

neighbour, to believe that one tone of voice or one idiom of language is more agreeable to their ear than another? When children disagree and quarrel, the parent chastises them: is the god less prudent than the parent?"

Had Landor published an edition of his "Imaginary Conversations" after 1857, there can be little doubt that he would have included this characteristic piece, which has so far escaped the notice of his editors. I have only been able to indicate the scope of the conversation and to extract representative bits. The whole would occupy about six columns of this journal.

WALTER JERROLD.

THE RONDEAU

I

THE Rondeau is—if you've forgot—
A trifling, minor thing; no plot
To win the world's admiring eye
As to the Epic's majesty,
Or wealth of Sonnet; written not

As when with frenzied haste and blot
The Poet pours his Ballad, hot
From lovesick brain—a *jeu d'esprit*
The Rondeau is:

And though one may not bate a jot
Of all the points the rules allot—
The thirteen lines, the catch-words three,
The double rhyme, the symmetry—
From this example judge not what
The Rondeau is!

II

'Tis out of vogue, the censors cry,
A fashion of a day gone by,
When high-bred dame and gallant beau
Dallied within the silken show,
The bonds of ancient chivalry;

Dobson, Lang, Henley, skilled to try
Old modes, have wrought it gracefully,
But with new men new methods, so
'Tis out of vogue:

My friend, so long as you or I
Cherish a thing, it cannot die;
Flowers out of fashion long ago
Do still in careless gardens blow.
Pluck one and look—and tell me why
'Tis out of vogue!

H. RAPHOE.

RICHARD JEFFERIES IN LONDON

It might be imagined that any large city, and London most of all, would be abhorrent to such a mind as that of Jefferies, the sensitive lover of Wiltshire and Sussex downs—the prose-poet of Summer's pageant, the student of harvest and hay-field, of bird and beast and flower. Those who know Jefferies well are aware that this is an entire mistake. The mistake has its root partly in a popular misconception of this great writer. Critics and reviewers, who very imperfectly understood him, used to speak of him, with a touch of condescension, as merely a pastoral writer, a naturalist, a kind of Gilbert White. Jefferies was all this, but he was something more. He was a thinker, though not in the language of the schools; a philosopher, though he formulated no system. He may have begun with the externals of things—the life of the poacher and the gamekeeper and the labourer, the habits

and habitats of birds and flowers; but he passed on to the root-questions of existence, the underlying spirit, the quest of creation's secret, the thirst for a fuller "soul-life." He was never satisfied; he died yearning. "In the hearts of most of us," he says, "there is always a desire for something beyond experience." To such a man, the country was of supreme suggestion and never-failing loveliness; but city life had also its mysteries and its beauties. The red roofs and dense buildings had their own suggestiveness; there were the magnetism and sympathy of crowds, the flaming sunsets, the stars of night. "The sky above London is as full of interest as above the hills," he says in one of his papers; and he, like the poet of Westmoreland lakes and mountains, had witnessed the strange magic of a London sunrise. "I once watched the sun rise on London Bridge, and never forgot it." Every true artist knows the wonderful effects to be noted at times in London squares and on London bridges, and the true poet knows it also. It is only the small man, the limited sympathy, that sees no beauty in cities. It is easy to quote Cowper's hackneyed line: "God made the country and man made the town"; but Jefferies saw deeper than this. He once wrote an essay on the "Plainest City in Europe;" it was not London of which he wrote, but Paris. To him the best thing in Paris was the *Vénus Accroupie* of the Louvre, which he describes in a paper that shows how wonderful an art-critic he might have become. In a volume entitled "The Life of the Fields" he dared to introduce chapters on the sunlight of London squares; Venice, not on the Adriatic, but by the river in the East End. He did not believe that to see things it was necessary to travel far. "Open your eyes, and see those things which are around us at this hour." The life of the fields itself, he tells us, is to be found in London, if we only have eyes to see it.

Among the hills and field-hollows of Wiltshire he had dreamed his dreams, and thirsted for a richer draught of the soul-life that alone could satisfy; and when he came to London "still I thought my old thoughts." To him the grimy river was always making for the sea, and his soul travelled onward with it, to a haven of fuller existence.

"For I thirst with all the thirst of the salt sea, and the sun-heated sands dry for the tide, with all the sea I thirst for beauty."

And London itself, sordid, noisy, jarring, had hints of this divine beauty that his soul could follow. At night the stars were there:

"I never forget them, not even in the restless Strand; they face one coming down the hill of the Haymarket; in Trafalgar Square, looking towards the high dark structure of the House at Westminster, the clear bright steel silver of the planet Jupiter shines unwearied, without sparkle or flicker."

London produces its own sky, he says, and he thought that this sky could best be studied from the great bridges, where there is some breadth of horizon.

"Sometimes upon Westminster Bridge at night the scene is very striking. Vast rugged columns of vapour rise up behind and over the towers of the House, hanging with threatening aspect; westward the sky is nearly clear, with some relic of the sunset glow; the river itself, black or illuminated with the electric light, imparting a silvery blue tint, crossed again with the red lamps of the steamers."

Of the thousands that cross this bridge daily, few indeed pause to think that beauty of the open air, natural loveliness, may be found there; few have time to pause at all, unless they be strangers lingering to take a view of the Parliament buildings and the Abbey. But a Jefferies comes that way, and amidst all the outward distraction and the inward worry, the drudgery and anxiety of poverty, he notes the glimpses of the divine, the deep prevalent mystery of something that lies just beyond the senses, something that the senses only guess—something that may be felt among the lush meadows, or on the breezy downs, or here by the dingy London riverside. Even the monotony of red Bermondsey roofs was suggestive to Jefferies:

"These red-tiled roofs have a distinctiveness, a character; they are something to think about. . . . Under this surface of roofs what a profundity of life there is!"

If this endless succession of roofs could be found not unpleasant, it is little wonder that, standing in Trafalgar Square, the man could see a world of beauty before him.

"At my back, within the gallery, there is many a canvas painted under Italian skies, in glowing Spain, in bright southern France. But yet, if any one impartial will stand here outside, under the portico, and forgetting that it is prosaic London, will look at the summer enclosed within the square, and acknowledge it for itself as it is, he must admit that the view—light and colour, tone and shade—is equal to the painted canvas, is full as it were to the brim of interest, suggestion, and delight. Trace out the colour and the brightness; gaze up into the sky, watch the swallows, note the sparkle of the fountain, observe the distant tower chiselled with the light and shade."

The charm, the colour, the endless variety, are there; only the seeing eye is needed. It is well to be reminded sometimes, by the words of a genius like Jefferies, that the elements of beauty are never far to seek; if we miss them in town, we are not likely to find them in the country. Jefferies could ponder on profoundest mysteries in front of the Royal Exchange; they were mysteries older and deeper than those of finance. But men have yet little learned to think, to possess their souls; country solitudes are unspeakably dull to them, and they have not learned to make a solitude of thought for themselves in the thickest traffic and noisiest clamour of the city. They may ape a love of beauty, but the culture of it has not proceeded far enough for them to find it in the red roofs, the dusky river-side, the formal squares, the narrow streets. Jefferies was not a Londoner in the sense in which Dr. Johnson and Charles Lamb were Londoners; his true home was the swelling downs, the bracing uplands, the village of thatched cottages. But he saw London with the eye of a poet, and his soul also was at home there. Let us learn to remember that he was something more than a mere cataloguer of birds and flowers.

A. L. S.

A LITERARY CAUSERIE

THE POET OF THE ELEGY

WHEN Dr. Johnson wrote his famous criticism of "The Elegy" there was one important point which he overlooked, and the omission renders his censure nugatory. This is the wonderful manner in which Thomas Gray caught the atmosphere that was absolutely essential to his poem. You feel on reading the first four lines the entire sentiment of a winter evening in the country: the tolling curfew, the lowing herd winding slowly o'er the lea, the ploughman trudging homeward, and the gradual, closing darkness prepare the mind for all that follows. And never in the course of the poem does the author insert a phrase or even a syllable to destroy this fine illusion. In that sense the poem is one of the most perfect in the English tongue.

Some little time ago I was at Stoke Poges, and in spite of much that has been done to vulgarise the surroundings, it still was easily imaginable that the train of thought expressed in "The Elegy" should pass through the poet's mind as he sat in the shade of that yew-tree which still stands to remind us of him. There is an addition to the churchyard, which has taken the shape of an ordinary town cemetery, with grave-stones fresh from the sculptor's hands, and sentimental epitaphs, and glasses with flowers, and all that makes a modern burying-place so repugnant. But if you shut your eyes to this and pass on to the other side of the church, there is a little graveyard which must be now exactly as it was when Thomas Gray's eyes looked down on it:

"Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

Here the graves are un-headstoned. Nothing except the grassy mounds show where sleep the labourers of earlier

generations, their harvesting, their sowing and weeding, their mourning and love-making all done. If you can separate yourself entirely from the mawkish sentimentality of the modern part of the churchyard, here you will find the full force of that tide of feeling which Gray has so admirably expressed. And the country round about still represents the scenery he had in his mind, even though it is traversed daily by noisy motor-cars and other recent inventions. But the splendid trees, the rich fertile country, and even the cottages show little that has changed. The only difficulty is that we feel no longer the sense of seclusion which made Gray write:

"Some village-Hampden, that, with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."

It is a sentiment that has been widely disputed, as some people are of opinion that when genius is sent into the world it is bound to make its way, whatever be the barriers opposed to its progress. But were this so, then Nature would treat men as she treats nothing else. On the oaks in the park near at hand millions of acorns come into existence every year. Each of them has a potentiality of becoming an oak, but probably not one in ten years' growth is able to fulfil that destiny. And it is the same with almost everything else. Out of her fertile womb Nature produces with endless fecundity, casting away a million lives that one may live. So must it also be with the soul of man. Let us imagine one to be born with the genius of a poet or a painter into those surroundings that Gray pictured so vividly. It has been said that the best bat at cricket could never make a high score unless he gets the bowling. What were the chances of a rustic in Gray's time? He might have intellect, but intellect is like gold that has never been mined till its powers are set free by education; and the children of the poor in those days were often put to work at five or six years of age—the infants were armed with wooden clappers and sent out to scare birds, harder labour being given them as they acquired sufficient strength to bear it. Self-education was rendered nearly impossible by the fact that whole families were often crowded into a one-roomed cottage. The boy forced outside took to premature courtship as the only practicable amusement. Early marriages resulted and the young man with the heaven-sent genius had to drudge for the livelihood of a young family. No doubt some overcame these obstacles, but they must have proved too much for the ordinary man, and hence, with the clowns and yokels of the parish, are buried there those who in different conditions might have moved far beyond their fellows. They have passed into oblivion, but so have many who were considered their superiors. Every one who has made inquiries about the people of the past must have been struck by the forgetfulness that closes down over the rich as well as the poor. "We are all rushing to obscurity," said the late Lord Tennyson during one of the last years of his life, "some a little quicker than the others, but all of us are to be involved in it." Life is like a road that we have to pass along once and once only, and on the way is no memorial of the travellers who have made the journey and can never return. So the "Elegy" is in reality a dirge for the sons of rural labour and a sign of the poet's understanding of their fate and his compassion for them. In his holiday visits to Stoke Poges he would have seen much to remind him of their pitiable lot. Some such idea possessed my mind as, in the dusk of a winter evening, I sat under the poet's yew-tree close adjoining the ancient little church wherein he used to pray. Among the tombs is that of his mother, and there are few epitaphs more affecting than that which he inscribed to "the careful tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her."

Outside the limits of the "Elegy" I think I like Gray best in his letters, which are some of the very best in the English language. There you find the same elements that