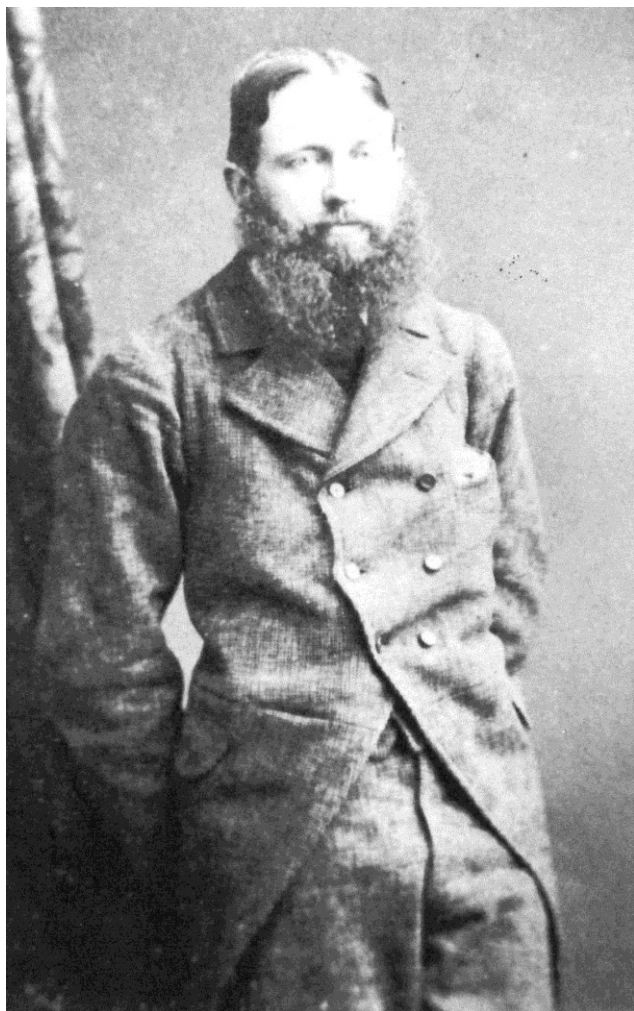




First page image: Photograph, dated April 4th, 1882 of Richard Jefferies by the London Stereoscopic Company of Regent Street, who also produced the best known portrait of the author. The Richard Jefferies Society has another copy, but of the top half only, with a note on the reverse side: "Torn in half by R.J. because he did not like it. Rescued by my mother E Sewell. Emily Hall." Emily (Hall) Sewell was Richard's cousin.

Richard Jefferies: Discoveries

George Miller

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11 May 2026

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Typeset in Garamond

George Miller was a student of Jefferies for over 60 years, and a member of the Society for almost as long. Born in Stanwell, Middlesex in 1939, he was raised in West Sussex and graduated from Cambridge University.

George wrote *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study* with Hugoe Matthews (Scolar Press, 1993) and was responsible for all the introductions to Jefferies' essays, articles and books. The 'Bib' is the best record of any writer's works and to this day, cannot be bettered. For students of Jefferies, it is the most useful publication ever produced.

George edited newly discovered texts, and compiled the section on Jefferies for the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature. He provided the biographical detail for the Richard Jefferies Wikipedia page.

His other publications include a novel titled *The Buzzards of Zinn: a Story of War and Peace* (The Medlar Press, 2010) and many books of poetry, all bound in beautiful covers. George was a bookbinder by profession. His poetry reflects his pacifist views, his abhorrence of injustice and his personal love of the beauty of nature. This poem is a prime example from Vol I of *Rehearsal: An Eclogue* (2019)

WHILE

While there is breath in my mouth let me
curse and rage against cruelty,
and ever yet more warmly bleed
for those in fear, in pain, in need.

Poetry

The Prospect of Whitby (Tern Press, 1981)

The Burial (Tern Press, 1985)

Message in a Space Bottle (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2003).

A Lessening (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2007)

Roads, Rivers, Hills & The Sea (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2011)

Who Says Money Doesn't Grow on Trees (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2012)

Poems in Plantin (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2013)

Permission (Silver Birch Press, 2014)

Seven Pastorals (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2015)

Rehearsal: An Eclogue in 2 Vols. (Hedge Sparrow Press, 2019)

The News and Weather (Hub Editions, 2022)

The following essays were an ongoing series which aimed to bring new information and interpretation to aspects of Richard Jefferies' life and works. They are collected here from, mainly, the Richard Jefferies Society's newsletters and *Journals* (RJSJ).

POSTSCRIPT 2024

Regrettably, as a young man, George Miller worked in a job cutting up sheets of asbestos. He was diagnosed with malignant pleural mesothelioma in April 2023 and died on 7 December 2023.

Here is proof, if needed, that George Miller's passion for Richard Jefferies goes back decades. This image of his letter, dated 22 Nov. 1963 to Samuel J. Looker (a major authority on Richard Jefferies), shows just that:

Fenbush ,
Rusper ,
MORSHAM.
Sx.

22 Nov '63

Dear Mr. Looker,

Thank you very much for your letter. I was very pleased to hear of your daughter's recovery, and also to receive so full & explanatory a letter long before I had expected. It clears up many points on which I was doubtful, and I shall put it by for future reference.

I have just been able to obtain a copy of 'The Jefferies Companion' which I am studying with interest. I should very much like to borrow your copy of 'The True Richard Jefferies',

if you could spare it for a couple of weeks. It is a pity it is so difficult to obtain.

There is one other question I should like to take this opportunity of asking, as it might bear on the early novels I am at present studying. Would you say, from the evidence of content, that either of the two unpublished novels in your ^{alone} collection is in fact one of those whose titles have been recorded: "Fortune; or, The Art of Success", "Only a Girl", "On a Summer Time" or "A Bit of Human Nature"? It not, has anything been heard of these last four?

With best wishes and many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

George Miller

The original letter is in the Richard Jefferies Society's Looker Archives lodged at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham.



Left to right: George Miller, Hugoe Matthews & Bill Keith, circa July 1978. Taken at Coate Water by Hiroko Keith, circa July 1978.



George representing the Oswestry Coalition for Peace, 25 April 2015. Anzac Day event held in Llangollen.

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I TWO FRAGMENTS

The 1890 volume of Cassell's Family Magazine contains an anonymous article entitled 'An Anatomy of Handwriting: by an Expert'. Several notable contemporary authors are discussed and examples of their handwriting printed in facsimile—among them Richard Jefferies. The author makes but one brief comment on Jefferies' hand:

The late Richard Jefferies wrote in a characteristically careful style; the specimen of his handwriting here shown exhibits some of that attention to the minutiae of detail by which his literary workmanship is so well known.

But more interesting than this observation is the actual passage reproduced, since, as far as I can recall, the letter it comes from is not otherwise known to us:

I am afraid to promise a series straight off the reel having a good many engagements, but possibly somewhat later I might do so. At all events I will do my best.

I remain
Faithfully yours
Richard Jefferies

Here we have an author very much in demand, but wise enough to keep his options open. It seems likely that this was written in the wake of the success of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, with a series of articles coming out in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Standard* and a novel, *Greene Ferne Farm*, in *Time*. We can only speculate on which publisher's or editor's enquiries he was responding to, and what the projected series might have been. But how tragically brief was this expansive period of acclaim and opportunity, before illness set in, and book sales began to decline.



My second fragment comes from the same period: an original scrap of manuscript in Jefferies' hand, written on the same notepaper that he used at his Surbiton address in 1878 and 1879. Our expert would not have been so complimentary about the handwriting of this hastily scrawled note, and it is only after much scrutiny that I've puzzled it out as follows:

Twilight

As for barn owls—you may stay all night and hardly hear one: all shot and nailed to the shed wall—with rows at one end dried shrivelled and green at the other one [*or* “end”] in their plumage white and beautiful.

Inserted after “green” above and below the line we have: “wrapped by nature in a mummy case of green”. There is a link here to ‘Traitors on the Gibbet’ in *The Amateur Poacher* (1880 p.89) where the grisly gallery of the keeper’s victims are itemised in detail: “In the second row the dried and shrivelled creatures were closely wrapped in nature’s mummy-cloth of green”. Clearly Jefferies abandoned the original context in which the note was written, but the telling phrase that occurred as an afterthought was preserved. Even in this small instance we see the artist at work.



II

W. H. ----- ?

In a paper on Jefferies written for the Manchester Literary Club in 1906 George H Bell comments on the lack of appreciation for Jefferies during his lifetime, and gives the following illustration:

There are few more pathetic revelations than the note attached to a set of Jefferies' books (1st editions) in a recent second-hand catalogue. They are all inscribed in Jefferies own writing to a friend of his, and came to the bookseller's hand *uncut*. The books of a man who yearned for sympathy and to whom it meant so much.

This is without doubt the same collection that Walter T Spencer refers to in his memoirs, published in 1923:

Twenty years ago I remember disposing of nine volumes of his best works, first editions, for twelve guineas. Each book was inscribed with an autograph presentation to one and the same person, who had inked out his own family name before selling them. But the fact of the volumes remaining with unopened sheets is a melancholy evidence that this particular friend of poor Jefferies was careless of his connection with such an unrivalled painter of country life...

Elsewhere Spencer describes Jefferies coming into his shop in New Oxford Street. He says he could never quite fathom Jefferies, who rarely seemed at ease. It's tempting to identify Spencer as the "cunning old bookseller" Jefferies refers to in 'Nature in Books', who offered to make up an early copy of Gerard's Herbal for him. A made up copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home* in Swindon Public Library has Spencer's label in it!

Despite his delight in the Gerard, even in its defective state, Jefferies resisted the temptation to buy a book he couldn't afford. I was not so successful when two inscribed copies of Jefferies' own books turned up on ABE a couple of years ago. I bought one of them—*Hodge and His Masters*. What specially interested me was that the name of the dedicatee in both cases had been crossed out, and when I contacted the dealer he told

me he'd bought the books at a fair where there were four similarly inscribed copies on offer. I had no doubt these were from Spencer's 9 volume set, and was curious to see if I could work out the name of Jefferies' false friend. All the dealer could decipher were the initials W H.

It wasn't that difficult. The recipient was W H Mudford and *Hodge* proved a happy choice as he was editor of the *Standard* where *Hodge* first appeared. Mudford, whose father wrote sketches and owned two newspaper titles, joined the *Standard* as a young man, and so impressed the proprietor that in 1876 the latter made him manager and editor for life by the terms of his will. Under Mudford's control the paper came to rival the *Telegraph* as a popular 1 penny daily, and the *Times* in its coverage of US and foreign affairs. Though stolidly Tory under his predecessor Mudford made it more independent and culturally broader, and had the reputation of being a law unto himself. When Longmans published Disraeli's last novel, *Endymion*, in November 1881, the *Standard* somehow obtained an early set of sheets and published a review three days before publication summarising the entire plot and identifying the originals of the characters, and also was somewhat cool about the book's merits. Longman was furious and complained to Disraeli, who replied that Mudford must have obtained the copy by bribery or deception—it was just his style. He accuses Mudford of affecting a conservative tone in the paper to appease his readers and “make his assistance more effective to his secret Liberal allies.” Longman asked for a meeting with Mudford, who refused. He then instructed his solicitors to proceed against him but there was no actual proof of wrong doing. Mudford emerged unscathed by the incident, and even remained a member of the exclusive Carlton Club.



W H Mudford

It can be seen that Mudford moved in rather different circles from Jefferies and was not perhaps the sort of man he might have struck up a personal friendship with. His one extant letter to Mudford, in reply to criticism of a hunting scene in *Hodge*, is entirely formal. Why then did he send Mudford copies of his books?

The *Standard* published articles by Jefferies in 1875 and from 1878 to 1887, the longest period of all the journals he contributed to. His father read the *Standard*, and with its independent, if not subversive, conservatism it was perhaps the paper Jefferies read himself. Sending his books to the editor was simply a way of reminding him that he was still a productive and successful author.

Jefferies' life certainly had its tragic aspect but he was not "pathetic", or "poor" in any but the pecuniary sense. And he

had more business acumen than he is generally given credit for.

Sources:

- ❖ George H Bell. *Concerning Richard Jefferies and Country Life*. In *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*, vol.32, 1906.
- ❖ Walter T Spencer. *Forty years in My Bookshop*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1923.
- ❖ Richard Jefferies. *Nature in Books*. In *Field and Hedgerow*. Longmans 1889.
- ❖ Joseph Hatton. *Journalistic London: Third Paper*. In *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, vol LXIV no. 379, December 1881. (The portrait of W H Mudford, 1839-1916, is taken from here)
- ❖ Annabel Jones. *Disraeli's Endymion: a Case Study*. In *Essays in the History of Publishing*. edited by Asa Briggs, Longman Group. 1974.



III PORTRAITS OF AN AUTHOR

Virtually all portraits of Jefferies derive from one image, a studio photograph by the London Stereoscopic Company. According to Cyril Wright this was taken on June 16 1879, though the Notebooks suggest Jefferies was at home that day. Looker dates it 1881 and another writer, Bryn Purdy, 1882. It would appear to show an older man than the previously unpublished photograph by Elliott and Fry reproduced in *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study* (1993). In this the features are more delicate and sensitive, more open and unresolved; and the hairline is lower, the beard less full. But this came from an album of authors published by Richard Bentley and Son, who didn't sign Jefferies up until June 1884. Another unpublished photograph in a private collection I have seen shows the same dreamy, unfocussed look as the Elliott and Fry portrait.

The most prolific image derived from the LSC portrait is the etching by William Strang, first published in the large paper edition of *Field and Hedgerow* in 1889 and reused in Longman editions of Jefferies through to 1936. This is a very fine and accurate reproduction, but compared with the original the face is more lived in, the expression more mature and self assured.

The next portrait based on the LSC photograph was the memorial bust by Margaret Thomas unveiled in Salisbury Cathedral in 1892. Photographs of this and another version of it in the National Portrait Gallery have again been frequently used in Jefferies publications. The Thomas portrait takes the tendencies apparent in the Strang image to an extreme. The mouth and eyebrows droop, the bridge of the nose is more prominent, the brow is lofty, the beard baroque: a countenance heavy with the weight of experience, and

thought, and suffering. As Kedrun Laurie explains in a closely researched article this transformation owed much to the influence of Besant and Jefferies' widow in their desire to ennoble Jefferies as a sage, a profound questioner who yet returned in the end to the Christian fold.

The bust, with its sanctified location and God invoking inscription, has not always found favour with Jefferies' admirers. W H Hudson strongly disliked it, but forgives the artist on the grounds that she only had a photograph to work from. In fact Thomas had produced a much more truthful image from the same photograph at an earlier date. This was to illustrate an article by Arthur Kinglake in the magazine *Illustrations*, edited by Francis George Heath (see illustration below). The article, in the December 1888 issue, begins:

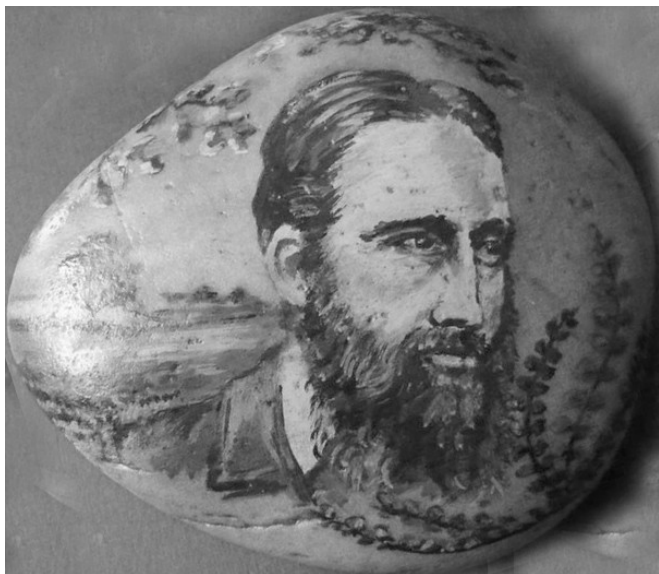
A photograph is a marvellous aid in retaining for living and loving ones the features of those who have gone. A friend of the late Richard Jefferies, not unmindful of some very slight attention shown by me to the family of this lamented author, sent me a photograph of him, from which Miss Margaret Thomas has made an excellent drawing...



Drawing of Richard Jefferies by Margaret Thomas, 1888.

Kinglake (brother of *Eothen* author A.W. Kinglake) in fact launched an appeal for Jefferies' family in the *Morning Post* and was later instrumental in commissioning the bust. He was a close friend and patron of the sculptor. The friend of Jefferies' he refers to was the artist J.W. North who worked tirelessly for the family and in support of the bust project. Heath, the editor, was another member of the memorial committee, and contributed a separate article in praise of Jefferies in an earlier issue of *Illustrations*.

It is clear from Kinglake's introduction that Margaret Thomas's brief on this occasion was to produce a likeness, not an interpretation or soul portrait. The result, in the youthful freshness of complexion, the even composure of the lips and the still, reflective rather than brooding, expression of the eyes, is very different from the bust, and in my view more genuine.



Painting on a pebble by Jane McCuska

Two other notable portraits from the LSC photograph are those produced for the centenaries of Jefferies' birth and death. I have seen the one by Stephen Makepeace Wiens, unveiled November 6 1948, only in a monochrome reproduction. It is recognisably Jefferies but like the bust a heavier man, both in weight and attitude, with something guarded or truculent about the expression. Peter Nutt's painting of 1987 though correct in detail fails for me to capture anything of the spirit of the original. One that does do it for me is a painting on a pebble by Jane McCuska, c. 1985. It was given me by Professor Peter Drew of Glasgow University who required his 19th century history students to read and comment on Jefferies. Miss McCuska produced the portrait in lieu of an essay and if it didn't help towards her degree it was certainly a work of more lasting interest.

Sources:

- ❖ Purdy, Bryn. *Literary Faces*. Volume one. Melstock Press, 1995.
- ❖ Wright, Cyril. *Richard Jefferies in Surrey*. RJS Talks and Articles 22.
- ❖ Miller, George, and Matthews, Hugoe. *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study*. Scolar Press, 1993.
- ❖ Laurie, Kedrun. *Margaret Thomas, Sculptor of the Bust of Richard Jefferies in Salisbury Cathedral*. RJS Journal, 13, 2004.



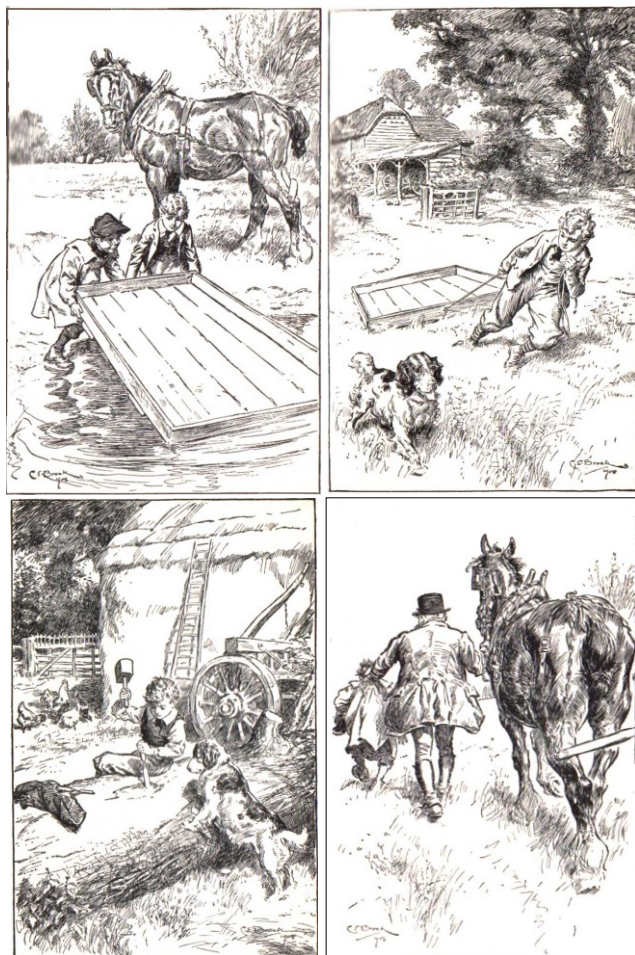
IV TWO ILLUSTRATORS

Charles Edmund Brock (born 1870) was a popular and prolific illustrator from 1890 until his death in 1938. Many of the best known classics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were published with his line illustrations, which combine accuracy and spontaneity, and delicate Regency refinement with robust rustic character. It was a style particularly suited for children's books, titles like *The Railway Children*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *English Fairy Tales* being among his most successful, as well as making adult works more accessible to the young. He would have been an ideal illustrator for Jefferies, especially *Bevis*, and I was pleased to discover that he did in fact produce a group of four line drawings and a watercolour sketch for an extract from the first chapter, 'Bevis at Work' (reproduced on p.17). My source for these is an obscure, undated anthology.¹

The profuse illustrations, in colour and monochrome plates as well as black and white text blocks, are by an array of artists, including some distinguished names like Arthur Rackham, W. Heath Robinson, and Charles's younger brother H.M. Brock, also a notable illustrator. It is unlikely that the Preston publisher edited the work or commissioned such a distinguished cast of illustrators. No doubt it was re-issued with the first publisher's permission, a supposition confirmed by the fact that the title page is a cancel, or replacement, of the one printed with the rest of the sheets. But I have yet to discover the identity of the original publisher. The *Bevis*

¹ *Alice's Champion*, by Mary Cowden Clarke, and other stories and verses by Richard Jefferies [and a string of other Victorian and Edwardian authors]. Profusely illustrated. James Askew and Son, Ltd. Corporation Street, Preston.'

illustrations are all signed 'C.E. Brock 1908', which from other clues would probably be the date the anthology first appeared.



Bevis at work

Bevis had been previously illustrated by A.V. Poncy in an edition, published by Sampson Low and abridged by G.A. Henty, that circulated during the 1890s. In blazer and cap Poncy's *Bevis* is a public schoolboy, but the weakness of execution gives us little more than a stereotype.

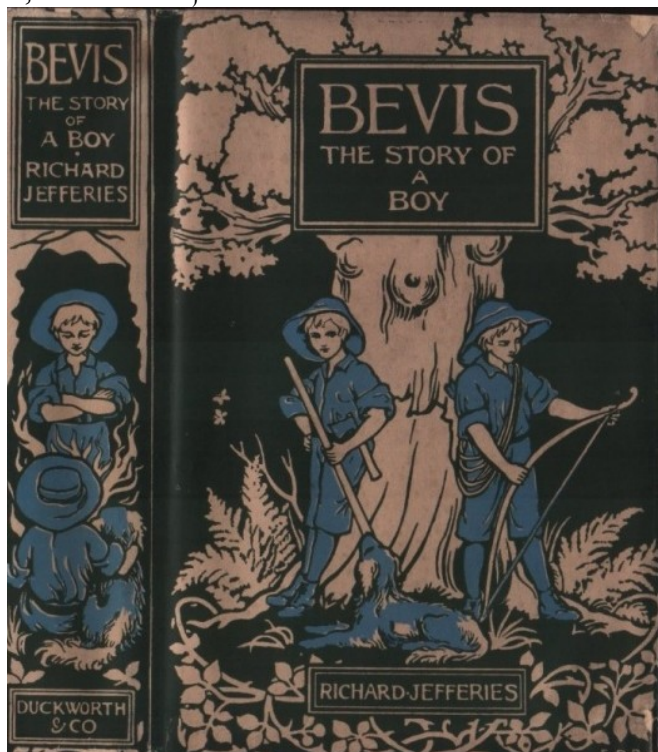
In Brock's drawings Bevis is cutely childish, but determined as well, and the carter's lad, Pan, the horse and the farm background detail are delightful. The colour plates in the 1913 Duckworth edition are also accomplished, and richly atmospheric. Bevis is a more manly figure, if not the noble youth portrayed in the unsigned frontispiece to the Herbert Strang abridgement of 1939. In E.H. Shepard's illustrations to the Cape edition, 1932-1972, we have what is likely to remain the most skilful and sensitive interpretation, but these examples of Brock's work suggest that a full text illustrated by him might have been a rival to it.



Brock illustration of Bevis (1913 Duckworth edition)

The Duckworth edition of *Bevis*, first published in 1904, has a splendid pictorial binding showing Bevis and Mark beneath the boughs of the mighty council oak, armed with flintlock, axe and bow, Pan lying at their feet and two butterflies hovering mid-air (see p.15). In their floppy hats and baggy clothes they look more like desert island castaways than school

prefects. As usual with book covers the image is unsigned, but we can now identify it as the work of another significant and celebrated Edwardian, F.D. Bedford. We know this because when the seventh and last impression was printed thirty years later the publisher re-used the original art work, clearly signed F.D.B., for the dust jacket.



There can be little doubt that Bedford also designed the covers of the two companion volumes published by Duckworth, *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1904) and *After London* (1905).

V
AMONG THE GREATS

Perhaps one characteristic of great writers is that they influence others. Professor Ebbatson found striking correlations of thought and phrase between the Marabar caves episode in Forster's *A Passage to India* and chapter VI of *The Story of My Heart*, the 'something of Richard Jefferies', he argues, that a character in *Howard's End* refers to.

There is a resonance of the same work in the following:-

He felt above him the vast indifferent dome and the calm processes of the heavenly bodies; and the earth beneath him, the earth that had borne him, had taken him to her breast. He closed his eyes in the languor of sleep. His eyelids trembled as if they felt the vast cyclic movement of the earth and her watchers, trembled as if they felt the strange light of some new world.



James Joyce



E.M. Forster

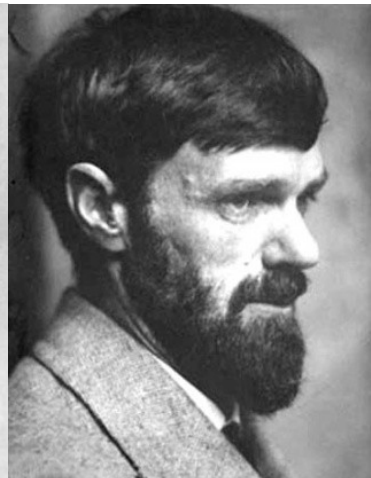
This is James Joyce in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Did Joyce read *The Story of My Heart*? Apparently he did. A Joyce scholar, Harold Beck, researching the dense web of allusions in *Ulysses*, finally traced two references back to Jefferies' autobiography. In the library episode Stephen recalls the phrase 'painted chambers loaded with tilebooks' which comes from the same unnerving sequence outside the Royal

Exchange, where Jefferies contemplates the agitated chaos of the human mass, and the futility of all systems and civilizations, which so disturbed Forster. The other reference to the 'mesial groove' of a Greek Statue Beck links to the National Gallery passage in chapter V.

Henry Williamson and D.H. Lawrence shared Jefferies heightened awareness of the natural world. A debt in Williamson's case is abundantly acknowledged, but Lawrence says little about Jefferies, though Q.D. Leavis and other critics have seen him as Lawrence's literary precursor. His declaration 'I do not like 'The Story of My Heart'' might seem definitive but the context shows it in another light. He is comparing it with Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and his own novel, *The Trespasser*, as a work that, on reflection, the author might feel to be too self-revealing. *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* could be considered in the same category. Lawrence is commenting on his own ambivalent feelings about writing beyond the bounds of convention.



Henry Williamson



D.H. Lawrence

Elsewhere Ebbatson quotes a passage from *The Story* as a likely source for Lawrence's best known poem 'Snake', and in a more detailed essay traces remarkable concurrences of imagery in two famous poems by G.M Hopkins (pictured below) and passages in Jefferies' prose. In this case, he concedes, there can be no question of influence, as neither would have read the other's works:



Rather, analogous temperaments, utterly different by education and career, have attained a similar vision of the natural world. Indeed, Jefferies occasionally discloses a sacramental view of nature which is identical to that of Hopkins's nature poems... *Hodge and His Masters* (1880) might be read as a gloss on *Harry Ploughman*; and the lament for John Brown in Jefferies last essay 'My Old Village', possesses just the sweet gravity of *Felix Randall*. Finally, it might be justly claimed for Jefferies that the reader of the notebooks comes into contact with a strenuous and latterly anguished sensibility which has many points of contact with the Hopkins of the journals and the terrible sonnets.

Ebbatson is right to see the differences of belief and circumstance between these two inspirational writers as superficial. A Catholic theologian who similarly regarded Jefferies' rejection of conventional faith as insignificant in the light of his spiritual vision was Edward Ingram Watkin, author of *The Philosophy of Mysticism*, in which he devotes many pages 'to point out the reality, depth and value of the truth... learnt and taught by Jefferies.' But the mystical revelations are not the whole story:

Jefferies, however, has another if quite secondary title to our study and affection, his incomparable insight into nature, not merely as an external knowledge of natural objects—though he is indeed an observer of unrivalled diligence and accuracy—but a sympathetic understanding of the inner life of nature and the spiritual values therein expressed.

Quoting at length from 'The Pageant of Summer' he makes a remarkable comparison:

The poetry of Homer is thus steeped in the sympathetic intuition of nature. His nature similes are cameos glowing with the colour of the object described, whose essence is revealed in some epithet which brings it before the reader in its living reality... The very style has taken his Homeric colouring, almost the Homeric rhythm. In the midst of the nineteenth century Jefferies has recaptured the unsophisticated freshness of the world's youth.

It is a comparison which would certainly have delighted the author.

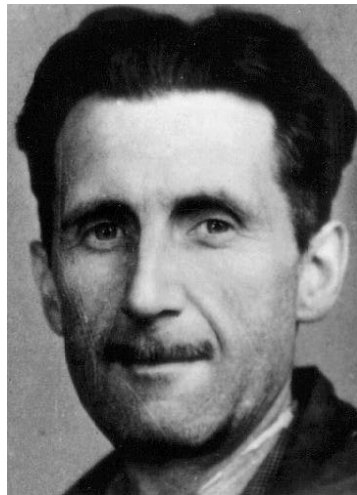
In February 1880 the publisher George Smith of Smith Elder and Co introduced Jefferies to Thomas Hardy and Henry James, major novelists who had already produced some of their finest work. The author of *The Scarlet Shawl* was hardly in the same league, though his first country books had been well received, and his first entirely rural, and Hardy-esque, novel, *Greene Ferne Farm*, had just appeared. If Smith had hoped some friendly guidance from more experienced writers might have ensued he must have been disappointed, and by the end of the year he was no longer accepting new work by Jefferies. In Hardy's case one might have expected some engagement, but what little notice he took of the younger writer on themes so close to his own indicates a certain reserve.

Henry James, cosmopolitan, sophisticated, the supreme novelist of manners and master of 'the art of fiction', can hardly be expected to have taken an interest in a provincial naturalist, however gifted. He owned a copy of *Wild Life in a Southern County*, but didn't acquire it until 1899. However his brother, William James, equally eminent as a philosopher and psychologist, certainly took note of *The Story of My Heart*, describing it as a 'wonderful mystical rhapsody' in his most important work, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and elsewhere as a 'remarkable autobiographical document'. Like Watkin he

responded to Jefferies as a writer, not just as a useful case study, and refers to the same essay, using the same central term, in a letter to Henry written in 1906:

I have just been reading in the volume by Richard Jefferies called "Life of the Fields" a wonderful rhapsody, "The Pageant of Summer." It needs to be read twice over and very attentively, being nothing but an enumeration of all the details visible in the corner of an old field with a hedge and a ditch. But rightly taken in, it is probably the highest flight of human genius in the direction of nature-worship. I don't see why it should not count as an immortal thing... Imperishable freshness!

A reference to Jefferies in one of George Orwell's letters suggests a thorough absence of sympathy, if not antipathy. He is commenting on Rupert Brook's 'Granchester': 'an enormous gust of "country sentiment", a sort of accumulated vomit from a stomach stuffed with place names... as a poem worse than worthless'; and he explains it as a product of 'the great age of the "Nature poet", the heyday



of Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson.' However on another occasion, asked what he considered the best books ever written, he came up with a list of 38 titles which included *The Amateur Poacher*.

Geoffrey Grigson remarked 'Jefferies has always captured the second rate.' If anyone deserves so belittling a term it is perhaps those critics who fail to see beyond his surface faults and follies to the inner strengths and significance of his vision.

Sources:

- ❖ J.R. Ebbatson. Richard Jefferies Society. Talks and Articles nos. 7, 30 and 34.
- ❖ James Joyce Broadsheet, number 61, February 2002.
- ❖ Edward Ingram Watkin, *The Philosophy of Mysticism* (London: Grant Richards, 1920).
- ❖ The Letters of William James (London: Longmans, 1926).
- ❖ George Orwell. *A Patriot After All*, 1940-41, Secker and Warburg, 1999; *A kind of Compulsion*, 1903-1936, Secker and Warburg 1998.



VI WAS JEFFERIES A RACIST?

The accusation is just one, but perhaps the most damaging, in a litany of detraction delivered by the late Alain Delattre, a French academic who had studied Jefferies for 25 years (his research including a spell as a labourer on a Wiltshire farm) on no less an occasion than the centenary lecture given to the Society in September 1987:

He never ceased to be a racist... I know that racism was rampant in his times, blatantly expressed by many writers, Cobbett, Lamb for instance, but this is no excuse.

He instances a character describing negro slaves as “cockroaches” in *Ben Tubbs Adventures* and two references to “the Jewish grip” in ‘My Old Village’, and states that Jefferies “disliked—that is feared—the gypsies.” Allied to his “Caesarism” (leader worship) and sadism (“Why is it so pleasant to strike... the fury of striking with a keen blade...” — though in fairness Jefferies is referring to cutting trees, not people), the shadowy outlines of a proto-Nazi begin to emerge from Delattre’s portrayal. Though few would recognise this as the true Jefferies a passage about gypsies in ‘Just before Winter’ is disturbing. He deplores mixed marriages between gypsies and native Anglo Saxon stock in English villages, and opines that Jews and Gypsies would have died out were it not for widespread interbreeding. “It is, in fact, the intermarriages that have kept the pure races of these human parasites alive. The mixing is continually going on.”

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the development of anthropology as a science, coinciding with the greatest moment of colonial expansion and largely as a means of proving the inferiority of the subjugated races. In 1853-5 a French ethnologist, Arthur Comte de Gobineau, published a key work in four volumes, his *Essay on the Inequality of the*

Human Races. The importance of racial purity became an established dogma. Even Disraeli, much admired by Jefferies in his youth, has a character proclaim: "Race is everything; there is no other truth. Any race must fall that carelessly suffers its blood to be mixed." Another influential writer, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, made the link with "Caesarism":

Race lifts a man above himself: it endows him with extraordinary—I might almost say supernatural—powers, so entirely does it distinguish him from the chaotic jumble of peoples drawn from all parts of the world; and should this man of pure origin be gifted above his fellows, then the fact of race strengthens and elevates him on every hand, and he becomes a genius towering over the rest of mankind.

The pseudo sciences of social Darwinism and eugenics, combined with popular prejudice, further strengthened the movement in the early 20th century. The "Jewish problem" was much canvassed, Zionism promoted as a solution, and beyond expulsion even the elimination of the inferior races mooted, notably by H G Wells. The German sociologist Hans Friedrich Günther defined degeneracy in racial terms, and proclaimed the error of philanthropy and social measures when devoted to those of "inferior hereditary qualities". He wrote: "The question put to us is whether we have courage enough to make ready for future generations a world cleansing itself racially and eugenically." Günther cites Jefferies in his work *Religious Attitudes of Indo-Europeans* as an example of Indo-European mysticism, which was not dissolution or intoxication as in other cultures but "self-assertion and confrontation of destiny" and "the inner contemplation of high minded men".

It can fairly be said that the blueprint for the European genocide had been drafted well before the man with the necessary "courage" arrived on the scene. When the horrific consequences of ideas formulated in book-lined Victorian

studies were exposed to the light of day in 1945 racism vanished from the political and scientific consensus, and earlier writers who had asserted or merely accepted it were tainted. Henry Williamson had allied himself closely with national socialist ideology. In a passage comparing Hitler's autobiography with Jefferies' Williamson reaffirms his faith while rejecting its practical consequences. He sees:

...many similarities in these two men. Both grew up as solitaries, unaffected by schooling, learning only from the natural intuitional self. I am sure that such genius or power should be used only in the creation of art: never applied DIRECTLY to the actions of ordinary men. Yet both Hitler and Jefferies were prophets crying, and perishing, in the industrial wilderness of the gold-god civilisation.

My delving into obscurities recently uncovered a publication entitled *Yesterday & Tomorrow: Roots of the National Revolution*, undated but production and ISBN suggesting 1980s or '90s. For its editors and readers nothing much had changed since the 1930s. The twenty five points of the original National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) manifesto are printed in full, along with the prescriptions of leading theorists like Joseph Goebbels, Gottfried Feder and Gregor Strasser. A number of English writers, deemed sympathetic witnesses, are also quoted at length: Robert Blatchford, Viscount Lymington, G.K. Chesterton, William Morris and Richard Jefferies. The latter is represented by the first chapter of *The Story of My Heart*, with a short introduction accompanied by an illustration (see below) showing a rugged countryman (Nordic type) gazing over a fence at an ordered and productive rural landscape:

Jefferies' work reflects a profound love of his native land. His affinity with nature and his enthusiasm for Life are a valuable antidote to the artificial, soul-deadening values of the rootless cosmopolitan Coca-Cola culture which threatens our sense of national identity today.

Although not 'political' as such, Jefferies' writings were a source of inspiration for early patriotic British socialists such as William Morris. The value of his visionary contribution to the spiritual aspect of the Movement has not declined with the passage of time.



In the general editorial Jefferies is elevated even beyond membership of the blood and soil fraternity to the status of martyr for the cause, who “overworked and exhausted, died of tuberculosis, the disease of the dark, irresponsible industrial Capitalism which he hated so much.” There is no mention anywhere of the fate of the European Jews, other than side swipes at “the lies and smears of wartime propaganda” and the “distorted fantasies of Jewish Hollywood.”

Undoubtedly there are some resemblances between Jefferies’ ideas about money, mechanisation, distribution, civilisation, nature, the land etc. and the more idealistic elements in National Socialism, but to align him with the full programme, and racism in particular, is absurd. The “cockroach” slur comes from a character in a very early story. Speaking for himself in maturity there is no discrimination in

his desire “to be loved by every beautiful woman on earth, from the swart Nubian to the white and divine Greek.” And in context “parasites” must surely have been intended as a neutral scientific term, however mistaken the science in question, rather than, as now, an expression of racial hatred. He admires the uncomplaining fortitude of the gypsies surviving on the common during severe winter weather in ‘Hours of Spring’. Like most country people he preferred honest, hard working, plain speaking and respectable folk to their opposites, regardless of who or what they were. As for the Jews, perhaps this little anecdote recalled by Jefferies’ son is all that need be added. During the family’s residence at Lorna Road, Brighton:

A very pleasant family of Jews lived next door, and, finding us friendly, they used to send in little gifts to father, such as Passover bread, which we all enjoyed very much.

Sources:

- ❖ Allain A Delattre. *John Richard Jefferies: his Worst and his Best*. The Centenary lecture delivered August 2nd, 1987. Richard Jefferies Society Talks and Articles 62.
- ❖ Arthur Comte de Gobineau. *Essai sue l’Inegalite des Races Humaines*. Paris, Didot, 1853-5.
- ❖ Houston Stewart Chamberlain. *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. John Lane, 1910.
- ❖ Hans F K Günther. *The Racial Elements of European History*. Methuen, 1927.
- ❖ Hans F K Günther. *The Religious Attitudes of the Indo-Europeans*. Historical Review Press, 2001 (reprint).
- ❖ Henry Williamson (ed.) *Richard Jefferies: Selections of his Work...* Faber & Faber, second edition, 1947.
- ❖ *Yesterday & Tomorrow: Roots of the National-Revolution*. London, Rising Press, n.d.
- ❖ *Concerning Richard Jefferies by Various Writers*. Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944.

VII
“BY THE AUTHOR OF *THE*
GAMEKEEPER AT HOME”

The habit of former owners of books to place or paste relevant cuttings or letters inside the endpapers often results in some interesting finds. A copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, first impression 1878, signed ‘Geo. King Harrison | Oct 78.’, has a tipped in letter from Jefferies to H.J. Moule Esq., headed ‘2 Woodside | Surbiton | Surrey | Jan 28th.’ Jefferies expresses pleasure and interest in Moule’s observation on rooks and a tame partridge, and thanks Moule for kind remarks about his book, probably *Wild Life in a Southern County*. He mentions his illness as the reason for his delayed reply.

Henry Joseph Moule (1825–1904) was the eldest of the eight sons of the Reverend Henry and Mary Moule. Henry senior became well known as an evangelical reformer at Fordington in Dorset, where he pursued an active programme of social and sanitary improvements among the rural poor. One son died in infancy and one, Horace, a close friend of Thomas Hardy, committed suicide. The others were high achievers, becoming bishops and academics, while Henry Joseph gained distinction as a prolific watercolourist who left a detailed record of Dorset life and scenery.¹

Between 1856 and 1860 he taught Hardy to sketch in water-colours.

¹ For an illustrated catalogue of H.J. Moule’s work see *A Victorian’s View of Dorset*, by Gwen Yarker, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1997.



*Henry Joseph Moule at the easel
of his own making*

Geo. King Harrison was a Staffordshire mine owner and JP with no known connection to Jefferies or Moule.

Another copy, the illustrated edition of 1880, has the name stamp of R.S. Chambers, probably Robert (Secundus) Chambers (1832-1888) editor of *Chambers's Journal*, with a loosely inserted letter from Jefferies to Chambers addressed Savernake, Lorna Road, West Brighton, Jan 25th, with a pencil annotation "Nature around London". The letter acknowledges Chambers' kindness in proposing to review his book (*Nature Near London*) in the *Journal* and thanks him for a postal order. The review came out on 12th April 1884 and is also headed "Nature Around London". The book was published in April 1883, and Jefferies was approached by Robert Chambers for contributions on country topics to the *Journal* on June 8 1883. It would appear from this that Chambers' interest in Jefferies was stimulated by *Nature Near London* rather than *The Gamekeeper at Home*. However in a previously unnoticed letter in the National Library of Scotland, dated 22 March (no year,

probably 1884 but possibly 1883, i.e. before the appearance of *Nature Near London*) Chambers asks Jefferies for a story along the lines of *The Gamekeeper at Home* but “containing a plot” (underlined) with a postscript saying “politics and religious controversy debarred”. No such work materialised but it is noteworthy that his first contribution to the *Journal* was ‘A King of Acres’ in three parts, a study of rural characters and problems in the manner of his later fiction. Chambers is possibly unique among Jefferies’ editors, publishers and literary advisers in having encouraged him to produce a work of fiction.

The Gamekeeper is a particularly good source of such discoveries as it was his most successful and best known work throughout his short life. Every subsequent life-time book named *The Gamekeeper* first of Jefferies’ other works listed on the title pages, and *The Amateur Poacher*, *Wild Life* and the first issue of *Bevis* had “by the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*” on the spine. In purely numerical terms its success would be the envy of a relatively unknown writer even today. Between June 1878 and 1881 Smith, Elder & Co. produced 9750 copies in a series of separate printings.² It was widely reviewed in the

² The bibliography is complex as title page statements do not match the publisher’s register. The following guide to identification is suggested after close comparison of copies:

June 1878. First impression of first edition. No edition statement on title page. 1878.

Oct. 1878. First edition second impression. Title page has *SECOND EDITION* 1878

Nov. 1878. First edition third impression. Title *THIRD EDITION* 1878, 2 in signature M² superior.

Jan. 1879. First edition fourth impression. Title *THIRD EDITION* 1878, 2 in signature M₂ normal.

Jan. 1879. American issue of above. Title *THIRD EDITION* 1879, 2 in signature M₂ normal.

July 1879. First edition fifth impression. Title *THIRD EDITION* 1879, signature ‘F’ signed ‘*F’.

Dec. 1879. Second edition, illustrated. Title no edition statement, 1880.

Dec. 1879. American issue of second (illustrated) edition. No edition statement, 1880.



Coulson Kernahan

regions and Scotland as well as in London journals and newspapers. We can get a good idea of the impact made by these “sketches of natural history and rural life” from an account by the novelist, critic and biographer Coulson Kernahan (1858–1943) of coming across one of them in the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

It so quivered with poignantly passionate if somewhat pagan love of Nature and of Art, it revealed so beauty-haunted and beauty-athirst a personality, that my attention was instantly riveted. I read it not once but many times. In fact I cut it out, to preserve, and have it to this day.

He goes on to say that the later Jefferies became for him, as for other contemporaries, too “feverish”; and Jefferies’ failure to realise that the beauties of nature were “manifestations of God” was problematic. “None the less”, he concludes, “Jefferies, so newly awakened, almost re-created the nature wonder and nature-worship spirit within us that today there are scores of nature-writers when in his time there were few.”

This was written in 1925, but the boom in nature and country writing began quite rapidly after the appearance of *The Gamekeeper at Home*. Up to that point it could be said to have been largely the preserve of the more highly educated or socially advantaged classes, scientists, sportsmen, antiquarians,

Feb. 1880. First edition sixth impression. Title states *THIRD EDITION* 1879, F signed normally.

1881. First edition seventh impression. Title page states *NEW EDITION*, 1881.

specimen collecting clergymen—the names of Gilbert White, Charles Kingsley, Charles Waterton, J.G. Wood, Frank Buckland and Philip Gosse come to mind. With Jefferies' success came the realisation that any writer with a country upbringing could turn what for him was common knowledge into saleable literary copy. A good example might be Denham Jordan writing as “a Son of the Marshes”, whose notes and observations were edited by J.A. Owen in a series of books of Jefferies-like content and titles: *Woodland, Moor and Stream; Within an Hour of London; Forest Field and Fell; On Surrey Hills*. He writes in the latter:

As a fellow field-naturalist, I would pay my tribute of praise, and express my perfect appreciation of the work of one of the most minute and truthful observers that England has ever seen... I feel competent, as one of nature's children, to give an opinion as to the value of the work of my lamented fellow naturalist, Richard Jefferies.

In ‘Rustic Naturalists’, a chapter in *Wild England of To-day*, another successor, C.J.C Cornish, links Jefferies with Thomas Bewick and William Cobbett as one of few such writers to actually have a background of farming or farm labour. “There are”, however, “numbers of men employed in sedentary occupations in villages and small country towns, who find in the pursuit of natural history the same change and excitement which the London artisan does in his favourite hobby of angling in the well-fished waters of the Thames and Lea.” Undoubtedly many obscure authors and journalists in the ‘80s and ‘90’s took a leaf or two out of Jefferies’ books, as well as others, not quite forgotten, with a clear or acknowledged debt. It was perhaps a trend that would have taken place in any case, with the spread of education and urbanisation, but the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home* was certainly a catalyst.

A number of commentators on literary developments at the end of the nineteenth century also credit Jefferies with a key role in the emergence of the regional novel:

His works were the boon companions of men and women 'commencing novelist', and it was the fascination of his treatment of the total resources of a couple of counties that awoke a new interest in regional writing. Again and again in letters Mary Webb expresses her indebtedness to Jefferies and in this she is typical of most if not all her contemporaries... It is the totality of presentation that occupies the novelist today ... It gives his work that note of credibility which can alone secure survival in literature as a transcript of life.

This from "bookman and collector" T.J. Hardy in 1934, but a more eminent critic had earlier regarded the same phenomenon with a sharper eye. In 'Externals', a chapter in



Arthur Quiller-Couch

Adventures in Criticism (based on an article in *The Speaker*: 'A Literary Causerie: the Countryside as Copy'), Arthur Quiller-Couch writes:

The works of Richard Jefferies form a considerable museum of externals of one particular kind: and this is possibly the reason why the Cockney novelist waxes eloquent over Richard Jefferies. He can now import the breath of the hay-field into his works at no greater expense of time and trouble than taking down *The Gamekeeper at Home* from his club bookshelf... And to my

mind it is a small but significant sign of a rather lamentable movement—of none other, indeed, than the 'Rural Exodus' as the political economists call it—that each and every novelist of my acquaintance, while assuming as a matter of course that his readers are tolerably familiar with the London Directory, should, equally as a matter of course, assume them to be ignorant of the commonest features of open-air life.

He proceeds to parody a passage from *Wild Life* with a description of the Brompton Road in the same manner, a witty and effective demonstration of a cataloguing tendency in

the genre which Orwell also despised, and to which Jefferies was not immune.

It is a reasonable supposition that the expansion of all kinds of writing about the countryside affected Jefferies' career adversely, at least from a commercial standpoint. The supply of genial and informed gossip on rural matters exceeded the demand. In the mid '80s his sales plummeted: *The Gamekeeper* sales were down to 143 in 1885 and only a single copy of *Round About a Great Estate* sold in the same year. Smith Elder in fact had enough stock of all their Jefferies titles by 1881 to last the rest of his lifetime, and only had to reprint after his death and the revival of interest generated by Besant's biography. Besant regarded Jefferies' change to another publisher as a career mistake, but it was almost certainly Smith Elder who abandoned Jefferies. He received £100 for the copyright of *The Gamekeeper* but in 1885 Chatto could only offer £40 for *The Open Air*, "in the present very depressed state of the market." And yet this rift with the publisher of *The Gamekeeper* and its successors may well have been a factor in directing Jefferies into more original and adventurous forms of creativity, which have weathered the harshest criticism.

Sources:

- ❖ Coulson Kernahan, *The Reading Girl*, London, George G. Harrap & Co., 1925.
- ❖ "A Son of the Marshes" [Denham Jordan], ed. J.A.Owen, *On Surrey Hills*, fourth edition, Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1893.
- ❖ C.J. Cornish, *Wild England of To-Day*, London, Seeley and Co., 1895.
- ❖ T.J. Hardy, *Books on the Shelf*, London, Philip Allan, 1934.
- ❖ A.T. Quiller-Couch, *Adventures in Criticism*, London, Cassel and Company, 1896.



VIII

DID JEFFERIES DIE A CHRISTIAN AFTER ALL?

The story that Jefferies reverted to Christianity in his final days or hours stems from an account by the artist J.W. North, who arrived at 'Sea View', Goring, on August 14th 1887. Jefferies had died earlier, at 2.30am. North reports: "His wife said that their time had been *for long* [my italics] spent in prayer together and reading St. Luke. Almost his last intelligible words were: 'Yes, yes, that is so. Help Lord, for Jessie's sake. Darling good-bye. God bless you and the children, and save you from such great pain.'" North's account is quoted and confirmed in Walter Besant's biography, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, published in 1888.

In the years immediately following Jefferies' death a controversy ran in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and elsewhere about "the pernicious works of Richard Jefferies", as some orthodox believers perceived them, and surrounding the question: "Did Richard Jefferies die a Christian?" Henry S. Salt, in his own words "rationalist, socialist, pacifist and humanitarian", vigorously challenged the idea of a deathbed conversion (or re-conversion) in a series of articles, followed by his book: *Richard Jefferies: a Study*, published in 1894, reprinted in 1905, and a pamphlet on the subject in 1906. He does not question North or Mrs Jefferies as witnesses, but argues that whatever Jefferies said when broken in body and mind could not gainsay all that he had written at the height of his powers, which proclaimed him a freethinker and agnostic. "Herein is the simple explanation of Jefferies' alleged conversion. He was very weak—so weak that he could not but yield outward acquiescence to the affectionate importunities to those around him, while still inwardly holding the views which, as he recently avowed, 'expressed his most serious convictions.'"

In a preface to the 1905 edition Salt revealed his trump card: that in correspondence between 1891 and 1893 Besant had retracted his support for the conversion story. It was a question of “outward conformity”, when he was “weak, too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time that he wrote *The Story of My Heart*.” Salt in fact had echoed Besant’s wording. In *Richard Jefferies, his Life and Work*, 1909, Edward Thomas supports Salt’s view, and quotes Besant in more detail on the reasons for his change of mind. Partly, he (Besant) indicates, it was due to receiving further information, though he doesn’t give the source. Salt later (*Seventy Years among Savages*, 1921) reflected that whereas his 1905 reissue of the *Study* provoked “some further outcry in a section of the press”, this was not repeated on the publication of the Thomas biography. His interpretation had prevailed.

The affecting tale of Jefferies’ return to the fold had not, however, entirely disappeared. An evangelical newsletter published in Hull in 1914 has the following, in a column headed “To the Children”:

Not long since there lived a naturalist whose heart was set on the fields and woods of dear and beautiful England, our inheritance from God. He wrote very clever books about them, but, sad to say, the Giver of all good was far from his thoughts. He was a freethinker, hated churches, and neglected the Bible. But ‘the kindness and love of God our Saviour’ had not left him. His health was shattered in his prime, and this was ‘God’s opportunity.’ He found flowers and animals could not sooth his conscience or satisfy his heart. But his good wife had a balm which the fields he loved could not yield. She read to her dying husband the Word of Life, and he listened wistfully. The Spirit of Life applied it to his spirit, and he said ‘those are the words of Jesus, they are true, and all philosophy is hollow.’ Later on, ‘I have done wrong and thought wrong. It was my intellectual vanity.’ (How these words fit in with Isaiah lv., 8, please read them.) Almost his last words were ‘Help, Lord, for Jesus’ sake.’ So Richard Jefferies died. ‘According to His mercy He saved’ him. So if you should read Jefferies’ charming descriptions of the works of Him who ‘hath made everything beautiful in its time,’ then remember that at the last the naturalist could say ‘Thou has magnified Thy Word above all thy

Name.' You know Who is 'the Word' 'by Whom and for Whom all things are made' I am sure.

If not, the capital letters offer a clue. A Christian commentary on Jefferies' life, work and belief that needs to be taken more seriously can be found in Edward Ingram Watkin's in *The Philosophy of Mysticism*, 1920. His extensive analysis finds Jefferies' mystical writings not only consistent with but supremely affirmative of Christian mysticism and his return to theistic belief its natural and fitting conclusion.

The creed of his childhood—an imperfect Christianity childishly understood—he rejected with contempt. But the work of the spirit of God in his soul overcame the philosophy of his extra-mystical intelligence, and compelled him to bear witness to the Light in an age of darkness, to affirm an experimental knowledge of God and eternal life which his lower reasoning denied. His witness even extended to the affirmation of theism taught by Christian mystics, of the soul, of eternity, of angels and of miracles, although this witness was strangely unconscious... Nor was he left in the end in his intellectual ignorance. As he lay on his bed of sickness, nigh to death, Christian faith was infused into him. This faith was indeed very imperfect, being limited by an ultra-Protestant individualism which rejected all church membership. Nevertheless it was the knowledge of God, clear and certain now to the discursive reason, as well as to the intuition of the centre, and thus accepted by the whole man.

Though flowing from an altogether fuller and deeper response to the works than the Hull evangelist's, this might none the less be seen as another attempt to force Jefferies back into the mould of orthodoxy. It is possible that Watkin had not read Salt or Thomas, and took his cue from Besant's more popular work, unaware that its author had recanted. On the other hand the Hull evangelist had clearly read an article in *The Girls' Own Paper* of December 1889 by a lady who gives a more detailed account than North or Besant of Jefferies' conversion based on Mrs Jefferies' letters to her:-

He used to pray so earnestly for me and the children, that we might be preserved from danger and trouble; he used to say, 'O God, for my beloved children. I love them so, I know not what to ask.' I give

you his very words... Another time he said ‘O God, I have done wrong, and thought wrong; it was my intellectual vanity. Listen to the prayers of my dearest girl; she has done no evil as I have done’... Almost his last conscious words were, ‘I have given myself unto God and Christ, and you pray for me; dear, merciful God, merciful Father.’

The author of this article signs herself C.W.M., the Catherine Winkworth Mackintosh who later wrote a rejoinder to Salt in *The Spectator*. She is also presumably the lady she refers to in the article who took pity on the sick and impoverished author on his move to Eltham in the spring of 1884 (somewhat earlier than is generally supposed). She offered spiritual healing as well as the physical comforts of her home and garden, urging that the Christian faith offered the solution to his anguished questionings and “restless craving”. He “listened, reasoned, and rejected”, but crucially “did not forbid the topic”, and the discussion continued in correspondence after the move to Crowborough. One day Jefferies asked her why she had not shown him the Revised Version of the Bible, and her sending him this seems to have precipitated a change of heart. “Throughout the long weary *months* [my italics again] that preceded his death the Bible was his constant companion.”

If we take this as a truthful witness we must accept that Jefferies’ return to orthodox Christian doctrine and discourse was more self-controlled, and over a longer period, than the “chance words and speeches” and “pain-wrung” final utterances, or simply consideration of others’ feelings, proposed by Salt, Besant and Thomas. Those writers had not the benefit of Jefferies’ notebooks, where it is clear that *The Story of My Heart* was not Jefferies’ last word on matters of belief and the meaning of life. He planned a sequel, though admittedly it would not have resembled a religious tract. His notes end within two months of his death, and in them he seems to be in a state of agonised doubt as to whether life is

entirely material or entirely spiritual; whether there is “nothing”, or a “Beyond”.

Salt clearly enjoyed the controversy, viewing himself as the embattled voice of reason against an army of zealots. In the “further outcry” following the re-issue of his Study he replied to an unfavourable review in the *Spectator* that suggested he had used Jefferies to “air his own opinions”, and again paraded Besant’s apostasy to support his view that Jefferies’ return to the faith he had long abandoned was “incredible”. The editor not unreasonably commented: “incredible is not the question”, it was “purely a question of evidence”, and in a subsequent issue C.W.M. restates the evidence from letters sent her by Mrs Jefferies. The salient feature that emerges is that Jefferies renewed interest in Christianity was not simply a reversion to the puerile pietism of his youth. Three weeks before his death he asked to be read St. Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount in which “the great socialist” (as Besant refers to Jesus in one of his letters to Salt) explains his doctrine of universal love, forgiveness and spiritual redistribution. Although “angels and miracles” didn’t come into it, there may be some truth in Watkin’s view that this development was consistent with Jefferies’ intellectual progress, and that in going directly to those words, as revolutionary in Jefferies’ day, and in ours, as when they were first spoken, he was still rejecting the overlay of centuries of tradition. And it is conceivable that Jefferies was sincere in accusing himself of “intellectual vanity” for having rejected all previous philosophy and belief.

However, the controversy is one that can be said to have ended not through resolution but loss of impetus, in an age and place where creedal religion has been widely abandoned, or reduced to mere custom and sentiment. Thomas’s final comment is judicious:-

The majority will be those who, orthodox Christian or not, see in the work of Jefferies, when he was most alive, a force at one with the

good that is in the world, with what makes for wisdom, beauty and joy, whether it can be usefully connected with Christianity or not.

What had been a live issue for readers in the 1890s no longer has any critical relevance. But it remains a biographical issue, and the balance of evidence suggests that Jefferies did embrace the teachings of a certain Galilean peripatetic philosopher at the end of his life when, despite intense physical suffering and concern for his loved ones, his mental faculties were unimpaired.

Sources:

- ❖ A cutting found in a copy of the 1897 edition of *Field and Hedgerow*. There are references to Hull and Grimbsy, and the date 1914. The title appears to be the name of a church in Hull, subheaded *Occasional Notes*.
- ❖ Henry S Salt, *Richard Jefferies: a Study*, London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1894, reprinted with the subtitle *His Life and Ideals*, Fifeild, 1905. *The Faith of Richard Jefferies* (pamphlet) London, Watts & Co., 1906. Letter in *The Spectator* of April 22 1905. *Seventy Years among Savages*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1921.
- ❖ Edward Ingram Watkin, *The Philosophy of Mysticism*, London, Grant Richards, 1920.
- ❖ Catherine Winkworth Mackintosh, 'Richard Jefferies' in *The Girl's Own Paper*, December 21 1889, Letter in *The Spectator*, May 6 1905.
- ❖ *Gospel According to St. Luke*, Chapter 6.

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## DID JEFFERIES DIE A CHRISTIAN AFTER ALL?—REVISITED

*A response to Tom Warebam's critique of the previous article. The italics throughout are my own.*

In my article 'Did Jefferies die a Christian after all?' I described a controversy that ran for a few years after his death, but no longer claims attention—at least had not

done so until Mr Wareham's riposte. In his opening paragraph he remarks on the lack of comment on the article from any other lovers of Jefferies. Perhaps this is because no one else formed such a perverse interpretation of it.

In his second paragraph Mr Wareham quotes the conclusion I reached 'after sifting through *some* of the evidence'. I say in fact that '*the balance of evidence*' '*suggests*' to me, that Jefferies did return to an acceptance of Christian teaching. Jessie Jefferies had always maintained this, but the article drew attention to another witness, CWM (Catherine Winkworth Macintosh), who had met Jefferies some three years before his death and claimed to have engaged in conversations and correspondence with him about the Christian faith throughout this period. I'm careful to say '*If we take this as truthful witness...*', and of course, both ladies may have invented or fantasised the whole thing. The fact (if it is a fact) that CWM was a member of 'an evangelical sect' seems enough to discredit her in Mr Wareham's eyes. I don't myself share the ladies' belief system any more than he does, but to me that is no reason to dismiss their witness. Rather their Christian values might have prompted them to tell the truth.

In paragraph three Mr Wareham challenges my view that the issue of Jefferies' supposed conversion is of biographical interest but of no critical importance. I base this on the observation that many great writers have held crazy or dangerous opinions without it affecting the esteem in which their published works are held. Isaac Newton dabbled in alchemy, Conan Doyle believed in fairies, Henry Williamson worshipped Hitler, and so on. Reading from the Gospel of St Luke rates pretty low on the scale. But Mr Wareham maintains that: 'To try and reduce the importance of this issue is to deny the importance of all Jefferies' more thought provoking and mystical works. Because, if Jefferies did recant all of his observations about 'Sun Life', if he did repent of his observations about Christianity, then *The Story of My Heart* and

other similar mystical writings become reduced to Victorian literary curiosities with no philosophical value to those of us who read them today.' This greatly overstates not only the likely effect but also the reported extent of his renunciation. The quest for the fuller life of the soul, for 'ideality', 'the beyond' 'eternity' etc. reiterated in his 'Sun Life' musings is entirely in line with Christian mysticism. This was the point of my citing Watkin, and there are many other scholarly works (James, Bucke, Underhill etc.) on the subject that could have been referenced. If faith is such a blight on art, thought and creativity what can we make of the works of Milton, Herbert, Donne, Crashaw, Blake and in Jefferies' time Newman and Hopkins, not to mention the great artists, philosophers and musicians who were profoundly Christian in outlook? Jefferies' observations on Christianity are either valid denunciations of hypocrisy, bigotry and narrow sectarianism, or the inclusion of Christianity in the rejection of all previous systems, creeds and philosophies—a standpoint he might well have come to reconsider. The statement that Christianity was 'a creed that Jefferies abhorred' is frankly nonsense.

This goes I hope some way to explaining why I think the conversion controversy has no critical relevance. Jefferies could have ended up a Buddhist or Zoroastrian and Bevis would still be Bevis, the Gamekeeper would still be at Home, and *The Story of My Heart* the great prose poem on its author's spiritual development that it is. But asking the question why I should take a view so different to his own, Mr Wareham proposes: 'The answer I think, lies in a motivation that lay behind the article.' What this hidden agenda is becomes clear in the rest of the piece. I cite a chance discovery of a clipping from a Hull evangelical tract which, as late as 1914, relates the conversion story in Besant's facile and sentimental manner as a homily for children. I describe this as 'the affecting tale of Jefferies' return to the fold', but my irony is lost on Mr Wareham. He believes that *I* think it affecting, and my plot is

to re-instate it in the narrative of Jefferies' life and work to the detriment of all Jefferies' mystical and philosophical writings. Again he comments on the passage I quote from Watkin 'This then is what George Miller seems to believe and it would indeed be a powerful rejection of 'Sun Life' if it were true.' Clearly Mr Wareham doesn't know me and hasn't read any of my published works, on Jefferies or other, and hasn't read this one with any attention. It requires no conjecture about what I 'seem' to think: I'm quite specific about how Watkin fits into my argument:

*'Three weeks before his death he asked to be read St. Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount in which "the great socialist" (as Besant refers to Jesus in one of his letters to Salt) explains his doctrine of universal love, forgiveness and spiritual redistribution. Although "angels and miracles" didn't come into it, there may be some truth in Watkin's view that this development was consistent with Jefferies' intellectual progress, and that in going directly to those words, as revolutionary in Jefferies' day, and in ours, as when they were first spoken, he was still rejecting the overlay of centuries of tradition. And it is conceivable that Jefferies was sincere in accusing himself of "intellectual vanity" for having rejected all previous philosophy and belief.'*

But Mr Wareham is a dab hand at conjecture, which fills the place of any new evidence he has to offer. He suggests that North worked up the conversion story to help raise funds for Jefferies' family, that CWM, who Jefferies took for a kind and caring friend, was member of a sect actively targeting vulnerable literary figures, and it was her again, in another guise, addressing the children of Hull some twenty years later. He spares Jessie Jefferies any direct accusation of falsehood (though he rejects the words of Jefferies she quoted on stylistic grounds!) but it is implicit in his view of the matter (either that or she was deluded) as it was in Salt's: 'It is not impossible that the sensitive Jefferies would have allowed his

wife and friends to read from the bible at his sick bed. He would have seen it as a comfort to them if not to himself.' But this only works if you completely strike CWM's witness from the record, and Mr Wareham produces no valid reason for doing so.

Thus in conclusion Mr Wareham upgrades the question in my title: 'Did Jefferies die a Christian?' to a '*claim*', adding my name to the Watkin/Mackintosh conspiracy to demote and defame Jefferies' most advanced and original writings. He refers to these throughout as 'Sun Life', a heading used in Jefferies' last notebooks for his troubled meditations on nature, the soul and human destiny. Even in this random, disjointed and at times illegible form the notes make an extraordinary and moving fugue of visions and ideas, but it is doubtful that, even if he had survived, Jefferies could ever have formed a coherent text from them. For every passage that echoes the Olympian self-confidence of *The Story of my Heart* (interspersed in Looker's version) there are moments of doubt that what he feels and sees so vividly has any objective reality, or that words could express it. The questioning deepens as to whether his aspirations for mankind and his own soul are nothing in the end, but a 'dream'.

So I stand by my article, but I have to admit that I got it very wrong in supposing the religious issue was dead and a balanced and cautious reappraisal was possible. The Christian evangelicals, lead by the redoubtable General Booth, have long since left the field, but their place has been taken by the militant atheists, championed no doubt by the equally redoubtable Dr Richard Dawkins. For myself I have no quarrel with what anyone believes or doesn't believe, provided he or she is prepared to accept the beliefs and unbeliefs of others. But given that so many of the great artefacts of mind and matter in Western and indeed World culture, from the Pyramids onwards, are rooted in religious beliefs of one kind

or another, those who cannot understand or accept them on any level have a problem.

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JEFFERIES AND CHRISTIANITY

In his “last parry” Tom Wareham says he still thinks I’m wrong about Jefferies’ conversion to Christianity, and felt a need to clarify his position as my accusation of perversity was so novel to him.³ If I may also be allowed a last word on the subject I would begin by pointing out that he is perversely wrong about what I think. My brief in these “Discoveries” was simply to report odd snippets of information from many years research and collecting that throw light on aspects of Jefferies’ life and works. In this case the discoveries were first that the death-bed conversion theory lingered in a debased form a decade or more after serious biographers and critics had dismissed it. Secondly that it also reappeared in a scholarly work on the history of Christian mysticism which hadn’t, to my knowledge, been noted previously, and Watkin gives a fuller account of Jefferies than Bucke, James or others on his mysticism. Moreover he was a passionate admirer of *The Story of my Heart*, comparing J’s vividness of style with Homer’s—hence my suggestion he be taken more seriously. To describe him as “patronising” is absurd, but Watkin nevertheless also appropriated Jefferies to his own belief system. Thirdly there was the first hand witness of CW Mackintosh, indicating that Jefferies’ re-engagement with Christian belief was more considered and over a much longer period than the notion of a “death-bed conversion” suggests.

In my first piece I suggested “re-conversion” would be a more appropriate term, but even this barely fits the

³ See RJS Autumn Newsletter and Annual Report 2012-13 pp. 17-18.

circumstances. Jefferies was baptised and brought up in the Christian faith, with conventionally devout parents and relatives, and espoused it with enthusiasm in youth. To my recollection he never renounced it or declared himself an atheist, and there is no entry on atheism in the Matthews/Treitel index of his total known output. Among references to God the most important is of course the idea of an existence higher than God put forward in *The Story*. Logically you would have to believe in something to conceive something beyond it, and the problem for Jefferies was not that God did not exist, but did not exist enough—certainly not the “God” reverberating from the church and chapel pulpits of his day. That God fell far short of the wonder and fullness of life envisioned in his states of heightened consciousness, approaching a mystic’s apprehension of universal truth. A creed based on denial and rejection was foreign to Jefferies’ thought and nature, and in claiming him for it Tom Wareham falls into the same error as Watkin—and “the Hull evangelist”.

But my point, as I said, was simply biographical: did Jefferies or did he not say the things reported, if not quite in those words or as understood by the witnesses? There is some evidence that he did, but no evidence that he didn’t. Tom Wareham’s discrediting of witnesses is based on pure conjecture, and takes us only so far as discounting any formal conversion involving priest and creed, no “sacerdotalism” as Besant put it, and none was called for. He is supposed simply to have read and assented to passages from St Luke. By that measure he might have questioned some of his more sweeping assertions, and perhaps would have agreed with the Anglican bishop who said that the words of Jesus were not true because he was divine, but it was his total apprehension of the truth that made him divine—or indeed with Ghandi who said all the world would be Christian, were not Christians so unlike their Christ. In fact it could hardly be said to be a matter of religion

at all, more a communion of two spirits who dared to believe in a peaceful world and fuller life of the soul. But in the end it's the human rather than divine implications of those final words that make them credible. The full extent of Jefferies' suffering is rarely taken into account, and that he wrote some of the most wonderful celebrations of the life around him in all its forms while wasting slowly away in the prime of life is surely one of the most remarkable triumphs of the human spirit. His public writings give barely a hint of his condition, and that his last private utterance should be a prayer that his children be spared such pain seems to me entirely characteristic, entirely human and believable.

And again none of this has any critical bearing—it does not “undermine” his autobiography any more than T.S. Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism undermines *The Wasteland*, or John Donne's shroud draped portrait of himself as Dean of St Paul's diminishes the reputation of his love poetry. It is only if a work has or is given a didactic or creedal significance that the subsequent views of its author have any bearing on it, and *The Story of my Heart* is a work of literature, not an atheist tract.



IX

TWO REVIEWS OF *THE OPEN AIR*

In my piece, “By the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*”, I suggested that the eclipse of Jefferies literary fortunes towards the end of his brief career was due in part to competition from other writers on nature and the countryside. Some slightly known candidates were cited, but this view is further corroborated by Rebecca Welshman’s discoveries of now forgotten rivals and imitators. In comparison with the £100 Jefferies received for *The Gamekeeper at Home* and a total of £300 for *Wild Life in a Southern County*, Chatto and Windus paid only £40 for his last non-fiction book, *The Open Air*. Jefferies enquired if there might be some returns from the American edition. In their reply, which admitted their offer was “not very large”, the publishers stated that they were entitled to any American payments by virtue of their purchase of the copyright. In any case the sums involved must have been even smaller. There is a copy of the American first edition in the Library of Congress, a paperback published by Harper,¹ but in years of searching I have only come across one other.

The same story is reflected in the amount of press attention accorded the later works. Compared with the twenty five reviews of *The Gamekeeper* listed by Hugoe Matthews and myself in the Bibliography, we traced no more than five of *The Open Air*. The digital recording and search engines now available to scholars may reveal others, but two more that I have come across in my serendipitous meanderings are of interest as they indicate some of the misgivings and

¹ *The Open Air*. New York, Harper and Brothers, (Harper’s Handy Series no.85), 1886.

reservations of Jefferies' contemporaries over the style and content of the later books. The following is embedded in the columns of *The London Illustrated News*, January 23, 1886:

"Who loves Nature like an Englishman?" exclaims Mr. Richard Jefferies; and every Englishman who loves it may be advised to read the pleasant papers he has collected under the title of *The Open Air* (Chatto and Windus). Some of them will be known already, since they have done duty in magazines; but they will bear reading a second time, or a third, for the author does not, to use Dryden's phrase, see Nature "through the spectacles of books", but knows her at first hand through the beauty of her forms, the glory of her colours, and the joyousness of her sounds. Well can he talk about the country delights of which the town liver knows little; and even a fashionable watering place like Brighton, where Nature, despite the sea, seems thrust aside in favour of fashion, gains under his hand a touch of picturesqueness. He notes the masts of the fishing-boats on the beach, the deep blue of the summer sky, "the many twinkling smile" of the sea, the atmosphere so full of light, and observes that the Brighton "glare" is one of its great recommendations. "There is no such glowing light elsewhere along the coast; these things are very local." Brighton has other charms, and sunshine brings human beauty with it. It is rather daring, perhaps, to assert, "There are more handsome women in Brighton than anywhere else in the world"; and "they are so common that... good-looking women who would be admired in other places pass by without notice." If there is exaggeration here, there is truth also; and we agree with Mr. Jefferies that, "whether Brighton grows handsome girls, or whether they flock there, drawn by instinct, or become lovely by staying there, is an enquiry too difficult to pursue." On the perils and annoyances of sea-bathing at Brighton the author dilates at large, and marvels at the courage shown by women on that most uncomfortable of shores. "Yet some people hesitate to give women the franchise! Actually a miserable privilege which any poor fool of a man can exercise." Altogether, "Good Dr. Brighton," as Thackeray called the health-giving town, receives generous treatment from the author. We like best, however, to meet him as a companion in the woods and lanes, on the open heath, or by the side of the stream, when the brown leaves are falling in the forest, or when the first spring flowers fill the copse with beauty. Read the chapters headed "Wild Flowers," "The Pine Wood," "The Haunt of the Hare," and "Out of Doors in February," and you will understand Mr. Jefferies' special gift as a writer. When he describes men and women, his hand is less certain, and inclined somewhat to be coarse.

The praise bestowed in this review is limiting, and rather negated by the sting in the tail. It is unlikely to have encouraged many new readers, or indeed any familiar with the earlier books. Similarly, in the “Miscellaneous” section of *The Contemporary Review* of February 1886 the reviewer’s somewhat perfunctory praise of Jefferies’ established merits is checked by his reaction to aspects of the work he finds distasteful:

Another charming volume has come from the singer of the woods and open ways. This time Mr. Jefferies has not taken so high a flight as in “After London;” but these shorter sketches, these overheard thoughts of his on the finer features of natural life, are more entirely successful. He is best when he is simplest—not trying after rhythmic effect, as in one part of the essay on “The Making of Beauty,” nor letting his enthusiasm for nature hurry him into foolish expressions upon art, as in the chapter entitled “Outside London,” where he altogether ignores the creative and exalts the appreciative faculty of the artist, venturing upon the wonderful statement that “those who love nature are the real artists; the ‘artists’ are copyists!” The author seems to indulge in eccentric views when he touches on questions of artistic taste; he has a very vast admiration for objects that “stand out”—to use his own expression; and he thinks far too highly of wagons freshly painted red.

This notice was probably written by Owen Seaman (pictured below)—I was alerted to it by a note accompanying his signature in a copy of the first edition of *The Open Air*.² Seaman (1861-1936) had a varied career as a writer, journalist, barrister and professor of literature. His talent was for parody and light verse, and he edited *Punch* from 1906 to 1932. He wrote war poems described by one anthologist³ as “patriotic doggerel”, was knighted in 1914 and made a baronet in 1933. He might be considered as typical of the more conventional reader who would prefer the genial simplicity and “charm” of *The Gamekeeper at Home* to the fuller expression of Jefferies vision and personality in his later works. These are now

² *The Open Air*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1885. This copy also has the signature of Ernest Brown, FRS (1866-1938), lunar theorist, astronomer and mathematician.

³ *English Poetry in Transition*, edited by John M Munro, Pegasus, 1968.

generally regarded as his best and most characteristic. They certainly had some fervent admirers in their time, but failed to sustain the broad consensus of approval that greeted his first successful books.



Owen Seaman



X

AN EARLY SUPPORTER, AND OTHERS

Who was George Avenell? The name crops up in connection with Jefferies in the early years of the last century. The information I have follows, but others may have more.

The first reference is a letter from Avenell to George Dartnell dated 21 December 1903:

About Jefferies, of course I knew him well by sight. As you are aware to most persons he was unknowable. I knew his wife better. On the day that Jefferies bans (*sic*) were published in Church, though living at home at the time, he said nothing to his father, who first learned the news from my father who happened to meet him that Sunday evening.

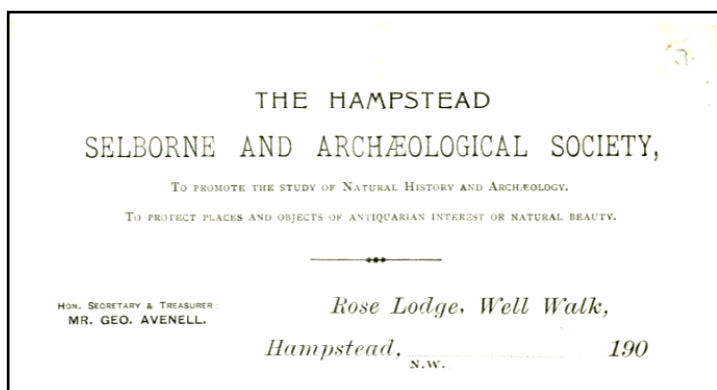
The mention of “Church”, as the only one possible, would make Avenell a resident or native of Chiseldon, where Jefferies and Jessie Baden were married on 8 July 1874. Helpfully the 1901 Census has a George Avenell born in Chiseldon in 1859, and in 1901 living in London. The suggestion in this letter is that the Avenell family were on neighbourly terms with the Jefferies and Badens, and that George knew Jessie independently, and found her more willing to befriend a teenaged youth than the aloof, ambitious young author she married. There is no correspondence or other evidence to suggest that Avenell ever got on closer terms with Richard.

Avenell’s letter to Dartnell is located in the Library of the Wilts Archaeological and Natural History Society. Dartnell, a local scholar and antiquarian, published frequently in the WANHS Magazine. His bibliographical study of Jefferies was published there in June 1893 and June 1895. Clearly he continued to make enquiries, perhaps with a further work in mind. Edward Thomas includes him among the key sources

for his biography of Jefferies published in 1909. He mentions Avenell among those who “have also given help”.

The next appearance is in 1911, when the Richard and Jessie’s daughter Phyllis gave Avenell a copy of the large paper limited edition of *The Toilers of the Field*, published in 1892. This copy is recorded in a Sotheby’s catalogue where the exact inscription is not given. An inserted sketch “near Funnell’s Farm, Crowborough, Sussex” is however described. The occasion of this presentation some nine years after publication is unknown, but the gift implies a continued, or renewed friendship with Jefferies’ family.

Going through some of S J Looker’s papers recently Jean Saunders discovered five pages of manuscript in handwriting resembling Jefferies’. It has a rather fainter title in the same hand that looks as though added later: ‘Night Thoughts by Richard Jefferies [a fragment]’, and in the corner a pencilled note in another’s hand: ‘Printed in Pall Mall Magazine August 1909.’ Any chance of its being Jefferies’ original MS is however dispelled by the fact that it is written on the back of sheets with the following printed heading:



The piece was indeed published in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, where it was discovered some years ago by Clive Pigou, as 'Night Thoughts in the Country, by the late Richard Jefferies', with illustrations by William Hyde. There is no indication of where it came from. Looker acquired Jefferies' original MS which is untitled, and included it in *The Chronicles of the Hedges* as 'Magic of the Night', with minor textual changes. Did Looker know of this previous appearance? In the Miller/Matthews Bibliography we assumed not, and conjectured; "It's appearance in 1909 may have been a by-product of Thomas' work for his biography of Jefferies which appeared the same year." The presumption now must be that Jean's discovery is Avenell's copy of the original MS, which he had been shown by Jessie or another member of Jefferies' family, and that it was he who placed it in the *Pall Mall Magazine*. The fine photogravure illustrations by Hyde truly capture the mood and atmosphere of the piece, and are unlikely to have been reprinted.



"The light that runs before the sun is visible."

The Hampstead and Selborne society appears to have been short lived, but Avenell's prominent position in it gives us an idea of the range of his interests as a man of means and education, and one known to be well-informed on the subject of Richard Jefferies. This impression is consolidated by an ALS to Avenell from Thomas Coke Watkins found in a copy of *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts*, passages from Jefferies' works selected by Watkins, published by Thomas B Mosher, Portland, Maine, 1907. This is one of several beautifully produced but inexpensive small books of Mosher's which did much to expand Jefferies readership in America. Watkins edited similar compilations of Thoreau and Emerson, and a monthly *Photographic Journal of America* published by Edward L. Wilson Co. in 1917; but Jefferies was a major interest as the letter clearly indicates:

TWENTY FIVE ST.
NICHOLAS TERRACE [printed]
New York
June 3rd 1921

Dear Sir —

It was a great pleasure and privilege to hear from so close a friend of Richard Jefferies and I wish to thank you for writing me so freely and frankly.

If my [expression?] of Jefferies and his work seemed unduly enthusiastic I assure you it was tempered with some degree of sanity—and critical judgment. No, I fear I cannot attribute it to Country or climate—although distance undoubtedly lends enchantment.

The [neglected, or possibly near invalid?] portion of Jefferies' life as you well know was a great tragedy—the saddest I know of and the bravest. I quite agree with you that on the whole Besant's "Life" is the truest and most sympathetic. I have recently re-read it with special interest and profit.

While of course Jefferies friend[ship?] was comparatively small, he is well known here and I believe there are still many who would enjoy and delight in his writings—and I mean to continue to bring him to the notice of nature lovers.

I enclose a little circular of books I edited for Crowell [Nature Near London, The Life of the Fields and The Open Air, published

by Thomas Y Crowell and Co, New York 1907]. They are now out of print or I would be glad to send you the set. Should I find any copies I will surely furn[ish?] you. Should you ever decide to put your lecture in book form I am sure that I could arrange for publication here—or place any article you might care to prepare.

Should I be so fortunate as to get to England one of these days, it will give me much pleasure to accept your cordial invitation for a meeting—

I mean to make every effort to get a worth while position here for Mr Harold Jefferies—as it would happen I am treasurer for a large and old established printing house and I feel sure that I can be of some help as soon as conditions are at all better—

I take pleasure in mailing you the copies of the little books I did for Mr Mosher—they are not very significant but did help to acquaint others with Jefferies here.

I also induced Mr Mosher to publish Jefferies essay on “Nature and Eternity”—the only manner in which this wonderful paper has been published since appearing in ‘Longmans’—I wonder why it was overlooked and never included in any of Jefferies’ books in England. It almost equals his “Pageant of Summer”—

I should be pleased to hear from you at any time you may be disposed to write—Believe me

Faithfully yours

Thomas Coke Watkins

To—Geo Avenell Esq

As Avenell’s lecture on Jefferies has not come to light we cannot ascertain his views on the strengths and weaknesses of Jefferies works, although we may assume from this that they were close to those of Besant, whose interpretation he obviously preferred to Salt’s or Thomas’s. However there is more than a hint that, as in the Dartnell letter, he was not uncritical of Jefferies’ personality, possibly a throwback to his early experience of the exclusive “unknowable” author. But the question of finding Harold a position shows a continued support for the family, and was perhaps the occasion for his contacting Watkins.

Postscript

The impression of a connection between Avenell and Jefferies' family is confirmed by a letter Jean Saunders came across in researching S.J. Looker's correspondence. In it Phyllis Jefferies (now Hargrave) thanks Looker for returning photographs taken by Avenell "about fifteen years ago" and comments: "he was a great admirer of R.J. & himself a Wiltshireman born at Badbury I think." The letter is addressed from 28 Nightingale Road, Guildford, March 21—no year: Jean suggests 1948 but adds: "I think that Phyllis might be referring to the Avenell photos used in *Richard Jefferies: a Tribute* (Worthing Cavalcade 1946). He is acknowledged in the book (on un-numbered p.11) but it isn't clear which photos he took. That might make the letter earlier if Phyllis is referring to photos that were later published in the book, or perhaps Looker was just slow to return them to Phyllis?"



XI

THE STORY OF *THE SCARLET SHAWL*

Jefferies' first book, *The Scarlet Shawl: a Novel*, was published between the 16th and 30th of July 1874 (Publisher's Circular) by Tinsley Brothers of 8, Catherine Street, Strand, printed by Savil, Edwards and Co. of Chandos Street, Covent Garden, in a single crown 8vo volume of 320 pages including prelims. and two advert. leaves, in an edition of probably 500 copies. The retail price was 10/6.

The Tinsley brothers, William and Edward, came from a rustic background somewhat lower down the social scale than Jefferies'. Edward, who claimed to have come to London on a hay cart, had aspirations of authorship. He gave up an engineering apprenticeship to dabble in journalism and publishing. William worked on a farm before following Edward, by what means of transport is not known. He loved theatres and bookshops and managed to glean enough stock from the street barrows to open his own shop in 1854. The brothers joined forces as publishers in 1858, but when Edward died in 1866 the firm continued as Tinsley Brothers under William's sole direction.

William did not fit the template of the Victorian gentleman publisher. Self-made and self-taught, he belonged to a somewhat rakish Bohemian set that frequented the Gaiety Bar, adjoining the premises in Catherine Street. The house of Tinsley tended to be the last resort of authors who had been rejected by more prestigious firms. William's fellow feeling towards aspiring young provincials, and undoubted generosity to a host of lady writers in difficult or desperate domestic situations, often got the better of his business acumen. But it also has to be said that his perception both of popular appeal and genuine ability was more acute than many of his rivals. His role, as he ruefully admits in his memoirs, was often to

bring on rising talent of which others were to reap the benefit.¹

Tinsley Brothers' biggest commercial success was M.E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, which, with subsequent Braddon titles, Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, early novels of Mrs Henry Wood, and Sheridan Le Fanu, associated Tinsley's good office with the 1860's vogue of the "sensation" novel: dark tales of mystery, crime and intrigue. But the full list is far more comprehensive, including social, domestic, high life and low life, historical, romantic and realist fiction. We find the names of William Black, George Meredith, Ouida, George Macdonald, G.A. Henty, Anthony Trollope, George Moore, Henry Kingsley, Harrison Ainsworth and George Gissing with the Tinsley imprint. Indeed Walter Besant, though his *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* severely criticises Tinsley for encouraging Jefferies to write fiction, also in his early career availed himself of his good offices. These names are interspersed with numerous listings of barely known or completely forgotten authors; and even some of whose recorded oeuvre in the *English Catalogue of Books* not a single copy survives.

However William Tinsley will ever be remembered for one discovery. In the three years preceding *The Scarlet Shawl* he published the first three novels of a young West Country architect, with the titles *Desperate Remedies*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. There is a curious symmetry between Tinsley's dealings with Thomas Hardy and with Jefferies. In both cases he perceived that their true strength lay in their knowledge of country life and characters and their ability to portray them vividly. The potential of the regional

¹ William Tinsley, *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher* (1900). The amusing story in George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) that the way to be published by Tinsley was to straddle the counter in Catherine Street and stroke the cat, retold by Malcolm Elwin in *The Essential Richard Jefferies* (1948), is of course nonsense.

novel had been wonderfully demonstrated by the success of George Eliot and the Brontës, and he was anxious to find and encourage new writers with the ability and knowledge to emulate them. In his advice to authors in *Reporting, Editing and Authorship* and in his earlier pitch to Tinsley of *Only a Girl* Jefferies clearly understood this potential, but neither he nor Hardy was prepared to commit himself fully to it at the outset, and were unwisely drawn to fashionable society and sensational incident as a quicker route to popular success. Of Hardy's trio Tinsley greatly preferred *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and put all his efforts into promoting it. By the same token he must have been prepared to tolerate what he certainly would have realised were the faults and weaknesses of Jefferies' early novels for the emergence here and there of the true rural vision. Hardy records a chance meeting with Tinsley in the Strand in which Tinsley asks Hardy when he is going to submit his next novel. Hardy replies that on the basis of his returns for *Desperate Remedies* he had decided to stick to architecture as a career. The reply he records verbatim:

'Pon my soul, Mr Hardy, you wouldn't have got another man in London to print it! Oh, be hanged if you would! 'twas a blood-curdling story! Now please try to find that new manuscript and let me see it.²

Tinsley might also have encouraged Jefferies at a similar low point, when his next novel, *Restless Human Hearts*, failed to make any headway. *World's End* that followed marked a considerable advance. If he was indeed influential in persuading both these young authors to try again, influence in literary matters has rarely been more crucial.

Tinsley's and many other publishers' records were destroyed in the London blitz. In any case he was not given to written agreements, an exchange of letters or a handshake being considered an adequate endorsement of any arrangement. This has laid him open to criticism, especially in

² Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p.88.

his dealings with Hardy. But J.A. Sutherland defends him, and his account of the transaction may be taken as a pattern for Tinsley's dealings with Jefferies:

The terms of agreement for *Desperate Remedies* were simple enough. Hardy had a half-profits contract and an edition of 500 three-volume copies was planned for. This was the usual arrangement for the first novel by an untried author. What was slightly unusual was that Hardy advanced £75 to the publisher as a 'guarantee'. This would be repaid to the novelist out of net profits if there were any. In fact Hardy never recovered the money. Tinsley calculated that the 372 copies sold yielded a half share of only £60 after expenses, leaving the novelist £15 out of pocket on his first published work.³

Sutherland explains that the half-profit system was open to abuse by publishers who exaggerated their expenses, but Peter Newbolt quotes testimony to Tinsley's honesty in such matters, and evidence of the meticulous methods of his part-time accountant, William Croft.⁴

Jefferies complained to William Hepworth Dixon in a letter dated February 4th [1876]:

I wrote a one volume novel which several publishers said was good but refused to take on the grounds that I was an unknown writer. Finally I gave Messrs. Tinsley Bros. £50 to publish it—they did and admitted that 200 copies were sold, and yet refused to give me 1/- or make the slightest return. I wrote a second novel in 3 vols. which they also published (at their own cost) but refused to give me anything. I think that in my ignorance of the trade I was thoroughly well cheated.”⁵

Comparing this situation with the £1-10s he gets per page for magazine articles he asks Dixon if he can give him an introduction to another publisher, or any other advice, regarding his third novel, on which he has spent “an immense deal of time and trouble”. The fact that *World's End* also went to Tinsley suggests the advice he got was unhelpful—or realistic. A novel would have to sell in thousands rather than hundreds, regardless of the publisher, to yield a return, and that, for a really successful novel, could also be in thousands. Then as now writing fiction was a speculative affair.

³ J.A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Athlone Press, 1976), p.157.

⁴ Peter Newbolt, *William Tinsley (1831-1902) "Speculative Publisher"*, 2001, p.160.

⁵ ALS from 22 Victoria Road, Swindon. William Hepworth Dixon (1821-75) was an author, scholar, historian, traveller, and editor of *The Athenaeum* from 1853 to 1869.

Most of the first issue of *The Scarlet Shawl* (probably the 200 Tinsley admitted selling) was sold at a discount to W.H. Smith and Son's circulating library. These copies are in purplish red sand grained cloth with an ornate border stamped in black on the front and repeated in blind on the back, with title, author, publisher, borders and ornaments all in gold on the spine. The second issue, appearing in the spring of 1875, is in red diagonal ribbed cloth, a black stamped border of plain rules and inner frame with rounded corners and repeated florets on both covers; the spine has gold and black rules, gold lettering and black ornament. Thomas Hardy recorded: "Never will I forget the thrill that ran through me from head to foot when I held my first copy of *Desperate Remedies* in my hand."⁶ But this pleasure was spoilt for Jefferies by an embarrassing typo (a missing "G" in "TRAINING") in the effusive dedication to Aunt Ellen. Tinsley was notably casual in the editing and proof reading departments. Jefferies must have complained about this, and also the unwelcome insertion of a leaf of Tinsley adverts. at the front of the book, as in the second issue a corrected cancel replaces the original dedication leaf and both leaves of adverts. are at the back. But this version has an even more conspicuous error in the misspelling "JEFFRIES" on the spine. The existence of a copies in the British Library and University of Toronto Library on which the original lettering has been erased and the author's name, correctly spelt, crudely superimposed in the same type face, no doubt indicates another strongly worded letter from author to publisher. It is possibly these faults that explain the non-appearance to date of any copy inscribed by the author.

A part, and perhaps the greater part, of the first issue, judging by survival rates, was remaindered. These copies have trimmed edges and come in green, blue and terra cotta shades of dot-and-ribbon cloth decorated with black and blind rules

⁶ *ibid.* Quoted p.160.

and ornaments, the title and author's surname in gold on the spine but no publisher. The integral uncorrected dedication leaf is present, sometimes resulting in wrong description as first issue copies, and there are no adverts. Despite having to sell off unbound sheets of the first print run Tinsley ordered a second in 1877. *The Publisher's Circular* gives the date as 16-30 August. Besant comments: "As the work is stated on the title page to have advanced to a second edition, one of two things is certain—namely either the book appealed to a large number of readers, or the editions were very small indeed. I incline, myself, to the latter opinion."⁷ He is doubtless referring to the undated "new edition" (the terms "edition" and "impression" were not clearly differentiated) as no "second edition" is known. According to Jefferies, however, no less than 5000 copies of this second impression were printed, making it the largest single print run of any title published in his lifetime. The claim is made in a note on the MS of *The Denny Morn*, published by Bentley in 1884, perhaps in response to a query by George Bentley regarding sales of previous titles.⁸

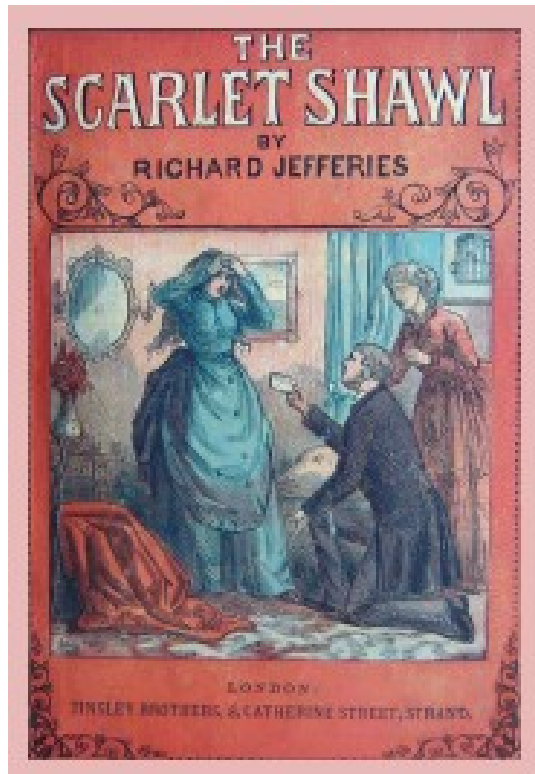
However fewer copies of the second even than the first impression have come into view. Of these known copies, printed without the half title and dedication, two are in green cloth, decorated in black with gold lettering, and no signs of library use. They would correspond with Tinsley's Six Shilling Series, "handsomely bound in cloth". Four are in "illustrated wrappers", known as yellowbacks, with a 3-colour illustration on the front cover showing a richly furnished interior with two distressed ladies and a dark suited man, kneeling with out-held letter (Nora, Rachel and Stanley⁹); red drapes in the

⁷ Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1888), p.147.

⁸ Miller and Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), D4.

⁹ I am grateful to W.J. Keith for pointing out the erroneous identification of the dark suited man as Percival in the Bibliography.

foreground. The price on the spine is one shilling, and the caption of the back cover reads “To be had in every Railway Stall and of every bookshop in the Kingdom.” The cheapness and availability goes some way to explain the 5000. With type still standing it would have been relatively inexpensive to print a considerable run, and the melodramatic title and lurid cover might well have sold it to weary and unsuspecting travellers.



It should also be noted that survival rates are no sure guide to print runs, and Michael Sadleir observes that the Tinsley books were more ephemeral than others. The adverts in the second impression include four pages listing “Mr. Farjeon’s

Works". Benjamin Leopold Farjeon emigrated to the antipodes and abandoned a successful career there to travel back to England and meet his hero, Charles Dickens. Tipped as Dickens's successor he was immensely popular and prolific, and the first print run alone of *Blade o' Grass* was 20,000. Yet a search at the time of writing on the worldwide internet reveals only a single copy of a Farjeon title with the Tinsley imprint for sale.

But it would seem that even the railway bookstalls struggled to dispose of 5000 1/- copies and an unusual, possibly even unprecedented, device was resorted to. Copies of the second impression have turned up paired with another title, *The Female Nihilist* by Ernest Lavigne, translated from the French by G. Sutherland Edwards, published by W.H. Allen & Co. of 13 Waterloo Place, 1880. Three copies have been examined, in red, blue and green publisher's cloth with decorated covers and full gilt spines. Another pairing has been reported with *Fond or Faithful?* by Richard Fitzgerald, published by Remington in 1882. A further copy separated from its companion could have been attached to one of these or to another title. The spines give the titles, the caption "Two thrilling novels", price 21/-, and London at the foot. The conjunction of two quite disparate works from different publishers would seem to indicate a third party in the shape of a remainder merchant. 21/- is the full price for two volumes but Carter¹⁰ states that remainders often had the original price on the spine as a sales ploy to contrast with the actual price on the fly-leaf inside—making this an early example perhaps of "two for the price of one". But the binding is the full specification for a first printing compared with the typical pared down remainder version, and Tinsley's adverts are still present with *The Scarlet Shawl*.

¹⁰ John Carter, *Victorian Fiction: an Exhibition...* (National Book League and C.U.P., 1947).

The reviews of *The Scarlet Shawl* would not have made up for Jefferies' disappointment with the book itself. "Beyond the rather rhapsodical style in which this slight story is spun out to the dimensions of a novel, there is little remarkable about it... Neither of the principle parties manages to arouse our interest, and the manners and morals of the whole company are of a common description." This from *The Athenaeum*. *The Examiner* again found it "a slight story", but "jauntily told", and summarises the plot in a jauntily dismissive way, in particular the chapter "describing, in the most luscious flowers of rhetoric, the effects of a scarlet shawl on modern society." *The Graphic* offers a little comfort: "The tale is not too long, and by no means dull, or without some power in character drawing, but against these merits must be set the fact that in places it is slightly—perhaps more than slightly—vulgar, and that the 'fastness' of the heroine is made unpleasantly conspicuous. It must however be said that these characteristics diminish as the story proceeds." This reviewer also notes Jefferies "curious theory about a scarlet shawl" and thinks him "too susceptible for his own peace of mind." *The Westminster Review* also finds "power", but again this is qualified: "... the author shows a power for describing characteristics. Some of his touches are very happy. But then he goes no further. All is surface."

None of these, however, go as far as Besant, who condemned the novel as a "worthless book" with "not the least touch of promise or power". Jefferies "knew nothing of society, nothing of men and women, except the people of a small country town." He "could never have been a successful novelist."¹¹ In fact Jefferies spent a good part of his childhood and youth in London, where his relatives, the Harrilds, Gydes, Lucketts and Baxters were artists, printers, inventors, entrepreneurs: people who went to concerts, exhibitions and the theatre and lived in a world of books. In letters to his aunt

¹¹ Besant, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-150.

Ellen he complains about the dullness of country life compared with the delights of Shanklin Villa in Sydenham, and excursions to the Crystal Palace, Lewes, the Hastings Regatta, and most exciting of all a trip to the Continent. Much of this material went into *The Scarlet Shawl*, though it has to be said there is nothing in the novel as fresh and vibrant as the description of Brussels and its people in his letter to his aunt from the Hotel de l'Europe of September 22 1870.¹² The book was certainly dulled by an attempt to emulate the conventions of the society novel, with its ennobled characters and tone of worldly cynicism.

The great majority of later commentators have followed Besant in their dismissive treatment of Jefferies' first book. The view, however, that Jefferies' early novels do in fact contain evidence of his genius, despite their many and obvious faults, is not entirely unknown among his critics. Edward Thomas found that the writing "has an emotional exuberance, even when it falls into fatuity" and observed that Jefferies "was seeking to satisfy a need for another life than was being lived around him", and that he "satisfied part of his hunger for beauty by painting this alien life and indulging in these coloured images."¹³ Looker and Porteous note a fine description of the downs.¹⁴ Roger Ebbatson signals moments when the characters are alive to their inner beings in harmony with nature.¹⁵ Andrew Rossabi's study of this and the other early novels represents by far the most thorough and perceptive analysis of their strengths and weaknesses.¹⁶

¹² Richard Jefferies, *Letters to Aunt Ellen* (Faringdon: Petton Books, 2009).

¹³ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work* (London: Hutchinson, 1909), pp. 94-96.

¹⁴ S.J. Looker and C. Porteous, *Richard Jefferies, Man of the Fields* (London: John Baker, 1965), pp. 99-100.

¹⁵ Roger Ebbatson, *Lawrence and the Nature Tradition*, (Harvester/Humanities, 1980), pp. 139-140.

¹⁶ (14) Richard Jefferies, *The Scarlet Shawl*, introduction by Andrew Rossabi (Faringdon: Petton Books, 2009).

The story of Jefferies, Tinsley and *The Scarlet Shawl* has a rather ironic and pathetic codicil. After nurturing Hardy and Jefferies Tinsley lost both of them to Smith, Elder & Co. "It was Smith's usual tactic," Sutherland observes, "using his money to buy property that was coming up in the world."¹⁷ In 1878 and 1879 Jefferies published *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *The Amateur Poacher*, books which Tinsley, a gamekeeper's son with many tales of his own of poachers' tricks and their fights with keepers, would have delighted to put his name to. But 1878 was the year that Tinsley first became bankrupt. With the help of his faithful accountant Croft he managed to weather the storm. In 1884 he was again unable to meet his debts, and yet somehow again managed to hold on. Jefferies died in 1887 before fulfilling the potential to succeed as a novelist that Tinsley saw in him, and the same year marked the final demise of the firm of Tinsley Brothers.

We know that during Jefferies' lifetime *The Scarlet Shawl* was still in circulation up to 1882, when it appeared in a double volume with *Fond or Faithful?* But it is likely to have been reissued in one form or another for several years after that. In fact a copy is noted which can be dated from as late as 1892. It is trimmed down to almost foolscap 8vo (or octavo) size—6¾ x 4¼ inches—in a very plain edition binding with only the title between rules gilt on the spine. The spine on this copy was detached, revealing the glued backstrip, as usual cut from printer's waste, which lists legal titles dated 1891 and 1892. The book has the bookplate of C.J. Longman, Jefferies publisher and friend, who at that time was collecting unpublished material for *Longman's Magazine*. This too carries the date 1891. No doubt this sad little volume owes its existence to the discovery and sale of a few remaining unbound quires of *The Scarlet Shawl* in the final clearance of Tinsley's premises. Their retention would tend to support

¹⁷ Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p.224.

Tinsley's claim, in his defence against Besant, that he genuinely believed in Jefferies' eventual success as a novelist.

In view of the general chorus of disapproval it is hardly surprising that many years elapsed before another edition of Jefferies' first book appeared. In fact it took over a century. In 1996 Ariel Books of 25 Nassington Road, London brought out a new edition in hardback (ISBN 1 900073 10 2) with the introductory study by Rossabi mentioned above. Growing interest and curiosity about Jefferies' early work has made this too a scarce book, and the need for more copies was met in 2009 by the Richard Jefferies Society, publishing under the imprint Petton Books (ISBN 978-0-9522813-7-5). This is a paperback using the yellowback cover illustration and the original printers' ornaments in the text. It has a revised version of Rossabi's introduction.



XII
AFTER LONDON: UNFINISHED
MASTERPIECE?

In his life of William Morris J.W. Mackail writes:
After London, the unfinished masterpiece of Richard Jefferies, was a book that Morris afterwards was never weary of praising. It put into definite shape, with a mingling of elusive romance and minute detail that was entirely after his heart, much that he had himself imagined; and he thought that it represented very closely what might really happen in a dispeopled England.

He quotes a letter of 13th May [1885] to Georgiana Burne-Jones in which Morris affirms his belief that 'civilization is doomed to destruction, and probably before very long':

... what a joy it is to think of! and how often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking the place of wretched hypocrisies. With that thought in mind all the history of the past is lighted up and lives again for me.¹

In an earlier letter to the same recipient (28th April 1885) Morris describes a journey through lovely countryside on the Carlisle to Settle railway and adds: 'I read a queer book called *After London* coming down: I rather like it: absurd hopes curled around my heart as I read it. I rather wish I were thirty years younger: I want to see the game played out.'²

¹ *The Life of William Morris*, J.W. Mackail (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), vol. II p.144.

² *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, edited by Norman Kelvin (Princeton University Press 1987), vol. II p.426.

These passages raise several questions. How much did Morris know of Jefferies' work as a whole, or was this a solitary chance encounter? Did he (as the editor of the collected letters suggests) simplify, possibly distort, Jefferies' vision, moulding it to his own despair and rejection of 'progress' and 'civilisation'? And finally was the book generally known, or believed to be, 'unfinished'?³

Certainly this conclusion was prevalent in the reviews. The *Athenaeum* comments: 'the story is incomplete, and we hope in no great while to hear the end of it.'⁴ The *Spectator*'s reviewer agrees that 'the story is an unfinished one' and adds: 'we have read the whole book with much interest, which would have been increased had Mr Jefferies given us a map showing the changes he supposes to have taken place, with the route of Felix's journey. Perhaps when he completes the tale, he may be induced to do so.'⁵ Others simply find the inconclusive ending unsatisfactory without implying a sequel. 'The story, which serves as a thread to connect the pictures of scenery and manners, is not uninteresting, but unfortunately it breaks off abruptly. The book ends in the midst of the hero's adventures.'⁶ 'The kind of novel that permeates Mr Jefferies' jingle of description, as a hunter might force his way through the wooded England of the future, comes to no kind of conclusion at all—not even so much as a catastrophe as Mr James sometimes admits.'⁷

Of those so far traced only the *Pall Mall Gazette* review endorses the conclusion as it stands: 'Finally the romance ends

³ The surviving pages of the MS are headed *The Relapse of Britain into Barbarism*. The latter part is missing. (*Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographic Study*, George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, [Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993], D3. Later references to this book are abbreviated to MM.)

⁴ *Athenaeum* no.2998 p.463, 11 April 1885.

⁵ *Spectator* vol.58 no.2975 p. 882, 4 July 1885.

⁶ *Westminster Review* vol. LXVIII, new series no.1, p.300.

⁷ *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. LXXI no 425 p.804, October 1885.

just where it ought to end—nowhere in particular: with the true instinct of a genuine artist Jefferies refuses to let us know what exists beyond the bounds of his own canvas. He paints us his picture, and when he has finished it to his own satisfaction he leaves it off *in medias rebus*. Dull people will want to know what happens afterwards: a good critic will see at once that the sketch is complete, and will admire the curious and complete skill that leaves it thus pendant at exactly the right moment.⁸

Besant's *Eulogy* quotes a detailed description of a version of *After London* offered to Longman in April [1883]. This was to be in three volumes, again in two parts, the first being *The Relapse into Barbarism* as published. However the second, called here *Chronicles of the House of Aquila*, was clearly longer than the published part II, treating 'the entire life of the time', and 'in minute detail'. He mentions 'heroes' rather than the single protagonist, whose setting forth on a voyage of discovery only happens 'eventually'. The Relapse was simply a prelude to the main action—what came about 'after London'. Jefferies adds significantly 'there is a love affair, but it is in no sense a novel', by which we might infer that a conventional plot and marital conclusion were never on the cards. Longman obviously declined the work, and Besant comments: 'As published by Cassell and Co. it was in one volume, and leaves off with the story only half told. Perhaps the author cut it down, perhaps the publishers refused to bring it out unless it was a short one-volume work.'⁹

Subsequent interpretations have varied considerably. Salt concentrates on the fate of London with no mention of the enigmatic conclusion. Thomas says of the end: 'It is a wilful

⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette* no.6264 vol.XLI p.4, 11 April 1885. The Latin phrase should read *in mediis rebus*.

⁹ Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (Chatto & Windus, 1888), pp.208-211.

one, as if on an hexameter instead of a pentameter, yet it needs no defence. Others could have been found to conform to the needs of perhaps a majority. But to end with suspended breath is as true in Nature, and in keeping with this age; it might be used as a variation upon “happily ever after” or “necessity is great”.¹⁰ Looker suggests that but for his illness Jefferies might have improved his later novels, for example ‘by taking *After London* to a more satisfying ending’¹¹. Keith, like Thomas, points to the similarities in character and career between Jefferies and his hero, and notes elements of escape and wish fulfilment. ‘We are left with the impression that [Felix] will be successful’ and ‘the success that he missed in life Jefferies portrays in romance.’¹² In general it may be said that to this point *After London*, while containing passages of acknowledged power, was not ranked among Jefferies’ best works; and, again very much in general, that this perception may now have changed. If so, a penetrating analysis by a recent novelist of note may well have been the turning point. Whereas for Thomas *After London* was almost a recuperation from *The Story of My Heart*, of the ideas in which there was ‘hardly a trace’, for John Fowles ‘one cannot understand *After London* unless one reads it alongside *The Story of My Heart*.’¹³ It is for him a book crucially of its time and ours, prophetic, philosophical, and at the same time profoundly personal. He writes:

The inconclusive ending of *After London* has also been much criticised. Yet it seems to me entirely consistent with the underlying purpose of the novel... The search in man for greater self-knowledge is a dangerous voyage,

¹⁰ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies: his Life and Work* (Hutchinson, 1909), p.260.

¹¹ S.J. Looker and C. Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields* (John Baker, 1965), p.138.

¹² W.J. Keith, *Richard Jefferies: a Critical Study* (University of Toronto Press, 1965), p.121.

¹³ John Fowles, introduction to *After London* (Oxford University Press, 1980), p.xv.

but far better that than not to voyage at all—and even though, of its nature, destination can never lie in one place or episode—or static Utopia. There are no happy ends in time, or evolution. The journey can never be an arrival, only an onwardness.¹⁴

Fowles began work on his introduction to the OUP World Classics edition in 1977—it came out in April 1980. He wrote to me in October 1978 with a number of unresolved questions about the antecedents, composition and publishing history, and in subsequent correspondence I passed on all the information I had at the time. This included the possibility that the book had been shortened at the publisher's insistence, but stating that in my opinion the final text was as Jefferies wanted it. I was able to add more detail to the picture in the introduction to *After London* in the Bibliography, for example that Chatto had also declined the book, after Longman's rejection. In difficult circumstances and with two of his previous publishers out of the running Jefferies was probably willing to make compromises. By the mid 1880s the reign of the three volume novel was drawing to an end and Cassell was among those publishers experimenting with single volume fiction offered to the public at a more affordable price without the intermediary offices of W.H. Smith's or Mudie's circulating libraries. True, at 10/6 *After London* was the same price as a single volume of a three-decker, but in a second impression and a re-issue that came out in the two years following it was priced at 3/6. While this gave some colour to Besant's suggestion of an enforced abridgement, I still supported the ending as intentional and in line with his mature sense of life's vicissitudes and uncertainties, its unplanned, inconclusive and unsatisfactory outcomes, and his belief that fiction should be true to this.

In 1989 I obtained some copies of Jefferies' MSS from

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.xx.

Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. Among them was a letter to one James Wilkie, dated April 7th. From the address, 14 Victoria Road, Eltham, this would be 1885. He writes: 'My handwriting has become very uncertain from long and severe illness, however I have put my name to the book with pleasure. I'm glad you like it; it is so much condensed that many have mistaken its meaning.'¹⁵ He goes on to refer to a paper by Wilkie on stone circles in the Welsh hills that interests him. Given the date, just one week after publication, and the known fact of a finished longer version of some years earlier, I had no doubt that this referred to *After London*. The phrase 'it is so much condensed' is intriguing. It rather hints not only that Jefferies disapproved of the redaction, but that it was carried out by the publishers: that the enigmatic ending which has attracted so much critical interest was perhaps the work of some nameless copy editor at La Belle Sauvage Yard.¹⁶ It would indeed seem extraordinary that a writer of Jefferies' stature would leave such important work to another, and there were insistent letters requesting proofs on earlier occasions. But as this letter attests, in 1885 he was in dire circumstances. Again from Eltham, on 6th December [1884] he writes to Robert Chambers, editor of *Chambers's Journal*, about another project, one which never came to fruition: 'I shall be pleased for you to make any alterations you wish in the paper... I have not fixed upon the number of papers for

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, MM, D46.2iii.

¹⁶ The grand office block in Fleet Lane constructed in the 1870s by John Cassell for his printing and publishing enterprise, which in 1883, as Cassell and Company, boasted of being the largest in the world, with numerous periodical titles as well as a book list of popular and celebrated authors. The buildings were destroyed in the blitz, with most of Cassell's records. Richard Kearton worked in the publicity department from 1882 to 1898. In his memoirs (*A Naturalist's Pilgrimage*, Cassell 1926) he describes his encounters with all the famous and not so famous writers who visited the premises. One would expect Jefferies to have been of special interest to a then budding naturalist, and both had been contributors to Cassell's *Live Stock Journal*. His absence from the roll call suggests he never went there, to discuss *After London* or on any other business.

“Fields of London”. I intended to leave that for you to decide. But I fancy you do not altogether like the idea of continuing and therefore perhaps I had better not go further but write... on a different topic, or under separate title. I do not mind.”¹⁷ Clearly at this juncture Jefferies was prepared to give his publisher considerable latitude in dealing with his texts; and indeed, if surgery is necessary, it is better done by another.

Other questions arise from the Wilkie letter. Who, for example, are the ‘many’ who have mistaken the book’s meaning? It was not a reference to the reviews as they, or the major ones at least, came out after the letter was written. And then what is meant by ‘meaning’? The term suggests Jefferies had more in mind than a romantic tale of weird events and heroic adventures. One possible solution to the problems thrown up by the letter is that it could refer to another of Jefferies’ books, and in *The Forward Life* Matthews and Treitel reproduce the key passage with the note “This is likely to be SH”.¹⁸ Jefferies certainly had ideas to convey in *The Story of My Heart*, but there is no evidence that it was ‘condensed’, or in any way other than the author intended it—and we have more correspondence and authorial commentary relating to *The Story* than to any other work. Besant portrays a writer who didn’t play to his strengths or take good advice, but on the contrary he was very responsive to suggestions from publishers, and every reason to want to make money from his writing. When Smith, Elder suggested *The Gamekeeper at Home* was rather on the short side he wrote *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and when they demurred that this didn’t have so much about the ways of gamekeepers and poachers he continued with *The Amateur Poacher*. It may have been a reviewer’s suggestion that led to him writing for a younger audience. *The Story* was the book, he

¹⁷ David J. Holmes Catalogue 48, *Letters and books*, item 65, part transcribed ALS.

¹⁸ H. Matthews and P. Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Petton Books, 1994), p.195.

claimed, in which he truly expressed himself, and was not written with any thought of profit. When he says that after seventeen years of contemplation it only amounted to a small book it was to convey the care that went into reducing it to its essence, not of any enforced curtailment. Longman remarked that he would have to print it 'in open type to make a reasonable sized volume.'¹⁹ And realising that Longman's friendship had perhaps outweighed his commercial interests in publishing it he immediately afterwards produced another book on country sports and rustic lore, having travelled to Exmoor to research it.

Another reason why it was unlikely to have been a copy of *The Story of My Heart* that Wilkie sent to Jefferies for signing is that by April 1885 very few copies were selling, in fact only one is recorded between September 1884 and May 1885. Longman wrote to Jefferies on the 18th September 1884: 'I'm sorry to say that the sale of the autobiography seems to have ceased'²⁰, and on 20th June the remaining 196 copies were sold as waste. Earlier that year Longman had complained to Jefferies about the number of free copies he was requesting, at least 15 of *Red Deer* and 14 of *The Story*: 'I really think that people ought to buy them instead of begging off you.'²¹ Very few inscribed copies have in fact come into view, but presumably these were all sent out to friends, admirers, editors, family members etc, and perhaps in this we have a clue to the 'many' who misunderstood or failed to grasp the 'meaning' of *After London*. Jefferies didn't sit at the high table of Victorian literature, but his isolation is often exaggerated. Undoubtedly he had a close following, and the chance survival of inscribed copies and letters like Wilkie's can only hint at its extent. There were readers too in America whose expectations

¹⁹ MM: D20.5xix.

²⁰ MM: D14.2vii.

²¹ MM: D15.2iv.

of Jefferies are apparent from a review of *After London* which begins: 'What has got into Mr Jefferies? He used to write delightful books.'²² This critic is not impressed—the book is 'a tiresome, and as far as we can see, useless piece of ingenuity'. Another American reviewer is certainly impressed with *The Relapse*—'described with a faithfulness which never falls below the impressiveness of actuality', and the fate of London which 'forms a chapter terrible in its realism'. But he is less taken with 'the fanciful tale of a certain Sir Felix', and also puts the book aside 'with regretful thoughts of *Wood Magic* and *The Gamekeeper at Home*.'²³

In conclusion: Besant was probably right in suggesting that Cassell would only publish *After London* as a single volume, which meant the original text had to be reduced. Jefferies probably left this work to the publisher, but doubtless would have seen and approved the final version. In this form the book met with a mixed response from reviewers and readers, many of whom found it perplexing and unsatisfactory, especially the ending, despite some original and powerful passages. Jefferies may have felt that his previous version would have fared better but it's impossible to say whether this would have been the case. As it stands its critical reputation has grown both in general literary terms and as a futuristic vision. It belongs with the great works—*The Story of My Heart*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *The Deny Morn*, the last essays; and one which especially speaks to our own times, with ordered rural societies breaking up, their populations moving to vast cities blighted with poverty, crime and corruption. A masterpiece certainly, but not unfinished. There was no intended sequel, and the ending is entirely consistent with Jefferies' developed thought and method: 'Nothing of the kind ever happens. Just the reverse, incomplete, non-dramatic. A true Life History has

²² *The Atlantic Monthly*, v.56 no.334, August 1885, p.278.

²³ *The Literary World*, Boston, July 25 1885.

no wind up and nothing finished or complete.²⁴



A detail from the book cover of *After London*
(London: Duckworth & Co., 1905)
By F D Bedford



²⁴ *The Nature Diaries and Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S.J. Looker (Grey Walls, 1948), p.112.

XIV THE SHOOTING BOOK

C.J. Longman of Longmans, Green & Co. was impressed by articles on country life appearing in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and published anonymously in June 1878 as *The Gamekeeper at Home*. He wrote to the publisher, George Smith, and asked him to forward a letter to the unknown author in which he proposed he undertake “a complete work on shooting”. We owe this information to Walter Besant,* who had access to letters between Longman and Jefferies now lost. Longman was to become Jefferies’ friend, supporter and publisher—but not of a book on shooting. Besant comments: “he was the very man to write such a book—and it would undoubtedly have proved a most popular book. Why, there is not a gentleman’s house in the three kingdoms which would not desire to have a copy of such a work.” But then Jefferies “could never do anything which did not spring from his own brain”.

In 1878 Jefferies had just come into success and popularity after years in the doldrums. He was full of ideas for new projects, and other publishers besides Longman were approaching him. On this crest of self-confidence he accepted Longman’s offer and promptly sent off a plan for the book, with chapters on the various aspects of the subject. At the same time he plied Longman with other projects: a novel, a pioneer work on socialism, a history of the English squire. Again quoting Besant: “He presently forwards a specimen chapter for the Shooting Book. That was in September, 1878. In October he formally accepted the business arrangements offered by the firm, undertook the work, and signed the agreement.” Longman returned the specimen chapter with the

agreement, which is now in the British Library (BL58816). It stipulates a work of 500 pages.

There follows a gap in Besant's correspondence file until December 1882. A letter from Jefferies refers to a book on shooting that Longman had published in the interval, and comments: "I see you have got out the Shooting-Book...No wonder; I could not expect anyone to be more patient than you were. But even now I hope some day to send a manuscript". Besant makes no further reference to the project, but he does record that in January 1885 Longman sent Jefferies a copy of "the Badminton hunting-book". This was in fact the first volume in the comprehensive and celebrated *Badminton Library of British Sports and Pastimes* published by the House of Longman. Jefferies' reply on 29th January was that the gift had made him miserable—not because the honours had gone elsewhere but because he was "on all fours", or "nailed to the uneasy chair", and could no longer enjoy the physical contact with nature and the open air that the book evoked. "I can still see it all plainly—the rocks and the rush of water, and the oaks of June above." The following year saw the lid placed firmly on any possibility of a Jefferies shooting book with the publication in the Badminton Library of two volumes on the subject, with subtitles *Field and Covert*, and *Moor and Marsh*, by Lord Walsingham and Sir Ralph Payne Gallwey. Together they comprised over 1000 pages.

While working on the Bibliography with Hugoe Matthews I wrote to numerous American university libraries, keen buyers of British literary MSS, to enquire if there was anything by Jefferies in their collections. One positive result came from the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory, Atlanta. As well as some ALS they sent copies of two bulky MSS, in Jefferies' holograph but neither with a title in his hand. One has the heading 'On Choosing a Gun' in ink, with 'On' crossed out. This, as 'Choosing a Gun', was published in *Hills and the Vale* (Duckworth 1909) by Edward Thomas, but the title is not his

writing either. There's a large encircled '1' also in the heading and the name 'Jones': other surnames (of the compositors who set the type) occur throughout the text. Thomas gives no idea of the source of the MS but presumably it was Mrs Jefferies as Longman had returned it to Jefferies, and Thomas had been in contact with her regarding his biography. The annotations are presumably Duckworth's, unless Longmans had set it in type before returning the MS.

The other MS, on the same subject, is on the same size paper and in identical handwriting, and the fact that they both ended up together at Emory suggests they had always been a pair. The heading written faintly on this one, perhaps in pencil: 'The Choice and Description of Guns', is in Mrs Jefferies' hand. There are no markings to suggest it was ever submitted for publication. But despite the similarity of title and physical match, the treatment of the subject could hardly be more different. The first is very much "by the author of *The Gamekeeper at Home*": a personal account of the author's daunting encounters with high class London gunsmiths, and not in the authoritative manner one would expect for a complete treatise on the art of shooting by an acknowledged expert. But the second is certainly a valiant attempt at that, with almost an excess of technical detail.

There's no way of telling which of these was written first but it's fairly certain that one or both of them was connected with the Shooting Book. 'Choice and Description' seems the most eligible one to have been submitted as a specimen, but perhaps 'On Choosing' was sent first, and then Jefferies realised, or perhaps Longman suggested, it was not quite the right approach for a 500 page manual. Either way there was certainly an on-going commitment to the project. Besant, founder of the Society of Authors, chose to portray Jefferies as an unworldly genius with no idea how to manage his career; but Jefferies would have been well aware, as poverty and illness set in, of the market potential of such a work. However

his first-hand knowledge of the shooting world was from the underside—the gamekeeper and poacher, the small farmer’s son. He complains in one letter of lack of information. He would have had to put himself about, and a great deal more than when writing the *Memoir of the Goddards*, to encompass the entire gentrified world of battues, grouse shooting, wildfowling and the rest. He could have done it, as he did stag hunting on Exmoor in *Red Deer*, if his health had held out, but at what cost, we wonder, to his other work. Would we have had *Wood Magic*, *Bevis* and *The Story of My Heart*? He might well have been richer but we certainly would have been the poorer if he had taken this direction.

And besides it wasn’t his style. He may have written ‘A Defence of Sport’ for Alfred Austin in the *National Review*, but for him the organised slaughter of preserved game with the more lethal new choke bores and other refinements he describes here, were not congenial. Rather, as we see in essays like ‘Sport and Science’ and ‘The Single Barrel Gun’, a solitary ramble with a favourite old gun that gave the quarry, if there was one, a sporting chance, was more to his liking; the gun really just a passport to being in the open air at all times, breathing it in and alive to all the beauties and mysteries of nature. In the *Times* letters and other early writings he adopted the pose of the expert, but it was his spontaneity and vitality, and the infusion of his personality that made his later work exceptional, then and now. A letter to W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, about a review he had written for the journal, shows that this way of writing was one he came to choose, and believe in:

“14 Victoria Road | Eltham | Kent | Aug 14th [1884]

Dear Sir,

I enclose the review of Sport in the Highlands. The different handwriting is because I dictated it. I find the book a good one & had the author given a full record of his

own personal experiences & confined himself to them, it
would have been of very unusual interest.

I remain | Faithfully Yours | Richard Jefferies”

**The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, Chatto & Windus, 1888, pp.
193-5 & 212



XV

THE GOTHIC JEFFERIES

On 11th March 1975 Hugoe Matthews found two volumes of the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1876 in a Cirencester bookshop. The second volume contained the opening chapters of *The Rise of Maximin*, a full length novel not known to have been published in any form and believed lost—certainly the most important Jefferies discovery since S.J. Looker. For an added bonus the first item on the contents page of volume one was an unknown story: ‘The Monkbourne Mystery, By Richard Jefferies’. My own somewhat more modest first discovery of an unrecorded Jefferies text occurred in the mid sixties. I was then going through files of the local newspapers Jefferies worked for in Swindon Public Library and came across ‘The Grave of the Last Abbot’, signed Geoffrey, the pseudonym Jefferies used for his literary and historical contributions to the *North Wilts Herald*. This was in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard* of June 12 1869, the only “Geoffrey” piece there and the last of the sequence. The story and the poem might whimsically be described as Jefferies’ gothic period; the influence of Edgar Allan Poe is apparent. They are now reprinted for the first time.

The plot of ‘The Monkbourne Mystery’ is conventional. We have young lovers divided by social rank, a difficulty resolved when the low born suitor turns out not to be low born after all. So too the characters: the irascible but good natured Squire, the worthy and mild-mannered vicar. Hugoe first described it to me as a Jefferies ghost story, but it is hardly that. Beginning on a bright May morning it doesn’t venture far into the dark. Any sense of the macabre is diffused by ponderings on scientific explanations of the supernatural, and the mystery is too soon solved. Even the fate of the immured

woman is cause more of sorrow than of horror, and mitigated by the happy outcome. There are hints of Jefferies' more usual preoccupations—the challenge to the old rural order from factory workers, the ploughing up of common land and providing allotments for village people. These give it a local feel, and the tale may owe less to Poe than to Purton, a village to the west of Swindon where:

A bricked up woman's skeleton found contained within a hidden room is thought to be related to the ghostly form which haunts the church. Some believe the figure to be a murdered nun.¹

The Church of St Mary the Virgin is unusual in having a separate tower and spire—apparently the result of competing benefactors. This may have suggested the idea of the two rival churches in the story. Jefferies would certainly have visited Purton to inspect the parish registers as his *Memoir of the Goddards* has a section on the Purton branch; and for his *History of Swindon and its Environs* serialised in *the North Wilts Herald*, which contains some notes on the church.



Purton Church

¹ www.ParanormalDatabase.com. Haunted Churches and other Myths and Legends.

John Blake was the abbot of Cirencester from c.1522 to 1539, when he peacefully surrendered the Abbey and its treasures to the commissioners of King Henry VIII. In 'The Grave of the Last Abbot' Jefferies is in another church, St Mary Driffeld, contemplating an uninscribed stone said to mark the place of Abbot Blake's burial. In a faltering imitation of Poe's 'The Raven' he builds an atmosphere of sepulchral gloom with chanting monks in ghostly procession, only to dispel it with what he later (in the preface to *Round About a Great Estate*) called 'the light of the future'. It is a significant conclusion in the light of his own future: an explicit departure from orthodox faith and ritual, and perhaps too an early sign that he would grow weary of antiquities.



XVI
JOHN, ALICE AND “SQUIRE” BROOK



Arthur 'Squire' Brook

Four of Jefferies' books inscribed to John and Alice Brook have been recorded: *Wood Magic*, 1881, *After London* and *The Open Air*, 1885, and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, 1887. *Wood Magic* and *Amaryllis* simply state 'From the Author', *After London* precise wording unknown, but *The Open Air* has 'With the Author's Love', and contains a pencil sketch signed by Jefferies. His usual style was 'From the Author' or 'With the Author's Compliments', and the usual recipients, editors or other professional contacts. 'Love' or 'best love' was reserved for close family members, 'With All my Love' to Jessie. *The*

Open Air inscription is also the only example on record of one dedicated to a couple, and it is of course quite possible that he presented other titles to the Brooks. All in all it would appear that they were close friends, and their identity is of interest.

But it remained a mystery. My searches over the years in books and records relating to locations, journals and publishers associated with Jefferies had proved fruitless, and likewise the census returns when they became available on the internet. In December 2015 Jean Saunders had access to an internet newspaper archive search site she had found useful and suggested I might try it for any enigmas of my own. So I typed in 'John Brook' and one result stood out: a letter in the *Sussex Express* of 23 February 1894—of which more below. I passed this information back to Jean, the keenest of internet sleuths, and it was not long before she had found him a wife called Alice, an occupation, farmer, and a home and history around the town of Bexhill on the Sussex coast.

A notebook entry of 28 June 1879 'Bexhill—Sussex—Hastings' suggests a visit by Jefferies at that time. Besant refers to a letter of 18 June 1886, when Jefferies was seriously ill. He describes it as 'too sad to quote' but adds:

Help of all kinds was forthcoming from friends whom one must not name: money, the offer of a house on the sea coast; but there was the difficulty of travelling. How was he to be moved? The difficulty was got over, and he went to Bexhill for a time, returning to Crowborough in September. The sea had done him good. On the night of his return, he enjoyed a tranquil sleep, and awoke without pain.

Thomas also mentions 'A visit to the sea at Bexhill [which] brought him some ease', but it isn't clear whether this is the same visit or an earlier one in September 1885. Masseck refers to his departure to Goring in December 1886 '*après avoir d'abord obtenu un petit soulagement* a Bexhill.' This does seem to indicate a further visit and the presence there of friends one must not name. Did Jessie accompany him, or was this an

opportunity for respite care; or perhaps for her to visit her own folk—so strangely absent from the story after her marriage?

oooOOOooo

The following is a summary of information about the Brooks of Bexhill gleaned from internet sources and the Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society records:-

The first Arthur Brook came to Bexhill in 1743 to manage estates of John Sackville, a landowner in Sussex and Dorset. After his death in 1782 his son Arthur Elphick Brook (1744-1836) farmed the estates with his brother Stephen, and Arthur became a landowner himself with the purchase of two farms, Collington and Chantry in 1802. He married in 1809, residing at Court Lodge, where Arthur Sawyer Brook was born. By then the Brooks were an important local family, and Arthur Elphick's status was further enhanced by his founding of the Bexhill Harriers, a pack of South Down beagle hounds which became famous, and on occasion entertained the future King Edward VII.

Arthur Sawyer Brook (1811-1890) inherited his father's farming interests. In 1851 he owned or managed 1000 acres and employed 30 labourers. He rose to such high esteem in Bexhill that he was awarded the honorary title of 'Squire'. The 1871 census gives him 900 acres, 27 men and 9 boys, but by 1881 this has shrunk to 120 acres, 5 men and two boys. The agricultural depression, together with the rapid growth of Bexhill as a seaside resort, swallowing large areas of agricultural land, were the possible causes of this decline, unless it refers to the land he owned rather than the estates he managed. At his death in 1890 he was living at Brook Lodge, Sea Road. He was buried in St. Patrick's Church.

Arthur John Brook (1845-1917) was known as, and signed himself, John Brook. Appearing as Arthur J. Brook in census returns is the reason he had not been found there. John's chief

claim to fame was as a cricketer, playing for Battle and Bexhill teams, and the Windmill Hill Club founded by the wealthy cricket loving Curteis family with whom he was on friendly terms. Herbert Curteis was also a member of the Harriers. His earliest recorded match was in 1860. He scored 110 in 1866, 101 in 1873, 73 in 1875 and 67 not out in 1877 in local matches. His last match was in 1908. He made a single first class appearance for Sussex against Kent at Ashford Road, Eastbourne, 25-27 August 1873, where his 10 runs in one innings contributed to a convincing win for the Sussex men by an innings and 104 runs. It appears that he farmed Chantry Farm of 52 acres and let the remaining land to a tenant. He married Alice Watt in 1880 at Eastbourne. Alice was born in Brussels in 1855. She may have been a silk weaver.¹ The couple resided at Court Lodge, where they had two female domestic servants in 1881. A son, Arthur Farncombe Brook, was born in 1882.

From the local press we gain a few further glimpses of the Brooks:

28 September 1872: *The South Eastern Advertiser* records the sale in Southdown Street of a well known flock belonging to ‘the respected master of the Bexhill Harriers who is retiring.’ From exactly what is unclear—certainly not from his mastership of the Harriers. It may be that he gave up the management of other farms and concentrated on his own—which might also account for the reduction of acreage.

22 March 1879. John Brook, farmer of Bexhill, summonsed to appear before the local magistrates for killing a hen belonging to G.W. Veness, an auctioneer. It was claimed that Brook had threatened to kill the birds if they continued to invade his property and damage his crops. Brook’s defence was that he had set his dog on a hen simply to drive it back through the

¹ My thanks to Peter Robins for this suggestion.

hedge. He was fined 1s. with costs on the grounds that he had exceeded his duty, and there were no crops on the land at the time. (*Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*)

4 February 1888. A.S. Brook and Mrs. John Brook are among the guests present at the inauguration of a clock to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. Squire Brook gave an address. (*Sussex Express*)

17 April 1891. A long report on a meeting to determine the future of the Bexhill Harriers. John had taken over the mastership on his father's death in 1890, but now wished to resign because of ill health. The chairman opened the meeting by saying it would be a great pity for the future of the town if the pack was lost, connected as it had been for many years with the name of Mr. Brook, 'and having been established with such immense care that there was not a pack of the kind to equal it in England.' There were many similar tributes to 'the late lamented Squire Brook'; a farmer's committee was formed to raise subscriptions, and a noble lord, Viscount Cantelupe, agreed to become the new master. One speaker thanked Mr. Brook for taking over on his father's death, adding 'he was personally sorry Mr. Brook was going to give them up, because he was a nice gentleman, and one of the olden times that reminded him of the old English yeoman. The late lamented Squire was always a genial, kind, good-hearted English gentleman and it was only under pressure of circumstances that his son had given up the mastership of the hounds.' (*Sussex Express*)

23 February 1894. A letter to the editor of the *Sussex Express*, headed THE AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL, signed John Brook. He is replying to a previous correspondent who supported the idea of an agricultural college, seeing it as a new and progressive initiative. Brook's argument in essence is that it was old hat and never worked before:

This scientific farming is no new thing. I dare say our friend has heard of the anti-corn law discussions, and that it was said in reply to the farmers, you must make two blades where only one has grown before, and you must call in science to your aid. Well, it was taken up far more earnestly than now. Large numbers went to the colleges of the day, in order to be prepared to meet the coming change. Had our friend given a list of those who, having finished their course of study and had gone forth to lead the great question of applying their acquired knowledge in practical farming as successful men, it would overwhelm the stupid farmer.

Failing in this, I fear his efforts will avail little with the older men. For my part, I could only furnish from personal knowledge two, but unfortunately they were both failures.

He supports his belief in traditional hands-on farming with 'the old adage':

He that by the plough would thrive,
Must himself either hold or drive.

Aged 49 at the time of writing Brook is clearly going back to a period in his infancy. The corn laws were repealed in 1849, but the issue was still a contentious one when he was growing up. It can be safely assumed that he is reflecting the views and experience of his late respected father as well as his own; and the same may be said of his comment on another much debated rural topic:

What does the extension of the allotments mean, but that land must return to the working man, seeing how readily the proprietary class avail themselves of it.

We have an independent but hard-working, practical farmer, if anything more in sympathy with the labourer than the landowner. The final comment in his only known public statement: 'I have no desire to appear in print but to avoid

recriminations', suggests the guarded attitude of a private man, consistent perhaps with a wish not to be known or named as one who, with his wife, gave hospitality and care to the dying author.

How Jefferies got to know the Brooks is of course a matter for speculation. It may have been a chance meeting, or through his Sussex relations, the Baxters of Lewis.² But we shouldn't forget that Jefferies was a prominent agricultural journalist, broadly conservative and supportive of the farming and sporting interests, while in favour of practical measures to improve the labourer's lot. His first country books were widely reviewed in farming and sporting journals and in the popular press. Perhaps the friendship began with a letter to Jefferies, from 'Squire' Brook or his son. Like Jefferies' father, John was a descendent from a prosperous and well regarded farming dynasty, carrying on in a smaller way but still independent: a traditionalist sceptical of new fashions and theories. He would have relished the contrasting portraits of 'The Man of Progress' and 'An Agricultural Genius—Old Style' in *Hodge and His Masters*. The friendship could have begun a year or two earlier than the *Wood Magic* inscription of May 1881. Perhaps the notebook entry of June 1879 marks the first visit.

It seems quite possible that Jefferies' acquaintance with John, Alice and 'Squire' Brook, and their home and estates in Bexhill, provided material for some of his later writings, both on agriculture and nature. Jefferies' earlier portrayal of squires, in *Hodge* for example, is based on a sound understanding of their social and economic circumstances, but we don't have the sense of a living original, known intimately, as we so often

² John Baxter played cricket for Sussex and in 1816 wrote the first rules for cricket: *Lambert's Cricketer's Guide*. He was also interested in farming and in later life took it up on a small scale at Oaklands near Ifield, experimenting with new farming methods and exhibiting models of new farmyards and buildings at the Great Exhibition, 1851. He wrote various books on agriculture, including the *Library of Agricultural Knowledge*. With Squire Brook and John Brook, both passionate about cricket and farming, the Baxters are likely to have introduced Jefferies to the Brooks.

do with his farmers, labourers, gamekeepers and poachers. In 1878 when Jefferies undertook a book on shooting for Longmans he also proposed a work on the history of the English squire, and there are subsequent notebook entries on the subject. Whether unfinished or abandoned it never appeared, but there are published and unpublished writings that clearly relate to it. Much of the unpublished material was included by S.J. Looker in various anthologies, a long section in *The Old House at Coate* under the title 'The Squire at Home' from a chapter heading in the projected work. Here we have a distinctive voice, a staunch defender of the status quo against the claims and proposals of the land reform movement, who vehemently rebuts the charge of being an obstacle to progress, having tried and tested all the new ideas—steam ploughing, drainage, guano, shorthorns, education etc.—and is ready to try any others that can improve not only his own fortunes but those of the farmers and labourers and their families whose affairs he knows as well as his own. He declares he is prepared to consent to try any new proposal, except communism, and his own abolition.

In 'An English Deer Park' the main interest is in the natural environment, described with the minute detail, colour and sensitivity of the later essays. But the character of the squire is central, and he is cast from the same mould as 'The Squire at Home'. He has the same intimate knowledge of all his subjects, whose comings and goings he observes from the window of the gun room in the old manor house. 'A man should be straight like a gun' is a saying they have in common. However, like Squire Brook, his title derives from character and conduct rather than from ownership. He is a tenant and land steward, but 'It is he who rules the park. The labourers and keepers call him the "squire".'

Perhaps the closest we get to Squire Brook is in the portrait of James Thardover in 'A King of Acres', published in

Chambers's Journal in January 1884.³ We have first a detailed description of the man, weatherbeaten, ace reddened by the wind, grey clad and dusty booted, eyes compared to the blue and grey of the field veronica, standing bolt upright with his arms on the gate (straight like a gun), sharply appraising the performance of the ploughing teams at work on the field before him. A little later we have references to the harriers chasing a hare, and the 'yowping' of the beagles, strongly suggestive of a Bexhill setting. In the second section Jefferies makes clear that this man's claim to rule the estate is based on grounds more firm than mere ownership:

Deed, seal, and charter give but a feeble hold compared with that which is afforded by labour. James Thardover held his lands again by right of labour; he had taken possession of them once more with thought, design, and actual work... He had laid his hands as it were on every acre. Those who work, own. There are many who receive rent who do not own; they are proprietors, not owners.

³ 'An English Deer Park' did not appear till after Jefferies' death. It came out in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, a New York publication, in October 1888. It was not included in Jefferies' own list of essays he intended to reprint in his next collection after *The Open Air*, but was included by his widow in *Field and Hedgerow*. When working on the Bibliography this gave rise to the possibility that, like 'The Squire at Home', it was unfinished or unedited MS perhaps intended for the book on the history of the English squire, forwarded by Mrs. Jefferies or Besant to the American magazine to promote his reputation there. A more recently discovered letter discounts this possibility. Jefferies had in fact been approached by Edmund Gosse, then editor, to contribute to *The Century*:

14 Victoria Road | Eltham | Kent | March 11th [1884 or 5 —probably the latter]

Dear Sir, | Some years since you were so kind as to write me to contribute to the Century. I had the pleasure of writing a paper, & I have quite recently heard that it is now in process of illustration. That being the case (& as it seems necessary to have M.S. ready a long time in advance for your magazine) may I enquire whether the Century would accept further papers from me? If so I can make a suggestion as I should be pleased to consider with a view to work on any ideas that you may have.

I remain | Faithfully Yours | Richard Jefferies | Edmund W. Gosse Esq.

This could only refer to 'An English Deer Park', and pushes the date of composition back to the early 1880s. Why publication was delayed still further to over a year after Jefferies' death is far from clear, but obviously he didn't feel he could pre-empt journal publication by including it in his new collection. The essay was reprinted by Edward Thomas in *The Hills and the Vale*, Duckworth, 1909.

And like 'The Squire at Home' he has energetically supported 'All the great agricultural movements of the last thirty years.' But we hear a voice independent of Jefferies' own in his outright condemnation of steam ploughing of which he (Jefferies) on the whole approved: 'It reduced the land to a dead level. They had previously been thrown into 'lands', with a drain trench on each side. On this dead level water did not run off quickly, and the growth of weeds increased.' We have his trenchant views on all the rural topics of the day; on shorthorns, hiring fairs, the scientific movement ('nothing came of it'), the improvement of cottages and farm buildings, the coming of the village school with the Education Act—which he enthusiastically funded and supported. He had backed every innovation up to the recently introduced silo system. 'It was thus that he laid hold on his lands with the strongest of titles—the work of his own hands.' But still farms were failing and becoming vacant.

Against this background of struggle and hardship in the years of depression the final section, 'A Ringfence: Conclusion', is one of Jefferies' loveliest celebrations of English landscape and natural life in its colour, richness and profusion, and the mental and spiritual relief it gave him and could give to his careworn compatriots. All these creatures and above all the human inhabitants within the estate boundary, are dependent on the Squire—his decisions, whether about felling a wood or founding a school, affect the whole. His role is to conserve and preserve something of infinite value, and Jefferies makes the cogent point that he could not do so without income from outside: 'the labour and time of the many-handed operatives in mill, factory and workshop went to aid in maintaining these living pictures.' But yet again the estate has a value beyond money. Every mill worker could trace his origins to the land, 'the fountain head from which the spring of life flows.' Jefferies concludes that all help should be given to assist the King of Acres, and the

farmers and labourers, 'against the adverse influences which press so heavily on English Agriculture.'

All three pieces were probably written in the early 1880s, a period of transition in Jefferies' writing, when he was ceasing to be a reporter or commentator, expert on farming matters and field sports, or a historian, and becoming a literary artist. Whether he quite saw himself in this way is debatable, but his many comparisons between literature and painting (a notable example in 'The King of Acres') suggests this was a conscious process. Jefferies too is in transit between the partisan views of *The Times* letters and the more speculative and radical ideas in *The Story of My Heart* and essays like 'After the Country Franchise'—though even in the latter he admits: 'we should have to preserve a few landowners, if only to have parks and woods.' Hence in the 'squire' essays we have not only both modes present, but in the central figure a reconciliation of the two: the ideal countryman who is at once reformer and preserver, progressive and traditionalist, on friendly and respectful terms with all ranks of society in his care, whose leadership is based on commitment and labour rather than ownership or wealth. Like any creative writer Jefferies would have drawn on many sources in this portrayal, but it is I think a reasonable assumption that the Brooks, the squire and his 'yeoman' son, (and perhaps Alice was the model for Mary the artist in 'The King of Acres') and their home and land at Bexhill, were prominent among them.



XVII

JEFFERIES, WHITMAN AND WILLIAM SHARP

William Sharp was born in Paisley, near Glasgow, in 1855, his father a successful merchant and his mother the daughter of the Swedish Vice Consul in Glasgow. Like Jefferies, as a child he was adventurous, read a great deal, and loved the countryside, especially the Inner Hebrides where the family spent their summers. The boon companion he shared his boyhood dreams and schemes with was his cousin Elizabeth from London, whom he met when he was about eight. She eventually became his wife. A gifted student he went from school to Glasgow University, but his time there was cut short by illness, and again like Jefferies his health was always fragile despite high energy and ambition to succeed. He was sent to Australia to recover, which surely would have been a great experience and as valuable in its way as a degree. He returned to live in London in 1878 working as a bank clerk but determined to establish himself in the literary world just when Jefferies, after a decade of false starts and dashed hopes, was beginning to make his mark. Sharp had the initial advantage of good connections among family and friends, one of whom, the Scottish artist and poet Joseph Noel Paton, introduced him to Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and then he had the still greater advantage of an enthusiastic, engaging manner, striking good looks and a buoyant disposition. He soon became closely involved with the literary circle around the Pre-Raphaelites, and the poet Christina Rossetti became a lasting friend. He was drawn to groups and movements, notably the Celtic Revival and its Scottish counterpart whose journal *The Evergreen* he edited and contributed to, and a ritualistic cult

called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, whose members included W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, Arthur Machen, Evelyn Underhill, a writer on mysticism, and the diabolist Aleister Crowley. He established himself as a literary journalist, editor, and poet and novelist with a wide circle of contacts, among them Yeats, George Meredith, Olive Schreiner, Coventry Patmore, Arthur Symonds and Walter Pater. He removed from the London scene in 1890, travelling much in his later years with Elizabeth—their relationship has been described as companionate. He died suddenly in Sicily at the age of fifty.

All this is in marked contrast to the fortunes and temperament of Richard Jefferies. Nothing developed from his meeting with Thomas Hardy in 1880, despite so much they shared in their backgrounds and materials, and no other writer of note crossed his path—unless you include Sharp. Despite the fact that as adults they were so opposite, there was a connection, and possibly a vital one, between them.

Jefferies' essay 'The Pageant of Summer' which came out in *Longman's Magazine* in June 1883 was much praised. He reprinted it in his next essay collection, *The Life of the Fields*, published by Chatto & Windus in early June 1884. He signed a copy to his wife on June 6 and one to his mother the following day. On June 12 he received a parcel which contained a letter from William Sharp and a copy of his second book of poems entitled *Earth's Voices, Transcripts from Nature, Sospittra, and Other Poems*,¹ also recently published. The same day Jefferies sent a copy of *The Life of the Fields* to Sharp² and the following letter:

Savernake | Lorna Road | West Brighton | June 12th [1884]
Dear Sir,

¹ London, Elliot Stock, 1884.

² 'William Sharp Esq | From the Author | June 12th 1884' (private collection).

I have just received your kind present and letter through Messrs. Chatto & Windus & hasten to return my sincere thanks for the many pleasant observations you have made. A letter like this from one who thoroughly understands and sympathises is worth more to the worker than the applause of hundreds. You have done me the honour to quote the Pageant of Summer on your front page, will you therefore accept my new volume The Life of the Fields in which the paper is reprinted. I send a copy by post. Opening the poems haphazard I light on a verse describing a wasp—"a yellow flame he seems to be"—these lines are truly a transcript from nature; so too, the next "In a Garden"—"the brown bee hums—o'er wild thyme wet With streamlet sprays, the dragon fly Hangs blue black 'gainst the azure sky"—accidentally also I found a poem the Song of the Thrush which conveys a good idea of the changing meter in which the bird sings. But I shall read the whole book with attention.

I remain | Faithfully Yours | Richard Jefferies | William Sharp Esq³

The quotation from "The Pageant of Summer" Jefferies refers to is:

The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live, so that the longer we can stay among these things, so much more is snatched from inevitable time.

and the poems he comments on are as follows:

From *Earth's Voices*, p. 19

XII. THE SONG OF THE THRUSH

When the beech-trees are green in the woodlands
And the thorns are whitened with may,
And the meadow-sweet blows and the yellow gorse blooms
I sit on a wind-waved spray,
And I sing through the livelong day
From the golden dawn till the sunset comes and the shadows of gloaming grey.

³ Private collection.

And I sing of the joy of the woodlands,
 And the fragrance of wild-wood flowers,
 And the song of the trees and the hum of the bees
 In the honeysuckle bowers,
 And the rustle of showers
 And the voice of the west-wind calling as though
 glades and green branches he scours.
 When the sunset glows over the woodlands
 More sweet rings my lyrical cry
 With the pain of my yearning to be 'mid the burning
 And beautiful colours that lie
 'Midst the gold of the sun-down sky,
 Where over the purple and crimson and amber the rose-pink cloud-curls fly.
 Sweet, sweet swells my voice thro' the woodlands,
 Repetitive, marvellous, rare:
 And the song-birds cease singing as my music goes ringing
 And eddying there,
 Now wild and now debonair,
 Now filled with a tumult of passion that throbs like a pulse in the hush'd warm
 air!

From *Transcripts from Nature*. p.[71]—72

II. THE WASP

Where the ripe pears droop heavily
 The yellow wasp hums loud and long
 His hot and drowsy Autumn song;
 A yellow flame he seems to be,
 When darting suddenly from height
 He lights where fallen peaches lie;
 Yellow and black, this tiny thing's
 A tiger soul on elfin wings.

III. IN A GARDEN

Above the beds of mignonette.
 Or 'midst the wall-flowers' drowsy spells
 Or swaying in Canterbury bells
 The brown bee hums: o'er wild thyme wet
 With streamlet sprays, the dragon-fly
 Hangs blue-black 'gainst azure sky;
 And like blown wild-rose leaves glow
 White butterflies drift to and fro.

It's easy to see that these poems would have appealed to
 Jefferies for their close observation and delight in colour. They
 have a metrical fluidity unusual at the time, though the

rhyming is heavy and constricting. Jefferies wrote again to Sharp on 26 August,⁴ saying he has now read the book fully and praising especially the sequence of Australian poems. In a postscript he points out his change of address to Eltham, which might indicate a wish to continue the correspondence. Whether or to what extent this took place is a question we have to consider, but first it is necessary to note that the first of two passages from Jefferies printed in the preliminary pages of *Earth's Voices* is not taken from 'The Pageant of Summer' but from *The Story of My Heart*:

It is enough to lie on the sward in the shadow of green boughs, to listen to the songs of summer, to drink in the sunlight, the air, the flowers, the sky, the beauty of it all... I want to be always in company with these, with earth, and sun, and sea, and stars by night.⁵

oooOOOooo

The previous year (1883) saw the inauguration of a remarkable new publishing venture, The Walter Scott Publishing Company of Newcastle on Tyne. Despite the name this had nothing to do with the author of the Waverley novels. The Walter Scott in question was a man of little formal education who started his own building business, and in true Samuel Smiles style created a major construction firm responsible for railways, docks, coal mines and steel furnaces. One contract he had was to build a new factory for the Tyne Publishing Company at Felling on Tyne, and when they ran into financial difficulties he bought the business itself and set up as a publisher. He appointed as manager a dynamic young Scotsman, David Gordon, who realised that, with the spread of education down the social scale, there was a growing demand for affordable books. Furthermore he realised that with a new purpose built factory equipped for printing and

⁴ National Library of Scotland Department of Manuscripts: Me. 15941, f.106.

⁵ Constable, 1947, ed. S.J. Looker, p.85.

binding, and a proprietor well placed in the field of distribution, the firm could undercut the London houses and supply this need, and do so without markedly lowering production standards. The reprinting of popular classics was the foundation of the firm's business throughout its short but spectacular life. The method was to print very large impressions on different paper stock and sizes, and to bind them in an array of styles as 'libraries' with impressive names. Parts of the print run could be franchised to other publishers, or to provincial booksellers wishing to create their own library, it requiring only a cancel title page with their imprint and a variant binding to do so. From this base the company went on to commission original works and new editions from leading experts and scholars in their field, again in cumulative series: The Contemporary Science Series, Great Writers, The Library of Humour, Every-Day Help, Makers of British Art, Music Stories, Fairy Tales and New England Library and others. They also published some early work of George Bernard Shaw and several of George Moore's novels, and perhaps most importantly, some of the first English translations of Tolstoy and Ibsen. Though the firm lost impetus after the death of (by then) Sir Walter Scott they were undoubtedly the pioneers of the popular expansion of the publishing industry in the twentieth century.⁶

The first series launched by David Gordon was the Canterbury Poets, each volume to be edited and introduced by a writer of note. The series editor, Joseph Skipsey, was hardly that—a self-taught coal miner and poet who returned to the pit between literary assignments. This was followed in 1886 by a companion series, the Camelot Classics, to include major works of English prose, the editorship of which fell to a young Welsh literary aspirant, Ernest Rhys—he later surmised

⁶ Walter Scott's chief editor, Ernest Rhys, joined the publisher J.M. Dent in 1906 and became the first editor of Everyman's Library.

because he was mistaken for Professor John Rhys, an eminent Celtic scholar. Rhys (Ernest) was a native of Carmarthen but had trained as a mining engineer in Newcastle before moving to London, where the firm had an office in Paternoster Row. He soon proved to be the right man for the job, rapidly expanding the list, taking on several volumes himself and recruiting editors well qualified to present others. Among them were friends in the Celtic movement like W.B. Yeats who compiled *Fairy and Folk-Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, and William Sharp who edited De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *The Great English Painters*. Sharp in fact was a prolific contributor to the Scott enterprise. Between 1885 and 1903, as well as the two Camelot editions, he took over the Canterbury Poets when Skipsey returned to the mine, edited and introduced nine volumes in the series and wrote biographies of Shelley, Heine and Browning in the Great Writers series. One of his own poetry collections, *Romantic Ballads and Poems of Phantasy*, was published by Scott in 1888. It may have been the Company's northern working-class ethos and perhaps the outsider perspective of the Celtic influence as well that recommended the books to their intended audience. But the price was the main thing. Alison Uttley remembered from her rural childhood:

There was a row of little books, bound in green cloth, called "The Canterbury Poets", edited by William Sharp and costing a shilling each. I had seen them often and peered into them. I bought the poems of Keats and Shelley.⁷

On January 3rd 1887 Rhys wrote to Jefferies under the letterhead of the Camelot Classics:

Dear Sir,

I have been wanting for some time to secure your good services for a vol. of White's *Natural History of Selborne* in this series. Ever since a certain beneficent uncle of mine, of rustic

⁷ Alison Uttley, *Country Things*, Faber, 1946.

tastes, put 'The Gamekeeper at Home' into my hands in my later boyhood, your books and essays have had a continued influence upon me, and now that I find myself, somewhat unaccountably, the editor of a series of books, it is in the simple nature of things that I should turn to you in this matter. Perhaps you have already seen some of the vols. that have been issued in the series, and so will have an idea of what our requirements are approximately. In this case they would be quite simple—merely a little introductory dissertation on Gilbert White and his delightful book, which need not be more than four or five pages; and indeed, as you will understand, the publishers are not able to pay for much original matter in so cheap an edition. Will you then kindly let me know what you think of the proposal, and what terms you require? I may add that I should like to issue the volume this spring if possible.

I asked my friend Mr Sharp for your address but as he is uncertain whether Savernake still holds good, I address this c/o your publisher.⁸

It appears from the last paragraph that there had been no further correspondence between Jefferies after June 1884. This is confirmed by a letter from Rhys dated 18 January following Jefferies' acceptance of the *Selborne* proposal. Jefferies must have enquired about Sharp, and his poetry in particular, to have elicited a final paragraph:

Mr Sharp went through a very trying bout of scarlet & rheumatic fever last year but is working away now with tremendous vigour at fiction and criticism. I am afraid he is not doing much in the way of verse, as indeed how is the lyrical impulse to come to an over-driven brain? He is over-working himself, I fear.⁹

A copy of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* was sent to Jefferies as an example of the series but he was discouraged by

⁸ British Library: Miller and Mathews D29.2iv.

⁹ *ibid.*, D26.iii. (The two volume biography of Sharp published after his death by his wife contains no references to Jefferies, and I have not found any letters in the recorded archives.)

the length of the introduction and the editing required. Apparently he told Rhys he had never read *Selborne* before and it would require considerable scientific annotation and revision, all of which would be impossible in his present state of health. Rhys replied on February 7th to say that nothing of the kind was required, and urging him to reconsider and take his time. He adds: 'I find it hard to think that ailment can be the cause of delay to you whom, of all men, I feel, sun, wind and strength of earth and sea should conspire to keep in perfect health.'¹⁰ In a letter from Sea View dated April 13th Jefferies says he has started the preface but is making little progress as the cold weather is preventing his use of the Bath chair, a hint perhaps that his condition was worse than Rhys had supposed. In effect he delegates the editorial work to Rhys, apart from the firm decision that White's Calendar rather than Antiquities should be included if there is not space for both.¹¹ In the event the book did not come out until the end of June.

In later memoirs Rhys admitted that he had not realised that Jefferies at this time was an impoverished invalid close to death. It came as a shock to learn that his 'enviably popular' and 'delightful works' had been produced during years of struggle against poverty and disease, but adds: 'only revealing in one, *The Story of My Heart*, the almost febrile intensity with which he looked at life and penetrated its secrets.'¹²

In 1886 Rhys edited a selection of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* for the Canterbury Poets, and in 1887 secured for the Camelot Classics Whitman's *Specimen Days in America*, 'newly revised by the author, with a fresh preface and additional notes'. This was the May volume, immediately preceding Jefferies' *Selborne*, and this juxtaposition may well have prompted Rhys, who had clearly established a warm

¹⁰ *ibid*, D26.iii.

¹¹ Ernest Rhys, *Letters from Limbo*, London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1936, pp.22-24.

¹² *ibid*, p.22.

relationship with the American sage, to recommend Jefferies' work and *The Story of My Heart* to him. He was sending a copy of the *Pall Mall Gazette* which reprinted some of the additional notes to *Specimen Days*, and in the covering letter dated 28th April 1887 adds:

In the same paper notice the article 'Some April Insects', by Richard Jefferies! I think you will like it. Jefferies is one of our best writers on nature over here; his writing is at once true and subtle, & very natural and simple withal. Did you ever read 'Story of My Heart', a very passionate confession of faith and fear it was, with a sentiment in it that made some of the critics say it must be inspired by your L[eaves] of G[rass]. If you have not yet seen it I would like to send it on.¹³

In December the same year, at the suggestion of Whitman's friend the psychiatrist Dr Maurice Bucke,¹⁴ Rhys visited Whitman in his 'shanty' in Camden, New Jersey. This led to a further Whitman title in the Camelot Classics: *Democratic Vistas and Other Papers*, 'published by arrangement with the author' in May 1888. Rhys does not mention whether Jefferies' work was discussed on his visit, but it does come up when another member of Whitman's circle, Horace Traubel, recorded their conversation almost a year later (April 1889). Whitman asked Traubel to read Rhys's letter of April '87 so that he can make a mental note of its contents. He interjects his assent to the comments about Jefferies' writing in general but says that he has not read *The Story*. However someone had brought it (or perhaps Rhys had sent it as promised), and he continues: 'I

¹³ Private collection. A rather more obscure member of Rhys's network of editors and translators he recommended Jefferies' autobiography to was Count Stanislaus Stenbock (?1860-?1898), an eccentric *fin de siècle* decadent who left a few wistfully haunting lines of verse. Stenbock wrote: 'I have read the 'Story of my Heart' —it is *unique* —I was both enthralled and appalled by it —to give it to anyone else to read seems like violating confidence.' *Letters from Limbo*, p.34.

¹⁴ Author of *Cosmic Consciousness: a Study of the Evolution of the Human Mind*, Philadelphia, Innes and Sons, 1901, in which Jefferies' mysticism is discussed, with extracts from *The Story of My Heart*.

may say I still have not read it: I have looked it through; it contains great passages—is profoundly emotional, undisguisedly genuine: a little too much inside rather than outside for me. I should not criticise it: I have not studied it intimately.’¹⁵ One can understand his caveat about there being not enough external reality from some of his postcard messages to Rhys, one of which begins: ‘I am feeling fairly today Sept. 28—I am sitting here in my den in big arm chair—have just been eating a big dish of white grapes—*Niagaras* they call ’em here—native and hardy...’ Another: ‘I am ab’t as usual—am just having my dinner—beef-onion stew—Cold here...’¹⁶ He would have found this side of Jefferies elsewhere, especially in the character of Iden in *Amaryllis at the Fair*.

A final reference to Sharp in the Jefferies biographies comes from Edward Thomas, who must have had access to some material no longer available. Jefferies, he says, delighted in Whitman’s work, and sent a copy of *Leaves of Grass* to his father. Apparently summarising a letter he writes: ‘Sending [the preface to *Selborne*] to Mr. Ernest Rhys, in June, he wished that he had had time for a longer essay. William Sharp had sent him a copy of Whitman’s *Specimen Days* as a token of esteem; and Jefferies was still alive enough to ask, ‘Why doesn’t Mr. Sharp send me his “Leaves of Grass,” as a companion to “Specimen Days”?’¹⁷ Sharp must also have realised how congenial Whitman would have been to Jefferies, and Jefferies’ response confirms it. With the exception of Longman the London publishers had not treated Jefferies well, and it might be supposed that had his health not failed he could have found an encouraging and sympathetic milieu

¹⁵ Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, London, OUP, 1953, vol. IV. This link was discovered by Jean Saunders; see ‘Did Walt Whitman Read Jefferies?’ in *The Richard Jefferies Autumn Newsletter & Annual Report*, 2014-2015. According to Bucke Whitman dipped into several books at a time and never read one through.

¹⁶ *Letters from Limbo*, pp. 13 and 15.

¹⁷ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies: his Life and Work*, London, Hutchinson, 1909, pp. 189 and 313.

working with Rhys, Sharp and the Walter Scott Publishing Company of Newcastle on Tyne; and one too in keeping with his desire to bring great literature to the labouring poor.¹⁸

Jefferies must have been deeply disappointed at the reception of *The Story of My Heart*, the work in which he expressed his truest self and deepest thoughts. There were few notices and almost a fifth of the edition was pulped. Rhys was one critic prepared to endorse it and Sharp had read it and was clearly drawn to Jefferies mystical side before his own had fully emerged. This was to take an unusual form, and it is reasonable to suppose that both Jefferies and Whitman were formative influences in the development of an ecstatic emotional response to nature approaching the mystical, and combining elements of the aesthetic and transcendentalist movements of the age. One strand of transcendentalism was feminism, not at this stage a social movement, but the physical, moral and spiritual idealisation of woman. This is a strong theme in Jefferies, especially in the portrait of Felise in *The Deny Morn* and the essay 'Nature in the Louvre', but it is even more relevant to Sharp. 'Sospitra' in the book he sent Jefferies is a goddess made mortal by human love, and a subsequent book of poems *Sospiri di Roma*, was inspired by the joy he felt in the presence of a beautiful woman he had met in Rome in 1891. This was printed privately in Italy¹⁹ and copies sent to close friends, perhaps because he was writing from deeper impulses in his nature than he was prepared to submit to the general public. Written entirely in free verse there are apparitions of the goddess of love in a city flowering amidst the ruins of antiquity, with a naked swimmer and goatskin clad

¹⁸ See 'Country Literature' in *The Life of the Fields*, Chatto & Windus, 1884.: 'The authors whose work have a world-wide reputation... would be the most popular' (p.223) and 'Sixpence, a shilling, eighteen pence; nothing must be more than two shillings, and a shilling would be the general maximum.' (p.231) —Walter Scott's prescription exactly.

¹⁹ Printed for the author by La Societa Laziale, Roma, 1891.

shepherd among its few mortal inhabitants, while the glories of nature are celebrated in over a hundred pages of highly coloured, exquisite and exotic word painting. There is a slight atmosphere of *After London* about it with the burgeoning depopulated wilderness and the remote figure of Aurora somewhere beyond. The lady in question, Edith Wingate Rinder, was also a writer and from Scotland, and at this point Sharp, having released the lyrical impulse to its full, gave up much of his editorial work and returned to Scotland. There he wrote *Pharais* (Gaelic for Paradise), a Celtic romance set in the Western Isles, and dedicated to 'E.W.R.'. As an afterthought he issued it under the name of Fiona Macleod.²⁰

Thereafter Sharp used this pseudonym for a sequence of Scottish novels without disclosing his authorship to any but a few intimate friends. The novels are characterised by rapturous descriptions of nature and landscape, and brave, noble female characters whether plain, beautiful, young or old. Sharp continued to write under his own name and succeeded in maintaining the illusion of two separate writers to the end of his life, which in 1905 had probably been hastened by the stresses and work load imposed by this dual career. The reasons for this unusual authorial dichotomy were in the first place practical. The Macleod books proved more successful financially, and also critically; they were acclaimed by writers in the Celtic school like Yeats and George Russell who were indifferent to Sharp's own name productions. But there were clearly deeper reasons. Some have suggested a sexual ambiguity or multiple personality disorder, but whatever the value of such theories they are unnecessary. His wife Elizabeth said on his death, when the secret was revealed, that she had urged the deception as she feared harsh criticism of his more

²⁰ Sharp said that Fiona was a Gaelic name (diminutive Fionaghal) rarely used at the time even in Scotland, and, Macleod had family associations.

self-revealing work,²¹ which could have been part of the truth; but Sharp himself was quite explicit in confidences given to a close friend:

I write out of my heart in a way that I cannot do as William Sharp... The wrapt sense of oneness with nature, this cosmic ecstasy and elation, this wayfaring along the extreme verges of the common world, all this is so wrought up with the romance of life that I could not bring myself to express by my outer self, insistent and tyrannical as that need is... My truest self, the self who is below all other selves, and my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions and dreams, must find expression, yet I cannot, save in this hidden way.

There are obvious similarities to Jefferies' apologia for his autobiography. Again: 'I stand on the verge of great things. I know it now and have dreamed overlong, and I have so much to learn and unlearn'; and 'When once the spirit of beauty has entered into the inner life, there can be no turning from that divine service, whatsoever hard patience and long sorrow be involved.'²²

Curiously the names of Sharp, Whitman and Jefferies were brought together by another offbeat publishing enterprise, that of Thomas B. Mosher, the pirate of Portland, Maine, who did so much to expand Jefferies' readership in America. In 1903 he brought out *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* by Jefferies, selected by Thomas Coke Watkins. This was followed in 1906 by *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* selected from Whitman by Anne Montgomerie Traubel (Horace Traubel's wife); and then the same title by Fiona Macleod in 1908, selected by Mrs. William Sharp and Roselle Lathrop Shields. There is nothing miniature about the passages quoted from the Fiona novels: the beauty and sublimity of land sea and the heavens in all their phases are brought forth in an exaltation of praise, and everywhere the insistence that nature and the human heart are

²¹ *New York Times*, December 15, 1905.

²² Quoted in *Fiona Macleod and her Creator*, by Catherine A. Janvier, in *The North American Review*, vol. 184 no. 612 (April 5 1907), pp. 718-732.

one. The text is prefaced by two quotations from the Ralph Waldo Emerson, the high priest of transcendentalism, and above them a short one, ‘I will search the world through for beauty’, comes from Richard Jefferies’ *The Story of My Heart*.²³



²³ Constable 1947, ed. S.J. Looker, p.65.

XVIII

JEFFERIES AND DOUGLAS ADAMS

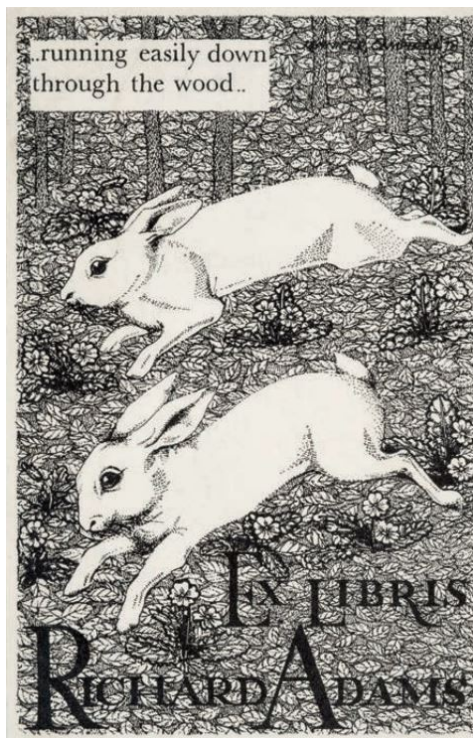
Wood Magic provides a curious instance of the way in which past writers can aid and inspire the literary careers of their successors. The story, in which animal characters represent the psychological and political complexities of human behaviour, a mixture of fable, fantasy and sometimes harsh realism, was unconventional when published in 1881, and was reprinted only once during Jefferies' lifetime. The title was taken over by Longmans to add to their own lifetime and posthumous works, in 1893, and its fortunes revived. Seven further impressions kept it in print until 1924. In 1928 Collins began to issue it as an illustrated pocket edition, a school classic, and other inexpensive or presentation formats. For twenty years it was a standard children's book along with *Bevis*, but by the 1950s, in a climate of social and cultural change, it had more or less run its course. Another twenty years elapsed before republication, this time by a tiny firm working on a shoestring. Gustav Rex Collings (1925–96) was, by all accounts, a publisher of independence and integrity, a despiser of fashion and an early environmentalist. His list included African and Brazilian writers as well as children's books. He regarded Jefferies as 'one of the most perceptive and poetic writers about the English countryside. . . mercifully free of the sentimentality that so often disfigures books about the country', and *Wood Magic* as 'an enchanting story of great vigour and understanding.' It was a publishing choice endorsed by a *Spectator* review which described the novel as 'one of the most unique and startlingly beautiful books in the English language, a fairy story of genius, the real and true thing, Jefferies' masterpiece.'

Richard Adam's long life span (1920–2016) had extended sixteen years beyond Jefferies' before he first put pen to paper with the intention of producing a literary work. At 18 he had gained a place at Worcester College, Oxford, to read modern history, but his studies were interrupted by the war. He served in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East, though not in combat roles. After the war he returned to Worcester College, graduated in 1948, and joined the Civil Service the same year. He married and there were two daughters whom he entertained as children with the adventures of a colony of rabbits. Later on they urged him to write the stories down and make a book. Working in his spare time it took him two years to complete the novel, and in 1968 the MS was duly sent off to an established London firm. It was turned down by them, and by the next, and the next . . . Accounts vary between seven and fourteen publishers and literary agents in all. It was not of course that they failed to see merit in the work, but simply believed at that time there was no market for such an unusual work in no well-defined genre. Publishers cling to the self-exonerating myth that any work of value will eventually find a publisher, but we cannot possibly know how many masterpieces have been consigned to oblivion by authors terminally discouraged by a seemingly impenetrable wall of rejection. It might well have been the case with Adams, a late developer needing his daughters' encouragement, had he not at this time acquired a copy of *Wood Magic* published by the free spirited Rex Collings and realised that there, if anywhere, he might encounter a sympathetic mind. The rest, as they say (with some 50 million copies sold to date), is history.

Watership Down was published by Rex Collings in 1972. In 1974 the edition came out in New York under the imprint of The Third Press—Joseph Okpaku Publishing Co., Inc, with an introduction by Adams. From this his debt to Jefferies is abundantly clear:

‘For one who himself aspires to be a writer and finds himself writing about Richard Jefferies, the concluding word must be this: Jefferies wrote more than well. He used words beautifully. His work is a delight to read, and this is undoubtedly the principle reason it has endured for nearly a century and looks good for another.’

Note: Quotations taken from the dust jackets of the Rex Collings edition, 1969 and 1976, and from the introduction to the Third Press edition of 1974. Richard Adams’ library was auctioned by Dominic Winter on 14 December 2017. It contained numerous copies of Jefferies’ books.



Richard Adams’ fine bookplate.

XIX

LIST OF AUTHOR INSCRIBED AND
ASSOCIATED COPIES OF RICHARD
JEFFERIES' BOOKS

Jefferies' inscribed presentation copies are rare, and the following list represents the tally known or seen as of February 2023, updating Hugoe Matthews' article 'Richard Jefferies. His Mark' in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 19. It is not easy to assess the proportion of the whole these examples represent. Smith Elder gave Jefferies six free copies for each of seven publications, counting the illustrated *Gamekeeper* as one of them, and 18 of the 42 can be accounted for. Six was probably a standard quota, though publishers could be flexible if sales were sluggish, or stock unsold. C.J. Longman, a friend and supporter of Jefferies as well as a publisher, gave him fourteen copies of *The Story of My Heart*, before selling the remainder as waste. The Longman ledgers show bestowals of 9, 6 and 'further copies' of *Red Deer* on separate dates, prompting him to write testily to enquire if Jefferies' friends couldn't buy their own. We know of just two (possibly three with Mudford—see below) of *The Story*, and seven on the same basis of *Red Deer*.

The inscriptions follow a consistent pattern. From *World's End* onwards they are all dated and none have his signature. They are decidedly formal, his mother being 'E. Jefferies' and his cousin and childhood playmate 'Horton Harrild Junr. Esq.' rather than 'Horty' as referred to in letters to Aunt Ellen. The one exception is the copy of *Amaryllis* to 'Sally, with love'. Apart from this to his sister the expression of love is reserved for his mother, aunt, wife, and his friends John and Alice Brook. For all others it's 'With the Author's complts.', or more minimally 'from the Author' ('author' always capitalised).

There are no messages beyond these wordings, apart from a first impression of *The Gamekeeper at Home* given to Frederick Greenwood in which Jefferies pays tribute to Greenwood's encouragement and advice.

From the outset Jefferies sent copies to people who might advance his fortunes as a writer. With the first two titles he appears to be thinking of his profile in Swindon, though curiously the Goddards themselves, (A.L., H.N. and the Rev. Francis) were not on the list. Perhaps that was thought unnecessary. No inscribed copies of the first two novels have turned up. His father reports a neighbour's opinion that *The Scarlet Shawl* was immoral. Jefferies was now angling for a London audience, or at least a less provincial one, and given the book's dedication to his aunt he couldn't have thought she would have found it offensive. He must have been very upset by the deflating typo in the dedication, followed by the misspelling of his name on the spine when a cancel was inserted, and this may account for the absence of an inscribed copy to her. But as she doesn't appear in the list until *Wild Life in a Southern County* comes to her 'with the Author's love' it is safer to assume that some copies to her are lost or out of sight.

By contrast to its predecessors *World's End* has no less than six inscribed recipients. They include his mother, and according to Matthews he sent all his subsequent books to her with the exception of *The Deny Morn*. Again the 'morality' problem (which so bedevilled Hardy) might be the reason why *The Deny Morn* was withheld. Other family members were given copies of *World's End*, Harrilds, and Billings and a close associate of the Harrild empire, Samuel Bremner, but after *World's End* the wider family doesn't reappear. The future trend is set by the inclusion of two London editors: Arthur Locker, editor of the *Graphic*, and the most important of them, Frederick Greenwood, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* published by Smith Elder.

Greenwood's role in Jefferies' development and success has been widely recognised, and is reflected in the dedication to him of *Wild Life* and the inscriptions in the other Smith Elder titles except *Round About a Great Estate*. After three with 'best wishes' this is perhaps just another mislaid rather than omitted, but no later Greenwood copies are known. In 1880 he left the *Pall Mall* to found and edit *St. James's Gazette*, but in itself this is unlikely to have affected their relationship. Jefferies was an equally prolific contributor to *St. James's*, quite possibly by invitation, while continuing to place work in the *PMG*. His persistence in plying an indifferent editor with complimentary copies is illustrated by the case of W.H. Mudford, editor of the *Standard*, a newspaper he contributed to throughout his career. The bookseller Walter T. Spencer recalled buying a cache of nine Jefferies first editions uncut and unread, all with the same inscription to a W.H. followed by a name scribbled over.¹ The *Gamekeeper* and *Hodge* listed below are two of these, and close examination reveals the name Mudford. In reminiscences² Greenwood spoke of feeling some 'shame and sorrow' on reading Besant's life of Jefferies. Like Besant he thought the country books and nature writings Jefferies' true sphere, the novels a failure and the 'religio-philosophical speculation' in no way comparable with *The Gamekeeper at Home*. Perhaps he had communicated these views to Jefferies with regard to his later books, and declined gift of further inscribed copies to him, while pleased to continue publishing his descriptive country pieces.

Like others who knew him Greenwood speaks of Jefferies as a reserved and solitary character, but his correspondence shows openness to interested enquiry and readiness to engage and form friendships with kindred spirits. The surviving

¹ 'W.H. -----?' in Richard Jefferies Society Autumn Newsletter and Annual Report 2007-2008.

² 'Richard Jefferies' by Frederick Greenwood, *Scots Observer* 2 Aug 1890, v.4 pp.275-277.

documentation is probably an incomplete picture of his social and intellectual life and the inscriptions an even paler reflection. Nevertheless there are some interesting names: William Hepworth Dixon, John and Alice Brook³, J.W. North⁴, F.W. Joynes, Fred G. Heal⁵, William Sharp⁶, Richard Garnett, T. Hanson Lewis and W.T. Stead.

Against this his background and family seem to have receded. As we have seen he sent all but one of his books to his mother, and perhaps to the aunt who meant so much to him from tutelage to maturity. But Ellen has only four to her name, and there is a curious pattern to the inscriptions themselves, progressing from 'with the Author's love' (*Wild Life*, 1879) to 'from the Author' (*Bevis*, 1883) to just 'Ellen Harrild' and the date (*After London*, 1885), and finally back to 'with the Author's love' (*The Open Air*, 1885). Does this indicate some estrangement, and reconciliation as the end approaches? The family ethos was devout and prosperous and the Church central. It's hard to imagine a sympathetic reading of *The Story of My Heart* in Shanklin Villa, or much common ground between the impoverished, visionary artist and the successful men of business that his cousins and brother in law became.

According to Robin Harrild who has researched his family's history, Ellen and Thomas Harrild treated Richard, who came to live with them aged four 'as if he were their own son'. Thomas died in 1867, but Jefferies continued to write to Ellen and visit 'throughout his life.'⁷ And yet the last letter preserved is dated 1873 and no later visits are known of or recorded. Also it appears that Jefferies never returned to Coate or visited

³ 'John, Alice and 'Squire' Brook', *RJS Journal* 32, Summer 2013, pp.117-124.

⁴ 'Richard Jefferies and John William North' by Steve P. Milton, *RJS Journal* 32 pp.132-149.

⁵ *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study*, Scolar, 1993. pp.375-381.

⁶ 'Jefferies, Whitman and William Sharp', *RJS Journal* 33, pp.58-68.

⁷ 'Fame and Fortune: Robert Harrild (1780-1853)' by Robin Harrild, p.17.

his parents in Bath, and it is strange that he did not include his father in the dedications. James Luckett Jefferies was certainly a complex character, irascible, masterful, yet thoughtful and sensitive. And his relationship with his son was also complex, especially during Richard's last days at Coate when he was desperately struggling to succeed as a writer while his father was desperately failing as a farmer. One of only two known letters to his mother was written in February 1886 from 'The Downs', Crowborough⁸. He has wanted to write for sometime but too weak and in pain. The cold is intense—see ('Winds of Heaven'⁹). He is concerned for his mother's health and asks after his father, still 'the governor', whom he has not heard of for a long time, and then goes on to talk lovingly about his children and their activities. He ends: 'With much love to yourself and the governor always your affectionate son, Richard.' The letter is a moving witness to a suspension, not cessation, of close family ties, in deep winter when Jefferies is brooding on his final masterpiece which will recreate Coate in its summer glory and celebrate its people in all their complexity, with his father, Iden, presiding like a disgruntled Prospero.

It is unfortunate that the enquiries of a well-wisher resulted in sentiments of bitterness and scorn in letters written by James Luckett in old age. Coate was the worst place in England and his son's writings hardly less contemptible. The biographers Looker and Porteous use this material to diminish James's character and his influence on his son¹⁰, but his latest and most thorough biographer does not fall into this error. The reminiscences of a lady who knew the couple at this time¹¹ shows an inner strength and a close bond between

⁸ 'Jefferies' letter to his mother'. *RJSJ* 26, p.29.

⁹ *Field and Hedgerow*.

¹⁰ *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields*, by Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, John Baker, 1964, pp.3-5.

¹¹ *Country Life*, 21 March, 1908.

them, and inscribed copies also tell a different tale. It seems that while Richard was sending copies to his mother James was buying them (and books were not cheap) to send to his daughter, Richard's sister. The dedications in *Round About a Great Estate*, *Greene Ferne Farm*, *Wood Magic* and *Red Deer* (and perhaps there were others) from the 'father of the author' show nothing but pride in his son's achievement. James also bought copies for himself, which included *Round About a Great Estate*, the book to which his own stories and country lore had contributed, and White's *Selborne*, edited by Richard Jefferies—his final appearance in book form.

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### **Reporting, Editing and Authorship [1873]**

- 'For my Dear Aunt Ellen | With her affectionate Nephew's love' (MM)
- 'Geo. North Esq. | With the Author's | Complts.' To a Swindon police superintendent. (MM)
- 'George Stroud Esq. | With the Author's | Complts.' To a former school friend. (Maggs)

### **A Memoir of the Goddards of North Wilts. [1873]**

- 'Aunt Ellen | With the Author's Sincere | Love | August 13<sup>th</sup> 73.' (MM)
- 'James S. Lang from F. Goddard Aug 26<sup>th</sup> 1873' From the Rev. Francis Goddard. (MM see intro)
- 'Mr. Stone | with the Author's Complts.' To a landowner mentioned on p.26. (MM)
- 'C. Jefferies' Copy belonging to the author's brother Charles. (MM)
- 'From the Author' (RJ's hand?) with a letter dated 20 February 1875 to James F. Fuller, author of *Omniana: the Autobiography of an Irish Octogenarian*, 1916, with part of letter in facsimile. (Davis 29—MM)
- 'C.A. Wheeler Esq. | With the Author's Compts.' To a

- noted Swindonian. (MM)
- ‘*A.L. Goddard* | 1873’ Copy of Ambrose Lethbridge Goddard MP of The Lawn, Swindon. (MM)
  - ‘*T Sotheron Estcourt*’ Copy of Thomas Sotheron Estcourt, MP for Cricklade, Home Secretary in 1859, with a letter to him from Horatio Nelson Goddard concerning Jefferies. (Maggs)

### **Jack Brass, Emperor of England**

- No inscribed copies known.

### **The Scarlet Shawl: A Novel**

- Printed dedication to this aunt: ...‘In the belief that success in after life chiefly depends on early impressions, I wish to dedicate this book to Ellen Harrild, as an acknowledgement of my early trainin[g], and of my esteem for her gracious disposition. R. Jefferies.’
- ‘Car Jac Longman | 1891’ Bookplate of C.J. Longman, Jefferies’ publisher and friend, in a 1891 remainder copy of the second edition. See ‘The Story of The Scarlet Shawl’, *RJS Journal*, Winter 2015. (GM)

### **Restless Human Hearts: A Novel**

- ‘*Jefferies. Coate*’ on fly leaf of each vol. (‘copy came from a family source’. (Sadleir 1312)
- Ellen Harrild, 1875. Noted in Hodgson Sale Catalogue, 12 July 1928 as ‘uncut’.

### **Suez-Cide!!**

- Jefferies sent a copy to William Hepworth Dixon, editor of the *Athenaeum*, with a letter dated 4 February 1876, in which he says that Dixon had read the MS. (GM—ALS)

## World's End

- 'E. Jefferies. *With the Author's love. July 5<sup>th</sup> 1877*' to his mother. (Sadleir 1318—MM)
- 'S. Bremner Esq. | *With the Author's Complts, | July 13<sup>th</sup> 1877.*' (Davis 80—MM)
- 'Arthur Locker Esq. | *With the Author's Complts, | July 5<sup>th</sup> 1877.*' to the editor of the *Graphic*. (CSmH—MM)
- 'Mr. and Mrs. R.T. Billing | *With the Author's Complts, | July 6<sup>th</sup> 1877*' to his sister and brother-in-law. (D. Winter 145)
- 'F. Harrild Esq. | *With the Author's Complts, | July 9 1877*' to Frederick Harrild, a cousin. (GM)
- 'F. Greenwood Esq. *With the Author's Complts, July 6<sup>th</sup> 1877*' to editor of PMG (Maggs)
- 'Ellen Harrild | *With the Author's Love | July 10th 1877.*' (Sotheby's Catalogue 13411, Lot 101, 10/12/2013. Described as recased with new endpapers and Frank Brewer Berris bookplate)

## The Gamekeeper at Home

- 'E. Jefferies, *With best love from her son the Author, June 25<sup>th</sup> 1878.*' (Davis 22—MM)
- 'Ellen Harrild. *With the Author's Love, June 25th 1878.*' (Hodgson Catalogue 12 July 1928 (uncut))
- Bookplate of William Algernon Locker, son of Arthur Locker editor of the *Graphic*, with two ALS from Jefferies to Arthur Locker. (Davis 21—MM)
- 'F. Greenwood Esq. | *With the Author's sincere acknowledgements of friendly encouragement | & literary advice | June 26<sup>th</sup> 1878.*' (Maggs)
- 'W.H. [*Mudford* scribbled out] Esq. | *From the Author | Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> 1879.*' (p.c.)

### **The Gamekeeper at Home, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, illustrated, 1880**

- 'F. Greenwood Esq. | *With the Author's best wishes* | Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> 1879.' (MM)
- 'Horton Harrild Junr. Esq. | *From the Author* | Dec 11<sup>th</sup> 1879.' (MM—D. Winter 148)
- 'R S Chambers' rubber stamped. A copy containing an ALS from Jefferies to R. Chambers, editor of *Chambers's Journal*, 25 January 1884. (GM)

### **Wild Life in a Southern County**

- 'E. Jefferies | *With the Author's Best love* | Feb 11 1879.' (D. Winter 149)
- 'Ellen Harrild, *with the Author's love*, Feb 11 1879.' (Wolff 3626)
- The book is dedicated to Frederick Greenwood, so he's certain to have been sent a copy.

### **The Amateur Poacher**

- 'Frederick Greenwood Esq. | *With the Author's best wishes* | October 13<sup>th</sup> 1879.' (GM)
- 'E. Jefferies | *With the Author's best love* | October 13<sup>th</sup> 1879' (D. Winter 150)

### **Greene Ferne Farm**

- 'Fanny Baden. *From, the Author*, Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1880' To his sister-in-law. Possibly the only known contact with his wife's family. (Davis 32)
- 'E. Jefferies | *With the Author's best love* | Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1880.' (D. Winter 151)
- 'Frederick Greenwood Esq. | *With the Author's best wishes* | Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1880.' (Maggs)
- 'To My Daughter Sarah | *From her Father* | Jas. Luckett Jefferies | Bath | Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1880.' (HM)
- 'Geo H. Harmer' Copy of George Henry Harmer, editor

of the *Wilts and Gloucester Standard* while Jefferies was associated with it. (SPL)

### **Hodge and His Masters**

- *F. Greenwood Esq. | With the Author's best wishes, | March 26<sup>th</sup> 1880.*' (MM)
- *'W.H. [Mudford' scribbled out] Esq. | With the Author's best wishes | March 25<sup>th</sup> 1880.*' (GM)
- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's best love | March 26 1880.'* (D. Winter 152)
- *'To Sarah Billing | With her Father's Love | James Luckett Jefferies | Bath | April 5<sup>th</sup> 1880.'* (D. Winter 153)

### **Round About a Great Estate**

- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's best love | Aug 6<sup>th</sup> 1880.'* (D. Winter 154)
- *'Mrs. Billing | With Father's Love | J.L. Jefferies | Oct 6/80.'* (D. Winter 173)
- *'Jas L Jefferies | 48 King Str | Bath',* Jefferies' father's copy. (D. Winter 171)
- *'R.M. Campbell | Kati Kati N.Z. | Jan 1881'* With an ALS from Jefferies to Smith Elder regarding a correspondent in New Zealand. (GM)

### **Wood Magic: a Fable**

- *'John & Alice Brook | From the Author | May 24<sup>th</sup> 81.'* See fn.3 above.
- *'F.W. Joynes Esq. | From the Author | May 24<sup>th</sup>.'* Frederick William Joynes, sub-editor of the *PMG*. (GM)
- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's love | May 23<sup>rd</sup> 81.'* (D. Winter 155)
- *'Mrs. Rbt. Billing | With her Father's best | Love | Jas. L. Jefferies | June 8<sup>th</sup> 1881.'* (D. Winter 156)

- *'Horton Harrild Junr. Esq. | From the Author | May 23<sup>rd</sup> 81.'* (p.c.)

### **Wood Magic 1882**

- *'To | Richard Theodosius | With love and good wishes from | the Author's niece, C.E. Billing. | April 1945.'* (GM)

### **Bevis: The Story of a Boy**

- *'Ellen Harrild from the author, July 1882'* *'E.H. from R.J.'* (uncut) pencilled on the title of volume III. (Sadleir 1305)
- To his mother dated July. (*Forward Life*)
- *'Geo. H. Harmer'* in all three volumes. (SPL)
- *'Walter V Jones, Esq., From the Author, July 1882'* (auction catalogue Sotheby, 18 July 1921)

### **Nature Near London**

- *'Jessie Jefferies | April 6<sup>th</sup> 1883.'* (MM—D. Winter 174)
- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's best love | April 6<sup>th</sup> 1883.'* (D. Winter 159)

### **Nature Near London, 3<sup>rd</sup> impression, 1887**

- *'S.E. Billing | In Memory of the | dear Author from | his only Sister. | Oct 1887.'* (D. Winter 173)
- Ellen Harrild, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1883 (uncut)

### **The Story of My Heart**

- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's best love | November 6<sup>th</sup> 1883.'* (Davis 65—MM)
- *'Geo. H. Harmer.'* (SPL)
- *'C. Jefferies'*, his brother Charles's copy. (D. Winter 160)
- *'J.W. North | From the Author | Oct 13<sup>th</sup> 1883'* to his friend, the artist and illustrator. (GM)
- *'Mrs. Richard Jefferies'* in pencil on the title. (Bradfer-

Lawrence 232)

### Red Deer

- *J.W. North | From the Author | Jan 5<sup>th</sup> 1884* With North's corrections. (GM)
- *'W.H. [Mudford' scribbled out] Esq. | from the Author | Jan 5<sup>th</sup> 1884.'* (pc)
- *'J. Comyns Carr Esq. | From the Author | Jan 7<sup>th</sup> 1884'* to the editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*. (MM—D. Winter 163)
- *'Fred G. Heal, Esq. From the Author, Jan 10<sup>th</sup> 1884'* to son of Arthur Heal, Huntsman of Devon and Somerset Staghounds. (MM)
- Jefferies is known to have sent copies to Richard Garnett and T. Hanson Lewis (see MM introduction to *Red Deer*, pp. 375-381) Hanson Lewis copy is listed in the 1969 catalogue of the Berg Collection, New York Public Library
- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's best love | January 14<sup>th</sup> 1884.'* (D. Winter 162—Robert Brown)

### Red Deer, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1892

- *James Luckett Jefferies | Father | of the Author | Aug 1895'* in a bold proud hand. (HM)

### The Life of the Fields

- *'Ellen Harrild/From the Author/ May 29<sup>th</sup> 1884'* (Jarndyce Catalogue, 2018). Aunt Ellen inscribes the book to her niece Jessie Metzner on 15 May 1909.
- *'Jessie Jefferies | June 8<sup>th</sup> 84 | With all the Author's love.'* (GM)
- *'E. Jefferies | With the Author's love | June 7<sup>th</sup> 1884.'* (MM)
- *'William Sharp Esq. | From the Author | June 12<sup>th</sup> 1884.'* See fn.6 above.

### The Dewy Morn

- 'C. Jefferies' on both title pages. (D. Winter 164)
- *J.W. North Esq. From the Author. Sept 8<sup>th</sup> 1884* (Anderson Galleries, New York, 13/10/1925)
- *Jessie, August 26<sup>th</sup> '84/With the author love*. (Henson Lewis in 1969 Catalogue of the Berg collection, The New York Public Library)

### After London

- 'E. Jefferies | *With the Author's best love* | *April 1<sup>st</sup> 1885*.' (Davis 1)
- *John and Alice Brook | From the Author | May 10<sup>th</sup> 1885*.' With a pencil sketch signed by Jefferies. See fn.3 above. (Sotheby—MM—D. Winter 165)
- 'Ellen Harrild | *April 1885*.' (D. Winter 166)

### The Open Air

- 'Ellen Harrild | *With the Author's love* | Nov [25<sup>th</sup> crossed out] 23<sup>rd</sup> 1885.' (MM—D. Winter 167—Robert Brown) Aunt Ellen inscribes the book to her niece Mrs Billing (i.e. Sarah Jefferies) on 28 May 1889.
- 'E. Jefferies | *With the Author's love* | 23<sup>rd</sup>.' (*Forward Life*, 23 Nov 1885)
- *John & Alice Brook With the Author's Love Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 1886*.' (MM—D. Winter 166)

### Amaryllis at the Fair

- *John and Alice Brook | From the Author | March 22<sup>nd</sup> '87*.' (MM)
- To his mother, March 17<sup>th</sup> 1887 ( *Forward Life*)
- 'Sally, with love, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, '87.' (D. Winter 168)
- 'W.T. Stead Esq. | *From the Author* | March 17<sup>th</sup> '87.' (GM)

## White's Selborne edited by Jefferies

➤ *James L. Jefferies* | 10 Sep 1887' (HM)

### References:

(RJS) Richard Jefferies Society

(MM) *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study*, Sclar, 1993.

(Maggs) *Agriculture and Country Life*, Cata 1395, Maggs Bros. 2006.

(GM): My collection.

(Sadleir) Michael Sadleir, *XIX Fiction*, Constable, 1951.

(Davis) G.M. & R.C. Davis, *Richard Jefferies 1848-1887*,  
Catalogue of part of Bradfer-Lawrence collection.

(CSmH) Henry E. Huntingdon Library, San Marino,  
California.

(D. Winter) *Children's & Illustrated Books, Modern First Editions*,  
Dominic Winter, Catalogue of sale 12 December 2013.

(Wolff) Robert Lee Wolff, *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, NY  
Garland Press, 1981-6.

(SPL) Swindon Public Library.

(Bradfer-Lawrence) Sale catalogue of part of H.L. Bradfer-  
Lawrence's Jefferies collection.

(HM) 'Richard Jefferies: His Mark', by Hugoe Matthews,  
*Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 19, 2009, pp.12-17.

(*Forward Life*) Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward  
Life of Richard Jefferies*. Petton Books, 1994.

(p.c.) Known or assumed to be in a private collection, with no  
known published listing.



## WALTER SCOTT, THE PUBLISHER

Walter Scott (1826–1910, unconnected to the novelist), the publisher of the Gilbert White edition of *Selborne* introduced by Jefferies, deserves a footnote. He was a stone mason in Newcastle on Tyne with little formal education, who became a builder and contractor and the Thomas Telford of the North in the classic model of the Victorian self-made man. In the 1880s he owned business interests in construction, civil engineering, steel manufacture and coal mining. His works included public buildings, railways, stations, and docks. One commission was to build a factory for the Tyne Publishing Company at Felling which had plans to modernise its operations. In so doing it overstretched its resources and Scott bought the factory and all its equipment: hence, in 1882, The Walter Scott Publishing Company was born. His friends were surprised at this cultural diversion but it is not difficult to read. The aspirational stone mason who became, in 1907, the 1st Baronet of Beauclerk, doubtless felt that a fine house with a fine library went with the territory, and he had the sense to realise that there were many others of the working and trading classes who shared his vision. Now he had the means to supply standard classics in attractive bindings for 1/- apiece where the London publishers were charging 6/-. There were other cheap reprints like Cassell's National Library, edited by Henry Morley, coming out in weekly volumes at 3d in paper and 6d in cloth; but the quality was commensurate with the price.

It's not clear how much time Scott himself devoted to the publishing business but his entrepreneurial flair is much in evidence. In Donald Gordon, a Scotsman, he found a dynamic manager, and he in turn found keen editors with lowly

backgrounds and literary passions. One was Joseph Skipsey who edited *The Canterbury Poets*, Scott's first major series, from 1884 to 1886 when William Sharp replaced him. Skipsey was a self-taught coal miner whose verses, published in Newcastle, had attracted the attention of William Morris and D G Rossetti. He found work in a library as well as editing, but meagre returns meant periods back in the mine. Skipsey met a young Welshman training to be a mining engineer but an unpublished writer who shared his wide range of literary enthusiasms. Skipsey asked him to edit the Canterbury edition of George Herbert, and a few months later the young man received an unexpected call at his flat from two prosperous looking men in top hats who invited him to become the editor of a new series of prose classic to be published by Scott. It became clear to him in the course of conversation that they had mistaken him for the well-known Celtic scholar Professor John Rhys, but Rhys (Ernest) took the job anyway.

This series was the *Camelot Classics*, changing later to the *Camelot Series* and later again to the *Scott Library*, which ran to 133 titles, Jefferies' edition of White's *Selborne* being no.17. Rhys commissioned an introduction from all his editors, choosing the most appropriate and distinguished names he could find. When the subject was a living author he often approached them in person. He went to America to meet Walt Whitman, and discussed Jefferies with the great man, receiving the latter's guarded approval. The visit resulted in the *Camelot* editions of two works benefiting from Whitman's latest revisions and reflections.

The Scott Company's desire to maximise the appeal of their books led to some interesting developments in production and marketing. No records remain but it is clear that they printed each impression in very large quantities and then issued them in a variety of styles and formats. *Selborne*, for example, in 1887, came out in plain blue cloth with paper label, red cloth with classical motifs, a highly ornate 'brocade' design in cloth

or half leather, and a fourth with a rustic scene in gilt and coloured inks on the front cover. Some of this impression also went into the Scott Library binding. The later impressions were absorbed into numerous other series or 'libraries', each with its distinctive livery: Brotherhood, Cambridge, Emerald, Half-roan, Million, Oxford and Reward, the last named aimed at the school and Sunday school prize market. There was also an illustrated edition not in any series and issued in different colours and styles. A further ploy was to sell whole libraries to booksellers up and down the country, printed and bound in Felling but with the client's imprint on the title page and in a binding style with a series name of his choice. Turner<sup>1</sup> notes examples in Preston, Bradford, Leeds, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Belfast. Other local imprints noted that include the *Selborne* are in Liverpool, Gloucester, Blackburn, several in London and one in Toronto. Jefferies' final contribution to a published book was certainly one of his most widely disseminated texts, and doubtless brought his name to the notice of many who might not otherwise have encountered it.

Successful though it was, Scott's business model went well beyond the trade in reprints. There were series of original works on a wide range of subjects: for example the Contemporary Science series, (49 titles), Great Writers (biographies, 45), Makers of British Art (14), Music Story (15), Young Folks' Library (12), Everyday Help (37) and other improving works with lists in single figures like Manuals of Employment for Educated Women and Rational Studies in Modern Languages. The firm also pioneered the reception of the works of Tolstoy and Ibsen with new translations into English. Though they had offices in London and later New York they remained firmly based on the banks of the Tyne,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Walter Scott Publishing Company: a Bibliography*, by John R Turner, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

and for that reason perhaps attracted young and talented writers from outside the ambit of the metropolitan establishment. They published early works by G.B. Shaw and George Moore; W.B. Yeats, William Archer, Havelock Ellis and William Sharp were among their editors.

The firm seemed quickly to lose its impetus after the death of its founder in 1910. A considerable quantity of sheets were left that continued to be sold cheaply to publishers, bookseller and bookbinders to be transformed into their own products, only the 1905 Felling on Tyne imprint on the last text page showing their true origin. J.M. Dent was one who used their sheets before printing his own, and of course recruiting their star editor as well. The final closure came in 1931 when Simpkin Marshall Company bought the remaining stock and re-issued Camelot/Scott titles under their own imprint as the Evergreen Library, in the plain cloth binding and colourful dust jacket of the period. It was in this guise that Jefferies' edition of White's *Selborne* made its final bow.



## XXI

### SOME UNPUBLISHED MSS

Samuel J. Looker (1888–1965), editor and interpreter of Jefferies and discoverer of obscure and unpublished works, remains a pre-eminent figure in Jefferies’ studies, both as a populariser and as a provider of an immense archive of material invaluable to scholarship, now conserved in the British Library. His editorial re-shapings and omissions were sometimes questionable, but undoubtedly the great benefits of his lifetime devotion outweigh the quibbles and cavils of academic correctness. In the introduction to his edition of *The Story of My Heart* with the published text printed alongside an earlier draft<sup>1</sup> he wrote: “I first became interested in Richard Jefferies in boyhood, and for over forty years have collected his books and manuscripts.”

Quite some years ago I came across a 1930 catalogue of Hodgson and Co<sup>2</sup>, the book auctioneers, which listed a number of unpublished MSS by Jefferies. In the middle of Looker’s period of active collecting, and coming from a famous house, he could hardly have missed them, and glancing through they all seemed things he’d acquired or reprinted in one form or another. Now, finding the catalogue and looking at it again, I come to the completely opposite conclusion. These are all original writings the contents of which, in whole or in part, and one in a specialist journal, have never seen the light.

The Jefferies MSS may well have escaped Looker’s notice as the catalogue was put out solely as the sale of the “valuable

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart*, Edited with the first draft of the Author’s Manuscript and an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Constable 1947), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Hodgson & Co, *A Catalogue of the Valuable and Extensive Library of the late Charles Whibley, Esq. to be sold at auction*. Nos. 25–7, 1929–30.

and extensive library of the late Charles Whibley Esq” which went on from June 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> and July 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. However at the end under “Other Properties” came “Rare and First Editions, Mostly Early and Mid-Victorian Writers”, and indeed some later, “From the Library of a Collector”, who unfortunately is not named. Jefferies figures in it, with an inscribed copy of *Reporting, Editing and Authorship* (recipient unnamed) and two lots of books, *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, other titles unnamed, and the Besant and Thomas biographies. This in itself indicates a strong interest in Jefferies, but more importantly there are seven “Original MSS. of Richard Jefferies”, the only MSS in the collection.

To take them one by one:-

Lot 635. “Original Manuscript of a description of Bird-life in the preserves of the “Squire of Southlands”—presumably intended as a chapter for “The Amateur Poacher”, but not used, 14 pages, 8vo.”

There are 14 pages relating to “the Squire” in the Looker collection<sup>3</sup> but they belong to Squire Thardover, talking about his life and philosophy, used by Looker in ‘The Squire and the Land’ section of *The Old House at Coate*<sup>4</sup>, not the unapproachable Squire of Southlands from *The Amateur Poacher*<sup>5</sup>, whose fearsome guardianship of his preserves, though known to be rich in bird life, made any such account of them impossible. Clearly a connected piece, and not the fragmentary poacher material of D6. A discarded chapter, which would have changed the direction of the narrative, seems a

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<sup>3</sup> Miller and Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study* (Scolar, 1993), D13.8, and other ‘D’ references.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate and other hitherto unpublished essays...* Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Lutterworth, 1948), pp.159–186.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Amateur Poacher* (Smith Elder, 1879), p.40.

reasonable assumption, and doubtless one made by a perceptive vendor rather than the auctioneer's cataloguer.

Lot 636. "Original MS. of an Essay—mainly introspective and severely self critical—apparently unpublished, but used largely in "The Story of my Heart," on 31 pages, 8vo."

At first sight a possible section of Looker's "first draft" of *The Story*, printed with his reprint of the published text in the Constable edition of 1947. The MS in the BL collection (D2) is of the 12 chapter final version; the draft is not there and its present whereabouts appears to be unknown. From Looker's description the draft consists of 95 pages in 8 sections, the longest 26 pages. It is "difficult to decipher", and "partly written in the form of notes". The term "essay" in the description here suggests a joined up and rounded piece. Admittedly the draft contains self-criticism ("I am not satisfied. I am not enough: I feel so little, weak and contemptible; my soul seems to see so little—no further than my physical vision, and that which is within reach is not of any value to me.") But as in the printed text this mood is a prelude to the reawakening and rapturous outgoings of the spirit. Nowhere is there an extended passage of severe self-criticism and introspection. A quite separate exercise, or perhaps again an interesting example of a decisive revision.

Lot 637. "Original MS. of "The Flying Dutchman: a Legend of the Great Western Railway," an early literary effort—in the form of a short story—which was never published, 31 pages, 8vo (*some torn*)"

The only other sighting of this is from a Chicago bookseller's catalogue of 1970 (D47.2).

Lot 638. "Original MS. of an unpublished Essay, entitled "January Notes," 11 pages, 8vo."

'January Notes' is a complicated case. A piece under this title appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1880, unsigned but attributed to Jefferies by John Pearson on the basis of textual connections with other articles. In the journal *Archives of Natural History*, October 1981, S Peter Dance published an original MS by Jefferies, which he had acquired from a book dealer in the USA, also entitled (by Jefferies) January Notes. The text is entirely different from the PMG article, for which of course there is no definite proof of Jefferies' authorship. In his introduction Dance notes that Looker had previously published all but one paragraph and two sentences from his MS in two previous contexts: the first as three "notes for essays" which he titled 'Tits and the Trees', 'The Rooks', and 'Shrinking of the Scene in Winter', in *Chronicles of the Hedges*<sup>6</sup>, and the second as "a composite scene from manuscript" under the title 'A Winter Scene'. in *Field and Farm*<sup>7</sup>. This consists of the three "notes" in the same order and the text in both cases is almost identical to the Dance MS. The absent material approves the killing of domestic cats and remarks on the extreme coldness of the weather. Dance comments: "it does seem remarkable that Looker had only disconnected manuscripts to work from. It is tempting to suggest that Looker once had in his possession the 'January Notes' manuscript", and the missing passages were removed because they "did not show his hero in the most favourable light, and the two sentences seemed unnecessarily topical". He adds that there is no proof that Looker ever owned or inspected the manuscript. Indeed it is not to be found in the BL archive, and he often stressed his assiduous collecting and personal ownership of all the materials for his books of

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Jefferies. *Chronicles of the Hedges and other essays*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Phoenix House, 1948).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Field and Farm: Essays Now First Collected, with Some from MSS*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Samuel J. Looker (Phoenix House, 1957).

previously unpublished work. With or without the offending passages these pieces were doubtless among the many untitled MSS he accumulated and which, inadvertently perhaps, he used twice with different interpretations of their intended use by Jefferies.

Lot 639. "Original MS. of an Essay on Country Life and the Outdoor World, 5 ½ pages, 8vo.

This could be one of any number of untitled jottings in the Looker files, but if he had been at the sale he would not have been likely to settle for this item alone. It doesn't seem to be a piece of any particular interest or substance.

Lot 640. "A Long Autograph Letter written to a friend, wholly concerned with a personal "difficulty" in which the writer found himself, and asking most earnestly for help, 7 pp. 8vo, *written from Shanklin Villa, Sydenham, Sep. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1870, signed in full with envelope*"

This is the original of a letter to John Woolford of Snodshill quoted by Edward Thomas in his biography of Jefferies<sup>8</sup>. It is also quoted in the Looker/ Porteous biography<sup>9</sup>. Thomas indicates two omissions, Looker/Porteous the same omissions and others; neither give the date, of which this entry is apparently the only record. Clearly it was never in Looker's possession: Thomas was shown it, probably by a Mr H Woolford mentioned in his acknowledgments, and transcribed what he required of it, and the *Man of the Fields* version is a shortened one taken from Thomas.

Lot 641. "Original Rough Draft of the only "formal poem"—"The Chaffinch"—he is known to have written, 7 stanzas of 6 lines each, with alterations, 3pp. 8vo, also a small pen-

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work* (Hutchinson, 1909), pp.70–71.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields* (John Baker, 1965), pp.70–71.

and-ink sketch done at Crowborough in 1886, and a letter to his mother written, in copy-book hand, when a child, in 1858”

Retitled ‘My Chaffinch’ this was printed in the PMG, 18 March 1887, and in *Field and Hedgerow*<sup>10</sup>. (There was one other formal poem, ‘The Mulberry Tree’, published in the Scots Observer 8 November 1890, and again by Looker in his *Nature Diaries and Notebooks*, Grey Walls 1941 under Jefferies’ title, ‘The Tree of Life’.) In the published version ‘My Chaffinch’ has 8 stanzas. The finished copy on 2 leaves is in the Looker archive (D15.17). Another fair copy on four pages is held by the University of Texas, Austin, together with letters and a receipt from Robert Billing to Thomas Bird Mosher concerning the sale of the manuscript to Mosher in 1901 on Mrs Jefferies’ behalf. The rough draft in 7 stanzas with alterations is obviously the precursor to these. It is not clear whether the Crowborough sketch is attached or connected to it in any way. Finally the childhood letter to his mother is unknown. There are early letters from Coate to his aunt Ellen in Sydenham but this is the only record of one sent to his mother while staying, presumably, with aunt and uncle at Shanklin Villa.

Despite Looker’s Herculean efforts there are without doubt still many pages of Jefferies writings and correspondence hidden from sight in private collections. The value attached to these collectors’ trophies will at least guarantee their preservation, and some will eventually find their way into libraries and institutions with public access. Meanwhile the often frustratingly brief descriptions in booksellers’ and auctioneers’ catalogues can sometimes tell us where there are gaps, even if they don’t fill them.

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Field and Hedgerow, being the Last Essays of Richard Jefferies Collected by his Widow* (Longmans, 1889), pp.320–321.

## XII

# JEFFERIES' POETS

(Extended Autumn, 2023)

This list points out the major significant number of poetical tributes to Jefferies, and from readers in most cases not regular or reputed poets, and from Auden before he became one.

ANON (Victor B Neuburg)

'Richard Jefferies'. In *Soft Wings: Songs in Sussex*, Steyning, Vine Press, 1921.

ANON

'To Richard Jefferies'. In *Fun* 24 Aug 1887; published by W. Lay, and in *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, 27 August 1887. (discovered by Peter Robins)

ATKINSON, Keith

'To Richard Jefferies'. In *Richard Jefferies Society Spring Newsletter*, November 1989.

AUDEN, W.H.

'Richard Jefferies'. In *Juvenilia: Poems 1922-1928*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

BELL, George H.

'Richard Jefferies'. In *The Manchester Quarterly*, vol. 25 p. 216, July 1906. (Noted by Peter Robins)

BELL, Julian

'To Richard Jefferies'. In *Winter Movement and Other Poems*, Chatto and Windus, 1930.

BLUNDELL, Colin

*Some Spirit Land: Found Poems from the Essays of Richard Jefferies*,  
Hub Editions, 1987.

*Something beyond the stars (from the Nature Diaries and Notebooks of  
Richard Jefferies)*, Hub Editions, 1993

BRIGDEN, C.A.T.

'Richard Jefferies 1848-1887', in *The Countryside Sketchbook*,  
John Hallewell Publications, Rochester, 1978

BRUCE, Philip Alexander

Untitled, begins: "*Melodious birds that haunt the English lea...*", in  
*Pocahontas and Other Sonnets*, Norfolk, Virginia, 1912.

BULKELEY, Rip.

'By Jefferies' Clump', In *Richard Jefferies Society Annual Report  
and Newsletter 1998-1999*.

BURTON, John Francis.

'To Richard Jefferies: a Sonnet'. In *Concerning Richard Jefferies by  
Various Writers*, The Worthing Cavalcade, Worthing Art  
Development Scheme, 1944.

DAVIDSON, John

'In the Hollow at Long Ditton', In *The Speaker*, 12 December  
1891, later in *Fleet Street Eclogues* (First series). Elkin Matthews  
and John Lane, 1893.

DOVETON, F.B.

'A Shortest Day Scene'. In *Sketches in Prose and Verse*. Suggested  
by Mr. Richard Jefferies' recent article in *St. James Gazette* (i.e  
'Just before Winter', 18 December 1886).

EWANCE, W.H.A.

‘Richard Jefferies’. In *Wilts County Mirror*, 8 April 1892.

FRITH, Roger

‘Wiltshire Summer Sunday (1866)’. In *A Spirit Illumined; a Hundred Years of Redemption through Nature: a Centenary Symposium*. Swindon, Richard Jefferies Society, 1986.

GEOGHEGAN, Mary

‘Richard Jefferies’. In *Temple Bar*, January 1892.

GIBSON, W.

‘Richard Jefferies’. In *Great Thoughts*, August, 1896.

HALL, Newton M.

“How can they manage without me?”—*Field and Hedgerow*, in *Dartmouth Literary Monthly*, (New Hampshire) May 1890

HEWER, M.S.

‘Richard Jefferies’. in *Concerning Richard Jefferies by Various Writers*, The Worthing Cavalcade, Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944.

HOOKE, Jeremy

‘Nobbut Dick Jefferies’. In *A Spirit Illumined* as above.

INCHFAWN, Fay

‘It was between the may and the June rose’ (Phrase from ‘The Pageant of Summer’). In *Country Life Anthology of Verse*, edited by P. Anderson Graham. London, Country Life, 1915. (Peter Robins contribution)

JOLLIFFE, Harold

‘Richard Jefferies’, in *The Richard Jefferies Society’s Twenty-First Anniversary, 1950-1971*.

JOLLY, Reginald G.

‘To Richard Jefferies: an appreciation’. in *Concerning Richard Jefferies by Various Writers*, The Worthing Cavalcade, Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944.

KEITH, W.J.

*Worshipper of Earth: A Centenary Tribute in Verse to Richard Jefferies*. Hub Editions, 1987. A sequence of sixteen poems in which the author projects his imagination into Jefferies’ thoughts and feelings at various points in his life and writings. ‘Jefferies Country’, in *The Countryman*, Autumn 1987

LOOKER, Samuel J.

‘To Richard Jefferies: In Homage’. In *Green Branches: Selected Poems*, Billericay, Grey Walls Press, 1941. Reprinted in *Jefferies’ Countryside*, Constable, 1944.

LOOKER, Samuel J.

‘The later Richard Jefferies Speaks’. Privately printed greetings card. Billericay, Essex, n.d.

LULHAM, Edward Percy Habberton

‘Daft Dick’, in *The Other Side of Silence*, Erskine MacDonald, 1913.

MACLEOD-GILFORD, Wendy

‘The mystic—Richard Jefferies’. In *Mulberry Moods: Original Writing from participants in the Richard Jefferies’ Footsteps Project with Swindon Community Writer Tony Hillier*. Longcot, Oxon, Richard Jefferies Society, 2007.

McCOURT, ANNA

‘To RJ on Reading His Book’. In *Hymns and Poems by Mrs McCourt*. London, W.B. Horner & Sons.

‘To the Same: FROM DEATH INTO LIFE’. As above.

MASSECK, Clinton Joseph

‘To Richard Jefferies’. In *Some Few Verses*. Somerville, Massachusetts, privately printed, 1907.

MIDDLETON, Peter

‘Richard Jefferies’. In *Eltham, This Amazing Place*. The Eltham Society, 2001.

MILLER, George

‘Il Miglior Fabbro’. In *Rehearsal: An Eclogue*, Oswestry, Hedge Sparrow Press, 2019.

MUNTZ, H. Irving

‘Richard Jefferies’. In *Concerning Richard Jefferies by Various Writers*, The Worthing Cavalcade, Worthing Art Development Scheme, 1944.

SHEEHAN, Hilda

‘After Richard Jefferies’. In *Mulberry Moods: Original Writing from participants in the Richard Jefferies’ Footsteps Project with Swindon Community Writer Tony Hillier*. Longcot, Oxon, Richard Jefferies Society, 2007.

SMITH, Edwin F.

‘Richard Jefferies (on reading *The Story of My Heart*)’. In *For Her Friends and Mine: a Book of Aspirations, Dreams and Memories*. Washington D.C., privately printed, 1915. A work celebrating the memory of the author’s wife Charlotte. (Discovered by Peter Robins)

SORLEY, Charles Hamilton

‘Richard Jefferies (Liddington Castle)’. In *Marlborough and Other poems*, Cambridge University Press, 1916.

STAPLEFORD, Robin

'Five Years with Jefferies'. In *RJS Autumn Newsletter*, 2023.

TAPLIN, Kim

Some lines in *Goodfellow*, a long poem, self published, [2006?].

TENNANT, Pamela (Pamela Adelaide Genevieve Wyndham Glenconner Grey)

'Richard Jefferies'. In *Windlestraw: a Book of Verse*. Chiswick Press, 1905

VON STURMER, H.H.

Untitled, begins "Dim woodlands made him wiser far..." In *The Story of My Heart*. Thomas B. Mosher, 1898, and subsequent editions.

WATSON, Giles

'Richard Jefferies Country'. In *On the Chalk: Poems for the Ridgeway*, Lulu.com., Nov. 2021.

WILLIAMS Alfred

Reference in *Poems in Wiltshire*, Erskine MacDonald, 1911: "To woo Dick Jefferies from his dreams on Sorrow's pillow tossed, | And walk with him upon the ridge, and pacify his ghost."

WOODROOFE, Bob

'The Man on the Hill'. In *Nature and the Vale: Poems of the Countryside and the Seasons*. Evesham, Greenwood Press.

"ZAGUAN" (nom de plume of Joseph Hall (RJ's cousin)

'Richard Jefferies' published in the *North Wilts Herald*, 24 February 1928.. With an introduction stating it is an attempt to express Jefferies thoughts if he'd returned to Coate at the time of writing.

# XIII

## T.S. ELIOT AND JEFFERIES

*Andrew Rossabi and George Miller*

Edited and annotated by *Janice Lingley*

RJS Newsletter Spring 2020



T.S. Eliot in 1934.

Photograph by Lady Ottoline Morrell.

*Andrew Rossabi advises that Jefferies' oeuvre was well known to the essayist, playwright, critic, and Nobel Prize-winning poet, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965). Andrew writes as follows:*

Between 1916 and 1919 T.S. Eliot worked part-time as an Extension Lecturer, giving evening courses on English and French Literature to mostly working-class adults. In September 1917 he gave a course on Victorian Literature under the auspices of the London County Council. He was paid £1 a lecture.

The course consisted of 25 lectures delivered on Friday evenings at the County Secondary School, High Street, Sydenham, beginning on 28 September. The syllabus was divided into five sections: Introductory: The Social Framework; The Makers of Nineteenth-Century Ideas; The Development of English Poetry; The Development of English Fiction; and The Byways of Victorian Literature. Lectures 23–25 fell into the last category. Lecture 23 was titled ‘The Gypsy Pateran: George Borrow,<sup>1</sup> Richard Jefferies and Others’.

In 1913 Eliot had immersed himself in the lives of the saints and mystics, Eliot read Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism* (1911)<sup>2</sup> and Richard Jefferies’ *The Story of My Heart*. In March 1917, he started work at Lloyds Bank. In May, Eliot became assistant editor of *The Egoist*.<sup>3</sup> In June, his first volume of poetry *Prufrack and Other Observations* was published by The Egoist Press.

The academic who first properly researched Eliot’s years as an Extension Lecturer, and emphasised their importance, is Ronald Schuchard, Emeritus Professor of English and Irish Literature at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia: see his ‘T.S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916–1919,’ in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 98, 1974, pp.163–173; and Chapter I, ‘In the Lecture-Halls’, of Schuchard’s book *Eliot’s Dark Angel, Interactions of Life and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; paperback 2001), which supplies the details given above; also, Schuchard’s University of London Inter-national Programmes’ Inaugural 1858 Charter Lecture,

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<sup>1</sup> George Henry Borrow (1803–1881), English novelist and writer of travel books, famous for his knowledge of, and empathy with, the Romani people.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941) was an Anglo-Catholic writer and pacifist; also the author of numerous religious titles, especially books on Christian mysticism. *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) was Underhill’s best-known work.

<sup>3</sup> *The Egoist*, a London literary magazine, published 1914–1919, featuring within its pages much significant early Modernist poetry and fiction.

'Eliot in the Wartime Classroom, 1916–1919', given on Tuesday 16 May 2017 (text accessible online).

*Janice Lingley commented that Eliot's use of the word 'Pateran' (not OED listed), in his lecture title is rather obtuse. She suggested that, whilst it could perhaps allude to Walter Pater;<sup>4</sup> the word might in fact be 'patteran', referring to the trail of natural materials left by gypsies, or travellers, as they are now called, for those of their kind following after. She recalled that Rudyard Kipling uses the word in his poem 'The Gypsy Trail' (1892). Andrew Rossabi and George Miller debated the point in an exchange of emails, George Miller commenting as follows:*

I favour a simple misspelling. Borrow in fact uses the word in Ursula's story in Chapter XI of *The Romney Rye* (1857):

So, when I married, I told my husband about the patteran, and we were in the habit of making our private trails with leaves and branches of trees, which none of the other gypsy people did; so, when I saw my husband's patteran, I knew it at once and followed it upwards of two hundred miles towards the north [. . .]

I do not see any valid connection between Jefferies and a style-conscious aesthete like Walter Pater, and I do not think a critic of Eliot's prowess would either. I think Eliot would have found Jefferies congenial. When Eliot uses his own imagery drawn from nature, it is visually precise ('the river's tent is broken')<sup>5</sup>, and they shared the experience of timelessness.

I was recently studying the sale catalogue of the immense library of Charles Whibley, a literary journalist of note<sup>6</sup> and a close friend of Eliot's. Whibley had several books of Jefferies,

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Pater (1839–1894) was an English art and literary critic; also a fiction writer.

<sup>5</sup> Lines 173–4 of Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922) are as follows: 'The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank'.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Whibley (1859–1930), English literary journalist and author; his series of articles 'Musings without Methods' appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for more than 25 years.

including William Allingham's<sup>7</sup> copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home*. Another of his associates was W.E. Henley<sup>8</sup> who described Jefferies as 'a reporter of genius.' In his essay on Whibley,<sup>9</sup> Eliot is making the point, with his usual array of caveats, codicils and contradictions, that journalistic prose at its best is as good as formal literary prose:

It looks artless. It is because the 'Musings' were methodically 'without method' that they were so living. Whibley followed faithfully and easily the movement of his own mind; he did not, as I and most people do, have to think up half a dozen subjects to talk about and then shuffle them into the most suitable order; the transition from one subject to another suggested itself [...] the whole personality of Whibley is present in whatever he wrote, and it is the unity of a personality which gives an indissoluble unity to his variety of subject.

It seems to me that this could be a description of Jefferies and his appeal. After all he too was a journalist first and foremost, writing swiftly, freely and informally for the moment. The patteran is a perfect metaphor for this: a seemingly random scattering of natural objects and yet having an order and direction from the mind and spirit that conceives it.

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<sup>7</sup> William Allingham (1824–1889), Irish poet and editor; also the author of a posthumously published *Diary* recording his meetings with the famous writers and artists of his day. Allingham published nine essays by Jefferies when he was editor of *Frazer's Magazine* (1874–1879)—see George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), pp.9–11. William Allingham married the illustrator and artist Helen Allingham, née Paterson, who became famous for her watercolours of country cottages and gardens. In 1874 she illustrated the *Cornhill* serialisation of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Hardy later said she was the best illustrator he ever had.

<sup>8</sup> William Ernest Henley (1849–1903), English poet, critic and the influential editor of various literary magazines and journals.

<sup>9</sup> Eliot's essay titled 'Charles Whibley' was collected in his *Selected Essays, 1917–1932*, published in London by Faber & Faber in 1932.

*Andrew Rossabi's subsequent reading of Eliot's essay on Charles Whibley inspired the following observations:*

What Eliot says about the futility of the distinction between journalism and literature is true and relevant to Jefferies, particularly the remark about 'a habit formed by early necessity of earning small sums quickly' being one of the stimuli to taking up the pen. As you rightly say, the remarks about Whibley and good journalism are equally applicable to Jefferies, especially the phrase about his 'faithfully and easily following the movement of his own mind', which recalled John Fowles in his introduction to *Round About a Great Estate* likening the movement in his writings to that of a country ramble, in the way Jefferies moves seamlessly and apparently effortlessly from topic to topic.<sup>10</sup> Several other observations in the essay seemed relevant to Jefferies. What Eliot says about the conversational style and sincerity representing moral integrity recalled Thomas's summary of Jefferies' style at the end of his concluding chapter, 'Recapitulation', in the biography: 'There are styles more majestic, more persuasive, more bewildering, but none which so rapidly convinces the reader of its source in the heart of one of the sincerest of men.'<sup>11</sup>

Returning to Eliot's comments on Whibley: 'Style alone cannot preserve; only good style in conjunction with permanently interesting content can preserve'; 'He [Whibley] made very few *ratures*<sup>12</sup> or corrections.' I also noted

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Round About a Great Estate* (1880), introduction by John Fowles (Bradford on Avon: Ex Libris Press, 1987): 'His [Jefferies'] prose is like nature itself. It may seem highly inconsequential, like a country amble, largely made up of whims, of following one's nose, grasshoppering from one mood or subject to the next. It is only at the end that more sensitive readers will recognize they have just been gently—if sometimes quirkily—led through a miracle of casual-seeming simplicity into matters and feeling far beyond any one small landscape,' p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Thomas's biography, *Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work* (1909) (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> '*ratures*': French for 'deletions, crossings-out'.

‘the greater name of Clarendon’, the Royalist historian of the Civil War whose prose, I think, had no small influence on Jefferies’ own narrative style.<sup>13</sup> Again, Eliot mentions Whibley’s sympathy with what he nicely terms ‘ragamuffins’, which recalled Oby Bottleton and the other somewhat disreputable characters who cross the pages of *The Amateur Poacher*.

I was interested to learn from *Wikipedia* that Whibley mixed with the Symbolists during his years in Paris, for Jefferies had this in common with the French Symbolists,<sup>14</sup> that his writing often suggests much more than it expresses: the trout in ‘A Brook’ and ‘A London Trout’<sup>15</sup> becomes more than simply a fish (the Christian symbol most obviously comes to mind), just as the brook, which he compares to a glass of wine rising to the brim but without spilling, becomes more than a brook. Again, what Eliot says about the ‘life’ in Whibley’s writing seems especially applicable to Jefferies by comparison with a writer like W.H. Hudson in whom (for all his many admirable qualities) I find a certain lack of what Yeats termed ‘the springing foot’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Hyde, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Clarendon (1609–1674), author of *The History of the Rebellion* (1702); Jefferies quotes Clarendon extensively in Chapters 4 and 6 of his *History of Swindon and Its Environs* (1896).

<sup>14</sup> Defined as: ‘A group of French writers of the 19th century. The term is widely applied, but in its most useful and restricted sense refers to the period c. 1880–95. The movement may be seen as a reaction against dominant realist and naturalist tendencies in literature generally and, in the case of poetry, against the descriptive precision and ‘objectivity’ of the Parnassians. The symbolists stressed the priority of suggestion and evocation over direct description and explicit analogy [...] and the symbol was identified as an important means of distilling a private mood, or evoking subtle affinities between the material and spiritual worlds,’ as defined in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2009), edited by Dinah Birch.

<sup>15</sup> Collected in *Nature Near London* (1883).

<sup>16</sup> William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), his reaction to the work of the novelist George Eliot: ‘She seemed to have a distrust or a distaste for all in life that gives one a springing foot’; see W.B. Yeats, *Reveries in Childhood and Youth* (London: Macmillan, 1916), p.52.

Eliot was himself extremely sensitive to nature and had an acute sense of place. All four of the *Quartets* are named after specific places with which he had close connection.<sup>17</sup> The passage in *The Dry Salvages* on the sea, the sea shore and the rock pool, and that in *Little Gidding* on 'midwinter spring' display a remarkable ability to translate into words the spiritual dimension of nature. 'If you came this way [...], etc':<sup>18</sup> Eliot (like Hopkins)<sup>19</sup> was wedded to the Christian tradition, which Jefferies was not, and he was capable of phrases like 'pentecostal fire' for the effect of brilliant winter sunlight; Jefferies never relates his mystical feelings to Christianity.

'And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog', from Eliot's poem *Marina*.<sup>20</sup> both men had a love of sailing. The first volume of Eliot's letters (edited by his second wife Valerie, and covering the years 1898–1922)<sup>21</sup> has a picture of Eliot in a sailing boat, captioned, 'Sailing off the Dry Salvages' on the back of the jacket. And I wonder if the passage on time at the opening of *Burnt Norton* was influenced by the 'Now is Eternity' passage in *The Story of My Heart*. But finally it is the differences between the two writers that stand out.

Kipling was another writer with roots in journalism, and one whom Eliot admired: some passages in *The Waste Land*

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<sup>17</sup> Four *Quartets* comprise *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942); the poems were collected in 1943.

<sup>18</sup> This line begins the second and third stanzas of *Little Gidding*.

<sup>19</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), English poet and Jesuit priest.

<sup>20</sup> *Marina* (1930), named after the daughter of the eponymous Pericles in Shakespeare's play, was one of six poems by Eliot appearing in the 'Ariel Series' of pamphlets published by Faber, from 1927 to 1931.

<sup>21</sup> Valerie Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, Vol. 1 1898–1922 (London: Faber, 1988).

seem to show his influence, the vox pop<sup>22</sup> vernacular bits such as the 'HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME' refrain.<sup>23</sup>

By the way, though I may not be able to add to your list of poems *about* Jefferies, I would propose Jefferies' 'List of Notes used in *Round About a Great Estate*' as an example of 'found poetry'<sup>24</sup>; and as poetry inspired *by* Jefferies, in the form of a prose poem, the long paragraph beginning, 'Jefferies often thought of the sea upon these hills', in Chapter I, 'The Country of Richard Jefferies', of Thomas's biography. The whole of this first chapter is an extended prose poem packed full of striking poetic imagery: 'its stiffened and weedy waters are stirred only by the moorhen, who walks more than she swims across them';<sup>25</sup> 'sculptured leagues of grassy chalk'; 'breasted hills curving as if under the influence of a great melody'—to give only three examples. The extent to which Jefferies, and the writing of the *Life and Works*, helped turn Thomas into a poet has not been fully appreciated.

*George Miller's response was as follows:*

My own enthusiasm for Eliot is as strong and almost as old as my enthusiasm for Jefferies, and I have always felt there was an affinity without any clear evidence of Eliot having read Jefferies. I think between the three of us we have established a

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<sup>22</sup> An abbreviation of the Latin *vox populi*, 'the voice of the people'; 'vox pop' is a journalistic term for summary interviews with 'the man on the street'.

<sup>23</sup> The recurring call of a London bartender, in Section II of the poem, 'A Game of Chess'; For Rudyard Kipling's use of vernacular language and demotic diction, see his *The Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (1892)

<sup>24</sup> George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliography* (Aldershot: Scolar Books, 1978), pp.228–230. 'Found poetry, also called the poetry of citation or appropriation, is created by taking words, phrases, and, even more commonly, entire passages from other sources and reframing them as 'poetry' by altering the context, frame, and format in which the source text appears'; as defined by M. Perloff in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), edited by Roland Greene.

<sup>25</sup> Referring to the Wilts and Berkshire Canal.

significant connection. In the critical heritage there has long been a partisan conflict between Jefferiesians and Hudsonians. I am entirely with the former, if only because Jefferies was closer to the soil—and interested in ragamuffins!

I entirely agree that Thomas's prose is the most poetic tribute to Jefferies in the truest sense.

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## JEFFERIES AND T.S. ELIOT

RJS Newsletter: Autumn 2020

I was looking through some of my books on mysticism that mention Jefferies. He is usually assigned a fairly minor place, often in the category of nature mystics alongside Wordsworth, Tennyson and Whitman, and in a minor role in relation to them. I was surprised by F.C. Happold's *Mysticism: a Study and an Anthology* (Penguin, 1963). Again the early Christian and Medieval mystics and 17<sup>th</sup> century divines are fully represented, but after Traherne and William Law none of the above. Except Jefferies that is, who gets a warm appraisal and lengthy passage from *The Story of My Heart*, 'that glowing and lovely history of the journeyings of a great soul'. Well it's purely circumstantial but I wonder if this unusual direction in the narrative has anything to do with Happold's dedication of the book to 'T.S. Eliot, poet of the *Four Quartets*.' I wonder if he knew Eliot, or perhaps attended his WEA lectures? I've often felt there's an affinity between *The Story of My Heart* and the *Quartets*—sensations of timelessness evoked by certain aspects of English countryside, and the sea.

Andrew Rossabi found reference to a letter from Eliot to Happold in Volume I of *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (Faber and Faber 2015).

The editors cite a letter<sup>26</sup> from T.S. Eliot to F.C. Happold dated 18 November 1958: 'I shall be pleased to answer any questions I can about the *Four Quartets*, but you must not think of me as a mystic or contemplative. I have had a few flashes during my life, though there must be many people whose experience has taken them farther. Tennyson, for instance, knew more about certain types of experience than I do.'



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<sup>26</sup>On p.985, in their commentary on 'The Dry Salvages' (V 18–19 The point of intersection of the timeless| With time.)

## XXIV

# GHOSTS ON HORSEBACK AND A HERO'S RETURN

On 10 April 2021 Batemans of Stamford, Lincolnshire, were auctioning 'A collection of books and ephemera relating to Richard Jefferies and naturalism, including a page from Richard Jefferies scrapbook, with letter and Pamphlet from Samuel J. Looker. . .'. The page, in Jefferies' hand, was penned in purple and black ink on a sheet of paper measuring 8 x 5", larger than his notebooks, which were in pencil, so clearly not a detached leaf from them, and bearing no evidence to suggest it was ever part of a scrapbook.

The note was formerly part of Samuel J. Looker's collection, but given by him to H.K. Springett<sup>1</sup> as a mark of appreciation. Looker's covering letter to Springett, dated 23 March 1945, reads: 'I want to give you something that you will really like and cherish, and I can think of nothing that would please you better than an actual page of notes written by Richard Jefferies himself nearly seventy years ago. Here it is with my very best wishes. . . I feel certain you will love to have a scrap of the Master's own writing. It is scarce and valuable but I have such a comprehensive collection that I am glad for you to have this.' The lot included two of Looker's pamphlets, both sent to Springett: *To the Immortal Memory of Richard Jefferies*, inscription dated 25 October 1944, and *The True Richard Jefferies*, inscription dated 12 February 1949, and on the back of the

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Kentish Springett (1885–1952) wrote the chapter titled 'Richard Jefferies at Surbiton and his *Nature Near London*' (pp.113–128) and supplied relevant photographs for the Worthing Cavalcade. 1946 publication: *Richard Jefferies: A Tribute by Various Writers* edited by Samuel Looker. Springett was living in Ewell (1939 records: 35 London Road) with his wife Phyllis.

document he signed an authentication stating that Jefferies ‘sometimes used this violet ink and especially whilst making notes for his *Wild Life in a Southern County*, first published in 1879.’ The purple ink is characteristic of Jefferies’ MSS and notes circa 1877; for example ‘Machiavelli: A Study’, ‘The Dragon at Ashdown’, ‘A Game for Bicyclists’ and ‘Three Centuries at Home’. So the most likely date of the ms is 1877, from 2 September, during his Tolworth years.

The notes are hastily scrawled and very difficult to read. The following is an attempt at a transcription, but alternative identification of some words is possible. The most difficult words to read are the two beginning with ‘D’ and ‘C’—possibly obscure terms, e.g. ‘Dagobah’, a domed structure for a saint’s relics (simile for an empty fireplace?); ‘Chaloupe’, some kind of boat.

The following interpretation of the document brings together the thoughts of Jean Saunders, Andrew Rossabi, Peter Robins and myself. The notes appear to relate to a visit to Hampton Court and the great kitchen with its “huge fireplace”. Jefferies mentions Hampton Court in ‘The Story of Furniture’ (Cassell’s Family Magazine) and ‘Magpie Fields’ (*Nature Near London*), but neither context relates to his observations here. “Wolsey’s scroll” is noted and this is depicted in a painting of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, for whom the palace was first built in 1514. Hampton Court is within walking distance of Jefferies’ Tolworth home. The palace was opened to the public after some renovations in 1838. Perhaps he is remembering the large fireplace at the Elizabethan mansion at Upper Upham with its dog irons and supporters, or Burderop Park perhaps? In *The Amateur Poacher* (1879) he mentions that Dickon was a great favourite at the house. He was in love with one of the maids, who showed Jefferies ‘the famous mantelpiece, a vast carved work, under which you

1st 2nd <sup>Furn</sup> <sup>back paper</sup> <sup>a new</sup> <sup>suppater</sup> <sup>from</sup>  
 1st Threl. Pers. & Dy. for: arrive do. & further  
 Relins q. Clif. Mutangles. <sup>ed photo</sup> <sup>story of man on</sup>  
 From chair & table: <sup>house built mid 19th</sup> <sup>18th & 19th</sup> <sup>Chalupa: in 18th</sup>  
 Shalupa:

Knives here for?

evening  
 Jason up to  
 Chimney  
 Ulysses  
 as his on  
 head

Instand from Egypt also: within: send on  
 Volupis sand: <sup>Copper for Chert</sup> <sup>Hampton Court</sup> <sup>inspiration</sup>  
 The note - glass: <sup>Marble</sup> <sup>Marble</sup> <sup>Marble</sup>  
 520 cl Roman Mayrick again for  
 1240 pg. An Myrick fire furniture

520  
 180  
 4 16 John  
 500 red. also for uplands &  
 to 20 at side Locks &  
 Vatches & clocks.

Varnish pens  
 Sam. Whist  
 Tins: 12  
 Onkens in  
 N. Bailey  
 Onk  
 Glass  
 Roman  
 Nodles in  
 Chests  
 Onk  
 Currier  
 An Horni fork  
 Glass and  
 present  
 tissue or

From  
Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> all

Fire Hearth: laws / huge fireplace—iron supporters/farm/: dog Iron : arriere dos.  
& furniture—// curing bacon up the chimney//— old ghost story of a man  
on horseback riding up hall & disappearing in large fire place

Return Q[ueen] Eliz. nutcrackers.

Farm chairs & tables: Dagobah: Chaloupe:  
Shakespeare:

Knives leave for?

Ulysses  
ashes on  
head——  
hospitality  
March

Inkstands from Egypt also: with her: send on

Wolsey's scroll:

see note

copper pan [ Ch.. ]

Hampton Court

March

620 col

—glass:

Chimneys see

1240 pg.

Roman

Meyrick again for

620

&

fine furniture

[150]

see Meyrick

4

600

16 folios

exactly

to 20 outside.

& Kensington Museum

also for cupboards &

Locks & watches

& clocks.

Warming pans

Dairy Utensils

Teniers: or

Rubens in

North]Gallery

scissors

Ancient Roman

& handles See

Album

bone ivory &

Thorn

chests

Canister

In Homer's feast

flowing round

pavement

lines re & c

could stand upright'. Even cottagers cured "bacon up the chimney" so this was a common practice.<sup>1</sup> However the "old ghost story of a man on horseback riding up hall & disappearing in large fire place" cannot be identified at Hampton Court but Jefferies writes of the legend in *The Amateur Poacher*.

once a year on a certain night a sable horse and cloaked horseman rode across that great apartment, flames snorting from the horse's nostrils, and into the fireplace, disappearing with a clap of thunder.

The quote comes from Chapter VI titled 'Lurcher Land: "The Park"'. Whilst Burderop Park appears to be the prime setting in Jefferies' mind for this, it might be Upper Upham mansion or a mixture of two. Memories of Upper Upham are recorded in *Jefferies' Land where* (p.90) Jefferies writes about the banqueting hall and Queen Elizabeth (in his note also) and the fire-place:

It is at least thirty feet in length, and of corresponding breadth and height. Here is another carved mantelpiece, considered to be of Jacobean times. It is in excellent preservation. The supporters on either hand are carved figures. What indescribable scenes of revelry this chamber in all probability witnessed in the days of long ago! Whilst the rude retainers quaffed, and roared forth their drinking songs in the spacious hall beneath, those of more noble birth feasted here. Every window—and there were three to this banqueting room, though now but one—glared forth upon the night with the light of the flames in the fireplace, or the flaring torches. Two cart-loads of wood, says tradition, was the allowance of yonder yawning chimney-place from sunset to sunrise. Here the strangely-dressed courtiers of Queen Elizabeth's time feasted and drank, and discussed court scandal. There is a tradition

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<sup>1</sup> See 'The Farmer at Home' in *Fraser's* in 1874 (collected in *The Toilers in the Field*, where Jefferies writes that the interiors of the third class of farmsteads (that is, the poorer ones) had a Dutch homeliness with a vast fireplace for curing bacon.

that Queen Elizabeth herself once spent a night or two in this old mansion during one of her progresses.

He also mentions that a horseman might have been able to ride into the Hall:

Perhaps in ancient days the door was of a similar height to allow of a horseman riding into the hall of the mansion—an occurrence by no means uncommon if tradition and ballads are worthy of credence.

“Kensington Museum” is mentioned too. There was a Meyrick Gallery of Ancient Armour in the South Kensington Museum around Jefferies’ time. Samuel Rush Meyrick also wrote *Specimens of Ancient Furniture* (London: William Pickering, 1836) which might explain the reference to “fine furniture”.

There is a ceiling devoted to Ulysses in the King’s Gallery, Kensington Palace, though there was no public access in 1877. The note about Ulysses, ashes, hospitality, and hearth could be a reference to the episode in Book VII of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus (Roman name Ulysses), his raft wrecked in a storm sent by Poseidon on his voyage home to Ithaka, is washed up on the shores of Scherie. He supplicates Arete, the Phaeacian Queen, to help him get home safely as he has “been suffering woes far from my friends. So saying he sat down on the hearth in the ashes by the fire, and they were all hushed in silence.” [p.243] “Homer’s feast” might equally apply: “Come, make the stranger to arise, and set him upon a silver-studded chair, and bid the heralds mix wine, [p.245] that we may pour libations also to Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt; for he ever attends upon reverend suppliants. And let the housewife give supper to the stranger of the store that is in the house.”

With its lists of domestic objects, kitchen utensils, furniture, clocks etc., the document has every appearance of detailed memoranda following a visit of interest, the notes in black added later, with a view to a possible article. Very much Jefferies the journalist, but with memories and associations

hinting at Jefferies the writer. In ‘Coate and Richard Jefferies’ John Chandler observes:

And yet there is something of a paradox. Although so exact and minute observer RJ does not record the landscape as a map records it. His woods and fields, meadows, brooks, roads and houses are rarely faithful to a single place... We are seldom completely sure whether Coate Farmhouse or Day House Farm, RJ’s father or father-in-law, Badbury Wick or Coate, Jessie his wife or RJ himself, are behind a particular description ... In contrast to the immediacy of RJ’s description of places in Surrey, Sussex and around London, in which he is specific about places and times, RJ’s Wiltshire is disguised by imaginary place names—Okebourne Wick, Luckett’s Place and Overborough for instance—which are used to recount incidents from his past.

In 1877 Jefferies had gained respect as a practical and informed commentator on agriculture and the land (one of his articles was even translated into Spanish), and at the same time obloquy and derision as a writer of sensational fiction. Before *The Gamekeeper* (1878) his main themes and fame as a literary interpreter of nature and rural life had not been established. He was writing on a variety of topics and looking for outlets in a variety of journals and newspapers. The notes were clearly written with an article in mind. He provides his calculation as to how many folios will be needed: 16–20 pages. The fact that he retained them could have meant that he might still have intended to write the piece he had in mind. On the other hand there remains the possibility that it was written, and published as other articles and his first successful books were (reviews of the early novels still too close for comfort) anonymously. And it may have been the untypical subject matter that has served to conceal it from the scrutiny of Jefferies’ unrelenting bibliographers.

## References

*Richard Jefferies: A Tribute by Various Writers*, edited by Samuel J. Looker. Worthing, Sussex, published under the Worthing Art Development Scheme by Aldridge Bros, 1946.

*To the Immortal Memory of Richard Jefferies*, by Samuel J. Looker. Issued upon the occasion of the unveiling of a tablet of indication and remembrance upon the house in which he died, Goring by Sea, Sussex. Issued under the Worthing Art Development Scheme and published at the Sign of the Dolphin, Aylesbury. 1939

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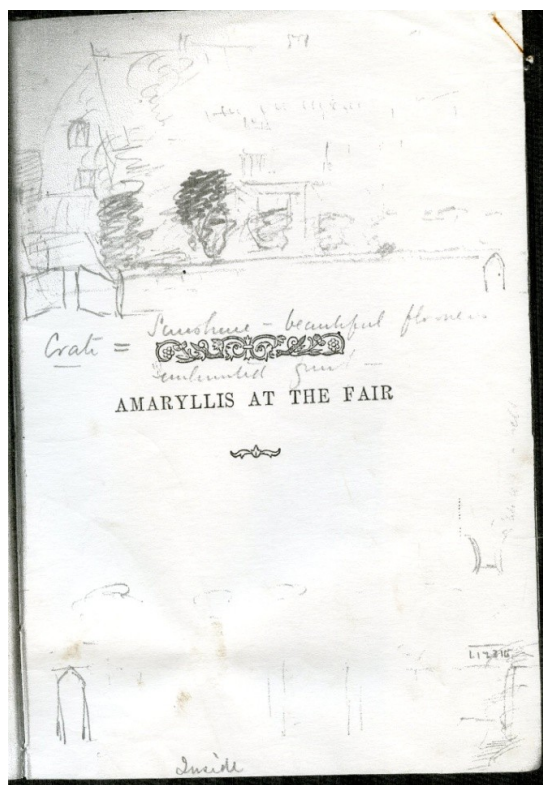
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## XXV

# AMARYLLIS AT THE FAIR

Amongst George Miller's book collection of Jefferies' works, that was the most extensive and comprehensive collection of any Jefferies' enthusiast and ran to hundreds of volumes, he owned a copy of *Amaryllis at the Fair* that once belonged to one of Jefferies' first cousins who had written notes in the margins of the book. It is the Association copy published by Sidney Kiek of 22, Paternoster Row, London around 1896-7. The notes are interesting to read.





**Annotations (in pencil unless stated otherwise) Notes in square brackets by George Miller or his best guess at an illegible word.**

Front pastedown

'5/-' 'Contains notes by a daughter of Martha Jefferies cousin to Richard'

Inserted sheet

'Calculation as to number of children see p 96 must have been written by a daughter? of Martha J[efferies] and W Hall as the other members of the family are referred to as Aunt and Uncle father and mother must be the Halls. Other notes in book seem to be written by same person. Notes in indelible by another relation of Richard Jefferies. She? refers to Richard's mother as Aunt see p 71.  
see end of book'.

Front free endpaper

'He213' [underlined — bookseller's code?] 2/- [immediately below in purple indelible] 'Do not lend this book — it is too painful / true and yet untrue'

Verso free endpaper

Newspaper cutting headed 'Richard Returns': a poem with a brief introduction describing it as a 'somewhat audacious attempt to suggest [Jefferies'] experiences on an imaginary visit [to Coate] in the present year of grace'.

Preliminary blank signed 'A'

Cutting with the last three stanzas of the seven stanza poem, signed 'ZAGUAN.' Immediately below this: 'Last visited with Fanny, Emily and Joe. March 5<sup>th</sup> 1928. The glory had departed [long dash]'

Note: This makes Florence (E. Bott, née Hall) the likely author of the pencilled notes. [Fanny (1859-1939), Emily (1852-1937), & Joe (1854-1930) were siblings of Florence (1856-1939).]

Verso preliminary blank

[Upper half sketch of side elevation of house with sloping roof, upper room with door and window, possibly a sofa, but with some indecipherable lines, lower room unidentified rectangular object with what could be a pump on one side. Below a plan of the ground floor 'Day room', 'sitting' legible, others illegible — possibly 'pantry' or 'larder', 'kitchen', 'cellar', 'Dairy'] [George Miller traced over the house layout as best he could]

Half title

At top: sketch of Coate Farm seen from the road, with wall, trees and gate to the left.

Below: 'Coate = Sunshine — beautiful flowers / enchanted [possibly 'unlimited'] fruit —'.

Below, sketch of view from inside showing wall with pointed arched gate now on left, row of lime trees, road beyond, and

squeeze belly style in hedge with path leading away. Some writing up the page by the path — looks like mile, or stile, to Snodhill . Above wall on right printed letters and or numbers, looks like 'LIZ 7 [or2]16'. Could be 'LIZZIE'. Centred below: 'inside'.

Title page

Below title: 'Really his own life, but a great deal of this is pure fiction.' Below the author's name: 'The place of my dreams — How I longed to live here!'

Page [1]

'Coate Farm' at head of page

Page 3

'face to face with the east wind' in text underlined

Page 4

'The wind had blown thus round that corner every March for a century' in text underlined. Line 22 'a grass path' underlined and note in margin 'gone now!'.

Page 7

Line 21 'handsome her father's intellectual face' underlined. Line 29 'Luckett's' underlined and note in margin 'great uncle Richard Jefferies'.

Page 8

Line 4 'place at Luckett's' underlined; line 5 'Queen Elizabeth's days' underlined. Note in margin 'Draycott Foliatt'. Line 24 'the rest could do nothing but spend it' underlined.

Page 24

Line 23 'great garden abounded with fruit' underlined.

Page 31

Line 4 'American clock' underlined, with note 'This is not right — it was a tall grandfather [Fanny?] has it now.'

Page 38

Line 7 'he had been there' (i.e. Jefferies' father had been in America) underlined and note in margin 'He ran away with [word or words illegible — could be a name, could be '... aunt G']'.

Page 40

Line 10 'Mrs. Iden's model City gentleman' underlined and note in margin 'Aunt was a pretty London girl Elizabeth Gyde'.

Page [42]

Line 9 'on the top of the wall—, 10 'up than those who went along', 21 'stand on a slight bank', 22 'Without there was a sheer red precipice of fourteen' (Amaryllis looking over the wall) underlined and note in margin 'Many an hour have I done this The wall at the lower end of part [or 'gate'] near The Sun'.

Page 54

Line 25 'Pounding up the slope', 26 'by-and-by to the gateway' and 28 'near the backdoor' (describing big John Duck's arrival) underlined.

Page 57

Line 15 'to dine with her grandfather' and 24 'plum free' underlined.

Page [59]

Line 8 'No such wall as that anywhere' underlined and note in margin 'Cost a small fortune'; and further down 'Now moved back two feet or more'.

Page 62

Lines 3-4 'grandfather, the great miller and baker, Lord Lardy-Cake', and 5-6 'bushels upon bushels of money' underlined.

Page 65

Line 18 'path across the fields, which was shorter' underlined, and note in margin 'How many fields, 8 [underlined three times] I used to know every tree in them!'.

Page 66

Next to reference to 'The Flam-/-mas!' lines 10-11 ' — Really Gyde.', and 'Gydes' in margin. Below this 'Too bad Richard too bad'.

Page 70

Lines 25-6 'horse-chest-/nut trees that he himself planted' underlined

Page 71

Lines 23-24 'beautiful shape and expressive eyes' underlined; note in the margin 'True!', and in lower margin in indelible 'Aunt was very handsome but so loved town life — shops party and pretty dresses — she yearned for a pony & trap — poor dear.'

Page 78

Bottom line 'one wide stone of semicircular shape' underlined, and note below 'Yes I remember it'.

Page 81

Line 13 'great knobbed old nose' underlined and note in margin 'Like mine.'

Page 84

Note at foot of page in indelible (referring to Grandfather Iden's, i.e. John Jefferies' collection of valuable books) 'At his death Uncle Sewell sold the lot even the family Bible — which Martha rescued —

Page [85]

Note at foot in indelible (again referring to old Iden / John Jefferies) 'Grandfather was well educated & literary but he had to give it all up & return to manage the mill — [Mother?] was the first child born in Swindon'.

Page 87

Line 6 'ease in pencil or pen-and-ink' (referring to Amaryllis's drawing ability) underlined and note in margin 'so could Richard'.

Page 88

Line 18 'grunting between his continuous fits *of* (—'coughing', i.e. Grandfather Iden being read to by Amaryllis) and note in margin 'Willie and I had to read the Psalms and say "Glory be to [ ] | after — we got into trouble for say [ing] a [underlined twice] men instead of ah-men'.

Page 94

Lines 4-5 'good old country meat' underlined and note in margin 'delicious'.

Page 95

Line 3 'Butler' (old Dr. Butler who advocated early walks 'afore the aair have been braathed auver') and note in margin 'Gay really'.

Page 96

Lines 3-4 'His daughters, elderly, uninteresting married folk' underlined and note in margin 'Mother away there! uninteresting indeed!'. Line 15 'twenty-one' (Grandfather Iden's grandchildren) underlined and note in margin '16 it should be'.

Page 97

Line 6 'the lame, the paralytic' (hangs on at Grandfather Iden's table) underlined and note in margin 'there were none! We were all young sturdy sound in mind & body'.

Page 98

Line 21 'be no more' ('children at Coombe Oaks', Amaryllis being the only one) underlined and note in margin 'there were really five'.

Page 102

Lines 10-12 (Grandfather going round the table handing out sovereigns to his descendants) bracketed and illegible note in margin: 'first [just?] 6 only [barely?] went [aunt? count?] — 16 sovereigns —'.

Page 107

Line 10 'She' underlined (the servant who found Amaryllis's discarded spade-guinea) and note below in indelible 'Elizabeth — is the one I remember I liked [,] large and kind to us children'.

Page 108

Penultimate line "'fairings'" underlined.

Page 114

At foot, when Grandfather Iden leads Amaryllis out of the crowd at the fair down a quiet stone-flagged passage, note in margin 'The Planks — Swindon'.

**Note:** 'To my mind the dear old "Planks," leading from the Square, Old Swindon, has always taken first honours. I remember it long before the Corn Exchange was built. On this site there were four or five lovely old-world cottages, with long gardens in front and a rustic porch at the entrance to each. They were always very neatly kept, especially in summer time. These, combined with the old mill pond and the beautiful trees leading to and facing to the Holy Rood Churchyard, formed a picturesque scene such as few towns possessed.' *A Swindon Retrospect, 1855-1930*, by Frederick Large, Swindon 1931.

Page 115

Line 10 'weight as it were of underlined (i.e. the great Abbey walls) and note in margin 'No such thing in Swindon really / only the ruins of Holy Rood Church'. Line 25 'three stags, (heads on a shield) underlined and note in margin 'Goddard's Aims Cei vus iion Servus'".

Page 117

Note against second paragraph describing the Pamment mansion 'Goddards'. Repeated page 119.

Page 121

Line 19 'organ' underlined and note in margin 'My mother played it. She used to take a hot potato in her bag to warm her fingers. There were very few others could play.'

Page 124

Describing Raleigh Pamment, note in margin 'Not true to life of the Goddards'.

Page 134

Line 7 'experienced, clever, learned, a man of wise old books' underlined and note in margin 'True!'

Page 154

First two lines (Amaryllis's study) underlined and note in margin 'Dick's room'.

Page 155

Line 2 'lumber-room' underlined and note in margin 'cheeseroom [or junk?] with shelves for cheese & apples'.

Page 162

Lines 13-15 'Sometimes she went into the next [room]', 'lumber-room' 'a wire [network]' underlined.

Page 177

Line 6 'on a level with the ground' (a window) underlined and a note in margin 'There is another put in now.'

Page 181

Note at foot of page (about Iden's labourer) in indelible 'Abner Webb — was the man in my time. He used to sing sad songs. I was always hustled away at harvest home suppers -'. ['sad' possibly euphemism for rude?]

Page 199

Lines 2-9 (describing the summer-house) bracketed and note in margin 'Happy times -'. Last three lines also bracketed.

Page 200

Note in the margin 'I wish I were there now'.

Page [240]

Lines 8-13 bracketed (Amadis turning the butter churn) and note in margin 'I have turned this — after one's palms shone like silk'.

Page 243

Line 7 'in a minute for the scraps' (children coming to collect scraps of food) underlined and note in margin 'I've seen a good helping of mutton handed out of the window'.

Page 244

Mrs Iden feeding the village cottage children, note in margin 'Oh aunt! I have seen you do it!'

Page 251

Lines 19-25 (describing the assembly in the summer-house) bracketed.

Page 252

Lines 2-3 'the rest, and peace, and sunshine [of an old] farmhouse' underlined and note in indelible below 'Yes dear things but they lost it all!'

Page 254

Note at foot in indelible 'Uncle's gates were famous. He truly rode high.'

Page 255

Penultimate line 'the pit' (saw-pit) underlined and note below in indelible 'Just by the [two words illegible] — gone long since'. Looks like 'round limestone' or 'lanesturn', or 'round — barn'?

Page 258

Lines 19-20 'it was beautiful to look at' (Coombe Oaks) underlined.

Page 260

At foot of page in indelible 'I weep as I close this book'.

Recto free endpaper

List of marriages at top in neat ink handwriting:

Fanny Jefferies William Cox Dec 1840  
James Luckett Jefferies (Islington) Elizabeth Gyde Sep  
10 1844  
['Richard's father and mother' added in pencil]  
Eliza Jefferies George Sewell 1848  
Martha Jefferies William Hall Swindon Old Church  
June 30<sup>th</sup> 1849

Below in indelible 'They had to go — the farm and all the gear  
was sold & they lived in apartments — top floor — of a tall  
house in dingy King St. Bath | alas!'

Verso free endpaper

List of lands held by the Jefferies family in neat ink,  
headed '1800'  
Mr Herring  
Coate Chiseldon: the home and home ground 6 acres  
18 poles.  
Great Meadow 2.1.9 (the upper Leaze & the lower  
Leaze and the  
bottom meadow. Horse Leaze 3.2.20 total a 15.2.7  
Agreement  
between Mr Eldridge & Jefferies for purchase of  
meadow Sand at  
Cote £1600 £500 paid & remaining £1100 at Xmas  
£25 acres.  
Lookers of Hodson 8a At Kelmscott 47a. James  
(uncle) 8 &  
Lechlade 8.  
Reservoir took 4 Acres.  
Richard at Kelmscott.

Below in indelible 'It was quite true. There was bad feeling in  
the family. Fanny the eldest daughter was undoubtedly the  
favourite & was really helped while James was expected to be  
regular with his rent & was never' continued on pastedown  
opposite.

Back pastedown

At top in pencil list of family members:

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Aunt & Uncle Cox       | 2 |
| 5 children             | 5 |
| Aunt & Uncle Sewell    | 2 |
| May                    | 1 |
| Sarah                  | 1 |
| Father & mother        | 2 |
| 6 children             | 6 |
| Uncle & Aunt Jefferies | 2 |
| Five children          | 5 |
| John                   | 1 |

Twenty one only were possible at this summer

Note from above continued 'helped as the others were. In the end when he did get Coate Farm it was so encumbered with debt he could not keep it. But the aunts were good kind women highly educated for their time especially mother who was highly [graded?] in English — an excellent pianist and French scholar. They all had exquisitely refined manners. You never heard a cross word or saw a [glance?]'.

XXVI

THE STORIES AND NOVELS OF  
RICHARD JEFFERIES

(revised 23/11/21)

*The first ten numbered sections below are transcribed and arranged from early scripts, c. 1962–3, on 8 × 6 ½" leaves. (N) refers to notes at the end which amend or update statements in the original. A separate piece on 10 × 7 ½" leaves, possibly written somewhat later, covers some of the same ground but amplifies and adds example and context to the main sequence. This is included as a postscript. A new paragraph has been added at the end of this.*

Contents:

1. The Early Fiction.
2. *The Denny Morn*.
3. 'The True Tale of a Wiltshire Labourer', and 'John Smith's Shanty'.
4. 'The Midsummer Hum', and 'Gaudy as a Garden'.
5. The critics.
6. Characterisation in *The Scarlet Shawl*.
7. 'The Field-Play': literary background.
8. 'Uptill-a-Thorn'.
9. 'Rural Dynamite'.
10. Conclusion.
11. Postscript.
12. End Notes.

## 1. The Early Fiction

Under the heading of early fiction must be considered the stories and novels written by Jefferies between 1866 and 1877. In March 1866 he joined the staff of the *North Wilts Herald*, where his first stories and poems began to appear. In 1877 he published *World's End*, the last of those ambitious works of fiction by which he hoped to become generally known as a novelist. It was the year also (N<sup>1</sup>) of his move from Swindon to Surbiton which marked the entry into a new phase of his career, and dedication to the acceptable subjects of agriculture, natural history and country life. The following is written of a character in *World's End* whose career resembles Jefferies' own, and may be taken as a comment on the early years of endeavour at Coate and Swindon:

Aymer certainly had talent, perhaps even genius, but he had not yet found his opportunity—he was not quite certain wherein his ability lay. All this efforts were tentative—They failed one and all.

It is agreed among Jefferies' critics and biographers that his early stories represented a false start, but there is considerable divergence of opinion as to how wasteful and how wide of the mark they were. Sir Walter Besant, whose account of them,<sup>1</sup> one suspects, is based less on a study of their contents than his assessment of the later novels and the opinions expressed in reviews (heroically preserved by Jefferies) of the earlier, regrets that no one advised Jefferies to tear up everything in which he strove to come to terms with the world outside Coate. On the other hand Edward Thomas, whose account<sup>2</sup> is the fullest yet published, writes:

It is quite possible that had there been no 'Henrique Beaumont', and 'Who Will Win'? there would have been no *Denny Morn*, no *Amaryllis*, no *Story of My Heart*.

and of the early novels that they:

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Besant. *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Thomas. *Richard Jefferies: His life and Work*. London, Hutchinson, 1909.

must have satisfied and permanently fortified that part of his nature which neither the agricultural articles, nor books like *Wild Life in a Southern County* could touch.

The stories to be considered here are antecedent to the novels. They began to appear in *The North Wilts Herald* from June 30<sup>th</sup> 1866, copies being preserved by Jefferies and later republished in *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies* edited by Grace Toplis, 1896.<sup>3</sup> There were no doubt many more, most of them lost along with plays, poems, lampoons, sketches and other youthful efforts. Some may still be recoverable from the pages of the *North Wilts Herald*, the *Swindon Advertiser*, and the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*. He refers to these stories in a letter to his aunt at Sydenham, in June 1868, and mentions his first attempts at a novel, on which he had been at work for two months:

I have taken great pains with it, and flatter myself that I have produced a tale of very different class to those sensational stories I wrote some time ago. I have attempted to make my story lifelike by delineating character rather than sensational incident. My characters are mainly drawn from life, and some of my incidents actually took place.<sup>4</sup>

This represents rather a good resolution than a moment of self-discovery, for the people and scenes which became an inexhaustible source for his later books seemed mostly dull and uninteresting at the age of twenty. That he had not permanently renounced sensational incident and extravagant character appears in the novels published during the '70s. He frequently claims in these that the characters are "no fiction", a circumstance which makes them, in fact, neither more nor less conventional.

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<sup>3</sup> Grace Toplis, ed. *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*. London, Simpkin; Wells, Arthur Young, 1896.

<sup>4</sup> This and other lost letters to publishers in Besant (1), chapter VI.

By 1871 Jefferies had written another full length work, discarding fiction in favour of the device of adopting some didactic point or purpose. It is called 'Fortune: or the Art of Success'. The idea came to him as a result of "inspiration". He wrote to Disraeli setting forth the scheme of the book, and derived high encouragement and confirmation from the statesman's courteous reply: "I think the subject of the highest interest, and I should have confidence in its treatment from the letter which you have done me the honour of addressing to me." Following Disraeli's recommendation he forwarded the work to "some eminent publisher"—Messrs. Longman, who declined it on the grounds that he had "gone too much into detail on frequent occasions", but adding that that this "will not, with a considerable portion of the public, in any degree take away from the interest of a work so thoroughly practical, and which displays so much knowledge of human nature, perhaps not in its highest, but in its general aspect."

The MS went next to Sampson Low, and then to Smith Elder, who accepted it but for some reason never published it, so that, as the MS has not been preserved, Longman's letter is the only indication of its content (N<sup>2</sup>). From this it may be inferred that Jefferies digressed, moralised and generalised as much as in *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Restless Human Hearts*, but that, as in *World's End*, he was less concerned to "delineate character" and analyse passion, than to illustrate the wickedness of the world and the baseness of human motives in general.

We know no more than this about the next novel (N<sup>3</sup>), written in 1872 (Jefferies produced them during the '70s at the rate of one a year), but the few scraps of evidence that are available suggest an instance of the way in which his last novels are dependent on his earliest and doubtless misguided attempts. The novel in question was entitled 'Only a Girl' and the "leading idea", he tells a prospective publisher, was "the

delineation of a girl entirely unconventional, entirely unfettered by precedent, and in sentiment always true to herself.” The impression that here perhaps is the germ of *The Deny Morn* is reinforced by a second letter of Sept. 1872:

The scenery is descriptive of that found in this county, with every portion of which I have been familiar for many years. The characters are drawn from life, though as far disguised as to render too easy identification impossible. I have worked in many of the traditions of North Wilts, endeavouring in fact, in a humble manner to do that for that county what Whyte Melville has done for Northamptonshire and Miss Braddon for Yorkshire.

There is no reason to suppose that this restriction to familiar scenes and living models produced a work very much above the level of the other early novels, and it was better, perhaps, that it should be ploughed back at this stage. The rural environment would have been faithfully observed, but without the glow of life which it is just beginning to acquire in *Restless Human Hearts* two years later, while the term “scenery” and the phrase “worked in” suggest the relation between certain features of Wiltshire scene and the characters and plots of the first sensational stories. Not only the reference to Miss Braddon put the sensation novel of the sixties in the background, but the title itself. Mansel<sup>5</sup> lists a novel by Capt. Lascelles Wraxall entitled *Only a Woman*, which he describes as “a tale of feminine passion and masculine weakness... chiefly remarkable for the author’s high estimate of the female sex—the heroine being a young woman whose animal charms are dwelt upon with unnecessary minuteness; but is described as having “no troublesome moral principles to keep her in check’.”

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Longueville Mansel, ‘Sensation Novels’, in *Quarterly Review*, vol. 113, Jan. — April 1863, pp.481–584. Frederick Charles Lascelles Wraxall. *Only a Woman*. 3 vols. 1860.

The beautiful fiend of the Lady Audley type<sup>6</sup> and the “fast” young lady were both stock articles of the sensation novelist, but the above description could apply to no character more aptly than Carlotta in *Restless Human Hearts*. She has “intense animal vigour” and “latent pantherism”. The “full voluptuous contour of the form, the superb neck and bust, the head set almost defiantly in its balance, conveyed the impression of physical nature in its perfection and completeness.” Moreover she:

had no image of moral perfection in her mind to which to aspire. The conception of such an idea was impossible to her. Her only idea of perfection was physical and mental gratification of self.

Nora of *The Scarlet Shawl* has similar qualities: “a vigorous physical organisation, and almost excess of animal energy, a panther like pose of intense but subdued force” (dwelt upon, however, with less “minuteness”) but she is sympathetic and, though an heiress of vast wealth, a natural country girl, whereas Carlotta resembles Pauline Vietri, the fascinating vampire of *The Scarlet Shawl* in the following:

Yet she was no longer young. But the very years which would have detracted from the shape of many had but added to the complexion and completeness of this evil woman. There was a finish, a fullness about her to which youth inspired in vain. It was this very finish, the fullness, which made almost a slave of Louis, a slave whom all the loveliness and freshness, the purity of Heloise could never retain. Her very age, her worldliness, her astute cleverness attracted him irresistibly.

Felise in *The Denny Morn* combines the physical qualities of Carlotta with the moral qualities of Heloise. More than this she is conceived with a wholeness, a disinterestedness, which however lacks nothing in intensity, while the above passage is sensational in conception and origin. The following description of Carlotta’s arm, however, even in its sensuous

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<sup>6</sup> London, Tinsley Bros., 1862.

“minuteness”, looks forward to *The Deny Morn* (and anticipates particularly a description of the dairy maid Cicely in *Round About a Great Estate*). It is characteristic of Jefferies and free of sensationalism:

It was round and full and firm, white and smooth as the skin of the famous empress who bathed in the milk of five hundred she asses to preserve the polish of her limbs... The flesh looked as firm as the very marble in which they (the statues of antiquity) are carved, yet to the touch it was softer than velvet and sank into a dimple at the slightest pressure. There was a smoothness, a polish on the surface of the skin, as if rubbed with oil; and here and there the blue veins wandered round it.

It is possible then to gain some idea of the significance of ‘Only a Girl’. We know neither theme nor title of his next novel, however, which he mentions as having been returned to him by Messrs. Bentley in a letter of May 1873. He refers simply to “my novel”, and it may of course have been the same one.

In 1874 *The Scarlet Shawl* was published by Tinsley Bros., the author contributing largely to the expenses of publication. There was apparently a second edition,<sup>7</sup> but the book was not a success, and is now very scarce.

He wrote to Tinsley again on October 9 1874 announcing that the MS of *Restless Human Hearts* was at their disposal. It was published in three volumes the following year. William Tinsley, who published the early novels, apparently thought of Jefferies as a potentially successful country novelist. In his *Random Recollections*<sup>8</sup> he writes, in defence of his encouragement of the embryonic Jefferies against Besant whose reproof includes publisher as well as author:

Mr. Jefferies was an author who disappointed me very much indeed by not making almost a great name as a novelist. He had a wonderful knowledge of English country life, its scenes, people and ways, and a

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<sup>7</sup> *The Scarlet Shawl*, second impression [1877].

<sup>8</sup> William Tinsley. *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher*, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, 1900.

skill in portraying them not surpassed by many authors at any time during this century—such a knowledge as has made many of our best known writers of fiction. The rural scenery and people in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* are splendid examples of how intensely interesting country life can be made in novels. I am not wondering why Mr. Jefferies did not write such an excellent work of *Adam Bede*, or any of George Eliot's works. I published three novels by Mr. Jefferies and there was good work in all of them. *The Scarlet Shawl* was a small one volume book, but there was some fair work in it. *Restless Human Hearts* contained many well-written, interesting scenes. No doubt had *World's End* been published before *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Restless Human Hearts* Mr. Jefferies would have made some way at once as a writer of fiction.

The contemporary reader might have been forgiven for missing Jefferies' wonderful knowledge of country life among much that is neither rural nor natural. Tinsley may have written this with the wisdom of hindsight in his own defence. It is more likely, however, judging by Jefferies' repeated assurance that he is describing people and places that he knows, that the country scenes were the ones that Tinsley found well written and interesting, and that he urged Jefferies to emulate George Eliot. In fact his notebooks<sup>9</sup> show that Jefferies was thinking about Iden, the leading character in his last novel, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, at least as early as 1876, and wrote thus of the genesis of the novel to the publisher, Richard Bentley, a decade later:<sup>10</sup>

May I mention, as you are going to read it yourself—that I originally intended this book to form a series of scenes from country life, and so proposed to call it 'Scenes from Country Life', a title of course suggested by the famous *Scenes of Clerical Life*. The idea of calling it a novel was secondary, and in fact it is quite immaterial to me whether (supposing you decide to publish it) you publish it as Scenes or as a novel—just as you think best.

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<sup>9</sup> S.J. Looker, ed. *The Nature Diaries and Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*. London, Grey Walls, 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Letters to Bentley in the British Library: Add. MS 58822, vol. XX.

Jefferies was always a problem to his publishers, and his letters to them often contain helpful suggestions. However if George Eliot was an encouraging precedent for prospective publishers, she was so for Jefferies also, if not a direct influence for more literary reasons. The first chapter of *Greene Ferne Farm* may owe a debt to her of this secondary kind; so too the liberal introduction of rustic dialogue into the novel, and an awareness of the humour derivable from a display of the “mental processes which take the place of reason in the uneducated mind”.<sup>11</sup> The scene in *The Scarlet Shawl* (one of the best and perhaps the “fair work” referred to by Tinsley) which describes the much respected eccentricities of the Rev. Prebendary, the restoration of Stanley Church, and especially Nora’s nostalgia and memories of childhood awe, may well have been suggested by the opening pages of ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, though it is none the less first hand work.

In the letter of October ’74 in which he submits *Restless Human Hearts*, he mentions yet another completed work of fiction, described as: “a book of adventure on a novel plan—in fact I don’t think anything of the kind has ever been written before. It describes the rise to power of an intelligent man in a half-civilised country, and is called ‘The Rise of Maximin’ (N<sup>4</sup>). This work has never come to light, but was probably used in the composition of *After London*, a book which Jefferies contemplated for many years, as is the case of the other two late novels. The two related ideas of *After London*, the destruction of civilisation by a great natural catastrophe and the triumph of intelligence over nature, and so the renewal of civilisation—these ideas developed, for a time at least, in isolation. The absolute value of human intelligence, the power of ideas to alter the physical and spiritual condition of human life, the indifference and designlessness of nature, man’s

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<sup>11</sup> ‘John Smith’s Shanty’.

dependence on man: these and related thoughts recur throughout his work and are at the centre of the enquiry into fundamentals which began with *The Story of My Heart*, and was continued in the pages of the last notebooks. Jefferies' characters were conceived from ideas, and his ideas from the study of nature and human nature, both from living and from literary models. There are instances of this in his early as well as the late fiction. Iden in *Amaryllis* is a man of ideas and much curious but essential learning, but he is incapable of action. Neville of *Restless Human Hearts* is a scholar and a dreamer, his brother Noel a great explorer; both prove inadequate to life, for one builds an ivory tower—the Temple of Nature—the other can find no rest or fulfilment. We must remember too the interest and significance of Julius Caesar, Machiavelli's *Caesar Borgia* and Homer's *Ulysses*, which were of no less importance to the conception of Felix Aquila than the element of autobiographical fantasy. This was probably as true of Maximin, the "man of intelligence" who was also, apparently, explorer, adventurer and conqueror.

The other leading idea of *After London* has also its roots in the early fiction: the idea of an immense natural catastrophe destroying 19<sup>th</sup> century urban civilisation. Jefferies' imagination was captured by great disasters, and he had the faculty to realise the whole event vividly in the detailed sequence of cause and effect. *World's End* provides two instances of this, though on both occasions the destruction of human life is man-contrived: the collapse of the floor of a packed theatre, and the murder of the entire crew and passengers of a steamer by a concealed poison-gas plant. There is nothing sensational or melodramatic in the manner in which these extraordinary events are related. In the first case it is grimly ironical, with a pained awareness of the ordeal of suffering multiplied by the number of victims. In the second the irony is more subtle and implicit, even Conradian. The reader knows of the diabolic

plot and so is gripped with suspense, while news, piecemeal and incomplete, reaches an incredulous world. Then at last comes a circumstantial and credible report and the horrifying event is unfolded, but through the eyes and mind of a man, though eminently honourable and reasonable, completely deceived, so that his every casual observation and perfectly logical deduction reveals further depths of treachery and evil more disturbingly beyond the apprehension of normal, respectable men. Once again the qualities of immediacy and close attention to detail are remarkable, and we can say of Jefferies as he does of Aymer in the book: "The whole tragedy seemed to pass before his mind; his vivid imagination called up a picture of the 'Lucca' steaming as fast as bursting pressure could drive her, with a crew of corpses, across the winter sea."

Two further pieces bring us close to the matter as well as the manner of *After London*. First an untitled and undated MS,<sup>12</sup> probably as early as 'The Rise of Maximin', describes the destruction of London by a prolonged and severe winter. As in the 'Lucca' incident just referred to and 'The Relapse into Barbarism' the catastrophe is reconstructed from surviving evidence, hearsay and report, and the logical sequence of events is traced with clarity and minuteness. The account of starvation, rapine, the burning of houses, mass suicide and other horrors is extremely vivid. Secondly an MS<sup>13</sup> dated October 20<sup>th</sup> 1879 describes the changes that take place in the countryside after all cultivation has come to an end. It would appear to be an early draft of the opening pages of *After London*, published in 1885. In a letter to C.J. Longman dated April of that year<sup>14</sup> he described the scheme of *After London* in some length, and concludes:

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<sup>12</sup> In *Beauty is Immortal*, edited by S.J. Looker. Worthing, Aldridge Bros., 1948. Editor's title.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.*, Besant, chapter VI.

All of these matters are purposely dealt with in minute detail so that they appear actual realities, and the incidents stand out as if they had just happened. There is a love affair, but it is in no sense a novel; more like a romance, but a romance of real character.

To return now to the chronology of the early novels: *Restless Human Hearts* was published by Tinsley in three volumes, in 1875, and in the same year another novel written called 'In Summer Time'. He wrote: "I think my new novel is the best thing I have ever written—it is full of the odd humours of the rustics I know so well." From this description it could well have been an earlier version of *Greene Ferne Farm*, published by Smith, Elder in 1880. Jefferies offered Tinsley £20 towards the cost of publication, but nothing came of it, and the MS has not come to light. The next novel, *World's End*, was published by Tinsley in 1877. It had some topical interest:

The story centres round the great property at Birmingham, considered to be worth four millions, which is without an owner. A year or two ago there was a family council in that city of a hundred claimants from America, Australia and other places, but it is still in Chancery. This is the core, or kernel, round which the plot develops itself. I think, upon perusal, that you would find it a striking book, and full of original ideas.

He offered Tinsley the whole of the first edition for nothing in consideration of his losses on *Restless Human Hearts*. However both publisher and author lost money on the three novels taken together. *World's End* was given a better reception by reviewers than its predecessors, and, as we have seen, Tinsley believed that if it had been the first to appear Jefferies would have made his way at once as a novelist. It was certainly more qualified to succeed with the Victorian reading public, having a more sustained animation throughout, a more vigorous plot, much less digression, exposition or fastidious analysis betraying the self-conscious presence of the author, and, as in the 'Lucca' affair, a real power to suspend the reader's awareness of the author and of himself. But this is to

anticipate. For the present we can let it stand that the terms “striking” and “original” are not entirely inappropriate, and that the novel was not done justice at the time, if indeed it has been since.

## 2. *The Denny Morn*

One further event belongs to a consideration of the early fiction. In 1878 Jefferies offered Tinsley a version of *The Denny Morn*. Excepting *Greene Ferne Farm* (which began serialisation in *Time* the following year, and is closely akin in spirit to *The Gamekeeper at Home* and other purely country books) this was his last attempt to get a novel published before 1884, when Bentley offered him £50 for the final version of *The Denny Morn*. We have seen that the “leading idea” of ‘Only a Girl’ was “the delineation of a girl entirely unconventional, entirely unfettered by precedent, and in sentiment always true to herself”. We have seen Jefferies’ treatment of the early heroines progressing from sensationalism (with its emphasis on the sinister and seductive) to a disinterested celebration of physical beauty in woman. The pages of Jefferies’ extant notebooks reveal the genesis of *The Denny Morn* between the versions of ’78 and ’84, and so enable us to complete this illustration of the continuity of development between the early and the late fiction. The notion of a break, which led Victorian critics to write off the early novels and class the late ones with the country books and essays—only marred by a misguided attempt at fiction—has an illusory confirmation in Jefferies’ willingness to disclaim the term “novel” as applied to the late books, and substitute terms like “scenes”, “fable” or “romance”. This shows no more, of course, than that he abandoned the ambition (apparent from internal and external evidence) to become known as a novelist, whether or not a novelist of country life. He certainly never abandoned the use of fictional media. Character and even plot, and the illusion of real life continuing over a period of time, for him were

indispensible for full expression. By full expression is not meant the emotional outpouring of *The Story of My Heart*, but wholeness of expression that combines modes of interpreting experience as diverse as those represented by the essays in *The Livestock Journal*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Nature Near London*, *Hodge and His Masters*, and *The Toilers of the Field*; such essays as ‘Sunlight in a London Square’ or ‘Notes on Landscape Painting’, as well as the questioning and aspiring fervour of *The Story*. It is in the early novels that Jefferies first explores the possibilities of fiction and that we first find the projection into full expression of opposite sides of his nature. At the heart of this process is the coming together of the life of ideas and the life of observation, his “saturation... with Greek thought” mentioned in a letter on *Amaryllis*<sup>15</sup> and an increasingly rich apprehension of the rural environment and the bitter-sweet quality of human drama. I have given instances in late and early fiction of characters deriving their intensity from both sources; the leading idea of *The Denny Morn* is another instance, the development of which can be traced in the pages of the notebooks.

The first version of *The Denny Morn* has not come to light, but we can conjecture, from hints in the notebooks that it continued sensational elements both in character and plot. He soon began to think of re-writing the book, and the first consideration was to remove these elements and simplify the story, making it more in the order of *Greene Ferne Farm* and the books of *The Gamekeeper at Home* series, chronicling the delights of country life. Thus in February 1878 he wrote:

Should not be more than three or at most four characters and entirely country, entirely pleasant as apart from revolting.

*Greene Ferne Farm* has a fair number of characters but is “entirely country” and if not “entirely pleasant” a mood of

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<sup>15</sup> Letter to Bentley, 17 May 1886. BL Add.MS.58822. vol. XX.

freshness, or inner hope and joy, pervades it even while it touches on agricultural depression and rural discontent, industrial squalor and the traditional tyranny of the countryside represented by old Andrew Fisher. Even the “relapse into barbarism” by which the bitterness between Valentine and Geoffrey is worked out is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the book. It should be placed with the mature novels, for although it sometimes shares the fault of stilted dialogue with the early novels it has qualities with which they have little to compare. The rhythm of the prose carries a subtle force; there is a depth of metaphorical suggestiveness in the descriptive detail, and the scenes are alive with mood and significance. The subordination of narrative plot to a series of scenes or pictures, richly worked and developing in contrasts, anticipates *Amaryllis* and *The Deny Morn*. Plot, of course, came to have a vital function in the latter, but at this early stage that novel was conceived more on the lines of *Greene Ferne Farm*, a rural idyll, only centring around a wonderful heroine, a natural country girl and also an embodiment of ideal womanhood. Two more early notes illustrate this: March 1878: “‘Atalanta’. Take a classic name: heroine is so interesting as to be more interesting than plot.” May ’78: “If re-write D, Morn, excise all evil characters, make all sweet and pleasant.”

*The Deny Morn* of course evolved beyond the stage of a rural idyll. This does not mean that Jefferies lost his inner buoyancy or belief in the regenerative power of nature, but rather that it became more urgent and practical. *Greene Ferne Farm* is a much lighter work for all its serious asides. Even the powerful picture of the rural tyrant lacks many of the subtleties of the portrayal of Godwin, the bailiff in *The Deny Morn*. There is something conventional and contrived about the heroine—a Victorian picture of womanhood, and a note of Tory patronage towards the labourers. It is less these faults in themselves than that they exist without spoiling the charm of the book that marks the significant difference.

The re-writing of *The Denny Morn* was put aside between 1878 and 1882, a period in which Jefferies was writing his series of country books, *Wood Magic* and *Bevis*, all of which draw on his childhood and youthful experiences at Coate, and in which, generally speaking, the fictional element is subordinate to the descriptive and autobiographical. Two isolated notes during this period, however, deserve quotation. Highly condensed though they are they reveal how far beyond the sensational or conventional the heroine has developed in Jefferies' mind; how she embodies, intensely, a whole range of thought and feeling, and her creative centrality in the novel:

Dec. 1880 "First conceive the character then devote every line and every page to work it out. The tone too, and setting, lurid for such to correspond. The description of one character—Nature—live for ever; as Clytemnestra. The nature, simply a woman, flesh and blood. Really a woman. Paint and picture and artistic ideas about Nature."

Oct. '81. "Light but glowing colour, all to show one woman, not delicate like Catherine, but from intense nature. Loves all men and all men love her. Yet though so loving, kind and good, not goody but generous. Brings her into contact with more men whom she hankers for in the same way."

During 1883 up to November 24<sup>th</sup> when he records its completion the notebooks are increasingly preoccupied with the development of *The Denny Morn*. In November or December 1882 appears the first sketch of a revised plot, parts of which, one imagines, remain over from the earlier version. It consists of three main characters, the heroine, who loves a man as "romantic as herself", but "poor". and "the rich intruder", favoured by the girl's parents. The father, like Goring and Iden, is "the Planter and Preserver", but she is at odds with her parents—"quite outside and beyond them." As in the final version she is bound beneath the hooves of a stallion by the jealous rival. The central situation has an interesting precedent in *Restless Human Hearts* where Heloise, a faun-like creature whose religion "had no existence apart from

colour and light and joy", lives with her father, the peaceful and retired Pierce Lestrangle, also a "Planter and Preserver". "Rich intruders" arrive in the forms of the exotic Carlotta, Pierce's daughter by his first wife, her husband, a powerful banker and speculator, and her secret lover Louis Lord Fontenoy. The latter is a callous cynic who is momentarily fascinated by Heloise. He marries her and takes her away, treating her with moral, and in the end physical brutality. Louis is a melodramatic villain and such as Jefferies may well have been referring to when he decided to excise evil characters from *The Deny Morn*. He was not referring to the opening chapters of *Restless Human Hearts* when he made the following Laurentian note (June '78) but it is a fair comment on them: "Vile wretch, injured angel. Every one of the applauding males wishes he had the opportunity of injure the angel."

The conception of Felise, of course, precluded sentimentality, but it is easy to see that if this first idea of a plot had been followed the foil to her intensely loving and aspiring nature would have been simply parental opposition, prejudice and poverty, rather as the sensitive and talented Aymer Malet is at odds with the sheep and turnip mentality of his uncle, and the course jeers of the rustics at *World's End*. The following note suggests such an arrangement: "Her personification of flower and leaf and tree. A poem of love. A contrast the roughness and coarseness of the rest of the world around, She is a Goddess of Nature." The replacement of the "rich intruder" by Godwin—the ruthless agent of seigniorial tyranny—as the jealous rival to Felise's love, immensely enlarges the scope of the novel, bringing Felise into conflict with a nature as strong in negative values as her own is in positive, and which, in its insentience (the "faculty of no imagination" which makes him impervious alike to human appeal and the humanising influence of nature) reflects the harshness and oppression of the system he serves. The story becomes not a simple one of a noble girl, surrounded by

grumbling rustics but conquering poverty, suspicion and jealousy by the force of her love—not simply that, but Felise’s presence and action in the novel is, as it were, a constant source of questioning, of demanding why there should be hardship and degradation in the midst of nature’s abundance, and why this repellent system constituted by the squire, his bailiff and his wife, folly in league with cruelty and hypocrisy—should rule the land. This aspect of *The Deny Morn* has antecedents of another kind with the early fiction.

### 3. ‘The True Tale of the Wiltshire Labourer’, and ‘John Smith’s Shanty’

In November 1872 Jefferies wrote a series of letters to *The Times*<sup>16</sup> describing the Wiltshire labourer, his physique, habits, fare, clothing, housing and wages, and the various benevolent schemes inaugurated by the conscientious clergy and landlords for the betterment of his condition: “I can confidently say that there is no class of persons in rural England who receive so many attentions and benefits from their superiors as the agricultural labourers.” Particularly he praised the noble clergy of the land who make the moral and physical welfare of the peasantry a special object of their solicitude in providing them with allotments (on condition of sobriety and church attendance), and have been silently working on the labourer’s behalf long before the arrival of his false friend, the upstart trade union agitator. At this time Jefferies was working for the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, and wrote for that paper ‘The True Tale of a Wiltshire Labourer’<sup>17</sup>—a grim tale of rural hardship and brutality which gives a less reassuring account of

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<sup>16</sup> Letters published in *The Times* on 14, 23 and 27 November 1872. Reprinted in *The Toilers of the Field*, ed. C.J. Longman, London, Longmans, 1892.

<sup>17</sup> MS. in BL, [c.1870] Published in *The Toilers of the Field*, ed. C.J. Longman, London, Longmans, 1892.

the life of the field labourer. It opens on the most joyful day of the year for the labourer, when the last pitches of hay are being flung up onto the wagon and the harvesters making their way to the feast in the farmhouse kitchen. Madge is a lissom nut-brown maid with sloe-black mischievous eyes, and Absalom her burly jealous lover. Their love takes no account of the grosser aspects of the harvest feast and they are married soon after. The ceremony occasions a succession of drinking bouts, and it is now that troubles begin. After a brawl Absalom's name is given to the Rev. J. Horton and he loses his allotment. Long hours and heavy work make him poor company for his lively wife, who seeks the society of a friendly gipsy tinker. The officious gossips of the neighbourhood find more in this than there really is, and a dull resentment smoulders in Absalom's mind. He says nothing but resorts more to the public house. "One cold, frosty, but beautiful moonlit night" Absalom returns tired but hungry from work to find his wife out. When she at last returns he knocks her senseless with a blow from his fist, and next morning leaves her.

The girl goes back to her mother, who drily announces that she is going to die, and hands over her life's savings—enough to provide for her funeral with a sovereign over for her destitute daughter. "I be goin' to die", repeated the old woman in the same calm, hard tone. A life of incessant labour had crushed all sentiment out of her—except superstition—and she faced the hard facts of existence without emotion." Madge, with child and unable to get work, returns to her cottage. She is visited by the bullying farmer who extorts 17/6 rent arrears. He is followed shortly after by his son, who offers her 6d. for her prostitution. At last the tinker brings her plight to the notice of the vicar's wife, who finds her half-starved, and without a stick or crust in the house. The baby is still-born, and Madge dies the same night—"totally worn out at nineteen."

The tale is written in a style as bleak as the matter it relates, and a handful only of descriptive details remind us of the changing glory and indifference of the surrounding countryside. This and the other stories to be considered here should properly be taken along with the whole body of Jefferies' socio-economic commentary on country life. The fictional vehicle is no more than an effective method of presenting facts and observations, and could be used equally well to throw the farmer's or landlord's predicament into relief. In fact looking at country society all round it was difficult to see who was to blame. This is the point of a second tale on the same lines—a more comprehensive and disinterested chronicle of the labourer's troubles called 'John Smith's Shanty' (N<sup>5</sup>) and published in *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1874.<sup>18</sup>

The description of the labourer, a man of massive strength, without grace and without vigour, is one of Jefferies' best, in its boldness of outline and concrete detail:

The continuous outdoor labour, the beating of innumerable storms, and the hard, coarse fare, had dried up all the original moisture of the hand, till it was rough, firm, and cracked or chapped like a piece of wood exposed to the sun and weather. The natural oil of the skin which gives to the hand its natural suppleness and delicate sense of touch, was gone like the sap in the tree he was felling, for it was early winter.

Prompted by an obscure instinct of sociability he takes his meal, a slice of cheese and a "hunch" of bread, by the roadside, where he is joined by an elderly labourer allotted the task of "ditchin", which explains why his rheumatic limbs are coated half way up with black slime. He discourses at great length on his many ills: the miasmal condition of his cottage, built on the edge of a stagnant pool (to keep the record

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<sup>18</sup> *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1874. Reprinted in *The Toilers of the Field*, ed. C.J. Longman, London, Longmans, 1892.

straight Smith points out that he built it himself and refuses to quit), the problem of bringing up nineteen children on 12s. a week, and he remembered a time when it was 6s., and his preference for the poor law system of those early days. He gives his own version of poaching and drunkenness incidents, which meant six weeks in jail, and loss of his allotment, and he has a refreshing attitude to the charitable ministrations of the first ladies of the village, a descriptive detail which calls to mind *The Derry Morn* rather than the letters to *The Times*:

He minded when that sharp old Miss \_\_\_\_ was always coming round with tracts and blankets, like taking some straw to a lot of pigs, and lecturing his 'missis' about economy. What a fuss she made, and scolded his wife as if she was a thief for having that fifteenth boy! His 'missis' turned round on her at last and said, lor miss, that's all the pleasure me and my old man's got.

This long harangue produces in Smith (although he knows the other's cantankerous disposition and addiction to drink and poaching) the same dull fire of resentment that arose in Absolom, and points forward to 'The Field-Play'. On Jefferies' part there is no animus, or special pleading, but at once more sympathy and insight:

Thought without method and without logical sequence is apt to press heavily on the uneducated mind. It was then that the reflection left a sensation of weight and discomfort on Smith.

The great evil of these things is that a fellow feeling will arise with the wrong doer, till the original distinction between right and wrong is lost.

Smith returns to his inhospitable cottage, his hungry family and shrewish wife who berates him for drinking away his children's livelihood. This meagre, flat-chested, square shouldered creature had once been, we are told, "a plump laughing girl of sloe-black eyes and nut brown complexion." To escape her stinging tongue he resorts to the public house, so perpetuating the vicious circle. Here at any rate his mind and heart can escape in congenial company before relapsing into the blissful oblivion of drunken sleep.

The story ends with an assault upon his wife and his subsequent conviction. But he stands up with dignity before the bench, which is not altogether ill-disposed towards him, and gives a manly account, eloquent in its provincialism, of the sufferings of his class. His imprisonment means that his wife and children are forced to go to the workhouse, where his daughter is already confined with an illegitimate child. "This is no fiction", Jefferies concludes, "but an uncompromising picture of things as they are. Who is to blame for them?"

The intention, then, of 'John Smith's Shanty' is a truthful and practical presentation of the field labourer's life with its characteristic hardships, and there is no attempt to load the issue or draw conclusions. The farmer, we are told, is himself in strait circumstances and cannot afford higher wages. There is some sympathy and understanding among the magistrates, and some pride and manhood in the labourer. But if the question "Who is to blame" is not intended to direct criticism to any one class, neither is it to question the established order of things—whatever conclusions readers may draw for themselves. Jefferies had indeed begun to question some of the assumptions which supported the established system. For example in *Restless Human Hearts* he attacks the notions that labour confers dignity and that wealth is the exclusive reward for industry, but from the standpoint of their obvious hypocrisy when workhouses were full of people whom a lifetime's toil had not enriched in either sense. The later passionate denunciation of enforced toil which after centuries of oppression had brought about not the least amelioration of the human lot (see for example *The Story of My Heart*, and 'St. Guido' in *The Open Air* (1884) has its source in an increasing richness of sensory and spiritual experience: the immediate awareness of nature's munificence, and the vivid imagination that would seem to go back in time to the earliest inhabitants of the Earth, and to realise the sum of human misery that had

filled the intervening ages. The Earth, he writes in *The Story*, produces enough and more than enough for man's needs:

Why then have we not enough? Why do people die of starvation, or lead a miserable existence on the verge of it? Why have millions upon millions to toil from morning to evening, just to gain a mere crust of bread? Because of the absolute lack of organisation, by which such labour should produce its effect, the absolute lack of distribution, the absolute lack of even the idea that such things are possible.

Felise of *The Deny Morn*, I have suggested elsewhere, embodies Jefferies' deepest experience of nature, and because of what she essentially is, as well as by her role in the plot, brings to bear the same pressure of radical criticism against inequality and inhumanity in country rule. That this association was a conscious part of Jefferies' intention in *The Deny Morn* is suggested by a short note of August '83: "Felise. Why? Why not organise and share?"

John Smith's Shanty' and *The Story of My Heart* represent the furthest development of limited types of expression, which the medium of fiction, once he had developed his characteristic use of it, enabled him to bring together in 'The Field-Play' and *The Deny Morn*. *The Story* is open to many kinds of objection; its truth lies in the quality of its emotion. 'John Smith's Shanty' is strongly drawn and purposeful, but static, lacking the quickening fire of urgent sympathy, aspiration, and protest.

#### 4. 'The Midsummer Hum', and 'Gaudy as a Garden'

Two more stories about agricultural labourers, 'The Midsummer Hum' and 'Gaudy as a Garden', appeared in *The Graphic* in July and August 1876. Whereas in 'The True Tale' and 'John Smith's Shanty' we have realistic fiction based on fact and observation, here, as in the earliest tales in the *North Wilts Herald*, the chief interest is the story itself, which aims at being neat, pleasing and picturesque. The countryside and the manners of the rustics are brought in only as background, in a way that recalls the phraseology of the letters to Tinsley

already quoted: "I have worked in the traditions of Wilts" and "The scenery is a description of that found in this county". Stylised rhapsodising like the following, for example, strikes a false and untypical note beside the precise and impassioned description of the countryside for which Jefferies is well known:

The joyous beauty of early June, like the rich glow on the face of a happy girl of seventeen, filled the meadows, the hedgerows and coppices with a cheery brightness, and called forth loud carolling of the 'fowls of the air', singing praises to their lord, the Sun.

Similarly "the traditions of Wilts": proverbs, oddities of speech and manners etc. are so packed into every paragraph as to make the speech of the rustics unnatural and parodic. For example from "The Midsummer Hum":

'Evenin' sir, a fine hum sir,' said the village mason; 'Pegs be main fond of bricks an' mortar. Mr. Kimmer's pushed the wall down, y'see, all cock-a-heap (piled up). Eez, this be Luver's Lane. Mebbe you come into these parts to larn about the labourers? I war a ploughboy. Measter druv I out o' bed one mornin' into the frosty grass without shoes nor stockings. Aw, you be in a hurry, I think I knows yer gaame.'

Two of the main characters of both these stories are slighter sketches of types we are already familiar with: young John and Absalom Brown being jealous, inarticulate but manly labourers of ungainly strength, while Molly Green and Lucy Locket are both pretty, mischievous country girls, with the usual nut-brown complexion and sloe-black eyes. Molly is seen "tripping daintily by, just showing a pretty peeping foot and ankle". She is short and plump with pouting scarlet lips—a hasty sketch perhaps for Polly Shaw of *The Deny Morn*. Lucy has "a rosy mouth, ever ready to smile, and hair of the true chestnut colour—the hue of the horse chestnut when just shelled from its prickly covering." "A laughing, thoughtless, impulsive creature, full of life, joyous as the sunshine—like the young June with its opening roses." We can detect here the presence

of an element other than the picturesque, an appreciation of the life that animates the girl, anticipating the heroine of 'The Field-Play'. This type figures again in *Greene Ferne Farm* as the dead mistress of Andrew Fisher. Like Madge of 'The True Tale' and Dolly of 'The Field-Play' she has been reduced from joyous girlhood to the blighted misery of a drudge, and the whole account of Fisher's past, a grim record of unchecked cruelty, lust and injustice in the countryside, links 'The True Tale' with *The Denny Morn*. In the stories all is prettiness and local colour, which, allied with class assumptions, cancel the possibilities suggested by the introduction of a third character, an intruder from the ruling class who supplants the young labourer in the girl's favour. 'Gaudy as a Garden' turns on the disclosure that Molly is simply using "Measter Willum", the farmer's son, as a cover for poaching, secretly remaining true to her jealous swain. The good-natured farmer catches them setting wires and promises Molly a husband if she will let his hares bide. Master William frankly owns up like a gentleman and congratulates young Jack; his father providing Jack with a cottage and job as head carter. Molly is cured of poaching.

In 'The Midsummer Hum' Lucy returns to Absalom when she realises that her flirtation with Mr. Martin, a guest of the squire, is driving Absalom to drink:

Mr. Martin, wild as he was, had a gentleman's instinct, and seeing her grief was real, had sense enough to regret his folly, and left then together. With the quick generosity of youth he wished to make amends, and not knowing what to do he called at Wick Farm, and entered into conversation with Old Mr. Kimmer on the agricultural labour question.

Under pretence of such an interest he provides handsomely (in terms of a labourer's needs and expectations) for the couple about to be married and set up home. In this patronising gesture, approved of here, as in his primly immaculate appearance in expensive summertime clothing,

combined with awkwardness in wielding a rake, he resembles the bicycle farmer satirised in *Hodge and His Masters*.

Both stories take place in harvest time—a time when the country people’s consciousness of tradition and community was at its height—and they are charming enough within their terms of reference. But the writing of them was, one imagines, altogether too simple and exercise to have had any real significant effect of Jefferies’ development, and they show that in the mid 1870’s he thought little of the possibilities of purely rural fiction. Not reprinted in his lifetime and very likely unknown to his Victorian critics, they give us some idea of how dissatisfying would have been the results of his confining himself from the outset, as one and all regret that he did not, to the country life of Coate. Lastly the two stories illustrate the transition from the early chronicling of the daily lives and common hardships of those who toil in the fields, to the later revision of this area of perception and sympathy in the light of a deeper communion with nature—a communion always precise in detail, un-Wordsworthian in its application to social and practical matters, and un-pantheistic in its distinction between the warmth generated by the flow of human emotions, and nature’s austere otherness and indifference to life. (See for example ‘Hours of Spring’ in *Field and Hedgerow*, (1889).

Most noticeably absent from these early rural tales are the modulations in tone imparted by a deeper sympathy and insight to his mature expression—the “sympathy and hopes with the light of the future” in the preface to *Round About a Great Estate* (1880), which he wishes to come from nature; the moving contrast of human misery with the full potential of nature and human nature (as in ‘Golden Brown’,<sup>19</sup> or ‘Hours of Spring’<sup>20</sup>), the boldly imaginative and almost majestic

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<sup>19</sup> In *The Open Air*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1885.

<sup>20</sup> In *Field and Hedgerow*, edited by Mrs. Jefferies. London, Longmans, 1889.

simplicity of the last essays on the land and its problems: 'After the Country Franchise',<sup>21</sup> 'The Wiltshire Labourer',<sup>22</sup> 'The Idle Earth',<sup>23</sup> a wider range of irony from the slyly mocking 'Primrose Gold in Our Village'<sup>24</sup> to the bitterly caustic 'Shooting Poachers',<sup>25</sup> and 'Hedgerow Sportsmen',<sup>26</sup> and above all the spirit of radical protest which runs through the later essays, reaching a climax in the scoffing indignation and Old Testament vehemence of denunciation in 'Thoughts on the Labour Question'<sup>27</sup>—which marks the extreme left of Jefferies' thought. Such intensities of thought and feeling went to the making of *The Denny Morn*, and it may not be immediately obvious that strong personal convictions with a political application are compatible with the creation of complex works of fiction. Fiction has been used often enough as a vehicle for reforming propaganda, especially by the sensation novelists in whom Jefferies was well read. Their method was to elaborate a situation which would shock weaker susceptibilities by appearing to undermine some established institution, notably marriage, where the procedure would be to make wives shrewish and hard of heart, and mistresses noble and generous. Jefferies was probably influenced by such fiction in so far as he introduced the marriage question into *Restless Human Hearts*, but even here there is no tendentiousness or special pleading in the chapters dealing with Georgiana's social experiment, Neville's reluctant acquiescence, their partial estrangement and final conventional marriage; and the reason is clearly his absorbing interest in two congenial characters, allowing them to act according to their

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<sup>21</sup> In *The Hills and the Vale*, edited by Edward Thomas, London, Duckworth, 1909.

<sup>22</sup> In *The Hills and the Vale*, edited by Edward Thomas, London, Duckworth, 1909.

<sup>23</sup> In *The Hills and the Vale*, edited by Edward Thomas, London, Duckworth, 1909.

<sup>24</sup> In *Field and Farm*, edited by S.J. Looker, London, Phoenix House, 1957.

<sup>25</sup> In *Chronicles of the Hedges*, edited by S.J. Looker, London, Phoenix House, 1948.

<sup>26</sup> In *Chronicles of the Hedges*, edited by S.J. Looker, London, Phoenix House, 1948.

<sup>27</sup> In *Field and Farm*, edited by S.J. Looker, London, Phoenix House, 1957.

natures and needs. Their views and ideas are measured against what they are. The central characters of the later novels—Iden, Felise and Felix Aquilla—embody ideas and ideals in this way; they are never mere mouthpieces. Their relation to Jefferies' recurrent thought processes is such as to make them more real and larger than life. It is impossible to separate his treatment of character from his whole vision and testament, a spirit of protest and radical views which developed in conjunction with his close observation of, and ardent response to, nature and humanity.

## 5. The Critics

Reviews of Jefferies' three early novels were for the most part dismissive and derisive, and even after his country books and essays brought him fame they were disregarded, while the later novels were held in some esteem only for the qualities they shared with his non-fiction. This trend was firmly established by the first biography that appeared the year after his death. The lavish praise bestowed by Walter Besant in his *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* did not extend to the novels, early or late:

As regards this, his earliest work of fiction, there is one remarkable fact, quite without precedent in the history of literature—it is that the book [*The Scarlet Shawl*] affords not the slightest indication of genius, insight, description, or dramatic power, especially of the kind with which he was destined to make his name... Consider again. he never was a novelist, he never could be one.

These pronouncements have been echoed with remarkable frequency:

“It is therefore certain that his importance for posterity will dwindle, if it has not already dwindled, to that given by a bundle of descriptive sketches.” George Saintsbury, 1890.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> George Saintsbury. *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature*. London, Macmillan, 1890.

"He was a reporter of genius, and he never got beyond reporting. Mr. Besant has the vitalising imagination which Jefferies lacked." W.E. Henley, 1890.<sup>29</sup>

The early novels "show no promise whatever of literary or intellectual ability"... "In brief he was an essayist and not a novelist at all". Henry S. Salt, 1894.<sup>30</sup>

"Has anyone been able to write with free and genuine appreciation of even the late novels?" Grace Toplis, 1896.<sup>31</sup>

"... such crude stuff as *The Scarlet Shawl*". Arthur Rickett, 1906.<sup>32</sup>

"Perhaps Jefferies never realised he was not a novelist", Holbrook Jackson, 1912.<sup>33</sup>

"... a long list of utterly worthless Scarlet Shawls and the like." Norman Foerster, 1913.<sup>34</sup>

"... weary years spent in writing rubbishy novels", of the early, and of the late: "...such methods are the resort of writers in whom the desire to tell tales is not equalled by their imagination or grip of narrative form... these are not novels..." Reginald Arkell, 1933.<sup>35</sup>

"It was hardly surprising that they were complete failures." David Ascoli 1948.<sup>36</sup>

"Few writers of average ability could have constructed such incompetent effigies of fiction" Malcolm Elwin, 1948.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> W.E. Henley. *Views and Reviews*. London, David Nutt, 1890.

<sup>30</sup> Henry S. Salt. *Richard Jefferies: a Study*. London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1894.

<sup>31</sup> Grace Toplis, ed. *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*. (3)

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Rickett. *The Vagabond in Literature*. London, Dent, 1906.

<sup>33</sup> Holbrook Jackson. *All Manner of Folk*. London, Grant Richards, 1912.

<sup>34</sup> Norman Foerster. 'The Vogue of Richard Jefferies'. In *PMLA of America*, December 1913.

<sup>35</sup> Reginald Arkell. *Richard Jefferies*. London, Rich and Cowan, 1933.

<sup>36</sup> David Ascoli. Introduction to *The Gamekeeper at Home and The Amateur Poacher*. OUP, 1948.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Elwin. *The Essential Richard Jefferies*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1948.

Perhaps it's not altogether surprising that the only Victorian to give Jefferies' fiction a sympathetic reading was a woman critic, Caroline A Foley, 1891.<sup>38</sup> Of the others one wonders how many had actually read the early novels. They were printed in small numbers, mostly swallowed up by the circulating libraries, and very few copies were available. Some trouble or expense, or a trip to the British Library, would have been necessary. However a recent writer, William J. Hyde,<sup>39</sup> did make some acquaintance with the texts, but arrives at the same conclusions, and usefully summarises the aspects of Jefferies' novels that have given offence:

A perusal such as the author has made of the early novels, *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Restless Human Hearts*, is certain to leave the impression, not only that these are bad novels, but that Jefferies was a hopelessly bad writer of novels. Here was a novelist who could not tell a story, one who had little depth of insight, and who began by selecting characters from the upper strata of society with which he must have been totally unfamiliar. What is more even for an age that was accustomed to having the writer speak directly to the reader during occasional interruptions of the plot, Jefferies' novels must have been annoying with their continual first person interruptions. The focus is not on the story but on the author, and in the early works the author had nothing important to say.

As for the upper strata characters of the early novels, they were not that much higher than the wealthy Sydenham villa folk with whom Jefferies spent many years of his childhood. In the letters to publishers cited above he insists his characters are from life, and it is quite possible he had encountered some of the social types he depicts in them. Moreover it was by no means uncommon for writers not of this class to adopt the convention of ennobling their leading roles. Jefferies' named

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<sup>38</sup> Caroline A. Foley. 'Women in the Works of Richard Jefferies' *Scots Magazine*, February 1891.

<sup>39</sup> William J. Hyde. 'Richard Jefferies and the Naturalistic Peasant'. *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, December 1956.

models, Wilkie Collins, Mary Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood are examples, as of course is the early Hardy. And it was not impossible for a wool merchant's son from Stratford-on-Avon to write convincingly of kings and noble dames. Against this chorus of dissent a countervailing strain of interpretation and appreciation arose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and of this I shall speak later. But one among the detractors deserves further consideration. Salt's *Richard Jefferies: A Study*<sup>30</sup> is a perceptive and intelligent full length work based on clearly stated criteria. As noted above he does begin at Besant's position:

His instinct was that of a naturalist who observes and moralises rather than that of a novelist who penetrates and interprets; and consequently his rustic characters, though strongly and clearly drawn, do not live, as, for example, those of Thomas Hardy live... Men and animals are alike mere figures in his landscape.

Humanity, we have to insist, was not only at the centre of the picture, but in the sense that Jefferies felt the reality of nature to consist in the infusion of our human perception of it, and nature itself a reality quite other than us, constituted the whole of its interest. Salt says as much in his section on Jefferies 'As Thinker':

His natural religion may be summed up in his own words: 'I believe in the human being, mind and form, flesh and soul.

and on Jefferies 'As Writer':

despite the outer calmness of the language, no sympathetic reader... will overlook the intensity of the human interest that is dominant throughout.

Salt's argument, however—and it is the Victorian argument at its best, attempts to reconcile his critique of Jefferies "lifeless" characterisation with his view of the intense human interest of his work as a whole: "He could sympathise profoundly with human nature in general, but not with the individual man; uncommunicative himself, he was incapable of divining and

portraying the emotions of others", and hence "he was quite unable to give any vivid dramatic life to his stories."

Impercipience and externality in dealing with individuals and at the same time a general sympathy for the human lot may be a viable paradox, but it implies a limiting criticism of the "general sympathy", a criticism which Victorian commentators suggested, unconsciously perhaps, when they compared Jefferies' ardour and indignation with Shelley's or Wordsworth's. As an account of Jefferies' mature work it is scarcely tenable, whatever aspect of that work we choose to consider. His deepest searching into the truth of the human condition (mind in relation to matter, time, nature and "the beyond" in the terms of the last notebooks) has behind it a personal urgency, a sense of immediate need that makes it not remote from the other source of his radical tendencies—the practical fact-finding study of Wiltshire agricultural conditions. He did not think of humanity simply in broad philosophical terms, or simply as socio-economic units, least of all as figures in a landscape. He entered into the complex life and relationships of individuals. If the interest of the characters, and not only the chief characters, of the late novels, and many from the early ones, does not lie in the sense we are given of the potentialities of their individual natures, the implications of their inner life—then it is impossible to imagine what the point of interest can be, or how it should be described. If the relationships between Mr. and Mrs. Iden, Felix and Oliver, Felise, Martial and Godwin, Amaryllis and her grandfather, and many more are without dramatic interest and their treatment without dramatic power, again we are at a loss to conceive the nature and manifestation of such qualities, or any fundamental distinction between Jefferies' characters and Hardy's, other than the fact that the latter are thrown into more complicated, protracted and melodramatic situations.

Jefferies' possession of a dramatic impulse is evidenced by the fact that from the outset of his career not a year went by without a fresh attempt to express himself in a story or fiction of some kind.<sup>(N<sup>6</sup>)</sup> With the possession of the vision and art of his maturity the necessity to trace human life, love and conflict to their most intimate springs in the human psyche became complete, and the means were at hand—to create the artistic illusion of life as it is lived, and to apprehend the quality of individual natures, of relationships and events. This is in no way altered or limited by the techniques he employed, in the unconventionality of which, one suspects, lay the true source of the Victorian objection, for example his use of a series of closely studied scenes or “word pictures” to develop story and theme, and similar to the essays in their organisation; the interruption of narrative plot by frequent digressions, and his expository style, “observing and moralising”, in general. *The Life of the Fields*, *The Open Air*, and *Field and Hedgerow* are as rich in the characteristic manner and matter of Jefferies mature years as the late novels, but they are by no means their equivalents. The introduction of personal reflections and observations may in a given case damage the artistic unity of the whole, in another it may enable the theme to be developed at another level: digressions are not objectionable in themselves. As for the expository style, Edward Garnett wrote in his admirable introduction to *Amaryllis at the Fair* (Duckworth 1904 edition)—the first account of Jefferies as novelist to challenge Victorian assumptions:

His commentary is a medium by which he lives with his characters. The author's imagination, memory, and instinctive perception are all working together.

The narrative style may be close to exposition, but exposition that verges on the poetic in complexity and variety of effect.

## 6. Characterisation in *The Scarlet Shawl*

Jefferies makes it clear in his early letters to publishers cited above that he is interested in character rather than events. I take characterisation as a leading topic for a discussion of Jefferies' first published novel because it brings under review all of what seem to be the best and most promising aspects of the book. On the other hand third-rate and derivative work falls under the headings of more or less separable components and supporting effects of the novel form. Of course the very fact that *The Scarlet Shawl* can be broken down in this way has critical implications. For the present, however, I wish simply to state that the difficulties and potentials of Jefferies' handling of the novel, as they present themselves in his first attempt, relate to questions of characterisation—to the precise field of his interest in human personality and behaviour, the treatment and notation of his characters, his attempts to make them dramatic, the subjective /objective relationship of character and author—in short the whole value that the exercise of character creation can be seen to have. We are considering then, Jefferies' use of the novelist's primary resource, his most essential means of coming to terms with life as he finds it, so that we are keeping before us from the outset the idea of Jefferies as a potential novelist.

The opening pages of the novel abound in solecisms of all kinds, from grammatical and syntactical errors to obvious affectations in manner and approach. It is surprising that Jefferies could not have done better at the age of 26, and not surprising that the critics who progressed no further dismissed the novel as worthless. But they were wrong notwithstanding. For all its faults and falsities *The Scarlet Shawl* is a remarkable production, and certain passages are connected by a thread of finer artistic purpose, and show real promise in the light of

Jefferies' future development as a novelist. Even in the much offending first chapter there are genuine moments, significant in relation to what follows. We are introduced to two lovers, Nora and Percival. They quarrel and decide to separate. Percival, we are told:

... had a nervously sensitive organisation—savagely sanguine and barbarously vigorous. He never could screw himself sown quietly into kid-gloves and dress-coats. Not but that he was civilised on the surface—only you had not got to scratch the soil very deeply before you came to nature, and nature in tropical confusion.

The sheer boldness is distracting—the piling up of adverbs, the mixed metaphor, the pointless or perhaps unintentional substitution “confusion” for the expected “profusion”. But the impression is a strong one, as it is the description of Nora:

He [Percival] might have known, had he been a student of psychology, that the dreamy, abstract gaze, and the odd light in the eyes, were only concomitants of a singularly vigorous physical organisation—an almost excess of animal energy—a panther-like pose of intense but subdued force. The magnificent development of the figure—the lithe movements of the long graceful limbs—the striking style of walk, like one of the antique statues warmed into life—should have suggested this to his mind.

Nora then is a prototype of Jefferies' physically divine heroines. To see the whole constitution and personality revealed in the light of the eye, conventionally the index of the soul, is an unusual perception. Her beauty is her strength, and very much her own—not a complement to the masculine persona; and this is the point of seeing her as an antique statue warmed to life. A great deal is intended by making Nora and Percival perfect physical types. He later reflects:

Under the Olympian cultus ... man and woman reached the highest pitch of development, judging from the artistic point of view, which is the true one. Their limbs and bodies were as those of gods, compared with our angular skinny things.

This is an early adumbration of a recurrent theme in Jefferies (“... the same ideal that Phydias sculptured of man and woman

filled with a godlike sense of the violet fields of Greece, beautiful beyond thought, calm as my turtle-dove before the lurid lightening of the unknown.”<sup>40</sup> The perfectly proportioned body and the robust constitution are taken as outward signs of corresponding spiritual qualities—of an unusual capacity for life. Beauty is a kind of genius. Nora and Percival are “natural”—contemplation of what they are ultimately suggests the infinite mystery and potency of nature. Their energies spring from the very sources of life. Conversely unsympathetic characters in the book are seen as artificial. On one level or another their behaviour can be explained by habit-formed mental bias registered in physical defects. The quarrel of the two lovers is a tussle between equals, and so entirely trivial that we do not attach much importance to their subsequent separation. In the light of further developments we come to see them as representing central human qualities, and strong healthy passions they cannot fulfil except in each other.

After leaving Percival, Nora associates with a character called Herbert Spencer. Jefferies’ reasons for using the name of England’s pre-eminent philosopher and polymath of the day are obscure. At the time Spencer had come round to opposing female suffrage, having first advocated it, and supporting the landowners’ cause. Some obscure irony may have been intended as the Herbert Spencer here is a dissipated hunting and sailing barbarian, coarse but “genuine”, and a man of “bulldog courage”. At this stage we are unlikely to see Nora’s physical attractions as little more than the conventional demand for a sexually interesting heroine. In writing of the “conflict of her better and reckless natures”, her “guiltiness” and “dangerous love of admiration” Jefferies seems to be latching on to the sensation novel convention of introducing a mildly pornographic frisson under cover of a strict moral

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<sup>40</sup> ‘The Pageant of Summer’, *Life of the Fields*.

purpose. But her association with Spencer doesn't turn out quite like this. In the first place his appearance ("A large coarse face without a redeeming feature, and the skin all spotted with pimple blotches disagreeably suggestive of an incipient stage of the plague) rather limits his potential as a seducer. Nora's reasons for accompanying him are given in detail:

For the moment, though, the bold avowal sent a hot blush over her cheeks, and left a tingling in her ears, and there was a feeling of repulse in her innermost mind. She had received the first rude blow to her natural modesty. That is a species of metal which, no matter how soft at first, speedily gets hardened and tough by judicious hammering. Not that Herbert was judicious—on the contrary he laid on the flattery inch deep and with a strong hand, and yet perhaps a keener intellect would not have succeeded so well as he on account of his very frankness. If he had attempted to insinuate a compliment, she would have rejected it instantly. And all the time she knew he was doing it for his own interest—that he cared not a jot whether she suffered in consequence.

The man she instinctively felt was vulgarly selfish to the backbone. Yet she walked by his side with a smile, looking down in that peculiar way of hers, with the white eyelids trembling, and the eyebrows slightly elevated, apparently perfectly happy. She was looking at his legs cased in knickerbockers and stockings with stripes—true athletic style... What a pleasure there was in a strong man's arm, what confidence it gave!

This is involved, if nothing else, and full of unexpected twists. Nora despises Spencer for his selfishness, yet accepts his attentions as frank and genuine, and yet again is hurt by them through her modesty. She finds him physically repulsive, yet takes pleasure in his masculine strength. If his face is a disaster there is a hint of physical desire in her admiration of his legs. He, though "genuine", is acting selfishly in trying to manipulate her feelings towards himself, yet callously insensitive of those feelings. We see that Jefferies is straining after paradoxes and subtleties some way beyond his actual perception, but that there is a residuum of observed truth. In

the first paragraph the situation is at once penetrated and confused, but the second has a surer touch, with the relations between the two people set before us visually, with some ironic charm. We note too that Spencer is seen through Nora's eyes and judged by her reactions to him, and the ambivalence of these reactions are conveyed by shifts between an internal and external viewpoint. Jefferies has now moved away from the position of social critic and "student of psychology". He is concerned with what the relationship means to Nora herself, and not with the repercussions of her behaviour in a society with strict and complicated rules.

Nora's next assailant, Gerard Wootton, forms an effective contrast with Herbert Spencer. He is represented as an elderly cynic, a man of subtle means and ends. Jefferies both makes and mars the character in his uncertainties of purpose and technique. An occasional vivid metaphor makes him more real than paragraphs of wordy analysis: "Slowly, however, the cautious old trout rose at a tempting fly." whereas the rendering of his talk fails completely:

'The sea,' he said, 'for me, if one must do anything of that kind. Especially today, when there was something to keep one from yawning, and to silence the nigger minstrels. I went down to the beach and saw the regatta.'

The flatness of this betrays all Jefferies' lack of skill or experience for the portrayal of such a character, and we are given a further example of his inadequacy when he attributes his failure in attempting to trace the impression to its sources in speech and gesture, to a special elusiveness on the part of his subject:

But Gerard was a man accustomed to make himself felt in society. He did not engross the conversation by irregular scintillations of wit. It was impossible to note what he did say or do but somehow, go where he would, he always had a circle round him.

The air of precision fails to conceal Jefferies' remoteness from all the outward facts, circumstances and manifestations which,

duly noted and deployed, could make Gerard credible to us a social type. Such a handicap would seem to rule out the least possibility of Gerard being of interest to author or reader, but this is not the case. Jefferies again abandons the pose of experienced observer of manners and creates the character out of his own emotional reaction to an alien way of life. This gives free range to his own intuitions; he seizes on correlations and contradictions that might not be registered nearly so well by a notation of observed manners. For example:

He had the gift of music, as men of his taper fingers and suppressed sarcastic nature often have, as if in mockery of the emotions they call forth.

Jefferies makes more of the occasion when Nora and Gerald play the piano to each other than of their drawing room encounters. It is when they are least aware of each other as social presences that developments in their relationship take place:

She was dotingly fond of music—it always subdued her. It reached her better nature, deeply crusted over as it was in those days. It made her silent. But Gerard did not wish her to talk. He knew better; he preferred that she should sink into a reverie, even if it led her thoughts to another object. A chaste sadness was close to sympathy...

The psychology of the situation, as it emerges from these simple notations, is entirely probable, and compelling in itself. Instead of placing the author at a distance from his people his treatment here his treatment is more from the inside. He deals directly with their moods and motives, as they are and not as they would represent them to each other. At the same time there is awkwardness in the shifting point of view from Nora to Gerard. We are simply told what effect music had on Nora, and what effect Gerard wished it to have. We can never quite forget that their inner lives are the author's own construction, that he is their sole arbiter and free to manipulate them at will. We have little sense of a dramatic occasion that dictates their thinking and feeling as they do at any one moment.

There is now, however, a sincerity of purpose, even though it falls short of a complete dramatic realisation; and the same can be said of the passage in which Nora plays to Gerard:

Gerard sat and listened to her. He thought she was to some extent, showing off to dazzle him. She had forgotten him. She used to begin simply—often with an old, old hymn, the plaintive notes of which, recalling of memories, made Gerard feel very uncomfortable. Then to tunes, simple still, and almost as old—heart melodies, classic now. Then wilder stretches of opera airs, strangely mingled in one long piece. She was fast becoming unconscious of everything but the expression of herself in sound. If Gerard could only have written down and interpreted those hieroglyphics! She was pouring out her heart in music; playing, not from the mind, but unconscious cerebration. A strange, wild, inner nature was giving itself freedom—oozing out in waves of music, and floating in echoes high up in the Gothic arched recess of the roof. Oh Nora, how little you ever understood yourself—how little anybody ever understood you.

The piano scene is of special interest in itself, as the only extended passage in Jefferies' works on the subject of music (N<sup>7</sup>), and also as an early example of his interest in the workings of the subconscious mind. It is certainly arresting, and shows promise, but again we are simply told the thoughts of each character and dramatic immediacy is lacking. In recording a "strange, wild inner life" Jefferies himself doesn't get below the level of statement, and in Gerard's bafflement we almost see a confession of his own. Does he understand Nora?—is the question that hangs in the air. Is she an individual human being vivid in the author's imagination, if partly eluding his powers of delineation, or a convenient heading under which to group certain of his own experiences and ideas about them? The experience represented in this passage is credible and suggestive, but how far does it belong to Nora and enhance her human interest? I think such questions cannot be finally answered, either with reference to Nora or the other leading characters. Jefferies is not simply

describing personal states of mind without regard for his characters as imagined individuals, distinct from himself, nor does he fully succeed in projecting them as such, and so determining dramatically the states of mind associated with them.

The weakness of dramatic life in *The Scarlet Shawl* arises, then, from the ambiguity of the relations of the author to his characters, and this is partly the cause and partly the result of his failure to solve, or even appreciate, the technical problems of the kind of psychological study he is attempting. There are, however, some interesting exceptions to this general rule, one such in the first of the two musical passages. We are told that Nora's "chaste sadness" belongs to her better self, but then a new admirer arrives, a lively young lad whose company breaks the spell of Gerard's music and appeals to very different parts of her nature:

Nora brightened up immediately. Gerard, with ineffable contempt at her folly, watched her out of the corner of his eyes making the boy at home. He very soon dropped the angular reserve which he thought was proper in good society; it melted away under Nora's sunny smile of encouragement. A real downright boy is never so happy as when he can get a handsome lady to listen to his talk. She liked him from the first. He was bright and bold, and rather good looking—dark eyes and well-cut lips. He was just old enough to make the game sweet enough without being dangerous. And he had another charm. He was full of chivalry ... 'Oh you are a jolly girl', said George, emphatically, with admiration in his dark bold eyes. She smiled and ran her hands lightly through his tangled masses of dark-brown hair. Gerard saw this over his shoulder, and it gave him a twinge.

The special factor of George's youth makes it socially permissible for his and Nora's behaviour to be natural and spontaneous, and they are thus not subject to the rules of Gerard's game. Gerard's unsuccessful attempt to betray Nora into marriage takes up most of the first half of the novel. Nora's part remains a passive one while Gerard becomes increasingly confused and ineffectual. At first he expects to

derive amusement as well as fortune from carrying out his plan, but as we are told more and more about his personal weaknesses and anxieties the value of this as a choice piece of villainy rapidly declines. He is afraid of losing his self-control, of becoming emotionally involved, and so subject to profound mortification in the event of failure. Nora's musical outpourings disturb him because he is forced inwardly to acknowledge an existence in every way superior to his own, and his suppressed jealousy makes him more bitterly determined to possess her. Then he has doubts about his scheme of ingratiating himself by a hundred minute personal attentions—might he not be taken completely for granted?

This danger presents itself, we are told, in spite of his immense self-conceit. He becomes hesitant and irritable, losing not only self-control but self knowledge—believing himself to be the good and upright man he is in the eyes of Nora's foolish and sanctimonious aunt. He grows indignant at the thought of Nora becoming a prey to some fortune hunting adventurer!

Though all this is explained rather than enacted it is not without a genuine engagement with the challenges and possibilities of the novelist's craft. And we see Jefferies finding his own way of doing this—playing to his strengths. The plot elements are minimal, almost gratuitous, as when Gerard tries to harm Nora by intercepting the mail. And also gratuitous is the moment when he removes his wig and false teeth in going to bed, becoming physically as well as morally repulsive.

It is not difficult to see why reviewers and critics found in *The Scarlet Shawl* unmistakable evidence that fiction was not Jefferies' metier. The novel is immature, and at the same time conventional and unprofessional. If one of these negatives could have been reversed it might have been regarded as a promising first attempt. But looking back from the late novels we can see that the fault lies almost entirely with his

immaturity and inexperience, while some of the procedures he hits on were the right ones for him. In *The Deny Morn*, for example, Jefferies' sympathies extend to the simple-minded miller, the ruthless bailiff, and the foolish squire. They are complex, paradoxical, human personalities that can be penetrated only by alert, intuitive powers working on a store of accurate observations. The Squire, Cornleigh, is an enigma, revealed aspect by aspect until his psychology becomes a living, ponderable fact, though in the last analysis his folly remains a mystery. Jefferies does not anatomise Gerard's humiliation to draw sympathy towards him, and it is a mark of immaturity that his lesser character are dealt with in a cursory way, as coarse, mean, foolish, hypocritical. "Artificial" is a term he uses, contrasting them with Nora and Percival who are children of nature. In consequence the minor characters are almost not human, but personifications of their faults and weaknesses; and the impression given is that if he had been able, or attempted, to body them forth, in action as real people, he might have discovered their humanity.

After the separation Percival's emotional life follows a similar pattern to Nora's—wounded vanity, jealousy, defiance, and the author's omniscient, moralistic narrative allows him to mock his pitiable state as he despises those of the lesser persons. In Sir Theodore Stanley, a parliamentarian, Nora has a further and more credible contender for her hand, before the final reunion, but at this point it becomes unnecessary to follow matters further. One aspect of Percival's characterisation, however, Jefferies use of him to think through certain experiences of his own, does call for comment in the light of future developments. His spiritual autobiography, *The Story of My Heart*, published in 1883, begins:

The story of my heart commences seventeen years ago. In the glow of youth there were times every now and then when I felt a necessity of a strong inspiration of soul-thought. My heart was dusty, parched for want of the rain of deep feeling; my mind arid and dry...

Such then had been the case in 1874 when Jefferies wrote *The Scarlet Shawl*, and incongruous and surprising though it is in a novel of social manners, he projects these feelings and the experiences and aspirations that flowed from them, onto the character of Percival:

His eyes, fastened on the horizon, drank in the glorious dawn of light, as the glowing sun revealed itself, a visible archangel. The azure sky, the roseate clouds, the glittering water, filled him with a sense of higher life. If he could only drink in this beauty he would be immortal.

This falls not far short of *The Story* itself, where Jefferies invests light passing through the atmosphere with a palpable intensity, as a living medium—a kind of spiritual manna, the sun no remote disc of brightness but a constant controlling presence. Percival is gazing from the parapet of London Bridge, as Jefferies does in a passage in *The Story*: “I saw my soul... I knew the supernatural to be more intensely real than the sun. I touched the supernatural, the immortal, there that moment.” But for Percival there is no such consummation. “Alas, it was only for a moment. There was the shriek of an engine and the tramp of a policeman. Percival returned to himself, and turned to go, shrugging his shoulders instinctively.”

The momentary escape from self and circumstance is no answer to Percival’s inner distress. That it is also insignificant and inadequate measured against the harsh actualities of life is demonstrated by its juxtaposition with a characteristic piece of social realism:

In one recess of the parapet close to him, reclined on the stone bench and fast asleep, was a vagrant—a strong, brawny man, barely decently clad in the filthiest rags. His vast jaw had dropped, and his wolfish mouth was open with an expression unutterably disgusting. On his breast a woman, still more rudely dressed—her naked shoulders and arms alike withered—was slumbering painfully, and moaning as she drew breath.

This is from the world of 'A True Tale' and 'John Smith's Shanty', and Jefferies illustrates his hero's fall from grace by having him withdraw hastily from the scene when the tramp starts ill-treating his woman. At the same time he is using his character to articulate his own questions and doubts, and the leadings of the mystical states described in *The Story*.

Percival's vanity had led him to, momentarily at least, put so high a value on his feelings and emotions that he even contemplated writing a new book of religion which should supercede the Bible, and lead all to think and feel as he did—he the translator of nature and heaven's decrees. This was utterly ridiculous of course, merely the distorted dream of his excited vanity; but there was more in it than in Sir Theodore's pursuit. Percival's was a deeper life. When circumstances made him deify himself it was the conception of the soul which he thought of giving expression to. The unconscious cerebration which had been going on in his mind, excited by the perception of the glories and beauties of nature... He could no more have written down that stream of conscious thought than he could have turned sensation itself into material shape; but he conceived the idea of doing so.

Here then is the germ of *The Story of My Heart*, which many have claimed Jefferies' highest achievement, though it does nothing to elevate *The Scarlet Shawl* as a novel.

The same could be said of the digressions, long passages of exposition rich in imagery, colour, historical and classical allusion, extended metaphor, poetic, cumulative, rhythmic prose. These occupy the whole of chapter V and the opening pages of chapter XVI. It would be pointless to say that they disrupt the artistic integrity of the novel, or the interest of the unravelling plot, since both of these are in short supply. On the contrary it is in these that we find the true theme of the book, and the true Jefferies. Throughout his work in all genres Jefferies writes about the human divine: the capacity in men and women to become "beautiful and calm without mental fear". In women he celebrates physical perfection as an index of spiritual beauty, the gift of love and life akin to nature; in

man the higher vision and spiritual awareness found in contemplation of nature. Against this he sees many corrupting forces, diseases of body mind and soul, Matthew Arnold's "strange disease of modern life".<sup>41</sup> It is this central vision that Jefferies attempts to shoehorn into a conventional London society novel of manners and morals. It is typical of the awkwardness this involves that he can only introduce his own experiences of heightened awareness and his thought of recording them in "a new book of religion" as instances of Percival's vanity. Jefferies would achieve this ambition, (though not everyone would come to think and feel as he did), and in these passages there are clear indications that he had the gifts and purpose to do so.

#### 7. 'The Field-Play': literary background

An opportunity to test some of the criticisms and observations on the quality and characteristics of the late fiction, especially those that appeared to incapacitate Jefferies as a novelist—his digressive expositions and spirit of ardent practical protest—is offered by 'The Field-Play', a story broadly contemporary with *The Deny Morn* (N<sup>8</sup>). It is, however, more particularly relevant here as it continues, and in some ways completes, the line of fiction we have traced through the early period: rural dramas with tragic potential, the figures, scenes and actions of which are now wrought together in a stronger pattern, acquiring a fuller significance and a more positive application.

'The Field-Play' is divided into two parts: 'Uptill-a-Thorn', and 'Rural Dynamite', and these titles alone suggest a more imaginative treatment than 'A True Tale' and 'John Smith'.

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<sup>41</sup> 'The Scholar Gipsy', Matthew Arnold.

The title 'Uptill-a-Thorn' is taken from three lines out of '*The Passionate Pilgrim*','<sup>42</sup> quoted as an epigraph:

Save the nightingale alone  
She poor bird as all forlorn  
leaned her breast uptill-a-thorn.

The story opens with the heroine arriving late to the harvest field, tearing the bosom of her dress as she climbs through a gap in the hedge and mending it with a thorn and a rose. In doing this she pricks her finger (N<sup>9</sup>):

The blood welled up more freely than would have been supposed from so small a place. She put her lips to it to suck it away, as folk do in all quarters of the Earth so far discovered, being one of those instinctive things which come without teaching, A red dot of blood stained her soft white cheek, for in brushing back her hair with her hand she forgot her wounded finger. With red blood on her face, a thorn and a rose in her bosom, and a hurt on her hand, she reached the chorus of reapers.

The initial strokes are boldly symbolic (lips, earth, blood, wound, bosom), perhaps disconcertingly so to a contemporary reader. But the intention is not to shock the modesty or complacency assumed there in such stories as 'Gaudy as a Garden', so much as to enforce a sum effect to which each detail contributes: her "print" dress, the "freely" flowing blood, the carelessness which explains the blood on her cheek,

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<sup>42</sup> Anthology of 20 poems originally published by W. Jaggard in 1599, attributed to Shakespeare but only five now thought to be his. Jefferies quotes no. XX, attributed to Richard Barnfield:

As it fell upon a day,  
In the merry month of May,  
Sitting in a pleasant shade  
Which a grove of myrtles made,  
Beasts did leap, and birds did sing,  
Trees did grow, and plants did spring;  
Every thing did banish moan,  
Save the nightingale alone:  
She, poor bird, as all forlorn,  
Lean'd her breast up-till a thorn.

and not least the thorn near the bosom. We are given at once the girl's personality, temperament and physical presence. She is full of unselfconscious life, vulnerable, impulsive, yielding and innocently seductive; and because of the nature she manifests is separate, alone like the nightingale in the song, among the "chorus" of the harvesters. The narrative unfolds swiftly, and by charged suggestion rather than circumstantial elaboration, of her betrayal and final degradation. The total effect is completed by a reference back to the opening and the title:

The poppies came and went once more, the harvest moon rose yellow and ruddy, all the joy of the year proceeded, but Dolly was like a violet over which a wagon-wheel had rolled. The thorn had gone deep into her bosom.

The reference, together with the association of Dolly's fate with the seasonal pattern of ceaseless change and repetition, makes the effect one of ballad-like simplicity, a sorrow for the early passing of beauty mellowed by a recognition that such is the inevitable course of things. This aspect, suggested by the title, epigraph and centred thorn image, corresponds to a sense of fatality implied in the terse directness of the narrative. The resemblance to Hardy is strong here. The two writers it would seem knew little of each other's work, and the similarity of outlook derives from a common source in the actual condition of life in rural Wessex. F.E. Green, in *The Tyranny of the Countryside*,<sup>43</sup> an account of the demoralising effect on the labourers of the landowners' control of housing, which shows that little had changed in the 26 years since Jefferies' 'The Wiltshire Labourer', writes:

The pessimism of Thomas Hardy seems deeply rooted in the soil of Dorset. We know that in the fine sensitive veins of Richard Jefferies there flowed a strong current of pessimism, in spite of all his strenuous attempts to present a brave face to the world by finding

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<sup>43</sup> F.E. Green. *The Tyranny of the Countryside*. London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1913.

joy in the flora and fauna around the great estates of Wessex. He brushed aside all consideration of writing about the human fauna as long as he could. Sprung from the yeoman class himself, it was difficult for him to sympathise with those whom his class traditionally treated as servants, but before his end came, the bitterness of the lives of those who toiled for others without adequate reward seared the great heart of Richard Jefferies and evoked from him a series of imperishable prose poems.

Cobbett, Jefferies, Hardy and Hudson never seem to have penetrated into the heart of Wessex without experiencing a touch of its desolating blight.

The brutal actualities of the story are qualified to a certain extent by a lyric note taken from an Elizabethan songbook, and at the same time the story is poetic in a truer sense, in the resourcefulness of the language and latent subtlety of its organisation. These qualities, a bold inventiveness and originality of technique, can be found throughout the later fiction and have parallels in the earlier novels. It is difficult to account for them in terms of 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction or the influence of earlier writers. In the Tinsley letters he refers to George Eliot, in a way suggesting some positive leadings, but the only other country writer he mentions, Whyte Melville, wrote pretty much exclusively for and about the fox-hunting gentry. A reference to Zola in the notebooks, however, is intriguing. With no obvious resort to contemporary models we must turn to the deeper promptings of older traditions for a more satisfactory if only partial explanation. Like Hardy again Jefferies' sense of the past was marked by a strong feeling for tradition—historic, folk and literary. The relics of the past—Roman and British coins, arrowheads, tumuli, camps and cannon balls made the countryside seem “alive with the dead”,<sup>44</sup> in his own expressive phrase. Common objects, tasks and customs seemed to him, as to Hardy, to have become hallowed and humanised through generations of use. He was fond of old ballads, pastoral and lyric poetry of the

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<sup>44</sup> Letter to Bentley, 17 May 1886. BL Add.MS.58822. vol. XX.

Elizabethan and other periods, and especially of Shakespeare. "Somehow the spirit of those sonnets and that peculiar poetry had penetrated his mind", he writes of the autobiographical character, Aymer, in *World's End*, who reads Shakespeare among the woods and fields.

Jefferies differs from Hardy in the absence of distancing emotions in his work—resignation, nostalgia, regret. The past was no vanished idyll to his fresh imagination. Rather his sense of pre-industrial England and its traditional poetry enhanced his celebration of the present and his belief in the future. "My sympathies and hopes are with the light of the future, only I should like it to come from nature", he declared in the last of his country books, before turning again to fiction. The poetic element in his work is more Shakespearean than Romantic—a means of fully realising and expressing the immediate experience, and the intensity of his response invested the present with a glow of ideality, in the light of which there appeared nothing unreal or archaic in the visions of past poets. He felt a community with the past that took no account of the passage of time, for the Earth, however old, was for him created anew in every moment the sun shone upon it. His appreciation of the ancient Greeks, with whose thought he professed himself "saturated",<sup>45</sup> is typical; they seemed to him the most human people, and he sympathised with the feeling that inspired them to acknowledge a god in every stream and grove. If he did not consciously recognise it he must have inwardly responded to the spirit in which Shakespeare and the Elizabethans translated their classical models in terms of the everyday sights and sounds of the English countryside. It is significant that the title "the dewy morn" is taken from two lines (also from *The Passionate Pilgrim*) which typify its robust poetry made from the commonest aspects of the country scene, through an intimate knowledge of their order and fitness:

Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn,  
and scarce the herd gone to the hedge for shade

However attractive these indications may appear it is hardly possible to determine any specific indebtedness to past literature. Jefferies' reading, though wide, was unsystematic—a process of saturation rather than self-improvement. His development was spontaneous, or rather there were few consciously recognised landmarks in the flow of stimuli. Nevertheless it is safe to say that his peculiar sense of the indigenous, traditional qualities of the poetic heritage was such as to draw out the candour, independence and resourcefulness of his own artistic nature.

Any comparison of Jefferies with Hardy must take into account the enormous disparity in the shape and length of their respective careers and the boundaries of their experience. Within his short career Jefferies' development was Keatsian in its rapid unbroken momentum. The books of his mature years all end in the ardent, restless aching for fuller life and deeper immersion in experience. It is the restlessness of incomplete achievement, partial fulfilment, but not loss of faith or self doubt. Hardy, born eight years before Jefferies and surviving him by some forty, felt the immensity of time measured by human lives, as a day to day reality which dwarfed the striving human ego. He had time enough to reconsider the past with a disillusioned but acutely susceptible mind, and to anticipate a future with which it was necessary to come to terms at an increasingly lower level of expectation. The terms 'nostalgia' and 'pessimism' are inadequate to define his sense of past and future, and the momentous problems of constant change and readjustment to them through the long perspectives of time. It is such experience that gives his novels their abiding appeal, a narrative power which Jefferies does not share. But Jefferies had other strengths purely as a novelist which a few, but eminent, critics have sought to draw attention to, especially Edward Thomas, Edward Garnett and Q.D. Leavis. A notable

expression of them comes in a study of Hardy<sup>45</sup> by another Cambridge critic, Douglas Brown, who writes:

*The Deny Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, his two most impressive novels, should have their permanent place alongside Hardy's novels on our shelves. Of rural truth we shall discover less in Hardy's Wessex than in Jefferies' Wiltshire, for Jefferies had the more penetrating knowledge of the whole range of agricultural life, the more passionate sympathy with the labourers, by far the surer grasp of rural economics, and the more astonishing sensibility towards the natural environment. The insight, the candour, the modesty and the sensuousness of his prose, and the strange audacity of some strokes of invention in his narrative, lay bare a sort of poverty in all but the finest pages of Hardy.

Jefferies essays have often been described as prose poetry; Brown here is pointing to what may be termed a poetic creativity in his novels and stories. Much of his earliest fiction is poetic or literary in a limiting sense—self-consciousness about style, pointless periphrasis and quotation goes with a paucity of fresh perception. This trait as we have seen is apparent as late as 1876 in 'Gaudy as a Garden', and 'The Midsummer Hum', but he is on easy enough terms with the actual and familiar to use a classical reference as a foil to them. Thus Milton is quoted:

... the savoury messes  
which the neat hand of Phyllis dresses ('L'Allegro')

to illustrate a decline in cottage economy. The heroine of *Amaryllis at the Fair* probably owes her name to Miltonic pastoral:

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles in Neaera's hair ('Lycidas')

but by the late novels proper names alone remain poetic, as a measure of the extent to which Jefferies literary heritage has become an integral part of his sensibility, and as pointers to

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Hardy. London, Longmans, 1954.

larger intended significances—the ideality of the characters which is a token of their unique vitality and freshness of conception, not a retreat from it. There is certainly nothing “literary” about the Elizabethan reference in *The Deny Morn*, the feeling which blends perfectly with the inner poetic life of the novel, from which the title derives. We think immediately of Felise bathing, the “alchemy of light”, the closing words—“the dew of her loving tears”, and the spirit of dawn and nature recreated, and all that she stands for in opposition to the out-worn oppressive system of country rule.

The poetic organisation of *The Deny Morn* is not without precedent in Jefferies fiction. His first published novel, *The Scarlet Shawl* (1874) derives its title from a series of digressions rich in imagery and symbolism, associated with the fable and purpose of the work, which is to demonstrate the superiority of natural over artificial affections. The imagery is at times lurid and overcharged, and the novel as a whole marred by a stilted conventionalism. Nevertheless there are signs of creative disturbance, and the exotic passages referred to are seedbeds of the prose of *The Story of My Heart* and *The Deny Morn*. This can also be shown in the next novel, *Restless Human Hearts* (1875)—a title appropriate enough in that the characters pass through ceaseless revolutions of passion, but no more so than in the run of popular and sensation novels with similar catch-phrase titles. But the title takes on a deeper and retrospective meaning in the final chapter, where we become aware of a genuine creative impulse in the conception of the novel, but so far lost among confused intentions and indifferent execution. Much of the imagery is carried over from *The Scarlet Shawl*, together with some of the emotional excitement. The latter is the product of a depth of meaning, interest and perception here which gives the prose its spontaneous, sensitive flow, so that even if the theme—man’s restlessness and woman’s fulfilment in marriage—were not

evoked more memorably again in the final sentences of *The Deny Morn*, this passage would still have links to the later work.

#### 8. 'Uptill-a-Thorn'

Having in mind then this growth of a poetic creativity in Jefferies' fiction, we approach 'The Field-Play' with some expectation of the kind of transformative development that is implicit in the title and opening paragraph. The transmutation of the baser elements of the earlier stories is most readily apparent in the heroine, Dolly—a successor to Molly, Madge, Lucy and Sally, but representing the completed transition from the celebration of the picturesque and provincial aspects of the natural girl to a general and yet more intimate appreciation of the life that animates her. We see this transition taking place in Violet from *World's End*:

She was very beautiful, it is hard to describe her. It was not perhaps so much the features, the hue of the hair, the colour of the eyes, the complexion or even the shape, as the life, the vitality, the wonderful freshness which seemed to throw a sudden light over her, as when sunshine falls on a bed of flowers.

He seems to be making a discovery of what it is that captivates him, and how it might be expressed, and making a tentative departure from the conventional. Thus he complains that "the modern taste for catalogues compels me to name the colour of her eyes and hair", and does so in the manner of a wedding reporter describing the dress of the bride. In the case of Dolly he notes the features with captious discrimination—the lips "a little full perhaps", the nose "not delicate enough to fit with the complexion", the hair "of no great abundance" and straggling "like wandering vines of bryony". The details are suggestive of personality as well as appearance, but this reporter's note-taking approach is soon overtaken by a more emotional, or poetic, evocation:

But [the unpleasing nose] was not noticed; no one saw anything beyond the laughing lips, the laughing shape, the eyes that melted so near to tears. The torn dress, the straggling hair, the tattered shoes, the unmended stocking, the straw hat split, the mingled poverty and carelessness—perhaps the dreaminess—disappeared when once you had met the full untroubled gaze of those beautiful eyes.

Apart from “the laughing shape” (“Her shape yielded so easily at each movement that it seemed to smile as she walked”), the “perhaps rather dreaminess”, and “untroubled gaze” we still have a catalogue of external details, but the effect is impressionistic rather than picturesque, especially in the force of “disappeared”, when we think the list is being continued. We are not simply given a record of what is to be seen, we see for ourselves with the pace and sequence of actual seeing as appearances change and combine to form impressions. Jefferies is guided in this not by a routine application of a descriptive technique, but by a sense of life, of which ephemeral appearances are signs and tokens. The faithfulness of seeing and recording the signs is inseparable from the vigour and insight of his interpretation of them. He moves from visual impressions to their meanings and implications, an intimation of the girl’s unfulfilled potential in the fluctuating response to her disordered appearance, the visual uncertainty resolved by “the full untroubled gaze of those beautiful eyes”:

Untroubled, that is, by any ulterior thought of evil or cunning; they were as open as the day, the day which you can make your own for evil or for good. So too, like the day, she was ready for the making.

The phrasing is memorable in its simplicity and naturalness, and rendered the more so by the fullness of the supporting context.

Dolly’s character is developed further in the next paragraph. It’s instability, which we associate at this point with the attractive uncertainty of her impression on the retina, and with the uncertainty of her fate, is now illustrated by a few narrative details which fall appropriately into place here—her loitering

on the way to the harvest field to pick flowers, pat the shepherd's dog, and converse with children and wagoners.

These actions are then immediately and poetically enlarged by a typical expository digression:

No character whatever, no more than the wind; she was like a well-hung gate swinging to the touch; like water yielding to let a reed sway; like a singing flame rising and falling to a word, and even to an altered tone of voice. A word pushed her this way; a word pushed her that. Always yielding, sweet and gentle. Is not this the most seductive of all characters in women?

The comparison of his heroine to a well-hung gate is perhaps the most telling indication that Jefferies has moved beyond Victorian keepsake conventions of the sentimental and picturesque. The similes, however, are neither clumsy nor far-fetched—each a separate instance of sensitive movement to the slightest pressure, and linked by a series of participles: “swinging”, “yielding”, “singing”, “rising and falling”—the same kind of mobility he sees in her figure and nature. As we have seen Jefferies powers of observation were supposed, by his Victorian critics, to equip him well as a naturalist but confine him to an external apprehension of human character.

Here we see his delicacy of sense-perception and intuitive insight working to reveal a human life just as well as that of any other species. To re-quote Garnett: “The commentary is a medium by which he lives with his characters. The author's imagination, memory, and instinctive perception are all working together”; and it is interesting to note how, when the synthesis has taken place, and the principle and quality of life manifested by the individual has been expressed, Jefferies makes it into a general proposition, as in: “Is not this the most seductive of all characters in women?” Questions, exclamations and appeals to the reader are frequent in Jefferies' fiction, as elsewhere. Such traits go some way to explain his dismissal as a writer of fiction by his contemporaries, the notion that his characters are extensions

of himself, that do not live on their own account, whereas by “living with” them he enhances them, introducing his own sympathies and understanding and inviting his readers to share and engage theirs.

A striking example of this is the character of Luke Bond, the miller in *The Deny Morn*—a minor or “low” character, treated with a light touch of humour like the old lady Geoffrey assists in *Greene Ferne Farm* (“The gurt chattering fool to come a-hindering I”) and curious psychological insights suggested by the rat-killing episode, and that in which Felise makes him a gift of roses. Here again generalisation supervenes upon realisation, with a direct, if ironic, appeal to the reader to share his fine appreciation of an individual way of life:

Thus the miller of Glads Mill was a happy man, for he possessed an inexhaustible fund of stolidity... He was complete in himself, like a tree.

If a man could select his fate, what better could he choose than this?

To be in strong good health; to have plenty of simple food and a never failing appetite; to sleep like the wall of the mill; to feel no anxiety for wife or children; to labour for no ever-receding ideal of fortune or art; above all to be content...

Jefferies must have been thinking here of his own life, in describing one so diametrically opposite to it.

So the heroine of ‘Uptill-a-Thorn’ is no “figure in a landscape”. She is presented vividly to the eye and the imagination as a complex living person, an individual but impulsive, unformed and unresolved. She is set against the background of the harvest field, where she arrives late, and people who are for dramatic reasons very much a part of the landscape. The traditional procedures and regimentation of the harvesting is conceived in terms of a “field-play”:

The farmer and the sun are the actors, and the hay-makers are the chorus, who bear the burden of the play. Marching, each a step behind the other, and yet in a row, they presented a slanting front,

and so worked the field, turning the 'wallows'. At the hedge she took her place, last in the row.

The metaphor contains the imaginative essence of his earlier and painstakingly detailed studies of agricultural labour in *The Times*, *Fraser's Magazine* and *Hodge and His Masters*. With its military touches—"marching" and "front" it conveys a sense of the inexorable and controlled pattern of toil, a realisation sharpened by the luxurious nourishment afforded the senses at the height of the year—the June roses, the song of the blackbird and the scent of new mown hay. It is with these we associate Dolly as she climbs through the untrimmed hedge and pins a rose on her breast, and the tragic potential of her wayward nature bound to a rigid community life is immediately apparent. She is last in the row of women, who work apart from the men: "those bitter, coarse feminine tongues which gave her the name of evil". We are able to appreciate without the aid of analysis that they have lost their individual humanity in years of communal toil, and resent a life that is not confined like their own. This is not the joyful harvest scene of all the paintings and engravings of the Birket Foster school, and out of it Dolly's tragedy takes shape:

There are some natures which, naturally meek, if much condemned, defy that condemnation by open guilt. The women accused her of too free a carriage with the men; she replied by seeking their company in the broad glare of the summer day... It is a serious matter indeed to give anyone a bad name, more especially a sensitive, nervous, beautiful girl.

We recognise that in leaving the women to join the men Dolly has taken a critical step, defying the established order and so forfeiting its protection. The men:

... laughed loudly, joked, but welcomed her; they chatted with her gaily, they compelled her to sip from their ale as they paused by the hedge. By noon there was a high colour on her cheeks; the sun, the exercise, the badinage had brought it up.

The hint here of intoxication, if only slightly if at all from the ale, heightens our sense of the girl's vulnerability and exposure, even though the men's treatment of her is good natured. The drama proceeds in this way, through the accumulation of descriptive detail, suggestion and explanation, each element contributing to the actuality of the physical and psychological situation. Not only the sun but everything it shines on is involved in the play—the “hedge” here—the rambling one Dolly scrambled through, and later:

Under the shady oaks at luncheon the men all petted her and flattered her, in their rude way, which rude as it was admitted of no mistake. Two or three men strolled up from the other fields,

and the changes in Dolly's appearance and behaviour are interwoven with the progress of the season:

The sweet scent of the new-mown hay disappeared, the hay became whiter, the ricks rose higher and were topped and finished. Hourly the year grew drier and sultry, as the time of wheat harvest approached. Sap of spring had dried away; dry stalk of summer remained, browned with heat.

Each facet enhances the realism of the scenery and the actors in it, to the point where we can hardly fail to acknowledge the operation of a subtle and mature narrative art, such as Douglas Brown outlined in the passage quoted.

The danger Dolly is now exposed to presents itself in two forms. The first is introduced casually, but develops suddenly and with force:

Two or three men strolled up from the other fields, luncheon in hand and eating as they came, merely to chat with her. One was a mower—a powerful fellow, big boned, big everywhere, and heavy fisted; his chest had been open since four o'clock that morning to the sun, and was tanned like his face. He took her in his mighty arms and kissed her before them all; not one of them dared move, for the weight of that bone-smashing fist was known.

The description of Big Mat's brutal physique counterpoints that of Dolly's beauty, and equally its psychological and fatal potential are evoked. His efficiency as a mower is conveyed in

terms of violence and destruction—his money is “torn from the sun in the burning hours of work”; he “slew” the grass along with moon daisies, sorrel and buttercups; he “slashes at the yellow stalks” of the wheat. Jefferies reflects:

I wonder if the man ever thought, as he reposed at noontide on a couch of grass under the hedge? Did he think that those immense muscles, that broad, rough-hewn plank of a chest of his, those vast bones encased in sinewy limbs—being flesh in its fullness—ought to have more of the earth than common men, and still more than thin-faced people, not men—in black coats?

The question here is more powerful than a statement. One such thin-faced person despised by Big Mat is the farmer’s son, Mr. Andrew, educated and destined for a position in a city merchant’s office. He represents the second risk to Dolly of fatal compromise. He finds her animated and aglow after her parley with the men and is immediately smitten. They linger long in sweet converse in what appears to be a rural idyll. The beauty of the lanes where they meet in the evening is potently conveyed, as also what passes between the lovers, but by indirectness, shifts of emphasis, question and apostrophe rather than circumstantial explanation. But then the point of Mr. Andrew’s inclusion in the story becomes apparent:

Dolly was happier than ever, the gayest of the gay. She sang, she laughed, her white gleaming teeth shone in the sunshine; it was as if she had some secret which enabled her to defy the taunts and cruel shameless words hurled at her, by other women.

Andrew does not marry her, or more conventionally, seduce her. He is “but half a farmer”, and clearly he betrays her with a false promise. With no commitment to the rural community, he escapes to this lucrative berth in the City, so exposing her to the greater danger—Big Mat. The two dangers are of course connected. Both Andrew and Mat enjoy the protection of the farmer, who we remember has only the sun as partner in his control over the scene of toil. A man who could work as Mat worked for the same wage as any other was not to be offended

lightly over a simple matter of drinking or fighting. "Beyond that" we are told, "there was nothing against him... he was rather a favourite with the master, and trusted". But Jefferies has already indicated that the problem goes deeper than drinking and fighting: "Who knew what big processes of reasoning, dim and big, passed through his mind in summer days? Did he conclude that he had a right to take what others only asked or worked for?"

The interest in Big Mat is far from being simply that of a psychological study, though his wider significance has psychological implications. We are given a clue to the former in the apparently casual phrase "in summer days", which suggests that these confused, inchoate thoughts are the growth of sun and toil. The human drama develops in point to point correspondence with the greater drama of the seasons, which proceed regardless of the lives it controls. Jefferies had similarly played out this drama in the concentrated, choric prose of *Greene Ferne Farm*, a prose that moves easily between the general and particular, the natural and the human manifestations of forms of work, and which conveys as much by subtleties of rhythm and repetition as by the bare content of words. We are made aware of the relation of seasonal changes to developments in Big Mat's mind when we move from the hay field to the wheat harvest in the drying year, and Mat's manic "slashing at the yellow stalks":

Why the man worked so hard no one could imagine, unless it was for pure physical pleasure of using those great muscles. Unless, indeed, a fire as it were, was burning in his mind, and drove him to labour to smother it, as they smother fires by beating them.

In this context the fire image, which is to become central, suggests more than the inarticulate discontent, the "thought without method and without logical sequence" which "is apt to press heavily upon the uneducated mind" of John Smith and his fellows, although the dangers to his own cause inherent in the lack of outlets for self-expression, and to the

lives of those dependent on him, which the early stories on the labourers' condition draw attention to, are very much relevant to 'The Field-Play'. Here, however, we are given at the level of sense-perception, a premonition of Mat as a destructive force, not from outside, but arising out of the very conditions, man-made and natural, that govern the harvest scene. It is at this point that Mat's drinking has its imaginative relevance. He spent "in one long drain of drink the lump of money his mighty arms had torn from the sun in the burning hours of toil". Note "sun" and "burning" here. (For the correlative account of harvest-time drinking as a social evil see 'Golden Brown' and 'One of the New Voters' in *The Open Air*, 1885). But the drink "which would have killed another man" is fuel to the fire burning in Big Mat, as though in opposition to the sun. "He grew and flourished upon it, more bone, more muscle, more of the savage nature of original man." It is the means by which the vast energy expended in work is restored to his system, but as a destructive force—a reversal of the customary thrift by which the community survives. The irony of this is not revealed until the end of 'Rural Dynamite', but here the dire consequences of his drinking extend no further than, but far enough, the irreversible marring of beauty and crushing of another life.

Now that Big Mat's condition and its potential for harm have been made apparent, and Dolly's lack of protection from her own community and her class superiors, have been established, the stage is set for her tragedy to be enacted. This is accomplished with economy and the minimum of comment, and fewer descriptive passages. At the wheat harvest:

Gay she was, as the brilliant poppies who, having the sun as their own, cared for nothing else. Till suddenly, just before the close of harvest, Dolly and Mat were missing from the field. Of course their absence was scandalously connected...

He is found intoxicated at the tavern, she ill at home:

There were dark circles round her eyes. Her chin drooped to her breast; she wrapped herself in a shawl in all the heat. It was some time before even the necessity of toil brought her forth again, and her manner was hurried and furtive; she would begin trembling all of a minute, and her eyes filled quickly...

So much is registered in Dolly's eyes:

By degrees the autumn advanced, and the rooks followed the ploughman. Dolly gradually recovered something of her physical buoyancy; her former light-heartedness never returned. Sometimes an incident would cause a flash of the old gaiety, only for her to sink back into subdued quietness. The change was most noticeable in her eyes; soft and tender still; brown and velvety, there was a deep sadness in them—the longer she looked at you the more it was visible. They seemed as if her spirit had suffered some great wrong; too great for redress, that could only be borne in silence.

The realism is intense; “the longer she looked at you” almost suggests Jefferies is describing someone known to him, or something familiar, as he would describe a bird or a flower:

Her eyes were still beautiful, but subdued, and full of a great wrong. What that wrong was became apparent in the course of time. Dolly had to live with Big Mat, and unhappily not as his wife. Next harvest there was a child wrapped in a red shawl with her in the field, placed under the shocks while she worked. Her brother Bill talked and threatened—of what avail was it? The law gave no redress, and among men in these things force was master still. There was no one who could meet Big Mat in fight.

The brief and condensed account of autumn activity sustains the sense of a matter-of-course recurrence and continuity. The rooks and the ploughman play their part. We note that the autumn advanced “by degrees” and Dolly recovered “gradually”. Everything returns, except what Dolly has lost will never return. One moment she is “as the brilliant poppies, having the sun as their own”, the poppies that fall to the scythe, but they too will return. There is a ballad like cadence here, until we reflect that the strength behind Mat's scything is a destructive force, a relentless hatred, a man-made condition beyond man's redress and a threat to others, and to the

community. Dolly's wrongs admit of no redress; the situation is one in which force is master still, and a radical social criticism is implied. The story breaks out of its poetic setting, and has no recourse to literary conventions or conventional feelings about the countryside, its landscape, people and their traditional way of life. Jefferies is thoroughly acquainted with his material and has worked it repeatedly; his view is radical, objective, and fully supported by first hand observation. But in 'The Field-Play' every aspect of his vision is dramatised; every feature of the contemplated way of life given its imaginative value in relation to every other, and the creative impulse is a more fundamental, pressing and sustained sense of human need than is to be traced anywhere else except in the late novels. What does this way of life offer towards the full development of personality, and what dangers and pitfalls lurk within it? Such questions are the key to the dramatisation—the role play of the harvest, the gossips, the main actors and the supporting ones down to the blackbirds, poppies and rooks. It is possible then to define a third level of complexity, underlying, but not of course independent of, the ballad-like narrative and the implied social criticism. We can speak of the story having something of the character of a fable contesting the rival claims of the individual and the community. But this is simply to offer an interpretation. The creative impulse to which we refer figures as an intensity of interest unmistakably there, informing every aspect of the action and the detailed life of the prose.

The finale of 'Uptill-a-Thorn' is accomplished with the bold and simple strokes of invention we have come to expect. Dolly's life and spirit are expressed, more than any other feature or aspect, in her eyes. After the great wrong of her seizure by Mat they are subdued, there is a deep sadness in them, but they are still beautiful. These observations are preceded by rhapsodic passage on the beauty of beautiful eyes.

Even after science has explained much and dispelled many illusions:

The eye is still the work of a magician: it is physically divine. Besides the liquid flesh which delights the beholder, there is then the retina, the mysterious nerve which receives a thousand pictures on one surface and confuses none; and further, the mystery of the brain which reproduces them at will, twenty years, yes, threescore years and ten, afterwards. Perhaps of all physical things the eye is most beautiful, most divine.

We move then from the divine flesh of the eye to “flesh in its fullness”, the egregious alcohol nourished flesh of Big Mat, internally on fire, a fire beyond control, a burning sense of resentment and entitlement. There is a suggestion of the chemistry of alcohol here which takes “fire” beyond its merely metaphorical connotation. “Was he not satisfied even yet? Did he not arrogate yet further prerogatives of kings—prerogatives which even Kings claim no longer?” What follows then seems inevitable, but none the less shocking:

One day, while in drink, his heavy fist descended—he forgot his might; he did not check it, like Ulysses in the battle with Irus—and Dolly fell.

When they lifted her up one eye was gone.

The event itself is treated with almost terse economy. The place, circumstances, occasion, or who “they”, the helpers were, are not mentioned. The final three paragraphs deal with the consequences, or lack of them. Firstly the totality or loss, physical, spiritual, and irreversible:

[The eye] was utterly put out, organically destroyed; no skill, no money, no loving care could restore it. The soft, brown velvet, the laugh, the tear gone for ever. The divine eye was broken—battered as a stone might be. The exquisite structure which reflected the trees and flowers, and took to itself the colour of the summer sky, was shapeless.

The destructive finality of the act could not be more forcefully put: “battered as a stone”, not “battered as if by a stone”. The second illustrates the effect on her personal and social status:

“in the second year, Mr. Andrew came down, and one day met her in the village. At first he does not recognise her, and when he does finds her ugly and “repellent”. He “fumbles” in this pocket for a coin to give her, and congratulates himself for not having got “entangled” with her. A footnote only, but an incisive one, in which cowardly betrayal is garnished with class snobbery and disdain. We see Andrew now as a complete outsider, representing the world in general and the ruling classes in particular in the total want of sympathy, or interest now her physical attraction has gone; and this disowning is underlined by the hollow gesture of charity. The passage points forward to the vehement attack on the contemporary poor law in ‘Rural Dynamite’, and on the class that administers it in a spirit totally opposite to Jefferies sympathy and solicitude for the needs of body and soul, which must still be nourished however irrecoverable the losses sustained by both.

The last paragraph reverts to Mat, and here there are no consequences, and no change. He drinks more, works harder and becomes more morose. The fire in him burns deeper, “and to the very quick”. No one can challenge him, and most ominously he continues to be valued and trusted by the farmer. The sense of a hidden, imminent menace again carries us forward, but the closing lines (quoted at the outset of this study) have the opposite tendency, consecrating Dolly’s tragedy in elegiac cadences, the poetry of retrospect and finality that takes up the “gone forever” note in the lament following the crisis. The lyrical moment, the moment of pure unattended sorrow, is certainly present, as in the lines appropriately selected from a poem of an age-old lyrical tradition. But at the same time the passage reflects at every point the artistically realised situation, where emotion is defined by its object, and objective realities not altered or simplified to evoke emotions. The movement, and the verbs, “came and went”, “proceeded”, “rolled”, re-enact the onward

passage of time felt throughout the story in the rhythm of work and seasonal change. Again Dolly is compared to a wild flower, untended in life, and unmourned because soon replaced. Yet we see her not so much as a child of fate, in a generalised allegorical sense, but more as the victim of an agricultural economy pursuing its course as relentlessly as the seasons with which it keeps time, and indifferent to the beauty it permits or destroys. Such is the suggestiveness of the reference to poppies, with which she has been associated in the careless splendour of her flowering, and the “wagon wheel”, which we reflect bears the rich harvest of a year’s toil and sunlight to the farmer’s rickyard—the central stage of ‘Rural Dynamite’. In this context the word “joy” is now charged with the bitterest of irony.

#### 9. ‘Rural Dynamite’

The first part of ‘The Field-Play’: ‘Uptill-a-Thorn’, is well rounded, although Big Mat’s mental state is left portentously unresolved. The terse economy and swift even pace of its development show a close familiarity with the material and an unfaltering sureness of artistic touch. ‘Rural Dynamite’ is a more problematic piece of writing, and in ways typical of Jefferies’ fiction. Despite its greater length it in some ways resembles a coda to ‘Uptill-a-Thorn’. It develops some of the social criticism implicit in the latter at the level of exposition, and analyses attitudes previously embodied in characterisation. Intensities of feeling dramatised in part one issue here in vigorous outgoing protest, with overtones of exasperation and contempt. Jefferies skill in making images and pregnant phrases lends itself to rhetorical uses. Does this direction, taken towards the end of ‘Rural Dynamite’, frustrate his artistic purpose and compromise the unity of the whole? This is the central question, and the answer can usefully guide our

approach to the digressions and authorial interventions of the larger works.

The story line now turns to the farmer, a controlling figure in the first part who's only equal is the sun, but one not particularised in any way. Now he comes before us he is anything but powerful, and subject as much to harsh conditions and the necessity of constant toil as any of those beneath him in the social order. The jolt of this realisation is signalled by a sudden change of climate:

In the cold North men eat bread of fir-bark; in our own fields the mouse, if pressed for food in winter, will gnaw the bark of sapling trees. Frost sharpens the teeth like a file, and hunger is keener than frost. If anyone used to more fertile scenes had walked across the barren meads Mr. Roberts rented as the summer declined, he would have said that a living could only be gained from them as the mouse gains it in frost-time. By sharp-set nibbling and paring; by the keenest frost-bitten meanness of living; by scraping a little bit here, and saving another trifle yonder, a farmer might possibly get through the year. At the end of each year he would be rather worse off than before, descending a step annually. He must nibble like a frost-driven mouse merely to exist. So poor was the soil that the clay came to the surface, and in wet weather a slip of the foot exposed it—the heel cut through the veneer of turf into the cold, dead, moist clay. Nothing grew but rushes. Every time a horse moved over the marshy land his hoof left deep holes which never again filled up...

The entire passage of over two pages describing the man, his land and his life, could stand as well as any other in the story, or in Jefferies' entire work, as showing the vitality of his prose, and the ready extension of imaginative sympathy for every aspect and detail of what he describes: the hungry mouse, the feel of the land under foot, its appearance in all weathers, the movement of birds from field to field, the grim economics of the small farmer's survival, and his life in a lonely farmhouse without a wife or a fire. Jefferies knew all this from his own background, with his experience as an agricultural journalist and the trained eye of a naturalist. Under the creative impulse

the different areas of sensibility and types of expertise work together, drawing metaphorical strength from each other and bringing words together in new combinations. Accidental rhythm, repetition and assonance are pressed into service, even a pun is risked, and the medium becomes, in his own words: “finite, manageable—plastic—comprehensible”.<sup>46</sup>

Jefferies quickly establishes continuity between the two parts of ‘The Field-Play’ by placing Roberts in the same regime of life-denying toil, surrounded by the comings and goings of nature’s children:

Never did any man labour so constantly as he, from earliest winter dawn when the blackbird, with puffed feathers, still tried to slumber in the thorn bush, but could not for cold, on to the latest summer eve, after the white barn owl passed round the fir copse... Such was his dogged pertinacity that, like the mouse, he won a living. He did more, he saved. At what price? At the price of a fireless life; I mean without cheer, I mean by denying everything that renders human life superior to that of the rabbit in his burrow. No wife, no children, no niece, or any woman to see to his comforts; no comfort and no pleasure; a bare house and rheumatism.

The thorn and the blackbird are links, if subliminal, to Dolly as we first see her, and clearly Mr. Roberts is not the wealthy farmer who arranges a lucrative position for his son. Like her he is a misfit. The next sentence establishes his connection to Dolly, and social proximity to the labouring class, again showing the abruptness in dealing with plot details:

Bill, his principle labourer, Dolly’s brother, slept with him in the same bed, master and man, a custom common in old times, long since generally disused.

The comparison, then, is invited. On the one side we have the fate of a natural country girl whose personality grows spontaneously in close contact with its environment, and is broken by alien and inhuman forces within the familiar scene.

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<sup>46</sup> S.J. Looker, ed., *The Nature Diaries and Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*. London, Grey Walls, 1948.

On the other Mr. Roberts, who also represents something invaluable and indigenous to country life, but whose status and wellbeing are undermined by changing conditions. He is the type of farmer in every way most severely hit by the depression—the small farmer on poor land, old fashioned in his ways; at the opposite end of the scale to the big, improving capitalist farmer controlling the lives of many, the scale of operations implicit in ‘Uptill-a-Thorn’. His capital and whole life interest are invested in the soil and he clings with heroic tenacity to his holding. Despite the grimness of the struggle he is a humane man, “upright in conduct and not unpleasant in manner... a warm man as warm men go after several years of bad seasons, falling prices and troubles of all kinds.” Unlike Dolly he is not put before us as a fully rounded individual. His virtues of resilience and honesty are those ideally of a distinct type—the yeoman or peasant farmer—and a type that did not sit well in the Victorian class structure. His relation to his labourers is master and servant, but not upper/middle and lower class. He rents land, which the owner knows he can make no money on himself. We see in his hop-growing, and thatching his ricks with flags from the marsh to save on straw, remnants of the old thrift, the mother of peasant civilisation. He survives by a frugality and resourcefulness unknown to the scientific farmer with his steam ploughs and superphosphates, and considered “beneath” him by the gentleman farmer of latter years—all types comprehensively delineated in Jefferies’ agrarian classic *Hodge and His Masters*. Mr. Roberts’ representative identity is made clear by many touches of detail, but the main emphasis falls otherwise. If his good temper and many skills are survivals of an old peasant tradition, the life he leads is far from being representative of it at its best. We have in fact a development of an earlier theme, a further instance of toil becoming blighting and oppressive because there is nothing else. His life is barren, and his “intense front-bitten

economy” a grotesque caricature of peasant thrift, hard working indeed but a life with its pleasures and festivals, a life of families and communities. His peasant qualities are absorbed in the death struggle of the tradition, not its perpetuation. The loneliness and bitterness and dead-end aspect of the struggle are brought out by certain larger effects—the unobtrusive symbolism that is everywhere a feature of Jefferies’ fiction. The farmhouse is “gaunt” and “grey”, surrounded by dark fir woods, and “isolated from the world”. His companions (besides the faithful Bill) are mice, rats, rabbits and owls—creatures associated with indigence or rapacity. The rats scamper in his garret and “the white owl float silently by” as he and Bill, in the cold nights, watch the fires of other farmers’ ricks burning all over the countryside.

Ironically it is Mr. Roberts’s very economy that is likely to be the cause of his total ruin. He has always saved a few shillings by not insuring his ricks, and now an epidemic of incendiarism has broken out. If those ricks were burned, “the savings—the nibbling of his life—were gone.” The local insurance branch naturally demurs to issue a new policy; it would require head office approval. So Roberts and Bill have to sit up at night after a day’s heavy work to guard the fruit of a lifetime’s labour.

At this point the narrative is paused for a description of rick burning and a general discussion of its causes and consequences. The prose is as vivid, immediate and analytical as any in Jefferies writing as a journalist and naturalist:

A hay-rick will burn for hours, one huge mass of concentrated glowing solid fire, not much flame but glowing coals, so that the farmer may fully understand, may watch and study and fully comprehend the extent of his loss. It burns itself from a square to a dome, and the red dome grows gradually smaller till its lowest layer of ashes strews the ground. It burns itself as it were in blocks: the rick was really homogenous; it looks while aglow as if it had been constructed of large bricks and blocks of hay. These now blackened blocks dry and crumble one by one and the dome sinks. Under foot

the earth is heated, so intense is the fire; no one can approach, even on the windward side, within a pole's length. A widening stream of dense white smoke flows away upwards, flecked with great sparks, blackening the elms, and carrying flakes of burning hay over outhouses, sheds and farmsteads.

This is just a small sample of an astonishing descriptive prose poem. We note how assonance and repetition work: "lowing"—"grows"—"lowest"—"aglow"—"flows"—"burn"—"burns"—"blackened"—"blackening"—"flecked"—"fakes" etc. As well as the clarity of representation to the eye, and other senses as in "The dust lies soft and silky on the hand", the description seems to enact the process of what it is describing. And the human scene is to the life as any artist could make it, or film maker given the sound track:

The pump, pump, swing, swing of the manual engines; the quick short pant of the steam fire-engine; the stream and hiss of the water [which as he has explained already has no effect except to create steam]; shouts and answers; gleaming brass helmets; frightened birds; crowds of white faces, whose frames are in shadow; a red glow on the black, wet mud of the empty pond; rosy light on the walls of the homestead, crossed with vast magnified shadows; windows glistening; men dragging sail-like tarpaulins and rick cloths to cover the sheds... the strangest mixture of perfect calm and heated anxiety, the smoke bluish, the floating flakes visible as black specks, the flames tawny, the pigeons fluttering around... Ultimately rows of flattened and roughly circular layers of blackened ashes, whose traces remain for months.

The forceful realism of the account validates the title 'Rural Dynamite'. "This is dynamite in the hands of the village ruffian", he continues, and further on "It is dynamite despite of insurance". The fire can spread to buildings, implements, wagons; livestock can be suffocated, even of occasion the homestead goes. It is a blow to the farmer's "moral existence as well as his pecuniary interests." Jefferies does not at first temper his moral outrage in the interests of artistic impersonality: "village ruffian" "this horrible incendiarism", "the brutality of it"; but almost immediately regains his poise

in a more objective analysis of the phenomenon. The outbreaks come in the form of sporadic epidemics of varying duration, within a radius of six or seven miles suggesting a single perpetrator. The culprit is rarely caught. Since it occurs immediately after harvest, when the labourers' pockets are full, poverty and hardship are not motives, and good farmers are targeted as much as mean and grasping ones. "What then is the cause?" Jefferies then answers his own question, and in doing so ceases to be a story teller and becomes a Victorian sage, in the manner of Carlyle or Ruskin, denouncing the evils and follies of his time, and urging what courses should be taken to remedy them. But although he has for several pages, literally lost the plot, what follows is in its way as remarkable as that which went before. The answer:

there is none but the bitter, bitter feeling which I venture to call the dynamite disposition, and which is found in every part of the civilized world; in Germany, Italy, France, and our own mildly ruled England. A brooding, morose, concentrated hatred of those who possess any kind of substance or comfort; landlord, farmer, every one. An unsparing vendetta, a merciless shark-like thirst of destructive vengeance; a monomania of battering, smashing, crushing, such as seizes the Lancashire weaver, who kicks his woman's brains out without any special reason for dislike...

No doubt he refers to a case in the news at the time, and is reminding us of course to Big Mat's assault on Dolly. The attentive reader by now will have realised that the fire in Mat's brain is the source of the fires burning across the countryside in the night sky. The violence, he continues has:

No creed, no high moral hopes of the rights of man and social regeneration, no true *sans culottism* even, nothing at all but set teeth and inflated nostrils; blow up, burn, smash, annihilate! A disposition, or character, which is not imaginary but a fact as proved abundantly by the placing of rails and iron chairs on lines to upset trains, by dynamite explosions at Government offices, railway stations, and even at newspaper offices, and sending letters filled with explosives, firing dynamite in trout streams just to destroy the harmless fish...

What Jefferies is describing here would now be called “terrorism”, and at the time, perhaps with somewhat more meaningful content, “nihilism” (N<sup>10</sup>). The word was used of Russian radicals, and the scope of Jefferies’ invective is clearly “international terrorism”, including, in the reference to “people who blow themselves to atoms to shatter the frame of a Czar”—suicide terrorism. But his focus is the home situation:

If anyone thinks there is no danger in England because there are no deep-seated causes of discontent, such as foreign rule, oppressive enactments, or conscription, I can assure him he is woefully mistaken. This class needs no cause at all; prosperity cannot allay its hatred, adversity does not weaken it.

At this point the argument shifts. The invective against “the street rough, that blot and hideous product of modern civilization” continues. but the anti-terrorist mantra of politicians everywhere gives way to some thoughts that would be original even now:

It is certainly unwise to the last degree to provoke this demon, to control which as yet no means have been found. You cannot arrest the invisible; you cannot pour Martini-Henry bullets into a phantom... In its dealing with the lower class this generation is certainly far from wise. Never was the distinction so sharp between the poor—the sullen poor who stand scornful and desperate at the street corners—and the well-to-do. The contrast now extends to everyone who can afford a black coat. It is not confined to the millionaire.

Indeed, the idea of dealing with terrorism by addressing its causes rather than shooting at it was a long way ahead of Jefferies’ time, and we could even say our own. But the focus now narrows to Jefferies’ central target, and doubtless the mainspring of the story itself. Having made it clear that he is not indicting “the sober mass of the working class” he continues:

There the thing is, and it requires no great sagacity to see that the present mode of dealing with it is a failure and likely to be worse... You should not stir it up and hold matches to it to see if it is there...

Nor should you put it under hydraulic pressure which is being done all over the country, under the new laws which force every wretch who enters a workhouse for a night's shelter to stay there two nights; under the cold-blooded cruelty which, in the guise of science, takes the miserable quarter of a pint of ale from the lips of the palsied and decrepit inmates; which puts the imbecile—even the guiltless imbecile—on what is practically bread and water. Words fail me to express the cruelty and inhumanity of this crazed legislation.

The diatribe against the new Poor Law and workhouse system continues for another page and a half, dominated by the central image of dynamite under hydraulic pressure. To the boast that fewer are seeking relief under it he asks what has become of the others. "Has your precious folly extinguished them?" They swell the ranks of an "Army of Wretches", and it is inevitable that every now and then one of them "turns and becomes the Devil of modern civilization". He pleads for a more humane treatment of the poor as the only way to reduce and control this menace. He does not lay the blame against society as a whole; rather he asserts that, from the titled to the cottager there was never a time of more true humanity inspired by the highest sentiments. The fault lay with official circles, acting "in the name of science miscalled, in the name of temperance perverted, in the name of progress backwards, in the name of education without food." He calls for a revolution of common sense against these iniquities. "Meantime dynamite".

Condemnation of the Victorian workhouse is a recurrent theme of Jefferies, especially in *Hodge and His Masters*, *The Story of My Heart*, and some of the late essays. It certainly exhibits what F.E. Green called "the great heart of Richard Jefferies". The question is, does this kind of writing belong in fiction? To this there is probably no definitive answer, but what can be said, in Jefferies case, is that it does not negate the strengths of his fiction, and in ways like the poetic flexibility of his language and use of dominant images, it partakes of those strengths. The rick burning is in fact metaphorically central, a

motiveless act of destruction affecting the welfare of all, analogous to and a consequence of the fire in Big Mat's brain. That too is motiveless—he is well paid and trusted, and allowed to get away with abduction and criminal assault. But his work is obsessive, joyless, machine-like and alcohol fuelled.

The countryside is beautiful, and harvest time is the crown of the year. As Jefferies put it in a later essay: "The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour".<sup>47</sup> The heavy, relentless toil required to maintain it generates this self-destructive force. In the harvest fields where others have seen harmony, beauty, fulfilment and prosperity, Jefferies sees tragedy.

Jefferies deftly retrieves the thread of his story, the reader having been held in suspense as to the fate of Mr. Roberts and his ricks, acknowledging the digression but without apology:

This is a long digression: suppose while you have been reading it that Mr. Roberts has passed one of the two terrible nights [waiting for his insurance to come through], his faithful Bill at one end of the rickyard and himself at the other.

So much has been realised, through poetry and passion, image and argument, that the rest of the story can move swiftly to its conclusion. It is an overcast, moonless night, and the two lose sight of each other. Worn out with work and staying awake they fall asleep. A conventional story teller would have made more of the drama and suspense, but Jefferies' handling of plot *per se* is as often perfunctory, and as here only a visual effect enhances the sequence of events:

Mr. Roberts awoke from the dead vacancy of sleep to the sensation of a flash of light crossing his eyelids, and to catch a glimpse of a man's neck with a red necktie illuminated by flame like a Rembrandt head in the centre of shadow.

He leaps forward, yelling, not to accost the attacker but to beat out the flames before they take hold. Woken by his master's yell Bill hurls his stick at the fleeing figure, who is hit and

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<sup>47</sup> In 'One of the New Voters', *The Open Air*, Chatto, 1885.

curses but still escapes. Roberts collapses from exhaustion and emotion. When he recovers at sunrise he must immediately go out to see for himself that his ricks have survived. They find Big Mat's hat. At his trial he makes no defence, "stolidly indifferent to the whole proceedings", except to claim that four of the firings were not his doing:

I should say that he did not himself know why he did it. That intense, brooding moroseness. that wormwood hatred, does not often understand itself. So much more dangerous is it; no softening influence can reach it.

He is sentenced to the longest period of servitude the law allotted.

Here the story might have ended, but the tragedy deepens. Faithful Bill gets reward money for his share in detecting the rick burner. It ruins him. Just as Mat had done he drinks, and in six weeks dies in the infirmary. Dolly now with no one to support her, and near to another confinement, is taken to the workhouse where her brother has just died. Drink is a subordinate theme throughout. It converts Mat's massive strength to a force of blind destruction. When money releases Bill from toil and gives him access to drink it is itself destructive of his weaker will and constitution. But complete denial of it by the temperance movement, and the relief it can give in moderation to the suffering and the toilers of the field, is deemed a perversion. Jefferies is not sure on the point but believes Dolly was denied the least drop during labour:

Dolly survived, but utterly broken, hollow-chested, a workhouse fixture. Still so long as she could stand she had to wash in the laundry; weak as she was they weakened her still further with steam and heat, and labour. Washing is hard work for those who enjoy health and vigour. To a girl broken in heart and body it is a slow destroyer.

Her health continues to decline, she has no future prospects and we hear no more of her. But we are taken back to what she was at the beginning of the story:

This was the girl who had lingered in the lane to help the boy pick watercress, to gather a flower, to listen to a thrush, to bask in the sunshine. Open air and green fields were to her life itself. Heart miseries are always better borne in the open air. How just, how truly scientific, to shut her in a steaming wash-house.

The reminder is poignant and timely, even though used for a further thrust against the hated institution. The final paragraph, which I quote in full, takes this denunciation further still. It might be considered gratuitous, and its factual accuracy might be questioned. But considered as one of Jefferies' bold strokes of invention it is effective artistically in conveying, through its ironic lyricism, the tragedy of Dolly's total incarceration and severance: not the finality of death, but the more terrible annihilation of life in death. In Part I the blighting of a human life begins in the blinding of an eye, a thing of beauty that beholds beauty. The second part ends in the blinding of the beauty that the eye sees, the eye which "reflected the trees and flowers, and took to itself the colour of the summer sky":

The workhouse was situated in a lovely spot on the lowest slopes of hills, hills covered afar with woods. Meadows at hand, corn fields further away, then green slopes over which broad cloud shadows glided slowly. The larks sang in spring, in summer the wheat was golden, in autumn the distant woods were brown and red and yellow. Had you spent your youth in these fields, had your little drama of life been enacted in them, do you not think that you would like at least to gaze out of them from the windows of your prison? It was observed that the miserable wretches were always looking out of the windows in this direction. The windows on that side were accordingly built up and bricked in that they might not look out.

## 10. Conclusions

'The Field-Play' is important in Jefferies' work out of all proportion to the few pages it fills. With *The Denny Morn* it embodies Jefferies' fullest creative response to the agricultural depression of the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an event of

major socio-economic and cultural significance. Much previous work as novelist, naturalist and journalist bears essential fruit in 'The Field-Play', and it gives meaning and bearing to early efforts that show little promise in themselves. As a wholly organised and inspired work, drawing extensively on his abilities and experience, it is without parallel among his other numerous essays and sketches. At the same time it can be taken, without minimising the differences of structure and theme among the late novels, as a microcosm of Jefferies' fiction, revealing both its problems and its real possibilities.

However the story has received little or no attention from Jefferies' critics and biographers. There can be no doubt from his notebooks that he himself regarded fiction as an important part of his output, and one he hoped to develop in his own way. 'The Field-Play' is the opening title in *The Life of the Fields*, his second major collection of essays and sketches published by Chatto & Windus in 1884. Jefferies in fact considered using 'The Field-Play' as the title of the book as a whole. In the popular pocket edition, first published in 1902 and reprinted in ten impressions through to 1937, it comes second, its place taken by 'The Pageant of Summer', perhaps the most celebrated of Jefferies' impassioned meditations on nature and life. This doubtless reflects a general preference for his essays and country books over the stories and novels, and perhaps the polemics of 'The Field-Play', and its political implications, disturbed some, as they would have enthused others. However in his Collector's Edition of 1948,<sup>48</sup> S.J. Looker restores it to the head of the contents list, and justly describes it in his introduction (in fact the only comment on the story I am aware of): "a fictional sketch of great power, sympathy and understanding".(N<sup>11</sup>)

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<sup>48</sup> Five volumes of Jefferies' non-fiction books, with introductions and notes by S.J. Looker and illustrations by Agnes Miller Parker and C.F. Tunnicliffe, issued 1947-1949, in an intended complete edition of Jefferies' works.

As noted previously Walter Besant's dismissal of Jefferies' fiction has had a long standing legacy. "In the ordinary sense of the word, Jefferies was not a novelist; in the artistic sense of the word he was not a novelist", he states in *The Eulogy*, and in a separately published essay, *The Art of Fiction*,<sup>49</sup> he offers: "But while Mr. Jefferies has his hedge, ditch and brook, we [the novelists] have out towns, our villages, our assemblies of men and women." But Besant's ideas and stipulations, based essentially on mid-Victorian practice, did not go unchallenged, and are remembered now only for having moved Henry James to write his classic defence of the novelist's freedom: "the freedom of an immense correspondence with life"—"the form of which is to be appreciated after the fact".<sup>50</sup> In an article in the *TLS* in 1914 'The Younger Generation', James named Edward Garnett as a literary figure of note. Garnett was a reader successively for Fisher Unwin, Heinemann and Duckworth, and had befriended, supported and advised a number of new writers and novelists challenging Victorian conventions, among them W.H. Hudson, Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, Edward Thomas and D.H. Lawrence. He could justly claim to have been one of the architects of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. While at Duckworth he published *Bevis* and the three late novels, for the last of which, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, he wrote an introduction<sup>51</sup> spiritedly upholding Jefferies' claims as a novelist, and as vigorously rebutting the denials and detractions of his critics:

Yes, it is very touching this unanimity [among the critics], and therefore it is a pleasure for this critic to say that in his judgement *Amaryllis at the Fair* is one of the very few later-day novels of English country life that are worth putting on one's shelf, and that to make

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<sup>49</sup> *The Art of Fiction: A Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institution*, April 25, 1884. London, Chatto & Windus, 1884.

<sup>50</sup> *The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James*. Boston, Cupples, Upham & Co., 1885.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Garnett. Introduction to *Amaryllis at the Fair*. London, Duckworth, 1904.

room for it he would turn out certain highly praised novels by Hardy which do not ring quite ring true, novels which the critics and the public, again with touching unanimity, have voted to be of high rank. But what is a novel? A novel, says the learned Charles Annandale, is “a fictitious prose narrative, involving some plot of greater or less intricacy, and professing to give a picture of real life, generally exhibiting the passions and sentiments, in a state of great activity, and especially the passion of love”.

He continues by showing that the book richly fulfils these requirements, while noting the plot is of less intricacy, a virtue in comparison with the stage effects and unreality of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*: the “whirligig changes of Farfrae and Lucetta, Henchard and Newson in the matrimonial mazes of the story, and listening to the chorus of the rustics in the wings.” By comparison:

How true, how unerringly true to human nature is this picture of the Iden household; how delicately held and rendered to a hair, is this picture of the father's sluggish, masculine will, pricked ineffectually by the waspish tongue of feminine criticism. Further, we not only have the family's idiosyncrasies, their habits, mental atmosphere, and domestic story brought before us in a hundred pages, easily and instinctively by the hand of the artist, but we have the whole book steeped in the breath of English spring...

On the question of Jefferies personal interpolations, which is so much an issue in ‘The Field-Play’, Garnett's position is somewhat ambiguous. He accepts that the digressions “damage the artistic illusion of the whole.” The book shows “the carelessness, the haste, the roughness of a sketch”, but adds “let us be thankful that its artistic weaknesses are those of a sketch direct from nature, rather than those of an ambitious studio picture. And these digressions are an integral part of the book's character.”

The eight pages of the introduction's lucid and fervent affirmation must be one of the most positive endorsements of a writer by a major critic ever penned. To quote here the final sentences:

“Jefferies did not understand human nature”, say the accomplished critics. Did he not? *Amaryllis at the Fair* is one of the truest criticisms of human life, oh reader, you are likely to meet with. The mixedness of things, the old, old human muddle, the meanness and stupidity and shortsightedness of humanity, the good salty taste of life in the healthy mouth, the spirituality of love, the strong earthy roots of appetite, man’s lust for life, with circumstance awry, and the sharp wind blowing alike on the just and the unjust—all is there on the printed page of *Amaryllis at the Fair*. The song of the wind and the roar of London unite and mingle therein for those who do not bring the exacting eye of superiority to this most human book.

Garnett’s advocacy of the spirit and art of Jefferies the novelist certainly stands out, but does not stand entirely alone. *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*, by Edward Thomas, published in 1909, has been described by Q.D. Leavis as a classic of critical biography. To date it is certainly the most sympathetic and judicious study of the man and his books, and the space devoted to all the novels, with abundant quotation and astute interpretation, show them to be of certainly no less importance than the country books, essays and *The Story of My Heart*. He makes no comment on them, however, as exercises in or developments of, specifically, the art of fiction. But then neither as critic and biographer, nor as a poet, was the novel central to his literary endeavour. The absence of any commentary on ‘The Field-Play’ is perhaps a reflection of this. Garnett’s introduction to *Amaryllis* was reprinted in Duckworth’s Reader’s Library and New Reader’s Library through to 1927. In 1938 a major article on Jefferies’ work and reputation, ‘Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies’ by Q.D. Leavis, appeared in the Cambridge literary review *Scrutiny*.<sup>52</sup> This is another landmark in the understanding of Jefferies’ work in general, and his fiction in particular, which takes priority in a conjectured collected edition, as in the article

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies’, by Q.D. Leavis. *Scrutiny: a Quarterly Review*, Vol. VI. no.4, March 1938. pp. 435–446.

itself. Like Garnett she begins by challenging current assessments, as represented by Looker's *Jefferies England* anthology<sup>53</sup> and Williamson's *Selections*,<sup>54</sup> and revised *Hodge and His Master*.<sup>55</sup> the first presenting him as a lofty Victorian sage, "a thinker"; and the other as an extension of the author's own ego. Beyond this she deplors a general neglect, due in part to "the Bloomsbury cult of W.H. Hudson", which left the impression that "Hudson did everything Jefferies did, only much better because he was an artist, a great stylist, and the other a clumsy amateur who wrote journalism". She then proceeds to put together her own selection of passages, showcasing some of Jefferies most progressive social ideas and scathing criticisms of the class system, the church, education, servitude and poverty, but nothing from *The Story of My Heart* (In which indeed she might have found some ammunition) or 'The Pageant of Summer'. However in acknowledging that Jefferies' was "a comprehensive and many-sided genius" it is clear that her intention is to balance the picture presented by Looker and Williamson, rather than to claim Jefferies exclusively as a clarion of the Left. "Jefferies' 'message' is so much more complex and deep-rooted that the total impression made of anything he wrote is not of this simple [Looker/Williamson] order." It is in *Greene Ferne Farm*, *Bevis*, *Wood Magic* and the three late novels Mrs. Leavis finds the qualities she most admires, but acknowledges: "The contrast between the maturity and originality of the content and Jefferies' clumsiness in manipulating the devices of the novel is striking and may put off many readers." She attributes the clumsiness simply to "indifference":

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<sup>53</sup> Jefferies' England, edited by S.J. Looker. London, Constable, 1937.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Jefferies: selections of his work... edited by Henry Williamson. London, Faber & Faber, 1937.

<sup>55</sup> *Hodge and His Masters*, re-arranged by Henry Williamson. London, Methuen, 1937.

... and when in *Amaryllis at the Fair* (another unfortunate title) he found a form that could convey all that he was interested in treating without obliging him to satisfy the conventional demands of the novelist he produced a masterpiece... The Victorian features of these novels bulk at least as largely in Hardy's novels, but it is only in Jefferies' that the vitality and genuineness of the rest makes the conventional idiom appear ludicrous... in Jefferies novels the best parts are more mature than the best parts of most of Hardy.

Mrs. Leavis finds *The Deny Morn* Jefferies' "most considerable novel". "In *The Deny Morn* he goes further than any Victorian novelist towards the modern novel—I mean the novel that seems to have significance for us other than as a mirror of manners and morals; I should describe it as one of the few real novels between *Wuthering Heights* and *Sons and Lovers*."

These are undoubtedly the boldest, but also well argued, claims to have been made for Jefferies as a novelist, primarily and characteristically. My only concern, a slight one, is the apparent contradiction of *Amaryllis at the Fair* being Jefferies' masterpiece, while *The Deny Morn* is his most considerable novel. It suggests that *Amaryllis* is a lesser achievement purely as a novel, and that could only be due to the absence of plot, and presence of copious authorial digressions. The latter of course are rich expressions of the author's wisdom, spirit and personality so do not detract from the masterpiece claim in the sense of making the work his most perfect testament. Jefferies himself regarded *The Story of My Heart* as the work in which he most fully expressed his life and soul, but which Mrs. Leavis refers to as a "garden-suburb cult". And then she finds "Amaryllis at the Fair" "another unfortunate title", the other, with more justice, being *The Story*. The title is in fact exceptionally well chosen, linking a classically named heroine with commonplace rituals and rusticity of a country fair. And there is a hint too of a sly rejoinder to the anticipated criticism that the book has no plot. It has a plot: Amaryllis goes to the fair; and what happens there is as significant as the dramatic

content of any novel. Amaryllis is a very real country girl, as is the even more idealised Felise, an Aphrodite who at one point loses her hat.

If we take Jefferies' nine full length works of fiction as a whole it is only in four of them that the authorial presence could be described as prominent. Some allowance might perhaps be made for the first two, as a beginner, and a young man brimming with perceptions and ideas which he took to be original, and some of which may well have been. *World's End* has far less of this and far more narrative, drama and intrigue, and some compelling events like the fate of the 'Lucca'. *Greene Ferne Farm* has often been compared to Hardy, especially to *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*. It is scenic and dramatic, its rustics sharply real, its lovers somewhat lightly drawn, and a very memorable *dies irae* scene in which the toil broken field labouring women each curtsy as they pass the window of the ancient tyrant landowner, cursing him under their breath, where he sits aloft as if enthroned, stone dead. What commentary there is concerns the labourers' political agitation which paradoxically supports the conservative position of Jefferies' letters to *The Times* in 1872. *Hodge and His Masters* should be mentioned in this context. It is filled with finely realised characters, places, life stories and situations, and lacks only a connecting plot to make it an impressive realist novel of its day. As for *Wood Magic* and *Bevis*, these are classed as children's books, and indeed have been and should be read by children. But there is nothing in the least condescending or sentimental about them, and they are equally instructive to an adult readership. Subtitled *A Fable*, *Wood Magic* weaves tales of power, cunning and intrigue that remind us of Jefferies' interest in the career of Niccolo Machiavelli (N<sup>12</sup>). *Bevis* takes us on a long saga of making things, role play, friendship, adventure, exploration, wonder and self-discovery that calls in play the order of narrative skill we find in *Robinson Crusoe* or *Huckleberry Finn*. The fact that his

characters are children doesn't make that any the less so. What commentary there is in the book, for example on the value of a country upbringing, is wholly appropriate. The first part of *After London* is a triumph of narrative progression, and again, the fact that it is about the natural rather than the human world does not detract from the imagination, knowledge and skill that went into its creation. In the post-apocalyptic world of the second part humanity has reverted to a much earlier stage of its development, so there would of course be no place for Jefferies' comments on the affairs of his own times. The picture is a little pale or sketchy, at least for Jefferies, but this may be the result of abridgment by or at the behest of the publisher. The hero Felix sets out on a quest to find his beloved, Aurora, whether a person or an aspiration is unresolved. The trials and discoveries of his journey are the main narrative interest, and the scene where he arrives at the festering and toxic swamp that was once London is one of the most arresting and memorable in his entire output. And again the ending that is not an ending, that confused the reviewers, is another stroke of original conception.

The scope, therefore, of the claim that Jefferies' novels are marred by personal intrusions and digressions, is limited, if indeed sustainable at all. The second objection is "clumsiness in manipulating the devices of the novel" as Mrs. Leavis puts it. She attributes this to indifference, Garnett to carelessness, but perhaps condensation would be another way of looking at it. Having established character and situation by other means, consequent events can be handled briefly. The clumsiness is in the convention, not the handling of it. The third is, as Salt baldly states, that Jefferies' characters do not live. The only explanation of this, in the face of so much evidence to the contrary, is that it is linked to the previous two: the idea that the only way human character and potential can be realised in fiction is by showing it in action, in a complex interwoven

series of events—a plot. If this were the case there would be no living human beings in formal poetry.

One further mistaken approach to Jefferies fiction needs also to be mentioned—one that enables his admirers to maintain their esteem while allowing for the criticisms of Besant and his following. Its main proponent is Samuel J. Looker, and Jefferies never had a more ardent admirer. The novels belonged, he proposed, to a special genre, the “bucolic novel”, and in this genre Jefferies was supreme—“The finest bucolic novels in the English language”.<sup>56</sup> There is a hint of this even in Garnett’s introduction to *Amaryllis*, when he describes the book as one of the best: “latter-day novels of English country life”, though he acknowledges later it is also a novel in which “the song of the wind and the roar of London unite”. It must be the case that the basic requirements of the novel are the same regardless of the location, subjects, or whether set in the past, present or future.

This alternative critique of Jefferies’ novels, therefore, places them in the forefront of his achievement, and also regards them as the growing tip of his development. *Amaryllis at the Fair*, Jefferies’ last book, ends with the heroine returned safely from the fair to her eccentric father’s beautiful but failing farm, sitting with her invalid lover, in an “interlude of Heaven”:

And as I must leave them (I trust but for a little while) I will leave them on the brown oak timber, sap-stain brown, in the sunshine and dancing shadow of summer, among the long grass and the wild flowers.

There can be little doubt that the lives, fortunes and dreams of these, and his many characters would have been at the heart of his future work, had he lived.

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<sup>56</sup> S.J. Looker. ‘Richard Jefferies as Novelist’. *The Worthing Cavalcade*. Worthing, Aldridge Bros. 1946.

As well as by Edward Garnett and Q.D. Leavis, this assessment is supported by Douglas Brown in his study of Thomas Hardy, 1854, referred to above, and in 'The Novels of Richard Jefferies' by J.W. Blench<sup>57</sup> the same year. Quoting Saintsbury's restriction of Jefferies entirely to "the world of nature—the simple lovely things of the earth", he writes:

However I believe this to be a mistaken view, and hope to show by short analyses, that his considerably varied themes and characteristic attitudes find their richest and most vital expression in his three best, but unjustly neglected, novels—*Greene Ferne Farm*, *The Denny Morn*, and *Amaryllis at the Fair*.

'The Field-Play' entirely fits into this reading of Jefferies' novels in relation to the rest of his work, and my contention here is that, despite its shorter length, in its intensity of sympathy and creativity it serves to enforce and validate it.

## 11 Postscript

It is clear that Jefferies "naturalistic" fiction evolved from his work as a journalist. 'The True Tale of a Wiltshire Labourer' and 'John Smith's Shanty' use simple narrative as a convenient way of presenting the facts and information he has gathered from personal experience and observation on the condition of the Wiltshire agricultural labourers. As case histories we would hardly expect much in the way of nature description or local colour in them. In 'Gaudy as a Garden' and 'The Midsummer Hum' the formula is reversed. The story is there for its own sake in the profusely rendered setting of midsummer fields and lanes, and the picture is filled out with details of wildlife and curious old rustic traditions. The labourer's malaise is just touched on here, and there is a hint of things to come in the introduction of a new character—the well-to-do young gentleman who comes between the peasant girl and her lover.

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<sup>57</sup> 'The Novels of Richard Jefferies', by J.W. Blench. *The Cambridge Journal*. Vol.7, March 1954.

But the earlier theme is cancelled out by this new development in that the labourer's sullen, inarticulate rage is provided with an object adequate for it. Moreover the gentleman, as a gentleman, is of course a man of honour, so that when he realises his mistake he can quite simply adopt the role of patron open to his class, and make generous amends. The result is a happy ending with everyone provided for. In fact the two stories are much slighter productions and have little bearing on Jefferies' development except that they bring together nature description (untypically idyllic) and an account (mellowed but first-hand) of life in the agricultural community. The synthesis of the two approaches takes place at a deeper level of the development of each in *Greene Ferne Farm*, Jefferies' first purely country novel published in 1880. Here the natural world is not present merely as scenery. It penetrates the foreground to become as vital as the human drama, and this extension and fruition of Jefferies' feeling for nature takes us forward to 'The Field-Play' where the ideal pattern materialises. His sensibility to the natural environment is at its high maturity in this work, and he goes further in his search for the truth in the existing state of things in agricultural life. He touches the tragic moral of the peasant's story as well as the social message urged by the facts of the contemporary situation.

Also noteworthy now is the way Jefferies encloses a grimly realistic story within a fragment of Elizabethan pastoral poetry. In earlier fiction we have seen idyllic cliché and self-conscious quotations in proportion to a lack of fresh perceptions. In the later novels, where expression is wholly original and the author's personality written into every line, he still keeps literary titles and classical sounding proper names: "the dewy morn", "Felise", "Amaryllis", "Alere Flamma", "Aurora", "Amadis Iden". The point of this, I think, is to emphasize the ideal, larger than life aspect of the leading figures, and give the works in which they appear a poetic

identity. He sets out with realistic intentions to represent what he called “the coarseness and cornucopia of life” (*Notebooks* Feb.1885), and writing “the natural history of men and women” (NB July 1879), and in opposition to this observes “My fatal tendency is towards the ideal. I begin resolved on coarseness and soon get to the dawn” (NB Aug 1884), and “All my characters have a tendency to become idealised. The world goes on by rule of thumb.” (NB June 1885). In fact a great deal of Jefferies’ notes for his novels, and the occasional hints of his reading of other novelists and poets, centres round the question of the conflict or compatibility, and relative desirability of real and romantic or ideal elements, naturalism and the role of the imagination in fiction. A typical entry reads: “A central character to go through all, stringing the pearls. This is real. No use to mix the real and romantic—separate. All real or all romantic—The idea is to make the central (even the real) romantic and yet real.” (NB Nov. 1883)

Despite the compressed syntax this can be seen to correspond with Jefferies’ practice in *The Deny Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*. Felise and Amaryllis are true-to-life country girls with real feelings and appetites, but they are given romantic names (probably from Swinburne and Milton) because the treatment is entirely *con amore*, and such that they pre-empt all other interests. Their beauty, and innate strength of constitution—physical and spiritual—make them so dear and sacred to Jefferies that in the last analysis they are ideal, and as such act as touchstones when brought into contact with cruelty, stupidity, ugliness—in a word coarseness, in country life. Reality at this level is present in strength in *After London*, which makes up the trilogy of Jefferies late fiction. Jefferies describes the book in a letter to C.J. Longman (April ’84) as “a romance of real character”, for although the scene is set in a remote imaginary future life has lost none of its edge. But the heroine is the most idealistic: she is named Aurora after his

symbol for the ideal. She represents the highest point of aspiration in a benighted community, cut off from history and sunk into barbarism by a great natural disaster. Thus her acting of Antigone is a link with past civilisation. One critic wrote: "We feel that she would be capable of Antigone's devotion... It is by invention of this kind that *After London* proves itself to be a romance, not only of facts, but ideas." (A. Clutton Brock, *The Speaker* Nov. 4 1905)

Dolly in 'The Field-Play' is at the other end of the scale from Aurora. Her name tells us she is a peasant girl of the type of Molly, Madge, Lucy and Sally in the earlier stories. Like them she is tied to the community and its life of toil, and her wrongs are the result of established tyrannies and abuses. Passive and representative though she is, nevertheless she is an embodiment of the ideal: of all that the life of the individual might be in natural surroundings. The nightingale and thorn symbolism isolates this way of seeing her, so that her betrayal belongs, in this light, to an ideal world of fable and romance—timeless, tragic, and set apart from the mundane world that caused it.

The reference to formal poetry in title and epigraph suggests also the secret of Jefferies' whole imaginative treatment and organisation of familiar material. From what scattered evidence we have it seems that he found the examples of other novelists of limited value in dealing with the problems peculiar to his own subject matter and sensibility—the problems that underlie his deliberation on the real, the romantic and ideal in fiction. Dickens is one example. In a note on Fagin in *Oliver Twist* he observes that "Some amount of exaggeration is necessary to produce the idea of reality". (NB May '85). But he finds the spirit and proportions of complete works to be at fault: "Dickens made whole books of coarse, repellent characters, and to me he is unreadable." (NB Jan./Feb. '84). On the same occasion he says of deformed characters in Victor Hugo and Eugene Sue: "They

may to some seem foils to throw up other beauties, to me they are repellent and spoil all, like grit in food.” Thinking perhaps of his own use of the strong central character he complains that Hugo’s progression by short scenes resembling statement and antithesis “does not give you time to become imbued with the sentiments of the characters.”

Paradoxically Emile Zola is one French novelist, known for his unsparing realism, that Jefferies may have derived some value from, especially in the context of ‘The Field-Play’. One brief note reads: “Zola, what looks realism is imagination.” (NB Aug.’84) This shows that Jefferies had read some of Zola’s work at this date. It is unlikely that he was able to obtain copies of French editions, and though he received some tuition in French he is not known to have been fluent, so he would have read Zola as he read the classics in English translations. Zola’s sexually explicit realism was unacceptable to English publishers and readers. Henry Vizetelly (who incidentally published two conventional stories of Jefferies’ in 1883) translated and published some of Zola’s most notorious realist novels in the ’80s and ’90s, and was prosecuted and fined on two occasions, on the second also imprisoned, for his pains. In any case the first complete versions in English came out after Jefferies note in August 1884: *Germinal* 1885, *La Terre* 1888, and *La Bete Humaine* in 1891. The question then is what Jefferies meant by this note. Was it that the squalor and brutality of lives at the lowest social levels he describes was imagined, or invented? Or it could have been a more subtle reading: the idea that total truthfulness in fiction (called for notably by George Eliot) required the power of imagination to penetrate, and truly understand and empathise with the condition and experience of another. Zola in fact interspersed his great realist sagas with romantic fables, seemingly exercised by the same dynamic contrast/balance between real and romantic, coarse and ideal, we find Jefferies wrestling with in

his notebooks. The Zola realist masterpiece that Jefferies could have read is *L'Assommoir*, of which two English translations were published in 1879. As a work which displayed the degrading effects and tragic consequences of alcohol it could have escaped the English censor and appealed to the temperance movement; and it is particularly relevant to 'The Field-Play'. Like Zola's heroine Dolly's fate is indirectly linked to drink, and like Gervaise she ends up broken in body and spirit as a laundry drudge.

These are novelists Jefferies appears to have studied in forming his own methods and directions in fiction. It was in poetry however, especially Shakespeare, that he found the fusion of real and romantic that satisfied and inspired him. A notebook jotting of November '83, when he could have been writing 'The Field-Play' runs: "Shakespeare. The real characters, Falstaff, Bardolph; the high sentiments Cleopatra, the country poetry, Jessica, the stars, green corn. The Three Real, Romantic, Shakespearean, most powerful spirit each alone. The Real, the Romantic, the Shakespearean." Jefferies must have assimilated Shakespeare's country poetry into his own feeling for nature at an early age. He writes of the autobiographical character in *World's End*: "Somehow the spirit of those sonnets and that peculiar poetry had penetrated his mind", and when he first sets eyes on his sweetheart: "All that English beauty, which seemed to pervade the poetry of the wonderful Will, to Aymer's fancy seemed to be hers."

In a personal note Andrew Rossabi writes: "When Henry Williamson said Jefferies was 'irregularly' the greatest English writer since Shakespeare one knows what he was struggling to say." Williamson's statement is similar in its sheer audacity to Q.D. Leavis's claim that *The Deny Morn* was one of the few real novels between *Wuthering Heights* and *Sons and Lovers*. But in both cases there is a spark of truth. It is regrettable that Lawrence didn't make any significant comment on Jefferies,

but he might well have added Jefferies after Hardy in the following:

They are all, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Maupassant, Flaubert—so very obvious and coarse, beside the lovely, mature and sensitive art of Fenimore Cooper or Hardy. It seems to me that our English art, at its best, is by far the subtlest and loveliest and most perfect in the world.<sup>58</sup>

Again a breathtaking claim, but there may be something more to it than literary chauvinism. As a boy Jefferies “devoured insatiably the tales of Fenimore Cowper”. (Rossabi op. cit.vol.1 p.324)

## 12. End Notes

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### N<sup>1</sup> Jefferies’ move from Swindon to London

Jefferies in fact moved from Swindon to Sydenham early in 1876, where he stayed at his aunt’s home, Shanklin Villa. He moved to a rented property in Surbiton sometime between December 1876 and January 1877.

### N<sup>2</sup> ‘Fortune: or the Art of Success’

A further letter of 23 June [1871], submitting *Fortune* to an unknown publisher, has since come to light. It goes into greater detail about the book’s contents and intentions, showing it to have been a genuine attempt to write a popular manual on how to succeed in life. The letter was added to the collection of the Richard Jefferies Society in 2014. A full discussion both of this and the letter to Disraeli, and the latter’s reply, will be found in *A Peculiarly English Genius: A Biography of Richard Jefferies*, by Andrew Rossabi, Petton Books 2020, vol. II, pp. 213–222. Jefferies clearly set great store by *Fortune*, and its rejection by several publishers must have greatly disappointed him. But as it appears to have had no bearing at all either on Jefferies’ development as a novelist, or any other department of the work in which he did achieve lasting popularity, his readers have no reason to be displeased.

### N<sup>3</sup> ‘Only a Girl’

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<sup>58</sup> Letter from Lawrence to Catherine Carswell, 27 Nov., 1916. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*. Vol III Part 1 (1916–21), edited by James T. Boulton & Andrew Robertson. Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 41.

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In *A Peculiarly English Genius*, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.420, Andrew Rossabi quotes the report on the book by Bentley's chief reader. Geraldine Jewsbury: "I do not like it and I do not think it is worth yr having. There is a description of a girl's school so detestable that it is impossible to like anything that comes out of it. There is no strength of interest [possibly 'intellect'] and none of the characters make the reader care much about them." This is hard to decipher. It could relate to the school Jefferies' heroine attended, or taught at. As a seasoned reporter we cannot imagine him inventing conditions that did not exist. Girls' schools were by no means beds of roses, and we recall the trouble Charlotte Bronte got into for her faithful account of the school where she and her sisters were sent, and where one of them died.

N<sup>4</sup> *The Rise of Maximin, Emperor of the Occident*

Since discovered in *The New Monthly Magazine*, serialised October 1876 to July 1877, vol. X no, LVIII to vol. XII, no, LXVII. This discovery was made by Hugoe Matthews on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1975, and independently by another researcher, John Pearson, at about the same time. Subtitled *Compiled by Lucius, Keeper of the Imperial Archives at Iscapolis*, it is itself presented as a discovery: chronicles of ancient unknown history somewhat in the manner of Ossian. An important addition to the canon of Jefferies' fiction, it was published in book form in 2010 by Petton Books, with an introduction by Andrew Rossabi. A full discussion will also be found in the pages of Rossabi's biography *A Peculiarly English Genius*, *op.cit.*, volume two, which confirms and consolidates its links with *After London*. Jefferies' futurist masterpiece has come to supercede past favourites, *The Gamekeeper*, *Bevis* and *Amaryllis*, as Jefferies' most noted work, reflecting, perhaps, the fact that his imagined apocalypse previsions the very real threat the planet and mankind are now facing.

N<sup>5</sup> 'John Smith's Shanty'

As originally published in *Fraser's Magazine* (February 1874, pp. 135–149) the story fills eleven pages, double column, and this is followed by four pages of commentary, in which Jefferies begins by repeating his question "Who is to blame?" His analysis is generally positive, citing the progress of education and literacy, better housing, improvements in wages and conditions, modern farming practices and more enlightened farmers and landowners. He concludes: "... such scenes as were depicted in the early part of this paper will become impossible. They were pictures drawn from reality, but from a reality which is fast becoming a thing of the past." C.J. Longman may well have omitted this section to preserve the dramatic unity of the story. But with the deepening of the agricultural depression it may

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well have appeared to Longman in 1892 that this benign transformation was not happening, as it did to many other observers into the twentieth century, and to Jefferies himself when he wrote 'The Field-Play' nine years later. The full text was republished in *Landscape and Labour*, edited by John Pearson, Bradford-on Avon, The Moonraker Press, 1979.

N<sup>6</sup> Jefferies' dramatic impulse.

I am grateful to Andrew Rossabi for pointing out a passage in an article by Edward Thomas on Jefferies fiction which enlarges and develops the same observation:

Jefferies wrote stories as soon as he wrote anything, and after he was seventeen perhaps not a year passed without his writing a new novel or short story or revising an old one: the last book published in his lifetime was a novel, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and the last words of it seem to promise something which death prevented. Nor were these novels experiments unconnected with his life and his other work. Each of the three later periods of his life is represented by a fiction or more than one, into which he put his best work and in a manner not always equalled by the books which everyone praises. Thus *The Gamekeeper at Home* period is represented by *Greene Ferne Farm* and *Round about a Great Estate* is almost a fiction; *The Story of My Heart* period is represented by *Wood Magic*, *Bevis*, and *Deny Morn*; the last period of his more reflective and more deeply human essays is represented by *Amaryllis* and *After London*.

(Article first published in the *Readers' Review*, July 1908; also in the *Journal of Education*, October 1908; reprinted in *RJSJ* No. 4 (1995), 16–18)

N<sup>7</sup> Jefferies' love of music

"To me music is like a spring of fresh water in the midst of the desert to a wearied Arab." Letter to Ellen Harrild, Besant p.67.

N<sup>8</sup> 'The Field-Play' composition and publication

The published notebooks contain one clear reference to an incident in 'The Field-Play' dated March 1883. An early entry on the revised *Deny Morn* appeared in March and the novel progressively occupies more space through the summer and autumn when longer passages on the characters and versions of the plot appear. Completion is recorded on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1883. 'The Field-Play' was first published in the December number of *Time*, 1883, and collected by Jefferies in *The Life of the Fields*, Chatto &

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Windus, June 1884. In America it was published with an introduction by Thomas B. Mosher, separately and in *The Biblelot*, vol VI, no. 7, July 1900. The first American edition of *The Life of the Fields* was published by Thomas Y. Crowell and Co, New York, 1907.

N<sup>9</sup> Dolly pricking her finger

Another Rossabi observation is appropriate here:

Dolly pricking her finger is anticipated by the scene in *Greene Ferne Farm* (Chapter 8, ‘A-nutting’) of Margaret pricking her thumb on a briar thorn, which Val extracts: ‘A tiny red globule of blood oozed from the white and polished skin, contrasting so sweetly in colour that he actually paused half a second to admire before he drew it.’

“Uptill” in the poem means “against”. Without invoking Freud we can appreciate that the breast/thorn image had strong symbolic resonance for Jefferies.

N<sup>10</sup> Nihilism

Remainder copies of *The Scarlet Shawl* were issued in a single volume with *A Female Nihilist* by Ernest Lavigne, London, W.H. Allen, [1880].

N<sup>11</sup> Critical comments on ‘The Field-Play’

Looker refers to it again in a gloss on the Notebook entry of March 1883 (*Notebooks* p.128): as “a powerful and sombre sketch of bucolic life”. Another commentary is in Thomas B. Mosher’s brief introduction to his printing of the story in 1900. He describes it as: “a cruel little masterpiece of English peasant life... a minor village tragedy without hope of a hereafter save the pessimistic implication that no hereafter is possible for Dolly. Not even De Quincey’s story of Ann, drawn as it was from actual experience, conveys such sense of utter extinguishment of soul.” He makes further comparisons with Hardy and William Morris.

N<sup>12</sup> ‘Machiavelli: a Study’, by Jefferies.

In *The Nineteenth Century and After*, September 1948 with an introduction by S.J Looker. Later reprinted in *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, no. 20, 2013.