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Chapters on Churches

By the Peripatetic Philosopher
Chapter II

First printed in the North Wilts Herald, 1 December 1866

It was a wintry sky under which I set forth upon my journey on Sunday morning last, and a stormy wind scattered the leaves that yet remained upon the trees in showers across my path, as I gradually, step by step, leaving Swindon Behind me, approached the Marlborough downs. Yet at intervals breaking up, the heavy masses of clouds allowed the sun, still retaining some considerable portion of his summer heat, to send his beams upon the earth, lighting it up with a glow, the brighter from contrast with preceding gloom and the cold wintry aspect of all around. Often when the sun-beams have fallen upon me, have I thought of the words of the blind boy's song, "Oh tell me what light is – I'm blind, I'm blind!" A more plaintive cry could scarcely be uttered, for we who possess the blessing of sight are not in a position to answer. "More light, more light," said the dying Goethe: - he who wrote "Faust", and seems to have identified himself with the hero in the lines:-

> And even the very light of heaven
> All mournfully upon me looks'
> Dim through the painted panes 'tis given
> More stinted by this heap of books.

Neither the lens of the optician not the scientific tome solve the question, only place it before us in a more extended form: for we find bound up in it many others as difficult: and only to discover one more proof of the great truth of the connection of all in the Universe. Yet in the full blaze of day-light the great problem is the great problem still, and we feel that we are all blind in reality:- we see the light, but cannot tell what we see. There is a beautiful moral to be drawn from this fact, especially when we remember that in olden times the sun, the great dispenser of light, was worshipped. It was a mistake, but a natural one, to worship the dispenser and confound it with the Creator. On, on, chasing each other over the distant downs, glide the shadows – swift as ideas passing through the mind; and unless seized in the camera, as thoughts unwritten – fleeting. As I walked reflectively, as is my wont, along, I passed a miserable-looking human being – a tramp, who solicited me for alms. I did not like his looks and passed on – having too much respect for the laws of my country to encourage one in breaking them. Begging is an indictable offence. These are the class of men who hang like a dead weight upon the community. A dead weight, for they do not even perform the office of the carrion-crow – as do the Pariahs in India; they are the carrion themselves. If nothing is to be got by begging, what is so easy as to steal? If a farmer offends – *offends* – by a hasty word, what so nice as to set

fire to his hay rick and enjoy revenge, and living at others expense at the same time? When in the autumn the labourer leaves his lonely cottage, 'tis but to twist the padlock off and take his goods. Here is the rogue's paradise – doing nothing. No wonder the utmost difficulty is experienced in finding a sufficient number of recruits to fill the gaps is our regiments, no wonder we are told that we cannot mass more than 50,000 troops at once; when these fellows are able to make, perhaps, five times the amount by begging than is allowed to the soldier. It has often struck me that in the end – as the English constitution is decidedly averse to conscription, every man who can clearly be proved to be of no occupation and sustaining himself by begging will have to be forced to serve in the army, or, at least, on public works. It is of no avail to provide them work unless it be compulsory, and surely there might be devised a more profitable labour than that of turning a treadmill. I know myself of a case where a farmer was applied to by three of the classes for relief stating that they would work if they could get it, but when hoes were brought out that they might assist his men in the turnip field, in Wiltshire phrase they "mizzled", *i.e.*, made off.

I now ascended a long slope – having passed a ghastly, gibbet-like finger post upon my right hand, and entered the village of Liddington. At a short distance rose towering up the downs, one of them crowned with a circumvallation, that brought up strange memories of the olden time – of the strong-armed Roman, of the brave Britons, of King Arthur and his table round. It has, however, often occurred to me that the origin of the round table custom has been generally set down to a mistaken idea of the wish of preserving equality and peace; and that purpose to be served was that when they sat down to dinner, there should be no danger of one jogging the other's elbow. Faintly struck upon my ear the sound of bells, seeming to proceed from some hollow in the downs, some concealed valley. Passing up a kind of bye street, I approached the church-yard gate just as some ladies arriving in a trap sprang down, and in so doing displayed a rather unusual amount of stocking – white as driven snow. Let it not be for a moment imagined that this is a subject scarcely fit for a philosopher to comment upon – far from it, let me remove that false notion. The philosopher reflects upon everything and everything includes stockings. Some there are who cannot admire a well formed ankle unless the said ankle be encased in a white stocking, who became a captious at the sight of black, and revolt entirely at worsted. Now undoubtedly, a white stocking is superior, but an ankle is an ankle, and – However, perhaps the subject might be allowed to drop – even a philosopher *may* – Exactly so. It is a strange church-yard this one at Liddington, elevated many feet above the level of the street; built up partly by a stone wall, partly banked. At the entrance is built a kind of house with seats, written over it to meet the comer's eye are the words – "Here we have no abiding city." A mournful confirmation of the truth of these words is shown when some old patriarch of the village seats himself a moment to recover breath lost in the ascent, ere he enters the porch. Gently passing away of mere old age, with tottering limbs, bowed form, features that bear witness to many a beating storm survived – survived but to meet death at last. "Here we have no abiding city." I read and pass on. The inside of the church, like itself, is ancient in style and

arrangement. The tower, portioned off, affords room for a single ringer, close by sit the choir; while the congregation seemed divided into rich and poor; the poor sitting on the left as you advance towards the pulpit, the rich upon the right. There were evident exceptions, but this seemed the general rule, and I noticed that when the preacher wished to address a word more especially to the poor he invariably glanced to the right of the pulpit. The windows are small, but being numerous afford sufficient light – many of them are stained glass presenting scripture scenes; while the church seemed divided into two portions by the pillars that are placed down the centre. Over the pulpit are placed the tablets of the law, the creed, and the Lord's prayer. I sat in such a position as not to be able to perceive whether this arrangement precluded the placing of them as is usual at the altar; certainly if so it seemed warranted – the altar being far back, whereas in their present position all can read who please.

Scarcely had I taken my seat when the bell ceased, solemn strains of music stole through the building, and the clergyman – the Rev. H. Munn, walked up the aisle to the reading desk. The arrangement of the church's interior is in this respect unfortunate, the clergyman having to proceed half-way down the centre aisle, turn to the right, and as it were re-trace his steps up another passage ere he can reach a portion screened as private. May I be excused if I remark, without the remotest intention of becoming personal, that the Rev. H. Munn has much in his appearance that answers to the ideal of a bishop. How often has it been observed – such incidents must happen to every-one in daily life, that there are some persons to whom unknowing why one takes an unaccountable dislike, and others again win us by their manner? To the last mentioned belongs Mr. Munn. I am told that he is highly valued by his parishioners, and I believe it, for his appearance, his voice, his manner all arouse involuntary respect. To return. The text was the 11th verse of the 49th chapter of Jeremiah, "Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive." I sat near the pulpit to take notes; here, however, is the gist so far as I can remember of the sermon. I cannot, however, convey the manner in which it was delivered. Written words are devoid of colour and of sound. The preacher in commencing observed that God throughout the Bible loved to display himself in the character of a father. They read in Genesis that the Spirit moved upon the water: that the spirit of Life. That spirit was working now, there was not a seed placed in the earth that was not subjected to its influence, and thus though God had created the world at the beginning, he was still creating. He was the Father of All. Mankind had rebelled against a most loving and gracious Father, but God was love and he had sent his only Son as Saviour. He was the father of All, but more especially of the Fatherless, as was shown in many places of his word, as well as in that which he had taken for his text. There were two ways of explaining it; in its actual meaning, and in one furnished by the context. The preceding texts were addressed to the Edomites who were not God's chosen people; if He could then address these words "Leave thy fatherless; I will preserve them alive" to them how much more so to His own people? God had deputed his authority as father – he was speaking now of Christian parents, to the father of a child. The text contained both a direction and a promise, "Leave thy fatherless," that is to me – to God. He could

himself conceive no greater trial to a father upon his death-bed than the knowledge he was about to leave his infant children to a hard, cold, selfish world. To the infidel there was something infinitely worse; it was his own destination when he stood upon the chasm of eternity and was about to take the leap. If there were a brother or a kind friend near the Christian father could commend them to him, but if not what a pang it must cause? What did God say? Leave thy fatherless to me. I am thy father also – I have been with thee through life, now leave them to me. But this required faith. There was, however, something more than a direction – thee was a promise. "I will preserve them alive." How would He do this? Not by supernatural means – not as he supported Elijah in olden times, but by disposing the heart of some kind person to accept the charge, or through the Church. Christ placing a child in the midst had said, "He that receiveth one of these, receiveth me." The apostle said that to visit the widow and the fatherless was a part of pure religion; and there was a terrible doom for those who received Him not. Their own district had been protected from those terrible scourges that had been desolating the land – the cattle plague, and the cholera. It had appeared to him that they could show their thankfulness to God in no more fitting a manner than by doing what he was about to ask them that day. A charitable lady in London had provided an asylum for those orphans who had lost their parents by the cholera, and of course the more money she received the more she could support. Let them give as they felt disposed, according to their means. Suppose Jesus standing at the door, as he had once stood at that of the Temple, and watching the giver of alms. Not that the Pharisees were all proud – fond of showing the gift not of giving; not that but some of them had dropped in their gold wishing that they might not be noticed – let them not imagine that the poor man's penny was better than the rich man's gold. It was not the gift, but the spirit that animated the giver. Jesus had noticed the widow who put in her all – a mite.

Such was the sermon. I was especially pleased with what was said about giving. It has of late become too common a practice to preach that the poor man's gift must of necessity be more acceptable than that of the rich – leaving the spirit entirely out of the question; merely as it were endeavouring to invite the rich to give largely that they might find equal acceptance with the poor.

Passing out into the churchyard I leisurely strolled around it, noting that the stones were mostly of ancient form, and but few in number. I have remarked that in tombstones, as in everything else, there is a fashion – fashion which reproduces itself. The view from here was very fine, but the wind, after leaving the shelter of the church, was very chilly – I dared not remain to gaze upon it; and stepped out rapidly homewards.

JANUARY NOTES

Richard Jefferies

Pall Mall Gazette, 31 January 1880

The new year opened with an interval of mild weather, and it was 'like spring' upon the 3rd of January. Bright sunshine and soft airs caused a pleasant feeling of warmth, which had an immediate effect upon the hitherto silent birds. From out of the barley-stubble – still untouched by the plough – the larks rose to a great height, singing joyously. So soon as one had finished and descended, another appeared, and thus the song was never allowed to cease. At noonday the rooks came crowding to the rookery-trees, and there set up a loud and continuous cawing, as if discussing a proposal to commence building. Along the ditches – where the hedger-and-ditcher had cleared away the rubbish, the brambles and dead plants which had choked it, the teazles waiting till the time should come to send up a stalk. Some young dock leaves, too, were visible, but of a pale and unhealthy green: they had possibly grown up under the cover of fallen leaves, which had induced them to rise, but at the same time kept them in darkness. The dead leaves being now disturbed, they were exposed. At sunset the western sky became red – a coloured background to the leafless trees. In the morning as the sun rose the eastern horizon was all aglow when the atmosphere was clear. Sometimes the morning clouds as you looked from the window suddenly became tinged with crimson, not in one place only, but over a large part of the sky: though the shepherd's warning, a red morning, is for the brief few minutes it lasts very beautiful. Upon the 5th the woodbine in the hedge has some fresh young leaves and opening buds.

Yet only so short a time previously as December 27 both trees and hedges had been cased in ice. On every bough there appeared glittering raindrops, such as are left after a shower, and upon some it looked as if the water had run down the side of a branch. Every needle of the Scotch firs was tipped with drops; the thorn-bushes were hung with them. So too the birch trees, which a passing glean of sunshine lit up as if their branches were of crystal. But the wind came, and the rain drops did not fall; the breeze could not shake them off as it does after a shower has ceased. They were, in fact, neither rain nor rime, but simply ice. One of the short thaws during the frost had allowed moisture to condense upon the trees – at such times, if you stand by a tree, you may see and hear the drops falling – and at night these had frozen. On the needles of the Scotch fir these ice drops were pear-shaped; on the thorn bushes more globular. Where the water had seemed to run down the side of the boughs it was in fact frozen, so that they were partly encased in ice. Even a smart stroke upon the bushes with a stick failed to shake off these drops. Buts so powerful is the sunshine, even in the early part of January, aided too by soft warm airs, that already so soon after these icy times the woodbine ventured to send forth

its buds, the larks sang, and even the wise rooks held council as to whether it were really spring. Up in the tall elms there was already the reddish tint among the myriad lesser twigs which promises that, though now bare, green leaves shall appear in due course. The rooks soon observed signs that warned them not to be too hasty. The sky clouded over, and the breeze began to come from the north and north-east; it was still for the most part dry and bright, but on the 12th a sharp frost covered the ponds with ice, and winter set in again in earnest. But though cold, there has been so little snow or rain that the month has been favourable and even pleasant; for the dry roads have enabled people to get about, and the ice has afforded skating.

The hard ground has of course made it difficult for many kinds of birds to obtain food in their usual haunts; but it does not necessarily follow that because those haunts are comparatively deserted the former residents are dead. For instance, in walking by hedgerows which in summer seemed teeming with life, there will now perhaps be scarce a blackbird or thrush. But go father afield and follow the course of a small brook through the meadows, a mile or so distant; there you will find blackbirds and thrushes, some starting up from under the hawthorn bushes that hang over the mudbanks and partially shelter the spot from frost, others by the furrows in the sward. Parties of redwings are there also, so that these meadows seem full of birds, while the hedgerows along the drier fields are nearly deserted. Where there is an arable field at all damp the least relaxation of frost brings a number of blackbirds and thrushes out from the neighbouring woods, to search among the clods which are softening at their edges and corners. The birds, in short, have shifted their quarters, and will return when the weather changes, May not, moreover, many of them have gone still further, and partially migrated to the extreme west of the country, where there is often little or no frost, while the east and central parts are ironbound? Last winter was surely severe enough, yet in summer the woods and hedgerows were as full as ever of blackbirds and thrushes. The fact of their absence from certain localities during continued frost is no proof whatever that they may have ceased to exist. That long-continued frost draws the attention of many people to the subject who at other times perhaps scarcely give it a thought, and then, not seeing the birds, they may naturally suppose them extinct. At the same time the hardness of the ground has undoubtedly exposed birds to great privation, though fortunately there has not been much snow of late. Snow, if at all deep and if it lies unmelted, threatens many of them with unmitigated famine. During the sharp weather before Christmas in one instance a crow not only ventured into the garden of a house near the metropolis, but came right under the very window, probably attracted by some fragment of meat left by a dog or cat. In frost the rooks resort much to those ploughed fields where manure has been carted out and placed in small heaps. They mount on these and find something in the rotten earth. Starlings in crowds resort to the rickyards, where too the lesser birds assemble. Very few fieldfares are seen about;

although they usually resort to the neighbourhood of water-meadows, which may explain their absence from districts where such meadows are not common, yet one would think they would be passing over, which is not the case. From this it would seem that locally, at least, there is a real absence of fieldfares this season.

A solitary missel-thrush sang on the 14th, though snow was on the ground, and a great titmouse was calling cheerfully on the 22nd, but with these exceptions and an occasional robin, there has been a silence in the hedges since the frost set in again. The frost towards the end of the month was for a while rendered cheerful by sunshine by day and bright moonlight at night. But presently the atmosphere thickened, the frost became even more severe than ever, and a remarkable deposit of rime appeared on the trees. It is rarely seen so thick; the smallest branches looked the size of walking-sticks. Under each tree there was an accumulation of rime, fallen from it, as if it had snowed in these places only. These few days tried the birds more than anything yet this winter; for even the running streams were frozen, and every time they perched on a bough down fell a shower of rime with a rushing noise. The stubble was coated thickly with hoar-frost, amid which the thrushes near the hedges, with their feathers puffed out, searched in vain, and scarcely cared to move when any one came by. The relief to them when the rime disappeared and the thaw began on the 30th must have been great indeed. Some of the young dock leaves that pushed up too soon are now shrivelled from exposure, but in the hedges there is a faint trace of green where the willow buds are showing on the boughs. Every edible berry has disappeared; the bird-catchers cannot find a single branch of privet with berries on it such as they like to use.

A Midnight Skate

This story appeared first in the Christmas Number of London Society, *December 1876, accompanied by an engraving of a skating couple. It is unsigned but a manuscript in the Hugh Watpole Library, King's School, Canterbury, entitled 'Snowed Up: A Mistletoe Story' is signed 'by Richard Jefferies, author of A Midnight Skate etc.'*

Are you quite sure you will not dine at Greystone this evening?' said Arthur Hyde, Esq., of Clere Park, as he grounded his gun and sat down upon an ash-stole.

'Quite sure,' replied his friend and guest, Charles Martel, lieutenant in a line regiment; and brushing away the thin crust of snow which had lodged upon a fallen trunk, he also sat down.

Though both young men, they appeared to possess strongly marked and very divergent characters.

Hyde, the owner of the fair domain over which they had been shooting pheasants, was about the average height, fair, with deep-blue eyes, and an honest open Saxon face, incapable of deceit or concealment, but also incapable of heroic effort though perhaps equal to deep and sustained affection. Martel was very tall, but hardly looked his height, being unusually developed about the chest and shoulders. His gray eye, keener features, and curling chestnut hair and beard conveyed the impression of a daring nature, not too readily subservient to the trammels of society.

'No,' he continued, 'I shall not go to Greystone. Sir William looks upon me with the suspicion naturally felt by a wealthy uncle with a beautiful ward towards a scamp of a soldier who has nothing but his sword.'

'I came out without a keeper because I thought we could talk more freely,' said Hyde, in a hesitating and doubtful tone. There is something I want to say to you, Charley, but - well - I -1 -'

'Nonsense! You will not offend me.'

'Well, then, tell me, is there no other reason why you will not accompany me to Greystone?' He cocked and uncocked his gun nervously. There, it must out - has anything passed between you and Ida?'

'On my honour, no,' replied Martel very earnestly.

Arthur Hyde placed his hand on his friend's shoulder and gazed anxiously into his eyes to read the truth there.

Thank Heaven!' he muttered. 'I was afraid. But never mind; the sun is sinking, let us return.'

They walked silently along the green 'drive' through the wood of bare ash poles. Hyde, absorbed in his thought, did not see the almost pitying glance of Martel.

'He loves her,' said the soldier to himself, 'and she - I am ashamed of it -she loves me. Shall I tell him of our meeting under the oak? No, it would make him miserable; and why? I undeceived her. A fellow feels confoundedly awkward when a girl he cares not a snap for will follow him; it makes him feel like a puppy. However, I'll forget it. I wonder if Florry will manage to slip out tonight - Arthur' (this aloud), 'what time does the moon rise - you're a farmer, you know?' Methodical Arthur consulted the almanac in his pocket-book.

'Last quarter - eleven-thirty,' he said.

'I may go out and shoot a wild duck,' said Martel explaining. 'Don't be surprised if I'm not in when you return.'

It was rather a slow solemn dinner at Greystone that evening, notwithstanding the beauty that adorned the table. Sir William Grey stone's two nieces, Ida Swayne and Florence Greystone, were each gems in their particular style. Both of the same height and figure, there was a general family likeness between them, but only at first sight, Ida having coal-black hair and blue eyes and pale clear complexion; Florence, beautiful golden tresses of great length, gray eyes, a rosier complexion and lively manner. Ida was more calm and sedate - 'still waters run deep'. Arthur Hyde sat between them, lighter at heart than he had been for many a day, for he had fancied there was an understanding between Ida and Martel. Though his heart was full of Ida his conversation was with Florence - as it often happens - and she asked after Martel.

'He has just had a chance of freeing his little estate from encumbrances,' said Hyde; 'But it requires about two thousand pounds and he will not let me lend him the money.'

'Foolish fellow,' said Sir William, 'It is ridiculous to despise money. What is it, Mark?'

The butler replied that Mr. Johnson, one of Sir William's chief tenants, was waiting in the library to pay his rent.

'Excuse me,' said Sir William, rising. 'We have finished, and I always make a practice of receiving my rents myself. Johnson has been behindhand lately. He owes me a round sum.'

Lady Greystone, who was a nonentity, led the way to the drawing-room. Ida was a splendid musician. Florence sang sweetly, but made no pretence to excel. She admitted her bad taste - she preferred so simple a ballad as 'Annie Laurie' to the opera airs.

Sir William presently came in, and ostentatiously spread bank-notes for 2,OOOL upon a card-table.

I don't like keeping so much in my bureau,' said he, 'but there is no help for it to-night. I really must get a safe. There are your dividends too, Florry, just come in.'

Finding no one admired his riches, Sir William gathered the notes and departed.

Hyde, though really a good fellow, was not brilliant at entertaining people; after a while a perceptible dullness began to prevail, and, failing to improve matters, he left.

At eleven the household retired.

The beautiful cousins, though friendly, were not affectionate; perhaps Ida, being portionless, envied Florence, who, if she married with her guardian's approval, would have 35,OOOL. They did not visit each other in their private rooms.

Florence quickly got rid of her maid North, and slipped the bolt of her door. She then partially drew up the Venetian blind of her boudoir window, and looked out upon the frozen lake below. Greystone House had been a priory, and one wing - the remains of the monastic building - rose up from the very edge of a broad shallow mere. There had been a water-gate or postern, now a small boat-house, and a stone staircase led from this to a passage, one end of which opened into the boudoir. It had been Florence's fancy to choose these rooms. Sir William said they would be cold; but Florence was wilful, so he had double baize doors put up in the passage. He loved her in his way, and humoured her every wish. Had it not been for his avarice, or rather reverence for money, Sir William would have been loved by many.

Florence placed her candle so as to show a light out upon the ice below. Then she took from the mantelpiece what had once been the upper arched part of a small window of stained glass in the old chapel, now preserved as a relic of antiquity, and held it before the flame. The red glass coloured the light; and in a few moments there was a sound under the window like the cry of an owl. She instantly removed the stained glass, dropped the Venetian blind, and hastily putting on her hat and fur jacket, opened the double baize doors, and stepped down the narrow dark staircase and out upon the ice. Not exactly upon the ice either, but into the strong arms of Charley Martel, who lifted her up as if she had been a child, and covered her face with kisses. She got away from him at last, but not very far, you may be sure.

'I mustn't stop long,' she said. 'We shall certainly be caught. I do feel, O, so wicked.'

'Why not come with me altogether?' said Charley; and he began to persuade her to elope with him.

'But if I did, uncle would never forgive me. He would never let me have my money, and I should be a burden to you. Wait a year or two.'

'I've half a mind,' said Charley, catching her up again, and making as if he would carry her off bodily, 'I wish I had brought some skates. I will tomorrow night, and - and -'

'What's that?' said Florence in great alarm.

'I did not hear anything.'

'I am sure a shadow went across my blind. Hush - let me go.'

Tomorrow night at this time, then - '

'Yes - yes. Only do let me go!'

She darted inside the postern-gate, shut it, and ran up the stone steps. As she opened the first of the double doors at the top of the stairs she distinctly heard a rustling sound, and paused. Anxiety and curiosity got the better of prudence - she

pushed the second door open very slightly, and peeped into the passage. Her candle in the boudoir cast a dim light into the passage, and she saw a shadowy figure glide towards her. Amazement more than fear held her spell-bound, for she saw herself!

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It was her own figure - her 'wraith' - clad in her dressing-gown, with her long golden hair floating over her shoulders, her eyes half shut as if asleep, and countenance extremely pale.

Florence turned giddy, her hold of the door relaxed and it shut itself. She leant for a moment against the wall, her heart seemed to have stopped beating. All the old stories she had read of wraiths, all the legends of the house itself of the apparitions of monks and nuns that had been seen, flashed across her mind. Yet she did not faint or cry out. Afterwards she attributed this to the ruling idea in her mind at the time, which was to keep her meeting with Charley secret.

The fascination of terror was upon her. She pushed open the door - the passage was empty. She glanced into the boudoir - nothing there. Suddenly she remembered that out of the passage a door led to the landing, - she opened it. There was a lamp on a ledge in the landing, but its light was feeble and uncertain. She again distinctly saw her own figure - the back this time - gliding without sound along the wall in the shadow. As she looked it vanished.

She rushed back to her own room and buried her face in her pillow, to smother the scream that forced itself from her lips. Florence could never remember distinctly, but it is probable that she became unconscious, and afterwards slept in her dress. She was awakened by a knocking at the door, and rose with a start to meet the broad daylight.

'It's me, if you please,' said the voice of her maid North.

Florence opened the door. The maid could not repress a start of surprise.

'You are ill,' she said, glancing at the bed, which had obviously been slept *on*, and not in. 'You look dreadfully pale.'

Florence did indeed feel ill, and at last consented to undress and return to bed, but begged North not to alarm the house.

'Say I have a headache; and bring me some strong tea.'

While North went to get the tea she tried to think over the apparition she had seen; but could not understand it. One thing only was clear - it must be kept secret.

'Goodness, miss,' cried the maid, bursting in, in utter opposition to her usually quiet manner, 'the house have been robbed! Sir William he be frantic - the two thousand pounds is gone!'

Florence sat up. 'How extraordinary.' she said.

'Not at all extraordinary, miss,' said a stern voice, and Sir William entered the room. 'You can go (addressing the maid and bolting the door after her) Now where were *you* last night?'

Florence flushed scarlet, and afterwards turned pale as death, but made no answer.

'I will tell you,' said Sir William, in a hard uncompromising tone. 'You visited my bureau and stole the 2,000L: no denials - the butler saw you as you left my study. And why did you steal it? I can tell you that also: you dropped these letters.' Florence

uttered a cry of alarm, as she saw two of Charley's notes which she thought safe in her desk. They explain the reason - your paramour wanted the money. Hush! Do not add lying to thieving. You have not got the notes, indeed! I shall search your room.'

He did so, Florence protesting, but quite borne down by his violence, and unable to prove that she was not near the bureau at that time by calling Charley as a witness. He left the room, threatening to send the police after that scoundrel Martel, who had no doubt got the notes.

What was the poor girl to do? Ill, frightened, exhausted, she lay still while endeavouring to shape a course. In half an hour Sir William returned.

'You may thank your cousin Ida,' he said; 'she has persuaded me not to trace the notes. I shall send you to-morrow to Edinburgh, to your aunts. As for Mr. Lieutenant, I will make his mess too hot to hold him.'

Her very maid, to whom she had been so kind, would not believe her most earnest declarations of innocence: had she not found her still undressed [sic] in the morning, pale and ill - conclusive proofs of guilt? Lady Greystone visited her once in the course of the day and left her a tract. She rose towards the afternoon, and her dinner was brought to her in her boudoir. Doubtless it was foolish in the extreme, but Florence's one hope was in Charley's coming that night upon the ice. A little snow fell, and she dreaded lest it should be thick; but the wind rose, and it cleared again. The maid wished to stay with her but this she refused.

At half-past eleven she displayed the well-known signal, and in a few minutes it was responded to. Sobbing upon his strong shoulder in that dark archway, she told him an incoherent tale of harsh usage and cruel wrong. Hardly knowing how, she felt skates upon her feet - Charley had said the night previous that he would bring them, and they could have a race round the lake before the moon rose; and leaning upon his arm, she glided out into the starlit night.

It was very foolish and very wrong of Charley, doubtless; but consider his fierce love, and still fiercer indignation. To do him justice, had he thoroughly understood the shameful suspicions that had been cast upon him, he would have faced Sir William, and insisted upon the matter being sifted to the bottom. But all he knew was that his darling had been wronged, and that she was in his arms. The very physical strength of the man seemed to rise up within him and bear him onward.

Florence was a skilful skater - she had learnt upon the rinks - and they were speedily some distance from the mansion, and at the opposite bank of the lake. Charley lifted her in his arms, carried her up the bank, and set her on her feet again on a broad frozen canal, which the lake partly fed. Her nature, her whole will succumbed to the sense of power which she felt in his presence.

Swiftly, under the Aurora borealis, they sped eastward upon the ringing skates. On the left, the bright white streamers shot up almost to the zenith; in front, a low bank of clouds was lighting up with the rising moon. The wild fowl whistled over them; the calm planet Jupiter looked down in serene splendour. The exercise sent the warm blood coursing through her veins; the wild scene, their racing speed, roused up the innate love of adventure in her heart. When she tired she placed her feet together, and

he drew her along almost as quickly. In little more than an hour they had covered twelve miles; the locks retarded them, but the wind assisted. At a bridge Charley took off her skates; the lights of a large town glittered close at hand, and the red signal-lamps showed a railway.

Charley had timed himself well for the midnight mail to London; he fee'd the guard, and they had a compartment to themselves. Excited as she was tired nature could not be resisted - towards the gray dawn Florence slept in his arms, and only woke up at London. As they stepped from the train and looked round for a cab, a knot of three gentlemenly men quietly approached and tapped Charley on the shoulder. The telegraph had anticipated them: they were arrested by detectives. So well had the thing been managed, that actually an apartment at an hotel had been reserved for Florence; Charley was marched off and placed in durance vile.

Calling at Greystone next morning about eleven, Arthur Hyde found everything in disorder. Sir William had left by the first train for London; and he had to hear the history of the stolen 2,000L, and the elopement upon the ice, which North, the maid, being suspicious and watchful, had discovered -the thin snow bore the tracks of the skates. While he listened in amazement came a telegram:

'I am getting a warrant for Martel; tonight he will be in Newgate. He stubbornly denies. Florence ill.'

At this Ida left the room, apparently agitated.

'Follow her,' said Lady Greystone; 'she feels deeply for poor Florry.'

Arthur overtook her in the library; perhaps it was the excitement of the moment strung up his courage - the words to ask her if she could love him trembled on his lips, when suddenly she threw herself at his feet, and grasping his knees begged him to forgive and aid her. Utterly confounded, Arthur listened to her confession. Wild with love for Martel and jealousy of Florence, whom she knew he worshipped, Ida had herself stolen the bank-notes, in the character of Florence, contriving so that the butler should see her returning. A clever actress in amateur theatricals, and not unlike Florence, all she had to do was to hide her dark hair with false golden tresses, and keep her eyes half closed. Aware of Florry's secret meetings with Charley, she had seized that moment to enter the boudoir and take Florry's letters, assisted by skeleton keys which had been used in an acting charade. As a proof of what she stated she placed the bank-notes in Arthur's hands. When the matter had blown over she intended to have cleared Martel's little property with the money. She had never anticipated the turn things would take, and that he would be suspected of abetting the theft. Her idea had been to separate the lovers, not to drive them away together, by the appearance of Florry's guilt.

Arthur lifted her from the carpet. Hurt as he was, there was a noble grain of knightly chivalry and love in his character.

'I forgive you,' he said; and in a lower voice, 'I love you still.'

Ida burst into a flood of tears.

He left her to telegraph to Sir William; and afterwards went to London by a special train, sparing no expense. That evening Charley was released, and Florence relieved

from the suspicion which had been cast upon her.

Sir William was all penitence to Florence and Charley.

'It was my fault,' he said; 'I drove you to - to - well, to run away. I will make amends, if you will forgive me. Mr. Martel, you will come with us as my niece's affianced husband. As for that bad wicked hussy -'

'Hush,' said Arthur Hyde. 'Hush, Sir, for *my* sake. After all she loved deeply' (with a gulp), 'for my sake say no more.'

It is easy now to foresee the end. By St. Valentine's-day Charley and Florence were married, and she had her dowry. Charley has not resigned, but bids fair to rise high in his profession.

And Ida? Ida cannot but feel the generous warmth of a love like Arthur Hyde's which, true and loyal under the most trying circumstances, is more hers now than ever. There are signs that before the may blossoms again a merry peal of bells will welcome a mistress to Arthur's home at Clere park.

The Fiction of Richard Jefferies

Edward Thomas

Reprinted from the Readers' Review, *July 1908; also in the* Journal of Education, *October 1908.*

Richard Jefferies is famous for a perfect country book, *The Amateur Poacher*, a perfect essay, 'The Pageant of Summer', and a wonderful autobiography, *The Story of My Heart.* But though he published five novels and three other fictions, besides short stories, and wrote much more, of which only the titles have survived, it is generally assumed that he was mistaken in attempting to write about men. What would become even of his most popular books without their humanity, I do not know - Hilary and Cicely Luckett, Dickon, Ikey, Little John, the Gamekeeper himself, and many another farmer and labourer, not to speak of the pretty country girls and the child St. Guido, and Jefferies himself. It seems hard that an author whose interest in men is shown in the blithe portraits of *Round about a Great Estate* and in the passionate questioning of *The Story of My Heart* should still be neglected as a novelist because Besant and Mr. Crawfurd laughed some hollow laughter nearly twenty years ago.

Jefferies wrote stories as soon as he wrote anything, and after he was seventeen perhaps not a year passed without his writing a new novel or short story or revising an old one: the last book published in his lifetime was a novel, *Amaryllis at the Fair,* and the last words of it seem to promise something which death prevented. Nor were these novels experiments unconnected with his life and his other work. Each of the three later periods of his life is represented by a fiction or more than one, into which he put his best work and in a manner not always equalled by the books which everyone praises. Thus the *Gamekeeper at Home* period is represented by *Greene Ferne Farm* and *Round about a Great Estate* is almost a fiction; *The Story of My Heart* period is represented by Wood *Magic, Bevis,* and *Dewy Morn;* the last period of his more reflective and more deeply human essays is represented by *Amaryllis* and *After London.*

Before any of these came three novels, never read and always condemned. One of his best critics assumes that they were written simply in the hope of making money. As Jefferies was a married provincial journalist and the son of a poor and rapidly failing farmer he naturally did want to make money. But his nature demanded an outlet which as a matter of fact only the novel supplied in those early days. He made his living between the ages of twenty and thirty by reporting and local history and magazine articles on the conditions of agriculture and the agricultural class. Yet at that very time he was a solitary lover of the hills by day and night, enjoying sometimes with agony moments of ecstatic oneness with Nature, moments which were gradually compelling him to try with all his powers to bring about, in himself and his contemporaries, in men yet unborn, a spiritual and even a physical state more godlike than any yet realised. At first he probably did not dare to speak of these mystic

moments and had no clear knowledge of what they meant. But he was a born writer and the passion of them had to be poured out into some kind of words.

At first he chose to write about beautiful women and rich men utterly remote from himself. His style occasionally has a richness not to be found in his agricultural articles of the time, but otherwise little of his passion appears to have got into *The Scarlet Shawl.* With *Restless Human Hearts* and *World's End* it is different; though here also there are extravagant stories and unreal imitations, they were invaluable to him. They gave an outlet for his lofty view of women, to his love of nature and to his interest in himself. In them he really begins the story of his heart. *World's End* was published in 1877, in his twenty-ninth year, when he at last moved to the neighbourhood of London. His next novel *Greene Feme Farm,* is more readable as a whole, being very short, though its best things were hardly better than the best things in the two predecessors. It contains some good Wiltshire dialogue, scraps of country lore, a portrait of a miserly old miller, and a well drawn picture of his death scene - he sits dead in the window while the homeward going gleaners curtsey to him with hatred in their hearts.

Wood Magic, called by him a fable, is a story of the adventures of a child among the birds and animals about an English farmhouse. The child talks with them and by right of his knowledge of gunpowder is allowed to share in their counsels. The fields and woods and hills which everyone supposes to belong to the landowners are really parts of the empire of a wise and ancient magpie, and battles between him and his enemies, plots and counterplots involving all the birds and beasts, scandals and minor adventures, with Bevis in most of them, fill the book. Some have pointed out that this kind of thing is impossible. But it is much more than a series of human adventures attributed to birds and beasts. Some of the animals are vividly imagined and the characters, though they may not be true, are alive. The mind receives a strong and delightful impression of a great variety of life entirely independent of men. The rustic setting is beautiful and simple. The human characters, though lightly touched, are good. Jefferies' strong sense of fate pervades the book. But above all the gospel of the goodness of the open air is everywhere, especially in the beautiful dialogue between Bevis and the Wind which ends the book.

Bevis: the story of a boy followed. It is a book of sport and adventure meant for boys particularly between the ages of ten and fourteen, but enjoyable to the full only by boys of a larger growth. The sports and adventures are modest glorifications of those actually enjoyed by Jefferies and his brother on and about a great pond near his native farmhouse. They fish and swim and row and fight and shoot, they play at marooned sailors on a desert island, they fit out a ship and make a gun; and while there is a glow about it all which makes it very desirable, it is also thoroughly real. The dialogue is excellent. The background of natural description is briefly and charmingly done, with here and there a deeper note indicating that *The Story of My Heart* is at hand. The characterisation of Bevis is as careful as might be guessed from the fact that he is Jefferies himself.

The Dewy Morn partakes of the mental and spiritual exuberance of the most productive period in Jefferies' life. The chain of diseases which were to prove fatal had begun; but he was in his thirty-fifth year, his spirit was unbroken, and the sea air of the south coast flooded his brain. The book is a portrait and a statue of a young, noble, and beautiful country girl during the period of her courtship and marriage. For sensuous and joyous beauty, innocent and free, it has no rival. The rapture in her passion and in her abounding physical and spiritual life makes the reader think of Spenser's Prothalamion and Epithalamion for its holiness, while for exactness and detail it belongs to our own age. No one thoroughly understands the Jefferies of *The Story of My Heart* who has not often read *The Dewy Morn*. The book also contains two or three landscapes finer than all but the best in his other books, and several love scenes, closely knit into the landscapes, of varying but profound charm and truth. The other characters are drawn with less enthusiasm, but sometimes with admirable insight and never falsely. Finally, it is worth reading simply as a well-told tale.

After London is a story of adventure in a wild England after an utter relapse into barbarism. All knowledge of printing and steam is forgotten; railways are overgrown by bramble and briar; London is known only as the cause of a fatal marsh at the edge of a huge fresh water lake formed by the overflowing of the Thames after its bridges and weirs have fallen. The relapse is described with extraordinary verisimilitude and reads like a piece out of one of the greatest historians. In the midst of this wild land Jefferies paints a noble family and sets one of them, a youth in many things resembling himself, upon strange adventures on land and water. ‘In the hearts of most of us', he wrote, as he looked at the dreamy masts alongside the London wharves 'there is always a desire for something beyond experience. Hardly any of us but have thought, some day I will go on a long voyage; but the years go by, and still we have not sailed.' This book was Jefferies' voyage, an answer to that craving which drove him as a boy to a vain attempt to reach Moscow on foot. It is beautiful, it is ironical, and it stands by itself.

Last comes *Amaryllis at the Fair*, containing portraits of his own father and a maternal uncle and farm labourers, done in the most minute manner. Their habits, their tastes, their way of speaking, are all recorded with the fidelity of a man who has lived to write this one book alone. The pen cannot, nor perhaps can the brush, exceed the lifelikeness of these joyous and pathetic homely scenes. There is no story and no need of one. The family is brought before our eyes and left in the hands of necessity which is great, says the tragic poet. Over and above the portraits and round about them, and woven into their very being is the mind of the author, who here reveals himself as he was among his fellowmen and not in the solitude of the hills or of the great city. Here he smiles and laughs and weeps and endures. It is the other side of the portrait in *The Story of My Heart* and the two support one another and add each to the value and beauty of the other in the eyes of his true lovers.

The Scarlet Shawl

Andrew Rossabi

The Scarlet Shawl (Tinsley Bros, 1874) was the first novel Jefferies published, if not the first he wrote. On the whole, it has not had a good press. The reviews ranged from the lukewarm *(Graphic)* to the hostile *(Athenaeum)* and the novel has been generally vilified by the critics ever since. 'A worthless book . . . coarse and clumsy' (Besant); 'a book which surely sounds the lowest depths of dulness and inanity' (Salt). Even the normally sympathetic Edward Thomas, the first critic to examine the early novels in any detail, was hard-pushed to find a good word for *The Scarlet Shawl* which he thought 'remote from the real Jefferies' and called 'this most vulnerable book'. However, Thomas made the crucial point that the early fiction, though largely worthless to us today, was important to Jefferies because it allowed him to express the emotional and spiritual side of his nature which could not be satisfied by the admirably well-informed and practical farming articles he contributed to *Fraser's* during the middle years of the 1870s.

W J Keith in his critical study made a number of pertinent general observations but did not discuss the early novels in any detail. He classed them as juvenilia and thought they contained nothing of interest that was not presented 'more subtly and more clearly in the later work.' He made the point that 'when the early novels are read today (which is seldom) it is because of Jefferies' authorship rather than for any intrinsic interest in the books themselves.' Their chief weakness was 'the imperfect relation between characters and plot'.

It would be absurd to claim that *The Scarlet Shawl* is a good novel or even a particularly interesting specimen of a bad novel, let alone a neglected masterpiece. Its faults are too glaring. But it does have its moments and is at least short by comparison with the three-decker *Restless Human Hearts* and *World's End* which followed. A plot outline may convey some idea of the flavour to those who have not read the book.

Percival Gifford, a romantic egoist in whom turbulent emotions are seething just under a civilised veneer, is informally engaged to the beautiful but moody Nora, a rich orphan. When Nora announces she is going to stay with her Aunt Milly at St Leonards-on-Sea, Percival is upset. A jealous, possessive lover, he suspects Nora wants to be free of his constant attentions and supervision. They quarrel, and Percival stalks out in a huff.

Nora is soon bored at St Leonards where she starts flirting with the bloated and blotched Herbert Spencer, a coarse *roue* who tells her she's the finest girl of the season and takes her sailing in a regatta. Nora also attracts the attentions of wicked old beau Gerard Wootton Esq (55) who thinks she would make 'a very fine dessert' and teaches her to play the organ. Another admirer is chivalrous young Master George, down for the regatta and 'just old enough to make the game sweet without being dangerous'.

Aunt Milly however has bigger fish to fry. A snob and religious bigot who spends £100 a year in tracts, she wants Nora to marry the rising young Liberal MP Sir

Theodore Stanley and so heal the feud between their two families. At first Nora dallies with the refined Sir Theodore but insensibly falls prey to his charm.

Percival meanwhile has written Nora a letter in which he lists (1) all the services he has rendered her, and (2) all the slights he has suffered at her hands, concluding with an expression of love and devotion in spite of everything. Nora's reply is curt and cutting and stresses what a glorious time she is having at St Leonards. Stamping his foot in vexation at the thought of Nora in Spencer's boat, Percival seeks distraction in London where an old schoolfriend introduces him to the daringly advanced circle centred on Pauline Vietri, a notorious coquette and *femme fatale,* a woman nearly twice his age. Pauline, who incarnates the scarlet shawl of the title, albeit she wears an invisible one 'ten times more potent than the material robe', soon has Percival eating out of her hand. 'That high-heeled tiny boot concealed a very pretty cloven hoof.'

Percival is a 'detestably conceited puppy' who calls on the example of prehistory, the Olympian gods, and evolution, to justify his polygamous leanings. He debates whether he is carrying out the decree of Heaven by stinting his natural abilities and confining himself to one woman, and believes he has a mission to become a new religious teacher of mankind. His already swollen head swells further as a result of Pauline's flattering attentions.

Christmas finds Nora sinking into apathy and secretly pining for Percival. She feels trapped by the insinuating advances of the meticulous Sir Theodore who 'was endlessly engaged in stroking her down as a man would stroke a cat'. Nora's awakening comes when Master George brings her the first snowdrop. Sir Theodore has bought her many rare and expensive orchids but the simple snowdrop reminds Nora of Percival and brings tears to her eyes. She goes up to London with a premonition that she will meet Percival. Sure enough, in Hyde Park she sees him in a carriage drawn by 'two milk-white horses', indolently reclining beside a beautiful woman who inspires in her visions of Cleopatra, Semiramis, and Keats' Lamia.

Percival's true feelings likewise begin to assert themselves after he catches a whiff of the sickly odour of Tyrian purple emanating from Pauline. While Pauline visits Paris, he returns to his house in the country where his old love for Nora, long-buried in the secret chambers of his heart, is reawoken. He writes to her requesting an interview.

Sir Theodore is immersed in the minutiae of a great bill being brought before Parliament. His love has become a balm to Nora, a drug like laudanum. Without telling Nora, Aunt Milly returns Percival's letter unopened, adding a note that Nora is now engaged to Sir Theodore.

Nora wants the wedding to take place as soon as possible. Otherwise she fears she will not be able to go through with it. But her instincts are warring, her nerves strung to breaking-point. The sound of the sea and organ, once dear to her, become hateful.

A few days before the wedding, on a night of full moon, spring tide and high wind, the string snaps. The thunder of the surf penetrates into Nora's bedroom. Unable to sleep, she gets up and writes a last tearful note to Percival, confessing her true feelings. When the wedding-day comes she sets off tight-lipped to church in the company of the deaf, doddering old uncle who is to give her away.

Meanwhile Percival has had his letter returned by Aunt Milly. Thunderstruck by the news of Nora's engagement he goes to Brussels where he seeks distraction at the *opera bouffe.* Nora's letter is forwarded to his hotel with a note from Wootton that the wedding is to take place in four days. Wootton has turned against Sir Theodore after finding a pencil sketch of himself, *sans* wig, false teeth and make-up, drawn by that clever caricaturist and left by Nora between the pages of a Bible in Aunt Milly's library. Percival rushes back to England, his journey complicated by the Franco-Prussian war.

As Percival's steamer leaves Ostend, Nora sets out for the church with her uncle. The coachman takes them to the wrong church and by the time they have arrived at the right one, it is too late for the wedding, which is postponed till the next day. The hands of the church clock have been surreptitiously advanced 15 minutes by loyal Master George, who has realised that Nora is still in love with Percival.

That evening the wedding guests are silently seated at dinner when Percival arrives. Without a word he hands Nora's note to Sir Theodore who reads it, rushes upstairs to Nora's boudoir, falls on his knees, and hoarsely asks if she loves 'that man'. 'With my whole heart,' replies Nora. Sir Theodore is too much of a gentleman to force Nora's affections and dissuades Aunt Milly from calling the police to have Percival ejected.

Nora sobs in Percival's arms. Both have been punished: Nora for flirting, Percival for pride. The baleful shadow of the scarlet shawl has departed for ever. 'Let the red rag flutter and flaunt itself as it might, it would no more attract either of them from the path of natural affection.'

Postscript: Master George becomes a favourite 'at a certain establishment'. Sir Theodore is made a cabinet minister when the Liberals are returned to power at the election two months later. Pauline is spared by the Prussian bombs and was last heard of in Vienna. Nora and Percival live happily ever after, though of course they have their little 'jars' at times.

The faults are obvious. A faint aura of unreality surrounds the whole thing, particularly in the early chapters where Jefferies' clumsy handling of basic fictional technique is most apparent. Neither of the protagonists has much substance. Nora is a flirt who gets her comeuppance when she is pressured into becoming engaged to a man she does not love, Percival a conceited jackass whose head is turned by a coquette. The minor characters are even more shadowy and stereotyped. Aunt Milly is the pious old maid, Herbert Spencer the aging *roue,* Gerard Wootton the scheming cynic, Master George the loyal friend, Sir Theodore the manipulating politician. Even Pauline Vietri, the siren with the naughty Italian name (which Thomas thinks Jefferies took from Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads),* never comes alive. She is described almost entirely in similes which, as Thomas complained about Swinburne's, 'are carried so far that the matter of the simile is more important in the total than what it appeared to intensify' - in other words, the illustration becomes more important than the thing illustrated. Thus Pauline is compared to one of those rare summers which

come 'once or twice in a cycle of years' when the sky remains blue from May to October, 'but, like those years too in this, their beauty withers up all that approach it, drying up the streams of pure emotion, starving the heart with unreal, intangible hopes' (77); and to a succulent pear growing on the south wall of a garden, fair to the eye but rotten within, 'a pear of the Dead Sea'. But what we retain from these luxuriant comparisons is not any clear picture of Pauline herself, but the image of the pitiless blue sky (which recurs in Chapter 2 of *Wild Life in a Southern County),* the beautiful but rotting pear. Similarly in Chapter XI Jefferies dilates on the mysterious fascination of the colour scarlet, evoking Tyre and Zidon, Baal and Astarte and the Great Whore of Babylon, and traces Pauline's descent from a long line of scarlet women through history, suggesting that priestesses dedicated to the service of Baal and Astarte still emerge at dusk in the London streets:

And here at any time of the night, but chiefly when the evening falls, and the roseate hues of sunset are still lingering in the sky, while the crescent moon rises and mingles her pale light with the last rays of the sun - here stalk abroad figures of women clad in scarlet. . . dedicated to the service of Baal and Astarte. (169)

All this is very well, if somewhat flowery and *fin-de-siecle,* but it doesn't help us to see Pauline clearly as an individual, only as a vague incarnation of the Scarlet Woman. And Jefferies rather vitiates his effect by wanting to have his cake and eat it. On the one hand Pauline is presented as *a femme fatale,* exemplar of the destructive Eternal Feminine, who counts married men among her admirers *('That* never speaks well for any feminine individual'), but on the other she is 'scrupulously moral' and 'unstained, pure'. Presumably Jefferies felt constrained by the fear that the reviewers would take him to task if he emphasised Pauline's immorality too strongly (the *Graphic* in fact complained of the 'fastness' of the heroine Nora) and the novel not sell as a result, Victorian novels being vetted by the *paterfamilias* when borrowed from the circulating libraries.

Nor are the characters placed in any context: they have no background and the novel as a whole is curiously (in view of Jefferies' later development) lacking in any sense of place. None of the chief locations, St Leonards, London or Brussels, are realised with any particularity. The action takes place in a kind of vacuum. For the most part, the characters are observed purely externally and never begin to live from within, to acquire an autonomous life independent of their creator. Or, as in the case of Percival, they are made all too transparently to act as the mouthpiece for Jefferies' own ideas and aspirations. Jefferies cannot make his characters reveal themselves through dialogue or action: he can only tell us what they are thinking or feeling or saying or doing. They remain largely static and the reader finds it difficult to identify or empathise with them. He remains acutely conscious that he is reading a novel. There is no willing suspension of disbelief. And the story itself is a trite and conventional Victorian morality tale.

Equally serious is the failure in tone. In a novel whose theme (if it can be said to possess one) is the primacy of the true, natural, vital feeling self, largely instinctive and unconscious, over the false self demanded by social convention, it is disconcerting

to find Jefferies writing with such a degree of self-consciousness and artificiality, in the early chapters at least. What he says of Percival in the opening pages might apply to his creator: 'He never could screw himself down quietly into kid-gloves and dress-coats.' For it quickly becomes apparent that Jefferies is distinctly uncomfortable in his guise as society novelist. The authorial persona does not ring true. Jefferies adopts what he thinks is the voice of the leisured classes ('up at Rye', 'a bore', 'the apotheosis of puppyism') but succeeds only in sounding arch and affected. He would have us believe he is the sophisticated man-about-town, slightly blase and world-weary. The early chapters are peppered with foreign words and phrases *(la haute venerie, dolcefar niente, pose, distingue, distrait, canaille)* and abound in cynical maxims about women. 'A true woman is always slow to trust her own sex.' 'It is a singular fact in physiology that if a woman is neither very beautiful nor very attractive, nor in any way likely to get married herself, she is pretty sure to dote on her brother.' The flattery of a handsome woman is never so dangerous as when she is older than the man.' There is always a spice of the milliner in a woman's nature.' These are the sort of clever-sounding but hollow aphorisms the aspirant complacently enters in his note-book. Sometimes the writing descends into banality: 'But the finest finesse in the human game at whist is continually defeated by the run of the cards.' For all the determined show of worldliness one is struck by the naivety and gaucheness unwittingly revealed by the author.

In this respect it is instructive to compare *The Scarlet Shawl* with Thomas Hardy's equivalent debut novel *Desperate Remedies* which was also published by Tinsley (three vols, 1871), also an attempt at a commercial fiction by an ambitious and impoverished young writer with his roots in the country, also a first novel whose publication was subsidised by the author (Hardy contributed £75, Jefferies £60). Hardy paid the £75 in person in Bank of England notes (much to Tinsley's surprise). In his biography of Hardy Michael Millgate remarks: 'Where Hardy obtained so considerable a sum is not quite clear: he perhaps drew upon savings originally intended to help support him at university.' Where the impecunious Jefferies found the sum of £60 is equally unclear. In their bibliography (which reproduces the original Tinsley reader's report on *The Scarlet Shawl)* George Miller and Hugoe Matthews speculate that the £60 may have been donated by Aunt Ellen (to whom the novel carries a fulsome dedication, whose wording occasioned some mirth in the *Examiner* reviewer). If so, one wonders whether she, a deeply religious woman, recognised herself at all in the portrait of Aunt Milly and thought the novel a suitable reward for her generosity. Similarly one wonders what Jessie thought of Percival's ideas on marriage ('there was a revolting narrowness about it.. something which destroyed a man's identity . . . there was no soul about it') expressed on p 152. The couple were married at Chiseldon Church on July 8 1874; the novel published on July 16.

Desperate Remedies is far from flawless: after the rejection of *The Poor Man and the Lady,* Hardy, taking George Meredith's advice, went for a more complicated plot and rather overdid the Gothic and sensation-novel elements, particularly in the second half, where he seems to be trying to outdo Harrison Ainsworth and Wilkie Collins. But

the impartial reader cannot but be impressed by how much more mature and technically accomplished Hardy's debut is. Not only is the craftsmanship superior but the characterisation richer, the story more gripping, the setting and social context more firmly realised, the exploration of feminine psychology more profound. Hardy provides an intricate story which for all its inherent implausibilities is meticulously worked out, as Macmillan's reader John Morley was forced to acknowledge, 'the plot being complex and absolutely impossible, yet it is worked out with elaborate seriousness and consistency'. Hardy put his local and professional knowledge to effective use in the Dorsetshire setting, in the masterly description of Knapwater House, in the delightful cider-pressing episode which drew praise from the reviewers, in the account of the fire which destroys the Three Tranters Inn, in the amusing 'below-stairs' scene in the kitchen, in a variety of small touches like the details of the country postman's round and the clue to the fugitive Aeneas Manston's progress furnished his pursuers by a shepherd:

He said that wherever a clear space three or four yards wide ran in a line through a flock of sheep lying about a ewe-lease, it was a proof that somebody had passed there not more than half-an-hour earlier. At twelve o'clock that day he had noticed such a feature in his flock.

In short Hardy was writing out of what he knew and the Grand Guignol melodrama at the end cannot obscure the solid observation and unaffected naturalism of the best scenes. *The Scarlet Shawl*, by contrast, is not rooted in the author's experience but in some never-never land visited only by purveyors of novelettish fiction.

Did Jefferies read *Desperate Remedies*, by the way? The plight of Cytherea and Nora is remarkably similar: after a contretemps with their lovers, both become engaged to men for whom they feel a mingled attraction and repulsion but whom in their heart of hearts they do not love. Both women are described as sinking into apathy and inertia, as passive victims being led to the matrimonial altar, as drifting like rudderless boats. Mansion plays the organ to Cytherea in the mouldering old manor-house while a thunderstorm rages outside: Wootton teaches Nora to play the organ in a back-room of Aunt Milly's immense mansion (no Freudian interpretations there, I hope). Edward Springrove takes an unchaperoned Cytherea rowing round Budmouth Bay: Spencer takes Nora sailing in a regatta at St Leonards. Such parallels should not be pressed, they are most probably coincidental, but even in their faults Hardy and Jefferies have something in common. Jefferies' social insecurity, manifest in his proclivity for French *mots* and what Thomas called his 'flimsy cynicism and assumption of worldliness', has its equivalent in Hardy's ponderous quotations from Virgil and strained artistic allusions, born of the exhibitionism of the provincial autodidact sensitive to his lack of formal education and overcompensating as a result. When Mansion looked into the rainwater-butt, 'the reflection from the smooth stagnant surface tinged his face with the greenish shades of Correggio's nudes'.

But if Jefferies perchance did read Hardy he should have learned from him and finally it is the differences rather than the similarities which stand out. In *Desperate Remedies* one is impressed by the rapidity of the action: we are taken a considerable

distance in the space of a few chapters. Even at this early stage in his career Hardy shows himself a master of narrative suspense: we become involved with his characters and want to know what happens to them. We are soon hooked and the pages keep spinning. The scene where Cytherea's architect father plunges to his death from the church spire is worthy of Hitchcock. Jefferies' plot is threadbare and he gets into difficulties over the simplest act of stage-management, with letters constantly winging their way between the estranged Percival and Nora and the unlikely chapter of accidents to ensure the cliffhanger end, culminating in the nifty ruse by which Master George postpones the wedding, as if none of the characters apart from Sir Theodore - vicar, bridesmaids, *et al* - possessed a watch. At this point one begins to ask if Jefferies is not writing tongue-in-cheek, sending up the novel by the palpable absurdity of his inventions. But it is more likely, one feels, to be the result of boredom, carelessness and indifference. He just wants to get the thing over. A similar sense of fatigue is evident at the close of *Restless Human Hearts* and *World's End*.

Is there then nothing to be said in favour of *The Scarlet Shawl?* Is it as hopelessly inept as Besant and Salt have claimed? Ought we to draw a discreet veil over it and hurry on to discuss the work of Jefferies' maturity? Perhaps a few points can be made in its defence. Firstly, it is what it was intended to be, a potboiler tailored to suit Tinsley's list, which was strong on sensation novels, the firm having made its fortune with M E Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, a tale of bigamy and murder that became an overnight bestseller in 1862 and is now regarded as one of the prototypes of the Victorian sensation novel, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) being the other. Both Miss Braddon and Wilkie Collins are mentioned by Jefferies in his *Reporting; Editing* & *Authorship* manual published the year before *The Scarlet Shawl* and there he noted that *The Woman in White* had created a fashion in novels for 'women in various colours'. The title of *The Scarlet Shawl* clearly nodded in the direction of Collins' bestseller. With hindsight it is easy to criticise Jefferies for following fashion but it is unfair to berate him for doing what he did not set out to do. He may have been false to his true self when he wrote *The Scarlet Shawl* but he had not yet discovered that self and the writing of the novel (which is all about just that, an adventure in consciousness leading to the discovery of one's true self) was an important and necessary stage on that tortuous path to self-knowledge, as Edward Thomas had the sagacity born of personal experience to realise.

And the novel is by no means a total disaster. It gathers strength as it proceeds and Jefferies shakes off the awkward self-consciousness that mars the early chapters, and his personality begins to dominate. There are several passages of power and beauty, even if they are not properly integrated into the main story, and merely sound themes explored more fully in the later work, as W J Keith observed. For example, the glowing description of the sunrise in Chapter X which comes literally out of the blue as Percival, after a night spent tramping the London streets, kicks his heels on London Bridge while waiting for the first train to take him to his house in the country:

The sky overhead was of a rich azure colour, faintly tinged with purple -the hue that is only seen a short space before the sun appears. Down the old river seawards

there was a flush, and the turrets of the Tower had a glow upon them, though the great ball of light was not yet visible to him. A cock crew somewhere - probably in some back court. Instinctively Percival paused and gazed over the parapet. He forgot himself for a moment. The grandeur of the mighty city, silent, and yet awaking round him - the very sternness and practical look of the buildings, impressing the mind with a sense of subdued power - drew back the littleness of his soul out of sight for an instant or two.

His eyes fastened on the horizon drank in the glorious dawn of the light, as the glowing sun revealed itself - a visible archangel. The azure sky, the roseate clouds, the glittering water, filled him with a sense of a higher life. If he could only drink in this beauty always he should be immortal. Alas! it was only for a moment. There was the shriek of an engine and the tramp of a policeman. Percival returned to himself, and turned to go, shrugging his shoulders instinctively. (158-9)

The faint echo of Wordsworth's Westminster Bridge sonnet should not blind us to the truth and beauty of this passage which foreshadows similarly exalted descriptions of the dawn sky in *Greene Feme Farm, Bevis* and *The Story of My Heart.* In Chapter XIV there is another heightened passage on the theme of the god-like potential of man, contrasted with the narrowness of the circle of ideas in which we habitually move, 'circumscribed by absurd prejudices and acquired habits', which became a major theme of the autobiography.

But the best thing in the novel are the passages describing Nora's gradual subjection to the icily immaculate Sir Theodore, her sinking into a torpor akin to a living death, and her awakening to her true feelings one night when the sound of the surf enters her bedroom. Suddenly the book comes alive, begins to roll. Here Jefferies displays his mastery of the chronicle or *recit* as he provides a sensitive and beautifully modulated record of Nora's feelings. The fluid yet grave cadences of the prose, the easy play of emotion, the detached yet compassionate viewpoint, remind one of D H Lawrence. It is done entirely by narrative; there is no dialogue. Feminists should relish the irony of Nora's situation. When she sinks into apathy and inertia, everyone thinks her much improved. Sir Theodore, who has been worried by Nora's natural wildness, is relieved. Nora 'so gentle, so ladylike, so unselfish' now conforms to his ideal of womanhood:

So quiet and gentle, so lady-like and subdued! In good truth, it was sheer apathy. Nora had no life left in her, no animation. Everything was so monotonous. Sir Theodore with his talent, his criticism, his severe eye, his refined ways, and delicate subtle touches, had driven her into a narrow circle. He had circumscribed her - tied her as it were to a stake - and told her to go round and round, and feed on that one ring of grass for ever, never even daring to lift her glance to the rolling prairies of freedom afar off. And she felt no desire to break through. There was the secret. These threads that bound her would have snapped like cobwebs had there been a will upon her part. But there was none. It was like sitting by a fire continuously, till the brain grew drowsy, and the limbs helplessly idle, and the breath feeble, and the heart slow in its action, till all thought even of starting up and rushing out into the keen frosty air was gone. (198-9)

Sir Theodore himself, though largely a negative presence, is the novel's best-drawn character and foreshadows the life-denying Godwin in *The Dewy Morn:*

There was an exactness in Sir Theodore before, now there was precision in everything he did. His letters were folded to a hair's -breadth; the stamp upon the envelope was in its proper place, with the head of the Queen upright; the address was clear, minute to a fault. In the very motions of his body there was a precision. The gesture of his hand went thus far, and no farther; his step was measured, his attitudes more decided. Insensibly the increased importance and confidence of the man filtered down into the minutest actions of daily life. Nothing was trivial to him. (201-2)

The novel also has some biographical value and interest. Percival's experiences in London whose hurrying crowds inspire thoughts of the *Anima Mundi* or World Soul as he feels himself 'carried . . . onwards as if upon a stream of magnetic ether', his Brussels trip, his thinking and general world-view, reflect those of his creator and it is remarkable how much of the full-fledged Jefferies the novel contains in embryo. We may note, in conclusion, the important role played by the sea which acts as a sort of leitmotif, and the mood of pre-Raphaelite languor which pervades much of the book. As Thomas observed, 'the characters have much leisure for passions' and both Percival and Nora seem locked in a struggle between the *thanatos* (death) and *eras* (life) instincts, with the latter winning out in the end. There is a similar tension in the writing and one feels that Jefferies develops and matures as the book progresses. Significantly both Nora and Percival's awakening comes through nature (the sunrise, the snowdrop, the sea). Nature will prove the means by which Jefferies realises his true self also.

Note Numbers in brackets refer to pages of the first edition.

The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies': A Personal Response

W] Keith

The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies: A Chronological Study,
Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel. *Petton Books, Bedwells Heath, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5JE. 1994.*

This book aims to bring together in chronological order all the facts that we know about Jefferies-the details of his personal life and what has been recorded about the composition and publication of his writings. A work of intense dedication, it must have entailed long hours of painstaking research on the part of its compilers. This is not the kind of book that one can review in the conventional sense: either it is comprehensive and accurate or it isn't, and so far as I can judge Matthews and Treitel have succeeded admirably. Having established this, I want to proceed to the more interesting questions: what does the book add to our knowledge, and how will it facilitate further study of Jefferies and his work?

Our knowledge of Jefferies' life and condition is extended in a number of directions. Most notable is the way in which Matthews, as a chest surgeon, is able-now that the various medical accounts and diagnoses are gathered together and arranged in order-to write authoritatively on the nature and progress of Jefferies' tuberculosis. His medical history is now clear (and comprehensible to a layman) as it has never been before. In bibliographical terms, also, the compilers have been able to make a valuable contribution. They have identified two minor but interesting Jefferies items published in the *Manchester Guardian* (see p. 179) and acknowledge another discovered by George Miller since the publication of the Miller and Matthews *Bibliography* (see pp. 205-6).

The most controversial topic, however (and one never before discussed in print so far as I know), is the possibility that the young Jefferies caused a family scandal by fathering an illegitimate child. The evidence is decidedly tenuous, and Matthews and Treitel rightly report it with a good deal of skepticism. It arises out of the court case following the assault on Jefferies by one of Jessie Baden's relatives. Matthews and Treitel continue: 'In 1969 Mr Hubert Harrison, a past Editor of the *Sivindon Evening Advertiser,* wrote to the then secretary of the RJS (RJS archive) implying that Henry ("Harry") Woolford, born c. 1867, was a relative (i.e. son) of J and that there was a photographic likeness between the two' (p. 50).

I would like to add a historical comment on this. In the late 1960s, this kind of biographical speculation was fashionable in quasi-scholarly circles. In the previous year, Lois Deacon and Terry Coleman had published *Providence and Thomas Hardy,* in which they argued for a love affair between Hardy and one of his cousins, Tryphena Sparks, which had resulted in the birth of a child. Here too a photograph was cited as supposed evidence, though it was subsequently demonstrated that the date linked with

the professional photographer's address on the back ruled out the possibility. In Jefferies' case, since the child was registered in the 1871 census as 'Henry Woolford Rawlings' and his mother subsequently married John Woolford (an acquaintance of Jefferies), an alternative scenario obviously suggests itself. My own opinion, based on the fate of the Hardy controversy, supports Matthews and Treitel; the suggestion cannot be taken seriously unless further and clearer evidence is forthcoming.

So far as future research is concerned, all sorts of promising opportunities open up. The day-to-day listings help serious students to see each of Jefferies' writings in the context in which it was written as well as in relation to other works composed around the same time. Some of this was possible before, but only with considerable effort and cross-referencing. In the course of annotation, the compilers have themselves succinctly indicated connections and resemblances between works widely scattered either in different journals or in different collections of his work. However, one caveat needs to be registered: Matthews and Treitel only list writings about which dates of composition or publishing details are known. A number of unpublished items as well as manuscript materials are not mentioned, and for these researchers will have to go to the Miller and Matthews *Bibliography.*

Those seeking new Jefferies texts will be intrigued by 'Chapters on Churches. By the Peripatetic Philosopher', a series of five articles published in the *North Wilts Herald* in 1866 and 1867. Unknown to most of us, tantalizingly mentioned in the *Bibliography,* they sound even more appealing now that Matthews and Treitel have summarized their contents. (The first two have now been reprinted in this *Journal).* Again, a student of rural political history could make a valuable study from Jefferies' treatment of the Wiltshire agricultural labourer now that the chronology of his writings on the subject has been laid out fully and clearly. In addition, the whole subject of the Jefferies canon needs to be reconsidered. As new articles have been added, some earlier attributions look less convincing. The combined evidence of the *Bibliography* and *The Forward Life* makes further inquiry possible-and even urgent.

This book, then, will be useful to Jefferies enthusiasts in numerous ways, and I would like to conclude with an anecdote that shows how it has already cleared up a small matter that has been bothering me for years. In the late 1950s, when I was engaged in research for my thesis on Jefferies, I came upon a stray reference indicating that Jefferies had once praised an unidentified story called The Stone Dog'. It seemed a trivial point and I made no formal note of it, but the detail lodged in my mind. Almost ten years later, when I had been commissioned to write a short book on the Canadian poet and short-story writer Charles G D Roberts, I opened his first collection of stories, *Earth's Enigmas* (1896)-and there was The Stone Dog! Unfortunately, I had totally forgotten where I had found the Jefferies reference. All the likely places-the *Notebooks,* Besant's and Thomas's quotations from letters, etc.-drew blanks. It has irritated me periodically ever since. Now I have found it here (p. 179), quoted from a no-longer extant letter by C J Masseck in his *Richard Jefferies: Etude d'une personnalite.*

Robert's story first appeared in the November 1885 issue of *Longman's Magazine*-*which* explains how Jefferies encountered it, and also confirms suspicions about Masseck's datings since the letter must be a year later than he implies. It is set in an unnamed Italian city, and describes the horrendous experiences of the narrator when he attempts to explore a doorway near a decaying antique fountain guarded by the stone statue of a dog. He believes that the dog comes to life and attacks him. After fainting, he is found and brought home by an Italian peasant, but later discovers tooth-marks on his wounded shoulder. It is, then, a 'dream-terror' story told in rather heavy prose yet possessing a curious force. There is some effective natural detail about the nearby marshes, and I suspect that Jefferies may have been reminded of his own description of Felix's discovery of 'the deadly marshes on the site of the mightiest city of former days' in the twenty-third chapter of *After London* (published in the same year). A minor detail in the whole context of Jefferies' work, but a good example of the kind of discovery that *The Forward Life* makes possible.

Finally, as someone who began writing seriously on Jefferies almost forty years ago, when few scholarly aids existed, I register gratification and amazement at the strides that Jefferies studies have made since that time. With the superb Miller and Matthews *Bibliography* and this meticulously compiled list, scholars are now excellently equipped to carry our understanding and appreciation of Jefferies even further.