

THE FORBEARS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES.

SO much misconception hangs round the youth and early manhood of Richard Jefferies, so many incorrect statements have been made thereon, that it is felt by those in the closer circle of blood relationship that it is time the mistakes should be cleared away at once and for aye. In nearly all—if not quite all—the notices that have appeared of Richard Jefferies, much stress has been laid on the fact of his poverty. It is true that a superfluity of this world's goods was not the portion of this particular family; but the home was a comfortable one, a freehold farm, and until later years, when Richard was able to fend for himself, there was a sufficiency for all needs. Too little appreciation of the author's father and forbears generally has been given. It was through his father and grandfather that the literary aptitude can be traced. Both sides of the house, in fact, were noted for their mental activity, as I hope to show.

In the year 1738 was born at Draycott Folliatt, Wilts. Richard Jefferies, who in 1772 married Fanny Luckett at Lechlade, Gloucestershire. Their early married life was passed at Rodbourne Cheney, Wilts. The house is still standing where James Luckett and John were born; the only other child, a daughter Fanny (who died unmarried) was born at Lechlade. The father appears to have been a man of force of character, while his wife, from traditions carefully preserved in the family, must have been a woman not only of parts, but of means and refinement, her many journeys to Bath being noted at a time when only the wealthy and high-born frequented that "city of waters." She died in 1805, while her husband survived her twenty years. He increased his possessions by purchase of land in Swindon and the neighbourhood,



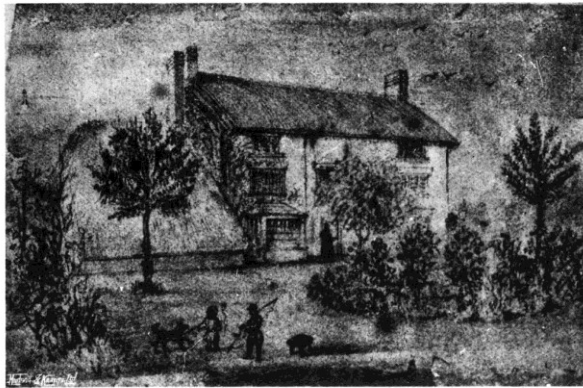
RICHARD JEFFERIES.
(As a young man.)

acquiring the chief milling and baking business in the town—then a simple market town, possessing no historical or architectural features—and ultimately coming to reside there. Situated on the top of a high hill, and intensely healthy, it was the cradle of a particularly hardy race. The records relating to this Richard Jefferies that have been preserved show that he was a shrewd man of business. He objected to pay more than he thought justifiable to the Rev. C. Tudway, vicar of Chiseldon, Wilts, in the matter of tithes and tenths. I have before me a letter from the latter gentleman, dated March 19th, 1805, time-stained, but in a beautifully clear handwriting, wherein he says:

Not having heard from you respecting your Tythes I beg to know in writing by the bearer whether you are inclined to pay me Mr. Brown's valuation of your composition for Tythes due on Monday next, £6 16 6. If not I must be under the necessity of requiring you to bring your Tenth measure of milk entire without fraud or diminution to the church porch at Chiseldon according to the Ecclesiastical Law.

Then there is another shorter note, dated November 23rd, 1815, in which the Rev. Mr. Tudway "begs Mr. Jefferies to inform him whether he is satisfied with the new value of composition as paid by his agent Mr. Brown, and if so, to pay the first half-year's instalment to him on Monday next, between the hours of 11 and 1 o'clock."

In July of the same year there is a formal notice served on the contumacious Richard, which evidently had not much effect, for under date April 8th, 1817, there is a bill of costs headed "A Modus Question in Chancery," too long to quote *in extenso* from Mr. Crowdy of Highworth, in which it is stated that Mr. Jefferies' portion of the bill of costs, which came to £52 10s., was £8 15s., "being 1 part in 6 of the above expense." The only known scrap of writing



COATE FARM.

(After an old sketch. The figures are supposed to be Dick and Harry.)

attributed to this stalwart yeoman, Richard Jefferies, written clearly and firmly when eighty-two years of age, I must quote verbatim:

I, Richard, Jefferies, am willing to pay Mr. Tudway the accustomed sum which I before have paid, 14/6 yearly, 11th May, 1820.

And overleaf:

Composition for Tythes due to the vicar of Chiseldon valued in June, 1815 at £5 16 6 per ann: by Mr. Brown, and agreed to by all the Farmers at that time. Five years' composition up to Lady Day, 1820. £29 2 6.

Evidently his son, John Jefferies, inherited the firm and obstinate character of his father, for there is a further note from a Mr. Bullock, the then vicar of Chiseldon, *re* the same troublesome "tythe." This vicar seems to have been of a milder disposition than Mr. Tudway, "being unwilling to go to law with my parish," for on January 25th, 1832, the Rev. J. T. Bullock tries to make a compromise and says:

I will meet you halfway and consent to receive £3 8 3 yearly. I shall be glad to hear your determination as soon as possible, because in the event of your refusing my offer, which I beg to state is without any detriment to my claim of £6 16 6, I shall be necessitated to proceed at once to obtain my just rights.

Again Mr. Jefferies is requested to send him the sum of "£3 6 0 due as four years' tithe on Tuesday, the 14th, 1833." Under it in my grandfather's writing appears:

J. Jefferies' composition 4 years at 14/6 a year: £2 18 0

The poor vicar had to accept that sum; for his receipt dated May 24th, 1833, reads:

Received of Mr. Jefferies the sum of £2 18 0 for tithes under a supposed Modus for two years.

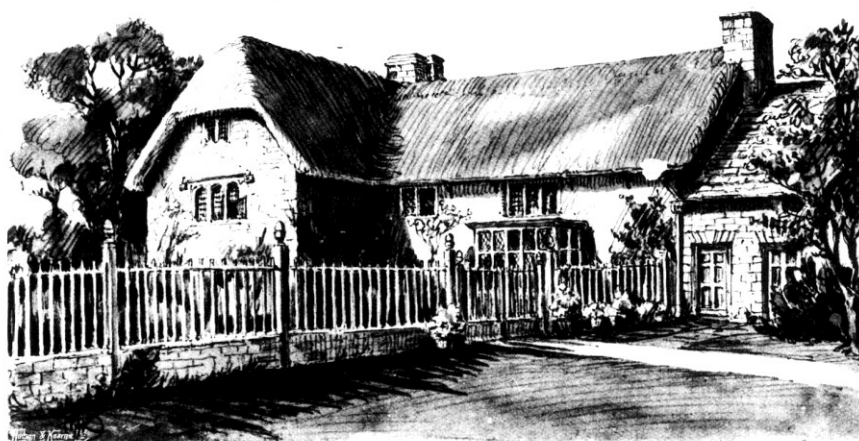
THOMAS BULLOCK.

I have quoted thus lengthily to show how strong are the chains of heredity, the determined nature of the great-grandfather being reproduced in his son John, again in James Luckett Jefferies his grandson, and not a whit the less in his great-grandson, John Richard Jefferies, the author. Richard Jefferies' eldest son, James Luckett, was possessed of eccentric habits, and subject to violent fits of temper, yet was not without recurrent phases of repentance. Tradition has it that he was a terror to children and dressed in a style to cause remark if nothing else—boots unlaced, trousers hitched up in a way peculiar to the owner, and shaggy hair and beard. Still, there are one or two persons who remember him in their early youth as one, if not exactly to be loved, whose peculiarities have been too darkly limned by a recent writer. His sister Fanny, who died many years before his death, must have been even more of a care and anxiety to my grandfather and his wife, with whom they both lived and died. The youngest son John, born May 7th, 1784, inheriting the tastes of his mother and, undoubtedly, her intellect,

for, in the house, which was a large old-fashioned one, built round three sides of a square courtyard, lived the eldest son in his apartments and the elderly maiden aunt in hers. The naturally fresh and active young life of the children was checked by the presence of those who cared not for, and could not understand, the exuberance of youth.

When John Jefferies returned from London—and he engaged the whole inside of a coach for his family—he took up the burden of his uncongenial occupation manfully, but it was none the less ever distasteful to him. He was a man of strong will and marked individuality. He felt it, therefore, his duty to carry on a business he loathed for his children's sake, turned his back for ever on the great city, though he never ceased to love all things pertaining to books and literature. His father disliked banking his money, and hidden in various parts of the old, rambling house large sums were found. With these the son built two houses in Swindon—private residences then—now long since turned into shops. The farm, which figures so largely in the history of Richard Jefferies, the author, had been for some time in the possession of the family, and when the children of John and Fanny Jefferies were growing up there was never any lack of means. In fact, had my grandfather been a business man and seized the opportunity, when the Great Western Railway made Swindon their headquarters, to obtain some of the contracts offered to him, he might have become very rich. But he would have nothing to do with any "interloping train" (the new railway was a mile and a-half away from the town, down field-bordered lanes), and so the tide was not taken at the flood. He never entered a train in his life, or returned to London after leaving it in 1816. He was very greatly set against all railway men, holding off for a long time from the acceptance of one as his son-in-law; but, eventually, coming to regard that one as the prop and stay of the family. His line of action was peculiar, as he was a man of intelligence and parts, "a prodigy of learning" (as a lady still living remembers him), a great lover of the country and its sights and sounds. He was extremely fond of driving across the uplands near the town to see the waving, golden corn; and at an age of much over seventy would climb up two flights of stairs in a daughter's house to sit at an upper window and gaze his fill at the swelling undulations (now long since blocked from view by houses), which extended for miles across a fertile green valley to an answering chalk ridge. As a child I remember distinctly two large bookcases—how we sigh for them now, absolutely typical pieces of Chippendale as they were!—filled with books and MSS., which occasionally I was allowed to handle; but, alas! in 1868, owing to some family arrangement, not really understood until too late, all but some score of books, including the three-volume Family Bible, was scattered to the winds, a dealer coming from Bristol and purchasing the lot! Treasured possessions of the family are still

preserved among some of us in the shape of old china, ancient deeds, silver, furniture, etc., which have of late years greatly increased in value even to the possessors, as the craze for old things has grown. The books in my possession, to me, are priceless. They are, as in the case of Nelson's "Fasts and Feasts," annotated by my grandfather and contain notes on various past events of interest. It was grievous to have parted with the others. A relative suggested that Richard should have a portion at least of the library as the inheritor of his grandfather's literary tastes; but the proposition fell through, probably from the reason that the contents of the house were practically left to the daughter, who had married a Scotchman, with the proverbial hard head for a bargain. This same John Jefferies loved reading and reflection, and though endowed with the warm



THE ORIGINAL HOME OF THE JEFFERIES FAMILY.

(After an old sketch.)

early went to London and entered the firm of Mr. Taylor, printer and publisher, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. Here he remained for some years, married, and with his wife and four children returned to Wiltshire in 1816, owing to the wish of his father, and the inaptitude of his brother to manage the business, which at that time was an excellent one. Four more children were born in Swindon, the first one being my own mother. John Jefferies and his wife must have had a particularly trying time,

temper of the family, was a man of singular generosity and kindness under the crust of reserve. When he disliked he did it thoroughly; but he was a conscientious upholder of Church and State, proud of his children's leaning towards things intellectual and literary. For many years prior to his death he distributed on his own birthday to each of his numerous grandchildren a sovereign apiece. He would give a house here, a meadow there, when he wished, to "even things

up" to his own children. His wife, "Fanny Ridger," a bright, hand some, amiable woman, to whom her children were devoted, died in 1858, while the summons did not come for him until April, 1868. The eldest boy, James Luckett (father of Richard, the author), born in 1816, felt the effects of the repression alluded to, never got on well with his father, and in 1837 left home for America. Hearing, through an outside friend of the family, that unless he came back, the farm—this very one of

the creeping poverty that eventually laid its hand on the home-
stead, resulting in the final break-up of the place, was the dreamy
unpractical mind of its owner; he hated the mart and the market-
place, shunned his fellow-men, if things went awry let them slide,
content to live like one of his own farm hands, provided
only God's earth was his to enjoy in his own way. Then,
again, this man was, for his time and circumstance, an
educated man. It is true he laughed and joked with the

cottagers, he spoke their
language, and, apparently,
thought their thoughts and
the villager then was of a
lower type than is to be found
now, even in rural Wiltshire
—but this was a deliberate
intention with him; he drowned
thought and regret for wasted
opportunity by living down to
his neighbours. Those of us
who know can look back, and
are unable to tell on the fingers
of one hand men in the same
sphere of life as James Jefferies
with a quarter of his innate
refinement, knowledge, or
education. The generality of
farmers in that part were un-
lettered, ignorant, hard-drinking
men; many of them made
money—and this, I own, added
to the bitterness of the Jefferies
outlook of life—but there are
letters still in the possession of
the family, showing what this
man, who has been classed in
most people's minds as a mere
rustic, really was. When Sir
Walter Besant wrote his
famous "Eulogy," time was



THE SUN INN BEFORE THE FIRE.

(After an old sketch.)

Coate—would go to an elder sister's husband, he returned and took possession of it. A cordial understanding was, unfortunately, never established between father and son; the former, perhaps, expected more deference and respect than he received, while the latter, inheriting also the family trait of obstinacy, and feeling sore at the constant coolness and disapproval of his actions, gradually drifted from the old home and scarcely ever visited his father. He married Elizabeth Gyde, daughter of a former colleague of his father's at Taylor's, a town-bred woman with a beautiful face and a pleasure-loving soul, kind and generous to a fault, but unsuited to a country life. Therefore, the grandfathers on both sides were of literary bent; one of Mr. Gyde's sons was a clever engraver on wood, and all of them were more or less gifted. James Luckett Jefferies had two brothers; one, the youngest, also named Richard, died young, aged ten; the other, John Luckett, passed away at thirty three. The latter—a youth of rare promise—developed into an artist of no mean powers; architecture, music and singing held great charms for him and he excelled in all. Many are the choice little pencil sketches, fine-line drawings and water-colours treasured by the family, together with his guitar and many volumes of music copied with a skilful pen. His sisters were all exceptionally educated women for the time, the eldest and fourth daughters being specially endued with a high order of intelligence and capability.

James Luckett Jefferies, the father of Richard, has been always placed on a line with the ordinary small tenant farmer, but this is a very grave error, as the possession of land in all time has been productive of very different sentiment to that arising from occupation by tenancy. That the original name of the hamlet was pronounced "Cote" may be taken for granted, as in an interesting bill dated June, 1805, "Mr. R. Jefferies is Dr. to B. Morland to the amount of £29 6 2 respecting the purchase of land at Cote." The farmhouse in which Richard Jefferies was born was the freehold of his father, presented to him on his marriage by his father, John Jefferies, and anyone who ever lived or even visited at the old home, would know how every individual inch of the ground, every sapling tree, every flowering shrub or nest-hiding hedgerow was loved and treasured by its owner. The elder man was handicapped from the start by insufficient working capital. The land was his—a little Naboth's vineyard, much coveted by surrounding landowners—but it was not large enough to run a big dairy on—the grass was too good for sheep—there was no corn land, and the days of poultry-farming were not. It was not large enough to keep a family upon without a balance at the bank for emergencies, and this James Jefferies never had, though he knew there was plenty of money lying idle in the paternal account, and he, the eldest, the only living son, could not touch it, nay, was grudging even a loan from it! Therefore, I wish it emphatically to be understood that James Luckett Jefferies was not born a poor man, though in manhood he was a heavily handicapped one. The real reason of

young for some of us, and the thought of putting down in printed words the refutation of such things as were hurtful or misleading had not borne fruit. This paper is written purely with the intention of rebutting the accusation that Richard Jefferies was an offshoot of poverty, and that his exceptional gifts were the more extraordinary on that account; and to give Richard's father his due as the one who trained his son to notice and admire the beauties of Nature. I do not think special notice has been taken of the sort of home this was before the wearing years of creeping want had taken the heart out of everything and everybody. Originally a thatched cottage, the larger portion of the dwelling-house had been added by John Jefferies; but the extravagant, one might say the refined, tastes of the son are shown by the improvements he gradually made. The long and handsome stone wall, topped by a wide coping, we all know about, was put up by Richard Jefferies' father. It was he who brought a water-finder with his witch-hazel to the farm, and who made the long tunnel through the fields to bring the water into the house (by the by, this water is gone from the old home now, and the cottagers used to say "ould Mr. Jaffries, he stopped it, afore he went away!"). It was he who rooted up all the rough, old cider apples, and stocked the orchard with the sweet, delightful codlins and russets it now possesses; he planted the pear trees on the walls, the Siberian crab and the yew tree on the lawn, and the luscious, and then little-known, egg plums; the box hedges, in Richard's youth just at their prime, taller than a man and a dense cover for birds. He scattered the musk seed, so that each year the delicate-scented little plant would crop up between the paving-stones under the "parlour" window. He built a ha-ha (wild extravagance! it is levelled now with the outer field) and a summer-house, round and thatched, coloured inside an egg-shell blue, and paved in exact, radiating lines with round, tide-washed pebbles (kidney-stones as he called them), for which he sent for miles a hired cart. His garden produce was always of the best; no one else ever grew such red carrots, yellow parsnips, juicy cucumbers! He planted horse-chestnuts and hiberns. (I remember how he cut down the whole hedge, in a rage, one day, because the men from the New Town, as it was called, had rifled the nuts in the early morning!) Then his gates! They must still be standing as a memento of his handiwork! No one has mentioned his gates except his son in his luridly untruthful, pathetically truthful, "Amaryllis at the Fair." Yet it is true, as he says there, that he spent days together on the manufacture of one gate. I can remember yet the smell of the freshly-sawn wood and the long talks that went on between master and man as they rested together on the sunny side of the hedge!

John Richard Jefferies, the author, was born November 6th, 1849, at Coate Farm, near Swindon. Very fond of reading and walking, Richard early developed a love for solitude, a trait

inherited from several ancestors on his father's side. As a boy and youth he had a wonderfully clear complexion, very fair hair, widely-opened prominent blue eyes, somewhat large mouth with slightly pendulous lower lip, well-shaped nose—on the whole a handsome lad, though spoiled by a tendency to stoop. Not particularly amiable, somewhat supercilious, not caring much, if at all, for outdoor games; fond of shutting himself up at the top of the house near the "cheese-room," where he spent much of his time in the production of blood-curdling romances. He invented, too, a sort of roller-skate, and many is the perilous journey about the "cheese-room" we made on these rudimentary articles. He was educated fitfully. Never very strong, as a boy he alternated between Coate and Sydenham,

the extremes of country and town life—one as free as air, the other dainty, elegant, closed in. He attended the only boys' school in Swindon more or less regularly. Times are changed, but I do not think he ever greatly distinguished himself as a pupil, neither was he popular with the boys. As I write this I distinctly remember him, then a boy of ten or twelve, reading to his grandfather in the "little parlour" of the old house in High Street, Swindon. He would call "gaol" goal, and, though sharply pulled up, persisted in it, and eventually was ordered out of the room in disgrace. This early exhibition of contumacy makes one frame a parallel in one's own mind between himself and his autocratic namesake and progenitor, Richard Jefferies.

JEFFERIES LUCKETT.

Jefferies Lockett was the non-de-plume of Fanny Catherine Hall – Richard Jefferies' first cousin. Her parents were William and Martha Hall. Martha was the sister of RJ's father James Lockett Jefferies. Fanny wrote from "Longford", Cotham Side, Bristol.