

**OLD SPORTS AND  
SPORTSMEN: OR, THE  
WILLEY COUNTRY**

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Old sports and sportsmen: or, The Willey country by John Randall

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**JOHN RANDALL**

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*Franz*

# OLD SPORTS AND SPORTSMEN

Or, the Willey Country

WITH SKETCHES OF SQUIRE FORESTER

AND HIS WHIPPER-IN

TOM MOODY

("You all knew Tom Moody the Whipper-in well").

By JOHN RANDALL, F.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "THE SEVERN VALLEY," ETC.

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## PREFACE.

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It is too much to expect that these pages will altogether escape criticism; my object will have been gained, however, if I have succeeded in collecting and placing intelligibly before the reader such noticeable facts as are interesting matters of local history. Should it appear that there has been imported into the work too many details touching the earlier features of the country, the little that is generally known on the subject, the close connection of cause and effect, and the influences the old forests may have had in perpetuating a love of sport among some members of a family whose name appears to have been derived from pursuits connected therewith, must be my excuse. Dr. Arnold once remarked upon the close connection existing between nature and mankind, and how each in turn is affected by the other, whilst a living writer, and a deeper



thinker, has gone still further, in saying that "He is great who is what he is from nature." Of course it is not intended to claim greatness for Squire Forester in the sense in which the word is ordinarily used, or qualities, even, differing very much from those bearing the impress of the common mould of humanity; but simply that he was what he was from nature, from pre-disposition, and from living at the time he did. Also, that he was in many respects a fair representative of the squirearchy of the period, of a class of squires in whom we recognise features discoverable in those in the enjoyment of the same natural vigour in our own day, but who may have chosen different fields for its development.

It did not appear to come within the scope of the work to enter to the same extent upon the doings of other sportsmen of Squire Forester's time, or to dilate upon those of gentlemen who subsequently distinguished themselves. It would have required many additional pages, for instance, to have done justice to the exploits of the first Lord Forester; or to those of the present right honourable proprietor of Willey, who upon retiring from the mastership of the Belvoir hounds was presented with a massive piece of plate, representing an incident which hap-

pened in connection with the Hunt. Of both Nimrod has written in the highest terms. The names of several whose deeds the same felicitous writer has described in connection with Shropshire will occur to the reader, as Mr. Stubbs, of Beckbury; Mr. Childe, of Kinlet; Mr. Boycott, of Rudge—who succeeded Sir Bellingham Graham on his giving up the Shifnal country; Lord Wenlock; Squire Corbett, and the Squire of Halston; names which, as Colonel Apperley has very justly said, will never be forgotten by the sporting world. As the reader will perceive, I have simply acted upon the principle laid down in the "Natural History of Selborne" by the Rev. Gilbert White, who says, "If the stationary men would pay some attention to the district in which they reside, and would publish their thoughts respecting the objects that surround them, from such materials might be drawn the most complete county history." This advice influenced me in undertaking the "Severn Valley," and I have endeavoured to keep the same in view now, by utilising the materials, and by using the best means at command for bringing together facts such as may serve to illustrate them, and which may not be unlooked for in a work of the kind.

Since the old Forest Periods, and since old Squire Forester's day even, the manners and the customs of the nation have changed; but the old love of sport discoverable in our ancestors, and inherited more or less by them from theirs, remains as a link connecting past generations with the present.

It matters not, it appears to me, whether either the writer or the reader indulges himself in such sports or not, he may be equally willing to recall the "Olden Time," with its instances of rough and ready pluck and daring, and to listen to an old song, made by an aged pate,

"Of a fine old English gentleman who had a great estate."

Shropshire and the surrounding counties during the past century had, as we all know, many old English gentlemen with large estates, who kept up their brave old houses at pretty liberal rates; but few probably exercised the virtue of hospitality more, or came nearer to the true type of the country gentleman of the period than the hearty old Willey Squire. Differ as we may in our views of the chase, we must admit that such amusements served to relieve the monotony of country life, and to make time pass pleasantly, which but for horses and hounds, and the