

**RED DEER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649148196

Red deer by Richard Jefferies

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Cover @ 2017

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**RICHARD JEFFERIES**

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# RED DEER

BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES

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SOUTHERN COUNTY' 'THE STORY OF MY HEART':  
MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY' ETC.

LONDON  
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
1884

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LONDON: PRINTED BY  
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE  
AND PARLIAMENT STREET.

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795  
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# RED DEER.



## I.

### RED DEER LAND.

THE wild red deer in the West of England have so largely increased in numbers recently as to occupy a very different and far more important position in the fauna of the country than used to be the case. Almost every one has heard as a kind of tradition that the red deer which used to roam in the forests all over England still remained wild in a corner of Somerset. The circumstance is often alluded to in books and conversation as an interesting story, not much more real than the adventures of Leather-stocking among the Red Indians and deer of the back-

woods. Or, if accepted as a fact, it is looked at in the same light as the preservation of white wild cattle in certain parks, wild but protected by enclosure. Those, of course, who have hunted in Somerset are well acquainted with the truth, but to the majority of people the red deer of Exmoor are like the golden eagles shot from time to time as they pass over southern woods, and preserved as valuable curiosities. Although so many tourists visit Somerset and Devon, and go through the red deer country, their objects are generally scenery or trout-fishing, and they are there at a season when the deer are peculiarly shy and seldom seen. Nor, if seen, could a casual passer-by understand the full meaning of their appearance. They are associated with the deer kept in parks, and considered to be wild only in a limited sense.

In reality the red deer are wild in the fullest sense of the term, as wild and unrestrained in their movements as the deer of

the backwoods of America. If found in one spot to-day, they may be miles distant on the morrow. They roam over hill and moor, through valley and plain, wood, meadow, and cultivated field, entering orchards, gardens, and allotments from time to time during the night, exactly as wild animals do about the settlements of colonists. They are never supplied with food even in the severest winters, but find their 'meat' where they can, like the hares. The hunt is no paper chase—no artificial sport, like that of deer turned out from a cart—the hunt is a real chase of the most arduous character, and for the purpose of killing the stag or hind, which is afterwards eaten as venison. The pursuit is attended with great fatigue and considerable danger, that of the hind, which is followed in winter, especially requiring hardihood and endurance. In distant countries wild animals are hunted in order to diminish their numbers and the damage they do to the crops of settlers; and in the same manner