

John Richard Jefferies, his Worst and his Best

The Centenary Lecture, delivered, Sunday August the Second, 1987 at the Arts Centre, Swindon, Wiltshire by Alain A. Delattre, G.F.W. (Hon.)

Inscribed to the Late Big Bad John Milnes, G.F.W.
of Temple Farm, Rockley, nr. Marlborough

Second rate Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank you, and Eureka.

Thank you for your presence and, he hopes, your attention to a second rate, worse, a French lecturer; we must be second rate since, on the occasion of Jefferies' first centenary, that of his birth, thirty-nine years ago, Geoffrey Grigson declared: "Jefferies has always captured the second rate." And Eureka because, with typical Gallic modesty I bluntly break the news to you, it has taken me only twenty-five years to solve a mystery you have not solved in a hundred.

My Firstly should be so startling to all but a few, my Secondly so obnoxious to most, that I balanced long and considered the demagogic solution of giving only Thirdly, that should please all.

Firstly will make you laugh if it prove wrong, but then I will console myself by remembering Jefferies' humiliations; you cannot possibly scorn, deride, and ridicule me any more than he was at Snodshill-Coate and in Swindon by his own kith and kin, his rustic neighbours and his colleagues, in London and abroad by scores of critics ever since his first book was published.

Secondly may induce you to thrash me. If it does, solace again I will seek in Jefferies' life story, and I will beseech you to content yourselves with giving me a black eye, as Fred Prince, a labourer, is reported having given him. If you go on hitting, my hope is that you stop short of beating me to silage, as his Baden brothers-in-law once did to him, in front of Daye House with, perhaps, Jessie having to watch the disgracing scene, under the elms a storm blew down in 1964.

Secondly may anger you because it shows Jefferies not only as a fifth rate writer, far below Mrs. Cartland herself and her inexhaustible secretions, but also as an objectionable private man; besides, my objections to the man do not in the least apply to his voyeurism or his sadism; in times of marching in broad daylight with official benediction along the thoroughfares of Paris, London and New York of crowds of males joyfully flaunting their gaiety and of females tartly proclaiming themselves harlots, the harmless literary sadist and Peeping Tom we stumble against at every corner of Jefferies' books should no longer scare any of us. As he, in one of his rare fits of genuine English humour puts it in 'The Bathing Season', they have "drowned Mrs. Grundy". I have. I hope you have too.

Now you begin to have a vague notion of the licking you will give me, let me give you an inkling of the fun I am to give you.

Firstly shall be uproariously funny, if wrong, because it consists in proving that I have discovered the keystone whose absence had, for a century, doomed every critical biography of Jefferies to failure, as it is the virtue of a keystone to give an arch strength and unity, the result of its absence to entail inevitable collapse.

The keystone is that Jefferies was decidedly eidetic and, to a lesser degree, synesthetic.

If there are psychologists among you, they have immediately understood the meaning and importance of the statement; but you do not need be a trained specialist to understand; you must only read a thrilling book which is on the shelves of every University Department of Psychology library the wide world over, *A prodigious Memory* - translation of French title by A.R. Luria.

Jefferies was an English Veniamin who never met his Luria and, consequently, lived and died confusedly feeling there was something prodigious in himself, but mistook it all the time for something else he could never acquire, literary talent of the first magnitude.

For that very small part of my audience, if any, who do not know what “eidetic” and “synesthetic” mean, who Luria and Veniamin were, here is the - rather longish, I am afraid, but indispensable, explanation.

Oxford English Dictionary quoting Encyclopaedia Britannica:

“Eidetic: an image which revives an optical impression with hallucinatory clearness. (...) An object may be eidetically seen immediately after it has been removed from sight or after a considerable period of time (...) has elapsed.”

Concise Oxford Dictionary:

“(... of mental image) having unusual vividness of detail, as if actually visible. Person able to see eidetic images.”

Here is Veniamin’s story: the editor of a paper in the nineteen twenties at morning briefing saw that one of the reporters took absolutely no written note of the long list of people he was to call on in the day, each having numerous questions to answer. The editor was not pleased, but before giving him a dressing, he asked him please repeat your orders, which Veniamin immediately did verbatim. The editor expressed his surprise, and Veniamin was not less surprised. Wasn’t it quite normal that one should repeat what one had just been told? Didn’t everybody do the same? He had never noticed anything remarkable about his own memory.

The editor suggested Veniamin to consult Luria, a young psychologist in his early twenties, Veniamin himself being about thirty. Veniamin went to Luria’s laboratory; Luria then wrote four columns of thirteen figures from one to ten on a sheet of paper; Veniamin examined it and, after mentally checking it, repeated it exactly. That was the first of a long series of tests, each carefully recorded, which extended over thirty years, and have become a classic in psychology. Veniamin could repeat the numbers backwards from centre to beginning or end, give the outer figures, start backwards or forwards from any figure anywhere on the list. Asked how he did achieve such a feat of memory, he answered that after the list had been removed from his sight, he went on seeing it as if it were still before his eyes. All he had to do then was to read the image. Hundreds of tests, far more difficult than this were carried out and, still more marvellous, fifteen years after any

of the different tests had been made, Veniamin could repeat exactly what he had seen so long before; he only had to call back first the place, year, and circumstances when the test had been made, every test different from any other, and he did it. In fact, as we shall see later, Veniamin's memory problem was not how to remember, but how to forget.

What "synesthetic" means I will explain later; but I am certain that many of you are already guessing what I am driving at and, I hope, less willing to deride me.

The question on your lips is then: "How do you know, why can you say that Jefferies was eidetic?"

The answer is, because I sensed it and because he has told us.

We, the second rate, one and all, from the first, Besant, then Salt, Thomas, Arkell, to the last, Dr. Keith, to name only those who have written a full book on Jefferies, not excepting even Looker, with whom I must deal separately, because his edition of the notebooks is a shame, we felt there was something extraordinary in Jefferies.

We felt it for two reasons; first, his absolutely unique rendering of natural scenes; second, apart from that, he was not second, but fifth, tenth, rate; the very contrast "captured" us.

My Gallic bragging consists in proclaiming myself the first who realized that Jefferies has told us, several times, that he was eidetic.

Twice at least he did it clearly, and a third time, glaringly. But he never fully realized himself what that meant. Please remember what I told you of Veniamin; he was thirty before he knew that he had a prodigious memory; if he had been run over by a car on his way to Luria's lab, the world would never have known it either.

It is in 'A Roman Brook' that we find a clear, unmistakable description of Jefferies' eidetic memory: "The brook has forgotten me but I have not forgotten the brook.... I wonder if any one else can see it in a picture before the eyes as I can, bright, and vivid as trees suddenly shown at night by a great flash of lightning. All the leaves and branches and birds at roost are visible during the flash. It is barely a second; it seems much longer. Memory, like the lightning, reveals the pictures in the mind. Every curve, and shore, and shallow is as familiar now as when I followed the winding stream so often."

If you read this as I did before I knew Veniamin, it strikes you as a nostalgic memory of the past, in musical prose, with an exclamation: "I wonder if any one else can see it in a picture before the eyes as I can..." This, before I had read Luria's book, was just a sort of rhetorical question that did not want an answer, or a hyperbole, an exaggeration, as when we are asked "Do you remember first meeting your wife twenty years ago?", and we answer: "As if it was yesterday!" But now I know Veniamin, I understand Jefferies' meaning thus: he does see the brook again, fifteen years after having left it, as you and I would see it if we had a photograph of it, or were actually looking at it. Which is widely, radically, not to say totally, different.

These remarks apply to a passage from 'Walks in the Wheat-fields', an essay published in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in 1887:

"Twenty-five years ago I went into a camera obscura, where you see miniature men and women, coloured photographs alive and moving... I

was only there a few moments, and I have never been in one since, and yet so inexplicable a thing is memory, the picture stands before me now clear as if it were painted and tangible. So many millions of pictures have come and gone upon the retina, and yet I can single out this one in an instant, and take it down as you would a book from a shelf. The millions of coloured etchings that have fixed themselves there in the course of those years are all in due order in the portfolio of the mind, and yet they cannot occupy the place of a pin's point. They have neither length, breadth, nor thickness, none of the qualifications of mathematical substance, and yet they must in some way be a species of matter. The fact indicates the possibility of still more subtle existences."

The extracts from 'A Roman Brook' and 'Walks in the Wheat-fields' make things clear; the glaring description of his eidetic memory Jefferies has left us blessed be Looker, who published it in 1944, is to be found in *Hyperion*, thus:

"There was once a youth In an obscure country village, quite lost in the rudest and most illiterate county of the West..." - that's you, I'm afraid -

"who passed a great part of his time reading books and dreaming, so much so, that he was useless upon the farm. —. If he had once seen a thing, or a face, or a landscape, he did not recollect it; that is, he did not recollect that he HAD seen it (which is what most people mean when they say "We remember"); he saw it again, standing as clearly before him as his own face in a mirror. It was not a flat surface, not an outline, but the thing itself, with light all round it.

Time rather strengthened than effaced the impression; so that after the lapse of fifteen years he could still see the dark hollows of the waves driven before the stormy wind which he used to watch beside the lake."

Could we dream of a more complete and accurate description of an eidetic memory? It is almost, to a word, absolutely to a fact, the scientific explanation chosen by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Oxford Concise* respectively forty and one hundred years after Jefferies described his own memory. Besides, it is probably Luria's lifelong study of Veniamin's memory and personality, and the facts narrated in *A Prodigious Memory*, that led to E.B.'s O.E.D.'s and O.C.'s definitions.

So that, if I be not this moment piling ridicule on myself Jefferies high, all his writings, and especially his fiction, in which, under the thinnest possible disguises, he keeps describing nobody but himself, himself in real life but also in his day-dreams, all his writings, including the worst - perhaps even more the worst - should become a document for psychologists, the lifelong evidence written day after day, far more regularly than even Luria's observation of the Russian Veniamin, of an English Veniamin who never met his own Luria.

For the literary critic, the interest is equal.

As for me, since I discovered my keystone, I have been passionately re-writing, having destroyed all my former work, the story of not simply the man alone, but that of a little world whose centre he is, a family and village

Saga whose roots plunge into a very remote past, centuries ago, and which will end with, and include, the present Centenary celebrations.

That was why I begged our Secretary, Cyril Wright, the great Helpful who offered me his hand as I was drowning in my Jefferies Slough of Despond, which I will describe later, I begged Cyril let me speak last; if I win, Jefferies wins with me; if I lose, for him it will be just one more humiliation - not painful, since posthumous -; but for me, a beautifully Jefferisian final catastrophe, proving once for all that he has always captured the... tenth rate.

Perhaps you think that eidetic memory is a wonderful gift, bound to make rich and happy whoever is endowed with it; especially a nature writer, who has only a few cryptic notes to take in the open air, which he will use as pegs to hang¹ the complete pictures he brings back to the silence of his study, and just copy from the models.

It is true that eidetic memory can play that role fully; but the possession of a complete album of colour photographs does not make a great painter, or writer. It can, it does, help, that is all. Otherwise, it is far from being a blessing; it did not help Veniamin much in his life. In fact, the monstrous development of one of the fundamental components of a personality must unbalance it. In Jefferies' case, added to the terrible traumas of his youth, to his shy, proud, keen-sensed, high-strung, character to his rejection by and of his neighbours, it proved a curse. He became a sort of Jekyll-Hyde: he hardly recognized his day-dreams as dreams, they had such force, presence, duration, that they blurred the perceptions of the present, became intimately mixed with them; he could no longer tell which was which. Besides, for him - and this is one of the central, most original ideas, most recurrently insisted upon in his strange *Story of my Heart*, for him Time does not exist; it is an illusion other people, not he, entertain.

For us, indeed, the past recedes and gradually dies away; but to him nothing became blurred; not only the images remained intact in his memory, always ready to resurrect with hallucinatory precision, but also the wounds, the pains, the slights endured years before, and they were as keenly felt as if they had just been suffered; in fact, he did suffer them again and again, endlessly.

Such a man could not possibly live as anybody else in an environment totally blind to his predicament.

So the answer to his question in 'A Roman Brook' is: "No, John-Richard, nobody can see the brook as you do." Nobody did. And nobody could even guess what you meant when they read you. Myself least of all... for twenty-four years.

Now do I understand the tragedy of your life, now I can safely I hope, tell your friends how you turned from a sentimental, loving, shy, reserved and proud, boy, into a sort of Hyde, who knew there was in himself the making of a good Jekyll, and fought desperately to suppress the former and liberate the latter, but was doomed to fail by circumstances."

I am afraid ninety minutes is far too short a time for me to say all the title of my lecture promised, but if I had to stop now the main, the capital message I wanted to transmit on the occasion of the Centenary, the keystone to the Jefferies arch, the explanation of what Besant, the year of

Jefferies death, called “a phenomenon in literature”, I am certain I have delivered. Right or wrong, my Jefferies.

A rapid account of A Frenchman’s Progress from this Jefferies to that which is to Come:

Twenty-five years ago, having read much about Jefferies in the course of research for a State Doctorate Thesis, in Besant, Salt and Thomas, but by him only a French digest of *Bevis*, and been captured by it, I landed on your shores.

I had long been an enthusiastic admirer of your gorgeous literature, poetry in particular, nature poetry above all, for instance, all that concerns nightingales.

Besant, Salt and Thomas had moved me, and Grigson enraged me on Jefferies’ behalf, humiliating me personally, by writing: “... as one may see from a bibliography of those who have written about him, Jefferies has always captured the second rate... This weakness - this ordinariness and softness - in Jefferies tunes with the huge body of easy writing about the English country-side.”

“I will”, thought I, “prove Grigson a fool; a funny notion indeed, this sliding scale between critics and writers! First rate critics for first rate writers, say Keats and Stevenson, second rate critics, lecturers and audiences for second rate writers like Jefferies; the Bard, who does not compete, probably remaining the special preserve of the Himalayan critic, Mr. Grigson himself.”

I payed a religious visit to Broadwater Cemetery, then drove on to Coate and Jefferies Land, to Swindon Library and its precious Jefferies shelves, to read what he, whom the inscription on his grave describes as “The Prose Poet of England’s Fields and Woodlands”, had to say, among other subjects, about nightingales.

My own feeble memory was ringing with the music of three nightingales. First, Shakespeare’s, just a few lines in the dialogue of the tragic lovers of Verona:

“Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day;
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierc’d the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree;
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.”

Then Keats’s:

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as if of hemlock I had drunk;
Darkling, I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call’d him soft names...
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!”

And finally the most complete, and scientifically accurate rendering of the eerie mixture-of celestial bliss and exquisite torture in the nightly song of Philomel, of its almost sudden merging, after hours of soloing, into the universal bird symphony of peep-of-day, Bridges'

Nightingales

Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come,
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom
Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods?. O, might I wander there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!

Nay, barren are those mountains, and spent the streams:
Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound
For all our art.

Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,
Dream, while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

From the pen of The prose Poet of England's Fields and Woodlands, whose birthplace, where he spent two thirds of his life, stands within easy walking distance of two Nightingale Farms, I found this: three or four times, mentioned casually throughout fiction and essays, the mere name of the bird, with a little more trite detail in an essay disappointingly entitled 'Nightingale Road', and another essay, worthless as literature, teeming with true and accurate detail, as the rule is with most of Jefferies' topical writing, but crowned in the middle by a perfectly spoony remark. Jefferies refers to the times before the Wild Bird Protection Act was passed:

"Scarcely any bird that visits us and breeds in our country is not shy and at the same time more stupid. In the 'good old days of bird-catching' it was child's play to snare them. A couple of roughs would come down from town and silence a whole grove. The nightingale would watch the trap being laid, and pounce on the alluring meal-worm as soon as the trapper was out of sight."

The essay is entitled 'Nightingales'.

And the more I read in Swindon library, the more disappointed I became, especially as I took advantage, in my short stay, of the presence of Jefferies' rarest books, which are to be found there only, and are his worst.

Most of you, certainly, have not had, like me, to acquire merit by wading through his incredible three-deckers, through the Early Fiction edited by a lady of charming and promising name and surname, Grace Toplis... and I shudder when I think that, some day or other, just as I rediscovered the surprising 'Ben Tubbs Adventures', his first, and in some respects his best work of fiction, and Mr. Matthews *The Rise of Maximin* which, I hope Mr. Matthews will agree, may well be his very worst, someone will dig up, not merely Only a Girl, a probable draught of *The Dewy Morn* or of *Amaryllis at the Fair*, but also the lost tragedy of 'Caesar Borgia, the King of Crime'.

Then, although, strange to say, my admiration of the essential *Bevis*, and of the great nature essays I was reading one by one, never flagged, I fell and sank deep into my Jefferies Slough of Despond, and long it was before my own Helpfuls - Bunyan had one, I two - held out their hands to drag me out.

Jefferies' shortcomings have been so minutely numbered by so many writers and critics before me, in English so far better than mine, that quotations from them will save me the time and spare me the pain of pleading the case myself.

Besant opened fire in 1888: "How could the same hand write the coarse and clumsy Scarlet Shawl and such sweet and delicate work?... the wonder of it ! How COULD such a man write these works... The thing cannot be wholly explained. It is a phenomenon in literature."

Salt followed in 1894, speaking of Jefferies' mannerisms, laxity, over-diffuseness, shambling, slipshod, cataloguing style, ugly solecisms, desultory discursive habit. He added: "... of humour there is hardly a trace in the whole series of his volumes, under any circumstances could he have become a novelist, his landscapes themselves show traces of the same deficiency, too vague and disconnected..."

For Henley (1913) "the style is too formal and sober, the English seldom other than homely, there is overmuch of the reporter and nothing like enough of the artist... he is bent upon emptying his notebooks in decent English."

Thomas, (1908), Jefferies' best biographer, and deepest admirer, thought that "his lonely, retiring, and yet emphatic egoism made a hundred mistakes, narrow, ill-considered, splenetic, fatuous... There is not an uncommon word, nor a word in an uncommon sense, all through Jefferies' books." This is true for general vocabulary, false for country lore. Thomas goes on: "He did not make great phrases, and hardly any single sentence would prove him a master. Something there was in him... which... repelled. Something which creeps into his writings, particularly in the more emphatic parts..."

Arkell, in 1933, spoke of stories "too bad to be true". Margaret Maison, more recently, baptized him "the Emperor of inimitable balderdash".

The curtest and most severe judgement came from one of Jefferies contemporaries and fellow-writers, Erehon Butler who, in a letter to Miss Savage, wrote: "... Richard Jefferies is an ass."

With almost all this I agree, not forgetting that in the Danish kingdom of literature, nobody escapes stricture. The Bard himself does not; Johnson said it was impossible to find six lines in Shakespeare without a fault, seven at most, and Greene called him a Shake-scene and upstart crow. Yet these

are but two feathers from the Swan of Avon, whereas the Coate Water duckling is left practically naked of his whole plumage.

As if all this was not enough, I will pluck the last and add my own little cartload of refuse, not because I relish debunking, - I dislike it -but because my strictures are, I believe, original; they concern not the writer, but the man.

Two disgracing episodes in Jefferies' life, both told and retold, by himself and every biographer and critic so far, have not seemed objectionable to any. Should I conclude that you, the English, approve Jefferies?

When he was 22, in 1870, he was holiday-making at Hastings and heard that servants in the retinue of the exiled French Empress nicknamed her "the Spanish cow". He had them reported and they were dismissed. I call this peaching on flunkies; in my view, hardly the job of a great writer, and a very petty way of altering the course of history.

Qualifications: De Foe acted as common Government spy for years, and our lofty moralist, the author of the noble *Servitudes et grandeurs militaires*, Count Alfred de Vigny, for years also, of his own free will, kept sending the authorities secret reports of the behaviour and opinions of political opponents to the regime of Napoléon le Petit, one at least of whom was jailed in consequence.

The second disgracing episode in Jefferies' life is that which rocketed him to the national orbit he has never really left, except for short period: of occultation since it happened, in 1872.

In February of that year farm labourers, who earned an average of seven shillings a week, began to agitate in Warwickshire, and Jefferies immediately pounced on them in a short letter to the editor of the *Wilts and Gloucester Standard*, dated February 28 as from "Coate Farm" - which never was the name his birthplace. The letter was published on March 9.

The agitation spread to the whole country; there were strikes at hay-making time. The first Labourers' Union was formed. The old scares of 1830-1 were revived, especially as in 1872 the terrible events of the French Commune barely a year before reminded the upper classes that, in their eyes, the Second French Revolution of 1830, far more than the famine wages allowed to the labourers had been responsible for their riots of 1830-31. An opinion firmly held by Wellington who, as Lord Lieutenant, had been at the head of the repression in 1831.

In 1830-1, Wiltshire had been the most agitated county, and most severely punished; so when the editors of the *Times* in November 1872 received a long, very informative letter from Wiltshire, signed by a young newspaperman recommended by Squire Sadler of Purton, and connected with the great Gyde brewers of Painswick, with the Estcourts, Lords of the Manor at Tetbury, signed again as from Coate Farm, Swindon, they were glad to publish it.

And that, in my eyes, was Jefferies' capital sin which he committed in his life.

The letter ran full tilt this time against the John Browns and Abner Webbs at large.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, commends the letter nor the two that followed, as literature. They are merely documents reflecting the minds of

most middle class people. Coming in the nick of time, they fully satisfied *The Times* and its readers, and as fully infuriated the labourers and their friends. The *Liverpool Mercury* counter-attacked immediately in a scornful, revengeful article entitled 'Agriculture in Kid Gloves'. So angered were the Labourers, angered have they been ever since, that they have not yet forgiven Jefferies; in a pamphlet published on the occasion of THEIR Centenary, in April 1972, Jefferies is named five times, and taken to task as the arch-offender.

So disgusted was I myself at the reading of the *Times* Letter that, the same year, I applied for a summer farm job on purpose of acquiring inner knowledge of the condition of the labourers a hundred years after Abner Webb and John Brown.

I had come to know English farmers, and like them, respect them for the traditional virtues, enterprise, hard work, courage, and the personal qualities of the few with whom I stayed and lived, at home and in their fields. But I did not know their labourers.

I was offered a job at Temple Farm, Rockley, near Marlborough. A real fluke because at Rockley, in 1830, there had been an affray, reported by the Hammonds in that great book of theirs, *The Village Labourer* - unfortunately prefaced, or rather defaced, by a person I will not name -.

In the encounter Oliver Codrington Calley, a member of the Chiseldon Calley family, the local squires, having just been sworn special constable, rode with a small troop to disperse a mob. The mob refused to disperse; a labourer, Peter Withers, so far of blameless character, the young father of several children, insulted the constabulary; Calley was ordered to seize him, crushed him between his horse and the wall - still standing - of the Millais park, and hit him with his loaded whip. Withers, who had taken a hammer from the local smithy to destroy Farmer Canning's threshing machine - I am not certain Canning was farming Temple then - hurled the heavy tool. Calley, who was thrown down his horse, insensible, bleeding freely, was carried home to his mansion, where he quickly recovered. Withers recovered too; in Australia where, having been sentenced to death, and reprieved, I was transported for life.

I am glad to add that it was Calley who saved his life, by begging the tribunal, in which there was one Mr. Estcourt, to spare him. And I must immediately dispel any thought of personal stricture on the Calley family and thank publicly Sir Henry Langton-Calley for his generous surrender of the invaluable Calley papers to P.R.O., Trowbridge, for his personal hospitality to me, and most of all, for what, as a member of R.A.F. crews, he has done for the liberation of my country.

The Rockley affray induced me to read every single issue of the *London Times* and the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* covering the Riots and their repression, and, among the thrilling information I garnered, there was the indictment of one James Jeffery, the ruthlessness of Mr. Estcourt - Jefferies' maternal grandmother was a Miss Estcourt. Please also notice that the owl-stupid enclosing squire in *The Dewy Morn* is only one phoneme removed from Calley, his surname being Cornleigh, and that Jefferies when a young man enjoyed poaching not really far from the Calley covers.

At Temple Farm I sank deeper and deeper into my Jefferies despond. Among my mates, whom I liked one and all, who always did their job properly, giving their employer far more value than the 28 odd basic weekly quid they received from him, who never in the whole summer came once to work with alcoholic drinks, as they mostly do in France, but with tea in hot-water bottles when the weather was... typical English summer weather, with squash - largely chemical - when we had normal summer weather, among my pals the was one I loved, Good old big John Milnes, nicknamed Big Bad John by friendly nursery rhyme antiphrasis; alas, no longer with us. I was amazed to learn that he had died, as Jefferies was when he learned that his father's old labourer, John Brown, had died, because he too was such a big, powerful, healthy-looking fellow. I had repeatedly invited him to come and spend holidays in France with me, now he had retired. I had so hoped to see him here to-day!

I will now quote from the *Times* Letters, which show Jefferies at his worst as man - and not far from it as writer.

In my early period of pure admiration of the author of *Bevis* I wonder and thought how unfair it was that there should not be a single Jefferies entry in that bible of English literary jewels, one of my constant bedside companions, the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations; at Temple Farm in 1972 I came to regret that there did not exist a Dictionary of Spoonisms; I would then have suggested a rich Jefferies harvest, among which these from the *Times* Letters;

“Never once in all my observation have I heard a labouring man make a grateful remark, and yet I can confidently say that there is no class of persons in England who receive so many attentions and benefits from their superiors as the agricultural labourer... They are too ungrateful for the many great benefits which are bountifully supplied them... Since labour has become so expensive, it has become common remark among the farmers that the labourer will go to church in broadcloth and the master in smock-frock...”

How true this must have been in its time, Jefferies! I have, with my own eyes, seen the twentieth century equivalent at Temple Farm; the owner used to pay us, his men, friendly dominical visits, riding a creaking push-bike, while Peter, one of our mates, who worked on Sundays, as we all did, because it was overtime all day, would come to work in one of his two purring, chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royces.

The only fundamental difference between the two situations was that, in 1872, both master and man attended religious service on Sundays, and in 1972, neither did.

Towards the “field-faring women” Jefferies is positively loathsome: “The agricultural women are certainly not handsome. I know no peasantry so entirely uninviting... The women must dress in the fashion... Gloves, kid, for the hands that milk the cows!!!”

I beg my former mates in favour of Jefferies; two years later he rendered full justice- to field-faring women and men, in particular in his honest account of the fogger's hard life, exclaiming, “there are few persons who

could long remain poetical on bread and cheese.” He knew then and told his readers that bread and cheese was all the food the fogger could afford with his wages.

Better still, Jefferies contradicted himself in his homage to John Brown saying he was such a great worker, about whom he had never heard one word of blame spoken; this was in a sort of literary testament, his last piece of... not writing, as he could no longer write, but had to dictate to Jessie, his wife. The essay is entitled ‘My Old Village’. There does Jefferies redeem himself as man, totally. But one might say that it makes his 1872 case worse as he had known the fogger and John Brown for years long before he committed the Times Letters.

One morning at Temple Farm my admiration and love of men like John Brown and John Milnes carried me a little too far, I am afraid.

I had been sent with the loader tractor to Rockley Bottom to cart straw. Big Bad John followed with another tractor towing two empty trailers, with Karl, the German student, to arrange the loads. I was in the lead about a quarter mile, so sat on the driver’s seat waiting for my pals to start work.

A gentleman - gentle is that gentle does - on horseback, at the head of a charming bevy of young pony-riding beauties, came by and, snapping his fingers at me, said: “Hey, open that gate for me!”

Off it shot like a rocket; Peter Withers spoke through my lips, while John and Karl, who meanwhile had arrived, and the young women, with perfect English non-interfering good breeding, stood silent, pretending not to see or hear anything: “I ain’t no b...y f...g flunkey of yours, and if you had any horse sense, you’d guess my name is not Hay, it’s Straw, Jack Straw!”

I knew I was running no risk of visiting Australia, but for a moment, the gentleman’s eyes flashed, and I looked at his whip; but then he did behave gentle; he alighted and, without a word, opened the gate for himself.

And then I was bestowed the only title I have ever been proud of, on the peaceful battlefield of Rockley Bottom; the lord who dubbed me was no less than Big Bad John himself who, nodding reproachfully, asked: “That true, Alan, that you’re something in a French university?”

I apologized it was true.

“Pity,” John sighed, “we could’ve made you a decent General Farm Worker!”

If you had allowed me three hours instead of a little over one, I could have analyzed in detail Jefferies’ conceit beyond imagination, his racism, his Caesarism.

He never ceased being a racist, from the early Ben Tubbs who calls the little black slaves who are being whipped in the hellish hold of the slave-trading ship “struggling, rolling, shouting, bawling, wriggling cock-roaches or black beetles”, “... and yet (poor Ned, Ben’s companion) could not help laughing.”, to his beautiful last, essay, in which he speaks twice of “the Jewish grip”, as if there existed no misers but they be Jews - what about your Scrooge, was he a Jew, our own French Harpagon and Grandet -?.

He equally disliked - that is, he feared - the Gypsies. I know that racism was rampant in his times, blatantly expressed by many writers, Cobbett, Lamb for instance, but this is no excuse.

His admiration for Julius Caesar, whom he repeatedly calls “the divine Julius” was boundless. I wonder whether he knew that Caesar has been described by a contemporary historian as “the lover of all our wives and the mistress of all our husbands”, what my undergraduates called “a steam-and-sailing craft”, and my mates at Temple Farm “a combine”, that is a bisexual.

Three times did Jefferies-Hyde in his fiction impersonate himself as emperor. In *The Rise of Maximus* the hero, as usual an avatar of Jefferies, is actually crowned emperor; in *Bevis* he is Caesar, and in *After London* he becomes “the Leader”, that is the Fuhrer; this, I suppose, being one of the reasons a famous English admirer of Hitler did also admire Jefferies; but “it is a mistake” Jefferies was never more a Caesarist than I ever was a “Hitlerite”; he was not one in the moronic crowds shouting themselves hoarse with “Heil” or “Viva” so-or-so, he was Adolf or Benito themselves.

Jefferies’ Caesarism was a compensation for missing strength. He was physically unfit for labour, he admitted it himself. He had no power, socially, over anyone, not even a despised labourer, which his father had.

In most of his fiction, he makes up for it, not only by Caesarism, but by simple domination over one person: his heroes always have a brother, a brawny fellow with little brain, while he, the hero, ‘is tall, lean, intellectual, and rises to power, every time.

Before giving you and myself, in my thirdly, the pleasure of praising the writer, and, more important in my view, the private man, let us call on the secret Jefferies Mrs. Grundy has so far prudishly veiled under the cloak of decency.

It is Jefferies the sadist, the Peeping Tom, the desperate, monstrously solitary man who died at thirty-eight, not only because lethal disease killed him, but also because, to a certain extent, he committed suicide by disease.

Sadism is omnipresent in Jefferies’ works, fully conscious and openly confessed several times, for example in *Round About a Great Estate*: “Why is it so pleasant to strike? What secret instinct is it that makes the delivery of a blow... so exhilarating... the fury of striking with a keen blade... seems to arise from the same feeling.”

Jefferies does not even suspect that striking is far from pleasant to many of us. No, John-Richard, it is not pleasant to strike, unless you be a blackguard like your tormentors under the elms of Daye’s; and I know that it disgusted your own Jekyll as it disgusts me, I know, because you have left us a full confession in that highly sentimental book of yours, *Wood Magic*. Yes, like many English people, you were profoundly sentimental. Just as you were profoundly humorous, and yet there is next to no humour in your writings, we shall see why.

I hope he who signs himself as “Spectator” on the jacket of the Rex Ceilings edition of *Wood Magic* will not resent my smiling when he describes *Wood Magic* as “mercifully free of the sentimentality that so often disfigures books about the country...” and “... not a book for the woolly ones.”

It is clear that Spectator is thinking of the over-brimming sadism that does disfigure the novel; instead of glorifying the pathological impulse that, to use woolly Cowper’s words,

“... owes its pleasures to another’s pain”

I have tried to understand and explain it; my contention with Spectator is that far from being unsentimental, *Wood Magic* is exactly the contrary, a highly sentimental book, for which, far from blaming Jefferies, I praise him.

It is only acceptance N° 3 of “sentiment” in O.E.D. that is objectionable, “false and unworthy tenderness...” Among other filth and trash abundantly carried by the inexhaustible flow of Mrs. Cartland’s secretions, there is mostly that sort of sentiment.

But “sentiment” in acceptance N° 2, “emotional feeling conveyed in literature or art”, say for instance the sentiment in John VIII, 7, when the Man of Nazareth saves the adulteress from being stoned to death, is there anything worthless or woolly in it?. Anything objectionable in allowing it to guide our action? Sentiment alone in behaviour is not enough but reason alone is far worse.

Wood Magic brims with laudable sentiment, unconsciously - or is it cunningly - concealed under a glaring cloak of sadism.

The younger Bevis - he may be about six, we are never told ages in any of Jefferies’ fiction - is the horriddest brat on earth and most comprehensive sadist; he favours indiscriminately lifeless targets, plants, animals, human beings; a steam-engine, hammer handles, a horse-shoe, a gate-catch, a boxwood-top, a brazen bugle, mole-trap, chairs, doors, all are broken, battered out of shape, kicked or slammed. He picks flowers to pieces, tears off blades of grass, just for fun. He makes the spaniel’s ribs rattle with a stick, which causes the innocent brute “to howl, so great was the pain”, and throws sticks at the colt. A dainty morsel in his Complete Sadistic Young Rake’s Progress, this, concerning birds: “... a number of greenfinches, and sparrows, and two or three hasty starlings... came to the sward where the mowers had just passed, and searched for food. They seemed so happy and looked so pretty, Bevis thought he should like to shoot one, so away he ran to the summer house for his bow and arrow.”

He punches the bailiff and kicks him; as for his brother, “I hit him yesterday so hard with my bat he would not come and play with me.” I bet he would not!

“It is nice to hit someone”, Jefferies-Hyde, via Bevis, concludes. No, it is not, John-Richard, and Jefferies-Jekyl knew full well it is disgusting; otherwise why should John-Richard Jefferies have written to his beloved Aunt Ellen 16th Oct. 1871, after the Baden blackguards had thrashed him: “... I was most brutally and cowardly assaulted the other day. I was much disfigured on the face at first, and suffered a great deal of pain for a week, but it is now nearly well - except: my hand which was much cut, and which I could not use at all for some days.... this is the first time I have been able to use a pen for a week.” It must have been very nice for them!

Besides young Bevis’s cruelties, Jefferies must add his own, in a total, superfluous digression of several pages about a gamekeeper who lies wounded in danger of bleeding to death a whole day, greedily watched by incredible weasel and crows, all thirsting for his blood and preparing to pounce and swoop down on him as soon as he becomes helpless; the man should long have been rescued if a labourer who had seen his danger had given the alarm, but on coming back home, as he belongs to the Times

Letters species, not to that of John Brown and John Milnes, all he gives is his wife a clout on the pate.

And yet *Wood Magic* is Jefferies' best fiction, with delicate, poetic, tender, passages.

Let's put an end to this catalogue of sadism by reminding that one of the plot's hinges is the clever device of a dynasty of magpies whose succession to the throne is ruled by another dainty ceremony, the pecking out of an eye from the young heir apparent.

How can I possibly affirm that Jefferies is sentimental, after I have blackened his case out of any semblance of hope? By reading the novel with eyes fixed not on myself via the hero, but on the man who sat at his desk writing the manuscript.

There are many proofs of Jefferies' sentimentality.

First, an accumulation of terms of endearment, all directed at one character, Bevis himself. I stopped numbering them after I had counted one hundred and thirty eight hypochoristic single or double or triple barrelled expressions such as "my pet, my dear, my darling, dearest, Bevis dear, my love, dear little Sir Bevis, I love you my darling " etc., etc.

Then, in two or three instances, Bevis's cruelty is shown as a sort of game, pretending to be bad, for instance this; "Fighting is not wicked if you love one another."

An even more open confession of the author's thirst of "the milk of human kindness" is Bevis's reaction at the denouement of the plot, when the arch-fiend in the story, the blackest of all villains, Kapchack, is sadistically dispatched by the desperate, infuriated old lover: "The old gentleman rushed to the spot, he beat the senseless body with the butt of his gun till the stock snapped; then he jumped on it, and stamped the dead bird into a shapeless remnant upon the ground. And Bevis, who, although he was always talking, of shooting and killing, could not bear to see anything really hurt, burst into a passion of tears..."

The very moment when the episode occurs in the story is in itself a confession; Bevis, that is Jefferies himself, was "a woolly one"; a very woolly one, because his Papa, and the two women he had adored when a child, his Dear Mamma and Aunt Ellen had in turn rejected him, or at least he felt rejected by them.

A third proof of Jefferies' sentimentality in *Wood Magic* is that the father, who hardly appears, and the mother, who never does, are invariably mentioned tenderly, most often called Papa, Mamma, Dear Mamma, with this delicate touch in chapter one: "Bevis looked up and saw that the field was full of cowslips. 'I will pick every one', said he, 'and carry them all back to my mother'."

As Dr. Storr writes in *Sexual Deviation*, sadism is a compensation. "Mother Darling", the boy sobs, "you have rejected me; I have been unable to keep your natural love by being good; I will force you to pay attention to me by being bad."

The scenario I can propose from the documents I have found is as follows: on Monday February 17th, 1852, this article was published in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*:

“Melancholy and Fatal Accident. On Monday Mr. Jefferies, a farmer, of Coate, came to Swindon market, accompanied by his little daughter, aged about 4 years, leaving her at her grandfather’s house to return home in the afternoon, the distance being about a mile and a half. She had frequently gone from one place to the other alone, but on this occasion her father upon reaching home sent a servant to meet her, when about a quarter of a mile of home they were overtaken by a horse and gig, the horse was running away, going from one side of the road to the other; the little girl saw the danger, and exclaimed: “Oh, Ann, we shall be killed, “on attempting to cross the road to escape out of the way of the horse, was knocked down and so seriously injured that the child died in about two hours afterwards. The servant girl had her arm broken, and otherwise very seriously injured, but hopes are entertained of her ultimate recovery. An inquest was held upon the body on Wednesday, before W.H. Whitmarsh, Esq., when a verdict of accidental death was returned.”

Jefferies was about two and a half years old when the horrible accident happened, quite old enough to have been seriously shocked; but it is not difficult to picture the scene at home, the young mother mad with grief, as she hopelessly nurses, for two hours, the broken, mangled, adorable little doll, her first born.

I know a woman in France, now over forty years of age, whose little girl on her way to school was killed when a drunken driver’s car hit the curb and overturned, crushing the child against a wall; the mother has not yet totally recovered.

We know for certain that Elizabeth Gyde-Jefferies was shocked for life. Nineteen years after the accident, in 1870, Jefferies wrote to her sister, his own Dear Aunt Ellen: “... of late she has become so foolishly nervous that really one doesn’t know what might happen if she were frightened.” We also know that she behaved queerly, and often walked around the ricks of the hamlet during long sleepless nights.

John-Richard may have adored his elder; that he adored his mother, I hope I have brought some proof. And yet she, in a certain way, rejected him soon after the catastrophe, in 1852, when he was four, the age kids are most lovable. He was sent away from home to live at Sydenham with his mother’s sister, to whom he became fondly attached... and who, six years later in a similar way, rejected him, by sending him back home to Coate, and betrayed him by taking with her his second sister.

At Sydenham, as a nephew to the Gydes and Estcourts, he had attended Prep School, a nursery for young gentlemen; at Swindon he was sent to a seedy place managed by a Plymouth Brother; he attended very casually, often playing truant “about them hedges” flourishing then most of the Swindon way, till he was fourteen. And that was the end of his education.

That he was a most sensitive, high-strung, shy, reserved, boy is well known; nor is it great rarity. But exceptional rarity his memory was; in him none of Alan Breck Stuart’s “grand memory for forgetting”. HE could forget nothing.

I offer this mild interpretation of Jefferies’ literary sadism very modestly.

That his voyeurism was perfectly harmless I am certain; anyhow, voyeurism has always amused me, and please do not deny me the pleasure of giving you a personal version of the famous Coventry event, before proving that there is peeping galore in all Jefferies' writings, and also in his private life.

What were the real mobiles at the bottom of the affair? I suspect that Lady Godiva's lord, besides his cruelty and miserliness towards the poor citizens of his town, must have been a regular booby, 'an old husband slack in performance'. Godiva was so disappointed in love that she, cleverly, suggested the street-strip-trip, in order to advertise her own beauty; suppose she had been my age, drooping every quarter of the compass, she would not have devised that positive drumming-up.

Besides, who but Tom was hurt? And even that I suspect is false; he was not really struck blind but, having once had a Pisgah view of Paradise, he could no longer enjoy the drab shows in the daily life of a common mechanic, and shut his eyes to the world in order to "watch unseen", inwardly, all the rest of his life - perhaps he was a little eidetic too - the gorgeous creature he alone had dared to spy.

There is not one Jefferies story without someone watching unseen; Amaryllis watches unseen, leaning on that very wall you can still see and touch bordering the Museum's garden, she watches unseen the Swindon-bound crowd; Martial in *The Dewy Morn* watches unseen the woman he loves as she bathes; she had watched him unseen before; the half-mad old miller - portrayed from Jefferies' own grand-uncle - watches unseen the sporting lovers; Geoffrey in *Greene Ferne Farm* watches unseen Margaret Estcourt, aged twenty, fallen asleep in a grove at eleven in the morning; and the whole plot of *Wood Magic* rests on the possibility for a boy of six of watching unseen unsuspected, the whole fantastic plot, and knot of counter-plots between the animals.

Jefferies in real life did the same.

In 'Field-faring Women', speaking on his own behalf, he advises his reader thus: "Ensconce yourself behind a hedge in view of a field where women are at work..."

Better, we read this in an essay entitled In Brighton: "It needs slow clouds and surge and soft sweet wind to enable me to dream concealed behind fishing boats."... "I spend much of my time dreaming on the beach, hidden behind a fishing boat..."

With due respect for specialists, I reject the pansexual explanation of sadism and voyeurism; that sex is implied, there is little doubt; but man is such a sophisticated creature that it is childish to reduce him to one impulse; timidly, again, I suggest that Jefferies' voyeurism may also be, in part at least, the inevitable result of his rejection of and by others, of the scorn and derision of which he had become the butt; he hardly dared to show himself.

Voyeurism, like sadism, is, partly a compensation; seeing unseen gives Tom power over the person spied unawares. Jefferies was once describing himself when, in *The Scarlet Shawl*, he wrote: "Gerard Wootton... said that every living being ... had at least one secret, of which they were mortally in

dread.... Now, if one could only fathom that secret, one would have anybody one liked to select in one's power."

Whatever their explanations, several important other traits of character are revealed in his writings, his general, private and public behaviour, which I have no leisure to study at length to-day. The ultimate result was the utter solitude which made him the hysterical dying man a London specialist perfectly diagnosed, but alas, Mrs. Grundy was keeping severe watch on his former biographers, and forbade any serious enquiry in that direction, otherwise I would not have had the rather ticklish task of doing it to-day.

Jefferies' tragedy is not that he lived only thirty-eight years; if the great writers of the past had died at thirty-eight, we would still have most of the best literature.

Jefferies never became a full-coloured, winged, insect; most of his production belongs to his larval period; the priceless advice and guidance of Besant, which was forwarded him by his sister Sarah who, in 1875, married in the family of the Billings, Besant's printers, produced the instantaneous change into the chrysalis, and *The Gamekeeper at Home*, his real beginning as nature-writer; but it was too late for the gorgeous butterfly, and that was the tragedy, his aimless struggle against Fate. For there was disease gnawing him all the time, and he knew it, and expressed it poignantly through his friend the squirrel in *Wood Magic*: "... be sure to see that no little unseen creeping thing is at work, for they are everywhere boring holes into the beam of life till it cracks..."

There are squirrels in Broadwater Cemetery, I have seen one skipping amid the tombs; perhaps when nobody is about he sits on Jefferies' rest place, and they chat together as they did in *Wood Magic*?

Jefferies struggled to the extreme resistance of his frail frame, but he knew he was doomed, hence the long shriek of torture that *Amaryllis at the Fair* is, primarily.

Remember the sorry scene, when the mother tramples the daffodils that came from the father's ancestral home; daffodils are Amaryllids, and Amaryllis is Jefferies in girl's disguise - or half of Jefferies, the second half being the languid Amadis.

Jefferies as a writer did not live thirty-eight years, barely ten, and that was not enough to make up for his lack of real culture, to slough the anti-culture that had been force-fed into him, as there is anti-culture force-fed into every generation, and finally not enough for him to lift the crushing weight of the monstrous solitude he had kept building around himself for twenty years, which he fancied served him

"... in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house."

Jefferies has told us how he often resorted to solitary places which, in his conceited moods, he styled "thinking-places" but knew and confessed several times to be day-dreaming places, thus in *Restless Human Hearts*, Vol. 2, p. 2: "... he lived in dreams... it was a species of mental opium-eating... He dignified it to himself by the name of 'study'."

Most prominent, in every sense, were in this respect to him Pevensey and Liddington Castles, the birth-places and sources of inspiration of *The Story of my Heart*; both are fortresses, the symbols at once of strength and weakness, with high and thick walls behind which the weak seek protection, which the strong spurn. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon built no castles, they stormed them. So did Hitler; when he began to build castles, Stalingrad, the Atlantic Wall, that was the beginning of his end.

Places also of solitude, even nowadays, much more so in Jefferies' times. Places where, he tells us, time ceased to exist.

Jefferies' solitude became monstrous; I was struck, reading *Wood Magic*, by the boy alone as human creature in a wilderness of animals. There is the episode of Bevis on the swing, a striking contrast with *The Swing* in Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

Stevenson's opening is a communion, implying the presence of another human being, a question:

"How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?"

The answer comes, immediately':

"Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do..."

Total solitude of Bevis in *Wood Magic*: "... away he ran to the swing, and pushed himself off." There is no one about and the haiku - haikus is what Jefferies ought to have written exclusively - the haiku ends in utter solitude: "There he went to and fro, as easily as possible" (this excellent prose equivalent of Stevenson's anapaests), shutting his eyes Stevenson's boy says "till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside"),

but Bevis ends "shutting his eyes and humming to himself."

The prison of self - as Prof. Keith writes in contrast of Wordsworth, "the inward eye that is the curse of solitude", Jefferies has unwittingly but perfectly put in the nutshell of this incredible phrase in *The Story of my Heart*: "I wanted to be in myself myself fully".

He, alas, succeeded too well, even in his family life. I have often thought of poor Jessie, his wife; no wonder if, as Mrs. Gay told me she had heard from the lips of an old lady who had lived next door to Jefferies at Goring, no wonder if Jessie did really take to solitary drinking.

I have compared the relationships between husbands and wives in the Stevenson, Thomas, and Jefferies pairs.

Here is the account of her appointment with Hudson in 1922 by Helen Thomas: "At the entrance to the restaurant I gazed about in my short-sighted way, but could not see him among the people there until a waitress pointed him to me, sitting alone in a corner.

"Mr. Hudson, I am Edward's wife."

One word, wife, not widow, and yet Edward Thomas by then had been lying under one of a million identical slabs in the hills of my country full year five, but wife in place of widow meant that he was still full alive in the heart, soul and flesh of the woman facing Hudson.

By Stevenson this short piece entitled

My Wife

Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble dew,
Steel-true, blade-straight
The great artificer
Made my mate.

No comment.

Jessie Baden was Jefferies' wife thirteen years, and survived him thirty-nine years, as long as he had lived altogether. His last two years she spent with him, night and day, nursing him, writing for him; not a page, not a line, not a word has been left by her concerning him.

From him to her, about all we have is a vague allusion to "those I loved", that may include her, a thankful appreciation of her devotion as his nurse in a letter to Longman, and this horror in his notebooks a few weeks before his death: "No hope, no gratitude, to whom! no love to turn to."

Why, no love to nor from Jessie, no love from or to the children, Harold and Phyllis ? No gratitude to the devoted nurse?

No love of the kids who were himself plus Jessie, and the first living proof that death shall have no dominion? John-Richard Jefferies and Jessie Baden have not died, since we see among us to-day two of their descendants.

If *The Sunday Times* trusted me with a Life in the day of John-Richard Jefferies, I would enlarge upon the precious epitome of a day in Jefferies life which Besant probably gathered from Jessie:

7.00 Rise - bath-room (solitary)

8.00 Breakfast. At meal-times, the rule has been enforced through many Jefferies generations that the family should keep silent, the father alone speaking if he wished; confirmed during Centenary celebrations by descendant.

8.30 Father retires to his study till 11.30; the house must be kept perfectly silent.

11.30 Father leaves home for an hour and a half solitary walk.

1 00 Lunch - silent, see above.

1.30 Father reads the paper.

2.00 Father's nap by the fireside.

3.00 Father leaves home for a second solitary walk.

4.30 Tea - silent -.

5.30 Father retires to his study in the perfectly silent house.

8.30 Silent dinner.

9.30 Reading or/and conversation. -

11pm The family retire to ... we do not know what sort of bed; solitary?
Conjugal? Silent? How, when, how often did they do it? Hyper-
Victorian silence till 7.00 the next morning.

I am suggesting absolutely nothing about the love life of the spouses
because I know absolutely nothing for certain. I do, in my Jefferies Saga, try
to guess what it may have been.

But I do believe in the controversial death-bed conversion; not to any
particular sect, but, just as he had redeemed himself in the fair portrait of
John Brown in 'My Old Village', the homage of the dying man to the old
labourer, Jefferies redeemed himself towards Jessie, Harold and Phyllis,
whose descendants - some at least - are with us to-day.

Of John Brown he dictated this to Jessie:

"If a man's work that he has done all the days of his life could be collected
and piled around him in visible shape, what a vast mound there would be
beside some! If each stroke was represented, say by a brick, John Brown
would have stood the day before his ending by the side of a monument as
high as a pyramid. Then if in front of him could be placed the sum and
product of his labour, the profit to himself, he could have held it in his
clenched hand like a nut, and no one would have seen it."

Less distant is Coate from Egypt than 'My Old Village' from *The Times*
Letters.

The last words Jefferies spoke expressed no desire of "being in himself
himself fully" but prayed for Jessie and the children, who reaped the fruit of
his labours; first, there was a subscription, which raised about £1,500; then
Besant hurriedly composed *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, whose profit was
for the bereaved family; later Jessie edited *Field and Hedgerow*, and this,
added to the yield of copyright for all that was published or reissued after
1887 provided Jessie with an income; not much, as Jefferies' works never
became bestsellers; enough for a scanty living, perhaps the equivalent of a
labourer's wages, the wages of an honest toiler of the fields of English
literature.

That Jefferies produced no great novel, that he could not, as Salt wrote:
"under any circumstances have become a novelist" is certain. How could
such a man portray anybody but himself, whom he introspected for years,
but never understood; how could he have perceived in himself the two
selves, so widely different?. The others he vaguely saw through the mist of
his dreams, not as other persons; let us quote Helen Thomas again in her
account of her meeting with Hudson:

"Mr. Hudson, I am Edward's wife."

After silently taking both my hands and gazing into my face with his hawk-like eyes,
he sat down. Hudson was tall, spare and loose-limbed. His hands reminded me of
Edward's strong, large working hands, the skin bronzed from exposure to all weathers,
cared for but not manicured. His hard clasp was as I liked, firm and friendly. His hair
was abundant and grizzled, as were his short-cut beard and moustache; his face was
lined and bony with hollow cheeks and high cheek-bones.

The eyes were startling in their contrast of darkness and brilliancy. They were deep
set and looked only, it seemed, at far distant things. They were eyes that I thought could

flash with anger, but on nothing petty would they focus. They and the nose gave the face its fierce, wild look of a great bird. But the lids drooped over the eyes and I thought he looked weary and terribly sad. His gaze rested on me sometimes and the eyes became less bright less piercing, tender and protecting.”

After reading such a portrait, one could pick Hudson at once in a crowd of a thousand; there is not one of the scores of personages in Jefferies’ fiction or nature, country writing, you could pick among ten.

But he could and did describe nature, not with great art, or any remarkable literary technique, but unique accuracy of keenest eyesight, nature that he brought back intact in the silence of his study. To all other writers, both great artists and lovers of nature, the scenery is mostly, if not only, a background for the evolution of their personages; I am thinking of great novels like *Adam Bede*, or *The Mill on the Floss*, or the stories of a far greater tusitala than Jefferies, Thomas Hardy and his Wessex. In Jefferies the pike basking in the sun, the wood-pigeon’s brutal take-off, the perpetual haste of the starling, are in the centre of the picture, not the outskirts or background; and that is supremely refreshing.

Maggie Tulliver is a complex character, and Cicely one more shadow; but where is the Tulliver mill? I have seen and scrubbed the cheese-vat in which Cicely dipped her white arms, it is in the small hall at the back of Daye House.

How could a man like Jefferies write humorously, who had become so miserable? No humour in him? Impossible, he would not have been English, which he was very much, rather too much sometimes; but to write humorously one must be happy, or at least not feel too miserable. He could only become sarcastic, very often.

The analyst would interpret his sun-worship in terms of father-son relationship; that may be true; but I have noticed that the cool shade with Southern writers plays the part of the sun with Northern ones; the English hunger for the sun and I do not think that the English automobile invasions of Perigord, Riviera and Spain are composed solely of English immature grown-ups seeking Dad.

Jefferies, who, whatever the season and the weather spent about four hours out of doors every day, very often “ensconced behind hedges” or “hidden behind a fishing-boat”, must have caught more colds than sunstrokes, dreaming of the sun.

Of writing masters, he had none, or perhaps, very timidly, Bunyan; hence my hints all along this talk; let us not forget that Bunyan’s masterpiece is about a dream.

The importance of Jefferies’ role as conservationist cannot be overstressed, and nobody would deny it.

But there is one very particular quarter of conservation to which his nature and topical writings, so varied and rich in quantity, have given precious help, the conservation of the English tongue; now your Empire of conquest has collapsed, just as our own French colonial empire, your language is building the world empire of “the sweet music of speech”.

As a foreign student of English, I am the proud and happy owner of the thirteen volume masterpiece of lexicography, the Oxford English Dictionary; every new word I meet in my readings, conversations, or hearings I

immediately check; except the century old Littré, we have in France no equivalent in quality and precision of definitions, shades of meaning; and none at all for the lists of quotations, each a vivid biography of the word from its most remote use to 1933.

Thus did I discover that Jefferies has provided far more quotations than writers far greater than himself. At alphabetic random let me quote bay, bennet, burr, champagniness (he alone quoted for this nonce-word), the “court-leet” (that played such a capital role in your country history), fogger, furze, gicks, hail, handing-post, harl, jag, lease, mill-pick, peggles, plim, populousness (again Jefferies’ own coining), quat, rowen, rowetty, sloucher, squail, squailer, turnpike (poacher’s picturesque metaphor), wake, wallow, that ancient ancestor of concrete, wattle and daub, whip (wine whip).

They have been selected from fourteen Jefferies’ titles; exactly as many as Tennyson and George Eliot; Borrow has only four. I wondered how many Jefferies quotations there were altogether; so I wrote to the editor of O.E.D., and Lo and behold, they did answer.

Who said that English humour was moribund? Not among editors certain! here is their answer:

“Sir,

... I am sorry that we cannot help you in the way you had hoped... The only way to establish these figures would be, I am afraid, to count them in the dictionary itself.”

Which I confess I have not done so far.

I have mentioned Jefferies’ conceit without proving the charge; it concerns mainly his fond belief in his own genius which he asserts blandly, openly, crudely, repeatedly, in fiction and essays; the most pitifully in *Amaryllis at the Fair*, of course, where we are told that the members of the maternal Flamma line (i.e. the Gydes-Estcourts) “were almost all flecked with talent..., a spot or two of genius”; as for the paternal line, “Here was Iden, with his great brain”, in him are united the best in art and the best in science, his “forehead might have been sculptured for Shakspeare’s...and he expressed his philosophy in a strain and with a simplicity that reminded you of Bacon”; he is called “Shakespeare Iden”, he has “Baconian intellect”.

Amaryllis herself draws; she does not write, though the garret at Coombe Oaks be Jefferies’ own chilly study at Coate-Snodshill; but another avatar of Jefferies-Hyde, certainly the most faithful of all his self-portraits, Aymer Malet in *World’s End* “was a born genius”.

Oxford English Dictionary will again, at this point where I must define the best Jefferies has left us, provide us with accurate definitions; when Jefferies speaks of his own personal “genius” or of that of a member of his family, he is obviously thinking of acceptance 5, “Native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation or practice; instinctive a extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention or discovery. Often contrasted with TALENT.”

This genius Jefferies, definitely, did not possess for literature.

He did possess a prodigious memory, but that was not his only exceptional gift; associated with the memory was an extraordinary perception of LIGHT, a sort of sixth sense that he alone among English writers had; and of that he was perfectly conscious, and he gave it a name, “consciousness of light”, in ‘The Lions in Trafalgar Square’. He was SYNESTHETIC since his perception of light was turned by his unique brain into a tactile perception, as is proved by this quotation from ‘The Pigeons at the British Museum’:

“... it is the nature of light to beat and throb; it has a pulse and undulation like the swing of the sea... you can feel it ceaselessly streaming on your face. It is renewed and fresh every moment, and never twice do you see the same ray...

This is as scientifically true as Bridges’ description of the song of nightingales, and as beautifully expressed.

Besides, from the philosophical point of view, he felt light as “the ever-existent thought which sustains the world.” Which is almost exactly the wording of the same idea expressed by Engels and approved by Lenin, that “matter thinks”; and if you class Jefferies among the morons, he will be in good company.

Perhaps not “genial”, but at least prophetic, in 1880, these two certitudes of his that “certainly not a thousandth part, barely the minutest fraction of what the mind is capable of comprehending in the way of knowledge has yet been acquired”, and that man has not yet extracted all the energy from a single atom.

Prophetic and visionary at least also these lines in ‘The Dawn’:

In my own mind the idea of light is associated with the colour yellow... May there not be light that we cannot see?

This was written eight years before X rays were discovered. Jefferies adds:

Something which is neither force nor matter is difficult to conceive... Light is... a visitant from the unknown... when in the silence I see the pale visitant at my bedside ... the thought will come to me that even now there may be messages in that beam undeciphered... You cannot tell what knowledge may be pouring down in every ray... There is a possibility that beings in distant earths possessed of greater knowledge than ourselves may be able to transmit their thoughts along, by the ray, as we do along wires.

Considering Jefferies’ marvellous memory, his keenest eyesight, his immense capacity for taking pain in a field which obviously was not his own, his eagerness for minute observation, the happy boldness of his scientific hypotheses, his admiration for Darwin’s best monographs, one comes to wonder what heights such a man, properly trained and educated, could have reached; if, after leaving his Prep School Jefferies, supported like Darwin by a united, loving family had been sent to Shrewsbury, then Christ’s... It is easy to scorn Public Schools, Dons, and Universities, as Stevenson and Morris did, after you have taken advantage of their cultural facilities; Jefferies was self-taught, and that practically means untaught, or at best ill-taught.

If... I know the vanity of ifs; but I am certain, as certain as he was himself, that there was in him the making of a great man; but the Pinta was not the Beagle, and never sailed any further than Coate Water.

Yet Jefferies' 'Dawn' moves me as deeply as Bridges' 'Nightingales', and I will conclude by suggesting, peevishly, that you and I, the discriminate lovers and admirers of the Emperor of Inimitable Balderdash, of the ass who emptied his notebooks in decent English, perhaps we are not that Second Rate.

Daye House Farm, Coate, Swindon,
15 Thermidor 195 - Brebis
Sunday, August 2nd, 1987



ENGLISH FARMS LIMITED

DIRECTORS

EARL WALDEGRAVE, K.G., T.D., D.L. (CHAIRMAN)
SIR ALEX. ABEL SMITH, T.D.
HUGH FINN, C.B.E., F.R.A.S.
E. J. TUCKER

WEST OVERTON

MARLBOROUGH
WILTSHIRE

GENERAL MANAGER: F. H. GALE
TELEPHONE: LOCKERIDGE 289

To whom it may concern. Alain Delattre has

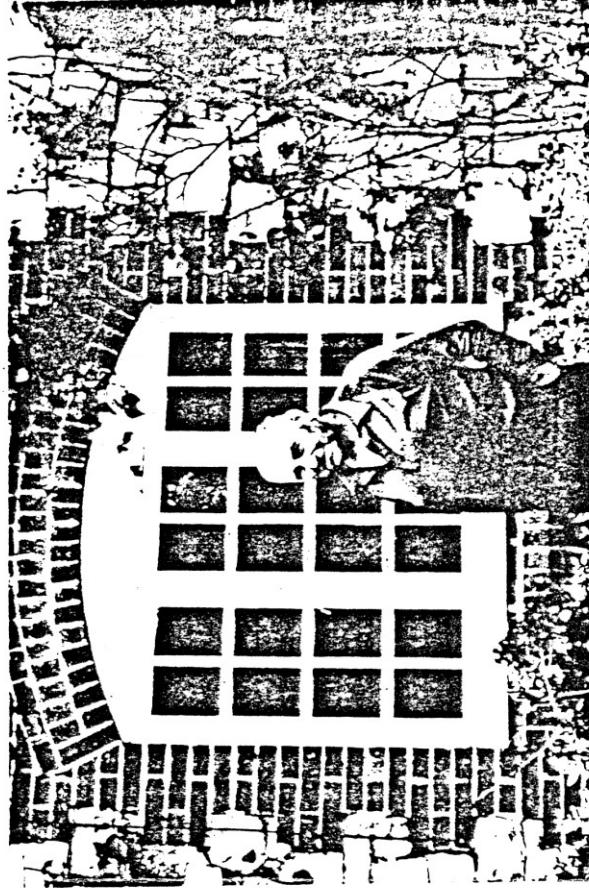
been employed on our 2,600 acre Temple Farm for a summer period of three months.

During this time he has had experience with the harvesting of 1,400 acres of cereals, & with the tending herts which till 300 cows.

At all times he has worked very well, getting on with his fellow workers.

While we are sorry to see him move on, we wish him well in future years.

Yours faithfully
Patrick Gale.



Big Bad John