

RICHARD JEFFERIES IN SURREY

A paper by Cyril F. Wright, Hon. Secretary of the Richard Jefferies Society, presented at the Wyvern Theatre Arts Centre, Swindon at the Society's meeting on Monday December 5th. 1977.

In 1877, a letter was written by Mr. John Gardner of Swindon to Mr. John Woolford, landlord of The Spotted Cow, at Coate, and formerly Farmer, of Snodshill. It reads as follows:

“ Dear Sir,

Kindly give me the address of Mr. Richard Jefferies, late of Victoria Street in the town. Hope Mrs. Woolford and yourself are well.”

The letter is dated May 17th. and, although we do not know the reason behind this request, it is important, because Richard Jefferies, his wife, Jessie and their two-year-old son, Harold, had left their house in Victoria Street (now Victoria Road) in the February of that year, one hundred years ago.

Mr. Gardner and other friends and relations might have wondered at the sudden departure of Mr. and Mrs. Jefferies from the district where both of them were born, after just two years spent in the modest stone-built residence with the rounded window-tops, like little Norman arches, the upper floor of which, over a florist's shop, remains unchanged, and bears a tablet, recording his stay in tins the second of their several temporary homes.

In terms of distance, they had gone a long way, most of those 79 miles “To London,” chipped low down on¹ milestone near Richard's old home at Coate, as recorded in “Meadow Thoughts.”¹

“No one else seemed to be conscious of the breadth that separated the place from the great centre, but it was, perhaps, that consciousness which deepened the solitude to me.”

It must have been a wrench to exchange the solitudes of Coate even for the unhurried, and quite familiar market town of Old Swindon; a greater effort must have been needed to forsake Swindon for the proximity of the great centre, that was London. Ambition, the increasing recognition of his talent as a writer, the need to support his wife and family were sufficient stimuli, and using the house of his favourite Aunt Ellen at Sydenham as a base he explored the outer suburbs, no doubt with many an estate agent's brochure in his hand, until they decided upon a plain, three-storied terrace-house on the road out from Surbiton to Ewell in Surrey.

Edward Thomas went along on the electric tram to look for it in 1908, getting local colour for his biography of Jefferies, and discovered it with a small poor fir, behind the railings of the front garden. He wrote that it had been overtaken by London for some time, though its front windows had a swelling, leafy view of Hounslow, Richmond Park, and Wimbledon Common

on one side, and of Hook, Chessington, Claygate, and their woods, on the other. This was 26 years after the Jefferies' had left the district.

Seventy years later, I tried to locate it, and felt glad that both Jefferies and Thomas had been spared the depressing sight of a Chinese Take-Away shop on bearing the number 296 Ewell Road, part of a row of small modern shops, possibly adapted from the former terrace houses. It is not just overtaken, it is swallowed up, submerged, almost obliterated by the insatiable Greater London.

One can however, from Jefferies' own descriptions, and from contemporary maps, visualise the attractions which influenced the choice of No. 2 Woodside, as it was more agreeably called at that time, to a young writer, passionately in love with the countryside, and equally absorbed in his determination to extend his growing reputation.

For one thing, it had to be accessible to a railway station, on a direct line to the metropolis, where he could visit publishers and editors, museums, markets, art galleries, agricultural shows. Well what was a mile walk to an energetic, long-legged young man, who was used to tramping great distances in the country? It was not an unpleasant walk either, through an area of what would today be called low-density development, of large, square, grey-walled, houses, standing in their own spacious and secluded grounds, the very epitome of a title associated with the name of Surbiton.

"The trees are all in leaf now," wrote Jefferies, in "The Spring of the Year"² "except the Turkey oaks - there are some fine young Turkey oaks, by Oak Hill Path - and the black poplars." There are still oak trees near the path that slopes down to Surbiton Station, skirting a green sylvan oasis, saved from the grounds of a house known as The Wood, part of which has been made into a bird sanctuary.

Some years ago it was proposed by Mr. Hockley Clarke, ornithologist and writer who lives at Surbiton, that the sanctuary be called "Jefferies' Wood," but this was not adopted at the time on the feeble objection that most people would think that the name referred to the notorious, but unfortunately better-known hanging judge. The Society has initiated efforts to have this suggestion implemented by the erection of a tablet at Oakhill, for which sanction and funds are being sought.

In 1877, Richard Jefferies had the real country at his doorstep. There was a small common facing the house, though even while he was there, some of my Lord Egmont's land opposite was given over to the building of a school and school-house in honey-coloured brick, which must to some extent have blocked the view. These buildings are still standing, and were in use up to a year or so ago.

Also close to the house was the little copse of which he wrote. It stands in the angle formed by two suburban roads, and the trees in it overshadow some villa gardens. This copse has always been a favourite with birds, and it is not uncommon to see a pheasant about it, sometimes within a gunshot of the gardens, while the call of the partridge in the evening may now and then be heard from the window."³

Further away were the Epsom and Banstead Downs, whose wooded outlines, must have consoled him for the loss of the bare chalk uplands of Wiltshire.

Number 2, Woodside, must have been one of the last houses in the Ewell Road, before it curved out through open fields, with only isolated buildings standing along it, such as the Red Lion Inn at Tolworth, where he might well have paid an occasional call, on his favourite walk to and from Tolworth Court Farm, and the red-brick bridge crossing the Hogsmill Stream by two rounded arches. It was here that his clear blue eye perceived a trout, that no one else seemed to notice:

“By the shore on this, the sunny side of the bridge...in a moment under the arch.”

The A420 with its roaring dual-carriageway which now crosses the stream, has cut off the Old Kingston Road, but a forlorn little stretch of it remains, shaped like a horse's hind leg, skirted on one side by lost neglected meadows, and on the other by playing-fields. As for the bridge, woe betide the unwary traveller on foot, with his mind on Jefferies, and unmindful of the traffic, as he rushes across from the upstream parapet to the downstream one. On the latter side the Hogsmill still flows between grassy, tree-lined banks, and if you can concentrate the eye upon the fields on either hand, and mentally exclude the pylons and the housing estate, you get a throwback of the rustic scene that charmed Richard Jefferies a hundred years since.

The great Tudor barn, to which Jefferies devotes a chapter in “Nature near London,” is now a few charred foundations, and rusty relics of old shafting. In its prime, it was a magnificent farm building, with twin loading bays, and a roof of red pantiles, reaching to within a man's height of the lane. A photo of it, taken probably just before the last war, shows it with a legend painted on its wooden walls: “POTATOES FOR SALE SEED 6/- per cwt.” Just think of that. In the nearby farmhouse, which dates from after Jefferies' day, Mr. Kevin Offer, who lives with his family in the surviving farm cottage showed me a fine water-colour of this farm, painted by R.F.Harrison in 1968, a year or two before it went up in flames, the fate of many another historic rural building.

You must read Jefferies' essay “A Barn,” to realise what it was like, and what it meant to him. The following paragraphs people the barn for us, and the fields of Tolworth Court Farm, with the characters whom Jefferies loved to watch and write about. “When the corn is high...on the verge of the Metropolis.”⁵

In the time of Edward III, Talworth was a moated Manor House, in the possession of the Earl of Kent. In Jefferies day it was part of the vast estates of the Earl of Egmont; and at the present time speculators and authorities vie for its few remaining litter-strewn and derelict acres.

Further up the hill on the left towards Old Maiden and Worcester Park, now densely populated areas, there are sports grounds, where stood Tolworth Hall, whose owner became friendly with Jefferies, and gave him freedom to roam the fields and woods of the estate. There is a story that Jefferies lived for a while in the lodge of Tolworth Hall, and that he wrote much of “Nature near London,” there. I am unable to find evidence for this, and since most of the essays which comprise this volume were contributed

to magazines over the period 1880-1881 when the Jefferies' seem to have been well settled in Ewell Road, it is intriguing, but unlikely. It is possible that on coming to Surbiton, he had temporary accommodation in the lodge, until his house was ready for occupation.

H. K. Springett, Naturalist and lifelong lover and student of Jefferies' works, explored the area south of Surbiton, in the direction of Tolworth, Worcester Park, Hook and Chessington, during the last war, (1944) and took a number of irreplaceable photographs of buildings and scenes associated with Jefferies life in Surrey. To him we are indebted for a view of No. 296 Ewell Road, after the terrace had suffered from bomb damage, the adjoining house having entirely disappeared. He also photographed Tolworth Hall Bridge and the Hogsmill winding through, the meadows; the white wooden rails upon which Jefferies must often have sat; the footpath to Chessington which the writer often trod; (indeed there is still a sign-posted "Footpath to Chessington," from the main road beyond Ruxley Farm, though it has lost its rural surroundings); the Barn and Rickyard at Tolworth Court; and the Old Kingston Road, of which Jefferies wrote that "it winds and turns in true crooked country fashion, with hedgerows, trees and fields, on both sides, and scarcely a building visible. It is not indeed so crooked as a lane in Gloucestershire, which I verily believe, passes the same tree thrice."

Mr. Springett must have been the latest of my predecessors to write on Richard Jefferies at Surbiton, and to photograph what then remained to recall his time in that area. Grieved though he was to observe the ravages of some sixty years, he would have found few comparable subjects for his camera today. His article and the photographs which appear in "The Worthing Cavalcade - Richard Jefferies. A Tribute." (1946) are therefore very precious.

Richard Jefferies was characteristically reticent about the details of his personal day to day habits, being, as Besant remarks, a private and retiring person. Nevertheless, from the descriptions which Besant gleaned from Jefferies' widow, for the purpose of writing his "Eulogy," (Besant himself never met Jefferies,) and from recollections of Harold Jefferies⁶ it is possible to reconstruct the daily round of the Jefferies family at Surbiton.

Living with a genius must always impose a strain upon any wife: when that genius is a writer who enjoins absolute quiet upon the family from breakfast-time until 11.30, and from tea-time until half-past-eight in the evening, Mrs. Jefferies must have been forbearing and patient indeed. Baby Phyllis, who arrived in 1880, must be persuaded not to cry, and Harold the five-year-old must mind his p's and q's. Harold acknowledged his transgressions, when he wrote "My favourite playroom was directly beneath mother's bedroom, and one day I planted a hassock or footstool in the centre of the room, and, imagining myself a steeplechaser, I started running and jumping over the obstacle. I was very quickly interrupted, and got such a lesson, I was quite careful for a few hours!"⁷

Traffic outside the house could be dangerous, even in those days, and with the tragic example of his own sister having been killed by a runaway horse on the Coate Road, it is not surprising that Richard did not allow his son to join the other small boys, who would run alongside the donkey-carts

and the coaches returning from Epsom races, or turn handsprings for coppers.

On the other hand, the lad must sometimes have sighed with relief when his imposing father, full-bearded and wearing perhaps the short cloak which “gave him a somewhat picturesque and continental look,” came down the stairs from his study, took his brown hard-felt topper from the hat-stand, felt in his pocket for his notebook and pencil, and strode out eagerly for his morning perambulation, leaving him to let off steam. Such a walk might take Richard Jefferies to Tolworth, or along the Ditton Road. Besant tells us that he might walk as much as 12 miles in a day, taking in the tiny, remote village of Chessington, entranced, no; doubt, by the story of an earlier writer, Fanny Burney, who, while staying at Chessington Hall, received a letter telling her that her novel “Evelina” had taken the town by storm. Would such wonderful news as had come to a girl of 26, be repeated to a young man in his early thirties?

However, the young writer had no need to go far from home to be among wild flowers and amid a profusion of bird-song. His Preface to “N.N.L.” begins:

“It is usually supposed to be necessary to go far into the country... partridges calling each other to roost.”

It is hard to imagine ploughed fields bordering the Ewell Road at Surbiton today, but Harold recalls “At this time, not far from our house...a sixpence for beer.”⁸

One hopes that this incident had not aroused Richard from his hour of sleep, in which, even at that age, he found the need to indulge, over his newspaper, after lunch. Supper-time must have been the pleasantest part of the day for Mr. and Mrs. Jefferies, when with the children in bed, and the day’s work done, though not forgotten, they could relax and chat over bread and cold meat, washed down, by Richard at any rate, with his favourite glass of claret.

They were never very well off, though perhaps not uncomfortable at this period, when he was getting fairly regular payment for whole sequences of nature essays appearing in newspapers and magazines; routine and special articles on an extraordinary range of agricultural topics for *The Live Stock Journal*, for some of which he received as much as 6 guineas; as well as for the serialisation of such books as *Hodge and his Masters*, and *Round About a Great Estate* in *The Standard* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Both these titles were to appear in book form, while he was at Surbiton, in the same year as *Greene Ferne Farm*, and followed by his children’s classics, *Wood Magic*, and *Bevis*. Three earlier books appeared in print during the Surbiton period - *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *The Amateur Poacher*, and *Wild Life in a Southern County*. This spate of publications did not, as one might fancy, ensure a steady and regular income. For example, Smith Elder paid him £300 for the copyright of *Hodge and his Masters*, but further payment had to wait until 300 copies were sold. It is doubtful if sales reached this figure.

The Jefferies’ had a certain position to maintain, and professional pride would see that Harold was sent to a Kindergarten in Surbiton, though he

was soon taken away when his father discovered that the punishment meted out was too harsh. There was also money to spare for an expensive swing in the garden, "Towards the end of the summer," writes Harold Jefferies, "the novelty began to pall, and I contrived to turn the swing into a ship." One is reminded of an exploit of his father's at Coate Farm, when he found similar imaginative use for an old four-poster bed.

Obviously there were times when finances enabled them to expand a bit, but the uncertain profession of writer kept the bogey of poverty always in front of them.

Richard Jefferies is often charged; with wilful obscurity in his sites and locations. He offers an excuse for this in his Preface to *Nature near London*. "The question may be asked...nothing, or but little."

Nevertheless, the places that he wrote about in the Surrey woods and lanes, and on the banks of the River Thames, are as clearly identified by name as places in Sussex, and much more easily than the heavily-disguised towns, villages and physical features of his native Wiltshire, an explorer in the perplexing jungle of motorways, by-passes, shopping and residential areas, and portions of Green Belt that now cover Jefferies-Land in N.W. Surrey, can still recapture scenes of his day, especially, if as in my case, he has been familiar with the district for many years. It is indeed, a part of my native heath. Walking or driving up Claygate Lane, where Jefferies spotted a withybed which was a favourite cover for hares, and saw two cuckoos chasing each other, and calling as they flew, one finds that the houses stop and the lane comes to a surprising end, reverting to a rural-looking footpath around the edge of Surbiton Golf Course. At the top of the Golf Course, if you can find your way under a by-pass that by-passes another bypass, there is still The Waffrons, an old white-walled house that Jefferies knew, with its stables and outbuildings, one of which now houses a Judo Club.

The lane here is sign-posted for Thames Ditton, and it is likely, that in the course of his routings, Jefferies tramped the two miles from there to the charming riverside village, which he remembers in that highly informative and drily amusing essay "The Modern Thames."⁹ He was intrigued by the riverside inn which must be The Swan at Thames Ditton. "The rooms almost overhung the water. Within there was an odour of spirits and spilled ale, a rustle of sporting papers, talk of racings and the click of billiard balls. Without there were two or three loafers, half-boatmen, half-vagabonds, waiting to pick up stray sixpences - a sort of leprosy of rascal and sneak in their faces and the lounge of their bodies."

Not altogether, you will say, a very pretty sight. Jefferies had looked forward to finding the Thames in its wide lower reaches as romantic and idyllic as the stream which flowed gently through the meadows around Cricklade, Castle Eaton and Inglesham. In effect he found much both to fascinate and repel him.

He heard of otters shamelessly shot, trapped and beaten to death; of a porpoise that had swum up-river, wounded with a gun at Mortlake; there was a disturbing lack of control over gentlemen with guns who destroyed wild life freely from the towpath. The manners of the boating fraternity and their coarse language appalled him; it seemed that when you got into a boat, you cast aside your consideration for others. In their turn, the small fry were

at the mercy of the even more arrogant bargees, in charge, or were they in charge, of those Frankensteins of the Thames, the giant coal barges, which occupied the whole river, with no idea where they were going, 'the bargee at the tiller, now sucking at his short black pipe, now munching onions and cheese.' Jefferies adds bitterly: "Liberty is beyond price; now no one is really free unless he can crush his neighbour's interest underfoot, like a horse-roller going over a daisy. Bargee is free, and the ashes of his pipe are worth a king's ransom."¹⁰

The second part of this incomparable essay, however, might be headed: "One Man in a Boat." It's as near as Jefferies gets in his writing to hilarity, though Harold Jefferies said that his father could laugh as heartily as any man. If you can picture the tall, bearded, reticent, rather diffident man of about 30, urging himself to have a go at navigating a skiff up-stream from a backwater towards Molesey Weir, you will share with him his embarrassment at the sight of a comely woman braiding her dark hair at the window of a houseboat, her large, arms unashamedly bare to the shoulders; the view of the old red palace of the Cardinal; his awkward avoidance of more experienced river people, and the strenuous efforts required to row against the current, leaving little energy over to look around and admire the green loveliness of the shore. You would shudder with him in his rueful account of spotting an article in the newspaper projecting from the pocket of his discarded jacket, in which was recorded the drowning of a gentleman, whose boat had carried against the piles of a weir. And here you are at the foot of perhaps that very same weir, almost in the splash of the cascade. This seems to be the signal to give up, to make for the shadows of the bank, to spy a reed-sparrow, in velvet black cap and dainty brown, pottering about the willow nearby. This was more like the beautiful river he had dreamed of.

On another occasion he took out a boat near Hampton Court Bridge and sculled the three miles or so downstream to Kingston, with its white bridge, red-tiled and gabled houses, and a church tower that stood out clear against the sky. In his delightful essay "The River,"¹¹ he describes the Surrey shore, as seen from a boat, with its coal barges, barge-ports, riverside inns, dredgers, and boat-builders yards, and the "Edwin and Angelina," lying at anchor, "her green painted water barrel lashed by the stern, her tiller idle after the long and toilsome voyage from Rochester."

His walk home from the Surrey bank of the Thames, at least two miles, with no alternative then but a cab, might have taken him under the railway arch at the foot of Cockrow Hill, Long Ditton, where he saw the nest of a pair of red-backed shrikes, or butcher-birds; then into the leafy Long Ditton Road, to hear the sweet and cultured notes of the blackcap by the hornbeam clump, or to see a robin on its special perch - a pole put across the hedge to prevent the cattle straying. Finally, now looking forward to taking the weight off his feet, he would hear the partridge call from the ploughed fields by Southborough Park, as the sun went down, or the hoot of a barn-owl, and know he was nearly home. There would be tea, some more writing, supper, and bed.

Early in the March mornings, he records, "I used to wake as the workmen's trains went rumbling by to the great city...the pure atmosphere of the Downs"¹²

I have early memories of workmen's trains on the old L & SW line, when if you got up at the crack of dawn, you could travel up to Waterloo from Weybridge for 9d. return (third class of course) via Walton, Esher and Surbiton. People used to say, that at Surbiton you got your first whiff of London. I don't expect that Richard Jefferies, the rising young author would have patronised a workmen's train when for instance, he travelled to town on June 16th. 1879 for a sitting at the studio of the London Stereoscopic Company. I hazard a guess that Jessie had used all her powers of loving persuasion to induce her husband to have his photograph taken.

We are grateful for the result of this sitting, as the photograph is the only one we have of Richard Jefferies as a man, except for the one of which half is preserved in the Museum at Coate, the other half having been thrown away by Jefferies in disgust.

Having got over his ordeal, what else might Jefferies have done in London on that particular day? He might have crossed Trafalgar Square with an admiring glance at Landseer's lions, before entering the national Gallery to be for an hour or so in front of his favourite Titians and Rubens. Then down to the City, and a quick walk across London Bridge, enjoying "the thickness of the people." Perhaps a call during the afternoon on Longmans or Smith Elder, his publishers; a spell in the Reading Room of the British Museum, returning by horse-drawn bus to Waterloo, his mind full of impressions which might not be recorded in print until after he had left Surbiton in search of health at Brighton, or on the South Downs.

Fascinated as he was by London, the desire to get away from it was one shared with the thousands of business men (few business women then) for whom,

the narrow streak of sunshine which day by day falls for a little while upon the office floor, yellowed by the dingy pane, is all perhaps to remind them of sun and sky, of the forces of nature; and that little is unnoticed. The pressure of business is so severe in these later days, that in the hurry and excitement it is not wonderful many should forget that the world is not comprised in the court of a City thoroughfare...

Thus it happens that although the cornfields and the meadows come so closely up to the offices and warehouses of mighty London, there is a line and mark in the minds of man between them; the man of merchandise does not see what the man of the field sees, though both may pass the same acres every morning.

Looking across from near his home at Surbiton on an afternoon in 1880, Jefferies was carried away by the gleaming and sparkling of the sun's rays on the glass roof of the Crystal Palace, some ten miles away. Perhaps, for a moment his thoughts were with his Aunt Ellen and Uncle Tom, who lived near there, and had made a home for him as a child. But the few grains of corn that he had winnowed in his hands, turned his mind to the wretched conditions of the labourers, reaping in these Surrey fields.

"The scented clover field - the white champions dot it here and there - yields a rich nectarous food for ten thousand bees, whose hum comes

together with its odour on the air. But these men and women and children ceaselessly toiling knew no such sweets: their food is as hard as their labour. How many foot-pounds then of human energy do these grains in my hand represent? Do they not in their little compass contain the potentialities, the past, and the future, of human life itself?¹³

His intensity of feeling for suffering humanity was at times, almost more than he could stand.

Richard Jefferies and his wife, spent five years in Surrey. These were I think, in the main, the happiest, most productive, most stimulating years of his short life, yet towards the end of them they were marked by the persistent encroachments of that malignant disease from which he was never afterwards to escape. In July 1882, they said goodbye to Surbiton for the sea-air of Hove.

His first book to be published after this move was the gathering together of nineteen essays previously published in *The Standard*, and now entitled *Nature near London*. This book, together with one or two other essays, such as 'The Modern Thames,' which appears in *The Open Air*, and 'The Spring of the Year,' first published in *The Hills and the Vale*, contains the essence of his observations of man and nature; his thoughts and reflections upon the natural and the human scene, in a corner of Surrey which though rural in his day, it now seems difficult to associate with a nature-writer.

It was a district upon which he left little mark. After he had departed, few of his fellow-residents knew they had lost a genius. Books about Surrey rarely mention his name. Perhaps the little commemorative plaque that is planned for the Bird Sanctuary at Oakhill, will serve as a reminder to all who visit there that Richard Jefferies, the chronicler of England's fields and woodlands, lived at Surbiton, and found much to chronicle there.

NOTES

- (1) *The Life of the Fields*. (1884)
- (2) *The Hills and the Vale*. (1909) Republished in *The Spring of the Year*. Ed. S.J. Looker. (1946)
- (3) "Round a London Copse." in *Nature near London*, (1883)
- (4) "A London Trout." in *Nature near London*. (1883)
- (5) "A Barn" in *Nature near London*. (1883)
- (6) *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, by Walter Besant (1888)
"Memories of Richard Jefferies," by Richard Harold Jefferies in "*The Worthing Cavalcade.- Concerning Richard Jefferies by Various Writers.*" (1944)
- (7) *op. cit.* (6)
- (8) *op. cit.* (6)
- (9) *The Open Air*, (1885) Repub'd in *Richard Jefferies' London*, Ed. S.J. Looker (1944)
- (10) *op. cit.* (9)
- (11) *Nature near London*.
- (12) *op. cit.* (3)
- (13) "Wheatfields" in *Nature near London*.

Excerpts not in the text of this Talk.

(4) from “A London Trout.”

By the shore, on this, the sunny side of the bridge, a few forget-me-nots grow in their season, water crow's-foot flowers, flags lie along the surface and slowly swing from side to side like a boat at anchor. The breeze brings a ripple, and the sunlight sparkles on it, the light reflected dances up the piers of the bridge. Those that pass along the road are naturally drawn to this bright parapet where the brook runs brimming full through green meadows. You can see right to the bottom; you can see where the rush of the water has scooped out a deeper channel under the arches, but look as long as you like, there are no fish.

The trout I watched so long and with such pleasure, was always on the other side, at the tail of the arch, waiting for whatever might come through to him. There in perpetual shadow he lay in wait, a little at the side of the arch, scarcely ever varying his position except to dart a yard up under the bridge to seize anything, and drifting out again to bring up at his anchorage, if people looked over the parapet that side they did not see him; they could not see the bottom there for the shadow, or if the summer noonday cast a strong beam, even then it seemed to cover the surface of the water with a film of light which could not be seen through. There are some aspects from which even a picture hung on a wall close at hand cannot be seen. So no one saw the trout; if anyone more curious leant over the parapet he was gone in a moment under the arch.

(5) from “A Barn.”

When the corn is high, and sometimes before it is well up, the doors of the barn are daily open, and shock-headed children peer over the hatch. There are others within playing and tumbling on a heap of straw - always straw - which is their bed at night. The sacks which form their counterpane are rolled aside, and their have half the barn for their nursery. If it is wet, at least one great girl and the mother will be there too, gravely sewing and sitting where they can see all that goes along the road.

A hundred yards away, in a corner of an arable field, the very windiest and most draughty that could be chosen, where the hedge is cut down so that it can barely be called a hedge, and where the elms draw the wind, the men of the family crowd over a smoky fire. In the wind and rain the fire could not burn at all had they not be means of a stick propped up a hurdle to the windward, and thus sheltered it. As it is there seems no flame, only white embers and a flow of smoke, into which the men from time to time cast the dead wood they have gathered, here the pot is boiled, and the cooking accomplished at a safe distance from the litter and straw of the rickyard. These people are Irish, who come year after year to the same barn for the hoeing and the harvest, travelling from the distant West to gather agricultural wages on the verge of the metropolis.

(8) from “Worthing Cavalcade.” Memories of Richard Jefferies, by Richard Harold Jefferies.

At this time, not far from our house, there was some cultivation going on, and one day I heard the hum of an engine. I was soon watching this new attraction. After watching the tilt-plough crossing and re-crossing the field, I began to feel hungry, and left for home and a meal. But the fascination of the machine was so great that I walked backwards in order not to miss a moment's view of the procedure. In doing so I stepped neatly into a ditch full of black mud. Fortunately one of the labourers saw my predicament and hauled me out. He then scraped my clothing all over with his clasp knife, and led me home. My father handed him a shilling for his trouble, and for many weeks after this man showed up, with some kind of a story, which never failed to extract a sixpence for beer.

from the Preface to *Nature near London*.

It is usually supposed to be necessary to go far into the country to find wild birds and animals in sufficient numbers to be pleasantly studied. Such was certainly my impression till circumstances led me, for the convenience of access to London, to reside for awhile about twelve miles from town. There my preconceived views were quite overthrown by the presence of as much bird life as I had been accustomed to in distant fields and woods.

First, as the spring began, came crowds of chiffchaffs and willow wrens filling the furze with ceaseless flutterings. Presently a nightingale sang in a hawthorn bush only just on the other side of the road. One morning, on looking out of window, there was a hen pheasant in the furze almost underneath. Rabbits often came out into the spaces of sward between the bushes.

The furze itself became a broad surface of gold, beautiful to look down upon, with islands of tenderest green interspersed, and willows in which the sedge-reedling chattered. They used to say in the country, that cuckoos were getting scarce, but here the notes of the cuckoo echoed all day long, and the birds often flew over the house. Doves cooed, blackbirds whistled, thrushes sang, jays called, wood pigeons uttered the old familiar notes in the little copse hard by. Even a heron went over now and then, and in the evening I could hear partridges calling each other to roost.

The question may be asked: Why have you not indicated in every case the precise locality where you were so pleased? Why not mention the exact hedge, the particular meadow? Because no two persons look at the same thing with the same eyes. To me, this spot may be attractive, to you another; a third thinks yonder marled oak the most artistic. Nor could I guarantee that everyone should see the same things under the same conditions of season, time or weather. How could I arrange for you next autumn to see the sprays of the horse-chestnut, scarlet from frost, reflected in the dark water of the brook? There might not be any frost till all the leaves had dropped. How could I contrive that the cuckoos should circle round the copse, the sunlight glint upon the stream, the warm sweet winds come breathing over the young corn just when I should wish you to feel it? Everyone must find their own locality. I find a favourite wild-flower here, and the spot is dear to me; you find yours yonder. Neither painter nor writer can show the

spectator their originals. It would be very easy, too, to pass any of these places and see nothing, or but little.

(12) from "Round a London Copse."

Early in the March mornings I used to wake as the workmen's trains went rumbling by to the great City, to see on the ceiling by the window a streak of sunlight, tinted orange by the vapour through which the level beams had passed. Something in the sense of morning lifts the heart up to the sun. The light, the air, the waving branches speak; the earth and life seem boundless at that moment. In this it is the same on the verge of the artificial City as when the rays came streaming through the pure atmosphere of the Downs.