most interesting and authoritative volume.

On Richard Jefferies

Richard Jefferies. By Reginald Arkell. (Rich and Cowan. 7s. 6d.)

It has generally been accepted that we are, as Mr. Arkell remarks, "a nation of country lovers." It is a curious fact, then, that we should have produced scarcely more than half a dozen great writers on the country; and a still more curious fact that we should staunchly continue to neglect them. Who among the hikers reads Cobbett? Where are the hosts of Edward Thomas fans? Hudson has his memorial. But what of Jefferies? "The War came," says Mr. Arkell, "and after it a generation who have not even heard his name. . . . . Booksellers repeat that they rarely sell his works, but that is scarcely odd, because they have no works to sell." It is quite true. Are we then really a nation of country lovers? Or was Napoleon right? Or is it that Jefferies is too bad to read, or too good? Many years ago Mr. Edward Garnett said of him: "He stands among the half-dozen country writers of the century whose work is racy of the English soil and of rural English human nature." Cross out "of the century" and put "in English literature" and the words are just as true. Jefferies stands as an interpreter of country life with Hudson and Cobbett, White and Thomas—who all, curiously enough, found the country of their heart in and about that country where he himself was born. Jefferies is cold, then, in good company. And Mr. Arkell has come to stand, as it were, between him and the icy blasts of posterity.

Richard Jefferies is a strange piece of work: part memoir, part biography, part "intimate personal study and tribute," full of not very relevant disquisitions by Mr. Arkell himself on country life, and all written, according to the publishers, "in the modern manner." What is this modern manner? Mr. Arkell's manner seems no more modern than the chapters of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, which in turn are no more modern than the spirited pages of *Rural Rides*. If "the modern manner" means anything it means that Mr. Arkell often writes of Jefferies with more intimacy than detachment, more prettiness than analysis. He has axes of his own to grind; there is often more Arkell than Jefferies. But the book begins

well and would have been a better book if it could have gone on with the freshness and charm of the early description of Mr. Arkell finding a milestone—To London 70 miles—near Jefferies' birthplace. But thereafter it fluctuates, never quite stimulating enough to send one rushing to some unread work of Jefferies and often bad enough to set the teeth on edge: "It finds its equivalent in the rocket's final ecstasy of stars and that poignant moment when "Abide with Me" is sung at the close of the Aldershot Tattoo." This *à propos* of a trick in Jefferies' writing. And this of his love of Brighton: "As though a timid and ascetic young professor of Ethnology should meet a beautiful blonde barmaid and love her for herself alone." This, no doubt, is the modern manner.

Richard Jefferies, in short, will hardly suit the true Jefferies lover. But it may catch the eyes of that generation who, though occupied with assaults of one kind and another on the country, "have not even heard his name"; in which case Mr. Arkell will have his justification and reward. One can scarcely hope it will begin a Jefferies revival. Jefferies, however, can wait for that. It is conceivable that sooner or later a generation will spring up which will not know a gamekeeper from a poacher, a stoat from a rabbit, a jay from a jackdaw, a daisy from a dandelion. Jefferies may then come into his own as a sure and charming authority on such quaint and antiquated things.

H. E. Bates.