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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).

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

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The Editors are Peter Robins and Jean Saunders.

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This 130th Anniversary Edition marks one hundred and thirty years since the death of Richard Jefferies. 2017 is the centenary of the death of Edward Thomas to whom the Society also pays tribute.



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On Allotment Gardens

Richard Jefferies

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The definition of an allotment is a small piece of cultivated ground lying at a distance from the occupier's habitation, and it differs also from a garden in the absence of fruit-trees, or flowers. It is a plot of land devoted simply to the growth of table vegetables, or other plants of a strictly utilitarian character. There is a strong resemblance between it and a farm: the allotment is, in fact, a miniature farm, the live stock being represented by the pig, which is partially fattened on the refuse, and whose manure is employed to fertilize it. Allotments are as varied in their size, and the terms under which they are held, as the soil and customs of the different localities in which they are situated. The rudest and most primitive allotment is found in secluded meadow-districts, where, until lately, the double-mound hedges gave the fields the appearance of glades in a species of forest. Even at this day, after so much timber has been thrown, and so little planted to replace it; when the process of enlarging the grounds and obliterating the divisions is rapidly progressing, still, if viewed from a distance and from a height, which gives a bird's-eye sweep to the vision, many parts of the country seem to be nothing but woodlands. Just at the foot of the hill upon which the spectator is standing, there are open fields visible; but with increasing distance the hedgerows and trees blend into what appears a vast forest, interspersed with villages. Of course, this is purely deceptive, but it demonstrates that notwithstanding the clearing that has been going on for the last thirty years, there still remain large quantities of wood. Where a double-mound hedge has been cut, it is common to find an allotment. The ash or thorn-stoles having been grubbed, care is taken to leave a fence on each side of the mound, and a gap having been left, with a pole across it in lieu of a gate, the garden is formed on the site of what was previously a small copse. If the ditch is deep, a plank or slab is thrown across it for a bridge. The first thing necessary in preparing such plots of land for cultivation is to level the banks, taking care not to weaken the fence too much. The digging up of this long narrow plot is attended with great difficulties, because of the numerous roots left in the earth, and not unfrequently the stones that turn up. After much labour it is got into some sort of condition, and planted

with potatoes or cabbage. The first crop is sadly interfered with by weeds, whose roots having so long run riot in the hedges, cannot now be extirpated for some time. Their seeds, too, seem to preserve an extraordinary degree of vitality, and a vigorous growth of rank, coarse vegetation cannot be entirely prevented. If in clearing out the ditches on each side of the double-mound, any of the mud taken up has been thrown on to the ground now cultivated, the crop of weeds is certain to be still larger, and more variegated in character.

It would almost seem that water possesses the power of retaining the germinating force in the seeds of some kinds of plants, so that although they cannot burst forth and grow while under the surface, yet the moment they are removed and placed in favourable conditions, life starts forth afresh. Every farmer who has cleared out a pond full of rich black mud, is well aware of this fact. The strong thick mud-heap left beside the pool in the course of one season is completely hidden with rank weeds. The labourer who works at this primitive allotment has all these difficulties to contend with; but having overcome them there still remain the rooks, who are terrible pests to a garden, let what may be said. Curiously enough, rooks will scarcely ever attack a garden close to the trees in which they build, unless pressed by severe weather; but a garden like this, at a distance from a dwelling, they do not distinguish from the field that surrounds it. All descriptions of birds prey upon this allotment; and no invention of clattering tin strips, or coloured ribbons fluttering in the breeze, will deter them from eating their fill. Then there are the rats, which, especially if the ditches are wet, and communicate with a water-course, will make great havoc. In addition, rabbits and wandering hares each do their part in the work of destruction. In spite of all these drawbacks, however, the labourer sometimes manages to raise a fair crop.

These allotments are always made by men who work all the year round upon the farm, and reside in a cottage, either rented off the farmer, or usually occupied by his labourers. The labourer clears the ground at the expense of his own labour, and has the first crop or so free of rent; after which a small, a very small rent, say one shilling, is imposed, in order to prevent disputes as to the title to land, than which nothing is more fruitful of litigation. But it generally happens that in a year or two the labourer's enthusiasm for this species of gardening dies away, and the allotment either falls into disuse, and is overrun with bushes, or the agriculturist finally grubs up and levels the whole. In this last case some little benefit is obtained from the cultivation of the ground, which induces it to more readily yield a good crop of grass.

Many agriculturists, when they level a mound, plough or dig it up at their own cost for the first year, take a crop of potatoes out of it. They generally answer well the first year in new broken ground; and the strip of land is at the same time cleansed of weeds, which would otherwise come up in immense profusion, and scatter their seeds over the fields.

Another primitive but far more preferable species of allotment, is the plot of land often granted by farmers at the corner of an arable field to the carter or some constant labourer. This can be ploughed up at the same time as the rest of the field, thus saving the time and labour of the spade. Although spade-husbandry is considered the best for this purpose, still the balance is made good by the greater facilities of the plough in cases like these. The spade is, of course, used as an auxiliary implement. These allotments have no fences, lying open like the rest of the field, only separated from it by a furrow. In some places this system is rather extensively followed, but in others the farmers have an objection to it, and prefer assisting the labourer to a garden close to his own cottage. The objection is that the labourer is often tempted to pay more attention to the work required on his allotment than to that which he is paid to do in the same field; and also that the necessity he pleads of working there in the early morning and late evening, is a pretext to act as a cloak to poaching. But when a row of cottages adjoin an arable field, as they frequently do, nothing is more common than for the labourers to have strips of it granted to them at a nominal rent – that is, supposing they work on the farm to which it belongs. For agriculturists have a certain feeling against allowing men, who work at a distance, to have allotments upon their farms, and the farmer's own men also resent it as unfair. The use of the allotment is, in these cases, thoroughly understood as an accommodation, for which the labourer pays not in cash, but in the fact of his being resident on the spot, and ready whenever wanted. The rent is, in consequence, merely nominal; or rather there is no rent, that of the cottage being reckoned to cover it.

Other allotments are those which the labourer forms for himself, often without leave or license, out of a piece of waste land by the side of the highway. This was at one time a constant practice, and hence in country districts it is common to find a broad highway road, with wide green sward on either hand suddenly contract itself to the width of a lane on approaching some small hamlet. In years gone by the squatters have appropriated the sward, and having established their title to some extent by the payment of quit-rent at the court-leets to the lord of the manor, cannot now be removed. In the same way as a broad road is thus

contracted to a lane, so narrow lanes are made still more inconvenient and awkward for meeting vehicles.

These allotments are long and narrow; and if the soil is good, there is only one thing to militate against their productiveness, and that is the high, thick hedge which almost invariably bounds them upon the side away from the road, and towards the fields. This hedge shelters innumerable birds, and perhaps rats, who do not scruple to prey upon the contents of the poor man's garden. The farmer does not care to cut his hedge too low, or diminish its thickness; because he knows by experience that these squatters are a most aggressive and grasping race, and if he yields an inch they will take an ell, which, although perhaps only natural, is not always desirable. In other words, the squatter will fill up the ditch, if he possibly can do so, to extend the area of his garden, and does not always hesitate to make free with the wood of his neighbour. Almost all villages which are situated in the midst of an arable district have one or more fields entirely given up to the labourers as allotments. These are the allotments proper. This is one of the advantages a labourer enjoys who lives in an arable country; for in meadow districts, allotments are neither so easily obtainable, nor so cheap, and are often at a considerable distance. There are numerous hamlets in meadow districts which have no allotments proper – that is, a field devoted to the purpose, where every one and any one may rent a plot of land. In these villages, the more fortunate cottagers have indeed gardens, but every cottage has not got a garden; and if it has, it is rarely large enough to supply vegetables for a family. Many will go to a distance of as much as two miles to rent an allotment, walking up to do the necessary work in the evening; but this is found too laborious to pay, and after a little time the attempt is thrown up. It is not altogether the farmer's fault that this state of things exists. There are, perhaps, twenty or thirty farmers on dairy holdings near this small hamlet. They require every yard of grass they can get; and can spare only a slip here and there in odd corners, to supplement the occasional deficiencies of their own gardens. At all events, they feel that they cannot accommodate any other labourers with gardens but those who work upon the estate all the year round. Should a farmer even be in favour of getting an allotment field for the hamlet, and go so far as to contemplate breaking up a four-acre piece with that view, he has first to consider these things: the cost of labour in breaking up the ground, the loss of grass, and will his lease or agreement permit him to do so. There is no reason why he alone should take all the necessary trouble, and go to the inevitable expense for the good of the public. Thus, while all acknowledge the benefit that would accrue, it is

nobody's business to initiate the movement. On the other hand, however, it must be remembered that pasture districts of this character are at the best but sparsely populated, and the number of heads of families living in cottages who have an imperative demand for gardens is comparatively small; so that the deficiency is not so seriously felt as might appear. The great villages in the centre of arable districts are usually fairly well supplied with allotment fields. Two, or even three fields entirely devoted to this purpose, may occasionally be found in one parish in different tithings. These fields may belong to the lord of the manor, and have been originally thrown open in this way, with the express object of benefiting the locality; or they are let out by some owner of property as much with a view of remuneration as accommodation to his neighbours. This latter is especially the case in the vicinity of large towns, or railway-stations, where there are numbers of men employed in factories, or on the lines. These men, in search of cheap cottages, come out into the surrounding villages, and having found a dwelling, the next thing is a garden, for which they are willing to pay a reasonable price; and some farmer, or enterprising owner, seeing this demand, opens his gates, and contrives to realize a good rental. There is, of course, a great difference between the prices charged in purely agricultural villages for allotments let out to resident labourers by the lord of the manor, and those rented by navvies or mechanics of persons whose object is not benevolence. Ascending still higher, there are other allotments to be found in the outskirts of rural towns. These are often on land which is in the market for building purposes, and you may see a board offering 'This eligible site for sale' affixed to a pole rising out of a plot of potatoes. The same thing occurs in large cities, near their edges, where they blend into the country; only here the true allotment is frequently lost in the market garden. In many country places there are large tracts of land which have been left centuries ago as a gift to the adjoining town, or presented to it by the then monarch, in recompense of services rendered by the inhabitants. As a rule, perhaps, these tracts of common-land will be found to be pasture; but instances of arable fields do occur, and, in certain examples, these extend to hundreds of acres. The occupation and use of these allotments is vested in the burgesses or aldermen; and minute laws have been elaborated in the process of generations regulating their distribution among the inhabitants. Although these tracts of land are not commonly so considered, in point of fact they are really and truly allotments, and come within the discussion. They are allotments on a larger scale, and governed by a recognized code; and as they have been in existence time out of mind, the lessons to be learnt from them cannot be

overlooked. Some of them, in fact, actually illustrate the practice and working of schemes which are loudly proclaimed in our day as new and untried theories, which one party represents to be a panacea for all evils, and the other condemns as the abominable outcome of communism. Neither seems to have taken the trouble to go into the facts; or rather, they are both apparently ignorant that such institutions exist in the very centre of the conservative country. The various species of allotments which are to be found in the kingdom, all come under one or other of the descriptions which have been just enumerated.

In visiting and examining many examples of all these varieties of allotments, I came to the conclusion that, allowing for slight differences consequent upon position, there was a great similarity between each instance to others of the same class. In commencing this examination, it seemed natural to begin with the gardens attached to the cottages, and which in certain places are little more than allotments; that is, used for purely utilitarian purposes. The greatest amount of variation existed as to the size of the garden. Some cottages had barely enough to grow a few boilings of early potatoes, the cultivated ground consisting of a narrow edging in front of the dwelling, and separated from the road only by rude palings. The inhabitants of these somewhat unfortunate places were always eager and anxious to obtain an allotment, but could not always do so, even though they were willing to pay a fair price, and to walk considerable distances to it. The reason was because the allotment field was only just sufficient in size to supply the wants of those cottagers who resided in the immediate neighbourhood, and worked upon the surrounding farm. These, of course, had the preference in the letting of the lots, and rarely could an outsider obtain a piece. These cottagers, either being squatters or really the owners of their houses, and thus independent, and perhaps sometimes disagreeable in the habits of their lives to the adjacent farmers, could not persuade them to allow a plot of ground to be broken up. The result of these untoward circumstances was, that the cottager had, in great part, to go without vegetables, or else to purchase them, which he was often unable to do from their scarcity and high price. A little further along a cottage would occur to which was attached a small garden, perhaps twenty yards long by five or six wide, taken, no doubt, years ago from the waste at the roadside. This cottage being held on quit-rent, and therefore practically a freehold, the labourer and his forefathers had dwelt on it for three generations, and their tastes plainly displayed itself in the garden, which was crowded with fruit-trees of all descriptions; for it is a characteristic of the labourer that he seems to possess a singular fancy for

planting one at least of every kind of tree and shrub, so that these small patches often contain as many varieties as really large gardens. Here are apple-trees, generally of old, crab-like, and now disused sorts; always bullaces, for which the labourer has a special predilection. Their rough, though not unpleasant, acid is, no doubt, exactly suited to a palate accustomed to a long dietary upon bacon and bread and cheese. Damsons, pears, and a small black plum, which is also a particular favourite, and even, in one or two instances, a walnut-tree and a filbert-bush. Gooseberry-bushes, currants, not so often raspberries, all crowd the confined area, and injure by their roots and shade the growth of the table vegetable. These, too, are of the most varied character. The whole area would be barely large enough to grow sufficient potatoes for the family; but, instead of being devoted to that purpose, it is split up into half-a-dozen tiny plots, containing at least two varieties of potato (there must be variety), peas, kidney-beans, broad-beans, parsnips, carrots, onions, and a few lettuces. The profits of such a garden entirely depend upon the fruit-trees, which sometimes, in favourable seasons, will yield sufficient to pay the entire rent, and leave something towards winter clothing. The produce of a single good plum or pear-tree will amount to as much as two pounds, and, as no care has been expended on the cultivation and production of the crop, it is looked upon as peculiarly remunerative. But these returns are singularly uncertain, and years may go by without a single penny of profit. From the parsnips the housewife makes a wine, as also from the gooseberries and currants, and occasionally from the elderberries, which grow in profusion upon the hedge which bounds the garden, and which, in nine cases out of ten, is of elder. These home-made wines are looked upon with great favour by the labouring class, and are esteemed as highly as sherry and port in a different social station. In visiting these people, they are sure to offer you a glass, and naturally feel hurt if you hesitate to imperil your digestion. Sometimes a labourer, whose father was a bit of a carpenter or blacksmith, has possession of a real orchard, though a small one – a piece of enclosed ground entirely planted with fruit-trees, apple in the centre and plum near the outside. This is, in good hands, a source of considerable revenue to him. Instances of this kind are not so rare as may be imagined. The fruit of these small orchards has not been selected with the care exercised in the gardens of the upper class; it is mostly rough and acid, but it finds a ready sale in rural districts. The farmsteads generally possess an orchard in counties and localities where the apple will grow; but in most cases these orchards have been planted by a previous generation, and the trees are fast decaying, while the sorts are no better than those in

the labourer's garden. The result of the custom of overcrowding their small gardens with so many varieties is, that the cottager is anxious to obtain a separate piece of ground, which he may devote entirely to potatoes and cabbage. Some of them have long narrow slips by the roadside, for which they pay quit-rent; and these are *de facto* allotments, with the difference that they stand solitary. Here the labourer grows his stock of indispensable vegetables.

I have often walked across fields of fairly good meadow land, to examine the rude and primitive hedge allotments made in the double mound. The soil is usually a clay, thick and hard, and apt to get into great lumps, which seem to defy attempts at cultivation. The appearance of these gardens in the midst of such hedges is very singular. The farmer himself is not above utilizing odd corners like this, especially where a stream wanders through his fields. In flat meadow land, these brooks, having a very slight fall, turn and twist about in the most extraordinary manner, making an endless series of little angular peninsulas, which were formerly generally planted as small withy or ash copses, and were the chosen resorts of moor-hens and wild-fowl, and occasionally a hare or a fox; but lately many of them have been grubbed and turned into allotment gardens, either used by the farmer himself or let out to his workpeople on easy terms.

The size of the allotments granted to labourers in the corners of arable fields varies almost in exact proportion to the richness of the soil. If the soil is good, the allotment is comparatively small; if it is poor, it is large in area, though nearly similar in productive power. Thus on down land, where the soil is thin and lies on a substratum of chalk-rubble, with layers of flint, these allotments on the outside of arable farms often extend to a quarter of an acre, and even in exceptional cases to more than this. A quarter or half an acre has a gratifying sound about it, and there is a seeming generosity in granting so large a share; but the facts are different, for on the summit of these hills corn does not come to perfection, and even on the slopes the oat-straw is often ridiculously short, and reminds one of Arctic vegetation. The cold is intense in winter, and the snow will lie in the hollows for a great length of time. It has been known to remain even till July. There is little or no moisture in the soil: what falls from the clouds is quickly absorbed, and issues in springs of the purest water – far down below, at the entrance to the valley. The heat is great in the middle of summer, and it is a dry heat, without the moisture which is favourable to abundant growth. The sharp frost, the bitter wind, the lack of moisture, the exposure, the shallow soil, are all inimical to cultivation, and materially reduce the value of these allotments. Some of these hill-farms are so far removed from all

human intercourse, and situated in such bleak and barren spots, that it is only by the offer of good wages and exceptional advantages, that the occupier can induce labourers to remain. These advantages consist of well-built cottages, essential in such chilly places, and large allotment gardens, which are in great part cultivated by the farmer, since it is his plough and horses which do the work. Many farmers who begun this system through necessity, come, in time, to recognize its general utility, and to take a deep interest in the small colony they have planted, and of which, in that out-of-the-way spot, they are judge and king. Some go even so far as to insure the goods of their cottagers against fire; a very excellent precaution, for, of all other dwellings, cottages seem peculiarly liable to conflagration. Out of these circumstances it frequently happens that the best cottages, largest, and most conveniently built, with the greatest amount of garden or allotment ground attached, are to be found in the most thinly-populated districts, where there seems hardly a house to a mile. It sometimes happens, also, that these allotments on the hills, though subject to so many drawbacks, give a larger yield of the most valuable of all vegetables – potatoes – than the more favourably situated garden in the vale. This arises from their occasionally escaping the potato disease in a most marked manner, and has been supposed to be due to the porosity of the soil, which allows the rain to filter through, and does not retain a quantity of water constantly at the bottom of the tuber. But at other times the same allotments are destroyed by drought, for nothing is more destructive to hill cultivation than a lack of rain. These great allotments often produce turnips as well as potatoes, and cabbages, and the more ordinary table vegetables. Turnips require a considerable area, in order to grow them in quantities at all useful.

Descending from the downs, there is almost always a fringe of villages where the valley commences. Nothing is more common than to find the sides of the deep vales or combes, the ‘bottoms,’ as they are called, cultivated as allotment gardens. They have a curious appearance, for, being on a steep slope, the rows of vegetables run up and down the hill, and everything may be said to be growing at an angle of forty-five. They answer, however, very well, though a man requires some little practice before he can dig and set seed properly, while working on a slope like the roof of a house. The advantage of utilizing these slopes is evident. They are often composed of a really good soil, and the ‘bottom’ itself, or floor of the narrow valley, is frequently the very richest meadow of the locality, kept constantly green and flourishing by the spring which bursts out of the hill-side and traverses it. The steep slope is too acute for hay-making, or, at

least, for carrying the hay when made. Practically, it is only useful for a sheep-walk; these sure-footed animals crop it with ease, but the slope is not of sufficient extent to maintain even a small flock. It is then profitably dug up and planted, and yields well. In the close vicinity of villages, these slopes, which resemble nothing so much as the sides of a very deep railway cutting, are always cultivated in this way, and regular allotments are marked out upon them. No practical difficulty is found in working them, the wheelbarrow only being superseded by the basket. The greatest enemies to these plots are the rabbits and vermin that shelter in the adjacent copses, for there are almost sure to be copses where these narrow valleys are seen.

The field set apart for allotments in a genuine agricultural village, where the larger area of land is arable, is not an interesting object to look at. It is always close to the road: this is absolutely necessary on account of communication. The fences are mere mounds; all hedges being kept shorn close not to harbour birds. The ordinary plan is to have a cart-track straight through the field, from which paths branch out on either hand leading to, and at the same time acting as divisions between, the lots.

In the early part of the year the field has a most varied and patchy aspect from the innumerable small squares of various vegetables, each with its different shade of green. In autumn and winter it is desolate and an eyesore, unless where the rule of the rental compels the occupiers to keep their lands clear and to remove or properly stack the refuse. Our labourers are not picturesque at this their favourite work of allotment gardening. The costume is against it: especially that of the women. Women do a great deal of work upon these allotments. They can pick weeds and hoe nearly as well as men: these always, however, retain to themselves the conduct of the sowing. One of the finest allotment-fields I know is part of the glebe-land of the parish rector. The former rector, with a foresight and spirit that did him justice, gave up these eight acres as an allotment field with the object of reclaiming his village, which at that time did not bear a very good character. The people were sparse, ill-lodged, and without gardens. No better plan could possibly have been devised. It answered to perfection. It gave the labourers occupation in their idle evening hours, thereby keeping them out of the ale-house. The very children could come and help, and took an interest in the growth of the plants. The men had something to think about besides drinking and grumbling. Gradually the whole village grew morally healthy. When the good rector passed away, another took his place who continued this really blessed work. To this day the result may be seen. This parish has few paupers, fewer criminals, less idle, discontented

men than the surrounding districts. There are more labourers in the church on Sundays. All because the right thing has been done. The question, however, that even here turns up is not so easily settled. That question is, whether it is better for the labourer who has an allotment to be left perfectly to his own devices, or whether it is preferable that there shall be some species of check. One is naturally in favour of complete liberty – of entire freedom from any kind of control; but experience has so often proved that in such cases extra earnings and extra advantages only go the common road to procure more drink. So it was that the rector of this parish found it necessary to make his presence felt, which he did in the first place by issuing the following circular: ‘Dear Friends, sad reports have been brought to me lately of the conduct of some in the parish, and amongst them, I am sorry to say, are tenants of the allotment gardens. Such conduct is contrary to the rules on which the allotments are held, and also contrary to the intentions of my predecessor in letting them out to the parishioners. They are intended to improve the condition of the labourers, and this by giving them employment in the summer evenings, increasing their supply of food, and withdrawing them from the influence of the public-house. But when drinking habits are indulged, all these benefits are lost, and the allotments which were intended to do the labourer good, only increase his means of obtaining intoxicating drinks. ... I send therefore a copy of the rules of the allotment gardens. These rules I give you due notice I intend to enforce.’ No fairer or better language could have been employed.

The ordinary allotment-field in villages is practically wholly without supervision. If it is a field provided by the lord of the manor, all those who live in cottages on the estate are considered to have a right to a plot; and although of course there are exceptions (one to be noticed presently), the rule is that the allotment continues in the possession of the cottager so long as he resides on the estate, no matter what his conduct may be. Where the allotment-field is a private property, let out for profit only, of course the due payment of rent is the only thing insisted on. In this instance the experiment has been tried of exercising a certain amount of supervision over the tenants: and the allotments have been, in a measure, made to serve the purpose of rewards for sobriety and general good conduct. The following are the rules : –

‘1st. The land shall be cultivated by the spade only, and proper attention shall be paid to its cultivation. 2. No allotment shall be underlet or exchanged. 3. The rent shall be due on the 1st of September in each year, and shall be paid before the crop is taken off the ground. 4. All tenants

shall maintain a character for morality and sobriety, and shall not frequent a public-house on the Sabbath-day. 5. If any tenant fail to pay his rent, or to fulfil any of the above conditions, he shall immediately forfeit his allotment, with his crop upon the same, and the landlord, or his agent, shall take possession, and enforce payment of the rent due by sale of the crop or otherwise as in arrears of rent. All the tenants are earnestly requested to attend regularly to the house of God during the times of divine service, with their families, to the best of their abilities.'

If these rules are read from the point of view of the farmer, it will be at once apparent that the prime object in his mind was the attainment of spiritual good by earthly means; in other words, the allotments were to assist in keeping labourers from drunkenness, immorality, and irreverence. There was comparatively little attention to the purely agricultural part of the contract: there is but one rule, that the spade only shall be used, which applies to the cultivation. The phrase 'proper attention to its cultivation' is too vague for practical purposes. It may of course be said that the circumstances of each labourer or tenant, and the condition of his particular plot of ground, may vary so perpetually as to be beyond the application of a rule. This may be true; but it is also true that some labourers have little or no conscience as regards the land, and will exhaust it with a succession of crops, and neglect to apply manure. In the long run this tends to his own disadvantage, but he is a person whose essential rule of life is the present, and nothing but the present, and his mind is one which it is almost impossible to bring to a proper conception of the meaning of the word, future. The present benefit tempts him, and he cares nothing for the future impoverishment of the land, unless it happens to be his own. To some extent therefore it seems advisable that he should be bound by certain rules as to the rotation of crops – a rotation which any gardener could draw up in a few minutes. These rules before us are ethical in their aim, and excellent as they may be, do not include everything that could be wished. They require to be supplemented. The law that the rent shall be paid before the crop is taken off was intended to prevent the produce being carried to a public-house in payment of a liquor score; and as the rent of allotments is so very small, it is one that will be very properly retained in any code that may be drawn up.

The great object to be sought in the distribution of allotment grounds is that there should be sufficient in each case to grow on one half of the plot potatoes enough for the family, while the other half is sown with other vegetables, and in fact lies fallow. This is the same thing as a rotation of crops, and might be embodied as a strict rule in any future code. That the

allotment resembles a farm, is a fact that must have ere now been apparent to the reader; but there follows an illustration still more pointed. This particular allotment-field, though it was well-situated, and comprised some first-rate soil, was rather low, and retained too much water. The landlord determined to drain it, and he did so in the way which cannot but strike every one as singularly fair. He bought the drain-pipes as his share of the cost. The pipes were put in by labourers who were paid the usual price for this work. Then the amount of this labour was divided out amongst the various tenants of the allotment-grounds, so that each paid a share in proportion to the size of his plot. The largest allotment was 48 perches; and there were holdings of allotments of 16, 20, 25 perches, etc. This is a purely agricultural contract, and forms a fair precedent as to what should be done under similar circumstances. On this allotment-field, as in all others where anything like order prevails, the fences are kept as low as possible, and no hedges or mounds are allowed – the division is simply a green footpath. It is surprising that the plan of thus turning a portion of the glebe-land into allotments has not been more generally followed. A readier means of encouraging industry, and doing an immense amount of practical good, could not be discovered. In these days, however, when dissent is so widely spread, and where chapels are to be found in the smallest rural villages, care must be taken that no appearance be presented of favouring churchgoers at the expense of dissenters. For this reason exception has been taken at the stress laid in the rules which have been copied upon attendance at church. Practically, in this particular instance, this rule means, not so much attendance at church, as absence from the ale-house; and no difference is made between churchmen and dissenters. At the same time it may be that in other places the same confidence may not exist between rector and inhabitants; and when any sectarian feeling existed it would be wiser to omit any mention of religion. The object of the rule would be equally well met if the prohibition only was expressed against frequenting the alehouse on the Sunday, and generally against drunkenness.

It will be interesting to compare with the above rules the following code of regulations, which have actually been in operation for thirty-five years, and may therefore claim to possess a title to serious consideration. In this case the allotment gardens are the property of the lord of the manor, and are situated in a small village, distant from any town, and entirely composed of an agricultural population.

‘Rules: 1. That the tenant shall hold his allotment, as a yearly tenant, from the ____ day of ____, after the rate of fourpence per lug (or perch),

free from all rates, tithes, and taxes. 2. That the rent shall be punctually paid by the tenant to the landlord, or his agent, on the 28th of September in each year; but if that day happens to fall on Sunday, then on the day preceding. 3. That all parochial rates, tithes, and taxes shall be paid by the landlord. 4. That the tenant shall keep the bounds and fences which join or belong to his allotment in good repair, and shall not trespass upon any other land in going to or returning from his allotment, or in hauling any manure thereto, but shall use and keep the regular and appointed road to and from the same. 5. That the tenant shall cultivate his allotment by spade husbandry. 6. That on the tenant removing his residence from the village, he shall no longer continue in the occupation of his allotment. 7. That if the tenant shall be convicted of felony, of any breach of the game laws, or do or commit any act punishable by law, or shall wilfully trespass or encroach upon the land of another tenant, or underlet any part of his own allotment, or make default in the payment of his rent at the time above-mentioned, or fail to perform any of the foregoing conditions, he shall immediately forfeit his interest in the land, together with his crop upon the same; and the landlord, or his agent, shall be at full liberty to take possession thereof, and to enforce the payment of all rent then due by sale of the crop or otherwise, as in cases of rent in arrear.'

The practical nature of these rules is at once apparent, and forms their chief recommendation. Rules 3, 4, and 7 especially seem to contain enactments that must be included in any effective code that may be drawn up. The proportion of land allowed to each tenant appears to be forty perches. The way in which the thing has worked may best be gathered from the owner's own words: 'I have no restriction as to rotation of crops, all my allotments are well cultivated, and, with about eighty here, I have never lost a rent, nor have I ever, in thirty-five years' experience, had occasion to dispossess a tenant for non-compliance with the rules. Potatoes, when the crop escapes disease, is the most profitable crop my people grow; but as these require a change, they grow on one half of their allotments usually. We are too distant here for any advantages of town requirements of (say) cabbages, carrots, etc. When potatoes are not a failure, as has often of late years been the case, some have told me that their profits on their forty poles, including all advantages, have returned them a profit of fifty shillings; but so far from a market for any produce, I believe this amount to be quite exceptional.

This case, from its peculiar circumstances, is remarkably interesting, and throws much light upon what may be accomplished, even under every apparent disadvantage, when a desire to benefit the lower classes is

combined with practical knowledge, and a firm, though light, governing hand. It illustrates particularly the great demand there is for allotment gardens, even in places where a pecuniary profit is not attainable except under highly-favourable conditions. There is no market for vegetables, yet the allotments are sought after, and have been occupied for more than a generation. This conclusively proves that, in reckoning the advantages of the allotment system, the element of pecuniary profit must not be rated too highly, for the convenience and accommodation rendered by a constant supply of fresh vegetables is quite sufficient to repay both the rent and the labour expended on cultivation.

Although allotments are usually to be found in the immediate vicinity of rural villages in arable districts, it is not always so; but where this is the case, there are sometimes common lands which are pastured by the inhabitants. This is very often found in those extremely ancient small towns whose history goes back to Saxon times. To some extent these common pastures supplied and still take the place of allotment grounds; but, except in one way, they are not now so useful as allotment gardens would be. This exception is where the common land is sufficiently valuable for the town council to find no difficulty in letting it at a good price to the adjacent farmers, and applying the proceeds to objects of general utility. To enable the council to do this, they must first obtain a special act; but that is easy, if the owners of the common right are agreed. Instances might be quoted where the moneys thus coming in have been applied to pave the town, and even to light it with gas, and generally to keep the rates down; but even in such cases allotments are required, and are becoming more and more the rule every year. The ordinary allotment gardens found in the outskirts of rural towns have few points of difference from those already described as existing in the villages, except the higher rate of rent. There is no supervision whatever over the tenant, and no rules are enforced as to cultivation. It is merely a matter of paying the rent, and doing what seems best in the eyes of the tenant, whose personal character is not in any way introduced into the contract. The one great drawback to the utility of allotments in towns is found to be the constant petty thefts that are committed. Allotment gardens are peculiarly open to spoliation from the absence of fences and the nature of the crops grown, which cannot be identified as a rule. In a season when there happens to be a scarcity of green food, such as cabbages, carrots, turnips, etc., a tenant who happens to have been fortunate, and has a fair share of these vegetables, is pretty certain to find them materially diminished during the night. For this reason some people have a predilection for planting parsnips, whose roots

take a firm hold of the earth, and are not easily stolen. This systematic thieving which goes on is another argument in favour of the general conclusion, that allotment gardens to be really successful, especially if on a large scale, must be under the care of a proper officer and staff, and governed by a series of simple but practical rules. Another unpleasantness which occupiers of allotment gardens in towns are always in dread of is the sale of the very ground under their feet for building purposes. Often the agreement upon which a tenant takes a garden is worded to the effect that such a sale shall be deemed an immediate termination of the letting, so that the tenant runs a chance of his crops being sacrificed to the inroads of bricks and mortar.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, there is a strong competition for allotments in all towns; and the difficulty experienced by the owners is not to find tenants, but to distribute the lots so as to arouse the least possible amount of jealousy and ill-feeling. The competition for these gardens is not, as might have been supposed, entirely among the poorer classes. On the contrary, the middle class inhabitants are equally eager for the accommodation of a large kitchen-garden; and there are few tradesmen in moderately-sized provincial towns who have not got allotments. This is, of course, exclusive of those who have private gardens of their own; but the number of these is comparatively few. If any one will take the trouble to visit the allotment gardens of a provincial town (some of these gardens extend to as much as fifteen acres or more) he will find men there at work whom he would never have dreamt of seeing. They are at work, not from necessity, but out of that natural pleasure and delight which human nature feels in gardening. Here are gentlemen of good social position in middle-class life, tradesmen of considerable property, engaged in gathering peas, sowing carrots, or earthing celery. The occupation is not looked upon in any way as degrading, or as a confession of poverty, but purely and simply as a healthy amusement, and a change from the confined atmosphere of the shop and counting-house. If this is the feeling among the fairly well-to-do who are well supplied with all the comforts of life, how much stronger must it be in those who barely earn enough for the subsistence of themselves and families. The keen desire these poor people feel for an allotment is evident in the struggle they make to possess one.

The very first question a man asks when he begins to work in a new place is, if he can get an allotment. If he can, he is satisfied. If not, he grows daily more discontented, as he marks the cost of the vegetables his family consume, and the scantiness of the supply upon the table. Beyond the mere economical part of the question, there undoubtedly exists, deep

down in human nature, in the rudest as well as in the most refined, a delight in watching things grow; a pleasure in inserting the seed, and noting the first tiny green speck that appears. There is an undefined and almost holy joy in watching the development of life; a feeling from which the lowest human creature is not exempt. There are men, and numbers of them, ignorant, brutal, drunkards, cruel to their children, harsh, if not worse to their wives, who yet actually take a really pure pleasure in their gardens. When the public-house is closed on the Sunday during the hours of service, especially the morning part, this low drunkard will saunter forth into his garden, taking with him two or three of his companions, and point out to them the growth of this crop of vegetables, and enlarge upon the fine quality of that. For the hour he is a rational being – a man. If only this influence could endure after he has left the spot! Still, although hitherto this has not been attained to, all the more reason why this single hour of reason and pure pleasure should be secured to as many as possible.

Perhaps the effects of an allotment garden are more apparent in towns than in villages, for the conditions of life are more varied, and, at the same time, more sharply pronounced. A man who in the country has no garden, and feels an almost irresistible desire for a little vegetable with his bread-and-cheese – the plea of nature for variety – can often beg a few greens, or he can, at the worst, go out and cut off a few turnips or swede tops, and escape notice. But a man in the heart of a large town cannot borrow, for vegetables are too costly for the poor to give them away. There are no turnips growing in the streets and squares. If he goes out into the country to take a few from the fields, he is at once pounced upon, as an agricultural labourer, in nine cases out of ten, would not be. For the agricultural labourer, living among the crops, and instrumental to their growth, has a species of vague claim upon the farmer; but the wandering wretch from the town none at all.

So it is that the inhabitants of towns, the poorer class, feel the lack of adequate garden accommodation very severely. Persons who move in good society, or who are independent, or partially so, cannot comprehend the part which vegetables play in the poor man's life. With so many varieties of food set before them – fish, soup, fowl, game, entrees, and so on, in endless succession – the man who is accustomed to *dine*, in the true sense of the word, never appreciates the value of vegetables, which are to him merely accessories, and but sparingly partaken of. But the labourer or artisan, who at best gets but plain mutton and bacon, and that in small quantities, falls back upon vegetables, not only to please the palate tired with one dish, but as taking the place of meat. Vegetables are, in fact, to him a cheaper meat.

Hence the possession of an allotment garden is a matter of the deepest import, and second only to the roof over his head. Taking the case of towns which seem to be well provided with allotment gardens, I could never find that there was any superfluous area offered to the population, but always a demand greater than the supply.

We now come, in this survey of the actual existing allotments of the country, to those exceptional towns which may be said to have, in great part, supported themselves upon an extended allotment system. It may be, perhaps, unpleasant to mention such a town by name, but the town has been made known to the editor of this magazine.¹ This particular town goes back for its foundation to the mythical portion of English history, before even the time of Arthur. But we come on safe ground when we arrive at written documents of Saxon ages. A great – perhaps, the greatest – monarch of that period, Athelstan, finding that he had gained a battle mainly by the assistance of the men of this place, gave them, by way of reward, five hundred acres of land; at the same time, converting the place into a borough. Each and every one of the common-burgesses was to have a share of this land; the governing council of burgesses to have a proportionately larger share; and the alderman or mayor, the greatest. During the lapse of so many centuries these primary conditions have been supplemented by a great multitude of minute regulations, which are nothing to our present purpose. The great fact is this: that there are at this day five hundred acres of arable land, mostly cultivated, and occupied by the commoners of this town, in lots varying from, eight, twelve, fifteen, and thirty acres. This is the largest application of the principle of allotment-gardens with which I am acquainted. They are, to some degree, hereditary; and, in consequence, the commoners – the lowest of the members of the corporation – constantly intermarry, with the object of renewing or retaining the allotment in the family. The corporation is composed, in fact, of working men, no less than the occupiers of the allotment gardens; and they possessed for a great length of time the power of sending a representative to Parliament. These allotments are fairly well cultivated, and extend for nearly two miles over a good soil. The allotment taken by the alderman is the largest, and is sufficient to support him. The system of perpetual intermarriage has led to the elaboration of a most curiously-detailed code of laws, regulating the succession to the allotments. From the earliest childhood, the allotment is the one object always held before the youthful aspirant. The town has certainly endured for an

¹ Editor's note: Malmesbury, Wiltshire.

extremely long time, and is as flourishing now as ever. But there are those who pronounce the allotment system – in so far, at least, as the hereditary succession is concerned – to be the bane of the place. In the first consideration, it leads young men to stay in the town, waiting and hoping for the decease of older men, and thus causing a plethora of labour. Then the intermarriages produce a stunted physical and a narrow-minded race. No one who has a chance of succeeding to these small reversionary estates, cares to set up a business or to bestir himself actively. Such are some of the allegations made by those who take a gloomy view of the situation. On the other hand, these hereditary allotments have secured to the town a degree of independence not usually found in small boroughs. This has been several times shown, when the electors have gone exactly contrary to the interest which might have been supposed to have been dominant. The statement, that a physically and mentally inferior race has resulted from the intermarriages, does not seem borne out by facts. The inhabitants do not appear to be less in stature, or in any way dwarfed. The argument, that men are kept hanging on in the town, where there is not sufficient employment, was probably partially true at one time; but not so now, since the price of labour has risen. The comparatively slow progress made by the town, and its obscurity as contrasted with other places without one-tenth of its history, is simply due to the fact that it has not had the good fortune to lie on any great through route of railway, or to be chosen as a manufacturing centre. Signs of more rapid progress have of late been made; such as the construction of a branch line of railway.

Taken on the whole, there cannot be said to be any decisive evidence either that the possession of these hereditary allotments has been baneful, or peculiarly beneficial. They prove one thing certainly, that, it is possible for a number of persons to occupy land in common, without descending to the practice of those revolutionary doctrines which are classed under the name of communism. At the same time they rather militate against the extravagant value that has been set upon the division of the land by a certain party of thinkers. It does not appear that this place was rendered in any way more prosperous, or the race of people stimulated to any extraordinary exertions, by the exceptional conditions under which they were placed. Perhaps the one great cause which has operated against the utility of these allotments, has been the fact of this hereditary descent. If any evil has resulted from the common land, it has originated in this custom; for while it produces a keen competition for the possession of these plots, it takes away every inducement to special care in cultivation, and confines the benefits received to a comparatively small number. If the common land

was thrown open to all who would cultivate it, or who could pay a rent for it, there would be a much better chance of yielding a marked good effect.

It is possible, too, that the area of the lot is too large; for then the occupier is induced to spend time upon it which could be more profitably employed at some handicraft. It is not enough to enable him to pay labourers under him, and it is too much for him to manage personally. Although the plots are fairly cultivated, no one has ever heard that any special success had been attained, any striking discovery made in the art of allotment gardening. The farmers of the districts do not watch the operations with any interest, expecting to see new and improved methods. So that the example, large as it is, proves very little beyond establishing the fact that a comparatively minute division of land may exist without danger to society.

There are counties in the east and central part of England where the farmers appear to be little better than large allotment gardeners. Farms of from ten to thirty acres bear a strong resemblance to the common lands mentioned above.

Experience has shown that the cultivation of these small farms is not conducive to prosperity. Much attention has been called to the condition of these counties of late, and the state of affairs has been minutely described in the journals, and the general impression produced is decidedly an adverse one. One argument only is brought out strongly in their favour; and that is, they breed a race of hardy men, more or less independent yeomen in fact; and men are, after all, the chief support of a state. Without for a moment denying this, it must not be lost sight of that no improvement in agriculture has originated upon small farms; and very few of the improvements that have been made can be utilized upon them.

It is hard to imagine the objection that can be taken to allotments for agricultural labourers. The use of an allotment appears to those who have resided among the agricultural poor to be productive of unmixed good. The labourer has then something which he can call his own; something which he can shape after his own heart. Brought up from his childhood amidst the operations of agriculture, which is simply gardening upon a greatly extended scale, he feels in time a natural desire to repeat the lessons he has learnt in natural economy on his own land, and for his own benefit. Over and above the purely pecuniary side of the question, there rises up the even more important one of the labourer's own individuality. Too often that individuality is lost sight of, and he is considered as merely a cypher, an atom in a great concrete mass, as a soldier whose personal welfare is of little account so long as the army win the battle. But the real

fact is, a fact which all thinkers must acknowledge, that the labourer is an Individual, with a mind as well as a body, ideas as well as arms to work with. The very first step in the education of the man is to increase his individuality – to increase the sense of originality, so to say. In the operations of the farm he is merely a machine, for no work requires so little thought as ordinary agricultural labour. Give him an allotment garden and he becomes a human being whose powers are called into action. He has to calculate the proper amount of seed, to divide the area into proportionate patches of various vegetables, and sow at the right season; to trim, and arrange, and all this by himself, and out of his own head, not in obedience to orders set before him. It is true that the amount of intelligence required is not great; but without this aid, even that amount may lay dormant. The bodily comforts that arise from allotments cannot be disputed. Where children cannot get a full supply of rich and nutritious meat, and certainly our agricultural children do not get anything approaching to an adequate amount of animal food, the next best thing for them must be a bountiful share of vegetables. In point of fact, the quantity of vegetables consumed by a labourer's family is enormously large, especially of the three most favourite sorts, i.e., potatoes, cabbage, and onions. Cabbage is quite as extensive an article of food as the potato, and the labourer makes few meals without an onion. The potato-disease has been a terrible weight upon the poor, far heavier than the high price of coal, or the rise of meat. The potato crop can now no longer be depended upon. It thus often happens that one-half of the allotment or garden fails to produce sufficient to pay the nominal rent, or to recompense the tenant for his labour. All possible expedients have been tried without success: the fatal fungus still makes its appearance – fatal indeed to the poor. This pest causes a tendency to cultivate cabbages, which are therefore more largely grown than would otherwise be the case. Many say that the crop that pays them best is onions. There is always a demand for them all the year round. Comparatively speaking, carrots, peas, and beans, are of secondary importance. Turnips are great favourites, but require too large an area. How many drunkards' families, whose head spent all his earnings in liquor, would have been starved had it not been for the produce of the allotment garden? When a man finally takes to selling the produce of his garden for drink, you may be sure that he has reached the lowest step of the ladder. The practice is unfortunately too common, and it is difficult to see how to prevent it. The price paid by the agricultural labourer for his allotment is usually very low. In some cases, where the land is poor, and the owner is the lord of the manor, it has been let at as little as 3d. per perch. The glebe-

allotment alluded to previously, was let at 5d. per perch. The general run varies from 6d. to 1s. 6d. in crowded villages and small towns. In towns the rate rises with the ratio of the population, but is never so high as to impede the profits of cultivation. It is not necessary to enter into an enumeration of the benefits which allotments confer upon the inhabitants of towns.

The circumstances from which some little opposition has arisen to the allotment system, have been mainly the unfortunate relations which have lately existed between master and man; but it is to be hoped that no such disturbances will have the effect of depriving the labourer of this great necessary of his life. Still undoubtedly the somewhat stubborn resistance of the men in some places, and more especially the threatening tone of their leaders, have produced a wide-spread reluctance on the part of the farmers to extend so many advantages as formerly to the labourers. There are those who say that if the labourer gets high wages, he cannot expect a cottage and a quarter of an acre of garden ground for next to nothing. But then it should be remembered that the cottage and garden ground, on the other hand, cost the farmer next to nothing. It is fortunate that the better disposed and largest number of agriculturists are decidedly in favour of conciliation; and we may therefore look for no opposition to the labourers' desire for allotments.

Another, and much more forcible objection, is that stated with some dogmatic energy, that the use of a large allotment ground tends to make a labourer an idle man. The argument appears paradoxical, but it has much more sense in it than may be imagined. A labourer becomes the tenant of a large piece of ground, say, a quarter of an acre. He cultivates it, and really finds a profit from it. Over and above the vegetables eaten by his family, he is enabled to sell some surplus stock, and to pocket the profit in hard cash. He keeps a pig, and fattens it upon the refuse. The sale of this pig places him in possession of several pounds, to him a large sum of money. So far so good. But now comes the mistake. If he is a man of some enterprise, and imbued with a desire to rise, or, what has much the same effect, is excited by avarice, he begins to make a very ancient and erroneous calculation. If a quarter of an acre will produce all these advantages, half an acre will produce twice as much; and an acre or two will even entirely support him. Filled with the idea, he takes an additional plot of ground, raising the extent of his holding perhaps to as much as three acres, and then his difficulties commence. In order to attend to this area properly, he is obliged to devote whole days to it, and sometimes a succession of days. The wages of these days are at once lost, and are to be reckoned as so much on the wrong side of the account. This intermittent attendance at

work brings him into ill-odour with his employer; and finally ends with his renouncing regular work, and taking to do odd jobs, which bring in a precarious livelihood, and leave him without wages in the winter, when he wants them the most. Still, even now that he is master of his own time, he cannot properly attend to his miniature farm by himself. The weather steps in and impedes him. It may happen that a few days only are favourable to seeding, or to getting up; and if these are lost, the season may be lost. His single arms and hands cannot do the work sufficiently fast. Then he has to call in aid, and to pay for that aid; and this goes to the D. account. Now he finds that while one pig was profitable, inasmuch as it costs nothing to keep, two or three require more food than the broken scraps his family leave. He must buy food for them if he wishes them to fatten. Here again the figures goes to the wrong side of the book. The pig, in fact, is the one thing about which a labourer might be naturally supposed to know most, and yet is the very thing upon which he commonly entertains the most exaggerated ideas. The real fact is, that the profit he derives from a pig is not made out of the pig itself, but because the pig acts as a savings' bank. He has to invest a few shillings to purchase it; that represents the original deposit. Then the scraps which would otherwise be wasted are consumed. Small sums that he would have wasted in drink are expended in the purchase of food for the pig; and presently when it is sold, lo! these unrecognized savings are returned, and the man is firmly convinced that he has been engaged in a most profitable transaction. If the money had been deposited in a savings' bank it would come to pretty much the same thing. Of course there really is a margin of profit, but very much less than the enthusiastic labourer reckons; and he discovers this to his cost when he comes to keep two or three. In a very short time he finds that it is impossible to obtain a living from this small holding, and his thoughts are then turned towards the means by which he may augment his income. Perhaps he is a member of some religious body, and finds a friend who lends him a small sum of money, with which he purchases a cow. But here again he finds that the animal has a mouth. The produce of the garden is totally insufficient to support the cow any more than a number of pigs. He endeavours to supplement it by feeding the cow on the grass at the roadside, but this is soon stopped by the police. Shortly the cow grows miserably poor; this decreases her milk. The calf is a wretched thing; it may die before it becomes saleable. He cannot afford to keep it long enough to get a really good price – sufficient to cover the previous loss of income through cessation of milk. It comes to much the same thing if he buys a

horse instead of a cow, and tries hauling. The horse, never a good one, is brought down by lack of proper food to a skeleton, and becomes useless.

It frequently happens that a farmer, struck by the persistent efforts of the man, will take pity upon him, and allow him to pasture the horse for nothing; and I have known instances where farmers have bought such men fresh horses, when the old died from exhaustion and starvation. Yet somehow they never seem to prosper. The end is always the same – the land has to be given, up, and the man returns to farm labour. There are to be found men in every village who get a living, and a fair living, by hauling, and these often have two or three small fields; but they do not pretend to make their income from gardening. It is the haulage which supports them, and there is only room for a very few hauliers; so that it has become a common saying, that if you want to ruin a labourer, give him a large garden. This arises from the over estimate he draws of its capabilities. These facts do not militate against the general utility of allotments, but they do very strongly oppose the theory that land should be divided into small farms of four acres each, and that such a division would be favourable to the prosperity of the country. Imagine the picture that has been drawn, and which any person who likes can verify for himself; imagine this state of things prevailing over a wide extent of country. It has been calculated that a man can just support life upon the produce of four acres; but, as we have seen, what a life! liable at any moment to be disabled by an inclement season, for ever struggling with nature for a hand to mouth existence. Surely no wealth, no flow of prosperity, could accrue to a nation thus employed. The condition of affairs would more resemble that prevailing in a savage country than anything else.

The reason of the wide-spread belief in the advantages to be derived from such a national system of allotment gardens, is the single assertion that the produce of a garden, well cultivated, is far greater than that of a field under the plough. It is pointed out that a labourer can pay so much per perch for an allotment, and yet make a good return; while the aggregate of the sums thus paid as rent are greater than the farmer gives – *i.e.*, an acre let out as allotment gardens returns more to the landlord than an acre rented by a farmer. This is certainly true, even in villages where land is not valuable, and very much more so in the neighbourhood of towns; but, upon examination, both these assertions, though based upon fact, cannot be used as arguments in favour of a national resort to the system, for the following very potent and very obvious reasons. The produce of a certain area cultivated as a garden is, indeed, greater than a similar area upon a farm; but the difference solely arises from the variety of

the crops. Thus, it often happens that a labourer who has an allotment, after growing vegetables for a time, will sow wheat as a change. Now, compare this wheat with that grown in the adjacent corn-field, and it will be found to be no better. In fact, such wheat is often produced by good farmers, who use steam or plough deep, and do not spare manure, as no allotment or garden ever brought forth yet.

Some of the splendid fields of wheat which I had the pleasure of examining last summer, while engaged in this very investigation, could not be surpassed by any known process. The allotment will not, therefore, ever give a better return in the staff of life; and there are agricultural reasons, moreover, which make it questionable whether wheat could be grown as a regular crop in gardens, for the soil requires a proper preparation – a preparation which tenants of so small an area could not give it. Then there must be taken into account the profits obtained and the benefit derived from the sheep and stock kept by a farmer. Every acre goes to assist in maintaining these. But it is impossible to maintain stock in allotment gardens; therefore the balance as to the produce of food for the people, both as regards wheat and meat, is in favour of farms (especially large farms) and against allotments. But, in addition, there are several reasons why the calculation that a four-acre division would be advantageous is proved to be erroneous. It is difficult to see how, if this ever were the case, the necessities of life, such as clothing, iron-work, etc., could be procured. It is very certain that a nation thus maintained could possess very little wealth in money.

I started upon these inquiries with precisely the opposite idea in my mind to the conclusions at which I have now arrived, for I had always thought that a more minute system of cultivation would produce larger yields; but the facts which have been forced upon me, and which are here stated, point irresistibly to a different result. It is hardly possible to calculate what might happen were other elements introduced into the question, and it was made to assume a more commercial aspect; for instance, if some plant of commercial value were introduced and largely cultivated on these allotments, it might alter the aspect of the matter. If flax, or madder, or something of that kind were grown, there might, perhaps, be a prospect of a better monetary return. As, however, the experiment, so far as I am aware, has never been tried, to any extent, it is not possible to judge. It is well known that in Belgium a very large section of the population in one part obtain their living by the cultivation of plots of land very similar to our allotments, only considerably larger; but they cultivate many other plants besides those which are found in our gardens,

as colza, which they grow largely, and even tobacco, of which every one raises enough for his own use. A commercial element is here introduced into the question which is not present in England, and which is altogether separate from the problem of the production of food. The results, therefore, to which these considerations bring us appear to be; Firstly, that the allotment system cannot be too widely extended, as a means of affording additional and varied food, as a relaxation to the overworked, and as an influence acting in favour of general moral good. Secondly, that it cannot at present take the place of high steam cultivation, which is far more effectual an agent for the production of wheat and meat. Thirdly, that any scheme by which the land would be divided into small plots or allotments must fail of its object, and would reduce the projectors to the condition of savages, or little better. Fourthly, that a plant requiring careful and minute attention, and bearing a high value in the commercial world, must be introduced before allotment gardens can become successful pecuniary speculations in a national sense. As regards the allotments themselves, some purely practical code of regulation is desirable.

It must be admitted that there is a wide-spreading leaven of communistic tendencies. This is especially the case in large towns and manufacturing districts; but that it is not confined to these places was proved by the circumstances attending the late labourers' strike and lock-out in the eastern counties; while it is well known that a numerous agency is engaged in preaching the doctrine all over the country. One of the principles which are thus gradually becoming instilled into the mind of the masses is, that each individual has a right to a certain share in the land of his birth – a teaching that so exactly agrees with the natural desires of most men, that it is not surprising if it finds crowds of adherents. Although it does appear that the universal application of the allotment system, or the general division of land, is a resource much to be opposed; still it does also seem that a very wide extension of the system of allotment is possible, and would act as a safety-valve in averting the danger of communistic excesses. It is in great towns that danger is to be apprehended, if anywhere. Now, there do not seem to be any insurmountable mechanical difficulties in the way of an extension of the allotment system to manufacturing capitals, or even to the metropolis itself. In London, notwithstanding the high value of land, there are vast open spaces – the parks – right in the very centre of the place. In the immediate neighbourhood there are large tracts of land employed as cemeteries. If it is possible to find ground near enough to the residence of the population to be practically useful as cemeteries, there can be no valid reason why spaces should not be available for a system of

gardens. Numerous companies have been formed for the purpose of supplying the workmen with houses; the building-societies and their estates are situated outside the city, but within easy reach by rail. Why should not societies exist and flourish, for the equally useful object of providing the workman with a garden? If the plan of universal division of land were thoroughly carried out, it follows that the cities would disappear, since, to obtain a bare living out of the four acres, a man must live on or very near to it, and spend his whole time in attending to it. But the extent of allotment-ground which such a society as this would provide for the workman must not be so large as to require any more attention than he could pay to it in the evening, or the Saturday afternoon, or at most in a day or so of absence from his work. He would have, of course, to go to his allotment by rail, and rail costs money. But how many thousands of workmen at this very hour go to their work day by day by rail, and return home at night; and the sum of money they thus expend must collectively be something enormous in the course of a year. To work his allotment he would have no necessity to visit it every day, or hardly every week. Such an allotment-ground must be under the direction of a proper staff of officers, for the distribution of lots, the collection of rent, the prevention of theft, and generally to maintain the necessary order. Looked at in this light, the extension of the allotment system to large towns does not hold out any very great difficulties. The political advantage which would accrue would be considerable, as a large section of the population would feel that one at least of their not altogether frivolous complaints was removed. As a pecuniary speculation, it is possible that such a society would pay as well as a building society; for the preliminary expenses would be so small in comparison. A building society has to erect blocks of houses before it can obtain any return; but merely to plough, and lay out a few fields in regular plots, and number them on a plan, is a light task. If the rent was not paid, the society could always seize the crops; and if a plot was not cultivated in a given time, they might have a rule by which the title to it should be vacated. To carry the idea further, a small additional payment per annum might make the plot the tenant's own property. This would probably act as a very powerful inducement.

The extension of the allotment system, in small towns and villages offers no mechanical difficulties. Here land is comparatively of low value, and can always be obtained within an easy distance. It has in fact only *to be done*. All the materials are ready to hand. It is not like building cottages. There is no preliminary large outlay, and subsequent imperceptible percentage. The outlay is the smallest possible in any undertaking; the

percentage good and even high occasionally. The importance of the extension of the system is generally admitted in rural districts, yet very slow progress is made, except in places where a judiciously autocratic landlord issues his mandate, and the thing so long talked of is done at once. The late troubles between the labourer and his employer have convinced the majority of agriculturists of the wisdom and desirability of giving the men good gardens. The worst of it is, that the agricultural mind is so slow to act, even after a decision has been arrived at. Where allotments are given, they are given partially; there is no systematic extension. Much remains yet to be done in our rural villages. A supply of good water, better drainage, and stricter sanitary arrangements, are among the necessities of the future, as the lack of them, has been the bane of the past. It would indeed almost seem that the great fault lies, not in the people themselves, not in the farmers and other residents – most of whom deplore the present state of things – but in the absence of any local authority. Towns, even the smallest, have a local authority; villages, practically, have none. The existing authorities are dead letters, except in very grievous cases. If ever a village council is endowed with sufficient power, it is certain that one of its first acts would be to supply an adequate area of allotments.



‘Allotment Gardens’ (1899). From a painting by Sir George Clausen.

Pasture and Population

Richard Jefferies

First published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 October 1877. Uncollected and unsigned. Attributed by Samuel J. Looker and much in the style of similar articles published in the *Live Stock Journal* at the time.

Every household is so directly concerned in the supply and the price of meat, that the alarm recently sounded tracing the disease of cattle in the country to the extension of the area under pasture deserves some investigation. Briefly stated, the complaint about the increase of grass resolves itself into three heads: first, that an acre of highly cultivated arable land will produce quadruple the quantity of beef compared with an acre of pasture; secondly, that, as a natural consequence, as pasture widens the price of meat must rise; and thirdly, that the spread of the innocent-looking grass-blades means the partial extinction of the agricultural population. Now, apart from the Scotch and American supplies, the sources of English beef are the grazing, the arable, and the dairy farms. Upon a dairy farm of 240 acres, all grass and good land, seventy cows may be kept, which yield a great weight of human food, either as milk or as butter and cheese. A few beasts are annually fattened and go to the butcher; but it is in calves, i.e. veal, that the dairy plays its part as a manufactory of meat. Many such calves, moreover, after passing the dealer's hands, reach the grazier, and form the rough material which he shapes into beef. So that the aforesaid few beasts which the dairy sends direct to the consumer do not by any means represent the veal production power. The grazier is a farmer whose system is to purchase cattle young and in only moderate condition, feed them up to a certain point, and despatch them by rail to the London salesman. Obviously these young cattle have to come from somewhere – Herefords and Devons from their respective counties, some from Scotland, numbers from Ireland, and black animals from Wales, in addition to the calves which are bred in the dairy districts. These the grazier buys late in autumn or early in the spring, turns his cattle out upon grass in the summer, and by the ensuing autumn reckons to clear off almost the whole drove to the butcher. The number of beasts grazed per acre varies, of course, with the character of the soil and the class of cattle kept. In the midland counties, upon fairly good pasture land, a common proportion is two bullocks to three acres. In addition, each acre carries one sheep. These pastures, however, are supplemented

with a certain proportion of arable land, sometimes as much as a third; but this affects the sheep principally, since the major proportion of the bullocks are cleared by autumn for London. From a farm of 900 acres, of which 600 are grass and the rest ploughed land, from 300 to 400 beasts will pass to the consumer in the course of the season. When the ratio of ploughed land rises above one half of the farm area, the number of beasts that can be profitably grazed rapidly diminishes, and the competition for pasture grows brisker; insomuch that those who cannot get grass land in their own immediate neighbourhood frequently rent a second farm, all grass, several miles distant. This in itself is a conclusive proof of the high value of pasture as a meat-maker.

To illustrate the comparative meat-producing power of grass versus arable glance at the latest returns for Devon and Norfolk. Devon is chiefly pasture, and the occupiers are engaged in grazing and dairy; Norfolk is principally arable; the total cultivated area of each approximates, but the acreage under grass is widely different. In 1877 Devon comprised 1,108,543 acres and procured 216,315 cattle of all kinds; Norfolk, 1,107,686 acres and only 108,082 cattle – just about half the number of the pasture county. The ratio curiously corresponds with the area of pasture. Devon has 457,661 acres of permanent grass; Norfolk, 241,849. But surely Norfolk, as a great root-growing county, should excel in sheep; but no – while the root husbandry of Norfolk supports 679,218, the grass of Devon carries 946,458. If it be objected that Devon rejoices in some of the richest pasture in England, and Norfolk has a poor soil, the reply is, in the latter county the science of arable farming has been carried to the very highest pitch, probably higher than anywhere else. Consequently, if the allegation were true that ploughed land will carry larger quantities of meat than grass, then the stock in Norfolk should at least more nearly equal that in Devon. Between Leicester and Suffolk the contrast is more striking – almost startling. Leicester, every one knows, is predominantly a grass county. Roughly speaking, two-thirds are pasture – in exact figures, area, 470,530 acres; permanent pasture, 297,324 acres. No less than 122,019 cattle are to be found in this small county. Suffolk, on the east coast, is in the corn division; and with an area of 770,128 acres, of which only 150,865 acres are grass – about a fifth – carries but 59,654 cattle! With very nearly 300,000 more acres, the corn or ploughed county possesses less than half the cattle of the little grass county. In fact, taking the entire twenty-one grazing counties, it appears that the grazing division contains 65.9 per cent. of the total number of cattle in England proper. These figures should at once

allay all anxiety as to the increase of pasture being instrumental in diminishing the beef supply and causing a rise of prices.

There are, moreover, several natural checks to the excessive growth of grass which in all human probability will ever restrain it within certain limits. Over large tracts of land the soil is too poor to bear it; grass will grow, of course, but not sufficiently well for dairy or grazing purposes. The rainfall on the eastern side of the county is deficient, so much so that meadows are only seen in some districts by the banks of rivers, which not only overflow but in past ages have deposited an alluvial earth of greater fertility. Then the mere cost of laying down pasture is considerable, and finally, and perhaps more forcibly, comes the ever-increasing demand for straw. Both for litter and for fodder – in the shape of chaff to economise expensive feed – straw becomes more valuable annually, as the agricultural policy settles down firmly in the direction of wheat. Where the soil will not bear grazing and the rainfall is deficient, while all who keep stock cry as loudly for straw as the Israelites under Pharaoh, there is little danger that the plough will cease to turn the furrow. The drift of the argument when these facts and figures are calmly considered is not to depreciate arable farming in its proper place, but to demonstrate that it cannot compete with good pasture in the economical production of beef. The cost of labour alone forbids, for while a grazier can work a hundred acres of grass with one man (in some places even more), three labourers are required to cultivate the same area of corn. In former days four men was the rule for one hundred acres arable (stiff land), but machinery has lowered the ratio. This machinery and artificial manure, without which nothing can be done, add enormously to the capital invested in successful arable farming. The price of a steam plough and tackle alone would stock a small dairy. To an owner of land pasture recommends itself for the best possible reasons – a rent at least a third higher will be paid (30s. arable, 40s. grass), a tenant is always forthcoming, and the value of the fee-simple is much greater. Perhaps from a purely farmer's point of view the most profitable – some will say the only profitable – holdings at the present moment are dairies, and these lands which, without being too heavily rented, will produce good malting barley.

It is quite true that in some pasture counties villages may be found which are practically deserted. Beyond the vicar's residence, and the mansion of a landlord, only there in the hunting season, not more than two farmhouses and half-a-dozen cottages are inhabited. The church, if such a simile be permissible, is a 'world too wide' for the shrunken shanks of the place. Upon the surface this undoubtedly has the appearance of

indicating that grass is injurious to population; but upon inquiry it will be found that it is no new thing. The real desertion occurred many years ago, shortly after the repeal of the Corn Laws – a repeal followed not by a decrease but increase of population – for then land naturally fitted for pasture was restored to its primitive condition. Further desertion took place when such high wages were offered in manufacturing towns and for navvy work on railways, just as at this very hour the scarcity of female and boy labour in the field is partly caused by the demand for it in mills and factories. These broad pastures, which seem to have exterminated the human race, in reality have done precisely the opposite. By the beef and mutton profitably grown on them the huge masses concentrated in the cities are fed. The descendants of the very men who left these empty villages – multiplied tenfold in London, Birmingham, etc. – are eating steaks and chops grown from the green grass which has supplanted the yellow corn their fathers reaped. Profitably grown advisedly, because farming is a business and not a matter of sentiment, and unless it can be done with a margin of profit it is clear meat will not be made at all, at least by private enterprise. Those who deplore the decline of arable farming trace it principally to the excessive expenditure upon machinery, labour, manure, and so on, which render it difficult to obtain a moderate percentage even in good seasons, and in bad years quite impossible. The logical sequence then stares one in the face – unless we have grass we cannot make meat at home profitably; if it cannot be made profitably it will not be made at all; and what then? State aid, or foreign importation, neither of which is probable in the requisite degree. Pasture, therefore, as the most economical producer of meat, is most favourable for population.



From an oil painting of cattle in pasture by Charles Collins RBA, 1851-1921

The Dawn and Richard Jefferies

Andrew Rossabi

A revised version of a lecture given to the Richard Jefferies Society at Swindon on Monday, 2 March 1981.

The subject was suggested by the beauty of the dawns observed while staying at the village of Chiseldon in North Wiltshire. The sun rose over or near Liddington Hill, according to season; and the splendour of the skies—the orange glow behind the dark green ridge of the downs, the clouds stippled rose and gold, the Turneresque scumblings like a dry brush charged with crimson purple drawn across the untranslatable blue—recalled how often the dawn featured in Jefferies' writings. It is found in *Round About a Great Estate*, *Greene Ferne Farm*, *Hodge and His Masters*, *Bevis*, *The Story of My Heart*, *The Dewy Morn*, and in early agricultural papers such as 'The Labourer's Daily Life' and later, more mystical pieces such as 'The Dawn'. The name of Felix Aquila's beloved Aurora in *After London* means dawn in Latin.

The list does not pretend to be complete but is enough for my purpose, which is to examine some of the passages in which the dawn occurs and to show how, among other things, the dawn became emblematic of Jefferies' mystical awakening, his entry into what Dr. R.M. Bucke termed 'cosmic consciousness', of which, however, he thought Jefferies attained only a partial and imperfect state.¹

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The first example is from Chapter II of *Round About a Great Estate*, where Jefferies describes the farmhouse kitchen at Lucketts' Place. Here, in the summer afternoons, when the servants are out helping with the hay-making, Hilary Lockett's daughter Cicely comes to sit on an old ash log by the hearth and dream. The kitchen has a single small lattice window set in its thick walls and is a gloomy place except 'at one particular time', the early mornings of spring, when, as Cicely comes rushing down to breakfast, 'the tiny yellow panes' of the east-facing window are lit up and rosy with the rays of the rising sun.

¹ Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., *Cosmic Consciousness*, A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind [1901] (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1951), p.319.

The beautiful light came through the elms of the rickyard, away from the ridge of the distant Down, and then for the first hour of the day the room was aglow. For quite two hundred years every visible sunrise had shone in at that window more or less, as the season changed and the sun rose to the north of east. Perhaps it was that sense of ancient homeliness that caused Cicely, without knowing why, to steal in there alone to dream, for nowhere else indoors could she have been so far away from the world of today.²

The dawn stands here for continuity and permanence. It is associated with the farmhouse kitchen, the oldest part of the house – ‘the rest having been added to it in the course of years as the mode of life changed and increasing civilisation demanded more convenience and comfort’³ – and represents a link with the past in a fast-changing world. The light shines through the tiny yellow and green panes, filling the room with its glow, as it has done every morning ‘more or less’ for the past two hundred years.

But the old order of the English countryside was breaking up; it was an age of unrest and upheaval, as Jefferies remarks in his preface, adding: ‘In this book some notes have been made of the former state of things before it passes away entirely.’⁴ *Round About a Great Estate* is full of country proverbs and saws, superstitions, legends, dialect words, weather-rhymes, herbal cures, and details of old handicrafts. Commented Edward Thomas:

There is much masterly gossip... although the book is crammed with odds and ends of local lore, it is as easy to read as a hedge of hazel and oak and thorn and maple and dogwood and brier is to be walked along.⁵

Jefferies used the metaphor of a new light or illumination to describe the changes wrought by the advent of education in the out-of-the-way villages and hamlets. But he did not wish the old days back:

My sympathies and hopes are with the light of the future, only I should like it to come from nature. The clock should be read by the sunshine, not the sun timed by the clock. The latter is indeed impossible, for though all the clocks in the world should declare the hour of dawn to be midnight, the sun will presently rise just the same.⁶

The dawn thus stands for contrasting ideas: for the light of continuity, the same sun rising and casting its glow into the farmhouse kitchen as it has

² *Round About a Great Estate* [1880] (London: John Murray, 1937), pp.22-3.

³ *ibid.*, p.20. Jefferies again refers to the antiquity of the kitchen in *Amaryllis at the Fair* (London: Quartet Books, 1980): ‘Amaryllis had always been so fond of the kitchen—the oldest part of the house, two centuries at least,’ (p.97).

⁴ *ibid.*, vi-vii.

⁵ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies*, With an Introduction and Bibliography by Roland Gant [1909] (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.129 and p.133.

⁶ *Round About a Great Estate*, vii.

done for the past two hundred years; and for the new light of education, which had helped dispel ignorance, but was also questioning and in many cases destroying traditional values. Jefferies himself was something of a Janus figure.⁷ On the one hand, he looked back nostalgically on ways fast disappearing, his book an attempt to preserve them from oblivion; on the other, he was a progressive free-thinker who said that he would 'sooner fight in the foremost ranks of Time' than see the medieval days return.⁸

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A more mystical attitude to the dawn is evident in *Greene Ferne Farm*. The three chapters 'Evening', 'Night' and 'Dawn' that form the novel's centrepiece describe a harrowing night spent on the downs by Margaret Estcourt and her admirer Geoffrey Newton. Geoffrey has ridden over in the hope of meeting Margaret, who has been staying with her friend May Fisher and is making her way home to Greene Ferne Farm.

It is a summer evening; the shadows of horse and rider lengthen as Geoffrey rides along a hill ridge. His grey goes lame and he dismounts and waits in a fir-wood until Margaret comes by on her chestnut, singing an old ballad. Embarrassed, she refuses Geoffrey's offer to escort her and canters off. Geoffrey follows on foot, running up and down the mist-filled hill-slopes to intercept her. The stars come out. Night falls. Geoffrey hears Margaret's voice calling in distress. She is lost. And so is he.

After unsuccessfully trying to find a landmark known as Moonlight Firs, they decide to follow the north star in the hope of reaching a road, but clouds blot out the stars. After a while they discover they have walked in a circle. Mysterious footsteps sound in the darkness. The night grows oppressive; a close, sulphurous atmosphere reigns, as before a storm. They almost stumble over the edge of an old chalk quarry. Finally they come to a prehistoric burial chamber, where they spend the night. The moon rises, 'a giant coppery moon, weird and magical'.⁹ Margaret sleeps inside the cave while Geoffrey gallantly remains in the open, pillowing his head on a cushion of thyme.

He wakes to the sound of larks. To the east, rolling up from the valley coombes, a thick wall of mist rises to envelop him 'as the waters rolled over

⁷ W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition, A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (University of Toronto Press, 1974), p.146: 'Jefferies looks forward as well as backward, and in so doing – in accepting, as it were, the role of Janus – he occupies a unique position in our rural prose literature, acting as both connector and divider.'

⁸ 'Outside London', *The Open Air* [1885] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), p.218.

⁹ *Greene Ferne Farm*, With an introduction by Andrew Rossabi [1880] (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p.71.

Pharaoh'. Then, above a distant ridge, he spies Venus, the morning-star, 'like molten silver, glowing with a lusciousness of light.'

From the azure ether came the wind, filling his chest with the vigour of the young day.

There follows a passage of lyrical yet precise description:

Who that has seen it can forget the wondrous beauty of the summer morning's sky? It is blue—it is sapphire— it is like the eye of a lovely woman. A rich purple shines through it; no painter ever approached the colour of it, no Titian or other, none from the beginning. Not even the golden flesh of Rubens' women, through the veins in whose limbs a sunlight pulses in lieu of blood shining behind the tissues, can equal the hues that glow behind the blue.

The East flamed out at last. Pencilled streaks of cloud high in the dome shone red. An orange light rose up and spread about the horizon, then turned crimson, and the upper edge of the sun's disk lifted itself over the hill. A swift beam of light shot like an arrow towards him, and the hawthorn bush obeyed with instant shadow: it passed beyond him over the green plain, up the ridge and away. The great orb, quivering with golden flames, looked forth upon the world.

He arose and involuntarily walked a few steps towards it, his heart swelling, the inner voice lifted. The larks sang with all their might, the swallows played high overhead. When he turned, Margaret had risen and came to meet him, blushing, and trying in vain to push back her hair, that had become slightly loosened. The breeze revelled in it.

'Is it not beautiful?' she said, as they shook hands, looking round. He gazed into her eyes till the fringes drooped and hid them: then he kissed her hand. Her cheeks burned; she withdrew it quickly. 'We must go,' she said, all confused. He would gladly have prolonged that moment, but went loyally to do her bidding.¹⁰

The dawn signifies succour, relief, warmth, reminding us that Apollo was not only sun-god but god of healing. The sunrise is contrasted with the primitive terrors of the night. Jefferies has exposed his characters to its perils to point up the thinness of the dividing-line between rational consciousness and the primal fears lurking not far below the mind's surface. The former certainties disappear. Old shepherds' tales of spirits haunting the downs, references to Jack O' Lantern and the Ould Un, and the distorted face of a gibbous moon 'red as ruddle', create an uncanny atmosphere. We share the characters' anxiety and distress. The dawn, when it comes, is welcome indeed.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp.77-8.

The mysterious footsteps turn out to have been those of the shepherd Jabez on his way home from market. Jabez, who can find his way over the downs with his head in a sack, has contrived to get lost, for which he blames the Ould Un. Geoffrey, however, surmises that he has more probably been seduced by the bottle.

Notable is the attention paid to the blue of the dawn sky, described with painterly exactness, even if Jefferies can find no equal to it. Blue – the ‘rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky’¹¹; the blue of the sea ‘in deeper ocean’¹²; ‘the firm blue of the northern sky’ above the front of the British Museum¹³; blue chalkhill flowers, speedwell, bugle, meadow’s cranesbill, ground-ivy; the blue butterflies visiting the tiny flowers of the thyme; the bluish-white light of the star Vega – the colour recurs in Jefferies’ work with a symbolic force akin to the Blue Flower (*Die Blaue Blume*) that became the emblem of the poet Novalis and the German Romantic painters, standing for an intense yet undefined aspiration (*sehnsucht*) after the infinite.¹⁴

In his *Theory of Colours* (*Zur Farbenlehre*, 1810¹⁵) Goethe described blue as cold, ever-receding, epitomised by the sky which we can never lay hands on.

As we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us, so we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it.¹⁶

A similar idea is found in the essay ‘Meadow Thoughts’ where Jefferies recalls how the sunlight extinguished the pages of the books he brought out to read in the garden at Coate, ‘in the shadow of the American crab tree’:

... the light of the sky put out the written pages. For this beautiful and wonderful light excited a sense of some likewise beautiful and wonderful truth, some unknown but grand thought hovering as a swallow above. The swallows hovered and did not alight, but they were there. An inexpressible

¹¹ *The Story of My Heart* [1883] (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.31.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ ‘The Pigeons at the British Museum,’ *The Life of the Fields* [1884] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906), p.215.

¹⁴ On blue and German Romanticism see John Gage, ‘Mood Indigo, From the Blue Flower to the Blue Rider,’ pp.122-130, in *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990*, Catalogue of an Exhibition organized in 1994-5 by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, and the Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London, with the assistance of the Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

¹⁵ Translated into English by Charles Lock Eastlake R.A., F.R.S., and published by John Murray in 1840 as *Goethe’s Theory of Colours*.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.311.

thought quivered in the azure overhead; it could not be fully grasped, but there was a sense and feeling of its presence.¹⁷

For Wassily Kandinsky, pioneer of abstraction, blue was the most heavenly, most spiritual of colours. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) he wrote that

The deeper its tone, the more intense and characteristic the effect. We feel a call to the infinite, a desire for purity and transcendence. *Blue is the typical heavenly colour.*¹⁸

In Jefferies' work blue is often associated with his aspiration to the beyond, to the something higher than deity.

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In *Greene Ferne Farm* the dawn also heralds the birth of love between Geoffrey and Margaret, drawn together by their common adventure, their shared endurance of the rigours of the night on the downs. The glory of the sunrise seals their new intimacy. They lose themselves in the spectacle and instinctively respond to its beauty. The dawn acts as love's objective correlative, recalling an entry in Jefferies' notebooks, 'Love is a continual dawn'.¹⁹

The beauty and exactness of the description, the rightness of the psychological observation – the solar rays darting forth awaken an answering movement in Geoffrey's breast, his involuntary step forward that of a reborn Adam reclaiming his lost paradise – suggest the dawn is as much spiritual as earthly. However, the spiritual is balanced by a robust paganism, a hint of solar worship in the way Jefferies personifies the rising sun: 'the great orb, quivering with golden flames, looked forth upon the world'. The language recalls that of a Homeric hymn: the Greek epithets for Apollo were 'all-seeing' and 'far-darting'.

There are many traces of sun-worship in Jefferies: for example, in the essay 'Nature and Eternity'.

What a great god the sun must be to the finches from whose wings his beams are reflected in glittering gold! The abstract idea of a deity apart, as they feel their life-blood stirring, their eyelids opening, with the rising sun; as they fly to satisfy their hunger with those little fruits they use; as they revel in the

¹⁷ 'Meadow Thoughts,' *The Life of the Fields*, *op.cit.*, p.60.

¹⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, *The Documents of Modern Art: Volume 5*, Edited by Robert Motherwell (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1966), p.58.

¹⁹ *The Nature Diaries and Note-Books of Richard Jefferies*, edited with an introduction and notes by Samuel J. Looker (London: The Grey Walls Press Ltd., 1948) [November 1883], p.157.

warm sunshine, and utter soft notes of love to their beautiful mates, they cannot but feel a sense, unnamed, indefinite, of joyous gratitude towards that great orb which is very akin to the sensual worship of ancient days. Darkness and cold are Typhon and Ahriman, light and warmth, Osiris and Ormuzd, indeed to them; with song they welcome the spring and celebrate the awakening of Adonis. Lovely little idolaters, my heart goes with them. Deep down in the mysteries of organic life there are causes for the marvellously extended grasp which the worship of light once held upon the world, hardly yet guessed at, and which even now play a part unsuspected in the motives of men. Even yet, despite our artificial life, despite railroads, telegraphs, printing-press, in the face of firm monotheistic convictions, once a year the old, old influence breaks forth, driving thousands and thousands from cities and houses out into field and forest, to the seashore and mountain-top, to gather fresh health and strength from the Sun, from the Air-Jove and old Ocean.²⁰

Jefferies' working title for his autobiography in his notebooks was 'Sun-Life' or 'Soul-Life', usually abbreviated to 'S.L.'

W.J. Keith has observed how the sun played a similarly central role in the imagination of other consumptive writers such as Llewelyn Powys and D.H. Lawrence.²¹ In Lawrence's story 'Sun' a woman desires 'to go naked to the sun' and 'to come together with the sun' –

She had never seen the naked sun stand up pure upon the sea-line, shaking the night off himself, like wetness. And he was full and naked. And she wanted to come to him.²²

Of New Mexico Lawrence wrote:

I think New Mexico was the greatest experience from the outside world I have ever had. It certainly changed me for ever... In the magnificent fierce morning of New Mexico one sprang awake, a new part of the soul woke up suddenly and the old world gave way to a new... All those mornings when I stood, in the fierce, proud silence of the Rockies, on their foothills, to look far over the desert to the blue mountains away in Arizona, blue as chalcedony, with the sage-brush desert sweeping grey-blue in between, dotted with tiny cube-crystals of houses, the vast amphitheatre of lofty, indomitable desert...

²⁰ *The Hills and the Vale*, with an introduction by Edward Thomas (London: Duckworth & Co., 1909), p.285. On p.290 Jefferies refers to the Egyptian sun-god Râ ('the loving warmth of its [the bird's] great god Ra, the sun'). The eponymous hero of the novel *The Rise of Maximin* [1876] (Longcot: Petton Books, 2012) has written a poem called 'Rah' or 'Sunlight'.

²¹ W.J. Keith, *op.cit.*, pp.140-41.

²² D.H. Lawrence, 'Sun,' in *The Princess and Other Stories*, Edited by Keith Sagar (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p.118.

What splendour! Only the tawny eagle could really sail out into the splendour of it all.²³

Jefferies' inspiration was chaster, more Victorian, turned towards the Greek and Egyptian gods rather than Etruscan or Mexican. Margaret Estcourt's blushing cheeks in *Greene Ferne Farm* echo the pencil streaks of red cloud in the sky and recall the Homeric epithet for the dawn, 'rosy-fingered'.

In Greek mythology Eos, goddess of the dawn, was drawn in a rose-coloured chariot and opened with rosy fingers the pearl gates of the east, pouring dew upon the earth and making the flowers grow. Her chariot was drawn by white horses and she was covered with a veil. Night and Sleep fled and the stars disappeared at her approach. She always set out before the sun and was the forerunner of his rising. She was the mother of Eosphoros, the Dawn-bringer, or morning-star, and of the Ethiopian king Memnon, killed by Achilles in the Trojan War. The Ethiopians erected to Memnon a colossal statue that made a melodious sound like the plucking of a lyre string when touched by the first ray of the rising sun. Jefferies mentions the statue in his essay 'The Dawn'.²⁴

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There is another rhapsodic description of the dawn in Chapter XLVIII of *Bevis*. Bevis and Mark have finally learned the identity of the mysterious visitor to the island where they are castaways: not Indians or a tiger as they supposed, but a small girl called Loo. After returning her to the mainland Bevis and Mark settle down for the night. Bevis wants to be up early to shoot a heron for its plume. Waking about three he takes the matchlock and walks through the wood to high ground that looks out over the still waters of the New Sea. Too absorbed to notice his surroundings until now he looks up at the tops of the tall firs and becomes conscious of the beauty of the morning, 'for it was more open there, and he could see a breadth of the sky'.²⁵

²³ D.H. Lawrence, 'New Mexico' [1928], in *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), pp.181-2.

²⁴ 'The Dawn,' *The Hills and the Vale*, *op.cit.*, p.308.

²⁵ *Bevis*, Edited with an Introduction by Peter Hunt, The World's Classics (Oxford University Press, 1989), p.391.

Firs again lift the eye to the blue heaven in the essay 'Wild Flowers' (*The Open Air*, *op.cit.*, p.28): 'Immediately the high fir-trees guided the eye upwards, and from their tops to the deep azure of the March sky over, but a step from the tree to the heavens,' and in *The Story of My Heart* (*op.cit.*, p.71): 'But it was the tall firs that pleased me most; the glance rose up the flame-shaped fir-tree, tapering to its green tip, and above was the azure sky. By the aid of the tree I felt the sky more.'

There follows one of the book's most exalted passages, a pendant to the evocation of the night-sky in 'Bevis's Zodiac'. Again the focus is on the colour blue:

The sun had not yet stood out from the orient, but his precedent light shone through the translucent blue. Yet it was not blue, nor is there any word, nor is a word possible to convey the feeling unless one could be built up of signs and symbols like those in the book of the magician, which glowed and burned to and fro the page. For the blue of the precious sapphire is thick to it, the turquoise dull; these hard surfaces are no more to be compared to it than sand and gravel. They are but stones, hard, cold, pitiful, that which gives them their lustre is the light. Through delicate porcelain sometimes the light comes, and it is not the porcelain, it is the light that is lovely. But porcelain is clay, and the light is shorn, checked, and shrunken. Down through the beauteous azure came the Light itself, pure, unreflected Light, untouched, untarnished even by the dew-sweetened petal of a flower, descending, flowing like a wind, a wind of glory sweeping through the blue. A luminous purple glowing as Love glows in the cheek, so glowed the passion of the heavens.

Two things only reach the soul. By touch there is indeed emotion. But the light in the eye, the sound of the voice! the soul trembles and like a flame leaps to meet them. So to the luminous purple azure his heart ascended.

Bevis, the lover of the sky, gazed and forgot; forgot as we forget that our pulses beat, having no labour to make them. Nor did he hear the south wind singing in the fir tops.

I do not know how any can slumber with this over them; how any can look down at the clods. The greatest wonder on earth is that there are any not able to see the earth's surpassing beauty. Such moments are beyond the chronograph and any measure of wheels; the passing of one cog may be equal to a century, for the mind has no time. What an incredible marvel it is that there are human creatures that slumber threescore and ten years, and look down at the clods and then say, 'We are old, we have lived seventy years.' Seventy years! The passing of one cog is longer; seven hundred times seventy years would not equal the click of the tiniest cog while the mind was living its own life. Sleep and clods, with the glory of the earth, and the sun, and the sea, and the endless ether around us! Incredible marvel this sleep and clods and talk of years. But I suppose it was only a second or two, for some slight movement attracted him, and he looked, and instantly the vision above was forgotten.²⁶

The movement is that of an otter, which Bevis proceeds to shoot. One of the strengths of *Bevis* is its naturalism. The exalted thoughts aroused by

²⁶ *Bevis, op.cit.*, pp.391-2.

the luminous blue of the dawn sky abruptly give way to the ferocity of a country boy dealing slaughter with his gun.

The passage is not flawless. A captious critic might find a hint of Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism in the vagueness of 'nor is a word possible to convey the feeling', in the self-consciously 'poetic' words 'orient' for east and 'beauteous' for beautiful, and in the syrupy adjective 'dew-sweetened'. However, the passage lives, throbs, sweeps the reader along by force of feeling. It describes one of those privileged moments when the subject enters a dimension where linear time ceases and all time is eternally present.

The narrator of Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* experiences similar moments when the taste of a madeleine biscuit dipped in tea restores to him a memory of long-forgotten childhood holidays at Combray; and again towards the end of the novel when, tripping over two uneven paving-stones in the courtyard of the Prince de Guermantes, he has a vision of dazzling azure that proves a hitherto lost memory of Venice, where he had once similarly tripped in the baptistery of St. Mark's. Such moments of time regained allow him to transcend the brevity of human life and experience a moment of eternity. The reliving of a fraction of the past in the present joins present and past in a dimension outside time. The narrator enters an extra-temporal realm where death no longer holds any fears for him. Such moments involve a loss of normal consciousness. The narrator says that if they had lasted any longer he would probably have fainted. Though they bring a sense of eternity, they are fugitive, short-lived.

Bevis' moment of absorption, when 'his heart ascended to the luminous purple azure,' is likewise timeless, beyond the measure of clocks: 'seven hundred times seventy years would not equal the click of the tiniest cog while the mind was living its own life.' The moment brings an awakening, a heightening of consciousness, in contrast to the sleep, the clod-like existence, of the majority: 'I do not know how any can slumber with this over them.'

Jefferies considered blindness to the beauty of nature a blasphemy, almost a crime. In *The Dewy Morn* Robert Godwin, bailiff to the vacuous Squire Cornleigh Cornleigh, embodies that blindness and insensitivity. Embittered by the heroine's Felise's rejection of him long ago, and become a prisoner of habit, he ignores the alchemy taking place in the east as he has ignored the beautiful night sky the previous evening. He is coldly indifferent to it all. Yet

Overhead and eastwards there shone a glory of blue heaven, illuminated from within with a golden light. The deep rich azure was lit up with an inner gold; it was a time to worship, to lift up the heart. Is there anything so wondrously beautiful as the sky just before the sun rises in summer?²⁷

In the mystical state of union with the Absolute the boundaries between inner and outer dissolve. In *Bevis* the inner dawn of the boy's enlightenment corresponds to the physical dawn. The spiritual awakening finds objective correlative in the outer and celestial.²⁸ According to Vedantic philosophy the world is most full of *sattva* (purity, knowledge, calm) at sunrise and sunset: they are the most spiritual and divine hours of the day.

Much of *Bevis* is bathed in a light like that of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode²⁹ and the early books of *The Prelude*: the light of childhood, when the earth appears 'apparelled in celestial light,/ The glory and the freshness of a dream'; the light of 'the hour/ Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower'; the 'visionary gleam' that dims as 'Shades of the prison-house begin to close/ Upon the growing Boy', until it fades 'into the light of common day'.

There is no evidence that Jefferies read Wordsworth³⁰: it is curious he never mentions him, although he had much in common with the poet in the depth of his response to nature. However we catch echoes here and there, particularly of the first book of *The Prelude*. *Wood Magic* and *Bevis* might have as their motto the lines:

Thus often in those fits of vulgar joy
Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits
Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
And is forgotten; even then I felt

²⁷ *The Dewy Morn* [1884] (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1900), p.144.

²⁸ In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies says he prayed with earth, sun, sky, stars and ocean: 'as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the notes of my soul, redoubling my own voice by their power,' (*op.cit.*, p.32) and that 'I was sensitive to all things, to the earth under, and the star-hollow round about; to the least blade of grass, to the largest oak. They seemed like exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling to me.' (*op.cit.*, p.133).

²⁹ Full title: 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. For an interesting discussion of the recurrence in Wordsworth's poetry of words to do with *light* (*gleam, flash, sparkle, light, glister, glisten, glitter, lustre, flash, splendour*, etc) see Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words*, Edited by John Kerrigan and Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.79-89.

³⁰ W.J. Keith, 'Jefferies' Reading,' *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, No.2 1993, p.20:

'It seems unthinkable that he did not know Wordsworth's poetry, yet it is difficult to believe that Jefferies, had he known it, would have failed to mention one whose work provides so many comparisons with his own.'

Gleams like the flashing of a shield;—the earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things.³¹

and

Those recollected hours that have the charm
Of visionary things, and lovely forms
And sweet sensations that throw back our life,
And almost make our infancy itself
A visible scene, on which the sun is shining.³²

The boy Wordsworth, like the youthful Jefferies, ‘loved the sun’.³³ Both
‘had seen him lay/ His beauty on the morning hills’.³⁴ Bevis and Mark
‘bathed in air and sunbeam and gathered years of health, like flowers from
the field,’³⁵ while the poet recalled how as a boy he had

Made one long bathing of a summer’s day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all a summer’s day, or coursed
Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves
Of yellow groundsel; or... stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother’s hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.³⁶

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In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies relates how

So long since that I have forgotten the date³⁷, I used every morning to visit a spot where I could get a clear view of the east. Immediately on rising I went out to some elms; thence I could see across the dewy fields to the distant hill over or near which the sun rose. These elms partially hid me, for at that time I had a dislike to being seen, feeling that I should be despised if I was noticed. This happened once or twice, and I knew I was watched contemptuously, though no one had the least idea of my object. But I went every morning, and was satisfied if I could get two or three minutes to think unchecked. Often I

³¹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, A Parallel Text, Edited by J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 1805-6 Text, Book First, lines 609-616.

³² *ibid.*, lines 659-663.

³³ *ibid.*, Book Second, line 184.

³⁴ *ibid.*, lines 188-9.

³⁵ *Bevis*, *op.cit.*, p.94.

³⁶ *The Prelude*, Book First, lines 294-304 (with omissions).

³⁷ Thomas thinks ‘perhaps, at the age of fifteen’ (*op.cit.*, p.39).

saw the sun rise over the line of the hills, but if it was summer the sun had been up a long time.

I looked at the hills, at the dewy grass, and then up through the elm branches to the sky. In a moment all that was behind me, the house, the people, the sounds, seemed to disappear, and to leave me alone. Involuntarily I drew a long breath, then I breathed slowly. My thought, or inner consciousness, went up through the illumined sky, and I was lost in a moment of exaltation. This lasted only a very short time, perhaps only part of a second, and while it lasted there was no formulated wish. I was absorbed; I drank the beauty of the morning; I was exalted. When it ceased I did wish for some increase or enlargement of my existence to correspond with the largeness of feeling I had momentarily enjoyed. Sometimes the wind came through the tops of the elms, and the slender boughs bent, and gazing up through them, and beyond the fleecy clouds, I felt lifted up. The light coming across the grass and leaving itself on the dew-drops, the sound of the wind, and the sense of mounting to the lofty heaven, filled me with a deep sigh, a wish to draw something out of the beauty of it, some part of that which caused my admiration, the subtle inner essence.

Sometimes the green tips of the highest boughs seemed gilded, the light laid a gold on the green. Or the trees bowed to a stormy wind roaring through them, the grass threw itself down, and in the east broad curtains of a rosy tint stretched along. The light was turned to redness in the vapour, and rain hid the summit of the hill. In the rush and roar of the stormy wind the same exaltation, the same desire, lifted me for a moment. I went there every morning, I could not exactly define why; it was like going to a rose bush to taste the scent of the flower and feel the dew from its petals on the lips. But I desired the beauty – the inner subtle meaning – to be in me, that I might have it, and with it an existence of a higher kind.³⁸

Here the sunrise is directly associated with a moment of heightened consciousness, of mystical illumination, when Jefferies lost all sense of individuality and was absorbed into the being of the universe, ‘the larger consciousness of the heavens’ as he put it in *Bevis*.³⁹ Thomas observes that Jefferies ‘unconsciously use[d] the long breath, followed by slow breathing’⁴⁰ that is deliberately practised by adepts as an aid to entering the mystical state of union with the Absolute.

Later Jefferies began to make daily pilgrimages to places where he could meditate in solitude:

³⁸ *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.*, pp.68-9.

³⁹ *Bevis, op.cit.*, p.292.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.167.

There was a feeling that I must go somewhere and be alone. It was a necessity to have a few minutes of this separate life every day; my mind required to live its own life apart from other things.⁴¹

In the opening chapter of the autobiography Jefferies' desire for a fuller life of the soul, his prayer that he 'might touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity',⁴² is again associated with the dawn:

I prayed... with the morning star, the light-bringer, once now and then when I saw it, a white-gold ball in the violet-purple sky, or framed about with pale summer vapour floating away as red streaks shot horizontally in the east. A diffused saffron ascended into the luminous upper azure. The disk of the sun rose over the hill, fluctuating with throbs of light; his chest heaved in fervour of brilliance. All the glory of the sunrise filled me with broader and furnace-like vehemence of prayer. That I might have the deepest of soul-life, the deepest of all, deeper far than all this greatness of the visible universe and even of the invisible; that I might have a fullness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception.⁴³

Later in the book the dawn is associated with Jefferies' conviction that there exist whole circles, whole continents, an infinity of ideas beyond the few with which we are familiar:

The dawn at my window ever causes a desire for larger thought, the recognition of the light at the moment of waking kindles afresh the wish for a broad day of the mind.

There is a certainty that there are yet ideas further, and greater – that there is still a limitless beyond, I know at that moment that there is no limit to the things that may be yet in material and tangible shape besides the immaterial perceptions of the soul. The dim white light of the dawn speaks it. This prophet which has come with its wonders to the bedside of every human being for so many thousands of years faces me once again with the upheld finger of light. Where is the limit to that physical sign?⁴⁴

Light, however, is not the end. It merely points to a still greater mystery:

Light is not all; light conceals more than it reveals; light is the darkest shadow of the sky; besides light there are many other mediums yet to be explored.⁴⁵

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⁴¹ *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.*, p.70.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.31.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp.36-7.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.125.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.126.

'The Dawn' (unpublished during Jefferies' lifetime) poses the same question and explores the same themes. In places the essay is close in word and spirit to the passages cited from the autobiography. Its date is uncertain. Thomas says: 'It may have been 1883, the year of *The Story of My Heart*, or it may have been as late as 1885.'⁴⁶ At all events, he describes 'The Dawn' as 'one of the most beautiful things Jefferies wrote after his awakening'⁴⁷ and as 'delicately perfect... It is pure spirit'.⁴⁸

The essay begins with Jefferies lying in bed in the dark,

conscious of a faint light not visible if I looked deliberately to find it, but seen sideways, and where I was not gazing. It slipped from direct glance as a shadow may slip from a hand-grasp, but it was there floating in the atmosphere of the room.⁴⁹

The dawn light, intangible, elusive, not to be directly grasped, recalls the mysterious blue mist that the narrator in *Restless Human Hearts* discerns in a painting of the interior of Antwerp Cathedral in the National Gallery.

the long dim arches of the cathedral, solemn and still, are filled with an undefined blue mist. You cannot see this blue mist if you look straight at it, or even if you think of it, or search for it. But it grows out of the canvas as the gaze rests upon it; it steals out from the dark places, and clouds the outlines of the pillars till the roof of the building floats upon azure colour.⁵⁰

The sideways glance recalls the method of peripheral vision Jefferies advocates for seeing through water in the essay 'A Brook':

Even the deepest, darkest water (not, of course, muddy) yields after a while to the eye. Half close the eyelids, and while gazing into it let your intelligence rather wait on the corners of the eye than on the glance you cast straight forward. For some reason when thus gazing the edge of the eye becomes exceedingly sensitive, and you are conscious of slight motions or of a thickness – not a defined object, but a thickness which indicates an object – which is otherwise quite invisible.⁵¹

The light becomes almost a metaphor for the mystery of existence. Jefferies calls the dawn light 'a visitant from the unknown'.⁵² A ghostly, spectral presence, it is yet pregnant with significance, like a sign, a messenger, from the other side, from another world. It brings Jefferies right up against the

⁴⁶ *The Hills and the Vale*, *op.cit.*, Introduction, p.xxxi.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.xxix.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.xxx.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.306.

⁵⁰ *Restless Human Hearts* [1875] (Longcot: Petton Books, 2008), p.7. Betsy Wieseman, Curator of Dutch Painting at the National Gallery, was unable to identify the painting for certain.

⁵¹ 'A Brook,' *Nature Near London* [1883] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901), p.58.

⁵² 'The Hills and the Vale,' *op.cit.*, p.306.

mystery and infinite vastness of creation, its unbelievable quality, the enigma that it poses and that baffles comprehension. It takes him back to the time of the builders of the pyramids 'five thousand years ago',⁵³ to whom the light came 'like an arrow from the sun'.

To me it comes white and spectral in the silence, a finger pointed, a voice saying, 'Even now you know nothing'.⁵⁴

Jefferies reasons that just as the pyramid builders were persuaded they understood the universe, and the secrets of life and death, so we, who with our instruments have parted and divided light, and are equally sure we have divined its secrets, may be in an equivalent state of ignorance. Even now there may be undeciphered messages in the pale beam of light at his bedside. On distant planets there may be beings able to transmit their thoughts by rays of light 'as we do along wires'. 'For ought we know' they may have already tried to communicate with us in this way 'time after time':

Such a message is possibly contained sometimes in the pale beam which comes to my bedside. That beam always impresses me with a profound, an intense and distressful sense of ignorance, of being outside the intelligence of the universe, as if there were a vast civilisation in view and yet not entered. Mere villagers and rustics creeping about a sullen earth, we know nothing of the grandeur and intellectual brilliance of that civilisation.⁵⁵

The dawn thus illuminates Jefferies' sense of his and mankind's ignorance. He postulates that if the greater intelligences that dwell on other planets were to communicate with us, they might help us conquer the disease and misery that oppress the majority in our world. He is positive there exist 'things absolutely different to any that have come under eyesight',⁵⁶ invisible forces more delicate, more ethereal than light, forces that 'may outstrip light in speed as light outstrips an arrow'. There may even be 'other things beside matter and motion, or force'.⁵⁷ The grey dawn rising every morning warns him not to be certain that all is known. The infinitude of space forces him to the conclusion that there is more. 'I cannot think that the universe can be so very, very easy as this'.⁵⁸

'The Dawn' is remarkable because it powerfully conveys a sense of the unknown, of the vast cosmos of ideas beyond the narrow circle inside

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.307.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.308.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.309.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.310.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.311.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.312.

which we habitually move, through the simple, familiar image of the pale spectral finger of light shining through the window each morning. The symbolic meaning of the light has expanded from individual illumination to the superior knowledge of extra-terrestrial civilisations. With its emphasis on physics and astronomy, the essay contains a prophecy of the dawning of the age of Aquarius, when science will be applied for the benefit of humanity.

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In the opening and closing chapters of *The Dewy Morn* the dawn heralds both the birth and the fulfilment of love between Martial Barnard and Felise Goring. Its beauty, as we have seen, is the touchstone by which is measured Godwin's brute insensitivity to the finer things in life, to the world of poetry and imagination and dream.

The book begins with an exquisite description of a walk taken soon after sunrise one May morning by Felise. It was Q.D. Leavis who said that Jefferies 'had a sensuous nature akin to but more robust than Keats'.⁵⁹ Dew, dawn, and down here form a trinity, as often in Jefferies.

The fragrance of the dew, invisibly evaporating, filled the air she [Felise] breathed. From sweet-green hawthorn leaves, from heavy grasses drooping, the glittering drops dissolving brought with them the odour of leaf and flower.⁶⁰

Everything has a spring-like freshness and purity, 'a strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning/ In Eden garden'⁶¹; the cowslip 'which no bee had yet sipped'⁶² and which Felise puts to her lips; the blue veronica [speedwell] in the grass; the young pink-eared rabbit nibbling peacefully; the bracken 'freshly-green, and rising rapidly now day by day';⁶³ the yellowhammer perched on a gate, singing.

Seated on a fallen oak trunk, Felise bathes in the beauty of the morning: her frame drooped as the soul, which bears it up, flowed outwards, feeling to grass, and flower, and leaf, as the swimmer spreads the arms abroad, and the fingers feel the water.⁶⁴

Like Rimbaud, Felise 'has embraced the summer dawn'.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Q.D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies,' *Scrutiny*, March 1938, Vol.4, p.437.

⁶⁰ *The Dewy Morn*, *op.cit.*, p.1.

⁶¹ 'Spring', *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Selected with an Introduction by W.H. Gardner [1953] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.28.

⁶² *The Dewy Morn*, *op.cit.*, p.2.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.3.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.4.

Beauty of morning, beauty of youth. Felise's supple limbs are filled 'with the plenty of ripe youth'.⁶⁶ She has upon her the bloom, 'that glow of the morn of life.'⁶⁷ She is a true Daughter of the Dawn. Edward Thomas wrote: 'she is a beautiful lover born not out of the bitter sea, but out of the streaming dew that makes the grass sweeter than honeycomb'.⁶⁸

A blackbird bathing in a ditch, the fresh May green of the hawthorn leaves, a lark's song, all so distract Felise that she misses the sunrise.

Much of the attraction of the dawn that Jefferies felt so young and so intensely must have been simply a response to the beauty of early morning. Edward Thomas perfectly captures the mood in 'The Glory'. The poem has the same quality of Eden vision as the opening chapter of *The Dewy Morn*:

The glory of the beauty of the morning, —
 The cuckoo crying over the untouched dew;
 The blackbird that has found it, and the dove
 That tempts me on to something sweeter than love;
 White clouds ranged even and fair as new-mown hay:
 The heat, the stir, the sublime vacancy
 Of sky and meadow and forest and my own heart: —
 The glory invites me, yet it leaves me scorning
 All I can ever do, all I can be,
 Beside the lovely of motion, shape, and hue,
 The happiness I fancy fit to dwell
 In beauty's presence.⁶⁹

The freshness and purity of the morning, the sense of rebirth and renewal, is evoked in the majestic roll of the opening lines of Shakespeare's sonnet:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
 Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;⁷⁰

The purity of the early morning air, its healthy life-giving properties, remind us that Jefferies always put his faith in natural medicines. In

⁶⁵ 'J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été', Arthur Rimbaud, 'Aube', XXII in 'Les Illuminations', *Oeuvres Complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Texte établi et annoté par Rolland de Renéville et Jules Mouquet (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963), p.194.

⁶⁶ *The Dewy Morn*, *op.cit.*, p.4.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.209.

⁶⁹ Edward Thomas, *Selected Poems*, Selected and introduced by R.S. Thomas (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.28.

⁷⁰ Sonnet XXXIII, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 1955), p.1110.

Amaryllis at the Fair he cites approvingly the dictum of ‘bluff, gruff, rule-of-thumb old Butler’:

‘If you wants to get well,’ old Dr Butler used to say, ‘you go for a walk in the marning afore the aair have been braathed auver.’

Before the air has been breathed over-inspired and re-inspired by human crowds, while it retains the sweetness of the morning, like water fresh from the spring; that was when it possessed its value, according to bluff, gruff, rule-of-thumb old Butler. Depend upon it, there is something in his dictum, too.⁷¹

Allied to this freshness, and expressive of it, are the dew-laden grass ‘flashing emerald and ruby’ and the sweetness of the birdsong in spring and early summer: the clarion of the thrush from his station high in an oak, speckled breast swelling in the sun; the piercing, dashing notes of the secretive wren; ‘the lark’s song like a waterfall in the sky’.⁷² The air, and the colours of leaf, flower and grass, are washed clean by the dawn, as a stream runs itself clear during the night.

R.C. Zaehner, an authority on mysticism and eastern religion, thinks Jefferies may independently have discovered the subtle energy that the Indian yogi calls *prāna*, the force that Jefferies said was ‘more subtle than electricity’.⁷³ *Prāna* means ‘breath’, ‘vital force’, or simply ‘wind’. It is akin to the *pneuma* of the Greeks, the fertilising wind that was believed to impregnate mares when they turned their hindquarters to it; and to the *anima* of the Romans. It is the breath of life, ‘the spirit which animates the universe and which breathes in man’.⁷⁴

Correct breathing is of paramount importance to students of yoga. The air is never purer than early in the morning, on the hills or by the sea. In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies refers to the purity of the air: ‘I thought of the wandering air — its pureness, which is its beauty’.⁷⁵ The air is particularly pure on the downs, as Jefferies noted in ‘The Breeze on Beachy Head’:

But the glory of these glorious Downs is the breeze. The air in the valleys immediately beneath them is pure and pleasant; but the least climb, even a hundred feet, puts you on a plane with the atmosphere itself, uninterrupted

⁷¹ *Amaryllis at the Fair, A Novel*, Introduction by Andrew Rossabi [1887] (London: Quartet Books, 1980), p.52.

⁷² *The Story of My Heart*, *op.cit.*, p.48.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.65.

⁷⁴ R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, An Inquiry into some Forms of Praeternatural Experience [1957] (Oxford University Press, 1975), p.48.

⁷⁵ *The Story of My Heart*, *op.cit.*, p.31.

by so much as the tree-tops. It is air without admixture. If it comes from the south, the waves refine it; if inland, the wheat and flowers and grass distil it.⁷⁶

It is as if the downs retained some of the saline purity of their oceanic origin. 'Like the goddess,' writes H.J. Massingham in *English Downland*, a Batsford book which, besides being an informed and evocative survey of chalk country with many fine photographs, has the merit of quoting Jefferies on the first page,

Like the goddess, chalk originally rose from the sea, white and gleaming as she. Its body was made up of infinite myriads of little animals with shells of silica which had drifted down into the abysses in a slow rain, dripping drop by drop through countless aeons of time.⁷⁷

A slow process indeed: it took 500 years to deposit one millimetre of chalk, 50 million years to lay down a total of 330 feet of rock.

More *prāna* may be naturally present in the atmosphere in the early morning than at any other time of day. Certain months seem particularly invigorating, the spring months of April, May and June, for example, whereas July and August are more sluggish and sultry. We all know those brilliant mornings that sometimes dawn after a storm or period of prolonged depression, a week of rain that kept us fretting indoors as children – mornings when the sky is washed blue and flocked with scudding cumulus, the air heavily oxygenated, and the earth renewed, as if purged overnight of her evil vapours. There is a mood of April pleasure, a fever, a giddy intoxication in the air, that makes one want to dance and lift one's head and sing with a joy half out its senses: a peerless morning such as Jefferies describes in his notebook for May 14, 1879:

Lark singing beautifully in the still dark and clouded sky at a quarter to three o'clock in the morning; about twenty minutes afterwards the first thrush: thought I heard distant cuckoo – not sure: and ten minutes after that the copse by garden perfectly ringing with the music. A beautiful May morning; thoroughly English morning: southerly wind, warm light breeze, smart showers of warm rain, and intervals of brilliant sunshine; the leaves in copse beautiful delicate green, refreshed, cleaned, and a still more lovely green from the shower; behind them the blue sky, and above the bright sun; white detached clouds sailing past.⁷⁸

A Constable landscape, sunshine and shower, the green fresh and sparkling under rain and sun.

⁷⁶ 'The Breeze on Beachy Head,' *Nature Near London*, *op.cit.*, p.240.

⁷⁷ H.J. Massingham, *English Downland*, The Face of Britain series [1936] (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1949), p.2.

⁷⁸ *The Nature Diaries and Note-books of Richard Jefferies*, *op.cit.*, p.47.

Thus the dawn was constellated in Jefferies' psyche as well as in the external world: it stood for the dawn of consciousness, for spiritual enlightenment. It was the symbol of Jefferies' illumination, the dawn of knowledge rising out of the cloud of unknowing.

W.J. Keith⁷⁹ has pointed out how often in *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies links the spiritual and physical worlds by means of metaphors drawn from nature. Among the examples he cites from the opening chapter are 'the rain of deep feeling',⁸⁰ 'the dust which settles on the heart',⁸¹ 'to drink deeply at the fresh fountains of life',⁸² 'the pure air of thought',⁸³ 'a wider horizon of feeling',⁸⁴ and 'the unattainable flower of the sky'.⁸⁵ Later Jefferies speaks of suffering 'a moral drought'.⁸⁶ The metaphors act to fuse the two worlds of subjective and objective, inner and outer.

The 'pure air of thought' recalls that Hermes (Roman name Mercury), messenger of the gods, was represented with winged helmet and sandals, and traditionally associated with air, air being symbolic of thought, its native element. Similarly water, especially the sea, commonly symbolises feeling and emotion. So Jefferies says his passion rose 'tumultuous as the waves'; the sea is within him, every boom of the wave repeats his prayer.⁸⁷

Again, he desires the endurance and strength of the sun: in astrology the sun is the ruler of Leo, sign of fixed fire, strongest of the signs in terms of outgoing energy. Jefferies' own sun-sign was Scorpio, sign of fixed water, corresponding to the eighth house of death and rebirth, most passionate of the signs, but also in higher types the most repressed, in love with what is secret and hidden, often with an interest in the occult.

In *The Dewy Morn* the dawn stands for the birth of love rather than for enlightenment, if the two can be separated. The novel is a hymn to Eros, a celebration of its beauty and its power. It has the same passionate spirit as

⁷⁹ W.J. Keith, *Richard Jefferies, A Critical Study* (University of Toronto Press, 1965), p.93.

⁸⁰ *The Story of My Heart, op.cit.*, p.29.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.30.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.31.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.86.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.135.

the autobiography. In his note-books Jefferies had described *The Story of My Heart* as a 'Long Paean of Soul to God, a paean in itself of its own existence.'⁸⁸ Much of *The Dewy Morn* is similarly a paean, to the love of life and of beauty. It is one of the most perfect because purest of Jefferies' books. There are none of the outbursts of misanthropic spleen and bigotry that mar some of his other writings.

The picture of the dawn in the final chapter is among the most moving passages. Felise and Martial are now married. The man sleeps, while the woman 'wakeful in her happiness, stole to the window where she had so often sat of old time'.⁸⁹ It is very early one morning in May, and Felise sits watching the sky. Writes Thomas, 'the contented woman is drawn against the vast loveliness of dawn.'⁹⁰ Upon the ground lies a stratum of darkness like a mist. 'Through this the lark soaring sang in the clear air above.'⁹¹ A white light rushes imperceptibly through the atmosphere and spreads along the distant ridge of hills. There follows a magical yet exact description of the night sky giving way to dawn:

So long as the night-blue tint of the sky continued the stars shone; as the dawn-beams shot upwards and increased in brightness this night-blue tint began to change, and with it the stars retired into the depths of space.⁹²

Thrush and blackbird begin to sing, a score of them, 'their chorus burst upon the dawn.'

The stars were gone, and the deep azure of the morning filled the sky. By the ridge of the hill the white light shone brightly; above it a purple mingled luminously with the blue; towards the zenith the loveliness of the colour is not to be written.⁹³

The dawn shines on Felise's face, 'and upon the beautiful golden hair drooping to her knees'. Her hands are folded, 'the same attitude in great happiness as in inconsolable sorrow; the dawn glistened upon the tears in her eyes.'⁹⁴ She is at perfect rest.

Except to love and to love fulfilled and then only to woman, is such rest ever given. For the heart, and the hand, and the mind of a man are for ever driving onwards, and no profundity of rest ever comes to his inmost consciousness.⁹⁵ At dawn he looks forward to the noonday...

⁸⁸ *The Nature Diaries and Note-books of Richard Jefferies, op.cit.* [24 March 1883], p.129.

⁸⁹ *The Dewy Morn, op. cit.*, p.392.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *ibid.*, p.223.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.393.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.394.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ The same idea is expressed at the end of the early novel *Restless Human Hearts* (1875).

A golden breath came up among the bright whiteness of the light over the ridge of the hill; there were scarlet streaks, the lips of the morning. In the glorious beauty of the sunrise her heart brimmed to the full of love.⁹⁶

Martial calls her name, and is answered by 'a kiss amid the dew of loving tears.'⁹⁷

Dew runs as a leitmotif through the novel, whose title is taken from *The Passionate Pilgrim*, two lines of which serve for epigraph:

Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn,
And scarce the herd gone to the hedge for shade.

The most evocative of Jefferies' titles, *The Dewy Morn* conveys the essence of his *oeuvre*, its qualities of freshness and purity. It has been said that 'Jefferies' words... are like a glassy covering of the things described'⁹⁸; and at its best his prose has an inner radiance, a prismatic diamantine colouring, that one associates with religious writing.

The writer perhaps most akin to Jefferies in the marriage of intense feeling with luminous clarity in the depiction of natural phenomena was his contemporary Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), who once said he knew 'the beauty of our Lord' by a bluebell ⁹⁹ and wrote:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.¹⁰⁰

Hopkins found the essence of things both in their Platonic form and in their individual Thisness or *haecceitas*, as his philosophic mentor, the Schoolman Duns Scotus (1266 or 1274-1308), termed it. His poetry has, like Jefferies' prose, a dawn-like quality of revelation in the literal sense of a curtain being drawn aside or back to reveal something previously hidden:

I caught this morning morning's minion,
kingdom of daylight's dauphin,
dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon...¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.395-6.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.396.

⁹⁸ Cited by Thomas (*op.cit.*, p.298), who does not give his source. Henry S. Salt in *Richard Jefferies: His Life & His Ideals* (London: Arthur C. Fifield, 1905) speaks of 'a style where it might seem that the words, as has been said of Shelley's words, "were really transparent, or that they throbbed with living lustres" – there is such crystalline brilliancy, and withal a heart of fire, both in the idea and in the expression' (p.105), and perhaps Thomas had this passage in mind.

⁹⁹ *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Selected with an Introduction and Notes by W.H. Gardner [1953] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), journal entry dated 18 May 1870, p.120.

¹⁰⁰ 'God's Grandeur,' *ibid.*, p.27.

¹⁰¹ 'The Windhover,' *ibid.*, p.30. Later in the poem, which he dedicated 'To Christ our Lord,' Hopkins likened the swinging turn of the kestrel to 'a skate's heel' sweeping 'smooth on a bow-bend', an image similar to that used by Jefferies to describe the bird's soaring flight in 'Birds Climbing the Air' in *The Life of The Fields* (1884):

Hopkins also wrote

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.¹⁰²

Had he been able to read him (Hopkins' poetry was published posthumously by his friend Robert Bridges in 1918, nearly thirty years after the poet's death) Jefferies would surely have approved those lines, he who was fond of quoting the lines from *Faust*:

Thy works sublime are now as bright
As on creation's day they rose.¹⁰³

In sum, the dawn penetrated Jefferies' work until it shared its qualities of freshness and purity, epitomised by the dew. Edward Thomas memorably expressed the effect of Jefferies' long communion with nature:

Air and sun so cleaned and sweetened his work that in the end the cleanness
and sweetness of Nature herself become inseparable from it in our minds.¹⁰⁴

and spoke of his having 'a spirituality now close as the grass, and now as the stars.'¹⁰⁵ The dawn represents the spiritual fragrance that permeates Jefferies' best work. Watching the dawn became, like drinking the pure sunlit water from the spring in 'the green-roofed cave'¹⁰⁶ in the hills, 'sacramental'.¹⁰⁷ Jefferies' heart lifted when he saw the sun mount the ridge of the distant down and shoot forth his rays: in answer he sent out a prayer, much as in *The Dewy Morn* 'of old, old time' the women of Greece went out to offer a prayer to Apollo at sunrise.¹⁰⁸

Jefferies was a natural mystic. His illumination came not through fasting or asceticism (which he condemned as 'the vilest blasphemy'¹⁰⁹), nor

... one ceases to beat the air with his wings, stretches them to their full length, and seems to lean aside. His impetus carries him forward and upward, at the same time in a circle, something like a skater on one foot.

¹⁰² 'God's Grandeur,' *ibid.*, p.27.

¹⁰³ Lines cited in *Greene Ferne Farm*, *op.cit.*, p.23. W.J. Keith writes in his 'Notes on *Greene Ferne Farm*' (February 1979), p.2: 'from the "Prologue in Heaven" at the opening of Goethe's *Faust* in Lewis Filmore's translation (1841).'

¹⁰⁴ *The Hills and the Vale*, *op.cit.*, p.xxxi.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ 'Meadow Thoughts', *The Life of the Fields*, *op.cit.*, p.66.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies*, *op.cit.*, p.54.

¹⁰⁸ *The Dewy Morn*, *op.cit.*, p.18.

¹⁰⁹ *The Story of My Heart*, *op.cit.*, p.93.

through guide or guru, nor by any of the traditional paths to enlightenment. It came to him as a grace.

Nor was his attitude to nature solely mystical or aesthetic. It was rooted in the practical realities of the soil. The son of a struggling small farmer, a proud member of the yeoman class, he knew the harshness of agricultural life at first hand. His rural pictures are free from romantic idealization, the veil of pastoral idyll lurking in the imagination of most town-dwellers. To conclude, here is the dawn as depicted in the essay 'The Labourer's Daily Life':

To rise at five of a summer's morning, and see the azure of the sky and the glorious sun, may be, perhaps, no great hardship, although there are few persons who could long remain poetical on bread and cheese. But to rise at five on a dark winter's morning is a very different affair. To put on coarse nailed boots, weighing fully seven pounds, gaiters up above the knee, a short greatcoat of some heavy material, and to step out into the driving rain and trudge wearily over field after field of wet grass, with the furrows full of water; then to sit on a three-legged stool, with mud and manure half-way up the ankles, and milk cows with one's head leaning against their damp, smoking hides for two hours, with the rain coming steadily drip, drip, drip – this is a very different affair.¹¹⁰

Jefferies paints a similarly bleak picture of the dawn in Chapter XXI 'A Winter's Morning' in *Hodge and His Masters*. The fogger's¹¹¹ dawn is very different from Felise's. He rises not to sunlight but to 'the pale beams of the waning moon'¹¹² that still cast a shadow on his cottage. His boots are stiff and hard, having been wet overnight. He eats some bread and cheese before stepping out into the frosty air. The furrows are white with ice, the stile crusted with rime. It is still dark but overhead the stars are losing their brilliance and Venus is shining. The cattle low as he enters the rickyard and mounts the haystack with a ladder and cuts out a truss of hay.

The fogger, like the milker and the carter, who also have to be up early, is often exposed to vile weather, wind and rain, furrows full of water, a flooded cowyard, a dripping haystack, slush and mire in the gateways, through which the milker staggers homeward under his yoke. Jefferies notes that the worst weather is often reserved for the last hour before dawn.

In winter when the rain is driven by a furious wind, when the lantern is blown out, and the fogger stumbles in pitchy darkness through mud and

¹¹⁰ 'The Labourer's Daily Life,' *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1874, collected in *The Toilers of the Field* [1892] (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), pp.93-4.

¹¹¹ Short for fodderer: the man who feeds the cattle.

¹¹² *Hodge and His Masters* [1880] (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.225.

water, it would be difficult to imagine a condition of things which concentrates more discomfort.¹¹³

Mysticism and appreciation of natural beauty were allied in Jefferies to a social conscience that strengthened and matured throughout his life, until he had, in Q.D. Leavis's words,

emancipated himself by nothing but the force of daily experience and sensitive reflection to a position of daring freedom from the ideas of his class, his age and his country.¹¹⁴

Jefferies wished his dawn for everyone, and by teaching his readers to see the world as he did, with the same intense clarity and exquisite tenderness of vision, bequeathed them 'sunshine and flowers'¹¹⁵ in each lifetime now.



Dawn over Liddington Hill.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.228.

¹¹⁴ Q.D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies,' *Scrutiny*, March 1938, vol.4, p.441.

¹¹⁵ *The Story of My Heart*, *op.cit.*, p.83.

The Later Richard Jefferies Speaks

Samuel J. Looker

This poem was found among a major collection of material acquired by the Richard Jefferies Society from the widow of Looker's grandson. As far as can be determined the poem has never been published and it is assumed that it was printed privately to send to friends.

I love the earth,
Never was such a worshipper of earth,
I love the brook, the sunlight on its face,
The life-giving water,
I love the herbs and flowers upon the hillside,
The rose of June, the daisy in the grass,
The bird's-foot lotus;
I love the songs of larks that fall like silver rain,
The greenfinches and their quiet love talking,
I love the pear-blossom falling like snow,
The beauteous petals of the apple-bloom,
And delicate buds of the hawthorn.
All birds I love, the humble sparrow,
The artist blackbird on his golden flute,
The storm cock's loudest song,
The yellowhammer sitting on the branch,
Sings in my mind forever,
The swallows on the wing
To me are constant joy;
I love the patient humble-bee
That seeks his solitary home in quiet content,

I love the sweet briar wind,
That softly sways the coloured meadow flowers,
I love the sound of the unresting sea,
Upon the shore loud ringing,
I love the hare that crouches in its form,
That delicate feeder,
I love the sly brown fox, the wandering rover,
I love the hawk that swiftly soars
Above the tallest trees,
And with its eagle eyes
Searches the plain;
But not as once I loved in early days,
For now I watch the mark,
I learn, enjoy,
In love and observation quite absorbed,
The snare untouched, the gun unused,
The earth most wonderful, and life more sacred still.



Samuel J. Looker, 1948

The Grey Walls Press

Peter Robins

Samuel J. Looker was widely recognised as an expert on Jefferies. For nearly thirty years, between 1937 and his death in 1965, he was responsible for publishing new material and various anthologies of Jefferies' work. He was also a reader for the publisher Constable, and edited anthologies of hunting, angling, cricket and golf and undertook public duty as a county councillor. Another, less known, interest of his was poetry and a slim volume of verse, *Dawn and Sunset Gold: Poems of Love and Nature*, was published at his own expense in 1920, followed by *Thorns and Sweet Briar* (1922) and *The Sheltering Tree* (1928).

In 1940, Charles Wrey Gardiner, poet and publisher, moved from Devon to his mother's house, Grey Walls, on the High Street in Billericay, Essex. It was from here that he published *Poetry Quarterly*, converting one of the rooms into a small bookshop where he sold the magazine and second-hand books. Grey Walls became the focal point of what literary life there was in Billericay in 1940 and local resident Samuel J. Looker and Gardiner soon became good friends. Readers of *Poetry Quarterly* were soon introduced to Looker as an important literary figure and he was invited to judge the annual competition for the best contribution to the magazine. It was Looker, with his greater publishing experience, who suggested to Gardiner that he should publish books as well as the magazine and late in 1940, The Grey Walls Press was founded.

No doubt as a compliment to his friend, Gardiner's first book under the imprint for 1940 was a selection of Looker's poetry, with the title *Green Branches*, published in December of that year. According to George Miller and Hugoe Matthews' *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study*, the collection included 'To Richard Jefferies: In Homage,' later reprinted in Looker's *Jefferies' Countryside* (Constable, 1944). In October 1941, *One Plum More* was published, an anthology of lesser-known poems of between 1586 and 1903, edited by Looker. The following month saw the publication of Looker's *The Nature Diaries and Note-Books of Richard Jefferies with an Essay A Tangle of Autumn*, having been previewed in the Summer edition of *Poetry Quarterly*. Miller and Matthews record that this included Looker's poem 'Envoy', the second part of his 'Richard Jefferies' that had appeared in *Green Branches*.

The new imprint attracted other poets including a series of books by Alex Comfort. By the end of 1941 Gardiner was enthusiastic about promoting the new ‘moderns’ and faithful contributors to *Poetry Quarterly* could no longer get their poems printed in the magazine. In early 1943 Gardiner moved his publishing business to Bloomsbury, where he expanded his list to include art books but until 1947 the firm’s output was limited to about five titles a year, owing to a combination of paper rationing and a lack of capital. At this time, Gardiner was approached by Peter Baker, who ran a small publishing house, The Falcon Press, at first to share a sales representative, but the idea evolved and it was not long before the imprints shared premises, staff and reciprocal directorships. Baker was ambitious and encouraged Gardiner to increase his list, with eighty titles appearing between 1947 and 1950. These included the ‘Crown Classics’ series, well-produced, inexpensive books of traditional verse with an introduction by a contemporary critic. Looker was commissioned for the volume of Elizabeth Barrett Browning; other introductions were written by Muriel Spark, Richard Church, Geoffrey Grigson, Stephen Spender, Hugh MacDiarmid as well as other notable poets, authors or journalists.



High Street, Billericay: Grey Walls is shown on the left, next to The Temperance Hotel. Both were demolished shortly after the Second World War.

Baker had consistently poor judgement as a publisher and businessman and his debts mounted as he counted on a publishing success to get him out of trouble. In 1950 he was elected as Conservative MP for Norfolk South and, encouraged by his new status, continued to expand his

business. His debts continued to accrue and in 1954 the receiver was eventually called in to Falcon Press, which was found to have debts of almost £300,000. In the investigation Baker was shown to have forged signatures on documents that purported to guarantee sources of finance. He pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey and was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and expelled from the House of Commons. At the age of forty-five, Baker died in hospital in 1966.

Gardiner made an attempt to unravel his imprint from the debacle, closed *Poetry Quarterly* and abandoned his book publishing in 1954. So entwined were the finances with Baker that The Grey Walls Press could not be rescued.

In 1960 Rupert Hart-Davis published the first volume of Gardiner's autobiography, *The Answer to Life is No*, but subsequent manuscripts were unpublished. In 1980, a year before Gardiner's death at the age of seventy-nine, Enitharmon Press published a limited edition of his poems.



Wrey Gardiner by Gregorio Prieto.
From *The Dark Thorn* by Wrey Gardiner,
The Grey Walls Press, 1946.

Helen Thomas's letter to Samuel Looker

The following letter was found among Looker's papers donated to the Richard Jefferies Society – now in the archive at the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham. The occasion refers to Samuel J. Looker's address to the audience celebrating the Richard Jefferies Centenary event held on Saturday, 19 June 1948. The party had walked from the Corn Exchange in Old Town, Swindon, leaving at 2pm, for Dayhouse Farm, Coate (the birthplace of Jessie (Baden) Jefferies). On arrival, Looker gave his talk. It is interesting to note that Edward Thomas's biography of Richard Jefferies 'received hardly any notice' when it was first published in 1909.

20/6/[19]48

Starwell Farm – Sheldon – Chippenham
Wiltshire

Dear Mr. Looker

At the moment when our party had to leave to catch our train, you were so surrounded by people that I felt I could not disturb you.

But I was sorry to leave without saying goodbye to you & thanking you for the lovely day of which the talks about Jefferies were the chief items.

I am quite sure the impassioned utterances would inspire any of the audiences who did not know the works of Jefferies to read him & in the light of all you have said understand and love him.

I also want to thank you for the many more numerous references to my husband's biog of Richard Jefferies which at the time of publication received hardly any notice at all. It warmed my heart to hear his work so perceived and by one who would be a severe critic of any book about Jefferies, & I left the meeting full of elation & happiness.

I feel sure you must have felt what a deep impression you have made on that most receptive audience, so unaffectedly sincere & interested, & so interesting & so successful in making the day the day it was. I only hope you were not too exhausted by it all.

Many people spoke to me of Edward & of my own little book & I confess I felt emotionally overwhelmed, & so I can well [imagine] your state at the end of that unforgettable day.

Ever yours sincerely

Helen Thomas

Edward Thomas: Prose into Poetry

Richard Stewart

To mark the centenary year of the death on 9 April 1917 of Edward Thomas, this article reproduces the text of a talk given to the Richard Jefferies Society by Richard Stewart on the occasion of a Study Day held at Lawn Community Centre, Swindon on 29 July 2006.

Before he died at Arras in April 1917, aged just 39, Edward Thomas had written about 40 books. That is nearly twice as many as Richard Jefferies, who had a comparable short life. At one time Thomas was working on six books at once and he lived by the pen and fed his family by the pen: essays, articles, reviews and books. He started early, copying Jefferies' style, to win botany essay prizes and thanks to the eminent critic and editor, James Ashcroft Noble, whose daughter Helen became Thomas' wife, he was soon having articles published in several magazines. It wasn't just influence, though. Thomas had a genuine talent for writing good prose. This is an extract from *Seen through the Willow Tree*, aged 16:

In summer it is not so dense but that I can find the blackbird wherever it sings among its branches and not in winter so agile but that its changing patterns are conspicuous against the sky, its sound an appreciable sussuration using the harp strings of the wind.

By the time he met Robert Frost and took his first memorable steps towards poetry, he was a man of letters, an eminent and highly respected critic, chief literary reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* since 1902 and earning in most years enough to support his family and at least one servant, and perhaps to push into the background his fear of lingering debt, a legacy of his Oxford days.

He was also part of a large literary circle, something Jefferies always lacked. His friends included Hilaire Belloc, Harold Monro, Ezra Pound, Walter de la Mare, W.H. Davies, Joseph Conrad, Gordon Bottomley, Wilfred Blunt, John Drinkwater, Wilfrid Gibson, Arthur Ransome, Eleanor Farjeon – and many more. These were not just casual acquaintances. Some were life-long friends, with whom he corresponded all his adult life, people he met, socialised with, stayed with when he needed to get away to concentrate on a time-limit book.

But there were problems, deep-seated literary and personal problems. The family lived in a total of 14 different homes and often Edward had to travel to research his books – to the Coastguard cottages at Dunwich off

the Suffolk coast, for example in 1908, to write his Jefferies biography. Perhaps these many breaks helped his marriage to survive. Helen and her young family bore the brunt of a complex personality at one time deeply sociable, passionate and sensitive, but also subject to moods of depression, misery, self-loathing and melancholy. Notes found after his death even discuss suicide and its consequences. They were frank with each other, brutally frank sometimes, as this entry from Helen's *World Without End* testifies:

There are no letters.

Why tell me what is written on your pale wretched face? I am cursed, and you are cursed because of me. I hate the tears I see you've been crying. Your sympathy and your love are both hateful to me. Hate me, but for God's sake don't stand there, pale and suffering. Leave me, I tell you. Get out and leave me! [p.92]



Helen and Edward Thomas, 1905.

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These fits of anger and irritation at home were almost uncontrollable at times and Gordon Bottomley, in a letter dated December 1939, wrote:

The marriage put him for ever out of his right road because it was premature and never let him have leisure and energy of spirit to find himself.

His working life was a constant round of writing and reading, walking or cycling to research books and though most of us probably have on our shelves well-thumbed copies of *The Icknield Way*, *The Hills and the Vale*, *In Pursuit of Spring* and my own favourite *The Heart of England*, Thomas also

wrote *Maurice Maeterlinck*, *Walter Pater* and other books that he described using words like ‘hack’ and ‘treadmill’:

Hasty compilations, ill-arranged, inaccurate and incomplete, and swollen to a ridiculous size for the sake of gain.

As early as 1905 he wrote:

Nothing is worthwhile and it is really wonderful how I persuade myself to work regularly. I have no joy, no hope, no responsibility, no certainty!

From 1910 onwards his regular sources of income diminished and the bouts of depression and introspective self-loathing increased. He was relentless in his pursuit of self-understanding but it was a dark world of despondency he was investigating. In late 1911 he wrote:

I have somehow lost my balance and can never recover it by diet or rule or any deliberate means, but only by some miracle from within or without!

That miracle occurred within two years but first, a look at the poetic world in which Thomas was immersed, though not as a serious poet.

From his father he had ‘The Children’s Hour’ and Longfellow, Welsh songs from his grandmother and songs were to be an important influence in his life. Their rhythm and cadence eventually shaped his best poetry. And if a song was new it would be sung repeatedly line by line to learn it, with Helen sitting at the piano, jotting down the notes. Songs permeate many of the essays in *The Heart of England*, even tunes written down at the back of the book.

His scholarship to his fourth school introduced him to the Aenid and Shakespeare, plus Byron, whom he disliked. Letters to friends discuss poetry and it is obvious Thomas had a comprehensive mastery of English poetry. He reviewed the poetry of W.H. Davies and many others, sat as a judge of prestigious poetry awards, was a frequent visitor to Harold Munro’s Poetry Bookshop, wrote a pocket book of poems and sonnets for the open air and also was the author of books on Keats, Swinburne, and *The Feminine Influence on the Poets*. He recognised the ‘prose poet’ in Jefferies, commenting in his introduction to *The Hills and the Vale* that this was:

A poet with an outlook that is purely individual and though deeply human, yet of a spirituality now close as the grass, and now as the stars.

The poetry was already there, deeply embedded in his published prose – just two examples. First an extract from ‘The Barge’ (*The Heart of England*):

Through the land went a dusky river, and in it a black barge with merrily painted prow. It was guided by a brown woman wearing a yellow scarf and she stood boldly up. In the midst of it a man played on a concertina and sang.

The barge was light and high in the water; lonely and unnoticed, it threaded the long curves and still the concertina lamented and the tall woman stood boldly up. As it disappeared the dolorous air began to darken and I knew why that barge stood so high and light—because its cargo was merely all the flowers and the birds and the joys and pains of spring, the contentments of summer, the regrets of autumn, of all men and women who had lived through the now dying year; and no one claimed them, no one sought them, no one stood on the bank to salute them.

Second, 'Entering Wales' from *Wales*:

Between the bridge and the mountain, and in fact surrounded by streams which were heard although unseen, was an island of apple trees.

There were murmurs of bees. There was a gush and fall and gurgle of streams, which could be traced by their bowing irises. There was a poignant glow and fragrance of flowers in an air so moist and cold and still that at dawn the earliest bee left a thin line of scent upon it. Beyond, the mountain, grim, without trees, lofty and dark, was clearly upholding the low blue sky full of slow clouds of the colour of the mountain lambs or of melting snow. This mountain and this sky, for that first hour, shut out, and not only shut out but destroyed, and not only destroyed but made as if it had never been, the world of the old woman, the coal-pits, the schools, and the grown-up persons. And the magic of Wales, or of Spring, or of childhood made the island of apple trees more than an orchard in flower. For as some women seem at first to be but rich eyes in a mist of complexion and sweet voice, so the orchard was but an invisible soul playing with scent and colour as symbols. Nor did this wonder vanish when I walked among the trees and looked up at the blossoms in the sky. For in that island of apple trees there was not one tree but was curved and jagged and twisted and splintered by great age, by the west wind, or by the weight of fruit in many autumns. In colour they were stony. They were scarred with knots like mouths. Some of their branches were bent sharply like lightning flashes. Some rose up like bony, sunburnt, imprecating arms of furious prophets. One stiff, gaunt bole that was half hid in flower might have been Ares' sword in the hands of the Cupids. Others were like ribs of submerged ships, or the horns of an ox emerging from a skeleton deep in the sand of a lonely coast. And the blossom of them all was the same, so that they seemed to be Winter with the frail Spring in his arms.

What is surprising is that, surrounded by all these strong poetic influences, Thomas could respond to Eleanor Farjeon in October 1913, who asked him if he had ever written a poem, that he couldn't write a poem to save his life. Not true actually, he wrote some poetry until his university days and of course Eleanor Farjeon's question was really 'Why not?'.

Within a few months he had met Frost, who was to prove the catalyst, but before exploring that relationship it is worth noting the words of

another life-long friend, Jessie Berridge, who wrote of 'his growing mastery of words and fastidious selection of them, his ear for the music of a phrase.'

Another long-standing friend, James Guthrie, wrote twenty years after Thomas' death that the poet in him evolved long before and that his poems were little different in texture from the best of his prose. I will look at sources of his poetry later.

It seems, until he met Robert Frost, that all the assurances of friends were not sufficient for Thomas to 'let go' and create what he later described to Frost, in a letter dated December 1914: 'I find myself engrossed and conscious of a possible perfection as I never was in prose'.

The Frost/Thomas relationship has been compared to that of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon in Craiglockhart Hospital in summer 1917, but Frost never altered words or suggested new ideas as Sassoon did. Frost, having read *In Pursuit of Spring*, was convinced that Thomas was a poet. Thomas called Frost 'my only brother' and 'the only begetter' of his poetry whereas Frost was more precise: 'I dragged him out from under the heap of his own work in prose'. In June, July, August and October they were often together, sometimes in the Malvern area, border country near Ledbury, country similar to Frost's native Vermont.

In a letter dated December 1939 Gordon Bottomley wrote 'Frost was the precipitant in his life (I speak chemically). Wherever he touched Frost, things went right with him. Frost started his poetry'.

Thomas suddenly saw, through Frost, that the path of poetry was the only way to self-fulfilment, to live his life in the truth he had always sought. They were of a similar age, Frost 39, Thomas 36, Thomas was more established in his career than Frost, who had come over to England to try to prove his worth as a poet after a decade of relative frustration in America. His robust, extrovert manner appealed to Thomas (and both Helen and Eleanor Farjeon said he drew Thomas to him like a magnet) who helped him with a very favourable review of *North of Boston*, a poetry collection full of what Frost described as 'language absolutely unliterary', many poems of narrative and dialogue, a few of which Thomas used himself in subsequent poems like 'Up in the Wind' and 'Wind in the Mist'. I must admit that I find these longer narrative poems of Thomas the least satisfactory but that also applies to Frost – many of his poetry collections are too over-balanced with long, somewhat tedious and largely uninspiring narrative/dialogue poems. That's perhaps just a personal opinion but if I stop to ask you to think of all the Frost poems you know, aren't the majority relatively short? The only ones I can think of which have any great

and successful length are 'Mending Wall', 'Home Burial' and 'The Death of the Hired Man'.

Frost and Thomas both excelled at creating memorable images in a few brief lines:

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.
['Dust of Snow']

The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood
This Eastertide call into mind the men,
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should
Have gathered them and will never do again.
['In Memoriam (Easter 1915)']

This sudden outpouring of verse, as if a great dam had been breached, produced 85 poems in the 7 months before he enlisted in July 1915 and with a view to eventual publication he used the pseudonym Edward Eastaway, an old family name, so if literary friends were reviewers they would not be biased in his favour. Over 40 poems followed from late 1915 to August 1916. Many of these were shaped in his head as he climbed up to the writing hut on the hill above his home or on the way home to Steep on the slow cross-country train:

Adlestrop
Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.
The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name
And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.
And for that minute a blackbird sang

Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

For an aspiring poet, the maturity of the rhyming is incredible.

Despite my Quaker beliefs, I have to add that all the evidence also suggests that although Thomas was an efficient soldier, the life obviously suited him as a poet. Even during this poetic outpouring he spent 26 days working on *The Life of the Duke of Marlborough*. But it was the poetry that dominated. Six months after enlisting he had told many friends that he had never felt better in his lifetime or more balanced. In a 1915 letter from Gordon Bottomley to Lascelles Abercrombie, he wrote 'I think the work has made some sort of new man and a poet out of Edward Thomas'. He had found his true sense of literary purpose, as a contented warrior. Initially Bottomley selected 18 out of 40 poems to publish in an anthology of new poetry, March 1917. Two interesting facts now – first, although Thomas is sometimes included in the war poets, he in fact wrote no poems directly about the war in France. Second, the *Times* review was unfavourable:

An unconscious survival of a materialism and naturalism which the tremendous life of the last 3 years has made an absurdity.

What also produced such an outpouring of poetry in his last years of life was the sudden realisation that most of the poetry was already there, buried within the books, notes, and diaries collected over years of writing, cycling, walking and conversation. To quote from a letter in November 1914 to W.H. Hudson: 'I haven't any work now. But I don't find the war shuts me up. In fact it has given me time to please myself with some unprofitable writing'. This refers to his starting prose versions of his poems from 16 November 1914. To look in detail at just one example, here is the prose record, dated 17 November 1914, for 'Old Man's Beard':

Just as she is turning in to the house or leaving it, the baby [Myfanwy] plucks a feather of old man's beard. The bush grows just across the path from the door. Sometimes she stands by it squeezing off tip after tip from the branches and shrivelling them between her fingers on to the path in grey-green shreds. So the bush is still only half as tall as she is, though it is the same age. She never talks of it, but I wonder how much of the garden she will remember, the hedge with the old damson trees topping it, the vegetable rows, the path bending round the house corner, the old man's beard opposite the door, and me sometimes forbidding her to touch it, if she lives to my years. As for myself I cannot remember when I first smelt that green bitterness. I, too, often gather a sprig from the bush and sniff it, and roll it between my fingers and sniff again and think, trying to discover what it is that I am remembering.

I do not wholly like the smell, yet would rather lose many meaningless sweeter ones than this bitter one of which I have mislaid the key. As I hold the sprig to my nose and slowly withdraw it, I think of nothing, I see, I hear nothing, yet I seem too to be listening, lying in wait for whatever it is I ought to remember but never do. No garden comes back to me, no hedge or path, no grey green bush called old man's beard or lad's love, no figure of mother or father or playmate, only a dark avenue without an end.

Just under three weeks later 'Old Man' was drafted at Steep:

Old Man, or Lad's-love,—in the name there's nothing
To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man,
The hoar-green feathery herb, almost a tree,
Growing with rosemary and lavender.
Even to one that knows it well, the names
Half decorate, half perplex, the thing it is:
At least, what that is clings not to the names
In spite of time. And yet I like the names.

The herb itself I like not, but for certain
I love it, as some day the child will love it
Who plucks a feather from the door-side bush
Whenever she goes in or out of the house.
Often she waits there, snipping the tips and shrivelling
The shreds at last on to the path, perhaps
Thinking, perhaps of nothing, till she sniffs
Her fingers and runs off. The bush is still
But half as tall as she, though it is as old;
So well she clips it. Not a word she says;
And I can only wonder how much hereafter
She will remember, with that bitter scent,
Of garden rows, and ancient damson trees
Topping a hedge, a bent path to a door,
A low thick bush beside the door, and me
Forbidding her to pick.

As for myself,
Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.
I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
Once more to think what it is I am remembering,
Always in vain. I cannot like the scent,
Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,
With no meaning, than this bitter one.

I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing;
Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait

For what I should, yet never can, remember:
No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush
Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end.

You'll notice between the two the correction to refer to 'old man' in the *Artemesia* family, rather than 'Old Man's Beard' which is the wild clematis of country lanes.

People he met feature in some poems. Aged just 16 he met 'Dad Uzzell' near Swindon [pictured below with his wife in their Salvationist kit and displaying their pension books].



Whether or not he ever lived at Hudson Bottom, he was a lasting influence, a man of the open air, roguish, hinting of illegality, an updated *Amateur Poacher*. The image of Uzzell, first described by Thomas as a 'stiff straight man, broad-shouldered and bushy bearded,' permeates several poems, especially 'Lob':

At hawthorn-time in Wiltshire travelling
In search of something chance would never bring,
An old man's face, by life and weather cut
And coloured,—rough, brown, sweet as any nut,—
A land face, sea-blue-eyed,—hung in my mind
When I had left him many a mile behind.

But one glimpse of his back, as there he stood,
Choosing his way, proved him of old Jack's blood,
Young Jack perhaps, and now a Wiltshireman
As he has oft been since his days began.

Many other poems can be traced back to earlier prose: thus his *In Pursuit of Spring* has:

The inn door, which was now open, was as the entrance to a bright cave in the middle of the darkness. The illumination had a kind of blessedness.

And in *The Heart of England*:

And that little inn, in the midst of mountains and immense night seemed a temple of all souls, where a few faithful ones still burnt candles and remembered the dead.

Now listen to those promptings in 'The Owl':

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

His melancholy was still there, but it became something more positive, rounded, beautiful.

From the late night of 'Rain' described in *The Icknield Way* and 'close, perpendicular, quiet rain' in an untrodden lane in *The Heart of England* comes 'Rain', one of my favourite Thomas' poems but within its bleakness, as revealed by David Gervais in an Edward Thomas Fellowship newsletter article, 2002, there is a magnificent sense of music, cadence, rhythm, perhaps owing something to the lines from Wordsworth like:

No motion has she now, no force
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in Earth's diurnal course,

With rocks and stones and trees.
['A Slumber did my Spirit Seal']

Rain

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
Since I was born into this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying to-night or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be for what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Not everything came from the past – his penultimate poem 'Out in the Dark' arose from his daughter Myfanwy's reaction to deer in the forest, outside their room with a Christmas tree, and the war-based 'This is No Case of Petty Right or Wrong' rose from an argument with his father about the war and the comment about it in a letter to Frost: 'He showed that his real feeling when he is not trying to be nice and comfortable is one of contempt. I know what contempt is and partly what I suffered was from the reminder that I had probably made Helen feel exactly the same'.

This is No Case of Petty Right or Wrong

This is no case of petty right or wrong
That politicians or philosophers
Can judge. I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.
Beside my hate for one fat patriot
My hatred of the Kaiser is love true: —
A kind of god he is, banging a gong.
But I have not to choose between the two,
Or between justice and injustice. Dinned
With war and argument I read no more
Than in the storm smoking along the wind
Athwart the wood. Two witches' cauldrons roar.

From one the weather shall rise clear and gay;
Out of the other an England beautiful
And like her mother that died yesterday.
Little I know or care if, being dull,
I shall miss something that historians
Can rake out of the ashes when perchance
The phoenix broods serene above their ken.
But with the best and meanest Englishmen
I am one in crying, God save England, lest
We lose what never slaves and cattle blessed.
The ages made her that made us from dust:
She is all we know and live by, and we trust
She is good and must endure, loving her so:
And as we love ourselves we hate her foe.

Edward Garnett wrote of Thomas' poetry that 'each of his poems in turn leads us deeper and deeper, ... mirrors some fresh aspect of nature's character and prodigal loveliness.'

Perhaps this poem sums up Thomas' literary career most succinctly and successfully:

The Long Small Room

The long small room that showed willows in the west
Narrowed up to the end the fireplace filled,
Although not wide. I liked it. No one guessed
What need or accident made them so build.

Only the moon, the mouse and the sparrow peeped
In from the ivy round the casement thick.
Of all they saw and heard there they shall keep
The tale for the old ivy and older brick.

When I look back I am like moon, sparrow, and mouse
That witnessed what they could never understand
Or alter or prevent in the dark house.

One thing remains the same – this my right hand

Crawling crab-like over the clean white page,
Resting awhile each morning on the pillow,
Then once more starting to crawl on towards age.
The hundred last leaves stream upon the willow.

And what if he had survived the war? Would he, as mentioned to others, have joined Frost to farm, in America. What other poetic output would have followed? He died young, like Keats, like Shelley, or in our own times like Jim Morrison, Buddy Holly, Jimi Hendrix, Sylvia Plath. He died at the peak of his poetic powers whereas Frost, in his last years, was a spent force,

the muse distant, and his final collection *In the Clearing* a thin echo of a formerly strong poetic voice.

I personally believe Thomas had much more to give as a poet. In *Edward Thomas A Portrait*, R. George Thomas discusses in some detail his interest in mysticism. Poems like the powerful, prophetic 'Lights Out', and the mysterious 'The Unknown Bird', which probably has as many layers of intended and inferred meaning as Frost's 'Mending Wall', are both evidence of this mysticism:

Lights Out

I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight,
Or winding, soon or late;
They cannot choose.

Many a road and track
That, since the dawn's first crack,
Up to the forest brink,
Deceived the travellers,
Suddenly now blurs,
And in they sink.

Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends;
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter, and leave, alone,
I know not how.

The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself.

Another similar but shorter one, very different to most poems he wrote, is 'Swedes':

They have taken the gable from the roof of clay

On the long swede pile. They have let in the sun
To the white and gold and purple of curled fronds
Unsunned. It is a sight more tender-gorgeous
At the wood-corner where Winter moans and drips
Than when, in the Valley of the Tombs of Kings,
A boy crawls down into a Pharaoh's tomb
And, first of Christian men, beholds the mummy,
God and monkey, chariot and throne and vase,
Blue pottery, alabaster, and gold.

But dreamless long-dead Amen-hotep lies.
This is a dream of Winter, sweet as Spring.

These and several others possibly point to the new and exciting direction Thomas' fresh poetic voice would have taken, had he not died.

Finally, Thomas and Jefferies. We all know the many connections but rather than give a somewhat obvious list of why Jefferies didn't become a successful poet, how about a simple one instead – he didn't need to be, as his prose was so good, so original at its best, so mystical on occasions and in its own way as enduring as Thomas' poetry. Also, consider how many famous writers you know who succeeded at both prose and poetry in their literary career – Lawrence, Hardy – any more?

To end, four examples, prose and poetry. Two from Thomas, two from Jefferies. The first is the coming of spring:

Jefferies: 'Hours of Spring'

With snow and frost and winter the earth was overcome, and the world
perished, stricken dumb and dead, swept clean and utterly destroyed – a
winter of the gods, the silence of snow and universal death. All that had been
passed away, and the earth was depopulated. Death triumphed, but under the
snow, behind the charmed rampart, slept the living germs. Down in the deep
coombe, where the dark oaks stood out individually in the whiteness of the
snow, fortified round about with immovable hills, there was the actual
presentment of Zoroaster's sacred story. Locked in sleep lay bud and germ –
the butterflies of next summer were there somewhere, under the snow. The
earth was swept of its inhabitants, but the seeds of life were not dead.

Thomas: 'Thaw'

Over the land freckled with snow half-thawed
The speculating rooks at their nests cawed
And saw from elm-tops, delicate as flower of grass,
What we below could not see, Winter pass.

Then two attempts to grasp summer's beauty:

Jefferies: 'Pageant of Summer'

I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs...

Thomas: 'The Glory'

The glory of the beauty of the morning,—
The cuckoo crying over the untouched dew;
The blackbird that has found it, and the dove
That tempts me on to something sweeter than love;
White clouds ranged even and fair as new-mown hay;
The heat, the stir, the sublime vacancy
Of sky and meadow and forest and my own heart:—
The glory invites me, yet it leaves me scorning
All I can ever do, all I can be,
Beside the lovely of motion, shape, and hue,
The happiness I fancy fit to dwell
In beauty's presence. Shall I now this day
Begin to seek as far as heaven, as hell,
Wisdom or strength to match this beauty, start
And tread the pale dust pitted with small dark drops,
In hope to find whatever it is I seek,
Harkening to short-lived happy-seeming things
That we know naught of, in the hazel copse?
Or must I be content with discontent
As larks and swallows are perhaps with wings?
And shall I ask at the day's end once more
What beauty is, and what I can have meant
By happiness? And shall I let all go,
Glad, weary, or both? Or shall I perhaps know
That I was happy oft and oft before,
Awhile forgetting how I am fast pent,
How dreary-swift, with naught to travel to,
Is Time? I cannot bite the day to the core.

Richard Jefferies

Lisle March Phillipps

This unsigned article was first published in the July 1909 edition of *The Edinburgh Review* (1802-1929), one of the most influential magazines of the 19th century, promoting Romanticism and Whig politics. The article draws some information from Edward Thomas's biography of Richard Jefferies published in the same year. Miller and Matthews identified the un-named author as L. March Phillip[p]s.¹ Further research by Andrew Rossabi and Jean Saunders supported the attribution.

Lisle March Phillipps was an art critic and cultural historian. Baptised in Tiverton on 28 April 1861, he was well-educated and went on to play cricket for south Devon teams. He served as a Surgeon Captain in the Rimington's Guides in the second Boer War and married Isabel Forbes Coulson in 1902 in his home town. By the 1911 census he was living in Henley as a 'writer of books' with his wife, two daughters and four servants and stood unsuccessfully for Parliament as the Liberal candidate for Newbury in 1910. Amongst his many books he wrote *Form and Colour* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1915) that opens with a chapter on the Vedanta doctrine that is similar to the passage on Hindu spirituality. At the end of the introduction to *Form and Colour* he writes that 'some of the material, amounting to about four or five chapters, of the following pages has appeared in the *Edinburgh* and *Contemporary* Reviews, suggesting he may have been a fairly regular contributor to those periodicals. March Phillipps also edited and introduced Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (three volumes, 1907) for Everyman's Library. He died at Henley in 1917 aged 55.

Born at Coate Farm, near Swindon, in 1848, Jefferies began his literary career as quite a boy by the production of several unusually stupid novels; but even while writing these he was led, by little and little, to the composition of those studies of Nature which, originally appearing in several journals and magazines, were afterwards collected to form the books on country life by which he is still best known. The writing of these essays revealed Jefferies as the possessor of a gift of the rarest order. They have been described as works of natural history and their author as a naturalist. But the description is a misleading one. Jefferies is not a naturalist otherwise than Wordsworth is one. There is nothing systematic or exhaustive in his observations, and nothing in the way of 'discovery'

¹ *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study* by George Miller and Hugoe Matthews (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), p.756.

save by accident. Of a hundred details related, ninety-nine will probably be familiar to a country reader. For pages together he will confine himself to speaking of the commonest weeds and flowers, and of these will relate no new fact. We sit with him beside the hedge, or stroll along the lane, pausing now and again to look through a gap or contemplate a duck-pond. The merest trifles – the gait of a rustic, the propping of a rick, the colour of the straw, the business a sparrow is on, the shape of a cloud, the noise of the wind in dry grass – all or any of the unconsidered trifles that meet the eye or ear in country places are mentioned, as it would seem, almost in idleness. Sometimes – indeed, often enough – there is a notable felicity in these allusions, approaching the quality of humour in its perfect aptness, and sometimes a thought is added or an inference drawn from what is observed; but more often an object is simply mentioned, and we pass on to the next.

The style has been called ‘cataloguing,’ and perhaps the word was first used as a term of reproach, but it is applicable enough and in no derogatory sense. Jefferies does catalogue, but the mere catalogue by him of the contents of a ditch will contain more natural magic than the most exalted descriptive flights of many other writers. It is sufficient for him to mention any trait in nature for his own inward mood and profound sympathy with his subject to be communicated to the reader. Perhaps the strangeness of this will seem less if we remember how surely mastery of a subject shows itself in trifling indications of touch and manner. Watch a skilled carpenter handling and turning over his tools; watch a skilled cricketer spinning and catching a cricket ball; in the sense of contact, in the unhurried, purposeful pressure and application of the strong fingers to the tool or ball, there can be seen an indication of each man’s inward knowledge of his subject and profound familiarity with it. Birds and flowers are to Jefferies what foot-rule and cricket ball are to carpenter and cricketer. He cannot handle or mention them but his inward knowledge of them is evident. This, indeed, is the severest test of initiation. To describe with eloquence and ornament is an art that may in great measure be learnt: a little feeling worked up with taste, reflexion, some reading, and a dash of literary skill will achieve the desired effect. But bring the matter down to bald statement, bring it down to ‘cataloguing,’ and only one faculty will stand by the writer – perfect emotional sympathy with the things he handles. We can recall but one writer in English who equals – and he far surpasses – Jefferies in this manifestation of the power of simplicity, and he is, of course, Wordsworth. We always feel in Wordsworth the inclination towards a manner of, to use Arnold’s words,

‘plain, first-hand, almost austere naturalness,’ and we feel the same inclination in Jefferies. When Arnold, indeed, says of Wordsworth that ‘his expression may often be called bald,’ he uses the very word which most naturally describes Jefferies’ cataloguing style. The truth is, both Wordsworth and Jefferies disdain all the heightening illusions and stimulating effects which eloquence can cast around its object, because both are so intimate with the real nature of what they are writing about. Eloquence, walking round and showing off the subject it deals with, must keep at a certain distance from it. When a man is close to a thing its name suffices him. It is his remoteness that is measured in adjectives. Passage after passage and line after line of Wordsworth occur to us which resemble Jefferies equally in subject and in treatment:

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
Among the woods and copses:

and immediately after –

These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees.

Here we have in perfection, and yielding their full effect, all the characteristics of Jefferies’ style: its enumeration of obvious common features, its rejection of all the usual descriptive colouring, and at the same time, how attained is scarcely apparent, an effect of reality equal to the very presence of the objects described.

We may go one step farther. This directness and simplicity, this love, as it would seem, of merely naming things, are traits that Jefferies and Wordsworth have in common. But they have another trait in common also, though one inseparable perhaps from these. Both alike are seemingly utterly unconscious of their own methods. We say of them that they choose simple themes and simple language; but both are unaware of any such choice. Wordsworth indeed framed a theory to justify his practice, but it was an afterthought. In the actual composition of his poetry he is as passive in Nature’s hands as a log upon the stream; and so is Jefferies in the composition of his Nature studies. So complete a self-effacement seems to indicate a deep inward affinity. Both Wordsworth and Jefferies were intensely conscious of the spiritual element in Nature, that element which rock and tree and flower suggest and interpret even while they veil it from us. What this spiritual element consists in it is not necessary to inquire.

Wordsworth thought of it as the will of God working through His creation; while Jefferies, who was fond of scientific guesses after he came to live near London, fancied that it might be something a little more volatile than electricity. The point is, that both men were so keenly aware of this spiritual life in Nature, and were indeed frequently so merged and swallowed up in it, sometimes to the point of the obliteration of their consciousness of outward things, that an attitude of complete self-surrender became the instinctive attitude of both towards Nature. Both had the feeling, not of any conscious observation of, but of entire absorption into, their natural surroundings. We shall return to the point presently. Here we wish to say that the peculiar simplicity, or unconsciousness, of manner, which forms so striking a resemblance between Wordsworth and Jefferies, is a consequence of this attitude of self-surrender, a consequence, that is to say, of their intense spiritual sensibility. It is a great mistake to think of mysticism as exhibiting itself necessarily in profound reflexions. It can exhibit itself equally in the most simple statements. When Wordsworth speaks of himself as stilled and laid asleep in body while with the eye of the soul he sees into the life of things, we recognise a direct description of the mystic faculty; and when Jefferies, in innumerable passages, speaks of being 'rapt,' 'carried away,' 'absorbed into the being or existence of the universe,' we recognise a similar instinct at work in him. But the mood penetrates as an influence the work of both writers, and the mark of its presence is that unconsciousness of utterance, as of a bird chirping or a brook murmuring, which belongs to them. For instance, such a verse as

The blackbird in the summer trees,
The lark upon the hill,
Let loose their carol when they please,
Are quiet when they will,

sounds perhaps simple and unremarkable enough at a first reading; but let the reader weigh the lines carefully, repeating them several times over to himself, and he will perceive, from the effortless way in which they rather fall from the poet's lips than are consciously uttered, that they are breathed in that mood of passive contemplation which elsewhere is more directly described. In the same way with Jefferies' descriptions of Nature: they are simple and bald enough, yet to them, too – and to the earliest as much as to the latest – there attaches the same profound influence. They are passive utterances, words spoken rather through than by the writer himself, and possess the inevitable veracity of the actual objects described.

Such was the quality of Jefferies' genius, such the gifts brought to light by his essays in natural history, undertaken in the intervals of novel-writing. Such accents could not fail to touch many hearts, and Jefferies' success in this line of literature was early secure. But it became by degrees apparent that his influence was to be measured in depth rather than in breadth. His books soon came to be awaited and received with eager pleasure, but by a limited circle of readers. He was puzzled himself at what seemed the discrepancy between the earnestness of the praise awarded to him and the limited sale of his work. The truth is that work like Jefferies' and Wordsworth's work is not formed for a very general popularity. It has not the qualities that strike the eye and that assert its right to attention, and it is therefore apt to be eclipsed by more commonplace material.

But in Jefferies' case there were circumstances which rendered recognition particularly difficult. He began, as we have said, by writing novels. These we may ignore, since they never were, and certainly now never will be, read, and therefore in no way affect the public estimate of their author. He next took up with Nature pure and simple, and his true powers were immediately revealed. But he himself did not remain in permanent and confident possession of those powers. In 1877 he left the Wiltshire downs to come and live at Surbiton, in order to be within reach of publishers and editors. At Surbiton he did much of his best country writing. He had a number of note-books with him full of minute observations of the Wiltshire country, and, as often happens, his feelings and imagination were at first quickened by absence from the familiar scenes. Moreover, he found a good deal to write about at Surbiton itself. Still, he felt the uprooting, and as time went on it told upon him more and more. He could not get out of the Surbiton country what he had got out of Wiltshire. As by degrees he expended his material and wore himself out, he was able to lay in no fresh stores. His mind began to prey upon itself. Other blows fell on him. In 1881 his health broke down, and he never recovered it. The story of the next six years, till his death in 1887, is a terrible one. He had undergone three painful operations in the first year of his illness, and the wounds were not all healed until January 1883.

'Within a month,' writes Mr. Thomas, 'he began to feel a gnawing internal pain; it was, he said, like the gnawing of a rat at a beam, or the burning of corrosive sublimate. He feared to travel by train lest he should throw himself out. In March 1884 he still did not regard the illness as serious. In April 1885 he broke down. The pain was found to be due to ulceration, perhaps also tubercular, of the small intestine. His strength declined; the wasting of his body was extreme. He was starved and half

delirious, and months of the winter had been spent indoors. In June he could only walk two hundred yards. In August it tore him to pieces, he said, to walk a short distance. Suddenly, in September 1885, he went down as if shot; his spine “seemed to suddenly snap”; he could not sit or lie so as to use a pen without distress; for seven months he was helpless, and in December was so weak that he could not dress himself.’ Less than two years later, in August 1887, he died.

Poor Henley somewhere speaks of the *bludgeonings* of chance to which he has been subject, and the grim word recurs as we watch Jefferies battered and beaten down by blow on blow. And yet through these gloomy years, torn from all the influences that nourished and inspired him – almost friendless, almost penniless, shattered in health, a suffering living skeleton, even yet, whenever his lips could dictate or his hand move, he continued to write. He continued to write, and to the very end, whenever his mind flowed back to the scenes of his early life, he wrote with the old charm and power and sense of mastery and ease. These intervals of calmness and insight were his to the end, but they were intermixed with other moods – moods, natural enough, heaven knows, of wild complaint, of agonised craving for the joys he has tasted so slightly, of vague and contradictory musings and guesses on man and his destiny, of morbid, furious self-analysis, as of one who tears his own heartstrings. These moods are concentrated in *The Story of My Heart*, begun about the time that illness struck him down. It contains many beautiful passages, and many, too, which, describing his own rapt and meditative moods, are interesting and illuminating. But it also contains much that was bred of weakness and pain, much that has to be not admired but explained. Moreover, there is another thing – Jefferies was not intellectual. He did not care for thinking for its own sake. His insight into a subject depended on no study, but on its hold upon his affections. Thus, while the characters in his novels are inconceivably wooden and lifeless, the characters in his Nature-books – the farmers, peasants, poachers, gamekeepers, who belong to the scenes he loved so completely as to be mere animated bits of them – are intensely alive. Here again we find our parallel with Wordsworth, who, as he tells us, loved the Cumberland shepherds he has so well portrayed:

... not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode.

All things that have their place in country life, every operation of farm or dairy, every tool and utensil, the plough, the churn, the waggon, is realised by Jefferies for the part it plays in that life. His emotions and affections it is

that lead him on, that interpret all things to him. But let him adopt the philosophical and intellectual point of view, let him start arguing on questions of political economy, on the land question, or on the scientific problems of the day, or on the whence and whither of human life, and no idle breeze rattling the winter branches has less to say than he. What Goethe said of Byron is as true of Jefferies: 'the moment he begins to reflect he is a child.'

Unfortunately, in *The Story of My Heart* he is much given to reflecting, or rather he is much given to wild surmising. Because knowledge comes to him on natural subjects he seems to think it will come equally spontaneously on all other subjects. The result is an extraordinary farrago and jumble of incongruous ideas. Nature is 'distinctly anti-human.' There is 'no design and no evolution' in the universe. Blind chance is the only guide. The world we live in 'has no concern with man.' At one moment the existence of a Deity is questioned altogether; at another His existence is one of the only three important discoveries of man. Sometimes Nature comes to heal and to restore; he feels himself one with her and every force and movement of hers – the freshness of the sea, the strength of wild animals, the steadfastness of earth itself passes into him and is part of him. The next moment he is swept into the opposite extreme, and Nature is cold and cruel, man's deadly enemy; she cares nothing for man; animals are so anti-human that the very thought of the formation of their skulls and frames causes loathing. A thought that haunts him is the infinite capacity for feeling of the human soul; but the only way he can think of to satisfy it is to make life a little longer and a little healthier. Nothing is more curious in the book than the contrast between the unquenchable thirst of the soul for infinite life and sensation and the idea of the attainment of this end through a more careful hygiene and vigilant guarding against accidents.

It is very evident that what we have in these quasi-scientific wanderings is not the real and sane Jefferies, but a Jefferies exiled from his own native resources, struck down with mortal sickness, and tormenting his mind with various problems of the day which the neighbourhood of London seemed to force upon his consciousness. Among many bits that are beautiful, and many that are interesting, there are more still that are overstrained and hysterical, as well as some that are, intellectually, childish or incoherent. Naturally, a book of this sort would tend to perplex and irritate nine readers out of ten, and certainly *The Story of My Heart* has by no means tended to explain Jefferies to his fellow-countrymen.

In the circumstances, the duty of a future biographer was clear enough: it was to explain the share which sickness and miseries of one kind and another had had in Jefferies' writings, and then to go on to distinguish what in his work was of lasting power and value and to set this clearly in the public view. But somehow Jefferies has not been lucky in his biographers. 'Kindly but unsympathetic' is the verdict pronounced by the latest of them, Mr. Edward Thomas, on Sir Walter Besant's *Eulogy*, and the description is adequate. Besant's book was full of praise, but it was the kind of indiscriminate and over-fluent praise which obscures more than it reveals. The book was not of the kind which attracts attention or awakens interest. Nor was Mr. Salt's contribution, when it came, one that was likely to interpret Jefferies to the public very effectively. It is perhaps sometimes a disadvantage, in the prosecution of certain kinds of literary work, for a writer to have any very absorbing intellectual interest of his own, for thus he is spared the temptation of wresting his subject to his own purposes. Mr. Salt's interests, comprising as they do the abolition of sport, the extirpation of Christianity, and the reconstruction of society on an entirely new basis, are of such an onerous nature that it is no wonder he should welcome a helping hand wherever he can find one; and perhaps no wonder that, in his desire to squeeze out of an ally all the help he can get, he should sometimes unintentionally distort his real character. This is what has happened in the present case. Mr. Salt hauls poor Jefferies about, and manages to drag him into several dreary old quarrels with landlords and gamekeepers; but all this involves a good deal of manipulation and making up. The real Jefferies had always been hard to find. When Mr. Salt had finished with him he was harder to find than ever.

The failure of his predecessors, however, only offered a fairer opportunity to Mr. Thomas. He had the chance of clearing up a subject not only difficult in itself but which had been additionally obscured by the ingenuity of other writers. In the main we are disappointed with the way Mr. Thomas has done his work. It is true we could easily praise his book. There is a great deal of excellent writing in it, especially a great deal of descriptive writing of a very high order. The author's style is subtle and refined; moreover, his sympathy and love for Jefferies himself are unmeasured, and he is frequently led to what seem to us the most perfectly true and just remarks on his character and temperament. In short, the book is one which it is a pleasure to read, and which we have no hesitation whatever in recommending to our readers. But at the same time, if we are right in saying that Jefferies' genius is displayed at its best in the natural magic of his country books, and that a critic's first duty should be to

distinguish between this best and other work, done later, that was marred and disfigured by weakness and pain, then it remains true that in this first duty the present book fails.

And the reason it fails is that, in spite of his natural critical tact, the author is too apt to be led away by the susceptibility of his feelings. He cannot resist emotional accents. His own style sometimes suffers a little from sentimental indulgence, and we find him occasionally tempted into emotional flights of his own insufficiently controlled by intellect. What he says of the 'power of using words' may serve as an example.

Lighter than gossamer, words can entangle and hold fast all that is loveliest, and strongest, and fleetest, and most enduring, in heaven and earth. They are for the moment, perhaps, excelled by the might of policy or beauty, but only for the moment, and then all has passed away; but the words remain, and though they also pass away under the smiling of the stars, they mark our utmost achievement in time. They outlive the life of which they seem the lightest emanation – the proud, the vigorous, the melodious words.

This passage is a failure, a failure because of the weakness we just now spoke of, to which the author, as critic and writer both, is prone – the weakness of being unable to resist the influence of sentiment. The mere emphasis and heat of emotional language so carry him away that he cannot steady himself to test its quality or contents. Now, in regard to many subjects this might not greatly matter, but in regard to Jefferies it is a most serious disqualification. For what Jefferies himself most needs deliverance from is the evil influence of his own fevered and hysterical emotionalism. He does not want a shoulder to weep on, but a strong hand to steady him. His later work is full of passages in which the writer, languishing at Surbiton or Brighton, with the hand of death on him, cries out for the fuller life he has missed. He remembers how he used to lie with his heart pressed upon the turf, feeling the pulse of Nature beat with his own, how he drank the sense of infinitude out of the blue sky, how the strength of the swinging salt sea, and the sweetness and freshness of the thyme and the flowers in the grass, were emotions in his own heart which seemed capable of limitless response and expansion. He had always felt that he had latent in him possibilities of infinite feeling, infinite consciousness. And now that he was cut off from all hope of developing them, now that he felt himself dying before he had really lived, there broke from him cries of despair and craving, most touching, indeed, but often hysterical and even half delirious: cries which, in spite of their vehemence, were cries of weakness.

Yet in these passages Mr. Thomas finds nothing lacking. Their frantic emotionalism quite subjugates him. 'Give me an iron mace,' the poor invalid exclaims, 'that I may crush the savage beast and hammer him down. A spear to thrust through with, so that I may feel the long blade enter and the push of the shaft. The unwearied strength of Ninus to hunt unceasingly in the fierce sun. Still I should desire greater strength and a stouter bow, wilder creatures to combat. The intense life of the senses, there is never enough for them. I envy Semiramis: I would have been ten times Semiramis. I envy Nero, because of the great concourse of beauty he saw. I should like to be loved by every beautiful woman on earth, from the swart Nubian to the white and divine Greek.' There is much of this sort of thing in *The Story of My Heart*.

The vehemence of exertion, the vehemence of the spear, the vehemence of sunlight and life, the insatiate desire of insatiate Semiramis, the still more insatiate desire of love, divine and beautiful, the uncontrollable adoration of beauty, these – these; give me these in greater abundance than was ever known to man or woman.

These passages are 'beyond criticism,' Mr. Thomas assures us. They are 'far within the realm of joy.' We do not know exactly what is meant by the realm of joy in this connexion, but we do know that the emotion displayed in the passages cited is an emotion not under control, or put to any use, but idly spilt upon the ground.

Biased by his love of sentiment, Mr. Thomas forms the judgement that Jefferies' Nature books are of quite subordinate importance, and that his genius is really displayed in the rhapsodies of *The Story of My Heart* – a view of the matter calculated, as we think, to do harm to Jefferies' reputation, and to hinder the full recognition which he has never yet quite received. The controversy really turns on the nature of the emotional gift of insight or intuition which Jefferies certainly possessed. Now, it is a strange omission, but in the whole of the present *Life* there is nothing which leads to a clearer comprehension of this faculty. Mr. Thomas refers to it frequently; he points out that others besides Jefferies have possessed it and have explained its effect in similar terms, and he seems to think of it on the whole as a source of inspiration. But he makes no attempt to analyse its nature, to determine the laws of its being, if it has any such laws, or to suggest any standard of criticism by which we can distinguish between its right and wrong action. The omission is all-important, for Jefferies is one of those who, intellectually insignificant, derive all their light from the faculty of inward contemplation vouchsafed to them; so that, unless the methods of this faculty be to some extent comprehended,

we have no means of appreciating the man or his work, and can deal with either only in terms of vague declamation.

Let us turn for a moment to the mystical idea as it first definitely arose in the East. Some portions of the Vedas, the Hindu sacred writings, go back, it is conjectured, almost to the time of the original Aryan invasions. The religion of the invaders seems to have been much what we should have expected, and bears, indeed, a strong likeness to the nature-worship of the Gothic invaders of the West. The forces of Nature are turned into deities, beneficent or otherwise, according to their influence on human affairs. The heavy clouds of the rainy season – the ‘cows of the sky,’ that carry in their udders the moisture that is to revive the earth – should they fail to bestow it, are said to be shepherded by watchful demons who drive them off to the caves of the mountains. Indra is the friendly deity who pierces the vapour with his thunderbolt and brings down the deluge. Indra is a Norse god all over, haughty and fierce, rejoicing in battle, *bon camarade* withal, and a great lover of the intoxicating soma juice. He rushes ‘impetuous as a bull’ to the place where it is flowing, and he quaffs it ‘like a thirsty stag.’ There is a quality about the robust Aryan gods, all the world over, which draws them together – a quality of hearty, wide-eyed recognition of Nature’s obvious action and influence; and it is with feelings of quite friendly recognition that we, of Thor and Odin worshipping stock, survey the exploits of the early gods of India. Soon, however, this sense of familiarity wanes, and a theory or idea begins to be developed in the East of apprehension by pure prescience, or inward instead of outward contemplation, which comes more and more to engross the Eastern mind, and in its developments draws off the East along a path of progress of its own. To the Vedas were added by degrees the Upanishads. The word Upanishad is explained by Indian writers as signifying secret. They convey, these books, a secret meaning intelligible only to a few, and again and again the warning is reiterated not to speak openly of this profound secret, and to impart it only to such as have proved by perseverance their sincerity in the quest of it. To these, the elect, who are not to be turned aside from the pursuit of wisdom, and who, as it is often expressed, have so overcome self as to have ‘attained tranquillity,’ the secret may be whispered, but to no one else.

This mysterious secret was the thought – destined to dominate Eastern life – that the soul, or spiritual consciousness, is the only source of real wisdom. Of the dates of the various Upanishads, mingled and intermixed as they are, it is impossible to speak with certainty; but it appears to be admitted that the speeches of the semi-mythical Yājñavalkya in the

Brihadâraanyaka Upanishad are among the oldest, and in these the great secret is already fully enunciated. Yâjñavalkya compares the âtman, the soul within the individual, to the ocean into which all currents are received. 'As breathing he (the âtman) is named breath; as speaking, speech; as seeing, eye; as hearing, ear; as understanding, mind; all these are but names for his operations.' Elsewhere this idea of the soul as the sum of all consciousness is expanded.

When the eye is directed on space, he (the âtman) is the spirit in the eye, the eye serves only for seeing; and if a man desires to smell, it is the âtman, the nose serves only for smelling; and if a man desires to speak, it is the âtman, the voice serves only for speaking; and if a man desires to hear, it is the âtman, the ear serves only for hearing; and if a man desires to understand, it is the âtman, the mind is his divine eye.

With awe and wonder the Eastern sages divined in their own souls the source of wisdom. The soul is thought of as the 'essential knowledge which shines within, in the heart.' It cannot itself be known, for no source of perception can be perceived. 'Thou canst not see the seer of seeing; thou canst not hear the hearer of hearing; thou canst not comprehend the comprehender of comprehension; thou canst not know the knower of knowledge.' But just as the eye, which cannot see itself, is that which sees all that is seen, so the soul, itself incomprehensible, is that which comprehends all that is comprehended. Repeatedly it is emphasised by Yâjñavalkya that the act of introspection, the reading in the soul, is the only real mode of perception. 'The knower,' the 'knowing subject,' are the commonest ways of describing the soul. Seeing is the strongest of our senses, and besides its title of knower the âtman's perception is often likened to sight. It is the 'seer' (vipascit), the 'all-beholder' (peridrashtar), the 'spectator' (sakshin). The Hindu, in short, conceived the soul as a great eye in the centre of his being which was able, if he directed towards it his consent and attention, to raise its lid and gaze out on realities and eternities. None have comprehended the significance of the thought without feeling its power. It is customary for religions to depend more or less on externals, on historical evidence, on the testimony of miracles, on the continuity of tradition, on a recognisable, visible authority. But the appeal of Hinduism is to nothing but spiritual consciousness, to the soul as knower. All that is offered for acceptance is evolved out of the soul and is verifiable by the soul. In that way only is it verifiable. Reason and argument cannot handle it, for these are incapable of apprehending the spiritual. Do you ask a Hindu for proof that his thought is true? 'Look into your own soul,' he will answer, 'and read the proof written there.'

The soul, then, in Hindu thought is spiritual consciousness, and spiritual consciousness is the only real consciousness. As this idea penetrated and soaked into the Oriental mind it worked its inevitable effect on the conception of the visible universe, and of the human faculties which deal with the visible universe. Concentrating all the energy of his will into the intense act of introspection which reveals to him his own spiritual nature, the Hindu is conscious of matter only as something that distracts and preoccupies. His own soul, he is assured in his moments of inward illumination, his *âtman*, is not really divided from Brahman, the universal soul. The apparent separation is an illusion wrought by matter, amid the unrealities of which the *âtman* is enmeshed and netted, and through the wearying vicissitudes of which it passes in a long succession of reincarnations, tossed from body to body like a shuttlecock, and perpetually subject to the deception of the senses and outward things, until the time comes when at last, looking deep into itself, it realises that the appearances of things are an hallucination, that spiritual being is the only real being, and that it is itself a part of and one with the universal spiritual essence. The man who has reached this knowledge, who can say 'I am Brahman,' has attained the goal. Materialism passes him by, and he lives in pure spiritual consciousness, having by his act of insight already realised his union with the universal spirit.

Thus, in Hindu thought an intense realisation, not of the soul's existence only, but of the soul's power of seeing and knowing, has brought with it an equally intense consciousness of the nothingness of Nature and the visible universe. It was bound to be so. Left to itself, unless something intervenes to control its action, the spiritual faculty makes short work of materialism. It feels that outward things, like the ripple on the surface of a pool, impede its power of inward vision, and the more intent it is on such vision the more rigorously it excludes such distractions. Hence the unrelenting character of Indian asceticism. It is the price set by Hindu philosophy on spiritual consciousness. Hence the quality too of Indian civilisation. All the knowledge and skill which in the West have flowed from the study of natural phenomena are lacking to the East. Intellect is the faculty which deals with things as they are. The East can treat nothing intellectually. It has lost the sense of the reality of outward things.

So far, between this Oriental mysticism and the thoughts we trace in Jefferies, the English naturalist, there is an obvious point of resemblance and an obvious point of difference. The Indian recognition of the capacity of the soul is Jefferies' very feeling. In their eagerness to cultivate and develop this faculty, in their recognition of its pre-eminence among the

powers of the mind, both are in absolute agreement. Jefferies' passionate, reiterated cry, 'give me more soul-life,' 'give me a deeper, richer soul-life,' is exactly what the Hindu has in his heart, and what is the end of all his discipline. On the other hand, Jefferies' seeking after spiritual consciousness, or soul-life as he calls it, certainly did not in his case lead to the effacement of Nature and the visible universe. On the contrary, for him increase of spiritual life, as he repeatedly says, proceeds out of increase of physical life. His soul prays through, or feels through, the sea, the grass, flowers and trees. They are his soul's nourishment, the pores, as he says on one occasion, through which it breathes. This is a curious discrepancy. Considering how identical is the aim of either, it is certainly remarkable that a whole mass of phenomena felt by the Hindu to be a chief obstacle in his way should be welcomed by the Englishman as a chief aid to progress.

From the mysticism of the East we turn to the mysticism of the West. We pass over the whole of classical civilisation, which was built on the intellectual side of human nature and contains practically no mysticism at all, and come down to the Christian civilisation which succeeded it. Here we are once more in contact with the spiritual faculty. The Eastern thought has penetrated Westward. The diffusion of the Greek race has provided the requisite carriers, the most efficient possible inquisitive, subtle-minded, extremely appreciative of new ideas, for its transmission. Alexandria has become the great emporium for the adaptation of Eastern speculation to Western modes of thinking. The clear-cut, definite classical ideas melt, and spiritual consciousness, the consciousness of the supernatural, of infinity, suffuse Western life. It has been argued that the change was the work of Christianity; but it is certain that the materials which were responsible for it existed outside of Christianity. The spiritualism of the East is a recognisable quality: it can be discerned travelling Westward when the opportunity arises; and in various ways, most notably in the suggestions of Neo-Platonism, it acts on Western thought independently of Christianity altogether. Neither its existence nor its effect can be questioned.

Yet Christianity must be allowed to be responsible for the ultimate form which that influence took. The Eastern thought that came Westward was pure spiritualism, pure soul-consciousness. It was not a religious thought at all. It recognised no deity. Knowledge, inward enlightenment, the realisation of what is, were the aims it proposed to itself. Its nature was philosophical; Christianity turned it into an element of religion. The history of the early Church is to a very great extent the history of this process. So far as the West was concerned the spiritual faculty was

harnessed, as it were, to certain definite facts. The Incarnation had broken in upon its dream. It no longer contemplated itself, it contemplated Christ.

From this followed inevitably all the difference which separates Western and Eastern mysticism. We wish to bring the main points of that difference into prominence without covering too wide a range of subject, and perhaps the best way of doing so will be to dwell for a moment on the idea of the contemplative life as conceived by East and West. In the East contemplation, as we have seen, was purely abstract, and asceticism correspondingly drastic. The eye of the spirit was to look through all flesh, and all flesh was to be annihilated accordingly. The West judged differently. It is the fashion nowadays to condemn monastic asceticism. Nothing appears more ridiculous and even maniacal than great energy expended and immense trouble taken for no apparent object whatever, and to us, who for so long have exercised chiefly the intellectual faculty of our nature, and are familiar only with the satisfaction to be derived from that, asceticism seems monstrous because objectless. We see what the ascetic gives up, and realise the value of that clearly enough, but the reason why he gives it up, the satisfaction to be derived from spiritual consciousness and spiritual vision, that is a matter which is hidden from us. What Christian asceticism aimed at was not the annihilation of materialism but a fusion of material and spiritual. To us it looks like pure spiritualism, to an Oriental it looks like rank materialism. Really it was a balance, a fusion of ideals not usually found in company. The characteristics by which it differs from Eastern asceticism are its recognition of human duties and charities, its recognition of the beauty of Nature, and its recognition of the value of study and thought and the cultivation of the intellect. The basis and inspiration of Western as of Eastern contemplation was the joy obtainable through the exercise of the soul's functions of seeing and knowing. But in the West, far from involving the obliteration of all human and material interests, contemplation seemed rather, while it subdued and purified, to sweeten and lend them an increased significance. It is certain that there have been no human friendships more loving and tender than existed between monks, that no charity was ever more constant and reliable than monastic charity. It is certain, again, that education, study, the love of thought and of letters were, for ten rough centuries, while Europe was given up to violence and the material of future nations was shaking into place, housed and domiciled in monasteries. It is certain that the love and culture of art were fostered in the same retreats; and it is certain finally, from the sites chosen for monasteries and the use made of those sites, as well as from intimate personal records which have come down to us, that a fondness

and attachment for Nature existed among monks which did not at that time commonly exist in the world. We are not speaking here, it will be understood, of the system of monasticism in the centuries immediately preceding the rise of the intellectualism of the Renaissance. Monasticism sickened for long before it died. Its decline marks and keeps pace with the decline of mysticism in Europe. The idea the 'knower,' the 'knowing agent,' was dying in the West to make room, provisionally at any rate, for the in knowing agent. But prior to the decline, say from the fifth to the thirteenth century, the mystical sense was a great power in Europe, and was compatible and went hand-in-hand with the love of humanity, the love of learning, the love of art, and the love of Nature, therein differing entirely from mysticism as apprehended by the East.

To assign a cause for this striking difference we must allow weight to the changed form of belief which had arisen in the West and the change it wrought in the intellectual point of view. The acceptance of the fact of the Incarnation was necessarily fatal to one of the two main tenets of mysticism. It was fatal to the idea of the nonentity of the visible universe. Not that it supplied the Christian with intellectual arguments. This finite existence, this life of time and space might be a dream. He could not tell. He knew of no reason why we should turn our own sense impressions into qualities of things separate from us. This apple is red. How do you know? Because my sight tells me so. But your sight is a property of your own, not of the apple's. It is sweet. How do you know? Because my taste tells me so. But your taste is a property of your own, not of the apple's. And so all along the line. The attributes we assign to objects, in virtue of which they exist, are sensations of our own, and the supposition that they amount to anything more is necessarily an arbitrary one. Who, or what, first conceived the ingenious idea of calling his own interior sensations of sweetness, hardness and redness by the name apple is not recorded. He may be figured, in any case, as the Hindu Adam. For in Hindu thought ignorance takes the place of sin, and man's fall consisted not in disobediently eating an apple, but in foolishly supposing that there was an apple there to eat.

But the Christian cut the knot he could not untie. Into his world of shadows had come a sudden reality. God had visited him, had broken into his little sphere of time and place, had put on the attributes of mortality and clothed Himself in the outward semblance of the finite. To one who had humbled his understanding to the reception of that gaunt fact the universe necessarily appeared under a new aspect. It mattered very little to him how unreal or transitory appearances might be. They had for the time

being received the divine sanction. Materialism might be a hoax, but it was a divine hoax. It belonged to a divine scheme. Moreover, no sooner did the Christian accept materialism in this light than it became itself transfigured. Natural truth and natural beauty became, in some inscrutable way, a support and an interpretation for spiritual truth and spiritual beauty. The finite ceased to be merely the finite, and was penetrated and suffused with the infinite. All the common affections and instincts of poor human lives, all the common sights and sounds we fondly think we see in a Nature which has no real existence, were endued with a sudden wonderful significance. These shadows, these idle hallucinations, this veil of matter which, as Hindu thought has it, is hung between us and reality and blots out the sight of it from us – all this actually became a means of instilling into the human mind a deeper idea and richer conception of spiritual existence.

This, we say, is the difference between contemplation, between the use made of the mystical faculty, that is, in the East and West. There is but the one faculty, and in both East and West the act of spiritual vision was the same; but whereas the East rejected temporal existence altogether, the West, on the Word of God, accepted it, and forthwith found that in manifold ways it could be treated and turned to account by the spiritual faculty itself.

We have spoken of the love of Humanity, of Knowledge, of Art and of Nature as being found consistent in Europe with the free exercise of the spiritual faculty. Let us follow one of these emotions, the love of Nature, a little further. In the *Contemporary Review* for last February there was an excellent article on the love of wild Nature by Mr. Havelock Ellis, in which he traces the history of the deepening and strengthening of this love. There had been little like it in the classic epoch, but it almost immediately follows, on the rise of Christianity. He quotes St. Jerome's epistle on the beauty of the desert, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, on the glory, and harmony of the universe, and St. Augustine on the colours of the sea and its majesty in storm, and then he comes down to later ages and traces through many centuries the 'close connexion between the most solemn or the most ascetic moments of Christian life, and scenery that was constantly beautiful and sometimes in the highest degree romantically wild.' But yet even while insisting on all this, even while pointing out that the Christian appreciation of the beauty of Nature was ahead of the standard of the age, Mr. Ellis does not find the cause of the change in any idea contained in Christianity. He thinks that a number of very emotional people were drawn to Christianity in the first centuries, and, being forced to take refuge

in wild places, developed an appreciation of that kind of scenery. We are certainly inclined to allow all due weight to any argument advanced by Mr. Ellis, but this explanation seems to us inadequate. We are not dealing with a temporary and spasmodic movement, but with a change, permanent and continuous, of the human mind in relation to Nature. The cause alleged by Mr. Ellis, that, in the early days of Christianity, some emotional individuals were driven to make close acquaintance with Nature, is a transitory cause. The time soon came when Christianity was received as the normal religion of Europe, and when its profession involved no change whatever in the ordinary habits of life; yet the new thought of something spiritual and divine in Nature did not therefore die out, but on the contrary steadily spread and grew. It is difficult to see how two phenomena, the one so accidental and temporary as the flight of certain Christians to the wild, the other so abiding as the new love of wild Nature, should be related as cause and effect.

Mr. Ellis, as it seems to us, has his hand on the right explanation but passes it by. The love of wild Nature 'received,' he thinks, 'a powerful impetus from influences associated with the development of primitive Christianity.' At the same time this love of Nature was a by-product of Christianity only, 'for there is nothing in the doctrine of Christianity which implies approval or disapproval of any aspects of Nature.' This may be true of the doctrine of Christianity: it may be true of the doctrine that it 'may be said to encourage indifference towards Nature altogether, abstracting man's attention from the external world and concentrating it on the problems of the soul.' But besides the doctrine there is the fact of Christianity, the fact of Christ's appearance in the flesh, the fact that He consented in His own person to Nature, that He recognised her ordinances, that He was touched by the beauty of wild flowers and regarded the fate of sparrows. How was this likely to tell? We must throw ourselves back into the currents of thought of the early Christian controversies. The question at issue was the nature of the Second Person of the Trinity. Oriental thought was set on explaining away and dissolving Christ's humanity; Western thought was set on establishing it. Put in another way, however, the controversy amounted to this: Was Christianity to be absorbed into the abstract Eastern philosophy, or was it to be accepted as sanctioning and recognising our human life and its surroundings?

That was the issue. The champions of the Western view recognised to the utmost the value of the mystical gift, the inward spiritual vision. They knew, just as well as the Hindu ascetics, what it was to be suffused with

spiritual consciousness. But they held out nevertheless for the hard fact of the Incarnation, and by so doing, by forcing and obliging the spiritual faculty to concern itself with Nature and this finite existence and the visible universe, they went surety, so to speak, for Nature's response to the spiritual faculty. Did they know all that was involved and all they hazarded? Perhaps not, though already they themselves were beginning to see Nature transfigured. In any case their trust was justified. Nature made the necessary response and an alliance, hitherto unthinkable, was struck up between the spiritual faculty in man and the universe in which he has his abode. It is a manifestation of this alliance which we follow when we trace, with Mr. Ellis, the deepening of man's love of Nature and the increasing sense of an inward beauty and harmony pervading all her aspects and operations. In short, the new view of Nature to which Mr. Ellis draws attention seems to us to be but one aspect of an influence which has penetrated Western life in all directions, which might be traced in the science, and art, and thought of Western life, and which still, to-day, is the controlling influence of that life. For we are still deep in the old controversy. We are still maintaining or disputing the fusion and equipoise of the spiritual and material elements in life. There are extremists among us of course, but the main thought, the instinct, of Western society revolts alike from pure materialism and from pure spiritualism. It will not give up its hold on spiritual ideas in order to take up entirely with the interests and opportunities of the visible universe; nor, on the other hand, will it give up the visible universe in favour of purely abstract spiritual ideas. Neither the classical ideal nor the Oriental ideal satisfies it. It insists on the fusion of the two. This, we believe, is the main idea that governs Western life, and this idea rests on the Incarnation.

We are not concerned here with the working of this idea generally, but we are concerned with its working in literature and as regards Nature. In this it is easy to recognise its effects. The poetry more especially of Christendom is informed with a feeling for Nature emotional and spiritual to a degree hitherto undreamt of. Nature is no longer a mere accessory of man, deriving her interest and significance chiefly from him, nor a mere delusion of the senses shutting him off from the truth. She is a witness and a testament. She is soaked in the Divine will and the Divine intention. As eyes full of spiritual question gazed at her the outer husk of appearances yielded and everywhere the inner spiritual meaning peeped through, as shining chestnuts show through the cracking pods.

Passage after passage illustrative of what we mean occurs to us.

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins.
[William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.]

Or this:

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things.

[William Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey'.]

What is peculiar in these passages is the fusion in them of spiritualism and realism. They are too spiritual to be the outcome of classical thought and too real to be the outcome of Eastern thought. They combine ideas never combined before Christianity; in a word they are made possible by the Incarnation.

But this new spirit in regard to Nature does not only show itself in such lofty flights as those we have quoted. It shows itself in more humble ways, in the mere handling, as it were, of natural objects with a new fondness and care, showing a higher sense of their preciousness. Jefferies, to whom we are thus brought back, was one of those who possessed in an extraordinary degree the sense of the spiritual in Nature, and, as we pointed out some way back, this sense reveals itself in his writing in the mere mention of things. He handles and touches them in such a way that his estimate of their worth is somehow communicated to the reader. We know from his own accounts how daily as he walked about watching and taking notes he would go apart into some lonely place and yield himself to a state of trance. He was in these trances 'rapt' and 'carried away.' His whole nature was given up to the act of spiritual aspiration. 'I see now,' he writes later, 'that what I laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning.' It is the old thought, the mystic thought, of the soul as knower. But it is not with Jefferies an abstract thought; on the contrary, the whole universe and all nature are ministers of his soul-life.

With the earth, the sun and sky, the stars hidden by the light, with the ocean . . . with these I prayed, as if they were the keys of an instrument. . . . Leaning against the oak's massive trunk, and feeling the rough bark and the lichen at my back, looking southwards over the grassy fields, cowslip-yellow, at the woods on the slope, I thought my desire of deeper soul-life . . . under the shapely rounded elms, by the hawthorn bushes and hazel, everywhere the same deep desire for the soul-nature. . . . But to touch the lichened bark of a tree, or the end of a spray projecting over the path as I walked, seemed to repeat the same prayer in me. The long-lived summer days dried and warmed the turf in the meadows. I used to lie down in solitary corners at full length on my back, so as to feel the embrace of the earth. The grass stood high above me, and the shadows of the tree-branches danced on my face. I looked up at the sky, with half-closed eyes to bear the dazzling light. Bees buzzed over, sometimes a butterfly passed, there was a hum in the air, greenfinches sang in the hedge. . . . Dreamy in appearance I was breathing full of existence; I was aware of the grass-blades, the flowers, the leaves on hawthorn and tree. I seemed to live more largely through them, as if each were a pore through which I drank. The grasshoppers called and leaped, the greenfinches sang, the blackbirds happily fluted, all the air hummed with life. I was plunged deep in existence, and with all that existence I prayed. . . . Through every grass-blade in the thousand, thousand grasses; through the million leaves, veined and edge-cut, on bush and tree; through the song-notes and the marked feathers of the birds; through the insects' hum and the colour of the butterflies; through the soft warm air, the flecks of cloud dissolving – I used them all for prayer.

These passages, we maintain, as much as the poetic passages before quoted, reveal a view of Nature not possible before the Incarnation, but made possible by it. Neither in the Oriental phase of pure emotionalism nor in the classical phase of pure intellectualism could they have been evolved. It was the welding of these two together, the forcing of mankind to look at material Nature through spiritual eyes, which gave birth to them.

There is no surer mark of genius in a writer than to be associated with a permanent and vital idea, and no surer guarantee of immortality. New ideas, or new adaptations of old ones to present conditions, have their fascination; they command the attention of the hour and the service of the writers of the hour. But as present conditions pass they pass too, and their champions along with them. How many brilliant writers could we not name whose brilliance, even while we admire it, we feel to be fugitive; whose reputation it requires their own utmost efforts to maintain; whose names even in a year or two would be forgotten were it not for the assiduity with which each keeps his own before the public; and all this

because their work is moored to no permanent idea and supported by no vital truth? Jefferies has this great advantage, that he worked in unison with the deepest thought of his race. He was a mystic, he believed in the soul as knower. He believed that, just as intellect is given us to handle material things with, the soul is given us to handle spiritual things with. This is mysticism. There is nothing really mysterious about it at all. It is always the case that to know anything we must possess within ourselves a faculty of like nature to the thing to be known. To know the spiritual we must possess a spiritual faculty. There has never, since the consciousness of that faculty first woke in man, been the least doubt as to its character, only, in the work set before it, it is true that the West alone, bound to materialism by the central fact of its religion, has used the spiritual sense to assay the spiritual contents of Nature. Here stands Jefferies: a mystic, but a Western mystic; a mystic of the order of the Incarnation. How angry Mr. Salt would be, and Mr. Thomas, too, we fear, could they hear us call him so; nay, how angry he would very likely have been himself! But it is not always so easy to know ourselves. Only the surface film of our nature is conscious, as only the surface film of the sea is ruffled. What we truly are is not necessarily what we think we are. Our opinions are often the shallowest part of us. Certainly they were the shallowest part of Jefferies, nor is it by these that he will finally be judged. What we have to do in regard to Jefferies is to separate the work he did under the inspiration of his own spiritual gift from that which he did under distracting and weakening influences. We have several times compared him with Wordsworth, and now we come to the point of difference betwixt the two. Wordsworth was one who, possessing the spiritual gift in fullest measure, never doubted it, but lived by it and relied upon it to the end. In his case no separating process is needed. But Jefferies was tried in ways spared to Wordsworth: by sickness and pain, by wasting disease, ending in early death, by alienation from the sources of his inner strength. The weak utterances of these moments of weakness ought not to obscure the utterances of his unclouded spirit; nor ultimately will they. Time, which so surely winnows wheat from chaff, will gather his grain for him. He will live by the work of his strength and prime, not of his weakness and disease; he will live by his writings on Nature. Few indeed are there who have touched natural things with his confidence and tenderness, for few have possessed his profound sense of Nature's spiritual significance. By this he will live and will be a source of light and strength to many, for by this he is allied to a thought destined to penetrate more and more completely the minds and lives of men.

One word in conclusion. We have been obliged in what we had to say and in the space at our disposal to dwell rather on the faults, as we think them, than on the merits of Mr. Thomas's book. But to ignore the latter would be an act of unfairness. We are not blind to them. It is easy to see that his task has been a labour of love for him. His affection for Jefferies has been the slow growth of the twenty years of his own life which have been passed in the same county. In that time the natural sympathy arising from a resemblance of temperaments has matured into a profound intimacy, and the thought of Jefferies became to his future biographer – we risk the assertion on the internal evidence of the book only, but with a confidence that we are right – like the presence of a living friend. All that is implied in the difference between a book undertaken from the usual motives and a book written from pure affection we get out of this book of Mr. Thomas's. And, besides this charm arising out of a sympathy between the author and his subject, we are drawn too in the present case by the influence of an indisputable literary talent. Its author is alive to the value of the finer shades of expression, and there is in consequence a vitality even in his most commonplace statements. Apart altogether from his estimate of his friend – for so we cannot help calling Jefferies – these are high qualities, and recognising as we do their value, we cordially thank Mr. Thomas for his book and wish it the success it deserves.

ART. X.—RICHARD JEFFERIES.

1. *Richard Jefferies*, Edward Thomas (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1909).
2. *The Story of My Heart: My Autobiography*, Richard Jefferies [1883] (London: Longmans, 1907).
3. *Wild Life in a Southern County*, Richard Jefferies [1879](London: Nelson, 1908).
4. *The Gamekeeper at Home*, illustrated by C. Whymper, Richard Jefferies [1878](London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1906).
5. *Round About a Great Estate*, Richard Jefferies [1880](London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1880).
6. *The Amateur Poacher*, Richard Jefferies [1879](London : Smith, Elder and Co., 1906).

‘The Great Earth Speaking’: Richard Jefferies and the Transcendentalists

Roger Ebbatson

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‘... the true meaning of utopia: it is a precipitate of collective dreams.’¹

The presence in nineteenth-century writing of countervailing impulses between community and isolation, with the attendant utopian possibilities, reaches back to Romanticism but was notably marked in the American Transcendentalist movement, and its English transmutation in the work of the English nature-writer, Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Jefferies once declared: ‘I am nothing unless I am a metaphysician.’² Whilst this is in some senses true, his central theme, transliterated by way of English Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, is undoubtedly the influence of natural objects upon the human mind. The entire body of Jefferies’ work is concerned with men and women in a natural setting, and his treatment of the theme ranged from agricultural journalism to pantheistic mysticism cast in prophetic terms. Despite attaining a degree of popularity and esteem with the reading public, Jefferies remained a solitary individual ‘Who loves Nature can make no friends, everyone repulses, all seem different’, as he observed in his diaries.³ Jefferies therefore seems in a way to stand apart from other contemporary observers of the rural scene such as Thomas Hardy, but his work does offer some deep affinities with Transcendentalism, a movement whose idealism, and utopian philosophy led to a view of the universe as a type of cosmic psyche.

In rebelling against Locke’s epistemology, and in their neo-Kantian distinction between Reason and Understanding, the American Transcendentalists veer towards pantheism and a belief in what they term ‘Universal Spirit’. Philosophically speaking, Emerson argues, ‘the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul’. Thus, ‘all that is separate from us, all

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLoughlin, (Cambridge: MA, 2002), p.906.

² Richard Jefferies, *The Nature Diaries of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S.J. Looker (London: Grey Walls Press, 1948), p.282.

³ *ibid.*, p.217.

which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME', is to be 'ranked under this name, NATURE'.⁴ The key document in this structure of feeling is Emerson's 1836 essay on 'Nature', which proposes that the universe is composed of nature and soul, and memorably alerts the reader to the mystical connotations of this distinction:

Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God.⁵

According to the doctrine propounded here, 'Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact'.⁶ Transcendentalism perceives as its central principle the unity in which each individual's identity is contained within the all. F.O. Matthiessen has pertinently noted Emerson's 'delicate pleasure in his senses, and his even greater pleasure in soaring beyond them'.⁷ The core of Emerson's thought lies in its complex projection of isolation and community, and it has been well said that Transcendental models of individuation 'cannot be completely reconciled with theories of social relationship; for the demands of self-reliance, especially the intuition of the 'divine' depths of the self, often pull one out of the social orbit into an intense introspection'.⁸

For Emerson, or for Thoreau at Walden Pond, Transcendentalism desiderated a solitary existence in contradistinction to those more communally oriented experiments in utopian living such as George Ripley's Brook Farm project of 1840. The essence of Emerson's concept of nature, to summarize, is his conception of an all-encompassing relationship between mind and nature, with its profound implications for human societies. It was the Transcendentalist role, as he interpreted it, to stand against the utilitarian tendencies of the age, and it is this project that relates him to the English nature-writer.

In Richard Jefferies' spiritual autobiography, *The Story of My Heart* (1883), the open spaces of the Wiltshire Downs in southern England enable him to project himself towards the earth in a redemptive or utopian gesture:

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (London: 1856), pp.10-11.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp.15-16.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.32.

⁷ F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (Oxford: 1968), p.52.

⁸ Jeffrey Steele, 'Transcendental Friendship', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, eds J. Porte and S. Morris (Cambridge: 1999), p.121.

Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the earth's firmness – I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me.⁹

Later in the book, when he has moved to Sussex, Jefferies discovers a 'green hollow on the side of a great hill, a green concave open to the sea', and he writes: 'Silence and sunshine, sea and hill gradually brought my mind into the condition of intense prayer.' These experiences tend towards the annihilation of time in which he can seminally affirm, 'Now is eternity; now is the immortal life'.¹⁰

This is surely messianic in its tendency. Such writing, like that of the Transcendentalists, stands in stark opposition to the materialism and teleology of the Victorian doctrine of progress, and to the literary realism which projects and critiques that materialism. In seeking a transcendent dimension opposed to contemporary values, Jefferies draws upon the potent tradition of Romantic nature philosophy. As Esther Leslie expresses it, in this mode of thought the human being stands in the midst of the natural world, 'incessantly communicating with nature through all organs of sensory perception and through the intuition of the mind'. She adds, 'Mystical, magical forces course through this energetic nature, structuring all that exists and leaving decipherable marks'.¹¹

Both Emerson, with his investment in the 'Here and Now', and Jefferies, with his sense of 'the Beyond', seek a utopian alternative to nineteenth-century positivism. In *The Story of My Heart* and other late speculative writing, Jefferies' gestures register a protest against a forgetting of being in desiring a cancellation of temporality or causation in favour of an ecstatic cultivation of presence which signals his affinity with the more philosophically articulated position of Martin Heidegger. Indeed, Jefferies' intimation of an 'eternity' in which 'now is the immortal life' resonates with the Nietzschean sense of 'noonday' as explicated by Heidegger:

We know what Nietzsche means by this word *midday*, the moment of the shortest shadow, when forenoon and afternoon, past and future, meet in one. Their meeting-place is the moment of supreme unity for all temporal things in utterly magnificent transfiguration ... it is the moment of eternity.

This is 'a point of time' which 'no clock can measure': 'a point in being as a whole when time itself is as the temporality of the moment'.¹² In particular,

⁹ Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart* [1883] (Dartington: 2002), pp.18-19.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.31, p.39.

¹¹ Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds* (London: 2005), p.35.

¹² Cited in Stuart Eldin, *Mapping the Present* (London: 2001), pp.48-49.

Heidegger's sense of the 'clearing' in which being becomes manifest is directly related to this structure of ideas, a concatenation in which the quotidian reality of the everyday is transformed, so that, as he phrases it, 'In the midst of beings as a whole an open space occurs. There is a clearing.'¹³

In Heidegger's thinking, the history of being has been occluded or forgotten in favour of history as event. The work of the artist, in this reading, is thus fundamentally utopian – indeed, in his definition all art is, 'in essence, poetry', an activity which takes place in 'the open region which poetry lets happen', so that beings 'shine and ring out'.¹⁴ The artist, that is to say, enables a rediscovery of being. Jefferies' vantage points on the Wiltshire or Sussex heights are saturated with a sense of space and light. In such 'alternative' writing, as Heidegger puts it, 'Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness'.¹⁵ Heidegger's notion of 'pure space and ecstatic time' is liberating for mankind, a sense of liberation which the philosopher shares with Emerson and Jefferies: the earth becomes, in this body of writing, not a resource for agricultural or industrial exploitation but rather a 'dwelling-place'. As Paul de Man observes in his commentary on Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin:

Before Being produces itself, one lives in expectation; the mind stands vigil and is brought closer to the moment as concentration increases, in thought and in prayer. It produces itself then in the lightning of the *Jetzt*, in absolute temporal present. If one could say it, it would be founded because the word has durability and founds the moment in a spatial presence where one could dwell.¹⁶

In a similar spirit, in an essay entitled 'On the Downs' written shortly before his early death, Jefferies wrote:

Stoop and touch the earth, and receive its influence; touch the flower, and feel its life; face the wind, and have its meaning; let the sunlight fall on the open hand as if you could hold it. Something may be grasped from them all, invisible yet strong. It is the sense of a wider existence – wider and higher.¹⁷

Jefferies here gestures towards an affinity with nature and 'the beyond' which would elude his contemporaries in the age of a teleologically defined sense of 'progress'. Then towards the end, in his notebooks, he would ruminate further:

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D.F. Krell (London: 1993), p.178.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.168, p.197.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.442.

¹⁶ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (London: 1983), p.258.

¹⁷ Richard Jefferies, 'On the Downs', in *Jefferies' England*, ed. S.J. Looker (London: 1945), p.93.

I fetish Nature. Sea, sunshine, clear water, leaves. If I can see why not – if they cannot see I cannot help that – I see the sands and the stars, and subtle cosmical material far up, and feel through, and the more I touch these the greater grows my soul life and soul touch.¹⁸

The drift of meaning here is towards an affinity with the natural world as a redemptive force in an age of mechanism.

In a fragment entitled 'To the Planetarium', Walter Benjamin offers a gloss on this type of celebratory response to landscape, arguing that what distinguishes ancient from modern man is 'the former's absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods', and he goes on:

The ancients' intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest to us, and never of one without the other. This means, however, that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally. It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights.

Thus, Benjamin stresses that such rapturous communion is not simply individualistic, 'unimportant and avoidable'. On the contrary, he avers, 'its hour strikes again and again', as was made manifest 'by the last war, which was an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with cosmic powers' in a form of degraded sublimity conjured up in almost biblical terminology: 'Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in Mother Earth.' At this historical conjuncture, as the logical consequence of the industrial revolution, the 'lust for profit of the ruling class sought satisfaction' through this ecstatic union, and thus 'technology betrayed man and turned the bridal bed into a bloodbath'. In this catastrophic process, the ancients' rapport with nature gave way to a different response, so that 'In the nights of annihilation of the last war the frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic'.¹⁹

More than a century earlier, Hegel had propounded the conditions for what he termed a 'new religion', marked by many of the elements that would characterize the thought of both Jefferies and the American Transcendentalists. This prophetic religion, Hegel suggests, is one 'which already announces itself in revelations to single individuals', and would be

¹⁸ Richard Jefferies, *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S.J. Looker (London: 1948), p.283.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (London: 1985), pp.103-104.

‘discerned in the rebirth of nature as the symbol of eternal unity’.²⁰ It is the stress upon the individualistic character of the response to nature which both validates and undermines the utopian tendencies of Jefferies’ strain of thinking, tendencies which may be framed with reference to Ferdinand Tönnies’ concept of the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from a world of organic fellowship (which some Transcendentalists attempted to revive) towards a bourgeois society where individuals become units in the chain of production. Is Jefferies’ thought, despite its pantheistic ecstasy and luminous intensity, an anguished response to this crisis? Certainly he was never to espouse or join one of the many alternative communitarian projects in Victorian Britain, his utopia remaining an idiosyncratic model with apparently no followers. Nonetheless, it is incontrovertible that both Thoreau and Jefferies, in the words of their disciple, Henry Salt, sought ‘to combine the power of minute and patient observation with the exercise of a highly idealistic and imaginative faculty’.²¹

There is, however, another aspect to Jefferies’ thought which stands in opposition to this solipsistic version of Transcendentalism. In some of his sociological and agricultural essays he devotes much thought to issues of land ownership, and comes close to espousing a type of organic socialism. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the growth of ideas about a more equitable distribution of land ownership and a consequent alteration in society posited upon the thesis that the peasants had been progressively alienated from the land they worked. This dispossession, reaching its climax in the enclosures, would lead dialectically to the evolution of a range of social alternatives ranging from the Chartist communes of the 1840s to Ruskin’s quasi-feudal Guild of St. George in the 1870s.²² These movements, like Jefferies’ own thinking, owe their origins to elements of English Romanticism. In his ‘Thoughts on the Labour Question’, published posthumously in 1891, Jefferies offers a daunting picture of human labour and the ‘Divine Right of Capital’:

The fierce sunshine beats down upon the white sand, or chalk, or hard clay of the railway cutting whose narrow sides focus the heat like a lens. Brawny arms swing the pick and drive the pointed spades into the soil. Clod by clod, inch by inch, the heavy earth is loosened, and the mountain removed by atoms at a time. Aching arms these, weary backs, stiffened limbs – brows black with dirt and perspiration. The glaring chalk blinds the eye with its

²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, ‘On the Relation of Nature to Philosophy in General’ (1802), in *Between Kant and Hegel*, eds. G. di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: NY, 1985), p.11.

²¹ Henry S. Salt, *Company I Have Kept* (London: 1930), p.98.

²² On these issues see Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities* (London: 1979), *passim*.

whiteness; the slippery sand gives beneath the footstep, or rises with the wind and fills the mouth with grit; the clay clings to the boot, weighing the leg down as lead.

The 'director' or 'financier' is depicted 'Rolling in his carriage': 'One man whipped with Hunger toils half-naked in the Pit, face to face with death; the other is crowned by his fellows sitting in state with fine wines and the sound of jubilee'.²³ As Diana Morrow points out, in an acute analysis of this piece, during the 1880s Jefferies would assume 'the mantle of transcendental nature priest' at the same time as he forged political links with the New Liberalism. She argues that in his later transcendental essays and *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies writes prophetically, as one who 'deplored the prevailing mechanistic, commercial ethos of the times, and envisaged a future when man, inspired by the abundance and beauty of nature, would cast off the constrictions of the present and fulfil his potential'.²⁴ This late thinking, Morrow demonstrates, began to have a practical effect after Jefferies' death, exerting a crucial influence, for instance, upon both the formulation of Lloyd George's Liberal programme of land reform and of Robert Blatchford's communitarian socialism.

In this important sense, therefore, Jefferies' writing possesses both visionary and practical elements, and it was this potent conjunction of qualities that was to trigger one of the most significant of all literary utopias. In the spring of 1885, William Morris was returning from a visit to the north of England, and on the train he read what he designated 'a queer book' which he greatly enjoyed: 'absurd hopes curled around my heart as I read it'.²⁵ This book was Jefferies' fantasy-romance, *After London* (1885), a work which Morris 'was never weary of praising', as J.W. Mackail recalled, because 'it put into definite shape, with a mingling of effusive romance and a minute detail that was entirely after his heart, much that he had half imagined'.²⁶ In a letter to Mrs. Burne-Jones, Morris welcomed the 'destruction' of civilization: 'how often it consoles me to think of barbarism flooding the world, and real feelings and passions ... taking the place of our wretched hypocrisies'.²⁷ This consolation, I suggest, derives at least in part from Richard Jefferies, and a reference in the letter to 'the days of Noah' clearly alludes to a significant feature of *After London*, the great lake that inundates southern England. The first part of Jefferies' romance deals with

²³ Richard Jefferies, 'Thoughts on the Labour Question', *Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, VIII (1999), p.19.

²⁴ Diana Morrow, "'Thoughts on the Labour Question': An Alternative View", *ibid.*, p.25.

²⁵ William Morris, *The Letters of William Morris*, ed. P. Henderson (London: 1950), p.236.

²⁶ J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols (London: 1899), II, p.144.

²⁷ Morris, *Letters*, p.236.

‘The Relapse into Barbarism’, the recession of England after some aboriginal calamity, so that the landscape is once again cloaked in forest, the towns evacuated, mechanical inventions lost and forgotten, and a great lake flooding the ‘South Country’.

The book’s action centres upon the career of a young man, Felix Aquila, and his progress around the lake. The theme of a ‘dispeopled’ England, the quasi-medieval social order, and the quest-theme all resonated with Morris, and served crucially as determinants in the composition of *News from Nowhere*. In *After London*, the destruction and flooding of the city has led to the creation of a desolate landscape in which the blackened water ‘bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud’ in a scene dominated by a low cloud hanging over the ‘oily liquid’.²⁸ The dystopian elements here and in Morris’ account of ‘the change’ may both owe something to Dickens’ powerful depiction of the American ‘New Eden’ in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844):

A flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber; a marsh on which the good growth of the earth seemed to have been wrecked and cast away, that from its decomposing ashes vile and ugly things might rise; where the very trees took the aspect of huge weeds, begotten of the slime from which they sprung, by the hot sun that burnt them up ... this was the realm of Hope through which they moved.²⁹

In the last analysis, Richard Jefferies and William Morris are crucially, unlike the satirical Dickens, however, ‘pilgrims of hope’, looking towards a renovated future society, and both of their romance texts partake of the seminal elements of the literary utopia as defined by Michel Foucault:

Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality, there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up ... countries where life is easy, even the road to them is chimerical This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula.³⁰

The writings of Jefferies and the American Transcendentalists, to sum up, are equally marked with traces of that crucial connection between man and the spatial world permeated with the desire for transcendence. In the final notebook entries for the early summer of 1887, written when he was mortally ill, Jefferies avers, ‘The transcendental soul I understand’.³¹ The

²⁸ Richard Jefferies, *After London* [1885] (Oxford: 1980), pp.37-38.

²⁹ Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. P.N. Furbank (Harmondsworth: 1968), p.442.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: 1994), p.194.

³¹ Jefferies, *Notebooks*, p.281.

insistent quest in these final ruminations for what Jefferies terms 'the Beyond' signify what Homi Bhabha has designated a 'spatial distance' that 'promises the future'. Bhabha's carefully inflected argument goes on:

The imaginary of spatial distance ... throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity. The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, not longer a synchronic presence ... We are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogeneous course of history, establishing a concept of the present as the 'time of the now'.³²

In his scattered and gnomic closing remarks, Jefferies rejects what he classifies as the 'Transcendental excitement of the soul' in favour of a sense of 'touch' which he associated with the sense of his days on the Ridgeway: 'The *transcendental repose* is most.'³³ In this complex moment of revelation, consciousness itself functions as the 'index of transcendental ideal beyond spiritual': 'Sun Life is the recognition of the Beyond not in everything but by everything, as the sea now roaring.' Again, 'Sun Life, the sea, contemplation leads to the Beyond most', to what Jefferies designates, 'The immense Mind beyond Mind'. At the end, Jefferies makes a final prophetic gesture away from his intense individualism and towards that communal utopia which he both sought and evaded throughout his life: 'I feel myself so very very stupid: I cannot see or understand. If not settle the infinite I may start a social band.'³⁴

³² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 2004), pp.5-6.

³³ Jefferies, *Notebooks*, p.284.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 286.

Richard Jefferies: (Liddington Castle)

Charles Hamilton Sorley

Charles Hamilton Sorley (19 May 1895–13 October 1915) was a poet, born in Aberdeen. He died in action in WWI at the Battle of Loos. A student at Marlborough College (1908–13), his poems were published posthumously as *Marlborough and Other Poems* in 1916.

I see the vision of the Vale
Rise teeming to the rampart Down,
The fields and, far below, the pale
Red-roofedness of Swindon town.

But though I see all things remote,
I cannot see them with the eyes

With which ere now the man from Coate
Looked down and wondered and was wise.

He knew the healing balm of night,
The strong and sweeping joy of day,

The sensible and dear delight
Of life, the pity of decay.

And many wondrous words he wrote,
And something good to man he showed,

About the entering in of Coate,
There, on the dusty Swindon road.

19 September 1913

John, Alice and ‘Squire’ Brook

George Miller



Arthur ‘Squire’ Brook

Four of Jefferies’ books inscribed to John and Alice Brook have been recorded: *Wood Magic*, 1881, *After London* and *The Open Air*, 1885, and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, 1887. *Wood Magic* and *Amaryllis* simply state ‘From the Author’, *After London* precise wording unknown, but *The Open Air* has ‘With the Author’s Love’, and contains a pencil sketch signed by Jefferies. His usual style was ‘From the Author’ or ‘With the Author’s Compliments’, and the usual recipients, editors or other professional contacts. ‘Love’ or ‘best love’ was reserved for close family members, ‘With All my Love’ to Jessie. *The Open Air* inscription is also the only example on record of one dedicated to a couple, and it is of course quite possible that he presented other titles to the Brooks. All in all it would appear that they were close friends, and their identity is of interest.

But it remained a mystery. My searches over the years in books and records relating to locations, journals and publishers associated with Jefferies had proved fruitless, and likewise the census returns when they became available on the internet. In December 2015 Jean Saunders had access to an internet newspaper archive search site she had found useful

and suggested I might try it for any enigmas of my own. So I typed in 'John Brook' and one result stood out: a letter in the *Sussex Express* of 23 February 1894 – of which more below. I passed this information back to Jean, the keenest of internet sleuths, and it was not long before she had found him a wife called Alice, an occupation, farmer, and a home and history around the town of Bexhill on the Sussex coast.

A notebook entry of 28 June 1879 'Bexhill – Sussex – Hastings' suggests a visit by Jefferies at that time. Besant refers to a letter of 18 June 1886, when Jefferies was seriously ill. He describes it as 'too sad to quote' but adds:

Help of all kinds was forthcoming from friends whom one must not name: money, the offer of a house on the sea coast; but there was the difficulty of travelling. How was he to be moved? The difficulty was got over, and he went to Bexhill for a time, returning to Crowborough in September. The sea had done him good. On the night of his return, he enjoyed a tranquil sleep, and awoke without pain.

Thomas also mentions 'A visit to the sea at Bexhill [which] brought him some ease', but it isn't clear whether this is the same visit or an earlier one in September 1885. Masseck refers to his departure to Goring in December 1886 '*après avoir d'abord obtenu un petit soulagement* a Bexhill.' This does seem to indicate a further visit and the presence there of friends one must not name. Did Jessie accompany him, or was this an opportunity for respite care; or perhaps for her to visit her own folk – so strangely absent from the story after her marriage?

oooOOOooo

The following is a summary of information about the Brooks of Bexhill gleaned from internet sources and the Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society records:-

The first Arthur Brook came to Bexhill in 1743 to manage estates of John Sackville, a landowner in Sussex and Dorset. After his death in 1782 his son Arthur Elphick Brook (1744-1836) farmed the estates with his brother Stephen, and Arthur became a landowner himself with the purchase of two farms, Collington and Chantry in 1802. He married in 1809, residing at Court Lodge, where Arthur Sawyer Brook was born. By then the Brooks were an important local family, and Arthur Elphick's status was further enhanced by his founding of the Bexhill Harriers, a pack of South Down beagle hounds which became famous, and on occasion entertained the future King Edward VII.

Arthur Sawyer Brook (1811-1890) inherited his father's farming interests. In 1851 he owned or managed 1000 acres and employed 30 labourers. He rose

to such high esteem in Bexhill that he was awarded the honorary title of 'Squire'. The 1871 census gives him 900 acres, 27 men and 9 boys, but by 1881 this has shrunk to 120 acres, 5 men and two boys. The agricultural depression, together with the rapid growth of Bexhill as a seaside resort, swallowing large areas of agricultural land, were the possible causes of this decline, unless it refers to the land he owned rather than the estates he managed. At his death in 1890 he was living at Brook Lodge, Sea Road. He was buried in St. Patrick's Church.

Arthur John Brook (1845-1917) was known as, and signed himself, John Brook. Appearing as Arthur J. Brook in census returns is the reason he had not been found there. John's chief claim to fame was as a cricketer, playing for Battle and Bexhill teams, and the Windmill Hill Club founded by the wealthy cricket loving Curteis family with whom he was on friendly terms. Herbert Curteis was also a member of the Harriers. His earliest recorded match was in 1860. He scored 110 in 1866, 101 in 1873, 73 in 1875 and 67 not out in 1877 in local matches. His last match was in 1908. He made a single first class appearance for Sussex against Kent at Ashford Road, Eastbourne, 25-27 August 1873, where his 10 runs in one innings contributed to a convincing win for the Sussex men by an innings and 104 runs. It appears that he farmed Chantry Farm of 52 acres and let the remaining land to a tenant. He married Alice Watt in 1880 at Eastbourne. Alice was born in Brussels in 1855. She may have been a silk weaver.¹ The couple resided at Court Lodge, where they had two female domestic servants in 1881. A son, Arthur Farncombe Brook, was born in 1882.

From the local press we gain a few further glimpses of the Brooks:

28 September 1872: *The South Eastern Advertiser* records the sale in Southdown Street of a well known flock belonging to 'the respected master of the Bexhill Harriers who is retiring.' From exactly what is unclear – certainly not from his mastership of the Harriers. It may be that he gave up the management of other farms and concentrated on his own – which might also account for the reduction of acreage.

22 March 1879. John Brook, farmer of Bexhill, summonsed to appear before the local magistrates for killing a hen belonging to G.W. Veness, an auctioneer. It was claimed that Brook had threatened to kill the birds if they continued to invade his property and damage his crops. Brook's defence was that he had set his dog on a hen simply to drive it back through the hedge. He was fined 1s. with costs on the grounds that he had

¹ My thanks to Peter Robins for this suggestion.

exceeded his duty, and there were no crops on the land at the time. (*Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*)

4 February 1888. A.S. Brook and Mrs. John Brook are among the guests present at the inauguration of a clock to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. Squire Brook gave an address. (*Sussex Express*)

17 April 1891. A long report on a meeting to determine the future of the Bexhill Harriers. John had taken over the mastership on his father's death in 1890, but now wished to resign because of ill health. The chairman opened the meeting by saying it would be a great pity for the future of the town if the pack was lost, connected as it had been for many years with the name of Mr. Brook, 'and having been established with such immense care that there was not a pack of the kind to equal it in England.' There were many similar tributes to 'the late lamented Squire Brook'; a farmer's committee was formed to raise subscriptions, and a noble lord, Viscount Cantelupe, agreed to become the new master. One speaker thanked Mr. Brook for taking over on his father's death, adding 'he was personally sorry Mr. Brook was going to give them up, because he was a nice gentleman, and one of the olden times that reminded him of the old English yeoman. The late lamented Squire was always a genial, kind, good-hearted English gentleman and it was only under pressure of circumstances that his son had given up the mastership of the hounds.' (*Sussex Express*)

23 February 1894. A letter to the editor of the *Sussex Express*, headed THE AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL, signed John Brook. He is replying to a previous correspondent who supported the idea of an agricultural college, seeing it as a new and progressive initiative. Brook's argument in essence is that it was old hat and never worked before:

This scientific farming is no new thing. I dare say our friend has heard of the anti-corn law discussions, and that it was said in reply to the farmers, you must make two blades where only one has grown before, and you must call in science to your aid. Well, it was taken up far more earnestly than now. Large numbers went to the colleges of the day, in order to be prepared to meet the coming change. Had our friend given a list of those who, having finished their course of study and had gone forth to lead the great question of applying their acquired knowledge in practical farming as successful men, it would overwhelm the stupid farmer.

Failing in this, I fear his efforts will avail little with the older men. For my part, I could only furnish from personal knowledge two, but unfortunately they were both failures.

He supports his belief in traditional hands-on farming with 'the old adage':

He that by the plough would thrive,

Must himself either hold or drive.

Aged 49 at the time of writing Brook is clearly going back to a period in his infancy. The corn laws were repealed in 1849, but the issue was still a contentious one when he was growing up. It can be safely assumed that he is reflecting the views and experience of his late respected father as well as his own; and the same may be said of his comment on another much debated rural topic:

What does the extension of the allotments mean, but that land must return to the working man, seeing how readily the proprietary class avail themselves of it.

We have an independent but hard-working, practical farmer, if anything more in sympathy with the labourer than the landowner. The final comment in his only known public statement: 'I have no desire to appear in print but to avoid recriminations', suggests the guarded attitude of a private man, consistent perhaps with a wish not to be known or named as one who, with his wife, gave hospitality and care to the dying author.

How Jefferies got to know the Brooks is of course a matter for speculation. It may have been a chance meeting, or through his Sussex relations, the Baxters of Lewis.² But we shouldn't forget that Jefferies was a prominent agricultural journalist, broadly conservative and supportive of the farming and sporting interests, while in favour of practical measures to improve the labourer's lot. His first country books were widely reviewed in farming and sporting journals and in the popular press. Perhaps the friendship began with a letter to Jefferies, from 'Squire' Brook or his son. Like Jefferies' father, John was a descendent from a prosperous and well regarded farming dynasty, carrying on in a smaller way but still independent: a traditionalist sceptical of new fashions and theories. He would have relished the contrasting portraits of 'The Man of Progress' and 'An Agricultural Genius – Old Style' in *Hodge and His Masters*. The friendship could have begun a year or two earlier than the *Wood Magic* inscription of May 1881. Perhaps the notebook entry of June 1879 marks the first visit.

It seems quite possible that Jefferies' acquaintance with John, Alice and 'Squire' Brook, and their home and estates in Bexhill, provided material for

² John Baxter played cricket for Sussex and in 1816 wrote the first rules for cricket: *Lambert's Cricketer's Guide*. He was also interested in farming and in later life took it up on a small scale at Oaklands near Ifield, experimenting with new farming methods and exhibiting models of new farmyards and buildings at the Great Exhibition, 1851. He wrote various books on agriculture, including the *Library of Agricultural Knowledge*. With Squire Brook and John Brook, both passionate about cricket and farming, the Baxters are likely to have introduced Jefferies to the Brooks.

some of his later writings, both on agriculture and nature. Jefferies' earlier portrayal of squires, in *Hodge* for example, is based on a sound understanding of their social and economic circumstances, but we don't have the sense of a living original, known intimately, as we so often do with his farmers, labourers, gamekeepers and poachers. In 1878 when Jefferies undertook a book on shooting for Longmans he also proposed a work on the history of the English squire, and there are subsequent notebook entries on the subject. Whether unfinished or abandoned it never appeared, but there are published and unpublished writings that clearly relate to it. Much of the unpublished material was included by S.J. Looker in various anthologies, a long section in *The Old House at Coate* under the title 'The Squire at Home' from a chapter heading in the projected work. Here we have a distinctive voice, a staunch defender of the status quo against the claims and proposals of the land reform movement, who vehemently rebuts the charge of being an obstacle to progress, having tried and tested all the new ideas – steam ploughing, drainage, guano, shorthorns, education etc. – and is ready to try any others that can improve not only his own fortunes but those of the farmers and labourers and their families whose affairs he knows as well as his own. He declares he is prepared to consent to try any new proposal, except communism, and his own abolition.

In 'An English Deer Park' the main interest is in the natural environment, described with the minute detail, colour and sensitivity of the later essays. But the character of the squire is central, and he is cast from the same mould as 'The Squire at Home'. He has the same intimate knowledge of all his subjects, whose comings and goings he observes from the window of the gun room in the old manor house. 'A man should be straight like a gun' is a saying they have in common. However, like Squire Brook, his title derives from character and conduct rather than from ownership. He is a tenant and land steward, but 'It is he who rules the park. The labourers and keepers call him the "squire".'

Perhaps the closest we get to Squire Brook is in the portrait of James Thardover in 'A King of Acres', published in *Chambers's Journal* in January 1884.³ We have first a detailed description of the man, weatherbeaten, ace

³ 'An English Deer Park' did not appear till after Jefferies' death. It came out in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, a New York publication, in October 1888. It was not included in Jefferies' own list of essays he intended to reprint in his next collection after *The Open Air*, but was included by his widow in *Field and Hedgerow*. When working on the Bibliography this gave rise to the possibility that, like 'The Squire at Home', it was unfinished or unedited MS perhaps intended for the book on the history of the English squire, forwarded by Mrs. Jefferies or Besant to the American

reddened by the wind, grey clad and dusty booted, eyes compared to the blue and grey of the field veronica, standing bolt upright with his arms on the gate (straight like a gun), sharply appraising the performance of the ploughing teams at work on the field before him. A little later we have references to the harriers chasing a hare, and the 'yowping' of the beagles, strongly suggestive of a Bexhill setting. In the second section Jefferies makes clear that this man's claim to rule the estate is based on grounds more firm than mere ownership:

Deed, seal, and charter give but a feeble hold compared with that which is afforded by labour. James Thardover held his lands again by right of labour; he had taken possession of them once more with thought, design, and actual work... He had laid his hands as it were on every acre. Those who work, own. There are many who receive rent who do not own; they are proprietors, not owners.

And like 'The Squire at Home' he has energetically supported 'All the great agricultural movements of the last thirty years.' But we hear a voice independent of Jefferies' own in his outright condemnation of steam ploughing of which he (Jefferies) on the whole approved: 'It reduced the land to a dead level. They had previously been thrown into 'lands', with a drain trench on each side. On this dead level water did not run off quickly, and the growth of weeds increased.' We have his trenchant views on all the rural topics of the day; on shorthorns, hiring fairs, the scientific movement ('nothing came of it'), the improvement of cottages and farm buildings, the coming of the village school with the Education Act – which he enthusiastically funded and supported. He had backed every innovation up to the recently introduced silo system. 'It was thus that he laid hold on his lands with the strongest of titles – the work of his own hands.' But still farms were failing and becoming vacant.

magazine to promote his reputation there. A more recently discovered letter discounts this possibility. Jefferies had in fact been approached by Edmund Gosse, then editor, to contribute to *The Century*:

14 Victoria Road | Eltham | Kent| March 11th [1884 or 5 – probably the latter]

Dear Sir, | Some years since you were so kind as to write me to contribute to the Century. I had the pleasure of writing a paper, & I have quite recently heard that it is now in process of illustration. That being the case (& as it seems necessary to have M.S. ready a long time in advance for your magazine) may I enquire whether the Century would accept further papers from me? If so I can make a suggestion as I should be pleased to consider with a view to work on any ideas that you may have. I remain | Faithfully Yours | Richard Jefferies | Edmund W. Gosse Esq.

This could only refer to 'An English Deer Park', and pushes the date of composition back to the early 1880s. Why publication was delayed still further to over a year after Jefferies' death is far from clear, but obviously he didn't feel he could pre-empt journal publication by including it in his new collection. The essay was reprinted by Edward Thomas in *The Hills and the Vale*, Duckworth, 1909.

Against this background of struggle and hardship in the years of depression the final section, 'A Ringfence: Conclusion', is one of Jefferies' loveliest celebrations of English landscape and natural life in its colour, richness and profusion, and the mental and spiritual relief it gave him and could give to his careworn compatriots. All these creatures and above all the human inhabitants within the estate boundary, are dependent on the Squire – his decisions, whether about felling a wood or founding a school, affect the whole. His role is to conserve and preserve something of infinite value, and Jefferies makes the cogent point that he could not do so without income from outside: 'the labour and time of the many-handed operatives in mill, factory and workshop went to aid in maintaining these living pictures.' But yet again the estate has a value beyond money. Every mill worker could trace his origins to the land, 'the fountain head from which the spring of life flows.' Jefferies concludes that all help should be given to assist the King of Acres, and the farmers and labourers, 'against the adverse influences which press so heavily on English Agriculture.'

All three pieces were probably written in the early 1880s, a period of transition in Jefferies' writing, when he was ceasing to be a reporter or commentator, expert on farming matters and field sports, or a historian, and becoming a literary artist. Whether he quite saw himself in this way is debatable, but his many comparisons between literature and painting (a notable example in 'The King of Acres') suggests this was a conscious process. Jefferies too is in transit between the partisan views of *The Times* letters and the more speculative and radical ideas in *The Story of My Heart* and essays like 'After the Country Franchise' – though even in the latter he admits: 'we should have to preserve a few landowners, if only to have parks and woods.' Hence in the 'squire' essays we have not only both modes present, but in the central figure a reconciliation of the two: the ideal countryman who is at once reformer and preserver, progressive and traditionalist, on friendly and respectful terms with all ranks of society in his care, whose leadership is based on commitment and labour rather than ownership or wealth. Like any creative writer Jefferies would have drawn on many sources in this portrayal, but it is I think a reasonable assumption that the Brooks, the squire and his 'yeoman' son, (and perhaps Alice was the model for Mary the artist in 'The King of Acres') and their home and land at Bexhill, were prominent among them.

George Baxter

Jean Saunders



George Baxter (31 July 1804- 11 Jan. 1867) was born in Lewes, the son of John Baxter (1781-1858). John was a respected printer and publisher, best known for publishing *Baxter's Bible* and the *Sussex Agricultural Express* that he founded with George's younger brother William (1808-1873). George was a pioneer in the field of colour printing and in Northampton Square, Clerkenwell – George's home and workshop from 1844-1860 – a blue plaque bears memory to this creative and remarkable man. In an article in the *Brighton Gazette* dated 3 April 1834, it states that George Baxter's 'new art ... will, in all probability, cause a revolution in the style of publishing.' In the article attention is drawn to Mudie's *British Birds*, the first book to include two vignettes of Baxter's work in 1834. George trained as a lithographer and engraver but developed a process to produce colour prints from blocks and plates using oil-based inks. He wanted to produce good, inexpensive prints and to imitate oil painting. He said of his prints, 'that while their artistic beauty may procure for them a place in the Royal palaces throughout Europe, the prices at which they are retailed introduces them to the humblest cottages.' Richard Jefferies might not have agreed with this last point. As much as he appreciated art, Jefferies wrote in 1884:

The proposed Society for the Encouragement of Art Culture in the Homes of the Poor was to furnish the labourer's cottage with an approved selection of prints and engravings from the works of the great masters ... Of all the odd

movements that have been started in the last few years, this for ornamenting the cottage with works of art is the most grotesque. To suppose that any man is likely to be the better because a picture is graciously hung on his walls above the heads of squalling children, and over the table scarcely supplied with bread, is indeed a monstrous perversion of common-sense.¹

But where does Richard Jefferies fit into this story? As is well known, Richard was ‘fostered’ by his Uncle Thomas and Aunt Ellen Harrild at Shanklin Villa, Sydenham, from about the age of four to eight or nine, returning to Coate every summer for a month.² Aunt Ellen was the sister of Richard’s mother who was struggling to cope with the death of their first daughter (Ellen), a baby (Harry), a young child (Richard) and life as a farmer’s wife.

There were strong ties between the Harrilds and Baxters: two of Uncle Thomas Harrild’s siblings married children of John Baxter – Mary Harrild (1806–1871) married George Baxter in 1827, whilst in 1835 Robert Harrild junior married Mary Baxter (their fathers, Robert Harrild senior and John Baxter, were good friends; both prominent in the printing/publishing business and both shared a passion for cricket). Even though Richard continued to visit his aunt as a young man, it seems that George Baxter does not feature in his life. Yet, from 1860, George and Mary lived but a couple of streets away from Shanklin Villa at The Retreat. Both houses had been funded by Robert Harrild senior for his children. The Retreat (pictured on the next page and designed by George) was of unusual architecture and had a domed roof.³

In a letter to Aunt Ellen dated 25 January 1867, Richard Jefferies wrote:

I enclose a slip of print which I cut from the *Pall Mall Gazette* the other evening which I think must refer to that gentleman of which death, and relationship to uncle, through marriage, you so lately informed me.⁴

Until recently, the identity of this person was unknown but a search in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 17 Jan. 1867 revealed that:

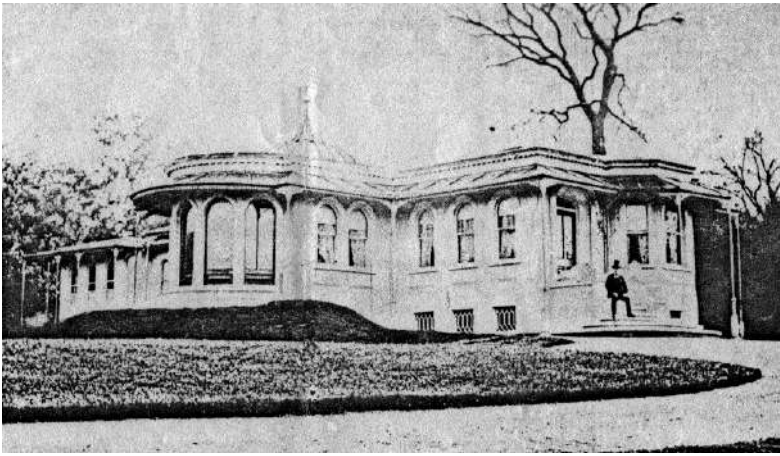
The death is announced of Mr. George Baxter, the inventor and patentee of oil-colour printing. The deceased gentleman was sixty-two years of age. Some time ago he met with an accident, which proved the remote cause of the attack of apoplexy from which he died.

¹ *The Dewy Morn*, Richard Jefferies (London: Richard Bentley, 1891), Ch.XLVII, p.338.

² *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, by Walter Besant (London: Chatto & Windus, 1888), p.27.

³ In a letter to Cyril Wright dated 20 Dec. 1984, K.R. Cox (Chief Librarian for the London Borough of Lewisham) wrote that Mary and daughter Charlotte lived at The Retreat after George’s death. By 1881 the house was renamed Leacroft and it appeared to be used as a nurses’ home. The house was demolished around 1904 when Collingtree Road was built across the garden.

⁴ *Richard Jefferies’ Letters to Aunt Ellen* (Faringdon: Petton Books, 2009), p.28.



The Retreat, Peak Hill, Sydenham

The Sussex Express (15 Jan. 1867) for which brother William Baxter was proprietor, reported more information about George's death:

Upwards of two months ago he was getting into an omnibus at the Mansion House, London, just as another omnibus drove up, when either the pole of the carriage or the horses' heads struck him with great violence at the back of his head, and at the same time trod upon his heels and cut his boot. The guard of the omnibus into which he was getting, seeing the danger, forced him up the steps into the carriage door, when he appeared to lose the use of his hands and power of thought, for at the same time he believed he let fall a parcel of money – about £27, which he never recovered, although some of the notes have been traced into Wales. Next day he was partially paralysed, and suffered from concussion of the brain, for which he was being medically treated, but on Thursday night apoplexy set in and he died next day.



We do not know how Aunt Ellen reported the death to Richard but his reply suggests that he never met George Baxter. The Harrilds and Baxters were nearly all involved in the printing/publishing world and Uncle Thomas's own printing company was responsible in 1851 for printing *Baxter's Pictorial Key to the Great Exhibition* (forming a Companion to the Official Catalogue) and *Visitors' Guide to London*. George had a stand at the exhibition, pictured on the previous page, as did the Harrilds.

No doubt, as a young man, Richard would have enjoyed talking to George about his pioneering work if they had met. Baxter's first colour print (around 1830) – depicting three butterflies: a peacock, a marbled white and a white admiral – might well have been admired by Richard.



Richard was well acquainted with George's younger brother William along with the latter's children who lived in Lewes and were around Richard's age (unlike George's children who were 10-20 years older). There are two known letters from Richard to Aunt Ellen referring to the Baxters at Lewes. On 21 June 1868 he wrote from Coate:

So [Wynne] Baxter is married at last – if you write to him or his lady, or stop – you'd better wait till you see him – then give him congratulations from me, not that they are worth anything but it shows an interest and I do take an interest in Wynne's progress through the world. How things chop and change in a few years – I remember running about the Lewes downs with the young Baxters and pelting each other with pieces of putty blown through tin tubes, and now he's married.⁵

⁵ *op. cit.*, *Richard Jefferies' Letters*, p.54.

Richard kept in touch with Wynne (who was a lawyer) and visited him on 7 September 1870 to obtain papers for his trip to Brussels. His letter of that date from a hotel in Hastings to Aunt Ellen read:

I reached Lewes at 4 and found Wynne at home. He wrote me out two certificates of identity and refused payment. I thought it kind – there is some trouble in fulfilling all the formalities. Whilst I was there about an hour Mr. Baxter senr. arrived from Croydon – much to Wynne’s astonishment.⁶

The Mitzman biography of George Baxter⁷ might explain why Richard never had contact with this illustrious man. It appears that George quarrelled with nearly everyone and there was a major rift with his brother William, made worse on the death of their father in 1858. After a period of ‘fame and glory’ George Baxter’s business started to flounder, debts accumulated, and by 1860 he decided to retire – the business was bankrupt by 1865. None of this improved his mood and he allowed no one into The Retreat apart from his son and daughters. His wife was completely cut off from her own family. Other biographers described Baxter as a deeply religious man, a good husband and father, and of a kindly and charitable nature. But he didn’t suffer fools gladly, was quick-tempered, difficult to work with, and a perfectionist. ‘His ability in business matters was unfortunately, as it often happens, in inverse ratio to his talent as an artist; and thus he was often victimised by those who professed to guide and direct his pecuniary affairs.’⁸ Walter Spencer recounts that ‘Baxter was ... too conscientious for this sinful world.’⁹ He used the most expensive materials and wanted his prints to last forever. Foolishly Baxter granted licences to several London art firms to produce prints in association with his name. Their prints were of poor quality, cheaply produced with inferior colours that most buyers could not distinguish from Baxter’s high quality work. Spencer writes: ‘How trashy these imitations appear to-day! ... Almost in a day after poor Baxter granted these fatal licences he lost the whole of his business.’¹⁰

There is an interesting letter from George Baxter dated 18 November 1858 reproduced in the Mitzman biography.¹¹ In it George explains why he didn’t attend his father’s funeral and the circumstances that had led to the huge rift between the two brothers. It appears that there was no animosity between George and his father but William was made the executor of their

⁶ *ibid*, p.65.

⁷ *George Baxter and the Baxter Prints* by Max E. Mitzman (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1978).

⁸ *The Sussex Express*, 15 January 1867, of which brother William was proprietor.

⁹ *Forty Years in my Bookshop*, Walter T. Spencer, (Constable 1923), p.161.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.164.

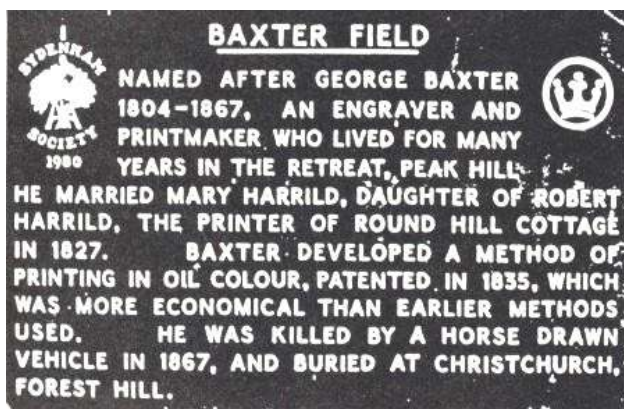
¹¹ *op. cit.*, *George Baxter and the Baxter Prints*, pp.59-60.

father's will. John Baxter was upset at the rift between his two sons and wanted George to forgive his younger brother. George blamed William's wife as much as anything for the bad feeling and recounts an incident when his brother and sister-in-law Anne visited Mary and himself. Anne had one of her tantrums and had to be bundled off on a train by her husband. William returned 'beaming with joy' at his wife's departure and offered apologies for her behaviour. George believed that his brother was also 'much chagrined' because he was not invited to the funeral of Robert Harrild senior (Uncle Thomas's father and George's father-in-law) in 1853 or to that of Robert's wife later that same year. George attributed this to his brother's worsening behaviour as executor, which had nothing to do with the outcome of the will, but more to do with matters of decorum, and sensitivity which he found lacking.

However it is a mystery why George isolated himself from the world not long after his retirement in Sydenham. Mitzman writes:

Baxter ... had been received by kings and princes, and his work had been admired by the highest in the land, but having quarrelled with his friends and relatives, he died a lonely, embittered and disappointed man.¹²

Reading between the lines, George Baxter appears to be suffering from depression. Perhaps there was more to his accident than meets the eye and to lose £27 at a time of great financial hardship must have been an added blow.



However his prints carried on bringing pleasure to many with large collections held at the Victoria and Albert Museum and at art galleries around the world. If George could have known the esteem with which he was held, his mood might have been lifted. For example, he would have

¹² *ibid*, p.61.

been delighted to know that he is remembered in Sydenham where a small recreation ground was named Baxter Field. A plaque was erected there by the Sydenham Society in 1980 (pictured on previous page). A Baxter Society, was formed in 1983, following a very successful exhibition of Baxter's work at Reading Museum and Art Gallery.

As a postscript, and to demonstrate further close ties between the Harrilds and Baxters, Frederick Harrild (1854–1937) is given as the source of the photograph on the Wikipedia page for George Baxter (reproduced on p.125). Frederick was Aunt Ellen and Uncle Thomas's nephew – Horton Harrild's son – who also lived a stone's throw from Shanklin Villa at Newark Lodge. Richard is known to have been playmates with Horton's children, particularly Horthy (1847–1937). In 1880 Frederick married William Baxter's daughter, Edith Warner Baxter (1859–1931). Horthy and Frederick both worked at the famous printing company their grandfather set up. By coincidence or good planning, after their marriage (in Kingston), Frederick and Edith lived less than a mile away from Richard and Jessie Jefferies in Surbiton/Long Ditton who lived there from 1877–1882. It seems that their childhood friendship continued – still in existence is a copy of *World's End* (1877) inscribed 'To Frederick Harrild Esq. with the compliments of the author.'¹³ The birth of their babies Phyllis Jefferies in December 1880 and (Edyth) Genista Harrild about eight months later must have increased their bonds. Frederick was a good soul and, no doubt, Richard would have got on well with him. A tribute to Frederick includes this statement: 'In particular the welfare of [the firm's] employees was the concern of his kindly and sympathetic nature, and he was responsible, more than any member of the family, for the traditionally good relationship between the proprietors and their workpeople.'¹⁴

Interestingly, there is also a connection with the Groombridge family and Richard's 'Josephine with the beautiful eyes' (see RJS newsletter – Spring 2016, pp.23-6). Horthy married Josephine's sister whilst Frederick's son, Fred (an architect), designed a house in Worthing for the Groombridges.

¹³ Robin Harrild inherited the book and supplied useful information about the family, for which I am most grateful. Robin is Frederick and Edith Harrild's great grandson and a direct descendant of both John Baxter and Robert Harrild senior – their great great great grandson.

¹⁴ *The House of Harrild (1801-1948)* by Edward Liveing (London: Harrild & Sons Ltd., 1949), p.46.

John William North and Richard Jefferies

Steve P. Milton

Based on a talk given to the Richard Jefferies Society in Swindon in December 2003.



Most readers of Richard Jefferies will know something of his friendship with the artist John William North from the references in Walter Besant's *Eulogy* published in 1888.

John North was born in Fulham on New Year's Day 1842, second son of Charles and Fanny. Charles made a modest living from a draper's shop just off Fulham Broadway and a growing family was beginning to place an increasing burden on the meagre family finances. It was here in Fulham that John spent his early years among an extended family of uncles and aunts and received a simple education. From the age of eight, North spent extended summer holidays on Uncle Gathard's farm in Hertfordshire

where he explored and sketched the local landscape and gained an understanding of rural life. North's talent for drawing was obvious from an early age and it seems that his parents saved enough to enrol him at a local art school. Unlike his great friend, the artistic luminary Fred Walker, he never trained along the lines followed at the Royal Academy Schools and, perhaps as a consequence, he was never an adherent to convention or a master of the figure. However, by the age of eleven he was completing competent watercolours—*The Thames at Wandsworth* now in the collection of the Museum of London illustrates this development.

In 1858, at the age of sixteen, North was apprenticed to the wood engraver Josiah Whymper at his workshop in Canterbury Place, Lambeth. There, North worked as an illustrator, producing drawings for the woodblock. North's illustrations began to appear in a wide variety of publications including those of the Religious Tract Society and the SPCK. At Canterbury Place, North became friendly with his master's son Edward and the two made walking trips together. One such trip brought the two young men to West Somerset in 1860 where they explored the area described by Richard Jefferies 23 years later in *Red Deer* and 'Summer in Somerset'. By 1864, North had established a reputation as one of the finest landscape illustrators of the 1860s, his work appearing regularly in the popular periodicals of the time including: *Good Words*, *Once a Week* and *The Sunday Magazine*. However, his finest illustrations are to be found in the expensive gift books produced by the Dalziel Brothers: *A Round of Days* (1866), *Wayside Posies* (1867) and (in the same year) *Jean Ingelow's Poems*.

By 1868, North had turned aside from illustration to make his living as an artist, principally at that time in watercolour. He was spending more and more time in Somerset, lodging at Halsway Manor, a crumbling C15th Ham stone house nestled under the western flank of the Quantock hills between Crowcombe and Bicknoller. Here he worked with George John Pinwell and later Fred Walker, both of whom he had met while they too were apprenticed with Whymper.

It was in Somerset that North began to develop the idiosyncratic landscape style most typified in his later exhibition watercolours. However, in the early 1870s, his style shows clearly his training as an illustrator with closely observed scenes in what has been described by Christopher Newell as a *rectilinear* form. These early works have a highly finished, almost enamelled quality, often with bright colour and the meticulous detail of the earlier Pre-Raphaelites. If the influence of the PRB can be traced in the manner of his works, in subject he may be seen to follow Birket Foster –

North's early training had involved making copies of his works. Swiftly though, North moved away from this early derivative style – becoming more distinctively original. The lack of formality – most apparent in his later work – may have been a consequence of technical limitation (marked in figure and sky), however, the unique poetic tone of his landscapes derives from a meticulous technique all of his own. A fascinating description of North's technique is provided by Hubert Herkomer in his Slade Lectures of 1893. North was rapidly asserting his own identity, moving away from a detailed 'literal' style to a technique that creates the *impression* of great detail; detail that proves illusive on close examination. His method was slow and deliberate – it could take several months to finish an exhibition canvas, the surfaces of which, according to Walker, were 'wrought with gem-like care.' Herbert Alexander describes North's approach with great perception:

North's interpretation of nature was like that of a poet. He did not sit down, like the average landscape painter, in picturesque scenery and arrange it improvingly; he waited until an entrancing moment in the passage of light or some human episode happily related to its surroundings awoke in his heart the ecstasy which is the poetic state. Then no sacrifice of time or labour was too great in the searching of nature to aid his revelation. Transparent colour, impalpable tone, illusive form distil a quintessence from life's beauty that dissolves like great music into the breadth of the eternal spirit.

North painted nature 'up-close' – choosing always the natural tangle and spontaneity of the living hedgerow and woodland above the formality of the classical landscape style. He always painted in the open air, often enduring inclement weather in order to capture fleeting light effects and to obtain the natural colour and tones of a scene. He would spend many days at a chosen painting ground, occasionally leaving the unfinished canvas at a nearby cottage. Later he began to use huts that could be drawn by horse from place to place or located permanently in favoured spots (such as the wooded Luxborough Valley above Rodewater). North's landscapes began to appear regularly at the Old Watercolour Society's annual exhibitions, on the walls of the influential Grosvenor and New Galleries and later at the pre-eminent Royal Academy exhibitions. He was elected an Associate of the RWS in 1871, becoming a full member in 1884. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1893 but significantly, he was never elevated to the rank of Royal Academician.

The works of North, Pinwell, Walker, Lionel Smythe and Robert Macbeth became influential in the 1870s and the group is now known as *The Idyllists* or *The Idyllic School*. The influence of the *Idyllists* and their

followers (including Herkomer, Luke Fildes and Frank Holl) was not confined to the shores of Britain – Van Gogh refers to his admiration for this group in his letters to his brother Theo. On the face of it, the term *Idyllist* suggests that these artists idealised or romanticised rural life, presenting an idyllic version of an often-harsh reality. The label is attractive, but it is certainly inadequate if used as the sole context by which North's work is considered. While there is a quiet, contemplative and poetic tone in many of his works they are almost completely free of the overt sentimentality that was prevalent in the late Victorian period. North acquired a great sympathy for the plight of the agricultural labouring class and he sought to portray life as it was played out before him. His canvasses are populated with wood-gatherers, gleaners, gamekeepers, gypsies and reapers – the people of the countryside.

It is interesting that a truly coherent *Idyllist* style never did develop during the lifetime of Pinwell and Walker for both died of consumption in 1875. Today the *Idyllists* are acknowledged as the first awakening of the *social realism* movement.

In Somerset, North found a remnant of an ancient feudal society – a world that was changing as mechanisation and the Game Laws brought hardship for farm labourers. Many of his paintings reflect on this theme; recording a way of life that must have seemed archaic even in his own time. By reflecting this forgotten world, North too can seem old-fashioned and nostalgic. Closer inspection reveals a complexity and depth for which North is rarely acknowledged. As he moved away from the constraints that illustration imposed, the narrative in his work became more subtle or replaced with a more obscure symbolism. Alexander described North as a 'poet-painter' and the titles of his works are littered with fragments from Blake, Spenser, Shakespeare, Pindar, Fontaine, Voltaire and others. Often these literary fragments help to reveal the feeling that North is seeking to convey. Frequently, there is a subtle dialogue between the artist and the viewer – a sense that North is seeking to express to us a purely emotional or, perhaps, spiritual response to the landscape. Like Jefferies, North imbues his landscapes with a mystical quality – deeper truths are glimpsed. For North, the *Idyllic* state is a transitory moment when heart and mind resonate in harmony with the natural landscape.

During the later part of the 1870s and during the first years of the 1880s North divided his time between Somerset, Algeria (where he built a home) and his London studios. After his marriage to a local farmer's daughter, Selina Weetch, at Bicknoller Church in 1884, the couple settled at Beggearnhuish House near Washford in West Somerset and his trips to

London started to become less frequent. Within 15 years Selina was dead and North moved with six children to Newland House near Billbrook, then to Withycombe and finally to Stamborough, a remote hamlet on the edge of Exmoor where he died in 1924.

John North and Richard Jefferies had much in common. They both came from lower-middle class backgrounds and neither received an expensive education – indeed they were largely self-taught from any book that came to hand. They had inquiring radical minds, unconstrained by conventional Victorian values. Both understood the reality of country life and sympathised with those who lived it. North was a fervent campaigner on behalf of the agricultural labouring class, championing their cause in the national and local press. He opposed the enclosure of common lands on the Quantocks under the Game Laws and he campaigned for decent rural sanitation and for social housing. Jefferies wrote articles and essays on similar themes. North was Liberal in both conviction and politics but his sympathy for the plight of the agricultural labourer came from direct first-hand knowledge and observation and not from any fervent political conviction. Alexander states that, for North, fighting the battles of the agricultural labourer was a ‘labour of love, and he called it his recreation’. This sympathy is greatly evident in his pronouncement before the start of WWI:

And if Germany were to conquer England, I don't see that it would matter, for if, as you say, she is so splendidly organised she might improve the state of England's agricultural labourers, which could not be worse than it is now.

A little of Jefferies' spirit is clearly evident in that remark (North later changed his view and supported the war). But most significantly, North and Jefferies shared a similar emotional response to the landscape.

There is an entry in a notebook kept by North's friend and biographer Herbert Alexander that confirms that Joseph Comyns Carr introduced Richard Jefferies and John North in 1883 – the year that Jefferies made his visit to Somerset to research material for *Red Deer* and the posthumous ‘Summer in Somerset’. Alexander's notes were based on North's collection of letters (now lost) and recollections of conversations with the artist and there is no reason to doubt this assertion. Carr graduated in law from London University in 1869 and before becoming editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, he had worked as an art critic for the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the editorship of Frederick Greenwood. Jefferies claimed to have been associated with the *PMG* from the late 1860s, although it seems that a more formal relationship began around the middle of the next decade. North was a reader of the *PMG* (and occasional contributor) and

this may have been his first contact with Jefferies' writing.

Frederick Greenwood was an early admirer of Richard Jefferies, later recalling that he had been among the first to publish his work. He wrote: 'One or two of those beautiful books of J first came out of the Pall Mall, all to an exasperatingly small amount of attention, a not inconsiderable amount in itself, but so much less than their manifest worth and charm deserved as to be painfully disappointing to J's editor.' In a letter reproduced in Robertson Scott's *Story of the PMG*, Jefferies confirms that he very much valued Greenwood's advice indeed he offered him a share in the proceeds of *The Gamekeeper at Home* in acknowledgement of his considerable editorial assistance with the work. Greenwood was an influential figure and his support did much to advance Jefferies' career; setting him before a wider and more discerning audience – it was Greenwood who in 1878 urged the reluctant publisher George Bentley to give serious consideration to *Greene Ferne Farm*; he had previously declined Jefferies' work.

North was on close terms with Comyns Carr; they shared a mutual circle of friends and associates through their connections with the Grosvenor Gallery, the New Gallery, the Arts Club and, in Carr's case, the Rabelais Club. North had been a member of the Arts Club since 1874 and had been exhibiting at the Grosvenor Gallery since at least 1882 but more probably since it opened in 1876. Sir Coutts Lindsay had appointed Comyns Carr as press representative for the Grosvenor Gallery and later co-assistant along with Charles Halle. The Grosvenor became a focus for those artists opposed to the anachronistic values of the pre-eminent Royal Academy – an institution strongly denounced by Comyns Carr. However, in 1888 he and Halle left the Grosvenor Gallery to set up the rival New Gallery on Regent Street, taking with them Lindsay's greatest asset, Burne-Jones. North switched allegiance too and was appointed onto the 'Consulting Committee'. Through his friendship with the flamboyant Carr and by virtue of his associations with these artistic institutions, North entered the periphery of a circle that included George Meredith, Barbara Bodichon, Thomas Hardy, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Victor Hugo, Henry Irving, Henry James, R.L. Stevenson, Burne-Jones, Whistler, Charles Halle, Walter Besant and other influential *fin de siècle* figures of the Aesthetic movement.

As a friend and critic, Comyns Carr was well acquainted with North's West Somerset landscapes and aware of the fascination this remote part of England held for the *Idyllists*. In 1885, Carr published an essay on Frederick Walker who had stayed and worked with North at Halsway and Woolston. There is no record of Carr visiting Somerset but his interest in the area was

significant for it seems it was Carr who suggested that Jefferies make the trip to write a topographical article for the newly launched *English Illustrated Magazine*, of which Carr was editor (Treitel and Matthews have suggested that Carr financed the trip). North was persuaded to illustrate the article – a project that could have been of little commercial interest to North who at this time was approaching the zenith of his fame and wealth (from 1871 his exhibition paintings had been selling for over £200), so this may have been a favour for Carr (unless North was already an admirer of Jefferies). With the trip planned, it remained only for Carr to introduce Jefferies and North. The introduction was made and in June of 1883 Jefferies was in Somerset.

Richard Jefferies' visit to Somerset was a brief one, lasting maybe two weeks at most. However, it turned out to be a fruitful trip, producing material for *Red Deer*, 'Summer in Somerset' and other articles. He must have been in good health because during his short stay he was able to explore a large area stretching from West Bagborough on the eastern flank of the Quantock Hills (about 5 miles west of Taunton) across the Brendon Hills, along the Severn coast to Porlock Weir and beyond to Oareford on Exmoor – a distance of some 30 miles. Memorably, Jefferies walks the banks of the River Barle (a river well known to North) following its course from Dulverton to the ancient bridge at Tarr Steps and beyond. Dulverton lies on the southern flank of Exmoor some 12 miles inland from Porlock Weir. It is hard to trace the writer's steps using only the published texts as a guide and the narrative occasionally hops from place to place ignoring the inconvenience of distance or geography. For example, Jefferies *drifts* from Dulverton back to The Quantocks – a hard march of at least 16 miles.

It seems clear that Jefferies started his exploration of West Somerset from the Quantock Hills. The late Berta Lawrence recalled a conversation with North's daughter supporting the idea that Jefferies stayed with North while in Somerset and Alexander's notes appear to confirm this with a reference to a *visit* in this year. It would have been a convenient arrangement; Stogumber and Williton stations are both within an easy walk from Bicknoller where North had lodgings. Jefferies refers to Bicknoller in 'Summer in Somerset' describing the ancient cross and he clearly explored the area for a day or two making walks onto the Quantock ridge and into Holford Combe – a spot well known to North and to Wordsworth and Coleridge a hundred years before. His rambles in this area suggest he had a local guide – someone to point out the local antiquities and places of interest. For example, Jefferies refers to Walker's painting grounds (and specifically to Walker's work *The Plough*) and who



'In Holford Glen', from a drawing by J.W. North that illustrated Jefferies' essay 'Summer in Somerset' for *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Oct. 1887.



'Exford from the bridge', from a drawing by J.W. North that illustrated Jefferies' essay 'Summer in Somerset' for *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Oct. 1887.

would have known the location of these places other than North? The background of *The Plough* – a crumbling honey coloured quarry – can be found not more than a few hundred yards from Woolston where North and Walker had lodged some ten years before. Curdon Mill with its undershot wheel can be found on the road from Woolston to Stogumber and it, too, features in Jefferies' narrative and appears in one of North's accompanying illustrations.

From Bicknoller Jefferies seems to have travelled on through Williton, Billbrook (where Dragon Cross and Hotel are to be found) and Dunster to Minehead. From Minehead he explored the area around Selworthy before making for Porlock Weir where it appears he took or considered taking accommodation at the Anchor Hotel (Treitel and Matthews). He certainly explored the area around Porlock including the beautiful woodlands of the Holnicot estate and beyond to Cloutsham and Dunkery Beacon. From Porlock it is a steep climb but relatively short journey to Exford where much of the material for *Red Deer* was collected with the help of Arthur and Fred Heal of the Devon and Somerset staghounds. The beautiful account of the River Barle in 'Summer in Somerset' suggests that from Dulverton Jefferies then travelled back to the Quantock Hills and to West Bagborough, so it is quite possible that his trip to Somerset began and ended in the company of North.

The friendship lasted for the remaining years of Jefferies' life. It is known that North made at least two visits to Jefferies and his family. In a note made the day after his friend's death, North refers to a meeting 'four years earlier at Eltham' (although Jefferies was living in Brighton in 1883). There is only one surviving letter from North to Jefferies dating from March 1886. In the letter, North plans 'a further' trip to Crowborough (confirming a previous visit had been made) and discusses details of family illnesses and bereavements – here he also refers to Jefferies' previous letter that must have touched on his deteriorating health. The letter concludes with some observations on wildlife. The friendly and intimate tone is obvious. Alexander notes further correspondence in 1887 but sadly these letters are lost. Jefferies seems to have shared the feelings of friendship for he sent North inscribed editions of his later works that were still in existence at the time of writing (sadly, these are now lost).

On 14 August 1887 at 2.30 pm in the afternoon North knocked on the door of 'Sea View' Goring. No doubt he had been informed of Jefferies' final decline and was hurrying to be at his bedside. A tragic scene confronted North – a scene that moved him deeply. Jefferies had died some 12 hours



'On the Barle', from a drawing by J.W. North that illustrated Jefferies' essay 'Summer in Somerset' for *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Oct. 1887.

before his arrival at 2.30 am in the morning and his wife Jessie was in a state of great distress. North's account of the scene (written in the style of a letter to his wife – note the reference to *dear*) speaks for itself:

Monday, 15 August 1887

I went yesterday expecting to once more speak with him. I found him lying dead, twelve hours dead. I saw him with Mrs. Jefferies and their little Phyllis. A pitiful sight to see them kiss the poor cold face! God help them! The poor dear wife seemed to feel the change which death had brought upon the dear loved face almost more than all the rest. 'Oh, how he is changed! A few hours back he was himself. How can I bear it? But they tell me he will again look better.' When I tried to dissuade her from looking upon him she said: 'I MUST—I MUST; until he is taken away I must see him and kiss him each time. My Phyllis, you will never see your dear papa without kissing him?' 'No, no,' said the little one, and she had no fear in the presence of death. You know, dear, how hard life was with them. All through his last days his wife was with him day and night. She had no hired nurse; their only servant (a young country girl who behaved nobly throughout) was her only help. His long, long illness of six years (you remember how near death he looked when you saw him first at Eltham four years back) this long, wearisome time had almost persuaded many who knew him not intimately that this illness was partly imaginary. He has proved it otherwise. A soldier who in health and high spirits, and excitement, rides to what appears certain death is called a hero; glory and honours are heaped upon him; but what is that compared with years of fighting without cessation, and absolute certainty of defeat always present to the mind.

I asked Mrs. J if he had made a will. 'No surely it would have been useless; we have nothing. A woman singly, strong as I am, could rough it; but if something could be done for the children I shall be thankful.' I had to call at my framemakers's to put off an appointment. I told him roughly what had happened to me yesterday. He had never heard of J, knew nothing of his work; but he said, 'I shall be glad if anything can be done if you will put me down for two guineas.' You, being both country born and bred, and with a heart inside your body, have always, sometimes to my surprise, recognised and admired poor J's writing.

North then adds further notes, clearly written some time after the event:

Shall I tell you what I think and know, that in all our literature until now he has never had a rival, and it is most unlikely that he will ever be equalled. In a hundred years he will be more truly appreciated. The number of men who combine the love and knowledge of his subjects with the love and knowledge of literary work is more limited perhaps in this age than in any previous one. Few people of intelligence and refinement of heart and mind live completely enough in the comparative solitude of the country, and much, perhaps most of his work, will always be unintelligible to those who cannot exist in a

country house except it is full of frequently changing guests. I have been trying by a different art for thirty years – equal to almost the whole of his life on earth – to convey the idea to others of some such subjects, and I feel with shame that in the work of half a year I do not get so near the heart and truth of nature as he in one paragraph. With strict charge that it should not leave my hands Mrs. J lent me the proof of an article which appeared in Longman's Magazine in spring, 1886. It was the very last copy he wrote with his own hand. Since that time his wife wrote from his dictation. I will try to get it for you, but in the meantime read this quotation, which touched me greatly yesterday:– 'I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me – how they manage, birds and flower, without ME to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly, day by day.'

And this:–

'They go on without me, orchis flower and cowslip. I cannot number them all. I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet – flower and buds, and beautiful clouds that go over, with sweet rush of rain and burst of sun glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill.'

One thing I saw in his last notebooks: 'Three great giants are against me – Disease, Despair, and Poverty.' Almost his last intelligible words were: 'Yes, yes that is so. Help, Lord for Jesus' sake. Darling, good-bye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain.'

In the gentlest, sweet, soft, sunny rain he was born along the path to his grave in the grass; and when the last part of the service for the dead was read, well and solemnly, and we turned away leaving him forever on earth, the large tears of Heaven fell thick and fast, and over and over again came to me the saying, 'Happy are the dead that the rain rains on.' The modest home-made wreath of wild-wood clematis and myrtle my wife had sent, pleased me by happy symbolism for as the myrtle is, so will his memory be 'forever green.'

North concludes his eulogy with the following passages from Robert Burns' *Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson*:

Mourn, little harebells o'er the lea;
 Ye stately foxgloves, fair to see;
 Ye woodbines hanging bonilie,
 In scented bow'rs;
 Ye roses on your thorny tree,
 The first o' flow'rs.
 Mourn, Spring, thou darling of the year!
 Ilk cowslip cup shall keep a tear:
 Thou, Simmer, while each corny spear
 Shoots up its head,
 Thy gay, green, flow'ry tresses shear,

For him that's dead!

Having witnessed this deeply affecting scene, North wrote next day to the *Pall Mall Gazette* calling for donations to help the widow and the family. His appeal was published on Tuesday, 16 August 1887. An insight into the efforts made by North to discharge this last duty to his departed friend is provided by some surviving correspondence between North and Charles Churchill Osborne of De Vaux Place, Salisbury (Editor of the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*). In the letters we find that North was unaware that another fund was already in existence. This is probably a reference to the fund established by C.P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* that had pre-dated his own appeal by some months. If so, then North must have been unaware of Scott's friendship with and support for Jefferies. By the time of North's appeal Scott's fund stood at over £200 (Jefferies had stated his last annual earnings at only £50). It was Scott who had assisted Jefferies to submit an application to the Royal Literary Fund for relief of his immediate pecuniary crisis. Osborne himself had launched an appeal in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* and had obviously written to North making him aware of it. Various other funds are referred to in North's final published accounts – the *Langworthy Fund* being one.

In his letters to Osborne, North tells how he labours until the early hours personally answering every letter in connection with the Fund. Much of the Osborne correspondence concerns the choice of Trustees for the fund and various names are mentioned. Most seemed unwilling to take on this duty and North himself was not inclined to put himself forward. Some of those approached by Osborne (and indeed Osborne himself) seem to have been slightly suspicious of any undertaking associated with the radical, campaigning and Liberal supporting *Pall Mall Gazette*. It seems too, that Osborne first suggested to North the idea of a memorial bust in Salisbury Cathedral. After consulting Jessie, North replies enthusiastically: 'I can tell you that yesterday Mrs. Jefferies seemed more touched and pleased by the idea of recognition in this way in her and his native county than in any other means I heard.' It was Osborne too who suggested an application for a Civil List pension on behalf of the family and North encouraged the idea, inviting him to 'speedily draw up an independent petition to the Treasury.' North, never one to rely totally on others, took a personal interest in the application, personally calling on Louis Jessop M.P. considering 'the best way to influence the government is through the members of Parliament.'

On 27 August 1887 a letter from North appeared in the *Standard* referring to the Richard Jefferies Fund. This may have been an effort to

broaden support and free himself 'from the taint' of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In a letter the following Monday (29 August), North provides some biographical details for Osborne who seems to have been unaware of Jefferies' place of birth or personal circumstances. He adds a description of the writer's long illness. It is a detailed and graphic account – suggesting that their friendship had been of a frank and intimate nature. Indeed, in the same letter North adds that he was 'perhaps the nearest personal friend of Jefferies.' Among the other interesting fragments in this letter is a reference to an approach made by Mr. Arthur Kinglake of Taunton to Mrs. Jefferies seeking to offer a position to her domestic servant, Jennie Moss. Kinglake, who had also launched an appeal to assist Jessie and the children in the *Morning Post* was later instrumental in the commissioning of the marble memorial bust for Salisbury Cathedral by Margaret Thomas.

By September, North had secured the support of W.C. Alexander, banker, of 24 Lombard Street, London to act as treasurer of the Richard Jefferies Fund – Alexander himself had made a generous donation to the fund of £100. Still no Trustees had been found although plans were now in place for the disposal of the funds. The interest on the accumulated fund would be applied to Jessie, until the children came of age when the capital would be applied for their benefit. North had already arranged for £140 to be paid to Jessie to help with her immediate necessities. On Saturday 17 September 1887 at North's request, Jessie, Harold and Phyllis arrived at Begbearnhuish House in West Somerset. They would stay with North for several months (they were still there in January 1888) until the immediate financial situation was secure. This must have been of great comfort to the grieving widow. North busied himself making arrangements for the 12-year-old Harold's education, describing the young student as 'a handsome lad, very tall for his age with exceedingly fair hair and with plenty of vivacity and fairly well up in the three R's.' On Monday morning, 3rd October, Harold walked through the gates at West Somerset County School in Wellington. On Sunday 25 September Jessie received confirmation that the Treasury had made an award of £100 per annum from the Civil List. And so, within six weeks of Jefferies' death his family's financial worries were at an end. There is in this a tragic irony – Jefferies' last years had been spent eking out a meagre living and worrying what would happen to the family after his impending death.

With financial matters resolved, Jessie and North turned their thoughts to Jefferies' papers. Several publishers had agreed to republish articles in book form and Walter Besant had promised to write a memoir and preface for one such volume. He visited Jessie and North in Somerset during

October to look through the papers and it seems that the idea of a memoir was abandoned in favour of a full-blown biography – *The Eulogy*.

With Trustees now appointed – Besant, Alfred Buckley and C.J. Longman having agreed – North finally published a full statement of the consolidated accounts of the Richard Jefferies Fund on 1 January 1889. This fascinating account contains the names of all the subscribers to the Fund. The various appeals had raised a total of £1,514 that would provide an annuity of around £150 for Jessie and the family. This, augmented by the other pensions and earnings from the posthumous publications, secured for the family a comfortable income.

At the Royal Watercolour Society in 1888 North presented his own beautiful eulogy to Jefferies under the title, *Sir Bevis and the Wood Woman*—North using Bevis' ennobled title from *Wood Magic* which had appeared in 1881. This large exhibition watercolour on paper measuring 37" x 26" depicts a sunlit woodland scene in autumn—in the foreground beside a tall tree, a woman is gathering wood with a billhook in hand and on the right in the distance we see a small golden-haired child fighting off a swarm of bees; an incident that juxtaposes humour to the overall sombre mood (it is likely that the figures represent Jefferies' wife Jessie and her small daughter, Phyllis).



Sir Bevis and the Wood Woman

North must have started work on this painting shortly after his return from Jefferies' funeral and it was most probably set in the Luxborough valley above Washford – a favourite painting ground during this period, only a couple of miles from his home at Beggearnhuish. The work shows North at the height of his powers – the last leaves hang from the trees and the whole canvas is suffused with intense autumn hues. On the left is a stream or pond and on the horizon, below grey skies, we can see the soft outline of the Brendon Hills. There is an obvious symbolism – the rustic billhook, the woodman's equivalent to the scythe, can be seen as a symbol of death and yet although it glints in the autumn sun it seems somehow insignificant. The power that death holds over man seems scorned by nature's eternal regeneration. In *Sir Bevis* we have an example of the complexity in North's work – there is no simple reading. On the face of it, North presents a timeless autumn landscape with subordinate figures, but when we understand the context we begin to read the work differently. What we have is an expression of North's unaffected emotional response to Jefferies' death portrayed with a poetic beauty beyond words. The effect is almost supernatural in its evocation of his departed friend – we can almost sense his presence.

The elegiac *Sir Bevis and the Wood Woman* was not to be North's final involvement with Richard Jefferies. In July 1890, Arthur Kinglake issued another appeal – this time to support the erection of a memorial bust in Salisbury Cathedral. Margaret Thomas was the selected sculptor and North dutifully volunteered to be a member of the organising Committee. The other committee members were the Richard Jefferies Fund Trustees – Besant, Longman and Buckley together with Kinglake, North, Osborne, C.P. Scott, George Smith, Andrew Lang, Mr. Burdett-Coutts, Walter Pollack, Andrew Chatto, Ambrose Goddard, H. Rider Haggard and F.G. Heath. The cost of the bust, £150, was slow to materialise and in the end Kinglake himself made a generous donation that allowed the project to be completed. The bust was undertaken using the London Stereoscopic Company photograph North had obtained and was supervised by Jessie Jefferies and Walter Besant. The marble was completed in 1891 and was unveiled by Bishop Wordsworth on Wednesday, 9 March at noon on a stormy spring day. In 1925, a plaster copy of the bust was presented to the Salisbury City Council by Frederick Sutton a local confectioner and Mayor of Salisbury (having been obtained from Besant and the Society of Authors) – it then stood for over 50 years in the Committee Room of the Council Offices (where this scribe and great grandson of North sat for many hours under that distant gaze). The bust is currently on loan to the

Richard Jefferies Society and displayed at the museum at Coate [see below, photograph courtesy of Tom Saunders].



North lived on for another 25 years but as time passed he became something of an anachronism, increasingly peripheral and eventually forgotten. His fortune lost through a failed papermaking enterprise, he died on 20 December 1924 in Stamborough in the heart of the Luxborough valley. Near the end of his life he reflected that of all his achievements, the help he had provided to Jefferies' family had been the single thing which had brought him most contentment.

Among the papers that he left is a small article of North's reflections on art, from which the following lines convey something of his philosophy and spirit:

'Art is a translation of a poem in the language of nature.'

'A true worker in any art is a minister of the very oldest form of religious worship...'

'Originality in Art is the expression of unaffected emotion.'

Perhaps it is in the last of these we have the clearest insight into the minds and work of both Richard Jefferies and John William North.



'Crowcombe', from a drawing by J.W. North that illustrated Jefferies' essay 'Summer in Somerset' for *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Oct. 1887.

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Richard Jefferies: the Tender Mercies of a Great Naturalist

Arthur Harvie

First published in *The Humane Review*, 7 July 1901, pp. 162-177 (*The Humane Review* was edited by H.S. Salt). Reverend Arthur E. Harvie (1869-1905), a vegetarian and anti-vivisectionist, was a Unitarian Minister at Kettering Road Church, Northampton at the time of his premature death from a heart attack. He gave a lecture on 'Richard Jefferies, High Priest of Nature' to the 'Northampton Thursday Evening Chat' that was reported in *The Northampton Mercury*, Friday, 11 Nov. 1904.

It is scarcely probable that the student of zoology will find himself directed to master any one of Richard Jefferies' works, nor will the scientific botanist of to-day be likely to turn to his pages with the hope of finding assistance in solving the problems of his department; the horticultural colleges and the professors of agriculture have never, so far as my knowledge goes, accepted as text-books *Hodge and His Masters*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *The Life of the Fields*, or any of the score of works that stand under the name of our English Thoreau; yet in every true sense of the word Richard Jefferies was a great naturalist, and the system or the man that denies him that title stands self-condemned. For, what is a naturalist, and what is great, and what was Jefferies? A naturalist by any rational interpretation of the term is one who has an intimate knowledge of the phenomena of animal and vegetable existence, who is well acquainted with the changing appearances of land and sky, studies the life of bird and insect, and in addition has the power of imparting his knowledge, impressions, and theories to others. The great naturalist is surely he who has a commanding range, whose knowledge extends from the least to the greatest, whose experience is lifelong, whose energy and patience unrelaxing, whose narrative convincing, whose enthusiasm boundless. Jefferies from almost babyhood was a painstaking observer of that abounding life of the fields, brooks and downs with which he came in closest contact. Nothing escaped his eye, and as his power developed there was scarcely any form of naturalistic lore with which he did not deal. His graphic pen sets before us, as no one before him did and no one after has done, those sights and sounds which the town-dweller never tires of imbibing through eye or ear, through printed page or tinted canvas. That his experience is limited (as far as his writings are concerned) to England,

that he did not adopt modern scientific methods, nor accept wholesale the most recent theories, may in the minds of some negative the claim that he should be considered amongst the greatest of nature students; but those who have learned to love nature as the result of his having touched their blinded eyes will probably consider that his first-hand acquaintance with his subject, his heroically patient observation, and his life-long devotion to his almost unlimited field of research amply compensate for any forsaking of the methods of the laboratory and the maker of text-books.

Jefferies lived in the country, knew it and loved it; he was blessed in addition with three gifts seldom before combined – a pair of eyes which nothing escaped, a memory which preserved the smallest details for reproduction at any distance of time, and a graphic power of description which in his own department still remains unique. For museums and stuffed specimens he cared nothing, for German text-books even less: living nature afforded him ample material, and his classified lists of species were in his heart or nowhere.

Were rural England to-morrow to be swept away by some unheard of catastrophe, it would be possible with Richard Jefferies' works at hand for imagination to reconstruct its sweet scenes and reproduce its life and song. Of no other writer, living or dead, indeed of no collection of writers could this be said save of him, our own great nature lover and nature poet. It cannot but be interesting to notice his relationship to the world of conscious sub-human life whose doings he so ably depicted, and of whose existence he has been to some extent both interpreter and revealer.

The writer of *The Story of My Heart* was a man capable of very deep affections; although few human beings succeeded in evoking them, their presence gives a tone to those volumes that deal with the problems of agricultural life, and the charge of misanthropy never proved so false as when applied to him. By nature he was shy, reserved, difficult of speech, shrinking from unknown personalities and calculated to appear morose, but so lavish was his affection that it went out in overflowing measure to sea and sky, land and flowers; no one who has read his spiritual biography will cavil at this assertion, or fail to understand the feeling of pity for his unnecessarily lonely life.

What was his relation to the living creatures in that world with which he seemed most familiar? How did the animals, the birds, the fishes present themselves to his mind and heart? The unsatisfactoriness of our reply will not be removed by withholding it a moment longer, and so, though we would give much that it might be otherwise, candour compels us to answer that a close study of his works persuades us that towards the sub-human

creation he occupied a double relation, divided in himself between lust of killing and love of every living thing.

A strange mixture was Richard Jefferies, a mixture in which the preponderance of different constituents varied from hour to hour. Hereditary instinct was of more importance in his make-up than he himself knew, and if his love of the open air which gave us *Life of the Fields* and *Field and Hedgerow*, was really 'in the blood,' so was also his love of the chase, which is responsible for those traces of inhumanity in his works which make us shudder.

The life-story of Richard Jefferies is too well-known to need repetition here, but it is necessary to recall the classification of his literary output so discriminately made by his most appreciative biographer. From 1872-8 is denoted the Early Period, and includes the two essays which first brought him to light, a number of papers on agricultural subjects, and a considerable amount of 'juvenilia' in the shape of novels, of which most Jefferies-students think the less said the better. The Middle or Naturalist Period stretches from 1878 to 1880, and is marked by the issue of such volumes as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*. From 1881 to the year of his death - 1887 - is marked as the Later or Poet-Naturalist Period: to its credit are placed those works which secure for Jefferies his peculiar position amongst English writers, volumes of which *Nature Near London*, *The Open Air*, *Field and Hedgerow*, and *The Story of My Heart* are the best known. One might imagine that with so accurate classification to our hand, and possessed of such facts concerning his development as are provided in Sir Walter Besant's *Eulogy*, it would be an easy matter to construct a satisfactory theory concerning his humanitarian development. The early works should have scarcely any trace of kindly consideration for animals, the sportsman and the farmer elements should more often predominate; the middle period would be expected to reveal growing sensibilities and some measure of escape from the conventional inhumanity of the country squire, while in the latest volumes there ought to be noticeable an overflowing of tenderness truly befitting the poet that had sprung so marvellously from the pseudo-novelist and the farmers' apologist. According to that most justifiable theory the following extract should be discoverable in *Life of the Fields* or *The Open Air*, denoting as it does a loving interest in the lower creation.

That watching so often stayed the shot that at last it grew to be a habit; the mere simple pleasure of seeing birds and animals, when they were quite unconscious that they were being observed, being too great to be spoiled by

the discharge. After carefully getting a wire on a jack; after waiting in a tree till a hare came along; after sitting in a mound till the partridges began to run together to roost: in the end the wire or gun remained unused. The same feeling has equally checked my hand in legitimate shooting: time after time I have flushed partridges without firing, and have let the hare bound over the furrow free.

In reality it is taken from *The Amateur Poacher*, one of Jefferies' earlier works (1879), full of horrors concerning ferreting and other equally objectionable practices, horrors which we cannot help but confess are related with evident appreciation and with practically no manifestation of sympathy towards the sufferers. The following is from the same volume:—

It is a beautiful sight to see the hounds bound over the sward; the sinewy back bends like a bow, but a bow that, instead of an arrow, shoots itself; the deep chests drink the air. Is there anything so joyful in life as the second when the chase begins? Then we race and tear up the slope ... In five minutes, as we cross the ridge, we see the game again; the hare is circling back – she passes under us not fifty yards away, as we stand panting on the hill. The youngest hound gains and runs right over her; she doubles, the older hound picks up the running. By a furze bush she doubles again, but the young one turns her, the next moment she is in the jaws of the old dog.

A beautiful sight! What heart worthy the name of human would not find all the beauty of sun and air, flower and song, grace and strength, for the time obliterated by the sight of sad and cruel a scene. We look in vain for anything approaching sympathy in this descriptive piece, and yet not so many pages away is the touching picture already referred to. It is in *The Amateur Poacher* that we have the story of Jefferies shooting his first snipe, 'the bird of all others that I longed to kill.' Day after day, he tells us, he studied the problem of its curious flight, in order that he might the more certainly end its life. When at last he has attained sufficient skill and manages to put an end to a definite amount of the world's treasure of life and beauty, he writes concerning the incident as follows: 'When the smoke has cleared away in the crisp air, there he lies, the yet warm beast on the frozen ground, to be lifted up not without a passing pity and admiration.' *A passing pity*: what travesty of reason have we here! It reminds one very strongly of that prayer – prepared and published recently by some good religious folk devoid of all sense of humour – intended for use by soldiers on the eve of battle: – 'May all ambition, and angry passions, and ill-feeling be quenched in every heart. Make us full of consideration and sympathy for the wounded. May the time be hastened when there shall be no more war, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Jefferies, be it noted, from youth upwards, seems also to have been entirely without the sense of

humour. Of the spaniel that accompanied him on his poaching expeditions, he says on one occasion when it had proved disobedient: 'I am afraid it got a kick,' but for the poor innocent rabbits done to death by bloodthirsty ferrets he has not a word of compassion.

Similar incongruities abound in the other writings and considerably disconcert those who expect to find an orderly development in the finer feelings of the author under consideration. More particularly is this the case in the earlier works.

Jefferies' fame, according to some, rests very largely upon *The Gamekeeper at Home* (1878), a book most difficult for the humanitarian to read. All the dark deeds of rabbit and fox hunting, the battue, etc., etc., are told with nothing to indicate any feelings of regret, and we find in every chapter a full acceptance of the conventional view of sport. The following is typical of much the book:

Coursing for the coursing's sake is capital sport. A hare when sorely tried with the hot breath from the hounds' nostrils on his flanks, will sometimes puzzle them by dashing round and round a rick. Then in sweeping circles the trio strain their limbs, but the hare, having at the corners the inner side and less ground to cover, easily keeps just ahead. This game lasts several minutes, till presently one of the hounds is sharp enough to dodge back and meet the hare the opposite way. Even then his quick eye and ready turn often give him another short breathing space by rushing away at a tangent.

The single expression 'This game,' reveals as much as a whole volume could the writer's relation to the chief actors in the scene he so vividly describes. If such sentiment, or rather want of sentiment is bad, what can be said concerning the next extract?

I have seen a rabbit whose back was broken by shot drag itself ten yards to the ditch. If the forelegs are broken, then he is helpless: all the kicks of the hind legs only tumble him over and over without giving him much progress... Now and then a rabbit hit in the head will run round and round in circles, making not the slightest attempt to escape. The first time I saw this, not understanding it, I gave the creature the second barrel; but next time I let the rabbit do as he would. He circled round and round, going at a rapid pace. I stood in his way, and he passed between my legs. After half a dozen circles the pace grew slower. Finally, he stopped, sat up quite still for a minute or so, and then drooped and died. The pellet had struck some portion of the brain.

This is none other than the spirit of the vivisector, yet, turn over the page and we read, speaking again of rabbits: 'It is much better to take a steady aim at the head, and so avoid torturing the creature.' Further on we find an expression of the same experience as was noted more in *The Amateur Poacher*. 'There is just sufficient interest to induce one to remain quiet and

still, which is the prime condition of seeing anything; and in my own case the rabbits so patiently stalked have at last often gone free.'

Nor are there wanting in this, the least inspiring of all Jefferies' works, further evidences of humanity. Some weasels are working a rabbit warren – 'To see their reddish heads thrust for a moment from the holes, and then re-appear at another, would have been amusing had it not been for the reflection that their frisky tricks would assuredly end in death.' In another chapter we find – 'So ready are all creatures to acknowledge kindness that ere now I have even made friends with the inhabitants of a wasps' nest.'

The story of Richard Jefferies, sitting gun in hand, watching, and in the end letting his intended victims go free, is a parable of his whole life; being interpreted it explains the strange jumble of kindly and unkindly relations which we find running through the greater part of his published writings.

First and essentially he was a sportsman; his ancestors for many generations suffered from the popular delusion concerning the nobility of chasing wild animals to death; entering into an unworthy tradition he early came to believe that the murder of feeble creatures, such as birds and rabbits, was an occupation worthy of a reasonable human being and much to be commended. Read *Bevis* and *Wood Magic*, two otherwise charming books, and you will find this 'sporting' instinct well developed even in childhood; turn to the volumes from which quotations have already been made, and it will be evident that to become a successful 'sportsman' is the ideal of his rising youth and manhood. Another impulse than love of sport took him into the open air, but undoubtedly it was the fascination of the chase that often kept him there. The instinct grew less and less powerful as he found his special gift, and learned to use it, but occasionally it re-asserted its sway. A notable instance of the recrudescence of barbaric impulses is found in *Red Deer*. This book, written in 1884, is an account of the haunts and habits of the wild deer of Exmoor, and gives a good many details concerning the worrying of these beautiful creatures in what is by courtesy called 'The Hunt.' From beginning to end we find no single expression of sympathy. The deer are described accurately, beautifully; all the charm and poetry of their life gleam out upon us from these pages; grace, gentleness, affection, endurance, courage is theirs, while to the specimens we see of human-kind belongs meanness and brutality. The animals are some of them half-tame, hinds heavy in calf are hunted, the scenes at the death of the deer are too grim, too ghastly to be recorded. Jefferies knows all this, makes us know it, too; but in *Red Deer* never a word of pity escapes his lips.

Sportsman, but also and just as much, a lover of wild life. The birds and

the animals were sources of unending pleasure to him; their lives interested and charmed him a great deal more than did the concerns of men; he came to have friends acquaintances in every brook, hedge, and copse, and found himself loving the tiny creatures whose unbounded freedom he never ceased to envy.

Lover and destroyer, sportsman and true naturalist, it is the struggle between these two opposites that forms so interesting a study in the case of Jefferies. Broadly speaking, the longer he lives the more sympathetic, the more truly human he becomes; but ever the old Adam is manifested, so that his works latest works are not free from gruesome suggestions. It is a matter of rejoicing, that his very last set of essays have no trace of inhumanity. Called upon himself to suffer excruciating agony, his heart went out in pity to all others that could suffer also, and dying a hundred deaths, his anguished heart bled for every unnecessary pang inflicted on the least member of the family, and the sporting instinct was in the end subdued.

Glancing seriatim at one or two of his books the varied phases of the conflict can easily be illustrated. Here is *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879). Unblushingly are there recorded the author's exploits in the way of shooting kingfishers and herons! Deeds of shame that merit as complete an ostracism as fell upon Coleridge's celebrated sporting mariner. On one occasion Jefferies hears an unfamiliar note. After a while he discovers it proceeds from a redwing, and sees that although the season was altogether too early there were two or three others with it.

There were three or four pairs of redwings in close neighbourhood, all evidently bent upon remaining to breed. *To make quite sure, I shot one.* Afterwards I found a nest and had the pleasure of seeing the young birds come to maturity and fly.

The same incongruity; patiently watching the nest, delighting in the growth of the little ones, and joyfully chronicling their doings; but for the sake of curiosity ready without the least scruple to sacrifice a life. The vivisector's spirit again, and in one who knows what life is to birds and animals, who describes it with a master hand, and seldom so well as in this same volume. Listen, it is his voice, the man who silenced the redwing forever in order to make sure of its species.

The joy of life of these animals – indeed, of almost all animals and birds in freedom – is very great. You may see it in every motion: in the lissom bound of the hare, the playful leap of the rabbit, the song that the lark and the finch *must* sing; the soft loving coo of the dove in the hawthorn; the blackbird ruffling out his feathers on a rail. The sense of living – the consciousness of

seeing and feeling – is manifestly intense in them all, and is in itself an exquisite pleasure. Their appetites seem ever fresh: they rush to the banquet spread by Mother Earth with a gusto that Lucullus never knew in the midst of his artistic gluttony; they drink from the stream with dainty sips as though it were richest wine. Watch the birds in the spring; the pairs dance from bough to bough, and know not how to express their wild happiness. The hare rejoices in the swiftness of his limbs: his nostrils sniff the air, his strong sinews spurn the earth; like an arrow from a bow he shoots up the steep hill that we must clamber slowly, halting half-way to breathe. On outspread wings the swallow floats above, then slants downwards with a rapid swoop, and with the impetus of the motion rises easily.

To make quite sure, I shot one.

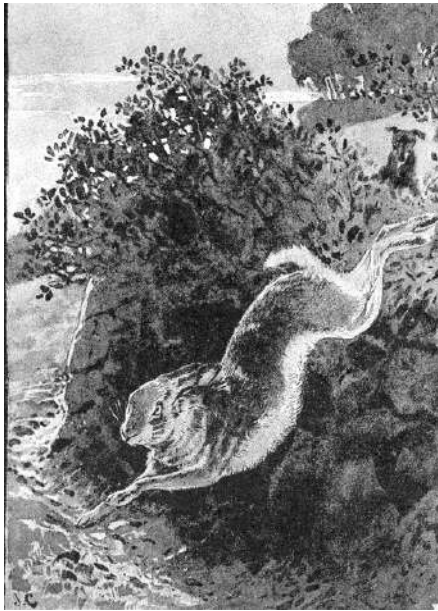


Illustration by John Charlton (1849-1917) for *Red Deer* [1883] (Longmans, 1894), p.217

Not only to birds but to starving sheep is his tenderness extended; the following does not suggest a callous nature:–

Of all animals a starved sheep is the most wretched to contemplate, not only because of the angularity of outline and the cavernous depressions where fat and flesh should be, but because the associations of many generations have given the sheep a peculiar claim upon humanity. They hang entirely on human help. They watch for the shepherd as though he were their father; and when he comes he can do no good, so that there is no more painful spectacle than a fold during a drought upon the hills.

Other contrasts equally striking can be found, and no explanation save that which realizes the conflict continually present in the writer's feelings can account for their existence.

In *Round About a Great Estate* (1880) we find a kindly thought expressed for the hares that cross a railway line at a spot where there is a sharp curve and where the train running swiftly yet silently, inevitably overtakes and destroys them, 'a miserable end for the poor creatures in the midst of their moonlight frolic.' Such words, all too infrequent, shed a glow over the rest of the book which no amount of apparent indifference to the fate of the animals can remove.

An earnest plea for the preservation of the otter is a notable feature in *Nature Near London* (1884), but that plea is based entirely on the claims of 'sport.' From what is said it cannot be gathered that the thought of the creature's right to live and right to enjoy its life ever entered the writer's head. The idiotic and brutal way in which this rare member of our fauna is treated whenever it does appear on the Thames or elsewhere rouses his ire, but the strongest adjective he uses is 'unsportsmanlike,' and that word sums up the whole of his argument in this particular case. A description of an otter hunt ('otter worry' is by far the better term) appears in *Life of the Fields*, accurate as can be, and ghastly enough; no gruesome detail is omitted, and no thought of pity is allowed to intrude; the otter-hunting Jefferies condones and defends, but his wrath is reserved for those whose destructive abilities promise to exterminate this interesting animal and so 'spoil sport'.

The most delightful surprise that awaits the student of Jefferies is to be found in *Nature Near London*; who that has read 'A Brook' and 'A London Trout' will ever forget the picture of the sportsman on the bridge, a picture lined in with a Messonier-like skill, but as remarkable for its suggestiveness as for its actual and human interest. Jefferies, with his wondrous eyes, has discovered a trout that daily haunts the arch of a certain bridge; no one else knows or suspects its presence, it is his own secret and the trout is safe.

As I sat from time to time under the aspen, within hearing of the murmuring water, the thought did rise occasionally that it was a pity to leave the trout there till some one blundered into the knowledge of his existence. There were ways and means by which he could be withdrawn without any noise or publicity. But, then, what would be the pleasure of securing him, the fleeting pleasure of an hour, compared to the delight of seeing him almost day by day? I watched him for many weeks, taking great precautions that no one should observe how continually I looked over into the water there. ... So the summer passed, and, though never free from apprehensions, to my great

pleasure without discovery.

For four years was this fellowship cultivated, not without further anxieties on Jefferies' side, until as ill-fate would have it the stream was dammed in order 'that some accursed main or pipe or other horror' might be laid across it further down. The trout's fate was sealed, but Jefferies could not stand by and see the inevitable end; love hoped against hope that this wary fish, who had escaped so much, might by his skill evade those 'barbarians' who one Sunday were bent on his destruction. 'But that was in the early summer. It is now winter,... I have never seen him since. I never failed to glance over the parapet into the shadowy water. Somehow it seemed to look colder, darker, less pleasant than it used to do.' This is his highest expression of humanitarianism yet reached; beside it the finely expressed compassion for over-driven cattle, which makes one of the preceding chapters delightful, seems almost commonplace.

Bird-catchers seemed to have formed Jefferies' *bête noir*, he never misses a chance of denouncing them or of manifesting his full sympathy for their unfortunate victims. This from the same volume as the last extract is worth a place in every bird-lover's scrap-book: –

Pity it is that anyone can be found to purchase the product of their brutality. No one would do so could they but realize the difference to the captive upon which they are lavishing their mistaken love, between the cage, the alternately hot and cold room (as the fire goes out at night), the close atmosphere and fumes that lurk near the ceiling, and the open air and freedom to which it was born.

Were we considering our author in the light of prison-reform movements the following, which emanates from a real sympathy with sorrows of birds, would scarcely be quotable; as it is, they are an indication that humane sentiment is not lacking in *The Life of the Fields*.

It is to be wished that these notices not to shoot or net small birds were more frequently seen. Brighton is still a bird-catching centre, and before the new close season commences acres of ground are covered with the nets of the bird-catchers. Pity they could not be confined a little while in the same manner as they confine their miserable feathery victims (in cages just to fit the bird, say six inches square) in cells where movement or rest would be alike impossible.

Another beautiful piece of humanitarian sentiment, fit to be put alongside the incident of the London trout, occurs in those brief lines ('Round a London Copse') in which he records the visit of starlings to his house.

The preceding spring a pair filled the gutter with the materials of their nest. Long after they had finished a storm descended, and the rain, thus dammed

up and unable to escape, flooded the corner. It cost half a sovereign to repair the damage, but it did not matter; the starlings had been happy.

Half-sovereigns were not too plentiful with Jefferies even in those his 'palmy days.'

The Open Air and *Life of the Fields* run a close race with Jefferies-lovers; viewed from our present standpoint they are much alike. Neither is free from decided traces of the sporting instinct; where no direct reference is made, many of the terms used in describing animals or birds betray the bias. A 'gun-shot' is the commonest measurement: to see a fish is at once to think of him as an object for the angler's skill. Perhaps the following is rather in the nature of reminiscence than an expression of Jefferies' own sentiments, but let us bear in mind that it appears in 1885.

Something in the *power* of the double-barrel – the overwhelming odds it affords the sportsman over bird and animal – pleases. A man feels master of the copse with a double-barrel; and such a sense of power, though only over feeble creatures, is fascinating. Besides, there is the delight of effect; for a clever right and left is sure of applause and makes the gunner feel 'good' in himself.

Surely here is betrayed the sportsman's secret – the lover of power, the love of applause. *The Open Air*, as we have said, is not without those traces which indicate the author's sympathy with 'sport.' Yet such misfortune is largely redeemed by the presence of words of pure compassion:–

Overtaken by the cartridge, still the hare, as he lies in the dewy grass, is handsome; lift him up and his fur is full of colour, there are layers of tint, shadings of brown within it, one under the other, and the surface is exquisitely clean. The colours are not really bright, at least not separately; but they are so clean and so clear that they give an impression of warmth and brightness. Even in the excitement of sport regret cannot but be felt at the sight of those few drops of blood about the mouth which indicate that all this beautiful workmanship must now cease to be. Had he escaped the sportsman would not have been displeased.

Again it is the birds that most command his compassion and evoke his tenderest utterance; entering into their feelings he wishes for them what they cannot wish for themselves:–

So concentrated on their little work in the sunshine, so intent on the tiny egg, on the insect captured on the grass-tip to be carried to the eager fledglings, so joyful in listening to the song poured out for them or in pouring it forth, quite oblivious of all else. It is in this intense concentration that they are so happy. If they could only live longer! – but a few such seasons for them – I wish they could live a hundred years just to feast on the seeds and sing and be utterly happy and oblivious of everything but the moment they are

passing.

The expression 'the dear larks' occurring in one of these later essays strikes a note of personal affection which is deepened as the farewell words of this prose-poet flutter down upon a heedless world. The hours of his intensest physical suffering had arrived, and he himself began to know from actual experience the meaning of those contortions and cries he had often caused as well as witnessed in his little brothers and sisters, began to understand even more fully that the weaker brethren of the boundless life-community were there to be loved and not to be slain.

The pathos of those last few essays becomes almost unbearable as we understand those inner experiences that prompted such a burst of loving appreciation of humblest life as this.

Their hearts so happy, their eyes so observant, the earth so bountiful to them with its supply of food, and the late warmth of the autumn sun lighting up their life. They know and feel the different loveliness of the seasons as much as we do. Every one must have noticed their joyousness in spring; they are quiet, but so very, very busy in the height of summer; as autumn comes on they obviously delight in the occasional hours of warmth. The marks of their little feet are almost sacred – a joyous life has been there – do not obliterate it. It is so delightful to know that something is happy.

The man who had shot a redwing just to see if his guess was correct, says in 'Some April Insects': –

It is difficult to scientifically identify small insects hastily flitting without capturing them, which I object to doing, for I dislike to interfere with their harmless liberty. They have all been named and classified, and I consider it a great cruelty to destroy them again without special purpose. The pleasure is to see them alive and busy with their works, and not to keep them in a cabinet.

And again: –

It is not worth while to catch them just for the purpose of identification, for they have enough enemies in the field without man and his heartless cabinets. The collector is the most terrible parasite of all. Let them go on with a happy hum, while the tulip opens in the sunshine.

Life seems to him a more valued possession than ever before, too precious to be thoughtlessly spilled. The sportsman's passion is surely dead when he writes in 'Swallow-Time' (*Field and Hedgerow*) that most charming elegy on our household favourite ending with the memorable and pregnant words: –

The beautiful swallows, be tender to them, for they symbol all that is best in our nature and all that is best in our hearts.

A little known but most remarkable essay of Jefferies is that which appeared some considerable time after his death, and was published under the title 'Nature and Eternity' (*Longman's Magazine*, May 1895). Probably one of his very last pieces of work, it equals if it does not surpass anything else that ever came from his pen; to read it, and no one can afford not to read it, is to be convinced that before the end came to our great naturalist's earthly career the sportsman in him died and the poet and lover was fully born. There is a picture in our mind of the gun flung away and broken, nothing marring the harmony between the interpreter and the world he endeavoured to reveal to his fellow men, his heart beating with that of every living creature, too gentle, too tender, too true to be able to forget the feelings even of the least. If that is not Jefferies, then he never wrote *Field and Hedgerow*, and the following is the work of some unknown genius who will wrest the laurel from the brows of him whose bust will yet make famous the walls of Salisbury's ancient fane:-

The goldfinches and the tiny caterpillars, the brilliant sun, if looked at lovingly and thoughtfully, will lift the soul out of the smaller life of human care that is of selfish aims, bounded by seventy years, into the greater, the limitless life which has been going on over universal space from endless ages past.

He finds himself 'full of love and sympathy for the feeble ant climbing over grass and leaf; for yonder nightingale pouring forth its song; feeling a community with the finches, with bird, with plant, with animal, and reverently studying all these and more.'

One parting word, and we know that Jefferies has obtained the secret of St. Francis and all humanitarians. So beautiful, so true, so tenderly said:

There is a slight rustle among the bushes and the fern upon the mound. It is a rabbit who has peeped forth into the sunshine. His eye opens wide with wonder at the sight of us; his nostrils work nervously as he watches us narrowly. But in a little while the silence and stillness re-assure him: he nibbles in a desultory way at the stray grasses on the mound, and finally ventures out into the meadow almost within reach of the hand. It is so easy to make the acquaintance - to make friends with the children of Nature. From the tiniest insect upwards, they are so ready to dwell in sympathy with us - only be tender, quiet, considerate, in a word *gentlemanly*, towards them, and they will freely wander around. And they have such marvellous tales to tell - intricate problems to solve for us.

So from him who had ravaged came forth perfect sweetness, so the sportsman fell before the poet, so Richard Jefferies ascended into Heaven.

Lore, Legend and Literary Allusion in *Greene Ferne Farm*

Janice M. Lingley

Miller and Matthews' bibliographical research¹ has established that *Greene Ferne Farm*, published in 1880, was in manuscript form by 1878 and that it probably incorporates material from two earlier unpublished novels which have not survived. It is also apparent from a letter by Jefferies to his publisher George Bentley that the novel was originally written in a two-volume format and that the text as we now have it represents an abbreviation. This letter states that the descriptions of landscape in the novel are based on the Wiltshire Downs – 'they are my native hills and I know them well' – and that the rural characters are also taken from life.

However, in terms of its cultural and historical associations the novel is far broader in scope. It may also be said to be the most consciously literary of Jefferies' fictional works. For example, he cites or refers to the following: Lewis Filmore's 1841 translation of Goethe's *Faust*² (pp.13, 42 & 105); the poem, 'Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn' (p.15)³; Cicero's notion of *summum bonum* 'the highest good' (p.20); Mary Howitt's (1799-1888) children's verse, 'The Spider and the Fly' (1829) (p.31);⁴ an improvised poem, 'Noontide in the Meadow', allegedly the composition of Geoffrey Newton (p.41); verse by the medieval French poet Olivier Basselin (this in translation and apparently Jefferies' own adaptation)⁵ (pp.41-42); Christopher Marlowe's (c.1564-1593) play *Dr. Faustus* (1604) (p.67); the

¹ *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study* by George Miller and Hugoe Matthews (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), pp.197-202. The Introduction to the Petton Books edition (2009) reproduces the section on *Greene Ferne Farm* in the Bibliography. The page references given in the text of the article refer to this edition.

² J. Wolfgang de Goethe, *Faustus: a Tragedy* (1808), translated by Lewis Filmore (London: Ingram, Cooke, & Co., 1841), pp.7, 22 and 49; this is available online as a 'Google Book'.

³ This poem, on the theme of Venus and Adonis, appears as the sixth in a collection of 20 verses, entitled *The Passionate Pilgrim* and attributed to William Shakespeare, published by William Jaggard in 1599. Only five of the poems are now considered to be by Shakespeare (I, 2, 3, 5 and 16). The author of the sixth poem is unknown. The phrase (line 11), 'The dewy morn'. of course supplies the title of Jefferies' 1884 novel.

⁴ Jefferies paraphrases the first line of Howitt's verse fable: ' "Will you walk into my parlour?" said the Spider to the Fly'.

⁵ Oliver Basselin (c.1400-c.1450), born in Val-de-Vire, Normandy, wrote a number of drinking songs: cf., the poem entitled 'Vire – Oliver Basselin' by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882).

song, 'Hark, hark! The lark at heaven's gate sings', from William Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* (1611) (Act II, sc. 3) (p.68); the classical legend of Aphrodite and Adonis (p.83); John Keats' (1795-1821) 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820) (line 7) (p.89); and Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (p.95). There are several Biblical and religious references. Chief among the rustic characters is Mrs. Estcourt's shepherd, Jabez: his name derives from a passage in 1 Corinthians, though he rather comically fails on two occasions (pp.10-11 and 69-74) to live up to his namesake: *Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.'*; Jabez's dog is named Job. The 'Song of Solomon' (Psalms 4.2) is quoted (p.15); the Red Sea crossing is alluded to (Exodus 13 17-14; 29) (p.68). Lines from the Requiem Mass⁶ are cited (p.90).

There are several instances of references to and quotations of traditional songs and ballads in Jefferies' writings, but only two of these occur in the novels: *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887)⁷ and *Greene Ferne Farm*. It is *Greene Ferne Farm* that is especially notable for its presentation of a diversity of traditional ballads, songs and poems. The ballad 'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington' is associated particularly with the developing relationship between Geoffrey Newton and Margaret Estcourt. It is invoked in an incident in which Geoffrey Newton initially woos Margaret Estcourt (p.16). This accounts for the slight blush as she subsequently sings the ballad in company with her friends during the haymaking: 'With the wild-rose in her hand, the delicate bloom on her cheek, the green hedge behind, the green elm above, and the sweet scent of the hay, she looked the ballad as well as sang it.' (p.42). Following their night together lost on the Downs, an idyllic and light-hearted gathering of the young people at Warren House rehearses to the music of an ancient piano Christopher Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' (1599), and the antistrophe associated with Sir Walter Raleigh, 'The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd'⁸ (pp.74-75). Jabez, who can sing 'like a giant refreshed with wine', regales the reader with two traditional Wiltshire songs – 'a ditty in praise of shepherding' (p.73) and 'George Ridler's Oven' (p.120)⁹. In the novel's closing scene, the

⁶ The lines cited are from a medieval and ecclesiastical Latin poem used in the Requiem Mass.

⁷ Richard Jefferies, *Amaryllis at the Fair* [1887] (Longcot: Petton Books, 2009), pp.149, 171-2, 181.

⁸ See Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* [1765], edited by Edward Walford (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1892), pp.341 and 118-119.

⁹ Jefferies provides only brief citations of these traditional songs, but they can be found in their entirety in the writings of Thomas Hughes (1822-1896), perhaps best known as the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). For 'George Ridler's Oven', see *The Scouring of the White Horse*

young folk dance to ‘that fine old country dance’ on the theme of fox-hunting, ‘Sir Roger de Coverley’ (p.117).

However, the burden of lore, legend and literary allusion in *Greene Ferne Farm* may be attributed to Jefferies’ nobly philanthropic young clergyman, Felix St. Bees, and is partly suggested by his rather extraordinary and unique surname. ‘Bees’ or ‘Beaze’ is an English surname dating back to the medieval period, but ‘St. Bees’ is a place-name referring to a prominent headland on the Cumbrian Irish Sea coast, and the nearby village named after it. Since St. Bees is some distance from Wiltshire, a merely topographical background seems rather unlikely.

The location was renowned in the Middle Ages for its monastery; the fine Norman architecture of the existing priory church of St. Mary and St. Bees may still be seen. The foundation’s dedication is based on a legendary Irish princess named Bega, who fled her native land and marriage to a Viking prince, to live initially as an anchoress on the Cumbrian coast, before dedicating herself to conventual life in Northumbria. The names ‘Bees’ and ‘Bega’ are etymologically related. ‘Bee’, denoted by the *OED* an obsolete word, means ‘a metal ring or torque for the arm or neck’; it derives from Anglo-Saxon *béah*, or *béag*, ‘bracelet’ or ‘ring’. According to legend St. Bega donated a ring to the Cumbrian church which was used for solemn oath-taking and occasioned various miracles. Stone carvings at the priory reveal that Irish-Norse Vikings settled in the area during the tenth century, and it may have been this that generated the cult of an exilic Irish saint.¹⁰ The use of a sacred ring or torque for solemn oath-taking was originally a heathen practice, which is perhaps what the hobgoblin who, according to Jabez, is accustomed to lead his victims mischievously astray in bewildering circles, obliquely alludes to (pp.73-74).

The relevance of this historical and topographical background to Jefferies’ novel seems perhaps rather tenuous, but there are literary associations – an Arthurian poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) and Sir Walter Scott’s (1771-1832) novel *Ivanhoe* (1819) – which make Jefferies’ improvised surname perhaps more comprehensible. Jefferies seems to have been generally well acquainted with Scott’s *Waverley* novels,¹¹ and there are

(London: Macmillan & Co, 1892), pp.190-192. Also included in this volume is *The Ashen Faggot: A Tale for Christmas*, pp.271-327; Jabez’ old shearing song appears on p.301.

¹⁰ These summary comments are based on an article, by John M. Todd, ‘St. Bega, Cult, Fact and Legend’, in *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, Vol. 80 (1980), pp.23-35.

¹¹ The references to Scott in Jefferies’ writings are as follows: *Waverley* (1814), in *History of Malmesbury*, Ch. 12; *The Antiquary* (1816), in *History of Swindon*, Ch. 5; *Ivanhoe* (1819), in *History of Swindon*, Ch. 8; *A Legend of Montrose* (1819), in *History of Swindon*, Ch.3; *Kenilworth* (1821) in the essay ‘My Old Village’, and *History of Swindon*, Ch. 5.; *Peveril of the Peak* (1823), in *A Memoir*

three references to St. Bees in *Ivanhoe* (1820). The novel is set in twelfth-century England, and deals with tensions between Saxons and Normans in the aftermath of the Battle of Hastings. Two of these allusions to St. Bees briefly focus on incidents involving the subjugate race: the chapel at St. Bees is said to have been robbed of 'cup, candlestick, and chalice' by 'lawless' Saxons¹²; on another occasion, the Abbot of St Bees is forced to say mass 'with an old hollow oak-tree for his stall' for the Saxon yeomen who, dispossessed of their lands, have sought refuge in the greenwood.¹³ These incidents would not appear to have any obvious relevance to Jefferies' nineteenth-century novel. But the theme of schism, though informed by in a rather different historical context, is a feature of the 'contemporary' world of Jefferies' novel: the defection of many parishioners to 'Bethel Chapel' in rejection of the established church and its prelate, described as being 'somewhat mistaken in the tone of his intercourse with the poor' (p.8) is sadly observed by Squire Thorpe. Also, as the editor of a modern edition of Scott's story has noted: 'the linguistic divide is a prominent topic in the first half of the novel and an important part of Scott's attempt to present the historical realities of twelfth century England.'¹⁴ In Jefferies' story, the dissension and disaffection between the native dialect speakers in the story and the dominant land-owning class, speaking the English of the educated, is at times most marked: the skepticism and contempt of the traditional farmer for those who must 'larn farming' (p.3); the working and living conditions of the Kingsbury factory workers, illustrated by in the situation of an injured erstwhile shepherd (pp.30-34); the cruelty of the mill-owner Andrew Fisher (pp.25-27); the socio-economic unrest evidenced by the striking farm labourers (pp.30, and pp.35-37); the diatribe of the old woman in conversation with Valentine Browne (pp.84-6); the physical effects of toil and poverty on female labourers (pp.88-89). It is part of the novel's achievement that Jefferies makes individuals on both sides of this socio-economic, religious, and cultural divide to a greater or lesser extent, sympathetic.

The other allusion to St. Bees in *Ivanhoe*¹⁵ is of a literary nature. The beautiful Rebecca has been accused of witchcraft and is the prisoner of the

of the Goddards of North Wilts; *Quentin Durward* (1823), in the essay 'The Haunt of the Hare'; *Woodstock* (1826), in *History of Swindon*, Ch.4., and *The Gamekeeper at Home*, Ch.3.; *Castle Dangerous* (1831), in *History of Swindon*, Ch.8.

¹² Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (1820), edited by Graham Tulloch (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), Ch.27, p.222.

¹³ Scott, *Ivanhoe*, *ibid.*, Ch.40., p.355.

¹⁴ Scott, *Ivanhoe*, *ibid.*, pp.xv-xvi.

¹⁵ Scott, *Ivanhoe*, *ibid.*, Ch.40, p.350.

Knights Templars. Ivanhoe is obliged to ride to her rescue in mock-heroic style on the Prior of St. Botolph's 'ambling jennet', Malkin, a mount evidently not formed for the role of a knightly charger. The horse is stated previously to have refused to carry the ponderous manuscript volume of a medieval world chronicle called *Fructus Temporum* (Latin for 'Results of the Times'), borrowed 'from the priest of St. Bees'.¹⁶ This history is part of a prose version of the early Middle English *Brut*, or *The Chronicle of Britain*. The original poem was composed by the English poet and priest Layamon; its ultimate source was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* ('History of the Kings of Britain'), and included in the poem is an extended account of Geoffrey's story of Arthur.

The St. Bega cult links the Priory church of St. Mary and St. Bees on the Irish Sea coast with a pre-Norman church dedicated to St. Bega situated by the shores of Bassenthwaite Lake.¹⁷ It was here that Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem 'Morte d'Arthur', was composed while staying with literary friends, the Steddings, at the nearby manor of Mirehouse. The poem was completed in 1838, and published in 1842 within the framework of a poem called 'The Epic'. This framework was discarded when the 'Morte', re-titled 'The Passing of Arthur', was incorporated into 'The Idylls of the King' (1859-1885). The opening lines of 'Morte d'Arthur' refer to the Bassenthwaite church:

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

'The Epic' is not without interest. It begins with a colloquy between four friends, a parson, a poet, the narrator and their host, and forms the prologue to the poet's recitation of 'Morte d'Arthur'. The gathering of the

¹⁶ Scott perhaps intended some word-play here on the bee as a pollinating insect; the literal meaning of *fructus* is 'fruits'; the phrase could be rendered 'Harvest of the Times'.

¹⁷ The saint is now commemorated by a 38-mile (58 km) trail through the West Cumbrian countryside called 'St. Bega's Way'; it begins at the priory church at St. Bees and ends at the Bassenthwaite church.

four men takes place on Christmas Eve and they speak sadly of Christmas as a celebration without meaning; the decay of faith; the new science of geology; the disillusionment felt by the poet with his craft. This poet has composed, and in his despair destroyed, an Arthurian epic consisting of twelve books; the 'Morte d'Arthur' represents the only part of the manuscript rescued from the flames. The poet's rehearsal of the poem enthralls two of his listeners; the parson falls asleep. In the epilogue to this recitation, the narrator dreams that night of Arthur's second coming and a regenerated faith, and wakes to the sound of Christmas bells.

In the interlude following the haymaking, Felix St. Bees expresses his views on poetry and song (p.42). Scorning the contemporary critical preoccupation with the classically based techniques of verse, the young clergyman avows his predilection for the traditional skill of the 'Maker' or minstrel, and refers particularly to Tennyson:

'Ah,' said Felix, 'no sign of study in those old ballads, no premeditation, nor word-twisting and jerking; rugged metre so involved that none can understand it without pondering an hour or two. This is the way we criticise poetry now-a-days, in our mechanical age – just listen: somebody has been measuring Tennyson with a foot-rule. I read from a professor's analysis – 'The line is varied by dactylic or iambic substitution, as well as by truncation and anacrusis;' 'the line is varied by anapaestic and trochaic substitutions, and by initial truncation.' As Faust says, not all these word-twisters have ever made a Maker yet.

The 'mechanical age' and its effects on the environment and individuals has been explored in St. Bees' and Newton's earlier encounter with the young railway worker who has been injured as a result of his employment.¹⁸ The theme is extended in antithesis by the ensuing description, mostly expressed in dialect, of a traditionally-made scythe.¹⁹

The quotation Felix St. Bees claims is directly from Goethe's *Faust*, represents Jefferies' free adaptation of lines from Lewis Filmore's 1841 translation, the version he is known to have read.²⁰ In Goethe's verse

¹⁸ Jefferies gives us brief but most graphic description of the industry in the Swindon *History*; he returns to the subject again in his essay entitled 'The Story of Swindon' in *The Hills and the Vale* (1909). Alfred Williams' *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915) fully corroborates Jefferies' account of his visit to the Swindon Works.

¹⁹ This passage (pp.43-44) is perhaps what Kedrun Laurie had in mind when she suggests in an aside that in his portrait of Felix St. Bees Jefferies satirizes 'Ruskinian acolytes': see the article entitled 'Who read Richard Jefferies: the evidence of the North fund subscription list', in *RJSJ*, No 18 (2009), pp.16-17.

²⁰ See the article by W.J. Keith on 'Jefferies' Reading' in *RJSJ*, No 2 (Spring 1993), pp.17-22: on the subject of Jefferies' favourite writings, Keith notes 'especially Goethe, whose *Faust*, in Filmore's translation, he seems to have known almost by heart.' (p.19).

drama, the devil Mephistopheles, disguised as Faust, slyly offers advice to a young scholar, and particularly recommends a course of logic: 'For 'tis an art,' he says, 'by which the mind Is nicely fetter'd and confined!' The 'fabrics' woven by the mind, Mephistopheles goes on to observe, can then be unravelled thread by thread:

Scholars in every time and place
Great value on such lore have set,
But never one of all the race
Has ever made a Weaver yet.
He who life's mystery would know
And to another would display
Tries (ere its nature he can show)
To drive the breathing soul away. . .²¹

Jefferies' young poetically minded clergyman analogously substitutes the word 'Maker', the traditional name for a poet, for 'Weaver', and clearly regards critics intent on mere metrical analysis as reductive and dismissive of meaning. Given the literary background of the 'Morte d'Arthur' already discussed, the reference to Tennyson, in juxtaposition with the ballad tradition, is a reminder that minstrels were skilled in the oral delivery of both epic and song. The extraordinary scene in which the young clergyman is subsequently involved – the discovery by rural workers of an ancient burial (pp.90-93) – can also be understood as relating to this theme.

Jefferies' discussion, in his *History of Swindon*, of the antiquities of Upper Upham may be cited as partly a source. Jefferies reports that the ploughing of some arable land in the vicinity of the mansion revealed 'some portions of mosaic-work in a very perfect state of preservation, supposed to have once formed the floor of a Roman villa, or some other structure of the Roman period.'²² Coins, too, discovered in the locality, he describes, which also testify to its ancient Romano-British character. 'Another Roman vestige,' he records, 'is also carefully kept. It is a brass ornament of a trumpet with an inscription in very primitively formed letters – *Gavdeamus* – that is, 'Let us rejoice.'²³ It appears that this artefact, in a modified form, informs the discovery of a giant skeleton beneath a large sarsen stone in *Greene Ferne Farm* (pp.89-93). Felix St. Bees' interest in the ancient burial appears to be merely antiquarian; he regrets that the rough and careless hastiness of the excavators does not permit a disciplined appraisal of the

²¹ Goethe, *Faustus*, *op. cit.*, p.22.

²² Jefferies, *History of Swindon*, *op.cit.*, p.83.

²³ Jefferies, *History of Swindon*, *ibid.*, pp.101-102; the quotation is from the original *North Wilts Herald* article.

find. His reaction to the revealing of a bronze fragment, also inscribed with the Latin *gaudeamus*, is more solemn. He identifies it as a piece from 'an ancient Roman trumpet'; moreover, 'a trumpet sounding to us from the tomb', and he interprets its message evangelically in terms of 'the certainty of the life to come'; he recalls the Latin inscription on the day of his marriage to May, and that of Geoffrey Newton and Margaret Estcourt.

The Wiltshire Downs are especially notable for the distinctive grey sandstone boulders of various sizes and shapes which are haphazardly, as it were, strewn across them. In their book on *English Stone Building*, Alec Clifton-Taylor and A.S. Ireson, observe that these boulders 'were for centuries a great geological mystery, because they bore no relationship to the other stones in the regions where they were found. Hence the name they were given: a variant of 'saracen', for there was a time when any stranger was dubbed a Saracen.'²⁴ Jefferies expresses something of the superstition surrounding these stones in *Bevis*. The two boys discover an isolated sarsen in an area called 'The Waste' – 'the wildest-looking field they had ever seen'.²⁵ The boys speculate that the boulder conceals a treasure, a serpent and a magic lamp that has been burning 'for ages and ages'; they decide the stone cannot be raised – 'not with levers or anything' – because 'there's a spell on it.' The narrator comments: 'Such great boulders often have crevices beneath, but whether this was a natural hollow, or whether the boulder was the capstone of a dolmen was not known.'²⁶ Subsequently *Bevis* explores the area again during a misty moonlit night: 'Something of the mystery of ancient days hovers at night over these untilled places,' observes the narrator.²⁷ A sarsen stone was also to be found in the Home-Field on Coate Farm, Jefferies' birth-place, and is described in *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879) as 'a great grey sarsen boulder, like an uncouth beast of ancient days crouching in the hollow.'²⁸ The ancient use of these stones to create imposing landscape artefacts – Stonehenge and Wayland's Smithy, for example – are discussed by Jefferies in the *Swindon History*.²⁹ All these citations testify to a sense of the stones' great antiquity, and the mystery of their presence as a stimulus to the contemplative mind and the romantic imagination.

²⁴ Alec Clifton-Taylor and A.S. Ireson, *English Stone Building* [1883] (London: Victor Gollancz, 1994), p.36.

²⁵ Jefferies, *Bevis*, *op. cit.*, p.165.

²⁶ Jefferies, *Bevis*, *ibid.*, pp.335-337.

²⁷ Jefferies, *Bevis*, *ibid.*, pp.348-9.

²⁸ Richard Jefferies, *Wild Life in a Southern County* [1879] (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1978), pp.212-213.

²⁹ Jefferies, *History of Swindon*, *op. cit.*, pp.150 and 176; 128-130.

In its essentials – a landscape with ancient cultural and historical associations; a group of men attempting to move a weighty stone; a rider on horseback arriving at the scene; the confrontation of pagan and Christian – the *Greene Ferne Farm* incident bears a resemblance to the conclusion of the Gaelic legend of ‘Oisín and the Land of Youth.’ This tale may be familiar to modern readers in the form of W.B. Yeats’ (1865-1939) poem, ‘The Wanderings of Oisín’, published in 1889. But the story of Oisín’s tragic return from the Land of Youth, from the so-called *Fenian Cycle* of ancient Irish tales, would have been available to mid- and late-Victorian readers in such collections as Patrick Weston Joyce’s *Old Celtic Romances* (one of the best known) and Patrick Kennedy’s *The Bardic Stories of Ireland*. The following summary is based on the version given in Patrick Kennedy’s *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (1866).³⁰

Oisín or Ossian, the giant son of the warrior and hunter Fionn mac Cumhaill or (in English) Finn MacCool, was in legend a warrior of the Fianna and Ireland’s greatest poet. The fairy woman Niamh, the daughter of a sea god, falls in love with him and carries him off to the Land of Youth. There Ossian gains immortality and is ageless, but at length he wishes to visit his native land again. Niamh lends him her white horse and warns him that his feet must never touch the ground. Oisín finds on his return that many years have passed in Ireland and, sadly, that he and the other warriors of the Fianna are hardly remembered. He meets a group of workmen trying to lift a large stone and in helping them, the girth of his saddle breaks; he falls to the ground, and at once becomes old, feeble and blind. Oisín’s plight is brought to the attention of St. Patrick, who harbours him in his house, but fails to convince Oisín of the joys of Christian redemption compared with his former life of hunting and battle, poetry and song. Oisín directs a member of St. Patrick’s sceptical household to a pillar-stone in Kildare. The wondrous blast of a magical war-horn found buried beneath it invokes the visionary re-appearance of some of the mighty fauna and flora of the old heroic world Oisín once knew, and convinces St. Patrick and his companions of the power and truth of what he tells.³¹ Patrick Kennedy’s retelling of the tale is preceded by verses

³⁰ These books are cited in an article by Russell K. Alspach, ‘Some Sources of Yeats The Wanderings of Oisín,’ in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 58, No.3 (September, 1943), pp.849-866. Patrick Kennedy’s (1801-1873) important contribution to folktale reporting in Ireland is discussed by Patricia Lysaght in an article entitled ‘The Wonder Tale in Ireland’, in Hilda Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudhri, *A companion to the fairy tale* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), pp.169-189.

³¹ Patrick Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1891); ‘The Old Age of Oisín’, pp.212-215.

preserved in the *Book of Leinster* and attributed to Oisín; they express the warrior lord's love of life:

When my seven battalions gather on the plain,
And hold aloft the standards of war,
And the dry cold wind whistles through the silk, –
That to me is sweetest music!
When the drinking-hall is furnished in Almuin,
And the pages hand the carved cups to the chiefs,
And the musicians touch the wires with their fingers,
And the drained cups ring on the hard polished table, –
Sweet to my ears is that music!
Sweet is the scream of the sea-gull and heron,
And the waves resounding on the Fair Strand;
Sweet is the song of the three sons of Meardha,
Mac Luacha's whistle, the Dord of Fear-Scara,
The cuckoo's note in early summer,
And the echo of loud laughter in the wood.³²

Jefferies' Felix St. Bees and the rustics he meets clumsily engaged in digging out the skeleton of the mysterious giant are clearly unaware of any Oisínic connection, but it is quite possible that Jefferies' contemporary readers would have perceived the resemblance of the incident to Gaelic tradition. The scene Jefferies describes may also have been partly based on Wordsworth's poem 'Glen-Almain or the Narrow Glen' from *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland* (1803):

In this still place, remote from men,
Sleeps Ossian, in the Narrow Glen;
In this still place, where murmurs on
But one meek streamlet, only one:
He sang of battles, and the breath
Of stormy war, and violent death;
And should, methinks, when all was past,
Have rightfully been laid at last
Where rocks were rudely heaped, and rent
As by a spirit turbulent;
Where sights were rough, and sounds were wild,
And everything unreconciled . . .

The topography of the downs is powerfully evoked by Jefferies in the episode in which Geoffrey Newton and Margaret Estcourt become lost and wander as strangers in a landscape which has been the scene of heroic and

³² Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions*, *ibid.*, pp.211-212; the word 'Dord' is annotated in a footnote as a war-bugle.

momentous battles between Briton and Saxon, and Saxon and Dane,³³ and the battle of *mons Badonicus*, the last of Arthur's twelve great victories; Liddington Castle, which provides Jefferies with 'a noble view' of downland at the beginning of *Wild Life in a Southern County*, is generally held to be the site of this legendary conflict. While Margaret Estcourt shelters for the night in the ancient tomb of an unidentified warrior-king, Newton muses in elegiac *ubi-sunt* fashion on the heroes and heroines of classical epic. Though the beauty of the dawn attends Margaret's re-emergence as a sort of revenant figure (pp.68-69), the potential of this idea is undeveloped. The possibility of renewal is threatened, it seems, by the modern weaponry which characterises the violent confrontation between Newton and Valentine Browne, who are described at the beginning of the novel as excellent friends (p.11): ' . . . these breechloaders, which send forth continuous flame, swift as the lightning, flash on flash, allow not a moment for thought. The "death and murder of a world," as Faust said, be on them.' (p.105) is the narrator's comment, again referring to Goethe.³⁴

The theme of the gun – so graphically expressed in the shooting contest which takes place, with nearly tragic results, at the end of the story – is taken up again in *Bevis*. St. Bees' first name, 'Felix' (Latin for 'happy, blessed'), anticipates that of the aspiring young nobleman Aquila in the anarchic, barbarian world of *After London*. Margaret Estcourt perhaps prefigures the beautiful heroine of *After London*, Aurora, whose name, besides referring to the Latin for sunrise, also invokes the goddess of dawn.

In the novel as we have it, the principal characters of *Greene Ferne Farm* are not developed in terms of a conventional plot, and the observation that they are 'slightly drawn',³⁵ though hardly refutable, is in view of the complexity of their associations in a sense beside the point. It is suggested, in conclusion, that *Greene Ferne Farm*, is not only significant on its own terms, but also deserves to be considered an important precursor to Jefferies' later fiction.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Dr. William Lamb and his colleagues in Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh for referring me to the article by Russell K. Alspach.

³³ For example, the Battle of Deorham that broke the power of the Britons in the west, and the Battle of Ashdown in which King Alfred defeated the Danes. Jefferies refers to the location of the battle of *mons Badonicus* in his *Swindon History*, *op. cit.* ; see p.136.

³⁴ Goethe, *Faustus*, *op. cit.*, p.49.

³⁵ Jefferies, *Greene Ferne Farm*, *op. cit.*, Introduction, p.xi.

Richard Jefferies

Mary Geoghegan

Published by Richard Bentley in *Temple Bar*, January 1892, 94th vol., p.28.

THE tomes of lore that lie
In feather of bird and wing of butterfly,
The rushes and the mountain brook, the speedwell blue as sky,
Room in his heart for all!
For striving stitchwort as for oak-tree tall;
Room for the chickweed at the gate, the weed upon the wall!
Still as the page was writ
’Twas Nature held his hand and guided it:
Broadcast and free the lines were sown as meadows kingcup lit.
Vague longings found a tongue;
Things dim and ancient into speech were wrung;
The epic of the rolling wheat, the lyric hedgerow sung!
He showed the soul within
The veil of matter luminous and thin,
He heard the old earth’s undersong piercing the modern din.
He opened wide to space
The iron portals of the commonplace:
Wonder on wonder crowded through as star on star we trace.
A glory haloed round
The very wayside grasses as he found
The highest holiest loveliness was closest to the ground!
Others might dully plod
Purblind with custom, deaf as any clod –
He knew the highest heights of heaven bent o’er the path he trod.
No bird that cleaves the air
But his revealing thought has made more fair;
No tremulous dell of summer leaves but feels his presence there.
So though we deem him dead,
Lo! he yet speaketh! and the words are sped
In grassy whispers o’er the fields – by every wild flower said!

Thinking our way to a Greener Future: New Horizons for the Study of Literature and Sustainability

Rebecca Welshman

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More than sixty years after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) – a call to arms that led the way in twentieth-century environmentalism – the ailing condition of the natural world continues to cast a shadow over the future. Carson – marine biologist and well-known author on natural history – presents the familiar symbol of the diverging roads in Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Less Travelled'. Carson encourages readers to consider the choice between continuing on the path to destruction or striking out towards conservation:

We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been travelling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road the one 'less travelled by' offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth. (Carson 1962, p.277)

The concept of sustainability originates from ecology. Aldo Leopold, a key voice of the 1970s environmental movement which followed Carson, defined the ecologically aware response to the earth in *A Sand County Almanac*: 'land ... is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soil, plants and animals ... it is a sustained circuit, like a slowly augmented revolving fund of life' (Leopold 1970, p.253). More recently, Olivia Sprinkel (2009) has defined sustainability as 'a balance between the financial, human, and environmental ... being in a community of discussion, dialogue and action – because no person or company is an island and everything is interconnected'. As I will discuss, research has identified fertile connections between literature and the bio-diverse natural world that appeal to the senses. David Abram considers the potential of sensory experience to restore a weakening connection with the natural environment, suggesting that thinking outside the human condition can widen our perceptions and broaden intelligence:

By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentence to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone, but is a property of the earth. (Abram 1996, p.262)

We might identify parallels between the environmental crisis and the crisis in the humanities, which Philip Davis describes as a 'great fifty-year long cry of distress, outrage, fear, and melancholy' (2013, p.vii). Both crises share a similar time span and experts in both fields are working hard to bring about change. In light of concerns that literary studies, and the wider humanities, are becoming 'irrelevant' (Cohen, 2009) to our roles as citizens and professionals, the combined study of literature and sustainability offers new ways to promote the relevance and significance of the humanities.¹

Discussions of the future of the humanities have recently appeared in book-form. In *The Future Without a Past*, John Russo (2005) traces the demise of the humanities to the technologisation of daily life. Russo argues that the scholarly climate is growing to recognise that our environment is no longer natural but technological. One result of this shift is that technological values are taking the place of human values. Martha Nussbaum (2012) writes of a 'silent crisis' in which 'nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive.' In his discussion of the future of literary criticism, Davis urges us to act now to preserve ways of reading and thinking about language that foster creative and innate responses to literary texts. Davis observes that the worth of such responses is increasingly being challenged by other disciplinary approaches:

the category of 'the literary' has always been contentious. What is clear however, is how increasingly it is dismissed or is unrecognised as a way of thinking or an arena for thought. It is sceptically challenged from within, for example, by the sometimes rival claims of cultural history, contextualised explanation, or media studies. It is shaken from without by even greater pressures: by economic exigency and the severe social attitudes that can follow from it; by technological change that may leave the traditional forms of serious human communication looking merely antiquated. For just these reasons this is the right time for renewal, to start reinvigorated work into the meaning and value of literary reading for the sake of the future. (Davis 2013, p.vii)

¹ Andrew Delbanco, director of American studies at Columbia University, declared in 2009:

'Although people in humanities have always lamented the state of the field, they have never felt quite as much of a panic that their field is becoming irrelevant' (cited in Cohen, 2009).

As Davis points out, the ‘rival claims of cultural history’ and other forms of contextual approaches can tend to dilute the richness of language itself as a medium of expression. The written word is not merely a reaction to or interpretation of a set of social, cultural, historical or political, or even scientific circumstances. This essay suggests that the relation between the increasing urgency of sustainable concerns and the deepening crisis of the humanities should spur us to rethink the ways in which we read and interpret the creative process. As sustainability traditionally looks to the material to provide solutions to problems, a counterpart movement – which encourages literary thinkers to look within themselves – might usefully contribute to sustaining our future as healthy emotional beings. This essay thus aims to identify ways in which practitioners might – in the words of psychologist William Brown – ‘dig down deep’ to reconsider the role of the creative unconscious; an act that Brown describes as ‘going below the surface of the mind, going behind what is immediately apparent, in the faith that in psychology things are not always what they seem’ (Brown 1970, p.9). This essay argues that to sustain creative literary thinking for the future we need to recognise the role of natural imagery in the working mind. Moreover, to recognise the biologically diverse and healthy natural world as raw material for thought offers one way for literary criticism to justify and develop its connection with the young science of sustainability.

The close association between the condition of the environment and physical, mental, and emotional health has long been recognised but only more recently seriously considered. Stephen Kellert notes that we tend to ‘value nature because ... it fosters physical, emotional, and intellectual rewards and benefits’ (2009, p.115). The value of nature to human wellbeing has been widely substantiated by qualitative and quantitative research. For example, a quantitative study by Jo Barton and Jules Pretty (2010) concluded that exercising in natural environments has short and long-term mental health benefits. The positive effect of experiencing natural environments on human health and well-being has been positively suggested by a number of studies (e.g.: Maller and Townsend 2006; Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, and St. Leger 2005). Indeed, Laura M. Fredrickson and Dorothy H. Anderson (1999) concluded that experiencing the wilderness contributed to spiritual growth. These developing fields of research have fed into University programmes. A current programme on Global Sustainability and Health at John Hopkins University, for example, explores how global warming, population increase, species loss, the ruin of ecosystems, and over consumption, are having noticeable effects on

human health and well-being. In the UK, new research is exploring the health benefits of reading. The Centre for Research into Reading, Information and Linguistic Systems (CRILS) at the University of Liverpool, in conjunction with The Reader Organisation, has found that shared reading has psychological benefits (eg: Billington, Dowrick, Robinson, Hamer and Williams, 2011). A number of studies conducted by CRILS and The Reader, including a pilot study of literature-based intervention in a prison setting, proffer literature as ‘a model of human thinking and feeling, [that allows] people to connect with the text and each other and come to new levels of understanding about themselves and the world around them’ (Robinson and Billington 2014, p.2). In 2012 Billington and Davis stated that responses from people with depression to passages which describe natural beauty confirm that reading about nature has healing qualities (Billington and Davis 2012). Beyond the study of reading, Theodore Roszak’s ecopsychology recognises the need for a balance between the psyche and the natural world and seeks to repair the damaged connection between people and environment (Roszak 1992).

In literature that engages deeply with the environment, natural features become tools through which to expand the thinking process. The following extract, from Richard Jefferies’ ‘The Sun and the Brook’, first published in the scientific magazine, *Knowledge* (1882), articulates the sympathy between the mind and the outer world:

The long, loving touch of the sun has left some of its own mystic attraction in the brook. Resting here, and gazing down into it, thoughts and dreams come flowing as the water flows. Thoughts without words, mobile like the stream, nothing compact that can be grasped and stayed: dreams that slip silently as water slips through the fingers. The grass is not grass alone; the leaves of the ash above are not leaves only. From tree, and earth, and soft air moving, there comes an invisible touch which arranges the senses to its waves as the ripples of the lake set the sand in parallel lines. The grass sways and fans the reposing mind; the leaves sway and stroke it, till it can feel beyond itself and with them, using each grass blade, each leaf, to abstract life from earth and ether. These then become new organs, fresh nerves and veins running afar out into the field, along the winding brook, up through the leaves, bringing a larger existence. The arms of the mind open wide to the broad sky. (Jefferies 1980, p.280)

Jefferies’ use of alliteration lulls the senses into a state of calm and repose, and encourages the reader to imagine a deeper sense of connection with the material world. Wordless thoughts are ‘mobile like the stream’, and dreams ‘slip silently as water slips’. To feel and imagine outwards, through the living world, he suggests, can improve our sensitivity and

allow us to live more fully – to respect the natural world as a vital part of our existence. With the '[open] arms of the mind', we can embrace the necessary shift in ideology – the recognition that, in order to live more sustainably, our expectations for how we experience the world need to change. Jefferies' observation that 'nature has affixed no bounds to thought' (1980, p.77) epitomises his belief in the rich potential for the experience of natural environments to expand and reveal the thinking process.² Indeed, recent research by Miles Richardson³ and Jenny Hallam (2013) has suggested that a familiar landscape incites emotional and widening thought experiences. The study, which used thematic analysis to evaluate diary entries based on daily visits to a familiar semi-rural landscape, found that the repeated experience of nature elicited a deep feeling of connectedness. Furthermore, the authors claim that engaging with the natural world is a process without end that procures a constant stream of new thoughts and understanding. As part of this framework of understanding, Richardson and Hallam (2013) refer to David Abram's observation that natural landscapes and the life within them are not static environments, but dynamic, and can be experienced on a personal level in various ways, with myriad implications for personal development. Such research, which is grounded in previous studies concerning creativity and the natural world, aligns the experience of nature with the process of creativity itself, which is often subjective and random in nature. Thus, to revisit an author's creative process, through the study of written works deeply engaged with the environment, affords new opportunities for the production of creative literary thinking that transcends the traditional boundaries of mere analysis.

Monty Don – author, broadcaster and President of the Soil Association – believes that 'nature can heal our social problems as well as our physical and mental ones', and declares that 'a society without respect for the natural world, the food it produces or the detail and ritual of the landscape is horribly impoverished' (Don [online]). Don, who has been long influenced and guided by the works of Jefferies, eloquently recalls his experience of gardening in early spring:

² Jefferies (1980, p.77) writes: 'There is largeness and freedom here. Broad as the down and free as the wind, the thought can roam high over the narrow roofs in the vale. Nature has affixed *no bounds to thought*'. The revelatory potential of the limitless natural world is juxtaposed against the constraints of the artificially constructed human world suggested by the rooftops.

³ Richardson's diary for this study formed the basis of *Needwood: A Search for Deep Nature* (2012), which charts a journey into a local rural area and identifies the universal need for nature connection. This has recently been followed by *A Blackbird's Year* (in press), an exploration into the connections between nature and thought, guided by the philosophy of Jefferies.

I was alone in the garden of my childhood. The trees had not yet come into leaf, but the sky was warm, there was gentle sun on my skin, peace glowing from every object around me. The soil was rilled like corduroy and worked to an umber tith. I ran its silkiness through my fingers, rummaging my hands through the seedbed until they grew down into the earth, fingers spreading through the grainy particles of dirt. I awoke with a lasting sense of well-being. [...] once you have felt the first warm soil of spring in your hands it never goes from the memory. (Don 1996, p.42)

As in the passage by Jefferies, the tactile experience of nature connects the author with his surroundings. In both accounts, natural features are routes for imaginative movement: Jefferies' thoughts become 'fresh nerves and veins running afar out into the field, along the winding brook, up through the leaves' (Jefferies 1980, p.280), Don runs his hands 'through the seedbed until they gr[o]w down into the earth' (Don 1996, p.42). For both authors, recognition of the intrinsic value of small things – 'leaves' or 'grainy particles of dirt' – fosters luminous self-awareness. Aspects of the environment which have, at least in part, endured through time – the soil, worked by generations of the same family, the brook that has run through the fields for centuries – inspire the individual to think beyond their own lifetime. Moreover, awareness of the independent vitality of the natural world creates a 'lasting sense of well being' – an experience that it would be unfair to deny to future generations by living unsustainably.

Fuller engagement with place stems from the rich maturation of what Richard Moran terms the 'inward glance' or 'introspective awareness' (2001, p.11). The works of Richard Jefferies offer some of the earliest and most consistent examples of how literature, in conveying sustainable values, creates its own linguistic biosphere. In 1870, in the garden of the Wiltshire farmhouse where he was born, Jefferies observed some spots on the sun. It was, he writes:

a wonderful and never-wearying spectacle, evening after evening as I watched it under the low boughs of the russet apple, the great fiery disk slowly dropping beyond the brook and the meadow, beyond the elms on the rise, beyond the distant hills. The green leaves over and the grass under the quiet rush of the brook, the evening song of the birds, the hushing hum of the bees at the hives set just there, I forgot all but these and the sun – by the spot I could touch out almost to it.

For centuries backwards perhaps no one with the naked eye had seen a sun-spot; for centuries to come no one might see them again; so that the moment of my existence in it seemed a link between the illimitable past and future; this moment made more vital, more fierce in its existence by the consciousness the sunspot gave of the long bygone and the endless to be. (Jefferies 1997, p.13)

At the time, the sun spots sparked a series of commentaries in newspapers and magazines concerning their origin. According to an anonymous article in the *Globe*, some believed the theory put forward by Maupertuis that the phenomena were caused by waste floating across the face of the sun ('Spots on the Sun' 1870, p.8). Others supported Lalande's idea that the formations stood out from the surface but had come from within (p.8). Professor Alexander Wilson suggested that the spots were 'cavities in the elastic solar atmosphere' (p.8), and another theory explained them as meteoric stones, which eventually got absorbed by the sun (p.8). In his account Jefferies is not concerned with what the spots are, or how they were formed, but rather with the sort of luminous self-awareness that arises through their contemplation. The spot itself is a point of connection between the lone thinker and the magnitude of the wider universe; a mirror to the temporary condition of his life on earth. 'The moment of [his] existence' is realised through the enduring presence of the familiar natural surroundings in and beyond his own lifetime – the brook, the orchard, and the generations of wildlife. Jefferies uses language to locate himself – not simply in the environment of the garden, but – within the grander timescale of times past and future. The leaves 'over' the water and the grass 'under' suggest a microcosmic shape or form of containment, as does his own position 'under' the apple tree, near the hives which are 'set just there'. The intimate experience of place conveys to the reader a deep and timeless sense of belonging, and implicitly suggests the worth of preserving natural beauty for future generations to enjoy.

Following the model of reading augmented by CRILS and The Reader, the study of serious literature gives meaning to individual experience, and engages the mind. Furthermore, reading literature that engages with a natural setting not only promotes sustainable values, but offers a way to sustain literary thinking itself. As the creative process is so closely associated with place, we can, through the study of literature, gain a deeper understanding of the importance of sustaining a healthy natural world. As noted by Angela Hague, 'there is almost a universal agreement that the creative process begins in an upsurge of emotional intensity' that is often associated with place (Hague 2003, p.85). Hague's examples include E.L. Doctorow's *Loon Lake*, which the author claims arose from 'a very strong sense of place'; Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (1948), which was inspired by a woodland walk; and Joseph Conrad's experiences of writing *Nostromo* (1904) and *Mirror of the Sea* (1906) (Hague 2003, p.86). Conrad records the creation of *Nostromo* as 'a period ... in which my sense of the truth of things was attended by a very intense

imaginative and emotional readiness' (Conrad, preface to *The Secret Agent* 1907, in Hague 2003, p.86). According to Hague, this emotional condition requires the author to retain 'an openness to experience and a receptivity to the contents of the unconscious mind that facilitate their emergence into consciousness' (Hague 2003, p.86). For the reader too the process of unconscious content becoming conscious – through imaginative engagement with a place or time significant to the author – gives meaning to the reader's individual life experience and can offer valuable guidance for the future. Furthermore, engagement with natural settings stimulates the author to consider the personal qualities needed by fictional characters to endure crises. For Conrad, the conception of *Nostromo*, which involved the vivid recall of a childhood experience of place, gave rise to the main character – a sailor who has a 'firm grip on the earth he inherits, in his improvidence and generosity ... a Man of the People ... distaining to lead but ruling from within' (Conrad 1984, p.xlv). In his futuristic novel *After London* (1885), set in an inundated southern landscape where the ruins of London are submerged beneath a poisonous swamp, Jefferies considers the personal qualities needed to survive an environmental crisis.⁴ The hero Felix Aquila – fortified by his courage, persistence, and faith in human love – helps to uphold a sustainable society that, while it has reverted to barbarism, does not exhaust the environment on which it depends.

Features of the natural world, which are so familiar as to be almost common-place, offer new ways to understand the complex architecture of human emotion and experience. Davis, Director of CRILS, suggests that a poem has its own 'emotional atmosphere' – that it is a 'holding ground of quiet emotion' (Billington and Davis 2012). Literature is an 'arena for thought' within which to sense or work through 'the invisible presence of mind, within, and between ... words' (Davis 2013, vii, p.9). Davis explains that this space:

could be the map or mould that a sonnet provides; it could be the recollected landscape in which a poet such as Wordsworth mentally stakes out his thinking; or simply the area marked out by a potential story and the interrelationships its premise involves. (Davis 2013, p.12)

Within this fertile ground, which has subterranean depths, ideas are worked through and encouraged to grow. One might recall the Roman amphitheatre, Maumbury Rings, in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of*

⁴ For further reading about the creative process that precipitated *After London* – in particular Jefferies' experience of the Isle of Wight see Rebecca Welshman, 2012. 'Imagining Archaeology: Nature and Landscape in the Work of Richard Jefferies (Part Two)'. *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 25: pp.14-30.

Casterbridge which is the setting for the ‘inarticulate’ Mayor’s reunion with his estranged wife, Susan Henchard (Hardy 2008, p.68).⁵ In Hardy’s example, the reunion within the ‘arena’ – upon the compacted relics of former human times – facilitates a recovery process within the layered terrain of Henchard’s mind.⁶ In his analysis of Hardy’s poetry, Davis (2013) argues that the creative process, which the reader revisits when reading, affords new spaces within which to reflect upon experience:⁷

Literature is that alternative place in which the writer creates openings, ‘heaving into uncreated space’ as D.H. Lawrence put it in his ‘Study of Thomas Hardy’ – each significant move of thought not only going on within that poetic space but further extending and sustaining its dominion. (Davis 2013, p.21)

‘Each ... move of thought’ connects with the next in a continually expanding web that gives structure to the shape of the space. To read is to follow these webs of meaning – to retrace the threads inwards towards the mind of the thinker – and so to experience the oscillation of thought that underpins the creative process. Contextual approaches, which privilege events or circumstances outside of the text, can tend to misrepresent the creative process as an over-simplified process of conditioning. It is thus the responsibility of the literary critic to look deeper – past the two-dimensional surface webs which loosely connect cultural, political, social, or even biological fields – to those dense multi-dimensional webs of emotional and personal questioning which are spun in the process of self-discovery.

We might consider the pivotal moment when Jefferies, after seventeen years’ contemplation, finally penned the first few lines of his spiritual autobiography *The Story of My Heart* (1883). Jefferies describes the experience, which took place at Pevensey Castle, Sussex, thus:

The grey stones, the thin red bricks laid by those whose eyes had seen Caesar’s Rome, lifted me out of the grasp of houselife, of modern civilization, of those minutiae which occupy the moment. The grey stone made me feel as if I had existed from then till now, so strongly did I enter into and see my own life as if reflected. My own existence was focussed back on me; I saw its joy, its unhappiness, its birth, its death, its possibilities among the infinite,

⁵ For further reading see Rebecca Welshman 2013. ‘Imagining Archaeology: Nature and Landscape in the Late Nineteenth Century.’ PhD diss., pp.144–149. University of Exeter. <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/10921/WelshmanR.pdf?sequence=2>

⁶ Hardy refers to the site as a ‘secluded arena’—entirely invisible to the outside world’ (*The Mayor of Casterbridge* 2008, p.68). Hardy attended an excavation of the site in 1908 that confirmed its Neolithic origins.

⁷ Notably, Davis (2013, p.11) draws up on natural images and terminology to convey his meaning. E.g.: ‘field of consciousness’; ‘floods’; the ‘booming, buzzing’ world at large.

above all its yearning Question. Why? Seeing it thus clearly, and lifted out of the moment by the force of seventeen centuries, I recognised the full mystery and the depth of things in the roots of the dry grass on the wall, in the green sea flowing near. (Jefferies 1905, pp.26-7)

Jefferies' observations of the material world in a rural setting afford a mirror to his inner thoughts and feelings whereby he perceives his 'own existence ... focussed back' on him. The therapeutic benefits of nature, wherein the natural world acts as a mirror to reflect an individual's thoughts and feelings, are summed up by Fran Segal:

When we begin to see wilderness as a life partner who mirrors our own depth and richness, supports our growth, and is a part of us at the transpersonal level, then we begin to see how the earth is involved in an ongoing organic process of its own, having inherent value in and of itself. (2001, p.204)

For Jefferies, whose most accomplished works Edward Thomas described as 'pure spirit' (Jefferies 1980, p.xxx), the 'near[ness]' of the sea and the 'roots of the dry grass on the wall' are coordinates that orientate him in the moment and deepen his awareness. The author understands his human condition all the more forcefully when he witnesses the legacies of human endeavour out of doors – beneath the same sun as the Roman builders, and in view of the same sea. As a microscope magnifies the present condition of the object in focus, so Jefferies visualises his existence within the sweep of time and the unwritten, infinite possibilities of the future. The layout of Pevensey Castle – the circular enclosure of the keep situated within a larger rectangle of land – may have recalled to him the structure of a compound microscope which has a rectangular 'stage' with an 'objective lens' that focuses on a circular area.⁸ The idea of his own life being 'focussed back' to him may thus be understood as a pivotal moment when the meaning of his life – no longer simply under analysis – is brought into sharp and sudden focus.

In 1887, four years after *The Story of My Heart*, Jefferies was working on a revised edition named *Sun Life*. In his notes for the second version he refers to looking through the opposite end of a telescope:

exaggerating death: looking at it through convex lens, or small end of telescope and life through the large end ... to live always among the present ... Fly's eye 16,000 facets an immensely powerful microscope. The infinite earth that I see and enter into – sparkling sea – the gleam on the fly's wing. (Jefferies 1948, p.248)

⁸ Compound microscopes also feature mirrors beneath the stage which reflect the light.

Small features of the natural world – such as the eye of a fly or a gleam of light upon water – offer a window into what Jefferies termed a larger ‘beyond’ (Jefferies 1948, p.283). Although the eye is tiny it is ‘an immensely powerful microscope’ that can magnify the ordinary world to new and dramatic proportions. Through small, seemingly ordinary phenomena, Jefferies can ‘see and enter into’ a space that is ‘infinite’, thus suggesting that the ordinary (small) contains the extraordinary (large) within it. Such perceptions encourage us to recognise the worth of the natural world as a threshold for new experience and to value ordinary things.

The confessional tone of *The Story of My Heart* conveys how the experience of the outdoors within a historic setting was essential to Jefferies’ creative process. The stone enclosure of Pevensey – the site of many former battles – fortifies the author by giving him the courage to ‘recognise [sic] the full mystery and the depth of things’ and to conquer his inarticulacy. He writes that the stone ‘made [him] feel’; that his mind is ‘swept’ and ‘lifted ... out of the grasp’ of ordinary routine (Jefferies 1905, pp.26-27). The individual psyche transcends containment within the ego’s version of itself to move ‘among the infinite’ – a gesture that is reinforced by the repeated refrain ‘lifted me out of the moment’ (Jefferies 1905, p.26). Jefferies further explains the role of the setting in the process of authorship:

The mystery and the possibilities are not in the roots of the grass, nor is the depth of things in the sea; they are in my existence, in my soul. The marvel of existence, almost the terror of it, was flung on me with crushing force by the sea, the sun shining, the distant hills. With all their ponderous weight they made me feel myself: all the time, all the centuries made me feel myself this moment a hundred-fold. I determined that I would endeavour to write what I had so long thought of, and the same evening put down one sentence. There the sentence remained two years. I tried to carry it on; I hesitated because I could not express it: nor can I now, though in desperation I am throwing these rude stones of thought together, rude as those of the ancient wall. (Jefferies 1905, p.27)

This experience prompted the unconscious content of the autobiography to rise to consciousness in the form of ‘rude stones of thought’. Although the thought alone is fleeting, the stone of the Roman wall sustains the thought by giving it an object. The stones, and the weight of time, become raw material for the mind – the building blocks of creativity which lead to the construction of the new literary form of a spiritual biography. An altered condition of realisation is ‘flung on [him] with crushing force by the sea’, and the ‘ponderous weight’ of the elements. This experience jolts the creative unconscious into action and

offers a constructive way through his inability to write. In the study of all serious literature we should begin with an open mind, just as the Roman engineers and the late-Victorian wordsmiths began with no more than an open space or a blank page across which to exercise their thoughts and hopes for the future. Moreover, it is the role of the literary critic to find new ways in which to explore and inhabit this space. Literary analysis of works which are sensitive to the subtle interrelations between thought and environment, challenges and deepens our perceptions, and can lead to the flowering of our own environmental sensitivity. As explained by Abram, perceptions of the human body involve reflections upon our 'inheritance ... rootedness in an evolutionary history and a particular ancestry' (Abram 1996, p.50). Authors such as Lawrence and Jefferies focused on exploring what Abram terms 'a world that exceeds our grasp in every direction, our means of contact with things and lives that are still unfolding, open and indeterminate, all around us' (Abram 1996, p.50). To get inside this process of 'unfolding' through literary-critical analysis promotes a similar – yet individual – experience of that world which 'exceeds our grasp'.

In this example from D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, the cultural-historical details of the industrial setting of Nottinghamshire are presented as secondary to the experience between Ursula and Skrebensky. Natural images sustain and give shape to otherwise unstable thoughts and feelings:

Coming out of the lane along the darkness, with the dark space spreading down to the wind, and the twinkling lights of the station below, the far-off windy chuff of a shunting train, the tiny clink-clink-clink of the wagons blown between the wind, the light of Beldover-edge twinkling upon the blackness of the hill opposite, the glow of the furnaces along the railway to the right, their steps began to falter. They would soon come out of the darkness into the lights. It was like turning back. It was unfulfilment. Two quivering, unwilling creatures, they lingered on the edge of the darkness, peering out at the lights and the machine-glimmer beyond. They could not turn back to the world – they could not.

So lingering along, they came to a great oak tree by the path. In all its budding mass it roared to the wind, and its trunk vibrated in every fibre, powerful, indomitable.

'We will sit down,' he said.

And in the roaring circle under the tree, that was almost invisible yet whose powerful presence received them, they lay a moment looking at the twinkling lights on the darkness opposite, saw the sweeping brand of a train past the edge of their darkened field.

Then he turned and kissed her, and she waited for him. The pain to her was the pain she wanted, the agony was the agony she wanted. She was caught up, entangled in the powerful vibration of the night. The man, what

was he? – a dark, powerful vibration that encompassed her. She passed away as on a dark wind, far, far away, into the pristine darkness of paradise, into the original immortality. She entered the dark fields of immortality. (Lawrence 1997, p.449)

The industrial backdrop of the mines is kept at the periphery of the scene with noises that are ‘far-off’, ‘tiny’, and in ‘darkness’. The oak forms an enclosure – a ‘roaring circle’ – within which Ursula enters the ‘pristine darkness of paradise’. The oak is the ‘powerful’ heart at the centre that ‘vibrate[s] in every fibre’. Compared with the distant activity of the mines, the oak is older, stronger, and ‘indomitable’. The qualities of the oak and the man combine – like the oak, the man is ‘a dark, powerful vibration that encompassed her’ – so that she becomes ‘entangled in the powerful vibration of the night’. Ursula’s meaningful union with Skrebensky relies upon the healthy ‘budding’ condition of the oak and its long continuance in the landscape. The tree’s position ‘by the path’ at the end of the lane suggests that it may have been a boundary marker.⁹ For Ursula and Skrebensky, who seek sanctuary from the ‘lights and the machine-glimmer’, the oak’s ‘roaring circle’ encloses them, and protects them from the outer world.¹⁰ As a boundary marker, the oak – ‘that was almost invisible yet whose powerful presence received them’ – facilitates Ursula’s crossing of spiritual boundaries and her initiation into ‘the dark fields of immortality’. Furthermore, the oak’s significance as a landmark is intimately related to the animalistic qualities that Lawrence invests in it. Its ‘roar’, which may recall the roar of a lion, seems to defy the spread of the mine that lies just at ‘the edge’ of the field and which threatens to encroach upon the land.¹¹ As guardian of the fields, the oak thus bespeaks the wider threat to the natural environment posed by rapid industrial progress.¹²

⁹ The Thoroton Society – Nottinghamshire’s main historical and archaeological society – records that oaks were used as markers. E.g.: ‘The Southwell-Morton boundary...includes a short length of double hedge and ditch, and on the Halloughton corner there is a high bank with *oak* trees (including an old pollard), *planted as markers* on the bends’ (Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire 1980, p.53).

¹⁰ The image of a ‘roaring circle’ might also conjure the circular outline of a roaring male lion, or the flaming fire of the sun. In their analysis of ancient symbolism in Israelite societies Keel and Uehlinger (1998, p.190) write that ‘even though the symbols had a completely different provenance and significance, lion symbolism and *sun* symbolism could be used in tandem’.

¹¹ The lion, if understood as a symbol of courage, may relate to Ursula’s defiance of fear and shame: ‘When she rose, she felt strangely free, strong. She was not ashamed, – why should she be?’ (Lawrence 1997, p.449).

¹² Iron Age limestone engravings in Judah represent the lion as a symbol of guardianship. Lawrence himself alludes to ‘the lion of Judah’ in a letter to S.S. Koteliansky (17 April, 1922), which mentions the posting of a ‘Kandy brass tray’: ‘the lion is meant to be a Buddha symbol, but it might just as well be the lion of Judah’ (Lawrence 2002, p.228). In the analysis of the lion symbol one might also

As the analysis of these examples suggests, the human response to place – which can retain elements that remain relatively unchanged over time – may nurture the contemporary desire to work through and understand our emotions. With respect to sustainability debates, and to the future of literary criticism, close reading can help us to consider why and how we need to change. Creative thinking in literary studies can encourage the type of exploration and self-discovery needed to prepare young generations of thinkers for the experience of living. As expressed by 1850s educator Bronson Alcott: ‘Education is that process by which thought is opened out of the soul, and, associated with outward things, is reflected back upon itself, and thus made conscious of their reality and shape’ (cited in Nussbaum 2012, p.2). Enhanced sensitivity can lead to greater understanding of the subtle connections between inner and outer worlds, and of the interrelation between the past, present and future. As suggested by the broad range of creative works and research that pay close attention to the natural world, our own health and creativity depends upon the maintenance of a biologically diverse natural environment. Moreover, to recognise – as Lawrence and Jefferies so eloquently expressed – the potential of the natural world to act as a mirror to our own thoughts and feelings gives the study of literature a profound reason to contribute to sustainability. However, to guide future critics and practitioners, we need to cultivate approaches to literary study which recognise and respond to sustainable ethics. We also need to make careful judgements about the texts that we choose to represent the developing relationship between literature and sustainability. The successful relationship between the two fields ultimately lies in generating fresh responses to how we think, feel and respond to the world around us. The potential for fruitful collaboration between the young science of sustainability and the established discipline of literature situates us on the threshold of a new horizon, and promises to be a new and significant justification for literary studies.

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consider how early twentieth-century colonial exploits in India threatened lion habitats and species numbers. Lawrence may thus be figuratively aligning the threat to native environments posed by British colonies with the spread of industrialisation in the north of England. See also Lawrence’s poem ‘The Mountain Lion’ in which he regrets human intrusion into wild habitats.

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Richard Jefferies

This short tribute to Richard Jefferies on his death was republished in the *Berkshire Chronicle* on 27 August 1887. Originally, the poem appeared in *Punch*. The poet remains unknown.

Lover of Nature, whom her lovers love,
Those who were dear to thee to *Them* are dear:
The world's hard way to lift their lives above
Is a clear duty, welcome as 'tis clear.
And if for every page of pure delight
Those fine and faithful fingers wrought for all,
There came the slenderest gift, the poorest mite,
More lightly on those stricken hearts might fall
The weight of sore bereavement, hard to bear,
E'en when, as here, all men its sorrow share.

Sketches from Jefferies' Notebook VI

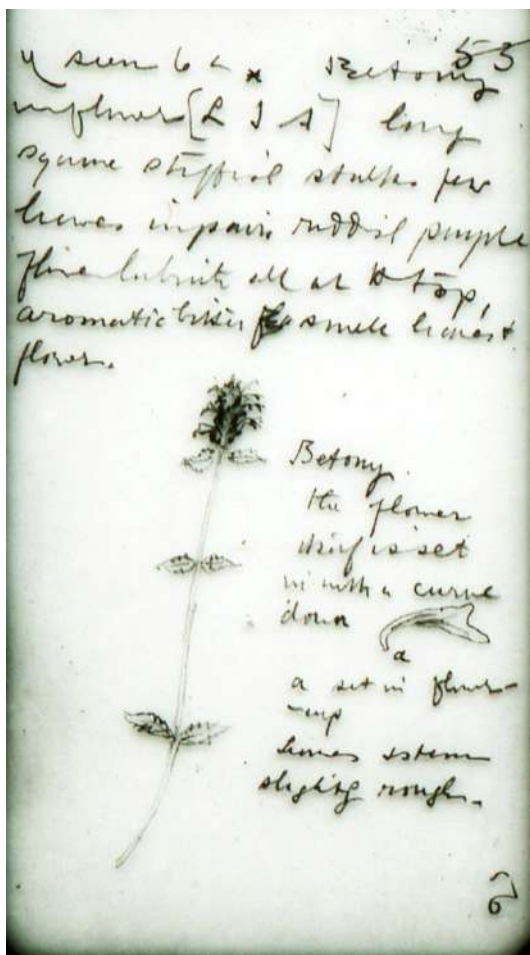


Folio 55 - 31 August 1879

succory

like pod on/ stalk - it is
an unopened/ flower, inside/ blue.

20/ stamen

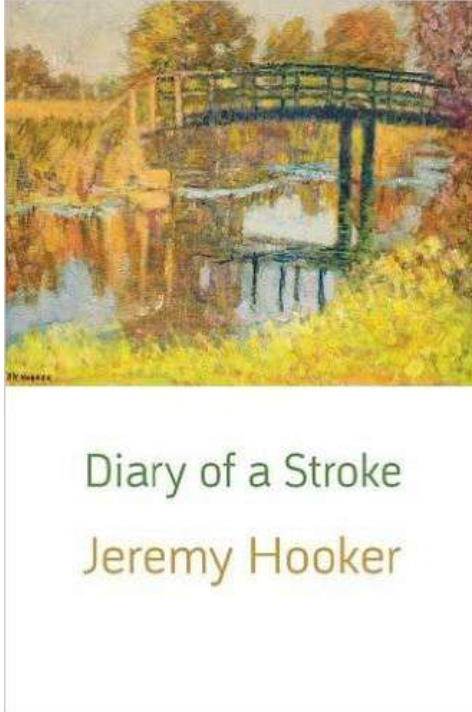


Folio 53 - 31 August 1879
 Betony/in flower ... long
 square stiffish stalks few
 leaves in pairs reddish purple
 flower labiate all at the top
 aromatic bitter smell leaves &/ flower.
 Betony/ the flower itself is set
 in with a curve/ down.
 a set in flower-/up
 Leaves & stem
 slightly rough.

Book Review

Roger Ebbatson

Jeremy Hooker: *Diary of a Stroke*. Shearman Books, 2016; 978-1-84861-509-0; £12.95.



The literary critic and poet Jeremy Hooker was suddenly afflicted with a stroke in the summer of 1999, and unusually decided to keep a diary recounting his experiences. Far from making depressing reading, this record of Hooker's hospital experience and subsequent recovery is indeed, as he says, 'a diary with a difference'. His reflections on his personal affliction, far from representing a self-centred collapse into his own troubles, are imbued with his meditations on the natural world as perceived through the frame of his admired literary models, amongst whom Richard Jefferies looms most prominently. Thus even at the outset of Hooker's hospitalisation we find him recording not only his physical

symptoms, family visits and so on, but also lacing his diaries with natural phenomena glimpsed through the windows, literary reflections and imaginative visions. Indeed Hooker may be said in some senses to share Jefferies' mode of visionary apprehension, and it is moving to observe the interplay in his often luminous writing between the physical effort entailed in his recuperation and his evocative observations on nature, art and mortality as here in his entry for 2 August:

Quiet afternoon. Sky veiled, a little breeze stirring the sunshade on the walled seating area outside. Murmur of voices from a few visitors. Across the ward an old man lies with his mouth open, face sharpened, probably near death.

Hooker inevitably feels at one remove from nature in this environment, and remarks tellingly,

Summer clouds in chalk country – for as long as I have loved these things, it has never occurred to me that, one day, I would be looking at them out of a hospital window, unable, if I wished, to walk over the hills.

The interplay here between the record of physical struggle and imaginative investment in nature is beautifully sustained, as in the account of Hooker's first laboured attempts at walking again which are interleaved with some prescient reflections on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers, and on the idea of the 'chiasm' or link between 'one's own flesh and the flesh of the world'. Hooker's technique here enables him to inhabit a space between words and experience, thereby eliciting a text which acts as a mediator rather as a substitute for the experience of empathy embedded in an interplay of metaphor and analogy. What is explored and articulated in the diary so fruitfully is the issue of the reciprocity of attention between self and environment, perceiver and landscape. The approach to natural description eschews the literal in favour of a form of writing which effectively creates a 'voice' for nature itself through a process of authorial/bodily immersion in landscape. The effect of this luminous text is thus, in the phrase of a contemporary philosopher, of 'a place opening itself to presence'. As Hooker begins the slow process of recovery he writes vividly about an almost mystical affinity with nature:

In childhood, and at times since, I have felt I could see life, or were on the verge of seeing it – a shimmering in the air, an almost visible body made of light and movement. Similarly, as a boy, I would sometimes see electricity flowing from a light bulb. Once, it came to rest on the back of my hand, and was a brilliant blue-green fly, which startled and frightened me, and I shook it off.

As a poet he feels aware of 'writing in places deeper in meanings than I (or anyone) could fathom', his perception summed up by terms such as 'charged' or 'ground', and rooted in his intellectual and emotional affiliation with Richard Jefferies:

When I read Jefferies' essays now, 45 years or more since I first read them, they are still more alive for me than anything I have ever read. Alive in the way of nature, as the drama of life occurs in the open air, the multitude of lives, the momentary changes and seasonal cycles, all...the flying colours, and the quick as it escapes us...for me he works magic [and] sees phenomenologically.

Jefferies' genius, Hooker remarks presciently, is for 'poetic seeing', and whilst he is often dismissed as a 'minor provincial figure', for Hooker he shares with some of the great painters a penetrating mode of perception 'below old habits of vision'.

The book goes on, after Hooker's release from hospital, to record with loving detail some memorable excursions in the countryside around the Mendips and elsewhere, but also offers an honest and unvarnished account of the author's tiredness and irritability with his situation. Indeed, what is so striking is the clarity of vision here, which also extends to Hooker's writing about his marriage and family relationships, as always framed and enmeshed with an intense responsiveness to the natural world. With its deeply pondered freight of personal memory, poetic technique and craft, and almost visionary intensity of perception, a book which might well have turned into a self-absorbed confessional turns out to be an exhilarating and insightful response to human mortality viewed through the perspective of the recurrence and renewal embodied in the world of nature. Jeremy Hooker ends this moving personal record with a return to his university desk, but immediately prior to this entrances the reader with one more natural vision which resonates powerfully in the memory, with its almost hypnotic pattern of recurrence and renewal:

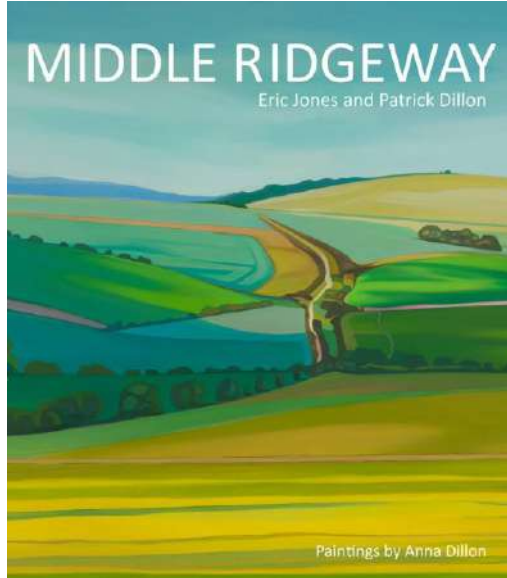
Morning view from the veranda over the sea garden, light frost on the grass. Sun rising over the Island, enveloped in an aura of sunlit sea mist, the long rounded back from west of Yarmouth to Alum Bay and the Needles, Tennyson's memorial on the highest point.

After breakfast we walked through the garden...Distant chalk cliffs of Purbeck – end of the broken geological bridge – echoing the nearer cliffs of West Wight. Sea music! Waves coming in, rising, concave waves curving over, breaking on shingle, ploughing it up – a long noise as water retreating sucks back the shingle, sifting, sifting...

Book Review

Janice M. Lingley

Middle Ridgeway and its environment by Eric Jones and Patrick Dillon. Wessex Books, Salisbury, 2016. Illustrated in colour with 20 paintings by Anna Dillon. 144 pages. ISBN 978-1-903035-48-1.



This book presents a ‘descriptive study’ of the principal ecological and economic changes from prehistory to the present day which have formed the landscape of the North Wessex Downs, focusing on the Middle Ridgeway from Streatley in Berkshire to Avebury in Wiltshire, together with its adjoining landscapes and parishes. The text is authoritative not just in terms of the writers’ academic expertise, but because their personal knowledge of, and engagement with, the area has been virtually life-long. The autobiographical appendix details provides impressive evidence of this. Anna Dillon, Patrick Dillon’s daughter, explains the development of her interest in the downland topography as an artist, and the painters who have influenced her.

Primarily aimed at the general reader, the text is without footnotes and detailed scholarly apparatus, but the reader is introduced to numerous

writers, such as John Aubrey, Gilbert White, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hughes, Alfred Williams and Richard Jefferies, who over the years have contributed comment – historical, economic, archaeological and literary – on the North Wessex Downs and its environs. For those whose acquaintance with the area has hitherto been restricted to leisurely scenic walks merely with the aid of a guidebook, the book will be a revelation and a stimulus to further reading and study. The student who wishes to acquire a knowledge of the area which is more broadly based than conventional lines of academic study will also find the book an excellent introduction to the subject. It is a very informed and informative book – thoughtful and challenging – and significantly extended by the illustrations. In their deployment of strong flowing lines and vibrant colour, Anna Dillon's paintings convey a sense of the landscape's primeval energy and power.

The first chapter argues the area's 'relative remoteness' and identifies it as 'an ecological island' of flora and fauna which represents a distinctive community. The authors suggest that remarkably it still possesses some of what must have been its 'ancient landscape beauty'. The ensuing chapter on 'Prehistory and Early History' is broadly chronological in its description of the underlying geology of the Downs and its early inhabitants, and is thematically related to the main body of the book. The central chapters, on 'The London Market', 'Ploughland and Grassland', 'Land Holding' and 'Countryside Sports', concentrating on the most recent centuries, discuss the environmental and economic changes which have had the most impact and for which there is both primary and secondary documentary evidence. The text generally is endowed with great interest in terms of its locally based anecdotal evidence: the carter's lad who died when his wagon became stuck in a snow drift high on the Downs; the drovers' dogs who were accustomed to happily finding their own way back to Wales while their owners journeyed home by sea; the traditional management of water meadows by men called 'drowners' and 'floaters'; the impact on grassland species by various kinds of livestock – to give just a few examples.

The book concludes with chapters on 'The Wildlife Legacy' and 'Retrospect and Prospect'. The penultimate chapter, concentrating as it does on ornithology, will be of particular interest to bird-watchers. The final chapter discusses the impact of the radical changes in agricultural methods and the pace of these changes in terms of their sustainability. It ends with a blunt warning concerning the Ridgeway in relation to the current focus of leisure and sporting activities which are unsympathetic to other users and lacking in any real appreciation of the area's amenity.

The book's content and organisation bears a certain resemblance to a study in which Professor Jones was involved during the writing stage and which, as the author himself gratefully acknowledges, greatly encouraged: this is Colin R. Tubbs' *The New Forest, an ecological history*, published in 1968. Tubbs' book was not aimed at the general reader, though the author hoped that its interest would not be confined only to ecologists and environmentalists. Tubbs concludes with a summary warning of the possible impact of the area's proximity to city dwellers, the ease of access for the motorist, and more particularly the leisure seeker, heedless of the effect of incursion on flora and fauna and indifferent to the preservation of peace and tranquillity. It seems that Jones and Dillon's motivation to write *Middle Ridgeway* may have been partly based on similar concerns. They conclude by noting: 'As Colin Tubbs wrote long ago on the pressures on the New Forest, another great south country environment, it may well be that economic loss and some restriction on the degree to which new demands can be satisfied will have to be accepted if it is to retain its peculiar character. One thing is certain. It cannot be all things to all people for all time. Nor can the Middle Ridgeway.'

The final very useful note on 'Organisations, Literature and Further Reading' begins with a paragraph on the North Wessex Downs as a designated 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. This modern development in the management of areas with much to offer scenically is unexplored in the text, and might usefully have been included, though perhaps the authors felt that this was outside the scope of a discussion which is essentially historically based, and whose principal achievement lies in inculcating perspectives in terms of changing land use over time.

The reader is left wondering at the recent contests to which environmental lobbyists, with the support of members of the public, have had to resort – not always successfully – apparently in the default of the effective implementation of the provisions supposedly guaranteed by statute legislation: the housing development at Coate, for example, which lies next to the AONB North Wessex Downs boundary; and further afield, but also affecting AONB southern downland, the building of the Falmer stadium.

Meantime the great swathe of farmed land stretching across southern England from which modern agricultural methods have driven birds, flowering plants, invertebrates and insects in quantity is still with us, the dearth of the last two fauna being of particular concern, as Jones and Dillon observe, because of their position at the base of food chains.

