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The RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No. 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Its activities include the Annual General Meeting and Birthday Lecture, winter meetings, summer outings, special events, and the publication of a *Journal*, spring and autumn Newsletters and an Annual Report. Membership is open to all on payment of the current annual subscription: £7.00 – individual; £8.00 – couple. This will increase to £12 and £14 respectively from July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.

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The *Journal* is the official organ of the Society. Copies are available for £2.00 (postage included), along with other Society publications, from the Hon. Secretary.

The principal aim of The Richard Jefferies Society *Journal* is to present material by Jefferies that has not been published or reprinted, or that is difficult to obtain, together with articles about Jefferies (commissioned or submitted), items of research and discovery, synopses of talks and lectures, book reviews, Wiltshire material relating to Jefferies, and correspondence.

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# Kiss and Try: A Tale of St Valentine

Richard Jefferies

First published in *London Society* (February 1877), and collected in *Society Novellettes* vol. I by Francis Cowley Burnand (London: Vizetelly and Co., 1883) along with an engraving by H W Cutts.

“I won’t marry for money, and I won’t be married for money, and I won’t marry at all; and when I do, I’ll please myself — so *there!* You are so stupid. Aunt Jane;” and the wilful little beauty stamped her foot, contradicting herself with a wrathful energy that would have done credit to an accomplished actress.

“My dear —”

“Don’t ‘my dear’ me! I’m not your *dear*. I can be *dear* to plenty of people if I choose.”

“My dear, really you are so impetuous, you’ll never be married.”

“There it is again, that hateful topic. Can’t you understand I don’t want to? Why should I? I’ve got plenty of money; I’ve got a carriage, and two such pets of ponies, and a hunter, and a house in the country; what more do I want? I wish you would all let me alone. There’s papa talking sorrowfully, silly old darling, about his declining years, and only me, and me not married; and if you are my aunt it’s no reason you should worry me night and day. I *won’t* have your lawyer if he’s as rich as Croesus — how much has he given you to plead his cause, eh?”

“You need not insult me, at all events. I counsel you for your own good, Miss Delaselle. Mr. Marshe is a most eligible person, most eligible. His father is in the front rank of his profession, and immensely rich; your papa approves of his suit. There is a possibility of the dormant peerage being revived in the favour of that family: Mr. Marshe senior has rendered great services in high quarters.”

“Thank you for your genealogical particulars. Now please tell me all about Captain Williams, and Theophilus Bishop, who will rise in the Church, and Sir Cornelius Wilkes, and Squire Thompson, and Mr. Burnaby, and Lieutenant Vane, and Lord Pauline, &c.”

“Really, you may well pause; the flirtations you carry on are beyond all belief. There were a dozen soldiers in the house yesterday.”

“And there’ll be two dozen to-night, and I shall have at least a hundred valentines to-morrow morning. Everybody likes me; of course they do. All the men know I don’t try to trap them into marrying me, like the other girls. Ah, there’s a ring; sure to be somebody to see me.”

“Shameful!” groaned Aunt Jane, composing herself to her work.

Marie glanced in the mirror over the mantelpiece, smiled, and adjusted a stray curl.

“Aunt, don’t you think I look awfully nice this evening?”

“Charming!” said a gentleman’s voice, as the door was thrown open, and Mr. Marshe was announced. “Pardon me, that dress is perfection.”

“Sir, I do not like personal remarks; they are extremely rude. However, your profession, I suppose, brings you into contact with vulgar people.”

“Marie!” reproachfully from Aunt Jane.

“Miss Delaselle is privileged,” said Marshe, a dapper young man, not bad-looking, but obviously conceited. Marie said all little men were vain; and as for lawyers they seemed to consider it the duty of heiresses to marry them.

“What divorce case are you engaged in now, sir?” she asked.

“We do not undertake that class of work,” said Marshe, loftily.

“Captain Williams — O, and Lord Pauline too! I *am* delighted to see you. We have been so dull this evening, have we not, Aunt Jane?”

These new-comers hardly acknowledged the lawyer, who on his part surveyed them with intense scorn. “Neither of them has a hundred pounds cash,” thought he to himself, “and yet such airs.”

Marie, however, was much more pleasant in her manner to them, which galled him extremely, yet he could not tear himself away; and after twenty times resolving never to speak to her again, he had actually opened a tacit understanding with Mr. Delaselle.

She was, indeed, one of those girls of whom it may be justly said that there is no living with them nor without them.

He turned to pay court to Aunt Jane, when the Rev. Theophilus Bishop arrived. He was acting for the present as a curate in town, till a valuable living, in the gift of a relative, should become vacant by the decease of the aged incumbent.

“You cruel man!” said Marie; “I heard of your sermon; so, if a poor lady is deserted by her husband and gets a divorce, she is not to marry again?”

“We are opposed to such unions on the highest grounds, my dear Miss Delaselle. If we had only known that a divorcee was one of the contracting parties, we should have most certainly refused permission to use the sacred edifice.”

“Well, it’s very hard. Don’t you think so, Mr. Marshe?”

“To refuse would be illegal,” said the lawyer, glad of a chance of putting down one of his rivals, “quite illegal, I feel sure, to say nothing

of the bad taste.”

“By the ecclesiastical law —” began the curate, firing up in a moment.

“It’s a confounded shame,” broke in Captain Williams.

“The ladies are deserving of every consideration,” said Lord Pauline, an aged *beau*, but well preserved. “You may be sure the lady was the injured party.”

“Ecclesiastical law —” repeated the curate.

“Suppose it was me,” said Marie; “suppose I had a brute of a husband — of course I never mean to have one, that’s understood.”

“The premises are very lucid,” said the lawyer sarcastically.

“And — and I was divorced. Mustn’t *I* — have — well —”

“You of course would be an exception,” said the curate; “but as a rule such marriages are even more sinful than those contracted simply with a view to filthy lucre.”

This was a cut for Marshe.

“I hate women who marry for money,” said Marie; “there’s nothing so despicable.”

“Nothing so despicable,” echoed Captain Williams and Lord Pauline, neither of whom had a “dollar.”

“Except a man’s marrying a lady for her money,” added the curate, who was well provided for as far “as the good things of this world went.” “There should be a certain equality of position and of pecuniary means in order to insure mutual respect.”

“Mutual respect be hanged!” muttered Captain Williams, in his beard.

“What did I hear?” said the curate; “the language of the barrack-room —”

“I say a girl that marries the man she loves is the truest and the best,” cried the captain loudly; “whether he’s poor or rich doesn’t matter. She’s the girl for me.”

To his surprise the captain caught Marie’s eyes fixed on him with an expression of sympathy that made his heart give a thump of delight. Could she? He was not such a bad fellow, this captain, though a trifle outspoken.

“I differ from you entirely,” said Lord Pauline. “I think nothing shows a more cowardly character than for a man without a penny and without social position” — this was a hint at his own title — “to attempt to obtain the affections of a lady who might engage herself to great advantage.”

“Lord Pauline understands the world and human nature,” said Aunt Jane. “His remarks are very just. O, good evening, sir;” with a marked

emphasis on the "sir."

Marie merely bowed in a distant manner to the gentleman who had at that moment entered, and turned quickly towards the piano. They all crowded round her, and pressed her to play, scarcely deigning to exchange salutations with the newcomer, who was thus as it were excluded from the circle — except Captain Williams, who welcomed him cordially.

" 'Tis poverty parts good company,' " whispered he, quoting the old song. "Never mind, old fellow; you're twenty times more a man than these miserable drumstick imitations. By Jove, what a chest you have!"

Thurstan Baynard was indeed "a man of inches," and broad in proportion — perhaps rather more than in proportion — though he had hardly yet reached his full development, being but twenty-six. A long silky black beard, thick curling moustaches, bright dark eyes, an open wide forehead, and rather massive head, gave him no inconsiderable claim to be called handsome. Thurstan was one of those men, sometimes met, who seem to possess every possible advantage except money. He was tall and strong, certainly good looking, agreeable in manner, well read, and still better travelled — he had, for a time, carried despatches as a Queen's Messenger — full of animal health and naturally joyous temperament, saddened however, by the perpetual sense of impecuniosity and the pressure of petty debt. His family was well connected, of ancient descent, and yet practically he was a vagabond upon the face of the earth. The families of Baynard and Delaselle were branches of the same stock; he and Marie had played together as children, and he was still free of the house; but when growing years seemed to threaten the danger of an imprudent attachment, Mr. Delaselle spoke to him in private very seriously on the matter, "hoping that he would not take advantage of his position to compromise Marie's chances of an eligible match." This was extremely bitter to Thurstan, whose proud spirit was deeply wounded; and henceforward he came rarely, and adopted a deferential distant manner.

Marie, on her part, scarcely noticed him now that they were arrived, he at manhood and she at womanhood. He thought it was pride; still he felt constrained to call occasionally, for in truth he loved her beyond expression.

Nothing destroys a man's spirit like poverty, especially if he still by birth belongs to that class of whom it was said *noblesse oblige*, and cannot fully descend to the little meannesses too often compulsorily practised by those who earn their daily bread. There were as yet no

lines upon his forehead, but there was an indescribable expression of subdued pain.

"I've come to say good-bye," said he to Captain Williams, as the two sat together in the background, while Marie played and sang gaily. Mr. Delaselle just nodded as he entered, and then devoted himself to Mr. Marshe.

"Where are you off to, then?" asked the captain. "Why on earth don't you go into the army?"

"Can't afford it — and can't live on thirteence a day either. No; I'm going to China; you know I've studied fortification. I've an idea I could help them to fortify themselves against the Russians. They are much alarmed at Russian aggression eastwards. General Kauffman's guns easily smashed up the wretched walls and towers of the Central Asian Khans. I think China ought to pay well for instruction how to build redoubts *a la Vauban*."

"It's not a bad idea; but how about leaving Miss Delaselle? I thought you were — Well, no matter; you're just the man for her. Yes, I'll say that even against my own interest. She'll be snapped up before you get back, man. Look at Marshe, and that prig the curate, and the old lord — pah! Are you sure she doesn't care for you?"

"She scarcely acknowledges me," said Thurstan. "And yet we used to — Still she has a right to do as she pleases. At all events I start to-morrow night for Southampton from Waterloo Station —"

"I'll see you off. By Jove, I'm sorry, deuced sorry! The best fellows are always shoved into a corner. To-morrow night — it's St. Valentine's-day to-morrow, now I think of it."

Just then Marie's voice, blithe and rich in tone, began with an inimitable expression of innocent mischievousness, so to say, the old verse:

A' the lads they look at me,  
Coming through the rye.

"It's just like her," said the captain; "and yet do you know, Thurstan, I believe there's something good in that girl despite all this frivolity. I wish you could have seen her just now when they were discussing marriages for money, and I said the best and truest girl was the one who married for love. There was a flash in her eye — I don't think she knows her own heart yet."

"Mr. Baynard," cried Marie suddenly, from her seat at the piano, "come and sing our old favourite, 'Annie Laurie.'"

The circle sneered at the mention of so simple a ballad. He hesitated; but she insisted, and finally he sang it — sang it as only a man could do who *felt* every line. It was true that she had never

pledged her word, but she was indeed “all the world” to him. He had a beautiful voice, bell-like, yet liquid, and, to alter just one word of Byron,

Love hath not, in all his choice,  
An arrow for the heart like a sweet voice.

They were all silent when he ceased. Marie indeed seemed to recover herself with an effort, and thanked him gently, in a tone that nearly unmanned him.

“Dear me!” cried the lawyer; “I’ve forgotten I had a telegram to leave at the office. Excuse me. I’ll return.”

Mr. Delaselle accompanied him to the door.

“Something very despicable in business,” said Lord Pauline.

“Very despicable, very,” echoed the curate. “Contact with the coarser natures who seek the aid of the law must naturally react upon those who listen to their revelations.”

“I believe there is a great fire,” said Mr. Delaselle, re-entering; “let us go up to the high windows to see.”

The gentlemen and Aunt Jane, who had a special horror of fire, followed him quickly; and Marie was moving in the same direction, when Thurstan, who had stood aside to let the others pass first, spoke her name gently.

She paused, and for the moment they were alone.

“Yes,” she said kindly.

“I – I just called to say good-bye; I start for China to-morrow night – some years before I may see you again,” said Thurstan, in a hurried and confused manner.

“Is this true?”

“It is indeed, quite true. You will remember me sometimes, Marie?” he almost said “my darling,” but his courage failed.

Her eyes fell; she flushed slightly.

“Yes, I shall remember you. Stay, let me think hush! Is it a fire?” she added, in a different tone, hearing footsteps.

“At a great distance; no danger,” said Mr. Delaselle. Aunt Jane glanced suspiciously from Thurstan to Marie, and back again.

He felt that he was looked on as *de trop*; and confused, believing too that to stay longer would be simply to prolong his torture, wished them good-night, and left what he had almost nerved himself to say to Marie still unsaid, and now probably beyond his power to say.

A certain stiffness fell upon the party, and Marie seemed to have lost her gaiety, till in less than an hour Marshe returned, and she brightened up, to the great delight of Aunt Jane and Mr. Delaselle, who saw in this a sign of affection for him, and were reassured.

Marshe was very lively. The fact was he thought he had done a clever thing. It was this. Driving to the office of the firm, Marshe, Marshe, and Copp, he recollected that he had a valentine in the pocket of his overcoat. It was a very expensive one, which he had selected with much care, containing a few love verses of the approved order, surrounded with a gorgeous design, and perfumed. He argued with himself pro and con, after the manner of the judicial mind, as he drove along, whether he should address the envelope himself in his own proper handwriting, or whether he should disguise his style, or get someone else to assist him. This highly important question has agitated the hearts of valentine senders ever since the graceful old custom began.

Clearly, if directed in his own handwriting, Marie, who knew it well, would recognise the sender immediately; of mystery there would be none, and the fun would be lost.

If the address was written by a stranger it was ten chances to one that she would never fix upon him, in which case the valentine might as well be thrown in the fire at once. What was to be done? A Frenchman would say that the answer to this apparently trifling question decided his destiny. It was still open when he reached the offices of the great firm, in which his part was really merely nominal. In these vast businesses each partner has one department to himself, and perhaps scarcely ever hears the name of the clients of the others: this young man, pert and fashionable in his ways, thought no more of his profession than was absolutely forced upon him. They were working very late that night; his father was sitting still, getting up a matter for a parliamentary committee — the telegram he had forgotten referred to this.

“Ah, Jones,” said he to a confidential clerk who had a room to himself, a kind of antechamber to the great man’s, “just put this letter in a large envelope, one with the firm’s initials on, — only the initials, mind, — and direct it with the typewriter to Miss Delaselle, \*\*\*\*\* Mayfair. Have it ready for me.”

In this way he thought he had conquered the difficulty. The writing machine really prints exactly like type; but the initials would leave a clue to guess by. Clever young man!

Jones, so soon as his back was turned, smiled, and smelt the letter. “Aha!” thought he, “I’ll have a look; its a valentine; I can smell the perfume.”

The envelope was but just stuck; he loosened it, and pulled out the valentine, laying it on a long letter he had just finished with the machine. Hardly had he taken a peep when the door opened again,

and Marshe stood in the opening – still, however, with his back turned, talking to the principal. In an awful fright, Jones upset all his papers, crammed the valentine and the long letter hastily into envelopes, and wrote the directions like lightning.

“That will do – capital!” said Marshe, taking the valentine. “It’s rather an awkward-looking parcel, though. Give me that other letter; I’ll send them both to post by the boy as I go down-stairs.”

He dashed back rapidly to Marie, who, as soon as he arrived, became as merry as ever, and raised his hopes exceeding high. When the evening closed, Marshe thought to himself, “She has evidently come round. I’ll strike while the iron is hot, and put the question to-morrow night. Bye the bye, that ill-favoured Thurstan I hear is off to Hong Kong. Glad of it; always had a lurking suspicion there was something between them.”

Who, in all great London, should have been so happy as Marie that night? Rich, feted, with crowds of admirers, and sure to have a hundred valentines next morning!

Would any one have believed that she never slept all night, but passed the weary hours, thinking, thinking, thinking, and frequently shedding tears. Till Thurstan was about to leave her, in all human probability for ever, she had never known how much she loved him. Indeed, she had hardly ever felt that she had a heart; life had been one long round of joyous frivolity. Now she knew the utter nothingness of all the nicknacks of wealth. Of what use were dozens of admirers if *he* was not there? She remembered Captain Williams’s blunt declaration that the best and truest woman was the one who married for love. Poor Thurstan had not a penny. Some of these men who courted her had shown such bad taste as to describe the shifts he as sometimes put to; instinctively they felt he was a dangerous rival, and thought to hold him up to contempt.

“I know he loves me,” she said to herself; “why has he never said so? It is this money; he is too proud to have me think he woos me for my money. To-morrow I shall lose him for ever.”

From sheer exhaustion she fell asleep at last, and was awakened by her maid, who had brought to her bedside a perfect heap of letters. Here were the hundred valentines!

Scarcely twenty hours before she had looked forward to this moment with delight; now she pushed the heap away as a vanity and vexation of spirit.

“Perhaps Thurstan has sent one,” she thought presently, and turned them over, seeking the well-remembered hand-writing. “No, not even a valentine; very likely he is too poor to buy one that he thinks good

enough for me. What is this thick letter? What curious writing! It's printing, I think."

Curiosity impelled her to open it. She read and read, and a colour rose in her cheeks.

"Is it possible!" she cried, and sprang up. "I'll do it! I will! I don't care!"

Hurriedly she wrote a note, and despatched it to Thurstan's chambers. A bold thing, doubtless: but reflect, they had been playmates. It ran thus:

"Miss Delaselle and Mr. Delaselle would like to see Mr. Baynard early in the day, that they may wish him farewell. They will feel much hurt if he does not come."

"Good heavens!" she thought, "if it should not reach him; if he should not come."

Thurstan, indeed, did hesitate, feeling that to see her again would be a severe trial. But love, all-powerful love, would not be denied. He went. She had so arranged that he found her alone in her boudoir.

"It's, extremely rude of you, sir, to force me to write to you." Now he was there, she could not resist the temptation to play with the mouse she had caught. "Why did you not tell me before that you were going?"

Thurstan, unhappy and down-hearted, could not meet her light tone with answering raillery. He stammered some excuse.

"And why are you going, sir?"

"I must obtain a living somewhere."

"Why not in England?"

"The competition is so great. And everybody despises me because I am poor."

"Stanny," said she, using an old familiar abbreviation, and placing her little hand on his broad shoulder, "Stanny, you're a big man — a giant — and O, so strong; can't you push your way in the crowd?"

"I've tried," said he simply.

"No, you haven't. I tell you what, Stan — I'm not afraid of you, though you are so big — *you're a coward!* There — O, don't flash your eyes at me! You're afraid, and so you are running away. You'll cry next, I suppose" (this was very cruel, Marie, bitterly cruel). "You're not half so brave as I am. Men are not half so brave as women" (her voice sank lower, and she looked at him, and her eyes suddenly filled with tears, though he, gazing away, did not see it). "Do you know what I should do if I were in your place?"

Something in her tone made him glance at her with a strange sensation in his throat.

"What would you do if you were me?" he said.

“Kiss and try,” she whispered softly, letting her head droop against his shoulder.

He did it. There are no words by which so sudden a revulsion of feeling can be described. The half-hour that followed was the happiest in his life. Suddenly he remembered himself.

“I am so poor,” he said. “Forgive me — they will say it was your money.”

“Are you sure you are so poor?” she said archly.

“Quite sure.”

“Then read that;” and she put Marshe’s valentine into his hand.

He tried to, but he could not take his gaze from her; and the letters seemed confused.

“Listen,” she said, and read it. Slowly the truth dawned upon him. Jones, the clerk, in his hurry, fearing to be caught peeping, had put the letter and the valentine in the wrong envelopes, or rather confused the addresses. Marie got, instead of a valentine, a long letter from Copp, the second principal of the firm, which had been really meant for Thurstan. The valentine went heaven knows where. Of course, how it happened was not found out till afterwards, but there was no mistaking the contents of the letter.

Copp in formal phrase informed Mr. Thurstan Baynard that by the terms of the will of General Sir Frederick Baynard, just deceased — a distant relation who had never previously owned him — he was entitled to a very large sum in consols, and still more valuable estates; provided — ah, whenever was there a blessing without a black side (?) — provided that within the space of twelve months he married a lady possessed of not less than a given amount, upon whose children the whole was to be settled. The old man was a miser, and it had been the work of his life to rehabilitate the fallen fortunes of the family. Casting about for a means of keeping the money he had painfully amassed in the family, he had hit upon this odd, but not unreasonable idea.

“So you see,” said Marie, “you’re richer than I am. Perhaps you won’t have me now?”

His answer was a fresh embrace.

“Ah,” she said, mocking his previously mournful tone, “I’m so poor now compared to you, you’ll think it was your money.”

“Incorrigible,” said he, kissing her.

“Incorrigible, indeed,” cried Aunt Jane, who had entered unseen. “This really is shameful — most ungentlemanly.”

“He is richer than — everybody,” said Marie, laughing. “This is the most beautiful valentine I ever had.”

“And this is the most beautiful one I ever had, or ever shall have,”

said he, laying his hand on her shoulder with an air of possession that horrified Aunt Jane.

Matters, however, were soon explained, and her objections melted away, as did Mr. Delaselle's.

They were married early in May, Captain Williams being Thurstan's best man.

"I was certain she loved you," he said. "I can understand now what she meant on St. Valentine's eve when she looked at me so meaningly, when I said the best and truest woman was the one that married for love. She loved you when you were poor. You ought to be grateful to St. Valentine all your life!"



"STANNY, YOU'RE A BIG MAN ; CAN'T YOU PUSH YOUR WAY IN  
THE CROWD !"

Engraving by H W Cutts

# The Machine in the Wheatfield: Steam-Power in the Victorian Countryside

Roger Ebbatson

(previously published in *Green Letters* 14 (2011))

In a chapter entitled 'On Machinery' added to the second edition of his influential work, *Principles of Political Economy* (1819), David Ricardo partially retracted his earlier Panglossian views on the impact of the industrial revolution. He conceded that 'I have...given my support to doctrines which I now think erroneous'.<sup>1</sup> He had originally postulated that the 'class of labourers' would be 'benefited by the use of machinery, as they would have the means of buying more commodities', but belatedly recognised that 'the substitution of machinery for human labour is often very injurious to the interests of the class of labourers', because 'there will necessarily be a diminution in the demand for labour, population will become redundant, and the situation of the labouring classes will be that of distress and poverty'. Nevertheless, Ricardo concludes, the 'employment of machinery could never be safely discouraged in a state'.<sup>2</sup> This conflicted and ambivalent diagnosis of the social impact of machinery would reverberate throughout the nineteenth century. In 'Signs of the Times' (1829), for example, Thomas Carlyle nominated the nineteenth century as 'the Age of Machinery', and lauded the way in which 'wonderful accessions' were being made 'to the physical power of mankind', with people 'better fed, clothed, lodged'.<sup>3</sup> And yet Carlyle, whilst enthusing about the way in which 'the Genius of Mechanism' is able to 'help us in all difficulties and emergencies', anxiously discerns that 'Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart'. In reaching for a conclusion Carlyle ambiguously suggests that technology 'is not always to be our hard taskmaster', but that 'a new and brighter spiritual era is slowly evolving'.<sup>4</sup> Such ambiguities would attach themselves to much of the social debate in the period from Carlyle to Ruskin and William Morris; they especially marked the question of the impact of new technologies

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<sup>1</sup> David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: Dent, 1963), 263.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 264, 266, 271.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, ed. A. Shelston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 64.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 66-7, 84.

in the English countryside in ways resonantly hinted at in some observations in Walter Benjamin's arcades project:

Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology. Of course, initially the technologically new seems nothing more than that. But in the very next childhood memory, its traits are already altered. Every childhood achieves something great and irreplaceable for humanity. By the interest it takes in technological phenomena, by the curiosity it displays before any sort of invention or machinery, every childhood binds the accomplishments of technology to the old worlds of symbol. There is nothing in the realm of mature that from the outset would be exempt from such a bond.<sup>5</sup>

Benjamin's contention is borne out in a striking essay entitled 'Unequal Agriculture' (1877), in which Richard Jefferies reflects upon the 'sheer, downright force' exhibited by the new steam-ploughing engines, their 'ponderous cranks' suggesting a 'crude force' reminiscent of 'prehistoric ages'. He goes on to conjure up a defamiliarised rural scene for the reader:

The broad wheels sink into the earth under the pressure; the steam hissing from the escape valves is carried by the breeze through the hawthorn hedge, hiding the red berries with a strange, unwonted cloud; the thick dark brown smoke, rising from the funnel as the stoker casts its food of coal into the fiery mouth of the beast, falls again and floats heavily over the yellow stubble, smothering and driving away the partridges and hares. There is a smell of oil, and cotton-waste, and gas, and steam, and smoke, which overcomes the fresh, sweet odour of the earth and green things after a shower.

As the fly-wheel revolves, a 'curious, shapeless thing, with a man riding upon it' proceeds by 'jerking forward, tearing its way through stubble and clay, dragging its iron teeth with sheer strength deep through the solid earth'. As Jefferies sums up this phenomenon, 'the savage force, the fierce, remorseless energy of the engine pulling the plough upwards, gives the mind an idea of power which cannot but impress the mind'.<sup>6</sup>

It has been claimed by an economic historian charting the spread of steam-power in the countryside that 'to the Victorian mind steam was the symbol of technical progress'.<sup>7</sup> The validity of this argument is

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, tr. H.Eiland and K. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002), 461.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Hills and the Vale*, ed. E.Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 134-5. Subsequently cited as HV.

<sup>7</sup> E.J.T.Collins, 'The Age of Machinery', in G.E. Mingay, ed., *The Victorian Countryside* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 208.

both endorsed and problematised by Jefferies' writings. Indeed it is not too much to suggest that in Jefferies' ambiguous response to the deployment of steam-power in the fields a symptomatic ecological ambivalence is discernible, and that such ambiguities receive philosophical endorsement and elaboration in the later thinking of Martin Heidegger. As W. J. Keith has observed, in the journalistic writing by which he earned a scanty living Jefferies 'seems to have decided that the complexities of the rural situation could be conveyed with more success by a kind of writing that strengthened pure description with literary devices and artistic form'. In much of this occasional writing, Keith aptly notes, 'descriptive reporting has transcended its own bounds and has emerged as creative literature'.<sup>8</sup> In the eloquent close of his essay 'One of the New Voters' (1885), Jefferies writes,

There is so much in the wheat, there are books of meditation in it, it is dear to the heart. Behind these beautiful aspects comes the reality of human labour – hours upon hours of heat and strain; there comes the reality of a rude life, and in the end little enough of gain. The wheat is beautiful, but human life is labour.<sup>9</sup>

Jefferies, who grew up close to the new railway town of Swindon, was notably alert to both the benefits and threats of the new age of steam. In 'The Story of Swindon' (1875) he writes in authoritative and admiring detail about the operations of the railway workshops, concluding that 'this great factory...is a standing proof of the development which goes on in the mind of man when constantly brought to bear on one subject', and speculating that 'the capability of metal is practically infinite' (HV, 128). These developments, however, were by no means restricted to urban life, and in an essay on 'Steam on Country Roads' (1881), for instance, Jefferies is attentive to the farming problems arising out of a 'deficiency of transit'. He writes:

An extensive use of steam on common roads appears essential to a revival of agricultural prosperity, because without it it is almost impossible for delicate and perishable produce to be quickly and cheaply brought to market.<sup>10</sup>

The distance from the rail network is a prime cause of the problems of collection and delivery of agricultural produce, Jefferies avers, and he goes on to argue that there is 'the absolute need of speedy and cheap transit to the English farmer if he is to rise again' (FH, 233). The

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<sup>8</sup> W.J.Keith, *Richard Jefferies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 40, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Open Air* (London: Dent, no date), 107.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 230. Subsequently cited as FH.

solution, he proposes, might take the form of the introduction of a 'road locomotive', 'very nearly noiseless, certainly sparkless, capable of running up and down hill on our smooth and capital roads'. We would then 'see goods trains passing every farm and loading at the gate of the field', opening up 'quick communication' with the railways (*ibid.*: 234, 235). Such a development would in his view bring about a number of beneficial results – an increase in land values, an extension in the amount of cultivated land and a subsequent growth of the rural population which would benefit from the new possibilities opened up by the land train: 'It is not too much to say that three parts of England are quite as much in need of opening up as the backwoods of America' (*ibid.*: 238).

Elsewhere, however, in an 1874 essay diagnosing 'The Power of the Farmers' and the motivation behind 'revolt of the field', Jefferies adopts a less Utopian posture to the introduction of steam power in relation to the immiseration of the work-folk:

Machinery has of course a good deal to do with this. The hay is mown by machines, made by machines, elevated on the ricks by machines, and the fields cleaned with rakes drawn by horses. The arable farmer ploughs by machinery, sows by machinery, reaps and threshes by iron and steel instead of thews and sinews. In the aggregate the difference is something serious.<sup>11</sup>

He makes clear in an unpublished essay, 'Thoughts on the Labour Question', however, that whilst 'the press, the steam engine, the electric telegraph' may be 'hastily inferred to be the prime origins of the "Labour" movement', being 'no friends of "Labour"...but rather its despots', in this analysis 'the effect is mistaken for the cause'<sup>12</sup>. A more nuanced response to the new agricultural technology is to be found in a late essay, 'Walks in the Wheatfields' (1887), in which the scene is rendered in painterly terms:

If I were a painter I should like to paint all this; I should like to paint a great steam-ploughing engine and its vast wheels, with its sweep of smoke, sometimes drifting low over the fallow, sometimes rising into the air in regular shape...A wonderful effect it has in the still air; sweet white violets in a corner by the hedge still there in all their beauty. For I think that the immense realism of the iron wheels makes the violet yet more lovely; the more they try to drive out Nature with a fork the more she returns, and the soul clings the stronger to the wild flowers. (FH, 142)

Such an aesthetic vision may fruitfully be framed by referring to the terminology and thinking outlined in Heidegger's 1954 essay on

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Power of the Farmers', in *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 19 (2010), 6.

<sup>12</sup> 'Thoughts on the Labour Question', in *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* 8 (1999), 13.

technology, in which he treats technique not merely as a function but as a mode of 'revealing' through which a world is shaped or defined. The material objects of the world are 'revealed' to being as they are encountered as equipment. In the period of modernity to which Jefferies' writing bears witness, technological thinking may reduce human beings to components in a technical system. For Heidegger, a world 'enframed' by technology is both alien and life-threatening in its domination of nature, and yet somehow there is also discernible a 'saving power' which is specifically to be located in the work of art. The essence of technology is not reducible to the technological; insofar as we use technology purely as an instrument we remain held fast by a will to mastery, but there is also the saving power which allows us to see Being as a 'sending'. In the resonant terms of Hölderlin cited by Heidegger, 'where danger is, grows/The saving power'. Thus Heidegger discovers in poetic texts modes of thinking which offer an alternative to the productionist ethos. Whilst technology may be viewed as a neutral instrument for achieving human purposes, for Heidegger the will to mastery becomes more urgent as science slips away from human control. Technology itself, however, understood properly is a way of revealing, but it is necessary to distinguish between revealing as bringing forth and revealing as challenging forth. In a sense Heidegger's diagnosis bears relation to that of Marx or Weber in his reading of the reification of the human into a 'standing-reserve'. Where 'enframing' dominates is located the 'highest danger', but if we are alive to this we can attain to a 'free relationship' to the essence of technology. We need, that is to say, to ponder upon our *ethos*, or dwelling-place: the growth of the saving power is a return home, where poetically man can dwell. A parallel sense of release is discernible in Jefferies' representation of steam-power in the late-Victorian countryside. His agricultural journalism, that is to say, may be contextualised by Heidegger's project in tracing the effect of a potent drive towards technical and objective knowledge in the modern period, a knowledge which inexorably obliterates any sense of mystery in nature and mankind. The dialectic which Heidegger discerns between concealment and a 'clearing of Being' is neglected in favour of a world of usable or calculable objects which are 'ready-at-hand'. Yet the pressing danger of the technological also contains the 'saving power' to which Jefferies' work, both journalistic and metaphysical, bears witness.

A sense of Heideggerian 'releasement' and the consequent assimilation of the machine into the larger cycle of nature was the subject of a suggestive essay by Jefferies entitled 'Notes on Landscape

Painting' (1884),<sup>13</sup> an article which demonstrates how, in Heidegger's terms, 'Enframing means the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological'.<sup>14</sup> In Heidegger's reading the 'merely instrumental' definition of technology is dismissed as 'untenable' (BW, 326). At the outset of his essay, Jefferies puts it like this:

The earth has a way of absorbing things that are placed upon it, of drawing from them their stiff individuality of newness, and throwing over them something of her own antiquity. As the furrow smooths and brightens the share, as the mist eats away the sharpness of the iron angles, so, in a larger manner, the machines sent forth to conquer the soil are conquered by it, become a part of it, and as natural as the old, old scythe and reaping-hook.<sup>15</sup>

The argument is thus one of absorption, of nature converting the new-fangled technologies into objects of colour and beauty, as in Jefferies' memorable depiction of the threshing-machine:

In the second of its presence a red handkerchief a woman wears on the ricks stands out, the brass on the engine glows, the water in the butt gleams, men's faces brighten, the cart-horse's coat looks glossy, the straw a pleasant yellow. (LF, 115)

In this almost visionary moment, 'The vast profound is full of the rushing air'. As Heidegger remarks, 'where everything that presences exhibits itself in the light of a cause-effect coherence' we lose the 'mysteriousness', and all sinks to 'the level of a cause, of *causa efficiens*' (BW, 331). Jefferies' sense of an enigmatic 'shadow of thickness in the air' gestures towards a Heideggerian 'destining of revealing' in which the 'danger of technology' is subsumed. That is to say, we must distinguish between fate and destining – we become free when we attain to the 'realm of destining' which is conceived as a sending or starting out upon the path. Man in this sense is one who 'listens'. We are not fated to be in thrall to technology but should accept it as a 'sending'. In a key passage Heidegger argues,

The destining that sends into ordering is consequently the extreme danger. What is dangerous is not technology. Technology is not demonic; but its essence is mysterious. The essence of technology, as a destining of revealing, is the danger. (BW, 333)

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<sup>13</sup> This essay conflates two pieces originally published in the *Magazine of Art*, March and November 1882, under the titles 'The Beauty of the Fields' and 'New Facts in Landscape'.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *Basic Writings*, ed. D.F.Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 325. Subsequently cited as BW.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Jefferies, *The Life of the Fields* (London: Chatto & Windus 1908), 114. Subsequently cited as LF.

In Jefferies' poetically inflected account of the reaping-machine, for instance, that which is new or threatening becomes 'lost in the corn':

The straw covers over the knives, the rims of the wheels sink into the pimperl, convolvulus, veronica; the dry earth powders them, and so all beneath is concealed. (LF, 116)

Thus, Jefferies argues, 'the cranks, and wheels, and knives, and mechanism do not exist – it was a machine in the workshop, but it is not a machine in the wheatfield' (*ibid.*: 116). In this subtle interpretation of the impact of technology on nature what Heidegger alludes to as the 'rods, pistons, and chassis' of modernity are transformed into natural effects blending into the landscape in a vision which can even encompass the impact of the steam-plough, whose 'massive wheels leave their imprint' as 'footsteps of steam' in what appears initially to be a destructive process:

Like the claws of some prehistoric monster, the shares rout up the ground; the solid ground is helpless before them; they tear and rend it. (*ibid.*: 117-18)

In language which proleptically anticipates Hardy's ominous representation of the steam-threshing machine in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), Jefferies notes how 'Humming, panting, trembling, with stretched but irresistible muscles, the iron creature conquers, and the plough approaches'. Indeed, the farming scene takes on a quasi-apocalyptic resonance:

By the panting, and the humming, and the clanking as the drum revolves, by the smoke hanging in the still air, by the trembling of the monster as it strains and tugs, by the sense of heat, and effort, and pent-up energy bubbling over in jets of steam that struggle through crevices somewhere, by the straightened rope and the jerking of the plough as it comes, you know how mighty is the power that thus in narrow space works its will upon the earth. (*ibid.*: 118)

And yet, as the eye gazes across the February landscape there occurs a change of perspective whereby 'the distant view is softened by haze' (*ibid.*: 119) in an aestheticisation of the import of the new technology which gestures towards the 'revealing' or 'clearing' discerned by Heidegger as the 'essence' of technicity:

Freedom governs the free space in the sense of the cleared, that is to say, the revealed. To the occurrence of revealing, *i.e.*, of truth, freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship. All revealing belongs within a harbouring and a concealing. But that which frees – the mystery – is concealed and always concealing itself. All revealing comes out of the free, goes into the free, and brings into the free...Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing shimmers the veil that hides

the essential occurrence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils.  
(BW, 330)

The potency of the agricultural machine in the Victorian countryside as portrayed with great inwardness by Jefferies might be construed as a form of the 'enframing' in Heideggerian terminology which 'blocks the shining-forth and holding sway of truth'. Heidegger is insistent on the point: 'The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology'. Thus he urges that 'technology is not demonic', whilst endorsing Jefferies' sense that 'its essence is mysterious' (*ibid.*: 333). It is enframing, the conversion of nature and humanity to the status of standing-reserve that constitutes 'the extreme danger', but this risk also contains within itself 'the growth of the saving power' (*ibid.*: 334), just as the barns which Jefferies sees as 'passing out of the life of farming' may be converted and thus 'saved' (FH, 121). Each type of machine, Heidegger notes, is construed as an 'available resource' but beyond this there is a sense in which technology 'unfolds', and it is thus that, in an almost religious sense, 'the essential unfolding of technology harbours in itself what we least suspect, the possible rise of the saving power' (BW, 337). If we 'represent technology as instrument', then 'we remain transfixed in the will to master it', but to the contrary, Heidegger insists, 'Here and now and in little things...we may foster the saving power in its increase' (*ibid.*: 338).

In proposing a concatenation between Jefferies' nature-writing and the later philosophy of Heidegger, we may conclude with the observation that, for the latter, modern technology should be comprehended through the notion of work, but rather than the work of the technical operator what is to take primacy is the work of art. It is art, and especially for Heidegger, poetry, which precipitates being at work and that is why, in his terminology, humans dwell poetically. Truth is the setting to work of Being, but in the era of modernity what he terms *techne* has replaced *poiesis*; man can only find himself by a reversal of this process. Technology, whether in the factory or the countryside, may possess progressive possibilities but only when it is rethought as a way of mediating between man and Being. In many respects the later Jefferies, in his quasi-mystical apprehension of nature, also adumbrates a way of thinking which will lead to a 'clearing' of Being, and his 'spiritual autobiography', *The Story of My Heart* (1883), is essentially a large-scale meditation on this topic. The central issues are present, however, in a number of shorter pieces, of which 'On the Downs' (1883) may be taken as representative. Here Jefferies quite explicitly conjures up the notion of light and clearing

which would inform Heideggerian thought many years later:

A trailing beam of light sweeps through the combe, broadening out where it touches the ground, and narrowing up to the cloud with which it travels. The hollow groove between the hills is lit up where it falls as with a ray cast from a mirror. It is an acre wide on the sward, and tapers up to the invisible slit in the cloud; a mere speck of light from the sky enlightens the earth, and one thought opens the hearts of all men. (HV, 270)

Here and elsewhere Jefferies moves beyond observation of the natural or agricultural world, with concomitant reflections upon the impact of technology, towards a more Utopian mode of writing that, as Keith remarks, 'seems to lie half-way between philosophical meaning and poetic logic'.<sup>16</sup> The enjoyment of 'freedom and delicious air' gives pleasure to the senses, 'but the heart searches deeper, and draws forth food for itself from sunshine, hills and sea' (HV, 270). The question of technology, of what Jefferies terms 'routine and labour' (*ibid.*: 278) is ultimately subsumed under a wider sense of the clearing of Being:

Stoop and touch the earth, and receive its influence; touch the flower, and feel its life; face the wind, and have its meaning; let the sunlight fall on the open hand as if you could hold it. Something may be grasped from them all, invisible yet strong. It is the sense of a wider existence – wider and higher. (*ibid.*: 273)

To sum up: this body of writing suggests that the complex and conflicted response to the impact of technology upon nature may possess hidden Utopian possibilities. Jefferies hints not at a simplistic aestheticisation of the natural scene but at a release, through aesthetic form, of an inherently repressive reality. Instead of exerting mastery over nature, the Kantian 'purposeful purposelessness' of the picture or the artwork projects a newly emancipated order committed to actualising the aesthetic beauties of phenomena, a transfiguration which might, in the vision of both Jefferies and Heidegger, enable technicity to evolve into art.

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<sup>16</sup> Keith, *Richard Jefferies*, 89.

# Elizabeth Jefferies' Letters to Sarah Jane Gyde

*John Price*

On the occasion of the Richard Jefferies Society's Birthday Lecture, held at Liddington Village Hall on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2011, John Price presented selected extracts from an archive of about thirty letters from Elizabeth Jefferies (Richard Jefferies' mother) to Sarah Jane Gyde (Richard's cousin). These are the only known letters written by Elizabeth, whose character image previously had been derived entirely from writings by Richard Jefferies and others. The following article is taken from John Price's talk. Elizabeth's original spelling has been retained along with the words she underlined.

**I**t is clearly impossible to do more than touch on the contents of this material in the time available this afternoon, so I have decided to quote extracts from some of the Sarah Jane letters, where Elizabeth talks about (a) her health; (b) Bath; and (c) Richard himself.

The Elizabeth Jefferies letters start at a time when she was still living at Coate, and Richard was still living at home. They end around 1892, and she died on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1895 after a stroke had left her immobile and without being able to speak.

Sarah Jane (1850-1932) is the daughter of Elizabeth's brother Samuel James Gyde (1819-1866). Samuel and his brother Charles (1816-1879) married sisters. Charles married Caroline Sandford (August 5<sup>th</sup> 1841), and Samuel married Maria Sandford (June 1<sup>st</sup> 1843). Elizabeth was present at both weddings, and she does seem to be fond of these brothers and their wives who are regularly mentioned in her letters. The families remained living in the Islington area and Sarah Jane lived mainly with her mother, who moved regularly. Sarah Jane never married and in the 1891 census (and living at 44 Arthur Road Islington) her occupation is given as "Fancy Worker", whilst her mother is listed as "Monthly Nurse". In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century England a Monthly Nurse was someone who looked after a mother and new-born child for a month after the birth. A Fancy Worker would be someone involved in fancy needlework, knitting, or similar craft-work.

Sarah Jane is obviously fond of her Aunt Elizabeth. With her own father and closest Uncle dead, she is seeking information about the Gyde history from her aunt. Elizabeth mentions Sarah Jane's brother in two undated letters. He was also named Samuel James (b. 1848) about whom nothing is known. The letters indicate that he died in military service in India, and this might suggest an early date for the first two letters.

We have three photographs of Elizabeth, taken at different ages. The last one may well be the one referred to in Elizabeth's letter of 1881, when she says: "My Dear Sarah, I have sent you a photo of myself. No doubt you will see a great alteration in my appearance for I am much stouter than when we last met which is many years ago. Time alters us all but more particularly age. My

teeth have taken flight which you can see,” [see photograph].



Other references to her own health occur as follows:

A letter from Coate, probably written in about 1872 in which she says: “Having had so much up and down stairs my ankles are swollen and my teeth are aching again. Have you eaten up your apples. The pears are nearly gone, the cider is put in barrels and it is very nice.”

March 30<sup>th</sup> 1881. “I have been quite poorly of late – think I took cold on the journey back. Mr Jefferies has been quite poorly with a severe cold and cough but think it is from the very severe cold weather quite sharp frosts. ... Sorry I did not sleep at your house for I have not been well since.”

October 1882. “I have not been well of late – suffer so much from my sight – been to the doctors several times and he says it comes from rheumatism in the head which I can assure you is very painful to endure – indeed for some time had to stay indoors out of the sun and wind – have not been out for a day this summer.”

December 16<sup>th</sup> 1882(?) “Since the cold weather I have had bad hands, broken chilblains very sore and wrapt up in rags, for cannot do very much writing or work.”

October 30<sup>th</sup> 1883. “Please excuse all blunders. I am not very well – still suffer from rheumatism in my head and eyes – it is such dreadful pain.”

December 1888. “The weather of late has tried us all very much. Mr Jefferies with myself have been very unwell from bad colds and coughs and really made us very weak – not fit for much work. I trust we shall soon have a change.”

January 9<sup>th</sup> 1889. “I have many times intended writing but my health has

been so very bad – could not write in a cheerful way – at the same time Mr. Jefferies has been very unwell and is still poorly at home, a bad cough. .... We had a short letter from dear old Harry. He is very ill and they have moved from — [indecipherable]. He thinks it is unhealthy. I do hope the change will improve health.”

There are several other references to health, which are included in extracts from the passages about Bath and Richard Jefferies.

Coate Farm was sold in September 1878. James Luckett and Elizabeth then moved to Bath. Their first address was at 13 Bathwick Street, and the first dated letter from Elizabeth at that address was in 1881. By 1883 they had moved to 48 New King Street in Bath where they remained in the lodging house described in Kelly of 1883 as; “Lodging House – Mrs. Townsend”.

Elizabeth’s first reference to their new city was in a letter of April 10<sup>th</sup> 1881. “My Dear Sarah, I write a few lines to ask if you would like to come and stay with me for a month – there are a number of cheap trains. You can have a return which lasts a month. Bath is a nice place and *we may not be here long* [emphasis added by John Price suggesting that the couple did not intend to remain in Bath]. I will pay your journey if that is any consideration and if your mother is engaged you could lock up the apartments but that of course rests with yourself. I think now the weather is changed and we hope to have it fine and pleasant after the rough winds and cold for which we have all suffered very much. Please answer in return so that I can engage a bed for you – don’t trouble about Dress. There is no one here that will know you for I have no friends here that know me.”

Then on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1882. “.. this place is much the same – cats alive and as ugly as ever –the house has been well done up – a new knocker and painted out side – indeed it looks very nice and this week there has been a grand show at the garden – all roses, which I am told were very splendid. The place was full of strangers from all parts – some from London and carriages in the streets – it proved a fine day and all passed well. It ended with a show of fireworks and I never saw Bath so gay, for everybody seemed delighted. I did not go for the weather was so warm and did not care to walk alone.”

In October 1882. “I do not join the Blue Ribbons or the Salvation Army – they abound in Bath. Such a lot of babble. There was a wedding of one of the captains this week - it was a complete crush.”

Last letter from Bathwick Street – undated. “Bath continues about the same, but it begins to fill up with visitors and they rise the prices for winter seasons.”

From New King Street. May 31<sup>st</sup> 1885. “We had a wet Whitsentide but the Race Days were very fine and a great number came from all parts – many from London and it was a gay scene. Also in this part a very Grand Lawn Tennis Match was played – such a lot of fashionable ladies and gents – so very handsomely dressed – altogether Bath was very full of visitors.

I did not see anything of it for was very unwell with a bad cold and all aches and pains. So sat at window to watch the passersby.”

Three years later in Jan 1888. “This house is very full, also is the one adjoining, they have the two – such a lot of work, about 14 rooms in each. We

have been here some time. The Christmas passed off quietly with us for we had no friends to join us or any relatives near, for I never have made any acquaintances in Bath. There seems a number of strangers came in and the pantomime is the Dick Whittington and cat.

September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1888. "I have sent you a few flowers I think they will be the last for this season – it being so rainy has spoilt so many things in gardens. ... I have been out with a friend for a few days and think the change has done me good at least for a time. Bath is getting very full for a time. The Association is coming and they are making preparations in many ways, also the Flower Show in the gardens for 2 days and fireworks. Everybody is wishing for fine weather." "PS. Mr Jefferies is about the same – jogy along."

1889 (early) "I have been very unwell all winter also has Mr. Jefferies and obliged to stay in the house for days – the cold is very trying, together with a great deal of rain. Bath is very full as numbers of invalids – for the waters. I do not go out much for cannot walk far. My feet are so painful and have such a cough. The fog is very trying to us all, we shall be glad when the summer comes."

And finally – (June) 1889. "Bath is very full of visitors and the Bath rooms are very full of ladies and gentlemen."

#### References to Richard Jefferies

March 30<sup>th</sup> 1881. "I have been looking over the books of Richards and there is one to spare so I send it for you – it may not be quite your taste of reading but it is only for the sake of those that wrote it."

December 6<sup>th</sup> 1881. "... as to Richard he does not tell us of any of his doings –suppose we shall hear when anything comes out in public. Today 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. is little Philis Birthday – 12 months –Richard's little girl."

June 9<sup>th</sup> 1882. "No doubt you have heard how ill Richard is and has been for some time past. They have taken him to Brighton for a change but he is still in charge of a doctor and drawn about in an invalid chair. I do hope the change will be a benefit."

October 1882. "Richard is now living in Brighton but not quite recovered from the sad illness so long a trouble to think of and all. He has been under two operations of a painful nature. I do hope the worst is past for it is nearly 12 months since he was taken ill. The doctor thought living in Brighton would be a benefit to him. I have not seen him for some time for he is to be very quiet and not see company but I do hope some day to go and see him once more."

January 1883. "I have just seen a book advertised of Richard's tittle The Story of my Heart. You will see in the times list of new works. He is now much better in health but very delicate – they have another baby-boy, the name of Launcelot Oliver. We seldom hear from them I am vexed(?) to say. The little girl is name Philis – she is a very pretty child."

August 15<sup>th</sup> 1887. "I have just heard the sad news of our dear Richard's

death which took place on Sunday morning. His sufferings of late has been most painful and he was reduced to a mere frame. Cannot tell you more particulars for I have only had a few lines. I can assure you is a very severe and painful trial and I am not feeling well myself. The heat has been very trying to many."

(1887) "I enclose a Memory Card of our dear Richard – not having had any sent before or I should have forwarded one to you.

Poor dear Richard was a sad and painful sufferer up till the last day and wasted to a mere frame – was carried about the room for days – this severe and painful trial has almost brought me down to despair and at times feel unfit for anything."

(1887) "I am sorry not to have a photo of our dear Richard. But someone unknown to us put one in Pall Mall which I have sent to you by this post. It is much too old although taken some years ago. Please keep it to yourself. Also the books sent sometime back by me for a keepsake in memory of the dear departed one. I can assure you this is a bitter trial to endure. They will leave Worthing soon but all is in a most unsettled state. There is a fund being set up for the widow and children. You may have seen some account in papers –Telegraph or Standard."

January 1888. "As you expressed a wish for a photo of dear Richard I have not yet been able to obtain one so I have sent you an illustration with some account of him and a very good photo, but it was taken some years ago and when in good health. Poor dear. He has a wasted frame of bones, a complete shadow and suffered to the last more than pen can describe. It really makes my heart ache to mention him yet we hope he is now among the heavenly and at the eternal rest for ever."

(Early) 1889 "Some time ago you expressed a wish to have a photo of our dear Richard who is gone from us forever after a long and painful suffering. I enclose one which is a pleasing memory of him. You, no doubt, can call to mind many little circumstances when you last met him at Coate. He was then in health but of late was much altered – quite a frame and full of care-worn features a distressing countenance from pain. You can put it in a little frame – it will look nice not having one that would come by post without breaking."

It is difficult to judge a person's personality from their letters – especially when the letters are all to a favourite relative, but the impression one gets of Elizabeth Jefferies from this correspondence is not that of a bitter or dissatisfied person – but rather of one who certainly feels sorry for herself, but is resigned to her situation – and values highly the contact with Sarah Jane. It is not the picture I gained from Mrs Iden in *Amaryllis* – though it is possible Elizabeth may have changed in her final years – and her letters are all largely literate.

# Two letters from Richard Jefferies to his Aunt Ellen Harrild

*Richard Jefferies*

In 2009 the Richard Jefferies Society published a collection entitled *Richard Jefferies' Letters to Aunt Ellen* [Faringdon: Petton Books]. The letters were written between 1856 and 1873. Richard Jefferies lived with his Aunt Ellen in Sydenham from approximately four to nine years of age. In 2011, the Society acquired two further letters, previously unrecorded, dated August 17<sup>th</sup> 1864 and November 8<sup>th</sup> 1870 from the Claudine Bulpitt collection. The letters are reproduced below along with footnotes added by Jean Saunders.

Coate  
Au 17<sup>th</sup> [18]64  
A miserable day.

Dear Aunt

I was told this morning that a letter had arrived and also that I must answer it. Consequently if you want to know what the insane individuals composing this stagnant place have been doing you must read, mark etc my letter. As for Aunt Sarah<sup>17</sup> a letter arrived at Swindon on Sunday informing them that she was quieter – in consequence of some medicine – but otherwise no better. Of course not. Nobody expected it. Its their interest to keep her there as long as possible. She was conveyed there early Wednesday morning (10<sup>th</sup>) in custody of Father and Mr. Hall<sup>18</sup> in a two horse fly. The “there” means Fairford. Everybody has heard of that place – an awful wicked place. Even the Church windows are painted with starving figures of imps and other occupants of the Bottomless pit.

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

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

A few stars shot last night but I never heard of any damage having

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Jefferies (b. March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1820) was James Luckett Jefferies’ sister. She never married and lived with her parents for most of her life. On the 1841 census she is recorded as living at Coate Farm along with James Luckett. She died soon after this letter was written – September 7<sup>th</sup> 1864 – and is buried at Christ Church, Swindon.

<sup>18</sup> Presumably referring to his uncle, William Hall who married Martha Jefferies.

been done. We are burnt up or rather other people are. I'm glad of it. It can't be too hot for me. 90° in shade is nothing here. We look like Portugese or kidney beans. I haven't seen a fire since last Christmas – its scandalous. That Clerk of the Weather – wish he's burn his fingers.

So your sea siding again. Glad to hear of it. Hope you won't drown – Sally<sup>19</sup> can't swim.

As for myself I'm going, going, going but pon my life it's a long way. Wish you'd grease my carriage wheels with a little gold dust.<sup>20</sup> Delicate hint that. Tell Sally I'm glad she's not coming home – there will be some apples to eat this year. That's one comfort. One can get the stomach ache then in a quiet, respectable way.

Uncle Tom<sup>21</sup> comes down Saturday – does he. Have you got an opera glass but I suppose you'd be too tired to look at the comet. Just below the Pleiades 2 in the morning.

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

Aunt Annie<sup>22</sup> is with you bet a 1£ (if I had it). Just like her. Give her my love and a smack. As for the children – they're bores but heaven be praised they're out of my hearing.

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

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

Well Grandmother<sup>23</sup> came – let's see, you know – and went Saturday with Mrs Estcourt (who came Friday) to London. Wish she would have staid longer. Can't make it out – but I'm lazy. Xcuse any more writing – its such a bore.

Love by the bushel etc etc etc  
I am  
Myself according to last accounts  
R. Jefferies.

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<sup>19</sup> Richard's sister Sarah (Sally) lived with Aunt Ellen for many years.

<sup>20</sup> In a letter to Aunt Ellen dated October 27<sup>th</sup> 1864 Richard thanks his Aunt for sending money. He assures her that he will spend it wisely. On the November 11<sup>th</sup> 1864, Richard left with his cousin James Cox to walk to Moscow!

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Harrild – Aunt Ellen's husband. He died in 1867.

<sup>22</sup> Ellen's sister, Anne (born October 18<sup>th</sup> 1829; married Arthur Harris Metzner on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1851 and they had 5 children. In the 1860s they lived at Round Hill Lodge, nearby to Aunt Ellen's home).

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth (Estcourt) Gyde – born 1793, died in Islington April 27<sup>th</sup> 1869. Buried at Pitchcombe, Glos., where she was born.

Coate Near Swindon  
Wilts. Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>. 1870

Dear Aunt

I was much surprised at Sarah's<sup>24</sup> sudden departure on Monday. I had no idea that she thought of leaving us till almost the last moment. She had become so much one of the household that she will be much missed by Mother particularly, & so sudden a departure increases the gap.

I am afraid that when she first came down she did not thoroughly enjoy herself because with the exception of Mother, we are all men here, & and she had no companion. But lately she has made the acquaintance of Miss Baden<sup>25</sup>. I believe they thoroughly enjoy each other's society. It seems a pity that Sarah should leave just as Coate was growing pleasant to her, and just too, as Christmas is approaching. Miss Baden<sup>26</sup> is the daughter of the largish [largest?] farmer in the neighbourhood & has received a very superior education, in fact I think she is a young lady whom you would be pleased to see Sarah associate with. I do not know what Sarah has returned for, but it does certainly seem to me a pity that she should have left just at this time. I do not know either what your wishes may be & I should be very sorry to thwart them, but if you could spare her I should be very pleased indeed to see her return and spend at least the ensuing Christmas with us. I know Mother misses her very much. I hope dear Aunt you will not be in any way annoyed at the request. I am only anxious that Sarah should take away with her a pleasant memory of Coate.

--- Aunt

Your affectionate nephew

Richard Jefferies.

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Jefferies' sister – known as Sally.

<sup>25</sup> Jessie Baden, Dayhouse Farm, Coate.

<sup>26</sup> Less than a year later, Richard and Jessie Baden were engaged!

# Book Review

*Wild Life in a Southern County* by Richard Jefferies (Wimborne Minster, Dorset: Little Toller Books, 2011); £10. ISBN 978-1-908213-00-6.

*Wild Life in a Southern County* is Jefferies' account of a changing Wiltshire life and landscape, centred on the farm he grew up on. Richard Mabey, author of *The Unofficial Countryside*, also published by Little Toller Books, introducing this edition, claims that the book set his "emotional compass" (p.7) before he had even set foot in the 'south'.

Compiled from articles written 1878-9 for the Pall Mall Gazette, the book has three clear sections – an exploration of the chalk downs surrounding a prehistoric earthwork which acts as a linking device and constant presence. The same role is then taken by the farm itself, with an intimate look at the building and its immediate environs. The third section is a written survey of the neighbouring fields and hedgerows, with the final chapters really serving as a set of appendices.

This means that the book never quite hangs together. Each chapter is well-observed, weighty with detail yet frustratingly self-contained. It is only in the third 'section' that the chapters link as a coherent whole (though perhaps a sketch map would have been a useful addition).

Still, Jefferies is more visionary than craftsman. The book opens with a lucid description of chalk grassland, a "faint sound as of a sea heard in a dream." (p.17). Later, and not for the only time, he captures a sense of stillness and lost time, in a single flock of sheep rising "towards the ridge, like a white mist." (p.23). At times this reverie can be almost spiritual, as in the sound of a flock of rooks, passing overhead like "a vast invisible broom." (p.201).

If Jefferies has an obvious belief, it is that all things are connected. On the downs, a sycamore grows through a tumulus to tap into the grave beneath. An oak in a field is described in deliberate conjunction with a sarsen stone, a "startled hare hastening away" and a sky "gorgeous with stars" (p.158).

These connections do not always work. A link between the 'feng shui' of birds and the migration of itinerant labourers is one of the more overdone examples.

More successful is his use of water as a metaphor for linked time, for instance a stream whose surface plaits "a pattern like four strands interwoven" (p.56), deliberately harking back to the custom of weaving

rushes among children.

Whereas Mabey dwells on the book's use of hedgerows as frontier motifs, Jefferies employs water similarly, a river forming a more than geographic border between the downs and the "broad green meads" (p.60) of his home village.

As a writer his style is uneven. He uses internal rhyming in the phrase "finely puddled adhesive mud" (p.87), for instance. Some metaphors, like "the torn sails of some of the old windmills" for rooks with damaged wings, have a vivid exactness. Others, like the comparison of cloudy light to beams falling through church windows, can be clichéd.

More problematic is his occasional habit of weighting the narrative with detail. Four pages comparing the flight patterns of downland birds, for instance, have the unfortunate effect of deconstructing the very movement he is trying to capture.

When he avoids this, his details can be illuminating and his eye unflinching. A stream is "brown with suspended sand and dead leaves slowly rotating under the surface" (p.174), just the kind of sheltered spot in which he notes a kingfisher frozen dead on its branch.

At times he mirrors the large scale by describing the small. A white-shelled snail on a grass stem is an instinctive analogy of the landscape's chalk green curvature.

The book's human inhabitants, when they do appear, are treated ambivalently. They have the solidity of ghosts or old photographs – glimpsed, physically and temporally, from far off. Even the farm's woodpile, with its wonderfully tactile impressions of dust, stored cheese, tools and oil, retains only the memories of work having been done. His refusal to name place or person simply increases this sense of distance.

As a child my own "emotional compass" was set by E.L. Grant Watson's *What to Look for in Summer*, with its illustrations by C.F. Tunnicliffe. Despite a somewhat uninspiring cover, the twenty-one monochrome engravings in this edition of *Wild Life...*, also, funnily enough, by Tunnicliffe, add a complementary depth to a work which largely succeeds in conjuring a landscape at once familiar, lost and visionary.

*Paul Davidson*

## Correction

Please note: missing text from the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No 21, Autumn 2011, p.14. The penultimate sentence in brackets should read: [Mrs Herbert has 5 grandchildren, Harold Jefferies has children & grandchildren in Canada, & Henry Jefferies<sup>17</sup> has descendants in America.]

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