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RICHARD JEFFERIES

Among those who have told or sung to us of the life of the English homesteads and meadows, Richard Jefferies stands first. Of field and forest and their thousand aspects by day and night; of dawn, when the mists sweep across the hills to the silent valley beneath; of noon, when the forest rings no more with strokes of the axe, and the woodcutters rest on the greensward beneath the mighty branches of the oaks; of night, when the lost traveller breaks from black copse into open glade and lifts his head in wonder to the thousand stars, of English sun, earth, and wind, Jefferies is the poet and interpreter.

His place is unique in English literature, for he is our only country writer who combines the aspiration of the poet with the knowledge of the naturalist, the eye of the artist with the instinct of the poacher. In him observation and aspiration are alike powerful, and this combination alone entitles him to be placed on a level with those who have excelled him in one branch, but have confined themselves to one department of their subject. But his right to rank as an English classic rests above all on the fact that in his pages is reflected the glory of England, of her streams and forests, of her moors and hills. His eloquence is born of English soil, and he holds a place in our hearts that cannot be held by those whose inspiration has been drawn from Alpine slopes, whose poetry has been coloured by an Italian sun. His place is unique, for he has broken fresh ground. He has grafted on one branch of our literature a new character, one that has something of poetry, of fiction, of natural history, but is not merely a combination of the three; he has the art of giving us the country with its sights and sounds, and not an account of the country, the art of bringing before us the green earth and the blue sky, of filling the heart with the emotions that sun and wind and sea create, the art of deceiving the mind and puzzling the senses with a beautiful mirage. He has fused two arts, the arts of literature and painting, and the pictures he has produced, painted on a larger canvas, are only inferior to the idylls of Theocritus in finish. Many English writers have taken the country for their background, but few for their foreground, and these few have confined themselves to localities. Many have a keener eye for particulars, but none have his range. The poets have passages of description which are more beautiful than any to be found in Jefferies, but such passages can never be shaped in prose; they are the cascades of poetry where every obstacle to expression creates fresh beauties in the flowing verse, as rocks

in the river's bed are hid by clouds of gleaming spray. The novelists have at times tried their strength in descriptions of scenery, but, as we find in Meredith, their art leads them to the close-shaven lawn and the people who walk there, and away from the winding stream and the birds that sing in the underwood. Some novelists indeed never enter the country at all (except to visit a hovel), for they find little deformity in the forest, and none on the hillside.

Complete familiarity with the country has enabled Jefferies to write of it from two points of view—the prose and the poetical. (The term poetical is here applied throughout to his matter and not to his form, for he published only a few sets of verses.) These two elements of prose and poetry are mixed equally in some of his books; in some the one or the other predominates, while in a few it is impossible to separate the two, so poetical is his treatment of detail. But in forming an estimate of the value of his work it is essential to distinguish between the portion which is made up of observation and that which breathes aspiration. [Of the sixteen volumes he published between 1878 and 1887 four ('Hodge and his Masters,' 'The Open Air,' 'The Life of the Fields,' and 'Nature near London') are filled with the articles and sketches he contributed to journals; five ('The Gamekeeper at Home,' 'The Amateur Poacher,' 'Wild Life in a Southern County,' 'Round about a Great Estate,' and 'Red Deer') are descriptions of country life and particular localities; six ('After London,' 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' 'The Dewy Morn,' 'Greene Ferne Farm,' 'Wood Magic,' and 'Bevis'), are novels and imaginative tales; and one ('The Story of my Heart'), is autobiographical.] Roughly speaking, the novels, tales, and the autobiography may be taken as his poetical, the others as his prose, works; and his early books may be criticised as the note-book of a countryman, his later as the conceptions of a poet. To some minds observation seems more valuable than aspiration, even in England, and a critic can no more be blamed for counselling Jefferies to return to his description of birds and insects than the public for not buying what it does not understand. Books on plants and animals are to books on human life and the poetry of human life what animals themselves are to men. 'Wild Life in a Southern County' is an admirable piece of insight into animal life, but 'The Story of my Heart' reveals the searchings of a beautiful spirit. The titles, indeed, of the two books gauge their worth and foreshadow their respective popularity. The very excellence of the one springs from the limitation of its subject; the artistic defects of the other are inevitable in a volume that strives to express what can only properly be felt, to translate into words the aspirations that the sight of beauty brings to the soul.

That a chorus of praise from the press should have greeted the appearance of 'The Gamekeeper at Home' might well throw some doubt on the author's woodcraft. But this suspicious sign was counter-balanced by scientific people

finding it all wrong. To the outsider Jefferies is a mine of country lore. Fortunately he had not that extreme accuracy which spoils descriptions, but he is accurate enough to be a popular guide to the fauna and flora of the southern counties. So complete is his familiarity with this part of England that it is easier for an outsider to test the trustworthiness of his observation in 'Red Deer, where the soil was new to him, than in any other of his books. Jefferies would seem to have visited Exmoor for a short time only, but those who have hunted over it from Porlock to Simonsbath swear that he must have been bred in a Somersetshire coombe, and not on a Wiltshire farm. And those who know the district contend that his descriptions are as true as they are beautiful. Exmoor with its shallow streams, where the sparkling water bubbles over brown stones, and gushes between mossy boulders, Exmoor with its black pools and solitary wastes across which the mists sweep to the desolate horizon, Exmoor with its green coombes where the tiny villages nestle among the unexpected trees, planted close for shelter, all the magic of the moor and sky are found in the pages of 'Red Deer.' And in its few chapters too are found inimitable pictures of the leafy valleys, still and hushed under a blue August sky, through which the road winds up to the steep hill, with its short sward, rising behind Dunster. From the summit the eye can see eastwards far into quiet Somersetshire, and westwards where the foamless grey sea skirts Minehead, and to the south-west where the mists close round Dunkery and Exmoor. These western landscapes of his equal, they cannot surpass, his descriptions of southern scenery, and they bear witness to his sensibility in receiving impressions, and his genius for reproducing them. As a country writer his range is indeed immense. From the labourer clipping the hedge to the ladies of the country families rolling past in their carriages on the dusty highroad, he knows the faces and reads the thoughts of each. As his rustics are drawn from his experience they are not filled with the honest emotion that chokes the mongrel dialect of the theatrical rustic; but we meet in them that combination of impenetrable stolidity and unrivalled faculty of knowing on which side their bread is buttered, which town people can hardly believe exists. If his folk have not all the charm of romance they surely have all the charm that their prototypes possessed, all the country outspokenness that is so honest (and so inconvenient), found in the coombe girl's description of her lover as 'a gurt hummoksing noon-naw,' ie. a great loose-jointed idiot. But were we to fully discuss the contents of Jefferies' prose works we should have to stop at the farm and examine the old furniture, pass through the farmyard and criticise the stock, visit each field and notice each plant, swing the axe and whet the scythe, and listen to the talk of the labourers, ask about old customs and treasure old sayings, try old receipts and recall old times, grumble with the farmer, and discuss the weather, the crops, the new reaping machines, and the costly cream-separators. His knowledge of practical details is as complete as that of the bailiff on an estate, and his command of

appropriate language is no less astonishing. All wild things find their match in him: he has an especial affection for Brer Rabbit and Sis Rook, who receive all the attention of his shot-gun and pencil. In short Jefferies knows the country as thoroughly as any farmer born and bred there. But his talent for presenting familiar facts in new lights is even more remarkable than his knowledge. He is the freshest of writers, everything he says is interesting to the ignorant, and suggestive to the learned. When some authors wish to tell you of birds and animals and their ways, the hot dust of the highroad seems to have filtered into their pages; but with Jefferies you lie in the long meadow grass on the shady side of the brook, and looking upwards you see the delicate green and jagged edges of the oak leaves against the blue sky, and you hear the whistle of the blackbird and the splash of falling water.

Fresh and sweet as his writings are, Jefferies is not properly a master of style. With the sentences of some writers a picture grows up before the reader's eyes, with some each word is a stroke of the brush, till at length the right effect is produced. So exquisite in others is this art of word-painting that it is impossible not to admire the picture, even though the subject be poor. But Jefferies' style is like a sheet of glass through which the objects themselves are seen. The reader walks to the window, as it were, and looks out, and he sees what the author wills him to see: green valley and blue sky, and yonder, the reapers in the golden cornfields, working beneath a burning sun; or a cool lane, hedged in with murmuring elms, that winds right to the foot of the Downs, ending suddenly in ruts at the gateway where the turf of the steep ascent begins, and where on the rounded slope the flying shadows race, as the clouds pass before the sun. His style never clouds, and never improves on his meaning. In this he resembles Defoe, and is unlike most modern writers. The defect of this style is that it has no shade: like sunshine it gives warmth and life to everything it touches, but its very definiteness is a limitation. Suggestiveness, which is the charm of night and shadow, is wanting, and the individuality of the reader is merged in that of the author and never in the individualities of the author's characters.

When we hear of the misfortunes of others we often put ourselves in their places, but when we see them with our eyes we rarely do. We sorrow with Hawthorne, we see with Jefferies; the one appeals to the eye, the other to the imagination. That form is not of all-importance to the English master is shown by his rarely attempting poetry, though his writings are studded with passages of the most poetical prose. First and foremost he wishes to express his meaning, and he wastes no time in trying to crack the nut whose rich kernel tempts so many would-be poets. Probably his style, clear and limpid as the waters of a brook, was only gained with hard work, but once attained it was attained for good. In 'The Story of My Heart' he tells us how he continually strove to express his thoughts, to paint in glowing words the glory of the sea, to enchant the car

with melodies in which should linger the murmur of the forest. When at last he succeeded to some degree, his style, beautiful when he is describing beautiful objects, becomes slightly dulled when he writes of ordinary things. It would perhaps be more correct to say that he developed two matters rather than two manners, though for convenience we shall say he developed two styles. His inferior style is diffuse and journalistic. He falls too often into the plan of cataloguing what he sees, 'a rabbit rushed across the path, a wood-pigeon flew into the firs,' till the mind becomes confused, and can only grasp a blurred outline. His very familiarity with the objects he describes is a temptation to take no trouble, and thus his descriptions sometimes lack individuality, and show too great a family likeness. This inferior style of workmanship was, however, doubtless designedly employed by him, just as the work of the clerk, the journalist, the artisan—in fact, all work undertaken for bread and not for love—comes up to a certain standard and rarely rises beyond it. Jefferies wrote for bread, and the four volumes which contain the sketches and articles he contributed to journals, betray the haste and carelessness of the artist's pot-boilers. From the little that is known of his life, and will be known till Mr. Besant's long-delayed volume appears, it seems that poverty prevented him from giving to his work that polish and finish to which leisure is essential. Thus some of his most valuable work will very likely perish, for it was produced under conditions where natural prolixity is a godsend to a writer, and conciseness a curse. And prolixity, a flaw in the few who have no faculty of style, is fatal in those who have a sense of style. A few writers say the wrong thing in the right way, fewer the right thing in the right way; but the majority say the right thing in the wrong way; and these last perhaps appreciate the value of style most, for being without it, they attract little or no attention. Ideas are like uncut diamonds which the crowd passes by; but polished by a master-hand light streams from every facet. Thus men refuse to listen to beautiful thoughts expressed in an ordinary way, for everybody feels himself master of the commonplace. But a beautiful style commands instant attention, because of its rarity, and because its presence implies the presence of beautiful thoughts. Truths are repeated a thousand times without effect; like blunt arrows they fall to the ground; barbed with epigram they strike home.

Jefferies sacrificed the quality of his work to quantity. 'The Dewy Morn' is full of the most beautiful lessons, which few take to heart, because opinions are there interwoven with convictions, and convictions are lost sight of in digressions. Had he had time to extract the gold of truth from the ore of first thoughts, the book might convert those who now throw it aside. The disadvantages, however, under which he worked interfered much more with the shaping of his theories of life than with the excellence of his descriptions of English landscape. Some of these last indeed have no equal in our literature. The description in 'Greene Ferne Farm' of night on the Downs, where the mists

roll in seas from coombe to coombe; in 'The Dewy Morn' of the dawn, where the woman sits with full heart beside the sleeping lover; of the sunset in the last page of 'Wood Magic, where the wind sings to Bevis of the secrets of sea and sky; these descriptions are to literature what the masterpieces of Poole are to painting. The diffuseness which offends us in his sketches becomes eloquence in his finished works. The song of the brook in 'Wood Magic,' springing from the author's heart, pierces the heart of the reader, and both seem to be unconscious that one is writing and the other reading, so intently are they listening to the eternal truths which are revealed to the chosen, by the voices of nature. The charm of Jefferies' style lies undoubtedly to a great extent in its simplicity. Some writers—Mr. Pater, for example—are so intent on the ornamentation of their thoughts that their readers go away dazzled and bewildered; others—as in 'The Return of the Native'—are so anxious about the effect they wish to produce, so careful in arranging the actors, the scenery, and the dresses, that the reader fancies himself in a theatre, and is more ready to applaud the stage manager than the author. Jefferies is never bald, never ornate, and never theatrical; and few are they among English writers who have not stumbled into one or other of these pitfalls. As an example of his most poetic prose take the following :—

My heart looks back and sympathises with all the joy and life of ancient times. With the circling dance burned in still attitude on the vase; with the chase and the hunter eagerly pursuing, whose javelin trembles to be thrown; with the extreme fury of feeling, the whirl of joy in the warriors from Marathon to the last battle of Rome, not with the slaughter, but with the passion; with the garlands and the flowers; with all the breathing busts that have panted beneath the sun. O beautiful human life! Tears come in my eyes as I think of it. So beautiful, so inexpressibly beautiful !—' Story of My Heart,' p. 117.

His deficiencies are more apparent in his novels than in his early works, but even in the former they are often concealed with patches of beauty. The scarlet poppies of the corn-fields do not however appeal to the farmer, and a public, commercial at heart, expects a full measure of the grain of incidents for its money. One of the chief deficiencies in his writings generally is a lack of humour. Irony sometimes peeps through his words (notably in 'Wood Magic'), but it is more properly the irony of facts than the irony of the man. The dry humour which occasionally enlivens 'Hodge and His Masters' is almost unconscious, and the author's indignation gets the better of his wit in the amusing sketch of 'Cornleigh Cornleigh, Esq.,' and 'The Society for the Encouragement of Art Culture in the Homes of the Poor.' The appalling solemnity of Wordsworth's letters shows that, although he had seen Nature smiling times without number, he could never have seen her laughing; and though many of our artists succeed to a marvel in making Nature ridiculous, perhaps their triumph is only the revenge of Art on the goddess who has so often made her hide her face. Whether there be nothing ridiculous in Nature,

except man, or not, Jefferies, like all writers who have communed much with her, rarely laughs. But a *savoir-faire* unknown to Wordsworth saves him from being laughed at, even when he is most in earnest. The *savoir-faire* is undoubtedly essential to a good novel; Jefferies had mixed with the labouring and the farming classes, and he shows considerable knowledge of the contents of the squire's house and the vicar's head; but the passion which he felt for nature left him, lover-like, but small interest in individuals. Thus the people who figure in his novels are not characters he has studied, they are the types he has met. His men are country gentlemen, farmers, rustics, sturdy, honest, and stolid as their prototypes, and drawn with considerable insight. His women are quite as fresh and sweet as English women are, but they too are more typical than individual. Even Felise, the heroine of 'The Dewy Morn,' fails to interest. Considered as a woman she lives and breathes, considered as a character she fails, considered as a figure explaining the author's convictions she stands for the type of perfect womanhood. But though he does not succeed in drawing individual men and women, he excels in his creation of boys. The energy, the audacity, the independence, and the candour of Bevis—the hero of 'Wood Magic' and 'Bevis'—win the heart of the reader as they did the heart of Frances.

His diffuseness has already been referred to. It is probable that had he lived to write much more this fault would have gained ground. In his last published work, 'Amoryllis at the Fair,' the author airs his hobbies to a considerable extent, a practice that can only delight his enthusiastic admirers, and an undeniable sign of exhaustion. Pretexts for prolonging the digressions are eagerly seized, and much of the matter should by right be spoken and not written. Perhaps the most serious weakness observable in his books is a lack of logic, which leads him to exaggeration generally and overstatement of a case. His attempt in 'The Story of My Heart' to show the unreality of logic is ingenious, but could hardly have been advanced by an educated man; the words 'by standing face to face with Nature, and not from books, I have convinced myself that there is no design and no evolution' could hardly have been written by anybody but a self-educated man. This looseness of statement and hasty generalisation does not indeed prevent us from admiring his aspirations, but it may spoil 'The Story of My Heart' for posterity. The bent indeed of Jefferies' mind is anti-scientific. A poet, living in a scientific age, he not unnaturally attributed present evils to present methods, and the veneer of cant that accompanies modern science hid from his eyes the substantial benefits lying beneath. The jargon of scientific persons, the cold application of hard and fast rules to particular cases, the injustice often perpetrated in the name of science by officialdom against the poor, repelled him, and in his warm-heartedness he is sometimes led into declaiming against the use instead of against the abuse of science. Again, his air of assurance on complicated subjects, his confidence in

certain remedies of his own, give his readers the impression that he had read but one or two chapters in the unfinished history of man.

II

THE beginning and end of Jefferies' creed is the Joyousness of Life, In Nature nothing is sad. In spring everything trembles with the joy that is the eagerness of life; when the sun has reached a certain height in the heavens, life bursts forth on the earth, and love and an ecstasy of passion fill the heart—an ecstasy of passion to love and to possess that surges when the sap rises in the wood and the trees burst into leaf. Music and the songs of birds, the rich and splendid colours and the sweet odours of flower and blossom, the grace of form of green bough against blue sky and of the snowy outlines of the clouds embody what the heart feels, expressing the idea of all things adding to the general beauty and receiving back a thousandfold. There is nothing sad in spring. Summer passes and yields to autumn. The fresh green of the leaves is transmuted to gold and crimson, the ripe nuts loosen in their brown husks, and the rough stiff hazel-leaves rustle in the autumn wind; the corn is stored, and dusk falls ere you have left the hillside for the meadows beneath. There is nothing sad in autumn: sorrow has only place in the heart of man. Lastly, the winter seizes on field and forest: by the solitary lake, covered with black ice crossed with a thousand dark-blue veins, perfect stillness vibrates on the straining ear, till the sharp crack of a branch, overladen with frozen snow, rings from the woods above. There is nothing sad in Nature. In summer each bird that sings in the greenwood, each leaf that quivers in the sunlight testifies to the joyousness of life; in winter, though all beauty seems to be buried beneath the snow, the sun, setting in a sheet of crimson flame, lights up the waste with incomparable glory, and at night when the north wind whistles round the farmhouse, the brilliant moon casts its spell over silver fields and leafless trees. There is nothing sad in Nature: even death is only terrible to those whom it touches not, for the old are glad to die, as once they were glad to live. Only what is unnatural is terrible, and death justifies itself to those whom it calls away. The mystery which surrounds us is the mystery of life, for everything changes, but nothing perishes. There is no consolation for the death of those we love, but there is something beyond consolation, the knowledge that we have loved them; for, all-absorbing as the present is, it cannot annihilate the past. Let us therefore so use the present that when death comes, having drunk strength and courage from the sunshine, we may face the shadow without fear. 'Reflect on the value of life, says Jefferies, 'and strew human life with flowers, make joy now real to those you love, and help forward the joy of those yet to be born.' The joyousness of life' is to Jefferies what the inevitableness of death is to the pessimist—an exceeding comfort. 'Nature works for the best' is his cry, and his heart is always with those

who live most in accordance with Nature. With Homer's heroes he delights in action for its own sake, he rejoices in swiftness of foot, keenness of sight, strength of limb. Health is the birthright of man, bringing with it pleasure. {Man, he argues, can never have beauty nor strength enough to satisfy his soul, and accordingly Jefferies never wearies of singing the triumph of strength and beauty; he would swing the axe till he could no longer drive the steel through the tree's tough fibres, he would battle with the sea till his limbs grew faint, and the waves tossed him back to the breakers, and buried him with their sheets of foam. To him the senses are the portals of the soul, and he avows that if men would see the beauty of the world their souls would grow as beautiful. |

It is by this passion for beauty above all that Jefferies shows himself a poet. Nothing in the shape of beauty escapes him, from the delicate pink cups of the waxen berries that thread the heavy arms of the yew to the silver crescent of the rising moon seen at midnight through the black branches of the swaying firs, from the roar of the wind in the pines; like the sound of far-off falling water, to the silence of the farmhouse at night, broken by the slow tick of the clock changing minutes to hours. So penetrated is he with the beauty of the South Downs that his words recreate the sentiment that clings to the place he is describing; thus one breathes the atmosphere of the lonely farmhouses hidden in the coombe-bottoms, and the air of the swelling green hills, from whose highest beech-crowned crests a view bursts on the eye of mile on mile of wood and meadow, of villages dotted at intervals on the landscape, of the gleam of sunlight on white spire and the flash of distant water; while above these beech-crowned crests, never deserted by the wind, stretches a vast panorama of sky, against whose blue horizon moves a slow procession of giant clouds, across whose arch the dark rain-clouds, wreathed with white vapour, glide swiftly towards the sun. And his pictures of evening bring back the indescribable peace that fills the heart at the close of an autumn day on the Downs, when the crimson sun sinks slowly over the hills, and from afar floats the quiet tinkle of the sheep-bells as the flock passes to the valley, when the leaves of the beeches on the hillside turn to glowing bronze in the passing wave of light and then fade in the dusk as the first star trembles in the sky—the indescribable peace that turns to a sense of mystery when darkness enwraps the world and the host of stars blazes forth under the quiet dome of night.

To people beautiful England with men who by leading free lives should understand and absorb much of its beauty was a favourite dream of Jefferies, and naturally he turned away in despair from the dwellers in towns who, surrounded by ugliness, end with making it a standard, and from the village populations, who, from whatever cause, never lift their eyes to the golden sunrise or the red sunset. He was thrown back on his imagination, and in 'After London' he strives to reproduce the wild freedom of uncivilised life. He pictures the days when the chieftains who now sleep in the grass-grown tumuli rushed

to slay and were slain: one sees the flashing of the uplifted spears, the struggle to gain the earthwork, the crash of men, and then the assailants break and scatter down the hill. Once more the barren Downs are clothed with beech and oak, once more the deer burst through thicket and speed through glade, while in their track rush the hunters, bow and spear in hand, following their quarry through swift stream and purple moor, till at last the stag is brought to bay in some dark gorge, where, sheltered by the overhanging rock, he thrusts with lowered antlers against the deep stabs of his foes. The forest awakes with the glare of the hunters' fire, with the torrents of sparks that rush upwards into the black night; then the shouts and the voices of men die away one by one, till all is still as before; nothing shows life in the darkness of the forest but the red glow of the embers, nothing breaks the silence but the howlings of the wolves now dying away in the distance, now suddenly sounding near at hand. All the poetry of a free life, the vigour, the lawlessness, the delights of the life of the senses, breathes in the pages of 'After London.'

Another of the most beautiful elements of Jefferies' writings is his purity. Without laying any particular stress on it, his books are fresh as the sea, fragrant as the meadow. Purity pervades them as light filters through a porcelain vase; a purity which has no kinship with that which can flourish only in the shadow of the convent wall, as ice is kept from the sun lest it should melt, but the purity of the wind of spring, that makes the blood course swift through the veins at its song of the beauty on land and sea; it is the purity of the sun, the giver of life, not of the moon whose fires are extinguished by the snows. It is the purity created by the open air, the purity of the greenwood fresh with the dews of the morning, the purity of the salt waves and the thyme-scented hills. Felise, the heroine of 'The Dewy Morn,' loses individuality through standing for the type of the purity of passion. Strength and beauty are hers, the hardy beauty that ripens beneath an English sun, the strength that the limbs wrest from the river and the hill. It is in descriptions such as that of Felise lying at the water's edge, dreaming of Martial, that Jefferies displays his real strength. [Beauty is his God, in whose presence he feels divine aspirations} And his prayers were answered, for the Gods give to few the power to image the beauty they have seen. Some of his descriptions in 'The Dewy Morn' are so pure and beautiful indeed that many people cannot read them. The purity of passion has always seemed an eternal truth to the pure, and an eternal lie to the impure. Society on this point is divided into two classes, and the astonishment expressed at the folly of one section is only equalled by the indignation felt at the hypocrisy of the other. It is impossible to blame either for an honest opinion, for nature is a pool into which all men must look, and very naturally some withdraw disgusted. If we seek for Jefferies' antithesis in views of purity, we find it in Zola. 'The soul of sweet delight can never be defiled. This saying of Blake's, which is the kernel of Jefferies' doctrines, is but a husk to Zola; for while to the one love

is the soul of the universe, and through it all things are revealed, to the other love is but a glamour, and under it the truth lies concealed. Although the beliefs of the two are utterly different, their teaching amounts to the same. Live against nature and life is accursed, says one; by obeying nature you create your own happiness, says the other. Zola, after studying all classes of a corrupt society, generalised from his experiences no more than Jefferies, who chanced to be bred among beautiful surroundings. From the difference of their surroundings it is that one preaches the beauty and purity of the flesh, the other its beauty and vileness. Zola leads you into the crowded city, and, stopping the rich and idle, tears away cloth and silk to show you unnatural lust beneath; he drags you into the grimy workshop and stifling mine, and pointing to the men and women toiling in the gloom, bids you listen to their oaths and brutal jests, and breathe the tainted air for yourself. He watches a young girl working at an unhealthy trade, surrounded with coarse and vicious companions, he sees her lose all self-respect and sink lower and lower, and he asserts—the flesh is vile. Jefferies on the other hand places his heroine Felise where she can drink deep of the beauty of earth and sky, and when love comes to her in the full flush of her beauty, he cries, ‘Without beauty there is no life for me. The divine beauty of the flesh is life itself to me.’ Love that to the pure is passion, to the passionless is lust. Jefferies dissects too little, but Zola has dissected so much that he almost fancies he has discovered the principle of love, as much within the reach of his scalpel as the principle of life.

It is noticeable that the authors who have loved the country most are never pessimistic. Pessimism, engendered by vice and misery, breeds in large towns; it is dispelled by sun and wind, by sea and sky. Jefferies has drawn gloomy pictures of the hardships and narrowness of village life, but he does not therefore always use the most sombre colours on his palette. He is not blind to the enormous difficulties that beset the man who tries to alter materially for the better the lot of his fellows, but whereas Zola preaches ‘It is written,’ Jefferies argues, ‘Say that it is hopeless, and it is hopeless; believe that something can be done, and much can be done.’ Thus does Jefferies turn inside out Zola’s coat of Necessity, and declare that it ought to be worn outside in, as a coat of Freewill. But though he remains untouched by the fashionable pessimism of the day, his theories do not lean for support on that broad-cloth optimism which leads many worthy people to argue that, as they have too much to eat, it is incredible that others should have too little; an optimism which springing from too much comfort, and the substitution of artificial for natural surroundings, leads to the employment of supernatural machinery, the fetish Providence, when anything out of the ordinary happens. In a word, their philosophy is typified in the saying of the gentleman whose coachman had been killed by lightning, ‘Providentially it struck the box-seat.’ From this bland optimism (occasionally found in Emerson), which is so irritating to the poor, Jefferies is entirely free, though had

he not suffered from poverty and privation himself it is doubtful whether his devotion to Nature would not have partly supplanted his sympathy with man. He reiterates that everything flourishes for its own purpose, and not for the sake of man. 'By night it is the same as by day; the stars care not, they pursue their courses, revolving, and we are nothing to them. All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass.' But he accepts the order of nature as being inevitable, and he occupies himself more with trying to discover the path by which man should travel, than with bemoaning the sloughs into which he has fallen.

What then are his remedies for the present evils of society? What would he have men be? First, all false gods must be set aside. 'Men,' he says, 'must abandon the pageantry of power, the still more foolish pageantry of wealth, the still more foolish precedence of place, for all this is labour thrown away; we live—that is, we snatch an existence— and our works become nothing, the piling up of fortunes, the building of cities, the establishment of immense commerce, ends in a cipher. The ceaseless labour of to-day has no sum or outcome, it leaves no sunshine and flowers to those who must succeed, nay, it sheds no sunshine on the life of the present toilers, for they are unconscious of the sun. Twelve thousand years have elapsed and yet now there is as vast an expenditure of labour, and time wasted in obtaining mere subsistence. Our earth produces not only a sufficiency but a superabundance, and pours a cornucopia of good things down upon us; in one year it produces enough food to last for thirty. Yet people die of starvation or lead a miserable existence on the verge of it. Millions upon millions toil from morning to evening to gain a mere crust of bread.' We occupy ourselves with petty things, and we get no nearer to the eternal and the immortal. What then must be done? 'The mind must first be cleared of the conceit that because we live to-day we are wiser than the ages gone. We must recognise that everything as yet has proved an illusion; all the philosophers in Diogenes Laertius fade away; [the theories of medieval life, the organon of experiment, down to the science of the hour, all is useless alike.] They are of no more account than the once mystic and now commonplace papyri of ancient Egypt, the writings of Assyria, the creed of Confucius. (All that the learning and lore of all these ages teach us is that we must begin afresh, we must try something else, we must go straight to the immense forces of the universe, to the sun, to the entity unknown." We must turn to nature, we must open our eyes to the divine beauty of the universe; we must reject all superstitions and traditions; we must become perfect in body; and then, and not till then, will great vistas open themselves to our purified senses. Our perceptions are the tools we work with; let us, then, perfect our tools, ' At present we die through our ancestors; we, in our turn, are now preparing death for our unborn posterity. Nothing has been accumulated for our benefit in ages past. All the labour and toil of so many millions who at this

hour are rushing to and fro in London has accumulated nothing for us. It should be the sacred and sworn duty of every one once, at least, during lifetime to do something in person towards the end of rolling back the tide of death.'

Jefferies' teaching, then, amounts to this. The end of life is the enjoyment of life, for in the life of the senses is the life of the soul. But the life of the senses cannot be led in cities; air, sunshine, and freedom are as essential to the health of the body as beauty is essential to the growth of the soul. Our present civilisation must be therefore cast aside, for the majority do not live under such conditions that they can develop perfect bodies or perfect souls; on the contrary, while one class has to toil night and day to get the bare necessities of life, the other is pursuing the shadow of happiness and not happiness itself, and in striving after the phantoms of place and power and wealth, the soul grows smaller, and its ideals become contemptible. Let us therefore put ourselves once again in touch with the mighty forces of nature, let us perfect our bodies, thereby bequeathing health and happiness to our children, not disease and misery, and our souls will absorb something of the sweetness of the earth, of the light of the sun, and of the beauty of the universe.

This doctrine, that man must retrace his footsteps and return to nature, is the outcome of a social crisis, when we find men of great hearts protesting against the very civilisation which has given them their aspirations. Rousseau in France, Tolstoi in Russia, and Jefferies in England, have in turn refused to follow the tendency, because it is the tendency, of their age. While the mass of men rush on intent on the things of the hour, while the goal of the many is wealth and ease, and power and glory the goal of their leaders, the souls of these men are filled with far purer images. Our gods to them are idols. They refuse to be drawn into the whirlpool of the present, for their thoughts are fixed on eternal truths. But these men are our prophets and not our guides. For when they turn their eyes from the glorious horizon to the path by which man progresses, and see how far he has yet to travel, and the toil and misery he now endures, despair seizes them, and they cry that he must turn back and begin afresh. But they ask an impossibility, for man progresses, ignorant alike of the goal to which he is bound, and of the force that impels him onward. And nation follows nation, and some have halted and are encamped by the wayside, and some have perished in the desert and their sepulchre is sand, and some have vanished utterly and their trace is nought. Human progress is a rising tide, each nation like a wave breaks on the shore, advancing only to retreat, but its place is taken by succeeding waves, and the mark is carried higher.

In all ages a few have resisted the prevailing tendency, the onward rush of their fellows, and the few who have done so have generally been the great in heart. Rousseau, Tolstoi, and Jefferies, dissimilar in most things, have this in common, that their exquisitely keen perception of the evils of the present blinds

them to the still greater evils of the past. They are answered by the history they ignore, but in putting history aside they make it.

EDWARD GARNETT.