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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Its activities include the Annual General Meeting and Birthday Lecture, winter meetings, summer outings, special events, and the publication of a *Journal*, spring and autumn Newsletters and an Annual Report. Membership is open to all on payment of the current annual subscription (£7.00 – individual; £8.00 – couple).

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The principal aim of The Richard Jefferies Society *Journal* is to present material by Jefferies that has not been published or reprinted, or that is difficult to obtain, together with articles about Jefferies (commissioned or submitted), items of research and discovery, synopses of talks and lectures, book reviews, Wiltshire material relating to Jefferies, and correspondence. MSS and correspondence for publication will be acknowledged but cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Submissions, preferably in electronic format, should be sent to the Editor at the following address: [RJSjournal@richardjefferiescreativity.co.uk](mailto:RJSjournal@richardjefferiescreativity.co.uk) or by post to the Secretary. The Editorial team comprises: Rebecca Welshman and Simon Coleman. The deadline for copy for the Spring 2012 edition is 1 January 2012.

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RICHARD JEFFERIES' BIRTHPLACE at Coate is now a museum. It is open on Sundays from 2-5pm in the summer, on the second Wednesday of the month from 10am-4pm throughout the year and otherwise by arrangement. For details about the Museum please apply to the Secretary.



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# ‘Out of the Season’

Richard Jefferies

First published in *London Society* (September 1876), and collected in *Society Novelettes* vol. II by F.C. Burnand and others (London: Vizetelly and Co., 1883).

“There is nothing so contemptible as a weak man,” said Mrs. Delamere to her grandniece. “Your father is a weak man, Charlotte. Why isn’t he a bishop, or something? Why aren’t you settled? Why is your father always coming to me for money? Because he is weak, and *you* —”

There was unutterable scorn in the inflection of the old lady’s voice.

“Isn’t this a twice-told tale, aunt?” replied Charlotte, in a wearied tone that had become habitual to her.

“He wants to go to town this season — for what? To pore over old trash in the libraries all day, and dawdle at his club in the evening. And as for you, how much do you suppose your three seasons cost me, Miss Delamere? There was the carriage and your lady’s-maid (you haven’t got one now, have you?) and your dresses — goodness, why two thousand would not cover it! — and here you are still — Mariana in the Moated Grange, seven-and-twenty if you’re a day. You’ll not go to town with my money!”

“I do not particularly desire to.”

“No; I know it. It’s that which irritates me. There’s no spirit in you. You look as white as milk. That lazy Brian is at the Court again — dawdling — I do hate dawdlers.” And out she swept.

Though use had made Charlotte calm and indifferent under these oft-repeated jeers, she would have been less than a woman if the recollection of three unsuccessful seasons had not been a little bitter. Had she not been “fast” enough, or was it simply her lack of dowry?

The Rev. Lord Talbot Delamere, her father, was indeed brother to a peer; but as eight healthy children intervened between him and the estate there was no prospect of an improvement in the weak man’s fortune. Charlotte had seen less handsome women than herself marry with *éclat*. Her mind was perhaps a little too well stored for social success.

“Lazy Brian,” a clerk in a well-known Crown office, lifted his hat negligently to aunt Delamere as she drove past, while he leant over a gate with his friend Mr. Martin, tenant of the Court Farm. He had run

down for a few days at Easter, as he said, "to give the dogs an airing"; two setters and a spaniel were playing about at their feet.

"You seem rather dull, Martin," said Brian, offering his cigar-case.

They were examples of two most opposite types of men: one tall, swarthy, and obviously weary; the farmer short, stouter, and, though very little older in years, showing his age more.

"I am," he replied. "I am dull. I have something on my mind. Come home. Will you write a letter for me?"

"Of course," said Brian, smiling.

But he did not smile when he found what the farmer, with the strange disinclination to use pen and ink often characteristic of his class, wished him to write. It was an offer of his hand to Charlotte Delamere.

"I know I'm beneath her," said Martin; "but, you see, she has had three seasons, and is not — well, not quite so young now; and — and — well, I love her, and I have money."

The letter was written.

Neither did Charlotte smile when she read it.

"How strange it should be in his handwriting!" she thought. "Poor Martin! he is a gentleman in heart and manner, though not by descent. I am sorry for him."

She wrote, and broke her refusal as gently as possible. Martin was not satisfied. He begged Brian to obtain an interview for him, knowing that he was on visiting-terms at the Rectory.

With some reluctance Brian went. Strange that he could not look Charlotte in the face while he delivered his message; strange that his voice should falter a little.

"I will meet him at four o'clock," she said, "in the lane by the copse."

The east wind blew cold and keen; but the sky was clear and blue, and the sun, though low, was bright. Between the hedgerows of the lanes it was warmer. She gathered a few anemones: they withered quickly in her hands.

"Like all I have to do with," she thought bitterly.

Martin met her. His tone, at first respectful, soon grew earnest.

"It is in vain," said Charlotte. "I think highly of you; but I do not love you, and I cannot marry you. It is not pride, believe me."

Then he desisted, lifted his hat, and left her. In the Hall the Rev. Talbot met her, his face glowing, and beckoned her to his study.

"Who do you think has come?" said he. "Why, Andrew Wilkins! He was my fag forty years ago. It doesn't interest you? O, indeed! Do you know that he has made half a million, miss? Do you know that he has asked my permission to — to — address you? He has money; we have

blood. You will dress up to the mark to-night, and be more cheerful. You have been out with that penniless Brian. Take care you do not get entangled with him."

"I refused him eight years ago," said Charlotte.

"It is well. Now dress; I'll send Rose up to you."

Rose was the dairymaid — for they kept two Alderney cows on the glebe — a bright-sparkling girl, who sometimes acted as Charlotte's lady's-maid. Charlotte had had a Frenchwoman to assist her toilet for those three seasons in town; being a failure, this humble assistance was considered good enough for her. But Rose was willing, handy, and affectionate.

Charlotte found Mr. Wilkins polished and smooth. He did not press himself upon her; she was grateful to him for that. But the Rev. Talbot and Aunt Delamere never left her a moment's peace. They worried her to show off her accomplishments.

"Do try and be lively," said her aunt. "Don't be a doll. Can't you see that you have the finest chance in the world? Why, he is sixty-two, has heart disease, and next year is his grand climacteric! Half a million! What diamonds!" This tune was played till her life became a burden.

At last she gave a nominal consent, but no time was fixed.

"Early next season," said aunt decisively. "Everything can be got ready by then. There may be something in you, Charlotte, after all. Give me a kiss."

This nominal or half-expressed consent gave her a respite; Wilkins left. It was a long miserable summer. Her heart was a dull aching void; she walked about the fields and lanes feeling herself a living lie. Towards autumn, Brian was at the Court again. Must the truth be told? A guilty thrill of pleasure ran through her. He had not called yet. One morning Rose asked to see her mistress in private. With many blushes she stammered out the truth: she was to be married to the head-carter at the Court, and the pair were to accompany Mr. Brian to Natal.

"To Natal!" said Charlotte, with a sinking feeling at her heart.

"Yes, ma'am. They say he be tired o' Lunnun, and have left his place."

"I shall be utterly alone," thought Charlotte. "Perhaps it will be best for us both. I have sacrificed everything to Society, and now —"

She broke down in private. But when Brian called she was calm enough. On his side he endeavoured to hide his embarrassment by an affected volubility.

"I must congratulate you," he said. "You will have a splendid settlement — you will be envied. At all events I shall have good

shooting in Africa. I was weary to death of doing nothing in town — no prospect, no hope. It is better to be a man, even if one does lose a position. My hands are as soft as a girl's now; in a few months they will harden. I have 1500*l.* of my own — Martin lends me another 1500*l.* A long sea-voyage! Yes, it is. I must apologise for taking your Rose; but with my inexperience, without that honest couple," etc.

It somehow happened that pending Brian's departure, which was to take place in October, Charlotte and he were much together in the fields. Perhaps it was the feeling that it was quite safe now one was going thousands of miles away, and the other to be married. They lingered in the lanes and among the barley, till at last poor Martin, who saw this, grew jealous. A suspicion forced itself upon him that he had been "sold"; that in trusting his secret to Brian he had been betrayed. In his anger he went straight to the Rev. Talbot, and bluntly said something, which resulted in that gentleman strictly ordering Charlotte to see Brian no more. Weak and at the same time selfish to the last degree, he fixed all his hopes of future personal gratification upon the consummation of the match with Mr. Wilkins. He rudely repulsed Brian from the Rectory, and kept watch himself over Charlotte.

Mr. Martin had no sooner succeeded in this underhand proceeding than his naturally honest and generous nature revolted, and his disturbed state of mind showed itself in peevish irritation, till Brian at length insisted upon an explanation, and had it.

"Martin," said he, "you have grievously wronged me. I did your message faithfully. It is true I loved Charlotte enough at one time to propose to her; but she had the sense to see that my income was incompetent to maintain a suitable establishment, and since then — well, since then we have met as friends only, and shall soon meet no more."

"Do you mean to say that that was the only reason you did not marry?"

"And sufficient reason. A poor fellow like me has no right to have feelings. They are a luxury reserved for the rich. But is it well between us? That is better: let us talk of Africa."

Martin, however, was not so easily put aside. He understood now that Charlotte and Brian were in truth devoted to each other, but controlled their affection.

"It is absurd," he thought; "more, it is unnatural and wrong. As I cannot have her, he shall, if it can be managed. Why should she not go with him to Natal? In Africa they need not mind being out of the season."

He argued with Brian; persuaded him to make another effort. At the same time Rose the milkmaid, whose time of service expired at the Rectory in a week, with true feminine love of intrigue, was painting, in colours as bold as she dared, the misery of Mr. Brian, who was going thousands of miles away from the only one he loved, and was so restless and unhappy.

“He walks about the garden half the night,” she said; “and always where he can see your window — no offence, ma’am; please, don’t be angry with me.”

Charlotte sighed. The prospect of splendid diamonds did not excite her as it ought to have done; the thought of Brian’s departure did. Her mind wandered across the sea. “There,” she thought, “there is room enough, and none of these miserable restrictions that tie us down and make us slaves of society.”

Rose was to be married on the Wednesday before the ship sailed; she asked her mistress to come to her mother’s cottage and see “her things.” To this the Rev. Talbot, who watched Charlotte like a cat, could make no objection. But Brian had been invited there also. Rose left them alone. When she returned, there were tears on her mistress’s face, but Brian held her hand, and his voice had a proud joyous ring in it as he asked Rose if she could keep a secret.

The mist of the October morning still lingered, when Mr. Martin’s dog-trap came gently, drawn by his favourite mare, along the lane by the Rectory grounds. A lady, muffled in an Ulster, stepped quickly out from the arched doorway in the wall, and mounted by his side. A mile was driven without a word: then from a stile came forward a taller figure carrying a gun-case and a trunk. He mounted behind. Little was said; but how that mare was driven! Nineteen miles were covered in an hour and a half — it was exactly a quarter to twelve as they reached St. George’s Church in Mickleham town. Rose was there and her swain: it was a double wedding. Mr. Martin gave Charlotte away. After three seasons married at last without bridesmaids or carriage, a breakfast in haste, and to her first love! At one o’clock the happy couples were speeding away by express for Southampton. Next day the steamer bore them southwards.

Two years have gone by. Farmer Martin stands among his barley, and reads a long letter from Natal, speaking of health, of happiness, of children, of a renewed youth and widening hopes. “In short,” finishes Brian, “now I am a man, whereas I was a child. Charlotte is very happy, and sends her love to you.”

“Ay, ay,” thought Martin, glancing wistfully southwards. “The crops are not now what they used to be; the wheat was yellow this spring, and thin in the ear afterwards. The land is exhausted; but there’s room yonder, there’s room yonder. Charlotte was wasted here—there she fulfils the noblest mission of a woman on earth. How many hundreds are there who would be equally happy if they could persuade themselves to do likewise! I cannot stand it here alone.”

He has given notice to quit. By next season he will be dancing Charlotte’s boy upon his knee. Little they reckon that they are out of the season: and as wealth gradually flows in upon them, they can, if they wish, return for a while; but not for long: the air there is purer, the life nobler, than in London drawing-rooms.

# Transcript of Christine Billing's address on the opening of the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate June 24, 1960

I<sup>1</sup> cannot tell you much about my Uncle Richard<sup>2</sup> — I did not know him — but I have some vivid memories of the family that once lived in this house. And I do remember most distinctly the day of Uncle Richard's funeral.<sup>3</sup> To my great surprise I found my mother<sup>4</sup> crying, & soon afterwards she went away in a black dress after telling my sister & me to take care of little Phyllis,<sup>5</sup> who had just come to stay with us. Little Phyllis was wearing a black dress too, her fair hair was flying about her shoulders & there was a very rueful expression on her round face. I was only a puny little child & I felt something was very wrong, so I sat down on the nursery floor & howled. That did have the good effect of giving the other two, who were a little older, the amusement of bullying me. Helen,<sup>6</sup> always a person of resource, brought out the wooden horse on wheels, which was one of our great treasures, lifted Phyllis on to it & pushed her towards me with great vigour. Nearer and nearer they came, both looking so vindictive that I was frightened & howled louder. So the game became really amusing. It was a long time before I got my own back, but little Phyllis & I were soon great friends. As young girls we had some splendid holidays in Cornwall, climbing over rocks, scaling cliffs & doing many things that would have horrified our parents had they known anything about it. Phyllis was a good companion — sometimes a really charming one — with an adventurous spirit & a boyish sense of fun, caught partly from

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Emily Billing (born 24 December 1881; died 1967) — Richard Jefferies' niece.

<sup>2</sup> (John) Richard Jefferies (born 6 November 1848 at Coate; died 14 August 1887 at Goring, Sussex).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Jefferies was buried at Broadwater cemetery on 20 August 1887.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah (Jefferies) Billing (born 2 July 1853 at Coate; died 16 November 1913 aged 60. Married on 10 June 1875 to Robert Thomas Billing [born Sep 1849 in Guildford; died 1942 aged 93]) — Richard Jefferies' sister.

<sup>5</sup> (Jessie) Phyllis Jefferies (born 6 December 1880 in Surbiton; died 1958 in Seaford. Married Alfred Hargrave of Leamington on 24 April 1916) — Richard Jefferies' daughter.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Elizabeth Billing (born 22 Jan 1878; died 1958).

her tall brother Harold.<sup>7</sup> But, like her father, she had a difficult side to her nature & she would have gloomy moods in which nothing seemed to interest her. As years went on these moods became more frequent. She had sad times nursing her mother & her husband unto their deaths & then came years of loneliness after both had gone. After some time we persuaded her to live near us, but I never felt that she was as much at home in Sussex as in Cornwall. Another blow was the death of her brother Harold, for though he lived in Canada they understood one another & corresponded regularly. Then, only six months before her end, when she was obviously beginning to go down the hill, there came the shock of my dear sister's sudden death. That was a blow to the family as well as to me, for Helen was one on whom the family depended. When things went wrong Helen was always asked to help & she would pack up & go without hesitation. She was a Jefferies in her love of beauty & of the joy of out-door life, but she was practical, clear-sighted, business-like & capable & helpful to all in trouble (she had no sympathy with idle dreamers or with any kind of sentimentality). In some ways she took the place filled by Aunt Ellen<sup>8</sup> in an earlier generation. Aunt Ellen was our Grandmamma Jefferies<sup>9</sup> sister & she married a Mr Thos. Harrild,<sup>10</sup> who was related to my Grandfather Joseph Billing,<sup>11</sup> so she was a well-known figure to both sides of the family. Aunt Ellen had no children of her own & when money was short in Wiltshire she often had one of her sister's children with her. She was a conventional Victorian lady, shocked by anything unorthodox, & yet she showed amazing understanding of young Richard Jefferies. She realised that he was a boy of unusual talent, & encouraged his ambition & urged him on, when the rest of the family would have kept him back. Her most frequent visitor was my mother "little Sarah" or "Sally" in this house, later on "Aunt Lily" to all the nieces and nephews; & for some years before her marriage my mother lived at Sydenham. Now Sydenham is not the neighbourhood to appeal to a country-lover, but "Shanklin Villa" had its attractions. In the front garden were the two Monkey Puzzles, one on each side of the door – tall & symmetrical & excitingly prickly to young fingers – & in the back

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<sup>7</sup> (Richard) Harold Jefferies (born 1875, Swindon; died 1942, Canada) – Richard Jefferies' son.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen (Gyde) Harrild (born 24 Aug 1825 Islington; died 24 Aug 1911, Sydenham) – Richard Jefferies' aunt.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth "Betsy" (Gyde) Jefferies (born 1817; died 21 July 1895 Bath) – Richard Jefferies' mother.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Harrild (1822-6 Dec 1867) – Richard Jefferies' uncle.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Billing (1817-1908) was married to Sarah Harrild (1810-1880); Thomas Harrild's sister.

garden was a fountain with gold fish, and a croquet lawn & a tall pine tree & a walnut tree & a distant peep at the Crystal Palace. I can remember Aunt Ellen well & am reminded of her by a sampler worked by her at the age of eight years, which I should like to see on these walls if you would accept it. It is a sober-looking sampler but quite appropriate, for she was a sober lady & a very diligent one (I cannot tell the number of beautifully made shawls she left behind). The inscription says "Ellen Gyde finished this, June 4<sup>th</sup> 1833". Then I have also a little painting of my Grandmother Jefferies by her niece Margaret Gyde,<sup>12</sup> who was a musician & artist, & if you have room for them, I hope to pass these two to the Museum later. I remember Aunt Ellen well, & far better than my Grandmother Jefferies but I remember my Grandfather<sup>13</sup> very distinctly. After the farm was given up they went to end their days in Bath & once my Mother took me with her to stay with them. Grandpa Jefferies met us at the railway station & I forgot my manners & stood staring up into his face, because I had never seen such blue eyes. With his white hair & his white beard & his shaggy eyebrows they showed up like pieces of the blue sky. I knew we should be friends & so we were. He used to take me for walks in the Victoria Park & tell me the names of flowers & birds & I used to chatter away as to someone of my own age (I was about 6 then). I never went to Bath again, though Mother visited them regularly. Soon after this Grandma had the stroke which deprived her of speech & movement, & her death was a merciful release. Then for the second time I saw my Mother cry, & it surprised me, for she was not the crying sort. She had a gay & gallant spirit [which she transmitted to my sister]. I stood by her through years of weakness & ill-health & heard no lamentations or complaints. My most vivid recollection of her is seeing her sitting up in bed (as she had been told not to do) the day after one of her bad heart-attacks, each one of which was almost like death greeting the doctor with shining eyes & a smiling face & saying "Doctor, I'm ever so much better. May I get up?" And the doctor turned away & his voice was choky when he said, "I am sorry Mrs. Billing, but you must stay here until I come again." Such instructions were hard on one of her active temperament, but she died with her spirit unbroken & bore her suffering as her brother Richard had borne his. I have often thought of him when he was too ill to write dictating to his wife the beautiful words which have brought joy to so many people. My

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Esther Gyde (b 1863 Islington) daughter of Francis Gyde & Richard Jefferies' cousin.

<sup>13</sup> James Lockett Jefferies (Born 8 Dec 1816, Somerstown; Died 23 Dec 1896 Bath) Richard Jefferies' father.

mother died in 1913 so she was spared the 1914 war which took its toll of the Jefferies' as of most families. Mrs Herbert's<sup>14</sup> brother, Charles<sup>15</sup> Jefferies' only son,<sup>16</sup> had reached manhood & life was full of promise for him, but he did not hesitate to give it up. He fought all through those bad years until a fortnight before the Armistice & then was killed, leading his Tank Corps. His name was Richard Jefferies & I feel he was worthy of it. The famous Richard Jefferies, & his forebears, & his wife & family have gone, & the third generation is dying out, but there are vigorous young members of the family growing up in Surrey, in Canada & the USA. [Mrs Herbert has 5 grandchildren, Harold Jefferies has children & grandchildren in Canada, & Henry Jefferies<sup>17</sup> has descendents in America.] As we go on we shall look back to this room for inspiration & we do thank the Swindon Corporation for honouring our Uncle Richard in this way.

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<sup>14</sup> Dorothy (Jefferies) Herbert (born 10 May 1890; died 1975 at Guildford, Surrey) – Richard Jefferies' niece.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Jefferies (born 26 Nov 1858; died January 1934 in Guildford) – Richard Jefferies' brother.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Oliver Jefferies (born 16 Sep 1892; died 29 Sep 1918) – Richard Jefferies' nephew.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Jefferies (born 14 June 1852 at Coate; Died 7 September 1920 in Texas) – Richard Jefferies' brother.

# The Jefferies Festival – 1911

*Kate Tryon*

*Kate Tryon (1864-1952), an artist from Massachusetts, described her own attachment to Richard Jefferies by saying that she yielded to no-one in the world in admiration of him and that no-one had read more closely all the lines he wrote than herself. She lectured on the subject of the birds of New England and studied at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. She made six trips to England, the first in 1910, to follow in Jefferies' footsteps, painting scenes that he wrote about. Her early visit is recorded in Kate Tryon's 'Adventures in the Vale of the White Horse' as seen through the eyes of an American visitor, Eleanor Hale. In Chapter XX of the manuscript Kate Tryon describes the festival event that took place at Coate Farm on 10 June 1911, followed by a walk to the Gamekeeper's Cottage and finishing at Chiseldon Church. The manuscript was published by the Richard Jefferies Society in August 2009 as a limited edition softback book.*

*An article in The Observer in 1911 records details of the event and notes it to have been 'the first local festival in memory of Richard Jefferies'. The article is reproduced in full below, along with a photo of the event, which was repeated in 1913.*

**T**he 'Jefferies Festival,' as they call it, is over. It would seem necessary to write about it either very much or very little. There were four or five scholarly and profound speeches delivered on the lawn at Coate Farm, Jefferies' birthplace.

The old leaded casement window of that bare attic room was open, and I could not but fancy — and Miss Hall afterward told me that she felt the same — that he whose great work and short life they were discussing was up there all the while, smiling sadly. I am sure he is sorry to find himself taken so seriously, to have them remember the Jefferies who declared, 'There is no hope on the old lines. They are dead and gone, like the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill,' rather than the Jefferies who, 'strong of foot, walked up Beachy Head, joying greatly in the sun.'

Some of his sentences sound tragic, and these have caught the eye of a superficial society to whom reading has become 'the art of skipping.' I remember young Sir Scout said it was better not to know Jefferies at all than to know one or two of his books or one or two of his essays, and fatally wrong to read them without knowing the story of the man.

True. To know all of Jefferies, not alone *The Story of My Heart*, which critics regard as a final and splendid fruitage of his mind; nor yet 'A Pageant of Summer,' one of the finest essays about nature in the language, but belonging, as they would have you remember, merely to

the blossom-time of that mind — to read all of Jefferies is to get a mighty uplift — unless you will not grant that it is an uplift to learn to derive your best happiness from the peace and beauty of Nature, but prefer to muddle away all your days amid the needless elaboration of modern life, while you pretend your gaze is fixed on a better world beyond. Ay, there's the rub between Jefferies and religion — so called.

Jefferies' paramount gift to us, then, I would say, is a real and deep enjoyment of God's world. If you want to read farther — but you had better not, if you are not ready to be as strong and brave and sincere as the writer — you will learn how he believes it possible to arrange things so that, through the ages ahead, more and more individuals may have a chance to share in this happiness from which the present social system bars half mankind. Richard Jefferies' Nature-writing exalts the faculty of joying in

The air we breathe,  
The grass we tread,  
The life without us and within,

for it is a faculty, the noblest and the most natural of human faculties, and it often dies from scant encouragement, oftener gets crushed under Mrs. Grundy's high-heeled pump. Never mind talking about Jefferies' philosophy, if it is going to hurt the feelings of the poor old sensitive world, and make his name hateful, so that it will forget *Bevis: The Story of a Boy* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*.

Stop here — or begin here. Just be content, you who love this beautiful writing about Nature, to make it known to every appreciative mind, and this name, Jefferies, so superlatively dear to some few choice spirits, will find its rightful place among the world-names.

I own it is hard to stop here with Jefferies, because, when he has got you back to Nature — say up in one of the old British camps at Liddington, White Horse, or Barbury Hill, — you are bound to get athinking, and to find yourself thinking decidedly Jefferieswise. If more thinking were done on hilltops instead of within four walls lined with books, reiterating what once helped, but now hinders, man's world would soon get saner, cleaner, happier.

Yes, yes, indeed! And now, honestly, why should one throw down *The Story of My Heart* and cry out, 'No Jefferies for me! He's mad, poor fellow,' when he has simply pointed out, with superbly passionate scorn, — which rankles in society's guilty conscience without doubt, — that it is high time for world-house-cleaning — that it will be easier for masters and servants after a thorough sweeping and dusting and courageous elimination of rubbish; that Thy Kingdom Come On Earth

is religion enough; that humanity is old enough to have outgrown meanness and greed; that poverty and all its train of woes which poison life with Fear and Dread is unnecessary and criminal, since the earth produces enough for all; that, with modern knowledge of hygiene and the human organism, we ought to retain and increase our powers long beyond the present term of existence, and might bring about in a few centuries a sort of earthly immortality, if evils well known to weaken the race were — just dumped with the other rubbish!

What wonder this truth came home to him, dying at thirty-eight of a defect born with him, so that, all embittered at being cheated of his years of fulfillment, he cried, 'We die by our ancestors!' and again —

As my heart beats feebly to-day, my trickling pulse scarcely notating the passing of time, so much the more earnestly do I hope that those to come after me may see more and enjoy more deeply than I have done — and so much the more gladly would I do all I can to enlarge the life that shall be then.

It is thirty-odd years later. We are catching up with Jefferies now. Modern thought throbs and burns with these very ideas that made *The Story of My Heart* seem the ravings of a dreamer. They no longer astonish. They do not irritate very much. Every newspaper-reader, looking for the signs of the times, knows that some of these dreams are beginning to change into realities. But few people know or remember that a young man born in this narrow old farmhouse in this poor Coate hamlet of North Wilts cherished these wild dreams in heart and brain, getting slight credit for it then or since.

Ah, yes! The old way — to bring flowers to the disease-wracked, to sympathize, to pray, to weep at the funeral and say 'All flesh is grass: Thy will be done!' is passing. The new way — Jefferies' way — is to search out the cause of disease and make an end of the monster.

I have finished now, and my poor head aches with trying to make quite clear to myself, in a few words, what Jefferies stands for. How I wonder if anyone would agree that I have done so! Would this little sermon have edified that gathering of yesterday, or would it too have 'fed the ear against the stomach of the sense?'

Perhaps the discourses were not all so badly off the point, if I had listened keenly. I own I was taken up with the emotional side of the occasion, with studying the crowd and watching the look of things in general and in particular, in hearing now a blackbird, now a greenfinch — as if they knew they ought surely to be heard at a 'Jefferies Festival'; above all, in marvelling over the fact that all these people, whose ancestors not so far back loved no spectacle better than

to see two lusty fellows stand up before a holiday company and 'At Backswords break each other's yed' were glad to devote this splendid June afternoon to such a proper twentieth-century use as a 'Jefferies Festival'!

A great thing is this British W.E.A., aiming not only at culture for women, as do our American Women's clubs, but for husbands, sons, daughters — for all who, at small expense, would like, in the outdoor season to make a Saturday afternoon pilgrimage to some near-by place of archaeological, historical or literary interest, to learn something of it from authoritative speakers, with a course of reading all laid out in print to prepare them for each 'Ramble', — to have a picnic tea afterwards, with songs, and a grand social time, often ending with evening service in an old parish Church, or sometimes a Cathedral. This was my second meeting with the W.E.A., and before the day was over, I had come to the mind that it is the very best society I ever heard of.

To be sure I thought the speeches rather over the heads of the audience. That is inevitable, and perhaps the fault was all mine. Perhaps these scholars and thinkers have a more profound understanding of Jefferies than I am capable of entering into. But I do think some well-chosen, sympathetically read passages from Jefferies' own writings would have gained him more followers than all their words. One selection was read towards the close, and a thrill ran through the crowd. The reader was an old native who remembered Jefferies. With trembling voice, he recited the history of the farm-wagon from the time it was new and bright and a child played in it to the time it was worn and infirm and carried an old man, once that little boy, up to his last resting-place in the Church-yard.

Of course the company did not break up without being photographed for post-cards by an enterprising local artist. Along towards the last I described our host the Colonel [Calley], his whole presence beaming hearty good-fellowship. The Ferrises were keeping open house, and when I went in to pay my respects, I found the massive old table in the sitting-room loaded with good things. Probably this store was heavily taxed, as the people were fast streaming away to tea at the Reservoir.

'Where do you keep yourself? I haven't seen you in an age!' cried Mrs. Ferris. 'The children talk about you every day, and wonder when you are coming back to do more painting. Don't forget I am waiting for a chance to drive you about the country. You mustn't work all the time!'

'Do I look overworked?' I managed to get in.

'You look as though your life suited you down to the ground!'

'It does.'

'You still like England then?'

'I adore it.'

And much more pleasant talk, not a bit remarkable, but serving to heighten good feeling.

Over in the shaded garden by the Reservoir-keeper's cottage and under the tall trees of the bank there were lively doings for more than an hour yet. There had been no general announcement about the pictures up in the boat-house, but the news got abroad, and once I looked in on the gazers, who seemed to be recognizing the scenes fast enough. I certainly enjoyed some distinction thereafter, and perhaps I may turn out to be a nine-days' wonder. Anyway, I had to be interviewed by a newspaper-representative, which I did not mind very much, considering he was for that very paper, *The North Wilts Herald*, on which Jefferies began his career.

If I had designed to get into society, I could not have done better than to have arranged this little exhibition. If I should pay all the calls, and drop in for all the cups of tea offered, to say nothing of visiting all the pet localities recommended to me, I am afraid there would not be much more painting this summer. Those who have found English people unresponsive and exclusive cannot have been Nature-lovers and painters. I am beginning to entertain the idea that my small sketch-box might be the Open Sesame to most good things and places in the world. It would indeed take long to record the pleasant meetings I had, not only at the tea-table and the boat-house, but on the walk to Chiseldon. For three-score of the more faithful started out towards the exquisite close of the day to walk to evening service at the Church in which Jefferies' marriage was solemnized.

The Colonel had undertaken to be our conductor and guide, presumably as the line-of-march was across his land, and he knew the way best for us and for the mowing-grass. I kept by his side most of the way up to Hodson hamlet, feeling it a proud distinction to be noticed by the squire. He had his weeding-spud alone, perhaps only as a familiar walking-companion, though he used it now and then, and I think would have liked to stop and annihilate a bed of yellow rattle and other 'beastly stuff' that grew by the field-path.

Here, in the corner of the last flat meadow where the grass is already tall and in full flower, we had a picturesque meeting with a party of Boy Scouts. They gave the Colonel their military salute, and he stopped to shake hands with their leader, with a cheery, 'Well, how goes it?'

The Scouts have just pitched camp at Burderop near Lodge Farm. 'He does think such a lot of those boys. I expect there's nothing he wouldn't do for them,' I overheard someone saying.

So it is. Everybody lauds the Colonel. Evidently this first English squire of my acquaintance is 'the good squire', kind and courteous to all.

In this walk I learned for the first time that the hard lane from the Swindon-Coate road round the nightingale-end of the Reservoir is one with the Hodson road. I had always taken the cut by the 'pitching' up through the blue-bell woods. However, our crowd of rambles kept to the lane — a lane with quite a sylvan character after it leaves the meadow, partly shaded by trees, decked with high hedges of fragrant blooming elder; pink and white wild roses strung on long arching streamers, with plenty of feathery hedge parsley, nettles, red robin and blue meadow-cranes-bill.

Across a brick-arched bridge over the railway, past the lovers' favorite stile under the tall firs at the top of the 'pitching', past the dreadful 'spring guns' sign so at variance with the character of the genial squire whose name it bears; and soon before us was the gamekeeper's cottage in its enchanted nook under the evergreens.

Here we make a long halt, for not everybody, not even Swindonians, had seen the famous gamekeeper's cottage.

Mr. Alban Ritter approached.

'How good it looks to-night. Don't you wish you could put it all into paint — not only the cottage, but the whole place. I see you haven't the firs in your sketch. Why?'

I shame to confess. From high on the roadslope there, the thing, though so good to look at, wouldn't arrange itself on my canvass. It doesn't seem a good place to set up my box — and I don't like standing in stinging-nettles.'

Your reasons do justice to the keen American mind! Have you any good ones for not visiting the nightingale's nest anymore? I have been there myself every night.'

You are more fortunate than I. Something kept me elsewhere. Are the eggs hatched?'

No, but still safe, I'm glad to say.'

I hope to see them again before time spoils the romance by transmuting them into chicks. — But the Colonel seems to be ordering us to march on. What an event for Hodson Bottom! I doubt if there were ever so many people here at once.'

How were we to reach Chiseldon Church from here? I expected we should climb our steep white lane out of the coombe, and join the

highroad which comes up from Wroughton, skirts Burderop Park and runs on to the upland village. But in England you need seldom go anywhere by a common dusty road, if only you know the better way.



This day has been filled to overflowing with happy experiences. It is too soon to say which was best, but I rather think the walk between the gamekeeper's and the Church was best. As the few cottages and their gardens are planted right across the bottom, the coombe itself, concealed ere long by a turn or by the rich foliage on its slopes, would not, to the stranger, seem accessible. But our guide led us straight through one of the gardens, over a stile, and we passed from one long field to another, keeping company with the bush-bordered brook which finally meets 'the Feeder,' coming from the Chiseldon coombe, into

which we got after the smooth golf-ground — although not quite easily, as there is the barrier of the railway embankment and its accompanying fence.

The glorious sight of breeze-stirred June foliage; the cuckoo's voice; the warble of willow-wrens; trill of robin; flute of blackbird; clarion of thrush near or far, the beautiful play of light and shadow on grasses, wildflowers and tree trunks; the quiet, seemingly enjoyment of the company, who filed along, never talking too loud or making too much disturbance of Nature. I spoke with several persons and found them keenly alive to the beauty and significance of the walk, though I am not sure that any among them, save Alban Ritter, has the gift for enjoying a solitary stroll, quite after the way of the man in whose memory they were making this unique pilgrimage. Still, Jefferies must have been pleased, if he could have known, for it is better to go to Nature in a crowd than not at all.

It is an inspiring moment when one emerges from the deep walls of the wooded valley and beholds the tranquil upland marked with grain-fields far-reaching towards the smooth, mountainous downs. Perfectly defined by the flooding sunlight they are, yet ever shrouded in their

own garment of tantalizing mystery.

Liddington nearest shows the two notches of its ancient fosse at one end and its beech-clump at the other. Here at the top of Chiseldon Coombe, as we look towards Liddington Castle, the long nave and battlemented tower of the Church holds the sun-glow, as it has for many, many hundred June-times.

'The bells should be ringing for us, for it is service-time,' said my companion of the moment, 'but the tower is so shaky they don't dare. They did ring a chime on Coronation Day, but it was risky. The Vicar and the people are working hard to get together means to strengthen the tower walls — a splendid chance for you American Jefferies-lovers to help!'

Words failed me to answer, but secretly I feared that the Church of Jefferies-association must fall, if its salvation depended upon Americans of wealth who love or even know his name. This is a great pity and wrong, and I heartily wish I might do something to alter the case. Not only should Chiseldon Church be made strong enough to stand forever, but there should be a copy of the beautiful Salisbury Cathedral bust of Jefferies placed inside, and the very finest of colour — how he worshipped colour! It should glow in every window. To be sure, Richard Jefferies lies buried in Sussex, near the sea by which he breathed his last, but his name — the name of his kin — is the first one the visitor may read in Chiseldon churchyard. His ancestral Church it is therefore — though I recall that his family did not always pay the tithe with alacrity! — Hither to service he used to walk with 'a noble girl just budding into womanhood.' Doubtless they strolled past the gamekeeper's cottage and up the coombe, as we had done, on many summer evenings when the birds sang the same songs, when the sunlight was just as cheering, the breeze just as soothing to the human sense. Those were the beautiful days of love and hope. How he worked to fulfil the dreams he cherished while he sat here in this holy place, maybe close to this same old chalkstone column! How he struggled to get a hearing! And he was heard. Then, when the world was just coming to love and look for every word he wrote, those three cruel giants, Disease, Poverty and Despair, the most cruel giants known to man, rose up against him. Still he fought, thinking and writing more and more divinely all the while — still he fought them until death — and if there ever was a conquering hero, Richard Jefferies was one.

# 'The Memory of Jefferies: Pretty Ceremonial in Wiltshire' *The Observer*, June 11, 1911

**T**he first local festival in memory of Richard Jefferies was held at Swindon yesterday in beautiful weather. The proceedings were of a simple character. Some three hundred lovers of the famous Nature writer from all parts of Wiltshire met at Swindon Corn Exchange and walked across the fields to scenes associated with Jefferies' early life. An informal meeting was held on the lawn at Coate Farm, the writer's birthplace. The Mayor of Swindon, Mr. T. Butler, presided, and short addresses were delivered on the subject of the day's pilgrimage by Mr. Alfred Owen Williams, the Blacksmith Poet, Mr. Stephen Reynolds and Mr. Edward Garnett.

Letters of apology were read from Lord Avebury, Lord Fitzmaurice, Mrs. Story Maskelyne and Mrs. Jefferies. Mr. Garnett said that Jefferies was far more than a naturalist. He was not only a great observer, but was an original thinker with the heart, the senses and the emotions of a great poet. In his spirit and in his way of looking at man and Nature he was nearer to the Greeks than almost any other English writer. Mr. Reynolds said that through Jefferies the spirit of the downs entered into national life. An exhibition of Morris dancing was subsequently given, and in the evening a special service was conducted at Chiseldon Church.



*The Richard Jefferies Festival, 1913*

# ‘Richard Jefferies and Sport: the Pursuit of an Ideal’

Rebecca Welshman

*Paper presented at the Richard Jefferies Society Study Day, June 2011*

Jefferies’ diverse career as a journalist, fiction writer, and thinker caused him to become known in many different subject areas, including agriculture, society papers, politics, rural writing, and spiritual life. Sport was one activity that, for Jefferies, connected these seemingly disparate areas. For Jefferies, sport was more than just a pastime. It allowed deep and meaningful engagement with the natural world, and in this way, it not only led him to his first successful publication – *The Gamekeeper at Home* – but is present in some form in the majority of his books. Take, for example, the relentless physical pursuits of the boys in *Bevis* who shoot, fish, swim, and sail, or Felix, the accomplished archer in *After London*, both of whom were modelled on Jefferies himself.

Jefferies’ own records of sporting events formed part of his close observation of society during the 1860s and 1870s; what he termed in a letter to an unknown publisher in 1871 as having ‘spent many years studying men and manners at home and abroad’.<sup>1</sup>

His notebook entries from 1876 record him attending the Epsom Derby in June, which was one of Britain’s largest sporting fixtures. It was the year when he was separated from Jessie and their young son, while he sought to establish himself with a more reliable income through his writing. At the time he was staying in Surbiton with the Harrilds, and was writing short stories for the magazine *London Society*, as well as agricultural articles for the *Livestock Journal*. From his notebooks it is clear that he attempted to place an article on Derby Day with several major newspapers to try and gain greater notice as an author.

The Derby was one of the most prestigious race meetings in the world and was attended by the full range of society. A write-up of the event in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* that year recorded that ‘an epitome of society, from the lowest to the highest grade, do the road to the Derby and the Downs of Epsom ... Life in every phase is to be seen and enjoyed.’ A further write-up of the event in the *Essex Standard*

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<sup>1</sup> Hugoe Matthews & Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Oxford: Petton Books, 1994), p.46.

recorded that ‘the attendance at Epsom on Wednesday exceeded that of any other Derby Day,’ and notes that ‘visitors were favoured with the most delightful weather for either road or rail’. The race itself was described as ‘more interesting this year than ever’, with Kisber’s ‘great victory’ stamping him ‘beyond doubt as one of the best horses we have seen for some years’.<sup>2</sup>

The race was unexpectedly won by a Hungarian bred horse called Kisber, who dramatically beat the favourite by 5 lengths. The horse’s owner cleared 100,000 pounds worth of debt, fortunate for him as he narrowly avoided having the horse seized before the race by a moneylender. Kisber was the first foreign-bred horse to win the Derby since the champion Gladiateur had raced to victory in 1862 and word of his success stunned the racing world in Vienna and Hungary.

Horses fascinated Jefferies; their strength, endurance and beauty of form were qualities which he envied, writing in *The Story of My Heart* that he wished to be ‘physically perfect, in shape, vigour, and movement’, and that his own build was disappointingly ‘slender’ – a frame that would ‘not respond to labour, [nor] increase in proportion to effort’.<sup>3</sup> During the 1870s he wrote several articles about or concerning horses, including ‘Horses in Relation to Art’, ‘The Horse as a Social Force’, and ‘Dangers of Hunting’.

The Epsom racecourse would have been about an hour’s journey from where Jefferies was staying at Shanklin Villa. In his notes he records approaching the racecourse from Epsom Station, one mile distant, where he would have had a clear view of the racecourse. He notes the ‘immense mass of people’ at the station, calculating that if 60 trains came to the station platform, each containing 800 people, that this would make 48,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Jefferies was correct in his observation of the exceptional crowds. A report in the *Cheshire Observer* speculated on the unprecedented size of the crowds present:

Great as may have been the gatherings in former years all now have been surpassed. No accurate statistics can be compiled of the hundreds of thousands who annually assemble on the Downs, but a judicious observer who takes a bird’s eye view from the commanding height of the top of the Grand Stand can well form a tolerable accurate estimate of the attendance,

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Derby Day,’ *Essex Standard, West Suffolk Gazette, and Eastern Counties’ Advertiser* (June 02 1876), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *The Story of My Heart: My Autobiography* (Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1905), p. 89. Hereafter cited as *The Story*.

<sup>4</sup> These selections are taken from John Pearson’s transcriptions of the 1876 notebooks, which were published in part in *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No. 15 (2006) pp. 3-10. Subsequent quotations draw from both the published and unpublished transcriptions.

and compare one year with another. All who attempted this agreed that they never remembered to have seen so great a mass of spectators thronging around that as a centre. Dividing into two solid lines that never lost cohesion as far as Tattenham Corner, streaming down into the hollow, and fairly hiding the hill side up the opposite swell of the Downs. It might be that the estimate of “more than half a million people” was well founded.<sup>5</sup>

In his notes Jefferies wryly speculates that there is ‘[probably] more money on Epsom Down than on any other spot in the world’. He comments on the style of women’s fashion, which corresponds with the subject and tone of the articles he published that year in *World* magazine – such as ‘The Coming Woman’, and ‘The Average of Beauty’. He observes ‘bursts of colour in dress’, a ‘flower garden in [a woman’s] bonnet’, feathered parasols, the odour of the grass, the atmosphere – charged with anticipation, and ‘the smoke, which unites [the city] every day.’ But more than just the extraordinary appearance of the Derby, Jefferies made a note on training – saying that ‘nothing can be done without great preparation’ and that this was ‘a lesson in life to all.’ This note to himself reflects the entries in his notebooks for that year, which are tinged with anxiety about the uncertainty of his career, and illustrate well his determination to succeed. The note could in fact be an early indication of Jefferies’ plans to write *The Story*, for it is followed by an entry on Sunday July 9<sup>th</sup> that refers to writing papers about the ‘grass and flowers and sun and breeze,’ and where he refers to ‘my joint religion and truth that I wish to write and publish ... my own real art thoughts: as well as other things.’

By this time Jefferies was discovering that writing about what he knew about nature and the countryside could offer a vehicle of expression of his true inner thoughts and feelings. It could be that the vibrancy of the Derby Day experience, and his observations of the formulation and design behind the success of a Derby winner, strengthened his own resolve to condense his thoughts and feelings into the form of a book. There are two important figureheads that feature in *The Story*, both of which Jefferies would have associated with the 1876 Derby. He notes that the crowds remind him of Xerxes’ army, writing that ‘the black dots move across the dim sun as you approach from Epsom Station’. Xerxes was King of Persia in 486 BC and appears in Jefferies’ notebooks, in *The Story*, and in *Amaryllis at the Fair*. The second figurehead which appears in *The Story* is Julius Caesar, which was the name of the horse that came third behind Kisber that day at the Derby. Both Xerxes and Caesar are presented in

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<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Derby Day,’ *Cheshire Observer* (June 3 1876), p.8.

*The Story* as symbols of human greatness and vision, and the ability to lead, qualities which Jefferies saw to a degree in himself and wished to develop. Xerxes is clearly associated with his experience of the London crowds and his concern that current social systems were not allowing for future happiness of generations to come. Jefferies' notes on the crowds at the Derby have clear affinity with the passage in *The Story* when he stands in front of the Royal Exchange, on the pavement that stands out like a promontory and sees into what he terms the 'agitated pool of human life' as the crowds rush about before him. The sight of the London crowds encourages him to pose the question: 'Can any creed, philosophy, system, or culture endure the test and remain unmolten in this fierce focus of human life?'<sup>6</sup>

The site of the Derby, high up on Epsom Downs, was a centre which drew people from all over the world. On a clear day, race-goers can see the whole of London from the spot. In *Amaryllis at the Fair* Jefferies recalls the Derby Day gathering as the finest crowd he had ever witnessed, writing:

The first time I saw the wonderful crowd of the Derby Day - perhaps the largest crowd in the world - I could scarcely believe my eyes, for I found on passing through it that the hundreds of thousands of people there had nothing more to amuse them than they would have found at an ordinary country fair. ... The next finest crowd is the crowd on August bank-holiday all along the Brighton beach, and there it is just the same. Nothing for the folk but Punch, brass bands, and somersaulters - dull old stories in my grandmother's time. Xerxes offered a reward to anyone who could invent him a fresh pleasure - the multitude of the Derby Day and Brighton beach should do the same. But indeed they do, for an immense fortune would certainly be the reward of such a discoverer.<sup>7</sup>

This reflection imparts something of the original feelings which Jefferies experienced at the Derby. The sight of the crowds, the expectation and excitement, he perceived were to a large degree dependent on something transient and what he terms 'dull'. He wished for such happiness and enjoyment to be longer, more lasting; to provide what he terms in *The Story* 'Something to shape this million-handed labour to an end and outcome, leaving accumulated sunshine and flowers to those who shall succeed.' His note made at the Derby - that 'nothing can be done without great preparation' reflects the method of his own unique search, which he patiently imparts to the reader in *The Story*:

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<sup>6</sup> *The Story*, p.73.

<sup>7</sup> *Amaryllis at the Fair* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1906), p. 109.

To prepare for such an effort, first the mind must be cleared of the conceit that, because we live to-day, we are wiser than the ages gone. The mind must acknowledge its ignorance; all the learning and lore of so many eras must be erased from it as an encumbrance. It is not from past or present knowledge, science or faith, that it is to be drawn. Erase these altogether as they are erased under the fierce heat of the focus before me. Begin wholly afresh. Go straight to the sun, the immense forces of the universe, to the Entity unknown; go higher than a god; deeper than prayer; and open a new day. That I might but have a fragment of Cæsar's intellect to find a fragment of this desire!<sup>8</sup>

Rich in human and animal life, the races could well have been an incentive to Jefferies to follow his own course; to pursue the objective which he outlined in the poem 'The Grave of the Last Abbot' in 1869 to 'overthrow' the dark ignorance that clothed the human mind, and admit the light. The event perhaps also reminded Jefferies of the ancient spiritual relationship between man and horse, which extended far back into primitive times. The summer of 1876 was certainly a time for reflection. In the draft version of *The Story* Jefferies refers to the 'bitter time' when he was separated from his family that year. That he had *The Story* in mind is clear from his description of a trip he took to Worthing to visit the sea – in response to a feeling that he was 'getting further and further from that which was truest within.' 'It was a true Pilgrimage', he says, 'back to the truth and the reality';<sup>9</sup> an afternoon spent amongst corn fields, by the waves, and amongst living things. He records wheatears and ripening corn, which indicates the summer, possibly a month or so after the Derby at Epsom.

Yet it was not only horse racing that was closely linked with the thought processes behind Jefferies' work. When he was writing for the local Swindon papers during the 1860s hare coursing was reaching its peak of popularity, with more than 150 coursing clubs in Britain, which were regularly attracting crowds of up to 80,000 people. The National Coursing Club was established in 1858 to monitor and refine the breeding of pedigree greyhounds in response to the unprecedented level of interest in the sport. It was a unique activity as it crossed the class divide, although by the late nineteenth century it became a predominantly working class entertainment. The number of agricultural articles Jefferies was writing in the 1870s meant that he spent considerable time attending agricultural events, including fairs, markets, shows, and exhibitions. Many of the farmers and labourers

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<sup>8</sup> *The Story*, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> *The Story of my Heart*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (London: Constable and Company, 1947), p. 169.

whom Jefferies would have met along the way would have participated in coursing. In his biography of Jefferies, Edward Thomas notes that to the south of Coate, 'close at hand' – 'lay the Downs — the solitary, arable slopes, the solid beech clumps, [and] the coursing and racing turf of Ashdown and Lambourn.'<sup>10</sup> Today, Lambourn, a village 6 miles east of Swindon, is known as the Valley of the Racehorse, and horses have been trained there since the eighteenth century. Even closer to Coate is Ashdown Park, the home of the Earl of Craven, who set up his home as one of the most well-known venues in the country for coursing meetings in the nineteenth century. An article in 1862 in *Baily's Sporting Magazine* illustrates the significance of Ashdown, stating that 'The Ashdown picture is the great talk of the coursing world'.<sup>11</sup>

In his description of the Wiltshire downs in *The Amateur Poacher* Jefferies writes that the close proximity of horse-racing establishments adds to the general atmosphere of indulgence, with 'Betting, card-playing, ferret-breeding and dog-fancying, poaching and politics' being the chief occupations of the locals. In the book Jefferies gives a detailed description of his acquaintance, Oby the labourer, who poaches with dogs. Oby tells Jefferies about a greyhound that was taken away from him when he went to jail and which he later read about in the newspapers when it became a winning courser. In 'Walks in the Wheatfields' Jefferies writes that 'hares are almost formed on purpose to be good sport' and that 'coursing is capital, the harriers first-rate.' His passion for the sport is further evident in his account of coursing on the Downs with Dickon in *The Amateur Poacher*; scenes which Edward Thomas wrote are 'the finest thing in the book.' Jefferies visits the Sarsen public-house, and goes coursing with Dickon, the land-lady's son, which, although Thomas points out 'some might think a trivial matter out of low life', Jefferies vividly recreates:

Sporting papers, beer-stained and thumb-marked, lie on the tables; framed portraits of winners 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.

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies: his Life and Work* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1909), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, 'Our Van', *Baily's Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* (February 01 1862), p. 155.

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. ...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. ...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.

...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 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?<sup>12</sup>

Jefferies' regular walks upon the Downs would have provided plenty of opportunities to become familiar with the local coursing dogs, and his earnest study of the newspapers at home would have ensured his acquaintance with the sporting sections. He notes for instance in 1876 that he is reading leading national newspapers cover to cover, in order to work out what type of article he might be able to place with them. This careful study of what was topical developed into an idea for a new paper of his own, which never came to fruition. Jefferies' interests in coursing and racing, and his familiarity with the sporting pages of the

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<sup>12</sup> *The Amateur Poacher* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879), pp. 97-100.

newspapers, may be responsible for the uncanny similarities between the names of characters in his work and the names of well-known greyhounds and racehorses of the era. The table below lists some well-known thoroughbred dogs and horses which appeared in the sporting sections of the newspapers during Jefferies' lifetime.

Year of Breeding	Greyhound	Racehorse
1858	Bevis Marks ( <i>Bevis</i> , 1882)	
1862	The Dewy Morn (1884)	
1863		Augustus ( <i>Greene Ferne Farm</i> , 1879)
1865		Formosa ( <i>Bevis</i> , 1882)
1867	Geoffrey ( <i>Greene Ferne Farm</i> , 1879)	
1868	Valentine ( <i>Greene Ferne Farm</i> , 1879)	
1867-1874	7 dogs named 'Formosa' ( <i>Bevis</i> , 1882)	
1869	Augustus ( <i>Greene Ferne Farm</i> , 1879)	
1872	Carlotta ( <i>Restless Human Hearts</i> , 1875)	
1872		Aquila ( <i>After London</i> , 1885)
1873		Julius Caesar ( <i>Story of My Heart</i> , 1883)
1873	Georgiana ( <i>Restless Human Hearts</i> , 1875)	
1873	Carlotta ( <i>Restless Human Hearts</i> )	
1873	Aaron ( <i>Round About a Great Estate</i> , 1880)	
1874	Cicely ( <i>Round About a Great Estate</i> , 1880)	
1874	Felix ( <i>GFF and After London</i> , 1885)	
1875	Hodge ( <i>Hodge and His Masters</i> )	
1875	Aurora ( <i>After London</i> , 1885)	
1876	Felix ( <i>GFF and After London</i> , 1885)	Sir Bevys ( <i>Wood Magic</i> , 1881)
1878		Amaryllis ( <i>Amaryllis at the Fair</i> , 1887)
1879	Hilary ( <i>Round About a Great Estate</i> , 1880)	
1879	Rosa ( <i>The Dewy Morn</i> , 1884)	
1879	The Dewy Morn (1884)	
1881	Julius Caesar ( <i>Story of My Heart</i> , 1883)	
1884	Amaryllis ( <i>Amaryllis at the Fair</i> , 1887)	

These names featured in the sporting pages of papers and magazines which Jefferies both read and contributed to, such as the *Daily News* and the *Graphic*. Some of these dogs were racing at Ashdown when Jefferies lived in Swindon, and the horses at Epsom when he was living in Sydenham and Surbiton. There was for example, a dog named Carlotta racing at Ashdown in 1874, the year before the name featured as the malicious heroine in *Restless Human Hearts*,<sup>13</sup> and in 1879 the Epsom Derby was won by Sir Bevys, which was the name of the protagonist in Jefferies' children's novel, *Wood Magic*, published in 1881.<sup>14</sup>

Other social sports which brought Jefferies into contact with local people in Wiltshire were shooting and hunting. As early as 1876 he made a note in his pocketbook on the insight into social history that hunting afforded, writing that:

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, 'Coursing', *The York Herald* (October 08 1874).

<sup>14</sup> A number of newspapers appear to have misspelt the horse's name as 'Bevis' with an 'i' rather than a 'y'.

to hunting we owe no little knowledge of men and manners, social history. The stiffness and woodenness of the trees: impracticable dressing. Chief characteristic the red coats ... green ground and a grey horse: no one paints the foggy days, the dead leaves, the soaking grass ... its melancholy landscape. Why does not someone paint the natural hunt? With the cottager and his bill hook looking up, and even the scarlet dulled by the rain or splashed by a fall and the fence tearing the coat.

Such accurate pictures of rural scenes would eventually come to fruition in 'Hodge's Masters', first serialised in *The Standard* (1877), and later published in book form (1880). Jefferies records similar experiences of the vivid sights, sounds, and colours of sport in *The Amateur Poacher*, when he watches a pheasant being shot down:

now and then one flew screaming high over the tops of the firs and ash poles, his glossy neck glowing in the sunlight and his long tail floating behind. These last pleased me most, for when the shot struck the great bird going at that rate even death could not at once arrest his progress. The impetus carried him yards, gradually slanting downwards, until he rolled in the green rush bunches.<sup>15</sup>

This observation suggests that Jefferies was fascinated by the strength of the bird and its ability to challenge the finality of the gun: at full flight even the meanest of human machines could not stop its progress through the air, and for just a few seconds he perceives the bird to defy death. But it was not only the thrill of the chase that Jefferies enjoyed. Attracted by the leisure possibilities of sports, Jefferies was particularly fond of skating, and made use of the expanse of Coate Water during the winters, and in the summer spent many hours swimming, fishing, and rowing.

In the majority of his sporting articles Jefferies makes clear and striking observations about movement, position and individual response to the environment. It was not long after his country books were serialised in the *Pall Mall Gazette* that Charles Longman asked Jefferies to write a manual on shooting. Although this was never finished, various items by Jefferies on shooting appear in the *Pall Mall Gazette* after this date. Jefferies' papers which offered sound advice on techniques and equipment for sport brought him considerable respect and established him as an authority on sporting and agricultural subjects. Sport gave Jefferies a reason to be out in the fields, or by the water, allowing him to engage with the natural world. It is from these

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<sup>15</sup> *The Amateur Poacher*, p. 112.

which he drew his ideas, and it was the experience of the outdoors that qualified him to comment on what he saw around him. In his essay 'The Defence of Sport', written for the *National Review* in 1883 as a response to the current debates surrounding the cruelty of blood sports, Jefferies reflects upon his own experiences. He refers to sport as an 'instinct' that betters mental and physical health, and suggests that a man will be better equipped in all areas of life and thought if he is first well educated in the life of the outdoors. The essay continues the theme of *The Story of My Heart* whereby Jefferies imparts to the reader the method by which he had learned about and understood the human and animal worlds. He writes:

With gun, or rod, or in the saddle, a man ... is better, larger in heart and mind for exercise in the field. He becomes himself; the layers of interest, self, and prejudice which circumstance have placed around him disappear. He forgives and forgets; his vision opens, and his heart expands. So severe is the pressure of the ties that it is not every one's fault if years and years of contained labour ultimately blind the moral sense. ... A pliant rod and silken line, beguiling the footsteps away beside a trout stream, will open a new view of the world. The management of the rod and line, the art to throw it exactly where the ripple runs swiftly at the foot of the rapid, gradually takes up the mind. ... The very rush of the water against the fishing-boots recalls the strained brain to flesh and blood; the nerves resume their long-suspended functions, and the thrill of life courses to and fro. Sounds of ripples, and splash, the leap of trout, the soft loving sigh of the wind in the trees ... charm the inner existence into accord with the earth. The wound-up sternness of thought melts away, and the fisherman discovers how beautiful it is simply to live.<sup>16</sup>

The essay affords valuable insight into the trajectory of Jefferies' thought at this time. In reflecting upon his own experiences at Coate he claims that sporting acquaints the sportsman with natural and meteorological phenomena, including haloes around the sun, the sighting of Mercury, and affords insight into the geological makeup of the earth itself. He writes that when shooting 'every day, the reeds, and ferns, and various growths through which I pushed my way, explained to me the jungles of India, the swamps of Central Africa, and the backwoods of America; all the vegetation of the world.' This theme of exploration had already been delineated in *Bevis*. But the boys' sea voyage into the 'unknown' parts of their New World on the reservoir is taken to an altogether more serious level in *After London*, when Felix, an older Jefferies, sets sail across the vast lake covering the south of

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Defence of Sport', *Chronicles of the Hedges*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (London: Phoenix House, 1948), 250-259 (255-256).

England. The seed of the idea behind this exploration had already been sown in *The Story* in which he refers to the three ideas of soul, immortality and deity as being outdated and akin to sailing 'round and round the circle of ideas like a boat on an inland lake'. Felix's journey charts a further stage in the development of Jefferies' soul-life, and his desire for improvement of current social, political and religious systems. The 'launch' of a new vessel being a metaphor for Jefferies' continued search for solutions to aid the betterment of humanity.

In *The Story* Jefferies uses the idea of the chase to explain the subtle workings of the mind and soul. He records his thoughts and feelings at Liddington Hill fort, imagining back through past ages to the time when man 'hurled the spear and shot with the bow.' The site itself was Iron Age where many past battles had been fought, including, it has been suggested, the Battle of Baden where the British fought the invading Saxons. Jefferies' own battle was an inner one, which has been frequently misunderstood. Some of the turns of phrase in the book have divided critical responses to the text. Bill Keith in his *Critical Study* of Jefferies acknowledges the mixed reception that Jefferies' views have received. Sentences such as, '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', which so disturbed W. H. Hudson, Keith describes as 'lapses'<sup>17</sup> and evidence of Jefferies' 'strange destructive instinct'. He suggests that although these passages can be understood more clearly in the context of D.H. Lawrence's phrase 'blood-intimacy',<sup>18</sup> which he discusses with reference to *The Amateur Poacher*, they are 'generally unnecessary elements in the general tenor of the work'. However, the idea of the chase was an inherent part of Jefferies' developing vision and might be better understood as a metaphor for his own ambition to capture in words the elusive nature of his deepening perceptions. Jefferies writes of the immense struggle he had in writing the book – being unable to find the right words to express himself, coupled with the feeling that he needed to write such a record at all, however poorly it was, at least initially, received. Jefferies' interest in the savage human instinct might also be understood in terms of his wish to understand and celebrate the human condition in all its varied states. He perceived that through the ages the fight for survival had remained an enduring instinct that was common to the whole human race, with the savage and brutal being just one

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<sup>17</sup> W. J. Keith, *Richard Jefferies: a Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

exaggerated form.

Jefferies' last major excursion in the open air was his summer on Exmoor upon which he based *Red Deer*. The book was written after a visit to the home of Jefferies' close friend, the artist J. W. North in June 1883. In it he refers to the 'complete catalogue of sport' that took place in Red Deer land – including salmon fishing, otter hunting, stag hunting, black game shooting, as well as pheasant and partridge shooting. Often Jefferies seeks to sensitively portray the instincts of the deer and afford the animal a point of view. In a moving passage he relays the quite common occurrence of a mother deer under pursuit by hounds seeking to ensure her fawn is safe:

A hind when started often has a calf running beside her. When she finds that the hounds have really chosen her, she will knock the calf with her head into a bush to save it from them. The calf will lie perfectly still, and the hounds go past after the mother. The hind places her head partly under the calf and lifts the little creature up, throwing it several yards off the line she is following. The huntsman, who is generally close up, has often seen the calf there lying still and motionless, as he rides by.<sup>19</sup>

Jefferies' motives for writing the book have not been plainly defined, but the project clearly continues his fascination with observing animals and birds, which continued to withhold deeper spiritual meaning. He gleaned what information he needed about the deer from Arthur Heal, Huntsman from the Devon and Somerset Staghounds and his son, Fred. In a letter to Longman, sent with the manuscript of the book Jefferies wrote that: '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'.<sup>20</sup> His fascination with the chase in *Red Deer*, which he perceives as a link to the previous centuries, continues a stream of thought from *The Story of My Heart*, which celebrates the relationship between the hunter and the hunted. It is significant that the only mention of the chase in *The Story of My Heart* is directly associated with Jefferies' prehistoric imagination:

My heart looks back and sympathises 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

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<sup>19</sup> *Red Deer* (London: Longmans Green, 1900), p. 184.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel J. Looker and Crichton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields* (London: John Baker, 1965), p. 193.

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!<sup>21</sup>

In this passage Jefferies clearly states that his passion was ‘not with the slaughter’ but with the pageant of human life as he imagines it through the ages. While his experience of the London crowds denotes anxiety at the emptiness of ordinary human goals and aspirations, his portrayal of prehistoric hunters and warriors suggests a more noble form of human occupation, closely associated with the natural and animal worlds. This connection between the mind of man, nature and animals is something that Jefferies perceived modern living – especially city living – to be losing touch with. The research for the writing of *Red Deer* allowed him to experience firsthand the finer details of the chase, affording valuable insight into an ancient form of human occupation and relationship with the land and its wild inhabitants. His wish to observe and record stag hunting on Exmoor, rather than sporting activities taking place in Sussex or Wiltshire, also symbolised his developing vision – moving outwards from Coate as the centre of his boyhood and his literary imagination – to explore new territories, not only geographically, but spiritually too.

In *The Old House at Coate*, written sometime in 1884 or 1885,<sup>22</sup> Jefferies specifically refers to his birthplace and its gardens as a ‘centre’: ‘Here was the centre of the world, the sun swung round us; we rode at night straight away into the space of the stars.’<sup>23</sup> This process of centring, which strengthened Jefferies’ imaginative connections with his homeland, afforded even deeper insight and more subtle expression of the lives and habits of wild life than in his earlier country books. *OHC* contains detailed analysis of the flight of birds and insects as a means to working out how flight might be achievable for mankind. In the following passage Jefferies considers the flight of birds in relation to swimming and skating:

In swimming, it has been discovered that the forward motion is derived from the legs thrusting a wedge of water backwards: they are kicked out apart and then come together; and the wedge of water between is squeezed backwards, causing the swimmer to advance. The wings of a bird act as

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<sup>21</sup> *The Story*, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Looker notes in his introduction to the book that in light of the style of Jefferies’ handwriting the manuscript for the *Old House at Coate* was likely to have been written sometime between 1884-5 (Richard Jefferies, *The Old House at Coate and Other Hitherto Unpublished Essays*, ed. by Samuel J. Looker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p. 17). Hereafter cited as *OHC*.

<sup>23</sup> *OHC*, p. 34.

they fold, in the same manner: driving a wedge of air behind them; and they use gravitation, the power which pulls downwards, as an aid, and a great one, to their progress, for they are always balanced and sliding. So far as advance is concerned, the existence of gravitation is an advantage to them, for they use it to puff them along.

Besides, however, these mechanical or physical means, there is in the bird one yet more important factor of flight: and that is, consciousness, and life, that subtle power for which no accurate term has been selected, the desire to go forward, and the effort which makes every feather instinct with energy.

A swift skater conceives the will to turn, and immediately, without special effort, he turns: there is a connexion between the will and the steel bound to the foot. The bird desires to fly, to rise or turn, and the willpower, in some subtle manner, adjusts its mere mechanical means to the air.<sup>24</sup>

Jefferies' notes on flight gather momentum in the 1884 notebooks, and from his detailed diagrams of aerial parts it appears he was trying to design a type of flying machine. In *Man of the Fields* Looker and Porteous devote a chapter to Jefferies' pioneering work on flight, noting that 'had Jefferies lived longer he might have become a pioneer of actual flight.'<sup>25</sup> The finer details of balance, movement, form and engineering which the process required, seemed, for Jefferies, to conceal a gateway to new perceptions of the world around.

In a similar way to the busy activities and flight of birds, Jefferies perceived the physical activity of humans to contribute to the growth and expansion of the body and mind. In a letter to Samuel Looker,<sup>26</sup> Jefferies' daughter, Phyllis, recalls the unusual intensity with which her father would watch the flight of seagulls when living at Brighton.<sup>27</sup> In flight Jefferies saw a perfect balance between the physique of the bird and its will to move. In a similar way to his appreciation of horses' 'grace of movement'<sup>28</sup> that was unique to the animal, he perceived that contact with the environment through sport or observation of physical activity could benefit and improve the mind and physique of humans, bringing him '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

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<sup>24</sup> *OHC*, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> *Man of the Fields*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished letter (private collection), date unknown.

<sup>27</sup> The Jefferies family moved to Brighton during the summer of 1882 and then to Eltham in the summer of 1884.

<sup>28</sup> *The Story*, p. 50.

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.<sup>29</sup>

In his work from 1884 onwards Jefferies sought to develop wider sympathies with human and animal life – marking a development from his observations of the Derby seven years earlier – and affording him valuable insights for the writing of *After London*, which explores the loss of balance between man, animals and environment. Unfortunately, for someone who so loved the outdoors, Jefferies was soon confined by his failing health to an indoor life, which in turn encouraged deeper metaphysical speculation coupled with his ambition for social remedy, in his later years. As his illness worsened, the benefits and pleasures of sport became memories rather than realities, but the thrill of the chase, and the graceful arts of skating and swimming contained movement, beauty, focus, and clarity - qualities which inspired him until the very end of his life. For Jefferies, the supreme value of sport lay ultimately in the opportunities it afforded for engaging with the outdoors. As Jefferies himself concludes in the last lines of *The Amateur Poacher*, the pure, elemental nature of the outdoors withholds something ancient and enduring, which remains for all to experience:

Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, whose twelve hours somehow have become shortened, into the sunlight and pure wind. A something that the ancients called divine can be found and felt there still.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *The Story*, p. 90.

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# A note from Elizabeth Jefferies to her niece, Sarah Jane Gyde

Sarah Jane Gyde (1850-1932)  
niece of Elizabeth Jefferies  
Richard's cousin.

Dear Sarah please give  
this little photo to -  
Your Sister Maria  
in remembrance of  
the old House at Home  
taken from a Drawing

Maria Sandford  
Hurd (nee Gyde,  
1846 - 1899)

Frederick Gyde  
(1823-1864)

of my poor Mother Fred  
when Richard and Henry  
were children -  
at Play in garden  
I can get you one of  
you wish E. Jefferies

Richard the  
writer & brother  
Henry Jefferies

Elizabeth (Betsy) Jefferies  
1817-1895 - Richard's mother

The sketch would appear to be the one reproduced in COUNTRY LIFE March 14th 1908 which does show children playing in the front garden - a much larger garden than exists today. The bay-window is shown, so the drawing ( by Fred Gyde) is after 1853/4 (see Fanny Hall's reminiscences.) The drawing "The Old House at Home - at Coate " also by Fred Gyde does not show the bay-window, nor the children.



# Book Review

*Mapping the Wessex Novel: Landscape, History and the Parochial in British Literature 1870-1940* by Andrew Radford (London: Continuum, 2010); £60. ISBN 978-0-8264-3968-0.

**M**apping the Wessex Novel is one of the first academic texts to pay detailed critical attention to the role of archaeology in the literary imagination of Wessex authors, including Richard Jefferies, Thomas Hardy, Mary Butts, and John Cowper Powys. The book is divided into 4 chapters titled: 'Hardy's Heathens'; 'Archaeophobia: A Fear of Old Things'; 'Mystical Secrets and Lies'; and 'The Return of the Nativist'. As archaeology in the nineteenth century was closely associated with other disciplines, such as collecting, geology, and history, Radford has, to a degree, sought to represent how such related subjects contributed to shaping the archaeo-literary imagination. The result is a fairly comprehensive account of the imaginative processes which underlie texts that are deeply grounded in the authors' native landscapes.

The book sheds light on and compares the different authors' perceptions of and use of the archaeological imagination, with effective and contrasting results. In its treatment of the subject the book is representative of the trends in archaeology of the time. Radford discusses some of the key archaeological sites which featured in the press when the authors were writing, and finds supporting evidence of their importance in the texts. However, with four authors being discussed, and the book itself only reaching 182 pages (including notes, bibliography, and index), I felt there was scope for more thorough treatment of the subject in relation to each author. The chapter on Jefferies particularly, for me, lacked insight into the overall trajectory of his thought during the years 1882-1887, and ends abruptly with the analysis of *After London*. It is difficult to agree with Radford's concluding remark that in *After London* Jefferies has reached a defining moment in his career – where 'biting disillusionment' puts an end to his exploratory desires to know more about the state of being (p.84), for the book clearly continues promising streams of thought from Jefferies' previous publications.

In his consideration of Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* Radford states that he aims to address 'its conceptual and cultural definitions of place' (p.13), and acknowledges that the book has not yet received much in-depth critical attention. He recognises the differences between Hardy and Jefferies' treatment of the past, and endeavours to

represent Hardy's 'persistent ... epistemological doubt, apprehension and unease'. Radford provides fresh insights into ways in which the past can underlie the experience of landscape, such as the treading of ancient trackways and the significance of the physical fabric of archaeology, including not only objects themselves, but the dust and ash in which they have been found. While Radford can be credited for widening academic responses to books which have hitherto not received their due critical attention, such as *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933) – a 1120 page novel by Cowper Powys - and Jefferies' 'History of Swindon and Environs', the reader is presented with a range of quite specific insights into each author's own landscape and mindscape, but with no clear overall framework to link them. One is left with the impression that each author provided useful subjects for study in themselves, but that the text as a whole lacks cohesion; a sense that is perhaps partly founded upon the author's own admission at the front of the volume that 'many of the chapters in this book were delivered as seminar papers or at university conferences.'

Throughout the book Radford stays close to the texts he is discussing, and the majority of his sentences include words taken directly from them. While this shows sustained engagement with the works, it requires more attention from the reader to follow and thus at times interrupts the fluency of the narrative. There are repetitions of phrase, of a noticeable number, such as 'opening gambit', which sometimes occurs more than once on a single page. In this sense the narrative at times reads more like a conference paper than a meticulously prepared text.

If you're looking for a light, informative read then this book is unlikely to be suitable due to its overtly academic style. However, its merits lie in its acknowledgement of themes and ideas which contemporary scholarship can sometimes overlook in favour of those which are more tangible or popular. Its greatest strength seems to be the illustration of the importance of archaeology as a newly emerging discipline at the end of the nineteenth century and its growing effect on the minds of writers during the period 1870-1940.

*Rebecca Welshman*

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