

THE BRYANSTON MISCELLANY.

Editor Victor Bonham-Carter

Published by Bryanston School, Blandford Dorset.

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Unpublished MSS of Richard Jefferies.

Samuel J Looker P79-88.

Richard Jefferies was born at Coate Farm, near Swindon, in 1848. The son of a small farmer, he inherited a great love of the countryside, a paternal passion for its lore, and a very real knowledge of farming, crafts and ways. His father, the Mr Iden of *Amaryllis at the Fair*, was a man of marked idiosyncrasy. The masterly portrait of him, in the early chapters of *Amaryllis*, shows how deeply his strange, enigmatic personality had impressed itself upon the plastic mind of his son.

Richard Jefferies, a delicate youth, remained throughout his short life, a shy, proud and independent solitary. In his formative years, he was left for long periods to his own devices. He wandered over the fields, hills and woods of that enchanted countryside, and these rambles were a more creative schooling than any amount of academic learning. Apart from this, he was an indefatigable reader of good books, with an intellectual curiosity and a passionate desire for knowledge. It was then that he first began to experience those esoteric feelings and thoughts, which afterwards found so eloquent and touching a voice in *The Story of My Heart*.

In 1872 *The Times* printed two remarkable letters from Jefferies on the condition of the Wiltshire farm labourer. This brought his name to the notice of other editors. He was given much encouragement by the great journalist Frederick Greenwood of the *Pall Mall Gazette*: and it was in this paper that the essays (afterwards published in book form as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher*, and others) were first printed.

P.80.

"The Life of the Fields" the title is delicious.
line drawn under.

39, Paternoster Row, London. E.C.

March 7 1884

My dear Sir,

I am sorry to say that the sale of the two books we have published by you do not encourage us to undertake your new one – at any rate rate (*sic*) at present. You no doubt know your own business best, but I can not help fancying that you would make more

Letter to Jefferies from C. J. Longman, his publisher

Jefferies' most mature writings, however, are to be found in later books, published between 1880 and 1887, the year of his death. *Hodge and His Masters*, *Bevis*, *The Story of My Heart*, *The Life of the Fields*, *After London*, *The Open Air*, and *Amaryllis at the Fair* – these are the best. *Field and Hedgerow*, essays collected by his widow in 1889, also contains some of his finest work.

Jefferies left Wiltshire in 1877. He lived at Surbiton (then in the country), Eltham, Brighton, Crowborough and at Goring-on-Sea near Worthing, where he died. He lies in Broadwater Cemetery, where the grave of another great naturalist, W. H. Hudson, may also be found not far away.

In his short lifetime Jefferies published no less than twenty-one full-length books, as well as several pamphlets. Twelve further volumes have been issued since his death, selected from unpublished manuscripts, or first collected from periodicals: notably *Field and Hedgerow*, *Toilers of the Field*, *The Hills and the Vale*, *The Old House at Coate*, *Chronicles of the Hedges*, *The Note-books and Nature Diaries*, *Field and Farm*. A number of essays and papers of less importance, but topical in their time, still remain uncollected. After all this, a large body of unpublished manuscript of good quality, sufficient to fill at least two further books, still exists; and even this takes no account of a large mass of nature notes and one third of the contents of his sixteen notebooks not reprinted. Eight other note-books and a number of essays have been lost or destroyed. Such an output is remarkable in a short life, haunted as it was by painful and disabling illness. Jefferies' fertility, invention and knowledge were amazing. Between 1873 and 1887 he wrote nearly five hundred essays and articles, some of them of considerable length, in addition to his books. Few men dying at thirty-eight have left behind so large an amount of good work.

It may be of interest to enumerate the more important pieces that still remain in manuscript:

About one-third of the contents of his diaries and nature note-books; his sketch book containing many pencil drawings of great charm; a hundred pages of a first draft of *Bevis* with many differences from the printed version; one hundred and thirty pages headed "The Squire at Home"; one hundred pages and some notes on Shooting (the only portion of a book suggested by Longman and to be illustrated by Charles Whymper); three long unfinished poems; a series of letters to his aunt, Mrs Harrild; a large collection of letters from his publishers – Smith Elder, Longman and C.P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*; a large number of other letters to and from Jefferies; an untitled fictional sketch on Beatrice and the Centaur; many pages of notes evidently intended for a revised edition of *The Story of My Heart*; an essay "A Dream by Landseer's Lions", which has some variations from "Lions in Trafalgar Square"; a conspectus of a proposed book "The Heart of England" – a picture of the men and women living on the land – which is a full synopsis of *Hodge and His Masters*; a conspectus of a new magazine; *The Amateur Poacher*, an early draft with many variations; a memo book containing an "Essay on Instinct", fifty-four pages, dated 1866; part of an early draft of *Greene Ferne Farm*; several chapters of another early novel, no title; "A Game for Bicyclists", twenty pages (a kind of bicycle polo invented and described); part of an earlier version of *After London*; a quantity of unclassified notes and comments and short drafts.

The surviving portion of the first draft of *Bevis* has some interesting features. In its complete state it must have run to over one thousand pages of written manuscript. Collation with the printed book shows many and wide variations. Moreover, some pages seem an early sketch for portions of *Amaryllis at the Fair*, especially where the family dinner is described at length. So the manuscript proved a quarry for both books. Jefferies' son Harold told me that so engrained had become the habit of silence at meals, that he himself had brought up his sons in the same tradition.

The extracts given below are now printed for the first time. The titles are mine:

DINNER AT THE FARM

Bevis and Mark came through the orchard: there was one red apple still on a leafless bough. Indoors the cloth was laid. Frances looked in to see it was all exact not knowing Bevis was there, with one little plump arm bare to the elbow and misted with flour which looked dingy on her delicate skin.

‘Look,’ said Mark, pointing under the arm-chair, ‘another pair.’ It was a pair of new boots far too small and shapely, neat and polished for an agriculturalist. Mark senior was always buying boots and yet never could get a pair to fit him. Mark once in a fit of temerity fetched them altogether out of dark corners and cupboards, and put them in double file where they reached from the door of the sitting room along the passage out into the courtyard and as far as the door of the old house; in all fifty-two boots, twenty-six pairs. By the mantelpiece the wall was coated with varnished oak, like wainscot except that it did not extend round the room, and just above the armchair was a spot where by the constant friction of the old man’s head the varnish or polish had worn away.

At dinner no one dared speak and must not clatter the knives too loudly: if anyone dropped a fork the Master grunted in high displeasure. Rigid silence was the order of the hour: why could not someone invent noiseless plates? Plates without the glaze so as not to scrape and clatter and jar on you? A noiseless coal scuttle was even more desirable to avoid the terrible clatter of putting a shovel of coals on the fire. If anyone chanced to extend his foot and accidentally touched the Master’s - that was something dreadful. While they dined, Pan (the spaniel), who happened to be shut out, stood up on his hind legs with his forepaws on the sill gazing in with reproachful eyes. The moment the dinner was over the cloth was dragged off and the things huddled out and everyone was expected to immediately leave that room, nor dared you turn the handle to glance in at a clock. So soon as the crowd had gone the Master seated himself in his arm-chair, got his head comfortable against the wainscot and drowsed away the most of the afternoon. So he did about half-past ten or eleven every evening and often stayed there till the light of the morning shone through the chinks in the shutter, sitting so intensely still that a mouse occasionally ran up his leg and took the crumbs from his knee. This attachment for his armchair and that particular spot was the standing miracle of the house. Mark never lost his wonder at it. Such a head too to stultify in slumber, day by day, week by week, year’s end to year’s end. A big capacious head, rather bald, a good deal like the engravings of Shakespeare’s, a style of head that must perforce have something in it, thoughts that flew high like the redwings of October, highflying thrushes with a speck of blood under each wing.

p.85. Extract of MS of first draft of Bevis

UNTUTORED LOVE

All the reapers knew she loved him; all those in the fields saw it as plainly as they saw the high Downs. Her eyes told it, large, black like a black cherry with a stain of red in them. Black cherries – the most luscious of cherries are banished because they stain the lips. But they were very beautiful eyes, loving and untaught: loving, as a dog loves his master without restraint. And her lips were scarlet and her dress at the throat always came unfastened one or two hooks of itself, revealing the line to which the sun had burned her, brown above, white and soft beneath. The fullness of her beauty filled her dress, a common print, torn with thorns, with burrs adhering, but her own contour filled it.

How should she know any better? Her mother she had never seen: her father was a drunkard, and a thief: her grandmother was not intentionally unkind, but harsh, making no allowances for youth. She slept on her bed which, instead of feathers, was filled with oat chaff. She ran wild gathering ‘Granfer Godlings’, the orchis with spotted leaves in spring. She hewed wood and drew water in winter with ‘daglets’, icicles on her apron, or ‘sobbled’, soaked in rain. She scarcely saw her father except when he ‘foddered’ his boots before he went out, filling them with hay as he wore no stockings. The only thing he taught her was how to make a fagging hook, the curved stick used in reaping, by boiling the stick in the pot, then bending it into shape while pliant and tying it so that it hardened as required for use. These poor are as pansheres, as broken earthenware cast forth into waste places. Wow should she know any better?

My last quotation from the unpublished manuscripts is from “The Squire at Home”. A book that Jefferies had long meditated. Alas he left it largely unfinished by his death, only some ten chapters were written, out of twenty planned.

THE WINDOW-SEAT IN THE GUN ROOM

The Squire's favourite resort when at home was the window-seat in the gun-room. From this window he could see a section of the highway whose crooked course could not be over-looked in any other part of the house. Those who have lived in lonely country places know how, as the years roll slowly on, the highway gradually becomes of the first importance, being the link along which the mind travels to the outer world. This road, following the outline of the park as scrupulously as if it were a frontier, just there curved sharply inwards and then as sharply outwards forming a salient angle whose extreme point approached within half a mile of the residence. It was bounded the whole way on the park side by a dry stone wall, against which hawthorn bushes had grown at intervals, and being left untrimmed and untouched so many years their stems were almost timber. Round these again ivy had risen, and increased in thickness till at a distance they resembled green bastions flanking the curtain. The waggoners who came by noted that these bushes were much beloved by wood pigeons and thrushes for the fruit upon them; haws in autumn and ivy berries in spring.

Just where the Squire's line of sight from the gun-room window struck it, the highway declined into a hollow across which ran a streamlet issuing from the park. At this declivity the road faced the house, so that the Squire reclining in the window-seat could see everyone who passed. If they came from Latten (the market town) they were obliged to draw rein and descend the slope at a walk because, though it was not steep, the bridge over the streamlet at the bottom was narrow, and a swerve would cause a collision with the railings. If they came the other way the horses walked up the hill: thus the slow pace at which they travelled gave time for observing them. The carts and vans which traverse the street before a suburban villa interest no one, the names upon them are no more than the advertisements in the papers. But in the country where people have dwelt for hundreds of years, generation after generation in one spot, there is not a waggon that can go by that has not a history. One perhaps brings down a load of wool from the Downs: it is from old Mr Hobbs' farm who for forty years has been proud of his clip. Another has a burden of wheat: it is Lambourne's team, he lost £500 in 1879 thorough the wet. Every man of any substance throughout the countryside is as well known and all his family affairs, as if they were written in a chronicle.

Jefferies took a few passages from this manuscript and incorporated them in the essay "An English Deer Park", first printed in the *Century Illustrated Magazine* in 1887 in two parts, with some delightful pictures by his friend, J. W. North. Mrs Jefferies included the essay in *Field and Hedgerow*.

It is tragic to think that illness and misfortune prevented Jefferies from carrying out the many schemes he had designed and partly mapped. None the less, in spite of much that has been edited since his death, there yet remains good work writing to be transcribed. The short extracts quoted here are merely a foretaste.