

Editorial

It is one of those strange coincidences that in this issue we have a write-up of the Plaque Ceremony to Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson at the Broadwater Cemetery in Worthing last spring, both of whom had great influence on HW. It is part of the HW legend that whilst convalescing in Folkestone in 1918, browsing in a bookshop he found a copy of Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* and read in rapt attention to the very end, the book being for him 'a revelation of total truth' and which set him on his own writing path.

Many people have shown the parallels between the writings of Jefferies and HW (particularly Dr J.W. Blench 'The Influence of Richard Jefferies upon Henry Williamson' Pt I, DUJ, Dec '86, Pt II, DUJ, June '87), and it is not necessary to reiterate them here. But there is in the Literary Estate Archive a manuscript notebook/diary started in 1920, which contains very real evidence that Richard Jefferies was uppermost in his mind at the time he was writing the first version of *The Flax of Dream*.

On the cover is written: 'Henry William Williamson, Naturalist and Disciple, of THE MASTER RICHARD JEFFERIES', whilst inside it states

"I am in eternity NOW"
Richard Jefferies
"I am in eternity now"
Henry Williamson

} "The spirit of Jefferies
communes with the
subconscious spirit of
Williamson in this Journal"
1920

A few pages into the text, following a passage dated 24th March about searching for Love and the impossibility of finding such, Henry writes: 'In death, perhaps . . . oh, Richard Jefferies send thy spirit near me always. I *do* talk to you in the silence when man is sleeping — I feel you in the wind — I *know* I do; but you, poor one, are dead: and who appreciated you?'

Whilst the entry for April 21st states: 'Today came a letter from Curtis Brown Ltd, "I have read with great interest your book *Flax of Dream* . . . it is beautifully written and a good story. Much, however, depends on the ending . . ." (I only sent books I and II). That is encouraging at all events.'

Two days later on April 23rd: 'At last! 'The Flax of Dream' is ended! Personally, I think the ending is great — it is so unexpected — but it is done to avoid any bathos. It suddenly fades away into nothingness . . .' And on May 10th: 'Took the last two Books of the 'Flax' to Curtis Brown, Ltd . . .'

This was not the actual published version for HW refers to a re-writing at the publisher's request later that year, but most possibly to the unpublished early work so ably discussed by Dr Blench in his three-part 'The Apprenticeship of a Novelist', *HWS Journal*, Nos. 17, 18, 19. Then, after some fearful discussion that if the work is not published he will not be able to achieve his heart's desire of moving out into the country, he writes: 'Jefferies wrote fine prose because he *could not* get into the heart of the forests.'

On 17th January 1921 HW writes: 'I have been rereading Jefferies' *Story of My Heart*. I think that it is the greatest book ever written . . .', and a month later on 21st February: 'Publication for *The Beautiful Years* is settled with Collins, the contract signed, the £25 in advance of Royalties paid over.'

References to Jefferies continue but become sparser throughout this Notebook which ends in midsummer 1924.

AW