Walks in Jefferies-Land

1912

Kate Tryon

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).

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The Kate Tryon manuscript

In 2010, the Richard Jefferies Society published Kate Tryon's memoir of her first visit to Jefferies' Land in 1910. [*Adventures in the Vale of the White Horse: Jefferies Land*, Petton Books.] It was discovered that the author and artist had started work on another manuscript in 1912 entitled "Walks in Jefferies-Land". However, this type-script was incomplete and designed to illustrate the places that Mrs Tryon had visited and portrayed in her oil-paintings using Jefferies' own words.

There are many pencilled-in additions to this type-script in Kate Tryon's own hand-writing and selected words are underlined in red crayon. Page 13 is left blank, albeit that the writer does not come across as a superstitious person. The Jefferies' quotes used are not word-perfect; neither is her spelling nor are her facts always correct. There is a handwritten note on the last page that reads: "This is supposed to be about half the book. – K.T."

The Richard Jefferies Society has edited the "Walks", correcting obvious errors but not the use of American spelling in the main text. References for quotes have been added along with appropriate foot-notes.

The Richard Jefferies Society is grateful to Kate Schneider (Kate Tryon's grand-daughter) for allowing the manuscripts to be published and thanks Stan Hickerton and Jean Saunders for editing the booklet.

TO THOSE WHO LOVE THE
ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

AND THE

WRITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES,

AND TO THOSE

WHOM IT MAY LEAD TO KNOW
AND LOVE BOTH BETTER,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

Kate Tryon
31 Beacon Street
Boston
1912.

As for us, we listened to the voice of this master for ten years; we shall hear no more of his discourses; but the old ones remain; we can go back to them again and again. It is the quality of truthful work that it never grows old or stale; one can return to it again and again; there is always something fresh in it, something new. In a great poem the lines always bring some new thought to the mind; in great music, the harmonies always call forth fresh emotion, and inspire some new thought; in a true book there is always some new truth to be discovered. If all of the rest of the literature of this day prove ephemeral and is doomed to swift oblivion, the works of Jefferies shall not perish. Our fashions change, and the things of which we write become old and pass away. But the everlasting hills abide and the meadows still lie green and flowery, and the roses and the honeysuckle still blossom in the hedge. And those who have written of these are so few and their words are so precious, that they shall not pass away, so long as their tongue endureth to be spoken and to be read. [p.48]

The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies
Sir Walter Besant
1888.

I

A SHORT SKETCH OF JEFFERIES

In 1863, an eminent American critic, writing on the death of the great Nature-writer, Henry David Thoreau, closed with the words,—"Nature has waited long for her Thoreau, and we can hardly expect, within a generation, at least, to see again one so gifted with her confidence." He was mistaken. Thoreau's successor in hearing the modern Gospel of Outdoors had already come into the world. This was Richard Jefferies, the son of a farmer at Coate, near Swindon, in North Wilts, England.

At that moment Jefferies was a tall, awkward, youth of fifteen who seemed to be devoting most of his energies to fishing and punting on Coate Reservoir, or to catching rabbits. Secretly, he liked to read books in his attic room, and, thanks to a printer-relation in London, more books found their way thither than are usually seen in the small English farmhouse. Thus he was forming a taste for writing which was first to find expression in work on the *North Wilts Herald*, of Swindon. But among these books there was little or nothing about the things of field or countryside. He had not heard of Thoreau's *Walden*, or of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, or of *The Maine Woods* or of *Cape Cod*; nor did he ever, in the thirty-eight years of his life, so far as we know, chance upon the records of his American confrere which would have delighted him so keenly. In fact, he was far, sadly far indeed, from beginning the work which was to win him an enduring and unique place in literature. Not until towards the close of his life, and then apparently only on being asked to write a preface to a new edition of *The Natural History of Selborne*, did he become acquainted with the fame of the immortal Gilbert White. If as a youth this book had been at his command, possibly it would have guided him directly into the path he was destined finally to follow, and so have saved him the bitter trouble of producing *The Scarlet Shawl*, *Restless Human Hearts*, and other early works belonging to the category of novels, and now so deservedly forgotten.

Richard Jefferies was educated in the School of Humiliations. One realizes this in reading the first story of his life by Sir Walter Besant, and still more fully in the carefully-studied biography by Mr. Edward Thomas. His boyish plans for walking to Russia and for running away

to America were not the only ones that miscarried. The strain and stress of family feeling which for many years accompanied the decline of Coate Farm was not the end of anxiety about daily bread. Ill for a time, and unable to keep his position on the Swindon newspaper; discountenanced as a visionary and ne'er-do-well, and seeking shelter with a neighbor at Snodshill Farm whom he promises to pay when better days come, he had faith in better days. He believed his genius, trusted his destiny. So did his aunt, Mrs. Harrild, of Sydenham. Too much credit cannot be given this fine woman for the share she must have taken in moulding Richard Jefferies. Hers was a second home for him, when he was a little boy. She took him to the seaside, showed him London, gave him books, and let him have money to publish his first ill-fated novel. In short, she it was who opened a bigger world for his imagination to feed upon, and saved him from being simply the countryman of Coate hamlet.

That, this ambitious young writer lacked nothing in diligence is certain. During these first few years, mixed up with romances that do and those that do not see the light, appears a history of the Goddards whose family, with that of the Calleys of Burderop House, is one of the oldest and most interesting about Swindon; papers about "Ancient Swindon" and its neighbourhood which make up that charming and valuable book now published under the title of *Jefferies Land,* and, at last, a real, practical success — the London *Times* articles on the condition of the agricultural laborer in Wiltshire. This must have been an agreeable surprise to the unbelieving family, for here was the dreaming fisherman, rabbit-catcher and would-be novelist suddenly developed into an authority on the economic problems of his country.

Probably on the strength of this success, having reached his twenty-sixth year, he was married, in Chiseldon Church, July 1874, to Miss Jessie Baden, of Day House Farm. As this farm adjoins the Jefferies place, the young people must have been acquainted always, and we know that he became a more or less frequent visitor at Day House after Miss Baden's return from boarding-school at Salisbury. Doubtless Jessie Baden and Day House Farm were in the young writer's mind when he wrote *Greene Ferne Farm.*

The six months after marriage were passed at Coate Farm, and a tablet on the front of a dismal stone house jammed among the business blocks of Victoria Street, Swindon, commemorates the fact that this was their home for two years. Here a son was born. Life was now a busy routine of writing for the local newspapers, and for the London *Graphic*, *Standard*, *New Quarterly*, *Fortnightly* and *Frazers*. All the while the dream of success as a novelist never vanished. In 1874,

the same year as his marriage, he published both *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Restless Human Hearts*,[1] and was soon at work upon *World's End* and an early form of *The Dewy Morn*.

The Essays, "Marlborough Forest", "Old Village Churches" and "Midsummer Hum", which appeared in the *Graphic* in 1875-6, were really the beginning of the writing on Nature, and it is an interesting coincidence that Mrs. Helen Allingham, the painter in color of English country sights, as Jefferies was their painter in words, was giving the world her first work, though not in this kind, as member of the artistic staff of the *Graphic*. It is a further coincidence that both Mrs. Allingham and Jefferies were born in the year 1848, but, whereas the former is still enjoying a prosperous life, the latter's brief day is long since ended.

1876 was an unsettled year for Jefferies, and he spent most of it at Sydenham, apart from his wife and child. By the next year, however, prospects were certain enough for them to establish a home near London, at 2 Woodside, Surbiton, and a promising career seemed opening to him through the publication serially in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and *Round about a Great Estate*.

From the time of settling at Surbiton, there were only ten years of life ahead. In 1879, Coate Farm was sold, Jefferies' father became a gardener at Bath, and he himself was thus cut off from the scenes of his boyhood and youth. Still, it is the years now past that count, not only in the making of these books just mentioned, but in the more thrillingly beautiful and often sublimely passionate utterances yet to flow from the mind and heart of this remarkable genius. For him the blackbird and chaffinch are ever singing their morning song in the sunny fields by Coate Reservoir. He can see the azure speedwell and starry white stitchwort abloom along the hedgerows, the rabbits scurrying away through the bluebell copses at Burderop. He can hear the larks singing above the wheatfields by the coomb under Liddington Castle. Exile from these things increases their value a hundred-fold. He can never forget them. Again and again they recur, and with increasing sacredness through the years of suffering that closed his life; so that only the Jefferies of Coate seems quite real to us, and not the Jefferies who dreamed over the lions in Trafalgar Square, or admired the beautiful women at Brighton, or who, never laying down his pen until the very last, fought poverty and mortal pain at Crowborough and Goring.

[1] *Restless Human Hearts* was published in 1875.

In Jefferies' most notable book, *The Story of My Heart*, intimate experiences with Nature in youth are blended with the mature thoughts on life of a man who has thrown tradition to the winds, thus untrammelled to look for Truth, and who is able to express himself with so much tenderness, pathos and power as must make an abiding impression upon the reader. Before the appearance in 1883 of this book, this autobiography which, although having little to tell about material conditions, makes bare a human heart as seldom before, its author had fallen ill of the disease which, while it was to be six years in exhausting his vitality, was to stimulate his mind to marvellous productiveness.

Nature Near London, *The Life of the Fields* and *The Open Air* were published during these years, also the romances *The Dewy Morn*, *After London*, and *Amaryllis at the Fair*. For two of these years while living in Lorna Road, West Brighton, he was comparatively well, and, inspired by the open downs reminiscent of his dear old home in Wiltshire, and intensely alive to the joy of existence, after coming through the horrible twelve-month of death-in-life, his power reached its zenith. Thenceforward there was little for him but pain and exhaustion, but through days and nights in which rest was denied, this power was active, and some of its latest expressions are the most beautiful, as in "Hours of Spring" and "My Old Village". These essays whose periods flow like music — the music of bird-song and of the brook — are Richard Jefferies' farewell to a world which he had regarded with a fullness of adoration unknown before, though hinted at in some of the most refined intellects of our day, deeply prophetic of a new age, and fraught with significance not yet fully comprehended.

The over-sensitive may feel impelled to turn away from contemplation of the sombre-seeming thinker who, in August 1887, died poor and little known in that cottage at Goring, in Sussex. But, if he will but stay and study the man and his work, he will find that from these have subtly flowed an influence that has left him richer, better and happier — that is, if he be a sincere soul, capable of mining the gold of life. Erelong he will know what that other mystic, Thoreau, meant, when he said,——

I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before;
I moments live, who lived but years;
And Truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.[2]

[2] From *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* by Henry David Thoreau.

II

THE DISCOVERY OF A MASTER

Five years after the death of Richard Jefferies, I, a soujourner in the American University-city of Cambridge, first came upon Besant's *Eulogy* of him, in the Harvard Library. *Field and Hedge-row* was immediately devoured, and made an ineffaceable impression. The portrait of the man remained graven on my mind as well — that tall, languid, dreamy man; sandy brown beard and moustache not hiding the full under lip; large blue eyes, with the same drooping left lid seen in his mother's picture; high forehead, with glossy hair parted far over on the left side; the whole expression "sensuous, silent and aware", as Mr. Thomas observes; lastly, a man scrupulously particular about dress. But this was after he had entered upon his career. I could see him too in the early, doubtful days when it was "nought but Dick Jefferies", striding over the downs in the summer twilight, clothing poor and unbecoming, locks long and eccentric.

Besant's *Eulogy* was followed by *Richard Jefferies, as Man and Thinker*, by Mr. Henry S. Salt, who has also written the best appreciation of Thoreau, and who indeed, of all the critics, is by temperament best adapted to the task of setting forth the high service of the Nature-writers. Mr. Salt's book confirmed my discipleship of Jefferies. To see Coate Farm and climb the high shoulder of the beloved Down was too much even to dream of then. But the impossible has come to pass. For two spring-times the door at Coate Farm has opened to me with kindest hospitality. Day by day and week by week I have wandered, sketch-box in hand, along those hedgerows, enlarging always my acquaintance with things and places now invested with a strange charm because touched by the great genius whose personality was never absent. How much Jefferies' work has gained for me in importance by my knowledge of Jefferies-Land is inestimable. If I had sometimes wished, with other admirers of his, that he had not written so much, and with so much detail, this objection tended to disappear.

Granted that one could keep the mood, with leisure, in this busy life, for a close reading of Jefferies' best work, one must find the interest and beauty of that work inexhaustible. This would be especially true if one were so fortunate as to have betimes some hours alone with Nature, to exercise the keener vision developed by this Master-seer. Nor is this all he teaches us — to love the life of the open

air. His social message is vital, and, so far has the world moved on in two decades that some of the passages in *The Story of My Heart* do not sound quite so wild as when first uttered. For *is* it not strange indeed that, after so many centuries of the world's existence, humanity profits so little by its lessons? Shall we always be content to tread the old ruts worn for us by people so much less wise than we? If we will but *believe we can*, can we not now begin to lift the burden that weighs mankind down? We have thought poverty and disease must always be. But is this so? I will never believe it. Better expect and demand more of life. We must think ourselves into an earthly immortality.

So reasoned Jefferies half a century ago, and such thoughts were very uncomfortable to easy-going, contented mortals, while many commiserated the writer on the unhappy lot which had given rise to such discontent with things as they are. But now we shall not have to think long to agree that Jefferies' philosophy, Jefferies' religion, if you will, has emerged as the Modern Spirit. So that the farmer's son in that Wiltshire hamlet of Coate was the prophet of we know not what changed and improved conditions of human life.

III

FIRST GLIMPSE OF JEFFERIES-LAND

On that morning in early May, as I journeyed into Wiltshire, I fell to talking with an intelligent woman who turned out to be quite a Nature-lover. She knew of Jefferies, and claimed to have read his *Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*. This I must doubt, recalling her parting words, as she alighted at Oxford, — "I fear you will find the country around about Swindon very dull."

And yet — there is no gain in trying to pretend or imagine otherwise — Jefferies-Land, at first glance, to one knowing nothing of its associations and hence not prejudiced in its favor, would very likely seem uninteresting, while one in search of the picturesque would easily find more satisfaction in other parts of England. This is true of the scenes that surrounded Gilbert White at Selborne; and Thoreau's Concord, in Massachusetts, is not the most beautiful town in New England. But once under the spell of Selborne, Concord or Coate, most other spots on earth, to the present writer at least, sink into insignificance.

Swindon, now a typical English manufacturing town whose sloping slates and chimneypot-rows represent mainly the homes of the thousands who labor in the Works of the Great Western Railway, has grown up within thirty years, that is, since Jefferies' newspaper-days. A bit of a tram-ride past busy shops merges not very perceptibly into a hilly section of the town at its southern edge distinguished as Swindon Old Town. Here, after turning out of Victoria Street, passing the Jefferies' house, which one is pretty sure not to discover the first time, the tram-line ends in the old paved market-place, with its Corn Exchange building. Here is no lack of the quaint and ancient. The lover of the picturesque feels happier. The shambly, mossy tiles of the Goddard Arms are a delight, and there is a pleasant mingling of shops and old stone cottages, some thatched, before we come to the broad fields stretching away for a mile and a half to Coate. Gillyflowers, forget-me-nots and primroses show their lovely colours at these cottage-fronts and so hold our attention that, as we ignored the Jefferies' house in stony Victoria Street, so we now pass without recognizing the town-entrance of "The Lawn", home of the Goddards, which Jefferies utilizes both in *Amaryllis at the Fair* and in *The Dewy Morn*.

Though more and more suffused with sunlight, the atmosphere is misty, and shows but vaguely the fields of springing corn, of grass, or of ploughed earth, where ghostly shapes of hedgerow-trees rise. For a distance a stone wall and concrete path on the left borders the formal white highway.

Here, out of the mist, rises now and then that curious bird, the lapwing, with his tumbling flight and sad cry, while a lark somewhere above prophecies sunshine. And now a cuckoo confirms the May-feeling. Or is it because the mist is lightening now, showing, only half a mile away on the right, among its trees and dark fir plantation, Coate Reservoir. And see! — the downs, walling the horizon.

The bare, hard road makes a sudden drop between high hedgerows where stands the first white-washed cottage of the hamlet. John Brown, for years a workman at Coate Farm, John Brown whom Jefferies thinks of tenderly in "My Old Village" and wishes he had remembered with a shilling when he had it to spare, once lived here.

And next on the left is a very gem of an old cottage, thatch decked with fat cushions of green moss, geraniums crowding its wee windows, and flowers and a fruit-tree peeping over the rude board fence that can give but little protection against the motor-dust of this busy road to Marlborough. Here lived Job Brown, father of John. He and his wife kept the little shop — an important place to young Jefferies, for here his rabbits turned into money, and the money into books.

"Here ends Coate Road" reads an inscription on the stone parapet of a bridge that takes the road over the water-course giving its name to "The Brook Field" of Coate Farm. The house itself is next beyond the Sun Inn, but out of sight, on account of the abrupt bend in the road. However, we have gone too far for the present. We must re-cross the bridge and swing open the white-painted gate leading, across a fieldful of cows and daisies to the brick cottage under the ivy-columned trees yonder. The Reservoir is hidden there. That red cottage was the home of old Day, the water-bailiff, but now it is to become our abiding-place at Coate, to which we look for "the good roast beef of old England" — between mounds of cabbage and potato — together with such rations of buttered bread, marmalade and tea as shall strengthen us for many a tramp on the downs.

IV

COATE FARM

In the exhaustive study of Jefferies' works which my visit to Coate prompted me to make, a chief delight was in the discovery of a fact which, if his two biographers have pointed it out, I had somehow missed: that is, how the same material is used over and over, especially those spots and features of home-scenery which were most dear to him. To reproduce the pages written about Coate Farm would be to fill a large book. I am going to set down right here some of the most significant, true and beautiful of these passages, grieving that I cannot give space to more, but confident that the reader will desire to search out the rest.

Look at these things, from *Bevis: the Story of a Boy*. And catch the atmosphere of a happy, carefree boyhood — that of little Richard Jefferies at Coate Farm:

"Where's your hat?" said Polly to Bevis.
"I don't know," said Bevis. "I suppose it's in the brook. It doesn't matter." [Ch.III]

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"So they went in and loaded their pockets with huge double slices of bread-and-butter done up in paper, apples, and the leg of a roast duck from the pantry." [Ch.IV]

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There was a gimlet on the dressing-table, and Bevis's purse on the floor, and the half-sovereign in it. A great tome, an ancient encyclopaedia, which Bevis had dragged upstairs, was lying on a chair, open at "Magic." Mark's pocket-knife was stuck in the bedpost, and in his best hat there were three corncrake's eggs, blown, of course, and put there for safety, as he never wore it.

She went to the window, and the swallows came to their nests above under the eaves. Bevis's jacket and things were lying everywhere, and as she left the room she saw a curious mark on the threshold, all angles and points. He had been trying to draw the wizard's foot there, inking the five angles, to keep out the evil spirits and witches, according to the proper way lest they should take the magician by surprise.

Next she went to the bench-room — their armoury — and lifted the latch, but it was locked, the key in Bevis's pocket. The door rattled hollow. She looked through the keyhole, and could see the crossbow and the rigging for the ship. Downstairs again, sitting with her needlework, she heard the carrier's van go by, marking the time to be about four. There was the booing of distant cows, and then a fly buzzed on the pane. She took off her thimble and looked at old Pan in the armchair — old Pan, Bevis's friend.

It was deadly quiet. No shout, and bang, and clatter upstairs. No loud “I must,” “I will.” No rushing through the room, upsetting chairs, twisting tables askew. No “Ma, where’s the hammer?” “Ma, where’s my bow?” “Ma, where’s my hat?” [Ch.XXII]

In *Amaryllis at the Fair* we are only away from Coate Farm for the day of the Fair — unless we except that minor occasion on which Amaryllis goes to town to buy new shoes and the bloaters for tea. The character of Amaryllis is closely identified with that of Jefferies himself; that of Mrs. Iden and Mr. Iden with those of Jefferies’ mother and father.

Here was Mrs. Iden, who had had a beautiful shape and expressive eyes, full in her youth of life and fire, who ought to have led the gayest life in London and Paris alternately, riding in a carriage, and flinging money about in the most extravagant, joyous, and good-natured manner — here was Mrs. Iden making butter in a dull farm-house, and wearing shoes out at the toes. [Ch.IX]

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Amaryllis went straight to the window and knelt down. She brought a handful of violets, fresh-gathered, to place in the glass which she kept there for her flowers. The window was cut in the thick wall, and formed a niche, where she always had a tumbler ready — a common glass tumbler, she could not afford a vase. [Ch.XX]

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Failure waited on her labours; the postman brought them all back again.

Yet in her untaught simplicity she had chosen the line which the very highest in the profession would probably have advised her to take. She drew what she knew. The great cart-horse, the old barn up the road, the hollow tree, the dry reeds, the birds, and chanticleer himself ... Hardly a circumstance of farm life she did not sketch; the fogger with his broad knife cutting hay; the ancient labourer sitting in the wheelbarrow munching his bread-and-cheese, his face a study for Teniers; the team coming home from plough — winter scenes, most of them, because it was winter time. [Ch.XXI]

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Amaryllis had always been so fond of the kitchen — the oldest part of the house, two centuries at least. The wide hearth and immense chimney, up which, when the fire was out, of a winter’s night you could see the stars; over which of a windy night you could imagine the witches riding by, borne on the deep howling of the blast; the great beam and the gun slung to it; the heavy oaken table, un-polished, greyish oak; the window in the thick wall, set with yellowish glass; the stone floor, and the walls from which the whitewash peeled in flakes; the rude old place was very dear to her.

Ofttimes they sat there in winter instead of the sitting-room, drawn by its antique homeliness. Mrs. Iden warmed elder wine, and Iden his great cup of Goliath ale, and they roasted chestnuts and apples, while the potatoes — large potatoes — Iden’s selected specialities — were baking buried in the ashes. Looking

over her shoulder Amaryllis could see the white drift of snow against the window, which was on a level with the ground outside, and so got Iden to tell her stories of the deep snow in the United States, and the thick ice, sawn with saws, or, his fancy roaming on, of the broad and beautiful Hudson River, the river he had so admired in his youth, the river the poets will sing some day; or of his clinging aloft at night in the gale on the banks of Newfoundland, for he had done duty as a sailor. A bold and adventurous man in his youth, why did he gossip at the stile now in his full and prime of manhood? [Ch.XXIII]

Here, in *Round about a Great Estate* is the old kitchen again, this time radiant with the glow of spring sunrise:

The kitchen had perhaps originally been the house, the rest having been added to it in the course of years as the mode of life changed and increasing civilisation demanded more convenience and comfort. The walls were quite four feet thick, and the one small lattice-window in its deep recess scarcely let in sufficient light, even on a summer's day, to dispel the gloom ... In the early mornings of the spring, as she came rushing down to breakfast, the tiny yellow panes of the window which faced the east were all lit up and rosy with the rays of the rising sun.

The beautiful light came through the elms of the rickyard, away from the ridge of the distant Down, and then for the first hour of the day the room was aglow. For quite two hundred years every visible sunrise had shone in at that window more or less, as the season changed and the sun rose to the north of east. Perhaps it was that sense of ancient homeliness that caused Cicely, without knowing why, to steal in there alone to dream, for nowhere else indoors could she have been so far away from the world of to-day. [Ch.II]

Of descriptions of the garden at Coate Farm there are many, and often, especially in *Amaryllis* and *Bevis* the summer-house and the "ha-ha" between the garden and the "Brook Field" are prominent. Many of the fruit-trees planted by Jefferies' father have had their day and gone, but the low box-hedge at the back and the trained pear-tree on the end wall of the narrow brick house still remain:

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

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

A damask rose opened its single petals, the sweetest-scented of all the roses. [Ch.VIII]

In the closing passage of *Round about a Great Estate* we have exquisitely rendered the very feeling of the long summer twilights when only the most exhausted laborer cares to think of sleep:

That evening was one of the most beautiful I remember. We all sat in the garden at Lucketts' Place till ten o'clock; it was still light and it seemed impossible to go indoors ... From our feet the meadow sloped down to the distant brook, the murmur of whose stream as it fell over a bay could be just heard. Northwards the stars were pale, the sun seems so little below the horizon there that the glow of the sunset and the glow of the dawn nearly meet. But southwards shone the dull red star of summer — Antares, seen while the wheat ripens and the ruddy and golden tints come upon the fruits. Then nightly describing a low curve he looks down upon the white shimmering corn, and carries the mind away to the burning sands and palms of the far south. In the light and colour and brilliance of an English summer we sometimes seem very near those tropical lands. [Ch.XX]

Motorists, many of them in a day go rushing past the high wall of Coate Farm, as though they, at least, were finding the country round about Swindon very dull, and had no idea of seeing anything this side of Stonehenge or Salisbury cathedral. Never by any chance is their eye caught by the tablet near the green gate, announcing that Richard Jefferies was born there on the sixth of November, 1848. If they should read this, very likely it would be without meaning for them.

I was so happy as to be introduced at Coate Farm by two cousins of Mrs. Jefferies[3] who had known the place from childhood, and delighted to point out the Siberian crab-apple tree, the mulberry, the damson, the spot where the summerhouse stood, and where the ha-ha, or wall, used to be,[4] between the garden and the meadow which slopes to the brook.

The visitor who comes here should have read *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *The Amateur Poacher*, *Round about a Great Estate*, *Wood Magic* and *Bevis: The Story of A Boy*. There can be no mistake in supposing that the first reconstructs for us the home of Jefferies' young manhood. In *Amaryllis*, trying with chilled fingers to draw in that cold attic chamber, we can see Jefferies laboring with his early ambition to write. The pressing need of somebody's earning some money; the family suspicion of unpractical tendencies — what numbing conditions for the development of youthful genius!

Was it here, by the flagstone path at this end of the house that the first March daffodil opened, causing Amaryllis the joy that her father,

[3] These cousins are more likely to be those of Richard Jefferies – daughters of his Aunt Martha Hall.

[4] The ha-ha wall still stands – the ditch may have been filled in around the time of Kate Tryon's visit.

at heart loving the daffodil as well as anybody, but soured by poverty, is moved to resent in this brutal way;—

> "Trumpery rubbish! — mean to dig 'em all up — would, if I had time. Have 'em carted out and drowed away — do for ashes to drow on the fields. Never no good to nobody thaay thengs. You can't eat 'em, can you, like you can potatoes?" [Ch.I]

The present tenants keep a lawn and a prim walk around the house, but cultivate few flowers and vegetables. The place makes a good home for a family of growing children, but apart from cutting the hay, caring for a couple of horses, a few cows and a little poultry, there is not much farming going on.

The pear-tree on the gable-end of the house towards Swindon flourishes luxuriantly. Its new shoots spray beyond the eaves, and look in at the casement of that "bare chamber next the cheese-room" sacred to Jefferies' memory. Rounded heads of clipped lime-trees, supported by their straight stems, unite to make a bank of sunny foliage above the wall between the garden and the road. There is some ivy on this wall, while the front of the house is completely covered with it. Beyond the end of the house, nearer the Sun Inn, the wall gets higher, on account of the sloping roadway, and we can imagine the very spot where Amaryllis sat and studied the crowd going to the Fair, particularly the awkward menfolk of whom there was not one to admire. The low-slanting thatch of the old part of the house, where the kitchen is, makes for picturesqueness, and so does the cone-shaped yew-tree in that corner of the modest enclosure. The slated roof of the main house cheapens the whole effect exceedingly.

At the back, where some roses climb amid ivy, is the pleasant nook where by the open door of the dairy, Jearje, his mind on the forthcoming ale, churned, while in the summer-house that used to stand by that box hedge, Amaryllis, convalescing Amadis and the artistic bachelor, Alere Flamma, from London, were wont to sit.

This former dairy-room, with its stone flagging under a projecting roof, is where, in *Round about a Great Estate* Jefferies makes us see the lovely rounded arms of Cicely as she turns the cheeses. Before the days of Coate Chapel Jefferies' father allowed this room to be used as a place of public worship, although there is no evidence to show that either of Jefferies' parents were especially religious.

Beyond the garden at the back, the pasture, rising slightly, makes a skyline and hides the Reservoir. The down too from this point sinks into insignificance behind the trees of Day House Farm.

Within doors the living-room with its fireplace and square, recessed window looking out on the polled lime-trees, is full of haunting

memories. Here the Idens, in *Amaryllis*, ate those fine joints of mutton cooked by the wood fire, with choice floury potatoes, the "farty-folds", while Iden deprecated his wife's custom of spoiling good swede greens with vinegar, and she got more than even with him by flouting his country manner of speech, all the more maddening because, when he took a notion, he could speak as good English as anyone.[5]

> "They be forty-folds" said Mr. Iden, helping himself to half a dozen. "Look at the gravy go up 'em like tea up a knob of sugar... Forty-folds. They comes forty to one. It be an amazing theng how thengs do that; forty grows for one. Thaay be an old-fashioned potato; you won't find many of thaay, not true forty-folds. Mine comes true 'cause I saves um every year a' purpose ... Forty-folds be the best keeping potatoes. Thur be so many new sorts now, but they bean't no good; they be very good for gentle-folks as doan't know no better and for poor folk as can't help theirselves. They won't grow everywhere neither; there bean't but one patch in our garden as ull grow um well. It's that big middle patch. Summat different in the soil thur. There's a lot, bless you! to be learned before you can grow a potato, for all it looks such a simple thing. Farty-folds ——"
>
> "Farty-folds!" said Mrs. Iden, imitating his provincial pronunciation with extreme disgust in her tone.
>
> "Aw yes, too" said Iden. "Varty-volds be ould potatoes, and thur bean't none as can beat um."
>
> The more she showed her irritation at his speech or ways the more he accentuated both language and manner.
>
> "Talking with your mouth full" said Mrs. Iden. It was true Iden did talk with his mouth full, very full indeed, for he fed heartily. The remark annoyed him; he grunted and spluttered and choked a little — floury things are choky. He got it down by taking a long draught at his quart of strong ale. Splendid ale it was too, the stuff that induces you to make faces at Goliath. He soon, began to talk again.
>
> "Th' ould shepherd fetched me these swede greens; I axed 'un three days ago; I know'd we was going to have this yer mutton. You got to settle these yer things aforehand."
>
> "Axed," muttered Mrs. Iden.
>
> 'Th' pigeons have been at um, they be 'mazing fond of um, so be the larks. These be the best as thur was. They be the best thing in the world for the blood. Swede greens be the top of all physic. If you can get fresh swede tops you don't want a doctor within twenty miles. There's nothing in the chemist's shops in England, equal to swede greens" ...
>
> "What a lot of salt you *do* eat!"
>
> "Only you must have the real swedes — not thuck stuff they sells in towns; greens they was once p'raps, but they be tough as leather, and haven't got a drop of sap in um. Swedes is only to be got about March."
>
> "Pooh! you can get them at Christmas in London," said Mrs. Iden.
>
> ... "Call they swede tops? They bean't no good, you might as well eat dried leaves ...
>
> Ha! You'll cut your thumb!" he shouted to Amaryllis. "Haven't I told you how to cut bread twenty times? Cutting towards your thumb like that! Here, like this"...

[5] Kate Tryon notes: "Jefferies' father, from whom Farmer Iden is drawn, had lived in London, had been in America and was fond of books, though generally looking and acting the part of a complete rustic."

He cut a slice to show her, and then tossed the slice across the table so accurately that it fell exactly into its proper place by her plate.

"Whyever couldn't you pass it on the tray?" said Mrs Iden. "Flinging in that manner! I hate to see it." [Chs.II-III]

The picture of this family dinner-party could not have been so natural without being drawn from life. No one can suppose that the master-artist who, but for Thomas Hardy, stands alone as the painter of English country people, was here working without models. Nay, after a little we cannot tell whether it was the elder Jefferies who encouraged the mice on the hearth but persecuted them in the cellar; whether it was Mrs. Iden or Mrs. Jefferies who used to lock herself in her room and weep over old kid gloves she had worn in her honeymoon.

Perhaps no part of this interesting house speaks so loudly of bygone days as the attic. Jefferies has told us of the robin and the wren that used to come into his retreat there, perhaps in quest of worms in the decayed woodwork or in old folios on top of the secretaire; how he and his brother had much early practice in sighting with the old flintlock from the sill of this window, so that nearly everything and everybody, including the milkmaid and the man making love down by the meadow hedge had been shot more than once without knowing it.

What a happy, carefree spirit of youth pervades *The Amateur Poacher,* whence comes this tale. Even one who never did and never could take the life of fish or fowl or four-footed creature must enjoy this book — the hunt for the traditional brace of pistols in the dusky garret in the old part of the house, where stood the stuffed fox with his uncanny grin; the spot of daylight at the chink; the surprising nearness of noises made by a starling's feet on the thatch outside, together with certain creepy sounds not so easy to explain without aid of ghost-theories. How we rejoice in the memory of that happy day when at length the boys were old enough to be trusted with a gun, and one was brought to light from within the old clock with the half moon and ship on its face which stood on the stair landing. Who would have believed that gun had been there all these years — and no-one knew!

V

COATE RESERVOIR

With voice of shrewish woman and yapping of cur, whatever the water-bailiff's cottage may have been like when the future author of "My Old Village" used to go there to beg the use of the punt, it is to-day the home of no little refinement. Born in the house since their parents took it thirty years ago, just after Coate Farm was sold, some excellent young people carry on the summer business of providing boats and teas for the holiday-makers whom Swindon sends in ever-increasing numbers to the Reservoir.

It is more than a hundred years since the Wilts and Berks Canal Company caused the brook from the downs to leave its waters in the marshy hollow of the fields for the benefit of the now disused canal to the Thames. It is interesting to know that this is the veritable canal in whose boats Tom Brown as a child secretly hoped he might have a chance to travel to London.

The Reservoir has now become wholly a part of Nature. The embankment forming the shore at the Coate Farm end has a walk where the sunlight loves to play through oak, ash, willow and tall Scotch firs. The great tit, wren, willow warbler, thrush, greenfinch, and chaffinch nest here, while the sweetest-voiced blackbird I ever heard haunts the trees that border the Brook Field just beneath. Noonday is his special inspiration — those glorious noondays of May and June when the clouds image themselves in the water. Perhaps he is a descendent of Jefferies' own blackbird of which he wrote:

> But the blackbird, king of hedgerows—
> Hedgerows to my memory dear—
> By the brook where rush and sedge grows,
> Sang his liquid love-notes clear.[6]

I hope it was not the eggs of this blackbird mistakenly offered me as a propitiatory present by one of the youngsters now living at Coate Farm! Luckily he has plenty of time in which to reform. Was not Jefferies himself once the nonchalant heathen who wrote his uncle one spring,— "I have robbed thirty one birds' eggs already."?[7]

[6] *Greene Ferne Farm*, [1880] Ch.IV – extract from an imaginary poem entitled "Noontide in the Meadow".

[7] Letter from young Jefferies to his Uncle Thomas Harrild, dated May 7, 1860.

The embankment gives one of the most characteristic views in Jefferies-Land. *Wild Life in a Southern County* begins with the words "The most commanding down". This it is whose shape — variously colored with the passing hour and changing atmosphere — rises beyond the tall elms and sycamores of Day House field at whose farther outline the square shape and chimney-stacks of Jessie Baden's old home may be seen. This down is Liddington Hill, and on its summit is the prehistoric earthwork, that spot made immortal in *The Story of My Heart*. But the Coate people do not know about this. To them it is simply "the Castle".

To explore as far as the other end of the Reservoir less than a mile away where the beech-grown hill of Burderop rises blue above the sedgy shore, one may choose either the southern bank towards the downs or the northern towards Swindon. In the first case, one skirts Day House field and passes the rabbit-haunted old sand-quarry under the clump of splendid sycamores, crosses the old brick-parapeted bridge at the brook, or "feeder", now choked and well-nigh lost in weeds and shrubbery, and thence into the field of Nightingale Farm, and one finds one's self between the sedgy shore and Burderop Hill, with a train gliding near at hand to the next station at Chiseldon, hidden in its coomb under Liddington Hill. The high bank at the sand-quarry curves into a lovely cove where the brook has its outlet. This place is the scene of the very most interesting of the boyish "doings" in the tale of *Bevis*. "Fir Tree Gulf" and "The Nile", respectively, are the names of the cove and of the brook. *Round about a Great Estate* contains this choice spring picture of the brook at the old brick footbridge:

> Two meadows distant from the lower woods of the Chace[8] there is what seems from afar a remarkably wide hedge irregularly bordered with furze. But or entering a gateway in it you find a bridge over a brook, which for some distance flows with a hedge on either side. The low parapet of the bridge affords a seat — one of Cicely's favourite haunts — whence in spring it is pleasant to look up the brook; for the banks sloping down from the bushes ... are yellow with primroses and hung over with willow boughs. As the brook is straight, the eye can see under these a long way up; and presently a kingfisher, bright with azure and ruddy hues, comes down the brook, flying just above the surface on which his reflection travels too. He perches for a moment on a branch close to the bridge, but the next sees that he is not alone, and instantly retreats with a shrill cry. [Ch.II]

The walk along the opposite bank of this narrow little sheet of water is also interesting, for one may see the lapwings in the cow-pasture, hear the rippling laughter of the willow warblers all the way, pass through

[8] Kate Tryon inserts a note here: "Burderop is here designated as 'Ashborne Chace' "

the dark plantation of firs under the cooing pigeons, the “chip-chip” of the chiffchaff and the elaborate chatter of the blackcap. And now, after scaring up the coot and moorhen from their nests among the sedge and yellow iris and rousing the ire of the wild white swan, it is Nightingale Farm again, this time near the spot where, time out of mind, a nightingale has nested and does still.

The Reservoir is a simple and in itself nowise extraordinary pond, all of whose features may be revealed within an hour. But it has ever a new story to tell, and one will often start to pass it on a jaunt afield, only to find one’s self idling away the time on its banks. Perhaps a little waiting will reveal the shy kingfisher — a streak of turquoise vanishing athwart the withy-bed. Surely here is a place where almost anything pleasant might happen at any minute, and, if no greater miracle occurs, is not the scenery of rolling clouds in tranquil water enough?

Jefferies spent the early years from five to nine with his aunt at Sydenham, and then Coate Reservoir came into his life and figured pretty prominently for all the rest of his playing-days, as we may judge by reading *Bevis: The Story of a Boy*. The doings of Bevis and Mark may be trusted in detail to have been those of young Richard and Harry Jefferies.[9] It all tallies with the testimony of those who remember the two brothers. In Bevis, full of strange enterprises, imaginative, dictatorial, given to fits of dreamy reserve, sometimes cruel enough to beat the donkey and sometimes tender enough to put a leaf under a drowning insect, we have the many-sided lad who grew into the many-sided literary genius.

One of Jefferies’ biographers says that *The Story of a Boy* would be an ideal boy’s story, if it were not three volumes long. Now, I have read it to an average boy of eight years, and his interest was a joy to see. Only twice came the order, — “O, skip that! That isn’t anything!” at bits of description that blocked the story too seriously; and the long passage about Bevis’s Zodiac, telling how he learned to place the constellations by the familiar trees of the home-horizon was quite beyond his understanding.

First, the boys try to walk around the little lake, very naturally getting mixed up among the reedy tangle at the Burderop end, and swinging off over Burderop Hill to the gamekeeper’s. Then they enlist the other boys of the hamlet and have a grand battle in the great field on the southern bank towards Day House Farm. They learn to swim and to sail a boat. They dig out and provision a cave on the island, and

[9] It is more likely that “Mark” was based mainly on Richard’s cousin, James Cox, as well as his brother Harry. See *Nearly Out of Heart and Hope* by Miles Fairburn (Auckland University Press, 1995).

live there for a number of days, naughtily telling the folks at home that they are going to visit "Big Jack" who lives in one of the down hamlets, probably Badbury. For fear it may be discovered that they are not at Jack's, little Charlie, their trusted ally, is to stand on the opposite bank under the sycamores every day at four, and wave a handkerchief, if all is well; his hat, in case of trouble. You should know this is a tropical island they inhabit. "Mind you don't step on a crocodile," said Mark "you can't see a bit", as they make their way through the sedges at the water's edge. Rabbits are *kangaroos*; wood pigeons, *parrots*; willow trees, *blue gums*; oaks, *teak trees*; wild parsnip or "gix" is "a new kind of bamboo". When they think it is about four o'clock they watch by the sundial they have made for the appearance of Charlie on that far, far-off bank of some land in the north temperate zone.

> Charlie was not on the hill, or, if so, he was behind a sycamore, out of sight; but they knew he had not yet made the signal, because the herd of cows was down by the hollow oak, some standing in the water ——
>
> "The buffaloes are moving," said Mark. "They are going up the hill." [Ch.XXXIV]

The old sand-quarry under the sycamores, scored with holes of rabbits and sand martins is very important in this book and what boy of any age from six to sixty but would revel in the good swims Bevis and Mark enjoyed in "Fir Tree Gulf" where those grand old trees to-day repeat themselves in calm summer weather:

> A kingfisher shot out from the mouth of the Nile opposite, and crossed aslant the gulf, whistling as he flew.
>
> "Look!" said Mark. "Don't you know that's a sign. Savages read signs, and those birds mean that there are heaps of fish."
>
> "Yes, but we ought to have a proper language."
>
> "Kalabala-blong!" said Mark.
>
> "Hududu-blow-fluz!" replied Bevis, taking a header from the top of the rail on which he had been sitting, and on which he just contrived to balance himself a moment without falling backwards.
>
> "Umplumum!" he shouted, coming up again.
>
> "Ikiklikah," and Mark disappeared.
>
> "Noklikah," said Bevis, giving him a shove under as he came up to breathe.
>
> "That's not fair," said Mark, scrambling up.
>
> Bevis was swimming, and Mark seized his feet. More splashing and shouting, and the rocks resounded. The echo of their voices returned from the quarry and the high bank under the firs.
>
> They raced presently down to the elms along the sweet soft turf, sprinkling the dry grass with the drops from their limbs, and the sunlight shone on their white shoulders. The wind blew and stroked their gleaming backs. They rolled and tumbled on the grass, and the earth was under them. From the water to the sun and the wind and the grass.
>
> They played round the huge sycamore trunks above the quarry, and the

massive boughs stretched over – from a distance they would have seemed mere specks beneath the immense trees. They raced across to a round hollow in the field and sat down at the bottom, so that they could see nothing but the sky overhead, and the clouds drifting. They lay at full length, and for a moment were still and silent; the sunbeam and the wind, the soft touch of the grass, the gliding cloud, the eye-loved blue gave them the delicious sense of growing strong in drowsy luxury. [Ch.X]

The sandmartins' holes in the quarry are a source of endless interest to them. Once they make a magic writing, the meaning of which Bevis says they are not to know until they "discover" it.

They started for the bathing-place and carefully deposited the roll in a sand-martin's hole some way up the face of the quarry, covering it with sand. To know the spot again, they counted and found it was the third burrow to the right, if you stood by the stone-heap and looked straight towards the first sycamore-tree. [Ch.XII]

Again, on another day, we have this interesting confabulation:

"What's in those holes?" said Mark, pointing to some large rabbit-burrows on the right side of the quarry.

"Mummies," said Bevis. "You may be sure there are mummies there, and very likely magic writings in their hands. I wish we could get a magic writing. Then we could do anything, and we could know all the secrets."

"What secrets?"

"Why, all these things have secrets."

"All?"

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

"And these?" said Mark, picking up a shell.

"Yes, once; but can't you see it is dead, and the secret, of course, is gone. If we had a magic writing."

"Let's buy a book," said Mark.

"They are not books; they are rolls, and you unroll them very slowly, and see curious things, pictures that move over the paper ..."

Boom!

They started. Mark lifted his spear, Bevis his bow. A deep, low, and slow sound, like thunder, toned from its many mutterings to a mighty sob, filled their ears for a moment. It might have been a very distant thunder, or a cannon in the forts far away. It was one of those mysterious sounds that are heard in summer when the sky is clear and the wind soft, and the midsummer hum is loud. They listened, but it did not come again.

"What was that?" said Mark at last.

"I don't know; of course it was something magic."

"Perhaps they don't like us coming into these magic places," said Mark. "Perhaps it is to tell us to go away. No doubt Pan is eaten."

"I shall not go away," said Bevis, as the boom did not come again. "I shall fight first;" and he fitted his arrow to the string. "What's that!" and in his start he let the arrow fly down among the thistles.

It was Pan looking down upon them from the edge above, where he had been waiting ever since they first called him, and wondering why they did not see him.

Bevis, chancing to glance up defiantly as he fitted his arrow to shoot the genie of the boom, had caught sight of the spaniel's face peering over the edge. Angry with Pan for making him start, Bevis picked up a stone and flung it at him, but the spaniel slipped back and escaped it.

"Fetch my arrow," said Bevis, stamping his foot.

Mark went down and got it. As he came up the sandy slope he looked back.

"There's a canoe," he said.

"So it is."

A long way off there was a black mark as it were among the glittering wavelets of the Golden Sea. They could not see it properly for the dazzling gleam.

"The cannibals have seen us," said Mark. "They can see miles. We shall be gnawn. Let's run out of sight before they come too near." [Ch.V]

I cannot refrain from quoting one more short passage from *Bevis*. It is the night before the "battle" on the Reservoir bank, and, although the heat lightning is playing about the sky in an alarming manner, two boys have plucked up enough courage to come to the farmhouse for the wooden swords, though they are glad to have brave Bevis and Mark accompany them home again. The weird spectacle of the waters of the "New Sea" under the lightning is almost too much even for Bevis.

"O, look!" they all said at once.

All the broad, still water, smooth as glass, shone and gleamed, reflecting back the bright light above; and far away they saw the wood[10] as plain as at noontide".

"It is awful!" said, Mark.

"It is nothing," said Bevis. "I like it." The continued crackling of the thunder just than deepened, and a boom came rolling down the level water from the needed hill. Bevis frowned, and held his lips tight together. He was startled, but would not show it. [Ch.XV]

There is a dead oak standing just in the water near the rabbit-warren called "Jefferies' Oak", and when one asks why, the answer will be, "Because he used to play there." The hatch where "we used to sit in danger of our lives, happy as kings"[11] — he and Harry — has given place to a modern arrangement, and it is quite true that "there is no music now" there, though down in the field the brook still flows among its polled willows. At the site of the old hatch the embankment leads to the corner of Day House Field to the right, and through a gap in the hawthorns can be seen, only a little way off where the hidden road runs, Coate Farm, with its rickyard under tall elms.

The sight of Coate Farm recalls how Bevis and Mark visited the pantry there for provisions to last them through their wonderful expedition around the "New Sea". Though *Bevis* is more full of the

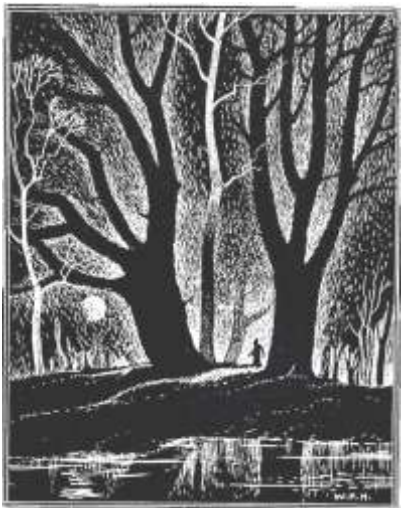
[10] Kate Tryon identifies the wood as Burderop Wood.

[11] Quote from "My Old Village."

Reservoir than *The Dewy Morn* it is a very important piece of background for the beautiful heroine in that romance. For we cannot help thinking that Felise's home stood in place of the water-bailiff's cottage, and her bathing-house just where there is a bathing-house to-day. To be sure the small, damp garden under the Reservoir bank is not so stately as that of Felise's uncle, and there is no sun-dial and no filbert-walk. These may have been borrowed from the old mansion, once a boys' school, which used to stand near the down-village of Bishopstone, and which impressed Jefferies so much that he has twice described it, once in an essay by itself called "A Forgotten Race" and once in *Wild Life in a Southern County*. But, if we will have Felise at Coate filbert-walks and sun-dials are as fanciful as her Roman bathing-tunic and the string of pearls with which she used to deck herself for her morning plunge.

There are summer twilights when Coate Reservoir seems wholly worthy of romance, and never more so than when the full June moon has just swung clear of Liddington Hill, dropping a rosy bar from shore to shore into the violet water, while

The mavis mild wi' mony a jote
Lulls drowsy day to rest.



VI

TO THE DOWNS

To the Jefferies-lover coming into his country there is little rest before striking out for Liddington Castle. Later on it appears that the most direct way is by the railway-track into Chiseldon, and even from that village it seems a surprising distance across the plateau at its back to the base of "the most commanding down". But, as it is in England a serious transgression to walk on "the line", the King's highway must suffice, helped out by lanes and footpaths which the stranger gradually comes to know.

It was late on Sunday afternoon that I set out for my first pilgrimage to the downs. Warm weather had sent an invading force from Swindon, some afoot, some on bicycles. Pleasure-boats dotted the Reservoir. Lovers strolled hand in hand. Children collected daisies, lady's smocks, meadow orchis and purple hyacinths — the latter a surprise to one who had not yet walked Burderop-way. Every cottage door in the hamlet of Coate was thrown open, and in dusky interiors that Jefferies himself must have known, old ladies might be seen enjoying their tea.

I mentioned the chronicler of Coate to an old fellow who remembered him. The aged native speaks a dialect impossible for a stranger to understand, but this man had a younger wife who interpreted for him. She herself was a comparatively recent comer at Coate. The gist of the matter was the folks did not consider Richard Jefferies quite right in the head. They were surprised when Andrew Baden's daughter took up with him. He used to go up on the hill and lie down for hours, and so forth.

"Well," I could not help rejoining at this, "you see that it made him famous, don't you? — so that his name is known across the seas, while the rest of you, who have minded your business so properly, will be clean forgotten after you are gone."

Some of the little garden-plants are lovely now, though when the gilly-flowers, forget-me-nots and primroses are past, and roses and elder-bloom of June, there will be little but dusty leafage. A second inn, "The Spotted Cow", looks as though its day were past. The sign "S.Theobald, practical thatcher" at a cottage where the roads divide attracts the eye, but after that we are glad to be with field and sky again — with whitethroats that chatter ahead of us and drop headlong

into the hedgetop and yellow-hammers saying every now and then their "Little-bit-o'-bread and no cheese!"

The sky this afternoon is the very kind to give impressiveness to wide open country. Brazen thunder-heads such as are seldom seen but long remembered tower aslant at the horizon, their deep violet tones by contrast making the lighted parts gleam with fiery radiance, although the sun has not begun to lower much. We are nearing the world of sheep-bells, and larks, that world to some minds most peaceful and inspiring, to others too maddeningly lonely for one to think of approaching it without company. After the last shepherd driving his flock there is not a human being to be seen. Looking back and to the left as far as one can see into the thunderous haze, the fields are lined with hedgerows and elms, rank on rank, farther and farther away, until they become blurred shapes in lavender.

Far up the height ahead on our left, old Wanborough Church into whose belfry-tower, dated 1435, we go when we read *Wild Life in a Southern County* — is perched among its elms. The other road back there would have led to it, and thence on over the hill to where, only a few miles away, stands White Horse Hill, over-looking The Vale of the White Horse, which Thomas Hughes describes in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. This is not only the land of King Alfred's victory over the Danes at Aescdun in 871, but his birthplace at Wantage is not far away. Nor is this all. Those who have Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* fresh in mind may suppose it not unlikely that the Earl of Leicester, thinking of Amy Robsart, often galloped here on horseback. Wayland Smith's forge of *Kenilworth* fame is just beyond our present horizon, and some day we will tramp to it, as Jefferies used to do. Indeed, Jefferies in his novel *Greene Ferne Farm* — which well deserves to live, if but for the rustics' talk it contains — could, not resist the temptation to lose his hero and heroine on the downs at night and make them stay until dawn at this weird tomb of prehistoric times. But no hint of these associations now stirs the brain. It will be months before we find them out, for landscape is mute on the subject of history, and so is the Wiltshire yeoman.

After passing much more wayside hedge by which the first lace-like discs of rough chevril, and sometimes pink campion, stitchwort, forget-me-not and white, or dumb, nettle bloom, we come to a cluster of most interesting old cottages. The settlement seems too small to need a name, but is, in fact, Badbury, whose manor in 955 King Edred gave to St. Dunstan, the Abbot of Glastonbury and which some enthusiastic students, readers of the tales of Nennius the ancient British historian, connect with King Arthur, fancying our Liddington

Hill to be Badon Hill where, in the year 520 this half-mythical hero is said to have won a battle over the Saxons.

Liddington Hill, lost for some time in the course of the road's gradual ascent, now looms in the background, still strangely distant, beyond a plateau lined off with corn-fields. It is very still, save when a lark begins to soar near by, singing sharply, until aerial distance has changed the song to a rippling cascade. A few pewits or lapwings are feeding among the springing grain. They cry occasionally, but only when their showy wings of seeming black and white twinkle in brief flights.

And now the road enters an important highway, none other than that Roman road called the Ridgeway, locally "the Rudge", mentioned also in *Tom Brown*. It follows the length of Liddington Hill, drawing nearer to its base, and disappears at the foot of the sloping skyline, whose summit bears the beech-clump locally called "the Folly" — a landmark to all the country round. The road at the farther end of Liddington Hill joins the road which goes on to Aldbourne.

Liddington Hill has another landmark which, like the beech-clump, may be seen afar. There is a cart-track straggling towards the beech-clump, while on the opposite end a broken hawthorn-hedge — the one so loved by the birds in *Wild Life* — mounts towards the "Castle". A third detail in the marking of Jefferies' down is a chalk-pit on its side. At a distance, unless in clear atmosphere or when a high sun lights the slope, beech-clump and hawthorn-hedge may disappear, but the chalk-pit is usually in sight, even when cloud or haze paints the down's smooth shape in purple or grey; while, at certain sunsets from Coate Reservoir I have often seen it gleaming with rosy fire.

We are abreast of this chalk-pit now, and insignificant enough it is — a mere nick in the velvety garment that clothes the hill. The dominant thunderhead of the afternoon has now rolled into the northeast, and seems bent on climbing the down ahead of us. It is terrific in grandeur, and, alone in its company, awe creeps into the soul, and something besides physical exertion makes the heart beat chokingly as we begin the skyward ascent.

After a little we turn and look back towards Coate, remembering the happy human beings we left there two hours ago. But Coate is gone — blotted from the sea of fields and hedgerow-elms barely defined in the thunderous haze. The down's footplain, with its curious checkerboard of pinkish soil and filmy green wheat, is the only thing in the landscape near enough to look real. There faintly the pewits cry, and over it larks sing without ceasing.

The turf, which appeared so smooth from below, is much dotted with small mounds, half earth, half broken chalk — the work of moles. Sulphur-tinted cowslips grow here and there, or pinky-lilac cuckoo-flowers. Both are more diminutive than in the plain appearing with shorter and shorter stems the higher they climb, until their petals scarcely overtop the grass. Cowslip and cuckoo-flower have here a new look, a more appealing charm, growing here on the steep downside; but when we note the snail-shells, the earnest Mind that has haunted us all the way and must ever haunt its Holy-of-Holies, Liddington Hill, breaks into utterance of some of its most memorable and exquisitely-expressed thoughts:–

> Every step crumbled up numbers of minute grey shells, empty and dry, that crunched under foot like hoar-frost or like fragile beads. They were very pretty; it was a shame to crush them — such vases as no king's pottery could make. They lay by millions in the depth of the sward, and I thought as I broke them unwillingly that each of these had once been a house of life. A living creature dwelt in each and felt the joy of existence and was to itself all in all — as if the great sun over the hill shone for it, and the width of the earth under was for it, and the grass and plants put on purpose for it. They were dead, the whole race of them, and these their skeletons were as dust under my feet. Nature sets no value upon life, neither of minute hill-snail nor of human being.
>
> I thought myself so much to the earliest leaf and the first meadow orchis — so important that I should note the first zee-zee of the titlark — that I should pronounce it summer because now the oaks were green; I must not miss a day nor an hour in the fields lest something should escape me. How beautiful the droop of the great brome-grass by the wood! But to-day I have to listen to the lark's song, not out of doors with him, but through the window-pane, and the bullfinch carries the rootlet-fibre to his nest without me. They manage without me very well; they know their times and seasons — not only the civilised rooks, with their libraries of knowledge in their old nests of reference, but the stray things of the hedge and the chiffchaff from over sea in the ash wood. They go on without me. Orchis-flower and cowslip — I cannot number them all — I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet — flower and bud and the beautiful clouds that go over, with the sweet rush of rain and burst of sun glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill. Nature sets no value upon life, neither of mine nor of the larks that sang years ago. The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing to the earth: it is bitter to know this before you are dead. These delicious violets are sweet for themselves; they were not shaped and coloured and gifted with that exquisite proportion and adjustment of odour and hue for me. High up against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife.
>
> Now this to me speaks as the roll of thunder that cannot be denied — you must hear it; and how can you shut your ears to what this lark sings, this violet tells, this little grey shell writes in the curl of its spire? The bitter truth that human life is no more to the universe than that of the unnoticed hill-snail in the grass ... We must look to ourselves to help ourselves. We must think ourselves into an earthly immortality. By day and by night, by years and by centuries, still striving, studying, searching to find that which shall enable us to live a fuller life upon the earth — to have a wider grasp upon its violets and loveliness, a deeper draught of the

> sweet-briar wind. Because my heart beats feebly today, my trickling pulse scarcely notating the passage of time, so much the more do I hope that those to come in future years may see wider and enjoy fuller than I have done; and so much the more gladly would I do all I can to enlarge the life that shall be then. There is no hope on the old lines — they are dead, like the empty shells; from the sweet, delicious violets think out fresh petals of thought and colour, as it were, of soul.[12]

While it is true, as Mr. Edward Thomas remarks, that human writing seldom comes so near to a sob as these words which the dying Jefferies dictated to his wife, they are not all pathos. The passionate joy in the unspeakable privilege of existence expressed in his work as a whole is not dead. This is quite the same impulse which made him cry "O beautiful human life! Tears come into my eyes as I think of it."[13] — Only the joy is no longer personal, but for humanity:

> There is so much for us yet to come, so much to be gathered, and enjoyed. Not for you or me now, but for our race, who will ultimately use this magical secret for their happiness. Earth holds secrets enough to give them the life of the fabled Immortals. My heart is fixed firm and stable in the belief that ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory.[14]

What joyful satisfaction should not belong to one who, in a brief lifetime — as brief as was ever allotted to man of genius — has done more than anyone before or since to unseal blind eyes and deaf ears?

But we have climbed to the fosse, descended its awesome depth, and climbed again straight up to the sky-edge of the rampart.

The molten sun is just entering the horizon-haze beneath which, in dim blue shapes of fields and hedgerow elms, as of a far-off dream-world, Coate Farm lies hidden.

To say of the panorama of that Wiltshire country as seen from the famous old British earthwork at May sunset that it is sublime is simply — useless. In the lifetime of each individual there is one scene, at one moment, blended with one emotion, that renders it supreme. That red sun setting on the Wiltshire plain — "the great sun" of *The Story of My Heart* which has beheld absolutely everything since time began — and no one ever found words to express this as did the Mind that pondered here — this sunset in the land of England's great prose -poet brings to mind another sunset seen in far-away Concord by America's poet-naturalist one November day some sixty years ago:—

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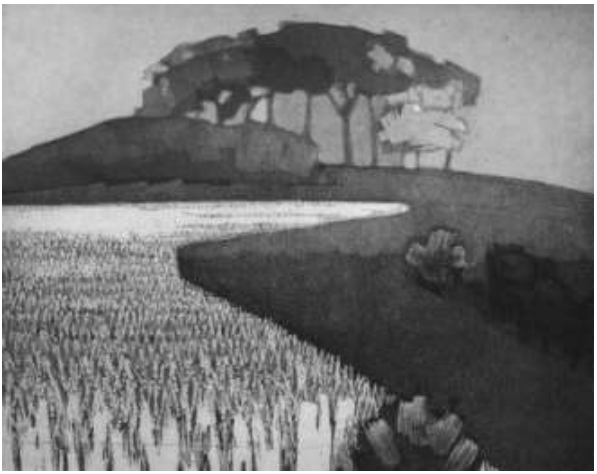
[12] "The Hours of Spring."
[13] *The Story of My Heart,* Ch.VII.
[14] "The Pageant of Summer."

> I was walking in a meadow, the source of a small brook, when the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold gray day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest, brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and on the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon and on the leaves of the scrub-oaks on the hillside, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow eastward as if we were the only motes in his beams. It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before, and the air also was so warm and serene that nothing was wanting to make a paradise of that meadow. When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever, an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still.[15]

Is not this a most touching parallel to the sentiment just quoted from Jefferies? Whatever of neglect and lack of appreciation may have been shown Jefferies and Thoreau in their lifetimes, however cold and shut up within themselves they may have seemed, theirs was not mere selfish sensual enjoyment of Nature. They were working for men and women to whom Nature shall be a legacy more and more prized as time goes on. Hear Thoreau's own words:—

> I would secrete pearls with the shellfish and lay up honey with the bees for them. I will sift the sunbeams for the public good.[16]



[15] From "Walking," an essay by Henry David Thoreau, 1861.

[16] *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau* in 14 volumes. This quote is taken from his entry for March 26, 1842 reproduced in volume 1.

VII

THE FIELD-PATH TO SWINDON

The foot-path from Coate to Swindon, across nine large, and even rising fields, besides escaping the white dust of the highway, shortens the distance very much; and, what is more important still, gives one a better chance to think and dream and to be with the birds and wild flowers. The natives are now pretty well agreed in calling it "Jefferies' path", because this was his way to and from his work on the newspaper; and by it came several hundred pilgrims on June 10th, 1911, to celebrate a "Jefferies Festival" at Coate Farm.

Turn into the lane by the Job Brown cottage, and where cattle browse under elms of striking individuality, the path begins. Oaks are few in the Coate fields of to-day, and this fact brings to mind the lament for the oaks in "My Old Village":——

> I think I have heard that the oaks are down. They may be standing or down, it matters nothing to me; the leaves I last saw upon them are gone for evermore, nor shall I ever see them come there again ruddy in spring. I would not see them again even if I could; they could never look again as they used to do. There are too many memories there. The happiest days become the saddest afterwards; let us never go back, lest we too die. There are no such oaks anywhere else, none so tall and straight, and with such massive heads, on which the sun used to shine as if on the globe of the earth, one side in shadow, the other in bright light. How often I have looked at oaks since, and yet have never been able to get the same effect from them! Like an old author printed in another type, the words are the same, but the sentiment is different.

When we come in sight of the last stile which leads into the elevated pasture bordering Swindon and the park of the Goddard estate, some hedgerow trees of dense foliage and rounded shape might be cousins to those whose disappearance was regretted by Jefferies. In the sloping path under these trees a number of slippery brown boulders — sarsen stones — lie embedded in the earth, helping the reader of "Ancient Swindon"[17] to identify this field as "Brudhill", called by some "Blood Hill" — a safe enough name for any field hereabouts, when one thinks of the savage days of Celtic, British, Danish and Saxon warfare, and knows that this land of North Wilts was populous in ancient times.

[17] *Jefferies' Land: A History of Swindon and its Environs* by Richard Jefferies with notes by Grace Toplis. "Ancient Swindon" constitutes Ch.I of the book, published posthumously in 1896.

We reach the brow of the hill and come in sight of the lantern tower of the Corn Exchange, rising above mossy, tiled roofs, with the old Italian mansion of the Goddards, high-embowered among its trees. But first, before considering these things, we are impelled to turn backward, and have a look at the downs — Liddington Hill with its white scar of the chalk-pit, its beech-clump and the expressive skyline of the entrenchment. Farther round to the left, but for the foreground trees, we could see White Horse Hill itself. Neither Coate nor its Reservoir is visible.

Now, turning towards the town: in this grassy hollow which forms the foreground of the picture of the Goddard mansion rising among its trees was once a pond and the mill of Jefferies' grandfather, alias Grandfather Iden in *Amaryllis*. The student of Jefferies might well wish that time had spared these relics together with the ancient Holyrood Church, whose lone chancel is here hidden in the same foliage that parts to reveal the old manor-house. The Church, which came down in Jefferies' day, had been the scene of his christening, although his marriage took place in the Church of his proper parish — at Chiseldon, yonder beneath his dear Liddington Hill.

"Where's the Church?" asks old Abner in *The Dewy Morn.* "Be he gone, then?" [Ch.XXXII]

> Many a painter had come to look at and sketch the ancient building. Therein reposed the entire history of Maasbury town. The births, the marriages, the deaths of six hundred years were enclosed in it like a casket. All the associations of the old families of the town were bound up in it. [Ch.XXXII]

Amaryllis, going to Grandfather Iden's to dinner on Fair Day (she hated the Fair itself) had not accepted her rustic admirer's invitation to ride in his trap. In vain Farmer Iden tries to comfort the would-be beau with the assurance that he will overtake and pick her up on the road. John Duck knows better. "Her wull go across the fields", says John Duck. "Shan't see her."

The Fair was held in the Square by the Corn Exchange.[18]

> Amaryllis knew the path perfectly, but if she had not, the tom-tomming of the drums and blowing of brass, audible two miles away, would have guided her safely to the fair. The noise became prodigious as she approached—the ceaseless tomtom, the beating of drums and gongs outside the show vans, the shouting of the showmen, the roar of a great crowd, the booing of cattle, the baaing of sheep, the neighing of horses — altogether the — "rucket" was tremendous.

[18] Kate Tryon adds a quote here: "Thomas Goddard, Esq. obtained a charter to hold a weekly market and two fairs yearly in 1627, which said markets and fairs have been duly observed since in the Square, Swindon." "Ancient Swindon", Richard Jefferies.

She looked back from the hill close to the town and saw the people hurrying in from every quarter—there was a string of them following the path she had come, and others getting over distant stiles. A shower had fallen in the night, but the ceaseless wheels had ground up the dust again, and the lines of the various roads were distinctly marked by the clouds hanging above them. [Ch.X][19]

After dinner old Iden, ex-miller and baker, takes his granddaughter out for a walk — a queer couple, ninety and sixteen. It is not clear where Jefferies has placed the old miller's dwelling, but apparently not near the millpond, or the two wayfarers would not have been obliged to push through the holiday crowd to have reached the grounds of the Pamment mansion, which Iden was bent on showing to the young girl, as, by special favour, he held a private key to the gate.

Iden turned down a passage near the end of the street, and in an instant the roar of the crowd which had boomed all round them was shut off by high walls up which it rose and hummed over their heads in the air. They walked on broad stone flags notched here and there at the edges, for the rest worn smooth by footsteps (the grave drives such a trade) like Iden's doorstep, they were in fact tomb-stones, and the walled passage brought them to the porch of the Abbey church ... Thence he took her to an arched door, nail-studded, in the passage wall, and giving her the key, told her to open it, and stood watching her in triumph, as if it had been the door to some immense treasury ... she guessed they were entering the lawns in front of the Hon. Raleigh Pamment's mansion. He was the largest owner of town and country; the streets, the market-place, the open spaces, in which the fair was being held, belonged to him; so did most of the farms and hamlets out of which the people had come ... To her the Pamments were the incarnation of everything detestable, of oppression, obstruction, and mediæval darkness ... [Ch.XIV]

We need not suppose that there is anything in common between the Pamment tories depicted by Jefferies and the Goddards, whose family history he wrote, as a young man. Only it was not easy for his fancy to play about his imaginary people until he had first set their feet on ground familiar to himself; and it is certainly very interesting to stand on the Goddards' velvety lawn — "three centuries of mowing had made it as smooth as the top of his own [old Iden's] head, where the years had mown away merrily" [Ch.XV], to gaze at the long windows of the Goddard house, and remember how the profligate young Pamment spied the odd couple from the library, and sent the butler to call them in, thinking rare sport was in store. If Jefferies had been as good a story-teller as he was a painter of scenes and of characters — I mean such characters as he knew — what a novel we should have had in *Amaryllis at the Fair*! A capital group of people, in the most interesting situations and environment, and nothing is lacking but — the story. Still, as it is, I must honestly declare that I for one found the book in

[19] Kate Tryon adds: [The roads themselves are hidden in this view – author.]

every line and page, one of the most fascinating I have ever read. Whether or not this would have been the case if I had read it before visiting Coate, I cannot tell.

The Goddard grounds are enclosed on the town side, but towards the north offer a free prospect of an infinite dead-level of fields, with hedgerows and elms stretching to the wide horizon. Here a knowing eye might trace the old Wilts and Berks Canal in its course northward out of Swindon into the country of Tom Brown's birth. But although the scene, when first glimpsed through the trees of "The Lawn" is impressive, its monotony soon causes it to pall. Evidently this stretch of Thamesward country made no appeal to Jefferies, for he is silent regarding it. His land lay southerly, under the fuller influence of the sun.

Jefferies, in his "Ancient Swindon", rejects Aubrey's explanation of the name of Swindon as coming from "Swine's Down", for, the place being called Swindon so very far back, it is more likely to have come from Sweyn or Swend, King of Denmark, who in 1013 gained ascendency over the country and undoubtedly spent much of his time in this part of England, "hence it is conjectured that Swindon means no more than Sweyn's-down, don, dune or hill — the Hill of Sweyn. Dune, now usually pronounced don, was a Saxon word for hill and survives in *down* of which there is a sufficiency in the neighbourhood."

If there could have been a Jefferies half-way back along the course of Swindon's eight hundred years of existence, there would have been a living picture on the page of its history instead of the barren record of descent of some of its landed property. But instead of a Jefferies in early English history, we have to be content with a few monks, and as the nearest one of these ecclesiastical worthies was William of Malmesbury (whose story our busy young writer also prepared) Swindon cuts no figure in England's ancient history.

In the days of Edward the Confessor, 1042-1066, a favorite nobleman named Earl William owned part of Swindon, and, when Domesday Book was made by command of William the Conqueror, 1082-1086, we find that Swindon had been given to five Norman nobles, among whom was Odin, the King's chamberlain, and the infamous Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, who plundered Durham Cathedral, and, setting sail to make mischief at Rome, was seized off the Isle of Wight by King William himself, and imprisoned. Sometime after Domesday Book, different parts of Swindon are designated as Haute, High, or Over Swindon, Nether Swindon and Even Swindon. Henry III (1207-1272) gave the Manor of High Swindon, corresponding to this modern property of the Goddards, to his half-brother, William de

Valence, the Earl of Pembroke of Goderich Castle whose son, Aylmer de Valence, will be familiar to readers of Scott's historical works. Aylmer de Valence's widow, who held High Swindon in 1377, was known as Countess of Pembroke, and founded Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. Finally, in 1650, Thomas Goddard, whose family had long been prominent land-holders in the vicinity, purchased the estate, and to the Goddards it belongs to-day.

In the days of Charles II, after the Civil War, Aubrey, the old historian of Wiltshire, visited Swindon, singling out for notice such facts as pleased him, whether or not they were calculated to be of value to future generations: — The "lome" is of "a darke haire colour". The poor people use cow-manure mixed with straw, and dried, for fuel. Every week on "Munday" there is a Gallant Market for Cattle. There is a famous quarry "discovered thirty years agon" (1642) and the excellent "paveing stone", whiter than Purbeck, they send to London. There is a ten-foot Sarsen stone standing in a pasture at Brome, west of the town, and a line of many stones below it, which he takes to be "the remaynder of a Druidish temple." Of course he is much interested in the tombstones in Holyrood Church — at present stored away in the remaining chancel or forming the aisle now open to wind and weather, running up to the chancel-door, between the ivy-loaded arches — all that remains of the nave of Holyrood Church, whose original foundation was dedicated as early as 1302 to Saint Mary the Virgin.

It was on a June afternoon that I first entered this ancient enclosure sacred to the past, and found arches, tablets, tombs and gravestones simply overwhelmed with the year's fresh growth of ivy and tall grass. The ivy is not that dark kind with grey-veined leaf, but that which bears more luxuriant foliage which, when young, is of a light oily green, so that I had to look for the beautiful old arches forming the core of these huge bushy shapes. The aisle of gravestones between is well-sprinkled with broken snail-shells, showing that "the wise thrush" has here his banqueting-hall.

Jefferies' words of description are especially significant today:

> Look at the rank, tall grass, damp even at noonday; its roots are nourished by that which once gaily trod the grass of its day under foot. Look at the dark green moss upon the tomb-stones — shortly it will fill up and hide the last memorial of those who lie beneath; others there are which have sunk out of sight in the same earth which received those they were intended to commemorate — such is the end of man. [*Jefferies Land,* Ch.II]

But, even while the young man penned this moral, was he not resolving that he himself should not be vanquished by jealous moss and crumbling stone? Verily there is a way. And, as Gilbert White of Selborne found it, so did he.

VIII

THE GAMEKEEPER AT HOME[20]

The keeper's cottage stands in a sheltered "coombe," or narrow hollow of the woodlands, overshadowed by a mighty Spanish chestnut, bare now of leaves, but in summer a noble tree. The ash wood covers the slope at the rear; on one side is a garden, and on the other a long strip of meadow with elms. In front, and somewhat lower, a streamlet winds, fringing the sward, and across it the fir plantations begin, their dark sombre foliage hanging over the water. [Ch.I]

Fresh air, exercise, frugal food and drink, the odour of the earth and the trees — these have given him, as he nears his sixtieth year, the strength and vitality of early manhood. [Ch.I]

"It's indoors, sir, as kills half the people; being indoors three parts of the day, and next to that, taking too much food and vittals. Eating's as bad as drinking; and there ain't nothing like fresh air and the smell of the woods. You should come out here in the spring, when the oak timber is throwed (because you see, the sap be rising and the bark strips then), and just sit down on a stick fresh peeled — I means a trunk you know — and sniff up the scent of that there oak bark. It goes right down your throat, and preserves your lungs as the tan do leather. And I've heard say as folk who work in the tan-yards never have no illness. There's always a smell from trees dead or living — I could tell what wood a log was in the dark by my nose; and the air is better where the woods be. The ladies up in the great house sometime goes out into the fir plantations — the turpentine scents strong, you see — and they say it's good for the chest; but bless you, you must live in it. People go abroad, I'm told, to live in the pine forests to cure 'em. I say these here oaks have got every bit as much good in that way. I never eat but two meals a day — breakfast and supper; what you would call dinner — and maybe in the middle of the day a hunch of dry bread and an apple. I take a deal for breakfast and I'm rather lear (hungry) at supper; but you may lay your oath that's why I'm what I am in the way of health. People stuffs theirselves, and by consequence it breaks out, you see. It's the same with cattle; they're overfed, tied up in stalls and stuffed, and never no exercise ... that's the real cause of these here rinderpests and pleuro-pneumonia and what-nots. At least that's my notion. I'm in the woods all day, and never comes home till supper —'cept, of course, in breeding-time to fetch the meal and stuff for the birds — so I gets the fresh air, you see; and the fresh air is the life, sir. There's the smell of the earth too — 'specially just as the plough turns it up — which is a fine thing; and the hedges and the grass are as sweet as sugar after a shower. Anything with a green leaf is the thing, depend upon it, if you want to live healthy ... when I drinks, I drinks ale: but most in general I drinks no strong liquor. Great coat! — Cold weather! — I never put no great coat on this thirty year. These here woods be as good as a topcoat in cold weather. Come off the open field with the east wind cutting into you, and get inside they firs, and you'll feel warm, in a minute." [Ch.I]

[20] This chapter was untitled in the manuscript.

Preeminent for interest in Jefferies-Land are the downs; and perhaps next them comes Burderop. It seems an odd name. Aubrey has it Burthorp, and probably that is nearer what it was in the days when the Danes were a power in the land. Thorp is the Danish word for village. Not much of a village is there to-day, however, save for five or six cottages at Hodson Bottom on the southern border of the Burderop estate, one of which is the famous gamekeeper's cottage.

Burderop shows itself from the fields by Coate Reservoir as a wooded rise setting back from the low, sedge-fringed meadows at the farther end of the mere. The great rounded shapes or some magnificent old beeches in the park make a notable skyline, and the whole hill is quick to clothe itself in most ravishing blues of atmosphere and to frown and smile with passing cloud and sunshine — both equally entrancing.

You may go ashore from a boat under Burderop — if you have a boatman who knows how and where to push through the acres of sedge to terra firma. These low fields belong to Nightingale Farm, but do not mistake the square brick house, with its rick near at hand for the farmhouse. The place has pleasant vegetable-gardens behind towards the water, and flower-plots in front towards the road. But it is a modern English tenement, gone astray in the fields.

We ignore the road, aiming for a white foot-path that climbs steeply through the upland copse, as soon as it has crossed the road, the field and the railway. Here was undoubtedly Jefferies' "ash wood" of *Wild Life in a Southern County* — that lovely spot where the nightingale sang and the bluebells grew, as they do today, although the nightingale pitches his camp a step farther down, where the water "backs in" behind the road. I am sure the place is identical with that where Jefferies heard him, for this ash wood then extended in that direction quite to the nightingale-haunt of today. Only lately have the trees been cleared up over the hillside on the other hand, that is, to the left. There among the stumps, the bluebells now grow thickest of all.

> In the spring the ground here is hidden by a verdant growth, out of which presently the anemone lifts its chaste flower. Then the wild hyacinths hang their blue bells so thickly that, glancing between the poles, it is hazy with colour; and in the evening, if the level beams of the red sun can reach them, here and there a streak of imperial purple plays upon the azure ... On the upper and clearer branches of the hawthorn the nightingale sings — more sweetly, I think, in the freshness of the spring morning than at night. Resting quietly on an ash-stole, with the scent of flowers and the odour of green buds and leaves, a ray of sunlight yonder lighting up the lichen and the moss on the oak trunk, a gentle air stirring in the branches above, giving glimpses of fleecy clouds sailing in the ether, there comes into the mind a feeling of intense joy in the simple fact of living. [Ch.XII]

Here almost for the first, if not the first time in any of the early writings, does Jefferies try to give any hint of the ecstasy he must, long ere this, have felt in Nature. The antiquarian, the romancer, the student of things agricultural, the sportsman, the naturalist have all been revealed. Only here and there does he begin to show himself in his true and highest character — the Poet of Nature. He is getting ready to write his most famous essay, "The Pageant of Summer", in which he wins all our hearts by confessing the whole truth about the matter:

> I cannot leave it; I must stay under the old tree in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs; the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning. Feeling with them, I receive some, at least, of their fulness of life. Never could I have enough; never stay long enough – whether here or whether lying on the shorter sward under the sweeping and graceful birches, or on the thyme-scented hills. Hour after hour, and still not enough. Or walking the footpath was never long enough, or my strength sufficient to endure till the mind was weary. The exceeding beauty of the earth, in her splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal. The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live, so that the longer we can stay among these things so much the more is snatched from inevitable Time … These are the only hours that are not wasted – these hours that absorb the soul and fill it with beauty. This is real life, and all else is illusion, or mere endurance … To be beautiful and to be calm, without mental fear, is the ideal of nature. If I cannot achieve it, at least I can think it.

This hillside wood, lately so divested of its timber that most of it would more accurately be called copse, is a favorite haunt of the silvery-voiced willow wren, and I shall always remember the place as sweet with hyacinths in May and with the climbing wild honeysuckle in June. The springing bracken, the steep white path, hard with flinty rubble, the shining water seen down through the tree-stems, the drooping fronds of the firtrees at the stile that soon lets into the road to Hodson Bottom — these pass before the mental vision at thought of Burderop. No stile in the township is more certain, on holidays and Sundays, to have its pair of lovers than this one. The angle in the road, the massy elder-hedges, the cool firs make a cosy nook, and the steps and rail of the stile afford seats.

After a short rising space, the road comes to one of those awesome places common to English beech-wood country, where snaky roots

outcrop beneath the summit of a broken cliff of earth, towering at the side of the road. It is picturesque, but the thought that those monster trees up there may come plunging down at any moment makes the stroller hasten. And now the road goes headlong into a hollow — a coomb — to rise almost as soon as it reaches bottom and climbs as high as before into the sky. Just here on the right is a clearing among the firs, stands the gamekeeper's cottage. On the left in the bottom are two more humble dwellings centuries old — a tiled stone cottage and one thatched and whitewashed. They make a sweetly domestic picture, with ricks, cabbages and garden flowers. The steep hill at their back, the tall woods dark with ancient firs, give that feeling of remoteness from the world so soothing to some spirits, so depressing to others.

No wonder that the boys, Bevis and Mark, in *Bevis: The Story of a Boy*, when they strayed here by mistake in their expedition around "The New Sea" (the Reservoir) thought the gamekeeper's cottage the abode of a witch, a terrifying idea, reinforced by the presence of an old woman and a black cat:

> "It's a witch," whispered Mark. "There's a black cat by the wall-flowers — that's a certain sign."
>
> "And two sticks with crutch-handles," said Bevis. "But just look there." He pointed to some gooseberry bushes loaded with the swelling fruit, than which there is nothing so pleasant on a warm, thirsty day. They looked at the gooseberries, and thirsted for them; then they looked at the witch.
>
> "Let's run in and pick some, and run out quick," whispered Mark.
>
> "You stupid; she'd turn us into anything in a minute."
>
> "Well — shoot her first," said Mark. "Take steady aim; John says if you draw their blood they can't do anything. Don't you remember, they stuck the last one with a prong."
>
> "Horrid cruel," said Bevis.
>
> "So it was," said Mark; "but when you want gooseberries... This is a terrible place."
>
> "Can we get away without her seeing?" [Ch.VIII]

Children and crude peoples do not like unfamiliar solitudes. Not until culture has surely made way with the lurking belief in strange spirits, do we care, even for gooseberries, to linger long in a place like Hodson Bottom. Though not really so isolated as it seems, we can easily imagine it the retreat where dwelt the young lass who, visiting the town for the first time and beholding the wonder of an illuminated clock, exclaimed: — "Lard a mussy! You've got another moon here! Yourn have got figures all round un!" — a story which may be found in one of Jefferies' introductions.[21]

[21] Introduction to *Round about a Great Estate.*

One day when I was sketching the gamekeeper's cottage, a lady who had got down from her pony-carriage to lead the little animal down the hill, remarked, — "A most fascinating spot this!" — and hurried out of it as fast as she could!

To venture into these woods anywhere on the right would be trespassing, for the great house and park of Burderop are there, and a sign, "Spring guns set here!" by the gate just beyond the lovers' stile is surely quite terrifying. But after one has come to know a few people, the case is different, and of all the delights of my stay in Jefferies-Land none outranked that of a visit to the gardener's cottage, the quaintest of tiled farmhouses hidden far in between pasture and woodland, with a great dove-cote peering over the brick-walled enclosure of the barnyard. Once within the barnyard, the dove-cote is seen to hold sway over an ancient wagon, a terrier tied near his kennel, myriad fowl and strange grey turkeys.

A rosy-cheeked young woman who is mistress of the feathered things could be counted on for the daintiest of teas, with a fresh-boiled egg and her own wonderful jam. No, she has never read any Richard Jefferies' books — had always wanted to, but could never seem to get hold of them. Then too some people said they were — hesitating — hard to understand.

A corner of the pheasant-preserve, a young plantation of ever-greens and flowering rhododendrons, comes up to the gate of the gardener's cottage, and a grassy path following its *wire* fencing (How Jefferies' old gamekeeper would have scolded at this!), passes under some of the veteran beeches of this big, level enclosure, to the gate which lets into a series of rabbit-haunted fields, and thence back to the "spring guns" sign and the lovers' stile. Instead of passing through this gate, however — which we should do if we were ready to go back to the Reservoir — if we continue only a few steps, we come out under the giant beech of all the park, standing at the edge of a real wooded precipice overlooking Swindon, Coate Reservoir and miles of lowland; but not downs. They are behind us, and no view of them can be had until we have gone through to the other side of the park.

This hill was a tough climb for Bevis and Mark the day they found the witch's cottage. Jefferies tells how…

> …without conscious thinking, they walked aslant, and so gained a few feet every ten yards, and then came to a spot where the crust of the top hung over, and from it the roots of beech-trees came curving down into the hollow space in search of earth. To one of these they clung by turns, some of the loose chalky clods fell on them, but they hauled themselves up over the projecting edge…

… At the summit there was a beautiful beech-tree with an immense round trunk rising straight up, and they sat down upon the moss, which always grows at the foot of the beech, to rest after their struggle up. As they sat down, they turned round, facing the cliff, and both shouted at once:

"The New Sea!" [Ch.VII]

In *The Gamekeeper at Home* we have this same place described again:

There is a part of the wood where the bushes grow but thinly and the ash-stoles are scattered at some distance from each other. It is on a steep slope — almost cliff — where the white chalk comes to the surface. On the edge above rise tall beech trees with smooth round trunks, whose roots push and project through the wall of chalk, and bend downwards, sometimes dislodging lumps of rubble to roll headlong among the bushes below. A few small firs cling half-way up, and a tangled, matted mass of briar and bramble climbs nearly to them, with many a stout thistle flourishing vigorously…

Once at the summit under the beeches, and there a comfortable seat may be found upon the moss. The wood stretches away beneath for more than a mile in breadth, and beyond it winds the narrow mere glittering in the rays of the early spring sunshine. The bloom is on the blackthorn, but not yet on the may; the hedges are but just awakening from the long winter sleep, and the trees have hardly put forth a sign. But the rooks are busily engaged in the trees of the park, and away yonder at the distant colony in the elms of the meadows…

The meadows lead down to the shores of the mere, and the nearest fields melt almost insensibly into the green margin of the water, for at the edge it is so full of flags, and rushes, and weeds as at a distance to be barely distinguishable there from the sward. [Ch.IV]

To reach Burderop House itself it is necessary, in going from the great beech at the edge of the cliff, to regain the big field and follow its course along the hilltop to a road from Swindon which soon passes the lodge gate, then shortly, turning to the left, the road to Chiseldon passes in sight of the sober Georgian pile. Had we known the way, we might have gone back to Lodge Farm, as the gardener's cottage is called, have taken the foot-path down into the fir-tree ravine towards the gamekeeper's, and from thence at the proper point, by a short ascent we should have found ourselves at the border of the great lawn, where a dying cedar-of-Lebanon extends its venerable arms.

The great house at Okebourne Chace stands in the midst of the park, and from the southern windows no dwellings are visible. Near at hand the trees appear isolated, but further away insensibly gather together, and above them rises the distant Down[22] crowned with four tumuli. Among several private paths which traverse the park there is one that, passing through a belt of ash-wood, enters the meadows. Sometimes following the hedges and sometimes crossing the angles, this path finally ends, after about a mile …" [Ch.I]

[22] Kate Tryon identifies the place as "Barbury Hill, another anciently-fortified hill to the right of Liddington Hill".

… at Coate Farm, of course. Coate Farm which, as “Luckett’s Place” in *Round about a Great Estate*, from which I have just quoted; as “Wick Farm” in *Wild Life in a Southern County*; as “Coomb Oaks” in *Amaryllis*; as “Longcot” in *Bevis* has been faithfully, lovingly depicted.

We had thought it should be all about Burderop — this *Round about a Great Estate*, and the opening sentences encourage the expectation that we should have some pictures of an old English manor house and the life within and without it. But Jefferies could not tell us what he did not know; and we must remember that, although he enjoyed the confidence of Haylock, the gamekeeper, he was, with or without reason, disliked by the master, father of the present owner, Colonel Calley.

“That young Jefferies”, the elder Calley is reported to have said, “is not the sort of fellow you want hanging about in your covers.”

What would he have said, if he had then known that this youth would one day write an eminently successful book called *The Amateur Poacher*!

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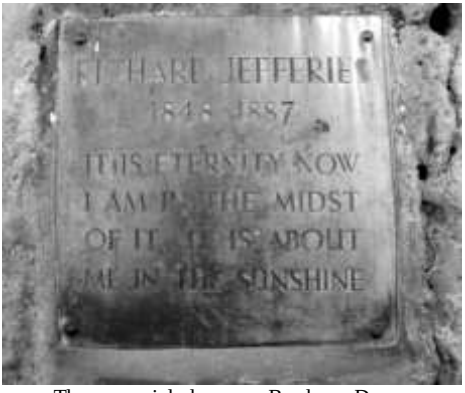
ꕥ ꕥ

The typescript ends here.
There is a handwritten pencil note on the last page that reads:

“This is supposed to be about half the book.
K.T.”



The memorial plaque on Burderop Down

Kate Tryon

Katherine Elizabeth (Allen) Tryon was born on the 18th March 1865 in the little village of Naples, Maine, and later, a Portland girl, attended Portland High School. Her art training was at Rhode Island School of Design and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. One of her paintings of Marlborough Forest in Wiltshire is said to have hung at Colby College, Maine. She was a lecturer on the birds of New England and England, a writer on nature subjects and an artist.

She married James Libby Tryon – a Harvard graduate, and lecturer – on the 15th September 1885. Their first born sons died in infancy – the first aged only one month and the other, just before his second birthday. Sylvia and Richard survived to have children of their own. Kate Tryon died on the 20th October 1952 aged 87 in Medford, Massachusetts.

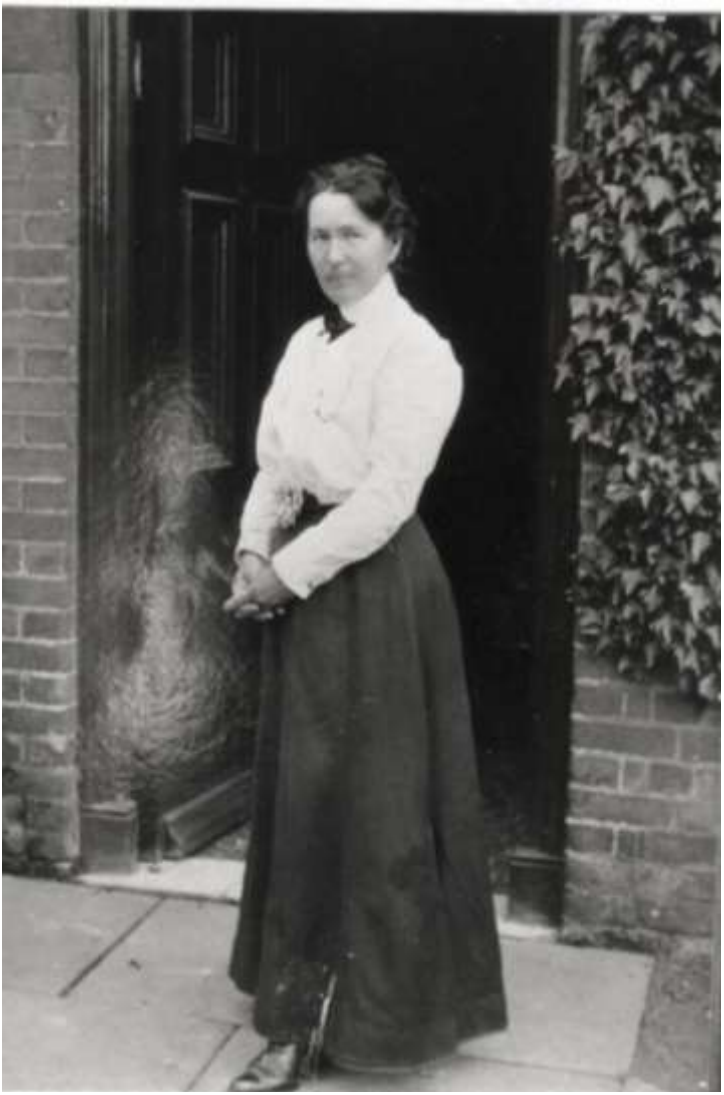
In 1903, Mrs Tryon came across a copy of Richard Jefferies' *Field and Hedgerow* and read a biography of the writer by Sir Walter Besant. The more she read, the more her admiration grew for Jefferies the man and his works – she longed to depict the scenes he mentioned on canvas. In 1910, Kate Tryon made the first of six trips to "Jefferies' Land" in north Wiltshire when she wrote: "The lark, the nightingale and Richard Jefferies – those are the three things that brought me to England."

Perhaps one of the greatest moments of exaltation Kate ever knew was when she walked into Coate village, Wiltshire, where Jefferies was born. She had left her baggage in Swindon and hired a driver. On approaching the village, she said to the driver "Let me walk into the village alone." The driver pointed out Jefferies' house, and also the lane to the reservoir keeper's cottage, where she hoped to stay. There, ahead of her, rose Liddington Hill, known to Jefferies' lovers as his "Holy of Holies."

Mrs Tryon returned to the area in 1911, 1912, 1924, 1927-8 and 1938. She was a speaker at The Jefferies' Festival in 1912 and she took a studio in Chiseldon for a year in 1927 to 1928 and filled it with flowers from which she made studies: tulips, jonquils, forget-me-nots and daisies. In common with Jefferies, she found special inspiration in the Downs: "If anybody ever asks my idea of heaven . . . I shall say 'The Wiltshire Downs on a spring morning.' "

During these visits to Wiltshire, Kate produced 230 oil-paintings. Travelling alone with her portable sketch-box, she sought out the views Jefferies described, such as buildings, thatched cottages and gardens.

In 1960, Sylvia (Tryon) Kramer visited the area and presented thirty-five of her mother's paintings to the newly opened Richard Jefferies Museum located in the author's birthplace. Some of them can still be seen today in their original wooden frames hand-carved by Kate Tryon. At the time a villager told Sylvia, "No one in Coate will ever forget the American lady who came over to paint 'Jefferies Land.' "

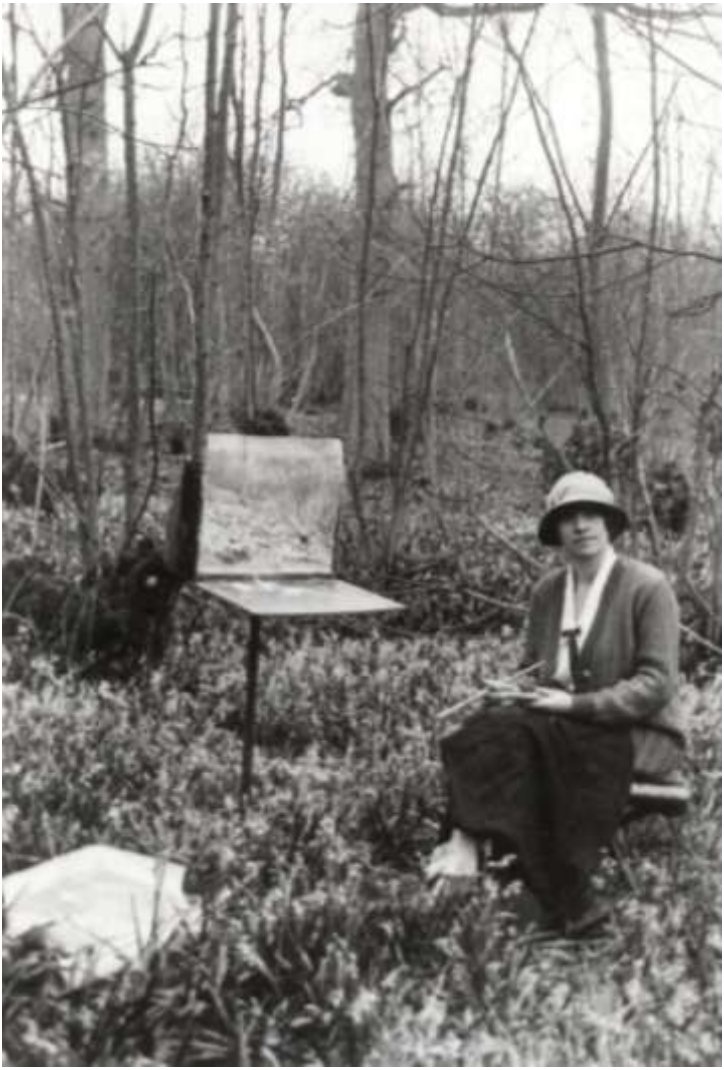


Kate Tryon pictured at the front door of Coate Farm in 1912 –
now the Richard Jefferies Museum.

Portrait by William Hooper

The front cover photograph shows Kate Tryon walking Jefferies' fieldpath from Coate to Swindon Old Town on her first visit to the area in 1910.

The back cover photograph shows Kate Tryon painting the bluebells in Hodson Woods, Burderop in 1910.



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