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# The Man of the Future

*Reprinted, for the first time, from The Swindon Advertiser, 19 June 1871.*

There is a hill with a white post on it. The post has four outstretched arms with hands in white gloves pointing to the Crystal Palace and Norwood; to Lower Sydenham and Penge; Lewisham and New Cross; Dulwich and Camberwell. Lower down the Dulwich-road is a bench by the wayside, painted white and under a tree. There sits an old gentleman scrupulously dressed in black, and leaning forwards upon a cane. He comes there once every day all the year round to think and meditate. So regular is he, and so deep seem his meditations, that the people in the Swiss chalet by the bench think the world could scarcely revolve without him to think over and arrange the seasons. Besides the tree, over the bench, there are many other trees, planes and sycamores chiefly. The air is soft and balmy, as is the air of spring, which is like the tobacco of the Turks inhaled through opium, exhilarating yet sleepy. The sunlight falls upon the white road through the bare interlaced branches of the trees, as if it fell through the small diamond panes of an ancient lattice window. This is Sydenham-hill.

From the East Cliff, Hastings, it is not possible to see the waves of the ocean beneath, nor the foam and the infinite restlessness - it is too far below, and the depth levels to the eye the incessant heavings. But the great plain stretches out to the horizon, as if the edge of that cliff was the world's end, and the rest of space was filled up with water. Over it pass the shadows of the clouds, and the tint varies from green to blue, and from blue to green, as they follow the broad acres of sunlight. There are dark things upon it here and there, like logs, but they move slower than the hand upon the dial, and certainly do not roll or pitch to the eye; yet they are ships, miles and miles away; distance has smoothed away the motions of sea and ships, of nature and art - may it be possible that from the limitless distance of eternity even the motions of great earths and suns, and the restless heaves of human hearts may appear as absolute stillness? Can anyone place themselves at such a point, and from thence survey the great problems which, infinitely divided, harass every individual, and pronounce that between the two most opposite sides of opinion, the parallax is inappreciable?

The old gentleman upon Sydenham-hill, scrupulously dressed in black, will not object if we sit down beside him and gaze upon *his* sea. This is the cliff edge at the end of the world to him, and yonder is the ocean, filling up all space. A blue mist only upon the horizon; but if you look more keenly, or use an opera-glass, the edge of the mist towards us resolves into house-roofs, and gable-ends, chimneys, and windows, in countless numbers - the edge of the mist only, for further they fade into each other, and the innumerable multitude melts into an ocean of evenness. Above which two things only are prominently visible, some strange-looking towers in a group, and a great dome, such a dome as water forms when thrown up by a torpedo. They are Westminster Abbey, and St. Pauls, for it is London.

The plane trees, which have a curious habit of barking themselves in places, like a fine woman anxious to reveal a little of her white arm, and the sycamores upon our hill are budding out. There goes a butterfly playing at hop skip and jump in the air, with no trace of the dark mummy case left behind. That bud has opened and the flower come forth, for these butterflies are the snowdrops and crocuses of the air. In the crevices of the bark, and among the lichens and mosses, a miniature people are bestirring themselves, and this hair of the trees will soon be as populous as the beard of the ancient classic who boasted of having more inhabitants than Rome herself. The birds are restlessly busy - as if they were about to have a general election - and, indeed, most of them have already selected their favourite candidates. The fields are verdantly green, as if the earth had been written upon with sympathetic and secret ink, which at the warmth of the sun, came forth in living characters. If you could see them, the very cows look more oily and unctuous upon the skin, as if there were a richness inside. There is movement everywhere upon the earth; something is going to be brought forth, whether it be a leaf or an egg. Yet all the thousand and one forces at work, like the sun's heat growing stronger day by day, like that heat grow stronger silently and imperceptibly. You may sit upon the bench and hear nothing, see nothing, but you *will feel* there is a growth.

Away yonder in that great human ocean, whose waves are houses and streets, there are tides setting this way and that, germs unfolding, mummy cases and vast sarcophagi lids slowly opening, forces at work, all silently and unperceived as in the buds upon the trees, with as little apparent motion as the ocean at the foot of the East Cliff, Hastings, but whose tide and breakers are nevertheless eating away the solid cliff itself. Something is growing, something is to be produced. Everybody is busy upon this, or that little errand upon purely individual interests, and so deeply engaged as not to perceive the mighty web the whole are weaving.

There are many rivers which run so slowly that you cannot tell what way the current moves, till you put your stick in and stir up a little of the mud at the bottom, and watch the dirty cloud as it floats. Such a broad and shallow stream is public opinion, and only by stirring up the mud is it possible to tell which way it runs. This is generally done at public meetings, sometimes rather extensively, and the mud is called 'Questions of the Day'.

There was a vestry meeting in a fashionable church. There were two carved oak seats at either end of a heavy oak table, rather more uncomfortable-looking than church furniture generally, which is angular enough and stiff as dogmas, there was an immense oak bench which was also a chest, and an iron safe let into the wall. The atmosphere smelt damp and mouldy, like a marsh; there were vaults underneath. From the iron safe a great book - the vestry book - was produced, and laid before the chairman, the clergyman himself. The question of the day was one of importance; it was how to raise the money necessary for the purposes of the church, pay the sexton and clerk, and pew-opener. As for wine and bread and sacramental purposes, that was not noticed - the clergyman knew very well that the scriptural five loaves and two fishes would feed his five thousand, or at least the very, very small decimal fraction of

those who would apply. He looked round and saw six people present; the churchwarden and parishwarden; a radical reformer, there to watch and be careful that no attempt was made in secret conclave on the rights of the people; a plumber and glazier, who expected a job upon the windows; and two listless reporters. A melancholy discussion followed. What was to be done? The church was always well attended, the pews crowded with silks and satins, flowery bonnets, and glossy broadcloth. The atmosphere of its aisles had a perpetual scent of perfume and powder, and restorative smelling-bottles. But there was no money in the offertory box - no subscriptions. A voluntary rate was simply to court the cold shoulder. The naked fact was plain before them, that the only cash-supporters were three old maids. What was the cause of this terrible desuetude? 'It seems to me,' said the grey-haired parishwarden, 'the reason is so many people now-a-days have no definite religion. They go to church or chapel for appearance or respectability, but have no definite religion. They will not pay for anything which does not promise a material return.' The clergyman sighed, and the vestry-book went back to the iron safe with a blank leaf.

A few miles away from that fashionable church, in an out-of-the-way hamlet of ten houses, and as many thatched cottages, with a dozen dirty children, running about like pigs turned out to search for acorns, there was the same night another meeting. It was held in a low thatched cottage. The window shutters were up and the door closed, but you could stand in the road by the rickety palings and hear all. A woman's voice was loudest calling for blessings from the Lord upon the families of everyone there present; screaming invocations to the Saviour; and ending with a scrap of hymn chanted to the tune of the gypsy songs at a fair. Then came coarser tones - some hedger and ditcher was holding forth upon the mysteries of the Incarnation, and the great love and care of the Lord for his creatures. Finally a psalm, and sobbing and crying and A-mens. In this meeting, ignorant and rude as it was, the congregation evidently meant what they sung and said - they were in earnest. But if you had questioned the woman preacher - a washerwoman - or the hedger and ditcher, you would have found that, earnest as they were, they really did not know what they believed in. Platitudes in plenty you would have got about the Sun of righteousness, and the way of Salvation, but definition none; merely a repetition of words as if they had a cabalistic virtue. No definite religion.

When Charles Dickens died, a certain Dean preached a funeral sermon in one of the most prominent Metropolitan places of worship. The character of the great novelist was delineated as one who lived, and wrote, and acted Christianity - as that of a man who felt and expressed morality and virtue, hated shams, to whom lies and hypocrisy were an abomination, and who unsparingly exposed them; doing the work of a prophet in a way suited to modern times. From the spectacle of which life, so spent, as a text, the preacher endeavoured to inculcate the great lessons of truth and morality, love for our fellowmen. That sermon was printed, and went far and wide. A lady of the Evangelical persuasion read it, and immediately exclaimed that it was a lecture, not a sermon, because there was not a word about the blood and agony, and none of the words of salvation, no mystery of the Incarnation and great Sacrifice. It was wicked to

call it a sermon - wicked to pronounce it from the pulpit, little better than heathenism. She meant that it was morality, but that there was in it no definite religion. Yet it was preached by a most eminent leader, and was accepted by vast numbers.

In every village, however small, throughout the length and breadth of the land, there will be found one man at least who lives much within himself; not necessarily secluded from society, but with his own thoughts and ideas. He sometimes goes to church, sometimes to chapel, oftener walks out in the sunshine on the Sunday, reads much and thinks more. He works hard and makes money. Yet he has no friends, because he searches things with his intellect as with a probe, and men feel themselves lowered in their own estimation when in contact with him. If you could examine his heart, you would find him deeply believing in God, tracing His hand everywhere, yet doubting and questioning almost everything recorded of Him; deeply reverent towards the Almighty, but bitterly sarcastic upon those who believe they understand Him perfectly, and sweeping away their narrow ideas with pitiless logic, cutting like a sword. There are usually two or three such men in every street; hundreds in great cities. Their influence is silent and unseen, but great - they have no definite religion.

In thousands upon thousands of English families the first thing the growing children hear is the incessant grumbling of their parents about their straightened means, mingled with an endless strain of admiration for wealth. They hear men estimated entirely by their money; they learn of failure in business as a crime, of poverty as wickedness, until at length, the words at first little heeded, produce a firm unshaken belief in money, and money only as the sole source of happiness and honour. Then, as the boys grow older, they are petted and caressed just in proportion to their success in getting good situations or not; and the poor unfortunate who fails in this has every other merit overlooked, and is pointed out daily to the rest as the disgrace of the family. So that the youthful sense of honour - which in youth is very sensitive - is aroused, and they esteem themselves, as others esteem them, according to the contents of their pockets. Each finer impulse, each generous sentiment has been crushed, carefully stamped out, from the commencement of life - reverence only cultivated, reverence for gold. And this, not in poor families only, but in hundreds far above the want of the necessities of life. The young man finds all his relations speak in the same tone - they value each other and himself by the money standard only. His energies are thus directed and confined in the one channel of money making. But the competition is so intense, and the crowd so great, that he finds his lessons of morality are a great burden, and hinder his passage. In this surging, shoving, hurrying, reckless crowd of human beings - forgetful of honour, dignity, respect - only anxious to scramble onwards, heedless of those who may be crushed under foot; in this terrible crowd politeness is in vain. 'Allow me, if you please,' will not clear the way. It must be won by shoves and vigorous elbow play. There must be no squeamish objection to dirty people; no firing up if a toe is trodden on; no generous knight-errantry if a lady has her pocket picked, or is worse abused. Simply shove ahead and take every possible advantage. In the great money-making crowd, morality, like politeness in the physical crowd, will not open a course. Astuteness is the quality gradually forced upon our

young man here. Careful, critical astuteness, valuing a thing by how much it will fetch only. As for art and beauty, truth, and such other old world dreams - quite useless they in the battle of Mammon. Gradually the test - how much will it fetch - comes to be applied by our model young man to other things besides what is usually called business. Love must be valued by it, and friendship. Arabella is beautiful but has not a farthing; clearly a bad speculation; guard your heart against impressions. Friendship and love are bad pay-masters. Finally, in the respectable pew, listening to the logicless sermons, he draws his own conclusions, values this too, by what it will fetch, and setting his teeth together, resolves, without words, that his own intellect shall be his guide. An intellect how miserably misled! It may be true that a thing is worth what it will fetch, but oh! knight of Mammon's field of the Cloth of Gold, are there not other things besides gold which should be reckoned when you estimate the value of a thing! Men, such as our astute friend, must have a religion, the pursuit of which will yield a material return. This is not a solitary case, that of thousands upon thousands, and the effect is all the more powerful that these men are profoundly intellectual, and carry with them the main strength of the nation. In the education of the rising generation, that education which is obtained by social interchange, by conversation, and observation of the facts, the main feature - the one great lesson and maxim inculcated is, value a thing by the material return it will bring. The effect of the almost universal acceptance of this axiom is not, however, wholly for evil. It creates a tendency towards practical Christianity - a love to man, shown not by offering tracts to the perishing wayfarer, but by doing actual material good, lightening the heavy burdened, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked. Look at the great war upon the Continent. Our national Christianity did not confine itself to praying and fasting, to preaching long sermons on the wickedness of war; but the nation, with strong common sense, resolved to relieve as much as possible the wretchedness of the sufferers. The half million raised and thus expended will be a thing to look back upon in the future with honest pride. The immense London hospitals supported by philanthropy, the Peabody charities, and similar institutions upon a smaller scale, in every part of the kingdom, all bear witness to the preference now given to a religion bringing actual material return. Contrast the grand liberality shown in these institutions, and the generous subscription for the sick and wounded, with the hissing down of a clergyman at a public meeting who proposed to put off the rejoicings for Princess Louise's marriage till after Lent. Is not the tendency sufficiently plain? Abstemiousness in Lent could do no one any material good.

How much faith rests upon ignorance? We admire as children the beautiful words and illustration of our Sunday school teacher. When we learn in after life that he finished by robbing the offertory box we do not feel so much confidence in those flowery similes and oily phrases. As youths we feel a certain reverence for this or that local magnate; the grey-haired magistrate, or the venerable clergyman. When we find the magistrate to be a gamester upon the turf, and the clergyman intolerant to an intolerable degree, our reverence departs; knowledge has been fatal to it, and never more do we fully and heartily admit the sentiment to our hearts. How can lawyers

possibly have any faith? They who know the secrets of so many apparently wealthy, who hold so many undreamt of mortgages, and spectral deeds; how can they possibly believe in the assertion of anything not proven by parchment? And yet this very hard logical reduction of every earthly thing to facts and figures, which would seem the sure way to arrive at truth, in course of time, so dries up and stifles the very instinct which is the judge between one fact and another, that the lawyer is at fault, and the woman, relying upon her strong fresh natural inspiration, right. The one resembles very complicated and costly machinery, which according to all science and reason *ought* to turn out a fabric beyond compare, but does not - the other, the hand weavers of India and Cashmere, by instinct of hand, producing a material in its design and execution only to be compared with the fine silk itself - the product of nature. Again, the banker and the newspaper editor; how much faith can they have. One sees a fashionable carriage rolling along the street and knows that the owner dares not write a cheque for fear of the miserable 'no effects'; the other knows the men who write those glowing paragraphs and high class sentiment, contradicting their published faith and morals every hour of their lives. Generally speaking these three, the lawyer, the banker, and the newspaper editor are the three most intellectual men of the place, at least of those in any way public characters. It must be very difficult for these influential persons, without faith, to have a definite religion. Numbers such must take their religion as their coffee, without a thought, because they know of nothing better, and have no time for a search.

Years ago, the police courts were secret places, into which, excepting judge and jury, lawyer and witness, but a very few favoured ones penetrated. The Squire and the Parson had it all their own way undisturbed. Manifold abuses and tyrannies there were without doubt; but the worst effect of all was the stifling of the intellectual faculties consequent upon such a system of exclusiveness in this and all things. Men were brought up to the bar without the slightest idea of defending themselves, except by simple assertions, and denial by hard swearing. But now - the very increase of crime, with open police courts, has had a most powerful effect upon the masses in gradually educating them to understand what is meant by verifying evidence; to apply their reasoning faculties to discover the truth or falsehood of an assertion. Even now, in the rural districts, when a man is told he can ask questions of the witness against him, he merely proceeds to loudly contradict every word the witness has uttered; has no idea of what the liberty of questioning is for; to examine the statement upon all sides, and discover if it be consistent with itself, and with other known facts. But among the mechanics and better class of workmen this kind of education has made great progress, and is slowly working its way into the masses of the people. It teaches them to examine things upon every side; not to be satisfied with the outward appearance only. It is the part of an animal to be led by the senses, as by seeing and hearing; of a rational being to question the evidence of the senses and establish truth by enquiry. The newspapers greatly forward this unconscious education of the masses. Almost every man sees a newspaper now. The countries of the earth thus become familiarly known to the lowest of the low - their manners, productions, and situation - for those

who cannot read, hear others talk who can. Questions of politics, religion, social economy, are treated in the newspaper, not as they would be by the Squire or the Parson, all from one point of view - even the most determined partizan writer cannot suppress the arguments of his opponent - but are laid before the reader in a hundred different aspects. And the public platform spreads still further this kind of education. One speaker lays down all the arguments on one side; another upon the other; a third takes a medium view; orators are compelled now to address themselves to the masses. The people therefore hear both sides. This has a notable effect in weakening prejudice, people unconsciously grow into a habit of examining everything by reason - compare it with this and that, turn it over and over, verify the evidence respecting it. A thing is no longer believed just because it has been said by someone in authority. The only authority acknowledged is that of Reason and Demonstration. Hearing both sides invariably results in very weak partizanship; people thus informed rarely take either side with much vigour. This is the theory of judging: a judge rarely shows partiality because our English course of procedure compels him to hear both sides of the question, complaint and defence. Newspaper reporters are said to be the most lukewarm politicians in the world, though constantly listening to great politicians. They hear both sides of the question, and both sides of every fraction of the question, till it seems impossible to tell which is the best, and human wisdom is levelled to the remark of Xenophon, that man's judgement could no more decide what would succeed than as if one should be guided by the cast of a die. By slow degrees the people are getting into the condition of the reporters. They hear both sides of every fraction of the question. Gradually, everything is brought to the test of reason and demonstration. Now religion, at least what is usually called religion, depends for its active influence upon faith, sentiment, emotions of the heart. But the great gold competition, the unconscious education of verifying evidence, is gradually removing the influence of sentiment, and substituting reason. Yet sentiment of some kind seems necessary to man; what new sentiments will arise upon the foundation of reason?

The Bible has been raked fore and aft with round shot and grape. Every single letter has been examined with as much attention as by the ancient Cabalists who believed that magic powers were concealed in them. Particular texts, upon which great systems were built up, and implicitly believed in by thousands have been undermined, and sometimes erased by the irresistible axe of criticism. What was once only done in silence by the keen thinker, or by the astute man of business, is now done openly by thousands, in pen and ink, and in still more powerful conversation. People will not believe unless the assertion can be proved, verified; unless the practice enjoined produces material results. They find that when carefully examined and placed in parallel with real life, that a single text will not meet the daily emergencies of existence, emergencies too of a daily life utterly unknown and undreamt of when that text was written. An immense superstructure of social morality requires to be built to adapt the hard lines of the text to the ever varying conditions of society. Rome built such a superstructure to meet and answer the daily life of the middle ages - ages of ignorance, half savagism, incessant warfare, and rude civilization. Another



superstructure is now required to meet and answer in the hearts of millions the emergencies of life today, in this age of knowledge, high civilization, steam and telegraph, and printing press.

Lounger in May-fair chambers, sipper of coffee in St. James's, saunterer upon the grand parade at Brighton, exquisite exotic of cambric and broadcloth, hot-house plant - what dost thou dream of the mighty forces at work among thy fellow men? Go down among the factories, and ironworks, and collieries, and shipyards - where thousands of slops and corduroys do congregate, there is where the germs are slowly unfolding and forcing their way up to the surface, germs of matters that will one day force themselves even upon thee. Constant interchange of thought and opinion, not between theorists, but between thousands of men in daily struggle for the necessities of life - men hourly facing the great hard problems of existence - gradually, but surely, a faith and general belief in something, must grow out of this. And over the wide Atlantic, what tremendous energies are at work there, especially in the wilder parts, where neither law nor equity, sentiment, nor faith of any kind, are admitted, nothing understood between man and man, but the right to struggle for existence. A naked struggle too - undisguised, against nature and man, spade in one hand, and revolver in the other. Strange men and strange ideas; old world doctrines, and new world theories, constantly intermingling, fighting with and strangling each other. From all this wild struggle for existence what will the slow process of natural selection call forth at last - a new Apollo Belvedere, a something utterly beautiful, or a monster rising from the sea, like the beast of the latter days in Revelations? From all this chaos, what will come to light? When will *the fiat lux* go forth?

What new superstructure, or temple, must be erected to meet the exigencies and demands of the new race of ideas and feelings, springing into life around us?

Steam, printing press, telegraph, constant travelling, and universal interchange of thoughts and facts, are gradually changing the face of the earth, and the condition of nations: of that there can be no dispute. Prejudices, superstitions, religions old as the hills, are fading away. But still man has a heart, feelings, hopes, fears; these cannot be swept away. Can man exist without a temple? Let us see if it be possible in a dim way to gaze ahead through the mist, and see whither these currents are drifting the vessel. A strong current is education. A man in the olden times was usually educated in one thing only. Say he was a labourer's son. At six or seven he was sent bird-keeping; a little older, he drove the horse while his father ploughed; finally he takes the plough himself. His whole education, from birth to age, consisted in rude farm work. More than possible that in his seventy years of life he never slept out of his parish. Others in a higher grade were similarly educated in one thing only - and in that thing, trade, or profession, in technical knowledge only. But now from the earliest boyhood we are instructed in universal knowledge. Reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, foreign languages - everything. We early learn to read the newspapers and from them acquire a general idea of almost all trades and professions. Magazines, scientific publications, lectures - all these down to the travelling menagerie, instruct us. Knowledge is no longer exclusive, but universal. The tendency shows itself clearly enough even in

business. Formerly, to become a business man, many years apprenticeship in that particular trade was thought indispensable, and having once learnt a trade, a man never dreamt of attempting anything else. Now a man turns grocer, draper, banker, clerk, farmer, mechanic, anything and everything, at a moment's notice, as circumstances chance to offer advantage. There is no mystery in trade or profession now - no long initiation and jealous guarding of secrets, no rude poetry of symbols and guilds. The mystery is no more. In America especially is this apparent - it is amusing to read the extraordinary occupations which an astute American has followed - cooper, clergyman, pedlar, editor, miner, farmer, crossing-sweeper and nigger-minstrel! And in England if, as we saw just now, if your washerwoman thinks herself capable of delivering a sermon, and pointing out to you the way of salvation, why should not your footman assume to be Chancellor of the Exchequer? Evidently the tendency to education is to make every man as far as possible acquainted with everything - to imbue us with the spirit of knowledge.

Science occupies itself no longer with vain scholastic problems, such as puzzled Aquinas, and the theorists of the middle ages, no longer seeks for the stone which should turn all it touched to gold, nor for the elixir which should give immortal life. Science is now bent earnestly upon discovering the uses of every part of nature, from a grain of sand to the great sun, with the ultimate object of turning the knowledge thus obtained to the advantage of the human race. This is the true search for the elixir of life.

Republicanism has become the political religion of the masses of the earth. It is not dominant in every place; nevertheless its maxims are the faith of the people to be realised in time to come. And what is the spirit of republicanism, the inward essence, and unspoken principle? It is that every man should think, act, and speak exactly as he wills; in a word that every man should govern himself.

If then we look into the dim future, as down some long cathedral aisle, and gaze at the distant altar-piece till its indistinct features grow into sight as our eyes become accustomed to the gloom, while the organ of life peals out its paeon, and the pillars of the earth tremble in that majestic music - while the nations bend the knee; then the great altar-piece of time presents a picture of men knowing all things, rulers of themselves. Each in himself his own priest, lawyer and king, each capable by the thousand inventions of practical science of transporting himself to the ends of the earth, almost capable of doing so by mere volition of will, and of practising equity for his own good; each his own lawyer, priest and ruler.

Aristotle said he did from philosophy what others did from fear of the laws. It seems to me a grand vision of the 'Man of the Future' - a vision of almost a god who shall know all things, have the power of doing all things, rule himself not from sentiment but conviction; be his own priest, lawyer, and king, acknowledging no superior but God.

# A Fragment of Manuscript

Mark Daniel recently gave the Society a page of notes - out-of-door observations - in Richard Jefferies' handwriting. He had bought a copy of the 1893 edition of Walter Besant's *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* and found the page attached to the front end-paper.

The first four lines are in pencil; the rest is in ink. Attempts to decipher the notes have been only partly successful: they are set out below; the manuscript itself is reproduced on the next page.

On page 151 of *Chronicles of the Hedges* (Samuel J Looker, editor, 1948) some of the observations have been utilised by Jefferies, and also on page 152.

The name of the original owner of the copy of *The Eulogy* is not known, nor how he or she obtained the manuscript leaf.

January 9 <sup>th</sup> .	Two rooks - or crows
-after a starling - starling cries - and escapes. Frosty <del>day</del> morning. Rooks on trees - morning.	
Robin crumbs	No frost
from sparrow	J....gh Hedge?
on wall	More green
Robin & cat	But bitterest cold Thermometer
	no record
Tits are really woodpeckers in habit	no record
Fields smaller in winter - it seems shrunken - & trees less high.	

January 9<sup>th</sup>. Two miles - a cross -  
up & a study - study was -  
Escapes. First <sup>money</sup> ~~study~~. Notes on trees  
- money.

Notes count  
for money  
in value

Notes & Cash

in form  
of a hope  
Wingsman  
But - almost  
and Thermometer  
no record

- Take care  
- half hand papers  
in habit

Finds smaller in value - the  
same structure - & trees less high

# Could Richard Jefferies Have Been an Artist Instead of a Writer?

Andrew Rossabi

One does not have to read far into Jefferies to discover that he was blessed with a remarkable visual imagination. The Victorians indeed were wont to see him as a painter of luminous miniatures, a sort of prose pre-Raphaelite. There has been no lack of testimony since to the intensely visual quality of Jefferies' writing, from Henry Williamson ('Like all men of genius, Jefferies had extraordinary sight and his style was his sight returning from his memory into words. He saw things as the sun sees them: plain') to Edward Thomas (The clearness of the physical is allied to the penetration of the spiritual vision)<sup>1</sup>. More recently, Jeremy Hooker has drawn parallels between Jefferies' writing and the late paintings of Vincent Van Gogh.<sup>2</sup> The following passage from 'Woodlands' in *Nature Near London* illustrates Jefferies' ability to evoke highly-charged pictures in the reader's mind, and suggests now Keats, now Thomas himself:

Returning presently to the gateway just outside the wood ... a waggon is now passing among the corn and is being laden with the sheaves. But afar off, across the broad field and under the wood, it seems somehow only a part of the silence and the solitude. The men with it move about the stubble, calmly toiling; the horses, having drawn it a little way, become motionless, reposing as they stand, every line of their large limbs expressing delight in physical ease and idleness.

Perhaps the heat has made the men silent, for scarcely a word is spoken; if it were, in the stillness it must be heard, though they are at some distance. The wheels, well greased for the heavy harvest work, do not creak. Save an occasional monosyllable, as the horses are ordered on, or to stop, and a faint rustling of straw, there is no sound. It may be the flood of brilliant light, or the mirage of the heat, but in some way the waggon and its rising load, the men and the horses, have an unreality of appearance.

The yellow wheat and stubble, the dull yellow of the waggon, toned down by years of weather, the green wood near at hand, darkening in the distance and slowly changing to blue, the cloudless sky, the heat-suffused atmosphere, in which things seem to float rather than to grow or stand, the shadowless field, all are there, and yet are not there, but far away and vision-like. The waggon, at last laden, travels away, and seems rather to disappear of itself than to be hidden by the trees. It is an effort to awake and move from the spot.

Imagine reading that in the rush-hour on your way home from work, in the pages of the *Standard*, forerunner of the *Evening Standard*, where the essay first appeared on 25 August, 1880.

A few preliminary observations. The drawing bug was in the family. There was Richard's uncle John Lockett Jefferies with his sensitive views of Coate, Draycot and Swindon. He died young aged 31 in 1856. According to Fanny Hall he was 'a youth of

rare promise - developed into an artist of no mean powers... Many are the choice little pencil sketches, fine-line drawings, and water-colours treasured by the family.<sup>3</sup> Richard is said to have taken after him (not least in dying young) and their drawings show a marked stylistic similarity. Some of the uncle's drawings are preserved in the Jefferies Collection in the BL<sup>4</sup>, mostly miniaturist views of Coate, the Jefferies farm, the garden, and the reservoir. They include one of the new chapel, sarcastically captioned 'Proposed Coate Cathedral'.

On the mother's side Frederick Gyde was, according to Thomas, 'an engraver on wood of some note, and a delicate artist with the pencil'.<sup>5</sup> The model for Alere Flamma, the prodigal and sot in *Amaryllis at the Fair*, he did much free-lance work for the Fleet St printer Richard Taylor for whom his father Charles worked as manager and binder and Richard's grandfather John Jefferies as overseer. Taylor was one of the leading c!9 printers of scientific and natural history works. *Inter alia* the firm printed the prestigious journal of the Royal Society, *Philosophical Transactions*, which published articles by Charles Darwin and A R Wallace, and the two illustrated volumes of P E Sclater and W H Hudson's *Argentine Ornithology* (1888-9).<sup>6</sup>

As a boy in Sydenham Jefferies was 'fond of drawing what he saw with laboured precision'.<sup>7</sup> I don't know whether he received lessons from his uncle John or Fred but the drawings in the sketch-book and 16 note-books held in the BL, which total about 350 and form the basis for any assessment of Jefferies' talents as an artist, suggest that he was no rank beginner. Someone, if only a schoolmaster, had taught Jefferies the rudiments. He knows what he is about. How he might have developed had he received proper training is difficult to judge, but one thing is clear. Jefferies could never have been as great an artist as he was a writer. His drawings are often exquisite. But they do not suggest the expansive ideas, the rich sensuousness, or the deep and vigorous feelings of his prose. They lack some quality of imagination. They tend to the literal. But they are certainly not to be denigrated. They derive from the same source - Jefferies' remarkable eyesight - and often have a visionary quality by the almost photographic realism with which the subject is rendered.

Jefferies was keen that his own children should have drawing lessons. Harold was sent to Boys Firmin, artist and local historian, author of a charming guide to Crowborough published in 1890 and illustrated by 12 of his own etchings. By Harold's account the lessons were not a success but to judge by his work in the BL archive Harold was a skilled draughtsman and watercolourist who excelled at rendering ships and the sea. I don't know whether Phyllis received lessons but it would seem likely on the evidence of the album of her drawings and watercolours, also held in the BL.<sup>8</sup>

Jefferies was interested in art and held particularly strong views on the subject of hunting pictures and landscape painting. He was a regular visitor to the National Gallery and to the Greek and Roman sculpture-rooms of the BM. He was aware of contemporary movements in art like impressionism. Towards the end of his life he became friendly with the artist J W North. Several painters, e.g. Graham Arnold of the Brotherhood of Ruralists, creator of a collage box construction titled 'Homage to Richard Jefferies' and illustrator of the Ex Libris Press edition of *Round About a Great*

*Estate*, have been admirers of his writing.<sup>9</sup> Jefferies' alter ego, Alere Flamma, has hundreds of sketches, chiefly wild flowers and landscapes, all higgledy-piggledy in his rooms. Lastly, there is the testimony of Harold:

Father was very good as a pencil artist. I remember some very delicate sketches he made, notably one of the hopkilns showing above the pines. I do not think he ever essayed oils or water-colours ...<sup>10</sup>

The chief evidence of Jefferies' skill as a draughtsman is contained in a small sketch-book measuring 10 x 15 cm in the BL." A label inside the cover indicates that the book was purchased in Paris which Jefferies visited in September 1883, a visit that inspired the essays 'The Plainest City in Europe' and 'Nature in the Louvre'. The latter is devoted to a description of the Venus Accroupie, or Crouching Venus, a Roman copy in marble of a Hellenistic Greek bronze original by Doedalses of Bithynia. The sketch-book contains four drawings of the statue. The first and most detailed is a three-quarter view with notes on the abdominal folds of skin to which reference is made in the essay. The drawing is accomplished: Jefferies shows a good grasp of form and strong tactile sense. Other views show the statue from the left side, without shading; the right side in three-quarter profile, which to my eye is less successful; and a full-frontal view, which Jefferies says is the best and which has much realistic shading. The flatness at the lower mesial groove, in the shape of an elongated diamond, on which Jefferies comments in the essay, is highlighted in one of the drawings. Jefferies presumably drew the statue before writing the essay. It's worth mentioning that Jefferies did not apply fixative and the graphite of some drawings has rubbed off onto the facing page. 'Nature in the Louvre' neatly demonstrates the superiority of Jefferies' writing over his drawing, however sensitive and accomplished the latter. The essay is one of the author's most lyrical, a celebration of the ideal beauty of nature as reflected in the female form.

The sketch-book has 31 pages of drawings. One shows a woman walking by the sea. She is holding a basket and her skirt is blowing in the wind. The picture looks a copy, perhaps of a Dutch seascape in the Louvre. A drawing of two horses tethered to a tree, reproduced in Looker and Porteous, again looks like a copy but is vigorous and strong.<sup>12</sup> Other drawings show a house with oriel window, an ungulate hoof, a mug or tankard, elm-trees, and a pair of rural scenes reminiscent of John Lockett Jefferies' work.

Some general remarks. The drawings are careful, correct, almost academic. They reveal a good eye, a sense of balance and form. The rural scenes show genuine talent, though this mustn't be exaggerated. The other main quality of the drawings is their miniaturist scale. They reveal a delicate sensibility, but not the emotional force of Jefferies' writing.

Much the same can be said of the drawings in the note-books." But first a description of a typical note-book. Jefferies bought a variety of types but they followed a generally similar size and pattern. The largest measures 93 x 159mm, the smallest 74 x 100mm. They are in effect memorandum-books, bound in black or

brown leather over paper boards, with a pouch inside the front cover, plain brown or marbled red-and-blue end-papers, a sheath for a pencil along the edge of the back cover, and a half-inch wide black elastic retaining strap. The pages have rounded corners and sometimes gilt edges. Other note-books have brown leather covers with a double gilt line and are closed by a silver-plated metal clasp.

The drawings reflect Jefferies' mood. As a general rule the presence of drawings indicates that Jefferies was in a happy frame of mind. Thus the 1876 note-book contains virtually no drawings, indicative of the fact that Jefferies was depressed at the time, being separated from Jessie and his infant son Harold whom he had left behind in Swindon while he stayed with his aunt in Sydenham and looked for a house near London. By contrast the Surbiton notebooks are the most cheerful, contain the most nature notes and drawings, and are written in the neatest hand.

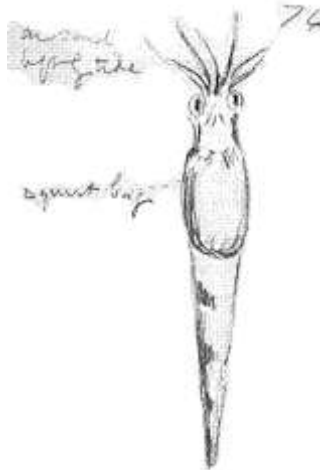
The year 1879 was something of an *annus mirabilis*. Jefferies had finally made his mark with *The Gamekeeper at Home* and *Wild Life in a Southern County*. But if a successful year for Jefferies, 1879 was a disastrous one for English farmers. From it is usually dated what came to be known as the Great Agricultural Depression, whose advent was heralded by one of the wettest years in memory. It rained and it rained. We've seen some rain this year (2002) but it was nothing to 1879 when it took on the dimensions of a Biblical deluge. On 28 August Jefferies noted: 'rain morning & has now rained 36 hours, all day yesterday, all night, & as hard as ever this morning'. The harvest was ruined. But it's an ill wind. If the year was disastrous for farmers, it was a godsend to the amateur botanist. Jefferies observes that one would think such an immense downpour of rain continued for months would destroy the flowers 'yet never was there such floral beauty as in the spring and early summer of that disastrous year'. He mentions an osier bed by the Hogsmill alight with yellow flags; the meadows beside the lane from Ewell to Worcester Park so thick with early purple orchids that the Jefferies christened them Orchis Meads; and a field full of buttercups by the Ewell Road:

There was no break: from hedge to hedge, it was just one breadth of yellow. The golden surface glistened with golden sheen: the reflected sunlight wavered over it, as heated air wavers. They stood high and so close together that the petals seemed to touch: the grass was invisible - roofed with gold. As a flat stone skims the water, making ducks and drakes, so it looked as if a stone might skim and slide along this burnished level. When the cows came in, they waded in flower to the middle as they waded in a pond. So that if the sky cleared for an hour the sun shone down on the most brilliant acres ever seen.<sup>14</sup>

This picture offers another test case, for it inspired Jefferies to make a sketch - a perfectly competent sketch - but nothing comparable to the verbal description. The spring and early summer of 1879 represent perhaps the highwater mark of Jefferies' love of nature - nature enjoyed for its own sake, without philosophising about the Beyond. 'A joyful wind & rain' he notes on 1 June. He delights in the flowering of the sycamore, in the beauty of the meadows ('never really beautiful till the oaks are quite out as they are now'), in the water crowfoot flowers in a



pond, in the lark 'singing suspended in one spot at a great height for longer than a kestrel quarter of an hour & then left for weariness of watching', in a lizard in the garden, in 'the green corn so light green under sunshine but what makes it so beautiful is the continual motion of the leaves flutter flutter flutter endlessly, & the changing shadow'. On 20 June he notes 'it has now actually been dry for two whole days'. Folio 52 has a beautiful sketch of winter barley, f55 a white bryony tendril 'exactly like a spiral spring', 26 June a crisp sketch of a geranium leaf which starts out from the page, 27 June a sketch of a humming-bird moth on a geranium in the garden, f79 a drawing of a stoat. Jefferies had seen five out hunting together, as he records in *Round About a Great Estate*, one stopping in the middle of the road with neck outstretched.<sup>15</sup> A drawing of the print of the forefeet of the latter in the dust of the road has the note 'claws not unlike a cat's but much smaller'. Folio 87 has a drawing of a grass seed-head with the awns shown in hallucinating detail.



15 September 1879, folio 74 in Notebook VI (July - October 1879).

The Surbiton years were a happy *quinquennium*, an oasis in Jefferies' life when he found professional success, financial security, and domestic content. On either side his life was bounded by unhappiness - on the one hand the years of often despairing struggle to establish himself as a writer, on the other the years of illness and the inexorable slide back into poverty. The happiness is reflected in the note-books and drawings. Plants predominate. Jefferies taught himself their names by sketching the plants as he encountered them on his daily walks. Once home, he would look them up in his reference works and then enter the name beside the drawing. We may conjecture with a reasonable degree of confidence that this was his method because the name of the plant (many remain unidentified) has clearly been added later, either the

handwriting or the pressure of the pencil is different. In this habit of sketching plants as an aid to identification Jefferies was merely doing what every amateur botanist has done. We tend to think of Jefferies as a naturalist who emerged fully-formed, like Athene from the head of Zeus. He did not. Firstly he was never a full-fledged naturalist in the manner of Gilbert White or W H Hudson. Second Jefferies' interest in natural history developed (in his writings at least) comparatively late. In the notebooks we can follow the process of self-education. Water and riverside plants are conspicuous, showing that in Tolworth Jefferies' walks regularly took him along the banks of the Hogsmill, as he records in his autobiography.<sup>16</sup> Yellow loosestrife, bullrush, tansy, greater willowherb are among the plants drawn or noted. Sometimes the drawing will make a point. Thus a sketch of a convolvulus leaf has written beside it 'shield knight on horseback', recalling that Jefferies somewhere nicely compares the black bryony leaf to a Norman shield in shape.

Jefferies clearly had a feeling for plants. The sketches are precise, detailed, yet delicate. Those of viper's bugloss and mugwort have an almost visionary quality. Jefferies' thoroughness and attention to detail are impressive. He counted the 20 stamens on a succory flower. He sketched a single goat's-beard petal to highlight the serration at the end, as well as a detailed drawing of the whole plant which he compared to a parasol blown inside out. In sum Jefferies shows definite talent as an embryo botanical illustrator. Had he received training he could probably have made a career as one.

Sea-poppy, thrift and sea-holly were sketched during a holiday in Brighton in September 1879, the latter with the note 'spines sharp enough to go through a dress'. A striking sketch of a cuttlefish left on the sand by the tide is reproduced in Looker's edition of the notebooks.<sup>17</sup> In Brighton Jefferies clearly spent much time simply watching the sea whose importance to him cannot be exaggerated, it was a potent force in the imagination of a writer of such deep feelings. Living in a landlocked county, the young Jefferies could only dream of the sea, 60 miles away across the downs at Southampton, but he could hear it as the wind came with a sish-sish through the dry bents on the rampart of Liddington Castle, and his boy's imagination found it as easy to transform Coate reservoir into a new and uncharted sea as a humble headwater of the Cole or 'the little willowy River Ray' (Thomas) into the mighty Mississippi. Harold recalls that at Brighton his father liked to watch the surf during a storm or gale and at Goring was able to identify the ships passing in the Channel by their rig.<sup>18</sup> Longfellow's 'The Secret of the Sea' was one of Jefferies' favourite poems. *Bevis* is suffused by a love of ships and sailing. Harold inherited his father's passion and became a sailor in the merchant navy. Harold's own drawings are chiefly of ships, first model ones, later the real thing. Jefferies wrote about the sea better than he drew it - in 'The Breeze on Beachy Head', *The Story of My Heart*, 'The Bathing Season', 'Sunny Brighton', as well as in *Bevis* and *After London*. On 26 November 1883 he drew some clouds and noted 'storm blowing up S. from sea'. Underneath is a sketch of a bay with waves rolling in.

The sojourn on Exmoor inspired pencil as well as pen. On 6 and 7 June 1883 Jefferies sketched hoof-prints to illustrate the difference between those of hind and hart. He drew the points of an antler, with the names of the points. A full-page panorama of *Red Deer* country is marked with the names of Selworthy, Luccombe, Cloutsham Ball. The book, by the way, is cited in the *OED* under some of the technical terms used in stag-hunting like 'in harbour' and 'harbourer'.

Other interests are reflected in the drawings. A sheep bell recalls Hilary Lockett's ability to distinguish one flock from another by the sound of their bells ('It's Johnson's flock; I know the tang of his tankards') in *Round About a Great Estate*.<sup>TM</sup> Jefferies' interest in rural crafts appears in two sketches on the handle of a Pycombe crook; in shooting, in a gun fitted with a long-distance sight, which may well be his own design; and in the occult, in the palm of a hand showing the parts governed by various planets. An inveterate sky-watcher, Jefferies sketched a rainbow, a shooting-star dated 9 November 1881 '5.25am south', and an almost perfectly horizontal swing-boat new moon on 12 and 13 March 1880. A drawing of the calyx of a snapdragon pierced by a bee's proboscis recalls a remark in Jefferies' preface to White's *The Natural History of Selborne*:

I have noticed that people are never so astonished as when some fact of natural history is unexpectedly pointed out to them, when it must have been for a long time under their very eyes. There are people who have never seen a humble bee drill a hole in the nectary of a snap-dragon and yet have a whole garden full of flowers.<sup>20</sup>

The last note-books contain fewer drawings, being focused on metaphysical and eschatological questions, interspersed with observations of birds' flight, and diagrams for the construction of a man-powered flying machine. The notes are mostly headed SL which stands for Soul or Sun Life - the exalted thoughts that came to Jefferies out of doors, in the sunlight, corresponding to the Soul or Sun he felt beating within him. It is tempting to speculate that at some subconscious level Jefferies was aware that he was dying and that he naturally became preoccupied with the question of the likely fate of his soul after death. The soul is commonly represented as winged, as a bird or butterfly, and one senses that Jefferies' almost obsessive interest in the mechanics of flight, his careful observation of birds to discover the secret of their flight, the incessant stream of diagrams of vanes, gears, levers, pulleys, that fill the last note-books, all this reflected the fact that as his body approached death Jefferies' soul felt the imminence of release and its wings gained in strength. That soul had already put forth wings at the sight of the myriad beauties of the natural world which reminded it of the glorious sights it had once gazed upon in heaven, of which it had been afforded a glimpse in the between-life state, between incarnations, before it had drunk of the waters of Lethe or forgetfulness. That is my perhaps fanciful hypothesis to explain Jefferies' fascination with flight towards the end of life.

In these last note-books Jefferies talks of Christ, the fate of the soul, the possibility of rebirth, matter, spirit, punishment after death, reincarnation, cosmic dust, God. The tone of the notes sometimes becomes vehement with double underlinings. Jefferies was not one to go gently into that good night. On the question of the soul's possible

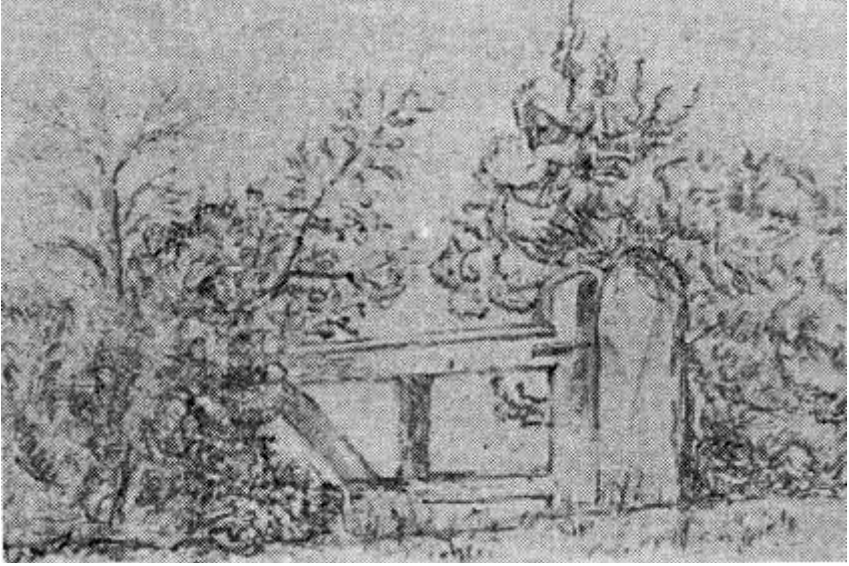
immortality he said he was 'in the position of Lucretius'. Lucretius was a Roman poet of the first century BC who wrote a long didactic poem titled *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of the Universe*). In it Lucretius expounded the materialist philosophy of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, who believed that at death the soul dissolved into its constituent atoms and that there was no afterlife, no eternal punishment in Hades or Tartarus. At this point one must remark how deeply affected Jefferies had been by the sudden death of his infant son Oliver Lancelot at Eltham. Harold's memoir provides eloquent testimony to the devastating impact this tragedy had on his father and it is corroborated by entries in the note-books.

But meanwhile what of the question? Could Jefferies have been a successful artist? The drawings in Jefferies' sketch- and note-books held in the British Library amply repay study. They show some of the qualities of Jefferies' prose, in particular some of his visionary eye. But they are on a miniaturist scale and reveal no more than an above-average talent, whereas at their best the writings display genius.

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*Text of a talk given to the Society at the Study Day in Chiseldon on 27 July 2002.*



*23 August 1886, facing folio 4 in Notebook XVI (June - August 1886).*

# Time and Eternity in Jefferies' Thought

Simon Coleman

The mystical writings of Richard Jefferies, which centre on his remarkable autobiography *The Story of My Heart*, make up a significant proportion of his output during the last five years of his life. Taken together, this is a body of work which, with eloquence and sincerity, articulates the wonder of his experience of the natural world and his passionate belief in an eternity and an ideal of life. This article explores Jefferies' idea of eternity and how it relates to his, and consequently man's, relationship with nature. It will examine parts of the first half of the autobiography, along with three of his most evocative 'nature mysticism' essays, 'The Pageant of Summer'<sup>1</sup>, 'Saint Guido'<sup>2</sup> and 'Wild Flowers'.<sup>3</sup>

*The Story of My Heart*, despite perfectly understandable shortcomings, in my view quite successfully presents most of the important strands of Jefferies' mystical and idealistic thought. Its ideas and speculations arise from his own experience of life, even if in places there are indications of the influence of Plato in his youth. Chapter 1 presents us with the awakening of his inner desire for a larger soul life which becomes the central theme of the book. Some of the most powerful passages demonstrate his ability to feel back into the past and sense the sunlight linking him with the life, the consciousness of the ages. The result is the experience of an enlarged consciousness in himself and the desire for a far greater expansion. The sun symbolises his inner consciousness and he desires the 'soul equivalent' of its brilliance. When compared to human years the sun suggests eternity, an idea perhaps most forcefully expressed in that wonderfully uplifting essay, 'Nature and Eternity'.<sup>4</sup> Jefferies' most common metaphors for illustrating his desire for more soul life are drawn from his awareness of the sun's presence: as it lights up each leaf and blade of grass, so would his soul, with greater powers, see into the real nature of the experienced world and grasp its subtle meaning. It is through this greater power of soul that the larger life can be realised.

Some commentators have thought that *The Story of My Heart* rather loses its way after Chapter 1, but I think Chapter 2 very effectively sustains the energy of the ecstatic first chapter. It opens with Jefferies in the narrow valley grooved in prehistoric times, the only sound being the sparrows in the wheat above. Under the full glare of the eternal sun, he considers the magnitude of the passage of time down to his present: 'How many, many years, how many cycles of years, how many bundles of cycles of years had the sun glowed down thus on that hollow?' The hollow in the hills probably symbolises, for him, an opening out, an expansion of consciousness. The sides of the hollow seem to support the sky and serve to draw his thought upwards and outwards. He feels the flow of time down to that moment and prays that he might have the intellectual part of it, the *idea* behind the passage of all the countless ages. This feeling

into the depths of the past brings the present, the 'now', into sharper focus - a technique he uses frequently in the autobiography.

Full to the brim of the wondrous past, I felt the wondrous present. For the day - the very moment I breathed, that second of time then in the valley, was as marvellous, as grand, as all that had gone before. . . . Now, this moment give me all the thought, all the idea, all the soul expressed in the cosmos around me.

He talks of the 'soul expressed in the cosmos', suggesting a pantheistic outlook, but we learn later that he sees no soul in nature and the universe. I think in the early chapters he is trying to explain the development of his thoughts which emerged gradually during his early adulthood. He starts with an initial sense of oneness with the cosmos, then describes instants of experience which appear to be removed from time, before coming to his belief in the immortality of the soul and a 'higher than deity' in Chapters 3 and 4. The problem of interpreting Jefferies' mysticism is complicated by the fact that he does not describe his experiences chronologically.

In Chapter 2 he sees his desire for more soul life expressed everywhere in nature, and most powerfully in the human form. The idea of nature being without design is also central to his thought. None of this, however, prepares the reader for the whirlwind climax to the chapter - his experience in the ancient castle at Pevensey. Although what happened to him mere prompted him to write down the first notes towards the drafting of *The Story of My Heart*, the experience itself does not seem to have been discussed at much length by Jefferies' biographers. The very powerful and intense prose seems to suggest that something of huge significance was revealed to him. He has led us through the winding way of his soul experiences and aspirations to an apparently more important moment of awakening. Looking at the stones of the Roman wall and feeling back through the ages,

My own existence was focused back on me; I saw its joy, its unhappiness, its birth, its death, its possibilities among the infinite, above all its yearning Question. Why? Seeing it thus clearly, and lifted out of the moment by the force of seventeen centuries, I recognised the full mystery and the depths of things in the roots of the dry grass on the wall, in the green sea flowing near. Is there anything I can do? The mystery and the possibilities are not in the roots of the grass, nor is the depth of things in the sea; they are in my existence, in my soul.

The passage of the centuries and the feeling of his soul being separate from matter concentrate his mind on the reality of that moment of existence, and he now sees his life as if from outside it. His birth, death and what has happened in his life are, it appears, removed from time. They are in some sort of continuum. He sees them all as soul experiences; he sees his soul in them. At this point there is a decisive move away from any pantheistic beliefs which Jefferies might have suggested at some points in Chapters 1 and 2. From now on his soul stands apart from nature. Soul is entirely natural to him while matter now seems mysterious, even alien to him - at one point he sees it as something 'supernatural'.

The eternity theme in *The Story of My Heart* is really a development from the message communicated to Bevis in *Wood Magic* by the brook and the wind.<sup>5</sup> In Chapter 3 of the autobiography, describing his thoughts by a tumulus on the downs, he conveys the idea in short, simple sentences which are very effective.

It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine; I am in it as the butterfly floats in the light-laden air---The years, the centuries, the cycles are absolutely nothing; it is only a moment since this tumulus was raised; in a thousand years it will still be only a moment.

This is his supreme expression of his belief in an eternity which is real and can be experienced - it is *here*. He feels that an instant of time, when fully experienced, contains all time; the past and future are not separated from the present moment. The 'now' becomes the centre of a 'cosmos' of consciousness through which the immortal soul can travel. At times he seems to hint at the possibility of the soul's communication with some deeper reality, something which continually occurs in his writing. In 'Meadow Thoughts'<sup>6</sup> the sunlight and the water communicate to him the 'silent mystery', while in *The Dewy Morn* Felise is 'led along by unknown impulses, as if voices issued from the woods calling her to enter . . .'<sup>7</sup> Jefferies seems to perceive some dynamic interaction of consciousnesses in an infinite, timeless structure and when he feels into the life of the man interred in the tumulus the idea of the soul's immortality becomes a natural one.

In the autobiography he goes on to outline his ideas for a better human life at a physical and mental level which would lead to more soul life. In 'The Pageant of Summer', however, he returns to nature for expression of something that could be translated into both a physical and spiritual ideal for man. This ideal, although influenced by the Classical Greek model, grew directly out of the feelings he had when he wandered the meadows and the hills in his youth.

Nowhere does Jefferies weave time and eternity themes into direct experience of nature more effectively than in 'The Pageant of Summer' - his greatest piece of writing. I think that there are parallels between Jefferies' approach to the problem of the man/nature dichotomy and some ideas found in Buddhist thought, though I do not wish to place too great an emphasis on this as Jefferies must be allowed to speak for himself. The eternity he felt has nothing to do with endless linear time nor, as S J Looker points out,<sup>8</sup> does he ever seek a union with an 'Absolute'. Time is a product of physical existence, of differentiation between one and many, subject and object, man and nature. In *The Story of My Heart* his soul can never be 'dipped in time' because he feels that it exists completely apart from the material world. In 'The Pageant of Summer' Jefferies adopts a different approach. He does not deny time, but he still senses that there is something beyond time and that the reality of existence involves both of these. He wants to experience as much of this infinitely unfolding and endless reality as he can - and do so *now*, not in a future paradise. He has long ago departed from dualistic religious thought with its antitheses of God and man, life and death, heaven and hell. In terms of the power of expression of ideas largely unfamiliar to



western thought and the lyrical beauty into which they are woven, it is a remarkable piece of work for a man of his time to produce.

In the essay he draws on all his creative powers to depict a vivid summer scene of endless life where time and timelessness (perhaps 'timelessness' is a better word than 'eternity', as the latter is too closely associated with traditional religious beliefs) go on together. This is a work of pure expression — expression of nature, of the underlying mysteries of life and of the human ideal. The conceptual thinking that is necessarily present in *The Story of My Heart* is absent here. The descriptions of plant, animal and insect life come in no set order - they are strewn around, as lacking in design as nature herself. In *The Story of My Heart* he goes through nature and seeks an infinite soul life; in 'The Pageant of Summer' we have his soul and nature existing side by side but with potential to find a point of meeting. Nature is here a source of hope for mankind: 'Let us not look at ourselves but onwards, and take strength from the leaf and the signs of the field. He is indeed despicable who cannot look onwards to the ideal life of man. Not to do so is to deny our birthright of mind.'

This would appear to contradict *The Story of My Heart* which states that there is nothing for man in nature - indeed nature sometimes appears as something strange confronting him. In 'The Pageant of Summer' the deeper meaning to existence is more passively sought and we can either view this as a different strand to his mysticism or as a development from the autobiography. The active and passive approaches to his seeking could produce works of striking contrast and show that Jefferies was more than a writer of rapturous prose-poetry. In 'The Pageant of Summer' was he describing a truly *religious* experience, something which would set him apart from mystics seeking the 'Absolute' and experiences based on theistic beliefs? I think that in this essay he moves on from the condition of 'soul being all' which emerges after Chapter 1 of the autobiography to describe a state of being which involved the outer world as much as his inner self or soul.

The magic of the essay is partly due to the way it conveys the feeling of everything in nature living for itself, unconsciously, paying no attention to human time. Nature itself reflects or symbolises something eternal. While Jefferies enters into the wonders he sees and hears around him - the objective world - he simultaneously searches inwards into his own being. He encounters nature as something both familiar to him and yet apart from him. I suggest that he is trying to reach a point where unconscious nature and conscious man meet, a point of identity. This would appear to correspond to the point where subjectivity and objectivity are identical, before time and timelessness have become differentiated, a concept in some Buddhist thought referred to as the 'beginningless beginning'.<sup>9</sup>

The personal sadness associated with the passage of time is present in this work and becomes stronger in essays such as 'Wild Flowers', 'Hours of Spring' and 'My Old Village'.<sup>10</sup> But 'The Pageant of Summer' is infused with an unquenchable optimism: we can gather beauty from nature; this beauty which exists for itself should give us hope. The idea of gathering beauty to expand the mind and spirit is even more evocatively conveyed in the closing passages.

The invisible shadow goes on and steals from us. But now, while I can see the shadow of the tree and watch it slowly gliding along the surface of the grass, it is mine. These are the only hours that are not wasted - these hours that absorb the soul and fill it with beauty. This is real life, and all else is illusion, or mere endurance.

This is surely as powerful a statement of the total joy of living, of the reality of the world experienced by the senses, and the value of the resulting spiritual awakening that a human being could make. Jefferies points directly to the infinite beauty of nature to show the human possibilities which we can grasp. Nature shows us her perfection and we have to find our own, by ourselves. Time passes but if it is measured by the sun and not by clocks, then life can be lived real, both in body and soul, and time by itself will have no meaning as everything will be experience of beauty.

In his nature worship Jefferies is not merely seeking participation, but actual identity, absorption and assimilation. His finding of the June rose provides the essay with a more powerful underlying meaning that does not merely reflect his subjectivity. He has placed the scene in time - it was 'between the may and the June roses'. He finds the rose unexpectedly early, perhaps implying that this particular one was seen for *the first* time. This is a point of awakening, when his unconscious feelings which, we can assume, have been guiding him along his ramble in the sun, are suddenly brought to consciousness: 'Straight go the white petals to the heart' and his mind instantly goes back to earlier pageants of summer, giving the sense of those summers being connected through his experience of that particular moment. It is one of those moments when he feels the existence of that larger reality and the language used is more evocative, perhaps, than in the moments of awakening in *The Story of My Heart*. There is also, I feel, the impression that Jefferies' finding of the rose is not all: it also finds him.

In this work the human ideal is not just an aspiration but *exists* somewhere. The June rose may just be symbolic but Jefferies' finding of it suggests a meeting of the human ideal and the ideal of nature. There is plenty of purely objective description of nature where time clearly exists - the may and the June rose have their own times. The June rose is not just there for Jefferies to discover, it is there for itself. The soul lives for itself and nature lives for herself, but in finding the true nature of one that of the other is discovered. W J Keith suggests that human reality only is presented in 'The Pageant of Summer'<sup>11</sup> but was Jefferies not trying to express something of *the* reality? He is consistent in making no reference to an 'Absolute' or any other such certainty, ensuring that the essay allows the fullest expression of the mystery of existence itself.

The essay 'Saint Guido' also provides useful insights into Jefferies' idealistic view of nature. In the books *Wood Magic* and *Bevis*, especially the former, the eternity theme had a special significance for Jefferies when projected into childhood. In 'Saint Guido' he explores the idea of human identity in nature discovered in childhood. The undeveloped mind of a child, being incapable of conceptual thought, would naturally be receptive to nature's message if that child were allowed to roam freely in the

meadows. The boy Guido becomes completely immersed in nature and the wheat teaches him the ideals expressed in "The Pageant of Summer". The wheat was unhappy at the thought of all the centuries that had passed, with all the flowers and the songs, while so many people, weighed down with labour have been unhappy. It is the classic Jefferies theme again - because of the incessant toil the magic of the moment is lost, the flowers are not gathered. The message is delivered more powerfully here than in *The Story of My Heart*, as nature herself delivers it. Also, the wheat says that it has thought so much more of itself since people came and cultivated it for their own benefit. Again it is the coming together of man and nature which makes the moment eternal. I think that the return to childhood gives this essay in places an even greater sense of idealism than 'The Pageant of Summer'.

'Wild Flowers' is another masterpiece, but a departure from 'The Pageant of Summer' in a number of ways. The work centres on his feelings when finding and gathering flowers in childhood and there is an underlying sense of sadness at the passage of the years from that magical period of life. As a boy he found 'unconscious happiness in finding wild flowers - unconscious and unquestioning, and therefore unbounded.' He then considers the idea of coming to nature as an adult without any previous memories. This essay contains some of his most impassioned descriptions of this instant picture of experienced nature. But whereas 'The Pageant of Summer' sweeps on with relentless optimism towards the human ideal and Jefferies' personal unhappiness vanishes into the stream of morally uplifting sentiments, 'Wild Flowers' becomes much more subjective and tips over into sentimentality. The sense of the eternity reflected in nature disappears with the passages on boyhood and there follows an acute sense of separation from nature, magnificently illustrated by the passage describing the cows standing in the buttercups:

On their broad brows the year falls gently; their great, beautiful eyes, which need but a tear or a smile to make them human - without these, such eyes, so large and full, seem above human life, eyes of the immortals, enduring without passion - in these eyes, as a mirror, nature is reflected.

In 'My Old Village', the theme of divorce from nature as known in childhood is even more painfully expressed: "The brook is dead, for where man goes nature ends.'

There are striking similarities between some of Jefferies' beliefs and those of more recent writers and thinkers. Jefferies' roughly-sketched world view finds echoes in the writings of Carl Jung and Jiddu Krishnamurti, and some of the ideas put forward by the 'new physicists' investigating consciousness. The fact that Jefferies was not at ease with the world of human affairs as, for example, Walt Whitman was, should in no way diminish his value as a thinker who stood face to face with the real world of nature and human life, having erased past dogmas from his mind. His thought develops from pure soul seeking in *The Story of My Heart* to a deeper affinity between the natural world and his inner being in "The Pageant of Summer" and other essays such as 'Saint Guido'. He felt into something other than a purely physical world with linear time - a reality where eternity was now and not in the future, something which included

physical and spiritual but extended infinitely beyond these. He sought truth in an individualistic way and realised that the creation of a whole new vocabulary would be required to express the 'language' of the soul. In 'Wild Flowers' and later essays he seems to turn in on himself and see his boyhood spent in the country as a magical world lost for ever. The ideal of human life would require a deeper understanding of man's connection with, and separateness from, nature. Nature allows us to feel into the essence of the 'whole' reality. It was outside ordinary human experience but, Jefferies believed, could be reached by deeper levels of the mind which we have yet to uncover. He was convinced that in the future we would make this leap and strive for the best possible life, physical and spiritual. The ideal was there to be found, some day.

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