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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887).

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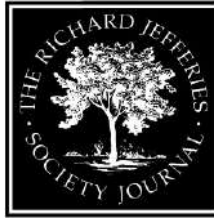
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The principal aim of *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* is to present material by Jefferies that has not been published or reprinted, or that is difficult to obtain, together with articles about Jefferies (commissioned or submitted), items of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

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

The Editors are Peter Robins and Jean Saunders. They have added footnotes to the articles by Richard Jefferies.

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The Coate Water Regatta

Richard Jefferies

This news report was first published, unsigned, in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, Saturday, July 5, 1873.

SWINDON REGATTA. — On Saturday last the first boat races for the Champion silver medals, and silver cup, on the Reservoir at Coate, came off. There was not such a large assembly as had been expected, there being a cricket match going forward at the same time at New Swindon. This caused some loss to the spirited and enterprising lessee, but we understand that he is by no means discouraged, he believing that the reservoir will in time infallibly become the great resort of the increasing population of Swindon. The idea of bringing Blondin to cross the water on a rope, after the famous Niagara precedent, was started on Saturday, and met with great favour among the gentlemen present. The contemplated spot for stretching the rope is close on a quarter of a mile wide, and there is a hill near which would give thousands of spectators the advantage of a natural amphitheatre. On Saturday refreshments were provided in Mr. Kempeter's capital tents, in which also the competitors dressed. We would suggest in future that all the competitors should be requested to keep in or near the dressing tent, so as to be on the spot when the race is called, but no doubt the experience gained by the experiment will enable the lessee to make better arrangements next time. The events were

— Pair oar dinghy race. Three crews, 1st heat E. Winn and W. Fox¹; 2nd, J.A. Brown and T. Fox. Course about a mile. Both crews started in good style, but it soon became evident that Winn was too strong for his bow oar every stroke pulling the boat's head round. This spoilt their starting and threw them out of their course, and necessitated immense exertions to gain lost ground. Mr. Brown (Uffcott) in the other boat steered capitally, straight to the flag and back, and on the return led by nearly three lengths. Winn went so near the Day House shore that the spectators thought he had declined the struggle, and gone to land, but in a minute or two his boat shot out again, and skirting the shore, drew up gradually till within half a length. Here the excitement was very great, Winn's crew being frantically cheered. They spurted and ran into some weeds, and then nearly against the barge in which

¹Possibly William Fox, born 1859. His father, an agricultural labourer of Badbury who once worked for the Badens, was accused of arson at Day House farm in 1861.

the 11th Wilts Rifle Volunteer Band was placed, but spurred again, and shot by the umpire's boat, about a length in the rear of Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown had meantime been rowing easily and was firm in his lead, but by some unaccountable mistake he went outside the flag, and was held disqualified. Winn was therefore held the winner.

— 2nd heat, E. Winn and W. Fox v. T. Fox and T. Hill. This was won in easy style by Winn's crew.

— 200 yards flat race, five competitors. 1st, J. Franklin; 2nd, T. Hazel; 3rd, E. Winn. The course was not long enough for Winn to show his powers, he being a noted 'stayer' Winn's pluck was the remark of everyone, he entered all the race, and went at it with a will, greatly assisting to keep up the fun.

— Scullers Race for the silver challenge cup. Value £6 10s. Only two competitors appeared, T. Fox and E. Winn. This cup has to be won five times, and this fact is supposed to have kept many scullers in the background, waiting to see who would win, and then to challenge the holder. The race was very slow, Fox winning easily. Fox is therefore the champion sculler of the reservoir.

— Hurdle race over ten flights. 1st, T. Gardner; 2nd, J. Morgan; 3rd, J. Cowley.

— Land and water race, about 100 yards water and 60 by land. This was very amusing, and caused much laughter. In order to prevent accidents a punt followed the swimmers at a short distance. 1st, E. Winn; 2nd, W. Noyes; 3rd, T. Hazell.

— Four oared race, for the silver challenge medals. This was the race of the day. Three competing crews appeared, Johnson's, Winn's, and H. Jefferies'. The strokes tossed to decide the first heat, and the result was Johnson v. Winn, Jefferies to row the winner. Johnson took the Day House side, and Winn the Broome. Crews: L.R. Johnson (stroke), B. Sykes. E. Hardiman, R. Rosy, C. Gabb (cox). E. Sinn (stroke), W. Fox, T. Fox, T. Hill, J. Baden² (coxes). Johnson's crew soon showed their superiority, and kept their lead during the whole course, winning without trouble. The pace was fast, Johnson coming in in 7 min. 45 sec. H. Jefferies' crew now went on the water in the outrigger, the umpire having decided that they must paddle over the course while the late winners rested. Crew: H. Jefferies³ (stroke), H. Brunsden⁴, W. Baden⁵, T. Wickenden⁶, C. Jefferies⁷ (coxes). They rowed up

² Probably John Baden, born 1863—Jessie Baden's youngest brother.

³ Richard Jefferies' brother Harry born 14 June 1852.

⁴ Harry Brunsden born in 1856—father (Henry) was a farmer in Badbury Wick.

⁵ Jessie Baden's brother Walter Baden baptised 2 August 1857.

⁶ T. Wickenden is possibly Thomas Wickenden, born 1855. His father was also a farmer in East Grinstead.

the course in splendid style, pulling like clockwork, the boat constantly travelling without a jerk, and bets were in consequence freely laid upon them. After an interval, Johnson's crew tossed for boats and sides. Jefferies won, and took the in-rigger and Day House side. Johnson taking the out-rigger and Broome shore. Johnson rowed straight to the starting point, the walk at the head of the water, where they waited, rapidly growing impatient for Jefferies' crew. The delay seemed extraordinary, but it soon transpired that Jefferies' cox on examining his rudder found the upper staple had started, and the rudder was consequently useless. Much speculation took place as to how this occurred, as no collision or anything had happened, no boats being allowed out while the races were proceeding. It was found necessary to take a staple from another boat, and when this was fixed, Jefferies slowly paddled over to the starting place and they took up their positions. On the start being given, Johnson took a slight lead for about twenty yards, having got off a little quicker, but the long, strong, and clockwork pull of their opponents quickly altered the case. Jefferies' grew nearer, came alongside, slowly forged ahead, and kept gradually gaining the whole course to the flag, when they had a lead by about three lengths. The turn round the flag was not so well managed, and as they started to turn, Johnson had got so near as to be broadside on his flag. But Jefferies now increased his pace having kept his strength till now, and the boat went rapidly ahead till half way down the course they were leading by six lengths, and slacked speed. Somewhat further Johnson virtually succumbed, and Jefferies paddled on, till a few lengths from the umpire's boat, when he put on a spurt to show his style. The time was not so fast as was expected. This was owing to Jefferies slacking speed as soon as he found his boat so far ahead. Time 7 min. 50 secs. Jefferies' are now the champion four-oared crew of the Reservoir.

This concluded the day's sport, during which Mr. E.R. Ing⁸, and Mr. R. Jefferies⁹ discharged the onerous duties of the offices of judge and starter to the satisfaction of all parties. In the evening the spectators, crews, and competitors assembled in the marquee, when Mr. Wheeler, who had been asked to distribute the prizes, took the chair, and made an appropriate speech. Such contests as these exercised both the body and the mind, and led to prowess on the battle-field, and on the principle of *mens sana in*

⁷ Richard Jefferies youngest brother Charlie born 26 November 1858.

⁸ Edwin Robert Ing (born 1831) was the wife of Jessie Baden's older half-sister Adelaide Baden. From at least 1881 to 1891 the couple lived next door (Walton House, The Sands) to the Hall family (Richard's aunt Martha née Jefferies). By 1901, Edwin lived at the Mound with sister-in-law, Elizabeth Baden.

⁹ Richard Jefferies, the writer.

corpore sano, to mental success, to academic honours, and to eminence in the senate or at the bar. The great hero Wellington had told them that Eton and Harrow won him Waterloo. If in the future England should require a well officered army, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and Marlborough would have trained them. Officers without athletes to follow their leader would be of no avail, and should they ever have a second edition of the Crimes, which God forbid, who should say that the thews and sinews, and strength of lungs developed by the sport of New Swindon, and of the Coate Reservoir, might not be a step towards deeds of daring and prowess, such as Britons displayed at Balaclava and Inkerman? Mr. Wheeler then gave the prizes. The Silver Challenge Medals and Cup were passed to the respective winners, and were then returned to the custody of the lessee, who will hold them till finally won. These winners are now open to challenge from any one within a 15-mile radius.



Ladies rowing on Coate Water, 1910

The Swindon Plesiosaur

Richard Jefferies

This report by Richard Jefferies was published in the 26 July 1873 edition of the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*. Jefferies alerted the British Museum about the find and an account of this, by Phyllis Treitel, was published in the *RJS Journal* No. 1, 1992.

A recent discovery¹ was made in an 1875 monograph of British fossils by Richard Owen in which Owen acknowledges Richard Jefferies for ‘the first intimation of this discovery, and for a sketch of part of the mandible, 4 feet in length, and of a femur 1 foot 1 inch in length of the *Pliosaurus*.’ This letter and the sketch or sketches have been lost. It wasn’t known until this time that Jefferies had sent sketches as well as a letter.

COAL AT SWINDON. — Some considerable interest has been aroused in the town by the discovery of a strata of coal at a considerable depth in the vast clay-pits of the Swindon Brick and Tile Company. These pits are situated close to the canal bank, so that barges can deliver at once into the premises of the Company, and they are only a few hundred yards distant from the Great Western Railway. The course of the new railway to Marlborough will pass close to the yard: so that there are unparalleled means of transit for the productions of the Company’s machinery, and if coal should be worked these easy lines of communication would greatly assist in development. The clay in these pits is of the ordinary yellow colour at the surface, and gradually deepens in hue, till at fifteen feet, it is as black as ink. Here occurs the strata of coal, which appears to be perfectly horizontal, and to underlie the clay to a great extent. The vein is three inches thick and contains two distinct species—one very solid, but with an oily look about it, much resembling cannel coal. The other breaks readily in small pieces, and has a more gaseous appearance. The grain of the wood from which these substances were formed is distinctly visible in both species, and is very fine and close. When placed on the fire both burn readily with a bright flame and gas, with a smoke exactly resembling the ordinary coal, but there is a pungent odour like the burning of firewood. From all these circumstances there can be no doubt that it is a vein of very good lignite. Dr. Mantell, the well-known geologist, who received part of his early education at Swindon in a school which was formed under the patronage of the Strange’s, writes in

¹ Peter Robins came across the 1875 monograph in September 2018. This is reproduced on p.13.

these terms: 'Lignite, Brown Coal or Cannel Coal: these are terms employed to designate certain varieties of carbonised wood in which the ligneous structure is more or less distinctly preserved. Lignite may be regarded as an imperfect coal, for in its chemical properties it holds an intermediate place between peat and bituminous coal. The newer deposits of *Brown* or wood coal are commonly found in depressions or basins, as if they had been produced by the submergence of woods and forests in a swamp or morass; and in many instances the ligneous structure is distinct in one part of the bed, while in another the mass is a pure black coal, differing in no respect from true coal, except that it is less dense.' This last remark gives hope that if a search was made, a larger and better deposit might be found, for says he, 'the principal feature which arrests attention on the examination of the section of the coal pit is the uniform presence of a thick bed of clay beneath every layer of coal,' so that there may be layers of alternate coal and clay to an unknown depth. A small pit could easily be sunk just to try the experiment. In another place, giving a synopsis of the British strata, Mantell says of the Oolite formation: 'Upper Oolite of Portland, Wilts, &c. 1. *Portland Oolite*. Limestone of an oolitic structure abounding in ammonites, trigoniae, &c., and other exuviae. Green and ferruginous sands—layers of chert. 2. *Kimmeridge Clay*. Blue clay, with septaria, and bands of sandy concretions—marine shells, and other organic remains—*ostrea deltoidea*. Beds of Lignite.' The dark clays of the clay-pit are evidently Kimmeridge clay. Perhaps still more interesting to scientific men even than the coal is the discovery of immense fossil remains. Almost on a level with the layer of coal at a depth of 15 feet, the workmen in the pits came upon a gigantic fossil, which appears to have been a jaw bone. It consisted of two long bones lying in the shape of a V, united at the point of the V in broad flat bone, not an inch thick. The long bones were much in the shape of a jaw bone and the length from the point of the V to the end of either area was 4 feet 9 inches. When we visited the pit the fossil had unfortunately been broken in an attempt to remove it entire: but the impression it had left as it laid upon the blue clay was distinctly visible. The remains of the fossil were of a fawn colour; in that respect differing from other bones found in the same pits which were quite black as if saturated with the blue clay. One of these bones measured 13 inches long, and must have weighed 10lb, another about the same length was 9 inches broad at one extremity, and as thick as the thickest part of a man's arm. With this there were what at first sight appeared to be vertebrae, but so small comparatively as to be unable to support such an enormous creature. On reference to Mantell's works we found a plate of the paddle of the Plesiosaurus, the largest bone of which in shape exactly resembled the fossil found in the clay-pit, while the other bones, called phalanges, also exactly resembled the

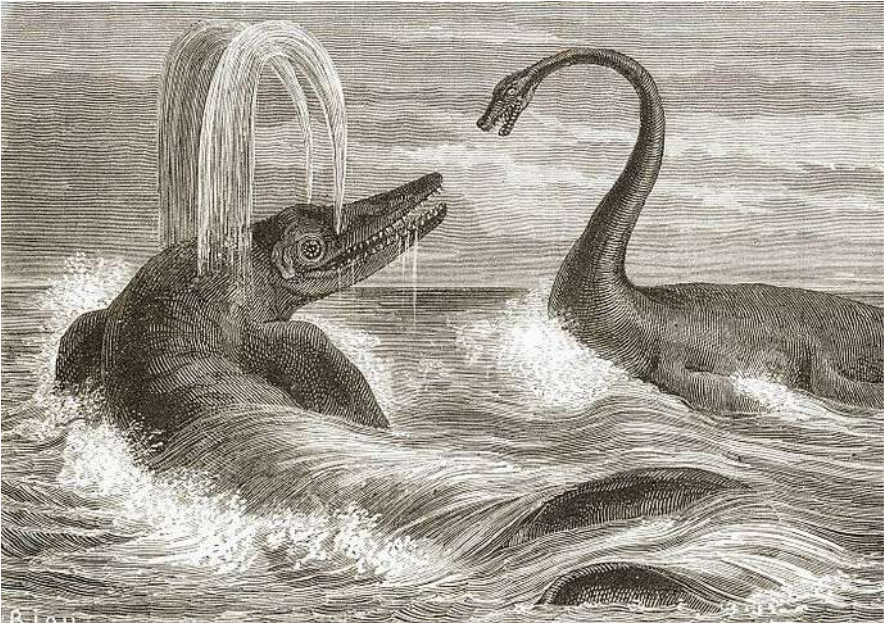
smaller vertebra-looking fossils. But the bone figured by Mantell was barely half the size of the fossil found at the clay-pit. The Plesiosaurus is found most abundantly in the Lias and Oolite. Mantell says he collected specimens of the bones in the green sand at Faringdon. At first it appeared more probable that these bones were those of the Ichthyosaurus², but the resemblance is much closer to the Plesiosaurus, especially when taken in conjunction with the vertebra-looking bones, which do not in any way resemble the corresponding phalanges of the Ichthyosaurus. The phalanges are the finger bones. The Plesiosaurus was a gigantic reptile, with a neck of immense length, so long as to resemble a serpent, and furnished with paddles. Both Ichthyosaurus and Plesiosaurus were 'marine, air-breathing, cold-blooded, carnivorous, vertebrate animals, swarming in prodigious numbers in the secondary epochs, and particularly in the seas of the Liassic period.' Mantell mentions vertebrae of the Ichthyosaurus as found at Swindon. In the clay-pits above referred to there are numerous remains of a shell exhibiting prismatic colours, considered to be the shell of the ammonites, casts of which of enormous size are common in the Swindon quarries, and are known as petrified snakes. In the cutting made for the new road from Victoria-street through the Rolleston Estate to New Swindon, to avoid the steep incline of the hill, large numbers of the fossil Trigoniae have been recently found. The works of the Swindon Brick and Tile Company consist of an enormous circular building surmounted by a tall factory chimney. The outer circle supported on brick arches is the drying shed where the new bricks are dried. Within this is the kiln, and within this again the furnace and heat shaft. The kiln is flat on the top, and covered with a roof, which roof also covers the bricks undergoing the process of drying. If the whole of the kilns were used they could burn 140,000 bricks at once: at present they were burning 70,000. The bricks are made by very simple and ingenious machinery at the rate of from 10,000 to 15,000 a day. The machinery at the top somewhat resembles a thrashing machine, a man standing and pushing the clay in much as the sheaves are pushed into a thrashing machine. In its passage downwards the clay passes through a series of rollers, which knead it, and finally push it out in the shape of a continuous long bar, exactly the width and thickness of a brick. Upon this bar a number of wires descend, cutting out the bricks, which are ready for drying. Two of these bars proceed from the same machine at a time, one each side.

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² Ichthyosaurus: misspelled by Jefferies.

Three further reports of the discovery were published in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard* on 2, 16 and 23 August 1873, the last reporting:

THE FOSSILS: Professor Owen has examined the tooth forwarded by Mr. Shopland, and determines it to belong to a very large marine Saurian allied to *Plesiosaurus*. He believes that Mr. Shopland in exhuming these remains, is on the track of an (as yet) unknown dragon. The fossils have been placed in the British Museum.



An 1863 engraving of an ichthyosaur and plesiosaur.³

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³ The ichthyosaur and the plesiosaur by Édouard Riou (engraved by Laurent Hotelin and Alexandre Hurel), courtesy of Taschen.

A recent discovery in one of Professor Owen's monographs confirms that Richard Jefferies did write to him in 1873 when the discovery was made and there is new evidence that Jefferies had included a sketch or sketches of some of the fossils. These sketches are now missing.

Phyllis Treitel's supposition that Jefferies' letter to Owen dated 'April 24th' belongs to the year 1876⁴ is corroborated as Owen's monographs on Reptilia were published the year before.

The 'Swindon Brick and Tile Company's Works,' whence, through the kindness of the managing director, James K. Shopland, Esq., the above-described fossils were obtained, are situated on land adjoining the Wilts and Berks Canal. The vertebrae were found, associated with remains of *Pliosaurus brachydeirus*, in the Kimmeridge clay, at a depth of fifteen feet. The clay here is of a deep black-blue; and a mass of lignite, seemingly derived from a crushed trunk of a tree, and burning like ordinary coal, was here discovered.

I was indebted to Richard Jefferies, Esq., of Coate, Swindon for the first intimation of this discovery, and for a sketch of part of the mandible, 4 feet in length, and of a femur 1 foot 1 inch in length, of the *Pliosaurus*; of which Sauropterygian genus an entire tooth, and parts of others, with fractured vertebral centrums, were exhumed from the same pit as contained the vertebrae of *Bothriospondylus*. To Mr. Shopland I am indebted for the transmission of the series of specimens here obtained, which included the evidences of the Dinosaurian genus above characterised. This genus, or type of vertebrae, I next proceed to illustrate by larger fossils from other localities and Mesozoic formations.⁵

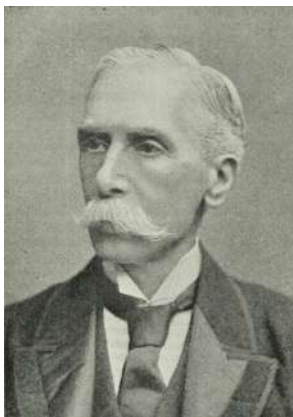
⁴ See 'Richard Jefferies and the Plesiosaur' by Phyllis Treitel, *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 1 (1992), pp.29–30, that includes an undated letter from Jefferies to Professor Owen.

⁵ Extract from: Richard Owen: *Monographs of the British Fossil Reptilia of the Mesozoic Formations, Part II*, The Palaeontographical Society, London, 1875; Chapter: 'Fossil Reptilia of the Kimmeridge Clay'.

The View from Crowborough

The Editors

The following letter was published in *The Autobiography of Alfred Austin: Poet Laureate, 1835-1910, in Two Volumes (Vol II)* (Macmillan and Co, 1911), Ch. VIII, pp.182-184.¹ There were no other references to Jefferies in Austin's book but, whilst editor of *The National Review* (1866-1896), Austin published Jefferies' 'In Defence of Sport' in August 1883. Austin, a staunch conservative, was appointed poet laureate in 1896 and died on 2 June 1913 in Ashford, Kent. The extract from Austin's autobiography is followed by another from a letter to C.P. Scott.



Alfred Austin, by Langfrier, 1900

I will here print the following sad letter which I received in 1885 from poor Richard Jefferies, the gifted author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and other delightful out-door books, for which I have the greatest admiration. He died in 1887.

THE DOWNS, CROWBOROUGH, SUSSEX,
Sept. 16th, 1885.

DEAR SIR

I get on so badly with my correspondence (and still worse with MS.) that I trust you will excuse the time I have taken to answer your kind letter. It is with difficulty that I can sit upright long enough to finish a letter or two, so that the days go by and nothing is done. Always nothing done a reflection that

¹ The letter was discovered by Peter Robins in September 2020. Austin adds after the letter: 'I have always feared his sufferings and death were caused by the hardships he underwent in observing Nature under all her conditions.'

upsets me very much every night. For I find the distress of compulsory idleness far greater than pain. All that has been written in the last four years now has been accomplished under severe suffering and often when physically helpless, and for four years I have been practically shut off from intercourse with others, so that you will understand a letter like yours is valuable to me, giving moral support. I seem to have exhausted almost the whole round of medicine in vain, and begin to think that the prediction of my Brighton doctor, put forth two years since, is perhaps near the truth that no treatment or course would be effectual in England.

From the top of this hill, I am told, there is a view of the hills at Dover, so that it must include Ashford. I am afraid that the altitude is hardly sufficient to affect me. In slight cases I am told it is often successful. For me a more Alpine character is, I fear, necessary.

I hardly know how to acknowledge the kind remarks you have made about my literary work such approval is of great value coming from so distinguished a writer as yourself. Please receive my thanks both for these remarks and for the sympathy which led you to take an interest in my condition. I can assure you it is very welcome to me.

I remain,

faithfully yours,

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

ALFRED AUSTIN, Esq.

~~~~~

Walter Besant, in his *Eulogy*<sup>2</sup> quotes a letter dated November [1885] from Jefferies to C.P. Scott from Crowborough 'where the fine air at first seemed to be restoring him. He could walk about in the field at the back of the house,' but

Suddenly I went down as if I had been shot. All the improvement was lost, and now I have been indoors three months, steadily becoming weaker and more emaciated every day. It is, in fact, starvation. They cannot feed me, try what they will. No one would believe what misery it is, and what extreme debility it produces. The worst of all is the helplessness. Often I am compelled to sit or lie for days and think, think, till I feel as if I should become insane, for my mind seems as clear as ever, and the anxiety and eager desire to do something is as strong as in my best days. There is an ancient story of a living man tied to a dead one, and that is like me; mind alive and body dead. I fear that my old friends will give me up in time, because I cannot travel the path of friendship now, and the Cymric proverb says that it soon grows covered with briars.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889), p.339.

# The Ammoniaphone

Jean Saunders

In his Notebook XIII, folio 89, dated around August 5 1884, Richard Jefferies included the entry:

Madame Rose Hersee, Lee Place, /Lewisham  
and on folio 90:

Dr. Carter Moffat  
ammoniaphone

205/ Regent St.



The ammoniaphone was an instrument invented by Robert Carter Moffat, an eminent Scottish chemist, to help singers and public speakers improve the quality of their voice by breathing in vapours. It was also claimed to help ease the symptoms of consumption and other lung problems. Hersee and Moffat can be linked in articles and advertisements published in 1884–5 where Madame Rose Hersee (pictured above), a distinguished operatic soprano, born in 1845, was one of many who endorsed the value of this invention. One advertisement provides her address which is, no doubt, where Jefferies found it and copied it. The advertisement below was in *The Graphic*, Sat 25 October 1884.



Ammoniaphone

**DR. CARTER MOFFAT'S AMMONIAPHONE**

**ARTIFICIAL ITALIAN AIR**

**WILL LAST A LIFETIME**

**DR. CARTER MOFFAT'S AMMONIAPHONE**

**THE MEDICAL BATTERY CO. 205, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.**

The metal tube, 25 inches in length, contained a wick soaked with hydrogen peroxide, ammonia and peppermint oil. Pressing valves at the ends enabled the user to 'inhale very slowly and deeply' the vapours by placing their 'lips tightly over the centre cap'.

Evidently, on a visit to Italy, Moffat analysed the air and found the presence of free ammonia and hydrogen peroxide that he believed might be responsible for the Italian's operatic ability and why the climate



might be more beneficial to tuberculosis sufferers.

So, was Moffat's ammoniaphone one of the many remedies that Jefferies had tried to help relieve symptoms associated with his tuberculosis? Had he contacted Madame Hersee to find out more about the benefits she discovered? Most of the cures and remedies Jefferies tried related to his digestive problems. He might not have been aware that these might also have been tubercular in origin. Doctors were perplexed by his symptoms. There are seven references to cholera in Notebook XIII and none for tuberculosis. Surely he didn't think he was suffering from cholera? If nothing else his cough must have been diagnosed as tuberculosis of the lung.

According to Jefferies he had tried every cure available. This passage is taken from the opening of Chapter XXXI of *Amaryllis at the Fair* where Jefferies draws directly on his own experience:

Some noble physicians have tried the effect of drugs upon themselves in order to advance their art; for this they have received Gold Medals, and are alluded to as Benefactors of Mankind. I have tried the effects of forty prescriptions upon My Person. With the various combinations, patent medicines, and so forth, the total would, I verily believe, reach eighty drugs.

Consequently, it is clear I ought to receive eighty gold medals. I am a Benefactor eighty times multiplied; the incarnation of virtue; a sort of Buddha, kiss my knees, ye slaves!

I have a complaisant feeling as I walk about that I have thus done more good than any man living.

I am still very ill.

The curious things an invalid is gravely recommended to try! One day I was sitting in that great cosmopolitan museum, the waiting-room at Charing Cross station, wearily glancing from time to time at the clock, and reckoning how long it would be before I could get home. There is nothing so utterly tiring to the enfeebled as an interview with a London physician. So there I sat, huddled of a heap, quite knocked up, and, I suppose, must have coughed from time to time.

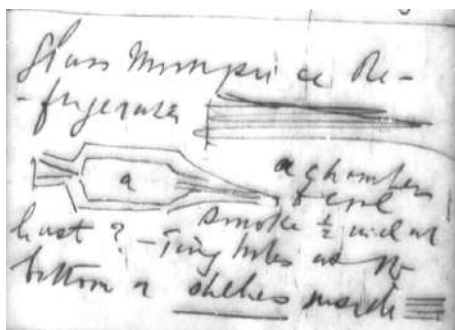
Jefferies goes on to relate how an American approached him at the station with a remedy he had employed to cure his own cough, the taking of crude oil as a medicine. Jefferies writes:

I wish I had tried it. Like him, I hate to hear anybody cough! Better take a ten-gallon keg of petroleum.

Jefferies' Notebook XIII is full of entries listing assorted remedies to try and the ammoniaphone might well have been one of them. He refers to it again in his Notebook XVI for 19 August 1886, two years later.

In July 1884 Jefferies writes ‘Opium—preventative cholera/Koch’<sup>1</sup>. The German physician Robert Koch had recently discovered the bacillus that caused cholera (in 1883) and tuberculosis (1882). By 1840 TB accounted for around one in every seven deaths—the largest killer. There was no shortage of quack cures ranging from ‘cod liver oil, lard and the smell of cow dung for the masses, to more exotic remedies like boa constrictor excreta, arsenic, aluminium, digitalis, gold and opium for the rich.’<sup>2</sup> Jefferies notes: ‘I am nearly a total/ abstainer. Practically I am quite/ claret port Hungarian Cyprus/—Recovery to moderation/from long illness./They advised me to take my codliver with port wine—to/shake it up together in a bottle & so /tipple it. Somehow I /fought shy of this, it was too much like mixing the/ profane & the sacred.’<sup>3</sup>

Jefferies’ notes reveal his ideas concerning a cooling smoke and he is clearly in the market for some sort of hookah pipe. This from folio 102: ‘Pipe— after all the Meershams!/The best pipe/London has to offer is the Reed/& Clumsy Butt (butt coils?)/(as in contrast with the Bar-/barian Turks Narghile<sup>4</sup>)’ followed by:



Glass mouth piece Re-  
frigerator.

a chamber  
to cool  
smoke ½ inch at  
least? — Tiny holes at the  
bottom or shelves inside.

Jefferies also records (folio 103) the name of an importer of tobacco and a cigarette manufacturer—George Litsica of 251 Oxford Street and mentions nicotine (folio 86) and the Turkish narghile again (folio 87) on 4 August along with cod liver oil. There are notes that list, ginger, ginseng, ammonia, pepper, Benedictine, caraway and cannabis and various other substances.

Who knows what Jefferies tried to relieve his suffering, but who can blame him for trying?

<sup>1</sup> Richard Jefferies’ Notebook XIII, folio 48, 9 July 1884.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Trial by TB: a study into current attempts to control the international upsurge in tuberculosis’ by Christopher I Holme in the Supplement of the Proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh, Jan 1997, Vol 27, No 1, p.19.

<sup>3</sup> Jefferies’ Notebook XIII, folio 110, 13 August 1884.

<sup>4</sup> The Turkish narghile was a hookah design.

## 22 Victoria Street

The following article appeared in the *Swindon Advertiser* on Friday, 4 April 1902, p.5. The unveiling of the plaque, made of Scotch grey granite, took place on 15 November 1902 after a meeting at the Town Hall.<sup>1</sup> The tablet reads:

Here lived  
Richard Jefferies  
1875-1877

A Noted House—It is not generally known that Richard Jefferies, the great Wiltshire writer, who was born at Coate, resided for the first few years of his married life, at No. 22, Victoria Street, Swindon, now occupied by Mr. W. Drew, architect.<sup>2</sup> Previous to Jefferies living there, the house was occupied by Mr. John Hampden,<sup>3</sup> who gained some amount of notoriety throughout the country by the persistency with which he argued that the world was flat, and had a celebrated law-suit over his failure to prove this on the Bedford Canal. He also claimed to be a descendant of the great John Hampden. For many years previous to this, the same house in Victoria Street, was the residence of the late Mr. William Morris, the founder and editor of the *Swindon Advertiser*.<sup>4</sup> And one whom we may be pardoned for claiming as the historian of the town and district. The *Advertiser* was printed and published in the house for a long period in its earliest years of existence. We are reminded of this by the announcement which appears on our front page that the members of the North Wilts Field and Camera Club are going to (with the permission of the owner and occupier) perpetuate the memory of Richard Jefferies by affixing a memorial tablet to the house. The Club invites subscriptions towards defraying the necessary cost, as they think many outside the Club will be pleased to contribute. Subscriptions may be sent to either Mr. H. Bottomley Knowles, Principal of the Swindon Technical Schools, or Mr. T.C. Davison, hon. sec., 49, Victoria Road, Swindon.

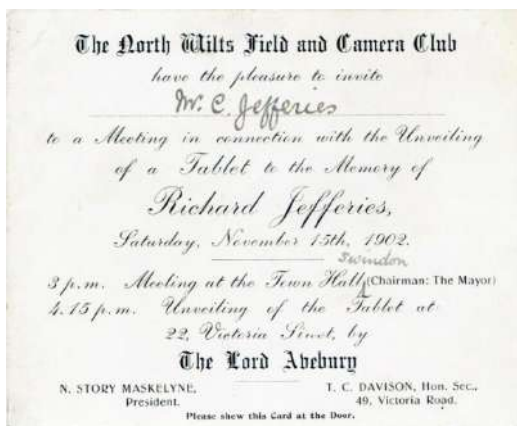
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¹ See *Swindon Advertiser*, 21 November 1902, p.6 for a full report of the ceremony to unveil the plaque at 22, Victoria Street. The article is reproduced in the Richard Jefferies Society's 'Talks and Articles' library, No, 125.

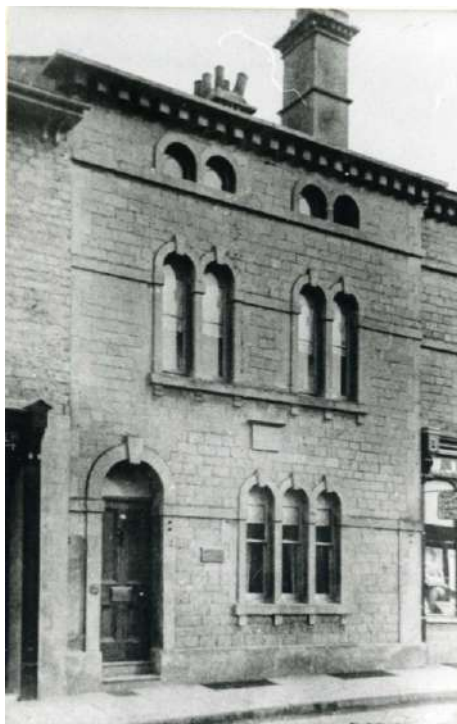
² Around 1881, 22 Victoria Street was William Ormond's solicitor's office.

³ John Hampden, 1819–1891, was an English scientist of the Royal Academy.

⁴ *Swindon Advertiser and Monthly Record* was first published on 6 February 1854 as a broadsheet costing one penny. Richard Jefferies had two articles and a letter published in the paper at the invitation of William Morris who did much to encourage the young writer.



Charlie Jefferies' (Richard's youngest brother) invitation to attend the event is pictured above. Below is an image of 22 Victoria Street with the plaque in situ. The plaque was later moved to the area of brick-work between the second floor windows. 22 Victoria Street is now 93 Victoria Road. The houses were renumbered between 1901 and 1911.



Unveiling a Memorial Tablet at Coate

As reported in the *Swindon Advertiser* 12 June 1903

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**RICHARD JEFFERIES**

A VISIT TO HIS BIRTHPLACE

UNVEILING A MEMORIAL TABLET

CEREMONY PERFORMED BY  
MR. N. STORY MASKELYNE

INTERESTING SPEECHES

When last November Lord Avebury visited Swindon and unveiled a memorial tablet at the house in Victoria Street, where Richard Jefferies, the great Wiltshire writer, lived for two years—from 1875 to 1877—it was understood that this would be followed by the erection of a similar tablet at Jefferies' birthplace at Coate. The idea of fixing these tablets originated at a meeting of the North Wilts Field and Camera Club, and was suggested by our townsman, Ald. L.L. Morse. The work was at once taken in hand by the Field and Camera Club who solicited subscriptions, and, as will be remembered, Lord Avebury came to Swindon in November last, and unveiled the tablet in Victoria Street a public meeting being also held in the Town Hall, presided over by the mayor (Ald. F.G. Wright).

Then steps were taken to get the second tablet affixed. The present owner and occupier of Jefferies' Farm, Coate, Mr. Jonathan Gosling, was approached, and he readily assented to the proposal of the Field and Camera Club, and the tablet has been fixed near the arched doorway that Jefferies described so fully in some of his works.

Last Saturday [6<sup>th</sup> June] saw the completion of the work, and the unveiling of the tablet. It was a lovely afternoon, and, although the gathering was only of a semi-public character, there was a large gathering, many lovers of Jefferies' books going over to Coate—some in carriages, some on motor bicycles, and other preferring the walk across the fields, which Jefferies has told us about in his last work, 'My Old Village.'

At half-past three the company assembled outside the farm house, among those present being Mr. N. Story Maskelyne, Mr. F.G. Wright (Mayor of Swindon), Mr. George Avenell (of London, Chairman of the Committee of

the Selborne Society, and also of the Society of Wiltshiremen in London). Mrs. W. Young (Cricklade), Mrs. E. Lawrence (Swindon), Mr. H. Bottomley Knowles, M.A., Mr. W.H. Stanier, Rev. Libby, Rev. T. Page, Rev. Stroud Williams, Mr. G. Allsopp, Mr. J. Gosling, Mr. H. Brunsdon, Mr. J.J. Shawyer, Mr. J. Baker, Mr. W. L. Mathieson, Mr. Thomas C. Davison (Hon. Secretary to the Field and Camera Club), Mr. W.J. Davison, etc., etc.

Mr. Bottomley Knowles presided over the gathering, and in a brief speech spoke of the delight which the great Wiltshire writer had given to thousands of his countryman who had perused his works. After referring to the ceremony which took place in Swindon last November<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Knowles said they were now assembled to unveil a memorial to the great man at the house where he was born 55 years ago, and where for 20 years of his short life he resided. That house was well known to everyone in the neighbourhood as the birthplace of Jefferies. He went from it into the fields which he described so beautifully in his books. When he left it, he had not found what he had been seeking all his life—the position he was to occupy and the destiny he was to fulfil. He felt he was destined for something, and the early part of his life was one long struggle to find out what that was. The foundation of his life's work was laid there, however, in the lanes and fields and the charming nature around. Anyone who loved the country should not only like Jefferies, but enjoy his writings. As a young man, he was not appreciated, but now they could understand that, for he was not like those around him. People generally took the normal view of men and things, and anyone different from themselves was considered abnormal. In not being appreciated, Jefferies shared the fate of all who were specially gifted. The man who was going to write 'The Story of My Heart' could not mix with his fellows; it was essential for him to have a great deal of self-communion. In the same way 'Sartor Resartus' could not have been penned by anyone other than a person who had devoted himself largely to self-introspection. Although Jefferies was known to this day by his neighbours as being half a lunatic, he (Mr. Knowles) did not think that implied anything deficient in him, or in the people of Coate or Swindon who entertained that opinion; it was that which must happen when they had an abnormal person to deal with. Now that they judged his personality by his written word they could see that Jefferies would one day assume—as he was now beginning to assume—an honoured place among the writers of our country (applause). After further remarks on Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> November 1902: a memorial tablet, 'Here lived Richard Jefferies 1875-1877', was unveiled having been affixed to 22 Victoria Street, Swindon [now 93 Victoria Road]. Among the speakers at the ceremony were Lord Avebury, N. Story Maskelyne and P. Anderson Graham (Editor of *Country Life*). A full report can be found in the *Swindon Advertiser*, 21 Nov 1902.

Jefferies' works, Mr. Knowles asked Mr. Maskelyne, the President of the Field and Camera Club, to unveil the memorial.

In doing so, Mr. Story Maskelyne said he had come there with pleasure that afternoon to finish the work which they begun in Swindon last November (applause). On the previous occasion, they had a sort of field day, and with speeches from Lord Avebury and other gentlemen they heard all about the life of Richard Jefferies and the work he had done. It was a chequered life, full of trials and struggles, but he was not going to allude to that side of the life of this great writer. He would rather ask his hearers to consider what was really the relation to the members of the Field and Camera Club like theirs to this valuable life's work of their fellow countryman, Richard Jefferies. In the first place, Jefferies was the pioneer in a particular kind of writing, though he was not absolutely the first to attempt it. Jefferies had taught us what enjoyment there was in Nature, and he had expressed it in the most beautiful language. To those who dwelt in towns and desired refreshment in the evening and at the week-end, they could not do better than get out into the country and enjoy Nature as Jefferies did. Some, he believed, delighted in beer and skittles and the public house. But the many, and the members of such Societies as the North Wilts Field and Camera Club did not consider beer and skittles to be the quintessence of enjoyment. No, there was for them something of that feeling which Jefferies had expressed to us in his writings, for in them was refreshment and enjoyment to be found in the fields, in appreciating the beauties of Nature. That was, he believed, one of the greatest pleasures. After further reference to this point, as emphasised in Jefferies' works, Mr. Story Maskylene said it was the same feeling that pervaded Wordsworth, who looked not only at the beauty around him, but asked himself what was the reason of it, and whence it came, and what this infinite harmony brought to the soul of man. It taught us just in proportion as we shared the beauties around us in Nature. Some of those present might have read that poem by Wordsworth, in which he imagined a child of Nature born and bred and trained in all the loveliness of the country around her,

And hers shall be the breathing balm,  
And hers the silence and the calm,  
Of mute, insensate things.  
The floating clouds their state shall lend  
To her; for her the willow bend;  
Nor shall she fail to see  
Even in the motions of the storm  
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form

By silent sympathy.<sup>2</sup>

They must go to nature themselves for that study, and the more they studied the particular forms which it presented to them the more they were delighted with them. He thought they should learn of nature by communing with it, and not from books. Then if they went to nature and wanted a question answered, they might go to the books and find the opinions of other thinkers and seers who had thought and seen before, so that they themselves could interpret what they saw. That, he thought, was the main object of their association with the name of Jefferies. They were told that an increasing love of nature would draw people back to the country. He hoped it might, though he doubted it, but it would add enormously to the enjoyment. To be alone with nature was not solitude; to understand its charms and enter into its spirit was true enjoyment. He thought the object of Jefferies could be brought home to them in that way. If, when they walked through the fields, instead of merely smoking a cigarette, they took the trouble to look at the flowers and think of the inspiration and education to be derived from the beautiful harmony which was the best part of nature, they would understand that object. Jefferies, who once lived in that nice old house was the descendant of a family of British yeoman, probably men of the old Wessex blood, but in unfortunate days he had to leave that home. The tablet there was far more reminiscent, he thought, than that on the house in Swindon in which he lived for a short period. The latter, however, would be seen by far more people, and thus his memory would be perpetuated in both places. He hope the tablet would long remain cherished there, and that many an Englishman might take off his hat to the man who had made that house venerable, and who had thrown over the whole of this country the beautiful poetry of his own nature. Mr. Story Maskelyne dwelt upon Jefferies' life at Coate. He then unveiled the tablet amidst applause, and said he hoped it would remind future generations of the man who had delighted them through his books on Nature. Mr. Maskelyne read the inscription on the tablet, which was as follows: 'Birthplace of Richard Jefferies. Born Nov. 6<sup>th</sup> 1848.' It did not, added Mr. Maskelyne, record the date of his death, for he was not really dead to us; his name would live immortal.

The Chairman then asked Mr. George Avenell, who had come down from London specially to be present, to say a few words.

Mr. Avenell expressed his gratification at being present on such an auspicious occasion. He had had an engagement in Kent that afternoon with the Selborne Society, but that he had no hesitation in cancelling since he considered that Coate had undoubtedly the prior claim upon him. As he was

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<sup>2</sup> Extract from 'Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower', 1815.



coming down in the train there was at one point a slackening of speed, so that he was able to catch the song of the greater whitethroat, and to hear the anthem of the ascending lark. This, and the long grasses bending and bowing in ripples to the breeze, which swept so quietly by, had caused his thoughts to turn to Jefferies' famous essay, 'Hours of Spring,' and to wonder how Nature could get on without him for who was there to mark with such loving care the coming of the birds, the blooming of the flowers, and to keep the calendar of the seasons, now that the master hand had crumbled into dust? Mr. Avenell then recalled to hearers that in Dove Cottage at Grasmere the memory of Wordsworth was perpetuated; at Keswick there were relics to be seen of his brother poet Southey; Ruskin was commemorated at Coniston; while at Haworth there was a museum devoted to that immortal family, the Brontës. Why, then, asked the speaker, turning to the tablet beside him, should there not be something to remind Wiltshiremen of the birthplace of their greatest son? Proceeding, Mr. Avenell stated that some of them were aware of the position he held in connection with the Selborne Society, whom he might be regarded as representing that afternoon, and mentioned that on the following Saturday the Society named was making a pilgrimage to the shrine at Selborne of the older naturalist, Gilbert White, so that he, the speaker, in a lowly way, might be looked upon as some sort of link between White and the Jefferiesian gathering there assembled. As he came over the brow of the hill that afternoon, the first thing in the hamlet to attract his notice was the tall chimney of John Brown's cottage, alluded to in Jefferies' essay, 'My Old Village.' To the right of them, the next building to the church, was John Smith's shanty, the subject of an early paper. In 'Meadow Thoughts' (Mr. Avenell held the book in his hand and quoted from it) they read that 'the old house (Jefferies' home) stood by the silent country road, secluded by many a long, long, mile and yet again secluded within the great walls of the garden. Often and often I rambled up to the milestone which stood under the oak to look at the chipped inscription low down—"To London, 79 miles.' So far away, you see, that the very inscription was cut at the foot of the stone, since no one would be likely to want that information.' Quoting again from the same essay, Mr. Avenell remarked that the company with their own eyes could view the lime trees by the garden wall and the footpath opposite which lost itself in the trees: 'Down the road skims an eave-swallow swift as an arrow, his white back making the sun-dried dust dull and dingy; he is seeking a pool for mortar, and will waver to and fro by the brook below till he finds a convenient place to alight. Thence back to the cave here, where for 40 years he and his ancestors built in safety.' Mr. Avenell here made a brief pause to direct the visitors' attention to the martins passing up and down on their way to their nests under the eaves of the house just as they did in

Jefferies' time. Proceeding, Mr. Avenell said Mr. Maskelyne had alluded to the loss of the family estate by the old yeoman family, and what could have been more pathetic than the visit, in after years, of Jefferies' mother, when she raised the latch of the door by which they were standing, surveyed the house and garden, and then overwhelmed by the flood of memories rushing over her, retired without entering her ancient home? The place was indeed the main source of Jefferies' inspiration, for to it his mind was ever reverting, no matter whether he lived at Surbiton, Brighton, Eltham, or Crowborough, the last high upon the Sussex Ridge, which Mr. Avenell stated he had visited a couple of years ago to view the house where Jefferies had for a time resided. Then came the closing scenes, when, so to speak, 'as a living man tied to a dead one, mind alive, body dead,' Jefferies, after as gallant a fight as was ever fought, vanquished by his three great foes, disease, despair and poverty, laid down the burden of the flesh at Goring-on-Sea, leaving imperishable works behind him (applause).

Mr. Stanier proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Story Maskelyne for his kindness, and mentioned that when he (Mr. Stanier) first came to Swindon 32 years ago, he had a casual acquaintance with Richard Jefferies, having met him frequently in Swindon. Quite recently he was reading in an American publication a statement in which the names of Jefferies and Thoreau were coupled together as being the men who had done more than any others to reveal Nature to us.

Mr. Knowles referred to the distinction of D.Sc., which the University of Oxford were about to confer on Mr. Story Maskelyne, and said he was glad his old University was thus honouring itself.

In reply, Mr. Story Maskelyne said he felt that the proper person to have unveiled that tablet was Mr. Avenell, for he was a personal friend of Jefferies.

Votes of thanks were also accorded to Mr. Knowles for presiding, and to Mr. Gosling for his great kindness.

### INSPECTING THE HOUSE

On the conclusion of the more formal proceedings, there was, as may be supposed, a desire on the part of the visitors to inspect the house and garden, a desire at once gratified by Mr. Jonathan Gosling, the owner, who himself showed the party round, and offered the necessary explanations, forgetful of the fact, as was pointed out to him, that people who live in houses, at some former time the residence of celebrities, have often to pay the penalty of intrusion by subsequent admirers. Access was given to the sitting room with the large bay window, where 'Farmer Iden,' as so vividly narrated in 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' took or feigned his afternoon nap while the mice, encouraged by the stillness, left the wainscoting, climbed his chair,

and sometimes touched his hand. One visitor ascended to the top storey to view the spot where Jefferies had handled and fondled his first gun, as related at the beginning of 'The Amateur Poacher,' but what in his time had become a garret, with an eerie chamber overhead tenanted by ghosts and starlings, was now a ceiled room, the alteration having probably been effected when the thatch was replaced by slate. Kitchen and out offices were also examined, and if a comparison is made with the detailed description of them in certain chapters in 'Wild Life' it would appear that here, too, the premises have undergone considerable changes. At one time, old folks may remember, a portion of them was used for devotional purposes before the little church nearby, though Mr. Gosling stated that such room or rooms had long since been demolished. The ha-ha between garden and meadow remains, but arbour and summer house have disappeared. Though we would fain preserve the old, especially when building or place is associated with our great ones, and woven into their story, yet must we recognise that with passing years will come change, some of them, perhaps, unnecessary, others, alas, inevitable.

The afternoon gave of its best, and restful it seemed to escape, if only for a while, from everyday polemics, and to linger amid such surroundings. On the house starlings chattered and whistled as in days past, doubtless with nests at hand; under the eaves, as we have seen, martins were very busy, and skimmed up and down, with white rumps almost glistening in the sun; a thrush from a neighbouring tree had punctuated with his song Mr. Maskelyne's remarks as though cognisant of the man whose memory the company had met to honour; and occasionally there came from the mead the blackbird's mellow melodies. In the garden a robin's voice was heard just over the heads of the visitors, while chaffinch and white-throat filled up the interstices between to strains. It was all so beautiful. Bathed in the afternoon sun were the meadows with their carpets of gold, and across the ripening grasses there ran from time to time little billows, as if touched by the finger of the winds; now and again a white cloud in the sky; trees, especially the oaks, in all the freshness of early summer; wild flowers in the hedges—campions, stitchwort, and a host of others; water heliographing back the rays of the sun; in the distance the downs, their rounded outlines showing clear—all this served to produce upon the retina a picture that should not easily be effaced. Well might Jefferies write: 'If we had never before looked upon the earth, but suddenly came to it man or woman grown, would it not seem to us a radiant vision? Like a dream of some spirit land it would appear, scarce fit to be touched lest it should fall to pieces, too beautiful to be long watched lest it should fade away.'

## AT THE RESERVOIR

The party then wended their way to Coate Reservoir, where tea was partaken of, provided by Mrs. Lawrence, and a pleasant hour was afterwards spent in visiting the haunts of Jefferies, and also inspecting a number of valuable pictures of scenes in and around Coate, so familiar to Jefferies. These were very kindly lent for exhibition during the afternoon by Mr. George Avenell, whose kindness was highly appreciated.

The whole of the arrangements for the afternoon were most satisfactorily carried out by Mr. T.C. Davison.

The tablet, which is of Aberdeen granite, is similar to the one erected in Swindon, and was supplied by Mr. George Saunders.

[End of newspaper report]

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A NOTE ON THE PRINCIPAL SPEAKERS:

George Avenell knew Jefferies personally but admitted that as Jefferies was 'unknowable' he knew Jessie better.³ Avenell was born in 1858 at Badbury, Chiseldon, a son of Hannah and William, a farmer. After an education at Caversham Home School he joined the North Wilts Banking Company as a clerk, working for a while in the Isle of Wight before transferring to London and by 1911 he had been promoted to Chief Inspector of Capital and Counties Bank as North Wilts Bank had become.

In contrast to his life in finance, Avenell was a lecturer on historical and literary subjects and well-informed about Richard Jefferies. As a keen photographer he joined the North Wilts Field and Camera Club⁴ and, sustaining his links to his birth county, he was a member of The Society of Wiltshiremen in London (a collective pining for the downs, perhaps), and the Hampstead branch of the Selborne Society.

While Jessie and Phyllis were living at Chiddingfold, Surrey, they joined some of the excursions organised by Avenell for the Field and Camera Club and Selborne Society.⁵ In 1911 Phyllis gave Avenell a copy of the large paper limited edition of *The Toilers of the Field*, published in 1892, but the occasion is unknown,⁶ possibly to celebrate Avenell's promotion or a parting gift before Jessie and Phyllis moved to Cornwall.

George Avenell died at Golders Green, London, in 1930, aged 72 and was buried at Chiseldon.

Nevil Story Maskelyne was born at Basset Down House, Wroughton in 1823, the eldest son of Antony Story and Margaret Maskelyne, daughter of Nevil Maskelyne

³ 'Discoveries', George Miller, RJS *Autumn Newsletter* 2015.

⁴ Some of his photographs were published in *Worthing Cavalcade: Richard Jefferies, A Tribute by Various Writers*, Ed. By Samuel L. Looker, Aldridge Bros., Worthing, Sussex, 1946.

⁵ *Swindon Advertiser*, 2 Sept 1904, 23 Sept 1904.

⁶ Miller, *op. cit.*

who was Astronomer Royal for forty-seven years. He attended Bruton Grammar School and went up to Wadham College, Oxford, where he studied crystallography, meteorites and gem-stones. From 1851 he taught there mineralogy and chemistry and played a prominent part in the establishment of science teaching at Oxford. Story Maskelyne became first keeper of the new department of minerals at the British Museum from 1857.

On his father's demise in 1880, he inherited the Basset Down estate and resigned from the British Museum to actively manage it and engage in local affairs. Perhaps his admiration of Jefferies' works developed during this period when he was living the life of a country gentleman. Story Maskelyne served as MP for Cricklade from 1880-1892 and as a Wiltshire County Councillor 1885-1904.

Story Maskelyne and his wife, Thereza, niece of Henry Fox Talbot, were pioneer experimenters in photography. Their work can be seen at the British Library and at the Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock.

Nevil Story Maskelyne died in 1911, aged 87, at Basset Down House, where he had been born.



This photograph shows the scene at the unveiling of the memorial tablet at Coate, 6th June 1903. The provenance of the photograph is untraced and we can only guess at those shown in the image, perhaps N. Story Maskelyne is the elderly figure nearest the tablet. The photograph was most likely taken by a member of the North Wilts Field and Camera Club. It is not a press photo as halftones were not a feature of newspapers at that time.

Richard Jefferies: Natural Historian of the English Countryside

Herbert M. Vaughan

First published in *From Anne to Victoria: Fourteen biographical studies between 1702 and 1901* by Herbert M. Vaughan M.A., F.S.A. (London: Methuen & Co, 1931). Chapter X (pp.156–175) is dedicated to Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) with the headline as above.

Natural history is today the commonplace knowledge of nearly everybody. We all know about migration of birds; of change of coats in certain animals; of the natural habits of snakes and eels; and of a thousand other pieces of information concerning the rural and animal world in which we live. It was very different with our ancestors; their ignorance was profound even as to the simplest facts of the birds and beasts and plants around them. In the distant past to take a practical interest in natural history was regarded as something worse than a hobby. Thus in the eighteenth century on one occasion an attempt was made to shut up as a lunatic a certain lady of rank, Lady Glanville, because she was in the habit of collecting and studying moths and butterflies. Her curious taste was evidenced by her heirs-at-law as a sure sign of her insanity. Again, the very notion of the migration of certain birds was apparently undreamed of until the days of that great naturalist, the Rev. Gilbert White, whose famous classic, *The Natural History of Selborne*, appeared about the date of the French Revolution. Yet it is interesting to observe that Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich, that charming and versatile genius, does certainly give a hint in his *Religio Medici* that he was aware of this wonderful secret of bird-life, which today is known to the veriest infant. The great Dr. Johnson was once asked by a lady as to what became of the swallows in winter, to which question he replied (so far as I can recall): ‘Madam, doubtless they seek a hiding-place at the approach of winter beneath streams or marshes. There they hibernate, and thence emerge later into the April sunshine.’ Johnson did not, of course, profess to be a naturalist, like his friend Oliver Goldsmith; and no doubt he had given the subject little or no attention. Still, it is interesting to note how utterly unobservant even so great a man as Johnson was of what are to us the simplest phenomena in Nature. Gilbert White’s delightful book undoubtedly forms a prominent landmark in the progress of natural history, and as time proceeded more and more true observers of Nature followed in White’s train.

Yarrell, Jardine, the Rev. F.O. Morris, Waterton, and many others carried on research in this direction, until by the middle of Victoria's reign there was comparatively little left to be discovered. There were excellent text-books for all those—and how numerous they are!—who own an innate inclination for the study of Nature. Still, there was left a wide field for the application of the discoveries of the past to everyday life in the countryside. The farms and the fields and the woods and the moors and the streams were still open books for the close student of Nature, where many novel and interesting facts and details could be gleaned by keen observers. The Rev. J.G. Wood, author of *Common Objects of the Country*, was perhaps the best known of this type of student, and his books and lectures did much to popularize the study of natural history. But the most charming of all these modern writers is undoubtedly to be recognized in Richard Jefferies.

Richard Jefferies was born on 6th November 1848 at Coate Farm, near Swindon in Wiltshire. One usually thinks of ugly Swindon in terms of the Great Western Railway, for at this point the train passes through many acres, not of green fields, but of sheds and factories connected with the line. But Swindon is in reality the entrance gate to Jefferies' Land, that enchanting county which he has described for us in so many of his books. Swindon, the new Swindon, is but a blot on the rural face of North Wilts, and we are soon outside its industrial radius in a brisk walk. Young Jefferies' father was a small farmer, and a man of some culture, with a marked taste for zoology, which his son inherited. We can glean many facts and incidents of Jefferies' early life from his autobiographical volumes—*Bevis*, a book primarily intended for young boys, and *The Story of My Heart*. They are interesting enough in their way, but there is little to chronicle beyond the simple fact that Jefferies was one of those born worshippers and observers of Nature in all her aspects. Like Ruskin, he held no doubt but that Nature was beautiful, though in diverse ways, in every guise. Before he was out of his 'teens, young Jefferies was contributing articles on country life and country objects to the local newspapers. From such journals as the *North Wilts Advertiser* he was promoted to the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, then in the palmy days of its popularity. He earned money fast, for his articles were read by many and he owned a fast-flowing pen. On the strength of his early success he ventured to marry when he was but twenty-five. He attempted novels in a further flight of ambition, but these did not prove so successful nor so lucrative as his Nature studies. Before he was thirty he had definitely won a place, and a secure place, in contemporary literature by his book, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, which brought him both money and an ever-extending popularity. Schoolboys were particularly delighted with this type of book, and as the average schoolmaster voted Jefferies a 'healthy' writer, his works were now

deemed indispensable to every school library. His growing reputation was enhanced two years later by *Wild Life in a Southern County* (which is, of course, his native Wiltshire), the book itself being based on articles previously published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In *Wood Magic*, which appeared in 1881, Jefferies gave a new vitality to the old form of tale, wherein animals are made to speak like humans before a human audience. The idea is as old as the world; even Aesop's Fables are comparatively modern, but Jefferies' treatment of the venerable theme proved novel and attractive. Very possibly *Wood Magic*, read in the school library at Westward Ho!, may have in later years suggested the idea of *The Jungle Book* and the personality of Mowgli the boy to Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

Of his many other works I intend to speak later, and I shall only add here that poor Richard Jefferies' life was a short one, and sadly marred by poverty and ill-health. Too proud to apply for a pension from the Literary Fund, or some such source, the popular chronicler of the English countryside continued to write, or rather to dictate to his wife (for he had already grown too feeble to use the pen) articles for the press. Under such conditions the last few years of his career were passed in anxiety and pain. He died at Goring, in Sussex, on 14th August 1887, at the early age of thirty-eight. His loss was deplored by a large circle of readers, and the inhabitants of his native county were sufficiently proud of him to erect a monument in his memory within the beautiful cathedral of Salisbury, the capital of his beloved shire of Wilts.

Jefferies has had many imitators. As I have already hinted, he was the founder of a new school in natural history. Even in the press of today one can discover echoes of Jefferies' influence in the small paragraphs of 'Nature Notes,' which most papers include in their columns. Of course these humble contributions own none of the racy charm of Jefferies' work, but they do undoubtedly perpetuate his attitude towards, and treatment of, the countryside. Of the many who have followed in the master's footsteps and have sought in his terms to treat of things and people rural, probably the best disciple is the late Rev. Alfred Rees, formerly of Llandyssul, Cardiganshire. Like Jefferies, Rees died early, but his two published volumes, *Ianto the Fisherman*, and *Creatures of the Night*, have accomplished very much for the lovely but remote valley of the Teifi what Jefferies did for his native Wiltshire. The pity is that Rees's books are not better known.

Of course, a good deal of Richard Jefferies' work is mere journalism—short articles afterwards published in book form—that helped to keep the pot boiling in the sad days of his long illness that ended in a premature death. His command of English is by no means of the first order, and he is a bad sinner in the matter of the split infinitive. There is a great deal of repetition

and not a little padding in some of his books. Yet Jefferies undoubtedly voices a large section of the British people, and especially boys who have the natural flair for the countryside, or rather for its inhabitants whether furred, finned, or feathered. I do not think all Jefferies' descriptions of sunsets and scenery ring quite true; and he always seems to me deficient in knowledge of plant-lore, let alone of botany. He can sometimes become sentimental, and, therefore, tedious. For example, after a good deal of talk about what he calls the starry flowers of the common stitchwort, he ends thus: 'Give me the old road, the same flowers—they were only stitchworts—the old succession of days and garlands, ever weaving into it fresh wildflowers from far and near. Fetch them from distant mountains, discover them on decaying walls, in unsuspected corners; though never seen before, still they are the same; there has been a place in the heart waiting for them.' This sounds to me perilously near nonsense.

The little piece I have just quoted—from one of the essays called 'The Open Air'¹—shows us Jefferies at his worst; probably he wrote it in time of sickness and in an introspective mood. How different is this extract from the truly charming descriptions and narratives of his earlier works! Take such a book as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, which was his first publication to win him fame and even affection. It is a very short volume, wholly without a story, yet exhibiting for us the true psychology, as it were, of a whole class, a very interesting and intelligent class, of the community, namely, the gamekeeper and his subordinates. The book appeared in 1878, and it is curious to observe how even at that date, now over half a century ago, Jefferies was already deploring the decay of the old-fashioned country life led by the squires and great landowners. What would he have said of present-day conditions, with the motor-car and even the aeroplane? What would he have thought of the late King Edward's luxurious habit of shooting pheasants from an automobile in a woodland ride? The plain fact is that the old-time romance of country life had begun to disappear even so early as the 'seventies, when Jefferies first took up his pen; by the end of the nineteenth century it was utterly ruined from the picturesque and romantic point of view. Sport had become mercenary and artificial; the smaller squires, who were more conservative in their taste and less vulgar in their notions of sport, were rapidly disappearing as a class; it only needed the Great War to finish off the old country life completely. In *The Gamekeeper at Home* Jefferies shows us in pleasant rambling fashion the daily life of a great sporting estate and of its guardians, and yet how prophetic is this passage written over fifty years ago!

¹ Editor's note. This quote appears in Jefferies' essay 'Wild Flowers' that was published in *The Open Air*.

The gamekeeper finds his work fall upon him harder now than it used to do: first, sportsmen look for a heavier return of killed and wounded; next, they are seldom willing to take much personal trouble to find the game, but like it in a manner brought to them; and lastly, he thinks the shooting season has grown shorter. Gentlemen used to reside at home the greater part of the winter and spread their shooting over many months. Now the seaside season has moved on, and numbers are by the beach at the time when formerly they were in the woods. Then others go abroad; the country-houses now advertised as 'to let' are almost innumerable. Time was when the local squire would have thought it derogatory to his dignity to make a commodity of his ancient mansion; now there seems quite a competition to let, and absenteeism is a reality of English as well as Irish country life. At least, such is the gamekeeper's idea, and he finds a confirmation of it in the sudden rush, as it were, upon his preserves.

Yes, Jefferies saw coming ahead the end of true sport, with the ruin or departure of the resident gentry and the advent of what we now call the profiteer or 'new rich.'

Turning to bird and beast life on the estate, Jefferies describes for us with marvellous accuracy the various enemies of the keeper: the carrion-crow, the hawk, the jay, and the owl, as well as the stoat and weasel; in short, all the destructive creatures commonly classed together as 'vermin.' Here is an admirable little sketch of the jay, with its bright plumage of brickly red and its lovely wing-feathers of richest blue.

The Jay is a handsome bird, whose chatter enlivens the plantations, and whose bright plumage contrasts pleasantly with the dull green of the firs. A pair of jays will work a hedge in a sportsmanlike manner, one on one side, the second on the other; while the tiny wren, which creeps through the bushes as a mouse through the grass, cowers in terror or slips into a knot-hole till the danger is past. When the husbandman has sown his field with the drill, hardly has he left the gateway before a legion of small birds pours out from the hedgerows and seeks for the stray seeds. Then you may see the jay hop out among them with an air of utter innocence, settling on the larger lumps of clay for convenience of view, swelling out his breast in pride of his beauty, jerking his tail up and down as if to say, *Admire me*. With a side-long hop and two flaps of the wing, he half springs, half glides to another coign of vantage. The small birds—sparrows, chaffinches, greenfinches—instantly scatter swiftly right and left, not rising, but with a hasty run for a yard or so. They know well his murderous intent, and yet are so busy they only just put themselves out of reach, aware that, unlike the hawk, the jay cannot strike at a distance. This game will continue for a long time; the jay all the while affecting an utter indifference, yet ever on the alert till he spies his chance. It is the young or weakly partridges or pheasants that fall to the jay and magpie.

Such a brief account of the jay and his cunning shows us well how observant and critical of wild life was this Wiltshire writer, who gained his

knowledge not from books but from personal experience in the open air. His very writings teach those of us who are devoted to Nature study that to probe the secrets of the open-air life around us we must use our own eyes and draw our own conclusions. I have always heard it said that to understand bird life, the best plan is to lie still in some thicket of a copse or spinney, and with a pair of field-glasses watch the movements of the birds as they come and go at nesting-time. And this method of observation, too, must be made fairly early in the year, before the leaf is fully out, and there is consequently a clearer range of vision for the naturalist. And whilst waiting for the birds to become careless or unsuspicious of your presence, how many beauties of flowers and young foliage are revealed to the watcher! The rich brown buds of the sycamore; the half-unfolded leaves of the beeches, like quantities of tiny green butterflies; the tender tints of honeysuckle and brier-rose; to say nothing of the bluebells, the pink campion, the snowy stitchwort, and dozens of other simple flowers that fill the hedges and ditches in early spring.

To hark away from bird and beast, from field and forest, this delightful book contains a capital account of a rare relic of olden time, which no doubt Jefferies had seen in his youth, but only as a curiosity long fallen out of use. This was the terrible man-trap, which at one time, probably so late as the early years of Queen Victoria, was not infrequently placed in orchards or gardens to protect the fruit. Until comparatively recent years fruit was not only scarce and dear, but almost unprocurable by those who owned no gardens. That was, of course, long before the days of rail and steam transit, which has made every species of fruit, British and foreign, from the home-grown apple to the tropical banana, saleable everywhere and at moderate prices. But a century or so ago, choice fruit, even pears and apples, were the property of the wealthy alone, and were constantly raided by gangs or by solitary thieves. To protect their fruit, landowners and also farmers, as well as wealthy merchants in town villas, were wont to place in hiding near their best trees the man-trap, which was made precisely on the lines of the common gin or rat-trap, but of course on a far bigger scale. This is how Jefferies describes it:

The jaws of this iron wolf are horrible to contemplate—rows of serrated projections, which fit into each other when closed, alternating with spikes a couple of inches long, like tusks. To set the trap you have to stand on the spring—the weight of a man is about sufficient to press it down. The machine itself is then hidden among the bushes or covered with dead leaves. Now touch the pan with a stout walking-stick, and the jaws cut it in two in the twinkling of an eye. They seem to snap together with a vicious energy, powerful enough to

break the bone of the leg; and assuredly no man ever got free whose foot was once caught by those terrible teeth.

The keeper will tell you that this man-trap used to be set up in the corner of the gardens and orchard belonging to the great house, which in the pre-policeman days were nightly robbed. He thinks there were quite as many traps set in the gardens just outside the towns as ever there were in the woods and preserves of the country proper. He recollects but one old man (a mole-catcher) who had actually experienced in his youth the sensation of being caught; he went ever after lame on one foot, the sinews having been cut or divided. The trap could be chained to its place if desired; but, as a matter of fact, a chain was unnecessary, for no man could possibly drag this torturing clog along.

A still more deadly variant of the man-trap, the so-called 'poacher-stopper,' is not, I think, mentioned by Jefferies. This consisted of a stout pole, some four feet high, with a long sharp spike of steel fixed at right angles near the top of the pole. This lethal contrivance was then well covered over with brushwood and driven firmly into the soil in some likely place that the nocturnal poacher would pass in his hunting. There is a specimen of the poacher-stopper preserved in the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff, and it is a gruesome engine to contemplate.

When you have read the best of Jefferies' books, you will have gained not only a clear insight into the natural history of bird and beast, but also into the human history of the countryside. And the author's comments are not only shrewd and accurate, but they are also always fair. He saw the two sides of the land question with impartial eyes, so that his criticism of both landlord and tenant is sound and just.

Probably the best book Jefferies ever wrote is his *Wild Life in a Southern County*. It is the most human, in the strict sense of that term, of all his books. For it deals not only with fish, flesh, and fowl, but also with the human element of the countryside. In *Wild Life* we are given an excellent picture of the old English farm-life as it had been lived for many generations in the past, and was even then being lived in the writer's own youth. Things agricultural have moved swiftly since those not very distant days, so that much of the simple primitive charm, which Jefferies describes so sympathetically, has by this time already disappeared. The use of tractors and of oil-engines was still unknown in the 'eighties, though the ugly steam plough was very much in evidence. Of all our southern counties, the inland county of Wiltshire is one of the sweetest and most interesting. It possesses no mountains or grand scenery; it owns no rivers of any size, and no lakes; it has no sea-shore and no wide marshes. But on the other hand, nowhere else are found such broad rich meadows, fringed with rows of tall elms and powdered in early summer with the buttercup and the ox-eyed daisy. Seen

from rising ground, the flat expanses of meadow-land look like some great forest, so tall and thick and serried rises the hedge-row timber. And then, in contrast with this rich champaign, are the great swelling masses of the downs which extend from the northern to the southern ends of the shire, from Swindon to Salisbury. The ancient traditions and customs and beliefs of old rural life die hard in Wiltshire, which within its boundaries contains our two chief Druidic monuments of the past—the great circle of Avebury, Devizes, and Stonehenge, set in the midst of the rolling expanse of Salisbury Plain. Never was there a more fruitful field for the naturalist. The great meadows, the grassy downs, the forest of Savernake, the parks and woodlands of such splendid old seats as Wilton House, Bowood, Longleat, Rood Ashton, and Roundway Park, offer innumerable and varied opportunities to the true and patient lover of Nature. And amid such beautiful scenery are scattered picturesque old market-towns such as Devizes and Marlborough and Westbury and Trowbridge and Bradford-on-Avon, and dozens of old-world villages grouped around their fine old parish churches, many of which in Jefferies' day had not been yet ruined by the hand of the restorer or the vandal.

Jefferies describes for us one such humble 'haunt of ancient peace' in his account of Wick Farm.

Wick Farm—almost every village has its outlying wick—stands alone in the fields. It is an ancient rambling building, the present form of which is the result of successive additions at various dates, and in various styles. . . .

The house has somehow shaped and fitted itself to the character of the dwellers therein: hidden and retired amongst trees, fresh and green with cherry and pear against the wall, yet the brown thatch and the old bricks subdued in tone by the weather. This individuality extends to the furniture: it is a little stiff and angular, but solid; and there are nooks and corners—as the window-seat—suggestive of placid repose; a strange opposite mixture throughout of flowery peace and silence, with an almost total lack of modern conveniences and appliances of comfort—as though the sinewy vigour of the residents disdained artificial ease. . . .

Since this family dwelt here, and well within what may be called the household memory, the very races of animals have changed or been supplanted. The cows in the field used to be long-horns, much more hardy and remaining in the meadows all the winter, with no better shelter than the hedges and bushes afforded. Now the short-horns have come, and the cattle are carefully housed. The sheep were horned—up in the lumber room two or three horns are still to be found. The pigs were of a different kind, and the dogs, and the poultry. If the race of men have not changed, they have altered their costume; the smock-frock lingered longest, but even that is going.

I need hardly add that the smock-frock, going in Jefferies' days, has now wholly disappeared. All the world is wearing the same dull, drab, conventional garments; all the poetry has in our time disappeared from rural life. It was fortunate it had not wholly vanished at the date when Jefferies flourished, so that at least he was able to write so charming a record of it. Even I can remember seeing smock-frocks in the congregation of the Wiltshire church of Poulshott, and that was not many years after the date this account of Wick Farm was penned. Nor are dull, unreasoning fashion in clothes and noisy, stinking traction the sole causes of our modern rural ugliness. The hideous corrugated iron is cheap and useful, and its glaring ribbed surface everywhere strikes a discordant note in the rural landscape:

Ye have conquered, O Progress and Science!
The world has grown grey at your breath.

It is clear that Jefferies' talents are not wholly confined to observation and experience. He owned a powerful imagination with regard to those things that interested him, namely, the countryside and all its inhabitants, human and humbler. This innate power is clearly shown to us in his curious romance, *After London, or Wild England*, which draws a vivid picture for us of an England that has returned to primitive times, and more or less to the conditions that prevailed in the days of the Heptarchy. The novel itself I did not much care for, with its air of a forced and rather false medievalism; but the *Prologue* to the story itself makes most interesting if rather depressing reading. Jefferies describes how some miasmatic cloud suddenly sweeps over England, and indeed over all Europe, blotting out civilization, and slaying nearly all human beings with its pestilential breath—just such a visitation, on a vaster scale, as the *Vlad Velyn* of the sixth century, or the Black Death under Edward III. All the inhabitants of the great cities are wiped out; all the arts and crafts and knowledge of mechanism, and the scientific wonders to which we have grown accustomed, cease of necessity. Rivers and drains are blocked up, and the streams overflow large areas of the Midlands, transforming them into a great permanent freshwater lake. He tells us also of the effect on the countryside that is saved from the waters; how the corn crops are eaten by mice, how the domestic animals gradually become wild, and how the whole land is swiftly transformed into bush; a vast sylvan wilderness, in short, wherein the remaining men and women have difficulty in protecting themselves from the descendants of the animals that were once their harmless and useful servants, but are now grown fierce and mischievous. There is a likeness in this graphic account to some of Mr. H.G. Wells's fantastic tales.

By the thirtieth year [from the Great Pestilence] there was not a single open place, the hills only excepted, where a man could walk, unless he followed the tracks of wild creatures, or cut himself a path. The ditches of course had long since become full of leaves and dead branches, so that the water which should have run off down them stagnated, and presently spread out into the hollow places and by the corners of what had once been fields, forming marshes, where the horsetails, flags, and sedges hid the water.

And, most terrible picture of all, we are shown how, around the erstwhile estuary of the Thames, where once flourished the great port of London, there now stretched a huge area of fetid swamp, some forty miles long by about twenty broad, over which ever hung foul and pestilential vapours. So poisonous were the water and the atmosphere of this great tract above the buried capital of the British Empire, that even water-fowl had abandoned the district; and though inexhaustible treasure was known to exist beneath this fearsome morass, none dared approach it for fear of its fevers and stench.



From the Bust by M. Thomas in the National Portrait Gallery

In *Hodge and His Masters*, a series of sketches of rural characters, which had originally appeared in the *Standard*, Jefferies deals solely with the human element of the countryside. The landlord, the tenant-farmer, the labourer, the magistrate, the parson, the fine lady of the manor-house, and a host of other familiar inhabitants of a country district, are treated in short biographical articles, all of which show the ripe judgment and sympathetic insight of the author. The book contains some wonderful pen-pictures of rural society in its widest sense. Take this sketch of a farmer who has to leave his farm, largely, as is shown, owing to his own obstinacy and even folly. He begins by abusing his landlord, who has really done him no wrong; he allows his farm to run to seed and grow unkempt; he grumbles openly; he complains about the game, about the high rent, about his taxes.

Finally, Smith gave notice that unless the rent was reduced he should not apply to renew his lease, which would soon expire. He had not the least intention in his secret mind of leaving the farm; he never dreamed that his notice would be accepted. He and his had dwelled there for a hundred years, and were as much part and parcel of the place as the elm-trees in the hedges. . . . But the months went by, and the landlord's agent gave no sign, and at last Smith realized that he really was going to leave.

Though he had so long talked of going, it came upon him like a thunderbolt. It was like an attack of some violent fever that shakes a strong man and leaves him as weak as a child. The farmer, whose meals had been so hearty, could not relish his food. His breakfast dwindled to a pretence; his lunch fell off; his dinner grew less; his supper faded; his spirits and water, the old familiar 'night-cap,' did him no good. His jolly ringing laugh was heard no more; from a thorough gossip he became taciturn and barely opened his lips. His clothes began to hang about him, instead of filling him all too tight; his complexion lost the red colour and became sallow; his eyes had a furtive look in them, so different to the old straightforward glance.

Some said he would take to his bed and die; some said he would jump into the pond one night, to be known no more in this world. But he neither jumped into the pond nor took to his bed.

And the saddest feature of this rustic tragedy, a tragedy that is ever occurring in the countryside, is that there was no necessity for all this bitterness and final flitting from the old home. 'Smith thought very hard things of the landlord, and felt that he should have his revenge. On the other hand, the landlord thought very hard things of Smith, and not without reason. . . . There was great irritation on both sides.' Smith had, in fact, done his landlord wrong in running out the farm, and the landlord, on his part, should have sought to conciliate the angry and aggrieved tenant. With goodwill and patience on both sides, the whole miserable business might have been averted.

Just one more quotation from *Hodge and His Masters*, to show how profound was Jefferies' personal knowledge of the countryside, and of his really remarkable power of prophecy of the evils which today assail us.

There exists at the present day [remember he is writing some fifty years or so ago] a class that is morally apathetic. In every village, in every hamlet, in every detached group of cottages, there are numbers of labouring men who are simply indifferent to church and to chapel alike. They neither deny nor affirm the primary truths taught in all places of worship; they are simply indifferent. Sunday comes and sees them lounging about the cottage door. They do not drink to excess, they are not more given to swearing than others, they are equally honest, and are not of ill-repute. But the moral sense seems extinct—the very idea of anything beyond gross earthly advantages never occurs to them. The days go past, the wages are paid, the food is eaten, and that is all.

Looking at it from the purely philosophic point of view, there is something sad in this dull apathy. The most pronounced materialist has a faith in some form of beauty—matter itself is capable of ideal shapes in his conception. These people know no ideal. It seems impossible to reach them, because there is no chord that will respond to the most skilful touch. This class is very numerous now—a disheartening fact. . . .

Besides this moral apathy, the cottager too often assumes an attitude distinctly antagonistic to every species of authority, . . . Respect for authority is extinct. The modern progressive cottager is perfectly certain that he knows as much as his immediate employer, the squire, and the parson put together. He is now the judge, the infallible authority himself. . . . He can scarcely nod his employer a common greeting in the morning. Courtesy is no longer practised. The idea in the man's mind appears to be to express contempt for his employer's property. It is an unpleasant symptom.

This is in truth something of a jeremiad as well as an accusation. If one had read these words this week, say, in the *Morning Post*, contained in a letter from some indignant landowner, one might not feel surprise. But this was actually penned by a man of the people, who understood the people of the countryside as few have done either before or after him, more than a whole generation ago. And again, Jefferies proceeds to discuss the future of the rural labourer with regard to the so-called education he has been receiving during his boyhood, but especially after his school-days are finished.

The future literature of the labourer becomes a serious question. He will think what he reads; and what he reads at the present moment [*i.e.* fifty years ago] is of anything but an elevating character. He will think too what he hears; and he hears much of an exciting but subversive political creed, and little of any other. There are busy tongues earnestly teaching him to despise property and social order, to suggest the overthrowing of existing institutions; there is scarcely any one to instruct him in the true lesson of history. . . . There are many who are

only too anxious to use the agricultural labourer as the means to effect ends which he scarcely understands. But there are few indeed who are anxious to instruct him in science or literature for his own sake.

What was a prophetic warning, based on intimate experience in Jefferies' day, has indeed become the established fact in our own. Who is to educate the denizens of the countryside as to the true relations of human society? Who is to tell them of Mazzini's maxim, that man has no *rights*, only duties? But this is a controversial matter that lies outside the scope of this study; I have merely quoted the passages above to show how far-seeing and shrewd a prophet was this simple Wiltshire yeoman, whom we think of as a charming writer on country lore and nothing further. Yet Jefferies' work, when it deals with the human side of his studies, was clearly based on intimate knowledge of and sympathy with the rural population amidst which he had moved during the whole span of his all-too-short career.

From a purely literary point of view, it is rather difficult to place Jefferies. That he is a wholesome, popular, and instructive writer there can be no question, but whether his books will live for any great length of time and become recognized classics, like White's *History of Selborne*, with which they have been compared by admirers, seems to me doubtful. Their chief value, I think, is that he has put on record an accurate account of the old English rural life just at the very moment of its final passing, or rather of its changing into something totally different. These swiftly approaching changes, both in the rural landscape and in its population, Jefferies himself was prophet enough to foresee clearly, as I have already shown; and some of his regrets over the decay of the picturesque life of the woods and farms find a cordial echo in many a present-day writer. Again, though his works make delightful reading, they often smell not a little of the lamp, and suggest the author as forcing his pen and his memory, in order to make both ends meet by newspaper articles. That was, of course, Jefferies' misfortune, not his fault. One could have wished that, like his great forerunner, White of Selborne, Jefferies had been a country parson, or land-agent, with sufficient means and ample leisure never to write except when in the proper mood. Not that the real sense of the beauty of the commonest objects in the countryside was ever absent from his eye or mind; he found beauty everywhere, and calls our attention to homely charms that but for his instruction we might easily pass unheeded.

'The warm yellow of wheat straw' (he writes in *Field and Hedgerow*) 'is very pleasant to look at on a winter's day under a grey sky; so too the straw looks nice and warm and comfortable, thrown down thickly in the yards for the roan cattle.' Of course, so simple and constant a sight as yellow straw in a

farmyard is full of beauty, even on a dull day; but how few of us would realize this fact but for Jefferies' admiration!

Moreover, his inherent pantheism, his seeing God's handiwork in and through Nature at all times and in every place, raises Jefferies far above the general ruck of writers on natural history who admire and observe without introspection. He speaks of the intensity of his joy in lying on the Norfolk cliffs above the green waters of the North Sea, surrounded by scarlet poppies and golden crowsfoot.² 'I wish I could do something more than gaze at all this scarlet and gold and crimson and green, something more than see it, not exactly to drink it or inhale it, but in some way to make it part of me, that I might live it.' Here we have the true yearning of the poet, who is also a philosopher, for the unattainable. The sentiment that animated Jefferies can be traced in the melancholy epic of the Latin poet Lucretius. There is in truth a certain note of divine despair that intrudes constantly into all Jefferies' writings. To this extent, then, Jefferies stands apart from, and perhaps above, those writers with whom he is sometimes casually classed.

Jefferies has, of course, written a large number of books, and I believe there are complete editions of his total work to be had. But out of this mass of writings I think I should be inclined to pick out the following as representing their author at his best. First of all, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, the *doyen* of his books, that raised him to fame; then its corollary, giving the reverse side of the medal, namely, *The Amateur Poacher*. These two volumes, which are both rather short, deal almost exclusively with the wild life of the countryside. *Round About a Great Estate* might also be included under this section. Then *Wild Life in a Southern County* strikes a half-way note, something between human and animal history and criticism, and is, in my opinion, the most pleasing of all his works, where, of a truth, all is pleasant reading. And last of all, *Hodge and His Masters*, from which I have quoted pretty freely, shows us Jefferies as the close student of human nature, and also as the prophet of future country life in England. In some ways this last is the most valuable of all his books, exhibiting as it does, at their best, all Jefferies' fine qualities and his fair, open mind. Of his novels, and especially of his autobiographical works, *Bevis* and *The Story of My Heart*, frankly I have no very high opinion, though I know the latter is a fairly popular book, nor do I deny its merits. To conclude, I shall end with a final quotation from

² Editor's Note: The reference to 'the Norfolk cliffs' and the 'North Sea' is questionable. Jefferies is not known to have visited Norfolk. However, there is an entry in Jefferies' notebook No. XI, for August 1883, that reads: 'Norfolk Broads, Wroxham. King's Arms Inn. Rail from Liverpool St.' He might have visited the Broads. There are very few cliffs in Norfolk. The Jefferies' quote that follows is taken from 'The July Grass' that was first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 24 July 1886, when Jefferies was living in Sussex, and later collected in *Field and Hedgerow*.

The Amateur Poacher, that I think not only gives us a graphic picture of the writer himself but also presents us with the key to his true kindly nature.

I have entered many woods just for the pleasure of creeping through the brake and the thickets. Destruction in itself was not the motive; it was an overpowering instinct for woods and fields. Yet woods and fields lose half their interest without a gun—I like the power to shoot, even though I may not use it. The very perfection of our modern guns is to me one of their drawbacks: the use of them is so easy and so certain of effect that it takes away the romance of sport.

There could be no greater pleasure to me than to wander with a matchlock through one of the great forests or wild tracts that still remain in England. A hare a day, a brace of partridges, or a wild duck would be ample in the way of actual shooting. The weapon itself, whether matchlock, wheel-lock, or even a cross-bow, would be a delight. Some of the antique wheel-lock guns are really beautiful specimens of design. The old powder-horns are often gems of workmanship. . . . How pleasant their carvings feel to the fingers! It is delightful to handle such implements. . . .

An imperfect weapon, yes; but the imperfect weapon would accord with the great oaks, the beech trees-full of knot holes, the mysterious thickets, the tall fern, the silence, and the solitude. The chase would become a real chase; not, as now, a foregone conclusion. And there would be time for pondering and dreaming.

Let us be always out of doors, among trees and grass, and rain and wind and sun. There the breeze comes and strikes the cheek and sets it aglow; the gale increases and the trees creak and roar, but it is only a ruder music. A calm follows, the sun shines in the sky, and it is the time to sit under an oak, leaning against the bark, while the birds sing and the air is soft and sweet. By night the stars shine, and there is no fathoming the dark spaces between those brilliant points, nor the thoughts that come, as it were, between the fixed stars and landmarks of the mind.

Or it is the morning on the hills, when hope is as wide as the world; or it is the evening on the shore. A red sun sinks, and the foam-tipped waves are crested with crimson; the booming surge breaks, and the spray flies afar, sprinkling the face watching under the pale cliffs. Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, whose twelve hours have somehow become shortened, into the sunlight and the pure wind. A something that the ancients called DIVINE can be found and felt there still.

Jefferies and Richard Adams

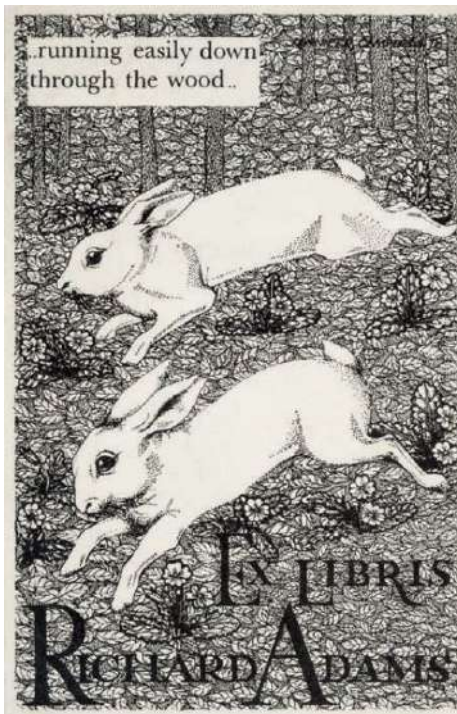
George Miller

Wood *Magic* provides a curious instance of the way in which past writers can aid and inspire the literary careers of their successors. The story, in which animal characters represent the psychological and political complexities of human behaviour, a mixture of fable, fantasy and sometimes harsh realism, was unconventional when published in 1881, and was reprinted only once during Jefferies' lifetime. The title was taken over by Longmans to add to their own lifetime and posthumous works, in 1893, and its fortunes revived. Seven further impressions kept it in print until 1924. In 1928 Collins began to issue it as an illustrated pocket edition, a school classic, and other inexpensive or presentation formats. For twenty years it was a standard children's book along with *Bevis*, but by the 1950s, in a climate of social and cultural change, it had more or less run its course. Another twenty years elapsed before republication, this time by a tiny firm working on a shoestring. Gustav Rex Collings (1925–96) was, by all accounts, a publisher of independence and integrity, a despiser of fashion and an early environmentalist. His list included African and Brazilian writers as well as children's books. He regarded Jefferies as 'one of the most perceptive and poetic writers about the English countryside. . . mercifully free of the sentimentality that so often disfigures books about the country', and *Wood Magic* as 'an enchanting story of great vigour and understanding.' It was a publishing choice endorsed by a *Spectator* review which described the novel as 'one of the most unique and startlingly beautiful books in the English language, a fairy story of genius, the real and true thing, Jefferies' masterpiece.'

Richard Adam's long life span (1920–2016) had extended sixteen years beyond Jefferies' before he first put pen to paper with the intention of producing a literary work. At 18 he had gained a place at Worcester College, Oxford, to read modern history, but his studies were interrupted by the war. He served in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East, though not in combat roles. After the war he returned to Worcester College, graduated in 1948, and joined the Civil Service the same year. He married and there were two daughters whom he entertained as children with the adventures of a colony of rabbits. Later on they urged him to write the stories down and make a book. Working in his spare time it took him two years to complete the novel, and in 1968 the MS was duly sent off to an established London firm. It was turned down by them, and by the next, and the next . . . Accounts vary between seven and fourteen publishers and literary agents in all. It was not

of course that they failed to see merit in the work, but simply believed at that time there was no market for such an unusual work in no well-defined genre. Publishers cling to the self-exonerating myth that any work of value will eventually find a publisher, but we cannot possibly know how many masterpieces have been consigned to oblivion by authors terminally discouraged by a seemingly impenetrable wall of rejection. It might well have been the case with Adams, a late developer needing his daughters' encouragement, had he not at this time acquired a copy of *Wood Magic* published by the free spirited Rex Collings and realised that there, if anywhere, he might encounter a sympathetic mind. The rest, as they say (with some 50 million copies sold to date), is history.

Watership Down was published by Rex Collings in 1972. In 1974 the edition came out in New York under the imprint of The Third Press—Joseph Okpaku Publishing Co., Inc, with an introduction by Adams. From this his debt to Jefferies is abundantly clear:



‘For one who himself aspires to be a writer and finds himself writing about Richard Jefferies, the concluding word must be this: Jefferies wrote more than well. He used words beautifully. His work is a delight to read, and this is undoubtedly the principle reason it has endured for nearly a century and looks good for another.’

Note: Quotations taken from the dust jackets of the Rex Collings edition, 1969 and 1976, and from the introduction to the Third Press edition of 1974. Richard Adams' library was auctioned by Dominic Winter on 14 December 2017. It contained numerous copies of Jefferies' books.

Richard Adams' fine bookplate.

Richard Jefferies

Holbrook Jackson

This essay about Richard Jefferies was part of *All Manner of Folk; Interpretations and Studies* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1912, pp.146–158) by George Holbrook Jackson (31 December 1874–16 June 1948). He was a British journalist, writer and publisher and was recognised as one of the leading bibliophiles of his time.

Something in the nature of Richard Jefferies made him other than a part of the human life of his surroundings. He was solitary everywhere; in the country and in the town—in London, in Paris. In his old home at Coate, in Wiltshire, he had an upper room into which he would retire with the classics. He was a byword with the villagers. ‘Seed ye owt on the Downs?’ one would inquire of another at sunset. ‘Nobbut Dick Jefferies moonin’ about,’ would be the reply. He always mooned about. The results are to be found in certain essays which belong to what is permanent in our literature. To the villagers his brooding personality must have been strange, fantastic. Like Thoreau, he demanded a margin to his life; a margin for the dreams and reveries of inspired idleness. This must have seemed rampant laziness to the Wiltshire peasantry, who fill their little hour with obvious and laborious toil. He could have been none the less strange to the respectable folk of Surbiton, when he lived among them; as strange as London was to him when he stood at Mansion House Corner absorbed in the maelstrom of traffic that surged around without absorbing him. It often happens that the artist is a stranger among men, sequestered and remote among rational things; absorbed only in the essentials of the life that moves around him, filtering them through his personality and retaining only what is permanent, lasting, true, according to his light, for expression in terms of art so that others may see what he sees and feel as he feels. He does not hold the mirror up to Nature—that were child’s play—and yet he is not unlike a child imagining the real in the unreal, or, as men say, the unreal in the real, for the things seen by the rest of men, before the artist guides his vision, are the mere husks of what he sees, and, as the dreamer has proved so often, the mere phantasms of what they are. Such inward rapture makes him different, sets him apart, perhaps not always for his good or the world’s. Richard Jefferies stood thus apart, absorbing the warm life of a southern English shire and uttering it again in a prose of exquisite balance, and at times so passionately that its beauty seemed heavy with melancholy.

The life of this interpreter of Nature is a tale of misguided endeavour and physical pain. Disease stalked with him always, and for many years his genius lay fallow beside the drudgery of literary hack-work. Provincial journalism devoured the readiness of his pen, and he scattered his young genius upon fictions for which it was not made. Perhaps Jefferies never realised that he was not a novelist, and had it not been for the accidental and prosaic incident of a letter to *The Times* he might have been weaving his energy into fictions, the best of which were only passable, until his early death; for he did not reach the age of forty. His last years were a fierce struggle with poverty and illness, both intensified by the fire of a nature which neither sought nor found respite in social or friendly intercourse. Yet it was during these years of pain and worry that his best work was produced; in fact, everything that has any lasting quality in his work was done during the last ten years of his life, and the best of all during the last five years, during years when increasing bodily weakness and material stress must have been surmounted only by heroic spiritual pluck. This is all the more remarkable when it is known that he was not free from that inevitable attendant upon poverty and disease—spiritual and intellectual apathy—the involuntary acceptance of living as a negative rather than a positive thing. The gaunt mood was never far away, and he alone could conquer it. ‘Whatever I wish to do,’ he wrote, ‘feebleness forbids. I think I should like a good walk. No. I think I should like to write. No. I think I should like to rest. No. Always No to everything.’ Traces of the battle are to be found in the hectic flush of his thought, and the, at times, febrile earnestness of his prose.

Richard Jefferies stands with Thoreau among those observers of nature who have added something to literature. There is, however, considerable difference in their attitudes towards life, although the lives of both were cut short by disease, and both were sceptics from the point of view of accepted religious ideas. There was a bolder and more joyous note in the life of the American, and although he made a hermit of himself by Walden Pond for two years, and walked among his kind wearing a halo of cynicism, there was more of the social being in him than in Jefferies. His transcendental egoism, too, made him laugh at fate. Jefferies, in the same circumstances, was inclined to curse. Thoreau looked upon the world with the eyes of one who wished to know; Jefferies demanded to know. ‘Only that day dawns to which we are awake,’ said the former, adding, with splendid confidence, ‘There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.’ But Jefferies, whilst uttering similar ideas to those behind the optimism of Thoreau, could never utter them with the same nonchalance. He knew and was never tired of saying to the soul that time and space were as naught, and that our present heritage was happiness. ‘How willingly would I strew the paths of all with

flowers!' he says. 'How beautiful a delight to make the world joyous!' None but the sad desire to make the world happy, and a haunting sense of the burden of life is always behind the thoughts of Richard Jefferies. It fills his faith in the possibility of a deeper joy with irrevocable gloom; and, with all his passionate love of the beauties of Nature, he is never fully awake to the day. It is only in moments of ecstasy that he is properly conscious of the coincidence of the present and eternity. The chief characteristic of his literary work is his faculty of infusing words with the intensity of his own nature. His essays are pictures of life and Nature seen through the eyes of one to whom eyes were a secondary consideration. He felt his way into Nature, and seemed to realise her mysterious way by intuition; and yet what records those eyes of his were! Nothing escaped them, not merely in detail but in the mass. But his aim was by no means to record merely a sensuous delight in exuberant Nature. The colour of flowers, the song of birds; the winds and their whispered eloquence among leaves; the diapason of the storm; the grave and gay movements of animals; the green and russet of the bridle-path; the English hedgerows quick with life and song; the blue sheen of the unripe oats, and the gold of ripened corn, were but symbols of a deeper soul life. 'The chief use of matter,' he says, 'is to demonstrate to us the existence of the soul.' It is this existence which he realises so well, and his literature will live longer by reason of the fact that he has been able to permeate it with this realisation than by all that skilled use of the art of the pen with which his books abound.

Among his Nature essays there is one so perfect as to stand out above all the rest. It is called 'The Pageant of Summer,' and it contains the most exalted and passionate interpretation of the beauty and luxury of that season to be found, not only in English prose, it is unequalled in English poetry. It is the very incarnation of the idea of June, that month of fulness and maturity before the 'mortal ripening of nature,' heralds autumnal days—the wheat-stack and the long winter silence. He seems to have imbibed the season through all the senses, to have steeped it in his ardent emotions and striving intellect, and then to have poured it forth like song. I know of no essay, outside of the devotional writers, possessing quite the same quiet rapture. It is that still, apparently cold, but actually white-hot rapture met with in John Henry Newman, in Jeremy Taylor, in Anthony Trahearne. But there is nothing of worship in it as they understood worship, yet it is worship none the less, the enraptured worship of animate things. Richard Jefferies must have stared at them with his whole being until he stared himself into ecstasy, and become one with the infinitude of exuberant Nature. In this prose poem he has attained the supreme thing in art—inevitability. This symphony in words might always have been—it has the poise of a swimming fish, the

balance of a bird on the wing—and the mind and heart of a man to communicate to men the sense of such poise and balance, the secret Nature tells only to her favourites:

Straight go the white petals to the heart; straight the mind's glance goes back to how many other pageants of summer in old times! When perchance the sunny days were even more sunny; when the stilly oaks were full of mystery, lurking like the Druid's mistletoe in the midst of their mighty branches. A glamour in the heart came back to it again from every flower; as the sunshine was reflected from them so the feeling of the heart returned tenfold. To the dreamy summer haze love gave a deep enchantment, the colours were fairer, the blue more lovely in the lucid sky. Each leaf finer, and the gross earth enamelled beneath the feet. A sweet breath on the air, a soft warm hand in the touch of the sunshine, a glance in the gleam of the rippled waters, a whisper in the dance of the shadows. The ethereal haze lifted the heavy oaks, and they were buoyant on the mead, the rugged bark was chastened and no longer rough; each slender flower beneath them again refined. There was a presence everywhere, though unseen, on the open hills, and not shut out under the dark pines. Dear were the June roses then because for another gathered. Yet even dearer now, with so many years as it were upon the petals; all the days that have been before, all the heart-throbs, all our hopes lie in this opened bud. Let not the eyes grow dim, look not back, but forward; the soul must uphold itself like the sun. Let us labour to make the heart grow larger as we become older, as the spreading oak gives more shelter. That we could but take to the soul some of the greatness and the beauty of the summer.

Truly he calls this essay 'The Pageant of Summer,' for such it is, moving in picture and pictured thoughts before the mind like nothing else; rising and falling with the author's rapture, and culminating in high rhapsody, even down to the final human thought, which is the man Jefferies:

I cannot leave it; I must stay under the old tree in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs; the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning. Feeling with them, I receive some, at least, of their fulness of life. Never could I have enough; never stay long enough—whether here or whether lying on the shorter sward under the sweeping and graceful birches, or on the thyme-scented hills. Hour after hour, and still not enough. Or walking the footpath was never long enough, or my strength sufficient to endure till the mind was weary. The exceeding beauty of the earth, in her splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal. 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 the more is snatched from inevitable Time. Let the shadow advance upon the dial—I can watch it with equanimity while it is there to be watched. It is only when the shadow is not there, when the clouds of winter cover it, that the dial is terrible. The invisible shadow goes on and steals from us. But now, while I can see the shadow of the tree and watch it slowly gliding along the surface of the grass, it is mine. These are the only hours that are not wasted—these hours that absorb the soul and fill it with beauty. This is real life, and all else is illusion, or mere endurance. Does this reverie of flowers and waterfall and song form an ideal, a human ideal, in the mind? It does; much the same ideal that Phidias sculptured of man and woman filled with a godlike sense of the violet fields of Greece, beautiful beyond thought, calm as my turtle-dove before the lurid lightning of the unknown. To be beautiful and to be calm, without mental fear, is the ideal of nature. If I cannot achieve it, at least I can think it.

Though Jefferies' work must live by reason of his Nature essays, he pursued other literary ways: novel and fantasy, folk-lore and sociology. Yet in all of his books—in *Amaryllis* no less than in *The Gamekeeper at Home*, or *The Toilers of the Fields*, in 'Sir Bevis,' and *Wood Magic*, no less than in *The Story of My Heart*—there are passages of passionate earth-worship and inspired nature-vision. In all his books there are matchless cameos from nature; and in the last of them there is a constant utterance of the pantheism which was so intimate a part of his being, and which found its fullest expression in *The Story of My Heart*. It is the passionate love of the inner life of Nature that makes the essays of Richard Jefferies so different from those of other poet-naturalists. White of Selborne in Nature a never-ending subject for memorabilia; John Burroughs enjoys and admires, much as a hungry boy does an apple; Thoreau sees in her the ethics of individuality—but Richard Jefferies, like Walt Whitman, sees himself in her; he weds her with a love that has less of the earth in it than the love of Whitman, with a love half reverent, half mystical. Nature for him is no more a series of separate events than life is a series of separate events for the mystics: he would be at one with it all, striving, urging his mind into the very heart of life, calling to the future, drumming at the door of mystery, yearning for a known eternity yet all the while telling himself that 'It is eternity now, it always was eternity, and always will be.'

Like the mystics, he has moments of intense emotion, when the separate self seems to become merged in the universal—then he is no longer the individual Richard Jefferies, but one with all things. Such moments are recorded in his works, and more particularly in that ardent record of the inner life he called *The Story of My Heart*. Therein he tells of intimate communion with Nature, and of remote experiences of the soul, almost

beyond the sphere of time. He clung to the idea of immortality with a sense of mysterious doubt which gave his strongest material affirmations a certain wistfulness. But there the intellect of Jefferies recognised no proof that the soul continued its life or not after bodily death, and he bids himself neither hope nor fear.

At least (he says) I am living. I have enjoyed the idea of immortality and the idea of my own soul. If then, after death, I am resolved without exception in earth, air, and water, and the spirit goes out like a flame, still I shall have had the glory of that thought.

His attitude towards life is that of one demanding more intimacy with the infinite, more consciousness of eternity, a deeper soul-life. He goes to the Downs, and in a lonely place he faces the unknown, and with the rapture of religious fervour he becomes another voice crying in the wilderness. 'Open my mind,' he prays, 'give my soul to see, let me live it now on earth, while I hear the burring of the larger bees, the sweet air in the grass, and watch the yellow wheat wave beneath me. Sun and earth and sea, night and day—these are the least of things. Give me soul-life.'

His position is that of one who just feels the existence of a realm of ideas beyond the day. It is not any more tangible than that, yet the very thought itself is a contribution to thought, and he is content, even in the face of the possibility of annihilation, with that thought alone. To have imagined something higher and stronger than, not only the human soul, but an existence 'higher, better and more perfect than deity' suffices him. In the conception that there exists a range of ideas outside any that have been thought or imagined he lays claim to the discovery of another idea. But, after all, the discovery, though new to him, is by no means new to philosophy or religion. Richard Jefferies was as remote from modern thought as he was from modern social life, and yet he was in the midst of each, and profoundly affected by each. He was an unconscious product of modern tendencies, and his isolated individuality is no more marked than in the fact that he uttered the advanced ideas of his day in the full belief that they were his alone.

His conception of mankind under the tyranny of the past is full of suggestion, and he is eager that all leanings upon what has been should be turned into an energy which would render tradition unnecessary. 'Erase the past from the mind,' he says, 'stand face to face with the real now—and work out all anew.' The chaos of social life fills him with wonder. 'In twelve thousand written years,' he says again, 'the world has not yet built itself a house, nor filled a granary, nor organised itself for its own comfort.' In the development of this thought Jefferies comes into line with the ripest thought of the day; with the men who see society as it is, not through the rosy hues of sentiment, and who see also society as it might be, and who strive with what

power they possess to realise something of the dream of joyful work and, what is just as necessary, joyful leisure without the ignoble hurry and waste that so characterise so much of our present existence. And in no mood is Richard Jefferies more sanguine and so free from that despondence which broods over his happiest works than in the desire that his fellows 'may enjoy their days, and the earth, and the beauty of this beautiful world; that they may rest by the sea and dream; that they may dance and sing, and eat and drink.' 'I will work towards that end with all my heart,' he says.



Holbrook Jackson
by Alvin Langdon Coburn, published by Duckworth & Co,
collotype, 15 October 1913 National Portrait Gallery

Richard Jefferies as a Reader and Book Lover

Samuel J. Looker

This article was specially written for the *Wiltshire Herald* circa 1948.

There has from time to time been much misunderstanding of Jefferies' culture. He has been called an untutored peasant, which is ridiculously wide of the mark, and even those who otherwise seem to understand him, have underrated the wide scope and range of his questing mind. Hostile critics, on the other hand, have been more unjust, as may be expected. One of the most wilful of them, Malcolm Elwin, in that very unsatisfactory selection, *The Essential Richard Jefferies* [Jonathan Cape, 1948], writes in a tone of supercilious contempt, when he says that Coate Farmhouse had but few books, and that Jefferies read but little. Elwin goes on to state that there was hardly any literary allusion in his writings and no inspiration from his reading as a boy, and in short, no speculation from contact with great minds and no critical taste. Of which one can only remark that seldom, in so short a space, has any modern critic written so many foolish and erroneous speculations, about a great writer. For Jefferies was well read, even in youth, beyond his years, and in spite of great handicaps, accumulated a considerable and catholic library of his own in early married life, records of which may be gleaned both from his miscellaneous notes and from the pages of some of his note-books. Moreover, in his books, and especially in *Amaryllis at the Fair*, something more may be gathered as to his literary proclivities. In chapter X of that work are some passages on Bernard Quaritch in the auction-room, that giant of the second-hand book trade, obviously written from personal knowledge. It must be remembered also that Spencer of Oxford Street, in his volume of antiquarian memoirs, published some twenty-five years ago, wrote of his meetings with Richard Jefferies in the well known shop opposite Mudie's, where Jefferies would go to look over the latest purchases, or to buy some coveted volume within the reach of his purse. In another place Elwin sneered that Jefferies looked up data in libraries to parade a semblance of learning. But he had not the slightest need to do this, because his mind was well stored and he had at his command, not only his own well-chosen collection, but also many older and rarer books owned by Grandfather Jefferies in Swindon, and of course, on Richard's periodical and fairly frequent visits to his uncle Harrild at

Sydenham, he would have free access to a considerable and catholic library there.

Now as to more specific details as to Jefferies' reading. In fiction he has read and studied Charles Reade, Thackeray and Ouida, as early as 1876. Of Charles Dickens, curiously enough, he expressed contempt and disliked Victor Hugo. In poetry Jefferies knew Shakespeare extremely well, and in one of his essays there is a most interesting paragraph on Shakespeare's sonnets, of which he says that he carried a pocket edition around with him and read it so often, it fell to pieces.

Dante he could not read. In a note written in 1884, Jefferies relegated it to what he called 'the literary dustbin.' He calls it the dullest book ever written and says it deals with mere mean revenge, and concludes that it would be like 'Disraeli writing a volume describing Gladstone up to his chin in boiling brimstone oil.' In 1881 Jefferies was reading the early famous sporting work *The Book of St Albans*, and in the same year, Cicero, Demosthenes, and *The Institutes of Quintilian*. The *Philosophy of Magic* by Salverte, *Occult & Philosophy* by Agrippa. Earlier still he mentions and quotes from Elton's *Hesiod*. In 1883, his list of books include *The Art of Etching*, Hume's *Essays*, the *Aphorisms of Hippocrates*, Rabelais and *Pendennis*. During 1884 Jefferies' reading list includes *The English Bread Book* by Acton, *Fat in the Human Body* by Bartlett, *Sketching from Nature* by Tristram J. Ellis, *A Primer of Art* by John Collier, *La Dame aux Camélias*, *The Fly-Fisher's Entomology* by Alfred Ronalds, *Notes on Physiology*, H. Ashby, *The Lives of the Necromancers*, William Godwin. The previous year he had also read and noted, Aristophanes, Swinburne, Dryden, *Memoirs of Saint-Simon*, *History of Wood Engraving in America*, a large and important work, *The Handbook of Mesmerism*, *History of Ancient Sculpture* by Mitchell, *Geology of the Counties of England*, *Speeches of Charles Villiers, M.P.*, A collection of the writings of Daniel Defoe, *The English Flora*, J.E. Smith, in six volumes, *Everyday Life in Our Public Schools* (author unknown), and *Rough Notes on British Birds*, Booth.

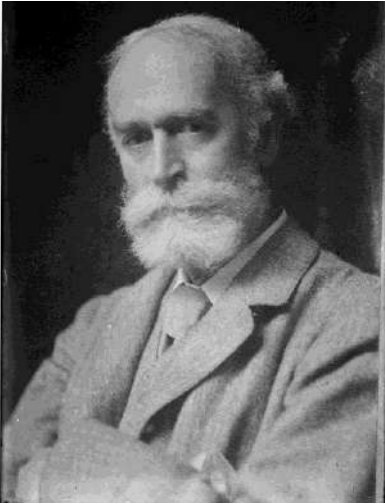
No mean list indeed, for a writer accused of narrow-mindedness, lack of reading and of but few books. In the notes written towards the end of his life in the closing months of 1886 and the early months of 1887, Richard Jefferies quotes from many classic authors, and shows a wide acquaintance with the best scientific thought of his own time. Altogether we may say Jefferies had a cultivated mind and a knowledge both of ancient and contemporary thought that many with far greater opportunities than himself might envy.

This is a mere sketch of a subject that could be greatly amplified, but it may serve to interest Jefferies' students to a small extent and show them, as they already suspected, something of Jefferies' essential culture.

An Uncivil List

Peter Robins

As Jefferies' physical condition deteriorated at The Downs, Crowborough in 1885/1886, two of his correspondents, C.P. Scott (editor of the *Manchester Guardian*) and C.J. Longman, were deeply concerned not only about his health but regarding Jefferies' dwindling financial resources.



Charles Prestwich Scott, 1919



Charles James Longman (1852-1934)

Jefferies had written to Scott from Eltham in January 1885 citing illness as to why he was unable to submit further articles, which prompted uncommon compassion from a national newspaper editor, perhaps swayed by the fact that Jefferies was about the same age as Scott and a fellow-journalist. By July, Jefferies, removed to Rotherfield, Sussex, had received financial help from Scott and in the August of the following year Jefferies accepted a cheque from Scott for £24.10 to meet 'the immediate necessity', probably medical expenses.¹ In addition Scott began raising funds to allow Jefferies to spend the winter in the sun, perhaps Southern Europe or South Africa, a recommendation made by one of Jefferies' physicians, Professor Gamgee.²

¹ Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies*, Petton Books, Oxford, 1964, See entries for 21 Jan, 21 Jul 1885 and 11 Aug 1886.

² Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1888, p.332.

Charles Longman, sensing Jefferies needed more than a travel fund, suggested to Jefferies in August 1886 that, with his permission, he would apply to the Royal Literary Fund for a grant. Jefferies replied complaining that relief from the Royal Literary Fund would be ‘worse than the workhouse’ and ‘I would rather run the risk of quitting this world altogether next winter than degrade myself that way.’³

Over the following weeks Longman persuaded Jefferies to apply and in October Longman, supported by Scott, made an application to the Fund. Longman wrote to Jefferies, saying, ‘It will add lustre to the RLF if they are able to assist in restoring you to health, and I told them so. I regard a grant from the Fund in much the same light as a Civil List Pension...’⁴ In November Jefferies was granted £100; his earnings for 1886 had been £50.⁵ What is still unclear, due to the lack of supporting evidence, is who put forward Jefferies’ name for a Civil List Pension and when. A biography of W.H. Smith by Sir Herbert Maxwell, provides a clue:

In 1885 an application was made to Mr. Gladstone, when First Lord of the Treasury, for the grant of a pension to that favourite writer Richard Jefferies, and was refused. When Smith came to the Treasury in 1887 Jefferies was beyond reach of a pension but £100 a-year was awarded to his widow in her lifetime.⁶

If an application was made as early as 1885 then it is likely that it was C.P. Scott who approached the government. The *Manchester Guardian* supported the Liberal line and Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill, so Scott was close to Gladstone. Scott stood in the general election of 1886 as a Liberal MP for Manchester North East but was unsuccessful. Later, from 1895–1906 Scott served as the Liberal MP for Leigh.

Given Longman’s mention of a Civil List Pension in his letter to Jefferies it’s possible Scott and Longman jointly nominated Jefferies for certainly they worked together to relieve Jefferies’ circumstances.

A Civil List Pension was a yearly allowance given by the state to persons in financial need, distinguished by their work in literature, science and art, or to their dependents. In earlier times sovereigns had increased their influence by granting lavish pensions. Reforms were made from the 1780s and further limitations imposed in 1830 and when Queen Victoria came to the throne pensions totalling altogether £1200 a year were granted, the amounts varying from £25 to £200 paid each year to each recipient.

³ Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields*, John Baker, London, 1964, p.199.

⁴ *ibid.* p.200.

⁵ Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *op. cit.* 29 Oct 1886.

⁶ Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Life and Times of The Right Honourable William Henry Smith MP*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1893, p.254.

The *Morning Post* of 5 August 1887 published the list of pensions granted for the year ended 20 June 1887. There were ten names on it including Lady Farnborough, Thomas Trollope (brother of Anthony) and Augustus Mongredien. Jefferies wasn't on the list. The application that had been made to the Liberal government that such a pension be awarded to Jefferies had been refused.

An exchange in the House of Commons on 29 August 1887⁷, shortly after Jefferies' death, raised the injustice:

MR. JENNINGS (Stockport) asked the Secretary to the Treasury, If he can state for what distinguished literary services a pension of £100 a-year was granted to Mr. Mongredien, and what permanent and valuable contributions to English literature that gentleman has made; and, whether he is able to throw any light upon the principle on which £100 a-year was given to Mr. Mongredien, while an eminent and a popular writer, the late Mr. Richard Jefferies, was allowed to die in indigence?

MR. WATT (Glasgow, Camlachie) asked the First Lord of the Treasury, Whether the pension referred to was not granted to Mr. Mongredien by a previous government; and whether it has been the practice of this House, or was competent to a Government, to review pensions granted by a previous Government to which the gracious assent of the Queen had been obtained.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY (Mr. W. H. Smith) (who replied) (Strand, Westminster) said: The pension to which my hon. Friend (Mr. Jennings) calls attention was granted by a former government. I have no information on the grounds on which it was granted. If my hon. Friend is not satisfied with the particulars given in the Parliamentary Return he should ask the right hon. Member for Mid Lothian (Mr. W.E. Gladstone) for fuller information about Mr. Mongredien's literary services. The claim of Richard Jefferies to one of these pensions was first brought before me in April last; and as the financial year of these pensions ends on 20th of June, the balance at my disposal was too small to meet many sad claims to which my attention has been drawn. I have, however, continued Mrs. Jefferies' name on the list of applicants, and her claims shall receive my most careful consideration.⁸

Walter Besant, hastily writing his *Eulogy*, immediately after Jefferies' death, echoed the grievance:

While the pensions of the Civil List—a breach of trust if ever there was one—are bestowed upon daughters of distinguished officers and widows of civil servants, such a man as Jefferies, for whose assistance the grant is yearly asked and voted, is left to starve.⁹

⁷ *Hansard*. HC Deb 29 August 1887 vol. 320 cc263–4.

⁸ W.H. Smith acted swiftly and on 26 Sept. 1887 the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that Jessie Jefferies had been granted an annual pension of £100 'in consideration of the literary attainments of her late husband, Mr. Richard Jefferies.'

⁹ Besant, *op. cit.* p.341.

Louis Jennings, a journalist, had been elected as a Conservative MP for Stockport in 1885. After a period on the *Saturday Review* he joined *The Times* in 1863 acting as correspondent in India then the USA where he edited *The New York Times* from 1870–1876. Returning to London he worked with John Murray as both author and book reviewer and wrote two books of rambles including *Field Paths and Green Lanes: Being Country Walks, Chiefly in Surrey and Sussex* (1877) in which he explored the past, preferably alone, through the lives and customs of country men and women rather than the written record. He followed this with a similar book covering the Peak District and the South Downs (1880) but then concentrated on political works. Whilst no contact between Jennings and Jefferies has been established, Jennings was obviously an admirer of Jefferies' work and aware of the circumstances at his death.

Jennings was prompted to raise the refusal of a pension for Jefferies by the Liberal government's temerity to grant a pension in its very last days of its administration in July 1886 to Augustus Mongredien for the 'merits and utility of his literary work'.¹⁰ Mongredien, of French extraction, was a corn merchant, horticulturalist, political economist, chess master and writer of books on various subjects, including some on botany, but mostly on free trade and, as a member of the Cobden Club, he had been useful in promoting the Liberal cause. He was a wealthy man and was not an obvious nominee for a Civil List Pension as his personal estate at his death in 1888 was more than £3,000.

Walter Besant's indignation was not limited to the exasperation he expressed in his *Eulogy*. In 1884 Besant had been the founding chairman of The Society of Authors, set up to protect the rights and to further the interests of authors and, four years later, he and his council commissioned William Morris Colles, a barrister, to investigate a complete account of the Pension List in relation to literature. The report, published in 1889,¹¹ listed all the recipients of a Civil List Pension from 1838–1888 and concluded that pensions were increasingly being awarded to military and naval personnel, civil servants and the widows of distinguished men at the expense of those in literature, science and art, for whom the scheme had been established. Colles was also concerned that many did not meet the criteria of 'eminence in literature or art' or 'useful attainments in science'. 'If they have accomplished

¹⁰ *Morning Post*, 5 Aug 1887.

¹¹ William Morris Colles, *Literature and the Pensions List*, Society of Authors, Henry Glasher, London, 1889.

no worthy work, if the country owes them nothing, upon what can they base their claims to be the objects of public charity?' he asserted.¹²

In conclusion Colles cited the case of Jefferies as to all that was wrong with the system:

The list shows those who received, but not those who were refused, a pension. It is unfortunately impossible to arrive at this knowledge. Everybody has signed the petitions in which application is made, but nobody knows how many these are or on what principles they are refused. One instance, however, is well-known and may be quoted. In the year 1886, the most eminent writer on Nature that this or any other country has ever seen was sick unto death and well-nigh starving. Had it not been for the assistance of a few who learned the sad circumstances of his illness he might have starved. It was the year in which the peeress already mentioned [Lady Farnborough] swallowed up £250 out of the grant; the gentleman who wrote pamphlets for the Cobden Club took another £100 [Augustus Mongredien]; and the widow of an Irish Police Inspector took £45. There seems to have remained £155 of the grant of £1,200 not appropriated. Yet this great writer on Nature, this great observer, whose works will never cease to instruct and to charm, was refused. His name was RICHARD JEFFERIES. How many similar applications lie forgotten in the cupboards of the Treasury!

In fairness to Gladstone he had fought two general elections in 1885 and 1886 and a defeat that year was largely due to Home Rule which had split the Liberal Party. That said, Gladstone had charge of the Civil List for twelve years during which time he made no attempt to increase the £1200 available for yearly pensions.

Speaking at the Royal Literary Fund dinner in 1890, John Morley¹³, Gladstone's biographer, denounced the meagre Civil List fund and its application:

It is commonly supposed that there is an immense fund at the disposal of Her Majesty's Ministers, by which they are able to make easy the last hours, or the hours of privations, of men of letters. I have watched for a good many years the administration of the Civil List pensions, and I venture to say that they are shabby and meagre in amount; that they are so capricious as almost to be grotesque in their application; and that if this country really wishes to do what the Civil List pensions are supposed to do, they must supply—and I cannot see why so wealthy a country as this should not supply—such an amount as will enable a man of letters, leading a thoroughly frugal and homely life, to give

¹² In a later enquiry into Civil List Pensions granted from 1851-1901 it was shown that only twenty per cent were for 'Literature'. *Notes By The Way*, John Collins Francis, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1909.

¹³ Liberal MP and former editor of *Fortnightly Review* and *Pall Mall Gazette*.

most of his time to the great and high interest with which he has charged himself.¹⁴

Morley's plea was not heeded and subsequent governments took little interest in the payment of civil list pensions but the amounts allocated to these pensions were increased from 1937 by the National Government to £2,500. During that year, Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated to a committee reviewing the Civil List that:

Out of 318 pensions which have been granted during the last 20 years, only 126 have been granted directly to the persons whose services are in question, the remainder, namely 192, having been granted to dependents or other persons...of the recipients of the pensions, 98 were men and 220 were women.¹⁵

The Civil List pension allocation was increased again by Conservative governments in 1952 (£5,000), 1972 (£10,000) and 1990 (£15,000).

In June 2002 the poet Christopher Logue admitted in an interview that he was 'shocked' to receive an annual Civil List pension of £800¹⁶ and in May 2012, the painter Molly Parkin told the press that she had been granted the 'rare honour of a Civil List Pension'.¹⁷

A year later, in the House of Commons on 17 June 2013, John Whittingdale, MP for Maldon, in a written question, asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer 'to list all those individuals in receipt of a civil list pension, and on what date each person was awarded and what the amount is of each pension.'

Sajid Javid, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, replied that, 'Under the Data Protection Act [1998] the Treasury is not able to disclose details of individuals in receipt of a pension. The annual cost of Civil List pensions paid to 53 people in 2012–13 was £126,293 and the average pension is £2,383'.¹⁸

Now we know even less about who is granted a Civil List pension unless the recipients announce the award. In modern times controversy is more likely to arise about the Queen's Birthday and New Year honours list rather than Civil List pensions which are largely forgotten or opaque.

If there is any consolation to be drawn from the scandal surrounding Jefferies' omission from the pension list it is that his widow, Jessie, enjoyed her award for almost forty years.

¹⁴ Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*, Cambridge U.P., 1985, p.88.

¹⁵ *Hansard* HC Deb 24 May 1937 vol 324 cc35–89.

¹⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2002.

¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 20 May 2012.

¹⁸ *Hansard* HC 17 June 2013 vol. 564, c453W.

Richard Jefferies

Newton M. Hall

Towards to the end of the nineteenth century students of Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, USA, contributed to and produced *The Dartmouth Literary Monthly*. The journal began in 1886 and was published during the school year by a board of editors from the junior and senior classes. The following poem was written by Newton M. Hall and appeared in the May 1890 edition. Hall went on to be Professor of English Literature at Iowa College.

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*'How can they manage without me?'— Field and Hedgerow*

The birds have missed him, and the winds that blow  
The meadow grass—the winds he loved so well.  
Again the spring will weave its wondrous spell;  
The golden summer days will come and go.

Above his grave the English flowers will grow,  
But wind-swept downs, the bees, the cowslip bell,  
The flying cloud, the firs—their solemn swell  
His fittest dirge—they all will miss him so.

Perchance the hand of God for him unbars  
The mysteries divine of Life and Death;  
Perchance he walks through fairest fields of light.  
And yet he, too, must miss, beyond the stars,  
The April rain, the spring-time's perfumed breath,  
The dreamy stillness of the summer night.

# ‘The Child Wanders in the Wood’

## Poetic Naturalists: Richard Jefferies

*Rev. R. Waddell, MA, DD*

This appreciative essay on Jefferies by Rutherford Waddell was published in the *Press*, a Christchurch, NZ, daily newspaper, on 28 February 1898. At that time, the Rev. Waddell was one of New Zealand’s most notable preachers.

Rutherford Waddell was born in Glenarm, County Antrim in 1852, the son of a Presbyterian minister, a vocation he decided to follow. He was educated at Queen’s College, Belfast, gaining an MA and at The Presbyterian Theological College. In 1877 Waddell married Kathleen Newman and they emigrated that year to New Zealand where he had been offered a post at St. Andrew’s Church, Dunedin.

Rev. Waddell combined journalism with his ministry, editing the Presbyterian weekly *The Outlook* and contributed to the *Evening Star*, Dunedin, for twenty-eight years. He died in 1932.

Some time since I wanted a particular book by Richard Jefferies. I could not get it in Dunedin or in Australia. Happening to be in Christchurch, I searched its bookshops. It was not to be found. Some had never heard of such a writer. Some who said that Christchurch people did not buy books of that sort. That is deplorable if it is true.

What is a poetic naturalist? In the preface to *Modern Painters*, Ruskin, drawing the distinction between the botanist’s knowledge of plants and the poet’s or painter’s writes thus:

The one notes their distinctions for the sake of swelling his herbarium, the other that he may render them vehicles of thought and emotion. The one counts the stamens, affixes a name, and is content; the other observes every character of the plants colour and form. Considering each of its attributes as an element of expression, he seizes on its line of grace or energy, rigidity or repose; notes the feebleness or vigour, the serenity or tremulousness of its hues, observes its local habits, its love or fear of peculiar places, its nourishment or destruction by particular influences. He associates it in his mind with all the features of the situation it inhabits and the ministering graces necessary to support. Thenceforward the flower is to him a living creation, with histories written on its leaves and passions breathing on its emotions.

This admirably states the difference between the scientific and the poetic naturalist. Let us look at it through an illustration. Out on the white sifted sandhills, where the grass is scant as the hair on a leper’s head, is a delicate tracery. What is it? To you it may be nothing, not worth a moment’s

thought. To another its angles and curves suggest problems in mathematics. To a third it speaks of life. It denotes the presence of a bird—a bird of a certain species, order, classification, etc. This last is the scientific naturalist. But these do not exhaust the possibilities. Let us turn to hear Jefferies:

The path across the arable fields was covered with a design of birds' feet. The reversed broad arrow of the foreclaws and the straight line of the hinder claw trailed all over it in curving lines ... For fifty or sixty yards the path was worked with an inextricable design. It was a pity to step on it and blot out the traces of those little feet. Their hearts so happy, their eyes so observant, the earth so bountiful to them with its supply of food and the late warmth of the autumn sun lighting up their life. They know and feel the deep loveliness of the seasons as much as we do. Everyone must have noticed their joyousness in spring; they are quiet, but so very, very busy in the height of summer. As autumn comes on they obviously delight in the occasional hours of warmth. The marks of their little feet are almost sacred. A joyous life has been theirs. Do not obliterate it. It is so delightful to know that something is happy.<sup>1</sup>

That is the poetic naturalist. That is how these delicate tracings, to which most of us would not give a second thought, present themselves to him. Now pass from the trail of the bird to the bird itself. To the vulgar sportsman it is a thing to be killed and eaten. To the sportsman of a higher type, it is game to be stalked and studied then secured. To the agriculturalist it is a mere bird and nothing more. To the scientific naturalist it is a problem with anatomy. Its wings, bones, brains etc. are to be dissected, tested and classified. Now if you will turn and read the wonderful description of the bird which Ruskin gives in *Queen of the Air*, you will have got another aspect of the matter. The bird

is a little more than a drift of the air brought into form by plumes. The air is its quills, it breathes through its whole frame and flesh, and glows with air in its flying, like blown flame; it rests upon the air, subdues it, surpasses it, outrides it—it is the air conscious of itself conquering itself, ruling itself?

But the whole magnificent passage is too long to quote. I must refer my readers to it. If at the same time they will read along with it his description of the serpent, and of the air itself, they will have some idea of the function of the poetic naturalist. His function is not to dissect nature. It is to make us see, and hear, and feel her mystery, her beauty, and her unity in her multitudinous life. That is what Richard Jefferies does, and does uniquely. It is a great work. It is, we may say, almost the very greatest work to which any writer could be called. Few, indeed, are the masters in this school. You may count them—at least you could up to within this last year or two—on the

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<sup>1</sup> Ed: 'Outside London', collected in *The Open Air* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1885).



fingers of one hand. In America Audubon, Thoreau, Burroughs; in Britain Gilbert White, of Selborne, and Richard Jefferies, of Coate. I want to invite attention to this last.

A man presents himself for study in three aspects:- His work, his thought about his work, his life out of which thought and work emerge. When we want to make a complete study of anyone that is how we had best approach him. First, what has he done? Then what is his thought or idea about what he has done? And then back behind his work and idea to himself. The work, the philosophy, the biography, these give us all we want to know about a writer. I shall speak mainly of one of these: of Jefferies' work.

I have put at the head of this article 'The Child Wanders in the Wood.' It is one of the titles of the chapters in Sir Walter Besant's biography of Jefferies. It seems to me to sum up completely Jefferies' attitude towards nature. The childlikeness with which he interprets nature is one of the chief charms of his writings. He approaches her, in his maturity, just as he did when he was young. The wonder, the mystery, the glamour, the freshness, the fascination which nature holds for the boy is present, only in a far intenser degree, in Jefferies the man.

The first aspect in which nature presents itself to the child is as a mass of units, of single, unconnected phenomena. To learn to observe these accurately is the foundation of knowledge. To paint them accurately with pen or pencil, the achievement of Art. It is then of incalculable value. But it threatens to become a lost accomplishment. Our forefathers had little literature, they were compelled to watch and make mental notes of facts. We have books and do not need. Then the swiftness of locomotion is contributing to the same disaster. Long ago people had to walk or ride. Roads were not good and motion slow. So our elders were forced to note facts that we never see from the windows of an express train or the cycle wheel that sleeps on its own swiftness. They carried landmarks in their mind; they told the coming of the seasons by the change in the flora of their districts, or the advent of a particular bird, or the variation in its movement or song. Books and rapid means of transit threaten to wipe out our observing faculties by doing away with their necessity. And Nature is economic. She takes away what we don't use or abuse.

If you ask schoolchildren to go to the sea or the top of a mountain and come back and write what they saw, one will be astonished at the paucity and meagreness of their observation. Our educational system interposes the written record between the child and the world. It only learns nature at second-hand, and very often not at all. This is a great calamity. But I was speaking of Jefferies' observing powers. It would be impossible within the limits of an article such as this to give illustrations. I can only refer my

readers to Jefferies' books. They will be amazed at the minuteness, the variety, the accuracy, and the diligence with which Jefferies transfers the facts of Nature to his pages. The animate and the inanimate world will become a wholly new place for them. As they read the record of his observations among shadows, colours, clouds, winds, buds, butterflies, and the whole myriad moving life of Nature around them, they will begin to think that their eyes were never open until now, that they were walking blindfold through a marvellous world.

But there is a second stage in the development of the poetic naturalist. In the first place, as I have said, Nature presents herself in a series of isolated facts. As the child wanders in the wood, the buds, the leaves, the grass, the flowers, the trees, the animals all exist as independent, unrelated entities. But by and bye he comes to see that the grass has to do with the soil, and the bee with the flowers, and the flowers with the sun, and all with that mysterious thing we call life. Thus there begins to emerge a connection. Now imagination comes and discovers this. It is its function to find out the underlying unity, to see how all are vitally bound together, how all resemble each other, how the soil and the flowers, and the bee and the bud and the man are all linked on to a generation gone, and generations yet to come. Some naturalists never advance to this stage. They observe, they collect, they catalogue, they classify. That is all. That is the work of the scientific naturalist, pure and simple. That is also what Burroughs, Audubon and Gilbert White do, and that is also what Jefferies does. But he does more, and it is this more constitutes him the poetic naturalist and gives him, for me at least, his distinctive charm. The facts of observation which are accumulated in Jefferies' writings are like the colours which the painter brings together. They are essential to his picture. The picture is impossible without a knowledge of them. But they are not the picture itself. That is the relation of observation to imagination. Observation accumulates the facts. They are the raw material of imagination. It cannot proceed without them as its basis and foundation. It is at this point that Jefferies passes on beyond writers like Thoreau and Burroughs, and earns for himself distinctively the title of poetic naturalist. He takes these raw materials which his marvellous industry and observing powers have collected, and constructs great imagination pictures out of them. An illustration or two will make clear what I mean. I select almost at random. Thus in an essay on 'The Pine Wood' in *The Open Air*, he writes:

How fond Nature is of spot markings! The wings of butterflies, the feathers of birds, the surface of eggs, the leaves and petals of plants, are constantly spotted; so too is fish, as trout. From the wing of the butterfly I looked involuntarily at the foxglove I had just gathered; inside the bells were thickly spotted—dots and

dustings that might have been transferred to a butterfly's wing. The spotted meadow orchis, the brown dots on the cowslips; brown, black, greenish, reddish dots and spots and dustings on the eggs of the finches, the whitethroats, and so many others. Some of the spots seem as if they had been splashed on and had run into short streaks, some mottled, some gathered together at the end; all spots, dots, dustings of minute specks, mottlings, and irregular markings. The histories, the stories, the library of knowledge contained in those signs! It was thought a wonderful thing when at last the strange inscriptions of Assyria were read, made of nail-headed characters whose sound was lost; it was thought a triumph when the yet older hieroglyphics of Egypt were compelled to give up their messages, and the world hoped that we should know the secrets of life. That hope was disappointed; there was nothing in the records but superstition and useless ritual. But here we go back to the beginning; the unfathomable time. In them the sun has written his command, and the wind inscribed deep thought. They were before superstition began. They were composed in the old, old world when the Immortals walked on earth. They have been handed down thousands and thousands of years to tell us that today we are still in the presence of the heavenly visitants if only we will give up the soul to their pure influences. The language in which they are written has no alphabet, and cannot be reduced to order. It can only be understood by the heart and the spirit.

Now in this you have combined minute and accurate observations of isolated facts, with the imaginative perception of the laws and associations that give them unity and passion and life. Space will allow just one more quotation. I select it in order to show how he manifests the same power in dealing with inanimate and material things.

In that wonderful book, *Field and Hedgerow*, he writes:

The commonest pebble, dusty and marked with the stains of the ground, seems to me so wonderful. My mind works round it; it becomes the sun and centre of a system of thought and feeling. Sometimes moving aside the tufts of grass with careless fingers, while resting on the sward, I found these little pebble stones, loose, in the crumbly earth among the rootlets. Then, brought out from the shadow, the sunlight shone on the particles of sand that adhered to it. Particles adhered to my skin—thousands of years between finger and thumb, those atoms of quartz, and sunlight shining all that time, and flowers blooming, and life glowing in all myriads of living things, from the cold limpet on the rock to the burning, throbbing heart of man.

Now, if you apply the idea of imagination to such pictures as these you will see how accurately they respond to it, or if you test them by a definition of imagination, say e.g., that of Hippolyte Taine in his *History of English Literature*, or better still and briefer, that of George Eliot in [*Impressions of*] *Theophrastus Such*, you find how true they are to it. To quote George Eliot:

A powerful imagination is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation, and a creative energy constantly fed by susceptibility to the veriest minutiae of experience, which it reproduces and constructs in fresh and fresh wholes; not the habitual confusion of provable fact with the fictions of fancy and transient inclination, but a breath of ideal association which informs every material object, every incidental fact, with far-reaching memories and stored residues of passion, bringing into light the less obvious relations of human existence.

That is an admirable definition of the function of imagination. Could there be a finer illustration of it than such quotations from Jefferies? You see in them how the loose facts of observation are tied together, strung like pearls, on a great unifying law; you see the vital connection that runs through all, how the lower leads on to the higher, how matter and plant and eggs and egg spots, how even the very pebbles and grains of sand—all belong together, and how over all he throws a breadth of ideal association informing the veriest minutiae with far reaching memories and stored residues of passion.

And these are but the merest hints of what may be found on almost every page of Jefferies' wonderful books. It is this which constitutes him a poetic naturalist *par excellence*.

And now here is the wonderful thing. This man who interprets for us with unapproachable power the joy, the beauty, the magic of Nature, was himself the least favoured of her children. All his working life he had to fight, as he says himself, with the three remorseless giants—Disease, Despair and Poverty. There is no more touching and terrible story in literature than the story of the gallantry of Jefferies in his death grip with these grim antagonists. In his inimitable sketch of his friend R. Louis Stevenson, J.M. Barrie refers to the absence from the pages of Stevenson's writing of any gloom cast by his own fragile life. There is no hint that he was running a race with a shadow—the shadow of death. 'The cry,' says Barrie, 'is "to arms." Spears glisten in the sunshine. See the brave colour twisting round the mountain side. Alas, the drummer lies on a couch beating his drum!' Thus was it with Jefferies. If one remembers when he reads those brilliant pages, so full of the sunshine, the splendour, the opulence and joy of nature, that they are written by a man in the terrible grip of pain and poverty, they will have a new pathos and power for him. 'Picture to yourself,' says Sir Walter Besant, 'the tall, gaunt man reduced to a skeleton, not able to use his pen for more than a few minutes at a time, his spine broken down, spitting blood, lying back on the sofa, his mind full of splendid thoughts which he cannot put on paper, dictating sometimes, when he was strong enough, resolved on making money, so as to save himself the "disgrace" of applying to the

Literary Fund, full of pain, by day and night, but never losing heart or hope. Is there in the whole calamitous history of authors a picture more full of sadness and of pity than this?' No; nor, we venture to add, one more noble and heroic. It was probably this experience that, if it did not create, at any rate intensified the note of humanitarianism which sounds its undertone through almost all of his books. In this, of course, he is not a pure poetic naturalist. He breaks away here from Burroughs and writers of that school. Over against the strong, free, glad, opulent life of Nature Jefferies could not keep his eyes off the feeble, meagre, joyless existence of man. It is a contrast that has impressed many. Thus Matthew Arnold in one of his finest poem notes it. He hears Nature saying—

There is no effort on my brow,  
I do not strive, I do not weep,  
I rush with the swift spheres, and glow  
In joy, and, when I will, I sleep.<sup>2</sup>

And man—man with his strenuous, sorrowful, feverish and unresting life, how great the difference! It forced itself home upon Jefferies. While he saw and felt the beauty and serene joy of nature, yet the human interest was ever in the background. Not art for art's sake, but art for man's sake was the creed which inspired him. Deep below all the brilliance or loveliness which nature appears in his writings, there sounds often—

I know not what ground-tone  
Of human agony.<sup>3</sup>

You recognise this, viz., in those wonderful essays—prose poems—'Walks in the Wheat-fields.' Never have wheat fields been described with such marvellous insight and sympathy. But in the background, like a blot in heaven, looms up Labour, Labour, with its ignorance, its poverty, its fierce, relentless struggle for food. 'This is human life, real human life—no rest—no calm enjoyment of the scene. No generous gift of the food and wine lavishly offered by the gods—the hard fist of necessity for ever battering man to a shapeless and hopeless fall.' Of course Jefferies is speaking of a time and place where the conditions of labour were more vigorous than they are with us. But there is more than enough, even yet, in these colonies to dissociate human life from the beauty and joy of nature to leave Jefferies' complaints on this head not wholly out of date.

But I must close. It is pitiful to think that the man who is 'a priest to us all of the wonder and bloom of the world,' should have passed from among us with his greatness scarcely recognised. It is one more proof that we are the

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<sup>2</sup> Ed: 'Stanzas in Memory of the Author of *Obermann*'.

<sup>3</sup> Ed: Matthew Arnold: 'Morality'.

sons of those who slew the prophets. Can there be anything more pathetic than what he writes in that delightful paper ‘Hours of Spring’?

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 carefully and lovingly day by day ... They were all 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 ... But today I have to listen to the lark’s song—not out of doors with him but through the window pane, and the bullfinch carries the rootlet fibre to its nest without me. They manage without me very well; they know their time and seasons. Not only the civilised rooks with their libraries of knowledge in their old nests of reference, but the stray things of the hedge, and the chiff-chaff from over sea in the ash wood. They go on without me, orchis flower and cowslip—I cannot number them all—I hear it as it were the patter of their feet—flower and bud 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.

That is one of the rare sad notes in which he speaks of himself. And it was indeed hard that he who was such a worshipper of Nature should feel at last how little she could give him. For that is the terrible thing. This great imperious Nature cares nothing for us. Her children who love her so well she crushes and buries, but she will draw the daisy from the soil next spring, and spread her summer pomps as gaily as though we had never been. It was this thought that added a bitter pang to Jefferies’ fight with death. And all the time he was dictating his magnificent essay he was lying under the trampling feet of the grim twin giants of Disease and Poverty. But it is all over now. His life is as heroic a legacy as our literature preserves, and as for his work as a poetic naturalist it is unique.

He showed the soul within,  
The veil of matter luminous and thin.  
He heard the old Earth’s under song piercing the  
modern din.

No bird that cleaves the air  
But his revealing thought has made more fair;  
No tremulous dell of summer leaves but feels his  
presence there.

So, though we deem him dead,  
Lo! He yet speaketh! and the words are sped  
In grassy whispers o’er the fields—by every wild  
flower said.<sup>4</sup>



Rev. Rutherford Waddell, 1900

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<sup>4</sup> Ed: Part of ‘Richard Jefferies’ by Mary Geoghegan, first published in *Temple Bar*, January 1892. The complete poem can be found in *RJS Journal* No.32, Summer 2017 p.174.

# Richard Jefferies and the Open Air

## *Lymington*

This essay, signed LYMINGTON, was published in the October, 1887 issue of the *National Review*, and reprinted in the US in *The Living Age* of 19 November, 1887, in which Jefferies' essay 'My Old Village' also appeared, reprinted from *Longmans Magazine* of October, 1887. The author was Newton Wallop, Viscount Lymington, a Liberal MP representing South Molton, Devon, from 1885 until 1891, when he succeeded his father as Earl of Portsmouth and took his place in the House of Lords. At his death in 1917 *The Times* reported that he owned more than 60,000 acres, mostly in Devon, Hampshire and Ireland, with his country seat at Hurstbourne Park, Whitchurch, Hampshire.



Newton Wallop, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Portsmouth

It is a curious contradiction that while the public never appreciated the works of Richard Jefferies when he lived, and we are confronted again by the melancholy spectacle—a spectacle unfortunately familiar to the experience of literature and art—of a man of genius dying in poverty and distress, his death has awakened our intellectual sense and gratitude for the great part which Richard Jefferies has performed in expressing the many subtle and exquisite pleasures which, to the pure and simple-minded lovers of nature, are ever around and among us.

The poetry of country life and of the simple and purer natures of the country poor has been expressed in painting by the French artist Millet. With him, as with Richard Jefferies, the genius of his work was never fully appreciated during his life. He died, not in poverty, but certainly a poor and neglected artist. It is the sympathy of after years that has realised the genius of his work, and the almost sublime pathos which speaks to us in his picture of the 'Angelus.' I do not know why work like that of Jefferies or Millet, its counterpart in painting, should have excited so little enthusiasm during the lifetime of its authors. Experience at least teaches us that, when first-rate work of this kind has been done, posterity has accorded it almost a fancy value. I venture to express a hope that this may be so in regard to Richard Jefferies.

As I am writing there lies on my library table Izaak Walton's own copy of the 'Reliquiæ Wottonianæ'.

Blest silent groves, O may ye be  
Forever mirth's best nursery.  
May pure contents  
Forever pitch their tents  
Upon these downs, these rocks, these mountains,  
And peace still slumber by these purling fountains  
Which we may every year  
Find when we come a-fishing here.

Yes, it was probably amid the sunny meadows of May and June, when the streams are fresh and full of insect life, that the sweet and dignified intercourse of Sir Henry Wotton and Izaak Walton first ripened into friendship.

There is hardly a book which today fetches more money at a sale or in a bookseller's catalogue—if happily it is still to be found there—than an original of Walton's works. Years have, perhaps, given a mellowness and additional charm to the *Compleat Angler*; but the motive of its interest and delights is implanted deep in an Englishman's nature. The excitement of sport spent amid the incomparable charms of English scenery and English sunshine is as delicious today as in the days of Merry England. Richard Jefferies had just the same love of sport, and sport enjoyed in the open air, as a medium for the study of nature and natural life as had Izaak Walton. Can anything be more delightful than his humorous sketches of, and initiation into, the craft of and mysteries of poaching? In *The Amateur Poacher* he tells us that game is started more by scent than by sight, and mentions how the breath and odour of sheep or cows have enabled him to approach rabbits or pheasants feeding. Again, if we turn to a delightful book—one of his later ones, called *Red Deer*, which is, perhaps, not so well known as *The Game-*



*keeper at Home,* or *Wild Life in a Southern County*—he gives us a most picturesque and truthful description of the wild sport of stag-hunting amid those glorious wildernesses of oak coppice and heather which compose ‘red deer land.’

Nor has Richard Jefferies failed to realise the charm of character which belongs to those who live in remote parts of the country:

Men are not so sharply defined in isolation as in localities nearer civilisation; they do not stand aloof in villa seclusion close by, and yet divided for a lifetime. Here, they acknowledge each other's existence; they approach and lend a helping hand in stress of work. The common bond of sport has much to do in preserving this spirit. Every one takes the deepest interest in the deer, and in sport generally; it is a topic certain to come up, and thus a community of feeling causes a pleasantness of manner. With the red deer of the old-world time of England, survive courtesy and hospitality and the old world friendliness.

There is in Richard Jefferies as there is in Izaak Walton a spirit of warm affectionate good-fellowship. Nature and life are not to him a scientific study whereof to evolve systems or creeds:

I will not permit myself to be taken captive by observing physical phenomena, as many evidently are. The intense concentration of the mind on mechanical effects appears often to render it incapable of perceiving anything that it not mechanical, or of supposing that action can occur other than set ways. I do not think that because crystals are precipitated with fixed angles, therefore the whole universe is necessarily mechanical. I think there are things exempt from mechanical rules. The restriction of thought to purely mechanical grooves blocks progress in the same way as the restrictions of mediæval superstition. Let the mind think, dream, imagine, let it have perfect freedom. To shut out the soul is to put us back more than twelve thousand years.

I do not know whether he was an accomplished sportsman in practice, but he would have sympathised with Sir Henry Wotton who, Izaak Walton tells us, never forgot his pleasure in angling, which he would call ‘his idle time, not idly spent.’ To Jefferies the study of human nature was an innate and passionate pleasure, vivid and keen to every sense he possessed. It is curious to note also how the activity of this natural sense excites the larger feelings of human kindness, and seems, as it were, to take the place of that mental activity which finds its vent in many minds in controversies concerning our place in the world which is beyond the senses. As a rule, the students of nature—Izaak Walton, Evelyn, of later times Frank Buckland— seem to have relished life exceedingly. Evelyn was one of the first to flavour English society and English country life with a taste for woods and gardens. Custom and superstition have, alas! in his case neglected the expressed wishes of a man whose heart and life were in the temples not made by human hands, for in

his fourth book of his 'Sylva' Evelyn discourses on the sacredness of standing groves, and expresses the opinion that, as our Saviour's sepulchre was in a garden, so tombs in fields, mountains, highways and gardens are preferable to the proudest mausoleums; and he adds:

The late elegant and accomplished Sir W. Temple, though he laid not his whole body in his garden, deposited the better part of it—his heart—there; and if my executors will gratify me in what I have desired, I wish my corpse may be interred as I have bespoken them, not at all out of singularity, but for other reasons not here necessary to trouble the reader with, what I have said in general being sufficient. However, let them order it as they think fit, so it be not in the church or chancel.

The passionate love of nature and of sunshine which belonged to the man, and which was reflected in the brightness and vivacity of his disposition, seemed to shrink from circumscribing or localising the temple of religion. To him—as to Sir Henry Wotton, who, we are told by Izaak Walton, while a great lover and bountiful entertainer of his neighbours, was a great enemy to wrangling disputes of religion—there breathed a spirit of religion and a sense of devotion in all those dreams of loveliness which nature is ever affording in the sunrise over down or coppice, or in the twilight of dim and glittering avenues.

Happy art thou whom God does bless  
With all the full choice of thine own happiness,  
And happier yet because thou 'rt blest  
With prudence how to choose the best;  
In books and gardens thou has plac'd aright  
Things which thou well dost understand,  
And both dost make with thy laborious hand  
Thy noble innocent delight.

Just as Evelyn first taught our countrymen how to plant, and enriched our orchards and our gardens, so has Richard Jefferies first brought home to us—and to many of limited means this is a great practical boon—the pleasures and delights of the home and southern counties, which cluster around the metropolis.

There are many, alas! the children of Gibeon, on whose faded and weary faces there has never played the breath or sunshine of the country; but among this class of the very poor in London who are being strangled out of a livelihood by the demon of cheap competition, in the shape of foreign pauper immigration, cheap labour, and foreign manufactures—many now enjoy visions of country life. By the help of Mrs. Jewne's funds and other agencies many London children are being boarded out in country cottages to taste of country air and country life. But town nurslings pitched into the

country for a few weeks' health cannot acquire the country knowledge of which Mr. Jefferies writes, and which, like much of the old folk-lore seems to linger among the old men who still crawl among us.

Many of my friends will remember the raciness of some speech of an illiterate Hodge, stuffed by experience with the knowledge of country matters rather than with the learning of the modern board school, at some village meeting in a county contest, when he has at last been got to deliver his views. In the same sense what can be more picturesque or graphic than the old local words?

In this village the word twilight is almost unknown. It is the 'dimmets' that describes the evening hour. Amid the decay of the old-world language and knowledge the attention of statesmen has been called to the general depletion, not only in the form but in the numbers and material, of village life. Year by year we notice the steady and growing influx of the smartest lads into the large towns. In one sense this is the salvation of physical type of the Londoner, but on the other hand it increases the congestion and intensifies the competition there, while it denudes the country-side, not only of labour, but of the best and most vigorous types of village society. Of the villages of today it cannot be said that

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray

Since the days of the 'Elegy,' country life has in many senses been raised and purified. The labouring poor live in better cottages; are better fed. They are more independent themselves, and education will enable their children to be even more so; but their lot and position, although it has been carved into greater consonance with modern ideas, it is not one of contentment. Today there exists a sort of superstition that all that glitters is gold, and that in the land of gin-shops and crowded thoroughfares, employment and fortune are to be found. None except the many failures know the loneliness of London. I need not dwell upon how sad and bitter is the disappointment, and how unsatisfactory the career of many of these trustful and simple-minded country emigrants.

Some gentlemen are interesting themselves about the creation of village communities, but the commercial life as we find it today in Switzerland would, I believe, be unsuited to the social character of English country life; nor do I anticipate that under our present fiscal arrangements much success would accrue from the revival of village industries.

It is in the agricultural parts of England, remote from coal and from large towns, to the prosperity of the farmer, that the labourer must look for employment. He possesses in the Labourers' Union a perfectly legitimate and

valuable means for the protecting the value of his labour. It is not so much the price of wages—although that is bound to fall if the present agricultural depression continues—as the want of employment that is, and will continuously increase, to drive the agricultural poor away from their home to drift hopelessly and helplessly over the face of the country. And, alas! an element of despair enters into this matter. No answer has as yet been vouchsafed to show us how this deplorable tendency of the country population to augment the congestion of the towns will not proportionately increase as foreign importation continues to depreciate the value of cereal crops in England, and to necessitate farms becoming derelict, or their conversion from arable into pasture, which, whatever there may be in the argument of certain kinds of lands being more naturally suited for cereals than grass, means a certain saving in the labour and the tradesmen's bills.

To turn to a very different but more satisfactory side of the general question. We have evidence on all sides of a healthy and increasing appreciation of the æsthetic side of natural scenery. The appraised commercial value of æsthetics would in itself furnish material for an article. It would be most interesting to note how, while the values of purely commercial properties have deteriorated during the last few years, while the landowners and manufacturers have been out at elbow, amid falling prices in land and houses, fancy prices can still be got for a fine print or picture, or, in the case of real property, for an old house, or for a genuine untouched old bit of woodland and chase as a site for the house of some Midas.

This sense, expressed in the desire for his daughter to marry an English 'deer park,' reaches the soul of the most unimaginative of American millionaires. No one cares for the dull acres with the improved farm buildings, and the only temptation to connect capital with the land, and that still remains to the acquisition of land, are the possibilities of sport or the beauty of the demesne.

What Richard Jefferies loved—the untutored beauty of the woods, the wilderness of down and heather, or the old manor house where old shadowy days, melted into night three centuries since, have left a little of their twilight in the hall; where there is a dream in every chair; and where romance has grown richer with age like the colour of the oak,—these, once the ideal possessions, and coveted by the few and most politely born are now appreciated by the many, and have become convertible into the gold of the London money market. Of this, for proof we have only to turn to any newspaper of today. Let me take this one, as a sample of many others, an advertisement from the *Field* newspaper of September 3<sup>rd</sup>:

*Ancient Mansion*, of Elizabethan period preferred, Wanted to purchase; any part of England will do, and preference will be given to house that has not been

restored or modernised in any way; a large quantity of land not required.—Address, ‘R. J. V.,’ care of Messrs. Osborn & Mercer, 28B Albemarle Street, Piccadilly, W.

If we turn to the types of opinion around which this reverence has intertwined itself, it is one of the pleasantest contradictions of advanced Radicalism that it has saved to the nation the weird and romantic beauty of Epping Forest, and stayed the hand of the wood-farmer and larch-planter in the unrivalled glades of primeval timber in the New Forest.

Amid the rise and fall of mushroom millionaires—the race to make and the race to spend—there is, as indeed there should be, a growing respect and regard for the incomparable beauty which centuries of family pride and family self-denial have created and lovingly preserved, in the multitudes of fine places and woodlands of ancient timber that are scattered throughout the country, and that, like the portraits of Vandyke, plead the pathos and story of English history.

In no part of England is all this so conspicuous as in those southern counties of which Richard Jefferies wrote. I know of no greater contrast, nothing which tells more graphically the history of the two countries, than the dreary and treeless plains of France across which has swept, uprooted, and destroyed, every phase of revolution and violence, with the peaceful and smiling entrance into England through the fruitful county of Kent, studded as it is with fine trees and places.

The southern counties have not only enjoyed more sunshine and more genial climate wherewith nature can adorn herself; but as their wealth has been that of sky and landscape, so they have not been endowed with that mineral wealth which destroys one and obscures the other.

There are parts of Wiltshire and Dorset that lie to the south of Salisbury, a wild land of downs and heath which adjoins the New Forest, that correspond with the description of Kingswood in ‘Sir Percival,’<sup>1</sup> that stood in the centre of an agricultural and wooded country, and was immediately surrounded by miles of chase and forest untouched since the Saxon time, when it had been the favourite hunting-ground of King and Etheling.

In a little pamphlet entitled *Reporting, Editing, and Authorship*, published by John Snow & Co., Jefferies says: ‘To create a taste in the public requires a great genius; it is therefore, wisest to study the existing taste, and so cast the story that it may suit the fashion of the day.’ The writing of Richard Jefferies describes, in express language, a growing passion which exists among all classes for the things in which he delighted:

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Henry Shorthouse; published 1886.

We often hear of the doomed days of shooting. My experience points in a very different direction. The depression in agriculture is very severe, and yet there is hardly a young farmer who does not take out a licence, and excellent shots many of them are. Moreover, while there are corresponding objections and troubles, there is no doubt that the facility of acquiring shooting resulting from the impoverishment of the landowning class, has opened out the sport very largely to a class who before found some difficulty in partaking of it. Everything that brings the capitalist in the towns into a practical acquaintance with the enjoyments of the country must benefit the agriculturalist, and it must tend to dispel the ridiculous prejudice and jealousy which, born of ignorance, are directed against a class who receive less interest for their capital than that of any other body of men.

That the public taste is attracted to other natural pleasures experienced by Richard Jefferies is established beyond controversy—open spaces, ‘the open air,’ flowers, for these the craving is general and growing; it is a part, and by no means an unimportant part, of that general belief which is sinking deep into our hearts, that just as the social reformer is acquiring the interest formally attached to the politician, so the removal of social evils and the creation of healthy and happier conditions—better homes in the towns, for the poor, homes which are not so miserable as to make the miseries of the gin-palace a brighter alternative—and a more general knowledge of the laws of health and healthy living, must precede the development of any finer conceptions of religious or human duties.

Jefferies puts into the language of poetry a thought which must have come home to many of us. Speaking of the wood pigeons he says:

They have not laboured in mental searching as we have; they have not wasted their time looking among the empty straw for the grain that is not there; they have been in the sunlight. Since the days of ancient Greece the doves have remained in the sunshine; we who have laboured have found nothing. In the sunshine by the shady verge of woods, by the sweet waters where the wild dove sips, there alone will thought be found.

To him the solitude and silence of nature are not as it appears to many morbid writers the voices of remorse, regret, retaliation. Nature speaks to him of herself, and, through herself, of higher things beyond. He could commune with her as an agreeable and cheerful companion, full of incident and anecdote, and not, as she is so often represented, the confessor of our own egotism, or of our own dreary foolish fancies. Jefferies writes that he was

sensitive to all things, to the earth under the star hollow round about, to the least blade of grass, to the largest oak. They seemed like the exterior nerves and veins for the conveyance of feeling to me; sometimes a very ecstasy of exquisite enjoyment of the entire visible universe filled me.

Such is a happy and indeed a practical philosophy; one which in these days may teach us a great deal. To increase the happiness of the many is forever on our lips; it is one of the leading mottoes of our political cant, but how much more effective would be such a wish if it fell from the lips of those in whose own nature's there was a sunshine that could to others be transmitted!

In conclusion, I would fain say a few words in relation to the mystical philosophy of which Richard Jefferies imbibed so deeply, and which all of us have more or less imbibed, to whom the eternities—for nature, while ever changing, never dies—of nature have appealed.

In Mr. Shorthouse the grace of English scenery, by him usually associated with an idealised aristocracy, the glories of Kingswood, its pleasance, chase, and halls of twilight, and of tapestry, awaken the feelings of a High Church sacramentalist. To him it is the story of religion as told by the Church that seems to touch, and, touching, transfuse with an increased glory the wonders of creation. To Jefferies there is also a deep religious sense, but of a different kind.

I was not more than eighteen when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe, and indefinable aspirations filled me. I found them in the grass-fields, under the trees, on the hilltops at sunrise, and in the night. There was deeper meaning everywhere.

With Jefferies the wonders of creation excite a humility, a sense of how limitless is the knowledge of facts, but how limited and circumscribed the knowledge of thought; as he says, ever the same thoughts come that have been written down centuries and centuries. To him nature is an incomprehensible religion in itself rather than the medium of revealing the doctrines of any particular religious system.

Sweet is the bitter sea, and the clear green in which the gaze seeks the soul looking through the glass into itself. The sea thinks for me as I listen and ponder; the sea thinks, and every boom of the wave repeats my prayer; my soul rising to the immensity utters its desire prayer with all the strength of the sea, or again, the full stream of ocean beats upon the shore, and the rich wind feeds the heart, the sun shines brightly; the sense of soul life burns in me like a torch.

Every page, every line I might say, of the writings of Richard Jefferies contradicts that hopeless and dreary philosophy of materialism which is accepted by those whose study of nature is not with eyes of love, but purely mechanical, of the laboratory only. Immortality is everywhere, around him and before him, nay, it is the sense with him of absolute incapacity to realise the immensity of this spiritual life which makes him feel the incompleteness and inadequacy of the definition of the religious mystery by any particular

creed or Church. Just as Marcus Aurelius asks: 'What is earth but a point, how small a corner is occupied! Who and what are they who are about to cry thee up?' so Jefferies felt that as the sky extended beyond the valley, so there are ideas beyond the valley of our thoughts. 'Beyond and over the horizon I feel that there are other waves of ideas unknown to me, flowing as the stream of ocean flows.' In this there is general agreement. To one and all upon whom has fallen nature's spell, to Shorthouse as well as to Jefferies, there is the feeling that ideas are beyond the power of language, that our immortal nature cannot be communicated through the medium of what is human and mortal.

For all that is revered by the various religious systems that belong to various races and climes this philosophy offers a reverence deep and profound. It is the philosophy of humility rather than of dogmatism, but just as Shorthouse and Jefferies have each in different ways attuned our minds to a higher interpretation of natural philosophy, so would it teach us to find a fresh sense and a quickening vitality of enjoyment in all that is around and among us.

Though it was now broad day, a gentle trace  
Of light, diviner than the common sun,  
Shed on the common earth, and the place  
Was filled with magic sounds woven into one  
Oblivious melody, confusing sense  
Amid the gliding waves and shadows dun.<sup>2</sup>

LYMINGTON.

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<sup>2</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Triumph of Life'.



# Letters on Literature

*Rev. Thomas Warham (Lionel Lit)*

*The Brisbane Courier*, a Queensland daily newspaper, published a weekly column during the first decade of the twentieth century titled 'Letters on Literature', which was contributed, in the form of a letter, by Lionel Lit.

The writer behind the pseudonym was a Methodist minister, Rev. Thomas Warham (pictured right, courtesy of State University of Queensland) who wrote with authority on ancient and modern authors and poets. In September 1904 and in June 1909, his subject was Richard Jefferies with Warham declaring himself as 'one who has spent unforgettable hours of pure delight in the company of Richard Jefferies'. These two letters appear below.



Thomas Warham was born in Staffordshire in 1864 and spent some years as a teacher but then trained as a Methodist minister accepting a position in Ipswich, Queensland, in 1888 and married there in 1891. His religious duties covered the large Ipswich circuit until he was transferred to Sandgate, a seaside suburb of Brisbane.

On the 8 April 1911 Warham was found drowned at Sandgate where he regularly swam. He had been suffering from dengue fever, a mosquito-borne infection, and heart problems had resulted in fainting fits. His tragic death, at the age of forty-seven, was thought to have been caused by a heart attack or dengue shock syndrome. He left a widow and three children.

In the many tributes paid to him in the press, *The Queenslander* of 22 April 1911 affirmed that:

In his delightful 'Letters on Literature' he gave us—who perhaps otherwise would have walked through the lanes and fields with open-eyed blindness—many vivid glimpses into the simple open-air life of country places. He introduced us to authors, who, but for him, would be forgotten on the dusty shelves of the libraries.

*The Brisbane Courier*, Saturday 17 September 1904, p.13.

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

Dear Bookman, June—The day after posting my letter on Izaak Walton's work brought the June copy of *The Bookman*, which by an interesting coincidence was a 'Walton' number. The principal article, however, was not devoted exclusively to the author of the *Compleat Angler*, but to a trio of Nature writers of which Izaak Walton was one. The second of the trio was Gilbert White, of Selborne, and the third was Richard Jefferies who in our own day, and in his own manner—a manner different from that of Walton and also of White—sought to do for his readers what these two classic

English writers did for our forbears, and for us and for generations still to come, give them an interest in the life of the countryside, drawing them from within doors and setting them amid the freshness, the beauty the wonder of Nature.

EULOGISTS of JEFFERIES—Richard Jefferies is just now beginning to be forgotten of the general reader, and one would like to arrest the process even in small degree, and within the narrow limits of one's own sphere. If he is ever forgotten it will not be for want of eulogists. It would not be surprising if among all the interesting and socially influential books of Sir Walter Besant, the longest lived should be his *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, a book which if it is unknown to you I would advise you to procure forthwith. The natural criticism of the book would be that it is too indiscriminate in his admiration. But the book does not set out to be a severely critical consideration of Jefferies' works, but to pronounce a eulogy on the man, and no matter how fine it may be to see a writer furbishing his critical weapons and then using them with deftness and effect, it is finer still from my point of view to see a literary craftsman literally aglow with admiration and sympathy for the life, character, and work of one of his fellows of the craft. Besides Besant's, there are other books dealing with Jefferies and scores of articles of which 'John Halsham's' in *The Bookman* is typical, all or nearly all, helping to support the statement that if Jefferies is ever forgotten it will not be for want of eulogists. By the way, it will be well for you to remember that it is from the above books and articles that the history of the man is to be obtained and not from Jefferies' autobiography, so called *The Story of My Heart*. This, while a book of absorbing interest, and memorably impressive will tell you nothing of the outer life of its subject. It is purely a record of the thoughts and feelings that made up the inner life of the writer, a story of mental and spiritual aspirations and sympathies with wonderful imaginings, not always free from morbidity.

SUCCESSORS—Then, if Jefferies is ever forgotten, it will not be because he has been succeeded and superseded by abler writers in his own line. We have today, as I happen to know, and am delighted to report quite a school of workers in the same vein. The writer of *The Bookman* article, 'John Halsham'—the pseudonym of Mr. C. Forrester Scott—has provided us with a feast à la Jefferies in his two books *Idlehurst* and *Kitty Fairball*. I am happy to have some of the writings of a 'Son of the Marshes' and of C.J. Cornish, who, with others I could name, are helping to maintain the Jefferies tradition. Still, the subject of Sir Walter Besant's *Eulogy* is the crux of the school and even if in the immediate future he should be further forgotten, it is conceivable that there may be a great revival of interest in his writings some day.

QUALITIES—Richard Jefferies was possessed of a sympathy with nature, as profound as that of Wordsworth himself. In both cases this meant an exquisite joy in nature's bounty and beauty, a commensurate pain in her wrongs. The heart that danced with the dancing daffodils, would have been hurt to see them bruised. So we find Jefferies saying of flowers growing near a cottage where there had been a smallpox outbreak, 'There is something in disease so destructive, as it were, to flowers'. With this sympathy there was a simply marvellous perception, something more than mere observation.

The people living in 'Jefferies-land' say, 'We dooan't know why folk come to Coate; there beean't nothin' here, we never seed them there things they say, Jefferies wrote in his books.' So it was in Jefferies' southern county; so it is among the Lakes, if we may believe an English divine. He was ascending a hill in the Lake district sitting on the box-seat. When the summit was reached a magnificent prospect was revealed; which drove the preacher into ecstasies. He appealed to the driver, 'Isn't it glorious?' 'We thinks nowt out,' was the unashamed reply. So one and another testifies, 'We never seed what Richard Jefferies saw,' not glories like those of the Lake district or the Alps, which any fool ought to be able to see, but he saw the glories of a square yard of meadow land or a bit of hedgerow. Of these things he wrote, not achieving the very highest results, I think, but so as to communicate a measure of the wonder and joy to others which he himself had felt.

LIMITATIONS—What one misses in Jefferies is the geniality of Walton, the humour of a John Burroughs. That these qualities should be absent need not altogether surprise us if we are familiar with the story of his struggles and sufferings. 'John Halsham' sets us speculating as to what might have been the result had Jefferies been born to the leisured ease of a Walton or a Gilbert White. However, it may be there in a certain sombreness in his writings, seldom relieved by a turn of humour, even when dealing with the villagers who are supposed to provide that fine quality in considerable measure.

Here is a bit which I came across in Miss Eleanor Hayden's *Travels Round Our Village*: 'My son, 'ee knaw,' she would explain with pardonable pride, 'a lives up at Barrow ; 'tis a ter'ble girt way off an' folks sez as you've got to cross the water to get to't. I cassn't say myself, fur I've niver bin ther'; but that's us 'tis. My son drives an engine; not one o' them as runs on rails an' screeches fit to mammer arrabody. His'n be what you calls a drudge—summat as cleans out the sea, luk 'ee. I reckon that 'ull be a longish job, so there ben't much fear o' him bein' short o' work yet awhile. Dear, dear, who'd ha' thought as iver the sea could ha' bin claned out? But ther's no tellin' what folks wun't be up to nowadays!'

In the same book there is much more of a similar kind, 'racy of the soil,' an' you will. But in Jefferies we see much more of the tragedy of village life than of its comedy. One misses the note which in the most sombre of Hardy's novels, for instance, gives the relief of a smile, the flash of rustic wit, the grotesque wisdom of the village oracle, the ludicrous speech of the rustic original. Richard Jefferies deals with the villager with no lack of sympathy, but with almost the seriousness of the reformer.

Looking over this letter, I seem not to have written with such generous appreciation as would have been becoming on the part of one who has spent unforgettable hours of pure delight in the company of Richard Jefferies, and who refrains from attempting to express his sense of the heroism of Jefferies' life by the sense of its being inexpressible — Yours, &c, LIONEL LIT.

*The Brisbane Courier*, Saturday June 26, 1909, p.19.

#### RICHARD JEFFERIES AND HIS BIOGRAPHERS

Dear Bookman, June—It is nearly twenty-two years since the life of Richard Jefferies reached its painful close, yet there are evidences of continued, perhaps even revived, interest in the man and his work. Quite recently his fine book, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, has been added to one of the most attractive popular libraries—that of Nelson—while still more recently another biography of him has been published. Manifestly, there is no likelihood of his being soon forgotten. His appeal may not be to a wide public, but for his own constituency the charm of his best writing is unfailing. To all who compose this constituency of admirers the news will be of interest that another addition has been made to the biographical treatment of the greatest of English nature writers. Jefferies is an interesting subject from more than one point of view. His life story treated externally, while it tells of no great and stirring events, no incidents which lend themselves to word painting, is just a deeply moving story, for it deals with one of the tragedies of English literary life, a lurid series of which the latest, though by no means the last, was furnished the other day by poor [John] Davidson. More interesting if less pathetic than the story of Jefferies' struggles and sufferings, is the record of his mental progress and its achievements. To have this story told with sympathy and intelligence is a thing to rejoice over. It seems worth while attempting to recall what has been done to enshrine the memory of Richard Jefferies in the literature of biography.

The biographers of Jefferies must be indebted to him for the light he casts on his own inner life in that striking piece of autobiography which he calls *The Story of My Heart*. This life story is almost as free from mundane

happenings as if it were the biography of a disembodied spirit. It is a strangely etherealised story, especially if one remembers that the writer sprang from that class of English folk who devote themselves to the raising and consuming of that unethereal commodity, the roast beef of old England. Here is a man who, instead of being weighed with the clods amid which his forbears had wrought for generations, attains to a mood of mental exaltation and mystical sympathy with nature which is felt at times to be abnormal and unhealthy. The capacity for close communion with nature such as Jefferies cultivated can only be purchased by the neglect of certain social relations and human qualities which avenge themselves for such neglect by depriving the too ardent Nature worshipper of that perfect poise and balance which underlie physical and mental health. Jefferies paid the price of his devotion. Shyness, impracticability, morbidity grow upon him. But though there may be traces of morbidity in *The Story of My Heart* the book is still a human document of highest value.

Following Jefferies' autobiography in the order of time comes *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* by Sir Walter Besant. Now that Jefferies has come to be recognised as the genius in his own class of writers, it is scarcely to be wondered at that Sir Walter's attempt to delineate him is felt to be inadequate. A critic as kindly as Richard Garnett spoke of the *Eulogy* as a 'benevolent but fussy and bourgeois' work whilst Mr. Thomas Seccombe holds up hands of pious deprecation at the bare idea that an absolutely 'secondary and imitative novelist' like Besant should try to use his biographic skill on such a subject and should 'patronise a poet-naturalist such as Jefferies'. I confess all this sounds a little unhandsome to me. Besant's qualifications for dealing with certain aspects of Jefferies' life and work were limited to non-existent and the *Eulogy* is a piece of book-making pure and simple. But it has yet to be shown that the memory of Jefferies has in any way suffered from Sir Walter's biography, while it is absolutely certain that it considerably extended the interest in Jefferies' career and writings. It was beyond the power of the eulogist to interpret successfully the mind and spirit of his subject, and this he seems to have recognised, for he is content in dealing with Jefferies' writings to let the poet naturalist speak for himself. But he conveyed with some success a sense of the nobility and loftiness of Jefferies' character, and especially of the tragedy of his too brief life.

It was, however, inevitable that in course of time Sir Walter Besant's *Eulogy* should be succeeded and in all probability superseded by later biographies. Such supersession is even now taking place and while the *Eulogy* may still have some value for the light it casts on Jefferies' struggles as an author, the student will henceforth turn elsewhere for a study of the man. Two biographers will keep him at this point. Mr. H.S. Salt, who published a

few years ago *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Ideals*, is one of the two. Mr. Salt, I remember, laid himself open to criticism and became involved in a somewhat heated controversy over some alleged misrepresentation of Jefferies' attitude towards Christianity at the time of his death. On this point I imagine his critics to have had the best of the argument. But in his main purpose, an attempt to interpret Jefferies as a nature-mystic, it is admitted that he achieved a considerable success. It is on this side that Richard Jefferies is unique and even phenomenal. There may arise another writer who, as a reporter of nature's doings will be as competent and charming as he, but we shall probably never again see one who had such an exalted, intimate, mystic communion with nature, as had this man.

And now last of all comes *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*, from the pen of Edward Thomas. For some time I have been following Mr. Thomas's career with interest, and much of what he has attempted thus far has been of a nature to prepare him for successfully attempting a delineation of his chosen subject. His first book, *Horae Solitariae*, has been a favourite with me since coming into my possession four or five years ago. Mr. Thomas is evidently a Celt with a native interest in the mystical side of things. He is also on the evidence of this little book a lover of books and of nature. These things all help to qualify him for attempting a study of Richard Jefferies. Here is a paragraph from, a chapter on 'February in England' which gives promise of a future fitness for dealing with Jefferies' life and work:

Day was almost gone, when again just at a certain part of dawn, for a short time spring seemed to be coming down the wind into the land, undeniably the genius of spring, though invisible, inaudible. This promise was nearer a perfume than anything else—as of remote blossom, driven hither across leagues of drenching Atlantic air, making the nostrils dilate with half-diffident expectation and surprise. A bat flew round the keep, and his snipping sound could be heard overhead. Hesperus come out, and burned longer than it had done before that year, so that in its tender light the land seemed in that brief half hour to advance a long way towards the season of catkins, through which the first voices from the south—chiff-chaff and wood wren would presently creep, and stir vapours of golden pollen, while in the clear noon there would be no shadow save the fly's on the great buttercup.

Since he wrote these words Mr. Thomas has worked well at his craft and has written what is so far his crowning work, and one that will be a joy to lovers of Jefferies—Yours, &c, LIONEL. LIT.

# Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies

Q.D. Leavis

This review, which appeared in the 'Comments and Reviews' section of *Scrutiny* (pp.435–446) for March 1938, is an important and historic contribution to the critical appreciation of Richard Jefferies by Q.D. Leavis, an outstanding critic.

*Jefferies' England—Nature Essays* by Richard Jefferies, Edited with an Introduction by S.J. Looker (Constable, 8/6).

*Richard Jefferies: Selections of his Work, with details of his Life and Circumstance, his Death and Immortality*, by Henry Williamson (Faber and Faber, 7/6).

*Hodge and His Masters*, by Richard Jefferies, revised by Henry Williamson (Methuen, 7/6).

Mention Richard Jefferies to anyone under thirty-five and he or she will almost certainly say 'Do you mean *The Story of My Heart* man? I never read it'; and they may recollect having read *Bevis* when young. An uninviting title and a boys' classic seem to be all that remains for the majority of a once considerable reputation. It is excellent therefore that selections from his works should be issued now to bring him before a new public, calling attention to the variety of his genius, with critical essays by the editors enouncing its nature. Unfortunately these selections have been undertaken, by the wrong people or in, the wrong spirit. It is not true, as some of the reviewers alleged, that they have chosen almost identical extracts—only two pieces are in fact duplicated—but neither book is likely to do Jefferies much good in the way of inducing the intelligentsia to give his entire *oeuvre* a trial. Mr. Williamson's selection is much the more attractive and more just in its representative variety, but unhappily so strongly does the editor's personality interleave the pages and so possessive is his attitude to his victim ('My Jefferies' he calls him, and apostrophises and converses with him with complacent impertinence)<sup>1</sup> that many readers who will decide or have long ago decided that they can't stomach the author of *The Village Book* will not realize that Jefferies is quite another kind of writer on rural themes. It would

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<sup>1</sup> Someone ought to register a protest against this kind of vulgarity, from which no dead writer seems to be safe. Posterity will think the twentieth-century *literati* had no spiritual manners. Jefferies has been one of the worst sufferers—c.f. Guy N. Pocock's introduction to the Everyman *Bevis* and the last life, an indefensible piece of book-making by Reginald Arkell, *Richard Jefferies* (Rich and Cowan, 1933).

be a pity if Jefferies should become the property of Mr. Williamson, as Cobbett became the property of G.K. Chesterton.

Jefferies was one of those comprehensive geniuses from whose work you can take what you are inclined to find. Mr. Looker selects to sell us a noble Victorian Jefferies (the mystic, the nature-philosopher, etc.) and not unintentionally: 'It is the purpose of this book to show the real Jefferies . . . It celebrates the author of *The Story of My Heart* . . . [where] Knowledge has given place to Wisdom.' This is scarcely an aspect that will appeal to the contemporary public, and reviewers indeed found Mr. Looker's Jefferies dull. From the other selection, which while keeping the same principle (of chronological representation) might have been made far more intelligently, you would conclude that Jefferies had written a much larger proportion of weak, ephemeral or eccentric stuff than is the case, and you are deprived of most of his strongest, finest and characteristic things.<sup>2</sup>

Disinterested campaigning for Jefferies would rather ask Messrs. Hutchinson to reprint Edward Thomas's *Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work* (1908) (preferably in the cheap pocket edition); since second-hand booksellers ask a guinea for this *Life* there must be a long-felt want. This book should be recognized as a classic in critical biography, to stand with Lockhart's *Scott* and Mrs. Gaskell's *Brontë* in point of intrinsic interest and containing better literary criticism than many critical works. The well-known fact that Thomas did hack-work for publishers has probably prevented recognition of this book, which he did voluntarily and evidently took much trouble to perfect. Since subsequent writers on Jefferies take all their facts from him as well as his careful bibliography, generally without acknowledgment, and since there is nothing more to be found out about Jefferies (the old inhabitants who knew him having passed away and Thomas anyhow observing 'Of the man himself we know, and apparently can know, very little'), to reprint Thomas's work would automatically render further book-making unnecessary. His is a model biography. The author is recognized as being present only by the sympathy that informs the narrative and the intelligence that directs the criticism and determines the selections. The selections from Jefferies' works there are so abundant and well-chosen that Thomas's *Life* of itself will send the reader to their sources. Another good piece of Jefferies criticism is an introduction to one of the novels, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, by Edward Garnett, prefixed to the New Readers Library edition.<sup>3</sup> Garnett exposes the silliness of the Saintsbury kind of

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<sup>2</sup> Though not all—there are two good long selections from *Amaryllis at the Fair* which ought to send people to the novel.

<sup>3</sup> Now O.P. Garnett's introduction is accessible in Vol. 5 of *Modern English Essays* (Dent, 1922).



critique of Jefferies and declares, with a supporting argument that is at least as necessary now as it was then, that 'in his judgment *Amaryllis* is one of the very few later-day novels of English country life that are worth putting on one's shelf, and that to make room for it he would turn out certain highly-praised novels by Hardy which the critics and the public, with touching unanimity, have voted to be of high rank.'

In fact Jefferies was a many-sided and comprehensive genius, not merely a peculiarly English genius but one whose interests, ideas, and temperament associate him with other peculiarly English geniuses: he recalls or embodies now Cobbett, now D.H. Lawrence, now Dickens, now Edward Thomas himself and he had a sensuous nature akin to but more robust than Keats; he has too a strikingly contemporary aspect as social satirist, and he is in the central and most important tradition of English prose style. No selection can do him justice that does not present and even stress these aspects of a writer who has been too generally represented merely as a word-painter of natural beauties, a sort of early Keats in prose.

Perhaps a few quotations from a mass of similar material will illustrate his characteristic vein of vigorous feeling.

Up in the north they say there is a district where the labourers spend their idle hours in cutting out and sticking together fiddles. I do not care twopence for a fiddle as a fiddle; but still I think if a labouring man coming home from plough, and exposure to rough wind, and living on coarse fare, can still have spirit enough left to sit down and patiently carve out bits of maple wood and fit them together into a complete and tunable fiddle, then he must have within him some of the true idea of art, and that fiddle is in itself a work of art. [*The Dewy Morn*]

He minded when that sharp old Miss \_\_\_\_ was always coming round with tracts and blankets like taking some straw to a lot of pigs, and lecturing his missis about economy. What a fuss she made, and scolded his wife as if she was a thief for having her fifteenth boy! His missis turned on her at last and said: 'Lor' miss, that's all the pleasure me an' my old man got.' [*The Toilers of the Field*]

In this book some notes have been made of the former state of things before it passes away entirely. But I would not have it therefore thought that I wish it to continue or return. My sympathies and hopes are with the light of the future, only I should like it to come from nature. The clock should be read by the sunshine, not the sun timed by the dock. The latter is indeed impossible, for though all the clocks in the world should declare the hour of dawn to be midnight, the sun will presently rise just the same. [*Round About a Great Estate*]

As himself of noble birth, Felix had hitherto seen things only from the point of view of his own class. Now he associated with grooms, he began to see society

from their point of view, and recognized how feebly it was held together by brute force, intrigue, cord and axe, and woman's flattery. But a push seemed needed to overthrow it. [*After London*]

To me it seems the most curious thing possible that well-to-do people should expect the poor to be delighted with their condition. I hope they never will be. [*Field and Hedgerow*]

There were parsons then, as now, in every rural parish preaching and teaching something they called the Gospel. Why did they not rise as one man and denounce this ghastly iniquity [hanging for sheep-stealing], and demand its abolition? They did nothing of the sort; they enjoyed their pipes and grog very comfortably . . . The gallows at the cross-roads is gone, but the workhouse stands . . . that blot on our civilization, the workhouse. [*Field and Hedgerow*]

Then to unlearn the first ideas of history, of science, of social institutions, to unlearn one's own life and purpose; to unlearn the old mode of thought and way of arriving at things; to take off peel after peel, and so get by degrees slowly towards the truth—thus writing, as it were, a sort of floating book in the mind, almost remaking the soul. It seems as if the chief value of books is to give us something to unlearn. Sometimes I feel indignant at the false views that were instilled into me in early days, and then again I see that that very indignation gives me a moral life. [*Field and Hedgerow*]

And even from *Bevis*, which its editors tell you is an idealization of his boyhood:

Loo said they were all hungry, but Samson was most hungry. He cried almost all day and all night, and woke himself up crying in the morning. Very often she left him, and went a long way down the hedge because she did not like to hear him.

'But,' objected Bevis, 'my Governor pays your father money, and I'm sure my mamma sends you things' . . . Bevis became much agitated, he said he would tell the Governor, he would tell dear mamma, Samson should not cry any more. Now Bevis had always been in contact almost with these folk, but yet he had never seen; you and I live in the midst of things, but never look beneath the surface. His face became quite white; he was thoroughly upset. It was his first glance at the hard roadside of life. He said he would do all sorts of things; Loo listened pleased but dimly doubtful, she could not have explained herself, but she nevertheless knew that it was beyond Bevis's power to alter these circumstances.

In his own time interest was drawn off at his death in disputations about 'Did Richard Jefferies die a Christian?'<sup>4</sup> and when such questions ceased to burn Jefferies was practically relegated with them to limbo. There has always been a garden-suburb cult of *The Story of My Heart* which has assisted in

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<sup>4</sup> See Thomas's *Life* and Bibliography.

discrediting him. It is an unfortunate title, and the book itself unless read in its place with the whole body of his writings will do him no good. Jefferies was not a 'thinker' whose thinking is of any use to us without the recreation of the experience that occasioned it, and his 'message' is more successfully conveyed in such relations, not in the prose poem which he attempted. The other factor that pushed Jefferies out of sight for the post-war generation was the Bloomsbury cult of W.H. Hudson. The impression that left was that Hudson did everything Jefferies did, only much better because he was an artist, a great stylist, and the other a clumsy amateur who wrote journalism. It is hard now to understand how anyone could have had patience with the precious style Hudson affected or have been interested in his Victorian Utopias. We did not venture to disagree openly with Mrs. Woolf and Mr. Herbert Read and Mr. Murry and the *Athenaeum*, but we privately found Hudson a bore and, in his sentimentalisation of human life, embarrassing. No one had the strength of mind of the child in *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and by the time Hudson had ceased to be read Jefferies had dropped back out of sight. It took the red blood of Mr. A.G. Street and the happy ingenuousness of Mr. Adrian Bell to get country life back into the circulating library. It is generally difficult to persuade people to persevere with *A Shepherd's Life*, the best of Hudson's country books, so discouraging are the first two chapters, yet it is well worth reading; but how strained, how literary, how unconvincing compared with the mounting life that informs *Round About a Great Estate*, to take only one out of a pile of Jefferies' good things. And how Hudson dates! while his predecessor is still a modern. To secure Jefferies his right to be read, several points could be made. One is the intrinsic value as literature of the rural life of much of his work. The large public that enjoyed *Farmer's Glory* and *Corduroy* would equally enjoy in the existing cheap editions *The Amateur Poacher*, *Wild Life in a Southern County* and *Round About a Great Estate* (one of the most delightful books in the English language). Those who have found *Change in the Village* and *Change in the Farm* relevant to their interest in social history will be glad that *Hodge and His Masters* is again in print (a handsome edition, but a cheaper one would have reached a larger public) and will be impelled by that to search Jefferies for more documentation; since three of the least useful chapters have been chosen for the Faber anthology the reprint will be even more welcome. It is characteristic of Jefferies that he expressed regret that Gilbert White 'did not leave a natural history of the people of his day.' The element in Jefferies' writings represented by the interest that Gilbert White lacked is the decisive one; some of his best work can be described as such a natural history—for instance 'The Country Sunday' among other essays in *Field and Hedgerow*, and pieces throughout his other volumes of collected essays,

*Nature Near London, The Life of the Fields, The Toilers of the Field*. But it also led him to collect folk-lore, rustic idiom and dialect words, and to note dying crafts and changing ways of living at a time when these subjects were little considered. To a far larger section of the intelligentsia an impressive case could be made for bringing Jefferies to their notice as an approved social thinker. His case-history would make useful propaganda; one of those Left journalists who turn out biographies showing that writers like Dickens were really just the same kind of writer as Mr. Alec Brown ought to be instructed to do Jefferies. Starting as a member of the yeoman-farmer class with all its Conservative prejudices and habits of social conformism he emancipated himself by nothing but the force of daily experience and sensitive reflection to a position of daring freedom from the ideas of his class, his age and his country (he died in 1887).

It would be noted in such a Life that he planned to write (and may even have written but never published) works called 'The New Pilgrim's Progress; or, A Christian's Painful Progress from the Town of Middle Class to the Golden City' and 'The Proletariate: The Power of the Future'; that he hated the Church as an oppressor, calling it 'a huge octopus' and noting with pleasure that 'the pickaxe is already laid to the foundations of the Church tower'; that he wrote of 'laws made by the rich for the rich'—'Most certainly the laws ought to be altered and must be altered'; that he protested in reference to projects for the cultural elevation of the villagers 'For the enjoyment of art it is first of all necessary to have a full belly'; that he never had the smallest hankering after the Merrie Englande past<sup>5</sup> but wanted the latest mechanism for agriculture and 'the light railway to call at the farmyard gate' and protested that the village had church and chapel but no cottage hospital, library, or lecture system to put the country folk in touch with the mental life of the time—villages should own themselves and have the right by Act of Parliament, like the railways, to buy land back from the land-owners at a reasonable price—'in the course of time, as the people take possession of the earth on which they stand . . .' he writes; that he never idyllicised country life or rested for long content with the sensuous beauties of nature—I am simply describing the realities of rural life behind the scenes' he says in 'One of the New Voters' and it might often serve as his epigraph; that he was acutely conscious of the class war and the monetary basis of modern society—*After London: or Wild England*, which is always written of as though it were of the *News from Nowhere* or *A Crystal Age* type of pretty day-dream impresses as contemporary not with Morris or Hudson

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<sup>5</sup> 'Dearly as I love the open air, I cannot regret the mediaeval days. I do not wish them back again, I would sooner fight in the foremost ranks of Time.' — 'Outside London.'

but with *The Wild Goose Chase* (it seems to me to be a consistent satire on the system Jefferies found himself living under and to be in great part autobiographical).<sup>6</sup> Jefferies hated the class distinctions which exacted servility from tenants and farm-hands, kept a hold over the morals of the cottager and strangled his independence, and the fierce attacks on this aspect of rural life should make *The Dewy Morn*,<sup>7</sup> his most considerable novel, a Left Book. I have quoted a significant passage from *Bevis*, and even *Wood Magic*, a story-book for little children, has every claim to be admitted to the socialist nursery. Edward Thomas notes that though Jefferies was aloof and 'not a talker,' yet he 'talked with ease and vigour on his own subjects, most eagerly on the Labour Question.'<sup>8</sup> These notes, which might be multiplied if space allowed, could feed a new biography which would make Jefferies appear alive and congenial to our younger generation as neither Mr. Looker's lofty thinker nor Mr. Williamson's alter ego can be. And it would have the merit of being nearer to the truth—the truth of Jefferies' character, that core of his varied writings that unites them and gives them significance. But of course as an account of his work and its importance for posterity it would be ludicrously inadequate, for these facts and quotations only impress when given prominence by extraction and accumulation.

Jefferies' 'message' is so much more complex and deep-rooted that the total impression made by anything he wrote is not of this simple order. For instance, his instinctive humanity and indignant expression of it are controlled by a characteristic irony—that irony of Jefferies' which is so disconcerting that Mr. Looker preferred to ignore it. Nor has *After London* any trace of the crude propagandism and spiritual vulgarity of *The Wild Goose Chase* with which I have suggested a comparison.

For Jefferies was an artist, though not of the Hudson genre. His writing never reaches after effect and seems unconscious of achieving any; he is therefore the best possible model and for this reason alone should be in common possession, as Addison once was. He might indeed, if a judicious selection were made, supersede *The Coverley Papers* (which have got to be a

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<sup>6</sup> No selection from it is given in either anthology but it is fortunately still in print in the New Readers Library and should make a popular class-room text.

<sup>7</sup> O.P. Nothing from it is given by either editor. Jefferies requested the publisher not to give the MS. to a Tory reader, who would be certain to reject it. Jefferies refused help from the Royal Literary Fund, which might have prolonged his life, because 'he believed that the fund was maintained by dukes and marquises instead of authors and journalists.' [Ed: Jefferies was granted £100 by the RLF in November 1886]

<sup>8</sup> Here is an interesting passage from the posthumous 'Thoughts on the Labour Question': 'Then, for Heaven's sake, let us all have a fair chance: do not make its possession dependent upon morality, virtue, genius, personal stature, nobility of mind, self-sacrifice, or such rubbish.'

bore in schools) not to speak of those positively vicious models of Style and The Essay children's taste is officially formed on. Thomas's account of his prose cannot be improved: 'These words call no attention to themselves. There is not an uncommon word, nor a word in an uncommon sense, all through Jefferies' books. There are styles which are noticeable for their very lucidity and naturalness; Jefferies is not noticeable even to this extent.' His style was not a garment in which he clothed everything indiscriminately . . . He did not make great phrases, and hardly a single sentence would prove him a master . . . Though he had read much, it was without having played the sedulous ape that he found himself in the great tradition.' He did not make great phrases. Anyone in Bloomsbury can make a phrase, but Jefferies' effects are cumulative. They express a play of character and an original outlook, so that in their context the simplest groups of words are pregnant, as when he writes in 'Bevis's Zodiac': 'The sparkle of Orion's stars brought to him a remnant of the immense vigour of the young world' or, to take something widely different, in 'The Country Sunday,' when describing the villagers going to chapel in their best clothes 'all out of drawing, and without a touch that could be construed into a national costume—the cheap shoddy shop in the country lane.' The curious anticipations of D.H. Lawrence here are widespread in his mature work and suggest both how original his outlook was and what direction his gifts might have taken had he lived (he died at thirty-eight). Nothing came to him through literature, he is as unliterary as Cobbett though of greater personal cultivation and finer native sensibility; a contemporary suggested, says Thomas, that he avoided literary society deliberately in order to preserve his native endowments. And he is an artist in another sense, that compared with his works his life has little interest—all of him that holds value for us exists complete in his writings. He left no revealing letters, he did not mix in any kind of society, his domestic life was happy and normal.

Why he has not got into the literary histories (Elton does not mention him, Saintsbury is fatuous, subsequent historians have followed one or the other) and the university courses in literature is a mystery, but reason seems to have no hand in deciding these things. Yet as a source of evidence for 'background' courses he is surely more reliable as well as more original than the novelists, as an essayist he has surely more claim to be studied as literature, than all these Lambs and Paters, and as a novelist himself he cannot be ignored where Hardy is studied (unless on quantitative grounds). Jefferies wrote four novels of permanent worth as well as some negligible ones. I have mentioned *After London*, which is written in Jefferies' mature style—the superb opening describing 'The Relapse Into Barbarism' as the wild supplanted the cities should be a well-known piece. *Greene Ferne Farm*

is the best of his early novels, comparable with the Hardy of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, while the most ambitious and novel-like of his later attempts, *The Dewy Morn*, reaches out towards D.H. Lawrence. The contrast between the maturity and originality of the content and Jefferies' clumsiness in manipulating the devices of the novel form is striking and may put off many readers. But the clumsiness is merely indifference, and when in *Amaryllis at the Fair* (another unfortunate title) he found a form that could convey all he was interested in treating without obliging him to satisfy the conventional demands on the novelist, he produced a masterpiece. But both *Greene Ferne Farm* and *The Dewy Morn* are too good to be let stay out of print. The Victorian features of these novels bulk at least as largely in Hardy's novels, but it is only in Jefferies' that the vitality and genuineness of the rest makes that conventional idiom appear ludicrous; most people seem able to read *The Return of the Native* with its 'Do you brave me, madam's?' without any feeling of incongruity between the melodrama of the parts and the total 'tragic' effect. But in Jefferies' novels the best parts are better and more mature than the best parts of most of Hardy's. The portrayer of rustic life who notes the village woman telling the welfare-worker who scolds her for her fecundity: 'That's all the pleasure me an' my old man got' and describes (in *Greene Ferne Farm*) old Andrew Fisher with his *Wuthering Heights* past receiving the clerical suitor for his grand-daughter's hand thus:

'Jim! Bill! Jock!' shouted the old man, starting out of his chair, purple in the face. 'Drow this veller out! Douse un in th' hog vault! Thee nimity-pimity odd-me-dod! I warn thee 'd like my money! Drot thee and thee wench!'

Jefferies is not a novelist who could conventionalize his villagers for purposes of humorous relief as Hardy does. In *The Dewy Morn* he goes further than any Victorian novelist towards the modern novel—I mean the novel that seems to have significance for us other than as a mirror of manners and morals; I should describe it as one of the few real novels between *Wuthering Heights* and *Sons and Lovers*. The final justification for asking the twentieth century to read Jefferies is, in Edward Thomas's fine words, that 'His own character, and the characters of his men and women, fortify us in our intention to live.' And we are more in need of fortification now than when those words were written.

We are now waiting for some sensible publisher to launch the Wiltshire Edition of Jefferies' Collected Works, preferably at 3/6 apiece—Jefferies must be more or less out of copyright now—with Jefferies' wood-anemone-leaf signature stamped on the covers. It should lead off with Thomas's *Life*, follow with *Greene Ferne Farm* and *Amaryllis* in one volume, third *The Dewy Morn*, then the other out-of-prints (*The Toilers of the Field*, *Red Deer*, *The Hills and*

*the Vale*) then those not available in cheap editions (*Hodge, Field and Hedgerow*), then all the rest. Those essays that have never been reprinted might be dug up from the nineteenth-century magazines he wrote for, and collected for us, perhaps by Mr. Adrian Bell.

Mr. Williamson is not to be allowed, as two publishers have here allowed him, to print his barn-owl device with Jefferies' wood-anemone on the title-pages (though he says 'I know you won't mind [Jefferies]'); he or anyone else is to have no finger in it. Jefferies needs no editor to stand between us and him and to interpret him by the light of petty egotism, he needs only to be available entire in a cheap and attractive form together with Edward Thomas's book. I am sure this publisher would not lose his money.



Queenie Leavis with her husband Frank



# Introduction to *Wild Life in a Southern County*

Richard Mabey



Introduction by Richard Mabey and Little Toller Books. Copyright © Richard Mabey 2011. Reproduced by permission of Sheil Land Associates Ltd. This Introduction was first published by Little Toller Books in 2011 and was included in 2019 in the Mabey' anthology *Turning the Boat for Home* (Chatto and Windus). Richard Mabey, pictured left, was the President of the Richard Jefferies Society from 1996–98 and he has been ceaseless in promoting the writings of Richard Jefferies to the public. 2021 marks his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Richard Jefferies' *Wild Life in a Southern County* was my first encounter with nature writing. I was about twelve years old, and quite content with my rag-bag collection of *I-Spy* books and bird guides, texts about what was what, and where to find it. When I found my elder sister's copy of *Wild Life*, I was mesmerised. Here were thoughts about how animals might think, and how landscapes made you feel. I'd forgotten most of its contents within a month, but the title stuck in my imagination like the aura of a half-recollected dream, or a mantra: wild-life-in-a-southern-county. I was living in Hertfordshire then, and the only 'southern' place I'd been to was the beach at Pevensey. But my emotional compass was already set in that direction. South meant the chalk hills at the top of our road, rising towards the summer sun. South meant a view down along a wooded valley, my private heartland, and a thin stream that wound its silver way towards the high Chilterns. In those adolescent years—already an incipient romantic—I would stand at a ritually precise spot at the top of the hill and gaze down that valley in a state of muddled rapture. What I was looking at seemed both wild, numinous, somehow beyond reach and understanding, but also profoundly and anciently English.

No wonder Jefferies chimed with me. *Wild Life* (and note the powerful separation of those two normally conjoined words<sup>1</sup>) is a collection of free-

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<sup>1</sup> Ed: Richard Jefferies was the first person to coin the phrase 'Wild Life' to describe flora and fauna rather than a description of human behaviour. The words became hyphenated by 1936 and the hyphen was dropped by 1982.

range essays exploring the author's unresolved feelings about the relations between the natural and human worlds. It's set in the very human context of the Wiltshire smallholding where he grew up, but is peopled mostly by non-human species. Jefferies makes the dialectic between these two worlds explicit in his short preface: 'There is a frontier line to civilisation in this country yet, and not far outside its great centres we come quickly even now to the borderland of nature . . . If we go a few hours journey only, and then step just beyond the highway—where the steam-ploughing engine has left the mark of its wide wheels on the dust—and glance into the hedgerow, the copse, or stream, there are nature's children as unrestrained in their wild, free life as they were in the veritable backwoods of primitive England.'

But the frontier is porous, fluid, debatable. Living things—humans included—pass across it, in both directions. So do ways of perceiving them, which can be coloured both by the civilised, rational mind or the feral imagination. Later in the preface Jefferies writes that 'nature is not cut and dried to hand, nor easily classified, each subject shading gradually into another. In studying the ways, for instance of so common a bird as the starling it cannot be separated from the farmhouse in the thatch of which it often breeds, the rooks with whom it associates, or the friendly sheep upon whose backs it sometimes rides.' This 'shading' of subjects is an exact description of Jefferies' meandering prose-style, and there is, I suspect, an element of rationalisation here of its sometimes chaotic discursiveness. But he was an intuitive ecologist, and this insistence on the connectivity of the natural world is a theme that runs through the book, and justifies his grouping of its contents by habitats. Except that they are not truly natural habitats, but the human landscapes around Coate Farm, near Swindon, where Jefferies was born and lived until he was eighteen: orchard, woodpile, homefield, ash copse, rabbit warren.

But there is sleight of place, and memory, here. Although *Wild Life* is set in Wiltshire, in the present tense, it was written in Surbiton in 1878–9, more than a decade after the encounters it chronicles. Jefferies was then thirty years old and had moved to suburban Surrey to be closer to the London newspaper world. The book is quarried from articles he contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, early examples of what has become an enduring form in British journalism—the 'Country Diary'.

Jefferies' distance from the scenes he is describing (it was also, as we'll see later, a social distancing) helps account for his fascination with borderlands, and for what is a dominant motif in the book. If the thread which runs through Edward Thomas' analogous, echoic *The South Country* (1909) is the pathway, on which he could walk himself up and out of his black moods (Thomas published a biography of Jefferies in the same year), the keynote of

Jefferies' *Wild Life* is the hedgerow, in which he can burrow down, away from the messiness of human society. The hedge is the 'frontier line to civilisation'. It is a mark of division in the affairs of humans, but a connective tissue for wildlife. It represents refuge, but also a kind of linear commonland. Jefferies recalls, in a later book, how his father used to point with disgust to 'our Dick poking about in them hedges', and like the poet John Clare, he is most at home—and at his best as a writer—in the hedge-bottom looking out, not on the hilltop taking imperious (or queasily spiritual) views of the landscape below. In one passage he recounts how, peering through a gap in a hedge, he once experienced a kind of optical illusion, in which a hill he knew suddenly appeared vastly higher than it had before. A cloud was resting on its top, and for a while had taken on the exact shape and tone of the hill. With the rest of the range obscured by the hedge, this glimpse through the gap revealed something closer to an alp. The aesthete always lurked, sometimes enlighteningly, sometimes subversively, inside the watchful naturalist.

More literally, hedges were the 'highways' of Jefferies' wild neighbours. Birds and animals passed up and down them between the copses and the farm. One major 'caravan route . . . abuts on the orchard [and] the finches, after spending a little time in the apple and damson trees, fly over the wall and road to [a] second hedge, and follow it down for nearly half a mile to a little enclosed meadow, which, like the orchard, is a specially favourite resort'. It isn't hard to imagine 'our Dick' himself dodging the waves of tits and blossom-haunting goldfinches ('a flood of sunshine falling through a roof of rosy pink') building up a map of their movements and 'resorts', and in the process conjuring the outlines of what sometimes seemed to him the skeleton or ghostly relics of the Wiltshire wildwood.

Jefferies' attention to what he saw is rapt, exact, almost painterly. The look or nature seemed to him as good a guide as any to its meaning and order. He notices the sparkle of ice on the high branches of beech trees in winter, and suggests that this 'proves that water is often present in the atmosphere in large quantities'. His vivid description of a magpie's movements perfectly catches the bird's character, but also begins to explain what it may be up to in its seemingly erratic foragings: 'he walks now to the right, a couple of yards, now to the left in a quick zigzag, so working across the field towards you; then with a long rush he makes a lengthy traverse at the top of his speed, turns and darts away again at right angles, and presently up goes his tail and he throws his head down with a jerk of the whole body as if he would thrust his beak deep into the earth.' He devotes almost two pages to the ripening colours of wheat, noting a moment when it briefly pales during a breeze, 'because the under part of the ear is shown and part of the stalk'.

He listens to the heavy buzz of hornets, and peers at them intently enough to know they are the most inoffensive of insects. And he watches a thrush smashing a snail on a sarsen stone: 'about two such blows break the shell, and he then coolly chips the fragments off as you might from an egg'.

There is a kind of hedge-scientist at work behind these observations, thinking by analogy, forging explanations by the application of reason (or at least a particular kind of reason) to acute observation. Jefferies rarely attempts to test his theories methodically, and never quotes the opinions or experiences of any other naturalists. He is an intellectual hermit. This occasionally leads him towards conclusions that today would be regarded as fanciful. He observes the large clutch size and sociable behaviour of long-tailed tits (cousins and unpaired birds often help with the feeding of the young), and concludes that several female birds lay their eggs in one communal nest. A cuckoo lingering close to the nest where she's laid her egg makes him 'doubt the cuckoo's alleged total indifference to her young'. He is also sceptical about cuckoos' host species failing to recognise that the monstrous chick growing in their nest is not one of their own. 'The robin is far too intelligent. Why, then, does he feed the intruder? There is something here approaching to the sentiment of humanity, as we should call it, towards the fellow creature.'

What lies behind these convictions is Jefferies' unusual attitude towards the idea of 'instinct'. He regards this as an inadequate explanation of the behaviour of wild creatures because they so often make mistakes. He tells the story of a party of sand martins attempting to quarry their nest-holes in the mortar of a thick stone wall at Coate Farm. It was a fruitless task, and 'At last, convinced of the impossibility of penetrating the mortar, which was much harder beneath the surface, they went away in a body. Instinct, infallible instinct, certainly would not direct these birds to such an unsuitable spot . . . The incident was clearly an experiment, and when they found it unsuccessful, they desisted.' A more conventional scientific explanation would be that it was precisely the martins' instinct for exploring soft stone that led them to the wall. But Jefferies' beguiling and sympathetic interpretation was correct, and far-sighted; he had simply adopted an over-deterministic view of the nature of instinct, seeing it as infallible, or 'blind'. Intelligent experimentation and exploration are now regarded as entirely compatible with broad instinctual drives.

Jefferies' belief in the free-will of other beings, in the maternal cuckoo and the compassionate robin, extended to an insistence that animals felt joy in their lives: 'You may see it in every motion: in the lissom bound of the hare, the playful leap of the rabbit, the song that the lark and the finch must sing'. But, inside *Wild Life* at least, his sympathy with other creatures is patchy and

inconsistent. There is a detachment in his prose, which displays plenty of intense curiosity, but little revelation about his own feelings. After a spellbinding and affectionate account of the family life of kingfishers, for instance, he gives, quite casually, as if he had forgotten what he said about joy, instructions about the best way to shoot the birds, especially the youngsters.

The fact is that, at this stage in his life, Jefferies had not yet worked out which side of that 'frontier line' he was on—anchored with civilisation, or on the wing with unrestrained nature. *Wild Life in a Southern County*, his second non-fiction book, is a transitional work, marking the beginnings of a shift away from such simplistic separations of the world. Contrary to the popular image of him as a deep-rooted countryman, Jefferies was a displaced person almost from birth. Aged four, he was despatched from his family's declining farm to live with an aunt in Sydenham. When he was nine he returned home, only to be shunted off to a succession of private schools in Swindon. No wonder he developed into a moody and solitary adolescent. He began reading Rabelais, and spent long days roaming the hill country round Marlborough. When he was sixteen he ran away from home with his cousin, first to France, and then to Liverpool, where he was found by the police and shipped back to Wiltshire. When the smallholding was badly hit by cattle plague in 1865, he left school for good, and started work in Swindon on a new Conservative paper, *The North Wilts Herald*, where he was a jack-of-all-trades reporter and resident short-story writer. At the end of the 1860s he became vaguely ill, left the paper and took a long recuperative holiday in Brussels. He was extravagantly delighted by the women, the fashions, the sophisticated manners, and from letters to his aunt it is clear what he was beginning to think of the philistinism of Wiltshire society.

He returned to Coate Farm in 1871, with no job and no money. His life began to slip into a mould more typical of the anxious, hand-to-mouth existence of the urban freelance, than of a supposed 'son of the soil'. He wrote a play, a memoir of a prospective Member of Parliament, a right-wing pamphlet that ridiculed the advance of popular education. His breakthrough came with a letter to *The Times* in a similar Conservative vein, scorning the habits, intelligence and apathy of the Wiltshire farm labourer. The letter won him sympathy from landowners, and offers of more journalistic work, and for the next few years he wrote copiously on rural affairs for *Fraser's Magazine* and the *Live Stock Journal*.

His increasing journalistic commitments sparked the move to Surbiton, and regular essays for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which he reminisces—albeit in an idealistic way—about life back at Coate. His first fully-fledged non-fiction work, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, is made up of pieces written for the

*Gazette* between late 1877 and spring '78. It is essentially a tribute to 'the master's' man and an account of the practical business of policing a sporting estate, and maintains the Conservative, deferential tone of his early journalism. The pieces for *Wild Life* appeared in the *Gazette* between 1878 and '79, and though in them is a new sympathy with the farm worker, and the first glimpses of his nature writing potential, flashes of the old right-wing shooting man continue to appear.

Jefferies had only eight years left to live at this point. He developed tuberculosis in 1881, and pain and disenchantment colour the rest of his work. He seems at last to understand the preciousness of life, to be engaged with it, not just as a curious observer but as a fellow being. His beliefs shift radically towards a kind of pantheism, and politically towards libertarian socialism. In his late essays he begins to write of the history, politics, ecology and aesthetics of the land as part of a single complex experience.

These final essays, such as 'Hours of Spring' (1886) and 'Walks in the Wheat-fields' (1887) are his most mature and powerful. But *Wild Life in a Southern County* contains their first buds. To read these essays today is chastening. There is, in the best of them, an electric attentiveness, a noticing, that is hard to aspire to. They are chastening, too, in what they are able to describe—an abundance of bird and insect life that, despite the contemporary passion for slaughter (in which the author played his part), is unimaginable in the modern industrial countryside. The great set-piece of *Wild Life*, 'Rooks returning to roost' is like an epic Victorian narrative painting, full of intense images—the sound of thousands of black wings 'beating the air with slow steady stroke can hardly be compared with anything else in its weird oppressiveness'; full too of a sense of the deep history, the natural 'tradition' of these great nightly migrations. And of one stunning statistic: the 'aerial army's line of march extends over quite five miles in one unbroken corps'. Jefferies did not know this, but he was sending, in a faltering new language, a message in a bottle from a disappearing country.

# Crowborough Beacon

*Eliza Brightwen*

One of the last things Jefferies wrote was the preface to the 1887 Walter Scott edition of *The Natural History of Selborne*, a book first published in 1789 and maintained in print ever since.

Gilbert White died in 1793 but it wasn't until 1885 that the Selborne Society was formed to perpetuate his name and interests. Five years later the Society began a magazine, *Nature Notes*, and this essay by Eliza Brightwen appeared in the issue of October 1897.

Eliza Elder was born in Banff, Scotland, in 1830 but orphaned at the age of seven when she was adopted by her uncle, Alexander Elder, one of the founders of the publishing house Smith, Elder & Co., and was brought up in Elder's country houses on the fringes of London. From an early age Eliza had a deep interest in natural history.



In 1855 she married a banker, George Brightwen, and they lived at The Grove, Stanmore, with its 170 acres of lakes, woods and gardens, where Eliza kept notes on the estate's birds, plants and animals. During her time at The Grove, her health broke down, suffering fatigue and mental distress, resulting in Eliza becoming a recluse for more than a decade. After her husband's death in 1883, she gradually emerged from seclusion and her first book *Wild Nature Won by Kindness* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1890) was published in her sixtieth year. At the time of her stay at Crowborough, two more books of a similar nature had been issued with three more titles published up to her death in 1906.

In the late nineteenth century Crowborough had been promoted as a healthy resort with its elevation, rolling hills and surrounding forest, an attractive spot for anyone with a history of poor health. Eliza Brightwen found the 'keen fresh breezes' invigorating but for Jefferies, as his condition deteriorated, he wrote in 'Hours of Spring,' 'the air was as sharp as a scythe—a rude barbarian giant wind knocking at the walls with a vast club, so that we crept sideways even to the windows to look out upon the world.'

**I**t has happened that during the great heat of this Jubilee year I needed to retreat to some spot where I might find quiet and a measure of coolness, whilst painters invaded my home.

Years ago I heard that Crowborough, Sussex, possessed certain charms in the way of exquisite scenery, the finest possible air, and nearness to a great forest. These attractions led me to settle there for the month of August, and possibly it may be of interest to some of our members to learn a little about a

part of the country where they may certainly enjoy a health-giving air and lovely scenery. It will be observed that I do not mention Crowborough's possession of a 'forest,' for that had been my great disappointment. I had cherished the hope that I might steal out very early some fine morning, soon after sunrise, and make my way into Ashdown Forest, there in leafy glades to see nature awakening into life, hear the first songs of the birds and enjoy some hours of quiet but intense happiness in the companionship of nature. Alas for my romantic anticipations, the forest now exists only in name.

'The great forest of Anderida,' so the guide-book says, 'ran through the whole of the southern part of Sussex, taking up nearly one half of the county. It extended from Kent through the whole weald of Sussex into Hampshire, and is said to have been one hundred and twenty miles in length.' Such a forest would indeed have satisfied my desires. I was still buoyed with the hope that some portions of it existed when I heard visitors remarking to each other that they had been through the 'forest' for their walks and drives; but after some days I discovered that the wild, heathery moorland still goes by the name of a forest although scarcely any trees but low growing Scotch firs now exist upon it.

Abundance of ironstone is found throughout this region, and the smelting works which were in operation long ago appear to have led to the destruction of the timber to supply fuel for the furnaces. A law passed by Henry VIII, in 1543, with reference to these Sussex woods, thought of course utilitarian in intention, is I think quite in accord with our Selbornian principles. The king ordered that 'in cutting a coppice wood of twenty-four years' growth or under, a certain number of trees should be left standing and unfelled for every acre.'

Crowborough is built upon a plateau over eight hundred feet above the level of the sea, so that one breathes an air which is most exhilarating and delicious; it would have delighted the good old divine, Thomas Fuller, who tells us to 'Choose good air, for air is a dish one feeds upon every minute and therefore it need be good.' The elevated position of this place enables one to see across ranges of purple hills on all sides, and one never tires of watching the cloud shadows flitting across the far-reaching landscape.

The Brighton Downs form the boundary of the view towards the south, and on clear days and moonlight nights it is said that one can discern the sea in the direction of Pevensey Bay, and even the ships can be clearly seen with the aid of a telescope.

The wide stretches of moorland covered with ling and heather, the young Scotch firs forming glades of welcome shadow here and there, the keen fresh breezes all suggest that one must be on a Scottish mountain rather than an



English hillside, at any rate the invigorating effect is the same, and one is led on and on without knowing fatigue.

At this season, after long drought the sandy soil is rather painfully arid and but few wild plants are to be found in flower. Asphodel must have been abundant in summer, for in marshy places its red brown seed vessels give a rich tone to the reedy grass. *Drosera rotundifolia* [common sundew] grows on the open parts of the moor, and more rarely the marsh gentian is also found. I am told that in the spring the hedges and banks abound with primroses, bluebells, and anemones, and the copses are yellow with wild daffodils.

I could not be in this neighbourhood without making a pilgrimage to the cottage known as 'Downs,' where in 1885-6 Richard Jefferies wrote some of his most fascinating essays, those contained in *Field and Hedgerow*. The square stone-built cottage is not by any means picturesque, having simply a door in the middle, a window on each side, and three windows above. The furze hedge which used to exist in front has been replaced with a low stone wall which encloses a small garden round the house. It is touching to think of 'The Hours of Spring' having been written in that lowly room facing the road, the last lines ever penned by his own hand being so full of sadness, his spirit pining to be able to watch the signs of coming spring, but only 'through the window-pane could he see the larks high up against the grey cloud and hear his song.'

There was no photograph to be obtained of the cottage, and it was only after several inquiries that I could discover where it was; so much for local fame.

During the month I have spent here I have seen but few types of birds, and no rare species, some rich coloured sulphur butterflies and an abundance of the commoner blue butterfly flitting over the heathery ground. They rest at night on slender grass stems with their heads downwards, and the wings so closely folded that no azure colour can be seen. I thought at first that they were grey flowers so numerous were they in one special field. They show a wise instinct in choosing their resting place, for even after a night of stormy wind and rain I found them next morning waving to and fro in their aerial cradles quite unharmed, while such fragile creatures amongst tree leafage would be certain to meet with injury and death.

I shall long remember my pleasant weeks in this health-giving place, the endless drives along the sandy lanes purple with heather and ling, and those with young Scotch firs growing up to replace the old forest and, above all, the pure sweet air which one feels most bring renewed vigour to one's brain and a greater enjoyment of life for months to come.

# Climbing a Belfry

J.R.S.C.

This short piece by J. R. S. C. [unidentified] was published in the *Chatterbox* annual for 1909<sup>1</sup> and is a retelling of Jefferies' essay 'The Belfry: Jackdaws', first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and collected in *Wild Life in a Southern County*.<sup>2</sup> *Chatterbox* was a halfpenny weekly paper for older children founded in 1866 by a clergyman, John Erskine Clarke, with a view to luring young readers away from the penny dreadfuls, and ran until 1955.

There is an old saying that man was born to climb; it is an evident fact that the world upon which he lives abounds with hills and dales. It is also true that to persons of all ages climbing is a pleasure, and, we might add, often a benefit too. People who are old have occasionally persevered in climbing, even going up lofty mountains, but the pursuit is best suited to the young. To a boy it is delightful to scale a high wall, or run up a hill, or to reach the top of a tower; if there is a little danger, that makes it more exciting.

In one of his books, Richard Jefferies, who wrote so much and so charmingly upon natural history and other subjects, tells his readers how he mounted the belfry of an old church. Many have climbed church towers and belfries just for fun, or to get a grand view from the top. Sometimes it happens they make a discovery, as for instance, when a gentleman found, lodged among the brickwork, masses of honey-comb, placed there by many colonies of bees.

This old church and its tower was on the edge of a hill, just above a wash-pool, to which, years and years ago, the shepherds used to bring their flocks. It is built of flint, set in cement which has become hard like stone. Alone, Mr. Jefferies entered the tower by the narrow door, thickly studded with nails, and slowly mounted the winding staircase of stone, requiring care, as there was not much room, and only a dim light came from the arrow-slits, which were choked by cobwebs, dust and dead leaves. It was only by passing them that Mr. Jefferies could guess how high he was getting, and, as the steps went round and round the central pillar, he had to keep near the outer wall, because the steps were much broken, especially next to the pillar.

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<sup>1</sup> Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co., London.

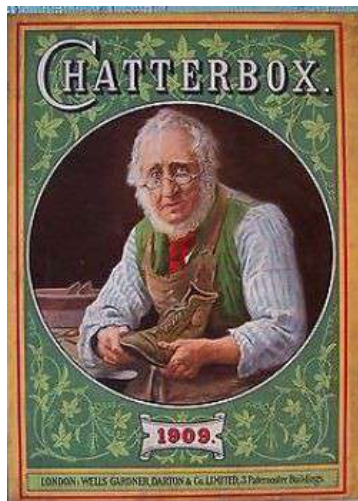
<sup>2</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 July 1878; *Wild Life in a Southern County* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1879).

Curious sounds came from above—the rustling made by the jackdaws in the belfry, and the dull creaky ticking of the clock, which, like the other ancient ones, had a solitary pointer, and no minute-hand. Higher still, the stairs were slippery, because thickly covered with little brown sticks and twigs, dropped by the jackdaws.

After the perils of ascending, Mr. Jefferies stepped into the belfry. The planks were decayed and worm-eaten, but he trod upon the beams of the floor, and peeped down to the pavement below, where stood the ringers when pulling the bells. It may be dangerous to touch a bell if you are unused to the employment. Some have broken their bones, or been stunned, by being flung against ceiling or wall; for, having given the rope a pull, you must quickly loose your hold. Dearly do many of the village ringers love their work, and are proud to think their grandsires made the hills resound with the same sweet chimes centuries ago.

Even in the belfry Mr. Jefferies could smell the clover and the new-mown grass, and some bees buzzed in at the larger windows. Outside, heard sparrows chattering, and the jackdaws repeated their peculiar cry. Very distinct, too, was the sharp screech of whirling swifts. Steps above the belfry led to the leaden roof, dark with age, close to the venerable weathercock, far too stiff to move unless the wind blew fiercely. Here he could observe the places chosen by the jackdaws for their nests amid the adornments of the top of the tower—outside the belfry windows, that were boarded up, where a ledge gave a safe resting for the nest, or in the quaint old gargoyles, which were broken or choked so that the water does not flow through them. Fond of church towers as they are, there are times when the jackdaws keep away from them, and associate with the rooks in copses or woods.

After taking a view of the churchyard, where one large, square tomb was very notable, over which the plough-boys leaped sometimes now, and on which formerly the loaves were put for the needy poor, who received bread in that strange way, Mr. Jefferies came down cautiously. He was not sorry to have finished his investigation, and handed back the keys to the wife of the aged clerk, who lived not many paces from the church, near the blacksmith and the village tinker.



# The Prose of *Selborne*: Some New Aspects of an Old Master

*Robert Blatchford*



Born in Maidstone in 1851 Robert Blatchford was apprenticed to a brushmaker at the age of fourteen but didn't like the work and later joined the army. Blatchford left in 1878 to work as a clerk then a freelance journalist, becoming leader writer for the *Sunday Chronicle*. Within a few years he founded the Manchester Fabian Society and launched a socialist newspaper, *The Clarion*.

A biographer of Blatchford, Philip Snowden, writing in 1934, claimed 'No man did more than he to make socialism understood by the ordinary working man.' His socialist writings were collected in *Merrie England* (London: Clarion Newspaper Company, 1893) which was a considerable success selling more than two million copies.

Chapter IV of *Merrie England*, 'Can England Feed Herself?', begins with an extract from Chapter X of Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* to support Blatchford's socialist beliefs.

This is our earth this day produces sufficient for our existence, this our earth produces not only a sufficiency, but a superabundance, and pours a cornucopia of good things down upon us. Further, it produces sufficient for stores and granaries to be filled to the roof-tree for years ahead. I verily believe that the earth in one year produces enough food to last for thirty. Why, then have we not enough? Why do people die of starvation, or lead a miserable existence on the verge of it? Why have millions upon millions to toil from morning to evening just to gain a mere crust of bread? Because of the absolute lack of organisation by which such labour should produce its effect, the absolute lack of distribution, the absolute lack, even, of the very idea that such things are possible. Nay, even to mention such things, to say that they are possible, is criminal with many. Madness could hardly go farther.

Blatchford used *The Clarion* to support the Boer War, which lost him some support among his readers and in 1909 he wrote ten articles for the *Daily Mail* warning of the 'German menace'. His nationalism and backing for British participation in the war in 1914 gradually pulled Blatchford away from the labour movement.

In later life, after the war and the death of his wife in 1921, he began to consider the claims of spiritualism, publishing a book, *More Things in Heaven and Earth* (London: Methuen & Co., 1925) in which he argued that the evidence for spiritualism was incontrovertible.

Blatchford was influenced by William Morris and in his writings emphasized the importance of the arts and the values of the countryside. In the essay below, published in *John O' London's Weekly* and collected in *What's All This?* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1940) Blatchford wonders why there was no colour in Gilbert White's *Selborne* in contrast to Jefferies' descriptions.

Robert Blatchford died at Horsham, Sussex, in 1943 aged 92.

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The Reverend Gilbert White was one of those happy men who when they die become books. He has become *The Natural History of Selborne*, and I should be proud to think I might become anything as good. I made the acquaintance of the Master seventy years ago. I was a boy of fourteen when I found him in our Sunday School library. I have been his admiring pupil ever since.

As a naturalist I cannot judge him—my knowledge is too superficial; as a writer and a man he sits smiling to my heart. I have read him and re-read him with growing wonder and delight. I can always read him. His charm endures, like the charm of an English landscape, like the songs the brooks sing, like the solace of a quiet sky. He is always sincere and friendly, he is always smilingly serene. I love to write about him. Perhaps my promised new lights may be but old lights. Then I will plead that they have never shone for me in any book or essay on his work that has chanced come my way.

May I say then: Gilbert White was an artist, a great artist; but he was a black and white artist. I cannot in his book, his lovely and pleasant book, find any love of colour. He has a marvellous eye for form and emotion, an ear like Sir Thomas Beecham's for niceties of sound and a genius for expressing form and sound and motion in words. It has been said of him that he was a nature lover who never told his love. If he loved colour, his love was carefully dissembled. And could a real love of colour be dissembled? One cannot imagine Richard Jefferies writing about a beech wood without a word for its colour. But on the first page of his *Selborne*, Gilbert White does that very thing: 'The covert of this eminence is altogether beech, the most lovely of all forest trees, whether we consider its smooth rind or bark, its glossy foliage, or graceful pendulous boughs.' White gives the impression that he is avoiding the colour.

This is not a complaint; it is a regret. If I say of a great batsman that he seldom uses the cut, which is the most pleasing stroke of the game, I am only expressing a wish that so great a player would extend the scope of his genius and our delight.

Gilbert White was a naturalist who loved the country and the outdoor life; he wooed Nature face to face. He must then, in his walks about Selborne, have seen the brightly coated cattle sheltered under the trees, the green lanes with their luscious carpets of violets and primroses, the flowering rushes at the stream side, the bluebells in the oakwood, and sunshine like gold upon the hills; but if he saw these wonders he saw them in black and white. In his exquisite pictures of the lane to Alton and the homing rooks there is no word of colour:

The evening procedures and manoeuvres of the rooks are curious and amusing in the autumn. Just before dusk they return in long strings from the foraging of the day and rendezvous by thousands over Selborne Down, where they wheel round in the air and sport and dive in a playful manner, all the while exciting their voices and making a loud cawing, which being blended and softened by the distance that we at the village are below them, becomes a confused noise or chiding, or, rather, a pressing murmur, very engaging to the imagination, and

not unlike the cry of a pack of hounds in hollow, echoing woods, or the rushing of the wind in tall trees, or the tumbling of the tide upon a pebbly shore.

That is masterly description. Reading such prose is like listening to music. But were there no autumn tints upon the rookery trees, no primrose sky or dappled clouds behind them? To insert colour terms into such a verbal picture would be to spoil it, I agree. But if Gilbert White had been a natural colourist he could not have kept the colour out. He does not seem to have felt colour, to have thought in colour. And, in such an artist, I wonder why.

Compare Milton: 'Sometimes walking, not unseen, by hedgerow elms on hillocks green, right against the eastern gate, where the great sun begins his state, robed in flames and amber light, the clouds in thousand liveries dight.'

Gilbert White would not have clothed the hillocks in green or dressed his sun in amber flames, or given a thousand chromatic liveries to the clouds. He seldom speaks of the clouds, seems to have thought of trees prosaically as timber and contented himself with botanising among the flowers. The word so universally beloved and sung, the word 'Rose', never once appears in *The Natural History of Selborne*. And to perfume, as to colour, White seems indifferent. Jefferies speaks lovingly of the 'sweet-briar wind'. White walked unmoved by the seductive breath of cowslip, hawthorn, violet or honeysuckle, like a cold anchorite among a bevy of court beauties. It is most strange. This great artist wrote sweet lyrical prose about clay soils and 'hungry lean sand' and has not a word to throw at the buttercup.

Poets have usually a soft spot in their hearts for wells; Mr. White's remarks about his local wells is bald: 'Our wells, at an average run to about sixty-three feet, and when sunk to that depth seldom fail; but produce a fine limpid water, soft to the taste and much commended by those who drink the pure element; but which does not lather well with soap.' The Selborne wells, if I may be permitted to say so, left our naturalist strangely dry. But, let a bird sound a note or flip a wing, and he jumps to it. As with this of the swallow: 'Avenues and long walks, under hedges, and pasture fields and mown meadows, where cattle graze, are her delights.' That is perfect; that is the real Gilbert White, the Master. Mr. Walter Johnson in his book on White, speaks several times of his word-pictures as 'etchings', and it is the right word. They are etchings: in black and white; but, oh, if he had trained his genius to colour! We may, to be sure 'console ourselves in our afflictions' with the reflection that those who are indifferent to colour will not miss it from White's pictures, and those of us who love colour will supply it from our imaginations.

The fact is that Gilbert White, bless him, was a realist and could not, or would not, write emotionally. He could not, for instance, have written as Jefferies wrote about the lark: 'balancing himself on his trembling wings

outspreed, a few yards above the earth and uttering that sweet little loving kiss, as it were, of song'; nor would he have concerned himself about the colour of a dandelion. Jefferies wrote:

There are a million books, and yet, with all their aid, I cannot tell you the colour of the May dandelion. There are three greens at this moment in my mind: that of the leaf of the flower-de-luce, that of the yellow iris leaf, and that of the bayonet-like leaf of the common flag. With admission to a million books, how am I to tell you the difference between these tints?

Jefferies is almost anguished over this chromatic difficulty. Gilbert White is never anguished about anything. He says of the blue-tit, in his cool, pleasant way: 'It will be well entertained with the seeds in the head of a sunflower'; and leaves it at that. And why not? We know the blue-tit and we know the sunflower; can we not picture for ourselves that azure spark of life on that blazoned child?

Very good; but when the Master says of the dragonfly that it is a favourite food of the sand-martin and the cuckoo, he nearly gars us greet. The dragonfly: think of it! What could not that supreme artist have done with that flashing miracle of burnished gold and emerald and sapphires?

Well here is *The Natural History of Selborne*. Let us give thanks even though, like *Oliver Twist*, we suffer a perpetual hunger for more. Brooks, now, and swallow talk, and the song of the blackbird, the Master could have given us all these. No other writer can make good his omission. The Master mentions the blackbird only once and says not a word about his song; and he says *this* about the blackcap: 'The blackcap has in common a full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe.'

That is magic. And the magician is silent, leaving us to sigh with Keats: 'Fled is that music.' And, alas, he, the incomparable one, wrote about the Selborne streams like a geographer. The brooks! Imagine it. The one man who might have translated the brook's mysterious music into words, 'into so quiet and so sweet a style', babbled about them like a blue book.

He was a great man and gave us generously of his genius. My trouble is he might have given us more.

Some Unpublished Manuscripts

George Miller

Samuel J. Looker (1888–1965), editor and interpreter of Jefferies and discoverer of obscure and unpublished works, remains a pre-eminent figure in Jefferies' studies, both as a populariser and as a provider of an immense archive of material invaluable to scholarship, now conserved in the British Library. His editorial re-shapings and omissions were sometimes questionable, but undoubtedly the great benefits of his lifetime devotion outweigh the quibbles and cavils of academic correctness. In the introduction to his edition of *The Story of My Heart* with the published text printed alongside an earlier draft¹ he wrote: 'I first became interested in Richard Jefferies in boyhood, and for over forty years have collected his books and manuscripts.'

Quite some years ago I came across a 1930 catalogue of Hodgson and Co.², the book auctioneers, which listed a number of unpublished MSS by Jefferies. In the middle of Looker's period of active collecting, and coming from a famous house, he could hardly have missed them, and glancing through they all seemed things he'd acquired or reprinted in one form or another. Now, finding the catalogue and looking at it again, I come to the completely opposite conclusion. These are all original writings the contents of which, in whole or in part, and one in a specialist journal, have never seen the light.

The Jefferies MSS may well have escaped Looker's notice as the catalogue was put out solely as the sale of the 'valuable and extensive library of the late Charles Whibley Esq.' which went on from June 25th to 29th and July 9th and 10th. However at the end under 'Other Properties' came 'Rare and First Editions, Mostly Early and Mid-Victorian Writers', and indeed some later, 'From the Library of a Collector', who unfortunately is not named. Jefferies figures in it, with an inscribed copy of *Reporting, Editing and Authorship* (recipient unnamed) and two lots of books, *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, other titles unnamed, and the Besant and Thomas biographies. This in itself indicates a strong interest in Jefferies, but more

¹ Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart, Edited with the first draft of the Author's Manuscript and an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker* (Constable 1947), p.8.

² Hodgson & Co., *A Catalogue of the Valuable and Extensive Library of the late Charles Whibley, Esq. to be sold at auction*. Nos. 25–7, 1929–30.

importantly there are seven ‘Original MSS. of Richard Jefferies’, the only MSS in the collection.

To take them one by one:—

Lot 635. ‘Original Manuscript of a description of Bird-life in the preserves of the “Squire of Southlands”—presumably intended as a chapter for *The Amateur Poacher*, but not used, 14 pages, 8vo.’

There are 14 pages relating to ‘the Squire’ in the Looker collection³ but they belong to Squire Thardover, talking about his life and philosophy, used by Looker in ‘The Squire and the Land’ section of *The Old House at Coate*,⁴ not the unapproachable Squire of Southlands from *The Amateur Poacher*,⁵ whose fearsome guardianship of his preserves, though known to be rich in bird life, made any such account of them impossible. Clearly a connected piece, and not the fragmentary poacher material of D6. A discarded chapter, which would have changed the direction of the narrative, seems a reasonable assumption, and doubtless one made by a perceptive vendor rather than the auctioneer’s cataloguer.

Lot 636. ‘Original MS. of an Essay—mainly introspective and severely self critical—apparently unpublished, but used largely in *The Story of My Heart*, on 31 pages, 8vo.’

At first sight a possible section of Looker’s ‘first draft’ of *The Story*, printed with his reprint of the published text in the Constable edition of 1947. The MS in the BL collection (D2) is of the 12 chapter final version; the draft is not there and its present whereabouts appears to be unknown. From Looker’s description the draft consists of 95 pages in 8 sections, the longest 26 pages. It is ‘difficult to decipher’, and ‘partly written in the form of notes’. The term ‘essay’ in the description here suggests a joined up and rounded piece. Admittedly the draft contains self-criticism (‘I am not satisfied. I am not enough: I feel so little, weak and contemptible; my soul seems to see so little—no further than my physical vision, and that which is within reach is not of any value to me.’) But as in the printed text this mood is a prelude to the reawakening and rapturous outgoings of the spirit. Nowhere is there an extended passage of severe self-criticism and introspection. A quite separate exercise, or perhaps again an interesting example of a decisive revision.

³ Miller and Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study* (Scolar, 1993), D13.8, and other ‘D’ references.

⁴ Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate and other hitherto unpublished essays*. . . Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Lutterworth, 1948), pp.159–186.

⁵ Richard Jefferies, *The Amateur Poacher* (Smith, Elder, 1879), p.40.

Lot 637. 'Original MS. of "The Flying Dutchman: a Legend of the Great Western Railway," an early literary effort—in the form of a short story—which was never published, 31 pages, 8vo (*some torn*)'

The only other sighting of this is from a Chicago bookseller's catalogue of 1970 (D47.2).

Lot 638. 'Original MS. of an unpublished Essay, entitled "January Notes," 11 pages, 8vo.'

'January Notes' is a complicated case. A piece under this title appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on January 31st 1880, unsigned but attributed to Jefferies by John Pearson on the basis of textual connections with other articles. In the journal *Archives of Natural History*, October 1981, S. Peter Dance published an original MS by Jefferies, which he had acquired from a book dealer in the USA, also titled (by Jefferies) 'January Notes.' The text is entirely different from the *PMG* article, for which of course there is no definite proof of Jefferies' authorship. In his introduction Dance notes that Looker had previously published all but one paragraph and two sentences from his MS in two previous contexts: the first as three 'notes for essays' which he titled 'Tits and the Trees', 'The Rooks', and 'Shrinking of the Scene in Winter', in *Chronicles of the Hedges*,⁶ and the second as 'a composite scene from manuscript' under the title 'A Winter Scene'. in *Field and Farm*.⁷ This consists of the three 'notes' in the same order and the text in both cases is almost identical to the Dance MS. The absent material approves the killing of domestic cats and remarks on the extreme coldness of the weather. Dance comments: 'it does seem remarkable that Looker had only disconnected manuscripts to work from. It is tempting to suggest that Looker once had in his possession the "January Notes" manuscript', and the missing passages were removed because they 'did not show his hero in the most favourable light, and the two sentences seemed unnecessarily topical'. He adds that there is no proof that Looker ever owned or inspected the manuscript. Indeed it is not to be found in the BL archive, and he often stressed his assiduous collecting and personal ownership of all the materials for his books of previously unpublished work. With or without the offending passages these pieces were doubtless among the many untitled MSS he accumulated and which, inadvertently perhaps, he used twice with different interpretations of their intended use by Jefferies.

⁶ Richard Jefferies. *Chronicles of the Hedges and other essays*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Phoenix House, 1948).

⁷ Richard Jefferies, *Field and Farm: Essays Now First Collected, with Some from MSS*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Phoenix House, 1957).

Lot 639. 'Original MS. of an Essay on Country Life and the Outdoor World, 5½ pages, 8vo.'

This could be one of any number of untitled jottings in the Looker files, but if he had been at the sale he would not have been likely to settle for this item alone. It doesn't seem to be a piece of any particular interest or substance.

Lot 640. 'A Long Autograph Letter written to a friend, wholly concerned with a personal "difficulty" in which the writer found himself, and asking most earnestly for help, 7pp. 8vo, written from Shanklin Villa, Sydenham, Sep. 28th, 1870, signed in full with envelope'

This is the original of a letter to John Woolford of Snodshill quoted by Edward Thomas in his biography of Jefferies⁸. It is also quoted in the Looker/Porteous biography.⁹ Thomas indicates two omissions, Looker/Porteous the same omissions and others; neither give the date, of which this entry is apparently the only record. Clearly it was never in Looker's possession: Thomas was shown it, probably by a Mr. H. Woolford mentioned in his acknowledgments, and transcribed what he required of it, and the *Man of the Fields* version is a shortened one taken from Thomas.

Lot 641. 'Original Rough Draft of the only "formal poem"—"The Chaffinch"—he is known to have written, 7 stanzas of 6 lines each, with alterations, 3pp. 8vo, also a small pen-and-ink sketch done at Crowborough in 1886, and a letter to his mother written, in copy-book hand, when a child, in 1858'

Retitled 'My Chaffinch' this was printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 March 1887, and in *Field and Hedgerow*.¹⁰ (There was one other formal poem, 'The Mulberry Tree', published in the *Scots Observer* 8 November 1890, and again by Looker in his *Nature Diaries and Notebooks*, Grey Walls 1941, under Jefferies' title, 'The Tree of Life'.) In the published version 'My Chaffinch' has 8 stanzas. The finished copy on 2 leaves is in the Looker archive (D15.17). Another fair copy on four pages is held by the University of Texas, Austin, together with letters and a receipt from Robert Billing to Thomas Bird Mosher concerning the sale of the manuscript to Mosher in 1901 on Mrs. Jefferies' behalf. The rough draft in 7 stanzas with alterations is obviously the precursor to these. It is not clear whether the Crowborough sketch is

⁸ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work* (Hutchinson, 1909), pp.70–71.

⁹ Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields* (John Baker, 1965), pp.70–71.

¹⁰ Richard Jefferies, *Field and Hedgerow, being the Last Essays of Richard Jefferies Collected by his Widow* (Longmans, 1889), pp.320–321.

attached or connected to it in any way. Finally the childhood letter to his mother is unknown. There are early letters from Coate to his aunt Ellen in Sydenham but this is the only record of one sent to his mother while staying, presumably, with aunt and uncle at Shanklin Villa.

Despite Looker's Herculean efforts there are without doubt still many pages of Jefferies' writings and correspondence hidden from sight in private collections. The value attached to these collectors' trophies will at least guarantee their preservation, and some will eventually find their way into libraries and institutions with public access. Meanwhile the often frustratingly brief descriptions in booksellers' and auctioneers' catalogues can sometimes tell us where there are gaps, even if they don't fill them.



Hodgson & Co. between the wars.

The Perils of Eulogy

Julian Hawthorne

Julian Hawthorne (1846–1934), son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, was Harvard educated and followed his father as a novelist, writer and journalist. This sardonic criticism of Walter Besant's *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1888; New York, Longmans, Green & Co., 1888) below was published in *America: A Journal of Today* (Slason Thompson & Co., Chicago) in the issue of 13 December 1888. Hawthorne provided a regular literary column to the short-lived general interest weekly (1888–1891) and at the time of writing was publishing detective fiction. As a journalist he covered the Indian Famine for *The Cosmopolitan* and the Spanish–American War for the *New York Journal*.



Julian Hawthorne, 1896.

We have heard a good deal lately of what is termed literary log-rolling. Mr. Jones, the eminent international novelist, publishes, in a leading magazine, an appreciative résumé of the work of the eminent apostle of realism, Mr. Brown, with a portrait. In due time the eminent apostle gives vent, in a leading magazine, to an admiring estimate of the productions of the eminent internationalist, also with a portrait. Well, it appears that both these handsome gentlemen think highly of each other. No doubt they do. But if they imagine that their articles are going to persuade readers to think as they do, they are, as the vulgar idiom hath it, way off. In fact, I believe that nothing has been written about Brown and Jones, respectively, that injured them as much as these same eulogies penned by Jones and Brown. People smile and say, sagaciously, ‘O, yes! Scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours!’

Or, for another example, here is the genial and benevolent Mr. Walter Besant, English novelist, of whom—since I do not wish to harm him—I will *not* say he writes most charming novels—here he comes with a volume deliberately entitled *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*. Now, the pathos of this case, as far as I am concerned, lies in the fact that, until I read the *Eulogy*, I yielded to none in my admiration of the work of Richard Jefferies; and when I heard, lately, that he had died in pain and poverty, I was heartily cast down by the news. Nevertheless, the truth is that by the time I had read Mr. Besant’s last page, I was as nearly disgusted with Richard Jefferies as one can

easily be with a man whom one has never met, and whose career was wholly harmless and upright. In the first place, the photogravure of him which served as a frontispiece to the book showed a man of bottomless self-conceit, obstinacy, and obtuseness—a man whose whole interest, aim, and affection centred on himself; a man who affected reserve because he was conscious of his own ungainliness and ignorance, yet who, if you gave him half a chance, would deluge you with rigmaroles about the importance, the unequalled and inconceivable merit of himself and his work, together with angry and astonished complaints of the organised hostility of the world to this precious entity of Richard Jefferies; and detailed descriptions of the unpleasant diseases to which he was subject; and statements of his conviction that no other human being ever suffered as much. All this, or more of it, was foreshadowed by that unlucky portrait; so I hastened to the text in order to correct this evil impression. Alas! the text simply translated the message of the portrait into words. He had one gift—a faculty for observing nature and describing it that amounted to genius, when it was at its best. This is, perhaps, the lowest form that literary genius can take; but, such as it was, he had it. He had nothing else in his entire composition (so far as Mr. Besant portrays him) that could entitle him to the manly regard of men. A pitiful, troublesome, perverse, vain creature. About human nature he knew nothing and cared nothing. His attempts at novel-writing were preposterous, intolerable failures. He was such a snob that he refused aid from the Literary Fund Society because it was offered by members of the English aristocracy, but made no bones about receiving from the pockets of his far from affluent personal acquaintances such sums as he needed to make himself comfortable. O, Richard Jefferies! If I were your ghost, I would haunt Walter Besant in the most distressing manner till his dying day.

Mr. Besant, meanwhile, evidently thinks he has benefited the memory of his friend to the utmost of his power. Certainly, of all eulogists known to men, Mr. Besant is the most inept and disastrous; his mistakes of judgment and tact are almost incredible; but nobody could have done anything with Jefferies. Let us forget what he was, and remember only his pretty catalogues of fauna and flora. For the rest, I am confident that this article of mine—for those who read it—will raise up better friends for poor Jefferies than all the pages of eulogistic indiscretion put forward by his English contemporary.

The Turnpike House on Coate Road

Jean Saunders

Turnpike roads¹ were introduced mainly in the 18th and early 19th century to create a network of better maintained highways in Britain. Approximately one-sixth of England's existing routes became turnpiked.² They were operated by local Trusts and regulated by Acts of Parliament. These Trusts were granted powers to levy tolls on the users of a specified stretch of road. The toll income was then used by the Trust to improve and maintain their section. The Parish remained responsible for looking after the other local roads that were toll free. At their peak, in the 1830s, over 1000 Trusts administered around 30,000 miles of turnpike road. Toll houses and gates were normally located at the edges of towns, where the responsibility of the vestry or parish ended, whilst some villages had toll gates where side roads joined the toll road. In England & Wales there were almost 8000 toll gates.

Although the powers under an Act were limited to a period of 21 years, in practice, the Trusts remained responsible for the roads until they were finally wound up under General Acts of Parliament between 1873 and 1878. Under the Highways Act of 1878, most turnpike roads became main roads and this legislation was followed up by the Local Government Act of 1888. The entire maintenance of the country's main roads then became the responsibility of the County Councils.

Something of life at a toll gate can be gleaned from Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*:

By this time they had reached the turnpike at Mile End; a profound silence prevailed until they had got two or three miles farther on, when Mr. Weller, senior, turning suddenly to Mr. Pickwick, said—'Wery queer life is a pike-keeper's, sir.'

'A what?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'A pike-keeper.'

'What do you mean by a pike-keeper?' inquired Mr. Peter Magnus.

The old 'un means a turnpike-keeper, gen'l'm'n,' observed Mr. Samuel Weller, in explanation.

¹ Thanks to Alan Rosevear for his personal communications, suggestions, helpful notes, maps on turnpike roads, lists and dates of Trusts at <http://www.turnpikes.org.uk/>. For more background information read the section on 'Roads', in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 4*, ed. Elizabeth Crittall (London, 1959), pp.254-271, that is also available online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol4/pp254-271>.

² *The Story of the Roads* by C.H. Hartmann, (London: Routledge, 1927).

'Oh,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I see. Yes; very curious life. Very uncomfortable.'
 'They're all on 'em men as has met vith some disappointment in life,' said Mr. Weller, senior.
 'Ay, ay,' said Mr. Pickwick.
 'Yes. Consequence of vich, they retires from the world, and shuts themselves up in pikes; partly with the view of being solitary, and partly to rewenge themselves on mankind by takin' tolls.'
 'Dear me,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I never knew that before.'

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The Jefferies' farm at Coate opened out on to one such turnpike road. It ran from old Swindon, down to Coate past the Sun Inn, Spotted Cow and Jefferies' milestone on to Common Head, up the hill through Liddington,<sup>3</sup> and on to Aldbourne, Preston, and Ramsbury. The road from Swindon to Common Head is now known as the Marlborough Road, albeit much widened and altered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century along with the growth of housing estates and the addition of the Great Western Hospital at Common Head. However, some of the route of the old turnpike road still exists next to Jefferies' milestone, Coate Cottages and the Spotted Cow; more about which later. Mainly known as Coate Road in Jefferies' time, there was a marker stone<sup>4</sup> (pictured right) on or near the wall by the stream from Coate Reservoir. It proclaims 'Here Ends Coate Road', which has caused much confusion as to exactly where Coate Road ends.<sup>5</sup> Richard Jefferies' father, James Luckett Jefferies, in describing his farmhouse to Dr. Rake,<sup>6</sup> names it Turnpike Road and it is labelled as such on some old tithe maps:



...there was a respectable look about the place by the side of the Turnpike Road on a Hill or rising ground, good and substantial stone wall in front and round the garden mostly my doing my garden was like no one else.<sup>6</sup>

According to Richard Jefferies, life on the turnpike road offered some distraction to agricultural labourers who were:

<sup>3</sup> 'The Street' was the original turnpike road through Liddington village—the new main road (B4192) to Hungerford split the church from the village.

<sup>4</sup> The stone is now on view at the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.

<sup>5</sup> See *RJS Autumn Newsletter* 2006, p.17 and Jefferies' article in Ch. II of 'Chapters on Churches' published in the *North Wilts Herald*, 5 Jan 1867, reprinted in the *RJS Journal* No. 6 (1997), pp.3-7.

<sup>6</sup> Letter dated 26 November 1896 and addressed to Mr. Alfred Theodore Rake, 8 Sherriif Road, West Hampstead, N.W.

never in a hurry . . . If you want to understand why, go and ensconce yourself behind a hedge, out of sight but in view of a field in which ten or twelve women are hoeing. By and by a pedlar or a van comes slowly along the turnpike road which runs past the field. At the first sound of footsteps or wheels all the bent backs are straight in an instant, and all the work is at a standstill. They stand staring at the van or tramp for five or six minutes, till the object of attention has passed out of sight.<sup>7</sup>

On 18 May 1814 an Act was passed to allow the Swindon and Hungerford Trust to turnpike this particular road. It covered 16 miles including a spine that ran from Liddington through Medbourne and Chiseldon to the Burderop gate. Along the entire course of the turnpiked road there were six main gates and five with side gates and bars. The spine road at Burderop joined an older turnpike road established in 1762 by the Swindon and Marlborough Trust. It ran from old Swindon, up the steep Burderop Down near Barbury Castle, via Four Mile Clump to the ‘Old Eagle’ coaching inn and Marlborough. It was twelve miles long, with two main gates and one side gate—one of these was just west of Burderop Farm. By 1819, a rival Marlborough and Swindon Trust petitioned for another north/south route of eleven miles linking Marlborough to Common Head, in the parish of Liddington, with gates at Southend and Badbury Wick (Green Hill). See the diagram map on p.133 that shows the routes of the three turnpike roads of interest.



‘Broome Lane, Coate Road, Swindon’ c.1906

There was a toll house on the Coate Road. It is possible it was the last cottage on the left before the Common Head junction. However, it might have been closer to old Swindon at the junction with an old track to Hodson, at Broome—not indicated on maps. The toll gate, near Common Head, on the other hand, was marked on maps, but labelled ‘Liddington-side.’

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Edward Thomas describes the Coate houses along the Coate Road (which he called the Hungerford Road) in the first chapter of his 1909 biography of

⁷ ‘Farmer at Home,’ first published in *Fraser’s Magazine*, August 1874 and reprinted in *The Toilers of the Field*.

Richard Jefferies⁸ that gives some clues (photographs have been added from the Richard Jefferies Society's archives):

'The hamlet of Coate is a wavering double row of farmhouses and cottages, less than two miles from Swindon on the Hungerford road. The first house on the right hand, where a slight hill dips to the little bridge—a white cottage with an over-tall chimney—was once John Brown's.'



Postcard of 'Coate Road, Swindon' with John Brown's cottage on the right.



John Brown's cottage. See Jefferies' last essay 'My Old Village'. John died on 13 December 1884 aged 54. The lady by the gate is believed to be his wife, Amelia.

'His father, Job Brown's, was the next house on the left.'

⁸ *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work* by Edward Thomas (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1909), pp.20–22.



Job Brown's cottage.

'Beyond the bridge, on the right, is "The Sun," once a thatched inn whose sign was a "veritable oriflamme"; there, once a year, men used to assemble to eat blackbird-pie and drink.'



Sketch by John Luckett Jefferies (the writer's uncle) from Jefferies' farm and inscribed 'Back of the old Sun Inn. House at Coate near Swindon.' A fire destroyed the thatch of the inn in the early hours of Tuesday 3 March 1891.

'Close by, on opposite sides of the road, were the millwright's and Ikey the blacksmith's shops. The millwright was George Bramble; his wife kept "The Sun," and they brewed their own ale.'



The millwright's house is the cottage on the left beyond the bridge over the brook from Coate Reservoir. The stone illustrated on p.121 was near the far end of the parapet on the left. Ikey, the blacksmith, was so named in *The Amateur Poacher*. In *Bevis* the blacksmith was Jonas and the sound of his hammer and anvil could be heard from Bevis's farmhouse. Bevis and Mark were regular visitors to the blacksmith, selling him rabbits, requesting repairs of tools and help making a rifle.

'Next to this inn is little Coate Farm house, guarded from the road by a high wall—over which Amaryllis watched the countryside going to the fair—and a row of pollard-limes. Stripped of its thatch, its ha-ha gone, its orchard neglected, it is the ghost of the fragrant home described so often in *Wild Life*, in *Amaryllis*, and in many essays, by the man whose birth here is recorded on a tablet at the gate. A wooden "squeeze-belly" stile opposite admits to a footpath over fields that were once part of Coate Farm. Just past the thatched outbuildings of the farm a by-road,⁹ bordered by elms and good ash-trees,

⁹ In Jefferies' articles under the title 'Chapters on Churches' he covers his journey from Coate to Chiseldon Church that was published in the *North Wilts Herald*, 5 January 1867, and reprinted in the *RJS Journal* No. 6 (1997), pp.3-7. Jefferies commences his journey at Coate by pushing 'open the white swing gate, enter[ing] a narrow road known as Day House Lane, and here commences another struggle with mud' and he goes through another swing gate, known as Daniel's, just before Badbury Wick. Day House Lane might have been 'gated' but this was not a turnpike road. However the lane linked two turnpiked roads—the Swindon-Hungerford Trust one that ran through Coate and the Marlborough-Swindon Trust route from Marlborough to Common Head. The latter collected tolls at Green Hill and that the toll house still stands (see p.127) in a lonely spot where Day House Lane runs under the A419 trunk road bridge. The shortest road route from Jefferies' farm to Chiseldon Church was along Day House Lane turning right on to the old Common Head-Marlborough turnpike road through Green Hill gate. A less muddy route, and easier for a cart, would use the turnpike road through Coate and turn right at Common Head on to the second turnpiked road. However, this would mean going through two toll gates, operated by different Trusts, and paying two tolls.

leads to Day House Farm, its elms and pollard willows, and half a hundred moles nailed to a pigsty wall. Jefferies' wife was born and bred at Day House.'



Jefferies' farmhouse and the 'squeeze-belly' stile, c.1912.



The Jefferies' farm cowshed, 1960s, pictured after the road-widening when Amaryllis's wall was moved inside the row of limes.

'Beyond this turning, on both sides of the road, are the cottages of Coate, close to the road, some of only one floor—the very lowliest of defences against wind and world in these parts—and one ruinous, with long, narrow gardens suggesting that they were once part of the grassy edging to the road. John Smith's shanty was on the right; "The Spotted Cow" is almost opposite. Beyond that are several cottages and a horsechestnut-tree; and on the other side of the road, still deep in grass, as when Jefferies mused over it, is the milestone saying "79 miles to London".'



The Spotted Cow¹⁰



The milestone

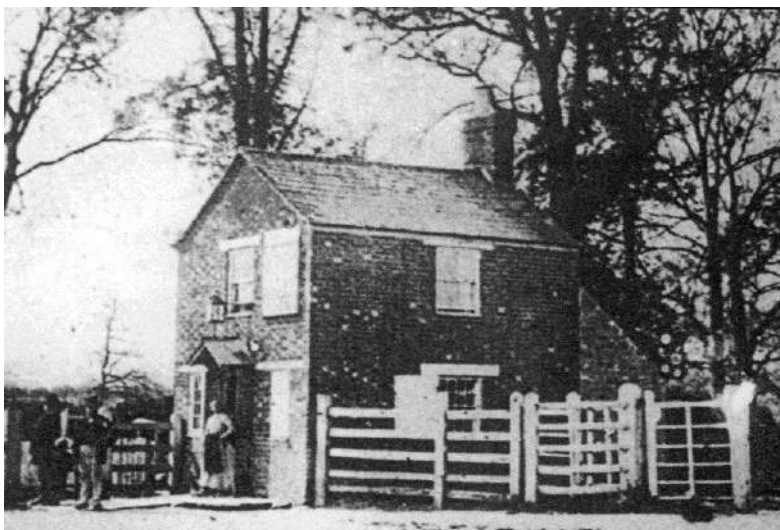
Both still remain alongside the old turnpiked road at Coate as well as many of the cottages from Jefferies' time. Jefferies wrote about the milestone in his essay 'Meadow Thoughts', *The Life of the Fields*.

'The last house, if it is strictly in Coate, is at the corner of a branch-road to Wanborough, and has a thatch with well-stitched edges—occupied, in fact, by "S. Theobald, practical thatcher," and dating from the seventeenth century. At that corner there used to be a "catch-gate," to catch those who entered the turnpike there, and so missed the gate at Liddington.'

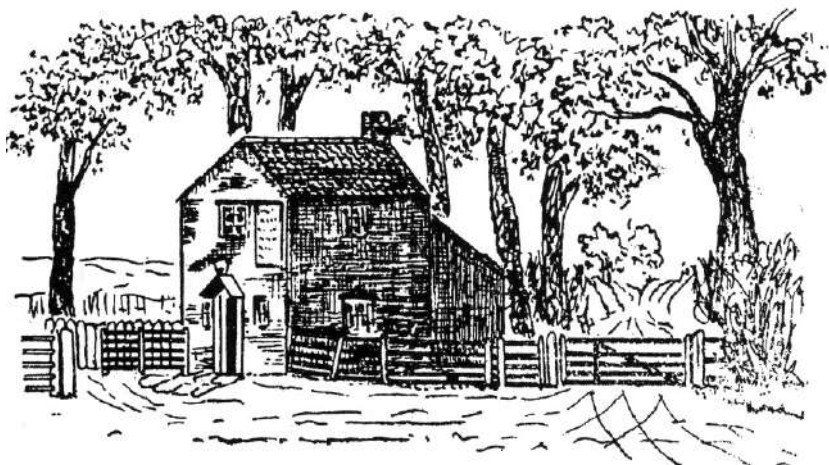
Four images of the Coate Road toll house exist: a photograph, two sketches and a painting. The photograph (see next page) is the most reliable and not subject to 'artistic licence' but it is undated and the toll gates are cut short. The rectangular board attached to the front of the house, displaying the toll charges, can be seen and is similar to the notice pictured on Collins Lane Gate at Purton (see p.130). The photograph would be more helpful if it pre-dates 1874 when the turnpike was abolished, but, as the house was not demolished, it could be later. There are two similar pen and ink sketches by S. Adye dated 1908/9, but Adye was too young to have seen the toll gates in operation. Sidney Adye was born in Holt, Wiltshire circa 1863 and didn't live

¹⁰ It is believed that the lady on the left, photographed outside the inn, is Mary Woolford or Smith (née Rawlings), born circa 1846, with whom Richard Jefferies was alleged to have had an illegitimate child. Mary was the model for *Bevis's* 'Polly the milkmaid'. See *A Peculiarly English Genius: A Biography of Richard Jefferies* by Andrew Rossabi (Petton Books, 2020), Vol II, p.234f. Mary Rawlings' grandfather was a former gamekeeper at Hodson for the Burderop estate. By 1881 Mary had married John Woolford, the inn-keeper at the Spotted Cow—but he died in 1888. Richard Jefferies had lived with John Woolford at Snodshill Farm in October 1870. By the 1891 census Mary had married Daniel Smith who became the new inn-keeper.

in Swindon until much later (1901?). One sketch appeared in 1932: *A Swindon Retrospect 1855-1930* by Frederick Large (see below) whilst Swindon Libraries owns a variation dated 1909. The fourth known image is an oil-painting by J. Hood¹¹ (see next page).



The toll house, Coate Road. (Courtesy of the Swindon Society)



‘The Old Toll House, Coate Road,’ by S. Adye 1908. *A Swindon Retrospect*, p.77.

¹¹ Josiah Clarence Hood (1866-1952) was a self-taught artist who produced numerous paintings of Swindon and Wiltshire based on old photographs and postcards. Turnpike House, Coate Road, Swindon is an oil on canvas (395 x 540mm) acquired from James Powell.



Turnpike House, Coate Road by J. Hood
courtesy of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

In Chapter VIII of *Bevis* Jack brings Bevis and Mark back home in his cart after the boys have been lost and sought directions home from the ‘witch’: ‘At the turnpike it took him [Jack] three minutes to find enough to pay the toll.’

Tolls in the mid 19th century were as follows for Coate Road:

Horse and coach, carriage, wagon etc. 4½d

Wagon or cart with strakes¹² over 9 inches wide 2d

Wagon or cart with wheels 6–9 inches wide 3d

Wagon or cart with wheels under 6 inches wide 6d

Millstones, pairs or singles, pulled by up to 5 horses 2/6d

Millstones, pairs or singles, pulled by more than 5 horses 2/6d + 1/- for every horse over 5

Horse not pulling a vehicle 1d

Cattle, per score 10d

Sheep or pigs, per score 5d

¹² ‘Strake’—name given to the iron rim of a wheel.



The narrower the wheels of a cart, the more damage they did to the road surface—hence the imposition of a more expensive toll duty.

An example of an existing toll-charge board can still be seen on the old Purton tollhouse (Collins Lane Gate), north-west of Swindon, pictured left.

The legal aspects of managing turnpikes came up regularly in local newspapers during Jefferies' time as a journalist. Jefferies complains about the solicitors' clerks who had a tendency to place their advertisements into the local newspapers at the very last minute:

After them come the solicitors' clerks, with equally important and lengthy notices of legal matters concerning the effects of farmers who have fallen into difficulties, of parochial or turnpike affairs, or 'Pursuant to an Act intituled "An Act to further amend the Law and to Relieve Trustees".' These notices have been lying on their desks for days, but are perversely sent down at the last moment, and upset the entire make-up of the paper.¹³

Of course, paying tolls was not popular and 'a person riding or driving from Wroughton to Stratton would have to pay toll at two gates, as would also a person going from Coate to Shaw'.¹⁴ And, as the railways took hold, many turnpike roads became uneconomic and fell into disrepair. This led, inevitably, to the end of turnpikes by the mid-1870s. Jefferies bemoans the future burden on farmers when this takes place:

Only a few days ago I saw in your valuable paper a list, nearly a column long, of the millionaires who had died in the last ten years. It would be interesting to know how much they had spent for the benefit of the agricultural labourer. Yet no one attacks them. They pay no poor-rates, no local taxation, or nothing in proportion. The farmer pays the poor-rate which supports the labourer in disease, accident, and old age; the highway rates on which the millionaire's carriage rolls; and very soon the turnpike trusts will fall in, and the farmers—i.e., the land—will have to support the imperial roads also. With all these heavy

¹³ *Hodge and His Masters*, (London: Smith, Elder, 1880), Vol. II, Ch. III, 'The Bank. The Old Newspaper,' p.64.

¹⁴ *Swindon Fifty Years Ago* by William Morris (1885), in the chapter on Turnpike Gates (pronounced 'Geat' in the Wiltshire dialect).

burdens on his back, having to compete against the world, he has yet no right to compensation for his invested capital if he is ordered to quit.¹⁵

It was mainly agricultural labourers or their wives who collected the tolls. Many lived in purpose-built toll houses. There is some information about the people who collected the tolls at Liddington-side. Mary Hawkins (aged 20) was the toll collector on the 1841 census and by 1852 the cottage address was recorded as Lyddington Wick Side Gate when a Frederick Masling was born there. Mary Hawkins might have been his mother (Mary Tull had married Thomas Masling/Maslyn/Maslen in 1845—the same age as Mary Hawkins, who cannot be found in previous or later censuses, whilst Mary Tull does not appear on the 1841 census). Thomas Maslen is registered on the 1851 census as a toll collector. Thomas and Mary are still living in the Liddington Wick cottage by the 1881 census and by the 1891 census a new family were living in the cottage, now recorded as ‘Old Toll Gate’. No records for toll collectors can be found at Broome, nor any mention of a toll house either, perhaps ruling this out as the Coate Road turnpike house.

During one of the best years, 1834, income for the Swindon and Hungerford Trust was £818. Tolls raised at Ogbourne (Southend) amounted to £318 for the Marlborough and Swindon Trust whilst the older turnpike over the Marlborough Downs brought in £270. By the 1870s, the decline in income was evident.

There were several notices in the local papers around this time including this from: ‘The United Trust of the Turnpike Roads from Swindon towards Hungerford, including the Branch Road from Liddington to Burderop, and from Swindon to Marlborough’ to announce that the ‘Toll Gates ... called the *Swindon, Liddington, Liddington-Side, Preston*¹⁶, *Chisledon*,¹⁷ and *Ogborne Gates*, will be let by auction at the house of William Godwin, . . . Bell Inn, in Swindon’.¹⁸ The tolls produced in the last year (1872) were recorded as £402 in total for the three gates in Swindon, Liddington¹⁹ and Liddington-side and £41 for Chiseldon Gate.

In 1874 the Swindon and Hungerford Trust and the turnpiked road came to an end, followed the year after by the Marlborough and Swindon Trust.

Regrettably, in common with so many places associated with Jefferies’ past in the Coate area, many of the houses from old Swindon to Common Head

¹⁵ From Jefferies’ second letter dated 25 November 1872 and published in *The Times*.

¹⁶ Preston is just past Aldbourne and the toll house still stands.

¹⁷ Former spelling of Chiseldon.

¹⁸ Notice in the *Wilts & Glos. Standard*, Sat 6 Sep 1873, p.3, col.3.

¹⁹ The toll house was located at the junction of the turnpike road (now The Street) through Liddington and the Icknield Way (now Ham Road that links to upper Wanborough) where gates crossed both roads.

were destroyed, whilst the fields in the foothills of the downs are now covered with housing estates and the Great Western Hospital. And with a more car-dependent society, the M4 motorway and A419 trunk road have cut Jefferies' land into pieces, more is the pity.

But, of course, Jefferies' birthplace and home remains almost intact. The former toll house still stands in Chiseldon on the corner of what is now the Hodson and Turnball roads, whilst the Preston toll house, near Ramsbury, is a quite delightful-looking cottage.



The old toll houses at Chiseldon (top) and Preston

The old toll house at Green Hill, at the end of Day House Lane, where it once met the Marlborough to Common Head turnpike road, has not fared so well. Below is a rear view of the house taken in 2020 from Meadow Lane. The bridge supports the 'replacement' A419 trunk road, which now carries heavy traffic between the roundabouts at Common Head and the M4 motorway. However, a short stretch of the original turnpiked road runs beside the front of the house. See also footnote 9.

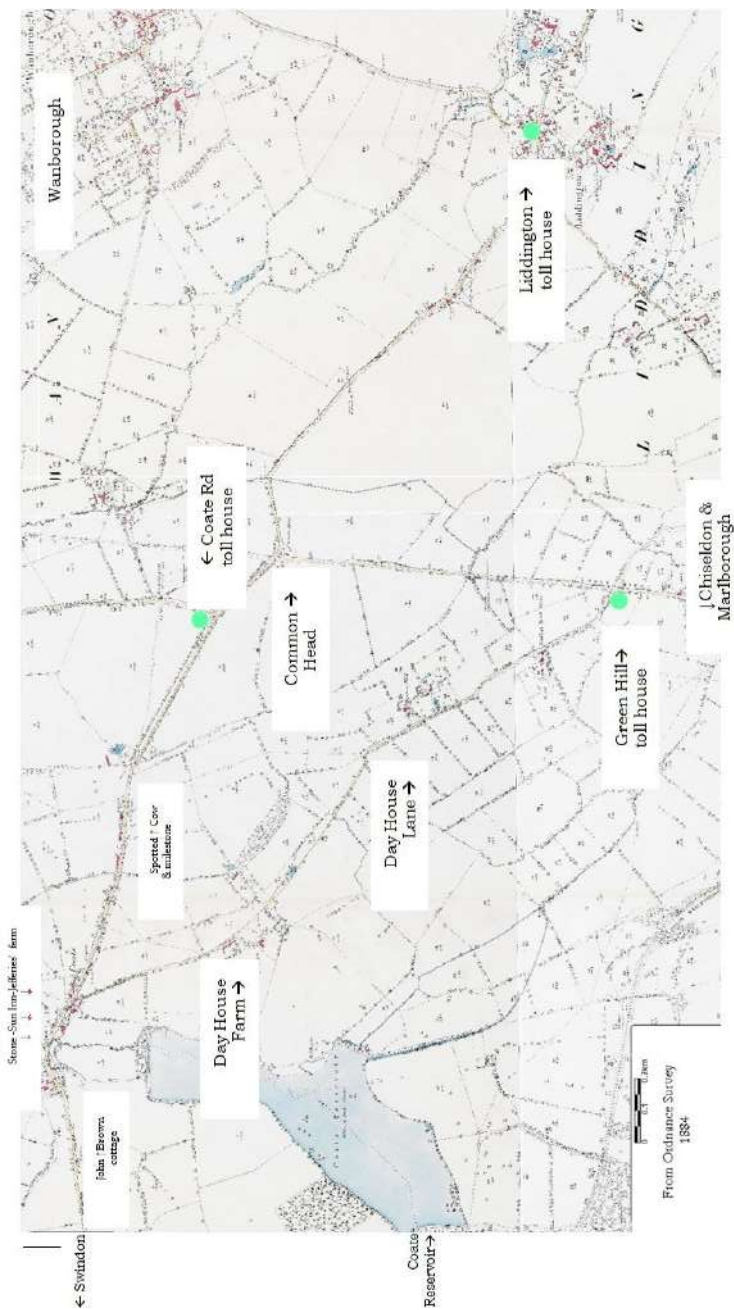


Old toll house, Green Hill, Badbury Wick



Swindon & Marlborough Trust		1762
Swindon & Hungerford Trust		1814
Marlborough & Swindon Trust		1819

Toll roads



Richard Jefferies

[His marble bust unveiled in Salisbury Cathedral, March 9th, 1892.]

W.H.A. Ewance

First published in the *Wilts County Mirror and Express*, 8 April 1892, p.3, col a. The poem was copied in February 2020 by Andrew Rossabi from the newspaper edition held in the British Library. We are grateful for the help of the staff of the BL News Reference Team in making the fragile and restricted item available, and to thank in particular Stewart Gillies and Karen Waddell. Nothing is known about W.H.A.E. apart from a reference to Reverend W.H.A. Ewance (Twickenham) and the printing of Stanza 3 in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Magazine*, June 1893, p.98.

A WREATH to deck the brow—
In life unwreathed, though racked with life's turmoil;
An honour-robe of rest from noontide toil,
And heat and languor of the weary fray,
And the sad tale of want, and hope's decay;—
Late given, but even now
Recaller of the smile and heart-glance true,
Earnest of love for him to-day we mourn anew.

'Tis well that he should live,
In marble moulded, in our old gray shrine,
With many a carved arcade and many a line
Of lancet lights, its hues harmonious blending,
With glory of its unmatched spire ascending
To the clouds' glory, and at foot the lawn
Silvered with dew sprays of the cold March dawn;—
Well for all time to give
Such speaking image of our nature-lover
To the fair city, set with fields of clover,
Clear reedy streams and circling walls of down,
Folding in fond embrace the old-world town.

Shire of the rounded hills!
Shire of cleft valleys, where, mid elmy bower,
Nestle white cots, all redolent of flower,
While the bees hum, and swallows build and breed,
And skim, low-darting, o'er the morning mead;

Shire, where the fountain fills
The streamlet, and anon the tiny fall
Past mounded hedgerows, lined with poplars tall,
Hazel, and old gnarled yew-trunks, winds in play
To Avon or to Kennet's wider way;
Shire that he loved to tread,
Guard in thy storied fane his carven form,
Think of the wanderer past life's heat and storm
Thine still, though cold and dead!

Child-home of nature's seer
Old farmstead, with long ridging, weatherworn,
Orchard, whose lichened boughs ripe fruits adorn,
Barn, copse, and meadows, dear
To young quick feet that know each grassy nook,
Each wood-life haunt, each glimmering in the brook
Of fly or fin, each plastic nest, each lay
Of bird to nesting mate; that lowland way
At morn his footsteps trod, but when the sun
Told afternoon, and hours of toil were run,
Up by the old encampment's topmost mound
On close thyme-odorous turf a rest he found,
And there the soul-dreams grew!
There, through the mists that centuries had brought,
The legendary fight again he fought
Of Dane and Briton, or with eager ken
Peopled with long-lost tenantry each glen;
While the faint evening hue
Over the soft green rampart fondly lingers,
And vales enfold, dark 'neath eve's misty fingers
Their groves of beech and yew!

Each furred and feathered race—
He knew them—insect, reptile, all to him
No abstract names alone, no fancies dim,
But emblems of a vast creating power;
Each herb and blossom, when Spring's fairy bower
Glistened in new-born grace,
Lived in his eyes as things with life endued,
In purpose grand, however small or rude;
Each bud the germ of beauty yet to be,

Each reed the music of the waving lea;
And so the nature-love
In half-dreams filled and thrilled his soul with wonder,
With yearnings for some bliss no grief could sunder,
Some life transcendant [sic], some still heavenlier Heaven,
Beyond that unseen Home to pure hearts given,
Some bourn that bourn above!

But life's cruel unrest
Chases fond dreams; earth's cares the brave heart press,
And slow disease is mated with distress;
Yet aye the brain seethes, and the busy mind
Communes with nature and her myriad kind;
And tranquil calm returns amid the pain,
And hope's sweet visions soothe the heart again,
And faith, thrice[-]welcome guest!
Comes the last earthly change—the seaboard home,
Where round vexed Channel sands the breakers foam,
And o'er the Southern slopes a warm breeze blows,—
There pass the last sweet months; with summer's rose
Life fades, all faint and worn;
So, girt by murmurs of the bees in spring,
So, while the summer birds above him sing,
While autumn withers, wintry tempests sweep,
In arms of hope, he sleeps the long last sleep,
Till the great waking morn!

Joy-close to human strife!
Four summers past—but take the wreath we bear;
Living, no laurels decked the brows of care,
But death to soldier dead brings calm repose,
And honour—robes shall grace his form, who knows,
How, after storm-tost life,
Not richest those, men deemed in wealth secure,
Heaven's golden store is theirs, who to the close endure!

W.H.A.E

‘Unique and Original’: A poet’s Introduction to *The Story of My Heart*

Elizabeth Jennings

This Introduction to *The Story of My Heart* (Macmillan, 1968) is reprinted copyright of The Estate of Elizabeth Jennings, 1968: and by kind permission of David Higham Associates.

There are certain kinds of literature which elude definition, books which stand apart for one or another reason. Of such is Richard Jefferies’ *The Story of My Heart*. Its title does, I think, go against it, because it makes the reader expect some kind of conventional love story. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. To find its equivalent one must seek out Traherne’s *Centuries of Meditations* or Teresa of Avila’s *Life*. As with these books, intensity is at a high level of achievement.

The Story of My Heart is the expression, the difficult putting into words, of a vision. It eschews the abstract but, none the less, it is in fact totally concerned with the abstract. The author displays for our attention and our credence not only certain experiences which remind us of Wordsworth more than anyone else but also the unique findings of a whole lifetime. The book is short, but it reverberates with subject-matter. It is also deeply personal, yet, such is its power and concentration, it moves us on a level where passion and thought are general, not differentiated. It is philosophical yet not a work of philosophy, metaphysical yet not a metaphysical thesis.

The Story of My Heart is, then, both visionary and expository. It analyses quite as much as it merely depicts, and its material is of such fascination that one would never be tempted to call the author egotistical. Some biographical facts, however, are useful in placing the man and his work.

Richard Jefferies was born in November 1848, at Coate Farmhouse near Swindon, Wiltshire. His father was a farmer, struggling against the Industrial Revolution, but, on the whole, the boy led an easy, comfortable childhood. He himself called himself ‘a son of the soil’. Richard was allowed much freedom during his childhood, and it is from the memory of that that *Bevis*, his beautiful story for boys, was conjured. From his childhood, too, he drew that feeling of closeness to nature which is such an abiding theme in *The Story of My Heart*.

As a young man Jefferies became a reporter. But his was a fugitive talent, and he never became widely known during his lifetime. He married, had

three children, and died an early death in Sussex in 1887. Thus there are few solid facts to pin upon this strange writer. In theme and subject-matter his work, as well as Wordsworth, recalls W.H. Hudson or the American Thoreau. But really he is entirely original. He has only received serious acclaim since his death, and that has come abundantly. For he appears to be that sort of writer—unique and original—who finds his own special public. Many who read *The Story of My Heart* would be hard put to it to give a totally rational explanation of their pleasure. The fact is that the book is written on many levels and is dense with detail.

Jefferies' other works, though they look formidable in an extensive bibliography, mainly comprise articles and serialisations. The only works which have really endured are *Bevis* and *The Story of My Heart*. Nevertheless, Jefferies did achieve *Wood Magic: A Fable, Round About a Great Estate*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and *Hodge and His Masters*. His work, in fact, divides itself into conventional novels, unconventional novels, and nature writings. I have given a selection of the last two kinds above.

The credo, the centre of this book, is expressed in Chapter 6 of *The Story of My Heart* in the words: 'With the great sun burning over the foam-flecked sea, roofed with heaven—aware of myself, a consciousness forced on me by these things—I feel that thought must yet grow larger and correspond in magnitude of conception to these. But these cannot content me, these Titanic things of sea, and sun, and profundity; I feel that my thought is stronger than they are. I burn life like a torch. The hot light shot back from the sea scorches my cheek—my life is burning in me. The soul throbs like the sea for a larger life. No thought which I have ever had satisfied my soul.'

This is certainly a credo, but it is also a fiery vision. Within it, Jefferies expresses all that most baffles him, all that mystifies him within and beyond this puzzling Universe. But what does it say beyond what is negative and obscure? Is Jefferies finding in natural objects a hiding-place for his restless spirit? No, I do not think that these are the answers. All that Jefferies swears to and abides by bears witness to this.

To reach the heart of his beliefs and his troubles, it will be necessary to study other mystics, usually of a more orthodox kind. At times Jefferies' experiences resemble those of his remarkable fellow mystics; at others they totally deviate. What we can only say is that all had an uncommonly rare experience and an uncommonly intense one. What Jefferies proffers, in a unique way, is a kind of timeless experience which appears to have needed only natural objects in which to express itself fully. Yet to say this is only to approximate to the splendour of Jefferies' visionary clarity. To collate and collect his life's fullness, it will be essential to seek out other men and women of similar intensity and analytical power.

Jefferies' inner life was intensely alive and vigorous. Of himself he says in *The Story of My Heart*: 'It is in myself that I desire increase, profit, and exaltation of body, mind, and soul. The surroundings, the clothes, the dwelling, the social status, the circumstances are to me utterly indifferent. Let the floor of the room be bare, let the furniture be a plank table, the bed a mere pallet. Let the house be plain and simple, but in the midst of air and light.' He goes on: 'Let me be furnished in myself with health, safety, strength, the perfection of physical existence. . . .' This last wish is very much at variance with John of the Cross, say, or Teresa of Avila, who endured and expected anguish and suffering, sometimes even in their loftiest states of prayer. In his desire for health and physical comfort, Jefferies shows himself to be rather a pagan. And he does so, too, in other respects, as we shall see.

For example, where the orthodox Christian mystics have always prescribed extreme ascetic exercises for those who seek union with God in the mystical life, Jefferies is positively against such practices. He says in *The Story of My Heart*: 'I believe all manner of asceticism to be the vilest blasphemy—towards the whole of the human race. . . . Let me be fleshly perfect.' We must learn to understand that for Jefferies a truly visionary experience was only vouchsafed to those who perfected themselves in the body as well as in the mind and soul. If we fail to understand this we shall misunderstand much that he has to say to us.

It is difficult to pin down precisely the sort of mystic Jefferies was. That he was a pure pantheist has been denied by W.J. Keith in the following words: 'It has often been maintained that Jefferies was a pantheist, but if we accept the strict definition of that term as one who believes that God is present in all and all in God, this can be rebutted easily enough by direct quotation.' And Keith continues, 'To be fair to the critics, it must be remembered that the natural world occupies as central a position in *The Story of My Heart* as in the rest of Jefferies' work.'

Thus we can see that Jefferies is in an extremely equivocal position—a nature mystic who is not a pantheist and a visionary who does not believe in the outward and inward order of the physical world. He reminds us of Traherne who declared that we should be 'clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars'. Jefferies writes, 'I myself maintain that the mind of man is practically infinite. It can understand anything brought before it. It has not the power of its own motion to bring everything before it, but when anything is brought it is understood. . . . The mind of man is infinite. Beyond this, man has a soul.' The ecstatic declarations of *The Story of My Heart* often bring to mind, in detail, the flights of ecstasy which make up *Centuries of Meditations*, especially when Traherne declares that God has made us able to create in our own minds greater worlds than he himself has made outside us.

But the great difference between Traherne and Jefferies is that Jefferies was not a religious man in any orthodox way.

The fact is that Jefferies was not only not a Christian, he was not religious in any specific sense at all. As W.J. Keith points out, 'Jefferies is quite clear about the natural world. It is controlled, he says, by "a force without a mind", by "something more subtle than electricity", something which "is certainly not the higher than deity of whom I have written". Nature, then, is animated, but not by a soul, and it is because nature is soul-less that the individual soul can expand and contain it. . .' In Jefferies there is no dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual worlds; they exist mutually. To understand this extremely unorthodox view, we must examine *The Story of My Heart* in greater detail.

Jefferies did not really believe in God, at least not in a personal spirit, a Creator who informed all things. In *The Story of My Heart* he declares: 'But let us, turning away from the illusion of a directing intelligence, look earnestly for something better than a god, seek for something higher than prayer, and lift our souls to be with the more than immortal now.' This is vague writing, and were it not for Jefferies' passion and integrity, it would be hard to accept it on any level. As it is, we must accept the genuineness of Jefferies' own idiosyncratic religion and understand it as clearly as we can.

The orthodox Christian mystics—John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Traherne, and so on—speak a common language. Once we have grasped this language, there is little in their experience which genuinely eludes us. But Jefferies was quite unlike such men and women as these, though he may well have shared something of the intensity of their visions. It is at this point that difficulty arises. The words in which Jefferies speaks of his visions are often reminiscent of these other mystics and also of St Augustine, yet his own analysis of the visions is very different from theirs. Thus he writes, in moments of ecstasy: '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. . .' and 'There is an immense ocean over which the mind can sail, upon which the vessel of thought has not yet been launched.'

These passages are strongly reminiscent of the experience described by St Augustine in his *Confessions*, where he and his mother have a shared vision at Ostia. But there is also a great difference. What they regard as supernatural, Jefferies views as natural. Indeed, he says of nature: 'The supernatural miscalled, the natural in truth is the real. *To me everything is supernatural* [*italics mine*].' These last words give us a very important clue to a true understanding of *The Story of My Heart*.

Short as it is, this is a very rich, a very full book; it contains comments on many topics. Knowing Jefferies' view of God, one might have expected him to be keenly interested in science. But this is not the case. He says, 'In this "must"—"it must follow"—lies my objection to the logic of science. The arguments proceed from premises to conclusions, and end with the assumption "it therefore follows". But I say that, however carefully the argument be built up, even though apparently flawless, there is no such thing at present as "it must follow".' Thus we see that Jefferies was no straightforward nineteenth-century evolutionist. His view of nature was entirely his own.

W.J. Keith gives a useful analysis of Jefferies' attitude to nature. 'The world of nature,' he says, 'was at first a necessity because it encouraged his feelings of immortality and aspiration. . . . Gradually, however, as the principles behind his thought develop and clarify so the need for the positive stimulus of nature grows less. Soon not only nature but a piece of beautiful sculpture can give the same feeling. When he gets to London, he finds the city no less congenial to the thought, and his supreme experience is felt on London Bridge.'

In Jefferies' thought, it is man's soul which gives meaning and purpose to everything. He declares adamantly, 'Those seas by which no man has stood—by which no soul has ever been—whether on earth or the planets, are dead.' This extract reminds us again of Traherne's remark that God has enabled us to make worlds in our own minds which are greater than he himself created in the physical world. The similarity to Jefferies is obvious, though the application is quite different.

Thus, Jefferies is not a nature mystic in the commonly accepted meaning of that phrase. Many things—the contemplation of the character of Julius Caesar, for example—could bring him to a state of rapture. All that was essential, he felt, was a willing and open spirit; so it is that he praises idleness: 'I deny altogether,' he declares, 'that idleness is an evil, or that it produces evil, and I am well aware why the interested are so bitter against idleness—namely, because it gives time for thought, and if men had time to think their reign would come to an end. Idleness—that is, the absence of the necessity to work for subsistence—is a great good.'

Again, this view is quite at odds with that of the great Christian mystics who felt that labour brought them closer to Christ. Indeed, Jefferies has a whole world view in which mankind is freed from the bonds of labour. In Chapter 11 (the same chapter which the quotation on idleness came from) he expresses this view: 'I hope succeeding generations will be able to be idle. I hope that nine-tenths of their time will be leisure time; that they may enjoy their days and the earth, and the beauty of this beautiful world.'

Jefferies sees man in an unfallen state, as only needing rest and freedom to enjoy the world fully. Although he speaks of 'the crookedness and unfamiliar curves of the conditions of life', he does not feel that man is suffering from, in Newman's phrase, 'some aboriginal calamity' brought about by himself. We must always bear in mind when we read *The Story of My Heart* that Jefferies was decidedly affected by nineteenth-century scepticism. He believed that nature was controlled by a 'force without a mind', by 'something more subtle than electricity', something which is 'not the higher than deity of whom I have written'.

Along with these ideas goes an account of the spiritual and material modes and the way in which they are mingled in Jefferies' thought. As W.J. Keith points out, his style is particularly fitting for the expression of these ideas. It is a light yet intense style, and one which expresses complicated ideas without ever becoming complicated or prolix itself. It is also a very accommodating style which adapts itself easily to whatever subject Jefferies happens to be considering. Jefferies makes much use of the exclamation and the rhetorical question, but these never appear ludicrous or overwrought. A typical passage from *The Story of My Heart* is the following: 'Man is altogether different from every other animal, every other living creature known. He is different in body. In his purely natural state—in his true natural state—he is immeasurably stronger. No animal approaches to the physical perfection of which a man is capable.'

Thus Jefferies employs fairly short sentences to express even the profoundest ideas, and so makes them seem simple and easily comprehensible to us. He does not adorn his prose with far-fetched similes and metaphors. He speaks to us directly as if he were explaining something to one person.

Many subjects are brought within the compass of Jefferies' flexible prose. *The Story of My Heart* not only describes Jefferies' exalted experiences. It also goes into many other subjects, for example, population and the meaning of chance. On the latter he reflects in Chapter 10: 'And I think that seeing how great a part chance plays in human affairs, it is essential that study should be made of chance. . . . These modes of research are not all. The psyche—the soul in me—tells me that there is much more, that these are merely beginnings of the crudest kind.'

The Story of My Heart is thus intended to present to us a whole way of life. From his loftiest visions, Jefferies descends to more mundane things and tells us how he believes life ought to be lived on this planet. He also tells us how a man ought to die and be treated after he is dead. 'Could I have my own way after death,' he declares, 'I would be burned on a pyre of pine-wood, open to the air, and placed on the summit of the hills. Then let my ashes be scattered

abroad—not collected in an urn—freely sown wide and broadcast. That is the natural interment of man—of man whose thought at least has been among the immortals.’

This tells us a little of what Jefferies believed concerning individual immortality. Man’s thought was, for him, his highest faculty, the one whereby he obtained a genuine form of eternity. But it was thought within flesh that attained to the great visions. As Jefferies wrote of his own experience: ‘The sweetness of the day, the fullness of the earth, the beauteous earth, how shall I say it?’

In *The Story of My Heart* he considers the life of cavemen and of the great civilisations: ‘A great life—an entire civilisation—lies just outside the pale of common thought. Cities and countries, inhabitants, intelligences, culture—an entire civilisation.’ Thus *The Story of My Heart* becomes a microcosm of the Universe, so full is it and so successful in holding one’s attention.

Having written so much of the contents and tone of *The Story of My Heart*, I have omitted, so far, to say anything of its particular effect on me. First of all, the book has an immensely bracing effect. Reading it is rather like swimming in the sea or climbing a high mountain. In this, it resembles Traherne’s *Centuries of Meditations*, or the poems of D.H. Lawrence. It is a book which both excites the mind and makes the body tingle. Few great literary works have precisely this effect. We must remember, however, that Jefferies is dealing with highly inflammable material, with extremely exalted subjects. At one time or another he touches on life, death, love, immortality, the beauty of nature, the power of man’s mind, and many other things. But more important than these subjects is the effect which his lofty style has upon us. It is his particular treatment of so many and various things which is so remarkable.

I have, at various times, made a study of the findings of the great mystics. Only in Richard Jefferies can I find the exaltation of spiritual rapture combined with an ecstatic enjoyment of the beauty of the physical world. *The Story of My Heart* invites us to share these joys and it certainly deserves the widest possible readership. I should like here to pay tribute to W.J. Keith for his sensitive study of Richard Jefferies (Oxford, 1965).



AFTERWORD: Elizabeth Jennings

Mention Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn and Robert Conquest and you have the key figures in a group of poets dubbed ‘The Movement’ by *The Spectator* in 1954. But there was another poet in this literary group, Elizabeth Jennings, who later declared that she felt cooped up

in this classification pointing out ‘two big differences between myself and my contemporaries were that I was a woman and also Roman Catholic, which meant that I wanted to write about subjects which were uninteresting to most Movement poets.’

Elizabeth Joan Jennings was born in 1926, a youngest daughter of Dr. Henry Jennings, medical officer of health for Lincolnshire. At the age of six, Elizabeth and the family moved to Oxford where she spent the rest of her life. Whilst reading for her English degree at St. Anne’s college she began writing poetry influenced by the lyrical poets Gerard Manley Hopkins, W.H. Auden, Robert Graves and Edwin Muir and a collection of her poems was published in 1953. At this time, Jennings was a librarian at Oxford City Library but from 1961 she made a living as a freelance writer, critic, reviewer and her poems were published by André Deutsch and Macmillan.

During the 1960s Jennings suffered bouts of mental illness often necessitating hospitalisation and, to her credit, published poems of her experiences. At best, her verse dwelt on small details of life, with themes of love, faith, nature and the seasons, death and childhood. Although Jennings never married or had any children, they feature quite frequently in her poems.

In 1968 Macmillan published an edition of Jefferies’ *The Story of My Heart* with an Introduction by Elizabeth Jennings. In her appraisal she finds a book which ‘both excites the mind and makes the body tingle’ and describes Jefferies as ‘unique and original’. As her Catholic faith informed her work she compares Jefferies’ declaration of his inner life with the Christian mystics, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, St. Augustine and Thomas Traherne.

Jennings’ poems and journalism, interrupted by mental health issues, provided a meagre income and over the following years she sold her manuscripts, literary papers and correspondence, most of which were bought by American universities. The original manuscript of Jennings’ Introduction to Jefferies’ *The Story of My Heart* is held, with other items from Jennings, by the University of Delaware together with a black, bound notebook labelled ‘RICHARD JEFFERIES’.

Perhaps with Jefferies in mind, and learning that he had been regarded as an idler in his teens and later praised idleness, Jennings wrote the three-stanza poem ‘The Idler’, the last stanza of which runs ‘So has his subtle power wiser than ours/And need elaborate no peace at all./Watch how a landscape kindest is to idlers/Helping their shiftlessness grow to new powers,/Composing stillness round their careless will.

Elizabeth Jennings was awarded a CBE in 1992 and died in a care home in Bampton, Oxfordshire in 2001.

Sarah Orne Jewett

Peter Robins



Sarah Orne Jewett

When *The Story of My Heart* was published in America in late 1883 the literary critics were swiftly dismissive. A review in *Good Literature*,¹ a New York weekly, claimed:

It is not an autobiography, but the wearisome repetition of unhealthy musings and imaginations. It is the effort of the author to explain what he confesses he does not understand, and conveys by exaggerated terms an idea of how extravagant and eccentric an unhealthy mind can become by indulgence in the folly of fruitless transcendentalism.

In *The Dial*,² published in Chicago, the reviewer was equally disdainful:

The repetition and verbiage of his rhapsodies become wearisome in the course of fifty or more pages during which the mind is struggling for some clear sound idea or motive to rest upon . . . there are not any thoughts in the story which satisfy one as a justification for its publication.

Transcendentalism, derided by the *Good Literature* critic, was a religious, literary and political movement which flourished in New England in the nineteenth century. Its adherents, lead by Emerson and Thoreau, yearned for intense spiritual experience and sought to transcend the purely material.

¹ 8 Dec 1883. v.5 p272.

² Jan 1884. v.4 p237.

One author in Maine, whose work was regarded by some as transcendental, was Sarah Orne Jewett who found *The Story of My Heart* a ‘wonderful little book’.

Sarah Orne Jewett was born in the inland port of South Berwick, Maine, in 1849, and was often taken by her father, a doctor, on calls to the local fishermen and farmers. Jewett found she had a talent for writing and her first story was published in 1868. There followed many other stories and vignettes published in *Harper’s Magazine*, *Century* and *Atlantic Monthly*. Her sketches of a New England town, based mainly on South Berwick, first published in *Atlantic Monthly*, were collected in her first book *Deeplaven* (1877).

Atlantic Monthly was to change Jewett’s life as she had established a close friendship with writer Annie Fields and her husband James T. Fields, publisher and editor of the magazine. After James Fields’ sudden death in 1881 Jewett and Annie Fields shared a life together for the next three decades during which Jewett considered Field’s Boston residence as her second home where they spent time together reading, writing, attending concerts and exhibitions and entertaining leading artists and writers of the day. They travelled to Europe several times hosting American and European writers. Although comfortable in this cosmopolitan world, Jewett never cut her rural roots and spent the summers in the same house where she grew up and in time died there.

In a letter to ‘Mrs. Fields’ from 1890, Jewett tells of her excitement at discovering *The Story of My Heart*:

To Mrs. Fields
[148 Charles Road, Boston]

Tuesday morning
[n.d. but between Jul-Oct 1890;
South Berwick, Maine]

I have been reading a really wonderful little book by poor Richard Jefferies. I have never even heard of it—‘The Story of My Heart’ he calls it, but it is really an expression of his religious growth and aspiration toward higher things. He finds little in conventional, or rather formulated religions, but everything in an eager belief in higher forms of life and unrevealed wisdom. He comes closer to these in out-of-door life, as one might expect who knows his other books, but his ability to put into words the consciousness of life and individuality and relationship to eternity is something amazing. I have never known anything like it. I thought of ‘thy friend’³ as I read it, and of ‘Phantastes’,⁴ which I haven’t read since growing up. There is a queer touch of Tolstoi’s creeds now and then. This copy was printed in ’83—strange I never knew anything about it.⁵

³ John Greenleaf Whittier, Quaker poet.

⁴ George Macdonald, published 1858.

⁵ *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, Ed. by Annie Fields (London: Constable & Co., 1911) p.71.

Harvard University holds Jewett's copy of *The Story of My Heart* which is inscribed 'S.O. Jewett 1888 [changed to 1888]' in pencil, with Jewett's marginal lining and comments challenging Jefferies' dismissal of deity.⁶

After *Deephaven* Jewett wrote several more novels, children's books and verse but the book that made her reputation was *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, published in 1896, a series of interconnected sketches of New England life. It was published here in 1910 by Constable.

Jewett's best writing resembled nineteenth-century French fiction and she kept above her desk a line from Flaubert, 'To write about ordinary life as one would write history.' This meant she wrote about what she knew and understood and was true to her transcendentalist mentors when she saw the world in a small village.

In 1902 she was injured in a carriage accident and died from a stroke in 1909 aged fifty-nine.



Sarah Orne Jewett House, South Berwick, Maine, c.1900.

⁶ George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press 1993) p.348.

Book Review

Jeremy Hooker: *Ditch Vision: Essays on Poetry, Nature and Place*. Awen Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-906900-51-9. pp. viii, 224. £14.00.

The literary reading of the natural landscape evolved and changed dramatically in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in this elegantly framed and perceptive study Jeremy Hooker sets out to define and examine what he memorably terms 'ditch vision', a mode of writing which focuses our attention on an essentially British 'humanised nature' on a small scale, as opposed to the cult of wilderness which often motivates and pervades American literature and art. An element of wildness is nevertheless retained, according to Hooker, by an English tradition of nature writing which was early on embodied by Dorothy Wordsworth or John Clare which constructs the act of writing itself as expressing the voice of nature. It was, however, Richard Jefferies in particular, Hooker maintains, who would make such ditch vision central to his literary project. In a paragraph about green rushes from 'The Pageant of Summer', for example, Jefferies emphasises the special value of such plants as registering the 'unfathomable depth' of the natural world, even on a small scale. In this reading Jefferies emerges as a founder-ecologist, to be followed by such varied late-Victorian authors as Hardy, Hopkins and Ruskin. Whilst Professor Hooker is perhaps wisely averse to the wilder shores of literary theory, he does here, apropos of Jefferies' powers of vision, interestingly cite the response of the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty to the representation of nature in the paintings of Cézanne. This might valuably have been explored further: Merleau-Ponty speaks of a 'halo of signification' located in the nineteenth-century aesthetics of nature, and interestingly for Hooker's thesis, defines the phenomenal world as consisting of 'near and far, foreground and horizon'. This introduction takes the account up to the present time, focusing upon such contemporary writers as Colin Simms, Jim Perrin and Richard Mabey. In this reading ditch vision offers us a sense of life, and therefore 'a ground of values for humans in relation to the non-human world'. In his fine earlier study, *Writers in a Landscape* (1996), Hooker had very effectively explored aspects of Jefferies' work, and his second chapter here, which is specifically focused on Jefferies, forms the emotional and critical epicentre of the book, mirroring as it does his own lifelong preoccupation with this oeuvre. Hooker sees Jefferies as a kind of poet of a natural world envisioned as a home for mankind, the prose works sometimes taking on both a genuine 'lyrical afflatus' and a pervasive sense of

nostalgia. Hooker is far from blind to what he identifies as Jefferies' weaknesses, notably a kind of emotionality specially exhibited in feeling the disappearance of nature after the onset of his illness. He offers a finely attuned reading of 'Meadow Thoughts' and other essays, whilst expressing reservations about some strands of *The Story of My Heart*, with its occasional lapses into 'imperialist ideology'. However, as an assessment of Jefferies' 'extraordinary poetic intelligence' this chapter deserves to be read by all admirers of Jefferies' work.

Subsequent chapters cover a fertile range of authors and topics, with Hooker ever alert to the creativity his chosen subjects bring to the literary evocations of the natural world. Thus there are here very pertinent and lively discussions about the issue of 'ground', and the notion of 'writing *from* place', not only about it, as in the Dutch poet Rutger Kopland, or the English and Canadian poems of Les Arnold with their elemental and unsettled qualities. The 'luminous' potency of Frances Bellerby's little-known West Country poems is valuably explored, as are those still somewhat under-appreciated though better-known Wessex authors, John Cowper Powys and Mary Butts, whose work resonates powerfully with Hooker's own personal origins in the same landscapes. Hooker offers here a stimulating account of J.C. Powys's powerful oeuvre, framing these remarkable novels in the light of Powys's argumentative interpretation of the Russian religious thinker, Nicolas Berdyaev. The chapter on Mary Butts' fiction is another highlight of this study, evoking very tellingly that 'evocation of the invisible' which characterises her exploration of the 'secret history' of the Wessex landscape. Other chapters, including the familiar but incisive pairing of the Dymock Poets' creative brotherhood of Robert Frost and Edward Thomas, and meditative essays on the characteristics of poetic vision, the lyric poetic voice, and the concept of 'ground', all serve to extend and enrich the reader's understanding. Professor Hooker might perhaps have been more attentive in the course of his argument to the interface between the type of ecopoetic writing which is his focus and current debates around the 'anthropocene' and environmental philosophy more widely. He is, however, notably responsive to the deep ties between landscape and human culture, and the ways in which our perceptions help to shape this form of 'ditch vision', infusing the raw material of nature with meaning. It may be observed, in conclusion, that Jefferies' presence is a pervasive and defining one throughout *Ditch Vision*. Jeremy Hooker invariably writes with the luminosity of a practising poet, and has produced a study of eloquent resonance, commitment and insight into the detailed observation of nature in this wide and significant body of quasi-ecological literature.

Roger Ebbatson