

**THE GAMEKEEPER AT
HOME. SKETCHERS
OF NATURAL
HISTORY AND RURAL LIFE**

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The Gamekeeper at Home. Sketchers of Natural History and Rural Life by Richard Jefferies

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RICHARD JEFFERIES

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*SKETCHES OF NATURAL HISTORY
AND RURAL LIFE*

When shaws beeme sheeme, and shradds full fayre,
And leaves both large and longe,
It is merrye walking in the fayre Forrest,
To hear the small birdes songe'

Ballad of Gey of Gisborne

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1878

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SK 353
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1878

P R E F A C E .



THOSE who delight in roaming about amongst the fields and lanes, or have spent any time in a country house, can hardly have failed to notice the custodian of the woods and covers, or to observe that he is often something of a 'character.' The Gamekeeper forms, indeed, so prominent a figure in rural life as almost to demand some biographical record of his work and ways. From the man to the territories over which he bears sway—the meadows, woods, and streams—and to his subjects, their furred and feathered inhabitants, is a natural transition. The enemies against whom he wages incessant warfare—vermin, poachers, and trespassers—must, of course, be included in such a survey.

Although, for ease and convenience of illustration, the character of a particular Keeper has been used as

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a nucleus about which to arrange materials that would otherwise have lacked a connecting link, the facts here collected are really entirely derived from original observation.

R. J.

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THE GAMEKEEPER AT HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN HIMSELF—HIS HOUSE, AND TOOLS.

THE keeper's cottage stands in a sheltered 'coombe,' or narrow hollow of the woodlands, overshadowed by a mighty Spanish chestnut, bare now of leaves, but in summer a noble tree. The ash wood covers the slope at the rear; on one side is a garden, and on the other a long strip of meadow with elms. In front, and somewhat lower, a streamlet winds, fringing the sward, and across it the fir plantations begin, their dark sombre foliage hanging over the water. A dead willow trunk thrown from bank to bank forms a rude bridge; the tree, not even squared, gives little surface for the foot, and in frosty weather a slip is easy. From this primitive contrivance a path, out of which others fork, leads into the intricacies of the covers, and from the garden a wicket-gate opens on the ash