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## Editorial

This issue of the Richard Jefferies Society Journal contains material which presents a side of Jefferies not often examined - his political views.

Without too much trouble he was able to place political articles such as 'Village Organization' (1875, *New Quarterly Magazine*) and 'After the County Franchise' (1884, *Longmans*); he placed similar work later with the *Manchester Guardian* (see RJSJ 71998); but most editors preferred essays dealing with rural matters, especially descriptions of wild life and the weather. 'Primrose Gold in Our Village' (1887, *Pall Mall Gazette*), which exposed the manipulative activities of the Conservative Party, was an exception.

Jefferies could not suppress his views about the ordering of society, however, and they emerge in books such as *The Dewy Morn* and *Amaryllis at the Fair*, and such essays as 'Walks in the Wheatfields' (1887, *English Illustrated Magazine; Field and Hedgerow*). At times, his vehemence seems excessive, and leaves his readers uncomfortable, but it is important to recognise how deep his feelings for his less well-favoured fellow citizens went.

# Jack Brass, Emperor of England

*This pamphlet, published by Jefferies at his own expense, appeared in 1873, probably in October. In June, he had invited Macmillan's to put their name on the title page, and told them it was 'a satire politically and socially', but they must have rejected or ignored his request. The pamphlet has never until now been reprinted, and copies of the original are scarce.*

Introduction

Letter to John Brass Esq.

Sir,

Machiavelli employed his talents and experience in compiling a book of advice for the Great Prince, the most magnificent Lorenzo de Medici, which if it had only been adhered to would have rendered him the most powerful man of his age. The titanic fortune at your disposal places you in the position of the Medici; and as the modern Prince, I write to inform you of the means by which you can attain the highest human elevation. The possibility of the project will be apparent the moment you realise the power of money. Those who live in poverty, and aspire only to gratify their appetites, are utterly ignorant of the grasp of capital, which extends so far that even public morality may partially depend upon the disposition of the wealthy. As all luxuries will be of such easy access, they will soon be exhausted, and nothing remain but the pursuit of abstract power. There are already many individuals who have both the ambition and the ability to enact the part of Cromwell; but they fail from want of that force which centres in your person, gold. It is necessary that you should follow this course for the safety of your own riches. The organisation of labour is so strong that capital will be no longer secure unless it judiciously seizes upon executive power. You have therefore the justification of the plea of self-defence. Money as mere matter is an irresponsible power. It follows that those who possess it in profusion have in proportion, to a larger or lesser extent, irresistible control over their fellows. As the chief of capitalists, it will be easy for you to become Emperor of England.

Do not be alarmed at the apparent rashness of the project. The state of things is such that the wonder is why some of the leading capitalists have not already combined, and arrived at least to an approximation of the idea.

Faithfully yours,  
R.J.

## THE MODERN PRINCE

It is said that there are few who understand the art of growing rich gradually; they flaunt their wealth in the face of the world, and obtain more hatred than credit. It is still more necessary to observe the principle of this proverb in the pursuit of power. At first, therefore, appear resigned to the pleasures of your position, while you quietly mature those plans and set those engines working which are to lift you to the throne, without exciting a suspicion of your object. For as progress is easy so long as there is no opposition, it is the constant endeavour of politicians to mask their intentions and to get as far upon the road as possible before their designs are known.

As the great majority of persons never think for themselves, but take their ideas from their paper, it will be best to begin by establishing at least two new daily newspapers as an important part of your propaganda. In order to obtain an immense circulation you will cause the editors to declare a new policy – that the public are to have the news of the world gratis, on condition of advertising. In a word, advertising will pay the expense of publication, and you can give away the largest newspaper in the realm for one half-penny. This may or may not be the fact; the object is to conceal that the paper is really gratis, because its views would then be immediately suspected of being no more genuine than a tradesman's circular.

About this time you will be troubled with endless applications for subscriptions to charities, etc. These suck away your strength – money – without any adequate return in increased influence. They are a delusion. Reply in the *Times* to this effect:

I have received numerous applications to employ my capital in paying speculations, as foreign loans; and also to subscribe to a long list of charities. I desire to state that I shall employ my capital entirely within the realm of England, and upon investments calculated to benefit the masses by affording the largest amount of remunerative labour. I consider this course preferable to indiscriminate charity. I refuse to pauperize the population.

This will at once give you a character for disinterested patriotism: a whole class will look to you as their leader. Your first idea will probably be to enter Parliament; but personally this matters very little, if you have your representatives there. It is necessary that there should be a band of one hundred members in the House, entirely returned by yourself. This will be sufficient to sway the assembly in any required direction. There are plenty of clever men to be found about the clubs, first-rate public speakers: they are the very men for the purpose. You must weaken the Conservatives, who are the natural enemies of changes in the Constitution. Having secured a Parliamentary squadron, they must be insensibly imbued with your policy. In the present age there is no reality in the pretence of reverence, honour, or sentiment; the actual objects of men are gold and pleasure, and gold takes the precedence because it purchases pleasure. All great men have become great as the representatives of the spirit of their time. Therefore, make yourself by degrees the representative of gold, not only the actual, visible, incarnation of gold, but as the representative of that course of policy which favours the accumulation of wealth by the nation, and by individuals.

But as the world is more affected by display than by power in the abstract, it is useless to keep your cash locked up in banks. It must be employed; your millions made tangible in great works, for it is only while circulating that they will control the population. This was the real reason why you declined to invest in foreign loans, because, although yielding a large profit, they are out of sight, and neither engage the attention nor extend influence over the home masses. The great centres of influence are the materials upon which labour is employed. These are coal, iron, railways and beer. Your capital must be invested in these. In buying up these works you must begin with the railways; first, because being in shares, they are more easily accessible; and because all the rest depend upon them for transit and consequently for business; so that having control over the lines, you have a lever by which to affect the other materials. It may appear an enormous transaction, and beyond the reach even of your immense wealth; but it is not so.

In the first place, it is not necessary to purchase all the lines, but only the principal trunks. Then there is no need to purchase the entire issue of shares; half at the utmost will be sufficient. There are operations known to financiers by which shares may be depreciated to half their value. By these means the purchase might be effected for about one-fifth of the apparent cost. Even this ought not to come entirely from your funds: nor should you appear too prominently in the matter. It must be managed for you by circles of financiers who will invest a certain proportion of their own funds in the transaction, though your capital must be in a proportion large enough to keep them in your power. Ultimately you must recoup yourself with a large margin of profit by carrying a measure that railways should be Government property, and so selling them to the State when you yourself are the State. Once in possession of the railways and you can gradually absorb the minor collieries and iron works, till the aggregate of these outweighs the independent owners. By thus commanding the centres of labour, it will be easy at any time to cause a disturbance enough to upset the Government. Scatter secret agents about among the workmen, instructed to originate and extend discontent; let them demand an increase of pay, refuse the advance, and in a few days everything in the country will be at a stand-still. By swaying the populace you will be able to sway the ministry whenever you wish. There will be still greater facilities for such practices as time goes on, because the increasing centralization of capital will cause a proportionate discontent in the ranks of labour. Do not be afraid of this: remember that the more vulgar the Democrat the more slavish his adoration of the wealth he professes to abhor. The possession of the railways will place a vast constituency at your disposal, so that you can double the number of your representatives in Parliament, and your political career will now commence. The newspapers must be ordered to preach communistic ideas, because communism is the sure fore-runner of despotism in a commercial country which requires order, that can only be guaranteed by the strong hand, and single will. To foster the growth of this feeling among the people, strengthen and support those institutions which put the idea partly into practice, such as co-operative stores. Support the farmers' measure giving compensation for unexhausted improvements, as a form of communism and calculated to weaken the Conservatives. Establish a system of easy transfer of land and abolish primogeniture: these measures will destroy the sense of absolute proprietorship, so

opposed to communism. All this will put greater power in the hands of the masses who are ultimately to delegate it to you. Everything should be supported which tends to weaken the old creed; that creed was a belief in system, in law, even to lawful religion. This was a strong bulwark against tyranny because no one could do anything not in accordance with system. The primary object is then to weaken and undermine this faith in system, and so to prepare the way for faith in a single man. The common law of England is a creed quite as much as any religion. The magistracy dare not overstep it in a single article: nothing is left to their discretion, but there are some disadvantages attending this practice. Some of the forms are antiquated and cause occasional injustice: sometimes there is suspicion of partiality; sometimes precedents are relied upon when they no longer apply: worse than this, it is very costly. Employ agents to report every case of this kind till a feeling is raised in favour of at least stipendiary magistrates: then, suggest that a little more power of discretion should be allowed. Finally order a code of equity to be drawn up founded on the old laws, abolish the justices and set equity judges in their places. Three-fourths of the lawyers will eagerly support the change, because the people will now be ignorant of the course of procedure, and require advice. The old faith in system will gradually disappear; people will become accustomed to depend upon the despotic will of one man – small circles extend into larger ones. The same course should be pursued with respect to religion, under a more specious cloak. You must appear as the representative of science; despatch a North Polar expedition at your own expense. Organise a learned body to experiment on spontaneous generation and to discuss the source of life. Foster free thought and support the theory which holds that science should be carried into all things, religion included. This will secure all intellectual people. Educate! educate! educate! Teach every one to rely on their own judgement so as to destroy the faith in authority, and lead to a confidence in their own reason, the surest method of seduction (As see a poem called 'Paradise Lost'). Follow the same course aesthetically speaking. Apart from law and religion, the greatest restraint upon the unbridled action of man is respect and esteem of women. A soldier of Aldershot told me that the courtezans of the camp were handsome to look at, but in their company the charm was removed because they acted precisely as the men. This is instructive. Let women have the suffrage, let them sit in Parliament, let them walk the hospitals, and act as police, let them do everything men do and their restraining, purifying charm will disappear – no man will be ashamed to commit a vulgar or evil action from respect, esteem or love for a woman. The English character is generally speaking too serious for easy revolution. Weaken it by vice: but first abolish the calm influence of the Sunday, permit Sunday trading, keep the mills and factories going – on the pretence exactly fitted to the populace, that – why should the priests defraud the working man of a whole day's wages by shutting the workshops once a week? Spread the so-called social literature which teaches a system of connubial communism. Legalize prostitution after the Parisian example. Throw the beer-shops open always: why should the poor man be robbed of his beer?

Now will be the time to gradually concentrate the whole government of the country in the metropolis. Let the million of paupers be relieved by Government, not by Local Boards. To a certain extent let local taxation be met by Imperial funds, which will

necessitate more Government officers and clerks. This will put a strain on the revenue which will have its uses. Centralize everything in bureaus, with armies of clerks, none of them responsible. When you are dictator, this will make control easier: the agents and wires will be ready at hand. If certain sanitary theories were carried out into execution, they would still further accustom the people to Imperial influence. It will be time now to begin the catastrophe. As the population increases and wealth still further tends to concentration in a few hands, the pressure of taxes will become unbearable. Your newspapers and innumerable agents throughout the country will be instructed to throw the misery of high-priced provisions and all other evils upon taxation. If your railways and collieries stop work a month or so, at this juncture the country would be in a ferment. In obedience to this disturbance, take off say ten millions of breakfast-table taxation: immediately reducing the price of provisions. But while the sensation produced remains, propagate the rumour that next session there will be a fearful deficit in the revenue and a corresponding increase of taxation: excite expectation of an awful crash. In view of this your newspapers and agents will discover that the expenditure of the country is doubled by the mere paying of the interest on the National Debt. The income is £70,000,000; expenditure £70,000,000, of which £27,000,000, close on half, is to pay interest of money borrowed fifty years ago, for purposes which everyone now condemns. Horrid injustice. Here is the root of the evil. Our taxes are artificial. Then repudiate the National Debt. Of course the word repudiate must never be suffered to appear. The scheme you will propose will be to pay off the debt, but in reality to confiscate it. The first consideration is, how much have we to meet? The debt is £800,000,000 bearing interest at say 3 per cent. But do not be staggered at the idea of paying off eight hundred millions. You have to do nothing of the kind, you have simply to provide a fund, the nominal interest on which will actually produce £27,000,000. The present interest is reckoned at 3 per cent., the interest on the substitute you will provide must be reckoned at 15 per cent and the pretence for so high a rate will be that its value increases yearly. At 15 per cent., it only requires £160,000,000 instead of £800,000,000 to pay £27,000,000 per annum. All you have to do then, is to provide funds of the nominal value of £160,000,000. But of course this must not come out of your own pocket. Confiscate the property of the Church of England, valued at £90,000,000, and this will meet more than half. Then the great landlords have enjoyed their properties for centuries: it is time the people shared the profits. They must pay a rent to Government. Thirdly, make immense grants of land in Australia and the colonies, and issue Government bonds upon these sources to the creditors. The pretences are obvious, in the first place, the property of the church and of the great landlords will be doubly cultivated, which will benefit the masses; and as the creditors will be obliged to cultivate the colonial lands, not to lose everything that will give employment to thousands. As the more cultivated, the higher the value of land; and as land without the expenditure of capital grows more valuable year by year in exact proportion to the increase of population, this will more than compensate for any little temporary loss incurred by the creditors in the transfer.

This will reduce expenditure by £27,000,000 leaving an equal surplus with which to lower taxation, and raise your popularity with the indigent masses to the extreme.

But it will have one other effect; it will ruin every capitalist in the country, which is exactly what you want, as you will then have no competition. The capitalists are your enemies; the small tradesmen are your strength, because they are completely at your mercy and because they require order. The consequence of the crash of firms will be, thousands of men out of employ, a general paralysis of trade, impending ruin, and sudden disturbance: you must put the fault of this on some one. You have meantime gradually reduced the prerogatives of royalty: even to that of signing a death warrant, or granting a pardon, on the grounds that no single person should be trusted with such serious responsibility. Royalty is now found to be a useless and costly incumbrance - a clog. Popular opinion must be manipulated against it. An outcry is easily made, for nothing is so artificial as public opinion. People read it in the papers, repeat it, and are afraid to contradict, lest they should be considered opposed to the wish of the nation. Having educated the masses into this condition, it will not be difficult to take a plebiscite upon some apparently unimportant resolution, and having passed it, raise another artificial public opinion upon that. The probability is that the then heads of that noble-minded family would retire from the country rather than plunge it in civil war. In this way, you would turn the very virtues of your chief opponents to your advantage. Another plebiscite makes you President.

One of your first acts will be to increase the pay of the army and navy, which will at once (in the then circumstances and at that date) secure your popularity with them; because the ranks will be mechanics, and the officers clerks, competing for place and salary: not as in days gone by for honour. In order to gain the credit of quieting the country you will now employ your money, recouped by the purchase of the railways by the State, in restoring monetary equilibrium. You can establish an institution for Government loans to small tradesmen at low interest. The drama now grows rapid in action, for one change produces an increasing readiness for another.

The newspapers begin to think (quite spontaneously) that neither the title of King or President is sufficiently dignified for the Premier of England. They point out that *de facto* it is an empire; that there are imperial taxes, and imperial funds already recognised; that it is common to speak of the empire of India. They hint that such a change would be in the spirit of republican competition because it would be open to every man to raise himself to that glorious position. Your band of M.P.s bring in a measure, and legalize you.

## EMPEROR OF ENGLAND

As an Emperor the course to pursue is to keep the masses constantly employed with remunerative labour. As every one thinks he has an equal right to govern, extend the civil service as a safety-valve for ambition. In reality your Government will depend upon its grasp of gold. In all other matters openly govern in accordance with public opinion: which will always remove your responsibility. But gold is the secret of power, retain its great centres in your hands, as the Bank. The better you manage it the more the people will be able to make money, and the easier they can do so the more stable your Government.

It will not be difficult to maintain yourself in your position so long as you do not commit the fatal mistake of attempting to establish a dynasty.



# Thoughts on the Labour Question

*In the collection of Jefferies' manuscripts in the British Library are a group of pages on the Labour Question (BL Add Mss 58814). Parts of the MS were published on 10 November 1891 in The Pall Mall Gazette, and Samuel Looker, with slight changes, republished these in Field and Farm (1957). They are published here, complete, for the first time. It is possible that these pages were never offered to a publisher, since they are clearly unfinished, but Walter Besant quotes from letters to Charles Longman, from 1878, in which Jefferies refers to a work provisionally entitled 'The Proletariat: The Power of the Future', and these may be the papers he was offering for consideration. A full discussion of 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' (not Jefferies' title) by Diana Morrow follows this item.*

## [Chapter I]

It is everywhere. That is the prime difficulty with this 'Labour Question', you cannot meet it, fight it, even define it because it is everywhere - all round, above, beneath. You cannot fix it to one spot, or one matter, and so discuss it conclusively for innumerable links and threads bind and weave it in with every phase of life. Therefore in writing this phrase enclose it always with inverted commas to indicate that it is a conventional term used to express an unknown quantity - the X in the equation of the world - which lies at the bottom and is the secret spring of everything happening in our time.

If a man goes into business it confronts him on the threshold, and threatens him from the first entry in his ledger till the pen falls from his stiffened fingers at three score and ten. The ceaseless see-saw of capital and labour interferes with calculation and destroys all certainty. The boilers are strong and in good order, the engine works smoothly, but the engine-driver - there is the terror and the trouble. Is it literature in which a special interest is taken? Well, the major part of books and papers are carefully flavoured to suit the swaying opinions of the multitude, the masses who work. Is it art? The palette and even the sculptor's chisel must pander to the passing taste, and are now to find their noblest aim in educating the great unwashed. Is it politics? The hammer and trowel knock so loudly at the statesman's mahogany door that he must listen perforce. Is it religion? The pickaxe is already laid to the foundation of the church tower.

These are but the broad outlines; the thing descends into the meanest smallest item of domestic daily life, for have we not servants, and must we not have coal, gas, bread, and upon each of these the workman lays his heavy hand. If he says No, you cannot have it for love or money. If the miner will not dig the coal, you may offer your coal-merchant £50 a ton safely, not a hundredweight will reach your cellar. So it rules every detail.

On the other hand this omnipotent power breathes its influence over the whole world: from Europe to America, America to Asia, Africa, Australia, the Pacific Isles. The history of the last hundred years, not the mere bare chronicle of the movements of kings and armies, but the cause of the heavings and throbbings of the nations, has been

written in blood by the workman's tool. The future, growing as inevitably out of the present as the tree from the acorn, will be shaped by the voices sounding from the bench, the mine, and the plough.

How did this 'Labour Question' come about? Some will point to the printing press, the steam engine, the electric telegraph as the answer. I think the influence of those material factors, so far as the soul and mind of man are concerned, has been greatly over-rated. The printing press has been invented four hundred years, if it be so magical an instrument why is it that at this late day it requires all the force of Governments and acts of Parliament to make the people learn to read? There is a something beyond – an inexplicable magnetism akin to what the ancients called a 'panic terror' yet very different in its object which flies from mind to mind as epidemics fly from body to body. Sometimes without absolutely knowing how or why everyone becomes silently prepared to expect a coming event. The extraordinary way in which the wave of religious excitement known as the 'revival' movement passed over many countries is an instance in point. There is a more powerful thing even than the press – a thing which our thinkers and politicians of recent times have overlooked and ignored – it is speech. Not public orations, but the words which pass without premeditation from man to man in the street, at the tavern bar, on the railway, anywhere they chance to meet. By speech a feeling spreads and spreads, and penetrates into every nook and corner of the land. The printed paper is only powerful in precisely the proportion as it reflects and puts in grammatical form and logical sequence the opinions already existing in our minds, so that we may see our thoughts before our eyes. Buddha had no printers yet his religion is believed in by hundreds of millions of the human race. Mahomet had no Walter's Machine to send forth the [?Suras] of the Koran in mile-long webs yet 'Allah' is the cry wherever the palm tree grows. The Twelve Apostles had no inking rollers yet they spread the divine words from the farthest west to the farthest east of the then known world, from England to India. As a fact moreover, the press with the exception of a few minor class-journals, is dead set against the 'Labour' movement: because it represents property and vested interest in church and state bonded warehouses, and Horse Guards, and 'Labour' saps and mines at the root of all these. So far as it is a power the press is against the fermentation among the masses.

The railroads are equally opposed to socialistic revolutions: they bring down police, gendarmes, bayonets, mitrailleurs at an hour's notice, so that no Jack Cade can secure time enough to concentrate his forces. Since Europe became a spider's web of railways, the multitudes have been bound down with bands of iron, and cannot stir physically. The telegraphs being mainly in the hands of governments (or monopolised in the moment of danger) lend their aid also to forestall and reveal such plots. Gunpowder and the repeating rifle, shrapnel shell, time fuse, three mile ranges, these are the masters of the mob. Arsenal science has laid a heavy hand on socialism. Otherwise we should have had *emeutes* enough. Why the very tramps on our highways are sufficiently numerous to sack London with ease, and they would not be long in organising an army to do so, where [sic] it not for steel and lead, and above all for the railroads; which are the safeguards of our cities. When the windows of the suburban villa rattles as the artillery practises at Woolwich, let the peaceful well-to-do dwellers

therein look out at the shoe-less, hat-less shivering wretches creeping along outside in the gutter, and thank heaven for that thundering boom.

Therefore I say that when the press, the steam engine, the electric telegraph, and similar inventions of the age, are hastily inferred to be the prime origins of the 'Labour' movement the effect is mistaken for the cause. Labour made them, works them, but they are no friends of 'Labour' in this sense (at least not yet) but rather its despots. Yet the 'Question' widens out, grows stronger, affects more details every day, and a wonderful thing it is that it should do so. Without bayonets, shells, mitrailleurs, ironclads, 80 ton guns, the 'Question' whispers in the ears of Kings, and their thrones quake as if the earth heaved under them.

Glance round the globe a moment. Begin with Europe: the Radicalism of Europe is intense, the workman, the *ouvrier* is at the bottom of it. England first of all is a Republic - the Throne has virtually retired on an enormous pension, its vested interest being recognised so far; the House of Lords is simply an exclusive club, the Commons were until lately the masters but they have found a greater than they, i.e. The Public. When the public pronounces its opinion, the Constitution, traditional usage, law itself, judge and jury, time-honoured policy, calls of party, all the barriers and privileges which we used to boast as the growth of a thousand years immediately fade away. It matters not one jot which party is in office - the thing is quite understood - the Ministry set about fulfilling the wishes of the people, whether intrinsically right or wrong. The Cabinet is in fact in precisely the same position as the Editor and staff of a great daily paper. Like the editor they must be incessantly on the watch to detect the changing wind and suit the leading articles, that is the measure, to its new direction. Perhaps it is for this reason that many of the political leaders of our time have been professedly literary men: Disraeli, Gladstone, pamphleteers and magazinists, and other well known names occur at once. Only the sensitive literary organisation like a delicate instrument can respond quickly enough to the magnetic current whose waves now rise and now fall as the battery of the People is excited or [or] at rest. And the People are mainly workmen. So that without formal alteration, the Government of to-day is the Grevy scheme in practice. M. Grevy proposes a Parliament without party in the present sense, the Prime Minister changed every month if necessary just as the majority vote but in his short career the absolute head of the State. The object of the political machine is avowedly to reflect Public opinion as rapidly as is humanly possible. We retain party; but are nonetheless governed by the Grevy system, because it is understood by each party that when in power it must do as the public journals tell it to do, even though precisely contrary to its own declared views. Our prime ministers thus eat the leek without so much as a wry face.

Remembering this, the best joke of the time was when the Commander in Chief of the army objected to the placing of Cleopatra's Needle in Hyde Park, because it might interfere with the mobilisation of the Guards in case of necessity. What Ministry would dare to send the sabres clattering into a political mob? What does it matter then whether there be room for mobilisation or not? But just now it was remarked that without Woolwich and the railways the tramp-mob could sack London. Yet now that it is not necessary to provide, and even impossible to provide against a political mob. Apparently contradictory these ideas are not opposed.

The tramp-mob can attack Property; but any mob can attack Politics. That is where we draw the line. If the police observed the faintest indication of a concentration of loose characters threatening a loot they would instantly disperse it, before it had got any headway at all. If the police observed a hundred thousand men assembling for a political purpose, the utmost they would do would be to keep a certain amount of order. And no duke or general dare send his sabres clattering into a political mob. The Ministry and indeed the Parliament which countenanced such a proceeding would simply disappear. Therefore if forty Pyramids, as well as obelisks, be erected in Hyde Park it does not concern Knightsbridge Barracks.

Before the Corn Law repeal, before the Reform Bill, England was sometimes Whig, sometimes Tory. After those dates the country by a shelving descent passed into a Republic. Mr. Bright says the Reform Bill of 1867 which extended the franchise to every artisan and mechanic in reasonably good employment was carried because in Birmingham one hundred thousand people turned out and shouted for it, and proportionate numbers elsewhere. This is absolutely true. Today if four hundred persons wrote letters to the daily journals advocating a certain course – as they did in the Staunton case – the law of the land is reversed to meet their views. This is the Grevy system in its perfection. The result is that every petty question becomes a political question, while it lasts. Clearly England is not only a Republic; but the most ultra-republican of republics and likely to become still more so.

The Colonies are avowedly republics, and they were founded, and are maintained entirely by working men; they ship hundreds of labourers to their ports by government subsidy every month, the 'Labour Question' is with them the question of existence. This applies to Australia, Canada, British Columbia, South Africa etc., in themselves a tolerably wide section of the globe. India is not a republic but a despotism. India however is not a colony. Looking over the map of the hemispheres it would be hard to parallel the case of India. Let that be for a while; we have gone beyond Europe unintentionally early in the discussion.

France is a Republic and has been so for almost a hundred years, though saddled briefly by two Napoleons, a Charles X, a Louis Philippe and a Marshal MacMahon. But ever since 1788 whoever has momentarily seized the helm of power in that beautiful and most unfortunate country, has in effect acknowledged that France is republican at heart (while denying it outwardly) by taking the utmost pains and precautions to suppress the expression of such feeling. It is the *ouvrier*, the workman again – he is at the bottom of it. See how they dread him; I mean those who deny that France is republican.

Here is an order issued by one of MacMahon's zealous agents prior to the election of October 14th 1877. It speaks volumes: M. de Fourton says in a [circular] to the prefects that the cafes, cabarets, and wineshops are centres of political republican propaganda, and then threatening the landlords with the closing of their houses if this continues declares that 'the public-house keeper must take steps to prevent in his establishment *the reading aloud of newspapers*, of electioneering placards and circulars, of political pamphlets; the political discussions which might arise thereon; the posting up of electoral circulars, the *distribution of handbills, or voting papers inside a cafe*, or a public house etc.' The artisan must not read the paper aloud! It is

notorious that the most solid support Napoleon III ever obtained was while he gave the workmen plenty to do and good wages in rebuilding Paris, erecting the Exposition, excavating the docks of Cherbourg and similar gigantic public works, so-called, really dynastic, or meant to be. He had a clear insight into the meaning of the 'Labour Question', and so long as he could make the rich, and the *bourgeoisie* pay the labourer for the works the 'Labour Question' supported him. In that wisdom no ruler of France has as yet approached the late Caesar.

Next Italy: this is what Cardinal Manning says of Italy, and assuredly he is not eager to discover the strength of the enemy. *He* is writing from the point of view of the Infallible church considering the restoration of a Temporal Power a desirability, and detecting in the republican movement an organized conspiracy against Christianity itself. *We* read between the lines and in the intense energy of the radicals which he depicts trace unmistakably the overwhelming force of the workman. He says:

No one can have watched the course of Italian governments without noting the steady advance of Mazzinian revolution in the successive ministries of Italy. From Cavour to Ratazzi, from Ratazzi to Ricasoli, from Ricasoli to Minghetti, from Minghetti to Deputis, the anti-Christian and anti-monarchical revolution has revealed itself in every successive change. The present Chamber . . . represents the revolution, and nothing but the revolution . . . The whole Chamber is revolutionary both Right and Left alike. And the Left are now in power.

The revolution was accomplished by whom? Not by the wealthy, or the bourgeoisie certainly; but by the workman, who continues to push it. So that it was virtually before the 'clacking of hammers, and driving of nails', before the spade and trowel, that the tiara[?] tumbled to the ground - not by the thin scattered bayonets of Garibaldi in themselves, but before them as representing the tools of the workshop, were Naples and Rome overthrown as Jericho before the ram's horns. Mazzini was the apostle of the bench: Garibaldi its Flaming Sword.

It requires a Bismarck to keep down the republicanism that is the workmanism of Germany. 'Iron and fire'; then it is with iron and fire the states of Germany were roughly welded together but they do not properly cohere, the grain of the various metals will not arrange itself in accordance with the central mass of Prussians; in Prussia itself the fibres crack and stretch. Liberalism, by which term in Germany it is the fashion to define what is called the revolution in Italy, wearies even the nerves of the great Chancellor in his ceaseless efforts to repress its growth. Throughout Germany the artisans have a powerful organization, with their own journals, representatives in Parliament, special policy, and even friends at Court. Herr Liebknecht, member of the Parliament, and a leader of the 'Labour' movement, put this in the plainest language lately, declaring publicly that there are two Germanies: the Germany of Prince Bismarck, bristling with bayonets, hated and feared by all Europe, and the Germany of the Socialists, i.e. the working men. It is not a generation ago since the Emperor had to take off his helmet to the crowd.

In Austria secret societies abound, and are in communication with the International: here the 'Labour Question' takes the political form of nationalism, this is, it works to resolve the ill-compacted Empire into the various races of which it is composed. This

disintegrating force is perpetually interfering with the designs of the statesmen of Austria, Prusso-Germany, and Russia.

Spain has been for years divided into two hostile camps, now with arms in their hands, now nominally at peace, but ever in reality bitterly striving with each other. Clericalism and Republicanism alternately dominate, and the ranks of the latter are reinforced by the working men of the cities. These, when they had almost conquered, talked of establishing a separate government in every province – as if we had a parliament and ministers in each county. For it is the peculiar paradox of proletarianism which claims to establish universal fraternity, to localize, and divide, and disintegrate.

One line will suffice for Switzerland: it is the refuge, and the model of those who desire to see Europe split up into a hundred thousand autonomic Communes.

Denmark and Sweden and Norway, by courtesy monarchies, are really agricultural republics: a republic is invariably an alternate and convenient term for government by the working man. Holland is a republic. Belgium is a bitter battlefield between Clericalism and Republicanism: its constitution is essentially republican, but the Clerics often stultify its intention. About once in every six months we are informed by telegraph that troops have been despatched to put down miners' strikes; this alone indicates the ferment of the 'Labour Question' in Belgium. Greece, to finish with the smaller states, is literally honeycombed with secret societies.

Lastly, Russia. Though the larger portion of her area is in Asia, she is distinctly a European power, and comes in this category. Nihilism, which is much the same as *sans culottism*, Socialism, Communism in their various forms, are spread all over the land; almost every week see their victims exiled to Siberia, still it increases, and is the dread of the reigning family. Passing now to America, the 'Labour Question' has been the motive power in any political movement in that immense country since it was colonized by Europeans. The great war between North and South for the liberation of the slave was simply a war about 'Labour'. Now Asia sends her contingent in the influx of Chinese to the Pacific slopes, causing a fresh difficulty. In Asia itself, the 'Labour Question' obscures itself under religions, racial antagonisms, famines etc.; but it is still there. From immemorial time vast hordes of men have issued from Asia marching westwards, the Cimmerians, the Celts, the Huns, Turks, and others in the past, the Rass in the present, all driven forward by increase of population, consequent dearth of food, and internal dissensions. Food is the very foundation of the 'Labour Question'. On the edge of Asia, as it were, the coolies swarm, or are imported into European employment; in the isles of the Pacific the same difficulties are rising.

Is it possible to have a single spot on the surface of the habitable globe where the 'Labour Question' is not stirring in the minds of men? Therefore is it not correct to assume that this is The Question of the future?

See too, in this the secret of the vitality of Rome, that is of the Vatican: see in it the secret of the immense importance of a feeble old man without a single soldier, an importance acknowledged by every state not only in Europe but the whole world. The modern strength of the Vatican (supposed and loudly proclaimed extinct because physically environed) is incalculable; and it is due to the re-action against republicanism, or workmanism.

Rome is in effect the representative of monarchy, family, or aristocracy, and vested interest throughout the world: she is in a word Capital as versus Labour. All institutions possess authority or property – even our own Protestant Church whose property is very great – which exhibit the control of the Few over the Many, are however much outwardly opposed, in reality as a matter of fact interested in upholding the Chair of St. Peter. Rome is Capital: Republicanism is Labour. Here is the Armageddon to which every man is hastening.

This necessarily brief outline will suffice to excite an idea of the extent of the 'Question'.

## Chapter II The Divine Right of Capital

Throw a golden sovereign upon the mahogany table, and listen. The circular disc of heavy metal rebounds and rings clear as a bell - as a bell calling slaves to obey the hest of its owner. They crowd in troops holding up their hands: true, it maybe only sufficient to engage one, but then while you retain it each individual among the thousand aspirants thinks he may be that fortunate one. And this is part of the power of money, however small the sum.

Parenthetically remember this: the political economist maintains as the foundation of his creed that coin should circulate, and in that circulation lies the greatest blessing of mankind. He contrasts the ancient system when a man who had slowly accumulated darics or sesterces, rose nobles, ay or even down to the guinea era, mysteriously buried them till such hour as grave need should arise. This he declares was the most foolish shortsighted of policies, for does not money make money? Take your savings to the bank, the Stock Exchange, the Bourse, the building society, invest it in trade, commerce, anything that will make men work, and see the coin circulating. Pre-supposing reasonable caution and favourable circumstances, it will return doubled; and this is the whole duty of man.

Now returning to the sovereign which lies quiescent, glittering on the dark mahogany, it is dear that it ought not to be permitted to remain thus, but must, if we believe the Political Economist, be made to add its atom of weight to the great pendulum which drives the clock of the world. It must buy something, even if it be only five per cent, a shilling additional per annum, and whatever that something may be – spend it, invest it in whatever manner – it will be the equivalent of human labour. When you spend it you purchase a man or woman; though possibly for a few hours only. Still they are for the time being yours absolutely. This is the primary step in the investigation; even if you pass it across the bank counter 'to my credit' still you have bought somebody, somebody will come to the bank and say, 'I want it - lend it to me', and that man really works for you, to pay you your five per cent.

The only way to escape this inevitable result is to bury it as the ancients did, in jars and caves.

It follows that the more money there is in circulation the more work is done, and the greater is the sum of human happiness, according to the Political Economist. Perhaps it may presently dawn upon the mind of some one that the increasing protest

of the rising 'Labour Question' denies this, his proposition; which is the proposition of Capital.

Meantime put the sovereign in circulation, and buy somebody. 2d to a boy to grovel on the dirty pavement and black your shoes. For five minutes your most obsequious slave. 2s .6d for breakfast at the Restaurant for eggs and ham and coffee, and a penny the waiter. This is more complicated, because you have bought not only the cringing waiter, the Restaurant keeper, the cook, the servants, even the ultimate landlord, but also the agriculturist who fattened the ham, whose fowls produced the eggs. 3d to the omnibus conductor, buying him, the driver, and the whole body of shareholders; and Time and Space into the bargain. 2s at the railway bookstall for a book while you wait for the train, buying the author, publisher, printer, compositors, 'devils' and all. 1d the newspaper, and the same process is repeated, including a fraction of the correspondent at the distant seat of war. 5s railway ticket, the equivalent of guard, porter, station master, driver, platelayer etc. 10s for an article of merchandise to sell again, buying those who produce it, and those to whom you will sell it, since they must travail to resell and get their profit. Or £1 in a lump to a creature decked in scarlet and fine linen, painted, soft of speech -but hush! That is buying a soul. This is absurd, says the Political Economist, there is no possible comparison between legitimate trade and the traffic in vice. In reply, stern fact points to 30,000 women avowedly earning a livelihood in this way in London alone; assuredly they do not do it from choice. They attend on Capital, squandered if you like, but still Capital.

In childhood we have all read of the slaves of the ring: the possessor had but to rub it and lo! the genie appeared and flew to execute his bidding. It mattered not whether the possessor was a good man, or evil-minded: the genie did his order utterly regardless of human suffering. This yellow sovereign lying on the dark mahogany is the magic ring of real life. With it, everything; without it, nothing. With it the brutal sot can buy pah! - the mind revolts to think of it. The grocer or wine merchant yonder - good man, goes to chapel, is a deacon, or church, is a church warden - he, himself, bristling with British virtue, acts the part of the genie of the ring. Whosoever brings him the ring - tosses the yellow coin on the counter - him he serves with obeisance, Yea, if the Scarlet Woman of Babylon came and held up that sign, and showed him the superscription of Caesar, he would fly to do her bidding - in the way of business!

This is the Divine Right of Capital. Look, the fierce sunshine beats down upon the white sand, or chalk, or hard clay of the railway cutting whose narrow sides focus the heat like a lens. Brawny arms swing the pick and drive the pointed spades into the soil. Clod by clod, inch by inch, the heavy earth is loosened, and the mountain removed by atoms at a time. Aching arms these, weary backs, stiffened limbs - brows black with dirt and perspiration. The glaring chalk blinds the eye with its whiteness; the slippery sand gives beneath the footstep, or rises with the wind and fills the mouth with grit; the clay clings to the boot, weighing the leg down as lead. The hot sun scorches the back of the neck, the lips grow dry and parched; and - 'Look out for yourself, mate!' With a jarring rattle the clumsy trucks come jolting down the incline on their way to the 'shoot'; then beware, for they will sometimes jump the ill-laid track, and crush human limbs like brittle icicles with tons of earth. Or a 'shot' is fired overhead, bellowing as the roar rushes from cliff to diff as an angry bull, and huge stones and



fragments hurtle in deadly shower. Or, worse than all, the treacherous day slips - bulges, trembles, and thuds in an awful avalanche, burying men alive. 'But they are paid to do it', says Comfortable Respectability (which hates everything in the shape of a 'question', glad to slur it over somehow). They are paid to do it! Go down into the Pit yourself, Comfortable Respectability, and try it as I have done, just for one hour of a summer day: then you will know the preciousness of a vulgar pot of beer! Three and sixpence a day is the price of these brawny muscles; the price of the rascally sherry you parade before your guests in such pseudo-generous profusion. One guinea a week - i.e. one stall at the opera. But why do they do it? Because Hunger and Thirst drive them; these are the fearful scourges, the whips worse than the knout, which lie at the back of Capital and give it its power. Do you suppose these human beings with minds and souls and feelings would not otherwise repose on the sweet sward, and harken to the song-birds as you may do on your lawn at Cedar Villa?

The 'financier', 'director', 'contractor', whatever his commercial title -perhaps all three, who is floating this line, where is he? Rolling in his carriage right royally as a King of Spades should do, honoured for the benefits he has conferred upon mankind, toasted at banquets, knighted by an appreciative Throne, his lady shining in bright raiment by his side, glorious in silk, and scarlet, and ermine, smiling as her lord, voluble of speech, pours forth his unctuous harangue. One man whipped with Hunger toils half-naked in the Pit, face to face with death; the other is crowned by his fellows sitting in state with fine wines and the sound of jubilee. This is the Divine Right of Capital. 'Nonsense!' Well, it may seem so no doubt on paper; but if you personally go down into the Pit and use a spade [~~'shovel'~~] deleted, [~~'swing a pick'~~] deleted for a few hours fully resolved not to eat or drink till you have earned it by the realistic sweat of your brow it is astonishing how different things will look to you. The golden image of Capital will seem no more divine to you then than the idol before which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow the knee. And you will understand the creed that is written at the bottom of the vulgar pot of beer.

This is what Capital says in the ear of the man without capital, whom hunger and thirst are scourging mercilessly: 'Come hither and do this work - do it for my especial benefit; do it at my price; labour at it as many hours as I bid you; be thankful that you have got it to do; touch your cap when you see me coming; hush your voice; send your wife into my mill, and your children into my factory; work for me without fail, or turn out into the street.'

That is the practical side of it; now the moral side. Capital preaches from the pulpit 'Labour was imposed on us from the beginning through the sin of our father Adam, a curse was laid upon the ground, and the command was given that man should eat bread in the sweat of his brow. Therefore when I - Capital - find you work to do I fulfil the law of Heaven, I stand as a vice-regent, from my hand flows the will of God. Servants obey your masters, and render respect to those in authority. But do not be cast down; cheer up, look your labour in the face and it will ennoble you; there is grandeur and dignity in work which no words can express, Christ himself worked at the bench with his father Joseph the carpenter, thereby rendering Labour divine for ever. Hercules in the heathen fable was immortalized and became a demigod because of his enormous labours. Therefore hug your chains, and glory in them; dig, hammer,

weave, thresh, and plough. Laborare est orare, said the monks; go to it with a new zest, rejoicing as a giant, to run your course. When your work is accomplished bring me the fruit thereof, and I will enjoy it. But, believe me, my friends, I, too, have my labour. I also am a man of sorrows; see, my hair is grey with thinking and scheming, and arranging things for you, dear brethren; pity me – show your sympathy for my travails [?trials], and remember how difficult it is for a rich man to enter Heaven, more so than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Only in all things obey me and murmur not. Has not God given me this money, and shall I not do what seemeth good in my sight with it? This is my divine right that you should work for me because I have got it.'

Because I have got it: those words should be written in letters an ell long. They are all-sufficient; there is no other reason, only 'because I have got it'.

How does man become possessed of Capital? How does he become a vice-regent – in the practical world precisely the counterpart of what the Pope claims to be in the spiritual, infallible, beyond all appeal, the finality in the chain of human cause and effect? How does this tremendous power concentrate itself in the hands of one man – surely because of a great and mighty genius, because of the innate dignity and fitness of his mind, because of his moral virtue, because of his moral stature? No: simply from chance.

Born to Capital from chance; inheriting it by chance; making it by chance; gradually growing it from father to son by a long series of fortunate circumstances. 'Self-made men', held up to such admiration by a canting crew, are simply men whose opportunities, whose meanness, or whose unscrupulousness have given them unusual advantages. Capital may hang on the life of a feeble child toying with a 'pussy-cat' in the nursery; it may be directed by the toothless mumble of a senile second childhood. Tramp, my lads, before that toothless mumble down into the Pit; swing your picks, look no further than 3s. 6d. a day, and rejoice in the Dignity of Labour! Chance may any day make a Capitalist of either of you; only think how you could swill and swell and satisfy your baser passions, and lord it over men of brains –glorious uncertainty! Today a despicable navvy – tomorrow, witty, clever, a genius, a Member of Parliament even – think of *that*. It is a great game of roulette this world of ours – a huge gambling establishment. You who are so bitter against Capital, how dearly you would like to be a Capitalist! Then, for Heaven's sake, let us all have a fair chance; don't make its possession dependent upon morality, virtue, genius, personal stature, nobility of mind, self-sacrifice, or such rubbish. Remember all men are born equal – that's *our* creed – let us have an equal chance, and retain

The good old rule, the simple plan  
That they should take who have the power  
And they should keep who can!

For then at any moment a navvy coarse and rude may become a demi-god.

This too, is the Divine Right of Capital. When I have got it I am anything you could name.

And I shall do exactly what I like with it – that is also my Divine Right. My neighbour may starve – it is nothing to me. Wretched women with bare breast,

withered cheeks, may crouch on the pavement hugging their miserable children to gather some faint warmth from contact, with the raindrops dripping on them from the eaves of my house wherein I slumber on a bed of softest down. It is nothing to me; if they worry me with their wailing I shall call the police. The tradesman opposite is cutting his throat in despair – a hundred pounds, they lie on my dressing table in ten bank notes, would save him body and soul, and his children from the gutter, the gaol, and the hospital. It is nothing to me. It is *my* money, and I shall do as I please with it. I shall go to the theatre, I shall drink choice wine, I shall bask in the smile of beauty. I shall throw away hundreds on a horse, I shall travel on the Continent, and avoid the cold by the side of the lovely Mediterranean. This money is mine; I have no responsibilities; it is nothing to me. My cheque is invariably honoured at my bankers. I never overdraw, forge, cheat - I rigidly observe the Decalogue; I am a just man. I am not as other men are. I wish you would not worry me as I cannot even take up my newspaper now without seeing some horrid thing, suicides, a million paupers, gaols crammed, lunatic asylums covering tens of acres, and still enlarging; forty-three people *starved* in one year in that officious Registrar General's Report; all this is a nuisance. It is nothing to me; you cannot even reproach me - I do no man wrong; it is my money and I shall do what I like with it; you must perforce admit it is my Divine Right.

No crown confers so much Divine Right as Capital. All this comes out of the golden sovereign we threw on the mahogany table. Even yet Capital has one more right – the right to combine and keep down Labour!

### Chapter III The Divine Right of Labour

A basket of tools is a fetich before which the minds of many leading men' in this nineteenth century bow down and worship with as much servility as the negro of Africa before a broken potshard stuck on a pole. Set up a spade, thrust it deep into the turf and there you have the idol – rude and uncouth as any bronze image of Buddha and without the aesthetic teaching behind the Hindoo god – in front of which they make lowly obeisance. Labour is divine, noble, godlike, heavenly, hammer and shovel are more sacred than the seven branched candlestick; a basket of tools is the very holy of holies out of which shall come the ultimate gospel of humanity; every nail driven in with dink and bang sounds a loud hymnal of praise and prayer! The working man is the incarnation of god, truly the worship of the tool-basket is an immeasurably higher cultus than that of ancient Olympus, and fitting to the age of intellectual progress.

Work, purely manual, mud-moving, dirt-compelling work, is in itself so intensely unutterably divine, that to question the fact is sheer blasphemy.

# Thoughts on the Labour Question': An Alternative View

*Diana Morrow*

'Thoughts on the Labour Question' is one of Richard Jefferies' most extraordinary pieces of social commentary. Its deficiencies as a rational and balanced argument are largely camouflaged by the drama and rhetorical vehemence of its prose. Interestingly, it was never published in Jefferies' lifetime, being found incomplete among his papers after his death. A severely edited version was first published by *The Pall Mall Gazette* in 1891, and it was not until 1957 that S. J. Looker included another heavily edited version in *Field and Farm: Essays Now First Collected, with Some from MSS.*<sup>1</sup> The essay was for many years understandably assumed to have been written in Jefferies' latter years, and thus to accord with the general consensus concerning his evolution from conservative to radical. However, in 1975 Graeme Woolston cast doubts on this provenance, arguing convincingly that the essay was written as early as 1877. Woolston concluded: The traditional account, therefore, of Jefferies' political development, that he progressed from being a Conservative to being a Radical, must be abandoned in favour of something altogether more complex.<sup>2</sup>

While applauding any reassessment of Jefferies' political development which recognises its complexity, it is perhaps useful to consider more specifically what is meant when referring to 'radicalism' within the context of the late nineteenth century. I would argue that if one associates 'radicalism' with advanced or 'New' Liberalism or with socialism, then 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' is by no means a 'radical' piece. To be virulently opposed to commercialism, materialism, and the Smilesean cult of labour and of the self-made man does not necessarily denote such 'radicalism'. If that were the case, individuals such as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin would all have to be positioned on the left of the political spectrum.<sup>3</sup> However, those authors were 'radicals' in the sense that they were 'radical conservatives', ie, virulent critics of contemporary society, fundamentally opposed, like Jefferies, to the tenets of *laissez-faire* Liberalism, but in favour of, indeed searching for a new hierarchical order. Instead of admiring the self-made men of commerce and industry, and the triumphant middle-class materialism which accompanied the growth of urban industrialism, radical conservatives pointed to their moral, spiritual, and cultural deficiencies. This position differs substantially, however, from the 'advanced Liberal radicalism' which we find in the more mature Jefferies. The latter variant of radicalism was one which criticised established landed elites, extolled the benefits of education, and generally welcomed the growth of a more democratic polity in which deference/ dependence relationships would no longer feature. It acknowledged that the old-style political economy of the Manchester School could no longer adequately address the needs of modern society, and welcomed a more genuinely representative and actively engaged form of government at both local and national levels.

In the analysis of 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' which follows it is argued that this essay was in many respects a radical conservative piece. Rather than furnishing evidence of an early 'radical' Jefferies, it helps to elucidate how his position evolved from radical conservatism toward one of advanced or New Liberalism, and highlights some of the common ground occupied by both. The man who wrote 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' in the late 1870s is still far from an advanced Liberal, despite his obviously deep and sincere sympathy for the problems of the labouring poor. The view that 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' is an essentially conservative essay is reinforced by those parts of the manuscript which S. J. Looker omitted from *Field and Farm*. However, in preaching against the gospel of work (a theme prominent in Chapter II), Jefferies was, as we shall see, adopting a stance which was not embraced by Conservatives, radical conservatives, moderate or advanced Liberals, or socialists. This perception of work as fundamentally problematic set Jefferies apart from most of his contemporaries. It was a form of non-partisan radicalism of the most extreme kind, calling into question a fundamental societal norm.

Nevertheless, much of 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' is consistent with a conservative world view, one virulently opposed to capitalism, and to a more democratic or pluralist ethos. In the previously unpublished parts of Chapter I there is much inflated propaganda about the threat of 'workmanism' which appears in fact specially designed to alert and alarm conservative readers. Certainly, the fact that Jefferies sent the piece to the conservative newspaper *The Standard* with the hopeful wish that 'there is only *one Standard* liberal enough to be really Conservative'<sup>4</sup> would have little logic had he considered it to be a radical article. It was not accepted by *The Standard* (whether due to its sentiments or because it was non-rural is unclear) and was, as noted above, finally published in 1891 by *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

By the time of his death in 1887, Jefferies had had a long association with this Liberal paper. In claiming 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' is largely a conservative piece, albeit of a 'radical' conservative kind, I am thus not opposing the general view of Jefferies' evolution from the right to the left of the political spectrum. It would be specious to deny the reforming spirit and politically engaged nature of much of Jefferies' later commentary. By the 1880s he was a respected professional journalist, who could choose what and where to publish. He chose to publish his more politically-oriented commentary with advanced Liberal newspapers. This is not surprising, as most of Jefferies' later works, with their emphasis on independent self-government, faith in man's perfectibility, opposition to privilege and critique of old-style *laissez-faire*, largely conform to a New Liberal ethos.

But his political development was both complex and never overtly partisan, and there are significant elements of continuity in his thought. Thus the early Jefferies, who was frequently capable of referring to the agricultural labourer in sneering and derogatory tones, could simultaneously express a deep and sympathetic appreciation of the tyranny of labour and heartfelt concern at the conditions endured by the rural labouring class. In a piece such as *Jack Brass, Emperor of England* (1873), rabidly anti-capitalist sentiment co-exists with views critical of education as the destroyer of faith in authority.<sup>5</sup> But in a piece like 'The Future of Country Society' (1877) his

stance appears already more progressive and liberal in tone, positive about education and about the prospect of further labourer independence.<sup>6</sup>

What happens in the early 1880s is that a combination of external historical developments and personal factors cause particular preoccupations and concerns to assume an increasing prominence in Jefferies' thought. Although 'hybrid' elements remain, generally his stance becomes less ambivalent or inconsistent, and more recognisably to the left. One of the most crucial external developments is his appreciation that the old-style rural social order based on deference/dependency relationships could not continue because the countryside had been so irrevocably transformed by ongoing depression, technological and educational developments, and the prospect of an extended franchise. The personal factor which arguably had the most impact on Jefferies' thought was the onset of chronic illness. That an increasingly dependent invalid, forced to labour to support his family, should seek to expiate the tyranny of labour and to sympathetically portray the plight of the underdog is not entirely surprising.

At the same time, Jefferies' transcendentalist voice became more prominent and in assuming the mantle of transcendentalist nature priest he forged another link with New Liberalism. As Avner Offer has pointed out, that political stance 'owed as much to transcendentalist tradition as to biological science. Hobson looked to Ruskin, not to Darwin.'<sup>7</sup> In his transcendentalist essays, and in his spiritual autobiography *The Story of My Heart* (1883), Jefferies deplored the prevailing mechanistic, commercial ethos of the times, and envisaged a future when man, inspired by the abundance and beauty of nature, would cast off the constrictions of the present and fulfil his potential. The power and intensity of such works had a significant impact on contemporary writers and politicians, many of whom were advocates of New Liberalism. Lloyd George's programme to reform and regenerate the rural sector, for example, was infused with transcendentalist sentiment, and C. F. G. Masterman (Lloyd George's right-hand man) was given to quoting extensively from Jefferies.<sup>8</sup>

But while elements of Jefferies' transcendentalist message, with its emphasis on the tyranny of labour and optimistic vision of future progress, held a special appeal for New Liberals and socialists alike, its anticommmercialism was common to both Tories and radicals. The common enemy was a market-driven society held together only by a cruel cash-nexus. Like most critics of urban industrialism, Jefferies was a physician to the disease of modern life, and in 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' he is addressing what he perceives to be a fundamental cause of the malaise. However if the diagnosis is similar to that expressed by the later, mature Jefferies, the prescriptions are lacking. There is a deep antipathy towards the worship of money, and to the tyranny of labour, but neither a welcoming acceptance of a more independent, democratic polity, nor optimism about the future blossoming of mankind's potential. If we have 'radicalism' here, it is a fundamentally conservative variant. Indeed, the first chapter of 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' (which did not, apart from the opening paragraph, appear in *Field and Farm*) is devoted to painting a sensationalised picture of the universality and latent danger of 'the Labour question'.

From the outset, Jefferies makes it clear that in referring to 'the Labour question', he is not, in fact, dealing simply with employer/employee issues. Nor is he focussing, as

is more the case in Chapter II, on the tyranny of hard, physically and mentally enervating labour. Rather 'the Labour question' in Chapter I has a much broader and more elastic meaning. What Jefferies is highlighting is the growth of a new kind of mass political culture, more comprehensive, pluralistic, and rooted in a wholly different social basis than the more limited polity of the past. This development is not lauded; in describing a situation where popular taste and popular opinion holds sway Jefferies' tone is not admiring. When he refers, for example, to an art and literature which 'are now to find their noblest aim in educating the great unwashed'<sup>9</sup>, the sardonic tone is reminiscent more of Burke than of Paine. Moreover, Jefferies conflates this tendency towards a mass-opinion oriented politics with a range of disparaging 'isms', from 'workmanism', to republicanism, liberalism, socialism, communism, nihilism, anarchism, internationalism, as well as mob rule. By putting all of these movements in the same boat, attributing their rise exclusively to the labouring proletariat, and emphasising their universality, Jefferies is engaging in a scare-mongering form of political journalism tailored to make a dramatic impact on the conservative public, and to reinforce their aversion to all such developments.

He proceeds to reinforce that aversion by playing on fears of potential mob rule. He achieves this by contesting the view that material factors, such as the printing press, the steam engine, and the electric telegraph have been decisive in bringing 'the Labour Question' to the fore; what is more important is the power of the spoken word. The aforementioned mechanical inventions if anything work against 'the fermentation of the masses'<sup>10</sup> as they are used effectively by the authorities to enforce reprisals against popular upheavals. The implication of this line of argument leads irresistibly to the conclusion that 'the Labour Question' involves keeping a lid on a seething pot of mass disaffection and potential riot. The reader is told, for example, that 'Without bayonets, shells, mitrailleurs, ironclads, 80 ton guns, the "Question" whispers in the ears of Kings, and their thrones quake as if the earth heaved under them.'<sup>11</sup>

At the bottom of this state of affairs, Jefferies claims, is the workman. In the next sentence, the workman is equated with 'The Public', and Jefferies is clearly critical of a political culture which has to pander to that public's opinions. There is an obvious lack of morality in a situation where politicians engage in an opportunistic playing to the gallery, a complete lack of integrity when 'the Ministry set about fulfilling the wishes of the people, whether intrinsically right or wrong. The Cabinet is in fact in precisely the same position as the Editor and staff of a great daily paper. Like the editor they must be incessantly on the watch to detect the changing wind and suit the leading articles.'<sup>12</sup>

Jefferies avers that because of this susceptibility to mass opinion, England is 'not only a Republic, but the most ultra-republican of republics, and likely to become still more so.'<sup>13</sup> This situation is then shown to be by no means unique to England, but to exist worldwide. The 'workman' is at the bottom of French 'republicanism'; he is the catalyst of the Mazzinian revolution, and the driving force behind German Liberalism.<sup>14</sup> This distorted and historically inaccurate assessment is followed by blanket and unsubstantiated claims that Austria is full of secret societies which are in communication with the International, that in Spain republicanism alternates with clericalism; Switzerland is 'a model of those who desire to see Europe split up into a

hundred thousand autonomic Communes<sup>15</sup>; and Scandinavia is effectively governed by the workingman. Holland is a republic and Belgium full of ferment and repression due to the 'Question'. Greece is 'literally honeycombed with secret societies'<sup>16</sup> while Russia is beset by Nihilism, which Jefferies pronounces to be much the same as sans culottism, Socialism and Communism in their various forms. 'The Labour Question' has been the motive power of American history, and there would seem to be some implied link between the 'Question' and a future influx of the 'Yellow Peril'. Finally, even 'the vitality of Rome' is due to 'workmanism', that is, to the strength of the reaction against it.<sup>17</sup> Chapter I thus comprises sensationalist, conspiracy-theory type journalism, which takes broad liberties with the facts and engages in overblown and inaccurate generalisations in order to create a dramatic and alarming picture of the contemporary situation.

Chapter II was published in *Field and Farm*, and constitutes what most Jefferies readers identify as 'Thoughts on the Labour Question'. At first, the tone of this chapter might well appear more 'radical', in that it begins with a lengthy diatribe against the centrality and despotism of money. Jefferies inveighs against the fact that it can buy and sell lives; that it is the force condemning countless individuals to demeaning and dehumanising labour. The insidious and soul-destroying impact of hard physical labour is an issue which Jefferies was deeply concerned about throughout his life; similarly he was acutely sensitive to the trials endured by the labouring poor. Yet this concern about the tyranny of labour, and about the sufferings of the labouring poor was by no means exclusive to those on the political left. Neither was indignant rejection of commercialism and the 'cash-nexus'. Writers such as Carlyle and Ruskin, who expressed an open preference for an organic and hierarchical social order, did so whilst castigating nineteenth-century commercialism and materialism. Those authors would have been in complete accordance with Jefferies' scathing indictment of the view that possession of capital alone indicates intrinsic virtue or merit.

It is the men of commerce, not landlords and farmers, who are held up for opprobrium and ridicule in 'Thoughts on the Labour Question'. The great self-made businessman, so widely esteemed and extolled by Smiles and others, is the 'financier, director, contractor, whatever his commercial title'<sup>18</sup>, whom Jefferies condemns. The only 'right' such men possess to a position of power in the land is the possession of capital. But the possession of capital, according to Jefferies, denotes no special moral virtue, nor does it necessarily comprise the hard-earned fruit of hard work. Rather its possession is more often than not the result of chance, or of inheritance, or of unscrupulousness. It is at this point that we can see the linkage between the seemingly divergent themes of Chapters I and II. The former critically depicts the new primacy of public opinion, which operates regardless of moral rights and wrongs. The latter exposes as false and unworthy those idols and purported 'virtues' which public opinion has chosen to worship and adore.

Perhaps most importantly, 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' queries the view that in granting work to others the possessor of capital is exercising some sort of divine altruism. Jefferies is thus attacking one of the great shibboleths of the nineteenth century, namely the innate virtue of work. He correctly perceived that the spread of a pro-work, 'self-help' ethos operated especially to the benefit of the self-made men.



Such men did not deserve their status as national icons any more than the labouring poor deserved to be fooled by the gospel of work. Work, rather than ennobling or enriching more often than not just destroys and dehumanises. A doctrine which advises labourers to 'hug your chains, and glory in them'<sup>19</sup> is one which Jefferies condemns as both self-serving and patently false.

In the final paragraphs of the piece, Jefferies draws a portrait which is sympathetic to the poor and downtrodden, and which vilifies the self-made men for their lack of charity, their failure to exhibit a sense of social responsibility, and their justification of non-interventionism on the grounds of possessive individualism. He is critiquing a political economy in which the possession of money is paramount, and the sense of obligation on the part of the propertied to help out those less fortunate than themselves is frequently non-existent. When decrying the Divine Right of those who possess capital to use it as they please, with little compassion for the impoverished and hungry, Jefferies is not necessarily furnishing evidence of 'radicalism' in its political sense. Many nineteenth-century conservatives were deeply concerned by 'The Condition of England Question', and frequently espoused a more directive and paternalist involvement in the lives of the poor. It is the worship of capital as somehow evidence of virtue which enflames Jefferies in this piece. When he addresses workmen with the reminder 'You who are so bitter against Capital, how dearly you would like to be a Capitalist!'<sup>20</sup> he is not expressing a politically radical stance but rather a moral antipathy to excessive cupidity and the all too prevalent worship of Mammon.

Similarly, the fragment of Chapter III, 'The Divine Right of Labour', indicates that Jefferies intended to pursue a further critique of the gospel of work. Interestingly, those who considered labour divine and believed 'the working man is the incarnation of god'<sup>21</sup> would have included socialist thinkers, as well as advocates of self-help. For most socialists, how labour was perceived, organised, and controlled was the crucial issue, not the existence of labour itself. Expiating the tyranny of labour might mean increasing remuneration, improving work conditions and relations, or exalting/elevating the labourer, but not critiquing labour itself. That Jefferies did not share this view is obvious from the biting sarcasm of the statement that 'Work, purely manual, mud-moving, dirt-compelling work, is so intensely unutterably divine, that to question the fact is sheer blasphemy.'<sup>22</sup>

It is this rejection of work as innately beneficial and a source of virtue, that is the most unique and distinctive aspect of the argument of 'Thoughts on the Labour Question'. In disapproving of work itself Jefferies had parted ways with 'radical conservatives' such as Carlyle and Ruskin, both of whom extolled it as a necessary, positive, even sacred activity. Indeed, he had parted ways with his contemporaries altogether. On this one issue, Jefferies' stance was both original and profoundly 'radical' because it called into question one of the great nineteenth-century articles of faith.

In conclusion, 'Thoughts on the labour Question' provides some interesting insights into the continuity in Jefferies' thought. Anti-commercialism and sensitivity to the tyranny of labour is present in both the early and the mature Jefferies. The fact that they feature in 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' does not make it a 'radical' piece if

we equate 'radical' with the advanced Liberal position frequently evident in the mature Jefferies' work. Indeed, the previously unpublished part of Chapter I especially attests to a fundamentally conservative stance, and helps to explain why Jefferies sent the article to a conservative newspaper. Aspects of the article could appeal to Tories and radicals alike, however, who shared an aversion to a market-driven society held together only by a cruel cash-nexus and a laissez-faire ethos. If we are searching for a categorisation, 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' has much in common with a radical conservative stance. But Jefferies' rejection of the gospel of work does not accord with radical conservatism as espoused by men like Ruskin or Carlyle, any more than it does with moderate or advanced Liberalism, or with socialism.

Although the evidence would seem to generally justify the claim that Jefferies moved, in the course of his career, from a form of radical conservatism to that of advanced Liberalism, his position was in some respects so complex and original as to defy a 'tag'. Moreover the fact remains that individuals at opposite ends of the political spectrum could and did find in him a spokesperson for an alternative set of values. The almost religious identification of those values with rural life and culture in the late nineteenth century helps to explain Jefferies' diverse and devoted following. Although 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' deals neither with rural life nor with nature, the anti-commercialism and sympathetic appreciation of the tyranny of labour so prominent in the article coloured Jefferies' perceptions of the contemporary countryside. If those perceptions often appear somewhat complex, or even hybrid as to politics, this is not necessarily a sign of weakness. Jefferies' nature and personal circumstances made him uniquely fitted to both understand and tellingly portray the myriad of countrysides, past and present, real and imagined, which jostled for place in the late nineteenth-century psyche.

## NOTES

1. Richard Jefferies, *Field and Farm: Essays Now First Collected with Some from MSS*, S.J. Looker (ed.), London, 1957.
2. Graeme Woolaston, 'Richard Jefferies - Thoughts on the Labour Question', *Notes and Queries*, vol. 220, 1975, p. 119.
3. See for example, Mark Francis and John Morrow, *A History of Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1994, pp. 159-172, 178-185.
4. S.J. Looker and Creighton Porteous, *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields*, London, 1964, p. 135.
5. Richard Jefferies, *Jack Brass, Emperor of England*, London, 1873, published in this issue.
6. Richard Jefferies/'The Future of Country Society', *New Quarterly*, July 1877, in *Landscape and Labour, Essays and Letters Now First Collected*, Introduction by John Pearson (ed.), Bradford-on-Avon, 1979, pp. 84-97.
7. Avner Offer, *Property and Politics 1870-1914, Landownership, Law, Ideology and Urban Development in England*, Cambridge, 1981, p. 343. For an insight into New Liberalism, see Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform*, Oxford, 1978.
8. See for example C.F.G Masterman, *The Condition of England*, London, 1911, p. 212.
9. Richard Jefferies, 'Thoughts on the Labour Question', p. 11.
10. *ibid.* p. 12

11. *ibid.* p. 13.
12. *ibid.* p. 13.
13. *ibid.* p. 14.
14. *ibid.* p. 15.
15. *ibid.* p. 16.
16. *ibid.* p. 16.
17. *ibid.* p. 17.
18. *ibid.* p. 19.
19. *ibid.* p. 20.
20. *ibid.* p. 21.
21. *ibid.* p. 21.
22. *ibid.* p. 22.

# Book Reviews

WRITERS IN A LANDSCAPE, Jeremy Hooker  
*University of Wales Press, 1996.175 pp. £12.55*

The 'landscape' of Jeremy Hooker's title is that of southern England, and his subject is the attempt on the part of four of its rural writers to achieve an 'imaginative shaping of place'. The writers involved are Jefferies, Edward Thomas, Hardy, and John Cowper Powys, though the book contains a concluding chapter that brings the topic up to our troubled and threatened present by considering William Golding's *The Spire* and V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. All these writers, Hooker argues, are united not only by their rural subject-matter but by their religious preoccupation, which most often manifests itself as the 'loss of a sense of the sacred'.

The book is subtly, even artfully, structured. It begins with an introductory chapter on 'Landscape of Childhood', documenting the way these writers (all of them born in the southern-England countryside except for the suburban Thomas, who spent many of his impressionable early summers in Wiltshire) look back to their rural childhoods from a perspective of detachment and even of exile. There follow two chapters on Jefferies, one appropriately entitled 'The Art of Seeing', the other an original reading of *After London* which shows him to be seriously engaged with the larger ecological and environmental issues that have become so crucial in our own day. The next two chapters discuss first Thomas's prose in general, and then his presentation of 'the south country' in both prose and verse. His debts to and difference from Jefferies are stressed throughout. Finally (before the Golding/Naipaul epilogue), two chapters compare Hardy and Powys in terms of their presentation of a shared regional landscape which both called Wessex.

It will be a temptation for admirers of Jefferies to read the two chapters devoted to him in isolation, but that would be a serious mistake. Indeed, one of the many important aspects of the book (and one that should especially interest members of the Richard Jefferies Society) is the way Hooker treats Jefferies' work as central to the overriding concerns not merely of his own century but of ours. These include the effects of imperial power, the decline in religious belief, the relation between the sexes, as well as the more obvious social, political, and economic rural and agricultural problems. Where most previous commentators (myself included) have tended to see Jefferies as an inevitably marginal writer, emphasizing country things when cities were in the ascendancy, Hooker has boldly turned the tables, offering him as an essential witness to a critical stage in English culture and development which is still in process.

Hooker demonstrates how all these writers achieve a rich complexity of rural understanding within what he calls a 'context of loss', and simultaneously write with 'an intensity born out of loss'. In Jefferies' case, this is exacerbated by geographical distance; often he is recreating a landscape he hasn't visited for ten years. But more is involved than Jefferies' eidetic imagination. Through his agricultural journalism - undertaken, one assumes, to earn his daily bread - he acquired a mastery of the technical and economic aspects of rural life and so gained an awareness of the hard

facts of farming within a dominantly industrial society that saved him from undue idealizing and sentimentalizing of the countryside. His comprehensive and varied knowledge manifested itself in numerous ways. Thus the clinical detachment of his early accounts of agricultural labourers ultimately combined with his later visionary concerns to produce the deeply human portrayals of Roger the Reaper in 'One of the New Voters' and John Brown in 'My Old Village'.

Jefferies shares with Hardy, as Hooker shows, an intense love of nature without any belief in a deity controlling nature, and with Powys (who wrote most of his Wessex romances in the United States) a physical separation from his subject-matter that forced a powerful retrospective imagination into play. Thomas, on the other hand, turned to Jefferies for an experience he could only enjoy at second-hand, yearning poignantly for rural roots he would never have. All four writers faced a series of double-binds: they depended for their livelihood on urban readers who frequently simplified and misunderstood their writings, while their artistic temperaments produced a self-consciousness that often came into conflict with their professed subjects. Hooker comments on all these and more, stressing in particular the sad decline during their lifetimes of the rural-based local culture that ought to have sustained them.

What makes Hooker's commentary so special is the fact that he makes his observations from within the culture – or the lingering remains of the culture – that Jefferies and the others portrayed. He was also born in southern England (though he lived and worked elsewhere for several years) and is himself a distinguished poet preoccupied, to quote his earlier literary-critical titles, with 'the poetry of place' and 'the presence of the past'. The creative challenges of Jefferies, Thomas, Hardy, and Powys are no strangers to him, since he writes in the light of their example and under the shadow of their achievement. Like all his work, *Writers in a Landscape* is a book to be read slowly and deliberately. His arguments are close-packed; every word counts.

This, then, is something new in Jefferies criticism, and in the discussion of rural writers in general. Years ago, when I was beginning to develop an interest in Jefferies, Geoffrey Grigson complained grumpily that he attracted the second-rate. That was daunting, though I had to confess that I could see what he meant. Whether my own work exemplified or refuted Grigson's claim is not for me to say, but I can state with confidence that Hooker has now effectively consigned the remark to oblivion. This is *first-rate* commentary, rare at any time, but especially, I fear, in the theory-and-language-clogged 1990s. It is a matter for rejoicing that Jefferies is now authoritatively hailed as belonging in the centre of an important and very special literary tradition.

W. J. Keith

## Wheat

There was no bulletin to tell the folk of its progress, no Nileometer to mark the rising flood of the wheat to its hour of overflow. Yet there went through the village a sense of expectation, and men said to each other, 'We shall be there soon.' No one knew the day – the last day of doom of the golden race; every one knew it was nigh. One evening there was a small piece cut at one side, a little notch, and two shocks stood there in the twilight. Next day the village sent forth its army with their crooked weapons to cut and slay. It used to be an era, let me tell you, when a great farmer gave the signal to his reapers; not a man, woman, or child that did not talk of that.

From 'Walks in the Wheat-fields' (1887) in *Field and Hedgerow*.