

THE LIFE OF THE FIELDS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649634514

The Life of the Fields by Richard Jefferies

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RICHARD JEFFERIES

**THE LIFE OF
THE FIELDS**

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THE
LIFE OF THE FIELDS

By RICHARD JEFFERIES

AUTHOR OF "THE GAMEKEEPER AT HOME," "NATURE NEAR LONDON," "RED
DEER," "THE STORY OF MY HEART: MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY," ETC.



London
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1884

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NOTE.

My thanks are due to those Editors who have so kindly permitted me to reprint the following pages:—"The Field-Play" appeared in *Time*; "Bits of Oak Bark" and "The Pageant of Summer," in *Longman's Magazine*; "Meadow Thoughts" and "Mind under Water," in *The Graphic*; "Climatis Lane," "Nature near Brighton," "Sea, Sky, and Down," "January in the Sussex Woods," and "By the Exe," in *The Standard*; "Notes on Landscape Painting," in *The Magazine of Art*; "Village Miners," in *The Gentleman's Magazine*; "Nature and the Gamekeeper," "The Sacrifice to Trout," "The Hovering of the Kestrel," and "Birds Climbing the Air," in *The St. James's Gazette*; "Sport and Science," in *The National Review*; "The Water-Colley," in *The Manchester Guardian*; "Country Literature," "Sunlight in a London Square," "Venice in the East End," "The Pigeons at the British Museum," and "The Plainest City in Europe," in *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

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THE LIFE OF THE FIELDS.

THE FIELD-PLAY.

I. UPTILL-A-THORN.

“ Save the nightingale alone ;
She, poor bird, as all forlorn,
Lean'd her breast uptill a thorn.”

Passionate Pilgrim.

SHE pinned her torn dress with a thorn torn from the bushes through which she had scrambled to the hay-field. The gap from the lane was narrow, made more narrow by the rapid growth of summer; her rake caught in an ash-spray, and in releasing it she “ranted” the bosom of her print dress. So soon as she had got through she dropped her rake on the hay, searched for a long, nail-like thorn, and thrust it through, for the good-looking, careless hussy never had any provision of pins about her. Then, taking a June rose which pricked her finger, she put the flower by the “rant,” or tear, and went to join the rest of the hay-makers. The blood welled up out of the scratch in the finger more freely than would have been sup-

posed from so small a place. She put her lips to it to suck it away, as folk do in all quarters of the earth yet discovered, being one of those instinctive things which come without teaching. A red dot of blood stained her soft white cheek, for, in brushing back her hair with her hand, she forgot the wounded finger. With red blood on her face, a thorn and a rose in her bosom, and a hurt on her hand, she reached the chorus of rakers.

The farmer and the sun are the leading actors, and the hay-makers are the chorus, who bear the burden of the play. Marching, each a step behind the other, and yet in a row, they presented a slanting front, and so crossed the field, turning the "wallows." At the hedge she took her place, the last in the row. There were five men and eight women; all flouted her. The men teased her for being late again at work; she said it was so far to come. The women jeered at her for tearing her dress—she couldn't get through a "thornin'" hedge right. There was only one thing she could do, and that was to "make a vool of zum veller" (make a fool of some fellow). Dolly did not take much notice, except that her nervous temperament showed slight excitement in the manner she used her rake, now turning the hay quickly, now missing altogether, then catching the teeth of the rake in the buttercup-runners. The women did not fail to tell her how awkward she was. By-and-by Dolly bounced forward, and, with a flush on her cheek, took the place next to the men. They teased her too, you see, but there was no spiteful malice in their tongues. There are some natures which, naturally meek, if much condemned, defy that condemnation, and will-