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Selections from Richard Jefferies' 1876 Notebook

John Pearson

Parts I and II of John Pearson's transcription of the 1876 notebook appeared in Numbers 13 and 14 of the *Journal*. The final part, Part III, follows here, and seems to cover early July. There are hints that Jefferies was prepared to go abroad to find topics for articles.

The original notebook is in the British Library (BL Add. Mss 58821). The transcription is published here with the permission of the Library and that of Dr Pearson. A copy of the thesis, from which this transcription is taken, is in the Swindon Reference Library. Study of Dr Pearson's scholarly notes of explanation is recommended.

Notebook for 1876 - Part III

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Some of this would do today - but speculation if you could offer the money to go to the place.

In view of the agitation of the temperance movement describe the great breweries ... These would make good sketches indeed.

Description revised - great reason - would be impossible to re-sell - liberation in America etc.

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Large farms - inspection and description of.

There is one comfort - that every article I give in makes it like this - that my next need not be so general in idea, because they will think that my treatment of a merely material, general conception will be good, therefore I need not strain so much after clever, and particularly general ideas: therefore, be content with everything and do not reject anything, because they may think I am doing it well.

Trade Traditions, as Fleet Street etc., and customs and morals.

N. All characteristics should have flaws like the Government and Lords.

Three Little Glances - as the man who wished to have no death ever in his house.

Preaching - the individual as against the multitude - against the good of many.

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All round England - the shore - ten articles.

Invite correspondents' opinions and have Letter Box, private or public opinions - condensed - one column on passing events. A sentence from each would be interesting - like this:

"Suez Canal shares - E.J. believes it will result in depression of other numbers." If none of these

good enough a state event shows a fertility and versatility which merit employment.
This at the top.

Some new enterprise - a few things in general to each of these great newspapers - have something of that kind.

Cornfields of the world - Russia, Hungary, America - splendid subject. Visit and describe.

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N. How wonderfully well I did this thing, how clever I was and I am - talk of nothing else at home at night - admiration of self - good.

Edmund Yates - Women of the World - as Cleopatra etc., seems, and others.

Ideas for articles and any proofs in ... and New Phases of Journalism.

Also, the editor of a newspaper is in the same position as a young maid to important people - accordingly *panem et circenses* - was particular with his actual notes at the Museum also.

These are not topics of the moment, but may be completed at any time. I can write features of the moment dismissed about men of depression.

The lighthouses - coastguard stations.

Launches on the Thames - description of - upper reaches ...

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1. That an earthquake would not shake the Derby, any more than it would a great ball.
2. The two sisters in black: black feathers and white.
3. A flower garden in her bonnet - she had a wonderful mass of feathers and flowers.
4. First book. A niche with the particular - May day, fresh lamb and the Fortnum and Mason basket...

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5. Placid . . . and the three sisters in white . . . Drinking champagne with lazy enjoyment - to comply.

The great pall, and the smoke which unites every day.

6. Hills - a Babylon was among the rise and falls.

4. Edge of the roads. With rain on the grass.

5. Background of green trees.

6. Pigeons going up.

7. The girl with the dark eyes ... with the dark gypsy trying to go along with him.

Round the course?

8. View of all through Tattenham Corner.

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9. Horses - calmly eating whilst others are running without a driver . . . Without training - it shows that nothing can be done without great preparation. A lesson in life to all.
10. The winter gorse in bloom and kissing in fashion.
11. Narrow, twenty-five yards - furze corner thick.
12. Just at the top of the first rise, almost opposite to Green Station is a mass of fern.
13. Plays with the lantern - breeze and the odour of the gorse - and gent undisturbed with the delay ...
- 14... .tents on the verge of spoliation.
15. The parasol with feathers ... the girl flushed with simple joy on the brake.

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17. Finish up with the idea: and a feature on the great manor. Three dogs. I feel like a Derby dog myself.
18. Back two, and all over the place, but back the favourite three or five times in vain.
19. I tapped at the door of the cottage - the pink flowers in the flower bed ... It was wonderful - the silver tankard with the pretty girl in green drinking from it.
20. ... the lilies in the hedge of ... Station.

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There is not a man who has not a ghost story of his own, but nobody believes anybody's else's ghost story, notwithstanding that they may not have an implicit faith in their own particular superstition.

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Every man has his ghost - i.e., is haunted by some secret. Write in shorthand all the secrets.

Begin T. with the half-mile calculation - is something novel. How long in all this space on the grass...

T. The immense mass of people. Xerxes - all dead in one hundred years: killed by Xerxes' army.

Half mile ... compare all multiplied. Taking off hats all in time.

Derby Day darlings. Darlings at the Derby.

1st - picture the girl on the top of a brake with principal charabanc.

2nd - a quarto picture piece? More lively - the Bedminster country girl.

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Shady Tram - does ever when in this installation a sense of this just flash across...

Note if possible. Sixty trains on one platform x 800 = 48,000 - add course, add rounds and add money? More money on Epsom Down than on any other spot in the world, probably.

The black dots move across the dim sun as you approach from Epsom Station. Xerxes - had 5,000,000, but scattered - these are all concentrated in one spot. The flies came with us to the Derby - never was the thing bad. Warm world - like butterflies, bright -

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emit a burst of colour in dress.

Walpurgis Day - gathering of the witches ... Derby witches? Rosy necks - difference in necks - round and tall like a tower - others swan-like - a little shown of it all the more delicious, tempting than the liberal display of the gale in the drawing-room. What has become of the

square boddice, cut open - so lovely and so trying.

1st picture. Exquisite, small and features like some delicate small flower of which smell acquired, or music.

2nd - like a rich wine or a hearth ballad of green Erin or blue Highlands.

Observation of peculiarities tell best.

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Plans:

Novel on agriculture - white clover a sign of Midsummer. Two years comes to Midsummer.

Spectator - begin with July 1st - read them over for libel. An effort to renew the sale.

Populo Volente - the *World* - the people with everything ...

Old ladies with camp stools.

June 24th - Midsummer day - Jesse says welcome the mid-year, it may be six months, but it will come, I am positive.

People who run any chance of getting to hell always say they don't believe in it.

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Pour Retour . . . Portsmouth, Aldershot, Woolwich, the war, everything. Introduced by Besika Bay. Describe departure of rain cloud, or something to show the country - everything on the place. Watch advertisements carefully for news to come of special military manoeuvres. If I should go to the court, tell Edmund Yates of it and ask if I shall retain for him, or will he send me. Also from Portsmouth - when would you come, or edit the article I have at this time?

It would be a ... type of story in journal something like what I produced . . . when he connected summaries on the country news. It might be called "The State of Affairs" - a very good title indeed. Write a story in two chapters - not more - or two parts - and

forward it to Macmillan? If good, it might be accepted on *Country Life* just at this time - I think I would do this at once ... Articles on country topics, also - try *St. James's* still on this? Offer to

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twenty magazines .. . This ought to be done. See .. British Museum files for joint ideas. You might present socialism - Worldism ... I must get on with this at once. Worldism - thought will not touch it and is not in the very best style - good language. I have never done this by given preparation for the novel publications. I have tried to do it, but could not, as I had no name. Now I have a name as a magazine writer and may get a story accepted, and from the story get the novel in the end. It must be done immediately.

I will begin it tomorrow, 28th, Wednesday - a good day. If only a few lines or notes for it, still a beginning.

Under the Midsummer Sky . . . thirty-five to forty folios in one chapter.

Harvest moon.

Idea - a lady advocating the use of getting among the agricultural labourers - aesthetic ever: will have description in it. This would do well for one of my agricultural articles

...

A new subject and a new style ...

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A good and novel short story would go in all the magazines as surely as an article in the *World*. I had better study my style and start it at once.

Etching - outline gold hair, short, chatty ... then sketch out in finer lines as if hand-graven etching? Take all your female characters from Shakespeare, the germ of them, digest and freely own it another day.

Title. "The Kissing Season" or "Kissing Time." This would do capital well with the *World* in the autumn time.

It would be a good title for Macmillans - light short novelette. Even if that does not take I could afterwards hire the title for the article in the *World*.

"Tora-Lira!" - another good title.

"But he the maiden coaxed aside

While sounds the fiddle gaily plied

From that old hawthorn tree beside." -*Faust*

Interlude in Himmel - would be an improved title for the short story, giving the love passage . . .

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Also for the *World* - after the turmoil of the season. "Venus Works" - Sir David

Lindsay - the old poet professes himself to be ignorant of these words and works. A splendid title for the *World* - was the divines etc.

Never send anything hastily to the *World*: send hasty things to the daily papers.

"For men's souls are tired of the Turks and their wicked ways and works."

Scancierbeg.

... But thee may make believe and see what will come of it, Joseph. "A Blue Geranium" - for Macmillan - a good title. Never a tree without a dead branch.

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Pour Retour - State Ball, Buckingham Palace, July 4th.

Nature harmonizes discords - blue sky, green tree - therefore a much cleverer artist than men.

Coarsely stated, man has an instinct of religion above heirs, etc. - makes him cling to something higher -

even the roughest.

Minto - editor, *Examiner*.

Silent Thunder over the world:

"I've but one simile and that's a blunder,

For wordless woman which is silent thunder."

How would some of my sarcastic honest things do for the *World* in the late autumn, or when?

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An enchanting history of 1876 from the newspaper files - would not this do at the end of a hard travel?

The synthesis of the *World* for every facet.

You must choose what the world would admire, but dress it up in warm clothes.

Pour Retour - learners - learn knowledge of the world.

Pour Retour - write to Harmer .. and ask for my *History of [?]*Swindon.

Poem as per *British Quarterly* - the troubadour in the plot of this poem has ... a thousand homes - the old idea - it is true today.

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What, though my lover be a base-born groom,

His mother laboured at the shifting loom,

His father poached the pheasants in the copse,

His whole religion centred in malt and hops,

At least he is a *man*, outright,

In deed, fight, drink, word and frame.

"In The Italian Manner." For the *World* - Longfellow aftermath.

"A Vision of Kings" - a crowd of all that have worn the diadem -

as they have attained the length [height] of human ambition, so in their disappointment and dissatisfaction, the intensification of *ennui* and hatred of humanitarianism, as per the king of the Roman second - brass coins -Constantine's dream over it - little coins. The Man of Sin - Augustus, King of Babylon. For the *World* - title.

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Letter: a live talk with an underground labourer and girl. . .

Why not call over the *World* shortly - nothing direct. To come under gradually - take ideas if it would do?

Pour Retour - go and see Robinson first, and take with you new magazine and the *World* etc. - then keep on writing for that paper.

Every day like a fly - this may follow, and boost chances [the best chance] I have. But any subject and every subject that turns up. Language would do well. I get a good chance of roughing a line in every day. Something like the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but on broader, picturesque lines. Style more than subject. Sunday 2nd July - you might also send one daily to the *Standard* and *Telegraph Times*.

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Pour Retour - why not take up the whole page in the *Athenaeum* with extracts from my scrapbook - asking at the end for employment - at showing how I can write an idea -I can get new employment, and may if striving??? 10th July - write to Allingham for the unit about that article??

In hand:

Short story for Macmillan. Put down the plot - a new novel in three parts.

Revision of "In Summer Time."

Articles - proceed for newspapers.

Any articles for the magazines. Series.

For the *World*

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1. Never been so unhappy as this time I have .. [done].
2. Wish I was coming back.
3. Gloated over me ...
4. Reproach me for every moment for never writing enough.
5. I wishing when you can come to me again.
6. But -I think this time - do you [love] [enough].
7. I cannot tell you how I hate you.
8. I hope if you are going to Turkey you will be [glad].
9. At dinner on the 5th flung a knife at me.

Three rats - jugular vein!!! In same house he was visiting - made good with the lawyer.

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Reading *behind* the lines - reading between the lines has been done - but now *behind* the lines - as the Germans and Spaniards at Gibraltar Station.

Pour Retour - Station - rewrite the article ... so write straightly, coarsely, picturesquely, flashy, gaudy - as wanted.

Pour Retour - Boulogne – autumn manoeuvres - French troops - a good thing to go - and see, and write too.

Pour Retour - Servia. See British Museum. History of - short article would be a good thing at the present moment. - Ranke? is Roumanian.

Edmund Yates - "The World S'amuse" - good title for the series of articles on amusements and the world without end development [death].

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Pour Retour - one of the great secrets in newspaper and magazine article-writing is to be anticipatory - try this thoroughly.

Pour Retour - every morning write out a list of public questions on all subjects anticipatory... as well.

... in progress:

Pour Retour - coming events - why not have a column in the newspapers devoted to this eulogy? Suggested it.

Pour Retour - short biographies of people in public notice - no need to be libellous at all - suggest Buchanan, Prince Milan etc - why not have the column for this kind of thing?

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Get *Coming Events* No 31 - standards of condition etc - would pay to have their account funds. Just mention in a line or two in this column.

Lord's Cricket Ground - Eton v Harrow - July 13th 2/6d.

Your inside will never get chapped - grease.

Inspiration is an accident of thought.

Pour Retour - get knowledge because it is the only thing you can certainly get - assert yourself boldly with the newspapers. If you don't do so you are immediately forgotten - continuously assert yourself: this is the golden rule.

Every day, every day, every day.

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Humanity and Natural History

Richard Jefferies

This essay was published in *Knowledge*, 5 January 1883, page 5. The article preceding Jefferies' essay was about advances in photography: 'there is an excess of coronal light from near the violet end of the spectrum'; Jefferies would have loved it.

Natural history is natural history no longer. Even the very phrase is passing out of use, having ceased to convey the meaning, which has grown too great for the words. By it was understood a catalogue of plants, a list of animals, a description of fossils. The animal kingdom and the vegetable kingdom were terms in constant use; they seem as antiquated now as the language of Chaucer.

I will go no farther back than my grandfather's book-case. There were the little thick volumes of Buffon, some broad fragments of Cuvier in folio, the same of Linnaeus in smaller blocks, Bakewell's "Geology", Kirby and Spence, a hundredweight and a hundred years of the "Philosophical Transactions", and certain books of botany strictly in Latin, whose authors are still honoured, but I shall not name them, for I detested those particular books beyond measure. This was a very respectable body of such learning for those days, and could not greatly have been improved upon. There is a solid mass of facts - a Silurian system - buried in those books to this hour. Buffon, as sure on all subjects as a gamecock, quick, witty, and pointed, writing in lace ruffles, and bringing crooked refractory nature into trim order and easy sentences, was the father of popularisers. Cuvier's bones were gigantic, and there are superstructures at the present day that rest on them. Linnaeus worshipped our golden gorse, and was thenceforth as dear to our hearts as a fairy tale.

Bakewell made a tessellated pavement with a geometrical design of what was then sprawling geology; right or wrong, at least you could see the pieces. Kirby and Spence are at this hour capital story-books for children, so interesting are their insects. I never smoked out a wasp's nest with straw or gunpowder after I read that book. The "Philosophical Transactions" are a queer jumble, but the variety and eccentricity of the topics excite the mind to look about for original ideas. The strictly Latin botanies are sawdust. From these authors, however, who, let it be observed, were for the most part primaeval and original in some manner, the book-making naturalists of the last forty years have copied their works.

My grandfather's books were genuine, and went to the full length of the knowledge then existent. They formed a kind of dictionary in which you could find particulars of any creature or thing. Turning to the antelope, its food, locality, and mode of life were accurately described, with its genus and Latin label. Turning to the sparrow, its habits, number and time of eggs were clearly recorded. Insects, fishes, plants, mosses - there was nothing known to be existent that was not described or classified. Few now understand the immense labour Linnaeus's system of botany represents. Though another system is now in use, the materials of it are practically Linnaean. What

Linnaeus effected in botany was carried out by various workers in other departments. Here then was a vast storehouse of facts - the accumulations of the ancients down from the days of Alexander the Great's preceptor. Looking at them broadly, the whole might be summed up as definition: The definition of an antelope, of an insect, or a plant. It was an encyclopaedia of living creatures - a dictionary. This was natural history as originally intended by the phrase.

There was no idea in it. If you read and read steadily through the entomology, and the conchology, and the ichthyology, all the tomes from end to end, most likely you would recollect something of the camel or the rhinoceros - a series of pictures might be formed in the mind; but you would not be the richer by one single idea. A ploughman may walk through a menagerie, and see the lions, and tigers, and the elephant, and will henceforward the better understand the infinity of life on the earth; but he will not possess a single new idea. So with these endless records in my grandfather's tomes: they conveyed nothing. I think the word "idea" carries my meaning better than theory or hypothesis. For my part, I consider that ideas are more valuable than facts, being, indeed, the greatest of all facts. Without an idea, facts are as dead as stones, on which no one can feed. Any one may stumble on a fact as a rabbit may turn up a coin. Only the wisest - or shall we rather say the secularly inspired? - can come, by long penance of thought, on the interpretation called an idea. When ideas came into natural history, it ceased to be natural history, and became philosophy.

Instead of endeavouring to trace the course of events from year to year and from thinker to thinker, till it grew to its present estate, it will serve better in way of contrast to sum in outline what that estate now is. At the central education establishments there are now three principal subjects placed before students. There are no precise terms by which these subjects can be accurately described, because they include so many branches. In effect, they are classics, the utilitarian cycle, and natural philosophy. Of old, classics took the first place, and Latin and Greek distinguished the gentleman and scholar. With recent years and the growing desire to profit by education, what I have called the utilitarian cycle has come so much to the front as to threaten the extinction of the classics. Students go to learn things that will actually be useful to them in life, by which they may secure an income. But yet something more is needed. A student may acquire a knowledge of three or more modern languages, be proficient in the higher arithmetic, and so forth - able, in short, to occupy any position in the official or mercantile world - and yet, if he stopped there, would be quite outside the living thought of the age. Without a knowledge of physical science, and that in a very extended form, he would be, however highly educated in other respects, still a mere clerk. In order, therefore, that the scholar may be able to mingle freely in the learned tone of the time, he is instructed in the elements at least of almost all the sciences. From physiology to botany, from electricity to astronomy, he is supposed to be grounded in everything. Unless he were so, half the allusions in the books and leading publications of the day would have no meaning to him. Again, very many of the best paid and most progressive employments are only open to physicists of some ability - as, for instance, the numerous developments of electricity. To indicate the various

causes which have led up to the present aspect is not necessary here. The point is that natural philosophy, physical science, physics, whatever name may be given to the higher form of natural history, is now considered so important as to overshadow the rest. The whole aim of modern education is to make a man think natural science - that is, in other words, fit him to comprehend the spirit of the time.

For the age thinks natural history in its higher or ideal form, just as former ages have thought metaphysics, or have been sceptical, or full of a revived classicism. It enters into every phase and movement. Physiology, for instance, which is the natural history of the human body, is taught - and rightly taught - to women, and even to children. If any one should object that physiology is not natural history, then *his* natural history is exactly that understood by the phrase in the books on my grandfather's shelves. Sanitation is one of the most powerful movements in our time, and seems likely to gather strength. Sanitation would be impossible without an insight into natural history. Its main object is to dispose of certain deleterious organisms, and if these organisms were not studied, it would be the merest rule of thumb. The germ theory, all the researches of Pasteur, and his experiments in microscopic vaccination, these are the purest natural history. So in surgery, the antiseptic treatment; though, indeed, all surgery which depends on growth is natural history. As for the physician of the nineteenth century, he is purely a naturalist. Theories have disappeared: the one leading idea is to get at what nature needs. Nature, nature! the word is on every lip. Men's lives are saved by natural history. Athletics are based on the results of minute researches into the absorption of food, the repair of tissues, all the processes of life, training being adapted to facilitate it. Except those who return conquerors from war there are none so highly honoured as explorers of unknown regions, such as the interior of Africa, or the Palaeocretaceous sea at the other extreme, whose work is certainly natural history. Astronomy reaches, indeed, above our earth, but uses the forces with which the earth acquaints us as keys to open the stellar spheres. Then, returning to the earth, astronomy ventures theories as to its origin. Despite the attacks made upon it, the Lyell theory, that existing causes are sufficient to explain existing things and the means by which they become as they are, this great idea still influences the mind of every investigator. Such causes may be seen at work in any pond, or even on the window-pane; the whole idea must have been gathered from an intellectual study of natural history, since natural history presents these causes at every step. An exhaustive account of the multitudinous ways in which natural science influences the mind of the age would be of unwieldy length. Everywhere throughout the Anglo-Saxon world, eager minds are seeking new discoveries in such science literally night and day. Therefore, it is strictly accurate to say that the age thinks natural philosophy, looking to it for guidance, help, and future increase.

To gather the views of all these workers into a focus and express it in a formula may not be without its use. The one central idea which inspires their efforts is this: that every single atom of matter should be employed for the good of the human race. While this motive animates the inquirer, the search is consecrated and the seeker dignified. The reward is certain - it is in the inward consciousness of a great aim,

which lifts the spirit, and, like a talisman, transmutes coarse things to preciousness. In our age nothing is holy but humanity. The human being is the one shrine towards which all pilgrims of our latter-day faith toil; the human being of itself, irrespective of race, sex, age, or distinction of good or bad. These are the ethics of natural history. The thing is plain enough to any one who stays a moment to consider; but in the hurry of life and the necessities of business, it is not so obvious perhaps to the many. I want to see it recognised as a truth so great as to be the first lesson of youth, the law of manhood, the chief dogma of the world.

Richard Jefferies: An Independent Mind

Hugoe Matthews

The first time I came across the name of Richard Jefferies was in 1962 when I bought a copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home* for half-a-crown in the Charing Cross Road. Forty-three years later I find myself giving this lecture, which inevitably prompts the question: Why? What was it about Jefferies' work that caught my attention in a way no other writer has done? As I tried to sort this out it seemed, first of all, that it was not just a matter of the qualities for which he is well known - his observation, description, and mysticism - but that there was some other element or ingredient in his work that was elusive and hard to define, but also very real. Eventually I began to think this had something to do with the way his mind worked, with the thoughts and attitudes he expresses when he is writing from his head rather than his heart, and I decided to read through all his work, in the order in which it was published*, to try to isolate this strand and trace its development over the course of his career.

Early Work.

For the first seven years of that career Jefferies was a reporter, on and off, for various local newspapers. Though we have no proven examples of his 'reporting' we do have his other writings from this period, and in this study I would like first to consider this body of work as a whole, and then turn to his thoughts on some specific subjects such as Man and Nature, Science, and Religion.

His first published prose, as far as we know, was 'A Strange Story' (1866), a tale of the supernatural in which a death is foretold, written in the form of a philosophical dialogue that he conducts through the medium of a narrator, Roderick, and his friend Fitzhugh. At the start of the piece Fitzhugh chides Roderick for his intellectual indolence:

Roderick, I see, like the majority of mankind, you are content to ignore that which you cannot understand, instead of seeking to unravel the mystery.

Later he refers to the mystical state as: 'the power of the mind to separate itself from the power of the body . . .' and challenges his friend on the question of belief:

Roderick, there are two classes of fools in the world - those who believe without a reason, and those who disbelieve without a reason; do you belong to either of these?
'No,' I replied, 'I neither believe nor disbelieve.'

At the age of seventeen Jefferies is already applying his mind to serious subjects, and, incidentally, hinting at future themes.

Just after his eighteenth birthday he starts a series of five 'Chapters on Churches' (1866-67, identified by George Miller in the 1990s) in which he visits local places of worship to report on the church, the congregation, the sermon, and so on. All were written under the pseudonym 'The Peripatetic Philosopher' (i.e. someone who wanders around thinking) and the first words of the series are: 'Nature is the church of the philosopher', which is a metaphor, an epigram, and a statement of intent, all rolled into one. After a detailed account of the sermon, including Why God Punishes? he says: 'Such was the sermon. I make no comment,' which is a neat way of saying 'you can rely on my reporting, but that doesn't mean I believe (or disbelieve) the message.'

In Chapter 2 he notes the difficulty of conveying the preacher's emphasis: 'Written words are devoid of colour and of sound', and in later chapters he begins to exercise the sort of curiosity that he alluded to in 'A Strange Story'. In Chapter 3 he goes to a church where the sermon is being given in Welsh, by a travelling preacher, to see if he can understand it (which he thinks he can), and whether it is being done for the money (which he thinks it isn't); and in Chapter 5 he listens to a 'boy-wonder' preacher to see if he is genuine, but finds, and reports in the paper, that he is a fake who was 'preaching' wholly from memory.

In his next undertaking, a 'History of Malmesbury' (1867), in the middle of a generally dense text he inserts, as a sort of reminder to himself or his readers, some of the lessons he has learnt in the course of his research. Of history in general he says:

it is impossible to trace the course of events without pausing to reflect how strongly evil and good are intermingled in them . . . judgement is suspended upon an action, so utterly unable does one feel to pronounce whether it was in reality a curse or a blessing . . . nothing can be more impertinent than to pronounce an event, or a time, as one of unmixed evil or unmixed good.

On the subject of writing he observes:

Numbers without question never did, and never will become celebrated, for the simple reason that they did not write . . . Ink alone confers immortality ... everything becomes swallowed up in the insatiable vortex of time, but the thoughts of men when placed upon paper.

and referring to the Church in the time of Edward the Confessor, he notes that the monks and priests, while preaching the eternal values:

were remarkably fond of the 'earthly and fleeting ones' - such as gold and silver, woods, meadows and lands . . . and made noise enough if such 'impious wretches' as the Danes, for instance, dared to lay hand upon their sacred stores.

In the same month, with history much on his mind, he writes to his Aunt Ellen about another thing he has learnt:

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 ... the country, if I may use the expression, seems alive with the dead ...

For Jefferies, being misled or misinformed was a serious matter. How could he form sound opinions if he didn't have the correct facts? Twenty years later, shortly before he died, he was still 'indignant' about it ('Nature and Books' 1887).

In 1868 he writes to his Aunt again - he has begun to realise he does not 'fit in' with the locals: 'I must be different from them, must be a poppy in the cornfield', which is a nicely ambiguous metaphor, as we don't know whether he means he is the only bright spot in a uniform landscape, or a weed that ought to be removed. By 1871, however, when he writes 'The Man of the Future', it is clear that this difference refers to his thinking:

In every village, however small... 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.

and in an undated but parallel passage, published by Looker as 'Hyperion' (1947), he reveals that it was modelled on Homer's Ulysses:

There was once a youth in an obscure country village, quite lost in the rudest and most illiterate county in the West, who passed a great part of his time reading books and dreaming, so much so that he was useless upon the farm. His name was Hyperion ... No matter what difficulty presented itself, Ulysses could think . . . His thought triumphed . . . This sank into Hyperion's mind . . . He thought Ulysses, he lived Ulysses .. Thus, Homer's man became part of his being

The central theme of 'The Man of the Future' is the importance of free thought, and what Jefferies predicts, and hopes for, is a decline in the influence of religious dogma and a rise in the proportion of independent and informed thinkers (like himself). The fact that the Police Courts are now open to the public, he says:

has had a most powerful effect on 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 . . .

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 ...

By slow degrees the people are getting into the condition of the reporters. They hear both sides of every fraction of the question.

What is the 'condition of the reporters'? In this context it is clearly not any formal qualification, but a mental discipline, or way of thinking, that is essential to doing his job properly, characterised by an enquiring mind, a determination to be wholly accurate with the facts, to look at both sides and 'every fraction' of a question, and to

be objective, balanced and independent in forming a judgment, and it is this approach that he adopts when he writes to *The Times* in 1872 on the issue of the agricultural wage.

At that time the agricultural workers were demanding more pay, largely on the grounds that they got less than industrial workers, but Jefferies points out that such a comparison must take into account the fact that the agricultural workers have significant perks (little or no rent, no travelling expenses, a plot for vegetables) while the factory workers do not, and that when this is done there is little disparity; and that the tenant-farmers are not 'exploiting' the workers - with the changes in agriculture they are in difficulty themselves and simply unable to pay an increase. For some, of course, these facts were unpalatable, but when the 'Son of a Wiltshire Labourer' writes to object, Jefferies simply replies with more facts and more logic and the correspondence is closed.

It was the quality of these letters that brought him the opportunity to write for the national magazines, and there is, perhaps, a pleasing irony in the fact that it was the method of thinking he had developed as a reporter (a job that never matched his ambitions) that enabled him to stop being a reporter. From then on, with his method fully established, he not only relied on it for the rest of his life, but frequently reminds us of it:

1873 - no one can properly report anything unless he first understands it.

(Reporting; Editing & Authorship)

1877 - Let it be always remembered that we are analysing, not arguing; we are describing, not contending. ('The Future of Country Society')

1883 - The mind becomes independent [of the world's opinion], and judges for itself. ('The Defence of Sport')

1885 - I am simply describing the realities of rural life behind the scenes. ('One of the New Voters')

1886 - Let it not be supposed for an instant that I set up as a censor; I do but delineate. ('Hours of Spring')

1887 - This is a picture, not a disputation ... ('The Country Sunday')

and in *Hodge* (1880) there is a nice example of his concern for accuracy in his entertaining account of a lecture on 'scientific' farming where he says:

It is to be hoped that Phillip's conversational account of his studies has been correctly reproduced here. The chemical terms look rather weak, but the memory of an ordinary listener can hardly be expected to retain such a mass of technicalities.

Later work.

From 1873, therefore, when he went freelance, the interest of Jefferies' work lies not so much in 'How' he thought, because that is already fixed, but in 'What' he thought about particular subjects, and in the rest of this paper I would like to look at a few of these - starting with some of his further thoughts on the subject of writing books. We saw in the 'History of Malmesbury' that he was already aware of the

importance of writing as a route to celebrity, or even 'immortality', but he was also conscious of its difficulties and limitations:

the painter can but give one aspect of the day, and the writer a mere catalogue of things ...
(*'A King of Acres'* 1884)

'Cataloguing' was a criticism that was levelled at some of his earlier country writing, perhaps with some justification, but he responded to it, and from about 1880 (after *Round About a Great Estate*) he began to add the meditative element that characterises most of his best work. Part of the problem of cataloguing is that there is just too much material:

one might begin to write a book about a hedgerow when a boy and find it incomplete in old age. (*Round About a Great Estate*)

which was the fate of 'Chronicles of the Hedges', started in 1881 but never finished, as he never even reached old age. On the other hand, if he tries to condense his material he merely encounters a different problem:

I think that as a general rule extracts are a mistake ... The extract itself loses its force and brilliance because the mind has not been prepared to perceive it by the gradual approach the author designed. ('Country Literature' 1881)

This 'gradual', or even roundabout, approach is a Jefferies trademark and it was retained when he collected the essays that make up *Nature Near London*, *The Life of the Fields*, and *The Open Air*. After his death, of course, it was open season, and within eight years Waylen had published his *Thoughts from the Writings of Richard Jefferies* (1895) with 150 extracts and no context.

If he tries to work out-of-doors, in the sunlight, it is hopeless: Three words, and where is the thought? - Gone', ('Meadow Thoughts' 1884), and if he turns to books for inspiration, he is liable to be disappointed. Recalling his grandfather's bookcase in a little-known essay titled 'Humanity and Natural History' (1883) he says:

Here, then, was a vast storehouse of facts ... Looking at them broadly, the whole might be summed up as definition: The definition of an antelope, of an insect, or a plant. It was an encyclopaedia of living creatures - a dictionary.... There was no idea in it.

At the British Museum it is no better:

Sitting at these long desks and trying to read, I soon find I have made a mistake; it is not here I shall find that which I seek. (*The Pigeons at the British Museum* 1884)

and in 'Nature and Books' (1887) he asks:

What is the colour of the dandelion?

Often in writing about these things I have felt very earnestly my own incompetence to give the least idea of their brilliancy and many-sided colours . . . At last I said, I will have more words; I will have more terms; I will have a book on colour, and I will find and use the right technical name for each one of those lovely tints ...
The dandelion remained unexplained . . . The book, in short, dealt with the artificial and not with nature.

So he turns to Monographs, Magazines, and Art Books, but the result is the same:

Nor have we got much news of the dandelion. For I sit on the thrown timber under the trees and meditate, and I want something more: I want the soul of the flowers.

Man and Nature.

This longing for 'the soul of the flowers' leads naturally to the question of Man's relationship to Nature - a problem that has existed ever since man became conscious of his surroundings. Is Nature something to be feared, placated, worshipped, investigated (the enlightenment), celebrated (the romantics), or simply exploited (the last 300 years)? For Jefferies none of these fits, but the answer only comes slowly. From childhood Nature had been his inspiration and delight, but from about 1880 he begins to recognise that it is both all-powerful, and totally indifferent to him:

Without air [man] cannot live. Nature cannot be escaped. ('Nature and Eternity' HV)
'there is an infinite possibility about the sea; it may do what it is not recorded to have done.' ('The Breeze on Beachy Head' 1881)

In 2005 the sea has done just that, twice - in Indonesia and New Orleans. Is this Jefferies being prophetic? No, just logical, and we should note the precision of his words - not 'what it has never done before', because he cannot know that, but 'what it is not recorded to have done.'

He senses the indifference in the herb garden at Kew, watching the bees: 'they are much too busily occupied to notice you or me' ('Herbs' 1880), and in the meadows, from the flowers:

if I (or the whole human race) were extinct the colour would be the same. The buttercup would open its petal to the sun just the same if I did not exist: I am nothing to it. (OHC)

As for the romantic notion that nature was made just for man's benefit, he demolishes that with a nice bit of lateral thinking in 'The Meadow Gateway' (1881):

doubtless the workmen and their employer believed they were labouring for their own convenience. The thrush is of quite a different opinion, so is the rabbit, and indeed, all the hedge people ... they are equally persuaded that the gateway was constructed for them.

and in 'Hours of Spring' (1886), the year before he died, he sums it all up:

I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me ...

The old, old error: I love the earth, therefore the earth loves me -I am her child -I am Man, the favoured of all creatures. I am the centre, and all for me was made.

Nature sets no value upon life neither of minute hill-snail nor of human being ... nor of the larks that sang years ago. The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing to the earth: it is bitter to know this before you are dead. Nature has no arrangement, no plan, nothing judicious even ...

In 'The Old House at Coate', published posthumously, he concludes:

I come at last - and not without, for a while, sorrow, to the inevitable conclusion that there is no object, no end, no purpose, no design, and no plan ...

even Time is an illusion:

no past... the Now is continuous. When the stars have revolved they only produce Now again. (*The Story of My Heart*)

disabuse the mind of the narrow view, the contracted belief that time is now and eternity tomorrow. Eternity is to-day. ('Nature and Eternity' HV)

So, on the one hand, man is just a part of nature - integral but not special. Nature was not made for Man's benefit; it is a 'state', or 'process', that was there before man arrived and will continue even if he, individually or collectively, ceases to exist. There is no reciprocity, Nature simply 'Is'. On the other hand, just because Nature does not 'give' to man, that does not mean that man cannot 'take' from Nature as much enjoyment as he wants, and Jefferies did. For him, Nature was not a Donor, it was an Opportunity. It's available to all:

I find a favourite wild-flower here, and the spot is dear to me; you find yours yonder. (Preface to *Nature Near London*)

and not just for enjoyment:

In the sunshine, by the shady verge of woods, by the sweet waters where the wild dove sips, there alone will thought be found. (The Pigeons at the BM' 1884)

It's a slight digression, but man as an integral part of nature is what determines much of Jefferies' sense of aesthetics. In *Wild Life in a Southern County* he describes an old English farmhouse and its grounds as a perfect example of man and nature side-by-side, the opposite of the new towns near London, where:

Whole streets of houses present exact duplicates of each other, even to the number of steps up to the front door and the position of the scraper. (The Farmer at Home' TF)

In *Round About a Great Estate*, after a glass of ale with Hilary, he says:

To me these old jugs and mugs and bowls have a deep and human interest, for you can seem to see and know the men who drank from them in the olden days. Now a tall Worcester vase, with all its elegance and gilding ... lacks that sympathy, and may please the eye but does not touch the heart.

'Willow-pattern' plates are simply a mystery: 'I really cannot see what possible connection the bushes or the Chinese summerhouses have with the roast beef of old England ...' and he has advice for painters - if they can't resist the temptation to paint birds' nests, they should at least do it so that the eggs won't roll out ('Birds' Nests' 1884); and paintings of landscape should include the agricultural machines, or they will 'lack the force of truth and reality . . . Why omit fifty years from the picture?' ('New Facts in Landscape' 1882)

In London, the Plane trees look as if they have a disease, possibly leprosy, and their leaves arrive late and drop early 'like pieces of brown paper', (OHC); as for the 'sickly green' laurels of suburbia:

Nothing will find refuge in, or under them . . . even snails do not care for such shelter. Snails have better taste. (The Contents of Ten Acres' LL) I would prefer thistles to planes and laurels. (OHC)

Gardens should not be tidied up like a 'ball-room' (NNL); formal gardens and landscaping are 'hideous disfigurements of beautiful scenery' (FH), and the separation of flower borders and fruit orchards is not natural - let them grow together: 'this is not neglect, this is true attention, to leave it to itself .. '(TF)

Science.

Nature is of course, also an opportunity for scientific enquiry and in 1868 he spent six months writing an 'Essay on Instinct' (never printed) that amounts to some 17,000 words, but it was not until *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879) that the subject begins to appear in his books, when he starts to ask some simple questions: What happens if you interrupt a column of ants on the march? Why is it so difficult to establish a new rookery? Do boulders and standing stones change their appearance, as the locals believe? When does the pimpernel close its petals in relation to rain? and so on.

In 'Summer in Somerset' (1887) he suggests that Tarr Steps, a crossing on the River Barle near Exmoor, is megalithic - a finding that has recently been confirmed, and in 'The Dawn' (HV) he says 'May there not be light we cannot see?' and there is - the rays that we now know as infra-red and ultra-violet.

In 1881, however, he moves to a different level of enquiry with a pair of articles titled 'Hedge Miners' and 'Mound Restorers': the first is an account of how hedges decay, and the second of how they are renewed, to produce a natural dynamic balance. For these he not only had to make observations but also to work out what was going on, which is genuine science and a description of an eco-system that was well ahead of

its time. Together they would have made an excellent chapter for 'Chronicles of the Hedges', if it had ever been finished.

Another innovation is that as part of watching wild-life, he begins to watch people, long before Desmond Morris made a career out of it:

A city crowd is to a certain extent mobile - each recognises that he must give way. A country crowd stands stock-still. (*Wild Life in a Southern County*) If you meet a farmer of the old style and his wife walking together, never do you see them arm-in-arm. The husband walks a yard or two in front, or else on the other side of the road; and this even when they are going to church. (*Round About a Great Estate*)

In 'Nightingale Road' (1880) he describes the panic that ensues when some cattle get into a suburban street, and in 'The Bathing Season' (1884) he sits on Brighton pier and watches the women bathers being flattened repeatedly by the waves: 'Was there ever such courage?' he asks, followed by one of his telling juxtapositions, 'Yet some people hesitate to give women the franchise!' Later in the same piece he describes the invasion of his personal space by the 'elbow-jogger', but also, in what might be termed 'applied' science, the antidote to the problem which is to 'Talk back very loudly!'

These are essentially light-hearted observations, but in 1883 the ability of some birds to 'hover' became a topical issue and in three articles he demonstrates a logical, sequential and very scientific approach to the problem. In the first, 'The Hovering of the Kestrel' (February) he works out that kestrels can hover in perfect calm, simply by beating their wings, and do not need either a vertical or a horizontal current for support; in the second, 'Birds Climbing the Air' (July) he makes the distinction between hawks hovering, and soaring in a spiral, and begins to think that this function may be dependent on a current, but it is not the wind; while in the third, 'Nature Near Brighton' (August) he observes that seagulls also soar, and concludes that there must be 'some hitherto unexplained elasticity or property of air' that enables them to do so. He has clearly identified what we now know as 'thermals'. Later, in 'Swallow-time' (1886), he says:

The more I think the more I am convinced that the buoyancy of the air is very far greater than science admits ...

Clearly, he understood the process of science and in his Preface to a new edition of Gilbert White's *Selborne* in 1887, he applauds White as a classic example of what can be achieved simply by thoughtful observation:

Part of his success was owing to his coming to the field with a mind unoccupied. He was not full of evolution when he walked out... His mind was free and his eye open.

So was Jefferies' mind, and his eye. Andrew Rossabi (RJSJ no 12) has suggested that Jefferies could have been an artist, but on the basis of his people-watching, eco-

systems, and thermals (even before the words were invented) he could also have been a scientist.

Religion.

One thing he could not have been was a cleric, and one reason is that from his earliest days he was highly critical of the church as an institution, and unimpressed by its representatives:

Platitudes in plenty ... but definition none; merely a repetition of words as if they had a cabalistic virtue ... ('The Man of the Future' 1871) one pack of hounds will cause more good feeling among men than fifty pulpits resounding. ('The Defence of Sport' 1883)

and when one of the women fruit-pickers tells him of a sermon on 'innerds',

Now anatomy climbs into the pulpit and shakes a bony fist at the congregation. ('The Country-side: Sussex', 1886)

In 'The Country Sunday' (1887) he listens to the church bells and watches the people going to their various denominations: 'some to one bell, some to another, some to ding dong, and some to dong ding . . .' He notes the young pastors: 'indulging in pleasant spiritual communion with the daughters of the mansion' and the back-biting amongst the congregation: 'where was the humanising tendency of much-vaunted Christianity?' and in his last published essay, 'Walks in the Wheatfields' (1887), he talks of the injustice of being hanged for stealing a sheep:

There were parsons then, as now, in every rural parish preaching and teaching something they called the Gospel. Why did they not rise as one man and denounce this ghastly iniquity, and demand its abolition?

Another reason is that his thoughts on the subject of 'God' are not exactly orthodox. In the early part of *The Story of My Heart* (which he described as an 'actual record of thought. . . unsparing to myself) there is quite a lot about God, but it is not the God of creation, or personal salvation, or any form of conventional Christianity. It is about God as an idea, or a concept, and not a very good one at that. The very idea of a deity, he says, is 'inferior', and he even dares to suggest that there could be a state of being 'higher than God', which was not only original but openly heretical.

Though he does not believe in the resurrection of the body, he does believe in the existence of the human soul, which he defines as 'a consciousness that aspires'. Whether it survives after death is uncertain, but even if it does not the thought that it might has been a great comfort. By the same token, prayer is not about asking for material things, but is simply the expression of the longings of the soul:

if the very name of religion was extinct, our hopes, our wish, would be the same. ('Nature and Eternity' HV)

After his death his wife and some of her friends claimed that Jefferies died a devout Christian, but this was challenged by Henry Salt in 1891 and recently by Kedrun Laurie in her doctoral thesis in 2003. To accept it one would want some first-hand evidence from his own writings, and the fact is, it simply isn't there. 'Nature is the church of the philosopher', he wrote at the age of 18, and that remained his church and his religion for the rest of his life.

In conclusion.

Perhaps the main point to emerge from this study is that when you separate Jefferies' thinking from his feelings you begin to see that he had an unusual and possibly exceptional mind. I think he was aware of it and took satisfaction from it, but he didn't 'parade' it. On the evidence of his early work it would appear that his inclination to thought was present right from the start, and that by the end of his time as a reporter he had developed a method of thinking that was based firmly on curiosity, accuracy, objectivity and independence.

He neither belonged to nor got his opinions from any other school of thought, but invented his own. His method, however, is rarely the main focus of his work. Its importance is that in an understated way it informs all his work and is central to its appeal, which (for this reader at least) comes from a unique blending of observation, description, mysticism, and thought.

The surprise is that this aspect of Jefferies' work has received so little attention. In more than a century since his death only one author has written on Jefferies as a thinker, and that was Henry Salt in the last chapter of his book *Richard Jefferies: A Study* in 1894. Since then much new material has been identified and it may be time for a reassessment, with the proviso that any analysis of Jefferies' thinking must take account of all his writings on a subject, and the sequence in which they originally appeared in the papers and magazines of his time.

*A booklet *The Published Works of Richard Jefferies (in order)* which was compiled to accompany this lecture is available from the Richard Jefferies Society.

This article formed the 2005 Birthday Lecture, given at Chiseldon on 8 October. Hugoe Matthews was elected President of the Society in 2004.

Literary Landscapes, Richard Jefferies and the Planning Inspector

Mark Daniel

Widely separated groups, all over the world, share the same peculiarity of earth worship - a strange phenomenon having nothing to do with the *sapiens* part of their humanity, and which must reflect the very beginnings of human life. Most of us no longer believe in the Spirits of the Forest, but we talk about a 'sense of place', or rationalise by calling on history to account for our feeling for land and landscape. And, since this seems to be a fundamental need, if people can find no other reason for venerating land they invent one.

What could be more mythic than Richard Adams' story of rabbits looking for a home, and their discovery of Watership Down? But for years after its publication, pilgrims, book and map in hand, would trace the course of the epic journey. Ridiculous? Not a bit of it! Like the Da Vinci Code pilgrims in the Rosslyn Chapel, they were responding to a basic human characteristic - the compulsion to experience in imagination situations which do not actually exist. Through literature, we venerate lands and places involved in our emotional experience and are prepared to fight for them.

Greed for quick profit, however, has often prevailed. About a hundred and fifty years ago, the Canterbury city fathers came within one vote of demolishing the Norman Westgate, to allow access to the wagons of a travelling circus. High Sunderland Hall near Halifax, almost certainly the model for Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, was not so fortunate - it was pulled down and another site, Top Withens, later 'invented' for visitors. Her sister Charlotte's Oakwell Hall, from *Shirley*, now stands incongruously beside a motorway. The watermeadows beside Hardy's *Casterbridge* have been ruined, and Egdon Heath largely given over to forestry and the Winfrith Atomic Energy Establishment.(Ref.1.)

A growing number of people are aware of the value of old scenes and places, and condemn earlier generations for bad decisions. There is the paradox that praise for short-term gain is almost always followed by opprobrium for long-term loss. And so it will be if the perhaps less well-informed views of a recently-visiting Planning Inspector are carried and the land between Coate Water and Liddington Hill further developed. Planning Inspectors' powers are wide, giving scope for personal views and partiality, and without even the requirement to take literary value into account. Stressing that Jefferies was a *local* writer and that his writings mainly concerned the *immediate* area around Coate, he seems to be trying to diminish a writer of international standing. He says that Jefferies was not in the same class as Hardy or Wordsworth. But how does he measure their worth - by the number of people who have heard of them? Did he not know that in a nationwide survey, run in July 2005 by *The Guardian*, to name the greatest British nature writer, Jefferies was the most

widely nominated, and that he was rated ahead of Hardy and Wordsworth? Wordsworth became Poet Laureate, and much of his output arrived on a wave of popular sentiment, probably resulting from the social upheavals, deprivations and stricken consciences of his time. Hardy was certainly one of our greatest country writers. But in his assessment the Inspector was making the mistake of not comparing like with like.

The value of Jefferies' work - and his landscape - depends not on the transient acclaim of popular fashion, but on several more fundamental human concerns. Firstly, the need to recognise links with our ancestors and their lands, met by his perceptive chronicles of contemporary rural life. Secondly, his powers of observation of the natural scene - giving pleasure, but also providing benchmarks by which to check our treatment of the earth. Thirdly and certainly not least, his extraordinary and not wholly unsuccessful attempts to give words for the deep feelings most of us experience about the earth and the infinite universe, but cannot express. In this *The Story of My Heart* is probably unique. Expression brings a kind of relief, which we, like the earth-worshippers of old, for some reason, need. And we need contact with the land and scene by which Jefferies worked the catharsis.

All across the land between Coate Water and Liddington, and out to Chiseldon, links with Jefferies and his world abound, astonishing in their number and trueness to life. Sixty-five years ago, when, after first reading *Bevis*, I visited the area, it was thrilling to find that so many features actually existed, and just where I'd imagined them. And quite recently the land where Bevis organised his 'Battle of Pharsalia', and which the eminent explorer Winthrop-Young had earlier puzzled over for the publishers Eyre and Spottiswoode, proved true for almost every hedge and gateway - but for how much longer?

Jefferies wrote of himself, 'There was once a youth in an obscure country village quite lost in the rudest and most illiterate county of the West . . .' (Ref .2). Could it be that his appreciation of Swindon was close to the truth, and still is? Are the minds of our administrators so indifferent to cultural paucity that they are equally blind to the possibilities? Literary landscapes are an increasing preoccupation with schools and universities, whose students are no longer tied to run-of-the-mill studies. Ph.D. theses are increasingly developed from more eclectic writing. Does Swindon consider whether it should do more to encourage tours of its literary landscape, enjoyed by students in other places - or was Jefferies right?

Swindon has a strong industrial history, which is invoked whenever its cultural standing is questioned. But does it have to undervalue a great rural and natural heritage, further enhanced by Jefferies?

Ref.1 Bradbury, Malcolm (Ed.), *The Atlas of Literature* 1996; De Agostini Editions, Interpark House, 7 Down St, London W1Y 7DS.

Ref.2 Jefferies, Richard, In notes by Samuel Looker, *Field and Hedgerow* Lutterworth Press, 1948, p 384.

Book Reviews

LANDSCAPE, WRITING AND "THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND" -1878-1917,
RUSKIN TO MODERNISM by Simon Grimble. Studies in British Literature,
Volume 81. The Edwin Mellon Press, 2004. 229pp. £69.95.

I document a line of non-fiction prose writing about landscape that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in response both to an expanding urban market for material about rural England and to a sense that the experience of landscape provided a kind of visible - if, at times, obscure - index to the state of the nation.

Thus Dr Simon Grimble, lecturer in English literature and intellectual history at Cambridge, in his introduction. His book concentrates on four writers: John Ruskin, Richard Jefferies, Edward Thomas and Ford Madox Ford. Grimble finds similarities between the four: they were intensely visual; shared an outsider-observer quality; focused on southern, rural England; and suffered mental ill-health.

Grimble relates Jefferies to the pre-Raphaelites and their near-sighted microscopic vision. He examines the various ways Jefferies was read after his death. P. Anderson Graham saw Jefferies as providing a vicarious experience of the countryside for an urban audience; Arthur Quiller-Couch accused him of 'supplying the club-novelist with his open-air effects'; Edward Thomas (in his introduction to *The Hills and the Vale*) spoke of his rising to 'a spirituality now close as the grass, and now as the stars'.

Grimble stresses Jefferies' lack of connection 'with a literary and intellectual community that would place him and educate him in its idiom'. He discusses 'The Story of Swindon', 'Village Organization', 'Unequal Agriculture', 'After the County Franchise', *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher* and *Bevis*. *The Story of My Heart* is treated with little sympathy. Grimble speaks of 'a stumbling expression of his [Jefferies'] desire for the numinous' and says the book 'falls short of its pretensions'.

Grimble deals at greatest length with *After London* of which he provides a sensitive and intelligent reading. He relates the novel to 'a rise in the representation of marshes and fens in painting'. Felix's wanderings through London 'produce from Jefferies some of his most intensely imagined writing, very far distant from the charge of cataloguing'.

Grimble ends by reviewing some of the images of Jefferies projected since his death. He sees Jefferies essentially as trying 'to get between the rural detail and the national frame, whilst preserving a critical sense of both'.

There are numerous printer's errors and some minor errors of fact. Smith, Elder & Co, not Eyre & Spottiswoode, published *The Gamekeeper at Home* in 1878; three, not two, of Jefferies' early novels were published; Jefferies died in August, not February, 1887, when he was 38, not 39. Grimble accuses others of patronising Jefferies but at times adopts a condescending tone himself. He speaks of Jefferies as 'plugging the

rural path'. But the argument is often subtle; the approach fresh; and the writing elegant, if marred by a penchant for trendy lit crit words like 'mode' and a repetitious use of the phrase 'to get between' in a metaphorical sense.

Andrew Rossabi

AN IMAGINARY ENGLAND: NATION, LANDSCAPE AND LITERATURE,
1840-1920 by Roger Ebbatson. Ashgate 2005. 232pp. £45.

This is an impressive book, aimed at a university readership, but dealing with themes that we all know and wonder about: the evolving concepts of Englishness.

Graphology is a study of a personality through handwriting; academics, in a like way, examine Englishness by scrutinising the prose and poetry of English writers. As Professor Ebbatson says 'works of art possess the power to expose those things which ideology conceals'. He has chosen, in ten chapters, to examine work by eight authors: Tennyson (two), Tennyson Turner, Jefferies, Hardy (two), Quiller-Couch, Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, D H Lawrence. What he looks for, between the lines, and 'behind the lines', are references to class friction, national degeneracy, subject races, 'empire' - anything that might be considered a change for the worse.

In the Jefferies chapter he chooses *The Dewy Morn*, and analyses Jefferies' handling of the topics of contempt for the ruling class, harshness towards the weak, misguided philanthropy, but no two chapters are alike in length, or anything else.

The nineteenth century abounds with English writers, and this book might well have included Kipling, Mrs Humphry Ward, or James Barrie, but in fact the author has chosen writers about whom he has something new to say. Much of it was new to this reviewer: Charles Tennyson Turner came as a complete revelation; as did Quiller-Couch's treasure-island yarn (but not to his credit); and Rupert Brooke's stay in Tahiti.

Professor Ebbatson is a member of this Society and Visiting Professor at Loughborough University. *Imaginary England* has an introductory chapter, a brief bibliography and an index. It is legible and pleasant to handle. I found no errors. Its author is widely read in modern texts and quotes copiously. Sometimes this is vexing, where it interrupts the flow of argument, but the footnotes to the citations are a joy, drawing attention to previously unknown books with tempting titles. The book is by no means an easy read. Old-fashioned readers will have difficulty with words like 'trope', 'alterity', 'parataxis' (and the dictionary is no help). But it is new and stimulating, positively dancing with ideas.

Phyllis Treitel