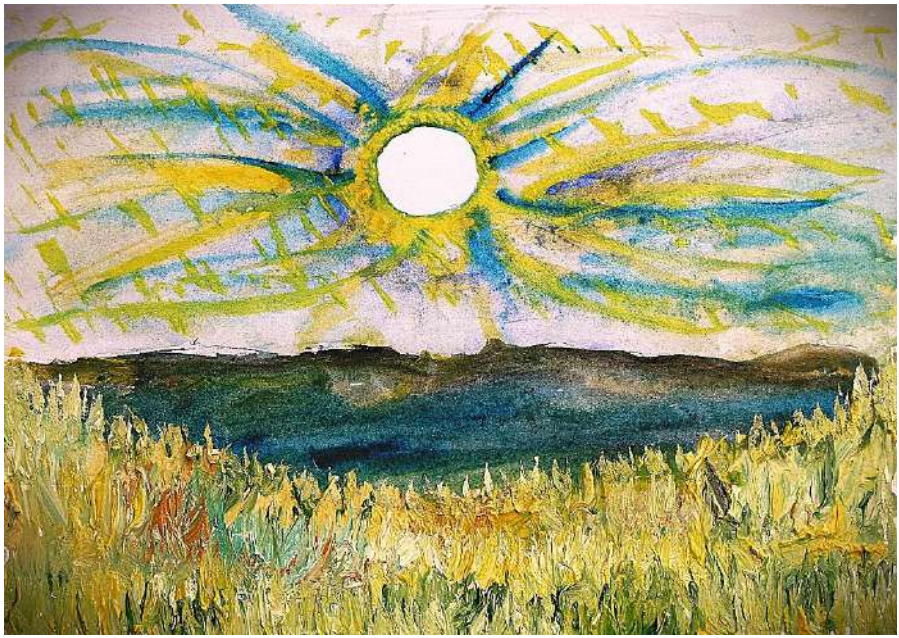


~ Liddington Hill ~

Richard Jefferies'

'Inflatus'

Nature Communion

~

Richard Jefferies

Liddington Hill 'Inflatus' c.1866

~ Combining three textual accounts ~

BLACK TEXT = standard text from *The Story of My Heart* publication. Written 1883. Chapters XII, I & II.

GREEN TEXT = from *Genesis of The Story of My Heart* (*Field and Farm* anthology 1957, ed. Samuel Looker). Drafted c.1882. Parts 1 & 2.

PURPLE TEXT = from *First Draft* of *The Story of My Heart* (appendix to *The Story of My Heart* – Constable 1947 edition, ed. Samuel Looker). Drafted c.1882. Part I.

Extracts selected and headings added, RD Stapleford 2026.

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~ STIRRINGS ~

I was not more than eighteen when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to me from all the visible universe, and indefinable aspirations filled me. I found them in the grass fields, under the trees, on the hilltops, at sunrise, and in the night. There was a deeper meaning everywhere. The Sun burned with it, the broad front of morning beamed with it; a deep feeling entered me while gazing at the sky in the azure noon, and in the starlit evening…

In the glow of youth there were times every now and then when I felt the 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, for there is a dust which settles on the heart as well as that which falls on a ledge. It is injurious to the mind as well as to the body to be always in one place and always surrounded by the same circumstances. A species

of thick clothing slowly grows about the mind, the pores are choked, little habits become a part of existence, and by degrees the mind is inclosed in a husk. When this began to form I felt eager to escape from it, to throw off the heavy clothing, to drink deeply once more at the fresh foundations of life. An inspiration—a long deep breath of the pure air of thought—could alone give health to the heart.

So long ago is it since the first promptings of these thoughts arose in my mind that it is difficult to trace the beginnings of them. They spread abroad downwards like the roots of a tree, and the deeper they are sought out the more finely divided they appear and difficult to detach from earth. To the very base of life they go.

Out in the grass fields at home when I was about sixteen these thoughts used to come, and I still recollect the extreme vividness of the pictures which formed in my mind of trees and meadows, waters and hills. Of these alone I did not think so much as of the inner and esoteric meaning which seemed everywhere… This inner and esoteric meaning of the universe. The Sun burned with it, the broad front of morning beamed with it, the thousand dew-drops proclaimed it, and it rested on the hills under the sky. The blue hill line was like looking through a window into a part of ourselves we do not always see. A deep feeling came to me from the far stars.

~ FROM COATE ~

The Sun rises in the morning at Coate, Wiltshire, where I used to live, over the down called Liddington Hill.

Immediately after getting up I used to go out to the outside of the garden and rickyard to a spot whence, under an elm, I could see clear across the fields eastwards to the hill. This spot was behind an elm, a little hidden and sheltered from sight, so that I could think and feel without check. Often I had to steal to it in a roundabout way,

lest I should be seen; and, after a long while I was seen, and it was not pleasant, for I felt ashamed; still, I felt I must go, and I did go.

Hidden in this nook, I looked at the ridge of the hill, over which sometimes there was a yellow light diffused about the sky; this was when the atmosphere was almost clear, and sometimes there were horizontal bars of red cloud.

While thus looking, almost at the moment of first doing so, I involuntarily drew a longer breath, after which my breath came slower and I forgot everything. All that was behind me as it were: the house, the people about, the sounds; even the grass, wet with dew, in front where the fields stretched away to the down, just for the moment was quite gone. My thought or inner consciousness went right up, away as it were into the yellow light, or farther than the red bars of cloud. This only lasted a very short time, perhaps only part of a second, and there was no formulated thought or wish. But afterwards, in the moments that followed, I did wish, in an indefinite way, for some increase or enlargement of my existence so that I could the more fully correspond to the largeness of feeling that I had enjoyed for a part of a second.

I did not connect this much, or at all, with any circumstances or condition of daily life, it was something in itself and apart.

After this wish, there generally came two things: the desire to get back again the moment of exultation, and then an attempt to formulate it into a theory or belief or doctrine, as to what I ought or ought not to do. But the moment of exultation, however much I might try, did not return, and this formula did not occur to me; so that after, for still another moment or two, standing to admire the hill, I went away more than half afraid that I had been watched, and despised because it was so unusual a thing to do.

Sometimes I crept in under a large crab [crabapple] tree which was covered with ivy, the ivy being evergreen, afforded some cover, even in winter and spring; or behind the trunks of the elms.

While there, the wind came through the tops of the elms, which bent slowly to and fro; and looking up through these at and beyond the fleecy clouds into the sky, I felt lifted up and away still higher through them.

The rosy light coming across the dewy grass from the hill; the wind; the sense of mounting up into the lofty heaven filled me again with a deep sigh, or wish, to get or draw something out of the space, some part of that which filled me with such admiration, the subtle inner part of it.

There seemed to be something like a communication between it and me, though only for a moment, though no doubt that sense of communication was only the sensitiveness of my own mind.

The tips of the elms were like gilt in the rays. My desire is for the beauty of these things; the feeling is itself a prayer: prayer to be myself like that desire.

I made this pilgrimage every morning, even when it was stormy or cold, first looking towards the east a moment or two. I did this, too, when it was so wet underfoot as to make it difficult to get to this spot.

~ TO LIDDINGTON HILL ~

Once now and then the feeling came over me so powerfully that I was obliged to go up to the hill over which the Sun rose. The distance being about three miles and I usually went through Liddington. The pilgrimage took me past the church and so to the footpaths through some cornfields.

Every now and then there came a time when my soul-nature felt the necessity of a strong inspiration of soul-thought. There was a hill to which I used to resort at such periods. The labour of walking to it, three miles, all uphill, seemed to clear my body of the grossness

of accumulated routine at home. To be always in one place is injurious to the mind as well as to the body. Thick clothing gathers slowly about the mind, little habits become part of existence, and by degrees the mind is enclosed in a husk. When this began to form I always felt a strong desire to escape from it and went to the hill. So soon as the labour began to tell on me, and so soon as the familiar every day scene was out of sight, I began to breathe a new air and to have a fresher inspiration.

There is a hill to which I used to resort at such periods. The labour of walking three miles to it, all the while gradually ascending, seemed to clear my blood of the heaviness accumulated at home. On a warm summer day the slow continued rise required continual effort, which carried away the sense of oppression. The familiar everyday scene was soon out of sight; I came to other trees, meadows, and fields; I began to breathe a new air and to have a fresher aspiration.

~ SWARD OF THE DOWN ~

I restrained my soul till I reached the sward of the hill; psyche, the soul that longed to be loose […] I restrained psyche, my soul, till I reached and put my foot on the grass at the beginning of the green hill itself.

The rise to the foot of the hill was gradual and required continued effort on a warm summer day. I restrained my prayer till I touched the sward: beginning at the edge of the grass. Then, moving slowly up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to take a wider horizon of feeling: with every inspiration of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The Sun shone down more brilliantly—his light was whiter here.

On reaching the sward of the Down, I no sooner felt it under foot and no sooner began to draw my breath longer, as I walked up, than the feeling came to me and my heart began to feel higher, purer, made able to ask and to pray without many words. I prayed that I

should possess this aspiration that I felt so deeply. That I should really possess soul-life.

Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The very light of the Sun was whiter and more brilliant here.

There was something in the redness of the dawn, in the light flooding from the Sun, in the blue heaven, in the whisper of the wind in the elm-tops, which I wanted in myself, in me, to absorb it into my being.

~ THE HILLTOP ~

By the time I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten all the petty circumstances of daily work, and the annoyances which surrounded me…

By the time I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence. I felt myself, 'myself'.

~ LIDDINGTON CASTLE / 'CAMP' (Hill Fort) ~

When I came to the south-eastern [corrected by RJ in subsequent draft – see below*] **side there was a spot where the outer bank had slipped leaving a partial gap like a gateway. From there the view was over a broad plain, beautiful with wheat and enclosed with a perfect amphitheatre of green hills…**

I used to go down into the ancient entrenchment upon the summit, and walk round the southern side, and there moving up the fosse, and lie down with my head just below the verge of the fosse, so that on lifting myself on my hands I could see over (but not within)

the rampart being behind. I was quite shut in and concealed and utterly alone, for there was no one nearer than a shepherd perhaps in the fields a mile away below.

There was an intrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse I walked round it slowly to recover breath. On the south-western [corrected from previous page draft text*] side there was a spot where the outer bank had partially slipped, leaving a gap. There the view was over a broad plain, beautiful with wheat, and inclosed by a perfect amphitheatre of green hills. Through these hills there was one narrow groove, or pass, southwards, where the white clouds seemed to close in the horizon. Woods hid the scattered hamlets and farmhouses, so that I was quite alone.

~ MEDITATION ~

On lying down, I used to first look up into the sky, gazing at it, till I could seem to see deep into the azure, and then lie down with my face in the short grass and thyme, placing my hands at each side of my face so as to shut out everything and quite hide myself. Then, having first drunk deeply of the heaven above, and felt the most glorious rays of the Sun, and remembering the old, old sea which lay but just yonder at the edge (as it seemed to me), I became lost, as it were, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe… feeling down, down, down, deep into the Earth under, and high above into the sky, and yet further up into the Sun and the stars there though not visible, and beyond these into great space, and losing thus my separateness as a man, became to feel like a part and into the whole.

Sometimes on lying down on the sward I first looked up at the sky, gazing for a long time till I could see deep into the azure and my eyes were full of the colour; then I turned my face to the grass and thyme, placing my hands at each side of my face so as to shut out everything and hide myself. Having drunk deeply of the heaven above and felt the most

glorious beauty of the day, and remembering the old, old, sea, which (as it seemed to me) was but just yonder at the edge, I now became lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt down deep into the Earth under, and high above into the sky, and farther still to the Sun and stars. Still farther beyond the stars into the hollow of space, and losing thus my separateness of being came to seem like a part of the whole. Then I whispered to the Earth beneath, through the grass and thyme, down into the depth of its ear, and again up to the starry space hid behind the blue of day. Travelling in an instant across the distant sea, I saw as if with actual vision the palms and coconut trees, the bamboos of India, and the cedars of the extreme south. Like a lake with islands the ocean lay before me, as clear and vivid as the plain beneath in the midst of the amphitheatre of hills…

Breathing the air, thinking of the sea, the sky, holding out the hand for the sunbeams to touch it, taking off my hat that the invisible ether beams of space might reach me; touching all these that I might touch God. God the unutterable spirit, invisible, unseen of eyes, that I might touch that which divided me from God. Beyond these at the other side, was God. With all the intensity of feeling which enwrapt me, into the intense communion I held with the Earth, the Sun, the sky, the stars, hidden by light, the ocean, the blade of grass and thyme; no longings can ever tell, the depth, the thrilling depth of these feelings; with these I prayed…

~ THE PRAYER ~

I was utterly alone with the Sun and the Earth. Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the Earth, the Sun, the air, and the distant sea far beyond sight. I thought of the Earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up: through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great Earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—its pureness, which is its beauty; the air touched me and gave me something of itself. I spoke to the sea: though so far, in my mind I saw it, green at the rim of the Earth and blue in deeper ocean; I desired to have its strength, its

mystery and glory. Then I addressed the Sun, desiring the soul equivalent of his light and brilliance, his endurance and unwearied race. I turned to the blue heaven over, gazing into its depth, inhaling its exquisite colour and sweetness. The rich blue of the unattainable flower of the sky drew my soul towards it, and there it rested, for pure colour is rest of heart. By all these I prayed; I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no other.

By the blue heaven, by the rolling Sun bursting through untrodden space, a new ocean of ether every day unveiled. By the fresh and wandering air encompassing the world; by the sea sounding on the shore—the green sea white-flecked at the margin and the deep ocean; by the strong Earth under me. Then, returning, I prayed by the sweet thyme, whose little flowers I touched with my hand; by the slender grass; by the crumble of dry chalky Earth I took up and let fall through my fingers. Touching the crumble of earth, the blade of grass, the thyme flower, breathing the Earth-encircling air, thinking of the sea and the sky, holding out my hand for the sunbeams to touch it, prone on the sward in token of deep reverence, thus I prayed that I might touch to the unutterable existence infinitely higher than deity.

Then I whispered to the Earth beneath, through the grass and thyme, down into the depth of its ear, and up to the starry space through the ether, and away. Travelling in an instant, across the sea and seeing (as if with the physical eyes the palms, cocoanut trees, Earth, just as clearly as the three-mile plain below me and as vividly) and whispered in thought:

With the glory of the great Sun, oh God, I long,
with the great firm, solid, deep and sustaining Earth under
and with all its strength into the depth and distance
and expansion of the ether,
with the age and formlessness and ceaseless motion of the vast Suns
which are but drops in space;
with the strength of the seas too;

with the stars and the light to them,
and all that is in them, with the unknown in the Great Space,
by all those things
which are the greatest and most powerful known to me;
by all the other things, oh God, which no doubt exist,
and of which I have not any idea whatsoever;
by all these things, oh God, I conjure You to hear me,
to listen to me, and to put these wishes into me.

Then, further, oh God, by my own soul,
that secret unknown and unfathomable thing or existence
by which I think and feel and know and have hopes of the above,
which above all things I cannot but believe You must have created
or caused to exist (far more than Earth, or sea, or air or ether)—
speaking, oh God, to You, by the inclination towards (not the words)
of this my soul (all words are short, as it were, of meaning),
I beg and implore You to put these wishes into me.
I wish to be more than I am;
to have something from each of these:
earth, air, light and water;
they are nothing in themselves but matter;
more of my own soul, which I see or feel by reflection;
but since I can neither see, hear nor learn of You anywhere,
it is only through these links that I can get at You—
gazing upon a flower—
and as I know nothing greater or grander than these,
and no possible contents of the star space above and around,
by these I beg and pray.

With the glory of the great sea, I said, with the firm, solid, and sustaining Earth; the depth, distance, and expanse of ether; the age, tamelessness, and ceaseless motion of the ocean; the stars, and the unknown in space; by all those things which are most powerful known to me, and by those which exist, but of which I have no idea whatever, I pray. Further, by my own soul, that secret existence which above all other

things bears the nearest resemblance to the ideal of spirit, infinitely nearer than Earth, Sun, or star. Speaking by an inclination towards, not in words, my soul prays that I may have something from each of these, that I may gather a flower from them, that I may have in myself the secret and meaning of the Earth, the golden Sun, the light, the foam-flecked sea. Let my soul become enlarged; I am not enough; I am little and contemptible. I desire a greatness of soul, an irradiance of mind, a deeper insight, a broader hope. Give me power of soul, so that I may actually effect by its will that which I strive for…

I recalled my inner existence, that consciousness which is called the soul. All these, that is myself, I threw into the balance to weigh the prayer the heavier. All my strength of body, mind and soul I flung into it; I tore and rent myself morally. I wrestled and laboured and toiled in might of prayer. This was prayer in itself, absolute, uncontrolled, undivided, simply itself. I lost myself for the moment in the wrestle, I hid my face in the short grass, and was wholly prostrated, wholly carried away.

With all the intensity of feeling which exulted me, all the intense communion I held with the Earth, the Sun and sky, the stars hidden by the light, with the ocean—in no manner can the thrilling depth of these feelings be written—with these I prayed, as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the note of my soul, redoubling my own voice by their power. The great Sun burning with light; the strong Earth, dear Earth; the warm sky; the pure air; the thought of ocean; the inexpressible beauty of all filled me with a rapture, an ecstasy, and inflatus. With this inflatus, too, I prayed. Next to myself I came and recalled myself, my bodily existence. I held out my hand, the Sunlight gleamed on the skin and the iridescent nails; I recalled the mystery and beauty of the flesh. I thought of the mind with which I could see the ocean sixty miles distant, and gather to myself its glory. I thought of my inner existence, that consciousness which is called the soul. These, that is, myself—I threw into the balance to weight the prayer the heavier. My strength of body, mind and soul, I flung into it; I put forth my strength; I wrestled and laboured, and toiled in might of prayer. The prayer, this

soul-emotion was in itself—not for an object—it was a passion. I hid my face in the grass, I was wholly prostrated, I lost myself in the wrestle, I was rapt and carried away.

~ COMING-TO ~

Becoming calmer, I returned again to myself and thought—I lay in rapt thought, floating in aspiration, steeped to the lips of my soul in desire. I did not then define, analyse, nor understand this. I see now that what I wanted was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be lifted up, to have soul-learning, to be full of it.

Becoming calmer, I returned to myself and thought, reclining in rapt thought, full of aspiration, steeped to the lips of my soul in desire. I did not then define, or analyse, or understand this. I see now that what I laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exulted, to be full of soul-learning.

Finally I rose and walked half a mile or so along the ridge to soothe myself. I became man again. Had any shepherd accidentally seen me lying on the turf, he would only have deemed me resting a few minutes. Who could have imagined the whirlwind of soul-passion that was going on within me as I reclined there!

Finally I rose, walked half a mile or so along the summit of the hill eastwards, to soothe myself and come to the common ways of life again. Had any shepherd accidentally seen me lying on the turf, he would only have thought that I was resting a few minutes; I made no outward show. Who could have imagined the whirlwind of passion that was going on within me as I reclined there!

~ GOING ON ~

I was greatly exhausted when I reached home. Occasionally I went upon the hill deliberately, deeming it good to do so; then, again, this

craving carried me away up there of itself. Though the principal feeling was the same, there were variations in the mode in which it affected me.

I was generally much exhausted when I reached home. Sometimes this craving carried me up the hill to itself: sometimes I went deliberately, deeming it good to do so; I went mostly in summer, but sometimes in winter, though I could not then sit on the grass. Yet to have merely been there seemed to repeat all that I had previously prayed.

In winter, though I could not then rest on the grass, or stay long enough to form any definite expression, I still went up to the hill once now and then, for it seemed that to merely visit the spot repeated all that I had previously said…

All the succeeding incidents of the year repeated my prayer as I noted them. The first green leaf on the hawthorn, the first spike of meadow grass, the first song of the nightingale, the green ear of wheat. I spoke it with the ear of wheat as the Sun tinted it golden; with the whitening barley; again with the red gold spots of autumn on the beech, the buff oak leaves, and the gossamer dew-weighted. All the larks over the green corn sang it for me, all the dear swallows; the green leaves rustled it; the green brook flags waved it; the swallows took it with them to repeat it for me in distant lands. By the running brook I meditated it; a flash of sunlight here in the curve, a flicker yonder on the ripples, the birds bathing in the sandy shallow, the rush of falling water. As the brook ran winding through the meadow, so one thought ran winding through my days…

Sometimes I spent the whole day walking over the hills searching for it; as if the labour of walking would force it from the ground. I remained in the woods for hours, among the ash sprays and the fluttering of the ring-doves at their nests, the scent of pines here and there, dreaming my prayer.

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Liddington Hill
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RD Stapleford
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