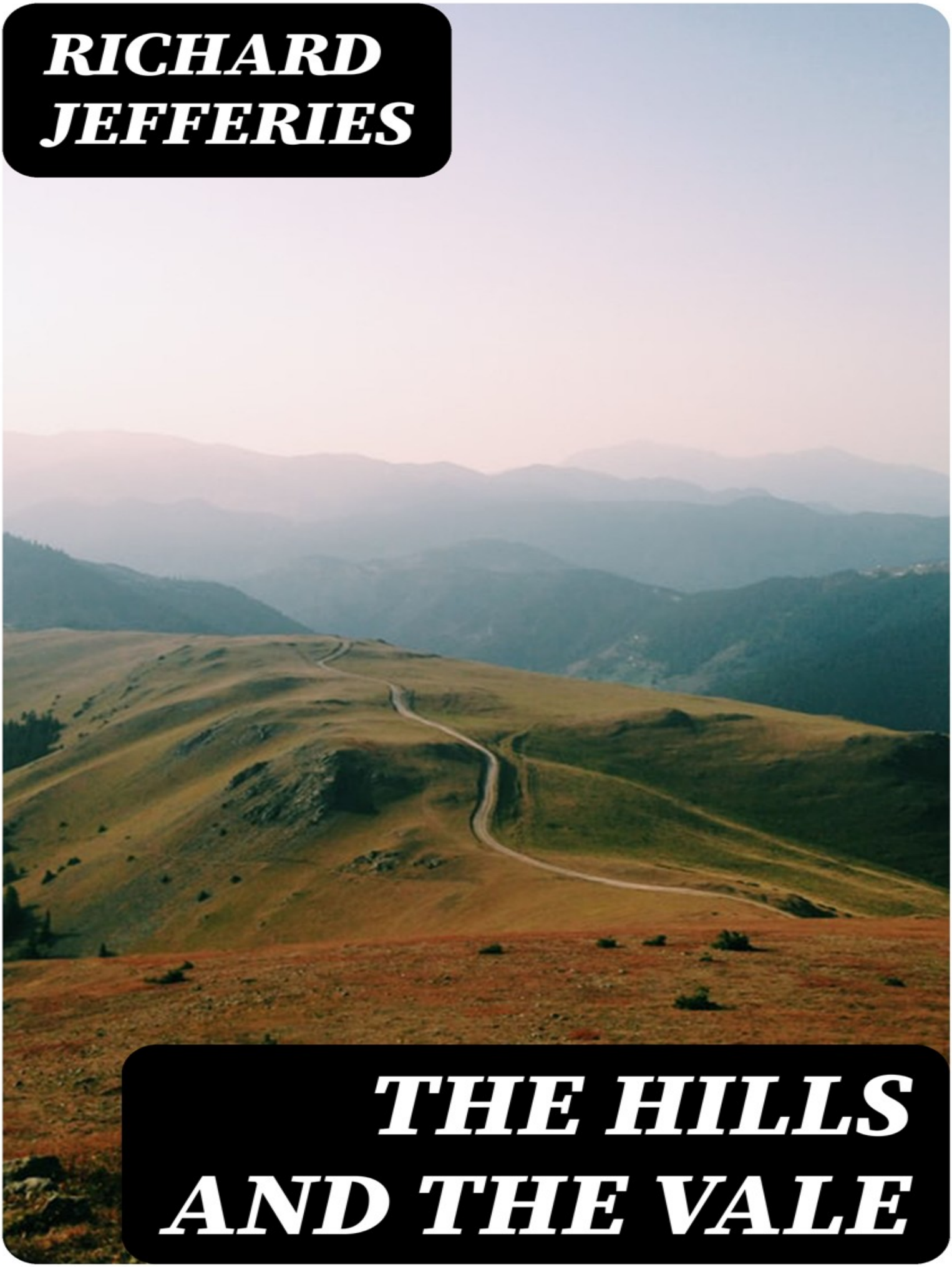
RICHARD JEFFERIES



# THE HILLS AND THE VALE

**Richard Jefferies**

# The Hills and the Vale

EAN 8596547365693

DigiCat, 2022
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# INTRODUCTION

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This book consists of three unpublished essays and of fifteen reprinted from *Longman's Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, the *New Quarterly*, *Knowledge*, *Chambers's Magazine*, the *Graphic*, and the *Standard*, where they have probably been little noticed since the time of their appearance. Several more volumes of this size might have been made by collecting all the articles which were not reprinted in Jefferies' lifetime, or in 'Field and Hedgerow' and 'Toilers of the Field,' shortly after his death. But the work in such volumes could only have attracted those very few of the omnivorous lovers of Jefferies who have not already found it out. After the letters on the Wiltshire labourer, addressed to the *Times* in 1872, he wrote nothing that was not perhaps at the time his best, but, being a journalist, he had often to deal immediately, and in a transitory manner, with passing events, or to empty a page or two of his note-books in response to an impulse assuredly no higher than habit or necessity. Many of these he passed over or rejected in making up volumes of essays for publication; some he certainly included. Of those he passed over, some are equal to the best, or all but the best, of those which he admitted, and I think these will be found in 'The Hills and the Vale.' There are others which need more excuse. The two early papers on 'Marlborough Forest' and 'Village Churches,' which were quoted in Besant's 'Eulogy,' are interesting on account of their earliness (1875), and charming enough to please those who read all Jefferies' books. 'The Story of Swindon,' 'Unequal Agriculture,' and 'Village Organization,' will be valued for their matter, and because they are examples of his writing, and of his interests and opinions, before he was

thirty. That they are partly out of date is true, but they are worth remembering by the student of Jefferies and of his times; they do credit to his insight and even to his foresight; and there is still upon them, here and there, some ungathered fruit. The later agricultural articles, 'The Idle Earth,' 'After the County Franchise,' and 'The Wiltshire Labourer,' are the work of his ripe years. There were also several papers published not only after his death, but after the posthumous collections. I have included all of these, for none of them needs defence, while 'Nature and Eternity' ranks with his finest work. The three papers now for the first time printed might have been, but are not, admitted on that ground alone. 'On Choosing a Gun' and 'Skating' belong to the period of 'The Amateur Poacher,' and are still alive, and too good to destroy. 'The Dawn' is beautiful.

Among these eighteen papers are examples from nearly every kind and period of Jefferies' work, though his earliest writing is still decently interred where it was born, in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire papers (chiefly the *North Wilts Herald*), except such as was disinterred by the late Miss Toplis for 'Jefferies Land,' 'T.T.T.,' and 'The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies.' From his early youth Jefferies was a reporter in the north of Wiltshire and south of Gloucestershire, at political and agricultural meetings, elections, police-courts, markets, and Boards of Guardians. He inquired privately or officially into the history of the Great Western Railway works at New Swindon, of the local churches and families, of ancient monuments, and he announced the facts with such reflections as came to him, or might be expected from him, in newspaper articles, papers read before the Wiltshire Archæological Society, and in a booklet on 'The Goddards of North Wilts.' As reporter, archæologist, and sportsman, he was continually walking to and fro across the vale and over the downs; or writing down what he saw, for the most part in a manner dictated by the

writing of other men engaged in the same way; or reading everything that came in his way, but especially natural history, chronicles, and Greek philosophy in English translations. He was bred entirely on English, and in a very late paper he could be so hazy about the meaning of 'illiterate' as to say that the labourers 'never were illiterate mentally; they are now no more illiterate in the partial sense of book-knowledge.' He tried his hand at topical humour, and again and again at short sensational tales. But until he was twenty-four he wrote nothing which could have suggested that he was much above the cleverer young men of the same calling. There was nothing fine or strong in his writing. His researches were industrious, but not illuminated. If his range of reading was uncommon, it gave him only some quotations of no exceptional felicity. His point of view could have given no cause for admiration or alarm. And yet he was not considered an ordinary young man, being apparently idle, ambitious, discontented, and morose, and certainly unsociable and negligently dressed. He walked about night and day, chiefly alone and with a noticeable long stride. But if he was ambitious, it was only that he desired success—the success of a writer, and probably a novelist, in the public eye. His possessions were the fruits of his wandering, his self-chosen books and a sensitive, solitary temperament. He might have been described as a clever young man, well-informed, a little independent, not first-rate at shorthand, and yet possibly too good for his place; and the description would have been all that was possible to anyone not intimate with him, and there was no one intimate with him but himself. He had as yet neither a manner nor a matter of his own. It is not clear from anything remaining that he had discovered that writing could be something more than a means of making party views plausible or information picturesque. In 1867, at the age of nineteen, he opened a description of Swindon as follows:

> 'Whenever a man imbued with republican politics and progressionist views ascends the platform and delivers an oration, it is a safe wager that he makes some allusion at least to Chicago, the famous mushroom city of the United States, which sprang up in a night, and thirty years ago consisted of a dozen miserable fishermen's huts, and now counts over two hundred thousand inhabitants. Chicago! Chicago! look at Chicago! and see in its development the vigour which invariably follows republican institutions.... Men need not go so far from their own doors to see another instance of rapid expansion and development which has taken place under a monarchical government. The Swindon of to-day is almost ridiculously disproportioned to the Swindon of forty years ago.... '

Eight years later Jefferies rewrote 'The Story of Swindon' as it is given in this book, and the allusion to Chicago was reduced to this:

> 'The workmen required food; tradesmen came and supplied that food, and Swindon rose as Chicago rose, as if by magic.'

Yet it is certain that in 1867 Jefferies was already carrying about with him an experience and a power which were to ripen very slowly into something unique. He was observing; he was developing a sense of the beauty in Nature, in humanity, in thought, and the arts; and he was 'not more than eighteen when an inner and esoteric meaning began to come to him from all the visible universe, and undefinable aspirations filled him.'

In 1872 he discovered part of his power almost in its perfection. He wrote several letters to the *Times* about the

Wiltshire labourer, and they were lucid, simple, moderate, founded on his own observation, and arranged in a telling, harmonious manner. What he said and thought about the labourers then is of no great importance now, and even in 1872 it was only a journalist's grain in the scale against the labourer's agitation. But it was admirably done. It was clear, easy writing, and a clear, easy writer he was thenceforth to the end.

These letters procured for him admission to *Fraser's* and other magazines, and he now began for them a long series of articles, mainly connected with the land and those who work on the land. He had now freedom and space to put on paper something of what he had seen and thought. The people, their homes, and their fields, he described and criticized with moderation and some spirit. He showed that he saw more things than most writing men, but it was in an ordinary light, in the same way as most of the readers whom he addressed. His gravity, tenderness and courage were discernible, but the articles were not more than a clever presentation of a set of facts and an intelligent, lucid point of view, which were good grist to the mills of that decade. They had neither the sagacity nor the passion which could have helped that calm style to make literature.

'The Story of Swindon' (*Fraser's*, May, 1875) is one of three or four articles which Jefferies wrote at that time on a subject not purely his own. As a journalist he had had to do a hundred things for which he had no strong natural taste. This article is a good example of his adaptable gifts. He was probably equal to grappling with any set of facts and ideas at the word of command. In 'coming to this very abode of the Cyclops' the *North Wilts Herald* reporter survives, and nothing could be more like everybody else than the phrasing and the atmosphere of the greater part, as in 'the ten minutes for refreshment, now in the case of certain

trains reduced to five, have made thousands of travellers familiar with the name of the spot.' This is probably due to lack not so much of skill as of developed personality. When he describes and states facts, he is lucid and forcible; when he reflects or decorates, he is often showy or ill at ease, or both, though the thought on p. 130 is valid enough. Through the cold, colourless light between him and the object, he saw and remembered clearly; short of creativeness, he was a master—or one of those skilled servants who appear masters—of words. The power is, at this distance, more worthy of attention than the achievement. The power of retaining and handling facts was one which he never lost, but it was absorbed and even concealed among powers of later development, when reality was a richer thing to him than is to be surmised from anything in 'The Story of Swindon.'

'Unequal Agriculture' (*Fraser's*, May, 1877) and 'Village Organization' (*New Quarterly*, October, 1875) belong to the same period. They describe and debate matters which are now not so new, though often as debatable. The description is sometimes felicitous, as in the 'steady jerk' of the sower's arm, but is not destined for immortality; and the picture of a steam-plough at work he himself surpassed in a later paper. But it is sufficiently vivid to survive for another generation. Since Cobbett no keener agriculturist's eye or better pen had surveyed North Wiltshire. The most advanced and the most antiquated style of farming remain the same in our own day. Whether these articles were commissioned or not, their form and direction was probably dictated as much by the expressed or supposed needs of the magazine as by Jefferies himself. His own line was not yet clear and strong, and he consciously or unconsciously adopted one which was a compromise between his own and that of his contemporaries. In fact, it is hard in places to tell whether he is expressing his own opinion or those of the farmers

whom he has consulted; and he still writes as one of an agricultural community who is to remain in it. But many of the suggestions in 'Village Organization' may still be found stimulating, and the inactivity of men in country parishes is not yet in need of further description; while the fact that 'the great centres of population have almost entirely occupied the attention of our legislators of late years' is still only fitfully perceived. It should be noticed, also, that he is true to himself and his later self, if not in his valiant asseveration of the farmer's sturdy independence, yet in the wish that there should be an authority to 'cause a parish to be supplied with good drinking water,' or that there should be a tank, 'the public property of the village.'

To 'Unequal Agriculture' the editor of *Fraser's Magazine* appended a note, saying that if England were to be brought to such a pitch of perfection under scientific cultivation as Jefferies desired, 'a few of us would then prefer to go away and live elsewhere.' And there is no doubt that he was carried away by his subject into an indiscriminate optimism, for he turned upon it sadly and with equal firmness in later life. But the writing is beyond that of the letters to the *Times*, and in the sentences—

> 'The plough is drawn by dull, patient oxen, plodding onwards now just as they were depicted upon the tombs and temples, the graves and worshipping-places, of races who had their being three thousand years ago. Think of the suns that have shone since then; of the summers and the bronzed grain waving in the wind; of the human teeth that have ground that grain, and are now hidden in the abyss of earth; yet still the oxen plod on, like slow Time itself, here this day in our land of steam and telegraph'

—in these sentences, though they are commonplace enough, there is proof that the writer already had that curious consciousness of the past which was to give so deep a tone to many of his pages later on. But in these papers, again, what is most noticeable is the practical knowledge and the power of handling practical things. Though he himself, brought up on his father's farm, had no taste for farming, and seldom did any practical work except splitting timber, he yet confines himself severely to things as they are, or as they may quickly be made to become by a patching-up. These are 'practical politics for practical men.' Consequently the clear and forcible writing is only better in degree than other writing of the moment with an element of controversy, and represents not the whole truth, but an aspect of selected portions of the truth. When it is turned to other purposes it shows a poor grace, as in 'a widespread ocean of wheat, an English gold-field, a veritable Yellow Sea, bowing in waves before the southern breeze—a sight full of peaceful poetry;' and the sluggish, customary euphemism of phrases like 'a few calves find their way to the butcher' is tedious enough.

'The Idle Earth' (*Longman's*, December, 1894), 'After the County Franchise' (*Longman's*, February, 1884), and 'The Wiltshire Labourer' (*Longman's*, 1887), belong to Jefferies' later years. 'The Idle Earth' was published only after his death, but, like the other two, was written, probably, between 1884 and 1887. He was no longer writing as a practical man, but as a critical outsider with an inside knowledge. 'The Idle Earth' is an astonishing curiosity—an extreme example of Jefferies' discontent with things as they are. 'Why is it,' he asks, 'that this cry arises that agriculture will not pay?… The answer is simple enough. It is because the earth is idle one-third of the year.' He looks round a January field and sees 'not an animal in sight, not a single machine for making money, not a penny being turned.' He

wishes to know, 'What would a manufacturer think of a business in which he was compelled to let his engines rest for a third of the year?' Then he falls upon the miserable Down-land because that is still more idle and still less productive. 'With all its progress,' he cries, 'how little real advance has agriculture made! All because of the stubborn, idle earth.' It is a genuine cry, to be paralleled by 'Life is short, art long,' and by his own wonder that 'in twelve thousand written years the world has not yet built itself a House, unfilled a Granary, nor organized itself for its own comfort,' by his contempt for 'this little petty life of seventy years,' and for the short sleep permitted to men.

The editor of *Longman's* had to explain that, in publishing 'After the County Franchise,' he was not really 'overstepping the limit which he laid down in undertaking to keep *Longman's Magazine* free from the strife of party politics, because it might be profitable to consider what changes this Bill will make, when it becomes law, in the lives and the social relations of our rural population.' It was true that Jefferies was no longer a party politician. He was by that time above and before either party. He is so still, and the reappearance of these no longer novel ideas is excusable simply because Jefferies' name is likely to gain for them still more of the consideration and support which they deserve, for it may be hoped that our day is ready to receive the seed of trouble and advance contained in the modest suggestion which he believed to be compatible with 'the acquisition of public and the preservation of private liberty.'

> ['We now govern our village ourselves;] why should we not possess our village? Why should we not live in our own houses? Why should we not have a little share in the land, as much, at least, as we can pay for?… Can an owner of this kind of

> property be permitted to refuse to sell? Must he be compelled to sell?'

Twenty-five years ago Jefferies, knowing that neither land nor cottages were to be had, that there was no security of tenure for the labourer, hoped for the day when 'some, at least, of our people may be able to set up homes for themselves in their own country.' He believed that 'the greater his freedom, the greater his attachment to home, the more settled the labourer,' the firmer would become the position of labourer, farmer, and landowner. Yet an advanced reformer of our own day—Mr. Montague Fordham in 'Mother Earth'—has still to cry the same thing in the wilderness; and it is still true that 'you cannot have a fixed population unless it has a home, and the labouring population is practically homeless.' On the other hand, it should be remembered that Jefferies also says: 'Parks and woods are becoming of priceless value; we should have to preserve a few landowners, if only to have parks and woods.'

These later articles are far more persuasive than their predecessors, for here there is no doubt, not merely that they are sincere, but that they are the unprejudiced opinion of the man as well as of the agriculturist. He has ceased to be concerned only with things as they are, or as they may be made to-morrow. He allows himself to think as much of justice as of expediency, of what is fitting as well as of what is at once possible. The phrases, 'Sentiment is more stubborn than fact,' 'Service is no inheritance,' 'I do not want any paupers,' 'I should not like men under my thumb,' 'Men demanding to be paid in full for full work, but refusing favours and petty assistance to be recouped hereafter;… men with the franchise, voting under the protection of the ballot, and voting first and foremost for the demolition of the infernal Poor Law and workhouse system'—these simple

phrases fall with peculiar and even pathetic force, in their context, from the mystic optimist whom pain was ripening fast in those last years. Even here he uses phrases like 'the serious work which brings in money' and commends 'push and enterprise' as a substitute for 'the slow plodding manner of the labourer.' But these are exceptional. As to the writing itself, of which this is an example,

> 'By home life I mean that which gathers about a house, however small, standing in its own grounds. Something comes into existence about such a house, an influence, a pervading feeling, like some warm colour softening the whole, tinting the lichen on the wall, even the very smoke-marks on the chimney. It is home, and the men and women born there will never lose the tone it has given them. Such homes are the strength of a land'

—it remains simple; but by the use of far fewer words, and of fewer orator's phrases, its unadorned directness has almost a positive spiritual quality.

But these agricultural essays, good as they were, and absorbing as they did all of Jefferies' social thoughts to the end of his life, became less and less frequent as he grew less inclined and less able to adapt his mind and style to the affairs of the moment.

In the same year as 'The Story of Swindon' he published 'Village Churches' and 'Marlborough Forest' (*Graphic*, December 4 and October 23, 1875). These and his unsuccessful novels remain to show the direction of his more intimate thoughts in the third decade of his life. They are as imperfect in their class as 'The Story of Swindon' is perfect in its own. They are the earliest of their kind from Jefferies' pen which have survived. He is dealing already

with another and a more individual kind of reality, and he is not yet at home with it in words. He approaches it with ceremony—with the ceremony of phrases like 'the great painter Autumn,' 'a very tiger to the rabbit,' 'the titles and pomp of belted earl and knight.' But here for the first time he is so bent upon himself and his object that he casts only an occasional glance upon his audience, whereas in his practical papers he has it continually in view, or even ready to jog his elbow if he dreams. The full English hedges, which he condemns as an agriculturist, he would now save from the modern Goths; he can even be sorry for the death of beautiful jays. Here, for the first time, it might occur to a student of the man that he is more than his words express. He does not see Nature as he sees the factory, and when he and Nature touch there is an emotional discharge which blurs the sight, though presently it is to enrich it. As yet we cannot be sure whether he is perfectly genuine or is striving for an effect based upon a recollection of someone else—probably it is both—when he writes:

> 'The heart has a yearning for the unknown, a longing to penetrate the deep shadow and the winding glade, where, as it seems, no human foot has been';

when he speaks of the '*visible* silence' of the old church, or exclaims:

> 'To us, each hour is of consequence, especially in this modern day, which has invented the detestable creed that time is money. But time is not money to Nature. She never hastens.… '

But already he is expressing a thought, which he was often to repeat in his maturity and in his best work, when he says of the church-bell that 'In the day when this bell was made,

men put their souls into their works. Their one great object was not to turn out 100,000 all alike.'

It was in the next year, 1876, that he began to think of using his observation and feeling in a 'chatty style,' of setting down 'some of the glamour—the magic of sunshine, and green things, and clear waters.' But it was not until 1878 that he succeeded in doing so. In 'The Amateur Poacher' and its companions, there was not between Jefferies and Nature the colourless, clear light of the factory or the journalist's workshop, but the tender English atmosphere or, if you like, that of the happy and thoughtful mind which had grown up in that atmosphere.

'Choosing a Gun' and 'Skating' belong to the period, if not the year, of 'The Amateur Poacher.' In fact, the passage about the pleasure of having the freedom of the woods with a wheel-lock, is either a first draft of one of the best in that book, or it is an unconscious repetition. Here again is a characteristic complaint that 'the leading idea of the gunmaker nowadays is to turn out a hundred thousand guns of one particular pattern.' The suggestion that some clever workman should go and set himself up in some village is one that has been followed in other trades, and is not yet exhausted. The writing is now excellent of its kind, but for the word 'Metropolis' and the phrase 'no great distance from' Pall Mall. The negligent—but slowly acquired—conversational simplicity captures the open air as calmly and pleasantly as the humour of the city dialogue.

'Skating' is slight enough, but ends with grace and an unsought solemnity which comes more and more into his later writing, so that in 'The Spring of the Year' (*Longman's*, June, 1894), after many notes about wood-pigeons, there comes such a genuine landscape as this:

> 'The bare, slender tips of the birches on which they perched exposed them against the sky. Once six alighted on a long birch-branch, bending it down with their weight, not unlike a heavy load of fruit. As the stormy sunset flamed up, tinting the fields with momentary red, their hollow voices sounded among the trees.'

These notes for April and May, 1881, were continued in 'The Coming of Summer,' which forms part of 'Toilers of the Field.' This informal chitchat, addressed chiefly to the amateur naturalist, became an easy habit with Jefferies. The talk is of the plainest and pleasantest here, and full of himself. With his 'I like sparrows,' he was an older and tenderer man than in 'The Gamekeeper' period. The paper gives some idea of his habits and haunts round about Surbiton before the fatal chain of illnesses began at the end of this year. Personally, I like to know that it was finished on May 10, 1881, at midnight, with 'Antares visible, the summer star,' very low in the south-east above Banstead Downs, and Lyra and Arcturus high above in the south, if Jefferies was writing at Tolworth, as presumably he was. This paper is to be preferred to 'Birds of Spring'—likeable mainly for the pages on the chiff-chaff and sedge-warbler—which does much the same thing, in a more formal manner, for the instruction of readers of *Chambers's* (March, 1884), who wished to know about our 'feathered visitors.'

'Vignettes from Nature' were posthumously published in *Longman's* (July, 1895). They abound in touches from the depth and tenderness of his nature, and when they were written Jefferies had passed into the most distinct period of his life—the period which gave birth to his mature ideas, and, in particular, to 'The Story of My Heart.' The light which he had carried about with him since his youth—a light so faint that we cannot be sure he was aware of it in retrospect

—now leaped up with a mystic significance. Professor William James, in 'Varieties of Religious Experience,' describes four marks by which states of mind may be recognized as mystical. The subject says that they defy expression. They are 'states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect… and, as a rule, they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time,' because the mystic believes that 'we both become one with the Absolute, and we become aware of our oneness.' They 'cannot be sustained for long… except in rare instances half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day.' And when the mystic consciousness has set in, 'the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and, indeed, sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power.' Most of the striking cases in Professor James's collection occurred out of doors. These marks may all be recognized in Jefferies' record of his own experience—'The Story of My Heart.' Yet it was, in the opinion of a very high authority—Dr. Maurice Bucke, in 'Cosmic Consciousness'—an imperfect experience, and his state is described as 'the twilight of cosmic consciousness.' Dr. Bucke gives as the marks of the cosmic sense—a subjective light on its appearance; moral elevation; intellectual illumination; the sense of immortality; loss of the fear of death and of the sense of sin; the suddenness of the awakening which takes place usually at a little past the thirtieth year, and comes only to noble characters (*e.g.*, Pascal, Blake, Balzac, and Whitman); a charm added to the personality; a transfiguration of the subject in the eyes of others when the cosmic sense is actually present. Jefferies appears to have lacked the subjective light and the full sense of immortality. 'If,' says Dr. Bucke, 'he had attained to cosmic consciousness, he would have entered into eternal life, and there would be no "seems" about it;' while he finds positive evidence against Jefferies' possession of the perfect cosmic sense in his

'contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best.' The sense varied in intensity with Jefferies, and in its everyday force was not much more than Kingsley's 'innate feeling that everything I see has a meaning, if I could but understand it,' which 'feeling of being surrounded with truths which I cannot grasp amounts to indescribable awe sometimes.'

Cosmic consciousness, the half-grasped power which gave its significance to his autobiography, to 'The Dawn,' 'The Sun and the Brook' (*Knowledge*, October 13, 1882), 'On the Downs' (*Standard*, March 23, 1883), 'Nature and Eternity' (*Longman's*, May, 1895), and many other papers, may have been [Pg xxviii] the faculty for which Jefferies prayed in 'The Story of My Heart,' and to which he desired that mankind should advance. In Dr. Bucke's view, an imperfectly supported one, men with this faculty are becoming more and more common, and he thinks that 'our descendants will sooner or later reach, as a race, the condition of cosmic consciousness, just as long ago our ancestors passed from simple to self consciousness.'

In Jefferies the development of this sense was gradual. Phrases suggesting that it is in progress may be found in earlier books—in the novels, in 'Wood Magic' and 'Bevis'—but 'The Story of My Heart' is the first that is inspired by it; and after that, all his best work is affected either by the same fervour and solemnity, or by its accompanying ideas, or by both. It is to be detected in many sentences in 'Vignettes,' and in the concluding prayer, 'Let the heart come out from the shadow of roofs to the open glow of the sky… '—even in the plea to the mechanics in 'A King of Acres' (*Chambers's*, January, 1884) not to 'pin their faith to any theory born and sprung up among the crushed and pale-faced life of modern time, but to look for themselves at the sky above the highest branches… that they might

gather to themselves some of the leaves—mental and spiritual leaves—of the ancient forest, feeling nearer to the truth and soul, as it were, that lives on in it.' It is in the aspiration and hope—in the sense of 'hovering on the verge of a great truth,' of 'a meaning waiting in the grass and water,' of a 'wider existence yet to be enjoyed on the earth'—in the 'increased consciousness of our own life,' gained from sun and sky and sea—it is everywhere in 'Sun and Brook' and 'On the Downs.' It suffuses the sensuous delicacy and exuberance and the spiritual joy of 'Nature and Eternity.' That paper belongs to, and in a measure corrects, 'The Story of My Heart.' There is less eloquence than in the autobiography, and a greater proportion of that beautiful simplicity that is so spiritual when combined with the characteristic cadence of Jefferies at his best. The mystic has a view of things by which all knowledge becomes real—or disappears—and all things are seen related to the whole in a manner which gives a wonderful value to the least of them. The combination of sensuousness and spiritual aspiration in this and other essays produces a beauty perhaps peculiar to Jefferies—often a vague beauty imperfectly adumbrated, as was the meaning of the universe itself in his mood of 'thoughts without words, mobile like the stream, nothing compact that can be grasped and stayed: dreams that slip silently as water slips through the fingers.' In 'Nature and Eternity' this is all the more impressive because Coate Farm and its fields, Jefferies' birthplace and early home, is the scene of it. That beauty haunts the last four essays of this book as it haunts 'The Story of My Heart,' like a theme of music, always a repetition, and yet never exactly the same. 'The Dawn' is one of the most beautiful things which Jefferies wrote after his awakening. The cadences are his best—gentle, wistful, not quite certain cadences, where the effect of the mere sound cannot be detached from the effect of the thought hovering behind the sound. How they kindle such a passage

as this, where Jefferies again brings before us his sense of past time!—

> 'But though so familiar, that spectral light in the silence has never lost its meaning, the violets are sweet year by year though never so many summers pass away; indeed, its meaning grows wider and more difficult as the time goes on. For think, this spectre of light—light's double-ganger—has stood by the couch of every human being for thousands and thousands of years. Sleeping or waking, happily dreaming, or wrenched with pain, whether they have noticed it or not, the finger of this light has pointed towards them. When they were building the pyramids, five thousand years ago, straight the arrow of light shot from the sun, lit their dusky forms, and glowed on the endless sand.... '

The whole essay is delicately perfect—as free from the spiritual eloquence of the autobiography and from the rhetoric of the agricultural papers as from the everyday atmosphere of earlier work and the decoration of the first outdoor essays. It is pure spirit. Take any passage, and it will be seen that in thought and style Jefferies' evolution is now complete. He has mounted from being a member of a class, at first undistinguishable from it, then clearly more enlightened, but still of it, and seeing things in the same way, up to the position of a poet with an outlook that is purely individual, and, though deeply human, yet of a spirituality now close as the grass, and now as the stars. The date of 'The Dawn' is uncertain. It may have been 1883, the year of 'The Story of My Heart,' or it may have been as late as 1885. This book, therefore, contains, like no other single volume, the record of Jefferies' progress during about ten of his most important years. It was not for nothing that

Jefferies, man and boy, had gone through the phases of sportsman, naturalist, and artist, and always worshipper, upon the hills, 'that he lived in a perpetual commerce with external Nature, and nourished himself upon the spirit of its forms.' Air and sun so cleaned and sweetened his work that in the end the cleanness and sweetness of Nature herself become inseparable from it in our minds.

# CHOOSING A GUN

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The first thought of the amateur sportsman naturally refers to his gun, and the questions arise: What sort of a gun do I want? Where can I get it? What price shall I pay? In appearance there can be no great difficulty in settling these matters, but in practice it is really by no means easy. Some time since, being on a visit to the Metropolis, I was requested by a friend to get him a gun, and accepted the commission, as M. Emile Ollivier went to war, with a light heart, little dreaming of the troubles that would start up in the attempt to conscientiously carry it out. He wanted a good gun, and was not very scrupulous as to maker or price, provided that the latter was not absolutely extravagant. With such *carte blanche* as this it seemed plain-sailing, and, indeed, I never gave a second thought to the business till I opened the door of the first respectable gunmaker's shop I came across, which happened to be no great distance from Pall Mall. A very polite gentleman immediately came forward, rubbing his hands as if he were washing them (which is an odd habit with many), and asked if there was anything he could do for me. Well, yes, I wanted a gun. Just so—they had one of the largest stocks in London, and would be most happy to show me specimens of all kinds. But was there any special sort of gun required, as then they could suit me in an instant.

'Hum! Ah! Well, I—I'—feeling rather vague—'perhaps you would let me see your catalogue——'

'Certainly.' And a handsomely got-up pamphlet, illustrated with woodcuts, was placed in my hands, and I began to

study the pages. But this did not suit him; doubtless, with the practice of his profession, he saw at once the uncertain manner of the customer who was feeling his way, and thought to bring it to a point.

'You want a good, useful gun, sir, I presume?'

'That is just it'—shutting the catalogue; quite a relief to have the thing put into shape for one!

'Then you can't do better than take our new patent double-action so-and-so. Here it is'—handing me a decent-looking weapon in thorough polish, which I begin to weigh in my hands, poise it to ascertain the balance, and to try how it comes to the present, and whether I can catch the rib quick enough, when he goes on: 'We can let you have that gun, sir, for ten guineas.'

'Oh, indeed! But that's very cheap, isn't it?' I thoughtlessly observe, putting the gun down.

My friend D. had mentioned a much higher amount as his ultimatum. The next instant I saw in what light my remark would be taken. It would be interpreted in this way: Here we have either a rich amateur, who doesn't care what he gives, or else a fool who knows nothing about it.

'Well, sir, of course it's our very plainest gun'—the weapon is tossed carelessly into the background—'in fact, we sometimes call it our gamekeeper gun. Now, here is a really fine thing—neatly finished, engraved plates, first choice stock, the very best walnut, price——' He names a sum very close to D.'s outside.

I handle the weapon in the same manner, and for the life of me cannot meet his eye, for I know that he is reading me, or thinks he is, like a book. With the exception that the gun is a trifle more elaborately got up, I cannot see or feel the

slightest difference, and begin secretly to suspect that the price of guns is regulated according to the inexperience of the purchaser—a sort of sliding scale, gauged to ignorance, and rising or falling with its density! He expatiates on the gun and points out all its beauties.

'Shooting carefully registered, sir. Can see it tried, or try it yourself, sir. Our range is barely three-quarters of an hour's ride. If the stock doesn't quite fit your shoulder, you can have another—the same price. You won't find a better gun in all London.'

I can see that it really is a very fair article, but do not detect the extraordinary excellencies so glibly described. I recollect an old proverb about the fool and the money he is said to part with hastily. I resolve to see more variety before making the final plunge; and what the eloquent shopkeeper thinks is my growing admiration for the gun which I continue to handle is really my embarrassment, for as yet I am not hardened, and dislike the idea of leaving the shop without making a purchase after actually touching the goods. But D.'s money—I must lay it out to the best advantage. Desperately I fling the gun into his hands, snatch up the catalogue, mutter incoherently, 'Will look it through—like the look of the thing—call again,' and find myself walking aimlessly along the pavement outside.

An unpleasant sense of having played a rather small part lingered for some time, and ultimately resolved itself into a determination to make up my mind as to exactly what D. wanted, and on entering the next shop, to ask to see that, and that only. So, turning to the address of another gunmaker, I walked towards it slowly, revolving in my mind the sort of shooting D. usually enjoyed. Visions of green fields, woods just beginning to turn colour, puffs of smoke hanging over the ground, rose up, and blotted out the bustling London scene. The shops glittering with their

brightest goods placed in front, the throng of vehicles, the crowds of people, faded away, the pace increased and the stride lengthened as if stepping over the elastic turf, and the roar of the traffic sounded low, like a distant waterfall. From this reverie the rude apostrophes of a hansom-cabman awoke me—I had walked right into the stream of the street, and instead of the awning boughs of the wood found a whip upheld, threatening chastisement for getting in the way. This brought me up from imagination to logic with a jerk, and I began to check off the uses D. could put his gun to on the fingers. (1) I knew he had a friend in Yorkshire, and shot over his moor every August. His gun, then, must be suited to grouse-shooting, and must be light, because of the heat which often prevails at that time, and renders dragging a heavy gun many miles over the heather—before they pack—a serious drawback to the pleasure of the sport. (2) He had some partridge-shooting of his own, and was peculiarly fond of it. (3) He was always invited to at least two battues. (4) A part of his own shooting was on the hills, where the hares were very wild, where there was no cover, and they had to be knocked over at long distances, and took a hard blow. That would require (*a*) a choke-bore, which was not suitable either, because in covers the pheasants at short ranges would not unlikely get 'blown,' which would annoy the host; or (*b*) a heavy, strong gun, which would take a stiff charge without too much recoil. But that, again, clashed with the light gun for shooting in August. (5) He had latterly taken a fancy to wild-fowl shooting by the coast, for which a very hard-hitting, long-range gun was needed. It would never do if D. could not bring down a duck. (6) He was notorious as a dead shot on snipe—this told rather in favour of a light gun, old system of boring; for where would a snipe or a woodcock be if it chanced to get 200 pellets into it at twenty yards? You might find the claws and fragments of the bill if you looked with a microscope. (7) No delicate piece of workmanship would do, because he was careless of his gun,