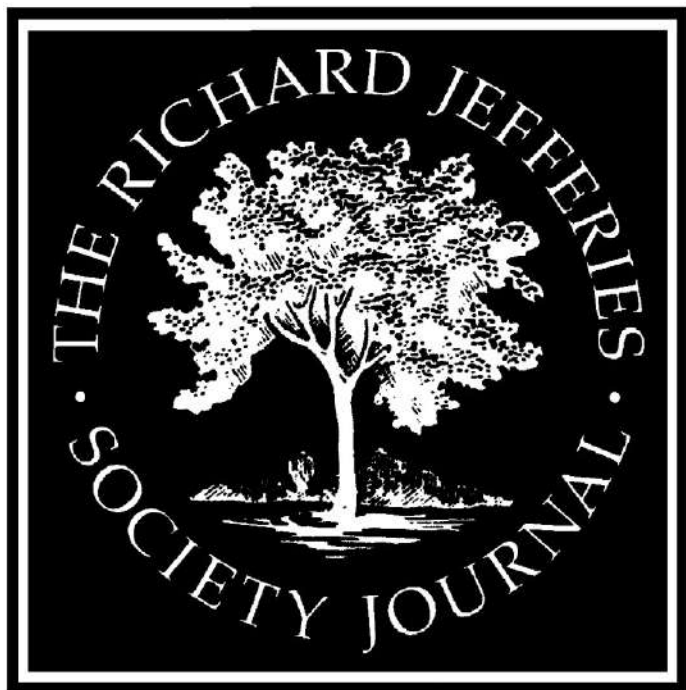




NUMBER 38

2023

The 175th anniversary of Jefferies' birth

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).

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

Website	http://www.richardjefferiessociety.org
Email	info@richardjefferiessociety.org

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

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

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.

Copyright in previously unpublished material is retained by the author. However a condition of publication is that the Society may publish the *Journal* on its website. The views of contributors are their own, and do not necessarily represent those of the Editors or the Richard Jefferies Society. The Editors' decision about content is final. Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material.



Journal No. 38, 2023

CONTENTS

A Railway-Accidents Bill	
— <i>Richard Jefferies</i>	5
The Shipton Accident	
— <i>Richard Jefferies</i>	21
The Flying Dutchman	
— <i>Richard Jefferies</i> (introduced by <i>Rebecca Welshman</i>)	33
Richard Returns (poem)	
— <i>Zaguan</i>	45
Over Marlboro'	
— <i>Wilfrid Ewart</i>	47
Edward Thomas, Richard Jefferies and Wiltshire	
— <i>W.J. Keith</i>	51
<i>Idyllists of the Country Side</i>	
— <i>George H. Ellwanger</i>	66
Two Poems/Hymns	
— <i>Anna McCourt</i>	87
The Last Days of Richard Jefferies	
— <i>Catherine Winkworth Mackintosh</i>	90
Wiltshire Summer Sunday, 1866 (poem)	
— <i>Roger Frith</i>	96
Richard Jefferies, the Nature Mystic of the Wiltshire Downs	
— <i>Fred J. Lazell</i>	98
Richard Jefferies	
— <i>Margaret Thomas</i>	108

Echoes from Salisbury	
— <i>Peter Robins</i>	116
'It was between the may and the rose' (poem)	
— <i>Fay Inchfawn</i>	123
Word Painting from Nature	
— J.D.	125

Concerning *Restless Human Hearts*:

Richard Jefferies' letter to William Tinsley	
— <i>Rebecca Welshman</i>	137
Review in the <i>Daily News</i>	143
Review in <i>The Observer</i>	144

A Railway-Accidents Bill

Richard Jefferies

First published signed in *Fraser's Magazine*, May 1874, pp.658-670.

When the fearful accidents of last autumn drew public attention so strongly to the management of the railways, it was urged that an undue prominence was likely to be attached to the subject, for such a state of things was abnormal, and, like an eruption of Vesuvius, only happened once in a long course of years. It was due to the tourist traffic, to the vast increase in the number of passengers, flowing out of the metropolis and from the other great cities in pursuit of health and enjoyment. This tourist traffic put a strain upon railway resources which they were not entirely able to meet. As soon as this pressure was removed, accidents would become fewer and farther between. Another fruitful cause of mishap, it was argued, was the excursion trains; these would cease towards winter, and railway travelling would be safe. But day by day went by, still bringing catalogues of killed and wounded, like the bulletins from the seat of war, and it was said that some of the papers kept a heading standing, always in type, under which to place the telegrams and reports of accident which were sure to arrive. The very frequency and steady continuance of accident had a certain amount of effect in lessening the acute tension of the public mind; they became a matter of course, an evil which must be endured. But now, after so many months of incessant mishap, the general feeling has again turned, and there is throughout the length and breadth of the land a sense of insecurity, an ill-defined dread of railway journeys. Looking at the long list of slaughtered and shattered—the word shattered is used advisedly, for no other will convey a correct idea of the injuries carelessly described as a ‘severe shaking’—looking at this list, one wonders almost how people, especially nervous people, can face a railway journey at all. There are, of course, hundreds of thousands of persons whose lives are of necessity spent in nearly constant travelling; these are forced to endure the risk; but there are also hundreds of thousands who move about not altogether for pleasure, but because of the peculiar restlessness which is one of the most marked traits of our era. There must be a large amount of fatalism in the national character—unconscious fatalism, for Englishmen, as a rule, look upon a declared belief in destiny as rather theatrical. But still there is the feeling that, however many scores may have been injured, still we may escape—we shall not be hurt. The population is so large that there are very few comparatively who have friends or relatives maimed, or who in any way are personally brought into connection with an

accident: it does not come home to everyone. Yet there is a unanimous opinion throughout the country that such a condition of railway affairs has been endured long enough, and it would only require some great public leader to take recognition of the matter to raise a storm of indignation at the wrong which is thus inflicted upon the public. Irrespective of politics, that is of party, the Ministry which should bring forward a Bill for the prevention of railway accidents would undoubtedly arrive at the highest pitch of popularity. But in all probability ministers of either party will be exceedingly careful how they introduce such a Bill in view of the enormous influence of the railway companies and the value of their vested interests. It would be a question opening up endless vistas of dispute, a perilous and unsatisfactory step. Had it been otherwise, there can scarcely be a doubt that Mr. Gladstone would have gone to the country with the offer of such a Bill as one of his bids at least; and so far as mere popularity is concerned, there is no doubt that it would have been a better hit than the abolition of the income tax. But popularity and power are two different things, as many candidates in the trade union interest discovered to their cost during the late election, when the ballot box gave a result utterly opposed to the uproarious shouting and cheering they had received. If Mr. Disraeli should put forward such a Bill we must give him credit for extreme courage, for it would be fought out to the bitter end with almost unexampled tenacity. There are those who think that the purchase of the railways by the State would be the best method of dealing with the question: whether that be so, or not, need not be discussed at present, for it is almost certain that no Government can at this day hope to carry such a measure. The utmost that can be attempted is the modification of existing regulations—in plain words, a moderate amount of interference. The lessons of the last six months have brought out into clear relief the principal points in railway management which require improvement. A correct appreciation of these points, always subdued and toned down by remembering the truism that all legislation is a compromise, will give a tolerably good conception of the outline of a possible Bill, only second in the complexity of the details with which it has to deal to Mr. Forster's Education Acts.

So vast a subject can only be attacked by a system of division into heads; of these the principal will be: Firstly, The Permanent Way; secondly, The Rolling Stock; thirdly, Passenger Traffic; fourthly, Goods Traffic; fifthly, Railway Servants, &c. &c. &c. These again are all so intimately connected that in speaking of one it is impossible to avoid allusions to the others. But, to begin with the permanent way. The original conception of a railway was a straight road of iron, without curve, and without rise or fall; and the first great railway engineers endeavoured, so far as circumstances would allow, to

carry these general principles into effect. They attempted to make lines direct from one large centre of industry to another, and only turned out of the straight course when it was rendered necessary in order to follow the second grand canon of railway construction—that is, to obtain a level as perfect as possible. So it was that the first trunk lines often ran for scores of miles through tracts of country without large towns or the means of supplying a commensurate amount of traffic: a mistake that afterwards led to the commission of another almost equally suicidal, that of constructing branch lines to single towns. Then, to get a level, vast sums of money were sunk in tunnelling, embanking, cuttings and viaducts, expenses which are now very much lowered by the discovery that trains can be run up and down inclines which in earlier days would have been deemed impracticable. The lines themselves were built to accommodate an amount of traffic which in those times seemed gigantic, but which now would be thought nothing. They were constructed, too, in expectation of only a moderate speed being attained, and the staff of servants was proportioned to these anticipations. Only in a few instances, it is to be deplored, have the altered conditions been met by judicious modifications. Many times the amount of traffic passes over the road, and yet it is neither widened nor are proper precautions taken. It is like using what was once a bridle track for the thoroughfare of a great city. So little did the first railway builders understand the task they had undertaken, that numbers of contractors mined themselves, and many great bridges fell in. But take a train on almost any railway whose terminus is in London, and go out ten or twenty miles, then alight, and examine the permanent way, and state if you can in what material points it differs from the road laid down twenty years before. The sleepers have been renewed, the rails themselves have been replaced some score of times, and two or three times by different patterns, but the line as a road remains unchanged. Even the fences at the sides are in the same unsatisfactory state. If it is a hedge, it is weak, low, utterly incapable of resisting cattle if they wished to get out. If it is post and rails, they too are low, and in places broken, yet the companies employ a staff to attend to these very fences, the cost of whose services in the course of years would almost suffice to build a wall along the whole route. Their [inability] to prevent accident was shown at Guildford. It is all very well for county court judges to decide, as they have done, that it is the duty of the owner or occupier of the land adjoining a line to prevent his cattle from getting out (even though the company may have a fence), and that he cannot claim compensation for their destruction if he does not himself keep up a fence. This may be sound law as regards the owner of the cattle; but the case changes entirely when sufferers from an accident caused by a stray bullock apply for compensation. The knowledge that a locomotive will run

up inclines and pass down declivities utterly un-thought of by the original engineers, has not altogether turned out for the safety of railway passengers. There can be little doubt that it has led to a certain amount of carelessness both in constructing new lines and in keeping up the old ones. Evidence given after the catastrophe at Wigan showed that the rails always deteriorated most at the uneven places, and, if we remember right, most upon the fall, those rails wearing out first on which the engines run down hill. It is of course utterly hopeless to think of railways being ever again made upon the principle of a perfect level; but this very fact should lend additional weight to the suggestion of Government inspectors of permanent way, acting not once or twice a year, but constantly employed.

The deterioration of the rails, the unevenness of the line, are one of the great causes of that incessant jolting and vibration which is equally destructive to the health of the passengers and the carriages. The incessant shaking and rattling keeps the passengers in a constant state of nervous watching, and when endured for a length of time must have its effect upon the spinal cord. In these days, when railway travelling is not a matter of pleasure or even of convenience, but to so many thousands of absolute necessity, when the practice of residing at a distance of ten, twenty, and even fifty miles from the 'office,' becomes continually more common, this matter of the smoothness of the permanent way is one of serious importance. It is not perhaps so fertile a cause of startling catastrophes as some other oversights; but it has its tangible dangers as well as its less perceptible effects.

An engine off the line is an occurrence so frequent now as scarcely to call forth a remark, but it is often undoubtedly owing to the uneven track. When this unevenness occurs at a sharp curve or near a series of points, the materials of a serious mishap are lying dormant. An engine off the line, common as it may be, is a most dangerous element. Imagine it happening at a point where a signal box could not be easily resorted to, and in the darkness of the night, with a passenger express coming up behind at forty miles an hour. Such an incident in broad daylight was very near causing a terrific accident to the up express on the Great Western only a short time since. This express, travelling at fifty-four and a half miles an hour, was brought up within three hundred yards of an engine which had left the rails, and which delayed the traffic two hours. In that delay again there is an indefinite possibility of accident.

In addition there is the chance of an axle breaking. Made of the best materials, and tested up to an immense weight, these axles may resist the incessant revolution, and its curious effects in weakening the adhesion of the metallic particles, for a considerable length of time; but when to this is

added the jar and shake caused by an uneven track, now down, now up, now one side, and now that, the axle must be splendid work indeed to escape fracture. It is often the case that the land upon which the sleepers are laid is not itself perfectly firm and compact, but gives to an appreciable extent, sinking down under the pressure of a train and rising after it has passed, so that the train is always travelling in a hollow. The rails as the train passes appear to bend. Much must depend upon the character of the soil and the length of time it has had to settle; something too may be laid to the charge of the weather; but still more to the workmen, who take up the sleepers to replace them with new, not ramming the soil down hard enough. A similar effect is produced in draining; when the drain is filled in, if not rammed down tight and the earth piled up to some slight extent above the level of the ground, it is sure in a few days to sink in. The workmen, however, must be excused because of the short time which is allowed to them in which to fulfil their tasks; and considering the immensity of the work, and the difficulties under which it is accomplished, it must in all fairness be admitted that it is wonderfully well done. But should any legislation take place upon the subject, the permanent way, as the very foundation of a railroad, must receive an attention which it has not hitherto had. It is impossible in the short space of an article like this to deal exhaustively with every detail; the broad features can alone be indicated. The most important necessity connected with the permanent way is obviously the widening of the track by the addition of one or two more lines. There is a very general feeling loudly and decidedly expressed that Parliament ought to compel railway companies upon whose lines there is an inordinate amount of traffic, to lay down a double track. They have land enough, it is argued, at least most of them have, without fresh purchases, and they have money enough. In a word, they owe it to the public. There is in this cry a great deal that is true, but at the same time it must not be forgotten that railway proprietors are but human as well as their passengers, and cannot perform impossibilities. In principle the public are quite right; in practice an amount of modification must necessarily take place. The expenditure which would be required to lay down double lines along the whole length of the great trunk roads would itself be so enormous as to utterly preclude the idea. It would absorb an amount of capital so large as to eat up all the dividends in interest on borrowed money, and this would be an evil scarcely less great than the present. A poor company means a weak company, unable to make proper provision for traffic, unable to meet its liabilities, unable to employ good servants. The insolvent state of such huge concerns as trunk railways is even a matter of serious consideration in a national point of view. The richer the railway companies, the better for the public. A great railway is in fact in some degree

a national bank, in which thousands have an interest besides the thousands who have invested in it. It would be the falsest policy to cripple the companies by compelling them to borrow the capital required to double their lines. They certainly could not construct such additional roads out of their reserves. What, then, seems reasonable to propose is, that through great stations, junctions, and generally at places where the traffic concentrates, the railways should be compulsorily widened. It came out in evidence not long since that the engine-driver of a goods train was eight hours before he could get his charge into a certain great station in the north. There clearly ought to be right through every such station a separate and distinct pair of rails never used for shunting, but always kept open for passenger traffic, and especially for the passage of express trains. It is not too much to require the companies to provide such accommodation as this.

The most prolific source of disaster is the shunting of goods and mineral trucks on the track along which in a few minutes a train must dash at the rate of fifty miles an hour. No system of signals, however complete, can be accepted as an absolute protection against danger. Events have proved that, let the signal arrangements be ever so complete and as carefully managed as possible, still accidents will happen; and a moment's thought will show the reason. These signals are not directed by an infallible power, they depend upon the foresight, the quick wit, the attention, and the judgment of many human beings. If all of these do their duty, and a very bewildering duty it sometimes is, even then a moment's hesitation, a slight error in judgment, may produce a fearful collision. But is it ever possible to get a hundred human organisations into such perfect accord as to all work exactly and harmoniously together? It is like trying to make as many watches tick precisely at the same moment; it cannot be done. Ninety-nine out of the hundred men may do at the critical moment exactly what they ought to do, but the last may make a mistake which will render the work of all the rest nugatory. Signalling ought to be carried to the utmost perfection, but let us be careful not to trust all to the semaphore, not to put a misplaced and blind confidence in the red and white arms and coloured lamps. Let there come a fog, for instance, and of what avail are they? But if through the crowded avenues of the centres of traffic there is a distinct and separate pair of rails always kept open, never used for shunting upon any pretext whatever, this with the aid of signals may be considered as the limit to which human foresight, trammelled as it always must be by circumstances, and by the question of cost, can attain.

The expenditure necessary to provide such short double lines would not be excessive. It would probably be almost covered in three or four years by the amount saved through the avoidance of accidents. A smash-up cannot be

estimated to cost on an average much less than £15,000; many estimate it as high as £25,000 and £30,000. First there is the wreck of an engine and tender—put that at £3,000; another engine and tender seriously damaged, and costing £1,000 to repair. Say ten carriages, more or less broken, at £500 each, that would be £5,000. Damage to the permanent way, £2,000; loss through hours of delay and interruption of traffic, £2,000; compensation to killed and wounded, say £5,000. This is a very low estimate, and does not include several items, such as labour, &c. Now the cost of making a line is often put at £10,000 per mile, but this includes expenditure which would not be incurred by a company making a new line parallel to their existing rail, and which would be so easy of access for materials.

Then the cost of a smash at £15,000 would about cover the cost of constructing two miles of railway, nearly if not quite enough to meet the demand for a separate and distinct pair of rails clear through over-burdened junctions and central stations. Surely legislative interference to this extent is justifiable. By this means also another prolific cause of mishap would be in great measure avoided, i.e. the risks attending points. Everyone must have noticed that on approaching a station the carriage rattles and shakes almost as if the wheels were passing over stones—this is caused by the points. Now to a train tearing along at the rate of fifty miles an hour, these jerks and jolts are serious matters; and if the points should not be precisely right the consequences may be appalling. The awful catastrophe at Wigan, still fresh in the memory of all, illustrates with ghastly distinctness the dangers attending an express train passing over a series of points. It does seem almost impossible to avoid points altogether, but the use of a distinct line of rails through stations and shunting places would reduce them to a minimum. There must at either end of these distinct lines be points for the purpose of running trains off what may be provisionally called the express rails. But such points would occur at two places only, and need be only of the simplest description. This reduction of the number of points to be crossed by trains travelling at great speed must in itself materially lessen the risk; and then there would be a gain also in the fewer spots at which watchfulness would be required.

In the method of working the permanent way experience does not seem to indicate any very decided superiority in any particular system. It is very rarely indeed that a train runs into a train in front of it travelling in the same direction, provided always that such trains are in their legitimate position. Even the delay of a slow train in front and the approach of a fast train behind has seldom of itself resulted in accident. There is firstly the safeguard of the signals warning the express that the slow train is only a short distance ahead; and secondly, a stern chase is proverbially a long one, and the driver of the

fast train can usually ascertain the presence of the other some time previously. One train only runs into another, as a rule, both travelling in the same direction, when one is engaged in shunting. Therefore it is doubtful if the compulsory adoption of the block system, except during the prevalence of fog, will be any real safeguard, and it may even prevent other precautions being taken by laying down too rigid a code of procedure. What is chiefly required is stringent shunting regulations. Shunting is the grand cause of accident. Strike at that, and you strike at the root of the whole matter. The companies themselves are perfectly well aware of the danger, but they find the greatest difficulty in dealing with it because it is upon shunting that so large a portion of their business depends. Every driver and guard is furnished with a set of rules, which he is required to sign, and adhere to, and any breach of which, if an accident occurs, lays the blame upon him and absolves the company. These rules are excellent, and so conceived as almost to preclude accident, but then the men find it impossible to follow them. They say that if they did strictly obey these instructions they should not get a train one hundred miles in a week. They must run some risk to get the cars along. Now this is putting a hard-working and, as a rule, careful staff of men in a false and unfair position. At the present moment the staff are responsible if a risky attempt at shunting results in disaster—they have disobeyed instructions. But the companies ought to be compelled so to arrange their traffic and their lines that their staff can honestly and literally carry out their orders. The whole subject of shunting is so complicated that only the labours of a commission taking sworn evidence can lead to a result sufficient to justify suggested legislation.

Level crossings are another risk belonging to this division of the subject, but they are already condemned, and therefore do not require discussion here.

The accidents arising out of the rolling stock itself are simple of description, but difficult to always account for, and consequently equally difficult to provide against. There is first that of the axle breaking. It is not at all an uncommon thing to see in the papers that a mile or so of rails was torn up, goods scattered in all directions, and trucks destroyed through the breaking of an axle of a goods train. This attracts little attention because it is rare for much loss of life to accompany it. But suppose such an event happening to a passenger carriage tearing along behind an express engine. The consequences that must ensue are beyond conception horrible. It is very true that such a thing appears to rarely occur to passenger cars, but it may do so at any moment, and how is it to be provided against? At the present moment great precautions are taken. The axles are severely tested before being used at all: they are tapped at regular distances, and it is understood

that after they have made a certain calculated number of revolutions they are removed, and new ones substituted. This is as it should be: but it would be a little better if it were made a matter not of interest, but of legal enactment. The practice of companies might be advantageously confirmed by the Legislature; for though they may generally carry it out, there is nothing to prevent them omitting these precautions.

Carriages leave the rails occasionally; this may generally be set down to the fault of the permanent way, or to the points. It has often been said that the plan upon which they are built is defective in one important respect—the axles have no play; they have no motion like the fore-wheels of a road waggon, and consequently in going round a curve there must be a certain amount of friction and grinding, which if the curve be sharp, and the speed high, may be an element of danger. It is argued that a small amount of motion should be permitted to the axles to enable them to travel round a curve without this grinding. On the face of it this is irrefutable; but the question arises whether in such cases stability would not be partially sacrificed. In passing a curve, too, the freedom of the axles to give a little would increase the risk from the already unpleasant tendency to heel over towards the outside; in other words, to fly off at a tangent. It cannot, therefore, be hastily decided whether or no this improvement would really be a gain. Another controversy has long raged between the systems of loose and taut couplings. Each system has its own peculiar advantages and disadvantages, and no single person is capable of giving a decided opinion. It may, however, be useful to bear in mind, that trucks which are loosely coupled are more frequently off the rails than passenger carriages, which are always more or less tightly coupled. On such matters as these no theorist ought to have his way: the preference should be finally awarded by a committee of practical men. The danger from fire, judging from the few occasions on which accidents of this kind have happened, appears to be comparatively small; but then it must not be forgotten that, whenever this class of mishap occurs, it is attended with peculiarly horrible traits. Fire can only break out in three ways: from the neglect to grease the axles, from carelessness (with matches for instance) on the part of passengers, or from the presence of combustibles (such as inflammable oils) in the parcels' vans. Precautions are always taken against the first and last of these risks. But still there is a risk, and a fearful one, when it is considered that the speed of a train causes a draught which would rapidly fan the smallest spark into overpowering flame. And while on this subject, too much stress cannot be laid on the dangerous practice in smoking carriages of dropping the lucifer or half burnt-out fusee down the hollow into which the window slides. It is not even uncommon to see lighted rolls of paper pushed down these places, which are simply made of dry wood. It is all

very well to say that a match soon goes out, and the paper will smother itself; and so it may ninety-nine times out a hundred, but the practice is nevertheless very objectionable, to say the least. After all, the only effective precaution that can be taken to insure the safety of passengers is easy and rapid communication with the guard. At present there is practically no communication. Of course, we all know that a string is affixed outside the doors of carriages on express trains, in a most awkward position, by pulling which a passenger may induce the guard to stop the train. But to do so places the whole of the responsibility of the stoppage upon the passenger; and unless it is justified by most imminent danger, he is liable to have to pay very heavy compensation for assumed loss to the company. We maintain that the responsibility of stopping a train ought never to rest solely upon the passenger. Besides the risk, or danger of injury to limb or life, from actual physical accident, there are many very cogent reasons why an easy and *intelligible* communication ought to be possible with the guard. A passenger, or passengers, may be shut up in a compartment with a lunatic or a dangerously drunken man. What on earth is there to prevent a fellow so minded from robbing or insulting unprotected ladies? It would be easy to spring from the carriage the moment it stopped, and mingle with the crowd on the platform before any alarm could be given to the station authorities. It is difficult to conceive why such robberies do not happen daily. On Continental railways the guard passes along the footboard outside the carriages while the train is in motion between stations, looks in at the window, examines the ticket, and gives whatever information is wished for. It is far from desirable that such a dangerous practice should be extended to our lines, but something must be done, especially on through trains running great distances. At present every person who gets into a railway carriage surrenders himself to the care of the company's servants, and to the chances of accident. He is boxed up within a small compartment, with no means of escape but that of jumping from the train, a remedy as bad as the risk of remaining; he is perfectly helpless, and can do nothing but resign himself to fate. At sea, even in shipwreck, a man may swim or cling to a spar, and there is usually some little previous warning; but here there is no resource—one is crushed or maimed without a voice in the matter. This is a point on which we have not the slightest hesitation in saying that the action of Parliament is immediately desirable.

Another obvious improvement, an improvement which would alone materially reduce the number of accidents, is the use of continuous brakes. The companies admit their utility, and yet neglect to apply the principle. It is almost incredible that such a glaring want should have been left so long unsupplied. What loss of life, what damage to limbs and constitutions, what enormous destruction of rolling stock, might have been avoided by the

adoption of these brakes! It is barely possible to believe that educated gentlemen, directors of rich and powerful companies, can require the pressure of Legislature before proceeding out of sheer self-interest to utilise this discovery.

There exists at this moment a degree of prejudice against high speed founded upon the supposition that great velocity increases the chances of accident. But if those accidents which have occurred to express trains are investigated, this prejudice will be found to be groundless. Velocity in itself is not a cause of mishap. Disasters to express trains have almost invariably happened through three distinct causes: the wrong position of the points, the neglect to shunt trains out of the way, and the want of proper means to bring the carriages to a standstill. It has been already suggested that a separate pair of express rails should be laid through every large station, thus escaping much of the risk from points and shunting. The employment of continuous brakes would remove the danger from the inability to stop quickly. With these natural precautions there is no real objection to the highest speed, or even to an increase in the speed now occasionally reached. Velocity does not raise the amount of vibration in a proportionate ratio. If the permanent way be in good condition, and the carriages sound and strong, a train will travel at fifty miles an hour with very little more shaking than another proceeding at twenty. The proposition to compulsorily reduce the speed of trains is one so utterly opposed to the spirit of the age, that it can never be seriously entertained. The ever increasing tendency to travel long distances upon what years ago would have been considered totally inadequate cause, the immense extension and ramification of business, and the formation of through routes hundreds of miles in length, all tend to raise the rate of speed. Time becomes day by day more and more the equivalent of money; even the massing of so many myriads of people in great cities, which creates imperative wants and demands that must be supplied, all lead in the same direction. Any return to the slow movement of a past time is impossible. What is necessary is a determined endeavour to remove those dangers which lurk upon the rail. There is *per se* no reason why speed should not be increased in proportion as improvements in the application of steam render it possible. With separate express rails through great stations, with strict shunting regulations, easy communication with the guard, and continuous brakes, there would be no more danger in travelling at seventy miles an hour than there is now in travelling fifty. We do not say that such a rate of speed is desirable in itself; only this, that if the development of trade and society should render it necessary, there is no actual obstacle in the way if common sense precautions are taken. On mathematical principles an accident on a railway is impossible. Here is a straight iron road practically

level, here are flanged wheels which must follow the rails. The motive power is subject to laws with which science has made us all familiar. There are no indefinite possibilities equivalent to the risk of a horse shying or bolting. The engine can neither shy nor bolt. Hence it is apparent that almost all railway accidents arise from preventable causes, and therefore the blame lies at the door of some one or other human being, and not on the shadowy shoulders of chance. Even under present conditions it is doubtful whether travelling by road is not more dangerous than by rail. If it were possible to collect statistics of all the accidents, collisions, overturnings, &c., of traps, carriages, vehicles of all descriptions throughout the country, the total would be appalling. Then compare with it the enormous numbers of persons conveyed by rail, and the contrast will be in favour of the iron road. It has become far too prevalent a habit to accept it as an established fact that a railway must of necessity be a dangerous method of travelling. This is a most erroneous notion. If only those precautions were adopted which the incessant accidents of the last eight months have so forcibly brought before the public, there would soon grow up a conviction that railway journeys are, humanly speaking, safe. That it would be to the interest of the companies to employ these precautions must be obvious. In the first place the drain upon their finances through claims for compensation, and for loss and damage sustained to rolling stock and permanent way, would be reduced to a minimum. Then, large numbers of nervous persons would gradually avail themselves of the rail, and travel three times where they now travel once. Finally, if the present state of things continues, the public may take steps which would considerably curtail the freedom of the companies.

There can be no doubt that one reason why the companies have not improved their systems is the mistakes they committed many years ago in the infancy of railway management, and from the effects of which many great lines have hardly yet recovered. This was the construction of innumerable branch lines to outlying towns, costing large sums in the first place, and annually absorbing a heavy share of the profit of the trunk road. It is a question whether even now it would not be advantageous to abandon some of these branches. The only real argument in their favour is the fact that in time some of these become the nuclei of other through routes, and thus end in developing traffic. It may be asked, are not the companies at this day committing a somewhat similar mistake by sinking vast sums in the construction of huge terminal stations in the metropolis with gigantic hotels, which scarcely any influx of visitors can make pay? If the capital thus sunk had been employed in improving the permanent way, so as to obviate many of the dangers of shunting, in the application of continuous brakes, and other precautions, it would surely have returned a much better percentage.

After all mechanical improvements are adopted, after all is done that science and experience can suggest, the safety of the passengers must depend in the greatest measure upon the servants of the companies. Before saying anything upon this subject, it is only just to acknowledge that, taken as a body, railway employ  s are a most reliable set of men. It is only wonderful that, under the difficulties they have to contend against, they succeed in fulfilling their duties so well. But they are notoriously over-worked and ill-paid; and, let them be never so anxious to do their duty, there must come a time when the strain of long hours and incessant attention causes an unconscious relaxation of watchfulness. It is then that points are left partly open, signals wrongly displayed, warnings neglected. If it is found that a common day labourer, upon whose mind his task makes no impression, cannot work for more than nine hours a day with health to himself and profit to his employer, how is it possible that men whose minds have to be perpetually on the alert, whose judgment and discretion are called into exercise every moment, can satisfactorily continue at their posts for twelve, fifteen, and even seventeen hours? The thing is glaringly absurd. If ever a Factory Act was needed to protect children from the ill consequences which too early employment would occasion to their health, surely legislative interference is pressingly required to guard the public against the fearful risks of this system of over-work and long hours. Scarcely an accident has happened in which it has not played a part. A more difficult matter to deal with is the danger and risk plate-layers and the servants of the companies themselves have to face. Even the practice of guards jumping into their compartments when the train is in motion is obviously one full of danger, and that of porters riding on the foot-steps of engines not less so. Yet it seems almost impossible to provide against these dangers. The men become, by constant familiarity, so hardened that they scorn the idea of risk, and any regulations, however good, are certain to become a dead letter. Still the principle of English law is, that a man cannot be allowed to injure himself, and an endeavour ought to be made to protect railway employ  s against their own fool-hardiness. The number of companies' servants killed and injured in a year is something awful, and it must be admitted that it is too often their own fault. There are certain matters, however, in which the companies might obviate a considerable amount of danger. The fire-boxes, for instance, of all engines should be so constructed as to pass over a man lying on the permanent way without touching. How many scores of fatal accidents such a simple regulation as that would have prevented!

The tendency of the times is the division of labour, and up to a certain point there are great advantages attending the system. Under any other, it would be impossible to carry on the enormous concerns which now flourish.

But when this subdivision of labour passes a certain point, it becomes in itself a source of danger. The case cannot be better illustrated than by the example of either of those magnificent steamers which so recently went down with crowds of passengers. Every fitting of those vessels was of the best and most approved description; they were provided with every scientific instrument and every precaution against accident. The system of discipline, theoretically at least, was perfect, yet they came into collision, and the result was indescribably dreadful. The captain cannot for ever remain upon the bridge, yet the moment his watchfulness is relaxed the ship is in danger. No one feels any responsibility for the whole vessel but him. Each says, 'My duty goes so far, and my responsibility an equal distance only,' and so the responsibility is passed on from one to the other, and centres nowhere. It is the old, old story of Ulysses and his men: the moment his eyes closed in slumber, the painful vigil of so many nights was rendered useless. There seems no safety unless the captain is always awake, ever ready to apply decided measures, which no one else can have the power to order. It is so, too, in a still greater degree with a railway. The station-masters cannot be at their posts for ever, neither can the general manager always remain in his office. But, obviously, complete reliance cannot be placed upon the system of division of labour. For safety it requires an eye that shall never be closed, a mind capable of appreciating any emergency, a strong will to at once apply the remedy. At the present moment, responsibility is divided amongst an immense number of subordinates, none of them responsible for the whole. There is no Ulysses, or, if there is, he sleeps too often. It is a matter of serious consideration, not only for railways but for other large businesses, how to supply this deficiency.

Besides the above, there are other questions which, though not so prominent, must at some time or other be discussed and settled. The whole system of compensation for death or injury is on a most unsatisfactory basis, and requires careful revision. The primary canon of such a revision, and which ought never to be lost sight of, is, that when a person has paid his money and received his ticket, the moment he sets foot in a railway carriage the owners of that carriage are responsible for his safety, always, of course, provided that he does not himself wantonly endanger it. But the companies frequently refuse compensation on the ground that the accident cannot be proved to be due to the negligence of their servants. Now, we pointed out just now that, on mathematical principles, an accident cannot happen to a train: it must owe its origin to some fault of the rail, the rolling stock, or the management, and for the condition of all these the company is assuredly liable. More than this, it would be a wholesome canon of common law to

assume that railway companies, when they contract to convey a person a certain distance, are responsible for his safety.

It has, in fact, been too long a practice, both in law and in argument, to treat the companies as common carriers. Whatever they may have been in the first place, they are certainly so no longer. They are endowed with certain powers by the Act under which they are constituted, and they occupy a most important position towards the public. While, therefore, that public is willing that they should enjoy peculiar privileges—such as the power to compulsorily purchase land—it, on the other hand, naturally demands that they shall sustain an equivalent amount of responsibility. The principle of common law, as clearly enunciated by the Liquor Acts, is, that a man shall not be allowed to injure himself; and, farther, that anyone permitting or aiding and abetting him in the self-injury of getting intoxicated, shall be liable to punishment. The railways are at least as open to the public as the taverns and hotels. The landlord of an hotel is liable to a penalty for permitting drunkenness in his establishment. This principle cannot, of course, be carried to its extreme logical conclusions when applied to railways. There must be certain modifications to meet the altered conditions of the case.

Another matter which will require careful consideration is the ever increasing tendency to delay in the running of the trains. They are almost invariably late. This is a serious interruption to the transaction of business, and a common source of accident. It has become a sort of recognised fact that a train is sure to be behind time; hence shunting is allowed to go on at the very moment when the express is due, and should that express be so unfortunate as to be punctual mishap is the consequence. The cause of this delay is principally the immense increase of traffic and the large number of additional goods trains. Recent decisions in the courts of law have shown that a person can recover damages for loss sustained through delay; but this check is in itself inadequate, and others more general in their application should be devised. It is easy to say, legislate on the subject. But no thinking man wishes a legitimate trade to be interfered with by Parliament more than is absolutely necessary. The delay of goods trains is perhaps even a more dangerous matter than of passenger cars. It is a question if it would not conduce to the safety of a line if all goods trains were compelled to start to time in the same way as passenger trains. It is already the practice, on some lines at least, to hang up a list of the trains that will pass during the day, goods trains included, with their times; but in practice this is not adhered to, and there are in addition a number of erratic and unexpected trains, which are the cause of much confusion. Excursion trains, again, have been a fruitful source of disaster, chiefly from the delay they cause to the regular traffic. It

was said last autumn that certain lines had resolved to discontinue running excursions, and would run cheap trains at the ordinary hours in the time table instead. This would probably be a great improvement.

No Railway-Accidents Bill, however cleverly designed, could possibly pass through the House without material alteration. In both Houses it is calculated there are one hundred and seventy railway directors, who represent an interest and power second to that of no other body in the kingdom. All these gentlemen would naturally strongly oppose any interference with the freedom of their administration. It is well that it should be so. Popular feeling once aroused on the subject will be very strong, and if unchecked will be in danger of forgetting the difficulties which beset the companies, and might rush into vexatious legislation. The pressure of public opinion without, against the interest and power of these gentlemen within, may lead to a reasonable and satisfactory compromise, rendering railway travelling as safe as is practically possible.

It may be useful to append a brief summary of those points which will require most serious consideration, and with which any Bill may be expected to deal.

Permanent Way: (1) The appointment of Government inspectors constantly employed to see that the permanent way is kept in good condition. (2) The erection of better fencing. (3) A certain, length of separate and distinct lines through junctions, and at important stations, never used for shunting purposes.

Rolling Stock: (1) The use of continuous brakes. (2) Easy and intelligible communication with the guard. (3) A fixed method of building passenger carriages and of coupling the same, founded upon evidence taken by commission. (4) Legal confirmation of the existing excellent regulations for testing axles.

Method of Management: (1) Strict shunting regulations. (2) Punctuality of both passenger and goods trains, and discontinuance or greater precautions in the running of excursions.

Railway Employés: (1) Diminution in the number of hours each servant is employed. (2) Stricter regulations to insure the safety of railway servants themselves. (3) A better system of responsibility on the part of higher officials.

Compensation: The laying down of a clear and decided doctrine of compensation.

Sworn evidence from experienced men is required with reference to the adoption or rejection of the block system and as to the safest way of running trains. Also as to the conditions under which extreme high speed may be attained with safety.

The Shipton Accident

Richard Jefferies

First published in *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1875, p.234-242 and signed by Richard Jefferies.¹ The Shipton-on-Cherwell train crash was a major disaster which occurred on the Great Western Railway. It involved the derailment of a long passenger train at Shipton, Oxfordshire on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1874, and was one of the worst ever disasters on GWR. There were 34 deaths and 69 seriously injured in the carriages which fell from the bridge over the canal. The engravings were published in *The Illustrated London News* on 2 January 1875.

The most extraordinary phenomenon attending the gigantic railway and other accidents of the day is the increasing tendency to ascribe them to causes out of the control of human beings. At the very time when the minute investigations of a coroner's jury, and the still more searching because scientific inquiries of the agents of the Board of Trade, point most convincingly to an entirely preventable origin, the tone of comment, not only in the papers, but in society generally, leans towards adopting a fatalistic creed. After all said and done, after all care has been taken, there must still remain a percentage of disaster. Level the permanent way till it runs as smooth as a billiard-table; test your axles up to scores of tons; make your tires of the finest metal; use vacuum brakes; the block system; employ the best and most trustworthy servants; and still casualties will occur. It is a part of the economy of human life, another illustration of the imperfection of

¹ The following letter accompanied the article and was sent to William Allingham, editor of *Fraser's Magazine*:

Coate, Swindon, Wilts,
January 4th, 1875.

Dear Sir, — I enclose an article upon the railway disaster at Shipton. In May last year a paper of mine suggesting an outline of a railway accident bill, was inserted in your journal. Three of the points then suggested as worthy of Parliamentary interference, were accessory to the late horrible slaughter. What I cannot understand is the tendency that now exists to ascribe these accidents to the operation of some mysterious law which demands its percentage of victims. I reside near the largest factory for the manufacture of railway material, engines, carriages, and rails &c. perhaps in the kingdom, and have had ample opportunities of seeing the entire process, and I cannot see any difficulty in so increasing the strength of tires and axles that breakage should be out of the question.

At present the snapping of an axle seems a regular occurrence. I have often thought that a description of this vast workshop would be interesting.

— I am, faithfully yours, Richard Jefferies.

man's nature. His foresight is not sufficient, his knowledge not ample enough.



‘The Terrible Railway Accident: Scene of the accident at Shipton-on-Cherwell.’

Engraving from *The Illustrated London News*, 2 January 1875, p.17.

If accidents arose from some mysterious and invisible agency, if trains ran off the line without the intermediate assistance of broken tires and weak couplings, and all the ingenuity of the intellect could discover no flaw in the machinery, there might then be some ground for a feeling so near akin to superstition. But with the evident and proclaimed causes staring everyone in the face, it is incredible how any civilised and educated person can stultify himself by acquiescing in such a theory. It is not only incredible, it is absolutely a dereliction of the duty every man owes to his fellow-creatures; for by accepting the present state of things as inevitable, we contribute to the production of future evils.

Look at the matter honestly and straightforwardly. The railway is not the sea. The sea was not made by human hands, and cannot be controlled by mortal agency. The storms arise, and sweep whither they will. Yet even here, much has been done by study and perseverance to escape the resistless might of the tempest. Science teaches the navigator how to steam out of the path of the cyclone, provides him with compasses, charts, other means of ascertaining his position; a thousand and one resources. In this way innumerable voyages are made in safety. But the railway is purely an invention of man; and its construction down to the smallest part is entirely his own. The very earth is levelled and tunnelled for its course. He makes the

rails, the engines, the carriages. Practically it may be said to obey his laws. In other words, man is the master of the railway, though not of the sea. He cannot control the ocean, but he can alter the iron way as suits best with his accumulated experiences. Therefore it is worse than folly, it is a species of crime, to assert for one moment that a percentage of accidents is inevitable.

The truth is that year by year has gone on adding to the list of casualties, and at the same time increasing their severity, till at last society grows accustomed and indifferent. The death of four or five, some years ago, would have caused a thrill of horror; now, a roll of killed and wounded is laid on our breakfast-tables equal to that of a Carlist battle. We exclaim, 'Ah! how dreadful!' sigh, turn the page, and travel up to town by the next train. Perhaps the very necessity of railway travelling, the knowledge that it is a thing that must be endured, makes many thoughtless and indifferent.

This tendency should be fought against and overcome. The subject should be dealt with by the rules of hard logic, and all dreaming cast to the winds. Here is the whole matter in a nut-shell; this is the core of it. If the cause of a railway accident is discoverable, then that accident was preventable. This must be adopted as our first canon, the dogma upon which the whole superstructure must rest. For there are no causes on the railway which are out of the control of man.

Let us consider this terrible slaughter at Shipton. There appear here to have been at least four conjoint accessory causes. The first of these we may assume to have been the breaking of the tire. The second was the fact of the carriage having only four wheels, so that as soon as one was gone, it limped as it were. The third was the want of perfect communication with the guard and engine-driver; the fourth, insufficiency of brake-power.

There does not appear to have been any trustworthy evidence that a carriage out of repair was placed in the rear of two powerful engines, and in front of a very heavy train. The assertion rested, in the first place, upon the authority of an uneducated man; and even supposing him to have been thoroughly acquainted with the subject, no one could tell whether a carriage was or was not in good condition without minute examination. Many of us have often travelled in carriages that to our humble apprehension seemed unsafe, and totally unfit for a speed of forty miles an hour; carriages whose wooden partitions trembled and shook, and which bore every apparent mark of old age. But even in such cases, if the wheels and body of the carriage were good, the general look of it mattered little so far as safety was concerned. Still it would be interesting to learn how often the companies find it worth their while to place new wheels under ancient carriages. A carriage may be truly called ancient which has been in use twenty years, and that there are such carriages still running has been more than once stated in the papers.

Per se it is of course absurd to suppose that a great company would authorise the placing of a defective carriage in such a position; and it is next to impossible to believe that old and experienced officials as those concerned appear to be could have committed such a criminal oversight. On the whole, that allegation may be passed upon one side.

But the fact is indisputable that a four-wheeled carriage was placed in the immediate rear of the engine B; a position in which, if anything happened to it, it would have to sustain the entire weight and impetus of the heavy train behind it. It is characteristic of this and numerous other accidents that the greatest damage is done, not by the engine, nor by a carriage getting off the line, but by the enormous force exerted by the rearmost carriages, which press forwards and throw themselves, one after another, upon the crippled one. This was prominently the case at Shipton, where there is every reason to believe that the originally injured carriage was bodily traversed by all the remainder of the train. Even had the carriage been formed of the most powerful materials, it could not possibly have withstood this. Here then we have at once a suggestion forced upon us—that there should be strong brake-power in the rear of the train. At this moment, as a rule, there is nothing but the ordinary hand-brake in the guard's van, which bears about as much proportion to the mass whose motion is to be overcome as a pane of glass to a bullet. The brake-power in the front of the train, instead of preventing, in all probability assisted in increasing, the destruction. This sounds paradoxical, but it is easily explained. If a person is driving a gig, and the horse suddenly pauses, he is thrown violently forwards. Railway passengers have often felt a similar jerk. So when this train was rushing along at forty miles an hour, and the engine-drivers, finding that something was wrong with the carriage close to them, put on their brakes and shut off steam, the result was that the engines felt the cessation of motive power, and the drag of the brake some few seconds before the carriage, which was in consequence forced forwards by the train behind it against what, for the purpose of illustration, may be called a stationary obstacle. It may thus possibly happen that powerful brake-power in the front of a train may contribute to the destruction it was intended to avert. But, on the other hand, supposing extremely strong brake-power existed in the guard's van at the rear of the train, and that he applied this the moment he heard the engine whistle, then, if his brake was confined to his own van only, unless the couplings were very strong they would give way and leave him alone upon the track. What seems required is a brake-power acting from the rear, and acting simultaneously on the wheels of all the carriages. Caution must be exercised in the application of brakes, because it may so happen that, under peculiar circumstances, a train may be thus torn into several detached

pieces. In the present instance there was practically no sufficient brake-power. It has been remarked that even if the train had been fitted with the continuous brake, it would have been of no avail, because the couplings broke. But the couplings did not break at first. The engine-driver's account is that, noticing the gong-string in motion, he glanced back, and seeing snow and dirt flying at the side of the first carriage, shut off steam and applied the brake. The couplings were not then broken, nor did they break, as other evidence proves, for two hundred yards at least from where the tire flew off. The argument is, however, so far good that, although the couplings did not yield in this particular instance for some time, in another accident they may yield at once, and the brake be thus rendered powerless. This tends in favour of increased brake-power at the rear of the train, and leads up to a great difficulty, which is, how to obtain sufficient force in the guard's van, independent of the engine. A special engine stationed here for the express purpose of generating force, to be at the disposal of the guard, is impracticable because too expensive. Possibly a reservoir of compressed air might answer to some extent. The question is one for a practical engineer, and one which a competent man, with the monetary resources of a great company at his back, might be expected to solve.

The tire of which so much has been said, and which was the primary cause of the accident, was, in point of fact, the flange; that portion of the outer circumference which prevents the wheel from running off the line. Here we come at once into direct conflict with the fatalists. They say that a tire, and a wheel generally, is made of metal. Metal is liable to wear, and to rust, and grows weaker in several ways not yet quite understood. Constant friction and revolution will, it is said, completely alter the disposition or 'set' of the particles in the fibre of iron. If the tire is made of steel, it will snap, or fly. If it is iron, it will wear. In either case sharp and continuous frosts render metal more liable to fracture. A sudden bump through some unevenness of the line may snap in frosty weather what might have endured for several years without that extra strain. The reply is easy and decisive. If the metal in present use snaps or flies, then make it stronger, or adopt some compound that does not. Look at the enormous strain—sharp and not gradual—upon a gun-barrel. Yet numerous experiments and the teachings of experience have led to the use of a compound which will bear it without a flaw for years; and even in the end if a gun does burst, it is generally owing to some obvious oversight, as double-charging. Look at the bearings, as they are called, of certain machinery, upon which axles revolve at the rate of several thousand revolutions per minute, compared to which railway speed is but crawling; yet they endure. It is not necessary that either of these precise compound metals should be employed in the construction of railway wheels, or tires, or axles.

But the principle is the point. If it is found that the ordinary steel or iron tire is liable to snap or fly, instead of quietly sitting down with the reflection that steel will snap, the way is to set to work and discover something that will not snap, and then at once to introduce the use of that material. It may be that even a small increase in the thickness of the tire employed, a slight difference in the mode of manufacture or forging of the metal, or, still more, in the way in which the tire is fastened on, may obviate all risk.

Any observant man may see that great manufacturers, like small craftsmen, get into a groove, and seem unable to stir out of it. They repeat one single pattern through endless numbers; they perpetuate peculiar methods of construction as if there was something talismanic about it. Examine an ordinary waggon on the road (not the rail, but the highway), and in a few minutes you will find that its construction is purely arbitrary, and has perhaps been copied from a model made a century ago. There are scores of pieces of wood used which have no real use at all, except to swell the cost of construction. It is like the Darwinian theory of the persistence of rudimentary organs long after their original use has been forgotten. It is very much the same with our great manufacturers. A high authority pointed out some years ago that the method of fastening tires on railway wheels then pursued was extremely defective, and suggested a simple improvement. Not the slightest notice was taken; and down to this very day, down to this awful and unprecedented accident, the very same method was followed, till at last the event has justified the prophet. This single fact in itself is sufficient to overthrow a host of fatalistic arguments. Still it may be urged that even if wheels and tires are strengthened, there is a limit to all things. Is there a limit to the construction of cannon? Are we not to have an 81 ton gun? It is sheer nonsense to urge that there is any practical limit to the construction of railway material. It can be made of any required strength.

The frosty weather, however, cannot be foreseen. It has yet to be asserted that all metals are weakened so much by frost as iron and steel. As only an axle and tire here and there yield to the frost, and as the great majority of axles and tires stand it without injury, we may safely conclude that there was something defective in the construction or condition of those axles and tires which did give through the frost. The frost simply found out the weak spot which ought to have been discovered previously.

There is no reason why proper instruments should not at any time reveal the existence of a flaw. At present the instrument relied upon is the human ear, than which nothing can be more delicate. But it is not every human ear that is capable of distinguishing between variations of tone when a wheel is tapped, especially in the noise of a railway junction. Are all the wheel-tappers selected with reference to their especial capability of distinguishing

tones? What guarantee is there that this same cold and frosty weather may not give the wheel-tapper a cold, and every one knows that the most usual effect of a cold is to dull the hearing. There is no reason why a proper and scientifically constructed instrument should not be applied to every wheel as it was tapped: an instrument that would at once show by its dial-face in what condition the metal was, and would automatically register that condition for future reference if needed. The wheel-tapper is a check upon the wheel, but we have no check upon the wheel-tapper.

While these and endless other suggestions are waiting ready to be tried, it is, we repeat, little less than a crime to sit down in the belief that a percentage of accident must happen.

When the portion of tire or flange flew off, the effect on the wheel with reference to the rail would be that at a certain moment in the course of the revolution there would be nothing to prevent the wheel from leaving the rail. At the other part of the revolution the wheel would be safe; but at the exact moment when the broken part came round there would be no projecting rim to prevent it slipping off the rail. Probably with the flange there also flew off a portion of the tire-proper, or of that portion of the wheel which actually bears the super-incumbent weight. Each time that the broken part came round it would cause a severe bump; and each of these bumps would increase the probability of the wheel leaving the line. It would have the effect of jarring the wheel till, perhaps, a second piece of tire would fly; and then the carriage would begin to limp, like a dog with a wounded paw, producing the most terrible jolts, and a kind of see-saw motion, now up and now down, enough to start the strongest framework. So soon as one wheel was gone or injured, there would be nothing to support that corner of the carriage or to keep it off the ground. But had it been a six-wheel carriage instead of a four-wheel, it is obvious that the carriage would not limp—the centre of gravity would remain the same or nearly so; and though there might be occasional jolts, there would be a strong presumption in favour of escape from serious injury. This is so plain and self-evident, and has been so frequently corroborated by actual facts, that the conclusion cannot be avoided. Four-wheeled carriages ought not to run, especially in front.

One very remarkable illustration of this portion of the subject has been given by a gentleman who chanced to be travelling on an American line when one of the wheels of the carriage broke clean in half. It was a six-wheeled car, and it stuck to the metals though causing a great deal of shaking. Presently the train was stopped, and the broken wheel chained up, so that the unbroken half slid upon the rail, and in this position it fulfilled its journey.

Whatever may be said to the contrary, it is well known that a large number of four-wheeled carriages are still in use; though the companies are gradually superseding them by six-wheeled. The misfortune is that so many accidents happen while these defective arrangements are being superseded. Anything more directly preventable than an accident arising because a carriage has four wheels instead of six cannot be imagined. In addition to these four-wheeled carriages which are still in use, there are large numbers of horse-trucks, cattle-vans, meat-vans, &c, which are often attached to passenger trains, and which have only four wheels. These, it is true, are usually attached at the rear, but not invariably so, and may at any time cause a disaster. Horse-owners frequently complain that the horse-boxes are in a most wretched condition, and ready to come to pieces with a kick. This may apply only to the wood work; but when the wood-work is so obviously bad, no one feels confident about the iron-work beneath.

It is almost a matter of surprise that ere now the breaking of an axle has not led to equally serious mischief as this breaking of a tire. Nothing is more common than to hear of the axle of a coal or goods truck breaking, and after tearing up the permanent way for several hundred yards and strewing the place with coal, hurling the trucks into a monstrous heap. But hitherto passenger trains seem to have escaped this risk tolerably well; at least no very fearful calamity has ensued from it. Coal-trucks, it may be observed in passing, are generally on four wheels. May it be that the increased proportionate weight on each wheel and axle has something to do with the comparative danger of four-wheeled cars? In America, it appears, they run eight-wheeled cars. The carriage which caused the accident at Shipton was not only a four-wheeled one, but low-roofed and old-fashioned in construction; all which contributed in a minor degree to its destruction.

But the most striking point of all that comes out is the fact, that in all human probability most, if not all, of these lives might have been saved had there been easy and effective communication with the guard or engine-driver. One of the passengers in the four-wheeled carriage, alarmed by the bumping and jolting, put his head out and pulled the communicating cord. But it is alleged that he could not succeed in arresting the attention of the driver until another passenger leaning out of the window hallooed and waved his hat. On the other hand, it is stated that the engine-driver's attention was attracted by the moving of the gong-string; and that he then looked back along the train and saw dirt and snow flying up. According to this view of the occurrence, the cord did act, but very imperfectly. The driver knew nothing of what was the matter till some time after the mischief had commenced. And had the carriage, instead of being close to the engine, been some distance in the rear, he could not have seen dirt and snow flying, and

might have remained some time in doubt as to whether there really was anything wrong or not. It does not seem improbable that the movement of the gong-string which the driver observed, may have been caused by the jolting and limping motion of the injured carriage, quite as much as by the passenger pulling it. In either case, or even supposing the cord to have acted properly, it was at the best a most imperfect signal, and one which the driver would hesitate to obey instantaneously and implicitly. That a driver would hesitate to pull up his train on the mere motion of the gong-cord was shown on this occasion, for he did not shut off steam until he had glanced down the side of the train. The utter inability of a cord of this description to convey anything more than a rudimentary sense of danger is at once apparent. It can give no information whatever; it only sounds an alarm, and until the driver sees some ground for that alarm he hesitates to pull up. Like scores of other accidents before it, this great catastrophe points to the absolute and imperative necessity which exists for some better method of communication between the passengers and those in charge of the train. In an age so fertile for its application of electricity to signalling, there does not seem to be any radical cause why this agent should not be employed. The code of signals need be but the fewest and most simple. One stroke on the gong to signify 'alarm.' This would draw the driver's attention to the condition of the train. Two strokes might signify 'the wheel,' three 'the axle,' four 'off the rail,' and so on; printed directions being placed in every carriage close to a knob like those for electric bells in houses.

The great difficulty seems to be to get over the almost insuperable but baseless objection which the authorities seem to feel against the passengers communicating with the officials. There seems to be no other difficulty whatever except this railway tradition: that the moment a person steps inside a carriage he places himself entirely in the hands of the company's servants, and must on no account be even allowed to inform them that destruction is close at hand. Of course if carriages were so constructed that the passengers might pass from one to the other, or the guard might do so, while the train was in motion, there would be no necessity for a comparatively complicated system of communication. But so simple a method of obviating accident, and preventing possible crime, is too much to be expected of our rigidly conservative companies; who, because they originally built their carriages without means of inter-communication, feel it their duty to continue to do so. Even in such a case, however, there should still be a means by which the guard from the rear of the train should be able to instantly communicate with the driver; and that in imperative tones, ordering him to stop, or slow, or whatever was desired.

Having now arrived at the point in the history of the accident where the driver does at last perceive a signal, the discussion returns to the question of additional brake-power. Four causes are indisputably admitted to have been accessory to the disaster, and each one of these was of a character strictly within the category of preventable causes. How extremely blind then to say that a percentage of accidents is inevitable! The only justification for this fatalistic feeling is the apparent ponderous immobility of the companies, rolling on their way regardless of human suffering, and even of the cost to their own exchequers.

On this occasion there was no neglect of the officials. There was no signal wrong; no points half open; no coal train shunting. Although the placing of a four-wheel carriage in such a position was greatly to be condemned, it was not an act that in itself was bound to bring about a catastrophe. The carriage might have gone the whole journey safely enough in the same way as it had completed endless journeys previously. The official who attached it to the train did not shut his eyes to a glaring red signal lamp, or neglect to reverse an engine. It can hardly be called a personal fault. It was the fault of the system. There ought not to have been a four-wheel carriage there to attach. No such carriages ought to have been on the railway that day, nor for years before. But the carriage was there; there was overcrowding, and haste, and lost time; and the carriage was used. Unless the carriage was a condemned one, it was not a personal fault; but it was the system which permitted the existence of such cars that was to blame.

In this one great and awful instance, in prominent contrast to so many other examples, the railway officials personally seem to have been blameless. All the records of that *dies iræ* go to prove that extra care had been taken with this very train. It started with the proper or usual complement of guards, and in addition an inspector. It started, it is true, two minutes late; but that is a fault which is comparatively venial considering the season of the year, and the extreme difficulty there always is at a place where a train is made up of getting several hundreds of persons properly seated at a certain fixed moment. When it was found that the train was losing time owing to the slippery state of the rails, another engine was attached. The moment the engine-driver saw the gong-string move he did his duty. Steam was shut off, and the gear reversed. Certain allegations were made that the assistance rendered after the accident was slow and ineffectual. But it must be remembered that to persons suffering torture from broken limbs a moment is a very long time, and the quickest human aid seems diabolically slow. There is no personal blame to any official.

This fact brings out this accident into striking relief. It proves conclusively that the best and most trustworthy servants cannot protect the public from

the evils of weak materials and a radically bad system. The wheel must have been weak, or it would not have broken. The system was bad, or else a four-wheel carriage would not have been in existence, and could not have been attached.

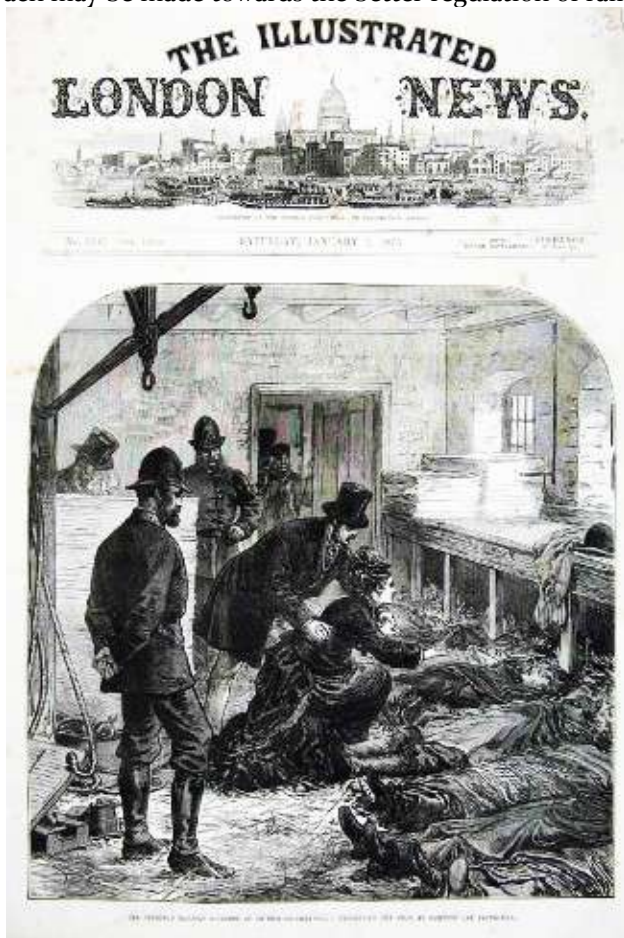
Let the blame then fall where it is due. It is due to the obstinate, the incredible opposition of the companies to all innovation. The cuckoo cry of the expense attending improvements is a sheer fallacy. The cost of these accidents alone would repay many improvements. The impetus that would be given to railway travelling could a sense of comparative security be induced would be a source of large profits. But there is expenditure of immense sums upon totally inadequate objects; in subsidies to branch lines, in the erection of gigantic hotels, in opposition to other lines; thus absorbing moneys which the public has a right to consider should be spent in adding to the security of travelling. One line (the Midland) has done something of late in this direction, but instead of imitators it meets with opposition.

Here is an accident which lays over thirty persons in their graves, and prostrates seventy more in untold agonies upon beds of sickness, spreading horror and misery over the land at Christmas time. Who can measure the anxiety which the report of this catastrophe occasioned in the minds of those who knew that their dear ones were at that time on the iron road, and yet who could obtain no authentic news either of their safety or destruction? If the Genius of Evil had selected a time more calculated than any other to strike desolation into the hearts of men, he could not have chosen a more fitting season for that demoniacal purpose. Yet we are told that a certain percentage of accidents is inevitable. To adopt such a conclusion is to yield up our judgment and our common sense, and to aid the destructive forces of matter as with the power of a fatalistic superstition which numbs human effort.

If ever there was an accident of a more distinctly preventable character than another, it was the accident at Shipton on that memorable Christmas Eve. Each and every one of the accessory causes was distinctly, and is still, within the control of man. The same causes exist at this moment, and may at any time lead to a similar casualty, notwithstanding the most careful selection of trustworthy men.

What is the conclusion from all these considerations? It is that it is the duty of every person to do whatever lies in his power to arouse public opinion so that its voice may become irresistible. Only through the force of public opinion can we expect the suggestions of reason to be attended to. We have waited in vain for the shrewd and clever men known to be at the head of railway concerns to make these obvious improvements. It now rests with the public to force them on to action. That can only be accomplished by

the assistance of Parliament. In an article which had the honour to appear in this Magazine in May of last year, it was pointed out that the time had arrived when legislative interference of a moderate and rational character was necessary. A short summary was then given of the more leading points in a possible bill, and which included the use of continuous brakes, easy and intelligible communication with the guard, and the testing of axles, of course including wheels. As Parliament soon meets, and the memory of the Shipton slaughter will be still fresh in the minds of the public, it may be that at last some approach may be made towards the better regulation of railroads.



‘The Terrible Railway Accident at Shipton-on-Cherwell, identifying the Dead at Hampton Gay Paper-Mill.’
The Illustrated London News, 2 January 1875.

‘The Flying Dutchman’: A Legend of the Great Western Railway

Richard Jefferies

“‘The Flying Dutchman’: A Legend of the Great Western Railway’, a short story in manuscript, handwritten by Richard Jefferies (unsigned), in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, the archives of Brigham Young University (31pp.) Circa 1875. Thanks to Brigham Young University for permission to reproduce the text.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUSCRIPT

Rebecca Welshman

‘The Flying Dutchman’, noted by George Miller and Hugoe Matthews in *A Bibliographical Study* under ‘Manuscript Material: Private Collections or Location Unknown’ (D47), was originally listed in a 1970 bookseller catalogue. A few years ago, I found the location of the actual manuscript in an online catalogue of the rare book and manuscript library of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

Set on an express train in the 1840s, and told retrospectively from the 1870s, the tale was likely written as a submission for one of the magazines Jefferies was targeting when trying to gain the attention of publishers in London. Aspects of the story are typical of the contributions published in popular periodicals of the time, such as the *World*, in which short fiction—designed to appeal to affluent readers with more than one home—often involved rail travel to and from London to countryside dwellings. However, certain elements which characterise Jefferies’ longer fiction are present, resulting in a narrative that has potential, yet remains disappointingly unfinished. The quality of the characterisation and dialogue are secondary to the message of the story, and the last line ‘At last he too died’ seems as if there were further concluding sentences to be written. The presence of surplus words in the narrative, and the first name ‘George’ for the barrister’s friend as well as the station master also suggest that this was a draft version that had not been thoroughly edited.

The tale begins in the Middle Temple, one of the four Inns of Court, in a plush interior indicated by the presence of the ‘red curtain’ and ‘fauteuil’, and proceeds to tell the story of the protagonist’s aunt Margaret who became trapped in a carriage on a train journey between Bristol and London. The

moral of the tale is clearly designed to warn that the speed of developing rail industry had not been matched by the development of adequate safety measures to protect passengers. It certainly echoes the concerns he raised in *Fraser's Magazine* on railway accidents and the measures he proposed to prevent them.

In 'A Railway-Accidents Bill' (*Fraser's*, May 1874) Jefferies warned of the 'fearful' risk of fire 'when it is considered that the speed of a train causes a draught which would rapidly fan the smallest spark into overpowering flame' and mentions the danger of dropping lit cigarettes 'down the hollow into which the window slides... which are simply made of dry wood'. 'Draught' fanning the flames is mentioned five times in 'The Flying Dutchman', and Mark believes he may have been responsible for the fire 'by dropping the match, or ash from his cigar.' In 'A Railway-Accidents Bill' Jefferies concludes that 'the only effective precaution that can be taken to ensure the safety of passengers is easy and rapid communication with the guard' and that the string outside carriage doors which could be pulled to alert the guard was dangerously inadequate. As he observes in 'The Shipton Accident' (February 1875), his prediction was correct, and in the case of dire emergency this string proved inadequate and cost lives. Indeed, he lists 'the want of perfect communication with the guard and engine-driver' as one of the main causes of the accident: 'the most striking point of all that comes out is the fact, that in all human probability most, if not all, of these lives might have been saved had there been easy and effective communication with the guard or engine-driver.' This point is emphasised in 'The Flying Dutchman' by the absence of a communication cord, leaving the passengers with no means to alert the guard or engine-driver, and 'out of the reach of human help'. The breakdown of communication that Jefferies stresses as a cause of the Shipton accident is accentuated in 'The Flying Dutchman' by the characters' repeated attempts to alert people on railway platforms. The narrator of the story states that: 'Since then [the 1840s] a line of communication with the guard has been added to all trains which travel a distance over twenty miles without stopping.'

Jefferies' wry observation in 'The Flying Dutchman' concerning the shirking of responsibility by railway companies and their denial that circumstances surrounding accidents could not be foreseen, echoes passages of similar sentiment in 'A Shipton Accident'. In 'The Flying Dutchman' he writes:

The Company compromised a threatened action for damages with a heavy sum; and surely it was no blame of theirs. The instructions were most precise that no train should leave Swindon Junction without every wheel being rung with the hammer to see that it was sound, and every axle-box opened to see that it was

full of that peculiar yellow grease used on the railway. It was one of those accidents no one could foresee.

Yet 'the subsequent enquiry proved beyond doubt that the axles from want of grease grew red-hot, and set fire to the woodwork of the carriage.' In 'The Shipton Accident' he also refers to the inadequate process of ringing train wheels with a hammer: 'Yet we are told that a certain percentage of accidents is inevitable. ... The frosty weather, however, cannot be foreseen. It has yet to be asserted that all metals are weakened so much by frost as iron and steel.... The frost simply found out the weak spot which ought to have been discovered previously.' He then recommends a 'proper and scientifically constructed instrument' be used rather than the human ear: 'an instrument that would at once show by its dial-face in what condition the metal was, and would automatically register that condition for future reference if needed.'

A number of textual similarities can be found between 'The Flying Dutchman' and Jefferies' fiction of the mid 1870s. One of these is the presence of the fauteuil. The only other mention of a fauteuil in Jefferies' works that I have been able to trace is in *Restless Human Hearts* (1875) in the Mayfair apartment used by Carlotta, and likewise we might note the similarity between the fire on the train and the snake incident in the novel. A reference to 'prima donnas' echoes a reference in *The Scarlet Shawl* to 'prima donnas' being paid for a single night's singing. 'On the qui vive' also appears in *Restless Human Hearts* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*, while 'phantasmagoria' can only be found in *Restless Human Hearts*. The phrase 'freedom of choice', rarely used in Jefferies' works, is used in both 'The Flying Dutchman' and *The Scarlet Shawl* in the context of a female character's love interest (Margaret had 'perfect freedom of choice' in the short story to choose between the cousins, whereas in the novel Nora 'had no freedom of choice' (p.130)).

On the other hand, certain phrases in 'The Flying Dutchman', such as 'leaves of the aspen' (in motion) and 'thin column of smoke', are characteristic of Jefferies' works of the later 1870s. Although Jefferies refers to an aspen in 1866 in 'A Strange Story' ('her form shook like an aspen leaf'), the phrase 'the leaves of the aspen' is largely contained to his works from 1878–1880. In 'November Days' (1878) 'the leaves of the aspen' appears in relation to the wind, in 'A Brook' (September 1880), 'the pale young leaves of the aspen rustled faintly' and 'the young leaves of the aspen are white', and in *The Story of My Heart* 'the leaves of the aspen rustled pleasantly'. As far as I have been able to tell, the phrase 'column of smoke', (which appears in *Hodge and His Masters*, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and *Wild Life in a Southern County*), was not used no earlier than *World's End* (1877) and no

later than *Bevis* (1882). More specifically, the exact phrase ‘thin column of smoke’ appears only in ‘The Flying Dutchman’, *World’s End* (1877) and *Bevis* (1882). The phrase ‘Driven by an irresistible impulse’ (‘The Flying Dutchman’), appears in *Restless Human Hearts* (‘felt ... an irresistible impulse’), and in both *The Story of My Heart* (1883) (‘I have been obliged to write these things by an irresistible impulse’), and the draft of *The Story of My Heart*, ‘I am compelled by an irresistible impulse’, the phrase is prefixed by a synonym of ‘driven’. Similarly, ‘rapid motion’ appears in *The Scarlet Shawl*, but more frequently appears in later works, such as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and *Chronicles of the Hedges*, while the ‘dreamy langour’ of the reclining artist (‘The Flying Dutchman’) appears in the alternative form of ‘exquisite langour’ in ‘In a Pine Wood’ (1877) where, beneath the pines, one ‘must begin to dream’, and the ‘delicious langour’ found in *The Scarlet Shawl*, *Restless Human Hearts*, and ‘Nature and Eternity’.

We might note that in ‘The Shipton Accident’ Jefferies assumes the role of agitator in attempting to alert the public mind to the dangers of inadequately managed rail travel. He notes that the causes of dangerous accidents are ‘still, within the control of man. The same causes exist at this moment, and may at any time lead to a similar casualty’, and ‘that it is the duty of every person to do whatever lies in his power to arouse public opinion so that its voice may become irresistible’. Having ‘waited in vain for the shrewd and clever men known to be at the head of railway concerns to make these obvious improvements. It now rests with the public to force them on to action.’ Alfred Williams mentions ‘the broad-gauge Flying Dutchman express’ in Chapter V of *Life in a Railway Factory*, where he refers to ‘its magnificent speed and stately carriage’ and ‘stirring tales’ of ‘flying journeys performed in defiance of all written injunctions and authority.’ It seems most likely that in ‘The Flying Dutchman’ Jefferies builds upon his role as an agitator for reform in *Fraser’s* by creating a piece of fiction designed to shock readers into the realistic possibility of being trapped in a burning railway carriage. He attempts to achieve this by using one of the most iconic express trains of the mid-nineteenth century, and certain fictional devices, such as the trope of the horror-struck face at the window, which is typical of gothic fiction. Though the story is set in the 1840s before the advent of the gong-string that allowed only a primitive and unreliable form of communication with the guard, the inference is that even with the presence of this measure, fatal accidents, such as the Shipton derailment, continued to happen. Jefferies thus uses the trope of the railway disaster to alert people to the danger of human error and poor judgement—in particular the inadequate checks and insufficient in-travel communication

system that remained. 'The Flying Dutchman' emphasises the point that history repeats itself (Jefferies mentions, for example, that it took the Flying Dutchman to derail and cause a fatality before speed restrictions were implemented). As he states in 'The Shipton Accident', the 'inadequate' gong-string had already led to unnecessary deaths and might easily result in future disasters.

The name 'Flying Dutchman' was inspired by a racehorse of that name that won the Derby and St. Leger in 1849. These associations with greatness and speed would likely have impressed Jefferies who took great inspiration and delight in watching the races when he lived near Epsom in the summer of 1876. Indeed, the story's characters seem designed to appeal to an urban readership familiar with the Great Western Railway at a time when he was regularly approaching London-based periodicals. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that he may have incorporated material into a short story from his recently published nonfiction articles, especially those concerning railway accidents in order to further stir 'public opinion' on the matter.

With regard to making textual comparisons with Jefferies' other works of fiction, we only have a relatively small collection of Jefferies' short fiction with which to compare 'The Flying Dutchman', and there likely remains a substantial number of unidentified pieces in periodicals. The textual connections with *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Restless Human Hearts*, and the similarities with his works of the later 1870s, seem to point to 1875 or later as the most likely period of composition. At this transitional time he had not yet found the voice to express 'the magic of green things',¹ and yet while falling back upon the sensation style of *Restless Human Hearts* and *The Scarlet Shawl*, certain phrases nevertheless anticipate the voice of his countryside serials in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (published 1877–1880). One final point in favour of a date of 1875 or later for 'The Flying Dutchman' is the presence of an 'infant son' in the narrative. Prior to the birth of his first child Harold (2 May 1875) children do not often feature in Jefferies' works, as testified to by *Restless Human Hearts*, for example. Quite naturally, after becoming a father himself Jefferies began to include children in his narratives more frequently.

Of additional interest, Jean Saunders found a reference to a real hell-fire Jack who drove his freight-train through a blazing wooden viaduct on 22 Sep

¹ See Jefferies' letter to Oswald Crawford of the *New Quarterly Magazine*, in which he expresses his wish to write in this vein. The letter is transcribed by Crawford in 'Richard Jefferies: Field-Naturalist and Littérateur,' *The Idler*, Vol. XIII (October 1898), and reprinted in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No.34 (2019), pp.78–93. See also Rebecca Welshman, 'Concerning Coate. A Letter from Richard Jefferies to Oswald Crawford (1876)', *RJSJ* No.23 (Summer 2012), pp.3–5.

1858. The Herefordshire archives hold a black and white photograph of ‘Driver Hellfire Jack steam engine at Great Malvern Station c.1861’:



~ ~ ~

The wind howls down the chimney, the rain dashes in a rage against the window—I shut out the storms with a red curtain, and lighting a lamp placed my chair near the fire. George is already there in a *fauteuil*, reclining almost at full length, his eyes half closed in dreamy languor. He is a painter just returned from Italy. We are now in the Middle Temple: for I am a barrister. He has heard the prima donnas in the land of their births; and the pantomimes have not yet begun—those extravaganzas in which the mind endeavours to find relief after the regularity of classic music. Positively there is nowhere we can go tonight. As a rising barrister (with nothing to do) and a long evening before us, George, who is always on the *qui vive* for *tableaux*, insists that I should employ my eloquence in telling him a story.

“By the Bye,” he says, “it had been several times on the tip of my tongue to ask you about that picture on the wall opposite to me—whom does it represent? Who painted it? What did you give for it?”

Ah, I answer, “That picture is my one consolation. When I am depressed by the hollowness of all around me: when my belief in humanity is staggered by the view of those characters whose crimes drag them to the light: when I am compelled to admit to myself that merit has no chance against mean servility, then I wheel my chair before that picture, and those eyes, so dreamy, and so full of love, that face of heavenly trust, so calm, and full of faith restores me to myself.”

“It was no common brush,” said George, “which contrived to convey this meaning that links those beneath the surface of the colours. It requires a

genius to portray a genius. It is, and is not, like the Madonna. The features are purely English, yet the expression is that of Our Lady. Had the great Italian been an Englishman he would have selected that type for the Mother of Jesus."

And he would have chosen rightly, I continue, for if ever woman was a fit Temple for the Spirit to dwell in that woman was Margaret Bellair. She was my aunt, and—but I will tell you her story. Bellair, her husband had estates in Somerset—coal and land. When my story begins they had been married around about two years, and had one little boy. In the autumn of 184—, they left their family mansion for London, en route to Brighton where they intended to spend the season. They came to Bristol to go up by the express. They had a compartment to themselves, first class of course,—Bellair, Margaret, and her infant son, and John Bellair. He was Bellair's cousin. They had both loved her for years before she married. But there had had been no jealousy between them—I see you smile incredulously, but it is true. They were both too noble. There was no feverish striving to possess her. They loved her too deeply—their first thought was her happiness. They gave her perfect freedom of choice. That choice fell on the eldest, Mark: yet she could not declare it without a pang for she knew that they both loved her, and the thought of paining either hurt her sensitive nature, But at length they were married, and after the first few months, John Bellair, at the express invitation of both bride and bridegroom came to take up his permanent residence with them. It was a complete reunion. I see you smile again—you anticipate an Italian denouement: but you will be disappointed. These men were purer: in her presence how was it possible to be otherwise. So the little boy was taught to call John 'uncle': and John was to accompany them to Brighton. At Bristol the compartment was secured: a supply of light literature laid in—the bell rang, the whistle sounded, and the express started.

That train was familiarly called 'The Flying Dutchman' for the speed was so great that it was scarcely seen approaching before it has past, and out of sight. Brunel in his partiality for the broad gauge did not leave out of his calculations, its capability for affording immense velocity: and the direction now one train up, and one down at the rate of sixty miles an hour, was a mile a minute! That was continued till by some fatality, the famous 'Flying Dutchman' went off the rails, rolled down an embankment, and killed a director whose monument still marks the spot. Then they moderated the speed to fifty, at which it still runs.

Swift as the spectral ship sailing in the teeth of the wind 'Flying Dutchman' coursed over the rails. The colossal engine with the eight wheels, now driven by the famous Hell-Fire-Jack whose boast was that he had ridden his locomotive over every kind of living creature except foxes, yet whose iron

nerves which luck prevented many an apparently inevitable accident, retained for him the highest confidence of the Company. Jack's day had passed: the broad gauge torn up: and the eight wheeled monsters are rusting under tarpaulins in melancholy rows in a shunting by the Swindon factory. Swiftly they whorled along, laughing over the discomfiture of the opponents of the railways, who argued that such rapid motion would infallibly destroy those who were carried by it, by preventing them from breathing. Bath—Chippenham—Wootton Bassett—Swindon.

"All trains stop here ten minutes" came then the cry. They descended from the compartment, not that they were hungry, but to stretch their limbs, and enter the first class refreshment room. Margaret went to the fire with the infant. The gentlemen strolled to the counter, and drank a glass of tonic each. Margaret amused herself with noting the peculiarities of the place and the conduct of the travellers who entered. Velvet covered couches were placed under the windows—most of them heaped with luggage in utter confusion. The fireplace was surmounted by wood-carvings, and high overhead a clock was let into the walls. It had stopped at 11—she noted even that little fact. The walls were painted with graceful female figures carrying grapes, and fruit. In the centre of the apartment stood a large circular table. In the middle of the table was a flower vase, filled with long sprays of that grass which is always in motion—like the leaves of the aspen. Against the vase framed advertisements gave the price of luncheon. There was a cluster of Champagne, and Moselle bottles, of all sizes. Roast beef, boiled beef, ham and tongue surrounded them: with plates and coffee cups at the extreme edge. Soup plates were steaming with hot liquid—the steam blown now one way, and now this, as the draught varied from one or the other folding doors. Margaret watching the travellers was surprised to see how often gentlemanly dressed men forgot to pay for their soup: and, were reminded when at the baize covered door by the waiter—"Your soup, Sir." For costumes no place is a better study than a railway refreshment room. She was particularly amused by one gentleman who wore a great coat of seal skin. Suddenly the bell rang and there was a rush to the carriages. As she left the apartment Margaret glanced out of the window, and saw a man fishing in a cold looking sheet of water immediately beneath (By the bye, winter and summer, at all times of the day, to late in the twilight there is always a man fishing in that surprising piece of water). The whistle sounded, the train started, and they were once more upon their way. Bellair wrapped Margaret knees in a rug; picked up *Punch*, and quietly lit his cigar. John was reading a novel. Margaret closed her eyes and partially yielded to the soothing influence of the rapid motion. With a few words only they passed Reading—the trains did not stop between Swindon and London—and were at the very height of the engine's speed. A

certain weariness is sure to supervene after a long journey by rail. John's novel fell from his hand, Bellair looked out the window, Margaret opened her eyes.

"Mark," she said, "What is that nasty smell?"

"I don't smell anything dear," replied Bellair.

"I do—it is like—like wool on fire."

"Fire—nonsense: it's my cigar."

"Can't you find of it?"

"Not the least dear."

A few minutes passed. Mark opened the window and flung out the end of his cigar.

"Mark—there it is again, pah!"

"Really dear, I can't smell it."

"No because you've been smoking: it's very strong."

"Perhaps we are passing some manufactory."

She looked out—there was nothing but fields. Just then they passed over the Thames and a gust of wind from the river went through the compartment, blowing out the cigar smoke and filling it with fresh air. Margaret shivered. Mark shut the window.

"There it is again—I'm sure there's something on fire." She sprang up in alarm, and the rug fell off her knees. At the same time they saw a thin column of smoke rise up from the carpeting of the floor where she had been seated.

"Oh, Mark, Mark—the carriage is on fire." She caught hold of her infant, he had been sleeping on the seat with his mother.

Mark smiled. "Impossible," he said: but he, and John went down on their knees and looked. The smoke curled up thinly, between them, and there was an unmistakeable odour of burning. As they knelt they could hear the axles. At the first moment they saw nothing; but in another Mark put his finger on a spot and drew it back quickly with a cry of pain. The spot was a small black circle on the carpet from which the smoke rose. It was a black ring rapidly enlarging itself. When they first saw it, it was scarcely as large as a sixpence, in a minute it had increased to the size of a shilling. A small bright tongue of flame—no larger than the flame of a candle shot up and sank again.

"Mark—Mark!"

He could not answer her—his mind was too full—there was no mistake now. The strong draught from beneath like the blast of a furnace, produced by the velocity of the carriage, fed the flame, and drove it upwards in a long tongue. The hole was fast growing larger in an oval shape, tending toward the seat away from the engine.

John threw down the window on his side and shouted for assistance: Mark did the same. There was no reply but the roaring and clattering of the train. They hammered at the wall of the carriage in the hope of attracting attention from the occupants of the next compartment, and so passing the word on to the guard. But there was no one in either compartment—they were alone in the carriage. With a roar they passed under an arch, and by a small station. Two porters were talking on the platform. Mark shouted to them but they did not so much as turn their heads—his voice was lost in the noise, and in a moment they were by, and out of the reach of human help. Opening the windows had increased the draught, and the hole had enlarged; to the size of a man's hand. Hot vapours rose up, and ever and anon brighter and larger tongues of flame. While they looked in mute horror it grew so big that Mark might have put his foot through and the smoke—they had shut the windows—darkened the compartment and half choked them. Margaret with her boy in her arms sprang on the seat toward the engine—the draught drove the fire in the opposite direction to that in which they were rushing along—and held her dress tightly around her to prevent it catching alight. John suddenly seized the travelling rug, and stuffed it into the hole. It stopped it—the smoke ceased to ascend for a moment: but the next flame darted through it—they pushed the rug further in, till it had consumed and fell through on the rail. Still it gave them hopes of choking the fire: they tore up the cushions on the seats, and piled them up one above the other—in two minutes the fire had burnt all round them and they, too, disappeared down the horrible gaping orifice. Mark flung his travelling bag on it: and they stripped off their coats and waistcoats, hurled their hats—all they could lay hands on into it.

It was useless. They fell through or were burnt in a minute: ever the hole grew larger, the smoke more suffocating; and the hot vapour more heated. Flames curled up the seat opposite to that on which they clung, over the seat, and up, and along the dry seasoned wood of the wall of the carriages, which crackled like sticks on a grate. The paint blistered up, the knots fell out and the flame roared like a furnace, louder than the noise of the train. They were forced to let the windows down—the heat and smoke stifled them. Margaret was silent—her lips apart but she said not a word—her infant screaming in her arms. It was astonishing how few words passed between them when once their minds had grasped the full extent of the danger—they seemed to understand each other without speech. Mark looked at John. Mutually their eyes fell on the helpless woman between them whom they both loved. Mark took out his watch: thirty-five minutes yet to reach London. Impossible to hold out, in ten minutes more at the furthest they must be consumed. The extreme speed of the train while it was their

danger was also their safety, for it drove the flames away from them and it gained but slowly comparatively in their direction. Still it was plainly an affair of moments only. Without a word Mark suddenly opened the door of the carriage, and stood out upon the steps. The wind struck him with tremendous force—an arch went by with a roar like thunder: but he clung to the brass handles with one hand, and stretched out the other. John took the infant, and gave it to him, and then tried to move Margaret, but she clung to the seat. It was evident that terror had consumed her—she could not have stood by herself on the plank outside, and how hold her there? She clung to the seat in the corner by the window, her eyes fixed on her husband's face. Once he looked along the train, the thought occurred to him—if he could but pull from one carriage to the other, and so to the engine! A glance showed him that it was impossible even to a practised official. He could not move from the place where he stood. Again John tried to move Margaret—again she only shrank closer to the corner and motioned him to go himself. At last at a sign from Mark, he went and clung to the carriage outside, standing on the plank. A confused sense of seeing woods and hills, and rivers shoot by in a wild phantasmagoria passed over. Mark: when he recovered himself and gave the infant to John. He measured the distance to the ground with his eye. Better to jump—if half-killed he could at least tell a porter to telegraph and stop the train by signal. As they approached the next station he would spring. She read his thought in his face and put out her arms and seized him. Her voice pitched in the key of extreme agony reached his ears even above the sound of the train and the crackle of the flames—“Do not leave me!” It pierced his heart like a knife. He hesitated. Things passed in a whirl before him. He saw nothing but Margaret's eyes fixed on him with an expression of eternal love. The flames had seized the seat beneath her; her feet were scorched: she concealed the sharp agony from him; but the flame bit through her dress, and stung her tender limbs—the glass of the window cracked, and burst at that moment with the heat, and involuntary she thrust her face out just as they roared by a station.

George, the station master of that place was standing on the platform and he has since told me himself, that it was not the smoke from the carriage—that was perhaps, hidden underneath the train—it was not the two men riding outside, he did not see them, he cannot account for it, but it was the face thrust through the window. “So,” he said to me, “artists to represent agony, or rage, usually choose a naturally ugly and frightful countenance—it is a mistake. Never in my life did I ever see a face so unutterably beautiful, nor one which expressed such unfathomable agony. It was like the face of an angel tortured in Hell! Driven by an irresistible impulse without even realising why I did so—I rushed to the telegraph-room

and sent a message in the most urgent words to the next station master to stay the train. After I had done so I found fault with myself—what reason had I to stop it—it might lose me my place. I walked up and down in considerable anxiety: but, Sir, as I approached the telegraph-room to counter-command the message, that face seemed to meet me—I could only wait.”

Well, it was near London, and the stations were close together. In five minutes or less the signals brought the express to a standstill just outside a station whose whole complement of officials were watching excited by such an unheard of event as stopping the ‘Flying Dutchman’. They rushed to it—they dragged out Margaret, as the carriage now the strong draught had ceased burning into a sheet of flame and fell to pieces before their eyes. Mark sat down on the rails stupefied. John stood drawing long respirations, and asking for Margaret—with the child in his arms, resisting all efforts to take it from him. Margaret was laid on the ground fainting—the fire on her dress was extinguished by throwing great coats on her, and a surgeon was speedily on the spot. The porters detached the rest of the train, transferred the passengers behind the burnt carriage to those in front of it, and sent it at diminished speed into Paddington.

“And Margaret?” said George.

Was not much burnt.

“What was the cause of the fire?”

Why Mark went mad almost for a time accusing himself of causing it by dropping the match, or ash from his cigar, but the subsequent enquiry proved beyond doubt that the axles from want of grease grew red-hot, and set fire to the woodwork of the carriage. The Company compromised a threatened action for damages with a heavy sum; and surely it was no blame of theirs. The instructions were most precise that no train should leave Swindon Junction without every wheel being rung with the hammer to see that it was sound, and every axle-box opened to see that it was full of that peculiar yellow grease used on the railway. It was one of those accidents no one could foresee.

Since then a line of communication with the guard has been added to all trains which travel a distance over twenty miles without stopping. And my Aunt, whose portrait hangs there? To all appearances she overcame the shock. She was slightly burnt; but in a few months her constitution broke up, and she parted away rather than died with one hand in John’s & her head on her husband’s shoulder. Mark lingered nearly two years suffering from fits, and months of terrible gloom. He was always accusing himself—why hadn’t he travelled by a slower train? Why hadn’t he jumped off at once to raise the alarm—she, at least would have been saved. At last he too died.

Richard Returns

Zaguan

This poem titled 'Richard Returns' by Zaguan is from an undated press cutting, possibly the *North Wilts Herald*, that published more of his poems around 1926. There is an introduction stating it is an attempt to express Jefferies' thoughts if he had returned to Coate at the time of writing.

[One of the saddest essays written by Richard Jefferies is entitled, 'My Old Village'. It describes his emotions on noting Time's changes when revisiting his birthplace. This is a somewhat audacious attempt to suggest his experiences on an imaginary visit in the present year of grace.]

ONE golden day, from nether shades, came he
Who limned all nature's phases.
Who told us truths of groves and glades
In pulsing prose with jewelled phrases.
The cherished scenes of youth he sought,
And slightly doubtful of his bearing,
Meandered down the road to Coate,
To find how boyhood's friends are faring.

The way has lost its pristine charm
For one of urban life a scorner:
The growing town's encroaching arm
Has reached as far as Piper's Corner.
This coppice, much depleted since,
Is where, when cawing rooks were homing,
The curly haired retriever, Prince,
Would hunt for hedgehogs in the gloaming.

The hazel boughs he often robbed
Of clustered russet fruit have vanished;
The hawthorn hedge is trimly 'bobbed',
The flinty highway cased and planished.
No longer jog the sturdy teams
To cart the crop above the quarry,
No jingling harness sways and gleams—
The wain is ousted by the lorry.

The haunted lime kiln still remains,
Though cleared of tangled brake and thicket;
Here, scared by tails of clanking chains,
The yokels hurried past its wicket.
The lucent lake, his constant joy,
Where bittern boomed and halcyon darted,
Was fringed with groups of *hoi polloi*,
It's fauns and water nymphs departed.

The homestead, where his youthful pen
Traced halting text with hesitation,
He found controlled by aldermen—
The plaything of a corporation.
No cheerful clang of milking-pails,
No rosy hinds, urbane and willing;
Gone are the harrows, yokes, and flails,
No churn revolves within the 'skilling'.

The ha-ha hives he missed, where blazed
In spring a wealth of daffodillies;
The pebbled-patterned arbours razed,
Where Iden prosed to Amaryllis.
To north across the meadow tracks
He looked the dreams of youth pursuing,
Past Lower Mead and Little Axe
To Snodshill, where he went a-wooing.

He turned and sighed as twilight neared
And Phoebus furled his beamy banners,
Then muttered something in his beard
Of 'other times and other manners'.
To fair Elysian fields he passed,
And, soaring through the pearly portals,
He reached his proper plane at last,
And took his place with the Immortals.

Over Marlboro'

Wilfrid Ewart

Over Marlboro' was published as Chapter V in Wilfrid Ewart's *Aspects of England* (1937), pp.201–206—a collection of Ewart's essays on English rural life. World War I novelist and essayist Wilfrid Herbert Gore Ewart (1892–1922) was born on 19 May 1892 and grew up in fashionable Belgravia. His father came from a military family and his mother was of aristocratic birth but she flew into rages that meant Wilfred and his sisters often stayed with their mother's cousin in Buckinghamshire and, by the age of nine, he went to boarding school. He was blind in one eye and had poor eyesight in the other but Ewart joined the army in the summer of 1914. He obtained a commission, serving as a captain in the Scots Guards. He was nervously distraught after Armistice. His book, *Way of Revelation* (1921), was a best-seller and told the story of two friends in London society before and during the war. He was killed accidentally by a stray bullet during New Year celebrations in Mexico City in 1922.



Wilfred Ewart from a painting by Nora Cundell

On the outskirts of the forest of Savernake a man stood in the burning heat of a summer's afternoon. He was a curious-looking man, attired in a cap, corduroys, and a homespun coat. He looked, at first glance, not unlike a good-class gamekeeper. The second glance, however, revealed a pale, almost ascetic type efface, bearded, with large brown dreaming eyes, grave, full of thought and even of sadness—it was seen to be the face of a dreamer. His body was thin, his limbs loose-jointed, and his gait the long-striding, easy, and somewhat untidy one of the individual whose thoughts are far from the immediate present.

He stood there with the dark green forest as his background and the pale green country stretching before him. How many travellers of how many conditions of how many generations must have paused on this last knoll of the western edge of Savernake Forest! Beautiful the forest looked with its fresh verdure above dim architraves and aisles, from which the man had just emerged. He knew every yard of it, every narrow twisting path, every fern-brake and thicket, every bracken-strewn depth; and he knew by heart the secret life that moved in there among the foxes, the squirrels, and the countless birds.

From his high vantage-point he gazed out upon a scene which he knew, perhaps, not less well. It was a scene little concerned with human life, but rather of the sky and air, the wind and sunlight, and of the world beyond this world. It contained strange and often melancholy effects of distance, of hills merging into hills, and these into other hills or the troughs of valleys; of high corn-lands, and of beech-clumps seen uncounted leagues away. All was green. There was no prevailing note of corn or culture. The valleys lost themselves in their twisting, winding among the downs or, climbing upward, seemed to lead but into the sky.

Long, long in the burning sunshine and the strange rapture which expressed itself in his face, the wayfarer gazed out upon this familiar country. Then, ash-plant in hand, he made his way down the steep slope of the hill, beyond the last great oak and the last mighty shade-giving beech. He passed to the east of Marlboro', and so across a high, wide common, where the cows, donkeys, and geese belonging to the inhabitants of that famous township have, for many centuries, pastured at will. He came with rapid strides, gazing up at the hard blueness of the sky, yet never failing to notice anything about him, whether of flower, weed, bird, beast, or insect. He came to Ogbourne St Andrew, saffron-yellow, thatched and whitewashed, set about at many angles as many downland villages are. He crossed the plashing Ogbourne stream, and climbed thence by a narrow road up the steep hillside beyond.

There were at first no hedges, only the cornfields, the feathery barley, the pale green waving wheat. Reaching the summit, the road entered a mysterious irregular tract of thorn-brake and of briars. The world of free space was left behind. The road became a lane, more narrow, twisting, winding, tortuous, and flinty. And what a queer stillness! Like the stillness of a larch-wood, but there was no wind among the thorns, which seemed aridly to absorb the heat.

He was alone and happy there. He wandered into the dim recesses, the hidden places and the obscure glades, caring nothing for the thorn-pricks and the low boughs of the crab-apple and rowan so he found the hawfinch in

her solitude, the goldfinch, and the shy warblers. A yellow-hammer beat out his tune to the hard blue and copper-pink sky. A rabbit darted across the road. He found the place full of a secret, stealing, rustling life. Rabbits seemed to stir everywhere—and it was the home of the magpie. Crickets and grasshoppers everywhere chirped; it seemed to be the anvil of the sun. . . . But he thought of the night there and—as he had known it—of the winter snow.

And in the very heart of this thorn country, which, up hill and down dale, extends to the vicinity of Ramsbury, he found a small ancient manor-house of grey, time-worn stone, flinty, said to have been the hunting-box of John of Gaunt. It was the centre of a small hamlet, hard to find, but itself standing alone with its ghosts and its summer silence. How all shut in, how breathless and quiet, that thorny solitude! The man strode on—it may or may not be that he noticed all these things. Now he was out upon the open down and, skirting fields of clover shot with poppy-red, of half-grown wheat, pale, scintillating, and of barley, came to Liddington with the evening sun. Green and smooth, rounded in shape and scored by numerous reminders of a bygone civilisation, Liddington Hill rises above the rest of the neighbouring downs. Around its foot a white road winds. Upon its face many of the smaller down flowers grow, while from its height may be seen the full scope and distance of all that far-flung country. Southward the Ogbourne valley winds back towards Marlboro', whence it came, east and west the hills rise to a moderate height, crowned on the one hand by Aldbourne Chase, on the other by beech-riven Barbury Hill. Northward the vale stretches into blue distances that cloud the Cotswold Hills; this remarkable soft blueness being the result of atmosphere, largely created by the great number of spinneys and trees which embellish the fields. North-eastward may be seen Highworth on a hill-top. Marston, Stanton Fitzwarren, Lydiard Millicent lie amid lanes and fields. It is all pastoral, quiet and green, save where, in the foreground, the tall chimneys, the smoke-stacks, the crowding roofs, the railway smoke of Swindon strike the increasingly modern note, that of the toiling, striving world of men.

Near at hand, indeed almost immediately beneath, his eye lit upon the gleaming water of the reservoir at Coate. Beyond, the great Burderop woods enfold a grassy park, while hither the meadows, richly studded with oak and elm, and wych-elm and ash standing in hedgerows, of hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel, end with the rising downs.

The lonely figure of this man, so strange and yet so commonplace, lingered a long time here, upon his face still writ the peculiar expression as between that of the ordinary countryman, the mystic, and the dreamer.

He then climbed a circular rampart, enclosing a little green meadow several acres in extent, these being part of an ancient British fortress, one of many in that part of the country. He found himself alone under the sky, the scent of the downland thyme and of the wild flowers which he loved being all about him, while ever present in his mind was the thought of the men who had dwelt and battled here untold centuries ago.

‘I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth,’ he wrote. ‘Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the earth’s firmness—I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty; the air touched me and gave me something of itself. I spoke to the sea; though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean; I desired to have its strength, its mystery and glory. Then I addressed the sun, desiring the soul equivalent of his light and brilliance, his endurance and unwearied race. I turned to the blue heaven over, gazing into its depth, inhaling its exquisite colour and sweetness. The rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky drew my soul towards it, and there it rested, for pure colour is rest of heart. By all these I prayed, I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no other.’

His mind travelled back and downwards too, for what the eye could not see in its fulness was the yellow-brick, square-built farmhouse, with multi-coloured thatched roof, with pear-tree trailing up wall-side toward the gable, where this strange spirit first saw the light. A trim flower-garden was in front; behind, a walled garden, and the farm-buildings and the rick—the fields and downs. ... To-day it is disappointing perhaps—a little modern, neat and orderly. A tablet facing the highway beside the garden-gate marks the house where Richard Jefferies saw the light. There the Idens ate their splendid meals; there Amaryllis loved, despaired; and, though the old ha-ha vanishes, from this wall above the road Amaryllis watched the passing of Pamment and of Duck, on a summer’s morning, in the fulness of her youth...

And there, through thirty years, he dwelt, whose long-gone spirit is the traveller in these lines. He grew there, joyed there, and less suffered than hereafter; from there roamed the many-featured country, the meadows, the downs, the valley, the thorn-brake, and the forest; from there passed out into the world which knew him not till he had died. Something in the grave landscape, something in the quality of the sunlight and the evening peace of the downs suggests that wherever his body lie, and through, or despite, perhaps, the restless tragedy of his life—his spirit reigns there now.

Edward Thomas, Richard Jefferies and Wiltshire

W.J. Keith

This transcript is from a lecture presented to the Richard Jefferies Society, on 7 June 1976 in Swindon, by Prof. W.J. Keith, Ph.D., M.A.. He was the President of the Richard Jefferies Society at that time. For a tribute to Bill Keith who died on 14 July 2018, see the *Richard Jefferies Society Autumn Newsletter*, 2018, pp.17-18. This article is also reproduced in memory of his dear wife, Hiroko, who died on 2 October 2022, aged 89.

Soon after Edward Thomas was commissioned to write his biography of Jefferies, he told his friend Jesse Berridge that he and Helen planned to take a short holiday at Coate ‘where [Jefferies] was born and lived 30 years, though I have already known it 20 years myself.’¹ By good fortune, his paternal grandmother, an uncle and an aunt had all lived in Swindon when he was a child, and Thomas spent numerous holidays here in his boyhood. The family lived, according to Mrs. Gay, in Cambria Place.² His aunt worked in a refreshment bar at the station; his uncle as a fitter in the Great Western Railway works (he left, and emigrated to South Africa, only two or three years before the young Alfred Williams, who was only a year older than Thomas, entered the works at the age of fifteen in 1892). In his autobiographical memoir, published posthumously as *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, we hear of his intense excitement at going to visit his Swindon relatives: ‘It was delicious to pass Wantage, Challow, Uffington, Shrivenham, to see the 75th, 76th mile marks by the railway side, to slow down at last to the cry of “Swindon” and see my grandmother, my uncle or my aunt waiting.’³ Indeed, Swindon has the distinction of being the subject of what seems to be Thomas’s first surviving piece of literary composition. He recalls being given a notebook at the age of eight or nine, and in it, he tells us, ‘I pronounced the houses of Swindon to be “like bull-dogs, small but

¹ R. George Thomas, ed. *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.141n. (The editor misreads ‘Corte’ for ‘Coate’ throughout.) Henceforth cited in text as *LGB*.

² Frances J. Gay, ‘Poet who found glamour in Swindon scene,’ *Swindon Evening Advertiser* (8 April 1967).

³ *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* (London: Faber, 1938), p.4. Henceforth cited in text as *CET*.

strongly built".⁴ Those words must have been written, it is interesting to note, about the time that Jefferies was dying at Goring.

At first, while still a very small boy, Thomas's rambles were confined to week-end walks with his uncle along the banks of the canal, occasional fishing, and the doubtful pleasure of watching the railway-workers hunt water-rats with terriers or, worse, pelt them with stones (*CET*, 50). The visits were frequent, however, and, at one point he even 'spent the greater part of a summer term in a Board-school in Swindon where the headmaster was a friend of [his] father's and Thomas 'became a Wiltshire boy in accent' (*CET*, 63). This gave him the opportunity to venture further afield. One occasion when, at the age of thirteen or so, he was taken by other boys to peer through a broken door into the slaughter-house, which backed on to the canal, made a deep impression upon him (*CET*, 90). Another schoolboy pastime was called 'foxing' and consisted of 'following up lovers in our meadows and lurking behind hedges to watch them' (*CET*, 92). Trivial mischievousness, perhaps, but notice how the meadows have become 'our meadows.' Thomas is now a self-naturalized Wiltshireman—and remained so for the rest of his life.

He writes in more extended detail of a later visit, and here we can catch a fascinating glimpse of future development—

I gave more time to butterflies in those weeks because I had now made friends with a Swindon boy who was very little of a fisherman. We chased the butterflies; we jumped the narrow brooks; we trespassed hither and thither with a St. Bernard puppy who drew after us all the cattle in the fields and provoked the farmer; we sat talking in the crown of a pollard willow. Fred was something of an athlete and we ran and jumped in friendly rivalry in the fields. I could beat him only at walking. I never met the boy of anything like my own age whom I could not beat at walking. So I stamped the dust furiously from one milestone to another towards Wootton Bassett in the hope of some day covering the mile in less than seven minutes. Also as I now had an old bicycle with me, we raced on bicycles. (*CET*, 127)

That sounds interestingly close to the carefree childhood of Bevis and Mark, though Thomas may not have been aware of the connection since it is by no means certain that he had encountered Jefferies at this time. The earliest we hear of acquaintance with his later literary hero occurs in the following reference from the essay 'How I Began': 'By the time I was fourteen or fifteen, ... I kept a more or less daily record of notable events, the finding of birds' nests, the catching of moles or fish, the skinning of a stoat, the reading of Richard Jefferies and the naturalists.' (*LS*, 17)

⁴ *The Last Sheaf* (London: Cape, 1928), p.16. Henceforth cited in text as *LS*.

Thomas is naturally rather vague about dates in his early recollections, but it appears to have been at about the age of fifteen that a climactic moment in his life came with the reading of Jefferies. Once again, it is necessary to quote at length—

I read books of travel, sport and natural history. I remember those of Waterton, Thomas Edward, Buckland, Wallace, Charles Kingsley, and above all Richard Jefferies. If I say little of Jefferies it is because not a year passed thereafter without copious draughts of him and I cannot pretend to distinguish amongst them. But very soon afterwards I was writing out in each of his books and elsewhere—as in a cousin's album—when I had the opportunity, those last words of *The Amateur Poacher*: 'Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, whose twelve hours somehow have become shortened, into the sunlight and the pure wind. A something that the ancients called divine can be found and felt there still.' They were a gospel, an incantation. What I liked in the books was the freer open-air life, the spice of illegality and daring, roguish characters—the opportunities so exceeding my own, the gun, the great pond, the country home, the apparently endless leisure—the glorious moments that one could always recapture by opening the *Poacher*—and the tinge of sadness here and there as in the picture of the old moucher perishing in his sleep by the lime kiln, and the heron flying over in the morning indifferent. Obviously Jefferies had lived a very different boyhood from ours, yet one which we longed for and supposed ourselves fit for. (*CET*, 134–5)

And, a little later: 'No book read at school was to me ever anything like as delightful as *The Amateur Poacher*' (*CET*, 136).

Thomas, we should remember, was a Londoner and these tastes were unusual. At St. Paul's School, which, he attended between 1894 and 1895, his fellow-students were expected to read and discuss the officially-sanctioned writers of the day—he mentions Maupassant and Meredith. Thomas, to them, must have seemed idiosyncratic and eccentric in his reading tastes—

I continued to read chiefly Jefferies and the naturalists, whom these boys knew nothing of. 'What are you reading, Thomas?' asked one of the boys who already wore a scholar's gown. '*The Gamekeeper at Home*,' said I. 'The gamekeeper's place is the woods,' said he. And I kept silence—not venturing to remark that the woods were his home. (*CET*, 141–2)

On the flyleaf of his algebra book he wrote ('in the worst possible Latin,' as he records), 'I love birds more than books' (*CET*, 14–3)—but Jefferies' books were exceptions to the rule. And Thomas's place, like the gamekeeper's, was also the woods. By this time he had already met—appropriately, while fishing—David ('Dad') Uzzell, a local 'character' closer to an amateur poacher than to a gamekeeper at home, with whom he corresponded until his death—at which time Uzzell wrote a letter of condolence to Helen Thomas that is one of the most moving human documents I know.

In 1895, immediately upon leaving school, Thomas made an extended visit to Swindon. By this time he was keeping a naturalist's diary, and this was later published in his first book, *The Woodland Life*, which appeared in 1897 (when, be it noted, he was still only nineteen). He began by walking from London to Marlborough Forest on foot, and, with the exception of a week spent at Clifton, he lived for three months in the Swindon area. The following extract, not representative because most of the diary consists of natural history observations, gives some indication of his interests at this time. He is writing of Coate Reservoir:

May 31. Hither, on a summer's day, the keepers stroll and chat with the fishers, and talk of the pheasants that do well this year. The keepers are from Burderop on the hill—great woods of oak and ash and lesser larches, with violet and windflower and primrose in spring—in whose midst is the low dormer-windowed cottage of Richard Jefferies' 'gamekeeper,' overbrowed by walnut trees, whose fruit the old keeper used lately to give the boys of the countryside.

June 1. Opposite the old house of Richard Jefferies, on the Coate Road just beyond the stile which leads a path aside to the reservoir, I met an old dame who had lived there in the old low house since a time considerably before the birth of Jefferies. She talked willingly of Jefferies; of his wanderings at all hours and on every side: and of the fact that she, in her younger days, prepared the single-windowed cheese-room at Coate Farm for use as his study.⁵

This last observation, by the way, is of doubtful accuracy. When I first encountered it, I wrote to Mrs. Gay on the subject and received a characteristic, 'common-sense' reply: 'That I think was not his writing room. How could it be when Mrs. Jefferies was still making cheese and would need it?'⁶ Later in the diary, Thomas speaks of a summer-house at the rear of Coate Farm 'built by Richard Jefferies alone with his own hands' (WL, 223). This, too, is questionable. One must remember that Thomas was very young (17) at this time, probably gullible, possibly a romancer. But Jefferies and the Jefferies country are clearly at the centre of his life and interests.

In the following year, 1896, Thomas paid yet another lengthy visit to Swindon, between February 15 and March 28. This is also recorded in *The Woodland Life*, and it was during this visit that Thomas wrote an article entitled 'In the Footsteps of Richard Jefferies,' published in the *New Age* (under his full name, Philip Edward Thomas) on April 2. This was the essay that I stumbled upon some eighteen months ago, parts of which, I

⁵ *The Woodland Life* (Second edition. Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1897), pp.177-8. Henceforth cited in text as WL.

⁶ Letter from Frances J. Gay to W.J. Keith, 7 May 1967.

understand, were read by Cyril Wright at a meeting of this Society in January.

At this point, however, we must retrace our steps a little. It was two years earlier, in the summer of 1894, that Thomas had been invited to the home of James Ashcroft Noble, a minor journalist and literary critic, to discuss his early attempts at writing, and had there met his daughter, Helen Noble, who was later to become Thomas's wife. By 1896 they were close friends. Helen records in her memoir *As It Was*: 'During his absence in Wiltshire David [as Edward is invariably called there] sent me boxes of wild flowers, and a thrush's egg—the first he had found.'⁷ (This period of their relationship was shadowed by the serious illness of her father, who in fact died within a day or two of Thomas's return to London.)

Later, Jefferies and the Jefferies country were to play important parts in the development of their love for each other. Here, for example, is an account so delicate in its intimacy that I hesitate to read it on this formal, public occasion, but my account would be incomplete without it:

Sometimes we would go to Wimbledon Common. It was on one of these summer evenings we had been talking of Richard Jefferies and his love for the human body. We had just read his essay, 'Nature in the Louvre' and his description of the 'Venus Accroupie', which he had admired so much. We were sitting in the undergrowth of a little copse in a remote part of the common. David had said that he had never seen a woman's body, and I do not remember quite how it came about, but I quite naturally and simply, without any feeling of shyness, knelt up in our secret bower and undid my clothes, and let them fall about my knees so that to the knees I was naked. I knew my body was pretty: my breasts were firm and round and neither too small nor too large, and my neck and shoulders made a pleasant line, and my arms were rounded and white, and, though my hips were small, the line of the waist was lovely. I was proud of my body, and took the most innocent pleasure in its lines and health and strength. So we knelt in the grass and dead leaves of the copse opposite to each other, he silent and I laughing with joy to feel the air on my skin, and to see his enraptured gaze. For as he knelt he gazed wonder-struck and almost adoring, quite still, quite silent—, looking now and then into my eyes with serious ecstatic look, his eyes full of tenderness and love, searching mine for any sign of regret or shyness. He did not touch me, but just knelt there letting his eyes take their fill of the beauty that was filling his soul with delight. When, without a word, I lifted my clothes about me, he helping me, he only then said, 'Jenny, I did not know there was such beauty.' (*HT*, 33–34)

Dates at this point are difficult to establish with any accuracy. Different biographers give slightly different versions, but it was probably in September

⁷ Helen Thomas, *As It Was and World Without End* (London: Faber, 1956), p.26. Henceforth cited in text as *HT*.

1897, just before Thomas's going up to Oxford, that he and Helen spent what she calls 'a tiny honeymoon' (*HT*, 43)—though in fact they were not yet married—in the Swindon area. They stayed, in Helen's words, 'in the cottage of his old gamekeeper friend,' and her description evokes for anyone familiar with the Jefferies country the gamekeeper's cottage at Hodson Bottom:

It stood like a fairy-tale cottage right in a wood, and quite off the road, a track from the lane taking you to it. It had a deep thatched roof almost hiding the little windows of the bedrooms with its deep eaves, and a porch with a little bench on each side, covered with traveller's joy and briar roses that filled the air with their mushy scent. It belonged to the wood, and the wood to it, as if it had been in reality the brown fur-covered creature that it looked, whose eyes peered out from under its overhanging brows shyly and kindly. (*HT*, 44)

William Cooke, in his recent biography of Thomas,⁸ follows earlier commentators in identifying the gamekeeper with Dad Uzzell, presumably because Helen refers to him as 'Dad,' but this seems incorrect. Uzzell was never gamekeeper in Hodson Bottom (from what we know of him, it would—to say the least—have been an eccentric choice), so either they didn't stay with the Uzzells or they didn't stay at Hodson. Mrs. Gay investigated the matter in some detail, and I fully accept her conclusions: that Helen herself muddled the gamekeeper and the ex-poacher, and that the two of them spent their blissful two or three days in the cottage once inhabited by Jefferies' keeper Haylock.

Edward and Helen were married in 1899, and the next few years can be passed over in silence here. Edward went to Oxford, the three children were born, and he embarked on his precarious career as free-lancing reviewer, journalist and writer. His rambles took him from time to time back into Wiltshire, but his connections with the county were irregular until April 1907 when we first hear of the projected 'life & criticism of Richard Jefferies' (*LGB*, 136–7). A contract was signed with Hutchinson's shortly afterwards, and it is interesting to note that Thomas was allowed more time than usual to produce a complete manuscript. None the less, he had only a year to write a long, detailed book requiring a great deal of painstaking and time-consuming research. He therefore set to work quickly, visited Mrs. Jefferies in late June ('but she had callers & I didn't get ahead much' [*LGB*, 14–5]), and again in mid-August. He also arranged an interview with C.J. Longman, who had been a sympathetic mentor to Jefferies in the 1880s and helped to see much of his work into print.

By the end of the summer Thomas was back in Swindon in search of background material. He spent three weeks in the area, during which he

⁸ William Cooke, *Edward Thomas: A Critical Biography* (London: Faber, 1970).

stayed at Broome Farm, and he describes the visit in a letter to the poet Gordon Bottomley: 'I was nearly always out of doors & when indoors I was writing out my notes or writing to crowds of people who were supposed to be likely to help me to know Jefferies' (*LGB*, 146). Unlike so many of his commissions for book-writing, this was one that Thomas found congenial, and despite the tinge of irony in that statement it is clear that he took his assignment seriously. At first he seems to have been afraid that he would be unable to uncover any new information (Mrs. Jefferies had informed him that she had told all she knew to Walter Besant), but he soon found that this was by no means the case: 'I met one or two good people—one splendid old woman—... & altogether I have a mass of trifles that are new & will have some effect' (*LGB*, 146). The 'splendid old woman' may well have been the original of 'Molly the Milkmaid' in *The Amateur Poacher* (who is presumably equitable with Polly the dairymaid in *Bevis*), for Thomas writes in the biography—

That he [Jefferies as a boy] fitted up one of the craft on the Reservoir with sails is certain; for I have met 'Molly the Milkmaid,' who stitched them after he had cut them to the right shape. ... 'Molly' did many things for him, and remembers driving a two-pronged, fork through an eel that she might skin it alive at his request, for he had never seen, that rite before.⁹

And there are other hints in the book that show how Thomas had made local contacts with people who knew Jefferies: 'All that I could learn from one who was with him on the *North Wilts Herald* was that the staff once signed a round-robin against his handwriting' (*RJ*, 62). One touching reminiscence, that Thomas obviously gathered from first-hand, is that of a woman who remembered encountering Jefferies on the Downs when she was still a little girl: 'There was a child who, venturing up to this odd-looking solitary, heard exciting talk from him of birds and beasts, and found him there again and again, staying with him till the nurse called her away from the "tramp".' (*RJ*, 78)

But Thomas drew his information from local records as well as from personal recollections. He told W.H. Hudson: 'I have been spending my time on the downs and with Chiseldon Parish records. ... In the eighteenth century Coate and Badbury and Chiseldon swarmed with married men and women named Jefferies, who produced boys and girls regularly, and so far I can't see which of them Jefferies came from.'¹⁰ Fortunately, between this time

⁹ *Richard Jefferies; His Life and Work* (London: Hutchinson, 1909), p.40. Henceforth cited in text as *RJ*.

¹⁰ James Guthrie, Ed., 'Edward Thomas's letters to W.H. Hudson,' (*London Mercury*, 2 August 1920), p.435.

and the completion of his book, the article by Jefferies' cousin Fanny Hall, entitled 'The Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' appeared in *Country Life* (March 1908) under the pseudonym 'Jefferies Luckett,' and Thomas was able to benefit from the information given there.

The visit was not wholly dedicated to 'research,' however. Helen spent two of the three weeks with him, and her description of it is warm and moving—

The fortnight we spent in Wiltshire was one of the happiest times of my life, and one of the few holidays of any length which David and I had alone together. We walked all day long, and Liddington Castle—an old British camp above Swindon—Wayland Smith's Cave, and the White Horse of [Uffington—Helen miscalls it 'Effingham'] became as familiar to me as our bare hillside in Hampshire. We stayed at a farm house some miles from Swindon, but often, when we had wandered too far afield to return the same day, put up for the night at a wayside inn, where once we arrived so soaking wet that we had to go to bed while our clothes were dried. ...

... In Wiltshire with its stone-built villages, its great barns like temples built to Demeter, its ancient and noble manor houses, with its guardian elms and rich red fallow, its meadows along the banks of Avon, its flocks and herds feeding as from time immemorial on the downs, its teams of farm horses often silhouetted on the skyline of the hills, its peasants toiling at their ancient craft in ancient traditional ways, I felt that I was at the very heart of England's being. ... Savernake Forest, Marlborough, Malmesbury, Shaftesbury, Amesbury, Devizes, Westbury and Bradford-on-Avon are some of the places I particularly remember we included in the wide area we traversed, and of course the special places connected with Jefferies. Many of the days stand out clear in my mind today—the ways we went, the things we saw, and even the words we spoke, so happy was I during this our longest holiday together. (I, 126, 127, 128)

None the less, for Thomas it was work—hard work, notwithstanding the fact that it was considerably more congenial than most of the hack-writing he was forced to undertake to earn his bread and butter. By the end of the year he had accumulated sufficient material (much of it at the British Museum) to get down to an extended bout of writing. For this he needed privacy and freedom from distraction—even from Helen and the children; by good fortune, his friend Harry Hooton succeeded in finding him a cottage at Minsmere on the Suffolk coast (a birdwatcher's paradise, by the way) where he could—at least theoretically—work in peace. He tells Bottomley that in ten days in January 1908 he wrote 40,000 words. A long passage on the difficulties he encountered in writing the book is worth quoting:

The first chapter at present is a long, too poetical (where it isn't too dull) chapter on Jefferies' Wiltshire. Then genealogical stuff & ancestors. Then the farmhouse & parents & childhood. Then the big boy & country journalist writing [short?] stories & very competent journalistic articles on agriculture &c.

There are prodigiously dull blocks in the thing, because you see nobody has done the thing completely or attempted it, & the scale asked for made completeness necessary. So I give the main points or even the 2nd rate stuff. (*LGB*, 153)

For all his modesty and self-criticism, he knows the significance of what he is doing—‘nobody has done the thing completely.’

Characteristically, however, Thomas’s initial energy and enthusiasm soon gave way to doubts and dissatisfactions. Three weeks later (February 1908) he is complaining that he has become ‘just a machine for turning out lengths of *Jefferies* almost every day’ (*LGB*, 155), and in another three weeks, when he is close to finishing the first draft, he continues in his self-deprecating manner: ‘The book is not, cannot be organic. It may have a lot of small lights, but no light on the whole man. Trying to mingle biography, criticism & mere exposition of his matter, I have made confusion’ (*LGB*, 159). One should not, though, lay too much stress on this hypercritical attitude to his work. Anyone who has read through Thomas’s letters knows that he always reacted in this way when discussing any books in progress; it was part of his temperament, the mask that he assumed when facing his friends and the world. But beneath this mask, we can see another side of Thomas, one determined to communicate what he calls his ‘special claims’ for *Jefferies* (*LGB*, 156), and it comes through in his attitude to Walter Besant’s earlier *Eulogy*. At the beginning of his research, he had referred to ‘Besant’s excellent advertisement’ (*LGB*, 137) which may or may not conceal a vein of irony, but before long he talks of Besant’s account as ‘perfunctorily arranged’ and comes to realise that ‘Besant missed a hundred touches of character.’¹¹ By the time he gets round to solid writing, his response is critical indeed. He writes to Bottomley: ‘I simply ignore Besant, tho my chances of controverting him with security, of pointing out his indolence his incompetence & his inaccuracy are many; not to speak of his pervasive vulgarity’ (*LGB*, 154). While we should acknowledge the fact that Besant wrote the book for the charitable purpose of making money for *Jefferies*’ widow and family, I must state—as one who has, as it were, followed in both Besant’s and Thomas’s footsteps—that Thomas is absolutely right. It reminds us that Thomas was a brilliant literary critic with the highest standards; he knew that his own work fell short of perfection, but was well aware of its superiority to its predecessors.

I have said that at the cottage at Minsmere he could work ‘at least theoretically’ in peace. In fact, he got into an emotional tangle with a young girl of seventeen whom he met while walking on the beach. Coincidentally,

¹¹ *ibid.*

she had connections with a family in whose home Helen had once lived as governess. The affair (if that is not too strong a term) was obviously innocent, idyllic and rather touching. Helen mentions it in *World Without End*, but got confused about dates and occasions, claiming that Thomas was writing his Swinburne book at the time. Thomas's letters, published much later, prove indisputably that Helen's memory was faulty on this point. I mention it here because readers of Helen's book may be unaware that this incident occurred while Thomas had Cicely Luckett, Felise Goring and Amaryllis Iden very much in the forefront of his mind (he admits in a letter to Bottomley about this time that he has 'been in love with' Felise [*LGB*, 171n]), and also because it is a clear instance of Helen's vagueness and so lends support to the belief that she was similarly inaccurate in her account of Dad Uzzell and the gamekeeper's cottage.

None the less, it would be true to say that Thomas 'broke the back' of his task while at Minsmere. By May 1908 he is 'writing the last chapter of Jefferies or at least sketching it, & walking for a week about Sussex, Surrey & Kent' (*LGB*, 163)—which seems to suggest that he was at one and the same time following in Jefferies' last footsteps [as many of us did last Saturday] and preparing for his next book, *The South Country*. In July the progress-report to Bottomley runs as follows: 'I have just finished Jefferies (all but the index and preface), & have today & yesterday compiled a monstrous bibliography for those who come after me' (*LGB*, 16p). At this point, perhaps I can be forgiven if I indulge in a little personal reminiscence. Exactly fifty years after Thomas wrote those words, I was myself engaged in going through his 'monstrous bibliography,' checking it, using it, adding to it, assessing it. Perhaps no one, with the obvious exception of your first president, Samuel J. Looker, has subjected this part of Thomas's work to such rigorous scrutiny, and I confess to feeling a sensation of warm and close fellowship when I read Thomas's words because I can count myself as one of 'those who came after' him. And my verdict on its usefulness may be worth recording. Inevitably, I found a few mistakes in it—slips of the pen, typographical errors, dates that are not quite right, etc. But I know, only too well, that if Thomas had not spent hours that were obviously uncongenial to him, in the interests of scholarly comprehensiveness and in tribute to Jefferies as one who deserved detailed scholarly treatment, my own work would have taken much, much longer and would have been far less accurate. I was always aware, while working on my thesis, of Thomas's help and example, and if my own even more monstrous list of works by and about Jefferies in my *Critical Study* (itself not without its mistakes and omissions) proves valuable to subsequent students of Jefferies, Edward Thomas deserves a vital part of the credit.

There is little more to tell about the writing of the biography. Gordon Bottomley agreed to read proofs, as he had done on a number of occasions for Thomas, and in the ensuing correspondence further light is shed upon Thomas's methods and problems. Bottomley wondered if he could give 'a more organic account of the progress of affairs in Jefferies' family,' but Thomas admits: 'I know nothing about them. ... It was not even possible to say that R.J. was a good husband & father with any certainty' (*LGB*, 170). This observation backs up the persistent rumour that Thomas somehow failed to win the full co-operation of surviving members of the Jefferies family. In an unpublished letter, now in the Jefferies material at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Thomas told Dr. T.H. Rake that Mrs. Jefferies thought him too young, and it is clear from a letter to Edward Garnett, the influential contemporary critic who was an enthusiast for Jefferies and a great supporter of Thomas, Hudson and Alfred Williams, that she had not shown him some as-then-unpublished pages originally intended for *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *The Amateur Poacher* that he knew she possessed.¹² 'Moreover, we know that Jefferies' sister, 'Mrs. Billing, did not allow him to consult Jefferies' notebooks, then in her possession, because of 'what seemed a rather domineering manner'¹³—a phrase so unlike what we know of Thomas's character that we can only suppose that a combination of nervousness and eagerness on his part led them to under-rate his ability and sincerity.

It is clear, too, that Bottomley was extremely helpful to Thomas with criticisms and suggestions. At one point Thomas writes: 'You are excellent. I adopt your suggestions shamelessly and with no intention of announcing to the world that you wrote the book' (*LGB*, 173). That, of course, is part of Thomas's quiet, nervous humour—he makes a similar remark to Edward Garnett: 'Very little but the expression is mine; ... they are your ideas or the ramifications of them'¹⁴—but a further reference to Bottomley's discovery of 'omissions & inconsistencies' in the bibliography (*LGB*, 175), discovered while reading the proofs, shows that his behind-the-scenes assistance was considerable.

The book was ultimately published on 26 January 1909 at 10s 6d (it appeared in an American version in September). Two years later (6 October 1911), it was reprinted in Hutchinson's 1/- Net Library¹⁵—at which point one can only remark: oh, inflation! The book was dedicated, appropriately, to W.H. Hudson. Thomas had written to Hudson as soon as the book was

¹² Edward Garnett, ed. 'Some Letters of Edward Thomas,' *Athenaeum* (16 April 1920), p.502.

¹³ Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields* (London: Baker, 1965), p.xi.

¹⁴ Guthrie, *loc. cit.* p.502.

commissioned to secure permission, and they corresponded about Jefferies at this time, Thomas eager to get Hudson's opinion about earlier prose writers that Jefferies had read and quietly but firmly defending Jefferies against Hudson's charge that he lacked humour. Typically, Thomas's most critical account of the book was written to the man who had accented the dedication: 'It seems wholly bad and full of sound and fury and my special brand of vagueness.'¹⁵

A few months before publication, Thomas had written to Bottomley: 'I wonder what people will say of a biographer who allows his subject to hold the field so' (*LGB*, 171). The book was, in fact, well received—Thomas was particularly pleased by a long and favourable review in *The Times* and by private praise from Henry S. Salt and Edward Garnett. On reading it, Garnett immediately asked him to reprint some of Jefferies' uncollected essays, a suggestion that resulted in *The Hills and the Vale*. But although the book seems to have been a *succès d'estime*, its financial rewards were modest at best. We find Thomas writing, rather ruefully, to Dad Uzzell in December 1909: 'My book on Jefferies did not succeed as well as you might think by the praise it had, and I have not made my fortune yet.'¹⁶ None the less, it soon took its place as the standard biography of Jefferies and as such has yet to be superseded. It is, I suppose, in the nature of things that the book's highest praise came twenty years after Thomas's death, when Mrs. Q.D. Leavis praised it 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.' Interestingly enough, she commends it for the very reason that Thomas feared it might be criticised—for his 'allowing the subject to hold the field so.' In Mrs. Leavis's words, '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.'¹⁷

That is an admirable critical statement, and I will not even attempt to emulate it. (The only point that seems worth adding is that, although current critical practice and fashion would claim that Thomas quotes too often and too long, much of the material was not readily available in Thomas's time, and the book performed an invaluable service in providing generous samples of Jefferies' writing as well as judicious commentary upon it.) Writing to Hudson about Besant's *Eulogy*, Thomas had observed: 'I think Besant's book

¹⁵ Guthrie, *loc. cit.* p.437.

¹⁶ John Moore, *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas* (London: Heinemann, 1939), p.154.

¹⁷ Q.D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies,' in F.R. Leavis, ed., *A Selection from 'Scrutiny'*, (2 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1968), II, p.203.

leaves such a bad flavour because it gives no idea of Jefferies' greatness and tremendous joy of life, and so allows the final sickness to dominate.'¹⁸ Thomas certainly corrected the imbalance in his own work.

In closing, it remains for me to bring my subject full circle by documenting Thomas's love of Wiltshire in the years following the publication of the biography. His next book was *The South Country* which, although he assured his publishers that he would 'scatter real place names plentifully' (*LGB*, 165), in one of his elusive, unrooted books. None the less, Wiltshire figures prominently, and a reference to Swindon and the old canal of his boyhood appears in the opening pages. And one of the more memorable passages depends for its inspiration upon Jefferies. He records how, at an unnamed town in Wiltshire close to the county boundary—

it occurs to me that I should like to taste lardy cakes—which I last bought at Wroughton fifteen years ago—before I leave the county. Richard Jefferies' grandfather was 'My Lord Lardy Cake' in old Swindon sixty years ago, and his memory is kept alive by those tough, sweet slabs of larded pastry which, in his generous ovens, gathered all the best essences of the other cakes, pies, tarts and joints which were permitted to be baked with them. In 'Amaryllis at the Fair' they are mentioned with some indignity as a ploughboy's delicacy. My lips water for them, and at the first bakery in—I ask for some. The baker tells me he has sold the last one ... [and] stiffly tries to persuade me that none of his fellow-townsmen bakes them. I disbelieve the man of dough for all his conscious look of sagacity and virtue, and am rewarded for my disbelief by four lardy cakes for threepence-halfpenny not many yards from his accursed threshold. Lardy cakes, I now discover for the first time, have this merit besides their excellent taste and provision of much pleasant but not finical labour for the teeth, that one is enough at a time, and that four will therefore, take a man a long way upon the roads of England.¹⁹

In 1911, he undertook his book on The Icknield Way (published in 1913) in which he follows the ancient British trackway from Thetford to Swindon. And at this point we encounter a new Thomas—and, perhaps, a new Wiltshire, though the unreliable, self-righteous baker has already offered a hint. Thomas had come along the Ridgeway from East Hendred, through Ashbury, Bishopstone and Wanborough, and eventually arrived, weary and hungry, at Chiseldon where he looked for a place to stay the night. And then, if we can believe an amused but irritated Thomas, his troubles began. He tried one inn and then another, in vain. A further encounter is as grotesque as it is frustrating—

¹⁸ Guthrie, *loc. cit.* p.435.

¹⁹ *The South Country* (London: Dent, 1909), pp.245-6.

An enormous woman stood wedged in the doorway; she was black-haired, sullen, and faintly moustached, and she had her hands hanging down because there was no room on either side of her to clasp them, and no room in the doorway for her to rest them upon the fat superincumbent upon her hips.²⁰

She calls her husband, who 'did not think he could spare me a bed.' At another possible place there is no room, and he is then told that it was impossible to get a bed that side of Swindon. He tries at Coate, but, again is turned away. At Swindon, at last, he is successful, though he paints a lugubrious picture of the bedroom decorations in which the dominating influence is a picture of 'a swarthy and hearty woman practically naked to the waist' advertising cigarettes, though, as Thomas notes ruefully, 'I could not imagine what she had to do with cigarettes of any kind' (*IW*, 308). Possibly, he speculated, 'they were afraid of German spies at Chisledon' (*IW*, 307). All in all, it has a prophetic intimation of a sadder—and to us more familiar—world.

The outbreak of the First World War, of which this seems a palpable foreshadowing, gave the *coup de grace* to 'Thomas's precarious employment as a writer of descriptive, meditative prose, but at the same time it released the poetic impulse that had been dormant within him for so long. The last two and a half years of his life saw a remarkable poetic flowering; during this period, under the shadow of the war, he explored what England meant to him, and as one of his best editors and commentators has recently noted, 'its heart and epitome is Wiltshire.'²¹ In one of his finest poems, 'Lob,' the spirit of England is personified as a Wiltshire countryman. The countryside in which he is set is somewhat south of here in the Pewsey Vale, the country around Alton Barnes and Alton Priors, but Lob himself seems to have been formed out of a composite of Dad Uzzell, the old gamekeeper, and possibly even Jefferies himself, who had been described on the first page of the biography as 'the genius, the human expression, of this country, emerging from it, not to be detached from it any more than the curves of some statues from their maternal stone' (*RJ*, 1). In the poem Thomas recalls how

At hawthorn-time in Wiltshire travelling
In search of something chance would never bring, (11.1-2)

he meets an old man who, in memory, haunts him, so he goes back into the country in search of him. The people he meets all recognize his description,

²⁰ *The Icknield Way* (London: Constable, 1913), pp.304-5. Henceforth cited in text as *IW*.

²¹ Edward Thomas, *Poems and Last Poems*, edited by Edna Longley (London: Collins, 1973), p.232. I am indebted to this source for the connection between 'Lob' and the passage from *RJ* quoted below. The quotations from 'Lob' are also taken from this edition (pp.68-72).

but their identifications of its subject are all different. At last he meets another memorable countryman, described as follows—

He was a squire's son
Who loved wild bird and beast, and dog and gun
For killing them. He had loved them from his birth,
One with another, as he loved the earth. (11.4-3-6)

This man gives him a long descriptive account of a recurring, unlying countryman, Lob, who contains within himself the spirit of the rural English. And the man sums him up as follows—

'Do you believe Jack dead before his hour?
Or that his name is Walker, or Bottlesford,
Or Button, a mere clown, or squire, or lord?
The man you saw,—Lob-lie-by-the-fire, Jack Cade,
Jack Smith, Jack Moon, poor Jack of every trade,
Young Jack, or old Jack, or Jack What-d'ye-call,
Jack-in-the-hedge, or Robin-run-by-the-wall,
Robin Hood, Ragged Robin, lazy Bob,
One of the lords of No Man's Land, good Lob,—
Although he was seen dying at Waterloo,
Hastings, Agincourt, and Sedgemoor too,—
Lives yet. Me never will admit he is dead
Till millers cease to grind men's bones for bread,
Not till the weathercock crows once again
And I remove my house out of the lane
On to the road.' (11.130-14-5)

Thomas concludes (and I will conclude also) by drawing the inevitable connection—

With this he disappeared
In hazel and thorn tangled with old-man's-beard.
But one glimpse of his back, as there he stood,
Choosing his way, proved him of old Jack's blood,
Young Jack perhaps, and now a Wiltshireman
As he has oft been since his days began. (11.14-5-150)

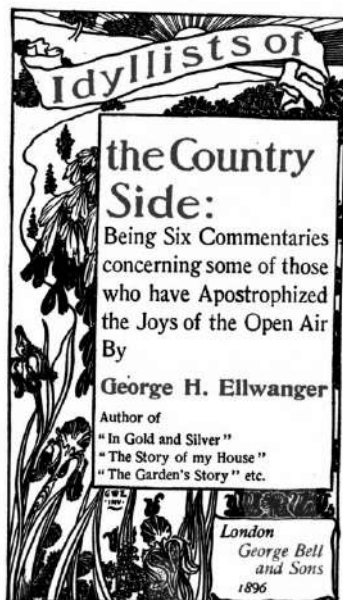
Idyllists of the Country Side

George H. Ellwanger

George Herman Ellwanger (1848–1906) was born in Rochester, New York, the son of a horticulturist. He followed a similar career but with the added bonus as a writer on these matters. He remarked that every tree has its individuality as marked as the eyes or nose of a man. His *The Garden's Story* (1889) and other volumes on nature brought his passion for floriculture and arboriculture to a large and appreciative audience. *The Story of My House* (1891) followed next and his *Idyllists of the Country Side* was published by George Bell and Sons in 1896. The six 'idyllists' were Jefferies (pp.123–170), Walton, Gilbert White, Thomas Hardy, Thoreau, and Burroughs. He went on to write an Introduction to White's *Natural History of Selborne* (1899).



George H. Ellwanger



AFIELD WITH JEFFERIES.

In summer when the shawes be shene,
And leaves be large and long, . . .
The wood-wele sang, and wolde not cease,
Sitting upon the spray.

Ballad of Guy of Gisborne.

REPOSING in one of the double transepts of the most symmetrical of English cathedrals, the ancient fane at Salisbury, is a marble bust typifying a face remarkable for its strength and charm in repose—at once the effigy of a poet, artist, and thinker, in whom the perceptive quality of beauty and inherent love for the beautiful are revealed by every feature. Calm and majestic, thoughtful and serene, it is a countenance that arrests the beholder, and haunts him, like some sweetly cadenced strain, long after the richly dight spire and hallowed Close of Salisbury have receded from the view. Upon the pedestal is graven this inscription—

TO THE MEMORY OF RICHARD JEFFERIES, BORN AT COATE IN THE PARISH OF CHISELDON AND COUNTY OF WILTS, 6th NOVEMBER, 1848. DIED AT GORING IN THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX, 14th AUGUST, 1887. WHO OBSERVING THE WORK OF ALMIGHTY GOD WITH A POET'S EYE, HAS ENRICHED THE LITERATURE OF HIS COUNTRY, AND WON FOR HIMSELF A PLACE AMONGST THOSE WHO HAVE MADE MEN HAPPIER AND WISER.

To those who know his work and the character and history of the man, this tribute must appear as touching as the epitaph of The Elogy. And perhaps its modest sentiment, reflecting his own modest nature, is sufficient,—his work lives after him and speaks more potently than any memorial that man may frame.

Entering Wiltshire from Dorsetshire, the landscape broadens; and though, like most of the southern counties, a country radiant with verdure, it may be questioned whether it is equal in pastoral attractiveness to Dorset, or in romantic loveliness to Hants, Kent, or Sussex. South-down sheep browse upon its countless chalk-downs, softly outlined in distant haze; and sleek-coated cattle graze amid the luxuriant herbage of its lowlands. Charlock and poppy stain its fields with gold and scarlet; while its hedgerows and thatches and ancient churches lend their ever-present grace to its rural scenes. This is the region of *Wild Life in a Southern County*, a country more minutely described than almost any other portion of England; though in the Wiltshire author's extended series of rural pictures, it should be remembered the scenes are also laid at Somerset, Devon, Middlesex, Surrey, and Sussex, and even close to the metropolis itself.

But to say that Wiltshire has been thus minutely portrayed were nothing exceptional of itself. Minute description is a relative quantity, depending upon numerous accessories before it becomes vitalized and endowed with a lasting quality. These essentials were inherent in Jefferies, who, throughout his references to Nature and Nature's works, conveyed his observations with the feeling of the poet and aesthetic sense of the artist.

For though prose was his chosen vehicle of expression, he was at heart a poet; while, had he painted with pigments instead of tracing his impressions on the printed page, he must have won a foremost name among the distinguished masters of the brush. The attributes of a painter—a great painter of landscapes—he possessed pre-eminently. To him belonged the apprehension of form, thorough knowledge of perspective, a keen imaginative sense, quick perceptive powers, an abiding love of the beautiful, and lastly, most highly developed of all his faculties, an intense sensibility for colour and understanding of tone. This latter quality constitutes the most striking trait of Jefferies' writings, apart from his phenomenal observation and the strong element of human sympathy characteristic of all his work.

Nor is this passion a mere love for effects, akin to the decorative element of art; but rather a sensuous pleasure in the contemplation and study of colour for itself alone. Colours in Nature delighted his aesthetic sense and appealed to his artistic temperament as a piece of antique Chinese glaze or the hues entangled in an Eastern carpet delight the virtuoso. To him the smallest grass-blade contributed a note to the general harmony; every day the mead was enamelled anew and its green seen for the first time.

To the question, 'What is the colour of the May dandelion?' he devotes an entire essay—failing to define its precise shade with satisfaction, on account of the paucity or limitation of available descriptive terms for tints. Terms expressive of the species of each genus of colour were wanting; that is, terms which are available for literary use and that may be employed for serious composition. There was no book, not even Chevreuil's, which could tell him the difference between the light scarlet of one poppy and the deep purple-scarlet of another species. The dandelion's brilliant disc could not be defined as yellow, or orange, or gold. It was, moreover, not glazed, like the corolla of the buttercup, but sensitive; altering as the day is bright or clouded, varying with the presence of a slight haze or the juxtaposition of other hues, and adding to its own hue the hue of that which was passing.¹ Neither can he find an exact similitude for the rich hue, after the faint fleeting yellow has become fixed, with which the sun invests the ripening wheat amid whose waving ranks there appears intermingled the red of the orange, the tint of bronze, and the hue of maize; but these comparisons might not fix a colour that plays over the surface of its changing yellow sea.²

His palette, notwithstanding, is singularly rich in light and shade, and in conveying the subtle gradations and chromatic deviations of the colourific scale. I recall no English writer by whom this appreciation is more strongly

¹ 'Nature and Books.'

² *Wild Life in a Southern County*

defined, or presented more vividly and constantly. Thoreau possessed this feeling, and also understood and was eminently capable of imparting both pronounced and delicate impressions received by the retina, though not to the extreme degree possessed by the Wiltshire essayist. With him colour flashes from every page, as stars come out upon the evening sky. The summer passes with its blaze of beauty, and the average person recalls, perchance, a turmoil of sunset dyes; while to Jefferies' heightened sense new hues were perceptible in the speedwell with every passing hour. No shade escaped him, and no molecule of light or scintilla of shadow might occur unnoticed by his receptive eye. The light was never the same on a landscape to him for many minutes together; the clouds and colours constantly changed; and he was present to record.

How sentiently, for example, the tone of the atmosphere is rendered in the sketches entitled 'The River' and 'Nutty Autumn,'—the one portraying the bloom of summer, that almost indefinable hue which hangs upon the heated fields, and is consonant with the sickle and the wheaten sheaf; the other expressive of the tawny and ripeness which broods over the latter-year. A few sentences, merely a word or two in almost any of his essays, stamp the landscape and the season indelibly upon the vision. In reading the rhythmic conceptions that flow in such a constant stream from his pen, one scarcely pauses to analyse his style—its colour is so pervasive—except to note and marvel at its spontaneity and entire freedom from effort. That he did not dwell upon the rounding of his periods would appear evident from the vast amount of his writings within a brief space of time, as well as from the abrupt, if not almost careless, manner he often has of terminating a chapter or a vein of thought. It is rather in the body of a chapter, or an essay, as he became imbued with the beauty of a thought which seemed to call for the exertion of his fullest poetic powers, that he stopped to pay minute attention to finish and polish of diction.

Like some resplendent insect above a flower, with irised vanes on which the sunshine streams, his essays scintillate and palpitate with colour. 'Colour and form and light are as magic to me,' he exclaims, while recalling ten years afterwards the flight of a white-backed eave-swallow, a yellow-hammer singing to the sinking sun, and the sunlight falling upon the crab-tree's flakes of bloom. For yellow in particular, the gold of Nature, he seems to have had an especial fondness; though this may be owing to the preponderance of that shade in the English flora—a colour that is regarded by Walter Pater as the primary colour of delight throughout Nature, and in nearly all art. In the fragrant chapter entitled 'Wild Flowers,' he refers specifically to this colour-sense—

Sometimes I think sun-painted colours are brighter to me than to many, and more strongly affect the nerves of the eye. Straw going by the road on a dusky winter's day seems so pleasantly golden—the sheaves lying aslant at the top, and these bundles of yellow tubes thrown up against the dark ivy on the opposite wall. Tiles red-burned, or orange-coated, the sea sometimes cleanly definite, the shadows of trees in a thin wood, where there is room for shadows to form and fall—some such shadows are sharper than light, and have a blue tint. Not only in summer, but in cold winter, and not only romantic things, but plain matter-of-fact things, as a waggon freshly painted red beside the wright's shop, stand out as if wet with colour, and delicately pencilled at the edges. It must be out-of-doors; nothing in-doors looks like this. ... Out-of-door colours do not need to be gaudy. A mere dull stake of wood thrust in the ground often stands out sharper than the pink flashes of the French studio; a faggot, the outline of a leaf, low tints without reflecting power strike the eye as a bell the ear. To me they are intensely clear; and the clearer, the greater the pleasure. It is often too great, for it takes me away from solid pursuits merely to receive the impression, as water is still to reflect the trees. This very power is often, I think, the cause of pain to me. To see so clearly is to value so highly and to feel too deeply.

Yet while possessing the attributes of an illustrious painter of landscapes, no one, were the choice left to posterity, would wish to have seen the author of *Field and Hedgerow* an artist, to the exclusion of an author, however honoured his name among those who have become immortal in one of the greatest of the arts. Jefferies' special place in literature, and his rank as a sympathising interpreter of Nature, it is safe to assume, could never have fallen to any one other than himself. There can be no second *Life of the Fields*. Other idylls may instruct and please, but in a different degree. A finer literarian may arise to hymn the paeon of the open-air; but the combinative qualities that speak from Jefferies' later work must remain to him alone.

The amount of his writings is so great, however, and the subjects are so varied, that it is impossible, within a limited compass, to epitomise them all. Incontestably, he wrote too much; he lacked the margin of leisure, and was constantly under the goad of providing for his livelihood, for which he depended solely upon his pen.

Owing to his peculiar artistic temperament, as well as to various individual characteristics, it is difficult to compare him with some other Nature-observers who were equally as painstaking as he. His work may not be appropriately classed with that of the learned Selborne rector, than whom none had a more watchful eye; nor with that of the Walden recluse, whose powers of observation in all that appertained to Nature's sights and sounds could not be surpassed. White was a riper scholar and classist, as well as a scientist; and Thoreau, a deeper thinker and a mystic, had also a wider

knowledge of literature, in addition to his epigrammatic force and poetic gift of utterance. But Selborne partakes more of the quality of a naturalist's calendar in epistolary form, besides being partly a record of an antiquarian and archaeologist; while a great portion of Thoreau's writings exist as notes from his journal, necessarily disjointed and more or less unfinished.

Jefferies was an essayist; and, above all, the idyllist and painter of country-life as it exists in England. To recall his name is to recall the myriad beauties of Nature in all her tenses of the seasons; in a thousand conditions of light and sky and atmosphere; in countless phases of growth and blossoming. To know him is to approach nearer the heart of the flower, the mystic concave of the sky, and the elusive verge of the horizon. The message of the wind and voice of the bird become clearer; the missive of the bud and precept of the falling leaf, no one has rendered more lovingly, more faithfully, than he. His extreme sympathy for the life of which he treats must strike even the most unsympathetic reader. Without special purpose, he considered it a great cruelty to destroy the smallest creature; and despite the difficulty he often experienced in identifying insects on the wing, he objected to capturing them. Their joy of life was so intense, the pleasure of living, the consciousness of seeing and feeling so exquisite, he could not willingly interfere with their harmless liberty. To the butterfly the rapture of the flower; to the bird the ecstasy of his song! Let the hare still leap in his lissom grace, the swallow trace his arabesques of beauty, the hawk describe his spiral in the sky—'the sunny moment is to them all in all.' At a glance his piercing vision swept each furrow and hedgerow, every down and coombe, every field and tree, noting their slightest movement and variation, their every sound and change. The mere touch of a leaf, he declares, was a talisman to bring him under the enchantment of the fields; so that he seemed to feel and know all that was proceeding among the grass-blades and in the bushes. Day by day there was an alteration perceptible, always an added note to make, a new portent in the burden of the breeze—'a sweet breath in 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.' He derived an unceasing pleasure from everything lovely, together with that rare felicity of discerning it in the most commonplace things, to him always the most interesting.

The very cottage-roof became a register full of meaning, increased activity on tile or thatch marking the approach of spring and summer, as familiar objects in wood and hedgerow cast denotative shadows before. The mossed and lichened house-top had its natural history, its science and art, its seasons, its migrants, semi-migrants and residents, of whom a voluminous

chronicle might be made.³ He could write a whole history of the Reed Canary Grass, whose touch and rustle brought with it a sense of wildness, as if there were a vast forest round about,—the birds and wild-life that frequented it, the play of the wind through its sensitive stalks, its green vernal tints and yellow autumnal fires, the water wherein its sharp-pointed leaf-tongues were reflected, the changing sky which lent to it an ever-varying tone, its beauty, its mystery, its majesty.⁴ The longer he studied a single locality, the more he found in it to describe; and a fresh footpath ever yielded him a fresh flower, a fresh delight.

These impressions, hour by hour and day by day, his brain received and retained, as the reflecting-plate mirrors the images formed by the camera. Like a great landscape-artist, he has fixed not only the permanent but the transitory. No landscape has ever been more truly glorified than that of Wiltshire. Only, it is the glory of the truth that he has immortalized, the glory of a light that really is on sea and land, if one be present at the opportune moment, and possessed of the faculty of seeing. More than Wordsworth, more than the rhymed school *De Rerum Natura*, is he the true laureate of the English country-side.

The student of Jefferies, at first charmed with his astounding insight of Nature, and the lucid manner with which he has presented its expressions and mutations, is still more impressed with the amount of work he has accomplished within his chosen range. This, apart from his novels, which, with one or two exceptions, do not enter into present consideration; although the human element of these not infrequently forms only a frame for his prismatic setting of the fields. He had read the classics in early life; he knew Linnaeus and Gerard; he had early read Culpepper's *Herbal*—plants and flowers were full of ideas to him. Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, he had studied at eighteen; and with Plato, Xenophon, Socrates, Sophocles, Athenaeus, Aristotle, and others of the old Greek and Latin writers, he was familiar. To him as to many, the ancient tomes were the most solacing and profitable; the old books of Nature and Nature's mind he would have chained up free for every man to read in every parish.

Beginning as a writer of fiction, it was not until after many years that Jefferies found his true place as an idyllist. Then with rapid succession appeared that marvellous series of out-of-door sketches, first presented in *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and continued until the final essay of *Field and Hedgerow*. Among the volumes treating of the country life should be included *The Dewy Morn*, and *Amaryllis at the Fair*; which though designated

³ 'Nature on the Roof.'

⁴ 'Outside London.'

as novels are really glowing pictures of still-life. The scenes described are largely those with which the author was familiar from boyhood; and in the person of Felise of the former romance is often reflected his own personality, and the love for country sights and sounds that he has invested with such breathing animation and detail throughout his essays.

This portrait and its accompanying calendar of the seasons—from the hawthorn's opening hasp to the last harebell on the hill—is on its part but an elaboration of a sentence fraught with meaning that occurs in the preface of *Nature Near London*: 'To traverse the paths day by day, and week by week; to keep an eye ever on the fields from year's end to year's end, is the one only method of knowing what really is in or comes to them. To understand and sympathise with Nature, one must be far removed from all extraneous influences, and bask in the repose that harbours amid the fields, and dwells beneath the boughs and rests upon the hillsides—then the mind gradually yields itself to the green earth, the winds among the trees, the song of birds, and comes to have an understanding with them all.'

The same idea has been differently expressed by him in his preface to *The Natural History of Selborne*, wherein he advises those who would see and know the life of Nature to fix themselves in some pleasant retreat, and work there with absolute quietness as long as possible. 'For it is in this quietness that the invisible becomes visible. The vacant field gradually becomes full of living things. In the hedges unsuspected birds come to the surface of the green leaf to take breath. Over the pond brilliantly coloured insects float to and fro, and the fish that never seem to move from the dark depths do move and come up to sight. Be very careful not to go too far, for it is a fact that the greatest variety of information is generally gathered in a very small compass.'

There is far more than this, however, which he has pointed out, unconsciously as relating to himself, in the first of the four lovely vignettes—among the most artistic he has traced—entitled, 'Beauty in the Country.' For, to write as Jefferies has written; to be a confidant of Nature and share the secrets of her penetralia, requires more than the mere power of observation however acute, or a life of reclusion however remote. It necessitates a love of out-of-door life, as fond, as passionate, as devoted as that of lover for his mistress. It calls for close communion with the earth and sky, at all hours and all seasons; not only during the gleam of the summer sunshine, but during cold and snows. Winter becomes as much a part of living Nature as does the summer, and is scarcely less prolific of phenomena. Its life is equally present, if more retired; though the bee be concealed in his hibernacle, and the embryo-moth wrapped in his warm cocoon; though the marmot doze in his burrow, and the flower-bud sleep beneath the snow. To write understandingly of the country-side one must have its tan imprinted on his

face, as the wheat-field is embrowned by the heat, and the autumn wood is flushed by the touch of the frost.

And this love and fervour are ingrained and innate, the result not of choice, but inheritance—an ancestral gift from some one, it may be of a past century, who has lived long amid the open air, and who, though his heritage may have lain dormant through his immediate successors, has yet transmitted his appreciation to another of a following generation. Or this gift, acquired either from an immediate ancestor, or a male ancestry more removed, may be additionally fostered in the capricious instances where it recurs, when on the maternal side there exists a similar predilection for some special phase of beauty, uncultivated though such appreciation may have been. Then, if the inheritor be possessed of a fine imaginative sense, and this be quickened by study and observation of Nature, in many instances he becomes a poet, either in the form of metre, or of balanced and musical prose. His intense love for his art, his sense of appreciation are linear; his style, the form by which his emotions are expressed, is distinctively his own.

A Nature-lover and close observer, Jefferies was by right of inheritance through his father and forefathers. So that this endowment is not voluntary, and may not be had for the striving; genius but comes where it is sent, falling, directly or indirectly, on some especial one by favour of descent. In the case of all great artists, somewhere and sometime, it may safely be presumed, some one among their ancestry has possessed a love, however undeveloped, closely related to that form of art in which they excel.

Such an inheritance Jefferies applies to 'The Making of Beauty.' A hundred and fifty years, more than twice the allotted span of man, he maintains, is required to form a beauty—a hundred and fifty years out-of-doors. There must be five generations of open air and exercise, with a sufficient proportion of comforts, before a beautiful woman may appear,—conditions which may only exist in the country, and hence all beautiful women come from the country or are of country extraction. Let us trace his line of analysis. A yeoman has a son, he pre-supposes, say a hundred and fifty years ago. This son, properly nourished, working in the fields, and sharing the athletic sports of the time, acquires an almost perfect physical frame. Marrying at thirty or thirty-five, he chooses for a wife one of the most charming among his friends, equally healthy and proportionally as strong. With the increase of home-comforts, another generation marks an improvement in the cast of countenance, refinement of features, and polish of manners. Under such healthy conditions, if the mother be comely, the daughter is fairer; if the father be of good height, the son is taller. Still another generation, and the family becomes noted as handsome. The chin has become more rounded, the cheek-bones sink, the ears are smaller, the texture of the skin is finer. The

handsome inter-marry with the handsome, and the improvement continues. Still the beauty awaits another generation to arrive; nor is it possible to predict from which shoot of the parental stalk, the perfected bloom will spring. In the fifth generation she comes—the type of perfect health and female loveliness by inheritance—the fairest flower that earth may unfold.

She walks, and the very earth smiles beneath her feet. A hundred and fifty years at the least—more probably twice that—have passed away, while from all enchanted things of earth and air this preciousness has been drawn. From the south wind that breathed a century and a half ago over the green wheat. From the perfume of the growing grasses waving over honey-laden clover and laughing veronica, hiding the greenfinches, baffling the bee. From rose-loved hedges, woodbine, and cornflower azure-blue, where yellowing wheat-stalks crowd up under the shadow of green firs. All the devious brooklet's sweetness where the iris stays the sunlight; all the wild-wood's hold of beauty; all the broad hill's thyme and freedom; thrice a hundred years repeated. A hundred years of cow-slips, blue-bells, violets; purple spring and golden autumn; sunshine, shower, and dewy mornings; the night immortal; all the rhythm of Time unrolling. A chronicle unwritten and past all power of writing: who shall preserve a record of the petals that fell from the roses a century ago? The swallows to the housetop three hundred times—think a moment of that. Thence she sprang, and the world yearns towards her beauty as to flowers that are past. The loveliness of seventeen is centuries old. Is this why passion is almost sad?

Besides 'The Making of Beauty' and the vignette of Dolly in 'The Field-Play,' Jefferies has depicted numerous attractive types of female beauty. The rounded curves of woman fascinated him; and he envied the superb health and robust physique of many a maid who slaved amid the heated sheaves. The contour of a finely moulded arm and bust, the flowing lines of woman's limbs and hips, her luxuriance of form appealed to him as to a sculptor. Witness his delineations in 'Golden-Brown,' 'The Force of Form,' and 'Nature In The Louvre.' His women of the fields, bronzed by the sunshine and exposure to the elements, forcibly recall Glatigny's peasantess, callous to heat, to rain, and to cold—a figure singularly reflective of the persons and their environment described in 'Golden-Brown'—

Elle est belle vraiment, la Normande robuste
Avec son large col implanté grassement,
Avec ses seins, orgueil et gloire de son buste
Que fait mouvoir sans cesse un lourd balancement.

Au détour d'un sentier alors qu'elle débouche
Ainsi qu'une génisse errant en liberté,
On croit voir la Cérés indomptable et farouche
Du gras pays normand si riche de santé.

Regardez-la marcher parmi les hautes herbes
La fille aux mouvements sauvages et nerveux,
Pendant que sur son front les grands épis des gerbes
Poussiéreux et sêrres hérissent ses cheveux!

C'est auprès de Bayeux que je l'ai rencontrée,
Dans un chemin couvert bordé par les pommiers,
Ou, la blaude flottante et la jambé guêtrée,
Le nez à l'air rougi, passaient deux gros fermiers.

The life of the labourer, with its attendant scenes in the wheat-field, hay-field, and the furrows, has been more effectively presented by Jefferies than by any other English writer. Equally comprehensive are his studies of the villagers, gipsies, cottagers, and the events that cluster about the hamlet; these, frequently presented, are most exhaustively treated under the title, *Hodge and His Masters*. Without stopping to verify the statement, I doubt if there be any of the Wiltshire essayist's works without some reference, or numerous references, to the wheat-field, for which he had an especial reverence, and was never tired of studying. It was yellow—his favourite colour—and its golden grains and sheaves represented to him the brawn and sinew and actual flesh and blood of man. He has painted it under all possible conditions of weather and seasons, of sowing and harvesting; with the birds and animals that fly over or frequent it, and the flowers that grow in it or about it.

As Hardy is the poet of the purple heath, so he is the singer of the golden corn; and Hodge and Roger the Reaper, in their minor way, take the place of Eustacia and Wildeve, as Dolly and Big Mat are suggestive of Tess and D'Urberville. The very steam-plough and threshing-machine he has rendered poetical, and almost artistic accompaniments of labour. The flail has all but disappeared, the scythe, the sickle, and the rake—the place of the harvester largely usurped by modern labour-saving instruments. But these, their stiff individuality of newness having become modified by time, are now, he claims, a part and portion of the brown earth, as natural and consistent as the olden scythe and reaping-hook.

The machine is lost in the corn, and nothing is visible but the colours, and the fact that it is the reaping, the time of harvest, dear to man these how many thousand years. There is nothing new in it; it is all old as the hills. The straw covers over the knives, the rims of the wheels sink into pimperl, convolvulus, veronica; the dry earth powders them, and so all beneath is concealed. Above, the sunlight, and once now and then the shadow of a tree throws its mantle over, and, like the hand of an enchanter, softly waving, surrounds it with a charm. So the cranks and wheels and knives and mechanism do not exist—it was a machine in the work-shop, but it is not a machine in the wheat-field. For the wheat-field, you see, is very, very old, and the air is of old time, and the

shadow, the flowers, and the sunlight, and that which moves among them becomes of them. The solitary reaper alone in the great field goes round and round, the red fans striking beside him—alone with the sunlight and the blue sky and the distant hills; and he and his reaper are as much of the corn-field as the long-forgotten sickle, or the reaping-hook.⁵

The drill, depositing the grains of ore beneath the azure dome of March; the steam-plough, heralding the violets and celandines of spring; and finally, the threshing-machine, winnowing the precious lode for the granary amid the fly-wheel's ceaseless chant—all these become equally pleasing as seen through the medium of his poetic vision. These modern aspects of the fields he would have introduced in painting, contending that by omitting them a period of fifty years is omitted from the picture, and therefore it is not real or typical of the pastoral landscape of to-day.

But had Jefferies been a painter, it may well be doubted whether he would have found these ideas practical in art, the province of art not being that of the photographer. The old implements, which are classic and poetical withal, and which may be picturesquely utilized, still exist in the outlying districts, and there can be nothing incongruous in their employment on the canvas. The modern implements, perhaps, might be introduced into poetry; for in this case they might be referred to with all their accessories of sound, colour, and even fragrance—the dirge of the fly-wheel, under a leaden sky, telling of vanished sunlit hours, the drone of the steam plough's revolving drum on the tawny fallows, the clank of the mowing-machine laying low the perfumed clover and new-mown grass. Indeed, the steam threshing-machine has supplied Charles Tennyson Turner with material for two charming sonnets, in which—

The fly-wheel with a mellow murmur turn'd;
While ever rising on its mystic stair
In the dim light, from secret chambers borne,
The straw of harvest, sever'd from the corn,
Climb'd, and fell over, in the murky air.

This realistic feeling expressed by Jefferies has a certain touch with that of Constable, who also would bring Nature into sympathy with man, saying he preferred the fields the farmers worked in, and the work they performed in them; and hence was fond of introducing villages, mills, steeples, and accustomed scenes of labour, into his compositions. But this was before the advent of the modern machine, which it may be reasonably supposed he would have left out had it existed then; agreeing with Hamerton that the material world was not made exclusively for the purpose of being painted,

⁵ 'Notes on Landscape Painting.'

and that both Nature and the farmers often make arrangements which might be good and reasonable on the solid earth we inhabit, but which for the clearest artistic reasons could not be tolerated in a picture. In fact, the machine in art is much like the nose in poetry. Neither may enter as a factor in the delineation of beauty—the one in art, the other in verse. Even Tennyson's metaphor—'Lightly was her nose Tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower,' seems a trifle strained in its conceit. It is permitted to Solomon alone, says Gautier, to compare the nose of a beautiful woman to the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.

There have been few things, Jefferies states, that he has read of, or studied, which he has not seen illustrated while out in the fields. And this may be more readily comprehended when he tells us that it was his habit to spend hours in trees for the purpose of a better watch on animals and birds. The ornithologist and naturalist, to know the wild creatures of which he treats, must match himself against their natural cunning and quickness, and therefore must have especial animal instincts, and, above all, a patience that never flags. Great as was his patience, and accurate as was his power of observation, Gilbert White, during his later life, was lacking in one sense, the sense of acute hearing, which is necessary to a full understanding of wild-life. This, he complained, incommoded him sadly, and lost to him all the pleasing notices and little intimations arising from rural sounds.

Throughout *The Amateur Poacher*, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Red Deer*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, as well as in nearly all his monographs relating to the country, Jefferies has portrayed the habits of its furred and feathered denizens as few have done before him, or since he ceased to write. All the birds whose shadows swept the fields, or soared through the plain of the air above, he knew and described—the lark heralding the birth of the corn, the yellow-hammer singing down the sun, the cuckoo crying, 'Come hither!' from the trees, the chaffinch singing, 'Will you, will you kiss me, dear?' the chiff-chaff's ringing call, 'To arms, to arms, ye leaves!' the thrush and blackbird, in whose throats the sweetness of green things dwells.

The phenomenon of the soaring bird, which from the days of Daedalus to those of Darwin has baffled the researches of naturalists, philosophers, and mathematicians, was a subject of close attention by Jefferies. But he has approached no nearer its solution, in the picturesque chapters, 'The Hovering of the Kestrel,' and 'Birds Climbing the Air,' than did Solomon of old when he declared: 'There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not—the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.'

Beyond describing most graphically the soaring of the Raptores which we all have witnessed and marvelled at, as in wheels of volant beauty they trace their ascending spiral in the sky, he was unable to record any new facts to serve as an explanation of the problem.

The impressions he derived from his observations, however, were that a hawk can soar in a perfectly quiet atmosphere; if there is a wind he utilizes it, but it is quite as much to his detriment as to his advantage; if there is no wind he ascends more readily and to a greater height, and will of choice soar in a calm—

in fact, hawks seem to prefer still, calm weather; but considering the height to which they attain, no one can positively assert that they do not utilize a current. If they do they may be said to sail round half the circle with the wind fair and behind, and then meet it the other half of the turn, using the impetus they have gained to surmount the breeze as they breast it. ... It is a fascinating motion to watch. The graceful sweeping curl holds the eye; it is a line of beauty, and draws the glance up into the heights of the air.⁶

Of no less interest are his comments regarding the hovering of the kestrel, the commonest hawk in the southern part of England, who, he states, can hover in a perfect calm, and no doubt could do so in a room were it large enough; who requires no current of any kind, neither a horizontal breeze nor an ascending current; who hovers in the dead calm of summer days, when there is not the faintest breath of wind.

He will and does hover in the still, soft atmosphere of early autumn, when the gossamer falls in showers, coming straight down as if it were raining silk. If you puff up a ball of thistle-down it will languish on your breath and sink again to the sward. The reapers are sweltering in the wheat, the keeper suffocates in the wood, the carter walks in the shadow cast by his load of corn, the country-side stares all parched and cracked, and gasps for a rainy breeze. The kestrel hovers just the same. ... In a light air or calm there is no ascending current, or it is imperceptible or of no use to the kestrel. Such currents, where they do exist, are very local; but the kestrel's hover is not local: he can do it anywhere.⁷

It is well known that the eagle, hawk, buzzard, and other birds of prey do not soar until they have attained a certain height, ceasing their soaring in like manner when they reach a similar level in alighting,—a fact in itself that would account for atmospheric conditions acting as a support to the bird, and forming a counter-resistance to the natural law of gravitation. That a rising column of air or some peculiar buoyant atmospheric medium serves as a purchase, is unquestionable. But what unseen power possessed by the bird

⁶ *The Life of the Fields*, 1884.

⁷ *ibid.*

himself, propels him for hours in his aerial ascent and measured circles, without the flutter of a feather or apparent expenditure of any force at all? Again, extreme elevations are not essential to soaring, the bird-of-prey in many cases commencing his ascending spiral at a height of less than two hundred feet—motionless except for a slight moving of the tail sometimes in steering, or the leaning of the body from side to side in balancing himself, like the pitch of a skater on the ‘outside edge.’

The assertion has been made by Mr. I. Lancaster, who has devoted many years to the study of the soaring of the Raptore, that these derive the force to move themselves in the air from gravity. Gravity, he maintains, gives all the motive power; that which antagonises itself and that which antagonises air resistance. Once within the limits of soaring, the gravitating force of the body gives a liberal supply of power for all the purposes of air navigation. . . . Why does not the body fall? From the reciprocal nature of action and reaction, the air is doing as much work on the bird as the latter is on the air. It may be hard to follow all the peculiarities of the disturbances going on under the bird, but it is certain that they serve to hold it up. They are mainly condensations of air upon which the body is falling—a force passing the rear edge of the bird’s wings and wasted in falling to the tension of the surrounding air. ... A soaring bird may be considered a machine for disturbing air. The motive power required for driving the mechanism is its gravitating force. Its effectiveness consists in the amount of disturbance which returns to the normal condition of the surrounding atmosphere.⁸

Jefferies’ conclusion that a kestrel no doubt could hover in a room if it were large enough, would appear hardly tenable, though compatible with his belief, verified by repeated observations, that the bird can and does support himself in the air while stationary without the assistance of one or more currents of air; and this entirely independent of local conditions, and usually at an altitude a little lower than the tallest elms.

Concerning this phenomenon and the problem of soaring, the statement is made by Mr. J.E. Hendricks that an evaluation, if it were practicable, of the excess of the upward, above the downward, atmospheric pressure upon the bird, when it soars horizontally or remains stationary on fixed wings, would doubtless show that such excess is exactly equal to the weight of the bird; and the rear expansion on a vertical section of a bird that remains stationary on fixed wing in a current of air, would be found to be exactly equal to the force exerted by the breeze.⁹ Prof. Joseph Le Conte, in turn, holds that the phenomenon of soaring is due to differential air-currents that are always to

⁸ ‘The Problem of the Soaring Bird’: *The American Naturalist*, November–December, 1885.

⁹ *The American Naturalist*, March, 1886.

be depended upon at a sufficient elevation, and which the bird skilfully utilizes to lift himself—that is, in soaring the bird slopes downward with the wind, acquiring thus great velocity, passes into a lower current of less velocity, then turns facing the wind, and shoots up a slope which carries him higher than the level of the start, then turns again in a current of still higher velocity, then descends again along a slope and repeats the same cycle.¹⁰

Another recorder, Mr. S.E. Peal, observes: 'It seems to me the solution is that when going with the wind the bird gathers momentum by going down a slight incline, and when it turns and meets the breeze this extra momentum is used in lifting the bird and carrying it over a shorter course. Thus it starts the next lap at a slightly higher level, but some twenty yards to leeward'; the recorder adding that the large birds, like the pelican, adjutants, cyrus, vultures, etc., do not soar in a dead calm, or during high winds—they prefer a steady breeze.¹¹

But do all these recent explanations, together with numerous other theories, in which the observers invariably differ in their conclusions, serve to satisfactorily solve the problem or to define it more clearly than did Jefferies, when from the solitudes of the Wiltshire Downs he noted the sweeping curls of the mounting hawk, and marked the sunlight burnish the bird's breast and underwing? To judge by the only poem that Richard Jefferies ever wrote, or at least the sole poem he has ever published, the chaffinch would appear to have been his favourite bird. The lark, mounting the azure stair-case of the sky, he has apostrophised more frequently, though nowhere as beautifully as he has rendered the strain of 'My Chaffinch'—

His hours he spends upon a fragrant fir;
His merry 'chink,' his happy 'kiss me, dear,'
Each moment sounded, keeps the copse astir.
Loudly he challenges his rivals near,
Anon aslant down to the ground he springs,
Like to a sunbeam made of coloured wings.

The firm and solid azure of the ceil
That struck by hand would give a hollow sound,
A dome turned perfect by the sun's great wheel,
Whose edges rest upon the hills around,
Rings many a mile with blue enamelled wall;
His fir-tree is the centre of it all.

'My life and soul,' as if he were a Greek,
His heart was Grecian in his greenwood fane;
'My life and soul,' through all the sunny week,

¹⁰ *Popular Science Monthly*, April, 1894.

¹¹ 'The Soaring of Birds': *Nature*, May, 1891.

The chaffinch sang with beating heart amain.

‘The humble-bee the wide wood-world may roam;
One feather’s breadth I shall not stir from home.’

‘No note he took of what the swallows said
About the firing of some evil gun,
Nor if the butterflies were blue or red,
For all his feelings were intent in one.
The loving soul, a-thrill in all his nerves,
A life immortal as a man’s deserves.’

Or he is painting a hare, as if he held the brush of Weenix, and one could see the fur still damp with colour. The hare’s fur is full of delicate pencillings laid on by Nature’s hand. The black bud-sheaths of the ash furnish a comparison for his ear-tips, the brown October brake one hue for his glossy pelt, the buff bryony leaf another, the clematis the white; all his hues may be traced or paralleled in the trees, the bushes, grasses, or flowers, as if extracted from them by a secret alchemy. In the plumage of the partridge are the tints found amid the wheat he frequents, the red tips of other feathers being reflections of the red sorrel of the meadows. Thus all the colours of bird, insect, and animal life are caught and mirrored from the woodlands and the fields.¹²

Again, he is stalking the wild red-deer amid the fastnesses of Exmoor—a stag in his glory of antler and coat of ruddy gold; and once more Weenix or Snyders seems to guide his brush. The branching antlers accord with the deep shadowy boughs and broad fronds of the bracken; the rufus hue of his coat fits to the foxglove, the purple heather, and later on to the orange and red of the beech; his easy, bounding motion springs from the elastic sward; he not only lives in the wild woods and moors—he grows out of them as the oak grows from the ground.¹³

Or, it is October, when haws are red on the thorn, and the long file of the rooks pass to their nests in the yellowing elms. He is contemplating a large trout, over the arch of a bridge, above whose haunt a beech-tree casts its amber shade. He had discovered the fish while gazing into the water, and would strike the bridge with his stick or raise his hat every time he passed, to increase his native wariness, and so prevent his presence being detected. For four seasons he watched him with keen delight, waving his broad fan, or rising swiftly to a hovering fly; and during all these years the fish escaped unnoticed, with fishermen angling in the neighbouring pond close at hand. But one day the water of the brook was led off by a side-hatch. The next

¹² ‘The Haunt of the Hare.’

¹³ *Red Deer*

morning the poachers were abroad; and he had not the heart to stay and learn the fate of the trout. He never saw him afterward; it was barely possible he had escaped down the stream—though, when crossing the bridge, he never failed to glance over the parapet into the shadowy water, which somehow seemed to look colder, darker, less pleasant than it used to do.¹⁴

With summer comes the swallow, once more bringing the hay and white clover and warm winds that breathe hotly, like one that has been running uphill. The white bars across his back gleam and glide beside the dark fir copse, a quarter of a mile away. All day he threads the eyes of needles, coursing from half-past two in the morning till ten at night without so much as disturbing a feather. He comes with foxglove and dragon-fly, and yellowing wheat, with green fir cones and boom of distant thunder, and all things that say, 'It is summer.'¹⁵

What a fluvial picture; what a carnival of colour and revel of running water is his pastel of the brown Barle River—flowing over red rocks aslant its course and racing round curving slopes; now white with foam as it splashes in the sunshine; with here a deep green pool overarched by trees where the green water laps at the purple stone; and there, above reddened stones and reddened growths beneath the water, a light that lets the red hues overcome the others—a wild rush of crowded waters rotating as they go; the next bend upwards dazzling the eyes where every inclined surface and striving parallel, every swirl and bubble, and eddy and rush around a rock reflects the sunlight, presenting a woven surface of brilliance, a mesh of light under which the water runs, itself invisible; while over all sounds the ceaseless rush! rush! of the river, like a mighty wind in the wood.

'I will go back to the deep green pool,' he continues—

... my eyes have less work to do to meet the changing features of the current which now seems smooth as my glance accompanies its movement. The rush of the river soothes the mind, the broad descending surfaces of yellow-green oak carry the glance downward from the blue sky over to the stream in the hollow. Rush! rush! it is the river, like a mighty wind in the wood. ... It draws me on to the deep green pool, a pool to stand near and think into. . . . The water is not green, but holds in solution three separate sets of colours. The *confervæ* on the stones, the growths beneath at the bottom waving a little as the water swirls, like minute sea-weeds—these are brown and green and somewhat reddish, too. Under water the red rock is toned and paler, but has deep black cavities. Next, the surface, continually changing as it rotates, throws back a different light; and thirdly, the oaks' yellow-green high up, the pale ash, the tender ferns drooping over low down, confer their tints on the stream. So from the floor of the pool,

¹⁴ 'A London Trout.'

¹⁵ 'Swallow-Time.'

from the surface, and from the adjacent bank, three sets of colours mingle. Washed together by the slow swirl, they produce a shade—the brown of the Barle—lost in darkness where the bank over-hangs.¹⁶

‘The Pageant Of Summer’ is justly considered Jefferies’ finest prose-poem, —a poem to be read again and again with an increased sense of its beauty. Yet many of his other essays approach it closely, as, for instance, ‘Wild Flowers,’ ‘Hours of Spring,’ ‘Winds of Heaven,’ ‘Meadow Thoughts,’ and ‘Summer in Somerset.’ The sea, likewise, frequently alluded to by him, the forest, and the downs, have been pictured as few besides him have been able to picture them. Even the very heart of London—Trafalgar Square—he has invested with a halo of poetry.

And no one who knows his history during the sad years of his later life can well repress a sob when reading the first and the concluding themes of *Field and Hedgerow*, written during his prolonged and torturing illness, when, racked by pain and penury, and pondering on the drift of time, he could still see and describe the peace of green things that were without him to keep their calendar,—he who noted it so carefully and lovingly day by day. Like the ‘wood-wele’ on the spray, he could not cease to sing. Without him as an informant, how could the lark he hears through the window know it was his hour? Without his book and pencil and observing eye, how does he understand that the hour has come? Orchis-flower and cowslip, they go on without him. He hears, as it were, the patter of their feet—flower and bud and the beautiful clouds that go over. They go on, and he is no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill.¹⁷

Jefferies’ home, and his principal abode until the last years of his young life, was at Coate, a hamlet in northern Wilts, a few miles distant from Swindon, and close to the Wiltshire Downs that he has outlined so vividly in *Wild Life*. The swifts were wheeling above the old homestead as I pushed open the arched oaken door of the high brick wall that encloses the farmstead and garden, where the present tenant, Mr. Maskelyne, bade me welcome. He had known Jefferies before his change of residence, though he had never read a line of his writings; and described him as an extremely reticent man who walked the fields with bowed head, ever intent upon his thoughts. They did not know him at the ‘Goddard Arms’ at Swindon, they knew him not along the highway; indeed it was with difficulty that I succeeded in locating Coate Farm where ‘The Pageant of Summer’ had again begun its perennial course.

¹⁶ ‘Summer in Somerset.’

¹⁷ ‘Hours of Spring.’

The heavy thatch of the cottage, with its far-reaching eaves—a good-sized brick building,—had been removed since Jefferies' day, and the roof slated in its stead. But the ivy on the house and some lovely moss-grown thatches on the numerous outbuildings still exist. Overlooking the ha-ha and orchard, in the rear, is the room once occupied by him, with the pear-tree used as a ladder by the birds, where the robin would enter his window and alight morning after morning on the rail at the foot of his bed; where the tiny wren would also come undaunted, perching on a bookcase in the room, and, ere leaving, would linger on the casement to utter her loud metallic call.¹⁸

The old-fashioned garden is spacious and retired; and screened from the roadway by the high brick wall, it invites to repose and a contemplative mood. The garden was beloved by Jefferies, who speaks of it in *Amaryllis* as a place for a poet, a spot for a painter, loved and resorted to by every bird of the air. Here grow great bushes of lavender and clumps of sweet-brier; and white-fringed pinks and roses disburse their fragrance. Two ivy-covered summer-houses, where the essayist often wrote, yet remain. To the right of the cottage and also almost opposite the front, are spacious green pastures with isolated oaks and elms. In the distance are the downs. A short way from the homestead is the farm where the woman lived who inspired his prose-poem on the first June rose, and who nursed him so devotedly throughout his illness. Overhead the lark was carolling, and from the fields rang out the merry notes of the chaffinch and the thrush. Apart from the hedges and occasional copses, and individual trees and groups of trees, with here and there a shaw, the country is sparsely wooded. The downs themselves are bare, but for their browsing flocks. And yet from this landscape Jefferies composed his marvellous pictures, peopling it with its multitudinous life and beauty and history. Every rod within a radius of leagues has been trodden by his tireless feet, every tree felt the touch of his loving hand.

The oaks he loved and wrote of so fondly stand as they stood in bygone years. There are no such oaks anywhere else, he says; none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads, on which the sun used to shine as if on the globe of the earth, one side in shadow, the other in bright light.¹⁹ I looked for patriarchal trees arching the highway with majestic sweep of bough. And yet they are not wonderful trees in any sense. They were but the oaks of his childhood and his home, invested through association with the halo of romance. Only he could have painted them and painted his fields as he has done; as only Corot could have painted Corot's landscapes with their attendant nymphs footing their saraband on the twilight sward. The eye but

¹⁸ *Wild Life in a Southern County*.

¹⁹ 'My Old Village.'

mirrors what the mind may see. Pan still passes by and haunts the countryside for the few who may hear the river's 'inner voice' and the song the landscape ever sings. To others it is simply the country, with trees and fields and grass. Only the poet learns its secrets and sees behind the screen. Thus a stranger might find it difficult to analyse the magnetic charm that the home of his birth always held for Jefferies; as we can never cease to marvel at his phenomenal insight of Nature, his deep feeling, his poetic gift of expression, and his wonderful knowledge of every phase and mood of rural life.

As I returned from Coate Farm through the peaceful hamlet and slumberous fields, a mellow sunset, tinted like the ripe wheat that Jefferies loved, flooded the homestead of the great prose-poet of the Wiltshire Downs. The old oaks of the highway were quickened with its rays, the thatch of the ricks caught its warm caress; and field and mead and hedgerow were gilded with the splendours of the dying day. But within the near-by copse the yellow-hammer called in vain, and the vespers of the nightingale missed a listening ear. Softly the afterglow paled upon the distant downs, as one by one the constellations rose, and the young moon's sickle sank to meet the coming dawn. And a sigh throbbed amid the oaks and hedgerows—a plaint of the evening breeze for him who had been with them and loved them and cherished them; even unto the glow-worm in the grass, and the dewdrop trembling upon the aven's awn.

Two Poems/Hymns

Anna McCourt

Anna McCourt was born in 1833. She was a religious lady who befriended Richard Jefferies. John Kennet reveals in 'Richard Jefferies in Eltham' (The Eltham Society, 2001, p.8) that 'Anna lived for many years at Southend Hall with her mother Ann Mackay. Between 1871 and 1881 she married Colonel McCourt of the Army Service Corps. They befriended the Jefferies family between 1884 and 1885. By 1891 Anna was a widow. In 1892 she published *Extracts from Letters Written by Col. McCourt* which were of a religious nature and written while he was on military service abroad before their marriage. From at least 1900 Anna lived at 14 Victoria Road, the Jefferies former home, until she died on 7 April 1916 aged 83.'

Also she wrote a book titled *Hymns and Poems by Mrs. McCourt*. It is undated, 64 pages in length, and published by W.B. Horner and Son (London). A copy is to be found in the Royal Collection in the Queen's Sitting Room, Osborne House. Their catalogue gives a date of 1880-1900, but clearly after 1887. As one of the poems is 'Our Queen' it is likely McCourt sent Queen Victoria a copy. There are two poems/hymns dedicated to Jefferies. The first on p.45, titled 'To R.J. on Reading His Book,' obviously refers to *The Story of My Heart*. This is followed on p.46-7 by a second poem 'To the Same: From Death unto Life.'

The hymns are reproduced thanks to John Kennet who has a copy of the book, once owned by a farmer who lived opposite Southend Hall, that bore the dedication: 'from the authoress, with best wishes'.

To R.J. on Reading His Book

Thou hast a mind so marvellously great,
That nothing here can gratify thy will,
The God who formed thee did that mind create,
And what He fashioned He indeed can fill.

Thou art a man unsatisfied, unblest,
Craving and longing for the deep unknown,
Seeking, and sighing for the ideal rest,
Which can be found in God and God alone.

Thy soul to perfect scenes and gifts aspires,
Thus God's creation in thy spirit flows;
Filled with His fulness, all thy heart's desires,
Would prove faint shadows of what He bestows.

Beyond thy thoughts—Oh! be assured of this—
Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath ever heard,
Nor heart conceived, the true eternal bliss
Revealed by God's own Spirit in His Word.

'Soul-life,' 'Eternity,' exist in thee!
Eternity began when thou wast born,
Then where, oh! where shall this thy soul-life be,
When time has ended, and when thou art gone?

Come to the God whose very name is 'Love,'
Take thy salvation in the Christ who died;
Then shall thou dwell with Him in realms above,
And 'Soul-life,' 'Heart,' and mind be satisfied!

To the same. From Death unto Life

To God be all the glory and the praise,
Who loved thee, gave Himself, and died for thee;
And didst from death to life Thy spirit raise,
To live with Him through all eternity.

Once thou wast blinded to thy lost estate,
By 'intellectual vanity' within;
Thy clever mind fresh marvels could create,
But knew not yet that Thou wast born in sin.

Till He who came the dead and lost to save,
Breathed life eternal in Thy precious soul;
And thou thyself to God and Christ then gave,
Who has accepted thee and made thee whole.

Now Thou art with Him, and supremely blest,
Free from all ills of sorrow and disease;
In His own presence thou hast found thy rest,
Thy toils are ended, and thy mind at ease.

‘Yes, yes, that is so!’ Thy confession spake,
And now is printed for the world to see;
And in thy words, ‘Help, Lord, for Jesus’ sake,’
God has been glorified and owned by thee.

‘Merciful Father,’ thou didst call Him then;
The name of *Father*, God delights to hear;
That word when uttered by the lips of men,
Can claim a *Father’s* heart—a *Father’s* ear.

And for the dear ones thou hast left below,
Thou didst entreat in this beseeching tone;
‘I know not what to ask, I love them so,’
Ah! all their need was to thy Father known.

Thus in thy dying, thou wast brought to life,
And in thy living, God is glorified;
And so has ended all the bitter strife,
The sin in thee for which thy Saviour died.

In works of nature thy delights have been,
And now in nature’s God thy soul doth live;
And all the wonders thou hast ever seen,
Enhance the praise thy new-born life can give.

An heir of God, joint heir with Christ above,
Thou shalt with Him in glory soon appear;
In all the fulness of Eternal love,
To reign with Jesus in His heavenly sphere.

The Last Days of Richard Jefferies

Catherine Winkworth Mackintosh



There were two articles about Richard Jefferies in *The Girl's Own Paper* published by the Religious Tract Society in 1889. The first by Alan Wright, published on 31 August 1889, does not add much to our knowledge about Jefferies, but he designed the historiated initial (pictured left) that opened both articles. The second, published on 21 December 1889, was by C.W.M. These are the initials of Catherine Winkworth Mackintosh. Her article was found by George Miller, but not republished, and written up as a Discovery in the *Richard Jefferies Society Autumn Newsletter* 2011, pp.22-25—‘Did Jefferies

Die a Christian After All?’—which opened up some correspondence and debate with Tom Wareham in subsequent newsletters.

If the content of Jessie's letter is true, it is understandable. There is an element of desperation in Jefferies' last entries in his notebooks. He wants to believe in something 'Beyond' to give him some hope, but cannot, and he admits to being conceited in his beliefs. On 31 May 1887 he wrote in his notebook: 'The hatred of nature/ I hated the sun the sea the/bees the trees. /I wanted—Beyond—the soul the/sense within me./ I hated material, I hated the/soul (the same as material/[wealth]) I hated/deity. I wanted the answer to the/cry in me..../like a bee on a window pane chance/only lets me out.' But only a few days later he would write the opposite about nature: 'Get out of tune with nature/no Sun L. (from illness) &/you cannot understand any-/thing: get in tune &/you understand everything.' At the end, he might well have sought some solace from words in the bible. Who knows what a person might say when racked with pain and influenced by devoutly religious people.

Catherine Winkworth Mackintosh was born in China on 13 February 1866 to the manager and underwriter of a marine insurance company. She never married and lived in the family home in Sevenoaks from at least 1881-1891. She died in 1955, aged 89 in Heathfield, Sussex.



1886 masthead illustration, based on the sculpture *The Spirit of Love and Truth* by Joseph Edwards (1814-1882).

There are many who think that Richard Jefferies' own works, and Mr. Besant's *Eulogy* of him had given to the world all that was to be known about this remarkable man. But there is one page of his history which very few have read, and yet it is not just to his memory for us to ignore it. Many who have been saddened by the bitter taunts he hurled at conventional Christianity, and by his perpetual cry, 'Give me physical perfection,' which sounds like an echo from beauty-loving pagan Greece, will rejoice to hear that towards the close of his life he found something far beyond this; after all his blind and passionate struggles towards 'the fuller life,' he learnt what it was to rest in 'the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.'

Throughout that wonderful book, *The Story of My Heart*, in which the most reserved and sensitive of men revealed the deepest depths of his quivering heart to a completely uncomprehending world, we trace one desire recurring on almost every page—'Give me the fuller soul.' Nothing less than the study of his own burning pages can possibly convey an adequate idea of the aspirations which filled his soul.

In one of his early letters, written about the age of nineteen, he speaks of the hand of God directing him, guiding him, punishing him. His heart is soft in thinking over the many consolations which his prayers have brought him, and of the increased benefit which he has derived from reading the Bible. He has passed through, he confesses, a period of scepticism, but that, he is happy to say, is gone, never to return again.

Never to return again! Yet this is what he writes fifteen years later—

In the march of time there fell away from my mind, as the leaves from the trees in autumn, the last traces and relics of superstitions and traditions acquired compulsorily in childhood. Always feebly adhering, they finally disappeared. . .

And further on—

How can I adequately express my contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best, for a wise and beneficent end, and are ordered by a humane intelligence! . . There is not the least trace of directing intelligence in human affairs. . .

Having arrived at this conclusion, he seeks for some explanation of the universe to take the place of the one he had abandoned. In vain! Nature is dumb. 'To all these questions I am unable to find any answer whatsoever. In our present range of ideas there is no reply to them.'

But while he ignores Revelation, his spirit pierces further into the unknown than ever did the philosophies of ancient Greece.

With the great sun burning over the foam-flaked sea, roofed in with heaven. . . . 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 soul throbs like the sea for a larger life. No thought which I have ever had has satisfied my soul! . . .

As the sky extends beyond the valley, so I know that there are ideas beyond the valley of my thought. The great sun burning in the sky, the sea, the firm earth, all the stars of night are feeble—all, all the cosmos is feeble; it is not strong enough to utter my prayer-desire. My soul cannot reach its full desire of prayer. I need no earth, or sea, or sun to think my thought. If my thought-part—the psyche—were entirely separated from the body and from the earth, I should of myself desire the same. In itself my soul desires; my existence, my soul-existence, is in itself my prayer; and so long as it exists, so long will it pray that I may have the fullest soul-life.

Commenting on this his biographer says—

In that letter where the Apostle Paul speaks at length of death and the resurrection, he concludes with the assurance . . . that the body as well as the soul shall live again: but the body glorified, made perfect and beautiful beyond human power of thought, to be wedded to the soul purified beyond human power of understanding. Is it not strange that this solitary questioner, longing and praying for a fuller and deeper understanding—a fuller soul—should also have arrived at the perception of the wonderful truth that the perfect soul demands the perfect body?

A voice was at hand to whisper, 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.'

In the spring of 1884 Richard Jefferies and his family came to Eltham. A gentleman and lady living there noticed day after day the pale, melancholy-looking invalid, sometimes accompanied by his wife and his two children. Though a stranger to them, his tall figure, striking features, and deep searching blue eyes could not fail to attract attention, while his faltering steps and terrible cough made them long to be of some service to him. An acquaintance sprang up, and ripened into intimacy. The invalid's appetite was tempted by the produce of their dairy and garden; and he would often come and sit under their trees, watching the peacocks for hours, as they wandered over the dappled lawns. Their carriage also was placed at his disposal, and it was while driving with him and his wife one day that the lady learnt something of the restless craving which filled his heart for some deeper, fuller perfection than he had yet found. Earnestly she spoke to him of Jesus, the One who alone could satisfy the longing soul. Her words seemed of no avail. He listened, reasoned, and rejected. Still, as he did not

forbid the topic, she lost no opportunity of talking with him, writing to him, above all praying for him; knowing, to quote her own words—

Thou hast a mind so marvellously great
That nothing here can gratify thy will;
The God who formed thee did that mind create,
And what He fashioned He indeed can fill.

Thou art a man, unsatisfied, unblest,
Craving and longing for the deep unknown;
Seeking and sighing for the ideal rest
Which can be found in God, and God alone.

Richard Jefferies might well be cast down. ‘Three great giants are against me,’ he wrote at this time—‘Disease, Despair, and Poverty.’ With these he was battling for life—and such a life! Himself racked with anguish, his family toiling to alleviate his sufferings, powerless to help them, yet aware that only his few remaining days stood between them and destitution! He was conscious that he must soon leave the beautiful world, whose loveliness he had so worshipped, for a land which was to him only

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns.

and worst of all he must leave it to the empire of those dull souls who cared nothing for it or him, and whose only creed, as he said, ‘the one only saying of the Gospel thoroughly ingrained in the souls of men,’ was ‘Pay me that thou owest.’

How differently would the public have received his *Amaryllis at the Fair* had the circumstances been known in which such sentences as these were penned—

Until the accident of reputation arises, merit is of no avail. . . Except an author, or an artist, or a musician, who on earth would attempt to win success by merit? That alone proves how correct the world is in its estimate of them; they must indeed be poor confiding fools. Succeed by merit! . . .

In the end—but how far is it to the end?— it is true that genius is certain of recognition; the steed by that time has got used to starvation, waiting for the grass to grow. . . . Nothing so hard as to succeed by merit; no path so full of disappointments, nothing so incredibly impossible.

Or again—

The ploughman is deeply in debt, poor fellow, but he can and does follow the plough, and finds, perhaps, some solace in the dull monotony of his labour. Clods cannot feel. A sensitive mind and vivid imagination, a delicately balanced organisation that almost lives on its ideas as veritable food, cannot do like this. The poet, the artist, the author, the thinker cannot follow their plough; their work depends on a serene mind.

But experience proves that they do do their work under such circumstances. They do; how greatly then they must be tortured, or for what a length of time they must have suffered to become benumbed!

Yet perhaps he was scarcely just to those commonplace folk who thought they appreciated his books because they had echoed the critic's praise, and who left him to starve while they enjoyed the wonders his finger had first pointed out to them. How could the public know the poverty which he so jealously hid from his very closest friends? Even they only found out little by little the real state of things; the absence not only of comforts but of necessities; the unremitting toil of his brave young wife.

The year passed; in 1885 the Jefferies went away to Crowborough Hill; but absence did not lessen the warm feeling between them and their friends at Eltham. They corresponded frequently; the lady pleading with Mr. Jefferies to embrace the Gospel, he replying with arguments in the strain of those already quoted.

This was no doubt the fulfilling of God's purpose. If he had accepted the Gospel directly from her, people might have said that, worn out with sickness, he had weakly yielded to the persuasions of a benevolent woman, under whose influence gratitude had got the better of logic. And so, though no doubt the ground was thus being prepared, the message came to him straight from God Himself.

As we have already seen, he was well acquainted with the Bible, and one day he asked his friend why she had never shown him the Revised Version. She sent him one—whether that was the means of opening his eyes or not we do not know; but we do know that at last he turned away from all the mists of doubt to the Light of Life; and it was no grudging, half-hearted allegiance that his proud and lofty spirit yielded to its Lord. Throughout the long weary months that preceded his death, the Bible was his constant companion, nor was he ashamed to confess with his mouth the change wrought in him.

Those three dreadful giants had lost their hold upon him; he could leave his dear ones to a Father's care. True, he was leaving bright scenes behind him; but he was going to realise, in a way far above his loftiest conceptions, that life-long prayer, 'Give me to live the deepest soul-life.'

His last days were spent at Goring, in Sussex, where he passed away on Sunday, August 14, 1887.

'God has been so good to me,' writes Mrs. Jefferies at this time to their friend at Eltham, 'and raised me up such friends, it makes me feel that He heard and answered my darling's prayers. He used to pray so earnestly for me and the children, that we might be preserved from danger and trouble;

he used to say, "O God, for my beloved children. I love them so, I know not what to ask." I give you his very words.' [She continues]—

Three weeks before he went to rest, he was laid on the sofa in the dining-room, and asked me to read to him the sixth chapter of St. Luke, beginning at the twentieth verse. When I had finished he said, 'Those are the words of Jesus; they are true, and all philosophy is hollow.' Another time he said, 'O God, I have done wrong, and thought wrong; it was my intellectual vanity. Listen to the prayers of my dearest girl; she has done no evil as I have done.'

Almost his last conscious words were, 'I have given myself unto God and Christ, and you pray for me: dear, merciful God, merciful Father.'

The last few weeks he suffered intensely, but I feel he was only allowed to suffer long enough for the truth to be revealed. . . . He was so patient . . . the more he suffered, the greater became his patience.

God bless you for all you did; you have reaped your reward, and your prayers were answered.

What follows is from the pen of his friend Mr. North—

Almost his last intelligible words were, 'Yes, yes, that is so. Help, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Darling, good-bye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain.'

He was buried at Broadwater, by Worthing, Sussex. In the gentlest, sweet, soft sunny rain he was borne along the path to his grave in the grass, and when the last part of the service for the dead had been read, well and solemnly, and we turned away, leaving him for ever on earth, the large drops from heaven fell thick and fast, and over and over again came to me the saying, 'Happy are the dead that the rain rains on.'

Yes, his soul has found 'the fuller life,' and his outward form lies there, waiting for 'physical perfection;' 'waiting for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our body of humiliation that it may be made like unto His body of glory.'

C. W. M.

Wiltshire Summer Sunday (1866)

Roger Frith

'Wiltshire Summer Sunday (1866)' was first published in *A Spirit Illumined; a Hundred Years of Redemption through Nature: a Centenary Symposium*, (Swindon, Richard Jefferies Society, 1987), pp.27-28. The poem was dedicated to 'Cyril and Norma' [Wright]. For an obituary of Roger Frith see Arnold Wesker's contribution published in the *Richard Jefferies Society Newsletter*, Spring 2009, pp.27-30.

Her song it was that woke him that fateful Sunday dawn:
His casement wide of nights to the sultry Summer weather,
of late she'd come, her ladder the cordon pear tree,
to peep along the broad, decaying sill.
This morning though, the bird went unobserved:
he'd worked too late, and with sleep came the nightmares—
the burning thatch, the coat that choked his pores.
Only at earth's darkest did he fall
into the heavy slumber the tortured have to earn . . .
Unconsciousness denied the rarest sight!
the pert bird on that morning ventured further—
hopped down to his desk where, by his midnight lamp,
she chanced upon a tome, an ancient, calf-bound tome.
From title page to colophon she scoured it
until, along its spine, she found some holes
when, lo, from one, she winkled forth a worm,
which gorged, for thanks, she made the chamber ring.
He stirred to see her flit the casement's bar ...
Consciousness brought back last night's resolve:
his nerves long frayed, he had to get away—
already he heard his father's reproofs as he dressed:
'Back-slider! Break-Sabbath!' imagined his mother's next letter
to his favourite Aunt Harrild in Sydenham—his fretful mother ...
Sunday or not, mattins that morn at the farm
would have to be missed: his heart was dusty, parched for want of rain . . .

The sun's first rays now lanced the distant vale—
between the north-east elms, the eastern oak,
those markers of his childhood's zodiac,

he watched its upper limb then raise the land.
O sun of Summer! How had he wasted it!
Caught up in study, reporting, correcting proofs,
too long he had been locked in from the sun!

A cursory glance at last night's lucubrations,
the last sheaf shuffled of his history of Swindon,
the Aubrey tossed aside, the Richard of Cirencester—
that quarto which had housed the wren's refection—
he donned his frock coat, grabbed his 'outlandish' hat,
decided against the gun inside the clock case,
tiptoed down the stairs and so slunk out,
a mid-Victorian youth into a pagan dawn . . .

He was away all day that Summer Sunday,
as he homed that evening up the lane,
he looked like death—his face was drawn and pale,
haunted by unnumbered ecstasies—
his clothes beneath were white—the white of chalk—
the chalk of Liddington and of Barbury!

The rest is ours, for from that day would come
the Story that, in time, ennobled us—
for from that draught of pure thought do we go
aspiring to a fuller, broader life—
our hearts made deeper as our souls go out,
lifted above the awful commonplace,
the pettiness of pelf, the waste of labour,
the prose of the accepted and received,
to walk awhile immortal in the sun:
new men in a world that he set free!

Sept.–Oct. 1983

Richard Jefferies, the Nature Mystic of the Wiltshire Downs

Fred J. Lazell



Frederick John Lazell was born in Essex in 1868 but emigrated to the United States at the age of nineteen where he attended Iowa State College. After graduation he became a journalist and was editor of the *Cedar Rapids Republican*. He was a nature enthusiast and wrote four books about the seasons in Iowa published by The Torch Press between 1906 and 1909.

His essay on Jefferies was published in *Unity*, 23 March 1911, a weekly published in Chicago as the 'Official Organ of the Congress of Religion'. Lazell taught journalism at the University of Iowa 1924-1937 and died in 1940.

Had Watts-Dunton¹ written his essay on 'The Poetic Interpretation of Nature' ten years later than he did, undoubtedly he would have added to the names of Sakya-Muni,² Spitama³ and Gazzali,⁴ that of Richard Jefferies, the nature mystic and prose poet of the Wiltshire Downs. For he was a man to whom love of nature was a passion and certainly nature came 'to know him and love him' in turn. He was a prophet of the beautiful, a pagan prophet, it is true, but a prophet to whom the beauty of the world was a continual call to prayer. Today we know that much of the writing of Richard Jefferies will live as long as the English language itself endures. But it will not

Ed:

¹ Theodore Watts-Dunton (1832-1914) critic and poet, friend and minder of Swinburne.

² Buddha Shakyamuni, Indian spiritual and philosophical founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama.

³ Zarathustra Spitama, ancient Iranian prophet and founder of Zoroastrianism.

⁴ Al-Ghazali, muslim theologian of the 11th century.

be read by the multitude. It will be greatly prized only by those who have looked upon the world and found it lovely and who have felt within their own lives some stirring of a spirit responsive to that which is in nature. And these will read Jefferies again and again, more grateful with each reading that such a soul was permitted to dwell upon the earth and was gifted with a voice able to articulate so sweetly and so clearly the thoughts and aspirations arising within themselves in their own best moments of vision and desire.

He studied nature as a lover, not as a scientist. There is nothing of the laboratory and very little of the text book in anything he ever wrote. He was a worshipper of nature in all her manifestations of beauty. He loved the wind-blown architecture of the snow and its changing hues in light and shadow. He took note of the rugged strength of naked trees and the graceful spray of their leafless branches; he noted also the pleasing effect of slanting sunlight on the mixed browns and greys of the winter wood. He has pictured some of those wind-blown, crimson wisps of cloud driving across the evening sky such as we saw so often during Christmas week. In *Bevis* we find mention of winter sunsets much like the exquisite colourings of winter sunsets in Iowa, when the shafts of light from the vanished sun are shot up over the western rim of the world into the cloud islands hanging above the sea of gold where the sun went down and refracted from them clear across the dome of the sky, suffusing the eastern horizon with rose-colour and reflected again to the hills beneath slowly staining the snow on the face of the slopes with a tender pink, like a blush creeping into a smooth white cheek.



Prairie Rose Lake, Iowa at sunset by Ken Krach (June 2021)

But the beauty of the growing season filled him with rapture. Colour and sunshine were an intoxication to him. He would lie on his back for hours, feasting on the blue of the sky, or sit and revel in the beauty of a field of yellow wheat and red poppies, the rounded masses of green foliage on the trees, the flecks of yellow sunlight on shaded streams. He brought to his observation of earth and sky the imagination of a poet, the passion of a lover and the spiritual discernment of a mystic. It was the possession of this latter quality which made him one of the greatest of nature writers. Very early in life he felt in nature an influence wonderful and benign, taking complete possession of him and lifting him to memorable heights of exaltation and ecstasy. This continued all through his life and it permeates all his nature essays, giving sweetness to his thought and melody to his words.

He was born Nov. 6, 1848, at Coate Farm, near the village of Swindon, North Wiltshire. Swindon is situated in Southern England, the land of the great downs, not unlike some of our higher Iowa prairies. On both there is always a sense of splendid space, always a nearness of the finite to the Infinite. The wind blows beneath immense reaches of sky and the ridges and hollows follow each other in rhythmic succession as if under the influence of some ever-recurring theme in some great world-melody. Untrodden but indelible old roads wind over the downs, like the old pioneer trails across Iowa prairies. Here and there are tumuli, the sepulchral mounds of a race long vanished, like the so-called Indian mounds of our Iowa hills and valleys. From the hills one looks down to fertile farms with houses and orchards and evergreen trees, surrounded by meadows and wheat fields separated by high, thick hedges, filled with birds and blossoms. Here and there is a forest and the gleam of quiet waters. Such was the land where Richard Jefferies lived for the first three-fourths of his life. He was the idyllist of this country-side, the mediator of its meaning to men, the heart and the voice of its loveliness, speaking in the sweetest of tones to the world.

He came from a long line of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire farmers, but there was a certain strain of city blood among them; some were artists and lovers of fine books and bindings. His father was a man of roving disposition when young, visiting the United States and Canada; but he returned to London and married Elizabeth Gyde, the daughter of a bookbinder. She was beautiful, pleasure-loving, kind and generous, but never quite reconciled to the hard work of the farm, never quite free from a lingering home-sickness for the bright and busy cheerfulness of the London streets and parks. Coate farm, with its forty acres of land, was given to this young couple on their wedding day. The house was a plain oblong two storey and a half structure, with brick walls and a slate roof, standing in the midst of flowers and trees. Here Richard was born and in a garret room with a gable window close by

the top of a big pear tree he had his study and did most of his writing until after he was married.

As a child he loved nature with passionate intensity. He would lie on his back and gaze up at the sky as he always did when he wanted someone to speak and to say: 'Sky, I love you as I love my mother.' When he arose in the morning he would steal out from the house to a group of elm trees which shielded him from observation so that he might be all alone with nature and have an unobstructed view of the eastern sky. As soon as he saw the glory of the coming sunrise, all was forgotten. His 'inner consciousness seemed to take him out of himself,' he did not think, he felt.

Rambling over the downs to the village school two and a half miles away he learned to love the wind and the sky. His father was very familiar with the birds and trees and flowers and he taught the boy all he knew. From the gamekeeper of a great estate nearby, Richard learned a great deal of practical knowledge of hunting and sport. All through his boyhood he was much alone with nature. He was a reserved boy, taking little interest in athletics and similar youthful sports. But he was the leader of his brothers and their friends in the world of fun and play which they had around 'The Reservoir,' a lake of eighty acres close to his father's farm. But his delight was to be alone with nature. He soon became familiar with every foot of ground for a radius of ten miles around his father's farm. He knew the flowers and the trees, the animals and the birds, and he knew, too, the night and the stars and the grandeur of the mighty earth rolling east to meet them. He filled one notebook after another with loving and careful notes of out-of-door life, and so he gathered the great store of nature knowledge that enabled him to write with such authority and charm.

He was a sure shot, but as he became interested in the habits and the beauty of the wild creatures he used the gun less and less. With his finger on the trigger he 'dropped the barrel and watched the beautiful bird until watching so often stayed the shot that it grew to be a habit; time after time he flushed the partridges without firing and let the hare bound over the furrow free.' He was learning to see nature, too, in such ways that he would never forget, enabling him long years after to return in memory to the old farm and recreate in words the glamour of the earth and sky, the magic of sunshine and shadow and the abundant lavishings of nature, which to him were ever a great delight. So in his essay on wild flowers he described for us the yellowhammer, sitting on the 'ash-branch in Stewart's marsh, singing in the sun, his feathers wet with colour, still singing the same sun-song, and will sing to me as long as the heart shall beat.'

The deep poetic feeling in that sentence is the secret of Jefferies' art. He could write because he felt so deeply. So he created for us the bole of the old

beech tree, 'spotted like a trout by the separate shadows of its first leaves,' the 'large, puffed clouds, like deliberate loads of hay, leaving little wisps and flecks behind them in the sky;' the 'buttercups, like nails of gold driven so thickly that the surface of the meadow was not visible;' the air after the summer shower which was 'sweeter and richer for the rain, like verse with a rhyme;' the big burdocks 'fighting for the footpath;' the 'curved moon, hung on the sky, as the hunter's horn is hung on the wall.' But such writing was done later in life. In his youth he had the imagination of the poet and the deep feelings of the mystic, but he did not have the artist's technique. He was to go through long years of training before he could recreate in words the colour and the song of the yellowhammer and put all the glamour of that scene into a single sentence.

When Jefferies was seventeen years of age he obtained a position as a reporter on the *North Wilts Herald*, published at Swindon. And he seems to have given his city editor quite as much annoyance as the average new reporter. Once he wrote a very severe criticism of a musical performance given by home talent; for that he had to fight one of the performers. He was a conservative in his politics at that time and when his city editor sent him to report a meeting of the liberals, Jefferies failed to write anything at all, because the speakers talked 'such rot'. Nevertheless he was a tireless writer and in addition to his regular work on the paper he wrote many special articles and some short stories. He attempted some ambitious books such as *Reporting, Editing and Authorship*; it is so easy for a young reporter to write books like that.

He was now a tall, thin, slightly stooping young man, with longish hair, inclined to be sandy, a big, broad forehead and very bright, noticeable blue eyes. He was growing a beard which afterwards became full and flowing. He was a young man living so much within his own mind that he frequently was deaf and blind to acquaintances who passed him on the street. A true child of the open air, very much closer the heart of 'Queen Isis' than to the hearts of any of his friends, save one; she was Miss Jessie Baden, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer. They learned to love each other with a love that never waned. During his three years' courtship he wrote three letters to the *London Times*, describing the actual conditions of the Wiltshire labourer; they aroused much discussion and drew the attention of other publishers to Jefferies, helping him to dispose of his manuscripts. But he did not heed the lesson of that slight success. He was trying to write novels which were artificial and commonplace, although they contained passages of description which showed that he was being prepared for the ministry of beauty which he soon was to enter.

In 1874 he and Miss Baden were married. In October 1875, he wrote 'Marlborough Forest,' his first nature essay, a description of the solitary enjoyment of nature for nature's own sake. This was warmly received, as were two essays of a similar nature, which followed the next year. Jefferies felt that his success was now assured. He moved to London, so as to be nearer his publishers. But he chose his home on the edge of the city, so that he might continue his daily walks among the fields and woods, an hour and half in the morning and again in the afternoon. He found a big aspen tree over a brook and thither he went almost daily and was fed by the sacrament of nature. Now he put aside, forever, his artificial fiction. He began to pour out from his memory and from his notebooks all the nature lore and the nature love he had gathered during the first twenty-eight years of his life around Coate farm. The essays were printed in the London papers and magazines and then gathered in four books, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *The Amateur Poacher* and *Round About a Great Estate*. Though they lack the human tenderness and spiritual sweetness which are characteristic of Jefferies' later and better work, yet these four books are a great delight to every lover of the out-of-doors. They are thoroughly rustic and effortless, essays written by a countryman about the country, nowhere pedantic, striving neither to teach nor to preach. But they are all aglow with the spirit of joy and they are written with mastery and ease, a directness and lucidity which make every page seem like a locust tree in the summer time, all shot through with sunlight and sweet air. Reading them, one is brought face to face with nature, seeing and smelling the flowers, hearing the birds sing and feeling the fresh sweet wind on the cheek.

Wood Magic came next. It is the story of Jefferies' childhood, done in fable. The principal character is a little boy named Bevis, who enjoys the closest company with the wild folk of the forests and down. The trees tell him the secrets which they whisper to each other in the summer night; even the wind and the brook instruct him. It is such a wise wind; and the brook knows so much that it is true and beautiful.

Then came *Bevis, the Story of a Boy*, where this same little lad has grown to be twelve or fifteen years old. It is a capital boy's book, full of descriptions of the fun Jefferies and his friends had around that lake called the reservoir. But it abounds in nature description, such as this:

The summer shadow lingered on the dial, the sun slowed his pace, in the rich light the fruits filled. The earth had listened to the chorus of the birds and, as they ceased, gave them their meed of berry, seed, and grain. There was no labour for them; their granaries were full. Ethereal gold floated about the hills, filling the hollows to the brim with haze. Like a grape, the air was rich and

luscious, and to breath it was a drowsy joy. For Circe had smoothed her garments and slumbered and the sun moved slow.

These books marked the close of the period of Jefferies' health and strength. In December 1881, he fell ill of a fistula and during the next year he underwent four operations for the cure of this disease. The wounds resulting from the operations were not healed until January 1883, by which time he was almost destitute but happy in the thought that now he could go to work and begin life all over again. Alas, it was not a month until he began to feel a terrible internal pain, resulting from ulceration of the small intestine. For the next four and a half years he walked in pain and poverty down the long valley of the shadow of death. But he worked hard, refusing to ask for assistance, and it was during this period that much of his very best work was done. Seldom has courage and optimism risen to such heights, seldom has any man achieved so much brilliant work in spite of unrelenting pain.

He moved to West Brighton the first year of his illness and wrote a series of essays descriptive of the beauty within a radius of twelve miles of London. It was a book filled with the beauty of the coloured air, showing the Londoners the beauty at their own doors. These essays were gathered into a volume called *Nature Near London*.

Then came *The Story of My Heart; My Autobiography*, which surely is unique. There is no other book like it. It deals not at all with the ordinary facts of biography, but is the story of the spiritual side of Jefferies' life, a frank recital and description of his mystic hours with nature. He tells us that there were hours in the glow of his youth when his heart was dry and dusty, parched for want of the rain of deep feeling. At such times there was a hill to which he used to resort, three miles from his home. The labour of walking to its summit, all the while gradually ascending, seemed to clear his blood of the heaviness which had accumulated at home. When he had reached the summit his gaze turned to the unattainable blue flower of the sky and there it rested, 'for pure colour is rest of heart.' He felt an emotion of the soul which is beyond all definition. Prayer is a puny thing to it. It was not a request for anything preferred to a deity, but an intense emotion and desire for a fuller and richer soul life.

There was a great oak tree near his home. He liked to place his back against it and feel its rough bark, or to touch it with his fingers. Immediately there came that delicate, yet strong, deep and sensuous enjoyment, an exaltation and an ecstasy; this was always followed by the prayer, the desire that the beauty of the earth, the air, the sun, might be translated into some growth of excellence in himself, enriching and ennobling his body, mind and soul. So he came to have daily pilgrimages to think on these things. He would lie down in the grass and feel the earth embrace him, feel the sun and

the sky pour out their love upon him. Every blade of grass, each leaf, was a pore through which he drank. And always the enjoyment was followed by the deep desire, the vehement aspiration for greater, fuller soul-life. So his life came to be a continual prayer. In the hall of statuary in the British Museum, when he closed the door behind him and contemplated the curves of beauty among the Grecian statues, there came the same enjoyment followed by the same prayer. On London Bridge he looked over the parapet and saw the tide, felt the push of the sea, its strength and its beauty, the same enjoyment and the same prayer. All through this book, as through a piece of music, this same beautiful motive runs. To the Christian there are some jarring notes in it, for Jefferies was a pagan; he saw in nature no evidence of a Directing Influence, he felt no loving influence of a great and fatherly heart. He never could follow the path of beauty up to the author of all beauty, though he did see clearly that all living things are constantly striving for and attaining a higher life.

After this came a series of noble essays, gathered into two books called *The Life of the Fields* and *The Open Air*. Undoubtedly many of these are the very highest of Jefferies' work, especially 'The Pageant of Summer'. They are filled with harmonies of language, thought and feeling, and a sweetness of thought which is perhaps attained by no other nature writer. In many of them in the very first sentence Jefferies takes his reader directly out-of-doors and then, in a few sentences more, he shows us a world all sparkling with dew and shimmering with loveliness, as if it had just been created; that being done he straightaway proceeds to get at its spiritual essence and beauty; and he does it as easily as a honey bee gets nectar from a flower.

The Dewy Morn is perhaps the one work of Jefferies' fiction which is worth a place in one's library, though *Amaryllis at the Fair*, which followed it, has many admirers. *The Dewy Morn* is a spiritual and dramatic presentment of human life with a marvellous background of nature. Some of it reads like the idylls of Theocritus and some like the Song of Solomon. Its principal character is a beautiful young woman, Felise, a pure creation of Jefferies' mind and heart, to justify his sense of the divinity of woman, the same divinity that he saw in the beautiful earth and the beautiful statues in the British Museum. To know Felise is an abiding joy.

All this time Jefferies had been growing weaker and now he could only sit by the window and look out at the earth and sky. He sees a lark high against a grey cloud and he writes with a pathos which touches us to tears:

I cannot go out and arrange with the birds and the gorse bloom; how does he know that it is time for him to sing? Without my book and pencil and observing eye, how does he know that his hour has come? To sing high in the air, to chase his mate over the ploughed fields, to battle with his high crested rival, to

balance himself on his trembling wings a few yards above the earth and utter that sweet little loving kiss, as it were, of song, oh, happy, happy days. So beautiful to watch as if he were my own and I felt it all. It is years since I went out among them in the old fields and saw them in the green corn. They must be dead, dear little things, by now. Without me to tell him, how does this lark, that I hear through the window today, know that it is his hour? I wonder to myself how they can all get along without me, how they manage, bird and flower, without me to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it, so carefully and lovingly, day by day.

In his last essay, dictated to his faithful wife, he goes back to the old home and pays a last wistful farewell to it and the dear earth; taking some notice, too, of the fact that some had not been able to understand him.

No one else seems to have seen the sparkle on the brook, or to have heard the music at the hatch, or to have felt back through the centuries. No one else seems to have understood how I got food from the clouds, now what there was in the night, nor why it is not so good to look at it through a window.

Sunday morning, August 14, 1887, he died. His body was placed high on the downs where he longed to be, among the flowers and grasses he love so well. Later a bust was placed in Salisbury Cathedral.

Ruskin has told us that the men in whom the love of beauty has been strong have always been among the earliest declarers and discoverers of things conducive to the happiness of mankind. To Richard Jefferies it was given to discover the true ministry of the beauty of nature, its ministry to the growth of the soul. To him Nature yielded thoughts so sweet that for many he is and will ever be the sweetest, the most persuasive, the most winning voice, that has ever spoken of nature. He has shown us that those who get the greatest good from nature are not the scientists who discover her laws, but the curious who guess her riddles, not even the poets who go to her to get material for their verse; but those who approach her with a beating heart of love are rewarded by being enfolded in her mystic heart of beauty, there to listen to her greatest secret. A part of that secret is the hasteless, ceaseless progress of all living things towards a higher and a better life; the fact that the hours when the soul is absorbed with beauty are the only hours when we really live: that to the chosen of nature, who feel themselves to be part of the great mother, all things are joyously beautiful. But the greatest part of that secret is scarcely to be spoken, neither is it to be set down in printed books. It is that feeling which fills the heart with an emotion never to be forgotten, lifting the soul to an ecstasy of vision and desire. Watts-Dunton calls it Nature's greatest wonder of all, that mesmeric power which she sometimes exercises upon her choicest favourites, when all their senses melt into one and they float on a blissful sea. Wordsworth called it,

A presence which disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime,
Of something far more deeply interfused.

Jefferies called it an ecstasy of sensuous enjoyment followed by a deep desire for a fuller soul-life. One of our later poets [William Hebert Carruth] has tried, though he succeeded but feebly, to express it in verse.

Like tides on the crescent sea-beach
When the moon is new and thin,
Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling and surging in;
Come from the mystic ocean
Whose rim no foot hath trod.
Some of us call it longing,
And others call it God.

Listening to that secret Jefferies came to his vision for the individual and for the race. It was a vision of a body, clean and sweet and strong, all its senses steeped in the loveliness of the world, a perfect, beautiful body like that which Phidias sculptured of man and woman, filled with a Godlike sense of the violet fields of Greece; of a mind large and lucid and calm as the turtle-dove in the flashes of the lightning; of a soul immortal and glorified, fit to be in the keeping of such a body and such a mind.

‘If I cannot achieve it,’ he wrote, ‘at least I can think it.’

He looked again and he saw a vision of a race with bodies all freed from every taint and blemish and weakness of hereditary sin; of a thousand, thousand minds, all focused into a brilliant light and a fierce heat, searching out and burning up all that would impede the progress of the race in its march toward perfection; a race with its ambition fixed, not on wealth but on beauty; a race which has solved the economic problems of production and distribution so happily that everyone shall have leisure to enjoy his days upon the earth; that all men shall have time each day to go to his own place of hearing, each to pray in his own oratory, to rest by the sea and to dream; that they shall work, not all of the time for their bread, but a great part of the time for the expansion of their minds and the enlargement of their souls.

Richard Jefferies

Margaret Thomas

Margaret Thomas (1842–1929) is well-known as the sculptor of the marble bust of Richard Jefferies that was unveiled in Salisbury Cathedral in 1892 (see the next article). This article was published in *The Bath Chronicle*, Thursday, December 26, 1895, p.6 cols I–II.

Whether the works of Richard Jefferies are as much appreciated by the rural population of England, which, from the subjects he treats, should be the best judge of their accuracy, as by the pent-up dwellers in towns, to whom they come like breaths of wind from the fragrant country, is a question worthy of study by those who strive to assign to this exquisite writer his just place in literature. The fidelity and finish of his descriptions, his truth and minuteness of observation, and latterly, his pure and elegant style of composition, dispose me to rank him very highly among those who have excelled in this particular kind of writing. His work may be said to resemble that of the old Dutch masters, in whose gem-like pictures the qualities of truth, harmony, and brilliance of colouring, are united to unswerving fidelity of representation and minuteness and yet breadth of detail. Like theirs, too, his subjects are not remote or romantic, but appeal to us all in the common course of our every-day life. His intense love of nature and faculty for painstaking observation, may perhaps also have rivalled that of the devoted artist, who did not think three weeks too much time to bestow on the elaboration of a broom-handle. Whether these qualities appeal most strongly to persons intimately acquainted with the subjects to which he dedicates his great gifts, or to those who have but a passing acquaintance with their inestimable charms, time alone can decide; and time is of most things the only impartial judge.

Sir Walter Besant, the great novelist, has lovingly written his life, and called it *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* because he says ‘in very truth, I can find nothing but admiration, pure and unalloyed, for that later work of his, on which will rest his fame and his abiding memory.’ For myself I am of the opinion that in his own style, and in the particular career in letters he has chosen, Richard Jefferies is unsurpassed and unsurpassable.

He failed as a novelist; he had neither the knowledge of men, nor the experience in the ways of that world in which society lives, moves, and has its being, necessary to enable him to write a good novel. His attempts at fiction result in a composition which is neither a novel nor an essay; he

portrays several characters with great pains, but having done so, does not know what to do with them—how to make them speak and act; they are figures modelled by Frankenstein who has not found the art of breathing life into his weird creation. *Restless Human Hearts*, *The Scarlet Shawl*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and the whole series of novels he published, have not the power of awakening any active interest in a public satiated with excitement, and anxious only for thrilling adventures and breathless incidents with which to stimulate its unhealthy tastes. *Amaryllis* cannot even boast a plot. Of course the pages contain, as might be expected, many a charming description of country life and scenery, but as mere novels they are failures. Jefferies' true powers lay in a different direction.

Having now said what he could not do, let us proceed to say what he could do, and do as none before ever succeeded in doing so well—observing and describing Nature under all her aspects and in every mood, to the minutest detail. so as to make us love and worship her, even as he, her great priest, loved and worshipped her. If we cannot sit at her feet and learn of her as he did, he is ready to explain her lessons to us and be her interpreter. For him no bush was without its interest, no mound without its glamour, no insect without its story, no bird or beast without its life history. Even a feather dropped by a seagull in its whirling flight serves him as a text for one of his delightful discourses. He takes us out into the fields and there explains the hidden meaning of all we see, and sees for us far more than our benighted visions can distinguish. The very blades of grass we crush beneath our feet, the leaves that whisper unnoticed above our heads, the lightest cloud that flecks the blue of heaven, the tiniest bud that lurks in the depths of the luxuriant hedges, the almost invisible insect that rests upon the wild flowers' brim, he knew and loved them all. They were his friends, his companions, his confidants through life. None have noticed as he has noticed them, the signs and tokens of the seasons, the habits of the birds, the appearance of the sky, the ways and manners of the country-folk. And besides this wonderful power of observation, he had the supreme gift of putting his thoughts and ideas into the most powerful and poetical language: so vividly does he do this that the scene he describes rises up before us and we see the waving wheat, hear the tinkling brook, behold the fish swimming in the clear depths, and listen to the 'swish' of the mower's scythe as he plunges it into the lush and juicy grass; nay, almost smell the perfume of the wildflowers as we linger over his magic page.

What more beautiful description of wheatfields can we have than this:

They were [painted] on the surface of a plain, set round about with a margin of green downs. They were large enough to have the charm of vague, indefinite extension; and yet all could be distinctly seen. Large squares of green corn that

was absorbing its yellow from the sunlight; chess squares, irregularly placed, of brown furrows; others of rich blood-red trifolium; others of scarlet sainfoin and blue lucerne, gardens of scarlet poppies here and there. Not all of these, of course, at once, but they followed so quickly in the summer days that they seemed to be one and the same pictures, and had you painted them altogether on the same canvas, ... they would not have seemed out of place. Never was such brilliant colour; it was chalk there, and on chalk the colours are always clearer, the poppies deeper, the yellow mustard and charlock a keener yellow; the air, too, is pellucid. Waggons going along the tracks; men and women hoeing; ricks of last year still among clumps of trees, where the chimneys and gables of farmhouses are partly visible; red-tiled barns away yonder; a shepherd moving his hurdles; away again the black funnel of an idle engine, and the fly-wheel above hawthorn bushes... The few white clouds sailing over seemed to belong to the fields on which their shadows were now foreshortened, now lengthened, as if they were really part of the fields, like the crops, and the azure sky so low down as to be the roof of the house and not at all a separate thing. And the sun a lamp that you might almost have pushed along his course faster with your hand; a loving and interesting sun that wanted the wheat to ripen, and stayed there in the slow-drawn arc of the summer day to lend a hand.¹

Listen to his description of a summer day: shall we not grow breathless as we read it?

A swooning August day, with a hot east wind, from which there is no escape, which gives no air to the chest—you breathe and are not satisfied with the inspiration; it does not fill; there is no life in the killed atmosphere. It is a vacuum of heat, and yet the strong hot wind bends the trees, and the tall firs wrestle with it as they did with Sinis, the pine-bender, bowed down and rebounding as if they would whirl their cones away like a catapult. Masses of air are moving by, and yet there is none to breathe. No escape in the shadow of hedge or wood, or in the darkened room; darkness excludes the heat that comes with light, but the heat of the oven-wind cannot be shut out. Some monstrous dragon of the Chinese sky pants his fiery breath upon us, and the brown grass stalks threaten to catch flame in the field. The grain of wheat that was full of juice dries hard in the ears, and water is no more good for thirst. There is not a cloud in the sky.²

He is equally at home in describing bird life, as for instance:

A swallow never hesitates, never looks before he leaps, threads all day the eyes of needles, and goes on from half-past two in the morning till ten at night, without so much as disturbing a feather. He is the perfection of a machine for falling. His round nest is under the eaves, he throws himself out of window and

¹ 'Walks in the Wheat-fields,' first published July 1887 in *English Illustrated Magazine* and collected in *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889.

² 'Winds of Heaven,' first published on 7 August 1886 in *Chambers's Journal* and collected in *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889.

begins to fall, ... fall, for twenty hours together. His head is bullet-shaped, his neck short, his body all thickened up to the shoulders, tailing out to the merest streak of feather. His form is like a plummet—he is not unlike the heavily weighted minnow used in trolling for pike. ... If wings could be put to the minnow, it would somewhat resemble the swallow. For the swallow is made to fall, and his wings to catch him, and by resisting his descent these outstretched planes lift him again into the sky. He does not fall perpendicularly, the angle of his fall is prolonged and very low, and the swifter he goes the more nearly it approximates to the horizontal. I think he goes swifter when flying just over the ground than when lounging in the easy hammock of the atmosphere.³

Or read how he describes two peasant women walking.

The feet, as they walked, were set firm on the ground, and the body advanced with measured, deliberate, yet lazy and confident grace; shoulders thrown back—square, but not over-square (as those who have been drilled); hips swelling at the side in lines like the full bust, though longer drawn; busts well filled and shapely ... Thrice blessed and fortunate, beautiful golden-brown in their cheeks, superb health in their gait, they walked as the immortals on earth.⁴

His *Red Deer*, *Gamekeeper at Home* and 'Pageant of Summer' are the best known of Jefferies' works, and have already achieved a world-wide reputation.

But, in addition to these descriptions which glorify his writings, and as it were, bring the beautiful country sights and sounds right home to the heart of the reader, his works abound in illustrations and quaint remarks which prove him to have been also a man of profound reflection. Absorbed and self-centred, he seems to have thought out for himself many of the problems which occur to anyone in the course of their daily experience; from Nature herself he has garnered wisdom, and mingled with the glowing descriptions in which he delights. For instance, from the wheatfield he learns the worthlessness of hoarded money and perpetual labour for gain. 'People think,' he says in *Saint Guido*, 'that when they have toiled, and worked a long time, almost all their lives, then they will come to the flowers, and the birds, and be joyful in the sunshine. But no, it will not be so, for then they will be old themselves, and their ears dull, and their eyes dim, so that the birds will sound a great distance off, and the flowers will not seem bright.'⁵

³ 'Swallow Time,' first published on 3 August 1886 in the *Standard* and collected in *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889.

⁴ 'Golden-brown,' first published on 27th August 1884 in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and collected in *The Open Air*, November 1885.

⁵ 'Saint Guido,' first published December 1884 in the *English Illustrated Magazine* and collected in *The Open Air*, 1885.

The 'Crouching Venus,' an antique statue in the Louvre, teaches him a lesson she has never whispered to us. 'Here is the difference between genius and talent. Talent has lined the walls with a hundred clever things, and could line miles of surface; genius gives us but one example, and the clever things are silenced. Here is the difference between that which expresses a noble idea, and that which is dexterously conventional. The one single idea dominates the whole. Here is the difference, again, between the secret of the heart, the aspiration of the soul, and that which is only the workmanship of a studio ancient or modern.'⁶

And again he finds from his observations of cottagers,

The well-to-do are educated, they have travelled, if not in their ideas, they are more or less cosmopolitan. In the cottager the character stands out in the coarsest relief; in the cottager you get to 'bed-rock,' as the Americans say; there's the foundation. Character runs upwards, not downwards. It is not the nature of the aristocrat that permeates the cottager, but the nature of the cottager that permeates the aristocrat. The best of us are polished cottagers. Scratch deep enough, and you come to that; so that to know a people, go to the cottage, and not to the mansion. The labouring man cannot quickly alter his ways. Can the manufacturer? All alike try to go in the same old groove, till disaster visits their persistence. It is English human nature.⁷

His works are full of the shrewd reflections of which the above are examples; all these he has interpreted for us from the book of Nature, and written in the most beautiful prose, more poetical than half the rhymes that are printed. He is justly called 'the prose poet of Wiltshire.'

A vein of profound and tender melancholy runs through his writings, based also on his out-of-door observations, caused by his conviction of the cruelty, or to speak more exactly, the impassability of nature. Speaking of the sea, hill, wood, waves, he says, 'for themselves they are not for us. Their glory fills the mind with rapture for a while, and it learns that they are, like carven idols, wholly careless and indifferent to our fate.' This thought is repeated over and over again till it becomes the key-note of his imaginings. Perhaps a foreboding of his own untimely death, though he himself was not aware of it, lent this tinge of sorrow to his thoughts. In *The Story of My Heart* he writes,

Nothing whatsoever is done for us. We are born naked, and not even protected by a shaggy covering. Nothing is done for us. The first and strongest command (using the word to convey the idea only) that nature, the universe, our own bodies give, is to do everything for ourselves. The sea does not make boats for

⁶ 'Nature in the Louvre,' first published in July 1887 in the *Magazine of Art* and collected in *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889..

⁷ 'Cottage Ideas,' first published 8 May 1886 in *Chambers's Journal* and collected in *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889.

us, nor the earth of her own will build us hospitals. The injured lie bleeding, and no invisible power lifts them up. The maidens were scorched in the midst of their devotions, and their remains make a mound hundreds of yards long. The infants perished in the snow, and the ravens tore their limbs. Those in the theatre crushed each other to the death—agony. For how long, for how many thousand years, must the earth and the sea, and the fire and the air, utter these things and force them upon us before they are admitted in their full significance?

The life of this remarkable man, as of so many others who have pursued the paths of literature, was calm and uneventful. Jefferies was born November 6, 1848, at the farmhouse of Coate, near Swindon, in Wiltshire. Shy and retiring by nature, he devoted himself from boyhood with the most intense devotion to the study of natural objects. No day passed, whatever might be the weather, in which he did not spend at least five hours out of doors; and, when he could no longer live face to face with the scenes and creatures he loved, he died. His earliest bent was towards a literary career, and he endeavoured to carry out his objects by novel-writing; in this, however, he did not succeed, for as has been before indicated, he had not the quality of talent necessary for that calling. As Sir W. Besant, the highest possible authority on the subject, says 'To begin with, he knew nothing of society, nothing of men and women, except the people of a small country town. He wholly lacked the dramatic faculty. He could draw splendid landscapes, but he could not connect them together by the thread of human interest. Nature in his books is always first, and humanity always second. Again, he did not understand, so to speak, stage management.'

After some years of struggling, during which he earned a modest income by writing for the press, he found his true talent, the studying and describing English country scenes and English country life, and this he did as none had ever before studied and described them. His works are an epitome of country life during the present century. 'He draws,' says his biographer, Sir W. Besant, 'as no other writer has done, the actual life of rural England under Queen Victoria.'

His rustics are not the Dresden china-looking figures of some artists or of the opera—Daphnes and Strephons toying with ribboned crooks and a few impossible sheep, who imitate the effete creations of Dryden and Gay; but real downright country clod-hoppers, who eat their bacon on a stile and go to sleep in a barn after imbibing gallons of unwholesome beer. His scenes are not the smooth and sunny landscapes of Watteau and Claude, which, eked out with an imaginary Greek ruin, look as if they had been balanced in the canvas with the aid of the scene-shifter, but the rough England through which we tramp in mire and rain, or get sunburnt during the occasional

bursts of hot summer sun, and through which we cut railways and build manufacturers' chimneys. In a few words of highest praise Jefferies is true—true as the works of Constable, David Cox, and Nasmyth, and Turner when he chooses to be so.

His life flowed on calmly enough, varied only by the incidents of matrimony, poverty, and ill-health, to the end, which, however, was melancholy in the extreme. Six years before his death he was smitten with illness, and suffered pain and torture such as few, mercifully, have ever known. Yet such was his love of his work, that some of his best books were written during that time, when he could scarcely hold a pen, fighting face to face with death. The essays which are embodied in *Field and Hedgerow*, which I think most truly characteristic of his best and finished work, were written during this time; also, *Red Deer*, an unrivalled description of its subject, which takes the reader straight into the wilds and makes him seem to breathe the invigorating air of the moors; and *The Open Air*, which contains some marvellous papers on London scenes and people.

His days and nights were a long struggle against suffering, with a determination, however, to go on with his work. Nothing more wonderful than the courage and resolution of this man. As in youth he had resolved to succeed somehow, though as yet ignorant of the better way, so now he would not be beaten by pain. [Besant]

The Story of My Heart is perhaps one of the strangest rhapsodies ever written. As an inquiry into the foundations of faith, or the destruction or reconstruction of a religious belief, it has no value; but as a description of certain aspirations and sentiments common to every refined and poetical nature, it is a production of great interest. As is usual with him, from the deeper inner consciousness he seems always to have possessed the profoundest meaning of nature, he draws everywhere most practical conclusions and teaches the most instructive lessons—which is that purity of heart is to be attained by constant communion with her. Without the study of this volume no opinion as to Jefferies' life and works could be considered final.

If we expect one or two short excursions on the continent, Jefferies never left England. For that reason his work is so entirely 'racy and of the soil' that probably no foreigner will ever be capable of fully appreciating it. For tranquil genius such as his, change which he abhorred, was unnecessary; it was not essential to its fullest development. The poet of the 'Ode to Immortality' derived his inspiration entirely from his native country, and had Burns been 'refined' by the 'grand tour' it is a question whether his poems would have possessed the vitality which thrills through them now.

Concentration to one nationality is favourable to the development of a certain cast of genius.

Richard Jefferies died at Goring, Sussex, August 14, 1887, leaving a widow and two children. He was a tall, rather handsome man and very fair; in the early part of his life he showed no particular weakness indicative of so early a decease. Rather indolent, and of methodical, simple habits and reserved disposition, he never made many acquaintances: Nature was to him mother and friend in one. It is difficult to imagine that his spirit does not still haunt the scenes he loved so well, absorbed into the universal soul of nature, immortal and serene.

Jefferies and the poet Keats seem to have possessed the same overpowering love of Nature, and similar habits of intense observation, the results of which they were endowed with genius to write for us in the richest language of poetry. Another similarity between them also occurs to me; both died early in life after intense physical suffering, and the fulness of the fame they both so earnestly desired was not attained till the grave had closed over their remains.



Margaret Thomas. Photograph from *The Story of Australian Art* by William Moore, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1934). No date for photo given.

Echoes from Salisbury

Peter Robins

When the Australian artist and sculptor Margaret Thomas accepted a commission from Arthur Kinglake to create a marble bust as a memorial to Richard Jefferies, the project began with confidence.¹

Arthur Kinglake launched his appeal for subscriptions in a letter to *The Standard* 21 July 1890:

SIR—It may interest your readers to learn that this unrivalled delineator of country life is no longer to remain unhonoured. A wish has been expressed of late by many that some Memorial of Richard Jefferies should be erected, and, inasmuch as he was a native of Wilts, and fond of his county, Salisbury Cathedral appeared to be the most appropriate spot for that purpose. Mr. Charles Longman, an attached friend of Richard Jefferies, and Mr. Walter Besant, the happy author of the “Eulogy,” regarding the proposal with favour, a Committee has been formed for placing a marble bust of the prose poet of the Wiltshire Downs in this grand old cathedral.

The Bishop of Salisbury and the Dean having most cordially given their assent to this project, the execution of the proposed Memorial has been entrusted to Miss Margaret Thomas, an artist of acknowledged ability. The estimated cost of this work will be about one hundred and fifty pounds. It is believed that little difficulty will be experienced in raising this small fund among the admirers and readers of the most remarkable man produced in the Diocese of Salisbury for many years.

The Committee consists of the Bishop of Salisbury and the Dean, Mr. Burdett-Coutts, M.P., Mr. Walter Pollock, Mr. Andrew Lang, Mr. Rider Haggard, Mr. J. W. North, Mr. George Smith, Mr. Andrew Chatto, Mr. Alfred Buckley, Mr. Osborne, Mr. C. P. Scott, Mr. F.G. Heath, Mr. Walter Besant, and Mr. Charles Longman. The two latter gentlemen will act as honorary



¹ See Kedrun Laurie, ‘Margaret Thomas, Sculptor of the Bust of Richard Jefferies in Salisbury Cathedral’ *RJS Journal* No.13 2004

Secretaries, and I have willingly accepted the office of Treasurer, and opened an account with Stuckey's Banking Company, Taunton, for subscriptions.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ARTHUR KINGLAKE.

Taunton, July 18.

In the same edition of *The Standard*, an editorial endorsed Kinglake's appeal confirming, '...we are confident that the trifling sum asked for by Mr. Kinglake this morning will be promptly and lovingly subscribed.'

Robert Arthur Kinglake was born in 1813, a son of an established banking and legal family in Taunton, Somerset. He followed in the family tradition as a lawyer, district registrar of probate and as a JP. A brother, Alexander, was an adventurer and is remembered for his book *Eothen*, an account of his travels in the Middle East².

From the 1860s, Arthur Kinglake developed an enthusiasm for commissioning busts of 'Somerset Worthies',³ men of merit who had been born in Somerset. Over the next three decades these amounted to more than a dozen memorials and were, and still are, displayed within the Taunton Shire Hall. Among the worthies were Admiral Blake, Colonel Chard, novelist Henry Fielding and the sculptor Charles Summers. At Summers' death in 1879 Kinglake asked Margaret Thomas, a former pupil of the sculptor, to execute a bust which was unveiled in 1880 and three years later her bust of Henry Fielding joined the display in the Shire Hall.

Kinglake and Thomas had a good working relationship and Kinglake raised funds to pay for the commissions so the same arrangement was in place for the Jefferies memorial, but it was destined for Salisbury rather than Taunton, an idiosyncrasy seemingly explained by Kinglake's admiration for the Wiltshire writer. The appeal was launched and Thomas began to sketch her ideas.

Two days after Kinglake's subscription appeal appeared in *The Standard*, a letter was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* 23 Jul 1890 from Augusta Warde, a wealthy widow in Bath, claiming that 'the aged parents of Richard Jefferies are in very poor circumstances and in failing health,' and that 'should the admirers of Richard Jefferies be willing to assist in helping the old couple, any sum would be gratefully received and forwarded to them by me.'

No doubt potential donors and members of Kinglake's fund-raising committee, familiar with the London press, realised that the bust appeal was perhaps untimely if Jefferies' parents were in poverty. Coupled with this,

² Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen* (London: J. Ollivier 1844).

³ Perhaps inspired by William Kent's garden monument of 1735 'The Temple of British Worthies' at Stowe, Buckingham. There are fourteen busts including Locke, Newton, Drake, Raleigh and Pope.

there were freethinkers among Jefferies' readers who considered a cathedral an unsuitable location for a memorial, preferring that the open air would be more appropriate and kept their hands in their pockets. Additionally, there was probably some weariness among those who held Jefferies in high regard who had already given generously to the funds raised immediately after his death for the benefit of his widow and children.

We don't know the result of Augusta Warde's appeal but the subject came up again when the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 25 October 1890, quoted a letter written by Frederick Greenwood, founder of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *St. James's Gazette*, to the *Scots Observer*⁴ in which he claimed, 'Jefferies' father and mother are living in great indigence. They are very old, a little money goes with them a long way' and requested subscriptions that could be sent to a Mrs. Tebb of Tunbridge Wells who would take charge of them. The *Scots Observer* had published on 2 August 1890 an essay by Greenwood on Richard Jefferies⁵ and it is conceivable that he had been in touch with Jefferies' parents and deduced their circumstances.

In the same edition as Greenwood's letter the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* published an assertive editorial advocating priority of the living over the dead, commenting:

It is natural that his [Richard Jefferies'] admirers should desire to celebrate his praise in marble, but still more honour may be done to his memory by relieving the wants of his parents than by placing his bust in Salisbury Cathedral and if the living were left in want for the sake of giving a stone to the dead, the memorial of Jefferies would be one which he himself would have had little to say in praise.

Six months on from the launch of Kinglake's appeal, a short item in the *Western Chronicle* 16 January 1891 announced that the fund had 'not yet received £50 towards the costs' commenting that the difficulty in raising the money 'is both humiliating and discreditable to the county which gave Jefferys (*sic*) birth.' One imagines that Kinglake may have been prompted to revive the appeal with only a third of the costs in hand. Even so the timing was again unfortunate for Arthur Kinglake's brother, Alexander, had died of cancer in London at the beginning of the month and after the funeral his papers and were sent down to Taunton for Arthur to deal with. Dealing with his brother's demise as well as continuing his professional duties as a lawyer, JP, and the unsatisfactory position of the bust fund after one year may have

⁴ The *Scots Observer* was originally a Scottish newspaper but transferred from Edinburgh to London and was renamed the *National Observer* in November 1890.

⁵ Republished in *RJS Journal* No.34 2019.

caused a bout of illness, for the *Taunton Courier* 1 July 1891 reported that Arthur Kinglake was 'suffering from ill health and was staying at Minehead and had no intention of resuming his magisterial duties.'

In the following month he had recovered, publishing a pamphlet, *Somerset Worthies*,⁶ dedicated to the romantic poet James Russell Lowell,⁷ which was warmly praised by the *West Somerset Free Press* 22 August 1891.

A newspaper item about Jefferies' parents appeared that same month in the *North Wilts Herald* 28 August 1891, this time discrediting earlier claims:

Reports have been going the rounds of the papers recently as to the parents of the late Richard Jefferies. They were presented as being in the poorest of circumstances, and one account went so far as to positively assert that they were in a workhouse. The story, on the authority of the *British Weekly*,⁸ is as incorrect as it is sensational. The couple are now occupying apartments in Bath.⁹

The newspaper's rebuttal may have brought some relief to Kinglake as one of the headwinds had been deflected but two more newspaper items appeared about the fund shortfall in the *Taunton Courier* 18 November 1891 and the *Bath Chronicle* 10 December 1891, the latter quoting Kinglake that he still wanted £80 to complete the payment.

Worse followed a week later when an anonymous subscriber, a whistleblower in today's terms, wrote to *The Athenaeum* 19 December 1891 exposing the 'unaccountable state of affairs' of the fundraising for the memorial. It is tempting to suspect that the writer was a member of the committee frustrated by the lack of commitment and action by Kinglake:

THE JEFFERIES MEMORIAL

A SUBSCRIBER writes:—

Many of your readers are doubtless more or less acquainted with the writings of Richard Jefferies, and I trust you will therefore allow me some space to state a few facts which will, I think, interest them. In July, 1890, an announcement was made that a committee had been formed and a fund started for the erection of a memorial to this beautiful writer. The scheme was received so kindly that the promoters were led to expect a speedy realization of the required sum, and the

⁶ Robert Arthur Kinglake, *Somerset Worthies*, (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1891).

⁷ Lowell had unveiled Margaret Thomas' bust of Henry Fielding, commissioned by Kinglake, at the Taunton Shire Hall 8 September 1883.

⁸ *British Weekly* (1886-1970) a journal of social and Christian progress.

⁹ Margaret Thomas' article 'Richard Jefferies in Salisbury Cathedral' in *Literary Opinion* April 1892 mentions that she had visited Jefferies' parents in Bath in 1891 where she found Jefferies' father 'a healthy, good looking man of seventy-five...and still a great walker', though his wife was an invalid. No comment on their circumstances was given but had the Jefferies been in poverty surely Thomas would have made it known.

work was put in hand. But now, nearly eighteen months since the opening of the fund, I regret to say a most unaccountable state of affairs exists. Some £50 is still wanted to complete the amount, the committee has dissolved itself, and, with one or two exceptions, there appears to be a most unconscientious desire of all concerned to wash their hands of the affair. I need not here enlarge upon the claims of a writer like Jefferies to a modest memorial such is now ready for erection in Salisbury Cathedral as soon as the money can be paid, nor will I remark further upon the action of the committee. It is to me quite incomprehensible how these miserable facts have come to exist, and through your columns I wish to appeal to all who know anything of Jefferies, all who value descriptions of the country for the country's sake, and who think that talent neglected during life should at least receive amends now. Unless sympathy for suffering and manly struggle for independence is dead, the appeal will not be in vain.

The Athenaeum published Kinglake's response under its 'Literary Gossip' section on 2 January 1892:

Mr. R. A. Kinglake writes:

A subscriber in a recent number of the *Athenaeum* opportunely refers to the unsatisfactory state of the 'Jefferies' Memorial.' Miss Thomas, the sculptor of the memorial, applies to me at the same time, as treasurer, for payment of the remaining portion of her honorarium, which has been due to her for many months. Gladly would I have complied with the request of this sculptor, painter, and poetess, whose talents called forth the admiration of the late Mr. Russell Lowell when he unveiled the memorial to Fielding in the Shire Hall at Taunton; but, alas! the bankers informed me that there was no *balance* in hand, and to overdraw the account in such a cause, even if granted, I thought would not be reputable. I am, therefore, obliged to take the public into my confidence and solicit contributions for doing honour to one of the greatest and most fascinating writers of the nineteenth century. Cheques and post-office orders can be paid to the honorary treasurer, R. Arthur Kinglake.

If the 'subscriber's' allegation that the committee had dissolved itself was true, Walter Besant was still an ally. A month later, no doubt in desperation that the memorial bust would not proceed, he stepped in, the *Taunton Courier* 10 February 1892 recording 'Mr. Besant, the author, has forwarded a cheque towards assisting the fund being raised for placing a bust of Richard Jefferies in Salisbury Cathedral.'

The bust was unveiled at noon on a wet Wednesday 9 March 1892 by the Bishop of Salisbury in the north transept of the cathedral. In its report the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* 12 March 1892 described the ceremony 'in the presence of a small assembly of about fifty persons, consisting chiefly of residents in the Close.' Jessie was present but Arthur Kinglake had been unable to attend due to ill health and Margaret Thomas arrived too late. Juxtaposed to the newspaper report, letters from Jessie Jefferies and Arthur

Kinglake were published. Jessie's was addressed to the Bishop of Salisbury and thanked everyone involved in the memorial.¹⁰

Kinglake gave his apologies and explained his absence to the Bishop of Salisbury but also gave a hint of who had contributed to the fund, naming the Viceroy of India and Lord Derby, adding 'some working men of the North of England have contributed a few shillings.' Other than these names we do not know who the other subscribers were, apart from Besant and an assumption that other members of the fundraising committee contributed. When funds were raised for Jefferies' family immediately after his death the *Pall Mall Gazette* regularly published lists of subscribers and the amounts donated but the bust fund remains opaque.¹¹

Six weeks after writing a cheque, possibly a sizeable personal donation, to ensure that Margaret Thomas was paid in full and to allow the unveiling to proceed, Walter Besant felt obliged to write a letter of explanation as to why there were no literary figures present at the ceremony. His letter was published in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* 2 April 1892:

THE UNVEILING OF THE BUST OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

SIR, — I have received many notes expressing surprise and disappointment that only one man of letters—he a resident in the city—was present at the unveiling of the bust of Richard Jefferies. I think, therefore, that it is due to those who admire the genius of this illustrious writer—and especially to those who took up the project (started first of all by Mr. Arthur Kinglake) and who carried it through—to state publicly the reason for the absence of the literary profession on the occasion.

The committee of men of letters by whom the monument was achieved were simply not invited to be present. Some of them would, however, have attended without any invitation at all, but they did not even receive the bare courtesy of a notification of the time at which the ceremony was to be held. Under these circumstances, it became of course impossible to attend. I hope the people of Salisbury will be good enough to believe that our absence was not due to any lack of appreciation of the writer, to whom this great and deserved honour was paid, but solely to the fact that we were, practically, not allowed to be present. I do not accuse anyone in this matter; I merely record the fact.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

WALTER BESANT.

March 26th, 1892.

¹⁰ A letter from Jessie Jefferies appeared in *The Times* 8 March 1892 informing readers that a marble bust to her husband's memory would be unveiled at Salisbury Cathedral on the 9 March.

¹¹ Stuckey's Banking Co., which held the fund donations, was subject to amalgamations over time and its records are now held by NatWest. The archivist, Kimberley Harsley, kindly searched the surviving records but no information about the fund was found.

Besant's restrained anger was also published in his own journal *The Author*¹²
1 April 1892:

The committee were absolutely ignored. This discourtesy, or neglect, was the sole cause of the absence from the ceremony of those who would have otherwise marked their respect and affection to the illustrious author by their presence.

Besant may have received a private apology from Kinglake or the Bishop but nothing appeared in the press.

Robert Arthur Kinglake died in his eighty-first year on 5 December 1893 after two months of illness when had been confined to his room. He left a widow, two daughters and a son. In its obituary published in the *Taunton Courier* 13 December 1893 Kinglake was praised for the forty years he spent on the Bench and his many charitable acts, including the welfare of discharged prisoners in Somerset. He was best remembered in the town and county as the instigator of the collection of busts of 'Somerset Worthies' displayed in the Shire Hall. The newspaper's obituary included a telling sentence about this pursuit and Kinglake's character; 'He raised funds for busts but when subscriptions fell off, as they did after a time, he paid for several busts himself.'

¹² A monthly journal, the organ of The Incorporated Society of Authors.

‘It was between the may and the rose’

Fay Inchfawn

Fay Inchfawn was the pen name of Elizabeth Rebecca Ward (née Daniels) a contributor of verse to women’s magazines between the wars as well as writing books for children and religious works. She was sometimes called the ‘Poet Laureate of the Home.’ The poem below was an early work and appeared shortly after she had married Atkinson Ward in 1914 and was published in *The Country Life Anthology of Verse* edited by P. Anderson Graham (London: Country Life, 1915).

Inchfawn took as her inspiration a sentence from Jefferies’ ‘The Pageant of Summer’,¹ thought to be his finest essay. The paragraph in which it appears runs as follows:

It was between the may and the June roses. The may bloom had fallen, and among the hawthorn boughs were the little green bunches that would feed the red-wings in autumn. High up the briars had climbed, straight and towering while there was a thorn or an ash sapling, or a yellow-green willow, to uphold them and then curving over towards the meadow. The buds were on them, but not yet open; it was between the may and the rose.

‘It was between the may and the rose’

Richard Jefferies

First Buttercup:

Say, will She come, or was it but a dream.
That joyous singing of the meadow Stream
Which spoke of Her?

Second Buttercup:

Nay, only yester Eve
The Wind told tales too wondrous to believe.
Of Her fair beauty, of Her winsome grace.
And bade us all bow down before Her face
When She should come.

¹ ‘The Pageant of Summer’ was first published in *Longman’s Magazine* June 1883 and collected in *The Life of the Fields* (1884) and then published as a separate item by various publishers in 1896, 1907 and 1911.

Third Buttercup:

But when? Ah, sister, when?
The Violet hoped, but she has died since then.
The Primroses are gone, and now the May
Drops down upon the yellow shining way.
Great pearls, all 'broidered on a cloth of gold.

The Stream:

The Iris wakes, for emerald fold on fold
Unfurls, and royal purple shows between—

The Wind:

Then hush! At last She comes—our radiant Queen!

Chorus of Buttercups:

'Tis She! 'Tis She! We crowd to meet Her. See
The Flags fly out, for now right royalty
She holds Her court—the waiting overpast.
Hail to the first wild Rose, awake at last!

FAY INCHFAWN



Word-Painting from Nature

J.D.

Last year the discovery of a previously unknown letter from Jefferies to his publisher, Smith, Elder, introduced us to *Cope's Tobacco Plant*. A copy of the monthly periodical was included with the letter which asked his publisher to take a look at it.¹ Subsequent research turned up the reason, for in the issue of October 1879 there appeared a lengthy essay, published below, much of which was praise for the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*, both published anonymously in 1878 and 1879 respectively.

Cope's Tobacco Plant doesn't spring to mind when considering late Victorian literary journals and was published by Cope Brothers and Company, a Liverpool manufacturer of tobacco products, its publication circulating in smoking rooms and to subscribers.² The journal's strapline was 'A Monthly Periodical Interesting to the Manufacturer, the Dealer, and the Smoker'. Its editor, John Fraser, a Scot, reprinted extracts from past authors, some with tenuous connections to tobacco, commissioned new literary essays and reviews, spreading these among tobacco trade news and classified ads.

The erudite essay 'Word-Painting from Nature' is signed by 'JD' whom we think was James Davies (1820-1883), a contributor to a number of journals. Davies combined the roles of landowner, clergyman, banker, classical scholar and journalist. He had written most of the articles on classical subjects for the *Saturday Review* for many years and was an authority on archaeology, architecture, topography and horticulture. In the *Contemporary Review* of February 1879 an essay by him on the English country squire was published, suggesting his mind was on rural matters that year.

Andrew Rossabi has commented on Davies' essay:

The discovery of the review of *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in Southern County* is an important contribution to Jefferies studies because JD gets about as close as anyone to penetrating the secret of the author's genius. It was good to read appreciation of such a degree of intensity and enthusiasm.

In his conclusion he touches on the source of Jefferies' appeal: the way he actually transports readers out of doors, bringing a sense of the open air and sunlight to the printed page to a degree that no other has done. As JD says, his writing seems impregnated by the fresh air of the downs. The sunlight, too, seems to have got into his prose and given it a hidden lustre.

JD also touches on the pastoral factor in that it is in periods of urban sophistication that pastoral (writing about nature and country life in the broadest sense) makes its appeal.

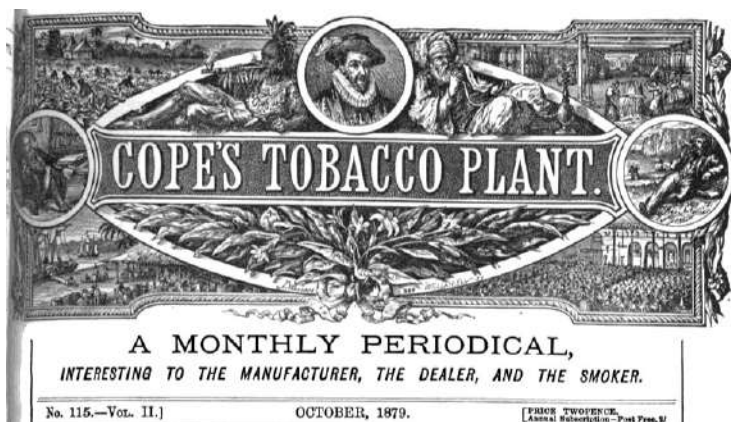
¹ See 'More Discoveries' *RJS Autumn Newsletter* 2022, pp.26-28.

² The *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (Cambridge, CUP, 1969) considered it worthy to list on the same page as *Contemporary Review*, *Nineteenth Century*, *Fortnightly* and other similar publications. p. 830. *Cope's Tobacco Plant* was published 1870-1881.

Consistent with the theme of *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, Davies quotes passages from the author's two books where tobacco is mentioned concluding that he has no 'overweening tenderness for Tobacco' associating it with 'loafing poachers, dissipated keepers, extravagant farmers and scheming salesmen.' Perhaps a disappointment for the publisher trying to ally the smoking habit with refined culture. Though Davies did appreciate among the author's qualities, his humour, an attribute largely overlooked by later critics.

Jefferies' own relationship with tobacco was revealed in correspondence between his son, Harold, living in Canada, and Samuel J. Looker in 1939, published in *The Worthing Cavalcade* in 1944:³ 'I remember purloining his cigarettes when opportunity offered; he always smoked *Three Castles*, as the doctors had, I believe, forbidden cigars, which he liked much better.' Harold's weakness for tobacco persisted and he recalls that Richard, on one occasion when they were at Goring, showed disapproval of a twelve-year-old smoking. It is conceivable that Richard had grasped in the last year of his life that his tobacco habit had hastened his death from tuberculosis.

~ ~ ~



pp.387-389

SOMETIMES the linnet piped his song:
 Sometimes the throistle whistled strong:
 Sometimes the sparrowhawk, wheel'd along,
 Hushed all the groves from fear of wrong:
 By grassy capes with fuller sound
 In curves the yellowing river ran,
 And drooping chestnut-buds began
 To spread into the perfect fan,
 Above the teeming ground.

—TENNYSON

³ *The Worthing Cavalcade: Concerning Richard Jefferies by Various Writers* (Worthing: Aldridge Bros. 1944). 'Memories of Richard Jefferies' by Richard Harold Jefferies pp.17-27.

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm,
And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands;
Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf
In cluster; then a moulder'd church; and higher
A long street climbs to one tall-tower'd mill;
And high in heaven behind it a gray down
With Danish barrows; and a hazelwood,
By autumn nutters haunted, flourishes
Green in a cuplike hollow of the down.

—TENNYSON

Knowledge this man prizes best
Seems fantastic to the rest:
Pondering shadows, colours, clouds,
Grass-buds and caterpillar shrouds,
Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
Tints that spot the violet's petal.

Many haps fall in the field
Seldom seen by wishful eyes,
But all her shows did Nature yield
To please and win this pilgrim wise.
He saw the partridge drum in the woods;
He heard the woodcock's evening hymn;
He found the tawny thrush's broods;
And the shy hawk did wait for him;
What others did at distance hear,
And guessed within the thicket's gloom,
Was showed to this philosopher,
And at his bidding seemed to come.

—EMERSON

I heard the distant waters dash
I saw the current whirl and flash,—
And richly, by the blue lake's silver beach,
The woods were bending with a silent reach.
Then o'er the vale, with gentle swell,
The music of the village bell
Came sweetly to the echo-giving hills;
And the wild horn, whose voice the woodland fills,
Was ringing to the merry shout,
That faint and far the glen sent out,
Where, answering to the sudden shot, thin smoke,
Through thick-leaved branches, from the dingle broke.

—LONGFELLOW

Thou paints auld Nature to the nines.
Nae gowden stream through myrtles twines
Where Philomel,
While mighty breezes sweep the vines,
Her griefs will tell!

In gowany glens thy burnie strays
Where bonnie lasses bleach their claes:
Or trots by hazelly shaws and brays,
Wi' hawthorns gray,
Where blackbirds join the shepherd's lays
At close o' day.

Thy rural loves are Nature's sel';
Nae bombast spates o' nonsense swell;
Nae snap conceits, but that sweet spell
O' witchin' love,
That charm that can the strongest quell,
The sternest move.

—BURNS

The heather was blooming, the meadows were mawn,
Our lads gaed a-hunting ae day at the dawn,
O'er moors and o'er mosses, and mony a glen,
At length they discovered a bonnie moor-hen.

Sweet brushing the dew from the brown heather-bells,
Her colours betrayed her on yon mossy fells,
Her plumage out-lusted the pride o' the spring,
And oh! as she wantonèd gay on the wing,

'Auld Phoebus himsel' as he peeped o'er the hill,
In spite at her plumage he tried his skill;
He levelled his rays where she basked on the brae—
His rays were outshone, and but marked where she lay.

They hunted the valley, they hunted the hill,
The best of our lads, wi' the best o' their skill,
But still as the fairest she sat in their sight—
Then, whirr! she was over, a mile at a flight.

I rede you beware at the hunting, young men;
I rede you beware at the hunting, young men;
Tak' some on the wing, and some as they spring,
But cannily steal on a bonny moor-hen.

—BURNS

Not Love, not War, nor the tumultuous swell
Of civil conflict, nor the wrecks of change,
Nor Duty struggling with afflictions strange—
Not these alone inspire the tuneful shell;

But where untroubled peace and concord dwell,
There also is the Muse not loth to range,
Watching the twilight smoke of cot or grange,
Skyward ascending from a woody dell.

—WORDSWORTH

I think it was William Shenstone, the poet, who proposed to divide the world into four classes—people that read, people that write, people that think, and foxhunters. The classification would not apply so strictly now; for English society has undergone a metamorphosis or two during the hundred and odd years since William Shenstone died; and, as it would be possible to find foxhunters in these days who read and write, and other foxhunters who think—men, for example, like Sir Stafford Northcote, Mr. Newdegate, and the late Major Whyte-Melville—so I think I have found, in the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*,⁴ a sportsman who has read much and thought much, and can write exceedingly well. I have not been in haste to record my opinion of these books; because, although I may confess to have read them, in the main, in the fragmentary form of their original appearance in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, yet my natural modesty chimes in with the advice which Fielding, the novelist, gave a century and a quarter ago, not only to young readers, but also to ‘all fathers, mothers, and guardians—That they would cautiously avoid the perusal of any modern book till it hath first had the sanction of some wise and learned man.’ Perhaps I have not always been so prudent; but it is well to follow good counsel, especially when it falls in with your disposition for the time being; and when I recollect that Henry Fielding was liberal enough to admit that Shakespeare and Molière had the ‘talents’ of wit and humour in some degree, I cannot doubt that the author of *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* is a sufficiently sage adviser. Well, many journals and hebdomadals of repute and standing, which struggle amongst themselves for the honour of speaking first in such matters, have long since published their criticisms upon these books; and amongst the ‘wise and learned’ men who write for those periodicals there has been a marvellous consensus of praise of the author and admiration of his work. Were I to give way to the splenetic humour which is proper to the character of the literary critic, I might yield to the tempting suggestion, that this wonderful agreement to applaud all round may be explained by the universal ignorance which prevails amongst critics upon the subject matter of these productions. I refrain from the ill-natured comment, principally

⁴ *The Gamekeeper at Home: Sketches of Natural History and Rural Life* (London: Smith, Elder and Co.), 1878. *Wild Life in a Southern County* by the Author of “The Gamekeeper at Home” (London: Smith, Elder and Co.), 1879.

because I am conscious that the censure it implies would inevitably recoil upon myself, who am about to say 'ditto' to the favourable scribes who have preceded me. When we do agree, it will be perceived, our unanimity is vastly surprising.

I desire, however, at the outset, to clear myself from all suspicion of having been won over to my present attitude by any flattering treatment of my favourite theme by the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home* and its companion volume. One or two references to his pages will suffice to show that he has no overweening tenderness for Tobacco, or for the art and practice of Tobacco-smoking. This picture of a casual poacher is not flattering:

Neither is it of any use to search a man whose tools, to a moral certainty, are concealed in some hedge. With his hands in his pockets, and a short pipe in his mouth, he can saunter along the side of a preserve if only a path, as is often the case, follows the edge; and by-and-by it grows dusk, and the keeper or keepers cannot be everywhere at once. There is nothing to prevent such fellows as these from sneaking over an estate with a lurcher dog at their heels. ... Presently, if the poacher but lifts his finger, away dashes the dog, and will miss nothing he comes across. The lurcher has always borne an evil repute, which, of course, is the due, not of the dog, but of his master.

Nor am I naturally pleased by the suggestion in this portrait of the wrong sort of gamekeeper:

Another class of keeper is rather passively than actively bad. This is the idle man, whose pipe is ever in his mouth, and whose hands are always in his pockets. He is often what is called a good-natured fellow—soft-spoken, respectful, and willing; liked by everybody, a capital comrade in his own class, and, in fact, with too many friends of a certain set. ... By degrees he easily falls into bad habits, takes too much liquor, finds his hands unsteady, becomes too lazy to repress poaching ... and finally is corrupted, and shares the proceeds of bolder rascals.

I don't know that I ever read a passage which would have given greater pleasure than that would to the late Mr. Reynolds, arch-priest of Anti-Tobaccoism in these realms. Turning to the other book, the kindest allusion to the Tobacco Leaf and its uses I find in all the six hundred pages of this writer's work is in the following sketch of a farm-auction:

Scarcely any ale is to be seen: it is there if asked for; but the great majority now drink sherry. The way in which this wine has supplanted the old-fashioned October ale is remarkable, and a noticeable sign of the times. At home the farmer may still have his foaming jug, but whenever farmers congregate together on occasions like this, sherry is the favourite. When calling at the inns in the towns on market-days—much business is transacted at the inns—spirits are usually taken, so that ale is no longer the characteristic country liquor. With

the sherry cigars are handed round—another change. It is true the elderly men stick to their long clay pipes, and it is observable that some of the younger after a while go back to the yard of clay; but on the whole the cigar is the proper thing. Then follow a couple of toasts, the stockowner's and auctioneer's—usually short—and an adjournment takes place—if it be stock, to the yards; if corn, the cloth is cleared of all but the wine, and the sale proceeds there and then. In either case the sherry and the cigars go round—persons being employed to press them freely upon all; and altogether a very jovial afternoon is spent.

Thus the writer seems to associate the appetite for Tobacco only with loafing poachers, dissipated keepers, extravagant farmers, and scheming salesmen who befuddle the buyers' brains before a sale. He fails to point the moral of his story about sherry and cigars, that have taken the place of honest October ale and the homely yard of clay. I might, perchance, point it for him, with a conclusion that would throw an edifying light on the problem of the present depression of agricultural interests in this country; but the deduction would hardly adorn the tale. We may leave it to the Royal Commission; and bet a hundred to one they never come within a mile of it. At least, then, if I admire this author's writings, let me be free from the imputation of Tobaccoite freemasonry.

The publishers have hit upon a happy and comprehensive general title for these two books—'Rural England'; and there are good reasons why they should be classed as twin volumes of a common work. I throw out the hint, that the writer may have the benefit of it, when he thinks it well to emerge from his needless obscurity, and give the world the benefit of his name. When that is done, the world of writers, as well as that of readers, will be eager to add to the laurels he has won *incognito*. In the meantime, I perceive with some little amusement that the critics of the dailies and weeklies—not to mention those publications of greater dignity which appear at intervals of a month or a quarter—have but one standard of comparison, and harp strangely on a single string. 'The library of good books on the country is not so large,' says the *Edinburgh Review*, 'but that any additions are exceedingly welcome; and since White wrote his *Natural History of Selborne* we have had nothing more delightful,' &c. Then speaks the *Athenæum*: 'A volume which is worthy of a place beside White's *Selborne*. In closeness of observation, in power of giving a picture far beyond the power of the mere word-painter, he is the equal of the Selborne rector—perhaps his superior.' That last, of course, is nonsense; because a man who paints his picture in words does nothing 'beyond the power of the mere word-paint'. There was some idea, doubtless, in the reviewer's mind; but he was not word-painter enough to limn it in ink or black-lead. I do not quarrel with the estimate; but had the

author of *Wild Life in a Southern County* no great prototype except the Rector of Selborne? It is not without purpose that I have prefixed to this article a handful of gleanings from a few of the more modern English-writing poets. When word-painting of Nature's features and habits, of natural scenery, the phases of rural life, the ways of animals and plants, and their relations with man, is the theme, shall we give no thought to Virgil and his Georgics? Shall we forget Chaucer?—of whom one recent critic says:

While at study, and when he was making songs and ditties, 'nothing else that God had made' had any interest for him. There was but one thing that roused him then, and that, too, he liked to enjoy alone. It was the beauty of the morning and the fields, the woods, and streams, and flowers, and the singing of the little birds. This made his heart full of revel and solace, and when spring came after winter he rose with the lark, and cried, 'Farewell, my book and my devotion.' He was the first who made the love of nature a distinct element in our poetry. He was the first who, in spending the whole day gazing alone on the daisy, set going that lovely delight in natural scenery which is so special a mark of our later poets.

May we not remember Spencer, and the *Shepherd's Calendar*? Perdita, too, talks somewhat of Nature:

O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodills,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength—a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one!

Says Lorenzo:

For do but note a wild and wanton herd,
Or race of youthful and unhandled colts,
Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud,
Which is the hot condition of their blood,
If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turn'd to a modest gaze
By the sweet power of music.

Yet, when we talk of Nature-painting, shall we have no memory of Shakespeare? Had Wither and Andrew Marvell none of this quality? Did Milton never sing of 'A May Morning' or 'To the Nightingale'? and shall we delight no more in 'L'Allegro' or 'Il Penseroso'? I seem to have met with some portraiture of Nature in Gray, and Collins, and Thomson, and Dyer, and Beattie; and there yet lingers in my mind some recollection of Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village'. Surely Allan Ramsay is not out of court with his 'Gentle Shepherd'; and what shall be done with Cowper and Burns and Crabbe? Do Wordsworth and Scott and Byron and Shelley count for nothing as word painters of Nature? May Keats have no niche in the gallery? And are there no living writers to dispute the palm with the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*? If it be objected that all these are poets, and out of the comparison, I first demur to the doctrine implied; for it is not the form we speak of; and, while much metre is prosaic, much descriptive prose is full of poetry—of which truth let Dickens and George Eliot suffice to bear witness. Next, I traverse the objection; for Scott did much Nature-painting in the prose of his romances; and Goldsmith's cunning in the craft is not altogether absent from his *Animated Nature*. Even if I must, after all, be confined for illustrations to one particular school, is Izaak Walton to have no mention? Have not the Rev. F.O. Morris, the Rev. J.G. Wood, Sir John Lubbock, Mr. Francis George Heath, and, though last, not least, Mr. Darwin, had something to say—and said that something well—about birds, and beasts, and insects, and trees, and the sentient forms of vegetable life; even since White wrote the *Natural History of Selborne*, and ere *Wild Life in a Southern County* appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*? There were strong men before Agamemnon, and men have not all been weaklings since that hero died. If the author should feel aggrieved by this enumeration, himself having set up no claim to competition with the giants, I would remind him that his complaint is rather against the too laudatory and extravagant friends, who for his sake ignored so long a line of worthies, than against me. I would willingly do him justice; but am loth to blot out so many glorious pages of literary history for the sake of paying him a courtly compliment.

My quarrel, then, is with the inconsiderate critics; and I do not measure too jealously my admiration for the two books before me. I find in *The Gamekeeper at Home* a remarkable, and, as I believe, unequalled fund of facts, illustrating the character, occupations, and peculiar knowledge of the English gamekeeper; the preserving and the habits of game; and a multitude of subjects more or less intimately connected with these. The faithful portraits of the keeper, his wife, and his son, are not the most interesting parts of the volume, although their merit is considerable; but here, as in *Wild Life in a Southern County*, it is the author's knowledge of the beasts and birds

and fishes, whether preserved for sport or not, which provides the principal charm of his writings. The sportsman could scarcely have a better or a more agreeable guide; and the reader who has no knowledge of sport will not on that account find the book less attractive, provided that he have that sympathy with Nature which is its animating spirit. His knowledge goes far beyond legitimate sport; and, so far as one of the uninitiated may judge in such a matter, he seems to have laid bare the whole art and mystery of poaching, in all its varieties, and down to its lowest range of cunning and trickery. In one place he tells how a pointer taught herself to catch fish, and to land them—roach, tench, perch, and even a small jack—without doing them the slightest harm; and this again and again, after the fishes had had time (supposing they had had the wit) to learn the dog's method.

Then he describes, not without humour, the spaniel that takes to poaching on its own account, and the tricks by which she tries to avoid detection. *Wild Life in a Southern County* abounds in descriptive passages and stories that will delight the heart of an angler. On one page we have an account of the way in which crows prey upon mussels when the season is so dry as to leave the bivalves exposed—times when the mussels leave their tracks in the bottom of the mere, as they drag their way to deeper water. On the next we have a picture of the life of that terror of the waters, the jack, which may move to envy such historians of the rod and line as our old friend the Red-Spinner:

Now and then, at long intervals, an exceptionally dry season so lowers the level of the mere that all the shallower parts become land, and are even passable on foot, though in places quicksands and deep fine mud must be carefully avoided. The fish that previously could enjoy a swim of some three-quarters of a mile are then forced to retire to one deep hole only a few acres in extent. Now commences a reign of terror, of which it is difficult to convey an adequate idea. These waters have not been netted for years, and consequently both pike and perch have increased to an extraordinary degree, and many of them have attained huge proportions. Pike of six pounds are commonly caught; eight, ten, twelve, and fourteen pound fish have often been landed. There was a tradition of a pike that weighed a quarter of a hundred weight, but one day the tradition was put into the shade by the capture of a pike that scaled a little over thirty pounds. There are supposed to be several more such monsters of the deep, since every now and then some labourer, passing by on a sunny day, when jack approach the shore and bask near the surface, declares that he has seen one as big as a man's leg. But about the vast number of ordinary-sized jack there can be no doubt at all; since anyone may see them who will stroll by the water's edge on a bright warm day, taking care to walk slowly and not to jar the ground or let his shadow fall on the water before he can glance round the willows and bushes. Jack may then be seen basking by the weeds. When an exceptionally long continuance of dry weather forces all the fish to retire to the few acres of water that remain, then these voracious brutes do as they please with the other

fish, and the roach especially suffer. Every two or three minutes the fry may be seen leaping in the air in the effort to escape, twenty or thirty at a time, and falling with a splash. The rush of hundreds and hundreds of roach causes a wave upon the surface which shows the course they take. This wave never ceases: as soon as it sinks here it rises yonder, and so on through the twenty-four hours, day and night. The miserable fish, flying for their lives, speed toward the shallow water, and often, unable to stop themselves, are carried by their impetus out on the mud and lie there on the land for a few seconds till they leap back again. Even the jack will sometimes run himself aground in the eagerness of his pursuit. Looking over the pool, the splash of the falling fish as they descend after the leap into the air may be heard in several directions at once, and the glint of their silvery sides in the sunshine is at the same time visible. At night it is clear the same thing is going forward, for the splashing continues, though the waves raised by the panic-stricken crowds cannot be distinguished in the darkness.

What the pike is amongst fishes, the crow is amongst small birds—with all the instincts of the bird of prey, and less of honour than the hawk or the jay. In *The Gamekeeper at Home* the author tells us:

But upon the crow the full vials of the keeper's wrath are poured, and not without reason. The crow among birds is like the local professional among human poachers: he haunts the place and clears everything—it would be hard to say what comes amiss to him. He is the impersonation of murder. His long, stout, pointed beak is a weapon of deadly power, wielded with surprising force by the sinewy neck. From a tiny callow fledgling, fallen out of the thrush's nest, to the partridge or a toothsome young rabbit, it is all one to him. Even the swift leveret is said sometimes to fall a prey, being so buffeted by the sooty wings of the assassin, and so blinded by the sharp beak striking at his eyes as to be presently overcome. For the crow has a terrible penchant for the morsel afforded by another's eyes. I have seen the skull of a miserable thrush, from which a crow rose and slowly sailed away, literally split as if by a chisel—doubtless by the blow that destroyed its sight.

It is not, however, in describing the character and habits of the living creatures, which chiefly employ his graphic powers, that this writer is alone successful. His picture of a village, in chapters IV. and V. of his second book, is full of clearly-drawn and truthful portraiture, as well of the personality as of the institutions of rural life. It would be difficult to over-praise his sketch of the old church-tower and belfry—jackdaw haunted, and 'choked with the cobwebs and the dust of years'; and there is a biographical account of a waggon which might without exaggeration be classed amongst the epics of prose writing. In the analogy drawn between the life of a ship and the history of a farmer's waggon, there is a touch of humour which approaches closely to genius. I can quote only the closing passage:

How many a man's life has centred about the waggon! As a child he rides in it as a treat to the hay-field with his father; as a lad he walks beside the leader, and gets his first ideas of the great world when they visit the market town. As a man, he takes command and pilots the ship for many a long, long year. When he marries, the waggon, lent for his own use, brings home his furniture. After a while his own children go for a ride in it, and play in it when stationary in the shed. In the painful ending the waggon carries the weak-kneed old man in pity to and from the old town for his weekly store of goods, or mayhap for his weekly dole of that staff of life his aged teeth can hardly grind. And many a plain coffin has the old waggon carried to the distant churchyard on the side of the hill. It is a cold spot—as life, too, was cold and hard; yet in the spring the daisies will come, and the thrushes will sing on the bough.

I hope I have done something to brush aside the unjustly fulsome and exaggerated flattery with which some inconsiderate critics have beclouded the true merits of these books; but I hope I have done something, also, to show what those merits are. The writer who can bring into literature the real life of the country—the poetry, the hard reality, the light and shade of that side of our national existence which is foreign to the town, does good service both to society and to letters, in an age when both tend too much to absorption in the ways of cities. 'God made the country and man made the town'; and just as the jaded physical frame of the citizen is refreshed and invigorated by the sights and the air of the countryside, so is the jaded mind of the student, worn with the city-air of our prevailing literature, revived and brought back to unison with Nature by books that breathe the air of the downs and reflect the light that shines on mere and copse, on cornfield and stream. These are the grounds of the welcome that is claimed by *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*.

J.D.

Richard Jefferies' Letter to William Tinsley concerning *Restless Human Hearts*.¹

Rebecca Welshman

Coate
Swindon
Wilts

March 5th [18]75

Dear Sir,

I did not anticipate that the pamphlet² would suit you. I see *Restless Human Hearts* is already well advertised in the dailies. I should be obliged if you would send copies to:—

Mrs. Besemeres³

4 Highbury Crescent
Islington

Mrs. T. Harrild⁴

Shanklin Villa
Sydenham Park
Kent

Mrs. C.E. Gyde⁵

7½ Red Lion Court
Fleet St.

and 9 copies addressed to me to be left till called for at the Goddard Arms Hotel, Swindon.

I should also be obliged if you would allow your clerk to keep a list of the papers in which reviews appear, & let me have it in a month or two's time: as

Ed:

¹ This letter by Richard Jefferies to William Tinsley is held in the archives of the David Bickersteth Magee (1905-1977) Collection of Victorian and Edwardian Manuscripts 1812-1952, VMSS 355 L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

² Possibly referring to *Suez-Cide!!* that was later published by John Snow and Co, as a pamphlet in February 1876; probably as a favour to Jefferies' Aunt Ellen Harrild.

³ Mrs. Ada Leary Besemeres was once a neighbour of Ellen Harrild in Sydenham. Mrs. Besemeres took an interest in Jefferies' writing.

⁴ Jefferies' Aunt Ellen Harrild née Gyde.

⁵ Charles Estcourt Gyde (1816-1879)—Jefferies' uncle.

very often one may learn something from a review, & I am by no means above taking a hint. The new novel I am now engaged on will I think be a striking one⁶—as a matter of course you will see the M.S. first, but it will not be ready just yet. I should be very willing to [receive] a friendly suggestion if any occurs to you as to my style.

I had forgotten that perhaps it would be as well to send one copy to F.W. Joynes Esq., Pall Mall Gazette office (in addition to their copy for review).

Faithfully yours

Richard Jefferies

W. Tinsley Esq.

At the same time as finding ‘The Flying Dutchman’,⁷ I noticed this previously unknown letter by Jefferies to his publisher Tinsley, in which he asks for copies of the recently published *Restless Human Hearts* to be sent to Aunt Ellen, Mrs. Besemeres (Aunt Ellen’s friend), his Uncle Charles Estcourt Gyde, and others. As George Miller has pointed out, this number of copies at 10/6 retail per volume was quite a request.

The reference to advertising in the dailies indicates that Jefferies is clearly pleased the novel is gaining attention and promoting his name. It echoes what he says in *Reporting; Editing & Authorship*: ‘In literature a name is everything. The public will read any commonplace clap-trap if only a well-known name be attached to it. Hence any amount of expenditure is justified ... treat literature as a trade, which, like other trades, requires an immense amount of advertising.’ His early novels certainly gained the attention of reviewers, but not the attention he would have liked.

Some time ago I came across a review of *Restless Human Hearts* in the *Daily News*,⁸ dated 27 March, a few weeks after his 5 March letter to Tinsley. It was clearly a paper that he wished to be associated with as in his notebook for May 1876 he records having submitted articles to it. His Aunt had attempted to secure him a job with the paper in 1868.⁹ The placing of the review in the column is favourable as it immediately follows a review of Braddon’s *A Strange World*. It begins by (sarcastically, I think) alluding to Jefferies as ‘a disciple of Mr. Mortimer Collins’, and soon descends into ridicule. The reviewer took issue with Jefferies’ description of marriage as ‘a tyranny and an unjust repression of nature,’ and the general ‘extravagance’ of

⁶ *World’s End*?

⁷ See pp.33–44 in this edition of the *Journal*.

⁸ See p.143 in this edition of the *Journal*.

⁹ *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies: a chronological study* by Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel (Oxford: Petton Books, 1994), p.32.

the story. It concludes: 'we have devoted thus much space to a summary of this worthless book because even ignorance and foolishness have their comic side.'

Although *Restless Human Hearts* suffers from a lack of dialogue and poorly developed characters, I think it is fair to say that some of the extremes of the novel can be read allegorically and that much of the satire, criticism and ridicule of society implicit in its scenes were simply lost on most reviewers. That Jefferies was asking Tinsley to send out copies to the three ladies a few weeks before the reviews started coming out in the papers suggests that at the point of writing the letter he believed *Restless Human Hearts* to be a viable commercial product. He was clearly keen to alert his benefactors and supporters to the publication of his second novel with Tinsleys. Perhaps he believed that its experimental originality would pay off, no matter whether the content might be considered shocking or not. However, in his letter to Crawford in May, editor of the *New Quarterly Magazine*, he is sounding less confident: 'you may possibly have seen that I am a novelist ... but I cannot recommend myself in this department, for I have never received a single favourable notice of a novel of mine! Tinsley Brothers, the publishers, say that the books are too original and too bold to take for some time.' He optimistically wrote in *The Scarlet Shawl* that 'fortune favours the bold', but in the case of his early published novels it didn't.

In his introduction to *Restless Human Hearts*, Andrew quotes Hugo's observation that the phrase 'restless heaves of human hearts' appears much earlier in 'Man of the Future' (1871), and is connected to the presence of the sea.¹⁰ The message of the novel, and what he meant by the title, is encapsulated in this paragraph, which also mentions 'great waves':

What, then, has become of all the original energy of man's nature? Has the race which now exists none—has it all vanished? How hard people work at paring down and subduing their own inward vigour, both physical and mental; how singularly hard they labour to reduce themselves to lay figures, passionless, purposeless, mere machines for eating and drinking and sleeping! The slightest evidence of an effort is enough to condemn a man utterly as a rude being, a barbarian, an uncivilised savage. It is fashionable to be languid, delicate, refined; to be undecided and careless, indifferent, yawnish. But pare away the natural energy, reduce the original vigour as much as ever they may, still there remains an ineradicable vein of restlessness. So that we see, every now and then, society rush hither and thither in great waves, seeking in some new sensation to find an outlet for the pent-up motion.

¹⁰ *Restless Human Hearts* (Oxfordshire: Petton Books, 2008), footnote 12, p.xxix.

It would seem that in *Restless Human Hearts* Jefferies was attempting to jolt his readers into recognising the futility and shallowness of the age, to reconnect with more instinctive and natural ways of thinking and feeling. The problem he highlights of a sensation-driven society that has become detached from the original source of life energy that facilitates powerful and meaningful experience is more relevant now than ever. But the message was poorly articulated and lost. He had clearly set his heart on the form of the novel as his chosen vehicle to articulate his frustration, aspirations, commentaries on society, and philosophy, but he couldn't separate the seams of thought enough—if at all—to create a coherent narrative.

Some years ago I found a brief note by a F.W. Joynes in the *Athenaeum* (17 September 1887) concerning Jefferies' authorship of *The Scarlet Shawl*. Joynes wrote in to state that Jefferies was the author of *The Scarlet Shawl* and had presented him with a copy of the novel. At the time I didn't know who Joynes was, but the discovery of the Tinsley letter prompted further investigation amongst council members. On a family history database, Jean Saunders found Frederick William Joynes to have been a journalist born in Totteridge, Hertfordshire in around 1829. He appears on the 1871 census return as living in Richmond, Surrey with his wife, three daughters and son. An obituary from 1909 explains that Joynes entered London journalism as Assistant Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*¹¹ under Mr. Frederick Greenwood, and with him helped to found the *St. James's Gazette* (another paper for which Jefferies wrote). Two years later Joynes went to the *Globe* (another journal that published Jefferies' articles) where 'most of his work' was published, and with which he stayed for a quarter of a century. The article also alludes to Joynes' character and understanding of Church matters: that he was known for 'remarkable for the soundness and moderation of his judgment of both men and things', for his 'sterling character ... and piety'.¹²

Joynes' letter to the *Athenaeum* suggests that there was some sort of doubt or discussion taking place about the authorship of *The Scarlet Shawl*. Perhaps, as Andrew Rossabi observed, this may have been connected to Walter Besant's statement in the *Eulogy*: 'Meantime, the wonder remains. How could the same hand write the coarse and clumsy *Scarlet Shawl* which was shortly to give the world such sweet and delicate work, so truthful, so artistic, so full of fine feeling? How could that be possible? Indeed, one cannot altogether explain it...' (*Eulogy*, 152–4). That Joynes was able to attest to Jefferies' authorship, and remarked publicly upon his gift of a signed copy, indicates that he felt endowed with a responsibility to defend him and his

¹¹ The *Pall Mall Gazette* was founded in 1865 by George Smith.

¹² 'An Old Journalist—and his work', *Globe*, 30 September 1909, p.4.

writings. Having looked again at the transcriptions of Jefferies' notebook of 1876, a number of references to what we believed to be 'Jones' may well have been 'Joynes'. Jefferies refers to sending Joynes pieces of work to place in various periodicals, including *The Times*. See, for example, 'When you have an idea, write it out & carry it to Jo[y]nes & get it through him', and on May 27: 'Jo[y]nes, if he will give me a column job on the ladies' dresses at the Derby', and 'Jo[y]nes if he will give me some employment ... Will he see, or let me ask Greenwood around to do it?' Together, these pieces of information are suggestive of a friendship or possibly even mentorship between Jefferies and the elder Joynes who may even have helped Jefferies place articles with papers other than the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Additionally, the personal copies to Joynes of *The Scarlet Shawl*, *Restless Human Hearts* and *Wood Magic*¹³ lend further support for Jefferies' claim for his early connection with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which I have argued in support of elsewhere.¹⁴

On the subject of Jefferies' attempts to establish a connection with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Jean Saunders recalls a correspondent whose great great grandfather Joseph Thomas Ashelford (b.1834) was known to have worked for the paper from 1867 until the 1880s as a printer and compositor. Joseph was the only son of Jane Sarah Billing (b.1807), one of Thomas Billing's many children. According to a story passed down through the family, Joseph Thomas Ashelford helped Jefferies to become acquainted with the *Pall Mall Gazette* and Jefferies was quite persistent in using his family to make contacts. However, it may be more likely that Jefferies first met Joynes in Swindon. After working as Editor of the *Leicester Journal*, Joynes moved to Swindon for a time where in 1863 he was Editor and manager of the *North Wilts Herald*, at the office where Jefferies would work only a few years later.¹⁵ Frederick Joynes' introduction to Frederick Greenwood at the *Pall Mall Gazette* would prove to be an immensely important connection for Jefferies that founded the success of his countryside writings, including *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*, first serialised in the paper a decade later.

¹³ George Miller owns a copy of *Wood Magic* inscribed to F.W. Joynes in Jefferies' hand.

¹⁴ In 1871, in his submission letter to an unknown publisher regarding the non-fiction work 'Fortune', Jefferies wrote that he had had a connection with the *Pall Mall Gazette* for five years.

¹⁵ For Joynes' Swindon connections, see correspondence between Joynes, Major Calley of Burderop, and William Morris printed in the *North Wilts Herald*, 13 July 1863. Joynes' only son, Martin William, was born on 29 December 1862 at Bath Terrace, Old Swindon. The terrace is part of Bath Road and very near to Martha (Jefferies) Hall's house, the Jefferies' family bakery and the *Swindon Advertiser* offices.

Reviews of *Restless Human Hearts*

The Tinsley Brothers took out several notices in March 1875 to advertise *Restless Human Hearts* in a variety of newspapers as shown in the cutting below.

**NEW NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE SCARLET
SHAWL," &c.**
Now Ready, at every Library, in Three Vols.,
RESTLESS HUMAN HEARTS. A New Novel.
By **RICHARD JEFFERIES**, Author of "The Scarlet
Shawl," &c. Also, Now Ready,
**SCATTERED SOULS. A New Novel. By Douglas Henry. In
Two Vols.**
Tinsley Brothers, 8, Catherine-street, Strand,

The following damning reviews of the novel were published in the *Daily News* on 27 March 1875 and *The Observer* on 1 August 1875. Both reviews are previously unrecorded and were not available at the time that Andrew Rossabi wrote his introduction to *Restless Human Hearts* (Petton Books, July 2008) or his chapters on the book in Volume II of *A Peculiarly English Genius: a Biography of Richard Jefferies* (Petton Books, 8 July 2020) where he was able to look beyond the sensationalism of the story. Rossabi covered other reviews on pp.653–55 of the *Biography* and commented 'Such reviews would be music to the ears of most modern publishers but in Jefferies' day ... they would have killed the book stone dead.' Rossabi mentioned that

The *Athenæum*,¹ *Graphic*² and *Spectator*³ all protested against the book's immorality. The *Athenæum* intimated that Jefferies' animadversion on the 'loathsome scurrility' of contemporary French fiction was a case of the pot calling the kettle black, while the *Graphic* fulminated against 'the really gross immorality of the plot', which rendered the book's publication 'little, if at all, short of an offence against decency', and opined that 'not a few of his situations are indelicate beyond all allowable limits'. The *Spectator* pursued the theme, saying 'this is one of the novels we would gladly pass over in silence' but 'it seems a duty to warn possible readers against what is an offensive and even noxious book'. It advised

any one to whom the librarians may send this book unordered, as they will sometimes send such books, to keep it safely under lock and key.

¹ *Athenæum*, No.2473, Saturday 20 March 1875, p.385.

² *Graphic*, Vol. XI, No. 279, Saturday 3 April 1875, p.323.

³ *Spectator*, No. 2461, Saturday 28 August 1875, p.1098.

Daily News,

Saturday, 27 March 1875

Dr Rebecca Welshman mentions this review on pp.138–9 of her article in this edition of the *Journal*.

A disciple of Mr. Mortimer Collins,¹ by name Mr. Richard Jefferies, favours the public with a chronicle of *Restless Human Hearts* (3 vols., Tinsley Bros.).

The story is well named, for the hearts with which Mr. Jefferies has to deal are as restless as peas in a pan. The unlucky owners of these fidgety hearts live in a world all their own, and even command a language of their own. They 'laid' in bed, as if they were so many hens. They know no more of their cases than the jackdaw of Rheims. They look upon marriage as 'a tyranny and an unjust repression of nature' and on man 'as a being who can do no ill.' We remember reading a novel in which the heroine was belaboured by an angry aunt with 'saucepans and casseroles.' Mr. Jefferies, not to be outdone, cures his heroine with 'Peruvian bark and quinine.' She would certainly require some remedy a little out of the common if, like the hero, she enjoyed five meals a day 'breakfast, luncheon, tea, dinner, and supper.'

No summary of the story will convey any idea of its extravagance. It has three heroines, and a demi-heroine, forty-five years of age, who has a love affair with a boy of twenty. The first heroine is described as a panther, forty years old. She elopes with her sister's husband, a peer (though 'he seldom uses the title') who 'haunts dens of infamy' who knows 'as no other does,' 'the weird, the bizarre, and the devilish,' and who 'has been trained in the blackleg diplomacy of the lowest saloons of Europe and America.' We are told how this engaging couple love, bite, beat, kick, scratch, and curse each other. The second heroine (on purely conscientious grounds) enters into a 'marriage' for three years, while the third heroine, who is the panther's sister, 'simply forgets' her husband after four months of marriage, and is 'shaken with passion' when in the presence of a friend in whom she recognises her affinity.

We have devoted thus much space to a summary of this worthless book because even ignorance and foolishness have their comic side.

¹ Ed. There is no evidence that Jefferies was 'a disciple' of Collins or that he read any of his works. Edward James Mortimer Collins (29 June 1827–28 July 1876) was an English novelist, journalist and poet.



Published on p.2 of the 1 August 1875 edition, the reviewer refers to Richard Jefferies as the authoress and clearly believes that no man could have written anything that would be in favour of female liberation or a trial marriage. The reviewer clearly read the novel carefully and *in toto*: the synopsis is accurate, detailed, and ends: 'Mr. Jefferies' tale has, in addition to its vulgarity, the disadvantage of being "infected with a corruption unsurpassed in its foulness".' It is curious how the reviewer latches onto the lurid elements in the story but almost completely ignores the spiritual aspects and the nature mysticism theme. If the novel is so utterly loathsome, why rehearse the offensive contents at such length and in such detail? The cause of morality would surely have been better served either by completely ignoring the book or by dismissing it in a single sentence.

Restless Human Hearts is something more than a mere sensation novel. It is in effect an elaborate dissertation upon marriage, an institution which Richard Jefferies, as the authoress calls herself, holds to be capable of very great improvement by being remodelled according to what the Americans call 'free-love' principles. Of the action of the tale we will not attempt to give any idea, partly because it is far too complicated, and partly also because the situations are often suggestive and occasionally gross. The chief heroine, Carlotta, is a peeress in her own right, and the wife of a certain Horton Knoyle, a floater of foreign loans and 'bullionist,' who by conducting his vast business on principles of strict integrity and truthfulness has amassed 'a fortune of many millions,' and who personally is 'a man of steel.' Carlotta herself is 'a magnificent tigress,' 'a grand creature,' 'a boa constrictor in human form.' There was, it seems, 'a latent pantherism about her,' which showed itself in 'the full voluptuous contour of her form,' in her 'brilliant teeth,' in 'a polish upon the surface of her skin as if rubbed with oil,' in her hair, which was 'a splendid sweep of glossy magnificence,' being probably also rubbed with oil, and in 'a glittering phosphoric light in her eyes such as may be seen in the panther's prowling in the dark.' This 'grand creature'—of whom the only impression Mr. Jefferies' somewhat erotic description leaves upon our mind is a vague idea that she must have been a fat, vulgar woman of forty—has married the bullionist solely as a matter of business, and her heart, such as it is, is really set upon Louis Fontenoy, who also was 'a peer in his own right,' although 'he rarely used the title.' Louis is a small, slight man, with 'a horrid grating laugh,' who, although he has 'never debased himself

personally,' has yet in the course of his travels 'associated with all the blackguards of Europe, and with all the rowdies of America,' until 'conscience' has 'no terrors' for him, nor does anything any longer interest him except 'the weird, the bizarre, and the devilish in human life.' These pursuits have imparted 'a caustic epigrammatic method of condensing his bitter truths into sharp arrowy sentences that left a sting, as it were, behind,' and his 'talk' has a 'fascination' in it. He is, in a word, 'a Man; unutterably a bad and abandoned being, but no half-hearted chicken, no poor creature, confined in narrow limits by creed or fear.' The bond between him and Carlotta, although 'strange'—as it certainly seems—is 'no less a real and effectual one'—so effectual, indeed, that the boa constrictor in human form is in the habit of dressing herself in man's clothes and coming to breakfast with him at a private set of chambers exquisitely fitted, up with 'all the conveniences of modern science'—such as electric bells, and 'all the comforts of ancient civilisation'—such as 'poses of the nude figure.' And yet in spite of the fact that Carlotta 'gloried in the power of attaching him to herself,' and he on his part was 'irresistibly attracted by her very age, her very worldliness, her artistic cleverness,' things do not appear to have always gone as smoothly as they might.

They did not spare each other. He cursed her freely, with all the foul-mouthed vulgarity and brutality he had imbibed in the low saloons of cities. She quailed not, nor even averted her glance. She stung him to the quick with her bitter words and sneering insinuations. He had struck her before now. That splendid arm lying negligently over the arm of the chair had been bruised by his blows, and shown the blue mark for many a day. Then she would sit before the glass and look at it and gloat over it. Such was her power over him, that in his rage and jealousy she could make him forget his manhood, forget that she was a woman. Perhaps it was this occasional habit of striking Carlotta that led him to hurl Heloise to the ground. And she, Carlotta, had dug her nails into his flesh till the blood spurted up, and relaxed not her hold till Louis beat her off. He could have shown the dint of her teeth and the print of her sharp and pointed nails. At such moments how intense and venomous was the hatred between them! Yet two hours afterwards they were more closely bound together than ever.

Louis, of course, has a wife, at whom he is in the habit of sneering 'in his Mephisto-like manner,' and whom he otherwise ill-treats, more especially making cruel mockery of the innocent pleasure which she takes in going to the theatre. Heloise has 'a heart full of aspirings which she deemed were sacred hopes,' 'a plastic nature,' 'a delicate and sensitive organisation,' and 'a soul which rippled up like water before the wind, and glittered with innumerable points of light reacted from the sun.' It was 'one of her fancies' to 'lie on the broad earth with her ear close to the ground, so that she could

feel the heart of the world throb slowly far underneath,' and we can consequently easily understand how she was 'a passive poet' and how 'her being was that of a harp played upon by nature, emitting the softest and most enchanting sounds, but originating nothing in itself.' When her Mephisto-like husband knocks her down, as he does one evening after a stormy interview with the boa constrictor in human shape, she goes home to her father, and she there falls in the way of a certain Noel Brandon, a kind of cross between the Guy Livingstone of fiction and the Livingstone of fact, who has muscles of steel and a resolution of marble, and who has walked across Central Africa, from Cairo to the Cape of Good Hope single-handed, but whose contempt for everybody and everything makes him 'strangely reticent' as to his 'wondrous' adventures. What might have happened, had not Heloise's dress caught fire the first night the two ran away, would no doubt, to use a phrase of Mr. Jefferies' own, 'have sadly shocked Exeter Hall;' and, indeed, one or two scenes that take place before the actual elopement, sometimes in a boat upon the river and sometimes under a certain 'giant' chestnut tree, the foot of which is appropriately haunted by 'a green and spotted snake,' are enough to shock anybody. Heloise, however, is so badly burnt that Noel is for days unable to go near her. 'The lower limbs and extremities chiefly suffered,' Mr. Jefferies carefully informs us; and by the time she is well again Louis has been murdered, and accordingly Noel, first in the presence of her relatives swears on 'a small Testament' to her purity, and then makes an honest woman of her.

As Heloise in early days had been in the habit of listening to the great heart of the world throbbing far underneath, so now, as we are led to infer, it is her habit to listen to Noel's heart beating, and to believe that it beats 'for her and her only,' and she is consequently 'very happy.'

Horton Knoyle has a sister called Georgiana, who is 'a grand and noble creature—tall as a goddess of the classic time, large limbed, moulded in a generous and full-developed manner by the great artist, Nature;' her waist is its natural size, her limbs move freely, and 'the huge and extended "bustle"—horrid excrescence!—found no place in her dress.' 'Personally,' in short, she owes more to nature than to art, while her mind is sufficiently 'scientific, logical and masculine' to enable her to address herself to 'the aesthetic side of the question' of women's rights. *Inter alia*, she is very fond of the British Museum, amongst the relics in which she finds 'the spirit of God, the Shechinah, dwelling,' and she is writing a book on 'the Prehistoric History of Man,' which we gather, from what we are told of it, must have borne a very strong family resemblance to the 'Typical Developments' of the hero of *Happy Thoughts*. To collect material for this great work, she and her 'accepted lover,' Neville Brandon, Noel's brother, 'travel together in the most

open manner, she with her maids and even footman, he with his attendants—never living at the same hotels, scrupulously observing the requirements of the strictest propriety.’

They were only lovers, yet he had accompanied her. In any other than Georgie the scandal would have been great; but even the gossip-loving coteries of highest and most ‘particular’ society could not even think of wrong in connection with Georgiana Knoyle. They laughed at her, sneered at her, but secretly they acknowledged her depth and strength of character. The banker her brother did not interfere; he spoke of it openly before all. Still, of course, society would have cavilled, had it not been for her intense individuality, which overcame the breath of slander. They knew that evil was impossible to her; her intellect would forbid it. Temptation even would never enter in at those calm serene gray eyes. Moreover, there were many who in their secret hearts, although they professedly sneered at such things, yet gladly hailed the innovation as one step in advance in casting off those trammels which bound women down like slaves—slaves of the drawing-room.

Finding this mode of life pall at last, or possibly even getting tired of her *Prehistoric History of Man*, Georgiana proposes to Neville that they marry one another ‘upon approbation’ for a period of three years, first explaining their views upon the marriage question to the world at large is ‘a document to be published in the form of a pamphlet.’ They are accordingly united after this somewhat novel fashion in the dining room of Pierce Lestrangle, father of Carlotta and Heloise—for the boa constrictor in human form and the young lady with a soul, that rippled up like water, are half sisters, which of course makes the conduct of the boa constrictor and of the Mephisto-like peer all the more reprehensible. The ceremony consists in Pierce, who is ‘a J.P.,’ swearing them on the Testament—there is a great deal of unnecessary affidavit talking in the course of the book—to life together as man and wife for three years, after which they write their names in his ‘antique family Bible,’ and so depart ‘for the Continent.’ The description of the wedding is, to use the words applied by Mr. Jefferies to the *John Bull*, ‘a strange mixture of religion and dress.’

A general agitation tokened the approach of the bride. With a slow and stately step, her noble and well-poised head held upright, not defiantly, but with a certain sense of self-assertion, Georgie, in all the radiance of her beauty, passed up the whole length of the hall. She was dressed in white satin, trimmed with antique lace, the train trailing far behind her. She did not wear the traditional orange wreath, nor the veil, but she carried a superb bouquet; and above her forehead, in the masses of hair, shone and glittered a magnificent diamond star, by the side of which was one large bell-shaped white flower. Eight bridesmaids followed her: there had been a difficulty in selecting these, so many pressed forward for the office, on account of the novelty of the whole thing.

Indeed, the only part of the ceremony to which exception can be taken is the formula used by Pierce, 'I pronounce ye man and wife,' which, besides not being strictly in accordance with 'the rubrica of the Establishment,' is also open to exception on grammatical grounds. Upon Georgie's return with her three-year husband from the Continent, 'Society' is naturally a little puzzled whether or not to recognise her. Paying a visit, however, to the Royal Academy, she is introduced to a certain duke, who invites her, 'by the express wish of the duchess,' to a garden party at his 'place by the Thames.' There her position in society is settled in the most satisfactory manner.

Society gathered round her like wasps round a ripe plum. Rank, title, wealth vied to exchange a word with her—she was not left a moment to herself. They would have killed her with ices, drowned her in wine and cooling drinks; and she bore it all so queenly, so calmly, with such superb and natural grace, as if she had been born to it, and it was her due. Truth to say there was a little feminine triumph in her heart, as how indeed could it be otherwise?

The *Morning Post*, in admiration of 'her ease and grace and the freedom of her movements,' calls her 'La Athene,' her success is complete, and her friends 'go dash into Parliament, and put a bill upon the orders of motion for next session, legalising such a method of marriage.' Whether this strange Parliamentary procedure was ruled to be in accordance with the forms of the House we are not told, for, somewhere towards the end of their third year, Georgie discovers that 'the true sphere of woman is her home;' her heart 'slowly, very slowly, but surely comes round to the great temple of woman, the hearth,' and she and Neville end by getting married in the most prosaic manner possible on the same day as Noel and Heloise. The excitement dies out, and Neville builds 'a Temple to Nature,' in which Georgie sits and reads him extracts from her still uncompleted *Prehistoric History of Man*.

Besides all these strange people we are also introduced to Ella and Claudius, a couple of young artists, who travel about together in the same kind of way as Georgie and Neville, and who do not appear to ever get married at all, and with them also to at certain Lord Lestrangle, an eccentric old nobleman, who 'has studied his own soul day by day for forty years,' and 'has ever found greater beauties, greater mysteries in it.' His lordship, however, beyond dying in due course, and 'leaving' his peerage to Noel and Heloise, does very little to affect the course of events. Louis, in spite of the Mephisto-like cunning on which he prides himself, is ultimately assassinated by the Commune, whose cause he has betrayed, and who accordingly send up 'out of the Thames mud,' a woman in a yellow dress—a moth—a night moth preying upon men'—'handsome in her way,' and decked with 'real diamonds and rubies, nothing less, mark that.' This extraordinary emissary of the Commune comes up a dark and slimy staircase by London Bridge, and

taps Louis on the shoulder, and the traitor is never seen again until his body is found floating in the Thames, its identity being sufficiently established by the fact that 'even in the rigidity of death the lips were drawn back in the old, old sneer.' The boa constrictor in human form is somewhat less fortunate, finding herself in the railway carriage with a cobra, by which, after dodging it for some time with the cushions, she is finally bitten in the foot; the 'teeth,' however, 'had to pass through the stocking,' which 'intercepted most of the venom,' and Carlotta's 'intense physical vigour' saves her. At the same time her 'glorious' hair has to be cropped close to her head—which is a dreadful thing for her—and she is condemned to pass the remainder of her life at Torquay, where she 'spends money lavishly in all kinds of cosmetics, but in vain,' and so ultimately shrivels up into a bald, ugly old woman, but yet with 'a living pose as unalterable as the firmness of those marble groups which all the world admires, but which no one wishes to imitate'—whatever that may mean.

Of Mr. Jefferies' style it is perhaps sufficient to say that he uses 'jaw' as an equivalent for conversation, that 'occurrences transpire' in almost every page, that Knoyle, speaking of his wife, admits his 'infatuation of her beauty;' that when £50,000 is wanted, at ten minutes notice, its payment is at once arranged, 'Horton, engaging to advance the whole, as he could, do easier than Pierce, whose wealth was more in land;' and that although this large sum is advanced for Louis's benefit, the only return he makes for it is to 'act most ungentlemanly.' *Restless Human Hearts*, in short, besides being—to use Mr. Jefferies' own phrase—'abominable bosh,' is also in its style, as well as in its matter, about as contemptible a specimen of the worst kind of 'penny dreadful' as our misfortune has ever brought in our way, while, unlike the ordinary penny dreadful, which has, at any rate the negative merit of being comparatively harmless, Mr. Jefferies' tale has, in addition to its vulgarity, the disadvantage of being 'infected with a corruption unsurpassed in its foulness.'

ISSN 0968-4247
Published by the Richard Jefferies Society, June 2023
Printed by Copytech UK, Peterborough