

Richard Jefferies launches an American Collector's Passion

Philip R. Bishop

It was in 1985 that I had begun what some may call a 'change in life' or others a 'career crisis'. I still think upon it as an awakening. The activities of that year led me upon a path which included writing a good bit of poetry and epistles, composing music for piano, examining mystic traditions, and reading Walt Whitman and Thoreau. It was also the year the I discovered the Mosher Press¹ through one book which greatly excited me: Richard Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart*. 'My god' I exclaimed to myself, 'he's saying some of the things I'm feeling'. I so loved the little book that I bought eight more titles by British authors, all from the Mosher Press, and all from what was called the 'Old World Series'. That was the start of a love affair with the Mosher Press which would lead to assembling what is now the world's largest research collection (ca. 4,500 items) of all things related to this Portland, Maine publisher who produced an exquisite array of 783 publications including those issued in fourteen different series from 1891-1923, all reflecting England's national literature and book design, primarily issued for an American public. This affair of the heart also blossomed into contributions of many essays and articles on some aspects of the Mosher Press and led to a major publication: the bio-bibliography, *Thomas Bird Mosher—Pirate Prince of Publishers*, co-published by the Oak Knoll Press and The British Library in 1998. While sponsoring a scholarly website on the Press, I continue to publish and to assist scholars in aspects of their work, or with loaning material for public exhibitions. This all started, however, with just that one little book, *The Story of My Heart* by Richard Jefferies.

For readers unacquainted with the Mosher Press publication of some of Richard Jefferies' works, here are the particulars:

Books published:

1. *Bits of Oak Bark and Meadow Thoughts* (in the Brocade Series) 1900, 1901, 1907 (Bishop 45 - 45.2)
2. *Hours of Spring and Wild Flowers* (Brocade Series), 1899, 1900, 1903, 1910 (Bishop 57-157.3)
3. *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* (Vest Pocket Series) 1903, 1904, 1907

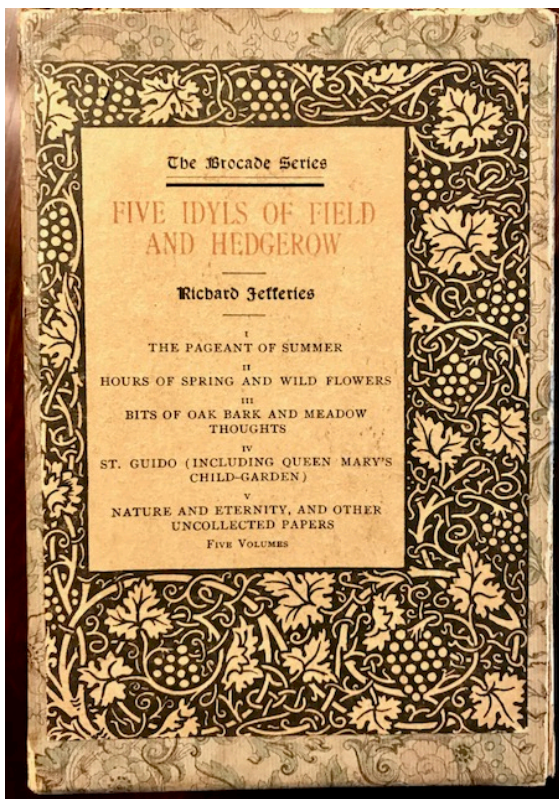
¹ For internet access to the Mosher Press website use www.ThomasBirdMosher.net

(Bishop 210-210.2)

4. *Nature and Eternity: With other Uncollected Papers* (Brocade Series) 1902, 1907 (Bishop 269-269.1)
5. *The Pageant of Summer* (Brocade Series) 1896, a 2nd in 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1904, 1910 (Bishop 282-282.9)
6. *The Pageant of Summer* (Vest Pocket Series) 1905, 1909 (Bishop 283-283.1)
7. *Saint Guido* (along with Dr. Brown's *Queen Mary's Child-Garden* (Brocade Series) 1901, 1903, 1908 (Bishop 340-340.2)
8. *The Story of My Heart—My Autobiography* (Old Word Series) 1898, 1900, 1905, 1909 (Bishop 388-388.3) N.B.: 1909 ed. with new Preface confirming RJ's Free-Thinker status, largely negating Mosher's previous Preface. In a letter to Dr. A.J. Marks (Bishop collection), dated 9 May 1910, Mosher wrote: '... I have just issued a new edition of "The Story of My Heart" by Jefferies. The only difference is that I have substituted a new and improved preface which states the real condition of his mind at the close of his life. It has been heretofore supposed that he went back to the Christian faith.'

Mosher offered his customers the five Brocade Series of books in a special matching brocade cloth covered, cabinet-style box with the outside of the box bearing the label 'Five Idyls of Field and Hedgerow' (pictured below).





Appearances in *The Bibelot*, Mosher's little literary magazine:

1. 'Sentences from The Story of My Heart' in Vol. II, March 1896, [iv], 57-80. (Bishop 19)
2. 'Saint Guido' in Vol. IV, July 1898, pp. 219-255. (Bishop 21)
3. 'The Field-Play' in Vol. VI, July 1900, pp. 215-254. (Bishop 23)

Minor appearances:

1. Brief selection in Fiona Macleod's *A Little Book of Nature Thoughts* (Vest Pocket) 1908 (Bishop 21i)
2. Quote from Jefferies in 'The Mosher Books' catalogue for 1910 (Bishop 254)

The Mosher Press Collection contains not only the publications of Thomas Bird Mosher in regular paper editions and in the more limited Japan vellum issuances, but additionally many of Mosher's publications printed on 'pure' vellum. There are sub-collections including the Mosher Books bound in fine decorated leather

bindings, books from Mosher's personal library, association copies, hand-illuminated copies of the Mosher Books, manuscripts and correspondence, reference books, and a wide variety of ephemera and office related material. An example of the latter is a large scrapbook volume containing a tribute poem which to my knowledge has never been published. The author of this poem is only designated by his/her initials 'J.M.B.' and, after a good bit of research, still remains a mystery. A picture of the original holograph poem pasted into the Mosher Press's scrapbook volume, along with my transcription of the same, appears on the next page.

To Richard Jefferies

When thou didst touch with fingers soft with love
The first wan snowdrop when the snow was gone,
Or when, o'er bowered with the silver tone
Of thrushes in the lime trees arched above
The old park lane, or, by the hedged highway,
Thou didst inspire the fresh, damp, forest breath,
The wisdom and the wonder and the faith
Thou knewest, and the sunshine of the day.
The mystery of the undying past,
The fragrance of crushed flowers vanished,
The oneness of these years and all the past
Of years to come and years long dim and dead,
Was plain unto thine eyes, until at last,
Thou sleptest, while the timespan dreamless sped.

J. M. B.

Thomas Bird Mosher's holograph appears just above the poem. He asks some recipient: 'I like this, don't you? Can you decypher the last line? T'. Mosher only used the initial 'T' (for Tom) when writing to his closest friends, but to suggest whom that might have been is only conjecture. So, the poem's appearance is mysterious all-round. The only thing definite is that Mosher never used it in any of his publications, and a small team of scholars has been unable to locate its appearance elsewhere. Incidentally, the folio scrapbook volume also contains paper clippings of articles written on Richard Jefferies, and reviews of Mosher's books by Jefferies.

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Can you decipher the last line?

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Another item of note is Mosher's copy of his *Standard Diary and Daily Reminder* for 1901. In this volume, taken along to England, Mosher noted his meeting with Mrs. Jessie Jefferies on Thursday, 18 April 1901 in London. On 4 January 1902 she wrote to Mosher indicating:

I cannot tell you how pleased I was to get your letter & the exquisite little volumes that accompanied it. They are really beautiful. I have forwarded one set to my sister in law (Mrs Billing) & she is very delighted & thinks it a 'most dainty little edition' which indeed it is. What pleasure it would have given my Husband could he have foreseen his work would have been admired & appreciated in your country... Phyllis & I often talk of the pleasant time we spent with Mrs Mosher & yourself in London...

²

In an unsigned 16 February 1911 letter (draft?) from Mosher to the editors of *The Publishers' Circular* he states:

Something was paid also by me to Mrs. Richard Jefferies not because I was obliged to pay it but because I wanted to do so. She had no rights as I understand it that even an English publisher was bound to respect, much less an American. (Houghton Library, MS Am 1096-1054)

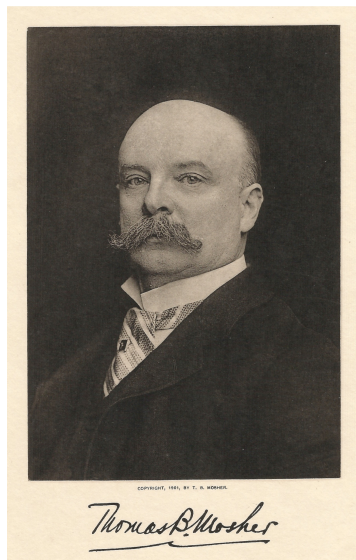
There have been other Richard Jefferies related materials that have come into the collection over the years. One is a volume by Edward R. Bigelow entitled *Walking: A Fine Art...* (Salem, MA: Cassino, [1907]) inscribed to Mr. T.B. Mosher 'In a special token of appreciation of his interest in Thoreau and Jefferies... Mar 21, 1911' accompanied by a letter from Bigelow inviting him to become a member of The Agassiz Association of which Bigelow was president. Speaking of Mosher's library, it should be noted that there is record that he had seventeen London imprints authored by Jefferies (plus ten unidentified titles), and nine biographical books on Jefferies. A copy of *Field and Hedgerow* (London, 1889) had an Autograph Manuscript Poem 'My Chaffinch' laid into this volume which contained the printed version of that poem. Walter Besant's *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (London, 1888) is recorded as containing a letter from Besant to Mosher.

There have also been some Jefferies/Mosher titles which have been specially rebound and are now in the collection. A copy of *The Pageant of Summer* (1905) was bound in full dark green gilt decorated morocco by Frances Tomlinson with the inscription 'With love to Helena Gavin from M.F.F. The little volume was bound by my friend Frances Tomlinson, M'. Tomlinson was of La Jolla, California.

² Houghton Library, MS Am 1096-753; here quoted with family permission. Complete text of letter reproduced on p.140.

She was a pupil of Helen B. Haskell (later Noyes) of New York and of Emily Preston (also of New York) who was a student of Cobden-Sanderson. Another is a copy of *The Story of My Heart* in three-quarter morocco bound by the Harcourt Bindery of Boston, Massachusetts for the Kaufmann Department Store in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But the most important binding is that which brought my Mosher collecting full circle because it involved a copy of *The Story of My Heart*.

From 1988 to 1992 I had an ongoing correspondence with the then foremost collector of the Mosher Press: Norman H. Strouse, author of the Mosher biography, *The Passionate Pirate* (Bird & Bull Press, 1964). Strouse collected a wide variety of books, including bindings from the Doves Press, but he always turned back to the Mosher Press as his bibliophilic preference and it was the last collection to leave his premises after the final period of his debilitating illness. I found out that my later letters were read to him by his daughter at his bedside. He died on 19 January 1993. Afterwards his daughter selected something from his Mosher collection which she sent me as a memento of her father. Unbeknownst to her the book would have far more meaning than she could surmise, being a copy of Richard Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* specially bound for Hatchards in full leather with hearts on the spine and covers. As mentioned at the outset, that title was the *very first* Mosher book that I ever bought, so getting that same title on Norman's behalf was like Norman sending a sign from the great beyond.



Mosher in 1901