

Richard Jefferies' Letters to Aunt Ellen

Introduced
by

The Richard Jefferies Society



Petton Books
Faringdon, Oxfordshire

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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848–1887).



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14 years old



23 years old

Richard Jefferies (ages approximate)



30 years old



Aunt Ellen Harrild

For

Lady Treitel
Vice-President
The Richard Jefferies Society

Richard Jefferies: a biographical note

Richard Jefferies was born on 6 November 1848 at Coate near Swindon in North Wiltshire, son of a small, struggling dairy farmer. His grandfather owned the chief mill and bakery in Swindon. Generations of Jefferies had been farmers in the isolated upland parish of Draycot Foliat on Chiseldon Plain since Elizabethan times. The mother's side of the family came from Painswick near Stroud and had strong connections with the London printing trade. The author's paternal and maternal grandfathers both worked for Richard Taylor of Red Lion Court off Fleet Street, a leading printer of scientific and natural history works. Between the ages of four and nine the boy was sent to live at Shanklin Villa, the Sydenham home of his Aunt Ellen and Uncle Thomas. Thomas Harrild was a letterpress printer with premises in Shoe Lane.

In 1866, after an irregular education, Jefferies joined the staff of the *North Wilts Herald*, a new Tory newspaper based in Swindon. He worked chiefly as a reporter but also published his first tales and short stories in its pages, as well as two local histories, of Malmesbury and of Swindon and its environs. He first came into wider prominence in 1872, year of the formation of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union under Joseph Arch, with three long letters on the condition of the Wiltshire labourer published in the columns of *The Times*. The letters attracted much attention and comment. During the mid-1870s Jefferies contributed articles on farming topics to such prestigious magazines as *Fraser's* and the *New Quarterly*. However, his chief ambition was to make his name as a writer of fiction and he published three novels (*The Scarlet Shawl* (1874), *Restless Human Hearts* (1875), and *World's End* (1877)) under the imprint of Tinsley Brothers, a frankly commercial and somewhat disreputable firm which had published Thomas Hardy's first three novels.

In 1877 Jefferies, now married to Jessie Baden, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, and father of a small boy, moved to Tolworth near Surbiton to be closer to his Fleet Street editors while retaining a foothold in the country that was increasingly the source of his literary inspiration. The severance from his native county acted as a Proustian trigger, and on 4 January 1878 in the *Pall Mall Gazette* appeared the first of a series of 24 articles under the title "The Gamekeeper at Home", based on memories of Wiltshire and of "Benny" Haylock, keeper on the Burderop estate near Coate. The series attracted the attention of George Smith of Smith, Elder & Co, who published *The Gamekeeper at Home* in volume form in June. The book was widely and glowingly reviewed and ran through several editions. Jefferies followed it with others in a similar vein, *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), *The Amateur Poacher* (1879), *Hodge and His Masters* (1880), and *Round About a Great Estate* (1880), which

the *Scrutiny* critic Q. D. Leavis called “one of the most delightful books in the English language”. These works established Jefferies as the foremost natural history and country writer of his day. While living in Surbiton he also published a slight but charming pastoral novel, *Greene Ferne Farm* (1880); two children’s books which have become classics, *Wood Magic* (1881) and *Bevis* (1882); and wrote the essays later collected under the title *Nature Near London*, about the remarkable variety and richness of wild life to be found in relatively close proximity to the capital.

Jefferies’ health had never been strong and in December 1881 he fell ill of a fistula, probably tubercular in origin. He underwent four painful operations and the following year moved to West Brighton in the hope that the sea air would improve his health. Illness, coupled with the presence of the sea, which always held a powerful fascination for him, and the rediscovery of a chalk grassland landscape like that of his native Wiltshire, spurred him to write an autobiography of his inner life, a book about which he told the publisher C. J. Longman he had been meditating seventeen years. It was called *The Story of My Heart* and was a record of his mystical experiences from the time when, at the age of eighteen, “an inner and esoteric meaning” had begun to come to him “from all the visible universe”. The book was a failure on publication (in 1883), but is regarded as the cornerstone of his work and a classic of English nature mysticism. William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* called it “Jefferies’ wonderful mystic rhapsody”.

His last four years were a heroic struggle against what Jefferies called the giants of Disease, Poverty and Despair, but he never ceased to write and dictated to his wife when he was too weak to hold a pen. During these years he produced much of his best work: the novels *The Dewy Morn* (1884), which Mrs Leavis described as “one of the few real novels between *Wuthering Heights* and *Sons and Lovers*”, *After London* (1885), which was greatly admired by William Morris, and *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887), to make room for which on his shelf the critic Edward Garnett said he would turn out several highly-regarded novels by Thomas Hardy; and the essay collections *The Life of the Fields* (1884), *The Open Air* (1885) and *Field and Hedgerow* (1889), the last of which was edited by his widow and published posthumously. Of the later essays Jefferies’ biographer Edward Thomas well said that “both in their mingling of reflection and description, and in their abundant play of emotion, they stand by themselves and enlarge the boundaries of this typical form of English prose”. Aptly, one of Jefferies’ last pieces was an introduction to a new edition of Gilbert White’s *The Natural History of Selborne*. He died on 14 August 1887 at Goring-by-Sea, of tuberculosis and exhaustion, and was buried in Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing.



Introduction



Shanklin Villa, Sydenham, Kent

The exact date is unknown but at around four years of age Richard Jefferies lived with his aunt and uncle, Ellen (*née* Gyde) and Thomas Harrild, at Shanklin Villa, Sydenham, Kent. The boy stayed there for four or five years, returning to Coate farm every summer for a month. In effect he was fostered during these years, albeit within the family and by a couple who were settled, childless (and remained so) and relatively well-off. Difficulties at home that included the death of Richard's sister Ellen – who was killed by a run-away horse on 10 February 1851 when aged 5 years 6 months – and the recent arrival of brother Henry – born on 14 June 1852 – probably precipitated the move. As such, Richard was separated from his parents at a critical stage in his emotional development. Aunt Ellen (Richard's mother's sister) had affection to spare and Richard became the willing recipient. The bond they formed lasted at least into his twenties.

In letters to Aunt Ellen (some are addressed to his Uncle and included here) collected between 1856 and 1873 Richard recalls

his memories of Sydenham, including his uncle's "electric machine", an occasion when the house was struck by lightning, Christmas parties at Round Hill House (home of Robert Harrild junior, Thomas's brother) and times spent with the children of Horton Harrild (another brother of Uncle Thomas) who were of a similar age to Richard. He records visits to the Hastings area and to Lewes where his friends, the young Baxters, lived. Richard also describes the effects of his early bouts of ill-health – no doubt, the initial attacks of tuberculosis that eventually killed him. In others he confides his failings, humiliations, ambitions and plans. He goes to great lengths not to upset his aunt and uncle and to reassure them that he has not been lazy. Later letters mention his engagement to Jessie Baden who he marries on 8 July 1874. Richard's final letter on record at the British Library records his delight that a book has been accepted for publication ("Fortune"), albeit that it was never published.

His letters are naïve and most touching.

Notes

Edward Thomas quoted from Richard Jefferies' letters to his aunt and uncle in *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Works* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1909) whilst Samuel J. Looker reproduced large extracts in *Richard Jefferies: A Man of the Fields* (London: John Baker Publishers Ltd., 1965) as did Walter Besant in *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1888). Information from Jefferies' letters was used in chronological order for *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* by Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel (Oxford: Petton Books, 1994).

Some of the letters, or extracts from them, mentioned in earlier publications are not in the public domain. They may be in private hands or might have been destroyed. Just one, the last in this book dated 7 May 1873 – highlighted by Walter Besant – is included in this collection as published in *The Eulogy*.

The text of the letters has not been altered in this edition. Some additions have been included in square brackets for clarification along with foot-notes, illustrations and old photographs.



Richard Jefferies mentions many names and places in his letters that require some background information. Audrey Smith provides the following insight into the Gyde and Harrild families in her biography of the writer: *The Interpreter* (Swindon: Blue Gate Books, 2008).

The Gyde family

Aunt Ellen Harrild was 8 years younger than her sister Betsy, Richard's mother. Their parents (Elizabeth Estcourt and Charles Gyde) were married in 1815, in the little Gloucestershire village of Pitchcombe, which lies on the main road between Painswick and Stroud. Charles worked in London as a book-binder and printer. The young married couple moved to Clerkenwell, a district much favoured by persons employed in the printing industry. Their first son was born – Charles Estcourt – in 1816; then Elizabeth (Betsy – Richard's mother) in 1817; Samuel James, (1820); Susan, (1822); and Frederick, (1823). Several house-moves later, Ellen arrived in 1825, Henry: 1827, Annie: 1829 and Francis: 1834. Charles and Elizabeth were good parents. Their children were well brought up, adequately educated, and carefully instructed in the precepts of the established church.

Charles Gyde had steady employment in the printing and publishing works belonging to Richard and Arthur Taylor who had gained a high reputation as producers of fine books. From their establishment in Red Lion Court, a turning off Fleet Street, came editions of classical works, and books upon natural history. The Taylors had two employees from the West Country at that time – Charles Gyde and John Jefferies, a baker's son from Swindon (Richard's grandfather). Not surprisingly, the two men became firm friends. John was born in 1780, and was thus some twelve years older than Charles. He lived with his wife, Fanny, and their three little girls, Fanny, Elizabeth and Mary, in St. Pancras. Soon after James Luckett Jefferies (Richard's father) was born in 1816, John Jefferies returned to Swindon to manage the family bakery business, from which his father (Richard Jefferies 1738-1825) wished to retire. Temporarily, the close contact between the Gydes and the Jefferies was broken although the families kept in touch. Richard's parents reunited the families by marriage in 1844 when Betsy Gyde married James Luckett Jefferies. Betsy left London to help her husband run John Jefferies' dairy farm at Coate. Ellen Gyde married Thomas Harrild in the year of Richard Jefferies' birth – 1848.

The Harrild family

Thomas Harrild (born in 1823) also worked in the printing trade as did his father, Robert Harrild. Robert was born in Bermondsey in 1780 and he started up a small printing business in partnership with his friend, Edward Billing (whose sister he married). The company specialised in printing improving books for children. Robert Harrild was an ingenious young man who revolutionised printing and made his name as a manufacturer of printing machinery. He formed another business association, as well as a personal friendship, with John Baxter, of *Baxter's Bible* fame. Robert Harrild moved his family (of wife, three sons and two daughters) away from London to Sydenham; at that time a small Kentish village. The Harrilds lived in Round Hill House, a fine mansion which had once been the local manor house. Robert Harrild was a model employer, taking a genuine interest in the welfare of his workers, and his true religious feeling made him careful for the good of those less fortunate than himself. He promoted schemes to benefit printers who became unemployed through industrial disease (they were disposed particularly to tuberculosis, paralysis of the hands, and eye trouble), and he was one of the first Guardians appointed under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

When Ellen Gyde married the son of this illustrious man in 1848, she found herself admitted to a closely-knit circle of relations-in-law. The Harrilds, the Baxters (who lived in Lewes), and the Billings had intermarried to a confusing extent. Robert Harrild's eldest son, another Robert, married Mary, a daughter of John Baxter, in 1835. Four years later Mary died of tuberculosis. Robert junior returned to Round Hill and lived with his father (who died in 1853) and his Aunt Carlass (born in 1793). A Harrild daughter, Mary, was married to John Baxter's son, George (a colour printer and engraver); the other Harrild girl, Sarah, was the wife of Joseph Billing, a nephew of old Robert Harrild's original partner. The family group was cemented still further by the fact that, with the exception of Sarah and Joseph Billing, all the young married Harrilds remained in Sydenham. Mary and George Baxter lived at The Retreat, a rather strange house that George had designed himself. Robert Harrild's second son, Horton, with his wife Mary, lived at Newark Lodge, a villa situated only a few hundred yards from Round Hill House. After their marriage, Thomas and Ellen settled down at Albany Cottage, equally near to

the old Harrilds. Old Robert Harrild owned both Newark Lodge and Albany Cottage, together with a fair amount of other property in the vicinity. Shanklin Villa was built on land that he owned.

Robert junior and Horton Harrild both entered their father's business on leaving school, and were appointed to directorships in early manhood. Thomas's career was a little different. He may well have learnt his trade in his father's company, but by the time he was twenty-three years of age, he had set up in business on his own as a "letter-press, copper-plate, and lithographic printer" at Wood Street nearby to Distaff Place.

Ellen was, perhaps, the fortunate one of the Gyde girls. Betsy (Richard's mother) found life hard as a farmer's wife. Their sister Susan was to die unmarried in 1862. In 1851 Annie, the youngest sister, married Arthur Harris Metzner – in the 1860s they lived in the lodge attached to Round Hill House, Sydenham. Presumably Ellen used her good offices to secure accommodation for a less affluent sister.

Richard's Uncle Thomas died aged 45 in 1867. Aunt Ellen remained at Shanklin Villa until her death aged 84 on 24 August 1911. Richard's sister Sarah lived with Aunt Ellen for many years. According to the census for Shanklin Villa, Sarah was living with her aunt and uncle in 1861 (aged 7). In 1871 (aged 17) her address was still given as Shanklin Villa and in 1881 (aged 27) she was living there with her husband Robert Billing (another nephew of the Harrilds) and her daughter Helen, aged 3.

Acknowledgements

It is thanks to the painstaking work of Phyllis Treitel, Vice-President of the Richard Jefferies Society, that these letters are now reproduced in full. Lady Treitel spent many hours at the British Library copying the letters by hand in the early 1990s and typing them up.

The Richard Jefferies Society extends its thanks to the British Library for allowing the letters in the Jefferies' archives to be published and for waiving their normal fee.

Four letters in this book are owned by the Richard Jefferies Society and are on display at the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate. Two of these letters were purchased in 2011 as part of an unknown Jefferies' archive that had been passed down from the Gyde family.

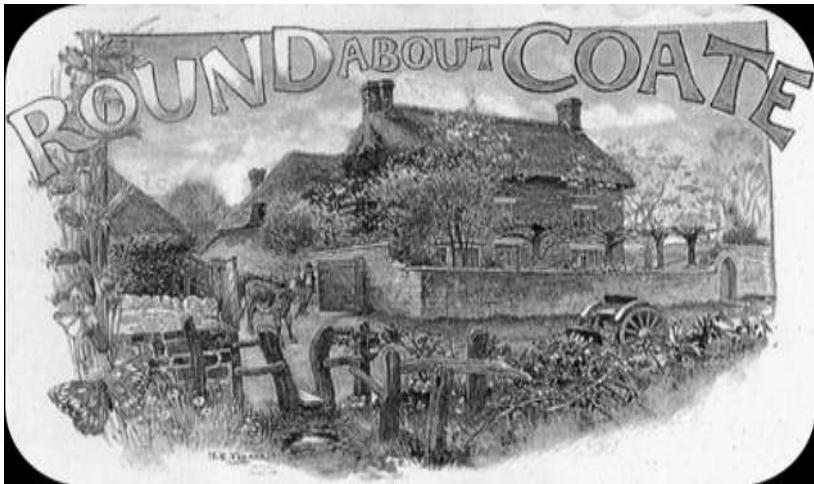


Sketch of the Old House at Coate by Ronald Aylett Muntz, 1896
Richard Jefferies Museum

Richard Jefferies'
letters to
Aunt Ellen



Richard Jefferies around 8 years of age



Richard Jefferies' birthplace and home
Illustration by H E Tidmarsh
January 1893 issue of the *Art Journal*

Two letters in the hand of Richard Jefferies were presented to The Richard Jefferies Society by Prof, Alain Delattre of Poitiers University on 25 August 1981, and offered on loan to the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate, Swindon. The letters are torn and incomplete. They are among the earliest known letters written by Jefferies as a boy. Some suggested words and letters that are missing from the originals are shown in *italic*.

The first letter was dated 19 July 1856. Jefferies was then 7½ years old. There is no address at the head of the letter and it was folded twice. On the back sheet in the centre appears – “Mr harild” – his Uncle Thomas Harrild. Richard was probably spending his summer holidays at home at this time.

July 19 1856

My dear ... *I am pleased to receive your* letter. I went to ... Farm ... and saw ... *mowing* ... Machine ... I am glad to say that my silk worms are getting on so well. Give my love to Aunt Ellen and Sarah for me. have *tried out* your Engine ... *Monday evening* ... a walked ... *walked home* ... the Pony

//reverse of sheet//

... *plead* [pleased] ... from you ... d tell all ... can ... *kisses* and ... love ... *your Dicky*



The second letter was sent when Richard was nearly 11 years old.

Coate
October 9th 1859

My dear Aunt

I hope you Uncle and Sarah¹ are very well. I am very sorry that I did *not write* to you before. ...s Sarahs rabbit ... *should* so much ... you. The baby

//reverse of sheet//

is getting on very well, only he is sometimes so cross. The reservoir² is got so low again. It will not be long before bonfire night comes, when I mean to have some fun. When do you mean to *come* and see us. O ... Charley³ is *going* ... away, by the ... Papa has ...

//third sheet//

many rabbits this year. How does Uncles printing office get on, have any new presses been added to it, since I left. With love to you and Uncle and a hundred kisses to Sarah I must conclude
Believe me,
Your loving Nephew,
Richard

//fourth sheet//

P.S. I should be very much pleased if you would bring, or, send my Latin Grammar



¹ Richard's sister Sarah (sometimes referred to as Sally), aged 6, also lived with the Harrilds.

² Coate Reservoir – the scene of many Jefferies' adventures.

³ Probably referring to either his young brother Charley (sometimes referred to as Charlie) not quite one at the time, or his Uncle Charles (his mother's brother).

Coate
May 7th [18]60

My dear Uncle

I hope you will get better sooner than is expected. How is the new office getting on. I suppose you have heard the cuckoo before this, last night three came up into a tree under which I was standing. I have robbed thirty one bird's eggs already, chiefly thrushes. It has been very nice and sunny days here, how has it been at Sydenham. How does the garden and greenhouse get on. I have made a sundial and I can tell the time by it. I have had a very bad cold and cough which kept me at home for four days. I am in the Rule of Three⁴ now, which Rule I like very much. How are you off for potatoes now. How is Jip now and the mare and the little canary getting on. I hope to hear Mr Robert⁵ is getting better. Have you got a new gardener yet. How is little Sarah. With love to you and Aunt and lots of kisses to Sarah, I must conclude as it is very near eight o'clock and must be off to school.

Believe me

Your loving

Nephew Richard.



⁴ A system of mathematics.

⁵ Uncle Thomas's older brother who lived at Round Hill House.

Coate
November 4th [18]61

Mr dear Aunt,

I write to tell you that one or two important thing[s] are going to come off in a week or so at our house, one of which at least I think will greatly please you and Uncle, the first is then that we are going to have a prayer meeting at our house every Tuesday as we cannot manage to have it on Sundays for a week or two it is to be held in the brewhouse which is going to be whitewashed some ugly old stairs took away and I don't [know] what else isn't going to be done to it, the preacher is going to stand in the doorway and along the beam in the dairy a curtain will be hung to keep the people's eyes from going much further than the preacher and in the dairy a few stools and chairs for ourselves and a few of the ladies and gentlemen who do not like to mix with the work people or our own friends. The other is that we are going to have a bonfire on the sixth and as there is no person that has a licence to sell fireworks in Swindon as I know of I make bold to ask you to send us a few dozens of squibs, crackers, and Catherine wheels etc. I must also tell you that I am in the Evening at Swindon to the Miss Cowles⁶ [sic], I go from 4 to 6 on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, on Wednesdays I go from 2 till 4.

[ends unsigned]

⁶ The Misses Cowell ran schools in Old Town, Swindon – a 2-mile uphill walk from Coate Farm.

Coate
Au 17th [18]64
A miserable day.

Dear Aunt

I was told this morning that a letter had arrived and also that I must answer it. Consequently if you want to know what the insane individuals composing this stagnant place have been doing you must read, mark etc my letter. As for Aunt Sarah⁷ a letter arrived at Swindon on Sunday informing them that she was quieter – in consequence of some medicine – but otherwise no better. Of course not. Nobody expected it. Its their interest to keep her there as long as possible. She was conveyed there early Wednesday morning (10th) in custody of Father and Mr. Hall⁸ in a two horse fly. The “there” means Fairford. Everybody has heard of that place – an awful wicked place. Even the Church windows are painted with starving figures of imps and other occupants of the Bottomless pit.

They say it is a very pretty place as far as vicars, trees, rivers, crayfish, eels and small potatoes are concerned. I know nothing more. There’s no news – not a particle.

A printer would go mad, an editor wild. There’s absolutely NOTHING DOING nor nothing to be done. All is talking and such talking. Insuper, ridiculous and puerile.

A few stars shot last night but I never heard of any damage having been done. We are burnt up or rather other people are. I’m glad of it. It can’t be too hot for me. 90° in shade is nothing here. We look like Portugese or kidney beans. I haven’t seen a fire since last Christmas – its scandalous. That Clerk of the Weather – wish he’s burn his fingers.

So your sea siding again. Glad to hear of it. Hope you won’t drown – Sally can’t swim.

As for myself I’m going, going, going but pon my life it’s a long way. Wish you’d grease my carriage wheels with a little gold dust. Delicate hint that. Tell Sally I’m glad she’s not coming home – there will be some apples to eat this year. That’s one comfort. One can get the stomach ache then in a quiet, respectable way.

⁷ Sarah Jefferies (b. 3 March 1820) was James Luckett Jefferies’ sister. She never married and lived with her parents for most of her life. In 1841(census) she lived at Coate Farm along with James. She died soon after this letter was written – 7 Sept. 1864 – and is buried at Christ Church, Swindon.

⁸ Presumably referring to his uncle, William Hall who married Martha Jefferies.

Uncle Tom comes down Saturday – does he. Have you got an opera glass but I suppose you'd be too tired to look at the comet. Just below the Pleiades 2 in the morning.

Shabby trick of Dunsford the Canal Superintendent this year – he's stopped bathing at the Reservoir. Wish there was no police – we'd duck him.

Aunt Annie⁹ is with you bet a 1£ (if I had it). Just like her. Give her my love and a smack. As for the children – they're bores but heaven be praised they're out of my hearing.

Oh Lor! As David said. Its too hot to talk or walk but send me a post office order and I'll get up to Swindon somehow.

Tell Uncle Tom its very disagreeable of him – he knows very well that Father never writes. Tell him too that I behave like a Christian and send him my love etc.

Well Grandmother¹⁰ came – let's see, you know – and went Saturday with Mrs Estcourt (who came Friday) to London. Wish she would have staid longer. Can't make it out – but I'm lazy. Xcuse any more writing – its such a bore.

Love by the bushel etc etc etc

I am

Myself according to last accounts

R. Jefferies.

Coate
Nr Swindon
Wilts.

⁹ Ellen's sister Anne (18/10/1829 married Arthur Harris Metzner on 16 August 1851 and they had 5 children. In the 1860s they lived at Round Hill Lodge, nearby to Aunt Ellen's home.

¹⁰ Elizabeth (Estcourt) Gyde – born 1793, died in Islington 27 April 1869. Buried at Pitchcombe, Glos., where she was born.

Coate
October 27th [18]64

My dear Aunt

I received your kind letter this morning and you cannot imagine with what pleasure I scanned its contents. I did indeed do you injustice in thinking for a moment that you would break your promise. And Mother says that both you & Uncle have been unwell though I rejoice to hear are now better. Uncle Henry¹¹ too it seems has been out of sorts which we are sorry to hear of.

We are all tolerable at home here likewise at Swindon. You remember last time I wrote I mentioned something about the proposed Church which it seems is true – Father has offered the land and 10£ in money, nobody else coming higher than 5£. The entire sum promised is I believe 115, 40 of which comes from the Dean & Chapter of Westminster who own large property (600 acres) here. There is nothing particular at present going forward at Coate saving time who goes as slow here as abroad. The weather (universal topic) this morning is shocking, fancy an expanse of dull leaden sky and a steady downfall. It is horrible after the fine time we have had. However it is the old concomitant of Winter who now comes on with giant strides as the falling leaves & piercing blasts fully testify. He is welcome provided frost sets in – jolly red nosed frost who brings wild ducks, snipes and other delicacies.

I still walk about with my gun stalking like a chained ghost continually over the same ground and with the same luck, viz., one rabbit a week.

Mother continues to grumble at, wop smack & kiss that young reprobate Charles who gets worse as he gets older thus inverting the natural order of things. As for Henry, the great lout, there never was such a fellow before. There he will sit and eat, eat, eat all day if it were possible. Gormandizing like, like really I know nothing like him. Nevertheless he seems to learn something at school, writes a much better hand than I do, and begins to understand spelling and arithmetic. He's got a correspondent, an old school fellow, nobody knows where in the North of England and writes to him in red ink, envelope and all.

¹¹ Uncle Henry is Aunt Ellen's brother, born 1827. He married and remained living in the Islington area.

But I bore you with domestic details though really there is little else to tell you, so you must excuse it. You see we seldom get a murder or anything of that sort down here and therefor have but few topics of interest, always excepting weather, crops, price of cheese, rise in wool & a grain of scandal. These are always ready at hand so by continually ringing the changes, certain persons get them by heart and consequently shine in conversation. Our curate Mr. Salisbury is a most singular individual and though a clergyman is, I verily believe, afraid of meeting ghosts in his walk home from Coate.

Now I have communicated every scrap of news & shall conclude first however thanking you sincerely & Uncle too for sending me the money for which I shall be ever obliged so with love to you & Uncle & Sarah, I remain,

Your affectionate nephew

R. Jefferies

PS. You need not be under the slightest apprehension regarding my spending the money¹² – I know its value far to[o] well for that even if there were no other considerations.



Richard Jefferies' writing table
Richard Jefferies Museum

¹² On the 11th November – Richard left with his cousin James Cox to walk to Moscow!

Coate
March 11th [18]66

My dear Aunt

I sent you a copy of the North Wilts Herald on Saturday by which you may guess that my connection with that paper has already commenced. In short I began last Tuesday and imagine that I shall like my place: – up to the present moment I do more, I enjoy it. Mr Piper (the Editor) is gentlemanly in his habits, plain and distinct but far from blunt in his style of speech and seems to be a man of deep thought – certainly of extensive reading. My duties are multifarious – reporting, correcting M.S. and proofs, with a slice of reviewing and an unlimited quantity of condensation appear to be the most prominent. I sit with him and thus have the benefit of his personal instruction besides other advantages I could not have if our offices were distinct and separate.

The room is comfortable upon the first floor commanding a good prospect of a limited portion of sky and an unlimited extent of brick wall, to say nothing of a large expanse of back-areas and cabbage gardens. This is advantageous also, as there is nothing in consequence to call one's attention from pens, ink and paper.

I mention these details because I think they will interest you being (pardon me, oh Aunt) a woman. Understand then that the pattern of the wall-paper would be seen to be elegant, were it not hidden behind almanacks, lists and files of paper, that the ornaments of the mantel shelf would be valuable if there were any, and that the pictures consist of a couple of engravings.

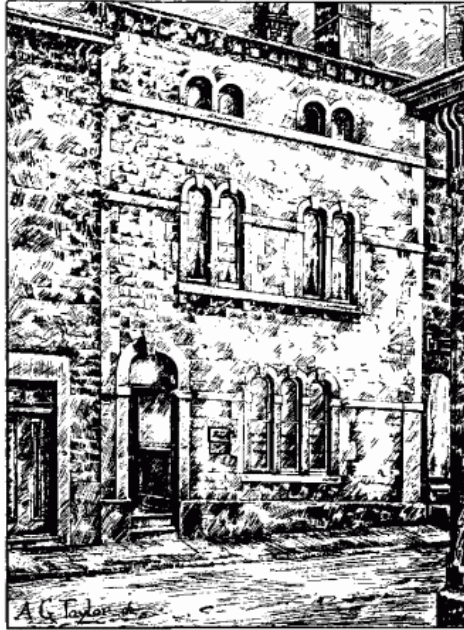
Nevertheless I have no doubt but that I shall succeed. Kity [?] seems tolerably contented with her lot – she is remarkably quiet to others, but singularly enough seems to have taken a dislike to me – literally as though she were afraid. Perhaps she divines that I have no love nor interest for her race either individually nor in a more extended sense.

Please tell Uncle, that I have at length discovered the use of paste and scissors, & that I have made my first acquaintance with a printer's devil: – little enough to my satisfaction in the latter case as a more despicable specimen of [crib?] never trod earth, suck't india rubber or staggered under a form.

I have done, my budget of news is exhausted and I have nothing to add, but to send you and Uncle my love, together with a hope that my late conduct will meet your approbation. Kiss Sarah for me and believe me

Your affectionate nephew

R. Jefferies



24 Victoria Street, Old Town, Swindon (similar building to the newspaper offices) where Richard lived with Jessie (married on 8 July 1874) for about 18 months. Their son, Harold, was born here on 3 May 1875.

Illustration by Miss Agnes G Taylor, 1896
from *Jefferies Land: a history of Swindon and its environs* by Richard Jefferies.

[written on blue paper]

Swindon
7.20pm Bakehouse
Sept 14 Friday [1866]

My dear Aunt

Here I am safe in Swindon. I walked from Temple Bar – wishing Uncle goodbye at Shoe Lane, to Windsor via Picadilly which you may remark to Uncle is precious long pica, Kensington where I met a goose who was I imagine a desperately dissipated character from a wink which was directed at me, Hounslow where I dined, Colnbrook and lastly Windsor. I thought over my project as I went and at length from many considerations came to the conclusion that I would not this time attempt to complete it. I felt in the first place that it neither met with yours or uncle's approbation and I would willingly give up the chance of a pleasure to please you. I more over felt rather tired while the weather had a decided gloomy look about it it indeed rained pretty sharply for a few minutes as I entered Windsor; so I determined that if there was a train within a reasonable time to proceed by it. I reached the station at 5 to 4 pm and found that the next departure was 20 min[utes] past. This allowed me time to take a cup of coffee at Layton's refreshment rooms after which I again repaired to the railway and after changing twice – once at Slough again at Reading, at last saw the Wiltshire downs and trod upon Wiltshire soil.

I think I never walked twenty miles of such dreary monotonous uninteresting country, or else it was leaving Sydenham or rather you. I really have enjoyed myself aunt very much indeed – both you and uncle have been so kind that it would have been next to an impossibility for me to have done otherwise. My feet seemed to lag as I never felt them before and I could not help as I entered the sordid parlor of an inn at Hounslow instituting a comparison between it and the breakfast parlor at Shanklin Villa; you may easily guess which scale fell. I treasure up the words which you spoke a few evenings ago and which Uncle so warmly seconded that now I am in business you have to see me more often – it was kind of Uncle to give me what he did but it was much kinder of him and you to give me this invitation. I shall not desert work whilst this is the reward.

Tell Elizabeth¹³ please that her sandwiches were excellent – rather heavy but all the better for that. With the help of a glass of

¹³ Elizabeth Abrams, born in Norfolk in 1831, was one of Aunt Ellen's servants.

ale I made a good dinner off them, and at Windsor finished the remainder with coffee and bread and butter.

I understand that they are all well at home – they were yesterday I am told and give a party tomorrow which looks as if there was nothing the matter. I shall see them this evening no doubt, and will write again.

I have nothing more to tell you and will conclude with love to you and Uncle

Believe me

Your affectionate nephew

R. Jefferies



Jefferies' bakehouse, Old Town, Swindon
sketched by Richard's uncle
John Luckett Jefferies 1824-1856

Coate
Oct 24 1866

My dear Uncle

I send you a short tale which I have called *The Passion Flower*, and may I call to mind your promise to lay it before the Editor of *London Society*? I should think it kind if you would read it through yourself first so that if you do not think it worthy I might write another, but as Aunt tells me you are still very busy, I cannot certainly expect that you would take so much trouble as that. I think it very kind of you to stir in the matter at all, knowing as I do what incessant care your own vast business requires. I know not that I am even justified in troubling you with this letter, which I am afraid will take you time to decypher [sic], and answer than you can well spare. I may just mention that we are all well, and conclude by asking you to remember me to dear Aunt and by remaining

Your affectionate nephew

R Jefferies.



Elizabeth (Betsy) Jefferies
1817-1895
Richard's mother – Aunt Ellen's sister

[Headed paper]

North Wilts Herald
J H Piper Propr.
6 Bath Terrace,
Swindon.
December 5 1866

My dear Aunt

Do not think me ungrateful that I delayed so long in writing to thank you for your very acceptable present – the only Christmas ‘good-thing’ in the way of eating which I can enjoy. It was very kind to think of me.

I must suppose that you are very much engaged, or else that I have unknowingly offended – it seems so long since I received a note from you. If I have displeased you dear Aunt, I know of none from whom I would sooner receive a rebuke, and I can try, at least, to please you if you will but show me the way.

It is in vain that I attempt to tell you any news from Coate beyond the fact that excepting Charles who has a cold we are all in tolerably good health. If you get the newspaper which I send and are curious to become acquainted with local affairs I must refer you to it knowing that you prefer print to my writing. It is very odd that altho’ I can read it myself with ease all others seem more or less puzzled. My letter then runs a chance of becoming dull as well as short; perhaps you will let me ask a few questions.

I never hear anything scarcely of or from Uncle. Certainly not from him. I should like to but I hardly know how to write to him. Those unfortunate discussions¹⁴ I held with him at Sydenham must I am afraid have given him a very disagreeable impression of me as obstinate and opinionative, so that if I were to write to him asking his advice or assistance I fear he would think me either very impertinent or else truckling and mean [?] in the hope of securing his interest. I wish Aunt to remove this impression which is altogether a mistaken one. If in the heat of argument I went farther than I ought I regretted it afterwards – it was from inadvertence and not from a want of that respect which is always due to those who have had more experience than ourselves, and certainly from me to Uncle, to whom I owe so much, and who has been to me more like a second father than any other relation. You

¹⁴ Edward Thomas suggests in his biography of Richard Jefferies (p.56) that the argument was about religion.

see dear Aunt, how unfortunate is the position in which I am placed, and it is you alone who can extricate me from it.

My questions have escaped me except that I should like to know how Aunt Annie¹⁵ is and to be remembered to her. Miss Carlass¹⁶ too, Aunt Carlass as I could scarcely help calling her, how is she? Of sister Sarah you will tell me without pressing. I send her a kiss by you, and with love to you and Uncle I remain

Your affectionate nephew

R. Jefferies



Sarah (Sally) Jefferies – July 1866
(Richard's sister)
1853-1913

¹⁵ Ellen's sister Annie was living in the lodge of Round Hill House at this time.

¹⁶ Miss Carlass (born 1793) was Uncle Thomas Harrild's aunt who lived with his brother Robert at Round Hill.

Coate

Jan 25 1867

My dear Aunt

I received yesterday morning a copy of the Christian World which from the handwriting of the direction I imagine to have been sent by you, especially as there is an article in it – marked as if to attract attention – upon your new church. Most flattering allusion, and yet not flattering for a well-merited tribute of praise can scarcely be called flattery is made in it to munificence of Mr Robert Harrild¹⁷ in presenting the site. It certainly was a noble gift. There is also mention made of old Mr Harrild¹⁸, whom I cannot remember, which must be very pleasing to Uncle, Mr Robert and Mr Horton¹⁹ (is that the correct way of writing the last gentleman's name?).

I enclose a slip of print which I cut from the Pall Mall Gazette the other evening which I think must refer to that gentleman of which death, and relationship to uncle, through marriage, you so lately informed me.

May I make a few enquiries? Is Kearsie Cowley still engaged in the tea trade? And my old friend, though he rather shunned me last summer, probably on account of what the Sydenham people chose to consider my outlandish hat, Robert Harrild²⁰ – 'Pet' once called – does he find the inside of an architect's office so pleasant as he expected? Of course the first house he plans, and which actually is built, his brother²¹ the photographer will take to make an addition to his friend's albums.

I still have a very pleasant memory of the splendid organ at the Crystal Palace – how fortunate it was not destroyed in the late fire – do you ever attend to hear it? Sarah, who learns music, I suppose cares but little about it. To me music is like a spring of fresh water in the midst of a desert to a wearied Arab. How people can talk during a performance of that kind I cannot understand. They would not if someone read an interesting story, and how poor in comparison is the best word painting with the swell of music. I do not allude to concerts, there is then too much noise,

¹⁷ Robert Harrild (1809-1871) – Uncle Thomas's elder brother.

¹⁸ Robert Harrild senior (1780-1853) – Uncle Thomas's father (see photograph on the next page).

¹⁹ Horton Harrild (1814-1896) – Uncle Thomas's youngest brother.

²⁰ Robert Harrild ("Pet") (b. 1844) – Horton Harrild's eldest son.

²¹ Horton Harrild junior ("Horty") (b.1847) – Horton Harrild's second son.

kettle drums are all very well to beat the tattoo and turn out the guard to relieve the sentries but not their music – ah give me the lives in preference. 'Tis commonly said we live in strange times, and if it be true, what a person wrote in the Times yesterday, that he actually skated upon the London pavement, there seems some truth in the saying. Certainly persons were skating on the Coate road an evening or two ago, but in London: Has the frost made a mistake and taken the English capital for that of Russia? Walking in London is seldom unattended with risk, but in such weather as that it must have been especially dangerous. May I trouble you for some information? You are well-acquainted with London, would you when you write next, which I hope will be shortly give me a list of the hills in it such as Holborn Hill, Snow Hill and so on. My paper runs short, so does my time, and I fear your patience. With love then to you, Uncle, and Sarah.

Believe me to remain dear Aunt,

Your affectionate Nephew,

R. Jefferies.



“Old Mr Harrild”
Robert Harrild Snr
(Uncle Thomas’s father)
1780-1853

[semi-printing]

Coate
June 2 [18]67

My dear Aunt

Have you not been well? I have not heard from you for so long, that I cannot help thinking there must be some cause for your silence. I hope I was not too presumptuous in asking for that book. If I could purchase them myself without such serious inconvenience as it would now cause me, I should not appeal to my friends. Poverty must be my excuse if I am impertinent in that particular, but I hardly know how to plead it, since it is said to be a sin most grievous in the sight of a Mammon-worshipping world.

I have completed my history²² – tho' it will be many weeks before it all appears – and have accepted an engagement to write another – The History of Swindon and its Environs – for the same person. I suppose I gave satisfaction since the terms are nearly double those of the former – which by the bye, is to be issued in book form, of which of course I will send you a specimen. I should like to know yours and Uncle's opinion upon this.

Mother informed me of Mr Bessemer's decease. It is very difficult to express one's feelings on such an occasion. Mrs Bessemer I know and have a great respect for, but of him I have no recollection. Moreover I understand he had a long illness which must have been a great anxiety to her. Perhaps the common expression – a happy release – is most applicable; tho' I do not like it.

Grandfather is better, as also the rest who have been ill. I chanced to be out in the snowstorm a few days since – the result was a severe cold, but I am now better. I much suspect that you have been suffering in a similar manner.

I should suppose the garden is beautiful now. Have your vegetables suffered by the frost? Scarce anything has escaped here. The Palace gardens must be magnificent now, if they come up to the display of former years. Flowers are beautiful, but to me music is more so. Whilst you perhaps would admire the rhododendrons – I should be listening to the organ. I shall never forget that magnificent organ – I mean at the Palace. Henry tells

²² History of Malmesbury.

me that Sarah has made great progress with her music. I am delighted to hear it, and should be more pleased to hear her play. Shall you bring her down Aunt, and, if so, about when? I should like to be at home to see her and you – this is why I ask. I suppose the lawn will soon be in use again as a croquet-ground. I remember last autumn playing a game with Mr Snow and two ladies – I think Miss Snow and Miss Gambol – or a similar name. How is Mr Snow? I remember him as a pleasant gentleman who is anxious not to give trouble and the result is —

Is Uncle still as busy as ever? Would it be possible for him to come down with Sarah? It would indeed be a pleasant surprize to see him at Coate. I do not remember his being down here since he drove you from here to London – I may be mistaken, but I do not think he has been here since.

With love to you and Uncle I will now conclude – remaining still
your

Affectionate Nephew
R. Jefferies



James Luckett Jefferies
(Richard's father)
1816-1896

Coate

July 21 [18]67

My dear Aunt

I was much pleased to hear from you again but delayed writing in return until now as I understood from the letter that you were going out. I am by no means surprized that you have not read my 'Malmesbury' – it is anything but an interesting topic except to those who live in the vicinity. The Ed. expresses himself very well satisfied with it but I can't say that I am. It is my first attempt at that kind of writing – such is my only excuse.

I am still engaged on Swindon, and seem likely to be so for some time yet. Do not think I am idle. You have no idea of the difficulties I meet with. Here I have no books – no old monkish records to assist me – everything must be hunted out upon the spot. I visit every place I have to refer to – copy inscriptions, listen to legends, examine antiquities, measure this, estimate that and a thousand other employments essential to a correct account take up my time. The walking I have done is something beyond belief. To give an instance. There was a book published some 20 years ago founded on a local legend, this I want, and have actually been to 10 different houses in search of it; that is, I have had a good 50 miles walk, and as yet all in vain. However I think I am on the right scent now, and I believe I shall get it.

This neighbourhood is a mine for an antiquary. I was given to understand at school that in ancient days Britain was a waste – uninhabited, rude and savage. I find this is a mistake. I see traces of former habitations, and former generations, in all directions – here Roman coins here British arrowheads – cannon balls, tumuli, camps:– in short, the country, if I may use such an expression, seems alive with the dead. I am inclined to believe that this part of North Wilts at least was as thickly inhabited of yore as it is now – the difference being only in the spot inhabited being exchanged for another more adapted to the wants of the times. I do not believe those sweeping assertions as to the barbarous state of our ancestors. The more I study the matter the more absurd and unfounded appear the notions popularly received. I am not alone in these conclusions. Antiquaries of widespread fame and great research support a similar view.

I hope Mrs Bessemer is well and that you will enjoy your visit, we are all looking forward to see you at Coate. Mother – mind this

is a secret – is making preparations, and I do believe the spiders have been more disturbed in the last few days than for 12 months past. I detest this cruelty to spiders – I admire those ingenious insects. One huge individual has taken possession of a box of mine, and has bred up a family – which will supply the deficiency mother has caused. This fellow I call Caesar Borgia – he has such an affection for blood. You will call him a monster which is praise since his size shows the number of flies he has destroyed. Why not keep a spider as well as a cat? They are both useful in their way, and a spider has this advantage – he spins you a web which will do instead of tapestry.

I hope to hear from you again ere long, and to hear that you are coming. I should be deeply disappointed were you to defer your visit. And Uncle – how is he? Beyond seeing his name upon a book occasionally I hear nothing of him. Remember me to him, and believe me dear Aunt to remain

Your affectionate nephew

Richard



Richard's Barrow, Gypsy Lane, Burderop

Coate
Sept 5th [18]67

My dear Aunt,

The book arrived safely this morning I was much pleased to see it. I thank you sincerely for it. I believe I must also thank Uncle, for I suspect he had the trouble of getting it. It is strange what a fascination the classics exert upon the imagination. Having begun reading them I care for few other books. They seem to me to improve both one's knowledge and style of composition. Sarah is at Swindon today – busy at the bazaar. She is assisting Mrs Piper who has a stall. So the piano is silent; she has however taken some pieces with her and will play on Mrs P's instrument. I hear that the bazaar is well attended and that the small articles sell well; heavy priced things remain on hand. Sarah will no doubt write you a full account when it is over, and the paper will supply details.

Mother has been suffering slightly this morning with the old complaint in the stomach, but is now better. I am improving but am still woefully (*sic*) weak and thin. I shall not be fit for a long journey for a week; and fear I shall not be able to do much for some time. The damsons are getting riper – they hang on the trees almost like grapes, I admire but dare not taste. Your hamper shall be filled when they are ready.

I am after all sorry that I can not go to the N. W. H. office. I think I could have made myself comfortable – at any rate I should have been doing something tangible. Not that I am exactly idle – I am making notes for a small pamphlet. I did too much yesterday in the way of study – my head when I got to bed seemed to swell big enough to fill the room – a very strange and disagreeable feeling which fortunately did not last long. It certainly was my intention to have gone to the office. I am like Caesar Borgia, who foresaw and prepared for every event except his illness and that disconcerted all his plans. However, as the disconcertion of mine is to lead to a visit to Sydenham, I am not at all downhearted. That will repay me for a good deal.

There is a good crop of plums in the garden this year, but there is little fear of any remaining uneaten. What with the wasps and the rest, I don't think there will be one wasted. Apples are more

to my taste – apples and pears; but we have next to none. I intend so soon as I am strong enough to pay a visit where I know there are plenty. Sarah's carte lies before me. It is certainly like her; but not first rate – not distinct enough. The indistinctness makes the features look larger and more boyish. She should be taken full length for a good effect. I have seen better efforts of Horty's²³. I had no idea he kept up his photo-apparatus. Most persons seem to me, in these matters, to make a kind of rush, and then throw it aside. This carte of Sarah's is like my handwriting – you can understand it, but don't go into extasies (*sic*) of admiration over it. Don't tell him this – else should he chance to see any of my work it will be criticized unmercifully. Verily this illness has had a strange effect on me – I am not sure about my spelling! My head is not clear yet. Hence I hesitate to write any more. When will you write to me? Remember me to Uncle, and believe me to be ever

Your affectionate nephew

Richard.



The orchard at Coate Farm
From a painting by Miss B Newcombe, 1893.

²³ Horton Harrild junior (born 1847).

Coate
Sept 18 [18]67

My dear Aunt

I received your kind letter yesterday morning. I feel well enough for the journey now, or rather think I shall be strong enough in a day or two for yesterday and today I have not been so well. I think I have over exerted myself. Getting about outdoors seemed to do me so much good that I fear I have gone too far and overdone myself. Still I don't think there is anything serious the matter with me. It seems almost impossible for us to come this week – it must be early next; but mother says she intends writing today, and she will probably fix the time. Sarah has been rather poorly for the last day or two – yet she will get about. All of us have suffered more or less from diarrhea, (*sic*) which the doctors say is at present epidemical in the neighbourhood. It is, however, I believe a mild form of the disease, since though almost all seem more or less affected with it, no deaths appear to have taken place. Henry has been very ill – obliged to have the doctor – but he seems now better. Sarah has had nothing but illness since she has been at home, and it is this which makes her so desirous of stopping as long as possible and which is mother's reason I believe for not hastening her departure. However, the damsons are ripe – Father and Henry have been gathering them this morning so that there will now be no excuse and I hope to see Sydenham soon. I will be smart as possible I only hope my idea of smartness will agree with those of the Sydenham people.

Sarah said she was going to write to Uncle this morning, and mother to you, so that you will probably hear all the Coate news without the trouble of deciphering my scrawl. Please remember me to Uncle and believe me ever to remain

Your affectionate nephew

Richard.

Coate
September 27th [1867]

My dear Aunt

I suppose you will think us as unstable as water and as variable as a weathercock, since mother a short while since wrote to say she did not think me well enough to bring Sarah, and now I write myself to say that I think I am. It is true that a week has passed and a week as you know makes a great difference sometimes in a person's health. I certainly did feel anything but able to come – that is to enjoy or do myself good if I did – at the time when Mother wrote, but am now greatly improved. I am still weak and miserably thin – I expect I shall be thin for some time to come, but I feel as if a change would do me good, and if you are still willing for me to come I shall be delighted to do so. Before I say anything about the day I will put you into acquaintance with some other matters. Yesterday & today I have had long conversations with Mr Piper, the upshot of which has been, that he has expressed his willingness to wait a fortnight for me if I like to return & take the place of reporter at 24/- per week – to live in Swindon. The man he had engaged when I fell ill turned out a failure and has left him, and as he knows that, should he advertise for another, he would still in all probability be still a fortnight before he could get another, he says he may as well wait for me, whom he knows. I said I should be pleased to take the place, and we parted on the understanding that should I feel well enough to undertake the duties I am to commence on or about the 14th of October.

Now Oct commences on Tuesday next, so that with your permission I should like to bring Sarah on Monday, that I may not lose any time. We could come by the usual train – leaving Swindon $\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 in the afternoon and reaching Paddington $\frac{1}{4}$ to 5. If you will answer by return of post, and fix the day decidedly, we shall come, if not days will slip by and a week will be gone before we are aware of it. You know how dilatory – how procrastinating country folks are. 'Oh – it don't matter – the day before or after' – such is the phrase, I venture to say that there are but two watches in Wiltshire which keep time correctly and one of those is mine. The other is our clergyman's who of course can't be wrong. Not that I wish to shorten Sarah's holiday – I like to see her enjoy herself, and if she can stay longer without injuring herself or displeasing you and Uncle – who are the primary persons to be consulted – why there is an end of the

matter; I will spend my fortnight in shooting or something else. Still I should like to know at once what is to be done. Sarah has now made a host of acquaintances and gets about a good deal in fact, for the last two or three days I have scarcely seen her. The piano is however, still kept in practice. I fear you will think me dreadfully selfish – my letter is nearly all about myself, and when I look through it, I find the pronoun I, prominent on each line. Allow me a small slip more paper to communicate what little there is of Coate news. Mother is not first rate – she thinks she has eaten something which does not agree with her. Father is much as usual but has suffered a great deal lately with the toothache. He would have liked to have brought Sarah, but scarcely knows how it would be possible to leave the cattle – certainly not when – he could not be tied to a day he says. Grandf[ather] says he is ‘bad’, and certainly does look poorly. He has had an attack of bile and the Dr. comes to see him. The worst is he can’t eat, and when he can’t eat he is never well – it is surprising what a quantity of food he takes when in good health. There does not appear to be anything serious the matter with him. Mr Sewell²⁴ is slowly, very slowly recovering. He walks about muffled up though the heat has been very great in the sunshine during the last few days, and looks sharp in the features. He has been at Snodshill a few days, but can’t feel happy away from the shop, and so has gone back to Swindon. I don’t think there is anything else worth mentioning – I leave Sarah to relate her adventures when she returns. I have been much pleased with the books you sent me. Though written over sixteen centuries ago so keen was the insight which the author had into human nature, that most of the epigrams are as pungent now as then. Should I come to Sydenham I must have a hunt through the old bookstalls and lay in a stock for the approaching winter evenings. Remember me please to Uncle and believe me dear Aunt to remain,

Your affectionate nephew

Richard

²⁴ George Sewell (a Scotsman born in 1819) was Richard’s uncle (a linen draper). He married Eliza (Jefferies) in 1840 and was living with John Jefferies at this time.

Coate
Sunday Oct 13 [18]67

My dear Aunt

I arrived safely at Coate about 8 o'clock last night and found them all in good health, saving colds, which all seem to have more or less. During the journey everything happened exactly as would be desired. We were just in time if you remember at the Forest Hill Station – I just caught the omnibus for Faringdon Street and arrived on the platform at the moment the train for Bishop's Road came in. At Paddington there were ten minutes to spare. The journey down was dreadfully dull. A low fog which extended all the way from London hid every object of interest, and so heavy was the atmosphere that the steam from the engine instead of streaming away over the train rolled along on the surface of the ground adding to the obscurity caused by the fog. Everyone in the carriage went to sleep except myself. I own I felt dull. Everything was so pleasant at Sydenham through yours and Uncle's kindness that I could not help feeling rather unhappy at leaving you. Increasing age has its disadvantages. Years ago I used to stay a month or two at Sydenham, last year it decreased to a fortnight – this time still less, and I fear next time will be shorter still. To a place of mere amusement – such as a theatre – one may go, enjoy oneself and feel no regret at leaving; but it is not so at Sydenham – it is not so much the place as the people. I think I enjoyed myself more this year than last. I did not certainly go to so many places of amusement, but I saw more of you and Uncle and what might be called home pleasures are after all the best and most lasting. Sydenham or rather Shanklin Villa seems my second home. How quickly time goes when one is enjoying oneself – I could scarcely realise that I had been away twelve days when I stepped out upon the platform at Swindon. There I was – bag in hand just the same as before – it almost seemed as if I was just starting instead of having come back. However I am not gone to India or abroad and hope to spend many happy days at Shanklin Villa yet. The country looks very mournful. There is a

thickness in the atmosphere, and the clouds hang heavily overhead. I just came in from a short walk – I think the autumn more advanced here than in London. The red leaves of the maple and the yellow leaves of the limes make a beautiful contrast with the oaks and elms as yet little affected by the frosts which I am told have been very severe – so as to spoil numbers of the bullace. They and the ketchup shall be sent if possible at an early date. Mother desires me to thank you for the money for the damsons and to express her pleasure at learning that Sarah is better. Please kiss that young lady for me and tell her to practice the True Love Polka. Tell her she will hear from me shortly. Remember me to Uncle – I shall never forget his kindness to me. I thoroughly enjoyed those drives. What strange things dreams are. I dreamt last night I was going to London with him in the gig from Sydenham, and I could scarcely believe myself at Coate until I looked out of the window and saw the fields & cattle. I will write as soon as I am settled in Swindon. Meantime dear Aunt believe me to remain ever

Your Loving nephew

Richard.



Coate
October 16 [18]67

My dear Uncle

I can hardly tell you how pleased I was on reaching the office Tuesday evening and finding a letter from you. The pleasure was the greater because it was entirely unexpected. It is so long since I received a letter from you that I feared I had forfeited your regard, or else that the pressure of business prevented your ever bestowing a thought upon me. This is indeed an agreeable surprize, and I hope now to hear from you whenever you have a leisure moment. I do indeed wish myself that I could have remained at Shanklin Villa. I enjoyed myself so much that I was loth to leave, and did feel rather dull. But your kind letter has greatly cheered me up. I feel that you have not forgotten me and more than this I feel proud to find that I have your approbation of what I have done. I shall indeed be pleased to come again when opportunity offers and I certainly will contrive if possible to come on a Saturday so as to spend more time with you. I could not help conjecturing on Sunday last what you were doing at Sydenham – this is foolish perhaps, but it is not often that one meets with such kindness as I have done from you and aunt, and it is difficult to forget it. Sunday passed rather drearily, I missed so many faces to which I had become accustomed during my short stay at Sydenham. Monday was a very busy day – I attended no less than three meetings, and was occupied all Tuesday in preparing copy so that it was not until the evening that I reached the office, and there found your letter which had arrived that morning. I saw directly whom it was from on account of the well remembered initials in one corner – T.H. – but I certainly did not anticipate the pleasure which its contents gave me. It is always a pleasure to hear from one's friends but such a letter I have not received for many years. You will see from the date that I am still at Coate – walking backwards and forwards. I have agreed for some lodgings

in Swindon²⁵ but they will not be ready until tomorrow (Thursday). As I have nearly two miles to walk the consequence is that my time in the morning is short. All are well at home except Charles who seems a little out of sorts. I hope that you are in good health at Shanklin Villa, and that Sarah has now perfectly recovered and will be able to resume school. Please give her my love. Remember me to dear Aunt and believe me, Uncle, to be your affectionate nephew

Richard.



Charles (Charlie or Charley) Jefferies
(Richard's youngest brother)
1858-1934

²⁵ This move is unconfirmed.

Good Friday 1868

My Dear Aunt,

I was much pleased to have a letter from you this morning – I was almost afraid from your silence that you were unwell. Of course you cannot always answer my letters; but please do when you can find time, for it is pleasant to have a letter from you. We are all pretty much the same in health, except Grandfather, who continues ill in bed. They sit up with him now nights – Father sat up one night, and goes to see him every day. It is considered to be general decay. So Miss Carlass gets out again – tell her dreams go by contraries. Horton takes the toga on Monday does he? I suppose the next thing will be to look out for a wife? I begin to think that Mr. Jones is a weathercock from his altering his tone about Spain – people hid away there, indeed, hermits I suppose in the caves. There is no fear of them, for, as you know, the “conies are a feeble folk,” although they do make their homes in the rocks. Spain is famous for rabbits, or was so, which makes the quotation apropos. If I remember they once had to employ an army to destroy them, they grew so numerous and did so much damage. I’m a crack shot at rabbits . . .

Flowers are beginning to make a show down here, now and I suppose your garden looks more cheerful. Charlie would tell you that the birds are building their nests, for he has found one with eggs in it. He and Henry are delighted at the idea of fireworks. The weather is beautiful though it is now colder, but then it is more invigorating. I suppose you don’t go out much in these easterly winds, and I daresay Sarah pretends that they skin her cheeks that she may stop away from school – like I did from church to-day, heaven pardon a sinner. It’s quite a heathen land down here, at least Charlie thinks so, for we got no hot cross buns this morning. This nice spring-weather makes the birds play at lovers, and as it is leap year the girls go ahead at a dread rate, at least so my friend the young ranting parson, Uncle Sewell’s shopman whom I told you about, says. He assures me he’s got 21 young women a’dying for

him, and that young gents “like he” who have a “calling” are exposed to terrible temptation – the girls have such a fancy for parsons. Is this true, because if it is I shall set up in that line at once? You see, I tell you everything that I hear by way of amusement. We’ve got a blind bridegroom here at Coate – actually married his cousin – I suppose you will say that none but a blind man would do that, by way of hint. He has set up in the tea, snuff, tobacco and fish line in opposition to old Job Brown, who has enjoyed a monopoly at Coate for the last forty years. Isn’t this energy in a blind man?

I’m working away in a frantic state of excitement at my essay on ‘Instinct’, which Mrs. Bessemere and you have got to read in MS. It’s written as plain as – as a deadwall stuck all over with bill posters. I am improving my handwriting by writing carefully. I hope I shall keep on patiently to the end. The last MS. Mrs. Bessemere read of mine was written at the beginning in a hand a child could read, and at the end I couldn’t read it myself. I shall write to Sarah shortly. I don’t think I’ve any Coate news to tell you – there is a sublime sameness in Coate ways which reminds you of the stars that rise and set regularly, just as we go to bed down here. I’ve scarcely time to tell you I’m your affectionate scapegrace nephew Richard, who loves you dearly.



Job Brown's Cottage, Coate

Coate
Sunday [before 12 April] 1868

Dear Aunt

I arrived safely at Coate yesterday evening, parcel and all, without an explosion, having been fortunate enough to catch all the trains and omnibus. I travelled with respectable people – four ladies and one gentleman from Paddington amongst whom the usual English taciturnity was observed, only two sentences being exchanged during the whole journey. I was too dull to talk, I always do feel dull when I leave you, for as I said before I am happier with you than at home because you enter into my prospects with interest and are always kind. You know that I have ever looked upon you as something more than an aunt and now that poor Uncle²⁶ is gone it seems to me that the tie between us is drawn closer. I shall look upon myself in a sense as your son and shall try to do something that may please you, for I feel that you are right, that I must wake up and go to work in real earnest, or this fatal indolence will ruin me. I wish I could have got something to do in the neighbourhood of Sydenham which would have enabled me to live with you. I still hope that I may yet do so. You will want to know how I found them. Mother I think is better than when I left, and the rest are well excepting Henry who has a cold. At Swindon it is not so. Grandfather is said to be very ill – very weak and feeble – lies in bed during the greater part of the day, and they say he has changed greatly in his temper, has become quiet and never interferes, which is opposite to what he has ever been. In short those who know him best think him failing fast. I have not yet seen him – he was in bed when I called last night. I hear too that Mrs Cox is unwell. By the bye, relative to a certain conversation you and I had²⁷, Polly Cox came over to Coate with me last night to take some beef tea to a sick man who formerly worked for them – she met her

²⁶ Thomas Harrild died on 6 December 1867, aged 45.

²⁷ Richard's cousin Joseph Hall (b. 1854) recounted Richard's interest in their cousin, Polly (Mary) Cox (see photograph on next page). This attraction was mutual.

sister opposite our house with Woolford and they all three went to Swindon together. I was surprized to find vegetation so backward as it is here compared with Sydenham. Were it not for the warm sunshine, the primroses, and the song of the birds, one might think it still winter for the trees are leafless and the hedges are still bare. Everything seems so unearthly quiet – so still, nature seems reposing; this is in comparison with London and even Sydenham. I will write again shortly, with many thanks for your kindness dear Aunt.

Believe me to remain your affectionate nephew

Richard.



Fanny Cox
(Richard's aunt)
1812-1901



Polly (Mary) Cox
(Richard's cousin)
1844-1920

Coate
Sunday April 12 1868
[Easter Sunday]

Dear Aunt

I am sorry to have to send tidings of death to you – Grandfather is no more²⁸. He died this evening between 5 and 6 o'clock. He was in an extremely weak state for sometime previous and there was no hope of his recovery, although no one expected so early a release, for a release, if we may judge it was. Unable to do or enjoy anything – scarce strong enough to speak life to him held out no apparent gratification. I know no particulars further than these. I went to Swindon this afternoon immediately after tea, and found that he had died ten minutes before I got there. I instantly hastened home for Father, who had seen him in the morning. No one is surprized – his great age seemed to preclude all possibility of recovery. There is nothing more that I can tell you at present dear Aunt, but I will write again in a few days.

Believe me to be your loving nephew

Richard



Christ Church, Swindon
Illustration by A S Hickerton

²⁸ John Jefferies died aged 83 and was buried at Christ Church, Swindon.

Coate
Friday June 5th 1868

My dear Aunt

I was so pleased to have a letter from you yesterday morning. It reached me just as I was starting for the railway station, for I spent the day at Bristol, and I read it in the train. I only went for pleasure, or rather for a change. My principal object was to have my photograph taken – I promised it to you so long ago that I am ashamed of myself for not sending it. I went to a first class artist and hope to have the pleasure of sending a carte to you shortly. You really have not the slightest need to be jealous of Mrs Bessemers²⁹, for she has promised to read an essay of mine which is more than 50 pages, so that I don't see that she is much to be envied. It certainly is strange that Father does not write to you about the gig. I can't understand his ways at all. If he doesn't write shortly I will try and manage to let you know, but I own I can do nothing with him. He will give me neither advice nor assistance, neither tell me what he would like done or anything else, so that I go my own way and ask nobody. I think the gig would be a great advantage – it would be very useful to us, and it would be pleasant for you when you came down to see an old friend. As for my views Aunt they are much the same. I want a situation and if possible I should prefer one of those Civil Service clerkships. Reporting is such uncertain exciting work that I am almost afraid of it especially as, to tell the truth, I don't feel very strong. I fainted in a church the other Sunday. Willie Cox³⁰ and I go to church sometimes together in the morning – sometimes to one place sometimes to another. That Sunday we went to Wanboro' church. I felt nothing at all the matter until the psalms began and then I suddenly fainted – fell down quite insensible and utterly helpless. William held me up

²⁹ Mrs. Ada Bessemers lived next-door-but-one to Aunt Ellen (a field divided the two houses from each other); she, in common with her friend Ellen, was also childless and took a great interest in Richard.

³⁰ Richard's cousin William Cox (1843-1909) lived at Snodshill Farm – brother of Polly Cox.

and I soon came round again. We went out and walked gently home to Snodshill where I had promised to go to dinner. I was afraid to go home for mother of late has become so foolishly nervous that really one doesn't know what might happen if she were frightened. I didn't eat much dinner but soon got round all right, but I don't think I've been so strong since. I can't walk far now without getting tired and I used to walk any distance. I never told them at home about my faint and I hope you won't – I only mentioned it to you with the idea of showing you that I'm not very strong and I should like a quiet place if I can get one. Could you find out for me if Mr Turner's address is the same now as when Horton gave it me, that I might write and ask him when another examination takes place. Please don't get frightening mother by letting her know anything about my being unwell in the church. It was very hot that day and I expect that had something to do with it. I hope you will write soon and tell me about Mr Turner. I am really very anxious to get a place. I am looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you soon at Coate. Some have begun haymaking but we have not yet. Remember me to Sarah and believe me dear Aunt to remain your sincerely affectionate nephew

Richard.

PS Is Aunt Annie still at New Cross?



Wanborough Church

Illustration by Miss Agnes G Taylor, 1896
from *Jefferies Land: a history of Swindon and its environs*
by Richard Jefferies, edited by Grace Toplis.

Coate

June 21st 1868 [Sunday]

My dear Aunt,

I am in your debt for three kind letters – I don't think I ever had so many from you before so close together – you quite put me to shame for my slackness in writing, but I will try to make amends – this I think is the longest day in the year so that it will be quite natural to write a long letter. I can always write more easily on a Sunday – I don't know why except that other people generally try to write on any other day but that and that I must be different from them, must be a poppy in the cornfield, even though the poppy be not so useful unless to send people to sleep as I am afraid my letter will you before I've finished. I shouldn't have dated it Sunday though had I been writing to any other, but I know you like me to deal with you truthfully even if it is distasteful. It is very kind of you Aunt to take so much trouble for me – I'm not deserving of it – nobody ought to be helped who won't help themselves. I should certainly think myself very lucky to get an engagement on the Daily News, which is a rising paper of a substantial character. I shall write to that gentleman you mentioned as you wish it, but really I've got no more to tell him than you have already. I'm a reporter and can write a little – that's all. A reporter out of practice too – a bad recommendation for a London daily paper. Still you will say there is nothing like trying and I quite agree with you. But to tell the truth I hardly know even if I did get an engagement just now in London whether I should be justified in taking it. I don't know whether it is the great heat or not, but certain it is that I've been very queer for some time – so much inclined to faint. I'm better today and have been better during the week, but I'm not strong and I hardly know what to be at until I am. It would look so excessively foolish to take a place and not be able to go through with it, it would be wrong, and would destroy my chances too for a long time after. Still I'll try. I'm quite out of practice as a reporter –

got quite rusty, so to rub it off and get sharp again I've offered to do a little for Mr Piper at times to keep my hand in. He was very agreeable of course. I've done nothing yet but no doubt shall shortly. As for seeing Mr Gay³¹ I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that – Time's the great physician, and Nature the best nurse. You laughed at me, and were I think a little angry with me back in the spring when I was with you because I would not take anything for my cold and cough. I told you I trusted in Nature – I was not deceived. I still trust in nature and will have nothing to do with physic, except indeed Nature's medicine – Time. Isn't it warm – it is just 5 minutes past 9 in the morning and I declare I perspire sitting here with the door open and a smashed window and doing nothing but write to you. It seems as if the weather had mistaken England for India. Now I know Aunt or at least I guess that Mother has been pestering you again lately about me – I wish to heaven she'd let me alone, she always makes a mess of everything, I don't believe she knows half the time what she's about, she walks into a room, stares round and then asks herself what she came there for. I fancy I hear you say "that's Betsy all over." The poor dear woman will put herself to such trouble about her unworthy son, who wishes he could let her have a thousand a year and a dozen slaves to fan her this hot weather. But really he will not be bothered. She marched into Swindon the other day, went to Mr Piper's and made a mess of it there – which gave me no end of trouble to explain away. I think she's got just a glimmering idea at last that it's best to leave her self willed son alone. She certainly seems better lately – more cheerful. We have a chat together now and then, only really 'tis a difficult matter to talk to her for in the middle of a thing she will jump up to see if Charley isn't eating too many green-gooseberries, which makes one think of the stomach-ache and other unpleasant things. I have just taken my coat off and am writing to you in my shirt-sleeves – 'tis so hot. Mother thinks that July would be the best time for you to come down – so if July will suit please come

³¹ A surgeon.

then. How glad I shall be to see you – I've got such a vast number of things to talk to you about and above all a confession to make, so come and shrive me. I can't understand why father should have refused the gig – I was astonished. He seems to me as if he flung away every advantage. Certainly it would cost something to bring it down, but nothing compared with its value and the use it would be to us. I hope you will send it. The dear old gig that poor Uncle and I had so many pleasant drives in. I shall never forget those drives. I'm not rich but I wouldn't mind contributing something to the cost of bringing it down, if it was only for my own sake, for you know I can't ride, but I am very fond of driving. It would be a boon to Mother too – I should take her out – I know where to get a quiet horse when I want one. I shall be much disappointed if it doesn't come. I don't know what the cost would be I'm sure, but if you'll let me pay part I will with pleasure and even all if it is not too much. I suppose even if it does come you would not trust me to take you out for a drive – you never would when poor uncle used to ask you to. Poor Uncle how often I think about him – he has left a holy memory behind him. It is very strange but I fancy your handwriting is quite altered since his death. I'm sure you are altered and perhaps it will show itself. But I must not write about him or I shall reopen the old wound, though I'm afraid the wound has not closed yet. Dear Aunt I must thank you again for the trouble you are taking for me. I hope you will come in July – I long to see you again. The haymaking in all human probability will be over by then, and if the weather continues like this the corn harvest on the point of beginning – the yellow wheat is very beautiful to look upon. The wheat is already up to my shoulder. I haven't had a line from Sally – 'tis too bad of her but I suppose it's my own fault for not writing to her. I suppose I must soon see about a piano, if you are only going to stay a short time – it had better be brought over the day before you come so as to be ready. You know what a dilatory lot we are down here I don't believe the water runs so fast here as at Sydenham, at least I know there's lots of stagnant pools. You would hardly believe it but little Charley has

learnt to swim this year – taught himself in the reservoir. [born 26.11.58 and so aged 9] He looks such a mite floating about in the water. It is a very good thing that he has learnt for ours is a dangerous place for water, what with the canal, the reservoir, brooks and great ponds. All three of us swim now. Henry is the crack swimmer, crack skater, crack jumper etc etc etc of Coate and neighbourhood. I don't know whether these little things interest you or not – sometimes I'm afraid I bore you, but I shall take chance this time and tell you all the news, you can tell me next time you write if you like it or no. Last Sunday we had visitors, unexpected and not wanted particularly. A young man who was formerly clerk etc at the Herald Office Swindon but who has lately set up in business at Malmesbury, as a printer, actually took the liberty of driving himself and sister over to Coate last Sunday, and contrived to get here just before dinner so that one couldn't help asking him to stop. I've known him a long time but never made an intimate of him and I thought it rather cool to invite himself and sister here, on a Sunday too. However, it turned out that he is in difficulties – he borrowed money to set up in business and it has been suddenly called in – so he came to me to know if I would help him pay part and go partners in his business, also in a paper. I said I neither would nor could, so he went to Mr Piper and I hear has made some arrangement there. At first sight such an offer looks tempting but I know the man and I know Malmesbury – a dead alive little town without even a railroad. Money would be sunk there even if I had it. I hardly knew what to do with him and his sister, having been very unwell all the morning and indeed lying on the sofa, but luckily George Stroud and another gent dropped in in the afternoon and they saved me the trouble of attending to them. I'll have nothing to do with him or his business. Aunt Sewell³² spent a day with us a little while ago – I had to go and fetch her for she likes to walk

³² Richard's Aunt Eliza (Jefferies) Sewell was born on 18 August 1813 and married George Sewell in 1840. The couple inherited the bakery and business when John Jefferies died. They bore no children in their time together. George died in 1874. Eliza lived until 1894 aged 81.

through the fields, and yet though she has lived in the country all her life is afraid of cows. So Baxter³³ is married at last – if you write to him or his lady, or stop – you’d better wait till you see him – then give him congratulations from me, not that they are worth anything but it shows an interest and I do take an interest in Wynne’s progress through the world. How things chop and change in a few years – I remember running about the Lewes downs with the young Baxters³⁴ and pelting each other with pieces of putty blown through tin tubes, and now he’s married. I suppose ‘twill be my turn next. And still the stars shine on. If they can see us mortals how they must sneer at our puppet show. Does Ted Harrild stare at them as much as ever? I told him I’d write to him, but I never have. I’ve a foot of observations for his examination in my note-book. Ask him if he’d like to hear from me. Isn’t this a long letter and I haven’t half finished yet, only the rest I shall keep for another. Please write soon and tell us if July will suit you. Remember me to Sarah. Perhaps you may kiss her – I don’t know she ought to write. Believe me dear Aunt

your sincerely affectionate nephew

Richard

³³ Wynne Baxter married Kate.

³⁴ Wynne Edwin Baxter (b. 1844 in Lewes) was the oldest of four children born to William and Anne Baxter. William was the brother of George Baxter who married Uncle Thomas’s sister, Mary.

Coate

July 12th 1868

My dear Aunt

I will most certainly make some enquiries as to the time at which the gig may be expected to arrive – I would willingly walk down to the station half a dozen times for it; I only asked you thinking that perhaps you might know. Thank you for the box of books – before it has come – thank you then for the purpose of sending it: – also too for the electric machine. How well I remember the time when dear Uncle brought it home with him. If you remember he gave us shocks, and showed us the electric spark in your closet in the breakfast parlour – shutting the door to make it dark. On one occasion more particularly I remember he and I were in your sanctum sanctorum of jam pots and pickles, and he charged the Leyden jar very strongly, and gave himself such a shock that he actually jumped up, off the ground. He offered me the machine once as a present to take home and I refused, if the truth must be told I believe from sheer cowardice. You know what an awful coward I used to be, especially I remember of thunder and lightning, and somehow or other I always connected that electric machine in my mind with the lightning. I was actually afraid to accept the machine. Many times since I have regretted refusing it, for it would have enabled me to perform many interesting experiments and assisted me greatly in my scientific studies. I shall not refuse it again, but thank you most sincerely for thinking of me. I shall carefully preserve it in remembrance of him, and I only wish he could be with you now to read this note and smile at my cowardice. For I was a coward in days gone by, especially of thunder. You remember the house being struck with lightning whilst you were at the Crystal Palace? Strange to say though it terribly frightened me at the time, I have never felt afraid of thunder since – that frightened my cowardice out of me. A propos of thunder – there is a storm going round me at this moment and I can hear the roaring of the thunder from time to time. I am very glad you are coming down at the end of this month, for as I said

before I expect I shall be out a good deal after the 10th of August, and I have a great deal to talk to you about, especially one subject. I am afraid that at first you will be displeased, but I shall not on that account hesitate to tell you the truth, for I know very well that after all that will please you best. I cannot tell you very well in a letter, but it is not very long now to the 29th. I am only angry with myself that I never told you before. However, what is done cannot be helped – it must be accepted. All destiny you know – that doctrine Uncle Charles³⁵ dislikes so, because I suppose he is not satisfied with his destiny whereas I am with mine, and indeed think myself very fortunate in every respect. I have only myself to blame if I am not happy and successful. By the bye, I wrote to Mr Turner, and yesterday had a note from him, saying that there was no such another examination taking place at present – an appointment would have to be got by means of a friend who had interest with the Government. He sent me a circular of an open examination for a supplementary clerkship in the University of London commencing at £80 per annum but it is so burdened with conditions that I shall have nothing to do with it. Even when gained one is not certain for the person who fills the place will be subject to annual re-election by the Senate of the University! I will stick to my trade unless something better than that turns up – annual re-election, i.e., liability to be turned out at any time. Please Aunt will you send me in your next note Mr Snow's address. I asked you before but I suppose it escaped your remembrance. I want to write to him – I think he might aid me. In truth I have employed the last two months in writing a story with which I have taken great pains, and flatter myself that I have produced a tale of a very different class to those sensational stories I wrote some time ago. I have attempted in fact to make my story lifelike by delineating character rather than by sensational incidents. My characters are many of them drawn from life, some of my incidents actually took place, and the scenery of the story is described from places that I have seen. If it

³⁵ Charles Estcourt Gyde (Aunt Ellen's oldest brother), born 1820.

was published here many persons would easily recognize many of the scenes and some of the characters. I have copied it out in a clear readable hand, better than this, upon good white paper, and I think that anyone might easily read it. Now I think that if I could get Mr Snow to look over my M.S. for me it would be a great advantage. Even if he did not aid me directly, he might lay it before some person who could – might perhaps show it to some of the magazine editors; in short there is no numbering the ways in which he might help me if he took an interest, for he must have a wide acquaintance in the publishing world. I should think it no little advantage, even if he did nothing else, if he would give me his opinion upon my powers as a writer – my faults and failings – his opinion or advice would have great weight with me. And he has always shown a surprising willingness to aid me – you must remember his coming up to Sydenham to see what I wanted him for when I called and found him out, also his going to the editor for me. So I might write and ask him without giving offence, only I have not got his address. If you agree with me – that it would at least be no harm to write to him – perhaps you will kindly send me his address at the first opportunity.

We are all pretty well except Henry who is not at all well but I do not think there is anything serious the matter, I am much better and I hope dear Aunt that you too are well.

Believe your loving nephew,

Richard.

Coate

Thursday [1868]

[St Swithin's day + 1 = 16th July]

Dear Aunt

The gig arrived safely Tuesday evening and Henry fetched it from the station early Wednesday morning. It is all right. The box came safely and everything in it. I believe Father was very pleased to see the gig, I know I was. In default of a better coach house it is now standing in the cowshed under shelter from the sun and rain; and covered with a cloth from dust. The cowsheds are not used at this time of year, the cows being out in the field. I ought I know to have written yesterday and told you of its arrival but I hope you will forgive me for really I had not one moment to myself all day, nor today until this afternoon. Mr Piper sent for me on Tuesday evening asking me to report the Swindon County Court of Wednesday, as he was obliged to go out and his reporter was overwhelmed with a press of business. So I went and a hot day's work it was in a close room shut up from 10 till six with perhaps 200 people. The heat – it was very warm on Wednesday – was very great, and I was in a constant perspiration from morning till night. Then this morning I had to write the copy out and carry it in. I am very glad you are coming soon and from what I can understand from Mother in so far as convenience is concerned it really makes little difference whether you come now or three months hence, only that now the weather is in your favour. Father has not been well – toothache and a bad cold, but he seems better today. Mother seems about the same. Henry is much better. Do not think it was carelessness on my part to send Henry for the gig, for in truth he is a better driver and knows more of horses than I do. But I should have gone with him had it not been for the reporting. Henry and Charley want to thank you for their books. You did not neglect to nail the box down tight enough. The electric machine came unbroken – I was rather afraid of the glass getting smashed. Thank you for it and the books, thank you too

for sending the gig. But somehow I was sorry to see poor Uncle's coat – it was kind to send it, but it brought him to my mind so vividly. Do you remember last autumn when I was with you, saying in jest to him and myself as we were going for a drive that we both wanted new great coats, for those we wore were beginning to get shabby? I remember it well. I am afraid that you find this hot weather very oppressive – I wrote to Mrs Bessemeres the other day and told her that I pitied her shut up in London, what a change from Hoove Lea! There was just a sprinkling shower yesterday – St Swithin's day – to christen the apples as people say. The corn is already yellow, and some is reaped: you will very probably see the reapers at work as you come down. I suppose you intend coming as soon as Sarah's holidays commence.

Why Aunt must I not write to Mr Snow before you see my MS? Has he any peculiar ideas? Is he very pious or something of that kind? I am sure there is nothing in my tale that the most strict could take offence at, for the virtuous are rewarded and the wicked punished, and that is exactly what you see in the bible, so that my story must be a good book if it resembles that one. However if you think I had better not write to him tell me. I own I was much disappointed when I learnt you thought not – I had almost reckoned upon him, and if you remember you used early in the spring to chide me for not asking him to help me, yet now I think of it, you hesitate to give me leave. However I have no doubt you have good reasons. Please write again aunt soon. We are all looking forward to see you. Kiss Sarah and believe me to remain your loving nephew

Richard

[written in pencil] Coate, 28 August 1868

Dear Aunt

Thank God I am getting better now, and can sit up in bed; but I am so miserably weak, and my legs are as thin as a grasshopper's. ... But when I come to think it over calmly, I can almost thank God that I have been ill, for it has made me pause and think, and I can now see what a wrong and even wicked course I have been secretly pursuing for a long time, and I hope I shall take warning. God has been very merciful to me this time. I never found my Bible a consolation before, but I have during the last two or three days, for its promises are full of mercy, and I have found it true, for I have prayed earnestly and God has answered me. . . Aunt Sewell sends me jellies, which Pollie makes who is staying for a while at Swindon, and above all I am in the country and can see the green grass out of window and it it (*sic*) is quiet – God be thanked for all this. And above all the weather is so much cooler – this seems a special blessing for what should I have done upstairs had that tropical weather continued? Yes, I have much to be thankful for and I hope I am. I hope dear Aunt that you are well – they tell me that you are gone to the seaside – I hope you will enjoy it, both you and Sarah. No doubt they will forward my letter from Shanklin Villa. Do please write to me as soon as you can – it would be such a pleasure to receive a letter from you. I shall try and write most days now – it is such a pleasure to be able too once more. I do so wish you were with me but I suppose that cannot be. How is Mrs Bessemeres – I should like to hear from her but do not feel equal to writing to her just at present. How I should like to go to Hoove Lea again. I have such a longing to see the sea – to have a change, in fact I must somehow as soon as I can move. I have saved a little money and I shall not spare it – Health before all other earthly things. My back is getting quite sore with lying in bed – I hope I shall soon be able to sit up a little. My dear Aunt I must now finish my long long note hoping to hear from you very very soon. With sincere love to you and Sarah believe me dear Aunt. Your loving and attached nephew
Richard

Coate

Tuesday [? September 1868]

My dear Aunt

I had your letter this morning whilst at breakfast downstairs along with Harry – this is the first time I have been downstairs to breakfast. I can't tell how delighted I was to get your note. I am so glad to hear you are enjoying yourself and such an agreeable companion – Mrs Bessemeres, oh, heigho! I wish I could join your party. However I suppose you will soon think of Shanklin Villa again. I have sent my Essay on Instinct and Mrs Bessemeres's book by post directed to you for her. It is wonderful how God has been raising me up – I am so to say quite strong. Yesterday – the sun being strong though the wind blew – I walked up and down behind a good thick sheltering hedge almost unceasingly for a whole hour – I must have walked nearly 2 miles backwards and forwards. Today – less wind but cloudy. As yet tis too early to go out, – only ten but I hope to have a walk presently. I must – I am so wearied of rooms, and really I think it is nearly as cold in our parlour as it is out. I am so tired of reading – so much of it overburdens one. In truth I want a change. But of that presently – you ask after mother. I am very sorry to say that she is quite ill. She was taken ill on Saturday night – tried to get up Sunday and did get my breakfast, but she was afterwards obliged to go to bed again.

Yesterday she came down again a little in the evening, but has not got up yet this morning. I have just been up to see her she says she shall get up presently. All the rest are well. Henry was much pleased to get a letter from Sally, I mean Sarah, tell her she shall have the Old Bachelor, and I will copy the music for her, or stop I will write a note to the dear girl myself. Heigho! I've just had a note from my editor, telling me he shall be very glad to see me at my post again, or rather that he is anxious to hear from me which sounds awkward. However I do not much despair of retaining my place, certain it is no one else could be got at the price who could be relied on – I do not speak from

vanity but because I know that no one but a person in my position, near home, could afford to spend so much time for so little money. I too am anxious to get back but really am not equal nor shall not be for weeks to the long walks, late hours etc. of a reporter. I must have a change first – it seems a necessity. My dear Aunt will you forgive me if I intrude too far on you good nature. I am absolutely afraid to go to Devonshire – in fact now winter comes on I think I had better put sea out . . .

[the rest of the letter is missing]



Henry (Harry) Jefferies
Richard's younger brother 1852-1920

Ivieshurst

Coate

November 15 1868 [Sunday]

My dear Aunt

I was very glad to hear from you again yesterday morning having in fact a little fear that I had offended you by not writing. You really are a little bit too hard upon me – I could hardly help myself, this awful election has kept me employed pretty nearly day and night. On my birthday I positively did work both day and night being up over 22 hours out of the 24. There has only been one day – last Friday 13th – that there has not been a meeting of some kind to attend, and today is the first Sunday since I returned home that I have not had to work on. After one has been to a noisy election meeting – the hubbub is something indescribable – come home and written it all out ready for the press, why I can assure you one doesn't feel much inclined for more writing. I have only been to bed twice before 12 since I returned.

Last Friday 13th was a clear day – no meeting whatever – so I took my gun and went out the whole day long from 9 o'clock in the morn till dark. Working at night hurts my eyes so and I am only too glad to get a day out in the fields – it puts me all right again. It was not a very merry way of keeping one's birthday was it – working all night? It was bitterly cold and even snowed a little. I wrapped my rug round my knees and wrote on. I got into bed just as the Abbey bells (it was at Cirencester) – chimed 5 o'clock in the morning. Strange musical old bells they are, very soft-sounding and melancholy as if tolling a requiem over the old monks who built the abbey. It is a rare church – almost a cathedral. The first thing I heard on awaking about 8 o'clock were the same bells ringing for service. They have 2 services every morning. So my 21st year began with hard work – how will it end? I think it's rather dreadful when one comes to think and reflect on it – 20 years old, a third of life gone. Tomorrow morn D. V., I start for Malmesbury by the first train – leave home about ½ past 6 – and the

election business begins in good earnest. Monday is nomination day at Malmesbury and a grand row is expected. A little army of policemen are going down from Swindon at the dawn. I suppose I shall be in the thick of it. On Tuesday it is nomination day at Cricklade (our own borough) and there too plenty of fighting is expected. But if there is any real hard fighting it will probably be on Wednesday. So you may call me "special correspondent at the seat of war". We are all well and hearty. I verily believe my appetite gets stronger every day – I can never get enough to eat – and I get stronger myself. I shall write again as soon as the election is over, until then believe me to remain

Your affectionate nephew

Richard.



[Hotel headed paper] Green's Hotel
Hastings
Sept 7th 1870

Dear Aunt

I hope you arrived safely & comfortably at Worthing, and that you feel no disagreeable twinges of rheumatism from the exposure to the rain. After leaving you I went to my hotel and had dinner immediately so whilst you shivered in the carriage, I enjoyed a feed. After that I found there was a train for Lewes at 3.35, and as it was so wet that I could not see anything of Brighton, I determined to push on at once. I reached Lewes at 4 and found Wynne³⁶ at home. He wrote me out two certificates of identity and refused payment. I thought it kind – there is some trouble in fulfilling all the formalities. Whilst I was there about an hour Mr Baxter senr.³⁷ arrived from Croydon – much to Wynne's astonishment. Mrs W. Baxter³⁸ had a party of friends so I did not see her, but her husband said she was well. I then took the 5.40 train to Hastings en route for Dover (finding from Wynne that I could not get a boat at Newhaven for Ostend). I enjoyed the ride from Lewes to Hastings very much. It was new & yet it was old, for I at once recognised many places I had seen years ago no doubt with you. I knew that the line would run close to the sea long before it actually did from memory. As I saw the sea the rain cleared off & I had a fine view of Beachy Head, & a glimpse of Eastbourne. I have no doubt that it is Beachy Head you can see from Worthing Pier – the cliff farthest out to sea. At Hastings I went into the first hotel and found it a very good one. I have just had coffee and have supper at half past 9. It is now 8. I have no doubt you will be comfortable at Worthing. One reason of my stopping here was the Prince Imperial's presence. He is at the Marine Hotel, and I have no doubt I shall see him. Besides

³⁶ Wynne Baxter was a solicitor. See foot-note 29.

³⁷ William Baxter (b. 1809) was the owner of the bi-weekly *Sussex Express*.

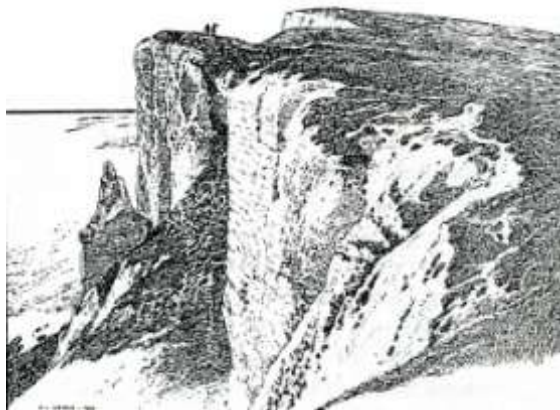
³⁸ Anne Baxter.

to Dover is a long journey without a break. At present I intend going on to Dover tomorrow forenoon, & if all is right with the passport may reach Ostend the same night per steamer. I hope you will stay longer at Worthing than Monday –it seems so short a time – but you know best. I wish to thank you for your kindness to me at Sydenham I enjoyed my visit very much indeed & it has done me great good. I was getting into a wretched state previously – my nervous system seemed shaken, and I felt as if I had no power of life in me. That was the reason why I seemed so lazy to you – why I laid on the sofa. The rest has completely altered me, and for that I have to thank you. I wish I could in return do something to restore you at least to perfect health & freedom from physical pain, if not to happiness.

I am dear Aunt your affectionate nephew

Richard

Do not forget Josephine. Her large and beautiful eyes have haunted me ever since our visit to Worthing. Remember me to her: but please do it privately, let no one else know what I have said of her. I hope to see her again. I shall write at once on reaching Ostend – or if anything interesting crosses me. Adieu!



Beachy Head

Green's Hotel
Hastings
Sept. 8 1870

Dear Aunt

It is the twilight of the evening, and I shall spend it in writing to you. I have remained here all day, visiting every part of the place. Last night, after writing to you I strolled down to the Marine Hotel, and saw the Prince sitting at his window. You may remember the hotel – facing the sea, with huge bow windows. The Prince has the front apartments. His window was open & he and his suite in waiting were apparently engaged in watching the storm out at sea. There was very vivid lightning, you must have seen it at Worthing. The Prince is accompanied by three rather aged military looking gentlemen and seems to have an old lady – a kind of nurse – constantly near him. After supper the weather cleared up, & the moon shone most brilliantly – I strolled out till 12 and again saw the Prince at supper. He sucked a bone like any other mortal. After this, walking on the beach, I was hailed by the coast-guard, who however, instantly became civil. Entering into conversation with them, I heard some anecdotes of smuggling and learnt to my astonishment that it is still carried on to a large extent. One of these men said that only last winter he had assisted at the capture from smugglers of 16 pipes of wine, and a whole bale of tobacco. The fishing boats bring in a good deal – sometimes meeting foreign vessels out at sea. This man showed me his arms – a “tuck stick” or sword-stick, a pistol, & an alarm rocket. He was an intelligent fellow and had served on an iron clad. I slept like a top that night and I hope you did too.

This morning the sea-parades were covered with people – hundreds & hundreds – all the way from the cliffs at Hastings to the extremity of St Leonards. I met crowds of well-dressed people, and ladies innumerable. Amongst all these ladies, numberless as the pebbles I saw no one at all pretty, excepting two French girls, part of the Prince's suite. They were twins I am sure, so exactly alike that you

could not distinguish one from the other except by their walking one on the left & the other on the right (so that one's left arm was against the other's right). They were fine made girls, & carried their heads high (as became companions of a Prince!) but, not nearly so handsome as Josephine. Though luxurious in form, they wanted her beautiful eyes. I saw them with the Prince. He came out for a stroll on the parade with his suite. He is very small, rather pretty, and decidedly intellectual-looking. He bows etc., to the crowd. The ladies took a special fancy to him. He had several hundred near him at every step – each at his devotion. Happy boy! There is a widespread belief here that the Empress Eugénie³⁹ is in the place, incognito. This evening there is news of a French victory at Strasburg – 8,000 Germans blown to atoms, & riddled with bullets per mitrailleuse. This is from the Standard – shaky authority.

I do not think this place equal to Brighton & shall not remain except under very special circumstances. There seems such a difficulty in getting a boat, & they ask prices nearly three times as high as the boats at Worthing. Worthing is free from rocks too, & better for boats. At Worthing too you have a pier. Here the pier is in course of reconstruction having tumbled into the sea. But the cliffs here are fine & an elderly gentleman I met this morning assured me the air was the best on the south coast – better than Torquay even for invalids. He said he had had many years experience in every place, & had finally found Hastings superior. A lady with him believed so too; but could not spare the time to sit down & talk, she was so interested in The Prince & must gaze at his window. This old gentleman asked to look through my telescope at a vessel – thus our acquaintance opened. We spoke of Napoleon III, when it came out that my friend had been connected with the diplomatic service & he gave me some most interesting anecdotes of Louis Phillipe's policy, &

³⁹ Desmond Seward provides an account of the Empress's movements in *Eugénie: the Empress and her Empire* (The History Press, 2005) at this time and records on page 259 that "After a dramatic reunion with the Prince Imperial in Hastings, at the Marine Hotel on Eastern Parade, mother and son stayed on the Sussex coast for the next fortnight."

Napoleon III's habits. My friend's bow at parting was quite à la ancien régime. I intend going on to Dover tomorrow. I think a day long enough for this place as I have no acquaintance. I find the dullness of being alone much compensated by my habit of entering into conversation with every one I can. It is surprising what a lot one learns thus. I hope you enjoy yourself. However this long letter may bore you & diminish your pleasure. Tell Fred⁴⁰ he is not at all like the Prince. The portraits are not in the least like the reality. Fred is as big again almost a man in comparison, & they have a different expression.

I am dear Aunt your affectionate nephew

Richard



Richard's final resting place
Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing, 2008.

The cross was originally mounted on the plinth. Two separate attacks on the cross by vandals led to the decision to lay the cross horizontally.

⁴⁰ Probably referring to Frederick Harrild (Horton Harrild's youngest son) born in 1854.

Green's Hotel
Hastings
Sept. 16th 1870

My dear Aunt

Will you be so kind as to take care of and preserve the two letters enclosed in this one. They are of the utmost importance to me, and I do not know with whom to trust them but you, while travelling about I might easily lose them. The adventures I have had since I have been here are almost beyond credibility: they have led me on from day to day, until I find a week has passed and I am still this side of the Channel. I will just give you a brief outline of the incidents that have happened to me. When I arrived here after leaving you, I found that the Prince Imperial was here – that he had arrived here the same day. When I went to bed that night, as I was lying in bed, the idea came into my head to write some verses on his exile. No sooner thought than done. I composed them that night and wrote them out and posted them the first thing next morning (Thursday). You say I am always too precipitate or too procrastinating. At least I lost no time in this. A day went by and on Saturday there came a note to me at the hotel, from the aid-de-camp of the Prince, acknowledging the receipt of the verses, and saying that the Prince had been much pleased with them. You will admit that this was about enough to turn a young author's head. Not being au fait in French I took the note to a French lady professor, and she translated it for me. I enclose the translation for you – but does not Sarah learn French? If so it would be good practice for her to try & read the note. Please tell her to take care of it, as it cannot be replaced, & would be of great value to me in after life. If I were seeking a place on a London paper the production of that note would be a wonderful recommendation. Well, the reception of that acknowledgement encouraged me, and on the following morning I set to work and wrote a letter to the Prince, communicating some rather important information which I had learnt whilst connected with the Press. The result was

a second letter from the aid-de-camp, this time dictated by the Empress Eugénie, who had read my note. I send you this letter too, and must beg you to carefully preserve it. I took it and had it translated by the same French lady – Madame d’Arnould, 2, Western Road, St Leonards, and I enclose translation. She says the expressions are very warm, & cannot be adequately rendered into English, she says it would be impossible to write more cordially in French than the Empress has done. Now came another discovery – It came out in conversation with that French lady that she had actually been to school with the Empress in her youth, that they had played together and been picnics together. Her husband was a sea commander – and she showed me his bell etc. He served Napoleon when Napoleon was President, but protested against the coup d’état of 1851 and they had then to leave Paris. She had been unfortunate and had now to earn her bread. She still preserves her husband’s coat of arms. etc. Then came another discovery. It appeared that the equerries of the Empress (sixteen in number) unable to speak English had seen her advertisement and came to her to act as interpreter. She did so. After a while it crept out that these rascals were abusing their employer behind her back – usually calling her “the Spanish Cow” – and even went the length of letting out private conversations they had overheard in the Tuileries and at the Marine Hotel. She felt extremely indignant at this ungrateful conduct (for they are well paid and have three months wages in advance) & she should like the Empress to know, but being so poor she could not call on her old companion, indeed her pride would not permit. These were the men she said, from whom the Prussians obtained intelligence; and certainly they did act the part of spies. Other Frenchmen resident here met them at an inn, and they then detailed to them what they had learnt at the Marine Hotel. I persuaded her (she was in a terrible way, indignant and angry) to write to my friend the aid-de-camp and see him. She did so, and the consequence is that a number of these fellows have been discharged. The Empress & the Prince are still here

despite all paragraphs in the papers. They drove out yesterday afternoon – I saw them.

When I first came here I was so delighted with the sea, that I took more exercise than was good for me. At your house I rested, and then when I got here worked too hard. What with this, and the excitement I overheated my blood and got very unwell. Thank God I am now better – but it kept me here a day or two longer than I should otherwise have remained.

I have met some most amusing companions. I told you of the Statesman who knew Louis Philippe. I also made friends with an old Indian Officer staying at this hotel. He had been thirty years in India. His conversation was exceedingly interesting. His position as a commander of native troops enabled him to enter places such as the great Monkey Temple, where others could not go. He was all through the Mutiny – in Lucknow when it was besieged, and relieved by the Highlanders, but he said in answer to me that he never heard the pibrochs playing. The Highlanders came but they were too busy with the guns to play music. Thus falls that romance, which has been made into a song. In leaving India he travelled through Australia, to the Sandwich Islands, and California, and from San Francisco across to New York by the newly constructed railway, which for some distance he says, runs through a tunnel in the snow, and fires are lighted in the carriages.

I also made friends with a gentleman who gave me a pamphlet he had written. I send it. I also made friends with a firm of four boatmen partners and learned an immense deal from them. One of them, a sailor, has been all over the world. He was at the taking of Pekin in China – was engaged in hunting the pirates – and has seen them shot down, mowed down like grass. With this man I have had two long rows – one 12, and the other 14 miles. The first was to Fairlight Glen. It so chanced, very curiously, that Fairlight was his native place, and although he had played on the cliffs as a child, yet he had never revisited the spot since he started as a sailor years ago until he went with me. On the second occasion, yesterday being fine, we rowed 6 miles straight out to sea, right in the track of the

great ships. We went alongside three of these ships – they were under full sail, a most beautiful sight. The sailors and captains were all anxious for news of the war in France which I gave them, and flung the days paper on board one ship.

There is nothing more beautiful than a great ship under full sail in the midst of the ocean, besides this I have had adventures with the ladies which I do not care to write, but will tell you some day. Vide, lock of hair!

I have not yet told you the best joke of all. One morning a strange gentleman called at the hotel and asked for me. I presented myself – slightly astonished. He bowed most gracefully, and asked if my name was Monsieur Jefferys? I said yes. He asked to see me privately. I got a room, when it turned out he was a partner in the firm Chillingnett wine-merchants, down here on a trip. The Empress was here, and he understood I was her London agent. Might he beg permission to supply her – would I lay his card before her! He trembled as he spoke, actually trembled agitated. I kept my countenance most seriously, looked grave, said I could not interfere in such a matter, that I had nothing to do with the Empress Household – he must be misinformed. I had the honour of political connection but not in his way. My gentleman looked sheepish, was profuse in apologies, and began to perspire. He insisted on leaving his card which I send! Isn't it rare!

How he came to learn anything about me I can't imagine, except that perhaps the hotel people had noticed the letters I received from the Marine Hotel where the Empress lives, and had put him upon me. If they wished to get anything out of me they were nicely fitted. Had I been inclined how I might have fleeced Mr Chillingnett. He would willingly have given £10 for an order from the Empress, and would have taken my word for it – just to stick in his advertisements, “supplied to the Empress”. I have had tradesmen come to me and offer money for information before now – when they thought I could give them early notice of work. But poor Chillingnett!

I should have written to you again at Worthing, but could not tell whether you were there, or had returned to

Sydenham. So I waited a few days, and now my materials have so accumulated that I write a long letter. I do not care about my adventures being published very widely. However, I leave that to your discretion in which I have every confidence. I am particularly anxious that the two French letters should be preserved. Do not let them go out of your hands & house on any account whatever. If any letters should come to Shanklin Villa for me, please hand them over to Ted who has instructions.

I have seen a regatta⁴¹ since I have been here, and was invited to sail in one of the competing vessels, but declined as I must get wet through the sea being rough. Today there is another regatta. My boatman friends won a prize. I do not think I shall see todays as if I feel well enough I think I shall move today. I can hardly return without just placing my foot on the Continent. Twice I have given out I was going abroad – once to Spain – I shall be afraid to return without doing something. So I think I shall sail over to Ostend from Dover tonight by moonlight.

I hope you are well. I feel quite isolated – having had no news of anyone for a week & more. Do not write here as I shall be gone. This hotel is good, comfortable & cheap. I will write from Belgium. Adieu. Give my love to Sarah & remember me to Ted.

Your affectionate nephew

Richard.

⁴¹ The regatta along with many other incidents, people and places experienced on this trip found their way into Jefferies' first published novel: *The Scarlet Shawl* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1874).

Hotel de l'Europe
[Brussels]
Sept 22 1870

My dear Aunt

At last I find a quiet moment to write to you, I have been so incessantly employed since I last wrote that it seems but yesterday: I have met with hundreds of adventures, too many to trouble you with in one letter. I left Hastings last Friday afternoon for Dover, and went on board the packet for Ostend the same evening at 10.45. It was a beautiful night, scarcely a breath of air, moonlight & starlit, and a calm sea. Every little wave that broke against the side, flashed like lightning with the phosphoric light of the zoophytes, and when at 11 the paddles began to move, great circles of phosphoric light surrounded the vessel. I was on deck all night, for instead of being 4 hours as advertised, the boat was 8 hours at sea. After we had been out about 4 hours the sailors mistook a light on the horizon for Ostend, & steamed towards it. Presently the light rose higher, & proved to be the planet Venus, shining so brilliantly. At that moment an immense bank of fog enveloped us, so thick that one could scarcely see from one end of the ship to the other. The captain had lost his way & the paddles were stopped. After a short time there was the sound of a cannon booming over the sea. Every one rushed on deck, thinking of war & ironclads, but it was the guns at Ostend, far away, firing to direct ships into port through the fog. It was now found that we had actually got about opposite Antwerp. So the ship was turned & we slowly crept back, afraid of running on shore. Then after an hour or two of this, we got into shallow water, & the lead was heaved every minute. The steam whistle was sounded & the guns on shore again fired – to our surprize we had run past Ostend almost as much the other way, thanks to the fog. Now I heard a bell ringing on shore – the matin bell – & you cannot imagine how strange the bell sounded – you must understand no shore was visible. More firing, & whistling until people began to think we should have to remain till the fog cleared. But I did not grumble, rather I

was glad for this delay gave me the opportunity of seeing
the sun, just as the fog cleared, rise at sea – an
indescribable sight —

Then over the waste of water
The morning sun uprose
Through the driving mist revealed
Like the lifting of the Host
By incense clouds almost
Concealed (Longfellow)

A boat finally came off & piloted us into harbour which we
reached at 7 o'clock Saturday morning – 8 hours passage.
Numbers were ill – the ladies, most dreadfully, I did not feel
a qualm. I went on by the next train at 9.30 to Brussels &
reached it at 1 o'clock, 100 miles through Bruges, Ghent
etc in a firstclass carriage for 5 francs = 4s 2d: Cheap – eh?
but the rails here are state property, don't you wish ours
were?

Everyone walks across the lines no bridges nor tunnels,
in fact you do as you like, but no one gets injured for
there's plenty of warning & good management. At Brussels
spelt Bruxelles here, every hotel was full but I got a room at
this place & kept to it. A Belgian gentleman told me it was
"le tip tope hotel" – he was trying to speak English, & very
dear, but it is much cheaper than a second class hotel at
Hastings in actual coin, & for accommodation & comfort
(*sic*) far cheaper. We have ten courses at dinner, & I drink
my bottle of wine, very often Moselle which is delicious. Not
only is it cheap but really good = unadulterated, fresh from
the Moselle vineyards which are close by.

Bruxelles delights me. It is beautifully clean, & people
say exactly like Paris in miniature. They call it un petit
Paris. The ladies are not to be approached by our horrid
dowdies in London. From the poorest to the richest all
dress admirably. There is a fashion, but no one confines
herself to it – each dresses in exactly that style which
pleases her best. The ladies are dark complexioned, with
dark sparkling eyes and very black hair, in fact, I never
knew what black hair was before.

Nearly all are pleasing, great numbers pretty, & some exceedingly handsome; un grand belle dined with us yesterday, a refugee from Paris, her husband is shut up in Metz, and has not been heard of for 6 weeks. I never saw a more classic countenance. Almost all fashionable Paris is here. But the ladies. The favourite colour of the dresses is chocolate, or one of its shades – this suits their complexions. Crinolines are abolished, but they have a kind of Grecian bend looped up behind. The flounces are the chief ornament; they are very rich. The sleeves are often very wide at the wrist. The boots are delicious little things – high heels, very coquettish; stockings white, collars Shakespeare style, very small bonnets, chiefly little[?] hats; chignons are invisible, thank Heaven! The hair is done very nicely; no pads. It is often done in two bundles! – eh, on each side of the parting, with one piece drawn back between them from the forehead to the nape of the neck. Often the neck is open, which I like. This would suit Lizzie Cowley. This is walking dress. Evening dress is generally closed up to the neck, and resembles a waistcoat. With a Shakespeare collar and the hair done close to the head, these dark ladies look almost like very handsome men. I have several times at the opera, where one cannot see the petticoat, had to look twice to make sure, and then only told by the absentee of whiskers and the expression of trusting, relying up on others, which always dwells upon a woman's face. Fans are used by every lady, who thinks anything of herself, and very skilfully, too. It is impossible not to fall in love with these girls. They are so animated, so full of life – to watch them converse is a study – so different from our cold, milk and water, yes and no young ladies. I am dreadfully annoyed that I do not speak French fluently, for manners are very easy here, and I could often join parties. I admire them greatly – they are so graceful. The children are almost as interesting. I used to hate children. I don't know why, but I am growing very fond of them. They are dressed most charmingly, with such taste and then, to see little things of 4 or 5 gesturing [?] away while they talk is very amusing. Every one is sociable here, and all Brussels has a great re-union once a day in the Park or on

the Boulevards. In the park you take a chair for 5 cents and converse or watch the company promenade, while the children romp, play kiss in the ring, and laugh, while the wind blows the yellow leaves of autumn rustling along, and the fountain plays, and the sun shines warm. Such an atmosphere of happiness I never saw, or felt as in this city. Every one seems happy – horses fat, dogs fat, workmen fat. I have been here a week nearly, and have not seen one beggar, and not one drunken man or woman though I have been literally all over the city at all hours. Yesterday in the park, a little one at play rolled her ball under my foot – so she came up and looked at me, and lisped “Pardonnez, monsieur”, and picked it up. Then came three more with a skipping-rope, crying “un, deux, très” and over. The élite of Europe are here – counts & dukes & princess innumerable. There is a Princess in this hotel & several noblemen. Sir Paul Hunter was here – the head of the English Ambulance Corps. I have several times thought if you ever came abroad you should come here where living is so cheap & the society & city so delightful – no smoke, noise, or smell, nor any dissipation – everything clean & beautiful. As for the war we are 100 miles from the nearest battlefield & 2 or 300 from the armies. There are hundreds of disarmed French prisoners in the city & numbers of wounded. Waggons of wounded men pass through daily. In every street you meet men with the red cross on their arms – members of the ambulance corps. Several gentlemen in this hotel have been to Sedan, one showed me a mitrailleuse bullet in a leaf of a book belonging to a French soldier found on the field. Three gentlemen started yesterday from this hotel to visit the battlefield. This is indeed the Hotel of Europe. All nations are here. At the table d’hôte the confusion of tongues is marvellous, English, French, German, even Russian & numbers of Americans. Three Australians are here (Russel of Victoria) a gentleman, wife & his sister. They are very polished & seem rich. They came from Australia to make a tour of Europe, & are now going their way back through Italy. I am acquainted with them. The gentleman has gone to Sedan. I went to Waterloo on Monday morning with a party – an extra-ordinary

collection from the four quarters of the earth. There were the three Australians, an American, a Frenchman, a young English gentleman just returned from a visit to Russia, & Siberia, and myself. We were much amused with each others adventures as you may imagine. Of Waterloo I will tell you more another day. I picked a pansy on the field – they grow wild – & the Australian lady accepted it as a souvenir: fancy, a pansy from Waterloo going to the Antipodes! The Russian traveller had a stick with him from Moscow. I bought some photos of the place for you.

I can't write any more, my hands tired, except this – I was again overtired when I got here & quite ill for two days, like a burning fever but it has pleased God to give me the most perfect health again. This I must acknowledge – for it is a great & inestimable blessing, before I close.

Adieu my dear Aunt. I hope you are well, my love to Sarah.

Your loving nephew

Richard.

I will not ask you to write here as I might leave any day.

[Mr John Woolford's⁴²] Snodshill
Nr Swindon
Oct 4th 1870

Dear Aunt

I arrived safely at Swindon Station at 7 oclock last night & walked on over here immediately across the fields. It was a thick fog but moonlight. The distance is about 3 miles quite far enough with my heavy bag and rug to carry. I received a very pleasant welcome indeed from Mr John, who assured me that I should put him to no inconvenience, we sat up till midnight talking and playing bagatelle, and then retired. My room was a large square room, with a good bed and beautifully clean sheets. It is well furnished and I wanted for nothing. Being on a hill there is a view for some miles over the fields. I confess that I felt rather low spirited at leaving you, for I seem not to have come home but to have left home. You have been so kind to me that I feel far more at home with you than I ever do at Coate – for there we are so distant & unsocial. But to you I could tell everything without reserve which I could not do to those at home. So that I seem to have left home. This made me dull all day & evening yesterday. As for my peculiar position, it scarcely affects me at all – I feel here just as I have felt in the hotels in which I lived abroad. Nor do I trouble myself in the least about the future; I think I am grown nearly indifferent to almost all things, though harder then ever in will. But I could not part from you

⁴² To put this letter into context: Richard had written (letter reproduced in the Edward Thomas biography pp70-72) to John Woolford (a farmer and neighbour at Coate) in late September to say that he is in great financial difficulty and has no-one else to turn to. He could stay on with his Aunt but does not wish to impose on her and cannot go home. Could he stay at Snodshill until he can re-establish himself? He will eventually repay any debts and, as security, gives a list and rough valuation of all his possessions: small silver watch £4, small gold chain £3, massive gold chain 8 guineas, diamond scarf-pin 10 guineas, double-barrelled gun £7, a gig, 200 books costing £60, and a gold piece. He has only £1 in cash. Also, he writes, “I could not object to bear a hand upon the farm ... I know something about it, having done so for amusement at home”.

without strong emotion, indeed I still feel it and it was this that made me dull.

I have been already hard at work. I walked to the Station & back this morning 6 miles, to get writing paper, envelopes, etc. & this afternoon have written four letters, all upon business matters. Here again I have to thank you, for staying with you a few days enabled me to collect my thoughts, & become cooler.

I was sitting waiting for dinner just now when in walked – Mother! She stared and became speechless with utter astonishment! We had a chat, & all went on smoothly. She was in a very good humour but not very well. She had a bad attack of dyspepsia yesterday & toothache today. Was there ever such good fortune – does not everything turn lucky in my hands. With me all is luck. Her coming in to see Miss Kibblewhite⁴³ saved me the awkwardness of going down there. And then her good humour, and I may say delight at seeing me. Wonderful. I shall however stop here a day or two & let them at home get accustomed to the idea of seeing me. I fancy that at first Father might be angry but if he gets educated up – after a few days, my presence will be looked upon as nothing extraordinary & then it may be ventured.

In one way though I am most awkwardly placed. It is almost ludicrous. How helpless a man is without money. All my strength won't help me in the least. I have only 2s/3d in the world and I assure you it's very awkward. Not that I want to spend money, but suppose I want to go anywhere – to Purton to see Squire Sadler, who promised me an introduction to The Times. I can't go. Or to Cirencester, or anywhere. Not only that there are often cases when one is placed in an absurd position with respect to others – I can't go anywhere with Mr John, if he asks me. Today I could have gone to Ashdown with him, but was obliged to refuse, not that I should have had to spend, but because I did not like to run the risk being made to appear foolish. What to do I do not know. If visitors come in tonight – I shall feel almost awkward in

⁴³ John Woolford's house-keeper.

this respect. It is impossible to ask Mother for any, for I should not like to spoil her good humour, & I much doubt if she has any to spare. I am almost afraid I must leave my watch chain with the jeweller for a time. It's most awkward, I can't ask you because you have already done more than I could expect. But something really must be done. If I hear of a place I can't go and take it.

Everyone asks after Sarah, & I tell them she is well, and [?] jolly. Will Cox was here for a short time last night and asked after her. Her message is all right and delivered. Young Sewell⁴⁴ has not been to Coate since she left, so he did not come so often to see Harry. The foot & mouth disease is spreading, I am sorry to say. Mr John W. has one cow ill, Mrs Cox has another, Mr Brunnsden⁴⁵ a third – three farms here affected. Ours are well at present, & I am glad to hear that Father has sold out the greater portion of his stock, so that he runs little risk. They had gone 'dry', ie gave little milk on account of the season, & he seized the opportunity to sell. With disease all round him I think this very fortunate. He will not buy again until the danger has passed.

Tell Sarah that I too had dreadfully dull railway companions.

I cannot say that I admire the country much after London, & the still more elegant Brussels manners. My efforts will be directed to return.

If any letters come for me please send them on at once to Coate.

I have made arrangements with Mother to have them sent up here (if I am still here). This house is surrounded by trees, oaks, & the rooks are busy in them eating the acorns. The fog has hardly cleared up at all, & we have a fire.

I am very comfortable physically but shall never rest until I return. I shall never be happy in the country again

⁴⁴ William Sewell was born on 19 February 1849 (in Carlisle). He was working as a railway clerk around this time and living with his uncle (George Sewell who married Richard's Aunt Eliza). William eventually married another of Richard's cousins – Emily Hall – in 1880.

⁴⁵ Henry Brunnsden (son of John) was also a farmer at Snodshill.

and I feel that I must see you more frequently than is possible at these great distances. Give Sally my best love. I shall write to her. Ask her to enquire after my Penge⁴⁶ lady. Remember me to Miss Carlass.

I am dear Aunt your affectionate Nephew

Richard.

If you write address to Coate please.



⁴⁶ Could this be Josephine with the "large and beautiful eyes"? See pages 66 & 68.

[Mr John Woolford's] Snodshill
Thursday October 6th 1870

Dear Aunt,

I am sincerely grateful to you and Sarah for the P.O.O. which reached me this morning. I am peculiarly pleased with this mark of Sarah's love, and shall not forget it when I am once more in power. I shall write to her on the first opportunity – I would this morning only we are going out, to drive to a cattle sale at some distance. I cannot refuse the invitation to go.

I have not the least objection to returning home providing I can pay Mother something a week – it was my inability to do this which made me so unwilling. Now I am able to pay her something a week I think it more than probable that I shall go there at the first opportunity. I will not give my word, but I intend to do so at the first opportunity, and I shall be still more inclined to do so by my wish to please you. I only wish to choose a favourable opportunity.

Mother came up here again on the evening of the day I wrote to you – she was so curious to learn my adventures – and brought S J with her. We spent a very pleasant evening and I saw her home. She is getting my room ready. These things pave the way, for she will repeat what she has heard from me to F. and he too will grow interested, and then all is well.

Harry and Charley came up last night and I gave C. the parcel. He sends his thanks. I was hard at work all day yesterday, corresponding, and sketching out articles for the papers. I mean to finish them – please keep me up to the mark. I sent one piece of news to the Pall Mall. Tell Sarah we are going to Sevenhampton, near Highworth this morning in Will Cox's trap – Mr John, Will and I. Anything more melancholy than the appearance of the country it would be hard to imagine – enveloped with a fog which did not rise at all yesterday day or night, the trees dripping with wet, and motionless for there is no wind all silent as the grave, except when an acorn comes rattling down or a dead leaf falls. I strolled out yesterday afternoon, but the

silence seemed so oppressive that I was fain to return to the fireside. We have a fire and it is needed this cold raw weather. All the fine weather kept itself to please Sally when she was here, and now I get the melancholy part. However I am very glad she did have fine weather. S. J. has just come up here to fetch the butter (this is churning day) and she tells me that Mother was unwell yesterday but is better today.

I have been making enquiries about the potted butter without mentioning who for. Miss Kibblewhite tells me that she could make any quantity at eighteenpence per pound, the price at which fresh butter sells here at present. She could pot 8 lbs a week. 16 lbs a fortnight. 24 lbs in three weeks. She could not spare more from other customers. So if you would like 10 or 20 lbs if you will write and tell me I will order it of her and send it. I like her butter very well. It is far superior to the Sydenham butter generally; but hardly equal to those small quantities which Mrs Horton gives you – at least I suppose it is as good but of a somewhat different flavour. That butter of Mrs Horton has a peculiar delicacy of flavour which I have rarely tasted in the country. Perhaps being small in quantity they take more care with it. But Miss Kibblewhite's is quite as good as any country butter to be got – else Father would not have it for he is very choice in butter. He does not consider hers equal to that Mother used to make – her best. If you wish to have some please tell me as soon as possible. Also if you would like some more honey, because in a few days I am going to see a gentleman a friend of mine who lives in the honey district – on the downs. They are celebrated for honey and it certainly is delicious, far purer and richer than the honey of the valley. Sally can tell you how she liked the taste of Miss Kibblewhite's butter, for as they have her butter at home, Sally must have tasted it. We heard here yesterday that von Moltke was dead: a terrible blow for Prussia if true. There is no other Coate news. I hope Sally will get over her melancholy – give her my warmest love and believe me dear Aunt to remain

Your loving nephew
Richard.

Coate Near Swindon
Wilts. Nov. 8th. 1870

Dear Aunt

I was much surprised at Sarah's sudden departure on Monday. I had no idea that she thought of leaving us till almost the last moment. She had become so much one of the household that she will be much missed by Mother particularly, & so sudden a departure increases the gap.

I am afraid that when she first came down she did not thoroughly enjoy herself because with the exception of Mother, we are all men here, & and she had no companion. But lately she has made the acquaintance of Miss Baden. I believe they thoroughly enjoy each other's society. It seems a pity that Sarah should leave just as Coate was growing pleasant to her, and just too, as Christmas is approaching. Miss Baden⁴⁷ is the daughter of the largish (largest?) farmer in the neighbourhood & has received a very superior education, in fact I think she is a young lady whom you would be pleased to see Sarah associate with. I do not know what Sarah has returned for, but it does certainly seem to me a pity that she should have left just at this time. I do not know either what your wishes may be & I should be very sorry to thwart them, but if you could spare her I should be very pleased indeed to see her return and spend at least the ensuing Christmas with us. I know Mother misses her very much. I hope dear Aunt you will not be in any way annoyed at the request. I am only anxious that Sarah should take away with her a pleasant memory of Coate.

???? Aunt

Your affectionate nephew

Richard Jefferies.

⁴⁷ Less than a year later, Richard and Jessie Baden were engaged!

Opening page missing. Handwriting (looped descenders) similar to that of 1870 and 1871.

[February 1871]

[Edward Thomas reports the content of this letter to his aunt on p.73 of *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Works*: “He is worse off then ever. He has written all sorts of things. ‘Very few were rejected, but none brought any return.’ The Marlborough newspaper gave him a little work – a few paragraphs a week – but he did not think it worth his while. Other papers receive his writings, but ‘don’t pay a farthing.’ London papers would employ him, but he cannot go to London for lack of money. He has been offered a correspondentship for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in Brussels, but he is uncertain. He is threatened for debt. He tries to sell his gun. He is obliged to wear a shirt until it falls to pieces and exposes him to severe cold. He goes on writing articles, sketching two novels, writing a hundred pages of one...”]

. . . I ought to be reporting not novel writing but surely if I could not get that work & whilst I was waiting for answers to my applications it was wiser to write from imagination than to remain idle even if I get nothing for my novels.

However my dear Aunt let me request you to think no further about me. One reason why I did not write before was because to tell you my position seemed almost like asking your help which I didn’t want to do. It was very kind of you to send me the last money but comparatively useless since it can only relieve a few necessities for a short time and then leave me in exactly the same position. So please don’t send any more as you might as well pour water into a sieve – injuring yourself without helping me materially. I shall not write again since I can only bore you. It would be best for you to forget my existence and with that idea I will say farewell.

I have still the firmest belief in my ultimate good fortune & success. I believe in destiny. Not the fear of total indigence for Father threatens to turn me out of doors, nor the fear of disgrace & imprisonment for debt, can shake my

calm indifference & belief in my good fortune. Though I have but a halfpenny today, tomorrow I shall be rich. Besides, though I have had a severe cold my health & strength are wonderful. Nothing earthly can hurt me.

As for not writing to Ted⁴⁸, it is simply because I've nothing to write about. It was his own especial wish when we commenced corresponding, & he has often repeated it that neither of us should write unless he had some scientific matter to write of, as something really necessary. Nothing scientific has occurred to me recently. Why on earth if he wants to hear from me doesn't he write himself? His last was only an answer to one of mine – delayed too for some two months.

Skating is in full vigour here, morning noon & night the reservoir, now a splendid piece of ice, resounds with the booming of the skates. Great numbers of ladies come. No one can beat Henry or even approach him. People skate there till nine at night or later. I suppose Sarah amuses herself at the same game I should think she would very quickly learn. With the exception of colds all the household are well. There is no news but a fine piece of scandal which of course so charitable a lady as yourself would not care to hear of. I suppose you are well as you say nothing to the contrary. I hope you are. With respects for Sarah & love for yourself

Your affectionate nephew

Richard

⁴⁸ Robert Edward Harrild (b.1844) – second son of Horton Harrild senior.

Coate

July 7th [18]71

My dear Aunt

I was very much pleased indeed to receive a letter from you at last after such a long long silence. I felt sure that you would feel Mr Robert's⁴⁹ loss very much. I think you placed more confidence in him than anyone and he was exceedingly kind. Even at this distance of time I still remember with pleasure the Christmas parties at Roundhill to which I used to go when a child – long before he was married. I fancy I can see the room now. There was always a geniality about Mr Robert – he was almost the only gentleman I admired. The sermon you sent I thought very good. I can quite understand that not feeling very well yourself and after this shock you feel that you require a change. I hope St. Leonards will restore you. I thought it a very pleasant place last summer; it is quieter than Hastings. I suppose the pier will be ready now: it was in course of building when I was there. I stayed at Green's Hotel the very first you see on getting out at Hastings station: a quiet place with moderate charges. I suppose you will take apartments. I don't think you will find it too warm – there is so much wind this summer. Mother is better now. A week or two ago she seemed very unwell not any particular complaint but nervous and liable to make herself miserable over the merest trifle. I think she wants some amusement we live so unsocially in this house. I have done my best of late to enter into her feelings and be some company for her, and she seems quite cheerful again now. I should say the sea air would do Sarah most good – the best tonic. Haymaking has lagged very much – such changing weather but the crops are now better than they have been for years and they are getting on pretty well with it now.

⁴⁹ "Mr Robert" (1809-1871) is Uncle Thomas's brother. Robert married Mary Baxter in 1835 but she died in 1839. He returned to live at Round Hill House with his father (Robert Harrild Snr.) and his Aunt Carlass (b 1793) who Richard Jefferies also mentions in his letters.

I am very busy getting well known as a writer. Both Swindon papers employ me. But I am chiefly occupied with my book – I work at it almost night and day, I feel sure it will succeed. If it does not I know nothing that will and may as well at once give up the profession. It is nearly finished, about another week will do it and then I must begin to sound the publishers.

I shall be very pleased indeed to accept your invitation. Besides the change and the pleasure of seeing you again, it will be a great advantage to me – I own I already look forward to it eagerly. It is very kind of you to ask me. But you always have been my best friend. I hope I shall see you before long. With love to Sarah, believe me

your affectionate nephew

Richard



Grass Meadows at Coate
Water-colour by Miss B Newcombe, 1893.

Coate

July 28 1871

My dear Aunt

I feel sure that you will be delighted to hear of a great success which has befallen me at last. I told you that I had been bending all my energies to the completion of a work. I completed it a short time since and an opportunity offering I wrote to Disraeli describing it and asking his opinion. You know he is considered the cleverest man in England, that he is the head of the rich and powerful Conservative party and that he is a celebrated and very successful author. His reply came this morning:

Grosvenor Gate. Dear Sir, The great pressure of public affairs at the present moment must be my excuse for not sooner replying to your interesting letter which I did not like to leave to a secretary. I think the subject of your work of the highest interest, and I should have confidence in its treatment from the letter which you have done me the honor [sic] of addressing to me. I should recommend you to forward your MS to some eminent publisher whose interest and experience would qualify to judge of it with impartiality.

Believe me dear Sir,
with every good wish,
Yours faithfully, B. Disraeli.

A recognition like this from so great an intellectual leader is a richer reward to oneself than the applause of hundreds or than any money can possibly be. And it is a guarantee of success even in a money sense for what publisher would not grasp at a work commended by Disraeli. This is a day of triumph to me. In an obscure country village personally totally unknown name never heard of, without the least assistance from any living person – alone and unaided – I have achieved the favourable opinion of the man who stands highest in our age for intellectual power – who represents the nobility

gentry and clergy of the land – who is the leader of half England. This too after enduring the sneers and bitter taunts of so many – and my own father among them – for idleness and incapacity. Hard indeed have I worked these many months since I last saw you, and at all times it has been my intention – and looked forward to as a reward – to write and tell you of my success. And at last – at last. Write to me and tell me you rejoice for without someone to rejoice with you success itself is cold and barren. My success is now assured.

I hope the seaside is doing you good and that you enjoy it. Is Sarah well? I had a note from Ted the other day. Mother seems pretty well. I am still very busy restlessly working. I shall be eager to hear from you. Believe me dear Aunt with much love

Your affectionate nephew

Richard.



Coate Reservoir – the setting for many of Richard's adventures.

Coate
August 17 1871

Dear Aunt

I think I told you that Messrs Longman and Co had had my my [sic] MS to examine. The following transcript of a letter from them will tell you the result.

Sir,—We have made ourselves fully acquainted with the contents of your work.

It is evident you are well acquainted with the 'proper study of mankind' [man] and we may say of the other sex also, if not included. To some persons it may appear and amongst them we must be included, though probably this may lead you to consider we are a firm of primitive, if not new immaculate elderly gentlemen, that you have gone too much into detail on frequent occasions besides those you indicate. That however will not, with a considerable portion of the public, in any degree take away from the interest of a work so thoroughly practical, and which displays so much knowledge of human nature, perhaps not in its highest but in its general aspect. We are sorry to be of opinion that the work would not succeed in our hands, but this should in no way discourage your intention to give to the world the advantage of your knowledge and experiences from which many may derive benefit. If Mr Disraeli had not already adopted the motto from Terence on the title-page of Lothair it would be admirably suited to your book. We are very much obliged and will return the MS. by the post. Wishing you success, we remain etc.

Now although it was disappointing for them not to take the book, yet I cannot help being very much pleased with the high commendation they pass upon it and I feel more certain of ultimate success than before. The opinion of so eminent a firm is very encouraging. I think I see why they do not take it. It is not exactly in their line. I begin to see it is with a book as with a horse; you must take it to the right

market to sell it. People often take horses to 20 markets before they sell them. I mean to take my book to every market I can find:- to try every publisher. Immediately on the receipt of the letter I wrote to Sampson Low and Co, who replied to say that if I would send the MS for their inspection it should have immediate attention. So the MS has now gone to them. I shall get a great advantage by having my work thus read by competent persons – if they don't take it so long as it is well written they will remember my name and be ready to examine another. I feel no doubt whatever that some publisher will find it suit him.

I have however been doing too much lately and overstrained myself. People kept telling me I looked pale and worn out and I laughed but they were right, for a few days ago I began to find a strange heavy feeling in the head and then came complete prostration for a day or two. In fact I was very ill indeed while it lasted, but am now well again. I must take more care of myself in future for I find it impossible to do any writing while ill. I suppose you are still at the sea but not being quite certain I have sent this to Shanklin with directions to forward. Tell Sarah that yesterday a party of us went to Marlboro Forest. It was [?] Mrs Baden's⁵⁰ party. Among them were Mrs H Tarrant, Miss Gertrude Bridgeman⁵¹. Henry and I went. It was a beautiful day. Mother has gone down to Stroud today by an excursion. There is a flower show at Stroud. I suppose she will go on to Pitchcombe.⁵² She seems very much better than she was. Henry has a cold. Charles is quite well. Last evening there was a fire at Liddington just out of Coate. Two cottages were destroyed. It was a great pity as they belonged to some poor old people – left them as a legacy for long service: and they had been foolish enough not to insure. We had a very heavy thunderstorm a few days ago

⁵⁰ Probably Jessie Baden's mother, Emma, born 1826 at Liddington.

⁵¹ Gertrude Bridgeman (b. 1850 in Frome) was the sister of Emily Alice Bridgeman (b. 1841 in Frome) who married Richard's cousin Willie Cox in June 1871. Presumably Gertrude had attended her sister's wedding at the time. The 1871 census reveals that Emily was working with Lizzie Cox (Will's sister) as assistants at a school in Wallingford run by Elizabeth Ann Large & Jane Cox (William Cox senior's sisters?).

⁵² A village between Stroud and Painswick.

and it lightens every evening. I hope you are well and enjoying yourself.

My love to Sarah and to yourself, your affectionate nephew

Richard.



Jessie Baden (1853-1926),
pictured in March 1879
(Richard married Jessie on 8 July 1874 at Chiseldon Church).

Coate
September 10th [18]71

My dear Aunt

I am afraid that you have been expecting a letter from me for some days & I hope you have not been put to any inconvenience as regards your arrangements. I was very pleased indeed to receive your note, and immediately looked round to see how I could come. I found however that I had not sufficient ready cash to justify so much expense for pleasure only, and it is now too late in the year to think of doing any work, or obtaining a situation in London. Parliament is dissolved, all the law courts are shut & everybody of any importance away on their holidays. As it is the least busy time of year of course the Editors of the newspapers take advantage of it and go out to enjoy themselves and it is a question if I should find any of those to whom I have access at home. So far therefore as business was concerned I could do nothing. I should very very much like to come and see you and Sarah, and it is a deep disappointment to me to have to decline, but I don't see how I possibly can. I am now seriously engaged to Miss Baden, and I think you will agree with me that I ought to consider her interest and welfare as much as my own selfish pleasure. It does not seem right to spend a considerable sum of money entirely upon myself – without the least prospect of getting any return for the investment. For myself you know very well that I put no value on money and that if alone now concerned, I should come immediately. But I am now come fully to man's estate and the world will make no allowance for sentiment or pleasure — it exacts full duty of me. I must therefore renounce the pleasure and remain at work. I delayed writing because I was in hopes that I might have become rich enough to be able to spare the amount. Sampson Low and Son have had the MS. of my book nearly a month and I have heard nothing from them except to acknowledge its safe arrival. I am daily expecting to hear from them, and was hoping that

if they purchased it I should be able to come and see you. But I must not keep you waiting any longer as I may disarrange your engagements and interfere with other visitors. So please dismiss all ideas of seeing me. If the publishers should purchase the MS. I may be able to come. I confess I am very much disappointed. Besides the pleasure of seeing you & all old friends one really does want a change once in the year. However I must wait till I'm richer. I am at work now upon some short stories. Mother seems pretty well, better a great deal than she was in the summer. She has not been unwell for some time & is more cheerful. Charles is growing fast, & looks tall. Henry has gone to Aldershot camp with the riflemen to spend 8 days under canvas – in tents. 50 went from Old Swindon, over 100 from both towns. He went on Friday last. He thoroughly enjoys soldiering puts his whole soul into it. He is considered one of the best men in the corps. The weather is rather unpleasant for tent life. I don't think he passes through London at all. He went via Reading & I think returns via South Western & Salisbury but I'm not sure of this last. They are mowing a second crop but the rain is very unfavourable. Tell Sarah it is Chiseldon flower show tomorrow she went there last year I think. I suppose I shall go with my lady. Autumn comes apace & the leaves are falling fast. I hope Mrs Bessemeres has not forgotten me. I mean to send her a copy of my book when it is published. I hope the sea did you good & that you are now quite well. With much love to you & Sarah, believe me dear Aunt to remain
your affectionate nephew

Richard

Coate
October 16 1871

Dear Aunt

I am sure you will be much pleased to learn that Messrs Smith Elder & Co of 15 Waterloo Place, Pall Mall wish to publish my book⁵³ and are now in treaty with me as to the remuneration I am to receive. I cannot help dear Aunt feeling this as a moment of great triumph – after so much opposition from everyone. All my friends prophesied failure, & when I refused to desist from endeavouring, grew angry with me, & annoyed me as much as possible. Yet I have succeeded and I know that you will rejoice. I will let you know as soon as we have agreed about the price, and, of course I shall have the pleasure of sending you some copies when it appears. I have only one regret and that is that poor Uncle is not alive to see my triumph – he would have been so pleased.

I have been hoping to hear from you for some time. I hope you are well. Aunt Annie may perhaps have told you that I was most brutally and cowardly assaulted the other day⁵⁴. I was much disfigured in the face at first & suffered a great deal of pain for a week but it is now nearly well – except my hand which was much cut, & which I could not use at all for some days. However it is recovering – this is the first time I have been able to use a pen for a week. I will write you an account of the affair in a day or two – it is such a labour to write now. I have also had a severe cold & cough. Mother seems quite well & has had no return of her illness.

Charlie goes to school. Henry is quite well.

⁵³ The book mentioned was 'Fortune,' but it was never published.

⁵⁴ On 7 October Richard was assaulted by Thomas Jenner Baden (b. 1834) in Badbury Wick Lane. He was Jessie's half-brother and, probably, did not look favourably on Richard's engagement to his little half-sister. Richard claimed that his and a young lady's name had been blackened in a letter that Baden had sent to Miss W H Baden. A fight ensued and Richard later charged his assailant with assault. The case was heard on 12 October and reported in the Swindon Advertiser of 16 October. The result was that Baden agreed to express regret for the letter, provided the content was proven to be untrue.

With love to Sarah & to yourself.

I am dear Aunt your affectionate nephew

Richard



Day House Farm, home of the Baden family.

Illustration by Miss Agnes G Taylor, 1896
from *Jefferies Land: a history of Swindon and its environs*
by Richard Jefferies.

[Coate]
May 7 [1873]

[Dear Aunt]

I have just had a great disappointment. After keeping the manuscript of my novel more than two months, Mr. —⁵⁵ has written to decline it. It really does seem like Sisyphus – just as one has rolled the stone close to the top of the hill, down it goes again, and all one's work has to be done over again.

For some time after I began literary work I did not care in the least about a failure, because I had a perpetual spring of hope that the next would be more fortunate. But now, after eight years of almost continual failure, it is very hard indeed to make a fresh effort, because there is no hope to sustain one's expectations. Still, although I have lost hope entirely, I am more than ever determined to succeed, and shall never cease trying till I do.

It seems so singular to me that, although publishers constantly decline my works, yet if by any chance something that I have written gets into print, everybody immediately admires it, so that it does not seem that there is any want of ability. You remember those letters in the *Times*?⁵⁶ They were declined by one editor of a much less important paper⁵⁷. The moment they were published everyone admired them, and even the most adverse critics allowed that the style and literary execution was good. I could show you a dozen clippings from adverse newspapers to that effect. This is the reflection that supports me under so many disappointments, because it seems to say that it is through no fault of mine. Thinking over this very deeply lately, and passing over in review the facts and experience I have obtained during the last eight years, I have come to the conclusion that it is no use for me to waste further time in waiting for the decisions of publishers, but that I

⁵⁵ Besant withheld the name of the publisher but it is believed to be George Bentley whilst the manuscript referred to might be "Only a Girl" (*The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies*, Hugoe Matthews & Phyllis Treitel, Oxford: Petton Books, 1994, p.58).

⁵⁶ In 1872 three long letters, by Richard Jefferies, on the condition of the Wiltshire agricultural labourer were published in *The Times* that aroused much debate.

⁵⁷ *Standard*.

ought to set to work and publish on my own account. What, then, shall I publish? A novel costs some £60 or £80 at least. This I cannot possibly afford; I have no friends who can afford it. I can borrow, it is true, but that seems like putting a noose round your own neck for some one else to hang you with. But then many authors have made a name and even large sums of money by publishing very small books...[He goes on to show in his sanguine way how a little book is bound to bring in a great profit.]

...Having tried, therefore, every other plan for succeeding, I have at last determined to try this. Do you not think I am right? It is only risking a few pounds – not like £60 or £80. The first little book I have selected to issue is a compendium of reporting experience for the use of learners⁵⁸. It is almost finished – all but binding – and the first copy issued you shall see. It will be published by J. Snow and Co., 2, Ivy Lane.

Then with regard to Swindon. I have so enlarged my account of it, and so enlarged the account of the Goddard family, that I have determined to publish the work in two parts. First to issue the Goddard part⁵⁹, by which means I shall not risk so much money, and shall see how the thing takes. Besides, I know that the Goddards would prefer it done in that way. I estimate the cost of the first part at about £10; and as the manuscript has been completed and lying idle for nearly three months, I should like to get it out at once, but I do not like to give the order until I have the cash to meet the bill.

You have no idea of the wretched feeling produced by incessant disappointment, and the long, long months of weary waiting for decisions without the least hope...

⁵⁸ *Reporting, Editing & Authorship* was published by J Snow & Co. in June 1873.

⁵⁹ *A Memoir of the Goddards of North Wilts.*, published in August 1873.

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