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THE GOSPEL IN RICHARD JEFFERIES

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There is nothing really and vitally interesting about a man except his religion. As the man thinketh in his heart, so he is. His religion is his life laid bare to the bone. His life is his religion closed on with action. The religious man is the seeing man—the man who does not merely walk purblind between sky and earth, carrying his own daily load of bricks and eating of his own loaf of daily bread.

There are for a man two things to see and only two—that which is within him and that which is outside him. Some have thought that these two are one. Others have argued their essential and eternal separation. The great point is not to argue about them but to be certain that we do see them. I that stand here, to myself, the centre of the universe—the universe that circles about me—these are all that really matter to a man. Does he realise them both? Does he see that they involve the idea of God? Or are they to him but the counters by shuffling which and presenting them over a counter he is enabled to get his daily bread?

It is with the universe outside of us that I would presently deal, and with one of its greatest and truest prophets. Of this be certain, that Nature is found of those that truly seek for her. In this she is like the God that made her. If we seek God truly, we shall find Him. If we seek Nature with a heart that loves her, she will reveal the secrets of her inmost soul to us. These are like God Himself, great, precious, austere. Will they suffice us?

Yes and no.

They will suffice us if we see them to be the *aura* of God who made them.

They will suffice us if in the struggle of existence, the pain and the wrong of it, we see the need of One who came to deal once for all with the whole problem of pain and wrong.

But no—they will never suffice us if we see Nature only as a beautiful and varied play, acted for our delectation certainly, but apart from our lives and in no connection with the Deity.

This conclusion is certain, for the thing has been tried.

I suppose that no man of all the ancient world had clearer vision of the divine character of Nature than Plato. To him there came a vision of the Nature-God as one who

*Gives peace on earth and calms the stormy deep;
Who stills the waves and bids the sufferer sleep.*

To him God was hardly “Unknown”, yet though these lines might without any suspicion have been extracted from a Christian hymnology, they are taken out of that wonderful Symposium which enshrines the clear-lined beauty eternal in the Greek language and the Greek nature. He moved in worlds not realised, in which the search for beauty and knowledge summed all his desires. He spoke of the divine love under the image of the human love of husband and wife, even as Paul, five hundred years afterwards, also did, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32).

Plato knew well that Nature without God, with no supernatural explanation, was no better than an empty husk—the shadowed picture of the cave of that which was reality in the sunshine.

But let us take on this matter the testimony of a great lover of Nature, and one of the sincerest and most outspoken souls of our time. John Ruskin has had many opinions, and has changed most of them two or three times; but he has at least been constant and singular in his devotion to Nature. Yet at the close of his long life, this is his testimony, expressed in language so perfect and fitting that it becomes enshrined in our hearts as a perpetual memory.

“Morning breaks as I write along these Coniston fells, and the level mists, motionless and grey beneath the rows of the moorland, veil the lower woods and the sleeping village and the long lawns of the Lake shore.

“O that someone had told me in my youth, when all my heart was set on these colours and clouds that appear for a moment and then vanish away, how little my love of them would serve me, when in the dues of evening all these things shall be completed and all my thoughts should be of those whom by neither I should see more.”

True it is that Nature does not betray the heart that loves her. But this also is true—that the heart that depends *wholly* upon her for comfort shall surely be disappointed.

It has often seemed to me that the Christian of heart, leal, solemn, cheerful, is

the only man fitted to hear the heart of Nature as it beats with full satisfaction and joy. To all others Nature passes away. The stamp of impermanence is overall. The decayed leaf trampled under foot is the fit emblem of the human race. But to the Christian—the Christ-man, the dead leaf and the fallen rose petal are but emblems of the eclipse of life that shall surely reawaken with the green pennon of the larch and the dropping gold of next year's laburnum. So also is it when we say “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust”.

Richard Jefferies was late in finding the secret—yet he found it. What his life might have been had he been spared—richer, fuller, with the Evangel of Christ to give new meaning to the Evangel of Nature—who can say?

But listen to him when as yet he knew only the one of these, before any one of us says that Nature is a sufficient guide and comforter. Jefferies worshipped Nature, yet he speaks thus of God:

“Nature sets no value on life, neither of minute hill snail nor of human being... They go on, and I—I am no more than the least of the empty snails that strew the sword of the hill. Nature sets no value upon life neither of mine nor of the larks that sang so long ago. The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing at all to the earth. It is better to know all this before you are dead. These delicious violets are sweet for themselves; they were not shaped and coloured and gifted with that exquisite proportion and adjustment of colour and hue for me. High against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife.”

This is the best that the study of Nature by itself could do for the unbeliever—even for an agnostic so wondrously made as Richard Jefferies. What, then, can it do for the others?

The secret is elsewhere.

I am reminded of one of Mr. [William] Gladstone's most beautiful and delightful sayings, in a letter written only last year. He says:

“All I write and all I hope and all I think is based upon the divinity of our Lord—the one central hope of our poor wayward race. If I am asked what is the remedy for the deeper sorrows of the human heart, what a man should chiefly look to in his progress through life, and the power that is to sustain him under trials, and enable him manfully to confront his afflictions, I must point to something which in the well-known him is called ‘The Old, Old Story,’ and which is told in an old, old book, and taught with an old, old teaching, which is the greatest and best gift ever given to mankind.”

It is indeed possible for the Christian to begin where Richard Jefferies left off, and to see in every bird and flower, every tree and mountain top, the essence of life. As says the late Laureate [Tennyson] in those deep six lines of his, to know these things as they may be known by every reverent and believing soul is to range up very close alongside of the Almighty.

*Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand*

*Little flower. But if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.*

It has often struck me when, all bookless, I wandered among the beautiful things of Nature of what infinite value it were to have a memory stored with the finest literature of this Evangel of the Open-Air. So that when

*Some wet bird-haunted English lawn
Lends us the music of its trees at dawn*

the answering notes of the eighth psalm might rise in the heart,
How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord, is Thy name.

Or, when watching over a great landscape from some mountain top, the solemn processional sweep of the seasons, the magnificent lines of [Cardinal John Henry] Newman might rise in our hearts.

*All is divine which the Highest hath made,
Through the days that He wrought till the day that He stayed;
Above and below, within and around,
From the centre of space to its uttermost bound.*

*In beauty surpassing the universe smiled,
On the morn of its birth like an innocent child,
Or like the rich bloom of some gorgeous flower;
And the Father rejoiced in the work of His power.*

*Yet worlds brighter still, and brighter than those,
And a brighter again He had made had He chose;
And you never could name the conceivable best,
To exhaust the resources is the Maker possessed.*

*But I know of one work of His infinite hand
That special and singular ever must stand,
So perfect, so pure, and of gifts such a store
That even Omnipotence cannot do more.*

*The freshness of May and the sweetness of June,
And the fire of July in her passionate noon,
Magnificent August, September serene,
Are together no match for my glorious queen.*

*O Mary, all months and all days are thine own,
In thee lasts their joyousness, when they are gone;
And we give to thee May, not because it is best,
But because it comes first, and is pledge of the rest.*

In the main we Britons have looked at Nature in two ways since we got over the stage of horror at her severer scenes, which characterised all writers among us down till the end of last century. The first way may be expressed in the well-worn words

which the French put into the mouth of the typical *John Bull*, “It is a fine morning; let us go out and kill something”. Now, Richard Jefferies had something of this in him. But it is fortunate that he had much more of the other—of that reverential observation of Nature—patient and resourceful—which has resulted from the residence of observant and thoughtful men among the wonderfully rich and various *fauna* and *flora* of our island. The tools of the first class of Nature observers have been the rifle, the shot-gun and the fishing-rod; those of the other class, the human eye, variously aided by microscope and field-glass.

There is another somewhat savage and primitive attitude of aggression towards Nature, which is really but a variation of the first attitude. It is perhaps best expressed in that remark of the Norfolk boy who was found abusing a toad by the roadside;

“I’ll larn thee to be twoäd!” cried the tormentor, between every pelting stone.

When reproved and chastised for his cruelty, young *Norfolk* manifested no penitence or even any measure of shame; but on the contrary, considered himself entirely justified, for remarked he after the whole was finished, between his tears at the unjust chastisement:

“But he *wur* twoäd!”

But this savage instinct runs into higher forms, of course, or else deer-forests would not be let for twice the income of a German principality, the red grouse would not have turned the sheep off the Highland hills, and where the finest peasantry in the world had, a generation ago, their modest shielings—the pheasants would not now be reared, like barndoor fowl, to run around the noble sportsmen expectant of corn, and to get instead the contents of an Eley cartridge and a free passage from the noble wholesale to the humble retail game-dealer.

But it is still for all that the savage instinct of “I’ll larn thee to be twoäd”, with the civilised refinement and improvement of breeding and protecting the animal for the sake of killing and selling.

This aspect of “killing no murder” has, of course, found abundant literary expression, though few of the books which deal with the subject have any claim to be considered literature, and need not be named here. Midway between the two classes lies the greatest classic of all, the *Complete Angler* of Izaak Walton, so full of the mellowest wisdom and the most gracious wit that all Nature books may be tested by it as to their quality. But with William Gilpin and Gilbert White of Selborne there arose another Nature literature much more worthy of the name than any that had gone before, accepting only ancient Izaak of the craft of the anglers.

This form of Nature observation is purely English, for the dullness of St. Pierre [*St. Pierre’s Studies of Nature*, etc., by Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, 1784], the boyish somersaults of Topfer [Rodolphe Töpffer (?)], and the morbid introspection of [Étienne-Jean-Baptiste-Pierre-Ignace Pivert de] Senancour cannot take rank as true Nature literature.

And the fine flower of that tendency in the present century has been the

Wiltshire farm boy, Richard Jefferies, who wrote of the Wiltshire downs and copses, its meadows and woods as no district has ever been written about before. We may say that he wrote thirteen or fourteen stout octavo volumes about a single farm. No one has ever dreamed of doing this and remaining readable. Yet Jefferies has achieved the impossible, and that without an apparent effort.

Here is, in brief the life of Richard Jefferies: “Go”, said the Voice that dismisses the soul on his way to inhabit an earthly frame— “Go; thy lot shall be to speak of trees from the cedar even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, and of beasts also and of fowls and of fishes. All thy ways shall be ordered for thee, so that thou shalt learn to speak of these things as no man ever spake of them before. Thou shalt rise to great honour among men. Many shall love to hear thy voice above all the voices of them that speak. This is a great gift. Thou shalt also enjoy the tender love of wife and children. Yet the things that men most desire—riches, rank, independence, ease, health, and long life, these are denied to thee. Thou shalt be always poor; thou shalt live in humble places; the goad of necessity shall continually prick thee to work when thou wouldst meditate; to write when thou wouldst observe. Thou shalt never be able to sit down to rest; thou shalt be afflicted with grievous plaguing diseases, and thou shalt die when little more than half the allotted life of man is past. Go, therefore. Be happy with what is given and lament not over what is denied.”

I have no idea of giving more than a sketch of the life of Richard Jefferies which is synopsised in these words. You will find them with much more that is delightful in *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* [1888], by Walter Besant, one of the noblest and most generous testimonies ever paid by one literary man to another.

Richard Jefferies was born on the 6th November, 1848, at the farmhouse of Coate, which stands on the road between Swindon and Marlborough. He died at Goring in Sussex, on 14th August, 1887. Not forty years, yet how much spent! Not forty years, and how much gained! Forty years of life, and nearly twenty of literary work. Never a day of perfect health during that time. During all his later years suffering intensely from a mysterious and painful disease, which many operations failed to remove, and many doctors to understand.

He writes that gorgeous idyll, “The Pageant of Summer”, and all his readers picture the author a rural athlete, rejoicing in the glory of health. Actually he wrote it between the spasms of agony which often caused him often to lay down his pen while in act to write.

Why, then, more than of ninety and nine that went not astray, should we speak of a gospel in the works and life of this sheep that so long wandered afield and so late returned to the fold? [Cf. Jesus’ parable, Luke 15:3-7.]

Because there is that about Richard Jefferies that never was about any other man—unique, instinctive. It was some such man as Jefferies, in the old-time woods of an old world Arcadia, whom the savage people, wondering at his knowledge and the words that proceeded out of his mouth, took for a god and called Pan or mayhap Faunus. Someone thus instinctive of the soul, to whom the Nature voices came clear, who read manifold tongues in the whispering reeds, in the dry grass on the wold—to

whom the branches of the trees as they whipped against each other in the night season brought voices—was the god concerning whom the beautiful Nature myths of Helias were made. Had Jefferies lived in the English forests when Caesar came, he had either been made a god or got a dagger through him as a wizard.

Even as it was, in Coate and about Swindon there were many that hold *moony Dick* Jefferies, lying long and lazy about the hills, to be “no more nor right”.

And what marvel was that? “No one else”, he says himself, “seems to have seen the sparkle of the brook, or heard the music at the hatch, or to have felt back through the centuries; and when I try to describe these things to them they look at me with a stolid incredulity. No one seems to understand how I got food from the clouds, nor what there was in the night, nor why it is not just as good to look out of the window. They turn their faces away from me, so that perhaps after all I was mistaken, and there never was any such place, or any such meadows, and I never was there. And perhaps I shall find out also, when I pass away physically, that as a matter of fact there never was any earth.” [*My Old Village.*]

What wonder that this particular prophet had no honour in his own country? A country parson told Mr. Besant in Swindon itself that he hoped the *biography* of Richard Jefferies would not prove to be as dry as the *works* of Richard Jefferies. These, he said, with the cheerful dogmatism of his kind, were as dry as a stick and impossible to read. Yet as Mr. Besant points out, the good man was no doubt in his way a scholar. He lives to this day in the Jefferies country. All round him are the hills and downs described in the *Wild Life in a Southern County*, the *Gamekeeper at Home*, and a score of other volumes. Yet to him they are dead and speechless. It is true, therefore, that there will always be a large number of people to whom the writings of Jefferies do not appeal, because they do not know the language in which they are written. It is easy to find out if we are of that number, for there is one paper which is a perfect touchstone of our capacity to appreciate Jefferies. It is to be found in that volume called *The Open Air*, and in the famous article entitled “The Pageant of Summer”.

I have endeavoured to show before in this place that it was an incidental mission of Christ to bring back men to the study of outward Nature. Of course, this purpose was so infinitely subordinate to His great mission of salvation that it is not once dwelt upon in Scripture as a prominent feature of His life. Yet nonetheless it is so. For Christ alone had eyes to see the sky and the sea, the lilies of the field and the sower going forth in the morning. Also He used these things for His own higher purposes of explanation and exposition, but all the same He saw them, and they stand on record as His observations. I think that if Richard Jefferies had lived in Palestine in the time of Christ, he would have lain on his breast along with John—for they both loved all the things that the Father had made.

It is most sad to think that it was only at the end of his short life that Jefferies laid his head, very weary, upon the bosom of the Master—only, indeed, in order that he might go to his eternal sleep.

Richard Jefferies was different from most great men in this, that the religion of his boyhood seems to have made no mark upon him at all. It is manifest that he

attended church in the ordinary way, and sat in the pews with the worshippers in the little Wiltshire village, yet all the time remained the most absolute pagan at heart. He heard Christ preached, but he never saw him practised, and the whole observance seemed to him to be but “a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal”. [1 Corinthians 13:1]

Even as a boy he continually desired to get away out of the pews, and escape from the dreariness of the lip service to the whispering woods and the great green bosoms of the hills. Reared in a Christian land, in the bosom of a church that is called the church of the poor, Jefferies was as pure Greek in spirit as though he had been born in Attica—as pagan as though he had risen every morning that he might on some Baal mountain go up to worship the red disk of the rising sun.

He did not fall away from Christian belief. He never possessed one. He was not a backslider, for he had never gone forward. He never looked backward, for he had never put his hand to the plough. It is this which makes that beautiful act of faith by which in the last year of his life he gave himself in humble faith and trust to Christ the Saviour, so pathetic [full of pathos] and so touching. In the pride of manhood he came as a child. He learned a new Christ. He read the gospels, as it were for the first time. Their phrases were not polarised for him by routine reading. They were not staled by heartless repetition. They came to him fresh and clear as when they were first written down by simple men, who dreamt not of commentary and critical apparatus yet told of the Christ whom they had known as a man knows his familiar friend.

There is one thing that makes the good end [...] Jefferies so infinitely refreshing. [...] depths of Nature for a [...]. He has noted, conned, [...] her very mood and phase—and he has found comfort in none. Indeed, he knows that Nature has no anodyne for pain, no help in bitterest pain. She has no medicine for

*The heavy trouble, the bewildering care
That weighs us down who live and earn our bread.*

Jefferies seems to say with William Morris, in the foreward to the “Earthly Paradise”:

*Of Heaven and Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Nor make quick coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your fears,
Nor hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.*

Nothing more completely proves the necessity of a special revelation from God than the fact that men of all ages and aspirations have found the gospel written in the heavens and the earth altogether insufficient. If, indeed, the revelation of God be not written in Nature it is nowhere within the scope of our search—

*Not where beyond Orion,
Heave seas of stellar spray;
Not in the chasms of night*

That rend the milky way.

This Jefferies-note of sadness in Nature is the echo of the sadness in the unsatisfied heart of man, conscious of his higher destinies, yet either ignorant how to reach them or prejudice against “The Way” [Christianity, cf. John 14:6, Acts 9:2 ff.] that is the only way.

This has been tested by earnest seekers after truth in every age from Sophocles, the “mellow glory of the Attic stage”, to him who sang of him in later years, Matthew Arnold, the writer of “Dover Beach”, that dirge of dead faith.

*Sophocles long ago
Heard it in the Aegean, and brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery. We
Find also in the sound a thought
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.*

Now, to Jefferies the world was anything but naked and drear. It was richly peopled with the most beautiful objects—each one of which was the most absorbing interest to him. No pebble could he lift off the muddy road but it instantly became the centre of a whole world of imagination and historical parallel. How had it come there, whence had it got these scratches, whence that wearing of its angles, whence that red stain of earth among the surrounding gravel? Never, as he says himself, was there such an earth-lover [ref. *Hours of Spring* by Jefferies]. Yet his conclusion is that of Sophocles and Arnold, of Morris and Job [latter, The Bible].

For all his seeking, he found no more than Sophocles and Arnold had found before him. The sublime, self-centred, convinced certainty of William Wordsworth was not his, though probably Wordsworth is the only man of the century who can be compared with Jefferies in his knowledge of Nature.

But we must now look at Jefferies’ greatest book, albeit it is not one for babes. *The Story of My Heart* is the tale, wondrous strange and passing beautiful, of his struggles to attain what is not given to any son of man to reach without the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, a story of failure, full and acknowledged.

See the Nature worshipper on the crest of some smooth down above the Wiltshire plain. He makes, as he says, no outward show. The shepherd passing casually by might have thought the youth but resting on the sod, Like Tennyson’s hero, only “long and lazy”. But all the while within him there is a fierce turmoil. He is striving to find God, and he is crying for the elusive Somewhat which he knows is there and yet he cannot grasp. “O that I knew where I might find Him!” [Job 23:3]

“Sometimes,” he says, in the *Story of My Heart*, “in lying down on the sward, I

first looked up at the sky, gazing for a long time till I could see deep into the azure, and my eyes were full of the colour; then I turned my face down to the grass and the time, placing my hands at each side of my face so as to shut out everything and hide myself. Having now drunk deeply of the heaven above, and felt the most glorious beauty of the day, and remembering the old, old sea, which was but over yonder at the edge, I now became lost and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt deep down into the earth under, and high above into the sky, and further still to the sun and the stars. Still further beyond the stars into the hollow of space, and losing thus my separateness, seemed to become a part of the whole...

“I prayed that I might have a soul more than equal, far beyond my conception of these things of the past, the present, and the fullness of all life. Not only equal to these, but beyond, higher, and more powerful than I could imagine. That I might take from all their energy, grandeur and beauty, and gather it into me—that my soul might be more than the cosmos of life. I prayed with the glowing clouds of sunset and the soft light of the first star coming through the violet sky. At night with the stars according to the season. Now with the Pleiades, now with the Swan or burning Sirius, and broad Orion's whole constellation, red Aldebaran, Arcturus and the northern crown; with the morning star, the light-bringer, now and then when I saw it, a white gold ball in the violet purple sky, or framed about with pale summer vapour floating away as red streaks shot horizontally in the east. All the glory of the sunrise filled me with broader and furnace-like vehemence of prayer. That I might have the deepest of soul life, the deepest of all, deeper far than all the greatness of this visible universe, and even of the invisible, that I might have a fullness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond conception.” [*The Story of My Heart*, chap. I, para. 8 & 13-14.]

Now, I know of no such passage as that in all the literature of the soul. Here is a lad of twenty, palpitating to the fingertips with the widest thoughts, trying to span the universe and grapple in tight grips with the Almighty; yet not in the way of scientific understanding, but in the endeavour to touch the inner soul of which all these are but the *aura*, the palpable envelope.

It was Jefferies trying to wring God from the shut mouth of His own eternity. The way was plain and open, but he passed it by, for he could not see the sublime simplicity of “God so loved the world” [John 3:16] because the Pharisee and the Scribe sat in the gate, crying aloud that they alone knew the way, neglecting the gospel and making broad their phylacteries in the pride of their exclusiveness.

Jefferies was a poor proud man, sensitive with the super-sensitiveness of the bodily feeble. He felt the scorn of the rich and the exclusiveness of the vicar's clique. He tells us, for instance, how in his parish church, the poor Hodges of the neighbourhood had from time immemorial been compelled to sit in the draft by the door, till the discovery that this brought on chest complaints and many other troubles. This discovery was made, says Jefferies, with bitter and unwonted irony, “after many centuries in the year in which they received the franchise”. [Cf. *Hodge and His Masters* (citation?)]

But the fancied rapture of this time did not long endure. All went well so long as he was realising the great vague immensities, but sorrow and disappointment and

death came upon him, and the shots struck near home. Then it was of no account to contemplate the sun, or to sit cool in the immensity of the stars. Foiled and baffled, a dire pessimism grew over his manly and healthy soul. The light went out of the world.

Hearken to this seeker after God as he wails aloud in the bitterness of his disappointment. His image of Dagon is shattered [cf. 1 Samuel 5:2-7]:

“For grief there is no known consolation. It is useless to fill our hearts with bubbles. A loved one is gone, and as to the future, even if there be a future, it is unknown. To assure ourselves otherwise is to soothe the mind with illusions; the bitterness of it is inconsolable... There is no consolation. There is no relief... But let us, turning from the illusion of a directing intelligence, look earnestly for something better than a god, seek for something better than a prayer, and lift our souls to be with the *more than immortal* now.” [*The Story of My Heart* chap. XI, para. 4 & 5.] But it would not do. It could not do, indeed—for that way madness lay. And for Jefferies, slowly sinking into a hard and bitter grave, often altogether without money, seeing his wife and children put to the bare bored and in danger of *the parish* [Victorian welfare support]—what wonder is it that he lost heart?

But, on the other hand, it was just then that he found his soul.

It was well, for he had lost all else. Parts of his trials—his terrible surgical operations—are not for telling even in written words. Says Mr. Besant, “Picture to yourself this tall gaunt man reduced to a skeleton, not able to use his pen for more than a few minutes at a time, his spine broken down, his lungs affected, lying back on the sofa, his mind full of splendid thoughts that he cannot put upon paper, dictating sometimes when (for a moment or two) he is strong enough, resolved to make money that way to save himself the shame of applying to the Literary Fund, full of pain by day and night, growing daily weaker, but never losing heart or hope—is there in the whole calamitous history of authors a picture more full of sadness and pity than this?”

But in the nights when he lay sleepless, communing with himself, watching

The window slowly grow a glimmering square,

the Christian faith that had never been his came to him, and in all the fuller tide for coming so late. He had, as it were, been on the verge of believing for long—perhaps only his pride keeping him back. He had tried thoughts and emotions fast as the universe and eternal as the soul of man, he had wandered in the darkest valley of the shadow, but now it was God's time for the shadows to flee away.

He called to his wife to read to him from the Evangelists [gospels]. He would hear more and yet more of the words and work of Christ—most of the decease that He accomplished at Jerusalem.

Richard Jefferies was ripe for laying down his head,

*Most like a tired child at a show
Which now he's weird vision close,
Would childlike on his love repose
Who give earth his beloved sleep.*

He asked, says Mr. Besant, for no priest— “he desired no minister even to visit him as he lay a long while a-dying. He had no need of them, for he wanted none other assurance than the words and voice of Him who swept away all priests. He died listening in full faith and confidence to the words contained in that old book.”

Says his friend Mr. North the painter, “His wife said that their time had been for a long time spent in prayer together and reading St. Luke. Almost his last words to one that spoke of Christ were, ‘Yes, yes, that is so. Help, Lord, for Jesus’ sake. Darling, goodbye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain.’”

From which also the Lord save us, and give us as tender and trustful a way-going. I have told of the search, of the disappointment, and the final home-coming. The wandering bairn that cried aloud for its Father—and then, when on the instant no Father came to it in the darkness of the gloomy wood, cried aloud again, that he had no Father at all, nor any other child that lived—at last turned his face homeward with wae [woe] and yearning in his heart.

And while he was yet a great way off his Father saw him, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. [Luke 15:20, the parable of the prodigal son.]

And that is the whole gospel and evangel of the life of Richard Jefferies.

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