

policy was to use extensively this factor as a policy of expansion of that imperialist Government. And the same policy is carried out still more extensively by the rulers of Moscow to-day.

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## RICHARD JEFFERIES: 1848-1948.

JOY is always attractive and infectious, and this year, 1948, falls on the centenary of a writer whose joy—a strong joy and radiance won against adversity—is a prominent quality in his writing, and of whom a fellow-writer has said: "He enjoyed, simply and passionately, his own life and the life of others, and in his books that enjoyment survives."

Richard Jefferies was born in November, 1848, at Coate Farmhouse, near Swindon. In 1887, after five years of illness, during which he contrived with magnificent courage to complete thirteen books, he died at Goring, near Worthing. His life was uneventful; only his inner life was unusual and exciting, and of this we have not any complete or entirely satisfactory record. Such record as we have is to be found in his writings, especially in *Bevis*, *Wood Magic*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and *Field and Hedgerow*. There are also some note-books in manuscript, but eight of the twelve have disappeared. Two books of selections are now published.

Jefferies has ensured for himself an enduring place in English literature for the quality of his prose, his mysticism, the fullness and attractiveness of his writing about Nature. Along with W. H. Hudson and Gilbert White he may be considered to be among the three greatest writers on Nature. His greatness lies principally in his combination of realism and romance, seen, for instance, in the second section of "One of the New Voters": his spirit of intense joy despite the constant struggle with the three giants of disease, despair and poverty, his "Englishness," his interpretation of the English countryside and country people, and his "radiant vision" which he had the ability to make real to others. "Wild Flowers" illustrates well these features.

It is interesting to note that in his short life of thirty-eight years Jefferies completed the material for twenty-two books: W. H. Hudson, who lived from 1841 (this seems now to be the settled date of his birth, those of 1846 and 1861 being now discarded) completed twenty-four published books. Hudson and Jefferies make a fascinating contrast; the former owing nothing to the earlier author. Perhaps had the two men met, neither would have felt fully at ease with the other, although admiration and companionship would not have been lacking. Both have made a unique contribution to our literary heritage. Edward Thomas is, perhaps, the nearest in his personality and work to Jefferies, and yet there are immense differences; nor did Jefferies' writings influence Thomas's ideas or style to any noticeable degree.

There is, and will remain, a degree of mystery around the rich, strong personality of Jefferies. He has not found any biographer with as long and intimate a knowledge as Morley Roberts had of Hudson. And, like Hudson, Selous, and most of the other Nature writers, Jefferies was remote, reserved, secretive, sensitive. Also he was sensuous ("Every spot of colour is a sort of food") and most tender. More conflict has gathered round his personality than around that of Hudson, who was, or rather appeared to be, less complex.



This conflict is due, in part, to the period in which Jefferies lived and the new ground he worked on. But perhaps it is also due to the extraordinary contrast between his outward life and his writings, together with his intense intellectual and spiritual development, his growth into a poet. To-day the legend of his hysteric melancholy has almost died, although as recently as 1939 this legend was accepted by an author. Would Jefferies have clarified his personality for his readers had he lived longer?

From his own books we can ascertain the authors and works which were his favourites. However, none of these, except Homer, the early English Herbals, Darwin, and Goethe's *Faust* have made any appreciable difference to his work. His genius lies in the originality, strength, and sincerity of his personality as expressed in his books. How, while living so solitary and hard a life, he managed to develop his thought and to achieve an exquisite English style in his later works is a problem. It is a fine achievement. Doubtless from his father and a few relatives and friends he obtained some stimulus. Only in the last year did he come to know White's *Selborne*.

Essentially Jefferies is a writer who has hewn out a style suitable to his needs. It is charged with vigour, vitality, and sincerity. His English is perspicuous, appropriate, and often persuasive. His vivid detailed descriptions let us see the person or event without any strain. After about 1881 a marked lyrical quality is added. He has a curious way of repeating words and phrases. Thus: "A thousand thousand bubbles rising to the surface would whiten the stream—a thousand thousand succeeded by another thousand thousand—and still flowing." Rarely does he fail to split an infinitive; but was not this common in the last century? Often his constructions are loose, and weaknesses, such as the separation of the relative word or clause from its antecedents, occur frequently. His education, his ill-health, his being forced to produce articles to maintain himself and his family may in some measure explain them. Words he chose with very great care. Since some extracts from his field note-books have recently been published, it is possible to see how accurate his writing is, and how, in some instances, he worked up his material.

His work falls into two divisions. In the first period he wrote objectively, crisply, as a countryman and a farmer's son about the country and daily life there; *The Gamekeeper at Home* is a sample of this. From 1881 the change is distinctively shown. His imaginative powers have grown, his work now being shot through with the vision which was not only within him but which had become articulate. The prose-poet, the mystic find utterance. "Nature and Eternity" and "Hours of Spring" illustrate the later phase. Henry S. Salt wrote in 1894 of his style: "As a master of language Richard Jefferies is equalled, at his best, by few contemporary writers and surpassed by fewer still, so perfectly melodious are his sentences, so full of tender gravity, so simple, yet so subtle in their structure and modulation. . . . Jefferies is a great lover of the refrain . . . it is a habit to haunt and circle round and revisit some special phrase or cadence, whose repetition may serve as a suggestive undertone to his melody." Again and again occur the ideas and subjects which absorbed him. Hudson wrote that "The sense of beauty is God's best gift to the human soul," and Jefferies' passionate search through the world for beauty proves that he had a very great share in this gift. How much rapture it brought him! From his autobiography we know how engrossed



he was with the subjects of immortality, prayer, soul-life, the fullest, wisest use of human life, the planned elimination of foolish, childish improvisation in human affairs, and his abhorrence of conventionalism, insincerity, and purely surface existence. He had a deep appreciation of the individual; his values in human existence were those of the great thinkers through the ages rather than of the commercial-minded person. His perception of the illusion of time, of the oneness of past and present, of Now being Eternity, is expressed repeatedly; it runs through *Wood Magic* and *The Story of My Heart*.

Social conditions shocked him, and he tried to make the public realise the hardness of the life of the country worker. Of art he writes again and again, and much of interest and fascination is contained in these ideas; for him this is another way of reaching to Nature. The sun, the wheat, the movements and habits of animals, the play of shadows on surfaces, the stars, the wind, birds, wild flowers, colour, clouds, cows, hills, downs, light, the observing of Nature in a narrow locality—these are some of the topics to which he returns again and again. In examining his way of treating these subjects it is possible to see how much he could extract from any experience, how much he observed. His dissatisfaction with the daily trivialities of life ("Life is so little and so mean," he exclaims) and a keen realisation of the littleness of the finite increased and galled him more and more. Both by temperament and by his circumstances he was a revolutionary, in spite of his external compliance with conventions.

Hudson and Gilbert White had a much wider intellectual background. Moreover, they lacked the mystical element, although by some Hudson is considered a mystic. And they had not the background of an unhappy home life during youth. However, this would seem to have dated only from about his fifteenth year, and his early marriage gave him again the happiness of a congenial family circle. Yet judging by *Amaryllis at the Fair* the wounds made by the friction and incompatibility between his parents were deep.

His mysticism, most familiar from his *Story of My Heart*, but occurring in his work from 1881, even in *Wood Magic*, may be said to have the four marks described by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Passages in *Bevis*, such as the chapter about the Zodiac, morning in the tropics, and many pieces throughout this story bear witness to his having always been subject to mystical states. His preoccupation with immortality, eternity, prayer, soul-life, his longing for union with the Infinite, are matters absorbing the attention of the mystics of any age. So intensely and longingly did he look at natural phenomena, as if, by patience and desire, he would wrest the secret of life and of the Deity from it. This is an essentially religious attitude. In his greatest lyrical outpourings he suggests a vision of the world which reminds us of that of Dame Julian of Norwich when, in the fourteenth century, she saw the world as a hazel nut. He had a joy greatly in excess of that of the average person and which effectively helped the bearing of his sufferings. His mystical writings faintly suggest Richard Rolle of Hampole and St. Augustine, both in the matter and in the ecstatic quality, and certain paragraphs suggest Shelley.

About his religion much has been written, most of it speculative, for he and his family were reserved. Some of his statements are rather contradictory, but this is understandable in a young man finding his way alone in the deepest channels of thought. In his note-books he



wrote : " I am an infidel " ; yet it is uncertain whether his attitude was a permanent one or if it expressed a passing mood. Many strong personalities have repudiated orthodox religion, and Jefferies lived during a period when agnosticism aroused stronger interest than it does to-day. Perhaps he was an agnostic rather than a pantheist or an atheist. But no one will ever know with certainty. *The Story of My Heart* is an incomplete statement. What would have been the difference if the work had been written in old age ? It is illuminating and fascinating to contrast Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago* and his *A Hind in Richmond Park* and, from a different angle, St. Augustine's *Confessions* with Jefferies' autobiography and his last essays.

Why did he not write poetry ? one often asks oneself. Having fashioned so melodious a prose style it would seem normal to compose lyrics. But the two poems which have been published cannot be regarded as good or great poetry. Was it lack of ear or of music, because Jefferies can be very unmusical in his prose ? Was it lack of knowledge, of wide acquaintance with poetry ? Was it lack of technique or of interest ? It is known that he cared for *Faust* and for Dryden, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Homer, and the early English ballads. With Hudson, whose prose is on a very high level, the same failure occurs with his few published poems, which are very inferior.

In comparing Jefferies' work with that of Selous, Gilbert White, Waterton, John Clare, Charles G. D. Roberts, and other Nature writers, we see immediately the difference. He has a different and a more splendid style and matter than any of these. He is, perhaps, nearest to Whitman, whose writings he appreciated. There is some affinity between W. H. Davies and Jefferies, and D. H. Lawrence is thought to be mentally akin.

By some Jefferies is regarded as a philosopher and a prophet, but it seems extremely doubtful if he so thought of himself. Neither his circumstances nor his temperament or talent fitted him to be this. He was dogmatic because he felt strongly. He penetrated deeply into the human misery he saw about him, he diagnosed the cant and insincerity which, possibly because of social conditions of the last century, were more widespread than at present. The essence of his thought is the expressing of his personal vision of life, the making clear and concrete the delight he felt in Nature and the simple, lasting things of life, and his sharing with readers the results of his rare powers of observation. The most attractive and enduring gift he has is his sense of the newness and freshness of everything, the beauty contained in each separate blade of grass, each wild flower, the loveliness of the dew on the grass, the movements of the hare, the song and life of every bird and insect—the enchanting rapture of existence, if we will but look and watch with quietude. As he has written : " Fir tree tops joy in seeing—living the problem. I cannot understand the problem, but it is a great delight to feel and live it looking at the tops of the firs." And in one of his finest essays, published posthumously in *The Hills and the Vale*, he says : " Light and colour, freedom and delicious air, give exquisite pleasure to the senses ; but the heart searches deeper, and draws forth food for itself from sunshine, hills and sea. Desiring their beauty so deeply, the desire in a measure satisfies itself. It is a thirst which slakes itself to grow the stronger. It springs afresh from the light, from the blue hill-line yonder, from the gorse-flower at hand ; to seize upon something that seems in them, which they symbolise and speak of ; to take it away within oneself ; to absorb it and feel



conscious of it—a something that cannot be defined, but which corresponds with all that is highest, truest, and most ideal within the mind. It says, Hope and aspire, strive for largeness of thought. . . . No system, no philosophy yet organised in logical sequence satisfies the inmost depth—fills and fully occupies the well of thought."

D. E. MARSHALL.

## DANISH PROBLEMS.

THE chief problems by which Denmark is to-day confronted are external, namely, that of South Slesvig and the question of Scandinavia's attitude towards the Western Union. After the first world war, the plebiscite held in North Slesvig was overwhelmingly in favour of return to Denmark, which had been despoiled of the whole of Slesvig (and Holstein) by the Prussians in 1864. But the plebiscite in South Slesvig, held at the same time, resulted in a pro-German majority, so that many Danes to-day regard with suspicion the desire of a great number of South Slesvigers to have their province re-incorporated in the Motherland. "How," said the late Christmas Möller to me about a year ago, "how can one believe in the sincerity of people who in so short a time have adopted a different ideal? If they express the same hope in twenty years, that will be another story." The Danish Government also prefers to wait before coming to a definite decision, seeing that so many of its citizens are of the same opinion as Christmas Möller, who was a wise statesman, while perhaps an almost equal number declare that what was stolen in 1864 should obviously be restored. Therefore, when the British Government, in whose zone of Germany South Slesvig lies, offered it to Denmark with or without a plebiscite, the prudent Government in Copenhagen declined to accept it. The small neighbour of a potential Great Power has to look ahead.

In the course of a recent tour of South Slesvig, it became more and more obvious how complicated this problem is; I was left with uncertainty as to whether, if a plebiscite were now to be held, the pro-Danish or the pro-German party would prevail. The language which the farmers themselves speak does not always harmonise with their sentiments—one whom I visited is and always has been pro-Danish, though he speaks only German. His farm has been in the possession of his family more than 400 years, and his language is due to the fact that he had no opportunity of attending a Danish school. He is by no means what has been called a Bacon-Dane, influenced by the hope of good things coming to him from Denmark; he has had to suffer for his opinions, the district in which he lives being pro-German. He told me that he is rather isolated, although his neighbours came to congratulate him on his silver wedding. One of his nearest neighbours, a strong pro-German, speaks Danish as well as German.

There was a time, notably in the eighteenth century, when the Dukes of Slesvig-Holstein and the gentry had such power that, although those provinces were a part of Denmark, it was an understood thing that the language in the elected council should be German. As late as 1843 this continued, and when in that year a merchant from Haderslev got up and spoke in Danish, which was also the language of two-thirds of the people, there was a wild demand that he should instantly stop or speak in German. The Royal Family which reigned