



NUMBER 33

Richard Jefferies: The View from Abroad

2018

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

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

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Note: American spelling, with some exceptions, has been anglicised.



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Extracts from *Ben Tubbs Adventures*

Richard Jefferies

Ben Tubbs Adventures was probably written in Jefferies' late teens and is his earliest extant work of any length. The hand-written manuscript is held at the British Library but the text was reproduced, with an Introduction by Andrew Rossabi, and published in 2016 by the Richard Jefferies Society under the Petton Books imprint. The page numbers refer to this edition.

Now certain rosy streaks of light conjoined with the fact that the stars looked precious dim and warned the travellers that day was approaching. Suddenly the sun cleared the summit of a hill and shot his beams in all directions causing the dew to glitter with a lustrous light; the birds woke up and the stars went out. [p.51]

As evening drew near they entered another forest of altogether a different description; here the trees grew thick and were matted with various creepers in one thick impenetrable wall of vegetation. There was no passing through this forest but by the winding buffalo paths trodden deep in the earth, which allowed but one horseman at a time and were frequently obstructed by creepers, under which the buffaloes had passed but which Finnikin—who rode foremost—was obliged to cut down with his hatchet. Few persons, once well in such a forest, would find their way out again, but Finnikin was a regular Indian in all but the colour of his skin, and even then, there was but slight difference. Just as the sun sunk they entered a sort of clearing some fifty yards in diameter which offered a capital place for a bivouac, especially as a large pool of water stood nearly in the centre. To this pool it was evident that the buffaloes came to drink as not only the path they had been following but five or six others coming from various directions led down to it. [p.101]

The moon was now rapidly sinking and her fading light showed that morning was approaching. Indeed in the eastern horizon certain rosy streaks of light, with which the sun is wont to herald his approach, had already shot up into the sky and was rapidly increasing in brightness. The stars were going out, one by one, until only the most splendid remained to testify that there had been such things, and these also soon disappeared. Then up rose the glorious sun sending his refulgent beams right in the faces of the fugitives and gladding their hearts with his splendour. [p.107]

Ben knew but little of Christianity beyond the name, he had but seldom bowed the knee, never had he trusted in God, never offered up a prayer in the real sense of the word. But now with death beneath, and worse than death behind, a sense of dependency came over him and he mentally prayed the Great Maker of the Universe to deliver him. [p.121]

The path widened again and to his great joy, at about a mile ahead, he saw that the cliffs went down and gave place to the rolling prairie, whose tall grass—such is the power of fancy—he would have sworn he saw waving. At this joyful sight his heart expanded and he uttered an exclamation of thankfulness. [p.122-123]

Far beneath him he could see the winding blue river clothed on each side by a narrow strip of wood succeeded by the boundless rolling prairie extending to the far-off horizon. Ahead he could see those abrupt hills that had caused him and his two companions to take the narrow path by the river. A few of these he saw he must pass before he felt the delightful turf of the prairie beneath his feet.

All appeared so still, so calm, so luxuriant under the hot beams of the midday sun as to almost make him forget the awkward situation he was in. For although he was in no immediate danger yet he well knew that there was but little chance of his ultimate escape. Thus he lay ruminating, chewing the cud of contemplation until the demands of hunger disturbed his reveries and he arose and walked forward. At first his legs almost refused their office but, after a few hundred yards were past, they recovered something of their old litherness and he walked rapidly forward.

On he went with joyful thoughts of presently meeting deer, and soon reached those broken hills before mentioned and, carefully ascending each one, peeped over into the valley below, hoping to see game. But none appeared, and having passed the last hill he, to his delight, entered the rolling prairie and, keeping near the wood which skirted the river, moved forward with rifle cocked in momentary expectation of deer. But mile after mile was thus passed—still no signs of any description of quadruped and he began to think he should lose his dinner. The sun too began to decline and, feeling that it was useless to continue his present course although loath to leave the river, he struck boldly out into the prairie towards the glorious luminary. [p.123-124]

John Burroughs' Letter to Harold Jefferies

This copy of a typed one-page letter is in the Mosher archives of the Houghton Library at Harvard University.¹ John Burroughs (April 3, 1837 – March 29, 1921) was an American nature essayist and was active in the conservation movement. See next article. For more information about Harold, see pp.136-144.

“Woodchuck Lodge”
Roxbury-in-the-Catskills,
New York.

October 2nd, 1915.

Dear Mr Jefferies:-

I am glad to have a letter from the son of Richard Jeff[e]ries. Of course I know your father's work, and greatly value it. When I went to England in 1882 I took one of your father's books with me (*Wild Life in a Southern Country* [sic]) I think, and promised myself the pleasure of seeing him, but for various reasons—none of which seem satisfactory at this distance—I failed to make the effort. I shall never cease to regret that I did not try to see him. The note he sounded is distinct in the literature of England, and will not be forgotten.

The volume of his that moved me most is *The Story of My Heart*. It reveals such a big heart working in such a rich poetic nature. I have never looked upon him as a mystic—he was far less so than Thoreau—but as a man of feeling and imagination describing and interpreting nature to us through his own heart. There is just enough of the magic of genius in his work to give it an aroma of its own. Without some touch or flavour of the ideal, the unattainable, we cannot have a work of true literature.

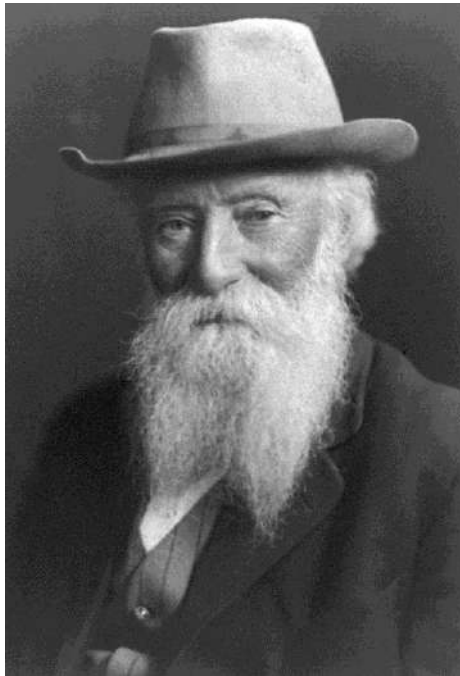
I am still writing books with my seventy ninth birthday only six months away, and am getting nearly as much out of life as ever I did. My next volume is to be called—“Under the Apple Trees” and was mostly written here in my orchard camp on the farm where I was born. I usually spend the summer and early fall months here. What a pity your father could not have had health and opportunity such as I have had. I had a good inheritance of health to begin with, and I have preserved it by living a sane and simple life. Then the struggle to live is rarely so hard in this country as in the old world.

¹ MS Am 1096 (295), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The great questions you refer to press upon all sensitive and imaginative souls. But they are insoluble. Of course we cannot “contemplate parting with one’s inner self” because in the very act of trying to do so we see our inner self is still in existence. We never can outrun our own shadow. Your thoughts about the theoretical curve are very suggestive. Celestial mathematics could probably give us the key to all mysteries if we were equal to the task of drawing it out.

I should be glad to see you if you ever come my way. With hearty good wishes, I am,

Very sincerely yours,
JOHN BURROUGHS.



John Burroughs, 1909

Introducing John Burroughs, 1837 - 1921

Phyllis Treitel

This paper was read by Phyllis Treitel, M.A.(Oxon), to the Richard Jefferies Society in Swindon on 3 December 1984.

Many of you will have heard the name John Burroughs even if you have never read anything he has written. Henry Salt mentions him several times in his book *Richard Jefferies; A Study*. The writers Edward Thomas and W.H. Hudson refer to him, and George Ellwanger's book, *Idyllists of the Countryside*, has a full chapter on him. Even so, I feel that some explanation is called for before I begin. John Burroughs is not only not Richard Jefferies, he was not even English. He was an American writer, writing mostly, but not entirely, about his own land and people; and this might suggest that he is no concern of ours, but, as I hope you will agree, by the time I have finished, there is something for us to gain from studying him. That is not to put him forward as a rival to Jefferies; nor do I intend to say which of the two I think the better writer. I shall not even, as I go along, draw comparisons for you between the life and work of Burroughs and that of Jefferies. I shall leave you to do that for yourselves. You may even come to think, as I do, that in many ways Burroughs resembles another English nature writer more than he does Jefferies.

My first reason for drawing him to your attention is that he was Richard Jefferies' contemporary, born eleven years before, and dying some thirty-four years after Jefferies. He wrote works that have a great deal in common with some of Jefferies', although Burroughs wrote no fiction and Jefferies no literary criticism. Indeed we reluctantly have to admit that of the two writers, Burroughs was the first in the field with nature essays, for what that is worth.

My other reason for talking about him is that he had a few things to say, though not many, about Jefferies himself; and since contemporary comments on Jefferies by fellow nature writers are rare, we must treasure those few we have, even if not all of them pay the compliments we like to hear.

My plan is to give you a very rapid account of Burroughs' life: there is a vast amount of biographical information and I have had to be very selective. Next, to indicate his standing as a writer, in so far as that has not already become plain. And then to relate what he thought about Richard Jefferies, to the extent that I have been able to find this out from his (that is Burroughs') books, journals and letters. I thought you would like to hear some short

extracts from his books; then you can begin to judge for yourselves what kind of writer he was. Kim Taplin has kindly agreed to do the reading.

~~~~

John Burroughs was born on a farm in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains in New York State, some 80 miles north of New York City. The nearest place to it was Roxbury. The year was 1837. He was the seventh of ten children, with two elder sisters and four elder brothers. In a reminiscence not published until after his death he said: 'I was the only one of the ten children who, as Father said, "took to larnin".' We all had the same infirmities of character: we were all tenderfeet—lacking in grit, will-power, and self-assertion, and the ability to deal with men. We were easily crowded to the wall, easily cheated, always ready to take a back seat, timid, complying, undecided, obstinate but not combative, selfish but not self-assertive, always the easy victims of pushing, coarse-grained, designing men.' [*My Boyhood*, p.57~]

Everyone in the family helped with the farm, including John, though he claims he never really liked it. We can believe this only in part; he was, as he got to his teens, an excellent mower, and he admits to getting great satisfaction out of one job. This consisted of going out into the fields where the cows grazed and taking great swipes with a stick at the dried cow pats which were known as Juno's cushions. [*My Boyhood*, p.48~] And no one who has read his description of the tapping of the maple trees for syrup when the winter was over, and making the syrup into sugar, would doubt his happiness for one moment.

As soon as he was old enough he attended his local schools. It is interesting to us to learn that at that time there was no school in the summer for the over-twelves but he went to school every winter until he was seventeen and would have liked to stay on even longer. Since his father had no money to pay for college, John left home and began school-teaching. When he had saved something from his earnings he was able to pay for a few months' tuition, first at the Heddings Literary Institute, then, after some more teaching, at the Cooperstown Seminary. He had decided very early on that he wanted to be a writer and his first effort appeared in print when he was nineteen, but it was several years before he knew he was on the right track.

Perhaps surprisingly for a young man with ambition and no money, he married at the age of twenty. The young woman, Ursula North, was a year older than he was, and throughout sixty restive but loyal years of marriage they seem to have been a continual trial to each other. There are many instances in literature where the wife or sister of a writer was a great help, sometimes an unacknowledged help, to him. This was not one of those cases.

Julian Burroughs, their son, writing after his parents were both dead, tells a story of an incident in his parents' life, soon after they were married: 'At that time', relates Julian, '[Father] was teaching school at a small town near Newburgh and when Saturday came he wanted to go into the parlour for his day's work ... Mother had no notion of its order being disturbed and its sanctity profaned by such a frivolous thing as writing—she locked the door. I think Father took it as an insult, not to himself but to his calling ... and, in what to me was fine and noble and justifiable frenzy, he smashed the door into "smithereens".' [*My Boyhood*, p.15]. We learn, from another source, that in that house at least, the best the aspiring writer could do for a desk was the top step of the attic stairs.

Unfortunately, this lack of sympathy on the part of Ursula never really changed. Burroughs' biographer found this fragment among his papers after his death:

It is the oft-told story, A crude, undeveloped young man marries a girl older and more experienced than himself. He develops, she simply hardens, and their interests diverge. In middle life they are far apart she knows him not at all, does not share his real life, only his kitchen life. The things he lives for are nothing to her; she has no mental or social wants; hardly any religious wants. One supreme want she has, to which she sacrifices everything—health, hospitality, friends, husband, child—the want to be free from dirt and disorder. She is one of those terrible housekeepers with whom there is no living—a housekeeper, but not a home-maker.

You couldn't find a book of my writing in that house. They are never mentioned there. She has no pride in them. She refuses to see people who come to see me—the people whom my writings draw. She looks upon my writing as a kind of self-indulgence which she ought to frown upon. She is jealous of everybody, man and woman alike. No doubt she loves me; but she would have me play second fiddle to her. I had to build a study outside. She literally cleaned me out; and now she is mad because I will not spend my evenings with her in the kitchen. She has not spoken to me today.

She has many noble traits, but the ordinary friction of life makes a fury of her. She has a strong will, and must have her way. I have a weak will, and find it hard to say No, or to stand up for my rights, and that irritates her. All my habits and disposition irritate her. I am easy and indulgent, and think anything is good enough for me and her. She is particular, exacting, proud and very conventional. She opposes me at every point. We can have no conversation whatever. I sit meal after meal and hardly say a word, year in and year out.

She was rude and uncivil to a friend of mine who came here last week with his novel to read to me. She visits in but one house, here and there—hardly once a year. No one comes here. She has no correspondents. She gives herself, body and soul, to the drudgery of housekeeping. She will not keep a girl, because she cannot get an angel.

I am not blameless. I have my own sins to answer for—sins she has driven me into ... but she has not been true to any of my higher wants and needs—has trampled them all under foot, though ignorantly and blindly, I admit. She has no self-knowledge at all—I never saw her like in this respect. She thinks herself a model wife. ... I don't see how I can live here much longer. I should like a year or two of real peace and sunshine before I die. ... Oh, what a boon is good nature; like sunshine, like a genial climate. [*Life and Letters*, I, pp.331-2]

Julian admits, however, that his father was often moody and irritable, that his mother took excellent care of the two of them, father and son, and that 'their last years were most happy together and filled with a sympathy and understanding that were beautiful'. [*My Boyhood*, p.200]

In order to earn enough for the two of them to set up housekeeping together, John had to spend several years teaching schoolchildren. The work was very poorly paid and before long he came to resent it. Yet it taught him a great deal about children, and the system of 'boarding round', whereby he stayed in turn with the children's families, must have been an education in itself. About six years after his marriage, in 1863 to be precise, he took a momentous step. He had no money, none to give Ursula while he was gone, but he set off for the Capital, Washington. He was tempted by a friend who was sure John could get a good job there and who promised, into the bargain, to introduce him to Walt Whitman. There was also the matter of the Civil War. John Burroughs was as caught up by the excitement of the war as anyone and he thought about joining the army. From the variety of reasons given for not joining up, including the fact that he had a carbuncle, it is clear that, though several people helped to dissuade him, the strongest disinclination was his own. After some miserable weeks with no money he finally found work as a clerk in the Treasury and before long he was able to send for Ursula. By the time their ten years in Washington were up they had been able to build their own house, [1332 V Street]. John was never to go back to school-teaching though it can be no accident that his books, written after all for adults, brought him, over the years, hundreds, probably thousands of school-age admirers.

The move to Washington allowed the Burroughses to establish themselves domestically; there was another equally important achievement here—John established himself as a writer. By the time he was 26 he had already had several articles published and he had discovered that his public wanted, what he was well able to provide, namely essays about the out-of-doors. Burroughs was not friendless and he did not lack advice and help with his writing but still it must be admitted that his encounter at this time with the poet Walt Whitman was of supreme importance to him. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* had first been published in 1855 and had met with a rather mixed reception.

Burroughs did not read the book until 1861 but he was immediately and permanently impressed by it. He was therefore ripe for an encounter with the poet. 'I loved him', said Burroughs, 'as I never loved any man. We were companionable without talking. I owe more to him than any other man in the world. He brooded me; he gave me things to think of; he taught me generosity, breadth and an all-embracing charity.' [*Life and Letters*, I, p.113] Later in life he was to ask himself whether he had perhaps been so much Whitman's advocate that he ultimately failed to be his judge, [*Whitman and Burroughs Comrades*, p.230] For good or ill he was one of Whitman's loyalest friends until, and indeed after, Whitman's death. So, it should not be too surprising to learn that Burroughs' first book was about Whitman. It came out in 1867, the first book to be written about the poet, and was called *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*. Whitman himself wrote parts of it, possibly as much as a half, though this fact was kept secret; Burroughs, who had had it printed at his own expense, lost money on it.

Indirectly, the life in Washington helped Burroughs in another way: he spent much of his working day guarding the bank's vault. Sometimes things were slack. He would let his thoughts roam to the scenes of the rural life he had left, a life for which he yearned as long as he lived. He had time to put these thoughts on to paper, and the joy and consolation he was able to inject into his writing was immediately popular with his readers. Published first as articles, they were in 1871 gathered into a book. Its title came from Whitman who suggested the name *Wake-Robin* as this was the popular name for an early-blooming wild flower, the trillium. The book proved to be a success and the first of many.

One more advantage accrued to Burroughs from the Washington job: the American Treasury had to send fifteen million dollars' worth of bonds to London. Burroughs was one of the three men chosen to deliver them. In late September 1871 he set off for England. Having performed his London tasks he was able to spend the whole of October travelling. He squeezed in a visit to France, took in Wales and Ireland on the way home and in 1875 brought out a third book, *Winter Sunshine*. Much of it, like *Wake-Robin*, consists of descriptions of the places and creatures near his early home that he loved to watch and think about; however the last chapter of the book is a truly delightful account of England and its people, including a description of a visit to Carlyle, one of Burroughs' heroes. He was accused, by his American readers, of seeing the English through rosy spectacles; in reply he said, in his preface to the book, 'If the "Britishers" do not deserve all the pleasant things I say of them, why then so much the worse for them.' [*Winter Sunshine*, p.iv]

By the time *Winter Sunshine* appeared, John and Ursula Burroughs were no longer in Washington. I think Ursula must have loved it there but John

did not really like town life. That he did all he could to bring the farm to the town is clear from an essay in his next book *Birds and Poets* which appeared in 1877. The essay is called 'Our rural divinity' and describes the cows he kept, one after the other, while he lived in the centre of Washington. It was evidently quite common at that time for a cow to be turned loose there by day to find grazing for herself and return 'home' in the evening. But having a cow and a garden in town was not enough to satisfy his longing. In 1872 he resigned his position in the Treasury and returned to New York State. There, on the banks of the Hudson River, not far from New York, he bought land and built himself a house. He was able to do this out of money he had saved (or, I should say, they had saved), but he was still not able to live solely on the payments he received for what he wrote. He found another job, a part-time one, as an examiner of broken banks. In time he became remarkably successful at this work but he only tolerated it because it enabled him to have time for the dreaming and watching and thinking that were necessary to his writing. His land he put down to grapes and soft fruit, and from the proceeds of this, using hired help, he made the third portion of his living. Manual work, direct contact with the soil, with stone and with growing things, helped to satisfy one half of his longing for the kind of life he had had at home; the other half—the homesickness for the home of his parents—he was never, ever, able to assuage. Indeed it seemed to take a stronger hold the older he got.

By 1878, the Burroughses must have begun to reconcile themselves to the sad fact that Ursula would never be, as the Bible says, 'a happy mother of children'. But I have already spoken of their son Julian. He was born in March 1873 and the details of his arrival are rather vague. William Sloane Kennedy, in his book, *The Real John Burroughs* [1924, p.49] stated that he had been told, both by Burroughs and by Whitman, that the little boy was adopted. He suggested that the baby was perhaps the child of John's brother Curtis. Elizabeth Burroughs Kelley, in her book about her father and grandfather [*John Burroughs Naturalist*, p.261] gives a list of erroneous statements about John Burroughs and includes on the list the statement that Julian might have been his nephew. So we regain in doubt.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt at all about one thing, however, the boy gave his father and mother the greatest possible joy and satisfaction. When Julian was four, that is in

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Jean Saunders dated 5 June 2006, Lady Treitel writes: 'Since I wrote this article I found out more about JB's son. Was he adopted? Yes. Was he JB's son? Yes. Mrs JB was a tartar. Couldn't keep servants. JB seduced one of them. She left and went to New York to give birth to a boy. JB suggested to Mrs JB that they adopt. She agreed. He produced baby boy but did not reveal parentage. Then it slipped out one day when she was twitting him for not fathering any children.'

1882, John decided to pay a second visit to the British Isles. Since he could not very well leave his family behind he took them with him. By this time the great Carlyle was dead but a good proportion of the three months of their stay was spent in Scotland, visiting Carlyle's home as well as the customary beauty spots. Burroughs took to the Scots as individuals as he never took to the English and was delighted to encounter a young man in Scotland who, when approached for information about birds, replied quoting from one of Burroughs' books. All the same, England, both the countryside and the people, exercised a great spell on the writer; he tramped for miles in the south of England studying the wild life and the people. His description of his hunt for the nightingale is one of the most attractive, because most coherent, essays he ever wrote. When he returned to America he was surprised to find how many essays were forthcoming from this one trip. In fact they formed a whole book which he called *Fresh Fields*. It appeared in 1884—just a hundred years ago.

Eventually, at the age of 49, Burroughs was able to give up the bank-examining and rely for support on the receipts from his writing and the sales of his fruit. Once only, when the grapes had been ruined by storms, he undertook a lecture tour. Not willing to let anything go to waste he even wrote an article on bank-examining. Entitled *Broken Banks and Lax Directors* it was much praised by those who reckoned to know about such matters.

In all, Burroughs wrote nearly thirty books, and, indeed was still writing at the age of nearly 84 when he died. In addition to his essays on nature and the out-of-doors he wrote much literary criticism and also what might, only loosely today, be called philosophy. You will be relieved to hear that although he was brought up on a farm and did not receive what would now be called a good education, he has never been described as a 'half-educated peasant' [P.A. Graham] let alone a 'literary leather-stocking' [W.E. Henley]. Though avid of praise he was an honest and modest person; he learned partly by observation and private thought, partly by responding to the books and personalities of men who impressed him. When he first began writing his inspiration (after Samuel Johnson) had been Ralph Waldo Emerson and Carlyle. As we have seen, he also came under the spell of Walt Whitman. To these mentors we can add Charles Darwin, Matthew Arnold and, when Burroughs was over 70, Henri Bergson. It is hard for us, with our concern about the nuclear threat, to realise that at one time there were people for whom Darwin's teaching seemed just as likely to demolish the world under their feet. Burroughs was devoted to Darwin—the man, the method and the message—but he too was made uneasy by Darwin's threat to established notions, and he wrestled vigorously and honestly in print with the problems as he saw them.

Whitman's death in 1892 left a terrible hole in Burroughs' life—it also let loose a barrage of uncomplimentary remarks about the poet. The best known of these was an article in *The Nation*, the author of which was a successful writer, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Burroughs felt obliged to defend Whitman and in 1896 brought out his second book about his friend, *Walt Whitman; A Study*. This time the words were all his own.

Burroughs himself is occasionally referred to as a poet. He never claimed to be one; he liked to be called a nature-essayist, but he did write several poems. One of them, written when he was 25, which he called 'Waiting', became popular and well known. It was almost certainly inspired by something written by Emerson. I mention it at this stage because one of the noticeable things about the last twenty years of Burroughs' life is the vindication of the claim made in the poem. If I read the first four verses you will understand.

Serene, I fold my hands and wait,  
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;  
I rave no more 'gainst Time or Fate,  
For lo! my own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,  
For what avails this eager pace?  
I stand amid the eternal ways,  
And what is mine shall know my face.

Asleep, awake, by night or day,  
The friends I seek are seeking me;  
No wind can drive my bark astray,  
Nor change the tide of destiny.

What matter if I stand alone?  
I wait with joy the coming years;  
My heart shall reap where it hath sown,  
And garner up its fruit of tears.

Well, these friends did come to him. Some I shall refer to when I come to the evidence of the world's reception of his work; one, I can deal with now. In 1901, among his now customary letters of appreciation from his readers, came one from a psychiatric doctor, a Miss Clara Barrus. She visited him at his home and they became great friends. Within a few weeks he could write to her: 'Now I am beginning to be conscious of a great loss in not having known you years ago, or when you first began to love my books. All the beautiful springs and summers that are past and you not a part of them for me.' [*Life and Letters*, II, p.20] Over the twenty years remaining to him she became more and more indispensable to him. She typed his articles, she read his proofs and checked details (he was a bad speller). Eventually she became



a housekeeper to the aging Burroughs pair and when Ursula died in 1917, Dr. Barrus stayed on and looked after John. One of the many results of her assistance must be the fact that, if we count quantity, half of John Burroughs' output of books came in the last twenty years of his life.

Once the Great War was revealed in all its savagery he became a fierce hater of the Germans; in spite of his 80 years he wrote again and again to the newspapers on the subject. Yet at heart he was an affectionate and sociable man, never gregarious but needing the stimulus of human contact. He made many friends and was a copious letter writer. From his late thirties he kept a journal. Dr. Barrus, writing his biography in 1925, four years after his death, said he had 'more of a personal following, more contacts with his readers, both through correspondence and in person, than any other American author has had, and, probably, more than any other author of modern times'. [*Life and Letters*, I, p.247]

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So we come to two important questions: how did the world react then to Burroughs' work and how does it react now? Contemporary reviews are of some help. His first nature book—*Wake-Robin*—was reviewed in the year of its publication in *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, published in New York. Having said that it was 'a most delicious book for summer reading' the reviewer admits that such books, not strictly ornithological or 'difficult to describe or analyze'—a difficulty that was to dog them for the next thirty years. The book's 'fine felicity of descriptive phrase' is commended, however, and the author accurately summed up with the words: 'Mr. Burroughs loves all nature, and is at home in all her ways.' [*Century*, August 1871, pp.445-6]

It is important to realise that most, if not all, of the essays in Burroughs' books had already appeared in magazines; *Century*, for example was an unfailing customer for his writings. So that by the time they were published as books, any slips had been corrected. The second book, *Winter Sunshine*, which appeared in 1876 was reviewed in *The Nation* by Henry James. He said, 'This is a charming little book', and, after comments like 'real originality' and 'remarkable felicity and vividness', said that the part about England 'really deserves to become classical'. [*The Nation*, 27 Jan 1876] So much for a sample of early American reactions. The opinion of European and especially English men of letters was also important to Americans and *Wake-Robin* was sent for review to England. John was a little put out by the treatment it got from the journal *The Athenaeum* and those of us who are interested in the development in the mid-nineteenth century of the market for nature books may learn something from the fact that *Wake-Robin*, along with a book on shooting shore birds, was reviewed in *The Athenaeum* under science books,

[*The Athenaeum*, 11 Nov. 1871, p.25] Although he compliments Burroughs on his style, the reviewer is clearly impatient with both authors because they 'say less about birds than about themselves'. He condemns this egotism, an evil which, he says, is increasing and he goes on 'when the essays have been read [he means Burroughs] the impression left is that the reader has not read an ill-made sentence, and has not stored up half-a-dozen facts worth remembering'. Some fifteen years later this literary egotism, if that is what it was, had become thoroughly established. *Literary World*, another English journal, said: 'Burroughs has no peer as a writer on nature among contemporary authors.' *St. James's Gazette* said: 'Mr. Burroughs is one of the most delightful of American essayists, steeped in culture to the finger-ends'.

In 1903 a mutual friend sent a copy of Burroughs' latest book, *Literary Values*, to Leslie Stephen. Stephen, writing to thank the sender said: 'It is a very charming book ... I enjoyed [it] thoroughly and the more because my health at present cuts me off from certain dry and onerous works which I otherwise ought to be studying—It is just the reading for a convalescent, as I hope that I may call myself.' Alas, Stephen was dead a year later. I think we would agree with Burroughs that there was 'no better critic in England' than Leslie Stephen at that time, we can also, as I imagine Burroughs did, read between Stephen's tactful but truthful lines. [Letter from Leslie Stephen to Dewitt Miller, 4 April 1903, Alders Library, University of Virginia.]

I have quoted from just a few of the comments of professional critics on John Burroughs' work; what did other writers in the same line of business think of him? They seem to have accepted him entirely, both as a writer and as an expert on birds. The writer W.H. Hudson not only wrote complimentary reviews of his books, he quotes him as an authority no less than four times in his own book, *British Birds*. Edward Thomas quotes him too, even going so far, in *The Icknield Way*, as to quote him on the subject of grit and how good it is, or is not, to walk upon.

If public demand is a criterion then Burroughs has to be called a success since all his early books went into several editions before he died. The railway tycoon E.H. Harriman (father of Averell Harriman) invited the sixty-two-year-old Burroughs to join an expedition to Alaska in 1899 and, rather reluctantly, he went. In 1903 he was the guest and travelling companion, on a rail trip across the American continent, of the president, Theodore Roosevelt. Of course the crowds mobbed Roosevelt but to Burroughs' amazement there was a huge banner out for him in Minneapolis and schoolgirls showered him with flowers. In the poem we heard earlier he had predicted that 'the friends I seek are seeking me'; these were the ones that he foretold in the poem. Among the last to discover him were Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone and Thomas Edison. In Burroughs' late seventies he was

taken by them on their motor camping trips. Henry Ford, who loved Burroughs' books, gave him at least four Ford cars. Burroughs responded by learning to drive after a fashion, occasionally ending up in a ditch or out through the back of the garage. Ford even gave him the money to buy up the old family farm after John's brothers had allowed it to get irrevocably into debt. To his great surprise, Burroughs was awarded three honorary degrees. One was a D.Litt. from Yale, because, as the public orator said, 'in your interpretation of nature you have enriched our literature'. In 1916, when his wife was slowly dying of cancer, the American Institute of Arts and Letters conferred upon him their gold medal for excellence in *belles-lettres*. He felt ashamed at his indifference to the honour.

His books were published in Britain too—originally a small series was published in Edinburgh in the 1880s. He had many admirers here though I think we would nowadays question the zeal of the Cornishman who sent Burroughs in 1881 a shipment of skylarks. Out of the original twenty-four only five reached New York alive.

But what of now? It is difficult to judge Burroughs' popularity. Many of his books have been reprinted in the last few years in the USA; on the other hand it is not uncommon to come upon his books or books about him, both in libraries and in book-dealers' shops, whose pages have never been opened. If one asks Americans at random about the writer John Burroughs they may, after an interval for thought, suggest a word like 'naturalist' or 'birds', but they are just as likely to think of Burroughs' namesake and say 'Tarzan!' Yet Burroughs is not forgotten. There is a John Burroughs Memorial Association in New York. Vassar College, with whose students John Burroughs was such a favourite in his lifetime, has just become the proud owner of the originals of the writer's journals, Burroughs' grandchildren still own the Riverby property and live there and his granddaughter Elizabeth Burroughs Kelley, now some 80 years old, is a recognised expert on her grandfather and his work. The various houses and places connected with the writer have been named National Historic Landmarks by the Department of the Interior and the Memorial field on the old farm, where Burroughs is buried, is maintained by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Many books of reminiscence were written about Burroughs soon after his death and a few more recently. Dr. Clara Barrus in 1925 completed the huge task of the two-volume biography, went on to edit the book based on the journals, and then a book about Burroughs and his great hero Whitman. A scholarly book about Burroughs, albeit a slim one, was written in 1974 by Perry Westbrook and for this, with its objectivity and penetration we must be grateful. It is long overdue.

I promised, at the beginning, that I would tell you what Burroughs wrote about Jefferies. A whole evening could be devoted to a comparison of the two writers; as I explained earlier, I do not propose to embark on that task. They can be compared: both wrote nature essays that seem to me to be modern, in the sense that they are timeless; both also wrote about matters that possess now, a hundred years later, as W.E. Henley, in his review of Walter Besant's book *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, [*The Athenaeum*, 8 December, 1888, p.765] said they would, an antiquarian interest. (A statement that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in 1893 felt free to deride in scorching terms—*The Speaker*, 1893, pp.357-8.) For all that, the two writers appear to me to have had different aims and had different achievements.

More interesting than our opinions of them, is their opinions of each other. It was the attempt to find out what each thought of the other that led me to delve so thoroughly into the details of Burroughs' work. If we ask: did Burroughs read Jefferies, the answer is yes, he did and mentions Jefferies in at least five places. I shall give you details in a moment. If we ask: did Jefferies read Burroughs, the answer is more difficult because he certainly never mentioned him. We know from Edward Thomas's book on Jefferies [*Richard Jefferies*, pp.173, 285] that Jefferies had read Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and his *Specimen Days and Collect*. Richard Haymaker in his book, *From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs*, which is about W.H. Hudson, states [p.80] that Jefferies may have been influenced by Burroughs though he offers nothing to support this statement. There is, in my opinion, some circumstantial evidence for thinking that Jefferies had read *Fresh Fields* but of signs of either comment or influence I have found none.

So I shall concentrate on what we know about Burroughs' views on Jefferies. In 1881 Burroughs, now aged 44, published a book called *Pepacton*. One of the essays in it describes a trip which Burroughs took in a canoe he made himself down the river near his home. The name of the river, Pepacton, became the name of the book. Another chapter in the book is entitled 'Footpaths'. In this essay, Burroughs describes (not for the first time) the pleasures of walking, and complains that his countrymen do too little of it. He compares his own country in this respect with England and, to bolster what he knows of English habits, supplies his readers with two quotations. One is from a book called *Field Paths and Green Lanes*; the other, although he does not name it, is from *The Amateur Poacher*. This is what he writes:

A later writer, the author of *A Gamekeeper at Home* and other books says: 'Those only know a country who are acquainted with its footpaths. By the roads, indeed, the outside may be seen; but the footpaths go through the heart of the land. There are routes by which mile after mile may be travelled without leaving the sward. So you may pass from village to village; now crossing green

meadows [sic], now cornfields, over brooks, past woods, through farmyard and rick 'barken'.

There the quotation ends and there is no other comment, [p.181]

The next reference comes in a book entitled *Riverby*, published in 1894 some seven years after Jefferies' death. This book contains a chapter entitled 'Lovers of Nature'; after mentioning Wordsworth he says this of Jefferies:

Jefferies was probably as genuine a lover of Nature as was Wordsworth, but he had not the same power to make us share his enjoyment. His page is sometimes wearisome from mere description and enumeration. He is rarely interpretative; the mood, the frame of mind, which Nature herself begets, he seldom imparts to us. What we finally love in Nature is ourselves, some suggestion of the human spirit, and no labored description or careful enumeration of details will bring us to this. It has been aptly said that Jefferies was a reporter of genius, but that he never (in his nature books) got beyond reporting. His *Wild Life* reads like a kind of field newspaper; he puts in everything, he is diligent and untiring, but for much of it one cares very little after he is through. For selecting and combining the things of permanent interest so as to excite curiosity and impart charm, he has but little power. [p.223]

There follow three pages in which Burroughs tells us what he thinks observation really consists of—Thoreau evidently lacked it. Then he comes back to Jefferies:

Richard Jefferies was not strictly an observer; he was a living and sympathetic spectator of the nature about him, a poet, if you please, but he tells us little that is memorable or suggestive. His best books are such as the *Gamekeeper at Home* and the *Amateur Poacher* where the human element is brought in, and the descriptions of nature are relieved by racy bits of character drawing. By far the best thing of all is a paper he wrote shortly before his death, called 'My Old Village'. It is very beautiful and pathetic and reveals the heart and soul of the man as nothing else he has written does. I must permit myself to transcribe one paragraph of it. It shows how he, too, was under the spell of the past, and such a recent past too: 'I think I have heard that the oaks are down. They may be standing or down, it matters nothing to me ...'

and there follows a page and a half of Jefferies' posthumously published essay. [p.227]

At first I found it difficult to make sense of these two sets of comments: they seemed inconsistent. The timing of the essay was another puzzle. It appears in a book published in 1894 and I could not think what had stimulated the reference to Jefferies or indeed the whole essay. Burroughs' own journal gave me a clue. He had been working on this particular essay in February and March 1889, five years before the book came out. Now Walter Besant's book *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* appeared in 1888 and W.E. Henley's review of it appeared in *The Athenaeum* in December of the same

year. Burroughs repeats some of Henley's words so the appearance of this review could account for Burroughs' first set of comments. It does not explain the second part of what he wrote. The very passage from 'My Old Village' quoted by Burroughs is also quoted by Besant in the very first chapter of *The Eulogy* but I find no sign in this piece that Burroughs had read Besant's book. I am inclined to the view that Burroughs read the essay some time after he had read Henley's review, probably in *Field and Hedgerow*. Such was the spell of Henley's words, however, that Burroughs could not bring himself to delete the earlier passage though it almost contradicted the later one. And in this respect it is interesting to me to discover that when W.E. Henley reprinted his various reviews in 1890 in book form (*Views and Reviews*), he had changed his piece on Jefferies almost beyond recognition. Not quite though—the mischievous phrase 'reporter of genius' was solicitously preserved.

Burroughs' book *Riverby* was re-issued in 1904 and it was possibly a copy of this edition that was read by a Mr. W.G. Cropley who, like me, took exception to the passage about Jefferies. The granddaughter of John Burroughs, Mrs. Elizabeth Kelley, kindly drew my attention to this letter and sent me a copy of it. Mr. Cropley, writing from Manningtree, Essex on 27 September 1906 said:

I have just finished the perusal of *Riverby* which, like the whole of your books I have much enjoyed, and which I heartily thank you for. I cannot however let pass unchallenged some remarks you make on Richard Jefferies in the above book. To quote one or two, you say 'He is rarely interpretative; the mood, the frame of mind, which nature herself begets, he seldom imparts to us.' 'For selecting and combining the things of permanent interest so as to excite curiosity and impart charm, he has but little power.'

Now I do not think that anyone who has made an exhaustive study of Jefferies' works can give such an unjust estimate as this. Surely you cannot have read his *Nature near London*, *The Open Air*, *The Life of the Fields*, three books to my mind inimitable and charming. You say his best books are *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *The Amateur Poacher*. It is true he made his name as a nature writer by them, but it cannot be fairly said that they are his best books. I will admit one of your remarks about him to be true 'His page is sometimes wearisome from mere description and enumeration'. It is; *Wild Life* and *Round About a Great Estate* both contain this fault, and perhaps one or two others.

I could of course go to great lengths of detail to justify what I have said, especially what you say about 'the passion for nature being related to our religious instincts' this being a trait in Jefferies' character never more strongly exemplified; I will not however say more, but will venture to add that if you will read or re-read the three books I have mentioned, you will have cause to modify your remarks.

I remain,
sincerely yours.

What are we to make of such comments as those of Burroughs? He read Jefferies' books, he knew that they were fairly widely read and talked about, yet he could not really bring himself to praise them. His private journal gives us some idea of his perplexity. On 20 October, 1904, he writes, 'To me, much of Jefferies' writing about nature is cloudlike—vague, formless, highly-colored masses of vapor. No tangible thought or fact. He is poor in ideas, poor in Science, but rich in feeling and fancy; no intensity or pungency of phrase, but a diffused kind of gladness in nature.' [*Journals*, p.240] This journal entry looks as though it was prompted by work Burroughs was doing on a new book, *Ways of Nature*, which came out in 1905. (It was reviewed in *The Speaker* by W.H. Hudson, 9 Dec. 1905) In this book he mentions Jefferies in three separate places and it is clear that he now regards Jefferies as something more than a mere spectator of nature. In one place he briefly quarrels with Jefferies over the matter of the construction of birds' nests. In another, where he has been talking of Ruskin and interpretation, he says: 'Richard Jefferies tells us how the flower, or the bird, or the cloud is related to his subjective life and experience. It means this or that to him; it may mean something entirely different to another, because he may be bound to it by a different tie of association. The poet fills the lap of earth with treasures not her own—the riches of his own spirit.' I find this statement hard to tally with the *Riverby* essay.

The third reference in the book *Ways of Nature* and, as far as I am aware, in any of Burroughs' books, appears in a chapter entitled 'The Literary Treatment of Nature', a subject that Burroughs as nature essayist and literary critic was bound to return to again and again and with which, by 1905, he regarded himself as uniquely equipped to deal. 'Gilbert White', he says, 'was a rare combination of the nature student and the man of science, and his book is one of the minor English classics. Richard Jefferies was a true nature lover, but his interests rarely take a scientific turn. Our Thoreau was in love with the natural but still more in love with the supernatural; yet he prized the fact and his books abound in delightful natural history observations.'

Perhaps we can put some of these comments into perspective by looking again into the journal. He wrote there, in 1917 (a very special year in many ways), of Thoreau, 'our Thoreau': 'A vast deal of chaff without any wheat. Such an exaggerator ... Little or no wise counsel in the book—throws no light on any of life's serious problems ... He shirked all civil and social responsibilities, and was able to live his life in the woods, off and on, for two years, because others stayed at home and helped to make the wheels go round.' [*Journals*, p.306] Of W.H. Hudson he once said in a letter to the writer Edith Rickert: 'The only book I know of him is his *Naturalist in La*

Plata and this contains so many big stories that I have come to doubt his veracity.’ [*Life and Letters*, II, p.86] We may perhaps conclude from these examples that neither Jefferies nor any other nature writer quite reached the standard that Burroughs held up. Although we must concede, that after reading Maeterlinck’s *The Bee*, he wrote to a woman correspondent, Edith Brower, ‘It is in my own line and I am envious of the author.’ [*Life and Letters*, II, p.9]

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We should not be too dismayed to find that Burroughs could not manage more than one cheer for Jefferies. On the one hand, although his granddaughter tells me that John Burroughs was ‘very familiar’ with Jefferies’ work, he would probably only have read what had appeared in book form; since he never read fiction if he could avoid it, he had almost certainly not read any of the fiction. On the other hand, Burroughs was a man who needed heroes. With giants like Whitman, Carlyle and Darwin to revere he was unlikely to champion the deliberately unheroic Jefferies, especially when, like Thoreau and Hudson, he was also something of a rival.

If the fates had only been kinder, I might have been able to end this paper by telling you that Burroughs and Jefferies met and what each thought of the other. Burroughs was in London during June and July of 1882. Had the two writers met, Burroughs’ whole attitude to Jefferies’ books might have been different. More important than this, I think, would have been the benefit such a visit would have brought to Jefferies who had just moved to Brighton in order to recover from his painful surgical operations. I have said that Burroughs needed heroes; but it would be a distortion not to say that he seems to have been the kindest, gentlest, most tactful of men socially and would straightaway have won the English writer’s confidence. The meeting nearly took place. In a letter, written in July to his American friend Myron Benton, Burroughs said: ‘I thought to look up Richard Jefferies but it is too late as we expect to leave London tomorrow.’ [*Life and Letters*. I, p.244] Burroughs left London for the north on 15 July.

There is a tantalising postscript to this non-meeting. In his contribution to the 1944 *Worthing Cavalcade*, published two years after his death, Jefferies’ son Harold wrote: ‘I remember later on when he [Jefferies] enjoyed Ruskin’s works and those of many contemporary philosophers and Nature writers, notable Gilbert White ... And old John Burroughs, the great American writer and nature lover. I have a letter from Burroughs stating that he fully intended calling on father when he visited England but somehow failed to do



so.’ [p.20] My attempts to trace the whereabouts of this most interesting letter have so far not met with any success.<sup>2</sup> In June and July 1882 the Jefferies family were almost certainly in the throes of moving house. If so they would not have been easy to locate and this might account for Burroughs’ failure to make his visit.

I have come to the end of what I have to say about John Burroughs. Perry Westbrook, the American academic I mentioned earlier, thinks Burroughs has been neglected. ‘Students of American literature’, he says, ‘and of intellectual history, would be rewarded if they would read other than [his] admittedly superb outdoor pieces,’ [*John Burroughs*, p.133] I think we may give Westbrook the last word. Writing of Burroughs’ first nature book, *Wake-Robin*, he said: ‘Burroughs had produced a minor classic, an outdoor book to be placed beside the volumes of John Muir, Richard Jefferies, or Gilbert White, to whose *The Natural History of Selborne* it has often been compared,’ [p.35] I shall have succeeded, this evening, if I have encouraged you to make the comparison for yourselves.

ADDENDA: The following readings from the works of John Burroughs accompanied this paper. The readings were given by Kim Taplin.

1. from *WINTER SUNSHINE* ‘The Snow-Walkers,’ pp.150

Look up at the miracle of the falling snow, — the air a dizzy maze of whirling, eddying flakes, noiselessly transforming the world, the exquisite crystals dropping in ditch and gutter, and disguising in the same suit of spotless livery all objects upon which they fall. How novel and fine the first drifts! The old, dilapidated fence is suddenly set off with the most fantastic ruffles, scalloped and fluted after an unheard-of fashion! Looking down a long line of decrepit stone wall, in the trimming of which the wind had fairly run riot, I saw, as for the first time, what a severe yet master artist old Winter is. Ah, a severe artist! How stern the woods look, dark and cold and as rigid against the horizon as iron!

All life and action upon the snow have an added emphasis and significance. Every expression is underscored. Summer has few finer pictures than this winter one of the farmer foddering his cattle from a stack upon the clean snow,—the movement, the sharply defined figures, the great green flakes of hay, the long file of patient cows, the advance just arriving and pressing eagerly for the choicest morsels,—and the bounty and providence it suggests. Or the chopper in the woods,—the prostrate tree, the white new chips scattered about, his easy triumph over the cold, his coat hanging to a limb, and the clear, sharp ring of his axe. The woods are rigid and tense, keyed up by the frost, and resound like a stringed instrument. Or the road-breakers, sallying forth with oxen and sleds in the still, white world, the day after the storm, to restore the lost track and demolish the beleaguering drifts.

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<sup>2</sup> See pp.7-8 of this issue.

All sounds are sharper in winter; the air transmits better. At night I hear more distinctly the steady roar of the North Mountain. In summer it is a sort of complacent purr, as the breezes stroke down its sides; but in winter always the same low, sullen growl.

A severe artist! No longer the canvas and the pigments, but the marble and the chisel. When the nights are calm and the moon full, I go out to gaze upon the wonderful purity of the moonlight and the snow. The air is full of latent fire, and the cold warms me—after a different fashion from that of the kitchen stove. The world lies about me in a ‘trance of snow.’ The clouds are pearly and iridescent, and seem the farthest possible remove from the condition of a storm,—the ghosts of clouds, the indwelling beauty freed from all dross. I see the hills, bulging with great drifts, lift themselves up cold and white against the sky, the black lines of fences here and there obliterated by the depth of the snow. Presently a fox barks away up next the mountain, and I imagine I can almost see him sitting there, in his furs, upon the illuminated surface, and looking down in my direction. As I listen, one answers him from behind the woods in the valley. What a wild winter sound, wild and weird, up among the ghostly hills! Since the wolf has ceased to howl upon these mountains, and the panther to scream, there is nothing to be compared with it. So wild! I get up in the middle of the night to hear it. It is refreshing to the ear, and one delights to know that such wild creatures are among us. At this season Nature makes the most of every throb of life that can withstand her severity. How heartily she indorses this fox! In what bold relief stand out the lives of all walkers of the snow! The snow is a great tell-tale, and blabs as effectually as it obliterates. I go into the woods, and know all that has happened. I cross the fields, and if only a mouse has visited his neighbor, the fact is chronicled.

2. from *WINTER SUNSHINE* ‘An October Abroad,’ pp.178-181

The South Downs form a very remarkable feature of this part of England, and are totally unlike any other landscape I ever saw. I believe it is Huxley who applies to them the epithet of *muttony*, which they certainly deserve, for they arc like the backs of immense sheep, smooth, and round, and fat,—so smooth, indeed, that the eye can hardly find a place to take hold of, not a tree, or bush, or fence, or house, or rock, or stone, or other object, for miles and miles, save here and there a group of straw-capped stacks, or a flock of sheep crawling slowly over them, attended by a shepherd and dog, and the only lines visible those which bound the squares where different crops had been gathered. The soil was rich and mellow, like a garden,—hills of chalk with a pellicle of black loam.

These hills stretch a great distance along the coast, and arc cut squarely off by the sea, presenting on this side a chain of white chalk cliffs suggesting the old Latin name of this land, Albion.

Before I had got fifty yards from the station I began to hear the larks, and being unprepared for them I was a little puzzled at first, but was not long discovering what luck I was in. The song disappointed me at first, being less sweet and melodious than I had expected to hear; indeed, I thought it a little sharp and harsh,—a little stubbly,—but in other respects, in strength and gladness and continuity, it was wonderful.

And the more I heard it the better I liked it, until I would gladly have given any of my songsters at home for a bird that could shower down such notes, even in autumn. Up, up, went the bird, describing a large easy spiral till he attained an altitude of three or four hundred feet, when, spread out against the sky for a space of ten or fifteen minutes or more, he poured out his delight, filling all the vault with sound. The song is of the sparrow kind, and, in its best parts, perpetually suggested the notes of our vesper sparrow; but the wonder of it is its copiousness and sustained strength. There is no theme, no beginning, middle, or end, like most of our best bird-songs, but a perfect swarm of notes pouring out like bees from a hive, and resembling each other nearly as closely, and only ceasing as the bird nears the earth again. We have many more melodious songsters; the bobolink in the meadows for instance, the vesper sparrow in the pastures, the purple finch in the groves, the winter wren, or any of the thrushes in the woods, or the wood-wagtail, whose air song is of a similar character to that of the skylark, and is even more rapid and ringing, and is delivered in nearly the same manner; but our birds all stop when the skylark has only just begun. Away he goes on quivering wing, inflating his throat fuller and fuller, mounting and mounting, and turning to all points of the compass as if to embrace the whole landscape in his song, the notes still raining upon you, as distinct as ever, after you have left him far behind. You feel that you need be in no hurry to observe the song lest the bird finish; you walk along, your mind reverts to other things, you examine the grass and weeds, or search for a curious stone, still here goes the bird; you sit down and study the landscape, or send your thoughts out toward France or Spain, or across the sea to your own land, and yet, when you get them back, there is that song above you, almost as unceasing as the light of a star. This strain indeed suggests some rare pyrotechnic display, musical sounds being substituted for the many-colored sparks and lights. And yet I will add, what perhaps the best readers do not need to be told, that neither the lark-song, nor any other bird-song in the open air and under the sky, is as noticeable a feature as my description of it might imply, or as the poets would have us believe; and that most persons, not especially interested in birds or their notes, and intent upon the general beauty of the landscape, would probably pass it by unremarked.

3. from *BIRDS AND POETS* 'A Bird Medley,' pp.83-85

People who have not made friends with the birds do not know how much they miss. Especially to one living in the country, of strong local attachments and an observing turn of mind, does an acquaintance with the birds form a close and invaluable tie. The only time I saw Thomas Carlyle, I remember his relating, apropos of this subject, that in his earlier days he was sent on a journey to a distant town on some business that gave him much bother and vexation, and that on his way back home, forlorn and dejected, he suddenly heard the larks singing all about him, — soaring and singing, just as they did about his father's fields, and it comforted him and cheered him up amazingly.

Most lovers of the birds can doubtless recall similar experiences from their own lives. Nothing wou<sup>ld</sup> me to a new place more than the birds. I go, for instance, to take up my abode in the country,—to plant myself upon unfamiliar ground. I know

nobody, and nobody knows me. The roads, the fields, the hills, the streams, the woods, are all strange. I look wistfully upon them, but they know me not.

They give back nothing to my yearning gaze. But there, on every hand, are the long-familiar birds,—the same ones I left behind me, the same ones I knew in my youth,—robins, sparrows, swallows, bobolinks, crows, hawks, high-holes, meadowlarks, all there before me, and ready to renew and perpetuate the old associations. Before my house is begun, theirs is completed; before I have taken root at all, they are thoroughly established. I do not yet know what kind of apples my apple-trees bear, but there, in the cavity of a decayed limb, the bluebirds are building a nest, and yonder, on that branch, the social sparrow is busy with hairs and straws. The robins have tasted the quality of my cherries, and the cedar-birds have known every red cedar on the place these many years. While my house is yet surrounded by its scaffoldings, the phoebe-bird has built her exquisite mossy nest on a projecting stone beneath the eaves, a robin has filled a niche in the wall with mud and dry grass, the chimney swallows are going out and in the chimney, and a pair of house wrens are at home in a snug cavity over the door, and, during an April snowstorm, a number of hermit thrushes have taken shelter in my unfinished chambers. Indeed, I am in the midst of friends before I fairly know it. The place is not so new as I had thought. It is already old; the birds have supplied the memories of many decades of years.

There is something almost pathetic in the fact that the birds remain forever the same. You grow old, your friends die or move to distant lands, events sweep on, and all things are changed. Yet there in your garden or orchard are the birds of your boyhood, the same notes, the same calls, and, to all intents and purposes, the identical birds endowed with perennial youth. The swallows, that built so far out of your reach beneath the eaves of your father's barn, the same ones now squeak and chatter beneath the eaves of your barn. The warblers and shy wood-birds you pursued with such glee ever so many summers ago, and whose names you taught to some beloved youth who now, perchance, sleeps amid his native hills, no marks of time or change cling to them; and when you walk out to the strange woods, there they are, mocking you with their ever-renewed and joyous youth. The call of the high-holes, the whistle of the quail, the strong piercing note of the meadowlark, the drumming of the grouse,—how these sounds ignore the years, and strike on the ear with the melody of that springtime when the world was young, and life was all holiday and romance!

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A full list of Burroughs' books can be found in Westbrook.

# Notes on Richard Jefferies

*Samuel A. Jones*

Samuel A. Jones MD, an American homeopath, sent his notes to Henry S. Salt who quoted from the first three paragraphs in *Richard Jefferies: His Life & His Ideals*, pp.25-26. The notes were probably written before 1894 and after 1891 when the second edition of *The Story of My Heart* was published. Jones' correspondence with Salt is held by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**I**t is necessary in studying the writings of Richard Jefferies to consider his bodily condition. He almost equalled Heine in suffering; and the probable nature of his diseases suggests the soil in which Genius appears chiefly to flourish. His portrait indicates the scrofulous diathesis with its singularly impressionable temperament, its rapturous enjoyment of a delight and its exalted susceptibility to a pang. In such an one the physical life is largely pathological. It is not to be estimated by the ordinary standard of the robust man.

One of Jefferies' medical attendants said of him, 'He strikes me as being a marked example of hysteria in man, though in his case, as in many women, the commoner phenomena of hysteria are wanting.' This element in the diagnosis of his mental condition is doubtless in accord with the teachings of modern science; but this same 'science' would find in the bloody sweat of Gethsemane only corpuscles, clot, and chloride of sodium, and it is to the latest date utterly unable to find any trace of the soul in the *caput mortuum* of its destructive analyses. This should be remembered, because there is a reproach in the ascription of 'hysteria' that is keenly felt by the subject. To the most recondite of the medical profession, be it known, hysteria is a mysterious super-sensuous enigma; not even in catalepsy is the domination of mind over matter more strikingly shown, and yet the physician in all the false pride of the schools attempts to hide his crass ignorance of the mystery by giving its phenomena a Greek name.

If, then, Jefferies was a 'marked example of hysteria,' that is only saying in effect that he is one of those in whom is displayed the astounding mastery of the spiritual over the material; and whilst the essential nature of hysteria is unknown, its results are often as impressive as they are inexplicable. It was hysteria that made Joan of Arc a terror to the bravest of England's soldiery, and it was only hysteria that nerved the arm of Luther when he threw his inkstand at the Devil. If hysteria has its debasements, it has also its

exaltations; if it can sink one unhappy subject as low as the brute, it can elevate another until the serene altitude is only 'a little lower than the angels.' Hysteria was doubtless called demoniac possession in the days of our Saviour, but even in those days it was again hysteria that bestowed the gift of tongues, and brought the vision that blinded Saul of Tarsus while it illumined his soul. It was, then, a similar aberration from the orbit of the common-place that gave Jefferies the heavenly glimpses which he vainly endeavours to describe in *The Story of My Heart*. There was one apocalypse on the island of Patmos, and another on that silent hill-top in Wiltshire; and both are alike incomprehensible to us. We who are granted not these heavenly visions doubt the testimony just as the tales of the early travellers were scoffed at by those who never left the place of their birth.

Jefferies' hysteria is the index to psychical peculiarities that aid us in comprehending one important factor which enters into the making of his singular *Story*. That work is one of the most peculiar products to be found in any literature. It is the reminiscences of experiences in an unusual bodily condition, and one which Jefferies had the power to induce at will. At first he required for its production a peculiar environment, but later in his life he was independent of environment and could project himself into these singular conditions as readily amidst all the roaring din of a London street as by a babbling brook or when alone on that silent hill-top which he depicts in the first chapter of his marvellous *Story*.

This peculiar condition is that *ecstasy* in which all mystics have delighted: and Jefferies has innocently described the *methodus operandi* of his 'projection'—to borrow a word from alchemists—in chap. V. of the *Story*:<sup>1</sup>

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 only lasted 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.

Jefferies must have acquired this trick of self-projection unconsciously: unaware of what he was learning and of the consequences of such learning. There is no evidence that he understood the physiological relationship between his drawing a long breath and then breathing slowly, and the succeeding momentary exaltation: but that process so changes the cerebral circulation that his brief absorption, 'only part of a second,' is readily accounted for by the physiologist.

In saying that Jefferies was not aware of what he was learning it is implied that he had not read any East Indian literature and thereby learned to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of My Heart*, 2nd edition, p.76.

practice the 'yoga.' Of course, the method followed by the Indian adept is much more complex than that employed by Jefferies, but at least one essential element for both is the peculiar respiration. However as Jefferies began this occult practice in his very 'teens, it is safe to conclude that it is an involuntary discovery of his own.

Of the succeeding ecstatic 'moment of exaltation,' he does not appear to have recognised any relationship of sense and effect between it and the preceding respiratory procedure, and this gives a charm to his *Story* that otherwise were wanting. His is not a conscious, sensual, De Quincey opium-delirium: he felt a purer delight than that which inspired the visions of Kublai Khan: he saw no 'damsel with a dulcimer,' but thrilled with yearning unspeakable for 'the fuller soul' and felt in every trembling fibre of His frame the consciousness of incarnated Immortality. If this was delirium, it was the pure breath of Nature that produced it: if, instead, it was a vision of glories ineffable, it was inspired by the very winds of heaven.

On first reading *The Story of My Heart* I found in it a weird quality that I was wholly at a loss to account for, but upon finding the passage above cited the explanation was at hand: his 'moments of exaltation' shadowed themselves in his *Story* and are reflected upon the reader according to his receptivity—the more one is en rapport with Jefferies the more will he be moved by these occult adumbrations.

To those singular experiences of Jefferies on the Wiltshire hill-top I unhesitatingly ascribe the vague unrest and the dimly-defined, unsatisfied yearning which *The Story of My Heart* occasions because these were so keenly felt by Jefferies himself and are so readily transmitted to the sympathetic reader by fervid genius.

The recollection of those 'moments of exaltation' remained with Jefferies after he had returned from his Pisgah to the coarser realities of life. It was to him as if the heavens had opened 'only a part of a second,' but that flashing glimpse had filled his heart with hunger and his soul with yearning that not all the beauty of the earth alone could ever appease. Then came surging from his heart that passionate prayer for 'the fuller life' because he too had come to know

that boundless hunger of the immortals  
Which only God's infinitude supplies.

(My dear Friend,

I found these notes in my portfolio, and if you can make *any* use whatsoever of them do so with all possible freedom. As I have not time to copy them, will you kindly return them when you are done with them. S.A.J. )

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Samuel Arthur Jones was born in Manchester on 11 June 1834 but his parents emigrated to America in 1842. He graduated as a Doctor of Medicine in 1860 at the Missouri Homeopathic Medical College. Married in 1863, he had eleven children! He practised in New Jersey from 1863-1875, and was a Professor of Histology and Pathology at New York Homeopathic Medical College, and Chair of Materia Medica in 1875.² In 1878, he moved to Ann Arbor to become Dean and Professor at the Homeopathic Medical College of the University of Michigan.³ Apart from practising medicine and raising children, he had an interest in literature (he wrote books on Thoreau), he was a book collector and was a corresponding member of the British Homeopathic Society. Evidently Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* would have been lost to posterity if Dr. Jones had not preserved the book. He had this to say about homeopathy in 1872 as editor of the *American Homœopathic Observer*:

Let us guard our homœopathic heritage most jealously. The provings on the healthy, the simillimum as the remedy, the single remedy, the reduced dose, may be and will be filled from us one by one and christened with new names to bide the theft. What will become of homœopathy? It will live, despite them, in Hahnemann's posology. The very infinitesimals which many are so ready to throw away are all that will save us.

He died in 1912.



Samuel A. Jones

² John S. Haller, *The History of American Homeopathy: the academic years, 1820-1935*, (Pharmaceutical Products Press, 22 Sep 2005), p.162.

³ Wilbert B. Hinsdale, University of Michigan, *Homeopathic Medical College*, (1891). pp.358, 379.

The Vogue of Richard Jefferies

Norman Foerster

First published in *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (New York), Vol. 28, 1913 pp. 530-538.

No one, so far as I know, has attempted to analyze the significant disagreement between the perfervid admirers of Richard Jefferies and those who read his books with mild respect. Henley's familiar phrase, 'a reporter of genius,' which from the point of view of those outside the cult seems more than just, falls far short of satisfying those within the cult. They prefer the unmixed adulation implied in the very title of the biography by Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*. They prefer the judgment of Mr. Henry Salt, who centres his praise, not on *The Gamekeeper at Home*, but on *The Story of My Heart*, which future ages are to read with 'tears of pity and admiration.' They prefer the poetically phrased criticism of his latest disciple and biographer, Mr. Edward Thomas, who tells us that the mystical Jefferies 'fought in the dim, far-off, wavering van, of which we have yet no sure tidings.'

The excellence of Jefferies's early work is conceded by all his readers and critics, and need not be pointed out afresh; Jefferies the reporter has a secure position. But Jefferies the 'mystic' is still neglected, in the opinion of those of the inner circle; and they are demanding, with increasing insistence, that something be done about it. Why does the world persist in shrugging its shoulders when the 'true' Jefferies is mentioned? Why do we not esteem more highly the Jefferies of *The Story of My Heart*, the Jefferies of the 'dim, far-off, wavering van'?

It is hardly possible to consider the story of his heart without considering briefly the story of his life. Jefferies was of country stock, with an infusion of Fleet-Street blood—his mother was a city woman whom country life had soured. He attended the schools of the poorer middle class irregularly up to the age of fifteen, and had no further education. At home he was unhappy, out of sympathy with his parents, with his brothers and sisters, and with farm life; nor did he have close friends in the neighbourhood. Rebelling against the prose of farm life, he sought the poetry of the woods and downs. When about fifteen years old, he ran away with a cousin, hoping to reach romantic Moscow ultimately; the boys were back quickly enough, spent all their money in tickets to America, but having no money for food, promptly returned to Wiltshire. Jefferies found himself on the farm once more,

completely out of tune with it. At the age of seventeen he entered journalism in a small town near his home, and the same year began to resort to the hills with the avowed purpose of ridding himself of sordid surroundings. Even now he had little human companionship; he was, in fact, for the most part disliked or merely pitied. In 'My Old Village,' he wrote, late in life, 'There was not a single one friendly to me.' In and near London, subsequently, he seemed the loneliest of men, 'a shy, proud recluse'—strangers could not converse with him at all. As the years went on, his pride and reserve and sensitiveness increased. Like most modern aspirants to literary success, he soon began to write novels,—a long list of utterly worthless, unsuccessful *Scarlet Shawls* and the like. 'You have no idea,' he wrote in 1873, 'of the wretched feeling produced by incessant disappointment, and the long, long months of weary waiting for decisions without the least hope.' These long months really lengthened into years and a lifetime; for although he published his essays and later novels readily enough, he earned very little money through them. That he wrote, on occasion, with a rug round his knees till five in the morning did not mend matters. Nor did his marriage in 1874, to a Miss Jessie Baden, by whom he had two children. The old heartrending contrast continued—the redundant wealth of nature and the pinching poverty of human life. Small wonder that he wrote in one of his novels, 'I would infinitely rather be a tallow-chandler, with a good steady income and no thought, than an author; at the first opportunity I mean to go into the tallow business.'

To his dangerous sensitiveness, which rebelled against dull surroundings, to his fatuous efforts to succeed in literature, to his lack of intellectual development and the poised judgment that education brings, there was added the chief bane of all,—broken health. He had never been strong; and in 1881, when he was in his prime, his fatal sickness began, an ulceration of the small intestine. This led to terrible suffering, and in 1887 his thirty-nine years of gloom, despair, and illness came to an end.

The Story of My Heart, which Jefferies wrote in his last years, is a book painful to read, bitter in its rejection of much that is best in life, blind and pathetically hopeful in its quest for a 'soul-life' higher than Deity. Long passages in it, as in his later essays, are devoted to an ecstatic, but hardly happy, celebration of hours spent in the fields and at the sea-shore earnestly praying 'to find this something better than a god,' and it is in these passages that Mr. Salt and Mr. Edward Thomas discover the spiritual and 'mystical' Jefferies whom they admire so ardently.

First of all, it is important to note that Jefferies was not a pantheistic mystic. Like Matthew Arnold, he was assured that 'Nature and man can

never be fast friends.’ This assertion he makes again and again in his writings. Thus:

There is nothing human in nature... . All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass... . By no course of reasoning, however tortuous, can nature and the universe be fitted to the mind... . I refuse to be bound by the laws of the tides, nor am I so bound... . I conclude that no deity has anything to do with nature.

This sense of the ‘anti-human’ character of nature Mr. Salt reluctantly labels as one of his ‘defects’—if a defect at all, a rather important one surely. Mr. Thomas is so reluctant that he denies altogether that such was the conviction of Jefferies, desperately searches through the rest of his hero’s writings for support, and in triumph presents several passages from an essay printed posthumously. But a careful reading of these passages indicates that only one paragraph points to a kinship between man and nature, and even this paragraph can be reconciled, if one deems it necessary to do so, with the usual attitude abundantly expressed in *The Story of My Heart*, in *The Life of the Fields*, in *Field and Hedgerow*, in *Amaryllis at the Fair*. That Jefferies momentarily thought otherwise is quite possible, but it was only momentarily, and there is no evidence of another view in those writings which Mr. Salt and Mr. Thomas regard as typical.

If, then, Jefferies did not find the One in the many through a sympathetic understanding of the natural world, why did he persist in spending his hours in wandering over the downs and through the fields?

I do not see how we can avoid the conclusion that he went to nature because she could provide as nothing else could the intense life of the senses—‘The intense life of the senses, there is never enough for them.’ Even as a boy he found himself hostile to his human surroundings; and as he grew older, poverty and illness increased his revulsion from the world of men and his desire for the sensuous life. Nature, notwithstanding her indifference to the presence of man in her midst, offered, on the one hand relief from the indifference of the human world—a less excusable indifference it seemed to him—and on the other hand a fullness of exquisite, sensuous pleasure attainable nowhere else.

One might object that it is city life that usually attracts country youth, because of the variety and abundance of sensuous pleasures it holds forth. That is true, and it was true of Jefferies:

The exquisite delight of utterly abandoned extravagance, no counting—
anathemas on counting and calculating! If life be not a dream what is the use of
living?

Say what you will, the truth is, we all struggle on in hope of living in a dream some day. This is my dream. Dreadfully, horribly wicked, is it not, in an age that preaches thrift and—twaddle? No joy like waste in London streets; happy waste, imaginative extravagance; to and fro like a butterfly!

Unfortunately, however, these pleasures must be paid for, and Jefferies could not pay for them. But he could at least enjoy the works of art to be found in London and Paris; unable to afford 'to buy so much as a glass of ale,' he seeks refreshment in the National Gallery:

The glowing face of Cytherea in Titian's Venus and Adonis, the heated cheek, the lips that kiss each eye that gazes on them, the desiring glance, the golden hair—sunbeams moulded into features—this face answered me. Juno's wide back and mesial groove, is anything so lovely as the back? Cytherea's poised hips unveiled for judgment; these called up the same thirst I felt on the greensward in the sun, on the wild beach listening to the quiet sob as the summer wave drank at the land.

Such a passage is, I cannot help thinking, less spiritual than sensual. The connection between this thirst and that caused by lying on the greensward is significant. The relation is still clearer in 'Nature in the Louvre'. He goes to the Louvre, is arrested early by the beauty of the Venus Accroupie, feasts his eyes upon it for the rest of the morning, returns the next day for the same purpose, and goes for a third time, only to find it more beautiful than ever. Why this increasing interest? he asks. Because, like a true Rousseauistic nympholept, he has often dreamed that the higher-than-deity is a woman!

The light and colour suspended in the summer atmosphere ... were to me always on the point of becoming tangible in some human form ... Here there came back to me this old thought born in the midst of flowers and windtrusted leaves, and I saw that with it the statue before me was in accord. The living original of the work was the human personification of the secret influence which had beckoned me on in the forest and by running streams.

Romantic nympholepsy is indeed such a tribute as even the chivalric Middle Ages did not pay to the physical beauty of woman—but it is not religion. And it leads, not to Christian service, not to personal excellence, but merely to a debased, purposeless pleasure in revery. It sometimes leads, as it did in the case of Jefferies, to such a confession as this: 'I should like to be loved by every beautiful woman on earth, from the swart Nubian to the white and divine Greek.'

Inasmuch as the struggling author cannot enjoy the pleasures of city life in their totality, Jefferies had recourse to the country, where the sensuous life is not concerned with shillings. But it was not to seek bracing frost and snow and mountains. Most of our modern poets of nature have profited by some such tonic: Wordsworth loved the bare crest of Scawfell [sic], Thoreau the

blasts of a New England winter, Whitman the booming surf of Long Island. With Jefferies it was always 'the great sun, burning'—it was always summer. Compare, in *The Life of the Fields*, the essay entitled 'The Pageant of Summer' with 'January in the Sussex Woods'; the former is long, full of colour and sound, replete with feeling, the latter is one-third as long, unenthusiastic, composed mostly of digression. To Jefferies, winter is indeed the 'inverted year.' Now, in southern England January is sharp and snowy, February more moist and almost as cold, March is a month of east winds and slanting rain, and in the autumn north winds indicate the approach of winter—endless variety, ample stimulus to thought and physical vigour. But in the writings of Jefferies we rarely hear of these months; his is a monotonous summer landscape, warm, often hot and enervating, and he himself is usually prone, 'with half-closed eyes.' The winds of October are too searching, he says, to allow one to linger beside the brook, 'but still it is pleasant to pass by and remember the summer days.' There is nothing so wearying, he says elsewhere, as a long frost; rain, mist, and gales are bad enough, but a frost is worse. These very things—rain, mist, gales, frost—were celebrated by the American Transcendentalists: thus Thoreau, on a cold and dismal day in mid-November, 'such a day as will almost oblige a man to eat his own heart,' exclaims, 'Ah, but is not this a glorious time for your deep inward fires?' In Thoreau and Emerson, as in Wordsworth, the mind and the will play fully as important a part as the senses. Jefferies, however, would brush aside the reason and the will, his soul to the warm sun and the soft breeze, and seek a Nirvana very different from that of the Hindoos. He lay on his back, he tells us, that he might receive 'the embrace of the earth,' which reminds us somewhat unpleasantly of his swart Nubian and divine Greek. Here he could let nature play upon his senses her ravishing harmonies:

Joy in life; joy in life. The ears listen, and want more: the eyes are gratified with gazing, and desire yet further; the nostrils are filled with the sweet odours of flower and sap. The touch, too, has its pleasures, dallying with leaf and flower. Can you not almost grasp the odour-laden air and hold it in the hollow of your hand?

So subtle and responsive are his senses that he can even 'feel a sense of blue colour' as he faces the strong breeze; 'it is wind-blue, not the night-blue, or heaven-blue, a colour of air.' And overhead always the hot sun, blazing like a god, sending happiness to the myriad creatures down below. Sometimes it seems to him that everything is floating rather than growing or standing, the cares of life are dissolved, and there is the bliss of vacuity, the total absence of thought and desire; at other times the pouring light excites the feeling that an inexpressible thought is quivering in the azure overhead, a Soul, for the understanding of which abundant 'soul-life' is necessary—his prayer is

ordinarily not for a higher soul-life but for more. Human existence is too brief, he insists again and again, pitifully brief; he would like to live for several centuries at least, and he is charitable enough to wish a similar good fortune for the grasshoppers: '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.'

In the light of such a passage—which has, indeed, its pathos—it is refreshing to turn to one like Emerson, whose reach did not exceed his grasp, who could write and believe, 'Life is unnecessarily long.'

If Jefferies was 'a reporter of genius,' he was also a hedonist.

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Norman Foerster, c.1930

Norman Foerster (1887-1972) was professor of English at the University of North Carolina, professor of English and director of the School of Letters at the University of Iowa, and instigator of the New Humanist movement in American criticism. He was the author of books on American literature and higher education, including *The Intellectual Heritage of Thoreau*.

Jefferies' 'Little Book'

Henry Miller

This extract was first published in Henry Miller's *The Books in My Life* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1952). Chapter XI is titled 'The Story of My Heart' and runs for 22 pages. The text has been reduced considerably by removing digressions from the main subject.

Some few years before sailing for Paris I had occasional meetings with my old friend Emil Schnellock in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. We used to stroll leisurely over the downs in the summer evenings, talking of the fundamental problems of life and eventually about books. Though our tastes were quite divergent, there were certain authors, such as Hamsun and D.H. Lawrence, for whom we had a common enthusiasm. My friend Emil had a most lovable way of deprecating his knowledge and understanding of books; pretending to be ignorant or obtuse, he would ply me with questions which only a sage or a philosopher could answer. I remember this short period vividly because it was an exercise in humility and self-control on my part. The desire to be absolutely truthful with my friend caused me to realize how very little I knew, how very little I could reveal, though he has always maintained that I was a guide and a mentor to him. In brief, the result of these communions was that I began to doubt all that I had blithely taken for granted. The more I endeavoured to explain my point of view the more I floundered. He may have thought I acquitted myself well, but not I. Often, on parting from him, I would continue the inner debate interminably.

I suspect that I was rather arrogant and conceited at this time, that I had all the makings of an intellectual snob. Even if I did not have all the answers, as we say, I must have given the illusion of being thus endowed. Talk came easily to me; I could always spin a glittering web. Emil's sincere, direct questions, always couched in the most humble spirit, punctured my vanity. There was something very artful about these innocent questions of his. They made clear to me that he not only knew a lot more than he pretended but that he sometimes knew much more than I did myself. If he read far less than I, he read with much greater attention and, as a result, he retained much more than I ever did. I used to think his memory astounding, and it was indeed, but, as I discovered later, it was the fruit of patience, love, devotion. He had, moreover, a gift which I only learned the value of much later, namely, the ability to discover in every author that which is valuable and lasting. By comparison I was ruthless and intolerant. There were certain

authors I absolutely could not stomach: I ruled them out as being beneath one's attention. Ten years, perhaps twenty years later, I might confess to my good friend Emil that I had found something of merit in them, an admission which often took him by surprise because, influenced by my dogmatic assertions, he had in the meantime come to suspect that he had overrated these authors. There was always this amusing and sometimes bewildering *décalage* where our opinions of authors were concerned.

There was one author whom he recommended to me with great warmth—it must have been a good twenty years ago. Knowing nothing about him or the little book he had written, never having heard the name before, I made a mental note of it and passed on. For some reason, at the time Emil mentioned it to me, I got the impression that it was a 'sentimental' narrative. *The Story of My Heart* it was called, and the author was English. Richard Jefferies, no less. Meant nothing to me. I would read it some day—when I had nothing better to do.

It is strange—I have touched on this before, I know—that even if one does forget the title and author of a book once recommended one does not forget the aura which accompanied the recommendation. A little word or phrase, an extra touch of warmth or zeal, keeps a certain vague remembrance alive in the back of one's head. We ought always to be alert to these smouldering vibrations. No matter if the person recommending the book be a fool or an idiot, we should always be ready to take heed. Of course my friend Emil was neither a fool nor an idiot. He was of an unusually warm nature, tender, sympathetic and believing. That something 'extra' which he had imparted on this occasion never ceased working in me...

My friend Emil, it is high time to acknowledge my debt to you. How in the name of heaven could I possibly have avoided reading this book for so long? Why did you not shout the title in my ears? Why were you not more insistent? Here is a man who speaks my inmost thoughts. He is the iconoclast I feel myself to be yet never fully reveal. He makes the utmost demands. He rejects, he scraps, he annihilates. What a seeker! What a daring seeker! When you read the following passage I wish you would try to recall those talks we had in Prospect Park, try to remember, if you can, the nature of my fumbling answers to those 'deep' questions you propounded ...

The mind is infinite and able to understand everything that is brought before it; there is no limit to its understanding.¹ The limit is the littleness of the things and the narrowness of the ideas which have been put for it to consider. For the philosophies of old time past and the discoveries of modern research are as

¹ Curious that Lautréamont said almost the same: 'Nothing is incomprehensible.' This and other citations are taken from the Haldeman-Julius print of Jefferies' *Story of My Heart*.

nothing to it. They do not fill it. When they have been read, the mind passes on, and asks for more. The utmost of them, the whole together, make a mere nothing. These things have been gathered together by immense labour, labour so great that it is a weariness to think of it; but yet, when all is summed up and written, the mind receives it all as easily as the hand picks flowers. It is like one sentence—read and gone.

Emil, reading Richard Jefferies, I suddenly recall my sublime—forgive me if I call it that—yes, my sublime impatience. What are we waiting for? Why are we marking time? Was not that me all over? It used to annoy you, I know, but you were tolerant of me. You would ask me a question and I would reply with a bigger one. For the life of me I could not understand, and would not understand, why we did not scrap everything immediately and begin afresh. That is why, when I came across certain utterances from the lips of Louis Lambert—another Louis! —I nearly jumped out of my skin. I was suffering then exactly as he had suffered.

I am not altogether convinced that there are many who suffer for the reasons intimated and to the degree which Louis Lambert tells us he suffered. Time and again I have hinted that there is a tyrant in me which continues to assert that society must one day be governed by its true masters. When I read Jefferies' statement: 'In twelve thousand written years the world has not yet built itself a House, nor filled a Granary, nor organized itself for its own comfort'—this old tyrant which refuses to be smothered rises up again. Time and again, touching on certain books, certain authors, recalling the tremendous impact of their utterances—men like Emerson, Nietzsche, Rimbaud, Whitman, the Zen masters especially—I think with fury and resentment (still!) of those early teachers into whose hands we were entrusted...

We should know, however, that there are people to whom one must never put certain questions. The answer is not in them! Among these people is the whole body of instructors to whom we are delivered from infancy hand and soul. These definitely do not know the answers. Nor, what is worse, do they know how to make us seek the answers in ourselves.

'If the eye is always watching, and the mind on the alert, ultimately chance supplies the solution,' says Jefferies. True. But what is here termed chance is something of our own creation...

The little book which Richard Jefferies calls his 'autobiography' is, to use the abused word once again, an inspirational work. In the whole of literature there are very few such works. Much that is styled inspirational is not at all; it is what men who 'specialize' in the subject would like us to believe is so. I mentioned Emerson. Never in my life have I met anyone who did not agree that Emerson is an inspiring writer. One may not accept his thought in toto,

but one comes away from a reading of him purified, so to say, and exalted ... There are those who open our eyes and there are those who lift us out of ourselves. The latter are not interested in foisting upon us new beliefs but in aiding us to penetrate reality more deeply, 'to make progress,' in other words, 'in the science of reality.' They proceed first by levelling all the superstructures of thought. Second they point to something beyond thought, to the ocean of mind, let us say, in which thought swims. And last they force us to think for ourselves. Says Jefferies, for example, in the midst of his confession:

Now, today, as I write, I stand in exactly the same position as the Caveman. Written tradition, systems of culture, modes of thought, have for me no existence. If ever they took any hold of my mind it must have been very slight; they have long ago been erased.

That is a mighty utterance. An heroic utterance. Who can repeat it honestly and sincerely? Who is there that even aspires to make such an utterance? Jefferies tells us towards the end of his book how he had tried again and again to put into written words the thoughts which had taken possession of him. Repeatedly he failed. And no wonder, for what he succeeded in giving us finally, fragmentary though he confesses it to be, is almost a defiance of thought. Explaining how, 'under happy circumstances,' he did at last begin (in 1880), he states that he got no further than to write down a few notes.

'Even then,' he says, 'I could not go on, but I kept the notes (I had destroyed all former beginnings), and in the end, two years afterwards, commenced this book.' He speaks of it as 'only a fragment, and a fragment scarcely hewn.' Then he adds, and this I think worth underscoring: 'Had I not made it personal I could scarcely have put it into any shape at all ... I am only too conscious of its imperfections, for I have as it were seventeen years of consciousness of my own inability to express this the idea of my life.'

In this same small paragraph he makes an assertion which is very dear to me and which is the only stop that can be offered to critics. Speaking of the inadequacy of words to express ideas—and by this he means, of course, ideas which lay beyond the habitual realms of thought—attempting briefly to give his own definition of such moot terms as soul, prayer, immortality, and declaring these to be deficient still, he concludes: 'I must leave my book as a whole to give its own meaning to its words.'

Perhaps the key to this amazing little book is the sentence which runs thus: 'No thought which I have ever had has satisfied my soul.' The story of his life begins therefore with the realization of his soul's hunger, his soul's quest. All that preceded this became as nought. 'Begin wholly afresh. Go straight to the sun, the immense forces of the universe, to the Entity

unknown; go higher than a god; deeper than prayer; and open a new day.' Sounds like D.H. Lawrence. I wonder now if Lawrence ever read Jefferies? There is not only a similarity of thought but of accent and rhythm. But then we find this same idiosyncrasy of speech, in English at any rate, whenever we come upon an original thinker. The iconoclast always exhorts us in short, staccato sentences. It is as if he were transmitting telegraphically from a distant, higher station. It is an utterly different rhythm from that of the prophets, who are filled with woe and lamentation, with oburgation and malediction. Somehow, whether we accept the commands or not, we are stirred; our feet go through the motion of marching forward, our chests heave, as if drawing in fresh draughts of oxygen, our eyes lift to capture the fleeting vision.

And now let us get to 'the Fourth Idea,' which is really the epitome of his soul's longing. He begins thus:

Three things only have been discovered of that which concerns the inner consciousness since before written history began. Three things only in twelve thousand written, or sculptured, years, and in the dumb, dim time before then. Three ideas the Cavemen primeval wrested from the unknown, the night which is round us still in daylight—the existence of the soul, immortality, the deity. These things found, prayer followed as a sequential result. Since then nothing further has been found in all the twelve thousand years, as if men had been satisfied and had found these to suffice. They do not suffice me. I desire to advance further, and to wrest a fourth, and even still more than a fourth, from the darkness of thought. I want more ideas of soul-life. I am certain there are more yet to be found. A great life—an entire civilization—lies just outside the pale of common thought. Cities and countries, inhabitants, intelligences, culture—an entire civilization. Except by illustrations drawn from familiar things, there is no way of indicating a new idea. I do not mean actual cities, actual civilization. Such life is different from any yet imagined. A nexus of ideas exists of which nothing is known—a vast system of ideas—a cosmos of thought. There is an Entity, a Soul-Entity, as yet unrecognized. These, rudely expressed, constitute my Fourth Idea. It is beyond, or beside, the three discovered by the Cavemen; it is in addition to the existence of the soul; in addition to immortality; and beyond the idea of the deity. I think there is something more than existence.

... What he strives magnificently to make us understand, make us realize, make us accept, is that these ideas came from a source which has never dried up and never will dry up; that we are marking time, withering, ossifying, giving ourselves up to death, so long as we rest content with these precious three and make no effort to swim back to the source.

Filled with consuming wonder, awe and reverence for life, never able to get enough of sea, air and sky, realizing 'the crushing hopelessness of books,'

determined to think things out for himself, it is not at all extraordinary consequently to find him declaring that the span of human life could be prolonged far beyond anything we imagine possible today. Indeed, he goes further, much further, and like a true man of spirit asserts that 'death is not inevitable to the ideal man. He is shaped for a species of physical immortality.' He begs us to ponder seriously on what might happen 'if the entire human race were united in their efforts to eliminate causes of decay.'

A few paragraphs further on he says, and with what justification:

The truth is, we die through our ancestors, we are murdered by our ancestors. Their dead hands stretch forth from the tomb and drag us down to their mouldering bones. We in our turn are now at this moment preparing death for our unborn posterity. This day those that die do not die in the sense of old age, they are slain.

Every revolutionary figure, whether in the field of religion or the field of politics, knows this only too well. 'Begin wholly afresh!' It is the old, old cry. But to slay the ghosts of the past has thus far been an insuperable task for humanity. 'A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg,' said Samuel Butler. One wonders whose way it is that causes man to continue turning out misfits, that makes him, surrounded and invested as he is by the most potent and divine powers, satisfied to remain no more than he has been and still is. Imagine what man is capable of, in his ignorance and cruelty, to provoke from the lips of the Marquis de Sade upon his first release from prison (after almost thirteen years spent in solitary confinement) these terrible words; '... All my feelings are extinguished. I have no longer any taste for anything, I like nothing any more; the world which foolishly I so vividly regretted seems to me so boring ... and so dull ... I have never been more misanthropic than I am now that I have returned among men, and if I seem peculiar to others, they can be assured that they produce the same effect on me ...' The plaint of this unfortunate individual is today voiced by millions. From all quarters of the globe there rises a wail of distress. Worse, a wail of utter despair.

'When,' asks Jefferies (in 1882!), 'will it be possible to be certain that the capacity of a single atom has been exhausted? At any moment some fortunate incident may reveal a fresh power.' Today we know—and how shamefully we have utilized it!—the power which resides in the atom. And it is today more than ever before that man roams hungry, naked, abandoned.

'Begin afresh!' The East rumbles. Indeed, the people of the East are at last making an heroic effort to shake off the fetters which bind them to the past. And what is the result? We of the West tremble in fear. We would hold them back. Where is progress? Who possesses enlightenment?

There is a sentence in Jefferies' little book which literally jumps from the page—at least for me. 'A reasoning process has yet to be invented by which

to go straight to the desired end.' To which statement I can hear the critical-minded objecting: 'Excellent indeed, but why doesn't he invent it?' Now it is one of the virtues of the men who inspire us that they always leave the way open. They suggest, they stimulate, they point. They do not take us by the hand and lead us. On the other hand I might say that there are men who are this very moment striving to show us how to accomplish this end. Now they are virtually unknown, but when the time comes they will stand revealed. We are not drifting blindly, however much it may seem so. But perhaps I ought to give the whole of Jefferies' thought here, for he has voiced it in a way which is unforgettable ...

This hour, rays or undulations of more subtle mediums are doubtless pouring on us over the wide earth, unrecognized, and full of messages and intelligence from the unseen. Of these we are this day as ignorant as those who painted the papyri were of light. There is an infinity of knowledge yet to be known, and beyond that an infinity of thought. No mental instrument even has yet been invented by which researches can be carried direct to the object. Whatever has been found has been discovered by fortunate accident; in looking for one thing another has been chanced on. A reasoning process has yet to be invented by which to go straight to the desired end. For now the slightest particle is enough to throw the search aside, and the most minute circumstance sufficient to conceal obvious and brilliantly shining truths ... At present the endeavour to make discoveries is like gazing at the sky up through the boughs of an oak. Here a beautiful star shines clearly; here a constellation is hidden by a branch; a universe by a leaf. Some mental instrument or organon is required to enable us to distinguish between the leaf which may be removed and a real void; when to cease to look in one direction, and to work in another ... I feel that there are infinities to be known, but they are hidden by a leaf.

... 'Things that have been miscalled supernatural appear to me simple,' says Jefferies,

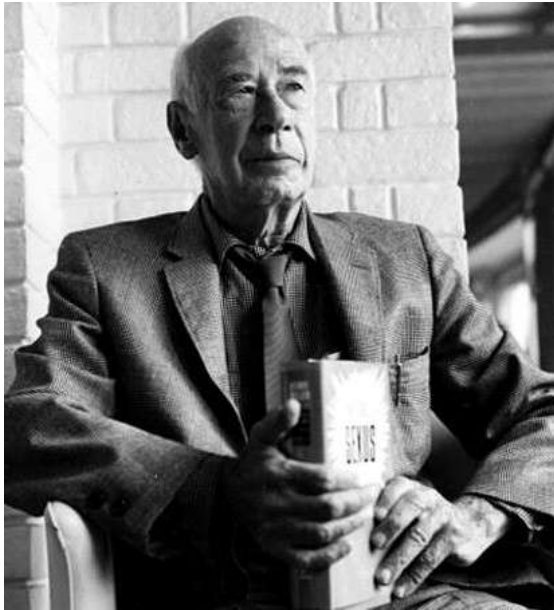
more natural than nature, than earth, than sea or sun ... It is matter which is the supernatural, and difficult of understanding ... Matter is beyond understanding, mysterious, impenetrable; I touch it easily, comprehend it, no. Soul, mind—the thought, the idea—is easily understood, it understands itself and is conscious. The supernatural miscalled, the natural in truth, is the real. To me everything is supernatural. How strange that condition of mind which cannot accept anything but the earth, the sea, the tangible universe! Without the misnamed supernatural these to me seem incomplete, unfinished. Without soul all these are dead. Except when I walk by the sea, and my soul is by it, the sea is dead. Those seas by which no man has stood—by which no soul has been—whether on earth or the planets, are dead. No matter how majestic the planet rolls in space, unless a soul be there it is dead.

... One part of man longs for the moon and other seizable worlds, never dreaming that another part of him is already traversing more mysterious, more spectacular realms.

Is it that man must make the circuit of the whole heavens before coming home to himself? Perhaps. Perhaps he must repeat the symbolic act of the great dragon of creation—coil and twist, twine and intertwine, until at last he succeeds in putting tail in mouth.

The true symbol of infinity is the full circle. It is also the symbol of fulfilment. And fulfilment is man's goal. Only in fulfilment will he find reality.

Aye, we must go full swing. How? —where is it if not everywhere and nowhere at the same time? When he is in possession of his soul, then will man be fully alive, caring nothing for immortality and knowing nothing of death. To begin wholly afresh may mean coming alive at last!



Henry Miller

Richard Jefferies

Newton Marshall Hall

This poem, by Newton Marshall Hall D.D., was published in *The Dial*, 'a Semi-monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information,' on 1 March 1893 (Vol. XIV, No.161). p.129. *The Dial* was founded in 1880 and based in Chicago. Newton Marshall Hall (1865-1926) was a Doctor of Divinity and an author, based in America. His works relate to the Bible and were published in the USA. He was born in New Hampshire and appears on the 1880 census as Newton Hall (aet 15, student)—his father was Marshall P. Hall (aet 42)—a clerk, his mother—Susan (aet 42) and brother Herbert (aet 10) in Manchester, Hillsborough, New Hampshire along with a servant. He appears to have visited England as he is listed on the passengers list sailing from Southampton to New York in 1921 as a clergyman and author.

Richard Jefferies

'I wonder how they will manage without me.'—*Field and Hedgerow*.

The birds will miss him, and the summer breeze
That lifts the meadow grass he loved so well,
The flying cloud, the modest blooms that dwell
In secret nooks, his stately murmuring trees;
And all his friends of field and wood, the bees,
The cuckoo, and the lark, will chant his knell;
For him the pines will lift their mournful swell
And join the solemn roar of breaking seas.

Perchance the hand of God for him unbars
The mysteries divine of life and death;
Perchance he walks through endless fields of light:
And yet he too must miss, beyond the stars,
The April rain, the hedgerows' fragrant breath,
The dreamy stillness of the summer night.

The Discovery of a Master

Kate Tryon

Extracts from Chapters I and II of *Walks in Jefferies-Land 1912* by Kate Tryon
(Richard Jefferies Society, Sep, 2010).

In 1863, an eminent American critic, writing on the death of the great Nature-writer, Henry David Thoreau, closed with the words, — ‘Nature has waited long for her Thoreau, and we can hardly expect, within a generation, at least, to see again one so gifted with her confidence.’ He was mistaken. Thoreau’s successor in hearing the modern Gospel of Outdoors had already come into the world. This was Richard Jefferies, the son of a farmer at Coate, near Swindon, in North Wilts, England... .

Five years after the death of Richard Jefferies, I, a sojourner in the American University-city of Cambridge [USA], first came upon Besant’s *Eulogy* of him, in the Harvard Library. *Field and Hedgerow* was immediately devoured, and made an ineffaceable impression. The portrait of the man remained graven on my mind as well—that tall, languid, dreamy man; sandy brown beard and moustache not hiding the full under lip; large blue eyes, with the same drooping left lid seen in his mother’s picture; high forehead, with glossy hair parted far over on the left side; the whole expression ‘sensuous, silent and aware’, as Mr. Thomas observes; lastly, a man scrupulously particular about dress. But this was after he had entered upon his career. I could see him too in the early, doubtful days when it was ‘nought but Dick Jefferies’, striding over the downs in the summer twilight, clothing poor and unbecoming, locks long and eccentric.

Besant’s *Eulogy* was followed by *Richard Jefferies, [A Study]* as man and thinker, by Mr. Henry S. Salt, who has also written the best appreciation of Thoreau, and who indeed, of all the critics, is by temperament best adapted to the task of setting forth the high service of the Nature-writers. Mr. Salt’s book confirmed my discipleship of Jefferies. To see Coate Farm and climb the high shoulder of the beloved Down was too much even to dream of then. But the impossible has come to pass. For two spring-times the door at Coate Farm has opened to me with kindest hospitality. Day by day and week by week I have wandered, sketch-box in hand, along those hedgerows, enlarging always my acquaintance with things and places now invested with a strange charm because touched by the great genius whose personality was never absent. How much Jefferies’ work has gained for me in importance by my knowledge of Jefferies-Land is inestimable. If I had sometimes wished, with

other admirers of his, that he had not written so much, and with so much detail, this objection tended to disappear.

Granted that one could keep the mood, with leisure, in this busy life, for a close reading of Jefferies' best work, one must find the interest and beauty of that work inexhaustible. This would be especially true if one were so fortunate as to have betimes some hours alone with Nature, to exercise the keener vision developed by this Master-seer. Nor is this all he teaches us—to love the life of the open air. His social message is vital, and, so far has the world moved on in two decades that some of the passages in *The Story of My Heart* do not sound quite so wild as when first uttered. For is it not strange indeed that, after so many centuries of the world's existence, humanity profits so little by its lessons? Shall we always be content to tread the old ruts worn for us by people so much less wise than we? If we will but *believe we can*, can we not now begin to lift the burden that weighs mankind down? We have thought poverty and disease must always be. But is this so? I will never believe it. Better expect and demand more of life. We must think ourselves into an earthly immortality.

So reasoned Jefferies half a century ago, and such thoughts were very uncomfortable to easy-going, contented mortals, while many commiserated the writer on the unhappy lot which had given rise to such discontent with things as they are. But now we shall not have to think long to agree that Jefferies' philosophy, Jefferies' religion, if you will, has emerged as the Modern Spirit. So that the farmer's son in that Wiltshire hamlet of Coate was the prophet of we know not what changed and improved conditions of human life.



Kate Tryon pictured at the front door of Coate Farm in 1912.

Portrait by William Hooper

Richard Jefferies

Alice Clarke Mullen

This article, reproduced from the *Audubon Magazine* (Nov-Dec 1948, pp.366-371), was written with drawings by the author for an American audience who would have been familiar with Thoreau and Burroughs but who might not have read Jefferies. *Audubon Magazine's* policy was 'to bring to [their] readers the fresh, stimulating, delightful aspects of the world of living nature' and 'to stress the deeper problems of conservation and their importance to human welfare.'



After a photograph of the marble bust by Margaret Thomas in National Portrait Gallery

A brief glimpse into the life of a famous English nature-writer, whose centenary is being celebrated this year.

'I became absorbed in the glory of the day, the sunshine, the sweet air, the yellowing corn turning from its sappy green to summer's noon of gold, the lark's song like a waterfall in the sky.

To look backwards with the swallows there is sadness, today with the fleck of cloud there is unrest; but forward with the broad sunlight, there is hope.

... forget not that the leaves shall fall and the stubble be beaten by the rains and whitened by the snow; yet hope on, because the sunlight and the flowers shall assuredly succeed again.'

These simple, yet impressive and comforting words were written many years ago by Richard Jefferies, one of the world's greatest 'nature-men'. Born on November 6, 1848, on an ancestral farm at Coate, in Wiltshire, England, his centenary is being celebrated this year by his countrymen, just as in 1945, we honoured Thoreau upon the occasion of his hundredth anniversary.

As a nature writer, Jefferies joins the company of Hudson, Gilbert White, Burroughs and Thoreau. In recording and interpreting the natural history of the English Countryside, Jefferies reached heights of poetic expression and spiritual feeling rarely equalled by other nature-men. He observed with the eyes of an artist as well as a naturalist: he was a philosopher, a mystic and, often, a prophet. As an author he was profoundly influenced by his early environment and for those American readers who have not yet sampled Jefferies' work, a brief glimpse into the life of this great poet-naturalist will, I

hope, stimulate an interest reading his numerous and varied works.

Jefferies was the second of five children. Descended from country folk of hardy English stock, the love of the countryside was part of his natural inheritance. Throughout his boyhood he was influenced particularly by his father, an aunt, and the gamekeeper of a large estate near Coate Farm. Jefferies' father, a man of deep understanding, was well informed in natural history and country lore. Fond of reading, he owned a well stocked library, a part of which came from relatives who were London publishers. Jefferies found in his father a kindred spirit. They roamed the countryside together and to him the boy owed much.

Jefferies' schooling was irregular and ended when he was still in his early teens. For a while there was some instruction from his father at home, who also taught Jefferies how to handle all sorts of tools. The boy frequently corresponded with his sympathetic aunt with whom he had lived from time to time during his early school years, and these letters show his first attempts at self-expression. Jefferies loved books and read everything in his own home and at his grandfather's in Swindon. He inherited artistic ability (an uncle was an engraver and artist), and loved to draw. The notebooks which, like Thoreau, he kept methodically in later life, show many delicate pencil sketches of plants, scenes, and various subjects made on his walks through the countryside.

Jefferies followed the country sports of the day, and enjoyed the companionship of the gamekeeper who taught him much of the art of hunting and the life and habits of game on a great English estate. With young companions, he fished, rowed, and spent many adventurous hours on Coate Reservoir near his home. This body of water became as important a part of his life as Walden Pond was to Thoreau. He immortalised it in his writing, particularly in *Bevis: The Story of a Boy*, and today, although it has been commercialized as a resort, many admirers come to view it because of its association with the beloved author.

Throughout his boyhood Jefferies was influenced by the beautiful rolling English downs which, near Coate, are interspersed with charming little villages. He became interested in the geology of that section of Wiltshire with its tumuli and barrows and other relics of ancient days. And because his family had lived so close to the soil, he knew and understood problems of agriculture and the human nature of country people. Jefferies did not care for farm work. He was often called lazy and queer by neighbours, for he would abandon chores and go off alone to spend hours following his interests in the downs, fields and woods. His imagination was kindled by minute observations of wildlife and the flowers which he loved. How indelible an impression this life made upon his mind and heart, is recorded

in everything he wrote in later years.

When Jefferies was seventeen, he made his first serious attempt to earn a living as office boy and reporter for a local paper published in Swindon. He found office routine confining and distasteful, and certain types of reporting irksome, for he liked best to describe and comment on the things he, himself, found interesting, rather than follow a prescribed assignment. About this time, he began to write stories, none of which met with success. His real literary start came in his twenty-fourth year with the publication of three letters for *The Times*, concerning the agriculturalist and his problems. Because they spoke with authority and demonstrated their author's accurate knowledge of the situation described, they were received with favourable comment. They resulted in a regular income, a certain amount of prestige, and the realization that their author had definite writing ability. This success led to articles and essays on farming, questions of labour, and subjects dealing with country life. Some of these were gathered together after Jefferies' death and published in the volumes, *Toilers of the Field* (1892) and *Hills and the Vale* (1909).



Coate Farm, the birthplace of Richard Jefferies

AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY G. H. BOTTOMLEY KNOWLES

Jefferies wrote sketches on natural history and rural life. He described a village church, a typical English manor house, the lovely Marlborough Forest, wild, uncultivated Exmoor with its red deer, the life and duties of a gamekeeper, how to choose a gun, the art and evils of hunting and poaching. He pictured the animals of fields and woods, numerous insects, and wildflowers, and activities of native birds. He remarked upon the weather, and its affect upon living things, his accounts of plants and wildlife are coloured by the poet's delicate feeling, and the painter's sure brush and

bright tints. One feels the atmosphere when he tells us about an evening 'when the wheat is nearly ripe' and a shepherd lad sitting under the beeches 'draws a sweet sound' from his wooden whistle.

There is no tune—no recognizable melody: he plays from his heart, and to himself ... his simple notes harmonize with the open plain, the looming hills, the ruddy sunset, as if striving to express the feelings these call forth.

In this setting, too,

Resting on the wild thyme under the hawthorn, partly hidden and quite silent, we may see stealing out from the corn into the fallow hard by, first one, then two, then half a dozen or more partridge chicks. With them is the anxious mother, watching the sky chiefly, lest a hawk be hovering about; nor will she lead them far from cover of the wheat. She stretches her neck up to listen and look; then, reassured, walks on, her head nodding as she moves. The little ones crowd after, one darting this way, another that, learning their lessons of life—how and where to find the most suitable food, how to hide from the enemy: imitation of the parent developing hereditary inclinations.

Jefferies wrote much about the rooks and their habits. Many wonderful



The Rookery

FROM A COMBINATION OF SEVERAL
PHOTOGRAPHS

passages are on the flight of birds in which he took particular interest. He used a clear style, forcible and unaffected, spirited and charming, and his sympathy for wild creatures is ever apparent. As time progressed, some of the shorter articles enlarged upon, and supplemented by others, gave rise to Jefferies' 'country books.' In such publications as *The Gamekeeper at Home* (1878), *Wildlife in a Southern County* (1879), *The Amateur Poacher* (1879), *Hodge and His Masters* (1880), and *Red Deer* (1884), Jefferies recorded a detailed and true picture of English rural life as it had existed for generations before the Victorian era in

which he, himself, lived.

In July, 1874, Richard Jefferies and Jessie Baden, his childhood playmate, were married in the old Chiseldon Church which he had attended and described in later years in the peaceful novel *Greene Ferne Farm* (1880), dedicated to his young wife. Mrs. Jefferies appreciated her husband's talents and encouraged him. As sickness gradually undermined his strength and curbed his activities, she was his faithful secretary, his nurse, his constant

and loving companion. They lived for a while at Coate Farm and in Swindon, then moved to Surbiton, near London, where they remained from 1887 until 1882. After that time, due to Jefferies' increasing ill health, they lived in a number of places, and finally moved to Goring, a small hamlet near the town of Worthing, for Jefferies wanted to be near the sea. Here, after a severe lingering illness, he died on August 14, 1887, at the age of thirty-nine [sic].

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Mrs. Jefferies lived until July, 1926, forty years longer than her husband. Two sons and a daughter were born to them. Their daughter, Phyllis, now Mrs. Hargrave, still survives. She was among those who returned to the old home at Coate this year, to hear tributes paid to her illustrious father's memory.

The years in Surbiton were marked by Jefferies' endeavours in other fields of writing, as well as his prolific composition of essays, and the demonstration of finer and deeper powers of authorship. In spite of his growing popularity as essayist, the demand for his work by an increasing number of publishers, and the resultant steady, though still unsatisfactory income from its sale, Jefferies persisted in efforts to write fiction, with little success. His stories did not contain qualities considered the prerequisites of a good novel, but they did reveal his ability as poet and naturalist. Finally, he turned to familiar fields and wrote about the people he knew or those he remembered vividly, and produced the exceedingly beautiful rustic novels, *Greene Ferne Farm* (1880), *The Dewy Morn* (1884), and *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887), the last of his books published during his lifetime. In them are superb descriptions of English countryside, and the characters, many drawn from Jefferies' own family and friends, are living and unforgettable.

Jefferies' other fiction, *Wood Magic: A Fable* (1881), *Bevis: The Story of a Boy* (1882), and *After London or Wild England* (1885), all listed as novels, are unique; different from any of his other writings. These, too, contain examples of their author's deep love and appreciation of nature.



*Jefferies' loved walk to the sea*  
**AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH IN "RICHARD  
JEFFERIES: A TRIBUTE"**

It was not until after Jefferies had moved near London that he began to miss the open fields and the downs, and to brood over memories of the old home at Coate. He recalled every detail of the familiar places where he had wandered as a boy, and wrote poignantly about them. Homesickness became more pronounced with the onset of severe illness and the consequent changes of residence in efforts to regain health. Despite ever growing weakness, pain, periods of natural despondency, and worry over finances and family affairs, Jefferies displayed remarkable courage, perseverance, and faith and hope in the future. It is easy to find hope expressed somewhere, in some way, in almost everything he wrote.

Throughout the incomparable nature descriptions written during his maturity, Jefferies voiced his philosophy. His expressions reach great heights in the extraordinary introspective book of reverie, *The Story of My Heart* (1883), the most discussed and probably the best known of all his writing. When overcome by his vision of the beauty and mystery in nature, and sense of a spiritual power in the universe, he composed such essays as, 'The Pageant of Summer' and 'The July Grass,' which, with his last and most affecting composition, 'Hours of Spring,' was published posthumously in the volume, *Field and Hedgerow* (1889). In these, interwoven with words of comfort and hope, are nature passages filled with examples of Jefferies' consummate artistry and depth of feeling. One example of this is found in his description of 'a favourite thinking place' in an open wood where he liked to be 'from the buds of spring to the berries of autumn.'

Sometimes, in the spring there was a sheen of bluebells covering acres; the doves cooed; the blackbirds whistled sweetly; there was a taste of green things in the air. But it was the tall firs that pleased me most; the glance up the flame-shaped fir-tree, tapering to its green tip, and above the azure sky. By the aid of the tree I felt the sky more. By the aid of everything beautiful I felt myself, and in that intense consciousness prayed for greater perfection of soul and body.

And one could scarcely write more beautifully or tenderly about flowers than Jefferies when he observed:

The bloom of the gorse is shut like a book, but is there—a few hours of warmth and the covers will fall open. The meadow is bare, but in a little while the heart-shaped celandine leaves will come in their accustomed place.

... here there are blue flowers—bluer than the wings of my favourite butterflies—with white centres—the lovely bird's eyes or veronica. The violet and the cowslip, bluebell and rose, are known to thousands; the veronica is overlooked ... Brightly blue and surrounded by greenest grass, imbedded in and all the more blue for the shadow of the grass, these growing butterflies' wings draw to themselves the sun.



The matchless poetic prose of this mature writing, with its pathos, and its delicacy in depicting nature in all her attitudes, extracting uplifting thoughts from her relentlessness, her wonder and her beauty, proclaim Richard Jefferies as one of the great poet-naturalists of all time. Who could surpass this writer, when, combining the heart and insight of the poet with the keen observations of one truly in harmony with nature, he said:

The storm passes and the sun comes out, the air is the sweeter and the richer for the rain, like verses with a rhyme: there will be more honey in the flowers.

Consider the grasses and the oaks, the swallows, the sweet blue butterfly—they are one and all a sign and token showing before our eyes earth made into life.



### *The Gamekeeper's Cottage*

**AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH IN "RICHARD  
JEFFERIES: A TRIBUTE"**

# Jefferies, Whitman and William Sharp

*George Miller*

William Sharp was born in Paisley, near Glasgow, in 1855, his father a successful merchant and his mother the daughter of the Swedish Vice-Consul in Glasgow. Like Jefferies, as a child he was adventurous, read a great deal, and loved the countryside, especially the Inner Hebrides where the family spent their summers. The boon companion he shared his boyhood dreams and schemes with was his cousin Elizabeth from London, whom he met when he was about eight. She eventually became his wife. A gifted student he went from school to Glasgow University, but his time there was cut short by illness, and again like Jefferies his health was always fragile despite high energy and ambition to succeed. He was sent to Australia to recover, which surely would have been a great experience and as valuable in its way as a degree. He returned to live in London in 1878 working as a bank clerk but determined to establish himself in the literary world just when Jefferies, after a decade of false starts and dashed hopes, was beginning to make his mark. Sharp had the initial advantage of good connections among family and friends, one of whom, the Scottish artist and poet Joseph Noel Paton, introduced him to Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and then he had the still greater advantage of an enthusiastic, engaging manner, striking good looks and a buoyant disposition. He soon became closely involved with the literary circle around the Pre-Raphaelites, and the poet Christina Rossetti became a lasting friend. He was drawn to groups and movements, notably the Celtic Revival and its Scottish counterpart whose journal *The Evergreen* he edited and contributed to, and a ritualistic cult called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, whose members included W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, Arthur Machen, Evelyn Underhill, a writer on mysticism, and the diabolist Aleister Crowley. He established himself as a literary journalist, editor, and poet and novelist with a wide circle of contacts, among them Yeats, George Meredith, Olive Schreiner, Coventry Patmore, Arthur Symons and Walter Pater. He removed from the London scene in 1890, travelling much in his later years with Elizabeth—their relationship has been described as companionate. He died suddenly in Sicily at the age of fifty.

All this is in marked contrast to the fortunes and temperament of Richard Jefferies. Nothing developed from his meeting with Thomas Hardy in 1880, despite so much they shared in their backgrounds and materials, and no other writer of note crossed his path—unless you include Sharp. Despite the

fact that as adults they were so opposite, there was a connection, and possibly a vital one, between them.

Jefferies' essay 'The Pageant of Summer' which came out in *Longman's Magazine* in June 1883 was much praised. He reprinted it in his next essay collection, *The Life of the Fields*, published by Chatto & Windus in early June 1884. He signed a copy to his wife on June 6 and one to his mother the following day. On June 12 he received a parcel which contained a letter from William Sharp and a copy of his second book of poems entitled *Earth's Voices, Transcripts from Nature, Sospitra, and Other Poems*,<sup>1</sup> also recently published. The same day Jefferies sent a copy of *The Life of the Fields* to Sharp<sup>2</sup> and the following letter:

Savernake | Lorna Road | West Brighton  
June 12<sup>th</sup> [1884]

Dear Sir,

I have just received your kind present and letter through Messrs. Chatto & Windus & hasten to return my sincere thanks for the many pleasant observations you have made. A letter like this from one who thoroughly understands and sympathises is worth more to the worker than the applause of hundreds. You have done me the honour to quote the Pageant of Summer on your front page, will you therefore accept my new volume The Life of the Fields in which the paper is reprinted. I send a copy by post. Opening the poems haphazard I light on a verse describing a wasp—"a yellow flame he seems to be"—these lines are truly a transcript from nature; so too, the next "In a Garden"—"the brown bee hums—o'er wild thyme wet With streamlet sprays, the dragon fly Hangs blue black 'gainst the azure sky"—accidentally also I found a poem the Song of the Thrush which conveys a good idea of the changing meter in which the bird sings. But I shall read the whole book with attention.

I remain

Faithfully Yours

Richard Jefferies

William Sharp Esq <sup>3</sup>

The quotation from 'The Pageant of Summer' Jefferies refers to is:

The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live, so that the longer we can stay among these things, so much more is snatched from inevitable time.

and the poems he comments on are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> London, Elliot Stock, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> 'William Sharp Esq | From the Author | June 12th 1884' (private collection).

<sup>3</sup> Private collection.

From *Earth's Voices*, p. 19

## XII. THE SONG OF THE THRUSH

When the beech-trees are green in the woodlands  
And the thorns are whitened with may,  
And the meadow-sweet blows and the yellow gorse blooms  
I sit on a wind-waved spray,  
And I sing through the livelong day  
From the golden dawn till the sunset comes and the shadows of gloaming grey.

And I sing of the joy of the woodlands,  
And the fragrance of wild-wood flowers,  
And the song of the trees and the hum of the bees  
In the honeysuckle bowers,  
And the rustle of showers  
And the voice of the west-wind calling as though  
glades and green branches he scours.

When the sunset glows over the woodlands  
More sweet rings my lyrical cry  
With the pain of my yearning to be 'mid the burning  
And beautiful colours that lie  
'Midst the gold of the sun-down sky,  
Where over the purple and crimson and amber the rose-pink cloud-curls fly.

Sweet, sweet swells my voice thro' the woodlands,  
Repetitive, marvellous, rare:  
And the song-birds cease singing as my music goes ringing  
And eddying there,  
Now wild and now debonair,  
Now filled with a tumult of passion that throbs like a pulse in the hush'd warm air!

From *Transcripts from Nature*, p.[71] – 72

## II. THE WASP

Where the ripe pears droop heavily  
The yellow wasp hums loud and long  
His hot and drowsy Autumn song;  
A yellow flame he seems to be,  
When darting suddenly from height  
He lights where fallen peaches lie;  
Yellow and black, this tiny thing's  
A tiger soul on elfin wings.

## III. IN A GARDEN

Above the beds of mignonette.  
Or 'midst the wall-flowers' drowsy spells  
Or swaying in Canterbury bells  
The brown bee hums: o'er wild thyme wet

With streamlet sprays, the dragon-fly  
Hangs blue-black 'gainst azure sky;  
And like blown wild-rose leaves glow  
White butterflies drift to and fro.

It's easy to see that these poems would have appealed to Jefferies for their close observation and delight in colour. They have a metrical fluidity unusual at the time, though the rhyming is heavy and constricting. Jefferies wrote again to Sharp on 26 August,<sup>4</sup> saying he has now read the book fully and praising especially the sequence of Australian poems. In a postscript he points out his change of address to Eltham, which might indicate a wish to continue the correspondence. Whether or to what extent this took place is a question we have to consider, but first it is necessary to note that the first of two passages from Jefferies printed in the preliminary pages of *Earth's Voices* is not taken from 'The Pageant of Summer' but from *The Story of My Heart*:

It is enough to lie on the sward in the shadow of green boughs, to listen to the songs of summer, to drink in the sunlight, the air, the flowers, the sky, the beauty of it all... I want to be always in company with these, with earth, and sun, and sea, and stars by night.<sup>5</sup>

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The previous year (1883) saw the inauguration of a remarkable new publishing venture, The Walter Scott Publishing Company of Newcastle on Tyne. Despite the name this had nothing to do with the author of the Waverley novels. The Walter Scott in question was a man of little formal education who started his own building business, and in true Samuel Smiles style created a major construction firm responsible for railways, docks, coal mines and steel furnaces. One contract he had was to build a new factory for the Tyne Publishing Company at Felling on Tyne, and when they ran into financial difficulties he bought the business itself and set up as a publisher. He appointed as manager a dynamic young Scotsman, David Gordon, who realised that, with the spread of education down the social scale, there was a growing demand for affordable books. Furthermore he realised that with a new purpose-built factory equipped for printing and binding, and a proprietor well placed in the field of distribution, the firm could undercut the London houses and supply this need, and do so without markedly lowering production standards. The reprinting of popular classics was the foundation of the firm's business throughout its short but spectacular life. The method was to print very large impressions on different paper stock and

⁴ National Library of Scotland Department of Manuscripts: Me. 15941, f.106.

⁵ Constable, 1947, ed. S.J. Looker, p.85.

sizes, and to bind them in an array of styles as 'libraries' with impressive names. Parts of the print run could be franchised to other publishers, or to provincial booksellers wishing to create their own library, it requiring only a cancel title page with their imprint and a variant binding to do so. From this base the company went on to commission original works and new editions from leading experts and scholars in their field, again in cumulative series: The Contemporary Science Series, Great Writers, The Library of Humour, Every-Day Help, Makers of British Art, Music Stories, Fairy Tales and New England Library and others. They also published some early work of George Bernard Shaw and several of George Moore's novels, and perhaps most importantly, some of the first English translations of Tolstoy and Ibsen. Though the firm lost impetus after the death of (by then) Sir Walter Scott they were undoubtedly the pioneers of the popular expansion of the publishing industry in the twentieth century.⁶

The first series launched by David Gordon was the Canterbury Poets, each volume to be edited and introduced by a writer of note. The series editor, Joseph Skipsey, was hardly that—a self-taught coal miner and poet who returned to the pit between literary assignments. This was followed in 1886 by a companion series, the Camelot Classics, to include major works of English prose, the editorship of which fell to a young Welsh literary aspirant, Ernest Rhys—he later surmised because he was mistaken for Professor John Rhys, an eminent Celtic scholar. Rhys (Ernest) was a native of Carmarthen but had trained as a mining engineer in Newcastle before moving to London, where the firm had an office in Paternoster Row. He soon proved to be the right man for the job, rapidly expanding the list, taking on several volumes himself and recruiting editors well qualified to present others. Among them were friends in the Celtic movement like W.B. Yeats who compiled *Fairy and Folk-Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, and William Sharp who edited *De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *The Great English Painters*. Sharp in fact was a prolific contributor to the Scott enterprise. Between 1885 and 1903, as well as the two Camelot editions, he took over the Canterbury Poets when Skipsey returned to the mine, edited and introduced nine volumes in the series and wrote biographies of Shelley, Heine and Browning in the Great Writers series. One of his own poetry collections, *Romantic Ballads and Poems of Phantasy*, was published by Scott in 1888. It may have been the Company's northern working-class ethos and perhaps the outsider perspective of the Celtic influence as well that recommended the

⁶ Walter Scott's chief editor, Ernest Rhys, joined the publisher J.M. Dent in 1906 and became the first editor of Everyman's Library.

books to their intended audience. But the price was the main thing. Alison Uttley remembered from her rural childhood:

There was a row of little books, bound in green cloth, called "The Canterbury Poets", edited by William Sharp and costing a shilling each. I had seen them often and peered into them. I bought the poems of Keats and Shelley.⁷

On January 3rd 1887 Rhys wrote to Jefferies under the letterhead of the Camelot Classics:

Dear Sir,

I have been wanting for some time to secure your good services for a vol. of White's *Natural History of Selborne* in this series. Ever since a certain beneficent uncle of mine, of rustic tastes, put 'The Gamekeeper at Home' into my hands in my later boyhood, your books and essays have had a continued influence upon me, and now that I find myself, somewhat unaccountably, the editor of a series of books, it is in the simple nature of things that I should turn to you in this matter. Perhaps you have already seen some of the vols. that have been issued in the series, and so will have an idea of what our requirements are approximately. In this case they would be quite simple - merely a little introductory dissertation on Gilbert White and his delightful book, which need not be more than four or five pages; and indeed, as you will understand, the publishers are not able to pay for much original matter in so cheap an edition. Will you then kindly let me know what you think of the proposal, and what terms you require? I may add that I should like to issue the volume this spring if possible. I asked my friend Mr. Sharp for your address but as he is uncertain whether Savernake still holds good, I address this c/o your publisher.⁸

It appears from the last paragraph that there had been no further correspondence between Jefferies after June 1884. This is confirmed by a letter from Rhys dated 18 January following Jefferies' acceptance of the *Selborne* proposal. Jefferies must have enquired about Sharp, and his poetry in particular, to have elicited a final paragraph:

Mr. Sharp went through a very trying bout of scarlet & rheumatic fever last year but is working away now with tremendous vigour at fiction and criticism. I am afraid he is not doing much in the way of verse, as indeed how is the lyrical impulse to come to an over-driven brain? He is over-working himself, I fear.⁹

A copy of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* was sent to Jefferies as an example of the series but he was discouraged by the length of the introduction and the editing required. Apparently he told Rhys he had never read *Selborne* before and it would require considerable scientific annotation

⁷ Alison Uttley, *Country Things*, Faber, 1946.

⁸ British Library: Miller and Mathews D29.2iv.

⁹ *ibid*, D26.iii. (The two volume biography of Sharp published after his death by his wife contains no references to Jefferies, and I have not found any letters in the recorded archives.)

and revision, all of which would be impossible in his present state of health. Rhys replied on February 7th to say that nothing of the kind was required, and urging him to reconsider and take his time. He adds: 'I find it hard to think that ailment can be the cause of delay to you whom, of all men, I feel, sun, wind and strength of earth and sea should conspire to keep in perfect health.'¹⁰ In a letter from Sea View dated April 13th Jefferies says he has started the preface but is making little progress as the cold weather is preventing his use of the Bath chair, a hint perhaps that his condition was worse than Rhys had supposed. In effect he delegates the editorial work to Rhys, apart from the firm decision that White's Calendar rather than Antiquities should be included if there is not space for both.¹¹ In the event the book did not come out until the end of June.

In later memoirs Rhys admitted that he had not realised that Jefferies at this time was an impoverished invalid close to death. It came as a shock to learn that his 'enviably popular' and 'delightful works' had been produced during years of struggle against poverty and disease, but adds: 'only revealing in one, *The Story of My Heart*, the almost febrile intensity with which he looked at life and penetrated its secrets.'¹²

In 1886 Rhys edited a selection of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* for the Canterbury Poets, and in 1887 secured for the Camelot Classics Whitman's *Specimen Days in America*, 'newly revised by the author, with a fresh preface and additional notes'. This was the May volume, immediately preceding Jefferies' *Selborne*, and this juxtaposition may well have prompted Rhys, who had clearly established a warm relationship with the American sage, to recommend Jefferies' work and *The Story of My Heart* to him. He was sending a copy of the *Pall Mall Gazette* which reprinted some of the additional notes to *Specimen Days*, and in the covering letter dated 28th April 1887 adds:

In the same paper notice the article 'Some April Insects', by Richard Jefferies! I think you will like it. Jefferies is one of our best writers on nature over here; his writing is at once true and subtle, & very natural and simple withal. Did you ever read 'Story of My Heart', a very passionate confession of faith and fear it was, with a sentiment in it that made some of the critics say it must be inspired by your L[eaves] of G[rass]. If you have not yet seen it I would like to send it on.¹³

¹⁰ *ibid*, D26.iii.

¹¹ Ernest Rhys, *Letters from Limbo*, London, J.M.Dent & Sons, 1936, pp.22-24.

¹² *ibid*, p.22.

¹³ Private collection. A rather more obscure member of Rhys's network of editors and translators he recommended Jefferies' autobiography to was Count Stanislaus Stenbock (?1860-?1898), an eccentric *fin de siècle* decadent who left a few wistfully haunting lines of verse. Stenbock wrote:

In December the same year, at the suggestion of Whitman's friend the psychiatrist Dr. Maurice Bucke,¹⁴ Rhys visited Whitman in his 'shanty' in Camden, New Jersey. This led to a further Whitman title in the Camelot Classics: *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers*, 'published by arrangement with the author' in May 1888. Rhys does not mention whether Jefferies' work was discussed on his visit, but it does come up when another member of Whitman's circle, Horace Traubel, recorded their conversation almost a year later (April 1889). Whitman asked Traubel to read Rhys's letter of April '87 so that he can make a mental note of its contents. He interjects his assent to the comments about Jefferies' writing in general but says that he has not read *The Story*. However someone had brought it (or perhaps Rhys had sent it as promised), and he continues: 'I may say I still have not read it: I have looked it through; it contains great passages—is profoundly emotional, undisguisedly genuine: a little too much inside rather than outside for me. I should not criticise it: I have not studied it intimately.'¹⁵ One can understand his caveat about there being not enough external reality from some of his postcard messages to Rhys, one of which begins: 'I am feeling fairly today Sept. 28—I am sitting here in my den in big arm chair—have just been eating a big dish of white grapes—*Niagaras* they call 'em here—native and hardy...' Another: 'I am ab't as usual—am just having my dinner—beef-onion stew—Cold here...'¹⁶ He would have found this side of Jefferies elsewhere, especially in the character of Iden in *Amaryllis at the Fair*.

A final reference to Sharp in the Jefferies biographies comes from Edward Thomas, who must have had access to some material no longer available. Jefferies, he says, delighted in Whitman's work, and sent a copy of *Leaves of Grass* to his father. Apparently summarising a letter he writes: 'Sending [the preface to *Selborne*] to Mr. Ernest Rhys, in June, he wished that he had had time for a longer essay. William Sharp had sent him a copy of Whitman's *Specimen Days* as a token of esteem; and Jefferies was still alive enough to ask, 'Why doesn't Mr. Sharp send me his "Leaves of Grass," as a companion

'I have read the 'Story of my Heart' – it is *unique* – I was both enthralled and appalled by it – to give it to anyone else to read seems like violating confidence.' *Letters from Limbo*, p.34.

¹⁴ Author of *Cosmic Consciousness: a Study of the Evolution of the Human Mind*, Philadelphia, Innes and Sons, 1901, in which Jefferies' mysticism is discussed, with extracts from *The Story of My Heart*. [See pp.88-91 of this issue for this appraisal]

¹⁵ Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, London, OUP, 1953, vol. IV. This link was discovered by Jean Saunders; see 'Did Walt Whitman Read Jefferies?' in *The Richard Jefferies Autumn Newsletter & Annual Report*, 2014-2015. According to Bucke Whitman dipped into several books at a time and never read one through.

¹⁶ *Letters from Limbo*, pp. 13 and 15.

to “Specimen Days”?¹⁷ Sharp must also have realised how congenial Whitman would have been to Jefferies, and Jefferies’ response confirms it. With the exception of Longman the London publishers had not treated Jefferies well, and it might be supposed that had his health not failed he could have found an encouraging and sympathetic milieu working with Rhys, Sharp and the Walter Scott Publishing Company of Newcastle on Tyne; and one too in keeping with his desire to bring great literature to the labouring poor.¹⁸

Jefferies must have been deeply disappointed at the reception of *The Story of My Heart*, the work in which he expressed his truest self and deepest thoughts. There were few notices and almost a fifth of the edition was pulped. Rhys was one critic prepared to endorse it and Sharp had read it and was clearly drawn to Jefferies’ mystical side before his own had fully emerged. This was to take an unusual form, and it is reasonable to suppose that both Jefferies and Whitman were formative influences in the development of an ecstatic emotional response to nature approaching the mystical, and combining elements of the aesthetic and transcendentalist movements of the age. One strand of transcendentalism was feminism, not at this stage a social movement, but the physical, moral and spiritual idealisation of woman. This is a strong theme in Jefferies, especially in the portrait of Felise in *The Dewy Morn* and the essay ‘Nature in the Louvre’, but it is even more relevant to Sharp. ‘Sospitra’ in the book he sent Jefferies is a goddess made mortal by human love, and a subsequent book of poems *Sospiri di Roma*, was inspired by the joy he felt in the presence of a beautiful woman he had met in Rome in 1891. This was printed privately in Italy¹⁹ and copies sent to close friends, perhaps because he was writing from deeper impulses in his nature than he was prepared to submit to the general public. Written entirely in free verse there are apparitions of the goddess of love in a city flowering amidst the ruins of antiquity, with a naked swimmer and goatskin-clad shepherd among its few mortal inhabitants, while the glories of nature are celebrated in over a hundred pages of highly coloured, exquisite and exotic word painting. There is a slight atmosphere of *After London* about it with the burgeoning depopulated wilderness and the remote figure of Aurora somewhere beyond. The lady in question, Edith Wingate

¹⁷ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*, London, Hutchinson, 1909, pp. 189 and 313.

¹⁸ See ‘Country Literature’ in *The Life of the Fields*, Chatto & Windus, 1884.: ‘The authors whose work have a world-wide reputation. . . would be the most popular’ (p.223) and ‘Sixpence, a shilling, eighteen pence; nothing must be more than two shillings, and a shilling would be the general maximum.’ (p.231) – Walter Scott’s prescription exactly.

¹⁹ Printed for the author by La Societa Laziale, Roma, 1891.

Rinder, was also a writer and from Scotland, and at this point Sharp, having released the lyrical impulse to its full, gave up much of his editorial work and returned to Scotland. There he wrote *Pharais* (Gaelic for Paradise), a Celtic romance set in the Western Isles, and dedicated to 'E.W.R.'. As an afterthought he issued it under the name of Fiona Macleod.²⁰

Thereafter Sharp used this pseudonym for a sequence of Scottish novels without disclosing his authorship to any but a few intimate friends. The novels are characterised by rapturous descriptions of nature and landscape, and brave, noble female characters whether plain, beautiful, young or old. Sharp continued to write under his own name and succeeded in maintaining the illusion of two separate writers to the end of his life, which in 1905 had probably been hastened by the stresses and work load imposed by this dual career. The reasons for this unusual authorial dichotomy were in the first place practical. The Macleod books proved more successful financially, and also critically; they were acclaimed by writers in the Celtic school like Yeats and George Russell who were indifferent to Sharp's own-name productions. But there were clearly deeper reasons. Some have suggested a sexual ambiguity or multiple personality disorder, but whatever the value of such theories they are unnecessary. His wife Elizabeth said on his death, when the secret was revealed, that she had urged the deception as she feared harsh criticism of his more self-revealing work,²¹ which could have been part of the truth; but Sharp himself was quite explicit in confidences given to a close friend:

I write out of my heart in a way that I cannot do as William Sharp... The wrapt sense of oneness with nature, this cosmic ecstasy and elation, this wayfaring along the extreme verges of the common world, all this is so wrought up with the romance of life that I could not bring myself to express by my outer self, insistent and tyrannical as that need is... My truest self, the self who is below all other selves, and my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions and dreams, must find expression, yet I cannot, save in this hidden way.

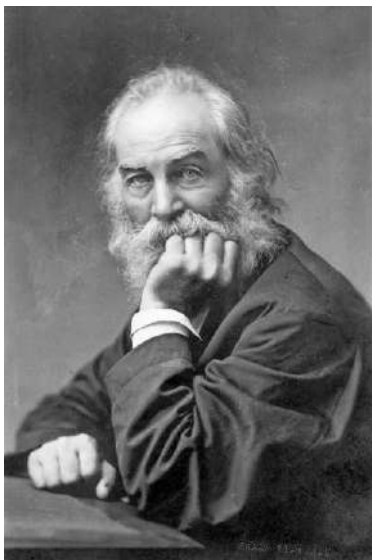
There are obvious similarities to Jefferies' apologia for his autobiography. Again: 'I stand on the verge of great things. I know it now and have dreamed overlong, and I have so much to learn and unlearn'; and 'When once the spirit of beauty has entered into the inner life, there can be no turning from that divine service, whatsoever hard patience and long sorrow be involved.'²²

²⁰ Sharp said that Fiona was a Gaelic name (diminutive Fionaghal) rarely used at the time even in Scotland, and Macleod had family associations.

²¹ *New York Times*, December 15, 1905.

²² Quoted in *Fiona Macleod and her Creator*, by Catherine A. Janvier, in *The North American Review*, vol. 184 no. 612 (April 5 1907), pp. 718-732.

Curiously the names of Sharp, Whitman and Jefferies were brought together by another offbeat publishing enterprise, that of Thomas B. Mosher, the pirate of Portland, Maine, who did so much to expand Jefferies' readership in America [see pp.129-135 of this issue]. In 1903 he brought out *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* by Jefferies, selected by Thomas Coke Watkins. This was followed in 1906 by *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* selected from Whitman by Anne Montgomerie Traubel (Horace Traubel's wife); and then the same title by Fiona Macleod in 1908, selected by Mrs. William Sharp and Roselle Lathrop Shields. There is nothing miniature about the passages quoted from the Fiona novels: the beauty and sublimity of land sea and the heavens in all their phases are brought forth in an exaltation of praise, and everywhere the insistence that nature and the human heart are one. The text is prefaced by two quotations from the Ralph Waldo Emerson, the high priest of transcendentalism, and above them a short one, 'I will search the world through for beauty', comes from Richard Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart*.²³



Walt Whitman



William Sharp

²³ Constable, 1947, ed. S.J. Looker, p.65.

Alice Clarke Mullen's Letters to Samuel J. Looker and *The Story without an End*

Jean Saunders

There are fifteen letters in the Samuel J. Looker archive that Alice Clarke Mullen sent to either Samuel, or his wife, or both.¹ The first is dated 16 March 1948; the last is a Christmas Greeting dated 16 December 1956. Initially Alice approached Looker through his publishers, Constable & Co., to congratulate him on editing the 1947 edition of *The Story of My Heart* that included extracts from the original transcript for Jefferies' work.

In 1948 she wrote regularly from her home (109, Normandy Drive, Silver Spring, Maryland) to express her joy about Jefferies' writing. Most of her letters discuss Jefferies' works, other writers, and family matters. Her husband, William Mullen, had died a few months earlier (18 May 1947) and Jefferies' writing brought her much-needed solace at a very painful time in her life. The couple had married in August 1929. William, an insurance agent, was 7 years younger but looked older; dogged by ill-health. After marriage Alice undertook secretarial and editorial work, library research in botany and biology, and was a scientific illustrator. However she gave up her career at her husband's request to become a housewife. She appears to bear him no grudge, indeed her love for her husband comes through very strongly in her letters. She writes that she had 'a promising beginning in art and literary criticism,' and taught biology, botany and English before marriage.

Alice later claimed that she enjoyed everything Jefferies wrote and that he was her favourite author. She went to great lengths to obtain Jefferies' works, contacting all and sundry in an effort to buy copies not just for herself but for friends and her sister too. She complained of the difficulties of obtaining Jefferies' books in America and valued all the information and material that Looker was able to supply. A long friendship was established between the Lookers and Alice and she became 'Auntie Alice in America' to their son, Peter. She sent the family gifts of commodities on ration in England such as tea and sweets and children's books for Peter.

¹ Samuel Looker archive, owned by the Richard Jefferies Society and held at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham (Ref. 4199, folder 77).

Alice was born on 12 June 1895 and grew up in Baltimore (Newington Avenue). Her maternal great grandparents came from Sleaford in Lincolnshire and bore the surname Allen. Alice mentions her sister, to whom she is very close—Katherine Allen Clarke—who she refers to as Kitty. Kitty obtained a doctorate writing a thesis on the French writer Jean Giono (1895-1970). Kitty led an academic life, and is best known for translating Giono's books; most notably *Joy of Man's Desiring* (1940) and *Blue Boy*. Kitty lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, where Alice eventually joined her.

Alice first heard of Jefferies in reading Hudson's *Nature in Downland* and Williamson's *Goodbye West Country*. She remembers reading a Jefferies' essay on New Year's Eve 1946 as her introduction to his writing. In the garden of William and Alice's home in Maryland, the couple had planted two small mulberry trees that had been dug up from a nearby field. But this was more in memory of Alice's own parents who had a glorious mulberry in their Baltimore garden. The later association with Jefferies' mulberry tree made her trees even more special to her. The couple were very happy in their home, having moved there in 1940 where they lived with a black and white cat, Pussum.

Alice was able to supply Looker with articles by Americans about Jefferies, American reviews of Jefferies' works (particularly those edited by Looker) and articles that Looker missed in England. For example, she sent him Lorna Keeling Collard's article 'Richard Jefferies' that was published in *The Contemporary Review* in November 1928. Ms. Collard had visited Coate Farm, by coincidence, on the day that Jessie Jefferies died. Alice must have supplied lists of material that she wanted and this included Carové's *The Story without an End* (more about this later). It seems that she never succeeded in obtaining copies of Jefferies' early fiction published by Tinsley Bros. Alice was also in correspondence with other Jefferies' enthusiasts in America including Dr. Samuel Jones [see pp.30-33 of this issue].

Her passion for Jefferies was reflected in every letter, so much so that Looker sent Phyllis Hargrave (Jefferies' daughter) a copy of one of them. Phyllis writes to Looker on 31 March 1948 from her home in Perranporth:

Thank you for sending Mrs. Mullen's letter to read, she seems very keen on R. J. & appreciates your editing, it is nice to receive such letters though Americans always seem a little too effusive but I think they are quite genuine.

This letter from Phyllis found its way to Alice as she mentions it in her letter dated 23 May 1948 and says that she will write to her. Around this time Looker moved from Billericay to Leicester. Alice had plans to move too and spent seven weeks later in the year with her sister Kitty in Amherst (Pussum came too!) where she found a lovely old house on the outskirts of Amherst

with 15 acres of land that she planned to name Maryland Farm and live with her sister. It took some while for her to sell her home in Maryland and during this time the editor of the *Audubon Magazine* asked her to write an article about Richard Jefferies which was published in Nov-Dec 1948 [see pp.51-57 of this issue]. Alice was a member of the Audubon Society and recalls a trip that she made with them to the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania to watch bird migration.

Alice mentions her dislike of Henry Williamson as a person—‘patronising’! and Malcolm Elwin’s biography of Jefferies. In a letter dated 13 December 1948 she writes: ‘I wonder why Mr Elwin took the trouble to collect selections from Jefferies if he cares so little about them. It makes me mad.’ She writes about Edwin Way Teale, a Jefferies’ enthusiast and an American naturalist—she says that his 1948 book *Days without Time: Adventures of a Naturalist* mentions both Hudson and Jefferies. She refers to Henry van Dyke’s essay ‘Who owns the Mountains?’ (published in *Fisherman’s Luck*, 1899) that is introduced with a quote from Jefferies’ ‘The Pageant of Summer’:

My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become, as it were, interwoven into man’s existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory.

Henry Jackson van Dyke (1852-1933), born in Philadelphia, was an American author, educator, and clergyman. He also wrote an essay titled ‘Wood Magic’.

The extent of Alice’s Jefferies’ library is remarkable given how difficult her task of seeking his books. And her own letters are well-written and beautifully expressed. She is particularly moved by finding notes made by an English soldier in her copy of *Out-of-Doors with Richard Jefferies* (J.M. Dent, 1935) which he read whilst keeping vigil at a gun post. The gunner recalls that on 30 April 1942 he was sitting and reading ‘Nature and Eternity’ which reminded him of places he had visited in Borrowdale. Against the third paragraph of ‘The Pageant of Summer,’ he writes: ‘Beautiful metaphor, simile combined, “sea hoofs beat upon the shore”, has not Tennyson called the waves “sea-horses” and do not their incomings and outgoings imprint on the sand some such shape as likened to a hoof on their advance and retreat.’ And of Jefferies’ description of the behaviour of rooks in ‘Out of Doors in February’, he commented: ‘How true, and also truly beautiful is the song of the hovering skylark just now above our gun post, singing so blithely in the sunlight.’ Alice comments: ‘Here was one young man ... whose reading of Jefferies did not arouse self-pity for himself, tied as he was by grim

circumstances ... when his interests and heart were elsewhere.' She hoped dearly that the soldier had made it home again.

She finally moved to Maryland Farm, Amherst, in May 1949. Alice wrote to Looker just before moving expressing how hard it was to leave the home where she had so happily shared with her husband and their garden that had thronged with so many birds. Letters are then sparse or missing. Her first letter from Maryland Farm is dated 8 October 1952 where she reports the death of her dear little cat Pussum a year before. It seems that the farm was harder work than imagined and both Alice and Kitty had been unwell. In 1955 she mentions her friend Rachel Carson who had quoted from 'The Pageant of Summer'. It seems they might have met at Goucher College, Baltimore.² On 18 August 1956 Alice is delighted to announce that on reaching sixty she had managed to secure a job as a secretary to a pathologist at Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Northampton, Massachusetts. Her final communication for 1956 was a Christmas card when she announced that her sister was sailing to France on 14 February until July to undertake more work on Jean Giono. Alice died soon after, on 19 April 1957, and was buried in Fort Lincoln Cemetery, Maryland. Her major collection of papers, books and pamphlets by and about Jefferies were donated to Goucher College Library in



her birth town of Baltimore, Maryland. They were donated by sister Kitty as a memorial to Alice and, hopefully, remain there to this day. The list includes 'A Tribute to Alice Clarke Mullen,' written by Samuel Looker to accompany the collection. There is a Jefferies' autographed copy of *The Standard Authors Reader* (evidently Jefferies' personal copy) and a copy of

Jefferies' Countryside (edited by Samuel Looker) presented to Alice and signed by Rachel Carson.

There is mention in the list of *The Story without an End* translated from the German by Sarah Austin and a note that 'Jefferies refers to this story in one of his novels'. I can find no evidence that Jefferies mentions the story but Walter Besant refers to it in *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (1888).

This led me on to research the book and the author, Friedrich Wilhelm Carové.

² There is a copy of Carson's *Under the Sea-Wind: a naturalist's picture of ocean life* at Goucher College Library, autographed by the author for Alice Clarke Mullen, Class of 1921, Goucher College.

Friedrich Wilhelm Carové published *Romantische Blätter* (Romantic Music) in 1818. This first collection of his stories contained some of the chapters that became the fairy tale entitled *Kinderleben oder das Märchen ohne Ende* that was published in full in his second collection: *Moosblüthen* (1830). Sarah Austin³ read the fairy tale to her German-speaking daughter and decided to translate it into English in order that other children might enjoy it. Austin's *The Story without an End* was eventually published in 1834 by Effingham Wilson (the title page is reproduced on the next page).

The magical dreamy tale of the orphaned child, who befriends a dragonfly and discovers the wonders of the natural world, is likely to have been a major influence on Jefferies' short story 'Saint Guido'⁴ and *Wood Magic* (1881). There are both good and dark episodes in the Carové and Jefferies' stories but the over-riding theme is the beneficial effect of nature on a young child.

Friedrich Wilhelm Carové (born 20 June 1789, Koblenz—died 18 March 1852, Heidelberg) was a German philosopher and publicist. He studied law and held judicial offices. In 1815 he went to Heidelberg, where he devoted himself, under the guidance of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), to philosophical studies and was made doctor of philosophy by the University of Heidelberg. In the 1840s he took part in the constitution of an international peace movement. By 1848 he was a member of the provisional German parliament. He initiated a call for the abolition of slavery. His most elaborate works are attacks on Roman Catholicism.

The Story without an End was clearly a favourite children's classic at one time. Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) mentions the Carové story with great affection in her novel *Moods* (1882)—she is moved by the innocence and truthfulness of The Child. Her father Amos Bronson Alcott was a teacher, a vegan and a transcendentalist (1799-1888) and a friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Alcott wrote the preface to the 1836 edition of *The Story without an End* pointing out the transcendental quality of the fable. Indeed it was partly English and German Romanticism that paved the way to American Transcendentalism at this time. Roger Ebbatson demonstrated Jefferies' link

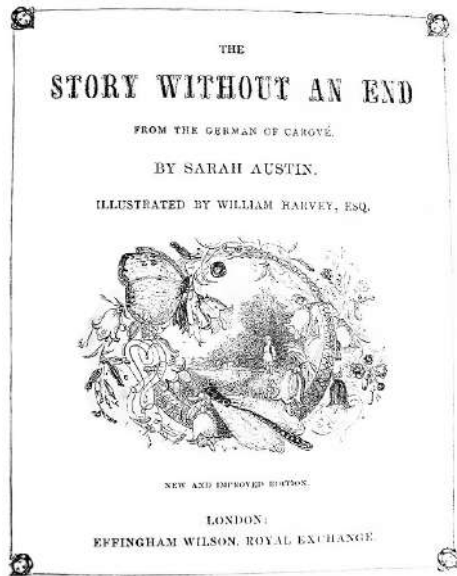
³Sarah Austin (1793-1867) née Taylor was an English editor, linguist and German translator. Born in Norwich, died in Weybridge, her only child was Lucie [Lady Duff-Gordon (1821-1869)], also an author and translator who wrote under the name Lucie Gordon.

⁴ 'Saint Guido' was first published in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, December 1884, and in *The Open Air*.

with the movement in his article entitled “The Great Earth Speaking”: Richard Jefferies and the Transcendentalists.’⁵



Friedrich Wilhelm Carové



Sir Leslie Stephen (1832–1904)—English author, critic, historian, biographer and father of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell—was reported as saying: “The only books (other than *Robinson Crusoe* etc.) which I remember to have impressed me in early childhood are a *Story without an End*, translated by Mrs. Austin from Carové, and *Grimm’s Fairy Tales ...* but I remember the general impression rather than details. I loved them both.”⁶

Charles Dickens, as Boz, wrote a parody of *The Story without an End* that was published in the *Morning Chronicle* on 18 December 1834. It was titled ‘The Story without a Beginning’ and in 1951 W.J. Carlton demonstrated the link with Carové’s story.

Walter Besant refers to the fable in the opening lines of chapter eleven of *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (1888), although he does not state the origin of the story. Besant writes:

There is a very delightful old story which used to be given to children, though I have not seen it for a long time in the hands of any children. It was called *The*

⁵ First published in *Literary Utopias of Cultural Communities*, Rodopi, 2010. Re-published in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, No. 32, Summer 2017, pp.107–115.

⁶ The quote is repeated in an article in the *Western Times*, 15 November 1902, collected by T.P. O’Connor in a column entitled ‘Books of my Childhood’ in *T.P.’s Weekly*.

Story without an End. A child wandered among the flowers, who talked to him. That is the whole story. There were coloured pictures in it. The story began without a beginning, and it came to a sudden stop without an ending.

It is perhaps upon a reminiscence of this old story that Jefferies has based nearly all his own. They are very delightful, especially the shorter stories; but they seldom have any end. There is sometimes, but not often, a story; there is generally only a succession of scenes—some delightful, all beautiful, and all original in the sense that nobody except Jefferies could possibly have written any of them. The child wanders. That is all. Some day, when the worth of this writer is universally recognised, these scenes and stories will be detached from the papers with which they are published, and issued in separate form, as beautifully illustrated as the art of the next generation—this will not take place for another generation—will allow.

It is interesting to note that Thomas Bird Mosher (Portland, Maine) published an edition of *The Story without an End* in 1897. In his foreword Mosher notes Besant's comments, as above. Mosher is known for publishing several Jefferies' nature articles in the 1890s [see pp.129-135 of this issue].

Besant then goes on to quote extracts from 'Saint Guido,' *Bevis* and *Wood Magic* that assume Jefferies was familiar with Carové's tale.

Carové never named 'The Child' in his story, whilst illustrators of the book depict the child as about four or five years of age of indeterminate sex. Illustrated copies of *Wood Magic* portray 'little "Sir" Bevis [such was his pet name]⁷ and The Child around the same age. Indeed Eleanor Vere Boyle illustrated both the 1868 edition of *The Story without an End* and the 1893 edition of *Wood Magic*.

Jefferies dedicated *Wood Magic* to his young son Harold (born 3 May 1875) who would have been nearly six when the book was published in 1881. It would not be surprising to learn that Jefferies read *The Story without an End* to young Harold but, of course, there is no proof that this is so.

In *Wood Magic* the creatures and plants talk to 'Sir' Bevis, which makes his trips to the woods more delightful. Within the story of the downfall of the treacherous magpie, there are other tales such as that of the wicked weasel, the cunning spider, the greedy toad, as well as the animals who help him on his way that include the hare, a butterfly and a grasshopper. Carové has his villains and goodies too. Both have the elements teaching the children: The Child is taught the way of the world and the wonders of nature by a droplet of water. Sir Bevis learns the same from the wind (see the final chapter of *Wood Magic*, titled 'Sir Bevis and the wind'); the writing is evocative of Carové.

⁷ The opening sentence of *Wood Magic* (1881).

No-one has ever established the influence that Carové might have had on Jefferies' fables or mentioned his name. *Wood Magic* and 'Saint Guido' are somewhat uncharacteristic of Jefferies' works and it seems more than likely that Jefferies must have known *The Story without an End* either as a child or as a father reading the fairy-tale to his children, or both. Surely he would have been influenced by it and 'Saint Guido' and *Wood Magic* might not have been written but for Carové.



Illustration by Eleanor Vere Boyle from the 1893 edition of *Wood Magic*



Illustration by Eleanor Vere Boyle for the 1868 edition of *The Story without an End*



Illustration by Curtis Wager-Smith for the 1904 edition of *The Story without an End*

Introduction to *An English Village*

Hamilton Wright Mabie

An English Village (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1903) was a new edition of *Wild Life in a Southern County* for an American audience. The book included twenty five photographs of the Coate area by Clifton Johnson. Hamilton W. Mabie (1846-1916) was an American essayist, editor, critic & lecturer.

The faces of Thoreau and Jefferies, the foremost recorders of Nature in America and England, furnish material for a study in contrasts rather than in resemblances. Both faces are long and narrow; both suggest the habit of quiet, concentrated observation; but in all other respects they are strikingly different. Thoreau has the look of a rustic; a man of sharp individuality, living largely within himself, not sensitive to atmosphere because he creates his own atmosphere; one who can live alone if necessary without the sense of isolation; a man of intellectual independence who will have his own ideas and take small pains to make them square with the ideas of others. The face of Jefferies, on the other hand, although not of the classic type, shows a classical regularity of features, a fine balance and harmony of proportions, courage joined with great sensitiveness, and the poetic temperament. His bust in Salisbury Cathedral, the Westminster of the southern country which he loved so well, might well find a place in the poet's colours, and the qualities they contributed to the totality of impression conveyed by the landscape. The naturalist and the poet were harmonized in Jefferies.

To the feeling for form and colour in Nature he united the feeling for the qualities of speech and for art. He goes on from the passage just quoted to describe his hunt for a language adequate to the beauty of the world; how he sought the books on colour only to find them technical and concerned with artificial not with natural things; how he went to science and studied optics, but found no explanation of the secret of the dandelion; how at last he found the adequate language in 'the graven classics of Greece and Rome, cut with a stylus so deeply into the tablet that they cannot be erased.' In these great works he finds little classification, no minute dissection, no dealing with Nature in a mechanical way; yet in some way, he discovers, these old writers had gotten 'the spirit of the earth and sea, the soul of the sun.'

The impression of the artistic temperament, the feeling for things not in themselves but in their relations conveyed by much of Jefferies' writing is amply confirmed in those passages in which he deals strictly with art. The

chapter on 'Nature in the Louvre' in *Field and Hedgerow* is a notable piece of criticism, revealing not only rare sensitiveness to beauty, but acute analysis and descriptive power of a high order. The study of the Stooping Venus, in the intensity of the joy which it registers, recalls Heine's first sight of the Venus of Milo in the same gallery. It is a piece of art interpretation of the most unusual quality. No man could have written it who was not an artist in temperament and in vision as well.

Jefferies was fortunately born when one considers the work he was to do. He began life close to the soil, for he was of yeoman stock, and spent his childhood on a farm so small that ownership of the land meant personal work over every foot, and intimate knowledge of every nook and corner. The future reporter of Nature came from the class who know her most intimately from earliest childhood. They spend their lives afield, and every change in the season is an event in the monotony of their simple tasks. Jefferies was born as close to the worker of the soil in England as was Millet in France. This minute, first-hand knowledge bears its fruit in *Wild Life in a Southern County*, in *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher*, *The Life of the Fields*, and in *The Toilers of the Field*. In the last of these volumes Jefferies describes the life of the farm worker with a fullness of knowledge and a quickness of sympathy which invest his reports with the deepest pathos. His account of 'The Labourer's Daily Life,' of 'Field-faring Women,' and his 'True Tale of the Wiltshire Labourer,' disclose the most intimate acquaintance with the people and conditions described.

If Jefferies had remained in the ranks of his kindred he would have known Nature at first hand, but he would never have given his knowledge currency among all English-speaking peoples and a charm of form which promises to place his works among the classics of out-of-door literature. As a Wiltshire yeoman he might have written 'The True Tale of a Wiltshire Labourer,' but he could not have written 'The Pageant of Summer,' 'The Hours of Spring,' 'Walks in the Wheatfields,' or a score of other papers in which the facts of natural life are not only accurately reported, but set in relation to the landscape, and invested with that atmosphere which, in books as in Nature, gives the play of light and shadow, the splendour and the glow of shining or hidden skies.

Thoreau had the New England and Jefferies the Old England temperament, and the differences between the two are so marked that they may be regarded as racial. The Concord naturalist has a more alert mind, is more interested in and prolific of ideas, has the wit which is called dry perhaps because it is so entirely of the mind, has a marked bent towards philosophy, and carries an extensive philosophical apparatus with him whenever he goes afield. The Wiltshire naturalist, on the other hand, has a

richer temperament, the blood in his veins is warmer, he thinks less but he feels more deeply; his record is in a way less detailed, but it is more artistic, he has little wit but an unforced and companionable humour; he lives more with people and less with the creatures of the fields and woods; his style is less pungent and individual than Thoreau's, but it has more flow, euphony, light and shadow; there is more of the varied and elemental warmth of Nature.

Wild Life in a Southern County is autobiographic; it is a wonderfully minute and graphic picture of the country in which Jefferies was born, and, like Thoreau's *Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and *Walden*, it will always be read, not only for its interest as a study of Nature but as a record of the external life of a man of genius, the description of the background of literary work of enduring interest. In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies has confided to the world some of his deeper experience. Few more pathetic confessions are to be found in literature than the story of this brave, tireless, hopeless worker, striving against great odds, and under the shadow of death, to keep to his task to the end of the day. A man of deep English integrity, and of resolute English courage, Jefferies had also the imagination of a poet and the feeling of an artist; and these are the prime qualities of his work.



'The Stone Trough near the Woodpile' [Coate Farm]
by Clifton Johnson, facing p.170,
An English Village (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1903).

Richard Jefferies

‘A liberal nature and a niggard doom
A difficult journey to a splendid tomb’.

Samuel A. Jones

First published in *The Inlander* (University of Michigan, March 1893), Vol 3, No. 6,
pp.250-255.

If the name of Richard Jefferies is strange to the reader, and if he be also
one

... who in the love of nature holds
Communion with her visible forms

it behoves him speedily to make one of the most delightful acquaintances. He will be beautifully and tenderly introduced by reading Walter Besant's *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*—a dewy wreath laid by a loving hand on ‘a splendid tomb.’

It is a new rendering of the old, old story; a repetition of one of nature's never-failing surprises for the children of men; another instance of a ‘twice born’ man.

Well and truly did Carlyle declare to the students of Edinburgh: ‘It is the first of all problems for a man to find out what kind of work he is to do in the universe.’ Even so!

Look at him whom we fondly call ‘poor’ Goldsmith. He thought to be a clergyman and made his application to the bishop for orders, clad in a pair of scarlet breeches. He innocently got what the incisive slang of our day terms ‘the grand bounce.’ How warmly the whole English-reading world blesses the aesthetic bishop for that! He then essayed to become a physician, and, through the fondness of his uncle Contarine, was enabled to study at Edinburgh, and subsequently to take his degree at Leyden. Well, in later years, when he was a full-blown M. D., Garrick advised him to prescribe only for his enemies.

Poor ‘Goldy!’ It seemed as if all the gods of Olympus were making sport of him. At last the stern necessities drove him to Griffith's garret and put the pen in his fingers. Hah! Now he had *found* ‘what kind of work he was to do in this universe.’ You know how he did it until he died. And when he was dead the tears rolled down gruff Sam Johnson's scrofula-scarred face as he wrote—

O, brave old Johnson, thou art wrong for once! This ‘inspired idiot,’ as Horace Walpole called him, had *touched* many things only to make a sorry botch of them all; was, indeed, fully as verdant as the Moses of his own delightful delineation; but when once he touched the pen, he who was said to *talk like poor Poll*, was by the same critic acknowledged to *write like an angel*. Aye, his writing won for him the gratitude of even the stately Goethe.

The career of Richard Jefferies presents none of Goldsmith’s egregious improvidences, but for long he too kicked against the pricks of destiny.

A moody, meditative boy, passing his youth in an English farm-house that had been in the family for centuries, not receiving anything of the higher education, reading promiscuously and as omnivorously as his environment allowed, and roaming through field and forest, by streamlet and river, on the hill-top at sunrise, under the old oaks by moonlight, and always with such seeing eyes. He had also the sterner teaching of misfortune; the homestead was slipping out of his father’s hands, and the Fates were against that struggling man who as a father was one of the best, as a manager one of the poorest.

The boyhood days formed an idyll that he never forgot, and that filled his memory with treasures which he had made imperishable, Genius has entered the farm-house of Coate and given the little Wiltshire boy her fearful gift.

When play-days were over and Richard Jefferies turned toward the business of life it was with his face in the right direction, and in his eighteenth year he was at work on the *North Wilts Herald*. Ah, how the new wine of Life was fermenting! In all the callow greenness of his ‘prenticeship—just nine months after he had begun upon the *Herald*—he sent to an uncle a story that he wished to have ‘submitted’ to the editor of a London magazine. Blessed by the buoyant hope that has not the angels’ fear! We know not the fate of this story, though its horoscope were easily cast; but he was undismayed, for we next learn of a tragedy, ‘Caesar Borgia; or, The King of Crime.’ That must have died in the egg, for certainly it never chirped.

In 1870 he chanced to see the pinchbeck Prince Napoleon at Ostend, and while lying in bed one night it occurred to him to write some verses on the exile of that then illustrious foreigner. Now let me give his own words:

No sooner thought than done. I composed them that night, and wrote them out and posted them the first thing next morning (Thursday). You say I am always too precipitate or too procrastinating. At least I lost no time in this. A day went by and on Easter day there came a note to me at the hotel, from the *aide-de-*

¹ Johnson’s epitaph for Goldsmith in Westminster Abbey reads ‘Nullum quod tetegit non ornavit.’

camp of the Prince, acknowledging the receipt of the verses and saying that the Prince had been much pleased with them. You will admit that this was about enough to turn a young author's head. Not being *au fait* in French I took the note to a French lady professor, and she translated it for me. I enclose the translation for you. But does not S. learn French? If so, it would be good practice for her to try and read the note. Please tell her to take care of it, as it can not be replaced, and will be *of great value to me in after life*.

'Great value to me in after life!' Dear Jefferies, thy books will shine as stars in the firmament when the memory of 'the copper Captain' is forgotten!

The years sped on; the young man's ambition grew apace, and there came the inevitable Novel. Not one only; they literally poured from that teeming brain. O, the long-eared Public that wouldn't read them! Richard Jefferies had the courage of his convictions, and when that of his publishers faltered, he had a novel printed at his own expense. It is quite likely that the kingdom of Literature is taken by violence, but Mr. Besant is decidedly of the opinion that publishing out of one's own pocket is altogether too violent to endeavour. The same expert acutely objects to these endeavours of Jefferies that depicting life in novels for him were too much like the German's attempt to evolve a description of the elephant from his inner consciousness. What did a youth who had lived among ploughboys and dairymaids know about lords and high-born ladies! What could a child of nature know of modern society reeking with the deadly vapours of the pit infernal!

Poor Jefferies was as one walking in his sleep urged by the feverish vision of his dream. But his good Genius did not forsake him; at last it came to him with healing on its wings and broke the spell that long had bound him.

Let Walter Besant tell the story of Jefferies' final deliverance:

It was somewhere about the year 1876 that I myself first fell upon some of his work. I remember the delight with which I drank, as a bright and refreshing draught from a clear spring-head, the story of the country life as set forth by him, this writer, the like of whom I had never read. Why, we must have been blind all our lives; here were the most wonderful things possible going on under our very noses, but we saw them not. Nay, after reading all the books and all the papers—every one—that Jefferies wrote between the years 1876 and 1887, after learning from him all that he had to teach, I can not yet see these things. I see a hedge; I see wild rose, honeysuckle, black bryony, blackberry, hawthorn, and elder. I see on the banks sweet wildflowers whose names I learn from year to year, and straightway forget because they grow not in the streets. I know very well, because Jefferies has told me so much, what I should be able to see in the hedge and on the bank besides these simple things; but yet I cannot see them, for all his teaching.

Ah, for the loving heart and the all-seeing eyes of the Wiltshire farm-bred boy Nature had no secrets. All the witcheries of the field, forest, and stream

were revealed to him and he was permitted to tell his visions to a moiling world. It really seemed as if Paradise were about to be *regained*; but just as the vision was growing in splendour, the Seer was called away! 'O the pity of it!'

It is said of 'good George Herbert' that his spirit was as a sword which is too sharp for its scabbard; it is equally true of Richard Jefferies. He had in him the seeds of an early dissolution, as any physician will readily discern from the likeness of him in Besant's *Eulogy*. Heine's 'mattress-grave' was not also for Jefferies; but pages as keen and suffering nearly as prolonged were his. Death creeping nearer by inches, day after day.

Jefferies' slender hoard was soon spent, but the dying man must still fight the wolf at the door, for was there not a faithful wife and that one sunbeam of his sad life—the dear little Phyllis!

Well said Carlyle in his life of Schiller: 'Look at the biography of authors! Except the Newgate Calendar, it is the most sickening chapter in the history of man.' Grim as it may be, the heroic spirit floods it with radiance, and not even our tears can dim the refulgence of the picture of Richard Jefferies rising above the agony of pain and dictating papers of supernal beauty when the stress of his torture left him only strength enough to speak.

Let me quote from the last paper that he himself ever wrote. He was an imprisoned invalid, and thus he dreamed of the 'Hours of Spring'.²

It is sweet on awaking in the early morn to listen to the small bird singing on the tree. No sound of voice or flute is like to the bird's song; there is something in it distinct and separate from all other notes. The throat of woman gives forth a more perfect music, and the organ is the glory of man's soul. The bird upon the tree utters the meaning of the wind—a voice of the grass and wild flower, words of the green leaf; they speak through that slender tone. Sweetness of dew and rifts of sunshine, the dark hawthorn touched with breadths of open bud, the odour of the air, the colour of the daffodil—all that is delicious and beloved of spring-time are expressed in his song. Genius is nature, and his lay, like the sap in the bough from which he sings, rises without thought. Nor is it necessary that it should be a song; a few short notes in the sharp spring morning are sufficient to stir the heart. But yesterday the least of them all came to a bough by my window, and in his call I heard the sweet-briar wind rushing over the young grass. Refulgent fall the golden rays of the sun; a minute only, the clouds cover him and the hedge is dark. The bloom of the gorse is shut like a book; but it is there—a few hours of warmth and the covers will fall open. The meadow is bare, but in a little while the heart-shaped celandine leaves will come in their accustomed place. On the pollard willows the long wands are yellow-ruddy in the passing gleam of sunshine, the first colour of spring appears in their bark.

² *Field and Hedgerow*.

The delicious wind rushes among them and they bow and rise; it touches the top of the dark pine that looks in the sun the same now as in summer; it lifts and swings the arching trail of bramble; it dries and crumbles the earth in its fingers; the hedge-sparrow's feathers are fluttered as he sings on the bush.

(Is there ever a landscape by Poussin to unequal the word painting? Can the divinest brush give the song of 'the small bird;' the balmy breath of the air; 'the delicious *rush* of the wind;' the *fluttering feathers* of the sparrow as he sings on the bush?)

Then follows this *stifled* sigh—for isn't the worn wife's heart breaking without *that*!

I wonder to *myself* how they can all get on without me—how they manage, bird and flower, without me to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly, day by day, the seed-leaves on the mounds in the sheltered places that come so early, the pushing up of the young grass, the succulent dandelion, the colt's foot on the heavy, thick clods, the trodden chickweed despised at *the foot of the gate-post*, so common and small, *and yet so dear to me*. Every blade of grass was mine, as though I had planted it separately. They were all my pets, as the roses the lover of his garden tends so faithfully. [Italics not in the original.]

Surely, surely there are fields of asphodel and amaranth beyond, or this Soul will startle Heaven with a sigh.

The Shadow grew daily darker and drew nearer and nearer, and here is his farewell to the beautiful earth:

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

Read reverently this fragment from a friendly letter: 'His wife said that their time had been for long spent in prayer together and reading St. Luke.'

The Physician-apostle with healing for a sorely-stricken spirit!

Among the last of his intelligible words were, 'Darling, good-bye. God bless you and the children.'

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I have before me a primrose that grew on his grave at Broadwater, and it will be very dear to me until I too pass on into the shadow of the night.

# Richard Jefferies: A Pagan Mystic

*Benjamin De Casseres*

Chapter, titled 'Richard Jefferies: A Pagan Mystic', from De Casseres' *Forty Immortals* (New York, 1926), pp.153-158. De Casseres (3 April 1873 – 7 Dec. 1945) was an American journalist, poet and essayist. Born in Philadelphia, he started working for *The Philadelphia Press* but moved to New York where he wrote for various newspapers including *The New York Times*.

**T**he cultured mysticism of Thoreau, the consuming, frenetic earth-passion of Whitman, the spiritual inebriety of Spinoza, the outreaching, tempestuous egoism of Nietzsche—Richard Jefferies combined within himself all these qualities and characteristics as they reveal themselves in that wonderful book, *The Story of My Heart*.

The book belongs among the great confessions of the world. There is in it a passion for soul-life deeper than à Kempis, a breadth that St. Augustine could never have spanned, a riant pantheism that Maurice de Guérin would have drawn back from in terror, a record of an extraordinary adventure of a man with his soul that pales to stark vulgarity the back-alley adventures of Benvenuto Cellini.

Like Walt Whitman, Jefferies had kicked all the stale cadavers out of his doorway; had flung the cross into the brackish waters where weakness and defeat had discovered it; seized on his soul and body and the rank wild earth with an amorous relish and saw in the material universe the loom of the spiritual universe. His optimism was greater than hope, for it outran the years.

The heart is the abode of pain, the brain is the abode of serenity, the soul is the abode of ecstasy. The stoic prefers serenity; the poet prefers ecstasy. In the presence of the things that suggest the infinite—mountains, forests, plains, seas, the star-universe—the heart and its anxieties are hushed, thought stands impotent, overlapped, evanesces; but the soul utters its wild signals to the Spirit that makes of matter its broad shadow-band.

To Jefferies everything was supernatural; everything wore an alien air—things stood in space and time, but were not of space and time. A man stands in atmosphere, but he is not atmosphere; he may welter in water, but he is not water. You may touch a tree, but you cannot touch the soul of the tree. The laws of matter are merely the method of miracles. There is an Inner of which matter is only the Outer; there is a Highest of which the material universe, including mind, is only a Lower. The tiniest leaflet on a tree is, at

the last, unexplainable; it is the variation of an infinite mystery—nothing more. There is only the supernatural. The natural is method; the supernatural is soul.

He says ‘matter is beyond understanding, mysterious, impenetrable. I touch it easily; comprehend it—no!’ This sums up all metaphysics. We know less of matter than we do of mind because matter comes to us at one remove; mind is immediately given. The essence of matter escapes us because it is garbled in its transition through the senses to consciousness. It is easier to find out God than to find out his ways. Through transcendental apperception we come immediately to the Everlasting; but matter must always remain an hypothesis, the dancing, multiform shadow on the sunlit wall of the Beyond-Mind.

This is not mysticism; it is given that name not by those who are seers, but by those who are what Jefferies called ‘mesmerized by matter’—that is, the ignorant, the practical, the sealed. No mystic ever called himself a mystic. His vision is too clear. Science and religion only believe. The mystic knows. His truths are commonplaces to him. Berkeley, Schopenhauer, Maeterlinck, Jefferies, Emerson—were they not all tangible, substantial, eating, drinking, sleeping beings? How many men have come in contact with matter as closely as Emerson and Jefferies?—yet both smilingly discarded matter. Examine anything closely and it becomes transparent. Long familiarity with nature takes one straight to nature’s immanent reality. Intuitive generalization—that is mysticism.

Jefferies fell on the earth and kissed it, gripped the tall grass firmly in his hands, watched brook water run through his hands, wrapped the tree trunks in his arms. A heathen? Yes, a heathen undebauched by Christianity; a fresh soul just from its source with the sure knowledge of primitives and children, untouched by 2,000 years of that cross-breeding of natural impulse with fear known as the Christian conscience.

No man—not even Plotinus, Plato, or Porphyry—ever searched so passionately for the Absolute as Jefferies. His intuition of this Absolute was bound up with scientific concepts. He dreamed of an intellectual Absolute. This made of him a unique dreamer in the history of the intelligence. The soul, immortality, deity, have always been approached sentimentally. They were downy couches for spiritual repose. They were necessities of the feelings; the intellect did not require them, indeed, could do without them better than with them. The soul was an infinite, invisible nervous system; immortality a clumsy device for dodging the grave-digger’s spade. God was—a word.

Herein comes Jefferies’ unique thought: ‘I think there is something more than existence.’ And again, ‘A nexus of ideas exists of which nothing is

known.’ Again, ‘There is something in addition to the existence of the soul, in addition to immortality and beyond the idea of deity.’

A marvellous surmise! A stupendous flight of thought! A man was among us who demanded something greater, in the cravings of his nature, than eternity, infinity and God!

He flung the mechanical devices of relativity to the ground and contemptuously crushed them with his heel. The infinite extension and projection of this universe which is the basis of our other-world dreams he rejected as vulgar.

He demanded a new series—another plane—a different kind of a web. He wanted to sport in an indomitable dimension.

Immortality and God were not enough; he needed something greater than both. He would rather think about deity than come in contact with it. The toxic blisses of the Infinite did not appeal to him. He would rather be the stern-faced Columbus of the Beyond-God.

Life has no further possibilities when one dreams such dreams as this. The curious terror evoked by matter is annihilated in the passion for the super-infinite.

Jefferies’ dream was the epitome of all dreams—and something more.



Benjamin De Casseres  
Source: *Leslie's Weekly*, 29 Oct 1921

# Richard Jefferies

*Richard Maurice Bucke*

Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke (1837-1902) was an eminent Canadian psychiatrist. His book *Cosmic Consciousness, A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* [1901] included this chapter on Richard Jefferies (ch. 28, pp.319-323).

**R**ichard Jefferies. Born November 6th, 1848; died August 14th, 1887.

This case is given as that of a man who spent several years in what has been called above the twilight of Cosmic Consciousness but upon whom the sun did not rise. In this connection the man is an exceedingly interesting study to all those who care about the subject matter of the present volume, and the more so because he has written a book in which he gives us what is undoubtedly a straightforward and candid account of his spiritual life down to his thirty-fifth year.<sup>1</sup> He seems to have entered early into the twilight above referred to, and it seems probable that Jefferies would have entered into at least momentary Cosmic Consciousness at about the usual age had it not been that before that time came, when thirty-three years old, he was seized with a fatal sickness which weakened and tortured him from that time until his death, which took place in his thirty-ninth year. Be this as it may, the book named represents the highest spiritual altitude attained by Jefferies—a spiritual altitude clearly above that of mere self consciousness and as clearly below the mental status of complete Cosmic Consciousness.

The book, of course, should be read as a whole—and it will well repay perusal—but for the purposes of the present volume the passages found below must suffice.

The story of my heart commences seventeen years ago [1]. I was not more than eighteen ... when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe, and undefinable aspirations filled me [181].

At eighteen years of age he enters into the twilight of the Cosmic Sense. But neither then nor afterwards present themselves any of the characteristic phenomena of entrance into Cosmic Consciousness.

I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Jefferies, Richard. *The Story of My Heart*. Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1883. The numbers in brackets refer to page numbers from this edition.



there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty; the air touched me and gave me something of itself [4]. By all these I prayed; I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition [5]. I thought of my inner existence, ... that consciousness which is called the soul. These—that is, myself—I threw into the balance to weigh the prayer the heavier. My strength of body, mind and soul, I flung into it; I put forth my strength; I wrestled and laboured and toiled in might of prayer. The prayer, this soul-emotion, was in itself—not for an object—it was a passion. I hid my face in the grass, I was wholly prostrated, I lost myself in the wrestle, I was rapt and carried away [7]. Had any shepherd accidentally seen me lying on the turf he would only have thought that I was resting a few minutes; I made no outward show. Who could have imagined the whirlwind of passion that was going on within me as I reclined there! I was greatly exhausted when I reached home [8]. Having drunk deeply of the heaven above ... and felt the most glorious beauty of the day, and remembering the old, old sea, which (as it seemed to me) was but just yonder at the edge, I now became lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt down deep into the earth under, and high above into the sky, and farther still to the sun and stars. Still farther beyond the stars into the hollow of space, and losing thus my separateness of being came to seem like a part of the whole [8-9]. With all that time and power I prayed that I might have in my soul the intellectual part of it—the idea, the thought [17]. Now, this moment gives me all the thought, all the idea, all the soul expressed in the Cosmos around me [18]. Gives me fullness of life like to the sea and the sun, to the earth and the air; gives me fullness of physical life, mind, equal and beyond their fullness; gives me a greatness and perfection of soul higher than all things; gives me my inexpressible desire which swells in me like a tide—gives it to me with all the force of the sea [103]. I realize a soul-life illimitable; I realize the existence of a Cosmos of thought [51]. I believe in the human form; let me find something, some method, by which that form<sup>2</sup> may achieve the utmost beauty. Its beauty is like an arrow, which may be shot any distance according to the strength of the bow. So the idea expressed in the human shape is capable of indefinite

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<sup>2</sup> Jefferies is always longing, always aspiring, always reaching out and striving. He intensely feels that there is something infinitely desirable just beyond his outstretched hand, but he never actually touches it.

Of such passages as these Salt says: 'Jefferies now writes without disguise, as one who has received a solemn revelation of the inner beauty of the universe.'

But note especially his love of external nature is always a longing, becoming intense but never fulfilled, to become the object.

But perhaps the essence of the Cosmic Sense, from the point of view of the intellect, is the realization that the subject and object are one. See *supra* the words of E. C. and of the Vaga-Saneyi Samhita-Upanishad also: 'Strange and hard that paradox true I give, objects gross and the unseen soul are one.'

But Gautama says that 'within him there arose the eye to perceive, the knowledge, the understanding, the wisdom that lights the true path, the light that expels darkness.'

expansion and elevation of beauty. Of the mind, the inner consciousness, the soul, my prayer desired that I might discover a mode of life for it, so that it might not only conceive of such a life, but actually enjoy it on the earth. I wished to search out a new and higher set of ideas on which the mind should work. The simile of a new book of the soul is the nearest to convey the meaning—a book drawn from the present and future, not the past. Instead of a set of ideas based on tradition, let me give the mind a new thought drawn straight from the wondrous present, direct this very hour [30]. Recognizing my own inner consciousness, ... the psyche, so clearly, death did not seem to me to affect the personality. In dissolution there was no bridgeless chasm, no unfathomable gulf of separation; the spirit did not immediately become inaccessible, leaping at a bound to an immeasurable distance. [34] To me everything is supernatural. [42] It is impossible to wrest the mind down to the same laws that rule pieces of timber.[42] When I consider that I dwell this moment in the eternal Now ... that has ever been and will be, that I am in the midst of immortal things this moment, that there probably are souls as infinitely superior to mine as mine to a piece of timber—what, then, is a ‘miracle?’ [44] I feel on the margin of a life unknown, ... very near, almost touching it—on the verge of powers which, if I could grasp, would give me an immense breadth of existence. [45] Sometimes a very ecstasy of exquisite enjoyment of the entire universe filled me [182]. I want more ideas of soul-life. I am certain that there are more yet to be found. A great life—an entire civilization—lies just outside the pale of common thought. [48] There is an Entity, a Soul-Entity, as yet unrecognized. [48] ... Man has a soul, as yet it seems to me lying in abeyance, by the aid of which he may yet discover things now deemed supernatural. [144] I believe, with all my heart, ... in the body and the flesh, and believe that it He has the feeling of continuous life—it does not seem that he can die.

If he had attained to Cosmic Consciousness he would have entered into eternal life, and there would be no ‘seems’ about it. ‘Why, who makes much of a miracle? To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle, every cubic inch of space is a miracle’,<sup>3</sup> etc. He feels that he has not realized—that there is something just out of reach; his contentment is never complete or only so by flashes. On the other hand, those who have fully entered Cosmic Consciousness—upon whom the sun has risen—who have achieved Nirvana—the kingdom of heaven—are at rest and happy. ‘I am satisfied,’ says Whitman, ‘I exist as I am. That is enough.’ ‘I know I am solid and sound.’ ‘I know I am deathless;’ and all the fully illumined from Gautama down to E. C., both inclusive, declare the same complete fulfilment of desire.

Yes, the Cosmic Sense which Jefferies felt but did not enter upon.

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<sup>3</sup> Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. David McKay, Philadelphia, 1891-1892., p.301

'I believe in the flesh and the appetites. Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle. Divine am I inside and out!' should be increased and made more beautiful by every means [114]; that the organs of the body may be stronger in their action, perfect, and lasting; that the exterior flesh may yet be more beautiful; that the shape may be finer, and the motions more graceful [129]. I believe all manner of asceticism to be the vilest blasphemy—blasphemy towards the whole of the human race. I believe in the flesh and the body, which is worthy of worship [114]. How can I adequately express my contempt for the assertion ... that all things occur for the best, for a wise and beneficent end, and are ordered by a human intelligence! It is the most utter falsehood and a crime against the human race [134]. Nothing is evolved. There is no evolution any more than there is any design in nature. By standing face to face with nature, and not from books, I have convinced myself that there is no design and no evolution. What there is, what was the cause, how and why, is not yet known; certainly it was neither of these [126]. There is nothing human in any living animal. All nature, the universe as far as we can see, is anti- or ultra-human, outside, and has no concern with man [62]. There being nothing human in nature in the universe, and all things being ultra-human and without design, shape, or purpose, I conclude that no deity has anything to do with nature [63]. Next, in human affairs, in the relations of man with man, in the conduct of life, in the events that occur, in human affairs generally, everything happens by chance [64]. But as everything in human affairs obviously happens by chance, it is clear that no deity is responsible [66]. I have been obliged to write these things ... by an irresistible impulse which has worked in me since early youth. They have not been written for the sake of argument, still less for any thought of profit; rather, indeed, the reverse. They have been forced from me by earnestness of heart, and they express my most serious convictions [181]. One of the greatest difficulties I have encountered is the lack of words to express ideas [184].

In these passages is positive evidence that Jefferies never really attained to the Cosmic Sense—that is, he never became conscious of the Cosmic order—the vision of the 'eternal wheels' of the 'chain of causation' was not granted him. So Blake said of 'Jerusalem': 'I have written this poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation and even against my will.' This feeling of external or internal domination by something or somebody is common if not universal with men having the Cosmic Sense. Even as in the case of those who have entered the holy of holies, so Jefferies, though the revelation to him was far from complete, saw more than he found it easy to express in our language of the self conscious mind.

# Richard Jefferies

*James Franklin Fuller*

This short piece was included in *Omniana: the Autobiography of an Irish Octogenarian* by J.F. Fuller (Jarrolds Publishers Ltd., 1916), pp. 148-9. Fuller (1835-1924) was an eccentric architect and author. The article included the well-known London Stereoscopic photograph of Richard Jefferies.

In 1875 I was (genealogically) greatly exercised in my mind about discovering the parentage of Captain Thomas Goddard ... when, hearing of a *Memoir of the Goddards of [North] Wilts*, by Richard Jefferies of Cote (sic), Swindon, I wrote to him, and got the little book which (of no assistance by-the-bye) was without publisher's name, and had no date. But it was the first work of a man who was destined to take a high place, for all time, in the ranks of the literary elect; and is now a very rare book, and highly prized by collectors of his writings. His short life was as pathetic as his fame was rapid. Practically he had but eight or ten years to devote to the production of his best works, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *The Amateur Poacher*, *Hodge and His Masters*, *Round About a Great Estate*, *Wood Magic*, *Life in [sic] the Fields*, and five or six other equally well-known works; including fiction, among them that charming one, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, which indeed is not, strictly, a novel—being devoid of plot. Jefferies was the son of a small farmer, and came of a race of farmers; but tilling the soil was not congenial, and he took to reporting and to writing for the provincial press, earning thereby a scanty subsistence, and struggling manfully against poverty and illness, till he was about twenty-five. From then on, he wrote, fighting against terrible physical prostration. He underwent four surgical operations for an internal complaint, recovering only to be prostrated again, by another ailment, which finally killed him, in 1887, at the age of thirty-nine (sic). He did not really begin to write the books that made him famous till he was about thirty, confronted all the while, as he says, by his three familiar 'great giants, disease, despair, and poverty.' What he did and how he did it, has been lovingly told by Walter Besant, in his *Eulogy*.

There is no question as to his place among the great ones of literature; it has been ungrudgingly assigned; the pity of it is that his life was so short, and his sufferings so great. The portrait is by the London Stereoscopic Company, and the facsimile of his writing is from a letter dated Cote (sic), Swindon, February 20, 1875, in which he says that he contemplated a second volume on the Goddards; but this never appeared; and he turned from what,

no doubt, must have been the uncongenial pursuit of pedigree, to the study of Nature, which he loved so well, though he found her relentlessly cruel and unpitiful. His Pantheism was indeed as chivalrous as it was profound.

can give me & what paper space  
shall be accorded. I do not see the  
Miss. Gen. et Herald. News, but will  
set the copy you allude to. I shall be  
most pleased to hear from you again  
shortly. Truly Yours  
R. L. Jefferies  
J. F. Fuller Esq.

Facsimile of Richard Jefferies' handwriting.



J. F. Fuller, aged 55

# Bevis à l'école

Peter Robins

In the summer of 1925, a middle-aged Frenchman, Germain d'Hangest, a teacher and writer, attended a literary conference at Girton College, Cambridge. Here he met George and Jessie Raines. George was a master at Ilford County High School teaching Latin, French and English Literature as well as being a Methodist lay preacher. D'Hangest loved English literature, especially the Romantic poets and in France he was known for his *English Romantic Poems: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Selections from Emerson* as well as translator of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The Raines were impressed with the charismatic Frenchman and invited him to their home in Ilford where he was introduced to the Raines' seventeen-year-old daughter, Kathleen.

Encouraged by her parents, Kathleen was ambitious to get to Cambridge and her father sensed that d'Hangest could be a useful mentor to his daughter at a crucial stage of her education. Their friendship grew and d'Hangest invited the Raines to Le Poldu, Brittany, where he and his family had a holiday home and in the following year, the Raines felt confident enough to allow Katherine to stay with the d'Hangest family at a château where d'Hangest was a tutor. Here they discussed religion, philosophy, poetry, literature and art.<sup>1</sup> Later that year, in October, Kathleen, with a scholarship from Ilford County High, went up to Girton College where she read Natural Sciences and Psychology. Later she became a respected poet, critic and scholar.

The experience of d'Hangest's trip to England perhaps contributed to his book *This England*, published by Hachette in 1928, followed by *These United States* in the following year. These were school textbooks for, by this time, d'Hangest was Professor of English at the Lycée Condorcet, Paris, and École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées as well as Inspector General of Public Instruction.

In 1939 Hachette published a school edition of *Bevis*, prepared by Germain d'Hangest, for the teaching of English in lycées and colleges throughout France. The book consists of thirty short extracts, not in chapters but in the sequence of the original, thirty translation exercises, grammatical notes and

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<sup>1</sup> Philippa Bernard, *No End to Snowdrops: A Biography of Kathleen Raine*, Shephard Walwyn Publishers, 2010, pp.14-15.

a lexicon of about 1600 words. Line and wash drawings by Robert Lemerrier<sup>2</sup> and two maps support the text.

D'Hangest contributed a five-page preface in which he describes Coate farmhouse and the lake, contrasting its modern appearance, with its leisure canoeists and bathers, to its earlier, natural state portrayed by Jefferies as *The New Sea*. He gives a brief history of the agricultural background of Jefferies' forebears and a summary of Jefferies' literary success in the 1870s and 1880s commenting, 'His books of nature mark a lucid progression of the description towards the spiritual interpretation of the universe,' adding, '*The Story of My Heart*, a philosophical poem in prose, is his most profound and moving work.'

An unfortunate aspect of the book is the poor quality of the illustrations. The figures are poorly drawn, appearing flat and awkward with no attempt at musculature, often with anatomical ambiguities and usually lacking any sense of movement. Jefferies' text certainly deserved better. A drawing by both Lemerrier (see below) and E. H. Shepard (see next page) illustrating their interpretation of the same incident in 'New Formosa—Sweet River Falls' (Chapter XLI) reproduced here clearly shows Shepard's superior draughtsmanship. The figures are well drawn and one senses the raft is about to move at any moment as a result of Bevis's efforts.<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> Robert Lemerrier, artist and engraver, was involved in the artists' colony at the medieval city of La Cadière d'Azur (Var) with Lucien Fontanarosa and André Favory.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Bevis*, illustrated by E. H. Shepard, Introduction by E. V. Lucas, Jonathan Cape, 1932. p.400.



THE RAFT

The French education system at the time required boys and girls to be taught in separate schools and d'Hangest appeared to have no doubts that *Bevis* would appeal to girls as well as boys. Opinion among British writers was divided. In the 1932 illustrated edition, an introduction by E. V. Lucas was clear that 'it is a boy's book from the first to the last'.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Henry Williamson in his introduction to the Everyman edition recommended that the book 'should be given to boys and girls at the age of ten'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the best verdict was delivered by a devoted reader and correspondent of Jefferies, George D. Lawrie, who in a letter to the author about six months before Jefferies' death wrote:

I must tell you that I have read your *Wood Magic* and *Bevis* to my two little girls—one 7½ the other 6 years old. The eldest one was perfectly delighted with them... It is some months since I read *Bevis* to them first and I have begun it again to them. I have christened them Bevis and Mark and they are mad to find a new sea and to make a hut and do all that the real Bevis and Mark did.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Bevis*, introduction by Henry Williamson, Everyman's Library, Dent, 1966. p.viii.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Jefferies, *A Biographical Study*, G. Miller and H. Matthews, Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1993. p.269.



After the Fall of France and the armistice in June 1940 with the establishment of the Vichy government under Marshal Pétain, the French state maintained normal effective full sovereignty in the unoccupied southern zone but had a limited and only civil authority in the northern zone under military occupation. The Germans and Vichy government jointly aimed for stability among the population and primary school education benefited in that English continued to be taught. But the history curriculum was reformed to eliminate negative references to Germany.

In a memoir by Stanley B. Loomis, the former US soldier recalls the liberation in 1944 of the town of Molsheim, north-east France, where he was surprised at the number of teenagers who could speak English: 'They were about five years under German occupation where they weren't even allowed to talk in public in French—only English and German. During that time the Germans installed teachers in schools to teach only German and English.'<sup>7</sup>

*Bevis* survived the war and must have been regarded as a valuable resource for the teaching of English as, in 1945, *Adventures in New Formosa* (extracts from *Bevis*) was published by Didier in The Rainbow Library and a second edition of the 1939 Hachette *Bevis* followed in 1947.

After the war d'Hangest continued to put together school text books including *Coleridge: Twenty-five Poems* (1945), *English Portraits* (1946) and *Great Travellers* (1948). In his seventies d'Hangest translated Paul Gallico's *Jennie* (*Mon Ami Jennie*, Delamain et Boutelleau, 1954). A new edition of *Bevis* for schools was published by Hatier, Paris, in 1960 with extracts selected by Francois Lauriau, d'Hangest by this time no longer active in publishing. The family name, however, continued to be recognised in French literature for his son, also, Germain, had written a major two-volume work on Walter Pater (*Walter Pater: l'homme et l'oeuvre*, Didier) which was published in 1961, two years before d'Hangest died. The author was later employed as Professor of English at the Paris-Sorbonne University (1967-1984).

The discovery of the French edition of *Bevis* was auspicious for one French graduate preparing for his doctorate, as Alain Delattre recalled in his lecture to The Richard Jefferies Society in 1987,<sup>8</sup>

Twenty-five years ago, having read much about Jefferies in the course of research for a State Doctorate Thesis, in Besant, Salt and Thomas, but by him

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley B. Loomis Sr. *My Life – My War – World War 2*, AuthorHouse, 2010. p.626.

<sup>8</sup> 'John Richard Jefferies, his Worst and his Best'. The Centenary Lecture, 2 August 1987, Swindon Arts Centre. Alain Delattre was a Professor at Poitiers University at this time. (*RJS Talks & Articles*, No. 62).

only a French digest of *Bevis* and had been captured by it, I landed on your shores.

Much of Jefferies' work doesn't lend itself to translation, nature being interpreted differently in each country according to the national disposition. In general, to the French the love of nature for nature's sake is misguided, finding Jefferies too lyrical and sentimental, Wordsworth's Romanticism a struggle. Fortunately Germain d'Hangest recognised the significance of Jefferies and introduced him to the school curriculum. In the closing paragraph of his preface in *Bevis* he declared, 'His inspiration is that of life itself. He will find a place, as a personality and as an artist, with Wordsworth, Keats, Henry Thoreau, Hudson and D. H. Lawrence... Let's start with *Bevis*. Read it with tenderness.'



Smocks, short trousers and berets were the uniform for French schoolboys in the 1930s.

# The French Point of View

*Edith Sichel*

The following review was published in *New and Old* (Constable, 1917), a posthumous collection of journalism by Edith Sichel, and first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1913.

Edith Helen Sichel (1862-1914) was the daughter of Michael Sichel and Helena Reiss who were Christians but of Jewish descent. Miss Sichel was privately tutored and was proficient in Latin, French and German. Much of her early adult life was devoted to charitable work in London's East End.

In the 1890s, Miss Sichel turned to journalism and became a steady contributor to journals and magazines including *The Pilot*, the *Monthly Review*, the *Times Literary Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, establishing a reputation as a perceptive reviewer of histories, biographies and memoirs. Later, she focused on writing elegant and absorbing prose about French history and is best remembered for her *Women and Men of the French Renaissance* (1901) and *Catherine de' Medici and the French Reformation* (1905). An obituary in *The Times* (15 Aug. 1914) observed, 'She had both wit and humour in a marked degree and her brilliant and terse style gave a special value to her historical works.'

Most moral misunderstandings, such especially exist between nations, arise from the different constructions put upon the term Nature. The word, indeed, includes as many meanings as 'Love', that other word, almost Nature's synonym; and upon the use and misuse of 'Love' and 'Nature' have been founded the biggest mistakes, as well as the finest creeds, in Western history—all its 'isms', from Asceticism and Puritanism to Naturalism, Platonism, Pantheism, Stoicism, Materialism, Idealism—even Mysticism, the religion of being before doing, of love before faith. Nature has figured to great spirits as the devil; as the star-sown universe, the hem of God's garment; as the monster red in tooth and claw; as the pitiful mother gathering her tired children to her breast; as the indifferent Moloch who devours them; as the law-abiding, self-contained antithesis to man's restless and anarchic passions; as the ungoverned being of dire caprices; as the 'Nature' who receives but what we give; as the greater life outside and beyond us; as the primal simplicity, the Hygieia, who beckons to the jaded victims of civilisation; as the incoherent bundle of instincts holding orgy in war and revolution.

It is thus that Nature has taken a different complexion in every country according to the national temperament, while the builders of Babel fondly

figure to themselves as acting upon the self-same password. And their illusion is of no slight import. It is not too much to say that every generation of ideas has begun or ended with some movement concerning Nature—an impulse towards, a reaction against her. From the days of Greek philosophy and before them, from the times of the Fathers and St. Augustine and the conflict between Freewill and Predestination, the pivot has remained the same. Medievalism, with its chivalrous artifices and monastic ideals—with its effort to order and to feudalise men's appetite—made against Nature. She took her revenge in the Renaissance, the heyday of humanists and artists, her *preux chevaliers*, who vindicated her rights. So did Luther and the first reformers. But the pendulum oscillated, and the Puritans worked havoc in men's consciousness with a sourer asceticism than the world had ever known. Then came the period of the grand style and of the prominence of the Roi Soleil in Europe. Nature was drugged into sleep, was counterfeited by etiquette and Le Nôtre, by Lely and Kneller, in their false arcadias, with intricate side-alleys for intrigue. Rousseau followed them—Nature's Peter the Hermit, who preached the Crusade without a Cross, proclaiming the return to Nature's bosom and practising his precepts by dropping his children at the door of the Foundling Hospital in Paris. The world took up his doctrine, and the French Revolution was the result: to be succeeded by natural movements everywhere—in the Lake School of English poetry—in the landscape-painters of France and England—in the educational systems born of Miss Edgeworth and Pestalozzi—no less in the abolition of slavery, in land reforms and in the repeal of the corn laws. Upon these there came the second Renaissance, the reign of Science: the investigation of Nature's laws, the arrogance of discovery, the protest of the Oxford Movement, of Pre-Raphaelite visions, and what not; until, if such a light survey be permitted us, we reach the creeds of the present day.

But no difference in regard to definitions of 'Nature' has been so marked or so confusing as that between France and England—since the days of the Puritans (till then we were as natural as our neighbours over the Channel). In France 'Nature' has, before all else, meant the spontaneous relations of man and woman. In England Nature has first meant the face of the universe and the spirit that it breathes upon us. Rabelais and Montaigne looked frankly at the sexes and the problems they create; Bacon devoted himself to probing the secrets of the earth. For us no Flaubert; for them no Lake School. Unhampered by conviction of sin, the French are natural, and look upon as natural the half of what we regard as moral, thereby causing misapprehensions that obscure main issues and falsify values of conduct. At this moment England is discovering what France has always known—that impropriety and immorality are not identical and that Nature has her say in

such things: in rediscovering Nature, in short, with much clatter from novelists and much acclamation of the ballet and the cult of the body—too much fuss about an obvious matter. And France, it would seem, from the books before us, has lately awakened to the simple sense of earth and sky and what they bring us, apart from dramatic effect. In either case exceptions have appeared within the last generations. In England arose Meredith to tell men in prose and verse that what is primal cannot die and that the life of the woods is linked to that of men—to tell it and to be misunderstood. In lesser degree, with far less perfect art, Richard Jefferies proclaimed the same truth; and long before these, before Puritanism, before the question was a matter for hostilities and the need of champion-philosophies, the great Elizabethan poets had sung to the same tune in all simplicity. This the Frenchmen<sup>1</sup> who have chosen these three writers—Meredith, Jefferies, and the Elizabethan, George Peele—have well understood; and it is their interpretation of the English attitude towards Nature that makes the chief point of interest in the volumes before us. Though sound and well-written expositions of their themes, they would not otherwise stand out as remarkable; for even the book on Meredith, the most distinguished of the trio, with its clever reports of his talk, fails to tell us anything new; in great measure, perhaps, just because the writer passes quickly over Meredith's criticisms of men and women—so often like those of a Frenchman and hence familiar to him—and lingers over the English characteristics already known to us. The author of *Richard Jefferies*, indeed, admires what to us appear Jefferies' foibles, his dithyrambs about the Universe, his over-use of the lyre, so nearly approaching French methods; while the study of George Peele, offering a new field to France, is to us but a piece of our literary history, and, again, only striking because illustrative of the Elizabethan outlook.

The main point of a French interpretation of English perceptions is that it must unconsciously reveal the soul of the interpreters and the contrast between the two national tempers. Thus it is, and when we close the volumes beside us one impression stands out foremost. To the French, the love of Nature for Nature's sake is no part of their daily lives, as revealed at least in their literature. That love seems to have found a refuge alone in other art—in their great school of landscape painting. There have, of course, been exceptions. As we have had our Meredith they have had their Sénancour, their George Sand, their André Theuriet, and others. But they were exceptions, misunderstood even by the choicest of French spirits. '*Elle s'est fait bergère*' was Saint-Beuve's comment on George Sand's exquisite idylls. To French writers the proper, and often the improper, study of mankind is man,

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<sup>1</sup> Sichel assumed, quite reasonably, that Masseck was French.

and when they introduce Nature it is with an axe to grind—as an adjunct to the sublime, or as a dramatic effect, in the pages of Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo; or as an aid to preaching and the elevation of God, in the hands of Rousseau; or as a symbol of a revived and classic Paganism, such as that of Maurice de Guérin; or as a channel of aesthetic sensibility, in the pictures of Loti and the word-impressionists. If we look further back, we find much the same. Villon and Charles d'Orléans, it is true, used Nature simply, but they had a scant following. To Ronsard and his Pléiade Nature figured as a grove in which to read the classics and eat peaches, or a fountain whence a Nymph might arise. Sometimes they seized details—they sang the swallows, or April, or the Winnowers: but these were stray impressions. No whole view of Nature, no love of Nature as a power to soothe and strengthen, existed then or afterwards. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Nature slept, smothered beneath hoops and periwigs; and the great Revolution, only caring for self-expression, affected torrents and precipices as bombastic symbols of inner tempest, and went into the country because of Rousseau. No Frenchman could have said: 'The Comforter hath found me here upon this lonely road'; for him the Comforter would have been a woman, the road unendurable if lonely. Cowper's calm pictures of winter afternoons and summer mornings would have counted for little in France beside his polished versification; Keats, Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson would have been prized for their ideas and their power of word-painting, but the influence of the earth which they painted on their spirits would have remained a force unknown; and although one of the best books on Wordsworth has been written by a Frenchman, to the bulk of his compatriots that High Priest of Nature must remain but half comprehended. A Sovereign Being existing apart from us, independent of our emotions, dwarfing into nothing those passions so all-important to a Frenchman, linked to man only in so far as man can empty himself of himself and go out with Nature, would not easily appeal to *l'Esprit Gaulois*, in the literal sense of that phrase. And this is how Meredith and Jefferies, as well as Wordsworth, feel nature. Yet M. Masseck gets no further than: 'Jefferies is the type of that group of the adorers of life, who, waking while other men slept, discovered something of the splendour of the world...He justified his existence before he died.' The definition of the justification is incomplete. Jefferies, dreamer, revolutionary, romancer, embryo thinker, went beyond the mere perception of splendour.

But these students of English authors do not only reveal the French attitude towards Nature. Both Meredith and Jefferies were, we have seen, like Frenchmen in their criticism between men and women. They were natural. But they were something more besides; they went further—and this is what interests the French. For England—the better England, not the land of

Puritans—is not in these matters a mere imitator of France; it has its own point of view, a point of view, a point of view which is its glory. The French consider the more obvious questions of the senses as outside the province of morals and below the level of intellect; to them it seems false and out of place to bring them before an ethical tribunal. A Meredith, a Jefferies, would no less acknowledge such questions as part of Nature, but, unlike the French, they do not stop there. All Nature—men, beasts, earth and sea—says Meredith (and Jefferies hymns the same), is one, bound together by indestructible ties. When we try to break them we sin against truth and put the human spirit in false positions. But that human spirit—also a part of Nature, however supplemented—has a transforming power. It can convert the most animal functions of man into his highest faculties—it can link the beast with the angel; and that by no fantastic evolution, no transcendental tricking of the nerves, but by simple honesty, by a frank acceptance of bare facts, by first acknowledging earth's maternal part in us and then giving that part over to the guardian of the intellect to be transmuted 'into something rich and strange.' Falling short of this, we abuse our heritage and remain of the dust, dusty. English poets have before now borne this message variously expressed. Donne, Browning, Kingsley have been among them. But Donne was an Elizabethan; and Browning and Kingsley were affected by the supernatural view of the natural. Neither Meredith nor Jefferies was spiritual, in the ordinary sense of the word. They were high-souled Pagans, apostles of modern Pantheism; and so it is the more remarkable that they were mystics—mystics of matter, mystics of Nature, knowing no difference between soul and body, regarding nothing natural as unclean, taking each part as a symbol of the whole, and looking upon every germ as a being with endless possibilities to be unfolded for the good of the world. But to enter Nature's jungle, to find your way there and pierce to her innermost, needs courage:

Enter these enchanted woods,  
    You who dare.  
Nothing harms beneath the leaves...  
Then is courage that endures  
Even her awful tremble yours...  
Here you meet the light invoked,  
Here is never secret cloaked...  
Are you of the stiff, the dry,  
Cursing the not understood...  
Hate, the shadow of a grain,  
You are lost in Westermain.

This is mysticism; and 'The Woods of Westermains' may well stand as an epitome of the faith of Meredith and Jefferies. Their point of view is a surprise to France—new and exciting; not so high-pitched or un-material as to offend its sceptical common sense, yet partaking of that romance which belongs to the North—and in thought, perhaps, especially to England: a romance, as like as not, born of struggle with rain and cold, with that very Nature who engenders our creed. The courage invoked by Meredith as a condition of initiation into Nature's secrets must strike fresh on the mind of the average Frenchman, since in those secrets he sees no dangers but the obvious ones—practical perils and inconveniences. Montaigne said that animals were paragons to men. Hamlet said that man was the paragon of animals. And it was reserved for English poets to see as nakedly as Zola and to hope as high as Victor Hugo. England has wrestled with Nature—has vowed that it will not let her go until she has revealed her name. And the French critics are beginning to be alive to the fact.

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Edith Helen Sichel



# Richard Jefferies: An Attempt at an Estimate

*Clinton Joseph Masseck*

This article, based on Masseck's thesis (in French) for his PhD at the University of Paris, was published in *Washington University Studies*, April 1914, vol.I, pp.243-263. His name was followed by 'Instructor in English'. Masseck was an American scholar, born in 1886, and a Harvard graduate.

W.E. Henley, writing in the columns of *The Athenaeum* in 1888, shortly after the premature death of Richard Jefferies, ventured not only the opinion that the man at that time was uninteresting, but also the prediction that the biography of the future would find no subject of its worth in this author. But the quarter of a century that has elapsed since this judgment was rendered has done much to demonstrate the fact that Henley, in a pretty generous degree at least, was a false prophet. Not only have the majority of Jefferies' works been re-published, some in many and expensive editions, but there have also appeared no less than three pretentious biographical and critical studies: those of Sir Walter Besant, Henry Salt, and Edward Thomas.<sup>1</sup> But this is not all. The student of Jefferies who attempts to establish the limits of the bibliographical material finds that, since 1888, the date of Henley writing, some hundreds of articles, ranging from the strictly philosophic to the entirely sentimental, have found their way into various English and American periodicals.

Yet it must be confessed in all fairness that Henley was in some measure right, Jefferies is not well known; he is not widely read; the great public of the newspapers and the popular novel know him not. And even to those to whom his name does not mean a confusion with that of Lord Jeffery of the *Edinburgh Review*, the extent of his work is not realized. As a picturesque recorder of the flora and fauna of his native county of Wiltshire, he appeals to a group of pseudo-scientific and sentimental nature lovers; by another group he is ranked with White and Thoreau as a field naturalist. Jefferies is interesting to the economist as a journalist who knew the social and economic conditions of the English agricultural labourer at first hand and who recorded his impressions with wealth of shrewdness and no small dramatic

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Besant: *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, London, 1888. Henry Salt: *Richard Jefferies: A Study*, London, 1894. Edward Thomas: *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*, London, 1909.

power. As a novelist, too, of English country life, particularly as exemplified in his *Amaryllis at the Fair*, he has attracted no little attention. It is Edward Garnett, the English critic, who finds in *Amaryllis at the Fair* something of the power of Hardy and a more considerable measure of humanity. Yet to others, Jefferies stands for that writer in the nineteenth century who has come the nearest to catching what may be loosely designated as the colour, the atmosphere of the out-of-doors. This is exemplified in his later essays more particularly. And it is this power, joined to the distinct manifestations of a mystic insight, as manifested in the autobiographical revelation, *The Story of My Heart*, that had caused no less a critic than George Trevelyan to hail Jefferies, with George Meredith, as one of the greatest of modern interpreters of what has been called the earth-spirit, that intense glorification of the beauty of nature, that insistence and reliance upon the indissoluble link that binds man to nature.

I propose first to sketch very briefly the outward events of his life, touching for a moment upon the influence of heredity and environment as factors in the understanding of Jefferies' character and achievement, and then to discuss in a somewhat general, and perhaps a too popular fashion, the literary efforts of Jefferies.

Jefferies was born November 6, 1848, in the little hamlet of Coate in the county of Wiltshire, England. He died August 14, 1887, at Goring, Surrey [sic]. The record of these thirty-nine years is a simple one. From 18 until 28 he lived in or about Coate, engaged in earning a dubious living as a local reporter on a newspaper. At 28 he moved to London and, having attained some measure of success as a writer upon life and ways of the English agricultural labourer, he began to devote himself to the depiction of the flora and fauna of his native Wiltshire. His work sold, and he enjoyed a comparative measure of prosperity for the next five years. Then he was stricken with a wasting and incurable disease that finally, despite all medical aid, was to kill him. Yet in the last five years, dying by inches, as he virtually was, he produced the flower of his work: his two best novels, the incomparable essays of observation and reflections, and that unique and remarkable record of mystical experience, *The Story of My Heart*. His sickness must be considered as an influence in his life because of its importance in explaining something of the quality of his work during these last five or six years of his life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Samuel Jones, in a yet unpublished monograph on Jefferies, has this to say regarding the relation of the physical and psychical in Jefferies: 'In studying the writings of Richard Jefferies it is necessary to consider his physical condition. He almost equalled Heine in suffering, and the probable nature of his diseases suggests the soil in which genius appears chiefly to flourish. His portrait indicates the scrofulous diathesis with its singularly impressionable temperament, its

A study of this interesting psychological problem, in connection with an explanation of the exact hereditary determinators in Jefferies, would not only explain fully the exquisite quality,—the seemingly inexplicable, judged by previous performances, of much of his later work,—but also the mystical *élan* of *The Story of My Heart*.

Jefferies was the descendant of a long line of yeomen, and even as he certainly inherited much of the obstinacy of his race, together with no small measure of its prejudices, so also he inherited certain individual traits that may explain some of his distinctly artistic tastes. It has been said that he was the descendant of yeoman farmers; this is in a measure true, but the family had received from time to time admixture of city stock, principally the blood of small tradesmen. Thus his mother came of London parents; a capable woman, but decidedly neurotic and flighty. She was a person of excellent taste; in her family was a brother, one Frederick Gyde, that was no mean artist and engraver, and others of the family were persons of studious habits. Jefferies certainly displayed the nervous irritability of his mother in full measure, if we are to believe the testimony of those who knew him best. From his father's side came almost what seems to be a taint of abnormal mentality, that in the case of his grandfather's brother certainly amounted to mild insanity or very pronounced eccentricity. His grandfather was a collector of rare editions, a decidedly bookish person, but eccentric to the last degree. He is best known by the unflattering portrait in *Amaryllis at the Fair*. In the same book, essentially in all its main details a picture of life within Jefferies' own home at Coate, we find our best portrayal of his really remarkable father. The latter was more than eccentric; some of his idiosyncrasies amounting almost to the inexplicable, if one is to judge by the norm of the average Wiltshire peasant. He was, however, well read, speaking on occasion in the Queen's English in preference to the dialect of the county. He was a lover of flowers, a master-gardener; he loved the chase; he was obstinate and had no conception of practical affairs. He contributed all these characteristics either by inheritance or example to his son. One should also note in this connection a brother of Jefferies' father, remembered still in the county as an artist of more than ordinary skill, a good musician, and a master of several instruments.

It is never easy to give an exact or even an approximate estimate of the influence of heredity in the production of men of unusual talents or

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rapturous enjoyment of a delight, and its intense susceptibility to a pang. In such an one the physical life is largely pathological; it is not to be estimated by the ordinary standard of the robust man.' Reprinted from Salt: *Richard Jefferies*, etc.

distinctive temperaments. With the influences of environment, certainly a strong factor that must be explained and understood in any consideration of Jefferies' work, and of education, which, too, in his case, by its very irregularity shaped his subsequent career, one who is not a student of such matters hesitates to advance an opinion. However, certain ancestral tendencies can apparently be discerned as reappearing in Jefferies, and an understanding of them will contribute something perhaps to an explanation of his subsequent career. It would seem fairly certain, for instance, that the paternal uncle, John Luckett Jefferies, as well as the maternal uncle, Frederick Gyde, both artists, may have contributed to give to their nephew that hyper-appreciation and acute sense of colour that he always possessed. Jefferies once said, 'To me colour is a sort of food; every spot of colour is a drop of wine to the spirit; colour and form and light are as magic to me; it is a trance; it requires a language of ideas to convey it.' It would seem also not unreasonable to say that from both sides of his family Jefferies came naturally by his passionate love of books, even as it seems almost certain that his highly strung and decidedly neurotic and mystical mind was the result of direct inheritance both from his mother and from his father and great uncle. And even the disease that killed him was in all probability inherited. Thus it is that there is a peculiar significance to a statement that Jefferies once penned: 'Our bodies are full of unexpected flaws, handed down it may be for thousands of years, and it is of these that we die, and not of natural decay... The truth is, we die through our ancestors; we are murdered by our ancestors. Their dead hands stretch forth from the tomb and drag us down to their mouldering bones.' There are some authors that can be isolated from their environment and studied with no loss of understanding. One cannot do this with Richard Jefferies. Even as Thoreau is without question the interpreter of Walden Pond and the woods and meadows of Concord, so it is that Jefferies is the personification, the articulate voice, of his village of Coate and its surrounding Downs. To Coate, Jefferies owed his inspiration for the great bulk of his economic studies, and nearly all of his nature essays; to the rolling Downs that dominate the village he owed much of the stimulation of his mystical experience and inspiration. It was on the windy summits of these chalky hills that first he felt the desire to fuse himself with the Over-Soul, and it was to the topmost heights of the Downs that he would go to find what he characteristically named his principal 'thinking place.' He wrote of them constantly, and no study of Jefferies, either as a naturalist or mystic, but particularly as a mystic, can neglect this influence of environment. Coate, with its many fields, its scattered copses, its great pond, almost a lake, Jefferies was to immortalize in *Bevis*; its picturesque inhabitants, together with the not far distant villages of Barbury and Chiseldon and Swindon were

to furnish all the material of his first four nature books, and much of the background for the later novels and essays.

Coate and its surrounding country therefore symbolise Jefferies. In effect, the village and the Downs were a part of him, as he was a part of them; he was as solidly rooted in the soil as his father's oak trees; even his peasant ancestors, their actions, their thoughts, had shaped his intelligence, had forced him, as it were, to study, to comprehend, to express the life that existed in this small part of England. As Besant has well expressed it, 'This corner of England should be renamed. As Yorkshire has its Craven, its Cleveland, its Richmond, its Holderness, so Wiltshire should have its Jefferies' Land enclosed in the irregular frame where is found Swindon, Barbury, Liddington, Ashbourne, Chase, and Wanborough.'

Of his education little need be said. It was irregular; he had little interest in the ordinary routine of the country or town school; the only noticeable thing that distinguished him from his companions was an inordinate love of reading. Cooper he devoured, and along with Cooper probably a very doubtful list of other adventure books. As shall be seen, his early writing is but the reflection of this first taste in reading. As he grew older, however, he read more widely, with no direction in selection, a considerable library. He knew some Latin, and scanted Greek. But his subsequent researches in the archaeology of the region of Coate forced him to acquire a decent reading knowledge of the former language. Yet he literally soaked himself in translations of the Greek tragedies; one can trace in his ideal of physical perfection as developed in *The Dewy Morn*, a novel, and in *The Story of My Heart*, a distinctly Greek influence. Goethe he read in translation, particularly *Faust*. Byron, David Lindsay, Ossian, Dryden, Shakespeare, Pope, Herodotus he knew pretty thoroughly; but in no sense was his reading directed. His style developed only with practice, although he early must have had a sense of effect gained somewhere from his reading; his early articles on the labour question are models of exposition.

There is one side of his education that was gained neither from books nor from schools. His father from the first taught him the ways of the chase, the habits of animals, the varieties of flowers. The boyhood letters of Jefferies are full of references to this sort of training. We know, too, from the autobiographical *The Amateur Poacher*, that Jefferies was soon an adept in the illegitimate bagging of rabbit and pheasant.

Yet he was not always the ardent hunter; he was at an early age an observer and taker of notes. I have heard old peasants at Coate several times mention with disdain Jefferies' habit of 'mooning about the hedges and a-sittin' the stiles, a-doin' nothin'.' But as we know from the letters to Mrs. Harrild, his aunt, and from the testimony of Besant, who was privileged to

see all his note books, these moments of apparent idleness were moments of observation and reflection. And so well did Jefferies train himself that he saw more, recorded more, and appreciated better the wild life of England than any other observer, not even excepting Gilbert White. Henri Fabre, the Frenchman, is perhaps his only rival as an accurate and sympathetic recorder of nature. So much for what may be termed his education.

One may discuss the literary career of Jefferies under two divisions—1866-1877 and 1877-1887. The first may be called the juvenile period when the author was simply finding himself, principally through the making of many costly and ill-advised experiments in writing. The second may be designated as the period of maturity, characterized not only by the best of his uninspired work—and by uninspired I mean that written from beyond the pale of mystical inspiration, journalistic, if you will,—but also by the best of his so-called inspired work, including in this division not only that complete mystical document, *The Story of My Heart*, but in addition all his better essays and his two last novels.

The first efforts of Jefferies as an author were a series of sentimental, blood-and-thunder short stories and tales, contributed to various local newspapers.<sup>3</sup> They are real ‘penny dreadfuls,’ teeming with murder and horror. They all show the strong influence of Cooper, especially in the treatment of Indian motives. I have been able to find but three or four paragraphs that display the slightest promise of the future Jefferies. Not much more can be said for the long list of local histories that he contributed to the columns of provincial newspapers. They are full of ill-digested allusions to his readings. Yet they are pretentious enough in their bulk, if not in their style, to merit some credit as the attempt of an untrained farmer’s son of only eighteen years.

From eighteen to twenty-four, he spent most of his spare time and all of his spare money in the writing and publishing of three novels. Like his earlier tales they are distinctly of the ‘penny dreadful’ type, yet occasionally there are suggestions of the style of the mature Jefferies. It was at this period that he felt for the first time, although he did not recognize their significance, his first mystical visions. As a result there are some half a dozen paragraphs in these earlier novels that indicate by their manner and method something of the coming Jefferies.

As a novelist Jefferies always lacked any idea of structure; his plots were involved in a maze of conflicting details; characters were taken from ‘high

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<sup>3</sup> These first literary productions of Jefferies have been reprinted under the editorship of Grace Toplis, under the following titles: *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*, London, 1896; *Jefferies’ Land: a History of Swindon and its Environs*, London, 1896.

society,' of which he knew or could know nothing, and the crudeness of the sentiment cannot be even condoned by the occasional 'purple patch' of stylistic perfection. Yet to the last we shall find Jefferies nursing the illusion that his was the novelist's power. To be sure in *The Dewy Morn* and more in *Amaryllis at the Fair* he succeeded in creating some sort of a picture of real life, but it was his own life, his own people, his own country that he reproduced as if from a photographic likeness that lingered in his own mind. But in the largest measure his was never the constructive faculty; he never could create an objective character. Of these three tales,<sup>4</sup> perhaps *World's End* comes the nearest to being a success; here, in part, is the country of the Downs, and in the person of the hero, Aymer Malet, we have a shadowy portrait of Jefferies himself. But rank sentimentality, impossible incidents of murder, insanity, and mystery stalk at large through these three long and pathetically painful volumes.

Jefferies arrived at the writer in a curious way, and not at all through the medium that he had wished. He had deluged the London publishers with novels and stories, but in vain. Finally as we have seen, he had been forced to publish at his own expense. His first hearing on merit was by means of a letter of protest that he wrote to the editor of the *London Times*. This was in November, 1872, at an important moment in the great agricultural labourers' strike, then in existence some six months. The labourers of his own county of Wiltshire had not struck, although there was much dissatisfaction and they had sent representatives to the Agricultural Congress held at Leamington during the previous summer.

Jefferies describes in his letter the average Wiltshire peasant as he knew him, as a labourer for his father, and as a neighbour at Coate. It is his food, his clothes, his houses, his wages, his morals that are discussed, simply and with the force of firsthand knowledge. The first letter was followed by two others. They excited much comment and many replies; Lord Shaftesbury, among the great, praised Jefferies. It is not difficult to understand the success of these letters. To the editor of *The Times* it must have seemed that here was a yeoman farmer, of perhaps forty or fifty years old, expressing an opinion born of ultimate and ripe understanding of the economic conditions of which he wrote. The editor was a surprised man to learn that his correspondent was a mere youth of twenty-four. But despite the lucidity, the force and interest of these simple expositions, one is sometimes quite too conscious of the yeoman farmer's point of view, and the yeoman farmer is

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<sup>4</sup> The titles are as follows: *The Scarlet Shawl*, London, 1874; *Restless Human Hearts*, 3 vols., London, 1875; *World's End*, 3 vols., London, 1877.

but the creature of the landlord. Jefferies subsequently in some twenty-five other articles that this success induced him to write, and in his two-volume study of the Wiltshire agricultural labourer, entitled *Hodge and His Master* [sic], never lost the point of view of the landlord. Yet, curious to remark, in his second period as writer, under the stimulation of pain and his sense of mystical insight, and after an intimate contact with the sordidness and poverty of London, he made a right-about turn as regards his position in this particular. In his later work, as for instance in *The Dewy Morn*, a rabid and almost scurrilous attack upon landlordism, he approaches preciously near to preaching modern socialism. *Amaryllis at the Fair* and 'Some Notes on the Labour Question', reprinted in part by Salt in his study of Jefferies, are full of anti-capitalistic and anarchistic doctrines. It would seem, not only in this respect, but in others, that there was a complete metamorphosis of character and thought in the two different periods of his literary career.

One is tempted almost to call the economic writings of Jefferies the best work of his first period. They show such a remarkable advance in technique as compared to the bulky local histories and the mawkish tales; they are sometimes almost brilliant, always rich in facts and clear in exposition. Yet at the best, as Thomas has remarked, they remain but excellent journalism, and, having served their purpose, they can well be forgotten except by the economic specialist. Such a person, searching for the first-hand impressions of a trained observer for some light upon the rural Wiltshire society, will find in these articles and in *Hodge and His Master* a wealth of really significant material.

The labour articles won him admittance to the London magazines and papers. They did more than this; they opened his eyes to the possibility of utilizing in a larger degree Wiltshire as material for his pen. If the men of his county would serve as subject matter, why not the beasts and scenery? He remembered his boyhood notes; he was still the trained observer in the field; even the presence of the great London at Surbiton, where he was living at the time, had not quelled the inborn ardour of a true naturalist; he still continued faithfully to record the bird and flower life about him. But for his first nature articles, he dipped into his old Coate experiences, and in 1875-1876 the *Graphic* published three short essays dealing with Wiltshire. In themselves they are only remarkable as the beginning of a new career. As Thomas well remarks, "They have nothing in them to be compared with the best parts of the early novels, but they are interesting because they are a beginning even more important than the early letters to *The Times*."

The first three articles were soon followed by others in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and immediately it would seem Jefferies conceived the idea of a book or a series of books upon Coate and the Downs. In December, 1876,



writing to Mr. Oswald Crawford, then editor of the *New Quarterly*, he says, 'The great Downs ... are literally teeming with matter for thought.' Later he adds, 'There is a great pond at Coate; I could write a book on it;' which remark is curiously reminiscent of Thoreau and Walden Pond.

*The Gamekeeper at Home* is the first of the projected books. It won him an immediate reputation. The Jefferies of the labour articles and also, it may be added, the Jefferies of the impossible novels that had fared so sorely with the reviewers, was forgotten in hailing this new Jefferies. It is not difficult to understand this. The charm of Coate, its fields, its copses, its birds, its flowers, is perfectly caught and reproduced. Simplicity of style, discursive remarks on all sorts of country lore and country habits, and a sense of perfect familiarity with the subject make *The Gamekeeper* one of the best books of its kind in the language; it is surpassed only by Jefferies' later works in the same series: *The Amateur Poacher*, *Round About a Great Estate*, and in particular *Wild Life in a Southern County*, where to the charm of *The Gamekeeper* is added a distinct intimation in style, and sometimes in thought, of the coming Jefferies of the second period.

The succeeding books in this series already named firmly establish the reputation of their author as a field naturalist. He is more accurate and exact than Thoreau, less the detached philosopher, and certainly happier in having no English Emerson to whom he must needs play the sedulous ape. He is more human than Gilbert White; a greater artist than his fellow Wiltshire naturalist, St. John. Throughout the series, as Thomas has noted, he is always the farmer's son and gamekeeper's friend, not only in his heartiness and woodcraft, but also in his callousness and careless acceptance of things as they are. Mr. Salt, otherwise one of Jefferies' most sympathetic critics, has been unable to reconcile this 'hardened' Jefferies, indifferent to the suffering of animals, and the horrors of the chase, with the quivering sensibility that displays itself in such later work as 'A London Trout' and *The Story of My Heart*. But after all, he was of the soil, a product of his race and environment; it was only later under the lash of the unusual stimulus of a nervous disease and a sense of 'inward revelation' that he arose to anything more than being a careful observer of nature with an unusually happy faculty of recording what he had seen. Yet these four books, together with his *Red Deer*, a study of the wild deer of Exmoor Forest, would secure him a place alongside of Thoreau and White. When, in 1887, he was dying, and writing in the interval of his pain an introduction to *Selborne*, he voiced his regret that White had so neglected the human life of his parish. This accusation can never be brought against Jefferies, since in these books of Wiltshire is to be found not only the portrait of himself but of his family and friends; and predominating

over all is the subtle charm, the quiet beauty of this most rural of rural English countrysides.

In 1881, Jefferies' health began to give way, and hereafter he was to write only with the greatest physical difficulty. In the interval between 1879, the date of the publication of *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and 1883, the date of the publication of *Nature Near London*, his first definite body of essays of reflection and observation, Jefferies had been moved to write two books reminiscent of his boyhood days. They were the volumes, *Wood Magic* (1881) and *Bevis: the Story of a Boy* (1882). The former is also written for children. The two stories are principally interesting as recording for the first time in some definite fashion those states of mystical elation that later were to be the inspiration of *The Story*. It would seem that since his eighteenth year these lapses of temporary consciousness had been recurring, but Jefferies here for the moment evidently recognizes in some degree their extraordinary character. But he seems at this period never to have fully grasped their peculiar nature, nor to have realized their effect upon his style and thought. In *Bevis*, in particular, otherwise a very lively boy's story of Coate Farm, there are several paragraphs of distinctly mystical import; yet he records these lapses of consciousness seemingly in a spirit of curiosity only.

The scope and aim of these two books was never repeated, unless we consider *After London* (1885), an attempt to picture the reversion of England to barbarism, where Felix Aquila, the hero, is a sort of grown-up Bevis, and with much of the latter's spirit of adventure, but with none of his mystical characteristics.

In 1883 there appeared the collection of essays entitled *Nature Near London*. He had exhausted the Wiltshire country; now his note-books of Surbiton were called into play. In these essays the genial humanity, the very youthful atmosphere of the Wiltshire series is gone, to be succeeded by a more cosmopolitan note and a spirit of impatience with some man-made institutions that amounts almost to querulousness. A newer attitude towards animals is observed, too. He is more humane, less the sportsman, more the naturalist. His observations on the atmosphere, the colour and form of clouds, are careful and exact. Then, too, there begin to appear digressions that later were so characteristic of the exuberant style of his last period. He begins to proclaim his philosophy of living, as for instance in the following typical quotation: 'Joy in life; joy in life. The ears listen and want more; the eyes are gratified with gazing, and desire yet further; the nostrils are filled with the sweet odour of flower and spray. The touch, too, has its pleasure, dallying with leaf and flower. Can you not almost grasp the odour-laden air and hold it in the hollow of the hand?' The sense of colour is here given its first play; the heightened sensitiveness of his mind, due to the progression of

his disease, seems to affect all of his sense impressions, and in the succeeding volumes of essays one finds Jefferies escaping more and more from the point of view of the mere observer, 'the walker about,' to become the thinker and rhapsodist. Thus it is that the volumes, *The Life of the Fields* (1884), *The Open Air* (1887), *Field and Hedgerow* (1889), published after his death, reveal a newer Jefferies than the one shown in the Wiltshire essays and the *Nature Near London*. In these three volumes are contained his best works. Some, of course, of the essays are frankly observational; but generally observation induces reflection; reflection gives way to ecstasy, and as a result, we have in such essays as 'The Pageant of Summer' and 'Meadow Thoughts' whole passages of rhythmic splendour shot with colour, that merit, in the real sense of the word, being called prose poems. But there came also moments of bitterness, when all the light and movement of the out-of-doors cannot thrill him into utterance. To physical pain is added a sort of pessimism engendered of disappointment in the world about him. He is to die; the birds will know him not; they will miss him, together with the flowers; and so, with 'a supreme and pathetic egoism,' he exclaims, 'All the grasses of the meadow were my pets; I loved them all; and perhaps that was why I never had a 'pet,' never cultivated a flower, never kept a caged bird, or any creature. Why keep pets when every wild free hawk that passed overhead in the air was mine? ... To-day, through the window pane, I see a lark high up against the grey cloud, and hear his song... without my book and pencil and observing eye, how does he understand that the hour has come? ... Without me to tell him how does this lark to-day that I hear through the window know that it is his hour?'<sup>5</sup>

Another and yet much the same note is struck in the essay, 'My Old Village'. The man is dying. He realizes that he can no longer record the things that he loves. He cannot fulfil his destiny of interpretation; he cannot return to his native village. He has been away ten years and now news has come that in the old village all has changed. People are dead, even the trees are gone. 'I have heard that the oaks are down... There are no such oaks anywhere else—none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads... How often have I looked at oaks since, and yet have never been able to get the same effect from them... The brooks have ceased to run... The brook is dead... Nothing but my own ghost to meet me by every hedge... And perhaps, in course of time, I shall find out also, when I pass away physically, that as a matter of fact there was never any earth.'

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<sup>5</sup> 'Hours of Spring'.

'My Old Village' is perhaps the finest of his essays, in its naturalism, in its pathos, in its self-revelation of the man of sorrow and pain. The earth-passion of 'The Pageant of Summer', the bitter-sweetness of the 'Hours of Spring' has departed forever; not even the mystic fervour that we shall presently find in *The Story of My Heart* is here to cheer him. And yet the record is perfect. The development of a personality has been almost completed; the Jefferies of the impossible stories, even the delightful and very human Jefferies of *The Gamekeeper*, is hardly to be discerned in the tragic figure of this last essay.

Some mention has already been made of his two later novels, *The Dewy Morn* (1884), and *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887). Both mark incomparably an advance in technique; but neither is perfect in form. Both are true only in so far as they reflect his own personal experiences and thoughts. Jefferies could never escape himself; no man could be less objective. These novels are discursive, the element of plot is almost *nil*, and long digressions to defend or advance pet theories mar the structure of the whole. Yet the books are significant by virtue of their faithful rendition of the author himself.

*The Dewy Morn*, as the earlier production, reflects the same joyousness in life and existence as characterizes 'The Pageant of Summer'. Its heroine Felise, resident on the Downs, is but another conception of the girl in Meredith's 'Love in the Valley'. She is superbly human; she is Greek in thought and physique. In truth, it is in *The Dewy Morn* that one finds the earth-spirit, together with the influence of Greek thought, the most apparent. 'To be, to live, to have an intense enjoyment in every inspiration of the breath; in every beat of the pulse; in every movement of the limbs; in every sense.' Thus speaks Felise; it is the essence of the book and of Jefferies' own desires.

But there is something else besides mere beauty of living expounded; Jefferies finds time to give voice to the new set of social opinions, very different indeed from those that characterize the calm complacency of *Hodge and His Master*. In this book Jefferies was the landlord's man; in *The Dewy Morn* he is the personification of hatred against the landlord and the system that makes him possible. Satire and invective, all the weapons of his new bitterness against society, are employed to their sharpest uses. And as one reads, there is no consciousness of incongruity between the somewhat sensual note struck in the personification of Felise and this voicement of class hatred. Rather both things express perfectly the new Jefferies; the Jefferies who is feeling anew; who is seeking a way towards perfection — personal perfection as found in the beauty of the physical and the exaltation of the senses, and that inner perfection and satisfaction which would come in eliminating from society all class distinctions and class prejudices.

*Amaryllis at the Fair* is really a picture of Coate Farm. The father, mother, relatives, the fields and Downs, the birds and wild flowers are jumbled together much as they remained in Jefferies' memory. In this novel Jefferies is writing in something of the same spirit that characterizes 'My Old Village'. He succeeds in making Coate and its farm and its people live again. In *Amaryllis*, although a girl, we have in good measure a sketch of Jefferies himself; the old man, Iden, is his father, true to life. But Jefferies cannot confine himself to Coate; he was dying, as he wrote; bitterness against the doctors who had failed to cure him and the world of London that had failed to recognize him properly is expressed again and again. Here he is an out-and-out socialist; he cries for reform; he gibes at the capitalists; organized charity becomes the target for one of the most masterly pieces of satirical invective in modern English; his description of the squalor and disease of the London poorer classes is a match for Zola in its terrible realism.

I have purposely reserved till the last any consideration of *The Story of My Heart*, both because it is the most important of Jefferies' works, and also because the task of presenting its contents in anything like a condensed and intelligible fashion is difficult. *The Story* yet remains to be discussed by some one cognisant of philosophical distinctions and mystical phenomena. Thomas has attempted it; he has not entirely succeeded. Besant avoids the difficulty; indeed, in his haste to issue his volume, he never even recognized the fact that Jefferies was in any sense a mystical subject.<sup>6</sup> Salt, alone, has perhaps come the nearest to setting forth Jefferies in his true aspect as mystic and thinker, but his account is too short.<sup>7</sup>

*The Story* was written in 1881-1882 and was published in 1883. It purports to be a revelation of the inner Jefferies, a confession and a description of the stages by which he reached, through mystical insight, the ideas of his later life. His general aim is 'to free thought from every trammel, with the view of its entering upon another and larger series of ideas than those which have occupied the brain of man so many years. He believes that there is a whole world of ideas outside and beyond those which now exercise us.'

He confesses that his mystical experiences began at eighteen, but it was only later, when his memory, stabbed with pain, took him back to his windy Downs or that he found himself by the sea—and the sea and the Downs in their mental effect and fascination of the senses are much the same—that he

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<sup>6</sup> Besant throughout his study presents a rather sentimental and distorted Jefferies: for instance, the characterization of *The Story* as the result of a deliberate and philosophical introspection is quite wide of the mark. There is nothing of deliberate and ordered thinking in this document.

<sup>7</sup> For an interesting though somewhat cursory comparison of the mysticism of Jefferies with that of certain Hindu writers, see an unsigned article in the *Edinburgh Review*, June, 1900. There is also a brief mention of Jefferies, the mystic, in Evelyn Underhill's book, *Mysticism*, London, 1912.

came to enjoy longer periods of mystic trance. So it should be understood that, although *The Story* purports to be a record of his life for eighteen years, its major portion is simply a record of later psychical experiences, in themselves larger and more intense repetitions of previous trances. Yet it has been only of late years that the fact has been recognized that Jefferies was in any sense a mystic. William James, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, was one of the first to estimate the real character of the revelation contained in *The Story of My Heart*. Before, it had been characterized as the work of a crazy man, quite impossible to understand as coming from the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*. However, if the trouble had been but taken it would have been easy to establish from internal evidence that *The Story* was but the record of a mystical experience and written under the impulse if not under the spell of an abnormal mental condition.<sup>8</sup>

There are some interesting questions of psychology involved that I cannot pretend to discuss. But it seems probable that the Downs, with their haunting solitude, with their rushing winds, with their play of light and colour, all factors recognized by psychologists as probable inducers of the mystical state in the proper subjects, played the major part in inducing the first trances. Then, too, Jefferies' susceptible nervous organization, his conscious habit of introspection, the probable mental abnormalities, inherited characteristics, all had their part in producing these states. We know very definitely that he lost himself most easily either atop the highest summit of the Downs or in sight of the sea. The trances were of varying duration; their characteristics of approach were always the same: a desire to fuse himself with earth, intense moments of prayer—and the final abandonment of self. In this process every sense was sharpened, he seemed actually to have the power, the actual physical power, of projecting himself beyond the limits of time and space. Invariably he emerged from his trances elated and uplifted.

In his passionate prayers to find a new life beyond present conceptions, Jefferies postulates three things which he expresses as follows: 'First, I desire that I might do or find something to exalt the soul ... Secondly, I desire to be able to do something for the flesh, to make a discovery or perfect a method by which the fleshly body might enjoy more pleasure, longer life, and suffer less pain. Thirdly, to construct a more flexible engine to carry into execution the design of the will.' Characteristically enough, in his development of the two first ideas which he himself considers the most important,—the third idea never has been understood as to its exact significance in Jefferies' mind,—he reverses the announced order and prays first for the perfection of

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<sup>8</sup> There is no evidence to indicate that Jefferies ever recognised the real nature of his trances.

the body. Here, as in his plea for a larger soul-life, Jefferies seeks his inspiration from the beauty of the earth. There are curious echoes of Greek thought and philosophy, the whole hopelessly obscured in the rush and turmoil of his elation. Nothing is ordered; all is rhapsodical. It is perhaps not necessary to discuss certain other ideas contained in the story. Suffice it to say that he rejects the idea of the Deity; the idea of immortality; he flies into a fit of fanaticism in attacking the doctrine of evolution. It is well perhaps to note this latter, since it betrays a curious inconsistency with certain of his doctrines set forth in earlier essays, particularly in 'Nature and Eternity'. Here, Jefferies puts forth the thesis that man and the animals are one, sharing in common the earth. In *The Story*, in his rejection of evolution as something monstrous and illogical, he takes pains to emphasize the isolation of man from the animals, and the indifference of earth and the elements to both. But this difference and apparent inconsistency in his thoughts can be traced, it seems to me, to the difference in the moods and in the physical temper of the man that controlled, on the one hand, the writing of such essays as 'Nature and Eternity' and 'The Pageant of Summer', entirely optimistic, the first almost accepting evolution and its principle, and, on the other hand, *The Story of My Heart*, with its utter and frank pessimism that rejects all idea either of design, of goodness, or of evolution in Nature.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it is possible to distinguish sharply, not only in this particular but in others, two distinct personalities in Jefferies; and this difference in personalities can only be explained, it seems to me, by understanding the physical and psychical history of the man in both periods of his life.

But after all Jefferies can lay no claim to being a philosopher, and *The Story of My Heart* lives not so much for its attempted philosophizing as for its insistence upon the necessity of physical perfection—with constant reference to the Greeks as models. Live in the open air; seek the sun and sea; know the earth, and though she be unfeeling, she will, on demand, give health and mental stimulation to him who will ask.

It is a remarkable revelation; and the marvellous lift of some of the descriptive passages is unexcelled in modern English prose. If there be passages that really deserve the designation of prose poetry, such passages can be found in *The Story*. And back of it all, one is conscious of the innate sincerity and inevitableness of this confession; it may not be philosophy, but it reveals a soul seeking to find itself.

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<sup>9</sup> This note of pessimism is act sustained throughout *The Story*; there is also an insistence upon the power and necessity of man to perfect himself by rising superior to natural hindrances through the agency of 'beauty-worship.' These contradictions of doctrine proclaim in themselves the sort of impulse that animates this book. It bears no evidence of ordered thinking, Besant notwithstanding.

Masterman, in his penetrating study, *The Social Condition of England*, has hailed Jefferies, with others, as the exponent of a new order of living, one that would proclaim the triumphant affirmation of the greatness of present things. Discover the splendour of the world, the earth itself, the sky, the sea; clasp them all and never let go the joys of present existence in the midst of all these splendid beauties. This is perhaps an adequate statement of what Jefferies has to say as his final message. But there are many who do not know him; many who refuse to accept him; there are those who can never dissociate the Jefferies of the first period from the very different Jefferies of the second period. To some critics, and we must count Saintsbury and Henley among these, he will remain but an extremely accurate and delicately fanciful popular naturalist, gifted only with the faculty of making others see and feel the simple beauties of field and wood. To others, however, he can be nothing else but the Jefferies of *The Story*, splendid figure, illogical though he may be, yet fit to be worshipped alongside of Rousseau, and Whitman,—a prophet and a superman.

But it would seem that aside from these two opinions another is tenable, one that will perhaps justify in a measure the patient study and tempered admiration that Thomas and other biographers have bestowed upon him. Jefferies in his progression of character, if the expression may be used, offers an interesting problem both in the realm of literature and psychology. From the crude sentimentalist of the first tales to the out-and-out mystic of *The Story* is indeed a long leap and in the tracing and in the comparative study of these various stages of his intellectual and spiritual development one not only sees the man in his proper perspective but gains also, it would seem, a newer and saner opinion of his ultimate place in literature.



# Afterword: Clinton Joseph Masseck

*Peter Robins*

## TO RICHARD JEFFERIES

OH, POET, thou one of fields and woods, thou son  
Of wind-swept, sun-kissed downs, who loved the earth  
And sky, the whole deep universe:—thy birth  
In life was quite beyond the common run  
Of men; thy soul with Nature's soul was one, –  
For thou at dusk did love to hear the mirth  
That dwells within the throstle's sound, since worth  
Of life, for thee in Nature, was sought and won.  
Ever and forever thy message goes  
To greet those men who love the earth and sea,  
Who feel with thee and Thoreau dear, that Life  
Doth dwell in Nature's heart, and Destiny  
And Truth belongs to him alone who knows  
The Way and looks beyond earth's petty strife.

Masseck wrote this quaint paean to Jefferies in 1907 when he was studying for a degree at Tufts College, Medford, Massachusetts. Although he had also contributed poems and short stories to Tufts' journal, *Tuftonian*, he privately published a slim volume of poetry, *Some Few Verses*, in which this poem with others was published, including 'On Reading Keats', 'A Song of the Spring' and 'Out in the Dusk'.<sup>1</sup> His Foreword declared that these verses, 'have been written for my own satisfaction and published on the same score. Primarily, as scrutiny of any sort will proclaim, they are first efforts and should be so judged.' The collection was dedicated to A.D.L.,<sup>2</sup> a classmate's sister, whom he married four years later, suggesting that, apart from being an expression of self-promotion, it was likely also to have been a billet-doux.

The origins of how Masseck discovered Jefferies are vague but with Thoreau having been a local author Masseck must have often read comparisons with Jefferies, bringing them together in his own 'To Richard Jefferies'. He must also have seen the pirated works of Jefferies that had been published since 1896 by Thomas B. Mosher of Portland, Maine, and a new

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<sup>1</sup> Clinton Joseph Masseck, *Some Few Verses*, privately printed, 12pp, Somerville, Massachusetts, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Annie Laura Danforth, b. 1888, Maine.

edition of *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts*,<sup>3</sup> a collection of ninety-six extracts from Jefferies' later works, was issued in the same year Masseck published *Some Few Verses*.



Cover of *Some Few Verses*

Masseck graduated from Tufts in 1908 gaining an AB *Lit. Ed.* (the equivalent of our Bachelor of Arts) and went on to nearby Harvard where he completed an AM (Master of Arts), returning to Tufts to become an instructor in English and oratory.

Clinton Joseph Masseck was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on 24 February 1886, the only son of Clinton Sewell and Mary Elmore Masseck. His great-grandfather, Joseph Masseck, a merchant, had immigrated to the US from France, settling in Saco, Maine.<sup>4</sup> Early in the new century the family moved to Nashua, New Hampshire, at the confluence of the Nashua and Merrimack rivers, where Clinton Snr. established a successful restaurant and catering business on Main Street.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Jefferies, *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts*, Selected by Thomas Coke Watkins. Thomas B. Mosher, Portland, Maine, 1903, 1904, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> *The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy: First Families of America*, Vol. 4, 1930, The Verkus Company, Chicago, Illinois.



Masseck family taken in 1901 at Manchester, New Hampshire.

Left to right: Clinton Sewell Masseck (1861-1923), Clinton Joseph Masseck (son of Clinton Sewell Masseck—1886-1948), Joseph Sewell Masseck (father of Clinton Sewell—1838-1914), Rev. Frank Lincoln Masseck (brother of Clinton Sewell Masseck—1865-1931)<sup>5</sup>

In June 1911, Clinton Joseph Masseck and Annie Laura Danforth, a teacher, were married by his uncle, the Rev. Frank L. Masseck, at Somerville, Massachusetts. The *Nashua Telegraph*, keen to record the life-events of the Massecks, reported:

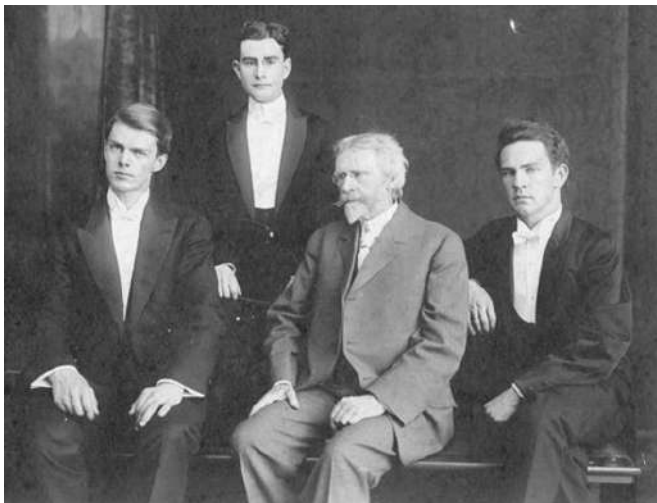
The bride and groom sailed Tuesday on the *Franconia* for a year abroad, spending the first two weeks in England and the remainder in France where Mr. Masseck will take up a special course at the University of France (*sic*).<sup>6</sup>

Tufts has a long-established reputation for its internationalism and study-abroad courses with strong links to the University of Paris, where Masseck was to study for his doctorate. A proficiency in French would have been necessary and it's possible that the Massecks, given their French heritage, kept the French language alive, at least within the family circle. Masseck's 60,000-word thesis on Jefferies was written entirely in French.

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<sup>5</sup> Photograph courtesy of Thomas Masseck Pooley.

<sup>6</sup> *Nashua Telegraph*, 30 June 1911.



Tufts Debating Team, 1908, with Masseck far right.<sup>7</sup>

At Whitsun in 1912, Masseck took a break from his studies and returned to England to visit Coate and Liddington. At Coate he met Lottie Lawrence, a daughter of the reservoir-keeper, who helped him with directions to Liddington. Had Masseck visited a little earlier he would have been introduced to a fellow-American, Kate Tryon, who was spending the summer in the area, staying with the Lawrence family, to sketch and paint 'Jefferies Land'. But, Tryon had been away from Coate, staying at Bishopstone, when Masseck called, an episode she recalled in her memoir:

"You've missed seeing a great many Jefferiesites by being away from the Reservoir these two weeks. There was a young man from the States—your own Boston, too!—living now in Paris, who has just written a book about Jefferies," Jack [Lawrence] told me.

"Lot will tell you. She walked out with him around the Reservoir and showed him the nearest way to get to Liddington Hill by Day House Lane. It was one of those showery days. He must have had a good wetting before he got back."

Neither of the girls [Lottie and Pollie Lawrence] could give a satisfying account of the young American...he could stay but a day and that day was bad. He said he must visit Liddington Hill if he did not see anything else. He had left them with a slip of paper from his notebook with the title of his book and his own name:

*Étude d'une Personnalité*  
Clinton Masseck

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<sup>7</sup> Photograph courtesy of Thomas Masseck Pooley.

“Why this is French!—*Study of a Personality*.”

“Yes, we understood him to say it was all written in French.”

“Well, I wish that English girls were more inquisitive. I never could stand a mystery. You will see me pine and die.”<sup>8</sup>

Masseck would have been greatly disappointed with a wet day on Liddington Hill if he had hoped to share Jefferies’ own transcendental experience there, described in the opening chapter of *The Story of My Heart*.

Masseck’s thesis, for which he was awarded a PhD, was published in Paris in May 1913 by Émile Larose, whose list was mainly concerned with works relating to the French colonies but the publishing of dissertations originating from the University of Paris formed a regular part of the firm’s output.

In the preface to his thesis Masseck acknowledged that he had relied on the works of the trinity of Jefferies’ biographers, Walter Besant, H.S. Salt and Edward Thomas as well as corresponding with C.J. Longman, Jefferies’ cousin James Cox and others. Thomas appears to have been particularly generous with his help as Masseck recognises,

the debt owed to the author Mr. Edward Thomas cannot be paid by a few simple words of gratitude. For the amiability of Mr. Thomas lending us several letters from Jefferies for his work which has provided us with so much information and suggestions, the author offers him heartfelt thanks.

To distinguish his work from that of Thomas, Masseck states in his introduction that, ‘Thomas’s work remains essentially a biography, ours will instead study the evolution of a character and as a man and a writer.’

*The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Athenaeum*<sup>9</sup> reviewed the book and it was noticed by the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History*

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<sup>8</sup> Kate Tryon, *Adventures in the Vale of the White Horse “Jefferies Land”*, Petton Books, Faringdon, 2010. pp 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 26 July 1913: Masseck (Clinton Joseph), Richard Jefferies, *Étude d’une Personnalité*. Paris, Larose :

‘Dr. Masseck calls his work the study of a personality but he does not succeed in giving us much sense of intimacy with Jefferies. Indeed, his treatment, if it has the merits, does not escape the defects of an academic compilation. A series of well-considered chapters deals with the influences of environment and heredity, with childhood and education, youthful tendencies, first efforts with the pen, and so forth, the climax being a review of *The Story of My Heart* and the conclusion of a formal summary entitled ‘The True Jefferies.’ There is method and there is insight in all this; but the first quality predominates over the second, and we put the book down, feeling that the author’s contribution has amounted to little more than the construction of a tasteful frame for his quotations. Among other predecessors he draws largely, and with full recognition, from the penetrative work of Mr. Edward Thomas. A notable feature of the volume is its excellent bibliography.’

*Magazine*.<sup>10</sup> Edward Thomas wrote a 12-page review but it was never published.<sup>11</sup>

On returning to America, Masseck joined the arts faculty at Washington University at St. Louis, Missouri as an instructor in English, where he was one of ten in the Department of English. In April, 1914 an article by Masseck was published in *Washington University Studies* with the title 'Richard Jefferies: An Attempt at an Estimate'.<sup>12</sup> This was an abridged version of his thesis and remains the only published English translation of his study of Jefferies [republished in the previous article of this issue].

Life in the Mid-West must have proved conducive to family life as a daughter, named Ruth, was born the following year and in 1916 he edited *The Dial*, a literary journal, as well as contributing two poems lauding the natural world to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.<sup>13</sup> But Masseck's domestic idyll was unexpectedly interrupted when on 6 April 1917 President Woodrow Wilson declared that the US would join its allies—Britain, France and Russia—to fight in the war in Europe. In May the government passed the Selective Service Act which compelled men aged between 21-30 to enlist in the National Army. Masseck was just overage, and with a child under 16, he could have deferred enlistment. Plain patriotism may have been the spur, perhaps enhanced by the thought that it was France that needed additional forces, to Masseck enlisting with the Kansas 353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 89<sup>th</sup> Division, formed in September 1917, when he was commissioned as Captain of Infantry.<sup>14</sup>

The US started the war with only a small army, men principally qualified to fight Indians and Mexicans. These and the new recruits required lengthy training for a different kind of warfare. By May 1918 there were 1,000,000 US troops stationed in France.

The 353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry sailed from New York 3 June 1918 bound for Liverpool. The official history of the regiment recorded that:

The men were mixed in holds called "compartments" below. It seemed impossible for the required numbers to get into the space allocated, much less live there. But officers and men must stay below until the ship was completely loaded. Shouts of "Air," "Let me out," came up through the hatches. "Stay down," was the order. Every

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<sup>10</sup> *TLS* 14 Aug 1913; *The Athenaeum* 26 Jul 1913; *WANHM* Vol. 38 1913-14.

<sup>11</sup> Review of *Richard Jefferies: Étude d'une personnalité* by Clinton Joseph Masseck; handwritten manuscript/draft with extensive revisions, 12 pages, undated. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>12</sup> *Washington University Studies*, April, 1914, Vol. I, pp.242-263, Washington University.

<sup>13</sup> *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Aug 1916, Ralph Fletcher Seymour, Chicago.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Thomas was also conflicted regarding enlistment. *q.v.* Edna Longley, *Edward Thomas, The Annotated Collected Poems*, Bloodaxe Books, 2008, pp.17-18.

man was soon busy fixing his hammock to the hooks in the ceiling and adjusting his life belt, assuring himself of whatever comfort and safety was available for the voyage.<sup>15</sup>

In these circumstances, Masseck must have brought to mind his previous Atlantic crossing, on the luxurious *Franconia*, only seven years before.

After docking at Liverpool on 16 June the troops moved to Winchester for a few days before embarking at Southampton for the crossing to France. It wasn't until September that the regiment went into action at the battle of Saint-Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne offensive, which continued until the armistice of 11 November. During these engagements Masseck was promoted to Major and was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for valour. Although the war had ended the regiment formed part of the army of occupation and it was not until May 1919 that Masseck and the regiment returned to America. In Atchinson, Kansas, Major Masseck led the 89<sup>th</sup> Division homecoming parade before the regiment was disbanded.

Masseck didn't return to Washington University but took the position of Director of Advertising Sales at Capper Farm Press, Topeka, Kansas, publisher of a weekly farming magazine. In addition he taught advertising to undergraduates and Topeka businessmen in the journalism department of Washburn College. Literature was still an interest and his membership of the Kansas Authors Club gave him the opportunity to give occasional lectures to members and to meet writers, playwrights and poets and discuss their work.

Masseck's military experience, albeit a short one, perhaps suppressed his desire to write poetry for no published work has been traced after 1916. But America did have its war poets, among them Alan Seeger, John Allan Wyeth and Herbert Kauffman, though they are less celebrated than their British counterparts.

In the summer of 1929, Masseck left the wide plains and wheatfields of Kansas to join the advertising agency H. K. McCann in New York. McCann had major clients such as Standard Oil and a network of offices across North America as well as branches in Berlin, London and Paris. The start of The Depression affected budgets for advertising and agencies began to reduce staff levels, McCann merging with The Erickson Company in 1930.

The census records for 1930, show Masseck as living alone at 34, 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, though described as married. At some time in the following decade the Massecks divorced and Masseck's status is recorded as so in the 1940 census. He was then boarding at the George Washington Hotel, Manhattan, a popular residence occupied by writers, musicians and

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Frank Dienst, *History of the 353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment 89<sup>th</sup> Division, National Army, September 1917-June 1919*, p. 22, 1921, The 353<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Society, Wichita, Kansas.

poets, among them W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood and Benjamin Britten stayed there when visiting New York.

In the early 1940s, Masseck formed his own agency, Van Dolen, Givaudan & Masseck. While there an old friend from St. Louis asked Masseck if he could give his son a job. The son was the twenty-seven-year-old William S. Burroughs, as yet unpublished, who was taken on as a copywriter. According to a biographer of Burroughs, 'Bill liked Masseck very much; like Bill he was a confirmed atheist and they used to go our drinking together.'<sup>16</sup> After Pearl Harbor, Burroughs quit the agency to enlist in the US army.

Clinton Joseph Masseck died in Manhattan 26 June 1948 aged 62. He was laid to rest in the family plot in Woodlawn Cemetery, Nashua, on 29 June to the sound of gunfire, as the *Nashua Telegraph* reported: 'Military honours were given by a firing squad from Fort Banks, Winthrop, Mass. The squad was under the direction of Sgt George H. Webster of Hudson while Pfc Paul Haggard was the bugler.'<sup>17</sup>



Masseck family grave, Woodlawn Cemetery, Nashua, New Hampshire.

A verse from his last published poem, 'At Thirty He Sings of a Day in Spring',<sup>18</sup> perhaps serves as his epitaph:

Perhaps they knew  
That dark would find me  
Waking from my dreams  
Of meadows infinite and eternal.  
Greener far than the meadows of the earth,  
Where I could run forever.

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Miles, *William S. Burroughs: A Life*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014, Ch.7.

<sup>17</sup> *Nashua Telegraph* 29 Jun 1948

<sup>18</sup> *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Aug 1916, Ralph Fletcher Seymour, Chicago.



# Richard Jefferies launches an American Collector's Passion

Philip R. Bishop

It was in 1985 that I had begun what some may call a 'change in life' or others a 'career crisis'. I still think upon it as an awakening. The activities of that year led me upon a path which included writing a good bit of poetry and epistles, composing music for piano, examining mystic traditions, and reading Walt Whitman and Thoreau. It was also the year that I discovered the Mosher Press<sup>1</sup> through one book which greatly excited me: Richard Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart*. 'My god,' I exclaimed to myself, 'he's saying some of the things I'm feeling'. I so loved the little book that I bought eight more titles by British authors, all from the Mosher Press, and all from what was called the 'Old World Series'. That was the start of a love affair with the Mosher Press which would lead to assembling what is now the world's largest research collection (ca. 4,500 items) of all things related to this Portland, Maine publisher who produced an exquisite array of 783 publications including those issued in fourteen different series from 1891-1923, all reflecting England's national literature and book design, primarily issued for an American public. This affair of the heart also blossomed into contributions of many essays and articles on some aspects of the Mosher Press and led to a major publication: the bio-bibliography, *Thomas Bird Mosher—Pirate Prince of Publishers*, co-published by the Oak Knoll Press and the British Library in 1998. While sponsoring a scholarly website on the Press, I continue to publish and to assist scholars in aspects of their work, or with loaning material for public exhibitions. This all started, however, with just that one little book, *The Story of My Heart* by Richard Jefferies.

For readers unacquainted with the Mosher Press publication of some of Richard Jefferies' works, here are the particulars:

## Books published:

1. *Bits of Oak Bark and Meadow Thoughts* (in the Brocade Series) 1900, 1901, 1907 (Bishop 45-45.2)
2. *Hours of Spring and Wild Flowers* (Brocade Series), 1899, 1900, 1903, 1910 (Bishop 157-157.3)
3. *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* (Vest Pocket Series) 1903, 1904,

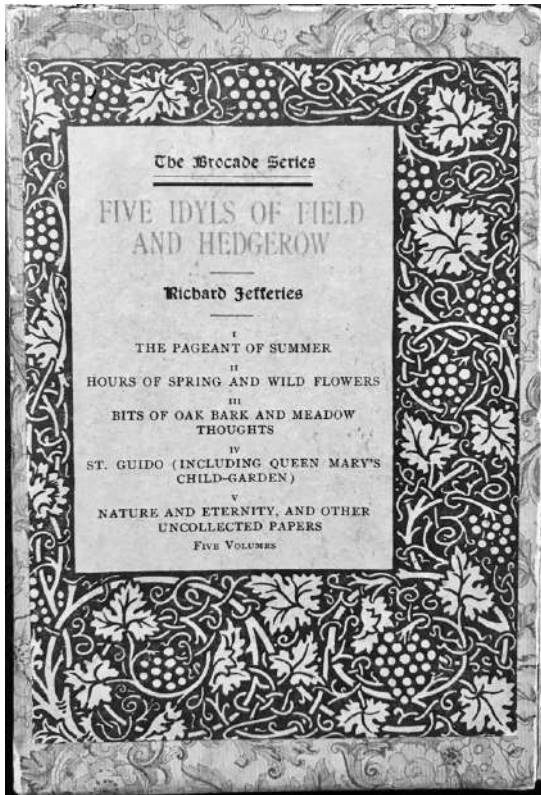
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<sup>1</sup> For internet access to the Mosher Press website use [www.ThomasBirdMosher.net](http://www.ThomasBirdMosher.net)

- 1907 (Bishop 210-210.2)
4. *Nature and Eternity: With other Uncollected Papers* (Brocade Series) 1902, 1907 (Bishop 269-269.1)
  5. *The Pageant of Summer* (Brocade Series) 1896, a 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1904, 1910 (Bishop 282-282.9)
  6. *The Pageant of Summer* (Vest Pocket Series) 1905, 1909 (Bishop 283-283.1)
  7. *Saint Guido* (along with Dr. Brown's *Queen Mary's Child-Garden* (Brocade Series) 1901, 1903, 1908 (Bishop 340-340.2)
  8. *The Story of My Heart—My Autobiography* (Old Word Series) 1898, 1900, 1905, 1909 (Bishop 388-388.3) N.B.: 1909 ed. with new Preface confirming RJ's Free-Thinker status, largely negating Mosher's previous Preface. In a letter to Dr. A.J. Marks (Bishop collection), dated 9 May 1910, Mosher wrote: '... I have just issued a new edition of "The Story of My Heart" by Jefferies. The only difference is that I have substituted a new and improved preface which states the real condition of his mind at the close of his life. It has been heretofore supposed that he went back to the Christian faith.'

Mosher offered his customers the five Brocade Series of books in a special matching brocade covered, cabinet-style box with the outside of the box bearing the label 'Five Idyls of Field and Hedgerow' (pictured below).





Appearances in *The Bibelot*, Mosher's little literary magazine:

1. 'Sentences from The Story of My Heart' in Vol. II, March 1896, [iv], 57-80. (Bishop 19)
2. 'Saint Guido' in Vol. IV, July 1898, pp. 219-255. (Bishop 21)
3. 'The Field-Play' in Vol. VI, July 1900, pp. 215-254. (Bishop 23)

Minor appearances:

1. Brief selection in Fiona Macleod's *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* (Vest Pocket) 1908 (Bishop 21)
2. Quote from Jefferies in 'The Mosher Books' catalogue for 1910 (Bishop 254)

The Mosher Press Collection contains not only the publications of Thomas Bird Mosher in regular paper editions and in the more limited Japan vellum issuances, but additionally many of Mosher's publications printed on 'pure' vellum. There are sub-collections including the Mosher Books bound in fine

decorated leather bindings, books from Mosher's personal library, association copies, hand-illuminated copies of the Mosher Books, manuscripts and correspondence, reference books, and a wide variety of ephemera and office related material. An example of the latter is a large scrapbook volume containing a tribute poem which to my knowledge has never been published. The author of this poem is only designated by his/her initials 'J.M.B.' and, after a good bit of research, still remains a mystery. A picture of the original holograph poem pasted into the Mosher Press's scrapbook volume is reproduced on p.133; my transcription of the same follows.

To Richard Jefferies

When thou didst touch with fingers soft with love  
The first wan snowdrop when the snow was gone,  
Or when, o'er bowered with the silver tone  
Of thrushes in the lime trees arched above  
The old park lane, or, by the hedged highway,  
Thou didst inspire the fresh, damp, forest breath,  
The wisdom and the wonder and the faith  
Thou knewest, and the sunshine of the day.  
The mystery of the undying past,  
The fragrance of crushed flowers vanished,  
The oneness of these years and all the past  
Of years to come and years long dim and dead,  
Was plain unto thine eyes, until at last,  
Thou sleptest, while the timespan dreamless sped.

J. M. B.

Thomas Bird Mosher's holograph appears just above the poem. He asks some recipient: 'I like this, don't you? Can you decypher the last line? T'. Mosher only used the initial 'T' (for Tom) when writing to his closest friends, but to suggest whom that might have been is only conjecture. So, the poem's appearance is mysterious all-round. The only thing definite is that Mosher never used it in any of his publications, and a small team of scholars has been unable to locate its appearance elsewhere. Incidentally, the folio scrapbook volume also contains paper clippings of articles written on Richard Jefferies, and reviews of Mosher's books by Jefferies.

I like this, don't you?  
Can you decipher the last line?

To Richard Jeffries.

When thou didst touch with fingers soft with love  
The first wannsnowdrop when the snow was gone,  
Or when, o'erbowered with the silver tone  
Of thrushes in the limestrees arched above  
The old park lane, or, by the hedged highway,  
Thou didst inspire the fresh, damp, forest breath,  
The wisdom and the wonder and the faith  
Thou knewest, and the sunshine of the day.  
The mystery of the undying past,  
The fragrance of crushed flowers vanished,  
The owners of these years and all the vast  
Of years to come and years long dim and dead,  
Was plain unto thine eyes, until at last,  
Thou sleptest, while the time-span dreamless sped.

J. M. B.

Another item of note is Mosher's copy of his *Standard Diary and Daily Reminder* for 1901. In this volume, taken along to England, Mosher noted his meeting with Mrs. Jessie Jefferies on Thursday, 18 April 1901 in London. On 4 January 1902 she wrote to Mosher indicating:

I cannot tell you how pleased I was to get your letter & the exquisite little volumes that accompanied it. They are really beautiful. I have forwarded one set to my sister in law (Mrs Billing) & she is very delighted & thinks it a 'most dainty little edition' which indeed it is. What pleasure it would have given my Husband could he have foreseen his work would have been admired & appreciated in your country... Phyllis & I often talk of the pleasant time we spent with Mrs Mosher & yourself in London...<sup>2</sup>

In an unsigned 16 February 1911 letter (draft?) from Mosher to the editors of *The Publishers' Circular* he states:

Something was paid also by me to Mrs. Richard Jefferies not because I was obliged to pay it but because I wanted to do so. She had no rights as I understand it that even an English publisher was bound to respect, much less an American. (Houghton Library, MS Am 1096-1054)

There have been other Richard Jefferies related materials that have come into the collection over the years. One is a volume by Edward R. Bigelow entitled *Walking: A Fine Art...* (Salem, MA: Cassino, [1907]) inscribed to Mr. T.B. Mosher 'In a special token of appreciation of his interest in Thoreau and Jefferies... Mar 21, 1911' accompanied by a letter from Bigelow inviting him to become a member of The Agassiz Association of which Bigelow was president. Speaking of Mosher's library, it should be noted that there is record that he had seventeen London imprints authored by Jefferies (plus ten unidentified titles), and nine biographical books on Jefferies. A copy of *Field and Hedgerow* (London, 1889) had an Autograph Manuscript Poem 'My Chaffinch' laid into this volume which contained the printed version of that poem. Walter Besant's *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (London, 1888) is recorded as containing a letter from Besant to Mosher.

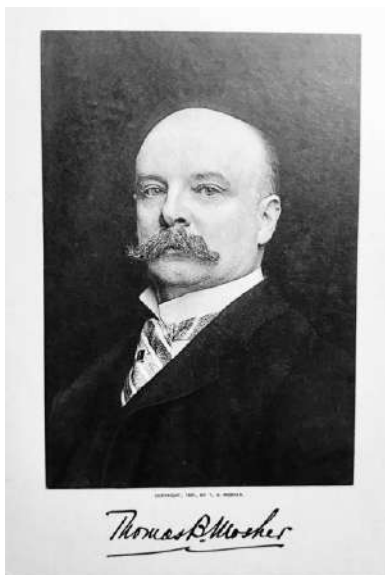
There have also been some Jefferies/Mosher titles which have been specially rebound and are now in the collection. A copy of *The Pageant of Summer* (1905) was bound in full dark green gilt decorated morocco by Frances Tomlinson with the inscription 'With love to Helena Gavin from M.F.F. The little volume was bound by my friend Frances Tomlinson, M'. Tomlinson was of La Jolla, California. She was a pupil of Helen B. Haskell (later Noyes) of New York and of Emily Preston (also of New York) who was

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<sup>2</sup> Houghton Library, MS Am 1096-753; here quoted with family permission. Complete text of letter reproduced on p.140.

a student of Cobden-Sanderson. Another is a copy of *The Story of My Heart* in three-quarter morocco bound by the Harcourt Bindery of Boston, Massachusetts for the Kaufmann Department Store in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But the most important binding is that which brought my Mosher collecting full circle because it involved a copy of *The Story of My Heart*.

From 1988 to 1992 I had an ongoing correspondence with the then foremost collector of the Mosher Press: Norman H. Strouse, author of the Mosher biography, *The Passionate Pirate* (Bird & Bull Press, 1964). Strouse collected a wide variety of books, including bindings from the Doves Press, but he always turned back to the Mosher Press as his bibliophilic preference and it was the last collection to leave his premises after the final period of his debilitating illness. I found out that my later letters were read to him by his daughter at his bedside. He died on 19 January 1993. Afterwards his daughter selected something from his Mosher collection which she sent me as a memento of her father. Unbeknownst to her the book would have far more meaning than she could surmise, being a copy of Richard Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* specially bound for Hatchards in full leather with hearts on the spine and covers. As mentioned at the outset, that title was the *very first* Mosher book that I ever bought, so getting that same title on Norman's behalf was like Norman sending a sign from the great beyond.



Mosher, 1901

# Finding Work for Harold Jefferies

Research by the Editors.<sup>1</sup>

**R**ichard Harold Jefferies (3 May 1875 - 3 Nov 1942) was just twelve years old when his father died. Affectionately known as Toby by Jessie and Richard, he was their first child, born in Swindon and baptised at Christ Church on 30 June 1875. A lock of his fair hair is on display at the Richard Jefferies Museum.

Otherwise called Harold, he attended Dulwich College for three years from January 1889 to December 1891. No doubt the Jefferies Fund, awarded to Jessie, helped her pay for the college fees.<sup>2</sup> Apparently Harold was not a keen sportsman. The Register reveals that he was never in the First, Second or Third Rugby XV; wasn't in the First, Second or Third Cricket XI; and did not win any event in the annual athletic sports. On Harold's college registration card, his home address at that time was 3, Townley Park Villas, Dulwich Rise and his date of birth was incorrectly recorded as 5 May 1875 not 3 May as registered on his birth certificate. Calista Lucy, archivist at Dulwich College, reported<sup>3</sup> that Harold was on the Engineering Side. Harold 'would have concentrated on the sciences—chemistry and physics, with mathematics, mechanical drawing and workshops (what today is called Design Technology). Dulwich was very innovative in the teaching of engineering and had a steam engine for demonstrating thermodynamics to the boys.' However the engineering course also included studies in French. Harold did particularly well in his end of Summer 1890 examination results when he came top of the class and came first in French—he was awarded two prizes for this achievement. After college Harold spent a year working at a large engineering establishment at Chelsea.

His passion for the sea led him to sail on the clipper ship *Rodney*<sup>4</sup> from 1894-5 as a midshipman/cadet officer. After exams, he was a midshipman

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<sup>1</sup> The editors are indebted to Lucille Kelleher in Canada for her help with accessing some information about her grandfather, Harold.

<sup>2</sup> The Fee Registers in the College's archives only go back to 1891. Mrs. Jefferies is recorded as paying the fees. For Lent term 1891 she only paid a half fee of £3.10s and was very late to pay. The full fee of £7 was paid for the Summer and Michaelmas terms 1891.

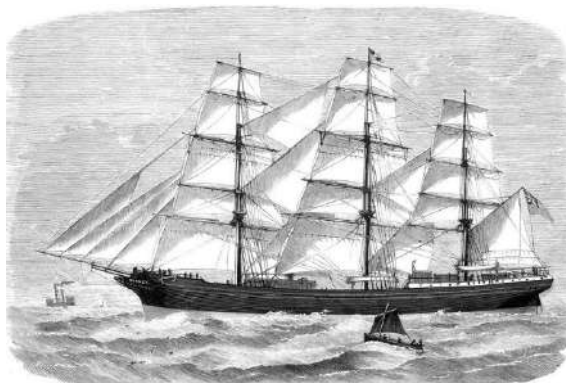
<sup>3</sup> Letter from the archivist at Dulwich College dated 7 September 2017 to the editors including school records for Harold.

<sup>4</sup> The *Rodney* was built in 1874 and was engaged in the Australian immigration trade. From 1887 to 1897 she sailed to Sydney, was then sold to the French and renamed *Gypsy* (source: Wikipedia). The second photograph of Harold, on the next page, by Vandyck of Sydney (1890-6), was possibly taken when Harold was a cadet officer on the *Rodney* around the age of



and third mate on the *Tamar*<sup>5</sup> from 1895-8 but later transferred to the steam service. Harold writes:

Years later Sir John (who was by that time Lord Avebury) gave me an introduction to Sir Alfred Jones, head of the Elder Dempster Shipping Company, and I got a job as third mate in one of their small steamers, *S.S. Congo*, which made the West African trip and called at dozens of ports from Bathurst down the coast to Fernando Po in the Bight of Benin.<sup>6</sup>



Wood engraving by Samuel Calvert (1828-1913) of Messrs. Devitt and Moore's *Rodney*

The *Congo* was a single-screw steamer built in 1882 and taken over by Elder Dempster Lines in 1898, the year Harold left the *Tamar*. The ship carried 38 passengers and cargo at a maximum speed of 10 knots. The *Congo* sank in 1907 after a collision with another vessel.

From around 1902 he was a proof-reader for the printers Billing and Sons based in Guildford. Robert Billing (1849-1940) was Harold's uncle and Sarah's husband (Richard Jefferies' sister). Along with Robert's brother, Joseph Harrild Billing, they took over the family's printing business.

On 14 April 1905, aged 30, Harold arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada sailing from Liverpool on the *Virginian*. His occupation is listed on the vessel log as 'Mariner'.

Harold married Ada Florence Laurens (18 August 1884 - 15 January 1971) from St. Saviour, Jersey on 24 November 1906 in Winnipeg. Ada had

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nineteen (1894). *Tracing Your Seafaring Ancestors: A Guide to Maritime Photographs for Family Historians* by Simon Wills (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2016) shows similar photographs of dress uniform on p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> The *Tamar* was built in 1889. Records show that in the time that Harold served on board, the ship visited Sydney and San Francisco.

<sup>6</sup> *Worthing Cavalcade - Concerning Richard Jefferies* by various writers (Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944), p.20.

emigrated from Liverpool on 31 December 1903 on the steamship *Ionian*, aged 19, along with a farming family (LeNeveu) that she had worked for as a domestic nurse in Jersey.<sup>7</sup> They arrived in St. John, New Brunswick, on 10 or 12 January 1904 heading for Winnipeg. The LeNeveu family are then recorded as living at Stonewall, 18 Selkirk, Manitoba on the census of 4 July 1906 along with Ada, still a servant, whilst Harold is recorded as a lodger there along with several other men from England. No doubt this is where Harold and Ada met and married later that year.

They had eight children: the first—Jessie Phyllis (named after Harold's sister) was born on 9 September 1907 in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, followed by Bevis Lockett (13 October 1909, St Boniface, Manitoba), Ellen Cecilia Mavis (1911, St James, Manitoba), Christina (10 July 1913, Portage La Prairie, Manitoba), Lucille (1915), Rosalie Ada (1919, Sturgeon Creek, Manitoba), June Rose (1922, Lachine, Quebec) and Richard Harold (1923, Lachine, Quebec). Some time between 1919 and 1922 the family moved to 444, Notre Dame, Lachine, near Montreal, no doubt for Harold to take up work for the *Montreal Herald* newspaper.

Harold died on 3 November 1942 and is buried near his home in Lachine at the Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal.



Portraits of Harold Jefferies as a young child and as a midshipman

<sup>7</sup> 1901 census for Homefields, St Clement, Jersey, Channel Islands. Head: Philip C. LeNeveu, farmer, aged 43.



Portraits of Harold Jefferies (dates unknown)

Thomas Bird Mosher (1852-1923) was a publisher of inexpensive but well-printed books in Portland, Maine. He was the subject of some controversy over piracy as many of his books were reprints of English authors, including Richard Jefferies. He also edited and published *The Bibelot* (1895-1915), a monthly magazine 'reprinting poetry and prose from scarce editions and sources not generally known.'

The Houghton Library at Harvard University holds archive material related to Mosher<sup>8</sup>. Copies of letters from Jessie Jefferies<sup>9</sup> to Mosher (plus her visiting card), and from her son Harold to Mosher<sup>10</sup> have been obtained from these archives. The main topic of the letters is finding gainful employment for Harold.

The first letter from Jessie, dated 4 January 1902 from Clarence House, [Chesterfield Road], Ashford, thanks Mosher for sending her copies of his Jefferies' publications; perhaps the Brocade Series illustrated on pp. 130-131. In the letter she expresses the surprising news that her husband had little knowledge of the extent to which his work was known in America during his lifetime. Jessie mentions that she and Phyllis (her daughter) often talk about their meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Mosher in London. This took place in April 1901, when she sold him the manuscript of Jefferies' poem 'My Chaffinch' for

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<sup>8</sup> We are indebted to Philip R. Bishop who alerted us to the existence of letters from Jessie Jefferies to Mosher, from Harold Jefferies to Mosher and John Burroughs to Harold Jefferies (see pp.7-8). See Mr. Bishop's article on pp.129-135.

<sup>9</sup> MS Am 1096 (753-754), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>10</sup> MS Am 1096 (752), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

£5 via her son-in-law Robert Billing. It appears that Harold (aged 27) has had enough of working at sea and is looking for alternative work. Jessie wonders if Mosher might be in a position to help and writes that her son will be contacting him. Under separate cover Harold Jefferies wrote to Mosher on the same date and from the same address and echoes his mother's appeal to find alternative work, perhaps in America, 'I have followed the sea for some years, but the life has become so very distasteful to me'.

Phyllis Hargrave mentioned her brother Harold in her letters to Samuel J. Looker sent in the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> She refers to the Mosher meeting in a letter sent from Perranporth on 2 January—the year is not given but might be around 1945: 'I have also to thank you for the choice edition of *The Pageant*, we had several copies but gave them all away so I am glad to have this one. My mother was in London some years ago & I remember my mother & I having lunch at the Hotel Cecil with them [Mr. and Mrs. Mosher], he would have given my brother a push in his publishing business but Harold would not go to America, he knew New York very well & hated it!'

In Jessie's second letter dated 27 December—from Oakleigh, [Woodside Road], Chiddingfold, Surrey, Jessie mentions that Harold is living in Stonewall, north of Winnipeg. As there is no mention of Ada, the letter was probably written in 1905. Jessie is worried that Harold has been made redundant from his job at a flour mill and writes that he would do anything for employment.

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The flour milling industry was a major business in Manitoba and conducted worldwide trade. There were several large companies that include the Ogilvie Flour Mills which had grain elevators spread around Winnipeg. Many of the early flour mills, built in rural Manitoba, were termed 'Grist Mills' that used millstones rather than rollers. Millstones produced an unrefined flour or 'grist' that was deemed an inferior product. One such mill was the Stonewall Grist Mill, built in the 1870s at a time when the railway network had expanded bringing settlers from rural Ontario, the USA and Britain whilst generous incentives encouraged farmers to settle.¹² Competition took its toll and the number of flour mills in Manitoba began to

¹¹ Letters held in the Richard Jefferies Society Looker Archive at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham and available online at:

http://richardjefferiessociety.co.uk/Hargrave_letters_Looker.pdf

¹² *A History of Flour Milling in Manitoba* by Karen Nicholson, Neil Otto & Edward Ledohowski (Historic Resources Branch, May 1992)

drop in the early 1900s from around 48 mills in 1900 to 36 by 1911.¹³ Harold must have been one of many to lose his job, but there were other mills around. Other victims of the industry might include the LeNeveu farming family with whom Harold had lodged as they had re-settled 55 miles west of Stonewall by the time of the 1911 census and Philip, the head of the family, was registered as a woodworker. Two of Harold and Ada's children were born in Portage La Prairie where there is also a flour mill and this might explain why he was there in 1907 and 1913.

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It is not known whether the approaches to Mosher ultimately bore fruit but Thomas Coke Watkins, editor of *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* (1903) for Mosher, mentions in his letter to George Avenell from New York in 1921 that Mosher has asked him if he can find a position for Harold Jefferies.<sup>14</sup> As Harold took up a job at the *Montreal Herald* not long after and moved to Lachine, Quebec, Watkins or Mosher might have helped in some way. Samuel J. Looker reported that Harold was a proof-reader.<sup>15</sup>

There are three more letters from Harold in the Looker archives.<sup>16</sup> They are sent to Odell<sup>17</sup> and make sad reading. They were written in 1942; the year that Harold died, aged 67. It is obvious from the tone of the first letter (10 May) that Odell had written to Harold requesting that he write up memories of his father, no doubt for publication in the *Worthing Cavalcade* book.<sup>18</sup> Harold complains that he hasn't worked for four months and is clearly distressed about this. With the second letter (11 May 1942) Harold mentions that he is sending memories of Goring but his mood is still low. On 4 June 1942, he writes that he does not want payment for the articles—he doesn't

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<sup>13</sup> *Manitoba History: The Flour Milling Industry in Manitoba since 1870* by John Everitt and Roberta Kempthorne of Brandon University. Published by the Manitoba Historical Society, Autumn 1993, No.26.

<sup>14</sup> Discoveries 11, by George Miller, Richard Jefferies Society Autumn Newsletter 2015.

<sup>15</sup> *Worthing Cavalcade – Concerning Richard Jefferies* by various writers (Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944), p.19

<sup>16</sup> Looker archives, owned by the Richard Jefferies Society, held at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham.

<sup>17</sup> (Mrs) Mary Theresa Odell (née Mackenzie) wrote three books about the Worthing and Brighton theatres. One, published in 1944, was part of the Worthing Art Development Scheme. Mary and her husband (William Henry, born 1876 might have played an editorial role in some of the other titles published at that time, including *Concerning Richard Jefferies*, (Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944). From the manner of address of the letter, perhaps Harold knew William Odell. They were about the same age.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, *Worthing Cavalcade – Concerning Richard Jefferies*.

consider himself a writer.<sup>19</sup> He is unhappy that his talents are worth nothing and that he is reliant on his three children living at home for financial support. He died five months later and just three days before the anniversary of his father's birthday. Looker says that he contracted rheumatic fever in 1914 and that he was crippled with arthritis.<sup>20</sup>

The letters follow:

Clarence House, Ashford, Middlesex

Jan 4. 1902. [Envelope included addressed to: Thos. B. Mosher esq, Publisher, Portland, Maine, USA]

Dear Mr Mosher

I cannot tell you how pleased I was to get your letter & the exquisite little volumes that accompanied it. They are really beautiful. I have forwarded one set to my sister in law (Mrs Billing) & she is very delighted & thinks it a "most dainty little edition" which indeed it is—what pleasure it would have given my husband could he have foreseen his work would have been admired & appreciated in your country—it is too, so kind, that you should think of sending me copies.

Phyllis and I often talk of the pleasant time we spent with Mrs Mosher & yourself in London—will you please give her my kindest remembrances. I should like to think I might one day have the pleasure of meeting you both again.

My son tells me he is writing to you by this mail. I hope you will not think him tiresome or too presumptuous, but he is so very anxious to find some employment other than the sea. Though he has followed it for so many years (he is now 27) he gets to dislike it more and more. He is very steady & industrious & I think would do very well at something more congenial. He has had excellent references from all superior officers under whom he has served in the Merchant Service. I told him I felt sure you would do anything for him that lay in your power —

Believe me

Dear Mr Mosher

Yours very sincerely

Jessie Jefferies

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¹⁹ *ibid*, *Concerning Richard Jefferies*, p.17. In Samuel J. Looker's notes that accompany the article 'Memories of Richard Jefferies' by Harold Jefferies, Looker wrote: 'Harold was the author of "Richard Jefferies", a descriptive article of considerable merit and sympathetic understanding on his father's work, which he contributed to *The Montreal Gazette* in May 1929.' [*Montreal Gazette*, 30 May 1929, p.12, (unsigned)]. This article is reproduced in the Worthing Cavalcade series – *Richard Jefferies: A Tribute* by various writers (Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1946), pp.89-90.

Looker goes on to praise the quality of writing in Harold's letters in his possession (pp.29-30) that suggest Harold could have been a writer.

²⁰ *ibid*.

Oakleigh, Chiddingfold, Surrey, England

Dec. 27 [1905]

Dear Mr Mosher

I trust you will pardon my writing to you for I know your time must be valuable but do you happen to know of anyone with influence on the new Railway they are constructing in Winnipeg?

My son who is in Stonewall is faced with the problem of how to get through the winter. He has been working at a flour mill & elevator but several hands have been discharged through slackness, himself amongst them. I think it should be possible for the only son of Richard Jefferies to find employment but he is without influence which appears to be as necessary in the New Country as here –

He has excellent references from Messrs Billing, Guildford. where he was employed three years as a publisher's reader & he can turn his hand almost to any kind of manual labour.

Should you know of anyone who could help him to obtain work his address is

R.H. Jefferies

Stonewall

N^r Winnipeg

I trust you will pardon my troubling you.

I think my son mentioned that he had written to you some months ago. I beg to remain

Yours faithfully

Jessie Jefferies

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Clarence House, Ashford, Middlesex

Jan 4th [envelope dated 1902]

Dear Sir

I trust you will not think I am taking a liberty in writing to you, but my Mother thinks you might possibly be able to help me in some way. I have followed the sea for some years, but the life has become so very distasteful to me that I am most anxious to get some employment ashore, preferably out door work, unfortunately I have no special qualifications except my own profession, and that makes it a matter of great difficulty to get anything to do in this country. I have had a good education, and can turn my hand to a good many things such as practical engineering, drawing etc.

Perhaps you could tell me what kind of opportunities there are for a young man like myself in your neighborhood. I have been in several great American cities, such as New York, 'Frisco, New Orleans and have always been impressed with the high rate of wages in comparison with this country. I am at preset disengaged and should be very glad to hear of something either at home or abroad, it is a matter of indifference what I do for a start.

My credentials are all first class from every ship I have sailed in.

Trusting you will pardon me for troubling you.

I beg to remain, dear Sir Yours obediently

Harold Jefferies

Thos B. Mosher Esq., Portland, Me

May 10 [1942]

My dear Odell

Yours of April 14. Thanks for your outline of what you wish me to complete. I am not quite sure just yet how to handle this, but really have not yet had time to study it. Although I have nothing else to do, and ought to welcome some work, I am not in a good frame of mind to go into it. However, in the course of the next week I will try to do something. You will understand that four months of unemployment have not left me in a very good humour. Thanks for the Sussex County Magazine which interested me very much.

More later  
R.H. Jefferies

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May 11/42

My dear Odell

I am feeling so dispirited that I am sending you, rather uncomplete [*sic*], a little article about Goring & my father.

I hope my mood will soon change & allow me a brighter outlook.
Meantime, many thanks for your interest in my father and my affairs.
Yours
R.H. Jefferies

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June 4/42

My dear Odell

Yours of May 6 just received. There is little probability of my getting employment. I am a long way over the age limit, although still quite capable of a good day's work, whether clerical or physical.

One cannot convince people of anything like that. It is against the rules, and general experience.

I appreciate your offer to pay for anything I write. However, I am not a writer, although a voracious reader. Perhaps I have never tried hard enough, even with the example of my gifted father ever before me. There is a difference between thinkers and writers. I am one of the former, but of course it does not "get me anywhere".

Although unemployed, my three children at home, namely: Richard, June and Jessie are contributing to the home upkeep, fortunately for all concerned.

Perhaps circumstances may alter. I am still looking for "jobs" and have a first-rate knowledge of the printing trade, but it is the young men who get the plums. I am not by any means despondent but I know that my earning career is finished, and I must depend on others.

Thanks again for your interest.  
Yours very truly—R.H. Jefferies



# Book Review

Roger Ebbatson

Richard Jefferies: *After London; or Wild England*, ed. Mark Frost.  
Edinburgh University Press 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4744-0239-2. £80.00.

**A**fter *London* has for many readers and critics been perceived as both a highly original and deeply problematic literary production. It was in the end for Edward Thomas ‘a bitter book’, and W.J. Keith summed up his sensitive reading by concluding that ‘*After London* is not one of Jefferies’ best books—partly because it is too close to the patterns of his own subconscious’, the balance between ‘intense logical realism and the heights of romantic fantasy’ being in his view ‘impossible to maintain’.<sup>1</sup> In the thoughtful introduction to his 1980 OUP edition of the novel, John Fowles categorised Jefferies as ‘neither a Swiftian intellectual nor a rosy Marxist’, and praised Felix Aquila’s ‘underlying psychic energy, or *élan*’ as ‘vital to the species’.<sup>2</sup> In this very welcome (but pricey) new edition of the book, Mark Frost has provided perhaps the most comprehensive overview of the text yet published, defining it as a novel of social alienation and extensive wish-fulfilment, and endorsing Jeremy Hooker’s fine analysis, with its sense that the text, ‘for all its concern with barbarism and coldness, is born of the crisis of modernity’.<sup>3</sup> As Frost discerns, *After London* orchestrates and problematises Victorian and post-Victorian anxieties ‘about the countryside and the city, science, industrialisation, social organisation, demographics, imperial identity, and resources’ (viii). Frost argues very pertinently that a new edition is especially timely now, given the recent emergence of ecocritical approaches to cultural attitudes to literature, and definitions and redefinitions of the somewhat fluid concept of the ‘anthropocene’. He productively and expertly locates *After London* within a wide and suggestive variety of contexts, examining the ways in which Jefferies challenges and undermines stable notions of generic categorisation, and also seeking to account for the lack of critical consensus about both this novel and, more widely, Jefferies’ significance for the reader of Victorian literature. It is in Frost’s view not a weakness but a strength of Jefferies’ work that it offers problems of classification; as he presciently observes, ‘Valuing only segments

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<sup>1</sup> W.J.Keith, *Richard Jefferies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 122.

<sup>2</sup> *After London*, ed. John Fowles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), xix, xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Hooker, *Writers in a Landscape* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 38.

of Jefferies' corpus leads to a limited, distorted view of his ideas', since 'his insouciant transgressions of literary boundaries are amongst the most important features of his work' (x). This view certainly runs counter to the type of contemporary response voiced by, for example, Walter Besant, who felt that Jefferies was no novelist, being notable only for his powerful evocations of landscape. This is a verdict which has sometimes been aired in discussions of *After London*, where the first part was felt to be effectively resonant but weakened in the second part by the unconvincing characterisation of Felix Aquila. Frost concedes that the later scenes possess some awkwardness and that Felix himself is the only fully-defined character, but he counters this by arguing that the novel's evocative landscapes 'demonstrate Jefferies' desire to produce a textual surface interwoven with moments of incidental stillness...at odds with the demands for onward narrative energy' (xiii). There is here and elsewhere in Jefferies what one might term *passabilité*, a receptivity of the mind and spirit and an obligation to be patient, to listen, to feel and sense the natural world in a way which J-F. Lyotard designates a type of 'free and floating attention'—an opening to what comes from nature. It is surely better to construe the open-endedness of *After London* from the point of view of a kind of modernist sense of the unfinished, in a trajectory which deconstructs the unity and fixed conclusions characteristic of Victorian fiction. *After London* is thus an 'open work' which denies totality. The catastrophe which the novel envisages, correctly read, surely signifies a compensation for the damage of modernity: the implications of a philosophical reading of the text would therefore enable us to see it, in Adorno's terms, as registering 'the impress, the negative of the administered world'.

Mark Frost's introduction proceeds to a carefully articulated account of the novel from a variety of category definitions: science-fiction, dystopian writing, Darwinism, literary romance, national identity, and pastoral. As a 'sci-fi' text, as Frost observes, *After London* may be bracketed with other key 19C experiments, beginning with Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), Jefferies' own exercise being one which dramatises a 'near-extinction' event which anticipates Wellsian and other literary manifestations of anxiety triggered to some degree by imperial uncertainties. When the book is read as a dystopia, Frost justly notes how the destruction of current 19C society fails to yield any 'positive alternatives'. Jefferies clearly indulges a type of 'guilty pleasure' in this depiction of urban destruction, and yet, Frost contends, he rejects the neo-medievalism which marks other texts such as Morris's *News from Nowhere*, the writings of Ruskin, or Tennysonian poetry. Here it is apposite to recall, as Frost himself does, Caroline Sumpter's insightful

Machiavellian account of the text,<sup>4</sup> which emphasises Jefferies' resistance to both the 19C doctrine of progress and to neo-medieval romanticisation. *After London*, as Frost puts it, 'asks whether beginning again is futile' (xxi), and he fully demonstrates the extent of Jefferies' 'dystopian preoccupation with London' (xxii), citing the remarkably resonant depiction of the 'vast stagnant swamp' which now marks the site of the metropolis. This powerful climactic image, as I have suggested elsewhere, shares a defining sense of decay with other swamp scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.<sup>5</sup> Frost's expert critique of the novel's Darwinist thematic argues that, in the wake of *The Origin of Species*, 'Jefferies is as unsettled as delighted by the natural world' (xxvi), and that therefore the route towards utopia is cut off by 'a vision of nature as remorseless and disconnected from human nature' (xxvii). This reading perhaps stresses the competitive rather than the co-operative elements in Darwin's reading of nature, but is certainly convincing in relation to the composition of *After London* itself. In a very productive later section of his introduction, Frost deals with issues of landscape representation and national ideology, and with the Naturalistic elements of the text in relation to Zola's advocacy of extreme realism and to the Russian cult of the 'superfluous man' at this juncture. He concludes with a most thoughtful and persuasive examination of the relation of *After London* to the debate surrounding 'the disastrous long-term impacts of human nature on the environment' (xxxix). In this regard, Frost argues, *After London* 'becomes a candidate as one of the first Anthropocene novels', but also reaches back in its form and content to classical pastoral. One element of Jefferies' text Frost might have explored a little more fully is the issue of sexual politics—as Hooker appositely observed, this is a novel imbued with the spirit of an imperialist cult of manliness and leadership.

All told, however, Mark Frost's introduction offers the reader a compelling, wide-ranging and insightful account of *After London*, in a critical essay which makes a significant advance in our understanding of this troubling and strikingly original text. This is a fine contribution to Jefferies studies, and essential reading for all serious students of his work.

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<sup>4</sup> Caroline Sumpter, 'Machiavelli writes the Future: History and Progress in *After London*', *19C Contexts* 33 (2011), 315–31.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Ebbatson, *Landscape and Literature, 1830–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), ch. 6.

# Book Review

Rebecca Welshman

Roger Ebbatson: *Landscapes of Eternal Return: Tennyson to Hardy*. Palgrave Macmillan 2016. ISBN: 978-3-319-32838-6, 250pp. £67.

Roger Ebbatson frames his discussion of a range of nineteenth-century texts within the Nietzschean concept of eternal recurrence. Focusing on poetry and prose from the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the book explores the philosophical and aesthetic challenges associated with individual perceptions of repetition and cyclical time in rural landscapes. The authors and poets discussed include Hallam, Tennyson, Swinburne, Hardy, and Jefferies.

'Repetitious Labour: Women in the Field' offers a thorough comparison of Jefferies' and Hardy's fiction and nonfiction writings on female agricultural labour. Ebbatson observes that in their depiction of casual field workers Hardy and Jefferies were both challenged by self-consciousness of their own positions within society. Ebbatson discusses Keith Snell's research on Hardy's 'stereotyping of the rural poor'. Like Jefferies, Hardy depicted the occupation of milkmaid as feminine but the tasks of field labour as essentially 'degrading'. Ebbatson writes, 'this is a body of writing, overtly sympathetic and responsive to the lives and working conditions of the "women of the fields", which unconsciously refracts relations of dominance and subordination between the sexes and between classes' (p. 103). Ebbatson also notes that the wider significance of the employment of women by men is overlooked by both writers in favour of their 'imaginative response to the question of rural labour'.

'Seeking the Beyond: Sacralising/Desacrilising Nature in Richard Jefferies' sets Jefferies' religious feelings in the context of the early Victorian crisis of belief, which was followed by a sudden growth in alternative understandings of human spirituality including Comtean Positivism and the humane liberal utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill. Ebbatson situates his discussion of Jefferies in the context of writings by Nietzsche and Heidegger and quotes the works of French philosopher Jacques Ranciere for its relevance to the process of rediscovering the sacred in nature. Crucially, Ebbatson makes the often overlooked connection between human labour and the life of the soul in Jefferies' works, which Jefferies himself was often seeking to articulate. To aid this process, Ebbatson employs J. Clark's Marxian analysis of the art of Gustave Courbet which sheds light on the artist's role in shaping material.

Ebbatson suggests that to read Jefferies' work we need to recognise the 'constellation' of factors surrounding its production—in particular the relation between Jefferies' own position in rural society and his urban readership.

In addition to *The Story of My Heart*, Ebbatson makes good use of references in Jefferies' late notebooks and the recently published essay 'Beatrice and the Centaur'. Ebbatson notes that it is the 'conjunction' between the material 'dry, chalky earth' and the transcendental 'response to earth, sun and ocean' that allows for the 'quasi-religious experience[s]' of *The Story of My Heart*. Jefferies' ability to forget time coupled with his powerfully 'religious attunement to nature' enables him to offer 'his own version of a type of eternal recurrence' characterised by moments that do not fit into religious or evolutionary frameworks. This discussion is enhanced by a strikingly relevant remark made by the German philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer concerning the 'Beyond' and the ideology of something more that naturally challenges the rigorous structure of modern society.

In his treatment of Hardy and Jefferies Ebbatson skilfully reveals yet again the rich insights afforded by considering these two great writers alongside one another, and, moreover, that there remains much to be gleaned from the study of Jefferies' spirituality.

ISSN: 0968-4247

Published by the Richard Jefferies Society, June 2018.

Typeface: Constantia 10