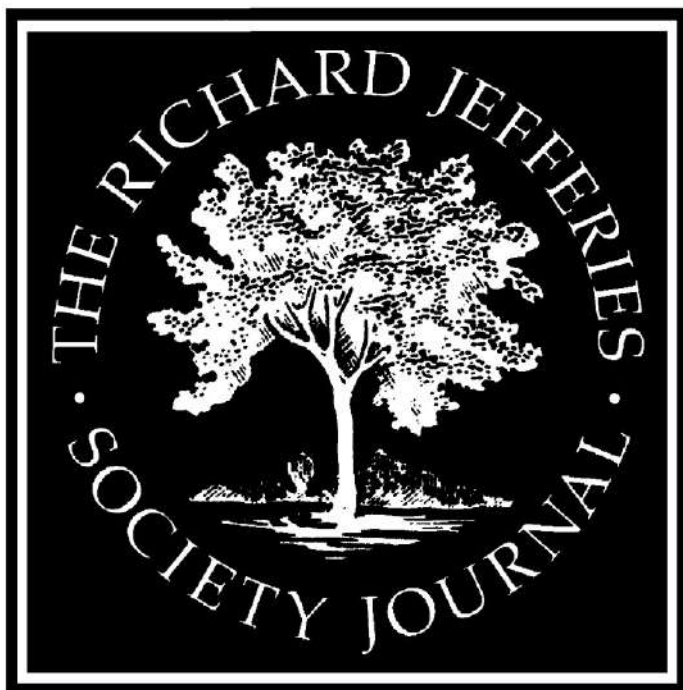




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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Its activities include the Annual General Meeting and Birthday Lecture, winter meetings, summer outings, special events, and the publication of two *Journals*, spring and autumn Newsletters and an Annual Report. Membership is open to all on payment of the current annual subscription: £12.00 – individual; £14.00 – couple (UK rate).

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

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RICHARD JEFFERIES' BIRTHPLACE at Coate is a museum. It is open on Sundays from 2-5pm in the summer, on the second Wednesday of the month from 10am-4pm throughout the year and otherwise by arrangement. For details about the Museum please apply to the Secretary.



Journal No. 23, 2012

C O N T E N T S

Concerning Coate. A letter from Richard Jefferies to Oswald Crawford (1876)	3
--	---

Saving Kennicott's Grove: Successful Conservation at an American Coate - <i>Eric Jones</i>	6
--	---

<i>Bevis</i> and Arthur Ransome's <i>Swallowdale</i> - <i>Janice M. Lingley</i>	17
--	----

Memorial to Richard Oliver Launcelot Jefferies - <i>Andrew Rossabi</i>	26
---	----

From Drought to Storm: meteorological phenomena at the time of Jefferies' death - <i>Rebecca Welshman</i>	30
---	----

Jefferies' Centenary - <i>E.J. Rogers</i>	39
--	----

From an Accident by a Runaway Horse - <i>Mary Jefferies</i>	41
--	----

Concerning Coate

A letter from Richard Jefferies to Oswald Crawford (1876)

Oswald Crawford edited the *New Quarterly Magazine*, to which Jefferies contributed papers on rural life during the 1870s. Crawford records being ‘immensely struck with the lucidity of these papers, the rare faculty of co-ordination possessed by the writer, and the strong, nervous, simple English which he had taught himself to use.’ In Jefferies’ writing, Crawford detected a ‘fresh, rhythmic note in style, the stamp of an original artist.’ A few years after Jefferies’ death, Crawford paid a visit to Coate Farm and found it, perhaps disappointingly so, to be ‘a plain, small, bare, rather poverty-stricken farm-house, by the roadside.’¹ He was more impressed by the ‘meadow land’ to the rear, through which a path led to the reservoir – ‘a picturesque and partly tree-embowered mere’.² In 1898 Crawford published ‘Richard Jefferies: Field-Naturalist and Litterateur’ in *The Idler*, an illustrated magazine, in which he quoted several paragraphs of a letter Jefferies wrote to him in December 1876:

I should certainly be pleased to meet you personally. My personal connection with farming is now almost at an end, though my father still retains his property at Coate. I find literature more congenial to my tastes, and 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. With respect to the Natural History papers, my principal ideas are these. While at home, having very little to do, I studied natural history from Nature – excuse the tautology. I used to take a gun for nominal occupation, and sit in the hedge for hours, noting the ways and habits even of moles and snails. I had my especial wasps-nest, and never was stung. The secret with all living creatures is – quiet. Be quiet, and you can form a connection, so to say, with everything, even with such a brute as the pike-fish. This went on for six or seven years – idle, you will say. Whether it was summer or winter, I would always find something to interest me, and, in time, extend these observations to the great

¹ ‘Richard Jefferies: Field-Naturalist and Litterateur’, *The Idler; an illustrated monthly magazine* (Oct. 1898) 13, 3, 289-301 (p.290).

² *ibid*, pp.290-292.

Downs adjacent, which are literally teeming, so to say, with matter for thought. I own that the result has been a profound optimism – if one looks at Nature metaphysically. Since that pleasant time, which I still regret, I have corrected my notes and endeavoured to organise them by reading the best books I could find on such subjects, including geology.

There is at Coate a reservoir – it is sixty years old, and looks quite as a lake – of some eighty acres of water. I think I could write a whole book on that great pond. I mapped it, and laid down the shallows and sand-banks, when I was a schoolboy, and I learnt how to manage a sailing boat on it. Even the mussels slowly crawling on the bottom, I believe, have taught me something. You can trace the action of the rain and frost and the waves on its banks, just as Lyell³ delineates the effect of the ocean on our coast line; of course, on a smaller scale, but the illustration is perfect. You can trace the action of the brook which feeds it – the sediment and sand carried down have formed shallows and banks, like the delta of a river. If the birds, that I and others have shot there, had been preserved – as now I wish they had been – they would form a little museum. My brother shot a brace of grebes there last week. The auk, the Northern diver, gulls of almost all varieties, come occasionally after storms. I should not attempt a laborious learned description, but rather choose a chatty style. I would endeavour to bring in some of the glamour – the magic of sunshine and green things and calm waters – if I could. It would give me much pleasure to write such articles for you.⁴

Crawfurd continues:

This paper was never written. It was saddening when I looked at this beautiful piece of water at Coate, after Jefferies' death, and remembered his promise to tell the story of his explorations of this wonderful and interesting pool. He had evidently already turned his thoughts in the true direction of his genius, but it was yet nearly two years before he brought out the *Gamekeeper at Home*, the first of his great Natural History series.

I said that Jefferies' place in Natural History was beside Gilbert White, of Selborne. In point of fact he achieved more than Gilbert White ever attempted, for he not only observed, catalogued, and recorded the ways and doings of wild animals, but he saw all aspects

³ Jefferies owned a copy of *An Introduction to Geology* by Robert Bakewell, 1813, signed 'R. Jefferies Coate'. (Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Oxon: Petton Books, 1994), p.81.

⁴ *ibid*, p.295.

of wild life through the eyes of a poet and interpreted them to us. Jefferies was a quite extraordinarily close observer of the material facts of the life he studied, but, unlike some of the great literary realists of to-day, he went further and supported a high idealistic doctrine on these hedgerows and woodland documents.⁵



Coate Farm in 1898
Courtesy of British Periodicals

⁵ p.295.

Saving Kennicott's Grove: Successful Conservation at an American Coate

Eric Jones

Lecture delivered to the Richard Jefferies Society at the Richard Jefferies Museum, Coate, on 14 April 2012

Introduction

The artists' colony at St Ives, Cornwall, is very well known. Less well known is that from the 1880s until the 1930s there was a similar colony at St Ives, Huntingdonshire.¹ One resident was Charles Whymper (1853-1941), who illustrated Richard Jefferies' *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and numerous other works of natural history. Charles was one of the nine sons of Josiah Wood Whymper (1813-1903), a London wood engraver and water-colour painter. Another son was Edward Whymper, famous (or notorious) as the first man to climb the Matterhorn, on an expedition that lost some of its members in a great Victorian tragedy.

Charles Whymper had been a pupil of the outstanding animal painter, Joseph Wolf, and in his day was highly thought of as an illustrator. He had contributed illustrations to Charles St John, *The Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands* (the first edition was 1849).² The publishers, Smith, Elder, had remarked him and wrote to Jefferies saying that they intended to employ him to bring out an illustrated edition of *Gamekeeper*. Charles was also approached by Longman about illustrating a book on shooting which Jefferies had started, and he wrote to Jefferies proposing a meeting, though there is no evidence this ever took place. Nevertheless the Whympers were connected with Jefferies in this way. If we turn in another direction we find that they were also connected with the American naturalist, Robert Kennicott. This was through yet another of Josiah Whymper's brood, Frederick, who went on Kennicott's expedition to Russian America in the 1860s and wrote and illustrated his own book about that territory – which was bought from the Tsar to become Alaska.

¹ Bridget Flanagan, *Artists along the Ouse 1880-1930* (Hemingford Abbots: Privately printed, 2010).

² Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies: a chronological study* (Boars Hill, Oxford: Petton Books, 1994), pp.114, 116, 135. Charles St John was related to the St Johns of Lydiard Tregoze.

Robert Kennicott: naturalist and scientist

Robert Kennicott (1835-1866), naturalist, was one of the sons of Dr John A. Kennicott (c.1802-1863), physician and horticulturist, who moved from New Orleans in the 1830s to pioneer at The Grove, now in Glenview, a suburb just outside Chicago. Dr John established a nursery there and two of his sons later founded the Kennicott Brothers Company (1880), which is one of the oldest horticultural businesses in Chicago, although Hiram Kennicott told me that the Grove nursery itself was run down by the 1890s. The Kennicotts were descended from a Roger Kennicott who had arrived at Malden, Massachusetts, from Devon in 1660, which suggests he may have been a self-exiled Parliamentarian. (I found a Kennicott house in Broadclyst but the Devon County Archivist was unable to trace an early connection).³



Robert Kennicott. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Archives

Robert Kennicott was brought to the Grove at one year of age in 1836. He cut his teeth on the natural history immediately around his home, at one time building a pen for rattlesnakes in the yard, and as a boy he collected for the Smithsonian Institution. He surveyed and collected on the Illinois Central Railroad survey and helped to found both the Chicago Academy of Sciences and the natural history museum at Northwestern University. He collected for the Smithsonian on an expedition to north-western Canada, and afterwards worked at the Smithsonian, Washington, on systematics, naming new species of snakes from western American specimens.

In 1864 he was engaged as naturalist on the Western Union Telegraph expedition to find a route for a telegraph between Russia and America by way of the Bering Sea. He died of a heart attack on this expedition in 1866 at the age of 30, even younger than Jefferies, though in circumstances a little more like those of Captain Scott. His

³ Letter from Mrs M. A. Rowe, Devon Record Office, 12 September 1979.

death was the premature loss of an outstanding scientist, geologist, explorer, ethnographer and linguist who picked up languages readily.

Among Kennicott's memorials, besides his Arctic journal and contributions to science, topographical features and a town in Alaska are named after him, as is the Kennecott Copper Corporation. Kennecott Copper is misspelled but as Byron said, 'fame consists of falling on the field of glory, and having your name spelled wrong in the dispatches.' Most of all, Kennicott's reports on the resources of what was then Russian America persuaded the United States to buy it and establish Alaska. Frederick Whymper, although an Englishman, was the artist on Kennicott's final expedition—admittedly in the first year he was not permitted to land from the ship, no doubt for some reason of diplomacy.⁴ In 1867 William Dall and he retraced Kennicott's route and Whymper sketched scenes along it.

I will say no more about this important scientific and political episode, or about the extraordinary Whympers, in order to concentrate on the rescue of Kennicott's home at the Grove from the type of inappropriate housing development with which we are all wearily familiar. The parallels with Jefferies' home at Coate are plain, but so are the differences: Jefferies thought of Swindon as the new Chicago but Swindon never grew appreciably and its educational and cultural interests remain stunted. It has failed to capitalise on the Jefferies connection. In Illinois, however, after a cliff-hanging struggle, Save the Grove was a resounding success.

Prairie Groves

After painfully cutting their way through many hundreds of miles of dark woods, the American pioneers came out onto the glaring prairies at about Chicago. They described the woods as ending abruptly, whereas modern scholars insist they degenerated into a fretwork edge and isolated groves. Freed from the oppression of endless trees, the settlers found that on the prairie they would now be short of lumber for cabins, fences and wood for the fire. One much-married man in Illinois promised likely women that, 'they should live in the timber where they could pick up their own firewood.'⁵ Such a man might halt at the forest margin, but others pressed on, casting about for wood lots. A prairie grove on a low ridge was a prime site, possessing timber

⁴ Sandra Spatz Schlachtmeyer, *A Death Decoded: Robert Kennicott and the Alaska Telegraph* (Alexandria, Virginia: Voyage Publishing, 2010).

⁵ Walter Havighurst (ed.), *Land of the Long Horizon* (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1960), p.194.

yet abutting grassland that could be brought under cultivation.⁶

Most groves have been built over and survive only as place names, Morton Grove, Downers Grove and so forth. Kennicott's Grove was preserved because of the landscape interests of Dr John Kennicott, physician and remarkable horticulturist, who unlike his neighbours did not really log the site, instead planting fresh timber. The first log cabin at the Grove had been built in 1833 by a man called Shrigley; the Kennicotts arrived in 1835 and bought the land from him.⁷ Apparently the property had been altered a little through previous logging and the effects of prairie fires, but it was then 1.5 x 0.75 miles in extent, vastly larger than today. The trees were mostly hickory and oak. There were then still plenty of Indians and numerous rabbits, squirrels, passenger pigeons, partridges, quails, and flocks of prairie hens in the trees in winter. This is according to an essay written for his tutor – the Kennicotts hired two tutors from Oxford – by Robert's brother, Amasa, in 1851.⁸ Initially there had been many deer and wolves and Amasa's father, Dr John, used to trap the latter. Robert Kennicott, another of Dr John's sons, reported on the ecological changes attendant on white settlement in north-eastern Illinois in the *Illinois Agricultural Society Report* of 1854. They largely related to increases in species adapted to open and cultivated country and to woodland that was more open than before.

By the late twentieth century pieces of the Grove had been sold and it had shrunk. Nevertheless, in contrast to the engulfing suburbia, it remained attractive to the naturalist, quite apart from the history of continuous settlement by the Kennicotts. Donald Culross Peattie called the Grove, 'zoologically classic ground'. Between the wars it had also been a literary resort, the home of writers and like-minded visitors from Chicago. Yet as that generation vanished and, well before my first visit in 1969, interest had faded. I am reminded of interest in Jefferies ebbing away following his prominence in soldiers' knapsacks during the Second World War.

⁶ The complexity of ecology, settler origins, and date, is emphasised by Terry G. Jordan, 'Between the Forest and the Prairie', *Agricultural History* 38 (4), 1964, pp. 205-216. The distinction between dense forest and open prairie was blurred by a wide belt of mixed ecosystems.

⁷ Amasa Kennicott, 'The Grove' [1851], reprinted in *The Des Plaines Historical Quarterly* (Oct-Dec 1939), pp.23-24. Stephan Swanson tells me however that the Kennicotts bought from the government (at \$1.25 per acre over five years at 25 cents per year.) Perhaps they bought out Shrigley's claim.

⁸ Reprinted in *The Des Plaines Historical Quarterly* (Oct-Dec 1939), pp. 23-24. Seen with other Kennicott materials in the possession of Mary Jane Kennicott Osgood, 1975.

Arriving at the Grove

My involvement with Coate and the Grove arose from an interest in ecological history, which always struck me as a proper conjoining of natural and cultural history. I took pleasure from writers who made no special distinction between them. But in the 1960s biology and history were estranged and ecological history was almost unheard of, though it has since become fashionable under the somewhat politicised banner of environmental history.

In 1969 I was invited to Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. I was offered a tenured post, to which I returned in 1970 and held until moving on to Australia in 1975. I chanced to have bought in England a second-hand copy of Peattie's *The Road of a Naturalist*, which in part described The Grove.⁹ Peattie was a journalist and writer who had married Louise Redfield, great-granddaughter of Dr John. She too was a writer. The Peatties went back to the Grove during the Depression and both later published books about it. When I got to Northwestern in Fall 1969 I could find no-one who knew about any of this but I managed to find my way to the Grove, which was an untended piece of woodland with scattered, sizeable houses: Surrey with a fringe on the top. It lay twenty miles from the Loop, just off Milwaukee Avenue, a great artery running north-west from Chicago.

For an Englishman it was hard to make much of the Grove, where the gardens or yards blurred into the woods without obvious boundaries. Yet American property was undoubtedly as fiercely defended as it was scantily demarcated. In the Middle West bird watching was then a more obscure pastime than homicide. Fearing that I might get shot if I blundered around with my binoculars, I picked one of the houses and fronted up at its door. I was hospitably received by Chas and Donna Ventura. They had heard about Kennicott (one or two of his descendants were still living in the Grove) but were astonished there might be any outside interest in him. I became friends with this couple and dropped in on them, as well as on the most sympathetic of their neighbours, Bob and Dee Stowe, whenever I went to the Grove. The Stowes owned a few Kennicott documents, notably Dr John's nursery ledger for 1858-1860, which Bob had picked up when a Kennicott house was demolished a few years earlier, and a typescript of Peattie's detailed 1940 flora of the Grove. Peattie listed 455 species of plants.

The northern half of the Grove had been sold to an electronics firm

⁹ Donald Culross Peattie, *The Road of a Naturalist* (London: Readers Union/Robert Hale, 1948).

and the southern half, although a few Kennicott descendants were still resident, was gradually being sold for housing.¹⁰ The Tri-state Tollway had already sheared off a corner. I continued to bird-watch there occasionally and in January 1973 noted a distinct increase in housing development. Where Zenith Corporation had bought the land, presumably to extend its office complex, the Precision Lumber Co. had a small lumber yard. Some of the timber seemed to have been recently felled in the Grove. I was with a serious-minded schoolboy, son of another academic from England, and he and I made some ring counts: white elm was 127 and 187 years old, white oak 121, red oak 117, and several other species were around the 50-year mark. Some timber still standing in the Grove may never have been cut—in a region where woodland seems always second—or third—growth. Afterwards we drove north up Milwaukee Avenue and along a couple of side roads, through (so my notes record) ‘depressing new suburban development with a total of two farms, one with an unpainted silo and a brace of miserable Holsteins, hanging on.’

The inside story of the ‘Save the Grove’ Campaign

The blow struck that spring of 1973. The Glenview Village Board met to hear a proposal to annexe 30 acres of the Grove – which was apparently unincorporated – and build 274 residential units in multi-storey condominiums. By April the surveyors’ stakes were already planted. This was the threat that galvanised Donna Ventura, Dee Stowe and me into founding a campaign group we called ‘Save the Grove’. The developers tried to make the women a laughing stock by labelling them ‘the Frog and Fern ladies’ (it was not originally the affectionate term that one Grove brochure claims), while for some reason I was referred to as ‘the so-called Eric Jones’. I remember endless meetings of the three of us, desperately trying to think of ways to drum up support from cultural and natural historical bodies. I did not record all of the politicking, all the telephoning, all the brush-offs, all the black nights when no-one else seemed interested or sympathetic. But remarks about the major episodes of Saving the Grove are interspersed among the lists of species in my bird notebooks and supply a precisely dated record. I draw the following from them.

No tradition of landscape history then existed and no-one had the English habit of driving out on Sundays to visit great country houses, for the Mid-West’s happier history meant there was none to visit. Thoreau’s Walden was way back in Massachusetts; Mid-Westerners

¹⁰ E. L. Jones, ‘On Revisiting North America’, *Biological Conservation* 3 (1), October 1970.

were sure they had nothing comparable to show. The birdwatchers, who as usual dominated field studies (I was one of them), mostly spent their time along the nearby shores of Lake Michigan, which were indeed ornithologically splendid, at least until they froze solid! By contrast, local birders would not have found the Grove anything special, though to English eyes it was full of birds and, in season, noisy with frogs and aflutter with butterflies. If England is briefly Africa in May, the northern United States is Central America throughout the summer – my wife described the suffocating humidity as like having permanent influenza. In winter Illinois can be like the Arctic; Robert Kennicott was brought up, one might almost say, on a taste of Alaska.

The obvious pitch for conservation was in terms of Illinois history, even national history, given Robert Kennicott's role in Alaska. The biological side was less easy to establish: the Grove was more interesting than exciting, especially in its truncated and somewhat damaged state (lots of invasive species), even though Robert Kennicott had identified some species there for the first time ever, making this their type location.

When 'Save the Grove' set out nothing seemed to be further from the minds of people in outer suburbia than matters ecological or historical, but I was to be astonished at the variety of societies and public bodies connected with planning that came out of the woodwork at the last minute. Unfortunately most of the organisations were just that, organisations, full of people (as far as I could judge) more interested in meetings and palaver than in getting out and studying nature for themselves. If they did get out, they trailed along in groups – natural history as a social activity rather than science. The same phenomenon occurs in England, Holland and Australia. The Illinois bodies were particularly inactive in those days and unused to environmental activism – they did not see Chicago's spread as posing a threat to anything of importance. I noted at the time that 'there is no effective SSSI [Site of Special Scientific Interest] or Scheduled Historical Building listing in Illinois – well, it isn't really effective in England but it's better than this.'

On 23 April 1973 I joined twenty representatives of bodies that the Frog and Fern duo had contacted by a frenzy of telephoning.¹¹ No-one came from the Kennicott Club at the Chicago Field Museum but those

¹¹ The following account is based on my files of news clippings, pamphlets, and letters to and from dignitaries up to and including the then Governor of the State of Illinois, Dan Walker. They refer mainly to 1973-74.

who did turn up came from the Illinois Nature Conservancy, Illinois Open Lands, the Forest Preserve District, North-eastern Illinois University, and the Sierra Club. A handful of interested residents came from Glenview itself. Donna and Dee showed them around. Most of these people had seemingly never had the curiosity to visit the Grove themselves and most of the bodies involved were fair-weather friends, melting away every time the twists and turns of the campaign went against us. I except Illinois Open Lands from this stricture; it did come to the party. On the other hand the professionals and institutional amateurs tended to know one another (clearly there was a network of sorts) and several of them were skilled at identifying plants. We found a seventeen-year locust (Periodical Cicada) under a log: it was first described from here by Robert Kennicott. We also found two little girls with their arms full of Trilliums in flower, for which they were soundly ticked off!

The gathering was shown an early Kennicott house and the one of about 1900 where Redfield and Peattie had done their writing, both occupied by sets of bachelors renting from Zenith. In the former was a wall covered with the pencilled names, dates and heights of Kennicotts and their friends, including 'Big Al', considered to have been Al Capone, who was a friend of a *Chicago Tribune* editor married to a Kennicott. Capone supposedly gave Cook County several forest preserves.

Persuading the straggling army to come back to the Stowe's house even for lunch and a cold beer took a big effort and they all tried to dodge agreeing to testify about the biological worth of the Grove at the Glenview Village Board meeting on the following evening. They did not want to commit their organisations – bureaucracies incapable of making quick decisions or committing themselves politically. (The Save Coate campaign has experienced something similar). I quote from my notes of 23 April 1973: 'I had to intervene to get Frog and Fern a listing of the organisations "present" and a composite, untraceable, statement. It took some doing to convince these people that the Grove's *total* value from open space, environmental teaching function, historical and literary associations, *plus* biological aspects, was indeed very great. The whole thing looked like falling through the slats between different organisations and even with a continuation of the hearing tomorrow night it is unclear who will prepare a scientific and legal case to present to the Village Board and eventually Cook County.' And I got home from the little expedition to the Grove to hear another distressing report – the Principal of Lincolnwood School, Evanston, was calling for the adjacent Perkins Forest Preserve to be cleared as

constituting a danger to his pupils. Marvellous place, of course; my wife had seen a hooded warbler there only the day before.

A few days later I was back in the Grove, holding forth on its significance for CBS television. A real Kennicott—Mary Jane Kennicott Osgood, Robert's great-great niece—was present. The programme was shown on Channel 2's News at Six as 'Save the Grove'. On 8 May I testified at a hearing of the Village Planning Board about the Grove's scientific and historical interest. 'Save the Grove' secured an extension until 26 June in order to prepare an alternative to development.

Then I was off to Australia for six months; Frog and Fern were left to it. When I got back in January 1974, Illinois Openlands was undertaking a feasibility study, though without any real biological inventorying, using \$5,000 provided by Northfield Township, in which Glenview is mostly situated. Campaigning had worked: local government had come up with this seed money and there was at least a stay of execution with respect to development. Then in September 1974 I got back from the long vacation in England to find that Glenview was to hold a referendum to raise the funds needed to 'Save the Grove'. Such a goal would have sounded unreachable had not the Illinois Department of Conservation, *mirabile dictu*, already put up \$350,000! Just how the politicians and bureaucrats had sensed the way the public wind was blowing was never clear but sense it they had.

We won. Not only was the Grove saved from development, it was bought by and for the public. On 15 October, 1974, I was able to visit the Glenview Park District HQ and then the Grove for a celebration bonfire, with coffee, beer, Coca Cola, hot dogs, and marshmallows. The referendum had been to raise bonds in order to buy 94 acres of the woodland and the Kennicott House for \$895,000 (with matching State and Federal funds the total came to over \$1 million). The vote was 3,559 (89 per cent) 'yes' against 438 'no', a result previously conceived only in our wildest dreams. It was the climax of 18 months' campaigning; five years since I had first set foot in the Grove; 139 years since the Kennicotts settled there. The people of Glenview had been rallied by all the talk of the wider significance of the formerly unregarded Grove and had delivered a response we can scarcely imagine at Coate. And they had done so when it cost them tax money, not just the signing of petitions that are costless to the individual. A tax impact study showed it was actually cheaper to buy the Grove than to provide the services for housing development, and indeed the cost of conservation was only a few dollars per household.

What lessons are to be learned from all this? One is that the balance

was swung by political action, after the issue had been defined and publicised by 'Save the Grove', but with little direct help from the plethora of conservation bodies. Other people were quick to claim the credit—to write history backwards—but there were occasions when the campaign would have come to nought if any one of the three of us, the Frog and Fern ladies and the so-called Eric Jones, had ceased to persevere.¹²

Timing is all in the planning world; a case had to be made at the initial hearings or everything would have been lost. Another feature is that we (and the politicians) had caught the vast, unexpected wave of interest in the environment: the first Earth Day had been celebrated on the Northwestern campus in April, 1970. Two congressmen told me independently that they paid attention to the environment only after their children had pressed them at the dinner table as to what they were actually going to do about it – the problem was at first seen only as a threat from pollution. The 1970s interest in the environment presumably also moved the voters of Glenview. The Park District was willing to act once we offered assurances that the Grove was much more than a duplication of the River Trails Nature Center, a mile or two away. Better, too, preserve the Grove than be forced to the resort of the Chicago Botanic Gardens and artificially recreate habitats. In addition, Illinois politicians were aware of the need for land for outdoor recreation. Credit where credit is due: the Governor of Illinois did veto rescuing the Grove with state funds but only because he wanted the cost to be shared among local, state and federal agencies. Zenith Corporation also chipped in generously, offering to give a sizeable area of land if the Referendum were approved.

Perhaps the lessons can be summed up as: publicise hard, never give up, concentrate on politicians more than conservation bodies, and get lucky.

Living happily ever after

Well, not immediately. The 'Save the Grove' committee fractured rather acrimoniously, though in 1976 it did turn into the Grove Heritage Association. From being listed in the National Register of Historical Places in 1973, the Grove became a National Historical Landmark in 1976. Yet while the developers were dead they would not quite lie down. Association members had to turn out in February, 1978, to try to halt the clearing of cedar trees on four-and-half adjacent acres. Trees 200 years old were felled. 'Miraculously',

¹² This statement is correct although other members of the 'Save the Grove' Committee did help mightily; I recall especially Gloria Buzard and Isobel Ernst.

however, the bulldozer then malfunctioned and went round in circles in the snow! A permanent court injunction was obtained to forbid extra 'defilement', the judge furiously criticising the landowners for 'vindictiveness' and 'malicious' behaviour in cutting trees while the Park District was in the midst of arranging to buy this parcel of land.

P.S. The Heritage Association has raised some millions of dollars for work on the site. A further 41 acres were acquired in 1995 and substantially more acreage in 2011 – I am delighted that the 2011 pitch quoted an old letter of mine about the significance of the Grove. There is now a director, Steve Swanson, for whom the hackneyed term 'dynamic' does not seem inappropriate. The list of achievements over the years has been remarkable and we can only look on from Coate with admiration and envy. The 1856 Kennicott House has been restored, the old Schoolhouse recreated, an Interpretive Center and a replica Pottowatomie longhouse built, and \$260,000 has been spent on ecological restoration. The Grove holds over 23,000 pages of historical manuscript material in a purpose-built, waterproof, fireproof, archival building. All sorts of events are held and there are now almost 200,000 visits per year. During the school year, 2010-2011, there were for the first time over 1,000 visiting school groups, all engaging in hands-on activities. This is a more than fitting memorial to the Kennicotts and to the efforts of Save the Grove.

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Bevis and Arthur Ransome's *Swallowdale*

Janice M. Lingley

*By mutual confidence and mutual aid
Great deeds are done, and great discoveries made.*
Alexander Pope¹

. . . but the thing that appeals to us all, and charms us, and carries us out of ourselves, is the union of story and scenery. Then you get poetry and romance, and it need not be very ancient or momentous history to light up the landscape with 'the consecration and the poet's dream'.

W. G. Collingwood²

The children featured in Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* stories, published in the years 1930 to 1947, are not only lively and intelligent characters who enjoy the outdoor world of landscape and water, wind and sail, they are also, implicitly and explicitly, children who are aware of, and exemplify the 'life' of literature. Allusions and references to works by well-known authors whose books may be read by, and/or are about children, are to a greater or lesser extent, a feature of all the stories in the series. The first three books, for example, *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), *Swallowdale* (1931) and *Peter Duck* (1932), arguably form a trilogy inspired by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883).³ Ransome cites these two source-books in a list of titles he compiled for children who had enjoyed his *Swallows and Amazons* stories, and who wished to read more books about sailing adventures.⁴ Also included is the topographically based

¹ Cited by Ransome at the beginning of Chapter 4 of *Swallowdale*, which recounts the valley's discovery. The quotation is from *The Iliad of Homer* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), Book 10, line 265.

² W. G. Collingwood, revised William Rollinson, *The Lake Counties* (London: Dent 1988; first published 1902), p.1. The quotation 'the consecration and the poet's dream' is from William Wordsworth's poem, 'Nature and the Poet', subtitled 'Suggested by a Picture of Peel Castle in a Storm Painted by Sir George Beaumont', line 16.

³ See Janice Lingley, 'The Able-Seamen: Peter Duck and Titty Walker', *The Journal of The Arthur Ransome Society, Mixed Moss* (2007), pp.19-26.

⁴ This list is reproduced in Christina Hardyment, *Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's Trunk*, (London: Cape, 1984), p.220.

historical narrative, *Thorstein of the Mere, A Saga of the Northmen in Lakeland* (1885), by Ransome's mentor, the artist, writer and antiquary, William Gershom Collingwood (1854-1932). In his recommendation of Collingwood's story of the Old North, which is based on the area of the southern lakes – the location of Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series – Ransome states that Collingwood's story is not only one of his favourite books, but also a favourite of his literary creations, the Blackett and Walker families. Richard Jefferies' *Bevis, the Story of a Boy* (1885) – a pioneering presentation of an English rural landscape, realistically and perceptively observed as the scene of children's adventurous play – appears in Ransome's list without comment. However, Jefferies' novel appears also to have been a significant influence on Ransome's procedure, especially with regard to the seminal *Swallows and Amazons* and its sequel *Swallowdale*.

The similarity between these two books and Jefferies' *Bevis* is fundamental: the children featured enthusiastically sail during the summer on inland lakes and camp on islands. In their imaginative play they assume the identity of blue water sailors and explorers, and their 'worldwide' expeditions and adventures are recorded on maps. Both authors locate their stories in places which are geographically verifiable, and which have autobiographical significance. The stories are notable too for the exposition of skills which the children must learn and practise in order to come to terms with their physical environment. Common to both writers is the sympathetic humour, and charming naturalness with which they present their child characters.

Both Ransome and Jefferies were essentially countrymen, but they were men of different generations and their stories are set in times which are contemporary to each. Ransome was born two years after Jefferies died, and in the decades that separated their respective childhoods industrialisation became prevalent in its impact on traditional ways of life, and was to culminate, in Ransome's adult lifetime, with the ending of mercantile sail, the mechanisation of farming, and the advent of the motorised vehicle.

Richard Jefferies grew up on a Wiltshire farm; he loved the countryside of his boyhood and kept meticulous diaries of his observations as an amateur naturalist. His detailed references in *Bevis* to the plenitude of the English countryside in a pre-industrial era constitute almost in themselves an historical record of a rural landscape as yet unaffected by the encroachments of the modern world. No doubt Ransome, a keen angler and fishing writer, enjoyed the descriptions of fish and fishing – the teeming roach and two huge tench (Chapter 4), the enormous pike (Chapter 31) and Bevis' friend

Mark astutely angling for perch (Chapter 42), for example; and the numerous birds (Jefferies refers to more than fifty species), which were then present in abundance.

Here is Jefferies in fine style describing the end of a summer's day:

A broad cool shadow from the trees had fallen over the hatch, for the afternoon had gone on, and the sun was declining behind them over the western hills. A broad, cool shadow, whose edges were far away, so that they were in the midst of it. The thrushes sang in the ashes, for they knew that the quiet evening, with the dew they love, was near. A bullfinch came to the hawthorn hedge just above the hatch, looked in and out once or twice, and then stepped inside the spray near his nest. A yellow-hammer called from the top of a tree, and another answered him across the field. Afar in the mowing-grass the crake lifted his voice, for he talks more as the sun sinks.⁵

That Ransome was as sensitive to, and appreciative of, the natural world as Jefferies, and moreover could be just as articulate in expressing it, may be understood from descriptive passages in his fishing articles. In an essay entitled 'For Going Home', to quote one notable example, Ransome describes 'a half-hour of magic' involving a wintry sunset and the song of a robin. Here the reader encounters the man behind the mask of the professional children's author:

The grayling stopped feeding the moment the sun sank in a clear sky behind the big hills to the west. There followed a half-hour of magic. A glow still rested on the eastern hills. The wind dropped. The pool where I was wading was like a sheet of tarnished but polished silver. The only noise was that of water, until a salmon plunged heavily and moved up, his back fin out of water, shattering the reflections of the hills. The ripples were washed away downstream, and the pool was smooth once more. It was very cold. And then suddenly a bird broke the silence with song from a solitary bare tree on the farther side of the river. The song was clear, sweet, and easy, a song of complete contentment. It was without a chorus, for no other bird was singing. For this reason it was more impressive than the general evensong of birds in early summer. It was, of course, a robin, expressing his opinion of the sunset and the day, which coincided with my own. I felt he sang for both of us, and took some little credit to myself for the feeling that we put into it.⁶

In both these passages the world of nature is understood to possess meritorious life independently of humankind and to have a vitality that is equivalent to, if indeed it does not surpass, that of the human

⁵ Richard Jefferies, *Bevis, the Story of a Boy* (London: Cape, 1958), p.45.

⁶ In Jeremy Swift, *Arthur Ransome on Fishing* (London: Cape, 1994), p.171.

world. *Bevis* is remarkable for such passages and, in the chapter entitled 'Bevis' Zodiac' (33) especially, this understanding inspires in Jefferies a visionary writing style. His novel was originally intended for the understanding of the adult, and only subsequently became identified with the younger reader.

In his fishing essays, Ransome exhibits with wit and poise a mannered style which must rank him with the best of English literary prose writers. Communicating a thorough understanding of his subject, his genial good sense and humour is not unmixed with mordant criticism of practice which in his view compromises, as he expresses it, the 'rigour of the game'; nor does he refrain from trenchant comment on polluters of lakes and rivers, and agricultural methods which are unsympathetic to fish and wildlife. However, in his *Swallows and Amazons* stories, Ransome wrote not only ostensibly for the children's market, but for readers of a later, culturally different era to that of *Bevis*, and his style of writing is modified accordingly. It is not overtly literary, and for the most part pared of descriptive exegesis; in marked contrast to Jefferies, he adopts a strategically oblique and reticent approach to the theme of rurality.

The traditional children's game of pretended identity and role-playing provides both writers with a means of endowing identity with metaphorical meaning. *Bevis'* father farms a large manorial estate and *Bevis'* adventures are based within the rural area which has been his home environment since birth. He and his friend Mark 'discover' and 're-create' the 'Longpond' (Coate Water), mapping their expeditions and naming anew their discoveries. The lake is called the 'New Sea', and the tropical island on which they establish a Robinson Crusoe-type camp and build their own raft is called 'New Formosa', and 'The Magic Land'. Their assumed identity as shipwrecked sailors and savages enables the boys to keep their sojourn on the island a secret from the world of adults, and from their friends.

This seclusion, in combination with the youthful innocence of his child subjects, allows Jefferies to endow the idyllic pastoralism he describes with primordial meaning. The chapter entitled 'New Formosa – Sweet River Falls' (41), describes an expedition to the southern part of the lake, where *Bevis* and Mark have previously noticed a channel through the prolific growth of water plants that characterises the area. Exploring further, they discover a small open bay fed by a stream and a waterfall and surrounded by beech trees. It is an exceptionally beautiful location, and the two restlessly energetic 'savages', intent on sailing, hunting, and fishing, are, despite themselves, enchanted by the discovery and the music of the water.

Ransome also takes up the notion of metaphorical identity, but develops it within the particular parameters he assumes for the Swallows and Amazons; children of a later and very different world to that in which Bevis moves and has his being. The title of 'savages' is conferred in *Swallows and Amazons* on the charcoal-burners, nominally because the children see them at night leaping around their fire; but the appellative also points to the fact that they are apparently the sole survivors of an ancient Lakeland tradition. The word's potential for irony and satire is also exploited in *Swallowdale*: motor horns are dubbed by Titty Walker 'trumpets of the savages', and 'tom-toms' are considered to denote the 'throbbing roar of a motor-cycle'.⁷

There is also a contrast between the books the children opt to take with them to their respective island camps. Bevis, a romantically conceived character, is equipped with his favourite book, the *Odyssey*, as well as *Don Quixote*, a collection of English ballads, a book of Shakespeare's poems and a rhymed translation of *Faust*. The Walker children's preference is for books of a rather more prosaically practical and mundane nature – seamanship, navigation and cookery. Titty's *Robinson Crusoe*, though fictional, purports to be a true autobiographical account of the survival of a shipwrecked and marooned mariner: 'It tells you just what to do on an island,' she says.⁸

In contrast with Bevis and Mark's carefully planned surrender of their boat, the Swallows' shipwreck, which occurs at the beginning of *Swallowdale*, is initially a most unwelcome experience, but one which becomes very positive. The little secluded valley, which able-seaman Titty and her younger brother, the ship's boy, discover high on the moorland on the other side of the lake to their island camp is, according to Titty, the most creatively imaginative of Ransome's child characters, a 'secret' place, 'the most secret valley that ever there was in the world,' she declares with particular emphasis.⁹ Although Titty's notion of 'secrecy' is not explicitly defined, its meaning may be understood from the exposition that follows. *Swallowdale*, she tells her brother, is 'just the place for Peter Duck'; and Peter Duck is the eponymous and imaginary old-time seaman who features in the third book of the Series, a story which, it is claimed, the Swallows and Amazons 'made up' the previous winter; Titty 'had had a big share in his invention'. The little hidden valley of *Swallowdale* is thus associated with story-telling and the child-mediated world of the

⁷ Arthur Ransome, *Swallowdale* (London: Cape, 1961), p.57.

⁸ Arthur Ransome, *Swallows and Amazons* (London: Cape, 1958), p.33.

⁹ *Swallowdale*, p. 64.

imagination.

Swallowdale may have been identified in Ransome's mind with the metaphysical valley featured in the story Bevis recounts to his friend Mark. 'The Story of the Other Side' (Chapter 39) concerns a traveller in a finite world who wishes there could never be an end to his journeys of exploration, and who is tired of always, sooner or later, coming to 'the other side'. After many such adventures the traveller learns of a narrow secret valley, which gives access through a magic door to a world of endless journeying. Leading from the door is a footpath, strewn with magical leaves, on which the secrets of life are recorded. Readers have been introduced to this notion earlier in the story, during the expedition around the lake, when Bevis tells Mark that everything around them has secrets: 'All the trees, and all the stones, and all the flowers.'¹⁰

Bevis, recounting the legend of 'The Other Side', is described 'as pouring out the story from his memory word for word, exactly as he had heard it, like water from a pitcher filled at the spring'.¹¹ When Bevis and Mark realise that their secret sojourn on New Formosa is inevitably coming to an end, Mark ruefully remarks, 'It seems to me we're getting near the hateful "Other Side"'.¹² The Able-Seaman of *Swallows and Amazons* would have sympathised, for she expresses similar sentiments. In her opinion, 'the thing that spoilt *Robinson Crusoe*' was that 'in the end he came home. There never ought to be an end.'¹³

When directly addressing the reader as narrator, Ransome's writing style in the *Swallows and Amazons* series is not generally remarkable for its use of metaphor, but when Titty and Roger return to Horseshoe Cove to tell the others about their discovery of Swallowdale, they too are described as 'pouring out their story'. This particular expression recurs in the fourth book of the series *Winter Holiday* (Chapter 4). Here it is twice used - once with specific reference to Swallowdale - to describe the unified movement of the children about the lakeside, in groups which include the newly befriended town children, Dick, an astronomer, and Dorothea, who writes stories. The metaphor is further developed by simile. Dorothea is described as feeling 'as if she had tumbled into a river and was being swept away in a strong current.' She is subsequently stated to be 'for once, inventing no stories. She

¹⁰ *Bevis*, p.62.

¹¹ *Bevis*, p.385.

¹² *Bevis*, p.470.

¹³ *Swallows and Amazons*, p. 200.

was living in one'.¹⁴

Swallowdale's topography appears to be based on an area west of Coniston well known to Ransome, Beacon Fell, and thus has some reality in fact.¹⁵ On a literal level, the little hidden valley, and its counterpart on the lake shore, Horseshoe Cove, are attendant on *Swallow's* repair and restoration, and fortuitously provide a location which allows the continuance of the children's holiday. The cave within Swallowdale is of course explicitly identified with *Treasure Island*, but as source-books, Stevenson's tale and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* do not achieve their fullest expression until the third book of the series *Peter Duck*.

Swallowdale's more general significance may reside in the exceptional nature of its topography. Looking towards its head, the little valley might have been 'hung in air' for all that can be seen beyond it; all that can be viewed in this direction is the sky overhead. It is only when looking *back* in the direction the children have climbed, that its location in the world of the lake and the surrounding hills can be descried and apprehended. Ransome's implicit metaphorical allusion to Jefferies, through the conception of the little hidden valley, is at once both literary and retrospective. In an influential essay published in 1919, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T. S. Eliot wrote of the importance of the historical sense of literature's past achievements to a writer. Eliot concludes this essay by saying that the creative writer 'is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious not of what is dead, but of what is already living'.¹⁶ It would appear that, for Ransome, *Bevis* was a novel that was 'already living', and that he drew particular inspiration from its vitality of feeling and expression. *Swallowdale* may be regarded as a fusion of ideas, informed by an empathy with the idyllic area of countryside that was the scene of Richard Jefferies' childhood, and which is so memorably described in *Bevis, the Story of a Boy*.

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¹⁴ Arthur Ransome, *Winter Holiday* (London: Cape, 1933), p.60.

¹⁵ Roger Wardale, *Arthur Ransome, Master Storyteller* (Ilkley: Great Northern Books, 2010), p.55.

¹⁶ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1932), pp.13-22.

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Memorial to Richard Oliver Launcelot Jefferies

Andrew Rossabi

Talk given at the ceremony in St. John's churchyard,
Eltham, on 16 March 2012

On behalf of the Richard Jefferies Society I should like to express our thanks to John Kennett and the Eltham Society for arranging this memorial stone to Richard Oliver Launcelot Jefferies, second son and third child of Richard Jefferies and his wife, Jessie, nee Baden. Oliver Launcelot died on 16 March 1885 aged one year eight months—127 years ago to the day.¹ For many years, apart from an inscription on his father's grave in Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing, his only memorial was a small wooden cross on the left-hand side of the footpath to the church here, where he lay buried in a common grave. The Jefferies Society understands that the Eltham Society has spent nearly three years in negotiations with the ecclesiastical authorities in order to place this stone and has borne the brunt of the cost.

Briefly to put Oliver's death into context: Richard, Jessie and their three children moved from West Brighton to Eltham in June or July 1884. Jefferies, already ill with tuberculosis, had been told by his doctors that it was better for him to live inland. The family stayed first for a month in lodgings at 42 High Street with a Mr. George Rathbone before settling at 14 Victoria Road, now 59 Footscray Road, where a blue GLC plaque, unveiled by the Mayor of Greenwich on 17 May 1986, commemorates the author's residence.² Jefferies spent a little under a year in Eltham before again moving, on the advice of a Dr Kidd, in the spring of 1885 to Jarvis Brook, Rotherfield, in Sussex. This Dr Kidd may have been the homeopath Dr Joseph Kidd who had attended Lord Beaconsfield and been present at his death.³

While living at Eltham Jefferies published two major novels, *The Dewy Morn* and *After London*, and numerous essays including 'The

¹ A fact pointed out by John Price, Chairman of the Richard Jefferies Society.

² John Kennett, 'Richard Jefferies in Eltham' (The Eltham Society, 2001), pp.2-3. The booklet provides an excellent short history.

³ Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies, A chronological study* (Oxford: Petton Books, 1994), p.194.

Roofs of London', 'Golden Brown' (about women fruit-pickers in Kent), 'The Modern Thames', 'Under the Acorns', 'The Haunt of the Hare', 'Saint Guido', 'Shooting Poachers', 'The Single-Barrel Gun', 'A Wet Night in London', 'Outside London', 'One of the New Voters', 'Field Sports in Art' and 'Scenes on the London Road', many of which were later collected in the volume *The Open Air* (1885).

Rather than with any creative achievement, however, one suspects Eltham must always have been associated in Jefferies' mind with the premature death of his infant son. His elder son Harold recalled:

It was whilst we lived at Eltham that my little brother Oliver Launcelot died from meningitis or something of that nature which was epidemic. This was a terrible blow to father. His suffering, which was far greater than that of the child, prevented him from attending the funeral, and mother and I were, I believe, alone in the coach to Eltham church. The agonised expression on father's face, as he stood at the open door watching the little cortege slowly move away, haunted my mind for many years.

That reminiscence and particularly the last sentence similarly haunts, I imagine, everyone who reads it. The death of an infant is probably the most grievous blow that be visited upon a family. Oliver's death must have seemed to Jefferies the final hammer-blow of Fate, and finished once and for all any idea he may still have had of a benevolent providence or kind heavenly father. 'The tomb cries aloud to us,' he had written in *The Story of My Heart* in uncanny anticipation of his own bereavement. 'For grief there is no known consolation. It is useless to fill our hearts with bubbles.'⁴ The notion not merely of a lack of a directing intelligence, but of an implacably hostile Destiny, an actively cruel Nature, seems embodied in his descriptions of the savage winter in 'Hours of Spring' and 'Winds of Heaven'. Then living at Crowborough, 'high-perched'⁵ at 700 feet above sea-level, he spoke of:

The air ... sharp as a scythe—a rude barbarian giant wind knocking at the walls of the house with a vast club, so that we crept sideways even to the windows to look out upon the world.

and of:

⁴ Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart* [1883] (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.124.

⁵ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work* [1909] (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.157.

the sky black and faintly yellow—brutal colours of despotism—heaven striking with clenched fist.⁶

But to end on a more hopeful note. In five days' time it will be the vernal equinox, the first day of spring, and Jefferies' writings are always full of hope. At the end of *The Amateur Poacher* he evoked 'morning on the hills, when hope is as wide as the world'.⁷ In *Nature Near London* he recounted how as he was travelling on 'the smooth express' to Brighton, soon after passing Redhill, a breeze came in through the carriage window and told him that the South Downs were drawing near. 'There is always hope in the hills', he wrote:

Hope dwells there, somewhere, mayhap, in the breeze, in the sward, or the pale cups of the harebells.⁸

In 'Out of Doors in February', walking in the fields during a warm spell, while the waters murmured in the ditches and the rooks cawed incessantly, he heard a lark ascending:

One ... rises, singing as he soars. The notes fall from the air over the dark wet earth, over the dark grass, and broken withered fern of the hedges, and listening to them it seems for a moment spring. There is sunshine in the song: the lark and the light are one. He gives us a few minutes of summer in February days.⁹

He descanted on a fresh green blade of corn:

Pure colour almost always gives the idea of fire, or rather it is perhaps as if a light shone through as well as colour itself. The fresh green blade of corn is like this, so pellucid, so clear and pure in its green as to seem to shine with colour.¹⁰

It was at Eltham during the long hot dry summer of 1884 that he used to take his folding-stool and sit in the shadow of some elms and gaze at a cabbage-field overgrown with poppies—green cabbage, scarlet poppies, and scores of white butterflies:

⁶ Richard Jefferies, 'Hours of Spring', *Field and Hedgerow* [1889] (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895), p.8.

⁷ Richard Jefferies, *The Amateur Poacher* [1879] (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, n.d., 1911), p.275.

⁸ Richard Jefferies, 'To Brighton', *Nature Near London* [1883] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1901), p.207.

⁹ Richard Jefferies, 'Out of Doors in February', *The Open Air* [1885] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1904), p.182.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

To me, colour is a sort of food; every spot of colour is a drop of wine to the spirit.¹¹

To return to 'Out of Doors in February': the green blade of corn gave Jefferies the idea of the underworld, the darkness under the earth, from which the green blades of the living corn sprang.

It is this mystery of growth and life, of beauty, and sweetness, and colour, starting forth from the clods that gives the corn its power over me. Somehow I identify myself with it; I live again as I see it. Year by year it is the same, and when I see it I feel that I have once more entered on a new life.¹²

I hope you will agree that this beautiful passage makes a fitting epitaph for Oliver Launcelot.



Photograph by David Shaw
16th March 2012

¹¹ Richard Jefferies, 'Outside London', *The Open Air*, op. cit., p.214.

¹² Richard Jefferies, 'Out of Doors in February', *The Open Air*, op. cit., p.190.

From Drought to Storm: meteorological phenomena at the time of Jefferies' death

Rebecca Welshman

The popularisation of nature in the late nineteenth century was recognised in an anonymous article in the *Daily News* in the autumn of the year that Jefferies died. The article observes that the coloured leaves of the woods were being visited more regularly by people from the city, and becoming a popular fashion accessory:

It seems that there is sufficient number of enthusiasts for woodland scenery to justify the proprietors of a four-horse coach in continuing to run twice a day throughout the present month for the mere sake of exhibiting to its passengers the autumnal glories of the foliage in Epping Forest.¹

The article discusses the lack of attention given to the autumn by poets such as Byron, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and even Keats, whose 'Ode to Autumn' fails to mention autumn. 'The truth,' writes the author, 'is that the foliage of late autumn has burst suddenly into fashion among us. The ladies now wear real autumn leaves in their bonnets, besides displaying them in sprays upon the left shoulder, or cunningly tucked into belts, where but a few years since the wearing of such decorations would have been thought strange and eccentric.' To accompany this surge of interest a new trade in autumn leaves also developed. Bunches of leaves were gathered and sold—described as a 'branch of industry absolutely unknown only five years ago—now afford[ing] employment to thousands of poor people.'²

Yet although Jefferies' work had contributed to this popularity, his experience of and imaginative engagement with the natural world was far more than a purely aesthetic experience. Through observation Jefferies sought to blend the experience of nature with philosophical thought—a phenomenon that for the most part of his life sustained his belief in a more profound experience of living. This conviction was tested during his later years when he endured chronic pain and exhaustion with the development of tuberculosis. Through bed-ridden

¹ *Daily News*, Oct 17 1887.

² *ibid.*

episodes, when he had to be content only to look out of his window across the fields, rather than walk among them, Jefferies pursued the reversionary autobiographical work *Sunlife* that he wished to be published as an improved version of *The Story of My Heart*. In his notes to this unpublished work Jefferies experiments with developing imaginative connections between his physical person and the metaphysical reaches of his thought. In May 1887 he wrote in a notebook:

I said to a thought 'make wood' and it made a piece of wood: I said 'travel on thought and make wood' and it travelled on, making trees of all kinds, and I forgot it, but it still went on.³

Jefferies' not-knowing whether his thought would 'continue' in some form, once his physical body had passed away, is expressed in 'Hours of Spring' (1886), the last article he wrote in his own hand. The essay records Jefferies' consideration of his own, at least physical, departure from the natural world:

I think of the drift of time, and I see the apple bloom coming and the blue veronica in the grass. A thousand thousand buds and leaves and flowers and blades of grass, things to note day by day, increasing so rapidly that no pencil can put them down and no book hold them, not even to number them—and how to write the thoughts they give? All these without me—how can they manage without me?⁴

It was Jefferies' apprehension that he might leave the world too early, before he had fully attempted to understand and explain the deeper meaning of existence. 'How can they manage without me?' is more an incredulous statement than a question: how is it fair that the disparate multitudes of nature will continue indifferently on, without the man who so carefully observed and documented them? Yet Jefferies died only a year later, in the early hours of Sunday 14 August 1887. Nature's indifference to his passing was what he had envisaged—'they go on without me ... and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill.'⁵ Yet, curiously, the week following his death brought about an unprecedented sequence of meteorological and natural events that caused unusual changes in the atmosphere and environment across Europe, and were remembered for a long time afterwards.

The summer of 1887 had been one of the longest dry spells on record. An article in *The Horsham Advertiser*, a local West Sussex

³ Folio 47, notebook XXIV. Unpublished.

⁴ Richard Jefferies, 'Hours of Spring', *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans and Co, 1889), p.5.

⁵ *ibid.*

newspaper, published weekly, records on July 2 a 'drought' when people were reported to be breaking bye-laws of the local water board by using water on their gardens.⁶ In *Jackson's Oxford Journal* it is recorded that in mid-Shropshire 'the weather continues hot and dry. Water-courses and pits are drying up. All pastures are parched; no green luxuriant grass is to be seen anywhere; no oasis in the desert'.⁷ It appears that this weather continued well into August, with another article on Saturday 13 August, the day before Jefferies' death, identifying this period of prolonged hot weather as unprecedented:

Who can remember such a delightful summer as we are now enjoying? It is true that rain would just now "come as a boon and blessing to men" (like some famous pens which I am not going to advertise here), but still it is glorious weather, the like of which, in our fickle climate, we very rarely see. In making our arrangements for out-door amusements we scarcely take into consideration the probability of a wet day; rain seems to be a thing of the past; and we can merrily start on a journey without being encumbered with umbrellas or mackintoshes. The clerk of the weather is, indeed, deserving of our heartiest thanks ... But there is a gloomier and darker side to the picture. The land is thirsty for water and grassy meadows are becoming quite brown and parched. At Rusper, Kingsfold, the supply of water is getting very short, and things will no doubt assume a very serious aspect if we have many more weeks of this drought.⁸

The drought in the Horsham and Worthing district is recorded to have lasted 33 days, while in other parts of the country, such as Dungeness it was 35 days. Across the country rainfall for the summer was well below average: at Liverpool rainfall was only 18 percent of the average expected, while Scilly had only 0.35 inches of rain in 37 days.

By the end of July and into August other newspapers began to relate the concerns of farming communities across the country that crops were suffering as a result of the drought. For instance, a report from the Midlands notes that wheat ears had not filled properly, and that the wheat harvest was not going to be as promising as hoped. This placed greater pressure on the harvest of root crops to be more favourable—yet the dry season had led to root crops being in a 'critical condition':

That condition, unless there should come very soon a plentiful supply of rain, cannot fail to become rapidly worse. Disease of many kinds is appearing. In the Swedes may be seen the ominous withering of plants

⁶ *The Horsham Advertiser*, July 2 1887.

⁷ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, July 30, 1887.

⁸ 'From grave to gay, from lively to severe', *The Horsham Advertiser*, August 13 1887.

whose root, on closer examination, will be found to be sawn off just below the surface of the soil by a nasty fat grub.⁹

Another article in the *Daily News* on Monday August 15 states that:

the drought has told so severely on grass land that most of it looks as brown and lifeless as the bare stubble-fields from which the corn has been cleared. ... Turnips on most lands are, as shown by yellow and flagging leaves, suffering positive injury from the drought, and the fly and the aphid are actively siding with the adverse weather. Beans in many places have suffered very badly from the black aphid.

Curiously, the weather report in the Special Sunday Edition of *Lloyd's Weekly* on August 14, the day that Jefferies died, suggests that the dry and cloudless weather had begun to show signs of breaking, thus marking a significant change from the sequence of the previous weeks and months. *Lloyd's* states 'with a decreasing temperature the fine season has nevertheless continued throughout the week over England, although there is now every indication of wet to come.'¹⁰ The same paper records there being only two and a half hours sunshine at Westminster on the Friday 12, compared to twelve hours on the Tuesday and nine and a half on the Monday, and forecasts 'some rain.'¹¹

However, the change in the weather not only brought rain, but also unprecedented meteorological events, such as the sudden onset of wintry weather. A unique sequence of headlines in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on Tuesday August 16 1887 begins with, 'A Remarkable Change in the Weather', describing how crops have been damaged by sharp frosts in Westmoreland over the past few nights: 'As much as three or four degrees have been registered and many potato and other plants have been killed. The occurrence of several degrees of frost in August is without precedent.' On the same page the *Pall Mall Gazette* records a 'tremendous cyclone' in the south of France—the result of a storm that began on the Saturday night at nine o'clock and lasted two hours, ending just before Jefferies' death at 2.30am on Sunday morning. This cyclone was of remarkable velocity, and is described as follows:

Large hailstones fell with such fury that the crops were almost totally destroyed. At Homps houses were demolished, roofs were torn open, the vines were cut to pieces, and large trees were uprooted and broken. At Redorte the consequences were more serious, and eight persons

⁹ Jackson's *Oxford Journal*, July 29 1887.

¹⁰ *Lloyd's Weekly newspaper, Special Sunday Edition*, August 14 1887.

¹¹ *ibid.*

were killed beneath the ruins of their houses ... The River Aude also became swollen and agitated, and several boats were thrown on the quays and dashed to pieces. Such a hurricane has not been known within the memory of any of the inhabitants of the locality, and the damage extends over a length of three miles of the district.¹²

If not remarkable enough, the same page of the *Pall Mall Gazette* also records an article from the *Daily Telegraph* about the ‘curious phenomenon’ of a plague of ants in Nancy; a supposed forerunner of the storm:

the insects were immense in size, some having wings, but the majority wingless. They fell in such large numbers that the inhabitants thought that they were having a repetition of one of the plagues of Egypt. The thick black flakes kept pouring from the air from five until six o’clock in the evening, and every district in the city was soon covered with what has been described, for want of a better expression, as “living black hail.”¹³

A correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, writing on the evening of Tuesday 16 August speaks of the ‘remarkable meteorological change’ that came over Paris that day:

The apparently limitless supply of sunshine with which we have been regaled without stint for the past month or thereabouts suddenly ran out, and there was nothing but clouds, storm, rain, and damp boulevards in its stead ... we are now evidently entering upon the period when the weather is about to break ... Rain fell there in torrents last night, and many buildings were struck by lightning. Trees were torn up by their roots out of the parks and gardens, the chairs outside the cafes were whirled away, tents were blown down, and chimney-stacks, large portions of church steeples, and gables were dashed to the ground.¹⁴

In England the night of Tuesday 16 August brought thunderstorms recorded as ‘general throughout England’, affecting Manchester, Kent, Sussex, Surrey, the Lake District, and Wolverhampton.¹⁵ The storms caused numerous deaths, buildings to catch fire, and several hours of rain that was described as ‘the bursting of a waterspout’.¹⁶ This unsettled weather continued into the week. In the early hours of Wednesday morning loud storms were heard over London, which carried on throughout Wednesday, with lightning that was described

¹² *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 16 1887.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Telegram sent to *Daily News* by the Paris Correspondent on the evening of Tuesday 16th August in *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 18 1887.

¹⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, August 18 1887.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

as ‘continuous’ and peals of thunder that were ‘unusually large.’¹⁷ An article in the *Leeds Mercury* records that these storms caused seven deaths by lightning strike in the space of a few hours, with widespread destruction and chaos to buildings, transport, and fruit. Apples were dashed from their trees in Yorkshire by hail, while in Liverpool a large cargo ship capsized in the dock. Twenty-three hours of rain were recorded in Cheshire, while in London, at the height of the storm, Christ Church, Endall Street, was struck twice by lightning between half past seven and eight o’clock, just as people were gathered for the evening service. The following account of this event is taken from the *Leeds Mercury*:

The steeple was struck, and a piece of stone weighing about a hundredweight fell into the workhouse-yard adjoining, and alighted on a timekeeper’s box, in which a man was sitting. Smaller pieces of stone fell, some into the yard, striking a man on the head, and others fell into the street. The noise caused by the falling masonry greatly terrified the worshippers, and the Rev. Mr. Mahooney, who at the time was reading the prayers, was compelled to bring the service to a premature conclusion. Some little time afterwards the roof of the church was again struck by lightning. A hole was made in the roof, through which water poured into the building, and the woodwork was set alight, but was extinguished by the rain. When the steeple was damaged the bell-ringer was at work; but though he was covered with falling mortar he escaped unhurt.¹⁸

At Chichester, West Sussex, twenty miles from ‘Sea View’ in Goring where Jefferies’ family and friends were preparing for his funeral, the end of the drought was marked by rain, lightning, and a burning hayrick at Rudgwick. The storm is reported to have caused significant damage to the Chichester Police Court, where the brickwork of the arch that supported the fire alarm bells was struck by lightning and knocked down, along with much of the lead work on the roof.¹⁹ A further article in the *Sussex Daily News* describes the impact of these sudden changes in the weather, highlighting them to be distinctly unusual from other summer thunderstorms, and possessing an altogether more virulent character:

The drought has terminated with a vengeance. Nature has rushed from one extreme to the other within a few hours’ space. A season of dryness which has not had an equal in length of duration for some twenty years or more, has just been brought to a close by a downpour, the heaviest which has been recorded for a decade. The rainstorm,

¹⁷ *Sussex Daily News*, August 18 1887.

¹⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, August 19 1887.

¹⁹ *Sussex Daily News*, Thursday August 18 1887.

which was accompanied by atmospheric disturbances of the most violent character, spent the worst of its fury upon the southeastern portions of England, the centre of its energies being situate above the metropolis. The terrific deluge was heralded by the heavy sullen clouds which the merest tyro in meteorology could guess were charged with electric fluid. When these clouds yielded beneath the weight of waters the thunder rolled and rumbled with a deafening resonance and the forked lightning flashed with a vividness almost blinding. The rain descended literally in torrents.²⁰

Within three hours rainfall reached two inches, equalling a twelfth of the annual rainfall expected for the Sussex area.

However, in villages where the water supply had all but run out, the rain proved very welcome. For the villagers the breaking of the drought was a relief, but for farmers it was described as nothing short of a miracle. The root crops which had suffered for want of rain were restored—the postponed break in the weather leaving farmers just enough time to gather in their harvests of cereal crops. The *Sussex Daily News* describes agriculturalists rejoicing at the break in the weather, stating that ‘the advent of a change has been hailed by farmers as a very fortunate occurrence [with] what has fallen having given hope that pasturage may revive.’²¹ The rains caused farmers to ‘look with brighter prospects to their crops of turnips and swedes, where they have not already been destroyed by the sun’s scorching rays.’²² Strange fluctuations in temperature and weather patterns continued during the days before Jefferies’ funeral. For instance, on Thursday August 18 there was report of a ‘sharp thunderstorm’ over Bournemouth and ‘in the course of half an hour there was dead calm in the bay’.²³ In Lincolnshire, the atmosphere—after having been warm and dry—was described as suddenly becoming ‘very cold’²⁴ after the breaking of a storm.

On Saturday August 20 Richard Jefferies was buried at Broadwater Cemetery, in what a close friend, J.W. North, termed ‘the gentlest, softest, sunny rain that I ever knew’.²⁵ The rest of North’s letter reads:

He was borne along the path to his grave in the grass, as the last part of the service for the dead was read, well and solemnly, and we left him forever. The large tears from heaven fell fast and thick, and over and over again came to me the saying ‘Happy are the dead that the

²⁰ *Sussex Daily News*, August 19 1887.

²¹ *Sussex Daily News*, August 18 1887.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 18 1887.

²⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, August 19, 1887.

²⁵ Letter by J.W. North to the *Standard* in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 27 1887.

rain rains on.’ The modest home-made wreath of clematis and myrtle that my wife had sent pleased me by its happy symbolism, for, as the myrtle is, so will his memory be ‘for ever green.’

After Jefferies was buried the unique series of meteorological disturbances did not cease. In fact, it was recorded in the *Sussex Daily News* that at 11 o’clock on the Saturday morning—the day that Jefferies was buried—a tornado was witnessed at Shoreham, Sussex, on the River Adar. The account reads:

About 11 o’clock on Saturday morning a singular phenomenon was witnessed at Shoreham on the River Adar. A kind of tornado was observed coming up the river; and as it proceeded on its course it increased considerably in velocity, causing the boats on the stream to rock violently. At the period of its greatest force, if such a term be applicable to this atmospheric disturbance – it drove the waters of the river together in a heap, with the result that a yacht in the path of the storm was thrown over on its side ... the whirlwind carried away a number of pailings, sheets, etc in connection with the boat sheds. The tornado finally expended itself in the direction of the coastguard station. Crowds of people witnessed the strange phenomenon.²⁶

So came the dramatic end of a drought that had threatened the livelihoods of farmers across Europe, with meteorological disturbances which defied weather predictions. We can imagine how this weather might have been befitting of the passing of Jefferies—a man who dreamt of ‘another universe where things are forming—opposite to this where they are being destroyed’²⁷; that his unrealised hopes and thoughts might somehow have been embodied in the ferocious storms which were already gathering over France as he passed away. Perhaps Jefferies himself would have been intrigued to learn that the natural world, in a curious sort of way, did not continue on in the same way as it had done when he had been alive. For an author who spent more than half of his career writing in the interests of British agriculture, the conclusion of these events was perhaps appropriate. We might even imagine that Jefferies’ worry—what he termed ‘the old, old error: I love the earth, therefore the earth loves me’—might in part have been alleviated if he could have imagined this quasi-reciprocal recognition of his departure. Yet perhaps we should also consider the occurrence of Jefferies’ death at the end of the drought as an intriguing coincidence, for would not the impish spirit in Jefferies—had he been given the chance—have sought about helping the farmers, but causing trouble for the clergy? Providing water for the thirsty villagers, but causing

²⁶ *Sussex Daily News*, Monday August 22 1887.

²⁷ Folio 28 Notebook XXIV (May-June 1887) (unpublished).

havoc for the London transport systems?²⁸ Whatever our interpretation, to all those who knew Jefferies it was unlikely that the spectacular meteorological events following his death and his funeral went by unnoticed. To know of them now can perhaps help us to better understand this strange, transitional period of time in August 1887.

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²⁸ It was known that Jefferies appreciated a joke. For instance, an article in the *Sussex Daily News* in 1887 reports a mistake in a magazine concerning the spelling of *The Gamekeeper at Home*: "Le Siecle, in alluding to the demise of the just dead Richard Jefferies describes him as the author of "The Gaming House Master at Home" (Le Patron de Jen Chez-Lui) and fixes the home of his birth in "The Weltshire". How the genial, patient dead and gone author of that delightful tome "The Gamekeeper at Home" would have enjoyed such a joke! But alas! He may not laugh any more on earth." (*Sussex Daily News*, August 23 1887).

Jefferies' Centenary

*E.J. Rogers**

This hand-written account of the 1948 Jefferies' Centenary Lecture was found amongst the papers of Samuel J. Looker. It was likely the basis for 'A Jefferies' Centenary Memory', written by E.J. Rogers, and published in *Aryan Path* (Bombay), July 1950, vol 21, pp 308-310. Rogers published a letter concerning Jefferies' mysticism in *Country Life* (1964) in which he gave his address as Oxhey, Hertfordshire. Rogers was a member of The Richard Jefferies Society.

I wish a keeper, dressed for the field, had been present at the Jefferies Centenary Lecture at Day House Farm on June 19th. Jefferies owed much to keeper Haylock.

About one hundred people gathered under the big open cart shed on a wet, windy afternoon. They were mostly members of the Workers' Educational Association from neighbouring Swindon, others were residential country folk and sportsmen. Some literary folk were present and I saw one man of genius. There was an interesting minority of young people who looked like students but there were some who looked like farmers and had walked across the fields. They all sat around on straw bales including the central figure of the Mayor of Swindon, but the open farmyard, the fields beyond, and the swift assault of the summer rain, quietly placed all in the background of Nature's equality.

When the earnest voice of Mr. Looker read to us of the beauty of the raindrops it was a happy coincidence that a passing shower made the puddles dance. The milkers passing to their thatched byre looked at the assembly with detached interest rather than with the self satisfied stare of the townsman, and the lowing from the byre afterwards and the clink of the milkers' full pails going to the dairy was all sincere music to those who could spare a thought for one who dreaded an over-industrialised countryside. After Mr. Looker had given half of his talk a blackbird perched on the top of a tall pole, probably used for drying rick covers, and sang as only a blackbird can, for the rest of the afternoon. "No sound of voice or flute can equal the blackbird", wrote Jefferies, and we listened to the same slow deliberate notes that he heard from another blackbird in his youth amongst these surrounding fields. The air was still, as it is when we have Summer rain, not another bird song, we expected the thrush, the storm-cock, from his

* From a manuscript in the Samuel Looker archive.

elm top, but we had the blackbird of Jefferies. Hardy would have loved this scene.

In his early youth, Jefferies spent much of his time with the keeper from Burderop and wandered about “doing nothing” with a gun under his arm, but “doing nothing” as we know meant something more, the body may not be exerting itself beyond the act of walking, but the eyes, the sense, and the intelligence is quickened with the live observation. A man looks to see what he will see, not what he knows he will find, as a man does who runs his eyes down the columns of a ledger, or who performs a soulless mechanical task. Nature is always full of the movement of life, the mind is kept alert, old ideas cannot make us see through the mind’s eye. Seeing is an art that the countryman retains but which the townsman loses as his vision is narrowed to his immediate surroundings, he has no background, no perspective; he peers rather than sees. A genius cannot have this type of eye.

Life begins and ends in a field, it is the history of time, it is the background against which we see events, the things we see are real, the things we do are practical. Jefferies, like Shakespeare, like any countryman, learnt unconsciously from this, he used his knowledge later, and that knowledge was not of the dust of libraries but of the green leaf symbol of the fertile imagination. When thought becomes dogmatic or set, life stultifies.

What background has the townsman? Nothing is real, the vision is limited by brick walls, his life is “the thing other people do” around him, it is artificial, more and more he becomes limited, he surrenders life for an abstraction, the cinema film is not worth five minutes of watching a rookery.

Although anybody cannot fail to enjoy reading Jefferies, the philosophy and message of this country genius will also be of interest. Every countryman is a philosopher, you may have to know him years before he reveals himself and then perhaps only by a chance remark, but the depth is there. The sportsman of today who wanders like Jefferies “doing nothing” is fast becoming more of a thinking man than his predecessor. The limited amount of game robs him of action, he must stand and wait, the echo of his report must be forgotten before he moves on, he is becoming quietly contemplative like the angler, and there are grand moments for thought - you watch a sunset as you wait for a pigeon. Afterwards as you hear the sap hiss in the green ash logs like those on the keeper’s hearth in the cottage in the sheltered coombe, if you still feel these thoughts, reach to your shelf for Richard Jefferies; it will be like listening to another sportsman.

From an Accident by a Runaway Horse

In Memory of Ellen Jefferies
Who Died 10 February 1851

Mary Jefferies

Richard Jefferies' sister Ellen was killed on Coate Road by a runaway horse and gig when she was only 5 years and 6 months old. Richard was 2 years and 3 months at the time. Mary Jefferies was their unmarried aunt born on 12 January 1815. She remained living with her parents at High Street, Swindon and died before her father on 24 January 1862 aged 47. Ellen was buried at Holyrood Church.

Lovely flower, young in bloom,
Call'd so early to thy tomb,
Oft shall thy remembrance, dear,
Cause to flow the bitter tear.

Ellen, dear, for ever fled,
Early number's with the dead;
Call'd from such a world of care,
Tastes eternal blessings there.

O'er the bed where thou was't laid,
Thy weeping mother's tears were shed;
Thy father's heart in anguish heav'd;
And every friend around us griev'd.

Lamented child, a long, a sad farewell,
Thy virtues on my mind shall ever dwell;
For though no more in beauty bright,
Thy form shall bless thy parent's sight;

Still the fond hope will on my bosom rise,
The sweet bud of earth will blossom in the skies,
Be this important truth on all imprest,
Though Heaven's decrees are hid, we know them to be best.

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