

RICHARD JEFFERIES AND THE ENGLISH FARM WORKER

A Classic of English Farming

Hodge and his Masters. By Richard Jefferies. Edited and with an Introduction by Henry Williamson. Pp. 340. (London : Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1946.) 10s. 6d. net.

IN 1872 there appeared in *The Times* a long and remarkable letter describing the life of a Wiltshire farm labourer. It was so different from the current ideas on the subject that it was drastically criticized by the *Liverpool Mercury* : "A Mr. Richard Jefferies, dating from Coate Farm, Swindon, has managed somehow or other to get two columns and a quarter of the *Times* to air his notions in, and very funny notions they seem to be—there is no doubt that he has moved about amongst hundreds of labourers ; but that he has ever adequately seen them in the sense of understanding and knowing them we should be very slow to believe". But Jefferies was not crushed, and seven years later, in 1879, he wrote a series of articles on country life which were published in book form in 1880 under the title "Hodge and his Masters". For some reason or other the book was not re-issued until 1937. Messrs. Faber and Faber have now re-published it with an introduction by Mr. Henry Williamson, who has wisely reprinted the original *Times* letter and the *Liverpool Mercury's* criticism thereon.

The book was well worth reprinting, for it gives a graphic picture of the Wiltshire countryside in the 1870's, written in Jefferies' usual limpid style and with his unerring instinct for getting at the essentials and yet including sufficient detail to make the picture vivid. He attempts no running narrative ; each chapter is self-contained and almost independent of the rest, and there is no final summing up. But all the same, the account is wonderfully clear, and all of Hodge's 'masters' are described in their turn. Hodge is, of course, the farm worker ; the masters are the farmer, the squire, the parson, the County Court officials, and at the end, the Board of Guardians, for Hodge, much against his will, ended his days in the workhouse ; his wife was dead, his children had emigrated, and the Guardians were precluded from giving outdoor relief by the circumstances that Hodge had saved a little and become part owner of his cottage.

The book was written in 1879—the worst season on record because of heavy persistent rain from hay-time to harvest and beyond. The results were disastrous : the corn gave wretchedly low yields of very poor quality, the land became smothered in weeds, hay became scarce and very dear, the grass was sodden and of desperately poor feeding value, livestock were ill-nourished and disease was widespread. All this is vividly described, but not too gloomily, for there is a stolidity about the countryman, which Jefferies faithfully reproduces, that makes him slow to recognize disaster. Had 1879 stood alone, the damage might well have been repaired, but it was followed by a run of bad seasons and, worse still, wheat began to pour in from North America in unregulated flow, and meat followed suit, so that prices fell and many farmers were ruined. The chapter "Going Downhill" is one of the saddest in the book.

The vividness with which the essential features are described gives the book a very modern feeling.

Over and over again one is tempted to forget that it was written in 1879 and not in 1946. The stress laid on the need for mechanization, the talks about artificial manures and hay-driers, the man who, having acquired wealth in the city, sets up as a farmer and proceeds to introduce business methods, but becomes for half the countryside an object of lawful plunder—and loses heavily in consequence—all these appear just as they would if Jefferies had been writing to-day. Happily the modern changes in the countryside, some good, some bad, have not destroyed its fundamental good features. Perhaps most important of all, the sense of responsibility to the land, the live-stock and the community remains ; fortunately indeed for us, for it has meant that the output per man-year has increased since 1939 by some 17 per cent, and throughout all that critical period there was no threat of action by the workers against the community. No other primary producers can show such a record : if they could, the nation would not be in its present predicament.

The book can be strongly recommended to all lovers of the English countryside. If a second edition is called for, we hope that editor or publishers will tell us more about Richard Jefferies, for, sad to say, many young people to-day know very little about him ; some indeed have never heard of him. But his work deserves to live.

E. JOHN RUSSELL

A TEXT-BOOK FOR ANÆSTHETISTS

The Chemistry of Anaesthesia

By Dr. John Adriani. Pp. ix + 530. (Oxford : Blackwell Scientific Publications, Ltd., 1946.) 35s. net.

MEDICAL men seeking special qualifications as anaesthetists are expected to acquire a good knowledge of the basic sciences on which anaesthesia depends. A pair of text-books on the physics and chemistry of anaesthesia for use by intending anaesthetists has been published by Blackwell Scientific Publications of Oxford. The author of the present volume, John Adriani, is director of the department of anaesthesia in the Charity Hospital of Louisiana at New Orleans.

The first hundred pages are devoted to inorganic chemistry, including the physical and chemical properties of the gases present in the atmosphere, the principles of flowmeters, absorption apparatus and other equipment used by anaesthetists.

The next two hundred pages give a detailed account of the chemical properties of general anaesthetics and of other drugs used by anaesthetists, including hypnotics, opium alkaloids, local anaesthetics, drugs affecting the autonomic system and analeptics. There are a number of tables giving the chemical formulæ of allied drugs in a form which makes it easy to compare them with one another. This section of the book will be useful for reference, but it is to be hoped that anaesthetists will not be expected to memorize all these detailed facts, most of which will be of little direct use in the practice of their art.

The last two hundred pages deal with the pharmacology of general anaesthesia, with a chapter on local anaesthesia and another on enzymes, vitamins and hormones. This section will be more valuable to anaesthetists than the rest of the book and may interest readers of *Nature*. The various theories of