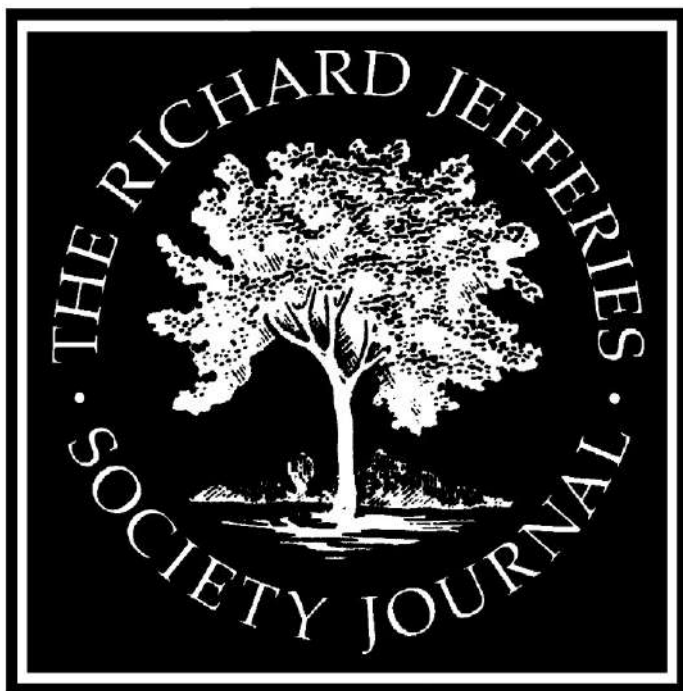




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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Its activities include the Annual General Meeting and Birthday Lecture, winter meetings, summer outings, special events, and the publication of a summer and winter *Journal*, 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).

President	<i>Andrew Rossabi</i>
Hon. Secretary	<i>Jean Saunders</i> <i>The Old Mill</i> <i>Mill Drive</i> <i>Foulsham</i> <i>Norfolk NR20 5RB</i>

Website	http://richardjefferiessociety.co.uk
Email	info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk

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

Submissions, preferably in electronic format, should be sent to the Honorary Secretary at the above address. MSS and correspondence for publication will be acknowledged but cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The Editors are Peter Robins and Jean Saunders.

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There is a London theme to this edition of the *Journal*.



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Sipping the Season

Richard Jefferies

First published in The World on 7 June 1876. Unsigned but there is a note in Richard Jefferies' 1876 notebook – Folio 72 – that mentions 'Sipping the Season' followed by a note on the Royal Academy.

The rarest element of feminine beauty is perhaps a good complexion; at all events, it comes next to a handsome mouth. Without the complexion, neither lovely eyes, hair, nor regular features produce their full effect. Sweetest of all things are the rich lips, pouting, scarlet; but even these lose half their charm unless the complexion – the background of the picture – be clear, and exhibit that velvety softness and peach-like bloom seen on the perfect cheek. To study the catalogue of the Royal Academy is most fatiguing work; it is pleasanter by far to sit down in the first saloon, facing the entrance from the staircase, and watch for living pictures, coloured by the dainty hand of Nature. For it must be owned that if good complexions are rare this season, so also are attempts to supply deficiencies by art. There was a time, not long since, when too many wore the yellow hair, a yard long, of Chaucer's Prioress – too many to look quite genuine; and there was a time when a high percentage of brilliant complexions might have been counted. It is not so now, and all honour to the fashion which has the courage to wear real hair, and to have the skin untouched by cosmetics. The ancients well knew the charm of a beautiful complexion. Venus herself was recognised by the brilliant eyes and rosy neck – the delicate intermingling of the red rose with the white – and the union of the two has led to the social triumph of many a belle. Occasionally there comes through the doorway one so far removed from the influence of fashion as to appear with a theatrical complexion. As the orator of old declared that he spoke above the natural tones of his voice in order that all might hear, so the actress, that all may see and admire, is permitted to heighten the tints of the cheek, and to bring out the brilliance of the eye. The moment a woman so ill-advised or ignorant of true art as to *wear* this complexion enters the saloon all eyes are for a moment upon her, but the contrast is too striking, the effect too loud, thus unsupported, and the smile of detection succeeds to the first surprise of admiration.

The atmosphere grows a little oppressive here; there is a sameness in the costumes, a dullness, not to say a dreariness, an absence of colour, and the eye longs for relief from the sombre tone of the majority of dresses. A streak of

bright yellow, a passing flash of crimson, even a simple *white* would be welcome in the mass of dark heavy hues. The 'fine lines' of a flowing train are lacking also, awkward perhaps to the wearer, but grateful to the looker-on, tired of short close-fitting skirts. Somehow there arises a sense of a vacuum of colour and graceful outline – a void; and it would be a pleasure to see it filled by some striking figure. Sad for the world indeed if, as is partially the case already, all ladies must wear sombre dresses precisely alike, just as miserable man extinguishes his individuality under a high hat! Sitting here, mark what an advantage the dark eye has over the blue and gray; that is, at first sight. In a crowd, in the street, the black eye must be seen; it delivers its fire with fatal penetration, and prints itself upon the mind. It has hardly any limit as to range; distance merely lends the additional charm of uncertainty as to its expression and the meaning in its depths. But the blue and gray have their revenge at close quarters. There is an infinite variety of expression in the blue when gazing into it, tone follows tone, and shade succeeds to shade, now full of sparkling mirth, now tender with incipient tears; while black eyes retain an almost fixed appearance, and it is difficult to fathom their meaning, so easily do they conceal the thoughts.

Phryne stands unabashed in all the glory of her unadorned charms, fresh from her bath, still holding the green and brown sea-weed in her hand, wet and glittering, strongly marked against the hue of her limbs. The hard rock behind conveys no idea of concealment, of retreat possible if surprised; she faces all beautiful, but bold. Such the painted picture. Now watch. Some less pretentious effort near has attracted the attention of a dainty nineteenth-century beauty; she steps a little nearer to the wall than is customary to view it better, and her profile comes just below the wanton's knee. Who, possessed of an atom of taste, could hesitate a moment in awarding the golden apple to the modestly attired? The delicious little hat, as it were tossed a trifle on one side of the pretty head, trimmed with delicate white face, is itself the perfection of taste and full of innocent temptation. The hair, not quite gold, nor yet quite brown, but sometimes one and sometimes the other, as the light and shadow fall upon it, is unassumingly plaited up in the simplest and yet most elegant manner.

Visit the much-condemned National Gallery, and look at the face of Titian's Venus as she gazes up at Adonis. The face only, remember. This is a face like that, devoid of the eager expression, and with an eye of a truer gray. Yet one can imagine this hair also looped up with pearls, like the queen of lovers. Only in this face there is a refinement, a delicacy, a modesty and retirement, exquisitely bewitching in itself. The eyes alone are just in the smallest degree restless – 'Mine eyes are gray and bright, and quick in turning.' She points with an ungloved hand at something that strikes her, and for a moment the white wrist, small and rounded, peeps forth with the blue veins, like the 'blue-veined

violets.' A dress, the very acme of taste, fitting the shape, yet not so close as to reveal unpleasantly the contour of the limbs, or to obstruct the walk, quiet, and yet not sombre; feet shod in the tiniest of boots – these complete a picture as far superior to the Phryne in all that at once steals away the heart and satisfies the mind as life itself is to dead paint. The one, excellent as it may be as a painting, we hardly remember; the other lingers in the memory and will not be driven away. Let the cynics sneer as they may, the womanhood of to-day is far sweeter and more excellent than the types which have survived of woman in the ancient world. Here at least there has been progress.

The crowd gets thicker; there is dust and heat; the open air will be pleasanter, and we are free to move. Society of late has liberated itself a good deal from the old trammels of particular times and seasons. Certain periods, more or less defined, must always be set apart. Nature herself divides the year into summer and winter; but nothing is more fatal to enjoyment than restriction as to hours and minutes. Watches and timetables dispel every illusion, however sweet. The sun will not shine at any given hour; the sky is not deeply blue at a fixed time. You must seize the fortunate moment, pause and let it exhaust itself regardless of other matters, if you would be happy. Idleness itself to be pleasant must be artistic, unfettered, free as air. Passing outwards the eye can hardly avoid noting the monotony of colour in the horses waiting here for their owners. There are fifty harnessed in pairs to open carriages; out of all that number only three are gray, the rest some shade of chestnut or bay. In the second line there are two black, or nearly black; but the preponderating majority is as before. In the Row it is the same – ten chestnut or bay to one of any other colour. Certainly that hue is capable of a beautiful gloss, and has high claims, but after a while it grows wearisome. Why such a dead sameness? Why not a little more variety? Must everybody ride behind a bay or chestnut? There is some originality in the carriages – not, perhaps, always in good taste; but the revival of even the ancient yellow-painted family-coach, driven by a coachman with powdered wig, gives some animation to the scene. It must be admitted that to sit in a carriage well, simple as it looks, is in itself an art – an art in which no one can approach a highbred English lady. It is not easy to hit that exact *pose* – something which in reclining without lying down, something which is calm and still without stiffness. Grace in such a position must *grow* with the person; it cannot be assumed nor taught in a few lessons. It is more difficult even than riding on horseback well. A more trying time for outdoor apparel could not have been possible than the late weather. Green foliage and bright sunshine, with the joyful song of birds hidden in the thickets of the Park, would not harmonise with fur-lined jackets and heavy fur carriage-rugs. Yet the bitter wind forbade summer garments, and taste was tried to the utmost in the endeavour to get something light and cheerful in appearance, but warm and

comfortable in reality.

The horses, as they are driven round and round, always put one in mind of the unfortunate human creatures who, either from necessity or choice, make a business of the season. It is so much more amusing to wander hither and thither, sipping and laughing a little as one goes. 1876, if not distinguished as yet by the invention of any extraordinary novelty in bonnets – distinguished, indeed, rather by its tameness in dress – exhibits an advance in one respect. It is natural, or as nearly natural as fashion can be. To see women walk upright like the old ideal, ‘Straight as an arrow, upright as a bolt,’ is a great relief after the affected mincing gait and the stoop of former years. By the bye, why does not some clever artist gives us a study of ‘back hair’? There is a certain bonnet-shop in Regent-street, in front of which upon a sunny afternoon may be seen a cluster ten deep of eager butterflies. Sketched from behind this cluster would be charming.



Illustration by E E Briscoe

Published in *Richard Jefferies' London* (Lutterworth Press, 1944)

After London: unfinished masterpiece?

George Miller

In his life of William Morris J.W. Mackail writes:

After London, the unfinished masterpiece of Richard Jefferies, was a book that Morris afterwards was never weary of praising. It put into definite shape, with a mingling of elusive romance and minute detail that was entirely after his heart, much that he had himself imagined; and he thought that it represented very closely what might really happen in a dispeopled England.

He quotes a letter of 13th May [1885] to Georgiana Burne-Jones in which Morris affirms his belief that 'civilization is doomed to destruction, and probably before very long':

... what a joy it is to think of! and how often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking the place of wretched hypocrisies. With that thought in mind all the history of the past is lighted up and lives again for me.¹

In an earlier letter to the same recipient (28th April 1885) Morris describes a journey through lovely countryside on the Carlisle to Settle railway and adds: 'I read a queer book called *After London* coming down: I rather like it: absurd hopes curled around my heart as I read it. I rather wish I were thirty years younger: I want to see the game played out.'²

These passages raise several questions. How much did Morris know of Jefferies' work as a whole, or was this a solitary chance encounter? Did he (as the editor of the collected letters suggests) simplify, possibly distort, Jefferies' vision, moulding it to his own despair and rejection of 'progress' and 'civilisation'? And finally was the book generally known, or believed to be, 'unfinished'?³

Certainly this conclusion was prevalent in the reviews. The *Athenaeum* comments: 'the story is incomplete, and we hope in no great while to hear the end of it.'⁴ The *Spectator's* reviewer agrees that 'the story is an unfinished one' and adds: 'we have read the whole book with much interest, which would have been increased had Mr Jefferies given us a map showing the changes he

¹ *The Life of William Morris*, J.W. Mackail (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), vol. II p.144.

² *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, edited by Norman Kelvin (Princeton University Press 1987), vol. II p.426.

³ The surviving pages of the MS are headed *The Relapse of Britain into Barbarism*. The latter part is missing. (*Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographic Study*, George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, [Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993], D3. Later references to this book are abbreviated to MM.)

⁴ *Athenaeum* no.2998 p.463, 11 April 1885.

supposes to have taken place, with the route of Felix's journey. Perhaps when he completes the tale, he may be induced to do so.⁵ Others simply find the inconclusive ending unsatisfactory without implying a sequel. 'The story, which serves as a thread to connect the pictures of scenery and manners, is not uninteresting, but unfortunately it breaks off abruptly. The book ends in the midst of the hero's adventures.'⁶ 'The kind of novel that permeates Mr Jefferies' jingle of description, as a hunter might force his way through the wooded England of the future, comes to no kind of conclusion at all – not even so much as a catastrophe as Mr James sometimes admits.'⁷

Of those so far traced only the *Pall Mall Gazette* review endorses the conclusion as it stands: 'Finally the romance ends just where it ought to end – nowhere in particular: with the true instinct of a genuine artist Jefferies refuses to let us know what exists beyond the bounds of his own canvas. He paints us his picture, and when he has finished it to his own satisfaction he leaves it off *in medias rebus*. Dull people will want to know what happens afterwards: a good critic will see at once that the sketch is complete, and will admire the curious and complete skill that leaves it thus pendant at exactly the right moment.'⁸

Besant's *Eulogy* quotes a detailed description of a version of *After London* offered to Longman in April [1883]. This was to be in three volumes, again in two parts, the first being *The Relapse into Barbarism* as published. However the second, called here *Chronicles of the House of Aquila*, was clearly longer than the published part II, treating 'the entire life of the time', and 'in minute detail'. He mentions 'heroes' rather than the single protagonist, whose setting forth on a voyage of discovery only happens 'eventually'. The Relapse was simply a prelude to the main action – what came about 'after London'. Jefferies adds significantly 'there is a love affair, but it is in no sense a novel', by which we might infer that a conventional plot and marital conclusion were never on the cards. Longman obviously declined the work, and Besant comments: 'As published by Cassell and Co. it was in one volume, and leaves off with the story only half told. Perhaps the author cut it down, perhaps the publishers refused to bring it out unless it was a short one-volume work.'⁹

Subsequent interpretations have varied considerably. Salt concentrates on the fate of London with no mention of the enigmatic conclusion. Thomas says of the end: 'It is a wilful one, as if on an hexameter instead of a pentameter, yet it needs no defence. Others could have been found to conform to the needs of

⁵ *Spectator* vol.58 no.2975 p. 882, 4 July 1885.

⁶ *Westminster Review* vol. LXVIII, new series no.1, p.300.

⁷ *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. LXXI no 425 p.804, October 1885.

⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette* no.6264 vol.XLI p.4, 11 April 1885. The Latin phrase should read *in mediis rebus*.

⁹ Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (Chatto & Windus, 1888), pp.208-211.

perhaps a majority. But to end with suspended breath is as true in Nature, and in keeping with this age; it might be used as a variation upon “happily ever after” or “necessity is great”.¹⁰ Looker suggests that but for his illness Jefferies might have improved his later novels, for example ‘by taking *After London* to a more satisfying ending’¹¹. Keith, like Thomas, points to the similarities in character and career between Jefferies and his hero, and notes elements of escape and wish fulfilment. ‘We are left with the impression that [Felix] will be successful’ and ‘the success that he missed in life Jefferies portrays in romance.’¹² In general it may be said that to this point *After London*, while containing passages of acknowledged power, was not ranked among Jefferies’ best works; and, again very much in general, that this perception may now have changed. If so, a penetrating analysis by a recent novelist of note may well have been the turning point. Whereas for Thomas *After London* was almost a recuperation from *The Story of My Heart*, of the ideas in which there was ‘hardly a trace’, for John Fowles ‘one cannot understand *After London* unless one reads it alongside *The Story of My Heart*.’¹³ It is for him a book crucially of its time and ours, prophetic, philosophical, and at the same time profoundly personal. He writes:

The inconclusive ending of *After London* has also been much criticised. Yet it seems to me entirely consistent with the underlying purpose of the novel... The search in man for greater self-knowledge is a dangerous voyage, but far better that than not to voyage at all – and even though, of its nature, destination can never lie in one place or episode – or static Utopia. There are no happy ends in time, or evolution. The journey can never be an arrival, only an onwardness.¹⁴

Fowles began work on his introduction to the OUP World Classics edition in 1977 – it came out in April 1980. He wrote to me in October 1978 with a number of unresolved questions about the antecedents, composition and publishing history, and in subsequent correspondence I passed on all the information I had at the time. This included the possibility that the book had been shortened at the publisher’s insistence, but stating that in my opinion the final text was as Jefferies wanted it. I was able to add more detail to the picture in the introduction to *After London* in the Bibliography, for example that Chatto had also declined the book, after Longman’s rejection. In difficult circumstances and with two of his previous publishers out of the running Jefferies was probably willing to make compromises. By the mid 1880s the reign of the three volume novel was drawing to an end and Cassell was among those publishers

¹⁰ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies: his Life and Work* (Hutchinson, 1909), p.260.

¹¹ S.J. Looker and C. Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields* (John Baker, 1965), p.138.

¹² W.J. Keith, *Richard Jefferies: a Critical Study* (University of Toronto Press, 1965), p.121.

¹³ John Fowles, introduction to *After London* (Oxford University Press, 1980), p.xv.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.xx.

experimenting with single volume fiction offered to the public at a more affordable price without the intermediary offices of W.H. Smith's or Mudie's circulating libraries. True, at 10/6 *After London* was the same price as a single volume of a three-decker, but in a second impression and a re-issue that came out in the two years following it was priced at 3/6. While this gave some colour to Besant's suggestion of an enforced abridgement, I still supported the ending as intentional and in line with his mature sense of life's vicissitudes and uncertainties, its unplanned, inconclusive and unsatisfactory outcomes, and his belief that fiction should be true to this.

In 1989 I obtained some copies of Jefferies' MSS from Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Among them was a letter to one James Wilkie, dated April 7th. From the address, 14 Victoria Road, Eltham, this would be 1885. He writes: 'My handwriting has become very uncertain from long and severe illness, however I have put my name to the book with pleasure. I'm glad you like it; it is so much condensed that many have mistaken its meaning.'¹⁵ He goes on to refer to a paper by Wilkie on stone circles in the Welsh hills that interests him. Given the date, just one week after publication, and the known fact of a finished longer version of some years earlier, I had no doubt that this referred to *After London*. The phrase 'it is so much condensed' is intriguing. It rather hints not only that Jefferies disapproved of the redaction, but that it was carried out by the publishers: that the enigmatic ending which has attracted so much critical interest was perhaps the work of some nameless copy editor at La Belle Sauvage Yard.¹⁶ It would indeed seem extraordinary that a writer of Jefferies' stature would leave such important work to another, and there were insistent letters requesting proofs on earlier occasions. But as this letter attests, in 1885 he was in dire circumstances. Again from Eltham, on 6th December [1884] he writes to Robert Chambers, editor of *Chambers's Journal*, about another project, one which never came to fruition: 'I shall be pleased for you to make any alterations you wish in the paper... I have not fixed upon the number of papers for "Fields of London". I intended to leave that for you to decide. But I fancy you do not altogether like the idea of continuing and therefore perhaps I had better not go

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, MM, D46.2iii.

¹⁶ The grand office block in Fleet Lane constructed in the 1870s by John Cassell for his printing and publishing enterprise, which in 1883, as Cassell and Company, boasted of being the largest in the world, with numerous periodical titles as well as a book list of popular and celebrated authors. The buildings were destroyed in the blitz, with most of Cassell's records. Richard Kearton worked in the publicity department from 1882 to 1898. In his memoirs (*A Naturalist's Pilgrimage*, Cassell 1926) he describes his encounters with all the famous and not so famous writers who visited the premises. One would expect Jefferies to have been of special interest to a then budding naturalist, and both had been contributors to Cassell's *Live Stock Journal*. His absence from the roll call suggests he never went there, to discuss *After London* or on any other business.

further but write... on a different topic, or under separate title. I do not mind.’¹⁷ Clearly at this juncture Jefferies was prepared to give his publisher considerable latitude in dealing with his texts; and indeed, if surgery is necessary, it is better done by another.

Other questions arise from the Wilkie letter. Who, for example, are the ‘many’ who have mistaken the book’s meaning? It was not a reference to the reviews as they, or the major ones at least, came out after the letter was written. And then what is meant by ‘meaning’? The term suggests Jefferies had more in mind than a romantic tale of weird events and heroic adventures. One possible solution to the problems thrown up by the letter is that it could refer to another of Jefferies’ books, and in *The Forward Life* Matthews and Treitel reproduce the key passage with the note ‘This is likely to be SH’.¹⁸ Jefferies certainly had ideas to convey in *The Story of My Heart*, but there is no evidence that it was ‘condensed’, or in any way other than the author intended it – and we have more correspondence and authorial commentary relating to *The Story* than to any other work. Besant portrays a writer who didn’t play to his strengths or take good advice, but on the contrary he was very responsive to suggestions from publishers, and every reason to want to make money from his writing. When Smith, Elder suggested *The Gamekeeper at Home* was rather on the short side he wrote *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and when they demurred that this didn’t have so much about the ways of gamekeepers and poachers he continued with *The Amateur Poacher*. It may have been a reviewer’s suggestion that led to him writing for a younger audience. *The Story* was the book, he claimed, in which he truly expressed himself, and was not written with any thought of profit. When he says that after seventeen years of contemplation it only amounted to a small book it was to convey the care that went into reducing it to its essence, not of any enforced curtailment. Longman remarked that he would have to print it ‘in open type to make a reasonable sized volume.’¹⁹ And realising that Longman’s friendship had perhaps outweighed his commercial interests in publishing it he immediately afterwards produced another book on country sports and rustic lore, having travelled to Exmoor to research it.

Another reason why it was unlikely to have been a copy of *The Story of My Heart* that Wilkie sent to Jefferies for signing is that by April 1885 very few copies were selling, in fact only one is recorded between September 1884 and May 1885. Longman wrote to Jefferies on the 18th September 1884: ‘I’m sorry to say that the sale of the autobiography seems to have ceased’²⁰, and on 20th June

¹⁷ David J. Holmes Catalogue 48, *Letters and books*, item 65, part transcribed ALS.

¹⁸ H. Matthews and P. Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Petton Books, 1994), p.195.

¹⁹ MM: D20.5xix.

²⁰ MM: D14.2vii.

the remaining 196 copies were sold as waste. Earlier that year Longman had complained to Jefferies about the number of free copies he was requesting, at least 15 of *Red Deer* and 14 of *The Story*: 'I really think that people ought to buy them instead of begging off you.'²¹ Very few inscribed copies have in fact come into view, but presumably these were all sent out to friends, admirers, editors, family members etc, and perhaps in this we have a clue to the 'many' who misunderstood or failed to grasp the 'meaning' of *After London*. Jefferies didn't sit at the high table of Victorian literature, but his isolation is often exaggerated. Undoubtedly he had a close following, and the chance survival of inscribed copies and letters like Wilkie's can only hint at its extent. There were readers too in America whose expectations of Jefferies are apparent from a review of *After London* which begins: 'What has got into Mr Jefferies? He used to write delightful books.'²² This critic is not impressed – the book is 'a tiresome, and as far as we can see, useless piece of ingenuity'. Another American reviewer is certainly impressed with *The Relapse* – 'described with a faithfulness which never falls below the impressiveness of actuality', and the fate of London which 'forms a chapter terrible in its realism'. But he is less taken with 'the fanciful tale of a certain Sir Felix', and also puts the book aside 'with regretful thoughts of *Wood Magic* and *The Gamekeeper at Home*.'²³

In conclusion: Besant was probably right in suggesting that Cassell would only publish *After London* as a single volume, which meant the original text had to be reduced. Jefferies probably left this work to the publisher, but doubtless would have seen and approved the final version. In this form the book met with a mixed response from reviewers and readers, many of whom found it perplexing and unsatisfactory, especially the ending, despite some original and powerful passages. Jefferies may have felt that his previous version would have fared better but it's impossible to say whether this would have been the case. As it stands its critical reputation has grown both in general literary terms and as a futuristic vision. It belongs with the great works – *The Story of My Heart*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *The Dewy Morn*, the last essays; and one which especially speaks to our own times, with ordered rural societies breaking up, their populations moving to vast cities blighted with poverty, crime and corruption. A masterpiece certainly, but not unfinished. There was no intended sequel, and the ending is entirely consistent with Jefferies' developed thought and method: 'Nothing of the kind ever happens. Just the reverse, incomplete, non-dramatic. A true Life History has no wind up and nothing finished or complete.'²⁴

²¹ MM: D15.2iv.

²² *The Atlantic Monthly*, v.56 no.334, August 1885, p.278.

²³ *The Literary World*, Boston, July 25 1885.

²⁴ *The Nature Diaries and Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S.J. Looker (Grey Walls, 1948), p.112.

Jefferies' London

Simon Coleman

Adapted from his lecture for the Richard Jefferies Society Study Day at St Pancras Parish Church Hall, Somers Town, on 27 June 2015.

Two years ago I gave a talk on Jefferies' London experiences which was fairly wide-ranging but far from a complete survey. When, for this Study Day paper, I returned to the topic of Jefferies and London, it was difficult to decide which parts to leave in and how to link them as seamlessly as possible with the fresh discussion that I wanted to include. I didn't attempt to cover *After London* in the earlier talk, instead concentrating on *Amaryllis at the Fair*. But, whether or not *After London* fits comfortably with a survey of Jefferies' experiences of real London places, such an important book can hardly be ignored a second time.

The aim of this paper is to focus on two main themes or questions that arise from reading Jefferies' writings on the Victorian capital. Firstly, what was the nature of the attractive power that drew him to London and made him explore it at considerable length? And secondly, what effect did it have on him, as evidenced by the work of his mature period? Such apparently puzzling statements as 'London convinced me of my thought' and 'London is the only real place in the world' seem to be pointers to areas of Jefferies' thought world that have perhaps received little attention. After examining the influence of London on *The Story of My Heart*, *Amaryllis at the Fair* and *After London*, I shall suggest that these three works are the key to understanding these deeper levels of his thought. They are, I believe, by a distance, the most imaginatively rich of his books and the ones in which he finds his clearest and most distinctive voice. I feel that they need to be viewed as a group – not in any sense a trilogy – but a group of works which reveal a truly powerful creative force that strives for the fullest expression.

Let's begin this journey to, and through, London with that memorable passage from 'Meadow Thoughts' in which Jefferies, in youth, is looking at the inscription on the Coate milestone which told him that London was 79 miles away.

The old house stood by the silent country road, secluded by many a long, long mile, and yet again secluded within the great walls of the garden. Often and often I rambled up to the milestone which stood under an oak, to look at the chipped inscription low down – 'To London, 79 Miles.' So far away, you see, that the very inscription was cut at the foot of the stone, since no one would be likely to want

that information. It was half hidden by docks and nettles, despised and unnoticed. A broad land this seventy-nine miles - how many meadows and corn-fields, hedges and woods, in that distance? – wide enough to seclude any house, to hide it, like an acorn in the grass. Those who have lived all their lives in remote places do not feel the remoteness. No one else seemed to be conscious of the breadth that separated the place from the great centre, but it was, perhaps, that consciousness which deepened the solitude to me.

While irrelevant to all the other folk of the hamlet, the stone mattered to Jefferies, whose imagination filled in those 79 miles and entered into the heart of the great metropolis. There by the milestone he saw London and we sense that his attraction to the capital was already present at this time. He had, of course, visited London in childhood when staying with his aunt and uncle, the Harrilds, at Sydenham. 'Meadow Thoughts' is essentially an evocation of a rural childhood home, a remote and self-contained 'universe', but the milestone passage allows us to bring a subtle new perspective to the dreamy and effortless scenes that follow it. The city and country are not separate imaginative worlds: the solitude of the latter is 'deepened' by thinking of the former.

Let's now shift ourselves in geography and time to discover Jefferies in the late 1870s exploring the Surrey countryside. He had now embarked on his writing career in earnest, living in Surbiton to be closer to the London-based publishers of his articles on agriculture and the countryside. The articles he wrote on Surrey, much of which was still quite rural, were collected in his 1883 anthology, *Nature Near London*, but he had begun his excursions in that area much earlier, very soon after moving to Surbiton in late 1876 or early 1877. He threw himself into his new world with typical zeal, finding abundant wildlife to observe and record – in fact he discovered far more bird-life than he was expecting in the fields, woods and villages in close proximity to London. But there was something else happening during this time. He began to become aware of, in his words, 'a dim sense of something wanting'. He says in the introduction to *Nature Near London*:

In the shadiest lane, in the still pinewoods, on the hills of purple heath, after brief contemplation there arose a restlessness, a feeling that it was essential to keep moving....This was the unseen influence of mighty London. The strong life of the vast city magnetized me, and I felt it under the calm oaks.

So, while still in the countryside, the attractive force exerted by the city is something almost tangible to him. He goes on to elaborate on this 'something wanting': it is 'the absolute quiet, peace and rest which dwells in the meadows and under the trees and on the hilltops in the country.'

So, while he's lost that complete solitude that had such a magical effect on his youth, he has come into the orbit of London – and it draws him in. He says

more about this in the last paragraphs of the essay 'Footpaths' (*Nature Near London*). He says that every footpath round about London takes you to the city, and that he felt drawn there. And it was not possible to sit and dream in proximity to the city – after a time one has to get moving, always ending up, it seems, in London. He describes the fascination of being in vast crowds...

It is the presence of man in his myriads. There is something in the heart which cannot be satisfied away from it. ('Footpaths')

Now, let us move with him into the heart of the capital, to Trafalgar Square, where Landseer's lions sit at the foot of Nelson's Column. They are the subject of the remarkable essay 'The Lions in Trafalgar Square', published in *Toilers of the Field*. It begins:

The lions in Trafalgar Square are to me the centre of London. By those lions began my London work; from them, as spokes from the middle of a wheel, radiate my London thoughts. Standing by them and looking south you have in front the Houses of Parliament, where resides the mastership of England; at your back is the National Gallery – that is art; and farther back the British Museum – books. To the right lies the wealth and luxury of the West End; to the left the roar and labour, the craft and gold, of the City. For themselves, they are the only monument in this vast capital worthy of a second visit as a monument.

So this is where Jefferies' London *work* began. It is interesting that he uses the word 'work', implying that his time in London and his writing on the city were necessary to him. He had a need to be there. Characteristically, he found a central place where he could map out a geographical area in his mind and gather his thoughts and sense impressions, feeling out to the places around this central point. In his Wiltshire days, Coate Farm, Liddington Hill and Barbury Castle could be identified as some of his centres in the rural landscape. Trafalgar Square now served the purpose admirably. I think this way of orienting his mind, as it were, is very significant. Parliament stands in front of him, the National Gallery behind, and so on, each institution or district representing a specific aspect of human society and human life – power, art, learning, entertainment and commerce. The way Jefferies describes them shows that they fascinate him: society in its concentrated and dynamic forms, and in its different moods, contains a power of attraction that he cannot ignore.

Of the movement of the masses of people in the square, he writes:

Ever rolling the human stream flows, mostly on the south side yonder, near enough to be audible, but toned to bearableness. A stream of human hearts, every atom a living mind filled with what thoughts? – a stream that ran through Rome once, but has altered its course and wears away the banks here now and triturates its own atoms, the hearts, to dust in the process.

He needs to see and to feel this flow of human life, 'the presence of man in his myriads', and to feel it through the ages, not merely in the present moment. This merging of past and present is a theme that appears often in his later writing. We also note the strain of sadness at the direction that human endeavour has taken. In Jefferies' view, it has moved away from Classical ideals (represented by Rome) and created a restless, commercially-driven society which wears down and distorts real human nature. But, in spite of its ability to grind people down, Jefferies' fascination with the capital is undiminished. Its rampant materialism, despite its negative results, still captures his imagination:

For London is the only *real* place in the world. ...Men amuse themselves in Paris; they work in London. Gold is made abroad, but London has a hook and line on every napoleon and dollar, pulling the round discs hither. A house is not a dwelling if a man's heart be elsewhere. Now, the heart of the world is in London, and the cities with the simulacrum of man in them are empty. They are moving images only; stand here and you are real.

This rather ambivalent essay tells us a lot about Jefferies' responses to London. Its attractive power, dynamic energy and expression of all the elements of human life, pulls him towards its centre like a magnet. Part of his London work, we can deduce, was to experience all this and to assimilate it into his life. In his youth he had been immersed in the beauty of nature and had felt the presence of some magical and ideal principle operating through all life: 'There was a presence everywhere on the hills and not shut out under the dark pines' ('The Pageant of Summer'). However, this magical 'something' felt in the heart of nature could not completely satisfy him. He had to immerse himself in the epicentre of human life – partly perhaps to see whether it embodied anything of his ideal life. Where was mankind going, and what was his own place within it? What was the value of his deeply moving pilgrimages in nature? Could London somehow provide an answer? His autobiography, in particular, provides clear indications that these were, in part, the reasons why he wandered around London and paid such close attention to its sights and sounds. This was work, not tourism.

I shall return to some of these themes later, but, at the risk of a rather abrupt transition, I must now examine some of Jefferies' more artistic writing on London. Towards the end of his essay 'Magpie Fields' from *Nature Near London*, he suddenly moves from rural Surrey scenes to descriptions of London skies, atmosphere and light.

So glorious is the night that not all London, with its glare and smoke, can smother the sky; in the midst of the gas, and the roar and the driving crowd, look up from the pavement, and there, straight above, are the calm stars. I never forget them, not even in the restless Strand; they face one coming down the hill of the Haymarket; in Trafalgar Square, looking towards the high dark structure of the

House at Westminster, the clear bright steel silver of the planet Jupiter shines unwearied, without sparkle or flicker.

And, as we would expect from Jefferies, his sensitivity to colour and light, so prominent in his rural writings, remains as strong as ever.

From Waterloo Bridge the golden cross on St. Paul's and the dome at one time stand out as if engraved upon the sky, clear and with a white aspect. At the same time, the brick of the old buildings at the back of the Strand is red and bright. The structures of the bridges appear light, and do not press upon their arches. The yellow straw stacked on the barges is bright, the copper-tinted sails bright, the white wall of the Embankment clear, and the lions' heads distinct. Every trace of colour, in short, is visible.

And he was hardly likely to omit to tell us something about London sunsets.

The redness of the winter sun in London is, indeed, characteristic.

A sunset in winter or early spring floods the streets with fiery glow. It comes, for instance, down Piccadilly; it is reflected from the smooth varnished roofs of the endless carriages that roll to and fro like the flicker of a mighty fire; it streaks the side of the street with rosiness. The faces of those who are passing are lit up by it, all unconscious as they are. The sky above London, indeed, is as full of interest as above the hills.

The last sentence points to the continuity of his work of finding beauty and fascination in the world around him, and recording it faithfully. The greater nature of the sun, sky and earth is as present to him in London as it was earlier on those sacred chalk downs of Wiltshire. Jefferies does not see London merely as an artificial metropolis diametrically opposed to the natural, open spaces of the country: London is completely contained in this greater nature. The light falls on it and the stars circle over it, as the crowds and carriages pass through ceaselessly.

The idea of London scenes as material for art is explored in the beautiful essay 'Venice in the East End' (*The Life of the Fields*). Jefferies finds himself in awe of the size and motion of the vast ships moving in and out of the docks. These are surely scenes worthy of an artist to come forth and put on record.

Why does not a painter come here and place the real romance of these things upon canvas, as Venice has been placed? Never twice alike, the changing atmosphere is reflected in the hue of the varnished masts, now gleaming, now dull, now dark. Till it has been painted, and sung by poet, and described by writers, nothing is human.

Typically, Jefferies finds the things of his present time that seem unremarkable to everyone else, as wonderful as the most celebrated achievements of other eras. The essay displays a clever blending of present and past themes and shows his imagination to be as active and fresh as ever, now working on the new material provided by the vast structures and dynamic activity of the capital.

'Sunlight in a London Square' (*The Life of the Fields*) is a great essay which celebrates life and light and one in which his imagination darts back in time to bring the human condition into sharp focus. Trafalgar Square is again the scene, but in this essay Jefferies seeks to paint a picture in words, while conveying a state of perception that is both dreamy and philosophical.

There are days now and again when the summer broods in Trafalgar Square; the flood of light from a cloudless sky gathers and grows, thickening the air; the houses enclose the beams as water is enclosed in a cup. Sideways from the white-painted walls light is reflected; upwards from the broad, heated pavement in the centre light and heat ascend; from the blue heaven it presses downwards. ...but the great sunlit square is silent – silent, that is, for the largest city on earth. A slumberous silence of abundant light, of the full summer day, of the high flood of summer hours whose tide can rise no higher. A time to linger and dream under the beautiful breast of heaven, heaven brooding and descending in pure light upon man's handiwork. If the light shall thus come in, and of its mere loveliness overcome every aspect of dreariness, why shall not the light of thought, and hope – the light of the soul – overcome and sweep away the dust of our lives?

Hope is powerfully interwoven into the work. I suggest that it can be compared to 'The Pageant of Summer' in the way it introduces evocative language into scenes so vividly described that they feel like pictures. After imagining swallows twittering away far back in Roman times, he paints another scene for us – a reaper at work in the field, and points to the astonishing burden of labour that the human race has imposed on itself through the ages. With language of stunning clarity, he absorbs the past and gazes beyond his own era to project his hope into the future.

...this ceaseless labour, repeating the furrow, reiterating the blow, the same furrow, the same stroke – shall we never know how to lighten it, how to live with the flowers, the swallows, the sweet delicious shade, and the murmur of the stream? Not the blackened reaper only, but the crowd whose low hum renders the fountain inaudible, the nameless and unknown crowd of this immense city wreathed round about the central square. I hope that at some time, by dint of bolder thought and freer action, the world shall see a race able to enjoy it without stint, a race able to enjoy the flowers with which the physical world is strewn, the colours of the garden of life. To look backwards with the swallow there is sadness, to-day with the fleck of cloud there is unrest; but forward, with the broad sunlight, there is hope.

Presented in this great essay are some of the principal themes of Jefferies' mature period – the period from c.1880 until his death in 1887: the ideal of beauty expressed by nature and the sunlight; the burden of work and consequent loss of contact with nature; and a focus on the future as the source of hope and possibility. In London he really comes face to face with society, in its restless and impersonal nature, in a way that wasn't possible in the rural

isolation of Coate. And we see Jefferies trying to make sense of it, trying to place the scenes before him in the context of all human history.

At the mid-point of his autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies describes an everyday scene in the heart of the city of London – the financial sector, then as now the focus of so much of the shifting capital of the world. Jefferies describes the scene as he stands on a promontory of pavement in front of the Royal Exchange building. This is what he says:

A stream of traffic runs on either side, and other streets send their currents down into the open space before it. Like the spokes of a wheel converging streams of human life flow into this agitated pool. Horses and carriages, carts, vans, omnibuses, cabs, every kind of conveyance cross each other's course in every possible direction. Twisting in and out by the wheels and under the horses' heads, working a devious way, men and women of all conditions wind a path over. They fill the interstices between the carriages and blacken the surface, till the vans almost float on human beings. Now the streams slacken, and now they rush again, but never cease; dark waves are always rolling down the incline opposite, waves swell out from the side rivers, all London converges into this focus. There is an indistinguishable noise – it is not clatter, hum, or roar, it is not resolvable; made up of a thousand thousand footsteps, from a thousand hoofs, a thousand wheels – of haste, and shuffle, and quick movements, and ponderous loads; no attention can resolve it into a fixed sound.

It might have been an ordinary street scene to everyone else, but to Jefferies, absorbed in the vortex of life in that focal point of the imperial city, it was a scene of fascination and also one which communicated a profound sadness to him. Here, by the Royal Exchange, he sees all the frenetic, concentrated activity of the developed world before his eyes. And he reminds us that it's not an isolated snapshot that caught his passing curiosity, but it's going on 'not for an hour only, but for all present time, hour by hour, day by day, year by year.'

He concentrates his mind on the seething masses of people who are driven on by the forces of materialism and personal circumstances. While taking all this in, he remains conscious of the sun and the presence of the immense forces of the universe. The presence of nature to him has not been obscured or diminished by the city. He has told us earlier that in London he found 'nature was deepened by the crowds and foot-worn stones.' Nature is the ever-present reality surrounding and penetrating the human world – we are never separate from it. It dwarfs our tiny human world with its commerce, religion and science, but Jefferies observes that the people rushing to and fro in front of him are unconscious of this simple reality. Before him is mass society and mass materialism, undisguised, and unyielding.

Here it rushes and pushes, the atoms triturate and grind, and, eagerly thrusting by, pursue their separate ends. Here it appears in its unconcealed personality,

indifferent to all else but itself, absorbed and rapt in eager self, devoid and stripped of conventional gloss and politeness, yielding only to get its own way; driving, pushing, carried on in a stress of feverish force like a bullet, dynamic force apart from reason or will, like the force that lifts the tides and sends the clouds onwards. The friction of a thousand interests evolves a condition of electricity in which men are moved to and fro without considering their steps. Yet the agitated pool of life is stonily indifferent, the thought is absent or preoccupied, for it is evident that the mass are unconscious of the scene in which they act.

This is an image of exceptional clarity. In these passages Jefferies is deeply absorbed in the white heat of human activity. He is no unfeeling and detached observer. He really enters into the scene and its constituent parts: the individual circumstances that are driving it. But he is detached enough to be able to step back from it and place it in the wider context of the spirit of the age, aware always of the sun and the forces of nature. He is simultaneously in the scene and outside it. Somehow these London street experiences also seem to help him perceive his own life more clearly, because later in the chapter he goes on to say:

All the experience of the greatest city in the world could not withhold me. I rejected it wholly. I stood bare-headed before the sun, in the presence of the earth and air, in the presence of the immense forces of the universe. I demand that which will make me more perfect now, this hour. London convinced me of my own thought. That thought has always been with me, and always grows wider.

The 'thought' is surely the one he describes in *The Story of My Heart*: '... one thought went winding through my days'. It is an aspiration for the most beautiful and complete human life possible. This thought, or inner desire, is what sustains the unity of the book. He needed the experience of London to test the 'thought', to see what it meant when faced by mass society. And it is clear that, when facing it, he felt his thought to be 'true'. Exploring the highest possibilities for life was a real work for him, not a merely woolly romantic sentiment.

The second half of the autobiography really follows on from this London experience, with the focus more on the problems of the human race and how they might be solved. The issues are dealt with on a very general level, but Jefferies still presents a perfectly reasonable assessment of the evils of wealth creation for its own sake, the limitations of scientific rationalism and the absence of any true ideal in the organisation of human affairs. And, it should be said, these are all issues that are very much with us today.

It would appear, on the evidence of the autobiography, that very little he saw and heard in the greatest city of the world seemed to answer to his ideal, or to have any obvious connection with it. It seems clear that he felt his life's purpose was to express some of the higher potential for life and that London, in some

way, helped to clarify this ideal and give it extra vitality. This, at least, is what he appears to imply.

This 'climax' of Jefferies' London experience, or non-experience, is, perhaps, a good point at which to move on from the 'real' London and to examine *After London*, published in 1885, just two years before his death.

I have come across quite a few people who are aware of Jefferies only as the author of *After London*, and with the huge popularity of science fiction in our time, perhaps that is not a major surprise. I confess that I'm frustrated by the book being consigned to the genres of science or apocalyptic fiction by people who know nothing of Jefferies' other work. I don't believe that the book can be properly understood by viewing it as belonging to this or that genre. My view of the importance of *After London* is quite simple: it provides exceptional insights into Jefferies' world of thought and feeling. The book tells us much about the struggles that he faced in his life and how he responded to them. And if it is viewed in the context of other books, then let them first and foremost be Jefferies' other works, especially *The Story of My Heart* and *Amaryllis at the Fair* and, though of lesser relevance, *Bevis* and the early novel *The Rise of Maximin*.

In Part One of *After London* we hear the account of the environmental disaster far back in the past which resulted in the appearance of a vast lake in the centre of England, the disappearance of London beneath swamps and the covering of former agricultural land by forest and dense vegetation. And civilisation has regressed dramatically to a state which comprises both medieval and savage characteristics, depending on whether one was in the cities or out in the forests. Part Two – the actual story – is a romance and an adventure. There has been much focus, inevitably, on the book's presentation of an extraordinary dystopia but, for me, it is really about the story of Felix and Aurora. The environmental cataclysm is a very original and fascinating imaginative development, which makes us wonder what other works Jefferies might have produced had he lived longer. But to focus on the environmental, futuristic and dystopian themes at the expense of the plot, in my opinion, completely misses the point of the book. In Felix it is very easy to spot a young Jefferies, in his brooding temperament, his love of hunting and the outdoors, and in his contempt for the narrow social world in which he is expected to participate. As for his lover, Aurora, she is rather more complex. She might possess some of Jefferies' wife's character, but she appears essentially as an ideal kind of young woman. She is appreciably more intellectual in character than the female heroines of his earlier novels: a collator and curator of the fragmented manuscripts of the earlier religion which has been practically forgotten. She does this because of her passion to conserve the ancient learning which she believes ought to flourish again. Aurora is a more shadowy character than, for example, Felise of *The Dewy Morn* who appears as radiant as the sun. While

Jefferies dwells at some length on Felise's physical appearance, we learn almost nothing about Aurora's. We are told, however, about her feelings towards humanity as a whole: '...ever anxious as she was for the good of all, she saw the sadness that reigned even in the midst of the fresh foliage of spring and among the flowers.'

This aspect of her character is surely a part of Jefferies' own which he has transplanted into his female heroine. We can find a similar idea in this quote from 'Wild Flowers': 'the sunshine and the flowers speak differently, for a heart that has once known sorrow reads behind the page, and sees sadness in joy.' So does Aurora, the woman of pure heart and developed intellect, represent a part of Jefferies' own heart, shall we say? – the part associated with that quest for beauty that recurs so often in his later work? I suggest that she does, and in her we see this ideal take shape in a female form. Felix embarks on a quest for what is really the Holy Grail of his life: to make himself worthy of her love. This is the one and only reason for his expedition around the great lake, the lake that has such resonance with Coate Water, the place of his childhood adventures. In *After London* we see, I think, in the two central characters, two elements of Jefferies' inner nature attempting to relate to one another. While the book contains obvious autobiographical material in the situation of Felix, Aurora's character takes the autobiographical element to a deeper level. I suggest that Aurora signifies a movement in the development of Jefferies' creative imagination and that in this romance he is looking for another way to tell the story of his heart.

London itself is buried under vast stagnant swamps: it has become a place of disease and death – its former glory long passed into myth. Along with the city, all the technology, knowledge and institutions of civilisation have also disappeared. London was obviously the centre of the great extinct civilisation and it is the memory and relics of this civilisation that sustain a strand of hope in the book. While the environmental disaster brought the ancient civilisation to its knees, it was the loss of all its technology and most of its learning that prevented any recovery. And that reminds us that Jefferies did value technological advance and the learning represented by literature and the arts, for all his frustration with their limitations.

People have wondered what Jefferies was trying to do by creating this sombre and disturbing setting for his romance. Was he really trying to see into the future and predict an environmental catastrophe of some sort? Or did he hate London and think he would find a fictional method of annihilating it? I don't find either of these scenarios at all convincing. We know from so much of his writing on London that he found much to admire about it, and from it gained a lot of material for thought. It was 'the only real place'. As for trying to foresee possible dramatic changes to the environment and to human society in the

future, I'm sure that Jefferies did think about these things and the book is a fascinating leap in the development of his imagination. But the future is not what the book is all about, in my view, and it is not predicting anything. Jefferies always wrote about the present. While he regularly used the past to illuminate the present and often wrote of his hopes for the future of mankind, it was the present that held everything. Jeremy Hooker considers the book to be a critique of Victorian society and I think that is getting on the right track. It seems probable that the brutal and degenerate communities described in the early chapters were suggested to him by his observation of late Victorian society. A society whose workhouses, grinding poverty, economic greed and ignorance of beauty reduced him to despair. He has projected elements of the society he knows into a very different environment, where the economic and social structures that once held it together and gave it the appearance of unity, have been stripped away. He feels that he's already living in a society that has institutionalized slavery, that worships money almost as a religion, that oppresses the female spirit, that is obsessed with power, that has turned away from nature and the sunlight, and that is stuck in medieval concepts of good and evil; in essence, one that is in opposition to the natural simplicity and generosity of the human spirit. But perhaps 'critique' of society is not the right word here. *After London* is more of an expression of the combined ills that he perceives, but taken out of their familiar context. It seems that he had to set them loose in an imaginary landscape to reveal the horrifying state that humanity had already fallen into. So I think he has penetrated the 'crust' of civilisation and seen through the learning, technology and organised religion into a much darker world beneath. Perhaps in some way, the book can be seen as the dark twin of *The Story of My Heart*, his sun-drenched autobiography. I think it was absolutely necessary for him to write both books.

Amaryllis at the Fair, Jefferies' last novel, is also significantly influenced by London, though this is often forgotten. The Coombe Oaks of the book is of course Coate Farmhouse; the two central characters, Iden and his daughter Amaryllis, have been much analysed and discussed and are not of great relevance to this paper. It is another character who interests me in the context of London, one who seems to have been rather overlooked, but to me is one of huge importance. He is the curious and charismatic Alere Flamma, the London artist, printer, bookbinder etc, who turns up in the latter part of the book. No fewer than four chapters are devoted to Alere Flamma and the Fleet Street world he inhabits as a son of the House of Flamma printers. It is interesting to note that W.J. Keith, in his *Richard Jefferies: a Critical Biography*, makes no attempt to discuss Flamma, while going to great lengths to comprehend the two main characters, Iden and Amaryllis, in the context of Jefferies' life and work. So what is Flamma's role in the novel?

He arrives, a bit run down from an excess of drinking, which is part of the Fleet Street culture, desperately in need of the rest and healing that, apparently, only Coombe Oaks can provide. Iden's wonderfully potent Goliath ale begins to restore him. Gradually his life experience, his vibrant and loquacious nature, his sheer joy of living in the moment, all emerge – and the effect on his listeners, Iden, Amaryllis, and another chance visitor, the sickly Amadis, is magnetic. Alere sings, plays the flute, and talks about art and much else.

This man has the true bohemian spirit: he breathes the life of Fleet Street, the world of the printing press. Jefferies calls Fleet Street 'the grey matter of the world's brain'. It feeds ideas and thought to the world at large, and Alere Flamma needs to be in the midst of this heady atmosphere, working as an engraver and bookbinder, but also doing menial tasks, sometimes even choosing to be completely idle. He drinks, he smokes, he has his own rules of behaviour, he's warm-hearted and is deeply moved by the street poverty. He frequents 'strong company', and he never bothers to wear a dress coat and enter the posh dinner and club society which was ever open to him. He has also travelled widely, producing an astonishingly miscellaneous collection of sketches – all of real scenes, drawn true to life. He sees everything, just as it is.

In Alere we also see Jefferies' great fascination with the printed word and how it affects the world. Fleet Street was truly alive, more so than the British Museum Reading Room where, he tells us in 'The Pigeons at the British Museum', the crushing weight of books has an almost deadening effect on the mind. Jefferies makes Alere almost intoxicated with Fleet Street's restless energy. The other crucial aspect of Alere's character is his love of nature and the countryside, and his talent for drawing it. This exceptional passage recalls the sentiments of Jefferies' essay 'Wild Flowers':

Wild flowers alone never become commonplace. The white wood-sorrel at the foot of the oak, the violet in the hedge of the vale, the thyme on the wind-swept downs, they were as fresh this year as last, as dear to-day as twenty years since, even dearer, for they grow now, as it were, in the earth we have made for them of our hopes, our prayers, our emotions, our thoughts.

Sketch-book upon sketch-book in Alere's room was full of wild flowers, drawn as he had found them in the lanes and woods at Coombe Oaks – by the footpaths, by the lake and the lesser ponds, on the hills – as he had found them, not formed into an artificial design, not torn up by the roots, or cut and posed for the occasion – exactly as they were when his eye caught sight of them. A difficult thing to do, but Alere did it.

So he's this unique blend of city and country – he is attuned to life in the city and the wider world, while remaining a lover of nature's beauty. His sketches are so true to life because his nature is true – he has no artifice. Alere is a free spirit, and Jefferies, I feel, has poured as much love into this character as he

does into Amaryllis. There is a striking contrast between Alere's fiery, life-loving nature and Iden's world-weary demeanour. Flamma means 'fire', of course, as Jefferies reminds us. Iden, though a lover of natural beauty like Alere, has been ground down by debt and work that didn't stimulate his mind. In the book there is the magnificent tragic image of Iden's head resting in the same place on the wall on which it has worn a groove over time. That image possibly refers also to the state of the human race as Jefferies saw it. Have we worn a giant groove for ourselves and forgotten the infinite possibilities that lie over the edges?

Alere, however, is completely true to himself and thus he perhaps suggests a way forward for mankind. He needs the beauty and peace of Coombe Oaks for healing when his one major vice in Fleet Street, the bottle, begins to take over. The fiery Goliath ale is just to his liking and, as he recovers, his talking and singing burst forth in the summer house, almost like the flowering of spring. The atmosphere is transformed and the group continue to talk from the end of April until nearly the end of May. So Alere needs the healing of this special place, Coombe Oaks, but he brings with him some vital life-principle which seems to awaken the inhabitants of the farmhouse. I think in these passages we see Jefferies, as it were, bringing a piece of London back home with him – to Coate, to the garden where his journey of imagination began in childhood. I can't explain why he needed to do this but I do feel that this process was somehow necessary for him.

Bringing all these impressions and ideas together to produce some sort of conclusion, I confess has not been easy. We have seen that London's awesome size, energy and centrality in the world's affairs was stimulating to Jefferies' mind. Out in the Surrey fields he was sensitive to the pulse of London, its gigantic 'otherness'. In the city's streets and squares, by the river, there is much to delight his aesthetic sensibility – probably as much as he found in the countryside. The sun and sky were still magical: nature, particularly bird life, was ever present. He could dream his 'old thought', his soul-life idea, in places of pilgrimage such as Trafalgar Square and London Bridge. These new city places of pilgrimage could include works of art. We find him by Landseer's lions, in the British Museum Greek sculpture galleries and gazing at a few favourite paintings in the National Gallery. In these works he saw, as it were, something of his spiritual ideal reflected back to him.

Being a realist, Jefferies never stopped thinking about the moving crowds and the engines of materialism driving human life in the developed world. He is sad to see the multitudes of people working for today only, apparently unconscious of eternal nature. They work on and on without any ideal to inform their imaginations. The feelings he had had on Liddington Hill and by the Coate stream now appear as even more real and meaningful, and his impulse to

communicate them was quickened. Important passages in *The Story of My Heart* present some of London's sights, sounds and moods. The city seemed to challenge him to respond to the real human life of his age and there is little doubt that he believed he possessed some ability, in potential at least, to direct human thought to higher and happier ends.

As well as in *The Story of My Heart*, we see the influence of London in the two last novels, *After London* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*. But the city appears differently in all three books. Jefferies is completely face to face with it in the autobiography; in *After London*, it is a part of history, mythology even. Jefferies has here gone beyond London, challenging the idea of its permanence at the centre of world's civilisation. Finally, in *Amaryllis at the Fair*, London returns in the character of Alere Flamma, who brings the worlds of city and country together in a remarkable way. London, or rather Fleet Street, has appeared in the remote hamlet with all its restless energy, its power over human thought and, also, its human misery. This curious character from Fleet Street, I think, tells us so much about Jefferies' fascination with, and ambivalence towards, London. All three major books on which I have focused are strongly autobiographical, and I feel that without his experience of London we would know a lot less about many aspects of Jefferies' thought world, about his perceptions of Victorian society as he found it, and about how he tried to come to terms with it. He found something in London – let's call it a personal truth of some kind. He had to go there to find this necessary something; it was a calling, part of his life's work. As he said... 'London convinced me of my thought'.

I referred to the 'London Bridge' experience two paragraphs above. It would seem remiss of me not to include something of this masterful descriptive passage from *The Story of My Heart* somewhere. So, I shall end with a substantial quote from it.

One moment at least I had, a moment when I thought of the push of the great sea forcing the water to flow under the feet of these crowds, the distant sea strong and splendid; when I saw the sunlight gleam on the tidal wavelets; when I felt the wind, and was conscious of the earth, the sea, the sun, the air, the immense forces working on, while the city hummed by the river. Nature was deepened by the crowds and foot-worn stones. If the tide had ebbcd, and the masts of the vessels were tilted as the hulls rested on the shelving mud, still even the blackened mud did not prevent me seeing the water as water flowing to the sea. The sea had drawn down, and the wavelets washing the strand here as they hastened were running the faster to it. Eastwards from London Bridge the river raced to the ocean.

The bright morning sun of summer heated the eastern parapet of London Bridge; I stayed in the recess to acknowledge it. The smooth water was a broad sheen of light, the built-up river flowed calm and silent by a thousand doors, rippling only where the stream chafed against a chain. Red pennants drooped, gilded vanes gleamed on polished masts, black-pitched hulls glistened like a black

rook's feathers in sunlight; the clear air cut out the forward angles of the warehouses, the shadowed wharves were quiet in shadows that carried light; far down the ships that were hauling out moved in repose, and with the stream floated away into the summer mist. There was a faint blue colour in the air hovering between the built-up banks, against the lit walls, in the hollows of the houses. The swallows wheeled and climbed, twittered and glided downwards. Burning on, the great sun stood in the sky, heating the parapet, glowing steadfastly upon me as when I rested in the narrow valley grooved out in prehistoric times. Burning on steadfast, and ever present as my thought.



Illustration by E E Briscoe
Published in *Richard Jefferies' London* (Lutterworth Press, 1944)

Richard Jefferies: *Nature Near London*

Naomi Racz

First published on November 19, 2015 in a series entitled 'Small Rain' that explores the history of urban nature writing.

Although *Nature Near London* is maybe more accurately classified as suburban nature writing, the 'near' in the title giving it away, it would feel remiss to begin this series with any other book. After all, a genre doesn't spring up fully formed over night and part of the aim of this series is to explore the evolution of urban nature writing as a sub-species distinct from nature writing (and if, indeed, it is possible to define the genre at all). With *Nature Near London* the seed of an idea was being sown – the idea that it is not necessary to turn one's back on the city to find nature. I also include Jefferies' book because the city, London, looms large; it is a presence that forms a counter-point to the places Jefferies explores. It also looms large in Jefferies' own mind, and magnetised him even as he seeks to escape it.

Jefferies was born in 1848 at Coate Farm, in Wiltshire. By his own accounts, Jefferies was not a popular child and he preferred the company of books and nature to people. In his nostalgic essay 'My Old Village' Jefferies writes of how the people in his childhood village were not particularly friendly to him: 'Nothing to do with them at all; it was me. I planted myself every where – in all the fields and under all the trees.' The landscape in which the young Jefferies planted himself was dominated by the Downs and the dramatic vistas they offered. In his autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies writes about walking up Liddington Hill: 'There the view was over a broad plain, beautiful with wheat, and inclosed [*sic*] by a perfect amphitheatre of green hills'. That word 'amphitheatre' suggests a grandeur of scale. It was also on these hills that Jefferies experienced a sense of spiritual oneness with nature and the wider universe:

Sometimes on lying down on the sward I first looked up at the sky, gazing for a long time till I could see deep into the azure and my eyes were full of the colour; then I turned my face to the grass and thyme... Having drunk deeply of the heaven above and felt the most glorious beauty of the day... I now became lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt down deep into the earth under, and high above into the sky, and farther still to the sun and the stars. Still further beyond the stars into the hollow of space, and losing thus my separateness of being came to seem like a part of the whole.

Jefferies seems to have spent much of his childhood and early adulthood lost

in his own thoughts, wandering the countryside, reading, thinking and shooting. Coate Farm was not a successful farm and Jefferies did not take to farming. Finally, after years of what seems to everyone else to be idleness, in 1866 Jefferies began to shape a career for himself with a position on the *North Wilts Herald*. Over the next eight years he made many attempts to get his work, and fiction in particular published. After some initial success with letters and articles about rural life published in newspapers and magazines, his first book, a novel called *The Scarlet Shawl*, was published in 1874.

In the same year Jefferies married Jessie Baden and the following year they had a son. The demands of supporting his family through his writing led Jefferies to want to be nearer to London and in 1877 they moved to the London suburb of Surbiton. It was in Surbiton that Jefferies gathered the observations that would become *Nature Near London*.

Near the beginning of *Nature Near London* Jefferies induces his readers to: 'Always go over a stile...' that is to say, never omit to explore a footpath. He refers to it as 'the one rule that should ever be borne in mind by those who wish to see the land as it really is.' It is a rule that Jefferies himself follows religiously. Not only does he seem to go over every stile, but he also combs every inch of his surroundings with great patience and attention. Nothing is beyond Jefferies, everything is worthy of his time. Perhaps nothing exemplifies this more than the passages on grass.

Grass is stuck somewhere between the human and the natural. For some it is the antithesis of natural, the domain of perfectly manicured lawns and the herbicides used to keep them that way. However, writers such as Tim Dee, with his book *Four Fields*, have gone some way to rehabilitate grass and perhaps he owes some homage to Jefferies. Describing the many shades of colour found in meadow grass, Jefferies writes:

Of the million blades of grass no two are of the same shade. Pluck a handful and spread them out side by side and this is at once evident. Nor is any single blade the same shade all the way up. There may be a faint yellow towards the root, a full green about the middle, at the tip perhaps the hot sun has scorched it, and there is a trace of brown.

I think any writer who can inspire a reader to take a closer look at their lawn is worthy of admiration.

Jefferies is surprised by the abundance of nature he encounters in Surbiton. Indeed, he seems to think that nature is more abundant near London than it is in the deepest countryside. At one point he writes about the wood-pigeons he encounters in a copse: 'though so associated with the deepest and most lonely woods, here they were close to the house and garden, constantly heard, and almost always visible; and London, too, so near.' That refrain, 'and London, too, so near,' echoes throughout the book.

Jefferies also writes beautifully about the things that he discovers on his walks around Surbiton, and displays a deep affinity for nature and birds in particular:

The blackbird's whistle is very human, like some one playing the flute; an uncertain player now drawing forth a bar of a beautiful melody and then losing it again. He does not know what quiver or what turn his note will take before it ends; the note leads him and completes itself. His music strives to express his keen appreciation of the loveliness of the days, the golden glory of the meadow, the light, and the luxurious shadows.

The striking difference between Jefferies writing about the Downs and his writing in *Nature Near London* is the difference in perspective. Jefferies' perspective has zoomed in. From taking in the sweeping vistas of the Downs and the entire universe, he has focused his attention on the small details of suburban nature – the wild flowers growing on the train embankments, a single trout in a brook, a patch of edgeland orchard, right down to small creatures such as ants. To quote myself¹: 'Despite the terms used to describe cities – sprawl comes to mind – they often draw us in on a much smaller scale.' Jefferies seems to have felt this effect in Surbiton.

But it is not just Surbiton that draws Jefferies in; London is a constant presence in *Nature Near London* and indeed seems to have captured his imagination throughout his life, since he was a small boy visiting his aunt and uncle there. It is a city that at turns delights and repels him. In a short essay in his posthumously published collection *The Toilers of the Fields*, called 'The Lions in Trafalgar Square', Jefferies writes about the lions of the essay's title and also about the experience of standing next to the lions and watching the life of the city go by:

London is the only real place in the world. The cities turn towards London as young partridges run to their mother. The cities know that they are not real. They are only houses and wharves, and bricks and stucco; only outside. The minds of all men in them, merchants, artists, thinkers, are bent on London... A house is not a dwelling if a man's heart be elsewhere. Now, the heart of the world is in London, and the cities with the simulacrum of man in them are empty. They are moving images only; stand here and you are real.

However, in *Nature Near London* Jefferies also recognises the way in which the city makes it easier for people to disconnect from nature and from the seasons:

[A]lthough the cornfields and the meadows come so closely up to the offices and warehouses of mighty London, there is a line and mark in the minds of men

¹ Naomi Racz, 'On the Benefits of Urban Monomania', 13 Jan 2014.
<http://www.humansandnature.org/benefits-urban-monomania>.

between them.

Ultimately, however, Jefferies is able to see past this divide and to view the city and the country, not as separate entities but as equal parts of a whole. It is this that is perhaps one of his most important ideas in relation to urban nature and Edward Thomas expresses it beautifully in his biography of Jefferies:

He [Jefferies] could not love the suburb gardens ... But with London itself it was different. London is one of the immense things of the world, like the Alps, the Sahara, the Western Sea; and it has a complexity, a wavering changefulness along with its mere size... Huge, labyrinthine, dense, yet airy and plastic to the roving spirits, it troubles the midnight stars, and conspires with the winds and the setting sun to colour and mould the clouds ... The spirits of grass and tree and pool have been driven underground: ponderous headstones of factory and warehouse keep them twisted and helpless in their graves. But London, except in paltry ways to lungs and feet, ends by overcoming any such fanciful sense of its incongruity with Nature. And that, too, not because of the excellent skies over it, the river, the wind in the smoke, the rain on the face; nor because of the fine grass that will grow through the grilles in the pavement round the trees by the National Portrait Gallery and the Gaiety Theatre, or the dock and groundsel and grass and rosebay that greedily adorn ... the crude earth and bricks of demolished buildings; but simply on account of its ancientness, its bulk, its humanity, and, arising out of these, its inevitableness as part of what the sun shines on ...

The idea that the city and nature are one isn't an idea I expected to encounter in a book published in 1883. Of course, I am relying on Thomas' interpretation of Jefferies, but it does seem to be the inevitable conclusion to Jefferies' personal philosophy as expressed in *The Story of My Heart*. If Jefferies, and indeed all humans, are part of nature, then by extension so are the things that humans create.

It's possible to argue that humans hadn't had quite the impact on the planet then as we have now (at one point in *Nature Near London*, Jefferies writes that he is convinced that small birds 'will never cease out of the land' – something we feel less certain about these days). But Jefferies was born into a world that must have still been reeling from revolutions – agricultural and industrial. The steam train is a constant presence in *Nature Near London* and appears as a sort of extension of London:

After rambling across furze and heath, or through dark fir woods; after lingering in the meadows among the buttercups... the path brings you in sight of a railway station. And the railway station, through some process of mind, presently compels you to go up on the platform, and after a little puffing and revolution of wheels you emerge at Charing Cross, or London Bridge, or Waterloo, or Ludgate Hill, and, with the freshness of the meadows still clinging to your coat, mingle with the crowd.

Later on he writes: 'It is not easy to realise in these days of quick transit and

still quicker communication that old England was mostly rural.'

Jefferies was also able to recognise the naturalising effect of time. In his essay 'Notes on Landscape Painting', Jefferies writes about how farm machinery is eventually conquered by nature:

The earth has a way of absorbing things that are placed upon it, of drawing from them their stiff individuality of newness, and throwing over them something of her own antiquity. As the furrow smooths and brightens the share, as the mist eats away the sharpness of the iron angles, so, in a larger manner, the machines sent forth to conquer the soil are conquered by it, become a part of it, and as natural as the old, old scythe and reaping-hook. Thus already the new agriculture has grown hoar.

Jefferies was under no illusion about the 'pristineness' of the British countryside or our ability to project such pristineness on to the land and ever our own machines.

I've never found the idea that humans are separate from nature or that everything we do here is somehow unnatural very appealing. And though I'm not sure I've ever experienced the oneness of the universe in quite the way Jefferies did, I don't think the interconnectedness of living systems is much disputed. Still, I find myself questioning how far down the road I can go with Jefferies. As Thomas puts it in his biography: 'Few townsmen could accept, as Jefferies did, the Downs and the crowd by the Mansion House and the docks, not merely as theoretically all one spirit, but in his heart'. I accept it theoretically, but in my heart? I still have my doubts.



'London Docks looking West'. Engraved by M J Darling from an original drawing by Thomas Shepherd, 1831. (National Maritime Museum)

To Richard Jefferies

Julian Bell

*First published in Winter Movement and other poems
(London: Chatto & Windus, 1930)*

You are our master, and to you
I bring these poems. If they hold
Some pale, faint beauty, it is due
To gleams of your remembered gold.

Yours was that magic. I've but tried
With tattered, scanty verse to tell
Of all that English countryside
You knew and loved so well.

And, if the England that you knew
Is vanishing before the towns,
Yet there may still remain some few
Quiet fields, and harebells on the Downs.

The slow returning plough and wain,
The hay, the harvest, whispering grass,
Steal gently over streets again,
And we may yet see London pass.

If still your spirit haunts the lane
On autumn evenings, and has taught
Some of your secret, not in vain
Shall I have written, or have sought

To catch those instants in a net
Of words; those minutes, crystal clear,
Which the mind never can forget
When all the world stood bright and near.

Now a calm ghost perhaps you see,
Pain free, with disembodied eyes,
The seasons, through Eternity,
Prepare our English Paradise.

Marsh Birds Pass Over London

Irregular Ode by Julian Bell inspired by After London

The traffic roars along the street
All through the lamp-lit town,
And endless crowds on shuffling feet
Go walking up and down.
Cars down an empty road
Sweep like a chariot race,
Rush in windy circles round
A broad, sky – open place.
Couples will dance, and bands will play,
And endless people hurry by
Till it is almost time for day
To light the London sky.
Almost the time when sleepy cows
Are called from a clanging gate,
And Barn Owls hoot from the elm boughs,
And autumn dawn comes late.
But in the city the hot light
Dances like flick’ring flame,
Red and green and blue and white,
In shifting patterns still the same.
The light of the city
Has reddened the sky,
And there are but few stars
To shine on passers-by.
On beating wings the Redshanks go
So far and high
That none can see them, few can catch and know
Their wailing cry.
Curlew and Whimbrel
Take that way,
Plovers Golden
And Plovers Grey,
Lapwing and Dotterel
From far away.
Steadily southward
Goes their flight,
They will rest on sea-beaches
To-morrow night,

They have left their marshes
And the hoar-frost white.
Southward and southward
And south to the sea,
Over the city and far away
Those high, shrill voices sound warningly.
The passing Whimbrel that none hear
Have shrieked a prophecy of fear.
The Seven Whistlers, as they fly,
Tell of who follows presently.
Loud warning all that they beware
Of armies hastening in the air,
That sweep in with a droning flight,
Continually, by day and night.
All through the night great houses flare,
The tattered walls that the bombs tear
Seem broken tins and jars left bare
In muddy sewers, when the sea
Ebbs from the tide-swept estuary.
Fallen, fallen and fallen,
The city fallen and gone.
The marsh birds' desolate calling
Comes menacing from the sky,
The city is falling, falling,
The passing Whimbrel cry.
And the down shepherds with their sheep
See the advancing grasses creep,
Walls crumble stone from stone,
Bone fall from bone.
The city now gleams white and fair
For no smoke clouds the air
Or blackens any wall
At all.
So white, so quiet, it seems to be
A seaside hamlet's cemet'ry
Covered in ground mist chill
On some September morning calm and still.
Grey clouds from the north-east,
Where the river mouth is wide;
The waters piled in a tattered hill

Sweep in on the spring tide.
The waters tower above the shore,
Grow higher and higher yet.
Steep curling waves that leap before
The heaved swell of the tidal bore
That hurries up the town.
Each ruined bridge comes tumbling down,
The waves pour through each gap
That bombs have torn in great stone dykes,
Steadily rise and lap
Against what doors and window-panes
Men had the time to close,
Cascades down every flight of steps,
And still the flooding grows:
Each street a river from side to side,
Where littered wavelets leap;
Steadily the floods gain ground,
What they have won they keep.
The tides sweep in and out again,
Fret and grind at the walls
Already shattered: splashing
In the spreading marsh each falls.
A muddy island, small and low,
Where purple, tall sea-asters grow
On the columns of Saint Paul's.
The ruins make an endless maze
Of banks and channels, gulfs and bays,
With flaking stone hid in the mud.
An empty marsh beneath skies grey.
Where only birds come all the day;
But through the dark the marsh fires gleam
From rotting weeds, and shifting, seem
The blurred reflection of the lights
That danced there for a thousand nights.
And with their desolate calling
Comes the Whimbrel's flight.
Fallen, fallen and fallen,
The cities pass and fall,
The wild birds of the marshes
See the end of them all.

Julian Bell: Bloomsbury Poet

Peter Robins

What will history make of the Bloomsbury Group? They continue to fascinate every new generation who, in turn, ponder on whether they were an influential group of writers, artists and intellectuals or an inward-looking, louche clique of snobs whose self-esteem was greater than their collective talents.

Julian Heward Bell was born into this highbrow circle on 8 February 1908, the son of art critic and historian Clive Bell and the painter Vanessa Bell, sister of Virginia Woolf. A brother, Quentin, was born two years later and a sister, Angelica, in 1918.

Although Bloomsbury was home, Bell grew up more a child of the country as there were frequent visits to a variety of country houses in Wiltshire, Suffolk and Sussex before the Bells rented, from 1916, Charleston, at the foot of Firle Beacon, the highest point on the Sussex Downs. In a poem, "Autobiography", written in 1934, Bell evokes his rural childhood:

And then the passage of those country years,
A war-time boyhood; orchard trees run wild,
West wind and rain, winters of holding mud,
Wood fires in blue-bright frost and tingling blood,
All brought to the sharp senses of a child.

At fourteen Bell was boarded at Leighton Park School, a Quaker establishment in Reading which espoused pacifism, a creed shared by Clive Bell, who had been a conscientious objector in the war. His character did not take to the Public School ethos and when Bell left at eighteen, Clive decided he should widen his horizons before going up to university and packed him off to Paris for a year to study with a friend of his father's. Bell didn't enjoy the gap-year of cosmopolitan culture and yearned for the English countryside – which prompted him to write his first poems.

In the autumn of 1927 Bell entered King's College, Cambridge, reading History then English, exploring his interest in poetry, and became involved in left-wing politics and journalism. The student publication *The Venture* published his first poems and in 1929 his poem "Chaffinch" was included in *Songs for Sixpence*, a series of poems published by W. Heffer & Sons. This was spotted by Chatto & Windus who invited Bell to submit his poems and his first volume, *Winter Movement*, was published in 1930 and had for themes wild nature and country life. The book, with its dedicatory stanzas "To Richard Jefferies", consists of twenty-seven poems, the most remarkable of which is

“Marsh Birds Pass Over London”, based on an episode in *After London*, which David Garnett described as ‘the best preface to *After London* that can be imagined’. Another poem in the collection, “Fern Ladies”, is also derived from *After London*. How Bell first discovered the works of Jefferies is not recorded. His dual biographers, Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, merely offer, ‘Since boyhood he had admired the prose of Richard Jefferies...and he wanted to achieve a comparable clarity and accuracy in verse. The influence of Jefferies is unmistakable.’ The book sold poorly despite some good reviews. Two years later Bell contributed a poem, “Arms and the Man”, to *New Signatures*, a collection of poetry published by the Woolf’s Hogarth Press which also included W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender. This was rather a late gesture by the Woolfs who had shown little interest in publishing Julian’s work. In a memoir of Julian, Virginia admitted, ‘I thought him very careless, not “an artist”, too personal in what he wrote and “all over the place”’. This is the one thing I regret in our relationship: that I might have encouraged him more as a writer.’

After graduating with an upper second-class degree rather than the first he had anticipated, Bell was determined to commit himself to the academic community and returned to King’s in the autumn of 1930 to work on a dissertation that might lead to his appointment as a Fellow. The following four years were devoted to research of two dissertations, one concerning Pope’s poetry and the other on ethics. Neither gave him the Fellowship he wanted.

By the end of 1935 Bell had reached a turning point: he could not find a place for himself in the world of Cambridge or Bloomsbury. Neither *Winter Movement* nor *New Signatures* brought him the acclaim he sought and judged by his own high expectations he was a failure as a poet. An unexpected escape from this dilemma presented itself when he was made an offer of the position of Professor of English at the National University of Wuhan, in China, four hundred miles along the Yangtze River from Nanking. This was made possible as a result of education reforms under Chiang Kai-shek. The duties involved teaching English and English Literature, from Shakespeare to Bloomsbury, and Bell began his residency in October, 1935.

In February 1936, The Hogarth Press published another volume of Bell’s poetry, *Work for the Winter*, a selection of poems that had been written some years earlier. Although there was one favourable review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Bell accepted that it was not going to make his reputation and by this time he had put writing poetry aside.

By July, reports of unrest in Spain appeared in the Chinese newspapers and Bell’s correspondence with friends in England is dominated by his analysis of the situation and whether he should join British volunteers, some of whom had entered the war from August. His other thoughts concerned just how long he should remain in China and what he could do on his return.

While enjoying the academic and social life at Wuhan, Bell became attracted to an intelligent and talented artist, Ling Shuhua, the wife of a Chinese scholar. They began a lengthy affair, including trips to Peking together, but by October, Chen Yuan, Ling's husband, had realised the deceit and confronted the couple. Bell's initial enthusiasm for teaching Chinese students had waned, he had also tired of the complications of his affair with a demanding mistress and his mind was settled on fighting with the International Brigade in Spain. His solution to this quandary was to resign, citing "family reasons" to save face for the Chinese. There was a delay in funding and arranging his return and he didn't leave until January 1937. Bell's intention was to travel to Marseille and then go directly to Spain to fight on behalf of the Republican Government. By this time he had revealed his intentions to his mother and friends who were alarmed at his plans and begged him to return to England before committing himself.

Bell arrived home in March 1937 to face his mother and his aunt Virginia and the friends they had gathered, including E. M. Forster, Stephen Spender and David Garnett, all of whom attempted to discourage him from fighting in Spain. Eventually, he compromised, put aside an ambition to fight and volunteered to join the British Medical Aid Unit as an ambulance driver, following the example of David Garnett who had served with the Friends Ambulance Unit in the Great War.

Bell left for Spain on 6 June 1937. A month later he was in high spirits, writing to his mother: 'I do think I'm being of real use as a driver, in that I'm careful and responsible and work on my car – a Chevrolet ambulance. Most of our drivers are wreckers, neglect all sorts of precautions like oiling and greasing, over-speeding etc. Any really good and careful drivers out here would be really valuable. The other odd element is the Charlestonian one of improvising materials – a bit of carpet to mend a stretcher, e.g., in which I find myself at home.' On the 18 July, during the battle of Brunete, he was wounded by a bomb at Villanueva de la Cañada and taken to the military hospital at El Escorial where he died the same day. Bell was buried at Fuencarral cemetery, north of Madrid, later to be a resting place for many of the International Brigade.

On hearing the news of her son, Vanessa suffered a complete physical breakdown. In her memoir, written less than a fortnight after Bell's death, Virginia's grief is imbued with ire: 'What did he feel about Spain? What made him feel it necessary, knowing as he did how it must torture Nessa, to go? He knew her feeling...yet he deliberately inflicted this fearful anxiety on her. What made him do it? ...I have never known anyone of my generation have that feeling about war. We were all C.O.'s in the Great War.'

In a short obituary published in *The Times*, Julian Bell was said to have 'made some reputation as a poet'. He was the only poet to emerge from the Bloomsbury Group but is now not much celebrated for his poetry but whose

reputation is firmly established as a poet who fought Fascism in the Spanish Civil War. The Scottish poet, Sorley MacLean, paid tribute to him in his poem “Cornford” (1938/9):

Cornford and Julian Bell
and Garcia Lorca
always going round in my head
and sky black without an opening.
Cornford and Julian Bell
and Garcia Lorca,
the poets will not get over your death
with the lie of the comfortable heart.



Julian Bell in the South of France, 1929

Poetry Review: *Scattered Light* by Jeremy Hooker

Richard Stewart

Jeremy Hooker is a name well known to the Richard Jefferies Society. He is currently Emeritus Professor of English at the University of South Wales. His many published books include the recent eleventh collection of poetry, *Scattered Light*. The first section has just one poem, 'Brother Worm', and explores one of the many achievements of Darwin besides 'Origin of Species'. It includes the well known account of Darwin placing worms close to a variety of musical instruments to see if they responded, the worm being a species that:

through its skin knows vibrations
of mole's snout, or bird above,
beak striking down.

and he adds that there is an affinity between the two:

accumulating over
millions of years mould
that bears crops, as he
in a lifetime gathers
facts.

I found several of the poems in the next section 'Unfinished Portraits', difficult to relate to, not a fault of the poet but probably because I didn't know the people involved. However, 'Father Painting' had for me a resonance with Monet's later life eye problems. Here the father is: 'almost blind, ruining a painting/ he thinks he is improving'. The poet adds that no one can stop him or should even try, 'behind his eyes the deeper tones'. In 'Unfinished Portrait' Durer's 'The Great Piece of Turf' is described as:

earth as never seen before,
vibrant with the breath
of the creator.

In 'Poet Among Ferns' a part of Tony Conran's life is described as: 'Loneliness was the place/ you came in from'.

There is a memorable tribute to Derek Jarman, relating how they might have met and shared a love of Hordle cliffs, West Wight, the Needles and the sea:

like a hare
in its form, sun warm on closed eyes

and then a beautiful alliterative final seven lines:

sea below whispering, grating gently on shingle,
the expanse of the bay marked by a ship
or a sail, but with a delicious emptiness
some dream could expand to fill,
or fade in the warmth, the scents
of sweetness and salt, the sound
of the sea hushing on shingle, whispering.

There are imaginative versions of ancient legends with 'The Master Of The Actaeon Mosaic' having the second use of the line 'piece by piece' set by itself to link the hounds killing their master and the mosaic maker assembling the pieces 'like a jagged tessera'. In the next section 'Scattered Light' there is an imaginative re-telling of Orpheus and Eurydice in just twenty nine carefully chosen words and 'Like Thistledown' is about words, reminding me of poems by Edward Thomas and the American Carl Sandburg on a similar theme, with one word which may:

catch on a bird's wing
or land where in time
it will lift a paving-stone

Some of the shorter poems I found less effective, but others incredibly powerful in their brevity, especially the four lines of 'The Bramley at Moor Farm'. In 'Mother of the Winds' an extended personification includes: 'feel on your face / the paws of the rain'.

As it is my own expertise, 'Butterfly Extravaganza' was very welcome, covering a wide range of species and:

Opening your eyes, you catch
the day emerging, unfolding
broad, blue wings.

This was a vivid reminder of Adonis Blue butterflies on the North Downs.

The section 'God's Houses' covers a wide variety of locations, with the first part of 'St. Faith's, Little Witchingham' reminding me of Shelley's 'Ozymandias' and then the convincing contrast in 'Netley' with the abbey ruins at first:

woods and water embowering
grey stone and shaven green;
then to Constable they become:
turbulence, fury—
a glimmer of white surrounded
by darkness

and 'a dark red figure' that once seen will haunt you.

So many of the poems have a positive and optimistic ending, as in 'St. Issui, Partrishow' with: 'swallows, little faces/looking out, eager to fly'.

'Salisbury Cathedral: The Bust of Richard Jefferies' will be familiar as the poet gave permission for its inclusion in the 2015-2016 Annual Report and Autumn newsletter of the Richard Jefferies Society. Jeremy Hooker manages to examine Jefferies and his personal 'religion' without getting embroiled in the still ongoing discussions on this matter, writing that :

They brought him in
out of the wild,
refashioned him:
a Victorian worthy,

which gives an early indication of the poet's sentiments, to which he adds:

If there has to be a statue
let it be one a bird can shit on
something one can imagine
feeling the wind—

and, with echoes of *After London*, he comments on the wind rising along the monuments:

preparing to scatter them
like pieces of eggshell and leaves.

The final section, 'Island View', includes an extremely powerful six pages, with ten sections, of 'Saltgrass Lane' which is a meditation on time and the different ages of Man, about a land that was:

always a place in the making
where I was happy to be.

and he adds: 'I do not expect to walk here/ alive again'. The last two ambiguous words repeat a theme running throughout this collection, that is the linking of Man and the natural world in both past, present and future time, something Jefferies so memorably explored in *The Story of My Heart* and essays such as 'The Pageant of Summer'.

This is a collection I would recommend to all lovers of Jefferies . Much of the poetry has a profound simplicity that merits many re-readings. It is also published by Enitharmon Press, to me the leading publishers of good contemporary poetry.

Collection published 2015, ISBN 9781910392089, paperback, £9.99.

Richard Jefferies, Apprentice Writer: Review of Richard Jefferies' *Ben Tubbs Adventures* and *The Farmer's World*

Jeremy Hooker

Two new books by Richard Jefferies are cause for celebration among Jefferies' readers. Neither, however, is likely to be read enthusiastically by those who love the lyrical Jefferies, Jefferies the naturalist and thinker, and author of highly individual novels; their value will rather be to Jefferies scholars, those to whom *everything* he wrote offers insight to the man and his work. Both have excellent introductions, and are worth acquiring for that reason alone. Indeed, Andrew Rossabi's introduction to *Ben Tubbs Adventures*, as one would expect of this author, is a major contribution to our understanding of Jefferies the writer.

To my mind *The Farmer's World* is by some way the more readable of the two books. Its subtitle announces clearly what it is: 'Richard Jefferies' Agricultural Journalism in the late 1870s'. It consists of essays that first appeared in *The Live Stock Journal and Fancier's Gazette*. Samuel J. Looker first discovered these, and a number of them were published in *Field and Farm* and *Chronicles of the Hedges*. They reveal a Jefferies who has learned his trade as an agricultural journalist. He may have learnt it too well, for as Eric Jones says, 'there are times when he panders' to the prejudices of his readers, who were 'centrally stock breeders and grassland farmers'. In these essays Jefferies is mainly a spokesman for the Establishment; the man who would write 'One of the New Voters' is nowhere in sight. What we do see, however, is a good specialist journalist. He knows the conditions and latest developments of his subject, and he writes a clear, informative prose. Eric Jones says the best that can be said for the book, that 'its insights into a genuinely crucial turning-point in rural affairs, presented in Jefferies' inimitable style, make it a significant source for agricultural historians. It should make an intriguing read for many others'.

I would not call *Ben Tubbs Adventures* an intriguing read. Andrew Rossabi says the best and the worst that can be said about it as a novel. He also describes its literary influences and biographical interest so thoroughly, and is so scholarly and even-handed, that I feel justified in giving my opinion frankly in this review. The story is a boy's adventure story, probably written when Jefferies was in his late teens – when, I think, he should have been old enough to know better. The fifteen-year old Ben runs away from home and school, and

with his friend voyages to America, falling in with slavers on the way. The story gathers momentum in America, where the boys and their older friend travel through forest and prairie, living off the land, experiencing hardship, and escaping the Comanche. The novel contains a good deal of casual racism in respect of blacks and Mexicans.

I think it would be po-faced to object to the latter. Jefferies had the prejudices of his time, which a reader now might have had if he or she had lived then. What I dislike more about the book is the *idea* of the boys, and especially Ben, who is violent and thoughtlessly cruel. This is more noticeable in the early chapters of the book, when he is extricating himself from his mother and other figures in authority. Ben at sea and on the run from Comanche is a more attractive figure. Jefferies, I think, doesn't recognise that his hero is dislikeable. His tone generally is ironic, but the prose style is too second-hand to establish a significant critical distance between author and hero.

The mature Jefferies was of course an adventure writer, and a good one. Exciting adventures well told are features of several of his stories and novels, most notably *Bevis* and *After London*. He made a living as a professional writer, and he lost and found his way, working through callow romance to find himself as both journalist and imaginative writer. *Ben Tubbs Adventures* shows his romance of America, which was no doubt stimulated by his father's stories, while essays in *The Farmer's World* display his continuing interest in American agriculture. Adventure, a romance of freedom in the open air, remains a feature of the mature Jefferies, and we may say of him what Coleridge said about the supreme value of carrying 'the feelings of Childhood into the powers of Manhood'. Thus, Coleridge virtually defines the making of genius.

This is, I believe, applicable to Jefferies. But it is not all that needs to be said about his creation of the roughneck Ben or the much finer and more complex, imperious Bevis. In reading *Ben Tubbs Adventures* I could not shake off the feeling that I was reading a compensatory fiction. Some words of one of Jefferies' schoolteachers, reported by his daughter, which Andrew Rossabi quotes, come to mind: 'he was very quiet, dreamy and reserved, which made him unpopular with the other boys'. Ben, it seems to me, is the alter ego of a young man who had been called a sissy, a Mummy's boy, or the equivalent: a sensitive lad made fun of by bullying youths and elders, one who had to prove himself as a hero and leader to others. Ben is meant to show his author's daring and toughness to those who have condemned him as a dreamer, and, perhaps, to Jefferies himself.

Of course, Richard Jefferies was a Victorian, a man of empire. He learnt to see adventure in the life of nature, in a bird's flight, or the odyssey of an insect up a blade of grass, but the Caesarism of *The Story of My Heart* reminds us that the sensitive writer, the lyrical poet-naturalist, was also an arm-chair warrior, a

dictatorial world-maker in his mind. Q. D. Leavis called him ‘a many-sided and comprehensive genius’. I agree with that view. Jefferies did have many sides, and we do him a disservice by emphasising one at the expense of others. That is not my intention in this review. My aim is rather to suggest that Jefferies was suppressing different sides of himself in both *Ben Tubbs Adventures* and the essays collected in *The Farmer’s World*. In the latter he was writing to make a living, with his eye focused on the market for agricultural journalism. In the former he was constructing a fantasy world to compensate for his deficiencies as a ‘real’ boy in other people’s eyes, and in his own conventional view.

Richard Jefferies, *Ben Tubbs Adventures*, Introduction by Andrew Rossabi, (Foulsham: Petton Books, April 2016). ISBN: 9780956375179, paperback, £12.

Richard Jefferies, *The Farmer’s World: Richard Jefferies’ Agricultural Journalism in the late 1870s*, Introduction by Eric Jones, (Foulsham: Petton Books, February 2016). ISBN: 9780956375162, paperback, £15.

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