

**THE STORY OF MY
HEART: MY
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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The story of my heart: my autobiography by Richard Jefferies

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RICHARD JEFFERIES

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MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES

AUTHOR OF 'FOOT: THE STORY OF A BOY,' 'ANABELLE AT THE FAIR,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY R. W. WAITE

LONDON
DUCKWORTH & CO.
8, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

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LOAN STACK

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1872

PREFACE

THE title of this book is 'The Story of my Heart: my Autobiography,' but it is not an autobiography in the ordinary sense of the word. It contains no history of the events of Richard Jefferies' life. It is in no way concerned with his birth or his marriage, his actions or his fortunes. All that is known of these has been told in 'The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies,' by Walter Besant. *Sunt lachrymæ rerum*, as the ancient poet sang, and for those who have tears to shed, what story is there more sure to draw them than that tale of heroic struggle against the agony of disease, of genius unappreciated until it was too late, of lofty aspirations and noble thought cut short all too soon?

But none of these things are dwelt on in 'The Story of my Heart.' Surely it is one of the most singular books that man of genius ever wrote. It is well described by its title. It is an outpouring of

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Jefferies' innermost soul. Like many another, he found himself at odds with the world. He saw the beauty of the land, the grandeur of the sea, the interest of life—above all of human life—but he was not satisfied. He longed for more beauty, a fuller grandeur, a deeper interest. This feeling completely mastered him, and in 'The Story of my Heart' he poured out with what strength and what skill he possessed the intensity of his longing. In republishing such a book it will not be thought out of place to gather together such few scraps of his writing as remain which seem to throw light on its genesis and its meaning.

On June 22, 1883, Jefferies wrote as follows:—

SAVERNAKE, LORNA ROAD, WEST BRIGHTON:

June 22, 1883.

DEAR SIR,—Thank you for the concession—I will write the story-sketches and send them. Mentally, the peasant paper is written: I mean it is composed; the MS. shall reach you in good time. I have just finished writing a book about which I have been meditating seventeen years. I have called it 'The Story of my Heart: an Autobiography,' and it really is an autobiography, an actual record of thought. After so much thinking it only makes one small volume—there are no words wasted in it. I do not know whether or no you would

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care to see the MS.; if so, I will forward it—I do not mean for the Magazine. . . . I wonder if you would like my autobiographical confessions.

I remain, faithfully yours,
RICHARD JEFFERIES.

C. J. LONGMAN, Esq.

Jefferies was born in 1848; so that he must have begun thinking about this book when he was eighteen years old.

On June 27, 1883, he wrote:—

I have much pleasure in sending you the MS. by letter post. My book is a real record—unsparing to myself as to all things—absolutely and unflinchingly true.

The book was accepted, and published in due course.

On November 3, 1883, he wrote:—

SAVERNAKE, LORNA ROAD, WEST BRIGHTON;
November 3, 1883.

DEAR SIR,—Some time since I received a circular asking for an analysis of 'My Autobiography' for your 'Notes on Books.' I have made several futile attempts to concentrate in a short note what I intended to convey in the volume. I find it impossible to do so. I have therefore endeavoured to place myself as it were outside the book, and to look at it

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as a stranger might. But even to do this I have been obliged to make two short quotations, which I hope is not contrary to your rules. My description of the book is very imperfect; still, it is the best I could do, for, in fact, to describe it properly would need another book. If any of your Readers can write a clearer description for me I should be much obliged.

This explanation is necessary to account for my delay in furnishing the required note.

I remain, faithfully yours,

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

C. J. LONGMAN, ESQ.

The analysis he drew up, which was printed in 'Notes on Books' of November 30, 1883, was as follows:

'This book is a confession. The Author describes the successive stages of emotion and thought through which he passed, till he arrived at the conclusions which are set forth in the latter part of the volume. He claims to have erased from his mind the traditions and learning of the past ages, and to stand face to face with nature and with the unknown. The general aim of the work is to free thought from every trammel, with a view of its entering upon another and larger series of ideas than those which have occupied the brain of man so many centuries. He believes that there is a whole world of ideas outside and beyond those which now exercise us.

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'The Author's ideas will be best illustrated by the following extracts:—

"I remember a cameo of Augustus Cæsar—the head of the emperor is graven in delicate lines, and shows the most exquisite proportions. It is a balanced head, a head adjusted to the calmest intellect. That head when it was living contained a circle of ideas, the largest, the widest, the most profound current in his time. All that philosophy had taught, all that practice, experiment, and empiricism had discovered, was familiar to him. There was no knowledge in the ancient world but what was accessible to the Emperor of Rome. Now at this day there are amongst us heads as finely proportioned as that cut out in the cameo. Though these living men do not possess arbitrary power, the advantages of arbitrary power—as far as knowledge is concerned—are secured to them by education, by the printing-press, and the facilities of our era. It is reasonable to imagine a head of our time filled with the largest, the widest, the most profound ideas current in the age. Augustus Cæsar, however great his intellect, could not in that balanced head have possessed the ideas familiar enough to the living head of this day. As we have a circle of ideas unknown to Augustus Cæsar, so I argue there are whole circles of ideas unknown to us."

'For himself, for the individual, the Author desires physical perfection—he despises external circumstances.

"It is in myself that I desire increase, profit, and exaltation of body, mind, and soul. The surroundings, the clothes, the dwelling, the social status, the circumstances are to me utterly indifferent. Let the floor of the room be bare, let the