesday 26 May 1948 at 18.30 hours.

Eulogies of Jefferies' life and work were given at an evening meeting at the Worthing Arts Centre. Looker was the key speaker. An exhibition was held in the Worthing Museum for several days that exhibited first editions of Jefferies' works, manuscripts and other items of interest that included the centenary oil-painting by Stephen Makepiece Wiens: 'The Last Chapter: Jefferies' Last Days at Goring' that was used on the cover of the dust jacket for the Worthing Cavalcade publications *Richard Jefferies: A Tribute by Various Writers* (1946) edited by Looker and dedicated to 'Jessie Phyllis Hargrave, daughter of Richard Jefferies, In Friendship and Admiration of her Loyalty to the Memory of her Father'.



'The Last Chapter: Jefferies' Last Days at Goring'  
Stephen Makepiece Wiens

Helen and Christine Billing also attended the Worthing celebrations along with Phyllis's cousin Dorothy from Guildford and her husband Reginald Herbert. It seems that they had all managed to attend the celebration in Swindon too. Christine Billing, in a letter to Looker, dated December 1948 thanks him for all he had done 'for Uncle Richard in his centenary year' and she thinks that 'the honour paid to her [Phyllis's] father has cheered her greatly & she seemed specially happy at Swindon.'

Sometime around 1949 Phyllis moved to Seaford and stayed with her cousins Christine and Helen at Dendra, Blatchington Street. Christine said: 'After some time we persuaded her to live near us, but I never felt that she was as much at home in Sussex as in Cornwall.'<sup>27</sup> Phyllis moved nearby to Wayside, Homefield Road (also in Blatchington).

Christine Billing sent Looker a photograph (below) taken at Dendra on midsummer day 1949. Phyllis is with her puppy in the garden. Phyllis mentions to Looker that her 'dear little Judy (you may remember her friendly ways) died last August [1947] & I have just got a little Corgi puppy, she is very engaging but also very wicked and destructive but she will soon grow out of those little ways. I have always had a dog & felt quite miserable without one.'



Phyllis and her puppy at Dendra, June 1949

There is a letter from Wayside to Looker dated 30 November [1949] that mentions that Phyllis and her cousins had been driving through Patcham and had hoped to find Looker's house<sup>34</sup> 'but there were so many new avenues.' She added:

I like Seaford very much though it seems very towny after Perranporth & I miss all my cottage friends & my lovely orchard, I expect the violets are out there now.

I have just been reading "The Worthing Cavalcade" & like it more than I did at first.

We have lately been to Crowborough where the occupants seemed very pleased to see us & also to Goring. I was a little startled to see the house is now a guest House but it is nicely kept & part of the garden is left much as it was when we were there.

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<sup>34</sup> Looker had moved to 11, Brae Side Avenue, Patcham, Brighton.

It seems that Phyllis and her cousins were out and about a considerable amount. She was 'glad to be near my own kith & kin, I see my cousins most days' [7 December 1949].

In October 1950, they were on holiday in Dartmoor. Christine Billing used the following photograph of a Dartmoor trip to send in a Christmas card to Looker that shows her sister Helen and cousin Phyllis next to the East Dart River at Postbridge, Dartmoor. Phyllis is standing on the old clapper bridge whilst Christine is seated and stroking a dog.



Helen Billing & Phyllis at Postbridge, Dartmoor, October 1950

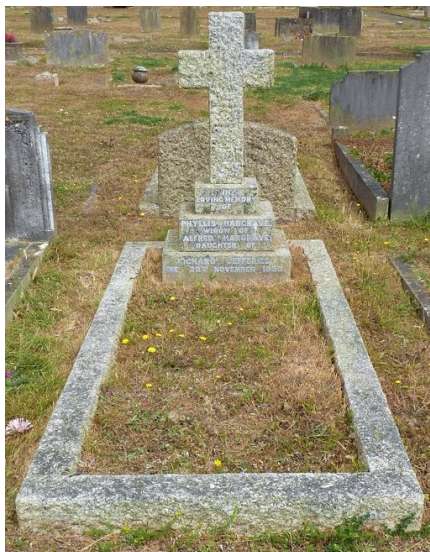


Helen died on 6 February 1958 leaving effects of £25,025 2s 6d to Christine. Phyllis died a few months later on 28 November 1958. She left a Will leaving

assets of £3371 17s 2d that were to be divided in equal shares to her brother's widow and her surviving nephews and nieces in Canada.

Christine helped distribute some family items. On the opening of the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate in 1960 she donated Jefferies' writing table and chest, the daguerreotype and painting of his mother, Betsy Jefferies as a young lady (that belonged to Christine herself and was painted by another cousin), and Aunt Ellen's sampler embroidered when she was 8 years old. The year before, many letters were on sale at the Hodgson auction held on 23 April 1959. This included the manuscript of 'Ben Tubbs Adventures' and Jefferies' letters to his Aunt Ellen Harrild.

Christine died herself on 4 May 1967. Nancie, the daughter of her cousin Dorothy, was an executor for the assets of £73,022. The three are buried at Seaford Cemetery. Phyllis in plot G4, 4004 and Helen & Christine together in the next plot (G4, 4003).



The grave of Phyllis Hargrave, Seaford Cemetery

The memorial reads: 'In/ Loving Memory/ of/ Phyllis Hargrave,/widow of /Alfred Hargrave/ daughter of/ Richard Jefferies/Died 28th November 1958,' whilst an inscription was also added to the west side of the plinth of her father's grave at Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing that reads: 'also of/ their daughter /Jessie Phyllis Hargrave /Died Nov. 28<sup>th</sup> 1958/Buried at Seaford' thus adding to the memorials of her mother and two brothers also.

No pictures of the Billing grave are available nor later photos of the Billing girls. However, Jessie, Phyllis and Harold owe this family a great debt in

being good friends as well as helpful relations and the following photographs serve as reminders of the Billings. Christine has the same facial characteristics as her grandmother Jessie, whilst Helen looks more like her father, Robert.

And whilst this might be an unkind and harsh comment to make about a person's life, Phyllis had a very easy and privileged one compared to the majority, as did her cousins Helen and Christine Billing.



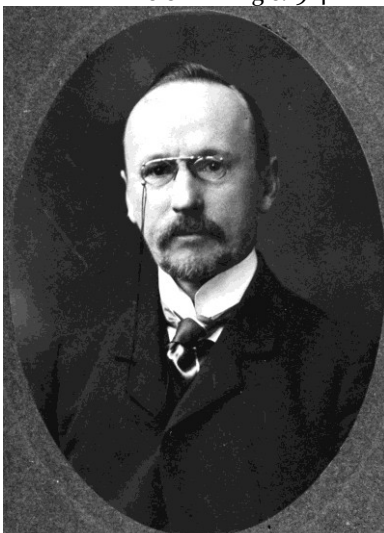
Christine Billing c.1905



Helen Billing c.1914



Sarah (Jefferies) Billing c.1910



Robert T Billing c. 1910

# Book Review

Barry Sloan

*Perception, Class and Environment in the Works of Thomas Hardy* by Roger Ebbatson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023)

In his latest book, Roger Ebbatson returns to a writer who has figured prominently in his critical work. His aim here—to explore how Hardy ‘modifies and dramatises the ways in which men and women mobilise or identify their experience of life’—is grounded in his sense of how, both as a novelist and a poet, the writer captures and articulates a comprehensively changing and unsettling world.

This in itself is not a new insight: for readers and critics alike, Hardy’s evocation of the shifts in life in mid-late nineteenth-century Dorset has always attracted interest and comment. For some, the fascination derives principally from the representation of an increasingly distant past and characters whose lives, however prone to misadventure and tragedy, predate the greater traumas of modernity.

Others, however, regard Hardy’s multifaceted accounts of the gathering forces of disruption to that older way of life, of their impact on individuals and their communities, and of their costs to personal well-being and to physical and ontological security as his major achievement. Ebbatson clearly shares the latter view, and his book, illuminated by extensive application of modern theory, invites a nuanced understanding of the challenges and pain caused by collisions of culture, social class, working practices and beliefs in the late Victorian period. While always responsive to Hardy’s knowledge of a rural world with deeply embedded customs, Ebbatson argues that Hardy does not seek an impossible ‘return to roots or exhibit a nostalgic longing for earlier forms of life but works to create meaning out of an increasingly fragmented social existence’.

Much of the discussion centres on *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) which Ebbatson describes as ‘a classic text of the 1890s’ with its focus on the progressive alienation, estrangement and displacement of Tess. These are reflected not only in specific details of the tensions and conflicts of value Tess faces, and of her increasingly nomadic life and improvised strategies for survival. They are also represented powerfully through Hardy’s evocation of the landscapes that inform and are integral to the stages in Tess’s life as she moves from the ‘protective boundaries of the [Blackmoor] vale’ and the

‘fecundity of Talbot Hays Dairy’ to the “starve-acre” landscape of Flintcomb-Ash’. These changing locations, Ebbatson suggests, serve to ‘unbind’ the relationship between place and home and to project a view of life reduced to an increasingly rootless—place-less—existence in language and imagery that often has the atmospheric and symbolic suggestiveness of poetry.

In a chapter of particular interest to readers of Richard Jefferies’ works, Ebbatson observes how in *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies writes to defeat the ceaseless flow of time by merging the vitality of the present moment with that of the past through memory, thereby ‘restoring experience to life again in the actuality of the present moment’ to create a feeling of eternity. Tess, too, he points out, experiences moments that stand outside time’s flow – for example, when she listens unobserved to Angel Clare playing the harp at Talbot Hays, Hardy writes: ‘Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears into her eyes. The fleeting pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden’s sensibility.’ But these moments are lost in the face of the mounting hardships that follow her husband’s rejection. Thus, later, crawling ‘like flies’ over the wind- and rain-lashed field at Flintcomb-Ash, Tess and Marian’s only relief comes from looking ‘across the country to where the Var or Froom was known to stretch, even though they might not be able to see it; [where] fixing their eyes on the cloaking grey mist, [they] *imagined* the old times they had enjoyed out there’ (my emphasis).

Ebbatson also contrasts Tess’s loss of visionary sense with Jefferies’ representation of Felise Goring’s enduring idealism in *The Dewy Morn* (1884), to indicate a key difference between the motivations that shaped the two writers: ‘For Hardy ... the function of writing is in the last analysis representational and historical, whilst for Jefferies, despite his expert acknowledgement and analysis of contemporary issues of land and labour, the act of writing is defamiliarizing and transcendental.’ This distinction is vital to Ebbatson’s celebration of Hardy’s achievement in both prose and poetry, and to his stimulating evaluation of him as a significant recorder of the ‘mental confusion, personal insecurity and ... deepening sense of homelessness’ that are the price paid by individuals emerging from collective patterns of thinking and tradition into the exposed and often comfortless condition of modernity.

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