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# A NATURE LOVER AND HIS WORK

Mr. Edward Thomas Writes a Sympathetic Biography of Richard Jefferies, Student of English Country Life.

THOSE who have found pleasure in the books of Richard Jefferies, the English nature writer, will enjoy reading Edward Thomas's "Richard Jefferies, His Life and Work," (Little, Brown & Co. \$3,) for they will find in it a full and sympathetic biography prepared by one who thoroughly

MAN

Wifehood, matehood and  
honor of all—This was

WOMAN

Whelming love against  
Bion of her heart—This



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## The "Spectator" and Richard Jefferies.

THE *Spectator* has been described as "the leading literary organ of the day," and its correspondence columns as "always interesting" owing to the fact that they are "open to the most varied shades of opinion," and that there is "no boycott." Is there not? Out of my own recent experience I can assure the writer of this gratifying testimonial that, if he should become engaged in correspondence with the leading literary organ of the day on such a subject as the alleged return of a dying Free-thinker to orthodoxy, he will have cause to modify his judgment. There is at least one "shade of opinion" which the *Spectator* is not ashamed to boycott, and that is the views of those who question the story of the "conversion" of Richard Jefferies. The following letter, addressed by me to the editor of the *Spectator*, and promptly "declined with thanks," will tell its own tale:—

SIR,—I am sure you have no more desire to claim Jefferies unfairly as a Christian than I to claim him unfairly as a Freethinker. As, therefore, you have allowed Mrs. Mackintosh to repeat in your columns (May 6th, 1905) the account of Jefferies's "conversion" which she contributed, sixteen years ago, to the *Girl's Own Paper*—a story which, in another form, is familiar to readers of Besant's *Eulogy*—I presume you will grant me the usual courtesy of a reply.

Now, obviously, only those who were present with Jefferies at the end can speak of what then happened. It is not the facts, but the interpretation of the facts, that we question; and here it is that a consideration of Jefferies's own avowal of his creed becomes essential to the discussion. To say that he was "at times inclined to sceptical views" is to understate the case somewhat ludicrously, seeing that in his *Story of My Heart*, published only four years before his death, and with the prospect of death confronting him, he solemnly referred to the opinions there expressed as his "most serious convictions," for seventeen years "continually thought of and pondered over," and that in his *Hours of Spring*, which appeared only fifteen months before he died, the same freethinking views were reiterated. Here, then, is indubitable evidence that the change in Jefferies's belief, if change there were, took place towards the very close of his life—at the time, that is, when he was physically and mentally a wreck. Surely, without offence to his surviving relatives, we may doubt the intellectual value attaching to a "conversion" of that kind!

But how, I have often been asked, can I reconcile this contention with Sir Walter Besant's earlier statement, that at the end "the simple old faith came back to him"? I trust that in fairness you will permit me to quote from a letter which Sir Walter Besant addressed to me privately in 1891, three years after the publication of his *Eulogy*.

"Now here," he said, "is an important point. I stated in my *Eulogy* that he died a Christian. This was true in the sense of outward conformity. His wife read to him from the Gospel of St. Luke, and he acquiesced. But *I have since been informed* [the italics are Sir W. Besant's] he was weak, too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time when he wrote the *Story of My Heart*."

You may dismiss me, Sir, if you will, as a biographer who "airs opinions of his own" (whose but his own should he air?) and who "does not know his duty"; but you will not so easily dismiss the fact that the writer of the *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, who first lent authority to the story of the death-bed conversion, himself came to regard that incident as of little significance or weight.—Yours faithfully,

May 9th, 1905.

HENRY S. SALT.

The above letter the *Spectator* suppressed, and was content to leave its readers under the totally false impression that I had no answer to make to the statement which it described in an editorial note as "disposing finally of the allegation that Jefferies did not return to the Christian faith." Such are the methods to which "the leading literary organ of the day" will condescend, when there is a "religious" motive for dishonesty.

HENRY S. SALT.

RICHARD JEFFERIES  
HIS LIFE AND WORK.







Farmington  
Richard Jeffries

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# RICHARD JEFFERIES

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY EDWARD THOMAS

AUTHOR OF

'HORE SOLITARIÆ,' 'THE HEART OF ENGLAND,' ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS  
AND A MAP

LONDON : HUTCHINSON & CO.

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1909





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T. H.

TO

W. H. HUDSON

AUTHOR OF 'THE NATURALIST IN LA PLATA,'

'THE PURPLE LAND,' 'GREEN MANSIONS,'

'NATURE IN DOWNLAND,' ETC.

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## PREFACE

THIS book is an attempt to give a fuller account of the life and writings of Richard Jefferies than has yet been published. That 'The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies' by the late Walter Besant was kindly, but unsympathetic and incomplete, cannot be disputed. Mr. Henry S. Salt's 'Richard Jefferies: His Life and His Ideals,' though a much better book, is a critical essay, and leaves the way clear for such a book as I have tried to write. For over twenty years I have known Jefferies' part of Wiltshire, and I hope that I have got most of what the country people had to tell about him and his family. I have had much information and great kindness from Mrs. Richard Jefferies, Miss Phyllis Jefferies, Mr. Charles Jefferies, Mrs. Robert T. Billing (*née* Sarah Jefferies), Mr. Robert T. Billing, Mrs. Harrild, Mr. Henry S. Salt, Mr. C. P. Scott, Mr. C. J. Longman, and Mr. George Dartnell, author of a bibliography of Richard Jefferies in the *Wiltshire Archaeological Society's Magazine*, etc. I desire also to thank the publishers of Richard Jefferies' books for their permission to quote extensively from them: Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co., publishers of 'The Gamekeeper at Home,' 'The Amateur Poacher,' 'Wild Life in a Southern County,' 'Round about a Great Estate,' 'Greene Ferne Farm,' and 'Hodge and his Masters'; Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co., publishers of 'Wood Magic,' 'The Story of My Heart,' 'Red Deer,' 'Field and Hedgerow,' and 'Toilers of the Field'; Messrs. Macmillan and Co., publishers of 'The Dewy Morn'; Messrs. Chatto and Windus, publishers of 'Nature near London,'

'The Open Air,' and 'Life of the Fields'; and Messrs. Duckworth and Co., publishers of 'Bevis,' 'After London,' and 'Amaryllis at the Fair'; also the proprietors of *Country Life* and Miss F. C. Hall for permission to use the photograph of Richard Jefferies as a young man. The following also have given me help: Mr. George Avenell, Mr. Samuel Lane Bondman, Mr. Gordon Bottomley, Mr. James Bradford, Mr. A. Coleman, Mr. T. C. Davison, Mr. F. B. Doveton, Mr. Ernest Rhys, Miss W. M. Fentiman, Mr. A. M. Freeman, the Rev. E. H. Goddard, Mr. William Gough, Mr. P. Anderson Graham, Mrs. Arthur Harvie, Mr. H. Bottomley Knowles, Mr. C. J. Longman, Mr. S. Morris, Mr. A. Theodore Rake, Mrs. Daniel Smith, Mr. H. H. Sturmer, Mr. H. Woolford, and Mr. W. Wright.

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# THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

## CHAPTER I

### THE COUNTRY OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

RICHARD JEFFERIES was born at Coate Farm, in the North Wiltshire hamlet of Coate and the parish of Chisledon, on November 6, 1848. There he dwelt for the greater part of the first thirty years of his life ; there and thereabouts, and in the neighbouring county of Gloucestershire, dwelt his ancestors for several, perhaps many, generations. This country and its people was the subject of half his work, and the background, the source, or the inspiration, of all but all the rest. He, in his turn, was the genius, the human expression, of this country, emerging from it, not to be detached from it any more than the curves of some statues from their maternal stone. He walked about the hills and fields of it day and night, in pursuit of sport, of health, of society, of solitude, of joy, of the dearest objects of his soul ; and though he left it never to return, yet three times before he died he lived in, or in sight of, country not unlike it—at Brighton, at Crowborough, and at Goring.

It is a beautiful, a quiet, an unrenowned, and a most visibly ancient land. The core and essence of it are the Downs, which lie south and east and west of Coate. Northward is Swindon, where Jefferies lived two years,

and Wootton Bassett, Purton, Malmesbury, Cirencester, and Fairford—all of which he knew, with their surrounding fields ; but to reach them was to leave the Downs for the rich, sluggish, dairy country of elms, that is seldom roused to the energy of hills. Fair as that part of Wiltshire is, it has left few marks upon his books ; and even in his youthful chapters on the Swindon neighbourhood, where he might have thought it his business to set his affection aside, he seldom betrays much knowledge of the northward land, of whose people Aubrey wrote that they ‘ speak drawling,’ are ‘ dull and heavy of spirits,’ ‘ feed chiefly on milk meats, which hurts their inventions,’ are ‘ melancholy, contemplative, malicious, by consequence whereof come more lawsuits—at least double those in the southern parts,’ and are ‘ more apt to be fanatic.’ Roughly speaking, the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal, in its course from near Wantage, past Uffington, Stratton St. Margaret, Swindon, Wootton Bassett, and Dauntsey, was Jefferies’ northern boundary. That boundary at least in winter he loved, for the frosts turned it into an incomparable track for his skates, and it is as a skater only that he is respectfully remembered in those parts. The canal has now relapsed into barbarism ; its stiffened and weedy waters are stirred only by the moorhen, who walks more than she swims across them.

For Jefferies at Coate, the summer sun rose over Whitehorse Hill, eight miles off in Berkshire, with the ancient entrenchment above and the westward-ramping white horse below ; and to reach the hill meant a long, lonely walk on the Ridgeway through the high corn-land and past Wayland Smith’s cave, or along the more frequented parallel road below, through Wanborough, Little Hinton, Bishopston, Ashbury, and Compton Beauchamp. At Bishopston stood the old mansion—used as a Grammar School—which he has celebrated in ‘ Wild Life in a Southern County,’ in ‘ An Extinct Race,’ and in his early chapter on the London and Faringdon road. At Hinton and Bishopston there are fine farmhouses with lime-

trees ; at Ashbury, also, one among trees and oats, built of stone, with many square windows and handsome chimneys ; and onewhere the by-road goes to Longcott and Shrivenham. North of this road is the flat land, which has so many elms bordering so many small fields that from a distance it seems one wood. South, and close at hand, are the Downs—the solitary, arable slopes, the solid beech clumps, the coursing and racing turf of Ashdown and Lambourn. Always high up, the Ridgeway goes north-eastward over the corn, with few traces of living men except the Oxford Steam-Ploughing Company's engines, harboured, perchance, amidst heaps of coal and the chalk-land flowers—hop-trefoil, saw-wort, scabious, purple gentian, and poppy. Wayland Smith's cave lies on the left going north-east, about thirty water-worn and mossy sarsens, some roughly hewn, three upright, with a superincumbent fourth, hidden among beeches and starved elders. Beyond, the old road is to be seen going rough and white up Whitehorse Hill, nicked by the entrenchment, and with it even the weary feet must go if it is summer and the hour a spacious and windless twilight. It leads to yet another camp, Letcombe Castle, two or three miles south of Wantage, farther than which a walker from Coate who had to return the same day would not be likely to travel.

Going south-east instead of north-east from Coate, a similar limit is reached at Lambourn. From Wamborough, through Totterdown, to Baydon, the road is the Ermine Street on its way from Cirencester, through Cricklade, to Sheen, and crosses the Ridgeway at Totterdown. For the ear at least Baydon is Badon Mount. This is pure down-land : the breasted hills curving as if under the influence of a great melody ; the beeches lining the Roman road, and sheltering a gipsy camp among harebells, sweet basil, and trefoil, which the grasshopper also loves. Lambourn itself is a fair, small town, with a cross, of which the shaft is as graceful and light as the beeches in the churchyard. It is the hub of many little roads that lead out among the curving expanses of pasture

and corn-land ; the tumuli, in one place seven together, give a solemn tone to so much sweetness and space. Between Baydon and Aldbourne, and about Sugar Hill, the country is more park-like. There is a green and hedgeless turf, with knots and trains of beeches and thorns, and many little undulations and barbaric, winding tracks, startled and sundered by the straight Roman road. Thence the eyes enjoy Martinsell Hill, gentle and large, above standing and reaped corn and the trees of Aldbourne. The road from Baydon to Aldbourne is notable for its passage through one of the finest hollows in the Downs. The unbroken undulations are long, and the mind floats with them and sleeps in the melody which they make : there is grass, mangolds, wheat in leaning shocks, solid beech clusters, and, far away, on the edge of the bowl, Liddington clump ; nor is there a house visible among the trackways, the haystacks, the sheep, and the corn, this side of the embowered Aldbourne church tower.

More south and less east from Coate, the Swindon and Hungerford road goes through Liddington to Aldbourne, again over the Downs, with four barrows on one hand, making different harmonies together as the vision shifts, and on the other the rectangular imprints of a British village at Upper Upham. Untrodden but indelible old roads, worn by hoofs and the naked feet and the trailing staves of long-dead generations, cross and join one another over the short grass of the chalk slopes. Aldbourne is white-washed, thatched, and tiled, with many turnings, and the traveller feels always as if he is in someone's yard, because the houses, with their flowers and open doors, look so frankly on the road ; as at Ogbourne St. George, close by, old millstones are used as paving for paths. The bells of the neighbourhood were once cast here. The village was famous from Aubrey's to Jefferies' day for rabbits ; and between here and Ogbourne St. George are Chase Woods and Aldbourne Chase, where, in Jefferies' youth, they found a cannon-ball that had lain there since the brush between Rupert and Essex, before the first

battle of Newbury. From Aldbourne is a good walk over the Downs to Marlborough by Stock Lane, on a steep-banked track, with eyebright flowers underfoot and among wayfaring trees, in sight of the oak and fir and hazel of Aldbourne Chase in long, gentle hollows. Hereby three deep tracks mount southward to Marlborough, and presently cross the remains of a Roman road that goes straight, though grassy, from Ogbourne to Mildenhall. Thatched Mildenhall was a Roman station, as the turf proclaims, and called Cunetio. At one time the children there used often to pay their school-fees in Roman coin. Now the slow sheep go past the barley-fields to Marlborough Fair, and the tired shepherd leans on his crooked ash and says once to his dusty flock, 'Coom along—coop!' Traveller's joy and white bryony climb about the thorns.

At Common Head, a mile south-east of Coate, the Roman road, leaving Ermine Street at Wanborough Nythe, crosses the Hungerford road on its way south to Mildenhall, through Savernake Forest (as often called Marlborough Forest by those living on the Marlborough side of it), to Winchester. It crosses the Ridgeway near Chisledon, under the hill that is crowned by the camp, or 'castle,' and the beech-clump of Liddington. Between it and the tiny colonies of Woodsend and Snap are more prints of British settlements on the turf, with tumuli and earthworks that make the earth look old, like the top bar of a stile, carved by saunterers, bored by wasps, grooved and scratched and polished again, or like a schoolboy's desk that has blunted a hundred ingenious knives. Recent theory suggests that the dark Iberic people found a refuge in Wiltshire from the Celts, who, invaded in their turn, held out long in the same land against the Saxons. Jefferies himself finds Celtic traces in the place-names and surnames of the neighbourhood. From near Woodsend, a little way off the Roman road, and within Aldbourne Chase, there is a spread of Downs, Inkpen supreme on the south-east, Martinsell woody and dark on the south, the Devizes hills south-west. Thence there is a pleasant



furzy descent into Ogbourne St. George. Ogbourne, thatched and irregular, with a bridge over the summer-dry bed of the winterbourne, is in an ash-tree country ; and most beautiful in late sunlight, against a calm, rich sky, are the green breasts of the westward hills, or in a still, cold summer night under a full moon amidst little, hard white clouds like rice. Winding with the River Og, the road forsakes the Roman way and enters Marlborough town, with its dormered and gabled High Street, long, wide, and discreet, and, though genial, obviously an entity which the visitor can know little of. It has been a royal residence ; it stood a siege in the Civil War ; its prehistoric existence seems announced by the sarsen stone that stands at one end of the High Street. It is the ' Overboro ' and ' Fleeceborough ' of Jefferies. The Kennet runs through, to be joined at Mildenhall by the Og. The Downs and Savernake Forest dominate the town. It is but a place at the edge of the forest. Though its nearest (northern) edge is not much less than ten miles from Coate, the forest was well within Jefferies' reach ; he often walked there and back, spending the whole summer day out of doors, liking the place for its beauty, its solitude, and its many uncertain memories. It was the subject of some of his earliest description ; it reappears in several books. Once, it seems that in a severe winter the stags broke out of the forest and roamed north, and one was shot in his own immediate country. From Mildenhall, south-eastwards along the Roman road or the course of it, to Crofton is six miles, and it is almost all forest, so that its mere size—if it needed such an auxiliary—makes Savernake respectable. Its trees are finely grown and grouped, large and numerous enough to make it venerable ; heroic, too, and able to sustain without injury the tremendous trifling column to the glory of a Marquis of Ailesbury, of Lord Bute, and of God. I say heroic, because the muscular, smooth beeches, moulded like the flanks and limbs of immortal beauty, and the oaks that perform great feats in holding out long, snaky, horizontal branches,

overgrown with moss and tufted polypody, and the dense, very old thorns, shapely, or twisted in rigid agonies, seem worthy of an heroic life—of the life of Mr. Doughty's British princes, Caradoc, Beichiad, Togodumnos; of women like Embla and Herfryd and Boudicca; of bards like Carvilios. They and their chariots alone should press the mossy, golden turf; they alone would not be unworthy of the great depths below the forest roof that seem to be submerged in time. In one part of the forest the moss at the base of every oak actually suggests a tide that has risen so high, and left this green sign, but left no life behind except the hosts of wood-pigeons and the crow, the magpie, the jay, and the green woodpecker, that are always crying about these desolate palaces of I know not what lovely powers. It is beautiful yet, and at evening, like the sea in a twitching calm of thin, disappearing dark lines, offers us the inexplicable sorrows and unsuspected consolations of music, building for us a new earth, a new heaven, and a new hell.

Still another way to Marlborough—and a better, because it can only be travelled on foot—is to climb Ladder Hill along the western edge of Burderop Woods, and to go straight for Barbury Castle and its attendant beech-clump, due south upon the summit of Hackpen Hill. East is the curve of Liddington Hill, the smooth, bare, uninhabited turf; north-east the bosom of Wanborough Hills; a little east of Barbury, on Smeathe's Ridge, trees that arrange themselves like a huge ruined castle; and more east a long, thin line of trees that seem Titanic wayfarers trooping dejectedly; and at the feet of these related hills is all one level land of corn and roots, and tinkling sheep, and ricks. The road traverses this plain, and begins to rise beyond Mudgell, crossing the Ridgeway close to the disused Burderop race-course. Tumuli and earthworks lie on the rising ground, on this hand and that, so commonly that the youthful Jefferies found it 'alive with the dead.' On Barbury Hill we are among harebell, rock-rose, scabious, and trefoil blossoms. The

'Castle' lies on the right, a double-mounded camp, where it is thought that Cedric and Ceawlin routed the Britons in the sixth century ; and beside it the nineteen harassed beeches, one dead, in a clump that is to be seen for many miles, from Uffington and from the hills above Oxford. The dull, soft sheep-bells interweave their tinklings among the tumuli and in the shade of the big mounds of beech that look so dark and massy from the lands below. It was over these hills that Margaret, in 'Greene Ferne Farm,' wandered with Geoffrey, and at night found rest only in the Devil's Den, near Fyfield, or the kistvaen, on Manton Down, near Rockley. Marlborough is reached by entering the Wootton Bassett and Marlborough road, which passes Marlborough Common.

Best of all the Down ways is the Ridgeway, joining it where it crosses the Hungerford road or near Chisledon. Jefferies knew it well ; this above all others would take him past 'hill after hill and plain after plain' in silence and solitude. It passes under Liddington Hill, with little risings and fallings through the open corn-land, but, climbing almost to Barbury Castle, it keeps a great height along the top of Hackpen Hill, paving itself with harebell, silverweed, eyebright and bartsia ; now east, now west, now south, it commands vast soaring and diving grounds for the delighted eyes, among solitary slopes of green and white hills, of turf and cloud. Moles, journeying often in the grassy ruts, turn up a fine dark soil from above the chalk. Tumuli, earthworks, and ancient settlements, and flocks of 'grey wethers' or sarsen stones, mark the side of the road until it dips to East Kennett, across the Bath Road, and on to Alton Priors over Wansdyke, which it intersects at Furze Hill. Wansdyke, that stupendous highway and barrier, running from near Heddington Wick over Morgan's Hill, by Shepherd's Shore, over Tann Hill to Savernake Forest, makes a rough southern boundary to the country of Jefferies, except that it excludes part of the forest. If the Ridgeway is left on Avebury Down, another grassy track leads into Avebury ; and most pleas-



ant is the descent among the sarsens that rest on turf blue with sheep's-bit or rosy with rest-harrow. Jefferies knew Avebury, through love of the Down ways and through his early archæological curiosity. What they worshipped at Avebury Temple no one knows, but the human mind is still fertile in fantasy and ferocity—if it no longer draws blood—when it worships within walls. To me the sycamores that gloom at the entrance to the temple are more divine. The village, built partly of roughly-hewn, worn sarsen, is enclosed among the temple's huge upright stones that make some such impression as a Celtic shore.

Almost parallel with the Ridgeway is the road from Swindon to Avebury and Devizes, joined from Coate by way of Ladder Hill and Wroughton village. Jefferies had friends at Wroughton, and must have known the church above the beeches, with its Sadlers, Codringtons, Benets, and Stubbeses, dead in battle, in child-bed, in peace, lying sententiously with coats of arms, skulls, scrolls, the vine, crowns, cross-bones, and epitaphs, to commemorate them; the churchyard also (with some gipsy tombs), where gravestones lean this way and that, to suggest a battlefield of fallen and falling and still unwounded men. Jefferies, in an early paper, quoted Aubrey's praise of this country as the 'garden of Wiltshire,' and tried to show that the Battle of Ellandune was fought near by in 823. Beyond the church, the road goes south-westward between banks of saw-wort, scabious, bedstraw, and yarrow, bounding the corn. Wherever there is a slope, it is trenched deep by a road, used or not. The telegraph-posts go ahead, with something of adventure in their persistency, their silent and lean serviceableness. A crawling cider-press passes on its way to Wootton Bassett, in charge of three young men, a boy, and an old man with peeled staff. Hackpen is in sight; between the road and the hill corn waves and sheep tinkle at the sainfoin; three beautiful slender ploughs stand alone in the midst of the long, hedgeless undulations, while the wind blows the smoking rain. Here, as along many of

the Down roads, grows the meadow crane's-bill, which Jefferies loved—a flower whose purple has wedded passion's opulence and thought's tranquillity. Broad Hinton, the next village on this road, fills a considerable space in Jefferies' earliest descriptions; he mentions the small white horse on the downside near, the church, the mansion which its owner burned to save from the Parliament in the Civil War, and the legendary treasure in a well close by. The church was described again in an early anonymous paper in the *Graphic*. (At 'The Bull' here a labourer says that a farmer at Braden still bakes lardy cakes once a fortnight, and loaves of which four would cover the inn table.) Broad Hinton Church is off the main road, but is on a track which runs from Bincknoll Camp southward until the white road takes its place just before Avebury Temple. For a large part of its way it runs alongside of a winterbourne that rises in Uffcott Down and feeds the Kennet. This track should be followed from Broad Hinton churchyard, whereby it enters the fields near beeches and a moated farm, and then straight over pink and white yarrow flowers, through the wheat to Winterbourne Bassett church tower, that stands among elms and beeches, thatched long barns and stacks and the marks of rased buildings; a stone circle lies within a mile. Just beyond the church a farmhouse has a peacock as a weathercock. Berwick Bassett Church, on the same path, is but a mile beyond, small and low, with mellow tiles and a little spire upon its tower—the whole dwarfed by great barns and ash-trees. Winterbourne Monkton, where the track joins the road, is nearly all thatched, and the walls are made largely of rude pieces of sarsen. Avebury Down and the 'grey wethers' rise close on the east, domed Windmill Hill and its tumuli on the west. Wansdyke is not far south, reached past Silbury Hill and Beckhampton, and a rookery that is perched a mile from any house in a wood of elm, ash, oak, and fir.

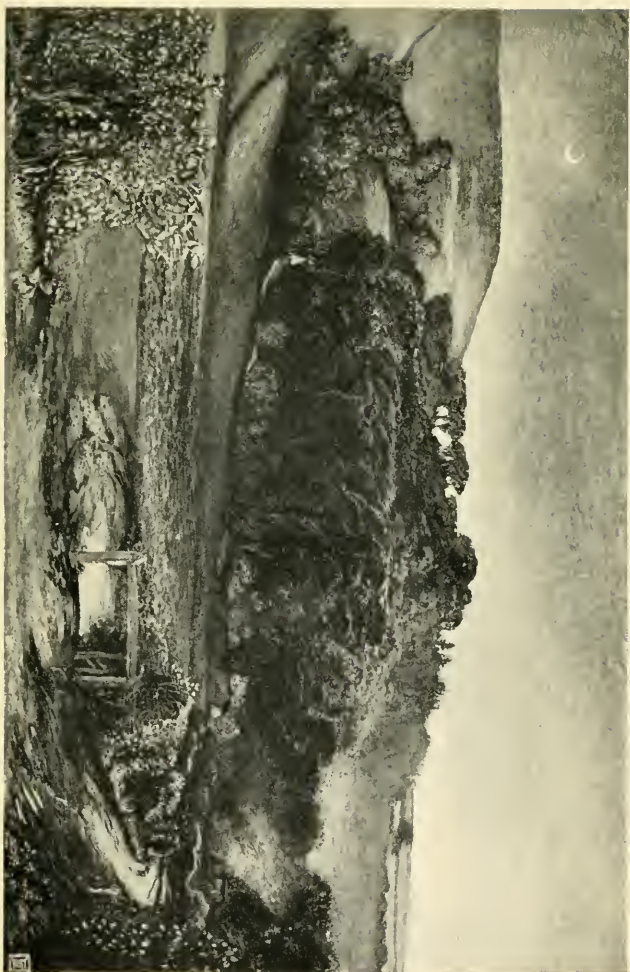
A good and a long way back to Coate is to go north-

west from Winterbourne Monkton to the tiny church of St. Peter's, Highway, near Hilmarton, it and its weedy and not populous churchyard half lost among thatched white cottages. From there to Swindon is a footpath through Clevancy, Clyffe Pypard, Broad Town, under Bincknoll 'Castle,' through Elcombe, following, it may well be, in places, the old pilgrim's way that led past Holy Cross at Swindon, past Elcombe, Bushton, Clyffe Pypard, and Studley, on its way to the shrine and well of St. Anne's-in-the-Wood at Bridlington, in Somerset. All the way this path looks up at a secondary terrace of the Downs, and sees the steep slopes which are cloven deep by ancient ways, or sometimes clothed in beech, and at Bincknoll heaped into a promontory carved by a camp, where the life that flourishes now is chiefly that of the chalk-land flowers—marjoram, sweet basil, field-gentian, rock-rose, and thistle—and the wayfaring tree, the hazel and the blackthorn. At Clyffe there is a church, a manor-house, a pond, and a chestnut-tree; a hanging beech-wood above, ash-trees below. At Broad Town and Bincknoll the way is through barley. The beeches and the good houses follow, of Bassett Down, Saltrop, and Elcombe. Grey Saltrop House, among ash and beech on the slope, has parted with many that rest in Wroughton Church; its smoke goes up in front of a storied cedar sweetly of a still evening. At Elcombe one of the most lovable of the roads from the hills to the elm-country descends,—a broad strip of grass on either side, and, upon the grass, not too many flowery cottages, with Elcombe Hall at the top and at the bottom a cold, large farmhouse, and its yews and mounting-steps by the gate. Wroughton Church is on the wooded hill above; beyond, also on the hill, is Old Swindon, and below it New Swindon—noisy, new, cheap, and Liberal, full of every accent, and on market-days rural with cattle and country carts. Swindon is the 'Kingsbury' and the 'Latten' of Jefferies. He described the Great Western Railway works there for the *North Wilts Herald* as a youth, for *Fraser's* as a man, both times

as a journalist. From the London side, Swindon is a woody hill, with a spire and the pepper-pot of a Corn Exchange. It commands a fine country from this hill. North-west is Highworth Hill, which should be seen when the red dawn is elm-barred, for it is precipitous, and of a rich blue and romantic texture unlike land, water, or cloud. Due south is Barbury, and its beeches and a meaning line of trees south-east of it. North-east are the trees of Lydiard Tregoze and Purton, beyond the smoke of New Swindon. South-east, from the footpath to Coate, are Liddington Hill and the breasted Downs above Wanborough. This path enters the fields by the lime-shaded road—with old, mossy, slated, dependent houses, high walls, and elms—that leads to The Lawn, the home of the Goddards, lords of the manor, a heavy, rectangular, mellow, but unimaginative house that has elm, wych-elm, poplar, and oak about it, and swerving reaches of grass and a dark, reedy water below. The Old Swindon church of Holy Rood adjoins the house; Richard Jefferies was christened there early in 1849. Only the chancel remains, the rest having been dismantled when it was superseded by a large Gilbert Scott church better suited to the town. The chancel is crowded with odds and ends of the dismantling; a faded hatchment and the startling inscription, *In Cælo Quies*; memorials of Goddards, Hornes, Neates, Vilets, Brinds, an Aubrey. Under elms and nettles are announced certain dead Goddards, Coventrys, Noads, Tinsons, Hardings, Hornes, Broadways, Lawrences. The pillars of the old nave stand, but enveloped in ivy; there is a path of tombs betwixt them. The only sound is the cracking shell of a snail which a thrush hammers on a gravestone. Aubrey has described the place as it was; the youthful Jefferies moralized among its ruins in a chapter on 'Ancient Swindon.' Below the churchyard wall is a grassy depression, now a fowl-run, once the Old Swindon mill-pond; close by was the mill worked by James Luckett Jefferies, Richard's great-uncle.

The country which Jefferies knew intimately is of rather





From a picture by James Guthrie.

FOREST AND DOWN.



narrower limits than that crossed by these roads and paths. It is particularly the village of Coate, his father's farm of thirty or forty acres, and the neighbouring farms of Day House and Snodshill ; the Reservoir and the brook that runs out of it to the north, past Wanborough Nythe ; Burderop Woods ; the villages of Wanborough, Liddington, Badbury, Chisledon, Wroughton, Broad Hinton, Ogbourne and Aldbourne, with the Downs and scattered farms between. This country is composed largely of the Downs, running north-east and south-west from Uffington ' Castle ' to Hackpen Hill. At the feet of these hills are Wanborough Plain, Chisledon Plain, and similar corn-land, more or less level and open, but in places cleft by almost perpendicular coombes, as at Liddington and Chisledon ; a wedge of this land makes a pass through the Downs, of triangular shape, Liddington, Barbury, and Ogbourne at the angles, Draycot Foliat in the midst. On this plain and at the edge of it, dominating much lower lands, are the churches of Wanborough, Chisledon, Wroughton, and Broad Hinton, and the house at Burderop. The plain breaks down to the lower lands abruptly in many places, as below Broad Hinton and Wroughton and Burderop, and on these steepes are most of the woods—Bincknoll, Quidhampton, Saltrop, and Burderop Woods. At the feet of the woods the land is a fertile clay, producing some of the finest grass and cattle—' of good note in Smithfield,' says Aubrey. Coate Farm, at the feet of Burderop Woods, is on this clay, and the land is all meadow.

The Downs in this immediate country of Jefferies are among the highest, most spacious, and most divinely carved in rolling ridge and hollowed flank ; and their summits commune with the finest summits in the more southerly Downs—Inkpen, Martinsell, Tann Hill. Liddington Hill and its ' castle,' a camp of a single but very deep fosse, was a chief haven to Jefferies. As he took deep breaths of the air about its harebell, eyebright, clover, bedstraw, scabious, and fine grass, his brain was furrowed

and sown with the thoughts that ripened in 'The Story of My Heart.' Hither, too, came Félise, the beautiful lover in 'The Dewy Morn,' when she began to love. At the top and in the camp are the same flowers, and some windy thorns and furze; and near by the 'folly' of twenty-one lean beeches—in growth like firs—and the stump of another, which make a landmark over half the county. Below, to the south, the charlock-yellow or bean-grey or corn-coloured squares of the arable extend to the woods and the far-off dark green elmy country of Cricklade; a flock of sheep seems to be blown along, or to flow as upon a stream. East, south, and west flint-diggers' cartways, old roads, and hares' paths lead over the Downs. In the rarely-seen hamlets of the dusty corn-land or the moist vale are the houses of the men Jefferies knew—farmers and labourers, slow of speech, more used to deeds whether at work or play. Backswording died late hereabouts; and you may still see an old man's shins all ridgy from the kicks earned in matches at straightforward kicking with heavy boots against unarmed shins; they drank devoutly, and so helped to sharpen Richard Jefferies' nerves and to wear his body out before he was forty; but they did more for him than that, these men of a different blood from the townsman's, though they have not given up their secrets to those who believe they have none. After their bread and cheese at 'The Bull' or 'The Plough,' they will sit at their second or third pint without a word and without the activity to light a pipe for half an hour; yet one of the same race will say of Jefferies that he lay on his back and dreamed when he should have been helping his family—which is, after all, but one dreamer's uncharitableness to another in a world of dreams.

Jefferies often thought of the sea upon these hills. The eye sometimes expects it. There is something oceanic in their magnitude, their ease, their solitude—above all, in their liquid forms, that combine apparent mobility with placidity, and in the vast playground which they provide



for the shadows of the clouds. They are never abrupt, but, flowing on and on, make a type of infinity. A troop, a clump, or a sprinkling of trees, a little wood, a house, squares of wheat or newly-ploughed land, a long white road, cannot detract from them—not even when the air is so clear that all sounds and sights and smells are bright and have a barb that plants them deep, and the hard black rocks slide in crystal air under the blue. In winter snow, to walk upon them is to walk on the clouds ; their forms are those of the snow-drifts filed by the wind. When they do not curve, they make that almost straight horizontal line which, seen five or six miles off against a pale evening sky through clear or misty air, is so significant and so untranslatable. Taken separately, the Downs have lines as fair as those of animals ; the light wavers on their smooth and, as it were, muscular sides as it does on the rippling haunches of a horse. Yet they have a hugeness of undivided surface for which there is no comparison to be found on the earth, and but seldom in the sky. They bring into the mind the thought that beauty—whether of a poet's lines, or of a melody, or of a cloud, or of shining water—is the natural and inseparable companion to passionate, bold, true-hearted acts and thoughts and emotions ; and with that thought the question as to what great thought is expressed in these sculptured leagues of grassy chalk. Here, it sometimes appears, especially when the land has taken an alms of twilight, the creative forces must have reposed after mighty labours, and have had dreams which their deeds have not equalled elsewhere. And it is little wonder that we, who can create nothing except of snow or sand, should be happy upon them, as if we hoped for a little while that their waves might lead us to whatever fancy has painted as desirable, lovely, and good. Yet it needs but to scratch the soil to recall that they also are but transient, the result of a myriad deaths, of changes and motives that regard them no more than they regard us and our little acts and great desires : that all flows away as water or wind.

One of the noblest views of the Downs and the northern country towards the Cotswolds and Malvern Hills is to be had from the roof of the Elizabethan manor-house at Upper Upham ; the legend is that Wales, too, can be seen. This handsome, remote house, high on the hills, reputed to be on the site of a hunting-lodge of John of Gaunt, was described at length by Jefferies as a young man and archæologist. He knew the tenant. It is empty now ; several of its windows are blocked up and fruit-trees grow over them ; within, the antique fireplaces and daïs are degraded by stale wall-paper ; yet the lawn is mown and kept level before the lofty porch. Jefferies knew the neighbouring fields well, and Snap and Woodsend and the British settlements, and Lower Upham, the farm to be passed between Chisledon and Upper Upham ; he remarked, in one of his early papers, on the ' strange avenue of sycamores ' at Lower Upham, where also is a line of the same trees trooping beautifully without purpose across a field, planted there, I suppose, for their state, by some curious lover of trees. Upper Upham is even more pleasantly to be reached by forsaking all roads (save where many sheep-tracks go side by side, and the eyebright flowers in the narrow strips between) and crossing the Downs from Liddington ' Castle,' then through Shipley Bottom, where stands a barn and stacks under ash and sycamore and elder, in the midst of corn, and walled on every side by Down and sky. There the painted lady butterfly comes to the scabious flower and the bee to the sweet basil in perfect solitude.

It must have been on these hills that Jefferies and Dickon ranged with their greyhounds for hares. Sometimes their silence retreats for a little while before the crying of foxhounds. ' Yander they goo, up to Barbriam Caastle !' says the ploughman, checking his homeward jingling team. But the March afternoon is at an end, and it is too late to follow farther over the hill. The wind has fallen, and the blackbird sings at ease ; the far-away missel-thrush is almost as mild and sweet. A hare has

stolen out, and in the still moist air before frost the violet scent is expanding. Then, suddenly, the huntsman's horn crackles upon the hill, splintering and tearing the solitude ; a full, rich note follows, and goes to the heart of silence and into our hearts, too. Again and again a shrewd, victorious note that seems the very essence of the red jackets that sprinkle the saddening slopes of Barbury Hill. It is almost night—a most almighty quiet night, folding all those hills as sheep into a pen ; yet the horn threatens it, invades it, overthrows it, shooting to and fro in its sombre texture threads of crimson and gold. And the heart leaps up and is glad at this insult to the night, at the stinging music, at the large scene, and the horses and horsemen gigantic against the sky. To that horn blown at the edge of night and the edge of the world come all the hunters of the earth, as if out of the ground or the sea of time that washes the base of the Down ; and they are more than those dark hunters on the ridge, and stand among them, weaving strangeness and solemnity about them. The heart is a hunter still, and it has found a long-desired quarry, and is bringing it home with melody over the early world, as grim and illimitable as the level cloud-land in the west. But the ploughman and his team go on ; the horn has died away, and the hounds pass silently, like dreams when night is over and day not begun.

Not far from the foot of Barbury Hill, and almost on the Ridgeway, is the parish of Draycot Foliatt, lying pleasant among oats and ash-trees. It is merely a farmhouse or two, and their fields, their birds, their hares, and moles, and stoats, and mice. Jefferies mentions it once by name, in an early newspaper article without name, in ' Wild Life in a Southern County ' as a parish where the dismantled church has disappeared, and the churchyard is an orchard, sacred from the plough. Some of Jefferies' ancestors came from this isolated upland parish ; there were many of his name at Draycot Foliatt in the eighteenth century. Long ago, an old man at Marlborough Fair said he knew a parish where there was ' ne'er a wife, ne'er a

child, ne'er a cow, ne'er a pig ' ; he explained that it was Draycot, where three farmers—Jefferies, Neale, and Puckeridge—lived as bachelors on arable farms worked by unmarried labourers, and kept no pigs. Part of this tale is in ' Round about a Great Estate.' A fair land is this on a still, rainy and misty winter day, with its wide, unoccupied fields and dreaming trees—no men, no sound, and the Downs as imaginary as the sea-noise in a shell.

On the other side of the Ridgeway from Draycot is Chisledon, where many a Jefferies is buried, and Richard was married. Its church and churchyard are drawn in the opening of ' Greene Ferne Farm.' East of Chisledon is Badbury, the ' Okebourne ' of ' Round about a Great Estate,' built about a steep coombe at the edge of the hills. The pound can still be seen, and the nobly-balanced elm at the head of the coombe ; but the windmill is gone. Behind its little manor-house are the green lines of a vanished building, with walnut-trees and a domed horse-chestnut near. Its inns are full of monitory verses in this kind :

' My liquor is good, my measure is just ;  
Then pray excuse, I cannot trust.  
Pray be seated and call away  
For what you will, and I'll obey.

' There's one thing more I do desire :  
That you'll not stand before the fire,  
Nor on the table attempt to sit  
Unless a quart you pay for it. . . . '

It has good, white farmhouses, and their grassy, thatched sheds and stacks under elm and ash are right on the road. The coombe has thatched cottages hidden behind fruit-trees. Badbury Wick, the Okebourne Wick of ' Round about a Great Estate,' is farther north on a by-road to Coate. Going north-west from Badbury, the road passes Medbourne and comes to Liddington. By the manor-house with mullioned windows, in a coombe below the road, used to be a mill, and this and the miller (I think John Brind) were the models for Warren House and Andrew

Fisher in 'Greene Ferne Farm.' The old man and some pretty visitors from Wales made a stir that is still remembered. He may have been the miller Tibbald of 'Round about a Great Estate,' that name being a common local form of Theobald. The gabled house has a new-looking garden, tennis-court, and swans on the pond ; but under the sheep-terraced hill behind, the dovecot and mossy, thatched farm-buildings are as they were.

Going west and north from Chisledon, instead of to Badbury, the road finds the hamlet of Hodson, the woods and great house of Burderop, and below them Coate Reservoir. These compose the chief scene of 'The Amateur Poacher' and 'The Gamekeeper at Home.' The keeper lived in the cottage with the thrice-scalloped thatch in Hodson Bottom, sweet chestnut behind it, and birch and spruce at each side ; date, 1741. The other houses in the Bottom are all thatched but one ; they have a little window in the middle of the thatch slope, like the dark eye of a hedgehog among his spines, and they stand irregularly among fruit, bean rows, and box-edging. 'Spring guns set here !' is the landowner's jocosely invitation to the wayfarer. But Jefferies knew the woods through and through. Here were the fir-trees and primroses that his mind would not separate. Here was the fray with the poachers when the squire (J. J. Calley, I think) was knocked on the head ; of which, and many more things, Jefferies heard much from Mrs. Rawlings, widow of an old Burderop keeper. Here, on Ladder Hill, the wind is full of the scent of yellow bed-straw, and the meadow crane's-bill grows by the dogwood and hazel, beneath the oaks. Here were the rooks and wood-pigeons of 'Wood Magic.' Burderop Park—its beech and oak and ash and fir ; its clouds (like a small, earthly dawn) of purple loosestrife ; its avenues of limes and wych-elms ; its grassy spaces, strewn with sarsens, stately and undisturbed ; its large, dull, sufficient-looking, homely house—suggested the Okebourne Chace of 'Round about a Great Estate.'



The Reservoir below is the 'mere' that appeared first in 'The Gamekeeper,' and again in 'The Amateur Poacher,' 'Wild Life,' 'Round about a Great Estate,' 'Bevis,' and 'After London.' It is a large, deep, weedy pond, shaped like a fish, its large tail at the north-east end, and was constructed in a marshy hollow in 1822 to feed the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal. It was reputed to have a whirlpool. There were, in Jefferies' day, two or three boats on it, including a punt or house-boat for bathing. On the north-west side Broome plantation comes to the edge, and reeds and partly submerged willows keep the shallows free from waves. At the south-west corner its head is cut off by the road from Broome to Hodson; but this head is now almost choked by weeds. The south-west side has its now peninsulated island and many willows; then a gulf—the 'fir-tree gulf' of 'Bevis'—shadowed by tall willows. Along the eastern side a footpath runs over two broad, sloping meadows—'The Plain' and 'Green Fern'—belonging to Day House Farm; and in these elm and oak and ash, and an old crab-tree, stand about in a happy disarray. Only a dead-leaf boat could travel far on the brook that enters the Reservoir at the 'Gulf'; for its bed is of the narrowest, and is among willow-herb and calthropped sedge, and under the overhanging brier and thorn which the delicate white bryony climbs over. The stream that flows out is the 'Mississippi,' that bounds Coate Farm and moistens its willow-roots. The wild-voiced sandpiper, duck, and coot, and moorhen haunt the Reservoir regularly; sand-martin and swallow fly over it; sometimes the heron overhangs it and clanks, seeming to bring storm in his hollowed wings. There are the largest of pike and tench in the water. From the surface can be seen the 'Plain,' the chimneys of Day House, and then nothing beyond but the clump and castle of Liddington, large and gaunt. Alongside the road by Day House Farm is part of a half-buried circle of sarsen stones, which Jefferies was first to notice.

The hamlet of Coate is a wavering double row of farm-

houses and cottages, less than two miles from Swindon on the Hungerford road. The first house on the right hand, where a slight hill dips to the little bridge—a white cottage with an over-tall chimney—was once John Brown's. His father, Job Brown's, was the next house on the left. Beyond the bridge, on the right, is 'The Sun,' once a thatched inn whose sign was a 'veritable oriflamme'; there, once a year, men used to assemble to eat blackbird-pie and drink. Close by, on opposite sides of the road, were the millwright's and Ikey the blacksmith's shops. The millwright was George Bramble; his wife kept 'The Sun,' and they brewed their own ale. Next to this inn is little Coate Farm house, guarded from the road by a high wall—over which Amaryllis watched the country-side going to the fair—and a row of pollard-limes. Stripped of its thatch, its ha-ha gone, its orchard neglected, it is the ghost of the fragrant home described so often in 'Wild Life,' in 'Amaryllis,' and in many essays, by the man whose birth here is recorded on a tablet at the gate. A wooden 'squeeze-belly' stile opposite admits to a footpath over fields that were once part of Coate Farm. Just past the thatched outbuildings of the farm a by-road, bordered by elms and good ash-trees, leads to Day House Farm, its elms and pollard willows, and half a hundred moles nailed to a pigsty wall. Jefferies' wife was born and bred at Day House. Beyond this turning, on both sides of the road, are the cottages of Coate, close to the road, some of only one floor—the very lowliest of defences against wind and world in these parts—and one ruinous, with long, narrow gardens suggesting that they were once part of the grassy edging to the road. John Smith's shanty was on the right; 'The Spotted Cow' is almost opposite. Beyond that are several cottages and a horsechestnut-tree; and on the other side of the road, still deep in grass, as when Jefferies mused over it, is the milestone saying '79 miles to London.' The last house, if it is strictly in Coate, is at the corner of a branch-road to Wanborough, and has a thatch with well-stitched edges—occupied, in

fact, by 'S. Theobald, practical thatcher,' and dating from the seventeenth century. At that corner there used to be a 'catch-gate,' to catch those who entered the turnpike there, and so missed the gate at Liddington. The farmhouses of Snodshill lie off the road on the other side from Coate Farm; there lived relations and friends of Jefferies, and he knew all their fields as the birds know them.

Such, then, is the surface of this land, such the genial reticence of its fat leazes, its double hedges like copses, its broad cornfields, its oaks and elms and beeches, its unloquacious men, its immense maternal Downs. Jefferies came to express part of this silence of uncounted generations. He was, as it were, a rib taken out of its side in that long sleep last disturbed by the cannon at Aldbourne Chase. So rich did he find it that in 'Sport and Science' he wrote: 'There have been few things I have read of or studied, which in some manner or other I have not seen illustrated in this county while out in the fields.' Like Thoreau, he calls his own land 'an epitome of the natural world, and . . . if anyone has come really into contact with its productions, and is familiar with them, and what they mean and represent, then he has a knowledge of all that exists on earth.'



## CHAPTER II

### ANCESTRY

JEFFERIES is, and has long been, a common Wiltshire name, spelt also Jeffries, Jeffreys, Jefferis, Jefferie, Jeffereye, Jeffery, Jefferyes, Jeffreyes, Jeafries, Jefferes. They were farmers, coopers, and the like at Wootton Bassett, Clevancy, Chippenham, Marlborough, in the seventeenth century. In the parishes of Chisledon and Draycot Foliat they rank with the Webbs, Garlicks, Crippses, Lookers, Nashes, Woolfords, Chowleses, Pontings, and Jeroms for abundance and persistency. Sprinkled over the corn-land and meadow between Draycot and Swindon there were several families of the name, yeomen and labourers, who intermarried with Reeveses, Harveys, Garlicks, Jeroms, Birds, Brookses, Chowleses, Nashes, and Bucklands, of the neighbouring parishes, and had many children, who became farmers, labourers, paupers, wanderers to other parts, vagrom men and ancestors of we know not what scholar, merchant, beauty, slum-dweller. The records of them are to be found in the parish register of Chisledon and of Holyrood, Old Swindon, though at Chisledon there is a gap between 1669 and 1712. Fine quintessential history, brief as the local speech, these records make. An old, strange man is found dead in a field in February, 'probably,' it is added, 'due to the severity of the weather and his advanced age.' A base-born child is found dead and deserted by its 'unnatural mother' under a hayrick. The poor are described, thus briefly, as 'ancient woman' or 'young girl.' One who

died on December 29, 1695, was 'Elizabeth, daughter of James Blake, a seaman (a poor vagrant)'; another is Mary, 'daughter of Owen Macklarten, an Irishman'; another, 'daughter of William and Sophia Buckland, travelling gypsies.' Curious are the changes in names and customs. Thus, Nyporios fades through Nipperys and Niperys to the Nipress of to-day. Thus, too, up to the middle of the eighteenth century, they gave the name of the father of an illegitimate child; then the mother's name, and the epithet 'base-born'; finally, in the nineteenth century, civilization reaches another milestone, and the child's name is given, and the mother described simply as 'unmarried.'

Richard Jefferies made several references to ancestors in his books. The Wheat in 'Saint Guido'\* tells the child that his 'papa's papa's papa, ever so much farther back than that, had all the fields round here,' and that in time every one was lost, and that yet again field after field was bought. In 'The Amateur Poacher' he speaks of a walnut thrown 'on the place'—*i.e.*, at Coate—by his great-grandfather. Iden in 'Amaryllis at the Fair' speaks of a great-uncle, a 'capital man of business, who built the mill and bought the old place at Lockett's, which belonged to us before Queen Elizabeth's days,' and 'very nearly made up the fortunes Nicholas and the rest of them got rid of.' It has also been said, and often repeated, that Jefferies came of a long line of yeomen ancestors; and one adds that their bones are in Chisledon churchyard. It seems, however, quite certain that Richard's great-grandfather was one Richard Jefferies, born at Draycot Foliat in 1738† or 1734. If he was born in 1734, he was the seventh child of William and Hannah Jeffries (*sic*) of Draycot.‡ He may, on the other hand, have been a younger son of John and Sarah (*née* Harvey) Jeffries, also of Draycot, who were married in 1728. This

\* *The Open Air*.

† 'Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' *Country Life*, March 14, 1908.

‡ Chisledon Register.

Richard, in 1772, married Fanny Luckett at Lechlade, in Gloucestershire. This pair lived for some time at Rodbourne Cheney, near Swindon; and there, in or about 1780, was born their eldest son, James Luckett, and, in 1784, John, the grandfather of our Richard Jefferies. Fanny Jefferies died in 1805,\* and a descendant writes of her that she 'must have been a woman not only of parts, but of means and refinement, her many journeys to Bath being noted at a time when only the wealthy and high-born frequented that "city of waters." '† Her husband, Richard, who survived until 1822, purchased Coate Farm in 1800, together with a mill and bakery at Swindon. It is on record that‡ he was a stiff man, who twice stood out against the sum demanded by the Vicar of Chisledon as tithe; his son John did the same after that in 1832 and 1833.

The Jefferies' of Draycot must have been substantial men, who made money when the price of corn was high in the early nineteenth century—men like 'Uncle Jonathan' in 'Round about a Great Estate.' Some of their tombs at Chisledon are weighty and important.

Of the two sons of Richard—James Luckett and John—not much is known. John is the grandfather Iden of 'Amaryllis,' and the 'little old man with silver buckles on his shoes' of 'My Old Village.' As a young man, he went to London, and was with a Mr. Taylor, printer and publisher of Red Lion Court, Fleet Street.§ It was in London that he married Fanny Ridger, and there he lived until he came to Swindon in 1816 to look after the Swindon business. In London four children were born to him. Of these, James Luckett, the eldest boy, but not the first-born, was the father of Richard Jefferies, the author. John Jefferies is said not to have liked the bakery. He was a lover of books and curious in bindings—a 'prodigy of learning,' someone calls him—and London attracted

\* 'Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' *Country Life*, March 14, 1908.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*

§ *Ibid.*

him ; but he never returned to it, and never entered a railway-train, against which he had a strong prejudice. Life was made none the easier for him by the presence of his elder brother, James Luckett, and of a maiden aunt in the same house with himself and his children, who reached the number of eight. About the house his old father had hidden much money, out of a dislike for banks. He was a good, even if an unwilling, baker, and he is still remembered as the maker of excellent lardy cakes at three-halfpence each : sugar and lard were not stinted ; the caraway of his rivals was left out ; and the cakes collected the subtlest goodness from all the joints of meat, the loaves, cakes, and tarts, which were baked in the same oven. From the lardy cakes he could retire to his books. Among his other activities was the investment of some of his father's money in the building of two houses at Swindon. And he was a lover of the country, fond of driving through the corn-land, and 'at an age of much over seventy would climb up two flights of stairs . . . to sit at an upper window and gaze his fill at the swelling undulations . . . which extended for miles across a fertile green valley to an answering chalk ridge.' He is said to have had the warm temper of the family, but also much generosity and kindness 'under the crust of reserve.\*' 'When he disliked he did it thoroughly ; but he was a conscientious upholder of Church and State.' His wife, 'a bright, handsome, amiable woman,' died in 1858 ; he himself in 1868.

John Jefferies' elder brother, James Luckett, never married. His oddities were put down to something like madness. He had a great distaste for braces, and preferred an old clock-chain wound about his waist ; when his brother's wife stitched the braces to his breeches, he allowed them to hang unused, and still wore the chain, which clanked terribly on the footpaths at night. He would often walk thus from Swindon to Coate with a

\* 'Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' *Country Life*, March 14, 1908.

kettleful of crumbs over his shoulders for his nephew and namesake's fowls. It is said that he once pulled up a number of fruit-trees which the nephew, Richard's father, had not planted rightly, and that it was this interference which drove the young man to America in 1837. He was the 'ghoul of the old mill' described in 'Reminiscences, Notes, and Relics of ye Old Wiltshire Towne,' by William Morris of the *Swindon Advertiser*.

'He was rather above the middle height, and rather stout and heavy built. He used to wear just about the same articles of dress as other people, but he wore them different from most people. For instance, he wore heavy hobnailed boots, which were never laced up, and the tongues of which were always lopping about on the fronts; he wore thick worsted stockings, but they were always down about his ankles; he wore breeches without braces, open at the knees, and which were saved from dropping down by a regular and persistent "hitching up." His coat and waistcoat were never buttoned up, while his shirt was always unfastened and open, leaving in full view his hair-covered breast, which appeared to be a continuation of his grizzly beard, which was surmounted by such a shaggy head of hair as was but seldom to be seen. His favourite position and occupation was, after he had got his mill going, to rest his elbows on the bottom half of the mill-door, at the point where he could command a view of the lane, and of any children who might venture to enter it from the road end. With his elbow resting on his clenched fist, he would be content to wait for hours, like a cat watching for a mouse, in the hope of meeting with some children, on whom he might scowl, and frighten out of their lives.'

It was to make up for his shortcomings that his younger brother was called to Swindon in 1816. He died in 1854.

Of the eight children of John Jefferies (the last of whom, Fanny, I believe, died in 1901, aged eighty-eight), two are interesting here—James Luckett, the father of Richard, and John Luckett, who died in 1856, at the age of thirty-



one. John Luckett is now remembered chiefly for a widely circulated print of Old Swindon Church which he drew, with his uncle's mill-pond thereby, and in it he has put three horses cooling their feet ; for in those days the postillions alighting at 'The Goddard Arms' took their horses to this pond. He was 'a youth of rare promise—developed into an artist of no mean powers ; architecture, music, and singing held great charms for him, and he excelled in all. Many are the choice little pencil sketches, fine-line drawings, and water-colours treasured by the family, together with his guitar, and many volumes of music copied with a skilful pen.'\* It is said that Richard took after him. His sisters were 'exceptionally educated women for the time'; rumour, insisting on the eccentricity of the family, says that one of them spent a year in bed in the misery arising from a love-affair.

James Luckett Jefferies, the father of Richard, was born in London in 1816. He was a dark-haired, intensely bright-blue-eyed man of about five feet ten inches in height, with fine hands and feet. He is said to have worked his passage out to America in 1837, and there, in Canada, and up the Hudson River, he stayed a year or two, and moved about a good deal, working, I have heard, as a farm-labourer. In 1844 he married Elizabeth Gyde, daughter of Charles Gyde of Islington, who was a book-binder at 7½, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, and had been a 'colleague of his father's at Taylor's.'† Another Miss Gyde married Thomas Harrild, a letterpress and lithographic printer in Shoe Lane, Fleet Street ; this aunt was Richard's kindest friend. As a child, Jefferies also visited the workshops of another uncle, Robert Harrild, variously described as printer, manufacturer of printing materials, publisher and bookseller, in Farringdon Street and in Great Eastcheap. Frederick Gyde, her brother, was an engraver on wood of some note, and a delicate artist with

\* 'Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' *Country Life*, March 14, 1908.

† *Ibid.*

the pencil ; he is the Alere Flamma of ' Amaryllis at the Fair.' The Gydes came from Painswick, near Stroud, in Gloucestershire, and they had farmed land in that place, famous for its wholesome air ; and of them I have heard it said that one generation lived in the country and the next in London, as the Jefferies' did. Charles Gyde ' of Islington ' was buried at Pitchcombe Church, near Stroud. Elizabeth Gyde was short, with hazel eyes, brown hair, and a lasting fine complexion—' a town-bred woman with a beautiful face and a pleasure-loving soul, kind and generous to a fault, but unsuited to a country life.'\* Her first child was Ellen, who died young, by an accident ; the second, John Richard Jefferies, who so signed himself as a boy, but was afterwards Richard Jefferies to the world. He was born on November 6, 1848, and was christened early in the next year by Mr. Bailey, Vicar of Holy Rood, Swindon. He had very fair, some call it sandy, uncurling hair ; a biggish, ' small Wellington ' nose ; loose, sensitive, ' somewhat large ' mouth, ' with slight pendulous lower lip ' ; ' wonderfully clear complexion ' ; ' widely-opened, prominent blue eyes ' ; good teeth, that were good until his death ; and small, firm hands. He grew to be about six feet in height, slender, with a slight stoop early developed. He had two younger brothers—Henry James and Charles—and a sister Sarah, all of whom are living now.

James Luckett Jefferies can be pretty well known by studying his portrait as Iden in ' Amaryllis.' Local memory corroborates that portrait. He was an original man, an eccentric, too, a man of character and instincts, sensitive, full of various activities, a great walker even when past seventy, and notably clever with his hands. He was very fond of trees, as they grew and when thrown, and could pick out a good thing for himself when there had been a fall of timber at Burderop. Richard Jefferies speaks of his great-grandfather as a connoisseur in timber, ' which is, indeed, a sort of instinct in all his descendants.'

\* ' Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' *Country Life*, March 14, 1908.

There was oak, elm, and ash, and a withy-bed on Coate Farm, walnuts overhanging the farmyard itself, and much fruit in the garden. And James Jefferies liked to plant. He always had good apples of his own growing at Coate ; and it was he who planted the copper-beech behind the house, and the French cherry in front. ' It was he who brought a water-finder with his witch-hazel to the farm, and who made the long tunnel through the fields to bring the water into the house. (By-the-by, this water is gone from the old home now, and the cottagers used to say, ' Ould Mr. Jefferies, he stopped it, afore he went away !') It was he who rooted up all the rough old cider apples, and stocked the orchard with the sweet, delightful codlins and russets it now possesses ; he planted the pear-trees on the walls, the Siberian crab and the yew-tree on the lawn, and the luscious and then little-known egg-plums ; the box-hedges, in Richard's youth just at their prime, taller than a man and a dense cover for birds. He scattered the musk-seed, so that each year the delicate, scented little plant would crop up between the paving-stones under the " parlour " window. His garden produce was always of the best ; no one else ever grew such red carrots, yellow parsnips, juicy cucumbers ! He planted horse-chestnuts and filberts. (I remember how he cut down the whole hedge in a rage one day, because the men from the New Town, as it was called, had rifled the nuts in the early morning.)'\*

They say, too, that he planted the mulberry and the weeping ash at Coate ; and he used to trim the pollard-limes behind the front wall, so that they made a solid bastion of leaves against the world. When he had no trees of his own, in his old age at Bath, he became a gardener, and he got to know all the trees in the gardens. Of birds, too, he knew much, as a sportsman and something more ; it seems to have been he who shot the last bittern at Coate. Sometimes he fished. He kept bees

\* ' Forbears of Richard Jefferies,' *Ccountry Life*, March 14, 1908.



under the southern wall of the house. He built the piggery and stable himself, and the high wall—Amaryllis's wall—which screens the garden from the road, and the blue summer-house that used to stand at the bottom of his garden, paved with radiating lines of kidney-stones which he brought himself from Medbourne. He made a ha-ha between the garden and the field; he put a seat round a sycamore that stood by the summer-house. He was a maker of good gates, and the one which Iden and the carpenter made in 'Amaryllis' was hung opposite the little church at Coate.

He was a funny-tempered man, full of unexpected likes and dislikes. It is remembered that he hated the smell of the gin that was drunk at Burderop over the timber, and he disliked tobacco-smoke. One year he would give up the garden to fruit-bushes; again it would be gorgeous with uncommon flowers; and then the flowers gave way to a fountain and gold and silver fish. He could be playfully mischievous, too, and like to hear the splash of coping-stones from the little Coate Road bridge as he pushed them over into the brook at night. Except in winter, he wore no stockings, and he took little care of his clothes. His most noted public act was the yearly bonfire in the field opposite the farmhouse on November 5. He seems to have excited curiosity, awe, and amusement more often than affection, but there is a story told that reveals his genial side. In the tall copper under the steep thatch of the older part of the house he used to brew some very good, strong ale—'Goliath ale'—and he would let his milker, then Abner Webb, take as much as he liked of this. James Jefferies would thus come into the milking-shed sometimes, and find Abner happy but incapable on the floor. He would milk the cows himself, and pass it over, until he at last had to tell Abner one Friday that he would pay him wages no more.

'Well,' said Abner, 'if thee doesn't know a good servant, I knows a good maister; and if thee won't pay I, I'll sarve ee for nowt.' And he remained on the farm.

James Jefferies always voted blue, but was a Radical in many of his ideas. He was a Churchman : for some time the Coate services were held at the back of his house ; and it was as much out of his hatred of the Methodists as of love for the Church that he offered to give the land and to cart the stones for the chapel at Coate.

Less is said of Elizabeth, his wife. She, too, was generous, but irritable and queer, and there are hints that a country life on a small, encumbered farm was not what she desired. But she made admirable butter, as some still remember, and a small cheese—about eight to the hundredweight.

She and her husband and John Brown—and after him, Abner Webb—with extra hands at haymaking, managed the little farm. In the year of Richard's birth gold was discovered in California, and soon after in Australia. Agriculture prospered. Meat, cheese, and butter were at a high price ; rates were low ; more money was spent on drainage and artificial manures ; great improvements were made in agricultural machinery ; and Jefferies, writing to Mrs. Harrild at the age of seven, shows how much he was impressed by a threshing-machine which he had seen for the first time at a large farm in the neighbourhood, and he drew a picture of the machine. But Coate Farm was only about forty acres in extent, and though the land was very good and was given to James Jefferies on his marriage, freehold, it never brought him much money, even in the best days.

The nearest market was at Swindon—at first a ' gin-and-water market,' where farmers, with samples of corn in their pockets, sat about over a glass and a pipe, and another glass and another pipe, till a dealer appeared. This was followed by a couple of rows of movable posts and rails in the Square every Monday (opposite the bakery), with sacks of wheat leaning against them. In 1853 a market-house was built ; in 1866 the present Corn Exchange was opened. There was a horse-fair all the way up Short Edge or Devizes Road, and a monthly cattle-

market in High Street, branching into Wood Street and Cricklade Street. There were several fairs, for the sale of in-calf heifers in the spring and of fat cattle in winter. At Lady Day and Michaelmas there was a hiring fair : carters had a piece of whipcord in their hats, cowmen and foggers a lock of cowhair, dairymaids a bunch of ribbons pinned at their breasts ; when hired, they attached long streamers.

## CHAPTER III

### CHILDHOOD AT COATE FARM

COATE FARM is a plain, oblong, slated, brick house of two stories, including the attics, attached on the east side to the small, steep-roofed, and still thatched remnant of an older house. In front, one sitting-room downstairs has a bay-window and window-seat. A large pear-tree covers the western end of the house, and still touches, as in Jefferies' day, the attic window that looks to Swindon. The bedrooms, one of them in the old part under the thatch, are reached by irregular passages and steps, and the staircase is narrow and dark. At the top are two long low attics, one of them the cheese-room where Jefferies read and Amaryllis painted, when its window was latticed, but not glazed. Beside the bedroom, there is a cellar, and a kitchen with open fireplace and brewing copper, all under the thatch ; and outside that the dairy, at right angles to the house. Thatched outbuildings are close by, under elms, to the east. The front garden, screened by wall and pollard-limes, has several trees—clipped yew, French cherry, plum, apple, and pear ; and some ill-grown plums lean against the wall, whence Amaryllis could easily look down on to the sunken road. In the back garden, also, are fruit-trees, together with mulberry, copper beech, and weeping ash.

Powdered by motor-cars, and deprived of most of its thatch, it is a dull, unnoticeable house, the greater part of it obviously belonging to about the year 1820, when John Jefferies built all but what is still thatched. The

ha-ha where the beehives stood and the ants nested is gone, the summer-house is gone. But the martins still nest under the eaves; there is still some lavender in the garden; and in the early June mornings—and in Jefferies' books—it is easy to see how sweet and fit a home it must have been made by James Jefferies in the middle of last century.

In the farmyard stood the common pump of the village, which made the place the hub of the universe, James Jefferies himself being fond of talk, and, as an old haymaker says, 'didn't bustle about like some of 'em.'

The land attached to the farmhouse was very little—about forty acres, all of it grass, feeding about eight cows and not employing more than one labourer except at the haymaking. Most of the land lay close round the house: two fields opposite, called locally Little and Great 'Axe' or 'Auks,' but by Jefferies 'Hawkes'; and three immediately behind, bounded on the south by the Reservoir—the Home Field, nearest the road to Day House, the Brook Field, between that and the stream, and a little corner piece beyond called Little Home Field. This little piece was a warm, rich corner where there was always a partridge or two, and Richard loved its oaks. But right away from the house, beyond the Reservoir, and on the very edge of Burderop—and now gathered into that estate—was another small field known as 'The Hodson Ground.' It had goodly double hedges, and, being so near the preserves, partook of some of their advantages, and served as an invaluable outwork for Jefferies when he began to loaf about with a gun. The trains between Swindon and Marlborough did not, in those days, burst in among the pheasants of Burderop, and the quiet of the field was complete.

This house and the fields were a good place for one to live in who was to become part of that country-side. That, and liberty for six days in the week, and James Luckett Jefferies for his father, was in Richard's favour. Then, too, there was his great-uncle's mill and its vast wheel by

old Swindon Church. And among men there were John Brown, the milker ; Thomas Smith, who worked at Day House and cobbled at home ; and the millwright and blacksmith by 'The Sun' ; old Day, the bailiff at the Reservoir ; old Mrs. Rawlings, the widow of a Burderop keeper ; and later, the gamekeeper himself, named Haylock. And he had but to follow the brook a little way out of his father's land to come to the bridge at Wanborough Nythe, an old Roman station, where he must early have felt the contrasts and the harmonies of sunlight on running water with the vestiges of long-vanished men.

'Bevis,' 'Wood Magic,' 'The Gamekeeper at Home,' and 'The Amateur Poacher,' reveal pretty certainly what use Jefferies made of these surroundings as a child. Of the childish sayings in the forty-ninth chapter of 'Bevis' it is rash to attribute any to Jefferies himself, since when he wrote the book he had a boy of his own. Some, I like to think, are certainly his, such as :\*

"Ah !" said he thoughtfully. "He [the Deity] got a high ladder and climbed up over the hedges to make the thunder. . . ."

"At Brighton he was taken over the Pavilion. . . . By-and-by, in the top stories, rather musty from old carpets and hangings : "Hum !" said he ; "seems stuffy. I can smell that gentleman's dinner " (*i.e.*, George IV.'s).

"Visiting a trim suburban villa. . . . "Don't think much of *your* garden," said Bevis ; "no buttercups. . . ."

"The crucifixion hurt his feelings very much. . . . "If God had been there, He would not have let them do it." "

'Wood Magic' gives us some unquestionably true things about those early years—the wanderings in the Home Field after butterflies, the talks with thrush and weasel and hare, the spaniel his companion ; the love of the sky as he lay in the grass and looked up, 'as he always did when he wanted someone to speak to,' and said, 'Sky, I love you like I love my mother.' How early I do not know, but it is likely that very early he fell, on occasion, into a

\* *Bevis.* '1



dream state with something like the vague, universal consciousness described in 'Bevis'; he\* 'felt with his soul out to the far-distant sun just as easily as he could feel with his hand to the bunch of grass beside him; he felt with his soul down through into the earth just as easily as he could touch the sward with his fingers. Something seemed to come to him out of the sunshine and the grass.' He was physically sensitive, and not without a conscious indulgence of this sensitiveness, if we may judge from the passage in 'Bevis' where his hero lies down and shuts his eyes to think, and Mark gently tickles his forehead and neck and hair and cheeks with a grass flower. 'Tell me a story,' says Mark in one place; 'I'll tickle you, and you tell me a story;' and Bevis closes his eyes and begins a tale. Thought and sensation were closely allied in Jefferies at a much later time.

But he must also have been a true, ferocious country child, robbing birds'-nests freely—a thing he was eager to pardon to the end—and willing to shoot the thrush, trap the weasel, and smash the toad. Where men and children are at close grips with Nature, and have to wrest a living from the soil or the sea, there is apt to hide, like an imprisoned toad, at the very roots of their philosophy, if it does not flap like a crow in the topmost branches, a feeling that all the life that is not with them—as horse and sheep and cow and sheep-dog are—is against them, rivalling them in pursuit of food and warmth, robbing the drills and taking a share of the waving corn and the glittering harvest of the sea. Sometimes the toad, sometimes the crow, this primeval gnome or puck, persisted in Jefferies' mind for many years, if it ever forsook it. He arose out of the earth, and he had its cruelty. He beat, or would have beaten, the offending beast, much as Mark and Bevis 'thrashed, thwacked, banged, thumped, poked, prodded, kicked, belaboured, bumped and hit' the donkey, 'working themselves into a frenzy of rage.'† It was 'the same Bevis who put an aspen-leaf carefully under the fly to

\* *Wood Magic.*

† *Bevis.*

save it from drowning. The sky was blue and the evening beautiful, but no one came to help the donkey.\* With the village boys he caught the roach and miller's-thumb, and robbed the moorhen's nest in the little brooks. Consistent after a strange fashion with this hostility to wild things was his instinct against petting them. He kept silk-worms, having a mulberry-tree at hand; but 'all the grasses of the meadow,'† he says, 'were my pets, I loved them all; and perhaps that was why I never had a "pet," never cultivated a flower, never kept a caged bird, or any creature. Why keep pets when every wild, free hawk that passed overhead in the air was mine? I joyed in his swift, careless flight, in the throw of his pinions, in his rush over the elms and miles of woodland; it was happiness to see his unchecked life. What more beautiful than the sweep and curve of his going through the azure sky? These were my pets, and all the grass.' Before he had any conscious thought it was a delight to find the flowers and take them home, snapping off also large green sprays and massy tree-bloom. Consistent, too, is the way in which he saw, so as to remember for ever, the yellow-hammer on the ash bough singing in the sun:‡ 'This one yellow-hammer still sits on the ash-branch in Stewart's Mash over the sward, singing in the sun, his feathers wet with colour, the same sun-song, and will sing to me so long as the heart shall beat.'

Callous and sensitive, he was not only dreamy, but fiery too, and the impatient irritability of Bevis comes straight from life. Food, too, was sweet between his teeth, or those 'cogs'—'indentations like a cogged wheel' round the loaf—stuck over with pats of fresh butter would not have lingered so in memory, and, with them, the apples up in the attic, of which he stole the largest with great deliberation. Once, perhaps, the farm-wagon must have taken him a long way by the southward road over the Downs; and he must have been told

\* *Bevis.* † 'Hours of Spring,' *Field and Hedgerow.*

‡ 'Wild Flowers,' *Open Air.*





From a photograph.

RICHARD JEFFERIES  
as a boy.



that over there lay Southampton and the sea, for not once or twice only is it mentioned that the Marlborough road 'led towards the ships,' sixty miles off. And on one of these early days, I think, he saw a skeleton disinterred by the brook, the 'Roman brook' by Wanborough Nythe. He describes such a disinterment made accidentally by a horse, and the skeleton haunts him in 'The Gamekeeper,' in 'Meadow Thoughts,' in 'The Story of My Heart,' and elsewhere. One sorrowful impression of this kind can furnish an acid by means of which even joyous things bite deeper into the brain.

I do not know how early he went to the sea, but he visited the Lewes Downs as a child, and was taken to the shore, probably at Eastbourne, Worthing, and Brighton, by his aunt and uncle, the Harrilds. When he was a little child he went to London, and stayed for months at a time with the Harrilds at Shanklin Villa, Sydenham. There he went to a small private school, and was a 'good' and docile, but not a brilliant, child. He was fond of drawing what he saw with much laboured precision. Taken to lengthy religious meetings at Exeter Hall, he kept himself happy in the crowd with his pencil and paper. He sat quietly for hours with any picture-books, such as *Punch*.

Very soon he was a fisherman in the brook, and then in the Reservoir. In 1856, before he was eight, he wrote that he had been 'out shooting with papa. We shot several Rabbits. I have rowed the Boat from one end of the water to the other with Mama and two others. I have caught some fishes, but they are dead.\* Before he was nine, he was 'climbing trees, shooting, fishing, swinging, blowing my trumpet all over the place, and up to all sorts of tricks.† Three months later he wrote :‡

'I have been on the Reservoir many times, and out with Papa shooting rabbits to Hodson, and have shot one myself. . . . I should like to come and see you again soon.

\* To Mrs. Harrild.

† To the same, July 2, 1857.

‡ To the same, October 19, 1857.

Papa says I cannot run about here much longer when it is wet and dirty. I must go away to school.'

When at home his schooling was irregular at first. Staying at Sydenham for months at a time, it was impossible that his dreaming father should see that he went to school as soon as he returned. But James Jefferies used to read and explain Shakespeare and the Bible to the children, and taught them what he knew of natural history. Coate Reservoir, and the fields and farmyard, trained and fed the child's eyes and ears in the course of collecting the forty kinds of eggs which hung in the summer-house. He inherited his father's handiness with tools, and he may well have made a gun, as Bevis did, with the blacksmith's help. That he fitted up one of the craft on the Reservoir with sails is certain; for I have met 'Molly the milkmaid,' who stitched them after he had cut them to the right shape. 'Everybody does everything for you,' said Mark to Bevis; and it seems as if the boy had a sharp will that went straight to its end. 'Molly' did many things for him, and remembers driving a two-pronged fork through an eel that she might skin it alive at his request, for he had never seen that rite before. His father taught him to swim, and the method, if it was that described in 'Bevis,' could hardly have been bettered.

What he could not get without money he usually had to do without, and as a big boy he had to beg a good deal for threepence. But at first that mattered little, as his tastes were those of an ordinary boy, playing at marbles when he was past eleven, begging fireworks from his aunt when he was thirteen.

In May, 1860, he was at school, and 'in the Rule of Three now, which I like very much.' This letter is characteristic enough to quote :\*

'I suppose you have heard the cuckoo before this. Last night three came up into a tree under which I was standing. I have robbed 31 birds' eggs already, chiefly thrushes. . . . I have made a sundial, and I can tell the

\* To Mrs. Harrild, May 7, 1860.

time by it. . . . How are you off for potatoes now? How is Jip now and the mare and the little canary getting on? . . . I must conclude has it is very near 8 o'clock, and must be off to school.'

It would take a rambling boy at least an hour to cross the fields from Coate Farm to a Swindon School. A little later he was going to 'the Miss Cowles,' apparently to school, for two hours a day on five days of the week. His handwriting varied very much at this period, showing self-consciousness. If in 1861 he was being taught by 'the Miss Cowles,' he was certainly for some time under Mr. Fentiman, a Plymouth Brother, who kept a school in Short Edge, or Devizes Road, and taught English, mathematics, French, and Latin. There were about thirty boys, sons of farmers, architects, bank-managers, tradesmen. Jefferies was noticeable there chiefly for being quiet, dreamy, and reserved; one says, 'not particularly amiable, somewhat supercilious, not caring much, if at all, for outdoor games'\*—*i.e.*, for such rigid games as cricket. Mr. Fentiman had himself been a boy, and had set up wigwams and raged on the warpath, and he lent Fenimore Cooper's 'Leatherstocking' tales to Jefferies, and thus helped him to the notion of camping out and playing at Indians on the shores of the Reservoir and on the Hodson Ground.

He spent many hours in this field at Hodson with his gun, and so became friendly with Haylock, the Burderop keeper, who lived in Hodson Bottom. This man had a reputation on account of the ferocity and licence of his language when he caught trespassers. He would give them plenty of 'tongue-pie,' says an old victim, but would never prosecute. He wore a tall beaver hat, and gave warning as he entered a copse by coughing loud, very loud. He had a notorious hatred of parsons, whether they came shooting with his master or not. Jefferies helped him in keeping down the vermin, and earned some privileges in return. The Hodson field was a good place for a wire, and the Burderop Woods made

\* 'Forbears of Richard Jefferies.'

a perfect back-garden for the boy, as they were preserved against nearly everybody else. They included dense, silent wood, more open undergrowth, deep hedges, moist sedge, and were rich in many kinds of birds except birds of prey, although these visited the place persistently. Among the withies of the little Reservoir there were snipe to be had ; and in the winter great crested grebes and divers came with many other water-birds to the main Reservoir.

Other instructors the boy had in a greyhound and in Juno, the pointer, who used to take fish out of the farm-yard trough without hurting them. Job Brown and others set him thinking about snares for fish, feather, and fur.

If he was becoming a keen and hardened shooter, sharing the sportsman's tenuous emotion of loving the hare that he has killed, he was a good deal more also. Watching in hedges, or up in trees, or in the punt, he trained his fine, restless eyes to their craft :

‘ [Sitting in a tree] like so many slender webs, his lines of sight thus drawn through mere chinks of foliage radiated from a central spot, and at the end of each he seemed as if he could feel if anything moved as much as he could see it. Each of these webs strained at his weary mind, and even in the shade the strong glare of the summer noon pressed heavily on his eyelids.’

In fact, he fell asleep. He learned to know the roads by which the birds travelled, so that he said (in ‘ Wild Life in a Southern County ’) he thought he could draw a map of the fields, and show the routes and resorts of birds and beasts ; and it was probably he that discovered the ice-blink on Coate Reservoir—the invisible mist above the ice which yet concealed a lantern laid upon it, unless the watcher lifted his head well above the surface. Several of his contemporaries recall his skill and energy in skating. He and his younger, but robuster and more daring brother, Harry, had a reputation for their skating which points to a youth well spent upon Reservoir and Canal.

Life at home was often of a delicious quiet, and before



he learned about Time there must have been many moments like that which lingered to inspire such passages as that in 'Round about a Great Estate,' where the damask rose opens its petals, the strawberries are ripe, and 'young Aaron' turns the blue-painted barrel-churn, while the finches call in the plum-trees. Not yet had his father's and mother's moods the enduring excuse that the farm was going surely to the bad; not yet had James Jefferies, his father dead, and all hope of more help departed, begun to let things that were wrong go yet more wrong, to mortgage the farm, and to dream, until he had to leave and become a gardener in Bath. His mother was often gay, and his father genial and at ease in his garden, and in these big, early, silent spaces of life the boy's soul could turn about and grow. It was, perhaps, at the age of fifteen—'so long since that I have forgotten the date,' as he wrote in 1883—that he used to go every morning, where, hidden by elm-trees, he could see the sun rise, or watch the early eastern sky:

'Involuntarily I drew a long breath, then I breathed slowly. My thought, or inner consciousness, went up through the illumined sky, and I was lost in a moment of exaltation. This only lasted a very short time, perhaps only part of a second, and while it lasted there was no formulated wish. I was absorbed; I drank the beauty of the morning; I was exalted.'

At or near the same time came those richer growths of the dream state and extended, if not 'cosmic,' consciousness' mentioned in 'Bevis,' where, too, he speaks of the exact position of the rising sun, 'between the young oak and the third group of elms':—

'The sward on the path on which Bevis used to lie and gaze up in the summer evening was real and tangible; the earth under was real; and so, too, the elms, the oak, the ash-trees, were real and tangible—things to be touched, and known to be. Now, like these, the mind, stepping from the one to the other, knew and almost felt the stars to be real, and not mere specks of light, but

things that were there by day over the elms as well as by night, and not apparitions of the evening departing at the twittering of the swallows. They were real, and the touch of his mind felt to them.

‘ He could not, as he reclined on the garden path by the strawberries, physically reach to and feel the oak ; but he could feel the oak in his mind, and so from the oak, stepping beyond it, he felt the stars. They were always there by day as well as by night. . . .

‘ The heavens were as much a part of life as the elms, the oak, the house, the garden and orchard, the meadow and the brook. They were no more separated than the furniture of the parlour, than the old oak chair where he sat, and saw the new moon shine over the mulberry-tree. They were neither above nor beneath, they were in the same place with him ; just as when you walk in the wood the trees are all about you, on a plane with you, so he felt the constellations and the sun on a plane with him, and that he was moving among them as the earth rolled on, like them, with them, in the stream of space.

‘ The day did not shut off the stars, the night did not shut off the sun ; they were always there. Not that he always thought of them, but they were never dismissed. When he listened to the greenfinches sweetly calling in the hawthorn, or when he read his books, poring over the “Odyssey,” with the sunshine on the wall, they were always there ; there was no severance. Bevis lived not only out to the finches and the swallows, to the far-away hills, but he lived out and felt out to the sky.

‘ It was living, not thinking. He lived it, never thinking, as the finches live their sunny life in the happy days of June. There was magic in everything, blades of grass and stars, the sun and the stones upon the ground.’

There is another passage in ‘ Bevis ’ where he ‘ became silent and fell into one of his dream states—when, as Mark said, he was like a tree ’ ; he was ‘ lost—something seemed to take him out of himself ’ ; and another where he sat



on the top of a hill and was 'lost in his dreamy mood,' and 'he did not think, he felt.'

He had become a great reader, too. I have seen his copy of 'Percy's Reliques,' with 'J. R. Jefferies, 1863,' on the fly-leaf. The ballad of King Estmere is often on Bevis's lips. At Coate Farm there were many old books, and many more at the grandfather's house in Swindon, bound in eighteenth-century leather and early nineteenth-century boards. The children had the run of these, and that is perhaps why so few of them survive. There was certainly a Culpeper, loved—before Linnæus and Gerarde—for his poisons and fantastic properties—*Orchis Masculula*, for example, credited with the power to call up the passion of love.\* There would be books like that 'small quarto, A.D. 1650, a kind of calendar of astrology, medicine, and agriculture, telling the farmer when the conjunction of the planets was favourable for purchasing stock or sowing seed.'† Favourites also were the 'Odyssey,' in, I believe, James Morrice's translation, as well as Pope's; 'Don Quixote,' Shakespeare's poems, Filmore's 'Faust.' These are mentioned again and again, especially the 'Odyssey' and 'Faust.' There was an ancient encyclopædia, with a page 'of chemical signs and those used by the alchemists, some of which he had copied off for magic'; and one giving all the alphabets—'Coptic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Syriac, and so on'; and 'the Arabic took his fancy as the most mysterious—the sweeping curves, the quivering lines, the blots where the reed pen thickened, there was no knowing what such writing might not mean.'‡ The encyclopædia often lay open at 'Magic,' and his mind—Bevis's mind—worked from some of the untruths and half-truths to the truth:—§

"... I wish we could get a magic writing. Then we could do anything, and we could know all the secrets."

"What secrets?"

"Why, all these things have secrets."

\* *Toilers of the Field.*

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Greene Ferne Farm.*

§ *Bevis.*

“ All ? ”

“ All,” said Bevis, looking round, and pointing with an arrow in his hand. “ All the trees, and all the stones, and all the flowers——”

‘ The magic of the past,’ he wrote, ‘ always had a charm for me. I had learned to know the lines . . . so that the “ gips ” could tell me nothing new.’\* Then there was ‘ Koenigsmark the Robber.’ ‘ Pilgrim’s Progress ’ was given to him by his Uncle and Aunt Harrild in 1858. Not much later came the many translations from the poets and others which Félise read—‘ the beautiful memoirs of Socrates, some parts of Plato, most of the histories, and the higher and purer poets.’ He mentions also Sophocles, Diogenes Laertius’ ‘ Lives of the Philosophers,’ Athenæus and Aristotle. As early as 1867 he quoted Rabelais, David Lindsay, and several chroniclers. From a book or from his father, and from his nights out of doors, he learned to know the stars as he did the hamlet houses and elms.

The first attraction of books for him was that of the unusual, the adventurous, the antique. ‘ Ulysses,’ he says, ‘ was ever my pattern and model.’† He gloated over the poisons of Culpeper. He arranged fights on ‘ The Plain,’ and had ‘ The Pathfinder ’ in his mind. His father told him, too, of his adventure twenty years ago. Upon the Downs he felt the call of the sea. He had, too, adventurous friends, boys not at all dreamy, but full of noise and energy. One of these lived over the way at Snodshill Farm—his cousin, James Cox. And one day they were missed together. Jimmy was the elder, and had started work in the Great Western Railway Works at Swindon, and could save a little money ; so they crossed the Channel into France, with Moscow dimly desirable and accessible over the hills and rivers and plains. But the French he learned at Swindon did not take Jefferies far, and they returned in a short time to England. Next

\* *Amateur Poacher.*

† *Ibid.*

they tried Liverpool, and spent all their money in tickets to America which did not cover their food. They had to return. Jimmy was soon off again, and never returned to the old life, nor, perhaps, did Jefferies, in quite the old way. The one has been in Australia these thirty years; Jefferies had set his foot on a road that was to lead to at least as distant a land.

This adventure—in or about 1864—may have been inspired by increasing difficulties at home. The place was ‘falling to decay, while at the same time it seemed to be flowing with milk and honey.’\* ‘There are no wolves,’ he wrote, ‘like those debt sends against a house.’† The food was good and plenteous, but there was no ready money. The farm was not prospering. The cattle plague came in 1865, after the three great corn harvests of 1863, 1864, and 1865. Though farmers’ clubs were becoming more and more active and numerous, and the progress in agricultural machinery went rapidly on, Coate Farm and the farmer, whose head wore a mark on the panel against which it leaned to think, were none the better. Richard had by this time left school for good, and though he was reading, rambling, and thinking, he was earning no money, except a few shillings for himself, made by selling hares which he snared or shot. The long, idle lad was beginning to be noticed for his idleness, his walks to Marlborough Forest, his everlasting loafing with a gun. Mr. Calley, at Burderop Park, used to say: ‘That young Jefferies is not the sort of fellow you want hanging about in your covers.’ His father felt that he had let his son slip out of his knowledge, and used to point with disgust to ‘our Dick poking about in them hedges.’ Nor would he do any farm-work worth speaking of. In a later letter he said that he had helped on the farm, and could lend a hand at almost anything; but the only work he cared to do was that of chopping wood or splitting it with betel and wedges to make posts and rails. The flint hauliers on the Downs used to see him going about as if he were

\* *After London.*

† *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

'looking for summat,' or as if he 'weren't doing any work.' He was, says another, admiring his capacity for doing apparently nothing, 'cut out for a gentleman if only there had been money.' He was in a ferment of undivined and growing powers which isolated him, of ambitions, of needs, which presents of books from his aunt could not satisfy. His father was not a man of books, though far from illiterate. For a time the boy would get into the habit of overlooking the wisdom of the unlearned. Probably he had begun to write as early as 1864, and a letter of that year shows the beginning of self-consciousness about style.\*

But however bitter the days of poverty, loneliness, misunderstanding, and constraint, the time when he was sixteen and seventeen had probably as great sweetness as bitterness, since the two go together in their extremes at least as much at that as at any other age. They say that, though he often carried his gun, he was less and less fond of shooting after he was fifteen or so. Yet he would still bring home a snipe on a frosty day, or a jay's wing in the spring from Burderop. He hung about on stiles by Maxell and Great Maxell fields, on the footpath to Badbury Lane, or by the brooks, or on the Reservoir, or on the Downs, and dreamed and thought. With his finger on the trigger, he 'hesitated, dropped the barrel, and watched the beautiful bird,' and 'that watching so often stayed the shot that at last it grew to be a habit. . . . Time after time I have flushed partridges without firing, and have let the hare bound over the furrow free.'† And yet I should not be surprised if he shared little John's delight in 'wristing' the rabbit's neck, 'as the neck gave with a sudden looseness, and in a moment what had been a living, straining creature became limp.'‡ He tells us that he shot many kingfishers and herons; he shot the redwing as it sang, to make quite sure of it. I dare say the eagle which he once saw going over was lucky in being at a great height.

\* To Mrs. Harrild, October 27, 1864.

† *Amateur Poacher*.

‡ *Ibid.*

All this—the hunting, the reading, the brooding—was filling his brain, clearing and subtilizing his eye. The clearness of the physical is allied to the penetration of the spiritual vision. For both are nourished to their perfect flowering by the habit of concentration. To see a thing as clearly as he saw the sun-painted yellow-hammer in Stewart's Mash is part of the office of the imagination. Imagination is no more than the making of graven images, whether of things on the earth or in the mind. To make them, clear concentrated sight and patient mind are the most necessary things after love ; and these two are the children of love. With the majority, love, accompanying and giving birth to imagination, reaches its intensity only once, and that briefly, in a lifetime ; and if they are ever again to know imagination, it is through fear, as when a tall flame shoots up before the eyes, or through sudden pain or anger giving their faces an honest energy of expression, and their lips, perhaps, a power of telling speech. Yet more rare is the power of repeating these images by music or language or carved stone. It is those who can do so who alone are, as a rule, aware that human life, nature, and art are every moment continuing and augmenting the Creation—making to-day the first day, and this field Eden, annihilating time—so that each moment all things are fresh and the sun has not drunken the blessed dew from off their bloom. The seeing eye of child or lover, the poet's verse, the musician's melody, add thus continually to the richness of the universe. Jefferies early possessed such an eye, such an imagination, though not for many years could he reveal some of its images by means of words. In fact, he was very soon to bear witness to the pitiful truth that the imagination does not supply the words that shall be its expression ; he was to fill much paper with words that revealed almost nothing of his inner and little more of his outer life.



## CHAPTER IV

### YOUTH AND EARLY MANHOOD—REPORTING—SHORT STORIES—PAMPHLETS—ARCHÆOLOGY

EARLY in March, 1866, soon after he was seventeen, Jefferies wrote to Mrs. Harrild to say that he had just begun to work on the *North Wilts Herald*, a new Conservative paper, published at Swindon. He had sent her a copy of the paper, by which, he says, she might guess that his connection with it had already commenced. He imagines that he will like his place, and up to the present moment he does more—he enjoys it ; his duties are ‘ multifarious—reporting, correcting manuscript and proofs, with a spice of reviewing and an unlimited amount of condensation.’ This work gave him a little money, sent him out of doors in many directions, and compelled him to use his pen in the expression of his own or other people’s knowledge and ideas. But that he had already had some practice is certain ; for, poor as are his stories published in the *North Wilts* of this period, they are not beginnings, nor even are the verses, like those ‘ To a Fashionable Bonnet,’ ending :

‘ Ah, girls are girls, and will be girls  
In spite of matrons gray ;  
Then why restrain the flowing curls  
When all for freedom pray ?’

The stories have much facility and exuberance of trashiness, of which this from ‘ Henrique Beaumont ’\* is no unjust example :

‘ A young man knelt at the feet of a maiden, whom he

\* *North Wilts Herald*.

endeavoured to prevent rising from an ottoman by detaining her hand in his. "Rowland Austin," muttered Henrique, setting his teeth.

"Unhand me, sir," said the maiden, while a rosy flush mantled her fair forehead, a glance of rising indignation shot from her deep blue eyes, and her lips quivered.'

Here occurs his first sketch of a Wiltshire miller, but not a promising one. 'Who will Win?' has a cynical psychological description of one who has seen a beauty pass in a carriage, and has loved her at first sight. He did not follow her, firstly, because the carriage went too fast; secondly, on account of the heat; thirdly, because it might return to whence it started; fourthly, because he wished to know the name of the inmate, which was not pasted up on the door. In this tale there is fighting and shipwreck; the hero is suspended over a precipice in the folds of a boa; the end is marriage. 'Masked'\* is about a doctor who puts poison in the intestines of a patient of his rival ('graceful, easy, "interesting," as the ladies would put it'), and an actress of unquestionable virtue, in whom 'contact with the boards had not depreciated her nature.' Such stories are probably the unconsciously insincere utterance of a truly romantic nature. 'A Strange Story'† is nearer to the mature Jefferies. It refers to 'yonder camp-crowned hill,' and begins with some conversation between two men (Roderick and Gerald Fitzhugh) as to why the White Horse, the fosse and ramparts of the ancient camp, and the time-worn barrow, 'should have power to render naught the abyss of a thousand years, and call up "deeds half hidden in the mist of years," while yet the ear is conscious of the cooing of doves, the eye of the passing rook and the hare in the fern.' There is an apparition of two persons in a churchyard—one being then some way off in the seer's house, the other far away. The seer dies soon, after expressing a belief that they would meet again; there is, too, a vague prophecy fulfilled. 'T. T. T.'‡ is in yet another vein,

\* *North Wilts Herald.*

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*



concerning a squire's wife who advocates 'tea and toast as a cure for all evils,' and so loses all her servants except one, who can get at the brandy. It is jaunty and mock-heroic, probably with local allusions. 'Traits of the Olden Time,'\* belonging to the same year, is sensible and genuine, though sententious. It touches on rural simplicity, ignorance, brutal hospitality, medicines, Anglo-Saxon forms of speech. 'The conversation of the lower class of agriculturists,' he says, 'sounds like a dialogue of the Heptarchy.' But though he tells us that 'the milker sings at his pail even when his breath is frozen upon his chin,' he mentions but one song, and that 'The Leathern Bottel.' All through the instances are too few and the generalizations too facile. Had this article been singled out and praised by someone of credit, the writer might have developed more directly towards descriptions of the country and country life. But insincerity is not disingenuousness, and that facile, expressionless fiction, useless as it is to us, was, in part, an indulgence to his not yet understood yearnings which they might otherwise have lacked. It was good for him to consider the language of emotion, even if he failed to utter his own; just as, later on, it was good for him to indulge in 'The Scarlet Shawl,' because it satisfied and kept alive for the time being the spiritual something in his nature as competent articles on agriculture could not do. Even so may it be when one who has fallen in love polishes his boots to a particular brightness, though they never meet his mistress's eye. It is quite possible that, had there been no 'Henrique Beaumont' and 'Who will Win?' there would have been no 'Dewy Morn,' no 'Amaryllis,' no 'Story of My Heart.' Right through the early period of Jefferies' life these two elements, the observing and informing, and the emotional and spiritual, remained side by side, usually distinct, but slowly gathering goodness from each other, until at last the boundary vanished in perfectly æsthetic expression. His handwriting as a

\* *North Wilts Herald.*

youth is a slight indication of his uncertainty and confusion ; for a time it was back-handed, and again it was a compromise between writing and printing.

There were more of these tales than are exposed in 'Early Fiction,' and Jefferies had hopes that his Uncle Harrild would pass them on to the editor of *London Society*, a journal that helped to relieve the rusticity of Coate. But he was not only writing tales, reporting, and correcting proofs. For some time past he had been reading modern science, as chance brought Darwin or Lyell along ; but it was without any guidance from critics or friends, and we know that he came upon White's 'Selborne,' *e.g.*, only towards the end of his life. He was reading history, too, and had turned archæologist and numismatist, looking out for signs of early occupation on the face of the earth, for coins, epitaphs, armorial bearings, pedigrees, legends, architecture in the churches, manor-houses, and farms. His own neighbourhood, as he wrote in July, 1867, was a mine for an antiquary. He threw over his school belief that ancient Britain was a waste. The Roman and British coins, arrow-heads, tumuli, camps, cannon-balls, made the country seem 'alive with the dead,' and he was 'inclined to think that this part of North Wilts, at least, was as thickly inhabited of yore as it is now, the difference being only in the spot inhabited having been exchanged for another more adapted to the wants of the times.' He read especially the historians and chroniclers of his own part of the country, and picked up all kinds of knowledge that he could either store up or set forth at once in the *North Wilts Herald*. Before the middle of 1867 he had finished a series of twenty chapters for that paper on the history of Malmesbury. There he quoted from Asser, Geoffrey of Monmouth, David Lindsay, 'Hudibras,' Byron, Goethe, Ossian, and Longfellow's 'King Witlaf's Drinking Horn.' But he gave his medley of quotations and paraphrases little vitality by passages of an insecure and imitated stateliness—as, for example : 'Certain names stand out in the mind

—with an objective reality, like sculpture. Who hears of Homer, without remembering the Trojan war ; of Plato, without in imagination listening to the soft sighing of the zephyrs through the groves of Academus ; of Romulus . . .’ or by the reflection that ‘ Ink alone confers immortality.’ It can only be hoped that really vital knowledge gained by handling this legend and history counterbalanced the vexation of spirit.

Before the end of 1866 he had begun the series of historical and descriptive articles on Swindon and the neighbourhood which now form the volume entitled ‘ Jefferies’ Land.’ There he made use of his well-loved ‘ Ballad of King Estmere ’ and Drayton’s ‘ Dowsabell ’ (also from the ‘ Reliques ’), together with the ‘ Iliad,’ Herodotus, Horace, Pliny, Rowe’s ‘ Lucan,’ Nennius, ‘ Domesday Book,’ Richard of Cirencester, Aubrey, Clarendon, Young, Pope’s ‘ Essay on Man,’ Ossian, and the ‘ Philosophical Magazine.’ The chapters were better than his paper needed, and they are a fairly clear and picturesque arrangement of history, genealogy, legend, and his own observation ; yet he is not above quoting Richard of Cirencester as an authority on 3600 B.C. He visited places as far apart as Avebury, Huish, Aldbourne, Uffington, Ashdown, Highworth, Braden Wood, Cricklade, Fairford, Malmesbury, and Wootton Bassett. In the church at Lydiard Tregoze he wrote :

‘ The effect of these numerous monuments to departed greatness is very solemn, and is increased by the dim light from the stained-glass windows. Here sleep the warrior and the statesman, men celebrated in their day, their names in all men’s mouths, now only known by the epitaph and escutcheon. Who remembers the great baron Tregoz ? Who thinks of him when he hears of Lydiard Tregoze ? Ewyas is still less remembered. The St. John commemorated by Pope runs the best chance of immortality. Those who fought with double-handed swords, with battle-axe and lance, have long been forgotten ; it is only the Muse who confers immortality. Ink is more

durable than iron. Yonder hang the heavy helmets of a forgotten generation. Who remembers the wearers? None but the genealogist, and he only after much cogitation.\*

It is well to have written thus, provided that no trace of having done so remains. For the rest, he informs, moralizes several times, is jocular, but hardly rises above the competence expected in such journalism. The writing is nearly always adequate, but there is nothing yet that is Jefferies' own, and he finds fault with Aubrey for troubling about just the local peculiarities which he himself was afterwards to chronicle. The matter was not digested, and it showed little more than the docility of mind of the young journalist. Some of the material he used later; most evaporated.

'When about eighteen,' he says in 'Nature and Books,'† he began to read translations from the literature of Greece and Rome: first came Diogenes Laertius' 'Lives of the Philosophers,' next Plato, then Athenæus; and he adds that between seventy and eighty of the 'hundred best books' had been his companions almost from boyhood, 'those lacking to complete the number being chiefly ecclesiastical or Continental.' He could forget all else that he had read, 'but it is difficult to forget these' [Greeks] 'even when I will.' Mrs. Harrild sent him books. William Morris, editor and proprietor of the *Swindon Advertiser*, himself a hardy spirit, widely and genially versed in local lore, and a racy writer, used to lend him books, among them 'Les Misérables.'

Except books, art had little to offer him at Swindon or Coate. He heard some music, and his letters twice refer to his enjoyment of the organ at the Crystal Palace; in his books he mentions music definitely, but seldom—'Madame Angot' once, and the singing of such ballads as 'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington' more than once. It is remembered that he criticized some village music

\* *Jefferies' Land*, edited by Grace Toplis.

† *Field and Hedgerow*.

harshly as a reporter, and fell foul of the parish clerk over it.

Now and then he took a short holiday. He mentions running about on the Lewes Downs ; but usually he stayed at Sydenham with his uncle and aunt, the Harrilds, and in September, 1866, he writes as if he had meant to walk all the way home to Coate. He walked from Temple Bar to Windsor, by way of Piccadilly (‘ which you may remark to uncle is precious long pica ’), Kensington, Hounslow, and Colnbrook, but, the weather being gloomy and he tired on reaching Windsor, he took a train that was soon to start, and gave up the walk. There was not always a train waiting for him when he was tired ; ‘ The Story of My Heart ’ shows that his eager heart and brain often winged him to walk until he was exhausted, and it is not unlikely that he lost as well as gained in after-years by his long journeys ‘ on his nerves.’

He was full of interest in ideas, and evidently of confidence, too. In December, 1866, he refers in a letter to some ‘ unfortunate discussions ’ with his uncle, which must have given ‘ a very disagreeable impression of him as obstinate and opinionative.’ He began to argue on theological questions with his father also. He dressed a little uncommonly, and mentions ‘ what the Sydenham people chose to consider his outlandish hat.’ He reconsidered the religious ‘ superstitions and traditions acquired compulsorily in childhood,’ and apparently passed through a stage of aggressive negation. There is no certain evidence on his religious education. The Sunday services for Coate were held actually at Coate Farm for a time, and in an early letter he speaks of a Tuesday prayer-meeting there, but with a spectator’s interest. James Jefferies was an irregular church-goer. It is not apparent that the religious atmosphere was particularly strong, or that Richard was particularly affected by it. If he had been, it is most unlikely that religion would not have powerfully affected the mystic experiences of his youth, through which, if ever, he would be passionately exposed to its



influence. There are many kinds of Christian, and it may be noticed that a man who shows some beauty of character is in danger of being ranked as of one kind, or put into a special class of his own, or charitably labelled *anima naturaliter Christiana*. Which Jefferies belonged to I shall not venture to say, but hardly to 'the religion of all sensible men,' if it is fair to draw conclusions from the most intimate writings of his intellectual prime.

1866 was, according to his own statement, the year when he began to resort to the hills with a more or less conscious purpose of getting rid of his usual surroundings. He is so often careful of dates, even when they are of little importance, and was so curious an observer of his own spiritual progress, that I see no reason to question the date. His heart, he says, grew dusty, 'parched for want of the rain of deep feeling,' and at such times he walked up Liddington Hill 'to breathe a new air and to have a fresher aspiration. . . .

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

'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. . . .

‘ 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.

‘ With all the intensity of feeling which exalted 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 depths 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 notes 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, an 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 weigh 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.’\*

‘ I did not then,’ he adds, ‘ define, or analyze, or understand this.’ Sometimes he climbed the hill ‘ deliberately, deeming it good to do so ’ ; at others, the craving carried him up there of itself. The exaltation made no outward show, but he reached home greatly exhausted. Later on he speaks of being ‘ absorbed into the being or existence of the universe ’ ; and if we allow for the effect of after-thoughts in this description, the experience was probably a development of the childish dream state of Bevis into a spiritual adventure. It was as far removed from the religion of his habit as from the sciences of his study ; yet it was in the nature of a religious ecstasy, of a passionate demand for and a partial realization of a state of oneness with the soul of the world ; and though there is no mention of the paraphernalia of religion, such acts as the drinking of the spring water were sacramental. ‘ Drinking the lucid water,’ he writes in ‘ The Story of My Heart,’ ‘ clear as light itself in solution, I absorbed the beauty and purity of it. I drank the thought of the element ; I desired soul-nature pure and limpid.’

‘ To this cell,’ he writes in another place,† of the same spring perhaps, ‘ I used to come once now and then on a summer’s day, tempted, perhaps, like the finches, by the cool, sweet water, but drawn also by a feeling that could not be analyzed. Stooping, I lifted the water in the

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

† *The Life of the Fields.*

hollow of my hand—carefully, lest the sand should be disturbed—and the sunlight gleamed on it as it slipped through my fingers. Alone in the green-roofed cave, alone with the sunlight and the pure water, there was a sense of something more than these. The water was more to me than water, and the sun than sun. The gleaming rays on the water in my palm held me for a moment, the touch of the water gave me something from itself. A moment, and the gleam was gone, the water flowing away, but I had had them. Beside the physical water and physical light, I had received from them their beauty ; they had communicated to me this silent mystery. The pure and beautiful water, the pure, clear, and beautiful light, each had given me something of their truth.

‘ So many times I came to it, toiling up the long and shadowless hill in the burning sunshine, often carrying a vessel to take some of it home with me. There was a brook, indeed ; but this was different, it was the spring ; it was taken home as a beautiful flower might be brought. It is not the physical water ; it is the sense or feeling that it conveys. Nor is it the physical sunshine ; it is the sense of inexpressible beauty which it brings with it. Of such I still drink, and hope to do so still deeper.’

Sacramental, too, was the looking out at the hills and stars over the hills before he slept. But not yet were these things entirely removed from the dreaminess of childhood. He speaks of ‘ dreaming his prayer,’ of wandering over the hills all day in search of, I think, he knew not what. Had he known what he sought, had he even realized that he was in search of something, it could hardly have failed to impress his writings long before ‘ The Story of My Heart.’ He was far more conscious of the poverty and bitterness, the loneliness and necessity of concealment from hostile or indifferent eyes, the injuries to his vanity, such as he attributed to Felix in ‘ After London.’

In September, 1867, he was very ill. He wrote to his aunt to say that while, a few days ago, he could walk

thirty miles, now he can scarcely take thirty steps ; his eyes are too weak to write much ; he is terribly *ennuyé*, and asks for a book. The illness has swept away some cobwebs from his brain ; he is going to be ' not a swell, but stylish,' believing that people look more at the coat than the man, knowing that ' this is the case with hats.' He is losing his place on the *North Wilts Herald* because it is now the busiest time of the year. A few days later he is improving, but still weak and thin. ' I did too much yesterday in the way of study—my head when I got to bed seemed to swell big enough to fill the room.' A fortnight later still he is suffering from over-exertion, but has been better. At the end of the month he is ' still weak and miserably thin ' ; the editor will give him a fortnight if he cares to return as a reporter at twenty-four shillings a week and live in Swindon. Most of that fortnight he spent at Sydenham, and whilst there composed or copied a sermon on Luke xii. 52, rhetorically showing that Christ will not allow compromise of any kind. Back at Coate, he writes that ' the red leaves of the maple and the yellow leaves of the limes make a beautiful contrast with the oaks and elms, as yet little affected by the frosts.' He is busily reporting—at three meetings in one day, he mentions.

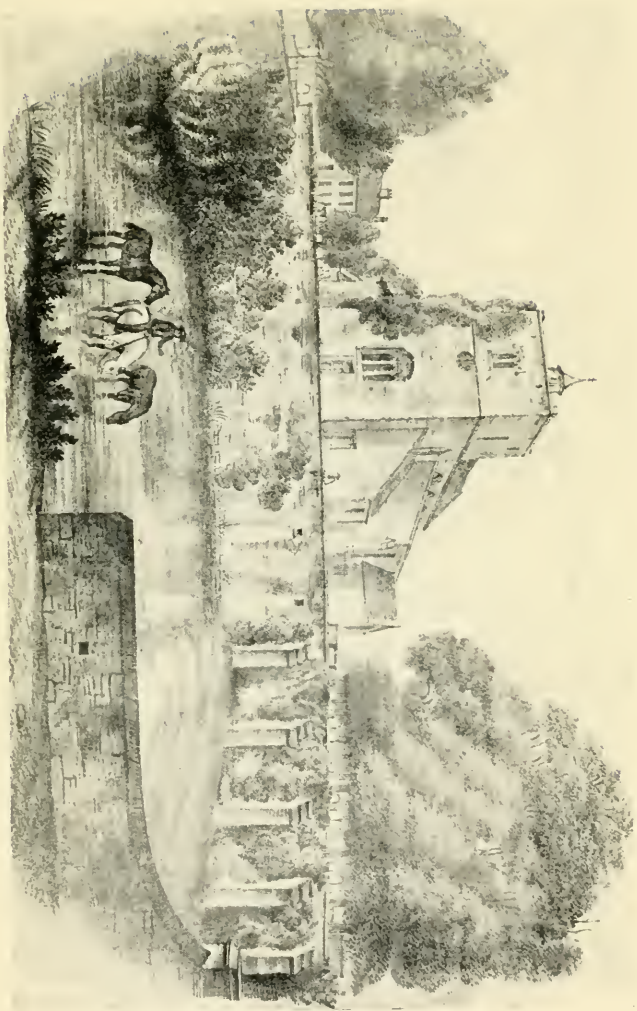
In an undated letter from Coate, not long after this illness, he writes to say that he has been ill of an eruptive fever, and can only walk up and down in the sun behind a good thick hedge. He does not want to go to Devon, because he will be alone. May he stay at Shanklin Villa, ' among the dear old scenes, in the dear old house, near the dear old Crystal Palace, which is well sheltered ' ? He had his way. In this letter he just mentions an essay on ' Instinct ' which he is writing. A little afterwards, in 1868 (Mr. Harrild having died), he writes to say that he is happier with his aunt than at home, because she enters into his prospects and is always kind ; he will work hard to please her, or ' this fatal indolence ' will ruin him. On Good Friday, 1868, he is still working at his essay on ' Instinct,' and improving his handwriting. All that I

could learn from one who was with him on the *North Wilts Herald* was that the staff once signed a roundrobin against his handwriting. At Coate, he says, 'a blind man married his cousin—I suppose you will say that none but a blind man would do that, by way of hint. He has set up in the tea, snuff, tobacco, and fish line, as a rival to old Job Brown, who has enjoyed a monopoly at Coate for the last forty years.'

In April, 1868, Richard's grandfather, John Jefferies, died; instead of leaving Coate Farm purely and simply to James Jefferies, Richard's father, he added a cumbersome provision, and it was not long before the son began to borrow on it. The bakery passed into other hands. Thus the home life was no easier; Richard was discontented and not well. He would, he writes in June, 1868, like a Civil Service clerkship. Reporting is too exciting and uncertain, for he is not strong, and has been fainting in church. Later in the same month (it is a Sunday, and he remarks, 'I can always write more easily on a Sunday—I don't know why, except that other people generally try to write on any other day than that, and that I must be different from them, must be a poppy in the cornfield') he says that he would think himself lucky to get an engagement on the *Daily News*. But he has 'been very queer for some time—so much inclined to faint; but there is no need for a doctor: Time's the great physician and Nature the best nurse,' and last spring he took nothing for a cold and cough; he will have nothing to do with physic. He knows that his mother has been discussing him with Mrs. Harrild, and wishes she would let him alone. 'I don't believe she knows half the time what she's about; she walks into a room, stares round, and then asks herself what she came there for.' She has been seeing Mr. Piper, editor of the *North Wilts*, and 'making a mess of it.' But he thinks she is learning that 'it is best to leave her self-willed son alone.'

In July he is expecting a box of books and an electric machine from Mrs. Harrild, which would help him in his





From a lithograph after a drawing by James Lockett Jeteries.

OLD SWINDON CHURCH.





‘scientific studies.’ He mentions how he used to be afraid of thunder and lightning, but had the cowardice frightened out of him when lightning struck his aunt’s house one day while he was there alone. He has been writing a story, with ‘character rather than sensational incident ; my characters are many of them drawn from life . . . scenery described from places that I have seen.’ The virtuous are rewarded and the wicked punished, exactly as in the Bible, he says. He is more cheerful now, though he has no regular newspaper work.

On August 28, 1868, his handwriting is slow, precise, and in pencil :

‘Thank God I am getting better now, and can sit up in bed ; but I am so miserably weak, and my legs are as thin as a grasshopper’s. . . . But when I come to think it over calmly, I can almost thank God that I have been ill, for it has made me pause and think, and I can now see what a wrong and even wicked course I have been secretly pursuing for a long time, and I hope I shall take warning. God has been very merciful to me this time. I never found my Bible a consolation before, but I have during the last two or three days, for its promises are full of mercy, and I have found it true, for I have prayed earnestly and God has answered me. . . .

‘Above all, I am in the country, and can see the green grass out of window, and it is quiet. . . .

‘I have such a longing to see the sea.’

He must have a change, and has saved enough to pay for it.

His aunt at Sydenham was one of his dearest friends ; she was a religious woman, and would be sure to offer the sick youth religious consolation. These utterances on the edge of the grave—the letter has several repetitions and slips—are insignificant, therefore, unless they can be shown to have any bearing upon Jefferies’ life in the days of strength which followed. Had they taken a more individual form that might suggest that this tremulous repentance issued from the holiest chambers of his heart,

it would be different ; but they are conventional, and as little related to the real man as ' Masked ' and the ' History of Malmesbury.' He was an irregular church-goer, except when later he used to go to Chisledon with the Misses Baden after his engagement to one of them. A man who remembers him well at church recalls that he used to enter by the ' Devil's door '—the door now, I think, blocked up, through which the exorcised Devil fled once upon a time from the baptized. As he recovered, his letters gradually lost the religious phrasing. He read the Greek Testament, and his thoughts seem to have travelled perversely not to Judæa, but to Greece. ' Everything beautiful is Greek,' he writes ; ' the greatest poet was a Greek—Homer. The most beautiful statues—those at Rome in the Vatican—were sculptured by Greeks. The Greek cast of countenance is the most beautiful ; when perfect, it is almost divine.' He wrote four letters to his aunt in September. In the first he can walk about his room with a stick ; his Bible is a great consolation, but he wants more faith. He wishes to get away from Coate for a while. ' It seems tainted ' by his illness, just as nearly twenty years later he remembered the violet bank of ' My Old Village ' to have been tainted by disease. Three days later he has been out of doors : ' I know not how to thank God sufficiently for thus raising me up.' He wants to write a pious memoir of his Uncle Harrild. He is writing a tragedy, ' Cæsar Borgia ; or, The King of Crime,' and hopes to see it at Drury Lane. Some day he will strike the right string, and get into public notice ; he is persuaded he will ultimately succeed. He has bought a history of the Popes, interesting now to him, ' when Romanism and ritualism seem once again lifting their heads.' Later he is amusing himself with books and writing, and walks about his room, enjoying his meals, especially tea ; all his old tastes return, including his fondness for sweet things. All the villagers have inquired after him, and sent him honey and other gifts ; he will see more of the people now—' too much study is selfish, almost sinful, perhaps quite.'

This was but a transient softness towards the neighbours who had ridiculed and reviled him for his indolence, his unusual figure and careless dress, and his poor scrap of a march to Moscow. They were nothing to him : ' there was not a single one friendly to me.' Near the end of the month he has twice walked to Swindon and back, and is strong enough to travel. His evenings are wearisome : his father and Henry go out, ' mother runs about the house,' and he gets tired of reading. He wants to see England : ' I think next spring, all being well, to start for a long journey, most probably into Cornwall, or else to the north of Scotland, but I would sooner see wild Cornwall and hear the wild Cornish legends of King Arthur.' His employers (the *Wilts and Gloster Standard*) wanted him back, and commissioned him to write a history of Cirencester. In October he took a short holiday at Sydenham or Eastbourne, and by the middle of November was as busy as ever, once working twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four at election work, and writing in cold weather with a rug round his knees until five in the morning. He is starting for Malmesbury at half-past six in the morning on foot ; he goes to Cricklade for Nomination Day, when fighting is expected.

On his one clear day in this busy season he was out all day with his gun. But it was not sport alone ; it was something more even than his deepest love of Nature in earlier days that now enriched his experience out of doors. Before his illness he had been devoted to one of his cousins at Snodshill ; not much later he began his courtship of Miss Jessie Baden, of Day House Farm, who became his wife. Seeing the roses in a much later summer, he recalled those of his youth :

' Straight go the white petals to the heart ; straight the mind's glance goes back to how many other pageants of summer in old times ! . . . To the dreamy summer haze love gave a deep enchantment, the colours were fairer, the blue more lovely in the lucid sky. Each leaf finer, and the gross earth enamelled beneath the feet. A sweet

breath on the air, a soft warm hand in the touch of the sunshine, a glance in the gleam of the rippled waters, a whisper in the dance of the shadows. The ethereal haze lifted the heavy oaks, and they were buoyant on the mead, the rugged bark was chastened and no longer rough, each slender flower beneath them again refined. There was a presence everywhere, though unseen, on the open hills, and not shut out under the dark pines. Dear were the June roses then, because for another gathered. Yet even dearer now, with so many years, as it were, upon the petals ; all the days that have been before, all the heart-throbs, all our hopes lie in this opened bud. Let not the eyes grow dim, look not back but forward ; the soul must uphold itself like the sun. Let us labour to make the heart grow larger as we become older, as the spreading oak gives more shelter. That we could but take to the soul some of the greatness and the beauty of the summer !’\*

That is what he was doing. Love rounded his nature into a romantic fulness to be expressed much later in words, where Nature and human passion are as indissolubly intertwined as they have been before or since, and more exuberantly joyous in their union. Love reinforced his ambitions, his passionate eye, his dreams, his mystic moments of oneness with earth and stars and sea. Before, he had seen with rich clear eyes the largeness and multiplicity of Nature ; now it was true of him as of Felise in ‘ The Dewy Morn ’ :

‘ She saw the clear definition of the trees, their colour, and the fineness of the extended branches—she was aware of the delicate leaves ; she saw the hues of the wheat, shading from pale yellow to ruddy gold ; her senses were alive to the minutest difference of tint or sound ; to the rustle of the squirrel touching the dry leaf, the rush of the falling water, the hum of the insect wing ; keen to the difference of motion, the gliding of the dots of sunlight on the sward, the broad flutter of the peacock-butterfly,

\* *The Life of the Fields.*



the quick vibration of the wasp-fly's vane. Her exalted passion strung her naturally fine and sensitive nature ; she seemed to feel the sun's majestic onward sweep in the deep azure—her love made earth divine.'

In 'World's End' he wrote : 'How delicious it is to see everything through the medium and in the company of a noble girl just ripening into womanhood !' 'The Story of My Heart,' 'The Dewy Morn,' and all his later books are full of proofs of his exquisite physical sensitiveness ; but the physical was always akin to the spiritual as the flower to the perfume. His tastes were delicate. He smoked little ; and he was a small drinker, taking not even a glass of porter for his dinner unless his reporting had been heavy. His sense of touch seems to have a soul of its own. To touch the lichened bark of a tree was to repeat his prayer for deeper soul-life. Felise takes a leaf, feels it, and drops it again ; she, too, touched the oak-bark, and 'full of life was her touch' ; she felt the water—'she liked to touch all things' ; she enjoyed the touch of her soft shoulder against her softer cheek. The spirit exalted this sensuousness ; the senses preserved the sweetness of the spirit. In another nature senses so opulent, especially if aided by an imperfect love, might have wrought their own destruction. But in Jefferies the senses perform always and only the functions of the soul, and the purity of his passion equals its fearlessness in whatever swoons and energies time may bring. Courage and spirit he had also, and when he was a tall, delicate man, already bearded round the throat, though he shaved his lip, he fought a long fight with a soldier and held his own ; but as they were shaking hands at the end, his enemy struck a treacherous blow that sent him home with a broken nose.

In September, 1870, he was at Hastings, on his way to Dover and Ostend. He was taking a longish holiday, and had already been staying at Sydenham and at Worthing, where the large and beautiful eyes of a Josephine had begun to haunt him. He was staying at

Hastings partly because the Prince Imperial was there : he sent the Prince some verses on his exile, and believed himself to have brought about the dismissal of some traitorous equerries who called the Empress ‘ the Spanish cow.’ These ‘ adventures ’ excited Jefferies, and he was unwell, but he entered into conversation with everyone approachable—with coastguards who told him something of smuggling, with boatmen, with a retired Indian officer, with a ‘ gentleman who had been in the diplomatic service,’ and with a pamphleteer. Also, he tells his aunt : ‘ I have had adventures with the ladies which I do not care to write . . . *vide* lock of hair.’ Towards the end of the month he was happy at Brussels, and writes from the Hôtel de l’Europe on September 22 a letter which reveals the same delight in holiday humanity as he afterwards took at Brighton and expressed with a blithe and sparkling sensuousness :

‘ Brussels delights me. It is beautifully clean, and people say exactly like Paris in miniature. They call it *un petit Paris*. The ladies are not to be approached by our horrid dowdies in London. From the poorest to the richest all dress admirably. There is a fashion, but no one confines herself to it—each dresses in that style exactly which pleases her best. The ladies are dark-complexioned, with dark sparkling eyes and very black hair ; in fact, I never knew what black hair was before. Nearly all are pleasing, great numbers pretty, and some exceedingly handsome ; *une grande belle* dined with us yesterday, a refugee from Paris. Her husband is shut up in Metz, and has not been heard of for six weeks. I never saw a more classic countenance. Almost all fashionable Paris is here. But the ladies. The favourite colour of the dresses is chocolate, or one of its shades,—this suits their complexions. Crinolines are abolished, but they have a kind of Grecian bend looped up behind. The flounces are the chief ornament ; they are very rich. The sleeves are often very wide at the wrists. The boots are delicious little things—high heels, very coquettish ; stockings



white, collars Shakespeare style, very small bonnets, chiefly little hats; chignons are invisible, thank Heaven! The hair is done very nicely; no pads. It is often done in two *bundles*!—one on each side of the parting, with one piece drawn back between them from the forehead to the nape of the neck. Often the neck is open, which I like. This would suit Lizzie Cowley. This is walking dress. Evening dress is generally closed up to the neck, and resembles a waistcoat. With a Shakespeare collar and the hair done close to the head, these dark ladies look almost like very handsome men. I have several times at the opera, where one cannot see the petticoat, had to look twice to make sure, and then only told by the absence of whiskers, and the expression of trusting, relying upon others, which always dwells upon a woman's face. Fans are used by every lady who thinks anything of herself, and very skilfully too. It is impossible not to fall in love with these girls. They are so animated, so full of life—to watch them converse is a study—so different from our cold, milk-and-water, yes and no young ladies. I am dreadfully annoyed that I do not speak and read fluently, for manners are very easy here, and I could often join parties. I admire them greatly—they are so graceful. The children are almost as interesting. I used to hate children. I don't know why, but I am growing very fond of them. They are dressed most charmingly, with such taste, and then, to see little things of 4 and 5 gesturing away while they talk is very amusing. Everyone is sociable here, and all Brussels has a great reunion once a day in the park or on the Boulevards. In the park you take a chair for 5 cents, and converse or watch the company promenade, while the children romp, play kiss-in-the-ring, and laugh, while the wind blows the yellow leaves of autumn rustling along, and the fountain plays, and the sun shines warm. Such an atmosphere of happiness I never saw, as full as is this city. Everyone seems happy—horses fat, dogs fat, workmen fat. I have been here a week nearly, and have not seen one beggar, and not

one drunken man or woman, though I have been literally all over the city at all hours. Yesterday in the park, a little one at play rolled her ball under my feet—so she came up and looked at me, and lisped, “Pardonnez, monsieur,” and picked it up. Then came three more with a skipping-rope, crying, “Un, deux, trois, and over!”

At Brussels, too, he saw the wounded coming back from Sedan ; and fifteen years later at Eltham he could still see the glow of intense pain in the eyes of one of the soldiers who were brought in during ‘the dusk of the lovely September evenings—it was a beautiful September ; the lime-leaves were just tinted with orange.’

His family at Coate must have resented this holiday-making ; he had no regular work, and they probably thought him frivolous ; and on returning to Sydenham at the end of September he wrote this letter to John Woolford, a farmer at Snodshill, near Coate Farm :

‘DEAR SIR,

‘I once told you that if ever I found myself in a difficulty I should come to you for help, and you were kind enough to say you would give it if it lay in your power. The truth is, I know no other to whom I can turn, for you are the only man I am acquainted with who has a generous sentiment. I have plenty of friends and relatives who have plenty of money, and who, so long as they believe me to be in a good position, will be ready enough to do anything for me, but let them once understand that I have got into a difficulty, they will shrug up their shoulders—as the old song says : “they will give unto those who don’t want it.” My pride, I think a proper pride, prevents me from asking these people. I could remain here with my kind aunt as long as I liked, but the truth would come out, and although she would not alter, yet the rest would look down upon me with contempt, and my presence would expose her to unpleasant remarks which I could not bear. I cannot return home for some-

thing of the same kind of reason—in one word, I have no other resource but you, and if you do not or cannot help I must turn navvy or starve. The fact is, I have had to learn the same bitter lesson that you have learnt, only upon a smaller scale—namely, that good nature is another name for foolery. I gave away so much that I left myself insufficient to live upon while my plans were growing up to bear fruit, and the consequence was I have had to abandon them at the very moment when a little more time would have given me success and made me independent.

‘All is not lost, but while the grass grows the steed starves. What I have to ask is—will you allow me to live a little time with you, until I can work myself up again? May I come to your house and remain with you until I shall be able to get a position again? I do not ask you to give this to me, but to lend it, for I have little doubt but that in time I shall be able to repay you every farthing of the cost, which I will do to the very uttermost. I am to all intents and purposes penniless. The only securities I can give you for repayment are these: I have a small silver watch which cost £4, a small Albert gold chain which cost £3, and a massive gold chain which cost 8 guineas, a diamond scarf-pin which cost 10 guineas, a double-barrelled gun which cost £7 (I have the warranty), and a gig which I don’t know the value of. Besides these, I have about 200 books, all standard and expensive works. They cost me full £60, and are in good condition. These are all my effects: besides, I am young and strong, and I should not object to bear a hand upon the farm when required; in fact, I should like to. I know something about it, having often done so for amusement at home. In actual coin I have only £1 left, and one or two franc-pieces. I forget, I have a small collection of coins in my cabinet at home, among them a gold 7s. 6d. piece, which you can have too. There are also 2 model steam-engines, a locomotive and a stationary. The locomotive cost £3 or £4.

‘I cannot go home. I would sooner starve. I can only go home when I am independent.

‘I could sell these little things, but that money would soon go ; besides, it would be very wretched to lose them, for some I value dearly. . . .

‘What I want is a bed and to live with you. I can write anywhere. . . .

‘If you would send a telegram, I should be obliged.

‘I own I much hope you will grant my request, not only because it is my last resource, but because in many things we have a community of ideas and sentiments, and I should enjoy a few weeks with you. I believe you could assist me very materially in several of my plans with your experience and knowledge of the world. And I think that I could amuse you with an account of a few things I have come across in the last few weeks. . . .

‘You remember, perhaps, my once asking you to become a subscriber to a novel I wished to publish. You agreed, but said that you thought people would much sooner subscribe or buy a copy of my “History of Swindon,” if it was made larger and published as a book. I said nothing, but at once dropped the idea of a novel, and went to work collecting material. I got a whole box full of papers and old deeds, and wrote out a book in manuscript. I had it estimated, and even had 500 circulars printed to advertise. This is the only manuscript I have by me, but I feel little doubt I shall soon be able to work my way up again.’

A few days later he was with Mr. Woolford. He regrets leaving Sydenham, because at Coate he and his family are ‘so distant and unsocial.’ He is afraid of his father’s displeasure ; but his mother has dropped in and met him at Snodshill. So he writes to his aunt. He has only two shillings and threepence, and must pawn his watch-chain. Squire Sadler at Purton has promised him an introduction to the *Times*, but he cannot go over for want of money. He is thoroughly discontented now. ‘I

cannot say,' he writes, 'that I admire the country much after London, and the still more elegant Brussels manners. . . . I shall never be happy in the country again.' Four days later he has received some money from his aunt, and he now confesses that his unwillingness to return home arose from his inability to pay for his board. But his mother has been over again, and she is getting his room ready—the tender, restless, melancholy mother. He is at work now, corresponding and sketching articles, sending a piece of news to the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The country is melancholy in lasting fog, with the sounds of rain, of an acorn, of a dead leaf falling; the oppressive silence sends him from the fields to the fireside. He is going to see a friend—perhaps Mr. Frampton, of Upper Upham—who lives in the honey district on the Downs. Mrs. Harrild has been asking for honey and butter; he praises a Miss Kibblewhite's butter, but it is not equal to his mother's best, and he says his father has a fine taste in butter, and knows the good.

In February, 1871, he writes from Coate. He is worse off than ever. He has written all sorts of things. 'Very few were rejected, but none brought any return.' The Marlborough newspaper gave him a little work—a few paragraphs a week—but he did not think it worth his while. Other papers receive his writings, but 'don't pay a farthing.' London papers would employ him, but he cannot go to London for lack of money. He has been offered a correspondentship for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in Brussels, but that is uncertain. He is threatened for debt. He tries to sell his gun. He is obliged to wear a shirt until it falls to pieces and exposes him to a severe cold. He goes on writing articles, sketching two novels, writing a hundred pages of one. In spite of all, he has the firmest belief in his ultimate good fortune and success. Not the fear of total indigence—for his father threatens to turn him out of doors—can shake his belief. He has had a severe cold, but his health and strength 'are wonderful.' In an aside he mentions the skating on



the Reservoir ; his brother Henry is the best skater of all.

In July he is busy, and earning money from the *North Wilts* and the *Swindon Advertiser*, but chiefly thinking of his book—the book of which Disraeli thought the subject ‘of the highest interest.’ But home is still unhappy : his mother is ‘very unwell . . . nervous and liable to make herself miserable over the merest trifle . . . we live so unsociably in this house.’ And he is off to Sydenham again ; his mother, on the other hand, is too poor and too busy with the haymaking to go. At the end of the month he is excited and delighted because Disraeli has recommended him to send his manuscript to a publisher. This ‘favourable opinion of the man who stands highest in an age for intellectual power’ overcomes the sneers and taunts of his friends—‘my own father amongst them’—for idleness and incapacity ; he begs his aunt to write and rejoice with him. In August Messrs. Longman, Green and Company are giving ‘full consideration’ to a novel, and he thinks that hopeful. He is writing a magazine article ; has written a play ; has sent the manuscript of a history of Swindon to a local paper ; and is going to Gloucester to report a trial. ‘Now the haymaking is over,’ he adds, ‘we are going to walk to Marlborough Forest.’

Messrs. Longman declined the book. It appeared to them that he had ‘gone too much into detail on frequent occasions.’ But 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.’ It is to be wished that some trace remained of a work which forced this publishing firm to confess itself ‘a firm of primitive, if not even immaculate, elderly gentlemen.’ It went in vain to Messrs. Sampson, Low ; Messrs. Smith, Elder accepted it, but it was never published. The title of it was ‘Fortune.’

In August he was ‘completely prostrated for a day or



two,' after a 'strange, heavy feeling in the head' from overwork. Later, he says it is no use his going to London to look for work, because it is a slack season and he is not well off. He is writing short stories. He is now 'seriously engaged to Miss Baden.' It had been a busy, troubled year. Nothing was spared him except satiety and resignation; nothing was spared him that could in the end tighten a string for the ripe music of his maturity.

In 1872 he was pretty fully employed by the local papers, helping to fill their columns, and storing his memory and note-books with his observations of agricultural men and women, farming, the courts, Boards of Guardians, and the landscape and architecture which he passed on his walks to Wootton Bassett, Marlborough, Malmesbury, or Wantage. He offered a novel called 'Only a Girl' to Messrs. Longman during this year. He was good enough as a writer for his editor to overlook his shortcomings, as when he failed to give any account of a Liberal meeting because it was 'such rot,' or preferred a walk to an agricultural banquet. He kept up his archæological curiosity. As early as 1869 he had written to Rev. F. Goddard, of Hilmarton, saying that 'for some years past' he had been interested in the antiquities of the neighbourhood, and asking for information concerning the lineage and estates of the Goddard family. In 1872 he was writing to H. N. Goddard, of Clyffe Pypard Manor, about pedigrees and portraits of the Goddards; a pedigree of the Walronds; a brass at Clyffe. He was reading Hatcher's 'History of Salisbury,' and borrowed 'The Monumental Brasses of England' and 'Monumental Brasses of Wiltshire' from H. N. Goddard; had searched 'Domesday' for Goddards, and was going to look at 'Inquisitiones Post-mortem' and 'Rotuli Hundredorum.' Near the end of the year, he wrote that he had finished a history of Swindon, for which he had been collecting material for 'ten or twelve years,' and was thinking of publishing it. Part of it he had woven into a history

of the Goddards, and, with the help of Mr. Goddard and one or two others, 'A Memoir of the Goddards of North Wilts' was published (by the author) in 1873. It is a dull and formless book, containing little but facts or fictions from other books. Here and there he shows his own methods, as when he quotes the churchwarden at Aldbourne as remembering a breastplate and pair of gauntlets hanging in what was the Goddards' chapel. He mentions Ossian and Longfellow again, and 'Peveril of the Peak,' and without great labour or success tries to prove that Aldbourne is 'Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain.' H. N. Goddard described Jefferies in 1872 as 'a rising young man who is writing a book about the Goddards.' The edition was almost sold out in a few months, and as late as the end of 1875 a new one with exhaustive pedigrees was discussed, but came to nothing.

Another archæological product was a paper read before the Wiltshire Archæological Society on 'Swindon and its Antiquities,' in September, 1873. He gave the inscriptions of some Roman coins, and pointed to 'the prevalence of the pure Welsh or British name of Lydiard in this neighbourhood, both as the name of persons and of places,' as a proof that the Britons long maintained their independence in Northern Wiltshire. Speaking of the power of an Earl of Pembroke, who set up Swindon Market, to erect a gallows and hang other men on it, he says: 'This irresponsible power vested in one man must have led to great abuses. What a contrast to the ballot-box of to-day, when we seem about to err on the other hand by diffusing power too widely!' He ends a lifeless and disjointed lecture with another facile piece of Goddardism:

'In 1772, when Ambrose Goddard was elected as county member, the motto used by his supporters, and worn as a card in the hat, was—"Goddard's the man, and freedom's his plan." Irrespective of all party politics, I feel that I may confidently say that there are numbers who at the expected election in the spring will repeat that ancient motto, and say—"Goddard's the man." We

know that real, that is constitutional, freedom is his plan.'

It was in 1873 that he published a pamphlet called 'Jack Brass, Emperor of England.' On the title-page is an imaginary newspaper quotation, beginning, 'The suit, Honour *v.* Brass, terminated on Tuesday.' It is an ironically inflated appeal to one Jack Brass to make himself omnipotent in England by means of gold, which is first in most men's eyes, and of which he has more than anyone :

'The newspapers must be ordered to preach communistic ideas, because communism is the sure forerunner of despotism in a commercial country which requires order, that can only be guaranteed by the strong hand and single will. To foster the growth of this feeling among the people, strengthen and support those institutions which put the idea partially into practice, such as co-operative stores. Support the farmers' measure giving compensation for unexhausted improvements, as a form of communism and calculated to weaken the Conservatives. Establish a system of easy transfer of land, and abolish primogeniture : these measures will destroy the sense of absolute proprietorship, so opposed to communism. All this will put greater power into the hands of the masses, who are ultimately to delegate it to you. . . . Educate ! educate ! educate ! Teach everyone to rely on their own judgment, so as to destroy the faith in authority, and lead to a confidence in their own reason, the surest method of seduction. . . . Let women have the suffrage. . . . No man will be ashamed to commit a vulgar or evil action from respect, esteem, or love for a woman. . . . Abolish the calm influence of the Sunday. . . .'

It is a jaunty, humorously-intended by-product of his Conservatism, which served its purpose, if it gave him as much satisfaction immediately as disgust later on.

In 1873 also appeared 'Reporting, Editing, and Authorship : Practical Hints for Beginners in Literature' (John Snow, Ivy Lane, Paternoster Row ; and Alfred Bull,

Victoria Street, Swindon). He recommends 'a good personal manner,' and an avoidance of the 'horsey' or 'fast.' Amplified reports may be coloured by 'descriptive or imaginative writing, and perhaps a few lines of poetry, or a quotation.' As to shorthand, had Chatterton learnt to write it, 'how different his fate might have been.' Literature, like other trades, 'requires an immense amount of advertising.' It is 'wisest to study the existing taste,' since only a great genius can create a taste. The author should publish at his own expense, and so avoid 'a fruitless and disheartening attempt to dispose of his manuscript.' The only point of any biographical value is that he insists on the reporter studying the topography, antiquities, traditions, and general characteristics, churches, and scenery of his neighbourhood. The rest of the book is a hasty concession to the common opinion that he was himself an unpractical idler; and he sets about giving advice which might produce just the smart young fellow that he could not go so far as to become, even to please his family.

He remained unchanged. His brother remembers that he used to walk for hours up and down by the lime-trees at Coate Farm, with the back of his hand to his chin, thinking; once he pitched a coin on to his hat as he was thinking thus, and Richard, picking up the coin, and learning its origin, found dozens of the old tokens in a rubbish-heap. He was still fond of shooting; the mere delight in marksmanship was so great that he used to shoot at the Eastcott rifle-butts from time to time. Or he would climb the Downs, and lie on his back with a book up above his eyes; and there was a child who, venturing up to this odd-looking solitary, heard enchanting talk from him of birds and beasts, and found him there again and again, staying with him until the nurse called her away from the 'tramp.' He was then a tall, thin, slightly stooping man, with longish hair, bearded, but with his eager, fresh, unworldly, sensuous lips free of moustache; bright, noticeable blue eyes; ill-dressed; taking long strides, and swinging his arms with a



From a photograph.

*John Richard Jefferies.  
July 17<sup>th</sup> 1872.*

RICHARD JEFFERIES  
as a young man.





good stick, or carrying his hands in his pockets ; having the reserve, together with confidence and even brusqueness, of a strong individual spirit developing in isolation ; sensitive, but from sheer concentration deaf and blind at times to the respected gentleman who said, ' Good-morning, Jefferies,' and hoped for ' Good-morning, sir,' in return. Had not ' an inner and esoteric meaning ' begun to reach him from the visible universe, with indefinable aspirations, 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.'\* Such pebbles he had lifted from the brook, to combat the world withal.

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

## CHAPTER V

EARLY MANHOOD *continued*)—LETTERS TO THE 'TIMES'  
—MAGAZINE ARTICLES ON AGRICULTURE AND  
CURRENT EVENTS

JEFFERIES' nearest approach as yet to self-expression in written words was in his three letters to the *Times* in November, 1872. In February of that year Joseph Arch mounted his pigstool under the chestnut at Wellesbourne, and the Warwickshire agricultural labourers resolved to form a Union. They struck work, asking unsuccessfully for sixteen instead of twelve shillings a week. The men of Oxfordshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Somerset, Norfolk, Essex, and Northamptonshire stood up for the Union; and at the Agricultural Labourers' Congress at Leamington there were representatives from Wiltshire. Jefferies took the occasion to write a long letter on the condition of the labourers, which, after being rejected by another paper, was printed in the *Times*.

He described the Wiltshireman as an average specimen of his class, in wages as in intelligence. He is strong, but slow, feeding chiefly on bread, cheese, bacon, and cabbage, and pot-liquor—the water in which even potatoes have been boiled. There is no ingenuity in their cookery. They eat immensely at the annual club dinner, and in the hay and harvest-fields drink a great deal of poor beer. They are better clothed than formerly, corduroy and slops, with 'really good clothes' and chimney-pot on Sundays, superseding smocks. The women, especially the young, must dress in the style of the day. As to

the cottages, 'there is scarcely room for further improvement' in the new ones; it is the hovels built by the hands of squatters that are bad in every way. The cottages have sufficient gardens: allotments have been increased. Some towns have common lands; and though not in the use of labourers, 'they are in the hands of a class to which the labourer often rises.' There has been no extended strike in the county, because the labourers, with ten to thirteen shillings a week, and the reapers, with as much as ten shillings a day, are so well off. If they cannot afford coal in the week, yet they buy a little on Saturday night at two pounds a ton. One cultivator paid one hundred pounds in cash to one cottage in the course of a year, 'showing the advantage the labourer possesses over the mechanic, since his wife and child can add to his income. Many farmers pay fifty and sixty pounds a year for labourers' beer, and let excellent cottages at one shilling a week. He praises the Duke of Marlborough for only letting cottages to men who work on the farms where they are situated. It is 'sheer cant' to say that the labourer has no chance of rising. He knows of two who are now farmers; and they can rise to be head-carter, or cowman, or bailiff, and do petty dealing in pigs and calves. The women are not handsome; he knows 'no peasantry so entirely uninviting.' They are moral, and no evil comes of their rough jokes. As dairy-maids they earn good wages, but they are poor workers in the field. Friendly societies, 'patronized by gentry and clergy,' are superseding the fatal mops and fairs, with their drinking and immorality. But neither they nor the men ever make a grateful remark, notwithstanding that 'no class of persons in England receive so many attentions and benefits from their superiors.' 'No term is too strong in condemnation for those persons who endeavour to arouse an agitation among a class of people so short-sighted and so ready to turn against their own benefactors and their own interest.' Those who blame the farmers must remember that they work largely on

borrowed capital, and run great risks. The wonder is that they have done what they have for the labourer, 'finding him with better cottages, better wages, better education, and affording him better opportunities of rising in the social scale.'

It is, he goes on to say in his second letter, the labourers themselves who will not rise—will not pay threepence a week in school-fees. They walk into Swindon from places six miles off to earn not much higher wages in the Great Western Railway factory, and then have to pay for house and garden more heavily than as agricultural labourers, and are liable to instant dismissal; and 'manufactures and immorality seem to go together.' The farmers have done more than their duty; they work hard, run heavy risks, and just make a living. Then he points out that millionaires 'pay no poor rate and no local taxation, or nothing in proportion.'

In the third letter he describes the garden allotments at Liddington, near Coate, founded and carried on by a rector of that parish, thus adding 'one more to the numberless ways in which the noble clergy of the Church of England have been silently labouring for the good of the people committed to their care for years before the agitators bestowed one thought on the agricultural poor.' In a sketch by Jefferies belonging to this period, called 'A True Tale of the Wiltshire Labourer,' a man is deprived of his allotment for drunkenness; and, deserted by him, the wife is in consequence not visited by the rector in her distress. The farmer comes for the rent, and offers her sixpence as the price of her prostitution. She dies after the birth of a still-born child, and the husband becomes a confirmed drunkard. This is another side of the matter, which it was not convenient, probably, to reveal in the letters to the *Times*.

These letters are conspicuous for lucid, forcible, and simple exposition of his own observation and the ideas of the tenant-farming class. They sprang readily out of a large experience, and deserved their success. They

caused discussion in the form of letters and articles in the press. They served the cause of truth by criticizing the labourers' economy, and by pointing out the weakness of the tenant-farmer, who had not even a right to compensation for invested capital if ordered to quit. It was well, too, that the tenant-farmer's point of view should be dressed to advantage. And Jefferies expressed a remarkable truth, from which he was to draw other conclusions, when he said that the labourers have no gratitude. But at this date there is little more to be said of these letters. They must have served the cause of a party even more than that of truth ; and honest though Jefferies was, he not only did not rise out of the high-walled position of a partisan, but even so proved no extraordinary degree of penetration. It was almost excellent journalism ; but it was not more. So, too, with 'The True Tale.' It was true, and it was worth saying. The form of the tale is good enough, and he has filled out that form with nothing, or almost nothing, but true nature, yet expressed with so little concentration that it is, after all, only a sketch. He was to return to the subject again.

This slight success did not make 1873 a cheerful year. Jefferies was writing another novel, and this was rejected by Messrs. Bentley in May. He could not understand how he failed to make headway after the praises given to his letters to the *Times*. He was coming to the conclusion that he must publish at his own expense ; and, in spite of 'eight years of almost continual failure,' is 'more than ever *determined* to succeed.'

Nevertheless, he continued to work at the vein just opened in the letters to the *Times*. In 1873 'The Future of Farming' was published in *Fraser's Magazine* ; in 1874 'The Size of Farms' in the *New Quarterly*, and 'The Farmer at Home,' 'The Labourer's Daily Life,' 'Field-Faring Women,' 'An English Homestead,' and 'John Smith's Shanty' in *Fraser's* ; and in the same year 'The Agricultural Life,' a book, was offered to Messrs. Longman.



In 1875 'Women in the Field' appeared in the *Graphic*, 'Village Organization' in the *New Quarterly*, 'The Cost of Agricultural Labour' in the *Standard*; in 1876 'The Power of the Farmers' in the *Fortnightly*; in 1877 'Unequal Agriculture' in *Fraser's*, 'The Future of County Society' in the *New Quarterly*. In 1878 he planned books that were never printed—'The Proletariate, the Power of the Future,' and 'A History of the English Squire'; and published 'A Great Agricultural Problem' in *Fraser's*.

Some of these articles are known to the public through 'Toilers of the Field,' a posthumous book in which they were reprinted; others were republished from the *Standard* in 1880, as 'Hodge and His Masters.' In the main, though some show a promise of different things, they belong to the same order as the letters of 1872, and to the history of agriculture and agricultural criticism rather than to the history of literature. As the knowledge of these matters came to Jefferies largely through his business as a provincial journalist, so, as it happens, it is seldom or never brought into such contact with his whole character and thought that it reflects the man. Other writers have exceeded him in minuteness and in breadth of view; Cobbett is better to read. The contemporary service rendered by Jefferies' lucidity, honesty, and force in detail and generalization can only be fairly estimated by a specialist. But this work hardly falls to be considered here, because it is not creative, its utmost vividness being well within the compass of the journalist as such, and outside that of the artist; and because its weight of opinion, though respectable, neither made any serious and lasting impression on the age, nor deserved to do so, and was such that its power is now practically spent. Some of the ideas set forth may, however, be mentioned here, as helping to give a view of Jefferies' intelligence, pure and simple, while he was a young man, applying itself to contemporary things.

In the articles published in 1874, and now grouped as



'Toilers of the Field,' he gave some excellent descriptions of the farmer, his conservatism, his pride, and his faith :

'I believe in the Sovereign, the Church, and the land : the Sovereign being the father of the people in a temporal sense ; the Church in a spiritual sense ; and the land being the only substantial and enduring means of subsistence. Cotton, coal and iron cannot be eaten, but the land gives us corn and beef ; therefore the land stands first and foremost, and the agriculturist, as the tiller of land, possesses an inalienable right which it is his duty to maintain, and in so doing he is acting for the good of the community. I believe that the son and the daughter should obey their parents, and show regard to their wishes, even when legally independent. Also that the servant should obey his employer. The connection between employer and employed does not cease with the payment of wages. It is the duty of the servant to show consideration for the advice of the master ; and the master is not free from responsibility as to the education and the comfort of the man. The master is bound by all laws, human and Divine, to pay a fair amount of wages for a day's work. If he does not do so he robs the workman as much as if he stole the money from his pocket. The workman is equally bound to do his work properly, and in neglecting to do so he robs his employer. To demand more wages than has been earned is an attempt at robbery. Both master and man should respect authority, and abide by its decisions.'\*

This, or something like it, was the brief but difficult creed in which Jefferies had been, with some laxity, brought up.

In his account of the labourer, which is in greater detail, there is an odd mixture of sentimental triviality, as in the remark that the labourer's cur 'seems as much attached to his master as more high-bred dogs to their owners,' and of realism and charming picturesqueness. He puts forcibly that stubborn question : What, then,

\* *Toilers of the Field.*

is the labourer to do ? What is he to do in the evenings now that village life is dull or dead ? Some of his criticism and suggestion is humane and bold ; he proposes ‘ some system of village self-government.’ His realism varies from plain statement, such as this description of the milker’s winter morning :

‘ To put on coarse nailed boots, weighing fully seven pounds, gaiters up to the knee, a short great-coat of some heavy material, and to step out into the driving rain and trudge wearily over field after field of wet grass, with the furrows full of water ; then to sit on a three-legged stool, with mud and manure half-way up to the ankles, and milk cows with one’s head leaning against their damp, smoking hides for two hours, with the rain coming steadily, drip, drip, drip. . . .’\*

to this :

‘ He [John Smith] 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 her fifteenth boy ! His “ missis ” turned on her at last, and said, “ Lor’, miss, that’s all the pleasure me an’ my old man got.” ’†

It is to be noticed that he says now that, whatever the virtues of the class, ‘ the immorality,’ which is short for ‘ sexual immorality,’ cannot be gainsaid. ‘ John Smith’s Shanty ’ is an advance upon ‘ The True Tale.’ From beginning to end it is a piece of lively truth, exact in detail, and with a brave human spirit over the description and comment that is far more uncommon. In the best of the book the writing might be called masterly for its precision and flow, if it were not outclassed by the best of his maturity.

In ‘ The Size of Farms ’ he condemns the small farmer, who is little above the labourer and can do nothing to improve his children’s position, cannot afford a steam-

\* *Toilers of the Field.*

† *Ibid.*



From a photograph.

JAMES LUCKETT JEFFERIES,  
the father of Richard Jefferies.



plough and high cultivation, is slovenly and incapable of progress, and is not sturdy and independent, but living on borrowed capital. There is no cause for alarm in the grouping of small farms.

In 'Women in the Field' he deplores the results of the hard work of women, even whilst suckling, and the 'saddest results in a moral sense' of contact with coarse men. He suggests an organization of ladies to receive girls after leaving school, in order to find them places as servants.

In 'On Allotment Gardens' he points to the satisfaction of watching things grow. He regards the system of allotment gardens as an unmixed good, and its extension as a safety-valve to 'communistic tendencies.' Why should there not be societies to furnish workmen with gardens as well as houses? And if there is room for a cemetery in London, why not also a garden? He deplores the lack of local authority: a village council would mean good water, better drainage, and an adequate area of allotments.

In 'The Spirit of Modern Agriculture' he emphasizes the fact that agriculture is not a 'calm, quiet calling' now, but one for restless, educated, intelligent men, struggling and pushing forward. 'American ideas' are spreading among the labourers, who have more and more in common with the mechanic and the navy. Why not take advantage of this restlessness, and have lectures for those men, who will soon have the franchise? He thinks there is a more liberal spirit and less local prejudice; tenant can stand up to landlord, and labourer to farmer.

In 'Village Organization' he finds that the School Board is favoured only where there is no great landlord and all are in disagreement; that there is a strong feeling against this placing the parish more under imperial rule, and curtailing 'the freedom that has hitherto existed.' The insisting upon 'a large amount of cubic space' in schools is intolerable. It is not to be expected that a single person will interfere against sewage

flowing into the water-supply, because 'farmers dislike meddling with other people's business'; his 'feelings as a gentleman' enable him to ride past overcrowded cottages, etc., and say nothing. Neither Vestry, nor Board of Guardians, nor Highway Board has in practice any valuable effect. A village *esprit de corps* should be created. A village council might be able to bring a good water-supply to the parish; to provide a village bathing-place, a rough gymnasium, annual games, a reading-room, an excursion to London or the sea. 'With every respect for the schoolmaster, let the schoolmaster be kept away from it.' Such a council would look after drainage and the rebuilding of cottages, to be paid for, perhaps, by annual instalments; provide common lands, a cottage hospital, cookery classes, entertainments; and settle local disputes. But it must be founded on 'the will of the inhabitants,' not forced upon them.

In 'The Power of the Farmer' he expects the Board of Guardians, composed of farmers and landed gentry, to show some tyranny towards the labourers by way of reprisal. Farmers will win in their contest with the Labourers' Unions because they have money, and their landlords, seeing that 'their interests are identical,' will stand by them. He favours blacklegs, and thinks that the Union's tactics are bad in deporting men, and so relieving the farmers of the need to support them at the workhouse. Arbitration he distrusts. He does not dwell on the possibility that there is something deeply wrong, if not in the region of party politics, when the land is left idle and only the men who could till it suffer.

In 'Unequal Agriculture' he contrasts the modern farm, with steam-plough, new cowsheds, etc., with the old-fashioned one, moated by liquid manure. The country ought to be 'equally highly cultivated everywhere.'

In 'The Future of County Society,' he points out that while the country clergy have great prestige and immense opportunities, 'a picture of the nineteenth century



which omitted the clergy would not be accused of untruthfulness.' They do not anywhere teach the labourer 'the ennobling and fascinating story of science.' The country gentry go more and more into commerce and manufacture; in London they find many with larger incomes, and in the country the big tenant is almost their equal. Dissent divorced the poor from the Church, and it was the first step to independence. The press influence is growing, expanded by wheelwright, blacksmith, or hedge-carpenter, who 'can think for himself.' He dreads the labourer's power after the county franchise, 'unless in the meantime men of intellect, calm thought, and noble views can somehow obtain a hold upon the people,' and he suggests a 'universal militia . . . without the stern restraint of conscription.' There is no 'general object' throughout each county—'no such thing as organization.' 'The country grows more republican year by year, and yet at the same time more exclusive.' 'The old social links are gone, and no new ones have sprung up.' There is 'a general desire on the part of everybody to be above their business or occupation,' yet 'a marked increase of independence.'

In 'A Great Agricultural Problem' he sees the growing importance of foreign imports: we must find out where our cheese, butter, etc., come from, and why they have supplanted home manufactures; we must not dismiss these matters 'while we rest under the ample shadow of the shorthorn.' He asks whether English farmers of any district have ever combined, as the French have in the cheese-making departments, and obtained a reputation for a particular product in a distant country, while filling their purses at the same time.

'Hodge and his Masters' was a belated continuation of these studies. There is still a touch of the provincial journalist in such passages as where he describes the labourer brutalized by the lowest public-house—who, 'if he awakes to the wretched state of his own family at last, instead of remembering that it is his own act, turns

round, accuses the farmer of starvation wages, shouts for what is really communism, and perhaps even in his sullen rage descends to crime.' The thought is often still commonplace, reflecting his commonplace environment, as when, in his narrative of the progress of a clever squire, he remarks that ambition, 'if not too extravagant, is a virtue.' He was writing a great deal at this time, and the fact that he was writing these chapters for a Conservative newspaper may be supposed to have affected his general tone. As yet he was hardly free from the ideas of his class, and he did what was expected of him. He put in nothing which he did not believe to be true; but he did not put in everything which was true. His admiration of the country curate is evidently sincere, but is it not possible that he was carried away not entirely by his heart and intelligence when he painted the worn-out enthusiast whose eyes were 'bright and burning still with living faith'? His book is, on the whole, partisan. Dealing with the Cottage Charter, he scored undoubtedly, but at this distance of time the applause that must have greeted him is ghostly and faint; and when he says, 'Even hunting, which it would have been thought every individual son of the soil would stand up for, is not allowed to continue unchallenged,' we can afford to laugh. Also, it is not true that the fields 'have never yet inspired those who dwell upon them with songs uprising from the soil.' Yet the book tells in the end by its weight of wide and intimate knowledge, and it has some good things in several different kinds—the observation and dry humour in the presentation of the 'low public'; the genial, straightforward picture of the good inn at Fleeceborough, with its excellent simple food, well cooked under perfect conditions, and its strong ale; the old-fashioned farmer's tea, and the daughters laughing straight from the heart in the joyousness of youth; Squire Filbard's portrait; and the descriptions in 'Hodge's Fields' are almost in his best manner. The 'Conclusion' has a plain statement of the man-made unhappiness of the aged labourer; it

attempts no solution ; it lays no blame ; yet it does throw the door open to a draught most uncomfortable to receive at the end of a book that would have been, without it, one to keep in good spirits the investors in things as they are.

A few other magazine articles may be mentioned here. Writing in *Fraser's* of May, 1874, on the Railway Accidents Bill, he says that ' no Government can at this day hope to carry such a measure ' as purchase of railways by the State. But while the companies have the privilege of purchasing land compulsorily, they must ' sustain an equivalent amount of responsibility.' He suggests Government inspectors of the permanent way ; better fences ; the use of continuous brakes ; diminution of the number of hours of employment ; stricter regulations to insure the safety of the servants themselves. It is a sober, clear, and practical article, showing plenty of knowledge and interest in practical matters. He shows good sense in his article in *Fraser's* of February, 1875, on the Shipton accident of the past Christmas Eve. He rebukes the comment that ' leans towards adopting a fatalistic creed ' in face of such accidents. It is ' a species of crime ' to say that a percentage of accidents is inevitable. Everything, he says, ' points to an entirely preventible origin,' and the remedy is to rouse public opinion to a point irresistible by the railway companies. His ' Story of Swindon ' in *Fraser's* of May, 1875, is also sensible and well-informed. He thinks the men of the Great Western Railway Factory intelligent, and strongly contrasting with the agricultural poor. He is ' tempted to declare ' this class of educated mechanics the ' protoplasm or living matter out of which modern society is evolved.'

## CHAPTER VI

### FIRST NOVELS

PARALLEL with journalistic activity, Jefferies' life went on in ways which his admirable articles in *Fraser's* and the *New Quarterly* never once suggest. He had not yet emerged from the womb of the Wiltshire earth; it was with difficulty that he was being born; he lay yet involved in the soil, only half of the man or earth-spirit that he was to become. His subjects lay outside of him, quite apart; or they had entered into his heart, but not his mind. As he walked in the dewy fields, with the early morning sun behind him, or under the moon, he saw the shining halo on the grass which Benvenuto Cellini records having seen. He was taking those daily pilgrimages in which there came to him 'a deep, strong, and sensuous enjoyment of the beautiful green earth, the beautiful sky and sun . . . inexpressible delight, as if they embraced and poured out their love for me. . . . After the sensuous enjoyment always came the thought, the desire: that I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of excellence in myself, both of body and of mind; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind and soul; that I might be higher in myself.' Summer and winter he went to the same oak to escape the loneliness of ordinary life. There were several of these 'thinking places': on the Hungerford road near Liddington, or on the Marlborough road near Badbury, where the hills were well in view; in one of the

deep coombes cloven in the chalk at Liddington or Badbury or Chisledon ; also a wood ' half an hour's walk distant,' perhaps Burderop Wood ; another, ' two miles along the road to a spot where the hills began,' seems most likely to be by the fir-trees on the Marlborough road, at the corner of the ' New ' road, where the pass through the Downs at Ogbourne St. George is in sight.

Little of this is to be found in his first published novel, ' The Scarlet Shawl ' (1874). His characters are persons with much leisure for passions. Percival Gifford is in love with Nora, but is enslaved by the dazzling Pauline Vietri, while Nora turns aside to flirt. The name and the naughtiness of Pauline Vietri, like that of Carlotta in ' Restless Human Hearts,' is perhaps a reflection from Jefferies' early reading of ' Poems and Ballads.' Percival, for a time ' a detestably conceited puppy,' reasons cleverly about polygamy, and questions whether he is carrying out the decree of Heaven if he stints his natural ability ' by confining himself to one lady.' But, in spite of this, he can reflect the ardours of Jefferies himself, when, for example, he dreams of ' a book of religion which should supersede ' the Koran and the Bible, and says, with a faint foretaste of ' The Story of My Heart ' : \*

' The unconscious cerebration which had been going on in his mind, excited by the perception of the glories and beauties of Nature—of stars, sea, flowers, art—which perception in him was peculiarly acute, when his vanity made him exalt himself and think of doing justice to himself, forced itself forward, and he grasped at it as the readiest and best means of showing his worth. He could no more have written down that stream of unconscious thought than he could have turned sensation itself into material shape ; but he conceived the idea of doing so. . . . '

And again :

' His eyes, fastened on the horizon, drank in the glorious dawn of the light as the glowing sun revealed itself—a visible archangel. The azure sky, the roseate clouds,

\* *The Scarlet Shawl.*



the glittering water, filled him with a sense of higher life. If he could only drink of this beauty always, he should be immortal. . . .’

Some of the writing, too, has an emotional exuberance, even when it falls into fatuity, which may have been an exalting exercise. There is, for example, a rich comparison of a kind of beautiful woman to one of those rare years when the sky is blue not only in May, but until October ends. When the hero has come to the disgust of a voluptuous life, Jefferies opens a chapter of pause by reflecting that ‘the glorious, beautiful, and kingly Tyrian purple had a peculiar odour about it—a faint sickly smell, a dampness, a trace of the salt sea on whose shores the dye was made. . . .’ He continues :\*

‘Deep, deep down under the apparent man—covered over, it may be, with the ashes of many years, the scoriæ of passion and the lava of ambition, and these, too, spread over with their crust of civilization, cultivated into smiling gardens, and rich cornfields, and happy glorious vineyards—under it all there is a buried city, a city of the inner heart, lost and forgotten these many days. There, on the walls of the chambers of that city, are pictures, fresh as when they were painted by the alchemy of light in the long, long years gone by. Dancing figures, full of youth and joy, with gladness in every limb, with flowing locks, and glances wildly free. There are green trees, and the cool shade, and the proud peacock in his glory of colour pluming himself upon the lawn. There is the summer arbour, overgrown and hidden with ivy, in whose dreamy, dark recess those lips first met, and sent a thrill of love and hope through all the trembling frame. There, too, in those chambers underneath the fallen cornice, are hidden the thirty pieces of silver, the cursed coin for whose possession the city was betrayed, and the heart yielded into the hands of the world. There, also, hidden in still darker corners, mouldering in decay, but visible even yet, are the bones of the skeletons of

\* *The Scarlet Shawl.*



those who perished in those dark days, done to death by treachery at the gate. Heap up the ashes upon them; hide them out of sight! Yet, deep as it lies hidden, heavy and dull and impenetrable as the crust may be, there shall come a time when the light of the sun, seen through a little crevice, shall pour in its brilliance upon them, and shall exhibit these chambers of imagery to the man walking in day-time. He shall awake, and shall walk through those chambers he builded in the olden times; and the pictures upon the walls shall pierce his soul.

‘With innumerable hopes and fears, with hunger and thirst, with the pangs of birth and death, innumerable multitudes of the tiniest creatures, living through vast periods of time, slowly built up from the lower ocean’s bed those firm and rolling downs of chalk which are now the homes of men. How slowly events happen! How impossible it is to note even to ourselves the imperceptible agencies, the countless multitudes of thoughts and impulses, “the dreams in the midst of business,” which by slow degrees wear away our former selves, and change us without our knowing it!’

‘He could not have told why, he hid it from himself at first; but it forced itself by slow degrees upon him, this sickly odour of the Tyrian purple.’

There is also a noticeable, exuberant and flowing passage of this kind on scarlet.

The development of the story is conventional and of no interest. How remote the book is from the real Jefferies, if not from the surface of the man in 1874, can be guessed from the unreality of such reflections as this:

‘It is a singular fact in physiology that if a woman is neither very beautiful nor very attractive, nor in any way likely to get married herself, she is pretty sure to dote on her brother. . . .’

And this:

‘There’s an *éclat* about mischief that virtue sighs for in vain.’

There is also a 'laid' for 'lay' in this most vulnerable book.

It was doubtless rash of this young provincial journalist to spend his time in violent efforts to understand people whom he had not seen and did not really care about ; but it is clear that, though he failed and wrote some inept things, and was guilty of a flimsy cynicism and assumption of worldliness, he 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.

'The Scarlet Shawl' was published in 1874, and in July of that year, at Chisledon Church, he married Miss Jessie Baden, of Day House Farm. For a few months they lived with his father and mother at Coate Farm. Early in 1875 they moved to Victoria Street, Swindon, where his house is now distinguished by a mural tablet. There his first child was born. He tells us himself that living in Swindon was unpleasant, because his work was wearisome and his daily pilgrimages had to be suspended. But there he still thought his old thoughts, which could take flight from a birch-tree visible from his window 'across the glow of sunset.'

'Restless Human Hearts,' his next published novel, was finished before October 9, 1874 ; for on that day he told Messrs. Tinsley that the manuscript was at their disposal. He has also, he goes on to say, 'a book of adventure on a novel plan' already finished ; 'it describes the rise to power of an intelligent man in a half-civilized country, and is called "The Rise of Maximus" '; but this was never published, and nothing is known of it. 'Restless Human Hearts' appeared in 1875, and in that year he mentions two other books that were never published—'In Summer Time' (a novel), and 'The New Pilgrim's Progress ; or, A Christian's Painful Progress from the Town of Middle Class to the Golden City.' This was also the year of 'Suez-cide ; or, How Miss Britannia Bought a Dirty Puddle and lost her Sugar Plums.' He

thought 'Restless Human Hearts' the best thing he had ever written, and was well pleased with what he called its 'odd humour' and 'original positions.' He begins to reveal himself at once in it. 'The lives of some among us,' he writes, 'do seem in some peculiar way to correspond with the singularities of Nature . . . persons whose whole being vibrates to the subtle and invisible touch of Nature, are alive to-day.' Such words help to prove that he was writing exactly when, in 'The Story of My Heart,' he traced his thoughts back through his early manhood to his youth. He speaks clearly for himself, in the presence of a picture at Antwerp Cathedral, when he points to the artist's 'sensual spiritualism : which is a union of the beauty perceived by the chaste and somewhat sad mind, and of the beauty which fascinates the eye.' The description applies to Jefferies himself, especially as he shows himself in 'The Dewy Morn.'

His heroine, *Heloïse*, is daughter of an old man who 'could not be happy unless he heard the finches sing when he woke'—those greenfinches that sing all through Jefferies' books. He lives near 'The Sun' at 'Avonbourne,' by the Downs—'downs upon whose slopes you might lie and listen to the whistling of the breezes through the bennets till all thought of the world and its contentions passes out of the mind.' *Heloïse*, the beautiful girl at one with Nature, is a dim sketch for the *Felise* of 'The Dewy Morn' :

'*Heloïse's* heart was full of aspirings—after she knew not what, but which she deemed were sacred hopes. She sat under the old chestnut-trees, watching the shadows dancing, and let these feelings have their way. She climbed up the steep-sided downs, and choosing a hollow sheltered from the wind, lay down upon the soft thymy turf, while the bees flew overhead and the lark sang high above her, and dreamt day-dreams, not of heaven, but of something—she knew not what ; of a state of existence all and every hour of which should be light and joy and life. It was one of her fancies, thus

lying on the broad earth, with her ear close to the ground, that she could feel the heart of the world throb slowly far underneath.’\*

She found in an English Protestant church ‘no sunshine, no colour, no light’; it was all stone—dead. But her father had given her translations from the classics, and ‘it was perhaps from these that these fancies’ grew. Her father ‘wished to found a science of the soul . . . a science of the higher instincts, the higher perceptions and aspirations, which we perceive by the abstract soul’; and had taught his daughter ‘to listen to the promptings of the soul within her; to distinguish between the pseudo soul and the true.’† Here, as in ‘The Story of My Heart,’ Jefferies, like Maeterlinck, feels it odd that, while we have physical and mental training, we have no psychic training.

This secluded girl marries Louis, a dazzling visitor from the world of London society, who has ‘studied the most loathsome and coarsely *outré* states of life’ from a desire to see man in his ‘nakedness.’ He tires of her, and devotes himself to Carlotta, her half-sister, a peer’s wife. In a rage, Louis knocks his wife down, and ‘a battered warrior’ whom Carlotta admires becomes the admirer of Heloïse. Louis sometimes beats Carlotta, and some stress is laid upon this voluptuous cruelty. Carlotta replies with scratches and bites. Physical violence is conspicuous in the book.

Another character and friend of Heloïse is Georgiana Knoyle, who walks ‘as those antique statues would have walked.’ She is a strong, pure character who wishes her lover to inaugurate a new era by marrying for three years, ‘not for life.’ He agrees; they enter into partnership, making provision for possible heirs. They compose a ‘new marriage service, adapted to the thought of modern days, and in accordance with the theory that man and woman are socially equal.’ There should be a certain amount of publicity after such unions; some ‘duly authorized person’ should perform the ceremony;

\* *Restless Human Hearts.*

† *Ibid.*

there should be registration by the State. Neville is said to have become tired of Georgiana very soon. He also, like Heloïse, is repelled by hewn stone, but 'beneath the shadow, if only of a single tree,' he says, 'gazing dreamily upwards through the boughs or leaves at the azure sky, listening to the breeze—"the sound of a going in the tree-tops"—there is a something that enters into me and carries me away with it in lofty dreams and hopes.'

The adventures of these people are very unreal, and are ill-chosen for the bringing out of their several remarkable characters. Carlotta's do not end with Louis, but with an Austrian Archduke. Pierce, Heloïse's father, becomes 'Lord Lestrangle' by the death of a relative. At last Georgiana and Neville, Noel—the 'battered warrior'—and Heloïse, are married at the same time. Neville builds a 'temple of Nature,' where you can sit and look 'down the long aisle of columns out upon the rolling downs,' and beyond them the sea; where you can hear a song from trees and hills and sun: *Benedicite omnia opera*.\*

As a rule, Jefferies' treatment of his characters is quite external; he obviously makes them do this or that, instead of allowing their natures to work. He is trying to imagine the motives of people who always give sovereigns to footmen. 'Liar and traitor, begone!' says one man to another, and the phrase is significant of some of the book. But it is full of intellectual curiosity, and among the expressions of opinion to be found in the frequent and often excellent digressions, one or two may be mentioned as signs of the author's developing mind and character.

He remarks 'how refreshing it is to pick up Froissart, or even Machiavelli's "Florence,"' because they had something to do; their life was real, and not all proxy and pretence like our own. He symbolizes modern slavery by boots:

\* *Restless Human Hearts.*



‘Socrates and Plato, Leonidas and Cæsar—all the heroes—the gods, too, walked with naked feet or in sandals. They knew nothing of Day and Martin. Their feet were open, free, unrestrained. Look at the feet of the statues—how beautiful ! But the feet in those boots —“cabined, cribbed, confined,” distorted, somehow there is something about those boots at which my mind revolts. They are the very symbols of our dirty macadamized times.’\* This playfulness is characteristic of the later Jefferies, and occasionally reached a considerable ironic charm.

Landseer’s paintings, says one of his characters, ‘were anything but well painted. . . . but the idea carried away the mind’; he speaks of the ‘magic charm of the marvellous Doré—instinct with Mind, with Idea, with Life.’†

Sculptors he calls ‘prophets of the body, the apostles of matter ; and their prophecies are perhaps even farther off from fulfilment than those of the prophets of the soul. . . . While we pursue the beautiful so long it is impossible for us to commit sin.’‡

Three chapters—those describing the life and labours of the Abbé in the prison on the French island—in Dumas’ ‘Monte Christo’ ought, he says, to be printed ‘at the end of the Apocrypha.’

It should also be noticed as another early instance of Jefferies’ interest in telepathy that when Heloïse is burnt at an hotel, her brother-in-law hears her scream across the roar of traffic, though he did not know before that she was in London.

With all its faults, the book marks a great advance in ideas upon ‘The Scarlet Shawl.’

In ‘World’s End,’ a novel published in 1877, there is again abundant evidence of Jefferies’ character ; he is evidently coming more and more to regard his own thoughts and adventures as possible material for his books. It opens with a passage in which Jefferies’ uncertain

\* *Restless Human Hearts.*

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*



ironical humour combines with his peculiar sense of the power of Time and Fate. It tells how a black rat founded the city of Stirmingham by gnawing the root of a willow so that it fell and dammed a stream which had once flowed through a barren land. The stream spread and made a marsh; reeds and willows sprang up, and gipsies came for the withies and the wild-fowl, and made a settlement, from which the city grew. The story concerns the 'great Baskette claim case,' various descendants of the early squatters putting forward their claim to the now valuable land. Only in the second volume is 'World's End' reached, a lonely place at cross-roads among the Downs, where there was a fine natural race-course (like the Burderop race-course under Barbury Hill) under the castle of Berbury hill. To the local races comes Aymer Malet, a plainly-dressed, very pale young man, like Jefferies, 'whose slight frame gave him an effeminate appearance.' He is a 'born genius,' who remembers one golden year in London, when he had his own way in a library and in the art galleries. His dead father lost all by racing, and he, like Jefferies, wires ground game, and sells it to carriers, and so is able to buy Bohn's translations of the Greek poets, philosophers, and dramatists, also 'most of the English poets, a few historians, and a large number of scientific works'; for he is devoured by a desire to understand 'the stars that shone so brightly upon those hills.' When he has read a book he sells it at half-price and buys others. 'He saw—he felt Nature. . . . The wind spoke to him in mystic language. . . . His books were *thought* through,' not merely read. He speculates whether there may be creatures in front of men, as there are animals behind. He longs to escape from his uncle, Martin Brown. 'The sun beckoned him to the distant sea.' Once he had escaped, but was forced back 'amid the jeers of acquaintances,' as Jefferies was. But he reached Florence, and there stood before the Venus de Medici, 'rapt in thought, and then suddenly burst into tears.' There he had met Lady Lechester,

owner of an estate near his home in Wiltshire. He had walked home from Dover, a hundred and fifty miles, often sleeping under ricks.

In May, as Aymer is lying amid brake on the Downs, reading 'the tiny edition of Shakespeare's "Songs and Sonnets," published by William Brown thirty years since, and now out of print,' Violet Waldron rides up on a black horse. She lives with her father, who is fond of his trees ('those who plant trees live long,' he quotes), his yew hedge and filbert walk—as Felise Goring lived with her uncle in 'The Dewy Morn.' Aymer snares twenty hares and sells a gold pencil-case, and then, walking to Reading, buys jet bracelets for Violet's wrist. Jefferies praises Violet not for her features, hair and eyes, so much as for 'the life, the vitality, the wonderful freshness which seemed to throw a sudden light over her, as when the sunshine falls upon a bed of flowers.' She plays Mendelssohn to him; he gives her lessons in drawing, which she repays in music and French. Old Waldron gives him a horse, and suggests that he should marry Violet and live in his house. At the altar 'her dress was good—it was nothing to the belles who flourish in Belgravia; but at World's End—goodness, it was Paris itself.' But the marriage is interrupted by the murder of Waldron; the ring rolls away. 'Of all that the ancients venerated and feared,' remarks Jefferies, 'necessity alone remains a factor in modern life.' Violet is penniless now. Aymer tries in vain to write while his hands and body are numbed by cold, as Amaryllis tried to draw, and as Jefferies must have tried to write by the northward lattice in the cheese-room at Coate Farm. He becomes a clerk in a lawyer's office, and in the courts he sees jobbery and corruption, 'class prejudice operating in the minds of those on the judgment-seat.' Aymer writes a book, is advised to bring it out at his own expense, and it goes into three editions without his knowing it—which is a point where Aymer's career is unlike Jefferies'. Then among some old newspapers he

gets into the labyrinth of the Baskette case, and, finally, the Waldrons are shown to have a claim. Aymer and Violet marry, and the borough of Stirmingham allows them £8,000 a year. Into this labyrinth it is unnecessary to go, though it was, in Jefferies' opinion, the principal attraction of his three volumes.

Lady Lechester's character reveals some of Jefferies' interests at this time. Thus, she suddenly springs up from her luncheon-table, and says she must go to meet her lover, a soldier. She goes on talking as if to someone with her, and is heard saying: 'Walter, what does that red spot on your forehead mean? Are you angry?' A month later she hears of his death from a bullet in the forehead. Afterwards, near where she had her vision of Walter, she used to meet 'something,' beautiful and 'half human, half divine,' a supernatural genius of the place.

There is a gipsy in the book who wanders about playing 'weird music' on a whistle. He has large ears, and seems a careless sketch of a kind of Pan.

One character takes us back to Jefferies' earliest fiction, for he has a 'private cremation stove.' Except Aymer and Violet, her father and Lady Lechester, the characters are out of his reach; and the length and complexity of the tale are merely obstacles, and not conquerable kingdoms, to his heroic persistency. Yet the best things in the book are the best things he has yet done, or the most promising, since they foretell the outdoor and the autobiographical elements in the work of his maturity.

In the year after the appearance of 'World's End' he offered a version of 'The Dewy Morn' to a publisher, but that book as it was in 1884 belongs to a later period. The last of the early novels is 'Greene Ferne Farm,' published as a serial in *Time* of the year 1879, and in a single volume in 1880. Its characters are May Fisher and Margaret Estcourt; Valentine Browne and Geoffrey Newton, friends and rival lovers of Margaret; the Rev. Felix St. Bees, May's lover; and old Andrew Fisher, a

millar and miser, May's grandfather. The rivalry of Valentine and Geoffrey is only ended by a fight with guns in a double hedge, an accidental offence setting fire to their smouldering hate. Geoffrey marries Margaret, and Felix May, without any important conflict of characters or display of manners, but with enough incident to make so short a book just barely acceptable to a mere reader of novels.

Geoffrey represents part of Jefferies himself, especially, perhaps, in the unseen watching of his sweetheart in the sunlit woods, 'rapt in the devotion of the artist, till a sense came over him like that feeling which the Greeks embodied in the punishment that fell on those who look unbidden upon the immortals.' Only Jefferies could have made him pause to admire the drop of blood on her white, polished skin before drawing out a thorn from her thumb. When he writes of Geoffrey watching the dawn, he inevitably describes his own impression :

' . . . Out from the last fringe of mist shone a great white globe, like molten silver, glowing with a lusciousness of light, soft and yet brilliant, so large and bright, and seemingly so near—but just above the ridge yonder—shining with heavenly splendour in the very dayspring. He knew Eosphoros, the Light-Bringer, the morning star of hope and joy and love, and his heart went out towards the beauty and the glory of it. Under him the broad bosom of the earth seemed to breathe instinct with life, bearing him up, and from the azure ether came the wind, filling his chest with the vigour of the young day.

'The azure ether—yes, and more than that! Who that has seen it can forget the wondrous beauty of the summer morning's sky? It is blue—it is sapphire—it is like the eyes of a lovely woman. A rich purple shines through it; no painter ever approached the colour of it, no Titian or other, none from the beginning. Not even the golden flesh of Rubens' women, through the veins in whose limbs a sunlight pulses in lieu of blood shining

behind the tissues, can equal the hues that glow behind the blue. . . .'\*

It must be put to the credit of the form of fiction that Jefferies here and in the other novels has a depth and humanity in his feeling for Nature which are absent from all his early country books like 'The Gamekeeper at Home.' His attempts, however vain, to describe human action and passion led him to search deeps of his own nature that might otherwise have been unsounded; and, almost without value as a whole, his novels were thus an exercise which he could ill have done without, and of considerable use as autobiography. In 'Greene Ferne Farm' there are several things worth pausing over: the Wiltshire dialogue always, and especially where the mower talks of the old-fashioned scythes 'made of dree sarts of wood'; the picture of Old Andrew Fisher in his beehive chair, sitting there in the sun-heat of his ninetieth summer—the hard old man who kept three old men at work on the threshing-floor, 'not for charity, but because he liked to listen to the knock-knock of the flails,' and threw his blackthorn at the parson who wanted his granddaughter ('Drow this veller out! Douse un in th' hog-vault! Thee nimity-pimity odd-me-dod! I warn thee'd like my money! Drot thee and thee wench!'); Augustus, the drunken bailiff's portrait, with his 'A man's made just like a pig inside'; and the death-scene of Andrew, where the gaunt, wrinkled, weary gleaners, going homeward, curtsy with hateful hearts as they pass near the chair where he sits cold and stiff. Jefferies' sad humour comes out again in the walk through Kingsbury (Swindon) back-streets:

'Down in the back-streets they found that Melting-Pot, the pewter tankard, in full operation. Men and women were busy keeping it full, while their children, with naked feet, played in the gutter among the refuse of the dust-heap, decayed cabbage, mangy curs, and filth. The ancient alchemists travailed to transmute the baser

\* *Greene Ferne Farm.*



metals into gold ; in these days whole townships are at work transmuting gold and silver into pewter. All the iron foundries, patent blasts, and Bessemer processes in the world cannot equal the melting power of the pewter tankard.\*

Then there are three verses by Jefferies, called ' Noon-tide in the Meadow,' to be quoted only to show how he gives away all that he has for the mere form of verse :

' Idly silent were the finches—  
 Finches fickle, fleeting, blithe ;  
 And the mower, man of inches,  
 Ceased to swing the sturdy scythe.

' All the leafy oaks were slumb'rous ;  
 Slumb'rous e'en the honey-bee ;  
 And his larger brother, cumbrous,  
 Humming home with golden knee.

' But the blackbird, king of hedgerows—  
 Hedgerows to my memory dear—  
 By the brook, where rush and sedge grows,  
 Sang his liquid love-notes clear.†

Altogether, it is an honest book ; true to the writer's experience, wherever it is possible, and often of an assured imaginative fidelity : yet a sad one to read, because Jefferies has not had the luck to hit upon a matter that will give full play to the best, and nothing but the best, that is in him. But, like the other three novels, this one must have temporarily satisfied and permanently fortified that part of his nature which neither the agricultural articles nor the books like ' Wild Life in a Southern County ' could touch.

\* *Greene Ferne Farm.*

† *Ibid.*



## CHAPTER VII

### FIRST COUNTRY ESSAYS

THREE short essays in the *Graphic* of 1875 and 1876 have nothing in them to be compared with the best parts of the early novels, but are interesting because they are a beginning even more important than the earlier letters to the *Times*. They are 'Marlborough Forest,' 'Village Churches,' and 'The Midsummer Hum.' Of a length to meet the needs of a weekly paper, they have already the form and observation and sentiment of the essays which afterwards went to make 'The Gamekeeper at Home,' 'Wild Life in a Southern County,' 'Nature near London,' and most of the later books. In them Nature and country things are described from the point of view of one who is not merely a sportsman, or a naturalist, or an agriculturist, or an archæologist, though he may play all those parts; but of a human being, sensuous, observant, reflective, who enjoys 'doing nothing' out of doors. Jefferies had many predecessors. Gilbert White, an unfertile literary genius and an all-round countryman, in the course of his incomparable letters to Pennant and Barrington, had come, as it always appears, by accident or divine grace, to express with perfect felicity his experience and enjoyment of life in the country. But his book has to carry with it a considerable dead-weight of what is or was only matter of fact. He was in the first place a naturalist; and it was improbable that, if he had any contemporary influence, it would be felt except by naturalists. Few of his successors approach him in literary importance. Waterton, a gentleman of good family, whose 'Essays on Natural History' appeared in 1838, had the charm of a genuine zeal and affection for

wild life. His notes on the rook, for example, are in the spirit of the plainest passages in Jefferies' 'Wild Life.' They state matters of fact of no great significance in a manner showing that he has enjoyed observing them himself; yet he can attract few not specially interested in birds. His affection does not involve the whole man, but is in the nature of a hobby, however much time it may have filled. St. John (who knew Wiltshire as a boy, and trapped wheatears on the Downs) is an intelligent, healthy, outdoor man, fond of scenery, and with an eye for such things as a party of Gaels bringing bright fish to the piny shore of a Highland lake under the moon. His enjoyment was probably great, but it is not a great element in his book, however much we may import into it from our liking for him. He is a fine man, but he is not an artist, and the reader does half the work of producing his admirable effects. His 'Short Sketches of the Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands' appeared in 1846. In the next year came Edward Jesse's 'Favourite Haunts and Rural Studies.' This author would like to give the cottagers 'a stake in this country worth fighting for.' He likes to see them on Sunday having tea in the garden; and there is real satisfaction in his picture of the interior of a cottage, the fitch of bacon on the rack, the dried pot-herbs and string of onions, the warming-pan shining in the corner. His 'Month of May—a Rural Walk,' with his mowers and haymakers and birds singing, is one of the earliest pieces of the kind in prose; but if it sprang from a real delight in the country, no soul or blood has suffused the words, and they are dead. Two years later, in 1849, appeared Knox's 'Ornithological Rambles in Sussex.' He is an ornithologist and sportsman. There is a careless charm, not incomparable to that of Jefferies' earlier work, about his descriptions of shooting in the Weald, and of the lane from Petworth to Parham, and of the wild open country, the nightingales in the little copses of blackthorn and dwarf oak, the common which provides the best sport a man could desire 'on this side of Tweed.' Buckland, whose

'Curiosities of Natural History' was published in 1857, is simply a curious, chatty naturalist with some stories to tell; and when he does not appeal to naturalists, as in 'Whitmonday at Harting,' he has not enough humanity to appeal to anyone else. Kingsley, in his 'Prose Idylls' of 1873, is sportsman, naturalist, historian, clergyman, and country gentleman. They are in dialogue, and they are bluff, hard, and superficial; but they belong to the same class as Jefferies' essays, from which they differ chiefly in this: that while his lead us to the writer's personality through Nature, Kingsley's lead us to Nature through the writer's personality, and if that is not liked by the reader, his pictures, etc., are unendurable.

In these early essays of 1875 and 1876 Jefferies sets himself the unusual and difficult task of reflecting in prose the solitary enjoyment of Nature, without any of the resources of these predecessors in sport or natural history, without the aid even of any passion, as of love, except what Nature herself inspires. In 'Marlborough Forest' he mentions the Civil War, saying that it did not touch the forest; but he relies for his effect upon the leaves and fruits, the pathless bracken, the woodpeckers and jays, the pack of stoats, the fighting stags, the beech avenue, and the inhuman quiet. As he says himself, 'The subtle influence of Nature penetrates every limb and every vein, fills the soul with a perfect contentment, an absence of all wish except to lie there half in sunshine, half in shade for ever, in a Nirvana of indifference to all but the exquisite delight of simply *living*.' But he fails as yet to convey that influence, to produce more than a readable article which only the careless townsman or unobservant countryman can much enjoy. In 'Village Churches' he has the aid of memory, quoting from 'Faust':

'Dim dream-like forms! your shadowy train  
Around me gathers once again.'

A phrase like 'a *visible* silence, which at once isolates the soul, separates it from external present influences, and compels it, in falling back upon itself, to recognize its own depths and powers,' has its value as a glimpse of

Jefferies himself; and the rooks at the acorns, the steep Downs, and the rustling of the grass over the Chisledon graves, the epitaph and the silence, the ticking of the clock, gave, perhaps, a new kind of pleasure to newspaper readers in 1876, but are memorable only as a beginning. One of the most interesting parts of the essay is that on the days of the handicrafts, when 'men put their souls into their works,' and it was not their object 'to turn out a hundred thousand all alike'—when the Aldbourne bell-founder, for a local fame, 'worked as truly, and in as careful a manner, as if he had known his bell was to be hung in St. Peter's at Rome.' We know all about that now, but in 1875 it was an achievement for the Swindon journalist to announce that 'this was the true spirit of art.' He always kept this love of handicrafts, though he might have made more use of his local knowledge of them, just as he might have done with the folk-songs and dialect of North Wiltshire had he recognized their value. In 'The Midsummer Hum,' which, unlike the other two, is signed 'R. Jefferies,' there is a cheerful sketch of 'Uptill-a-thorn' of later days. Lucy Lockett and Absalom Brown are lovers; Mr. Martin, a gentleman, admires the girl in the hayfield, but in the end secretly gives the Vicar twenty pounds for Absalom and Lucy when they are married—Lucy, with 'small nose, slightly *retroussé* and impertinent,' is 'a laughing, thoughtless, impulsive creature, full of life, and joyous as the sunshine—like the young June with its opening roses.' She is a shadow, only a shadow, of one of Jefferies' beautiful animated women. His village mason sings a version of 'When Joan's ale was new':

'Zo, he flung his hammer agen the wall,  
An' prayed as the church an' the steeple might fall,  
An' thus med be work for masons all  
When Jones' ale was new.'

Other slender essays of this kind might probably be found in the newspapers of about 1876, but it was not until the Surbiton days that Jefferies found how easy it was to put down his country lore in this form.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN LONDON AND THE SUBURBS

A GREAT part of 1876—his twenty-eighth year—was spent at Sydenham, and about that time his earliest descriptive essays appeared in the *Graphic*. He must have gone up to find a suitable house near London, yet at the edge of the country, and to make sure of his journalistic connections. This was that bitter time of which he speaks in 'The Story of My Heart,' when it was necessary to be separated from his family. 'There is little indeed,' he wrote, 'in the more immediate suburbs of London to gratify the sense of the beautiful. Yet there was a cedar by which I used to walk up and down and think the same thoughts as under the great oak in the solitude of the sunlit meadows.' Early in 1877 he and his wife and child left Victoria Street, Swindon, for 2, Woodside, Surbiton. Woodside is a small block of whitish, stuccoed, flat-fronted houses of two stories, just beyond the last shops and just before Douglas Road, on the right-hand side of the Ewell road as you go to Tolworth by the electric tram. No. 2 is the second house towards Ewell, and has a poor small fir behind the railings of the front garden. It has been overtaken by London for some time, though its front windows have a swelling, leafy view of Hounslow, Richmond Park, and Wimbledon Common on one side, and of Hook, Chessington, Claygate, and their woods, on the other. Tolworth Farm is but a few yards past the tramway terminus; and the flat, elmy meadows, though they retain the scattered



houses and ricks of what was once a hamlet, have a dejected and demoralized air of defeat by the city. At Tolworth Court Farm, some way beyond, there is a good row of conical corn-ricks, and a tiled barn with pigeons above, and a reedy pond, where the Ewell road bends just before crossing the Hogsmill River by an elm-shaded bridge. Farther still are long woods on the left, having rooks' nests in their oaks ; and out from the green leaves dashes the lofty chariot of a superb American, sounding a horn that sets his half-dozen carriage-hounds capering, and his horses going ten miles an hour—a magnificent Old English display. There are still two fords through the bright Hogsmill close by—one near Ruxley Farm, one at the 'Bones Gate' turning ; one is mentioned in 'Footpaths,' an essay in 'Nature near London.' Squares of plough-land, mangolds, grass, stubble, and mustard succeed one another in the autumn. Beyond, south-east, are Banstead Downs ; south-west, the woods of Barwell Court, of Esher Common, Oxshott and Fairmile. Except on a few Saturdays and Sundays this is a deep, quiet country even now. The American's horn shatters the quiet into fragments that reassemble most easily ; but in Jefferies' day it had still more rural elements left.

In his first spring there he was 'astonished and delighted' by the richness of the bird-life ; he never knew so many nightingales. He saw herons go over, and a teal. Magpies were common, and he records ten together on September 9, 1881, within twelve miles of Charing Cross. There were the same happy greenfinches—his favourite birds—which 'never cease love-making in the elms.' The beautiful white bryony grew over the hedges. 'Birds,' he notes, 'care nothing for appropriate surroundings.' He was awakened by the workmen's trains in the March mornings, yet when he saw the orange-tinted light upon the ceiling, 'something in the sense of morning lifted the heart up to the sun.' Almost at his door was a copse of Scotch and spruce fir, hornbeam,



birch, and ash—now vanished—where he used to watch dove and pigeon, cuckoo, nightingale, sedge-warbler, and missel-thrush. Once a pair of house-martins built under his eaves, and the starlings were welcome, though they dammed the gutter. Among many flowers here was the fairest of those belonging to the Wiltshire downland—the ‘blue meadow geranium,’ or crane’s-bill. He was the first to point out that the flowers have sought sanctuary on the sides of railway cuttings and embankments.

The cart-horses of the neighbouring farms wore ‘the ancient harness, with bells under high hoods, or belfries—bells well attuned, too, and not far inferior to those rung by hand-bell men.’ The farmhouses, the stone staddles for the corn-ricks, were old; so, too, the broad and red-faced labourers, with fringe of reddish whiskers. ‘Could we look back three hundred years, just such a man would be seen in the midst of the same surroundings, deliberately trudging round the straw-ricks of Elizabethan days, calm and complacent, though the Armada be at hand.’ The Irish, some of them without a word of English, came harvesting in their long-tailed coats, breeches, and worsted stockings, ‘with a quick, easy gait and springy step, quite distinct from the Saxon stump.’ There was a village shop among cherry and pear orchards—‘the sweets, and twine, and trifles are such as may be seen in similar meadows a hundred miles distant.’

It was no wonder, then, that Jefferies kept his love of walking, though Northern Surrey has not the same temptations to long walks as the Downs. He walked regularly for an hour and a half in the morning, and for the same time in the afternoon, and would rise from his work at odd times to stroll round Tolworth. He liked to repeat his walks again and again, as he did in Wiltshire. ‘From my home near London I made a pilgrimage almost daily,’ he writes, ‘to an aspen by a brook’; and this would probably be the Hogsmill near Tolworth Court Farm. By those walks he not only escaped from the ‘constant

routine of house-life, the same work, the same thought in the work, the little circumstances regularly recurring,' which 'will dull the keenest edge of thought,' but could repeat his prayer, his 'inexpressible desire of physical life, of soul life, equal to and beyond the highest imagining of his heart.' In 'Woodlands' he describes Woodstock Lane from Long Ditton to Claygate, and Prince's Lane and Prince's Covers; in 'Footpaths,' Chessington Church; the Ewell road in 'Flocks of Birds'; Oxshott in 'Heathlands'; Thames Ditton in 'The Modern Thames'; the now altered lane from Woodstock Lane to Ditton Hill in 'Round a London Copse'; an old orchard at the corner of Langley Avenue and Ditton Hill, and the Ditton road at Southborough, in 'The Coming of Summer'; the Hogsmill by Tolworth Court in 'A Brook' and 'A London Trout.' His 'Nightingale Road' is perhaps the lane from Old Malden Church to the Kingston road. His 'Barn' was perhaps on the road from Hook to Leatherhead, up Telegraph Hill. He visited Kew, and found there the real silence: 'Thus reclining, the storm and stress of life dissolve; there is no thought, no care, no desire; somewhat of the Nirvana of the earth beneath—the earth which for ever produces and receives back again, and yet is for ever at rest—enters into and soothes the heart.' He rowed on the Thames at Teddington and Molesey, and showed himself a good citizen by his protest against the destruction of the fauna and flora of the river and its banks. London, he thought, 'should look upon the inhabitants of the river as peculiarly her own. . . . I marvel that they permit the least of birds to be shot upon its banks.' But having known the Wiltshire fields and been friendly with the nearest keeper and the farmers, he would have nothing to say to preservation 'by beadle.'

Nevertheless, 'the inevitable end of every footpath round about London is London.' He describes how he saw the London atmosphere come drifting one July day—'a bluish-yellow mist, the edge of which was clearly

defined, and which blotted out distant objects and blurred those nearer at hand.' The influence of London was everywhere. The elms were frequently spoiled by being used as posts for wire-fencing ; sewers carried away the water from some roots, and gas leaking from the pipes could do no good. And he saw foreign shrubs and trees, the emblems of sudden riches, rhododendron and plane especially, taking possession of gardens where he longed to see oaks and filbert-walks. He missed the Downs : ' Hills that purify those who walk on them there were not. Still, I thought my old thoughts.' He could not love the suburb gardens, being countryman thoroughbred, for their artful niceness and luxuriance, their highest achievements in choicely urbane combination of smoothest lawn and ordered beds and borders, sumptuous domesticities, and those abrupt boundaries which are not found in the country itself. Still less, probably, could he see the charm of the older suburban houses and gardens, yielding nothing to the tide that has surrounded them on every side, until one day their cedars fall and the air is full of the mortar and plaster flying from ceiling and wall, and settling on the grass and prostrate ivy. The dignity and sweetness of these houses, entrenched behind ha-has, posts and chains, and good split oak fences, with crocuses thick under their elms—their discreet withdrawn windows magical among the trees which they illumine at night—in the midst of the jerry-built haste and huddle of glittering shops and streets, with a thousand senseless eyes that know not what they mean, might move him by their final pathos, but not much by their beauty ; at least, he has not revealed it.

But with London itself it was different. London is one of the immense things of the world, like the Alps, the Sahara, the Western Sea ; and it has a complexity, a wavering changefulness along with its mere size, which no poets or artists have defined as they have in a sense defined those other things. Huge, labyrinthine, dense, yet airy and plastic to the roving spirit, it troubles

the midnight stars, and conspires with the winds and the setting sun to colour and mould the clouds. It is an epitome of the world, of 'other people,' and plunging into it the mind ranges through the humiliations or oblivions of insignificance to all the consolations and even triumphs of preserving its own integrity there, and perhaps even—for some moments—the bliss of gliding as a wave in the world-mind that towers and roars and foams here with beauty and shipwreck and curious flotsam on the tide. In little towns and villages there is often no real incongruity with the fields in which they lie, with their handful of lights at night. In large towns there is a real interruption. The spirits of grass and tree and pool have been driven underground; ponderous headstones of factory and warehouse keep them twisted and helpless in their graves. But London, except in paltry ways to lungs and feet, ends by overcoming any such fanciful sense of its incongruity with Nature. And that, too, not because of the excellent skies over it, the river, the wind in the smoke, the rain on the face; nor because of the fine grass that will grow through the grilles in the pavement round the trees by the National Portrait Gallery and the Gaiety Theatre, or the dock and groundsel and grass and rose-bay that greedily adorn—as with the hand that beflowered Nero's grave—the crude earth and bricks of demolished buildings; but simply on account of its ancientness, its bulk, its humanity, and, arising out of these, its inevitableness as part of what the sun shines on. Of Aymer Malet in his novel of 'World's End' Jefferies wrote: 'Like all men with any pretence to brains, though he delighted in Nature and loved the country, there was a strong, almost irresistible desire within him to mingle in the vast crowds of cities, to feel that indefinable "life" which animates the mass.' He said himself: 'I am very fond of what I may call a thickness of the people such as exists in London'; 'I dream in London quite as much as in the woodlands'; 'I like the solitude of the hills and the hum of the most crowded

city ; I dislike little towns and villages.' In a crowd there is, too, welcome distraction to one who knows that the hearts of most human beings can stand a longer siege than Troy ; that every word is an arrow or a stone of defence, if not offence ; that families are secret societies against humanity, especially to one who, like Jefferies, asks : ' Has anyone thought for an instant upon the extreme difficulty of knowing a person ? ' In one of his essays in ' Nature near London ' he shows that London fascinated him by itself as well as by its power of such consolation. ' It is the presence of man in his myriads,' he wrote ; ' it is a curious thing that your next-door neighbour may be a stranger, but there are no strangers in a vast crowd. They all seem to have some relationship, or rather, perhaps, they do not rouse the sense of reserve which a single unknown person might.' He continues : ' Still, the impulse is not to be analyzed ; these are mere notes acknowledging its power.' The neighbourhood of the city induced ' a mental, a nerve-restlessness ' out in the Surrey fields ; ' the hills and vales, and meads and woods, are like the ocean upon which Sinbad sailed ; but coming too near the loadstone of London, the ship wends thither, whether or no—at least, it is so with me ; and I often go to London without any object whatever, but just because I must, and, arriving there, wander whithersoever the hurrying throng carries me.' He tells us of seeing Jupiter and the stars as he came down the Haymarket or from the Strand. He watched the differences of definition in the changing atmosphere with delight ; the exquisite London fleetingness of impressions fortified his keen interest in the weather. He knew the sunsets from Westminster Bridge, ' big with presage, gloom, tragedy,' and the light of winter and spring sunsets shining on the unconscious westward faces in Piccadilly. Once he watched the sunrise from London Bridge, and never forgot it. He dreamed in Trafalgar Square and by the portico of the British Museum. To live fixed in London was impossible to him ; yet of London, simply



as a gaudy, opulent place, he was no mean admirer. 'Let the grandees go to the opera,' he wrote in 'Amaryllis at the Fair': 'for me the streets.' When he thought of the shops he was a hearty countryman in his enthusiasm. 'How delicious now to walk down Regent Street, along Piccadilly, up Bond Street, and so on, in a widening circle, with a thousand pounds in one's pocket, just to spend, all your own, and no need to worry. . . . To take a lady—the lady—to St. Peter Robinson's, and spread the silks of the earth before her feet, and see the awakening delight in her eyes and the glow on her cheek; to buy a pony for the "kids," and a diamond brooch for the kind, middle-aged matron who befriended you years since in time of financial need; to get a new gun and inquire about the price of a deer-stalk in Scotland; whetting the road now and then with a sip of Moët—but only one sip, for your liver's sake—just to brighten up the imagination; and so onwards in a widening circle, as sunlit fancy led. Could Xerxes, could great Pompey, could Cæsar with all his legions, could Lucullus with all his oysters, ever have enjoyed such pleasure as this—just to spend money freely, with a jolly chuckle, in the streets of London? . . . No joy like waste in London streets—happy waste, imaginative extravagance; to and fro like a butterfly!' London has the exuberance and carelessness of Nature herself. And which of the great Londoners has excelled Jefferies, when he wrote of the life of his uncle, Frederick Gyde, the *Alere Flamma* of 'Amaryllis,' 'artist, engraver, bookbinder, connoisseur, traveller, printer, Republican, conspirator, sot, smoker, dreamer, poet, kind-hearted, good-natured, prodigal, shiftless, man of Fleet Street, carpet-bag man, gentleman shaken to pieces.' There is a wonderful feverish glow—a romantic glow, even—together with a sad penetration, when he writes of Fleet Street: 'Let the meads be never so sweet, the mountain-top never so exalted, still to Fleet Street the mind will return.' He is, in fact, one of the great Londoners. What he disliked in London was the noise



and the grit. 'The noise wearying the mind to a state of drowsy narcotism, you become chloroformed through the sense of hearing, a condition of dreary resignation and uncomfortable ease'; and when he had had too much of it, he saw the faces of the crowd 'not quite human in their eager and intensely concentrated haste' on a wet night. The 'gritty dust, too, it settles in the nostrils and on the lips,' was especially horrible to him, and he has reflected this horror in 'Amaryllis' and in 'The Dewy Morn,' where the grit on the papers and in the ink has almost a ghostly effect.

Some years later Jefferies lived for a short time at Eltham (14, Victoria Road), and used to enter town by the London, Chatham and Dover railway-station at London Bridge. The red-tiled Bermondsey roofs pleased him as he saw them from the train. He liked to see the vastness at once, which was impossible by the road. 'Nowhere else is there an entrance to a city like this.' From Bermondsey he saw the masts of ships. 'Masts are always dreamy to look at,' he wrote; 'they speak a romance of the sea, of unknown lands, of distant forests aglow with tropical colours and abounding with strange forms of life. In the hearts of most of us there is always a desire for something beyond experience. Hardly any of us but have thought, "Some day I will go on a long voyage." But the years go by, and still we have not sailed.' At the same time as Stevenson, and without mere fancy, he discovered the romantic in London. He loved the docks, and his great red bowsprit of an Australian clipper is an enduring London vision. 'If,' he asked—'if Italian painters had had such things as these to paint, if poets of old time had had such things as these to sing, do you imagine they would have been contented with crank caravels and tales twice told already? They had eyes to see that which was around them. Open your eyes and see those things which are around us at this hour.' Nor was this a skin-deep idea. Sun and river and wind overcame the grit. The colour of the Horse Guards and

of women's dresses fed his avaricious eye. The pictures in the National Gallery, the statues in the Museum, were as real to him as hills and stars. Staying in a recess of London Bridge in the summer morning sun, he enjoyed the coloured ships and shadowed wharves and clear air ; or, leaning on the parapet, felt the sun, as when he rested in the fosse of Liddington Castle on his own Wiltshire Downs. 'Nature,' he said, 'was deepened by the crowds and foot-worn stones.' It was Trafalgar Square that, on a summer day, forced him to ask, as he 'dreamed under the beautiful breast of heaven—heaven brooding and descending in pure light upon man's handiwork : If the light shall thus come in, and of its mere loveliness overcome every aspect of dreariness, why shall not the light of thought and hope—the light of the soul—overcome and sweep away the dust of our lives ?' On London Bridge and by the Royal Exchange he 'felt the presence of the immense powers of the universe'—felt himself 'in the midst of eternity, in the midst of the supernatural, among the immortal.' So great was his admiration that he called London Bridge 'the only *real* place in the world.' The cities, he continues, 'run towards London, as young partridges run to their mother. The cities know that they are not real. They are only houses and wharves and bricks and stucco—only outside. The minds of all men in them—merchants, artists, thinkers—are bent on London. . . . A house is not a dwelling if a man's heart be elsewhere. Now, the heart of the world is in London, and the cities with the simulacrum of man in them are empty. They are moving images only ; stand here, and you are real.' It is not the least of the city's praises that it was part of the culture which made Richard Jefferies' mature work memorable.

Of his life at this period we have little evidence except what is to be found in his books. As he wrote for many newspapers and magazines, and changed his publisher several times, he was pretty often in London, and must have had his hours of disgust ; but that 'the town was

odious to him, the streets an abomination,' is an unrecognizable statement of the facts. Only 'After London' supports this view; there he makes London survive only as the cause of a miasma and a stench. As a rule, he accepts it as inevitable, and enjoys it profoundly.

Having no literary friends, he was seldom the subject or victim of reminiscences. Of human society he asked for little but what was homely, and he got no more. Strangers found him the loneliest of men in appearance, and quite impossible to converse with. That he liked this standing aloof 'in villa-seclusion, close by and yet divided for a life-time,' is unlikely, though it gave him greater freedom for his solitary daily walks—an hour and a half between the end of his morning's work and his one o'clock dinner, and the same following on his after-dinner sleep of an hour. His habits were regular. Breakfast was at eight, often 'nothing but dry toast and tea'; then work. After tea he worked again until half-past eight, when he had a light supper, 'with a glass of claret,' and then read or talked until bedtime, at eleven. He smoked 'very rarely,' which probably means that his smoking was not a habit. He demanded silence in the house. He was not a talker, but talked with ease and vigour on his own subjects, most eagerly on the Labour Question. His speech had retained none of the Wiltshire accent. He is said to have been slightly but distinctly marked as of yeoman birth by acknowledging, without any loss to his independence, merely social superiority, though when younger he was regarded as having 'no proper' (*i.e.*, no low) sense of his own position, and could not fawn or flatter or coax. One of his acquaintances thought his avoiding of company so decided as to be a conscious device to preserve 'his native sensibilities.' He was certainly not to be taken captive by any of the usual attractions of a town life; solitude, the spectacle of humanity, and home-life were his deepest joys. 'A shy, proud recluse,' one calls him. In appear-

ance he was 'long, languid, and loitering,' whether he sat or moved across a room; 'a long man from head to foot; his legs long, his arms long . . . somewhat drooping eyelids, softly drooping mouth'; his expression sensuous, tender, 'silent and aware.' In dress, when he came to town, he was 'trim and town-like,' but never noticeable except for the lack of umbrella and overcoat. The result of his visits was that he 'began to make money as a writer on country matters,' which is a way of saying that he was able to pay his bills and to save less than enough to keep himself and his wife and two children when illness forbade him even to dictate.

## CHAPTER IX

FIRST COUNTRY BOOKS — 'THE GAMEKEEPER AT HOME'—'WILD LIFE IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY'—  
'THE AMATEUR POACHER'—'ROUND ABOUT A GREAT ESTATE'

THE two or three country essays of 1875 and 1876 would have been forgotten as certainly as 'The Scarlet Shawl' had they not been followed soon after his removal to Surbiton by many more in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, some of which were reprinted as 'The Gamekeeper at Home' in 1878. The rest, poorer as a rule than the reprinted papers, are easily to be found, though all unsigned. As early as December, 1876, in a letter to Mr. Oswald Crawford, editor of the *New Quarterly*, Jefferies had begun to think about this book and its successors. His first thought was to make the Reservoir at Coate definitely the centre of the book. 'If,' he writes, 'the birds which I and others have shot there had been preserved—as I now wish they had been—they would form a little museum. My brother shot a brace of grebes [crested grebes] there last week.' In this letter he expands more than he usually does. 'I used,' he continues, 'to take a gun for nominal occupation, and sit in the hedge for hours, noting the ways and habits even of moles and snails. I had my especial wasps' nest, and never was stung. The secret with all living creatures is—quiet. . . . The great Downs . . . are literally teeming with matter for thought. I own that the result has been a profound optimism—if one looks at Nature metaphysically. Since

that pleasant time, which I still regret, I have corrected my notes, and endeavoured to organize them by reading the best books, I could find on such subjects, including geology.' At first he was to have written the articles for Mr. Crawford, and he goes on to suggest what he has in mind. 'I should not,' he writes, 'attempt a laborious, learned description, but rather choose a chatty style. I would endeavour to bring in some of the glamour—the magic of sunshine, and green things, and calm waters—if I could.' That is what he did for the *Pall Mall*. Now at length he has aimed at something new and within his reach. He has begun to pour out great and small, good and indifferent, from his memory and his notebooks, the treasures of country-lore. He takes the Burderop Woods and adjacent fields and ponds, the keeper Haylock and his predecessor Rawlings, and their cottage in Hodson Bottom, and, using them freely and minutely, makes his first book out of them. He knows it all perfectly well, and talks about it with a rich, quiet ease. He gives information about an hundred things—about the keeper and his ways, his dogs, his guns and implements, his surroundings, the cottages, the trees, the wild animals, the birds, the fish—and he gives enough to have led a publisher to write and ask him for a history of shooting, of which he was thinking years later, but wrote only a chapter. 'The Gamekeeper' is almost as informing as 'Toilers of the Field,' yet were it shorn of everything else it would not be half the book it is. For he gives his information, and with it the spirit of his enjoyment of those things. And a very simple enjoyment it is, for it belongs to his youth and to only the simplest part of it. He is the farmer's son who has knocked about with a gun and seen the keepers and underkeepers a little more than usual, with a curiosity and memory far above the common. His absolute familiarity with country life is an essential, but it is the joy of that life which makes his book a memorable one. Even the countryman recognizes that, while to the townsman it is the sun and



wind and rain and open country that count, long after the facts are forgotten. Things occur in his pages as they do on walks, haphazard and often unconnected. Descriptions, portraits, narratives, arguments, odds and ends of superstitions, customs, curiosities, come together in Nature's own abundance. The writing is effortless, and in places slipshod ; it hardly matters : the breath of elaboration might have made it less rustic. As it stands it is perhaps the first thoroughly rustic book in English, by a countryman and about the country, with no alien savours whatever. Even White's utmost simplicity is that of a scholar, and smells of Oriel as much as of Selborne. But it is significant that almost the subtlest part of 'The Gamekeeper,' the essence and gospel, is put with hardly a shade of incongruity into the keeper's mouth :

'It's indoors, sir, as kills half the people ; being indoors three parts of the day, and next to that taking too much drink and vittals. Eating's as bad as drinking ; and there ain't nothing like fresh air and the smell of the woods. You should come out here in the spring, when the oak timber is throwed (because, you see, the sap be rising, and the bark strips then), and just sit down on a stick fresh peeled—I means a trunk, you know—and sniff up the scent of that there oak-bark. It goes right down your throat, and preserves your lungs as the tan do leather. And I've heard say as folk who work in the tan-yards never have no illness. There's always a smell from the trees, dead or living. I could tell what wood a log was in the dark by my nose ; and the air is better where the woods be. The ladies up in the great house sometimes goes out into the fir plantations—the turpentine scents strong, you see—and they say it's good for the chest ; but, bless you, you must live in it. People go abroad, I'm told, to live in the pine forests to cure 'em : I say these here oaks have got every bit as much good in that way. I never eat but two meals a day—breakfast and supper ; what you would call dinner—and maybe in the middle of the day a hunch of dry bread and an apple.

I take a deal for breakfast, and I'm rather lear [hungry] at supper ; but you may lay your oath that's why I'm what I am in the way of health. People stuffs theirselves, and by consequence it breaks out, you see. It's the same with cattle ; they're overfed, tied up in stalls, stuffed, and never no exercise, and mostly oily food, too. It stands to reason they must get bad ; and that's the real cause of these here rinderpests, and pleuro-pneumonia, and what-nots. At least, that's my notion. I'm in the woods all day and never comes home till supper—'cept, of course, in breeding time, to fetch the meal and stuff for the birds—so I gets the fresh air, you see ; and the fresh air is the life, sir. There's the smell of the earth, too—'specially just as the plough turns it up—which is a fine thing ; and the hedges and the grass are as sweet as sugar after a shower. Anything with a green leaf is the thing, depend upon it, if you want to live healthy. I never signed no pledge ; and if a man asks me to take a glass of ale, I never says him no. But I ain't got no barrel at home ; and all the time I've been in this here place I've never been to a public. Gentlemen give me tips—of course they does ; and much obliged I be ; but I takes it to my missus. Many's the time they've asked me to have a glass of champagne or brandy when we've had lunch under the hedge ; but I says no, and would like a glass of beer best, which I gets, of course. No ; when I drink, I drinks ale : but most in general I drinks no strong liquor. Great coat !—cold weather ! I never put no great coat on this thirty year. These here woods be as good as a topcoat in cold weather. Come off the open fields with the east wind cutting into you, and get inside they firs and you'll feel warm in a minute. If you goes into the ash-wood you must go in farther, because the wind comes more between the poles.\*

Fresh air, good ale, and juicy beef-steaks were the only medicines which Jefferies never ceased to praise.

\* *The Gamekeeper at Home.*

Next to this passage one of the most significant things in the book is the claim of reason for animals, and that also is made first by the keeper. If that interesting chapter is ever written on the influence of the unlearned—the Thurtells and the rest—on literature, through their friendships with writing men, Haylock of Burderop must not be omitted. Altogether the book may be said to be the first revelation of matters which hundreds of countrymen have known for centuries. In Jefferies all the keepers, and poachers, and bird-scarers, and farmers become articulate—as, for example, when he records that ‘the rabbit-burrow here at my elbow is not silent; it seems to catch and heighten faint noises from a distance. . . . So that in all probability to the rabbit his hole must be a perfect “Ear of Dionysius,” magnifying a whisper.’ But to return to his youth meant a return also to the ideas of his youth and of his environment. He is the farmer’s son and gamekeeper’s friend, not only in his heartiness and woodcraft, but in his callousness and his careless acceptance of things as they are. For the time being his attitude towards life is that of the gamekeeper. With characteristic docility, having to write about the gamekeeper, he becomes one; and in his crude abuse of poachers and veneration of the hunt and the great house, in his genuine satisfaction at the fact that in rabbiting ‘the young gentlemen tip freely,’ and that the keeper ‘is one of those fortunate individuals whom all the world tips,’ he even overdoes his part. Simply because a labourer now and then kills a hare in his allotment, he must sneer at the ‘kindly talk uttered over allotments’; and the keeper is so deified that he and his ground-ash stick appear to be equal to all the ingenious and robust mechanics of Swindon town. Yet a keeper, it seems, may be contaminated ‘without volition of his own’ by contact with the bad men who have not the luck to be keepers! If it were not for the poacher’s own wit and knowledge that come out in half of the best passages, the reader might be excused for disgust

with such a policeman god as the book invokes. In the whole there is no trace of the loftier ideas which had been expressed, however uncertainly, in the luckless novels. Yet these are little matters, only to be mentioned in order that his later progress may be made clear; for here is good cheer, the smell of the morning, and the freedom of a sweet land.

'Wild Life in a Southern County,' also consisting of papers from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was published as a book in 1879. Here also he returns to Coate, Burderop, and the Reservoir, but ranges farther afield to Marlborough Forest, Draycot, Broad Hinton, Bishopston, Aldbourne, covering much of the same ground as in his early *North Wilts Herald* articles, and using, too, part of his contributions to the *Graphic*; while in the sixteenth chapter he begins to include his observations from the neighbourhood of Surbiton. Its twenty chapters conform roughly to the rough scheme of beginning at the Downs, on Liddington Castle, and descending with a stream to the lower land, to Coate Farm and the fields and woods around. But the arrangement is even less rigid than in 'The Gamekeeper'; the digressions are more haphazard, the writing more careless. The writing of newspaper articles of a certain length helps to develop a habit of filling a proposed number of pages rather than of achieving a firm and logical form demanded by the substance. The length of an article demanded by an editor has no necessary connection with the subject of it. In prose such lengths are as destructive to order and beauty as the fourteen lines of a sonnet commonly are to sense. Jefferies' difficulty, writing with no precedent to warn or guide, was unusually great, and his rich, untrained intelligence was an ordained victim. Almost to the end of his life he is to be seen painfully struggling with, or carelessly giving way to, the necessity of writing essays of a standard length, introducing brief irrelevancies, and seriously injuring what he really has to say. But 'Wild Life,' though not without dulness and repetition,

overcomes those disadvantages by its abundance. Jefferies is now much less a sportsman and more a naturalist and ruminating countryman. In its range of knowledge, as of country, it is beyond 'The Gamekeeper.' Coate Farm and fields, the Downs, the camp and its prehistoric defenders, the springs and streams, sport, agriculture, the ways of birds, beasts, fish, insects, and reptiles, the atmosphere, village life, village architecture and industries, superstitions and religion, are described by one who has hardly yet known life without these things. As the work of patient eyesight, the many notes on clouds and mists are more than respectable; those, again, for example, like the possible explanations of the rooks' line of flight morning and evening, mark decidedly the irruption of an imaginative intelligence into natural history, which is so often in danger of falling into the hands of mere takers of notes; others are accurate and simply made, as where he transcribes straight from his Surbiton notes, and they can hardly make an appeal except to the boy-naturalist and the townsman pleased to hear about everything rural. The human characters are slighter than in 'The Gamekeeper,' but more varied and sympathetically handled. Not only is the book richer in material than its predecessor—so rich that it must have a considerable value as a mere record of a certain time and place in English life—but the treatment is richer, more genial and humane. The waggon's history in the sixth chapter, for example, is a good thing. It has a foundation of special knowledge, but not in the narrow manner of a specialist; and upon this foundation there is the writer's experience of life. Thus it has the merit of some ripe craftsman's talk and the permanence of simple writing. The book is remarkable, too, for its attitude towards animals. Jefferies finds that the ant has not infallible instinct, but 'faculties resembling those of the mind'; he infers that the rook knows that a walking-stick is not a gun; and he says: 'The longer I observe the more I am convinced that birds and animals often



act from causes quite distinct from those which at first sight appeared sufficient to account for their motions.' And yet again :

'The joy in life of these animals—indeed, of almost all animals and birds in freedom—is very great. You may see it in every motion : in the lissom bound of the hare, the playful leap of the rabbit, the song that the lark and the finch *must* sing ; the soft, loving coo of the dove in the hawthorn ; the blackbird ruffling out her feathers on a rail. The sense of living—the consciousness of seeing and feeling—is manifestly intense in them all, and is in itself an exquisite pleasure. Their appetites seem ever fresh : they rush to the banquet spread by Mother Earth with a gusto that Lucullus never knew in the midst of his artistic gluttony ; they drink from the stream with dainty sips as though it were richest wine. Watch the birds in the spring ; the pairs dance from bough to bough, and know not how to express their wild happiness. The hare rejoices in the swiftness of his limbs ; his nostrils sniff the air, his strong sinews spurn the earth ; like an arrow from a bow he shoots up the steep hill that we must clamber slowly, halting half-way to breathe. On outspread wings the swallow floats above, then slants downwards with a rapid swoop, and with the impetus of the motion rises easily. Therefore it is that this skull here' [of a hare], 'lying so light in the palm of the hand, with the bright sunshine falling on it, and a shadowy darkness in the vacant orbits of the eyes, fills us with sadness. "As leaves on leaves, so men on men decay" ; how much more so with these creatures whose generations are so short !'\*

The sense of their happiness is born out of his own—a happiness akin to sorrow, because it is so exquisite, and so much a part of youth. The use of a gun and its effects have become habitual, and have left him quite free to feel and reflect exactly as many men do who would not willingly take any life.

\* *Wild Life in a Southern County.*



As in 'Greene Ferne Farm,' belonging to the same year, he is interested in the country crafts—in the millwright, the rope-walker, the bell-founder, the basket-maker and mop-maker—and in distinguishing local usages; he regrets their decay, because of their goodness as much as of their age. He makes another revelation of his view of art; for he likes 'the poetry of life' under the harshness of an old hunting picture, the horses from life, the men portraits, the hounds labelled with names; but he has not seen really truthful hunting scenes on canvas: the best are conventional, and have too much colour. He shows how it might be done:

'A thick mist clings in the hollow there by the osier-bed, where the pack have overtaken the fox, so that you cannot see the dogs. Beyond, the contour of the hill is lost in the cloud trailing over it; the foreground towards us shows a sloping ploughed field, a damp brown, with a thin mist creeping along the cold furrows. Yonder, three vague and shadowy figures are pushing laboriously forward beside the leafless hedge; while the dirt-bespattered bays hardly show against its black background and through the mist. Some way behind, a weary grey—the only spot of colour, and that dimmed—is gamely struggling—it is not leaping—through a gap beside a gaunt oak-tree, whose dark buff leaves yet linger. But out of these surely an artist who dared to face Nature as she is might work a picture.'\*

All through the book he sees things like this, as they are, without a tinge of pastoral or other sentiment; and it is worth noticing that in the eleventh chapter he mentions his dreaming in summer or standing to muse in an early spring night, under the great oak that looked over a great field to the Downs—perhaps the very oak where he used to go to dream the dreams of 'The Story of My Heart'—but he mentions it with no dimmest hint as yet of what those dreams are to bring forth, and he is silent as to what he dreamed or mused. The import-

\* *Wild Life in a Southern County.*

ance of those brief mystic moments may not yet have come home to him, or he may have felt that the dreams had no place in such a book. He remembers his shooting, and bird-watching, and roaming, and his talks with farmers, and sextons ; and he waits.

‘The Amateur Poacher,’ consisting of articles from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and published in 1879, is on the whole, as well as in the best of its parts, an advance from ‘The Gamekeeper’ and ‘Wild Life.’ Once more he is at Coate Farmhouse and fields, Burderop, the Downs, Wootton Bassett, and Marlborough, and this time as the poacher or the not too scrupulous rambler with a gun. He has the advantage now of writing frankly in the first person about his own doings, and acknowledging several ingenious village acquaintances. It is full of the life of men whom he knew as he knew the fields—chiefly the roguish and sporting side of them—but lively and faithful, every word of it. Here first appears Molly the milkmaid—the merry, hard-working maid at Coate Farm, who used to say, when people laughed at Jefferies : ‘Ah ! you med laugh, but if you was inside Dick’s yed for five minutes you wouldn’t want to get back into your own.’ He had described his birthplace inside and out in ‘Wild Life,’ but in a detached way ; he still made it his business to inform, and he had not yet ventured to suppose that people would follow him for his own sake. In ‘The Poacher’ he has at once by good fortune the confidence to write about Coate Farm as his own home. The result is that no boy, at least, can read the book and not remember for ever the stuffed fox grinning up in the garret ; the garret itself, its old pistols and legendary skeleton ; the perch-fishing ; the gun.

‘There are days in spring when the white clouds go swiftly past, with occasional breaks of bright sunshine lighting up a spot in the landscape. That is like the memory of one’s youth. There is a long, dull blank, and then a brilliant streak of recollection. Doubtless it was a year or two afterwards when, seeing that the

natural instinct could not be suppressed, but had better be recognized, they produced a real gun (single barrel) for me from the clock-case.

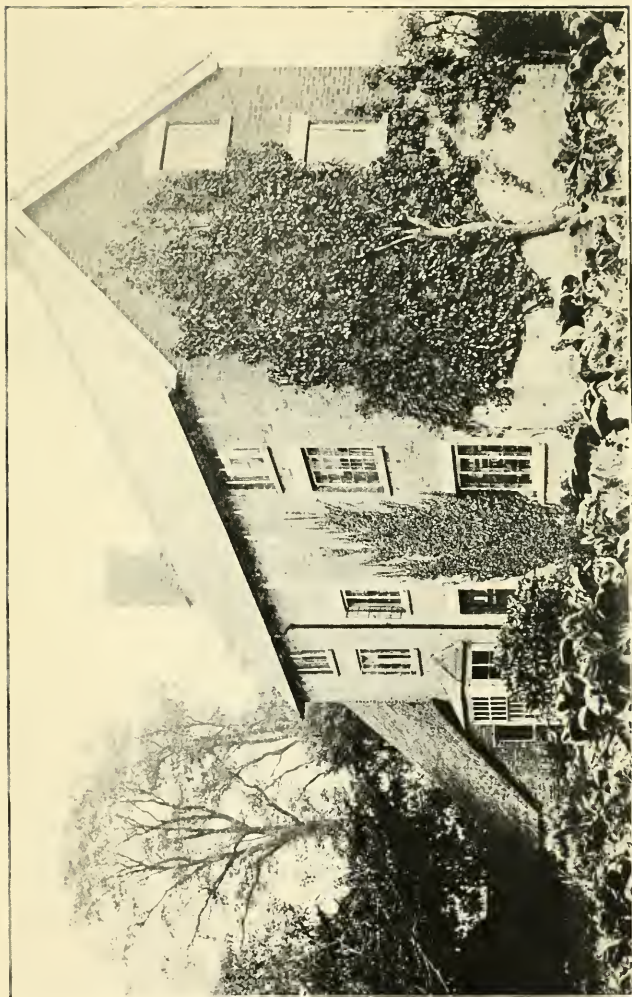
' It stood on the landing just at the bottom of the dark flight that led to the garret. An oaken case six feet high or more, and a vast dial, with a mysterious picture of a full moon and a ship in full sail that somehow indicated the quarters of the year, if you had been imitating Rip Van Winkle, and after a sleep of six months wanted to know whether it was spring or autumn. But only to think that, all the while we were puzzling over the moon and the ship and the queer signs on the dial, a gun was hidden inside ! The case was locked, it is true ; but there are ways of opening locks, and we were always handy with tools. This gun was almost, but not quite, so long as the other. That dated from the time between Stuart and Hanover ; this might not have been more than seventy years old. And a beautiful piece of workmanship it was : my new double breechloader is a coarse, common thing to compare with it. Long and slender and light as a feather, it came to the shoulder with wonderful ease. Then there was a groove in the barrel at the breech and for some inches up which caught the eye and guided the glance like a trough to the sight at the muzzle, and thence to the bird. The stock was shod with brass, and the trigger-guard was of brass, with a kind of flange stretching half-way down to the butt and inserted in the wood. After a few minutes' polishing it shone like gold, and to see the sunlight flash on it was a joy.

' You might note the grain of the barrel, for it had not been browned ; and it took a good deal of sand to get the rust off. By aid of a little oil and careful wiping after a shower it was easy to keep it bright. Those browned barrels only encourage idleness. The lock was a trifle dull at first, simply from lack of use. A small screw-driver soon had it to pieces, and it speedily clicked again sweet as a flute. If the hammer came back

rather far when at full cock, that was because the lock had been converted from a flint, and you could not expect it to be absolutely perfect. Besides which, as the fall was longer the blow was heavier, and the cap was sure to explode.\*

It is all so easy and natural ; the boy's and man's heart is, and has been for twenty years, in these things ; and when such a one is remembering and calling for power to write them down, it will go hard if he is not answered. There can be no doubt that Jefferies was answered. He goes to an old mansion left by the family in the hands of butler, and keeper, and maids ; his friend Dickon is in love with one of the maids, and takes him there ; and their merry irresponsibility and lawless shooting in the woods slip into the simple, unelaborate sentences with perfect truth. With still something of 'The Game-keeper' spirit he labels the roguish Oby as poacher, fighting man, 'hardened against shame, an Ishmaelite openly contemning authority and yet not insensible to kindness'; but then gives his history with gusto, though without seeming to commit himself, by putting it into the old man's mouth. Luke, the pitiful rheumy rabbit contractor, with his doddering artfulness, is another character honestly set down. Huge Little John ferreting, intent as a dog, and impatient of any method but his own, 'wristing' the rabbits' necks with quiet satisfaction, is equally good. The talk of these men lacks the liveliness and humour of Edwin Waugh's Lancashire sketches, yet there is never a false note. They live. The great heavy-laden waggon of life goes rocking down the lanes, and the artist gathers up some of the wisps from the elm-trees when it has passed. The waggon and the load disappear, but there are the wisps wagging in the sun and rain of late autumn, of winter, of spring, and of returning summer, and to us who cannot gather them so, blessed are those who can, like Jefferies. If the crop be poor, it was grown in the earth, and has its value for us who descend

\* *The Amateur Poacher.*



From a photograph by G. H. Bottomley Knowles.

FRONT AND NORTH END OF COATE FARM.

The gable window, at the top of the pear tree, was that of Jelleries' study.



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into it again. We cannot refuse the meanest portrait, so it be true. For if life has not been truly drawn, how shall we know whether it ought to be uprooted, or a cure attempted, or haply imitated? And however ugly and troublous to delicate souls, human joy is not denied to it, and even miserable things a true-hearted man shall make the bearers of joy. The finest thing in the book is probably the visit to the Sarsen public-house, and then the coursing on the Downs with Dickon, the landlady's son, which some might think a trivial matter out of low life. But hear it :

'The talk to-day, as the brown brandy, which the paler cognac has not yet superseded, is consumed and the fumes of coarse tobacco and the smell of spilt beer and the faint, sickly odour of evaporating spirits overpower the flowers, is of horses. The stable-lads from the training-stables far up on the Downs drop in or call at the door without dismounting. Once or twice a day a tout calls and takes his "grub," and scribbles a report in the little back-parlour. Sporting papers, beer-stained and thumb-marked, lie on the tables; framed portraits of   
rs hang on the walls. Burly men, who certainly cannot ride a race, but who have horse in every feature, puff cigars and chat in jerky monosyllables that to an outsider are perfectly incomprehensible. But the glib way in which heavy sums of money are spoken of conveys the impression that they dabble in enormous wealth.

'There are dogs under the tables and chairs; dogs in the window-seat; dogs panting on the stone flags of the passage, after a sharp trot behind a trap, choosing the coolest spot to loll their red tongues out; dogs outside in the road; dogs standing on hind-legs, and painfully lapping the water in the horse-trough; and there is a yapping of puppies in the distance. The cushions of the sofa are strewn with dogs' hairs, and once now and then a dog leisurely hops up the staircase.

'Customers are served by the landlady, a decent body enough in her way: her son, the man of the house, is up

in the "orchut" at the rear, feeding his dogs. Where the "orchut" ends in a paddock stands a small shed; in places the thatch on the roof has fallen through in the course of years and revealed the bare rafters. The bottom part of the door has decayed, and the long nose of a greyhound is thrust out, sniffing through a hole. Dickon, the said son, is delighted to undo the padlock for a visitor who is "square." In an instant the long hounds leap up, half a dozen at a time, and I stagger backwards, forced by the sheer vigour of their caresses against the door-post. Dickon cannot quell the uproarious pack; he kicks the door open, and away they scamper round and round the paddock at headlong speed.

'What a joy it is to them to stretch their limbs! I forget the squalor of the kennel in watching their happy gambols. I cannot drink more than one tumbler of brown brandy-and-water; but Dickon overlooks that weakness, feeling that I admire his greyhounds. It is arranged that I am to see them work in the autumn.

'The months pass, and in his trap, with the famous trotter in the shafts, we roll up the village street. Apple-bloom and golden fruit, too, are gone, and the houses show more now among the bare trees; but as the rim of the ruddy November sun comes forth from the edge of a cloud there appears a buff tint everywhere in the background. When elm and ash are bare, the oaks retain their leaves, and these are illumined by the autumn beams. Overtopped by tall elms, and hidden by the orchards, the oaks were hardly seen in the summer; now they are found to be numerous, and give the prevailing hue to the place.

'Dickon taps the dashboard as the mare at last tops the hill, and away she speeds along the level plateau for the Downs. Two greyhounds are with us; two more have gone on under charge of a boy. Skirting the hills a mile or two, we presently leave the road and drive over the turf; there is no track, but Dickon knows his way.

The rendezvous is a small fir plantation, the young trees in which are but shoulder-high. Below is a plain entirely surrounded by the hills, and partly green with root crops ; more than one flock of sheep is down there, and two teams ploughing the stubble. Neither the ploughman nor the shepherds take the least heed of us, except to watch for the sport. The spare couple are fastened in the trap ; the boy jumps up and takes the reins. Dickon puts the slip on the couple that are to run first, and we begin to range.

‘ Just at the foot of the hill the grass is tall and grey ; there, too, are the dead dry stalks of many plants that cultivation has driven from the ploughed fields, and that find a refuge at the edge. A hare starts from the verge and makes up the Downs. Dickon slips the hounds, and a faint halloo comes from the shepherds and ploughmen. It is a beautiful sight to see the hounds bound over the sward ; the sinewy back bends like a bow, but a bow that, instead of an arrow, shoots itself ; the deep chests drink the air. Is there any moment as joyful in life as the second when the chase begins ? As we gaze, before we even step forward, the hare is over the ridge and out of sight. Then we race and tear up the slope ; then the boy in the trap grasps the reins, and away goes the mare out of sight, too.

‘ Dickon is long and raw-boned, a powerful fellow, strong of limb, and twice my build ; but he sips too often at the brown brandy, and after the first burst I can head him. But he knows the hills and the route the hare will take, so that I have but to keep pace. In five minutes, as we cross a ridge, we see the game again ; the hare is circling back—she passes under us not fifty yards away, as we stand panting on the hill. The youngest hound gains, and runs right over her ; she doubles ; the older hound picks up the running. By a furze-bush she doubles again ; but the young one turns her—the next moment she is in the jaws of the old dog.

‘ Again and again the hounds are slipped, now one

couple, now the other ; we pant, and can scarcely speak with running, but the wild excitement of the hour and the sweet pure air of the Downs supply fresh strength. The little lad brings the mare anywhere : through the furze, among the flint-pits, jolting over the ruts, she rattles along with sure alacrity. There are five hares in the sack under the straw when at last we get up and ' slowly drive down to the highway, reaching it some two miles from where we left it. Dickon sends the dogs home by the boy on foot ; we drive round and return to the village by a different route, entering it from the opposite direction. . . . '\*

When such vitality begins to be really abundant in literature, the moralists may begin to weed out. Jefferies asks no questions in ' The Amateur Poacher.' Except in his power to observe and portray, he seems the plainest of countrymen, with his opinion that ' a strong man must drink now and then.'

His observation is in most cases seconded by effective expression ; he conveys a fact in a way that gives it a value beyond the simple information. But in this book he has entered upon his long course of recording minutely what his microscopic glance perceived, and clearly it is true ; yet too often not vivid enough for literature nor exact enough for science, as, for example, here :

' In January that ice that freezes in the ditches appears of a dark colour, because it lies without intervening water on the dead brown leaves. Their tint shows through the translucent crystal, but near the edge of the ice three white lines run round. If by any chance the ice gets broken or upturned, these white bands are seen to be caused by flanges projecting from the under-surface, almost like stands. They are sometimes connected in such a way that the parallel flanges appear like the letter " h " with the two down-strokes prolonged.' †

And this, again, is an extract from a notebook, and in this state is of no value at all :

\* *The Amateur Poacher.*

† *Ibid.*

‘Overhead light-grey clouds, closely packed but not rainy, drifted very slowly before a N.E. upper current.’\*

Often the detail is neither finely wrought nor complete, but it tells by its quantity, and by the rude spirit of life in the whole. Of the man himself, little is yet revealed, though much of his youth. He still accepts things just as they are, enjoying their chance issues, as when Oby, his fine for poaching paid, stands with tankard in hand and touches his hat to the passing magistrate ‘with a gesture of sly humility.’ Coming into contact with an estate managed in a business-like way, he only reflects that ‘under the existing system of land tenure, an estate cannot be worked like the machinery of a factory.’ He did not, I believe, do much, if any, shooting in Surrey, but he was a sportsman nevertheless, from the way in which he described the kind of shot that ‘pleased me most’ at a pheasant going so fast that the impetus carried it dead many yards. Yet it is, perhaps, significant that the book ends with the fine passage already quoted—‘That watching so often stayed the shot that at last it grew to be a habit: the mere simple pleasure of seeing birds and animals, when they were quite unconscious that they were observed, being too great to be spoiled by the discharge’—where he attributes his pleasure in roaming with a gun not so much to the shooting as to the watching; to the moving about in the woods alone, walking ‘with his hands in his boots,’ innocently rivalling the beasts in silence and skill; to the ‘something which the ancients called divine’ that is still to be found and felt in the sunlight and the pure wind.

‘Round about a Great Estate’ was reprinted from the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1880. It is, I think, the pleasantest of all his books to handle, shorter than the rest, the page good and the type large—a book in almost its perfect physical condition. It has two ludicrous irrelevancies, yet I like it best of these four early books. The short

\* *The Amateur Poacher.*



preface marks the farthest intellectual advance which Jefferies had yet made. He has given many notes on the country life of the earlier half of the century, but, he says, he would not wish it to continue or return :

‘ My sympathies and hopes are with the light of the future, only I should like it to come from nature. The clock should be read by the sunshine, not the sun timed by the clock. The latter is indeed impossible, for though all the clocks in the world should declare the hour of dawn to be midnight, the sun will presently rise just the same.’\*

But this was written after the book itself, which is of the same calibre as the other three. It could hardly have been otherwise, for where he is not drawing upon the same early period of his own life, he is drawing upon the memories of much older people, of his father and grandfather, of the farmers round about, of old Mrs. Rawlings, perhaps of Miller Brind at Liddington. It is not a novel, but it contains more human character than all the earlier novels and more than ‘ The Amateur Poacher.’ Hilary Luckett is probably his father, with something added from other men, perhaps from Andrew Baden of Day House Farm, his wife’s father. The faint, adorable Cicely may be a compound or his ideal country maid. As in ‘ The Amateur Poacher,’ his characters are not meant to be completed, and they are drawn in his most genial mood, so that they are naturally idyllic. They are met by accident in their farms or fields ; they talk and stroll together ; and then the brooks and birds and fields insensibly steal upon the human figures. Aaron, with the old-fashioned wallet on his back, is John Brown the milker, or perhaps Abner Webb. Old Aaron is Job Brown, the man of the little Coate shop. The hedge-carpenter and cobbler who used the bacon for soling boots is Thomas Smith—or ‘ John Smith ’—who worked at Day House Farm. The flint-haulier was one Stephen Walker of Chisledon. Here is Mrs. Jefferies at

\* *Round about a Great Estate.*



her cheese-making ; here are mills and millers ; and Jefferies himself delighting in throwing trees ; ' The Sun ' at Coate ; the ' Hodson Ground ' ; and his favourite ballad of Dowsabell. To judge from a reference in ' Cuckoo Fields,' he had revisited Coate in 1879 at about the time when the farmhouse and lands were sold. But there is no trace of that in the gossip about Hilary :

' If you should be visiting Okebourne Chace, and any question should arise, whether of horses, dog, or gun, you are sure to be referred to Hilary. Hilary knows all about it : he is the authority thereabout on all matters concerning game. Is it proposed to plant fresh covers ? Hilary's opinion is asked. Is it proposed to thin out some of the older trees ? What does Hilary say ?

' It is a fact that people really believe no part of a partridge is ever taken away after being set before him. Neither bones nor sinews remain : so fond is he of the brown bird. Having eaten the breast, and the juicy leg and the delicate wing, he next proceeds to suck the bones ; for game to be thoroughly enjoyed should be eaten like a mince-pie, in the fingers. There is always one bone with a sweeter flavour than the rest, just at the joint or fracture : it varies in every bird, according to the chance of cooking, but, having discovered it, put it aside for further and more strict attention. Presently he begins to grind up the bones in his strong teeth, commencing with the smallest. His teeth are not now so powerful as when in younger days he used to lift a sack of wheat with them, or the full milking bucket up to the level of the copper in the dairy. Still, they gradually reduce the slender skeleton. The feat is not so difficult if the bird has been well hung. . . .

' As we sat in his house one evening, there grew upon our ears a peculiar sound, a humming deep bass, somewhat resembling the low notes of a piano with a pressure on the pedal. It increased and became louder, coming from the road which passed the house ; it was caused by a very large flock of sheep driven slowly. The individual

“ baa ” of each lamb was so mixed, as it were, with the bleat of its fellow that the swelling sound took a strange mysterious tone ; a voice that seemed to speak of trouble, and perplexity, and anxiety for rest. Hilary, as a farmer, must of course go out to see whose they were, and I went with him ; but before we reached the garden gate he turned back, remarking, “ It’s Johnson’s flock ; I know the tang of his tankards.” The flat-shaped bells hung on a sheep’s neck are called tankards ; and Hilary could distinguish one flock from another by the varying notes of their bells.’ \*

There is much masterly gossip, with a sensuous quality in the words and sound of it, beyond anything he had yet written. The delicious quiet of its best cannot be excelled. When the subject of the moment is baking bread in a brick oven, the writing is at one with that sweet toil itself :

‘ They still baked a batch of bread occasionally, but not all that was required. Cicely superintended the baking, passing the barm through a sieve with a wisp of clean hay in it. The hay takes off any sourness, and insures it being perfectly sweet. She knew when the oven was hot enough by the gauge-brick : this particular brick, as the heat increased, became spotted with white, and when it had turned quite white the oven was ready. The wood embers were raked out with the scraper, and the malkin, being wetted, cleaned out the ashes. “ Thee looks like a gurt malkin ” is a common term of reproach among the poor folk—meaning a bunch of rags on the end of a stick. We went out to look at the oven ; and then Mrs. Luckett made me taste her black-currant gin, which was very good. Presently we went into the orchard to look at the first apple-tree out in bloom. While there a magpie flew across the meadow, and as I watched it Mrs. Luckett advised me to turn my back and not to look too long in that direction. “ For,” said she, “ one magpie is good luck, but two mean sorrow ; and

\* *Round about a Great Estate.*

if you should see three—goodness!—something awful might happen.” \*

Or again :

‘ Just outside the palings of the courtyard at Luckett’s Place, in front of the dairy, was a line of damson and plum-trees standing in a narrow patch bordered by a miniature box-hedge. The thrushes were always searching about in this box, which was hardly high enough to hide them, for the snails which they found there. They broke the shells on the stone flags of the garden path adjacent, and were often so intently occupied in the box as to seem to fly up from under the very feet of anyone who passed.

‘ Under the damson-tree the first white snowdrops came, and the crocuses, whose yellow petals often appeared over the snow, and presently the daffodils and the beautiful narcissus. There were cowslips and primroses, too, which the boys last year had planted upside down, that they might come up variegated. The earliest violet was gathered there, for the corner was enclosed on three sides, and somehow the sunshine fell more genially in that untrimmed spot than in formal gardens where it is courted. Against the house a pear was trained, and opened its white bloom the first of all ; in its shelter the birds built their nests. The chaffinches called cheerfully on the plum-trees, and sang in the early morning. When the apples bloomed, the goldfinches visited the same trees at least once a day.

‘ A damask rose opened its single petals, the sweetest-scented of all the roses : there were a few strawberries under the wall of the house ; by-and-by the pears above enlarged, and the damsons were coated with bloom. On the tall plum-trees hung the large purplish-red plums : upon shaking the tree, one or two came down with a thud. The branches of the damsons depended so low, looking, as it were, right into the court, and pressing the fruit against your very face as you entered, that you could not choose

\* *Round about a Great Estate.*

but take some when it was ripe. A blue-painted barrel churn stood by the door ; young Aaron turned it in the morning, while the finches called in the plum-trees, but now and then not all the strength of his sturdy shoulders nor patient hours of turning could " fetch " the butter, for a witch had been busy.

' Sometimes, on entering the dairy in the familiar country way, you might find Cicely, now almost come to womanhood, at the cheese-tub. As she bent over it, her rounded arms, bare nearly to the shoulder, were laved in the white milk. It must have been from the dairy that Poppæa learned to bathe in milk, for Cicely's arms shone white and smooth, with the gleam of a perfect skin. But Mrs. Luckett would never let her touch the salt, which will ruin the hands. Cicely, however, who would do something, turned the cheeses in the cheese-room alone. Taking one corner of the clean cloth in her teeth, in a second, by some dexterous sleight of hand, the heavy cheese was over, though ponderous enough to puzzle many a man, especially as it had to come over gently, that the shape might not be injured.

' She did it without the least perceptible exertion. At the moment of the turn, when the weight must have been felt, there was no knot of muscle visible on her arm. That is the difference ; for

" When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,"

the muscles of the man's limb knot themselves and stand out in bold relief. The smooth contour of Cicely's arm never varied. Mrs. Luckett, talking about cheese as we watched Cicely one morning, said people's taste had much altered ; for she understood they were now fond of a foreign sort that was full of holes. The old saying was that bread should be full of holes, cheese should have none. Just then Hilary entered, and completed the triad by adding that ale should make you see double.

' So he called for the brown jug, and he and I had a glass. On my side of the jug stood a sportsman in



From a daguerreotype.

ELIZABETH JEFFERIES,  
the mother of Richard Jefferies.





breeches and gaiters, his gun presented, and ever in the act to fire : his dog pointed, and the birds were flying towards Hilary. Though rude in design, the scene was true to nature and the times : from the buttons on the coat to the long barrel of the gun, the details were accurate, and nothing improved to suit the artist's fancy. To me these old jugs and mugs and bowls have a deep and human interest, for you can seem to see and know the men who drank from them in the olden days.

' Now, a tall Worcester vase, with all its elegance and gilding, though it may be valued at £5,000, lacks that sympathy, and may please the eye, but does not touch the heart. For it has never shared in the jovial feast nor comforted the weary ; the soul of man has never communicated to it some of its own subtle essence. But this hollow bowl whispers back the genial songs that were shouted over it a hundred years ago. On the ancient Grecian pottery, too, the hunter with his spear chases the boar or urges his hounds after the flying deer ; the women are dancing, and you can almost hear the notes of the flute. These things were part of their daily life ; these are no imaginary pictures of imaginary and impossible scenes : they are simply scenes in which everyone took part. So I think that the old English jugs and mugs and bowls are true art, with something of the antique classical spirit in them, for truly you can read the hearts of the folk for whom they were made. . . . '\*

The blissful ease and sincerity of these things are too near perfection for questions to be asked about Jefferies' education in art. In his visit to Tibbald, the miller, when they talk about the millstones and ' the care, the skill, the forethought, and the sense of just proportion ' of the millwright, he shows again how he regrets that machinery, in destroying the handicraft, has taken away yet another means of culture from the countryman.

The genial mood of this period has brought it about that, although the book is crammed with odds and ends

\* *Round about a Great Estate.*

of local lore, it is as easy to read as a hedge of hazel and oak and thorn and maple and dogwood and brier is to be walked along ; and 'A Farmer of the Olden Times,' for example, a picture of Uncle Jonathan at the Idovers, about 1810, is a picture easy and mellow in treatment, fine in detail, which makes it absurd to speak with anything but respect of Jefferies' eye and feeling for humanity. When in 1887 he lay dying, and writing—dictating, I should say—his introduction to the 'Natural History of Selborne,' he regretted that Gilbert White had left the human life of his parish almost untouched. Against Jefferies no such charge can be brought, and I cannot think that White would have left us a more lively and various scene had he taken the time for painting it out of his long placid life. In these four books, from 'The Gamekeeper' to 'The Great Estate,' for almost the first time in English literature a pure countryman who is nothing but a countryman reveals his life and neighbourhood. No man could be neglected who had so much knowledge which it is impossible to acquire by effort and time alone ; his power of showing the joy in things, and of making them a means to joy, gives him still higher claims. Thus, at his best, he writes as if his hand had in it part of that spirit which builds the hills and lights the stars over them ; in his veins are the saps of oak and ash and elm, the blood of things that run and fly and creep. Like Constable, he might have said : 'I love every stile and stump and lane in the village ; as long as I am able to hold a brush I shall never cease to paint them.'

Though published in 1884, 'Red Deer' belongs to the same class as these four books. In June, 1882, Jefferies was on Exmoor, watching the red-deer, trout-fishing, and walking by Exe and Barle. 'Red Deer' and some of the essays in 'The Life of the Fields' and 'Field and Hedgerow' were among the results. He seems not to have gone farther to fulfil his youthful dream of Arthurian Cornwall. Jefferies himself says of the book that 'it is

in the same style as "The Gamekeeper." \* It is, he says, 'a minute account of the natural history of the wild deer of Exmoor and of the mode of hunting them. I went all over Exmoor a short while since on foot in order to see the deer for myself ; and in addition I had the advantages of getting full information from the huntsman himself and from others who have watched the deer for twenty years past. The chase of the wild stag is a bit out of the life of the fifteenth century brought down to our own times. Nothing has interested me so much, and I contemplate going down again. In addition, there are in the MS. a number of Somerset poaching tricks, which were explained to me by gamekeepers and by a land-owner there.' He points out that there are no competitors in the field ; and 'as Somerset and Devon are annually visited by some thousands of people for trout-fishing (I was trout-fishing there lately), hunting, and the scenery, I thought a book on the deer—which they all inquire about—and full of local colour would be certain of some sale, not only one year, but perhaps several seasons in succession.' It is, in fact, one of the most readable sporting treatises that exists, if treatise it may be called, in spite of the fact that no sportsman would go to it for information. It is of all Jefferies' books the most orderly, consistent, and complete, if we exclude the make-weight of two chapters at the end. Having set himself to write a book on an attractive but little-known subject, he became a reporting journalist again, and subdued himself to the subject to such purpose that he seems to be the docile gamekeeper's friend again—when, for example, he writes :

'The way to kill those birds [magpies] is to hang up a dead lamb, poisoned, in a tree ; they tear the flesh, and are destroyed by the poison it has absorbed. . . . Owls are very numerous in the covers. Wood-owls or brown-owls, as they are indifferently called, are considered by the keepers destructive to game, especially to young

\* In a letter to C. J. Longman, August 22, 1883.

rabbits. . . . They will take a leveret. . . . To draw an owl from his nest in a hollow tree is not a pleasant task, even with a glove on ; he will often manage to get his sharp claws into the wrist. The way is to seize his head and crush it, killing him instantly, for an owl's head is soft, and can be crushed easily. . . . Buzzards are sometimes shot, and are now worth something to sell to collectors.\*

For the time being he has evidently entered into the feelings of the game preserver and gamekeeper, and 'the joy of life' and even the facts about the wood-owls' diet have passed out of mind. Nevertheless, he attains to the opinion that 'too severe punishment' of poachers is responsible for their violence.

Jefferies has mastered his material, and amid all the technique of an ancient and exclusive sport is never dull. The landscape is suggested in its breadth and with just enough detail, and it makes a comprehensible setting to the whole. Only once does he pause in what was probably a rapidly written book to satisfy the exquisite curiosity of his eye, when he has to speak of 'the ruddy golden coat of the warrantable deer,' with the bright sunlight shining on it 'so that the colour seemed unsteady, or as if it was visibly emanating and flowing forth in undulations. . . . There is an unsteadiness of surface as if it came a little towards you, and was wavy.' The writing, very careless in one or two places, is suited to its purpose ; it never shines, but runs comfortably forward with narrative, discussion, explanation, and pictures such as this :

'There is no more beautiful creature than a stag in his pride of antler, his coat of ruddy gold, his grace of form and motion. He seems the natural owner of the ferny coombes, the oak woods, the broad slopes of heather. They belong to him, and he steps upon the sward in lordly mastership. The land is his, and the hills, the sweet streams, and rocky glens. He is infinitely more

\* *Red Deer.*

natural than the cattle and sheep that have strayed into his domains. For some inexplicable reason, although they too are in reality natural, when he is present they look as if they had been put there and were kept there by artificial means. They do not, as painters say, shade in with the colours and shape of the landscape. He is as natural as an oak, or a fern, or a rock itself. He is earth-born—autochthon—and holds possession by descent. Utterly scorning control, the walls and hedges are nothing to him—he roams where he chooses, as fancy leads, and gathers the food that pleases him. . . .’\*

For its subject, its adequate statement and description of matters even now little touched by books, and for its author, ‘Red Deer’ may long be remembered; but among his works it is something of a *tour de force*, and is almost the only one which might be well liked and yet not invite the reader to any of the others; and in spite of the advantage of unity which he gains from a well-defined subject, it hardly makes us regret that he did not oftener forsake the essay form, with all its encouragement of looseness and irrelevance.

\* *Red Deer.*



## CHAPTER X

### 'NATURE NEAR LONDON'

WHEN he had written 'The Gamekeeper' and its three companion books, Jefferies had all but exhausted his notes of Coate Farm and the surrounding country; he had made a mental retrogression in order to use them more vividly. When he writes about that county again it is nearly always as one who, having travelled to a distant city of the mind, can never return. His memories of Wiltshire are inexhaustible; but 'Wood Magic' and 'Bevis' are not memories as were the earlier books. The Surbiton country definitely appeared in 'Wild Life,' and no doubt his observations there helped him in the other books of that time; but it was when he had emptied his Wiltshire notebooks that he began to use chiefly those of Surbiton. Parts of 'Nature near London' were written in 1881; so, too, was 'The Coming of Summer,' and perhaps 'The Spring of the Year'; the material is clearly taken from 1877 and the following years. And not only is the material new, but the eye that sees and the mind that broods over it is changed. The old, simpler exuberance of 'The Poacher' is lost. Thoughts have troubled and checked it; his health is finally to give way in 1881; and the new surroundings are not a part of him, as were the old, and he seems to see them more as strange pictures—as pictures which his brooding and solitary mind more and more informs; the labourers and farmers and keepers who used to move about the Wiltshire fields have disappeared, and the landscape is



rather inhuman for a time, for in Surrey he knew nobody, though he saw ploughman and milker and harvester. But he had to write, and the demand for his short country papers having been established, he naturally kept to that desultory form. He had made the discovery that it was not necessary to go far into the country ‘ to find wild birds and animals in sufficient numbers to be pleasantly studied.’ The subject would appeal to a London editor and audience. The *Standard*, which had printed ‘ Hodge and His Masters,’ printed the papers collected under the title of ‘ Nature near London ’ in 1883.

In these papers he is no longer the sportsman, and not obviously the countryman. He is the man of sensitive eyes and ears, the artist in a narrow sense. He describes a place, or more often a series of places, along the paths and roads of a day’s walk at a particular season, with digressions, as memory or the need of comparison prompts him, to other seasons and places. There is no aim at exact unity and consistency of subject and treatment. He is always the walker, moving about and taking notes. It is doubtful if the most careful resident observer could follow him accurately in half the papers, which resemble the record of an actual walk, closed up so as to avoid barren stretches, and of whatever is seen and thought in the course of the walk. In ‘ Heathlands ’ the movements of a colony of ants fill half the space given to the fir and heath of Oxshott. This increasing attention to small things may have come the more rapidly for his inability to walk as far as he used to do. He was always a careful watcher of the skies, and the Thames Valley and the neighbourhood of London gave his eyes a fuller harvest than ever. He hardly found a sufficient outlet for his knowledge of the atmosphere, its colour and form. Ruskin surpasses him in his effects, and yet has not Jefferies’ exquisite eye ; with no other writer can there be any comparison for variety and delicacy in description of the coloured air. Some papers, such as ‘ Nutty Autumn,’ ‘ Wheatfields,’ and ‘ A Barn,’ have a unity of

feeling and colour, and though they are not meant to compete with painting, they have the effect of a rich, humanized landscape. But it is the seasonableness of the gossip which gives whatever unity they have to the papers that are without a definite subject, such as 'Trees about Town,' 'Kew Gardens,' 'A London Trout.' Thus the repetition which is noticeable in 'The Coming of Summer' and 'Round a London Copse' is inevitable. Most are for the Londoners at whose doors these things were being discovered. They inform; they prove the truth of his assertion that 'the quantity and variety of life in the hedges was really astonishing'; and to mainly urban minds they may long be pleasant—'The River,' 'Nutty Autumn,' and 'A Barn' most deservedly so—for they make a charming inventory even when, as in 'The Spring of the Year,' they are but notes and dates and place-names, such as Long Ditton Road, Red Lion Lane, Hogsmill Brook, Cockrow Hill, Southborough and Worcester Parks, Hook, Horton, and the footpath from Roxby Farm to Chessington. Now and then, even in these informing papers, Jefferies escapes to write of the strength and glory of the spring sun: 'Joy in life; joy in life. The ears listen and want more: the eyes are gratified with gazing, and desire yet further; the nostrils are filled with the sweet odours of flower and sap. The touch, too, has its pleasures, dallying with leaf and flower. Can you not almost grasp the odour-laden air and hold it in the hollow of the hand?' Or he remembers the greenfinches' love-making in the elms. Probably he took the advice which he gives in 'Footpaths,' 'Always get over a stile.'

Where he catalogues, it is with an eye more bent upon the finest detail of form and colour than before. In 'A Brook' he tells how he uses his sight: 'Even the deepest, darkest water (not, of course, muddy) yields after a while to the eye. Half close the eyelids, and while gazing into it let your intelligence rather wait upon the corners of the eye than on the glance you cast straight

forward. For some reason when thus gazing the edge of the eye becomes exceedingly sensitive, and you are conscious of slight motion or of a thickness—not a defined object, but a thickness which indicates an object—which is otherwise quite invisible.\* Some of his minute descriptions read like instructions to an artist, and they prove a busy eye and nothing more ; others, again, with an excellent curiosity and patient attempt to record visible things not noticed before, may call for the admiration of the humble, but can please few—as, for example, in a description like this of the waves of an eddy :

‘ Now, walking behind the waves that roll away from you, dark shadowy spots fluctuate to and fro in the trough of the water. Before a glance can define its shape, the shadow elongates itself from a spot to an oval, the oval melts into another oval, and reappears afar off. When, too, in flood-time, the hurrying current seems to respond more sensitively to the shape of the shallows and the banks beneath, there boils up from below a ceaseless succession of irregular circles, as if the water there expanded from a centre, marking the verge of its outflow with bubbles and raised lines upon the surface.’†

But in ‘ A Barn ’ this observation has fallen into its place, and has made a real picture, where there is no detail impeding the whole, nor any struggle with dead words, as in the piece just quoted. ‘ Wheat-fields,’ too, is beautiful in the exact detail and in the suffused spirit of the whole. ‘ Sweet summer,’ he says, ‘ is but just long enough for the happy loves of the larks.’ How tender he is now in speaking of the birds, even of the sparrows ! ‘ I like sparrows,’ he says, in ‘ The Spring of the Year,’‡ ‘ and am always glad to hear their chirp ; the house seems still and quiet after the nesting-time, when they leave us for the wheatfields, where they stay the rest of the summer. What happy

\* ‘ A Brook,’ *Nature near London*.

† ‘ The River,’ *ibid*.

‡ *Longman's Magazine*, June, 1894.

days they have among the ripening corn !' Actually, a farmer's son who thinks of the happiness of sparrows in the corn ! ' Nutty Autumn ' has some learned and delightful colour notes. Artists may treasure them ; they may teach others how to see ; but notes they remain, in spite of the conclusion :

' The autumn itself is nutty, brown, hard, frosty, and sweet. Nuts are hard, frosts are hard ; but the one is sweet, and the other braces the strong. Exercise often wearies in the spring, and in the summer heats is scarcely to be faced ; but in autumn, to those who are well, every step is bracing and hardens the frame, as the sap is hardening in the trees.\*

It was written in the autumn of 1881, and hints that he was not one of those who are well. To this class of notes belong the opening and other parts of ' The River,' the end of ' The Crows,' and the description of the London atmosphere floating out to the country before a north-east wind. He writes, in ' The River ':

' There is a slight but perceptible colour in the atmosphere of summer. It is not visible close at hand, nor always where the light falls strongest, and if looked at too long it sometimes fades away. But over gorse and heath, in the warm hollows of wheatfields, and round about the rising ground, there is something more than air alone. It is not mist, nor the hazy vapour of autumn, nor the blue tints that come over distant hills and woods.

' As there is bloom upon the peach and grape, so this is the bloom of summer. The air is ripe and rich, full of the emanations, the perfume, from corn and flower and leafy tree. In strictness the term will not, of course, be accurate, yet by what other word can this appearance in the atmosphere be described but as a bloom ? Upon a still and sunlit summer afternoon it may be seen over the osier-covered islets in the Thames immediately above Teddington Lock.†

\* ' Nutty Autumn,' *Nature near London*. † ' The River,' *ibid*.

Curiosity seems in places to outstrip his sense of beauty ; he ceases to be an artist, and is perhaps not yet a scientist. There is much curiosity in 'A Brook' and 'A London Trout.' But the trout which his fond eyes at length disentangled from the forms of water and weed in the Hogsmill brook, and his watching, justify the curiosity. He watched it for weeks, months, for four seasons, and took great precautions that no one should find out what he watched ; ' if anyone was following me, or appeared likely to peer over the parapet, I carelessly struck the top of the wall with my stick in such a manner that it should project, an action sufficient to send the fish under the arch ' ; and the river was colder, darker, and less pleasant when it had gone. He has begun to think about animals not merely as objects of study, or as curious objects stuck prettily about the world. He complains of ' staring eyes, heads continually turned from side to side, starting at everything, sometimes bare places on the shoulders,' when droves of cattle go by. In ' Trees about Town ' he describes a platform, inaccessible to cats, for the feeding of birds in winter. He detests the bird-catchers who haunt suburban lanes. ' Pity it is,' he adds, ' that anyone can be found to purchase the product of their brutality.' Some time later, in ' The Open Air,' he expresses the opinion that all wild-life should be encouraged and protected on the Thames, ' morally the property of the greatest city in the world.' And yet it is twaddle, he thinks, to fine a boy for taking a bird's egg. It is hard, indeed, to say on what principle he thinks protection wise. It is more likely that, instead of a principle, he has three prejudices—love of individual freedom, love of untouched Nature, and hatred of ' preservation by beadle ' ; and they are very strong, for though he is a trout-fisher, he says in one place that he would be glad to see back again the creatures which preservation has destroyed.



## CHAPTER XI

### 'WOOD MAGIC' AND 'BEVIS'

TWICE again before he left Surbiton Jefferies returned to his native place in books : ' Wood Magic ' appeared in 1881, ' Bevis ' in 1882. In ' Wood Magic ' the little boy Bevis talks with the birds, the animals, and the butterflies, with the wind also ; and they answer him, often in a manner implying that they have many experiences, interests, and ideas in common with him. Bevis, petulant, adventurous, impatient, and yet dreamy, in the fields about Coate Farm, is a very real child ; and to some it is a shock to pass from him to the kingdoms of the animals, with their human ways, their councils, their scandals, their plots, their wars and loves. Perhaps it is a little surprising that Jefferies should apparently have made so little effort to present the lively and fascinating inhumanity of the animals, and some hint of the difference between their motives and their gods and ours. It is less surprising when we remember that he is writing for children and as a child. He does not wantonly condescend to the child, but returns naturally to the values which animals had in the mingled real and fantastic of his own childhood. It may be due as much to education as to nature, but it is true that the child is heartily anthropomorphic. I have heard a child say, like Lucretius before him, that the sun in the desert spaces of the sky feeds upon the blue. The beasts appear to be changelings, emancipated, to their gain as well as loss, from some human necessities. It is in their four-leggedness, or their wingedness, or their habit of staying out all day and all night, that they seem



chiefly to differ from children. Wings, feathers, fur, tails, must often seem as mere disguises; the lack of English speech a mere lack, as it were an accident. In 'Wood Magic' Jefferies, or Bevis, makes good this deficiency. If he is very far from saying the truest things about this immeasurable commonwealth of various life in which we have yet to learn our offices, he does give animal lives a human reality. He has fallen, in fact, into just such an ambuscade as awaits the allegorist, and it may be said of his birds and beasts, as a rule, what was said by Coleridge of some of the characters in 'Pilgrim's Progress'—that they are 'real persons with nicknames.' More could not be expected if the treatment of the dogs at Coate Farm was like that of Pan, the spaniel, in 'Wood Magic'; it is not exceptionally brutal, but it is callous and off-hand.

To all who can return to the attitude of the folk-story towards animals, regarding them as curious, often clever, sometimes malicious, diminutive human beings, the book is full of delight. The names of the birds—Kapchack, the magpie; Tchink, the chaffinch; Choo Hoo, the wood-pigeon; Cloctaw, the jackdaw; Te-te, the tomtit—are charming, and it was a stroke of genius to make the starlings the royal couriers. Prettily, too, are the characteristic notes of the birds introduced into their speeches:

"I too-whoo should like to know if Tchack-tchack is coming," said the wood-pigeon. . . .

"I think, think, the owl is very stupid not to begin," said the chaffinch.\*

Nor is the book really misleading. It does not, at least, underestimate the animal's intelligence and interest in life. If it humanizes, it also throws many a flash upon Nature's independence of humanity; and it has the great merit that for the time being a large tract of country, hill and wood and field and water, is the property of magpies, jays, wood-pigeons, hawks, rooks, and missel-thrushes, of weasel, squirrel, fox, and rat, instead of

\* *Wood Magic*.

squires and tradesmen ; and over all this land, in defiance of laws of trespass, they fly and run and creep, careless of men, though admitting ' dear little Sir Bevis ' to the council because he has power over fire and has a cannon. That is a generous conception, with many delightful results. And if the birds are usually human beings with beaks and wings, one of the grasshoppers at least is pretty clearly Jefferies himself, answering Bevis, who has asked why all the birds go down to bathe on Midsummer Day :

" " Why ? " repeated the grasshopper ; " I never heard anybody say anything about that before. There is always a great deal of talking going on, for the trees have nothing else to do but to gossip with each other ; but they never ask why. . . . "

" " Why don't you hop straight ? " said Bevis presently. . . .

" " How very stupid you are ! " said the grasshopper. " If you go straight, of course you can only see just what is under your feet ; but if you go first this way and then that, then you see everything. You are nearly as silly as the ants, who never see anything beautiful all their lives. Be sure you have nothing to do with the ants, Bevis ; they are a mean, wretched, miserly set, quite contemptible and beneath notice. Now, I go everywhere all round the field, and spend my time searching for lovely things ; sometimes I find flowers, and sometimes the butterflies come down into the grass and tell me the news ; and I am so fond of the sunshine, I sing to it all day long. Tell me, now, is there anything so beautiful as the sunshine and the blue sky, and the green grass, and the velvet and blue and spotted butterflies, and the trees which cast such a pleasant shadow and talk so sweetly, and the brook which is always running ? I should like to listen to it for a thousand years. " ' ' \*

The Reed is even more like Jefferies :

' There is no why at all. We have been listening to the

\* *Wood Magic.*

brook, me and my family, for ever so many thousands of years, and though the brook has been talking and singing all that time, I never heard him ask why about anything. And the great oak, where you went to sleep, has been there, goodness me, nobody can tell how long, and every one of his leaves (he has had millions of them) have all been talking, but not one of them ever asked why ; nor does the sun, nor the stars, which I see every night shining in the clear water down there, so that I am quite sure there is no why at all.’\*

This impression of the great age, the happiness, the inhumanity of Nature (or the unnaturalness of man), is sometimes made with the force of a proverb or a folk-tale. The irony, too, is often admirable, and I seem to see in Kapchack, the omnipotent magpie, the crooked shadow of a very august personage :

“ “ It is,” says the Toad, “ a very dangerous thing to talk about Kapchack, and everybody is most terribly afraid of him ; he is so full of malice.”

“ “ Why ever do they let him be King ?” said Bevis. “ I would not, if I were them. Why ever do they put up with him, and his cruelty and greediness ? I will tell the thrush and the starling not to endure him any longer.”

“ “ Pooh ! pooh !” said the Toad. “ It is all very well for you to say so, but you must excuse me for saying, my dear Sir Bevis, that you really know very little about it. The thrush and the starling would not understand what you meant. The thrush’s father always did as Kapchack told him, and sang his praises, as I told you, and so did his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, and all his friends and relations, these years and years past. So that now the thrushes have no idea of there being no Kapchack. . . .” †

And yet this Kapchack, who was supposed to be of uncounted years, was really only a distant descendant of the original Kapchack ; for each King tore out an eye from

\* *Wood Magic*.

† *Ibid*.

his eldest son to make him like himself, and thus ensure his succession—the King never dies—among his unsuspecting subjects.

In several places Jefferies' strong feeling about Fate is expressed with a quaint intensity, as when the Squirrel tells Bevis :

“ “ Elms indeed are very treacherous, and I recommend you to have nothing to do with them, dear. . . . He can wait till you go under him, and then drop that big bough on you. He has had that bough waiting to drop on somebody for quite ten years. . . . Now, the reason the elms are so dangerous is because they will wait so long till somebody passes. Trees can do a great deal, I can tell you ; why, I have known a tree, when it could not drop a bough, fall down altogether when there was not a breath of wind, nor any lightning, just to kill a cow or a sheep, out of sheer bad temper.” \* ”

The flint lies in wait to upset a cart ; the water lies in wait, ‘ and if they stop swimming a minute they will be drowned ’ ; and ‘ if you climb up a tree, be sure and remember to hold tight, and not forget, for the earth will not forget, but will pull you down to it thump, and hurt you very much.’ † Here, too, is that denial of time, born of his mystic trances, which was later to give his mind such a range backward and forward in eternity :

“ “ My dear,” said the brook, “ that which has gone by, whether it happened a second since, or a thousand years since, is just the same ; there is no real division betwixt you and the past. You people who live now have made up all sorts of stupid, very stupid, stories, dear ; I hope you will not believe them ; they tell you about time and all that. Now there is no such thing as time, Bevis, my love ; there never was any time, and there never will be ; the sun laughs at it, even when he marks it on the sundial. Yesterday was just a second ago, and so was ten thousand years since, and there is nothing between you

\* *Wood Magic.*

† *Ibid.*

and then ; there is no wall between you and then—nothing at all, dear——” And the brook sang so low and thoughtfully that Bevis could not catch what he said, but the tune was so sweet, and soft, and sad that it made him keep quite still. While he was listening the kingfisher came back and perched on the hatch, and Bevis saw his ruddy neck and his blue wings.

“ “ There is nothing between you and then,” the brook began again, “ nothing at all, dear ; only some stories which are not true ; if you will not believe me, look at the sun ; but you cannot look at the sun, darling, it shines so bright. It shines just the same, as bright and beautiful ; and the wind blows as sweet as ever, and I sparkle and sing just the same, and you may drink me if you like ; and the grass is just as green ; and the stars shine at night. Oh, yes, Bevis dear, *we* are all here just the same, my love, and all things are as bright and beautiful as ten thousand times ten thousand years ago, which is no longer since than a second.

“ “ But your own people have gone away from us—that is their own fault. I cannot think why they should do so ; they have gone away from us, and they are no longer happy. Bevis, they cannot understand our songs—they sing stupid songs they have made up themselves, and which they did not learn of us, and then, because they are not happy, they say : ‘ The world is growing old.’ But it is not true, Bevis, the world is not old ; it is as young as ever it was. Fling me a leaf—and now another. Do not you forget me, Bevis ; come and see me now and then, and throw twigs to me and splash me.” ’ \*

The quiet tune of that singing brook runs through all of Jefferies’ books. To taste of its flashing water is a sacrament in ‘ The Story of My Heart ’ ; the recollection of it saddens him in his last writing because he fears it is not heard of men ; not to hear it amidst the wild questioning, the sad despairs, the sadder hopes, of the autobiography is to have missed the joyous heart of his work.

\* *Wood Magic.*



The last chapter, where Sir Bevis talks with the wind, brings back the same thought in an even more prophetic way. The wind tells him of the man in the tumulus on the hill :

“ He died about a minute ago, dear, just before you came up the hill. If you were to ask the people who live in the houses, where they will not let me in (they carefully shut out the sun too), they would tell you he died thousands of years ago ; but they are foolish, very foolish. It was hardly so long ago as yesterday. Did not the brook tell you all about that ?

“ Now this man, and all his people, used to love me and drink me as much as ever they could all day long and a great part of the night, and when they died they still wanted to be with me, and so they were all buried on the tops of the hills, and you will find these curious little mounds everywhere on the ridges, dear, where I blow along. There I come to them still, and sing through the long dry grass, and rush over the turf, and I bring the scent of the clover from the plain, and the bees come humming along upon me. The sun comes, too, and the rain. But I am here most ; the sun only shines by day, and the rain only comes now and then.

“ But I am always here, day and night, winter and summer. Drink me as much as you will, you cannot drink me away ; there is always just as much of me left. As I told you, the people who were buried in those little mounds used to drink me, and oh ! how they raced along the turf, dear ; there is nobody can run so fast now ; and they leaped and danced, and sang and shouted. I loved them as I love you, my darling ; there, sit down and rest on the thyme, dear, and I will stroke your hair and sing to you. . . .

“ There never was a yesterday,” whispered the wind presently, “ and there never will be to-morrow. It is all one long to-day. When the man in the hill was you were too, and he still is now you are here ; but of these things you will know when you are older, that is, if you will only



continue to drink me. Come, dear, let us race again.” So the two went on and came to a hawthorn-bush, and Bevis, full of mischief always, tried to slip away from the wind round the bush, but the wind laughed and caught him.

‘ A little farther and they came to the fosse of the old camp. Bevis went down into the trench, and he and the wind raced round along it as fast as ever they could go, till presently he ran up out of it on the hill, and there was the waggon underneath him, with the load well piled up now. There was the plain, yellow with stubble ; the hills beyond it and the blue valley just the same as he had left it.

‘ As Bevis stood and looked down, the wind caressed him, and said : “ Good-bye, darling, I am going yonder, straight across to the blue valley and the blue sky, where they meet ; but I shall be back again when you come next time. Now remember, my dear, to drink me—come up here and drink me.”

“ Shall you be here ?” said Bevis. “ Are you quite sure you will be here ?”

“ Yes,” said the wind, “ I shall be quite certain to be here ; I promise you, love, I will never go quite away. Promise me faithfully, too, that you will come up and drink me, and shout and race and be happy.”

“ I promise,” said Bevis, beginning to go down the hill ; “ good-bye, jolly old Wind.”

“ Good-bye, dearest,” whispered the wind, as he went across out towards the valley. As Bevis went down the hill, a blue harebell, who had been singing farewell to summer all the morning, called to him and asked him to gather her and carry her home, as she would rather go with him than stay now autumn was near.

‘ Bevis gathered the harebell, and ran with the flower in his hand down the hill, and as he ran the wild thyme kissed his feet, and said : “ Come again, Bevis, come again.” At the bottom of the hill the waggon was loaded now ; so they lifted him up, and he rode home on the broad back of the leader.’\*

\* *Wood Magic.*

It will be said that Jefferies is prolix, and so he is, and most so in his best work, for prolixity is part of the result of the divine impetus which took him to his highest levels. Nor is it wholly a fault, since to uproot it would be to take away much good that is inseparable from it. It is a fault which he shares with three other countrymen, all poets, Drayton, and Wither, and William Browne of Tavistock; and he shares, too, their hearty sweetness.

In 'Bevis: The Story of a Boy' the child has grown to be twelve or fourteen years old. There is little or none of the fancy in it which fills 'Wood Magic'; there is no dwelling with pathos or humour or condescension on boyhood, but a reconstruction of great tracts of it; the man who grew out of Bevis is revealed only in half a dozen passages, where he describes at length some state of mind from which the child speedily emerged, or where an adult, artistic attitude has lured him into the picture of old 'Jumps,' and into some landscape touches a little out of keeping with the blitheness of the main part. Though his business is with the adventures of the boys, Bevis and Mark, he cannot help showing that his return to the period of childhood is not due simply to the fact that he has two children of his own. He has begun to weigh the significance of early impressions, to connect them with later ones. Except that he has given Coate Farm and its owner an advance to greater size and riches, the surroundings are those of Jefferies' own boyhood. The boy Mark is his younger brother, Harry Jefferies, a robust and daring boy, who afterwards went to America and stayed there. Bevis, masterful, petulant, impatient, and dreamy, is Jefferies in the main.

In the first chapter Bevis is making a raft out of a packing-case; having made it, he and Mark take turns in poling it about the stream; then, tiring of it, they discover the New Sea:

"Let's go round the Longpond," said Bevis; "we have never been quite round it."

" " So we will," said Mark. " But we shall not be back to dinner."

" " As if travellers ever thought of dinner ! Of course, we shall take our provisions with us."

" " Let's go and get our spears," said Mark.

" " Let's take Pan," said Bevis.

" " Where is your old compass ?" said Mark.

" " Oh, I know—and I must make a map ; wait a minute. We ought to have a medicine chest ; the savages will worry us for physic ; and very likely we shall have dreadful fevers."

" " So we shall, of course ; but perhaps there are wonderful plants to cure us, and we know them, and the savages don't—there's sorrel."

" " Of course, and we can nibble some hawthorn leaf."

" " Or a stalk of wheat."

" " Or some watercress."

" " Or some nuts."

" " No, certainly not ; they're not ripe," said Bevis, " and unripe fruit is very dangerous in tropical countries."

" " We ought to keep a diary," said Mark. " When we go to sleep, who shall watch first, you or I ?"

" " We'll light a fire," said Bevis. " That will frighten the lions ; they will glare at us, but they can't stand fire. You hit them on the head with a burning stick."

' So they went in, and loaded their pockets with huge double slices of bread-and-butter done up in paper, apples, and the leg of a roast duck from the pantry. . . . '\*

And in or on Coate Reservoir—or the ' Longpond,' or ' New Sea '—and on ' The Plain,' a great meadow of Day House Farm that slopes down to its shores, they are to be found all through the book. They learn to swim in it, they fish in it, and ride on catamarans, and after fitting sails to an old blue boat, with a pool of bilge-water, dead insects, and willow-leaves at the bottom, they are free of many islands and creeks. They organize a battle of Pharsalia with a crowd of other boys on ' The Plain.' They discover the

unknown island of New Formosa, make a gun and provision their island hut, and there maroon themselves. There is nothing incredible or on a fantastic scale in the whole book, and if once the author's enjoyment had flagged, the narrative must have gone down in the deeps of dulness. No talk could be more real than the talk of these boys; the hurry, confidence, exuberance are to the life, with no graces, no heroism, added. The description of their games, their quarrels, their plots, their fishing, swimming, sailing, skating, shooting, is equally real, the observation so hearty and genuine that there is no dull place. They want to cut down a willow, and have wearied of the axe:

" "I know," said Mark, "we must make a fire, and burn the tree. We are savages, you know, and that is how they do it."

" "How silly you are!" said Bevis. "We are *not* savages, and I shall not play at that. We have just discovered this river, and we are going down it on our raft; and if we do not reach some place to-night, and build a fort, very likely the savages will shoot us. I believe I heard one shouting just now—there was something rustled, I am sure, in the forest." '\*

Bevis and Mark have gone to bed.

' Suddenly Bevis started up on his arm.

" "Let's have a war," he said.

" "That would be first-rate," said Mark; "and have a great battle!"

" "An awful battle," said Bevis; "the biggest and most awful ever known."

" "Like Waterloo?"

" "Pooh!"

" "Agincourt?"

" "Pooh!"

" "Mal—Mal," said Mark, trying to think of Malplaquet.

" "Oh, more than anything!" said Bevis. "Somebody will have to write a history about it."

\* *Bevis: The Story of a Boy.*

“ Shall we wear armour ? ”

“ That would be bow-and-arrow time. Bows and arrows don’t make any banging.”

“ No more they do. It wants lots of banging and smoke, else it’s nothing.”

“ No ; only chopping and sticking.”

“ And smashing and yelling.”

“ No, and that’s nothing.”

“ Only if we have rifles,” said Mark thoughtfully, “ you see, people don’t see one another ; they are so far off ; and nobody stands on a bridge and keeps back all the enemy all by himself.”

“ And nobody has a triumph afterwards with elephants and chariots, and paints his face vermillion.”

“ Let’s have bow-and-arrow time,” said Mark ; “ it’s much nicer ; and you sell the prisoners for slaves and get heaps of money, and do just as you like, and plough up the cities that don’t please you.”

“ Much nicer,” said Bevis. “ You very often kill all the lot, and there’s nothing silly. I shall be King Richard and have a battle-axe—no, let’s be the Normans ! ”

“ Wouldn’t King Arthur do ? ”

“ No ; he was killed ; that would be stupid. I’ve a great mind to be Charlemagne.”

“ Then I shall be Roland.”

“ No ; you must be a traitor.”

“ But I want to fight on your side,” said Mark.

“ How many are there we can get to make up the war ? ”

“ They consulted, and soon reckoned up fourteen or fifteen.

“ It will be jolly awful,” said Mark. “ There will be heaps of slain.”

“ Let’s have Troy,” said Bevis.

“ That’s too slow,” said Mark. “ It lasted ten years.”

“ Alexander the Great—let’s see, whom did he fight ? ”



“ I don’t know ; people nobody ever heard of—nobody particular—Indians and Persians, and all that sort.”

“ I know,” said Bevis ; “ of course ! I know. Of course, I shall be Julius Cæsar !”

“ And I shall be Mark Antony.”

“ And we will fight Pompey.”

“ But who shall be Pompey ?” said Mark.

“ Pooh ! there’s Bill, and Wat, and Ted ; anybody will do for Pompey.” \*

The boys ‘ bathed in air and sunbeam, and gathered years of health like flowers from the field.’ Enterprise and independence, high spirits, love of the open air, are to be felt, if not learnt, in every chapter of the book. As a boy’s book—I speak under correction from boys—it has no fault, except, perhaps, that the exactness and abundance of detail is disproportionate in a work that has, alas ! to end. It is too dramatic for an epic, and its movement is confused, not to speak of its being shamefully interrupted by the description of an anemone-leaf.

It is full of evidence of Jefferies not only as a boy, but as a man. It marks an advance from the genial, easy treatment of the Lucketts in ‘ Round about a Great Estate ’ towards the minuteness of ‘ Amaryllis.’ The landscape is finer than in any of his earlier books — for example, the sunrise in chapter xlviii., where he says : ‘ I do not know how any can slumber with this over them. . . . Such moments are beyond the chronograph and any measure of wheels ; the passing of one cog may be equal to a century, for the mind has no time. . . . What an incredible marvel it is that there are human creatures that slumber threescore and ten years, and look down at the clods, and then say : “ We are old ; we have lived seventy years.” Seventy years ! The passing of one cog is longer ; seven hundred times seventy years would not equal the click of the tiniest cog while the mind was living its own life. Sleep and clods, with the glory of the earth,

\* *Bevis : The Story of a Boy.*



and the sun, and the sea, and the endless ether around us ! Incredible marvel this sleep and clods and talk of years. . . .'\*

And I cannot help quoting this little piece :

'The summer shadow lingered on the dial, the sun slowed his pace, pausing on his way, in the rich light the fruits filled. The earth had listened to the chorus of the birds, and as they ceased, gave them their meed of berry, seed, and grain. There was no labour for them ; their granaries were full. Ethereal gold floated about the hills, filling their hollows to the brim with haze. Like a grape the air was ripe and luscious, and to breathe it was a drowsy joy. For Circe had smoothed her garment and slumbered, and the very sun moved slow. . . .

'The hazel bushes seemed quite vacant ; only one bird passed while they were there, and that was a robin, come to see what they were doing, and if there was anything for him. In the butchery of the Wars of the Roses, that such flowers should be stained with such memories ! It is certain that the murderers watched the robin perched hard by. He listened to the voice of fair Rosamond ; he was at the tryst when Amy Robsart met her lover. Nothing happens in the fields and woods without a robin.'†

Then, again, how fine the description of the swallows' flight : 'With a camel's-hair tip the swallow sweeps the sky. . . .' And the portrait of 'Jumps' : 'His years pressed heavy on him—very heavy, like a huge bundle of sticks ; he was lost under his age. . . .' That exquisite physical eye does not lead him astray ; it goes straight to its mark like an arrow, but an arrow fledged with feathers from no earthly wing ; and therefore the spiritual effect lives on after the visual effect is dimmed or lost.

In a little while he will be ready for 'The Story of My Heart.' He has already tried to begin it.

\* *Bevis: The Story of a Boy.*

† *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER XII

### ILLNESS—REMOVAL TO BRIGHTON—‘THE BREEZE ON BEACHY HEAD’

IN December, 1881, Jefferies fell ill of fistula, perhaps tubercular in origin, and during the next twelve months four times suffered the painful operation which is used to cure this disease; ‘the pain,’ he wrote, ‘was awful—like lightning through the brain’\*; but he was not prostrate or unable to work for the whole of this time, since in the middle of it he was on Exmoor. The wounds were not all healed until January, 1883. Within a month he began to feel a gnawing internal pain; it was, he said, like the gnawing of a rat at a beam, or the burning of corrosive sublimate. He feared to travel by train lest he should throw himself out. In March, 1884, he still did not regard the illness as serious. In April, 1885, he broke down. The pain was found to be due to ulceration, perhaps also tubercular, of the small intestine. His strength declined; the wasting of his body was extreme. He was starved and half delirious, and months of the winter had been spent indoors. In June he could only walk two hundred yards. In August it tore him to pieces, he said, to walk a short distance. Suddenly, in September, 1885, he went down as if shot: his spine ‘seemed to suddenly snap’†; he could not sit or lie so as to use a pen without distress; for seven months he was helpless, and in December was so weak that he could not dress himself. South Africa and Algiers had been suggested to him for

\* To Mr. C. P. Scott.

† *Ibid.*

a winter rest. The Royal Literary Fund might have borne the expense, since he was now too poor; but he refused such help, because he believed that the fund was maintained by dukes and marquises, instead of authors and journalists and publishers. He hated it for himself as he hated the workhouse for the agricultural poor. 'The idea of literature being patronized in these days is too utterly nauseous.'\* Perhaps, he said, he might think differently were he a town-born man. He admitted that only a stimulus like that of travel or sea-air or Schwalbach could check the sinking. He had to be content with the air of high-perched Crowborough, in Sussex. From there, in September, 1885, he wrote: 'I cannot do anything. Whatever I wish to do, it seems as if a voice said, "No, you must not do it." Feebleness forbids. I think I would like a good walk. "No." I think I would like to write. "No." I think I would like to rest. "No." Always "No" to everything. Even writing this letter has made the spine ache almost past endurance. I cannot convey to you how miserable it is to be impotent—to feel yourself full of ideas and work and to be unable to effect it. It is absolutely maddening. Still, the autumn comes on, and there is no staying it.' A visit to the sea at Bexhill brought him some ease, but he had an attack of vomiting blood soon afterwards. In September, 1886, he described himself as having been a complete invalid for some years. In October, he said that for five years he had not slept properly. A fund was now privately raised, and in December, 1886, he was at Goring, near Worthing. He studied medical books, especially on tuberculosis, and wrote an account of his own illness. His diseases, his 'distressing neuralgia and other nerve sufferings,' were caused at first, he suspected, by 'too ceaseless work.' 'There are,' he says, 'few—very few, perhaps none *living*—who have come through such a series of diseases.'† He was an intractable patient—prejudiced against the diet, for example, that was imposed. He was now a

\* To Mr. C. P. Scott.

† *Ibid.*

skeleton. He had little money but what was given to him. Confined indoors, he had nothing to write. He could not express ideas which did not come to him boldly. But the winter of 1886-87 passed more easily. In January he dictated a little. In February, 1887, he was looking forward to the warm days by the sea. Then, before the end of March, he had a hæmorrhage, and for a time could not even dictate. On August 14, 1887, he died of exhaustion and chronic fibroid phthisis, a modified form, in which the tissue resists the bacilli by a fibrous hardening of the lungs. 'He was,' said one doctor, 'a very marked case of hysteria in man'; another, who knew his writings, says that his portrait 'indicates the scrofulous diathesis, with its singularly impressionable temperament, its rapturous enjoyment of a delight, and its intense susceptibility to a pang.' In some way, not yet to be explained, the mortal pining of his body was related to the intense mental vivacity of his last years. 'Some of my best work,' he writes, 'was done in this intense agony.'\* His sense of colour became more acute. He tells us that in the long, hot summer days of 1884 he took his folding-stool out to a cabbage-field near Eltham to see the poppies, because 'every spot of colour is a sort of food.' He never really ceased work, and it was after the beginning of his chain of diseases in 1881 that he took the walks by which he knew, as he says in one letter, the whole of the Sussex Downs. Many of his essays in 'Field and Hedgerow' were written or dictated to his wife during the worst of his illness. 'Amaryllis at the Fair' was also written then. He made many plans—in May, 1885, for example (when writing a short note 'made his pulse beat as if he had been using' a sledgehammer †), offering a novel of which nothing is known, called 'A Bit of Human Nature'; in May, 1886 (when 'anyone walking across the room heavily hurt him, the jar shaking the injured intestine'), considering the proposal that he should write a year-book or diary of Nature. In his last year he undertook to write an intro-

\* To Mr. C. P. Scott.

† *Ibid.*

duction to the 'Camelot' edition of Gilbert White's 'Selborne,' and finished it only a few months before his death. Both parents and his sister and two brothers survived him. His father lived to be eighty years old, his mother almost as old; the rest are still alive.

Jefferies' illness, by confining his physical activity and putting a keener and more perilous edge upon his sensitiveness, threw him back still more upon himself. London had probably done a little of the same work before. Leaving the familiar Wiltshire country, he had to forsake many habits of mind and body, and to descend into himself more and more. After the sundering of those old associations and the contact with London came the impulse which produced the 'Amateur Poacher' and its companion books. After the confinement, the misery, the self-examination of his illness in 1881-83 came the long series of sensuous and impassioned contemplative essays, and 'The Story of My Heart,' 'The Dewy Morn,' 'After London,' and 'Amaryllis at the Fair.'

In 1882 he left Surbiton for the sea-air of West Brighton, where he was living, at 'Savernake,' Lorna Road, in December, and probably before that. The last two chapters of 'Nature near London' were composed among these new surroundings. He was now once again within reach of perfectly unspoilt country, above all, of the sea and his natal air of the Downs. On the hills above Falmer, Plumpton, and Fulking the grass was heaped with tumuli; the camps on these hills would recall those of Liddington and Barbury; the beauty of Mount Caburn, of Ditchling, Firle, Wolstanbury, and Chanctonbury was the same in kind as that of Hackpen, Whitehorse Hill, Wanborough Downs, Martinsell, and Tan Hill; below them, on the north, lay the Weald, not unlike the low, fat, dairy country of North Wiltshire, and on the south the sea, of which he could only dream at Liddington. He had known Sussex and the South Downs before in childish and later visits to Eastbourne, Hastings, and Lewes; and it was at



Pevensey, in 1880, that he made the seminal notes for 'The Story of My Heart.'

As he drew near the Downs in the train he could read no more. He forgot the dust of London, that 'fills the eyes, and blurs the vision' and 'chokes the spirit.' 'There is,' he wrote, 'always hope in the hills'; 'hope dwells there, somewhere mayhap in the breeze, in the sward, or the pale cups of the harebells.' He was at home again on the Downs, on the ancient hill and its earthwork 'alone with the wind.' The sea-air, the sight of the waters, the wind, the holiday voices and dresses of Brighton in sunlight, were champagne to him. In 'Sea, Sky, and Down' he saw the sea 'reflected in the plate-glass windows of the street, . . . covering over the golden bracelets and jewellery with a moving picture of the silvery waves.' He used to walk up to the station to see the happy, beautiful, jolly people arriving, and the cabs 'overgrown with luggage like huge barnacles,' and he 'left feeling better.' He liked the dry bright air, in which the liveliest colours were inlaid; 'no tint is too bright—scarlet, cardinal, anything the imagination fancies'; the 'pleasant lines of people chatting, the human sunshine of laughter'; the fishermen; the women riding; the opulence of it all; the old houses. 'This,' he says, 'is the land of health.' Sea, the air of the hills, and sunshine are 'medicines that by degrees strengthen not only the body, but the unquiet mind.' And the first papers written in Sussex, those included in 'Nature near London,' reflect a larger enjoyment than any of those about Surrey. In 'The South Down Shepherd' he might have been on his own Downs again. He is happy to see the ancient shepherd and talk of the crooks—'each village-made crook had an individuality'—of the hares and foxes and sheep-dog; to see the oxen ploughing with an ancient plough of a form slowly wrought out and as delicate as a plant—in these curved lines and smoothness, in this perfect adaptability of means to end, there is the spirit of art showing itself, not with colour or crayon, but working

in tangible material substance.' The same thoughts came to him as he looked at the old pottery in the Brighton Museum. 'The Breeze on Beachy Head' has something of the joy of 'The Poacher,' and also a deeper one and a humanity more wide :

'The waves coming round the promontory before the west wind still give the idea of a flowing stream, as they did in Homer's days. Here, beneath the cliff, standing where beach and sand meet, it is still ; the wind passes six hundred feet overhead. But yonder, every larger wave rolling before the breeze breaks over the rocks ; a white line of spray rushes along them, gleaming in the sunshine ; for a moment the dark rock-wall disappears, till the spray sinks.

'The sea seems higher than the spot where I stand, its surface on a higher level—raised like a green mound—as if it would burst in and occupy the space up to the foot of the cliff in a moment. It will not do so, I know ; but there is an infinite possibility about the sea ; it may do what it is not recorded to have done. It is not to be ordered ; it may overleap the bounds human observation has fixed for it. It has a potency unfathomable. There is still something in it not quite grasped and understood—something still to be discovered—a mystery.

'So the white spray rushes along the low broken wall of rocks, the sun gleams on the flying fragments of the wave, again it sinks, and the rhythmic motion holds the mind, as an invisible force holds back the tide. A faith of expectancy, a sense that something may drift up from the unknown, a large belief in the unseen resources of the endless space out yonder, soothes the mind with dreamy hope.

'The little rules and little experiences, all the petty ways of narrow life, are shut off behind by the ponderous and impassable cliff ; as if we had dwelt in the dim light of a cave, but coming out at last to look at the sun, a great stone had fallen and closed the entrance, so that there was no return to the shadow. The impassable precipice shuts

off our former selves of yesterday, forcing us to look out over the sea only, or up to the deeper heaven.

‘ These breadths draw out the soul ; we feel that we have wider thoughts than we know ; the soul has been living, as it were, in a nutshell, all unaware of its own power, and now suddenly finds freedom in the sun and sky. Straight, as if sawn down from turf to beach, the cliff shuts off the human world, for the sea knows no time and no era ; you cannot tell what century it is from the face of the sea. A Roman trireme suddenly rounding the white edge-line of chalk, borne on wind and oar from the Isle of Wight towards the grey castle at Pevensey (already old in olden days), would not seem strange. What wonder could surprise us coming from the wonderful sea ?’\*

‘ The impassable precipice shuts off our former selves of yesterday.’ He sniffs immortal airs on the open road ahead.

\* ‘ The Breeze on Beachy Head,’ *Nature near London*.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ‘THE STORY OF MY HEART’

ON June 22, 1883, Jefferies wrote\* to say that he had just finished writing a book about which he had been meditating seventeen years ; he had called it ‘ The Story of My Heart : An Autobiography.’ He was then living at West Brighton. The sea had once before strengthened his original intention to write down his experiences ; he tried or resolved to try again, but vainly. In 1880, once more by the sea, at Pevensy, ‘ under happy circumstances,’ he made a few notes which he kept. He was then thirty-two or thirty-three—at the age when others, such as Whitman, have received their illumination. Two years later he began to write the book which was now finished.

He had taken a long journey since first, when he was eighteen, ‘ an inner and esoteric meaning ’ began to come to him ‘ from all the visible universe,’ and ‘ indefinable aspirations filled him ’ as a result of his intense moments of oneness with Nature on the Downs. Those and the even earlier experiences were brief momentary ravishments of his daily life as student, sportsman, and reporter. Had they been of long duration and frequent occurrence, it seems likely that they would have had a more immediate influence on his life and writing, and that they would have become connected with his piety. As he describes those moments in his maturity they are elusive ; to the writer of the letters to the *Times* they can

\* To Mr. C. J. Longman.

hardly have reached the state of words. Here and there, as in the novels and at the end of 'The Poacher,' are passages which may be attributed to this spiritual side of his life. But the mood, the very vocabulary, of these early country books was against the revelation of which he was in search; the matter of those books could be the subject of everyday talk, while it is likely that he said not a word of his inner life until he wrote 'The Story of My Heart.' The form of fiction, however, in 'Wood Magic' and in 'Bevis' put Jefferies more at his ease, and he could say of Bevis what he could not yet say of himself. But now, at the age of thirty-four, with five more years to die in—disease already strong upon his body, yet powerless to deny him the pleasure of the north wind on the hills—he was not shy of speaking out in his own person, of going back to the fields of his youth to glean where he had already reaped and harvested—fairy gleanings gathered so late by the ghost of the reaper.

By this time he was a man of much irregular reading in poetry, science, and philosophy. If we may judge from his liking for Dryden, Longfellow, and translations from the 'Odyssey' and 'Faust,' he had no very strong taste for the form of poetry, though I have heard that he read, more widely than was then common, the Elizabethan song-writers. The old ballads he certainly loved. He praised Addison almost alone among older prose-writers; among contemporaries, he admired Stevenson, Bret Harte, and Charles Reade, but not Dickens. Of books belonging to him I have seen 'The Assemblies of Al Hariri' (translated by Chenery), 'Bhagavad Gita' (translated by J. Cockburn Thomson), Swinburne's 'Poems and Ballads' (1871); translations of the 'Iliad,' the Greek Minor Poets and the Anthology, and Persius; and Percy's 'Reliques.' These were the remains of a collection which began to dwindle long before his death. He read less and less as time went on. 'The glamour of modern science and discoveries,' he tells us, 'faded away.' But, in any case, he was perhaps always an erratic reader who knew



what he liked, and found his food in the oddest ways, yet was likely to go far astray. His judgment, too, was uncertain; in one of his letters\* he complains of a reviewer (not of one of his own books) in the *Athenæum* simply on the ground that public opinion was all against him. He had, however, by the constant necessity of moulding language to fit a more and more subtle subject-matter, become the master—the still rather uncertain master—of an easy, delicate, often sweet and, without extravagance, luxuriant style. It was not, I think, developed by much conscious effort, but grew to his use like the handle of a walking-stick. It is at times grossly careless in construction and in sound, probably because he often wrote in haste or in an uneasy state. But, given an entirely suitable subject, he wrote with a natural fineness and richness and a carelessness, too, like the blackbird's singing. He rises and falls with his subject more than most writers, for his style was not a garment in which he clothed everything indiscriminately. Reading had given him his vocabulary, but no one model. Parts of 'The Poacher' and 'A Great Estate' could not be bettered, but his style afterwards left what seemed the maturity of those books, and went through another apprenticeship, and absorbed new orders of sensations and emotions. His eyesight won fields unknown to him before, both out of doors and in the British Museum and the picture-galleries. Of his peculiar sensitiveness—though to which of the senses it is to be referred I do not know—he gives an instance in the migratory impulse mentioned in 'January in the Sussex Woods.' 'I am,' he writes, 'personally subject twice a year to the migratory impulse. I feel it in spring and autumn, say about March, when the leaves begin to appear, and again as the corn is carried, and most strongly as the fields are left in stubble. I have felt it every year since boyhood, often so powerfully as to be quite unable to resist it. Go I must, and go I do, somewhere; if I do not, I am soon unwell.

\* To Mr. C. J. Longman.

The general idea of direction is southerly, both spring and autumn ; no doubt the reason is because this is a northern country.\*

But five fine senses are not the sum even of a sensual man, and in Jefferies they are humble in the service of the soul that apprehends the beauty of life and the bitterness because that must fade or die by the hand of Fate or Time or Man himself. His love and enjoyment of beauty, far more than his ill-health and pain, were the causes of his sorrowfulness. Of melancholy he has little ; for, alike in sorrow and in joy, he is keenly alive, and in both revolting against the alterable conditions of life, and penetrating them to see the beauty at the heart. Yet by this time his ill-health was assured. I have heard that in his sleeplessness he was known to ring all the bells of the house in which he lay, unable to bear the isolation among those who slept. Four years before the end he looked 'near death.'

He was now in the main a poet, in whose composition there is a naturalist, a sportsman, a curious minded and solitary countryman, as well as a lover and interpreter of life. He could still be only one of these things at a time, as in 'Red Deer,' where he was a mere sportsman. When he refused even to consider the possibility that there could be anything better than fine white flour or a feather-bed ; when he laughed at hygiene, or philanthropy, or temperance, or other 'fads,' he was a countryman preserving his cottage ideas. But more and more these portions of him took a due and unobserved place in the poet, the larger man who, though exquisitely sensitive, had no mere delicacy and rejected no part of life in man or nature, country or town. His taste was for quiet and seclusion and the things that are old—'give me the old road, the same flowers'—but that could never long restrain him from the long ranging thoughts which soon put away these things from him for ever. The old world of 'fear God, honour the pheasant, and damn the rest' became dim to him. Something he may have lost, but the

\* 'January in the Sussex Woods' in *Life of the Fields*.

neighbourhood of pheasants, at least, does men little good. I knew a parish of 10,397 souls, of which 10,000 were pheasants and the rest human beings, so miserable—except seventeen of them at the big house and rectory—that they were not even worth shooting or, as far as was known, eating. Jefferies was no longer capable of taking just an intelligent party view of things, of remaining an observer and a gossip only, of leaving at the bottom of the well the thoughts peculiarly his own and choosing instead things as they are, and have been, and evermore shall be. For at length the 'superstitions and traditions acquired compulsorily in childhood'\* fell away and disappeared, and he was free to do what he could by himself, a lonely, an extremely isolated, man.

'The Story of My Heart' is a confession, a description, of the stages by which he reached the ideas of his later life. He has erased from his mind the traditions and learning of the past ages, and stands 'face to face with the unknown.' His general aim is 'to free thought from every trammel, with the view of its entering upon another and larger series of ideas than those which have occupied the brain of man so many years. He believes that there is a whole world of ideas outside and beyond those which now exercise us.'

As a child he used to go away by himself, if only for two or three minutes, 'to think unchecked.' 'Involuntarily,' he says, 'I drew a long breath, then I breathed slowly. My thought, or inner consciousness, went up through the illumined sky, and I was lost in a moment of exaltation. This only lasted a very short time, perhaps only part of a second, and while it lasted there was no formulated wish.' There came, too, 'a deep, strong, and sensuous enjoyment of the beautiful green earth, the beautiful sky and sun,' and the thought 'that I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of excellence in myself, both

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

of body and of mind ; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind and soul ; that I might be higher in myself.\*

Later still, he walked along the Marlborough road to the fir-trees, where he could ' think a moment ' with his morning soul and eyes untroubled by recollection of irrelevant daily things. Such experiences—the being absorbed and the exaltation—differently interpreted, or fitted into different schemes of life, or neglected, or allowed to leaven life by hidden ways, must come to many. A sense of humour or much social intercourse may easily subdue them or compel them to work underground. Jefferies, perhaps because they belonged to the moments when he was most remote from the painful life of journalism or of his father's house, and because there was no one with whom he could share or illuminate them, cherished and dwelt upon them. Except in his ready and devout acceptance of these spiritual intimations, he resembles Behmen with his deep, inward ecstasy ; and Behmen bore his mysticism about with him in silence for twelve years. The mystic teachers lucidly described in Mr. Edward Carpenter's ' Adam's Peak to Elephanta ' attain to a similar ' universal or cosmic consciousness.' They aim ' by will to surrender the will ; by determination and concentration to press inward and upward to that portion of one's being which belongs to the universal ' ; they consciously, as Jefferies unconsciously, use the long breath, followed by slow breathing, as a physical introduction to the mystic state. Jefferies also at times concentrated himself deliberately, driving away ' by continued will ' all sense of outward appearances. The novelty and strangeness of the mystic state cause what are considered ' phantasmal trains of delusive speculation ' in some minds. Tennyson, again, by the repetition of his own name, reached a trance in which ' the individual seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being . . . when death was an almost

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life.' In Tennyson the influence of such trances must be sought in his religious ideas and in whatever there is beyond the visible and tangible in his handling of Nature. One of the youngest and most interesting of poets now alive—Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie—has described the trance 'upon a hill, alone,' almost in the words of Jefferies :

' . . . And then suddenly,—  
While perhaps twice my heart was dutiful  
To send my blood upon its little race,—  
I was exalted above surety,  
And out of time did fall.' \*

Other poets have had similar experiences, if we may judge by results. A few have preserved some traces of the moments themselves. Shelley's 'May Morning,' for example, 'when I walked forth upon the glittering grass,' may have brought him some such exaltation. Wordsworth's 'Ode' is in part a recollection of experiences of this kind interpreted by him as 'intimations of immortality.' Myers plainly called genius 'a kind of exalted but undeveloped clairvoyance'; and something like this trance happens to many who have not artistic genius; but the effect, in solution, whether in literature or art or conduct, may not be easily perceptible, and the extreme brevity of the entrancement may help it to be ignored.

To Jefferies, then, we have to be grateful for describing so vividly a matter of which the evidence cannot be too great. Lying on the turf of Liddington Hill, he was quite alone, having shaken off 'the petty circumstances and the annoyances of existence' during the climb through 'rich pure air' up the steep slope.

'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

\* *Poems and Interludes* (John Lane).



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.

‘With all the intensity of feeling which exalted 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 notes 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, an 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 weigh 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. . . .

‘ 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 cocoanut-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.

‘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. . . . Dreamy in appearance, I was breathing full of existence ; I was aware of the grass blades, the flowers, the leaves on hawthorn and tree. I seemed to live more largely through them, as if each were a pore through which I drank.’\*

‘I see now,’ he says, ‘that what I laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning’ ; to map out the obscure country he had discovered, to show its relation to the earth, to build a long airy bridge from one to the other, that he and his fellows might pass over and be blessed. Speaking ‘not in words,’ his soul prayed to be enlarged, to have some-

\* *The Story of My Heart.*



From a photograph.

THE VENUS ACCROUPIE  
of "Nature in the Louvre."

p. 187.





thing from sea and earth and air and stars, to be ‘full of light as the sun’s rays.’ Not only did he feel to the heights and the depths, but to the ‘dimmiest part’ in the life of the earth, and from all the ages his soul desired ‘to take that soul-life which had flowed through them.’ Yet this present moment was ‘as marvellous, as grand’ as all that had gone before; now was ‘the wonder and the glory.’ The lucid water of the spring, the dew, the storm wind, the summer air, the crescent moon, all moved him to repeat his prayer. ‘All the larks over the green corn sang it to me, all the dear swallows.’ At sight of the sea ‘the passion rose tumultuous as the waves.’ The sunset over London fanned it. It was deepest in the presence of living human beauty.

‘In this lies the outcome and end of all the loveliness of sunshine and green leaf, of flowers, pure water, and sweet air. This is embodiment and highest expression; the scattered, uncertain, and designless loveliness of tree and sunlight brought to shape. Through this beauty I prayed deepest and longest, and down to this hour. The shape—the divine idea of that shape—the swelling muscle or the dreamy limb, strong sinew or curve of bust, Aphrodite or Hercules, it is the same. That I may have the soul-life, the soul-nature, let divine beauty bring to me divine soul.

‘Statues also: the smallest fragment of marble carved in the shape of a human arm will awake the desire I felt in my hill-prayer.’\*

Later came the need to put the prayer and the indefinite aspiration into such a form ‘as would admit of actually working upon the lines it indicated for some good. And this was the prayer:

‘First, I desired that I might do or find something to exalt the soul, something to enable it to live its own life, a more powerful existence now. Secondly, I desired to be able to do something for the flesh, to make a discovery or perfect a method by which the fleshly body might enjoy more pleasure, longer life,

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

and suffer less pain. Thirdly, to construct a more flexible engine with which to carry into execution the design of the will.\*

The bones, he quaintly says, should be 'firmer, somewhat larger.' He desires beautiful shape and movement. 'I believe,' he says, 'in the human form ; let me find something, some method, by which that form may achieve the utmost beauty.' For the soul he desires a larger, more continuous, more illuminated life than that which it now meets with haphazard, a new and higher set of ideas on which it should work. He believes in what he can touch, but that guides him to another beauty as a shadow guides us to the substance. Sometimes he himself seems to use a power which has nothing to do with hearing or touch or sight. He could 'feel' the existence of the man buried on the Downs, and the coexistence with that man leads him to think that death does not affect the personality. The idea of extinction, not that of continuation, after death requires a 'miracle.' A man lay dead in an outhouse at Coate, and as he passed it, it seemed to him that the man was still alive. He 'cannot understand time . . . by no possible means could I get into time if I tried. I am in eternity now, and must there remain. Haste not, be at rest, this Now is eternity.'† Like Traherne, he saw the corn as 'orient and immortal wheat'; for as he moved about he felt in the midst of immortal things—'the sweetness of the day, the fulness of the earth, the beauteous earth, how shall I say it?' In 'The Open Air' he says that to him, as a boy, the earth was that radiant vision which it would be to one set suddenly down upon it ; and 'the freshness is still there.' In London, as on the Downs, he felt out into the depths of the ether, and 'touched the supernatural, the immortal.' He asserts no belief in alleged miracles, or that there have been miracles ; but 'they would be perfectly natural,' so great is the soul ; and he can conceive 'soul works by simple will or thought a thousand times greater.' He feels on

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

† *Ibid.*

the verge of powers which would give ‘an immense breadth of existence, an ability to execute what I now only conceive.’ But in the past only three discoveries seem to him to be important: the existence of the soul, immortality, the Deity. He is impatient of this poverty, and would erase the superstition, ritual and ceremony, built upon those ideas. He believes in something beyond. If death be extinction—he is willing to admit it possible—it is nothing: ‘I think immortality. I lift my mind to a fourth idea.’

Up to this point the book is the ‘unflinchingly true’ revelation of a human spirit which he called it, the writing so simple and yet so pointed and tempered with passion that there is no part which does not deeply pierce a human mind. Even the fancy that he would like to have his body burned on a hill-top after death acquires a sublimity from the lofty melodies in which it is curiously lapped. The rapture of the aspiration, had he never got beyond, has wings as of eagles to bear up the heart towards noble things. An unquenchable lust of the whole nature forced him to question heaven and earth about life, and to undertake a voyage bolder than Madoc’s; it has placed him with several honourable men whom such a lust has brought to at least as high an honour as the learning and tradition which they lacked have gained for many a theologian and philosopher. Sometimes, in the phrasing and cadence, as in ‘For the flesh, this arm of mine, the limbs of others gracefully moving,’ and in the idea—‘I believe in the human form’—he seems to be recalling Whitman, whose ‘Leaves of Grass’ delighted him. He sent a copy to his father, that silent thinker.

There follows a passage in which he finds ‘nothing human in nature.’ The creative forces in this world of men and beasts and trees and stars might seem to be sportive godlets. Such a view may be monstrous; but let us not forget that, like other monsters, it was earth-born, and born in the open air. The sea, the earth, the sun, the trees, the hills, care nothing for human life. A

great part of nature is 'distinctly anti-human.' 'The miserably hideous things of the sea,' 'the shapeless shape' of the toad, the snake that takes away the breath, even the animals we can love, are repellent; 'there is nothing human in any living animal,' and they are 'without design, shape, or purpose.' More absurdly he says: 'Animals think to a certain extent, but if their conceptions be ever so clever, not having hands, they cannot execute them.' The human mind cannot 'be fitted to the cosmos': it is 'distinct—separate.' Nature is the work of 'a force without mind,' not of a deity; 'for what we understand by the Deity is the purest form of idea, of Mind, and no mind is exhibited in these.' Julius Cæsar, whose bust he watched at the British Museum, came 'nearest to the ideal of a design-power arranging the affairs of the world for good in practical things'; but human folly is 'ever destroying our greatest.' In human affairs 'everything happens by chance'; 'rewards and punishments are purely human institutions, and if government be relaxed they entirely disappear. No intelligence whatever interferes in human affairs.' He has been in hell, and dreamed more terrible dreams than when De Quincey lay down with crocodiles. We make our own happiness and order, or not at all. These dreams only urge him yet more strongly to search for a soul-life which shall be independent of Nature and the idea of deity. He has really achieved the most ancient discovery of the theologians—that man stands apart from the rest of created things. But instead of being humbled by this—of seeking for some cause such as sin—he sees in the isolation a great hope. It is man that is supreme in man's world. Let us give way to our virtues and energies, and cease to look for help apart from man.

Whether these violent and intolerable dreams can be traced to some early horror of seeing skulls turned up by the plough, of reading of the sufferings of travellers and prisoners, I do not know. They possibly owe something to the ordinary countryman's attitude towards animals:

first, as things competing with himself for maintenance, destroying crops, and even threatening life by poison, tooth, and claw; second, as objects of sport: so that it was perhaps as true of him as of Felix Aquila, in 'After London,' that he 'could not at times shake off the apprehensions aroused by untoward omens, as when he stepped upon the adder in the woods.' To such a one walking in the earth, and seeing how beast and fish spend half their time in avoiding men, the thought must come either that they are irreparably alien, or that we are at fault; if, indeed, that other thought does not intrude, that it were better to lie silent, a faggot of ruddy, fleshless bones that cause no loathing to the bright birds, than to crash through this merry world of dancing plumes and limbs and leaves. That we and they are at fault is the more hopeful view. Jefferies seems to have chosen the first. But in his 'Nature and Eternity,' an essay that has some things in common with 'The Story of My Heart,' there are thoughts so opposed to these fancies, and so much more in harmony not only with the spirit of the best human thought, but with Jefferies' work as a whole, that I shall use it here. The following passage throws a little more light upon the nature of Jefferies' vision:

'It is only while in a dreamy, slumbrous, half-mesmerized state that Nature's ancient papyrus roll can be read—only when the mind is at rest, separated from care and labour; when the body is at ease, luxuriating in warmth and delicious languor; when the soul is in accord and sympathy with the sunlight, with the leaf, with the slender blades of grass, and can feel with the tiniest insect which climbs up them as up a mighty tree. As the genius of great musicians, without an articulated word or printed letter, can carry with it all the emotions, so now, lying prone upon the earth in the shadow, with quiescent will, listening, thoughts and feelings rise respondent to the sunbeams, to the leaf, to the very blade of grass. Resting the head upon the hand, gazing down upon the ground, the strange and marvellous inner sight



of the mind penetrates the solid earth, grasps in part the mystery of its vast extension upon either side, bearing its majestic mountains, its deep forests, its grand oceans, and almost feels the life which in ten million forms revels upon its surface. Returning upon itself, the mind joys in the knowledge that it, too, is a part of this wonder—akin to the ten million creatures, akin to the very earth itself. How grand and holy is this life ! how sacred the temple which contains it ! . . .

‘ This little petty life of seventy years, with its little petty aims and hopes, its despicable years and contemptible seasons, is no more the life with which the mind is occupied. . . . It is a grand and ennobling feeling to know that at this moment illimitable time extends on either hand. . . .

‘ The sight of that splendid disc carries the soul with it till it feels as eternal as the sun.’\*

He continues :

‘ Would that it were possible for the heart and mind to enter into *all* the life that glows and teems upon the earth—to feel with it, hope with it, sorrow with it, and thereby to become a grander, nobler being. Such a being, with such a sympathy and larger existence, must hold in scorn the feeble, cowardly, selfish desire for an immortality of pleasure only, whose one great hope is to escape pain. No. Let me joy with all living creatures ; let me suffer with them all—the reward of feeling a deeper, grander life would be amply sufficient. . . . Let me have wider feelings, more extended sympathies ; let me feel with all living things, rejoice and praise with them. Let me have deeper knowledge, a nearer insight, a more reverent conception. Let me see the mystery of life—the secret of the sap as it rises in the tree—the secret of the blood as it courses through the vein. . . . Never did vivid imagination stretch out the powers of Deity with such a fulness, with such intellectual grasp, vigour, omniscience, as the human mind could reach to, if only its organs, its means, were equal

\* ‘ Nature and Eternity ’ (*Longman's Magazine*, May, 1895).

to the thought. Give us, then, greater strength of body, greater length of days ; give us more vital energy, let our limbs be mighty as those of the giants of old. Supplement such organs with nobler mechanical engines—with extended means of locomotion ; add novel and more minute methods of analysis and discovery. Let us become as demi-gods. . . .\*

Reclining under a chestnut-tree in this mood, he says that it is impossible to conceive ideas of murder, violence, or aught degrading ; the whole existence is 'permeated with reverent love.' In the future, he thinks, 'the human race might be as we are this moment,' under the chestnut-tree.

The finest passages follow :

'It is probable that with the progress of knowledge it will be possible to satisfy the necessary wants of existence much more easily than now, and thus to remove one great cause of discord. . . .

'This blade of grass grows as high as it can, the nightingale there sings as sweetly as it can, the goldfinches feed to their full desire, and lay down no arbitrary rules of life ; the great sun above pours out its heat and light in a flood unrestrained. What is the meaning of this hieroglyph, which is repeated in a thousand other ways and shapes, which meets us at every turn ? It is evident that all living creatures, from the zoophyte upwards—plant, reptile, bird, animal, and in his natural state, in his physical frame, man also—strive with all their power to obtain as perfect an existence as possible. . . . All tends to one end, a fuller development of the individual, a higher condition of the species ; still farther, to the production of new races capable of additional progress. Part and parcel as we are of the great community of living beings, indissolubly connected with them from the lowest to the highest by a thousand ties, it is impossible for us to escape from the operation of this law.

'The physical and the mental man are, as it were, a

\* 'Nature and Eternity' (*Longman's Magazine*, May, 1895).

mass of inherited structures. . . . He is made up of the Past. This is a happy and an inspiring discovery . . . which calls upon us for new and larger moral and physical exertion, which throws upon us wider and nobler duties, for upon us depends the future.

‘A whole circle of ideas of moral conceptions . . . which were high and noble in the rudimentary being. . . . Let these perish. . . . We must no longer allow the hoary age of such traditions to blind the eye and cause the knee to bend. . . . The very plants are wiser far. They seek the light of to-day, the heat of the sun which shines at this hour. . . . But . . . it is necessary that some far-seeing master-mind, some giant intellect, should arise, and sketch out in bold, unmistakable outlines the grand and noble future which the human race should labour for. . . .

‘The faiths of the past, of the ancient world, now extinct or feebly lingering on, were each inspired by one mind only. The faith of the future, in strong contrast, will spring from the researches of a thousand thousand thinkers, where minds, once brought into a focus, will speedily burn up all that is useless and worn out with a fierce heat, and evoke a new and brilliant light. This converging thought is one of the greatest blessings of the day, made possible by the vastly extended means of communication, and almost seems specially destined for this very purpose.’\*

The mood in which this was written must have been a happier one, and it is justifiable to suppose that its exalted and democratic optimism was due in no slight degree to the clear vision that saw in all forms of life one commonwealth, one law, one beauty.

These thoughts are at one with many which follow in the later chapters of ‘The Story of My Heart.’ The divine beauty of the flesh which he enjoyed in pictures and statuary is curiously inwoven with the beauty of Nature. A shoulder, a bust, gratifies the ‘sea-thirst’

\* ‘Nature and Eternity’ (*Longman's Magazine*, May, 1895).

with which his throat and tongue and whole body have often been ‘parched and feverish dry.’ The lips and hair of Cytherea, ‘Juno’s wide back and mesial groove,’ slake the same thirst. These were they, he says of the Greek men and women, ‘who would have stayed with me under the shadow of the oaks while the black-birds fluted and the south air swung the cowslips. . . . These had thirsted of sun, and earth, and sea, and sky. Their shape spoke this thirst and desire like mine.’\* It would, he says, have seemed natural to find ‘butterflies fluttering among the statues.’ But the books, the human books, away from the sunlight, gave no thought as the gleamy spring water did.

Turning again to men, the roaring press of them opposite the Royal Exchange in London, he sees that they will wither away with no result. But he does not despair, though he believes that there is no ‘theory, philosophy, or creed’ to guide and shape ‘this million-handed labour to an end and outcome that will leave more sunshine and more flowers to those who must succeed.’ He is forced to express the desirable by the images of sunshine and flowers. First, he says, we must efface the learning of the past, and ‘go straight to the sun.’ Though at last his prayer became ‘less solely associated with these things,’ it is always the sun, the hills, the wind, the flowers, the sea—the sea whose moving waters he esteems as religiously as Keats. It is house-life that he personally must escape from ‘back to the sun’; away from the preaching of house-life: ‘Remain; be content; go round and round in one barren path, a little money, a little food and sleep, some ancient fables, old age, and death.’ As he is dissatisfied with what men have done, so is he with thought itself and with experience. Those were his topmost moments when he prayed without words, and ‘an ecstasy of soul accompanied the delicate excitement of the senses’; this was the chaos that gave birth to a dancing star. Thought must

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

expand so as to 'correspond in magnitude of conception' with sun and sea. This immeasurable soul-life which he desires is always associated with the flesh, as in its origin it was associated with his own senses. Nothing is of any use unless it gives him a stronger body and mind. Again he demands a larger frame, a longer day, more sunshine, a longer sleep to accumulate new force. And this is the manner of his demand :

'I live by the sea now ; I can see nothing of it in a day ; why, I do but get a breath of it, and the sun sinks before I have well begun to think. Life is so little and so mean. I dream sometimes backwards of the ancient times. If I could but have the bow of Ninus, and the earth full of wild bulls and lions, to hunt them down, there would be rest in that. To shoot with a gun is nothing ; a mere touch discharges it. Give me a bow, that I may enjoy the delight of feeling myself draw the string and the strong wood bending, that I may see the rush of the arrow, and the broad head bury itself deep in shaggy hide. Give me an iron mace that I may crush the savage beast and hammer him down. A spear to thrust through with, so that I may feel the long blade enter and the push of the shaft. The unwearied strength of Ninus to hunt unceasingly in the fierce sun. Still I should desire greater strength and a stouter bow, wilder creatures to combat. The intense life of the senses, there is never enough for them. I envy Semiramis ; I would have been ten times Semiramis. I envy Nero, because of the great concourse of beauty he saw. I should like to be loved by every beautiful woman on earth, from the swart Nubian to the white and divine Greek.

'Wine is pleasant and meat refreshing ; but though I own with absolute honesty that I like them, these are the least of all. Of these two only have I ever had enough. The vehemence of exertion, the vehemence of the spear, the vehemence of sunlight and life, the insatiate desire of insatiate Semiramis, the still more insatiate desire of love, divine and beautiful, the uncontrollable adoration



of beauty, these—these : give me these in greater abundance than was ever known to man or woman. The strength of Hercules, the fulness of the senses, the richness of life, would not in the least impair my desire of soul-life. On the reverse, with every stronger beat of the pulse my desire of soul-life would expand. So it has ever been with me ; in hard exercise, in sensuous pleasure, in the embrace of the sunlight, even in the drinking of a glass of wine, my heart has been lifted the higher towards perfection of soul. Fulness of physical life causes a deeper desire of soul-life.

‘Let me be physically perfect, in shape, vigour, and movement. My frame, naturally slender, will not respond to labour, and increase in proportion to effort, nor will exposure harden a delicate skin. It disappoints me so far, but my spirit rises with the effort, and my thought opens. This is the only profit of frost, the pleasure of winter, to conquer cold, and to feel braced and strengthened by that whose province it is to wither and destroy, making of cold, life’s enemy, life’s renewer. The black north wind hardens the resolution as steel is tempered in ice-water. It is a sensual joy, as sensuous as the warm embrace of the sunlight, but fulness of physical life ever brings to me a more eager desire of soul-life.

‘Splendid it is to feel the boat rise to the roller, or forced through by the sail to shear the foam aside like a share ; splendid to undulate as the chest lies on the wave, swimming, the brimming ocean round : then I know and feel its deep strong tide, its immense fulness, and the sun glowing over ; splendid to climb the steep green hill : in these I feel myself, I drink the exquisite joy of the senses, and my soul lifts itself with them. It is beautiful even to watch a fine horse gallop, the long stride, the rush of the wind as he passes—my heart beats quicker to the thud of the hoofs, and I feel his strength. Gladly would I have the strength of the Tartar stallion roaming the wild steppe ; that very strength, what

vehemence of soul-thought would accompany it. But I should like it, too, for itself. For I believe, with all my heart, in the body and the flesh, and believe that it should be increased and made more beautiful by every means. I believe—I do more than think—I believe it to be a sacred duty, incumbent upon every one, man and woman, to add to and encourage their physical life, by exercise, and in every manner. A sacred duty each towards himself, and each towards the whole of the human race. Each one of us should do some little part for the physical good of the race—health, strength, vigour. There is no harm therein to the soul: on the contrary, those who stunt their physical life are most certainly stunting their souls.

‘I believe all manner of asceticism to be the vilest blasphemy—blasphemy towards the whole of the human race. I believe in the flesh and the body, which is worthy of worship—to see a perfect human body unveiled causes a sense of worship. The ascetics are the only persons who are impure. Increase of physical beauty is attended by increase of soul beauty. The soul is the higher even by gazing on beauty. Let me be fleshly perfect.

‘It is in myself that I desire increase, profit, and exaltation of body, mind, and soul. The surroundings, the clothes, the dwelling, the social status, the circumstances are to me utterly indifferent. Let the floor of the room be bare, let the furniture be a plank table, the bed a mere pallet. Let the house be plain and simple, but in the midst of air and light. These are enough—a cave would be enough; in a warmer climate the open air would suffice. Let me be furnished in myself with health, safety, strength, the perfection of physical existence; let my mind be furnished with highest thoughts of soul-life. Let me be in myself myself fully. The pageantry of power, the still more foolish pageantry of wealth, the senseless precedence of place; words fail me to express my utter contempt for such pleasure or such

ambitions. Let me be in myself myself fully, and those I love equally so.

‘ 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 all. Or upon the hill-tops to watch the white clouds rising over the curved hill-lines, their shadows descending the slope. Or on the beach to listen to the sweet sigh as the smooth sea runs up and recedes. It is lying beside the immortals, in-drawing the life of the ocean, the earth, and the sun.

‘ I want to be always in company with these, with earth, and sun, and sea, and stars by night. The pettiness of house-life—chairs and tables—and the pettiness of observances, the petty necessity of useless labour, useless because productive of nothing, chafe me the year through. I want to be always in company with the sun, and sea, and earth. These, and the stars by night, are my natural companions.

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

‘ So deep is the passion of life that, if it were possible to live again, it must be exquisite to die pushing the eager breast against the sword. In the flush of strength to face the sharp pain joyously, and laugh in the last glance of the sun—if only to live again, now on earth, were possible. So subtle is the chord of life that sometimes to watch troops marching in rhythmic order,

undulating along the column as the feet are lifted, brings tears in my eyes. Yet could I have in my own heart all the passion, the love and joy, burned in the breasts that have panted, breathing deeply, since the hour of Ilion, yet still I should desire more. How willingly I would strew the paths of all with flowers; how beautiful a delight to make the world joyous! The song should never be silent, the dance never still, the laugh should sound like water which runs for ever.

‘I would submit to a severe discipline, and to go without many things cheerfully, for the good and happiness of the human race in the future. Each one of us should do something, however small, towards that great end. At the present time the labour of our predecessors in this country, in all other countries of the earth, is entirely wasted. We live—that is, we snatch an existence—and our works become nothing. The piling up of fortunes, the building of cities, the establishment of immense commerce, ends in a cipher. These objects are so outside my idea that I cannot understand them, and look upon the struggle in amazement. Not even the pressure of poverty can force upon me an understanding of, and sympathy with, these things. It is the human being as the human being of whom I think. That the human being as the human being, nude—apart altogether from money, clothing, houses, properties—should enjoy greater health, strength, safety, beauty, and happiness, I would gladly agree to a discipline like that of Sparta. The Spartan method did produce the finest race of men, and Sparta was famous in antiquity for the most beautiful women. So far, therefore, it fits exactly to my ideas.

‘No science of modern times has yet discovered a plan to meet the requirements of the millions who live now, no plan by which they might attain similar physical proportion. Some increase of longevity, some slight improvement in the general health is promised, and these are great things, but far, far beneath the ideal. Probably the

whole mode of thought of the nations must be altered before physical progress is possible. Not while money, furniture, affected show and the pageantry of wealth are the ambitions of the multitude can the multitude become ideal in form. When the ambition of the multitude is fixed on the ideal of form and beauty, then that ideal will become immediately possible, and a marked advance towards it could be made in three generations. Glad, indeed, should I be to discover something that would help towards this end.

‘ How pleasant it would be each day to think, To-day I have done something that will tend to render future generations more happy. The very thought would make this hour sweeter. It is absolutely necessary that something of this kind should be discovered. First, we must lay down the axiom that as yet nothing has been found ; we have nothing to start with ; all has to be begun afresh. All courses or methods of human life have hitherto been failures. Some course of life is needed based on things that are, irrespective of tradition. The physical ideal must be kept steadily in view.’\*

It may be said that in this eloquence is the hectic flush of the man doomed to an early death ; that here is the weakling’s morbid sympathy with strength. But its movement, its parallel to Shelley’s ‘ Be thou me, impetuous one ! ’ place it beyond criticism far within the realm of joy.

‘ There is,’ he says, ‘ no design and no evolution.’ The sequence from cause to effect does not seem to him inevitable. There is no ‘ must ’—which recalls the brook’s ‘ there is no why.’ The balance of logic does not correspond with life, with the irregular human frame, the unbalanced tree ; and returning to his idea of the inhumanity of Nature, he finds ‘ no humanity ’ in our bones, neither square nor round, and causing ‘ a sense of horror, so extra-human are they in shape.’ Instead of arguing thence that human thought of human origin is

\* *The Story of My Heart.*



above this irregularity and 'inhuman' nature, he believes that it is on a mistaken road, and has missed 'an immense range of thought.' Our symmetrical and regular thought is not fit for this unruly universe. Jefferies' hope actually springs from this absence of design and of a superior power, because 'all things become,' if we accept this view, 'at once plastic to our will.' Nothing is done for us; then let us set about ruling the earth. Accidents are crimes; they and diseases are all preventable. Our bodies are flawed by our ancestors; 'none die of age. The only things that have been stored up have been for our evil and destruction, diseases and weaknesses crossed and cultivated and rendered almost part and parcel of our bones. In twelve thousand written years the world has not yet built itself a House, nor filled a Granary, nor organized itself for its own comfort. It is so marvellous I cannot express the wonder with which it fills me.'\*

There is something savage in this child-like astonishment at the way of the world, as of the barefoot man who first sat down to muse why flints should tear his flesh as he mounted the hill.

Nevertheless, he thinks it possible that death is unnecessary. The beauty of the ideal human being indicates immortality. Above all, man has a soul, an 'inner consciousness which aspires,' and 'may yet discover things now deemed unnatural.' Now let us, therefore, 'begin to roll back the tide of death, and to set our faces steadily to a future of life. It should be the sacred and sworn duty of every one, once at least during lifetime, to do something in person towards this end. It would be a delight and pleasure to me to do something every day, were it ever so minute. . . . †

Theory and experiment are good. Observation is better still, for it can master chance. Like M. Maeterlinck much later, he says that 'it is essential that

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

† *Ibid.*

study should be made of chance ; it seems to me that an organon might be deduced from chance as much as from experiment.’ Like that same thinker, it is for a ‘ first valley of leisure ’\* that he craves, where labour will become ‘ less incessant, exhausting, less material, tyrannical, pitiless.’ He repeats his belief that we can reach ideas far outside the circle of to-day. Let all ‘ do their utmost to think outside and beyond our present circle of ideas.’ ‘ What,’ he asks, ‘ would be said if a carpenter about to commence a piece of work examined his tools and deliberately cast away that with the finest edge ?’ That tool is the soul, the mind of the mind, and it must be our purpose to educate the soul ; and he is thinking of that ‘ lofty morality ’ which, says M. Maeterlinck, ‘ presupposes a state of soul or of heart rather than a code of strictly formulated precepts . . . its essence the sincere and strong wish to form within ourselves a powerful idea of justice and of love that always rises above that formed by the clearest and most generous portions of our intelligence.’† Just before the noble conclusion of the book (‘ That I may have the fullest soul-life ’), Jefferies expresses his dissatisfaction with the words he has used : ‘ I must leave my book as a whole,’ he says, ‘ to give its own meaning to its words ’; and then ‘ after so much pondering, I feel that I know nothing, that I have not yet begun.’

The book is a poem ; I had almost said a piece of music. The ideas rise up and fall, lose their outlines, and, resurgent again, have not fulfilled their whole purpose until the full-charged silence of the conclusion. Prose has rarely reached such a length—I recall chiefly ‘ Religio Medici ’ and the ‘ Cypress Grove ’ of Drummond—and yet retained this absolute, more than logical, unity, such a complex consistency of moods that now shake the cliffs and now cannot loosen the dew from the flower of the grass. The reason, often beckoned to, can remain in abeyance throughout much of the early enjoyment of

\* *The Buried Temple.*

† *Life and Flowers.*

these harmonies, and to miss this enjoyment is to miss half the book. For the time being we watch this great conflict of one of the Many with the One—

‘Ceus cetera nusquam  
Bella forent, nulli tota morentur in orbe.’

Even without enjoying it in its entirety, the holiness of its energy in certain places cannot be passed by, and unless we go to it with many amulets and phylacteries, we shall believe that to love and admire that energy is at least to open the heart a little wider to the joy and sorrow and beauty of the world. Jefferies is a mystic, and speaks to a world that is not mystic yet likes to hear a beautiful voice, as that giant-king in the ‘Arabian Nights’ liked to hear the lamentation of the caged human being. And were this book far wilder and more remote from market-place and laboratory, the uncommon sincerity and human sweetness that break through the many veils could not be repudiated. Jefferies himself said in a letter that he was ‘no cabinet theorist’; that his favourite lines were those in Goethe’s ‘Faust’

‘All theory, my friend, is grey,  
But green is life’s bright golden tree.’

The gift of words in the book is undeniable, phrases like ‘the fresh and wandering air encompassing the world,’ and also the impetuosity of much of it, reminding us of great poetry; its sincerity added, it cannot be allowed to die, except the death of becoming a document. Or is it, then, so easy to know a man as we know this one? Do we commonly know one man by spending a lifetime with a score? Suppose this one wrong or deluding, yet to know anyone as we can know him is to make us wiser and juster in our lives and judgments. With him we can tread part at least of the boundaries of humanity, or perchance learn that what seemed a boundary is but a sea. And, again, as a devout spirit he must be heard, a devout spirit without one holy ancient relic save his own soul, and it is surely

a tragic and inspiring spectacle to watch this spirit at odds with the universe and time embattled.

The physician and the athlete have not done for the body what Jefferies helps to do by proving it divine ; in his book lies more incitement to a spiritual consideration of the flesh than in any other. Athleticism and week-ends in the country are not to be despised ; Jefferies would not have despised them, though he thought little of short races ; but they will fall away and recur before his ‘ I believe in the body ’ has even been fully understood. He thinks of Nature as supplying men with strength and desire and means for soul-life. He has rediscovered the sources of joy in Nature, and foresees that what has fed his lonely ecstasy in the Downs will distribute the same force and balm among the cities of men below. They are, indeed, perennial sources, but his passionate love of the beautiful and joyous fill him with longing for the day when they shall be universal too. In spite of that thought of the inhumanity of Nature, I think that not Blake, not ‘ Three years she grew in sun and shower,’ so fills the mind with the attainable harmony of the world in which man has yet to learn his part. A few words of Blake are quintessential, inexhaustibly fecund, but they are hieroglyphics, while the words of Jefferies are laced through and through with sunlight and air, and they have the power of wings. What other mystics have claimed seems true of him—that he is a mouthpiece of Nature herself. He has not, as others have done, sighed after an unsocial virtue, but for one that touches all men ; his aim the ultimate one of joy ; and therefore when he says, ‘ I believe in the body,’ it is more than hygiene, and passes into the beating of our hearts and into the music of life itself.

He desires to study and sharpen and employ the soul, ‘ the keenest, the sharpest tool possessed by man,’ and those labours, it may be surmised, would amply fill the time of leisure for which he yearns. He does not, any more than M. Maeterlinck, pretend to draw up a syllabus

for disciples, and it is true of him, as of the greatest teachers, that his best lovers never become his disciples, since his work is to inspire, and, like wine, the ways of his inspiration are many. The soul which he would educate is what has brought him his noblest pleasures and deepest hopes, and he believes it to be a common possession of which he is simply a discoverer. Apparently he would say that the soul is often troubled by the brain as, for example, the eye at night is troubled, though hardly any darkness is impenetrable to the eye that is freed from all clouds of cogitation. In the same way had Coleridge, convinced of the profound importance of the poet's inspiration, planned an essay on poetry to supersede all the books of morals and metaphysics. It was enough for Jefferies to have had the idea that by the soul 'we have our happiness or not at all'; that the soul does away with the need of using the word 'God,' and is to rule the world.

He cries in the wilderness, and the strangeness of the crying cannot but avail. Life cannot remain the same as it was before the book; we must be a little more liberal, more adventurous, more expectant and aware, than before. In his passion for humanity he is with Lucretius and Shelley, and his revolting note, like theirs, is woven into the great music; he has the true rhythm of life, as the tide and also the earthquake has. It is the greatness of his hope that makes him speak scornfully about the achievement of the past, but it is due also in part to the belief, natural in so isolated a man, that his experiences were exceptional, and that old schemes of life were misdirected because they seemed to take nothing of the kind into account. He accepts the inventions of science, and would not part with them, any more than with his feather-bed; but they are only foundations whose place is underground. He is impatient of the pride in them. They are but engines, and they are deified. The soul should be exalted and rule. It is uncertain what other ruler he would have among men. He does not approach matters of practice; had he done so, he might have shown himself,



as he usually did, cautious in proposing definite measures of reform. But only the readers over head and ears in love with things as they are could suppose that the co-operation with posterity which he suggests is accessible through party cries, or by a method open to our hap-hazard modern tyrannies. In ‘ Nature and Eternity ’ he says : ‘ It is necessary that some far-seeing master-mind, some giant intellect, should arise and sketch out in bold, unmistakable outlines the grand and noble future which the human race should labour for.’\* This dream of a master-mind and his regret over the death of Julius Cæsar and Augustus recall the words : ‘ This man of the future who will redeem us from the old ideal . . . as also from what had to grow out of this ideal ; . . . this bell of noonday and the great decision which restores freedom to the will, which restores to the earth its goal and to man his hope . . . he must come some day.’† But Jefferies would not have made the mistake of so admiring the unfettered great man’s prowess as not to see the beauty of the conquered and all the other forms of life which the powerful would destroy if they might. He is rather with Whitman, who eagerly embraces all life, not because it is all equally good, but because we may spoil all if we hastily condemn or destroy what has in it the goodness of fresh life ; only the slothful and the imitative are bad. To the end he is divinely discontented with this goodly world, and inexpressibly sad it is to see one come from such long draughts of beauty sorrowfully away ; yet is it wholly a joyous book save to one who knows not how to live.

When in his heat Jefferies desires that his soul might be ‘ more than the cosmos of life,’ he must either be read in heat or condemned ; only in the almost lyric sweep of the whole is it passed. Yet such passages, weak in themselves, do but strengthen the force of the whole by their testimony for the writer’s honesty. A clever man would have erased them ; but, then, a clever man would have

\* *Longman’s Magazine*, 1895.

† Nietzsche.

rearranged the book and given it an appearance of reasonableness which it could not long survive. It is by the tones and gestures of the writer, in his words and ideas and images, that he must be interpreted if he is to inspire where he cannot instruct, and forbid the duckweed to mantle overhead. Nor let anyone rashly argue that his prophecy is the offspring of morbid sensitiveness, unless it be thought that by this time the plain man—if any such there be—ought to be superseding the man of genius in directing the world; that we have had enough of madmen who will go cheerfully to the hemlock or the cross, or even live on, for an idea. He fought in the dim, far-off, wavering van, of which we have yet no sure tidings, his weapon the mountain harp or the pebbles of the brook, and that, too, in spite of the acquaintance who urged him to produce ‘more saleable ware,’ and the anonymous Christian whose comment on the book was, ‘The fool hath said in his heart.’\*

\* In a letter to Jefferies.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ‘THE LIFE OF THE FIELDS’—‘THE OPEN AIR.’

JEFFERIES lived at West Brighton until at least as late as the end of June, 1884. In September he was at 14, Victoria Road, Eltham, a neighbourhood not unlike that of Surbiton, and about as far from London, where he spent less than a year, for in June, 1885, he was lodging at Rehoboth Villa, Jarvis Brook, Rotherfield, Sussex, while a cottage was sought for at Tunbridge Wells; and a little later he was at ‘The Downs,’ Crowborough, where he lived until July, 1886, or later. ‘The Life of the Fields,’ the next volume of essays to ‘Nature near London,’ was published in 1884, and most of it was written at Brighton. ‘The Open Air,’ published in 1885, was written partly at Brighton, partly (for example, the last four essays) at Eltham. His subjects were by no means all taken from these neighbourhoods. In ‘The Field Play,’ ‘Bits of Oak Bark,’ ‘The Pageant of Summer,’ ‘Meadow Thoughts,’ ‘Mind under Water,’ and ‘Sport and Science,’ for example, his thoughts are of Wiltshire, or of some country in which it predominated. In ‘By the Exe’ and ‘The Water Colley’ he is in Somerset. In several papers he is thinking chiefly of London; in one of Paris, to which he must have paid a short visit at about this time. These papers, contributed to many different magazines and newspapers, fall, though not, of course, without some reluctance, into three classes. The first consists of lengths of notes, carefully wrought in parts, but irregular, almost shapeless, and showing signs of

fatigue or of painful concession to the 'essay' form, such as 'Clematis Lane,' 'January in the Sussex Woods,' 'By the Exe,' and others. Essays, accurately so called, make the second class; these are orderly discussions of a given subject, the material supplied chiefly by his own observation and reflection, as in 'Mind under Water,' 'Birds Climbing the Air,' 'The Plainest City in Europe.' In the third class come those papers with which the first might have ranked had they been more happily wrought. They are impassioned descriptions or meditations, like 'The Pageant of Summer,' 'Meadow Thoughts,' 'Sunlight in a London Square,' 'Venice in the East End,' and to these must be added the stories and sketches like 'St. Guido,' and 'Bits of Oak Bark.'

In the first class, he is hampered by his notebooks and the necessity of writing for the magazines. The reader who wishes for country facts and 'no nonsense' finds them here. The fragments of pictures are often fine in detail; the observation of natural facts useful; the thoughts, as in 'January in the Sussex Woods,' lively and new; all reveal something of the man, and can be enjoyed for his sake.

But the other two classes show more clearly and favourably the Jefferies of 1883, 1884, and 1885; his mind, his heart, and all his senses, his whole humanity, is at work in them, and, above all, in the impassioned descriptions and meditations. Some of the essays in the second class show us what a naturalist Jefferies might have become. He had been for years a great reader in natural history: he mentions Linnæus, Darwin, Lyell, Maury, and others; while among his books I have seen Bevan's 'Honey Bee'; Morris's 'Butterflies'; Shuckard's 'British Bees'; Lubbock's 'Ants, Bees, and Wasps'; J. Bell Pettigrew's 'Animal Locomotion; or, Walking, Swimming, and Flying, with a Dissertation on Aeronautics.' His eye, as has been seen, was restless, curious, and exact; and his power of recording what he saw in precise and vivid English was growing every year.



From a photograph.

ELIZABETH JEFFERIES,  
the mother of Richard Jefferies.

p. 240.





Implicit in that power, and of priceless value to it, was his own complex joy in life, in the exertion of bodily, and mental, and spiritual energies, whether in himself and other men and women, or in bird and beast. That and an eye continually on an object under natural conditions raise 'The Hovering of the Kestrel' and 'Birds Climbing the Air' to a high place in natural history. The description is so plain and matter of fact—though it is also imaginative enough to bring the thing described before the eyes of all but the most ignorant readers—that it may seem of little account; and true it is that it is bound to be superseded by something yet more exact and as vivid. But it is a model and a stimulus; much natural history is born dead through ignoring it; and the best belongs to the same class, and, whether due in any high degree or not to Jefferies' influence, is beyond almost everything that preceded his work. In this class of his essays occurs his claim, consistently made all through his life, for intelligence instead of hereditary instinct in animals. He makes a genuine, and apparently, in part, a successful attempt, in 'Mind under Water,' to get into the mind of the fish, very much as Maeterlinck has done with the dog. 'Birds,' he declares, 'are lively, intellectual, imaginative, and affectionate creatures, and all their movements are not dictated by mere necessity.' Only through such an anthropomorphism, as we proudly call it, can an understanding of other forms of life begin, and it led Jefferies to a yet further stage—that of perceiving that there may be things which 'weigh with ants' at present inaccessible to our intelligence, that our range of ideas no more includes theirs than theirs includes ours. He may have thought the more boldly on this subject because he was at the time interested in the forms of mental activity which cannot be classed with reason, as the telepathic explanation of a coincidence in the 'Legend of a Gateway' shows. He may presently be proved to have been wrong, but that it was a progressive error there can be little doubt.

The third class of Jefferies' essays appear to belong chiefly to the period which brought forth 'The Story of My Heart' and 'The Dewy Morn.' Many of their thoughts are to be traced to the stir from which sprang 'The Story of My Heart'; some are almost repetitions of parts of that book; others are developments, or further conclusions, or have faint infusions of the prophetic mood after its fury has passed. In 'Meadow Thoughts,' for example, some of the same thoughts fall into their place among the visible beauties of Nature with a tranquillity not to be found in the autobiography—the contrast between the bright summer light and books, and the correspondence between the light and 'some likewise beautiful and wonderful truth' as yet unknown, and again the bitter, simple thought that 'no physical reason exists why every human being should not have sufficient, at least, of necessities.' The sunlight puts out the words of the printed books as it puts out the fire; 'the very grass blades confound the wisest.' The thought comes to him amid the weariness of printed matter at the British Museum: the pigeons fleeing about the portico lure him again to the something beyond thought. 'They,' he says, 'have not laboured in mental searching as we have; they have not wasted their time looking among empty straw for the grain that is not there. They have been in the sunlight. Since the days of ancient Greece the doves have remained in the sunshine. We who have laboured have found nothing. In the sunshine, by the shady verge of woods, by the sweet waters where the wild dove sips, there alone will thought be found.' It is the cry, with a deeper tone in it, which the poet cried:

'The swoon of Imogen,  
Fair Pastorella in the bandit's den,  
Are things to brood on with more ardency  
Than the death-days of empires.'

There is the hope, too, that the beautiful and wonderful thought hovering in the sunlight will come to earth—will

come to us before it is so late that we take the gift in weariness and dismay. In the spot-markings of butterflies' wings, of flowers, of eggs, he says, 'the sun has written his commands, and the wind inscribed deep thought,' and tells us that to-day the immortals who walked on the earth when they were composed are among us yet, 'if only we will give up the soul to these pure influences.' The abundance, 'the open-handed generosity and divine waste of Nature,' again, lead him away from the meanness forced upon us by circumstances to the belief that some day 'no one need ever feel anxiety about mere subsistence'; and yet it is pitiful that the infant oak will not be transplanted to safety, and will perish.'

In 'Sunlight in a London Square' the thought of the reapers sadly labouring sends him forward to 'a race able to enjoy the flowers with which the physical work is strewn.' For himself and others he desires longer, more joyous life, and the passion of his wish seems half a realization; he desires it for the very birds—'a hundred years just to feast on the seeds and sing and be utterly happy and oblivious of everything but the moment they are passing.' In the same mood comes a pleading for wiser treatment of 'the sullen poor who stand scornful and desperate at the street-corners.' The holy spring, the water and the light, give him of their truth, of the sense of beauty which they bring with them; in his love of its purity there is an even profounder sentiment than in Ruskin's passionate upbraiding of those who defiled the Wandel springs. In 'The Pageant of Summer' the hope is repeated: 'Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled Immortals.' Part at least of the charm of that and the kindred essays lies in the linking of spiritual things to their physical causes among the coombes, the long wavering heights, the barley and the grass, of the Downs, and the flowers of Coate Farm itself. Earth, the mighty mother, emerges almost personified in these essays, benign, abundant, hale. In

'Beauty in the Country' he says that 'it takes a hundred and fifty years to make a beauty—a hundred and fifty years out of doors. . . . All beautiful women come from the country.'

The Wind and the Wheat speak these same things in 'St. Guido.' Joy in Nature 'makes to-day a thousand years long backwards and a thousand years long forwards.' The Wheat is glad to be cut down for men's sakes, knowing its tribe cannot die, 'but there is one thing we do not like, and that is all the labour and the misery which ends in nothing, not even a flower.' The Wheat goes on :

'“All the thousand years of labour since this field was first ploughed have not stored up anything for you. It would not matter about the work so much if you were only happy ; the bees work every year, but they are happy ; the doves build a nest every year, but they are very, very happy. We think it must be because you do not come out to us and be with us, and think more as we do. It is not because your people have not got plenty to eat and drink—you have as much as the bees. Why, just look at us ! Look at the wheat that grows all over the world ; all the figures that were ever written in pencil could not tell how much, it is such an immense quantity. Yet your people starve and die of hunger every now and then, and we have seen the wretched beggars tramping along the road. We have known of times when there was a great pile of us, almost a hill piled up ; it was not in this country, it was in another warmer country, and yet no one dared to touch it—they died at the bottom of the hill of wheat. The earth is full of skeletons of people who have died of hunger. They are dying now this minute in your big cities, with nothing but stones all round them—stone walls and stone streets ; not jolly stones like those you threw in the water, dear—hard, unkind stones that make them cold and let them die, while we are growing here, millions of us, in the sunshine with the butterflies floating over us. This makes us,



unhappy ; I was very unhappy this morning till you came running over and played with us.

“ “ It is not because there is not enough : it is because your people are so short-sighted, so jealous and selfish, and so curiously infatuated with things that are not so good as your old toys which you have flung away and forgotten. And you teach the children hum, hum, all day to care about such silly things, and to work for them and to look to them as the object of their lives. It is because you do not share us among you without price or difference ; because you do not share the great earth among you fairly, without spite and jealousy and avarice ; because you will not agree ; you silly, foolish people to let all the flowers wither for a thousand years while you keep each other at a distance, instead of agreeing and sharing them ! Is there something in you—as there is poison in the nightshade, you know it, dear, your papa told you not to touch it—is there a sort of poison in your people that works them up into a hatred of one another ? Why, then, do you not agree and have all things, all the great earth can give you, just as we have the sunshine and the rain ? How happy your people could be if they would only agree ! But you go on teaching even the little children to follow the same silly objects, hum, hum, hum, all the day, and they will grow up to hate each other, and to try which can get the most round things—you have one in your pocket.”

“ “ Sixpence,” said Guido. “ It’s quite a new one.” \*

It is naughty Socialistic Wheat. Then, again, in ‘ One of the New Voters,’ Roger the reaper has swallowed a gallon of harvest beer, ‘ probably the vilest drink in the world ’: ‘ upon this abominable mess the golden harvest of English fields is gathered in.’ Next day he can eat no breakfast, but he drinks more of the beer, and works fourteen hours, then to the inn. ‘ I think,’ says Jefferies, ‘ it would need a very clever man indeed to invent something for him to do, some way for him to

spend his evening.' He sees no way out ; no way of blunting the contrast between the golden sun and wheat and the harvest slave. He has come to see that the labourer's life is not, as the *Times* said in 1872, ' that life of competency without care which poets dream of ' ; he has even found that harvest wages may be earned too hard. He sees no way out. He states an evil, and dimly sees a good. He has discovered something divine in Nature with which he cannot reconcile men as they are. But he takes refuge in no fortress of dreams ; he never forgets, he would never desert, men and the present. ' The forest is gone,' he writes at Eltham, ' but the spirit of Nature stays, and can be found by those who search for it. Dearly as I love the open air, I cannot regret the medieval days. I do not wish them back again ; I would sooner fight in the foremost ranks of Time. Nor do we need them, for the spirit of Nature stays, and will always be here, no matter to how high a pinnacle of thought the human mind may attain ; still the sweet air, and the hills, and the sea, and the sun, will always be with us.'\*

But these essays are not to be judged by the thoughts which occur in them. In the best he has created poetry that gushes naturally, thought, emotion, and sensuous picture, out of the loving contemplation of visible things.

There are at least four ways of looking at visible things. Take, for example, a rough, thistly meadow at night.

One man sees a multitude of tall, pale thistles in a field of grey moonlight, knows them to be thistles, acknowledges the fact, and passes on without pause.

One is startled by their appearance. They are unlike thistles or any other plants as seen by day, and he has never seen them so before. He stops to make sure what they are, and at last remembers seeing them in a commonplace light by day, and he allows the first impression to die away.

Another sees them, and is startled, utterly forgetful

\* *The Open Air.*

that there was anything there when he passed before. He cannot reason about them, is too lazy or excited to go over and touch and see ; he returns home with a tale of the unusual moonlight growth in the field at the edge of the wood. In an earlier age he might have reported the seeing of a mushroom flourishing of fairies.

Another sees them with a rapt placidity as something beautiful and new, and his recollection or discovery that they are thistles does not disturb his enjoyment. His eye and heart feed together upon their strangeness and beauty. He has really captured one of the visions which clear eyes and an untarnished soul are summoning continually from inexhaustible and eternal Nature.

Jefferies is often like the first, and the result of this kind of vision is his most pedestrian essay ; at his best, as in 'The Pageant of Summer,' he is like the last. Being a prose-writer, he cannot change the things themselves—flower, and leaf, and sky—into melody and words, as the poet can in verse. Prose is by its nature discursive and explanatory, and Jefferies brings the objects before the eyes, and gradually, by means of a phrase, a comment, or a thought arising out of them, invests them with the spirit of life which gave them their first significance to him. Description and meditation, a beating heart and memory aiding, grow and intertwine with all the apparently ungoverned life of copse or meadow that comes to have a separate identity of its own. He seeks no neatness or balance, is impatient of the devices of the city-bred artist. 'Is all the world,' he asks, 'to be Versaillised ?' It is impossible without an example to describe the process by which he passes out of the delight of the eyes into the spiritual world, as in this passage from 'The Pageant of Summer' :

'Fanning so swiftly, the wasp's wings are but just visible as he passes ; did he pause, the light would be apparent through their texture. On the wings of the dragon-fly, as he hovers an instant before he darts, there is a prismatic gleam. These wing textures are even more

delicate than the minute filaments on a swallow's quill, more delicate than the pollen of a flower. They are formed of matter indeed, but how exquisitely it is resolved into the means and organs of life ! Though not often consciously recognized, perhaps this is the great pleasure of summer, to watch the earth, the dead particles, resolving themselves into the living case of life, to see the seed-leaf push aside the clod and become by degrees the perfumed flower. From the tiny mottled egg come the wings that by-and-by shall pass the immense sea. It is in this marvellous transformation of clods and cold matter into living things that the joy and the hope of summer reside. Every blade of grass, each leaf, each separate floret and petal, is an inscription speaking of hope. Consider the grasses and the oaks, the swallows, the sweet blue butterfly—they are one and all a sign and token showing before our eyes earth made into life. So that my hope becomes as broad as the horizon afar, reiterated by every leaf, sung on every bough, reflected in the gleam of every flower. There is so much for us yet to come, so much to be gathered and enjoyed. Not for you or me, now, but for our race, who will ultimately use this magical secret for their happiness. Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled Immortals. My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory. Hence it is that a flower is to me so much more than stalk and petals. When I look in the glass I see that every line in my face means pessimism ; but in spite of my face—that is my experience—I remain an optimist. Time with an unsteady hand has etched thin crooked lines, and, deepening the hollows, has cast the original expression into shadow. Pain and sorrow flow over us with little ceasing, as the sea-hoofs beat on the beach. Let us not look at ourselves, but onwards, and take strength from the leaf and the signs of the field.

He is indeed despicable who cannot look onwards to the ideal life of man. Not to do so is to deny our birthright of mind.\*

But the part in Jefferies' work is usually much less than the whole. He has something like the abundance of earth itself. Now and then there is a phrase like 'The curved moon hung on the sky as the hunter's horn on the wall,' or 'The storm passes and the sun comes out; the air is the sweeter and the richer for the rain, like verses with a rhyme'; but it is not in such, were they twice as numerous, that the merit of a piece consists. The writing has the abundance of Nature; the poetry resides in the passionate level of the whole. To this passion the words are truly subservient. No word astonishes; at their best the words are quietly effective; they fall now and then to the ungainly or commonplace. He did not refer his periods to his ear; also, he often wrote in haste and pain. It is rare for him to produce a large picture except by accident: when he does, he has his eye on physical objects and attempts to render them by accumulation and selection of details, and may be said to compete with the effects of the brush in such a piece as this from the 'Notes on Landscape Painting':

'The earth has a way of absorbing things that are placed upon it, of drawing from them their stiff individuality of newness, and throwing over them something of her own antiquity. As the furrow smooths and brightens the share, as the mist eats away the sharpness of the iron angles, so, in a larger manner, the machines sent forth to conquer the soil are conquered by it, become a part of it, and as natural as the old, old scythe and reaping-hook. Thus already the new agriculture has grown hoar.

'The oldest of the modern implements is the threshing-machine, which is historic, for it was once the cause of rural war. . . . It is as natural as the ricks: things grow old so soon in the fields.

\* *The Life of the Fields.*



'On the fitful autumn breeze, with brown leaves whirling and grey grass rustling in the hedges, the hum of the fly-wheel sounds afar, travelling through the mist which hides the hills. Sometimes the ricks are in the open stubble, up the Down side, where the wind comes in a long, strong rush, like a tide, carrying away the smoke from the funnel in a sweeping trail; while the brown canvas, stretched as a screen, flaps and tears, and the folk at work can scarce hear each other speak, any more than you can by the side of the sea. Vast atmospheric curtains—what else can you call them?—roll away, opening a view of the stage of hills a moment, and, closing again, reach from heaven to earth around. The dark sky thickens and lowers as if it were gathering thunder, as women glean wheat-ears in their laps. It is not thunder; it is as if the wind grew solid and hurled itself—as a man might throw out his clenched fist—at the hill. The inclined plane of the mist-clouds again reflects a grey light, and, as if swept up by the fierce gale, a beam of sunshine comes. You see it first long, as it is at an angle; then overhead it shortens, and again lengthens after it has passed, somewhat like the spoke of a wheel. In the second of its presence a red handkerchief a woman wears on the ricks stands out, the brass on the engine glows, the water in the butt gleams, men's faces brighten, the cart-horse's coat looks glossy, the straw a pleasant yellow. It is gone, and lights up the backs of the sheep yonder as it runs up the hill swifter than a hare. Swish! The north wind darkens the sky, and the fly-wheel moans in the gloom; the wood-pigeons go a mile a minute on the wind, hardly using their wings; the brown woods below huddle together, rounding their shoulders to the blast; a great air-shadow, not mist, a shadow of thickness in the air, looms behind a tiled roof in the valley. The vast profound is full of the rushing air. . . .'\*

Here nothing is created. It might have been done

\* *The Life of the Fields.*

in a score of different ways equally well. It is the work of a faithful observer, and it can suggest Nature to those who know it. The words are such as the observer might have used to another in order to describe a scene familiar to them both. But the objects are *written about*; they are not presented as, for example, visible objects are presented in Mr. Sturge Moore's "Rout of the Amazons." The writing is nearer to the original than an auctioneer's descriptions, but is not different in essential character. For both are without imagination, the power that sees a thing alive with the mind's eye, so that, even were that thing outside to pass away for ever, it would still be clear and with power of motion within the brain. To possess that power is to enjoy and suffer life intensely: to give that inward image another outer life, in words, in paint, in marble, in melody, is to be an artist. Jefferies had that power, but the images that he preserved in full vitality were of emotions and sensations rather than of physical objects. The emotion connected with an object was usually more vivid in his mind than the object itself, notwithstanding his powerful and faithful sight. Even in the passage just quoted it is a feeling about the landscape that comes nearest to being created and made alive. When the feeling is stronger and prevails, as in the harvest landscape of 'The Dewy Morn,' and in many passages in 'The Pageant of Summer' and 'Meadow Thoughts,' Nature's loveliness, permanence, and abundance is married to the writer's humanity in a manner that effects a more rare and more difficult achievement—one of Jefferies' greatest achievements—than the pictures of Ruskin or of Stevenson.

In 'Sunlight in a London Square,' which is typical of his later moralized landscape, there is no mere advice to a landscape painter:

'I stood under the portico of the National Gallery in the shade, looking southwards, across the fountains and the lions, towards the green trees under the distant tower. Once a swallow sang in passing on the wing, garrulous still

as in the time of old Rome and Augustan Virgil. From the high pediments dropped the occasional chatter of sparrows, and the chirp of their young in the roofs. The second brood ; they were late ; they would not be in time for the harvest and the fields of stubble. A flight of blue pigeons rose from the central pavement to the level line of the parapet of the western houses. A starling shot across the square, swift, straight, resolute. I looked for the swifts, but they had gone, earliest of all to leave our sky for distant countries. Away in the harvest-field the reaper, pausing in his work, had glanced up at the one stray fleck of cloud in the sky, which to my fancy might be a Cupid on a blue panel, and, seeing it, smiled in the midst of the corn, wiping his blackened face, for he knew it meant dry weather. Heat, and the dust of straw, the violent labour, had darkened his face from brown almost to blackness—a more than swarthinness, a blackness. The stray cloud was spreading out in filaments, each thread drawn to a fineness that ended presently in disappearance. It was a sign to him of continued sunshine and the prosperity of increased wages. The sun from whose fiery brilliance I escaped into the shadow was to him a welcome friend ; his neck was bare to the fierceness of the sun. His heart was gladdened because the sky promised him permission to labour till the sinews of his fingers stiffened in their crooked shape (as they held the reaping-hook), and he could hardly open them to grasp the loaf he had gained.

‘ So men laboured of old time, whether with plough or sickle or pruning-hook, in the days when Augustan Virgil heard the garrulous swallow, still garrulous. An endless succession of labour, under the brightness of summer, under the gloom of winter ; to my thought it is a sadness even in the colour and light and glow of this hour of sun, this ceaseless labour, repeating the furrow, reiterating the blow, the same furrow, the same stroke—shall we never know how to lighten it, how to live with the flowers, the swallows, the sweet, delicious shade, and the murmur of

the stream? Not the blackened reaper only, but the crowd whose low hum renders the fountain inaudible, the nameless and unknown crowd of this immense city wreathed round about the central square. I hope that at some time, by dint of bolder thought and freer action, the world shall see a race able to enjoy it without stint, a race able to enjoy the colours of the garden of life. To look backwards with the swallow there is sadness, to-day with the fleck of cloud there is unrest; but forward, with the broad sunlight, there is hope. . . .

Then there are the passages where he is interested in his own impressions, but has not advanced to a full artistic use of them—as, for example, when he tells us of the sense of wildness coming at the touch of the Reed Canary Grass, or where he says that there is no purple in ripe wheat which can be seen if it is looked for specially, ‘but when the distant beams of sunlight travelling over the hill swept through the rich ripe grain, for a moment there was a sense of purple on the retina.’ The honesty and exactness of that guarantee the quality of his work and of his observation.

One piece of advice to those who would observe herepeats several times: summer and winter keep in one place, because in the course of a year every creature that is not thoroughly local will pass over any given spot. It was probably his own habit more and more, for though in a letter written late in his life at Crowborough he speaks of knowing the whole range of the South Downs, he was compelled by ill-health to walk less and less. His earlier writings were the work of a walker; the later are the work of one who lies or sits.

## CHAPTER XV

### ‘THE DEWY MORN’

‘THE Dewy Morn,’ originally written several years before, but certainly revised, was published in 1884. The manuscript was first sent to Messrs. Longman from Brighton in December, 1883, with a note requesting that it shall not be given to a Tory reader, ‘or it will be condemned without mercy.’ A large part of it was almost certainly rewritten in its present form at about the same time as ‘The Story of My Heart.’ It has much of the same emotional thought; it has the same passion and impetuosity in style. Returning as he did so often in ‘The Story of My Heart’ to his youth, he put his memories and his mature divinations into the heroine of ‘The Dewy Morn,’ the beautiful country girl Felise. In women he found the beauty he saw and loved in Nature, as if, indeed, they were made, as Blodeuwedd was made by Gwydion, of the blossoms of the oak and the blossoms of the broom and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, but with an added solemnity as of the mountains and of light upon great waters. Perhaps he had found more in one woman than in any other human beings: certain it is that he early began to draw, or try to draw, women of singular beauty and character, with a vigour and originality, as in the Georgiana of his ‘Restless Human Hearts,’ beyond the man. Cicely Lockett is a fair, happy, sun-sweet shadow of a character. Frances in ‘Bevis’ is only pretty and female. In some of his Brighton essays his admiration of well-dressed women riding or



walking in the superb sunlight gave an unusual sparkle and gaiety to the writing. In 'Bevis,' in 'The Field Play,' and in the early 'Midsummer Hum' he sketched or suggested several labourers' daughters of great freshness, courage, and health. His 'Golden Brown' is a pure piece of worship of the peculiar beauty of young labouring women, perhaps of gipsy blood (he was interested in gipsies whom he often saw at Crowborough, and he read Smart and Crofton's 'Dialect of the English Gipsies') :—

'Two young women, both in the freshness of youth and health. Their faces glowed with a golden-brown, and so great is the effect of colour that their plain features were transfigured. The sunlight under their faces made them beautiful. The summer light had been absorbed by the skin, and now shone forth from it again ; as certain substances exposed to the day absorb light and emit a phosphorescent gleam in the darkness of night, so the sunlight had been drunk up by the surface of the skin, and emanated from it.

'Hour after hour in the gardens and orchards they worked in the full beams of the sun, gathering fruit for the London market, resting at midday in the shade of the elms in the corner. Even then they were in the sunshine—even in the shade, for the air carries it, or its influence, as it carries the perfumes of flowers. The heated air undulates over the field in waves which are visible at a distance ; near at hand they are not seen, but roll in endless ripples through the shadows of the trees, bringing with them the actinic power of the sun. Not actinic—alchemic—some intangible, mysterious power which cannot be supplied in any other form but the sun's rays. It reddens the cherry, it gilds the apple, it colours the rose, it ripens the wheat, it touches a woman's face with the golden-brown of ripe life—ripe as a plum. There is no other hue so beautiful as this human sunshine tint.

'The great painters knew it—Rubens, for instance ; perhaps he saw it on the faces of the women who gathered fruit or laboured at the harvest in the Low Countries

centuries since. He could never have seen it in a city of these northern climes, that is certain. Nothing in nature that I know, except the human face, ever attains this colour. Nothing like it is ever seen in the sky, either at dawn or sunset ; the dawn is often golden, often scarlet, or purple and gold ; the sunset crimson, flaming bright, or delicately grey and scarlet ; lovely colours all of them, but not like this. Nor is there any flower comparable to it, nor any gem. It is purely human, and it is only found on the human face which has felt the sunshine continually. There must, too, I suppose, be a disposition towards it, a peculiar and exceptional condition of the fibres which build up the skin ; for of the numbers who work out of doors, very, very few possess it ; they become brown, red, or tanned, sometimes of a parchment hue—they do not get this colour.

‘ These two women from the fruit gardens had the golden-brown in their faces, and their plain features were transfigured. They were walking in the dusty road ; there was as background a high, dusty hawthorn hedge which had lost the freshness of spring and was browned by the work of caterpillars ; they were in rags and jags, their shoes had split, and their feet looked twice as wide in consequence. Their hands were black ; not grimy, but absolutely black, and neither hands nor necks ever knew water, I am sure. There was not the least shape to their garments ; their dresses simply hung down in straight ungraceful lines ; there was no colour of ribbon or flower, to light up the dinginess. But they had the golden-brown in their faces, and they were beautiful.

‘ The feet, as they walked, were set firm on the ground, and the body advanced with measured, deliberate, yet lazy and confident grace ; shoulders thrown back—square, but not over-square (as those who have been drilled) ; hips swelling at the side in lines like the full bust, though longer drawn ; busts well filled and shapely, despite the rags and jags and the washed-out gaudiness of the shawl. There was that in their cheeks that all the wealth of London

could not purchase—a superb health in their carriage princesses could not obtain. It came, then, from the air and sunlight, and still more, from some alchemy unknown to the physician or the physiologist, some faculty exercised by the body, happily endowed with a special power of extracting the utmost richness and benefit from the rudest elements. Thrice blessed and fortunate, beautiful golden-brown in their cheeks, superb health in their gait, they walked as the immortals on earth.\*

The beauty of a woman seemed to him so large and full of divine correspondencies that in 'Beauty in the Country' he says: 'Her physique excels man's'; and that paper is a prose counterpart to Wordsworth's 'Three years she grew in sun and shower.'

'She walks, and the very earth smiles beneath her feet. Something comes with her that is more than mortal; witness the yearning welcome that stretches towards her from all. As the sunshine lights up the aspect of things, so her presence sweetens the very flowers like dew. But the yearning welcome is, I think, the most remarkable of the evidence that may be accumulated about it. So deep, so earnest, so forgetful of the rest, the passion of beauty is almost sad in its intense abstraction. It is a passion, this yearning. She walks in the glory of young life; she is really centuries old.

'A hundred and fifty years at the least—more probably twice that—have passed away, while from all enchanted things of earth and air this preciousness has been drawn. From the south wind that breathed a century and a half ago over the green wheat. From the perfume of the growing grasses waving over honey-laden clover and laughing veronica, hiding the greenfinches, baffling the bee. From rose-loved hedges, woodbine, and cornflower azure-blue, where yellowing wheat-stalks crowd up under the shadow of green firs. All the devious brooklet's sweetness where the iris stays the sunlight; all the wild woods hold of beauty; all the broad hill's thyme and freedom: thrice a

\* *The Open Air.*

hundred years repeated. A hundred years of cowslips, blue-bells, violets ; purple spring and golden autumn ; sunshine, shower, and dewy mornings ; the night immortal ; all the rhythm of Time unrolling. A chronicle unwritten and past all power of writing : who shall preserve a record of the petals that fell from the roses a century ago ? The swallows to the house-top three hundred times—think a moment of that. Thence she sprang, and the world yearns towards her beauty as to flowers that are past. The loveliness of seventeen is centuries old. Is this why passion is almost sad ?’\*

The arms, the torso, the mouth of woman uplift his heart with a sense of the divine.

In ‘The Dewy Morn’ he creates a woman who shall justify this sense of her divinity, which she does without losing her reality, nor even, except in her physical beauty, rising above many other healthy young women in love. She is a beautiful lover, born not out of the bitter sea, but out of the streaming dew that makes the grass sweeter than honeycomb. Jefferies is not merely interested in her, but pours out her passion by an intense imaginative act in which she absorbs him, yet retains her individuality ; she is virginal, like few heroines, entirely uncorrupted by the author. She is the girl of ‘Love in the Valley’ seen by a different lover.

Felise, a girl of twenty, lives with her uncle, Mr. Goring, an independent man with some land and a house, who has secluded himself, gardening, beekeeping, planting trees, and meditating. The name Felise was possibly given to her in the early first draft out of homage to ‘Poems and Ballads.’ The book tells first of her hearty, joyous passion of love for Martial Barnard, a young neighbour living on a big encumbered farm. He has long thought himself in love with another, but his feeling has stagnated, and he has fallen into an embittered state. He admires Felise coolly, and is much with her, but has resolved not to fall in love. She will do anything

\* *The Open Air.*

to be with him, but his feeling for her is only converted to perfect love when he believes himself to be drowning in an attempt to save the life of Felise's maid, Polly Shaw. Another lover is Robert Godwin, the hard bailiff of the great Cornleigh Estate, who has secretly grown tender over her since she rolled in his mowing grass as a child and he said nothing. Seeing her the frank lover of his rival, Barnard, he one day seizes her, binds her, and tries to make his horse trample on her face as she lies upon the ground. Martial shoots the horse, and Godwin soon afterwards kills himself. Martial's fortunes mend, and he is able to marry Felise at the end of the book.

As a background there are the Downs and the swollen Cornleigh Estate belonging to a stupid rich man who has long represented the county in Parliament, and has gone on rounding off his estate with the best nature in the world, allowing his bailiff to see that no one not working on the estate shall dwell in one of his cottages, to deny the villagers access to drinking water, and so on. Goring is a stiff, quiet opponent to Cornleigh; Martial, in a long speech at a meeting where everyone is bowing down to Cornleigh, an eloquent opponent who has his coat torn for his pains.

Goring, a musing, reticent fugitive from the superfluous troubles of the world, is not a well-defined character, but his library, his garden, his filbert walk, and the bathing-pool in his woods, make a lovely refuge for Felise. They are a pair not unlike Prospero and Miranda.

She has flawless physical strength, and at the opening of the book her splendid energy, all the unhesitating sensuousness of health, innocence, and youth, soars with the emotion of love for Barnard. She is out by Ashpen Hill a little after four in the summer morning.

'Felise sat down on a great trunk of oak lying in the lane by a gateway, and sighed with very depth of enjoyment. There was a yellow-hammer perched on the gate, and he had been singing. When Felise approached, he ceased; but seeing that she was quiet and intended him



no harm, he began again. His four or five rising notes, and the long-drawn idle-sounding note with which they conclude, suited so well with the sunshine, they soothed her still further. She sighed again, and let herself sit loosely on the oak-trunk, like the yellow-hammer. He had his back humped, and all his body rested comfortably. So did she ; she permitted her back to bow, her shoulders to stoop, her limbs to relax, and idle nature to have her own way. After a while she sighed again.

‘ She was bathing in the beauty of the morning—floating upheld on the dewy petals. A swimmer lies on the warm summer water, the softest of couches, extended at full length, the body so gently held that it undulates slightly with the faint swell. So soft is the couch it softens the frame, which becomes supple, flexible, like the water itself.

‘ Felise was lying on the flowers and grass, extended under the sun, steeped in their sweetness. She visibly sat on the oak-trunk—invisibly her nature was reclining, as the swimmer on the sun-warmed sea. Her frame drooped as the soul, which bears it up, flowed outwards, feeling to grass, and flower, and leaf, as the swimmer spreads the arms abroad, and the fingers feel the water. She sighed with deep content, dissolving in the luxurious bath of beauty.

‘ Her strong heart beating, the pulses throbbing, her bosom rising and regularly sinking with the rich waves of life ; her supple limbs and roundness filled with the plenty of ripe youth ; her white, soft, roseate skin, the surface where the sun touched her hand glistening with the dew of the pore ; the bloom upon her—that glow of the morn of life—the hair more lovely than the sunlight ; the grace unwritten of perfect form—these produced within her a sense of existence—a consciousness of being, to which she was abandoned ; and her lips parted to sigh. The sigh was the expression of feeling herself to be.

‘ To be ! To live ! To have an intense enjoyment in every inspiration of breath ; in every beat of the pulse ; in every movement of the limbs ; in every sense !

‘The rugged oak-trunk was pleasant to her. She placed her hand on the brown, stained wood—stained with its own sap, for the bark had been removed. She touched it ; and so full of life was her touch, that it found a pleasure in that rude wood. The brown boulder-stone in the lane, ancient, smoothed, and ground in times which have vanished like a cloud, its surface the colour of old polished oak, reflecting the sun with a dull gleam—the very boulder-stone was pleasant to her, so full of life was her sense of sight.

‘There came a skylark, dropping over the hedge, and alighted on a dusty level spot in the lane. His shadow shot a foot long on the dust, thrown by the level beams of the sun. The dust, in shadow and sunshine—the despised dust—now that the lark drew her glance to it, was pleasant to see.

‘All things are joyously beautiful to those who feel themselves to be ; but it is only given to the chosen of nature to know this exceeding delight.

‘In herself rapt, the whole face of earth and sky ministered to her, each and all that made up the visible world was flung at her feet. They did homage—Felise, queen of herself, was queen of all.

‘It was love without a lover—love absorbed in itself. Her whole existence was quivering with love ; this intensity of life was love. She was gathering from sunlight, azure sky and grassy fields, from dewy hills and all the morning, an immense strength to love. Her parted lips sighed—there was such store and warmth of love within them. Without a thought she thought deeply, pondering, weighed down on herself with weight of feeling. Her own intense existence absorbed her. . . .

‘There was nothing large, gigantic, or Amazonian about her ; it was the perfection of her physical nature, not size or training. Her natural body had been further perfected by a purely natural life. The wind, the sun, the fields, the hills—freedom, and the spirit which dwells among these, had made her a natural woman ; such a

woman as Earth meant to live upon her surface, and as Earth intended in the first origin of things : beauty and strength—strength and beauty.

‘ What a latent power of love was there in that richness of blood, that depth of chest, that greatness of heart ! Pure love, pure as the spring-water that comes from the hills, was there ready to be poured forth—always full, always pouring, always the same and always pure.’\*

She has seen Barnard hardly at all, and only a short time ago for the first time. Long before, as she wandered over the hills, her heart had been full of love ; meeting Barnard is only the outlet for that love.

‘ As she had roamed about the hills, and wandered in the woods, or by the shore, musing in deep enjoyment of the sunlight and the wind, love was coursing through each vein, filling every throb of her heart. It was this which gave such beauty to the flower, such colour to the sky, such pleasant coolness to the stream. She awoke to it in the morning as the swallows came to the eave by the window ; they had been coursing long before through the air while she lay sleeping.

‘ She threw open her window and breathed it—the sweet wind from the meadows brought it. All day the sunlight poured it forth upon the green grass and rustling leaves ; she moved in it as she moved in the sunbeams. By night it was with her. An inexpressible fulness of passion grew in her breast.

‘ But could this be ? Could anyone love without an object ? Is it possible for the heart to become full and yet without an image ? Not perhaps with a small nature, a narrow mind, a stunted being. With all great hearts and true women it is always the case ; they love first in themselves, they love without knowing why, or whom—it is their very life. If such a great and noble woman were enclosed in a prison from youth, and permitted no sight of man, still to the end of existence she would love. The

\* *The Dewy Morn.*

divine flame lighted in her with life would burn on to the last moment.

'Felise's heart was lost before she saw him. She lost it amid the flowers of the meadow, the wind on the hill, by the rushing stream. She lost it in her study among her books, her poetry of old Greece—songs of the 'Violet Land'—her 'Odyssey' and dramas of Sophocles and Æschylus; among the stars that swept by over the hill; by the surge that ran up and kissed her feet. The pointed grass stole it from her; the fresh leaves of spring demanded it; all things beautiful took it from her. Her heart was lost long since.

'The streamlet in the woods is full before the dove alights to drink at it; the flower in the grass has expanded before the butterfly comes. A great passion does not leap into existence as violets sprang up beneath the white feet of Aphrodite. It has grown first. The grapes have ripened in the sun before they are plucked for wine.

'Her vigour of life was very great; yet it was not that that sent her to the fields and woods, to the hill-top and the shore; nor the abounding physical vigour which forced her broad chest through the clear green sea; nor the strong muscle hidden in the rounded arm which drove her boat over the waves. The soul that inspired the effort was the love that was growing within her.'\*

She walks, she runs, she swims, she rows, the fine flower of all that Wiltshire downland to which the novelist has added the sea. Her heart 'put a feeling' into whatever she saw; she brought the beauty to them. This is, perhaps, one of Jefferies' inconsistencies. He had no system, and he was not always studied in his expressions. I do not think he means that there was no beauty there before, but rather that she, the supreme expression of natural beauty, came to the fields and the hills as the dawn to set free a spirit already there. It is inconceivable to me that such joy as hers and that of other lovers in the presence of Nature should be merely as a

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perfume or a sound that fills a senseless hall for a short time. That joy is rather the discovery of sympathies and affinities, heaven high, ocean deep, and wide as the world. Felise emerges dominant from the expanse of living things because she is human, but to say that she brings them their beauty is as if a mole were to announce that upon his mounds were based the pillars that upheld the firmament. No, she bears gifts of beauty about with her to flower and clod and cloud only in the sense that she illuminates them for herself and her lover, and that through her all created things are gladdened because in her the divine, which they also partake, riots unwontedly ; through her they speak and have new life. Jefferies speaks more accurately when he says that until Barnard came the land was incomplete ; he gave a meaning to it ; and ' she endowed him with all that she perceived in the glory and mystery around her by day and night.' Nature's reception of Felise makes these opening chapters comparable, for their sensuous and holy delight, with few things except the ' Epithalamion ' of Spenser and the love scene between Esla and Cloten in the tenth book of ' The Dawn in Britain.'

But the spiritual blitheness is not found only where Felise is wandering, like Jefferies, alone and a lover. It is allied in its warmth to Titian's ' Venus and Adonis,' and has also a real dramatic value, in this scene where Felise, as yet all but a stranger to Barnard, has compelled him to stop and speak to her when he is riding on the Downs. They can talk but awkwardly ; she looks straight in his face, but he avoids her ; she strokes his horse.

' He could not help but look, at the sound of his name. He saw a face full of wistful meaning upturned to him. Her golden hair had strayed a little on her forehead, three or four glistening threads wandered over it, asking some loving hand to smooth them back. The white brow without a stain, a mark, a line ; no kiss there but must be purified by the touch ; it was an altar which could not be tainted—which would turn taint to purity. Large grey



eyes that seemed to see him only—to whom the whole world, the hills round them, the sky over, was not—eyes that drew his towards them, and held his vision in defiance of his will. If once you look over the side of a boat into the clear sea, you must continue looking—the depth fascinates the mind. Some depth in her rapt gaze fascinated him.

'Her eyebrows arched—not too much arched—the curve of the cheek, roseate, almost but not quite smiling, carried his thought downwards to her breathing lips. Her lips were apart, rich, dewy, curved; they kissed him by their expression, if not in deed. In that instant his heart throbbed violently; the beat rose to thrice its usual rate.

'The first moment of awaking to a happy morning, the daylight that means a joyful event; the first view of the sea in youth, when the blue expanse brings tears to the eyes—in these there is some parallel to the sudden, the extreme, and the delicious feeling that shot through him. To reach the ideal of human happiness it is necessary to be for the moment unconscious of all, except the cause. For that moment he had no consciousness except of her, such was the power of her passion glowing in her face.

'Even Felise, eager to retain him with her, and unhesitatingly employing every means, could not maintain that gaze. Unabashed and bold with love, she was too true, too wholly his, to descend to any art. Her gaze, passionate as it was, was natural and unstudied; therefore it could not continue. Her eyes drooped, and he was released.

'Immediately, as if stung to a sense of his honour, he placed his hands on the horse, sprang up, and seated himself.

'“I—I have much to do,” he said, embarrassed to the last degree, and holding out his hand.

'She would not see it. She took the bridle, and stroked Ruy's neck, placing her cheek almost against the glossy skin. Obeying the pressure of his knee, Ruy began to

move slowly. She walked beside him, holding the bridle ; but Ruy's long stride soon threatened to leave her behind. For very shame, he could not but stay. At a touch Ruy halted. She looked up at him ; he carefully avoided her glance. The horse, growing restless, began to move again ; again, for courtesy's sake, he was compelled to check him. Not a word had been spoken while this show was proceeding.

' Barnard's face grew hot with impatience, or embarrassment, or a sense that he was doing wrong in some manner not at the moment apparent. Sideways, she saw his glowing cheek. It only inflamed her heart the more ; the bright colour, like the scarlet tints in a picture, lit up his face. Next he controlled himself, and forced his features and attitude to an impassive indifference. He would sit like a statue till it pleased her to let him go. Ruy pulled hard to get his neck free that he might feed again.

' She stooped and gathered him some grass and gave it to him. Twice she fed him. Barnard remained silent and impassive. Still not a word between them. The third time she gathered a handful of grass ; as she rose her shoulder brushed his knee. She stood there, and did not move. Her warm shoulder just touched him, no more ; her golden hair was very near. She drew over a tuft of Ruy's mane, and began to deftly plait it. Barnard's face, in defiance of himself, flushed scarlet ; his very ears burned. He stole half a glance sideways ; how lovely her roseate cheek, the threads of her golden hair, against the bay's neck ! Ruy was turning his nostrils round to touch her, and ask for more grass. She swiftly plaited his mane.

' At that moment another horse neighed over the hill ; they both looked round—no one was in sight. But Ruy answered with a neigh, and in the same instant stepped forward. Barnard pressed his knee ; Ruy began to move faster. Barnard bowed ; his voice was temporarily inarticulate, and he was gone.\*

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There are at least three other passages between Felise and Barnard which would be enough to place this fiction very high in spite of some awkwardness, as in the steps to marriage after the crisis of the book.

The second passage is where Barnard, admiring but not yet loving Felise, hides in the bracken by the bathing-pool, and, watching Felise, is constrained to remain hidden while she unexpectedly bathes before his eyes. In 'Nature in the Louvre' and in 'The Story of My Heart' Jefferies has written of the nude with something beyond and above idolatry. The hip, the breast, the flank, the back, the limbs, are dear to eye and heart; they are loved for their humanity; and he gives them a universal significance, and links them to the sunlight and the hills and the sea. He found 'the idea of perfect human beauty—the idea of shape and curve and motion' in the writers of Greece, 'even those of pure thought.' His attitude towards this beauty is Greek, and it is more than Greek, something more than Greek which I can only suggest by saying that there is a feminine element in it which the Greek never had. It is sensuous, without the bold fleshliness of Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis,' without the headiness of Keats' 'Eve of St. Agnes,' without Pater's languor. The whole passage should be compared with that describing the similar scene of Damon and Musidora in Thomson's 'Summer,' to which the stamp of a more worldly nature has given a different charm. Of shame there is not a touch, in Jefferies or in his reader.

'Felise opened the door of the bathing-room, and stepped out upon the platform before it. She stood in the shadow of the beeches behind; all the rest of the pool was in bright light. Her bathing-tunic was blue, bordered with white, and fringed with gold—such a tunic as might have been worn by a Grecian maiden.

'It was loose about her shoulders: they were nearly bare; her arms quite so. In the shade the whiteness and purity of her skin was wonderfully beautiful. It

gleamed in the cool shade, more so than the yellow iris flowers, though they had the advantage of bright colour.

‘ The beauty of a perfect skin is so great, to gaze at it is happiness. The world holds no enjoyment like the view of beauty.

‘ Her white feet were at the very edge of the dull boards, so that her reflection was complete in the water had anyone been looking from the opposite shore. She put up her hands to settle the strings of pearls in her hair, to make certain that they would not come loose. It was Felise’s fancy to wear her pearls—her only jewellery and dowry—when she bathed out of doors in the sunshine. She decked herself for the bath—the bath not only in water, but in the air and light—as if she had been going to a temple in the ancient times.

‘ With her hands employed at the back of her head and arms raised, the contour of her form was accentuated. The deep broad chest, the bust, the hips, filled out. The action of lifting the arms in this manner opens the ribs, decreases the waist, slightly curves the back, and extends and develops every line. A sculptor should have chosen her in such an attitude.

‘ In a moment, lifting her hands and joining them high above her head, she dived—the pearls glistened as she passed out of the shadow into the sunlight, and the water hid her completely.

‘ The dove flew, startled from his branch in the beech ; a swallow that had been coming to drink, as he flew, mounted again into the air.

‘ She rose at some distance from the diving-platform, and immediately struck out slowly, swimming on her chest. Her chin was well out of water, and sometimes her neck ; her chest held so large a volume of air that she was as buoyant as a water-bird. It needed no effort to keep afloat ; all her strength was at liberty to be used in propulsion. Swimming towards the hatch, presently she turned and came back to the platform, then out again into

the centre of the pool, where she floated, dived under, and floated again.

‘Gathering energy from practice and the touch of the water, she now swam on her side, following the margin of the pool all round, so as to have a larger course. Twice she went round without a pause—swimming her swiftest, equal, in a direct line, to several hundred yards. Still joying in the sunlight and the water, she continued again for the third circle. Her passage was even swifter, her vigour grew with the labour.

‘The water drew back the tunic from her right shoulder, which shone almost at the surface; her white right arm swept backwards, grasping the wave; her left arm was concealed, being under her, and deeper. It is the fastest, the easiest, and the most graceful mode of swimming. In the moment when her rounded right arm was sweeping backwards, clearly visible in the limpid water—just as the stroke was nearly completed—the sculptor might again have obtained an inspiration. For at that moment there was repose in action, the exertion of the stroke finishing, the form gliding easily, the left cheek resting as if reposing on the surface.

‘At the completion of the third round, Felise swam to the shallow grassy shore, where Shaw was now waiting for her.

“‘Oh, how you do panck!’ (pant), said Shaw, laughing, as Felise walked up out of the water on to the turf, and sat down at the edge of the shadow of the beech. Her breast was heaving with the labour, her deep grey eyes shone as if enlarged; there was a slight increase of colour in her face. She was not in the least exhausted; she was exhilarated to the utmost. Shaw chatted beside her; Felise neither heard nor heeded: she was full of the influence of the air and light and limpid fountain.

‘There was something almost sacred to her in the limpid water, in the sweet air, and the light of day. The flower in the grass was not only colour, it was alive. The



water was not merely a smooth surface, the air not merely an invisible current, the light not merely illumination. As if they had been living powers, so they influenced her. A feeling entered her from them : the light, the air, the water, the soft sward on which her hand rested, life came to her from them.

‘ With them she felt her own life, she knew her own fulness of existence. Like this the maidens of ancient Greece sang to the stream when they filled their urns. Even Socrates the wisest sat pondering in reverence by the stream. Felise was full of the delicious influence of the great powers of nature. This susceptibility rendered her love so rich and deep.

‘ She sat leaning on her left hand, her knees lying sideways, and her right hand on her ankle ; the upper part of her form in shadow, her limbs in the brilliant light. The beams fell on her white rounded knees ; the right knee being uppermost was entirely in light, but it cast a partial shadow on the left one.

‘ Twins in exquisite whiteness and shape they reposed together, the under one a little in advance. The knee-cap (which in woman is small), slipping naturally aside, left a space on the summit of each knee smooth and almost level, perhaps in the least degree concave. Upon these lovely surfaces the light rested lovingly ; in the wide earth there was no spot the sun loved so well.

‘ The rounded supple knee is where the form hinges ; there all is poised. They are the centres from which beauty rises. With the knee all grace begins ; they bend, and at the same moment the neck bows, and the forehead droops. Resting on them firmly the shape rises, the neck is straightened, and the brow thrown back. All is poised on the knee.

‘ Because of its varying mood of grace the knee can with difficulty be seized in sculpture or painting. The least flexure alters the contour. Now from head to foot it is the flesh that is beautiful, that which covers and conceals the bones and muscles under its texture. Such is the rule,



From a photograph.

JAMES LUCKETT JEFFERIES,  
the father of Richard Jefferies.



to express beauty you must delineate the adipose tissue ; the knee is the exception.

‘ Here the bone—the knee-cap—is but thinly covered, and there is cartilage and sinew ; not much more than the skin hides them. Here is the only place where the bone and sinew can approach the surface—can be recognized—and yet not interfere with the sense of loveliness. Why so ?

‘ Because at this centre motion commences ; the idea of motion is inseparable from it, motion in graceful lines. In walking it is the knee that gives the step, in the dance, stooping to gather flowers, bending to prayer ; from the knee passion springs to the arms of her lover. We have seen these movements and admired them, and the eye transfers their grace to the knee.

‘ But it is also of itself shaped. There alone the bone and sinew assume an exquisite form. I cannot tell you why the human heart yearns towards that which is rounded, smooth, shapely ; it is an instinct in the depth of our nature.

‘ The knee is so very human, so nearly sorrowful in its humanity ; sorrow seeks its knees, sadness bends on them, love desiring in secret does so on its knees. They have been bent in many moods in so many lands so many many centuries past. Human life is centred in the knee. In the knee we recognize all that the heart has experienced.

‘ Beautiful knees, the poise and centre of the form ! Were I rich, how gladly I would give a thousand pounds for a true picture of the knee ! and if the coloured shadow on canvas were worth so much, how many times multiplied the value of the original reality !

‘ However indifferent the person may be—the individual—to see the knee is to love it for itself.

‘ The shadow of the upper one partially encroached on the lower ; round about the under knee, too, the short grass rose. Immediately behind, the least way higher than the upper knee, the bullion fringe of the tunic drooped across the white skin. Her left hand rested

among the daisies ; her feet reached nearly to some golden lotus flowers.

‘ The left, or under foot, was much hidden by the grass ; the grass touched warm, having been hours in the sunshine. The upper foot was visible, and two straight strokes—two parallel dimples crossed the large toe (the thumb of the foot) at the second joint.

‘ She held her ankle lightly with her right hand, so that her right arm descended beside her body. Bare from the shoulder in its luxurious fulness, it reposed against her. The slight pressure of its own weight enlarged it midway between the shoulder and the elbow. But the left arm being straightened appeared, on the contrary, largest at the shoulder.

‘ That shoulder—the left—raised a little higher than the other, on account of her position, was partly bare, the tunic having slipped somewhat. Unconsciously she pressed her cheek against it, feeling and caressing it. Her shoulder lifted itself a little to meet the embrace of her cheek, and the tunic slipped still more, giving it and that side of her bust freedom to the air. She liked to feel herself ; the soft skin of the shoulder met the softer cheek ; her lips touched the place where arm and shoulder are about to mingle.

‘ Shaw thought Felise had finished bathing, and kneeling behind her, undid her hair, which fell and reached the grass. It was somewhat wavy, very thick and long, and delicate in texture. As it descended it concealed the beautiful shoulders like a mantle. She took her strings of pearls from Shaw, and held them in her right hand ; she valued them greatly, and scarcely cared to let even Shaw carry them.

‘ A red butterfly came by and hovered about her knee, inclined to alight, but perceiving that it glistened with the water, flew onwards over the pool.

‘ Felise moved her feet among the grass, she liked to feel it ; she extended her foot to the golden lotus flowers. But the moment of luxurious enjoyment of the sunlight



and the air, the liberty of the tunic, was over ; her active nature reasserted itself ; she rose and walked towards the bathing apartment to dress.

' " There's a rabbit in the ferns," said Shaw, following her ; " I heard him rustle twice. Wonder why you won't talk to-day, now. If I was to run round the water like you swim round, I should die of pancking [panting], I should."

' She looked as if such exertion would overcome her : short, plump, and merry.

' Felise took no heed of Shaw's chatter ; she was thinking how to accomplish her resolution.\*

The liberty of innocence has hardly reached beyond that. Barnard watching Felise, like Geoffrey in ' Greene Ferne Farm ' watching Margaret with ' the devotion of an artist,' suggests a coldness, as of the sea, in the voluptuousness, peculiar, perhaps, to Jefferies himself.

The third passage is chapter xli., one of the richest pastoral pictures in English, though pastoral is a poor word to use of such realism in the portraits and the background. The August thunder booms far off at sea ; the reapers reap in the brilliant sun ; and the lovers sit and look out upon the land : ' Let us not outlive love in our days, and come to look back with sorrow on those times. You have seen the ships upon the sea ; they sail hither and thither thousands of miles. Do they find aught equal to love ? Can they bring back precious gems to rival it from the rich south ? ' There is no pastoral picture like it for the beauty of human passion and the abundance and sympathy of Nature round about.

The fourth passage is in the last pages of all. Felise and Martial were married ; ' the man slept ; the woman, wakeful in her happiness, stole to the window where she had so often sat of old time.' It was early in a morning of May, and the contented woman is drawn against the vast loveliness of dawn. ' A pure rest had come to her life. Except to love and to love fulfilled, and then only to

\* *The Dewy Morn.*

woman, is such rest ever given. For the heart, and the hand, and the mind of a man are for ever driving onwards, and no profundity of rest ever comes to his inmost consciousness. At dawn he looks forward to the noon-day.' Felise did not look forward, but 'her heart brimmed to the full of love.' In this passage Jefferies has divined one of the clearest divisions between man and woman, whilst making a picture of great beauty that completes the portrait of Felise's youth.

The book is a portrait of Felise. Martial Barnard is not as essential to the book, nor as interesting to Jefferies :

'Comparatively his face was small for his height ; he was not all face, as we see some men, whose countenances seem to descend to the last button of their waistcoats. His head was in just proportion, the summit and finish of his shape, as a capital of a column. His hair had a shade like the gold of Felise's, yet not in the least like hers, for his was deeper, browner, as if the sun had burnt it, as it had his cheek. Had it not been cropped so close, his hair would have curled ; in the days of Charles II. such hair would have been of priceless value to a cavalier, curled locks flowing to the shoulder.

'In outline his countenance was somewhat oval, his features fine—a straight nose and chin well marked, but not heavy. He had a short beard, and his head showed the more to advantage, because he had a good neck, not too thick. His eyes were blue, and framed in firmly-drawn eyebrows and long lashes. Though well built, he was slender rather than stout ; his hands were brown, but not large.'

He is revealed in many ways, as when he talks of Shakespeare with his sweetheart ; but he is the intellectual side of Jefferies himself, the emotional having been exhausted in the character of Felise. It is the Jefferies of 1883 who makes the bold speech against the Cornleigh interest, saying that 'there does not exist a race of freemen on the face of the earth who have been so completely under the thumb as farmers' ; that 'there never will be any

more prosperity in English agriculture till the entire system is revised ; till a man can cultivate the land free from vexatious hindrances, medieval hindrances, superstitious hindrances, and burdens such as tithes, ordinary and extraordinary ; that the Church is ' a huge octopus ' ; and, finally, that he has ' done with the steward, with the solicitor, with the parson, with the gardener, and the gamekeeper . . . with the groom, and the whole circle of despicable sycophants.' There has been a change since ' Hodge and His Masters.' It is noticeable everywhere, and nowhere so much as where he speaks again of the peasant's ingratitude : ' for one act of kindness in eighty years, why should they feel grateful ?' The labourer ' must still be a serf,' he says, when he can be turned out of employment and home at once. He has become as bitter against things as they are ordained by the land-owners as he used to be against their opponents ; he is pleased with what he called ' the deep etching ' in his description of the Cornleigh estate, where if a girl has an illegitimate child she and her parents, or whoever lives with her, have to leave the cottage ; for ' the rulers at the House, whether the haughty ladies or their shaven advisers, looked with such sacerdotal horror upon this inexpiable crime that nothing less than absolute extinction could suffice.' ' Why,' he asks, ' should any one person possess the power to issue such a ukase ? They do possess the power, and will do so while nine-tenths of each agricultural hamlet are at the absolute disposal of the proprietor of the soil.' He has nothing to say against the Ballot Act now. Ridiculing Lætitia Cornleigh's scheme for ' The Encouragement of Art Culture in the Homes of the Poor,' he says true things about Art :

' For the enjoyment of art it is first of all necessary to have a full belly.

' May I inquire, too, of any painter, if such chances to light on these pages, whether he would consider it likely to encourage a love of art merely to hang a picture on a wall ? whether he has not known even well-educated and

wealthy people who possessed scores of valuable pictures without the least love of art ? whether, in short, even he, a painter of pictures, considered pictures the whole end and aim of art ?

‘ Is not art rather in the man than on the wall ?

‘ Once now and then I have been into the cottages of farm labourers (who had the good fortune to possess security of tenure) and found old oak furniture ; curious grotesque crockery, generally much coloured—the favourite colour red ; ancient brazen-faced upright clocks ticking slowly, as the stars go slowly past in the quiet hours of night ; odd things on the mantelpiece ; an old gun with brass fittings, polished brass ornaments ; two or three old books with leather bindings ; on the walls quaint smoke-tinted pictures three-score years old.

‘ Outside, trees in the garden—plums, pears, damsons—trees planted by the owner for fruit and shade, but mostly for solace, since it is a pleasant thing to see a tree grow. These people, having no fear of being turned out of doors, had accumulated such treasures, a chair at a time, making the interior home-like. And out of doors they had planted trees ; without love of trees, I doubt if there be any art. Of art itself in itself they had had no thought ; not one had ever tried to draw or paint. They had coloured their strips of flower-garden or bordering with bright yellow flowers ; that was all the paint they knew.

‘ Yet I think this home-life in itself was something like true art. There was a sense of the fitness of things, and good instinctive taste in the selection of interior fittings, furniture, and even of colour.

‘ Oak is our national wood, old oak, dark and deep-shaded—Rembrandt oak—oak is part of our national art. Brass polishes and gleams in sunlight through the window or glows in the sparkle from winter’s fire. It sets off the black oak. Red-coloured chinaware (perhaps it is a shade of pink) is gay and bright under low-pitched ceilings with dark wood beams and no white ceiling. Yellow flowers



light up the brown mould. Altogether a realistic picture painted in actual dark oak, actual brass, actual red china, and actual yellow flowers.

‘ Here then there was art in the man. Can you put that taste in by hanging a picture on the wall ? Letitia’s pictures were chiefly of the pre-Raphaelite ecclesiastical order—saints, saints’ lives and deaths, such as were painted in the fourteenth century, and with which life at the present day has no sort of sympathy.

‘ There was not a cottage-tenant on the estate of Cornleigh who could call his cottage his own securely for more than six months. How, then, was it possible for taste to grow up, or to exercise itself if it was there ?

‘ There can be no art in a people who know that at any moment they may be thrust out of doors. Art is of slow growth.

‘ Up in the north they say there is a district where the labourers spend their idle hours in cutting out and sticking together fiddles. I do not care twopence for a fiddle as a fiddle ; but still I think if a labouring man coming home from plough, and exposure to rough wind, and living on coarse fare, can still have spirit enough left to sit down and patiently carve out bits of maple wood and fit them together into a complete and tunable fiddle, then he must have within him some of the true idea of art, and that fiddle is in itself a work of art.

‘ Nothing of the sort will ever be possible in our cottage homes till the people in them know that they can live therein as long as they please provided they pay the rent, and are not liable to be ordered off into the next county or anywhere because they have displeased someone.’\*

He laughs at the great new Maasbury Church that was to replace the little old one, and to give the ‘ shaven advisers ’ the profit of the social influence gained by such a change. But Jefferies never knew nor cared much about the church, whether he praised it as a youth or scorned it in his maturity. The scorn was better than

\* *The Dewy Morn.*



the praise, because it was more generous and more in harmony with his character. Complacent praise never did any good; humane scorn of an old and confused institution might possibly do good. It is a pity he took to abuse; but his nature was dogmatic, and abuse is the superfluity of a dogmatic nature. He has learned, too, that things may be imperfect and yet better than the perfection of cloistered nullity, and he contrasts the empty Cornleigh with Justice Shallow, who 'had heard the chimes at midnight, had made the acquaintance of the *bona robas*, had been intoxicated (by inference), had sown wild oats in his youth.'

But along with this spirit of opposition Jefferies retains much of the old—in his hate of Boards and beadles, and his belief in 'good juicy meat' and ale. Here he is thinking again of Fate: 'Petty circumstances unregarded lead men on, from step to step, from thought to thought, action to action; is this Fate?' In other places, 'Someone has to suffer—always someone has to suffer'; and, 'Nothing is ever a pleasure or a real profit to him who has to labour for it. Truth—you die in the pursuit, and the sea beats the beach as it did a thousand years ago.' Here, too, the creed implied in all his books is definitely stated:

'All of you with little children, and who have no need to count expense, or even if you have such need, take them somehow into the country among green grass and yellow wheat—among trees—by hills and streams, if you wish their highest education, that of the heart and the soul, to be completed.

'Therein shall they find a Secret—a knowledge not to be written, not to be found in books. They shall know the sun and the wind, the running water, and the breast of the broad earth. Under the green spray, among the hazel boughs where the nightingale sings, they shall find a Secret, a feeling, a sense that fills the heart with an emotion never to be forgotten. They will forget their books—they will never forget the grassy fields.

'If you wish your children to think deep things—to

know the holiest emotions—take them to the woods and hills, and give them the freedom of the meadows.

‘ It is of no use to palter with your conscience and say, “ They have everything ; they have expensive toys, story-books without end ; we never go anywhere without bringing them home something to amuse them ; they have been to the seaside, and actually to Paris ; it is absurd, they *cannot* want anything more.”

‘ But they *do* want something more, without which all this expensive spoiling is quite thrown away. They want the unconscious teaching of the country, and without that they will never know the truths of this life. They need to feel—unconsciously—the influence of the air that blows, sun-sweetened, over fragrant hay ; to feel the influence of deep shady woods, mile-deep in boughs—the stream—the high hills ; they need to revel in long grass. Put away their books, and give them the freedom of the meadows. Do it at any cost or trouble to yourselves, if you wish them to become great men and noble women.’\*

Robert Godwin, the Cornleigh bailiff, hopeless lover of Felise, is Jefferies’ one successful concentration upon a character in no way like himself. Like Barnard, he is usually *written about* rather than revealed as Felise is ; but his acute moments are as imaginatively drawn as anything in the book. He was one to whom ‘ that scarce definable culture—that idea which exists in the heart and soul independent of outward appearances—the sense of a beautiful inner life—so delicate a music was soundless in his ears.’ And ‘ the ground was solid under his feet ; the sky afar off a mere translucent roof ; the sun a round ball of heat, never seen unless he chanced to be driving westwards towards sunset. . . . When his hands were still and his frame reposed, his mind was simply vacant, like that of a horse looking from his stable-door, or a dog by his kennel.’ He had ‘ the faculty of no imagination.’ Yet he never thought of anything else but Felise ; for nine years ‘ a colourless eye watched her.’ ‘ He lived in

\* *The Dewy Morn.*

a dream—this dreamless man ; he was absorbed in one idea—an idea so fixed that his mind was vacant. . . . His mind was with Felise.’ Then one day she promised to go over to his house—really to see the horse which Barnard had had to sell to Godwin. He stood near her, having come in a fury to complain of her fishing where she ought not to. He had never before been so near. Her presence was ‘almost an embrace,’ and now ‘his abstraction was so intense that he was in a manner dead.’ Yet he worked correctly all the long summer day before she was to come. In the evening he worked at his accounts, wrote letters, made notes. His sister, tired of writing, had her supper and went to bed. He went out and waited until the mail-cart came for the letters. He could not rest ; he took no notice of the sky at that time, ‘when, if ever it will, the soul reigns, and the coarse, rude acts of day are forgotten in the aspiration of the inmost mind.’

‘Robert returned to his bedroom, took off his coat, looked at his bed, and put his coat on again. He did not care to lie down. He lighted a great stable-lantern, and went out of doors again.

‘The hasp of the gate against which he had leaned was a little shaky and loose ; he found the tools, went to work, and put it to rights. Then he went into the orchard to the garden-house, and examined the gardener’s tools, one by one, to see if they had been roughly used, or injured ; if so, the man must pay. The man had been digging ; with the lantern in his hand Robert paced the distance dug to see how many yards he had completed.

‘Robert went to the stable, looked in at Ruy, climbed up into the tallet, and spied about to see if any forage had been stolen. He examined the carter’s collection of horse-hair—his perquisite—to see if it was accumulating too fast.

‘He brought out a stool and saw, and sawed up fire-wood till he had made a goodly heap. He would have

done more, but that would encourage waste. If only a little was cut up, only a little would be used.

' He planed a piece of timber intended for the head of a gate. He counted the poles aslant against the wood-pile. Nothing else remaining that he could do, he returned to the garden, took off his coat, set the lantern on the grass, and dug where the gardener had left off. While he dug the night went on—the night that was in no haste to do anything ; and by degrees a pale light grew up above the eastern horizon. The dawn comes early in summer.

' Still Robert dug steadily on till the other mail-cart—the down mail—approached. He stopped and listened ; the driver did not pull up, so there were no letters. Robert scraped his boots, put away the spade, blew out the lantern, and went indoors.

' By the pale white light he looked again at his bed ; but he could not lie down. There was no rest in him that night. He lit his cheap candle and went up into the attic overhead, where he had not been for years. The shutters were perpetually closed up there, so that the place was partly dark, although streaks of dawn came through the chinks. The great bare room was full of ancient lumber.

' He set the candle on an oak press and fell to work, sorting the confused mass which strewn the floor. Old chairs—some broken, some perfect—a picture or two, hair-trunks, books, bundles of newspapers, pieces of chain—odd lengths thrown aside—nameless odds and ends, such as candlesticks, parts of implements, the waste of a century, all covered with dust and dead black cobwebs. Dead cobwebs thick with dust, not the fine clean threads the spider has in use ; webs which had been abandoned fifty years ago.

' The skeleton of a bird lay at the bottom of a hollow in the pile, perhaps an injured swallow that had crept in there to die. A pair of flintlock pistols, the flints still in the hammers, were in very good condition, scarcely

rusted ; Robert snicked the locks and examined them carefully. He was black with dust and cobwebs.

‘ Chairs and furniture he threw on one side, boxes on another, papers and books in a corner, and soon began to make order of confusion.

‘ The light of morning came stronger through the chinks ; the flame of the candle appeared yellow. The alchemy of light was changing the sky without.

‘ He worked on till footsteps sounded on the paths outside, the carters had come to see to the horses. There was someone at last to drive.

‘ Robert went downstairs, and out to the pump ; there he washed himself in the open air, as he had been made to do years and years ago in his stern old father’s time. The habit adhered still ; the man was indeed all habit. Then he visited the stables, and began to drive the carters ; the night was over, the day had begun.

‘ Overhead and eastwards there shone a glory of blue heaven, illuminated from within with golden light. The deep rich azure was lit up with an inner gold ; it was a time to worship, to lift up the heart. Is there anything so wondrously beautiful as the sky just before the sun rises in summer ?

‘ There was a sound of cart-horses stamping heavily, the rattle and creak of harness, the shuffle of feet ; a man came out with a set forehead, grumbling and muttering ; the driver was at work.

‘ No one heeded the alchemy proceeding in the east, which drew forth gold and made it shine in the purple.’\*

Yet in selling Felise a horse, he insisted on ten pounds more than the price she knew he had just given for it. Later, he contrived more than once to have Felise and Barnard together in his garden, to see with his own eyes the love between them. Then, when at last he believed, seeing her frank ardour, that ‘ she was Martial’s mistress,’ he caught her, gagged her, threw her down, and vainly tried to make the horse trample on her. Frustrated by

\* *The Dewy Morn.*



Martial, he escaped, and after a frantic interview with Felise, Barnard, and Goring, shot himself.

With Godwin, the beautiful Felise, the half-emerging Barnard, and the shadowy Goring ; with Felise’s pretty hapless maid, Polly Shaw, and Polly’s lover and his old father, and the phlegmatic miller ; with Cornleigh, and his wife, the ‘ capital thing for Cornleigh,’ the book might have been the first in a long line of novels, giving a spiritual and dramatic presentment of human life, and a perfectly intimate, always relevant, background of landscape and garden—nay, more than a background, since Nature is stamped with the human characters as the hyacinth with the signature of Apollo’s grief. ‘ The Dewy Morn ’ shows more sides of the mature or maturing Jefferies than any of its predecessors—his passion for beauty and humanity, his sensuous and spiritual view of Nature and women, his hatred of oppression, his impatience of delaying reform, his belief in Fate, his growing curiosity about human character. The writing, employed on description, portraiture, narrative, reflection, and dialogue, is accordingly more varied, nor is success denied to it. There are several places where the easy omission of a phrase or two would have cleared away an awkward fault, and the narrative progresses with a few small crudities to which the lack of self-criticism blinded him. It is deftness only that is wanting, and Jefferies was never deft.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ‘AFTER LONDON’

‘AFTER London,’ or ‘Wild England,’ was published in 1885, but finished in March or April, 1884. On April 2, 1884, he wrote\* from Brighton that he had just put the finishing touch to it, though in June, 1885, he said that ‘the MS. was completed three years since.’ It is, he says, ‘in no sense a novel, more like a romance, but a romance of a *real* character. . . . You will, I think, do me the justice to say that it is original.’ The two years at Brighton were his most prolific. He wrote there ‘The Story of My Heart,’ ‘The Dewy Morn,’ ‘Red Deer,’ ‘After London,’ as well as many of the essays in ‘Nature near London,’ ‘The Life of the Fields,’ ‘The Open Air,’ ‘Field and Hedgerow,’ and some not yet reprinted from the magazines. This was an oasis of comparative health and unbounded mental energy after the illness of 1881-82, and as late as March 27, 1884, he could write\* that his illness was ‘not at all serious, but very annoying, being so apt to prevent his getting about’; it had, in fact, kept him away from London for some time, except to see a physician. So busy had he been that he was told he wrote too much.

‘To me,’ he answers,\* ‘it seems as if I wrote nothing, more especially since my illness, for this is the third year I have been so weakened. To me it seems as if I wrote nothing, for my mind teems with ideas, and my difficulty is to know what to do with them. I not only sketch out

\* To Mr. C. J. Longman.

the general plan of a book almost instantaneously, but I can see every little detail of it from the first page to the last. The mere writing—the handwriting—is the only trouble; it is very wearying. At this moment I have several volumes complete in my mind. Scarce a day goes by that I do not put down a fresh thought. I have twelve notebooks crammed full of ideas, plots, sketches for papers, and so on.’

He continues :

‘ What you say about publishing too often has no doubt some truth in it, but I have no choice in that respect until the publisher gives me a larger sum for the MS. These trifling sums are of little value in the nineteenth and expensive century. I should not expose my possessions or affairs to anyone else, but I believe I may be perfectly sure of you. I have wanted to talk to you about these things for some time, but my health has been so very indifferent that I have not been able to get about.’

Notwithstanding his productiveness, his new book was an excellent piece of writing, with some split infinitives, a slip in construction, the use of ‘ assist ’ for ‘ help,’ and a few other tokens of his usual indifference to trifles. Originally, it was perhaps much longer than we know it now, for he said that it was ‘ in three volumes.’ It sprang, perhaps, from the calm that followed the excitement of ‘ The Story of My Heart,’ ‘ The Dewy Morn,’ and essays like ‘ The Pageant of Summer,’ and ‘ Sunny Brighton ’; and of the ideas in those books there is hardly a trace. Having described the relapse of England into barbarism, and the loss of everything characteristic of nineteenth-century civilization, one so dogmatic and prophetic as Jefferies might have been expected to make use of this opportunity, and to show us a Utopia. Instead of which, the doings of the house of Aquila, a family which has survived the relapse, are a continuation of the games of Bevis. Here Bevis is grown a man and called Felix Aquila; Mark is now a big, proud soldier, called Oliver; the ‘ Governor ’—James Jefferies—is the Baron

Constans Aquila. The inland sea over which Felix adventures to the swampy site of London is Coate Reservoir enlarged. It is a solemn, playful sequel to 'Bevis.'

'The Relapse into Barbarism' is one of Jefferies' masterpieces in description. The calm, ironical detail with which the change is depicted has a touch of Herodotus and of Ordericus Vitalis, but is all his own, and reveals an unsuspected strength of remorseless logic and restraint. Hedges and woods spread so that 'by the thirtieth year there was not one single open place, the hills only excepted, where a man could walk, unless he followed the tracks of wild creatures, or cut himself a path.' Ditches had been filled up, weirs and bridges destroyed. Thames and Severn overflowed, and made an inland sea between the Cotswolds and the Downs, for the ruins of London blocked the river, and were changed into swamp 'which no man dare enter, since death would be his inevitable fate. There exhales from this oozy mass so fatal a vapour that no animal can endure it. The black water bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud at the bottom. When the wind collects the miasma, and, as it were, presses it together, it becomes visible as a low cloud which hangs over the place. The cloud does not advance beyond the limits of the marsh, seeming to stay there by some constant attraction; and well it is for us that it does not, since at such times when the vapour is thickest the very wild-fowl leave the reeds, and fly from the poison. There are no fishes; neither can eels exist in the mud, nor even newts. It is dead.' The same, or as bad a fate, has overtaken other cities. 'The sites,' says the historian, 'are uninhabitable because of the emanations from the ruins. Therefore they are avoided. Even the spot where a single house has been known to have existed is avoided by the hunters in the wood. They say, when they are stricken with ague or fever, that they must have unwittingly slept on the site of an ancient habitation.' The wild animals are descended from our domestic kinds; they are the white and black

cattle, the forest cats, and the black, yellow, and white wood dogs, four kinds of wild swine, two of wild horses. Tradition speaks of famous racehorses in the old time : ‘ Did but one exist, how eagerly would it be sought out, for in these days it would be worth its weight in gold, unless, indeed, as some affirm, such speed only endured for a mile or two.’ Poultry and deer have become wild ; the beaver, escaping from ‘ the dens of the ancients,’ has re-established itself. The richer and more cultivated men left the country long ago, and the unlettered survivors have few arts, no gunpowder and no steam. The railway embankments are overgrown by thickets, the tunnels broken down.

The Bushmen of the woods, descended from tramps, are utterly savage and depraved. The gipsies still remain apart in tents and on horses, attacking travellers. The few cities are on the shores of the great lake. ‘ In the provinces and kingdoms round about the lake there is hardly a town where the slaves do not outnumber the free as ten to one. . . . If a man in his hunger steals a loaf, he becomes a slave.’ The mark of a noble is that he can read and write. The nobles have no culture, and are distinguished chiefly by their courage. ‘ There are few books,’ says the historian, ‘ and still fewer to read them ; and these all in manuscript, for though the way to print is not lost, it is not employed, since no one wants books.’ On the margin of this state the Welsh and Irish wait for an opportunity to rush in and destroy. Their ships hover in the lake.

‘ Never, as I observed before, was there so beautiful an expanse of water. How much must we sorrow that it has so often proved only the easiest mode of bringing the miseries of war to the doors of the unoffending ! Yet men are never weary of sailing to and fro upon it, and most of the cities of the present time are upon its shores. And in the evening we walk by the beach, and from the rising grounds look over its waters, as if to gaze upon their loveliness were reward to us for the labour of the day.’\*

\* *After London.*



Baron Constans, head of the House of Aquila, is a thoughtful, secluded, impoverished man, cultivating his garden like James Jefferies and the old men in 'World's End' and 'The Dewy Morn.' He has no power at Court, and has to give way to younger, more pushful men. He has been a great wielder of the battle-axe, and has invented a wheel for drawing water and a machine for casting stones. The common people love him. The place is flowing with milk and honey, but there is no money.

His eldest son, Felix, has a few books and parchments annotated by himself. By pondering over these he has reconstructed much of the old knowledge. He prefers this study to war, and is despised for it. His 'unbending independence' isolates him still more. Only in one thing is he admitted to excel, in the use of the bow, and that is an ignoble weapon. Yet it is he who notices the lack of discipline and order which leaves the family stockade imperfectly guarded. He lives the life of a student, but also of a hunter, and, like Jefferies, he sells furs. He cannot even hope to succeed to his father's estate, so heavily is it encumbered. To his brother Oliver had fallen 'all the blood and bone and thew and sinew of the house . . . all the fiery, restless spirit and defiant temper; all the utter recklessness and warrior's instinct.'

Felix is making a canoe; 'the individuality and interest of the work' would be lost were he to have it made for him. Oliver helps, and the contrast between Felix's originality and awkwardness and Oliver's bluff readiness is carried further. In the intervals of work he walks about the shore, and notices an important strategic position, points it out to the prince anonymously, and is ignored.

The brothers go together to Thyma Castle, where lives Aurora, Felix's beloved. Oliver, handsome, ready, and joyous, is at ease and happy with all the feasters; Felix, fancying himself despised, is morose, and even accuses Aurora of flirtation. He is bent on a great voyage alone

over the lake. That could satisfy his heart, and the June morning sun 'filled him with hope.' He leaves home without a word. Once on the water 'his natural strength of mind' returns. His pensive eye sees in the strait through which he passes the key to the lake. The thought of Aurora leads him on in the hope of earning recognition for his talents from a warring monarch—Isembard of Aisi. Having landed, his poor appearance brings him many vexations. Joining the army at last, he suggests a new form of trigger for the crossbows; he resolves to point out the King's errors, and begins with the words: 'Your Majesty, you are an incapable commander.' The genial King sees the wisdom of his suggestion, and, hearing of the new trigger, gives him clothes and a sword; but he is beaten out of camp for a proposal scoffed at by the master of the artillery. He continues his voyage, and reaches the lifeless water, the withered sedges, the falling willow-leaves, the scummy surface, near the London swamp. Irresistibly the wind carries him over the black water. He lands on a plantless plain, hard, black, burnt, and often hollow-sounding; he grows drowsy amid flickering vapours; old houses dissolve in powder at his touch; he is among the skeletons of those who have come to the poisonous land for treasure. Returning to his canoe with one large diamond for Aurora, he is taken by a steady wind once more to the sweet water, and hears the voices of thrush and swallow. In a land of shepherds, his unique adventures and skill with the bow gain him kindly honours. His arrows destroy many in a fight with gipsies, and put the rest to flight. The divination that water is to be found in a certain place, his knowledge of herbs, give him an embarrassing authority; he is offered kingship, and accepts it only during time of war. He writes out the shepherd law. Yet he cannot forget Aurora, and is ever on the look-out for a way of return by land. He will bring Aurora here, and build a castle for her. He gets leave to be away two months, and even then slips off on a false pretext. It is a long journey

across unpenetrated forest, say from Guildford to Marlborough :

‘ Not only was there no track, but no one had ever traversed it, unless, indeed, it were Bushmen, who to all intents might be confused with the wild animals it contained.

‘ Yet his heart rose as he walked rapidly among the oaks ; already he saw her, he felt the welcoming touch of her hand ; the danger of Bushman or gipsy was as nothing. The forest at the commencement consisted chiefly of oaks, trees which do not grow close together, and so permitted of quick walking. Felix pushed on, absorbed in thought. The sun sank ; still onward ; and as the dusk fell he was still moving rapidly westward.’\*

That is the end. It is a wilful 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 to Nature, and in keeping with this age ; it might be used as a variation upon ‘ happily ever after ’ or ‘ necessity is great.’

The members of the House of Aquila are described with sufficient intensity of detail as to their appearance, habits of thought and conduct, and surroundings, to make us willing to hear more of them, yet they are rather written about than revealed. But though Felix himself is not more than the others a complete creature of flesh and mind, he develops into an interesting spirit rather than a man, and his voyage is always fascinating. ‘ In the hearts of most of us,’ wrote Jefferies, looking at the dreamy masts of Thames, ‘ there is always a desire for something beyond experience. Hardly any of us but have thought, Some day I will go on a long voyage ; but the years go by, and still we have not sailed.’ This book was his voyage, the answer to that need which had sent him to see Moscow on foot as a boy. Few records of imagined life are for the time being so desirable as that of the solitary

\* *After London.*

voyage, and especially the landing among the shepherds ; it has the charm of the serene and the remote ; it is a pastoral fluting with a grave undertone. Of the incidents, the journey through the forest, with the dread of Bushmen, is perfectly realized. It is pastoral, but it is the unforced, half-allegorical significance in the adventures of this new and sensitive mind in a strange world that holds the book together. It must have been a curious joy to Jefferies to set himself afloat in the canoe on that crystal water, bold, yet self-torturing, soaring, independent, yet crude and dogmatic ; to plunge at last into the ancient wood and gain Aurora or perish. But it is also a bitter book. The Fate of his other books is terribly exalted to permit so mean a world, full of corruption, slavery, suspicion, uncertainty, instead of a hearty barbarism, after the troublesome destruction of a whole civilization ; and it is excusable to wonder that the relapse should have been to a state so far below what not he alone dreamed of as the lot of the man in the tumulus on the Downs. That it is not a Utopia is redeemed by the happy thought that just as Coate Reservoir was made to cover the marshy fields below Burderop in order that the little Richard Jefferies might sail and fish there, so the civilization of England has been buried under an inland sea, that Felix may sail on it alone and find adventures. Having created a new world, Jefferies seems to have been so smitten with the sight of wood and water that he himself ran down to it and enjoyed and suffered there in earnest—laying great schemes, making a ship, sailing her, exercising woodcraft, killing gipsy after gipsy with his inevitable arrows, dreaming of a castle by the lake where he could take Aurora as he dreamed of a hut on the island at Coate—and so doing found it not different from the old world. It is a piece of delightful self-indulgence that makes him describe the playing of the ‘ Antigone,’ chosen by Aurora, another of his admirable women, fair, noble, sweet, but most shadowy of them all. ‘ “ Antigone ” was her favourite, and she wished Felix to see it. In some indefinable manner the

spirit of the ancient Greeks seemed to her in accord with the times, for men had, or appeared to have, so little control over their own lives that they might well imagine themselves overruled by destiny. . . .’ She, too, in those iron days, preserves almost alone ‘the religion of the primitive church’ and ‘the duty of humanity to all, the duty of saving and protecting life, of kindness and gentleness . . . a living protest against the lawlessness and brutality of the time.’ Felix does not oppose her, but is ‘simply untouched,’ for his mind is too clear and his knowledge of the physical sciences too great; yet the mystery of existence has impressed him in the solitary forest, and though he despises superstitions, he cannot shake off ‘the apprehensions aroused by untoward omens,’ such as the stepping on an adder. In the chapter on ‘Superstitions,’ founded on the manuscript of one who had lived among the Romany and seen their worship and sorceries, Felix looks eagerly at ‘the strange diagrams’ which might be alchemical signs, just as Bevis pores over the books of magic, and as Jefferies set his mind to work at the sight of markings on eggs of birds and wings of butterflies, at the shape of bones and of strange beasts, at the divine curves of the human body.



## CHAPTER XVII

### ‘AMARYLLIS AT THE FAIR’

‘AMARYLLIS at the Fair’ was the last book published by Jefferies during his lifetime. Probably it was written before May, 1886, since he then offered a book to a publisher, saying, ‘I think you will soon see that the characters are from life’; this was most likely ‘Amaryllis.’ He was very ill; his spine had given way, and there was no position in which he could lie or sit so as to use a pen without distress; and ‘consequently,’ he wrote, ‘a vast mass of ideas go into space, for I cannot write them down.’ In this book, also, he revisits Coate Farm—how different a man from what he was in ‘The Poacher,’ ‘Bevis,’ ‘The Dewy Morn’! He painted his own youth in various ways in ‘The Poacher’ and ‘The Story of My Heart’ and other books, and he painted it amidst the fields of Coate. He called upon them, also, to deepen the lines of ‘Meadow Thoughts’ and ‘Oak Bark.’ But now Coate Farm (or ‘Coombe Oaks,’ as he calls it in ‘Amaryllis’) no longer belonged to a Jefferies, though James Luckett and his wife still lived; and Jefferies returns to it a sick, wise man of thirty-six or thirty-seven, of many thoughts and changes, if of no forgettings, with his love and his joy deepened, the cup of beauty preserved and enriched by a touch of bitterness that takes away any over-sweetness or tendency to go sour. Almost the first words are: ‘There are no damask roses now, like there used to be in summer at Coombe Oaks.’

The people are Amaryllis, a girl of sixteen; her father

Iden, a farmer ; her mother, born a Flamma ; Amadis Iden, ' of the same stock of Idens, yet no relations,' aged twenty-one ; Alere Flamma, aged forty-nine ; old Iden, Amaryllis' grandfather ; and several others—farm people, a squire's son. . . . They are not the people who lived at Coate Farm, but are drawn from them : Amaryllis, from Jefferies' sister, much younger than himself ; the Idens from his father and mother ; Grandfather Iden from John Jefferies, Richard's grandfather, who kept the baker's shop ; Alere Flamma from Fred Gyde, Mrs. Jefferies' brother, engraver and printer ; Amadis Iden perhaps from Jefferies himself, but partly from John Luckett Jefferies, his father's brother, draughtsman and musician, who died young.

The main part of the framework also is taken from Coate and the Jefferies family. Iden is an original, thoughtful, unbusiness-like man whose farm is going to the bad ; his wife, soured by poverty, but still generous, is at odds with him. Amaryllis could draw, if only she could keep her fingers warm in the cold attic, and she is a favourite with the baker, her grandfather, from whom her father is estranged ; but, disliking the old man, she will make none of the concessions that might have helped to a reconciliation on the day of the fair ; she is proud, and she has a sweetheart, the sickly Amadis. The end of the story leaves her with him happy :

' In the fitness of things Amaryllis ought not to have been sitting there like this, with Amadis lost in the sweet summer dream of love.

' She ought to have loved and married a Launcelot du Lake, a hero of the mighty arm, only with the income of Sir Gorgius Midas : that is the proper thing.

' But the fitness of things never comes to pass—everything happens in the Turkish manner.

' Here was Amaryllis, very strong and full of life, very, very young and inexperienced, very poor and without the least expectation whatever (for who could reconcile the old and the older Iden ?), the daughter of poor and

embarrassed parents, whom she wished and prayed to help in their coming old age. Here was Amaryllis, full of poetic feeling and half a painter at heart, full of generous sentiments—what a nature to be ground down in the sordidness of married poverty !

'Here was Amadis, extremely poor, quite feeble, and unable to earn a shilling, just talking of seeing the doctor again about this fearful debility, full, too, as he thought, of ideas—what a being to think of her !

'Nothing ever happens in the fitness of things. If only now he could have regained the health and strength of six short months ago—if only that, but you see, he had not even that. He might get better ; true—he *might*, I have tried 80 drugs and I am no better, I hope he will.

'Could any blundering Sultan in the fatalistic East have put things together for them with more utter contempt of fitness ? It is all in the Turkish manner, you see.

'There they sat, happier and happier, and deeper and deeper in love every moment, on the brown timber in the long grass, their hearts as full of love as the meadow was of sunshine.

'You have heard of the Sun's Golden Cup, in which after sunset he was carried over Ocean's stream, while we slumber in the night, to land again in the East and give us the joy of his rising. The great Golden Cup in which Hercules, too, was taken over ; it was as if that Cup had been filled to the brim with the nectar of love and placed at the [? their] lips to drink, inexhaustible.

'In the play of "Faust"—Alere's "Faust"—Goethe has put an interlude, an Intermezzo ; I shall leave Amaryllis and Amadis in their Interlude in Heaven. Let the Play of Human Life, with its sorrows and its Dread, pause awhile ; let Care go aside behind the wings, let Debt and Poverty unrobe, let Age stand upright, let Time stop still (oh, Miracle ! as the Sun did in the Vale of Ajalon). Let us leave our lovers in the Interlude in 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.’\*

Five or six days fill the book. First, a March day, when Amaryllis finds a daffodil in the garden and her father is planting potatoes, and he talks to her about her great-uncle Richard; dinner follows, and Iden is left alone to muse as he has done for thirty years, while the mice run up to his knee and eat the crumbs of his bread and cheese. Second is Lady Day, Fair Day; Amaryllis watches the fair-goers, the tramps, the farmers, the labourers, the cattle and sheep, and one Jack Duck comes in to gossip and take some of Iden’s ‘Goliath ale.’ Amaryllis herself goes to the fair, calls on Grandfather Iden (reputed to have twenty thousand guineas in the iron box under his bed), and has dinner with the crowd of relatives who come, each to receive a sovereign from the old man, and the most pleasing of them a spade guinea. Amaryllis wins the guinea, but throws it away in her impatient dislike of the old man, who does not help her father: then the two go out into the crowd, from which the grandfather takes her to see the manor-house of the Pamment family; she runs away, and her people at Coombe Oaks are delighted at her rebellion. Third, the day—many days in one—when she sits up in the attic and tries to draw, but is too unhappy because it is cold and the duns never let her father rest. Then come the days in May when Iden, Alere, Amadis, and Amaryllis talk in the round summer-house; and Alere suggests thoughts on Fleet Street, Amadis on health, and Amaryllis on love. The characters limn themselves in thought and speech and act, and out of these few days spring Jefferies’ thoughts on the life which he himself had seen and endured—the life of thoughtful or passionate people swayed by poverty, by ill-health, and by the products of their thoughts and passions, whims, bad temper, generosity, disappointment,

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

revolt. There is here no waste of energy on the plots that led Jefferies astray in 'World's End' and 'Greene Ferne Farm,' and compelled him into courses where his genius availed not. The book has a form dictated solely by his own mind and soul, and by the life he elected to project. Here is nothing irrelevant or out of its place. Jefferies has free play for all his nature, has no need to do what he has no mind to, or to shirk. Though at the end he seems, alas ! to promise another book, nothing is left unfinished, though, indeed, he neglects to say that all lived happily for ever after. You may like it or not, but to find fault with the form is to assume that you know more about the life at Coombe Oaks and about Jefferies than he himself knew, and to confess that you want a detective story, a treasure-hunt, a proof that the righteous man never begs for his bread, or what not. Some have taken the trouble to say it is not a novel. It is called 'Amaryllis at the Fair : a Novel,' and has on the title-page the words of Alcæus : 'Our day is but a finger ; bring large cups.' It is, at any rate, a fiction, a statement of life through conversation, action and reflection, and it is an artistic whole. Accept 'Pantagruel' and 'Tristram Shandy,' and you must accept 'Amaryllis,' however poor it may be. Reject it for its ending—then rewrite it as was done with 'Paradise Lost.'

And first for the characters. They are always seen at once with the eye and the mind. Amaryllis, lovely, young, and strong, stands out, 'the front line of her shape beginning to bud like spring' against the red brick wall as she runs. She is running against the March east wind to tell her father of the opened daffodil. At last Iden rises from his potato-planting :

" " Trumpery rubbish—mean to dig 'em all up—would if I had time," muttered the father. " Have 'em carted out and drowed away—do for ashes to drow on the fields. Never no good on to nobody, thaay thengs. You can't eat 'em, can you, like you can potatoes ? "

" " But it's lovely. Here it is," and Amaryllis stepped



on the patch tenderly, and lifted up the drooping face of the flower.

“ Ah, yes,” said Iden, putting his left hand to his chin, a habit of his when thinking, and suddenly quite altering his pronunciation from that of the country folk and labourers amongst whom he dwelt to the correct accent of education. “ Ah, yes ; the daffodil was your great-uncle’s favourite flower.”

“ Richard ?” asked Amaryllis.

“ Richard,” repeated Iden. And Amaryllis, noting how handsome her father’s intellectual face looked, wandered in her mind from the flower as he talked, and marvelled how he could be so rough sometimes, and why he talked like the labourers, and wore a ragged coat—he who was so full of wisdom in his other moods, and spoke, and thought, and indeed acted as a perfect gentleman.

“ Richard’s favourite flower,” he went on. “ He brought the daffodils down from Luckett’s ; every one in the garden came from there. He was always reading poetry, and writing, and sketching, and yet he was such a capital man of business ; no one could understand that. He built the mill, and saved heaps of money ; he bought back the old place at Luckett’s, which belonged to us before Queen Elizabeth’s days ; indeed, he very nearly made up the fortunes Nicholas and the rest of them got rid of. He was, indeed, a man. And now it is all going again—faster than he made it. He used to take you on his knee and say you would walk well, because you had a good ankle.”

‘ Amaryllis blushed and smoothed her dress with her hands, as if that would lengthen the skirt and hide the ankles which Richard, the great-uncle, had admired when she was a child, being a man, but which her feminine acquaintances told her were heavy.

“ Here, put on your hat and scarf ; how foolish of you to go out in this wind without them !” said Mrs. Iden, coming out. She thrust them into Amaryllis’ unwilling hands, and retired indoors again immediately.

"He was the only one of all the family," continued her father, "who could make money; all the rest could do nothing but spend it. For ten generations he was the only money-maker and saver, and yet he was as free and liberal as possible. Very curious, wasn't it?—only one in ten generations—difficult to understand why none of the others—why——" He paused, thinking.\*

Or she leans by the wall her father built, up above the road, and sees the fair-goers, herself watching with critical reverie and a vague, unconscious eye for men. Or she is with her grandfather, over ninety years old:

He took Amaryllis by the arm as she stood on the step and pulled her into the shop, asked her if her father were coming, then walked her down by the oven-door, and made her stand up by a silver-mounted peel, to see how tall she was. The peel is the long wooden rod, broad at one end, with which loaves are placed in the baker's oven. Father Iden being proud of his trade, in his old age had his favourite peel ornamented with silver.

"Too fast—too fast," he said, shaking his head, and coughing; "you grow too fast; there's the notch I cut last year, and now you're two inches taller." He lowered the peel, and showed her where his thumb was—quite two inches higher than the last year's mark.

"I want to be tall," said Amaryllis.

"I daresay—I daresay," said the old man, in the hasty manner of feeble age, as he cut another notch to record her height. The handle of the peel was notched all round, where he had measured his grandchildren; there were so many marks it was not easy to see how he distinguished them.

"Is your father coming?" he asked, when he had finished with the knife.

"I don't know." This was Jesuitically true—she did not *know*—she could not be certain; but in her heart she was sure he would not come. But she did not want to hear any hard words said about him. . . . †

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

† *Ibid.*

Or she is in the attic, chair and table by the window, and a disused bedstead and a linen-press (her bookcase) behind :

‘ Amaryllis went straight to the window and knelt down. She brought a handful of violets, fresh-gathered, to place in the glass which she kept there for her flowers. The window was cut in the thick wall, and formed a niche, where she had always had a tumbler ready—a common glass tumbler, she could not afford a vase.

‘ They were the white wild violets, the sweetest of all, gathered while the nightingale was singing his morning song in the April sunshine—a song the world never listens to, more delicious than his evening notes, for the sunlight helps him, and the blue of the heavens, the green leaf, and the soft wind—all the soul of spring.

‘ White wild violets, a dewdrop as it were of flower, tender and delicate, growing under the great hawthorn hedge, by the mosses and among the dry, brown leaves of last year, easily overlooked unless you know exactly where to go for them. She had a bunch for her neck, and a large bunch for her niche. They would have sunk and fallen into the glass, but she hung them by their chins over the edge of the tumbler, with their stalks in the water. Then she sat down in the old chair at the table, and rested her head on her hand.

‘ Except where she did this every day, and so brushed it, a thin layer of dust had covered the surface (there was no cloth) and had collected on her portfolio, thrust aside and neglected. Dust on the indiarubber, dust on the cake of Indian ink, dust invisible on the smooth surface of the pencils, dust in the little box of vine charcoal.

‘ The hoarse baying of the hungry wolves around the house had shaken the pencil from her fingers—Siberian wolves they were, racing over the arid deserts of debt, large and sharp-toothed, ever increasing in number and ferocity, ready to tear the very door down. There are no wolves like those debt sends against a house.

‘ Every knock at the door, every strange footstep up



From a painting.

FANNY JEFFERIES,  
a grandmother of Richard Jefferies.





the approach, every letter that came, was like the gnawing and gnashing of savage teeth

‘ Iden could plant the potatoes and gossip at the stile, and put the letters unopened on the mantelshef—a pile of bills over his head where he slept calmly after dinner. Iden could plant potatoes, and cut trusses of hay, and go through *his* work to appearance unmoved.

‘ Amaryllis could not draw—she could not do it ; her imagination refused to see the idea ; the more she concentrated her mind, the louder she heard the ceaseless grinding and gnashing of teeth.

‘ Potatoes can be planted and nails can be hammered, bill-hooks can be wielded and faggots chopped, no matter what the inward care. The ploughman is deeply in debt, poor fellow, but he can, and does, follow the plough, and finds, perhaps, some solace in the dull monotony of his labour. Clods cannot feel. A sensitive mind and vivid imagination—a delicately-balanced organization, that almost lives on its ideas as veritable food—cannot do like this. The poet, the artist, the author, the thinker, cannot follow their plough ; their work depends on a serene mind.

‘ But experience proves that they *do* do their work under such circumstances. They do ; how greatly then they must be tortured, or for what a length of time they must have suffered to become benumbed.

‘ Amaryllis was young, and all her feelings unchecked of Time. She could not sketch—that was a thing of useless paper and pencil ; what was wanted was money. She could not read, that was not real ; what was wanted was solid coin.

‘ So the portfolio was thrust aside, neglected and covered with dust, but she came every day to her flowers in the window-niche. . . .

‘ She loved beauty for its own sake—she loved the sunlight, the grass and trees, the gleaming water, the colours of the fields and of the sky. To listen to the running water was to her a dear delight, to the wind in the high

firs, or caught in the wide-stretching arms of the oak ; she rested among these things, they were to her mind as sleep to the body. The few good pictures she had seen pleased her, but did not rouse the emotion the sunlight caused ; artificial music was enjoyable, but not like the running stream. It said nothing—the stream was full of thought.

‘No eager desire to paint like that or play like that was awakened by pictures or music ; Amaryllis was a passive and not an active artist by nature. And I think that is the better part ; at least, I know it is a thousand times more pleasure to me to see a beautiful thing than to write about it. Could I choose I would go on seeing beautiful things, and not writing.’\*

Or she kneels and prays that her father and mother shall be richer and happier, while downstairs the creditors cry aloud : ‘Pay me that thou owest !’—‘the very sum and total,’ says Jefferies, ‘of religion.’ Or, at the end, she sits with Amadis in the garden.

Jefferies was doubtless thinking of his own early troubles when he wrote : ‘How unnatural it seems that a girl like this, that young and fresh and full of generous feeling as she was, her whole mind should perforce be taken up with the question of money ; an unnatural and evil state of things.’ And Amaryllis is, in fact, a pretty and happy-natured country girl with the character of the youthful Jefferies, in its quick temper, independence, sensitiveness, and worship of beauty. She has beautiful hair, but is not yet more than the promise of a beautiful woman. She is tall, and has strong ankles. Of her appearance he tells us little more, for she is in the passage between childhood and womanhood, strong, eager, and full of life, but something dim, as one of her age often is within the cloud of possibilities. For the rest she is a Flamma (*i.e.*, a Gyde), a revolutionary Flamma, and not an Iden (a Jefferies). As with Felise, so with Amaryllis, Jefferies is in perfect sympathy ; he enters into her life, he sorrows and enjoys with her, and not only with her, but with the other

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

characters. He cannot detach himself from them and let their characters work out a doom. He is up and among them all the time, and they have him, like Rabelais, seeing he cannot be their fellow-soldier, 'for their faithful brother, refreshing and cheering, according to his little power, their return from the alarms of the enemy.' He moves from one to the other, listening for the music swept out of them, praising them, fearing for them—in fact, one of them, the chief character, at once the protagonist and the chorus.

Iden is drawn in the same way, a strong, handsome, honest, generous man, deserving to live and glorify life, but inevitably going under the sea of debt, of failure, of a good, misunderstanding, nervous wife, of 'Fate.' He plants his potatoes himself, stooping in his ragged coat while the March wind blows :

'The way in which he was planting potatoes was wonderful, every potato was placed at exactly the right distance apart, and a hole made for it in the general trench ; before it was set it was looked at and turned over, and the thumb rubbed against it to be sure that it was sound, and when finally put in, a little mould was delicately adjusted round to keep it in its right position till the whole row was buried. He carried the potatoes in his coat-pocket—those, that is, for the row—and took them out one by one ; had he been planting his own children he could not have been more careful.'\*

He was 'always at work, and he could talk so cleverly, too,' thinks Amaryllis ; 'and knew everything, and yet they were so short of money. How could this be ?' Her wonder at this is like Jefferies' wonder that the human race has not yet built a barn for its own use. But Iden will have his mutton good, fetching it himself in a flag basket, and seeing that it is hung.

'No one could do it right but Mr. Iden himself. There was a good deal of reason in this personal care of the meat, for it is a certain fact that unless you do look after such things yourself, and that persistently, too, you never get

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

it first-rate. For this cause people in grand villas scarcely ever have anything worth eating on their tables. Their household expenses reach thousands yearly, and yet they rarely have anything eatable, and their dinner-tables can never show meat, vegetables, or fruit equal to Mr. Iden's. The meat was dark brown, as mutton should be, for if it is the least bit white it is sure to be poor ; the grain was short, and ate like bread and butter, firm, and yet almost crumbling to the touch ; it was full of juicy red gravy, and cut pleasantly, the knife went through it nicely ; you can tell good meat directly you touch it with the knife. It was cooked to a turn, and had been done at a wood fire on a hearth ; no oven taste, no taint of coal-gas or carbon ; the pure flame of wood had browned it. Such emanations as there may be from burning logs are odorous of the woodland, of the sunshine, of the fields and fresh air ; the wood simply gives out as it burns the sweetness it has imbibed through its leaves from the atmosphere which floats above grass and flowers. Essences of this order, if they do penetrate the fibres of the meat, add to its flavour a delicate aroma. Grass-fed meat, cooked at a wood fire, for me.

'Wonderful it is that wealthy people can endure to have their meat cooked over coal or in a shut-up iron box, where it kills itself with its own steam, which ought to escape. But then, wealthy villa people do do odd things. *Les Misérables* who have to write like myself must put up with anything and be thankful for permission to exist ; but people with mighty incomes from tea, or crockery-ware, or mud, or bricks and mortar—why on earth these happy and favoured mortals do not live like the gods passes understanding.

'Parisian people use charcoal : perhaps Paris will convert some of you who will not listen to a farmer.

'Mr. Iden had himself grown the potatoes that were placed before him. They were white, floury, without a drop of water in the whole dish of them. They were equal to the finest bread—far, far superior to the bread with



which the immense city of London permits itself to be poisoned. (It is not much better, for it destroys the digestion.) This, too, with wheat at thirty shillings the quarter, a price which is in itself one of the most wonderful things of the age. The finest bread ought to be cheap.

“ ‘ They be forty-folds,’ said Mr. Iden, helping himself to half a dozen. “ Look at the gravy go up into um like tea up a knob of sugar.” . . . ’ \*

The good bread, good potatoes, good swede greens, and good mutton, are a matter for our joy as long as human beings remain corrupt and carnivorous. Yet he could not drum the women into ‘ good, solid, straightforward eating ’ ; they must have herrings for tea, snacks of pastry, vinegar with greens, and so on. Rhubarb and black currants he had every day in the season, and used to sweeten his hands with the black-currant leaves. Jefferies himself liked food and drink, if we may judge from his satisfaction with the great eating of the labourers in ‘ Greene Ferne Farm ’ ; with Hilary’s way with a partridge, and his ‘ lamb is never good eating without sunshine ’ ; with the many pleasures of eating, if it be only home-made bread and butter in ‘ Bevis ’ ; with the joint and tart and ale in ‘ Hodge and His Masters ’ ; with the mullet and the juicy steak and ale in ‘ The Dewy Morn ’ ; and his love of ale and contempt for lentils in ‘ Amaryllis.’ In these matters he has at times a fervour and a large sacred enjoyment almost beyond Charles Lamb’s.

After dinner, Iden muses by the fire, finishing his bread and cheese, grumbling over the *Standard* ; then he drowzes, his face resting on his hand, his head against the wainscot of the wall, where the varnish is worn away and even hollowed :

‘ This human mark reminded one of the grooves worn by the knees of generations of worshippers in the sacred steps of the temple which they ascended on all-fours. It was, indeed, a mark of devotion, as Mrs. Iden and others, not very keen observers, would have said, to the god of

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*



Sleep ; in truth, it was a singular instance of continued devotion at the throne of the god of Thought.

‘ It was to think that Mr. Iden in the commencement assumed this posture of slumber, and commanded silence. But thought which has been cultivated for a third of a century is apt to tone down to something very near somnolence.

‘ That panel of wainscot was, in fact, as worthy of preservation as those on which the early artists delineated the Madonna and Infant, and for which high prices are now paid. It was intensely — superlatively — human. Worn in slow time by a human head within which a great mind was working under the most unhappy conditions, it had the deep value attaching to inanimate things which have witnessed intolerable suffering.

‘ I am not a Roman Catholic, but I must confess that if I could be assured any particular piece of wood had really formed a part of the Cross I should think it the most valuable thing in the world, to which Koh-i-noors would be mud.

‘ I am a pagan, and think the heart and soul above crowns.

‘ That panel was in effect a cross on which a heart had been tortured for the third of a century, that is, for the space of time allotted to a generation.

‘ That mark upon the panel had still a further meaning, it represented the unhappiness, the misfortunes, the Nemesis of two hundred years. This family of Idens had endured already two hundred years of unhappiness and discordance for no original fault of theirs, simply because they had once been fortunate of old time, and therefore they had to work out that hour of sunshine to the utmost depths of shadow.

‘ The panel of the wainscot upon which that mark had been worn was in effect a cross upon which a human heart had been tortured—and thought can, indeed, torture—for a third of a century. For Iden had learned to know himself, and despaired.’\*

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

Mrs. Iden is watching him through the window, shaking her fist at the thinker who was so still lest he should frighten the mice, which at other times he killed without mercy. After this Iden has a baked apple, and then has to be nagged at by his wife, who can only now clear away the dinner-things and get ready for tea. But she rushes away, with tea unmade, to trample the daffodil violently underfoot, and then, locking herself in her bedroom, to cry over an old glove.

In the summer evening, after haymaking, Iden would often go out and paddle barefoot in the sweet wet grass, and Mrs. Iden would nag again, because nobody else did that. They have lavender in the garden, and when the London Flammas ask for some Coombe Oaks lavender, husband and wife are drawn together ‘over the hedge of lavender’ for a little while.

One day Amaryllis comes down after dreaming—she often dreamed it—that the thatch was on fire, and finds Iden talking with Amadis and Alere, newly arrived. Iden is making them welcome, and they are talking of the house which ‘the Idens of yore had built in a lonely spot, expressly in order that they might drink, drink, drink, undisturbed by their unreasonable wives.’ Then they talk in the garden. It is all Iden’s work, and it was said that his father first quarrelled with him because he had made it beautiful with trees and flowers. The apple-bloom falls at his feet. Iden had planted the trees. ‘It was his genius to make things grow . . . a sort of Pan, a half-god of leaves and boughs, and reeds and streams, a sort of Nature in human shape, moving about and sowing Plenty and Beauty.’ He could never hurry, but did the work that lay about him—a man more clearly than most others a part of the creative power of the world, at one with earth and wind and sea. He should have had a life as long as Jefferies desired—long life, long sleep—‘forty hours of night and sleep would not be too much.’\* He lived as if this desire would be fulfilled, making immortal oaken gates where the ordinary farmer would

\* *The Story of My Heart.*

have used a couple of rails. The best timber well seasoned, the best workmanship, no haste, plenty of talk and plenty of 'Goliath' ale for the carpenter: 'it was the Iden way.'

Beside him, Mrs. Iden is hardly more than a ghost, nervous, irritable, shrill, shuffling, dissatisfied with everything . . . but a very real ghost such as abounds in this world. She lives chiefly in the passage where she has been abusing Luce, the maid, for not doing things which are in fact done.

'So, flinging the duster at Luce, out she flew into the court, and thence into the kitchen, where she cut a great slice of bread and cheese, and drew a quart of ale, and took them out to Bill Nye.

' "Aw, thank'ee m'm," said Bill, from the very depth of his chest, and set to work happily.

'Next, she drew a mug for Jearje, who held it with one hand and sipped, while he turned with the other; his bread and cheese he ate in like manner, he could not wait till he had finished the churning.

' "Verily, man is made up of impatience," said the angel Gabriel in the Koran, as you no doubt remember; Adam was made of clay (who was the sculptor's ghost that modelled him?), and when the breath of life was breathed into him, he rose on his arm and begun to eat before his lower limbs were yet vivified. This is a fact. "Verily, man is made up of impatience." As the angel had never had a stomach or anything to sit upon, as the French say, he need not have made so unkind a remark; if he had had a stomach and a digestion like Bill Nye and Jearje, it is certain he would never have wanted to be an angel.

'Next, there were four cottage children now in the court, waiting for scraps.

'Mrs. Iden, bustling to and fro like a whirlwind, swept the poor little things into the kitchen and filled two baskets for them with slices of bread and butter, squares of cheese, a beef bone, half a rabbit, a dish of cold potatoes,

two bottles of beer from the barrel, odds and ends, and so swept them off again in a jiffy.

‘ Mrs. Iden ! Mrs. Iden ! you ought to be ashamed of yourself, that is not the way to feed the poor. What *could* you be thinking of, you ignorant farmer’s wife ! . . .

‘ No wasteful bread and butter, no scandalous cheese, no abominable beef bone, no wretched rabbit, no prodigal potatoes, above all, No immoral ale !

‘ There, Mrs. Iden.

‘ Go to the famous Henry Ward Beecher, that shining light and apostle, Mrs. Iden, and read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what he says :

“ ‘ A man who cannot live on bread is not fit to live. A family may live, laugh, love, and be happy that eats bread in the morning with good water, and water and good bread at noon, and water and bread at night.’ ”

‘ Does that sound like an echo of the voice that ceased on the Cross ?

‘ Guilty Mrs. Iden, ignorant farmer’s wife ; hide your beef and ale, your rabbit and potatoes. . . . ’ \*

Such lively, faithful scenes of domestic life, and such luxuriant colouring out of Jefferies’ prejudice, are of the essence of the book. It is with Grandfather Iden that there is some dramatic play of characters, and the conflict of Iden and Flamma blood is most nearly seen between him and Amaryllis. They are side by side for some time, the fair child and the grim ancient man bent like an S. Amaryllis is angry with him for his quarrel with her father, and yet giving way a little for her family’s sake. The old man is fond of her—he in his ‘ great, grey, tottering hat,’ bent under as heavy a load as strong Jack Duck under two sacks of wheat—fond of roast pork as of flowers and bright leaves, fond of the lord of the manor and all his works, cherishing a Beaconsfield peacock’s feather. At the dinner he goes from chair to chair of the thirty-two sycophantic relatives expecting gold. Coming to his son’s empty chair, he stands and leans over it, the happy

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

chatterers suddenly still ; and as he groans, Amaryllis thinks him more monstrous than ever, remembering the crack in her mother's boot. As a great treat he takes her over the Pamments' manor-house, but, sick of him and of the young Pamment's eye for her, she breaks away and runs home, and the quarrel is reinforced by a letter about the neglect of her education. Everything in the book is as natural as that. It is that plain, coarse, bitter, occasionally merry life, with no developing story to lure us on, stated with mordant ease, which is of all things the most rarely achieved. The labourers and Luce, the maid, work and eat and drink ; there is no mystery ; no one loves above him in rank ; but they appear and reappear with a truth which hardly any English writer has given to agricultural labourers. Jefferies does not go far with them ; he has no occasion ; they are only clattering about the yard : but his handling is absolutely sympathetic and understanding. Mr. Hardy is far more dramatic, far more psychological, and also far cleverer in effects, but he is seldom so right. Barnes has the same homeliness and close observation, but with an idyllic colouring or suppression.

Jefferies' friendly intimacy with his characters is nowhere so hearty as with Alere Flamma. He is in many ways different from his creator or reviver, but it gave Jefferies great pleasure to think about him. He is far from the ideal man such as Jefferies might have created at the time of 'The Story of My Heart,' but in the real world of the remaining actual years Alere was after his own heart. Jefferies enters so much into the spirit of his devil-may-care generosity, tenderness, independence and mirth that he does not trouble to put speeches into Alere's mouth, and in places the two are indivisible. The Flamma family, says Jefferies, was mercurial, revolutionary, hot republican, a 'nervous, excitable, passionate, fidgety, tipsy, idle, good-for-nothing lot . . . almost all flecked with talent like white foam on a black horse, a spot or two of genius, and the



rest black guilt or folly.' Alere's shaking hands could 'draw delicate lines without a flaw' (as Fred Gyde drew Day House Farm). He made designs for bindings, did some of the tooling himself, drew and engraved, and helped in the printing-house in Fleet Street. He had drawers full of unsorted sketches, landscapes, flowers, studies from the nude. His studio was a plain, not very old room, with no gauntlets and breastplates, Turkish guns, no 'properties,' but books everywhere, and music, 'for Flamma was fond of his many-keyed flute.' He could not get out of Fleet Street. There he lived and worked, and 'he could stop when he liked and take a swig of stout.' He did as he chose, not as bidden; and so made little money, and only a little fame.

'Alere liked pulling off the proofs in his shirt-sleeves, swigging his stout, smoking on the sly, working with all the genius of an inspired mechanic one moment and dropping into absolute idleness the next, spending infinite pains in finishing one bit of work, as if his very life depended on the smoothing of an edge of paper, putting off the next till the end of the month, pottering, sleeping, gossiping, dreaming over old German works, and especially dreaming over Goethe, humming old German songs—for he had been a great traveller—sometimes scrawling a furious Mazzinian onslaught in a semi-Nihilist foreign print, collecting stray engravings, wandering hither and thither.

'Alere Flamma, artist, engraver, bookbinder, connoisseur, traveller, printer, republican, conspirator, sot, smoker, dreamer, poet, kind-hearted, good-natured, prodigal, shiftless, man of Fleet Street, carpet-bag man, gentleman shaken to pieces.

'He worked in his shirt-sleeves and drank stout, but nothing vulgar had ever been recorded against Alere Flamma. He frequented strong company—very strong meat—but no vile word left his lips.'\*

Jefferies is almost envious of this so different life. He

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

always hankered after travel and adventure, but he did not go farther than to receive, but not to accept, an invitation to go out as correspondent to the Zulu War; lying ill in January, 1886, he regretted that he had not gone.

Alere worked until he had perhaps ten pounds, and then paused, and smoked, and gave away his money. He 'did not seem to trouble himself about the dogs' in London streets; 'he saw so much of the human nuisances.' He and Jefferies thought little of the organization of which the one great advantage is that 'by no possible means can you risk giving a penny to a man not of high moral character, though he be perishing of starvation.' He was no genius neglected or destroyed by intemperance: he simply had no ambition and no 'business avarice.' When the rats began to run up the wall in broad daylight, he packed his carpet-bag and came to Coombe Oaks; and presently he began to sing old songs, student-songs, songs from Goethe, and played 'delicious airs of Mozart chiefly' for Amaryllis.

'By Flamma's side there stood a great mug of the Goliath ale, and between his lips there was a long church-warden pipe.

'The Goliath ale was his mineral water; his gaseous, alkaline, chalybeate liquor; better by far than Kissingen, Homburg, Vichy; better by far than mud baths and hot springs. There is no medicine in nature, or made by man, like good ale. He who drinks ale is strong.

'The bitter principle of the aromatic hops went to his nervous system, to the much-suffering liver, to the clogged and weary organs, bracing and stimulating, urging on, vitalizing anew.

'The spirit drawn from the joyous barley warmed his heart; a cordial grown on the sunny hill-side, watered with dew and sweet rain, coloured by the light, a liquor of sunshine, potable sunbeam.

'Age mingling hops and barley in that just and equitable proportion, no cunning of hand, no science can

achieve, gave to it the vigour of years, the full manhood of strength.

‘ There was in it an alchemic power analysis cannot define. The chemist analyzes, and he finds of ten parts, there are this and there are that, and the residue is “volatile principle,” for which all the dictionaries of science have no explanation.

“ ‘ Volatile principle ’—there it is, that is the secret. That is the life of the thing ; by no possible means can you obtain that volatile principle—that alchemic force—except contained in genuine old ale.

‘ Only it must be genuine, and it must be old ; such as Iden brewed.

‘ The Idens had been famous for ale for generations.

‘ By degrees Alere’s hand grew less shaky ; the glass ceased to chink against his teeth ; the strong, good ale was setting his Fleet Street liver in order.

‘ You have “ liver,” you have “ dyspepsia,” you have “ kidneys,” you have “ abdominal glands,” and the doctor tells you you must take bitters—*i.e.*, quassia, buchu, gentian, cascarilla, calumba ; aperients and diluents, podophyllin, taraxacum, salts ; physic for the nerves and blood, quinine, iron, phosphorus ; this is but the briefest outline of your draughts and preparations ; add to it, for various purposes, liquor arsenicalis, bromide of potassium, strychnia, belladonna.

‘ Weary and disappointed, you turn to patent medicines—American and French patent physic is very popular now—and find the same things precisely under taking titles, enormously advertised.

‘ It is a fact that nine out of ten of the medicines compounded are intended to produce exactly the same effects as are caused by a few glasses of good old ale. The objects are to set the great glands in motion, to regulate the stomach, brace the nerves, and act as a tonic and cordial ; a little ether put in to aid the digestion of the compound. This is precisely what good old ale does, and digests itself very comfortably. Above all things, it

contains the volatile principle, which the prescriptions have not got.

‘ Many of the compounds actually are beer, bittered with quassia instead of hops ; made nauseous in order that you may have faith in them.

‘ “ Throw physic to the dogs,” get a cask of the true Goliath, and “ *drenk un down to the therd hoop.*”

‘ Long before Alere had got to the first hoop the rats ceased to run up the wall, his hand became less shaky, he began to play a very good knife and fork at the bacon and Iden’s splendid potatoes ; by-and-by he began to hum old German songs.

‘ But you may ask, how do *you* know, you’re not a doctor, you’re a mere story-spinner, you’re no authority ? I reply that I am in a position to know much more than a doctor.

‘ How can that be ?

‘ Because I have been a Patient. It is so much easier to be a doctor than a patient. The doctor imagines what his prescriptions are like and what they will do ; he imagines, but the Patient *knows.*’\*

He completes the charm of Coombe Oaks and of ‘ Amaryllis at the Fair ’ :

‘ There was Alere Flamma singing in the summer-house ; Amadis Iden resting on the form ; Amaryllis standing by him ; Bill Nye munching ; Jearje indolently rotating the churn with one hand, and feeding himself with the other ; Luce sitting down to her lunch in the kitchen ; Iden lifting his mug in the bow-window ; Jack Duck with his great mouth full ; eight people—and four little children trotting down the road with baskets of food.

‘ “ The lazy lot of people in this house ; I never saw anything like it.”

‘ And that was the beauty of the place, the “ Let us not trouble ourselves ;” “ a handful in Peace and Quiet ” is better than set banquets ; crumbs for everybody, and

\* *Amaryllis at the Fair.*

for the robin, too ; " God listens to those who pray to Him. Let us eat, and drink, and think of nothing ;" believe me, the plain plenty, and the rest, and peace, and sunshine of an old farmhouse, there is nothing like it in this world !

" " I never saw anything like it. Nothing done ; nothing done ; the morning gone and nothing done ; and the butter's not come yet !"

' Homer is thought much of ; now, his heroes are always eating. They eat all through the " Iliad," they eat at Patroclus' tomb ; Ulysses eats a good deal in the " Odyssey " : Jupiter eats. They only did at Coombe Oaks as was done on Olympus.'

Such a mixture never was : the man from Fleet Street playing Mozart, Iden making his immortal gate, lovely Amaryllis tending the sick Amadis, the labourers at their work or drinking the good ale, the apple-bloom falling, the buttercups high in the meadow, the shadow of the bailiff still in possession.

Next after ' The Story of My Heart ' comes ' Amaryllis ' as a complete, expressive book, full of Jefferies himself and of the world as he saw it. In the autobiography he was overflowing with the inspiration which he had been receiving in solitude for the first thirty years of his life, and its proper expression was the solemn, swift, joyful, but mirthless ecstasy of that book. In ' Amaryllis ' there is no speed, no sweep of thought like the long line of the sculptured, houseless Downs, but, instead, the crowded criss-cross lines of the ridgy hamlet, with gable, and roof, and chimney, and rick, and elm, and the vast honeycomb of London itself. Yet it is just as much a whole, full as it is of unconventional masterly transitions, breathing one spirit. Here Jefferies' rebelliousness comes down from heaven to the street : the church, charity, architecture, London, everything as it is, makes a butt for laughter, scorn, and hate—everything save the hearts of men. Sometimes he has a large ripe sadness, which is not the wasteful, fatal sadness at all, as when he worships



the wainscot worn by his father's head ; or he has a naïve, ferocious anger, as when he points to the men and women tramps, the Things, that go slip-slop to the fair, 'not equal in value to the sheep . . . not worth anything when they're dead.' 'Fate' is here stronger than ever : Iden is unfortunate for a hundred reasons, and 'after all said and done, Fate.' Everything 'is in the Turkish manner,' he says, making Grand-Viziers of Barbers, making great Iden and fair Amaryllis the quarry of creditors. Nevertheless, night has enfolded the hamlet, lamps are lighted, the snow is piled without, and Mrs. Iden has warmed her elder wine ; her husband's potatoes are buried in the warm ashes : Jefferies has but two years to live, and it is loving-kindness which, after all, he feels and makes feel, as he draws up to the fire, towards a world not yet fit for the life he dreamed of on the Downs. Until men and women are ready for that pallet 'in the midst of air and light,' that plain and simple house, there is much goodness in the farm when men speak truth and drain large cups. With all its unhappiness, the house, and in some degree the book, with all its honesty, is a consoling one. We seem to hear the poet who sang : A great storm comes out of the heavens, the streams are frostbound ; pile up the fire, mix lavishly the honey-sweet wine, and lay your head on a cushion soft.

'Let the grandees go to the opera,' he says ; 'for me the streets.' In his mind he cannot get away from that terrible beautiful 'thickness of people,' London, any more than Alere could. The vastness, variety, complexity, opulence, disorder, are a delight as well as a pain. It is all wrong, and meantime let us love it—love it, except the sycophancy and the tyranny ; Jefferies would add also 'thrift and—twaddle.' How delicious, he says—the man who has to crawl upstairs on hands and knees when he is so fortunate as to have got downstairs !—'How delicious now to walk down Regent Street, along Piccadilly, up Bond Street, and so on, in a widening circle, with a thousand pounds in one's pocket,

just to spend, all your own, and no need to worry when it was gone! . . .

‘The exquisite delight of utterly abandoned extravagance, no counting—anathemas on counting and calculation! If life be not a dream, what is the use of living?’

‘Say what you will, the truth is we all struggle on in hope of living in a dream some day. This is my dream. Dreadfully, horribly wicked, is it not, in an age that preaches thrift and—twaddle?’

London seems to him to have something of the exuberant carelessness of Nature, still pouring gifts, still inexhaustible, as careless also of men. He says, ‘if he could only write the inner life of Fleet Street,’ he would vanquish Balzac, Zola, Hugo, ‘not in any grace of style or sweeping march of diction, but just pencil-jotted in the roughest words to hand, just as rich and poor, well-dressed ladies and next-door beggars are bundled into a train.’ In no other book but this, written under the inspiration of London, written ‘to describe a bit of human life exactly as it really is,’ would he have found a place for Raleigh Pamment, ‘late hours, tobacco, whisky, and ballet-dancers writ very large indeed on his broad face,’ who was a hero to his valet. The valet ‘swore in Raleigh’s very words, and used to spit like him.’ Jefferies seems to see a breath of the Divine in this sportsman’s generous energy, perhaps in his free spending of money.

It is a medley, ‘in the Turkish manner,’ like life itself, with a Pantagruelian flow—Red Lion Court, Coate Farm, sweetest fields of love, and early morning pavements spotted by expectorations—the rich crowd, and then old Dr. Butler with his ‘Hum! A’ have lived twenty years on pork. Let ’n yet it!’ and ‘If you want to get well, you go for a walk in the marning afore the aair have been braathed auver.’ The urn is shaken, but the lot-drawers take their fates in a dream. In no other of his books does his humour, so much despised, show itself so abundantly. He had not humour according to the largest definition that can be given to the word. It was

not twisted inextricably into the strands of his nature ; it was often invisible, and let us be thankful for it that yet another man of genius has been denied this heaven-descended monkey as a lifelong inseparable companion. Yet humour he had, if humour can be intermittent. It takes several forms. It perceives the minor inconsistencies of life, and can become jocularity. The commonest form is archness, a quiet dryness, with a twist in the phrasing peculiar to him—something so personal as to suggest a trick of speech or facial expression. Thus, he describes the way in which the spell of the low publican draws\* ‘logs of timber and faggots half across the parish, which will pull pheasants off their perch, extract trout from the deep, and stay the swift hare in midst of her career.’ And ‘who,’ he asks,† ‘would suspect an oyster of deceit?’ and tells of an old gentleman who insisted on having his oysters opened, not at the shop, but at his door. ‘He feared the craft and subtility of the wicked oyster.’ So, again, in the passage on the pewter tankard in ‘Greene Ferne Farm.’ Facetiousness is never far away, as in ‘Fish somehow slip through ordinary rules, being slimy of surface.’ It can descend to a mere one-man drollery, or to an elephantine jeer, or a snarling chuckle, as at charity, thrift, hygiene, etc. It can rise also to a sarcastic extravagance, as when he asked why the otter is killed in the Thames.‡ ‘Has he ravaged the fields? Does he threaten the homesteads? Is he at Temple Bar? Are we to run, as the old song says, from the Dragon?’ To be described as dryly amusing, perhaps, are such passages as where he speaks of that ‘marvel of our civilization’—‘The Thames is swearing-free. . . . You may begin at the mouth, off the Nore, and curse your way up to Cricklade. A hundred miles for swearing is a fine preserve.’ Sometimes it lends him an admirable metaphor. But in ‘Amaryllis’ it makes its nearest approach to true irony, and perhaps is such, in spite of a certain

\* *Hodge and His Masters.*† *The Dewy Morn.*‡ *The Open Air.*

self-consciousness which makes the reader pretty sure that these things are not yet part of the writer's natural armour, but are like javelins used for the moment's purpose, a little feverishly, as in this :

‘ I would infinitely rather be a tallow-chandler, with a good, steady income and no thought, than an author ; at the first opportunity I mean to go into the tallow business.’

Or in this :

‘ Some noble physicians have tried the effect of drugs upon themselves in order to advance their art ; for this they have received Gold Medals, and are alluded to as Benefactors of Mankind.

‘ I have tried the effects of forty prescriptions upon My Person. With the various combinations, patent medicines, and so forth, the total would, I verily believe, reach eighty drugs.

‘ Consequently, it is clear I ought to receive eighty gold medals. I am a Benefactor eighty times multiplied ; the incarnation of virtue ; a sort of Buddha. Kiss my knees, ye slaves !

‘ I have a complaisant feeling as I walk about that I have thus done more good than any man living.

‘ I am still very ill.’

It is best of all where it is least verbal, where it lurks and gives a glow to whole pages, as in the description of Iden's dinner. It is, however, let us admit, an armour which he is assuming against the world, now that increasing poverty and illness have denied him the Downs, and oncoming age has denied him the dream. For there are two ways of opposing the world — by poetry, by enthusiasm, when a man believes in his dream, in spite of the contradictions of life ; and by humour, when he smiles at the contrast between himself and the Other Dreamer whose dreams came true.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ‘FIELD AND HEDGEROW’ AND OTHER ESSAYS— DEATH

‘FIELD AND HEDGEROW’ was published in January, 1889, and consists largely of Jefferies’ latest essays, composed during his last illness at Sea View, Goring, together with some of considerably earlier date—‘Nature in the Louvre,’ for example, having been written early in 1884, while ‘Field Sports in Art’ was published in 1885. Other essays of the same and earlier dates were printed in the posthumous ‘Toilers of the Field’ of 1892. Some that were printed in the magazines have not been reprinted. Their subjects are taken from the neighbourhood of Coate, of Surbiton, of Brighton, of Crowborough, and from London, Exmoor, and the Quantocks. Some of these have already been touched on; some, like ‘An Extinct Race,’ ‘Orchis Masculina,’ ‘The Golden-crested Wren,’ and ‘House Martins,’ are too slight to be valuable except to the complete lover of Jefferies; others belong to the same class of irregular, patchwork essays as several, heretofore mentioned, in ‘The Life of the Fields’ and ‘The Open Air.’ Such are, for example, ‘Country Places,’ ‘April Gossip,’ ‘The Time of Year,’ and ‘Mixed Days of May and December.’ The rest fall into the other two classes—of essays, first, dealing more or less systematically with a definite subject, as in ‘Nature and Books,’ ‘Locality and Nature,’ ‘Field Sports in Art,’ ‘After the County Franchise,’ and the introduction to White’s ‘Selborne’; and, second, of essays which have a structure made at least as much by the emotions as by the intellect, and



such are, among others, 'Hours of Spring,' 'Winds of Heaven,' 'My Old Village,' and 'Nature and Eternity.' The best of these two classes are examples of Jefferies' ripest art and most advanced ideas, even though he could often see the clouds only through a window, and could escape from pain, from 'the iron grip of hell,' only for moments while he was writing them. In several it is clear that he is thinking about death as something that is for him. In the passage on phthisis, which he had been studying, in 'Some April Insects'; in the sadness of the hour when he saw the emperor moth on that sunny second day of April—'to think it will never return'; in the looking back (in 'Walks in the Wheatfields' and 'My Old Village') to Coate, to the cornfields under the Downs, and to the brook; in the vividness of his Crowborough winter picture—in these things there is death.

His own poverty and pain contributed, perhaps, a little to the bitterness of his writing on poverty at this time. He would revive the tithe—'the monstrous injustice of the extraordinary tithe'—if only the poor and aged and injured of the village might have it. He seemed to see the workhouse as the labourer does in the wintry moon when first the rheumatism forbids him to rise—'that blot on our civilization—the workhouse'; and to give the children a midday meal at the school, he said, 'would be only simple justice after so many centuries.' 'What a triumph for the Jubilee Year,'\* he wrote (or, I should say, dictated) in 1887, his death-year, at sight of the old notice-board saying :

'All persons found wandering abroad, lying, lodging, or being in any barn, outhouse, or in the open air, and not giving a good account of themselves, will be apprehended as rogues and vagabonds, and be either publicly whipt or sent to the house of correction, and afterwards disposed of according to law, by order of the magistrates. Any person who shall apprehend any rogue or vagabond will be entitled to a reward of ten shillings.'

\* 'Country Places,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

The notice reminds him that even now the workhouse endures, men are imprisoned for debt, and 'in the West End of London a poor woman, an ironer, being in debt, her six children's clothes were seized.' He cries out upon 'the enormous weight of ecclesiastical bricks and mortar that cumbers the land,' while the vagrom man with nothing in his pocket must not sleep in the open. Walking in the wheatfields, he remembers how the reapers reaped when he was a boy :

'Their necks grew black, much like black oak in old houses. Their open chests were always bare, and flat, and stark, and never rising with rounded, bust-like muscle as the Greek statues of athletes.

'The breast-bone was burned black, and their arms, tough as ash, seemed cased in leather. They grew visibly thinner in the harvest-field, and shrunk together—all flesh disappearing, and nothing but sinew and muscle remaining. Never was such work. The wages were low in those days, and it is not long ago, either—I mean the all-year-round wages. The reaping was piecework, at so much per acre—like solid gold to men and women who had lived on dry bones, as it were, through the winter. So they worked and slaved, and tore at the wheat as if they were seized with a frenzy, the heat, the aches, the illness, the sunstroke, always impending in the air, the stomach hungry again before the meal was over. It was nothing. No song, no laugh, no stay—on from morn till night, possessed with a maddened desire to labour, for the more they could cut the larger the sum they would receive ; and what is man's heart and brain to money ? So hard, you see, is the pressure of human life that these miserales would have prayed on their knees for permission to tear their arms from the socket, and to scorch and shrivel themselves to charred human brands in the furnace of the sun.

'Does it not seem bitter that it should be so ? Here was the wheat, the beauty of which I strive in vain to tell you, in the midst of the flowery summer, scourging

them with the knot of necessity ; that which should give life pulling the life out of them, removing their existence below that of the cattle, so far as the pleasure of living goes. Without doubt, many a low mound in the churchyard—once visible, now level—was the sooner raised over the nameless dead because of that terrible strain in the few weeks of the gold fever. This is human life, real human life—no rest, no calm enjoyment of the scene, no generous gift of food and wine lavishly offered by the gods, the hard fist of necessity for ever battering man to a shapeless and hopeless fall.’\*

Experience and reading have not blinded him to the blunt cruelty of life. He feels it like the child whom fire burns for the first time. He is like the poet who in his childhood stretched out his hand to feel as well as to see the beauty of water boiling in a pot, and was scalded for it. He seems to exclaim directly that beauty and joy are right, and all else wrong, and with all the more frankness and terrible simplicity because he has learned it for himself. Venturing into politics, he is still indignant because the country, though it wants to abolish the vestiges of feudalism and is beginning to unite against tithes, yet ‘ votes Conservative, and places a Conservative in office. . . . It would break down the monopoly of the railways, and at the same time would like a monopoly of protection for itself.’ Not far from a cottager himself, he can sympathize with cottagers who put unprofitable sentiments before self-interest. ‘ I would rather my children shared my crust,’ he says, ‘ than fed on roast-beef in a stranger’s hall.’ Like them, he says he does not care for small sums, little gains. In ‘ After the County Franchise ’† he tries to look forward to a village council that shall represent the people, in place of a Board of Guardians which is ‘ land and money simply.’ The power to vote must bring the labourers some such council, but let them beware of borrowing ; let them prefer a rude discomfort.

\* ‘ Walks in the Wheatfields,’ *Field and Hedgerow*.

† *Longman’s Magazine*, 1887.

Why, he asks, should the council not possess its own village? Why should we not live in our own houses? He even asks, Can an owner of this kind of property be permitted to refuse to sell? Which is a pertinent but saucy question for this yeoman's son to ask. He ventures to suggest that ten or twenty out of a thousand acres should be purchasable by force 'at a given and moderate price,' and points out, with naïve and most troublesome logic, that the railways have as great a privilege. As things are, the labourer is a hand-to-mouth nomad bound for the workhouse—the word 'pauper' Jefferies detests so much that it is painful for him to use it—'because the owner of ten thousand acres is by no means obliged to part with a minutest fragment of it.' The Poor Laws would, he thinks, be unnecessary if there were a good system of insurance. He complains of the 'glacier-like' movements of Government, of the 'mediæval law' which prevents the use of steam on the common roads. The Church has lost all hold of him, and, not only as an artist, he dislikes the very towers and steeples.

'I wish the trees, the elms, would grow tall enough and thick enough to hide the steeples and towers which stand up so stiff and stark, and bare and cold, some of them blunted and squab, some of them sharp enough to impale, with no more shape than a walking-stick, ferrule upwards, every one of them out of proportion and jarring to the eye. If by good fortune you can find a spot where you cannot see a steeple or a church-tower, where you can see only fields and woods, you will find it so much more beautiful, for Nature has made it of its kind perfect. The dim sea is always so beautiful a view because it is not disfigured by these buildings. In the ships men live, in the houses among the trees they live; these steeples and towers are empty, and no spirit can dwell in that which is out of proportion. Scarcely anyone can paint a picture of the country without sticking in one of these repellent structures. The oast houses, whose red cones are so plentiful in Kent and Sussex, have quite a different



effect ; they have some colour, and by a curious felicity the builders have hit upon a good proportion, so that the shape is pleasant. These, too, have some use in the world.\*

In another place he points out that the country people have chapels, churches, Salvation Army barracks, but no cottage hospital, no provision for the aged or infirm, no library or lectures, no good water : ' all this fervour and building of temples and rattling of the Salvation Army drum and loud demands for the New Jerusalem, and not a single effort for physical well-being or mental training.'† To this dying man it was an astonishing sight. At the same time, he was becoming antipathetic to the cottager in other ways—in the matter of destroying life, for example. He points out the cruelty and stupidity in killing birds, especially the insectivorous. The sparrows are his friends, and he has always let them build about his house ; and even for the purpose of identification, he says that he objects to trapping insects, because he dislikes ' to interfere with their harmless liberty.'‡

In ' The Wiltshire Labourer '§ he goes on with the subject. There is, he finds, ' the same insolvency, the same wearisome monotony of existence in debt, the same hopeless countenances and conversation,' among the farmers. They cannot keep their sons on the land. The state of farming drives him into a naïve wonder that the earth should lie idle for so many months in the year ; he calls it ' a reproach to science.'|| The labourers have improved in ' social stature ' ; they want blacking instead of grease, more fashionable clothes, and therefore more money. Ten years before, Jefferies had praised those who built better cottages and gave large gardens and allotments to the labourers. The population has become more

\* ' Walks in the Wheatfields,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

† ' Country Sunday,' *ibid.*

‡ ' Some April Insects,' *ibid.*

§ *Longman's Magazine*, 1887.

|| ' Idle Earth,' *ibid.*, 1894.



wandering, in spite of this, because there is no fixity of tenure. 'You cannot have a fixed population unless it has a home, and the labouring population is practically homeless. As to the allotments, cottagers do not think it a favour to be allowed to rent land at three times what the farmer pays for it.'\* Why, he asks, cannot landowners let cottages direct, and give the labourers security so long as rent is paid? Better still, let them give facilities for the gradual purchase of the freehold by the labourers. They 'deserve' settled homes. 'Deserve'! The word is revolutionary, and that Jefferies should soberly point out what a class of men deserves, as if that were some reason for giving it, marks an interesting change from the year of his letters to the *Times*; it marks the intrusion of his ideals into practical matters. Writing as a practical man, he says that the labourers deserve settled homes.

The labour question, he sees, is everywhere. Books and papers are 'carefully flavoured to suit the masses who work. . . . Is it religion? The pickaxe is already laid to the foundation of the church tower.' Though the son of a farmer who hated the ranters, he is delighted with the chapel where the labourer is not despised. 'Was it,' he asks, 'merely a coincidence that the clerical eye was opened just at the moment when Hodge became a voter?'† Money is more and more; in the posthumous 'Thoughts on the Labour Question'‡ he pictures men working hard in great heat or amid great risks, all for the golden sovereign. 'Throw a golden sovereign upon the mahogany table and listen. The circular disc of heavy metal rebounds and rings clear as a bell—as a bell calling slaves to obey the hest of its owner.' 'It is,' he writes, 'a great game of roulette, this world of ours—a huge gambling establishment. You who are so bitter against Capital, how dearly you would like to be a Capitalist! Then, for Heaven's sake, let us all have a

\* 'Idle Earth,' in *Longman's*, 1894.

† 'The Country Sunday,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

‡ *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 10, 1891.

fair chance : do not make its possession dependent upon morality, virtue, genius, personal stature, nobility of mind, self-sacrifice, or such rubbish.' His were not the times in which a poet could write : ' I have been young, and now am old ; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.'

But there is a large and not always latent power of conservatism in Jefferies as in the land itself ; it emerges now and then, as if a mastodon heaved up the earth and thrust its shoulders out in the midst of the street. His spirit, his own special part of himself, that which belongs to the years since 1848, is capable of the bravest flights ; but there were many years before 1848, and they, too, are in him, and he is of them. Hence a labourer's sentiment or a farmer's prejudice easily threatens his tower of ivory, ' pinnacled dim in the intense inane ' ; hence he can never quite get away from Coate Farm, its half-dozen little fields, and his good father making the bad best of it. He delights in Linnæus' ' Tour in Lapland ' ' because it gives a smack in the face to modern pseudo-scientific medical cant about hygiene, showing how the Laplanders break every " law," human and " Divine," ventilation, bath, and diet—all the trash—and therefore enjoy the most excellent health, and live to a great old age.'\*

So also the unscientific and unhistorical man in him scorns ' infallible instinct ' and ' evolution ' as explanations of birds' nests. ' An examination of birds' nests, if conducted free of prejudice, will convince any independent person neither that the one nor the other explains these common hedge difficulties '†—*e.g.*, the fact that nests are too small for the fledglings, which ' bubble over ' the edge. The county wants new land laws, but votes Conservative ; it ' has learned to read, and does not buy books.'‡ Jefferies used to think that the country-

\* ' Nature in Books,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

† ' Bird's Nests,' *ibid.*

‡ ' Walks in the Wheatfields,' *ibid.*

man was going to become a reader ; but now, he says, the books are by townsmen, the pictures are derived from the stage. Nature herself is a good enough book. At the end of an essay on 'English Cottage Ideas' he says : 'The best of us are polished cottagers.'\* Of a chaffinch — 'my chaffinch' — he can write :

'The loving soul, a-thrill in all his nerves,  
A life immortal as a man's deserves.'†

But let him return to sport, and his 'dear skylarks' and happy greenfinches seem to be quite forgotten. 'Hares,' he writes, 'are almost formed on purpose to be good sport, and make a jolly good dish, a pleasant addition to the ceaseless round of mutton and beef to which the dead level of civilization reduces us. Coursing is capital, the harriers first-rate.'‡ His imagination had bounds to it, and the hare which he saw as he lay alone on the Downs had nothing to do with the one that cried out before the hound or made 'a jolly good dish.' As he says himself, speaking of things in general, 'character runs upwards, not downwards. It is not the nature of the aristocrat that permeates the cottager, but the nature of the cottager that permeates the aristocrat. . . . All alike try to go in the same old groove, till disaster visits their persistence. It is English human nature.'§ His inconsistencies are true to Nature and to the country mind. 'Man made the town,' and in the town man builds up a new world of logic and ideas. But the country meanwhile exists and absorbs. Jefferies is fascinated by the gypsies, without a Deity, 'under English oaks and beeches' :

'So old, they went through civilization ten thousand years since ; they have worn it all out, even hope in the future ; they merely live acquiescent to fate, like the red deer. The crescent moon, the evening star, the clatter of the fern-owl, the red embers of the wood fire, the

\* 'Cottage Ideas,' *Field and Hedgerow*. † 'My Chaffinch,' *ibid*.

‡ 'Walks in the Wheatfields,' *ibid*.

§ 'Cottage Ideas,' *ibid*.

pungent smoke blown round about by the occasional puffs of wind, the shadowy trees, the sound of the horses cropping the grass, the night that steals on till the stubbles alone are light among the fields—the gipsy sleeps in his tent on mother earth ; it is, you see, primeval man with primeval Nature. One thing he gains, at least—an iron health, an untiring foot, women whose haunches bear any burden, children whose naked feet are not afraid of the dew.’\*

Few townsmen could accept, as Jefferies did, the Downs and the crowd by the Mansion House and the docks, not merely as theoretically all of one spirit, but in his heart. For him, the steam-plough and the reaping-machine, as well as oak and violet ; he wants the light railway to call at the farmyard gate. And yet he has always a sense of the contrast between what belongs to an outdoor and what belongs to an indoor tradition, rejecting the indoor very heartily as when he rejects the great book on colours, because it deals with the artificial and not with Nature. He asks if it would be possible ‘to build up a fresh system of colour language by means of natural objects.’ And, again, ‘I found,’ he says, ‘from the dandelion that there were no books.’† Unless the writers have gone to Nature, their books are *biblia abiblia*. He likes White, because ‘he was not full of evolution when he walked out, or variation, or devolution, or degeneration. He did not look for microbes everywhere. His mind was free and his eye open.’‡ He has gone through many books to get news of the dandelion, but he sits on the thrown timber and wants the soul of the flowers. Science he respects ; he wants alchemy, too.

‘Let us not be too entirely mechanical, Baconian, and experimental only ; let us let the soul hope and dream and float on these oceans of accumulated facts, and feel

\* ‘Just before Winter,’ *Field and Hedgerow*.

† ‘Nature and Books,’ *ibid*.

‡ Preface to *Natural History of Selborne*.

still greater aspirations than it has ever known since first a flint was chipped before the glaciers. . . .'\*

So, also, he wants an art that will face the real and yet idealize. 'He who has got the sense of beauty in his eye can find it in things as they really are.' His is the true realism, and his philosophy of art is excellent when he comments: 'In these landscape days we put our pictures on the wall only, and no imagination into the things we handle and use.' †

Consciously often, unconsciously sometimes, he is feeling after the causes of this harmony between Nature and the works of men. A statue known as 'Venus Accroupie' in the Louvre brings him and us almost in sight of them:

'At a third visit it seemed to me that the statue had grown much more beautiful in the few days which had elapsed since I first saw it. Pondering upon the causes of this increasing interest, I began to see that one reason was because it recalled to my memory the loveliness of Nature. Old days which I had spent wandering among deep meadows and by green woods came back to me. In such days the fancy had often occurred to me that, besides the loveliness of leaves and flowers, there must be some secret influence drawing me on as a hand might beckon. The light and colour suspended in the summer atmosphere, as colour is in stained but translucent glass, were to me always on the point of becoming tangible in some beautiful form. The hovering lines and shape never became sufficiently defined for me to know what form it could be, yet the colours and the light meant something which I was not able to fix. . . . Here there came back to me this old thought born in the midst of flowers and wind-rustled leaves, and I saw that with it the statue before me was in accord. The living original of this work was the human impersonation of the secret influence which had beckoned me on in the

\* Preface to *Natural History of Selborne*.

† 'Field Sports in Art,' *Field and Hedgerow*.



forest and by running streams. She expressed in loveliness of form the colour and light of sunny days ; she expressed the deep aspiring desire of the soul for the perfection of the frame in which it is encased, for the perfection of its own existence. . . . Though I cannot name the ideal good, it seems to me that it will be in some way closely associated with the ideal beauty of Nature.\*

It is, in fact, beauty that he so hardily loves—beauty somehow associated in his mind with physical strength, with sincerity and truth. Impermanent as mist breathed on the mirror of eternity, he perceives that the steam-plough, like the old Sussex plough, the new Australian clipper, and the crank caravels of old time, are good and divine because they are fearless expressions of the one energy that propagates and slays. ‘The earth is right and the tree is right,’ he says ; ‘trim either, and all is wrong.’ Of poppies he says : ‘There is genius in them, the genius of colour, and they are saved’ ; of the sweetness of the bird’s song in an early morning of spring : ‘Genius is nature, and his lay, like the sap in the bough from which he sings, rises without thought.’

These last words are from one of the finest of his essays in the personal and poetic class. It was written during illness and exile from the fields, when he saw the lark through the window-pane. It was, it is said, the last essay written with his own hand, some time in the spring of 1886. He thought of the bloom of the gorse outside, ‘shut like a book,’ but soon to open ; of the sunlight and wind at their work. ‘I wonder to myself,’ he says, ‘how they can all get on without me—how they manage, bird and flower, without me to keep the calendar for them.’

‘All the grasses,’ he continues—‘all the grasses of the meadow were my pets : I loved them all ; and perhaps that was why I never had a “pet,” never cultivated a flower, never kept a caged bird, or any creature. Why

\* ‘Nature in the Louvre,’ *Field and Hedgerow*.

keep pets when every wild free hawk that passed over head in the air was mine? I joyed in his swift, careless flight, in the throw of his pinions, in his rush over the elms and miles of woodland; it was happiness to see his unchecked life. What more beautiful than the sweep and curve of his going through the azure sky? These were my pets, and all the grass. Under the wind it seemed to dry and become grey, and the starlings running to and fro on the surface that did not sink now stood high above it and were larger. The dust that drifted along blessed it, and it grew. Day by day a change; always a note to make. The moss drying on the tree-trunks, dog's-mercury stirring under the ash-poles, bird's-claw buds of beech lengthening: books upon books to be filled with these things. I cannot think how they manage without me.

'To-day through the window-pane I see a lark high up against the grey cloud, and hear his song. I cannot walk about and arrange with the birds and gorse-bloom; how does he know it is the time for him to sing? Without my book and pencil and observing eye, how does he understand that the hour has come? To sing high in the air, to chase his mate over the low stone wall of the ploughed field, to battle with his high-crested rival, to balance himself on his trembling wings, outspread a few yards above the earth, and utter that sweet little loving kiss, as it were, of song—oh, happy, happy days! So beautiful to watch, as if he were my own, and I felt it all! It is years since I went out amongst them in the old fields, and saw them in the green corn; they must be dead, dear little things, by now. Without me to tell him, how does this lark to-day that I hear through the window know it is his hour?'

What utterly abandoned sincerity is here! Writing seldom comes so near to a sob without causing disgust. Seldom, save in Shelley, is the veil between the poet and the reader living after him so transparent. It is the

\* 'Hours of Spring,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

writing of one in whose veins the sea floweth, who is clothed with the heavens, crowned with the stars, as Traherne says—one who so loves and enjoys the world that he is ‘covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it.’ Thinking of all these things, Jefferies remembers his error to believe that because he loved the earth, the earth loved him. He recalls how he once walked ‘gaily’ up to Beachy Head, joying in sun and wind, and crunching the shells of long-dead things for which Nature cares as much as for him. That sends him to the thought of ‘The Story of My Heart’: ‘We must look to ourselves to help ourselves. We must think ourselves into an earthly immortality’;\* for so he calls a divine fulness of life. And the little pebble in the grass teaches him that he is a soul, ‘because he is not that that touches the nerves of his hand’; the chief use of matter is ‘to demonstrate to us the existence of the soul.’ He returns to the beauty of the earth, of the forest-clad hills about Crowborough, even in winter, when the sky was ‘black and faintly yellow—brutal colours of despotism—heaven striking with clenched fist.’ Earth is always beautiful, and ‘the heart, from the moment of its first beat, instinctively longs for the beautiful.’ But it is frost-bound, and a labouring man who would not go to the workhouse asks to be allowed to dig in the garden :

‘Nature, earth, and the gods did not help him; sun and stars, where were they? He knocked at the door of the farms and found good in man only—not in Law or Order, but in individual man alone.’†

The snow and wind will not spare the gypsy woman lying with her babes. ‘Nothing good to man but man. Let man, then, leave his gods and lift up his ideal beyond them.’ The birds also starve—only one thrush is left. And yet ‘the buzzing crowds of summer were still under the snow.’ Then the long frost breaks; the wind is in the south, and the gorse in flower. But an old man goes past in a waggon on the bed in which he had slept seventy-

\* ‘Hours of Spring,’ *Field and Hedgerow*.

† *Ibid*.

three years. 'It is not the tyranny of anyone that has done it ; it is the tyranny of circumstance, the lot of man.' But the sycamore bud opens ; there are lambs, there are butterflies ; the plough can break the clod. And yet there is no order, he says, as of a drill ; the wild flowers are not found by a foot-measure.

'Nature has no arrangement, no plan, nothing judicious even. The walnut-trees bring forth their tender buds, and the frost turns them—they have no mosaic of time to fit in, like a Roman tessellated pavement. Nature is like a child, who will sing and shout, though you may be never so deeply pondering in the study, and does not wait for the hour that suits your mind. You do not know what you may find each day. Perhaps you may only pick up a fallen feather, but it is beautiful, every filament. Always beautiful ! everything beautiful ! And are these things new—the ploughman and his team, the lark's song, the green leaf ? Can they be new ? Surely they have been of old time ! They are, indeed, new—the only things that are so ; the rest is old and grey, and a weariness.\*'

So it ends. How true, how false, how unreasonable, it all is ! Why is he not working in the slums to improve the lot of men whom the gods will not help ? He does but add to the difficulty and absurdity of life, to lie there ill and poor in the monotonous frost, looking out of the window, all manner of memories, hopes, joys, sorrows coming to his heart as doves to the dovecot. And yet does he not in the end extract more joy than sorrow from it all ? Is it not a triumph of beauty and life ? It makes for goodness, joy, and beauty in its proclamation that life can endure most dog-like things and yet flourish exceedingly. Always these two truths—the exuberance of Nature and the divinity of man. Even if it were all a nightmare, the very truthfulness of the agitated voice, rising and falling in honest contemplation of common sorrows, would preserve it, since it is rarely given to the

\* 'Hours of Spring,' *Field and Hedgerow*.



best of men to speak the truth. Its shape is the shape of an emotional mood, and it ends because the emotion ends. It is music, and above, or independent of, logic. It obeys some deeper law than that which any model could teach. It really has the effect of music, with its succession of thoughts and images wrought into as real a unity as there is in '*Phæolus ille*' or the 'Ode to a Nightingale.' Some would say the effect is that of religious music, but it rebels against all the gods, against all things except life.

In 'The July Grass' another of his old thoughts has returned. At the sight of a scarlet-spotted fly enjoying the sun—'if the sunshine were a hundred hours long, still it would not be long enough'—he resolves that he will not think; he will be unconscious, he will live. He has there met, perhaps, the most tragic condition of man's greatness—his self-consciousness. If the sea-waves were to be self-conscious, they would cease to wash the shore; a self-conscious world would fester and stink in a month. Many men survive the terror. Jefferies survived it, and desired to be like the scarlet-spotted fly. Has the Nature of which he spoke ambiguous, terrible things in 'The Story of My Heart' taken a sharp revenge? or is she only showing the maternal extremity of her love, that she makes him say, 'All things that are beautiful are found by chance, like everything that is good'? It is the same cry as the poet's 'Let us keep our lives simple and passionate.' In one place, having defended the intelligence of ants, hinting at 'some consideration of which we are ignorant, but which weighs with ants,' he says: 'I do not know that I am myself more rational.'\* But he is not content to gaze at the scarlet and gold and crimson and green of July, to see, to drink it, but desires 'in some way to make it part of me, that I might live it.' Oh, the unprofitable sweetness of life, sweetest when it passes briefly and unconsciously like a poppy's blossoming! Jefferies will not be content until he has seen it all.

\* 'Among the Nuts,' *Field and Hedgerow*.



It is wonderful that he does not meet such a fate as that of Faustus, with such senses as he had, feeling 'a sense of blue as he faces the strong breeze . . . wind-blue, not the night-blue or heaven-blue, a colour of air.'\* Sitting among the hops in the oast-chamber until his mind 'was full of fancy, imagination, flowing with ideas,' a 'sense of lightness and joyousness' lifted him up; he 'wanted music, and felt full of laughter.'† He seems to see everything, and to endeavour to record everything clearly, even when it is of little artistic or scientific value. Thus, he notes that the colour of the old oak-leaves 'is too brown for buff; it is more like fresh harness.' He notes, among the wind's labours, the ruffling of the mole's velvet back. Wonderful it is that he should write at all, after this restless roving with the winds and diving in the waters, this care for all the business of the earth as if truly it could not go on without him, as if he had

'The cloudy winds to keep  
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.'

That he is an artist so often is hardly less surprising than it would be had James Luckett Jefferies been one, or Uncle Jonathan at the Idovers. In 'An English Deer-Park,'‡ and such papers, he sometimes appears to be expressing a view like theirs—the view of a man who has a plenty of country lore in his heart, so that calm and beautiful old things flow naturally from his pen. Some of this has only reached the form of gossip, as in 'The Countryside: Sussex,' 'Country Places,' 'Buckhurst Park,'§ 'Summer in Somerset,' but incomparable gossip, often to be valued as a vivid record of a certain time and place, and having a great charm for the townsman and the sportsman. By this abundance and confusion as of Nature he shows his birth out of the soil, with which, indeed, he seems still to maintain an irrefragable connection. But what gives life and significance to them, and

\* 'Winds of Heaven,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

† 'The Countryside: Sussex,' *ibid*.

‡ *Ibid*.

§ *Ibid*.

Old View

Forring, Sussex

Dec 3rd

Dear Mr. Scott,

Mr. C. J. Longman, 39  
Paternoster Row, London, has kindly  
consented to co-operate in anything  
done for me. He is a literary  
partner in Longmans & Co the well known  
publishers, & is a gentleman you would  
I am sure take to immediately. He  
is an old literary associate of mine  
& is the only person besides yourself  
who has shown an interest in my  
future. I hope you approved of my last  
letter. Believe me,

C. P. Scott Esq

Yours faithfully

Edw. H. Manchester

Richard Jefferies



makes them more than extracts from Nature, is the quickening imagination. He has built images of certain things in his brain with such clearness and of such close relationship to his own life and thought that they make a new world, where, without imagination, we should have missed a thousand things that Nature has. 'At every hour of the day,' he says,\* 'I am accustomed to call up figures at will before my eyes, which stand out well defined and coloured to the very hue of their faces.' Without this imagination there is no life. Imagination is not an artistic quality, but a quality pertaining to intensity of life, to reality, and it is possessed by the ploughman, sailor, or mechanic as commonly as by the artist, and by it they live, or, more accurately, by their possession they prove that they live, and do not endure the life in death of the unimaginative. The intellect and the perpetually decaying frame speak aloud in tones which mean that death comes soon and death ends all; that when the breath is out of our bodies all is over, and the visible world of men and women and Nature and art is no more to us than, in a few days, we are to them. But imagination stops our ears against the song of the cold sirens on the rocks, and helps us to go on living as if for ever, to do and to be the greatest and most god-like things, making nothing of time or death. Thus, the contrast is not between imagination and reality, but between imagination and death; it is better to say between love and death, for imagination is the most sacred child of love. Jefferies himself says of beauty which only the imagination can hold that it is 'an expression of hope; . . . while the heart is absorbed in its contemplation, unconscious but powerful hope is filling the breast.'†

'My Old Village,'‡ one of the last, if not the last, of his essays, is perhaps the finest of all in its naturalism, its pathos, its beauty, its perfection of form, as of a copse or a worn tree which we recognize as perfect because it has

\* 'Field Sports in Art,' *Field and Hedgerow*.

† 'Nature in the Louvre,' *ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*

grown to the sound of music. 'John Brown is dead,' it begins, and Richard Jefferies' father wrote in a copy of the magazine where it first appeared: 'He was my milker and workman for eighteen or twenty years, and was the first man my son could remember. His father was Job Brown.' Jefferies goes on to recall the cottage where Brown lived, and the raised piece of wood across the doorway over which he slipped on coming home in the evening, and fell forward dead on the brick floor—'hard to fall on and die.' There, by the strong labourer's cottage, the first violets came. He remembers John Brown's strength, his mighty mowing. 'If a man's work that he has done all the days of his life could be collected and piled up around him in visible shape, what a vast mound there would be beside some! If each act or stroke was represented, say, by a brick, John Brown would have stood the day before his ending by the side of a monument as high as a pyramid. Then if in front of him could be placed the sum and product of his labour, the profit to himself, he could have held it in his clenched hand like a nut, and no one would have seen it.'\* He remembers, too, this man's going off to Swindon with a wallet for the bread, his tipsy gravity as he carried a yoke of milk, bathing himself at length in it as he fell. They had small-pox in the cottage near. 'That terrible disease seemed to quite spoil the violet bank opposite, and I never picked one there afterwards.' Nearly twenty years before Jefferies had wanted to leave Coate because it was 'tainted' by his own illness. It was John Brown's tall chimney that he saw—and we can still see—coming home at all hours, a comfortable sight when he still believed in ghosts. 'The ghosts die as we grow older; they die, and their places are taken by real ghosts.' The next cottage (going towards Coate Farm) was Job Brown's, and he remembers the little shopkeeper who 'had a way of shaking hands with you with his right hand, while his left hand was casually doing something else in a detached sort of way.'

\* 'My Old Village,' *Field and Hedgerow*.



He caught rats and rabbits and moles ; he sold ' such immense dark-brown jumbles, such cheek-distenders . . . I really think I could eat one now.' But Job is long dead. Next came the water-bailiff's cottage, with the oars leaning against it, and the punt with a list, the big gun, the shrewish wife—dead now. Then the thatched village, hiding irregularly up lanes and among elms. But not one of the farmers is left, not even the strong young man, ' the hardy, dark young man, built of iron, broad, thick, and short, who looked as if frost, snow, and heat were all the same to him.' In his prime a sunstroke sent him to bed, and in twelve months he was buried. ' Of them all,' of all the people Jefferies knew or used to see, ' I verily believe there was but one soul living in the same old house.' The trees, too—

' I think I have heard that the oaks are down. They may be standing or down ; it matters nothing to me. The leaves I last saw upon them are gone for evermore, nor shall I ever see them come there again ruddy in spring. I would not see them again even if I could ; they could never look again as they used to do. There are too many memories there. The happiest days become the saddest afterwards. Let us never go back, lest we, too, die. There are no such oaks anywhere else—none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads, on which the sun used to shine as if on the globe of the earth, one side in shadow, the other in bright light. How often I have looked at oaks since, and yet have never been able to get the same effect from them ! Like an old author printed in another type, the words are the same, but the sentiment is different. The brooks have ceased to run. There is no music now at the old hatch where we used to sit in danger of our lives, happy as kings, on the narrow bar over the deep water. The barred pike that used to come up in such numbers are no more among the flags. The perch used to drift down the stream, and then bring up again. The sun shone there for a very long time, and the water rippled and

sang, and it always seemed to me that I could feel the rippling and the singing and the sparkling back through the centuries. The brook is dead, for when man goes Nature ends. I dare say there is water there still, but it is not the brook ; the brook is gone, like John Brown's soul. There used to be clouds over the fields—white clouds in blue summer skies. I have lived a good deal on clouds. They have been meat to me often ; they bring something to the spirit which even trees do not. I see clouds now sometimes when the iron grip of hell permits for a minute or two ; they are very different clouds, and speak differently. I long for some of the old clouds that had no memories. There were nights in those times over those fields—not darkness, but night—full of glowing suns and glowing richness of life that sprang up to meet them. The nights are there still—they are everywhere ; nothing local in the night—but it is not the night to me seen through the window.

‘ There used to be footpaths. . . . ’\*

There was the footpath where, ‘ a hundred years ago, a little old man with silver buckles on his shoes ’ used to walk once a week to drink milk with his children at the farm—Coate Farm, for Richard Jefferies' father has put a note alongside this passage, saying ‘ My father ’—and the path to the railway where Richard, as a boy, used to go to see the broad-gauge engines sweep by.

‘ I wish I could feel like that now. The feeling is not quite gone, even now, and I have often since seen those great broad-gauge creatures moving alive to and fro like Ezekiel's wheel-dream beside the platforms of Babylon with much of the same old delight. Still, I never went back with them to the faded footpath. They are all faded now, these footpaths.’†

The walnut-trees at home are dead, where he used to sit with a ‘ great volume by Sir Walter Scott,’ and balance the luxuries of reading and eating nuts ; where he read of the lost caravan that found princely hospitality at an

\* ‘ My Old Village,’ *Field and Hedgerow*.

† *Ibid*.

unexpected oasis, and came away with pearls and rubies, only to find they had been away, not a month or two, but twenty years, and as they grew old one by one they set out to find the city of the oasis, but left their bones among the palms and water of the mirage.

The ash-copses are cut, where he used to go with the little copy of Shakespeare's poems and sonnets, never reading it out of doors, yet carrying it about until it was worn.

'Was everyone, then, so pleasant to me in those days?' So he suddenly interrupts his memories. There was not one friendly; they were indifferent to him, he to them. He will not remember the noisy scapegrace, nor his cousin Jimmy Cox, nor his brother Harry, not Alere, nor Amadis, nor Molly, the milkmaid.

'I planted myself everywhere under the trees in the fields and footpaths by day and by night, and that is why I have never put myself into the charge of the many-wheeled creatures that move on the rails and gone back thither, lest I might find the trees look small, and the elms mere switches, and the fields shrunken, and the brooks dry, and no voice anywhere. Nothing but my own ghost to meet me by every hedge. I fear lest I should find myself more dead than all the rest, and verily I wish, could it be without injury to others, that the sand of the desert would rise and roll over and obliterate the place for ever and ever.'\*

But, he says, he need not wish this; and then with unlucky mock gravity, which could only have succeeded had it been irony, he goes on to point out with firstly, secondly, and seventhly, that beyond his own there is no evidence to support what he has said about the sparkle of the brook and the old man with the silver buckles and the footpaths . . . 'so that perhaps, after all, I was mistaken, and there never was any such place or any such meadows, and I was never there. And perhaps, in course of time, I shall find out also, when I pass away

\* 'My Old Village,' *Field and Hedgerow*

physically, that, as a matter of fact, there never was any earth.'

It is most mournful music, but it is music. At first sight it is one of the most numbing and desperate things outside of our own lives. With its interruptions, its moodiness, it is an exquisite portrait of an hour in the life of a sensitive egoist, with disease and poverty against him, looking backward, as Lamb and Hood looked backward. Were it nothing more, it might seem to be one of those pieces that check the heart and make against life. But it is more; it is not merely a swaying wreck that drifts to the whirlpool and death of its desire. Languor, acquiescence, retrospection can effect nothing, even if sometimes they guide a pen. Behind this gloom there is intense vitality, a stirring and a promise of the lightning which, purging the gloom, brings the rain and the sunlight of beauty and joy again. The piece has that intensity which makes pure sorrow the equal of pure joy, so keen is it, so expressive of the whole character, so rich in apprehensions of Nature and men. Jefferies' style here attains its greatest simplicity, the highest expressiveness of the period which followed 'The Story of My Heart' and produced 'Amaryllis.' He was dictating, not writing. There is no long-sought *mot propre* intruding upon the sentences that are like speech and, as is not rare in Jefferies, are unafraid of slang. There is nothing ornate, nothing luxurious; his eye is quiet. Like 'Winds of Heaven,' 'Hours of Spring,' and others, it has the effect of music, in spite of its lack of melody or pattern. It is a lonely human voice speaking clearly as the heart moves it on the plainest matters. Again and again it touches the source of tears, then suddenly ceases. That they are the tears of a dying man is an accident, and is not necessary to the effect of the whole. They are also the tears of one who is still young. In some ways the style, unaffected, sufficient, without peculiarities, within reach of the commonplace, recalls that of 'The Amateur Poacher.' But in these ten years of passionate thought and observa-

tion, of much life and much writing, he has found himself ; and now it is no longer the sportsman, or the naturalist, or the agriculturist, or the colourist, or the mystic, that speaks, but a man who has played these parts and been worn and shaped by them, by work and pain. Whether this was but a stage towards an end never to be attained—

‘Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burnèd is Apollo’s laurel bough’—

or only the last stage before death, it is impossible to say. But it is certain that these last years, these last months, brought gifts that had not been received when ‘The Amateur Poacher,’ when ‘The Story of My Heart’ and ‘The Dewy Morn’ were written. The observation was as fine as ever, and the humanity was deeper and more varied, and his maturing interest in men made him regret that White ‘did not leave a natural history of the people of his day.’\* When he undertook the preface to the ‘Natural History of Selborne’ in February, 1887, he was ‘a perfect invalid.’ Sending it 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 enough alive to ask, ‘Why doesn’t Mr. Sharp send me his “Leaves of Grass,” as a companion to “Specimen Days”?’ But his work was done. He had few more months to live, and he spent them in weakness and pain, though not without intervals of pleasure ; for Mr. J. W. North† tells how, at this time, when he was at Goring on a visit, Jefferies arranged for him and Mrs. Jefferies a trip to Arundel, partly that he might, ‘unrebuked, spend some of his latest hard earnings in a pint of “Perrier Jouet” for my supper,’ and on their return he was standing against the doorpost to welcome them. During these months

\* Preface to White’s *Selborne*.

† *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 16, 1887.



' the Bible was his constant companion.'\* Three weeks before his death Mrs. Jefferies was reading to him from St. Luke (vi. 20), and Jefferies said: ' Those are the words of Jesus; they are true, and all philosophy is hollow.'† At another time he said: ' I have done wrong and thought wrong; it was my intellectual vanity.'‡ Later still, apparently, Mrs. Jefferies told Mr. J.W. North§ that their time had long been spent in prayer together and in reading St. Luke. ' Almost his last intelligible words were: " Yes, yes; that is so. Help, Lord, for Jesus' sake. Darling, good-bye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain." '

¶ Lying sleepless in the night, according to Besant,|| who wrote within a year of Jefferies' death, ' the simple old faith came back to him,' and he ' died listening with faith and love to the words contained in the old Book ' (*i.e.*, the Bible). But a few years later, discussing this ' conversion ' with Mr. Henry S. Salt, Besant wrote :

' I stated in my " Eulogy " that he died a Christian. \* His wife read to him from the Gospel of St. Luke, and he acquiesced. But, *I have since been informed*, he was weak—too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time that he wrote " The Story of My Heart." For my own part, it surprised me to hear that a man who had written those pages should ever return to orthodoxy, but I had no choice but to record the story as it happened and was told to me. . . . When a man gets as far as Jefferies—when he has shed and scattered to the winds all sacerdotalism and authority—he does not go back. You neglected to notice that, if he went back at all, it was not to ask for the priest or the last Sacraments of the Church. He was satisfied with the words of the great socialist and anti-sacerdotalist ' (*i.e.*, Jesus).¶¶

\* C. W. M., in *Girls' Own Paper*, December 21, 1889.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.*

§ *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 16, 1887.

|| *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*.

¶¶ Quoted in *The Faith of Richard Jefferies*, by Henry S. Salt.

This incident has been interpreted in two ways. One party says that Jefferies died an orthodox Christian, and some would even go so far as to make him a sort of Dr. Faustus, who was redeemed at the last hour. The other party says :

‘ Herein is the simple explanation of Jefferies’ alleged conversion. He was very weak—so weak that he perhaps could not but yield outward acquiescence to the affectionate importunities of those around him, while still inwardly holding the views which, as he recently avowed, “expressed his most serious convictions.” So long as he retained any slight measure of health and strength ; so long as he was able, even at rare intervals, to enjoy that vital communion with Nature on which his whole being depended ; so long, in fact, as he was Richard Jefferies, and not a shattered wreck, he was a free-thinker. Even at the last he withdrew no syllable of his writings ; he saw no priest ; he made no acceptance of any sort of dogma. His own published statements remain, and will remain, beyond dispute or question, the authoritative expression of his life-creed.’\*

With the interpretations that come of private grief and affection, nobody outside the family and friends of the dead is concerned. But there are some narrow sectarians who would ignore the work of Jefferies’ maturity, and lay stress upon words which might be paralleled from the condemned cell. They strike him when he is down, which is a liberty hardly to be conceded to Christians, even when the opponent is a freethinker. They do not claim that his thought progressed to this orthodox end ; but, intruding upon a matter of the spirit with dead words—with words once spiritual in which they have slain the spirit—they would drag the dead man into an unquiet air, as of a political election, in order that he who pursued the truth may vote as a partisan. His pursuit was tripped up by death, and to attach any importance to his fallen hours is to cast scorn upon life,

\* *Richard Jefferies : His Life and His Ideals*, by Henry S. Salt.

and is like ridiculing the lover and praiser of a vanished beauty because she is now a handful of dust. It is even more impious and absurd, since Jefferies' work survives and is a power. The last words of anyone, distorted by mortal pain and the circumstances of parting, cannot be a power, whether he dies acquiescent, or delirious, or fuddled by death, or with pain-wrung blasphemy on his lips. Those who would make capital out of these words of Jefferies—and how far are they 'intelligible,' and is not 'all philosophy is hollow' almost equal to blasphemy?—are already comfortable in their own conceit, and need not this poor addition to their calendar. 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 usefully be connected with Christianity or not. /

## CHAPTER XIX

### RECAPITULATION

RICHARD JEFFERIES was, then, always a child of the soil, as well as of the earth in a larger sense. From father and mother he had the blood of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire farmers. He was the second child (the eldest child, a daughter, died young) of a younger son of a younger son. But it was country blood with a difference: both Gyde and Jefferies had been dipped in London, and had followed there the trade of printing; and though old John Jefferies, the grandfather, retired early, and not quite contentedly, to the mill and the bakery and the farm, and Charles Gyde 'of Islington' was buried in Pitchcombe churchyard, they had been troubled by this change from the fields to Fleet Street and back again. Richard's mother, in spite of her good butter, was not a countrywoman, and she was soured by the life of one. His father left Wiltshire as a young man, and travelled roughly, seeing the cities of the United States. Of their sons, the two younger worked on the farm till it was given up; then the second of them went to America and stayed there. The youngest lives in a town. Richard Jefferies, the eldest son, would hardly ever work on the land. Some of his schooldays and most of his early holidays he spent near London, at Sydenham, and when he was very young began to be interested in his uncle's printing-works. Most of his relations had seen more of books than the majority of country people. Two of his uncles were men of unusual accomplishment—John Luckett Jefferies, a draughtsman and musician;

Frederick Gyde, draughtsman and engraver. Uncle and aunt sent books to Coate Farm. Father and grandfather had a taste for books.

The boy gave no early promise, and no special care was taken of him. He attended the ordinary schools of the poorer middle class, and those irregularly and never after he was fifteen. When not at school, he was out of doors, picking up the usual knowledge of a farmer's son, but carefully, and more and more with the help of books. Home life was not happy; he was a retiring and unpopular boy, not strong, but of great courage. Whether he was more unpopular than any unusual boy is likely to be I do not know; but all through his life he seems to have attracted little affection, and his writings show that, in return, he loved, but had no likings. Something there was in him, perhaps, akin to his uncomfortable humour, which unconsciously repelled—something that creeps into his writings, particularly in the more emphatic parts, and gives us a twinge as at an unpleasant voice. He dreamed away much time, and came early to a sense of loneliness among men and of peculiar intimacy with Nature, whom he first courted as a sportsman. Unwilling to work on the farm, he was obliged to do something soon after his schooldays, and he took to reporting for a local newspaper when he was seventeen. He began to read books of science and philosophy. He found himself at still greater odds with his family, who accused him of indolence. He expressed himself in crude, sensational stories and in local histories. He suffered from severe illnesses and great weakness several times. When he was not much past twenty he was engaged to the daughter of a neighbouring farmer.

Then he was moved by the agitation of the agricultural labourers for higher wages to write some articles on the condition of the Wiltshire labourer, and these were printed as letters in the *Times*. Here he first showed a power of forcible and simple expression, and a knowledge of those things among which his home life and work had thrown



him. His point of view was that which the small farmer would naturally take, but the sense and force of the writing was worthy of the best journalism, and had he continued to work in this way he might have made a good middle-class income in London. But he was becoming master of an instrument on which he wanted to play other tunes. Instead of short stories, he now wrote novels, which are nearly always absurd where they concern well-dressed people who tip in gold, but are charming and true wherever the life of the country and of quiet country people is touched. By fiction he hoped in vain to make a large sum of money for himself and the wife whom he married in his twenty-sixth year ; but he did succeed in acquiring, partly by means of it, a more emotional and profound means of expression than he was likely to have done by his sensible and practical articles on agriculture and country society. He lost money by his fiction, and wrote fewer magazine articles than he might have done had he given himself exclusively up to them, according to the posthumous advice of a biographer. Meantime his intimacy with Nature was ripening. He was becoming a richly experienced observer of wild life in the South of England under all conditions ; and his passionate moments of oneness with Nature were becoming clearer, more intelligible to himself, and more capable of articulate expression. Thus, he was at the same time developing along parallel paths his faculties as a watcher of birds and animals, of colour and form in earth and sky, as critic of social conditions, as student of human life, and as mystic. During this period of various and often wasteful production, nearly the whole of the third decade of his life, his health was fairly good, and when he was almost thirty he moved to Surbiton, near London, in order to be closer to editors and publishers and the British Museum.

He had already begun to write short sketches of the country, of the men, the wild life, and the landscape ; but it was only after reaching Surbiton that he began to

concentrate himself upon this work. London thrilled and delighted and repelled him, and probably stimulated him. He certainly found a market there for his work, which was readily printed in newspapers and magazines, and afterwards published with applause in the form of books. With little arrangement, but with the charm of exuberance and freshness, he poured out his stores of country knowledge. There had been unlettered men who knew much that he knew ; there had been greater naturalists and more experienced sportsmen, more magical painters—at least, in verse—of country things ; but no one English writer before had had such a wide knowledge of labourers, farmers, gamekeepers, poachers, of the fields, and woods, and waters, and the sky above them, by day and night ; of their inhabitants that run and fly and creep, that are still and fragrant and many-coloured. No writer had been able to express this knowledge with such a pleasing element of personality in the style that mere ignorance was no bar to its enjoyment. When he wrote these books—‘The Amateur Poacher’ and its companions—he had no rival, nor have they since been equalled in purity, abundance, and rusticity. The writer was clearly as much of the soil as the things which he described. In his books the things themselves were alive, were given a new life by an artist’s words, a life more intense than they had had for any but the few before they were thus brought on to the printed page. Here was the life of man and animal, the crude and lavish beauty of English country-life in the nineteenth century, with glimpses of the older life remembered by the men and women who still ploughed or kept sheep in Wiltshire and Surrey. In writing these four books, Jefferies was mainly drawing upon his memory and his Wiltshire notes, depicting things as he had seen and known them in his childhood and youth. The expression is mature, indeed, but the matter simple, the spirit, as a rule, one of wholesome old-fashioned enjoyment, the reflection contented and commonplace.

When these books had been written his good health was at an end, and when, in 'Nature near London,' he came to describe scenes which he had not known as a young man, there was a new subtlety in the observation, at once a more microscopic and a more sensuous eye, more tenderness, a greater love of making pictures and of dwelling upon colours and forms. There was no more of the rude rustic content to be out rabbiting and fishing. The tall countryman who knew and loved all weathers as they came was bending, and spring was now intensely spring to his reawakened senses. The seasons, night and day, heat and cold, sun and rain and snow, became more sharply differentiated in his mind, and came to him with many fresh cries of joyous or pathetic appeal. In the early books the country lies before us very much as it would have appeared to James Lockett or old John Jefferies. They would have recognized everything in them, if they had had the luck to read them; the sport, the poaching, the curious notes on wild things, the old customs and pieces of gossip—these stand out clear and unquestionable as in an old woodcut. It was a priceless gift, smelling of youth and the days before the steam-plough. But how different these later essays! Pain, anxiety, fatigue, had put a sharp edge on life—a keen edge, easily worn out. He was still glad to be with a shepherd, to hear about the sport, but it was characteristic of the new period that he should watch a trout for days and years, and be careful lest anyone should rob the pool of it; that he should love the old wooden plough with no machine-made lines, and discover the 'bloom' in the summer atmosphere; and confess that he often went to London with no object, and, arriving there, wandered wherever the throng might carry him. In these later essays there is often much observation that may be read for its own sake. But something was creeping into the style, staining it with more delicate dyes. The bloom in the atmosphere, the hues on an old barn-roof, were in part his own life-blood. In the earlier work we think

only of the author where he is explicitly autobiographical, though we may exercise our fancy about him in an irrelevant way. Many had seen Nature just so, though he was alone in so writing of it. In the later he was more and more a singular man, a discoverer of colours, of moods, of arrangements. This was the landscape of sensuous, troubled men; here were most rare, most delicate, most fleeting things. The result was at once portraiture and landscape. Perhaps the mystic element in Jefferies, unintentionally asserted, gave its new seriousness to this work. Except in the last words of 'The Poacher,' there had been little sign of it; but now, in the fanciful narrative of 'Wood Magic' and the autobiographical story of 'Bevis,' the mystic promise was clear in those passages where the child Bevis talked to the wind or felt with his spirit out to the stars and to the sea. For a long time Jefferies must have been imperfectly conscious of the meaning of his mystic communion with Nature. It was as a deep pool that slowly fills with an element so clear that it is unnoticed until it overflows. It overflowed, and Jefferies wrote 'The Story of My Heart' in a passion.

Here for the first time was the whole man, brain, heart, and soul, the body and the senses, all that thought and dreamed and enjoyed and aspired in him. At every entrance the universe came pouring in, by all the old ways and by ways untrodden before. The book is the pledge of the value of Jefferies' work. It reveals the cosmic consciousness that had become fully developed in him soon after he turned thirty. Such acute humanity as is to be found in 'The Story of My Heart' gives us confidence that what its possessor did in his prime, before and after it, is not to be neglected of those who are touched by mortal things. To past, present, and future he offers a hand that is not to be denied. Having tasted of physical, mental, and spiritual life, and aware of the diverse life of the world, in man, in beast, in tree, in earth, and sky, and sea, and stars, he comes to us as from



a holy feast, face flushed, head crowned. He was discontented to some purpose with our age, with modernity, and not merely discontented, for he unsealed a new fountain of religious joy, and in the books that followed, whether he wrote of men or of Nature, he gave a rich, sensuous, and hearty pleasure, lofty delights of the spirit, a goad to a bolder, more generous life in our own inner deeps and in our social intercourse; he pointed to an everlasting source of truth and joy; he created a woman, Felise, whom it is a divine inspiration to know, and others, men and women, scarred, mournful, but undespairing, whose ordinary humanity, as in 'Amaryllis,' was drawn with such minuteness and love that we enjoy while we suffer, and rise ourselves with a useful discontent and an impulse towards what is more beautiful and true. 'The Story of My Heart' gathered up into itself all the spiritual experiences which had been dimly hinted at in the early novels and outdoor books. As an autobiography it is unsurpassed, because it is alone. It is a bold, intimate revelation of a singular modern mind in a style of such vitality that the thoughts are as acts, and have a strong motive and suggestive power. 'The Dewy Morn,' which followed, embodied the passion of the autobiography in the form of woman, beautiful and young and passionate.

Jefferies' thinking was symptomatic of the age rather than original; it is stimulating because it is personal. 'He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he commeth to you with words set in delightful proportion. . . . and with a tale, forsooth, he commeth unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner.' His asserted lack of tradition, his rebuke of the past, his saying that the old books must be rewritten, is a challenge to the present to take heed of itself. There is no real lack of a sense of the past in one who has a sense of co-operation with the future, which adds to the dignity of life, gives a social and eternal value to our most solitary



and spiritual acts, and promises us an immortality more responsible than that of the theologians, as real if not as flattering.

The mystic consciousness which gave the original impulse to 'The Story of My Heart' did not die away, though it was but seldom distinctly expressed after 'The Dewy Morn.' It was diffused through his maturest essays, nevertheless, such as 'The Pageant of Summer,' 'Meadow Thoughts,' 'Nature in the Louvre,' and 'Winds of Heaven,' effecting a greater seriousness, a wider ramification of suggestion, a deeper colouring; while in the semi-scientific essays it is to be found in the increased imagination, and in the essays criticizing agricultural conditions it takes the form of deeper sympathies and more advanced thought. It gave a more solemn note to the joy which is the most striking thing in all his books, whether it is the joy of the child, the sportsman, the lover, the adventurer, the mystic, the artist, the friend of men. Against this his ill-health is nothing to record, except as something triumphed over by the spirit of life. His sadness came of his appetite for joy, which was in excess of the twenty-four hours day and the possible threescore years and ten. By this excess, resembling the excess of the oak scattering its doomed acorns and the sun parching what it has fostered, he is at one with Nature and the forces of life, and at the same time by his creative power he rescues something of what they are whirling down to oblivion and the open sea, and makes of it a rich garden, high-walled against them.

Many of the essays in 'The Open Air' and 'The Life of the Fields' belong to the same inspiration. Nature, described by passionate words, is harmonized with the writer's mind and with his hopes for humanity. Natural beauty and humanity are always together there. He wished to plunge human thought into sea and air and green things that it might be restored, as he hoped to be restored himself in the air of Brighton and Crowborough. Almost fevered was his joy in seeing and thinking of the

beauty of Nature and humanity. Ideas, images, allusions, a rhythm here, a thought there, recurring like a burden, produce an extraordinarily opulent effect, whether the subject is a fashionable crowd, a railway-station, or a midsummer hedge. This brilliancy can be hectic and end in languor, perhaps, but ultimately it is bracing, and the north-west wind blows more often than the south.

There followed 'After London,' 'Amaryllis,' and many of the essays in 'Field and Hedgerow.' The exuberance of colour and fancy in the preceding period was slowly settling down. In 'Amaryllis' there is none of the glory of 'The Dewy Morn.' There is even an appearance, in some of this later work, of a return to the style of 'The Poacher,' though that simple lucidity and ease was refined and enriched by the poetic years between. 'Amaryllis' was as new and individual as the autobiography. It tells no tale, and its construction is obviously unusual, as well as strong and inartificial; but it gives a picture of a small English farmhouse, and of a farmer and his family, which is humorous, pathetic, and intensely alive. Restless and sad and gay and wonderfully kind was the humanity that saw the Idens and the Flammas thus; that painted them stroke by stroke, correcting or enhancing earlier effects, until the whole thing breathed. 'Wild Flowers,' 'My Old Village,' 'Hours of Spring,' and many more were from the same source. They have the same minute observation, the same maturity of comment, the same atmosphere laden with opposites. They are pieces of impassioned prose, in which the writer, expressing his thoughts and recollections, moulded the form of the essay into something as original as it was in the hands of Hazlitt or Lamb. Both in their mingling of reflection and description, and in their abundant play of emotion, they stand by themselves and enlarge the boundaries of this typical form of English prose.

Few men have put themselves into words with such unconsidered variety. He expressed the whole range of

a man's experience in the open air. This was not done without risks and some loss. He commented on many matters of his day and country. His lonely, retiring, and yet emphatic egoism made a hundred mistakes, narrow, ill-considered, splenetic, fatuous. He was big enough to take these risks, and he made his impression by his sympathies, his creation, not by his antipathies. He drew Nature and human life as he saw it, and he saw it with an unusual eye for detail and with unusual wealth of personality behind. And in all of his best writing he turns from theme to theme, and his seriousness, his utter frankness, the obvious importance of the matter to himself, give us confidence in following him ; and though the abundance of what he saw will continue to attract many, it is for his way of seeing, for his composition, his glowing colours, his ideas, for the passionate music wrought out of his life, that we must chiefly go to him. He is on the side of health, of beauty, of strength, of truth, of improvement in life to be wrought by increasing honesty, subtlety, tenderness, courage, and foresight. His own character, and the characters of his men and women, fortify us in our intention to live. Nature, as he thought of it, and as his books present it, is a great flood of physical and spiritual sanity, 'of pure ablution round earth's human shores,' to which he bids us resort. Turning to England in particular, he makes us feel what a heritage are its hills and waters ; he even went so far as to hint that some of it should be national. It is he who, above all other writers, has produced the largest, the most abundant, and the most truthful pictures of Southern English country, both wild and cultivated.

Of the man himself we know, and apparently can know, very little. He spent as much as possible of his short life of thirty-eight years in the valleys and on the hills of Wiltshire, Surrey, Kent, and Sussex. His reading was wide, but of eccentric range. In habits he was always simple, and he did nothing unusual except to look after his own affairs. He made few friends ; his habit of taking

long solitary walks, and later his ill health, kept him from seeking society, and he was happy with the relations and the friends of simple tastes among whom he found himself. He was homely and unaffected in their company, and with them, as with literary and other acquaintances, he talked not much, but easily, on his own subjects and on current matters. He wrote few letters, and in none, apparently, expressed himself with anything like the deeper egoism of his books. His life went perfectly well, nourished by his own energy and by domestic affection. He had one difficulty—ill health—which in its turn threatened poverty. So long as he could send articles to the papers and magazines he was well off, but seldom able to save. He enjoyed, simply and passionately, his own life and the life of others, and in his books that enjoyment survives, and their sincerity and variety keep, and will keep, them alive ; for akin to, and part of, his gift of love was his power of using words. Nothing is more mysterious than this power, along with the kindred powers of artist and musician. It is the supreme proof, above beauty, physical strength, intelligence, that a man or woman lives. Lighter than gossamer, words can entangle and hold fast all that is loveliest, and strongest, and fleetest, and most enduring, in heaven and earth. They are for the moment, perhaps, excelled by the might of policy or beauty, but only for the moment, and then all has passed away ; but the words remain, and though they also pass away under the smiling of the stars, they mark our utmost achievement in time. They outlive the life of which they seem the lightest emanation—the proud, the vigorous, the melodious words. Jefferies' words, it has been well said, are like a glassy covering of the things described. But they are often more than that : the things are forgotten, and it is an aspect of them, a recreation of them, a finer development of them, which endures in the written words. These words call no attention to themselves. There is not an uncommon word, nor a word in an uncommon sense, all through

Jefferies' books. There are styles which are noticeable for their very lucidity and naturalness ; Jefferies' is not noticeable even to this extent. 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. Sometimes it is slipshod—in sound often so, for he had not a fine ear. It comes right, as a rule, by force of true vision and sincerity. On a moving subject, and amidst friends, he would speak much as he wrote. He did not make great phrases, and hardly any single sentence would prove him a master. He could argue, describe visible things and states of mind ; he could be intimate, persuasive, and picturesque. No one quoted so rarely as he. He drew many sides of indoor and outdoor rustic life, human and animal, moving and at rest, and in his words these things retain their pure rusticity. Later, the neighbourhood of London made him dwell more sensuously than before on the natural beauty which contrasted with the town. Later still, the sensuous was merged and mingled with the spiritual, and the effect was more and more poetic—it might be said religious ; and his style expanded to aid these larger purposes, thus being able in turn to depict Nature from the points of view of the countryman, of the sensuous painter, of the poet of humanity. So, too, with human life. Whether he touched it lightly and pictorially, as in 'Round about a Great Estate,' or with love and fire, as in 'The Dewy Morn,' or with minute reconstruction of acts, thoughts, conversation, and environment, as in 'Amaryllis,' he was equal to the different demands upon his words. Though he had read much, it was without having played the sedulous ape that he found himself in the great tradition, an honourable descendant of masters, the disciple of none, and himself secure of descendants ; for he allied himself to Nature, and still plays his part in her office of granting health, and hearty pleasure, and consolation, and the delights of the senses and of the spirit, to men.



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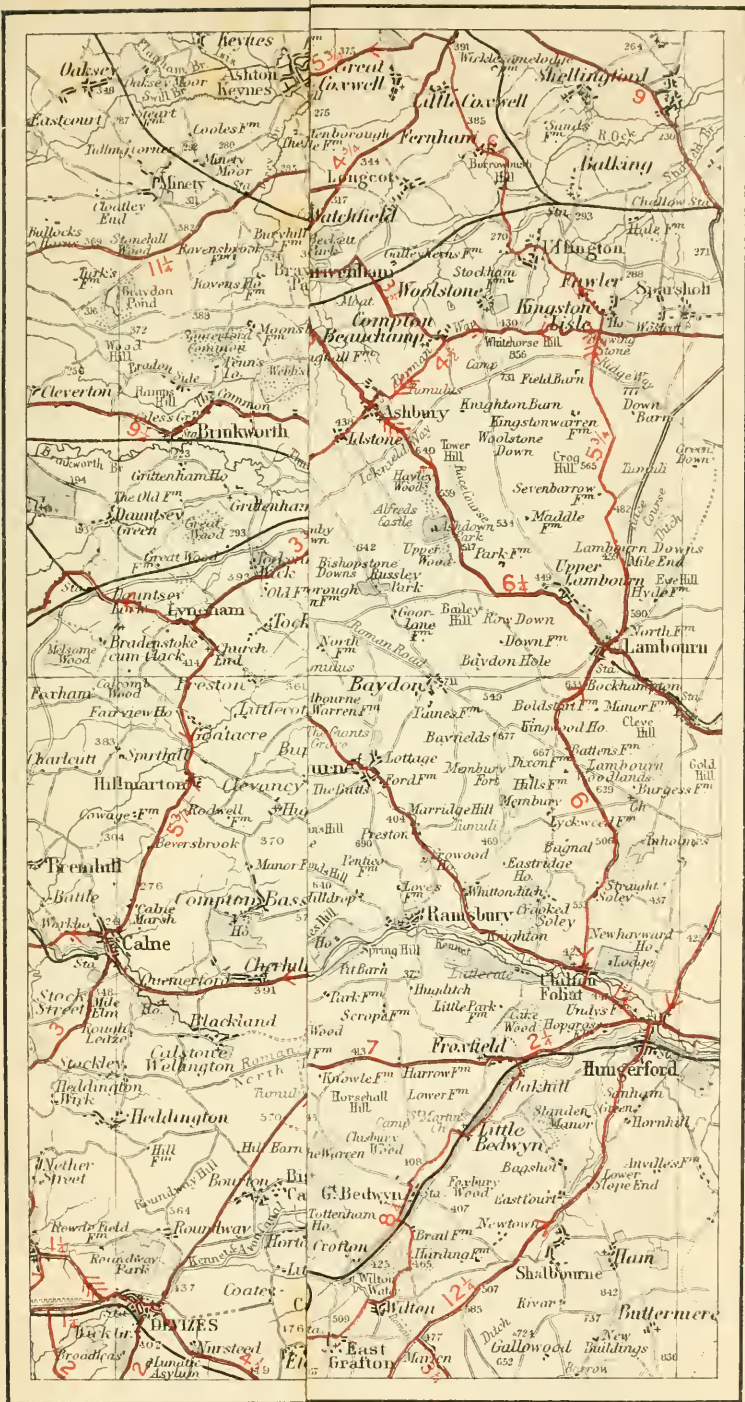
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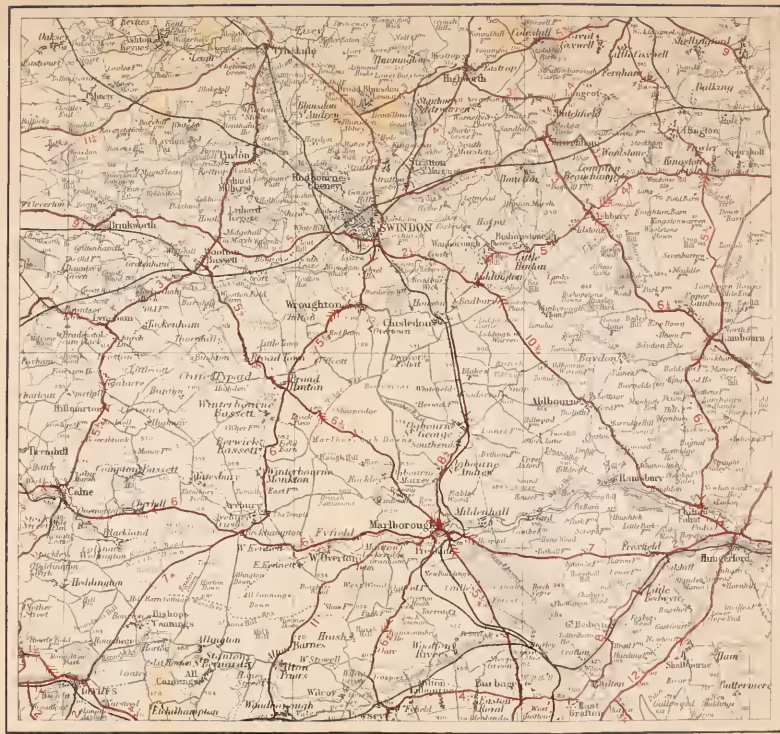
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## PREFACE

RICHARD JEFFERIES was born at Coate Farm, Wiltshire, November 6, 1848, and died, after five years of almost continuous suffering, August 14, 1887.

His early work betrayed few signs of promise: his later work gave perfect expression to that old bucolic life and nature-worship never wholly absent from the world's literature in any age, and with Jefferies seen even in the felicity of mere title-pages,—*The Dewy Morn*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *The Pageant of Summer*.

Two books about this man, may be read with profit: Sir Walter Besant's *Eulogy* (1888), and a shorter *Study*, by Mr. H. S. Salt (1894). For so young a writer, coming so late into possession of his powers, he has left a matchless record in English letters; a record that will remain when much of brilliant impermanence is forgotten.

*The Story of My Heart*, first published in 1883, is purely an autobiography of the spirit; say indeed, an affirmation, not of the flesh but of the mystery become clear

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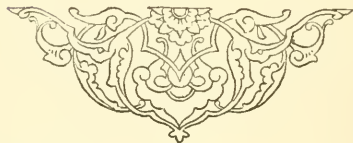
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PREFACE

to him of the natural body raised up a spiritual body. That this testimony has been misunderstood is quite possible. 'You may read in it, if you will, the abandonment, rather than the loss, of his early faith; you cannot read in it, but you shall hear . . . how he found it again.'

There is, then, in this matured work of Richard Jefferies a new sense of tears and joy in things earthly and things eternal. He has sought out and laid hold upon a truth that no man, as a finality, can gainsay; and his *Story* becomes a revelation of the steps taken by the soul that despite the storms of illusion led him from the first to seek God; and at the last to abide in Him.

T. B. M.



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