

**WILD LIFE IN A
SOUTHERN
COUNTY**

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Wild Life in a Southern County by Richard Jefferies

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RICHARD JEFFERIES

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BOSTON
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1879

PREFACE.

THERE is a frontier line to civilization in this country yet, and not far outside its great centres we come quickly even now on the borderland of nature. Modern progress, except where it has exterminated them, has scarcely touched the habits of bird or animal: so almost up to the very houses of the metropolis the nightingale yearly returns to her former haunts. If we go a few hours' journey only, and then step just beyond the highway — where the steam ploughing engine has left the mark of its wide wheels on the dust — and glance into the hedgerow, the copse, or stream, there are nature's children as unrestrained in their wild, free life as they were in the veritable backwoods of primitive England. So, too, in some degree with the fillers of the soil: old manners and customs linger, and there seems an echo of the past in the breadth of their pronunciation.

But a difficulty confronts the explorer who would carry away a note of what he has seen, because nature is not cut and dried to hand, nor easily classified, each subject sliding gradually into another. In studying the ways, for instance, of so common a bird as the starling, it cannot be separated from the farm-house in the thatch of which it often breeds, the rooks with whom it associates, or the friendly sheep upon whose backs it sometimes rides. Since the subjects are so closely connected, it is best, perhaps,

to take the places they prefer for the convenience of division, and group them as far as possible in the districts they usually frequent.

The following chapters have, therefore, been so arranged as to correspond in some degree with the contour of the country. Commencing at the highest spot, an ancient entrenchment on the Downs has been chosen as the starting-place from whence to explore the uplands. Beneath the hill a spring breaks forth, and, tracing its course downwards, there next come the village and the hamlet. Still farther the streamlet becomes a broad brook, flowing through meadows in the midst of which stands a solitary farmhouse. The house itself, the garden and orchard, are visited by various birds and animals. In the fields immediately around—in the great hedges and the copse—are numerous others, and an expedition is made to the forest. Returning to the farm again as a centre, the rookery remains to be examined, and the ways and habits of the inhabitants of the hedges. Finally come the fish and wild-fowl of the brook and lake;—finishing in the Vale.

R. J.

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