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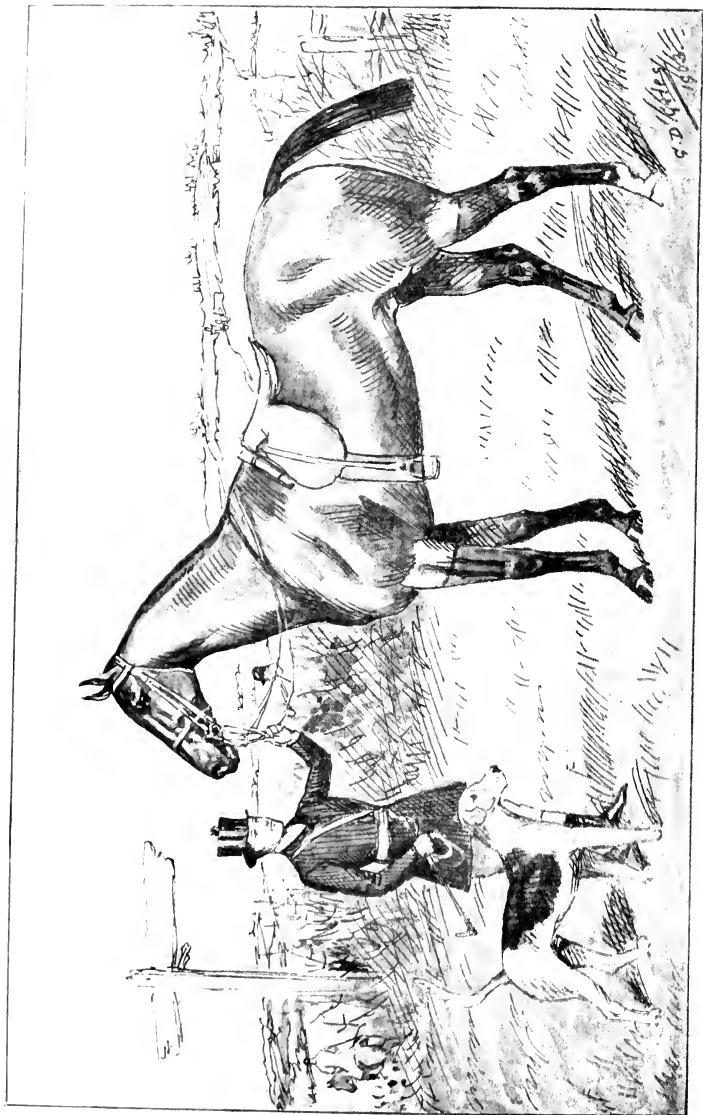


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THE BEST OF THE FUN



HORSE AND HOUND.

THE
1891-1897

BY

CAPTAIN E. PENNELL-ELMHIRST

AUTHOR OF

“THE CREAM OF LEICESTERSHIRE,” “THE HUNTING
COUNTRIES OF GREAT BRITAIN,” ETC

WITH EIGHT COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. D. GILES
AND FORTY-EIGHT OTHERS BY J. STURGESS
AND G. D. GILES

*“I’ve lived my life, I’ve nearly done,
I’ve played the game all round;
But I’m free to confess that the best of my fun
I owe it to horse and hound.”*

WHYTE MELVILLE

LONDON

1903

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TO
HUNT-SERVANTS
A BODY OF MEN WHO DESERVE OUR ESTEEM AND
ADMIRATION, AND OF WHOM THE LATE
WILLIAM GOODALL
OF THE PYTCHLEY
WAS A WORTHY EXAMPLE



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THE BEST OF THE FUN

CHAPTER I

A NOVICE'S EXPERIENCES OF MEATH

FIRST impressions are ever more vivid, occasionally more truthful, and generally more characteristic of subject than fully matured conclusions. Thus I shall proceed to treat you, my reader, much as the newly transported youngster in India or China does his fond parent, pouring out his soul and describing what he sees as if no white man had ever penetrated the country before. With surroundings and generalities as regards Meath you may or may not be familiar. I will not deal with these, but confine myself to setting down experiences and sensations such as might befall any new comer embarking (not altogether haphazard, but under reliable pilotage) on the *mare ignotum*, the green ocean of Meath. Not without a tremor, I confess, did I push off—nor am I ashamed to add that during the previous week I snatched gladly and gratefully at passing opportunity of a word of counsel from two old comrades of the chase. "Pull up at every fence. Take them at a walk if you can," urged Captain Trotter. "Slow up at them all," said Captain Smith, "and leave it to your horse." "Yes, but isn't he apt to scotch at these great graves they tell me of?" "Not he. He can see a great deal more than you can. Don't you know of the Irish dealer who declined a one-eyed horse of great character, with the remark that in his opinion a horse to cross Meath properly should have at least two eyes in his head, and, if possible, one in his tail?" The illustration was new to me, if it

isn't to you, and I pondered much over it, even during the hours of an uneasy ride across Channel. The maxims of two such mentors have never since been absent from my mind, even in moments of direst terror and fancied peril. "Go slow, go slow!" I say to myself, till, like the poor ignorant's wail of "O pilot! 'tis an awful night," it has become a kind of prayer to me when the banks loom high and the deep chasms yawn. For, by all that is holy, the ditches of Meath are very chasms. It is difficult to conceive any period of Ireland's history when labour was so cheap, and landowners so lavish of the soil, that the populace were employed to dig the ground everywhere into rampart and dyke, as if every field was not only to be fenced but to be fortified—built and separated each into a rich green *Campus Martius*.

Without further preface let me bring you to the covert-side of Philpotstown (*town* being, I take it, the adjunct denominating in each case the habitat of some aboriginal settler. If I am not right, may I not offend.). Well, here were some twenty or thirty riders all told, and at but a little after three in the afternoon—a contrast, indeed, to the merry Shires and their eager, too eager multitudes. For, remember, Monday, October 19, 1891, was in the season proper—as they calendar it in Meath, and as betokened by the pink coats around (among them, by the way, one bearing the Q.H. button, and inviting memory back to Cream Gorse and the Coplow; Mr. Beaumont the wearer). A find—a scream—watches out—and away! Now to see what we shall see. Shiver and shake as much as you please by the covert-side. But who shall tremble, who shall linger, when, like a rocket loosened, the pack is seen shooting forth in the dark background, and a good horse is instantly quickening into life between your knees? When such a moment fails to stimulate and to stir, may I, at least, be beneath the green turf rather than above it!

Round and beyond the little wood-covert was the inevitable shepherd, driving reynard across the river that flows beneath it. (Saving the near neighbourhood of the Boyne, it takes far less to make a "river" in Ireland than

we keep within the term "brook" across the water. But this by the way.) Now, if there is one man whose bounden duty it is to probe the depth of running water, or to decipher difficulties generally, it is the huntsman. So we are wont to consider, and to him we invariably



"Take it at a walk"

and unconsciously turn in our moments of doubt and fear. In this case it was to a very ready and capable guide. Mr. John Watson had replied to the mute appeal almost before it was framed, and was already saddle-deep in the swollen stream, the big brown stallion lifting him up the further bank with a mighty heave. Alas for the smaller horse and the Q.H. button; the deep current swept them both down, with a venom that the waters of Whissendine

or Twyford had never evinced. Now across the rich wet grass the dog pack were driving heartily, and as the little band emerged as best it could from the grasping flood, hounds were some three hundred yards away. Aha! no Irish double is this, but a simple obstacle of thorn and—may I believe it?—with rail on top. They told me that timber existed not in Meath. You may take this fence at all events Leicestershire fashion, and indeed be thankful you have the pace on, for the ditch beyond is wider and deeper than they often dig in the grass countries of Old England. And the next too is a wide, fair fly-water from brink to brink, and either brink shrouded in rushy vagueness. Let us suppose you have taken the office from Mr. Watson and his man Holmes, or from Mr. Watkins and Mr. Carden; that your well-taught mount marked exactly where sound turf ends and water begins, and that you are safely careering over the wide acreage of pasture beyond. The hamlet (that isn't Irish; no matter) of Dunberry is, you learn afterwards, the landmark on your right. But you are more intent on creeping into the lane under a tree, and cramming out again over a wall-like bank, than in gazing about for landmarks. Already you may be with the pack—flinging hard into their work with a full-toned delight that well becomes the blood of Cheshire, Brocklesby, and Milton—as they pour out of the lane, and seem settled to run their fox to his death. Steady, fool, steady! Did I not tell you, *Go slow, go slow?* Your first Irish bank—and it nearly caught you. Shoulders and talent that was all your horse's alone made recovery good. Did you not mark those better men in front, how they steadied into the slowest trot? A flock of sheep scurries across the front, a herd of sleek, fat bullocks comes lumbering round, and hounds are brought to a momentary, very vital stop (some seventeen minutes from the find). Though on again directly, it has eased the first pressure from the fox, whereas another ten minutes at this pace would have burst him and kept him to hand. Hounds right themselves again rapidly, and go forward full merrily. Strong thorn growers of wondrous height and strength mark the banks hereabout,

at once undeceiving one as to the uniformity of Meath fences, a point so often put forward at a distance from the scene. The second of these pasture-dividers is as a great green wall on the top of a rampart. The Master and his big horse have bored a hole, and you see next-comer and next-comer wriggle through and disappear



A great green wall on the top of a rampart

with an audible splash into some abyss beyond. Oh, it's horrible! But you and I can't stay here among the fat bullocks. No necessity to repeat the formula, Go slow, go slow! Are we not already at a dead and fearful stop? So we too will crawl up, push the thorns and leaves aside as far as we can, to find ourselves poised over a wet, running ditch, too broad, surely, for any horse to jump, at a stand, and too deep, one would imagine, to allow of

ever emerging on horseback. But nobody is down there now, so the others must have got out somehow.

By my Saxon soul, if I ever come out of this alive I'll be off by the morning train back to peaceful Northamptonshire. Hold up, old man. You have a helpless, ignorant being on your back ; and his fate is wholly in your hands. Down we go into the muddy tank awaiting us—the slush flying upward to fill eyes, nose, and mouth—a second spring (long before we are ready) not only lifting us half-way up the perpendicular bank, but bringing our face in full contact with the good steed's unrelenting skull. The shock drives our head back till every well-worn feature is fresh-scored by the overhanging thorns ; a third spring drags us painfully to daylight ; and by the help of a stout snaffle bridle we emerge battered, bleeding, and thoroughly frightened, to pursue the flying men of Meath. Just in time now to join them, as one by one they walk up another thorny bank, then call upon their horses to leap, at a stand, a yawning chasm that we, in our simple ignorance, should have deemed far beyond the power of horseflesh, however strong of hock or stout of loin. Fearlessly the bold nags fling themselves, and safely they land one and all. In meek amazement we suggest to our well-taught conveyance that he should do likewise. Aptly he follows suit, and thankfully we murmur a blessing on the liberal owner to whose friendly kindness we are indebted. Again the great four-pound-an-acre bullocks came ramping round ; and again are hounds hindered when they should be choking their fox. Now they reach the demesne—if I am right in so terming the surroundings of the house at Tullyard. A huge mearing (*Anglice*, boundary) fence, or embankment, with perpendicular face and watery ditches, here stands athwart the path. Half the party turn leftward, to tackle it where said to be just feasible. Three out of four first essayists are down in the effort ; while hounds swing suddenly to the right, recross the great double, and go on attended by master and man. Over pasture and bank they hunt cheerily on—hindered occasionally by cattle, but often close at their fox, ere reaching Meadstown. A

broad brook—possibly the same we had seen forded at Philpotstown—was crossed on the way, the Master alone flying it in his stride, the others contentedly availing themselves of a cattle-ford. Near the covert of Meadstown a fat female of humble degree had viewed the fox. Loudly she shrieked and wildly she waved her apron till she brought huntsman and hounds to her side, that she might point to exactly the opposite corner of the wide field as reynard's route. Beyond Meadstown he had just touched the bog, but refrained from putting its pathless surface between him and his pursuers. Forty minutes to here—and he apparently a beaten fox. But the attentions of a collie dog appeared to infuse new life into him. He relinquished the twisting tactics that had kept Cheshire Royal and his comrades so busy with their noses by the bogside ; and he turned back through the plantations of Meadstown. The field now consisted of Messrs. Sullivan, C. Murphy, T. Maher, and H. Cullen—if I have caught my information correctly—and even these were fain to ride cautiously on the return journey to Philpotstown ; Mr. Watson alone, on his second horse, being able to keep hounds close company. To shorten my already too lengthy story, hounds worked their way back by Kilbride Chapel, to regain their starting-point in one hour and twenty-five minutes after having left it, and without having touched a covert (or, it goes without saying, a ploughed field). Still their fox was moving on ; but after hunting him another quarter hour, and almost to Carrolstown, it became necessary to stop hounds in the failing light.

Such was my initial experience of Meath and its very sporting, keen-working pack. Almost needless to add, I came home delighted with both—in spite of the sundry and more or less severe trials to which, as above noted, my nervous system had been subjected. To the business-like completeness of Mr. John Watson's hunt establishment and to his own marked capacity as a huntsman, it would, under the circumstances of my pleasant visit to Meath, be but bad taste to make other than passing allusion.

And space admits not of my dealing at any length with the cheery items of the following day, when a much larger field (and, may I add, a very smart body of riders) assembled at Trim, for a gallop round the neighbourhood of the town. Nor need I describe in detail the mingled feelings that animate the ordinary stranger's breast as he finds himself poised goatlike on each lofty bank, and as he awaits his horse's pleasure to take him into the apparently fathomless depths below. Happy for him, probably, that at such times he has little or no voice in the direction of his own destiny. He has taken his ticket ; and if, like myself, he is lucky enough to have been consigned to a first-class carriage, he may well rely upon being carried safely to his destination. This much at least have I already learned in Meath—that a horse possesses talent and discrimination such as we of Middle England seldom give him credit for, and that, at all events in Ireland, it is necessary to let him exercise his powers altogether without interference.

CHAPTER II

A NOVICE'S EXPERIENCES OF MEATH (*continued*)

ON the Thursday following, October 22, 1891, I was taken to quite another section of the Meath country—to the Master's thinking, and that of many of his most capable supporters, the most sporting of all their territory. This is to the north, and about a dozen miles from Navan, a wide hilly country, not wholly unlike the Cottessmore. How would you fancy it, though, men of Oakham, if you woke one morning to find all your white gates done away with or locked, and your hedges perched (but not cut-and-laid, certainly) on broad stone-faced banks some six feet in height, with a deep, deep ditch added on one side or both ? This, I take it, is in the main the character of the Mountainstown and Headstown district. Had I been set down in it on foot or horseback a month ago, I should have declared by all I fancied I knew about hunting that this was a breakneck, impracticable country. Hear-

ing that hounds did hunt over it, I should have looked round at once for the lanes of Devon and Somerset—and found them not. Now I have seen it practically demonstrated that the horses of the country *can* get over it, I wonder the more—as I have never ceased to wonder since I came to Ireland—how I and others of a like sphere can have gone on riding to hounds for so many years and yet have learned so little of what a horse can really do. One conclusion I have come to regarding Meath: which is that, however popular and largely resorted-to the country may again become (and I venture to predict a great future under the present *régime*), it can never be grossly overcrowded, like some portions of our charming Shires. For in Meath it is absolutely impossible that you can turn up at the end of a good and fairly straight gallop, mop your forehead, and, *without having jumped a single fence in the line*, swear it was one of the best things you ever “saw.” Do we not see this happen in the Shires time after time, and do more than half of a large field ever ride a run at all? But in Meath you cannot hunt or go beyond a first covert-side without riding the country, a country that to my unaccustomed and perhaps cowardly eye is very strong indeed. Thus all the regular men of Meath are sportsmen and horsemen, and withal, may I presume to add, exceedingly courteous and pleasant sportsmen too. Moreover, they know their country by heart, and they know the exact capabilities of nearly every man, certainly of every *horse*, in it.

While England was being drowned out by daily deluges of rain, and while lament was wafted over by every post that the ground was already deeper than had been known for years, in Ireland we were hunting daily in glorious, perhaps too gaudy, sunshine. Some days hounds could run hard; on others—glass and forecast identically similar—hounds would be choked off the moment they found themselves among sheep and cattle; two sources of hindrance that in less overwhelming degree are, I believe, to be found in mild and grassy Meath the winter through.

On Thursday there was no great scent from Moun-

tainstown, though they found plenty of foxes everywhere. Of the two in Bog Wood they had some pretty hound work, especially road-hunting, with one who eventually beat them in the direction of Newtown. There was a leash in Headstown little wood and gorse, the first one going away across the front, too frightened to think of anything but a straight course and a distant point. We had only fifteen minutes with him; but that fifteen minutes, under the leadership of Mr. John Watson, was quite sufficient to expound fully the fashion of the country and its original method of fence-making. A narrow-back of loose boulders gave him his initial subject of exposition; a great loose-stoned bank (beyond a first deep ditch) gave him foothold before he disappeared altogether from view, till his cap was seen bobbing happily across the pasture beyond. No need to continue the series. The railway at length put a temporary stop to it, and before the thread was taken fully in hand again, hounds had run their fox to ground, short of Mountainstown. Then we had an hour's ring under difficulties from Bengerstown, one of the gorses built by the great Sam Reynell, the Alexander of Meath.

The field of Thursday was not so large (though very representative of that side of the country) but that I was enabled to learn a great number of the names. Lord Headfort (and others of his party driving), Mr. and Mrs. Pollock of Mountainstown, Major and Mrs. Kearney, Mr. and Miss Gargen, Miss Platten, Major Everard (Mrs. Everard on wheels), Mr. and Mrs. Donovan, Mrs. Singleton (driving), Lord C. Bentinck, Captain Hone, Messrs. Caldwell, Carden, Coppinger, Hopkins (2), Law, Lembarde, Newland, Tierman, W. Waller (ex-M.F.H.), Walker, &c.

On Friday the same hounds were again in a totally different variety of country—the demesnes of Killeen and Dunsany (the places of residence of Lord Fingall and Lord Dunsany respectively). In brilliant sunshine but a cooler air they were able to run with more venom and determination than on any day of the week. To the lady pack was given the task of rattling this chain of coverts and parkland; which they did very effectually, though

rewarded only by running a very beaten fox to ground. After two days with either pack, I may take upon myself to assert that the condition and drive of the Meath hounds leave nothing to be desired. They are fit as hounds can be; they run hard, and they keep their noses down. Foxes are plentiful, and sport is almost assured. The demesnes in question are a natural arena for cub-hunting (though to-day, be it remembered, was nearly a week on into the regular season): and the day admits of no story at my hands, albeit its later hour was eked out by means of a short run across the open, leaving all hands at Drumree, the starting-point for the return special to Dublin.

The greatest novelty of all, to my narrow English experience, was the opening day of the Ward Union Staghounds. Never had I seen in any degree the like of it. Never, possibly, may I see the like of it again. Some profane person in my hearing had compared the occasion to old-time Easter Mondays in Epping Forest. I say that the simile in no way holds good. 'Arry of London would as soon venture to dangle his legs over the gallery balustrade, or over the knifeboard guardrail of an omnibus, as put his limbs in the position of buffer, to fend off one galloping car from another, amid a crowd of reckless hundreds. Still less would he throw in his lot—regardless of all other essential requisites for riding to deer and hounds beyond four doubtful legs under him and half-a-crown cap money in his pocket—prepared to face any country, any obstacle (and as many of them as good luck will allow him) in company with the pick of the land, both of manhood and horseflesh. This Ward experience enables me to say I have now seen the stag hunted by nearly every pack in this yet-united kingdom; but the manner of meet and of throwing-off is nowhere the same as here. It would be impertinent of me to cavil at the mere dulness of colouring and costume observable at the Meet; but it is surely incongruous that at such a gathering of mirth-loving people, with a view to a ride with the Ward, only a businesslike solemnity should pervade the function. I fancy that a First Meet is never a very

popular occasion among the better men of the Ward. They see in it a loose-off of Dublin effervescence that militates against real sport and reasonable safety. But that effervescence is by no means festive, even if it borders on the fearful. A few over-fresh horses constitute its chief symptoms and one of its chief dangers. For the rest, the effervescence is tightly bottled till the signal shall be given. Meantime the repression would seem to be positively painful, and the effect solemnifying. In other words there was no excitement apparent about this throw-off of the Ward but the *funk*—I speak from my own point of view and sensation, it is true, but I speak also as to how it seemed with others. No ; by no means an Epping Hunt was this, with its luncheon hamper, and its after-scramper beneath the trees. A solid ride and many dangers, known and unknown, were in front. The crowd well realised the fact ; yet they had no means of qualifying the dread prospect. Now can I understand the sense of expediency that prompts more than one jolly Master of English Staghounds that I could name to combine his midday meal with a mild midday revel—cram his field full of champagne, in fact, and send them off with their hackles up. To continue the simile, these looked “cold and rough in their coats” by the time they had travelled some half-dozen miles of crowded lanes from “Ward” to reach the place of turn-out, near the hills of Kilbride. Along narrow lanes, with little or no grass sidings to the road, they pressed in close company—a strong sprinkling of kickers interspersed among the cavalcade, and the rider of each kicker being, if expression was any clue to his feelings, usually the aggrieved party, whenever a thwack and disturbance was heard. They could scarcely have all got there before hounds opened ; for by some arrangement, doubtless unavoidable, the deer had been uncarted close to the gate leading into the field, and hounds threw their tongues the moment they were out of the lane. Yes, here was the “arrangement”—a muddy brook to start with, of no great width ; but, whatever may be the case in County Dublin, many horses in County Northampton or County Leicester are foolish

enough to turn up their noses at water at first offer. Even here, methinks, horses are not immaculate. A loud flop proclaimed that Irish horses are not all alike trustworthy; and right and left there sounded splash, splash, as if of a school of seals taking the water.

Personally, I confess to the keenest possible sense of gratitude and relief on finding myself on the *beyant*—having neither ridden over any one in front of me, nor been overtaken in mid-air by any one behind. What must have been the fate of some of the earliest plungers I still shudder to think. It made the danger no more sublime, nor the situation less threatening, though the scene gained undoubtedly in picturesqueness and possibly romance, that at each of the first half-dozen banks and brooks (for it was a very watery region) there was clustered a bevy of fair wreckers intent upon securing all the sport and excitement that might be got. These had driven down after the deer-cart, and, with a knowledge of the game that I have yet to acquire, had followed the course of the stag till they had fixed upon such points of vantage as could best show them (from a new reading) all the fun of the fair. There they stood, almost flagging out the course, till hounds ran fence after fence to their midst, and the phalanx of horsemen rode devotedly to its doom. Surely the dainty dames of Cæsar's amphitheatre never watched the contest more excitedly, nor turned their thumbs downwards more unrelentingly, than these who now clapped their hands and waved their handkerchiefs as each competitor came to earth, or water. By twos and threes and fours the latter fell. The banks and ditches were grassy and ill-defined; and never, in a somewhat varied experience of big fields and free catastrophe, have I seen half so many croppers in the same space of time. In a strong timber and stake-and-bound country it might have meant half-a-dozen collar-bones. Here it involved many muddy coats and several loose horses. The country folk eagerly caught and returned most of these last; but I can still see a well-built dun hunter taking every fence among the tail hounds for at least a mile. The country was wet enough almost for

snipe-shooting ; and horses fairly splashed over it, without, however, sinking deep through the marshy grass. Matters were just properly settling themselves, and even the width of the ditches had begun to seem less awe-inspiring, when, at the end of twelve minutes, we jumped into the Ashbourne Road (close to the seventh milestone from Dublin), and the stag was found to have been headed back. Under ordinary circumstances, and on other ground, a breather after some three miles' deep galloping would have been a welcome gain. One could have trotted quietly through gateways in the direction required, and have started off again with recruited energy. Here, after being hemmed in to the road for a hundred yards' saunter opposite a forbidding narrow-back (a fence something like a Madras mud-wall with a burying-hole beyond it), it became necessary to ride through a farmyard having two deep water ditches within the next fifty yards. (How these Irish farmers get about their land with only a single, invariably padlocked, gate on the whole farm is beyond my powers of explanation). Somehow or other we at length regained Brindley, who, while leading his field, had been the first to realise the deer's double-back ; and, scarcely had we done so, than the stag *went to ground* in a lofty culvert beneath a lane. From the view began a second scurry, in which we passed Ballymacarney fox-covert—deer and hounds this time having all the best of it, for the deep watercourses made progress slow and complicated, and the long grassed turf was everywhere spongy if not holding. One rivercourse (I believe it was the Ward itself—or was it the "Lough of the Bay" ?) would have driven us all back sorrowing in an English country. You had to climb up a little wall-like bank, creep down the almost perpendicular cutting for a horse's length, then spring across eight or ten feet of water, and scramble an equally perpendicular side beyond. These Irish hunters in truth pass any ordinary Englishman's understanding. A white horse showed us it was possible ; the huntsman and his whip followed suit ; and accordingly we all (several others being as untaught as myself) resigned ourselves to our fate, arriving on the other side with eyes shut and

waste-coats palpitating. Even after this there was more falling about. Men don't often hurt themselves, I am told. The ground does not fly at your head as it does in the turnover Shires. And so we jumped into a lane, and found ourselves—at the Meet again! Thirty minutes—and safe! “Horse not quite in condition.” Have I not some of my own waiting to be killed in their native land? Shall I risk casualty at the end of a week's hearty enjoyment—of which the recent rough gallop has been not the worst item? Not for a moment. “Go home when you have enjoyed yourself” is a worthy maxim. Now for a five minutes' trot—deer, hounds, and horses—along a road. Then, having counted a dozen in all (including the hard, clever staff), as comprising the party now with hounds, and among them at least three soldiers new to the country, I gave myself the order “Home.”

Of whom was the field composed—the field proper, not its casual following—how can I possibly tell? For in most instances faces were as unfamiliar as the varicoloured backs that I saw skimming the plain before me. But from one of Dublin's numerous morning papers I gather that, besides the Master, Mr. J. Fox Goodman, such notable men as Messrs. Percy-Maynard, Maher, and Allen were among the riders, while, of faces not altogether unfamiliar, I recognised Lord Southampton, Lord William and Lord Charles Bentinck, Colonel Stockwell, Major Lamont, Major Fisher, Captains Pilkington and Onslow, Captain and Mrs. Steeds.

A dozen couple of great slashing hounds composed the pack—just such a pack, I imagine, as can best hunt the red deer.

But I had not yet done with the Ward country and its little idiosyncrasies. Having loosened my girths and lit the cigar of content, I watched the chase disappear into the flat distance (they travelled, I believe, but sufficiently far to make a fairly good run complete), then I turned my head to regain the road. “More power to yer honour, remember the gateman!” spake a native with a muckcart. Well pleased with all I had seen, I was gladly producing a shilling thank-offering for my

thirsty applicant, when two others burst upon the scene. "Begorra, and it wasn't him that held the gate at all. Haven't we been running all the day?" Of course the first comer stuck up vociferously for his rights, whereupon No. 2 in his excitement declared, "Thin the gentleman shan't go out by the gate at all at all," and even laid hand upon my reins! This was more than I could stand; so, in the confidence begotten of a good horse, of the knowledge that a gate is as a rule the least desirable point of exit from any ordinary field in Ireland, and of the possession of perhaps the only hunting-crop of that day's assembly, I ordered my new friend hotly to drop his hands at once. With this order he readily complied; but only to plunge them both, with best intent, into the face of his rival, the muckcart-man. At it they went, like the electors of Cork, very clumsily but very fiercely, hammering each other while I yelled with laughter. Two good rounds they treated me to, till, fully satisfied with the sport provided, I thought it time to play peacemaker. Sixpence apiece made their hearts glad; and off they went in high good humour, the three of them, to do justice to the toast of "Stag-hunting," as far as the pittance would allow.

CHAPTER III

THE CARLOW AND ISLAND

IT had long been my ambition to see Mr. Robert Watson hunt a fox; good fortune and good friendship put this also in my power during my visit to Ireland, a chance upon which I shall ever congratulate myself. An immense tract of very varied country (at least four counties in whole or in part; to wit, Carlow, Wexford, Wicklow, and Kildare) is hunted over by him, as it was by his father and grandfather before, Mr. Watson at the present moment being seventy-nine years of age, *yet young as a boy*. Of course from one day's experience I cannot pretend to be in a position to describe the

country ; but my general impression, from what I saw and from what I heard, is that the Carlow and Island is rougher, less universally grassy, and, to ride over, little less complicated than Meath. Many of its banks are stone-faced ; walls are not infrequent, and bogs are by no means unknown. But a good man on a good horse (the two essentials for almost every country) can live near enough to hounds over most of it. Taking the field every three days a week, hounds have on one of those days (Thursday, if I remember right) never less than fourteen Irish miles to travel to covert, and, indeed, are usually sent on overnight. Of the hounds themselves, it is safe to say that no pack in Ireland is at the present time at all equal to them. They have been in the same family, and the same kennels, for some two hundred years, and from father to son has descended not only the love of hunting, but the faculty of breeding a foxhound. The Fitzwilliam (Milton), as we know, have at various times been largely indebted to the Ballydarton kennel (for instance, in the case of the Carlow and Island Singer) ; for the drive and determination of the Fitzwilliam are quite in keeping with the qualities most insisted upon by Mr. Watson ; hunting-power and the best of blood being the foundation of his creed.

The lady pack were taken to "The Fighting Cocks" the day on which it was my privilege to see them (October 28, 1891). A bright, level, and very sharp-looking pack, as was afterwards evidenced in their work, wherein—though this was by no means an absolutely good scenting day—they showed themselves busy, eager, and bustling as hounds could be.

As I said in my last, Ireland was enjoying itself in sunshine during the greater part of the time that England was storm-beaten—there being at least no disturbance nearer than Cork. By the way, I have come to realise with thorough conviction what has been hinted to me frequently for many a day, viz. that Ireland's true vocation and use is hunting. The Green Island is properly the field—the grandest of fields—of hunting, not of politics. Given up wholly to the former, she would be

fulfilling her fittest destiny. Riches would flow into her ; and the men of Ireland, high and low alike, would be working their common bent for their common good, and for the good of their country. All politics apart, the wealth of Ireland would be found in its country sports and country life. These now only flicker—in many parts have died out altogether—as candles without wax, for want of sustenance, for want of food for a flame that would naturally burn brightly. Several good countries—wild (by which I mean open and unbroken), fox-hunting, grass-growing countries in Ireland are already without hounds, because they are without country gentlemen and without funds. Ask these few remainder (by whom hunting is still kept up) how the sport would fare were they, too, to be forced to surrender their sadly attenuated properties.

It is not everywhere in Ireland that the red coat is donned before November ; thus the Carlow-and-Island men were still in their mufti on the day in question. Cub-hunting, indeed, it happened to be ; though I doubt not a good old fox would have been readily meted out his deserts had he offered himself. But of the several foxes at Kellistown, the two elder for a long time only hovered round their brood, like the parent birds of a young covey. At last we had a quarter of an hour's scurry which touched Mr. John Bunbury's place at Moyle, and brought us back to Loch and the covert of Kellistown. Surely in the history of last season (1890-91), broken and disappointing as it was, no item of personal ill-fortune was so sad as the accident that deprived Mrs. John Bunbury of her hunting. I say it advisedly and without exaggeration, no lady we have seen ride to hounds, where so many ride fearlessly, skilfully, and well, had the knowledge and faculty of crossing a country possessed by Mrs. Bunbury, who not only rode to *hounds* in the most complete sense, but might even have handled them herself.

This pleasant trifle of a gallop began by hounds working out a twisting difficult line before throwing themselves into scent for fifteen fast minutes. Then they and the sun kept us awhile at boiling-point. One may learn something every day. One ought to—however inapt

a scholar. The point that I picked up on this occasion, all unwillingly I confess, was cheaply acquired, for it only involved the price of a felt hat and a stiff neck, viz. that the part of a bank you ought *not* to choose for your leap is where by force of cattle tread or rainwash it has become razor-topped and thin. In this condition it is likely enough to crumble to your horse's beat and—well, in my case I found myself heading downwards into the further ditch, till brought up short by my crumpled billycock and the rein still grasped in my hand. I looked upward in mortal terror for what might be coming after. But no horse was to be seen, till I heard two good Irish oaths and two good Irish shillelagh strokes, when above the bank he appeared, and jumped hastily over instead of upon me. How it all happened I could neither make out at the time, nor have I been able to decipher since. But it left an impress on my mind that nothing is to be gained from the cowardly instinct of going for the lowest level, any more than safety is always to be attained in Mid-England by skirting for the meanest gaps. And how that Irishman came to be there in the nick of time, blackthorn in hand, is comprehensible only through the fact that, wherever and whenever hounds are running in Ireland, there are men on foot—labourers and “herds”—running too.

But to continue with my own experiences, as one who serves to illustrate conclusions probably arrived at by every new comer in Ireland. This little episode lost me the pilot I had intended as mine own, and whom, altogether without his leave, I had selected as most likely to keep me near hounds and out of danger. Accordingly, in jumping the next fence, I jumped it anywhere but at the right spot, and, having descended its second stone-built face (for, Janus-like, these Carlow banks frown at you with a face back and front),¹ found myself penned in a corral that to my notion would have held a Texan steer. But the old schoolmaster I was bestriding never hesitated a moment. At once he took the shortest route after the

¹ Lord Huntly will remember the fact, during his Mastership of the Fitzwilliam, of an inquiring visitor asking him overnight, “Would he be likely to find the ditches in that country towards him, or from him, at his fences next day?”

tinkling music, as if to impress upon me that he had had quite enough of my guidance, and that in future he meant to be coachman. Anyhow, he lit on the top of the bank like Leotard perching on his trapeze—giving me much the sensation of being tied on to some aerial exhibitor—and on he went into the next field with the same leisurely and shockless gait. When in course of time he let himself down into a road, so easily and gently that he would scarcely have broken an egg had he lit on it, though exacting a sore strain upon my power of remaining anything like in the perpendicular, I breathed freely—the breath of thankfulness and amazement. Now I found myself in the good company from which I had never wished to separate, and from whose guiding presence I vowed nothing should again take me till the day was over. They had come the last mile without jumping a fence (a very uncommon feat in Ireland, I take it), while I had been perspiring in wholly unnecessary, and possibly merely fancied, peril! After this we were again for a long time at Kellistown, the pack running two or three foxes almost to a standstill.

Afterwards hounds took the open—this time by the Old Covert, and by the steeple of Kellistown, to the banks of the Burrin. These few minutes (to ground) lay over a wide grass country, and were decked by a variety of scene that would have made Mr. Sturgess happy. But as I can neither draw horses tumbling upward into a road—in attempting to spring high enough out of a bog to reach the top of its stone-faced embankment—nor depict them rolling downwards when landing into similar soft ground beyond, my story must go bare of illustration. What in my view is much more a matter of regret is that a good gallop set properly going should have ended abruptly and unexpectedly at an open rabbit-burrow, and that my day's experience of a charming pack and (if repute goes for anything) a phenomenal huntsman, one who with all the knowledge of the craft that half a century of practice has accumulated, combines the vigour and nerve of a young man, should thus have been limited to the opportunity of two brief scurries and a term of work in

covert. Of the field assembled at Kellistown Gorse, a field that is as remarkable for its unanimity and close fellowship as it is for devotion to its chief, there were, among others, Miss Watson, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Stewart-Duckett, Mr. and Mrs. Pike, Mr. and Mrs. Roche, Miss Bolton, Dr. and Mrs. Kidd, Major Alexander, Messrs. Bagenal, Beresford, Dawson, Eustace (3), Forbes, Grogan, Hall-Dare, Hore, M'Clintock.

I can quite conceive that Carlow is, even to the skilled Irish practitioner, anything but an easy country in which to live with hounds when they are running hard. To begin with, the hounds are a very fast pack, chiefly of Fitzwilliam and Brocklesby blood—Milton Remus and Brocklesby Weathergage, for instance, accounting for nearly half the present pack; then there is nothing to stop or, rather, to string them out, for they can carry a head twenty couple wide on to the banks and through their unkempt hedge-growth, while these lofty fences cloud the view, and, moreover, are by no means to be jumped invariably as they come. Many of them are not to be jumped at all.

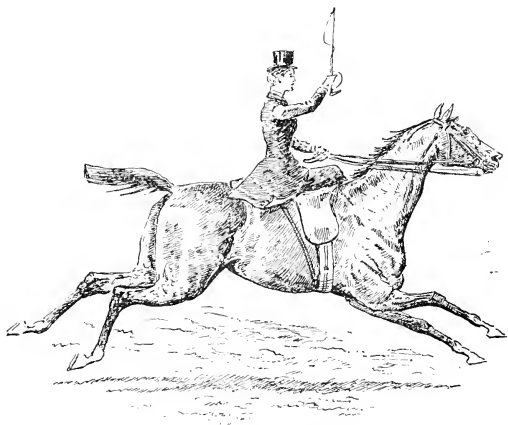
A text-book example of the conservative good-fellowship of the hunt I happened to see next day at Chancellor's in Dublin, in the shape of a portrait album of the Carlow and Island Hunt members, compiled for presentation to Mr. Robt. Watson.

CHAPTER IV

GUY FAWKES' DAY

As a barque that has been tossed upon distant waters (there are always terrors in the unknown), I return to the plain-sailing Midlands of England, to find them fully a fortnight backward as compared to Ireland. Hounds have been somewhat busy for the past week or so, the ground excellent, scent of course good, with the glass up in the heavens, and the leaf coming down as rapidly as the wire. We can never ride here with our eyes shut, whatever folk may say at a distance. But we fight very shy

indeed of leafy hedges that we cannot see through, and before the bullocks are out of the pastures. I can tell you nothing further back than October 29, except upon hearsay, a weapon I take in hand only when crippled. On that day the Pytchley ran all a sunny morning and flew for a short while in the afternoon. If ever sunshine should have had power to spoil sport (a power I think it never has, *ceteris similibus*, though it can dazzle you, confuse your horse, and certainly cloud a wire-strand) it should



She dropped half-a-dozen resounding stripes on his off-shoulder

have been that Friday. Yet hounds ran hard under it for quite an hour, reduced both their fox and their field to a trot, and made a fine run without help. They were laid on their game as he stole away from Badby Wood. They ran him round the Fawsley estate, then pushed him quite an uncommon line by Catesby to Shuckburgh Hill, fox winning by about a dozen lengths all out. There are not so many gates in the county of Meath, as the right division of pursuers opened alongside hounds this forenoon.

In the afternoon again was an unusual line taken—for a pretty inauguration of a promising season (there are no prophetic berries on the hedges; the turf is full of wet

and the coverts of foxes! What more would you have?). From Dodford Holt to Everdon Stubbs is a very bright seventeen minutes—may be done in fifteen if scent serves and you haven't given the Everdon brook credit for a sound bottom. Ah, there's something familiar in the fierce flurry which it is our wont to adopt in this subordinate island when we perceive six feet of water crossing our path. But this is not a fitting introduction to a little incident that I consider not only illustrative of our clime and rate of riding at a brook but of the manner of woman-kind holding its own over here. "Only a hack," she had already explained. "Is yours good at water?" as she made running down the field approaching the brook. "The worst in England," responded he promptly, rather than accept the proffered honour of place. Without further word or ado, she took the "hack" tight by the head, dropped half-a-dozen resounding stripes upon his off-shoulder, and before he knew where he was, the "hack" found himself a yard or two over the brook, the last speaker coming meekly but not ungratefully after. A weak scent upon the falling leaves allowed a beaten fox to crawl about altogether in safety in Everdon Stubbs. A good day's sport.

THE WARWICKSHIRE GALLOP FROM SHUCKBURGH

Bear with me while I cram upon paper as fast as I can the great gallop of the Warwickshire from Shuckburgh. Shuckburgh has often been my theme, and I have even been accused of ranking Shuckburgh too high. I put it higher than ever this afternoon. I was very sanguine as I rode to covert—a still, cold, and dull morning—the glass steady and the whole wide landscape clear and blue. And there they all were at the meet in the newest and brightest of pinks—and I alone, from shameful ignorance, in cub-hunting kit.

The most perfect hunting weather avails nothing without a good fox. Him we found, as I shall tell. The Pytchley, you remember, had run to Shuckburgh Hill only on Friday last. No matter, he was there—and fully

alive to the sound of the horn. He had travelled nearly the length of the wood, and was coming back, with the grand dog pack hard at his heels, before we had properly surmounted the ridge above the covert. John Boore's signal-horn and George's clear scream brought the Master back to cheer hounds as they threaded the laurels and passed the house. Then, as they worked through the roadside wood, we stood on the hilltop gazing our fill upon the wide blue vista, upon the verge of which we could see Rugby's water tower and steeple. Little did we expect so soon to be near them. Peering round the woodside we could just command, past the red-oak foliage, the first green pasture in the Flecknoe direction. Many a fox has stolen away here. Yonder they go—three couple of them—and the rest close after. To scramble down the hillside, round by the lodge, and down the turnpike road was no dilatory or difficult job. Then some evil spirit seemed to have come out to fly in the faces of those earliest in the road. With few exceptions, they turned back—for a gate. Had they gone with Mr. John Arkwright, Capt. Riddell, and Lord Willoughby, they might yet have had a gate, and a start, too. The first—high-bushed—fence might possibly have stopped them, had not Mr. Arkwright (in answer to the artful query, "Will your horse face it?") responded by knocking the strong dead thorns to smithereens. Down the valley hounds went, 'twixt the canal and Flecknoe, on whose hill there was shouting already. The fox had not come near the keen villagers; but that mattered not to them. They had seen him; felt that they had fully earned a right to "View holloa"; and by so doing very possibly they kept his head forward for Rugby. Lord Willoughby had to lift his pack forward through sheep and oxen and across the canal. Then they were on a fair, delectable plain. Gaily they made use of it, both hounds and their ready, eager field.

Soon we found ourselves popping over the same fences that last winter barred us one day from Calcot or Sawbridge (I forget at the moment which) with disastrous wire. Now they were open and inviting, and the pace sufficient. But ah! we remembered that horrid, muddy

and wire-girt brook that runs from Wolfhamcote or Braunston to Grandborough, and that threw us all out of the gallop that day. We were to have had a ford, were we not? No sign of it now. And the field slanted off to the right, to take the canal-side towards Braunston. All but Mr. Vaughan-Williams, who found a feasible spot to get in, and (what was far more to the point) to get out. Next beyond the brook was quite an Irish fence—two ditches, two hedges, and a bank. But his horse was from the Blackmoor Vale, where they teach them something Irish, and he was able to go on in peace. Hounds bore at once to their left, away from Braunston village, away too from their field, and ran parallel to the Dunchurch road. Now they had their heads straight for Bunker's Hill. Here was the arena of the giants of old, who hunted from Dunchurch and steeplechased from Shuckburgh to Bunker's Hill. Who shall not envy them, except for that their day is over, and ours is not yet wholly spent? And the country is as good as ever, not a strand of wire (we thank you heartily, good fellows, who farm this glorious district), and not a fence unjumpable. I am not sure of this last, though: for at Willoughby, where fox and hounds ran through a farmyard, and the lucky spectator, who happened to be cutting hay on a lofty stack, declared (I am told) that the only possible way of following them was through the village. However, Mr. Vaughan-Williams was riding to them immediately after; riding by sight, if not in the same field with hounds. And half-way over the flat, Mr. J. Charters, Lord Willoughby de Broke, Mr. Colquhoun (if I caught the name rightly), Captain Riddell (of whom I may be allowed, for old acquaintance' sake, to repeat what I see and hear, that he has never ridden more brilliantly than in the present autumn), with Captain Follett, Mr. Whitworth, Colonel Fell, Captain Askwith, and a few others, now got up to, or all but up to, hounds once more. At any rate, they were with them as the pack drove on at once through Bunker's Hill Covert (fifty minutes from the find), and went away for Dunchurch. Why—is not this the very anniversary of the "Bloody Hunt of Dunchurch"? After such a happy

coincidence, I at least will never omit a loyal toast and a hearty one on the 5th of November. Henceforth indeed will "I see no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot."

Twenty minutes more—not quite so fast, for it had all been hard, uninterrupted galloping to Bunker's Hill—brought them along the hillside to the lodge gate of Bilton Grange. Another ten minutes' twist took us to Cook's Gorse, and here or hereabouts hounds undoubtedly changed, though at the end of two hours' hunting they ran a fox to ground almost beneath the Rugby Water Tower.

Up to Bilton Grange I think it impossible they could have changed (though such a matter must always be mere opinion). And I further allow myself to think that the fox that gave them this grand gallop was probably the same which beat them last year across this very ground to Cook's Gorse. Under the faulty conditions of haste and a feeble memory I append such few other names as those of Mr. and Mrs. Cassell, Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Major Allfrey, Captain Allfrey, Captain Faber, Messrs. Verney, Bather, Edwards, Goodman, Martin, and Wedge.

From the far end of Shuckburgh Wood to Bunker's Hill is rather more than a five-mile point (hounds ran an arc), to Bilton Grange is nearly seven, to the Water Tower between eight and nine.

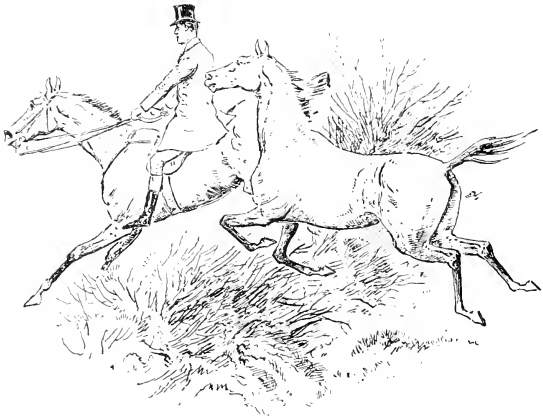
I hope I may have succeeded in making clear the points and outline of a run that, for merit of fox and hounds and country, we are not likely to see frequently equalled during the season of 1891-92.

I think I may venture a reflection that applies to us all—*i.e.* to Northamptonshire and its flying fields. You know we are "terrible fellows" for gates. When we get there these are often very clumsily and inconsiderately fastened. The most active—sometimes the most misguided—man jumps off to let the huntsman through. It was by no means his intention to do gate-opener, hat in hand, for the million; I mean for the next twenty comers. But too often he gets many kicks, never any halfpence. Everybody is profusely grateful, or, at least, one or two spokesmen are. And these, perhaps, go so

far as to inquire if he is "all right." Then the twenty surge on, leaving the luckless man to scramble up as best he can, and to take a twenty-fold worse place at the next gap—the crucial point in each fence—than he would otherwise have done. This not only leaves him shorn of his pride of place, but, as we all know too well, may very likely prevent him from taking active part in the run at all, except as a follower after men as distinct from a rider to hounds. Now this is not fair. Whether you elect or not to take advantage of his dismounting, and to go through the gate he has thus opened—at the cost, possibly, of wet feet, a strained back, and general dishevelment—is of course entirely optional on your part. You were equally at liberty, instead, to bore a hole through the fence itself if you disliked the delay. But having availed yourself of his self-sacrifice, the least you can do is to allow the poor man to remount, and to go on, as before, in front of you. He may be clumsy at getting back into the pigskin. He is likely to be ten times delayed if a mob of horses are dashing past him. And I admit it is horribly aggravating for you and me to hear the pack getting farther and farther away, while we are merely detained till the stupid fellow has caught his stirrup and regained his seat. Yet I maintain you have no more right to leave him in the lurch, or even to sniggle into one of those twenty places he loses, than you have to cut him out of his turn at a fence. He has severed the Gordian knot of a closed gateway (how much that means you have only to ride in the Midlands of England to see), and he ought to have the benefit of it. A cruel thing it is to make, figuratively, a stepping-stone of his carcase. But we all do—too frequently. Hounds would seldom suffer anything by a few fair moments of delay on our part. The victim is the ready man whose service we accept and ignore.

A pretty instance of hereditary taste was furnished in mid-chase this week by a neat colt-foal, lately weaned from its Mogador mother. The colt took two fences on his own account to get to the horn, and, once there, stuck to Lord Chesham over fence and ditch for a mile or

more. The owner, a Boddington farmer (and it may not be generally known that many great steeplechasers of old time—ask the veteran, Mr. Cowper—were reared at Boddington), happened to be within touch, and, though it matters not to the outside world, sold his weanling hunter to “Brooksby” as he went. I have not yet decided at what date the youngster may be equal to saddle and tops, but most certainly I shall expect him to carry me straight, if



Hereditary taste. Over fences and ditches

my sense of duty to hounds shall last me three years more.

Monday was all Fawsley. I shall weary you if I attempt renewed description of this peculiar district. Lock all the gates, and you would then have in Fawsley (I was going to say a Vale of Aylesbury, but, I remember, that too is profusely gated) an easy Meath. Of course, there would be a Lough o' the Bay, and a Bush Farm-fence here and there, but the bulk of it would be feasible and fascinating enough. As it is we gain ground, but often lose hounds, by galloping gateward, and the man who would play skyrocket and go off at continual tangents would merely be laughed to well-deserved scorn. Hounds

always run hard over Fawsley, and a galloping hack is the best conveyance, aided always by a ready crop-handle and a vigorous arm. Now and then it happens that the gate is all too small, the whip and arm all too unskilled or unmasculine, the gate slams, a cheery boy on an unmouthed pony charges headlong into our midst, and we don't like Fawsley as well as hounds do.

It was a lovely day to ride to covert—even on your own hunter, to my mind the least pleasurable of all conveyances. I generally have quite enough of my beast before he makes his last stumble into the stable yard. When I am doing covert-lad for myself, I am merely enacting the part of dry-nurse to my animal—soothing his tantrums and yielding to his vagaries. I can't even afford to get his back down by means of a good gallop. He has it all his own way, and takes delight in proving it by making me as uncomfortable as possible. A brougham home I shall never attain to—but a galloping hack to covert, if only the hunter of the day after to-morrow, is almost an essential luxury. It is an economy of fatigue, a fillip to the spirits, and adds ten per cent. to the pleasure of the day.

I never seem to myself to have grasped what has gone on during the day (I mean among my fellow men and women—for I seldom dare, till the day's ended, take my eye off "those confounded hounds"—if ever I do they invariably pay me out for it)—no, not until I am wreathing my nose in smoke and my soul in after-dinner reflection. Now the man whom of all others I revere (in my particular and perhaps mischosen sphere) is the fox-hunter who rides not for glory, but because he means to be with hounds, whether all the world be there before him or whether he has that world savaging at his coat-tails. Such an one I saw to-day. I won't tell you whether he wore pink or black after the essay—nor before, if he will in all friendship leave it to *me*. But I ask you plainly, would *you* have the physical pluck to take a very wet and very discoloured certainty, rather than go only sixty yards back, with your chin and your moral courage both high in the air, to join hounds and a hundred folk, who are already

one deep-ploughed field ahead? I wouldn't, unless to begin life all over again. But I envy the man who did. His principle was as undeniable as his courage.

CHAPTER V

THE PYTCHLEY FROM HEMFLOW

WEDNESDAY found us enjoying ourselves heartily with the Pytchley, splashing over the wet grass (for as yet we do not sink deep nor are held as we sink) and bedaubing each other lustily. You never saw so many mud-covered and dissolute-looking mortals as constituted the usually smart field of the Pytchley on Wednesday last. By 4 P.M. the features of them were unrecognisable under their plasters of mire—varied, too, in numerous instances by blood-streaks that they had picked up in the bullfinches—while at least a moiety, apparently not satisfied with the share of dirt thus awarded them, were carrying still more upon their shoulders. 'Tis said that so many falls have not been seen in Northamptonshire for a year past. Why, I can't tell you. It was not the size of the fences, for there was no occasion to jump anything big the day through. Perhaps it was the wet, and the occasional pace, and the blackberry leaves.

“Capital day's sport—killed a couple of foxes,” is an old summary that has never conveyed anything tangible to my mind. Nor would it convey at all why Wednesday's was a good day's sport. Hounds killed a brace of foxes, it is true—and without chopping them. But it was not the brace of kills that made the sport and the fun—nor that sent us home brimful of the old, happy, comforting conclusion, “*Nothing* like fox-hunting, after all!” No, it was the spell of a good pack driving across the grass—the charm of good companionship, of flying fences, and the ever-varying incident of chase—the linking of a good horse's wondrous physical power with man's eager spirit—the glow of exercise—the rush of event—the knowledge that only a small and uncertain share of Life's *jolliest* side

is likely to fall to our lot, and that to-day has held another little portion of your share. I speak only for the luckier dogs of the day—about half the field, perhaps—who happened to be below the Hempflow Hills when the run of the afternoon began. The others will have their turn to-morrow, or next day, or next week. Then, as they have often done before, will they sit down that evening—glad of their lot, and for the moment “envying no man anything.”

I am far from intending to exaggerate the virtues of Wednesday's run. I have seen, possibly, many a better. But fox-hunting would rank even higher than it does if one never saw a worse. It began with some twenty-five very excellent minutes over a charming country, and our fox eventually beat hounds at the end of an hour. (A muggy hot day, a Scotch mist, and at last a fair scent.)

They had just killed their first fox of all, having hunted him from Yelvertoft Fieldside and tired him out round the wooded sides of the Hempflow—he an enterprisable one. Another jumped up from the bushes to watch his comrade's obsequies; the rites were abruptly closed, and attention was instantly turned to the new comer. The second whip signalled his going, from about the bottom rung of what we know as Jacob's Ladder, that greasy staircase leading down the Hempflow side at about the steepest point. Thither Goodall took hounds at once, then stopped and turned to blow “Forward—Away” again and again. Unfortunately a mass of good sportsmen on the hilltop had no means of grasping the situation; they knew a fox had been killed, and they merely associated the *tantara* with the ceremonial of the worry. The Master, indeed, having just previously been thoroughly soaked in a wet ditch, had retired into Hempflow House for a hurried (and not unpicturesque) change of garment. (Two others of our number, by the way, have been nearly drowned during the week past.) I could make quite a catalogue of good names to show how widely and undeservedly ill luck extended, but this is not my province. I may go on to say that hounds started not so rapidly but that all

below the hill had ample time to join in, as they crossed the canal, and again almost touched it on the northern border of Hemplow's precincts. "A good run started much like this, and from here, only two years ago," I found myself muttering. (You remember the gallop in the snow to Kilworth and Bosworth, do you not?) Was there something prophetic in the memory of that moment?

Hounds now spun downhill over the Stanford pastures, ant-hilly and rough some of them, but capital scenting-ground the whole. Two or three easy fences took us to the railway, and then through the length of one field hounds, bullocks, and horsemen seemed all to jostle one another in full cry. From Yelvertoft (or Stanford Hall) station their fox suddenly bore away again; and the little ladies streamed leftward up the same sort of grazing-grounds till they reached the Coton corner of the estate, where stands a stone monument setting out its purpose of existence and the number of miles that it is from other points of the universe. So at least we knew where we were; till on crossing the river we suddenly found that an ox-fence with a bank (a very unusual complication in this simple country) cut us off from hounds, and we began to wonder what would become of us. But it so happens that in the first whip of the Pytchley not only has Goodall a very adequate assistant, but we have also. If he cannot expound a difficulty, we generally give it up. So he showed us how to "go-on-and-off-clever," and we followed him meekly, one and all, at the very spot he had pointed out. We were not going to risk it elsewhere. And again he found the only timbered corner of an otherwise entirely wired field. And that led to a bridge across the Coton brook—the very field, I remember, where I took my very first ducking in my very first pair of cord breeches. (I was the frog endeavouring to reach the measurement of such bulls as Jem Mason, Mr. Villiers, &c. So it wasn't yesterday.) Now we felt tolerably secure, could trust to our own legs, and made great use of them as we pounded uphill, across two firm pastures, and through two open gates. Then, as the little crowd mustered a moment at a double gateway, one was near

enough to mark at least some of the leaders, and even to watch how they spread themselves over the green fields beyond, hounds pointing straight for Crick Covert, as yet two or three miles ahead. Mr. Gordon Cunard had got his whip short by the head, a sure sign that things looked like business; Mr. Hugh Owen was raking alongside of him with, I imagine, a couple of stone to the good nowadays; Captain Middleton had come up with a rush, and was ready to force the pace if hounds would let him; Mr. Murland was again gleaning comparison 'twixt Meath and Northampton; and Mr. G. Milner was doing determined justice to a comparatively strange country, and possibly to a brother's stud. Half-a-dozen other men and more—*e.g.* Mr. Pender, till he had the misfortune to break down his smaller chestnut horse; Mr. T. Jameson, till the four-year-old grey tipped on to his head; Captain Soames; Messrs. Hegan, Marston, Adamthwaite, Vaughan-Williams, Cox, and of course the huntsman—were all, to borrow a phrase from another sport, having a good look in. But forward among them all, depending upon none of them, but riding each her own line easily, quietly, and successfully, were three ladies—Miss Violet Morgan, Miss Hanbury, and Mrs. Byass. To the people actually with hounds, I fancy the pace was just right—sufficient to keep them galloping well, yet never so great but that they could “hold hounds.” To those at all behind it was, as usual, terrific; and hence, perhaps, so many minor casualties (though the term minor may or may not be a sufficient qualification to a bleeding nose or a bruised shoulder. This depends much on the subject). As to the fences—nobody could possibly quarrel with them. It has always been our creed that the Crick-and-Yelvertoft district was originally laid out on hunting lines solely, so beautifully do its delightful fences accommodate themselves to a horse's stride and a moderate man's standard. Now we came fairly racing down the left-hand side of Crick Covert almost before we knew where we were. Only half a mile previously our fox was to be seen in the field with hounds; but the “silly flock” swept in between them and their game, or they might have coursed him down there and

then. Twenty-seven minutes as they reach a first fresh-sown wheatfield above Crick village. Five minutes' check, then they hunted on under Cracks Hill, and so forward to what is known as Hensman's House, near West Haddon. But he beat them, owing, I believe, in a great measure to that cold, wet wheatfield and its hindrance at a critical moment, for there was no great holding scent. The run lasted, as I have said, an hour. If I write any more, it will take you nearly that time to read it.

But I must just add how they afterwards found a brace of foxes at Winwick Warren, and ran one down the Thornby Bottom for about sixteen or seventeen minutes—when they holed him. He bolted of his own accord, and was killed. I shall wound no susceptibilities, I trust, if I venture to say of this pleasant little spin that the prettiest feat of riding it contained was Mr. Muntz's in-and-out of a woolly-fenced lane, and this on a mare by no means easy to steady.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHIRES UNDER WATER

WEDNESDAY, December 2, will do for a fair sample day of our present state, 1891. We are all on the spot, you must understand, and hungering after sport. No other attraction now serves to thin our fields—nor will there be, until a frost shall come with its customary mischief-making. Racing, shooting and fishing are all relegated to a back seat: and apparently there is but one Diana—she who hunts the fox. Never, surely, has she been called upon to play her part upon a wetter, muddier arena than at this moment provided for her even in these fair Grass Countries! In fact, the state of the ground puts an entirely different aspect upon fox-hunting in the Midlands, as compared with what it wore last year, and the year before, and the year before that. "The more wet, the more sport" has been an accepted doctrine long before you and I—or our fathers—went a-hunting (let me see, I don't think the mothers of many of us were accustomed

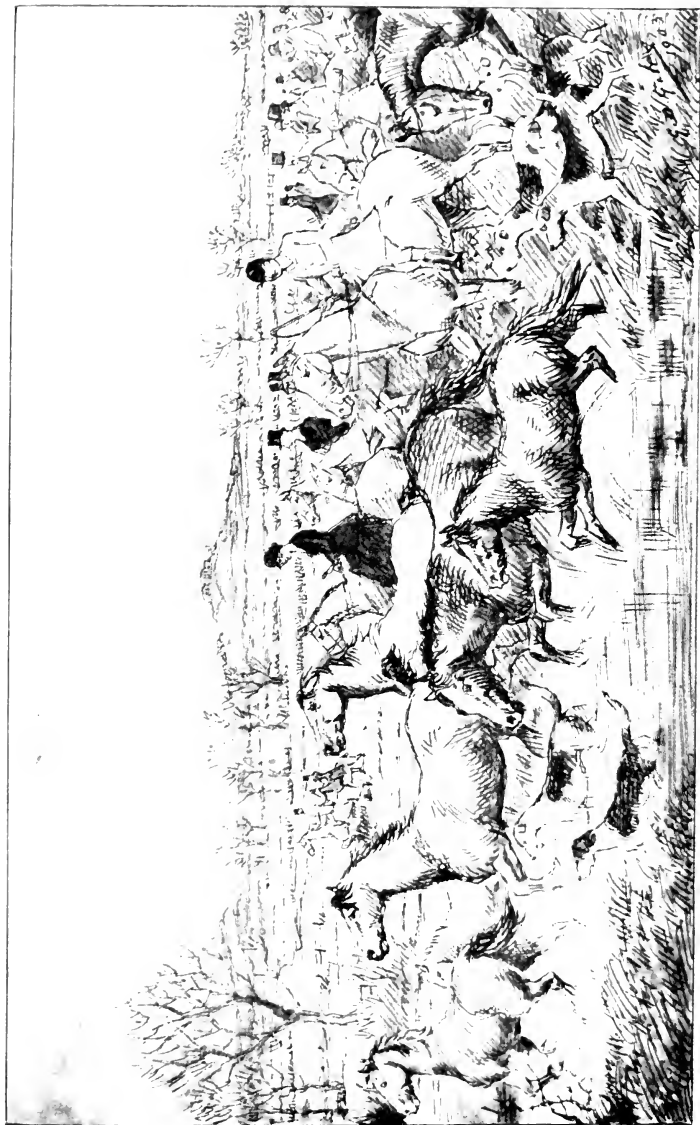
to ride to hounds, were they?). But, at the risk of being set down as presumptuous, I beg to withhold my acceptance of the theory, taken as an absolute, hard-and-fast rule. Wet you want, I grant; but, for all practical purposes of scent and sport, it is just as good below the turf as above it. I maintain (and am possibly repeating myself in so asserting) that a wet summer is just as effectual towards providing scent as a wet winter—and is, in plain Saxon, a deal pleasanter. We have seen quite as fine, quite as many, and quite as enjoyable runs on the top of the ground as we have when the soundest of turf is fetlock deep. (They never have it deep in Meath, I am told; and yet there is no better scenting country, nor one more prolific of straight, hard gallops—such as all fox-hunters love, till their nerve fails.)

In a wet, deep season you are apt to overrate the sport day by day. If there is anything like a scent, hounds can then travel far better than horses; and even at three-quarter pace you can barely live with them, still less override them. Thus you are obliged to give them room; and you naturally give them credit for running inordinately fast. Only a good horse in good condition can get through the run at all, and this you are prone to put down to the excellence of the sport rather than to the "villainy of the soil." For the last two or three seasons a comparatively small, light-weight horse could carry you delightfully over the Shires. Now you ask too much of him. He can only do it with difficulty and occasionally, and is an expensive tenant of a stall.

Another main point that gives grace to a wet winter is the fact that a fox cannot travel nearly so fast, or so far, before hounds when he is bedraggled and dirty, as when he has only to glance over clean, firm turf, with his brush in the air, his glossy fur unsoiled, and the pores of his skin open to the breeze. But whether this may be taken as another argument for or against a wet hunting-season I leave it to you to determine, while I go on to the simple facts of Wednesday.

The Pytchley met at Lilbourne, the scene of more

great meets, the source of more great runs than, perhaps, any spot in the time-honoured map of the White-Collar Hunt. Yet from Lilbourne Gorse it is more difficult for a fox to make his point, and for the atoms of an overwhelming field to do themselves justice, than from anywhere else at which I have assisted to make a crowd. I won't descant at length upon the why and wherefore. But, the field make their approach by one side, up a little mud lane. Arrived at the Gorse, they are blocked; and so is that side of the covert, while on the opposite is a river, a railway, and a road containing all the residents of three neighbouring parishes, and all the very many "hunters" whose forefather was Macadam. How a fox ever gets out of the squeeze has remained a puzzle to me since first I rode a Shetland pony. How we ever get after him and hounds, is a question that has a very disturbing effect on some hundreds of breasts each time that the Pytchley draw Lilbourne Gorse. To-day we solved it, as we did at Dunsmore, at Hilmorton Gorse, as we did at Crick Gorse, and as we did at Yelvertoft Fieldside (I enumerate all these, as I have not the slightest intention of dragging you to them in detail on this scentless day) by playing at stag-hunting. We hunted the fox ourselves—"heads up and sterns down," if only some one sinner loosed off at a canter. If not, we put our noses down demurely, and worked it out at a walk. Of course we all knew we were wrong. But if you suppose for a moment, sir, that the most orthodox sportsman who ever talked scientific fox-hunting would be such an ass as to stand still alone, while two hundred of his immediate contemporaries (of his own kidney, jealous openly as women, jealous in their hearts as very men) get between him and the next gate, or the next gap, why, bring him to me, and let him allow me to crown him with a laurel wreath, and show him in the market-place of Warwick and Northampton for this one Christmastide only, that all who ride in scarlet and in black may learn there is more virtue in self-control than in prostration before the Juggernaut of authority. But, all foolery apart, to-day we wanted our Master, or (in his unavoid-



able absence) even, if I may presume to say so, an acting-Master, a field-Master—somebody to say something. We could but reiterate, "Oh for a Master! Oh for a Man!"—an old-time quotation, but never more piteously appropriate than to-day. Foxes all the time—scent never—the field having a delightful mudlark always, and at least two fences before hounds. Who shall blame them? I don't think they even deserved swearing at. But to a word of caution they would have listened, and corrected themselves at any moment. For instance, it was a sight of itself to see the crowd splash its way across the flat meadows between Clifton-on-Dunsmore and Hilmorton Gorse. Hounds came on by degrees; but they were scarcely part of the play. "You have a horse to sell, oh! I have a horse to sell, oh!" You can show them how it ought to be done. I can fling a leap, too. And me, am I not habited and side-saddled? and is not a lead all that I want? Yoi-over—fifty of them! I take not my types from personality. But, by all that is reliable in printer's ink, this is the way that hounds were deftly conducted to Hilmorton Gorse, this waterlogged Wednesday.

A herd of Welsh ponies and ragged cart-colts broke from their flooded pasture, and joining the *mêlée*, splashed their way also ahead of the pack, burst through the gates, and trod through the gaps. At one time it seemed as though we were all about to ride out to sea, so overflowed was this beautiful valley of the Old Grand Military. Goodall kept his head, his patience, and his temper, the day through. An admirable achievement, under the circumstances, you will allow.

With which of the foxes of the day we trod, or rather waded, the Hilmorton flat is of no very great consequence. As a matter of insignificant fact, it was with the second of the twain from Lilbourne Gorse. We were finding and hunting all day—with never scent enough to kill a fox (unless they succeeded in doing it in the evening—when from the Fieldside they ran up to the Cold Ashby Hills). The best hunt was doubtless from Crick's famous gorse (this covert also being doubly

tenanted), and was enacted, not without some difficulties on the way, past the right of Yelvertoft village to the Fieldside, and to ground just beyond. Half-an-hour thus spent has its charms. I cannot, as the everyday, prosaic historian, consent to allot it such encomium as it drew from a right welcome soldier friend, to-day, taking the first of his sixty days' portion of leave. Neither can I afford to be captious. On the contrary, my little mind often finds amusement even in the littler things of fox-hunting, though I protest I aim ever at refraining from exaggeration in earnest. Constituted and educated as my understanding is, and as is that of many a better man—fox-hunting is at all times a beautiful thing. (I ought to qualify the expression, perhaps, by adding the words "in the abstract," for I don't mean when you are under your horse in a ditch.) But not only is it always pleasant merely to be "out hunting," and enjoyable to be riding to the music of hounds: but if you want to find your fellow-creatures at their very best (socially and congenially), take them as they are to be seen in one of the big hunting-fields of the Midlands on a warm, quiet day like Wednesday last. What mattered it to them that they flung shovelfuls of mud and water over each other? Is it not universally allowed that, the Meet once over, personal appearance in its minor details is no longer a factor in the enjoyment of the day? Had there been more vigorous sport, they would have seen less of each other, and the happy conditions of "coffee-housing" would have been unknown for the day. (How do they do, I wonder, in sporting Ireland, on a bad scenting, or a foxless day, where there are no gates and few roads? It must be terror-striking work, jumping about for hour after hour when hounds are not running!) Had there been less wet on Wednesday, there would very probably have been fewer foxes, whereas there were plenty to be found wherever and whenever wanted. There is hardly a fox below ground this December, save in some occasional gravelly upland. And thus it is that we find foxes in ample numbers in many of the Midland coverts where scarcity was feared during cub-hunting.

It is worth pointing out (not to you, whom I follow, but to those who ride with me) that, with the country in its present state, it pays to take your fences, as much as practicable, each of you at your own place. This sounds absurd, for there are obviously not 300 places in a fence, but, on the other hand, many a fence has a front broad and facile enough for all of the 300 who are likely to want to jump it. The first, and perhaps the second, horse finds tolerably good foothold. Immediately afterwards, in its present sodden state, the turf becomes poached, the ground is rapidly trodden into a bog, and the fence is battered down to the level of a few strong growers or stumps, to the damage of the farmer and danger to your horse. Believe me, you will ride safer, and do far less damage if, whenever possible, you select your own place and ride for it. (Besides, by so doing you will demonstrate to the ruck of us what we want chiefly to know, viz. where a chance piece of wire has been left by the shepherd, and, further, you will then be in a position to ride out the next Sunday and obtain leave for its removal.) Even out of deep ground the power of a horse's spring is something very marvellous, if only he knows and feels where he is putting his hind legs. But he cannot jump with any certainty out of false ground. I saw fences jumped clean and clear on Wednesday that you would have thought needed a spring-board to enable a horse to cover them.

There used to be a creed that one horse could very well do the day's work *up to Christmas*, because the days are short. And we used often to add a corollary, and get the most out of our studs, by affirming that after Christmas the same horse could do a whole day's work because he was in condition. What it is to be after Christmas I dare not venture an opinion. But, with country in its present state, no horse could live the day through, if only hounds could run. They can't. So the reflection may stand aside—till our month of sport comes, as most assuredly it will come very soon.

My experience (and I speak solely on the ground of economy and precaution) points to the fact that, for

the sake of your stud and yourself, and always when possible, you should take out two. If you have a bad day, No. 1 is ready and better for another occasion three days hence. If you have a good day, you certainly want them both, as the ground is now. Besides, to take two out (I won't say your only two, but two out of four, for instance) is tantamount to investing in an accident insurance policy. It pays if required, and it seems to ward off mishap while you possess it. There is nothing more distressing nor more frequent than to have to go home early because your single horse is discovered to be lame, coughing, or amiss.

A new definition, from a quarter not altogether celebrated for originality—to wit, the stable-yard. The mainstay of a certain stud is Victor, bay gelding with Hibernian pedigree and understandings that were doubtful some years ago, and are beyond all doubt this pull-about winter. "How's Victor this morning?" inquired his hopeful owner, with a view to a third day in the current week out of the long-suffering hero. "Capital, sir, capital!" answered the head of the remount department. "He eats well and rests well, but the size of his legs makes him go a bit clumsy-like."

CHAPTER VII

A ROUGH HOUR WITH THE PYCHLEY

How shall we grumble at rain, how shall we murmur at deep ground, after so narrow an escape as Saturday, December 12, 1892, from frost and snow and ice-bound imprisonment? We were nearly as possible hemmed in, and, *hey, presto!* on Monday we are at it again amid mud and flood and dirt unutterable, rapidly accustoming ourselves to riding through a country rather than over it, and quite content to regard the torrents of rain as merely part of the play.

On Saturday morning at shaving-time the turf was white almost as the suds on one's brush; the sun shone

cold and bright, and all nature seemed turning to winter of the baser sort. There are no minutes so contemplative as those during which the razor is wandering over the hill and dale of an unbearded face, gliding in and out of the ridge and furrow of maturity's wrinkles, or sweeping smoothly over the lawnlike expanse of youth's sleek, untroubled cheek, rounding the angles and scraping the very curbstones of leaner physiognomy, or changing its legs deftly to clear the ruts cut by thorn or briar during the week past. The mind then naturally betakes itself to day-dreams, and the dream of this morning was of imminent idleness, of a useless and expensive stud, and of what on earth we were to do with ourselves if frost set in.

Black clouds floated over the Meet, the air was warmer (or was it the Newnham cherry-brandy that accounted for temperature improved?) and snow was now our forecast. The Pytchley moved off very punctually—leaving behind them, alas, more than one tardy comer to bewail another run missed. For hounds found their fox readily in the same round spinney beneath Staverton Wood that gave them their great run of three years ago. Now they brought off a very sterling hunt with a wide-ranging fox. On a lustier scent to-day's also should have been a great run. As it was, we were kept cantering and galloping for the best part of an hour and ten minutes—a measure of enjoyment far above our recent portion, believe me.

Staverton Wood has a contour not unlike one of the lions of Trafalgar Square. Fox and hounds, as generally happens here, ran among the fir-trees along its backbone, then mounted and traversed its head before plunging downward on to the level beneath. (A single hound, meanwhile, by herself was engaged in coursing and killing a second fox in the spinney above mentioned!) The pack had reached the valley before we could ride over the head, to scramble our way out through the entangling crest of spruce and thorn; and they were already to be seen running hard to Staverton village. The most opportune road put us all right in five minutes—and then they stopped running! Once more (as is an everyday occur-

rence this cold-scenting season) they were unable to turn with their fox, though almost close at his brush. He had twisted to the left, away from Shuckburgh's enticing front; and huntsman's help was needed to set them again on the line. Now they went on fairly over that wild broken slope of grass, whereon watercourses and gullies bound every second field, on the way to Catesby. These chasms, or bottoms, were easy enough on the left, upper ground, near their source. They were confusing and difficult, boggy and trappy lower down. The right-hand division had a rough and embarrassing experience among them, and in consequence cared little for this part of the run. (Is not our estimate invariably framed on our own accidental experiences of the occasion? Were any of us ever known to crack up, or enthuse over, a run in which we had, for instance, failed to get a start or failed to keep one—or, say, lamed our best horse, or been left in a brook?)

But—whether we galloped smoothly, or whether by dint of scrambling, wading, rambling hither and thither in search of outlet, and of spurting furiously in between times—we all at length came into Catesby's old park, and pulled up on the brink of Dane's Hole. Our fox had already been viewed forward and beyond; and a few minutes later we were working on by Hellidon and Griffin's Gorse—the pace quite fair, and nothing to complain of but Dr. Johnson's wired farm. Onward they ran well till past and above Charwelton village (a six-mile point), when suddenly our fox, tired of straight-going amid the clinging mud, turned short back behind the village. Horses had already lost much of their fresher vigour; but the very ugly Charwelton Bottom was successfully tackled by Messrs. Walton, Laycock, and Hatfield; while, partly under a sense of self-security, partly under an impression that the delay of the moment on the part of hounds was likely to last indefinitely, the others rounded the double by means of the adjacent road. The pack thereupon set to work to run harder than they had yet been able to (and this down-wind in a snowstorm!), gave even the bolder trio a stern chase, and only let the others

up after some fifteen minutes more, on Studboro' Hill (I give the name of this fir-topped landmark more particularly, as it will be found a prominent centre-point also in Monday's run, below). Briefly now, hounds hunted towards Staverton's wooded hill once more. But a three-field strip of cold plough baffled them, and, though Goodall afterwards touched a line over the main earths, scent was not sufficiently holding to allow of carrying on. Time to the final check, one hour ten minutes—an excellent rough hunt. I hold out the word *rough* to secure a compromise from those—and they were not a few—who for one reason or another expressed themselves as not entirely satisfied with everything that came in their way. And I admit that the chilly, wet snowstorm was by no means calculated to soothe a bosom ruffled by *contretemps* or irritated by disappointment.

Apropos it was positively refreshing and admirable to remark an instance in which a very complete and confirmed casualty only elicited a merry laugh, and a query "Did you see that?" from the sufferer.

I have already told you that among our first flight of recent seasons are numbered some three or four excellent cross-country riders whose training has been mostly on the flat. Now if there is one essential to the making of a high-class jockey it is that his head should be screwed on the right way. But just towards the end of the run in question it as near as possible befell one of these,¹ possessing in the highest degree that qualification, that his head should become unscrewed altogether. The mare pecked, half recovered herself, pecked again, and deposited the professional slowly on to his neck with his heels poised high in the air. His head was tucked, like St. Patrick's, under his arm; and upon this axis he proceeded to revolve—while his spurs glistened aloft apparently quite satisfied with their position and balance, for many seconds, and showed no sign of a wish to gravitate earthward. Their owner belongs to the category of heavy-weight jockeys—which means that he weighs about as much as half a huntsman, or perhaps two-thirds of a whipper-in. But

¹ F. Webb.

had he been a couple of stone heavier, he would assuredly never have escaped from that dilemma except in the condition of a chicken just caught and prepared for curry—still less would he have regarded it as a mere pleasing reminiscence to take back to Newmarket. He is now prepared to back himself against any of the acrobatic *gamin* at headquarters, for correctness of attitude and power of endurance.

In the field of Saturday were several Cambridge undergraduates, enjoying themselves thoroughly in accord-



Heels poised high in the air

ance with their tenets. Among these were Lords Blandford and Milton, with Mr. Cavendish; and one or two of them had also been fortunate enough to be with the same hounds on the previous day, when the old Cottesbrook fox took them again off to Short Wood, some fifty minutes with scarcely a check.

The downpour of the first day of the week, whether in town or country, was probably in excess of that of any ordinary month's rainfall. There is something almost pathetic about a wet Sunday in London. So many people want to leaven their week's labour, and can't. For instance, is there, I ask you, any more touching sight than

that of the innumerable womenfolk—from domestic slaves up to Worth's young ladies, or even the ill-paid governess class—disappointed in their Sunday out, hurrying nevertheless through the pouring rain, embottled in cloak or mackintosh down to their knees, but (as is the manner of women) with feet and ankles merely thin-stockinged and thinner shod, and exposed freely to the driving storm? But to return to Mid-Northamptonshire, which we do on a Sunday night by the only good train of the week. It gives us time to dine before the journey—which, accordingly, finds us sometimes talkative, at others sleepy, according to the man and his method, or accident, of dining. On the evening in question rain beat heavily against the carriage-window, but through the dim glass a vague moon shone faintly on a water-strewn outlook. One had curled himself into a corner, declined a cigar, and, snoring happily amid the tobacco-cloud through which he was just visible, took neither part in nor, apparently, any notice of the chatter around him. Needless to say, rain and floods were, with sport and want of sport, the main topics of our talk. But the moment the train slackened pace for the Weedon stop, the practised warrior proved that even in sleep he was not unobservant. Up he jumped, rubbing his eyes heartily, and the window-pane methodically. “By Jove! you fellows are right. Look! The whole country's under water. I shan't bother to go out tomorrow at all.” “It's the *canal*, old gentleman, the canal!” roared his irreverent comrades. “Here, Jones, take out the Major's luggage, put him to bed, and treat him for water on the brain!” All out. Right aboard. And the Major went hunting next morning.

A HEAVY RUN WITH THE GRAFTON

Preston Capes was their meet. “Any horse that can gallop will do for Fawsley,” many argued, and ordered accordingly. “Grass and gates the usual routine, why take out a jumper.” And, as it turned out, they had more to jump, and a stiffer trial in store for their horses, than on any day of the season now so nearly approaching its

meridian. *Two hours and fifty minutes*, most of it hard running. And you know the state of the ground—even if termed grass!

I never saw a run—that was to be a *run*—begin more curiously. Hounds—the lady pack of the Grafton, too; to my mind still the most fox-killing lot that ever drove on a line—could scarcely move across the first three fields after the find. “Wish I hadn’t brought out a hunter,” he murmured. Good sir, you would have been glad of *two* before they brushed that lusty vixen. She was found near the Fawsley Woodyard, and turned through the little covert of Hogstaff. Directly she bore up the wind (a morning gale still blowing) they took up the cudgels in earnest. Through the Laurels and into Badby Wood, as fast as our horses (hacks or hunters, or casualty gees—by which I mean the odd roarer, or occasional trapper, of the stud)—as fast as they could gallop by our accustomed corners and cuts. Then we rode on to a holloa by Badby village to the earths upon Studboro’ Hill—at which hounds sniffed inquiringly. Reynard had done the same. But the right man had done his duty, and Reynard had to go further afield—for Catesby, to holloa and to pace improved. Hounds tackled to work forthwith. And I want to note, as I noticed, the effect of continued rain upon ground that has already been deeply trodden. The Pytchley on Saturday had marked a wet grass field in a hundred places. On Monday, after more rainfall, not a hoof-print was left. The turf had welled up from below and erased them. Now I pull up—am pulled up. And I’ll te’l you how a man feels when spun over wire. (For a second time, good fellow, I beg you not holloa “Wire!” to a brother mortal already in air. For all the world ’tis like bidding one hold up one’s nose in cold blood to be punched when the striker shall be ready. It makes the wire glisten—almost grin in your face. One can’t help oneself, but Providence and a horse’s weight may break the brutal strand.) Well, he feels he is “caught at last”; he knows they are all in a jumble; and the next thing he sees is a pair of heels flashing over and past him. This is the awakening.

Then there comes over him, useless though it be, the murderous frenzy of a wild cat caught in a snare. He yearns, perhaps raves, to be hand and throat with the "fiend, or fool," who has thus wantonly trapped him, and likely enough has rent and torn the good hunter now galloping madly in the distance. And this is the sentiment that, in spite of himself, will recur again and again for a dozen hours afterwards. The next instinct is to shake and stretch himself, and to tell off his bones whether any have gone. Finally he will stagger away after his horse, thank from his heart the man who brings the latter to him; and the while it gradually comes to him that the farmer will probably be as sorry for the mishap as himself, will pull himself together as best he can, in struggling to regain the now distant pack.

It was not difficult to make up a certain amount of lost ground, in the descent of the hill between Catesby House and its covert of Dane Hole, which latter hounds just passed on a freshening scent. They were over the next brow towards Shuckburgh so quickly that half their field overshot the mark and galloped on towards Hellidon village. One, two, three grass fields, and as many quickly flown fences—then a corner, through which the few couple of white forms were darting and disappearing. A very useful property is a hunting memory. Last year, in a curiously similar run of the Grafton, we were cornered in this very field—a wide oxer hemming us in on the right, a forbidding, fence-girt bottom stopping us in front. It was only in the very angle that we were enabled to pierce the fence and scramble the brook. Mr. Orr Ewing now dashed for it at once, the brown mare landing well beyond rail and water, and turned rightward instanter for the second complication—a trifle of yellow water and a barrier of thorn. But it needed Mr. Murland and his Meath horse to effect the double neatly and properly. On he went then to the next (also a very Irish fence, the Catesby Bottom) with a hundred yards' vantage of his fellows, including at this period the Master, Mr. E. Douglas Pennant—than whom no one saw the whole of this trying run better, if so well—Messrs. Grazebrook,

Vaughan - Williams, Hatfield, Parsons, Adamthwaite, General Clery, Captain Riddell, Mrs. Byass and Mrs. Clerk, with another lady and gentleman unknown to me, and some few more, besides the Hunt servants. And these I think comprised most of the party that rose Shuckburgh Hill with the hounds.

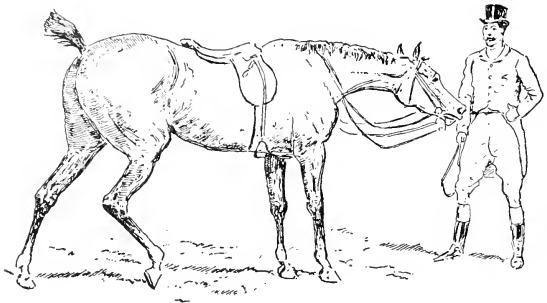
Whether the main earths were stopped I cannot say ; but, instead of going to ground as expected, their fox broke forth almost at once beneath the Wood, and fainted over the great grass fields towards Napton—a section of ground of which I for one am by no means fond on a half-blown horse. But she (I mean the old vixen fox) had not heart, or wind, left for a wider range of country. She swung soon to the village of Lower Shuckburgh to climb the eastern wood and dash past the House, with her head again homeward—while most of the party who had got so far with hounds pulled up peaceably to talk it over. Fifty minutes or so to here, if memory does not fail me.

A single hound drove forth from the laurels—to meet three-fourths of the field, now reappearing. Yet somehow the fox seems to have passed them all, unseen. This leading hound was stopped for the body ; and then, by a route parallel on the present left, hounds returned quickly to Catesby—the turf more deep than I can attempt to convey, and every ditch a rusty, turbulent stream. A broken and hazardous country at all times is that of Shuckburgh. (I wish my thoughts would not keep turning to the morrow—not its hazards, but its prospective delights and its rich possibilities—while I write on the eve of its tri-weekly Warwickshire Meet.) I was about to describe how one of my most gallant friends, after jumping the ordinary hedge of bended thorn, disappeared as if into a well. A certain amount of scuffle attended the proceeding ; so various anxious friends were prompted to gallop to the scene, by means of a neighbouring gate. Peering down—into an abnormally deep ditch, not a well after all—they descried him just rising to his own feet and from under his horse's hoofs. "Hulloa there, old chap ! Are you all right ?" this being the invariable form of inquiry, very kindly, but conveying under the

polish of classical English the cruder query, "Are you knocked out of time? If not, say so at once, and let us get forrard!" In this case he was eager to relieve their minds as quickly as possible: stood to attention forthwith, and was about to reply. But the military instinct thwarted him disastrously. At the first sound of voices he had seized his hat. As their near presence dawned on him he clapped it on his head. But, alas! the hat was a bucket of mud-and-water, that poured over his face, caulked the seam 'twixt collar and neck, and completely choked utterance and reply. A few seconds later he was hauled on to the bank. Seventy minutes afterwards his ship was out of dock—his horse upon dry land.

I take it for granted (why, I scarcely know; for all who glance over the *Field* are not of Warwickshire nor of Northamptonshire) you are familiar with the fact that from Shuckburgh to Catesby is, as hounds usually run, about a three-mile course of ravishing—now distressing—grass. Afterwards come the highlands again. Over these hounds nearly ran the road, to Badby Wood, the harder galloping very acceptable indeed. Then, as has been instanced a thousand times before, a beaten fox could not stay in the strong covert. They rushed her through, and had her fairly beaten in the open fields about Newnham. Once they coursed her in view; but it took another half-hour to run her down from hedgerow to hedgerow. All first-horses were fully cooked. Second-horses had long been requisitioned where possible. At last in her extremity the old vixen crept into Badby village; and for refuge betook herself under a wooden hen-house on wheels. There she squatted at bay—snapping victoriously for a while at the baying pack, till the Master and a few stalwart assistants raised the caravan, and hounds went in at their prey. *Two hours and fifty minutes* from find to finish—and my story proportionately long. The kill took place within fifty yards of where the Grafton last year caught their fox from a roof-top; and thus they now reproduced two good runs of last season rolled into one. All thanks and good

wishes to Sir Rainald, who gave us this treat! May many another Christmas see him hale and hearty among us!



The first-horses were fully cooked

IN SUNSHINE AND FOG WITH THE WARWICKSHIRE

Thursday saw us on much of the same ground as did the Monday and Saturday previous—the Shuckburgh domain, to wit. Lord Willoughby de Broke arrived out of the fog of the lower ground to find the highlands of the Daventry district sparkling in gayest sunshine. A sharp hoar-frost had pervaded everywhere; but only in the Warwickshire Vale was it thus held down, by a cold mist that brought the lowlanders to covert like so many Fathers Christmas, the degree of similarity varying with their garb and the amount of icicled hair upon their faces.

In spite of the flying visit of the Grafton on Monday, hounds soon owned to a fox in Shuckburgh Wood and drove him forth immediately into the valley towards Catesby. With the ground still chilly from frost, scent was anything but brilliant during the next hour. Thus it would be but iteration (you know the epithet, but we don't say it in print) to take you field for field over this delightful area. Hounds were busy for some time about

Catesby and Hellidon ; and it speaks volumes for Mr. Martin's good care that, even to-day, there were at least three other foxes in Dane Hole.

At length they hunted back to Shuckburgh Hill—their fox waiting for them in a small spinney beneath it, till they almost caught a view as he mounted the hill. Indeed for the next half-hour he ran in what I may be allowed, without aspersion upon him, to term very jackal-fashion. (A jackal, you may know—if not, please take my word for it—never troubles himself to get far ahead of hounds, but lobs along at his ease, not caring much how often they may view him.) Past the left of Shuckburgh House and village they drove him hard towards Napton, till the presence of a shepherd shifted him for a few fields back towards the hill. Then, I daresay, he met a strong section of the field, making their way from the wood, while most of us had of necessity (for the canal cut us off from hounds) been hammering the roads lustily. At any rate he was in the same pasture with hounds near Napton, at a period when we were very much engaged in finding our way about, amid the strong fences to which I have alluded in connection with Monday.

Now we set off downhill northward, and plunge into very darkness. "Where is the canal?" was the question in the Southam road. The Master alone did not wait to ask, but was away in the gloom before any of us had even taken stock of the woolly fence bounding the road. In fact, I may fairly be allowed to say that, but for his determined riding during the next twenty minutes, hounds would have taken themselves off in the darkness, and possibly remained out for the day. As it was, we had a charming ride under his leadership, the tinkling of hounds being the accompaniment (if tinkling be a fit term to convey the full-mouthed music of a dog pack). By the way, I venture to submit the remark that the Warwickshire of the present have the only pack of dogs that I have ever seen really come through a crowd, at all times and on all occasions, as boldly and as readily as the ladies. It has long been my confirmed impression

that in the Shires the bitches do their work sharper and better than their big brothers ; they are less easily put out, and a great field of horsemen troubles them much less.

But of this foggy gallop. It took us along the canal-side westward, and then we went—somewhere. It mattered little *where*, so long as the country remained rideable. As it was, I think most of us would at the time have much preferred a far lower and weaker scale of top binder and rail, though there was but little hesitation, after the example of Master and man, on the part of Messrs. Verney, Graham, Milne, J. Mills, Newbold, a stranger in pink swallow-tail, with Mr. Ford's novice, and a few of whose names I must plead ignorance or forgetfulness. Short a distance as one could see—at times not a dozen lengths!—it was said that a view was again caught of the fox by one of the little field, as he swished through a corner “scarcely ten yards before hounds.” Let this be as it may, the darkness grew more and more impenetrable, and Lord Willoughby stopped hounds by Stockton village. Total time from the find, one hour and forty minutes.

I have finished (though I can scarcely expect to have brought you along thus far, to read your release—even if the frost of to-day should keep you a week in your chimney-corner). No, I haven't. I am always ready to volunteer advice, in the same way that many good people occupy most of their time, and all of their conversation, with gratuitous comment upon the concerns of their fellow men and women. (1) Don't give the wife of your bosom the housekeeping money just before starting for hunting! or, if you do, insist that she leaves it behind at home. An instance to the contrary occurred during the run of to-day. These habit pockets are very indifferent moneybags. The purse flew out, the road was converted into a very Tom Tidler's ground, and she was far too good a sportswoman to stop! (2) Get your supply of hats in before the season commences, or at any rate before the country again attains the present grievous condition! It looks funny, to say the least of it—nay, it tells

a tale that makes the very porters chuckle and grin—to have them arriving, by twos, at the station that your neighbours and friends most affect. I assure you that every parcel office in the Midlands is now choked with them! In the first instance I saw, of twin head-pieces thus awaiting delivery, they were at once labelled, not inappropriately, by a comrade of the future wearer's, "With care. This side up."

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTMASSING

OUR "Christmassing" of 1891 was over with Sunday. On Monday there lingered only its memory, the consequences, and a very pronounced bone in the ground. The Grafton hunted and found foxes. For my part—inasmuch as my worthy editor by no means considers himself bound, as in the case of an M.F.H., at once to replace all horses broken down in his service—I have long outgrown the extravagant rashness of attempting to ride to hounds when the ground is only half thawed. To look at hounds going away in the distance doesn't amuse me, and it is, besides, about as practicable as going on, after your justifiable hour, to see a last covert drawn "on the chance of their running your way." Of course on such occasions they never do run your way, and equally of course you invariably go off with them, to the demolition of every premeditated arrangement on your part. Even this result has its wholesome moral, which is, I suppose, that as long as it be given to you to hunt at all, it is your bounden duty to make no other engagement or plan in life which will in any degree interfere with your getting all you possibly can out of every horse in your stable. *Verbum sap.*

Thus on Monday I contented myself with long road-exercise, keeping studiously aloof from the vicinity of hounds. And on Tuesday they kept altogether aloof from me and my neighbourhood, while warm showers

and sunshine played diligently upon the reluctant earth, preparing it fitly for the morrow at Crick.

On Saturday, by the way, I had been taken (as an offset, possibly, to one of those heavy extra meals with which good Christians celebrate the season and prepare for themselves a gouty future) to see a pack of harriers, or rather, as light happened to be failing and did not admit of much time upon the flags, to view the champion dogs of two successive years at Peterboro'. I confess with shame and humiliation that I am as ignorant of the lines upon which harriers should be shaped, as a certain great sheep-and-scenery painter evinced himself with regard to those of the horse in last year's Academy—or, take another instance, viz. that of the original sculptor of the Iron Duke *à cheval*. (I had almost forgotten, though the fact by no means palliates my present criminal unenlightenment, that I myself once aspired to hunting a pack of harriers. This was in Japan, where hares were not plentiful, and where even a red-herring had to find a substitute in a red mullet. The pack died off hound by hound—like sheep—from the very unsporting complaint of flukes-in-the-liver, till at last old Rubicon threw his solitary tongue on the trail of the red mullet, when he, too, turned up his toes. The note of the hound was perforce hushed in Japan, for there was no draft available within some 6000 miles, and already we were under orders for home and fox-hunting. Our best fun, I should add, was—particularly during the declining existence of the pack—obtained by starting the red mullet across country by moonlight. But then the country was all plough; there was never a bone in it—and the bulk of the field was made up of very youthful subalterns, much more easily replaceable than harriers.)

But to return to the Aldenham champions, it seemed to my unskilled eye that if they had been rather bigger they would have passed for very decent foxhounds. (If there be anything depreciatory in the remark, let me recall it instantler, with the request that it be considered unuttered.) The kennels overlook some of the pick of the Harrow Vale—in which, nowadays, the harriers have

perhaps best opportunity of disporting themselves. If so, the hare, I take it, must in Hertfordshire be almost as worthy an animal as the wily fox, or the fatted—I beg pardon ; put it down, please, to Christmas fare—I meant the noble stag.

Speaking of Christmas fare, I could not but be struck, during my trot to kennel and back, by the thoroughness with which all rustic Hertfordshire does its duty by Boxing Day. They evinced their allegiance in very various fashion, though each and every form of adherence was plainly attributable to the only medium through which the honest working-man even indirectly assists his employers in making up the required revenue of the country. But the method which seemed to me to be most original of all—and containing one of those practical lessons for which I am ever on the look-out—was in the case of a gay roysterer whom at first sight I took to be engaged in beating a turnip-field for rabbits. The Hertfordshire lanes, as you may know—and as all riding men of Hertfordshire complain—are very narrow, and occasionally have a ditch under either bank, which is very dangerous, on Boxing Day. Even in his cups our festive one was fully aware of this. His expansive soul was not to be “cribbed, cabined, and confined” within such earthborn limits ; still less did he mean to chant his tuneful “Won’t go home till morning” upon the broad of his back in one of these contemptible ditches. So he swarmed up the slippery bank ; found footing—vague and complicated it is true, but still footing—amid the turnips ; and he zigzagged his route unhindered, taking a course that quite answered his purpose as being more or less parallel with the directing but despised lane. Had he been a Londoner, the same instinct would no doubt have bidden him enjoy his Boxing Day stroll in Sackville Street, the only thoroughfare in the metropolis, I am instructed, that is altogether devoid of lamp-posts. He became obviously very much annoyed with me—either on account of my undisguised amusement, or because in the innocence of my heart I asked him, “Must he really go home, or wouldn’t he take a little more ?”—for he

made a dive in hot haste for a stone. It turned out to be a turnip ; but it sped like a parachute across the lane, and nothing but the high bank saved me. But he had demonstrated beyond contradiction how, under certain reasonable conditions, a straight narrow road could be converted into a broad one—in his instance leading to the village council at the Blue Boar.

Now to fox-hunting, for which we assembled on Wednesday—not a great crowd, for Crick. Welcome



Covertside greetings

indeed was the warm drizzle (save and except for such few of our number as ride handicapped with glass in hat or eye) ; welcome even was the soft, wet ground ; and thrice welcome were covert-side greetings and meetings after nearly a fortnight's interruption. If men wore a well-fed, hearty bearing, horses added in several instances a silly exuberance that served to set a mark upon at least four coats, before hounds found their fox. As these coats, however, as far as I saw, belonged wholly to second-horsemen—entrusted, no doubt, with the part of "getting young Termagant's back down" with a view to master's

safety and comfort later on—these casualties were provocative of less mortification, and of less merciless chaff than if they had been accorded to the masters themselves. Indeed, the worst that happened was the breakage of one of those half-pint flasks that go nowadays to complete the caparison of a second-horseman, and the spilling of so much full-coloured port down the young man's leathers, giving him a ghastly, mutilated appearance for the rest of the day.

And, gentlemen, if you would spare your friends alarm and anxiety, do not, I implore you, wear red hatstrings on a rainy day. The effect, as you may have noticed for yourselves, is nothing less than horrible! They look very smart and pretty in the sunshine, these miniature cables of vermilion and gold; but, when rain-soaked, the vermilion has a way of separating itself from the gold, with the result that the wearer's neck and collar appear to be streaming with blood! It was not till I had hurried up to one of my intimates, and he turned a bright, untroubled face to my question, "What *have* you done to your neck?" that I made sure that he was not half decapitated.

Whether or no the pleasures of a fair day's hunting are much discounted by a twenty-mile ride afterward is a matter that depends to a certain extent upon the man, but a good deal more upon the horse that has to carry him home. To some men the long, perhaps solitary journey involves no fatigue nor even boredom. I remember a Tailbyte friend once remarking quite unconcernedly, as he bade me good night and turned for Market Harboro', "The third time this week that I have had to ride over twenty miles home, finishing with that Welham Lane!" But he was, as his *nom de guerre* implied, a man whose frame was tough as seasoned oak, far tougher than the good ash rails that gave him his pseudonym. And the Harboro' men were noted in those days for pounding homeward as hard and relentlessly as through the day they had ridden the country in competition with the Meltonians.

A starry night, even if it lightens and varies the way,

may be a not wholly welcome condition. As for instance on Friday, when a biting atmosphere, a rising glass, and (most fatal sign of all!) the suddenly improved scent of the day combined to forecast a coming frost. Then do the stars lose half their bright fascination, and even the Great Bear, who has been good enough to pilot me homeward more nights of my hunting life than I care to count up, ceases to be welcomed as a chum of old time. As a matter of fact, it is usually only the last few miles of the journey that pall upon the ordinary votary, and tempt him to the momentary disloyalty of undervaluing the candle he has elected to burn. By that time he has probably thought out every thought he cares to allow dwelling-place in his mind, has called up every vision of past or future that is pleasant or profitable to commune with, till finally he descends to the practical, and finds himself grossly wondering what he has for dinner. He feels very empty, and his tired horse insists on kicking every pebble out of his path. This last is, to my mind, the most trying and painful development of a long road-ride after hunting. It is not only irritating to your own nervous system, but it necessitates constantly a sharp appeal—cruel, doubtless, but sadly unavoidable—to the wearied animal that he may, for his own sake and yours, keep on his legs yet a little longer. Oh, Lady Florence, Lady Florence, how could you? They tell me you have broken out with a philippic against the Cruelty of all Sport. Is it the memory of many a long ride home to Melton that has prompted you, you who could not wittingly have inflicted cruelty in any other fashion?

By the way, my readers, have you a good recipe for "chronic cough," an ailment that is far more prevalent than you would imagine in the stables of the Grass Countries? Here is one much in vogue. It "has stood the test of years," nor is its employment limited, I believe, to Midland hunting-fields. Its efficacy ought therefore to be beyond dispute. Given a sharp bridle, a smart second-horseman fairly conscious of his smartness, and a horse afflicted with a churchyard cough, yet retaining appearance and utility sufficient to postpone for the present his

consignment to the kennels. Then the moment the poor brute groans forth his sepulchral cough, let Smartness job him twice in the mouth and kick him lustily in the ribs, repeating the application as often as occasion may offer. This treatment, if properly persevered in, should, even if it fail to effect a complete cure, at least suffice to keep in check the more aggravating symptoms of the malady.

Weather requires no historian ; and its prophets, if not altogether worthless, are by no means far-seeing. Yet was I told as plainly as possible on Friday that this cold spell was in store. I believe thoroughly in bird-omen, do not *you*—at least if you were born in the country and brought up among nature and its life ? On Friday not only did a fieldfare cross my path as I trotted to covert, but a weird grey owl kept me company for fully half a mile on my long ride homeward ! Along a high-fenced narrow lane he moved noiselessly before me, so close that I expected every moment to throw my thong round him as I held my arm in readiness, like a whipper-in intent on punishing riot. *Why* the “bird of wisdom” hovered so near to me for so long I cannot explain, except on the hypothesis of extremes being attracted one to the other. But I am stating a fact, and I made up my mind at once that the omen was unpropitious, and that it pointed to nothing else than frost.

An excellent, nay, an unavoidable opportunity is this horrid week for the study of Christmas accounts. Let us hope you may all come out of them as cheerfully as our old friend Pepys, who on one occasion wound up by stating that he was “mighty content, being creditor £6900, for which,” he added with heart and soul, “the Lord of Heaven be praised !” If you are in such happy case, don't fail to notice that the Hunt secretaries are thirsting for your blood, or, rather, hungering for your shekels ; also that there are a good many bricks not yet paid for in a kennel to which we are indebted for sport of the best and management of the most liberal description.

CHAPTER IX

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

MY text is furnished for me by one John Speed, who in 1611 wrote of Northamptonshire, "The aire is good, temperate and healthful; the soil is champion, rich and fruitful, and so plenteously peopled that from some ascents thirty parish-churches and many more windmills at one view may be seene. Commodities arising in this shire are chiefly gotten by tillage and plough, whereby corn so plenteously aboundeth that in no other countrie is found more, or so much; the pastures and woods are filled with cattle, and everywhere sheep loaden with their fleeces of wooll."

So much for our champion shire as it appeared 280 years ago, before the Pytchley became a subscription pack, and before a gorse—or apparently even a wood—had been enclosed. The other changes are obvious enough. I take leave to doubt that thirty Northamptonshire churches ever were visible from any one hilltop. There are not now: though Stowe-Nine-Churches is credited with commanding the lesser number. Windmills have disappeared from the country—or remain in the case of the more solid structures, dismantled of their tophammer, mere landmarks, unsightly wrecks, but not nearly so dangerous to horse and rider as when in full swing. Nor can it still be said that corn so plentifully aboundeth—or oats might perhaps be bought at less ruinous price than now: but, on the other hand, would you not rather keep one horse to ride over grass than two to wallow in plough? I suppose most of our green ridge-and-furrow was undrained tillage land in those days. They probably wintered their cattle in the woods. Now the country is to some extent cleared after October. Breeding stock and store stock remain—also "everywhere sheep loaden with their fleeces of wooll."

And these constitute some of the chief difficulties of a huntsman in these latter days. Bullocks run at a fox

as soon as they see him—often turn him right away from his course, and then tread over his trail and steam over his line. Sheep huddle up, scour away for a while, then perhaps turn to scamper wonderingly after—having cast a blight over the whole pasture. Directly hounds appear, both cattle and sheep come trooping round them; and not only is scent completely wiped out, but the pack is often brought up for want of room. Without cattle, without sheep—and without a field, if you will have it so—no doubt a good pack of hounds would kill many more foxes, and would change foxes far less. But there they are, all three; and a huntsman has to circumvent them as best he can. A quick, self-reliant man will use his discretion freely as to helping—or at least encouraging—hounds onward at once. A master of the art, like Frank Beers, could do it without ever getting their heads up—and so can many another. Similar action is often needed where a flock of crows or starlings have foiled the line; and may be on occasion quite as legitimate, quite as necessary, where “a bit of cold plough” renders hounds suddenly and hopelessly helpless, as on many days it undeniably will. You have seen it so only too often during the fag end of '91—the worst scenting period dealt out to us for years past.

It is mortifying to the utmost when, after running hard upon the grass for a mile or two, hounds are suddenly pulled up by a few acres of sticky plough—across whose surface their fox has gone, as it were, upon clogs, to shake off the encumbrance immediately he regains the turf beyond, and to speed away in the distance while they spell their way a yard at a time, if at all. No plough-team is at work, no shrill-toned urchin is tenting crows: the outlook is clear and the horizon is still: Reynard's line is pronounced indubitably into mid-field: he *must* have gone on, and the moments are very precious. But the mud “carries” like cobbler's wax; and only here and there can an old hound fling the note of authority. On a sinking fox let them alone: on a lively, fresh-found fox, no—very often *no*. 'Tis a hundred to one he is forward. Give him the credit, anyhow. “Believe every

fox a good one!" was framed years before you or I first looked on at fox-hunting. If he proves himself a bad one, you will have all the leisure you want.

A good old fox, in condition, is in a grass country nearly, if not quite, as stout and enduring as a foxhound. If the weight of his coat and his brush don't kill him—or he has not supped too well overnight—he is just as strong as his pursuer. Of the various foxes you have seen run to death, how many of them do you know to have been killed without having been shouted at, baulked, frightened, or extraneously hurried on their way? I cannot at this moment recall ever a kill without a view or a holloa associated with some part of the run, however little attention was paid it by hounds or huntsman. Poor Reynard had felt it or heard it, and it had hurried his heart-beat, and hastened his fainting footsteps. Else might he have—as so often he has—beaten hounds fair and square on a fine scenting day.

A huntsman—they teach me—can never afford to let a good fox get far ahead of him. On a blazing scent his fox never will, unless the man in office is culpably slow. But give him "half a chance," he will turn a moderate scent into a weak one, and distance it out altogether before he is tired. With a short-running fox it does not matter—except that by pressing him hard you may make him a good fox in spite of himself. "Have at him!" then, is not a bad maxim (it is a lovely cry as we used to hear it in Leicestershire). A varmint huntsman is the man to show sport.

What are your whips about, you ask, if they can't keep cattle and sheep away from the hounds? So they can, and so they do, *often*. But apart from the fact that they may at the particular moment be equally busy doing something else, it is not always politic, nor even possible, for a whip to rush out of the fray to get between hounds and bullocks. I am speaking of the large, excessively combatant, fields of the Grass Countries. If he dash forward, and the Master—or, where he is hunting his own hounds, the all-necessary Field-Master—be not immediately at hand to direct and control, why, there may be

a whole cluster of gentlemen—some young and some old enough to know better—dash forward also, as if in contest for first spear. Sport is then likely to be hindered rather than accelerated. Let me not be taken as insinuating that we are greater fools here than in other hunting-fields of more moderate proportion. Far from it; we rather like ourselves, taking pride in our sphere, and arguing that, while the Shires are the arena on which to see fox-hunting at its best, it is also that on which to meet men, most of whom have elsewhere learned the business of riding to hounds, and who are here turning the faculty to fullest account.

But numbers it is of course that frame the frequent difficulty. A whipper-in—always supposing that he is as good a rider as he should be (and, in my experience of the Grass Countries, very seldom indeed fails to be)—has but little trouble in doing his work when a run is fairly in swing. On this point of keeping cattle and sheep off hounds, and from foiling more ground than can possibly be avoided, he can render more useful assistance to his huntsman—towards making a run and killing a fox—than in almost any other way. But he must do it very readily, very rapidly, and *very quietly*. Some few of them cannot keep their mouths shut; but rate and bawl to a degree that is irritating to hear—and if to you and me, how much more to hounds, whose every nerve is intent upon holding the delicate thread of their fox's course?

CHAPTER X

THE INFLUENZA SCOURGE

Friday Night, January 22, 1892.—Is it thawing? Is breath coming into our nostrils, vitality into our existence? Will blood again circulate, and pulse once more beat high to the bidding of the hound, and joy assert itself where recently thought has been mournful and the air has been black with melancholy? Shall we shake off the incubus of sadness, the *atra cura* of fell surrounding, the atmosphere

of death and mourning, and the wail that comes of the pestilence—exchange it, push it back, our own sorrows and those of more general, more lofty consequence, for active, outdoor geniality—not for forgetfulness, but for healthy, vigorous palliation? Life is made up of alternative; else, how would they upon whom life is insisted, bear its burden to all appearance cheerfully onward? The *Harakiri* is not for our clime—for high or for low! Would you drown grief or disappointment—do it, not in the flowing bowl (or its quenchless after-thirst), but in the manly distraction of sport—above all, *me judice*, in the brisk, kindly atmosphere of the hunting-field! If new aspiration, new hope, new life, new spirits cannot be gleaned in a run with hounds—if happy forgetfulness, to be succeeded by a pleasing content that makes the world brighter and one's fellow-men more appreciable, is not to be found in the excitement of a ride to hounds—tell me, pray tell me, where it is to be had, and pass me there forthwith, properly horsed and fitly accoutred! I wonder if I re-echo the unspoken thought and prayer of many and many a hunting man towards the close of this death-dealing period of frost and grief—suggestive and memory-laden in its weight of woe to each one of us with all that has been mournful in our own lives. I think I do. It has been, Give us release—give us active, self-reliant life. Let us forth to revive, to ride, to breathe—where gloom shall be dispelled by hearty exercise, and painful topic give place to healthful, mirth-bringing excitement!

And on Saturday we hunted. Once more it was given us to ride to hounds upon a scent—to ride, it is true, somewhat sedately or craftily in the forenoon, but to make the most of what was vouchsafed in the afternoon, when the thaw had reached below the surface and the turf under the northern hedgerows had in some degree yielded. Hounds at any rate could work their foxes and play with us to their own advantage, whether by sending us round to gate or gap, or by leaving us standing still, as the phrase goes, in a wheatfield.

The atmosphere of the day may have had something to do with it: over-dieting a good deal. But if the im-

pression forced upon me were in any degree correct, horses and riders alike were deplorably out of condition. At the covert-side they evinced it only by a nearly general sleekness of appearance, as illustrated by a leaning towards rotundity or ruddiness as the case might be. When strong exercise began, both panted lustily, and grew heated and moist on wholly inadequate provocation. By Monday both will probably be all the better for it. To-morrow they will be stiff, perhaps sleepy, and in occasional instances even sore and abraded. *Mem.*—Saddles ought now again to be carefully looked to: for sore backs are quite a spring product, and uneven stuffing is as galling to a horse's back as a wrinkled stocking (let us say) to the human cuticle. Personally, I am as glad when the commencement of hunting takes place on a Saturday as I used to be thankful when the 12th of August fell upon that day. Last week we were taken rather unawares. Many were hibernating in town; and early-morning and late-evening trains brought them hurrying down—to find the country still comparatively grim-looking, but the thermometer working hard towards mending matters.

The rides of Badby Wood were as piecrust, that is to say, the few of them that are not almost macadamed for our benefit. At first they bore the Pytchley field (quite a little one to-day, please) clattering and slipping on the surface, while the lady pack drove cheerily up and down and about the covert. By degrees the crust broke, and horses then churned the frost-rotted ground into bog-holes. Perseverance at last achieved the task of driving a fox forth, and hounds then led us over an Alpine district—chiefly tilled, as if it had slipped all by mistake into the Grass Countries—past the back of Everdon to the Grafton coverts beyond. A little dip in the ground put the Everdon brook across our path—at least to such of us as would admit the necessity—and a score or so of horses reported progress by slipping in very varied fashion from one hard greasy bank to the other. The jump is scarcely a jump at any time. To-day it was hardly a fair question to put to them, with gate and shallow ford adjacent. This fox was lost at Everdon Stubbs. Next

they ran sharp from Staverton Wood, over a couple of miles of stopping plough, to ground. Of the brace of foxes at Braunston Gorse one gave us a two-mile scamper in a circle; the other, quite late in the evening, consented to go forth to Welton and Norton (which the map will tell you is not a far cry) and beat hounds at dark. So we had seen several foxes found and hunted, and the few brief minutes round Braunston were accepted gladly as a taste of new life.

On February 3rd all the world apparently came forth to see what a Pytchley Wednesday might be like, and accordingly made it, as is customary, a mammoth course of smart men and women. As luck would have it, Reynard entered fully into the arrangements, and took them for a jaunt over some of the best and most open of the Pytchley grass. Thus there was room for all and a few more, while for half-an-hour or so they disported themselves hither and thither between the two little coverts of Lilbourne and Crick. Hounds had found at the former, not by any means an easy place from which to start on the part of a crowd of horse-people all bent upon doing their best; but their fox had met with equal difficulties, and so the great phalanx was spread almost in line along the road behind the church before hounds in any degree settled to run. Then, as a swarm of bees after their hive-master, they swept across the valley and over its tempting, facile fences. If there was not a place for each enthusiastic rider, there was at least room enough that one should not jump upon another, and the hounds went just fast enough to keep themselves out of the way. As the course swung wide from side to side, it took more than twenty minutes to gain Hilmorton Covert, that we have often seen reached in fifteen. From here to Crick Gorse, from Crick Gorse to here and back again, occupied another half-hour; during which all hands enjoyed themselves, and declared they should be very glad to come again. Then, under a failing scent, Goodall worked his way valiantly to Yelvertoft village, his progress thither reminding one at times of nothing more closely than that of a welsher being borne to immersion by a surging crowd—

the hounds, meantime, being wholly unconsidered items. He must have been almost glad when his fox beat him and delivered him.

The day, though not so malevolently boisterous as its predecessors, was not sufficiently balmy to tempt the hundreds to see it out. The wind was liver-searching in its keenness at Yelvertoft Fieldside, as we stood on the bridge with the powers-that-be—the latter, not improbably, musing whether “the burden laid upon them was greater than they could bear.” Heaven forbid! To be brief, covert after covert was drawn; no fox, till the fishpond at Hempow, then a brace. With one of these, but with never a scent, Goodall worked out a run of nearly an hour and a half by sheer, dogged perseverance, aided by the fact that for some reason unknown his fox waited more than once for his coming. Thus, this afternoon we rode over a rough highland line, to the right of Cold Ashby and Thornby, to ground in the valley between Cottesbrook and Purser’s Hill, bringing hounds comfortably near kennels about five o’clock. When I said highland, I ought to have written it Irish-highland; for over most of the obstacles that stood in our way we had to creep and crawl, vociferating “Come up!” or in some cases rolling about because our horses were altogether too English. Taking extremes from which to formulate a general rule (an entirely false method, no doubt), the difference between an Irish horse and an English horse as applied to fashion of jumping may be defined as that in the one case you ask the horse to think for himself, and to act altogether on his own discretion; in the other you give him his orders and bid him obey them without stopping to think—treat him, in fact, on the same footing as the nobler animal who takes your hunter on to covert. You want no sticky horse to fly over the Shires, any more than you can do with a flying horse in Meath. But it is very pleasant when your mount will either creep or fly, *according to order*.

How would Irish horses have behaved in this case, think you? Two English hunters—more placid than usual, on account of being more or less blown—walked

unwillingly into a brook, and there were called upon to stand, while the rider of one dismounted to tear down a rail on the farther bank. During this operation one of them bethought him he would drink ; the other bethought him he might rest his weary head, which accordingly he did across the neck of the first. The dismounted rider having returned to his saddle, it was time to go on. The horse that had quenched his thirst raised his head with a view to progress, and in so doing carried the tired one's head upwards. Here they were, irremediably stuck, like stags locked in combat, or bullocks in a crowded truck. Neither could move, and hounds were running ! I have reason to believe they are not there still ; but the incident, as I left it, was fraught with terrible possibilities.

Having brought you to the end of a long, not uneventful day—the events, by the way, being emphasised by quite an extraordinary number of mud-stained coats and habits, for, you must know, these safety-skirt ladies run up their list of croppers as flippantly and light-heartedly as a Meltonian in his first season, or a rough-rider in his first situation—I will now tell you how to get home again, as illustrated for my special benefit this evening. A long ride home is often tiring, and it is very easy to leave a pony-cart out. Don't forget the big fur rug. Then, if you squeeze in three abreast on the one seat, everything is in favour of your keeping warm. All right ! Let go his head ! Up reared the pony, eager for his collar. But, before he got there, down came the lash, astonishing him to such a degree that, with one wild buck into the air, he broke both shafts, tilted the trio softly backwards in one fur-covered mass, and then straightway set off home on his own account, frightening the led hunters out of their wits as he clattered past them half-way. Capital business driving home after hunting.

As I have asserted many a time before, fox-hunting is in truth the well-loved sport quite as much of the agricultural classes as it is of the mounted and scarlet-clad classes (even as defined almost to extreme to-day, in the high-born and titled roll-call of the latter). A day upon which the "hoonters" are about gives vivid pleasure to a ten

times larger number of working people (who have seldom time or means to go beyond their parish boundary for amusement) than of richer folk who ride a-horseback that day. Old men to little children all accept the pageant with gusto, and view its operations with keen delight, being never so happy as when they can share it by screaming at a fox, however distant.

That even old women will take active and enthusiastic part I had personal opportunity of assuring myself to-day. A good dame had not only seen the fox, but she could not understand how its exact course could be a matter of indifference to any one of us apart from the huntsman, who was already taking advantage of her information. To elucidate her point, and to insist upon our understanding her shrill-toned directions, she perched herself on a new post-and-rails that supplemented the only place of egress. Deaf to my entreaties, and, of course, determined not to be silenced, she held forth from her point of vantage till my time, patience, and gallantry were alike exhausted. So judging there was just room, I determined on at least sharing the doorway with her. No sooner did she realise the coming of the inevitable than, with a loud shriek, she flung herself prone to her right front; the young mare, rising at the timber, swerved off to the left with a startled violence that nearly pitched me on to the turf between them; and I am still in doubt as to which of us three sustained the heaviest shock to the nervous system.

They have invented a new form of impediment to our progress across Northamptonshire. It is hardly likely to meet with wide adoption, but we encountered it on Monday, thus. The occupier's cattle had bored a hole through a dense bullfinch, after a fashion peculiar to shorthorn bullocks, who can virtually take their great carcasses wherever their heads can go. The good man, willing to humour his oxen, but not wishing the outlet to be converted into a common highway, at once drew together the thorns overhead, entwining them neatly and scientifically. Following hounds there came one for whom I entertain sincerest regard. He looked for a spot

where his horse could go through, and, having spotted it, naturally went for it with due rapidity, lest some other should get there before him. The mare, following the fresh-made bullock-tracks, shot through, as a hare through a smeuse. He was retained, preserving connection with his hunter only by the delicacy of her mouth and the length of her crupper, which allowed him to remain seated just ahead of her tail, while with his hands he tore asunder the network of thorn that enveloped his only remaining hat and face. He tells me that for the rest of the day he fairly wept blood, that his hat has gone to spend the frost on the block, and that he holds himself to have been very inconsiderately treated, as he points to his face to witness.

Hardly so badly treated, perhaps, as another of his clique. What say you? This latter, being born a poet rather than a soldier, does not affect the style of collar that supports our chin during the fatigues of mufti parade. The classical, unmilitary collar is—like a top-boot that has been too frequently ministered by an indifferent valet—apt to leave a slot in front of the wearer's throat. There has been little or no mud flying about lately, during this barren, nor'-westerly, inexplicably ill-scenting weather. But earth and gravel are frequently kicked up by the galloping hoof, and a large lump of these was thus flung right into the poet's slot. Do what he would, the intruding morsel had disappeared before he could stop it; and as the run went on it grated its way downwards till his silken undervest became a very hermit's shirt of torturing discomfort. Worst of all, a pebble had been included in the intruding mass, and before the fox was killed he was riding on that pebble. No help for it, and home he went, riding delicately. Far be it from me to suggest how others should dress; but, for my own part, with this sad example in mind, I shall cling steadfastly to the lofty, protective stock that belongs to military antiquity.

One of my yearly blows, irrespective of such casual slaps in the face as Destiny may deal one, is contained in the parting with my hound puppies. The lambs are

coming, and the puppies must go, poor little ones, to discipline and confinement, the two most irksome conditions possible to impose upon man, horse, or dog. Just as they have become companionable, they are carried off by the kennel-cart, and they leave a sad void behind them. All their ingenious freaks of iniquity, all the hot water into which they have so persistently plunged one, all the taxes they have levied in the shape of damage to neighbours or of wanton destruction at home—all their crimes are forgotten, and one would give much to have them and their droll mischief-making back again. Day after day they have been lumbering delightfully after the one old hare on the property, filling up the intervals with chasing or being chased by the foals, their sworn playfellows, or with throwing their tongues in cautious defiance at the great black bullocks of a neighbour's pasture. Now they have gone to make acquaintance with whipcord and repression, perhaps to die of distemper and home-sickness (which finishes off many an ailing puppy), perhaps to be drafted to Russia or Madras, but perhaps to lead us again and again, from Shuckburgh or from Crick.

CHAPTER XI

A LATE RELEASE

IF hunting went on the whole year round, as it may in some planet, or in some future hunting-ground, an occasional frost might provide a charming interlude, as, for instance, when we all go a-Christmassing, or when young men and maids foregather for hunt balls. Even a twelve o'clock meet scarcely makes hunting chime in with the latter, while, as for a 9.30 innovation, it has to be surrendered at discretion, like some of Mr. Balfour's well-intended safeguards.

But a frost in latter February has about as much to recommend it as a week's rain for Ascot or a tempest for Henley. It is a keen, irretrievable misfortune, and is

regarded by fox-hunters, as it is by lamb-breeders, as a distinct breach of privilege.

Our horses were far from requiring a rest. In spite of deep ground for the bulk of the winter, we have scarcely tired a horse this season—in the Weedon district. Right and left of us, there have been a run or two here, a run or two there, but they have not come our way, since November.

Else might there be something refreshing, exhilarating, and deliciously gratifying in the summons to work after the lapse of days. We look forward, of course, with a zest that no other attraction could supply to to-morrow with the North Warwickshire, to Wednesday with the Pytchley. But is there not in the outlook a tinge of sadness, that belongs to so much on earth when once we are out of our teens, or our twenties (as may pertain to the cruel accident of sex)? Too late, too late, is a cry that has perhaps embodied more disappointment, conveyed more bitterness, and even contained more condensed agony than any protest by human voice. But moralising or moan, chagrin or regret, what have we to do with you to-night—with two good horses awaiting the morrow, and the morrow—a travelling hack to the stable, and a clean bill of health just issued by trusty groom—the thermometer at forty degrees, and the sky serene? We have dined; we are sound; and, God be thanked, we shall be dancing the green to the best of all tunes before we're a dozen hours older.

Tuesday Morning.—And how is the outlook now? A suspicion of grey frost, a determined outburst of sunshine. Not the best possible omens of sport, you will say. Never mind, bright and refreshing, and wholesome, conditions wherein to be abroad, bound for the covert-side once more, whether astride the galloper, or snugly packed abaft the trotter. The former will put your liver of idleness to rights before you reach hounds; the latter will set your teeth chattering till in thought you are back in the dentist's chair—a perch that, I am led to believe, has fox-hunters for occupants during a frost almost as freely as has the theatre stall, or the haircutter's mystic

stool. Our roads are roughened in February with an ingenuity that can only be termed devilish. Every loose stone is raked into path and rut, to the confusion of your horse, the ruin of your trap, and with no possibility of benefit to the road, for the granite pieces are merely kicked off again without being absorbed.

Mr. Ashton, meeting at Wolston, brought his hounds first to Wilcox Gorse; and, with a fox outlying in the immediate vicinity, treated us to a twenty minutes' gallop of which we all thought much, and made the most. The ditches of Duns Moor were deep and wide as ever; but their condition has wholly and happily changed since November. You can now see into them; and, though the view is not invariably enticing, it admits of guiding your horse where the sailing is plain and his course is obvious. In fact, this deep-dug, awesome plain has lost all its terrors since the snow. Added to which the line—to Ryton Coppice and Ryton Wood (there to ground)—bore evident signs of having been more or less recently ridden, possibly tumbled through. Most of the fences were gapped clean, even to the bottom of the ditches.

There was a scent, a rare treat in itself. Hounds could drive, and keep us going—keep us out of mischief, if you like to put it that way. For even with the help of gaps there could be no pressing hounds, though, I make bold to assert, there was a field in their wake that, were I master, I should be loth to let for a moment out of my sight.

Occupying a wholly different position, I had the opportunity from my own standpoint of reaping no small pleasure from the prowess of a single individual, with whose name I will take upon myself to make free. This was in the performance of Mr. Martin, of Catesby, who, walking seventeen stone, and here competing with many men seven stone lighter, was gliding over the country in the foremost van, riding fairly to hounds, steadying his horse at each jump in a fashion that half the light-weights would do well to copy, yet taking every fence at his own spot and losing no ground as he went. In truth, it did *me* good to mark and learn from my yeoman friend.

It has been laid down by some capable authority—I think it was “Scrutator”—that if you want to ingratiate yourself with the huntsman of a pack to which you happen to arrive as a stranger, you cannot do better than open the ball with some remark appreciative of his hounds. A charming instance of this policy came to ear a week or two ago, on the occasion of a lawn meet, and even of an address from the Master in office. On this occasion Stranger (there are a good many on our weekly bank holiday, so the pseudonym cannot be regarded as personal) took advantage of the momentary lull at the conclusion of the Master’s words, and lost no time in putting the good old principle into practice. “Mr. Chirpy,” he began, addressing the huntsman by name, “I notice your hounds” (they were the little lady pack, please note) “are not nearly so massive or powerful as the Coal and Iron Hounds that I am accustomed to hunt with” (naming a pack that Will Chirpy had been wont to hold as very small beer indeed). “How do you account for that?” he persisted, while the huntsman sat aghast till every feature of his sport-worn face began working with repression of feeling. That no retort escaped his lips, I take to be stronger evidence of Will Chirpy’s command of temper and of self than even his cool presence of mind among the galloping hundreds. Turning from the questioner to his first whip, he merely inquired in leisurely syllables, that were cutting only from their very calmness—“Who’s that gentleman, John; do you know?” Then, as if conscious he could bear the strain no longer, “Put ’em up, Alfred. No good messing here. Beg pardon, my lord, did you say I was to move off?”

Wednesday Night, February 24.—The pleasant task of noting the sport of to-day I shall leave till to-morrow. I doubt if any of the band of matured young fellows would care to undertake it, who did their duty by the Pytchley Hunt Ball of last night and have since been subjected to a thorough wet morning, a long day of constant galloping, to say nothing of subsequent steaming bath and well-earned evening of quiescence (a word that you may render according to your special habits and proclivities). Of the

overnight function I say nothing, except that, however smart and complete of itself, it was by no means on the scale of a Pytchley Wednesday; that the world of male-kind would seem to have undergone a process akin to transposition, the old men having become very young, and the young men very old. Why, a "man" is quite aged nowadays at twenty. He is often *blase'* and worn at twenty-five! Is he not!

As to the Ball I would merely add, as they tell me, Beauty was closely concentrated, both as to matron and maid. There was an eclipse in each class. My feminine readers—if I am honoured by any—may possibly fail to follow the threadbare simile. But if any of them assisted at the event in question, I warrant you they will "name the winner in one" in either competition; and perhaps add, "Of course I know whom he means; but I can't say I admired her one bit, while as to a girl at her first ball, of course she looks fresh, happy, and bright, which is what men pretend to like!"

Now I find myself humming drowsily to my hearth-rug companions—well, never mind what. Snap responds by wagging his stern like a hound first feathering in covert, Puss by jumping on to my manuscript and rendering it more undecipherable than ever. Time for bed, pussy. Glad I had strength of mind enough to cry off a pleasant man-party; for I am a dull and heavy-eyed dog to-night. The snowdrifts from below, the rainpour from above, have an exhausting effect alike upon vision and faculty. A happy weariness, though, is that begotten of a busy day's hunting.

Some new vicissitude of the chase I discover almost every day I go out. Were I to set them out in detail, and dispense them in a volume, I feel sure that few men having home responsibilities would be allowed to go forth, to ride and to hunt. Yet these casualties, risks, and hairbreadth escapes are, as I have often pointed out, by no means necessarily the outcome of conscientious hard riding. Take this instance of yesterday, the morning of which, you remember, was both very wet and very warm. He was equipped with apron and with covert coat.

And he has likewise equipped himself with a pulling horse and a very inadequate bridle. Between the lot he shortly found himself in a state of heat and distress bordering upon apoplexy. There was nothing for it but to pull up at once and get rid of some of the encumbering garments. Accordingly he brought the bay mare abruptly to a standstill by putting her head straight at a hovel wall. Off went the mackintosh-apron, to be twisted deftly round the breastplate. With the rain-drenched covert coat he was not so successful. It clung to his arms as if glued to them; and do what he would he could get it no further than his elbows. The bay mare of course took advantage of the opportunity to set herself going again in pursuit of hounds. And this she did at best pace while her rider sat pinioned by his elbows, in a plight little better than Mazeppa's! How it ended I cannot tell you: for they were soon a mile away. But it is said that a rent covert coat was picked up a mile or so further on; and I know that Mazeppa II. means to hunt again to-morrow, though very silent and reserved as to the incident in question.

CHAPTER XII

A DART FROM WINWICK WARREN

LORD SPENCER has consented to retain the Mastership of the Pytchley. Comment on the gratifying announcement would be altogether superfluous. Had he vacated the post, there was no one to fill it adequately—though of course an acceptable stop gap (I can think of no other words to express blameless inadequacy) would speedily have been forthcoming. We are grateful to Lord Spencer, not merely for continuing to hold an office that has been, as it were, the natural prerogative of his family for generations, but for consenting, at whatever inconvenience and labour to himself, still to carry on the multiplied duties and responsibilities that accompany the mastership of a country so popular and so accessible as the Pytchley.

Tuesday, March 1st, was the occasion of our first 9.30 muster. Whether the experiment was successful as to keeping down numbers must be for others to judge. As a matter of fact, the field of the morning did not exceed 250. But then it must be borne in mind that other hounds were out—this being a Shrove Tuesday meet in lieu of Wednesday. It is open to doubt if any further reduction is likely to be brought about by a less stringent measure than recurring to John Peel's hour of meeting. The modern Nimrod would hardly be brought to fold his cravat or buckle his leathern garters by candlelight. He would withdraw his subscription, and go elsewhere—or, maybe, take to golf.

He turned up in fair force, though, on Tuesday at Crick—having gone to bed specially early overnight, and looking all the better for it. A long and varied day he had before him: a trying day, a cold day, but withal a very pleasurable day, according to my estimate and according to the standard of this insufficient season. Sleet and snow blinded him as he rode or drove to covert, after his scanty, premature breakfast: and the same persecuting elements worried him the livelong day, pinching him at the covert-side, and chilling him during the periods of inaction that constitute so considerable a section of every day's hunting. On the other hand he was loosed off no less than four times upon a flying ride—the fourth occasion developing into a very merry, genial gallop, and sending him home warmed to the bone.

It was bleak and cold, and nigh upon three o'clock of the afternoon, that we stood upon the hill of Winwick Warren—wondering vaguely at the persevering industry of the earth stopper, who to all appearance had laid a flat stone to the mouth of every aperture on this honeycombed height. A shivering throng we were—our complexions illustrating every shade of æsthetic uncomeliness. “Yaick-aick-aick!” Don't you know it? It has power to set my heart going more deftly than any signal save Tom Furr's “Yurry-Yurry-Yurry” of similar occasion. “The same fox we took from Purser's Hill, my lord,” cries John, as he cheers hounds to the line and we crowd up to the

road, that crosses our front eastward. Sheep are penned here and there in the two turnip-fields beyond it. Our fox has dashed through them without halting or turning, and gains useful ground in consequence—though it seems hardly ten seconds later that we are clear of the hurdles, the sheep-netting, the next three plough-country fences of wattle and bramble, and are dashing down the grassy slope towards Guilsboro'. Some sudden inspiration, or it may be interference, has occurred to our fox on reaching the lower ground; for he strikes upward and leftward with a quick unexpected swing that threatens to carry the little ladies clean away from us, as they dart across the fair pastures, northward. Firm and invigorating is the turf upon this red upland. With pace as now, 'tis ever a delight to ride it. What the fences may be is a matter of chance as they come. You and I will cling close to the grey, and follow the official—as we have many a time before. If he frighten us too sorely we can but pull up—break a stirrup, lose a shoe, lame a horse, or what not. There are wide and awkward bottoms among these ridges—such places as you like to know the other side of before you find yourself irretrievably under weigh. Will it do? Will it do? The answer comes only from the thud of the grey's bounding hoofs, as he lands yards beyond what was after all but insignificance. But the next is a teaser if I remember aright; and, as I have remarked before, I never in my cowardice fail to remember a fence once seen, though I may not even recognise the locality until I have deciphered it afterwards from amid the cobwebs of my brain. Strike it right or strike it left, you may have to crawl, clamber, or even to gallop round. Follow the grey under the ash-trees, keep on all the pace you have, but steady her head, and steady her quarters; and a hundred to one you clear ditch, blackthorn, and rail, beside Mr. Hugh Owen, Mr. Foster, and the rest of the centre division. Passing by what I take to be Nortoft Lodge (if not, it was some other small farmhouse, between Thornby and Guilsboro'), the little ladies drive hard as ever up the greensward to the Cold Ashby road. (How little memories crop up as one gallops! 'Twas the very same greensward, do you remem-

ber, farmer-friend, wherein with proper pride you rode to cheer Betsey-the-single-handed, her whom you had walked—and you were put round at once to the huntsman yourself?) The jump into the road is as a leap over an avalanche—for great masses of snow lie beyond and below. There may be a wide gulf beneath—there is probably nothing. But a horse quite as cautious and prudent as yourself flings himself into the roadway, far beyond the white, mud-freckled drifts—and, possibly, in such good company as that of Messrs. Roden, Gordon-Cunard, and H. Mills. Lord Spencer is on the spot to insist upon room, for the pack now feathering upon the soiled surface of the plough beyond. Downward then they push again, towards the Yelvertoft valley: and, bending still leftward, hunt brightly past Winwick village, till they turn upward over the spot where Goodall brought his fox to hand in the fog gallop of some four years ago. Prompted by the reminiscence, one of the most active participators, and certainly the heaviest¹ in that fog-episode, now proceeds at once to set his stamp upon the exact locality. This he does by imprinting deep in the red soil the outline of himself and his bay mare—leaving on the hillside a landmark similar in shape, and almost identical in scale, with that giving a name to the Vale of White Horse.

After this hounds work onward almost to Ravensthorpe, and into the district beyond West Haddon. But the farther they go, the more ground does their fox seem to have gained upon them. And he won the day, which thus terminated about four o'clock. The last event we may well term a pretty hunt of nearly an hour—of which the first twenty-five minutes or so were enjoyable exceedingly. To no one, I would venture to wager, did they commend themselves more heartily and acceptably than to the light-weight little lady from Northumberland, piloted to point of view by Mr. Darby—I mean, of course, Miss Fenwick, who, with her father, has been hunting some few recent days in Northamptonshire.

¹ Mr. P. A. Muntz.

CHAPTER XIII

A HOLIDAY WITH THE WARD

FROZEN out in England, how better seek relaxation and change than in a ride across Meath or county Dublin? A contrast—sometimes a very thrilling one—will the Saxon find it, when emerging fresh and untaught from the crude simplicity of the stake-and-bounds of his native pastures. Why don't you try it more generally, ye greedy thrusters, with youth on your side, with an insatiable appetite for perilous leaps, and above all with a growing craving ever for a new sensation? You will get it—this last named—I promise you, when first you find yourselves poised on a narrow back—a gulf, ten feet deep, and as many feet wide, holding out its arms to you, while your horse gathers himself on the crumbling ridge for a second, supreme spring—and for a landing only a newly-stoned road wide and far beneath you.

If you don't select a frost, take the autumn; and school your nerves then, for the coming fray in the overcrowded arena of the Shires. I believe you are all welcome in this sport-loving land, to farmers and hunting-men alike (at least this is the impression that they undeniably convey to the grateful, casual stranger). You see, you can't level an Irish fence to the ground—even if a hundred or two ride over it. You can't break down a bank in the blithe, well-pleased fashion in which you shiver a post and rails or scatter an oxer; while as for riding over wheat or cutting up a piece of seeds, you must be wilfully and ingeniously wicked if you can either achieve these or succeed in leaving open a gate or liberating the stock.

Of the many points that I find to astonish and impress me during my novitiate in Irish hunting-fields is this one—viz. that, notwithstanding the unaltered and unimproved state of each fence after the passage of the leaders, the whole main body of the field always contentedly follow on, just as they do with us, where all the terrors and most of the dangers of a fence are quickly knocked to pieces by

preceding horsemen. Here, as there, let the place be never so ghastly in its original ugliness, no sooner is one daring leader safely over than the whole flock of followers accept his lead—and, what is more, though the leap is no whit better for them, their very confidence seems to carry them all safely over. I wonder at the men; I wonder still more at the women; and I wonder most of all at the horses—as I see chasm after chasm crossed unflinching, that would hang up a Leicestershire or Northamptonshire field for the day.

One word more. If you do come over at any future time, don't bring your second horsemen, and don't bring your English-bred horses. You will have no use for either. I must leave others to enlighten you as to how to escape from the dilemma, while I go on briefly to illustrate my impressions of the Ward country, from experiences of the present week; "Sharp frost, no hunting, horses well" being the state of the Grass Countries of England, as telegraphed from the home-stables.

On Monday, then, March 7, 1892, along roads dusty as the Epsom route in May or June, I jogged leisurely forth to Brindley Memorial—a point at no great distance from the kennels, but some nine very long Irish miles from Dublin, and where (as no doubt I might have learned long ago from my friend "Triviator," and as every one in Ireland knows) a handsome monument is erected to the memory of the father of the present huntsman—for over twenty years having held the office his son now fills so capably. Owing to a temporary alteration of meets—affecting the present week—a well-filled special had, I learned, carried a party (and with them no doubt my esteemed collaborateur) to the foxhounds of Meath. Thus the field of the Ward was small, and the contrast with recent events and surroundings elsewhere was the more marked and striking. My route lay not direct from the city of Dublin, but from Ashtown. Consequently, to reach the meet, I had to find my way through Finglas and other outlying hamlets whose names I endeavoured as best I could to assimilate into a Saxon memory. Soon, as I expected, I succeeded in losing my way; and forth-

with I stuttered forth such portion of my directions as I could remember to various peasants lounging about their cabin doors. I might as well have addressed them in Japanese or Malay. They merely looked at me wonderingly but kindly. Of a sudden, however, a stalwart matron burst forth with emphasis, "Is it the hunt ye mane?" She knew where that was to be, of course; as did probably every villager for a dozen miles round. And she directed me delightedly and intelligibly enough on my way, to a function that in Ireland is second in attraction only to a funeral.

A mare of charming quality was my mount, at Mr. M'Donald's kind hands, and her silken mane had been plaited with exemplary neatness by her stable attendant. Two little damsels, barefooted, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, and golden-haired, played by the roadside. "Ah, now! Look at the harse! Hasn't he lovely curls?" cried one laughing damsel. "Truth he has!" chimed in the other sweet imp, showing a set of teeth that fairly sparkled across her face. "But isn't it a lovely colonel?" I appeal to *you*, reader. Wouldn't you have crossed both their little palms with silver? I did—and rode on as jauntily as if my gazette were in my pocket, and a new truth had just been revealed and acclaimed.

"What is that strong dog?" I happened to inquire of Brindley, as he strolled his pack along the road from the meet. "He came from the Fitzwilliam," he replied, giving the hound's name. "Did he!" I exclaimed, my curiosity aroused. "What is he by?" Instead of the information, I was met with an astonished counter-query, "Who might you be?" and the comment in all good humour, "I've not been asked a hound's pedigree these ever so many years"—showing that, thorough, practical, and highly-advanced as is the science of riding in the Green Island, the less exciting details of hound-culture are not a subject of very wide interest. I was forced to explain in excuse that the study in question was to a certain minor extent my trade in life, which at once met with his friendly approval.

At the comfortable hour of 1.30, the deer was enlarged

by the main road adjoining the village of Ashbourne. A very small circle he made westward, while the bulk of a field of fifty or sixty remained sensibly in the road till hounds swept back to them, at the spot where he had been viewed across. The chief—indeed, only—objects, apparently, for which he had made this *détour* were to assure us that but little frost remained in the ground, and that by sample of two atrocious-looking gulfs he had a strong country in view for our benefit. The second was into the road wherein clustered the majority of the horsemen, a whole gallery of cars and other vehicles, and a complete army of wreckers. Personally, I consider I only just escaped becoming prey to the last named by exercising a judicious flank movement, and jumping into a lane at right angles—for, as I galloped up the road a few seconds afterwards, there were three horses' heads gaping upwards on the bank, like crocodiles at the Zoo pushing forward to be fed; there were three sorrow-stricken sportsmen hauling helplessly at their bridles; and, as vultures to a feast, a cloud of loafers fluttered hurriedly up.

Leaving the road in the wake of the flying crew, now fairly embarked upon the wide green sea stretching eastward, I found the iron gate through which they had passed into the first grass field. But a spalpeen was holding it ajar, demanding toll of stragglers as they came. It was no time to fumble with gloved hand for the coin of extortion: it was still less a moment at which a man, already more or less in the lurch, cared to be hindered by a blackmailer. So, fortunately catching the gate's upright with my outstretched foot, I went through almost at speed, leaving the extortioner loudly anathematising his own iron trap and me.

Hounds had checked a moment, and among a network of ditches and deceptive narrowbacks I found many people riding up and down, and eventually swallowing necessity—none of them turning back, but most of them preferring evidently to look long before they leaped (as well they might do, according to my own terrified estimate of these great gullies and double-scrambles)—while the leaders

sat looking leisurely round in their saddles, hounds having flashed over the line.

Onward they rode again ; and for the next twenty minutes were engaged in getting rapidly from field to field, over what they admitted afterwards to be a succession of narrowbacks of the most trappy description. They seemed all that to me, as I followed on as best I could—too proud to ejaculate aloud, but muttering many a prayerful interjection as I found myself wavering on each crumbling ridge or recovering barely from a second hidden grip. Not even the bliss of ignorance, that allowed me to believe this the ordinary and everyday class of country of the Ward, sufficed to make those complicated fortifications in any degree welcome to my untutored understanding.

Do you, my Saxon brethren, know what these narrowbacks of theirs are like ? Not all of you do ; so I will tell you in a few words, and without exaggeration. Picture to yourself a chasm in the ground such as you may have seen excavated down a street, when a main sewer is to be laid down in a town. There seems no bottom to it ; and its width is sufficient for a fair water-jump in mild Northamptonshire. Beyond this a grass-grown wall of earth, that may be five feet in height, or that may be only three. Beyond this, again, a sharp-dug little ditch, placed at the exact distance to catch the fore-legs of a far-jumping horse—in fact, to turn completely on to his back any animal that cannot gather his hind legs to kick back, with the power and instantaneousness of a cat struggling for its liberty.

Or take the charming compound the other way. A common or English horse, and a common or Saxon rider, approaching the little grip, and viewing the green and innocent wall it protects, would probably skim lightly over, to—I daren't finish the picture—say, to make work for the wreckers. The Irish horse, on the contrary, perches neatly on the green coping, surveys the prospect for a second, and reveals to your astonished gaze, a black awesome gulf, into which it seems altogether improbable he can help plunging you. He doesn't though ; but with

a spring as of a bent bow, lands you lightly on the farther brink, while you—the Saxon horseman—faintly gasp forth the breath of astonishment, thankfulness, and relief.

One reflection I can offer you—not as a panacea, but as a possible mitigator of your natural terrors. It was put very aptly to me the other day, to mark the difference between falling in the Shires of England and falling in Ireland—and, remember, in neither sphere can you expect, nor is it even desirable, that you should continue to go without a fall now and again. In the one case you are flung from a height, and when going probably a good pace. *In the other you fall when you are already down.* I think the definition commends itself without explanation. My notes are growing lengthy. Let me add only of Monday that (all errors of geography on my part to be excepted) they ran past Garriston, and, after a sharp final spurt, took their deed near Naul, a pleasant forty minutes of fine country and instructive experience.

A GALLOP IN A SNOWSTORM

The funniest experience of a sport-seeking life was the run enjoyed hugely with the Ward on Wednesday last, in a blizzard snowstorm. The humour of it I put aside as impossible to convey. But I can give you the simple facts, as far as I retain them in a storm-battered head-piece.

Driving snow-showers had come on with the early morn, and at the time there seemed only a happy prospect of warmth within doors, of a heavy luncheon, and a day lost; but at 12.30 we were in the special, at one o'clock we were at Drumree, and at 1.30 we made part of a multi-clad field of fifty that shivered at Dunshaughlin—without map and without memory I must risk these names, and plead for indulgence. Lord Zetland was there, and so were Lord Molyneux and Lord Melgund (the last-named at the font of his first baptism of sport in Ireland). Needless to add, he went through the ordeal in store with admirable success, and I am sure he will understand my proud feeling of satisfaction on seeing him at the meet.

He was even a newer boy than myself. I had almost, by virtue of seniority, asked him his name. Besides him, I found old comrades, such as Captains Onslow and Hone, with other acquaintance of previous or passing occasion. It does not take you long to find *camaraderie* in an Irish hunting-field.

There was a deer in the cart. There may have been two, if a deer-cart be double-barrelled—a point of venerie of which it has never yet occurred to me to obtain solution. I know only that two deer generally take carriage exercise on these occasions. But, in any case, the cart had nothing to do with this, the most unartificial, and in many respects the most attractive, deer-hunt at which it has ever been my fortune to assist. Hounds found their deer for themselves, got away close at his brush (or whatever takes the place of that honoured attribute); and after having hustled him heartily at starting, never ran him, or rather her, into view again. They drove their hind very hard for twenty-five minutes, throwing their tongues lustily; then for another hour and a half hunted out her line like harriers, running, as is the way of staghounds, nearly mute on a cold scent, yet opening freely when they found excuse for pace. They had not caught her even then. And not until Friday shall I learn whether or no she still runs wild. I and others from a distance had all done sufficient by that hour, and scent seemed fading fast.

This outlying deer had taken up her quarters in Poorhouse Gorse. Report came to say that she had been seen to leave it that morning; but after consultation as to whether a fox would be disturbed, Brindley was given licence to draw it.

(*Thursday, March 10*).—And now, by reason of innate dilatoriness and the pressure of pleasant occupation, I find myself with about half-an-hour in which to tell you of nearly a two hours' run. Perhaps I may limit myself to the early thirty minutes.

Poorhouse Gorse. No chance of a fox being in it. Every chance, Brindley urged, of his outlying deer. Hounds threw their tongues the moment they entered. Only the usual let-off of music, we deemed it, that stag-

hounds will vent when taken to a line, and when they know the strife is imminent. Not a bit of it. 'Twas genuine acknowledgment of the game within—as we appreciated afterwards, though now we sauntered, with turned-up collars and with scarce a hope, by the deep ditched covert-side, scrutinising with mixed feelings the formidable partition 'twixt field and field, noticing mournfully the absence of civilised gates, and marked shiveringly the black snow-clouds that loomed overhead.

Hooroosh—Hooroosh! A real Irish chorus, taken up, as it seemed, from the whole countryside. The deer had broke, the mob of beaters, and what not, had opened their throats, and hounds were away to a view.

The big hind at first made a bad strike for freedom; she met the village of Dunshaughlin, she met a sheep dog, and she came back among us, till five minutes later we had galloped the street, to see her bounding from the road leftward into the country beyond, with a fair start of the pack, and with a wild, good career before her.

In short, it was a typical commencement. A single exit (wherever men hunt they will follow sheep-fashion, you know) over the stone-faced narrowback, into an upland pasture, the big beast bounding gaily forward, and hounds just emerging from the road, as we clustered quietly for a start. "All on" surely. And now to keep them in sight, over the firm green upland, and the unknown difficulties of a strange country. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*, wouldn't you put it, my classical and revered collaborateur?

A corner, a pond, and a wall surrounding ditto. Only way into next field seems the top of the wall. So a certain few clamber for a stride or so gravely along the wall, to drop into the drinking-place and so on.

Ridge and furrow I thought to be solely a product of Britain. Here it is, though, in its narrowest and choppiest form, while hounds are driving forward, and the first stray streaks of snow meet your straining eyeballs.

Ugly bank—and stone-faced, too. Nothing else the other side, I hope. Come up, old Confidence! You must find courage for both of us. Safely atop. Heavens,

what next? On into space, and down into depth. What manner of men—of farmers, of landlords—ever devised, and contrived, and executed such barrier as this? Elephants couldn't storm it, let alone the black Irish bullocks of two-year-old growth. (By the way, what has become of the stock since autumn, when the fat beasts fairly chivvied the hounds in each field?)

Gallop we now our hardest, while hounds gain ground, and the storm bursts; but the deer, like a sensible animal, chooses ever the easiest outlet, and hounds don't tail enough to allow of the readiest rider jumping on them.

Close to their sterns, though, ride Captain Dewhurst, Mr. Hugh Gore, Mr. Percy Maynard, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and I don't know how many more—and, landing over a wide double, they strike the road (what road, don't ask me), while the pack dash alongside through a thin plantation, and run parallel to them for half a mile.

I hate a road to ride in. I hate a road worst of all to jump into. It's a dangerous path to follow; it is a still more dangerous trap to enter. But the deer has taken to it, and we must slip in behind the others—with a wriggle, and a squirm, and a recover—all because it was nothing, and because the top bar, I mean top earth, wouldn't break.

Snow and sleet and driving storm were now full in our faces. We jumped out of them, and out of the road, a few hundred yards further on, turning sideways to the gale and hoping that Mercy would keep our heads at least half averted from the blinding storm. So cold and bitter, too. I bethought me of Lord Manners and his Liverpool victory, won, he declared, solely through the medium of his woollen gloves; and I banged each dog-skinned hand in turn upon my thigh as I galloped, warm everywhere else, and delighted. Nay, I could have laughed aloud, for the pace and the fun and the novelty, till, till—for man is very mortal, even in his hottest moments—I saw something bigger and uglier than I had ever seen before. And a man riding at it, too; and this in a corner whence there was no escape! The ditch seemed boundless, the bank was as the Great Wall of China; yet there

was Mr. Gore and his chestnut flinging upward and into it, and pinned to its side like fly to a window-pane, till the mare drew herself foot after foot to the summit.

And this, I learned afterwards, was The Gerardstown Double. Yet I believe many—or even most—got up it, and over it. Don't bring it over to *our country* is all I can say! We could do nothing at all with it there, believe me.

The storm was a tempest now. The snow filled ears and eyes and collars, embedded itself on manly chest, drifted into feminine bosom, and there froze. You could barely see twenty yards (and then only by hurried winks), and yet hounds were running their very hardest, with a cry that cut through the storm like the Inchcape Bell. The best beacon, if you could keep near it, was the crop-tail of Mr. Bowen's brown mare, whose square quarters could just be distinguished pounding off into the gloom at a pace that threatened quickly to rob us of all guidance. Now he was joined by Mr. Leonard—the best heavy-weight, I make bold to say, I have seen for many a year—and the twain (the latter the deputed Master) kept hounds in touch through the blinding downfall, till they reached Corbalton and its park.

Quaint indeed was the prospect now, as the sky cleared and the sun shone through. A merry Christmas party we were—covered one and all from head to foot with encrusted snow, and with a carpet, two or three inches thick, spread white and soft beneath our feet.

Twenty-five minutes of the very best to this point, if my standard of estimate be worth anything. Lord Melgund, who saw it from the very van, and whose criterion of a gallop with hounds has been formed on a very similar basis to mine, would possibly bear me out. At any rate, I take it, we shall go back to Northamptonshire appraising it thus. And, likely enough, we shall talk for many a day of how some four or five ladies rode through the storm, over a country that, to say the least, awed and astonished us both. Besides her whom I have already taken liberty to name, Mrs. M'Calmont, Mrs. Galbraith, Mrs. Dewhurst (on her wondrous cob, too, and not mounted as in the gallop of Monday), and Mrs. Dudgeon.

Post time is closing, and so must I. The run was far from over; but the rest was slow, though skilful and very pretty hunting. A master of his art is Brindley—witness that recovery when hounds had drifted hundreds of yards beyond the line on the river-bank below Corballis—and his manner of handling is quiet and clever in the extreme. Well may his followers put him in the front place of his craft.

He worked on now by Kilbrue and Green Park, and took his deer.

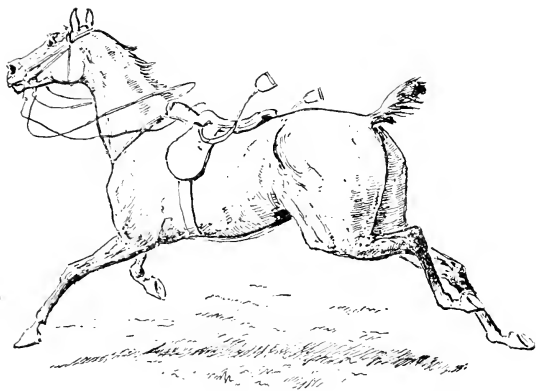
By no means so exciting as my last previous experience with the Ward was the sport of Monday, 14th March. While I dare not for a moment lay claim to full acquaintance with the craft of stag-hunting, I know at least enough to prevent my expecting a run *every day*—though the percentage of good gallops is, I take it, greater with the Ward than with any other pack, for the reason that the deer go freely over the open banks, whereas they will often hesitate before plunging through the thorn fences of many parts of England, even running the whole circle of a field in search of an outlet.

On Wednesday their deer ran very crooked. Moreover, they had given him a very liberal start; and, with another heavy snowstorm on the point of bursting, there was never scent enough to allow of hounds setting him straight.

I would rather take part in a fast run than a slow run anywhere. But especially would I with "The Wards." To begin with, the country, or, rather, its fences, are, to my untutored mind, much more suited to pace than to pottering. I can see plainly that others think the same. The slower hounds go, the longer people hesitate, and the closer they huddle one upon another to the spot where a leader has gone, albeit the fence is banked and modelled exactly the same throughout its length.

Again (pardon me for saying it), the Ward field is not the one of all others amid which the practice of riding slowly and in your turn is exceptionally favoured. A mere matter of habit—but a habit to which it does not happen to have given close attention. Courteous, and

good-humoured to a degree, the Ward field—except with reference to ladies—ignores altogether what elsewhere we denominate, and insist upon, as *turn*—viz. our right of jumping a fence exactly in the order in which we arrive within jumping distance. That this custom does not hold good is very possibly part of the outcome of stag-hunting, and of stag-hunting in its best and fastest form. I am writing for fox-hunters. And I say that for fox-hunting the worst possible school is stag-hunting. What say Masters of Foxhounds?



Flying steeds with empty saddles and dangling reins

Changing subject to the other main factor of the sport, to wit, the horse. I should like to prepare you for a vicissitude which you are certain to encounter occasionally—if not frequently—when you elect to throw in your luck with the Ward. This is being parted from your horse, and being left only with the consoling assurance that he will surely pursue his career for many a mile, with no one having the power, if they had the inclination, to stop him. It is not etiquette in stag-hunting to catch loose horses. How should it be, unless your own is very blown, or there be other occasion for assuming a virtue? As a matter of fact, my dreams of the

Ward will ever have for their chief illustrations flying steeds with empty saddles and dangling reins, and narrow-backs upon which horse and rider are slowly separating.

I can understand nothing more despairing than the sense of being deserted in a wild, perhaps wholly unfamiliar, country by the beast that constitutes your conveyance for the day, and to whom alone you look for assistance over the dozen vague miles separating you from your hearth. Having once got rid of you, his habit appears to be to see as much of the sport as he can, until he finds himself in a road—when he at once takes first place, outstrips even the deer, and goes off into space.

Were it to be my fortune to hunt regularly with The Wards, I should seriously contemplate having all my horses branded, as on the Western prairie; or even, as that might not explain itself sufficiently to the local mind, have a fully addressed luggage label affixed daily to my hunter's mane.

Indeed, now that I am safely back in my native Shire, I may conscientiously affirm that, whatever doubt and alarm may have attended the necessity of negotiating the strange impediments of county Meath or county Dublin, the two points on which I dwelt ever in honest fear, were (1) lest my career should be stopped, and my run lost, by one of these big ditches swallowing me up, horse and all; and (2) lest the same result should happen by my horse getting away and leaving me afoot.

For all I know, it may be in acknowledgment of this last paramount danger—so frequently evidenced in fact—that the members of the Ward Union—unquestionably the most thorough and sporting Hunt that clubs together with a view to chasing the stag—do not affect a livery, nor even as a rule garb themselves otherwise than in vestments suitable almost equally for running as for riding. The result is wanting in picturesqueness; though, so far from intending ungraciously to cavil at the general absence of scarlet or of green, the casual visitor may add this also to his debt of gratitude, that he does not find his coat of travel or of cub-hunting out of place amid a strictly uniformed crowd.

Often at a narrowback during the run the leading horse would scatter the soft surface-turf, leaving the bank skinned to the bone. Other horses would then land as it were upon a glacier, many of them balancing themselves for a while upon their girths—till they could recover their legs, or couldn't. "Let 'em alone" is, I fancy, the only principle to apply either when they are essaying their jump or when they miss it. Hence it is, possibly, that ladies ride with safety over an Irish country. An Irish horse thinks for himself, and will not be interrupted with impunity. I wonder what an English-bred and English-taught horse would have made of two such tasks as were set to, and achieved by, almost every horse in to-day's field. The one was a stone-faced drop of six feet into a watercourse, the other nearly double that depth from an almost perpendicular bank into a road! He would probably have jumped off the top, with consequences that you can imagine. Were I rich, and were all my horses English, I would send every one of them to be educated in Ireland, to be taught to think and taught to take care of themselves—and of me.

Make a note; and thank me for another hint, brother-Saxon. Bring out, for slow hunting, small change and enough of it. "The price of a dhrink" is an appeal to yer honour at every iron gate through which you may hope to pass—and is one that you cannot well hope to withstand. Keep an outside cash-pocket for it: and in your inner pouch have half a sovereign ready for the occasional digging out of your horse from a ditch.

CHAPTER XIV

DOUBTFUL MOUNTS

Wednesday, March 23.—The Pytchley at Misterton—Mr. Bamford welcoming them to breakfast, in open-handed sympathy with their self-inflicted trial. By 9.45 a field of comfortable size had assembled: the rest were at Lincoln, at Leamington, or else breakfasting at home.

A cool morning, and a warm midday. I need not detain you with a long recital—of how they killed a brace of foxes without much sport, after hunting another very pleasantly from Misterton to Churchover, where a village sheep-dog spoiled the finish.

They very nearly began the day with a goodly gallop; but at that early hour of the morning the shepherds were—they tell me—still counting their sheep, and our fox was met face to face. I am told further—and this is a very much more serious argument against a 9.30 meet—that the local bone-setters insist they cannot possibly get free at such an hour, and that we may just make up our minds to bind up each other. I am loth to trifle with a subject so unattractive: but I am not superstitious (unless it may be under the threefold combination of a single magpie, a 9.30 meet, and a wholly undue allowance of tobacco overnight), else would I, *apropos* of broken bones, have turned straight homeward one day very recently. First cheery friend, seeing me mounted on a horse more familiar to him than to me, “Holloa, I wonder how you will get on with that quad! He put Willie Plunger’s shoulder out for him!” Second good-natured and disinterested friend immediately afterwards, noticing the leather stops that kept my martingale in place upon the brute’s bridle rein, “I say, those are dangerous things. They are always getting caught, and poor Jackson was carried in consequence clean over the cliff at Brighton!”

I did not allow myself to be choked off my ride, and driven to seek an antidote in Rudyard Kipling; but on the other hand I did not allow myself to be mounted on that horse again (he was not my own, please). And this is a true story—if not very strictly to the point.

“Did ye catch him?” asked the village carpenter, as we turned homewards. “Didn’t ye now?” he added in half disdain and half raillery. “Then, ye’d ought to ha’ ma-ade more ha-aste!”

You may be aware that various and well-sustained efforts have of late years been made to naturalise in England the pure-bred Arab, the original source of our best racing stock. It has even been attempted to make what

the new vernacular terms a "fox-catching horse" of him. What he may arrive at in the course of a few generations I dare not hazard an opinion, prejudiced as I am, from Indian experience, in favour of his extraordinary pluck and endurance. But, were I making the experiment in the first generation, I should begin (if I may volunteer the remark) by treating him as I would a native-born farmer's colt, viz. by docking his tail hunter-fashion. Until to-day I should have done it merely as a first step towards "condition," or at any rate as a move towards befitting appearance, just as I should hint to my younger brother that he ought to smoke a cigar in the hunting-field rather than a pipe, or my sister that she should carry her stirrup-leg forward when she is galloping rather than curl it, as so frequently obtains, round the back of her saddle. I might, in my soberer moments, and from a breeder's point of view, recommend the operation, on the principle of root-pruning, viz. in order to develop growth and vigour in the parent stem. But I have a more immediate reason, from to-day. The farmer had built up his gap with heavy thorns. The little Arab took his turn with a light heart, and with a whisk of his tail as if to brush away a mosquito. The latter effort tied him tight to a thorn-bush that had half filled the gap, but that was readily uprooted by the impetus. His owner found speed gradually slackening; but not till half across the field was he brought absolutely to an anchor. Spurring was no use. The ready courage that would have faced a charging boar, or delighted in a polo scrimmage, had suddenly vanished in mid-field. The desert steed was paralysed. And why? Only because he had carried his fence away with him in his tail, and could draw it no further. Surely we might be excused for our gentle laughter.

CHAPTER XV

AMATEURS AND HUNTSMEN

Wednesday Night, March 30, 1892.—I am dull, I am dull. Not merely because I was born so, not only because I

look back upon little or no sport since my last entry, nor even that I have spent a blank day—no hounds within reach—but because my old goose-quill is wholly unloaded, having nothing aboard but wet ink and a dry retrospect. A right day's fox-hunting gives me—gives all who take part in it—a three-volume novel of reminiscence, incident, subject, and dream—a world of thought, for a while, though like a star it may drop, or may vanish in a night or a moment from our ken. A day's delight is but written on a slate: the sponge of time wipes out by the morrow. Without a thread, a guiding string, a sinew, there is no nerve, no pulsation, no moulding of shape or form—and the bare bone is better buried. I remember nothing of a bad day (no, not bad—a day's outing with hounds is never *bad* save and except a good horse has been lamed or killed, a good run has been lost, or one's own brittle frame has been shattered for a while); but I put a moderate day aside at once in my bath and totally in my dinner—don't you? I feel grateful for warmth and comfort, and I dismiss the disagreeable, of hope unsatisfied and preparation unrequited. I have thrown in my lot with the best of good fellows, and we are at least none the worse for it. I have spent pleasant hours in hope and converse. But I have little to talk about—nothing to jot down for future reference. I am sanguine of to-morrow—and I feel better on the thought. *Le roi est mort, vive le roi!*—which I shall at once proceed to translate, and to drink to the old, old refrain, "Fox-hunting, God bless it!"

For diversion I turn to my hound-books. (I am not about to inflict Kennel upon you. By-and-by, I may brush up my pedigrees, and discourse upon "sorts," for such few of you as will listen. But not now.) And at once my heart goes out to the huntsman. Many of you look upon him as being the happiest of mortals—as having two good horses per diem to ride, free, gratis, and to death if necessary—and as at this time of year having merely to hold his hand for your solid mark of appreciation. Why, this is their most miserable, most anxious, most wearing time! You and I come home each evening to our creature comforts—meaning, a roll

in a fat armchair, a growl at things in general (especially if we are foolish enough to open letters that might very well wait till Sunday afternoon, and then might properly be told off to answer themselves) before we proceed to eat quite as much as is good for us, drink twice as much as we need, and perhaps give our neighbours all round a dressing over of faintest praise while coffee goes round or conversation threatens to flag. The huntsman, luckless man, has none of these distractions—at least can allow himself none. The puppies are all in, and the best of them are down with distemper. He has to forsake his meal, to forego his glass and his smoke—to ignore the fatigue that we all recognise so wearily (we who do none of his work during the hot or chilly day), the fatigue and bone-ache of enervating spring. His welcome home is the news that his loveliest puppy is dead; his task that the next best must be saved if possible. And to-morrow he must work hard as ever.

Were I huntsman or master again I would—the cost practicable—have a kennel far away, where, under sufficient care, the puppies might sicken or thrive till the critical time was passed, and the remnant could speak for themselves. And, believe me, a puppy-walker whose pet has gone to kennel only to die can at least feel equally with huntsman or master.

Friday, 25th March, was worked into an amusing day, by the talent of the huntsman and the co-operation of a numerous young contingent—chiefly, I fancy, doing honour to Cambridge. The Pytchley had met at Great Brington; and, though there was never a great scent the cool day through, foxes were kind, and the ground was favourable. We were in the Brington and Buckby neighbourhood—a goodly district, and, what was much to the purpose to-day, a very delectable jump-ground. Goodall and the “big dogs” hunted one fox down in the open; and made a run, out of no beginning, with another.

That mirth was in the air and youth was in the field was early hinted to me—how do you think? By the discovery, at one of the first gateways adjoining Nobottle Wood, of a spur of such exaggerated dimension

as not even the Honourable Crasher would have been armed with after one season at Harboro'. Why, the shaft would have made two of my mature and unambitious goads. I am glad I picked it up, else might it have remained to be dug from the ground a century hence, and exhibited as a token of how the aristocrats of imperial Britain once took their pleasure in the cruel and bloody pursuit of the fox. Now it remains on offer to Lord Shrewsbury as *fin-de-siècle* addition to his collection of Instruments of Torture.

They came out to ride, these young gentlemen, half-a-score of them. And right gallantly did they ride, as young bloods should—hounds the excuse. Some had their own horses; some had Mr. Hames'; though how my worthy friend of Leicester-town was to get any profit out of the arrangement I leave it to him to say. Hounds ran just rightly for the occasion—that is to say, they never ran fast enough to give anybody a chance of losing himself, and yet they ran on over a country that offered every temptation and opportunity. Suffice it to say, that never in after-life are the young sportsmen in question likely to look back with regret to their "flutter with the Pytchley" of this Friday aforesaid; never need they number it among the occasions on which that "bitterest memory of the human soul," as it has been termed—to wit, *lost opportunity*—has to be reckoned. Take this one instance: a chained gate, hounds just carrying a line but the country good enough for anything, fifty or sixty people remaining to make good the afternoon. You know the gates are strong in our Grass Countries, and we don't jump them, for two reasons—(1) because we are afraid to; and (2) because, if we jumped one occasionally, our horses might expect to jump them all, which, to say the least, would be awkward, considering how closely we stuff ourselves into these outlets whenever we can reach one.

But such are not the tenets of Cambridge, nor the teaching of her University. Lord Blandford trotted up, and over, in a moment, as is the habit, I am told, with The Drag. Of course Mr. H. A. Smith, on similar principles, was ready and willing to follow—which he



promptly and properly did, while the field drew rein in amazement and amusement. The first to recover himself was the huntsman—himself no chicken, either in years or heart. "Let me come!" he exclaimed, every feature aglow with merriment as he turned the grey mare for a run: "I'll not be beat by them boys!" (for in moments of excitement the idioms of the Shire ever crop up unbidden with all who pride themselves on being product of a grazing country). What would have followed I cannot say, except that Goodall would assuredly have got over, and that some of us, in our stubborn pride, would undoubtedly have come down. But a marplot turned up in the person of one who hitherto has invariably been found ready to tackle any big place he may deem requisite. On this occasion he was already on his legs, unchaining the gate. The sport was spoiled, and the fun was finished.

It is almost time I told you what the day contained as regards hunting. The best event had its origin from Harpole Hill, a small plantation overlooking the valley towards Weedon. Ten minutes, fast, to ground, were followed by an hour and a quarter's run, through Nobottle Wood and into the lower country of Brington, Brockhall, and Whilton. Near the last-named village, it is conjectured, they left their run fox dead-beat, while they pursued a fresh one in a circle by Brockhall, but came right upon their run fox as they circled back, and killed him without difficulty.

There are gouty legs in some stables to-day, I warrant. March is especially the month during which the old maxim holds good—"Never go into the stable to-day of the horse you were hunting yesterday!"

On Saturday next was there not the ever-amusing little brook? And, if I remember right, to-day was to have constituted the commencement of a young journal. It had been urged that each and every hunting-man ought to keep a diary, at least noting the day's sport, the horse ridden, &c., with a few plain remarks for future reference. The graduate in question had fully agreed, had bought his diary, and even made preliminary entry when giving orders overnight to his groom—"Meet Daventry. Rode

Valiant"—leaving remainder to be filled in after hunting. Surely he had forgotten that the morrow was 1st April, or he would never have initiated such an undertaking on a date so fraught with disappointment and deception!

At any rate the final entry—the only entry that Hunting Journal is ever to contain—is limited to the sentence: "That brute Valiant put me into the brook *twice*"—with one word condemning Valiant and the diary alike to contemptuous oblivion.

CHAPTER XVI

NORTHERN COUNTRIES

"I knows no more melancholic ceremony than takin' the string out of one's 'at and foldin' hup the old red rag at the end of the season—a rag unlike all other rags, the dearer and more hinterestin' the older and more worthless it becomes."—*Jorrocks' "Sportin' Lector."*

APT and appropriate enough already is the above text to the majority of your hunting readers. I, on the contrary, having brought my old red rag—or, what is tantamount to it, my old black swallow-tail—northward (to the very scene whereat these words were written), have there been airing it awhile before consigning it to the lumber-room, or to the back of the fire. For, within smoke-range of Cannie Newcastle, the fox is hunted for weeks after he is at peace in the fashion-grounds of the Shires; and, if you knew it, or would—you who are not hasting to race your substance away, but cling to fox-hunting as closely as you can—you might steal in some years even a month from the summer vacation.

We were fairly baked out of the Grass Countries—grilled, melted, emaciated almost, by those final days of sport and heat. The Sunday Turkish bath—often the most renovating of processes—was on this occasion a mere fruitless farce. Even the hot chamber at 155° could bring exhausted nature to no such melting mood as had the gallops of previous days in open air. "Very hard condition, sir," observed the brawny *masseur*, as he

kneaded the fleshless ribs, drew out the sinewy limbs, and mercilessly pounded the recent bruises of his victim—preparing him thus to visit fresh fields and pastures new. (I *must* be allowed a sequel in brief parenthesis. It has to do with hunting only indirectly, and with that of the fox not at all; but it embodies a veracious example of the risks and chances of life. Stranger in same dressing-room, having completed his toilet while Fox-hunter is undergoing treatment as above, gives boy a shilling to pack and despatch his things after him. Boy carries out the order instantler; but includes also the whole of Fox-hunter's kit except his Sunday hat. F. turns up cleansed and refreshed, with just sufficient time to allow of his fulfilling luncheon engagement. Question at issue between Fox-hunter and the officials, and prolonged till F. is very late indeed—in fact, I think, still in abeyance—Will, under the circumstances, a well-ironed beaver be held sufficient to frank wearer to a luncheon party, however select and intimate?)

Arrived north, what I saw there you shall find briefly sketched below.

THE MORPETH

Tuesday, 5th April 1892, gave me the pleasant privilege of seeing this pack in their best country—viz. that adjoining the Tynedale boundary, and in the neighbourhood of the Master's (Mr. Cookson) seat at Meldon.

A change of scene and a change of subject are welcome alike to sportsman and penman; and when the change involves a run in a new grass country—at a time when our own cherished Shires have practically put up their shutters for the summer—the novelty has a double charm.

I am not one to declare ever that the last country seen is the best I have known. But I believe that few of us who affect the Midlands of England are at all aware what good ground exists in Northumberland. Amid the pressure of hunting and of its happy concomitants, I confess I found it impossible instantly to do any justice to the green up-

lands on which I have had the good fortune to ride. Hunting and history—though in my case more or less co-existent—often jostle each other as closely as a Northamptonshire field in a gateway. One or other must be squeezed or shut out. The last occasion, I remember, on which I stayed at home to write I lost a good run—after being miserably unhappy all day and writing nothing. Consequently last week I decided on the other alternative, threw my first hurried notes into the fire, and went hunting every day as opportunity offered and generous friendship assisted. Thus I saw various countries that I had hitherto known only through the medium of summer research and of others' experience; and, with the good luck that has often followed my trips to new ground, fell in everywhere with more than average sport.

I left the Northamptonshire turf baked and sun-dried. I found Northumberland grass mossy, elastic, and sound, as I am told it remains nearly the year round, seldom attaining hardness, and never becoming really deep. In the Shires we too often suffer from one extreme or the other. The strong clay either holds our horses or batters them. In Northumberland you gallop always on the top of the ground as gaily as at the Curragh; and (now I will add something that should surely be held to recommend it): you don't often fall at the fences! When you do fall it is not with the thwack that accompanies a turnover in the Merry Midlands. Why this is the case I will endeavour to demonstrate as I go. For the present it is sufficient to say that, during my first week in the North, I scarcely witnessed a fall, though I saw the sadly painful results of one in the shape of a kick in the face to a fallen sportsman.

The Morpeth on the day in question met at Benridge, there to be welcomed right royally by Miss Blackburn. If Tuesday be any fair sample, I should say the Morpeth is a hunt exceptionally favoured in thirsty springtime. There are times when thirst is an appalling misery—ask a Montana cowboy, ask an English Guardsman who has marched across the Egyptian desert. There are times when thirst may be a positive convenience. And on this hot Tuesday

it was found, I have strong grounds for believing, a distinctly convenient attribute at more than one period of the day.

The Morpeth pack—wiry and hard-working as it seemed on this hot, tiring day—is to be recruited with some twenty-one couple of Lord Portsmouth's, just purchased by Mr. Cookson, and will thus, in improved strength and capacity, go shortly into the new good kennels he has erected near Maldon Park.

Some useful larch plantations—of the same type that, with the gorses (or, as they term them in the North, whins), form so many of the coverts of the Tynedale country—lay close to the meet of to-day, and from the second of these, Higham Dykes, a travelling fox broke quickly away. Indeed, it takes but little time to recognise that nowhere more than in Northumberland is it necessary for all hands to be on the *qui vive* when hounds are drawing. In these bramble-carpeted brakes foxes jump up to the first touch of horn, and seldom linger a moment before facing the open.

Rance, a quick man, with a quick eye, and an undeniable rider over this rough-fenced country, had his pack out at once to the Master's holloa, and the run began. With difficulty at first: for a couple of dusty fallows retained scarce a line—luckily, as it happened, for the man who came there to see; for he—I—had begun by running my untutored head against the only wired fence in the district, and had to creep back as best I could through a bullfinch that had apparently never known hedge-cutter's knife since Northumberland became a county, though the sheep had done their duty by keeping doorways open here and there through its base. They work their weapons differently, do these northern hedge-cutters, to our knights of the bill-hook, and happily too, for if they once took to bending and laying the thorns on the top of the narrow little banks, how would it be possible to ride over such manner of fence? No, they limit themselves, as far as one can see, to slicing off occasionally all the best of the wood; the sheep assist them by nibbling off every shoot they can reach, and the holes, or some few of them, are then mended

with thin sawn strips of timber that a hunter can dispel with impunity. Thus much of Northumberland remains comparatively easy riding. What it would be if Northamptonshire hedge-cutters were imported from the Midlands, and with them a sufficiency of Leicestershire ash timber—well, the shivering would then be on the part of the rider rather than that of the rails! As it is, I beg to point to Northumberland as specially innocuous riding ground for the average horseman who can afford to mount himself fairly, and to whom a heavy fall is no longer an ambition and a pleasurable achievement. At least so do they aver who live there, and whose judgment is based upon a lifetime's experience rather than, as in my own case, upon brief passing acquaintance.

As hounds buckled to work on the turf, we found ourselves among pastures wide and wild as those of the Cottesmore, but without the deep ridge-and-furrow, without the steep hills, and without, as I have said, the strong ox-fences that belong to the bullock-grounds of Mid-England, and such, as I found on the morrow and since, constitutes the bulk of the smooth highlands of the Tynedale and the Morpeth. In twenty minutes we had passed the World's End farm and reached Ogle Dene—*dene* being in the language of the country, if I interpret it rightly, a wooded dell, with a possible trout-stream at bottom. By Hetchester they ran on to the verge of Belsay Park (the seat of Sir A. Middleton), when, on the turnpike road that divides Morpeth from Tynedale, their fox was to be seen travelling the dusty macadam for more than a mile. The view assisted hounds to keep on close terms with him; and, as he bent into their own country again by Harnham and its quaint cliff, they drove him through Bolam (Lord Decies'), and pressed him hard over Angerton Moor to Angerton Station (some fifty minutes). In the wood, close by, the main earth was open, and in the heat of the day the field turned gladly, to the Master's invitation, at Meldon.

Of the field of the day I may jot down the following few names, viz.: Mr. Laycock (also of Churchill, Daventry) and Miss Laycock, Mr. C. Perkins (a heavy-weight of highest calibre, riding excellent horses), with Miss Perkins,

Mr. and Mrs. Orde and Miss Orde, Miss Blackburn, Messrs. G. Fenwick, Liddell, Lawson, F. Straker, Gordon-Wood, Dent, Watson (2).

THE TYNEDALE

Turning to the Tynedale, I have to begin by noting the death of their late huntsman, Cornish, which took place on Monday, April 4. By birth a native of Devonshire, he was with the Tynedale hounds from 1869 to 1883, the greater part of the time in the service of the late Mr. Fenwick, under whom he brought the pack into the highest state of perfection. He was not only a good servant, an excellent huntsman, and surpassingly skilled in the conditioning of hounds, but he possessed the invaluable faculty of making himself liked by the farmers of the country, one and all of whom recognised him heartily as a friend.

The present huntsman of the Tynedale is H. Bonner, recently of the Meath, and formerly whip to the Bicester and the Belvoir. Having succeeded well in his first season here, he is likely, I hope and believe, to show sport for many years to come.

Their meet on Wednesday, April 6, was at Kirkheaton (Mr. Bewicke's), not far from the centre of their country, and approached from the south (as indeed from nearly all sides) through a wide stretch of fascinating grass, over which the eye can wander longingly and unawed.

I am bound to confess—with all apology both for the mistake at the time and for the present assertion—that in sketching the Tynedale among the Hunting Countries of England, I was unintentionally misled as to the practicability of the greater part of it. As a matter of fact, while much of it is easy, nearly the whole of it is rideable enough, the only exception being in the case of some of the wilder west and north-west, whose walls preclude your riding over them—not so much on account of their height as on account of their being coped with knife-edged pieces of limestone, placed transversely. Thus they form an obstacle that one of experience described to me as “only

fit for servants' horses"—though I don't for a moment ask Mr. Straker or his gallant huntsman to accept the definition in its entirety.

Besides these walls, and besides the lighter fences of the east, there are round Kirkheaton many stone-faced banks, with more or less growth of thorn or screen of timber on top. But of these, as of the majority of the fences of the country, a good Irish horse will make comparatively light—always supposing he is not blown by the extraordinary pace with which hounds are in the habit of running over these broad ranges of coarse, high-scenting grass. There is nothing whatever to stop hounds; not even wide ditches such as pertain to Meath. They fly the walls abreast, and they swish through the hollow hedges all in a row. So the least false turn on your part, the least waiting for some one else to make the requisite hole for you—and hounds slip you forthwith. The best authorities on the Tynedale country assure me that riding to hounds here involves a continual struggle not to be run away from! On a bad scenting day hounds have, both from the wide conformation of the pastures and from the consideration of their limited field, all the room they need.

Thus, say I, the Tynedale is, without doubt, a very beautiful and enticing country. Its turf, even this April, is mossy and soft. It is elastic in midsummer, I am assured; and in midwinter it is never deep. And of the size of these great grass fields I dare scarcely tell you—lest you should deny me belief. But many are of a hundred acres; some are even more, while I have been shown one or two in which a gallop of over a mile is obtainable.

Mr. Straker was fortunate on Wednesday, in that a shower had fallen overnight and damped the surface of the withering herbage. At any rate there was a flying scent; and, as the foxes of the day allowed, there was sharp fun now and again.

But first I must make a note of what was to me a great and novel treat. Mr. Dent, the trainer and once-owner of the Waterloo Cup hero, had most kindly brought Fullerton, Young Fullerton, Needham, and another or two

of Colonel North's grand greyhounds to the meet for me to see. Of racing greyhounds I am far from pretending to be a *connoisseur* (my experience of coursing being limited to the fact of having first learned to ride Leicestershire by galloping to greyhounds). But no man who loves horse and hound, animal life and development, could fail to be struck and delighted with Fullerton's glorious strength and palpable symmetry. Every muscle, every sinew, every line, betokened power, activity, and rare speed. And, with him in memory, I feel already that in future I shall know some little about a high-class greyhound when I see one.

The field of Wednesday, besides containing several who were with the Morpeth yesterday, held, among others, the Master and Mrs. Straker, Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick, Mrs. M. Fenwick, Mr. and Misses Allgood, Messrs. Robson and Miss Robson, Mr. and Mrs. Bell, Messrs. Straker (C., J., and F.), Captain Bewicke, Captain Browne, Messrs. Stephenson, Barker, Bewicke, Wallis, &c.

April is probably the worst month of the year in which to see a pack of hounds. Indeed it must be often difficult to bring out a full pack at all at such a time. But in the Tynedale to-day I recognised the same beautiful necks and shoulders that struck me a dozen years ago; and I had opportunity during the day of witnessing their pace and ready drive.

And, as I was prepared to see, there were horses in the field such as it would puzzle England to surpass, for fashion and power and value. Of a truth, there is wealth and there is love of a good horse in Cannie Newcastle yet.

Very readily a fox was found in one of the Kirkheaton coverts—a larch plantation as afore described—and very hotly they ran him for a few minutes into the Capheaton demesne across the valley, having first threatened the open ground eastward. Through this valley runs the river Blyth, with boggy banks, on uncertain bottom, and very varying width. Where I followed several men and women of the country, the stream had narrowed to very easy jumping dimensions; while to the left there were men up

to their tops in bog, with their horses loose in the treacherous stream. Next I found myself in a wood surrounding a residence, whose propinquity I could only guess from the presence of a carriage-drive. Having lost my pilots and hearing a view holloa outside, I decided to get clear of the wood as soon as I could. But this I could only effect by leading my horse through a door in a wall—which was promptly locked after me, while I remained for five minutes in durance vile at the hands of a truculent bailiff, and a victim to the laughing jests of his two comely daughters. At length he vouchsafed to pass me out through a farm gate: and it was at least pleasing to learn afterwards that these sacred precincts belonged to one of the best fox-preservers in the country. Hounds by this time might have been anywhere. But they were not—that is to say, they were divided on a brace of foxes, and no run was taking place.

One little wrinkle I learned to-day anent Northumbrian country, viz. that, however tempting and near at hand a gate may be, it by no means follows that it is desirable to ride thither (as one's home-instinct prompts). For seldom is it made to swing; never is it made to unlatch to the hunting-crop; and the fence adjoining may often be a preferable, invariably a more rapid, means of egress.

LORD ZETLAND'S

On Thursday, April 8, I eagerly availed myself of a chance of seeing this good pack in their lower country—Scotch Corner the place of meeting, and Sedbury Park the immediate draw.

The rain that had favoured Northumberland had not extended thus southward, but a cold, wet fog answered the same purpose—hounds were able to run. In fact they could drive over grass and bring the line across plough, to work out a gallop and make a run—which meant a great deal to a visitor from countries where in the past season hounds have more often found themselves totally helpless.

Scotch Corner—about two miles from the kennels at Aske—would appear to take its name from the fact that

the old Scotch road, along which the herds of Highland cattle were largely driven, here joins the Watling Street. (Have I got it right?) And for our first draw we moved a mile or so towards Gretna Green.

The wood at Sedbury Park is one in which, I am informed, foxes often hang considerably. But our fox of to-day gave us only time to adjust leathers and to take one turn round its limits, ere Champion had hounds away to joyous note and merry scream—such as, to my way of thinking, throw life and sparkle into fox-hunting, that some men would make dull, pedantic, or even dolorous. The chase is nothing if not bright and invigorating, and a blithesome huntsman can do more than aught else to render it so.

Away over small enclosures and simple fences—a field of some fifty or sixty people, all bent on seeing the sport. A very, very efficient field too, I venture to think; and especially, if I may further hazard the opinion, as regards the ladies of the hunt. These latter, to the number of a full half-dozen, were making their way over the country quite as ably and readily as the men. Fourteen-stone horses, with riders of either sex quite capable of steering them and doing them full justice, are quite a feature of Lord Zetland's field. And, as it happened, only strong, bold horses and sufficient riders could have made their way across the dense country beyond Skeeby Whin. For, after passing that covert, and leaving some few ploughed fields behind, the chase entered upon a district of rough grass and of rough, unkempt fences, without a gap in any of them. But each bullfinch in turn was bored in as many places as occasion demanded—witness crushed hats, scratched faces, and torn coats; but never a fall. For the line to Brompton Mill (reached in twenty-five minutes) has not been chosen by a fox, they tell me—and I can well believe—for a year or two. (Yet we ran it again this afternoon!) At Brompton Mill we crossed the Swale—now in its most fordable condition, and needing only an eye to a point of exit—and in ten minutes more were at Brough Whin Covert. It may or may not be a fresh fox that took us round by Colborne Village to Tunstall,

where it was supposed he got to ground. Time, one hour ten minutes.

Trotting back by Catterick Bridge and its racecourse, we set off anew from Church Whin, at Kirkbank, to run by Middleton Towers. Difficult, but exceedingly well managed, hunting took us to Black Bull Inn and its lane ; and we then ran the same scratchy line to Brompton Mill, but not so fast as in the morning—our fox being given up when he crossed the water. Time about one hour—to conclude a most pleasurable day's sport. You can tell little indeed of a country from riding over it one day only, and that day foggy and mist-bound. But I have every reason to believe that Lord Zetland's—varying from upper moorland to close-kept lowland—is truly a sporting and enjoyable country ; that it is not by any means a difficult country to ride ; and that, as another characteristic, its hunt is essentially genial and closely bound.

I do not know whether I am justified in adducing in example of these characteristics a trivial episode of to-day—and certainly one has no right to flaunt one's little jest among strangers, however kindly and indulgent they be found. It was merely the one fall of the day—a very little one, and into a ploughed field too—which we in Northamptonshire should welcome as the luckiest possible chance, in preference to an ordinary bang against the hard, hard turf of springtide. The young sportsman fell easily and had no fear for himself ; but more solicitude was forthcoming, and more hearty inquiry rained upon him, than we in rugged Northamptonshire earn even with a collar-bone or a complete knock-out. Don't mistake me. I commend the occasion to your notice, ye gallopers of Northants, in that, but a week before, I saw a gallant young farmer cast exactly thus into a ploughed field, and his horse went on uninterrupted for two fields further. It is true he had rather committed himself to accelerating progress ; for, finding he was unable to clutch the reins as his "nag" left him, he took his revenge by winding his long lash loudly and twice-repeated round the hocks of the miscreant ! But *you* might have tried to stop him—hounds being at fault.

With Lord Zetland's hounds on Thursday were, besides Mr. Cradock (the founder and former Master of the pack): Mr. and Mrs. C. Hunter, Captain Towers Clarke, (late Master of the West Meath) and Mrs. Clarke, Mr. and Mrs. H. Straker, Mr. and Mrs. C. Straker, Captain and Mrs. Williamson, Mrs. Crane, Mrs. Press, Miss Pease, Miss Neasham, Captain S. Cradock, Mr. Wilson-Todd (Master of the Bedale) and his huntsman, Holland, Mr. D. Lascelles, Mr. Scarth, &c. &c.

I have only to add that it delighted me to see Champion hunting, and riding to, his hounds.

THE BRAES OF DERWENT

My newest experience of all (unless it was the catching a salmon) lay in a day with the Braes of Derwent—a pack kept by Colonel Cowen to hunt the rough highlands and woodlands south of the Tyne. The hounds—if not a show pack—are capable enough; while as for the huntsman, Siddle Dixon, it is a treat to hear him rousing the echoes of the woods and denes. On Saturday there happened to be no scent whatever, and hounds could not own a fox only two minutes before them. But I am told by many and trustworthy, that Dixon can hunt a woodland fox to death in exceptional form. His method with hounds in these great coverts is certainly bright and encouraging. I am not fond of a cheerless huntsman anywhere; no more are hounds. I *hate* a dullard in a big woodland, and so do they; as they will soon evince by dawdling and shirking work, especially when drawing for a fox or hunting him on a cold scent. A hound dislikes nothing so much as being left out in the cold when the fun is taking place. He will never work freely, unless naturally independent and wilful, if he has no clue to the whereabouts of huntsman and pack, or if he is not sure that he will be called into action directly game is afoot.

In the forest depths which engulfed Mr Jorrocks there is especially need that hounds should be kept together and in touch of their huntsman. I wish I could have seen a run with them—and come out alive. But, as I have said,

there was no scent on Saturday, even with "the biggest fox whatever was seen," as he flicked across a main ride, and we had barely "counted twenty" ere hounds were puzzling hopelessly over his line.

The meet of Saturday was Scales Cross. The field with the Braes is never a large one. To-day it consisted of barely a dozen all told, among them being: Mr. Humble, two Messrs. Cowen (sons of the Master), Mr. Wallis, Mr. Hill, and Mr. and Mrs. G. Fenwick. And this little party saw three or four foxes, found in the adjacent woodlands, scrambled awhile in the braes and denes, and dispersed early in sorrow over the impossibility of hunting a fox this day.

CAPTAIN MIDDLETON

It is safe to say that the death of no single man in England could have gone home to its riding community so sharply or vividly as that of Captain Middleton. Wherever men rode, wherever men hunted, and wherever they took life happily, his was a familiar figure and a welcome face. They looked upon him, and up to him, as one of the most accomplished and best tried horsemen of the age—one who rode to hounds and between the flags for love of it, never for what he could make or win.

His eye to hounds was marvellous; and he revelled in a strong country and a good horse. He rode with the nerve and light-heartedness of boyhood, with all the knowledge and quickness of a full maturity that had lost nothing of its nerve, its power, or its original fire. Possessed of a wonderful constitution, he never tired. Whatever the hours, whatever the strain of travel, of arrangement, or of social distraction, he appeared ever at the covert-side the freshest of all; had he even been riding a severe race the day before, and travelling all night to return.

As one who has known him intimately since his cornet days, and ridden runs unnumbered in his cheery company, I can write pronouncedly on this head. As one who found him a pleasant, happy comrade, a clever, well-informed man, and a genial, unvarying friend, I mourn his loss in deep

sincerity—as will many and many, nay, a countless number of sportsmen and men-of-the-world.

But who shall say this end was the worst for him? Not I, however sadly one may think of those who have the melancholy right to mourn most for him. He died painlessly—dropped out unawares—in the heyday of his strength and fame. Would he have chosen a sick-bed or a puling old age? No—and who shall wish it for him?

But through England, and wherever Englishmen foregather the wide world through, there have gone up this week the words I find myself uttering sorrowfully, “Poor Bay! Poor Bay! A gallant fellow, a good comrade, and a kindly man! God be with him!”

THE TYNEDALE

My last day with this flying pack gave me the opportunity I particularly desired—of making acquaintance with their wild western ground and highest plateaux. And now I am in a position to emphasise what I have already asserted, viz. that most of you are little aware how charming a country is to be found in Northumberland, and to be found, moreover, at its best when the playgrounds of fashion are nearly, or quite, dried out. The Tynedale grass would seem to be virtually sunproof. On this Wednesday there was never clatter of hoof, except on a wall-top, and in a wide run (five miles across its breadth on the map) *we never saw a ploughed field!*

Nor am I, if I take the tone of my informants correctly, by any means imperilling the comfort of those already on the spot by calling attention thus to the attractions of Tyneside in spring. Northumberland is too far from London, too remote from the interruptions that the smart world considers necessary to its existence, to allow of the gay mass migrating thither in strength or for a permanency. But there are a number—a very large number—of men and women who set a gallop with hounds, over a grass country, far before any other joy in life. These are accustomed to hunt on, in the Midlands, in Cheshire, in Wiltshire, or with the Meynell, till

their hounds meet no longer, and very likely till their horses have not a sound leg left among them. Hunting in these countries after the middle of March is a lottery, often a very expensive one. If hounds run, it is seldom without the tale being told over again next day in stable bucket and bandage ; while if the ground jumps up in your face at such a time, believe me, it hits you with venom and malice, and leaves a sting then that in December it never possessed. In Northumberland, meanwhile, they are moving on comfortably, with never a jar in the ground, and apparently with that gratifying immunity from peril to horse and man—comparative immunity, at all events—that I have been persuaded to accept as one of the most pleasing characteristics of the country. Here quite a month's hunting is a tolerable certainty after the date in question. Newcastle, with help of the train, will proffer five days a week ; Stamfordham, an excellent base, the same number by road ; and Corbridge or Hexham, on the riverside, some three or four. It would take a large number of people to make a congested field in this open country. At present their muster, even at such a favourite fixture as Hallington, is a very limited one. Sociability suggests increase of numbers ; and, though it is far from my business to issue invitations broadcast on behalf of other people, I believe I am safe in saying that the very sociable hunting folk of Northumberland would gladly see their field somewhat increased. You cannot do much damage to stone walls and banks by jumping over them ; and your horse's feet do not sink deep enough into the grass to do it harm, while the pastures are so wide, and the fences so even along their length, that riders need seldom get in each other's way. On the other hand, hunting the fox—and the consequent riding to hounds—cannot take up the whole of each and every day. At least it is so in the Grass Countries of the Midlands ; and how dull it would be there for the remaining hours, but for the large and sociable company. Man never displays his gregarious instinct to such pleasing advantage as in the hunting field. It is seldom that he there cares to prove himself altogether independent of his fellow-men. And how few would care

to go out fox-hunting singly and alone—were such a thing possible !

The average size of these Northumbrian grazing-grounds cannot be less than twenty acres. Many of the enclosures are double and treble that acreage. Another peculiarity of the Tynedale country is the extent and variety of the views that present themselves as you cross it. Thus on the way to Hallington from the Tyne the eye can roam to the Cheviots on the north (to-day snow-clad to their base), to Crossfell—one of the Cumberland hills—to the west, and over the river southward to Yorkshire. In fact you can see to the boundaries of Scotland, Durham, Yorkshire, and Westmoreland ; and yet these uplands are so gently undulating that the country cannot be deemed hilly, as we understand it in Leicestershire or counties next of kin. Northumberland may be a cold county ; but no part of the Tynedale is so high above the sea, for instance, as Naseby's battlefield.

The Tynedale foxes, again, belong entirely to the category of wild animals, accustomed to roam and ready to travel—as wild and indigenous, indeed, as the curlew and the blackcock to these green, moorland-like uplands. There are few—scarcely any—villages round which they might prowl for poultry or pickings ; and their size of frame and richness of fur bear testimony to their vigour of race and habit.

The meet on the day which forms my theme, then, was Hallington, a couple of miles westward of Kirkheaton, of the week before ; and the site of Newcastle's main source of water supply. The blackheaded gulls of the eastern coast are accustomed to view these extensive reservoirs as laid out for their especial benefit, and accordingly flock thither at this season as thickly as Bank-holiday trippers to Epping Forest, or the loungers of Newcastle to their railway depot. But more to the point is it that Hallington is the base frequently chosen whence hounds carry on operations in the far nor'-west, to which a practical limit is marked by the crags of Wannie and heather-clad hills such as only a moss-trooper would care to traverse.

To reach Hallington involves a long ride or drive from the banks of the Tyne. But as one rises quickly to the upper level, such wide views of eligible—nay, beautiful—ground present themselves in succession that the journey should never be tedious or unattractive, unless, as I may now proceed to add, in a blinding snowstorm, such as set upon us this Wednesday morning! A well-equipped dogcart and unruffled company will, however, laugh off even snowflakes; and, after all, the same distant landscapes were visible and attractive enough in the evening sunshine, by-and-by. Riders fared not so well; for they carried on their way a wealth of snow that fairly crystallised them from hat to knee, till they could dismount to shake it off.

Nor ought I to omit comment on the bridle-paths which lead so freely across country to the Tynedale meets, taking you through one great enclosure of galloping ground after another as cheerily as, for instance, the grassy track from Twyford to Owston. And, mark you, there is not a railway or canal from end to end of the Tynedale country! One of the canons of my faith, from Shetland-ponyism, has ever been that a "gallop to covert in Leicestershire is as good as hunting in any other country." But I had not ridden to covert upon Tyneside. I shall never again quote the axiom now.

Snow had ceased to fall long ere Hallington was reached—indeed it seemed to have confined its attack chiefly to the bank of the river and to the distant Cheviots. A cold breeze had succeeded; but the day was fine; and there was a scent.

Hounds began by killing a fox in the Hallington Plantations. Then they gave us a dozen minutes' scurry to a drain by the waterworks—over ground so typical of this section of Northumberland that I feel prompted to set forth each minute and each feature in detail, for education of southerners such as myself. Take them thus—and if I am prolix beyond fair licence, remember indulgently that I am as one whose main subject is to be now thrown up for the summer. Hallington New Covert—young whin and young larch (the covert, I am told, that

will remain in years to come a monument to poor Cornish, who worked hard for its completion). A pretty find and a flying start! Two fields of rank wet grass—the second field, bordered by Bavington Plantation, demonstrating, if it needed demonstration, how very fleet a pack are the Tynedale. They (the dog pack) could travel the level greensward without coming back to the fastest horse of the morning—and that, I fancy, was the Master's. Yet only a day or two ago Mr. Dent, trainer of Fullerton, assured me in all sincerity, and I cannot but accept his evidence, that a good horse can beat the fastest of greyhounds for a mile! If this be true, tell me not then that foxhounds are, even for a mile on the flat, as fast as horses!

A sharp twist to the right! Two more damp grass-fields; two more open gateways; some ridge-and-furrow, of mild description, as compared with what we rock upon in our Midland hemisphere; a stone wall, four feet high to the first comer, about two feet by the time we reach it; next a stone-faced bank with a ditch on either side; then a narrower bank with rail on top that scatters readily; then a broken watercourse—thus half-a-dozen twenty-acre fields traversed; and lastly an old gate, only left up because not worth moving to mend, and so, eminently suited either to be jumped or broken. Forty minutes of such entertainment would have been delightful—those twelve minutes serving merely for sample, fast, vigorous, and safe. Next, they met with a roaming fox; and, with some little outside assistance, as against a reputed lamb-killer, they pulled him down quickly.

But the run of the day—fifty minutes' quick and capital hunting, and embracing a half-circle whose width was fully five miles—began from Greatlaw, another square larch plantation.

Grass still, and continually, by the adjoining covert of Kidlaw, by the right of Kirk Harle and Little Harle Tower, across the stone-bottomed river Wansbeck to Wallington Hall (Sir G. Trevelyan's), which is situated, apparently, on the very march with the Morpeth (this first quarter hour very fast). Back at hunting pace then along the beck,

and within the Northern border-line of the country, by Kirkwhelpington—the pace good, though half the pack had, if I mistake not, slipped aside on another fox. Then a truly wild, often wet, country, laid out in immense yellow-green fields, with now and then a stone-faced bank, now and then a wall, with the inevitable weak spot whence the coping-stones had been flung; these to be jumped or scrambled, as the case might be. Thus, moving rapidly forward, hounds reached Howick, on the border of the moor; marking their fox to ground in the gully of Sweet-horpe, just before the plantations of Howick. A very sporting run.

Of the field of the day the following are a few names, viz.: Mr. J. C. Straker; Rev. J. and Misses Allgood; Mr., Mrs., and Miss Fenwick; Mr. and Mrs. C. Straker; Mr. and Mrs. M. Fenwick; Mr. S. and Miss Clayton; Misses Swan; Miss Leadbitter; Messrs. C. W. Henderson, Wallis, M. Liddell, F. Straker, T. Bell, Kirsopp, Ward, C. Hall, Colin Ross, H. Swinburne, Sanderson, H. and R. Blackett, Blayney, Dent.

Among the many hapless incidents of the season 1891-92, Mr. Tailby's breaking a leg is one of the most recent and most regrettable. It threatens, unless the undefeated spirit rises once more in defiance of deliberate conviction, practically to end a hunting career that already numbers forty-seven seasons.

One cannot fancy Mr. Tailby—nor, I believe, could he fancy himself—either trotting about on a pony or galloping the roads for a possible point. He has ridden as keenly as a boy, and as hard as an undergraduate, up to this very year; and it would, no doubt, go sorely against the grain for him to ride to hounds in any other fashion. His exuberant enjoyment of the chase, especially in its most dashing phases, has ever been a delight to witness, and a lesson (as I have read it for a score of years) encouraging and gratifying to men far younger than himself. The hardiest frame cannot go on being knocked about for ever. Mr. Tailby has probably had more bad falls over High Leicestershire than any man alive. And, though all

the courage remains that was wont to take him over the Skeffington Lordship in battle with such men as the old Earl of Wilton, with Sir Frederic Johnstone, Captain Coventry, Captain Carnegie, Mr. Powell, and others of the days when Melton and Harboro' rode in hottest rivalry week by week, he is not only the last of these upon the scene of action, but was born long before any but the first-named—besides having been “knocked out of time” more often than all of them put together! It was, I may mention, as far back as “Running Rein's year” that Mr. Tailby with two horses—one his own, the other Mr. Cradock's—rode from Cambridge to the Derby and back, in twenty-two hours.

There are, of course, other districts in which good fox-hunting is to be had besides those which the Immortal One used to term the “cut-'em-down countries.” But, apart from home-considerations and home-occupations, it is not every one who cares to migrate after middle age. Else might one venture to hint that, though to “follow on with the ruck” in the Shires would be but poor pastime for one who for so many years has been daily prominent in the van, yet in some other counties, notably on those beautiful grass uplands of the North that I have been endeavouring to describe, it is quite possible to witness all the sport from a good position without risk of such crushing falls as *must* be the occasional portion of any man who regularly rides up to hounds in the Midlands. Very *very* few men exhibit the recuperative power that has been a characteristic of Mr. Tailby. *Still fewer* have retained year after year, with fall after fall, such indomitable and admirable courage. In my hunting reminiscences, already a chapter of fair length, I can point to no more honourable example. The fox-hunting of the future will produce few, if any, like him.¹

¹ It is gratifying to note that during the season 1902-3, immediately preceding publication of this volume, Mr. Tailby was still riding to hounds, almost with his accustomed fire.

CHAPTER XVII

ROCKIES IN SEPTEMBER

THE first entry of any interest I find was the occasion of our shifting camp, after two days' sojourn on the edge of a lovely natural park, and, as usual, with a bubbling stream within biscuit-throw of the camp fire. During these days we had provisioned ourselves with fresh deer-meat, and had ridden far and wide in search of elk tracks, but without any sufficient result. It was now determined by our guide and mentor that we should at least reach ground frequented by big buck, and whence the possible haunts of elk might also be attained; so, leaving ourselves in his hands, we set forth obediently and hopefully.

The mules were packed with the customary blessings, and we rode off at ten o'clock through park and heavy fir timber, issuing about midday upon an area of burnt timber, such as constitutes one of the most curious features of the backwoods. At some period within the last ten years a forest fire had swept over this, as in more than one direction its devastating work could at this moment be marked in progress, as you stood upon any of the overlooking hills. The great pine-trees had fallen as they burned, and the huge charred logs lay athwart the path in every direction, while here and there a half-burnt monster stood erect and gaunt. Grass and weeds rose to an unusual height among the *débris*: and deer, more especially the older bucks, delight in nothing so much as this dreary sepulchre of the forest. For a horseman it is the most difficult ground of all over which to make progress; and for a pack train it would seem impossible. But, lightly laden, the mules in single file will follow a leader with ease, threading their way in his footsteps and jumping each prone log after his example; while at every hundred yards or so deer would jump up—stopping probably on the nearest rise to stare curiously at the queer intruders, then resuming their kangaroo-like bounds into the far distance.

The sun beat hotly down upon the dry grass, and a warm breeze helped to stir the black dust as the cavalcade

moved over it. A steep gulch broke the surface of the plain ; and if our present course was to be pursued, it was necessary to go down a hillside not only as steep as the roof of a house (not by any means as the flat top of a log cabin), but laced and entangled with the same grass-embedded timber. Fallen and charred, and in every sense obstructive, I did not deem it possible for pack mules ; but thereby only showed my want of experience of their powers. I dismounted and led my Indian shooting-pony, Ute, who could, I found, follow me anywhere, and with greater ease than I could scramble, uphill or downhill ; and together we descended some 300 feet, crossed the rocky torrent (a creek, of course, in American parlance), clambered up the opposite bank, where I lit my pipe and watched with interest the mule train. They made their way very deliberately and carefully, sniffing for a while at each difficult obstacle, to make sure that those in front had really gone that way ; but, beyond knocking one of their number into the water, where, with the whole of our cook's outfit weighing him down, he lay groaning until unpacked, they all came scatheless out of the gulch.

As they strung from the creek I was riding parallel and above them, when, round a knoll, and on the bank of a tributary creek, I caught sight of a good buck grazing beneath me. The horns were fair enough ; and though he was standing awkwardly for a shot, the distance was not more than sixty yards, and as he raised his head I fired from the saddle, the bullet taking him through his fat ribs and going out through his chest. Amid the noise of the torrent I signalled the cook, as the member of the party most easily to be spared on the march, and with his help soon had the head off, the liver out, and the meat duly cared for, to be fetched on the morrow.

At five o'clock we brought up at our new camping ground—an ideal spot, such as is to be found only near the summits of the Rockies, where a sparkling stream dashes out of the very mountain-top, with willows surrounding its outlet, with the highest clusters of pines encircling its earliest reaches, with heavy meadows adjoining its banks, and stretches of park land touching it here and

there. Does and their fawns scampered past as we drew up; the big blue grouse fluttered into the trees, offering themselves, as it were, to the pea rifle and frying-pan; and the sun lingered warningly, a rough red circle on the western hill-tops. Saddles were piled, packs thrown in a circle, tents pitched, stock watered, the fractious members picketed, and supper going in half-an-hour.

Hardly had this been achieved than another outfit of hunters and pack animals appeared on the scene, prepared to camp on the very spot—the head of this Nebraska creek—the leader of this party declaring it had been his camping-ground for several “falls” before. Possession being the whole of the law, we could only regret benignly that we should have arrived before him, who, like ourselves, had left civilisation behind many days ago. The others lay for the night in our near neighbourhood, and it was agreed that next morning they should move to explore fresh fields.

But I could not get it out of my head that if, as I had every reason to believe, there were big buck in the vicinity, it was more desirable that we should be astir and afield before the new arrivals. The very fact of their being led thither by an old hunter, when we believed no white men to be within thirty miles, went to prove that the ground was good; and I went to bed, if not in my boots, in every portion and degree of hunting raiment—indeed the cold at that altitude made the wearing of even a great coat in bed by no means so extravagant a measure as it may in this island sound! Rifle, cartridge-belt, field-glasses, and saddle lay ready to hand; my own saddle-horse and that of the faithful cook had been picketed close by, together with an amenable mule on which we meant to pack the deer meat of this afternoon, whenever in our morning wanderings we might eventually reach it.

But I need hardly have made such elaborate preparation. I have inferred that those of our camp animals likely to stray had been picketed; but I should have added that the tamer were not, being supposed to cling placidly to the bell mule. And this bell mule had a great partiality for the neighbourhood of the camp fire. Now our

neighbours for the night had also a bell mule: and these two quickly developed an aversion to each other, like the lions in "Bombastes Furioso." They could not bear to hear each other's bells clapping. And they decided to fight it out, choosing our peaceful camp for the combat. I had looked upon Jim, our second hunter, as a man whose temperament was naturally serene, and having his tongue, unlike the tongues of city-going men, well under command. But when, in spite of a degree of cold very many degrees below freezing, he dashed out in the moonlight almost unclad, brandishing a firebrand and wielding it and an equally blazing tongue upon the combatants, I was at a loss whether to be more horror-struck or amused. Having exhausted myself with laughing, I concluded that being thus kept awake militated seriously against the comedy of the scene; and I dared not now attempt sleep, for fear daylight should be upon us, and the other outfit be stirring first.

So at three o'clock I was upon them, roused the cook, and nearly got shot by the horse-wrangler, who made certain the Indians were upon him, and snatched up his "gun"—a great ivory-handled sheriff-killer such as every west-country man carries who would have the world believe he can at odd times enact the part of "bad man." At length, by-the-bye, after not a little experience of the Far West, it has recently been given to me to learn how it is that the Dick, Tom, and Harry system of nomenclature prevails, and that surnames are to all intents and purpose dispensed with, and why no man ever asks another his name. "It isn't every man," explained my informant, "who cares to give himself away. When you've been in camp a day or two with a man, you are pretty sure to catch on to something to call him by." As a fact, I once asked a man, usually known as Old William, what was the proper name of his partner John, with whom he had been hewing timber and sharing bedding for upwards of two years. "Don't know as ever I heerd tell, Cap'n. He calls me Bill, and I calls him John, and that's about all of it."

However, on this particular morning I made them all pretty miserable, waiting round the fire for daylight, for

quite half-an-hour after breakfast had been dished up and disposed of. Even my tent companion—the best of fellows when at 94 Piccadilly, and especially between the hours of 8 and 12 P.M.—was hardly joyous. One and all sat smoking their pipes with a grim philosophy in which was no sign of humour—no sense of the ridiculous. Saddling-up is a much briefer process in prairie-land than it is in Eastern regions ; and, “ anyway,” about 5 A.M. we rode out towards the dawn.

John (the *chef*) and I wended our way eastward and upward, to gain the main divide close above, he leading the pack mule as we rode, I moving quietly ahead amid the scattered pines and peeping stealthily round each dusky corner. Grouse flew at our feet ; and deer, chiefly does and fawns, were browsing in every glade. Our progress was naturally slow, and thus we could scarcely have been two miles from camp when, as I rode from the shadowy timber to emerge in the bursting sunshine, a pair of grand, great antlers waved athwart the rising sun, and no further from me than perhaps 150 yards !

I rolled quietly off little Ute on the instant, leaving him contentedly to fill himself with the good bunch grass. John reined up as he saw me slip off, and held back his saddle and pack animals in the shade—his excitement, as he described afterwards, being every bit as intense as my own. I should have fired then and there, but for reasons—(1) I felt I had a momentary attack of “ buck-fever ” upon me, (2) I saw a chance of creeping nearer, and (3) with the low bright rays of the sun right in my eyes I had no faith in my power of either judging the distance or drawing a bead correctly. Besides, the big buck (surely a royal stag elsewhere) was now feeding away from me, and so rapidly I could gain but little ground, while I kept a young spruce fir between him and me, and trembled as I crossed the sunlight to put it before me. And the dry weeds crackled underfoot. His feeding hours were nearly over ; and he was working back into the timber, snatching his last morsels as he went. Very grand and massive and unconcerned he looked, raising his head now and again as if, like myself, to take in the glories of the mountain

scenery. When the sheltering spruce was reached, it was time to loose off ; else, though he had apparently no suspicion, and merely tossed his antlers casually, in obedience to habit, he would soon be within the wood and secure. The grass reached almost to his back ; and the white patch of his tail was towards me. I was madly keen for the shot and for that branching head that rose aloft occasionally from the herbage. My breath went fast, from my hurrying stalk and from the rarity of the air, which at that altitude hardly allows a new comer to lace his boots without panting. I squatted as one used to squat for the deer target at Wimbledon ; but I found myself below the grass. Then I stood up and whistled in the hopes that he might look round. Twice, three times ; no notice taken ; and he was fast disappearing, when some choicer bits of grass moved his appetite aside, and he turned his right shoulder for a moment. Quickly I took the shot as I stood ; then when the rifle was at my shoulder I frankly confess I liked neither the shrouding grass nor the blur of the sun on my foresight. But I pulled steadily as I could. To my relief the antlers went up, and the big buck sank down to the shot. The bullet, as I quite expected, had struck him full high, but full fatally, just under the backbone behind the withers. It took him down, as the hunters express it, then and there ; and the big buck was mine.

CHAPTER XVIII

ROCKIES IN SEPTEMBER—(*continued*)

LAST chapter told of the death of the big buck at sunrise—the “ Sullivan-buck ” we called him afterwards, as he hung in camp, all America at that time being aglow with the great Sullivan-Corbet fight at New Orleans. John and I swore to take the carcass in whole ; and a great and unnecessary job we gave ourselves in consequence, and in spite of our having the pack mule and packing-rope at hand.

I should have premised that while the lifeblood flowed out of the stricken deer's throat, from the knife-cut, I strolled onward upon the adjacent slopes. Deer were

feeding everywhere about the surrounding glades, and I was soon within easy shot of two fair bucks. But second-class had no charm for me now, and we certainly wanted not for meat; so after watching these into the timber, and studying for a while the graceful does and fawns as they retired leisurely from the sunlight, I returned to the big fellow, now dead. Though the date was as late as September 22, his wide-stretching horns still carried their velvet, which I account for by the fact that the ground he frequented was the topmost and coolest ridge of the Rockies, his death having taken place within 200 or 300 yards of the divide. Thus he had probably not shed his old horns until summer, and the velvet would not have been rubbed off his new ones until the winter. All the buck we shot, or saw, on the lower ridges had their horns already cleaned and polished. This head I left in America, to be set up as it stood in the velvet. An hour's hard work in the growing sun it gave John and myself to remove the head in fit form for mounting, to clean our deer, and to lift and fix him upon our sixteen-hand mule. The carcass alone, fat nearly as that of a seal, could not have weighed less than 250 lbs.; and you who have tried, know how limp and unwieldy is the carcass of a deer just killed.

But we brought him into camp intact, for our own satisfaction, and for the inspection of the rival outfit, just breakfasting. For *our* meal we had his liver, to my mind the choicest morsel of a Western deer, and certainly the most edible until the flesh has hung for some days. No danger, in this pure, clean air, of its spoiling even in the sun. Hung above the ground, the outside quickly hardens till not a fly can penetrate, while the inner meat ripens and grows tender day by day.

The obstinacy which at times assails a hunter as to bringing in his spoils is not unfamiliar to most who have toiled and roughed it in pursuit of sport. It is but a sign and a part of the dogged perseverance that alone often leads to success. An instance was furnished me one dusky evening by my usual companion Jim. I could scarcely ride a well-beaten game-track in the gloomy twilight. "How do you make your way after dark in

these pine forests?" I asked. "It's all what a man's used to, I reckon, Cap'n. I mind the night I carried a green b'arskin six mile, through worse timber than this, and never a trail and never a moon. Are you ever carried a green b'arskin?" I confessed I hadn't, and awaited the rest. "Wal, it come about this way. Me and young Sykes was camped on the north fork of Grass-hopper Creek, in the fall of '85. No, I disremembered, 'twere the fall of '86, when b'arskins was low and I trapped six in one month. I come round by a trap late, just casual like, on the way to camp. There was as big a black b'ar as ever you laid eyes on caught by one hind foot. 'I ain't going to take no chances with you,' I says, for I've knowed a sight of accidents through fooling with a b'ar just snicked in a trap. So I stands off and pumps lead into his head till he were settled, and then I sets to and skins him. It were eight o'clock before I had done, and there warn't no moon. Wal, this here b'ar was as big as a steer, but I packed his hide on my back for six mile afoot, through rough fallen timber thicker nor this. And thinks I to myself, coffee and bacon and a bit of b'ar's grease (that I had brought along) won't be so bad when I gets in. Dalled if the camp warn't empty! And it were two o'clock afore I had lit fire and cooked biscuit—when in comes my pardner, as customary as could be. I never did have a meal cooked but he come in just five minutes after. I made sure he'd 'a been there that night. Now he'd got a story he'd been trying to catch an elk calf; the mother wouldn't lie down, and he got cold and concluded to leave them. But he said he were 'nation glad I had cooked the victuals."

Anybody who knows the difficulties of riding or walking through a pine forest will appreciate Jim's trouble in the dark, and understand his chagrin at finding a supperless camp. Believe me, a wolf or lynx has no more power to see his way in the dark than an old trapper!

Another of Jim's bear stories. Perhaps I may recall some more of them by-and-by; but for the present this little adventure will suffice. During one of his trapping expeditions Jim chanced to be looking round for a grouse

for his dinner ; and, to slay him, had armed himself with an old shot-gun, the right barrel alone of which would go off at all, and then only by means of raising the hammer and letting it drop from the thumb. Moving quietly among some scattered pine-trees, he found himself behind a thick spruce, from the farther side of which came sounds as of a buck feeding. "That'll be better than grouse!" thought Jim ; "I'm that close I can blow a hole in him, sure." The rest shall be told as near as possible in his own words. "I come round the tree quiet and sly as may be, with the hammer riz with my thumb, and looking to loose her off as soon as I could see the buck's blue hide. I'd like to ha' dropped when, all of a minute, an old black b'ar set up so close to me I could a'most ha' touched him. He were grubbing about in the grass ever so much lower than the buck I looked for, and I never seed the big black critter till he turned and grinned. He were 'nation scared, you bet, and so were I. I come very near loosing the shot-gun off in his face, and running for it. Then I says, as he growed and growed, 'You ain't got no call to stop, I ain't a looking for *you*!' So he calculated he'd no use for me either, but turned round and shuffled off, a'growing and a'growing, you believe me, all the time. I thought you was a little b'ar,' I says, 'when I first ketched sight of you, down there ; but you're a big b'ar, you are, a *very* big b'ar, as big a b'ar as ever I seed !' and I wiped off the sweat as come running down my face like rain."

Once more. "Do you ever come across bears hibernating?" "No, it's not often as anybody does. I never knowed but one man as killed a b'ar from his hole in winter. There was two fellars trapping in the Green Water country, and they'd run out of grease—hadn't a bit for cooking. A young chap we called Long Island Bill (he'd come from back East two falls afore) was one of 'em, and he'd never seed a b'ar. The sun was shining hot, and it looked as though winter were breaking. A b'ar had poked his snout out through the snow on the side of the gulch ; Bill saw something black, and thought it a cub as it drew back. So, says he, 'I'll get some grease anyhow.' With that he tromples down the snow,

uncovering the mouth of a cave, and in he crawls, holding his Winchester afore him. Sure enough, there there was the little b'ar's eyes, and he slaps into 'em three times, and he hears a groan. 'Guess I'll go and get my pardner, and we'll fetch him out when the smoke clears,' says he. For he'd had about enough of a dark cave, though it were but a cub in it. 'Pete,' says he, 'I've killed a b'ar cub! Come and help us in with the hide and the taller.' So back they comes to the cave, and there they stood a-talking and smoking a pipe comfortable-like, afore beginning. Well, of all the dog-garned noises as ever you heerd, Pete says, it come out o' that cave. Pete, he turned and run; Long Island Bill shoves up his Winchester, but it were knocked right out of his hand as he pulled trigger. A reg'lar great old b'ar flummoxed out; Bill he jumped a one side, the snow gev way under the b'ar, and there he were—caught, till Bill come to enough to walk up and shoot him. For, you see, the snow wouldn't carry the b'ar's weight, though the men could go atop of it where it was froze. They'd got all the grease they wanted that time, and some to sell besides. For it was a terrible big old black b'ar—I seed the skin. Bill don't mean to go creeping into a b'ar's cave again though, even though it's only a cub."

The next extract from my journal I find set down as "a most enjoyable day." I had roused the camp at 4.30, but no persuasion on my part could induce breakfast for an earlier start than 6.30, by which time the sun had already gilded the hills. Mind, our retiring hour was seldom later than 7.30, or 8 P.M. at most; so except for the effort required in leaving a big heap of blankets to turn to the camp fire, no particular hardship was involved in breaking fast before sunrise, which, again, is the signal for all game to move towards the timber. The nights, of course, are at this altitude very sharp and cold, even in September, though the days are warm and the sky ever cloudless. On the plains, by the way, the cowboys on round-up invariably breakfast at 3.30, and are in the saddle about 4.

At length Mat and I rode off, taking our course

upward to the divide, then descending by open and rocky ground beyond to the wood-girt creek flowing eastward for the Atlantic, whereas the water from which this morning's coffee had been brewed came from a stream whose eventual destiny is the Pacific.

Even at this hour the big buck that haunt this lofty divide were still feeding on the open hillside, gathered in bunches, with a view, no doubt, to the autumn migration to lower grounds. I had not wished to fire, even for a good head, so early in the day, as our nominal quest was elk, and we had many a mile's ride before us. But it was exciting to see six great antlered fellows trotting across the open, then no less than ten together; and so when four more stood broadside on and within distance, I could not help drawing head on the biggest as I sat in the saddle. I missed my shot clean, a feat, I notice, that is seldom admitted in copy on shooting. Excuse, if it be any, was soon forthcoming in the discovery that I had, in a moment of mental distraction just before, caused by the appearance of the ten buck together, raised my sight to 300 yards, and left it there when I fired at about 150.

Vexed at this, I determined on a head as soon as obtainable; and when, about half-an-hour afterwards, Mat pointed out a good pair of antlers facing us at about 80 yards among the aspen trees, I pulled myself together and planted a .450 bullet fair in the chest, my horse standing motionless to the shot. I was to-day, fortunately as it turned out, mounted upon a larger and more galloping animal than my usual Indian pony. The buck's head removed, it was left to be picked up on the way back, the meat to be fetched by "the boys" next morning.

Countless deer were working their way through the timber by the riverside, and many big buck were roused as we rode over the wooded heights beyond. The whole country, indeed, was that day like nothing but a well-furnished deer park.

But for elk-sign we sought in vain; so about midday, after the usual halt and pleasant smoke, worked our way back by a wide horse-shoe route towards the morning kill, the deer passing us by scores as we rode, their course

invariably pointing westward. The yearly move to their winter feeding-grounds was obviously commencing, and from it not half of them would ever return. The Indians—the most reckless and unscrupulous of all hide-hunters, yet virtually licensed, and certainly seldom if ever interfered with, by the United States Government, albeit the various States strive hard to protect their game by sternly forbidding white men to slaughter for market—the Indians would take care of that, while the settlers of the lower slopes would naturally want also their stock of meat for the winter months.

“Snakes! There’s a *daisy!*” whispered Mat fiercely and suddenly, his eyes either quicker than mine, or more accustomed to discriminate objects in thick covert. “Don’t you see him, Cap’n, beyond the big pine? There, right sideways on!” But for the life of me I *couldn’t* see the buck amid the shades and shadows of trees and grass, till he browsed on and fairly turned his back, to stroll up the lower ground beyond a slight ravine. The size of his body and the spread of his horns were plain enough at a glance, and he was not more than sixty yards away. So I took the shot at the moment, firing down upon his broad back as he rose the hillside. The bullet struck him too far back, but near the spine, and crippled his off hind-quarter. “We shall have him!” cried Mat, as the big fellow set off through the more open timber, and disappeared into a clump of green spruce. “Let him go! He’ll lie down in a minute.”

But without a dog, and in covert so varied, here and there so dense, I felt by no means disposed to let him out of sight; so rode sharply to the point at which he had disappeared, thence to mark his going away below at a strong, lumbering gallop. Through grass and weeds saddle-high, among the trees and rocks, we dashed after him—the impulse and excitement of chase urging onward, in full fox-hunting vein. I carried only one spur, of a cumbrous, cowboy pattern, but this I rattled hard and constantly against George’s roan ribs, till he entered keenly into the delight of the business and we gained steadily on the big buck. Finding himself pursued, the latter kept rigidly to

the more open ground, and made marvellous progress in spite of his crippled condition. Fallen trees and hidden holes made no difference in our career, nor did even a covered gulch into which George and his rider suddenly dipped to a full twelve feet.

Soon, however, the wound and his gross fat began to tell upon our game, and at length we found ourselves within fifty yards of him. But a fresh effort downhill carried him almost from view before I could dismount for a killing shot. In agony lest I should lose him, I tried other tactics; and, keeping him on my left between me and the open nullah, strained every nerve, and every sinew of the now panting George, to get past and round him. The manœuvre succeeded well; the big buck edged off into the creek-bed as I galloped on to cut him off at a spot where it shallowed. Reaching the clearing, I was out of saddle in a moment, the nails of my heavy hunting-boot catching in the stirrup and throwing me on my back. (Note this, my fellow-sportsmen, as yet another caution against the mad carelessness of taking saddle in nailed boots!) Mat's voice rang gladly down the glade, from the brink of the water-course, "Here he is, Cap'n; shoot him again!" His shout roused the great buck to a final struggle. Painfully he laboured down the hollow towards me, and regretfully I planted a bullet into his sleek ribs. Far rather would I have knifed him in fair shikar fashion, as I imagined I could easily have done—though, according to Mat afterwards, such a course would have been directly against all backwoodsmen's rules for self-security. "He'd a been round quicker nor you think. I got throwed twenty feet down a cliff by a broken-legged 'un, and I ain't got no more use for knifing 'em! No, sir."

The horns of this veteran buck were very peculiar—the two antlers widespread, being exactly similar, in having three good points atop, but without a sign of any lesser points below. Our men, two of them at least of great experience, agreed that they had never come across a head so regular thus equipped, though the horns of the black-tail buck vary in the most multitudinous fashion.

Thus, for instance, of the half-dozen heads I brought back to this country, no two at all closely resemble each other, though all of them belonged to buck of well-matured age.

With our two saddle-horses we carried to camp the whole of this fat deer and both of the heads—Mat tramping alongside his horse for six hot miles of rough climbing. No work is too severe for these hardy backwoodsmen, when once the spirit moves them to undertake anything. Toil and discomfort are play to them when once their mind is set upon accomplishing any feat. They may revel in idleness at times, but they revel equally in work, and they seldom mix up the two. Added to which, they are obliging and kindly to a degree, and thoughtful and zealous for the interests and comfort of whoever they have undertaken to chaperone in a sphere that is so familiar to them, but so difficult—even impossible—to a stranger unassisted.

CHAPTER XIX

ROCKIES IN SEPTEMBER—(*continued*)

ONE warm forenoon in the same week found Jim and myself riding northward along the Great Divide. Our coats were folded on the saddle-bow, and the sun blazed hotly, in a hurry to wipe out the frost of the early morning. Underfoot every blade of grass, every sprig of weed crackled from the long-continued drought, for the frosted dew had evaporated, and the earth's surface was parched and shrivelled. In the far distance the smoke of forest fires was rising rapidly in half-a-dozen different directions, the air was vividly clear, and the distant peaks stood out blue and distinct, each with a yarn attached from Jim's inexhaustible portfolio. Here were the "Mink-Ears," round which the last herd of buffalo ran in '85; here the "Snowy-Cap," which a thousand elk had frequented in a band in '80 (dates take ever an important place in a backwoodsman's story); beyond those far dim peaks ran Bear Creek, "where me and my pardner trapped a heap of bear and beaver in '86, though the Injins was

doing all they could to spring our traps and scare the game."

The "fall" of 1892 was singularly prolonged and dry. It seldom happens that September passes on the Upper Rockies without one or two initiatory snowstorms, that serve to wet the ground and damp the withering foliage. But in the present autumn no such means of insurance was forthcoming; fires sprang up everywhere, and the whole country was at the mercy of the winds. A camp fire carelessly left smouldering would break out days afterwards from the bed of pine-fibre on which it rested, and which in itself was as a mass of tinder. The fallen timber is everywhere as a plain of ready fuel, and the fire marches before the breeze until "corralled" by accident of water and change of wind. Almost invariably the wind entirely drops at night, and the fires dwindle in the cold and dewy stillness, only to break out again with the breeze in the next forenoon, throwing forth great clouds of smoke, and, as the day passes, gradually obscuring half the landscape with dense vapour. Thus, this September, one could, from a single height, count no less than eight distinct forest fires in full blaze, and many miles of grand timber were utterly destroyed.

That the forest fires are to a certain extent of yearly occurrence is illustrated by the fact that the railway companies, buying their sleepers in stacks where cut, always covenant not to take delivery "until *after* the first snowstorm of the fall." And many a hard-working axeman has lost the whole of his summer wages by means of this clause.

It was pleasant riding though, this sunny morning, and especially when the breeze rose, and the distant smoke-clouds with it. We chose our way in advance through a comparatively open country, the yellow aspens quivering brightly upon tree-stems, dotted only so closely that they interfered in no degree with easy progress. Deer kept dancing across our path. Once a dainty, big-eyed tawn, disturbed by Jim as he happened to be riding a hundred yards on my right, came bounding up to me, taking my horse possibly for its mammy. I kept up the

delusion as far as my powers of imitation would avail ; and as I bleated the little fellow trotted alongside, till a puff of wind suddenly hinted to him of danger, when away he bounded into the forest.

At another time a brace of fawns perceived our coming, though their mother was comfortably reclining in the cool shade. In a moment, one from one side, another from the other, dashed down upon the old doe, butted her vigorously in the ribs, and, whether she liked it or not, drove her off to the nearest thicket. Before entering covert she stopped, and looked round with an air of wonderment most comical ; then, flinging her tail in the air, went off with great jumps, with her offspring leaping on either side. Such little incidents of animal life in the wild forest have for many of us almost as pleasing an interest as the more vigorous moments of sport.

I could wish there were more birds in the upland forests of Western America. Beyond the grouse, many hawks, an occasional eagle, or a stray jay, very few are to be met with. The air never resounds to song, and the foliage is never brightened by feathered life. A single lively exception on the latter head is found in the quaint and ubiquitous "camp follower," a sort of colossal tomtit in his ways and habits. Soft grey in colour, in size about equal to a thrush, the "camp follower" makes himself at home directly packs are off and the fire is lit. From that moment it is *his* camp ; he will peck his meals from the hanging meat, or even satisfy hunger from a bone held out to him by hand.

Our object in to-day's ride was to reach the summit of Nightcap Mountain, whose clusters of dark pine loomed like a belt beneath the snow that still whitened its crest. Climbing upwards and upwards from the intervening valley, the pines were at last reached, and there, as we had expected, a cool and bubbling stream, beside which we could spend the midday hour, an hour of which a frugal meal was the foundation ; the remainder a feast of scenery, a dream of contentment, a lazy appreciation of existence in such surrounding.

Our saddle-horses cropped the grass while we lingered

over a pipe in the grateful shade. "Did you ever get your horse stampeded by bear or lion?" I asked, by way of starting Jim on a yarn. "No," he said, "I can't say as ever I did. I don't often take chances on a rotten rope or a scrub-bush. A tight knot and a sound tree's good enough for me. But it was pretty much same as stampeding one time with me and a pack mule. I were riding along with the pack rope in my hand, when I come across one of them mountain lions right afore me. They are mostly terrible cowards. But this here one stood up with her ears back as nasty as could be. I reckon she'd got cubs. 'Well,' I says, 'you're looking that sassy, I guess you'd like to know the time o' day!' So I puts up my Winchester careful, and made sure to plug her in the bosom, when I got a jerk as pulled me clean out o' the saddle; the Winchester went off in the air, and I come scotch on to the ground. The durned mule were off, with the frying-pan and dutch-oven playing accompaniment, and he doing his best to pitch himself clear of the whole pack. I got up that mad I'd like to have let a hole into his thick hide with my little four-eighty, but the muzzle was choked up with dirt, and I began to wonder what the lion were doing. I couldn't see nothing of her. She'd cleared out. But," he added after a pause, inviting sympathy as it were, "I got even with her—a mighty curious thing too, for I make no doubt it were the same. Three days after I were setting a trap for wolverine (wonderful fighters them wolverine! They ain't no bigger than a sheep-dog; but they do say that one of them can whip a b'ar or a mountain lion either). I had sot down to smoke a pipe by the side of a little creek, and there were a piece quite open just across the water. A mountain lion, the very same old cat, s'help me, walks out as confidential as could be, a-purring and stretching, and then she stands still and yawns! 'Oh, that's you?' says I to myself. 'You was mighty sassy the other day, and I reckon we'll get level this time.' So I waits till she were moving clear off (you don't want a lion or a b'ar to be coming head on when you go to shooting him), and then I put the little bullet in proper. That stopped her sass, and brought me

twenty dollars—ten for the bounty and ten for the pelt."

So he went on, telling me of the ways of wild animals and his experiences with them, and the whole with such a relish of his life that, had I been twenty years younger, I would gladly have thrown up even one winter's fox-hunting for a winter's trapping. I know well that a Western winter is a cold experience; but an English winter, as we have seen of late, and as has been proved annually for the last three years, is often anything but unbroken bliss. The life of a trapper is all interest. He learns to delight in it for its own sake. It has none of the attractiveness that belongs to the national pursuit of the almighty dollar. Indeed the trapper and the cowboy provide possibly the only exceptions, the country through, to the universal devotion accorded to the silver image—the type of liberty and fraternity, but of equality only so far as one man has as much moneyed righteousness as another. So the world over. But the trapper and the cowboy, like Gallio, care for none of these things.

"You must have had queer times among the Indians?" I suggested. "Yes, Cap'n, I've seen them pretty nasty at times. And I've seen a heap of 'em wiped out—time I was packing with General Miles' army after the Custer masacre. I mind we surprised two hundred in their tepes one morning; but the order was to fire into the tents, and most of 'em cut their way out at the back of the tents and got clean off. And next night but one they shot two horse-keepers and got away with all their ponies we had just took from 'em. They don't often try it on shooting a man trapping, unless he's quite alone and no chance of it being known he's out—same as they shot Bill Samples on Black Powder Creek, just as he rode into his camp. He got his gun on to one of 'em; and *he* was took upon Bill's horse, badly hit through the ribs. But he wouldn't give his pardner away—till the sheriff's gammoned him as Little Wolf (they knowed pretty well it was him) was took and had owned to the killing. Then they had 'em both.

"I don't know as I wouldn't rayther have Injins than a mean white man. I come nigher being shot by a white

man than any time by Injins, and all along of an old fool as I had trapped with winter before. Grizzly Joe, they called him. He's now a sheriff in Yellow Park county. He'd gammoned old Dug Fraser out of a lot of skins him and me had trapped that winter. Now this here Grizzly Joe'd do a man out of anything—jump a claim—and bluff the man after, if he thought he could. He weighed over 200 lb.; and when he worked in the mines they gave him the wages of two men, reg'lar. Well, we had some words, and I says, 'Mebbe you did settle with Dug but you didn't with me, and one of you's got to do it.' So I goes to Dug Fraser pretty mad. He didn't dare give Grizzly Joe away; and yet I seed how it was. 'Joe *may* weigh 200 lb.,' I says, 'but that won't make no difference if he comes to play any tricks on me!' So next time he sees Grizzly Joe, Dug says to him, 'Jim's going to shoot you on sight!' It might a been three months arter; I was setting some beaver traps on Red Water Creek, Wyoming, you know. I'd laid down my Winchester, and was walking across the ice above the beaver dam, when over the dam I sees a man's head come up slowly; then I sees a gun-barrel laid straight for me, and then a big black beard as I knowed could belong to no one but Grizzly Joe. 'Hulloa, Joe!' says I, 'what might you be a doing?' 'Nothin' now,' says he, 'but if you'd had a gun in your hand, you'd a been a dead man now, sure enough!' 'Well, Joe, you'd got the drop on me, and no mistake. But what's that for?' And then it come out, what Dug Fraser had told him. So between that there old fool, and this mean cuss, I come very near having to quit trapping altogether. I hold now that if he hadn't a knowed that my party and his'n were both within sound of gunshot, why, he'd a pulled trigger as soon as he drawed bead."

Time allowed of no more of Jim's stories for that day. Saddling up, we rode to the summit of the mountain—the final acclivity so steep that we had to pull our horses after us with the saddle-rope, mine turning a backward somersault at the first attempt. Now we travelled the ridge for two or three miles—no sign of elk, but the fresh-skinned carcass of a young deer, showing that the villainous hide-

hunters were in the neighbourhood. Then, dipping into the valley on the homeward track, we rode through park after park of undulating beauty—the grass and weeds, as usual, saddle-high, amid the scattered trees. Deer became more numerous as we reached the lower ground and the vicinity of its creek. I had not intended to shoot, having ridden out only to explore new ground. But, as a band of deer sauntered through the timber about 150 yards away, it was impossible not to notice two good heads—impossible not to aim at the bearer of the bigger. To pull the trigger was only one degree more, and a grand buck fell to the report, shot high up behind the shoulder. “Satisfactory—very!” I commented, right well pleased that I had held thus steady from the saddle, and equally well pleased when meat and head had been duly packed and conveyed to camp.

Our arrival there was heralded in rather laughable fashion. A few hundred yards before reaching it we disturbed a fine heavy buck. He looked magnificent, as with great striding bounds he carried his wide-spread antlers away through the forest—here a sloping park studded with clumps of magnificent timber. “He’s going straight into camp!” I hazarded, little knowing how literally the surmise was being fulfilled. A few minutes afterwards we found all loose horses and mules flocking at full gallop to their tethered comrades, while John, the cook, and Phil, the horse-wrangler, were screaming with laughter and blazing their pistols into the trees in sheer wantonness. The buck, it seems, had shied away from the “stock” picketed on the choice grass hard by—to find himself by this manœuvre between the tents and the camp fire, and hemmed in by the miscellaneous impedimenta scattered round. The boys were busy upon their customary afternoon vocation—to wit, “lying around,” a part of their duties that, more often than not, was enacted to the accompaniment of gun-cleaning, firing at a mark, or such like recreation giving them command of a weapon at hand. But on this particular occasion neither rifle nor six-shooter was within reach when the buck jumped thus unceremoniously into camp. John rushed for our tent, where the little

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grouse-rifle usually lay. Phil rushed in the other direction in search of his ivory-handled law-defier, nearly ran against the buck, and then tumbled into the fire. The next moment the deer had vanished, and the boys stood gazing blankly into each other's faces. What they said when they recovered speech shall not be written here. It was not long, but deep and strong.

CHAPTER XX

LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

I DELIGHT in a new scene, and welcome heartily a new experience. Of a truth I found them both on Friday, October 7—the eve of my sailing for the hunting-grounds of the Old Country. Hear me out, and believe me, gentlemen of England and of Ireland who may read these notes. You will shake your heads, I warn you; and you will scatter many a needless grain of salt upon the story, as is your manner of dealing with travellers' tales from across the Atlantic. Take my plain record and impressions as you may, here they are, as set down shortly after the day's occurrence.

Know, then, that in immediate proximity to the city of New York is the flat narrow strip of land known as Long Island, stretching some hundred and fifty miles or so eastward. The greater part of its interior is farming land and grassy plain, the former divided everywhere into fields of ten to twenty acres, or thereabouts, by means of strong timber fences; the latter dotted here and there with villas, or boxes (as we might term them in the Old Country), belonging to the opulent citizens of New York, who thus in their leisure hours attain country air and some country pursuits. For, as you may or may not know, almost every man in America is in business; every man continues to make money if he can; few of them, in contrast to the custom so freely in vogue on our side of the water, being wholly employed in spending it. Perhaps it is due to this fact that so many among the upper

class of America are to all appearance as lavish in their personal expenditure as they are certainly generous, almost unbounded, in their hospitality.

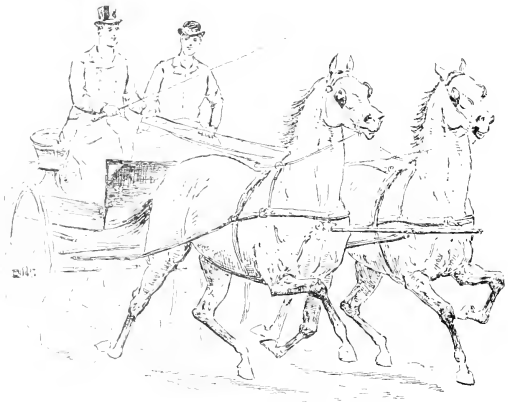
Let that be as it may, a strong taste for country life has of late set in, especially on the part of the younger generation, whose leaning is towards the development of active out-door sport. Consequently many picturesque residences have been erected in the district aforesaid, clubs have been formed for hunting and polo, and no less than three smartly-equipped packs of foxhounds take the field upon Long Island, as soon as the crops are cut and the heat of summer has given place to the pleasant coolness of autumn. These three are known respectively as The Rockaway, The Meadowbrook, and the Queen's County or Mr. Griswold's—the hounds of the last-named kennel having been almost entirely imported, or bred from stock imported, by that gentleman.

Saturday being essentially the recognised day on which the hunting men of New York take the field, and Saturday at early morning being the time of departure for the outgoing steamer, I feared that once again no chance remained of my joining in a gallop across the timber-fenced plains of Long Island—occasion that I had for many a day coveted, and for which I had received many a kindly invitation. But at Chicago a telegram hurried me on—"Griswold will give you a run on Friday morning." The mount, I knew, was certain to be capable and trusty; and forward I travelled delightedly, to reach Long Island overnight.

10.30 at Westbury Forge was the arrangement; and thither we drove in the cool morning twilight—a team (*i.e.* a pair, in transatlantic rendering) of lusty trotters making the dust fly handsomely. None of the country roads of America are macadamised, or in any way built or hardened, a fact that I mention now as having an important bearing not only on the aspect of the day's proceedings, but upon the feasibility of crossing the enclosed country at all. Let me not be misunderstood. Roads are in Long Island of little or no use in the light in which we, the great body of English fox-hunters, are accustomed to

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regard them, viz. as safe channels for facilitating progress in pursuit of hounds. There they come rather as intercepting barriers, crossing the line of route every half-mile or mile at least. They run at right angles one to another, and at short distances, as possible streets and highways of the future. They may occur only as section-boundaries (a section being 1600 acres, if my memory serves me), or they may come thickly as the dream of a some-day populous town. Such at least is my impression; and from to-day's experience I can aver that they have to be jumped



Making the dust fly handsomely

into and out of; also that, though their inner surface is sound and reasonably soft, their aspect to the stranger is as uninviting as it is frequent and exacting.

Our route to the meet ran alongside the Hempstead plain, on whose broad bosom (as enticing for a gallop almost as Newmarket Heath) the Meadowbrook Club have planted their house, kennels, and polo ground. On our right lay farmland of the usual Long Island type—fields of somewhat rugged grass, now brown and scorched by the outgoing heat-season, and stubble and dust-garden emanating from lately gathered harvest. The whole is composed of light, loamy soil, that never bakes hard, and

so never rebels obstinately against a horse's footfall. Thus concussion is minimised; and horses can go on jumping freely year after year. On the other hand, it is never deep or spongy with wet, the descending rain finding its way rapidly to the water-level, some six feet only below the surface.

"Surely you don't ride at a flight of rails like that?" I inquired, pointing to a first barricade that met my troubled gaze—to wit, a morticed erection of oaken bars, each of them as thick as a man's thigh, and the lot carried considerably higher than an ordinary Leicestershire gate. "Why, yes! That's nothing much. The farmers aim at setting their fences at four feet eight, to keep their stock in." I asked no more; but held my peace while the horrid parallel intruded itself upon my mind, of the condemned man in the prison-cart catching a first view of the gallows awaiting him. But I gazed and gazed, as each successive bone-trap hove in view; and, you may depend upon it, the longer I looked the less I liked them. And I wondered who would ride the horses at home in Old England.¹

But at the rendezvous were those we were now to ride. For me a tried and proven hunter—a brown gelding, Shipmate by name, up to fully fourteen stone, and with shoulders good enough to allay at least some of the qualms engendered during my recent drive. For my host, Mr. Roby (I shall make no apology for decorating my little tale with the names that belong to it, and that may mark it with its due imprint of veracity)—for him was a neat but powerful thoroughbred, of lesser height, and more often the mount of his sister; though how Miss Roby (even on Brunette), or how any lady is to be carried in safety day by day over this ghastly country will, I take leave to remark, be a subject of wonderment to me for many a day.

Scarcely had we mounted than up rode Mr. Frank Griswold with a most useful-looking pack of about seventeen

¹ "It is all very well for a man to boast that in all his life he has never been frightened, and believes that he never could be so. There may be men of that nature—I will not dare to deny it; only I have never known them."—*Lorna Doone*.

couple, with his young Irish whipper-in, and with the small field of a by-day that had been so hastily and kindly improvised. Faultless is a word that would do scant justice to the equipment of master and man. It was as workmanlike as it was fashionable; complete in every attribute; and did my eyes good, at 3000 miles from home. Of the others, Mr. Collyer alone (to whom yet another pack of foxhounds was on its way from the Old Country) was in pink; and he bestrode a grand grey horse, known as Majesty, fully equal to the fourteen-stone task imposed upon him. By the way, it seems to me, as far as casual opportunity allowed me to form impressions before quitting the sporting sphere of Long Island, that here the little hunting world learn to know most horses by name and history as systematically as the thrusters of Meath tabulate their more important fences, till they become, as it were, household words.

Perhaps no two names are more familiar to the hunting and horse-loving community of New York than those of the two bays which Mr. Griswold and his man bestrode. And they serve as admirably to illustrate my subject as they did subsequently to show me how such country should be crossed. The Master, then, was upon Hempstead, of whom I soon became fairly entitled to assert that if "a rum 'un to look at, he was a devil to go." A more ornate, or even less inelegant, description would be inapplicable to Hempstead. He has, appropriately, a large knowledge-box, and inappropriately a wasplike waist. Like Mercury he carries his wings on his heels; and very good use he makes of them—though they make it impossible for him to conceal that he is what is termed in America a "cold-blooded horse." Hempstead's credentials, however, include the fact that he has jumped not less than 6 feet 3 inches over the timber at the New York Annual Horse Show. Add to this that he is fifteen years old, that he has for a full proportion of his time been going to hounds upon Long Island, that his legs are clean as they were when he was five—and you will allow that Hempstead has a reasonable right to assume the character of a great hunter and wonderful conveyance.

The Clipper, carrying the whip, is also no small marvel. He is the oldest horse now taking place in the chase upon Long Island, his age being only so far known that in 1883 he cleared six feet at the New York Show. The high-jumping competition was then only in its infancy. Two years ago the record rose to 7 feet 2 inches. Since then the contest has been discontinued, the sole cause being the danger involved in the fact that the bar was nearly solidly fixed, being held in its place by ropes in the hands of three or four stalwart Irishmen. The competition used to take place by electric light, the horses rose off tan, laid upon sand or earth, and some ten thousand people would assemble to witness the struggle. The horses themselves, of their own keen accord, would gallop hard at the jump; and, so far from getting under it and lobbing over, as a stone-wall jumper more often does, would fling themselves from afar and take it in their stride. It is this faculty of "standing off" at his jump that makes the flying of a high post-and-rails on the part of an accomplished hunter so thrilling and pleasurable a sensation, as I was yet to learn. Clipper, it remains to be added, is a blood-like bay, about 15.3 in height, and his legs, beyond bearing one trifling callous enlargement obtained in early youth, show no sign whatever of the almost incessant galloping and jumping he has been called upon to perform.

No time was lost at the meet; but hounds were trotted on at once northward, till they reached a small roadside covert known, I believe, as Old Westbury Wood. Here everything was ready for them, and they darted into the wood in full clamour. For a moment it struck me that the sudden break must be riot, till I remembered that, of course *Fox et præterea nihil* was by force of circumstances barred from being the motto of Long Island and its vinery (and if I may be forgiven that the old jest rises up unawares). No, they make no secret of it. "As much fox as possible" is their creed. But *hunting* anyhow, and "a run" in any case. Thus direction is controlled, damages are lessened, a ride is insured, and, as I take it to-day, a sample of country is exhibited according to requirement. Safe and intact upon board ship, it is surely allowed me

to lighten a weary hour with the strange and merry memory.

Adown the thicket, then, hounds threw their tongues heartily, while I drew my old timekeeper from its fob and wondered what might come next. The fire of chase was kindled, and the glow of expectation and excitement fairly lit within us. Now the pack had overshot the line, and the Master drew them gently back along the outer edge of the wood, towards which the balance of possibilities pointed as direction. "Yoi over!" and they were away, huntsman and whip leading forth from the leafy branches, as through a paper hoop, in order to gain the stubble-field in their wake. I believe that it was an old snake fence that they jumped; but I was far too eager to push my face through the overhanging branches to do more than give Shipmate the office to follow, and sit tight as he rose. *Ferrard* they stream! Now, if there is one sight upon earth that has power to lift me several heavens above it, to bid heart and spirit spring forward as if with no dragging clay attached, to thrust out of thought all else in the world—aye, even grovelling fear—it is a pack of hounds flying to a head, while a good horse endorses their glad appeal. Is it not so with you? If not, then cast me aside; for this brief story is only of myself, who imagine that you would have felt and thought as I did. In my place you would have followed almost automatically over the sturdy post-and-rails beyond the wood, well content, then, to have got beyond them, and right thankful that your host's good mount apparently deserved his reputation—wondering also, possibly, as you glanced forward, what proportion, or if even a substratum, of truth had lain in the comforting words of the Master as he rode from the meet. "Very big and gaunt these fences look!" we had remarked; adding, with a jauntiness we were far from feeling, "But they say the horses here jump them well enough." "Oh, you'll find some rails down, or a gap, in almost every one," he had answered. And we had believed him, as the artless miner believed the Heathen Chinese.

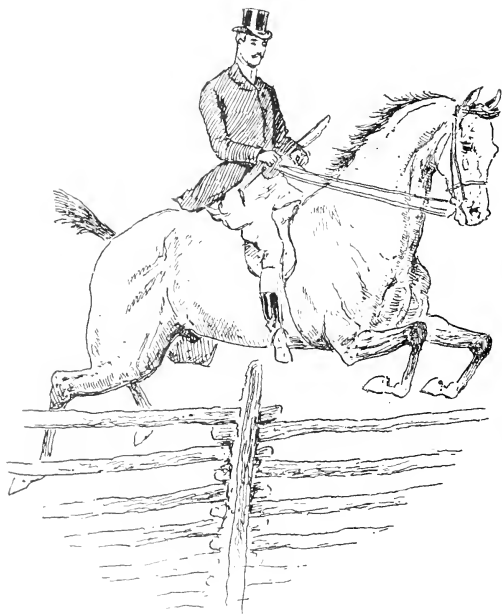
See! What is he doing now? Where are the rails down, and where is the gap? Six foot of timber, surely—and

he is within three strides—both ears cocked and both spurs in! Nay, I will lower six inches, but never another inch, an' I have to prove it at pistol point. Well, it was death or degradation now, and no time to balance the account. So I gave the old horse a strong pull, gripped him tight between my nervous knees, chose my panel some three lengths from my instigator, and sat still for the result. Rugged and awful loomed the ponderous top-rail, on a level with my horse's ears, one of which—ill omen—was twinkling towards the exemplar on our right. A moment more, and we seemed right under the frowning barricade; then a hoist, a bang, a prolonged quiver, but no fall, though a yard of turf was ploughed up, and the demonstrator turned quietly in his saddle for a smile and a word of encouragement.

They have a habit, it seems, with the Hunt in question—and a habit not altogether unwarranted—of leaving to the Master, in his capacity as huntsman, the responsibility of showing the way to his field. And here, as elsewhere, his is the duty and business of obtaining room for his hounds; and as here he is likely to know as much about the probable line as any one, the etiquette is justifiable from every point of view. At the same time it is a high trial to put upon him who plays second, or third, or minor fiddle, that he has to play exactly the same tune as the professor whose first fiddle is an instrument of unexceptionable merit. Were it my fortune to become a habitual member of this gallant orchestra, fain would I bargain that the leader should occasionally, if not usually, wield his powerful bow upon a fiddle of less exemplary tone. As it is, however, whither he leads the others invariably follow, resining their bows manfully, and picking themselves up undauntedly when for the moment knocked out of time or tune. And horse as well as man adapt themselves to the custom, and so almost involuntarily attach themselves to his lead.

Meanwhile old Straduarius—I mean Hempstead—had swung quickly to the right in the track of hounds, and cantered easily over another such hair-riser as the post-and-rails preceding. Shipmate this time was well in his

wake ; and feeling himself now duly authorised, bounded over with a rollicking spring that seemed never-ending for height and distance. Indeed from this moment he never laid iron to wood, nor trifled with a stick. "Stick" did I say? Our newest ox-rails in the Shire are sticks by com-



Bounded over with a rollicking spring

parison ; these were, every one one of them, half as thick through as a railway sleeper.

But even yet, though gathering confidence with each wish into the air, and grateful courage with each quiet return to *terra firma*, I had by no means brought myself to believe in immunity in store. The next question asked was in the form of the snake or zigzag, the old-time fence of the country, built at a period when men merely piled up

split rails in twelve-foot lengths and to a sufficient height (four feet and upwards)—keeping them together as we can zigzag cards on their edges across the table, and supporting them at the angles with two or three other split rails stuck upwards. At this description of fence you have to ride either sideways, or by turning in the last few strides as you ride. And, stalwart as they are, the snake fences are neither so lofty as the champions among their morticed brethren nor, being more closely built and so in a measure resembling a wall, are they so deterrent to the eye of one whose collar-bones have already been knotted and spliced amid the rail-guarded pastures of Leicestershire.

Now the chase was following a lane. "This is as it should be," thought I, as I thundered down the hard, beaten cattle-track after my cicerone. "Wonder if they have any gates in these parts?" The answer came soon, with the end of the "lane" (as I had deemed it for a short hundred yards). Two rails alone blocked the outlet, at a height no whit below the average of the obstacles just reasoned with. Hempstead was already being quietly squeezed, as the moment demanded or measurement suggested, and in a few seconds more the pink back was gliding onward, with the black rail outlined as it were a belt against his waist. (I remember Custance on *The Doctor* served me just such a trick—ah, how many years ago!—in a lane beyond Lowesby: only that it was not quite so much so, except that the ground was just as hard.) And yet now nobody stopped, and nobody, as far as I know, was down. We should one and all have done the former, had the scene been laid in the Merry Midlands. Then some good man would have jumped off to pull it down; and then, like enough, many of us would have ridden through without thanking him, or even catching his horse.

But I shall weary you. For so engrossed was I with my own task, my own difficulties, wonderments, and, I may add, keen enjoyment, that with one eye given to the pack and the other divided between the artistic back in front of me and the next-coming complication in front of him, I had no leisure to note much of what others

might be doing. Now and then Mr. Roby on Brunette would land over a fence beside me, or glance lightly over the next one ahead, the little mare bounding into space like a springbok; or Mr Cottenet (huntsman of The Meadowbrook) would race by upon a grey thoroughbred, said to be almost new to the game now being played. A natural faculty, truly, and superadded to a liberal development thereof at home, should a horse possess before essaying the unbreakable country in question. Many a green young one have I pushed over, or through, the varied hinderments of our green Midlands; and derived great fun and sport from the process. But nothing short of a pension should induce me to ride a novice upon Long Island. My one visit has enabled me to realise that a horse of great jumping power, complete education, and unswerving courage may be a very safe conveyance, and may treat you, moreover, to a sensation as delightful as it is novel. But five-foot timber that is no more likely to break than the mainmast of this good ship—my present mount over a yet rougher country—is about the last form of exercise I should set for the schooling of the youngster, with any hope of his carrying himself and me through—*i.e.* to the end of the run. What say you? And what say you if those five-foot rails be into a road, with a drop of a couple of feet on landing? And how would you expect a young one to recover himself in time to go out again, by doubling over a trench by the roadside, and striking off a weed-grown bank to clear timber of nearly equal height beyond—and the whole width of the road being little more than three horses' lengths. He didn't! But it was the grey's only mistake, beyond rapping his legs raw in half-a-dozen places.

All this had taken place in about a quarter of an hour, during which we had been galloping steadily, and jumping, it seemed to me, incessantly. "Titus' fences," I am told, is the Hunt designation of the district—or rather of Mr Titus' system of subdivision. Whether Titus be emperor, farmer, republican, or democrat, I had no opportunity of inquiring; but his style of fence-making is, I made bold to assert, nothing less than imperial, and I commend it with all

respect to every agriculturist who, while entertaining a proper hatred of wire, is yet averse to having his fences knocked down. I warrant you that friend Titus seldom, if ever, finds a panel broken.

By this time I had assumed sufficient confidence to consider myself justified in once more attempting a line of my own, rather than continue to follow blindly in the footsteps of a guide, however talented and trustworthy. Accordingly, as the pack hit the line after a brief check, I cut myself loose as it were from my leading-strings, and set forth to walk alone; that is to say, I left the Master riding on the left of his pack, while I strode forth on the right—riding “wide of hounds,” as his Lordship might forcibly recommend, that thus on hounds swinging to fault one may be pretty sure to find oneself among some of them and be ——. I soon discovered, however, that to an arrangement of this kind there must be two consenting parties. No sooner had I topped the boundary of the next ten-acre pasture than I found myself confronted by another roadway, with hounds just diving through the fence beyond. This lane, too, was flanked by the same uncompromising timber, and this lane also held out a drop to the coming “lepper.” However, we had managed such before: so I hardened my heart, and imagined myself already half over. Not so old Shipnate. He had no idea of being fooled thus by an ignorant Britisher. “No, sir!” he said, plainer than words, “I guess the Master’s lead is good enough for me;” and therewith he stuck his head against one of the middle bars, and pulled up dead short. I turned him still further from hounds, and sent him with both spurs in his ribs full tilt at the barrier at right angles to us. More determinedly than ever he stopped in the last stride. The situation became appalling. Here was I, as completely penned as a steer in a stockyard. Desperately I twisted him round; and, setting his head for the fourth side of the great corral, brought arms and legs and tongue to assist in a final despairing charge. Whether it was the strange sting of the last-named implement—sharpened on many a foreign whetstone—or whether, as is more likely, the present course exactly chimed in with his own pre-

conceived ideas, I cannot say ; but, hesitating no longer, the old horse flicked out of the enclosure like a brick, wheeled to the rein immediately, and was in and out of the road ere you could have clapped your hands. Two fields further the pack were at momentary fault ; and henceforth Shipmate behaved as faultlessly as a girl at her chaperone's elbow.

The sun was now blazing warmly ; the dust lay hot and thick where till recently had been heavy cornfields. Thus pace slackened as we passed the woodlands to the northward of Westbury, and adjacent to the sea (the name of those woodlands I failed to catch ; but they are "full of foxes," quoth the Master, "though the foxes are difficult to drive into the open"). The heat was beginning still further to tell its tale as hounds hunted by Hone's Wood, and by the Queen's County Kennels at East Wiliston—our fox mercifully choosing an easier line, wherein many a bar was prone and gaps were to be found at last.

So, nearly to Mineola town or village, within sight of which, and by the side of some standing corn, hounds caught a view, dashed into their fox, and tore him up so quickly that barely a head was left to be given to the stranger. Forty-five minutes the run, from start to finish a jolly ride, and a stirring experience such as for novelty and for brisk sensation I commend to whoever shall have found Leicestershire slow, Meath pedantic, or the Badminton short of foxes and sport. For my part, if the yawning ditches of Meath frightened me last October, the frowning timber of Long Island has this month scared me considerably more. A few more such autumn episodes, and I shall have no nerve remaining even for gentle Northamptonshire. The naked wire of Australia would seem to be the only terror left to sample, and that I am certainly content to leave untried. By the way, were these Mr. Gordon Bennett's schooling grounds, before he took the field in the Melton district ? If so, I no longer marvel at the temerity that led him to over-estimate Riga's capacity at a rasping gate below Ranksboro' Gorse—with consequences, however, less awful than at first appeared.

Mr. P. Collyer and Mr. C. Carroll, in spite of an unlucky turn at starting, were both on the scene of the hill as soon as others ; while Miss Roby and Miss Carey, with intuitive knowledge of locality, had contrived to bring their vehicles alongside the chase for the final half-mile.

Mr. Frank Griswold's handling of hounds is, I may be permitted to say, both quiet and masterly. As to his riding to them, I will merely remark that if any man could be found in England or Ireland capable of sailing more smoothly, determinedly, and gracefully over the tremendous timber fences of the day in question, I would gladly travel from far to see him do it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE 13TH HUSSARS' HOUNDS, CORK

MY first ride with hounds after landing at Queenstown was on Monday, October 17, 1892, under the kind auspices of the 13th Hussars, who, like their predecessors the 3rd, hunt the district immediately west of Cork, originally "The Muskerry." "A rough country," they told me ; and certainly in some of its characteristics it seemed very different from any I had seen before. But I have seen many a rougher ; and hope I may never be called upon to ride in a worse. This is my after impression, gathered on such material as the day afforded, added to a wide bird's-eye view of the undulating plains that stretch southward from the River Lea.

If a cavalry regiment quartered at the little village of Ballincollig (some four or five miles from the city of Cork) did not keep a pack of hounds, it passes man's understanding to suggest what the officers could do during the winter months, when once the demands of Her Most Gracious Majesty upon their time are duly satisfied. For beyond Ballincollig is, apparently, nothing ; and Cork, though doubtless a great and genial city, at least puts in no higher claim than Peebles as to being superior to London on the score of attractiveness.

Ballincollig, in fact, was originally pitched upon by the Government of the day as a desirable site on which to isolate a gunpowder factory ; and a cavalry regiment has ever since been told off to keep guard upon it. There being no likelihood of a grateful country recognising with a subsidy the necessity for a pack of watchdogs within the barracks, it devolved upon the officers themselves to find kennels, which they did by purchase of an " evicted farm " across the river, and the buildings thus adapted are handed over from regiment to regiment. And seven days a fortnight is the present programme upon which they take the country.

Monday the 17th, on which hounds were taken to Cloghroe, was not a good scenting day, either in the open or in the woods of Ardrum, for which the fixture was mainly intended. And Cloghroe is more miles from Cork than a Saxon understanding was likely to have gathered from current report. Still, a car worthy of the county ought to have carried one thither within the hour, by the riverside route, and in spite of the forbidding steam tramway that slices the road in half.

So I pass over the few minutes' scurry of the morning, that brought a cub to hand amid stony-backed paddocks such as constitute much of the farmland of Cork county. And I pass over the vanishing of an old fox among the falling leaves of Ardrum's plantations (Ardrum being a fine old mansion and demesne belonging to Sir George Colthurst of Blarney, but to all appearance left to a caretaker, and uncared for). And I take my stand late in the afternoon upon the Kennel Hill, with a gorse almost underfoot, with the lower ground occupied by the river, the Ballincollig Powder Mills, the Barracks, and the Kennels, and with a wide vista of small enclosures and glistening stone-banks extending southward and beyond into far distance. The broad river is hereabouts checked and spread by a weir, over which two canoes were now shooting. Two powder-barges were being towed up below, like nothing else than floating hearses. Cork and its picturesque surroundings gleamed in the sunlight down stream ; and the shining water wended its way beyond, to Queenstown and

the sea. The remainder of the pack bayed in kennel to the sound of the horn, to which a few veterans at liberty responded by climbing the slope, and the whole scene suggested contemplation and a quiet cigar.

But there were cubs in the gorse, and cubs that, once roused, must go somewhere. It took some time to rouse them, the interval broken by the whip taking a harmless fall over the big bank that bounds the covert, and that lay in wait also for the Master (not, unfortunately, without mishap to his horse).

Well, eventually a cub introduced us—introduced me, I should say, for I at least was (if you are not) utterly strange to stone-faced banks, such as are the speciality of Cork county. The cub gave us some twenty-five minutes' hunting, and fully twenty-five of these curious banks. Speaking personally—*i.e.* adopting the pronoun I, to which I am bound to attach myself in these wanderings after novelty—I was, in plain, unsophisticated English, as right as the bank. For had not Mr. T. Donovan, of Leicester fame, empowered me to ride his own two-season hunter—known only as "Donovan's brown?" And in a strange country I trust entirely to my pack animal—leaving it to him, with my trust in his owner, to pull me through. And so far he has seldom failed me. Thus, under the guidance of Mr. Tremayne and his assistant Mr. Wise, I soon knew more about stone-faced banks than I had acquired throughout some decades of hearsay.

I couldn't make them out at all, to begin with. For the life of me I did not see how, without chance of a foot-hold half-way, horses were to arrive on the summit of five-foot banks, thence to drop down a similar declivity. It seemed no trouble to them—even to a pony four-year-old. (But the latter was fitly described by her rider as having a "heart as big as a bucket.")

On the other hand, these grass-topped banks have nothing upon or near them that could suggest the epithet "blind," which in the month of October belongs inseparably to our Anglo-Saxon fences, and even to some of the chasms of Meath. They are as plain sailing now as in the winter, that, to put it after the way of the country, never

comes to county Cork, where a stopping frost is known only as a wild exception. The Cork banks were built at some remote period in a fashion of their own. (Would that it could be imitated elsewhere—the sharp points of the stone being eliminated in the process.) Two walls were, I imagine, raised side by side (one by each proprietor of adjoining allotments), and the interval between them filled in by contribution from midfield on either side. For there are few, if any, ditches from which the banks can be accounted—though, by the same token, a “ditch” in Western Ireland is a bank, and a dyke goes to make up a “ditch.” Hedge-growth is therefore unnecessary, and wire would be a superfluous extravagance. Goats and horses can alone climb such fences; and goats, though a strong contingent of existing live-stock on most of the Cork farms, are seldom urged to enterprise by dint of long spurs. On Monday we met nothing that I suppose the horse of the country could consider terrifying—though I take upon myself to assert that, during the ring of a few miles *via* Healy's Bridge and the hillside northward, they crossed some half-dozen parapets that would, each of them, have stayed a field of Leicestershire horses and men (myself most certainly among the latter). Hounds hunted their fox into view, and coursed him back to the gorse he had come from. Here he found refuge under ground, having at any rate done me the kindness of showing the manner of fence they build in county Cork, and of allowing me once again to see hounds working busily and well. The condition of the pack, by the way, would do credit to any kennel in the three kingdoms—every hound being full of muscle, but with his ribs plainly marked.

I conclude my hurried notes by appending such few names as I was able to gather, of the little field of the day, *viz.*: Colonel Torin (commanding 13th), Captain Pedder, Messrs. Neville, Battye, Major L. Johnson, Mrs. E. Hegan, Messrs. Hawkes, and Murphy (3).

CHAPTER XXII

TIPPERARY

It had long been my ambition to see county Tipperary, to gallop over its grassy acres, and, if might be, to try a fling at its lofty banks. "A sea of turf, cut and marked with plain turf banks, broad and high—and no one knows where the earth came from of which they were made. And you may get over them anywhere." This was the description that elsewhere had been given me over and over again, and that I now heard repeated on the spot. Last week, on my way through Ireland, Mr. Burke assisted me to verify, or negative, the description, on the excellent basis of horses not only trained to the country, but in condition to go, the latter state being ever difficult to attain in the month of October, whether in Ireland or England. I can't say that from these two days' cheery experience I found my information to have been entirely accurate. Indeed, if I went only upon what I saw and encountered with hounds on these Wednesday and Thursday mornings, I would no more accept it than, if I remember aright, Talleyrand did the definition of a crab, viz. that it was "a red fish that walked backwards." For in the run of Wednesday we were chiefly among tillage: the banks were very narrow, and, as often as not, almost denuded of turf: while on Thursday most of the fences were found to be surmounted by strong thorn, were almost smothered with bramble and weed—under whose overhanging canopy on either side lay a deep ditch, in waiting for whoever might try to "get over anywhere." Yet, I protest, I was in no degree disappointed; nor am I disposed to accept any lower estimate of the country than that already put before me. The whim of the foxes led us into eccentricities of the country, as was explained to me at the time, and as I had opportunity of seeing for myself as more and more ground opened itself for observation. Otherwise, expecting only eccentricity and novelty as I went, I might in my ignorance have gone away with a very inadequate idea of

the country. Truly Tipperary is a grand arena—or rather, I suppose, *part* of the grand arena that stretches, roughly speaking, from Limerick southward to the Waterford Mountains. My introduction to it was my journey by rail from Mallow to Limerick Junction, thence to Clonmel; and, as I travelled, it came home to me vividly how aptly Ireland merits the name of the Green Island. I had recently left the grassy slopes of the Rockies to cross America to the Atlantic. There the pasture, whether prairie or “tame” grass (so termed), was everywhere brown as old hay. Here in Ireland the sod was brilliantly green, and in some fields fresh and full-coloured hay was still being carted or cocked.

Far more undulating than Meath—at all events than any but Northern Meath—is Tipperary. Thus, without attempting the impertinence of any further comparison, you can see more of what hounds, often of what your fox is doing, at a distance. And of this facility do the country people take fullest advantage. You would imagine, when gazing over the landscape from a point of vantage, that its inhabitants are few and far between. For a few white-washed hamlets and a few scattered cabins appear to constitute all the dwellings of the district. But you quickly reason otherwise when a fox covert is being drawn, with or without warning. With the instinct of eagles to the carcass the country folk flock forth, and in a few minutes every hillside is clustered, while dogs enough come forward to form a second, a bobbery, pack upon a passing fox. Blame the cur dogs. But who shall blame the natives? Sport is their natural prerogative, their inborn and strongest taste—which only their own misguided agitators have opposed, and endeavoured in vain to crush. The interest taken by every field labourer in the hunt is as intense as to the stranger it is almost comical to witness. For instance, such concentrated disappointment and reprobation you never saw depicted on man’s countenance as when, one of these days, a cast was being made, but made some few yards too high upon the hillside to carry out the views of the eager informer. “Faugh! They’re byant it: black

murder!" he shouted. "Why, the fox followed yon double ditch!" (pointing to a big bank without any ditch at all, as we understand a ditch). And then, as hounds and the line came unexpectedly together, he leaped in the air with a yell that should have earned him a strait-waistcoat, threw his remnant of a hat into a tree, and screamed, "More power to yer honour and yer dogs!" Another, on a different tack—and prompted possibly by the rumours of labour-rule already too rife in Ireland—jumped on to his bank, over which our fox had just scrambled, and up to which hounds were already running hard. (His holding, by the way, was only an empty potato ground.) "He went over Pat Flanagan's ground, yer honour. I seen him! Ah, now, yer dogs is too fast altogether!" And he gave up, as hounds and horsemen went on to cross the bank and the fallow from which he he would fain have fended them.

And amid it all—amid the heading, holloaing, misdirecting, and cur-loosing—the Master rode good-temperedly on, let his hounds solve the question for themselves, and so killed his fox. I am alluding now more particularly to Wednesday, and will found my brief story upon Donegal, one of the most perfect gorse coverts I was ever invited to look into. Picture it thus, as I have it before me after some days' interval: Several acres of gorse of three or four years' growth, clothing a gentle slope as with a garment of frieze; northward, below and beyond, a champaign country (the best term ever devised) of greensward and clean-shaven banks. (Trees form no part of the scenery of an Irish hunting-country, save as an attribute of a demesne—that is, if I take it rightly, a wooded park.) Behind, a broken area, topped with spectators, accumulating rapidly as crows at sunset: and in the background the blue mountains of Waterford, hazy in the bright sunshine that had followed on a frosty night. No condition for scent, say you, and as I am bound to admit. Yet a lively pack and a lively field disported themselves to a circling fox. And I, as a novice, turned over a fresh page of experience, as each field and each fence offered

a new phase of riding to hounds, and to hounds hunting indomitably, my good mount—"the big bay 'oss," as they called him in the stable, "Green," as the Master has christened him, on the *lucus-a-non-lucendo* principle—reading me a lesson at every bank. Please do not suppose for a moment that, cast loose by myself in that country, I should have attempted progress at all—except that, once landed into an Irish field, you are bound to jump out or remain there till rent-day (a date hardly so specific as the Greek Kalends). These threadbare banks were solid only in their height. They stood erect as the mud-walls of India, and often far above saddle-level. But they had few ditches among them, and the sensations I can best recall were: (1) the apparent impossibility of getting on to the top of them; (2) the uncertainty of getting off again before they crumbled. "Very unusual," they told me. And so I hope to find, if ever fortune favours my hunting regularly in a peaceable Tipperary. Yet a field of a hundred people made light of them, and the lightest of the light were the ladies, very prominent indeed of whom, I may venture thus bluntly to say, was Mrs. Higgins. The meet had been D'Arcy's Cross, and among the hundred were: Lord and Lady Southampton, Mrs. Massy, Mrs. Higgins, Mr. and Miss Watson, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Clifford, Miss Bookey, Miss Malcolmson, Miss Going, Mr. and Miss Moore, Lord William Bentinck, Lord Shaftesbury, Captain Kavanagh and Mr. Brand (10th Hussars), Captain Bryan, Sir Charles Gough, Colonel Inigo Jones, Colonel H. Parnell, Captain Gough, Captain Orr and others of the Royal Irish Regiment, Mr. Riall (to whom the beautiful gorse of Donegal owes existence and welfare), Colonel Evanson, Messrs. Scully, Wise, Perry, Burke (3), Hemphill, O. Jones, Kennedy, Quinton (2), Smith, Phillips, and Colonel Kellis on wheels.

It were better, perhaps, if I were more geographical. But when sailing in strange waters, and not even having a chart at hand, one may well be excused for keeping clear of the shallows. 'Tis a long way to go for illustration, were it not that recent lamentable event suggests.

I remember that the gunboat *Grasshopper*, in which I did the most exciting hunting of my life—the chase of Chinese pirates in the half-mapped seas 'twixt Formosa and the mainland—very frequently went ashore under her venturesome commander. “And a half two!”—“Stop her! Full speed astern!” (the *tally ho—ba-ack* of the sea) still rings often in my dreams. But I might well have entered in my log that, sailing from the port of Donegal, we cruised on a westward, half-circular course, and anchored with a kill near Barne, at the end of forty-five minutes.

Almost immediately the Master and his white horse were again on the move, and we followed. It was much as if Tom Furr, having killed his fox at Barkby Holt, were ordered to draw the Coplow and went thither a bee-line, after the manner of Osbaldeston and Captain Ross. We all accepted the lead obediently, though I thought it strange, but dared not do otherwise. (What pangs I should save myself could I but play the coward that I feel, in prospect and retrospect especially, and what fun I should lose!) This was nearly as good as a run; and, after all, they used to do much the same thing in Charles Payne's time with the Pytchley, did they not?

The little lark from point to point led to Woodrooff, one of the strongholds of the country; and, round its park and woods, the pack drove one of its many foxes for an hour, till a rabbit-hole saved him.

And now, in the cursory fashion that must be the privilege of the wanderer, I come to Thursday—Drangan the meet, and Ballylennan the draw (Ballylennan and Ballyluski being more or less homogeneous, I contrive to retain them in memory as the bases of the day).

Ballylennan, then, is another pretty gorse, this time in a flat valley, and at the foot of a hill on which another covert, Kyle—of more jungle-like description—has its place; and in the gorse were at least two brace of foxes. As I stood by the covert-side I caught some such remark as “A capital place, if you would only get away from it.” And the action of a hard-riding Irish field in turning to the nearest gateway (just as we do in the English Mid-

lands) directly a fox broke covert, ought of itself to have been sufficient warning of difficulties in store. Certainly the surrounding fences had a most uncompromising look, being great thorn fences stuck on high banks, with the very vaguest surroundings. But according to precedent I tacked myself on to the Master, and by him was safely piloted for the next five minutes to the temporary haven of Kyle. Indeed our progress thither was, I imagine, far the simpler and safer; for, as we gained the road that runs beneath the covert of Kyle, our fellow-passengers were dropping into it one by one, with a clatter as of coals shot on to a pavement. I remember looking up as a red coat crashed into the lane at my horse's nose, and there, perched like a chamois on a topmost crag, was Lady Southampton poising for a similar spring.

The big dog-hounds—an excellent fox-killing pack, I make bold to assert—were driving hard through the undergrowth and bracken of Kyle, with a better scent than yesterday. And, issuing beyond, we found ourselves still amid wet, rough pastures, and heavy, straggling fences, but with vigour and pace enough in the chase to make those twenty minutes very bright and stirring, as we sought for outlets here and there, and found them or missed them according to our luck or incompetency.

And now I will tell you how I, the alien, got on. The same may, likely enough, happen to you—if you, too, go as a stranger untaught. In my case I had already realised that quite my fair share of immunity had been dealt out to me during my three visits to Ireland. It was quite time I had a lesson, and I accepted it not ungratefully. The little black horse O'Connell was good enough for anything, but he could no more see through a crowd of brambles than I could. He knew that a big bank was hid away somewhere beneath it; and I—well, in Ireland I am quite content to let my horse frame his own opinion as to what particular combination of fence he may at that moment be exploring. In this case the bank must have been somewhat higher and steeper than either of us supposed, for the next minute, instead of bounding off again in the happy way I had pictured to myself, we were

rocking on it, as a toy-horse and rider swing on a pedestal, with a balance-weight. Neither my English ash-plant nor the persuasive eloquence of two ready countrymen—much-maligned, I shall ever consider, are



We were rocking on the bank

these sporting peasants, who form so active an element in an Irish hunting-field—availed to alter the situation one bit; and I began to think I might stand on that bank till Mr. Burke had killed his fox. The only thing for it was to push the horse back again into the nearer ditch. This I managed successfully, but even then my stubborn soul rebelled against the ignominy of sneaking

back upon the trail of others. Result : first, I was knocked into the prickly bushes as my steed jumped up beside me ; then he trod on my toes as we stood on the summit together ; and then it became a matter of descending into the next field, with another bramble-grown ditch before us. This was quite a circus-business, and we flew off into space in tight embrace. Now, it happens that my battered legs have lost a good deal of their pristine power of spring. Consequently, though I cleared my ditch pretty well, I did not land quite so far into the field as did the Liberator. I could not let him go on without me, so the next moment I was clinging to the bridle with my head between his heels. But he treated me honourably, and in a very brief while I was scurrying down the hillside at top-speed, much out of breath, and catching at my right stirrup as I went. "Heavens! what's happened? Knock out my hat, man! Let go his head! Hurt? Not a bit. Thanks, you're a brick!" I sputtered forth, as I spat the black mud from my mouth and wiped the dark dirt from my eyes. My gaze had been all on the hounds now feathering across the field below ; O'Connell had found either a bog or a grass-hidden drain in which to tie up his fore-legs, and had ironed me out handsomely. By good chance, both horse and rider happened at the time to be in hard and sound condition, consequently the day's enjoyment was marred little or nothing to either of them by these passing vicissitudes, and in two fields they had recovered touch of hounds. A check came near Willmount, at the end of twenty minutes, and slower hunting took the line through Wilford and Lismolin till their fox got to ground near Drangan, the place of meeting. Total time, about fifty minutes.

A somewhat intricate country, if my unaccustomed eye apprised it at all accurately, was the scene of our hunt until its end. By the way, is it, I ask you, encouraging to the next comers that the pilot of the party, on reaching the top of a bramble-hidden bank, should there pause to ejaculate, "Great Scot! it's a rum 'un!" before disappearing from view into farther depths? The words were evidently as heartfelt as they were sturdy of expression,

but they failed to balk Lord William Bentinck, who came next, and whose previous training had taught him to make light of what was, after all, nothing worse than a blind Meath ditch. For my part, I have been served that way before, and once even lost a run in Warwickshire by being thus frightened. I think you may take it as a rule that, even if the danger be half as awful as the shouter would make you believe, you are still just as likely to get over as he was. But I never like him for shouting merely because the place is bigger than he had fancied. Do you?

I will bring my jottings to an end as soon as possible. The gorse and glen of Ballyluski (one of the very best coverts in Tipperary) formed the afternoon draw, and showed us a crowd of foxes. A glorious country, such as had been pictured to me, and such as I had seen much of during the ride to covert, was spread all round. But the multitude of foxes and of foot-people prevented sport, and the day ended with our hunting a second fox to ground near Gracetown.

The field of the day was not a large one. It embraced perhaps a score of those of the day before, added to, I was informed, by Dr. Heffernan, Major Langley, Mr. Kennedy, &c. Mr. Riall was riding a strikingly good-looking stallion by Hesper. But the prince of horses in the field was the Master's brown Newtown, with which he has won the Tipperary Point-to-Point the last two years, and for which a great sum of money has been refused. In conclusion, I venture to record my testimony that not only are the Tipperary "well done" in the commonly accepted sense of the term, but the hounds are sharp and hard-driving upon a fox; while Mr. Burke, besides possessing the none too common combination of keenness and good temper, has acquired also the art of helping them when necessary. I cannot but think there will be great sport in Tipperary in the near future.

My two most pleasant days at an end, it became necessary for me to journey on to reach another scene for the morrow. But how to go hunting next morning was now an anxious question with me. The bog-bedaubed

garments in which I was riding to my train happened to be my only available riding kit (having done recent duty upon the Rocky Mountains). But, like gallant and generous comrades, the 10th came to the front with dry, and, I protest, most becoming clothes in which I might take saddle in the morning. And these (I am bound to add by way of completing my tale) I returned as I took steamer next night, duly plastered, to mark appreciation and gratitude, with the mud of another Irish county.

In what county and with what hounds I had that final exhilarating ride I shall, for reasons that belong to others rather than to myself, refrain from telling. Suffice it to say (and this only, as I have supposed before, because you yourself may one day be serving your novitiate, travelling and hunting in Ireland), that at twelve o'clock that night I was still driving about the lanes on an outside car seeking my dinner, and that about 8 A.M. we were galloping knee to knee across some of the most beautiful ground in the world—all stiffness gone and all care forgotten.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE EARLIEST CUT

LET Wednesday, November 2, 1892—a first Pytchley Wednesday—be our opening day, the earliest cut into our winter dish, the first dip into our year's life. The glory, the fun, the excitement of a new season are all before us. Would that we could stop the clock, make sun and moon and time—aye, and wear and tear—stand still, and remain as we are now, on the brink of daily gamble for delights of which we know well the worth, and of which the cost need seldom be a sore heart or a rent purse. Two months hence, and half of you will only just be girding your loins. Two months more, and we shall be beginning to wonder what we are to do with ourselves for eight more. Moralising is not my *forte*. But at least I can be practical in advising others on an old text. Don't, pray don't let a frosty Christmas come upon you and find you moaning:

“Oh, what a fool I was not to be hunting in November! And what *have* I to show for these (epithet) corn-bills?” “Counting up costs beforehand” is by no means what I would urge. That is a form of practical philosophy that I am puzzled to think where to place, certainly not among hunting men, men of the world, even commercial men, and more certainly still, not among women, as I have been told to believe of them. It has at all events no place, here and about in November, except as a caution against short-sightedness—against such a principle, for instance, as keeping your new coat in a drawer until you have paid for it. I was nearly writing, “Why, you may be dead before another year.” But, simultaneously with the up-starting of an expression that was not meant to be flippant, comes the thought of an old merry comrade who lived his life and was snatched away at its best maturity. We miss him and we mourn him; but who shall wish he had been fated another death? Not I, who miss him very vividly, and who have none but distinctly happy memories of our life’s intercourse. Nor, I truly believe, would he have desired it differently.¹

Well, we hunt on and we ride on, in what we make our world for the better part of the year. After that we become atoms of a larger, less closely knit sphere. But in lesser or larger universe the gaps in our front ranks are readily filled, the rear rank steps up, recruits fall in, and the world rotates none the less blithely. Only the elder men sorrow for their contemporaries. Youth finds promotion, and youth only thinks it contemptible to be older than himself.

After all, though the ball was set merrily rolling on Wednesday, Misterton was no gala meet. No war-paint was on show, except in the case of two braves from remote edges of the reservation, and in the case of two or three strangers, visitors from afar. These visitors, in fact, might well have concluded that, after all, the Pytchley is but a provincial little hunt—not as yet exactly descended to a trencher-fed pack, but aspiring not to advertisement even in the local papers. The level beauty of the Pytchley little

¹ Captain Bay Middleton.

pack should at first glance have dispelled any illusion on the score of feeding and management. But, by the way, have you heard that delicious little incident that took place a week ago in connection with a well-known pack, not more than a hundred miles from the scene of to-day? (All the penalties of incredulity will I take on my shoulders ere I divulge more closely the locality. You know how mercilessly huntsmen roast each other whenever chance arises. And this story is sure to be going the rounds long ere our next meeting of the Hunt Servants' Benevolent. Don't forget the claims of that good institution, ladies and gentlemen all!) Well, a certain good pack, sharp-set and fitly conditioned, were thrown into a deep woodland. A stormy wind and the huntsman's cheer alone broke the silence, till, after half-an-hour without a sign, some one started an alarm that hounds were away; and the whole field, hunt servants included, galloped far and wide down the breeze in search of the pack. Nothing could be heard, nothing could be seen of them; so, after scouring the country and other woodlands for miles, they returned to the covert from which they had started thus hurriedly, and the mystery was soon explained. A farmer's bullock happened to have strayed into the wood, and there had somehow broken its leg. The good man, on discovering it, had with his gun put the poor beast out of its misery, taken off the hide, and left the carcase in the wood. And round it, in every attitude and aspect of repletion, was the missing pack of hounds—so gorged, indeed, that no choice remained but to take them straightway back to kennel.

But of Wednesday last. Disguised in every form of shooting-coat and nethers there was the cheery Pytchley field—very much as we shall see it until after Christmas-tide, when they bring out, according to custom immemorial, not only "their sisters and their cousins and their aunts," but all who are going to dance with them at the Hunt balls. Far be it from me, or from any other impertinent scribbler, to say that this will not be as it should be, but it tends to make the gaps in the fences full fifty per cent. wider, and possibly vexes the Master's soul in proportion to the burden it lays upon the landholders.

Lord Spencer was unable to be present to-day, and the same was the case with the Hon. Secretary. Of the rest I will endeavour to attach some few names below, but first let me tell you of what sport took place ; for, please, I am writing with head up and stern down, inasmuch as duty calls me to Shuckburgh on the morrow.

The grand supply of foxes that has ever distinguished Misterton suffers no diminution at the hands of Mr. Bamford, the new proprietor. And for an hour hounds rang the changes from covert to covert, *i.e.* from The Reeds to Shawell Wood. The early morning had been cold and frosty, and the advent of a bright, warm sun had led to the natural result of such conditions—no scent. Thus till noon, when the long plantation known as Thurnboro' Spinney was drawn. One fox chopped, a second away, but driven back to The Reeds, thence to break again by Walcot village and across the brook northward.

So convinced were most of us that with our cub-hunting costume we had brought a day of dawdling and fox-schooling, that now we were more or less asleep. And, even when hounds seemed to be running on, it took time to rouse us from our comatose state, the more so that the knowledge of blind fences and the possibility of wire weighed heavily upon our slowly awakening senses.

Not so Mr. Foster and Will Goodall, who were on with the pack as sharply as if three hundred scarleted after-Christmas horsemen were pursuing them from Lilbourne to Crick. Grateful were we—grateful indeed was I, and so I presume were others in whose souls the fear of wire has been inculcated—that these twain demonstrated how little, if any, wire existed in the neighbourhood. They jumped into none ; and we, of course, followed safely afterwards. A good horse will carry a very moderate man right up in a run, if only he has a pilot sailing smoothly in front of him. And so, I tell you, they made it easy for many of us, who might have looked a long time before taking first plunge through a dark veil of leaf and thorn into the possible clutch of cold and sharp-pointed iron.

From my point of vantage I could see the fun

splendidly. I could watch the brown coat and the red popping over the high, bank-like fences; and I could mark a line of half-a-dozen dusky customers and one lady flitting closely in their tracks. With respect and with edification I noted one ex-Master—and the senior of me and of most of us—plunging his new Irish importation into, and kicking him gaily out of, the brook that runs from Gilmorton to Misterton, while at the same moment I all but knocked my best friend (across whose mahogany we are to have it out to-morrow night) into the yellow stream flowing 'neath the stout laid hedge.

By now we were in the noontide of a perfect November day—cool, cloudy, and quiet; and the little ladies were racing happily over a charming outspread of grass. (After all there is nothing like a burst in the flying Grass Countries of Old England.) Across the road (Gilmorton and Lutterworth) and over the dairy meadows to Bitteswell—the same line, you remember, we ran last year, when we killed at the Cross-in-Hand. And, the better to recall it to your memory, there is John riding the same old grey horse—rather whiter now—that helped us all along that day.

And who else was there or about? you ask. I will give you half an answer, *i.e.* a few of them, names familiar in the front rank of the Pytchley field, *viz.*: Mrs. Byass, Captain Riddell, Mr. Adamthwaite, Mr. C. Marriott, Captain Faber, and Mr. Gilbert. I can't be contradicted about these: and my sins shall be sins of omission. Some twenty minutes of the best, then a check close to Bitteswell village, then twenty minutes more of very pretty work of horse and hound. (Scoff not, ye Nestors of the plough. Ye can't see hounds do their work in the Grass Countries without bringing the horse, and a fairly good one, forbye, also into play. And, to do us reasonable justice, we accept the necessity, as a rule, very cordially.)

So we lost our fox near Gilmorton village, but picked him up, poor fellow, in the afternoon, stiff and sore, in Misterton Gorse, and killed him in The Reeds.

THE NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

came on Tuesday to Dunchurch—one of the best meets in England, we have been used to deem it, and one that we should pick as soon as any other with a view to exhibiting to a stranger the beauties of our boasted Grass Countries. And so it came about that to-day we were seldom off plough, and that plough of the wettest description, besides being fenced and divided by the deep woolly ditches of Duns Moor. The thrusters who came from afar (a determined band of them invariably turn up for a Rugby Tuesday) were fairly taken aback. They had been galloping their fences lustily with the Pytchley on the Saturday and Monday; and they proceeded to do the same here. Result: five complete somersaults at a single fence, and one horse left wedged six feet below the surface. A member of this nomad troop, if I may be forgiven the use of such an expression, had a story against a comrade, and against himself, that he circulated with gusto. It seems that during their flight of either Saturday or Monday these two collided on approaching a fence, and, as was likely to be the case, the bigger prevailed. Narrator was the smaller; so, flinging the biggest he had ready at his burly friend, he turned aside, chose another place, and “took a toss” (as is the fashion to term it) in all goodwill. Picking himself up, he looked round to see how his rival had fared. The latter was just crawling on his hands and knees out of a pond, into which he had jumped, to the exclusion of Narrator!

Very briefly the correction recently given to one of our fashionable huntsmen. Man ferreting rabbits declared “no fox had crossed that field to-day.” Hounds took up the line vociferously. “They’re wrong! That ain’t no fox!” Suddenly his cur terrier chimed in, flinging her tongue *Yap-Yap* with the best of them. “Now you’re right,” he ejaculated. “That’s where he’s gone! I’d trust my little bitch anywhere!”

CHAPTER XXIV

FIRST SCORES

THE first satisfactory run of this season was on Wednesday, November 16, with the Pytchley. "Raced him for twenty minutes, and hunted him to death in thirty more" is how we should epitomise it.

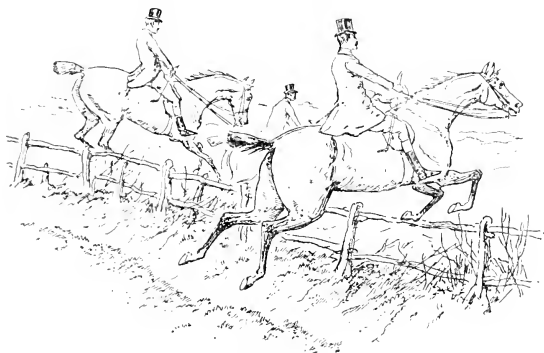
Here are further particulars, if you care for them and will take them as I could snatch them. Wednesday's was a damp, misty morning, with a rising glass—such a morning as has given us many a gallop, and was likely enough to give us one to-day. So I took upon myself to prophesy, with endorsement from the huntsman as he entered the train at Northampton for Kilworth.

Speaking afterwards, I believe myself safe in asserting that it was a rare scenting day. Hounds ran hard enough from Kilworth Sticks to Misterton; but they could not force their fox past shepherds and ploughmen.

At 2.10 we were at the Wilderness Covert, in Stanford Hall Park, the starting-point of good gallops innumerable, and in every direction. To-day there were left perhaps a hundred people (nearly all, in fact, of the morning), when the dash came across the ridge-and-furrow of the old park for the iron wicket of the corner. "Nearly blown my horse already, getting here!" was one galloper's remark, that would have applied to all.

Will's horn was going as he rode, and a dozen couple were already flying past the little round dell known as the Icehouse Spinney. Most of the leading men seemed to remember a tangible spot in the big double beneath discovered a fortnight ago, or, if I recognised it aright, pointed out so deftly a year or so since by Mr. Steeds. At any rate it was there now, very useful and very slippery; and fortunate were they who reached it in time. For the bitches were streaming madly up the great pastures beyond, and we were hindered again for one moment, while threading a cattle-pen on the hilltop, to gain the Swinford and South Kilworth Road.

To a furious scurry like this must be a dozen, nay forty different aspects, according to individual fortune, share, and experience. This was like nothing but a point-to-point race (except, perhaps, the Kadir Cup), which, as you know, every one of the competitors would infallibly have won—but for some unforeseen and tantalising accident. Well, I was at this moment at least in good company—there being for instance, besides the huntsman and the Acting Master, three of the Messrs. Mills, Mr. Wroughton, Captains Riddell and Gordon Mackenzie, Messrs. Adam-



Settled in their swing

twaihe, Wilmot-Smith, Gordon Cunard, and I don't know how many more. As we jumped, or gated, into the lane, the tail hounds were glistening through the high bullfinch, in the grass field beyond. Our "unforeseen accident" was their swinging at once to the left, while we took the road rightward for a full fifty yards. The mistake was plain enough when, a moment after, we had emerged again into the country, the tail hounds were leaving us fast, and would soon be away in the mist. That clean-cut post-and-rails, from grass into plough, is not nearly so high as it looks; and gave scarcely an effort to a dozen horses just settled in their swing, with a dozen riders painfully sensible of the danger of losing hounds. Ours was

now the plough side of the pack. There were other men dashing inside upon the grass. Yet our course was plain sailing enough, and the pride of place ought to have been ours, as we demonstrated plainly enough to one another, for mutual comfort, afterwards. At any rate it added fuel to the fire of pace that hounds kept bearing all the while from us and to the others. At this time we were heading nearly due north, and squeezing every effort possible out of our straining steeds. As we splashed the wet yellow furrow, and pulled them together for the width and the ox-rail that border a field-road hereabouts, it seemed, in the flash of memory, as if poor Bay was still leading us in the gallop, as he led us at this very spot only a couple of seasons ago. Then, as I raised my eyes now, and stretched them down the fifty-acre greensward, there were Mr. Wallis and Miss Fenwick just emerging from the bottom and flying up the next great pasture, with hounds close parallel on their left. We had believed this bottom to be a big, ugly jump; but it was good enough where they had struck it; and right gladly did we all avail ourselves of the lead. Bending still more, hounds now pointed for Walcote—and, we hoped, to Misterton—a whole bevy of riders chiming in within the half-circle. But the twenty minutes' fierce driving had practically burst our fox, and he doubled as he reached the road that leads into Walcote. With a minute thus lost, it required Goodall's help to carry hounds on to Swinford and past Mr. Gilbert's house; and it called for all their own hunting power to make good their line on the Shawell road beyond. After this the game worked itself out like the final cards of Solitaire (if you happen to know that study of Patience invented especially for overwrought business men and overstrung huntsmen). The pack rattled on past the kennels of Mr. Cross's harriers. (You can imagine the uproar as they awoke to the propinquity of the chase in full cry!) Thus to Shawell, and to a kill in mid-village. Time, as I have said, some fifty minutes. May we have many more like it, and, if some be better, we may scarcely hope that none may be worse.

Saturday night should be good enough for such memoranda as the *Field* is good enough to accept as sufficient service, from amid the hardships and labour inseparable from the chase of the fox. Since dinner I have lingered over the day ; I have studied the night, and the North Star, twinkling dimly in a warm, quiet heaven, assures me confidently of a hunting week. I am sensible of a happy day ; and I am old enough to take each added item gratefully—counting it as one more bead to my roll, to be spelt out in aftertime, or be buried with my spurs. Have I not heard Will Goodall enliven covert with his “ Yuic-Yuic-Yuic ” (*crescendo*) ? Have I not spurred to John’s “ Yarry-Yarry ! Away ! Away ! ” ? and have I not been to the bottom of Braunston Brook ?—all three details very becoming to, and in keeping with, a proper day’s sport with the Pytchley. Now it is my pleasant task to pen you a note or two—sketching for my own amusement, while craving acceptance and indulgence from you. If not done to-night, it will be blurred by to-morrow and forgotten by next day.

I am tempted to begin in the middle—at Braunston Gorse—an old theme, and one that I don’t mind confessing that I never followed less successfully in action than to-day. But that is my business, unless that thereby I fall short in my duty as *raconteur* to you. Braunston Gorse, then—the navvies about, and the gorse therefore a reputed uncertainty. But a fox afoot, and a fox in the right direction, over that beautiful landscape that is intersected by the Braunston Brook. How we did rush and ride as we set forth over the two great anthilly fields of grass—the Master at last in personal authority ! Then hounds turned leftward before reaching the water (though for that matter there were customers over, and craners bridging the brook already). A first bullfinch, a second corner—a boggy take-off, and an apparently broken-necked horse (I withhold sympathy till I know whether it was a lapsed spinal cord or mere cussedness that kept him across the only practicable path). Three hundred yards to gallop round ! You who know the scene will recognise the crucial moments thus haplessly lost. Then I remember a whole

road and posts and rails levelled by Mr. Darby, as an outlet for side-saddle following. I recall a squashed bridle-bridge and gateway, and a nightmare of a dozen flying forms beyond, while Indian file took us over the water—and while Captain Renton, who had overshot the bridge by one fence, was taking his first cut across the well-filled brook, that he jumped no less than three times. On the Flecknoe side of the brook hounds were running parallel

much the same line and quite the same pace as in our great Braunston gallop of five years ago; and as they swung towards the brook methought I saw a short cut and a chance to regain lost ground. I took it, and very cold it was! a sentiment that my companion plunger never ceased to reiterate the rest of the day through. Nor did it seem in any degree to mitigate his sense of ill-usage that his horse struggled out the right side (going on without him, it must be added), while my graceless beast scrambled back on to the wrong. Overnight he had sworn he wouldn't take three hundred for the new purchase. Now the former owner may have him back at a discount. 'Tis curious, but no less true, that a very great proportion of our horses don't go half as well to the cry of hounds next morning as they did on the line of that last round before joining the ladies. Isn't it so?

Do you suppose that one minute's delay put me out of the battle? Not a bit of it. I had fallen out of the first fighting line, but I soon found myself among supports and reserves all busily engaged. I was no longer pressing forward in the immediate wake of Lord Spencer, Messrs. Mills (senior, of course, for is not this his special battleground?), Muntz, Graham, Captain Baird, General Clery, and half-a-dozen others. (Men, like race-horses, as in the instance of Lady Rosebery at Liverpool, run best on particular courses.) But, half-a-dozen fields further, I found myself skirmishing busily in the company of some twenty others, some of whom I had only recently left. These were running backwards and forwards to the water's edge, mixed up by twos and threes on the bank, then retiring to disentangle, and after occasionally dropping out—I mean dropping in—one of their number repeating the

movement over again. The brook here was but a standing jump, but it appeared to afford varied and infinite subject, such as I dare not trifle with. I am at liberty to depict myself in any absurdity of predicament, but the dilemmas of others are only to be taken now and again as subject on sufferance.

This gallop, bright and rapid as it was, was all over in fifteen minutes (their fox to ground under the Staverton road). Had it been fifty, I might not have taken so lightly my first utter routing in connection with Braunston Gorse. On Monday, s'help me, the whole stud shall go water-jumping, and shall practise the brook as studiously as on first enlistment they invariably practise the bar.

Next fox was hunted from Staverton Wood to ground on Arbury Hill; and the last of the day was caught on the bridge-side at Whilton Wharf, after a few minutes' scamper from Thrupp's Spinney. He had been accustomed, doubtless, to crossing it nightly in quiet safety, but in daylight he found the bridge held by as sturdy a band of ladies as ever took part in a fox-hunt. Queens of canal barges were they, and their round, rosy faces gave broadest evidence of how yet another class finds delight in the sport of kings and princes. As hounds jumped at their fox every one of them was entrapped in the lock; and 'twas a sight to mark all the prettiest men of the hunt doing duty upon bended knee, hoisting the splashing hounds on to *terra firma* (this the end of the day, though; so the sacrifice was hardly as severe as it may read). What a run and a ride there should have been, could poor Reynard have crossed the canal to the pastures of Watford. Only twenty men left, and those twenty, viciously intent, were just settling to work when the end came all too soon. And a scent that swam on the plough, what would it have been on the grass?

Now, if ever you find yourself on a puller and he has become master, for sport's sake do as he did to-day. And he a distinguished member of a distinguished corps. He was bound to go somewhere, for it was down-hill and the horse meant it. Goodall didn't want him in the middle of the pack, so gently waved his disengaged hand as the soldier

dashed in on his left in a high bullfinched corner. The young centurion never hesitated a moment. To go forward was to defy protest and to spoil sport. So immediately "Action left" was the word. He wheeled at a gallop against the dense and lofty parapet of thorns, and accepted his fate loyally and smilingly. If approbation and acclamation on the part of his fellows carry any weight, the bronze cross for valour will assuredly be his.

I turn from my light fooling to dwell a moment on a sadder subject—sad to us locally, as you will all recognise in the sympathy that belongs to fox-hunting, and in the similarity of instance that cannot, alas! but belong be-times to your own circle.

By the roadside at Badby, as we clattered by—a merry, chattering crew, doubtless—there might have been seen an old man, the wreck of a grand frame, the wearer of a fine old face. As "Riddy of Barby" one knew him in one's boyhood, as almost a leader among our yeomen friends. As Riddy of Barby he owned and took races with Pathfinder, afterwards a Liverpool winner. As Riddy of Badby he moved a few miles, still to be in the Pytchley country, still to be appreciated and honoured by Pytchley men. Only last season he would delightedly escort a Pytchley man's child to show her all he could of the sport and to lead her in safety, just as Mr. Russell upon Exmoor loved to pilot a girl to the stag-hunting. Now, as he sorrowfully murmured—the while he gazed wistfully on the passing concourse—"his hunting is over," and pain is his portion while pleasure is ours. These few words may meet his eye. If so, he will take it home to his kindly heart that many and many a word of sympathy and feeling anent him pass daily in the field in which he was so long an esteemed and welcome figure.

To the earlier part of a good sporting day, Monday, November 14, I must go back to recall that the morning fox took us from Stowe Wood some eight miles of selected plough and covert-land as far as Tiffield, near Blisworth, and that the two pictures of the day were Mr. Murland leading several of us to momentary destruction by skimming a big bottom at Foxley (was it not?) and the tearful effort

on the part of three kindly young matrons of the hunt to render assistance to a soldier in dire distress. The latter was hung in his stirrup. The ladies could only respond to his hopeless appeal by jumping off their horses to the ground. Once there, manacled and abashed by the puzzle-garments of the day, they were unable either to climb the fence or afford any help whatever, till at length the only fit person, the rector of the neighbouring parish, rode to the rescue. Don't laugh. It was a nerve-shaking predicament that ended well, but might have been distressingly serious.

To reach the meet of the North Warwickshire at Hilmorton on Tuesday we had to make our way through the Rugby Annual Horse Fair, that morning in full swing. In my instance, I found myself unwillingly started into a sharp trot by the cracking of a coper's whip, accompanied by the offer of "Thirty quid, guvnor, if you'll give me one back!" This for my best horse! As for retort, I might as well have ventured to chaff a cabby.

CHAPTER XXV

SHOEMAKERS AND COATMENDERS

WHEN first I wrote the heading "Grass Countries," I little thought there were so many continuous acres of plough in all Northamptonshire, as a Grafton fox has now shown us twice in a fortnight. To-day, Monday, November 28, 1892, he began his career at Grubb's Copse (a name suggestive enough of such an exploit), and continued his unhallowed course some four miles to Gayton and Blisworth, where, having up to this point chosen every bit of wet tillage that happened to deface the country, he even stooped to exploring the ironstone quarries before making his brief apology in the better vale between Northampton and Gayton. In the end they marked him to ground near Rothersthorpe (an hour's run, a fair point, over ground grossly pedantic).

All this is very uninteresting. So was the run, albeit the beautiful Grafton bitches alone made it by dint of drive

and nose across cold scenting dirt. Some runs will send you to bed exhilarated—inebriated, if you like, with or without the addition of old champagne. There are some runs—this was one—for which I would not pull out a bottle; or, in more practical, sober English, that engender dependence rather than delight of thought. And yet nobody



Continuous acres of plough

more than your contributor (who muses in humble gratitude upon the fact that he has to-day been hunting with the choicest pack in England—may he be pardoned for thus confidently asserting it)—nobody appreciates more wholly those pushing qualities which lend a charm to a hunt over cold, repellent ground. In a word, I hate such ground, though I love and admire a pack that can make a run over it. I confess to returning beploughed, bedraggled, like a fox whose heart has been well-nigh broken by the weight of mire upon his brush.

Far rather would I take my chance upon Exmoor, or go for my life upon the Cheviots, than scramble thus dolorously along such an eccentric and rain-soaked line as fortune marked out for us on Monday. An ungracious, a barely wholesome sentiment, you will say. But it is evoked, I protest, neither by default of dinner nor derangement of liver, nor even by disaster of a good horse lamed. Such influences might easily crop up under the head of accident, and under the same head comes this travail of plough in a country whose first point and proper point is grass.

Inverting order, I have left behind the doings of the morning. These were, briefly, a meet of hounds, of terriers and shoemakers, at Foster's Booth. Bootmaking and badger-baiting, be it known, are concomitant industries in Northamptonshire. Sometimes they are adverse to fox-hunting; at other times they play in heartily. To get them on our side it is, above all things, desirable to run a fox to ground occasionally where they can join in the fun. Then you dig him to save him. "Must have him out," Tom Furr used to say in the Loughborough neighbourhood. "Sure to die if we leave him, poor thing." And pathos and the spade invariably carried the day.

The foxes of to-day were as prophets in their own country. They believed in distinction elsewhere. Our first, from Ascott Thorns, proved also to be a probable hero of a fortnight ago, for he took us much the same line past Litchboro' and left us at Pattishall, having at all events given us some twenty minutes' quick amusement in a happier land than that of the afternoon. And now I lie by for Wednesday, the Pytchley at Swinford, as you may see duly advertised at the railway stations, set forth in the local papers, and emblazoned on the cards of saddlers and of livery-stable keepers, though never whispered to the journals of sport. I have never seen a Swinford meet fail. A Pytchley Wednesday before Christmas is as good as a week of life. Not another cigar, I thank you; but lend me, rather, a cool head and a quick eye for the morrow.

Were you one of the two hundred who rode with the

Pytchley this Wednesday, you could scarcely have returned home without admitting, first, that the chance had been given you of seeing excellent hunting and much bright houndwork ; secondly, that you had ridden in capital company ; and thirdly (if you like to add it), that every opportunity had been forthcoming of testing the pleasures of tumbling about.

In fact I am not sure that the third privilege was not a matter of more general adoption—I won't say appreciation—than the other two. You know your fellow-men and fellow-women quite as well as I do, or any other irresponsible penman can do. And you know well that, talk as technically and enthusiastically as we choose, we don't every one care a great deal about "the blessed hounds." You know, too, while admitting the Pytchley field to be about the cheeriest under the sun, that quite a good many think that Providence has dealt very harshly indeed with them, in that it allows more than themselves and their six particular friends to come out with the pack at all. On the score of falling about, there could be no two opinions. Nobody wished it to befall him, but quite twenty-five per cent. of the field met their fate in one fashion or another—pretty harmlessly, I believe, but very obviously and dirtily. The explanation was perhaps to be found in a blazing sun and a succession of blind, woolly fences with the sunshine directly beyond them. Add to these conditions an excessive number of people, some very young, some very youthful (you would appreciate the difference if you could take a census of the Pytchley field), but all in an excessive hurry ; and I think you need look no further for inducing causes. The effect was in many cases exceedingly comical, and, as we all in turn contribute our quota to the comedy of the day, I need hardly apologise for touching upon instance. A gallant lancer had his tunic split from shoulder to tail, and, galloping off a full mile in the opposite direction to hounds, pulled up to find himself pursued by a dozen breathless men and women. When he laid tax upon them for safety-pins, most of them fled away in wrath, avowing that they had been abominably tricked. However, he reappeared shortly afterwards with his tails

quite as neatly and effectively adjusted as Mr. Scott's admirable safety-apron. A somewhat similar accident had befallen one of the hunt servants, but in his case the mishap merely betrayed the secret of an exceedingly dapper figure. If the stuffing had but been of the same colour as the outer skin of the bird, the cut would have been less suggestive of the turkey poult—which I shall now certainly send him at Christmas.

Almost all these falls were, if I may say it without offence, of the good, harmless, north-country fashion, the sort of falls that make horses, and ought to make horse-men. Here we dread nothing so much as going slow at our fences (and I have heard it said, the more we funk the faster we go). But you may rely upon it that, if you wish to make a fall a fair certainty, you have only to choose your opportunity and gallop at a blind ditch towards you, with the sun full in your horse's eyes—the latter having in all probability been carefully curtailed of their lashes by a smart and conscientious groom. A great many of these little casualties occurred while, with a first fox from Shawell Wood, we journeyed the slice of plough that intervenes between that covert and Swinford village. From my quiet and careful position I could see red balls and black, of thrusting humanity, shot up in the air by twos and threes at every fence, and by the time I arrived there was no difficulty whatever in walking through in safety.

The best hunt of the day was that of the afternoon, South Kilworth Covert the source. Hounds started on excellent terms, but the same curious collision (with a flock of geese) that confused their fox and drove him from his point (probably North Kilworth) hindered them for some moments on his track. Recovering from this they followed him sharply, with a leftward swing, till the already foiled coverts of Stanford and Swinford were pierced and past. Then, across river and railway again, and by the left to Yelvertoft to the Hemplow Hills—an hour's pretty hunt, with a bold, good fox that knew plenty of country. This paved the way to a sixteen minutes' scurry that, if nicely set, had been a gem. I

thought it fun, I protest, for my post of observation was only just so far outside the ring that I had to ride all the while. If you happened to have shot off wider yet, you may have been carried away towards Welford or borne upwards to Cold Ashby (in neither case alone, nor unworthily chaperoned); or, on the other hand, you might have stood upon the Hemplow, while we circled the rim of the basin southward, and have met us with placid superiority as we returned panting. But during that quarter-hour the little Pytchley ladies had been putting in some of the best work of the day. It was then three o'clock, and they had been running almost incessantly since 11.30. By the way they dashed after their fox along the Elkington hillsides, clustering as close as starlings in flight, showed the acme of venom and condition—the two most essential attributes of a foxhound. Nor had they done yet. Most of our horses had—certainly every single one. But with a fox (I can scarcely suppose the same) they broke forth again to Lord Spencer's covert, and Goodall went onward with them once more over the upper ground for Guilsborough, while your representative trotted, perforce, homeward across the vale. To-day rumour reaches me of their having run on to Coton, by Guilsborough, and put their fox to ground in a rabbit burrow, Goodall having to leave his horse out for the night. Thus they must have been running two hours, and covered an immense amount of ground, in a seven-mile point.

It will be seen that this Wednesday, commencing with a trace of frost and a very determined sunshine, but improving as the hours went by, was a busy day and a crowded day, of a type that marks the season well set and is likely to repeat itself almost weekly. Yet, I would point out, if the huntsman was occasionally favoured with an excess of information (by no means invariably unanimous), he seldom found himself hampered or crowded; and, as foxes were generally moving forward, the crowd spread comfortably, and got but very little in its own way. So, I repeat, all that varied concourse had its opportunity during the day. And for this we may in a great measure

thank our noble Master, that he was there to control and direct. A fearful and irresponsible thing is a masterless crowd on a Pytchley Wednesday.

Not all the perils of the hunting-field are gotten of jumping great fences, as I have observed many a time before. Had you been among those who clustered near Thornby, warm and rosy at first, till enthusiasm and caloric alike dwindled over a rabbit-hole that in Reynard's interest declined to be sapped, you might have seen yet another instance in point. Let us put it thus, and challenge recognition: Two young Nimrods, the better to invite the cooling breeze, had thrown open their coats, dropped rein on their horses' necks, and, while one sat with both legs hanging gracefully on the near side, the other produced a silver box which might well have contained a substantial luncheon, but which, according to the custom of the younger day, held almost a bucketful of paper-smokes. To tender these is, I am induced to believe, as much a mark of what across the water is termed "high-tone," and of courteous good-fellowship, as used to be the handing of the snuff-box by our grandfathers, or as is still the passing of the pipe by the Indians. This done, it became a matter of lighting a match, in a cool breeze more likely to extinguish than to fan a flame. So the smoke-giver leaned over, while the other played the part of Vestal, and all went happily—till their horses, too, must needs fraternise as closely. A's curb-chain caught on to B's curb-hook; the two steeds started hurriedly back, with the result that B's bridle came off by the ears, and A's horse galloped off up the field, bucking fiercely at the strange encumbrance tied on to his nose, while B leaped off and left his bridleless and equally frightened beast to his own devices. And this is true to the letter.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RIVER CHARWELL WITH THE BICESTER

THE Bicester were at Byfield on Saturday, December 3. I remember only two trifling drawbacks to a very enjoy-

able day. These were the triumph of Dr. Johnson in getting us all within his trap-farm—penning the Master and most of us therein till hounds were miles away, and, moreover, spinning three or four unwitting strangers over his boasted steel hawser. Secondly, the suffering we all inflicted upon ourselves by enveloping our bodies—half frozen by the chill air of yesterday—in the warmest clothing we could muster. Saturday turned out warm and oppressive, and we fairly sweltered during the mid-day gallop. Dismissing such minor discomforts, I take leave to post you in the upper ride of Warden Hill, or rather of its comfortless-looking brake of dripping bramble and thorn, and dead, wet fern. Hence was the gallop in question.

Hounds had wandered through it for some minutes, and soliloquy on the uninviting aspect of the covert had just passed one's lips, when Lord Chesham was seen hurriedly to collect his pack and brush through the turnip-field above. "Something up, surely! A fox, probably!" And all who rode within the covert pricked up their ears, and worked their way out also. But for two fields hounds gave no sign; and it was not till they were over the brow and descending the green valley towards Eydon that the Master could endorse his information with horn and cheer.

Then the little ladies proclaimed a scent, darting across the open as if for Eydon Covert. But at the brook of that name our fox had turned sharp to the right, and, running one bank or the other, apparently set himself to work thus to shake off pursuers. With the section that go upon horseback he met, doubtless, with more than average success; but his course made no difference whatever to the merciless ladies shaking their wet sides and flinging their fierce tongues in his wake, as they crossed and recrossed the stream—a stream that to us is one of our most substantial bugbears, fair and, on the whole, honest though it be.

My little tale would be nothing but for this brook, and the ride would doubtless have had but half its incident. Of course I did not notice one quarter, and most of that

I must keep to myself ; but I saw enough to make me smile in my soup and wake laughing from sleep this night.

Already Mr. Cookson was hauling Paul Jones on to his legs, from what must have been a very narrow escape of a broken back, the stream being of inordinate width and the bank rotten. We meanwhile galloped rightward for an easier spot, struck it comfortably, and with little or no misadventure spurred upward over the firm grass pastures, hoping thus to be carried to Canons Ashby. The sound turf and the strong thorn fences form an exceedingly pretty riding district intermediate between the two hunts, and hounds were now travelling at the pace most proper to its development.

I have a little method of my own by which I gauge at the time, and seldom fail to remember afterwards, such fences as have made impression upon my cowardly soul. When the appeal has been most terror-striking, it has been my too frequent habit, while not actually giving up everything as lost, yet to prepare myself for the worst, by loosening the grip of my knee as the horse rises, and thus, as it were, getting ready to go, far and freely as may be, directly the turnover shall come. More often than not, of course, it does not come at all ; and then I find myself standing in a fashion that would best become a riding-school recruit—wondering, perhaps, if anybody has witnessed the ungraceful exhibition, but taking comfort in the hope that others, too, may have been more than sufficiently occupied in securing their own safety.

Pardon the digression. I am often obliged to take self as sample, thus to illustrate sensations and incidents common to us all. Now the racing pack had bent again to the right, and were already splashing through the water to the bank we had so recently left, and which appeared so unnecessarily wide-set from the nearer brink, for such volume of water as it is set to carry. The river Charwell, I believe ?

But, under the influence of the pace, or, it may be, of the fire imparted by one already successful essay, there seemed to be none of the hesitancy that we have often seen, and shared, upon the banks of the Charwell. As I

have said, I could take in only a very small part of what was happening along the line ; and right thankful am I to say that on this occasion I did not have to remain to see. Some got over, some got in, some got through ; some fell on landing, some without landing. Under which category I come is my own affair alone. But to witness the brothers Cookson—the younger on the well-known chestnut mare—fly the water side by side was quite encouraging enough (fifteen feet, I put it, at a guess) ; while if further example were needed, it was to be found lower down, where Lord Chesham had turned short to his right, and two ladies (Miss Porter and Miss Hanbury) —who, I venture to assert, rode the gallop as prominently and successfully as any of the party—were already skimming the water in his track. Mr. Fabling, on his bay four-year-old, landed immediately behind the bay mare above mentioned ; while half-way between the two divisions the foam flew upward with a double-barrelled report. At one place it was found possible to jump in and out beneath a tree, till two essayists rolled backwards into the stream and choked up this point of escape. A ford, they say, also existed ; but surely not in this chapter, or it would hardly have escaped the eager eye of your narrator, ever vigilant to seize upon a “ pass,” as they term it in the county of Meath. At any rate the dozen or so who now went on with hounds had nothing to do with a ford ; and among these were Captain Riddell, Messrs Orr-Ewing, Clayton, B. Hanbury, Cox the first whip, and a gentleman on a hog-maned grey.

Threading one of the spinneys that usually make the first draw from Trafford Bridge, hounds ran on, still circling, to cross the Banbury and Byfield road, and over the flat to the hamlet of Appletree. Near this, and on the verge of the Boddington Vale, their beaten fox was headed abruptly ; and, scarcely able to trot, was seen taking the road into Aston-le-Wall. Hounds carried the line right into the village ; but their game had hidden up somewhere, and may give them another, and wider, gallop on a future day. Time of the above, about thirty-five minutes from leaving covert.

It was a day of universal scent. On many days—most days—scent would appear to follow some rule of local option—revelry here, total abstinence there. You know little about scent. I know a good deal less than nothing. But I am ready to believe, if any one will advance a tangible theory, that certain soils are suited on certain days, when the same apparent conditions of atmosphere are of no use whatever in the next parish. I believe, moreover, that foxes smell as variously as men ride differently; and, finally, I put my trust only in a rising glass, and in a quick, cheery huntsman. Some days hounds carry a scent up to their hackles, and then, once bewildered, can find it nowhere; other days they can't get down to it for minutes, and then never lose it. Air-scent and pad-scent, I suppose? Hence to evaporation, whose theory we can never formulate, but that is answerable for the whole evolution of scent. Let it alone. *Ye've 'ya-ate!* Learn all we can, we shall never be able to better a day dealt out to us. If a huntsman would make a run, he must plod on, believing it lies in him to make it, as a good man often will, when you and I, on-lookers at high pressure, have left him alone to do it.

CHAPTER XXVII

A NORTH WARWICKSHIRE SPIN

ON Sunday, frozen to London, I was prompted not unnaturally to join the ranks of the unemployed. To put it correctly, I found myself passing through Trafalgar Square, at the very moment that the noisiest and hoarsest of the paid demagogues was blazing forth from betwixt the lions, about the infamy of property and the rights of those out of work. His fierce, if ill-delivered, philippic exactly fell in with my ideas. "In every parish," he said, while the well-fed bobbies smiled, and a well-amused crowd laughed and applauded, "the unemployed should help themselves, and show they were no longer to be trampled upon." Very good. I would no longer be

trodden under foot, no longer be beholden to the employers of labour, the accumulators of wealth. The local corn-dealer at least I had on the hip, ditto the blacksmith. They should taste of my new precepts through the medium of account rendered and ignored. Happy idea wherewith to lighten the tedium of a frost. But that night came the thaw, my new rôle ceased to be tangible, my employment returned, and they were saved.

I need go no farther than Tuesday, December 13, for my simple tale. The North Warwickshire meeting at Rugby gave us, by all acknowledgment, the best day's sport of the young season.

Passing over the killing of a mangy fox from Hilmorton Gorse (a fortunate feat from an otherwise healthy and well-stocked covert), we came to Cook's Gorse, the source already of one sharp gallop this autumn. Hounds had on that occasion killed a fox, hunting him down in Rugby town. But common supposition had it at the time that they had changed, in the gardens of Bilton Grange, before killing. To-day's event went to prove the theory.

Cook's Gorse (Parnell's Gorse were a more up-to-date name) takes its stand above the little stream known as Rain's Brook, and this is some two miles out of Rugby. Let me add, before proceeding further, that Tuesday had again picked up the frost, dispersed only two days previously, and, as we stood at the covert-side, already had conviction been forced into our shivering frames—"No more hunting for a month." It was freezing at that time (about one o'clock) as piquantly and heartily as at cock-crow, an epoch that I take to be about identical with the candle-light shave, when by force of circumstances London has to be the morning starting-point. Thus the roads were as glass, the north sides of the hedges as powdered pie-crust; and, needless to say, the whole of that covert-side assembly were "keen as mustard," dreading a lock-out, but eagerly sanguine of the present chance. And there was no small or second-rate muster this Tuesday, believe me.

With a fox gone at the lower end, we "got away,"

one and all, excellently. But, almost immediately, there came confusion and entanglement at the brook alluded to. There was a little hand-gate bridge, and we had thought the brook hereabouts to be wired or iron-hurdled. But as a matter of fact, while the bridge was frost-glazed to an extent that sent an early comer's horse on to its side between the hand-rails, the brook was not iron-guarded, but easily jumpable, and now quickly and extensively jumped.

To a screaming scent hounds darted over the big ridge-and-furrow fields beyond, running an arc with the brook, and returning over the latter below Bilton Grange. A second time I found myself gliding over a hand-bridge, while three or four men were recovering themselves from the water on my right, and the pack was flying onwards with a scent I have not seen the like of this winter, well ahead of every one. At this moment we (*i.e.* the section with which I had cast in my lot) felt as if, try all we knew, we could do nothing right. You who ride to hounds have experienced the distressing sensation—a sensation with which you are likely to make acquaintance nowhere so frequently as with the crowded fields of the Shires. For, accustomed as you may be to numbers, and appreciative as you may be of the charms of a great and goodly company, there is no gainsaying the fact that at times we do hamper each other most abjectly. Once rammed into the gate-and-gap stream, especially if that stream be running crookedly, there is nothing in the world will extricate you—certainly not loss of temper, into which so many of us silently and savagely relapse. You had better surrender at discretion and await a future opportunity, unless, as now, chance should come and fortune favour when least expected.

Like a bright light in a gloomy sky at that moment seemed the flash of the pack across the distant greenward, as it turned on the hillside beneath the Grange and struck leftward athwart our front. Mr. C. Mills and half-a-dozen others took in the position at once, rode the intervening fences at a sharp angle, and were alongside hounds before the latter hit the Coventry road, at the

exact spot as two or three weeks ago, from the same covert. The next mile, too, was identical. But, instead of our fox being headed under Dunchurch village, as on that occasion, he was now able to sink the green valley and make his point for Leicester Piece. And from a riding (aye, and hunting) point of view, this was the choicest morsel of the day's repast. For, tell me, you who ride, or have ridden, the Grass Countries, are there any moments so supreme, any hunting so picturesque and exciting, as when a fast pack is making its own running, when the turf is as springboard, when the country gives scope to all, and when the fences are within fair compass of horses just warmed to their work? Such is Paradise, of which we get a glimpse only now and again, though we store up each brief view in that album of memory which each of us treasures for after-time, when not even harriers nor a plough-country can give us pastime.

Personally, I am not anxious to live until such time—and assuredly I shall not, if called upon to follow often Mr. Cookson and that wonderful chestnut mare. It is neither my business, my habit, nor my wish (nor, kind as my friends are in allowing me free and frequent use of their names, would it be within the bounds of good taste) that I should endeavour to make any man a hero; but, in all my experience of Leicestershire, where timber was the only diet upon which we fattened or crumbled according to our individual power of assimilation, I never saw any man carve out a succession of neat and stalwart flights more aptly and unhesitatingly than did, to-day, the masterhand in question. The take-off in each case was grey and probably greasy under the rime-frost; to some of these sturdy problems there was a ditch towards him, to the others a grave beyond; and in every instance the rails were—well, I cannot say exactly *how high*, but very big and apparently unbreakable. One never knows. There came, not long after him, one of fifteen stone, saddle-weight, on an Irish weight-carrier of recent importation. The Irish hunter knew neither fear nor post-an-l-rails. So he levelled the lot, beginning at the bottom bar and going on without a stumble. To cap the per-

formance, the thrice-gallant rider found himself at once overtaken and accosted by, as he tells me, a horse-dealer's man. "Beg pardon, sir ; but I'm ever so much obliged. I thought you was never a-coming. And I don't know what my master would a-said to me, if my horse had two big legs like yourn is sure to have in the morning!"

Who had in the meantime availed themselves quickest of the unbroken opportunity it is difficult for me to assert or recall. But I shall not be very wide of the mark in saying that as the chase swept past Bunker's Hill, leaving that covert to the left, some of the nearest in its wake were: Mr. Yerburgh, in the form of some years ago, Messrs. Graham, J. Adamthwaite, Mrs. Byass, Captains Atherton, Riddell, and Lamb, Messrs. Parsons, F. Charters, &c. And there were others whom one naturally omits "because they are always there"—for example, among our elder riders, Mr. Mills, on a five-year-old of his own breeding; and Mr. Muntz, weighing sixteen stone and a bittock.

Eighteen minutes of the primest; then a momentary check, a second of breathing-time, at the road Dunchurch-to-Southam. Carr put matters right immediately; and the hunt went on cheerily to the little covert of Leicester's Piece—twenty-four minutes to this. A good fox or a blown one (or was he both?) skirted the covert without entering, and held on by Bourton (if I am naming the village correctly), making Wolston Heath or the vague distance his present point. Crossing and skirting the railway, he got to ground on its banks close to Dunchurch Station, having thus completed a sharp, warming half-circle, whose outside points were some four or five miles apart.

Nor were we left long to chill in the biting breeze. Cawston Spinnies quickly set us going once more. Not much of a fox to look at, and he never seemed able to get away from hounds. His earliest efforts were ignoble to a degree, for he tried to hide himself in Bilton village, and then plunged into the labyrinth of the Bilton Grange surroundings. But he died in worthy fashion. Hounds gave him no peace till he took the country—the beautiful Willoughby

country in the vale, where, racing from scent to view, they pulled him down handsomely, after ten or twelve final minutes—half-an-hour in all—throughout which they had, as it were, been glued to his brush.

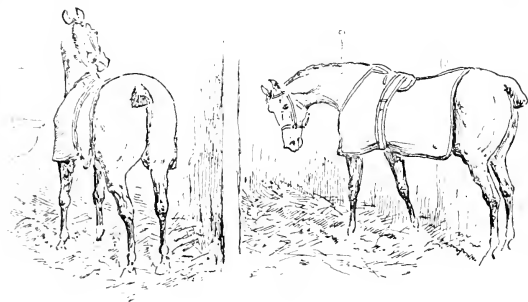
I ought to have written all this on Tuesday night. Possibly my details might then have been fuller, my comments more incisive, and my facts more clearly put, as when action has hardly been broken off or the flame of excitement had time to die. But I claim the right not only to be occasionally drowsy and gratefully tired after a day's hunting (in this instance a very hot-and-cold day, after a week's abstinence), but to be allowed now and again the supreme luxury of "brooding" over the evening cigar. Readily do we all brood on our misfortunes, "dipping our souls in the nethermost hell" of mental torture. (And this we have to do whether we like it or not, when no recent scene, no recent joy is present to exorcise the demon of sorrow.) But we don't give half enough time to ruminating upon lately experienced delight, of which there are many moments—aye, many hours and days, surely—in every man and woman's life. We "chew the cud of bitterness" and "brood our sorrows on a throne," but we seldom sit down alone to recall enjoyment in which we have just revelled. The taste goes out of our mouth, we sleep off the memory, the occasion is forgotten; and the sensations of the moment can no more be conjured up afterwards than our household skeletons can be kept locked in their cupboards.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MIGRATION IN THE FROST

IRELAND, *January 1893*.—A fourth week of frost having opened with a heavy snowstorm and a northerly wind, I could submit to fate no longer; but, casting a pair of "black jacks," my own spurs, and a quire of foolscap into my kit-bag, turned my back upon Arctic England—awaking next morning in green Hibernia, as it were out of an evil dream.

Here, they told me, hunting had not been stopped since Christmas Day, the very date on which we went into winter quarters, and since which the most we had known of fox-hunting was contained in the querulous plaints of the frozen-out muster in the club smoking-room. Monotony is a word wholly insufficient to express the existence of a hunting man who has no bones to waste upon skating, and who, after a first week in which to see a play or two, eat a dinner or two, and perhaps try on a coat, finds himself still penned up in London, only because the country, and the contemplation of an idle stud, is more aggravating still.



An idle stud

In Ireland a sense of warmth and sport seemed to pervade the land. Cattle and sheep were browsing at large in the green fields, amid richest grass. A happy lot, methought, is that of the Irish farmer! He is seldom called upon to fodder his stock; and his beasts are never pinched with cold and short commons. His tenure is fixed by law, and his payment of rent by his own inclination. He has no gates to keep in repair, and, as for his fences, it takes a mighty hard knock to make a gap in a bank. Instead of five horses that may be seen dragging a plough through the stiff clays of Mid England, a light brood mare and a donkey will do all the ploughing and harrowing that *he* needs. Take my advice, farmer friends of Northamptonshire. Go west, but go no further than Ireland.

I will give you another point that tells in favour of the Irishman and his young horse, and that will in some measure explain how he makes horse-breeding pay when you can't; for doubtless, with all the friendly assistance of the Royal Grant, you are endeavouring with all your might to breed 300-guinea hunters upon a fee of two guineas (is it not thus that the advocates of horse-raising put the matter before you? Alas and alack! I fear you will never attain it). Well, with their mild winters and their ever-growing grass—I don't forget the limestone soil, but we have that in many parts of England too—the Irish colts thrive and grow all winter, and they and their dams cost very little to keep. In fact they grow into money; very many of ours grow into weeds, and often actually cost the farmer additional money only to get rid of them.

THE DUHALLOW

My destination on this occasion was Cork, and my opportunity the Duhallow and the United, neither of which packs I had yet seen. Dispensing with preliminaries, suffice it that on Friday, January 20, 1893, I was fortunate enough to find myself one of a party of twenty-three, in a special from Cork, bound for Buttevant. It goes without saying that there were also exactly twenty-three horses in the train; for no one apparently ever dreams of taking out more than one horse per diem in Ireland. In that country—a paradise of sport, a purgatory of politics—a horse can do a whole day's work. In England, with probably a year or two of improved condition in him, he can do half a good day, and only the whole of a very indifferent day. But then, the light soil that allows the old mare and the donkey to plough it with ease is not only generally left to grow grass, but in neither condition does it hold and cling like our rich soils that are so rapidly breaking our farmers. And, again, there is not half the effort required, or the jar incurred, in going on and off a bank as in flying a wide hedge-and-ditch; albeit the banks of county Cork are almost universally stone-faced, demanding a clean up-pump, with no foothold till the top is reached.

The Duhallow country, at present hunted by Mr.

Barry, is, as may be known, in want of a master for next season. The hopes of the Duhallow men have been centred in Lord Chesham; but whether this arrangement will be brought about, or has already been abandoned, I am not in a position to say. By general consent the Duhallow is one of the most sporting countries in Ireland, and doubtless will not be long without having a full choice of candidates for the mastership. This pack, too, bears a high reputation in Ireland, having been raised thereto by the efforts of the late Lord Doneraile. As far as I could see of them to-day, they gave me the idea of possessing speed and quality. They are a different style of hound from what we are nowadays accustomed to see in England, being rather narrow, and high on the leg, but having compensatory depth of brisket, fair backs, and clean heads and necks. If I may say it, without offence, they remind me in some slight degree of what Mr. Henry Chaplin's hounds (formerly Lord H. Bentinck's) were before he put bone into them.¹

A single day's hunting—and that not a particularly eventful one—of course gives one no claim whatever to form estimate or description of a country as a whole, the more so that Friday, by common consent, introduced us into the worst corner of it, to wit, a comparatively narrow valley, having a heath-covered mountain on one side, the same on the other, with the river Blackwater running between. The better ground, to the north and west, I hope to view at some future, not very distant, date; for this, I am led to believe, is as good as any in Ireland, not even excepting the best of the Limerick, to which it adjoins.

But Friday happened to be the day for the Cork special; and accordingly the party took train to Buttevant, and rode on to the meet at Brough Cross—"two miles," declared the rustics—a long four, I cannot but think it should have been by English measurement. No such *very* small field, as I had been prepared to expect. With the Cork contingent there must have been well-nigh a hundred, though the only reliable tally lies with the gentleman who

¹ A remark justified by the fact that Lord Doneraile's pack was founded entirely on material from Lord Henry Bentinck's kennel.

undertook the duty of collecting the half-crowns. (An admirable system this, I venture to think, and one that, if adopted in the Rugby and Melton districts, might go to paying for many broken rails. And broken rails, we know too well, often lead to wire.)

I was struck with the thoroughly "useful" type of most of the horses of the day. Short-legged, strong-hocked, strong-backed, and of course snaffle-bridled, they looked like lifting a rider well on to a bank, and setting him down safely beyond it. Not very many carried suggestion of great pace—nor is excessive speed, I am taught to believe, an essential qualification in county Cork. Power and activity to cope with continual jumping are much more necessary in a country, to cross parts of which—I quote an expression attributed to our mourned comrade, Captain Middleton—is not unlike jumping in and out of the pews of a church.

On the sport of Friday I have not long to dwell. The meet being at Brough Cross, hounds were first run through the gorse at the foot of Ballyvoneare Mountain. (I reproduce these names with a certain degree of fear and trembling, and under all protest against my being held responsible for further exactitude than painstaking inquiry and a barbarous Saxon ear enable me to attain.) However, I may say that it was in the demesne of Doneraile—the place it was hoped Lord Chesham might have succeeded in obtaining as a residence, in view of his taking the country—that they first found. A brace of foxes were started here; and one of them, rumour informed us afterwards, had taken his line for Cahirmee Gorse, which would have introduced us to some far better ground. But hounds were hard upon another, and chased him to death round the plantations of the demesne.

Of the three, or four, foxes found at what I take to be Annakisna Wood, they hunted one for a couple of miles or so to the Blackwater, over anything but a captivating line, where even the un-Irish element of ridge-and-furrow was met with, while the more indigenous bog had not disappeared at its presence. The great salmon river was in full water; but a ford existed some half a mile down stream

from Carrig, the point at which hounds had feathered across. Accordingly the Master and half his field went round and across, the remainder keeping to the northern bank, and the two parties taking post on opposite sides of the stream where Reynard had gained "his earth beneath the rocks," at or close to Rock Forest.

It being late in the afternoon, and another draw being declared unlikely, the northern division rode for Mallow. Their comrades on the south bank were shortly afterwards on the point of doing the same, when at the last moment they were called back by the note of a hound; the Master had presence of mind to send a whip at once to the unstopped earth; and a sharp little gallop ensued down the riverside to Killawillin, near which they had recently forded the water. Mr. Phelan of Cork distinguished himself by jumping a deep quarry, in safety, during the scurry; and when the chase turned upwards on to the mountain of Moynass, the remaining members of the Cork special left for home.

THE UNITED (CORK)

In weather that would have been becoming to mild October—and while by newspaper report the thaw was in England working its sluggish way with a northerly wind—I had the pleasure of being introduced to another country altogether strange to me. I cannot, I regret to say, claim that my introduction was backed by the happy accident of sport—a presence impossible on any occasion absolutely to command. But I saw a good, wide, and wild area of fox-hunting ground, quite different from any in which I had yet been entered. Apart from the chance achievement of the day, there is to me in a first experience of a new country a special excitement, a maiden tremor so to speak, that enhances tenfold the charms of whatever sport may fall to one's lot. On Monday last our portion was but a brief warm scurry over ground that the United to a man would have declined to pick out had any option been offered them, but that at least gave one the opportunity of seeing for the first time how the horses and men of county Cork negotiate these curious fences. And now I must take back at once a sentence that occurs somewhat earlier

in this letter, to the effect that it is difficult to knock a gap in an Irish bank. This by no means applies to county Cork, many of whose stony banks, perhaps from insufficient strength in the first instance, generally from chronic damp and neglect afterwards, crumble only too readily to the footfall. The broader and sturdier banks, say the hard riders of the country (and who is there who does not ride hard with the United, or can follow these hounds at all without jumping almost incessantly?)—the sounder, bigger banks are safe enough, at all events for the first man, less so for his immediate followers: and they take them almost at speed.

The weak, half-wall half-bank fences, though not likely to put you down when going slow, are risky to gallop over. But when taken at leisure they offer the most curious spectacle, as a leap, ever invented for the edification of an ignorant Englishman. The horse of the country jumps them one leg at a time; and if this mode of procedure is not sufficient to disperse the unnecessary stones, he presses down upon them with his stomach (I have no more delicate term handy at the moment) until the structure melts beneath his weight. The sensation to a novice is as if he might be riding a horse suffering from a severe attack of internal pain; and he longs to get off, till he finds by experience that, by sitting still, it all comes right in the end.

I consider that, much sport or little sport this day, I was fortunate enough to see a great deal of the United country. They met at Dundallerick—pretty nearly the centre of it. And, driving from Cork, one rose gradually during a dozen miles until one reached the higher ground whence wide views could be obtained—as, for instance, during the day, from Knockeen Mountain across a fine open valley of several miles to Fermoy. Do not imagine, by-the-bye, that Knockeen or many another gentle eminence in the same category are in reality any more worthy of being dignified by the name of “mountains” than, say, Tilton Hill or Robin-a-Tiptoe—certainly not more than the Hemplow Hills of the Pytchley. Far be it from me to venture to hint that a proneness to exaggeration is in the

smallest degree a trait in the national character. But when I see a gentle upland such as a Southdown slope christened a "mountain" and a tiny brooklet yeapt a "river," it sets me wondering whether all Irish definitions—such, for instance, as applied to a horse for sale, a shooting to be let, &c. &c.—ought on every occasion to be accepted without scrutiny, by one unfamiliar with the national mode of expression.

But to resume. From Knockeen Mountain and its neighbours you look over, not only the spreading vale towards Fermoy, but a goodly tract of wild country, having scarcely a house upon it, to the north-west—the whole making a compact block sufficient, if need be, for four days a week. Near Cork and the sea are numerous glens, deep and rugged to get into, and difficult to climb out of. But these to a great measure disappear as you move inland. Small grass fields and narrow banks, gorse-covered and stone-faced, are then the leading features; for plough is, happily, of little account in Ireland. Light soil and low rents—very badly paid—are other features. If you want any more, they are to be found in the strength and bone of the short-legged horses of county Cork, and in the determination with which men and women alike all drive them along when hounds run. There was no great chance of seeing them at work on Monday, for the whole sport was comprised in a twenty-five minutes' rough scurry round Dundallerick. They set very little store by it; and rightly, no doubt—though I confess to having enjoyed it, while I watched the men on the outer circle taking their jumps, all strange and novel to me. But then had not my appetite been sharpened by nearly a month of frost, the keenest whetstone to a hunter's zest? (By the way, I will give you a new term that I picked up during the frost. At that shop in St. James's Street where our noble Master has figured for weeks past, I asked price and name of a cut of a lady riding to hounds. The shopman "didn't know; the plate represented lady-huntswoman.")

Passing on to a figure more apropos to the occasion, and whose sharp and healthy physiognomy might well be taken to personify Tom Moody. The huntsman John

Wallis—or, as he is better known the country through, Johnny—has had great success for many years in bringing off sport for the United. Beginning his career as an earth-stopper and runner with terriers, he gradually crept into the saddle, and eventually was promoted to the horn by Mr. Murphy—one English servant after another having failed to meet the requirements of an Irish country. The latter gentleman—then the most popular of Masters, and who was able even to continue hunting during the worst of the “agitation”—can, unfortunately, only view the chase from wheels, a bad accident having put an end to his Mastership and his riding. The Hunt is now managed by Mr. James Russell, with a tact and courtesy to which I may be allowed to testify, by hearsay and by passing experience. The packs have their best material in drafts from the Bramham Moor.

I will now conclude my very sketchy remarks upon the United by giving such few names as I could gather of the field of the day, viz. : Mr. Russell, Lord and Lady Listowel, Captain and Mrs. Leetham, Captain and Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Murphy, Mrs. Hegan, Mrs. Sadler, Mrs. Warren-Jackson, Miss Grey, Miss Murray, Miss G. Gubbins, Major Luttmann-Johnson, Captains Phillips, Beamish, Scholes, N. Johnson, Cooper, Messrs. D. Hare, Nicholson, Clare, C. Murphy, O'Brien, Cholmondeley, and Barry.

Two sharp, good days with the Tipperary offer me so much field that I hardly dare venture astride old Pegasus with a view to riding it over again. Nor would I, but that a railway journey has given me opportunity of recalling it, item by item, mile by mile, even fence by fence. I do not propose to inflict all this upon you ; but here is the outline, before it shall be blurred by a dart with the Ward and half a new week in Northamptonshire, where, I understand, they are again hard at work, and where on Monday they will doubtless tell me of many a wonderful thing that has happened.

But of Wednesday, January 25. I had seen some of Tipperary before, I was to see the best of it now. And, if the runs did not come off according to expected lines, I

was happy enough to drop in for some admirable sport, and delightful rides—where men had room to ride, had there been three hundred of them, in place of thirty or so.

The Fethard district was the nominal area ; and the first scurry of the day included the Fethard Steeplechase Course—not the very worst of their ground, you may be sure. As the meet (Coolmore) was close to bed and breakfast, of course—in proper keeping with a nature stubbornly undisciplined—I was late. The Master was just throwing his hounds into covert. The field, knowing their ground well, had posted themselves to the right of the plantation, and, accordingly, were most of them left behind. To the scream of the whip I saw Mr. Burke set the famous Newtown at a first bank, and go off at score. Of course I pinned my faith to the horn : and for the next fifteen minutes, following Mr. Wyse, Capt. Pedder, and Mr. Croome, I saw a charming sample of quick and merry fun. I have been now just sufficiently in Ireland no longer to be astonished at anything. I accept the queer, great fences because I see that other people get over them ; and, as I have without exception been nobly treated as to my mounts, I trust to their honour to get me over too. Please do not consider this any bravado. Fancy the alternative. There is no gate out of an Irish field, except an occasional one that is padlocked. What would be the ultimate destiny of a man who dared not jump out, and, still worse, if he happened to be a stranger in the country ? It is horrible to contemplate. No—you *must* jump in Ireland. If you don't jump, you can't hunt ; and as I ventured once before to put it—not, I confess, with general acceptance on the part of elderly and influential friends—if the same were the case in England, we should have no overcrowded fields in the Shires.

But of this Fethard country. You might have gone fifty abreast—though the breastwork, I remember, was on at least two occasions nearly six feet of smooth stone-faced bank, and as slippery as glass till you reached the more or less roomy summit. I confess I don't like those perpendicular icebergs. I have never yet had the horse of the country back on me : but I have very frequently and

very unwillingly been called upon to court such a catastrophe. Let me not, however, lose the opportunity of saying that in Tipperary the consequences need not often be nearly as severe upon your enjoyment of the sport as in Meath. In the latter you may be buried till the fox is killed, or the deer is taken. In the former you shake yourself, pick up the pieces, have another try, and go on again. I am speaking of Tipperary proper, and of Wednesday morning in particular. Its afternoon was "bushy," and Thursday was different altogether. I now only recall the fair open banks, a level valley, wet grass fields, and Mr. Burke and his leading couples abreast, driving their fox to the hill of Kilnockin, above the town of Fethard, where Reynard was headed, blown, and pulled down ten minutes later. Oh, it *was* hot? As a migrate from chilly England I had not been fairly warm for a month. But there was better fun yet to come.

The great covert of Ballyluski was our next point—as, indeed, it essayed to be all Thursday, though, from excess of sport on the way, on neither day did we reach it. An amusing process is the going from covert to covert in Ireland—especially, perhaps, in Tipperary, where it is often done at a gallop, with never a gate by the way. You may thus, without a fox before you, frequently find yourself committed to as much jumping as in many countries (the Midlands of England, for instance) might be forced upon you in a day's hunting.

A Gallop from the Parsons should be my heading—the covert a snug hillside patch, with a road beneath it, and by no means dissimilar to our *angulus ridens* of the Quorn. The prickly furze of an Irish covert is far more trying to hounds, far more favourable to a fox, than the gorse or briars of the sister Isle. In this instance hounds were all round the green thorny nest in which Reynard was harboured, when Mr. Darby Scully, standing in the road, saw him jump from their midst. The leading hound chased him over the hilltop with not a dozen yards between them: the whole bevy of ladies streamed forth in close attendance—and the men of Tipperary set forth to ride. A closely fenced "bushy" country faced them,

and they scattered right and left as they met the great straggling fences. There is no swishing through the growers as with our straggly bullfinches at home. They grow stout as ash and stubborn as oak. The first fence and its further branches threw a good man on his back—his very pride of position preventing his horse being caught till, two fields on, the latter threw in his lot with some colts. Mr. Riall, on the young Hesper stallion¹ I remember on a former visit, took up the running, and held it during the first few furious minutes that led to Shallikoyl (a house with a shrubbery, whereat, if I have it right, a fox has found refuge before). Big grass fields, and strongly thorned banks, were the order of going; and on one of these Mr. Wyse staked a good horse badly. A stopped drain sent our fox away across a wild, pleasant track of more open ground—the Pepperstown township—till he reached Rathkenny, a good gorse on a hilltop. Hence he could be seen making his way over the next valley; and soon he took us by Bennett's Hill. To ground under the road at Knockelly, thirty-five excellent minutes.

This brought us nearly to Grove; and hounds killed a second fox in the laurels, within fifty yards of their kennelled comrades. The remainder of the afternoon was occupied in an hour's hunt round and about the big wood of Grove Hill.

Here are some few names of the day, besides those already mentioned, viz.: Mrs. Burke, Mr. and Miss Baily, Miss Helme, Lord Charles Bentinck, Colonel Inigo Jones, Captains Pedder, Gough, Joliffe, M'Lean, Messrs. Brand, Curzon, Malcolmson, Gibbons, Nugent Humble, Higgins, Holmes, Dr. Hefferman.

Thursday, in its great run of the afternoon, gave us the best sport of all. The morning had been oppressively sunny, almost sultry, when, after a lawn meet at Grove, the Master trotted to the gorse-shrouded hill of Kynnagrana, and there awoke several foxes. It was almost a mercy that no run ensued—till the day had cooled down and a clouded afternoon had introduced us once again to

¹ Afterwards a winner at Punchestown.

Ballylennan. This was the same low-lying gorse I had seen in the autumn, beautiful in itself, but amid the wettest and strongest surroundings of any covert of the hunt. So I had been told, and so I soon realised—apart from my rough-and-tumble experiences of a previous visit. But our journey thence to-day was southward and eastward, towards the snow-streaked mountains of Waterford and to the verge of the Kilkenny territory. A very unusual line, they told me; and one they deprecated almost apologetically as a very “cross” country—“the worst they had, and only taken in of late years by Mr. Burke in order to extend his ground.” Well, I can only say that it was *all* grass, sloppy enough for the first couple of miles to have been a snipe-marsh, but sound under-foot, and improving gradually into first-rate galloping-ground.

As for the fences, they were, I admit, of a very strange and occasionally somewhat awesome description. But then, as I have already inferred, I am no judge whatever of what is really the most trying fashion of fence in Ireland. There are many sorts of startling barriers, simple and compound; and what is daily food in one part of Ireland is dreaded as poison in another. The Irish countries, in fact, differ among themselves (after the manner of their politicians) as widely as from their English neighbours. The only thing for a stranger is to accept the inevitable, do as he sees others do—and make believe, as best he can, that nothing comes amiss. From this point of view alone I obtrude my personality, supposing myself a type of Englishman in an Irish hunting-field. I must be allowed another momentary digression, merely to note that, wherever an English wanderer finds himself in Ireland, there will he also find sympathy, cordiality, welcome, and assistance. He will be helped out of difficulties, prompted on occasion, never viewed with jealousy, but treated at all times with a sterling good-fellowship of which it would be hard to find the like, the world over.

Now to Ballylennan's swampy gorse—a fox away (as they said he had been before) to the first twang of horn. We splashed round its precincts, and rode nervously after

the Master, wondering what next—the devil or the deep sea—might be awaiting us. Curiously there was little scent for a first three minutes; perhaps hounds' heads were up, or the water had washed away the scent from the yellow grass. Half-hidden, half-open drains cut each field; but bullocks had made their own roadways round each fence angle, till some high, blind, and bushy banks became a wild necessity. At one of these—wet and greasy atop because of the water by degrees splashed on to them—they say that no less than seven eager folk lay prone and besmeared. Personally I didn't stay to count them. My mission was, if possible, forward—after the Master. And if my little black Daniel carried me near him, it was due to the fact that his schoolmaster led him, and that he knew more than three months ago.

Soon we were out of the swamps of Ballyrichard. Now we were on the best of turf—fences thorny, banks easy and frequented—checked a moment at the river Anner, but went into full play along the hillside that my kindly private secretary has noted at Killaghy.

The accepted notion of Tipperary—not mine, but that of the Irish public—is that its banks are broad and bare, and its ditches *nil*. *No such thing*, except exemplified to-day, when we rode to the borders of Kilkenny! First there were high razor-shaped banks, then great thorn hedges (thorns growing as trees) embroidering the banks, with a deep bramble-covered ditch on either side—a cross, in fact, between Northern Meath and the stubbornest of the Belvoir Vale. Again, instead of a whole fieldside being equally practicable, there was seldom but one spot—and that a kind of dive through a hoop—where egress could be insisted upon. And believe me, without prejudice, if it had not been for the Master and Mr Riall, I believe those spots would have been undiscovered still. There were, now and again, iron gates, it is true, between the great grass fields. But more often than not, these gates were mere cold steel delusions—agricultural ornaments, padlocked until haytime—and we beat the bars in vain.

Yet, wherever the two leaders laid bare a bank, the public followed—earliest among them always two young

Ladies upon grey horses (ponies almost), Miss Evanson and Miss Holmes—(they must grant me their names, as I fear no contradiction), with Mr. and Mrs. Clibborn (the former a welter-weight) and young Mr. Hartigan, of well-famed parentage—a boy upon Mr. Burke's extraordinary pony. (Another parenthesis, almost an impertinence—the same pony, only the day before, had been the exponent of the Master's free-heartedness. "Sure, sir," said his footman, "I've been four years in your service, and I've never yet followed the hounds!" "Haven't you, Paddy? Then take the 'pony.' Isn't the second whip laid up because he must go riding in one of these four-pound steeplechases?" And Paddy did—girding up his trousers with knee-straps, and walking straddleways for three days afterwards. But he saw all the fun—for, bar Mrs. Dewhurst's little wonder in Meath, the pony in question is the best hunter in Ireland. I would like to see a match between the pair and ride one.)

Where was I? Oh, at about thirty minutes from Ballylennan—when a farmer holloaed us back over the Anner (a fresh fox, I believe, for hounds and huntsman wanted to go on, their own side). Then they hunted for ten minutes—a wriggling course, as of an undetermined fox, up to Modresliel (this good name applies, I suppose, to the old woman's cottage, the only distinguishing mark of which was some little washing flapping in the wind, and possibly staying our fox's progress). At any rate, after a five-mile point, he turned back from this and Kilkenny. We had run through the valley of Slievenamon (renowned in song), and nearly to the base of the mountain of that name. Mr. Burke—of whom I may be allowed to say with emphasis that he makes half his sport by *giving every fox credit for being a good one*—had to come back at last, and struck a direct return line towards Lismolin. These names convey nothing to my English readers—very little to me after the moment of writing them, and, as far as I can manage it, spelling them. But this was the only real check in a two hours' run. With a wide right-hand sweep we rode back to Ballylennan, taking in the Kilmount Hills and leaving the Drangan Covert half a mile on our right, excellent pace and good ground all the way; skirted Ballylennan Gorse

after an hour and a half, and, with a turn towards Ballylusk, came back with a beaten fox to our starting-point in exactly two hours. A dozen men and two or three ladies (among them Miss Hulme) arrived with them—every horse owning to more than sufficient. I believe I am not beyond the fact, or my province, in believing that, as with hounds from end to end of this long run, there were none so consistent as the two leaders aforesaid, with Captain Gay and Miss Evanson in near attendance. Of Mr. Burke I don't hesitate to assert (all obligation of hospitality apart) that I have seen no one in Ireland on a par with him across country unless it be the Master of the Meath, or unless it be his right-hand friend Mr. Riall—the latter possibly the best exemplar in Tipperary of how that country should be ridden. It is a treat to see him taking it quick. It is a wonder to see him taking it slow. In the first case the horse obeys the man. In the latter the horse is made to use the best faculties to be found in an Irish hunter.

Another paragraph of this fine run yet remains. Hounds again left covert ; and the Master, supposing them to be still engaged upon his hunted fox, rode after them with his whipper-in—these two upon their second horses, while not a man among his field was in a position to accompany. The further hounds went, the better the pace ; and so far from bringing a tired fox to hand, as he hoped every moment, Mr. Burke had to whip off *an hour later*, at dark, just as hounds were entering the big covert of Mohober—some five miles, as the crows flies, from Ballylennan. The line was a strong one, past the right of Prouts ; and the watch pointed to 5.15 as he stopped hounds. When he went away at 4.15 all our horses—some of them four years old, some few five years old, and one or two still to be called three years old, for in Ireland nobody seems to ride any but young horses, unless they happen to possess something unsaleable—all our horses had had fully enough, and looked only for gruel. “Is it gruel ye want ?” quoth the man replacing the gate, or, rather, the substitute of thorns and poles. “Sure I'll take ye to Farmer's Murphy's. It's only just beyant ; and ye'll get all the gruel ye want—and whisky—and beef besides,

for didn't he kill a cow about a month ago!" His considerate offer was declined; but the village of Drangan was soon thickly studded with horses taking their gruel, and men their whisky and soda, in the street.

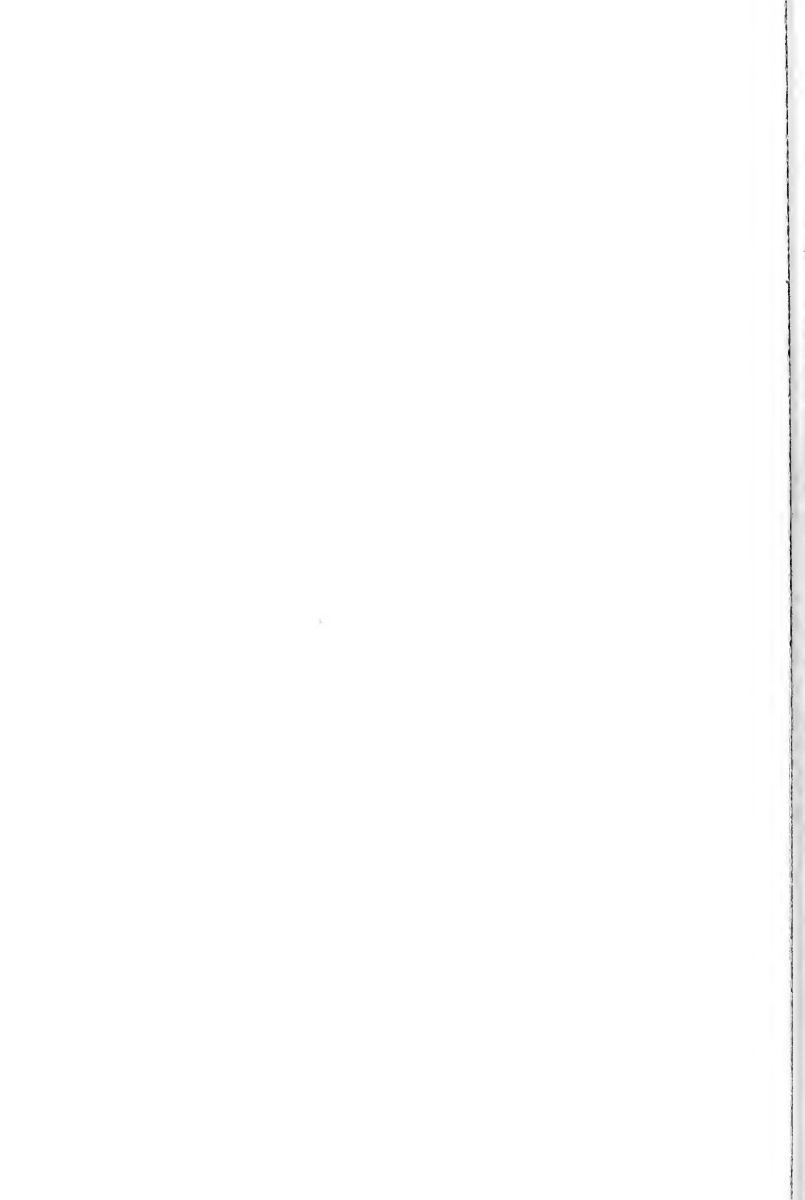
Among the field of the day were, in addition to those already mentioned: Captain and Mrs. M'Lean, Mr. and Miss Bell, Mrs. Carroll, Mrs. Hartigan, Sir Charles Gough, Colonel Inigo Jones, Captains Pedder, Joliffe, Murphy, Dr. Hefferman, Messrs. Darby Scully (on a smart young mare just bought after winning one of the £4 races of the country), Wyse, Curzon, Hemphill, Croome (on a three-year-old if I am not mistaken), Shavelle, Crilly, Anglin, Morton, Guiry, Phelan, Mockler, Evanson, and Moore; and on wheels Mrs. Burke and Miss Malins, the Ladies Beauclerc, Mrs. De Boinville, Mrs. Crilly, Miss Clibborn, Miss Carr, Miss Summerville, Miss Brien, and Miss Power.

After my experiences of last week, superadded to those of last autumn, I cannot but arrive at the opinion that Tipperary is, as at present, the finest hunting country I have had the luck to ride over—not even excepting Meath, over which it has this advantage, viz. that if you happen to get down in Meath you are very likely to lose the run by remaining in one of its deep, gloomy dykes until rescued with spade and rope. In Tipperary, as I have said before, you may always get up and go on.

I have told of the sport, and I have already used up more space than I ought; but, at the risk of being garrulous, I must tell you of my train companions on the way from Fethard. I had been much perturbed lest my week's notes had miscarried. They had been sent by rail rather than post—the latter, strange as it may seem, being in Ireland even more dilatory as a means of communication than the former. My fellow-voyager, a local and jovial priest, hearing my anxious inquiries, sought to comfort me. "Indeed, the post is a very bad construction here altogether. I'm living but seven miles away; and you might post a letter to me, and then set off to walk two days afterwards. You'd be with me as soon as the letter—may be before." So I concluded I had done right in not trusting to the postal arrangements of the district.



FIG. 1. A STREET SCENE IN LONDON, 1850. (FROM "THE LIFE OF CHARLES DICKENS" BY ALFRED RUSSELL WALLACE, VOL. I, P. 100.)



Soon afterwards another jolly friar entered the carriage. He had his hand wrapped up, and alluded to his leg as having been recently bruised. He averred he had been riding all his life—"horse-bucking and all manner of games"—but that he had never hurt himself till now. "How was this?" I asked. "Did the horse fall?" "He did not," he explained. "I struck him with the spur, and he got his mettle up. I thought I would stop him before he got to the grove, but he pulled one way and I pulled the other, and a tree came in between my leg and the saddle. But, sure, it will be all right now," he added cheerfully, exhibiting a fist as big and black and round as a bullock's heart. Then he continued very pleasantly, "Have you had some good hunting in this country? The hunting in England isn't as good as here. You haven't any banks to the fences there!" I humbly admitted this, and he went on, "Galway, they tell me, is a terrible place for hunting. The banks are all stones, and it's only a real clever horse that can keep his legs on them." Then, alas, he left the train, or who knows how much more I might have gratefully learned from my hearty and agreeable fellow-passenger?

CHAPTER XXIX

A HOME SEQUEL

FULL forty-eight hours, so my experience points, does it take the ordinary landsman to recuperate after a Channel passage. In my case I had planned to secure at least Sunday for restorative purposes, and am not ashamed to confess that sixteen hours out of the next twenty-four were spent in peaceful slumber, after the ordeal of a sufficiently purgatorial gale to have expiated any year of ordinary sin.

Next day, Monday, January 29, 1893, I sought awakening by means of a hunt with the Grafton, who met at Woodford. The cure was effectual enough, and, gratifying though it was that it took place in a good district, with a grand pack, on a perfect day, it would have been

still more palatable had not so many foxes been ever occupying attention. Thus, hounds were splitting into sections the day through. The most amusing illustration was found in the final episode, when, after an hour or so of varied hunting, the pack again divided as they left Staverton Wood, and left—so it was stoutly sworn—a beaten fox. One division ran hard, a half-circle to Badby Wood, and after fifteen minutes were whipped off from what was *also* sworn stoutly “a beaten fox.” The other division ran just as hard for eighteen minutes, *their* fox getting to ground in a drain, also “tired to death.” The phrase was made to apply to this one, for they had him out and ate him. And for the rest of the day the gallopers of the two divisions were in hot argument as to which had had the better fun. I think I heard more good-humoured untruths asserted than ever before in a day’s hunt. I can answer for it that *our* division at all events “lied” with most conscientious unanimity.

Tuesday with the North Warwickshire at Dunchurch was another lovely hunting day. All the world went there, most of them arrayed in their best: some of us, fortunately, less ambitiously attired. For the yellow water made no distinction between new clothes and old, between gilded youth and rusted age. It was ready for them all, and swallowed with a greedy appetite as many as would come into its embrace. I allude to the Hilmorton Brook, to-day level with the meadows and rotten as to its banks. Alas, I first made friends with the muddy stream when about eleven years old. Since then I may safely say that I have renewed acquaintance with its familiar depths quite once a year on an average. But never in better company than to-day. It seemed to me that half the riding-men of the Hunt went in or down. No, I shan’t tell you who. I am at liberty to hold myself up to ridicule when I choose—not these others, though they looked a very comical crew indeed, especially till several of the party had ridden back to Rugby, to reappear in dry clothes. Some of them even accepted two duckings—the huntsman certainly took two falls in leading us. Some two or three men, again, got clear over the first time, though per-

sonally I was far too busy at the moment to observe who they were.

Carr had hunted his fox from Cook's Gorse round the left of Upper Hilmorton, till he reached a complication of railway, canal, and brook beneath Lower Hilmorton. Crammed into a low water meadow, there was apparently



The occupants of the carriages enjoyed the funny spectacle

no way for him and the field to extricate themselves, except by jumping the brimming stream. *Hinc ille lachrymæ*—though the gallery (the occupants of a string of carriages drawn up not a hundred yards from the scene of action) received the exhibition with anything but a decent show of commiseration. On the contrary, they wore a broad grin for the whole rest of the day, it seemed to me, or, at least, whatever may answer for a broad grin

upon fair young countenances. "Bless their pretty faces," as the Immortal One would have put it from his standpoint of fatherly licence, "they will never get such a chance again!" So who shall grudge them the funny spectacle, or their delighted mirth?

After extrication—a matter of time in some individual instances—the "merry chase," as we are prone to call it, went on by the brookside towards the Rugby Steeplechase Course. Soon it recrossed the water, and soon ensued the second, and very similar, scene of the watery play. The survivors galloped a mile to the right, then a mile back to the left, and a few minutes later their fox was lost near Mr. Muntz's spinney by the steeplechase course. Well, it was a warm, sunny day, so wet garments mattered little. And, had it not been for the wire-netting (unfortunately left up round the new gorse at Bunker's Hill), we might have had a drying gallop from that honoured covert. A fine, bright fox could not get clear of hounds.

I had not room in my Tipperary letter for them, so must crave permission to append here these two instances of instinctive love of hunting, such as may have been found to exist in England, but is hardly likely to have been thus exemplified anywhere but in Ireland. One day last week a field of horsemen, in the full heat of chase, came dashing along a road, overtaking a farmer on his way to plough. He was riding one horse and leading another. The led horse broke away in the turmoil, turned out with the first riders over a big dyke and bank, and went clattering on, with the chains dangling noisily. "If that's the way of it," shouted the farmer, "devil a bit of ploughing will I do to-day!" And out of the road he turned too, the three of them going the whole run to the finish!

The second occurred some little while back in the same district. My informant (an unimpeachable authority) was making his way to a meet, when he overtook a countryman walking beside his cart and a heavy load of coals. "Where might the meet be, yer honour?" asked the man. At Ashbourne, he was told. "At Ashbourne, is it? That's where I'm going. And will the dogs be there? Sure, I've not been to a meet these many years.

Will I be in time?" He was in time. And, what is more, he took his horse out of the cart, emptied one of the sacks of its coal, tied it on in lieu of a saddle, rode the whole run through, jumping everything as it came, and sold his horse next day for sixty-five pounds!

But then in Ireland they never use what we call "cart-horses."

The following Tuesday's gallop with the North Warwickshire must be written before I go to bed, else how shall I, with a clear conscience, hunt with the Pytchley to-morrow at Swinford?

Tuesday, you remember, was a sudden lapse from February into June. The meet was Hilmorton; and sport belongs to the Rugby side this year. We began by riding a fast few minutes from Hilmorton Gorse—an old, happy line across the Rugby Steeplechase Course. If my pen were untrammelled by considerations private and personal, what a tale I could unfold, even with such a matter-of-fact, prosaic implement as mine! Why, sir, I laughed till I grew weary; and laughed the more because I laughed at some who, but a week ago, had their merry-humoured laugh at me and my good company. The Hilmorton Brook was below high-water mark to-day, but it was swimming-deep, they tell me. "And, oh," said he, "if you could but have seen the big fellow swimming with only half his cap above water, you'd—you'd have died." And the next moment he nearly did die, flicking over a stake-and-bound before his horse, catching the latter as he landed after him, and pursuing his career as fast as he could to escape the storm of chaff flung in pursuit. A merry crew indeed this sunny morning. And what a long hunt it was about Clifton, and Lilbourne, and Catthorpe, and Swinford nearly to Shawell Wood; very little scent, and much worthy perseverance of huntsman and of hounds. Permit me one more sentence in summary, embodying a day's career, a volume of experience. Hot debate, heated argument upon a tropical subject overnight, till the light went out upon Westminster's clock-tower. A few hours' sleep, a two hours' journey, an hour's hunting, a cooler in one's own brook,

a change of kit in one's own dressing-room, another hour's hunting, another change, back to Westminster—first man at the latch-end of the division-gate to-night. Who shall say that our legislators do not deserve well of their country?

But, alas! that he missed the gallop of which I shall tell.

It began at Cawston Spinnies, and most of us began wrong, having to circle the coverts to get to hounds upon an area of wet plough. Yet it worked out well for them and for us. (I attempt no more classical form of description while the midnight cigar lights the recent past and illuminates the near to-morrow. And oh, Mr. Printer, while I think of it, that was *your* Latin, not mine, that decorated my last letter from the Grass Countries. I accept your hint, diabolical as it was. You shall have nothing but crude, unadorned English in future.)

These Dunsmoor fields were all fresh ploughed, and long ago were deeply ditched. As we rode them, close upon hounds—lo! there was a little red fox scuttling the hedgeside a hundred yards before them, a new comer, probably. And which they ran I can't tell you, for the two lines joined, and the pack pressed on by the left of Bilton Grange. "Of all abominations and sources of discomfort," some enterprising man advertises; give you a tall hat, say I. And as self-respect rebels against riding without one—why, get off and be ridden over, and serve you undeniably right! So much by parenthesis.

Hounds dashed over the wet tillage in the cool of the evening ('twas nearly four o'clock when they had found), and soon, taking a happy line wholly unusual, they were "full speed ahead" upon the grassy vale of the Dunchurch Brook. Perfect ground they picked, as we should choose it who find delight in a flying country—fair timber, fair stake-and-bounds, fair turf, and hounds a bit ahead. Hope we shall find the brook amiable! But it wasn't. A heavy thorn bullfinch fringed its margin, and we skirted a full field, while one drove headlong into its dark embrace. It will do here! And it did, though it yawned black beneath a double veil of thorns.

In the bog-grazing pastures of Willoughby hounds lingered a moment (a curious catch in the scent, such as hindered them more than once when apparently in fullest drive), and, with watches telling twenty minutes, such men as Captain Mackeson, Captain Lamb, Messrs. J. and C. Adamthwaite, Murland, Graham, together with, I may be permitted to add, Mrs. Byass, drew rein, while a little multitude rode up from the right *viz* the Bilton ford. Some hard-driving couples caught the line forward almost immediately, carried it to the canal bank, and the pack took the towing-path to the Barby Bridge. Another brief, charming ride ensued over what I may term the Hilmorton Point-to-Point Course; hounds ran their fox into view in the road leading into Hilmorton village, and fairly doubled him up in the brickyard, worrying him in the deep pond or clayhole by the roadside. Forty-five minutes from the find: a pretty hunt and a typical ride.

As a feat of horsemanship I look back to nothing in the day equal to Mr. John Adamthwaite's example at almost the final fence—to wit, popping over a fair brook to land on three feet width of bank, thence to clear four feet in height of strong binders. Any man can *follow*, but it takes a master hand to lead in a crisis of this kind.

CHAPTER XXX

STORM AND TEMPEST

Wednesday, February 15, 1893.—Looking back on the week, I am as one who has come through a storm at sea. I can tell you there *has* been a storm, and that is all. Blown about, beaten, and buffeted, consciousness had remained, and even appreciation (for amusement was to be found in the tempest, and sport in an occasional calm). As a scribbler I plead for indulgence. Tell me, has there been any evening during the week past when (accustomed night by night to do duty to your daily paper) after hunting you could, with comfort to yourself, tackle the overnight debates? You gave them up, you know, and you almost

wished (for this and every reason) that happy autumn were back, when the perusal of "to-day's *Times*" was a needless, unprofitable task, and when nothing more serious engrossed attention than plans for the morrow and prattle upon past and future. Recent evenings have found you genial, perhaps, till ten, heavy-eyed till bed-time, but fresh as a daisy, doubtless, at saddle-hour next morning. So, forgive my diary's dulness, and grant me, another week, rather a specimen day than a storm-tossed series.

I begin with Friday, the cruellest day of all, when the Pytchley were at West Haddon, and all West Haddon at Watford Gorse. Capital fellows these shoemakers. They love a hunt, and they mean to see it—or at all events the fox—if possible. They don't bring many dogs with them; they work hard on another day or two during the week; and who shall grudge them their fortnightly outing with foxhounds? They are down upon barbed wire too, and threaten to cut every bit in the neighbourhood. They say leather won't stand it, either raw hide or tanned apron.

I think that on Friday they were more under control than any other factor of the chase. For ourselves, we were ungovernable. The hurricane made fools of us all. It confused the foxes, drove hounds off their noses, and us on the top of them. Horses were unmanageable: so were hats, so were habits, so were gates, so were tempers. Men blew each other up: women were in two instances blown completely over. I remember nothing like it before or since the great gale of October 9—some ten years ago, wasn't it, Tom Firr?

How can I give you example of the wild, distracting influence of this tempestuous day better than in the following instance? If there is one pack in the United Kingdom that can claim to be free from riot it is the Pytchley. The wild deer of their woodlands have no charm for them; and they will hunt their way unruffled through an army of "old hares" (all hares, as you know, are "old hares" in the language of huntsmen and country folk). It so happened that one of our dressiest men had so far surrendered himself to the hurricane as at the last

moment to crown his otherwise unimpeachable get-up with a humble black billycock. The *tout ensemble* was unusual, but on this occasion not absolutely singular. On the contrary, were there not even soldiers of some distinction—from general officers to second lieutenants of gunners—similarly accoutred, while wise men of all grades had committed themselves to the keeping of rough-weather suits of ungainly fashion? But the storm-demon that buffeted and bullied all alike, young and old, fair and uncomely, was for the day in supreme command, and seized greedily upon this incongruous subject as a fit and profitable plaything. It tore the headpiece from our fashionable friend, and sent it rolling among hounds at the moment when the huntsman was galloping them to the line of a fox just gone. The first few couple started aside as the black object bounded into their midst, the body of the pack leaned for an instant towards the bounding and apparently inanimate intruder. But a few of the “young and the jealous” went for it open-mouthed, pursued it over half an acre, and finally Baronet, recognising sympathy of colour, ran clean into the uncanny thing in the open, his sole excuse when rounded up by the first whip being couched in the fact that he, Baronet, having been walked by the butcher of Daventry and run by his hatless boys, had never made acquaintance with a billycock, still less with one endued with powers of leaping and going.

This morning there had been also a special from Oxford. I wot that in the results of the day these younger Nimrods found “full value”—to use a comparatively recent and, to my mind, admirably expressive phrase of the *carpe diem* school, a school in which, by the same token, most of us have long been enrolled.

But of the sport—how came it about? Firstly, then, with a fox from the gorse above mentioned, over the green hilltop on which stands a certain windmill (or its lifeless trunk, for our cheap loaf is of steam-ground wheat nowadays, and windmills have, like the sandwich-men of the London streets, only casual employment as objects to direct the eye). Their fox ran close past the mournful edifice, only a field or so before hounds. But, after the

first few warming minutes, hounds could never press him, and before twenty-five were ticked off they had lost him. As a matter of fact, since the calm, sport-giving weather of a week ago broke up, scent has been of a shifty, uncertain nature, and so, I suppose, it will continue till the weather again settles. A wild barometer is more deadly to sport than even a wild field. (I hesitate to allow I have ever seen or made part of the latter production in the well-drilled Shires, though I am bound to confess to having been on more than one occasion within earshot when denunciation was being launched, such as surely could never have been called forth by any lesser infliction.)

CHAPTER XXXI

THE HUNTSMAN'S MONTH

FEBRUARY, "the huntsman's month," as a Master of Hounds who has himself proved it with two or three of the best months on record reminded me very recently—a wet, open February is always replete with sport. The present one has been doing its duty honourably. From the point of view of the huntsman, I fancy it will hardly have been deemed a "killing" month. But it has given what most of us want, viz. sport on most days, and exercise on all. If the ground is wet, horses are fit—fitter now, probably, than at any other time of the year. The country is at its easiest to ride over; for not only can you spot in a moment the weakest place in every fence, but a blown horse can shatter a top-binder now that would turn him on to his saddle in November. With the ground in its present deep state, there has been, I assure you, no lack of opportunity of making proof of this theory; nor, as far as I could see, has there been any lack of willing experimentalists.

The Pytchley on Saturday held their annual meet at Weedon Barracks, the recognised school of instruction for officers aiming at proficiency in riding to hounds. Three years ago, you may remember, the meet was

followed by an extraordinarily long and straight run, from Knightley Wood into Warwickshire. To-day Lord Spencer, snatching his infrequent holiday from official work, had intended to draw the same neutral coverts, but was induced to alter his programme, and give us Braunston Gorse, the choicest standpoint upon Pytchley ground. We found a Shuckburgh fox, too; and after him rode across that lovely panorama of green country, of which it has been my privilege so often to rave. The slower the journey, the shorter the comment. Had the little trip—to nearest points, the Dover and Calais, as as it were, of Northamptonshire and Warwickshire—been done in fifteen minutes, I might have inflicted a volume upon you, and perhaps have supplemented it with another had we gone on to forty-five and a kill. We did it in twenty, with a catchy scent—two hundred people and “all on.” You will understand, then, this was a pleasant little jaunt over beautiful country. But it was not one of Braunston's best. And from Braunston we have learned to look for such great things that we could not but appraise the present product as being scarcely up to sample. Besides, had we not to-day attained, all of us, the right side of the brook? Our fox, in most exemplary fashion, took us across by means of the old canal dam. Arrived at Shuckburgh, he went to ground beneath the road.

The season has life enough left to allow of our seeing that beautiful thicket of privet and thorn drawn once or twice yet, before the curtain shall drop to hide it and its surroundings for the summer. I am interrupted, and reminded that I am filling in my diary when I ought not to be thus at work. The bleating of lambs comes in through the open window, and the cawing of rooks “pierces the fearful hollow of mine ear.” Could there be ruder, more untimely break? We are only in February! And the two finest runs it has been my luck to see with the Pytchley were in March.

Wednesday, February 22, as we fully expected, from a barometer clinging to Stormy and a forecast laden with threats, was as ill-conditioned a day as ever put love of fox-

hunting to the test. Yet, in spite of rain and hail and snow—as pleaded by Will's (Shakespeare, if you please, not by no means our Whitecollar Will's) dissuasive spouse, in the best of his hunting songs—the Pytchley meet at North Kilworth came off in fair strength, and, what seemed wondrous on such a morning, was even well illuminated with scarlet and lightened with white. It was indeed a day, I would plead, on which all duty as to uniform—save and except, of course, on the part of those excellent and waterproof men, the hunt servants—might well be remitted. Given such remission, one starts fair. Equipped in apron, covert coat, and billycock, one may face the bleakest weather as fearlessly as a batsman protected by two pads of cork and two gloves of indiarubber can stand up against bowling that, without these assistants, would sweep him from the field. The difficulty is to know at dressing-time what one may expect during the day. You should be guided, I have long been told, by the verdict of the weather-glass, the weathercock, and the thermometer. If the day's forecast is available in time, so much the better. This is admirable in theory, difficult in practice. You need thus a complete Home Observatory. Besides, you are not always at home. Of the fallibility of even home arrangements, take my own instance this morning. Secure of the other above-named indicators, I found myself short of an out-door thermometer. So yesterday I sent for one, and hung it to a northern aspect, with orders that I was to be informed at shaving-time as to its reading. "Well," I asked, as I hesitated between warm weather cords and heavy leathers, "what does the new glass say? Hot or cold?" "Can't quite read it," said my conscientious domestic, "but here it is; I brought it in the first thing this morning, and it's been in the kitchen ever since."

A few scattered snowflakes gave me all further answer I wanted, and I kept my knees dry, my body warm, and head unhampered through a rough yet very sporting day. But I felt sore and selfish when I saw scores of more worthy men, who had obviously bought themselves no thermometer, and who could afford a chill wetting no

more than I, braving it out, pale and shivering, in unprotected pink and breeches bedrenched. Yes, and women too; no, a million pardons, I mean they were braver than we, and quite as wet, quite as cold and miserable, in habits unprotected, and with tempers apparently unruffled. Certainly, in some instances they had intangible veils with which in some degree to shield their faces against the darting sleet that at times drove and irritated us all well-nigh to madness. I pretend not to gauge the feelings of others by my own sensations. But now and again, as my eyes smarted and my vision was gone, as my horse turned from the storm, and the next fence was (to give my printer a fair turn) like a line of my own manuscript that I have smudged and rewritten at score, I felt that I would have given the world to loose off ill humour somewhere, anywhere. Impossible in such company, where give-much-and-take-all-that-is-necessary is the implicit and genial rule of observance, neglected not even on such a day of trial as this.

Even a Pytchley field rode in subdued form this morning. They left Kilworth Sticks with none of the uncontrolled vehemence that here so frequently threatens, occasionally overwhelms, hounds. They could not see the fences, and accordingly hounds were permitted to get comfortably through them first.

But I will not detain you long as to Wednesday morning. Goodall soon found he was hunting a vixen, and let her go. Later in the day his work began in earnest from one of the Misterton Spinnies, and continued, after a sharp beginning, very steadily over a wide range of ground that comprised the parishes of Swinford, Stanford, Catthorpe, and Shawell, a change of foxes (I imagine at Misterton Gorse) at last robbing him of blood nearly earned. There were no very leading features in this well-worked chase of an hour and a half's duration, beyond the weather that I have described, the occasional depth of ground, and the number of rabbit-holes altogether indescribable. These were the drawbacks. Pleasure was to be found in a great deal of exceedingly pretty hunting, and in the survey of the better ground, which, after all, largely predominated.

I fancy that the most difficult, yet successful, effort on the part of the huntsman must have been the keeping of noses down with his own pack, upon his fox's line that encircled almost the kennel walls of the Catthorpe Beagles, the inmates, of course, tonguing loudly, almost madly, the while.

Then I remember the terrifying spectacle of a runaway horse, bearing upon his back a white bundle, of which, despite the cries that issued from it, one could not make out whether it was man, woman, or child. It was actually the last-named, a curly-haired urchin of about a dozen summers, who had been dressed up in cockade and mackintosh and dubbed a covert lad. Hat and cockade were gone; their departure may probably have set the horse off. But the white mackintosh floated in the wind, and the boy lay on one side of the horse, with a leg round the latter's neck, while the whole time he was crying out, by no means from fear, but intent upon checking if possible the steed confided to him. Arrived at the bottom of the pasture down which he was careering, the horse fortunately overshot the gateway, pulled up with a jerk in the corner, and shot the white bundle of humanity in among the hedge thorns. I happened to be nearest to him as the boy jumped to his feet. Absolutely unruffled of countenance, he showed less signs of fear than you may see a dozen times a day upon unwilling faces opposed to an obnoxious fence. To the inquiry "Are you hurt?" he brought his hand promptly to his forelock, and replied as politely as if he were declining an offer of more pudding, "No, sir; thank you, sir," then proceeded to remount as if nothing had happened. Truly that boy has good mettle and good training in him, and ought to be entered forthwith in a good Hunt Kennel.

But the best of Wednesday was found in the afternoon scurry from the Hemplow. By the time we arrived at the foot of these time-honoured hills not a member of the field but wore a cold, blue look, as if *in extremis* as to temperature and circulation. The Laurels were drawn blank, but hope pointed with every show of reason to the sheltered gorse and wooded glade beneath the southern

slope. Blank the gorse, and blank the countenances of many of the remainder field. Several members, indeed, turned homeward at this period, and thus lost their last chance of a warming. A good fox had already stolen away ; the pack struck his line as they drew up the glen ; and soon hounds were out with their heads towards Lord Spencer's covert, about a mile distant. Progress thither, across some three or four big pastures, was at cantering pace. Arrived at the covert, Goodall took hounds rapidly in hand, and galloped round. A hedge-cutter put him right, in the Elkington Bottom ; and immediately the little ladies were away at railway speed. They kept on the left of the broken watercourse till they had divided its stream into two headlets, both of them awkward jumps as they came in the way. They then swung to the right over the steep grass pitches, and made a half-circle to Winwick Warren. Pace and ground were alike severe, and hounds had their full share of law as they raced to the gorse. Lord Southampton, who had been quickest over the early difficulties, was well nearest to them till the black mare came down a burster. Goodall was of course at hand to cheer his flying pack, and thus stepped into his lordship's shoes ; while Mr. Gordon Cunard and young Mr. Underwood held a forward place on the right. Methinks I could hear, from my rearguard position, more than one ox-rail crack loudly to a half-blown horse—nay, I could hear even the huntsman's cheery laugh as the amateur carpenter struggled back each time from neck to saddle, while he himself took advantage of the new-made doorway. Some eighteen minutes stretched the girths of every horse ; and it was not much more than twenty in all when the game was ended. I thought we were in for the run of the year. A stout fox had gone on at once into the flowing plains of Yelvertoft. But it seemed as if all the sheep and cattle of Winwick had mustered in one field across our path. They smeared out every trace of the line ; and a most promising run ended abruptly, but thus warmly. So much for the Pytchley.

On Monday, February 20, I bade my factotum rummage out what he elects to call my "old blue sparrer-

tail with the Q. H. buttons," and betook me for a holiday. For once I filled the rôle of a bird of good omen—for did I not drop in for the merriest gallop that the Quorn have scored since Christmas? For me it only remains to express gratitude for a thorough treat, and to go to bed wishing that a slashing scent, a bold fox, a superb country, a sufficient horse, and the huntsman I toast in a nightly bumper, were one's everyday portion. Ah me! How then would one ever contemplate with content the crossing of any more final Styx than the amenable Smite?¹

CHAPTER XXXII

A GREAT WEEK

MONDAY, February 27, 1893, was not only a charming hunting day, but was rich in sport. Probably the second event of that day will take rank with anything in the Grafton record, of the season now waning. In a chase that lasted two hours, hounds ran hard and hunted hard for quite an hour and a half. I am puzzled to define the extreme points of a run that was within three miles of completing its circle. But from Everdon Hill to the spot where hounds made their nearest approach to Gayton is not less than seven miles and a half.

The Knightley Wood run of the Grafton I suppose they will denominate this. Had it been straight, it would have been by no means unlike that of the Pytchley of three years before. As it was, the continued bend allowed many more people to get to the end than if hounds had kept their heads straight. I speak feelingly; for most certainly I could never, with the ground in its present awful state, have brought a fat four-year-old as far as Grubb's Copse, had the line been ruled out to its full length. A smooth, hard road was, in some cases, of invaluable assistance during the final mile or two; while from the standpoint of its sound surface you might see horses walking faintly or standing riderless in every field between Ascott Thorns

¹ *I*vide "Quorn Season, 1892-93," p 280.

and Grubb's Copse—a panorama in life and colouring of "A Good Thing in a Pewy Country" (you know the old Alken print).

The Grafton had begun the morning with some twenty and odd minutes of racing round the Fawsley domain, proving that at least there was a scent upon the grass. A rime frost, you may remember, had caught the ground that morning; while on Sunday, as you will scarcely have forgotten, rain had deluged the country, till now horses sank deeper into plough and into grass than perhaps during any recent winter. Now I will briefly sketch the line. Found in the handy little wood known as Knightley's Wood; and at about 12.30 left it to run to Mantel's Heath, a similar wood adjoining. Thence nearly to Fawsley Park, round Everdon village; some frittering about the Everdon Brook, and a short turn to Everdon Stubbs and the brow leading to Stowe Wood. From Stowe Wood the run may be said to have really begun. From here they started in hard earnest, southward, direct to Pattishall House; past it and its covert, over the grassy hills to Eastcote village; thence in a wide curl nearly to Gayton village, right-handed still under Ascott Thorns to Grubb's Copse—all hunting and quick running, an easy country, at times very deep. Beyond Grubb's Copse a long check.

At this moment of writing appears at home my second horseman, like Agag, walking delicately. I had not seen him all day—nor my luncheon, an item we consider gravely in these parts. In similar case I know were many other expectant pursuers, possibly riding, till they could ride no more, their "young one for a gentle airing." I could not blame him. How could I? though he be kept for that special purpose. He tells me he had clung to the inside turn. But he had made a rare day of it. He saw them recover the line at Foxley, while I was standing in excellent company beside my panting beast at Grubb's Copse. With them, and with men blessed with more *apropos* squireens, he had seen hounds hunt on through Maidford, back to Mantel's Heath, and Heaven knows where, till finally they gave up the chase near Blakesley,

having been running, I imagine, between three and four hours. On this latter part I am open to correction. So is my informant, and he has had it, as far as I had the heart and conscience to bestow it, in exchange for a beaten horse and a gloomy ride home, while hounds were still running and the day was yet bright. Nevertheless I look back with no regret upon a fine run and a pleasant country, hoping only that I may tire another horse tomorrow, with the belted varlet more efficient or fortunate.

The following list will give not only a considerable portion of the field of the day, but also a fair idea of who saw more or less of the Grafton run of Monday: The Master and Mrs. Pennant, Sir Thomas and Lady Hesketh, Major and Mrs. Blackburne, Major and Mrs. Allfrey, Mr. and Mrs. Byass, Mr. and Mrs. Church, Rev. and Miss Evans, Mr. and Mrs. Peareth, Mr. and Mrs. Simpson, Mr. and Miss Whitehouse, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton, Mrs. Blacklock, Miss Burchett, Miss Alderson, Miss Follett, Lord Cork, Lord Euston, Lord Alfred FitzRoy, Lord Dungarvan, Sir William Humphrey, Captains Riddell and Mackeson, Messrs. Orr Ewing, Grant Ives, Morland, C. Knightley, Adamthwaite, Burton, G. Campbell, F. Thornton, Grazebrook, and the officers of Weedon Garrison.

THE NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

Tuesday, the last day of February.—Never, surely, was a find welcomed with more glad and involuntary acclamation than at Leicester's Piece this afternoon. The "view holloa" found echo in a general hurrah—not loud, but joyously earnest. The previous Tuesday, as some of you may have in mind, had worked out that rather rare and doleful experience, a *blank day*. On this Tuesday the watch had reached 2.10, when all fear of such unhappy recurrence was thus effectually dispersed. The old simile of a torrent bursting its banks conveys only inadequately such outpouring of pent enthusiasm. And of course there was a scent, on this cool, brisk afternoon, and upon such turf as surrounds this favoured covert—our last hope, by the way, previous to the woodlands and their deep monotony.

Hensborough Hill, if I have its name rightly, was topped with foot-people : but a bold fox had apparently run through them. (How little we realise the "muck" that a determined fox has to run!) Have you ever watched one threading his way through a country swarming with noisy enemies, all bent on making their presence known to him, and all seeking to drive him from his path? That he can ever make his point at all is no less marvellous than the knack of the Pytchley lady pack to cut through a murderous rush of horsemen. Hensborough Hill is a green pinnacle commanding the country round ; and upon it, directly the news spreads that hounds are about, cluster all the sport-loving foot-folk of the neighbourhood. To-day they had hardly realised the draw soon enough ; for in many instances they had reached no nearer than the adjoining rise of Toft, a hamlet at the back of Dunchurch. Here, however, they had a dog, and caused a check—a check not long enough, however, for the recovery of our only cap, whose wearer accordingly led on with head un-helmed, every grey hair a testimony to a good run seen. For during these sixteen minutes we were at chase-pace upon a delicious country, striving hard to eke out of present occasion all deficiency on the part of the previous Tuesday. And, during those stirring minutes, we had not only encountered a brook (the same one, surely, now I think of it, that earlier in the season tied up a very similar giant), but had also made acquaintance with a fashion of fence that very much obtains in the Midlands towards early spring. This, to describe it briefly and practically, is but an old hedge made new. Its tall, straggling growers have just been plashed and laid, and a brand-new top-binder has been bent along the top, while all the *débris* of thorn has been cast into the ditch, to some extent obliterating the latter from view. Altogether its appearance is not entirely unlike that of a cropped and smartened patient in the barber's chair, his neckhole (forgive Midland provincialism in the hurry of writing) not having yet been blown clear by the barber's Æolian breath. At any rate, not only is the unbreakable binder very apparent in its newness and strength, but the ditch is very vague, and, having probably

been just cleaned out, also very deep. Now, I think we dislike this combination, when hounds are going at top speed, almost as heartily as a large section of the steeplechase world hate the Open Ditch, over which there has been so much controversy and so many broken collar-bones. Give us time for a pull, and for that skilful hand-



The open ditch

ling which we all believe ourselves to have acquired, we may lift a good-couraged horse with tolerable security—always supposing that we don't employ that judicious "lift" at the wrong moment, and thereby plant him inconsequently into the thorny ditch towards him. But going fast at these spring products is simply a venture—the toss of a coin. Believe me, I have seen more imperial

punishment dealt out by these hardy annuals than by any other honest development of the Grass Countries.

Well, we had a happy little ride to Cawston after the flying ladies, who afterwards toned down upon a moderating scent while they threaded the railway side towards Long Lawford — some pretty hunting and pretty country. Twice did Carr recover his fox's line very cleverly, before he passed Holbrook Grange and was held on by holloas across a very network of railways. I have always thought that Rugby had a never-ending stream of trains passing in and out during every hour of the twenty-four. This afternoon, by some marvel the stream seemed checked at this particular period ; or those quick, dapper ladies might have been, like the Royal Irish, decimated ten times over.

The confines of Rugby still remain grass, whose occupiers desire nothing better than to see a good hole or two knocked in their fences, as some of us, I noticed afterwards, obligingly and effectually did. My story contains little more, under the head of Tuesday, beyond that with their fox, possibly a fresh one, in view in Bilton Grange, they ran again into Cawston Spinnies, where I left them at the end of an hour and a half. I hear they hunted round and beyond for a further thirty minutes or so, before giving up.

THE PYTCHLEY

Wednesday Morning, 7 a.m.—Rain and tempest beating against the window-panes. "What's the good of calling me on a morning like this? Go away!" "Please, sir, what about the horse-box?" The query, and a cup of tea, brought the slothful one to his senses, among them being that of shame that he should even have dreamed of surrendering a day's hunting. "Very well, stop one horse, and bring me my oldest of old clothes." And at eleven o'clock we were at Lilbourne, with the rainclouds scudding away overhead, the air soft and warm, and about half an ordinary field trooping up in such vestments as each member considered he could best afford to spoil. There was probably more mud flying about on Wednesday than

ever was known in March, this being the first day of a month usually associated with dust and hard ground. Perhaps (forgive my ignorance if the speculation be a wild one) this may be the turn of March hares rather than of kings' ransoms. I am no politician, so I give it up.

This I can tell you, viz. that the killing of that fox from Crick Gorse was a wonderful and truly creditable performance on the part of Goodall and the Pytchley little pack. A hunt of two hours and forty minutes, of which we rode perhaps those forty with keen pleasure, and watched the rest with gradually intensified interest and admiration. We went over so much ground that I am fain to glance at my map for instruction. I find we ran a point of *nine miles and a half*, counting Hilmorton Gorse and Tallyho Covert as the extremes ; and, furthermore, it is on this occasion safe to affirm that one and the same fox took us the whole distance. How do we know ? Because he bore a peculiar and meagre brush, more like a spike than a flag ; and he himself, like many a long-running fox, was mean and indifferent to look upon.

We had the usual rush from Crick Gorse to that of Hilmorton, a mile or so away across the flat, wet pastures ; then a ten minutes' wait while the little traveller tried to shake himself clear. He got away at last, and took us hotly towards Kilsby, the natural consequence being that any visitor who was out (I may venture to instance Lord Fingal) would see more barbed wire than we might otherwise have been able to show them in a month. Once clear of this, there was better country to cross in the Watford direction : and the first serious check ensued close to West Haddon. Hunting on, hounds worked nearer their fox at Winwick Warren ; but he was still on, and they picked his line out, sometimes with difficulty, sometimes with greater vigour, past the covert of Firetail and the villages of Cold Ashby and Naseby, till they ran right up to him at Tallyho and pinned him directly they entered the covert.

The previous week had wound up icily, yet not without warming sport and varied incident. I find the days entered thus :—

Friday, February 24.—The Pytchley at Brockhall. First fox ran as if he did not know his country, and hounds knocked him over in two-and-twenty minutes. With a flying start and a rare scent, they twisted him around the neighbourhood of Brockhall, coursed him up the street of Weedon village, and ran into him within the Barracks, *i.e.* at the stables by the Officers' Quarters.

Nobottle Wood is the sort of place many men enter only with the idea of spending there the rest of the day. But Nobottle to-day had a straight and ready fox; and he took them through Harleston Heath to Sanders' Gorse—yes, through Harleston Heath, that scentless expanse of fir and bracken, from which it is next to impossible to drive a fox against his inclination. To reach the Heath, the "big dogs" (as we have been taught to term them) fairly flew across well-gated pastures, not unlike those of Brigstock Parks, the interval-ground between the main coverts of the Pytchley Woodlands. Beyond the Heath, slow hunting and indifferent ground, till our fox reached the gorse, and probably crept underground. Indeed, good scent and poor country marked Friday throughout.

The final items were curious. One of the Althorp foxes, that have harboured in the Park well-nigh a twelve-month and that Goodall knows individually almost by name, declined to be hunted beyond his lordship's kitchen garden. Accordingly the huntsman drew off the pack, and the company dispersed to their various homes. I was doing the same, but by chance lingered a minute or two at the stud-farm stables to inspect the stallion Fabius. Proceeding on my way, I had scarcely lit the home-ward cigar, when a scream burst on my astonished ear. "Forrard! Forrard! Yei-kuic-kuic!" and Goodall thundered down upon me in the village of Harlestone, having one member of the field with him in pink, one in black, and picking up as he went some half-dozen of the Northampton contingent. As he left the gardens, it seems, he had been called to another fox that had climbed the Park wall. "Running?" I gasped. "Yes, running like mad." And so they did, for a while; then hunted on for nearly an hour, round by Harpole Hill, Nobottle Wood, Great

Brington, Brington Clump, and half-way to East Haddon, before their fox beat them. We turned home again then, thinking ourselves great sportsmen, I can tell you.

THE BICESTER

Saturday, February 25.—Chipping Warden. A good gallop and an enjoyable hunt, with a wide-running fox from Johnson's Bushes, a patch of gorse near the wood of Red Hill. Draining operations were going on all round, and men were even digging within twenty yards of the find. Over the hill to the vicinity of Byfield railway station, under the line and over the brook by means of cart-road and bridge—a regular trap. Beyond was a small paddock with double post-and-rails and some ditch. To get to his hounds, Lord Chesham accepted the most trying fence I have seen jumped this winter. The rest of us found a place much smaller; and eventually, of course, the right man came to render it more amenable still. After leaving Hinton Gorse to the right, hounds going a fair pace, we found ourselves by degrees in far better country. Griffin's Gorse remained three fields to the left; hounds then bore away from Charwelton village, and ran hard and well into the Pytchley country. This was the nicest part of the run—pace good and country A1. Soon we mounted on the prominent highland of Sharman's Hill; and anon we were galloping the wide acres of Fawsley—Fawsley Rectory being probably the furthest point (some five miles). Hitherto the chase had gone almost directly up the cold wind. As they turned down it, scent seemed to fail; and somewhere after the first good half-hour they undoubtedly changed foxes. Truly, a sharp, good pack will Lord Chesham leave behind him.

Among those whom I may fairly take to have been enjoying this pleasant run was Mr. Barry, Master of the Duhallow. It may have been out of compliment to him that our fox enforced a greater number of what I may call Irish fences (*i.e.* banks, doubles, and complications) than we often ride over in a fortnight. I believe, too, I am right in supposing that Lord Londonderry found in the gallop a holiday after his own heart.

Since the above was entered in my log, I learn that Lord Chesham finished the day right well—with forty minutes and a kill. He found his fox on Warden Hill; hounds dusted him to Red Hill, and back straight to Thenford without a check, pulling him down in the gardens of Thenford House.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND A GREAT GALLOP

It can't be done, believe me! It can't be done!! If this torrent of sport continues to flow on, you may send me down at once six new horses and a shorthand writer (if the latter be a light-weight, and can be trusted to ride second horse occasionally, so much the better). But mortal man—even with a horse in every stall allowed him by his landlord—cannot keep pace with the daily exaction of wide points, killing bursts, and a country hock-deep. We have scarcely known a bad scenting-day this season. Last week alone gave us three immense long runs, the Grafton Monday, the Pytchley Wednesday already told, and the Pytchley Friday yet to be entered, the last-named having a better point even than either of the others, viz. eleven miles, as I measure it roughly from Kelmarsh to Hallaton. Yes, Friday and Saturday, March 3 and 4, of the Pytchley deserve a historian of their own, and him without any of the toil of another half-week on his hands. I forbear to claim such indulgence; and you must put up with me while I skim the subject as if it were all light going, as if my heels were untrammelled, and as if I had a right to take my task thus easily.

I begin with Saturday. Why? Because it was short, vigorous, decisive, and exciting, because it brought colour to the cheek and light to the eye of every man and woman who had taken part, and because after it there was laughter in every voice and jest on every lip. I might be shy of admitting preference for Saturday's thrilling gallop as against the "good old-fashioned" chases of those three previous days (far be it from me to undervalue them, or

the week's sport as a whole. I have seen nothing like it since Mr. Coupland's final season with the Quorn). I might with every reason dread the impeachment that experience ought by this time to have taught me how far more solid and edifying is a good hunting run with a point—"not too fast, you know"—had I not been fortified, first, by having heard the delightful encomium of our Master upon the gallop in question, and second, by the happy ejaculation of our huntsman, "*That's the pace foxhounds should run*"—both these authorities having seen more runs and more gallops than have fallen to the lot of your humble servant.

Only twenty-five minutes from Braunston Gorse to ground on Shuckburgh Hill. Now you may, perhaps, throw your paper on one side, or turn the page for something better. Yet it was good enough, I tell you, to get to the bottom of every horse (but one) in a great, good field, well fitted to do justice to Shuckburgh Vale. Why, if corroboration of power of pace backed by deep ground were needed, have not seventeen minutes with the Belvoir from Coston Covert to Woodwell Head more than once in our time completely blown the best horses in Melton? Add to the pace and the ground—the latter hilly at first, then deep, level turf accentuated by chopping ridge-and-furrow—a close June-like day and a blazing sun, and you will follow me as I trace the development, to wit, every horse faltering, many of them barely walking, at the foot of Shuckburgh Hill.

Braunston Gorse was the mast to which the Pytchley had nailed their colours for the day. Trifles of covert had been drawn, but hope centred in Braunston Gorse, and hope to-day told no "flattering tale." In fact it even discounted its promise by pointing to a nor'-westerly wind and bidding us turn our eyes away from the fair hillbound prospect, on which I have descanted so often, so involuntarily, and so gladly. Three times this season have we gone westward from Braunston Gorse—each time possibly with the same fox, each time with the same destination in view, but always starting differently. To-day we began towards Daventry—the "wrong side," they all exclaimed, as they hustled, iron knee in velvet overall, through bridle-

gate and cart-gate (four necessary outlets in succession) to cut hounds flying the dale leftward. I now follow the fray by means of tableaux as they recur to mind, marking occasion, hindrance, and progress. No. 1. Lord Spencer, Messrs. Goodman, Newbold, and Adamthwaite, with John Isaacs, tearing down the slope for Drayton Spinnies, and landing almost abreast over the strong



A shepherd waving his hat

fenced drop into a bridle-road. (It seems to me that half the fences of the three counties have now the power of jogging my memory as I pass with reminiscence of some merry incident or some trifling *contretemps*. Was there not one of the field to-day, who, some few years ago, made this, his first fence in Northamptonshire, his own by virtue of carrying a rood of it into the next pasture and there rolling upon it till he and his horse

between them had given the bridle-path almost a faggot paving?) Then a shepherd on the steep hilltop waving his hat, while the little ladies screamed by him in mad endorsement. Another dip, another rise; then Tableau II. Lord Southampton, John, and two others sweeping abreast over the Staverton Bottom—a vague, hedge-covered watercourse—while to their right Mr. C. Beatty made the way plain, with Miss Fenwick at his heels. Miss Czarnikov's chestnut dropped short and fell back with apparently a broken back. (It was not so, I am glad to add, though the horse was sadly lamed.) Hounds were up the next hill faster than horsemen, and at the little double fence half-way Mr. Weatherby's old favourite dropped from heart disease. (How could a hunter of twenty seasons die better?) No. III. Hounds swinging to the right across the lane forming the Staverton and Braunston bridle-road, Mr. Graham and Mr. C. Adamthwaite, and Lord Southampton, keeping well up the slope with them, the two former jumping into the lane, all three issuing by a gate. And these three, avoiding the crowd of the lane, and thus well placed to swoop into the vale below (the vale across which the House of Commons' Point-to-Point was run two years ago), had all the best of the chief minutes of this tremendous race after hounds. Mr. Murland, clear on the right, at the same time made excellent use of the lower ground. On the other hand, if you turned into the lane a moment too soon, there were fifty, it may have been a hundred, people blocking the line; and for three fields it was follow-my-leader where a leader was, I had nearly written, *hateful* (as he or she took time to jump and wanted time for a possible fall). There are only two men, in my knowledge, who can extricate themselves with certainty at such a juncture. These are the Quorn huntsman and the Pytchley huntsman of the present, and, please God, many a future day. How they do it I know not—else would I gladly take a lesson and strive thankfully to imitate—unless it be that, while one of them has the most marvellous knack of galloping between his fences and of marking a new outlet for him-

self, the other has the power of correcting any temporary mistake of his own and turning to advantage any wrong turn on the part of others, with a lightning instinct I have never seen equalled.

It was clear galloping — level-racing conveys the struggle better—across the rain-soaked meadows of the brookside. How the dark thorn fences crackled as the competitors swept over them! You gave us a treat to-day, Mr. Bromwich. “A treat,” he said afterwards; “it was a treat to see them cross my land like that!” Thank you, thank you, Mr. Bromwich, say all of us, for your jolly sentiment. And two of those who cracked it quickest also farm land in the neighbourhood, one of them above mentioned.

Tableau IV. shows the gate opening into the Shuckburgh and Staverton main road, the same three leaders coming up to it abreast and with much the same following, viz. those with whose names I have already made free. With them were also at least three or four other ladies. Whoever you be who may honour, not the scribbler but his subject, sufficiently to follow me through, do not, I pray you, set any false estimate on our gallops or on the calibre of our country, because some ladies here ride as prominently and helpfully as the men. There are ladies nowadays who can do it, whatever the pace and whatever the fences, with two stone weight and a safety-skirt in their favour.

Fifteen minutes to this point (you reached it, some of you, in twelve by another route on the first occasion). By the way, on Saturday we just missed the brook. I could have wished we hadn't; for at that pace, and thus settled to work, I cannot believe the essay would have been costly to many of us. And the Braunston Brook is to us in the light of what a Chinaman calls *Joss-pigeon*—worshipped and attractive ever, if ugly in itself and betimes malignant.

The blazing scent that had brought hounds thither at steeplechase speed over turf did not fail them on the road. They carried it without a falter down the latter, turning into the fields by the brookside with all the same dash,

every single hound striving to the head. Captain Lamb and one or two others left the road before the brook, and immediately afterwards had to try their luck over it. The rest bridged the stream; then, to the number of a score or so, took the new plashed fence from macadam to pasture. But in one sense it was a bad quarter of an hour that they had been through. Strong ridge-and-furrow and two wide double ditches were now a strong order for horses that had already run a four-mile course. Lord Southampton's four-year-old collapsed incontinently; Mr. Adamthwaite's brown came down a buster; Mr. Charles Beatty's mount only recovered himself by spitting out his bit and retaining but the snaffle to lean upon. Mr. Murland found himself in a wired corner immediately after jumping the same little brook. Mrs. Dalgleish's chestnut, that had carried her so prominently, shook his head, or at least his tail, sadly; and John Isaacs' brown came back to a trot. So did Mrs. Byass' young horse, and so did Captain Askwith's old one. Mr. Graham's racing mare, Destiny, alone went on gaily; with Mrs. Graham, on her white-faced, equally well-bred mare, nearest to him, till hounds entered the wood by Shuckburgh House, and when hers too cried "Enough," as Goodall trotted up by aid of spur and dint of cheer.

In five minutes more, as they stood on the summit and prayed for a gasp ere going further, hounds pulled up, baying over the main earth. Such a picture of hot and happy distress as now displayed on Shuckburgh Hill was surely never put upon canvas yet.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SADNESS IN SUNSHINE

IF there be sadness in sunshine, it is to be found by the fox-hunter on those early spring days which tell him how surely and how soon he must change his life, put aside his main happiness, and seek other occupation. Saturday last might have been one of those days—perhaps was.

until sport came forward to knock all sadness out of mind, and to make the present appreciable all the more that its pleasures were unexpected. For the yesterday, Friday, had been dull—yes, actually dull—except, perhaps, as viewed by the huntsman, who would seem always to be happy, undaunted, and hopeful, however stubborn the fates, however difficult the prospect. I am speaking of the Pytchley, who were all day quite out of luck and without a scent, and most of the day among wood or plough besides—Nobottle Wood, Harleston Heath, and the neighbourhood of the Northampton Lunatic Asylum, to wit. The Grafton did rather better in their Brackley district, and killed their fox.

It is in no discontented mood, though, that men and women of the Grass Countries are preparing to accept the inevitable. The one comment is upon the lips of all. "A *good* season," they protest with emphasis—a season they have enjoyed heartily, and that has gone all too quickly. Thus will they go into summer, loving fox-hunting as much as ever.

The season, of course, is not yet over ; we may see a great run or two, and share some bright gallops still. But the day-to-day conditions of continual sport would seem to have passed away ; and had we power to invoke a change, we could hardly, bound as we are by friendship and obligation to the good fellows who farm the land, wish things otherwise. At this moment of writing (Saturday evening, March 11) the state of both weather and ground is, I suppose, as good as they could desire. On the other hand, the grass is still capital going, and moist enough for scent ; and, allowing that the fallows are dry and scentless, we cannot hurt the wheat.

Saturday was no record-day, but was by no means uneventful. The Bicester were joined at Lower Boddington by a field of much the same calibre—though, owing to the Grand Military and other attractions, hardly of the same proportions—as usual in their upper Northamptonshire district. At any rate there was room to jump and to ride, and to watch hounds upon the good ground that a Boddington fox soon chose for them. For, choice of

ground—ever an important factor in our enjoyment of the Grass Countries—is of particular importance when once the dust begins to rise from the arable, of which even here we cannot aspire to be wholly free. It is not merely that hounds cannot often run when the dust-clouds are driving; but there is something so incongruous in the existence of the latter, that in their presence we feel out of place and out of season—as if, in fact, we ought not to be hunting the fox at all. On this occasion we soon left the dry acres, by Boddington village, which were being busily prepared for corn (that, alas! can never pay for growing); and found ourselves among the pleasant meadows of Priors Marston. At this time of year, it seems to me, there is a very gluttony in the appetite of hunting-men (*riding-men*, if you think the term more appropriate, in connection with a Northamptonshire field. I decline to accept the correction as being by any means absolute)—of riding-men for strong fences that would have set most of them meditating only a month or so ago. They never lose a chance now, any more than a confirmed drinker ever turns from a proffered glass. And over the upstanding barriers of this tempting country they rode abreast—each, apparently, endeavouring to better his neighbour. There was something of the same sort yesterday, though with only a quarter of the opportunity; and this on the part, not so much of professional thrusters as of, more or less, amateur aspirants, if I may be forgiven for so putting it. Half the Pytchley field, it happened, had already arrived in a grass meadow: the other half had not, but now proceeded to get there—out of some village allotment-grounds separated by ordinary hedge and ditch. So, scorning gap or gate, they charged the fence in line. The result, if alarming at the moment, was ludicrous enough when completed in safety. They went down *six in a row*, tumbling in among their comrades so rapidly that the latter could scarcely give them scope to roll. A slight rise in the further bank of the “dyke” (as the hedgecutter of our English shires calls it, identically with the definition in vogue in Ireland) caught each horse by the toes, sending him and his rider turning

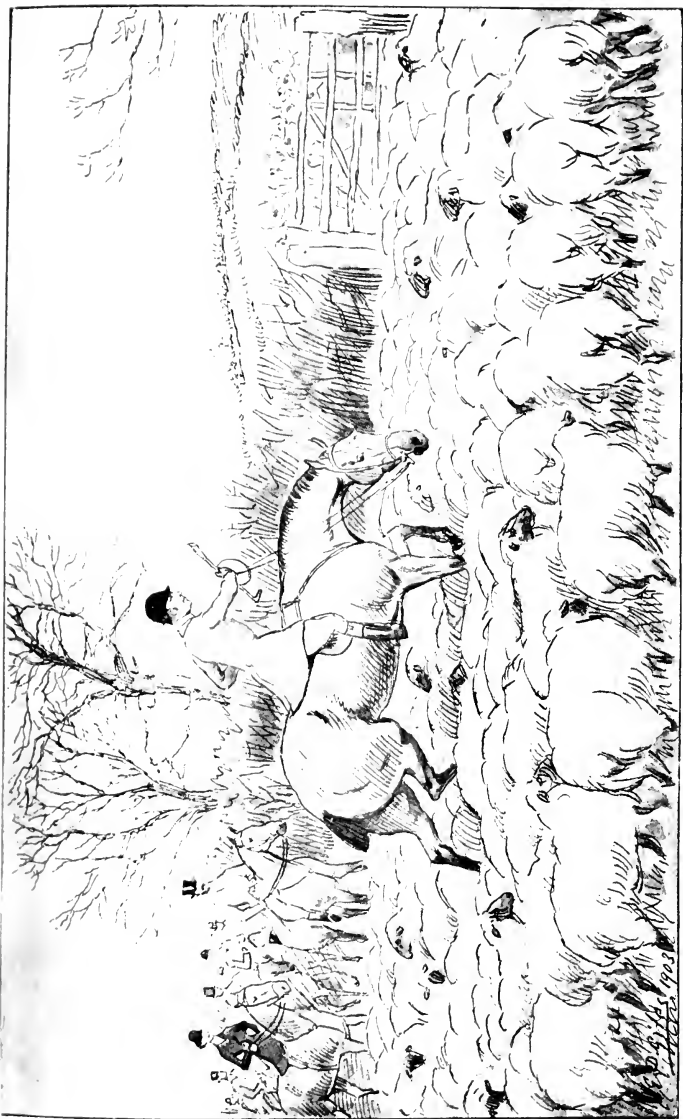
cart-wheels over the green ridge-and-furrow. The first to arrive in this alarming fashion was one whose well-matured appearance seemed almost to give contradiction to the agility he displayed. He not only spun his wheels faster than his horse, but, these completed, he was up in a trice, and, flinging his arms round the neck of his prone steed, proceeded to wrestle with him as if to pin him, in proper ring fashion, both shoulders to the ground. Some few yards from him, a curious competition was being enacted. Two young farmers from adjoining parishes raced for precedence, a closely-fought finish resulting in a head victory on the part of the last to rise at the jump. Both went down the field with their horses rolling after them. But he who leaped last not only leaped farthest, but, having concluded his double somersault, remained stationary upon his head, heels erect in air, until his competitor rose up confessedly beaten. The winner then righted himself with a final kick, drew his head out of his waistcoat pocket, and mounted his horse with an air of well-proven superiority — while heartless men laughed, after the manner of schoolboys. Such trifles are sent, and received, with wicked welcome, on a dull day, such as noted for Friday.

Of Saturday I have yet to add that the Boddington Gorse fox was lost near Hellidon: and that with a grey fellow, outlying on a fallow, there was running and riding for a dozen¹ minutes again on Priors Marston parish, to ground.

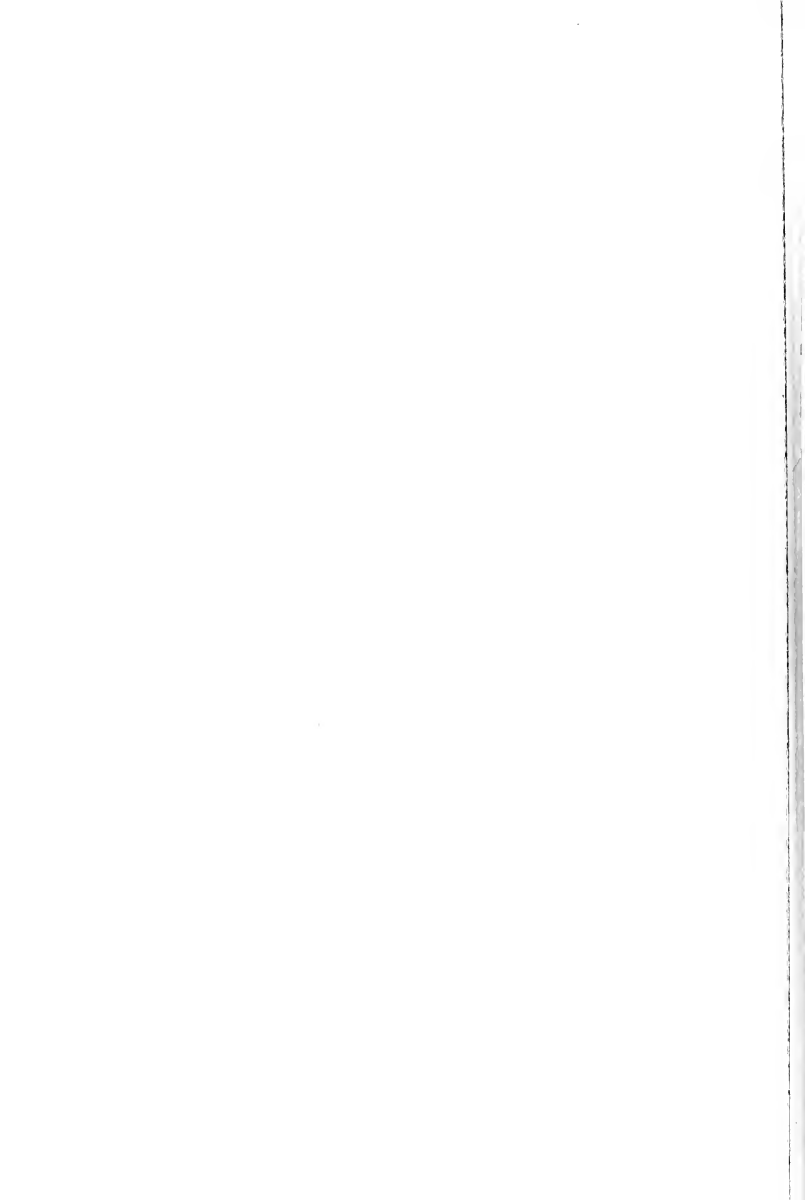
Thursday, March 16.—Contrary to my fortune generally during this winter, I find that the week past has in some slight measure been punishing me for want of ubiquity in the service of my readers. That is to say, instead of luck taking me with the right pack, it has twice sent me with the wrong, though on both occasions I was quartering my ground widely, and working it fairly according to prospect and precedent. Thus, though the Bicester treated us in no niggardly fashion on Saturday, I should dearly like to have seen the Pytchley killing their Kelmarsh fox—him that they hunted far beyond Harboro' the week before. On this occasion they were able to

press him at starting ; had him blown by the time he reached Waterloo (some twenty-five minutes to the gorse, I fancy), then hunted him to death round by Arthingworth and Braybrooke. The feature of the latter part of the run must have been the performance of Pansy (sister to Paradox, if I can speak without referring to book), who, separated from her comrades by a hill and clump of trees to windward, brought the line on alone for several minutes.

Then, again, on Monday last, when the Pytchley, after rambling for some hours on dusty upland, came to Sanders' Gorse, their fox persisted in bringing them back to Harleston Heath—a district of which we had enjoyed a surfeit only three days before. The generally excellent plan of drawing up the whole field at a gate some hundreds of yards from the covert chanced on this occasion to favour the fox too well. I do not believe you can ever force a fox exactly in a direction you want him, in opposition to his own wishes, though you may possibly divert his course in some degree at starting. However, this one only too gladly availed himself of facilities ; ignored the green vista that should have tempted him north to Cottesbrook, and, after a career of no great interest, across three miles of country, gained the Heath but not safety. Goodall drove him out, from amid half-a-dozen other foxes, and killed him in Chapel Brampton village. There was no more of interest during the day, unless in wanton idleness you could indulge in a laugh at the quaint position in which our very practical huntsman found himself, when desirous of making a forward cast. Indeed his hounds were already through the gate he was obliged to open, when up dashed a flock of sheep, took him as their shepherd, or as their rallying-point, and from some strange freak of their own proceeded to gyrate round his horse in a solid circle. The performance lasted so long, the flock rotating round him at a pace that should have dazed him, that his field had time to assemble in force ; and soon the air rang with irrepressible laughter. The indignity of the position forced itself, then, so keenly upon the chief actor that, with a hot blush surmounting even a complexion hardened by a quarter-century of



THE SHEEP PROCEEDED TO GRAZE, ROUND HIS HORSE IN A SOLID CIRCLE.



weather and work, he fairly burst through the giddy ranks that penned him in. From what I could gather, it is still a matter of speculation among his Northampton friends as to whether this curious performance is not practised on non-hunting days, the arena being within half a mile of kennels. I cannot bring myself to entertain this supposition, relying rather, for a solution of this curious vagary, merely upon the fact that sheep are the silliest animals in existence, always excepting, as some would urge, our own species.

“You made a mistake yesterday!” men threw in my face on the morrow. I admit the fact ungrudgingly. The Grafton marked two by honours. They found a fox with a goodly scent, at Hinton Gorse, and he took them fast over a grass line, viz. the valley that runs to Maidford—*thirty minutes excellent*, they tell me (*they*, too, being men whose story is learned at the tail of the hounds, not whose estimate is dished up according to taste). Hounds and country were alike at their best during those minutes. Afterwards slow hunting by way of Seawell Wood, Braden, Lois Weedon, and, I believe, the great covert of Bucknells, with a change or two of foxes as they went. Or did they mark their first fox to ground in the gravel-pits at Braden, after hunting him an hour and a quarter?

To-day, Thursday, we all attended Rugby Steeplechases, not, as in years gone by, to see the soldiers ride (though, by the same token, the most finished piece of horsemanship of to-day was but a repetition of what we used then to see year after year at the same hands—those of Captain W. Hope Johnstone). Nor is it any longer a meeting at which our hunters may compete in mere hunting condition. Yet it is a merry little gathering, the course is perfect, and the view superb. There were no accidents, and, I believe, no objections. To-night we hope for the threatened rain.

I have purposely refrained from speaking of Wednesday until the end of a letter possibly more frivolous and discursive than usual. On Wednesday the news met us at the covert-side of the sad and sudden death of one of the

best-known members of our field. If it shocked and saddened us at the moment, it came home more vividly and with more intense regret afterwards, as one realised, not only the manner of death, but the mental agony that must have preceded it. Mr. Craven had endured also for weeks past not only acute physical pain from a crushed rib (the result of a fall with hounds when riding harder and with more apparent enjoyment than for years past), but with it that most trying and grievous of inflictions, *insomnia*. For all this he had kept up a brave face, and had driven almost daily to covert with a pleasant smile on his face. Who shall wonder that the strain broke him down? It is not for me to add further comment; but in expressing my feelings as an individual, I cannot but think I re-echo those of a large mass of people who, like myself, had enjoyed his intimate acquaintance for many years. Mr. Craven, while never effusive—nay, rather reticent than otherwise—was ever sincere and consistent. Neither his friendship nor his consideration varied from day to day. He seldom opened a conversation or approached a subject; but, I can earnestly assert, he invariably entered into the one with ready interest, and took up the other—when broached with a view to discussion and information—with an open, thoughtful mind. He either gave you a sound opinion, or held it over to another day, when I have often known him recur to a topic which had in the meantime engaged thought or even reference. Indeed, if one had been asked to point out a member of our hunting community possessed of an evenly-balanced, well-regulated mind, one would likely enough have singled out Mr. Craven. He took a wide and kindly interest in people and things, and had no taste for the small tittle-tattle that is daily food to so many of us.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ATHERSTONE

MARCH is hardly the month one should choose for an annual visit to a neighbouring county. Coton House,

however, happened to be fixed for the day following the Rugby Chases ; and so, dusty fallows and hardened surface notwithstanding, I gladly took advantage of a meet from which the Atherstone on their last occasion had scored a run with a point of some thirteen miles. I wish it could have been my good fortune to select that occasion. No, how could I, when my duty called elsewhere to the tail of hounds, or as near that happy position as it was in me to attain ?

A very rough day was this Friday of 1893. The black clouds gathered hourly, then burst in driving snow, and anon gave way to a blue sky, while half a hurricane retained throughout its hold upon a wintry scene. The stricken ground took no notice of the storm, beyond inhaling the snowflakes and withering rapidly to the blast. Not a comfortable day to be hunting, you will say. No, but how pitiless would such storms have sounded from within doors ! Lucky rather were we to be without. Weather, duly recognised before we set forth, is seldom so bad as the window-panes' chatter to those within.

A day wholly unlikely for sport, it is true. I know no worse augury when going to covert than a well-fed horse turning of his own will like an automaton, and offering his tail to the storm. I cannot remember a scent on a gust-broken day, though I believe scent to be entirely independent of steady rain, consistent gale, or baulking sunshine.

The Coton fox was a bold and ready traveller. Given but a scent, the Atherstone would have raided far into the Pytchley country. As it was, hounds made their way under difficulties past the right of Shawell church, across the Watling Street Road to Mr. Muntz's spinnies, on to the winning field of the previous day's chases (the green pasture rendered hideous by an empty grand stand and by race-course litter of every description). Here we were, with what the promoters of the race meeting fitly advertise as "the finest hunting country in England" spread at our feet. And more—a fox had gone over it ! The huntsman established this fact, but hounds could work upon it only for a couple of fields. Oh for a scent ! Then would we have had a blither contest, with Crick Covert as the

goal, than aught that was run forth yesterday to the popping of corks and the cry of the ring.

I may pass over the rest of this wild, rough day. I make bold, however, to remark that I was charmed with the Atherstone lady pack—fine, lengthy hounds all of them, but, more than that, exceedingly sharp and keen in their work, driving hard and spreading wide. Not an onlooker amongst them.

Having seen the bitches in the open on Friday, I went on Saturday to see the dogs hunt in the woodlands of Coombe. And in the woods I left them still running, while under the evening sun I sauntered by dusty road to Rugby. Such journey is wont to prompt anything but a cheerful vein of thought. A dry March is a weary penance. No other Lenten ascetic, layman or ecclesiast, is "in it" with the fox-hunter under such circumstances. And yet I write this with a brace of Belvoir Ash-Wednesday brushes figuring a broad smile above the mantelpiece! Not another word against March or its accident of condition. We have not done with it yet, nor with April in snug corners either. But men of moderate means cannot afford to throw another leap, by any possibility avoidable, until rain falls. With the Atherstone I gladly noticed that, as usual with this pack, though unfortunately of late years by no means usual elsewhere, a strong proportion of farmers had taken the field. From Mr. Berry Congreve, one of the finest horsemen of the past half-century, down to a cluster of young men on their first purchases, all looked workmanlike. But why do most of them ride such inefficient, undersized beasts that can never do them justice or pay for their corn? Here were a number of high-couraged, well-schooled horsemen bestriding animals that may do to ride round the farm, or even to spur over a jump at which a London visitor is craning helplessly on his 200-guinea conveyance. But these indifferent cobs have no more money value than their cost at last Rugby fair, say £20 for shepherding purposes. Another £5 would have bought a big, bony Irish three-year-old, which would have done the same work, done it better, given the young owner twice as much fun, and brought back £60

to £100 after a season's hunting. I am not, I regret to admit, an advocate of horse-breeding as a help to the farmer of moderate means in England. It is too risky, too lengthy, and too expensive a process for him to indulge in, while every energy is being strained to make both ends of his main occupation duly meet. He will assuredly develop either into one more exponent of the old adage (there is some truth in most old adages), "Two brood mares will ruin a farmer," or into the semi-professional horse-dealing farmer, a *rôle* sometimes successful and admirable, sometimes not. The ordinary young farmer, by nature and practice a horseman, may still get his hunting, if not profitably at least inexpensively, by buying a good colt of rough class, teaching him, and selling him at a fair profit to dealer or gentleman (the definition their own) as soon as he can; while in riding a scrambling pony he is merely helping to use up his capital.

Of my Atherstone experiences I have only to add that I saw Wilson hunting hounds with science and readiness on Friday, and with cheery quickness on Saturday—the latter characteristic no mean attribute amid heavy woodland.

I ought to append some names wherewith to decorate my meagre sketch of Atherstone ground; but when I have noted those of Mr. and Mrs. Oakeley (the former to all appearance enjoying his hunting quite as thoroughly as when he held the reins, before handing them over to Mr. Inge), their son and Miss Oakeley, Messrs. E. Pierrepont, H. Townshend, and Ralli, my memory fails me, and I must finish the paragraph with &c. For most of the others seemed to me to be those who, like myself, haunt a district rather than cling to a pack.

I conclude with a note previously penned, and by no means begotten of any particular day or pack. Spring hunting is, of course, occasion for a Master's determining which hounds he shall draft. There is probably (for this, I understand from every side, is an exceptionally good and healthy year for young hounds coming in) no lack, rather an embarrassment, of new material. Get rid of the old favourites, except if, and only if, they drive right at the head. Your "reliable old line hunters" are villainous

beasts, except from the fox's point of view. They save him, time after time. And you never discover the fact more plainly than when his line has to be carried through big covert. The driving hounds of one, two, and three seasons are carrying the trail ahead. The old rascals won't take their word for it; but, with their *bow-wow-wow*, check the van and drag back the chase, when every moment is of consequence and a fox is making the most of it. They are *not*; but they are busy asserting their own importance, and hindering the hunt. I have known it to my cost; and it "makes me squirm" (if plain pink Anglo-Saxon be permissible) to mark the feat and its result. Next to this, I hate and abhor a hound flinging his stern and not his tongue. Draft him too, no matter what his pedigree, his shape, or his other performance.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A HOT AND THIRSTY MARCH

WITH the ground hard and the sun hot, why did we go hunting on Friday and Saturday, March 24 and 25 of 1893? It might have been August for climate, while it was March, to intensity, for soil. It was hazardous to beast and expensive to man. More harm was imminent, more wear and tear unavoidable, in days such as these than in two months of fair working weather.

We went out because hounds gave us the excuse—to meet our friends, to discuss the past, to lament the present, and chatter of the future—not, in most instances, with any tangible hope of sport. "The game was played out, the season was over. Pleasant enough to be strolling about on horseback, instead of idling at home. Nobody but a fool would think of riding over a country in its present state," &c. &c. So they talked; and so, with the inconsistency that makes existence a merry-go-round, did they all—the men whose ordinary badge is a cool white collar—ride through the blazing heat, as if Pluto rather than Pythley claimed the initial on their button. Truth

to tell, most of them had wholly or partly doffed their uniform, and met the almost sulphurous air in accoutrement and headpiece more suited to an atmosphere that was hardly earthly. Fairer heads were topped with straw. Am I right, by the way, in saying that maidenhair was to the black god sacred? Let this be as it may, there was many a beaming countenance on Saturday that offered scant allegiance to the dismal deity after the episode of which I shall briefly tell.

The Pytchley, indeed, seldom adjourn for luncheon. They did on Saturday—to great and grateful advantage of horse and alike of rider. At whose good gift you may guess for yourselves, when I lay the occasion at Arthingworth. Oh, it *was* hot! But the bucket was ready and the bowl was cool. *Benedictus benedicat.* And there was a fox at Sunderland Wood. We thought he would only help us to finish the fresh-lit cigar, and that he would merely die under the heat, like the two fat foxes of yesterday (Sulby and Naseby, if I may note it now). But to-day's find was not to end in smoke, nor its fox in a worry. Briefly, we had twenty-five minutes, up the happy valley of Kelmarsh and yonder, that turned a hopeless prospect into hottest reality, swamped dawdling idleness in broiling action. By Kelmarsh Spinnies and Tallyho Covert to that of Naseby is a line of meadow-land (or rather, rich feeding-land, I fancy) high scenting, fair going, and frequent, that has been run many a time and oft, from Captain Thomson's reign of my earliest memory, and, for all I know, during centuries afore. Our fox of this afternoon twisted as he ran, blown and exhausted, no doubt, by pace and heat; and from most of the fields into which we jumped we rode out at right angles (unless, by-the-bye, that only exit happened already to be taken possession of by a factor of the hunt embedded to the girths). But we rode till every rein was white with soapsud and every flank was heaving—till, when a pause came for all but hounds and huntsman, we clustered as best we might under shade of hedge or hovel, to gasp for breathable air—and

“Oh for a pull at the bowl that was gone,
And a draught of the cup that was still!”

One of Dickens' men of the masses, was it not, who cooled his parched palate by "rinsing his mouth with fresh air"? Such was our method in our present strait, when this first check came—that little wee girl in the lane having perhaps turned our fox down its dusty length; and Goodall could hunt him no further than Naseby Covert, or its approximate vicinity.

Wednesday Night, March 29.—As a fox returns to his buried feast, as a pelican brings back and enjoys his food at his leisure, as a bovine chews the cud as he rests—so in the pleasant dead of night, when the house has no sound and the voice of interruption is at rest, is it the scribbler's privilege to unlock the cupboard of memory. Its door had probably closed with a snap, immediately its contents were stored. Till this moment, I confess to having borne in mind little but the outline of yesterday's doings, or of those of the day before, still less of a week past. No more, I wager, had *you*, after these hot, tiring days, and consequently heavy, wearied nights. You were aware you had been out and at work, and that you had been enjoying yourselves hugely. And you were exceedingly pleased this morning when assured that the horse of yesterday, instead of being now a ten-pound cripple, as by all laws of consequence and probability he should be, is still in possession of four capable legs. As for *remembering*, that faculty was swallowed in last night's soup; and now has to be exorcised afresh. This once achieved, all will be back with you by to-morrow's morn. And as you, sirs, stand, razor in hand, opposite those brown-red features, you will make, as it were, a clean sweep of recent events. One day out of the saddle will have brought you out fresher than ever, longing only that these good things could quickly come over again. And you, fair ladies, as you sit to be brushed, opposite a reflection far more agreeable to look upon (sunshine and its effects nathless) than our rugged, world-riven features, do not you, too, think more, dream more of the pleasant side of life (of hunting, if you like) at toilet-hour than at any other? It is so with us, I assure you, save and excepting only at this chance still hour of midnight, of which I have been speaking.

Thus Monday, with its quiet repetitive, and Tuesday with its quick action and wide distance, are clear at this moment as any recent noonday after morning haze. It would be difficult to say which day was the hotter, or on which day the ground was more extravagantly dangerous to stable and pocket. We try various theories, with which to extenuate the costly recklessness that brings us into the hunting field under present circumstances. One asserts, with fair show of reason, that hard ground does not seriously affect young, sound horses. It may not. But it certainly will tend to make them old before their time, while, if a good young one should break down, the loss is much more serious than in the case of an old horse already nearly worn out. Another argues that, whereas old horses are apt to hit and hurt themselves in deep ground, they go with comparative safety on the surface, however hard it may be. As to this, I can only say that the old horses are now in the habit of making a terrible noise about it as they land over a fence. They protest with a moan, that varies in its depth and volume only in proportion to their soundness of wind or otherwise. (Could such a test be applied in Messrs. Tattersall's yard, how much trouble would it save the members of the R.C.V.S., and how much poking in the ribs to their luckless subjects!) For my part, I am inclined in theory to lean to the old horse. You then know the most your day's hunting can cost you; and if, like the rest of us, you have not self-restraint enough to stop at home when conditions are so unfit, at least you will not be called upon, as it were, to pay for a coat before you have worn it. But beware of the open gaps, trodden and baked to rock. They are more risky and painful, by far, than any fair fence with turf for a landing-stage.

But to chronicle events is my business. The Grafton on Monday met at Preston Capes; and, after a somewhat disappointing start, made out the afternoon with a hunt that must have lasted nearly three hours—the whole of it, I am prepared to believe, with one and the same fox. You will understand by this that the pace was never severe, though they ran nicely enough at times upon the grass.

On the plough hounds could do nothing for themselves, and had simply to trust to the huntsman's discretion. The line was in the main the same that they have run repeatedly this season, and frequently, I suppose, for many seasons past, viz. forward and back among the little chains of woods from Seawell to Stowe—its interest varying always according to speed and divergence of route. On Monday they found their fox at Preston Wood, ran by Knightley Wood to Seawell and back, thence to Everdon Stubbs and Stowe Wood, a double twist round these, and finally a break forth by Lower Weedon nearly to Dodford Holt. The first hour was pleasantest and prettiest. On both occasions of their fox leaving Stowe Wood he crept out apparently beaten. But the upland arable helped him before the pack could reach him ; and he made his brush safe by about 6.30. I don't think I can make more story of this, and sincerely do I trust there were no toes down next morning.

The same day, as I learn, the Woodland Pytchley, running into the heart of the mother country, and thus keeping almost entirely upon good green turf, scored an excellent fifty minutes, very probably with the same fox that Goodall had driven into the woods on the Saturday previous. From Brampton Wood Mr. Mackenzie, with his good dog pack, brought him back by way of Braybrooke village, as if for Loatland Wood ; then, if I have it rightly (leaving Arthingworth on the left) by Clipston Station and Oxenden village. From here they ran harder than ever over a strong good line towards Kelmars, their fox reaching the open earths at Langborough, near Kelmars Station, only just in front of hounds. This must have been a charming run. It was witnessed only by a few, but among those few Lord Downe, Mr. T. Jameson, and other appreciative members of the Pytchley proper.

On Tuesday (not Wednesday this time—for was not the morrow to be the occasion of a full dress parade of the Hunt servants upon Northampton Racecourse ?) the Pytchley came to Swinford ; and, though the sun blazed no less fiercely, while the weathercock turned its beak faintly to the south, they still kept the sport up to sample, and

treated us to a long, good run with a ten-mile point, Stanford Hall to Copston Gorse or thereabouts—beyond Newnham Paddox—in the Atherstone country, will mark the distance.

I pass over the earlier hunt of the day, when a fox from Shawell Wood was lost near Swinford—as he has



A miniature steeplechase course

been lost two or three times before, without any clue discovered as to which of the thousand-and-one rabbit-holes of the neighbourhood he appropriates to himself.

The main business of the day began at The Wilderness, Stanford Park, and began pretty inerrily, through the medium of the grass fields to Shawell Wood. Then the huntsman had to step forward to bring hounds over the ploughs nearly to Catthorpe. Again on the grass as they

turned rightward from Catthorpe, hounds sped happily to Shawell ; and, rounding the church, made a half-circle of the village, and, now running sharply, now picking their way slowly, went onward to Cotesbach. It was during the journey from Catthorpe to Cotesbach that men first found themselves constrained to ignore all considerations of ground and legs, and to make their way as best they could. But oh, how the bare turf rattled here and there above Shawell village ! And one or two of the fences were so obdurately wide that, ride carefully as you would, horses had to stretch themselves to clear the further ditch.

To me (if I may be forgiven for intruding my personality for one moment) this ride round my native village constituted an experience teeming with interest. Here we galloped across the " Bushey Close," over whose bunches of gorse I had a miniature steeplechase course for my Shetland pony. Here, opening for us the gate into the road, was " Ben " Letts, who has many a time been seen with the Pytchley on a good horse, and over whose farm and fences I had the privilege of riding since boyhood. Here, pointing out the path of our fox, " so done he could 'a caught him himself," was Henry Cockerell, eagerly welcoming the hunt over his " bit o' land " ; and here was the village cripple, who never misses a meet to which his crutches can carry him. You have, all of you, home sympathies ; and, believe me and pardon me, none cling with a stronger instinct to their native soil than they who were born in a hunting country.

But, beat as he was said to be, our fox crept on to Cotesbach village ; and while Goodall was endeavouring to pick him up in its outskirts (in fact, he seemed almost to have him in hand), up jumped another, right in front of hounds. Ought I to say " another " ? It is always—not here, but with s'mother pack—" the same fox, I'll swear." But this white-tagged fellow was so fresh and so fleet, and went away so gaily, that I for one cannot consent in this instance to sacrifice my conscience. He was over the Cotesbach grazing-grounds and down to the river Swift in no time—and you might, if you pleased, jump one little

brook only to be stopped by the main stream, and have to jump back again. The pack travelled fast while we galloped the Watling Street, by Bentsford Bridge, to catch them hovering on a wheatfield. Goodall had them forward, by help of a view on the part of Alfred (he and John both doing good service in front during this difficult spring day); so that hounds entered the covert of Twelve-acres before their fox left it. Immediately, however, they went on; and soon, by the side of Coalpit Lane and its plantation, up *he* jumped again, in view. The same one? Well, he had the same white tag. But he was very strong; and though headed and turned after half a mile down the road, he had no intention whatever of giving himself up to hounds. They hunted him through the gardens of Newnham House, but could do little more. So the run—a thoroughly good hunting-run of fully two hours—was brought to a close, and hounds went home by train from Rugby.

CHAPTER XXXVII

LOITERERS

I AM at a difficulty in writing of Saturday, April 1, 1893, my last day of the season with the Grafton—a day when those who care nothing for hunting the fox were lounging at length or perhaps cricketing even, on the warm, dry turf, thanking God for a pleasant Eastertide. Nor had *we* any occasion for grumble—loitering on horseback and in merry company through a spring day, where woods were budding, where the thorn was flowering and the grass rides were yet as velvet. But, to tell of Saturday as a day with a crack pack—the Grafton lady pack of all others—of a truth it is beyond me! There were, if I am not mistaken, some few strangers out. One there was I can aver, and he from Essex, where at all events they don't head their accounts "Grass Countries" as we do before taking our readers often as not among woods and plough. By good chance he has thrown his diary in my way; and

with his leave or without it (for I have really nothing to offer in its place) I extract the following :—

“Heard a good deal overnight about the Grafton country from Bobby Boss—old schoolfellow, who was to give me a mount next day. Says the grey’s a nailer, but makes a bit of a noise, ‘doesn’t stop him.’ Hope the Grafton don’t *always* run forty minutes over the grass without a check. A four-mile Point-to-Point I don’t mind ; but that’s all over in about a dozen minutes. How am I to find my way to covert if Bobby can’t come too ? ‘Simplest thing in the world,’ he says, ‘bridle-road quite straight, can’t possibly miss it. See, I’ll put it down on paper for you.’ And Bobby pencilled a line more or less straight upon a sheet of paper, ornamented the sides of his line, or bridle-road, with a few names, and drew various other lines across it which he said I was *not* to follow. ‘What’s the good of putting them there, then ?’ I protested. ‘Never mind,’ retorted Bobby hotly. ‘You follow your nose and you’ll get to Scotfield Green in good time.’ So I did, I am bound to confess, but not by following my nose. Had it not been for ‘the man with a beard’—who picked me up near Blisworth, told me I was steering for Banbury, and then led me through more gates than we open in a month in Essex—I might be wandering about the Duke of Grafton’s property still. Bridle-road indeed ! Never again will I be beguiled off the ‘hard-high’ in a strange country. For a mile or two before we found ourselves at the meet we were in a rich forest—very civilised and well tended as to rides and glades, it is true—but a forest that they tell me stretches more or less uninterruptedly across Northamptonshire into the heart of Lincolnshire. Whittlewood, or, more commonly, Whittlebury, is the name of this portion, his Grace’s mansion and park of Wakefield (the one under the humble denomination of Lodge, the other that of Lawn) situated in the midst thereof—very picturesque, very sylvan, and, I imagine, exceedingly adapted to spring and autumn hunting of the fox. That the supply is kept up with this view was soon demonstrated. Foxes several times crossed the rides a couple together. One was a grey—they spoke of him as

a 'white' fox. He was grey and striped as a hyena, and he fairly laughed at hounds to-day, as he is said to have done for two or three years past. Made April fools of them, in fact. His appearance suggested, or, to be honest, my description of him suggested to Bobby (who is a bit of a bookworm, you know, and who invariably says something rude when I ask him 'What can a man want with books while his horses are sound and the weather's open?') that this mottled Reynard was indeed masquerading as 'proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim.' But was it not curious that though, as they told me, the Grafton Hounds have been running hard almost daily of late amid dust and glare and southerly wind, yet to-day, with the glass rising rapidly and the wind in the north, for the first time there was no scent at all? Give it up. And on a matter of scent never ask another."

"And the Grafton bitches, of which I had heard so much. What of them? Well, they *are* very beautiful. But I wish I had come on some quiet day, and seen them in kennel, with my pocket full of biscuit. To-day, as long as I saw them (which was till about five o'clock) they found it absolutely impossible to follow a fox when once he was out of their sight. They tried hard enough, till they realised there was no hope. Even then they made an effort whenever a huntsman asked them, or a whipper-in screamed in a ride. One old lady, it is true—and one who is said to have helped to kill many a fox—finding it was no go, and that there was no whipcord within tasting distance, quietly joined the luncheon-eaters about two o'clock; and, after begging a bite here and a morsel there, turned every sandwich-paper over for stray crumbs. As for the field, they were compelled to lounge about in a single wide ride, exactly as if they were taking their morning exercise in the Row; and they even looked just about as well primed with energy and desire for action as the white-faced community we are accustomed to see there in July (in much worse clothes, by-the-bye, as now affected, than at any covert-side, even in Essex). If I have never been with the Grafton before, I have at least been on Exmoor while the field (on horse and wheels, and

foot, as indeed here) awaited at Cloutsham the breaking-covert of the first stag in August. And I don't think that even on Exmoor it was much hotter, or much more like fox-hunting! To make the parallel fit still more closely, here, too, was a deer bounding across a glade, with two tufters at his heels." (Mark you, reader, this is all in inverted commas. Am I not forewarned by the sad plight of my most esteemed collaborateur? Rusticus, dear Rusticus, why did you? Indeed, indeed I hardly dare laugh, though my very ribs are thumping against my waistcoat for room. Oh, surely you have read, many and many a time, of Dotheboy's Hall and the Master's fate? Who are the boys? Therein you'll find the "holy text shall teach the rustic moralist to die.")

Having extracted thus far from the stolen diary, I need add little or nothing, beyond thanking my kind acquaintance for the loan thus taken, and the difficulty from which he thus extricated me. He adds, I find, that he went back to Essex, having seen at least six foxes running before hounds, and, in order to see this, having never moved a mile! He thinks that the Grass Countries are a fraud, and that it is much cheaper and quite as satisfactory to hunt in Essex, the Puckeridge country, with its home rule and its quaint perils alone excepted. I will note down for him what he cannot, a few names of those who adorned this curiously listless day: Lord Penrhyn, Mr. and Mrs. E. Douglas-Pennant, Mr. Robarts, Captain and Mrs. Oliver, Major and Mrs. Gould, Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote, Mrs. Atkinson, Mr. and Mrs. Ryan, Miss Milne, Lord Euston, Lord Alfred FitzRoy, Mr. Selby Lowndes, Major Ellis, Messrs. H. Gosling, Wilder, Whitton, Bentley, &c. &c.

P. S.—I think you will agree with me as to who are the most regrettable sufferers of all from this premature collapse of hunting in many parts of England, viz. the schoolboys. One's heart fairly bleeds for them, when one recalls the concentrated bliss that a single day's hunting used to represent at that age, and when one bears in mind that, besides being robbed at Eastertide, they fared little better during their Christmas holidays, frost and

snow usurping the greater part. Now we, their unemployed elders, have had "a capital time," as English winters go. Our term of discipline and denial lasted only about a month and a half, after which we were free to hunt every day; and scarcely a week of our long vacation but has been replete with fun and teeming with sport. One of the best sporting seasons of our time, it is safe to affirm. Not one week can I, at all events, recall in which hounds—most packs of hounds in the Midlands—could not run hard and show sport. Even yet, unless a water famine is to set in, it may be open to us—some of us—elsewhere to snatch a few more days' hunting, and so eke out a season that would fain close before its time.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN COUNTY TIPPERARY

I HAD hoped to have gathered crumbs of sport on various floors, eking out my season and extending my experiences, throughout the month of April. What prospect is left me by this abnormal drought and summer heat, it is at the moment of writing hard to say. Suffice to say that I got as far as Tipperary, and that I consider myself fortunate indeed in having been assisted to prolong my career at all events another week. Thus it is that I am still in a position to flourish my pen in your kindly faces. Bear with it, and with me, while I tell briefly of Tipperary as I found it in this hardened spring.

I arrived in time to witness the Hunt Point-to-Point Races at Donoughmore—a lovely arena for such a scene, though on the present occasion marred in some degree by the state of the ground, that narrowed the number of competitors, and drove the riders as far as possible to gallop wide for gaps and cattle-refts. For the spectator the winning-field was an admirable standpoint whence to see the races, and to look over a country which *cateris paribus* (here to be translated, broad banks in place of flying fences) may well be likened to that beneath the

Rugby Steeplechase Course. And I saw Mr. Burke ride past the judge, a winner for the fourth year in succession of the Red Coat Welter (this time with the old mare Vanity). The Light Weight contest, having at least three "race-horses" among its entries, was run at racing pace; especially, if I may venture to add, on the part of one of the leading members of the Hunt, who went off at a tangent, and at such speed that he soon disappeared from view of his anxious friends. And, as a matter of fact, it was only when, like a hunted stag, his runaway steed came round exhausted, to soil in the river Moyle, that his safety was assured to sympathising comrades. A very pretty contest was this. It only remains to add that, after a field of nine or ten had kept well together throughout, the gallopers came through at the finish, and the race was easily won by Mr. Dobbin's Lady Golightly.

A great day for the countryside is a meeting of this sort in Ireland. If to you, as it did to me, it would constitute a new experience, go and see for yourselves. It is altogether beyond my powers of description, equally as it would be a vain attempt to reproduce the running commentary of my ragged companion on the first high bank. He, too, had chosen this point of vantage; and, with a liberality betokening nature's gentleman, had lent me the tail of his coat that I might hoist myself after. It came off in my hands; but this he did not mind a little bit. It rather established a mutual understanding; and throughout the race his glib comments, directed chiefly upon riders (by Christian name mostly) rather than upon horses, were of invaluable service towards appreciation of the struggle. How could I essay to convey the smartness and repartee of the dark-eyed ladies tempting me to buy oranges at their swarthy hands? Exhausted by importunity, I urged I hadn't a copper left. "Faith, it's silver I'll take, yer honour!" And silver she got, in the shape of my last lucky sixpence. "God bless ye! ye've helped a poor widow," was gratitude enough for all obligation, methought, till a rival beauty chimed in. "A widder, yer 'anner! she's only a grass-widder, and that since morning. Sure I'm the same, and I'll drink yer 'anner's health, too!"

And, the while, hospitality went round and the cup was kept flowing, under the glare of sunshine and in the haze of such heat as should belong rather to harvest-time. Each race commenced as per agreement to suit general convenience. Competitors were weighed in under military supervision, and weighed out under ditto. The judge was not on the card; so, not unnaturally, he was forgotten. Well, the stakes were honour and glory, so the first arrival took the honour, and took off his hat in acknowledgment; the second snatched glory on the post. Thus, the definite result of one race remains in abeyance till another year; and all parties are satisfied—a happy state of things that often obtains in peaceful Ireland, where sport and good-fellowship are the ruling motives. I will dart ahead and give you an example in point, lest I forget it when I reach the date. On Saturday, when the Tipperary were at Gibb's Forge, it was not generally believed that Mr. Burke could hunt—so adamantine was the ground, so oppressive the weather. Thus two keen hunting-men turned up to breakfast, after attending a training gallop, and with no view of hunting; also with no horses to ride. They, and others, set off on foot. But on the way to covert they encountered a string of useful horses belonging to a comrade—these at exercise, also with a view to the forthcoming chases at Fethard. "Do they want work?" they inquired of the stableman in charge. "Faix, they do, and Mr. Phelan will be proud if you give it them!" Accordingly they did, and three of the stud had an ample gallop. I hope I shan't have got that *fidus Achates* into trouble by telling.

On Friday I was conveyed eastward to Modeshel, almost at the border of Kilkenny. The hounds—the same hard-working dog pack that, on the occasion of my last visit, showed us the three hours' run from Ballylennan—now arrived at the trysting-place, dust-laden as a company of soldiers on their return march from Aldershot's Long Valley, of grimy memory. A ten-mile drive developed a great stretch of fine grass country, stoutly banked and strongly hedged. Indeed, if ever a country merited the description, "strong, yet practicable," it is surely eastern

Tipperary. I will add, moreover, the point wherefrom the strength of this, and similar Irish countries, comes home most prominently to the Saxon mind. In England we ride a run and may ride it hard. Between times (*i.e.* when hounds are not running or only running slowly) we go at our leisure, chiefly through gates. Even a huntsman, while making his casts, probably jumps only a few gaps. The case is altogether different in Ireland. You have to take the country as it comes, with or without excitement to urge you on. Thus, if there be need for the process known as "hardening your heart," it should be undertaken, I advise, shortly after breakfast, your fearful breast being then as far as possible encased in *robur* and *as triplex* for the day; while, for a man to hunt hounds effectively and for a full term of years in Ireland, he ought to be (as in the case of the Master of the Tipperary, I make free to add) entirely free from all considerations of personal peril.

The capital town of this neatly farmed, and to all appearance flourishing, district is in itself a most extraordinary contrast to its surroundings. If its name happens to be not altogether un-Irish, the inhabitants and their dwelling-houses of *Mullinahone* are more typically Hibernian than any I have yet encountered. The bulk of the population lounged about the streets, having their heads as indifferently covered as their dwellings were incompletely roofed. Nobody seemed to have anything to do, nor even serviceable clothes to do it in. They might have been waiting for rain, but that, if so, one would imagine it should have occurred to them to make their houses watertight—though, if appearances go for anything, the filthy interior cannot but be by comparison more healthy when freely ventilated than if hermetically closed. The very next day's county newspaper, by the way, recorded the fact that a member of Mullinahone's agricultural population had just died, aged 115, which goes to bear out the theory advanced. But, in view of raising the revenue of the coming nation, will, I wonder, assessors be guided by the appearance of the land itself, or of the bedraggled-looking people who will be responsible for the increased taxation?

Nor have I wandered so far from fox-hunting as it

might seem. These apparently poverty-stricken folk—who lavish little of their hard earnings upon clothing and dwelling, and are, it is pleasing to learn, often far better circumstanced than they appear—are not only madly fond of hunting, but would gladly see its following greatly multiplied, that their own market might be more directly accessible, and their provender more in demand, than through the medium of the local dealers.

But have I not some little sport to narrate—even of Friday, when the heat was of August, and when even Irish turf could scarce retain its freshness? At this remote fixture, and with the forthcoming Hunt Races at Fethard requiring all available horses for next week, no wonder our meet was but sparsely attended. When I have mentioned the names of Captain MacNaughten (a late Master), the Misses Langley (nieces of another former Master), and Miss Hulme, I am at a loss to enumerate further from my slender knowledge. Ballintaggert was, I learned, the denomination of the long straggling wood we first drew—a covert that, if I am right in so putting it, seems to link the lower, hedge-grown, and widely-dyked plain towards Kilkenny territory with the more smoothly-fenced undulations of inner Tipperary. It was into the former, the valley, that we started now, with one of the two foxes from Ballintaggert Wood, and, running round the right of the demesne of Harley, had what to my mind constituted a series of sturdy doubles and watercourses, and what not, till our fox twisted us out of scent in the hot sunshine. For the day in question, I found myself acting in the aspiring position of cicerone to another, and yet more untutored, Englishman. I had duly passed on to him the rather varied definitions and injunctions I had myself received previous to entry into Tipperary, leaving him to verify and apply them for himself. I had even conveyed to him the widely accepted impression that Tipperary is guileless of what we term “ditches” and Irishmen call “dykes.” No wonder, then, that after some forty minutes’ quiet career in the vicinity of Harley—during which he several times found himself on a high bank with a deep-cut stream running on both sides beneath him—he not only

reproached me with inaccuracy, but more or less held me to account for the unexpected strain upon his Saxon nerves. "My dear fellow, this is what they told me," was all I could urge. "And you don't look half as much astonished and frightened as I was, when first I set off to ride from Ballylennan!"

The hard limestone road along which we lounged *en route* for Prout's Gorse was like nothing but a baking oven at white heat. We watered our horses at a wayside stream, and right thankfully we watered our own dusty throats at a cottage as we passed. Then was brought an alarm of a fox gone from a quaint ruined fort on the hilltop, one of the many circular earthworks, marked yet by dyke and blackthorn, that are still dotted about the country, and that, white-flecked with thorn blossom without, and carpeted with primrose and violet within, are at this time intensely picturesque. Well, a fox *had* gone, but long gone; so shortly we moved on again to Prout's Furze—a snug glen whose side was yellow with the luxuriant bloom of the close-growing gorse. "Just like a mustard-plaster" was the practical but grossly unpoetical comment at my elbow. So it was, but perhaps the horrid remark was meant more especially to apply to the prickly terrors pertaining to the Irish furze—which in its early years makes a covert almost impenetrable to foxhounds. However, Mr. Burke's hounds wriggled through inch by inch, and at length disturbed and evicted a fox. With him we went away at score, again down into the valley, close at his brush, and of course a scent, though we crossed two pieces of dustiest oat-ground. The banks were high, and the hedges atop were woolly. If "woolly" is too soft a word to apply to Irish blackthorn that cuts like a saw, take it as applying only to the thick briar blind that still surmounts many a bank. And it was through the medium of this that it soon came to my lot to amplify my experience of the country, and even to add to my acquaintance with its language. A "boreen," my Saxon brethren, is what we should, perhaps, define as a cart-lane, a road built for farm purposes, and made solid with such rough stones as come readiest to hand. I reached the crest of the bank over-

looking the boreen, and very soon entered the boreen itself, but not at all as I wished. Several strong briar saplings had twisted themselves in a knot round my horse's forelegs, and flung him saddle downwards on to these comfortable cobble-stones. (Elliman's Embrocation. Friend Sturgess, please note.) I have long ago learned to hate jumping into a road of any description; and many a good sportsman has found to his cost that a high road is most dangerous ground. (I call to witness Captain Gordon-Mackenzie, still sadly crippled at Market Harboro'.) But a boreen, I am inclined to think at this moment, is the nastiest road of all.

There might have been some ill-fate abroad that day, for casualties overtook the greater proportion of our little field. If insignificant in result, they were to some extent alarming; and, in one painful instance, sorely funny. No one would laugh, or be moved to anything but intense anxiety, on seeing a lady caught by her habit and pommel. But, taking another instance, all the respect due to seniority, all the courtesy demanded by recent and kindly acquaintance, all the self-restraint that intercourse with the world should teach the most graceless trifle—all these will at times give way, and merriment yield unrestrainedly to a sense of the ridiculous. I shall put it, no doubt, so that *you* will not be tempted to laugh. You will see no fun in it. But then you did not see the old black horse tread his way along the lofty bank beside the bubbling stream till he had climbed above what must have been a waggonload of dead material (boughs of trees, thorns, &c.) brought there to form a barricade across the little "river." You did not see the bank crumble beneath his weighty footfall, or mark him crushing the *débris* into the brook bottom; still less did you see the climax—his rolling over on his side upon the crackling boughs, and so depositing his rider, back downwards, in the cool stream, boots and spurs lodged upwards on the thorns, and head supported only by the trickling water. The old horse righted himself and walked out. The horseman couldn't, for all that he kicked, and explained, and denounced; until the second whip, engaged at the moment in recover-

ing the huntsman's cap, could spare time to come to his rescue. So, you see, we had our little accidents and incidents this day, and I hope I may be forgiven telling them.

I return to the hounds. These, after leaving Prout's Gorse, had circled the fields as far as The Islands—by which I presume is meant the farm and its house, to be



Casualties to some extent alarming

viewed from the covert upon the vale below. Then they had returned, and set forth again to complete the figure of eight by means of some twenty minutes of exceedingly pretty going, in which they nearly touched the wood of the morning—Ballintaggert, to wit. The ground was hard, it is true—considerably harder than that of the Harley neighbourhood, in the earlier part of the day. But the banks were firm, and horses seemed to jump

off and on them without jar and without fear—none more so than in the case of the famous brown pony, once more the treat of Paddy the footman, again taking his holiday at the tail of hounds. And this reminds me. No sketch of the Tipperary, its work and its establishment, would be half complete without allusion to John Grady, Mr. Burke's veteran groom. Not a stud-groom in Melton, Harboro', or Rugby could, I warrant, bring horses out so often and so fit to go as the genius in question, whose material, moreover, often comes to him in its rawest state—not matured, seasoned, and conditioned like most new arrivals to the large hunting-stables across the water.

Reaching Prout's Gorse a last time, the hounds marked their fox to ground, and the sport of the day came to an end. No, not altogether. There was yet a minor item, viz. a toast of reconciliation to be drunk in milk provided by Mr. Prout. It seems, as the late Master told, that during the worst of the Land League agitation, some ten years ago, a determined attempt was made to stop the Tipperary Hounds when they were in the act of drawing the gorse in question. Peasants and farmers trooped in from all sides, and the covert was quickly surrounded with men, women, and children, shouting, blowing horns, and otherwise assisting to find a fox. The first whip at the moment was on foot within the gorse, his horse being tied to the fence outside, when young Prout, then quite a boy, jumped into the saddle and rode off with it. Of course this was more than the Master could stand, so the marauder was pursued and the horse soon rescued. To-day we have not only the Prout family jealously guarding the gorse in the interests of the Hunt, but refreshing the Master, the late Master, and their field with cool, welcome bowls of milk.

And if during the long ride home we were greeted once with the cheery query, "Have you had a hoont to-day?" it must have been offered to us fifty times in various degrees and inflections of good Tipperary brogue—in proof of the hold of the sport on the popular mind, and in token of appreciation of the Master conducting it.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE NEW FOREST DEERHOUNDS

THE long and well-honoured association of Captain Lovell with the chase of the wild deer of the New Forest practically terminated on Monday, April 23. It is over forty years since Captain Lovell initiated the sport, and proved that the fallow buck could be made to run before hounds. From that date to this his pack has been steadily maintained and improved; the method of hunting was gradually developed into a science; and not only the residents of the Forest, but numberless visitors in spring and autumn, have been regaled with a true and very charming sport. Until some few years ago, the whole burden of the chase was borne by himself and his daughters. Since then he has taught a huntsman—Allen—whose services, together with the use of the well-drilled pack, will assist the incoming Master to carry on the work as much as possible on the same lines as those of the original exponent, whose retirement is so deeply and widely regretted.

I may note at once that his successor is to be Mr. Walker, late Master of the Croome, who, in undertaking a task that is necessarily entirely new to him, will at least have the great advantage of a Mentor the most capable and well-disposed, besides finding the authorities of the Forest equally desirous that a sport so exclusively connected with the English National Park should be maintained at its present high standard.

In ordinary years the hunting of the wild fallow-deer has been continued until about May 5, but at the end of last week it was found impracticable to carry it on to the usual date, and Monday was accordingly fixed for a final meet—New Park, on the lower forest and close to Brockenhurst, being named for the occasion. So, comparatively early on that broiling morning, I found myself taking the steam covert-hack at Waterloo Station. Already the atmosphere was too hot and stifling to admit of a greatcoat. Whether my sensitiveness or natural modesty

happens to be in excess of my fair allowance it is not for me to hazard an opinion, but I am bound to confess that in my coolest and whitest cords I felt painfully conscious that my appearance on a London platform on so sultry a morning was rather that of a mountebank, and I could not disguise from myself that the travelling public evidently thought so too. And this notwithstanding the fact that I had at the last moment discarded my hunting-crop, as being incompatible with appearances in such harvest-like weather, and had armed myself with an ordinary cane, which at least always robs me, even when in Ireland, of the idea that I am going out hunting at all. As a matter of fact, a white umbrella would have been no whit more incongruous, and would, indeed, have proved a far more serviceable companion. No matter; I was soon carried out of grimy London, past Woking's grim cemetery, past the near neighbourhood of Cæsar's Camp and the Long Valley—over which, even at that early hour, the heavy dust-clouds hovered angrily, bidding even your over-worked correspondent hug himself pharisaically. The outlook now was bright and green, healthy corn-crops hiding the brown arable of Hampshire, while its grass meadows grew richly by the side of every rivulet.

Now I want to give vent to a grumble, to echo a grievance, not as a mere hunting-man, but as a member of the great country-loving public. If there is one time of the year in which we have, or should have, the privilege of lightening the monotony of a railway journey—nay, of making it the medium of pleasantest enjoyment—it is when being whisked through rural scenery in springtime. Not an Englishman or Englishwoman but finds delight in marking the country bursting into new life, assuming its fresh, many-coloured garb of leaf, and flower, and herb. What meets his or her eye now—meets it obtrusively, unavoidably, blatantly—but Vandalism in its coarsest and most glaring form? Yellow advertisement boards and monster notices, of this physis or that tooth-wash, thrust themselves in hideous prominence before the vision and across the foreground of the most lovely landscape when you look forth from the carriage-window for a

feast of scenery and of spring. Why should the land thus be made hideous? why should the travelling public be tortured by these obtrusive horrors? why should they be robbed thus of their birthright, the glorious beauty of their native land? and why, again, should that birthright be handed over as a monopoly to vulgar vendors of cosmetics or poisonous purgatives? Is there no power to help us, no legislator willing to come forward on our behalf? or are we cheerfully to accept the infliction as one of the blessings of Free Trade?

The Forest was at length reached, a good horse was awaiting me, and now I was jogging across Brockenhurst Common—under a sun more oppressive, along a road more dust-laden, than when across this very ground I saw a fallow-buck so handsomely galloped down one mid-August.

The roadside meet by the gate of New Park was indeed a summer scene. Hounds were lying down beneath a holly-bush; a group of thirty or forty riders were clustered under the scanty shade of the old oaks, that as yet were guiltless of foliage; while on the other side of the road were drawn up a number of carriages whose occupants for the most part were bent upon picnicking rather than deer-hunting. Nearly a hundred horsemen eventually took part in what they looked upon as a valedictory, and, in sincerity, a somewhat sad occasion—the final day of a long and honoured *régime*. A few of those present were, besides the Misses Lovell, Lady Cantelupe, Miss Glyn, Captain and Miss Standish, Misses Dobie, Miss Tattnell, Lord Howth, General Seymour, Sir A. Grant, Colonel Powell, Colonel Crofton, Mr. G. Lascelles, Major Talbot, Mr. Blake, Captain Turpin, Messrs. Wingrove Penton, Wilder, Allenby, and Miles Marsh.

The Forest was not yet looking its best. Another fortnight, with more seasonable weather, might, as I have said, still have seen hounds at work, and then the woods would have been found in their best and gayest colouring—the trees in leaf, the thorn-bushes in flower, and the ground in full herbage. Now the earth was parched, the grassy rides within the fir-enclosures were rugged and

broken—almost dangerous to horses, except that the old ruts and hoof-marks rather crumbled when galloped upon. The Forest ponies, by the way, though as yet looking rough in their unshed coats, seemed in excellent case after a favourable winter and adequate care. I am told—I suppose with some reason—that many of the commoners still cling to forest-bred sires in preference to the stallions of higher class that have been liberally introduced into the district. Possibly the produce of the former may be hardier. It is difficult to see in what other respect any superiority can be claimed for them.

To seek game for the day, hounds were taken into the low, thick woodlands that are growing pine for the Government—that some day, we hope, may be cleared to give place to the oak saplings in their midst, and that some day, again, may allow all the Forest to be galloping-ground. It was long ere the game was forthcoming; but Moonstone and Hermit (the tufters) at length had their quarry afoot; the pack were uncoupled, and the chase began. The heat, of course, was almost overwhelming: but it is a very different thing asking hounds to run at their very fittest—in April, with the ground clear of undergrowth and their own ribs bereft of fat—to calling upon them in autumn among the overwhelming bracken. There was little scent; and the chosen buck did his best to confuse them by doubling back among his comrade; while, headed by Allen, we galloped hither and thither among the rided labyrinths of Stubby, Park Hill, and Ramnor. At length the chase, as is usual, I believe, crossed the main road—Brockenhurst to Lyndhurst—and one deer, hard pressed, sought the Lymington water, another buck at the same time being hard run in the original coverts. The hunt, by New Park into Rhinefields (another of these gigantic coverts), was fast and stirring—stretching five miles as a point—but nothing came of it, except the discovery, after two hours' hot work, that we were running too many deer. And here my story of the day ends.

On the Monday previous Captain Lovell had brought off his last stag-hunt, and signalised the occasion by killing

a royal after a run of sixteen miles, completed in an hour and a half. The number of red deer within or near the New Forest is now very small ; and they afford sport on two or three days at most during the year. On the day in question a fine stag was harboured and roused in one of Lord Radnor's coverts ; the pack was laid on as he pointed for the Forest ; and they ran him across the best of it, the open moorland of Ocknell and neighbourhood. The first half-hour was very fast indeed, and the final half-hour very exciting. After doubling at last in the wood of Kingsgarn—as I learn—hounds set up their deer after racing him some twenty minutes to water. He then broke his bay, to take refuge finally within the grounds of the Powder Works. With his back to the fence he easily kept hounds off him, though his well-known antlers had, most unfortunately, been shed during the week past. At last a rope was thrown over his head, and the big stag was made venison. This run was by no means straight, being rather in the shape of a figure of eight ; but hounds ran very hard throughout, and the chase must have been one of great merit and charm.

Returning to the fallow deer, it should be noted that, though on Monday scent was weak and insufficient—as, indeed, it is said to have been ever since the ground became so determinedly dry—it was very different when the pack recommenced work about the end of February. Then, in fourteen days, hounds killed seventeen deer, many of them good bucks, and after fine runs.

I have no more to add but to repeat, with very earnest endorsement, the universal expression of deep regret that Captain Lovell should feel himself compelled to lay aside the strain and burden of mastership, and to relinquish management of a sport he himself created and had brought to such perfection. For my own pleasant experiences at his kindly and courteous hands I thank him most cordially.

CHAPTER XL

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS IN SEPTEMBER

FOR a final leaflet under this heading my notebook serves me with a day's record of reverse, a picture that, as I said before, seldom takes its proper turn in story of gunning. Perhaps it would be a dull tale to tell of all our misses and mischances. Of a certainty it would fail to tickle us in recounting. So we pick out the plums and hand them round for discussion, ourselves eking out a full share of satisfaction from the process.

In illustration, then. One Saturday, as I have entered it, I lost a right good buck through over-confidence—not through missing him, this time. I am fain to confess to missing frequently enough, like other people; though from long-continued practice I may fairly claim average proficiency with the rifle; and, like the same other people, I am prone to talk a good deal more about my hits than my misses.

On this occasion Jim and I, after a long and hot morning's ride, worked our way along the crest of a lofty ridge, a wooded precipice on our left hand descending into the densely timbered basin below. Peering occasionally over the edge, we at length found ourselves looking down upon a well-adorned buck, feeding lazily on a grassy plateau some sixty yards below. A shot from the saddle seemed to strike him fair on the shoulder, and at once to cripple him. Indeed, I waited to see him fall. I heard Jim mutter something, but failed to catch his words, which, uttered in the indifferent tone that the Americans would seem usually to adopt in moments of emergency, appear to have been, "I guess you might as well shoot him again, cap'n!" As he spoke, two other fine buck appeared, to join their shattered comrade, who thereupon at once regained power of movement and commenced to limp on with them, turning from me as he moved. It was high time to put in another shot, and I fired hurriedly—half uncertain to the last second

whether to aim at the wounded buck, or at the bearer of a still more attractive set of horns. The result was very similar to that generally following upon a blaze into the brown of a covey of partridges, viz. nothing to show for it. The shot no doubt went over the lot, as in a close cluster they disappeared into the precipitous covert. "Sure to have him!" said Jim. But we didn't; and there my story ends, so far as that deer is concerned. The moral is perhaps best conveyed in Mat's emphatic diction as delivered that night over the camp fire: "You ain't got no claim to call a deer your'n while he can stand on his legs. I just keep my Winchester a-pumpin' till the son of a gun lies down." To cap this, Jim of course had a story—of how a deer jumped up and knocked him over when he had taken it for dead and more than half cut its throat, giving him till nightfall before he could secure it; "and he wouldn't ha' gone on till then, only he and his mate hadn't had fresh meat for three days, and were run out of bacon besides." Then he followed on with a tale of a bear being shot and killed with never a mark of a bullet upon him (an assertion towards which I myself can offer corroborative evidence, in the solemn avowal that I once shot, and afterwards ate, an antelope on which the bullet had left no wound or sign whatever). Jim's story went about thus—after the customary preface of date and district, partnership, and so forth: "Me and Bob Jeffares had had no luck at all, while George Smith and young Sid Bromley (he didn't count, he knowed no more nor a grainger, but he done to look arter the cooking and the skins. Bless you, if he'd gone setting a b'ar-trap he'd a sprung it on hisself for sartin—and not the first either, as I've knowed caught). George were the terriblest fellar for b'ar ever you heerd tell of. Seemed as though, if there were a b'ar in the country, he couldn't help running agin' him. He'd killed seven that fall; and we hadn't got one, though we wasn't above twenty mile apart. Well, we'd come across b'ar-track, and killed a bait handy; and me and Bob was going round to the trap next morning when we sees a little black b'ar coming right along towards us. 'You

shoot!' says Bob, 'if that little popgun's any good for b'ar' (for he'd use to laugh at my little Winchester, and had one of them big old buffalo-guns hisself). I don't know how it was, unless I were riled and Bob were laughing. But sure enough I missed that there b'ar—though I didn't think I had, for he went away bleeding, and I follered him for a goodish bit towards the creek, where George were camped. 'Never mind!' I says, 'you are agoing where George is, and as sure as you're a b'ar George'll have you!' And when we come back to the trap, dalled if there weren't the b'ar's hind-toe in it, as he had left and I thought were the shot-wound.

"It might ha' been two days arter, when we run out of sugar and a'most of coffee too. So I says, 'Bob,' says I, 'I guess I'll just ride over to the head of Deep Creek and see what George and his mate's got.' When I come to their camp, the young fellow were just washing up his dishes and smoking his pipe contented-like, while George were away after the traps. 'Well,' says I, 'what luck? Has George tumbled across another b'ar lately?' 'Yes! Only a little 'un, though, this time; and, what's more, there ain't never a bullet mark on him, though George shot him dead, and the skin hangs yonder.' 'Had he a toe pinched off in a trap?' says I. 'Looks like it,' says he, 'the left foot behind.' 'No, siree; it's the right. I'd like to go you a month's good wages on it.' 'How should *you* know?' says he. 'You'd a-knowed,' I says, 'if you'd a-tramped eight mile on the trail of it. Let's look at it!' And, sure enough, when we laid the hide down and spread it out, there was a toe of the right foot gone. But no bullet-hole; no, nor sign of a hurt anywhere! It were just as I had figured—George had run right across that b'ar next morning. It took but one shot to finish him and he skinned him right, away. But blame me if he ever knowed where he hit him; no more don't I."

To return to our own ride to camp that evening—a ride through rough forest and much fallen timber, up and down precipitous hills. Often the ponies had to be led while clambering where only mountain ponies could possibly have made their way at all. One little episode—to

me amusing, interesting, and aggravating all at once— occurred as we left the timber and rose the final divide, beyond the summit of which was our camp. A wood of heavy pine-trees lay just below and on our left hand as we rode leisurely along the ridge. It seemed the very ground for big buck frequenting the upper heights, and by this



A splendid buck dashed past my pony's nose

time of day they might well be moving out to graze. Carefully we peered ahead, the wind blowing directly from our right. We were just giving it up, and leaving the little stony ridge at a trot, when there was a clatter as of a squadron of cavalry coming up from behind. With a snort and a rattle a splendid buck dashed close past my pony's nose, his great branching antlers gleaming in the

setting sun, and his eye distorted with alarm and wonderment. He had been within the timber till we had passed without his seeing us, and till the breeze had carried our wind to his nostrils. Then he had rushed forth, not knowing where his danger lay, and so had almost run over us as he crossed the brow. At any rate he was in covert again and out of harm's way before I could pull up and pull trigger. He had given us a beautiful spectacle, and laughed at us into the bargain.

My partner ("English soldier-officer") had, I found on reaching camp, done well during the day. Where he had ridden the big buck had, he said, "run up and looked at him," the trophies he brought proving his words. With his adventures and successes I refrain from meddling, reproducing my own experience only so far as to illustrate the pleasant life of a sportsman in these Rocky wilds.

I have nearly done. We worked back to Hunters' Lake, spent a day or two in fishing there, and devoted another to a trip to the smaller water of Great-Trout Lake. It was midday, and a hot midday, when we reached this latter; and the big fish merely smiled, swimming lazily up to the fly, turning over as if to take, then idly passing on, as for instance one turns away from food in the Red Sea heat. But, riding back, we put covey after covey of the blue grouse into the trees, sent a man round to drive them over our heads, and soon had every saddle festooned with the gamey birds.

By the way, I should have described the methods of the professional fisherman—a poacher according to the game laws of the State, but a fully recognised factor as regards the food supply of the towns. Probably he is a trapper, whose main occupation is at a standstill during the summer months. He finds for himself a partner (they always hunt in couples), and he, or they, fit out themselves with two donkeys ("jacks" in Western phraseology), and a few flies, casts, and lines. These, with their blankets and a few dollars' worth of stores, constitute their whole necessary outfit. A willow wand stands in lieu of a "pole," the term by which every fishing-rod, however scientifically built, is known in America. And the two

men, if average fishermen and energetic at their work, will generally catch a hundred fish in the day, total weight between sixty and seventy pounds. These fish are cleaned and laid out by night to freeze. They are then packed in grass against the heat of the sun. On the third or fourth day the jacks are loaded up, and one of the partners takes them into the nearest town, while the other continues his fishing. "How do they find a market if they can't expose them for sale?" I asked Jim in my innocence. "Oh, that ain't no trouble!" replied he. "Them high-toned hotels must have 'em, and they'll take all you've got at thirty-five cents a pound." I leave you to calculate the proceeds; but, as Jim added, "two men can make pretty fair wages at that."

Regaining Hunters' Lake and its well-equipped cabins was a return to luxury midway between positive civilisation and a picnic in the wilds. *Perrier Jouet* from an icy stream, trout from an afternoon's angling in the lake, venison from recent wanderings, a cook with a kitchen range, clean linen, and one of "the boys" volunteering service as waiter. Illustration: the second bottle just opened to the health of our absent host. "Waiter" (*loquitor*) in a quiet undertone: "Do either of you gentlemen object to shooting?" No response; but each gentleman wonders what next, and begins to wish he hadn't left his own six-shooter outside. *Bang! Bang!!* between our very chairs. "Guess I've done you this time, you d——d son of a gun!" Red blood trickled, then poured on to the snowy tablecloth. E'en the Major's plate and the Captain's pate were bedewed with the horrid warm liquid. Don't shudder (though we did). 'Twas only a rat in the canvas roofing that Jake had dislodged for practice. Nerves are of no account out West.

CHAPTER XLI

THE QUORN SEASON (1892-93)

THE Quorn, after an excellent month to begin with, had a comparative lull in mid-winter; but came to the

front again with some very notable runs in early spring. As one of these, perhaps their most enjoyable gallop of the season (many of the Quornites give it this rank), happens nowhere to have been sketched with regard to persons or incidents, I may be excused for taking it here as an instance in illustration of the bright sport of the winter past. The Quorn had met that Monday (February 20) at Willoughby, a point situated some dozen miles from Leicester and altogether remote from any crowd-inducing centre. Thus the Willoughby field was, for the Shires, one of very moderate dimensions. Briefly, it was almost exclusively a Quorn field, Melton, of course, being a strong factor. Captain Warner led them at once to "The Curate." How thick and warm and foxy the old gorse looked! "Yes, and always has done," added Tom Furr to the half soliloquy, though his thoughts were not at the moment going back so far as mine, namely, to the first occasion I saw it drawn by Squire Musters, and heard him cheer the bitches over the ride with his peculiar, sharp, *varmint* tone (that to the hearer seemed, as Captain Smith of merry mood put it, like nothing else than a little boy's voice cheering from a big man's throat). "What's more," added Tom, "we've had one rare good doing from here this year, and we may have another now. The day's right enough." Hardly had the words left those clean-cut lips, hardly had the ladies threaded their way into the dense covert, before *there*—not a hundred yards from his horse's head—was a long grey fox gliding away at a swift, stealthy gallop! At that instant hounds opened on another fox in covert. Half a minute, and then the "Yurry-yurry-yurry!" that has made our hearts beat and our backbone creep so often and so happily. Again and again it echoed forth, while the bitches tongued loudly in covert; and with any other man there could have been left nothing but despair, a fatal delay, or a fresh beginning. But now there was a pause; and the hound music in the covert slackened. "Yerv-yaat!" screamed the veteran, and round they all came, bounding gladly forth to the voice. Not a whip could get near them in the thick gorse. So the gallop began. By the time they reached Parson's

Gorse, on the hillside half a mile away and overlooking all that is best and most beautiful of the Belvoir Vale, every hound was in her place ; and it was across this lovely landscape that the chase took its way. As hounds dashed up to the little thicket that has been known and revered by continued generations of Meltonians as Parson's Gorse, the huntsman and a strong following elected the lower ground, and cut into the road beneath the covert. It happened that their fox had never entered. Hounds drove on above the upper margin, gradually swinging deeper into the grass field along the crest of the hill. Close in their wake rode a bevy of men, most of them, if I could distinguish aright, clad in unorthodox black, and all of them on this occasion with the turn of fortune's wheel in their favour. First to emerge from that field, and to dash down the steep side of what is known as Hickling Standard—the lofty, tree-topped landmark in which the ridge terminates—was Mr. Parker, a Yorkshireman having his first ride in vaunted Leicestershire, and fortunate enough to have that ride on a 400-guinea hunter belonging to Mr. Russell-Munro (who also, by the way, took his full share of enjoyment from the run). And this advantage he held until the vale was well entered and forces to some degree reunited. Lord Manners' hat was knocked off by a bough as he rose in his wake. Stop for it? Not much! There is not a scent like this every day. Nor, with all their well-deserved credit for courtesy and *camaraderie*, was it to be expected that either Mr. Alfred Brocklehurst or Mr. Bertie Sheriffe should halt in their career to supply the deficiency. One or the other of them did his best by knocking the beaver out of the way as he passed, and down the hill it went rolling like a tambourine, in fitting accompaniment as they plunged downward, too—the ridge-and-furrow awful, and the descent precipitous. It was fair, sweet going on the lower ground, the meadows level, if deep, and the hedges a credit to a vale renowned in song and renowned in story since fox-hunting first came into fashion. Below Hickling village Lord Lonsdale and Lady Gerard came to the head of affairs from the right—(how much, I wonder, had this good gallop to do with

clinching his lordship's resolution as to the Quorn master-ship?)—while from the left rode Firr, Mr. W. Chaplin (junr.), Mr. Wade, and Mr. Marshall—the last-named a farmer upon a blood three-year-old. (How these shot to the fore so quickly, after the turn beneath the Parson's, is



Glory or engulfment

a matter of marvel. It goes more than all to prove how clear was the course, and to render another instance, if need be, of the huntsman's marvellous faculty of making up ground apparently lost.) The Smite! the Smite! Friend of my boyhood, betrayer again and again of my

manhood's rash confidence! Algy Turnor, where are you—who used ever to lead us here, to glory, or engulfment (often, too often, I am bound on our part to admit, to the latter reward)? Will it do? Will it do, your lordship? Yes, if you go fast! And the steel-marks told afterwards how fast they did go, though, like their booted employers, these held silent as to the distance they were carried beyond the black gulf, before the vigour of pace could be checked. A point of four miles and three quarters in twenty-five minutes! We call that good going in the shires of England—good at least when reduced to the unerring verdict of Ordnance map and ivory scale. Beside Hose village hounds hovered a moment, then bore rightward over canal and railway, rose up out of the Vale, and bayed over the open earth of Harby Hills, fifty-three minutes from the find. This, I take it, was as happy a specimen of a true Leicestershire gallop as fell to the lot of the Quorn the winter through. Who else was in the run I dare not attempt with any accuracy, after this lapse of time, to say. But if I mention Lady Curzon, the Master, and Mr. Cecil Chaplin, I shall, at all events, be on the right side; while I have a vivid and pleasing remembrance of the presence of Colonel Forester (the oldest of the Meltonians), of Mr. Cochrane (nearly his equal in age), and of Captains Boyce and O'Neal.

CHAPTER XLII

TYPICAL CUB-HUNTING

GAUGE the fascination of fox-hunting only by one's sensations on being roused from bed at 4 A.M.—the flavour scarce departed of the last cigar and the last good story—there would, I warrant, be no more complaint of the crowds, no longer any danger to be apprehended from the over-popularity of our gloried pursuit. You would gladly sell yourself very cheap—and your horses too—at such time, and would contemplate without a qualm the prospect of never seeing a hound again. If ever the game

seems literally not worth the candle you are burning, it is during that half-hour when cub-hunting kit is being dragged on, when mislaid gloves and whips are being sought in dark corners and ill-temper, when you are waiting for coffee—and wishing you had the pluck to go to bed. There may be romance in the gloaming of eve ; there is nought but self-pitying depression in the half-light before morn, when the wind is blowing cold and the sky is draped with black, funereal cloud crape. This is the hour, it may cheer you to remember, that, from some inexplicable motive of refined cruelty, is selected by the executive of our gracious and merciful King for bidding any condemned malefactor prepare himself to step forth to the scaffold and the rope. Do *you* feel as if you could “die game” at such a time ? Bah ! You have drifted into this vein of thought because, sir, you are now paying for your overnight fun. When you were cackling over that crowning jest as the clock struck twelve, the huntsman had been peacefully fox-killing in his sleep for hours past, or was even then perhaps muttering in his missis’ ear, “*Don't* make a noise ! Ye-et Rarpid, good beetch ! Hi-ky-kyk !” And, by now, he and his assistants are sauntering to covert, merry in their hearts as crickets, though they are going out to work, and you, forsooth, to play. Well, if it were your *business*, doubtless you would be able to do the same. As it is, they have the best of you ; and you confess it to yourself with sorrow, and perhaps with a shade of self-contempt.

The scene of Saturday morning’s work was Grafton Park, another beautiful woodland belonging to the Duke of Buccleuch. The turf-rides of Grafton Park, greatly benefited on this occasion by yesterday’s heavy thunderstorms, enable one to be near hounds almost continually. And those at the northernmost end, being arranged in starfish fashion, allow the spectator to remain stationary while witnessing all that is taking place in the vicinity. As the cubs were born and brought up somewhere close here, you are in a position to find your share in cub-hunting made easy ; for you have only to stand in one spot while the chase revolves round you, and the eight rays of

the starfish give you as many occasions for a view, and, if you like, of a holloa. Of the several cubs afoot, one princely youngster stood out from his fellows as Forager has, at Althorp and at Peterborough alike : and, in spite of Goodall's best attention, the cub was able to save his peculiarly white-tipped banner for another day and the other pack. Blood-happiness, as it may be termed, is a phase of expression distinctive of the successful hunt-servant ; and when results admit of its being worn, is anything but unattractive. In its absence a less becoming melancholy is only too apt to supervene. Saturday was a bad scenting day, and bloodless, and there could be no more hunting until Tuesday. Can you not sympathise ?

Tuesday gave us the reverse of the picture. Everything was bright, from the bitch pack to the cool, clear morning ; from a burning scent to the huntsman's beaming face, as he handled his second cub at nine by the clock. The north wind, that had again dried the ground to the consistency of brick, set a rime on the grass and put such power into the scent that hounds were never at fault. They chased fox after fox as if in view ; and for hours we had almost continuous music. It was a morning to do them good—to give the young hounds work without over-tiring them, and a double taste of blood by their own exertions. I believe just as firmly in the efficacy of taking hounds home when they have had enough as I do in the desirability of you yourself returning thither while you are pleased—in both cases with the sweet uncloyed upon the palate. To-day Goodall had eleven couple of youngsters out, and every one of them went madly into the cry.

A brace of cubs on Tuesday in Geddington Chase ; and a brace the Thursday before in Weekly Hall Wood. This was the allowance meted to the lady pack, well earned, and that could well be spared. On Tuesday they found and scattered nearly half a score of cubs ; rattled half of them for their future good, besides running two of them to their immediate end. The first litter was found in a little wood called Sart, just outside the five-hundred-acre Chase, and from its dimensions and position admirably adapted for the closing scene of the educational process (in technical

language, for the "holding up" of a beaten cub). In September, remember, we are at morning school. In November begin the holidays, when huntsmen of course only kill the "poor things" when they can't help it; and as the "poor things" are at that period more capable of taking care of themselves, the tender men who blow the horn after them are then in some degree assisted towards the better carrying out of their mission of mercy.

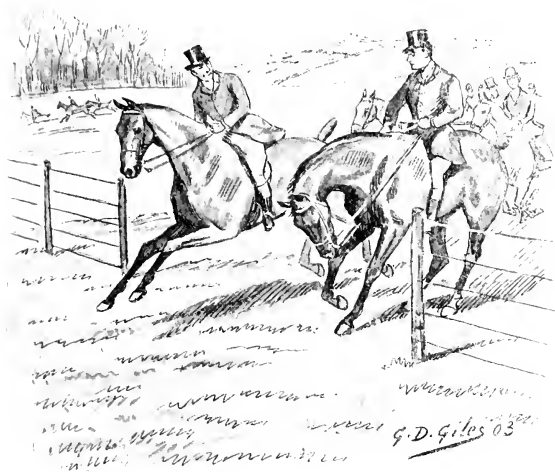
By this time not only did one or two of Goodall's hounds present an appearance of having been bathed in blood; but he himself, as the result of a plunge into covert in order to rescue the remains of a kill, was trickling from every feature; while his white collar was nearly obliterated with gore. In fact, as some one lightly remarked, it looked as if for once our keen huntsman had tried to drink so much blood he could not swallow it all. (Let me not for a moment be supposed to infer that a single unnecessary fox was killed on Wednesday. But it was a dainty feast. And, besides, two foxes got to ground in front of hounds.) A still more sanguinary-looking object was one old dog in the pack who had rent an ear from top to bottom on a barbed wire. Now, you know, it has for some years been customary with the Pytchley to leave their hounds' ears unrounded. But this hound can hardly be allowed to go through life with a long, split curtain flapping on the side of his head—a kind of divided skirt to hide his blushes. It will therefore be, I imagine, a matter for earnest consultation in kennel as to whether merely the injured flapper shall be rounded on lines laid down by our ancestors, or whether the poor dog is to have both ears rounded, and is henceforth to figure as a kind of pariah among the unmutilated. I shall speculate keenly upon this point during my absence in county Tipperary, and shall look forward with no little curiosity to the appearance of Bobadil on my return.

But please note, ye thrusters, who propose to ride on the backs of this pack during the winter, that the Pytchley have another hound on whom they set greater store. And his name, as some of you may surmise, is Forager, of this year's entry. Besides being "quite useful-looking"—so

decided the judges at Peterborough—Forager is, I may add, rapidly developing into an excellent foxhound, while the way he brought a piece of meat out of covert, and through the pack, yesterday gave ample evidence that he knows already for what purpose he is taken out hunting. Be sure you do not fail on your first appearance at the covert-side, and when exchanging greetings with the huntsman, to ask at once "Which is Forager?" (By the way, don't ask on a Wednesday, when the lady pack is doing duty on the Rugby side.) I heard the question asked yesterday: and the good man with the horn could almost be heard to purr. But as the questioner was one of our most prominent squadron-leaders—and is, moreover, on the most cordial terms with the huntsman—the latter could not bring himself to forego the opportunity. "Well, I'll tell you, and show you a little mark he's got—*so as you won't ride over him*. Forager! Forager!! That's him with a white spot on his right hip. Now you know him?" And, true enough, the mark is unmistakable—a round spot as big as a half-crown. If ever you see that spot staring you in the face when a hound is hindering you at a fence, stop for your life or pull round to perdition—no matter how many greedy competitors may already be jumping right or left of you! *Verbum sap.*

Now, if I may venture liberty of incident or example, it is surely in the case of an old playmate. Well, Playmate, while possessing very many essential qualifications towards riding over a country, *e.g.* nerve, keenness, and capable horse-flesh, has been to a minor extent handicapped with shortness of vision. He can see a fence, and, having seen it, is on most occasions, I notice, "mad to be at it." The new barbarous fence is to him a more invisible, and thus more dangerous, enemy than to most of us. But he can see three plain strands bisecting a field, if only by means of the timber posts twenty feet apart. To-day, being on the ride—his first ride of the year, and thus accentuated tenfold—he was pulled up short, while leading his field. Three strands and many posts stood across the pasture and his path, and he had nothing for it but to rein up. But it so happened that exactly where he halted meant the

conclusion of the wire. It had been removed for twenty yards by some freak of the farmer, for hay-carrying purposes probably. There he stood, helplessly barred, content to go back or to wander round maybe till now, but



His graceless playmate galloped past

that a yell, irreverent and inexcusable, rang in his ear: "Get on, Bartimeus, hanging about"—and his graceless playmate galloped past, slap through what seemed to the lingerer a treble-stranded upright of iron.

CHAPTER XLIII

COUNTY TIPPERARY

October 1893.—If the London and North-Western lay their metals deftly, and the Great Southern and Western carry you on almost equally smoothly when once you have reached the further shore, there is, alas! neither bridge nor pavement 'twixt Holyhead and Kingston; and the road, such as it is,

appears invariably to get very much out of order about the time of the equinox. As one who has sailed and sickened with utmost consistency for many years, let me tender my recipe as applied to the four hours' run across Channel. Dine fairly well before starting; eschew tobacco afterwards (by which I mean, don't smoke); sit up till you get on board; but half-an-hour before reaching Holyhead, administer to yourself some light sandwiches and a pint of the very driest; then turn in between the sheets, in the cabin previously secured by telegraph, and if, having hunted all that forenoon, you do not now sleep in peaceful oblivion of stormy wind and boisterous wave, why, you must consult some other doctor. For the homeward voyage, starting about one's ordinary dinner-time, one is driven to play the bold sailor-boy on deck, and in all probability to suffer very bitterly in the impersonation.

There is something intensely refreshing and reviving, though, in the aspect of the green fields of Kildare, as one sails through them in the warm, soft morning (the word "saft" doubtless referring to the effect of the rainfall upon the ground on which we propose soon to be tumbling about). A heavy drizzle overspreads the landscape, but is powerless to shut out the gorgeous colouring in which the foliage of Ireland stands resplendent while making its last fight against the attack of autumn. Only a few cattle are here and there scattered in the fields; but these are evidently fattening heartily on the rich, rank herbage that offers such contrast to our own summer-dried and close-cropped pasturage. Every field is level and smooth enough for football, or, with very little assistance, even for cricket; while the banks, boasting a hedge-covering as ragged as an Irish countryman's coat, seem each to cry out: "Simple Saxon, come and jump me! Sure ye needn't fear at all. See, now, all the gaps I have left ye." You won't have to travel all the way to Cork, gentle reader, in order to come within the sphere of the Blarney stone's honeyed influence.

Ballybrophy, Templemore, Thurles—thirty or forty miles of country (aye, heavenly country) hereabouts without a foxhound, I am told! Is not this a solemn waste? For the good of Ireland, will not the Government of the future

take up the subject of assisted emigration from Cheshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, and Yorkshire? Hounds are to be bought very cheap nowadays, while horses, I have reason to believe, are grown freely on the spot. The undertaking, therefore, on the part of the State need not be a very costly one; and, while calculated to develop the proper natural resources of Ireland, would do much towards relieving the congested districts of distressful England. Here we are in hunting Tipperary once more.

From Goold's Cross fifteen miles (Irish) on a side car (also Irish) might appear in the abstract as wholly unattractive, especially after nearly twenty hours' ride on rail and steamer. But on this soft and mellow afternoon, with the glorious country ripening for the sport on which one's thoughts are greedily bent, there is anything but dulness in such a journey. To the grateful eye, wearied with the prolonged summer, there is pleasure in every turn of the landscape; there is association of fun and sport in the very sight of an Irish cabin, of its often filthy human occupants, and of its invariably sleek and well-fed pig.

The Tipperary hounds hunt over a vast block of country, the whole of which, while varying considerably in its manner of fence and description of ground, is, as far as my experience has yet reached, good beyond common. It is nearly all grass; it is all rideable; and it all carries a scent. What more would you have? Well, I will tell you. You must in yourself have a fair nerve, a sufficient store of bodily vigour, and a proper love of sport for sport's sake. I might almost add, you must love a ride. These characteristics pertain largely to the jovial Tipperary field; and if you haven't them in some slight degree, it is only fair to suggest that various other spheres are to be found which may be more congenial to your tastes. A few falls—nay, a fair number of falls—are inseparable from riding with hounds in Tipperary. They are not likely to be harmful falls. On the contrary, you will generally be let down pretty easily; and serious accidents are rare (especially as regards the more fragile sex—if the adjective be fitting—since the universal adoption of the safety skirt). But if you happen to be constitutionally

averse to an occasional roll, you will be far safer among the gates and bridle-roads of the countries that owe so much of their destructive popularity to these facilities. Oh, that we had to move about the shires of Old England without gates and without wire (the latter condition being a very possible corollary to the former). We should then have the same peaceful little fields that they have in county Tipperary, where, believe me, Saxon brethren, they ride over quite as many big fences during a cool, unexcited progress from covert to covert as during any time of the day. A day's hunting in Tipperary involves more jumping than very many of you allow yourselves in a week, an assertion that I feel myself at this moment of writing (after two days' hunting upon mere cub-hunting condition) able emphatically to endorse in my own person. My back fairly aches with the double, treble, often quadruple jerk that belongs to jumping these many-varied banks. To the average Englishman, accustomed to sit down and to sit back, as long as his horsemanship permits him, while his horse flies easily from field to field, there is something strangely complicated in what takes place beneath him during the negotiation of a Tipperary bank-and-ditch. The going up and the going on are comparatively smooth, though often, I assert, very wonderful, a six or seven feet bank being not at all uncommon. But what happens next depends entirely upon what form the fence may be found to take on the farther side, and upon what measure your horse may adopt towards completing his jump. He will almost invariably give you the idea that he is bent upon coming neck-and-crop into the next field, though he seldom carries out his threat, even though a second ditch be choked with the grass and brambles of October. But, while avoiding the collapse that seems so imminent, he changes his legs perhaps once, perhaps two or three times in succession, and finally, just as you have given up yourself wholly for lost, he gives a back kick that carries him well on to *terra firma*, and yourself possibly on to his ears, while every joint in your backbone calls out to you that you were born and taught to ride in England.

What may you be doing in England? Have you had

anything yet as good as this that I am about, however inadequately, to describe—the sport of Friday last with the Tipperary? Old England is three weeks behind time. Did not the Tipperary open their season on October 15th, while the Quorn are not to get into their new clothes till November 6th? You may not have had rain enough. Here the ground is in condition absolutely perfect, the grass rich and the soil moist, with warm and recent rain. And, as the ploughed land is limited to an occasional potato patch, which you need seldom enter, it matters nothing if that be soft and deep. The fences, of course, are blind. They invariably are, the winter through, it seems to me, in Tipperary. And the Tipperary horse, having during his three-year-old schooling fathomed one or two bramble-veiled dykes, is not easily entrapped afterwards. Warm as the inner room of a Turkish bath has the atmosphere been on several days of late. But each day have horses grown fitter; each day have our own lungs worked more freely; each day has our whole muscular system developed and hardened. I'faith, sirs, we have had a merry time, stealing a march upon you. Allow me to put it thus, and allow me at the same time to register my gratitude to the kind friends by whose assistance I have thus been enabled to score.

Tipperary is a book that I have, in recent months, been privileged to study page by page, and very pleasant reading, believe me, have I found it. Friday's page happened to be not altogether a new one. I had turned it before. But the leaf was not dimmed, nor were the illustrations less brilliant than on last perusal. To reduce my meaning to plain fact, we had two gallops from two of the same coverts, and I verily believe, with *the same two foxes* as nearly a year ago! It will hardly happen again, for the head of that big Ballylennan fox has gone to ornament a certain Saxon smoking-room in the Grass Countries.

I have before described Ballylennan's swampy gorse—a low-lying covert in the flat valley of a tributary of the river Anner, and situated in a district that I have learned to love well, associating it, as I do, with wild sport, consistent scent, and a country that, if rough, is very

practicable and sound. I gather that the regular members of the Hunt give preference to other, more open, ground. Personally I like the Ballylennan neighbourhood — not only because, with its heavy, bushed hedges it looks more like Northamptonshire, but because these hedges are set on broad, fair banks, upon which a horse has time to perch himself in safety, and you to consider what will happen next. I like far less those crumbling barriers from which you may, or may not, reach the ground as you left it, and at best are likely to reach it with a dull, dead jar against your backbone. There are always one or two holes in these thorny growths ; and, if hounds be only going fast enough, it is not difficult to spot and to pierce them with decent safety. Northward of Ballylennan, and less than a mile away, is the rough covert of Kyle, standing on a rise of ground overlooking the vale aforesaid, as, for instance, Clawson Thorns overlooks the Vale of Belvoir, to which, in its general aspect, this Vale of Ballylennan is not altogether dissimilar. An open bridle-road, and a fox with his head for Kyle, not at all unnaturally suggests to every one that this covert must be the immediate point ; and as with life so with fox-hunting, its only certainty is the unexpected, the assumption fell through, the odds were upset, and some of the best men of the hunt were thrown out. A man on a hayrick turned the fox by screaming at him as he came, the intervening farm buildings shut hounds out of view, and in half a minute all the mischief was done. The chase had turned leftward, and was now crossing this flat and glorious valley at racing pace, with the Master (upon Newtown, whose presence in the field would seem ever to insure a gallop), Mr. D. Scully (upon "the Slug"), Mr. Maclean, Mr. Dawnay, Mr. Walker (enjoying his first good ride in Tipperary), Sir John Power, Major Hatchell, and the brothers Hughes in attendance.

At first hounds swung back almost to Ballylennan Covert ; then they dashed forward straight for the gorse of Drangan, Mr. Maclean's light grey being the only beacon perceptible as it quivered through openings in the intervening hedges. No, not the only guide. A single hound that,

like ourselves, had flashed beyond the farmhouse, cut straight across country to the head, with a dash and instinct that belong supremely to a foxhound. At his heels I found myself riding a steeplechase with such professors as Mr. J. Phelan and Mr. Croom, the former finished horseman eventually winning by half-a-dozen lengths? Did I get there? Yes, I may reply, with Vanity and my own spurs, Vanity being the winner of last spring's Point-to-Point. Thankful indeed was I for the generous thought that had put me on her, where the banks loom large and the dykes are gorse-covered, bramble-hidden, and deep; and when as now hounds, with a full field's start, ran with their heads level and their necks outstretched. For a mile we could make no impression upon the grey will-o'-the-wisp in front; but in a mile and a half we had jumped the brook that, with its deep, gorse-fringed banks meanders the vale, and in a minute more we were at last taking the pull that hounds seldom fail to allow when you are really riding on terms. The same fox as last winter, I have already dared to surmise. Did he not cross the vale, and twice the brook, almost by the same smeuses, and certainly at the identical spots at the river (as they denominate such a stream in Ireland)? At twenty minutes we nearly rode over an old woman, whom our fox had encountered only a moment before. But this was just beneath Drangan Gorse; and in a very few minutes more hounds were working their fox round the little covert, while riders were only too gladly turning their horses' heads to the light breeze, and looking back upon the fair expanse they had just traversed. Quickly their fox was driven forth into the open, and quickly hounds had him by the brush, as he swarmed the third bank beyond the covert. (Forty-five minutes from start to finish.) An immense fat old fox; his condition killed him, and never again will he beat hounds from Ballylennan.

In the sharp scurry from Parson's Hill there was repetition of history again, even with the brief limit of my Tipperary experience. Again in the darkening afternoon we drew the tiny patch of gorse on the hilltop, and again did a big yellow fox jump forth before hounds. A

too hasty scream sent him back through their midst, and, snapping at him as they went, the pack coursed him down the slope, Warrior even bundling him harmlessly over as he topped the first bank. The men of Tipperary were away in their wake as so many arrows from competing bows. Two grass fields and then the potato patch, which there was now no time to avoid. Over the great boundary bank in a dozen places; across the cross-cut, confusing potato rows, round with a right swing to race up the higher ground, Mr. Burke, Messrs Riall, Phelan, Scully, Croom, and Higgins apparently heading the struggle, while hounds fairly flew in advance. It might seem an impertinence to invoke the aid of the old fable of the hare and the tortoise. But if ever a welter-weight proved that the race is not always to the swift or to the feather, it was in the case of Mr. Hemphill, who, leaving the others to entrap themselves for a while in a lane leading to Pepperstown, turned sharp with hounds as they bore left, and reached that house a field ahead of his lighter competitors. So far exactly the line of last year.

Now ensued the *contretemps* of the gallop—the only drawback to a charming burst. Our fox, headed from the house, led hounds and most of the little company into a field whence there was no escape, a thick, plain strand of wire hemming in three sides. Mr. Phelan rode at a point in it where the gorse appeared sufficiently to cover the iron; but his horse swerved to the more open place adjoining, and spun a terrible somersault into the next field. Lord William Bentinck, Mr. Riall, and Mr. Croom stayed to extricate the tangled horse and rider (which, marvellous to say, was effected without damage of any sort), while the rest of the party cut the wire and went on in pursuit of Mr. R. Chaplin (10th Hussars) and Kenneth (the first whip), who alone by good luck had skirted the trap. (It is not for me, a stranger, to make, or even repeat, any comment on a snare so unusual in this fair, open country. But if words have the power attributed to them, there should have been some burning ears that afternoon and eve while the men of the Tipperary Hunt talked over their grievance.)

To first check only some fifteen or sixteen minutes, but the yellow fox in view, not two hundred yards from hounds. The road and bridge gave him a minute's law in which to reach Rathkenny Gorse; after which they hunted him through and hunted him round, till Mr. Burke decided to give him his life, when at the end of half-an-hour a blown and beaten fox was pretty well at his mercy. Among others taking part in this merry ride were Mr. Handley (who on the Monday had taken so prominent a part with his grey mare), and Mr. Dawnay (10th Hussars), who thus saw well all the sport of the day.

Wednesday, October 25.—I thought, after rising at 7.30 and filling in my diary before hunting yesterday, that I might claim holiday for the week, and that I had foisted upon my readers as much as I had any right to ask them to bear; but at risk of prolixity I cannot leave Tuesday untold. It would have been held a great day at any time and anywhere. In October, and over the cream of Tipperary, it was nothing less than a delightful and well-timed experience. Wake up, wake up! ye cub-hunters of Merrie England. November is all too late to begin. You may have frost upon you next week, and then—your winter is over.

Briefly now. Tuesday at Coleman Cross was more or less a by-day, taking place, at three days' advertisement, of another fixture abandoned. Sport only began about 1.45, when they found at Coolmore (near Fethard, and recently the residence of Lord Southampton). A turn up and down the plantations occupied some five minutes, and their fox was seen by a peasant to steal away in a northerly direction, towards Mortlestown. A lovely country developed at once. Big sound banks, somewhat overgrown with furze and grass perhaps, but seldom with hidden dykes to catch the careless. And of course the fields all grass. Very few cattle in them, and the enclosures of fair size—the ground level and damp enough still, in spite of three or four days of summer weather. Pace gradually improved after hounds had sprung across the road and were heading westward for Woodhouse, their fox's point, some three or four miles away. A galloping hunt of thirty minutes took us there, and was almost an

education in itself as to how to cross Tipperary, so varied and so fair were the fences, and so sound the ground. I am not sure though, by the way, whether it will invariably pay to prepare a Tipperary horse for Northamptonshire by instructing him over strong timber in the middle of a run. He has a natural contempt for a stick across his path, and will try to break through it, however thick. What say you on the subject, my young and gallant friend?

On the fun of the next gallop, with a fresh fox from the gorse of Knockinglass, I must not dilate at any length. It commenced leisurely, our fox being bothered by foot-people, and hounds bothered by his consequent dodging. But of a sudden it warmed up, the pace quickened, and the country grew big. On a twisting line that embraced Lismortagh, Mortlestown, and the outskirts of Killinaule, we galloped till scarcely a horse could gallop more, the first check coming after thirty-five minutes, and the scream over the earths at Springhill at forty-five. The completed hour saw a dozen thirsty souls reviving life at Mr. Hemphill's most opportune and hospitable sideboard. How that gentleman with his weight rode one horse to the end of that afternoon is to me almost as marvellous as his performance of the Friday previous, or as the success of Mr. J. Phelan to-day in negotiating a most extraordinary compound of bank, double ditch, and hedge into the wood of Lismortagh—a jump that sent his next follower rolling backward whence he came. In Tipperary, where one man goes, others generally can, and will, follow. But if my own experience, acquired some fifteen minutes after the last-named incident, be worth anything, I can conscientiously recommend the line to be drawn at Mr. Phelan's ventures. It so happened that, in struggling to gain upon the flying pack, the gentleman in question flew up into the midst of a high, overgrown bank, and in a moment afterwards was to be seen forcing his way along to the accompaniment of some mild objurgations that might be taken to apply to his position, or to his horse, or to any unwelcome aspect of affairs. On the principle that it never does to listen to what the man in front has to

say on the subject of the peril he conceives he has overcome, and from which he may or may not seek to deter you, I hastened up after him as soon as I considered the coast to be clear, trusting to Providence and a Tipperary horse to take me on as well as my predecessor. But, happening to be riding a vigorous jumper, I found myself taken on all too quickly, and the next moment to be swimming about in a deep pond, into which I had descended plump upon my friend's hat. Heading for the shore, I soon emerged in safety, while Mr. Phelan went on without his head-covering. On the way home in the evening he rode back to the spot to recover his damaged beaver at the hands of an industrious countryman, who was wet and mud-besmeared to the shoulders. "Sure the next feller that come he just dhrove it to the bottom, and I've been fishing for it with the spade this half-hour," explained the countryman as he gratefully pocketed his wage. But the faculty of jumping a big fence is by no means the sole essential for riding well to hounds; and I must be allowed to render humble tribute to Mr. Phelan's brilliant talent in this line. Possessing all the quickness of a steeplechase jockey, he combines with it the readiness of eye and of discrimination that mark a first-rate man to hounds.

CHAPTER XLIV

COUNTY TIPPERARY—(*continued*)

THE rush of sport has made my notes as hurried as they are voluminous. There is no sitting still in county Tipperary. Besides the four days' fox-hunting which Mr. Burke gives weekly, the 10th Hussars are out twice with their harriers. And if this be not enough, it is open to you to join the farmers' pack, and to pursue the hare—or occasionally a deer—from morn to eve each Sunday. Of the last-named section of the county sport I am bound to plead ignorance, excepting so far as noting that to every second shanty in the neighbourhood is attached a non-descript hunting-dog—perhaps beagle, harrier, foxhound,

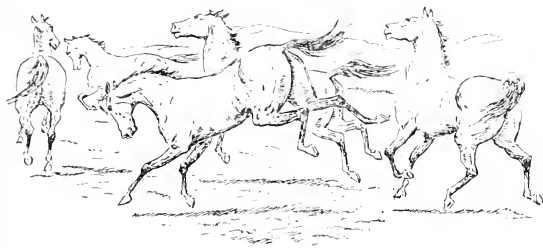
or dachshund—all of which know as well as the parish priest when the seventh day comes round.

But the 10th Hussars have this year an exceedingly pretty little pack, chiefly dwarf foxhounds, that can drive a hare straight or bustle an outlying fox in very different form from what Mr. Jorrocks anathematised as “currant-jelly dogs.” Lord William Bentinck carries the horn, with Mr. Brand as his usual whipper-in. On the pleasant afternoon I saw them in the Clonmell neighbourhood they doubled up a brace of hares, one after a very interesting hunt, and this upon ground almost too freely stocked with hares for harrier purposes. And on Saturday last in the Cahir district they had two good runs (one a point of about three miles), and killed both hares. Oftentimes there will be seen with the harriers as large a field as with the foxhounds, every man who has a horse to school or to show and sell (and who has not in Tipperary?) taking advantage of the occasion, while the country people delight in a sport in which upon foot they can take so much more prominent a part.

A feature of no little interest to a stranger, whether hunting in Tipperary or elsewhere in Ireland, is found in the squads of young horses he sees galloping the pastures whenever hounds are about. They by no means invariably confine themselves to a single field, but often go for miles, seldom meeting with any harm on the way. But then an Irish horse is born to take care of himself. Often a colt may be seen wandering of his own free will about a farm homestead beside a road, into which he may saunter whenever he chooses. From his foalhood he is likely to be as familiar with man and his surroundings as are the chickens and the pig. It is his freedom to roam and his freedom from fear that helps to make him so valuable and so sensible. And the appreciation he thus finds at the hands of the foreign buyer keeps Ireland comparatively denuded of horses over the age of mere colts. With few exceptions—the property of men who can afford to retain something good for their own use—there remain of what we term sizeable horses chiefly the infirm and the rejected. It happened to be my fate at a certain covert-side not long

ago to find myself within a select circle of the biggest and perhaps the best-looking hunters in the field. They hadn't the decency even then to hide the infirmity that bound them to the distressful country. One after another groaned aloud. "Ugh" went up on one side of me, "Ugh-ugh" on the other. I had heard aforetime the exaggeration of a horse "roaring in his walk." Never before did I hear, or believe possible, six horses roaring at a standstill.

And, as the farmers part with their fillies as well as their colts, it becomes a matter of wonder what is left to breed from. Probably the veterinary surgeon would find few of their brood mares deserving of a clean bill of sound-



Squads of young horses galloping in the pastures

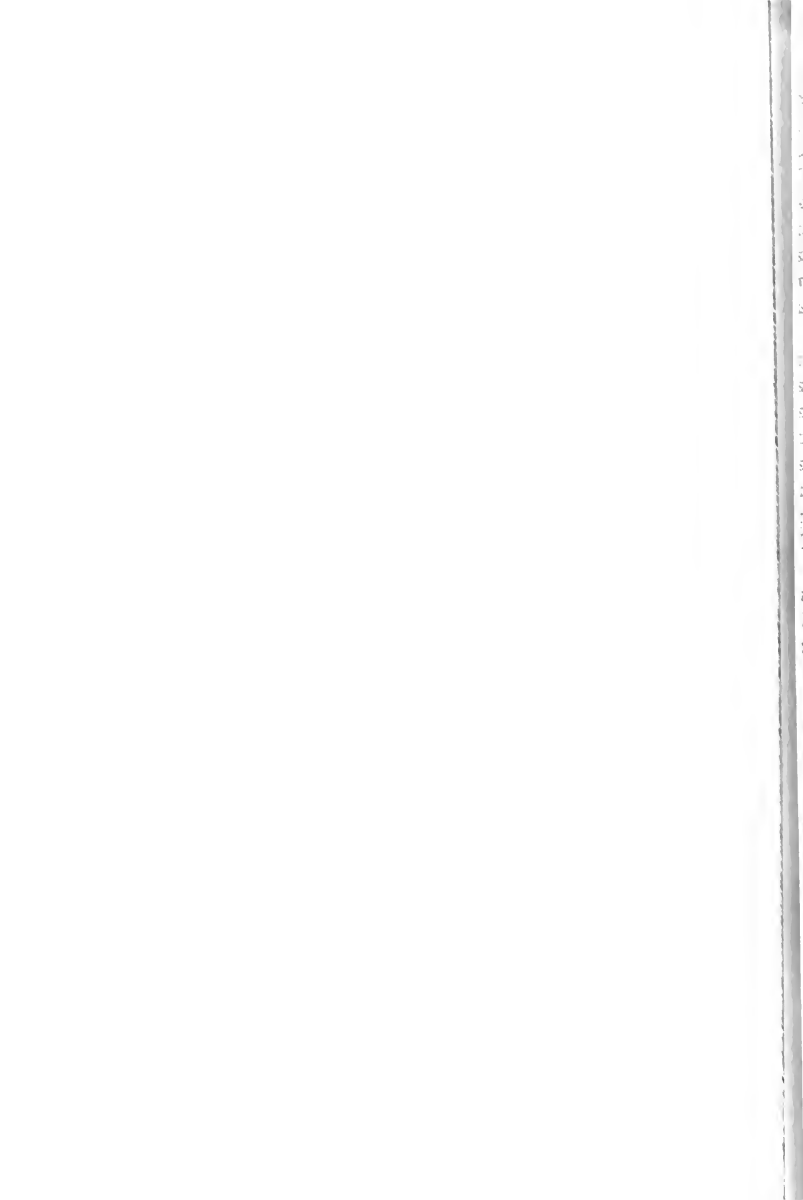
ness. Yet good colts and fillies are raised by the hundred, and every man in Ireland would seem to look upon horse-breeding as an absorbing and a profitable pursuit. There they have a way of describing a horse to any listener, no matter how unbelieving or how long practised in the craft himself, that for very intensity cannot fail to insist upon some degree of credence if not of absolute conviction. Here is a little instance which I am writing for my English readers. Irish groom bestriding an animal whose every outline betokened want of speed. To him slyly suggested an intimate friend of his master's: "Good-looking horse that, Mike; but is he fast enough?" "Fast enough, ye mane? Faix, yer honour, it's not hunting but *racing* he should be doing this minute!" What further possible inquiry could there be to this?

It had often enough been told me of the habit of countrymen to take a horse out of cart or plough and to join in the chase. But I never thought to see a pair of yokels thus mount a white horse apiece and, with blinkered bridles and no saddle whatever, ride hotly to hounds, each pair one field from the other and taking their own line, each an exact counterpart of the other. As I happened to be riding midway between them, the effect of this queer apparition on either flank was positively startling. I began almost to think that Paddy-the-footman's insistence on filling my flask according to the custom of the country might possibly have something to do with this double phenomenon. That there was little or nothing eccentric in the trappings of this strange pair you may take the following as proof. A gossoon had ridden out upon a saddle moored in its place by a single girth and a stern anchor, *i.e.* a crupper. The former fastening was soon reft and dangling. "Your girth's broke!" shouted a tender-hearted sportsman, as the boy larruped his pony at a big bank in front. The youngster pulled up for a moment, looked down at the riven girth, then, whacking the pony afresh, went on his way with the reply: "Ah now, no matter. Isn't the crupper there to hould me?"

We are led to believe that Ireland's future financial prosperity will in a great measure depend upon her consumption of whisky. If this be the case, it is only fair to county Tipperary to assert that she at least is prepared to contribute full share towards the national revenue. That whisky is the wine of the country is absolutely recognised. It is at once the token of good companionship and the medium of hospitality. It is employed to cement a friendship and to develop acquaintance—to seal a compact or to stamp a welcome. As such you must accept it, harden your head or endanger offence. (Ask successive Masters of the Harriers their experience.) Even the servants of a Tipperary establishment insist on carrying out this hospitable principle. "Ah, sure now, that's nothing at all"—as you brew your whisky and soda to a Saxon measure. And as for allowing your saddle-flask to be filled at anything lower than 10 per cent. under proof, no



EACH AN EXACT COUNTERPART OF THE OTHER.



beseeching will induce them to be party to such a breach of etiquette. In my own recent case I had, I protest, daily implored in vain for a due admixture of water. Then, to top it all, Paddy aforesaid fairly gave me away. Another more or less abstemious guest arrived, and requested that he might have his flask "filled weak—the same as Mr. Brooksby's." "Begorra," retorted Paddy with a wicked grin, "that man likes his dhrink as strong as anybody's! He takes it *strong*."

But the quaintest illustration I know of the overflow of whisky was that of a young gentleman who, having satisfied his own requirements for the occasion, administered the rest of the liquor at hand to his pack of beagles, to the extent of two full wine-glasses a hound. He then stationed himself beyond the sunk fence bordering his lawn; blew his horn and holloed loudly—till the whole pack staggered over the drop and tumbled into the ditch. There he left them to get sober at their leisure.

I have only to add, as an instance of how little account is distance regarded in county Tipperary, that Captain and Mrs. Barclay found themselves at the end of the day with some twenty-five *Irish* miles to ride and drive home!

I can give you another, far more extravagant, record from the past fortnight. Two young ladies, determined on attending the opening meet, rode their horses twenty similar miles into Thurles at early morn, put them on the train, hunted all day, rode back half-a-dozen miles to Fethard, thence trained back to Thurles, and rode home those twenty Irish miles that night! What think you of that, my countrywomen? Without further names I can tell you that a gentleman who keeps his horses at Fethard frequently comes thirty Celtic miles to a meet; while during the opening week another sportsman found himself riding forty miles home into county Waterford after hunting with the Tipperary.

I think I have now given you as much as you will swallow. So I will merely assert that it is all perfectly true.

CHAPTER XLV

THE QUORN UNDER LORD LONSDALE (1893)

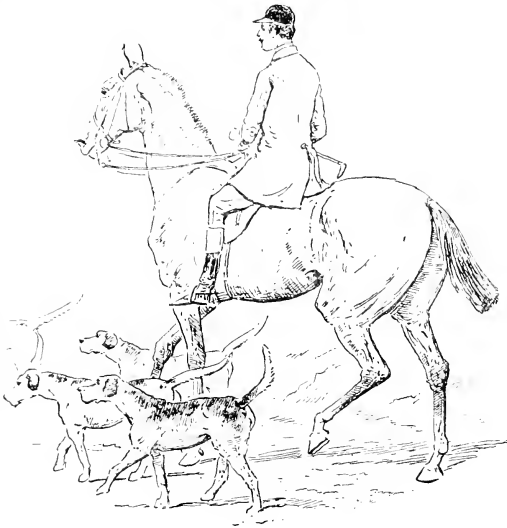
AN oft-quoted utterance on the part of the truest gentleman who ever wrote upon sport is to the effect that "after a good run he always felt as if he had done a good deed." Very good indeed did I feel after the Quorn Friday of December 8, and little excuse need I plead. For had we not seen a brilliant gallop and a second excellent hunt, enacted both of them over the best of that beautiful country?

I had come from a distance, once more to hear Tom Firr; again to see the good pack at their work under his marvellous handling, and for myself to mark the firm rule of Lord Lonsdale insisting upon scope for his huntsman and hounds. As luck would have it, I saw it all under circumstances most favourable and events most fortunate.

The overnight storm had freshened the ground, had driven foxes into the coverts, and had cleared the air for scent and sport. It had, it is true, brought the smart Melton field out all unadorned. But what mattered this? It gave them a business-like air that was fully endorsed by the deeds of the day. Knowing Leicestershire, as I happen to, I make bold to say I never saw it ridden over harder and more unflinchingly. In giving a few names of those riding to hounds I cannot, at all events, be wrong in commencing with those of Lady Curzon, Lady Gerard, Miss Tennant, and Miss Fraser. To these, and to that of the noble Master, I may add, from indifferent memory, and only as an old-time acquaintance, those of Mr. and Mrs. L. Lowther, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin, Mr. and Mrs. C. Fenwick, Mr. and Mrs. Philips, Mrs. Osgood, Lord Seymour, Baron M. de Tuyll, General Chippendall, Captains Biddulph, Boyce, King-King, O'Neil, Messrs. Hedworth Barclay, Baldock, H. Bourke, B. Lubbock, H. Praed, B. Sheriffe, Russell-Monro, G. Wood, Hames, Kewley, Wade, &c.

No insignificant item in the scene (as may be imagined)

was Tom Furr. Coming, as I did, a pilgrim to a hallowed land, I may be pardoned if I gazed with some curiosity upon a familiar face in a new setting. Relevantly or otherwise, the idea now given me was that of an old picture hung in a new frame—a *chef d'œuvre* by an old master redecorated and hung in an exhibition of works by new masters. That Tom Furr fitted his framing goes



A hog-maned steeplechaser

without saying. But Tom Furr, leathered as to the legs, hung with swan-necked spur, crossed with a stirrup-strap, and mounted (superbly mounted) on a hog-maned steeplechaser with a long tail, made up a total that to my mind would best be set down as Tom Furr *en aspic*. It is needless, also, to add that Tom Furr forgot his casement as readily as he ever ignores his swamping field directly hounds run, and directly business is about. Indeed, business has ever been Furr's engrossing principle, and to this he owes half of his incomparable success.

Gaddesby Spinney (the planting of the late Mr. Cheney, himself one of the quickest men who ever rode to the Quorn in the days of Osbaldeston and since) sent hounds forth only as far as the Quenborough precincts. The run of the day took place from Barkby Gorse, a product of comparatively recent times. This beautiful bed of furze immediately adjoins the holt or wood.

Away-with-the-first-fox-that-breaks has ever been a leading principle of fox-hunting in the Shires. Misery, then, it was to-day to watch a fine fellow set off for Leicester, while hounds were tied to another in covert. In vain did Tom's horn appeal to a pack deafened by their own music; in vain did that great voice ring forth till the whole air seemed filled with the volume of sound. "No good. You may go back, gentlemen, and get into your places." But next moment we were on the move again, cantering up the green lane between gorse and holt. And soon the big dog-hounds were throwing their heavy voices in the wood. Down the middle ride, already deep and boggy from the one night's rain, we trotted quickly after Firr to reach the little hand-gate on the south (or Beeby) side, just as the pack came revelling round the covert. Arrived at the hand-gate, every tongue ceased for one second. Then out they burst with a crash, down the meadow and up the wind. Away, away from Barkby Holt once more, on a flood of memory and an ecstasy of anticipation. The bulk of the field had betaken themselves round the east end of the covert, and now galloped down upon hounds as the latter swung leftward along the valley. The well-known Beeby Bottom was thus left on the right, and the chase mounted the hill for Baggrave Lodge. A grand, wide-stretching country, wild and untenanted, save by big bullocks and an occasional herdsman, is this section of Quornland. With a scent and a good fox, I know of no ground like it. And we had both before us this day. "Time, time! give the hounds time!" cried the field-master, Mr. Lancelot Lowther. And this given, they scarcely wanted the indulgence for another twenty minutes. Rising a second hill (I cannot describe more closely to you, though upon it and every following one I could map out

in my remainder-brain many and many a gallop of former years), hounds struck the Baggrave and Hungerton road, upon its brow. The Hungerton Bottom (a hedge-fenced chasm) loomed below, and already the pack were driving down upon it. The Master and huntsman, with Mr. and Mrs. C. Chaplin, Mr. Hames, and several others, dashed off to the left, where the stream runs through an open field. Mr. Kewley, Baron Max de Tuyll, and a large squadron with them, verged right, popped out of the road where a post-and-rail invited, then hurried down the big ox-pasture to the gulch (I know of no English expression to convey notion of the watercourses that intersect our grassy highlands). The corner by the little plantation—the plantation where years ago Firr's horse floundered over a wire and hurt him badly—looked more feasible. There was a cattle-track down to it, and a cattle-track leading beyond it. Surely there must be gap or gate! And there was—the former, feebly patched. On to the bank and off; and hounds came across our front with their heads for Quenby. Beside Quenby Plantation they hovered for a moment. The two forces joined; their fox had been driven leftward and onward, and the gallop continued to Lowesby. A second's hesitation, and they were forward again, faster than ever, but less severely upon us, who now galloped parallel upon the road, all the way to John O'Gaunt. The best of the run was to this point (the railway bridge before the covert—thirty minutes). But a good fox was neither caught nor beat. He travelled the right-hand edge of the covert, and pointing for the Cottesmore Woods, went to ground in the stone quarry by Tilton Station, while a brace of fresh foxes took hounds on for a few fields. You may take Tilton Station as the point, and you cannot, on a rough calculation, make it less than seven miles, run practically straight. I remember well (so will some of you) a very similar line run twice, say ten or a dozen years before, with a fox from Barkby Holt. On the third occasion on which we came to ride after him he was mangy and decrepit, and died at once from his previous exertions and from his chill underground.

CHAPTER XLVI

SPORT AT LAST

“CRICK—the very sound of it is crisp as Southdown mutton” wrote many years ago the only man who could ever do justice to fox-hunting. Even he—our Homer, our master of thought and sport, my kindly mentor—never conceived anything happier than the gallop of to-day, from a Crick meet. My prosy pen shall tackle it if it can: and plain descript shall take the place of poesy.

What do we know of scent? what do we know of the likelihood of fox-hunting? Here was Wednesday ushered in with violent gale and the glass at its lowest dip! Prediction at such time would have been vain almost to impertinence. But I would rather have a storm well burst than a squall coming on—would not you? The storm this morning raged upon us. It had spent itself for a while before we drew Lilbourne Gorse, soon after midday. Here my tale begins.

I should have told you, though, that hardly ever before had so small a meet been witnessed at Crick. There were scarcely more people than I see opposite me as I write, in the Pytchley Hunt print of 1852. Only those intent upon the business of fox-hunting had cared to face the morning: and thus you will understand my statement—without prejudice to the run—that most of us succeeded in seeing the sport. The run of which I am about to tell you was no “cut-’em-down” steeplechase, in which at most only four or five men could share. But it was a fast gallop of over half-an-hour without any positive check; and it owed its transcendent charm to the beauty and rideability of the country, to the paucity of the field, to the excellence of the pace, and to the soundness of the ground. One ploughed field at most could you have entered; and this you might easily avoid. I think myself happy indeed in the fact that, within a fortnight, I have seen hounds run hard for a half-a-dozen miles over the very cream of the Quorn and the cream of the Pytchley countries.

Well, here are names which go to make up almost the whole of Wednesday’s field, December 17, 1893. Some

few have doubtless slipped me at the moment, but the list is more nearly complete than ever before of a Pytchley field. I can only wish it included many others of our hard-riding community, and more especially that of our courteous and sport-loving Master. Lord Braye (acting Master), Lord Southampton, Marquis Pizzardi, Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Mr. and the Misses Fenwick, Mr. and the Misses Miller, Mrs. Byass, Mrs. Blacklock, Mrs. Chamberlain, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Osgood, Miss Cross, Miss Darby, Miss M. Lowndes, General Clery, Captains Alfrey, Askwith, Beach, Pender, Renton, Williams, and the gentleman (I beg his pardon that I have forgotten his name) from that high-sounding land Linlithgow-and-Stirlingshire, Messrs. Adamthwaite, Bentley, Broom, Brown, Curzon, Cooper, B. Chaplin, Czarnikov, Drage (2), J. Darby, Fabling, T. Gilbert, Gees (2), Jameson, Kewley, E. and R. Loder, Hetherington, Hipwell, Howkins (2), Mills, senr. and junr., Muntz, Milner, Paton, Price, G. Powell, Parnell, Wheeler, and Wroughton.

As I have said, there was a lull in the storm as we stood above Lilbourne Gorse, many of us already bedrenched, the others shortly to be condemned to a hot struggle in oilskin. Of all the good fox-coverts in Northamptonshire, the gorse in question is apparently so placed as to make it impossible for a fox to get away. Yet from no covert in the hunt have we seen so many great gallops since—well, say since the commencement of Lord Spencer's first mastership. River and railway run below; foot-people invariably crown the grass-fields right and left; while we, usually in hundreds, block the upper end. But once again a bold fox ran the gauntlet. He broke at once across the great green pasture that stretches to Lilbourne church, and crossed the Rugby road under a fire of view holloas that might have been heard at the town last named.

Too hurried and too muffled to look at my watch at the moment, I appealed for assistance to one who rode by me, and who never neglects to time a run, any more than he leaves uncared for the best interests of the Hunt. Five minutes later I fumbled to my waistcoat and took up the timing for myself and my employers.

And now I will endeavour to tell you of the run as far as I could see of it, and can remember of it this morning. (It ought, perhaps, to have gone down on paper last night: but for the life of me I could not forego the delight of a reverie, the joy of riding the gallop over again upon a smoke-cloud, then to retire to bed upon a dream.)

I remember we all trotted peacefully out of the road after Goodall, that the little ladies screamed into their work immediately, and that the broad back of our future M.P. and the neat forms of the Drage brothers were at once in prominent pilotage, assuring us of the absence of wire where the hedges are laid so trimly and the flickering sunlight threw a haze across one's vision. Here I must interpolate the fact that, throughout this cheery gallop, we were scarcely once baulked by wire (the single instance I shall name by-and-by excepted). Almost every farmer in the district had taken down his summer fencing; and much of this good result, I may be permitted to add, we owed to the personal exertions of Mr. Fenwick and Mr. J. Darby, of Hilmorton. Often and often as one approached a fence—in itself of quite sufficient proportion—one dared hardly “loose off” till the last stride, seeing the wire posts and peering in dread of the wire.

For a mile we rode straight for the gorse of Hilmorton. Whether anything headed our fox thence I cannot say, but suddenly he veered to the left, and laying himself out over what the organisers of the Rugby Steeplechases advertise, not without warrant, as “the finest hunting country in the world”—viz. the Crick-and-Lilbourne valley—took us up the centre of it, while he held his head for Yelvertoft. Holloa, sir, how came you here? If I can't see your face I can swear to your familiar back as you settle down to ride with the pack. C. Mills for a thousand! Alongside him range Messrs. Fabling and Hetherington, with Captain Beach and Miss Fenwick, while a small host are on the right of the boundary fence that bisects the vale. Room for all, each fence to be taken at many points; and the pace, though not so hot as it will soon become, is yet sufficient.

Our fox would, I think, have turned again on a shorter

axis, but that a farmer met him and bore him down again into the vale, and the chase went on delightfully over this pattern country. Just short of Yelvertoft village the turn came ; hounds swung to the left, and in a strongly-fenced corner we seemed likely to be pounded. But the strong ox-rail beyond the edge had no terrors for Lord Southampton, who—riding, I fancy, the chestnut horse he calls Coolmore—made light of it at once, and also of the strong timber in the fence immediately beyond. As he reached the Yelvertoft road he found the place of vantage already secured by Mr. Fenwick, whose knowledge of the country and its foxes had kept him inside of the turn.

Beyond the road another oxer went crack in several places, as the left contingent landed into a meadow from which there was apparently no escape. The hamlet of Claycoton was just below ; and the village carpenter had put up not only some very captivating rails, but the very unnecessary addition of a strand of barbed wire. “Your wire-nippers, for Heaven’s sake !” bawled the imprisoned ones to their comrades in the road alongside. At that moment exit was found possible by a side fence, and a hundred yards’ *détour* let out the captives, while Goodall galloped on for Hemplow with the flying pack, and Lord Southampton fell harmlessly on landing over an immense chasm beside the village.

Rising the hill, the old quotation rose involuntarily to one’s lips, as the chase was seen to be headed, as it has so often been headed before, by our honoured veteran, Mr. Trueman Mills :—

“First in the van was the old grey man,
Who rode on the old grey mare”

Another well-known boundary fence, that of the Stanford Hall estate, confronted them as they rose the brow. Mr. T. Jameson’s Irish practice came in useful here, and the hunt swept on over these wide pastures ; the bitches running to kill, and Goodall as happy as a schoolboy. A boy again I thought Mr. W. Hipwell, in whose company I have ridden since boyhood’s days, and who now was leading his field over one wide-set oxer after another.

(Men tell me that to-day they had to jump more of these sterling ox-fences than they have sometimes jumped in a season; and certainly, as far as jumping enters into the question, it seemed to me everybody accepted enthusiastically all that came in his or her way.) Goodall, by-the-bye, was riding that dapper little brown which, upon an obvious joke (the horse having been bought from Mr. George Gee), we all now know as Gee-Gee, and on which our huntsman recently immortalised himself by hunting a hare to death with the Dallington beagles.

At a killing pace now were hounds running on towards Welford; and we looked for a view and for blood every minute among these wide, open pastures where, at last, the grass rode as velvet and yet scarce broke to the foot-fall. But, alas for our finish, though hurrah for a good fox! Fortune favoured bold Charley, and robbed our keen huntsman. The second whip caught the view, and the latter did not catch his fox. Opposite South Kilworth Covert, hounds and fox were in the same field. Goodall galloped to the view, but beyond the railway they could not touch it. Probably his fox may have run down the line. At any rate the run was over—as joyous a burst as we have seen for years. Thirty-five minutes exactly. Extreme points five miles.

Please do not suppose that, in venturing to deck my sketch as I go along, I infer that those with whose names I have taken liberties alone were prominent. On the contrary, never was a run more closely and yet more fairly ridden. For instance, several other ladies were well among the front rank throughout, viz.: Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Byass, Mrs. Blacklock, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Chamberlain; while, besides most of those in my list above who constitute what I have heard termed “the regular lot” of our riders to hounds, I may well example other farmers, such as Mr. J. Cooper, Mr. T. Gilbert, jun., and the brothers Howkins (sons of the good fellow who looks after the well-being of Lilbourne Gorse. Why does not one of you come forward in gratitude for to-day and buy the slashing bay four-year-old that carried his boy so well?).

I have nothing more to add of this gallop, save that I can remember only about three times this line to have been followed at all closely by a fox. Once was when our Prince was out (only then they started from Crick). The last occasion was about six years ago, very late one cold evening.

I shall be anxious until to-morrow lest our tired fox should have crept back to the Hemplow, and there been picked up when hounds drew the hills. For, as I left on the old principle of going home (with one horse) when you have enjoyed yourself, I saw hounds feather beneath the hill covert, and speak as they entered it. If that fox was thus caught, it will be a calamity to the Pytchley Hunt. Why, even the butcher of Lilbourne was delighted to hear of his escape. "He's had a many of my fowls. But dang the fowls, says I; I'm glad he's got off."

There has, I learn, been frivolling during the past week in Southern Northamptonshire. It is early in the winter for this. But no matter. They have had a Hunt Ball—well organised, well patronised, and well wined. The story goes that among the last to leave the function were two young fox-hunters, returning to one roof in the paternal brougham. Being brothers, they had not much to talk about on the way. Besides, nature at high pressure for long, amid such surroundings, relapses easily in happy exhaustion. The younger brother roused himself as the carriage pulled up, slammed the door after him, and entered the ready portal—believing, he avers, that the other had woke up and gone in before. At any rate the good coachman—himself only anxious for his long-deferred bed—quickly had his horses out, backed his carriage into the coach-house, locked it up, and retired to roost. He was not as early as usual in his attendance at stables the next morning; but, when he did come, it was as if all pandemonium was loose in that cool coach-house. Even now, as I am told, it has been found difficult to reconcile the conflicting versions of big brother and little brother—the former averring stoutly that "the young 'un did it on purpose, and all because he owed him one over a certain after-supper dance."

CHAPTER XLVII

A CHAPTER OF EXCUSES

THE remarkable gallop of the Pytchley on Saturday, December 23, 1893, is hardly more easy to recount than it was to ride.

They had met at Charwelton on a perfect hunting morning, had consumed a couple of hours in asserting their rights over the country loaned to the Grafton—"beating the bounds" as it were; had then returned to the neighbourhood of Charwelton; and soon after one o'clock were drawn up in one large grass field while a fox was being ejected from a drain in the next.

Mr Goodman had chanced to see a fine fox go to ground, as he rode to covert; and Lord Spencer determined to avail himself of the certainty, rather than risk the waste of further hours in threshing out a country already well hunted.

I may take Saturday's gallop as illustrating what I said in eulogy of that of the Wednesday previous, from Lilbourne Gorse, viz. that the latter had a charm which a runaway burst has not. Saturday was more than a steeple-chase. It was a match between horses and hounds; and, under the conditions, hounds had the best of it. They ran away from us. Nobody could live with them through the whole run; and thus, I assert, ten people went home on the Wednesday with a sweet flavour on their palate to one who drank his wine with gusto on Saturday night. Saturday's was a grand instance of how the little Pytchley lady pack can race, and also of how a stout fox can stand before them. They drove him at top speed for forty minutes; but whether they were running him or a substitute for the next half-hour, I cannot take upon myself to say. I confess I hoped every minute to see him handled. What right had he in a drain? He could only have gone there to avoid being hunted—a contingency that, I take it, he will now be more anxious than ever to avoid.

If the comparison be admissible, there was something

very much akin to the uncarting of the stag in the unearthing of Reynard on Saturday. His lordship was forward superintending operations, while we sat and quivered in the next field, till his horn should sound the signal. It sounded at last. We hurried up after Goodall, and the pack were laid quietly on the line. For a field our two our fox had run in a dazed fashion—perhaps the terriers were at his brush—though, when once his head was straight, there was little hesitation in his style of going. Thus, time enough was given for us to file through two bridle-gates while the pack rounded a slender plantation and came back upon us as we stood face to face with a low but newly-built flight of timber—a stalwart hussar as squadron leader. Now they are past us. Now you may get on. “Forward the 15th, the world is looking at you!” And next minute fifty sets of heels rattled the timber, taking it in close order like sheep out from a fold. From the very start it was a difficult run to ride. No sooner were you set going in one direction than hounds demanded a fresh effort in another. And, I maintain, the fences were strong. Who, for instance, looked for a double ditch to that broad fence in the first valley, when we skirted Dr. Johnson’s wire trap and headed for the Bicester covert of Dane Hole, a mile and a half away?

Goodall at all events was with his hounds as they dived into this rough gully—a kind of Herefordshire dingle it is, a watercourse running down its midst and its sides clad with larch and bramble. For earths and rabbit-holes here abound; and nothing would have astonished us less than that our fox should have here closed proceedings by returning to ground.

A very different catastrophe was to happen. You may, or may not, know from personal experience that to cross this glen we have been accustomed to follow a winding path leading to a rough bridge over the stream. The path was there; and we crowded down this *facilis descensus Averni*—to find the bridge collapsed and the chasm almost filled with the *débris*. The huntsman at once jumped off and led over, his horse recovering his legs after every one of them had gone through the broken causeway. Mr Murland

followed with similar experience, but left the wreck in a less accommodating condition than ever ; while Mr. Lamb, I believe, turned up stream, and found his way over a little higher. As for the rest, they were most of them now in unhappiest plight. Just as happened at another bridge



The huntsman led over the broken causeway

of old—"Those behind cried forward, while those in front cried back," and progress was impossible either way—their misery in some degree alleviated by the comforting sound of "Tallyho—back!" Some few, however, warned by Lord Willoughby de Broke, who on some previous recent date had discovered the collapse of the path, turned at once from the entrance of the trap, made all haste round the

upper end, and arrived at Catesby House (half a mile perhaps beyond Dane Hole) in time to see Goodall ascending the hill with hounds in full cry, his run fox forward, a fresh one back. (I picked up a book quite lately, to read with much interest the reminiscences of Dean Hole. Humour rather than pathos marked its contents; and this I can maintain, viz. that there was nothing in it half so pathetic as the experiences detailed at many a dinner-table this evening, under a very similar title.)

Mr. Goodman, who lived here so long, and thus had every right to precedence, was already with the huntsman, as the chase turned up the steep green slope, and appeared bound for Studborough Hill. Bending across, they pierced one of the farm or parish boundary hedges that render much of this district so difficult. Was not this the very Irish-banked and English-timbered complication that tied us all up, a year or two ago, as we came from Braunston Gorse?

Well might your heart sink within you. Progress and escape seemed out of the question, and would have been but for the friendly bullock and his summer ravages. He had horned away a corner rail; and so by riding up within the oxer for twenty yards it was possible to bore, as he had done, through hedge and brook and over bank. Now hounds were pattering merrily along the hillside, now they swung toward the valley, and now there lay in front only a wide green vista—the yellow brook shining below like a distant streak of gold, and the far heights of Shuckburgh closing the landscape in hazy vagueness. On perfect riding ground for the next mile or so the pack drove onward; and it seemed as if it would be easy enough to hold them for a fox's life, with the ground in its present firm condition and horses that have been in continuous work since August. But, instead of crossing the very practicable brook as they neared it (and so making straight for Shuckburgh), hounds held on parallel to the stream, and with their heads for Staverton brought their struggling pursuers in contact with the burns and braes that feed and tend the main brook. More than once have I seen hounds laugh at horses over this very ground. You may get over, or

through, each fence when once you find your place. But to keep touch of a racing pack while at every dip in the ground you are held, it may be for a few seconds, it may be for a good many, is a task we have here seen attempted aforetime and in vain. The huntsman and his party—joined now by Lord Willoughby de Broke, Messrs. Murland, Fabling, Adamthwaite, Jameson, Cazenove, Kewley, Simpson, Rhodes, Mr. and Mrs. Allfrey, and others—had perhaps kept too long on the upper ground, but made up leeway rapidly as they followed hounds downward. Turning with them, they, or some of them, encountered three difficulties in turn, while hounds never waited a minute for explanation or reprieve. The first of these was solved by a gate, unexpected and accepted with a gasp; the second was worse than it looked, the key to it being a watering-place where a drinking-trough and its rails required a clever horse or, may be, a man *in extremis*. The third called for a push into deep thorns and a flounder through a green bog. Then by a ford you may cross the brook after the pack. (How curious and incontrovertible a fact it is that fox and hounds almost invariably point the easiest way!)

But with these difficulties—these hindrances—the necessity for poking here and craning there—hounds were over the water and over the rise adjoining the Staverton and Shuckburgh road with two hundred yards' vantage. Now the sunshine bleared the landscape; and almost in a moment they were lost to view, though the music remained in one's ears like the tinkling of distant sheep-bells. They had threaded one of the gorges that lead to Shuckburgh; and only a few tail-hounds gave a momentary clue. Under the long plantation beneath Shuckburgh the music was an accompaniment but no guide. A blown fox had shirked the hill; and hounds had swished leftward with him, before men, in the blinding sunshine, could take in the turn. Lord Spencer and one of his whips perceived the sudden double; the others swung outwards before coming round to the gazing cattle and their comrades within the circle.

To make short a story already too long, huntsman and party came back by the bridle-road to Catesby, caught

hounds before they reached Dane Hole, but had to succumb to them once again before the pack had reached the covert and were out beyond, forty minutes to a first check, horses all out. If hounds ever went faster, may I, for one, not be asked to catch them.

Five minutes later we were for a third time back in Dane Hole, and afterwards saw hounds follow a fox for another half-hour.

This is how I read, and how I venture to write, the course of hounds and men on this Saturday, Charwelton and Shuckburgh being less than a four-mile point, and they ran a circle of twice that distance.

At Christmas we are bound to accept solicitation, whether in the form of men singing tunes, or no tunes, at the door, or in the less direct subservience which greets you unexpectedly at station or village. We even get it out hunting. (I have no sympathy for, and the less sympathy because I constantly find myself blackmailed by, the red "runners" who, most of them, remain all day at the most convenient public, and hold you up on the way home.) I was fairly caught on Saturday, by the more honest labouring man. He had opened a gate and stood there, not for love of the job, I am fain to believe. When I passed, perhaps the hundredth in order, he touched his hat for the hundredth time. "Thank you," responded I, with my customary liberality. "I've had that afore, a many times," said he, "but I don't seem to get no forrarder!" A retort that cost me a shilling I can hardly grudge now.

So goes our open Christmastide, the tide of sympathy, of life with the living, of dream of the dead. Pastors have writ, preachers have preached, on the subject and the occasion times by the thousand. But we need no teaching to tell us that Christmas develops our sympathies—with those who are here and those who have gone; stretches our heartstrings and bows our heads. There is nothing disrespectful—far from it, there is reverence—in the thought that fox-hunting, the least harmful of all excitements, is at once a refuge and a stimulant.

CHAPTER XLVIII

ROUGH AND TUMBLE

IF ever I felt inclined to commence with the protest, "Story? God bless you, sirs, I have none to tell!" and thereupon wipe my pen, it is to-day—Tuesday, January 2—and why? because no hounds are within reach, and I have leisure and to spare.

Our most amusing day of the past week was Friday, December 28, a capital scenting day, and full of hunting as to its afternoon.

By fortunate coincidence, the Pytchley and Grafton, meeting at Weedon Barracks and Towcester, the two places about seven miles apart, were able to divide the holiday-makers. To all appearance a fair might have been in progress in the streets of Weedon. Towcester, I am told, presented a similar aspect. A nice day, doubtless, for driving and pleasure-seeking, it was also eminently suitable for the more serious business of fox-hunting. The Pytchley (with whom I had the privilege of throwing in my fortune) entertained their *cortège* of chariots, footmen, and horsemen with a parade about the country for a couple of hours. Then, with diminished numbers, they set about chasing a fox from Vanderplanks, the covert, to my mind, the least likely of all. However, here or hereabouts was a fox. As far as I could make out, they found him first outside the covert in one direction, then on the other; and quickly were at work driving him up the valley towards Ravensthorpe. He drove very much like a young horse whose mouth is unmade, and who has no special ambition for harness, turning his head hither and thither when pressed, and jibbing when opportunity offered. And, ye gods, how the young men and the old of the Pytchley hurried in his wake, the van dividing into two sections, the one on the left led, through bullfinch and thorn, by a dashing subaltern of the 10th (P.W.R. Lancers), while two of his erst superior officers headed the senior division on the right. Both came to a check a few

minutes later near Mr. E. Fitzroy's house, the steam rising from the crowded road as from a boiling-house. Their fox was back. I do not know that he had the excuse of being headed, but he took back with him a comrade. One of the twain popped into Buckby Folly; the other went over the beautiful ground chosen some years ago for the Guards' Point-to-Point Race, and, a mile or two further, crossing the front of hounds, came into view. Now ensued, to my mind, the fun of the fair. Fox and hounds hardly a field apart on a scenting day, there *must* be pace and there must be frolic till that fox is dead! If there ever be a time to "hurry up" and be glad it is then. Such was the present case—the country enchanting and the pace immense. West Haddon was passed on the right by Lord Southampton and his ready following, nearest to him, I make bold to assert, being a young lady from Hertfordshire, while for the next dozen minutes he rode towards Watford Gorse. One field from the covert a fat fox made his last effort, broke right through the pack, then was coursed down by the big dog-hounds, and died fighting, as an old fox should. One hour, not straight, but with a bright beginning and a goodly finish.

This much of the day—and "luncheon," as some of our more golden and less engrossed ones dare to term it—having been thus consumed, we were taken to Buckby Folly. An anxious party, as usual, huddled in the centre ride beneath the hill, more intent, doubtless, with their ears than with their eyes. Else, while listening for the view holloa, the dart of a lively fox across the lower hand-gate could hardly have escaped their glance. As it was, they started in sweet surprise to the tuneful echo of the second whip's scream, up the valley and for half-a-dozen fields rapidly. Why should hounds check so suddenly and mysteriously? The freshly-broken gap in the meadow ought to have answered the question. But most of us, who now waited and wondered, were unaware of the fact that in this field hounds had wavered and many horsemen had lingered only an hour ago. Thus the line had crossed ground more foiled than if sheep by the flock or oxen by the herd had trodden it after a fox.

By the way, as there recur to mind countless occasions on which in recent weeks hounds have been brought to check by these scudding flocks, does it not seem that there are at the present time many more sheep in the Grass Countries than we have seen for years? I fancy this is the case, consequent on the recent dry summer. Sheep have thriven, and more or less paid their way. Cattle have not, and are too expensive to winter.

But, returning from the pastoral to the fox-hunting aspect of the subject, I have heard it laid down with some positiveness that a few cattle will foil the line of a fox worse than a whole flock of sheep. This does not chime in with my experience as far as I have been able to observe. I have seen in my time—and fancy I even know now—hard-driving hounds able on most occasions to go right through a cluster of bullocks. (Was not old Contest an instance, Mr. Furr?) But they can seldom do it with sheep. The passage of a flock across the line of a fox seems usually to wipe out the scent as completely as a sponge removes writing from a slate. It always seems to me—though I pretend to lay down no law on such matter—that a huntsman can afford his hounds much more time when baulked by cattle than when by sheep before he takes upon himself to move forward to their assistance. But I must hunt out such theories no longer. They come only indirectly out of the present check; and already was Goodall, having brought his pack round to the direction they first pointed as they dashed into the meadow—already was he well on with his fox forward for Winwick. Pace of course slackened for a while. A travelling fox had gained ground, and for some fields that ground happened to be cold arable. But even these fields were handsomely fenced, as I shall prove by one instance—to wit, a thick bullfinch with a five-foot drop into the next field. The bullfinch thorns were just of requisite height to catch feet and spurs of any rider of, say, life-guard's height. Three such men rode abreast; the thorns tilted each of them out of all riding-school position, the drop did the rest, and all three spun handsomely into the soft fallow. For the life of me I could only in my gracelessness sit still

and laugh till my own turn came, when, slipping carefully through the hole made by one of them, out of very gratitude I did what little I could towards retrieving his horse.

Hounds had kindly lingered by the way ; so, after a couple of miles' galloping, we easily reached them, by the right of Winwick Warren, and before the play again warmed up. Pace improved vastly as the chase went on almost to the Thornby Spinnies, over a broken and water-split, but grassy country, wherein Mr. Murland's Irish experience stood him in good stead, and the grey constituted a good beacon. Our fox now bent up to the Cold Ashby road ; and, whether headed or not, ran it back for nearly two miles till he had passed Winwick Warren on the return journey. Entering the country again beside Mr. Atterbury's house, he chose us a course of exceptional strength, just as horses (at all events those that had done the day's work through) began to show signs of enough. However, men were not to be denied, and the result—harmless enough to allow of a comical side—was funny in the extreme. It is computed that at least twenty men took their fate unflinchingly. One after another went down, till it became almost a disgrace to remain with a coat unsoiled. For each ungapped fence in turn had to be bored or broken, and whoever undertook the task almost invariably fell in the effort (I am not sure but that one bold pilot went aground quite four times). Thus, with hounds running happily, we regained Buckby Folly just before dusk, and again at about an hour from the start. Goodall then, very sensibly, stopped hounds, though his fox was already viewed within the covert. So ended a right pleasant day.

By-the-bye, rumour has it that the nomination of a field veterinary surgeon is a likely contingency. That his office would be no idle sinecure will readily be accepted by all who have witnessed the catastrophes that have befallen horseflesh during the weeks just past. But the quaintest instance of how valuable would be the presence of the professional scientist was furnished after the Shuckburgh run of the Warwickshire on Thursday week. It is no fanciful joke that I am about to relate, but a true brief

tale of how serious a shock occurred to the nervous system of one whom we had deemed superior to any trial of nerve or fear of blood. He had enjoyed his ride, and been one of the first at the kill. And, as holds good on such occasions, he had left the saddle to walk his horse, and fling his jest, round the neighbourhood of the baying pack. After so doing, he posted himself exactly where the fierce dog-hounds of Kinton had first pulled their fox almost to pieces. Chancing to glance downwards as he approached the climax of his last drawing-room tale, he suddenly stopped with his face white as ashes, to gasp out, "My ——! I've staked the old horse!"

Questions of comparative anatomy are difficult indeed to handle delicately. But suffice it to explain that the gore which dyed the grass was not the outcome of the old horse, but of poor Reynard deceased; and to add that the applause which greeted discovery of our hero's mistake was far in advance of any he might have earned from the bijou of scandal he never finished.

No trifles interest me more than the pigmies who come out at Christmastide, and enjoy themselves as long as they are allowed into the new year. The little fellows are rapidly disappearing—last week, I take it, being a week of final joys and farewell tears. Yesterday I accosted one sturdy young gentleman with "Halloa, I thought you were back at school?" "I was to have gone yesterday," retorted the youngster with an arch grin, "but mother thought I wasn't looking well, and I asked her to write and say so." To-day a young gentleman, born to fox-hunting, had his answer still more determinedly to the point. "I ought to have been back a week ago," he explained unblushingly, "but I got a boil on my right wrist." "That was very clever of you," I could not but reply; "you must have one on your left this week." As he not only claimed the head of the morning fox, but carried it on his saddlebow all through the afternoon run, besides holding gates open very skilfully for hounds with the afflicted wrist, I am inclined to think that contagion is certainly likely to spread to his other arm, as is only fair and well deserved.

CHAPTER XLIX

A WET SCURRY FROM BRAUNSTON GORSE

YOU may weary of my oft-told tale—a gallop from Braunston to Shuckburgh. Bear with me. It has infinite variety in event; if not, by my shortcomings in description. Yet I ask for no happier subject.

Saturday's experience was certainly varied, perhaps tortuous; very tempestuous, undoubtedly delightful. As such I endeavour to sketch it. Conditions of the day—south-easterly squalls, and a determined rainfall. But the glass scarcely moved, and perhaps this was the secret of the scent and the pace.

The Pytchley had met at Welton Place, a couple of miles from the town of Daventry. On ordinary days—fixture and date considered—there would have been a great, perhaps a ponderous field. But Saturday, February 17th, from one point of view was an extraordinarily disagreeable day. The wind had turned to a cold quarter, and the rain, for which we have yearned these many weeks, now drove pitilessly through everything but oil-skin. So quite half of our crowd had stayed at home. These may now learn how it fared with the rest, some of whose names I here append: Lady Hesketh, Mrs. Thornton, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Thornton, Mrs. Blacklock, Mrs. Osgood, Mrs. Whitehorn, Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Lockeking, Mr. and Miss Hanbury, Captain and Mrs. Allfrey, Captain and Mrs. Pender, Mr., Mrs., and Misses Byass, Mr. and Mrs. Cazenove, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton, Mr., Mrs., and Misses Fenwick, Mr. and Miss Lowndes, Mr. and Miss Burton, Lords Braye and Cork, Count Larisch, Rev. — Stevens, Major Blackburn, Captains Askwith, Barry, Baird, Close, Faber, Goulburn, Renton, Riddell, Soames, Smith, Wheeler, M. Duval, Messrs. Atherton, Adamthwaite, Adams, Allen, Buchan, Beatty, Briton, Budd, Czarnikov, John Cooper, Cox, Drage (2), Darby, Elwell, Noel Fenwick, Fabling, J. Gee, Graham, Goodman, Hibbert, Kewley, James, Knightley, Laurence, Levita, R. Loder, Miller, C.

Mills, Muntz, M'Corquadales, Pownall, Wakeley, Wallis, R. Williams, Yerburgh, &c.

We knew that Braunston Gorse was to be the *pièce de résistance*. We knew that Shuckburgh Hill, over the border, had been well rattled on the Thursday previous, and so, sanguine as we ever are when, with eye and ear intent, we await what Braunston Gorse may bring forth, we never stood by the covert-side in more confirmed expectancy than about noontide on Saturday. By this time almost every one had begun to feel the first trickle of rain-water adown the skin; and many a fair form bore a sea-bathing appearance, as workmanlike as it was homely. Men for the most part were better prepared. The morning had been unmistakable, and their rough-weather kit was more complete. The new garment, for instance—a kind of Noah's-Ark *redingote* of light waterproof cloth—is at the covert-side eminently practicable and desirable. Its lengthy skirts shelter the longest legs. To the rustic observer it may suggest in some degree the idea of going a-milking, though I cannot see that this is of any consequence. Rather, I should imagine, would objection be found, when going rapidly across country, in that these flying jibs must rend and disperse among the rough thorn bullfinches of Northamptonshire, or that, in the case of a nervous horse, they might rouse a panic, with disastrous consequences. (At risk of being dubbed at once discursory and long-winded, I cannot refrain from here inserting, in illustration of such possible danger, an experiment on the part of an honourable friend in the Far West, who, to overcome his saddle-horse's abhorrence to a covered waggon, tied a waggon-sheet to the animal's tail. The result was that the poor brute broke from his picket in full sail, stampeded 500 head of valuable horses, many of which were never recovered, while he went away into space, no trace being ever afterwards recovered of him or of his strange apparel.) Before leaving the subject as pertaining to Saturday, I should add that one of those who wore the new overcoat on Saturday had committed himself to oil-silk as the material, and so looked as ready for deep water as any seal. He happened to be one for whom I

entertain feelings of affectionate regard; so in view of what might be before us I could not at the covert-side resist volunteering the caution, "For Heaven's sake, my dear fellow, fasten that thing tight round your neck and legs. If you get into the Braunston Brook (as you probably will), you will be like a torpedo-boat with a hole in it, and it will take three men to lift you out!" Many a true word is spoken in jest, and this is exactly what happened soon after.

We had been ten minutes in the storm above Braunston Gorse before Goodall's cheer proclaimed a find, and warmed our chilled and sinking hearts. Then there was a break towards Daventry, and a light little fox was headed back into the covert. The gorse, as I have told you many a time before, looks about westward upon a basin of green, that for hunting, scenting, and riding properties has few equals. So this first baulk disconcerted us nothing. We merely ranged round the whole upper edge, that no fox could well break again in the undesired direction, the only trouble being now whether, from a covert so invariably weak of scent (in contradistinction to the high-scenting grass outside), hounds could again force their fox, and whether they had a fox at all willing to try for Shuckburgh. Wind was right enough, and the chances of the game were still in our favour. Hoping to be of service in viewing him over the narrow ride, I ventured to slip into covert with the huntsman; and for the next ten minutes or so watched that keen functionary toiling round the privet thicket, while scarcely a hound could throw tongue to a scent.

How we got away at last was a quiet and pretty piece of management, deserving all that came after. John Isaac viewed our fox—I should say *a* fox—steal down the gully-side. Not only did he "count twenty" twice over, but then the signal came in a whispered scream, "Master!" with a wave of the arm towards the point of break. So Will was able easily to get his whole pack together, to lay them on the line without flurry; and the whole field, moving up quietly, were all within range when the dog-hounds roared forth their first glad acclaim.

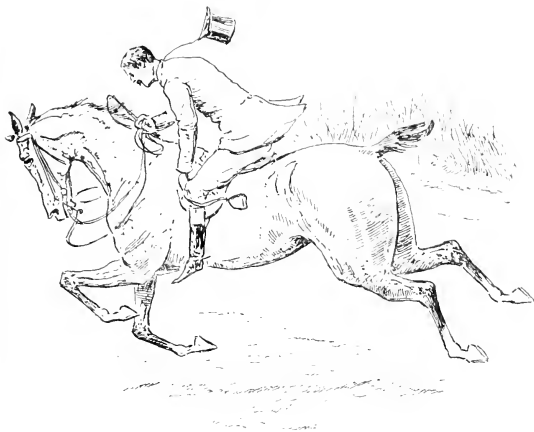
No thought now of wet or cold nor, shall I say, of anything disagreeable upon earth! The merry thunder of four hundred hoofs! It made one laugh to listen to it. And it made one happy within, to think of all that might be in front, aye, and was.

Fox and hounds took us by the old canal-dam, with its single gap in the cross fence, over the Braunston Brook for this first time. A game of grab it is for the outlet, "Steady, sirs, steady! First come, first served!" and hounds and huntsman must have their proper room. A scent, a scent; and the country clear! No, it wasn't. Some lost rustic was wandering afield; and from him hounds turned with their fox across our right, bending for Wolfhamcote. Often I like, and swear by, the lady pack rather than the dogs. But would they have turned so readily and steadily here as their brothers, or would they have flashed on, in this the first ecstasy of a burst? The "big dogs" swung in a moment; and swung again as our fox recovered his point, leaving Flecknoe on his right.

From this high-perched village there run—as I have explained once before—several eccentric boundary fences and deep hedged dykes to join the main watercourse in the valley below. Hounds led us again—as they so often do—to the one and only jumping-place at the first of these bottoms. Hunt-servants by instinct and intuition follow their hounds; so the first whip (as did the second, I remember, last year) galloped straight to this spot, followed by huntsman, by Mr. H. Drage, and by as many as could. *How many* could, I thank Heaven I cannot tell you. But this I gather from after-converse, viz. that the drawback to this bright gallop, a drawback common to so many of those evolved in our merry Shires, was the recurrence of these single, one-at-a-time, places. There were, in all, at least three of these; and of course somebody fell at each, and blocked the way.

Meanwhile Goodall was cheering hounds onward over a country dear to our hearts, and for whose well-maintained charms we are indebted so deeply to the yeoman of Flecknoe, Staverton, and of the valley of the young Leame—he skimming the fence on the right of the hounds, Mr. C. Beatty making his own course on the left. Towards the

latter hounds bent as they entered the ground chosen a few seasons ago for the House of Commons Point-to-Point. A strong high bullfinch and a stout half-hidden ox-rail draped the field above the brook ; and ere men had galloped half across the pasture hounds were shaking their sides on the further bank. The little chestnut was asked to do it in two, and did half of it : " Never swallowed so much water in my life," said he : while the huntsman went for it in one, and recovering himself in three, picked himself up with a



A hot hat flying in the breeze

huic-huic-huic (celerrimo). Happiest man in England now ; and the best of them all, on our side, to ride to his own hounds. Indifferent to whom may care to take first cut, he turns as hounds go, is ever in the very front of the chase, " let the young and the jealous try hard for his place." (And but yesterday, they tell me, Tom Furr was in similar fashion making example of the Quornites from Barkby Holt to the Coplow !) A poise on the upland above the stream, a steadier at a picked place, and Captain Baird and a dozen others flew the half-empty chasm fifty yards on the right. The upland was firm and the turf was all spring, as

they raced into the wind for Staverton village. Was it the squall in your teeth, or was it lack of racing condition, that caused that sob, and bade you involuntarily—as a choice between Mr. E. Miller's high timber and Mr. C. Mills' dense thorns—go for the bullfinch, galloping the next field with a hot hat flying in the breeze and an obstinate stirrup that refused to be caught—the two properties recovered only after landing over the next smooth stake-and-bound?

As in early November, our fox refused to breast the winning field, and bore off to the right. Skirting the slope, hounds picked up a threefold contingent; and at the Daventry and Shuckburgh road some twenty people issued, most by a gate to the right, one by a flight of timber on the left, one by a flight of fancy at the same spot, which eventuated, he tells me, in a run after his horse nearly to Daventry. Twenty minutes to this point, eight minutes on (towards Catesby), and then a check. You ask me who was there; I can't tell you. They looked so much alike when I came up, in their water-proofs and their heat and their joy, that I dare not attempt to cipher and catalogue them. But I believe that I am right in saying that the first lady up was Miss Lowndes, and others were Mrs. Locke-King, Miss Fenwick, Miss Czarnikov, and Miss May Byass; while of men I venture at all events to include (besides those mentioned and the two whips) Mr. Adamthwaite, Captains Barry, Askwith, Renton, Goulburn, and Faber.

With a fresh horse and some twenty minutes' more hunting, Goodall worked his fox round to the gardens of Shuckburgh House, the sparkle all off the scent, possibly from the taint of freshly-dressed fields, and left him under ground.

CHAPTER L

TRIFLES

WITH the Bicester from Red Hill Wood three foxes went away at once in three different directions (on February

24). Wilson blew the body of the pack to him on the lower side towards Eydon, the direction of more than one good run of late months, but after a first field or so hounds seemed almost powerless. One couple and a half had crept on as far as the brook, and here their comrades joined them, while we rode up to find an unpleasing chasm across our path, yet no pace nor ardour to promote adventure. That some slight adventure did accrue I am in a position personally to testify. Not a mishap begotten of recklessness, but rather such as might befall a jolly farmer of the fens returning through his labyrinth of dykes after a healthy market, or as recently overtook another of us in the farmyard of Braunston Cleaves. At any rate, as is only fair, your recorder this time furnished the laugh himself; and so, when hounds came altogether to a standstill at Eydon, the wind blowing cold and a sleet storm passing, he concluded to convey his uncomeliness homeward, satisfied with having enacted his part in the entertainment of the day. By the way, there was a grim consolation in the thought—flashing through the mind—as a big-hoofed horse trod him below the mud, and the dirty water forced its way down his unwilling throat. “Wonder if the Braunston Brook tasted last week half as nasty as this!” Another point, he tells me, came home to him this evening still more acutely. You remember the Immortal One’s soliloquy: “Blessed if I ain’t got a fi’-pound note in my pocket, and it’ll be utterly ruined!” Fi’-pound notes happen to grow very sparsely upon your correspondent’s tree of life; and such as may now and again appear are plucked far too greedily by watchful blackbirds to admit of their ever running such risks of solution by flood or field. But by some luckless chance this morning’s post had brought him five shillings’ worth of postage stamps, change out of a cheque. These now present the appearance of chewed paper, and I am authorised to offer them at less than half price to any enthusiastic speculator whose sympathies may prompt him to redeem them in the interests of sport.

Were I to find myself at any time prompted to “tread on the tails” of a coat, I do not think that I should have

the temerity to pick out for the experiment those of the biggest and boldest of my acquaintance. Yet such was the rash act committed on Monday by some youthful indiscreet. The coat was on the ground; so was the wearer, just preparing to regain his legs and afterwards his saddle, when the near side tail was suddenly pinned to the earth



The effect was comical

by the hoofs of the next comer, and, as the wearer struggled up, the vestment split from collar to waist. Not a whit disconcerted by the *contretemps*, the eager sportsman rushed down the field after his horse, presenting a spectacle to which I can suggest no parallel, unless it be found in that of a man having jumped suddenly out of bed, for delicacy's sake crammed on his tall hat and thrust his arms through the sleeves of his dress coat, carrying the garment in front of him. The general effect as he ran away in the

wind—a black wing flapping on either side of his white back and legs—was comical in the extreme, even if it was scarcely less decent than, say, that of a dowager at a drawing-room.

If you want proof of how labyrinthine was the sport of the day, I can give it you in a trifling experience of my own. Hounds were running at the time steadily and consistently, if not exactly fiercely, beside a boundary hedgerow. It occurred to me to jump the fence one way, just at the moment that a noble lord was impelled to cross it towards the other. The fence being of Irish fashion, a ditch on either side, and both of us going slowly, we met in the middle—and there, with our horses nose to nose, proceeded amicably to argue out the point, as to which was the more desirable direction. *Noblesse oblige*. The gentle seigneur gave in to me, turned his horse round, enforced his opinion by jumping the fence lower down, and we arrived at length, merrily and simultaneously, at the end of the barrier in dispute.

On Wednesday, March 14, with the Pytchley at West Haddon, it seemed as if the Melton contingent had been forewarned against bringing with them on the day any of those mane-shorn animals, recently so much affected in the sister shire. Picture to yourself the gratification of being called upon to climb and re-climb the Hemplow Hills upon a hog-maned horse—this, too, in March, when his waist is like a woman's—and you, maybe, have ever made it one of your fads to ride with your girths giving fullest scope to the play of heart and lungs! It seems to me—apart from the fact that a hog-maned horse carries ever a sly, shamefaced look, as if he were afraid to meet his fellow-creatures—that in depriving him of his mane you deprive yourself of what with most mortals is equivalent to a second right hand. Among the various uses to which I, for one, am accustomed to put my horse's half-kept but sufficient mane are, firstly, as a side-rope by which I haul myself into the saddle; secondly, as a life-line by which to maintain myself in position when once there. By its means I recover myself when, on landing over a fence, I find myself going faster than my horse;

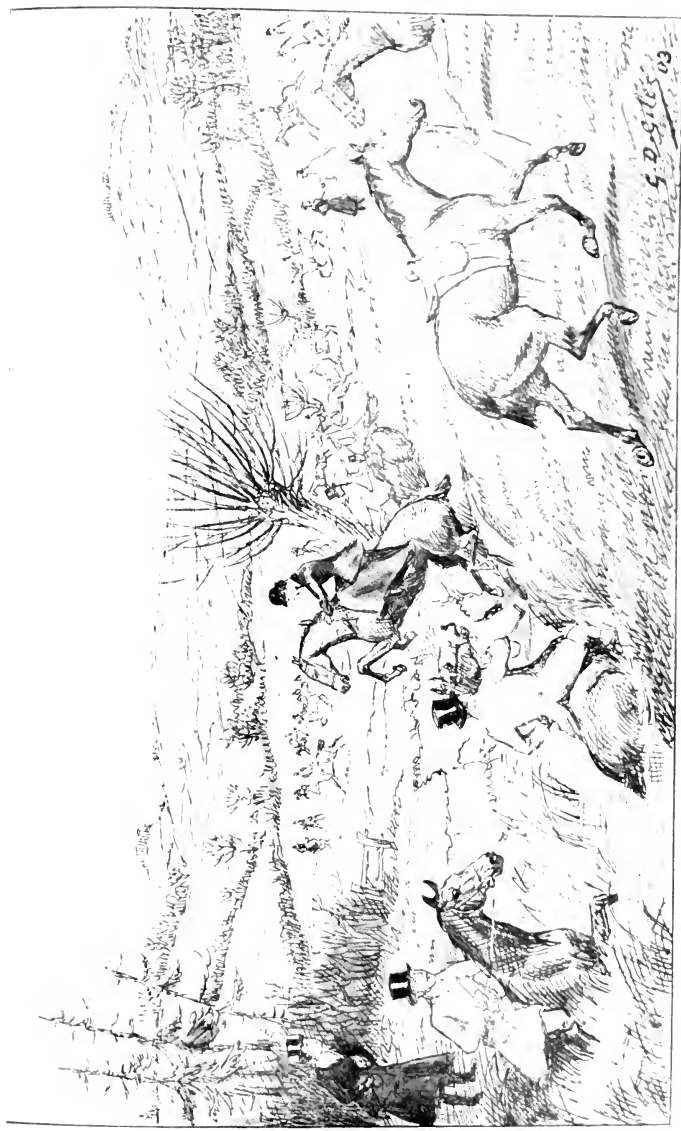
by its means I avoid leaving the premises backwards as he rises up a bank ; and by its means alone, when a wilful horse rears, I avert the unsightly alternative of clasp- ing him with both arms round the neck. Such an accessory to riding may to many people seem altogether superfluous. So it must surely be regarded in later Leicestershire. For the plea that a coarse hunter needs his mane hogged in order to give him the appearance of high breeding can be no more admissible now, than in the days when I best knew the smart horses of Melton.

On Thursday, March 15—as my duty, custom, and inclination bound—we attended the Rugby Hunt Chases ; met our hunting-friends and our farmer-friends ; and took our luncheons on a vastly different scale from what is our Spartan method on hunting-days. Say, is not this a refreshing example of sweet ignorance ? Fair novice, attending her first steeplechase, reads notice in small print beside the attractive water-jump. “ Please keep well back when the horses are jumping.” “ Yes,” she commented, “ but will the jockeys be able to read, and attend to that, as they jump ? ”

CHAPTER LI

THAT WICKED BRAUNSTON BROOK AGAIN

I TAKE up my pen as occasion and opportunity best present themselves in mid-week, to find myself confronted by Saturday with the Pytchley from Badby Wood, as perhaps the most amusing day of the season, could I but hope so to portray it. Pardon me, readers, you know, well as I do, that such opportunity—such lucid interval, if you like—does not crop up whenever demanded. For instance, I sat me down on Saturday night, took this same pen in hand, to throw it down some five minutes afterwards, and to awake at 2 A.M., chilled to the bone, and with my legs athwart the empty fireplace—from a dream that I was a run fox in a damp drain. Possibly the loss of a stirrup leather and iron, with a subsequent ride on a pulling horse, may have been in some degree





accountable. That such misfortune, by the way, was not quite singular, is to be proved by the fact that for a single iron, subsequently brought on by a friendly farmer, there were at least three bedraggled and insistent claimants.

No matter, I presume you were with hounds as they rattled round Badby Wood. I dare not assume, without your assurance, that you were with them when ten minutes later they emerged from the big covert—two foxes before them, one behind them. "That's your fox, Master!" insisted John to his chief. "He's gone for Braunston, and I know him, and I've seen him before." Gladly and decidedly did our huntsman take up the cue. What good in March to hang back upon the vixen in covert? let me emphasise. It is at such times that a huntsman may make a run. It is at such times that keen and determined whippers-in can best serve his interest and those of true sport. The dog fox had gone; and, if he had stolen a minute's start, what matter on a scenting day?

So for twenty more minutes, over a rough country—a first, deep-banked, and casualty-stricken brook included—hounds ran hard. And at the end of those twenty minutes the field closed up, Staverton Hill having been touched on its left, and now only the oft-told tale of Shuckburgh and Braunston in front. 'Twould take ten penmen and ten pencilmen (given twenty good horses among them) to portray with all licence half that took place hereafter. For my humble part I can only now trot soberly along the line. Fun! Bless you, sirs, there was no end to it! But how much of it dare I bring back? None of it. I trust I know "my place" too well. And "all along of" that ridiculous Braunston Brook—at which we arrived, not in hot haste, but in cool leisure, not once but thrice, to suffer in turn with few exceptions, and these, I protest, the least noble. Thus, for instance, he who skimmed it readiest on first arrival, afterwards succumbed earliest. (Mark you, our neighbour's blue flags had been set with a view to jumping from Braunston way, and thus became mere wrecking signals when

approached from the other direction.) We made Braunston Covert in forty-five minutes, then, after some interval, came back in our tracks, to strike the same water, the same banks, the same bottom, or, maybe, the same bottomless stream—and struck them. We went in by pairs, believe me. There were husbands looking for wives—no, perhaps I am exaggerating. There were wives seeking half-drowned husbands, to find them dragged out in entanglement with forms to which they had no right, save that of common disaster. There were wives struggling out of their depth while unwilling bachelors pursued them downstream, and willing bachelors stood on the banks and shouted cheap advice. “Stand on your saddle! Come to me, I am the safe man!” and so on. Two little maidens jumped over; the cynic jumped in; while the men of the world, and for the most part the women, went through by a ford, kept themselves fairly clean, but splashed and besmeared each other as they went. To complete the panorama a reproachless man disappeared out of sight, swam to the surface, and an hour afterwards (reinstated by home influence and propinquity) reappeared whitewashed, reclad, and respectable. In like manner the disengaged couple came forth during the afternoon from their separate sanctuaries—looking, oh! so bright, so guileless, and so clean, you would never have believed in their luckless, and very involuntary, misadventure.

All this is nonsense, no doubt, but is it not true, and with no *entendre*? And meanwhile what have I told you of the hounds? Only that they hunted to Braunston Gorse and back, treating the brook as a natural adjunct, and its neighbourhood as a scene of charming delightment. Our huntsman worked back to Badby Wood, leaving Staverton Wood and Hill this time on the right. He refound his fox near the main earths, drove him out towards Everdon scarce able to crawl, and quickly brought him to the end that all good foxes deserve, two hours and twenty-five minutes from the find.

Let me now look at the map. The extreme points, from our leaving Badby Wood to reaching Braunston

Gorse, are but five miles apart. But we ran this twice, and, if you know not how good a country it contains, may it fall to your lot to learn before you die. Apart from the point, our fox ran as usual a fish-hook course. And now I have done, I wish I could have told you all, and better, that, like me, you might have laughed in your sleep at the thought of the men and the mermaids in the water, or e'en of the seraph who hovered the glad pack around.

To most of the little incidents I venture to snatch belongs a moral. Punctuality is the virtue I would now extol. Some few days ago the Master of a certain pack (one of the six or seven with which I enjoy the happiness of an occasional hunt) found himself unable to attend the meet with his usual soldierly punctuality. With characteristic courtesy, however, he had arranged for his huntsman to move off after giving the ordinary brief law. This done, the Tom Moody of the period had found his fox, had extricated his hounds from the first vortex, and, getting their noses down, had thought himself settling to a run. "Hold hard! hold hard!" he aspirated. "Just a minute, gentlemen," he beseeched. "Will ye now? Who's that on the grey right over the line? Oh dear, oh dear!" "Heigh! you sir!" roared several acting Masters. "Where are you going to?" vociferated each jealous thruster, the wind thus knocked out of his sails by some unknown, with a full field's start. And how did he get there, with that great oxer between us and him? A gallant fellow anyhow. "Stop, sir; heigh!" went up the chorus. Heavens, 'tis the Master! And a solemn silence fell upon the excited assembly as the great man rode up, his blushing honours hot upon him, to take his place at the head, no longer in advance of it.

CHAPTER LII

A MEMORABLE MARCH

THE best scenting day of the winter was Wednesday, March 21, with the Pytchley. Will not this March of 1894 be memorable? On Wednesday a fox could never

clear himself from hounds. They ran as if in view. Reasons for scent are mere speculation; as precedents they only falsify themselves next day. But there were present conditions that sound fairly plausible, viz. a glass that had been steadily rising for a week, and now had reached the topgallant mast; an easterly direction in the weathercock; a dull, hazy atmosphere; and the ground well saturated beneath the surface. What mattered dry roads and filmy fallows? Hounds ran over the latter as lightly as we scampered, and, like us, they revelled upon the damp, sound turf, and made a day of it.

While most of you who rode with the Pytchley are sleeping, or, at worst, smoking upon its memory, I am riding it over again in renewed delight, e'en though I dare not hope to make the joy reciprocal. My theme, a one-horse experience, as an open winter may fairly necessitate, extends only over a period of three hours. But for myself, as I dare wager on behalf of scores of others, I would rather those three hours than a whole month of summer idleness. The straightest gallop of the season (five miles from find to finish) was done in twenty-two minutes, and was succeeded by forty-five minutes' hard running—first fox to ground, second to death.

A lawn meet had been held at Kilworth House; and Lord Spencer, to our gratification and, I may add, no little to the advantage of the day, was able to take personal command.

From Kilworth Sticks the first fox. He hung for some time in covert. "Not the Walton Holt customer," spoke one who should know. (By the way, we owe Mr. Fernie full gratitude for his courtesy, that on Monday he forbore from disturbing the sanctuary his run fox had obviously reached.)

Five minutes later came the rush; scarce any one at first knew whither. My humble career as galloping correspondent was all but cut short in the first hundred yards by a newly dug drain. Recovered from this, with mud and turf upon browband, I found hounds had apparently escaped altogether from horn and signal, and were dashing into the full medley of the left advance. Through

these they made their way westward (if this conveys anything to minds whose good fortune it has never been to wander in wilderness or forest). Well, I may say at once, towards Misterton and Bitteswell; and from this they diverged not a yard. It seemed indeed a difficult run in which to secure a reasonable start, even for one whose duties are not half so onerous or distraining as those of a second whip. But hounds held on and held straight; and the difficulty ought soon to have smoothed itself. These Pytchley Wednesdays, *with a scent*, soon plane themselves out. Quickly I saw before me the dozen or two whom I knew ought to be there; and then at last I felt my own safety assured. They took me past rocks, and shoals, and shallows, by the landmark of Daniells' Covert. They embarked me upon a fair sea beyond; and if I quivered for a moment at open water in the offing, it was no fault of mine, but the danger of an honoured comrade. You ask me who was at the head of the fray while thus they were shooting the rapids. I dare not take ten names, for they were but ten out of fifty of whom I could catch occasional glance; but over the pretty grazing-grounds 'twixt Lutterworth and Gilmorton, surely Mr. C. Beatty, in fashion familiar here and acquired possibly between the flags, was acting chief pilot; while such well-known figures as those of Mr. Gordon Cunard and Mr. Charles Mills were (with Goodall, of course) among the most independent dozen! At any rate I dare to aver, not without pardonable pride in the old mare, that Mrs. Blacklock was, throughout, the leading lady of the merry hunt. Twenty-two minutes to Bitteswell Gorse; and it was hard indeed upon our huntsman's professional thirst that here his fox should have kept his skin intact. Hounds were within two hundred yards of their game when, beyond the covert, he took breathing time in a hovel, then popped quietly back into the main earth.

It is getting late, and his lordship is out on the morrow at Gaydon Inn. I have already, or ought to have, told you that the grass rode as velvet; and that the plough, of which we had crossed perhaps one piece, perhaps two,

not more, in this gallop, carried as hot a scent as grass, and, as they tell me, it has recently been carrying in Cambridgeshire and Essex and such partially-blessed countries. *Apropos*, please remember of this season, much abused till lately, now fast redeeming itself, that you have never ridden the country with such pleasure and such safety as during the past, almost waterless, winter. Put this against your disappointments, and, moreover, chew the cud of this March for months to come. Its fruit too usually has been as of the Dead Sea, dust and ashes; this year it is luscious, sufficient, and invigorating.

The second run of Wednesday was similar only in pace, and in that respect more so; we stop for no science of expression when scribbling against time, and for a hunt in the morn. From Misterton Reeds towards Shawell Wood, then clear of the plough to reach Swinford Corner—I believe verily some of those early gallopers reached Stanford Hall, two miles away, ere they realised that the chase had turned for Walcote. Then across the meadows rightward, very fast and very amusing; I use the term advisedly. The pith and essence of hunting is its amusement, its jollity if you will. Deliver me from any one who would degrade it into a dull, day-by-day penance. My own contingent episode at this period came out of encounter with a herd of lean kine, such as, alas, you may see on every English farm this spring when fodder has been scarce or *nil*. You might ride clean through one attenuated bullock; but you cannot ride through a whole bunch of them, especially when, too weak to take notice of the fox's coming, they are still lying down, to dream of the growing grass. The cry of the hounds woke them. I had spied my weak gap in a wall-like bullfinch, and was well on my way through their midst, when they suddenly rose. A phantom heifer knocked me against a spectre bullock; the bullock fended me off against a shadowy calf; and, to avoid the last-named, I had to jump at the wall of thorns where least of all I should have dared approach it. A tremendous effort on the part of an animal, whose prominent virtue in life is care for her own safety, and consequently for that of her

grateful master, took us many feet into the air, and we attained the other side. How I know not; but the old mare and the new spurs brought me back at last into position, and in future I mean to let sleeping bullocks lie.

This was not half so bad as the *contretemps* to our most amiable yeoman and universal friend, one whose help is at all times ready for the motherless and her, or even him, who may be in distress. He was crossed at a gap;



“I keeps no wire i’ winter-time”

he was knocked over when attempting to remount; he was ridden down when running after the grey; and though, from a distance, believe me, I could have cried at seeing such treatment, you could mark, from a hundred yards away, the laugh on his jolly face as they brought the grey back. More power to him; and remember, please, he is local secretary to the Agricultural Benevolent Institution.¹

How far have I got with my route? We did not approach Stanford too closely, but touched the left of the village of South Kilworth, so to Kilworth House of the

¹ Mr. John Gee.

morning meet, and through Caldicote's Spinney towards the Sticks. Close past the left of this, and along almost the line of the morning. Yonder he goes! No, 'tis a hare. Yes, but a fox besides. And they killed him some forty and odd minutes after leaving the Reeds.

My sketch might, under other conditions, have been more practical and systematic. As it stands, I trust it may in some degree convey how genial a day was this Wednesday. I remember no occasion on which the verdict after event was more unanimous and cordial. Every single member of a large field appeared to have enjoyed himself or herself to the utmost, by no means excepting the trainload of fair pilgrims from Weedon and Daventry. The second run of the day, not so straight, though at times fully as fast as the scurry of the morning perhaps, met with more general favour, fully a hundred people taking their part.

Prominent visitors, by the way, were Prince and Princess Henry of Pless, and Mr. Coupland.

"Any wire here?" shouted some of them to a grey farmer as he rushed out bare-headed to welcome them through a gate. "Wire be d—d!" he responded lustily. "I keeps no wire i' winter-time." Good luck and good crops to you, hearty friend. Would that every English farmer might answer us thus.

CHAPTER LIII

A WATERY SCRAP

THE final holiday of the Pytchley (season 1893-94) was on Wednesday, March 28. They fixed it for Welton Station, and they relied upon Braunston Gorse. The sun blazed hotly as for a week past, but the east wind blew cold and kindly, and it was this bite in the breeze that alone led to a stirring day's sport. In summer kit mostly—the kind of outfit that nowadays is held suitable for London and its June rides—came hunting folk from far and near. Yes, a hunting-coat is a heavy infliction, and mufti, *i.e.* straw hat and loose jacket, looks well enough

upon women. Having said this, I dare say no more, but will get to my subject.

Are you tired of Braunston Gorse? I am not, nor are most of us here, while foxes take the vale, and we in turn escape the narrow but bottomless brook. For a full



Braunston Gorse

twenty minutes above the gorse we palpitated in the hot sun till the guiding star of our fate was seen to glance across the green distance, and the old cheery play began. How we bridged the brook and scattered over the blest arena of Flecknoe is a matter of detail I need hardly recount. There was a furious scent, and hounds turned into the wind, turned into it till they brought the old

brook across our path, and with it the old comedy of error and disaster. "Bless you, sir, I had all but sold him, and thought the cheque was in my pocket as I rode for the brook!" That cheque now lies a fathom deep in muddy water, crossed "Not negotiable." "I'd been over sure but for that young chap with the horse to sell," quoth he with the horn. "But I didn't do so badly," he added with a chuckle. "Jim Goodfellow's horse scrambled out, and I scrambled on him. 'Bring on mine,' says I, and I got to hounds in two fields. Rather ride at five foot of timber any day than take chances at a brook!" For myself, I passed five long seconds of agony on the further brink, while Messrs. Kewley, Murland, and Adamthwaite, Captain Baird, Mr. Fabling, Mr. J. Darby, Miss Hanbury, Miss Fenwick, &c., found Elysium in a clean, quiet jump on the right; and Mr. Jameson, with Lords Spencer and Annaly, swept past the swimming and struggling *mêlée* to the left. Under Staverton came a hot succession of fences, then a hill to mount, and hounds a field ahead towards Drayton. Mr. Gordon Cunard bored a hole from the lane through its girding bullfinch in their wake, while the bridle-road served the diminished multitude as the pack swung yet more to the left. This continued turning had played havoc with a fierce riding field; and to arrive late at the brook was a worse experience than even an early plunge. "Twenty or thirty in it together," was one report, while in each case the explanation was identical, "The way was blocked, and my horse of course refused or went in."

A mile before regaining Braunston Gorse, a blown fox was in view to such as Mr. Mills and his nearest comrades. In twenty minutes hounds were back in covert; and some few minutes later, I regret to say, had gained blood. Of blown horses and heated men was there ever such exhibit?

Tuesday, March 27.—"A Diary of a Summer Fox-hunter" might perhaps be a better title for the current week. By pleasant privilege I have followed various packs, and eked out a sunny Eastertide. But though sunshine is incompatible with dulness, and good company is a boon beyond compare, fox-hunting, I am bound to protest, serves its

purpose best as a rough-weather, or at any rate as a wintry medium. Energy and excitement are the soul of it, and these have no place in the midday hours that of late have been chosen for the pursuit. Few of us are fond of early rising; some of us like to "come home to tea," and all of us entertain a happy respect for dinner-time. But, were I an independent Master of Foxhounds (is there a being so enviable?) I would in such weather either follow the lead of John Peel "at break of day," or I would take my chance in the cool of eve. In my humble opinion it is a distressful sight to see panting hounds working their utmost upon a scentless fox, the latter knowing his advantage possibly, unwilling to go positively, and surrendering himself probably to be killed rather than face the open distance. Worse still if you can't find him, as you probably won't in the small, pet coverts where you most want him, though you may come across foxes in confusing multitude in a cool woodland, and there maybe "mop 'em up like mice," as I have heard our observant huntsman put it.

Not for me is it to take exception to the happy covert-side, whereat all that is mortal is most genial, and where the most prominent atoms of the present week have been the Easter floodings home for a holiday. (They gave us no such opportunity in my time, or, egad, upon how many more days in Leicestershire might I not have the joy of looking back?—the happiest days of all.) Breeches and gaiters and a pony that can jump—what a boast I should have gone back with, and fought it out with Jones junior when he swore I wasn't trusted with spurs!

CHAPTER LIV

A SKETCH OF THE BLACKMORE VALE

THE hunting season of the Blackmore Vale seldom comes to an end before the first week in May. If the present year be an exception, 'twill be in view of a forward spring and the farmers' interests. That I have been indulged

with a view of the Vale even so late as the first few days of this hot, dry April is to me a matter of congratulation and unmixed gratitude. Spring hunting in 1894 has practically no place. Ireland has, I learn, closed her books; the New Forest is baked out; and if the fox is anywhere to be ridden after in comfort until May, it can be only at the extreme and opposite poles of Dartmoor and Tyneside.

On the journey westward, at the beginning of the present week, it was a relief indeed, after traversing the arid plains of Salisbury, to find oneself steaming into the cool oasis of the Vale of Blackmore. Monday's hunting took place hardly in this favoured basin, but on, perhaps, its roughest and most difficult edge. Thus I shall take the liberty of passing this day very briefly by.

Mr. Merthyr Guest, I should note, not only hunts his country six days a week, advertising four and giving local notice of the other two, but carries the whole burden of expense upon his own shoulders. That so comparatively limited a country can at all times provide sufficient foxes for the purpose is the strongest possible proof of the deep and general appreciation of the Master, and of his generous liberality. As a matter of fact, the Vale fairly swarms with foxes, whether in the smaller coverts which closely decorate the lower ground, or in the strong woodlands which surmount so many of the hills.

Monday, April 2, saw the dog pack at Clifton Wood, near Yeovil Junction and on the extreme south-west of the country. The river Yeo and the London and South-Western Railway both keep guard of this covert and its northern flank, but a brace of foxes at once dashed across the double barrier. In spite of excessive heat and occasional dust, hounds were able to run nicely to Cocker Wood, which they reached in a quarter of an hour, the pack at once carrying their line through. Afterwards they hunted slowly towards Closworth, left Penn Wood on the right, and, returning to Clifton Wood after about an hour in all, marked their fox to ground in a drain between wood and village. All this had been rough upland hunting, in a district attributed to the Cattistock, but which certainly (as

far as I am in a position to assert) could be taken in no way to represent fairly that well-favoured country.

It having been already decided that for good reason a fox was, if possible, to be killed from Clifton Wood, spade, pick-axe, and terrier now went to work for two hours. By the time Reynard had been eaten the afternoon had cooled down, and it was thought that hounds might probably run. But, beyond exhibiting to us the depth of some few of the ditches near Yetminster and Thornford, while a vixen fox dodged hither and thither among the banks, they could do little, and were soon taken home. I learn the following names among the field of the day, viz.: Lord Ilchester, General Godfrey Clerk, Captain and Miss Digby, Mr. Wingfield Digby, Madame Spiers, Miss Vaughan Lee, Mrs. and Miss M'Adam, Mr. and Miss Bullock, Mr. and Miss Drake, Miss B. Clark, Mrs. G. Gordon, the veteran Mr. J. Batten, Mr. A. Clayton and Miss Clayton, Colonel Harbin, Colonel Chadwick, Captain Shuldham, Major Nesbitt, Mr. Digby Collins, Mr. H. Neville, Mr. A. Baillie, Mr. Sandford, Mr. Conway, Mr. Marsh, Mr. Dampney, Mr. Whittle, Mr. Andrews, &c.

Speaking as I do on the insufficient basis of brief acquaintance with the Blackmore Vale, I am inclined to credit that country with some of the following characteristics, viz.: as above mentioned, a rich amplitude of coverts and a bountiful supply of foxes, a prevailing extent of good scenting grass, well-watered valleys (containing two or three rivers and many negotiable brooks), the whole of this area divided into countless meadows and some few feeding-grounds. That in a run with the Blackmore Vale you are "always in the air" has come to be regarded as a maxim, containing, doubtless, as sound a substratum of truth as is involved in most aphorisms. As a matter of fact you must, if you hunt with that pack, find yourself continually jumping fences; for, while the hedges, brooks, and banks succeed each other very rapidly, the gates, though genuine gates enough in comparison with those of Ireland, by no means swing readily to the hunting-crop like those of Mid England. They latch usually by their own weight; their own weight must be

lifted ; and the latch, if so it may be called, is an immovable fixture intended only to retard. And as almost every fence (the dingle of the hillside excepted) is to be ridden over at one point or another, I can readily understand that one would be likely to lose rather than gain ground by essaying to manipulate each tempting gate. (I write as one to whom the easy-swinging gates of the Shires constitute of course a natural, unfailing attraction.) This necessity for cross-country riding, in the truest meaning of the term, very possibly has something to do with the moderate numbers of an ordinary Blackmore field.

And the fences themselves—what of these ? I believe I am safe in saying that, beyond what nature has cut here and there in the form of dingle and brook, they are fashioned almost invariably upon the system of a bank surmounted by thorn, hazel, or other hedge growth. The bank varies in size and height according to the requirement of the district ; so do the ditches, double or single ; while the hedge is cut on a pattern unknown to the Midland fencemaker, and that of course is only applicable to a bank. Its growers are laid lengthways, generally only a foot or two from the soil, are kept in their places by sharp, upright stakes, while the superfluous growth is trimmed in a close succession of knifelike blades, comparable to nothing so much, when newly cut, as to *chevaux de frise* wherewith to check the advance of foot and horse. How any hunter escapes impalement is to me a matter of wondering surprise. But I am told they habitually do, when once they know their business.

Fortunate indeed may I consider myself in any way to have sampled the Vale during this summer month. Of course I can lay no claim to have learned it ; but I have seen enough to allow me to endorse what I had long ago been told of its delights and its characteristics.

On Tuesday—favoured in some measure by good luck, in a much greater degree by the kind courtesy of the Master—I took part in a thirty-five-minute hunt of most cheery description, over what is known locally as their Stalbridge Vale—the turf riding firm, mossy, and elastic, while never a ploughed field came in the way.

Whatever the day may have been elsewhere, in the Blackmore Vale there was a tropical sun but a cool south-westerly breeze. And scent upon the grass was firm; though directly hounds struck a road there came a dead stop—as, let us say, of an editor's blue pencil across wordy manuscript.

Mr. Merthyr Guest had met at Sandley Tunnel Head, on the highland overlooking the Vale, into which he at once descended in order to draw Nyland, the Ranksborough Gorse of the Hunt in question. But the sport of the day came from Fifehead, a covert of the Master's just under the hill. It was close upon 2.30 when a fox was viewed thence ascending the upland. "The worst direction he could have chosen!" quoth one who had kindly taken upon himself the post of cicerone to the wandering scribe. Yes, but the horn of the huntsman was gaily tuning below; and, while screams resounded southward proclaiming yet a third fox away, the field dashed round the covert in ardent search of the pack. Two meadows and two gates, two tail hounds, now we had a clue, and now we sat down to gain position, your humble and timid investigator enjoying, as ever when called upon to ride a strange country, sensations wholly similar to those of a wretched urchin forced for the first time out of a bathing-machine. I had, I knew, a bit of the blood of Tipperary beneath me, though how much he might have learned before leaving his native land I could only guess from his honourable aversion to falling in Northamptonshire. To a bathing-machine, if I remember right, there is invariably a rope, and a rope I ever seek and clutch eagerly on such similar occasion as the present, finding it in the form either of the huntsman or of some expert equally conversant with the proper method of crossing the country. Here a loose and flying coat, surmounting an equally flying grey, at once took my fancy; and in hot haste I made after the combination, steering as best I could, or as best young Tipperary could help me, across the cut trenches that serve in due course to irrigate water-meadows. The banks were fair and sound, perhaps six feet high at most, varying to one foot at least. The high banks had sufficient breadth

of top upon which a horse could change his legs in comfort. And my preceptor, I soon noticed, chose, whenever possible, the spot where loose dead thorns, rather than sharp trimmed spikes or budding binders, composed the top-hamper of the fence. "Very like Ireland after all, only rather easier," spake I to myself, as with newborn confidence I landed from the second bank, and would gladly have doffed my hat to my unconscious pilot, but that he was already leading me over a third into a road, and that the compliment, besides being wasted, might likely enough have involved me in dangerous inattention to my own safety.

Here was the pack, the huntsman picking himself up from a fall into the lane, hounds casting themselves on either flank, and a countryman beckoning up the road. Quickly they were put right, and quickly the chase went on. A moderate brook (Bow Brook, I fancy) brought moderate confusion, not a tithe of what we should have decorated it with in the shires of Northampton or Leicester. The fences then came lighter, the pace better, and those first fifteen minutes deserve to be dubbed "excellent fun." On after a brief check, then two or more nice little brooks which horses, by force of practice, seemed to take all kindly in their stride. More quick, pretty work on the part of the lady pack, more pleasant dairy closes or mowing meadows, more and continual popping on to banks and galloping upon soft turf. Ah! what a luxurious privilege when all the world had seemed hard-baked and summer-gripped. So on for thirty-five minutes in all. Then it was told us that our fox, completely tired, had been rolled over by a sheepdog. Further search at length revealed that he had crawled back into an adjacent drain.

It will help to substantiate my brief sketch of Tuesday's run if I add that the line was across Cale, with the first check at Five Bridges, thence over Sayle's Farm to Rhodes' House, heading for Stalbridge, and crossing the Stalbridge Brook, rightward parallel to Devon and Somerset Railway nearly to Henstridge Station, and still more to the right to Baslem's Hill, where the cur dog put in his

interference. And among the small field of the day were, besides the Master and Lady Theodora Guest, Mr. Digby Collius, Captain Hornby, M. G. Glyn, Lord Maghera-



Leading me over a bank into a road

orne, Mr. A. Sutton, Lord W. S. Douglas, Captain S. Orred, Captain Phelps, Major Nesbitt, Mr. and Miss Dendy, Mrs. Henshaw and Mr. Henshaw (*filis*), Mr. F. Lascelles, Mr. Quicke, and Nr. Nightingale (whose paint-

ings of hunters and hunter scenes have brought him into wide notice).

I should like to have said more about the hounds than a three days' hunting experience and a narrow margin of writing will allow. The kennel has an unbroken record since 1833 ; and, during Mr. Guest's mastership of ten years, new blood has almost yearly been added to the home pack. That the present Master mounts his whole establishment upon grey horses of excellent type, is almost too well known to call for mention here. No one who has seen it can have failed to realise how striking is the daily covert-side picture of grey horses and scarlet coats. I was particularly taken with the grand old weight-carrier, Rambler by name, that Mr. Guest rode on Tuesday.

Of the hounds I confess to liking best the mixed pack which the Master takes out for his own two by-days. Level and neat they are, especially busy and determined in their work. These I saw on Wednesday, when they were taken beyond Wincanton to the north of the country, and met at Redlynch, a charming property of the Earl of Ilchester, whose presence and influence in the country, by the way, are ever of the greatest assistance to its sport. Moor Wood being the adjacent draw, there quickly ensued the seventeen minutes' scurry that I learn has been of late so frequently enacted, to the great overhanging coverts of Stourton opposite. The memorial tower of Stourhead would seem to be a beacon to the Moor Wood fox ; for which he has been wont to jump out of his brambly-kennel and out of covert before hounds had time to proclaim him found.

On Wednesday, with a brief check by Walk Covert, caused by his encountering two farm hands in a lane, he took them sharply and prettily to Stavordale Wood. They hunted him down at length in the Alderbed, another of the chain of woods. Afterwards they ran a second also to his death, from Cockrow, twice into the open, the rest by woodland, Mr. Guest thus scoring a capital day's work, which I apologise for having sketched thus briefly.

CHAPTER LV

TIPPERARY IN SPRING

THE Green Island looked, probably, never less green than on Wednesday, April 1, 1894, when I was being whirled across it on my way to the hunting-grounds of county Tipperary. The bountiful herbage of the previous autumn had been more than the cattle could clear off during a winter unusually mild even for that favoured climate, and the fog-grass had grown brown for want of rain. The stock in many cases browsed fetlock-deep, presenting, in their sleek condition, pleasing contrast to the attenuated beasts we had seen roaming the bare pastures of distressful Britain. But the rain, commencing gently in Dublin, was now falling gradually. County Tipperary had already enjoyed twenty-four hours' downpour, and the drive from Clonmell to Fethard was across a sea of pasturage as rich and verdant as ever. I seemed to be back in October. The green buds, already thickly clothing the bushes, helped to keep up the illusion, which the patches of blackthorn blossom scarce seemed to dispel, so well might these have been snowdrifts of an early storm.

"Will hunt Thursday and Friday. Come," had been the Master's kindly telegram. It arrived when I had surrendered all thought of further hunting, when boots and breeches had been cupboarded, and self and horses thrown up for the summer. Is it necessary to say how gleefully I accepted the summons, the more eagerly that an open winter in England had for six months allowed me no taste of Ireland's ever fresh and genial sport?

In Mr. Burke's season there had, it appears, been a lull of some weeks subsequent to the successful October I had been so happy in seeing. Sport then gradually mended, until after the New Year it rose to proper form, culminating during the final months in several runs of surpassing merit. Instance the second and much faster of the two hunts from Ballyluski's famous covert to the wood at Grove (the Master's residence), viz. seven miles from

point to point, five up to the first check—the whole done in fifty minutes, to the check upon Kilnochin Hill in forty! Riding home, as I did on Thursday, along the ridge overlooking the Peppardstown valley, it was easy to realise how glorious a line had been taken a month before. And, believe me, if you would fill your eyes and feed imagination with sweeping views of wild grass country, all rideable but everywhere varying, take your stand on any of the hilltops of undulating Tipperary! Then there was the thirty-five minutes' gallop of Saturday a week ago, the ground dry and the heat oppressive, from Ballylennan Gorse (*via* Killaghy and Drangan to the hill covert of Rathkenny), a finer run than even the two I had been privileged to see from the first-named charming covert. Add to this a tremendous burst of some forty minutes from Garranacole's yellow furze dell to Kilcooly, in the far north of the country, during which gallop most of the field had the ill-luck to enclose themselves hopelessly within the demesne walls of Coalbrook, and you have at all events three of the gems with which spring has been decorated in Tipperary. The loss of a number of hounds last summer was a sore handicap until the young entry, chiefly from Belvoir and Lord Fitzhardinge, came into capable work. The pack then showed excellent form, and being now still further recruited by the young drafts of the Grafton and the Pytchley, it will do full credit to the sunny new kennels the Master has recently erected at Grove.

If Wednesday was as of October, Thursday might well have belonged to November. And November we made it, forgetful of the near end, and imagining as best we could that fox-hunting was still in full flood. A wholesome rain beat down while we drove the ten miles northward to Ballingarry; it enveloped us during the day, and plied us heavily on the way home. Already the ground was wetter than perhaps during the season now closing. But, wet though it may sometimes become, can Tipperary ever be called deep? I have not yet known it deserving that title.

The meet was for Garranacole; but, after ten responses in succession through the season, this pretty glen (to-day exposed to the south-westerly storm) had nothing to say for

itself. But by 2.30 we were at Ballyluski. Hounds opened at once, and within a couple of minutes a fine fox broke eastward from the gorse, caring nothing for the group of horsemen on the hillside immediately above him. A slender and sombre-clad field was that of to-day. If I remember



A fine fox broke from the gorse

rightly, the Master and his men alone offered coat of pink to the weather ; while, all told, there could hardly have been twenty people with the Hunt. The Hussars, by the way, who are wont to furnish ever a strong detachment, were on this occasion represented only by the single vedette whom fortune or his turn of duty had posted at Fethard. Squadron-drill, I learn, was the common ail-

ment, which an early Easter may or may not have served prematurely to bring out like nettle-rash, another spring complaint. Now, having no longer before my eyes the fear of authorities, nor even of hats that are cocked nor of plumes that are waved, and having further beguiled my journey from shire to county with the soul-stirring pages of Baron de Marbot, I cannot in my impertinence but think that, with the prolonged horrors of war at every moment imminent before them, our warriors are deserving of all lenity and indulgence in time of peace. The Image of War, with fully ten per cent. of its danger as represented by the banks of Ballyluski, should surely suffice for all martial exercise until such time as the summer has to be killed or until Aldershot claims the corps for its own.

"Did ye see the terrible fall Mr. H. was after getting?" queried of me a fair damsel when the first half-dozen of these great overhanging banks had, I thought, been comfortably surmounted. "Indeed I did not," replied I with a shiver, adopting unconsciously the idiom of the country; "I wish you had not told me." "Ah, it's nothing," she responded, with a bright laugh as she popped on to a six-foot bank bordering a lane, left both of her mare's hind-legs for some seconds across the crumbling summit, then, picking the animal off its head and off the road, rode gaily on to the same silvery tune of merriment and content.

These banks of the Croherne township were, it seemed to me, not only unusually massive and consequently overawing, but were slippery with the recent rain and difficult to the foothold. Moreover, they come so close together that you are hardly over one than it becomes your apparent duty to jump into the middle of the pack already hidden by the next. That under such conditions one might easily be tempted to ride too close to hounds I can well imagine, for every few seconds they are entirely out of sight; and if scent be indifferent, or their fox short-running, small wonder if an anxious field is prone to hover too closely upon their backs. That these particular banks were as trying as most in Tipperary I am the more ready to believe, because after a certain amount of experience I am more able to discriminate for myself between

the easy and the difficult. In other words, I am not frightened by them all, only by some. I no longer (as I heard it put by a gallant soldier, who in reality makes light of them all) die three deaths at each, viz. one on jumping on to the bank, another poised (as now) among the gorse or thorn upon its summit, and a third while plunging into the unknown depths beyond. I shrink from accepting such description quite literally as applied to myself; but I maintain that in the negotiation of many woolly and ill-defined banks there is a prolonged crisis, which to most Saxon minds will be found pleasurable only in inverse ratio to its duration. For my part, I delight in a horse that goes quick off his banks, though the slower he will approach them the more confidence, and I believe safety, he gives me.

But I am neglecting the run, in which, by the way, I had got so far as to allude to a "terrible fall." It merited, happily, no such designation, this, I firmly believe, having been invented at the moment by my fair informant, as a javelin against my thin armour of courage. It had been merely a case of broken stirrup-leather. To replace it the fallen knight made his way at once into a farmhouse adjacent, paid 5s. for another, and went on in hot pursuit of hounds. At the very first fence this also, in proper Irish fashion, snapped in two, and a second time our luckless friend was left prone.

"The Grove fox! The Grove fox for a hundred!" they had shouted as he broke covert, carrying his white tag defiantly high. But, if he was, something prevented his turning to his point; and he ran throughout like a fox who had lost his way, or rather who had failed to make his line. Yet hounds could never really press him, and at starting six couples of them had whisked back into covert upon heel. There was some funny floundering at the second or third fence—I can hardly call it a bank pure and simple; it was rather the slope of an earth-work, bush-crowned, with a deep dyke beyond. To the smoothest point of this we all hurried, led by one of the hardest and quickest of Tipperary's sons, to find ourselves checked and huddled on the very brow by our usually

undaunted and irrepressible rider. Was he daunted? By no means. I must tell you what had happened. It seems that, possibly with a view to Anglicising his horse for readier sale, he had that morning double-bridled him for the first time. Now a Tipperary horse has, to borrow an Americanism, "no use" for two bits in his mouth at a time. So, with almost more than human acuteness, he resented the insult by catching his curb on a stick as he reached the parapet in question. There he remained, like a ram caught by a thorn bush, till his rider could dismount to release him, and the rest of us broke away with lamentation to find another exit. This we found here and there, making the descent into the broad dyke with many scrambles, and at least a brace of falls, among us.

By this time hounds had rounded the hillside and touched the patch of gorse at White Hall, before descending into the valley of the township of Coherne. Running on, steadily but not fast (as the storms overhead thickened) they gained the hills and stone walls near Coolquill Castle. What would your English horse say, or think, if he were asked to run up a stone staircase forming a footpath over a bank from one field to another? Whatever he might think, I for one should dislike to press the necessity upon him. Yet here a dozen horses in succession made their footing good, the only downfall being in the case of a lady. I hardly know how best to express my admiration for the way the ladies of Tipperary cross a country that most would define as altogether too rough-and-tumble for their sex. The strong thorns alone, through which they have often to force their way, have little bend or give in them, like those of an English hedge. Rather are they stubborn and unyielding enough to imperil any habit, or any but the stoutest hat that can be built of felt.

When within half a mile of the demesne coverts of Ballyphilip, our fox (finding himself now some four miles from home) suddenly changed his tactics, and, recrossing a road, swung right round to Ballincurry. Soon we found ourselves near Ballingarry village, the meet of the morning, and after some forty-five minutes from the find. Here our

fox was headed, hounds could do little more with him, and we rode home in the bursting storm.

The little field of the day consisted of, besides Mr. Burke, Mr. and the Misses Ponsonby, Miss Langley, Miss Willett, Miss Brown, Captain Bryan, Messrs. Riall, Higgins, Hemphill, Leatham, Hanly, Malcolmson, Murphy, Ashby, Sayers, Dr. Hefferman, and perhaps half-a-dozen others.

At Coolmore on Friday there seemed every prospect of a gallop. Fox and hounds were away in a second, scent appeared ravishing, and the beautiful arena of Peppardstown was directly before us. But a vixen fox would do no more than take us a sharp scurry round the sturdy neighbourhood of Coolmore (even this made up a cheery trifle). I told you yesterday of stone-stile climbing on the part of the native horse. We had another instance to-day. Beside a locked and useless gate, at the corner of a field, stood the usual pretentious iron gate-post. Round this ran a footpath, across the apex of the two stone walls fencing a cottage. An Irish horse can change his legs as readily as a goat. Thus whoever came into that corner had to come out goat-fashion over the double wall; and they did it without catastrophe, all the more satisfactory, in that a hard road awaited their coming. Ah, but they are "*great* horses" in Ireland. (So well have I learned to appreciate the emphatic pithiness of that encomium that I warn any submissive friend who may ever again accompany me round my home stables, he will no longer hear each occupant in turn described as "one of the very best hunters in England, I give you my word." He will merely hear of each, "That's a *great* horse!" muttered beneath my breath; then be left to judge for himself, from the depth of intonation, which may be really the *greatest* of all.)

I will write no more of Friday. It finished the season; and, besides the little scurry at Coolmore, we had wandered over a beautiful tract of country, among the pleasant company of the day being, besides the Master and besides many of yesterday's field, Mr. and Hon. Mrs. Maclean, Mr. and Mrs. Hartigan, Mrs. Carroll, Mrs. Higgins,

Misses Murphy(2), Miss Stevenson, Messrs. Barry, Corcoran, Curzon, Greene, Philips, Scully, &c.

I cannot close this sketch without expressing once again my intense appreciation of the welcome given and the assistance ever extended by the men of Tipperary to a sport-loving Saxon taking his holiday among them. Their one idea towards him would seem to be to help him to see the sport to the best advantage, and to make his time pass pleasantly. The last instance of my recent experience was in the shape of an invitation to attend a small dinner, given at Fethard to Mr. Burke by some of his more immediate neighbours in the Hunt. The event was royally and gracefully carried out, and its closing rites were on a par with the happiest and most exhilarating phases of freemasonry.

CHAPTER LVI

THE BIG BULL ELK OF COLORADO

AS exciting a day's hunting as has fallen to my lot for years. But it was not a cub nor an old fox, nor even a stag on Exmoor, nor yet a fallow buck in the New Forest, that I saw broken up this 31st of August 1894. 'Twas a right royal bull elk, as handsome as the Rocky Mountains (already said to be "hunted out") can now produce. I spare you all preliminaries ; will linger not a moment over ocean voyage or transcontinental journey. I will not even ask you to accompany me a-horseback for three days by mule-trail and through pathless forest, where every second step carries you across fallen timber interlaced beneath the dark, giant pine-trees. Its very inaccessibility renders the hunting-ground in question so wild, undisturbed, and richly stocked. Picture to yourselves a deep mountain-girt basin, some ten miles across, its verdant area about equally divided between sombre pine-forest and natural parks of waving green grass and gaudy flowering (for a wet August has kept the Rockies still in full summer brilliancy). Through this a rushing river, full of the greediest and most palatable of trout. Beside this our camp fire and our

picketed horses—and round us sufficient deer, grouse, and elk to make every day a sporting study. Slaughter has place only so far as the larder demands, or a sample head appears to justify. Our first day showed us that game enough was in the country. Our second gave the result I am about briefly to pencil this Sunday afternoon under tent cover.

We are (1) "the Judge," (2) myself, (3 and 4) two "boys," rather older than either of us, who pack the horses, pitch the camp, and do with a good will anything that may be required. The cooking is a joint operation, depending for its division of labour partly upon the accident of the hour, and partly upon the measure in which each individual fancies his particular talent. Thus, one can make "an elegant stew," another can produce quite "dandy bread," a third "gives in to nobody" in the accomplishment of putting Boston beans on the table, while all of us wield the frying-pan as if to the manner born. For myself, though a disciple in all these arts, I find that an expression of admiration all round obviates the necessity of further active participation, and not only saves me a good deal of trouble but does away with risk of too many cooks. The Judge, as by position and experience, as well as by the force of a disposition active almost to restlessness, of course takes the lead in this and every other branch of our present pursuits.

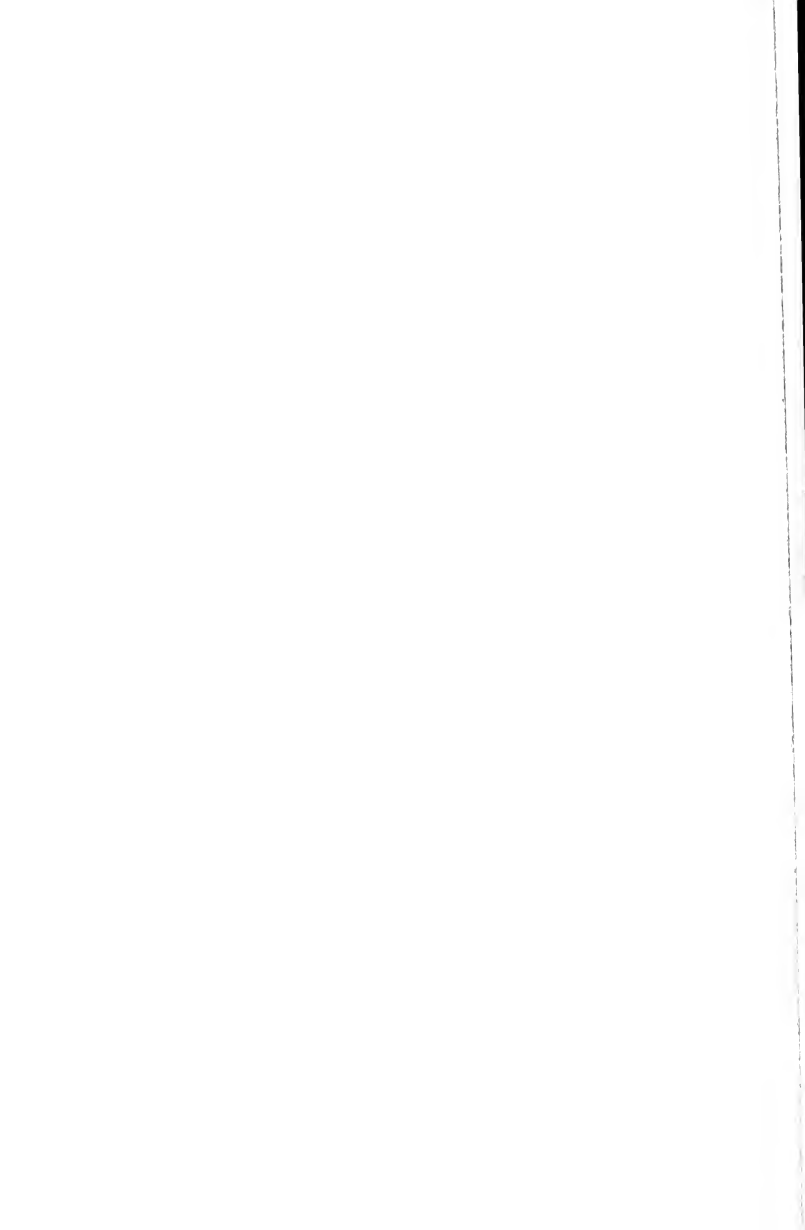
"An early start to-morrow morning, Judge, eh? 'Twill be Saturday, and the 1st of September besides." The Judge was quite agreeable; and after the usual breakfast at sunrise he and I were in the saddle by about seven. No great hardship is there in early rising, when nine o'clock has been the latest hour of bedtime. A chief part of those first few nights on the Rockies is, indeed, spent in attempts, often unavailing, to keep warm. The sunshine of the day has been hot almost to scorching. The night air searches through tent and bedding till you feel you almost as well might be courting sleep in a refrigerator. And yet you arise fresh and vigorous, and fit for anything, as you imagine, until you are called upon to run afoot, when it is brought to your mind that you are working at an altitude of

11,000 feet to 12,000 feet, the latter being the height of the perpendicular of snow-capped cliffs surrounding the valley you have made your temporary home. Happily, most of this work is done upon horseback. Well, this morning our most pressing and immediate object was fresh meat; our more keen ambition was elk, of which we had already seen ample sign, even in the hoof-mark of a massive bull. Our quest took us up stream, and, after a mile or so of stiff climbing over wooded hills, where the only road-makers would seem to have been game and Indians, we entered a long strip of park land, and a useful little spike or yearling buck soon afterwards fell to my companion's rifle. We wasted only such time as was necessary in making him ready for saddle and supper, and hanging upon a tree, before proceeding along the connecting stretches of park through which the narrowing river tinkled its downward way. We took our path through the trees bordering a wet and open strip, whose width could not at this point have been more than about 200 yards. A distant whistle caught my ear. "What was that?" I asked. "A bird, I guess," replied the judicial one; and my mind was contentedly relapsing into rest, when again the whistle sounded, nearer and shriller. "A bull elk bugling!" burst from the lips of both of us, and the Judge even sounded a reply on an old dog-whistle of mine, whose note happens to bear a curious similarity to the bugle-call of the male elk. Whether by accident or otherwise, an answer came back at once. "Off your horse, captain, and hide yourself. I will tie both these out of sight in the timber." And a few seconds later we were hidden silently under cover of the trees, watching eagerly for call to further action, while my English retriever crouched between us. See, a brown form moving in the opposite wood—another, and another—a whole bunch of them. And out issued a placid-looking cow elk, followed by her yearling, and gradually by a whole string; fourteen of various ages and kinds, but no old bull.

"My stars, what meat!" whispered my comrade, his thoughts reverting hungrily to the camp fire and to three days of salt provisions. "There ain't no big bull; shoot



THE BIG BULL EYE OF COLORADO.



one of them little spiked bulls." Well, I couldn't and I wouldn't, though now they had crossed the open to our side and were passing within sixty yards. That bugle I knew well had been sounded by no stripling. Yet I crept stealthily forward to survey them at leisure, Fan following at my heels, showing no excitement (as I feared she might), but thinking rather, as the Judge afterwards put it, "we were just going a-milking."

Ah! what yonder? Something quite different—something lord-like, lion-like, his enormous antlers towering above him as the spars of an old-time man-of-war, his swollen crest and his black bushy front proclaiming him champion as he was challenger of the forest. He threw his shrill call once as he stepped into the open, as it might have been into an arena, then tossed his mighty head, and wended his way very deliberately after the members of his harem. A more magnificent sight in a more magnificent scene it would be impossible to picture, he the central figure in an amphitheatre more imposing a hundred times than any ever devised or adapted in Roman Italy or Sicily.

His whole fate seemed already to rest on my trigger-finger. The hero of a hundred fights was approaching his doom at the hands of an antagonist unfairly armed as compared with all he had met before, whose assaults were marked in many a deep scar on his rugged sides. Sailing onward like a three-decker, he bore slowly down upon us, while I sat Wimbledon-fashion, with elbows on my knees, and waited the moment to bring him, easily as I thought, to book. Ah, the dashing of cup from lip is the commonest incident of human fate! Another minute would have brought him broadside on, and the prize would have been mine; but there sounded on my ear from an interval of several yards in rear the same whispered voice that so recently had bade me kill the fat yearling. Again I heard the word "shoot," and I heard also some caution as to the game getting nearer. At first I would pay no heed, but satisfied myself with laying my rifle in position, and preparing for a shot should the big bull by chance take alarm. The whispered instruction was rapidly repeated,

this time more vehemently. (My friend and guide, remember, was giving me every privilege of *first shot*, and had, as it were, the right in some measure to direct my movements.) So, though the great game was in the worst possible position for a fatal shot, viz. almost stem on, and between 100 and 150 yards away, whereas he would soon have ranged alongside at fifty paces, I decided to trust to my .450 Express and to the exceptional opportunity for a steady aim. He swung a little as he picked his way across the swampy ground, and, as his right side showed for a moment, I delivered a bullet as near his shoulder as I could. He halted instanter, raised his proud head, as it were indignant, and I looked to see him fall in his tracks. But he wheeled steadily round, and steadily moved off towards the timbered covert he had left, while the Judge played away with his repeating Winchester, and I sent my second bullet and a third after his retreating form. That he failed to raise even a momentary trot seemed, to my experience of many beasts in various lands, conclusive that he had received mortal hurt, and I looked to find him prone or helpless within the trees. Not so my companion, who certainly had enjoyed more frequent opportunity than myself of testing the vitality of an old bull elk.

"He's just one of them sulky old fellows that isn't used to running, and won't." This is the way he put it, and the sentiment would account in some measure for his being readily satisfied that the bull had gone on, and that, though "we might stumble across him by chance, this was a big territory in which to find him." No blood was to be seen, and the trail soon got mixed up with others of the morning. So, all too readily it seemed to me, we cast right and cast left, gave up the chase as hopeless, and rode slowly on to other parks and other woods.

"Can't you eat your luncheon, captain?" queried the Judge as we sat on the greensward at midday. "No, Judge, I couldn't touch it. I'm at this moment the most miserable man in all America. If I thought that grand fellow wasn't even wounded I would not so much mind, but I know he's gone to die and his horns to rot in the forest."

How it comes to pass that I have spent an hour of this Sunday morning in cleaning that old bull's scalp, and that last evening found me almost the best pleased man in America, must be left for another entry. Meanwhile a messenger has been sent from camp to store for a saw to divide the massive skull, and render the wide-stretching antlers more portable.

CHAPTER LVII

THE BIG BULL ELK OF COLORADO—(*continued*)

AND yet through this September afternoon I could not persuade myself I had really lost all sight and chance of that glorious head. Had I not travelled more than 5000 miles to secure such trophy? Had I not searched and inquired and enlisted the help of sympathetic friends to discover ground where such a sample might still be found? And having at last encountered him in full magnificence—apparently in my very hand—was I to lose him thus contemptibly through over-haste, through underrating his strength? It was the work of a "tenderfoot," and shame entered into my very soul. To think that he—such specimen of the grandest of the deer tribe—should be left to die in the forest, or at best to fall a maimed and easy prey to the next hunter who should happen to encounter the band, of which he would be found a sickly hanger-on rather than a proud chieftain as I had seen him that morning. The thought was humiliating, and I felt as if I could never handle rifle again. The shadows were lengthening under the pine-trees and athwart my soul as, after hunting out several more of the upper parks by the mountain's base, we turned our horses' heads campwards, intending to pick up the little spike buck that had formed the preface of the morning.

"Here is the very spot where we shot at the big bull! I don't believe it possible, Judge, that he can have gone far. I will have one more look among the timber, if you are not in a hurry." "Right, captain," replied my com-

rade ; "but I have not much faith in your finding him. Guess I'll wait in the park at the end of the timber." "Five minutes," I pleaded apologetically. And into the timber I wended my way, imbued with very much the same forlorn hope as has now and then induced Will Goodall again to draw for his beaten fox, on the off-chance of fresh-finding him.

To any one unfamiliar with the pine forests of the Rockies it would be difficult to imagine the density created by the intermingling of live timber and dead timber, still more to realise the ingenuity and sure-footedness with which a mountain horse will surmount the fallen logs of the latter. Making one more sweep round its outskirts, I turned upwards to the brow of the narrow wood, picking my way dolefully among the trees, but scrutinising carefully everywhere for dead beast or even for blood-sign.

My pencil halts upon my notebook when I think of the rush of gladness to my brain as, from behind a prone spruce, there rose, within twenty yards, those glorious great antlers and that huge red form. The horse I bestrode had, I knew well, a deep-rooted fear of gunshot from his back. But what mattered it now? I flung off a hasty shot at the dim mass among the trees, and the next moment was whirled round and round, clinging to my saddle with the tenacity of a broncho-buster. "Look out!" I shouted, as soon as I could snatch breath; and then, kicking spurs into my terrified quadruped, made more haste through the rough timber than I had ever before dared. There was no need for the shout. The shot had proclaimed the find, and the game had slowly entered the open. As I issued from the wood the Judge's last three cartridges rang out in quick succession, and the big bull was to be seen staggering up another wooded hill 100 yards away. Throwing myself from the saddle, too hurriedly to cast reins in proper fashion over my horse's head, I fired two barrels hastily at the big mark, the second one sounding fair on his back as he rose the ascent.

The Judge, like me, had neglected to drop his bridle-rein in the hurry of dismounting; and now the two horses

were off at a trot, heading straight for camp. Away went my companion at hot speed to head them off, casting his empty Winchester on the ground, and leaving the elk to me and to fate. By this time, what with the rarity of the air and the cumbersomeness of the garments with which, on a showery day in the Rockies, it is necessary to clothe oneself (adding, if you like, some deficiency of condition and the weight of a heavy rifle), I found myself at the foot of the hill, within twenty yards of my game, so blown that I knew I could barely run up and finish him. Accordingly, turning my steps, I rounded the little eminence, planted myself in the open, and held the elk secure until the Judge should return, or failing that, till I could at least get in upon the crippled beast with a fair chance of holding the rifle straight. In less time than I could have expected my partner returned, equally breathless, with two empty saddles and one empty weapon. "You ain't let him go again, captain?" he panted forth. "Not a bit of it," I responded, with perhaps premature gladness. "He's in there, dead as a door-nail, I'll warrant, but I was too blown to go in till you came. Stay here and watch, lest I have made any mistake." But I had not, though for assurance' sake I circled the hilltop, and astonished Fan greatly by taking no notice whatever of a large brood of grouse that rose around us.

Back I worked till I reached the spot where the big bull and I had, as it were, parted company. There he lay, with his great head down-hill and his broad antlers supporting him between two young fir-trees. I doubt if those wild woods had ever re-echoed before to "Who-whoop" and "Tallyho"; but I am not ashamed to confess that I screamed myself hoarse, and that I will live on that double chase for many a day to come.

I should explain that, though all turned out well and exceptionally fortunately in the end, an unfortunate mistake, or rather misconception, of prompting had well-nigh robbed me of the coveted antlers, and endowed me with a regrettable memory that years would have failed to remove. It seems that the Judge, observing my rifle at shoulder (as I sat with elbows on knees), imagined

I was about instantly to fire. Accordingly he had repeated the caution, "Don't shoot yet," again and again; distance had carried to me only the word "shoot," and thus I had in the first instance unwillingly pulled trigger prematurely and at a disadvantage. (Another example to add to many in my hunting career, that prompting, however valuable the source, is far more likely to be misleading than the unhampered instinct of one's own experience.) As it happened, the heavy blow of the Express had done its work, the bullet (the late Lord Keane's "split-nosed" pattern) having travelled the body from just behind the shoulder to the spine, there to be cut out of the loin in bent and broken shape. This had served to hinder and cripple the bull. But his extraordinary tenacity of life is shown by the fact that his tawny hide contains no less than seven bullet-holes. In cutting him up, the find of each bullet was treated in camp as a separate excitement, the yield of metal being pronounced by the old prospector, who at present acts for us in the capacity of packer, cook and butcher, as being "superior to that of any mine in Leadville."

CHAPTER LVIII

ANOTHER RIDE WITH THE MEADOWBROOK HOUNDS, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

I AM a strong believer in an occasional nerve-test. Perhaps, and certainly nowadays, I would scarcely follow the principle so far as did an intimate friend of mine, who offered himself to be carried by Blondin across the rope stretched from Canterbury Cathedral, and was intensely mortified to find himself anticipated by the late Captain Pritchard Rayner, if I remember right. Another earnest advocate of the theory was a brother officer who, in the flogging days of the Army, in all honesty avowed himself anxious to try the tripod "to see whether he could really stand the punishment." Needless to say, he never acquired the opportunity. But he was sincere, and his aspiration,

however grotesque, was but the expression of a principle sufficiently founded.

As a nerve tonic, to be taken like other tonics—local instance in point, the cocktail—just prior to the meal, *i.e.* to the regular hunting season, I may safely commend a ride over the timber fences of Long Island, New York. I will answer for it that the dose will be found refreshing, stimulating, and appetising. For my part I had tried it once before, and had then swallowed at a gulp what I now accepted on a willing palate. One's first oyster was startling; one's second was swallowed with more or less gusto. Whether a complete course would ensure full relish must, I fancy, depend in a great measure on the organisation, mental and physical, of the subject under treatment.

I have before described Long Island, its fences and its mode of hunting. This was two years ago. It is now only necessary for me to repeat that the surface of the country is tolerably flat, the soil for the most part sandy and diligently cultivated; that for fences the farmers use only post-and-rails of *four feet and upwards*, and of most uncompromising strength; and that for foxes the Hunt-management very properly prefer the-man-with-a-bag to a short-running bagman from the neighbouring woods. Thus it is at all times open to the director of affairs to meet all the requirements of occasion. It may happen that it is the first day of the season; it may happen that a certain number of ladies wish to join in the sport; it may chance that an inquiring visitor from the Old Country is desirous of seeing how it is all done; and it may even turn out that the last-named has come as "a chiel among them taking notes." A fair sample of sport and country must at all events be dealt out to him. And here it is, as he now read it, so far as an elegant mite of horse-flesh and his own little mead of capacity allowed him to translate.

"The opening meet will be at the Meadowbrook Club, and the run will be the best of the season," wrote my friendly host, to welcome me eastward from the mountains, and to tempt me to a renewal of an experience that had thrilled me no little in the autumn of 1892—an ex-

perience I am never tired of retailing to my thrusting comrades of the Shires, and that now, in all modification of script and adjective, I am about briefly to repeat. (By the way, I have a parenthesis. It may be remembered by the incredulous that I then wrote of more than one five-foot timber-fence occurring in that run of 1892. Only two months ago I chanced to be again in Long Island for a day on my way West. Driving from Mineola I came across one of those very fences, jumped out, and stood alongside of it. It was *full* five feet, and with a drop into the road—the road, it is true, not macadamised.) And now I will tell you how the horses upon Long Island are taught to negotiate with ease and certainty these unbending obstacles. Almost every man who has a hunting-box or stables on the Island makes a point of fixing up a circular school, round which each horse in turn is practised without rein or encumbrance. Heavy log-timbers form the two jumps, and are raised or lowered by weight or pulley. No horse is considered fitted to begin with hounds till he can go readily round, taking each jump at five feet. Thus taught, and with the ground invariably sound, on the grass hard as an Indian maidan, no wonder they seldom make a mistake, and that thus riding-to-rounds is a practicable, if not a very popular, pastime upon Long Island.

I had seen this exercise enacted a day or two previous in the schools of Mr. T. Hitchcock and of the Club, in both of which a three-year-old had easily jumped the required height. And in both of these stables, as well as in those of Mr. Winthrop and Mr. Ellis, I had been privileged to look over various made hunters, whose performance is beyond question, and whose appearance was alone a most sufficient guarantee of the necessary power. Verily, a bad horse would readily break your neck upon Long Island; so, needless to say, he is unsought for, whatever his price. Mr. Hitchcock's neat horses are altogether of the long, low, and thoroughbred type; Mr. Winthrop's, on the contrary, are tall and upstanding; so is at least one of Mr. Ellis's, while Lofty, a bay on which Mr. Herbert was to-day mounted, is taller than all, being

over seventeen hands. The other three gentlemen above-named were all, at the last moment, prevented from joining the chase of Monday.

The summer of 1894 happens to have been unusually devoid of rain ; and the surface of the Island became consequently almost as dry as a dead camp-fire. The summer itself seemed hardly to have passed away, as under the lowering sun we rode to the trysting-place this Monday afternoon, October 1, 1894. No further law is permitted to late-comers upon Long Island than has already been allowed to the man with the bag. Of these registered minutes they are at liberty to avail themselves for conversational and such like purposes as are supposed to pertain to a meet of hounds. Thus, at four o'clock to a moment Mr. Frank Griswold was to be seen issuing from the Club grounds, some seventeen couple round his heels, and Joe Murphy in attendance, Master and man as well equipped, well-mounted, and business-like as when I saw them two years ago. Since that day Mr. Griswold, amalgamating his own pack with that of the Club, has succeeded Mr. T. Hitchcock as Master of the Meadowbrook, on the latter resigning and establishing hounds in South Carolina. With the mastership, be it added, comes the privilege of at all times and under all circumstances leading the field in pursuit of hounds. Methinks, were this etiquette to be acknowledged and enforced in Old England, many a change of mastership would speedily be announced. Looked at from one point of view alone, imagine the feelings of the M.F.H. called upon to live ever in front of the galloping hundreds of the Quorn or Pytchley ! If you want another point of view, you will find it in a glimpse of the Long Island timber ; fancy yourself booked for the post in question for a period of years, three times a week whatever the weather and whatever your mode of life and its temptations ; then go home, and there study at leisure "A Question of Courage" as set forth in this month's *Lippincott's Magazine*.

For all exigencies that might arise on the present occasion the Master appeared admirably mounted on a beautiful mare named Sweetheart, said to have been bred

in Canada, and known to have been successfully exhibited at the New York Horse Shows, where she has more than once achieved a record of six feet in the jumping arena. Murphy was riding the big Canadian mare, Kannuck; Hewett, stud-groom of the Meadowbrook Hunt, was mounted on a powerful, apparently rather underbred, horse, whose reputation is second to none as a sure conveyance, which means that he and his rider (the latter long since handicapped by broken thighs and various minor fractures incidental to the practice of tutoring young horses upon Long Island) were easily equal to all contingencies of the day. Whenever it came to attacking an awkward leap out of a road, the first to turn towards it were usually Hewett and his big horse, followed instantaneously by his little son, "a 75-lb. boy," and a wonderful dun pony, who, if the timber happened to be too big for him, would go on and off like a greyhound.

Of the field there were Mr Charles Carroll, on his black Irish horse, Honest John, that has carried him some seasons and has also won many prizes. Mr. Carroll (who, by-the-bye, was duly clad in the pink of the chase) is a keen fox-hunter, having graduated in the fields of the Old Country and of Pau. He had now, with Mr Herbert aforesaid, travelled all night from the Genesee Valley, where good natural fox-hunting prevails, and where the farmers turn their attention largely to the breeding of hunters. Beside him were Mr. H. S. Page, in the cool, white clothing of summer; Mr. Victor Morowitz on a particularly neat bay mare, that I had already seen at the kennels, and that I am told has won many jumping prizes at the New York Riding Club; Mr. J. L. Kernochan on a hog-maned chestnut that has already visited Leicestershire in Mr. Mortimer's stud, and Mrs. Kernochan, superbly mounted on Retribution, said to be the best half-bred steeplechase mare in the country. Mr. Rawlings Cottonet was on Red Baron, who bears the character of being very fast and good; Mr. Van Renseler Kennedy on the old-fashioned and reliable Wisdom; and Mr. George Day on the Laverack mare (horse and man alike powerful and capable). Mr. Willard Roby was alone riding a horse

raised upon Long Island, viz. Gimcrack, by Bitoxi. Gimcrack had been hunted only once or twice previously; but, having been well schooled at home, was able to go faultlessly through the run. Mr. S. D. Ripley was on his nice bay mare Molly, who also has won honours at the shows. And here ends my knowledge of the members of the field. I can only add that, as in Ireland, every one who goes hunting upon Long Island must be on business bent. There are few gates and fewer gaps, and shirking is of no avail.

The Westbury Plain, upon which the Meadowbrook Club is situated, has almost the scope of Newmarket Heath, and is level and rideable from end to end. Across this trotted the little cavalcade, some twenty horsemen, while a strong muster of carriages drove round the flank to Westbury town. Among the charioteers were Mr. Whitney (ex-secretary of the navy) and his daughter, Mrs. C. Carroll, Mrs. T. Hitchcock, Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Smith-Hadden, Mrs. Peters, Miss Roby, Miss Marié, Miss Bird, &c. Doubtless they were to some extent informed of the intended course, for they reappeared in force no less than three times during the run. Though there can be but remote risk of their heading the fox, the presence of a number of vehicles along an intersecting lane is said to be at times not altogether without its dangers to riders and drivers alike. For instance, it is on record that at Newport, not long ago, one of the field of horsemen jumped clean into the body of a landau, turning a somersault, horseman on the further side, without damage to anybody.

Crossing the railway, the Master moved northward. Already I had a vivid forboding of what was intended, for had I not been reminded that north was the direction when, two years ago, we were treated to Titus's Farm and his well-known fences, and had not I heard it discussed overnight as to whether the run so confidently foretold would be over the easy country south or that in the contrary direction? However, having long ago emerged from that period of life when, having no fear, one often affected it, and having on the contrary attained

that far less desirable state of being frequently in a funk, while never daring to show it, I followed with apparent complacency till, to my absolute relief, hounds suddenly broke from the road, and with a whimper set forth upon the open grass adjoining. A wave of the Master's hand and a note of the horn brought them back to the line across which they had flashed. From habit the old watch was drawn from the fob, then the billycock was beaten down, reins were shortened in hand, and the fun began. Aye, it *was* fun too, for the next half-hour—a pastime of itself, a merry ride, a jovial experience. Put all comparisons out of mind. Remember, this was a simple drag hunt over quaint and sturdy country; 'tis the same game that men here have been forced to accept in lieu of fox-hunting, and certainly it cannot be laid to their charge that they have been content with any child's play as a substitute.

Some upright poles against the sun almost proclaimed a wire, before we had galloped half a mile, and before we had reached a fence. Dazzled by the sunlight, Mr. Cottenet and half-a-dozen others broke through it with a clang and without a fall. A zigzag fence stood across our path, and with this we opened the ball, while hounds clustered and settled to run hard across the cornfield beyond. I like those zigzag fences, the relics of pioneer farming in Eastern America. They are not so tall as the more modern post-and-rails; they are more tangible to the eye, yet hold out some hope of crumbling to the ground if struck. The others are fixtures, indeed, seldom relinquishing any but a single top-bar, and that only under the strongest possible protest. And of this sort was the next—into a very narrow lane, and prefaced by a very indistinct take-off, where weeds from beneath the corn crop had trespassed close to the timber. The Master selected a place beneath a tree, and was no sooner in the lane than a second bound from Sweetheart carried him, *volens volens*, out beyond. The two next comers entered pocket to pocket, and many others, missing the more eligible spot, were fain to skirmish down the strong rails till they came to the Jericho turnpike and the woods above

Mr. Winthrop's house. A momentary check brought all the field together; Murphy jumped off to unchain the lane-gate, into the road, horsemen threaded their way through the stream of carriages, and hounds went off again at cry. Now for a fair sample of Long Island. Look right and look left. No escape. Each twenty-acre field is bound round with these great morticed fences, and gates are as little known as in the Green Island beyond the ocean. One spot is altogether the same as another; our leader follows in the track of hounds; and the first four-footer is down without rap of hoof, or even refusal. The second is like unto it, but may claim a few inches more, with the advantage or otherwise of a slight drop. Ah, what a delightful sensation!—the bound of a free-going horse, eager for his jump and careful of his stride. 'Tis like a gasp of mountain air again, that one breathes in the few seconds of that voyage aloft. I have always held that a fair pace at timber is best and safest, as it certainly is most pleasurable. I find my theory endorsed again and again among the timber jumpers of America. See Mr. Griswold there (whose performance in this direction I have learned to regard as almost phenomenal) taking the wooden barricades at a steady gallop, his horse pulled together for each fresh effort, but the pace seldom checked, and a fall so seldom scored that to-day's instance, later on, was regarded as almost unique.

But meanwhile a clatter and a crash proclaim loudly that a liberty, sure to be resented, has already been taken by some reckless quadruped. Sure enough, Mr. Page's young mare, after rolling over her white-clad rider and leaving him with a broken collar-bone, is to be seen careering past hounds to join a bunch of colts in a mad gallop round the enclosure (bad luck for a good man, on this the first day of a brief season. But defend me, for one, from ever attempting the Long Island country on a "green horse!"). Forward still for the others, the lady on Retribution holding her own gallantly, over a stronger line than I, at least, ever rode in our English Shires! Look here! Four massive rails into a narrow road—along it, not twenty

yards to the left, surely a gateway that I have seen before. Some memory at all events flashes through my startled brain as Mr. Griswold dashes at the breach. Breach, good heavens! 'tis the selfsame set of draw-rails over which they contrived to lead us two years ago from out of Titus's classic pastures. They looked, I remember, ghastly then. But surely they have grown in the interim. A hog-backed rail now surmounts the too-sufficient barway of that time, and Mr. Griswold is just spinning over the lot, at a pace rather increased than diminished, Sweetheart rising at about the angle at which a bear would climb a tree. I see no use in shutting my eyes, I haven't the nerve to pull up and go home; but I can't help praying that the little mare's stride may be right and true—another moment we are over what I deemed a hopeless impossibility; and a grateful blessing leaves my lips for Brunette's kindly owner. A phase of high farming possibly; but, whether or no, this extra rail has, I am told, been quite recently added to most of the fences of this particular district. (And, by-the-bye, I am promised the measurement of these particular draw-rails; so will commit myself to no premature estimate.¹)

Soon another road and another brief check (twenty minutes to this, and under a still blazing sun). The Old Westbury post-office stood here, as we had leisure to see, while hounds were carried down the road and we waited to take our turn at some low rails into the highway. The heat, the pace, and the occasional soft soil of the lately stripped cornfields had begun to tell on horses now for the first time called upon to gallop. A white lather was the token with some, a certain carelessness at the smaller fences with others. Had that road been stoned, I know well where one set of broken knees would have been earned, while a feat of retrograde climbing (hand over hand, from ground to bridle, bridle to mane, mane to saddle) was being enacted that would have done more than credit to Aldershot's gymnasium or Canterbury's riding-school.

¹ The fence was measured by Mr. Griswold as 5 feet 4 inches in height. The rail being roached, the actual jump was 5 feet 6 inches.

Some of the more prudent or sensible members of the field now pulled up. The others rode out again eastward till hounds bore once more to the right, for Wheatley. Jumping out of the Wheatley road, Sweetheart (of whom it is only fair to add that this was her first day's experience as huntsman's horse) fell heavily, and the Master's foot hung for a few moments in the stirrup. Soon, however, he was up and away in pursuit of Mr. Carroll, who had turned out of the road simultaneously. Several strong fences came here, of which I and my brave, but now slightly blown, little mount were able to avoid personal experience by seizing upon a line of lighter fences, a hundred yards or so on the left. Indeed, I could not help fancying that these had actually been lowered, according to custom, by bold Reynard himself towards the close of his flight. Murphy and Hewett were also ready to accept them. And a few minutes later we "ran into him" near Mr. Lane's house. Thirty minutes; and my story told.

CHAPTER LIX

THE MUSKERRY HUNT, COUNTY CORK—THE TENTH HUSSARS' PACK

October 1894.—My next experience after Long Island began in county Cork, a region offering distinct comparison, in that most of its dangers are to the horse rather than to the man. My lot was cast by fate, and kindly friendship, with the 10th Hussars—the latter being relegated for a couple of years to what may truly be termed the extremest corner of the two kingdoms—I had nearly written, of the known cavalry world—Ballincollig, to wit. Zealous as are the authorities of the present era in finding day-to-day employment, the year round, for the men who spend what money they can afford for the honour of holding Her Majesty's Commission, there must be some little time, at any rate during the winter months, when recreation and exercise become excusable or even necessary to the British officer. To kill this time, and to provide such solace and

occupation on the spot as may induce men to forego costly pilgrimages to hunting-grounds at a distance, it has been found desirable by each cavalry regiment taking its turn at Ballincollig, there to maintain a pack of foxhounds. At present no Government grant is forthcoming, nor has even been applied for. The establishment is therefore necessarily a very modest one. Huntsman and whippers-in are officers of the regiment, and of course find their own horses, while the residents of the country take charge of the foxes and poultry grievances. Thus is the old Muskerry Hunt kept alive ; and the officers of corps, in which the British Public consider they hold a directly vested interest, are probably saved to the State. For Ballincollig, without hounds and without polo (neither of which exercises, I believe, have their proper place in the red-book of the present day) would—how shall I venture to express it?—well, would be found more conducive to rapid promotion than the well-being of a regiment in any way requires.

The 10th Hussars took over during the current summer a capital pack from the 13th, and these they supplemented with a draft from the Duke of Buccleuch's. The young hounds have entered well, and are of excellent pattern. Indeed, limited as was the experience of last week, it was enough to tell one that the hounds are keen, sufficiently musical, and very fit to go. Lord William Cavendish-Bentinck hunts them, and Mr. Reginald Chaplin whips in to him ; and their kennel huntsman is Brooks, formerly with Mr. Walter Greene's staghounds.

By the way, if anything or anybody will avail to bring you up to time on a hunting morning it is the summons of a soldier-servant. At first stroke of the clock his regulation boots sound his coming along the uncarpeted passage ; at the last stroke his martial knock proclaims deliberately and sternly upon the panels that your hour has come. He wastes no words, he employs no suasion to enforce the call of duty, but with heavy hand and with ponderous footfall he takes your hot water to its place, and throws light upon the room ; then, facing your dazzled eyes and half-aroused faculties, draws himself

rigidly to "Attention," and demands instruction as to the bringing of your breakfast. Tea (to which this hospitable man has put about as much water as he would to his own whisky), two boiled eggs, and a blessing on the good vintage that has left your tongue so supple this early



The summons of a soldier-servant

morn, these constitute your breakfast, and you are ready for anything, even for the playful buck-jump with which a light-hearted mount greets your coming to the pigskin. Ah, I like the early morning while it lasts. If its charms are lost in lassitude as the afternoon grows to evening, why, you have already had your day. A sturdy walk will carry you on to dinner, and that night's sleep will be beyond price.

The Muskerry country is, like much of county Cork, liable to be termed rough, and not altogether without some slight show of reason. Its glens are numerous and often difficult to cross, its varied fences are usually built up with sharp stones, and its soil owns quite as much tillage as grass. 'Tis tempting Providence, or your banker, to ride a fresh and valuable young horse over its face; for the chances are that sufficient practice to make him perfect will also knock off half his value. During the progress of education he is likely to have acquired as many scars as a Hong-Kong dollar that has been through the hands of the compradores. Fifty pounds should, I make bold to assert, be held an outside price to pay for a horse to ride over the Muskerry country—that sum probably representing more than his value after a season or two's experience among the knife-like rocks of the district. The 10th, most of whom brought their studs from Tipperary, have started with the very sensible plan of protecting their hunters' legs with polo-boots. That this will be found frequently effective I have grateful reason to know, even from our brief gallop to overhaul hounds on Wednesday. After twenty minutes of an easy wall-and-bank line from St. Anne's northward, my mount, far too good-looking and valuable for the occasion, had cut completely through both leather and felt of the boot, leaving a mere scratch on the off hind-leg, where, but for the guard, the fetlock might have been well-nigh severed.

But if the Muskerry country be like neither Leicestershire nor Tipperary, it is by no means without its advantages. For instance, it can boast of quite fifty per cent. more grass than Hants, Essex, or Norfolk. It is not unduly difficult to cross, its tenantry preferring as a rule the picturesque to the solid in their manner of fence-keeping (let not this be supposed to apply to the immediate neighbourhood of Ballincollig and Cork, where the mortar-faced banks are awe-aspiring to a degree).

Foxes have been found fairly plentiful; indeed, I have the authority of Mr. Hawke, the oldest sportsman of the district, for saying that they are this year exceptionally numerous. For myself, I saw a fine show at the coverts

of St. Anne's, the most picturesque of hydropathic establishments, and enough also at Farran, in spite of the determination of the badgers to annul the earth-stopping.

From the former place on Wednesday hounds eventually slipped us all by following an old fox across the padlocked railway. Half-an-hour later they got blood by the riverside at Abbeville, our pursuit being regulated by a stray hound or two and by the clusters of labourers on the bank-tops. Interest in the sport retains its place in the hearts of the country people of county Cork, even though its growth may have been stunted at times by political troubles. At the note of the horn they all run forth to see the hounds, and, if possible, to point whither the fox has in their opinion gone. Instance on Friday, a merry maid, by no means uncomely, leaving her potato-digging and leaping to the bank. "Will I come wid ye, darlin'?" I heard not the answer from the gallant official; but my thoughts went back to far-off Japan, a very free country, wherein I had years ago the fortune to hunt a pack of hounds. Even there, among a people yet more joyous and outspoken than the Irish, I cannot remember to have been greeted thus gracefully.

CHAPTER LX

TIPPERARY IN OCTOBER

THAT I have learned to look upon a return to county Tipperary as akin to home-coming is due, primarily, to the wondrously kind comradeship with which I have there been met; and next, of course, to the fact that I have thus become acquainted with much of its beautiful country. I was enchanted when I first broke ground therein. Since then, I affirm gratefully and unreservedly, the more I see of it the better I like it.

Yet when last week I arrived at Clonmell, and in the cool evening drove forth under the autumn moon, then just rising in rounded splendour over the purple crest of Slievenamon, Tipperary could hardly be reported at its best.

"No rain for six weeks," they told me—an assertion that the dusty roads indorsed, and the next morning's walk fully emphasised. Altogether, hunting seemed beyond the pale of possibility. But the meets had been advertised: and the Tipperary stop not for trifles.

On Tuesday I was driven across the country that Mr. Burke has more recently included in the Tipperary Republic. The Charity Bazaar at Curraghmore was the occasion calling together all who live in the counties of Tipperary and Waterford. That so time-honoured and magnificent an establishment as Curraghmore should ever have been compelled to close kennels and stables (to that date among the proudest institutions of the country) is a testimony to the evil power of the Land League. That Lord and Lady Waterford should, even after this, care to do their utmost for their poorer neighbours is testimony indeed to their own large-heartedness. Upon the sad fact that these two, in our time active leaders of the chase in England as in Ireland, should both be more or less restricted to their chairs, while superintending the arrangements of the *fête*, I do not allow myself to dwell. Suffice it to add that, through their exertions, aided by a staff of volunteers, fair, able, and persuasive to a degree, the local hospital on this occasion profited to the extent of some hundreds of pounds, while the neighbourhood spent its afternoon and its money joyously.

Speaking of the Curraghmore country—now gathered to the Tipperary—I am led by the best possible authority to understand that it is exceptionally good scenting-ground. If, as I presume is correct, it in this respect compares favourably with Tipperary, it certainly deserves the encomium, for, as far as repeated experience may entitle me to speak, I look upon Tipperary as the most consistent scenting-ground I have ever known. Hounds can almost invariably run well over it; and a really bad scenting-day I have yet to encounter. Even last week, when the turf was hard and dewless, and the tillage like dust and ashes, hounds were able to drive hard, and turn readily with their fox.

On Wednesday, October 24, the meet being at D'Arcy's

Cross, we were taken to the beautiful gorse Donegal, the apple of Mr. Riall's eye and the light that twinkles in the orbs of Farmer Smith, better known as Donegal-Smith, who lives near by, and who possesses a faculty of teaching young horses to jump that is inborn in equal degree only in his brother. Donegal on the east and Ballyluski on the west, three years ago shared between them all the best honours of Tipperary, each being drawn upwards of a dozen times during a notable season, and on every occasion providing a find and a gallop. A large proportion of the regular hunting-men of Tipperary were assembled above the gorse to-day—in a cold north-east wind that might have done credit to Ranksborough in March. Like Ranksborough, or whisky, Donegal has no bad side to it. Good, better, and best are the only degrees of comparison. On this occasion a willing fox, leaving his many brethren, chose the good side northward. Red coats and scarlet-trimmed habits swooped round the quarry (the Tipperary, as you know, being already in the full swing of their season); the Master had two couple out; and a patient field—all the more patient, possibly, that the ground was like rock—drew rein to let other thirteen couple reach the first gap before them. I'thuth, 'twas edifying. Will *you* do as well, for your new Masters, ye men of Rugby, when first you sport pink from Hilmorton and Lilbourne in the coming month? The dust flew, and so did the fourteen couple, soon eighteen, the merry ladies. That the banks were lofty I can vouch. They told me afterwards they were "blind." In humble ignorance I protest I fail to understand the term as applied to a bank. Our Northamptonshire ditches are this year blind as Justice no doubt, as I may prove to myself during the current week. But to a Tipperary bank the better term would surely be *masked*. At the least you jump on to something solid: not on to empty space. (If you would try the latter sensation, take an Irish horse over Leicestershire while the leaf is still green, and each hedge and ditch remains an apparent bank!) The "blindness" of the Tipperary bank seems to me to be brought about by its own height. It hides all that may be beyond. And this "beyant" varies widely accord-

ing to special district and special accident. It may be a smooth plain surface, such as we have often been told is the speciality of Tipperary, but have failed to find except in occasional patches. It may be a deep broad dyke, a stream, or a boreen (*Anglice*, a stone-paved cart-lane). To-day the country leaned to the dyke, often on either side.



The boreen

And when the variety came, in the form of the boreen, you were lucky if you did not illustrate the ready talent of your mount—who popped into and down it at speed—by shooting head-first into the stone-coping he seemed bent upon flying. Such are some of the eccentric experiences of a quick ride over an Irish country; the horse a skilled performer, the man a confiding stranger. How much better placed are you than in the stake-and-bound districts that Englishmen call their “Shires!” In the former a clever

horse will carry you along in spite of yourself. In the latter a cunning man may squeeze a half-taught, free-jumping horse from field to field, while the other may find grief unutterable in half a mile. Am I right?

In either country a fairly safe plan is to look for a guiding star. In Tipperary take the Master and Mr. W. Riall, now twin planets, by reason of the field master having donned suitable attire, the cap and gown of office. There is almost monotony in the fact that, whenever hounds are going their fastest over a strong country, right and left and foremost ride Master and field-master, with room enough for the pack between them. And during this present scurry the Master was taking his weekly ride upon Newtown. During the present twelve-minute steeplechase perhaps their nearest attendants, as far as I was in a position to see, were Mr. W. Perry and Lord Tyrone.

To ground at Oatrath, if thus I caught rightly the name and guessed the spelling. A terrier did the needful; and horses had scarce caught their wind ere we were running back to Donegal. The pack flashed over the line at starting—all but a single hound of Lord Doneraile's blood, who ran alone for several fields. (Lord Doneraile's, as you may know, is tantamount to Lord Henry Bentinck's.) In another quarter hour our fox was re-entering Donegal—hounds a single field behind him. The pack was then stopped, sport being held preferable to blood in Tipperary. Donegal, moreover, has taken two years to recover the accidental killing of a vixen in covert.

It calls for still greater audacity on my part to express an opinion on the rosy facing that the Tipperary ladies have added to their habits. To my humble and incompetent eye the new departure appears a very pronounced success. Riding habits, fair ladies, always seem to me to require lighting up. The open waistcoat has done something of this, the open scarf still more. But in a sombre closed habit you none of you look your best; most of you look exactly alike, and only a face that possesses exceptional colouring of its own at all does itself credit. Of course it is excessive impertinence on my part to say as much. But this is what men think, and it remains for the scribe to take the onus of expressing it.

The Tipperary ladies further affix to their scarlet collars two golden foxes. These images they take off on such occasions as they ride with the harriers. This, the time-honoured Fethard pack, is no longer in the hands of the soldiers whose orderly-room is at Cahir and whose recreation-ground is round Fethard. With the Tipperary foxhounds hunting five days a week, and the Kilkenny two, besides the Sabbath-breaking pack of the locality, perhaps the military hardly need hounds of their own, as when first they established them, for lack of fox-hunting. Accordingly, Mr. Croome has put together a very useful little pack of about 18-inch hounds, and Mr. Morton whips-in to him.

On Friday, October 19, these opened their ball with a largely attended meet at Clonmel. Apart from other considerations, hare-hunting always commends itself with emphasis in a country whose main product and material for mart is horseflesh. Every young horse in the district learns his work, while many earn their market, with harriers. For, while the hare runs her gentle circles, there is usually not only time and occasion enough for all needful schooling, but time enough also to initiate and conclude a bargain. The dust and drought were so pronounced on Friday that scent was sadly lacking. The abnormal hardness of the ground (this in a country that one has been taught to regard as excessively favoured as regards supply of rain) brought, moreover, to my mind the gross inconsistency of riding another man's horses under such condition when I should probably be willing neither to ride nor to lend my own. Accordingly, declining any further mounts from my most kind host, I fled precipitately, and *of course* rain and snow fell heavily next morning.

CHAPTER LXI

PYCHLEY BORDERLAND

ON Saturday, November 23, 1894, the Pytchley enjoyed themselves very much on their neighbours' ground. They were engaged, so to speak, in "beating the bounds,"

and thus spent much of their time upon or over the border line. Meeting at Charwelton, they hunted a fox for two hours from Charwelton osier-bed, *via* Hinton Gorse (Grafton), the neighbourhood of Griffin's Gorse (Bicester), and spent a *mauvais quart d'heure* within the doctor's iron toils, before they regained their starting-point. Now they ran on sharper, by the left of Woodford village, and the game seemed awakening when, suddenly, across the vision of a "twenty minutes' dart and a kill in the open" came the abominable chasm through which the Woodford Brook here wends its way. Too broad to jump at a stand, too steep-sided to admit of fording, it has an aspect ugly as death to the ordinary hunter. With hounds running parallel, we skirted it for a time. When the pack turned across it, we endeavoured to do the same. John Isaac caught it at a loop, and swept down and over it in splendid fashion. Mr. Murland, the bank crumbling beneath him, got over with a fall. Horses would not turn from the stream of horsemen to the stream of water. And oh, ignominy! we flogged helplessly on the brink. A good, raw Irish horse would have made little of it, especially had he hailed from deep-dyked county Meath. The old hunter of the Shires declined to be trapped; and stuck his toes obstinately into the turf. Mr. C. Beatty alone succeeded in putting on sufficient pace to follow John's example without a fall. A few others fell over or fell in, and the remainder went round, some gnashing their teeth, a good many perhaps contentedly (like the wandering cowboy, who rides from ranche to ranche seeking work and prays Heaven that he may not get it). After all, their fox went to ground a few fields on; and again was Goodall robbed of a well-earned mouthful. He had it—I mean his hounds had—very soon afterwards, having raced a fox down in a dozen minutes from Church Wood nearly to Charwelton. Finally, from Hogstaff—another of the Fawsley coverts—hounds ran furiously for twenty-five minutes, over the park-like enclosures of the Fawsley estate, into Badby Wood.

On Monday I was taken, by inclination, as many a good man betimes from his hearth, from a home meet of

the Grafton, Showseley Common (do you know it?) to Walgrave of the Pytchley—the latter seven or eight miles adrift of Northampton. “Don’t give away our Monday country by cracking it up,” quoth our senior optimist of this region. “My dear Nestor,” said I—this is at one o’clock—“I have seen nothing yet but mud and water, and occasional wood. I think I can choke the public off these!”



Mr. C. Beatty alone followed John's example

Now, it happens that though, like St. Paul, *Romanus sum*—*i.e.* Pytchley-bred-and-born—I have never before seen this obscure nursery-ground of the Hunt. I have heard tales oft-repeated of its wealth of sport and its fund of joviality, and I confess I accepted one full half as the outcome of family partnership (I am not about to give you away, *mon secrétaire*). Twelve of the county, and twenty-four of the county town is, I take it, an average apportionment of the pleasant little Monday field that disports itself over a country that might well afford even

another pack of hounds. In the pretty playground is included a tract, Northampton and Wellingboro', that might almost carry a two days' pack of its own. Popularity and wire are the two destructive agents that are rapidly killing fox-hunting. These have but a thin grasp upon Monday's more provincial side of aristocratic Pytchleydom. Don't go there, gentlemen! 'Tis difficult of access, and assumes a virtue of provincialism that it does not, save for its modesty, possess. The accident of scent counts for nothing. We had it up our sleeves in the north-east wind as we drove into it this morning, and were blue and cold at covertsides.

There was a vigour of scent to own and to appreciate when in the afternoon hounds started on a fox from Orlingbury. Vulgar country, I assure you—at least so I am prompted. But it was very ploughy indeed, as far as Cock-a-hoop or Cock-a-leeky, or some such plough-country name, a couple of miles and back to Harrowden. But the Harrowden Valley, what of that? Ask the honorary secretary when next you enclose him your customary check. And hounds ran very fast while occupied in this figure-of-eight scurry of forty-five minutes. Their fox was then beat and almost within their grip as they drove him back to a spinney on the brow above Harrowden. But hounds went on for a field or so on what was evidently the stale line of another fox. Thus they lost their own, who, no doubt, dodged back in the confusion.

Pulled out to a straight point-to-point, this would have been held a first-rate gallop. Then, too, it is possible, those Harrowden bottoms would have been more readily taken. As it was, they seemed to check everybody until, as far as I could see, the welter Captain Kerr had put them, and a full field's start, to his credit. The morning hunt, too, had been interesting in its way—the way being very muddy and occasionally very woody (Sywell alone answering for some hundreds of acres). It began at Wilmer Park and ended near Vivian's Covert. If my sketch of Monday appears somewhat cursory, you will please understand that I have told you quite as much

about this inaccessible retreat as is good for you to know.

If the final decade of the nineteenth century does not produce a generation of Spartan mothers, then I for one will give up all faith in the virtue of training. The *fin de siècle* young man is "not in it" with either matron or virgin of the present day when it comes to taking a heavy fall, getting up with a smiling face, and even (thanks to the tailors and the popular uproar) girding up their loins, and running over grass, stubble, or plough. They record their tosses at the rate of two or three a week with as much equanimity as if they were reckoning the pairs of gloves they have thrown away. To-day, believe me, they relieved the monotony of each grassy field by trotting merrily over it—one or other, or a pair of them—in pursuit of flying horses, and scarcely gasped when thanking gracefully the happy youth to whose lot it had fallen to bring back their steeds. One promising member of our heavy-weight division achieved gratitude no less than three times, while four fair ladies in a row were comparing notes as to their respective tumbles. At least a dozen were down during the morning—the blind ditches chiefly to blame—and the worst result, I am glad to say, was only the necessity, in one or two cases, of having to carry in hand the Champion and Wilton stirrup as they ran. The boys fell of course, too, a few. But the disparity of numbers was more in proportion to the census of the population than in accordance with the ratio of the hunting-field.

CHAPTER LXII

A SCENT IN PRACTICE AND IN THEORY

Apropos of the jolly Eton boys, whose only occupation of late has been to keep up the memory of the flood, I have been told a little instance to prove that some of them, at least, are well up-to-date in the art of looking after themselves. The youngster in question, having succeeded by one o'clock in galloping his mother's pony to a standstill, was, at this critical juncture, fortunate enough to

come across his father's second horseman. Ousting this functionary from the saddle, he demanded the luncheon borne on his belt, ate the whole of it with gusto and celerity, and finished the day on the governor's horse—leaving the fond parent to go home to an early tea. Does not that boy bid fair to become a Napoleon?

The Grafton run of Monday, December 2, 1894, began



He finished the day on the governor's horse

curiously, and brought fitful fortune in its train. The meet had been at Litchborough, and the morning had been spent in killing a bad fox in Stowe Wood. Quite a multitude of foxes took up the attention of hounds in Mantels Heath; and it was quite a quarter of an hour ere they could shake themselves clear of this and of its sister covert, Knightley Wood. Then they dived into the valley, and brought up for a moment at Snorscombe osier-bed,

the field separating right and left to await the issue. A brace of foxes again divided affairs. Master and huntsman were on the left, or Fawsley, side ; and towards them broke several couples of hounds. At the same moment several other couples broke eastward, or right-handed. The fox of these latter was headed by the Everdon populace ; and the next scene was almost unique, viz. hounds (the leftward lot) running hard on one side of the brook towards Fawsley, a grand fox racing them, -at a hundred yards' distance, on the further bank of the stream. Determined not to be baulked of his share in the chase, and evidently having the legs of hounds, this Reynard proceeded to cross their front. The leading hounds caught a view. So did the huntsman, and cheered his remainder to the head. Thus began a racing gallop across southern Fawsley—by Church Wood, Preston Capes, Ganderton Wood, and Canons Ashby—some thirty-five minutes, all grass, no “lep.” (You couldn't do that in Tipperary! Nor would you, you will respond, if you could. Never mind, you do not know the blessing of gates. And, if here and there you go through the form of setting up gateways, why, it is but a “shtick” of thick timber you set across the opening—isn't it now?) By gateway then, and galloping, the little crew of a dozen or so made their way to the confines of Canons Ashby, and were not distressed that a check should here occur. I'faith they would have been much more distressed if it had not. The chase now went on steadily to Eydon. Let me look at my map—Eydon being in Bicestershire. Extreme point, six miles. Our fox was seen to enter the gorse, and the earths of course were open. Conclusion natural.

A few minutes afterwards there came up a much hotter body of pursuers than those already on the spot, the latter having assumed the various orthodox attitudes in vogue on such occasions (you know them, without description from me—coats unbuttoned, girths loosened, tongues ditto ; flask, alas, on second horses in the far distance). The new arrivals were by no means out of countenance. Nine couple came out on their side of the osier-bed, they swore. And they had had plenty of fun

by the way: jumped many horrid obstacles which the others had avoided. Declared all the best men of the Hunt were with them. Had also two tales typical of blessed innocence, such as is shared by a vast proportion of our field in this well-gated elysium. "Thrice cursed luck," murmured in blue despondency one whose better and fairer half was onward in the van, as he swung a gate to the next comer, all abeam. "Why?" inquired the well-contented one. "Because we are not with hounds, of course," retorted the wrathful Benedict. "Oh, aren't we?" timidly inquired the other. "What are these?" pointing to the nominal nine couple being brought on by the whipper-in.

But still more cruel to wounded feelings was the comment of another traveller by the slow train (sex does not transpire) to perhaps the keenest and hardest man of the Hunt. She or he was not quite so well satisfied. "There doesn't seem to be much scent to-day, does there?" pointing to the struggling couples being coaxed and whipcorded on their stern chase. Keen-and-Hard nearly choked.

Speaking of sterns (it must have been among the rear-guard, for the van tell me they never jumped), somebody landed on one of the beautiful Grafton bitches, and at one fell tread nicked off six inches of her wavy stern.

A clinking hound-run this; and excellent and easy to see. Let me think, have I any names with which to decorate my plain tale? Yes, those of Mrs. Oliver, Mrs. Gould, and Mrs. Byass, with one quite essential to the tale of all recent Grafton sport, that of the veteran Mr. Roper.

By the way, if any proof were needed of the destructive power attached to the footfall of horses across the line of a fox, a striking instance, I remember, was to be observed on a Wednesday recently with the Pytchley. They had run their fox for forty-five minutes, and had him almost in hand by Welford Station—hounds were within a hundred yards or so of his brush. At this moment he was driven back by people in the road, and forced uphill across the wide grazing-ground over which a hundred of us had just cantered. Hounds turned with him, throwing

their tongues furiously up to the point where the horses' footprints intervened. Here they were suddenly at fault, even the mysterious yellow bitch on a visit, who had led them all day. Yet their game was barely out of view. And, though held quietly across the field upon the very footsteps of their fox, they could own to no line until well beyond the track of horsemen, when on they went merrily enough.

There is no reason to suppose that the scent of a horse is, to their notion, any less sweet than the trail of a deer. A blacksmith's shop will of itself almost answer the question as regards the power of odour belonging to the equine foot. We know well that the *vis odora canum*—with which phrase the poet could have been alluding to nothing else than a strong-smelling sheepdog—that this will completely put off the best pack of hounds that ever tried to discriminate between a fox and a chasing collie. Why should horses be less capable of spoiling sport?

And the foot-scent is not all. As we all consider we have learned, there are some days on which hounds hunt only by foot-scent, others on which they rely wholly on body-scent as it floats above ground, or is even carried down wind to an appreciable distance. Thus we may often be—too often are—standing recklessly, or worse still moving onward, up-wind of the puzzling pack, while our horses steam hotly, and the vapour floats over hounds in a dense cloud. There are moments when in a grass country a Master of Hounds is often driven to madness, and, drifting, will swear aloud that the penalties of position such as his are heavier than mortal man can bear, or than are balanced by sweets of office or pride of place. The two simple rules, viz. of giving full room to hounds in a road, and of standing clear of them when at fault, are not only the most difficult to enforce, but it must in all honesty be allowed, the most difficult to carry out, among the crowded fields of the Midlands. The pressure is ever from behind, and the hindmost know nothing of, and care less for, the obligation at that moment weighing upon those who happen to have arrived before them.

My sermon, in lieu of chronicle, takes another turn.

During the temporary lull in sport there has been revolving in what I call my mind—much as a melody revolves in one's head while dressing, and one finds oneself whistling it all day—the little point of getting hounds out of covert. No. It is not a little point, however attenuated it may seem in my hands, for upon it depends often the making or marring of a run. When is it permissible, on the part of a huntsman, to start away from covert with a few couple of hounds only? (You will give me the axiom that it is worth *anything* to get away close on a fox's brush; and you will grant that one of the greatest and most essential, and most marvellous, attributes of a high-class foxhound is his ability, at a pinch, to thread his way quickly to the front, through a crowd of galloping horsemen.) I make bold, subject to all correction, to submit it as follows. With only one fox in covert, or at all events with no other fox taking up the attention of hounds, it is often excusable for a huntsman to lay on a few couple (Charles Payne's practice, I believe, was five couple) and, with the others coming to horn and the Master as much as possible keeping their way clear, thus to set the cry going as soon as he can. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred he will have every hound worth having with the body before two fields are crossed.

On the other hand, with the body of the pack running another fox in covert, it is, with the rarest exception, absolutely inadmissible to attempt following one that has gone away either as first fox or as most eligible fox. You can't get your hounds, save a few slack stragglers, and if you went on with these, you would have neither pack nor run. Or, if your whipper-in can reach and stop them forcibly, the chances are that they come out disappointed, crestfallen, and out of humour. A master of the art may sometimes be seen to "gammon" them, taking advantage of a momentary check in covert to pounce upon them, pick them up, and carry them to the new line with their bristles still up. Mortifying it often is, to mark a good fox striking out the choicest line, while a "bad beast" is taking up the attention of hounds within covert. He need not necessarily be a bad beast, either. Example the

best, or nearly the best, gallop of the Quorn (I was privileged to witness) last season. The first fox went away unpursued. The second stayed in covert until he could make his point. Then made it with far-reaching vigour to Tilton. In practice I feel certain, as far as my observation goes, that no more rash and hopeless task can be undertaken than, as we see occasionally, a few odd couple laid on a line on the chance of their comrades, at present otherwise engaged, catching them up in reasonable course.

Apropos of remarks above written on the scent-giving properties of the horse, it has come to my hearing that a certain pack of staghounds were last week nearly called out to hunt up a valuable hunter lost and at large. This much at all events, though scarcely more credible, can be vouched for as fairly correct, and I hold the proofs in my hand. Understand, then, that on Thursday of last week one of our leading jockeys,¹ whose dapper little figure and merry face have for some seasons been familiar to the Pytchley field, gave a friend a mount with Mr. Walter Greene's staghounds—a pack that, hunting the Bury St. Edmunds district, are not only easily reached from Newmarket, but afford the professional racing men many of their best hunting gallops. The friend took a cropper into a big wood. By the time he had recovered himself and his hat and his whip, the horse was out of sight, and not even with the assistance of his host could he find any trace of the steed. There was nothing for it but to "foot it" home, while the unhappy owner continued his search all that day, continuing with a thirty-mile quest on the morrow. No sign and no news till Saturday, when late in the evening a telegram came apprising him that his horse (no, his wife's, which made the long period of anxiety more acutely difficult for the poor man to bear) had been found in one of the big tracts of woodland with which the fertile country of Suffolk abounds, in a wood—Sapiston Grove—belonging, I believe, to the Duke of Grafton. The hapless beast was fast tangled by his bridle, and during these days had endeavoured to assuage the pangs of hunger by gnawing the bark of such trees

¹ The late George Barrett.

as he could reach. His saddle had twisted round through his rolling, and, it is unnecessary to add, he was ravenous for substantial food. Beyond this he was little the worse, and his mistress looks forward to riding him during the current week.

CHAPTER LXIII

BOOTLAND AND WOODLAND

NOTHING sharper had yet decked our moderate season in Northamptonshire than the bright gallop from Sanders' Gorse on Friday afternoon, December 28, 1894.

Anything less like sport than the meet of the morning at Althorp Park it would be difficult to conceive. Half-a-dozen redcoats rode among a surging mob of bootmakers, like cavalry doing duty against riot. There were more terriers than hounds ; and, as every available conveyance in Northampton had been chartered to bring all it could to the festive fray, the park-drive might well have been the rail-side at a race meeting. To render the analogy closer, the rush of human beings that swept across the greenward, when hounds moved on to draw, was for all the world like the onslaught of a racing mob upon a welsher. However, they saw a fox found, they saw it hunted across the park, nay, assisted in no small degree to hunt it, and many of them were in at its death in a stone quarry about a mile away. Fox-hunting and his Lordship would be popular toasts among the shoemakers of the district this evening—no heeltaps, I warrant.

This function duly completed, we were taken on to Sanders' Gorse, the day still young, and the ground now much warmer than when the free and independent of Northampton first trod the rime in Althorp Park. The veteran Mr. Sanders was duly in readiness for us, seated in his well-known pony-trap. But he must have spent a bad quarter of an hour, while hounds failed to throw a tongue in the beautiful gorse of which he is sponsor and guardian. It was only while we were engaged in drawing the adjoining plantation and the enclosure of Cank

that his heart was warmed by a "View holloa," and a fox was driven into his covert—doubtless by some blessed being in the disguise of black apron and white terrier (the regulation outfit of the man of the last whenever he gives



The mob assisted to hunt the fox

himself a holiday). Even then hounds could take up no line, proving, as they have often proved before, that the gorse in question is a badly scenting covert. A flippant fox, however, wanted little more suggestion. He had been found, and he now meant to make his point, in spite of skirmishers and whatever difficulties might surround

his way. He stole on, then, by a hedgeside eastward ; gained something, after all, by a baulk in the main road in the first half-mile ; and then threw in our faces the first difficulty of the run—the Spratton Brook, with its rail-guarded bank and its one recognised ford, by late flood rendered difficult, black, and abominable—ask our coming member. Hounds crossed some three hundred yards to the right of the opening. Cunning men and women were there already, and the clever wanted to be there as soon as possible. “Your turn ! my turn !—oh dear, I hope I shan’t go under like that !” and so on. Anyhow we emerged, in this plight or that, with, say, five, ten, fifteen, or fifty people before us—hounds going hardly as fast as they seemed, or how could we have caught them in two miles, Lord Spencer’s gates through the inimical wire fencing notwithstanding ? Here they were, the pack, at a hover in the same black bullock field in which they hung, you remember, on last year’s occasion. Then ensued the brightest of the fun, hounds running harder than they have run for weeks, all in a handful, too, and the dog pack. I feel I have this winter been dealt little to write, in the way of glow of the chase ; indeed I call to mind only three little items, the first Shuckburgh scurry on fat horses in early November, the dash from Leicester’s Piece with the North Warwickshire, and the stiff twenty minutes from Ladbroke. The fire seemed kindled to-day as we rode to Creaton, the Master giving us a line of his own upon the sound turf, George Barrett treading on his heels at the timber-topping business. So they entered the road under Creaton Gorse, these and Captains Goulbourn and Lund, representing the two mounted branches of our *corps d’élite*, with Lord Spencer, Mr. Foster, Mr. Whitworth, Miss Byass, and Mrs. Osgood, the grey-clad man on the grey-ticked horse, and of course our hard-riding staff, all turning up the hill together, as hounds streamed past it with a bold fox in front. Down into the great pastures of Cottesbrooke ; twenty minutes to here, and the drive of the pack eliciting rapturous scream from our jovial huntsman. Ah, why didn’t I listen to his friendly veto ? Not from conceit, I believe, but because

of the old stubborn principle—enter with hounds and get out how you can. Well, in the best of company, I *couldn't* get out of Cottesbrooke Park and its ironclad demesne till after hounds had checked, some minutes later, beyond the railway towards Lamport. But I wish my worst enemy those few minutes within.

The pack, I am told, seemed racing into their fox, when a big bunch of Hereford cattle slouched over their path. And a stick-heap below Brixworth village saved him, as he curled up-wind after a four-mile point. A little distance, you will say. But he started under difficulties—and the point gave the cream of the gallop, the thirty minutes, with hounds most of the time well ahead.

Winter opened fire upon us on Saturday, and cannonaded us fiercely during the day, while the Pytchley were hunting from Harrington. A bitter snowstorm enveloped all who approached the meet with anything like punctuality. Then came an interval of perhaps an hour and a half of fairly open weather with occasional blue sky; and during this time Goodall and the bustling lady pack brought off a hunting run that possessed no little interest, and occupied some sixty-five minutes. Where were we, and where did we go? I warrant not five members of the Pytchley field knew, or even know now. Fortunately, there were two or three bold foresters abroad, to point out the various woodlands that we approached and touched, and to explain to the stranger throng that all the ins-and-betweens of the Pytchley Woodlands are not such as we saw this day, and to which, to their shame be it said, the visitors hesitated not to apply most odiously comparative epithets. To me it chanced to be very familiar ground. I can venture to say only in its defence that while to all appearance it is the meanest district of the country now hunted over by Mr. Austin Mackenzie and his charming pack, yet often I have seen hounds run hard indeed over it, and strong, straight foxes lead thence to very distant points.

Rothwell is a swarthy boot-and-iron village, or growing town, situated on the border-line between Pytchley proper and Pytchley woodland. Rothwell has a little

wood at hand, to which we were taken to look for a fox, and by-and-by struck a line outside. With cheek and difficulty, and many a rabbit-hole to beguile the way, we were carried across ploughed fields and numerous little fences, of suitable fashion it might happen for educating a young horse, to the grounds of Rushton Hall. With cool self-confidence our fox threaded not only the lawn and garden, but afterwards the village street. Then ensued a discussion of some length and clamour among the villagers as to which way the huntsman should be directed. This being brought to a close by the good man deciding the point for himself, we followed him and hounds for a while towards Geddington Chase—the great covert looming dark as a devouring monster against the near horizon. But we were saved engulfment by our fox bearing off to his left; and, passing Pipwell, skirted Carlton Forest, while hounds made the pace warmer as he turned towards the north-westerly gale. Pressing onward, they ran hard up to the drain well-known to the foresters, in a field near Stoke Wood, and not far from the familiar meet of Dob Hall.

The run over, the storm, having treated us thus honourably, came forward in its turn; and as they huddled, back to wind, against a hedge that gave no shelter, the Pytchley presented a forlorn and piteous aspect. Within the hour I had remarked, who claim to know the Woodlands fairly well, that never surely had so many coats of scarlet enlivened this quiet country-side, and this though weather-glass and weather-sign and forecast had to-day combined to put a large majority into mufti. For you must know, in the merry, merry woodlands of Rockingham, Brigstock, Carlton, and adjoining forests, one in pink—he probably the secretary—besides Master and men, make up not uncommonly a field, as far as colour is concerned. Beyond these, there are a dozen or so, soberly clad, sportsmen of the best calibre; but occasionally not even the one is found to redeem the colourless aspect of the little field. This much in passing, and no offence to the best woodlands in England, that I love right well.

Not for you, my kindly comrades of Pythchleydom, this trifle. You probably told it to me. At any rate you were doubtless bidden to smile over it in last week's hunting field. There are two of you, among whose many amiable traits are included great kindness of heart and great abhorrence of the more vulgar maladies of this life. And these two set off to drive the gig from Harboro' to a certain meet. The road, like many of our country ways, ran through open fields; and was of course interrupted by several gates. Approaching the first of these, each making belief that his only wish was to anticipate his partner in the dirty and disagreeable duty of getting out to open it, they descried an urchin of several summers loitering outside a cottage. The same bright idea struck both simultaneously. With one accord they lured the ragged boy with promise of silver, popped him in between them directly the first gate was opened, and honourably and carefully included his scanty form in all their rugs and furs. Kindness to children is ever a point in the character of gentlemen. So, by way of putting the brat at his ease, they forthwith opened conversation with him. "Well, my little man," began one whose soothing tones might well become a bishop, "how is it you are not at school? Has the School Board forgotten you?" "No, sir," replied the little man as he wriggled round to make his answer in the face of the kindly interrogator, "I've got the measles; and doctor says I mustn't go back while it's catching." I need hardly add that the urchin was paid off on the spot, and that our two friends opened the rest of the gates for themselves.

CHAPTER LXIV

JANUARY JAUNTS

January 12, 1895.—I did not want this frost—did you? Possibly you did—on a good stud beginning to develop the signs of wear-and-tear. In my case I had got over the tear, and added further horses to withstand the wear, for neither you nor I believe in this wintry check. The world

had seemed so mild, and the weather so balmy; daily sport and daily companionship had become so entirely a part of our lives, that this sudden jerking up of the train gave us a rude, unwholesome shock. In Northamptonshire we look back upon a course of pleasant days. In Leicestershire they recall some remarkable runs. In fact Melton has, so far, had the best of it. The Quorn have made Stoddart scores; the Cottesmore have again come up to Tailbyte form. Mr. Fernie does not allow that his up-to-Christmas season has been good, though his adherents,



Signs of wear-and-tear

and still more his visitors, say otherwise. The complaint, through most of mid-England, and, as I gather, through most of good Ireland, has been that old foxes have been wanting, or in hiding. I can understand this, where a successful huntsman has for seasons past been driving them to death, and where the scourge of mange has been abetting him. But this I can safely aver, viz. that where I happen to have been hunting—in no mean countries—a good scent and a good fox have seldom exhibited themselves on the same day.

After Christmas has invariably been our best time with the Pytchley. January often fails us; and is likely to do

so now. But, if you value your summer happiness, don't miss a day, even if you let the bills stand over until April 1st. The old axiom, "Hunt six days a week until Christmas, and as many as you can afterwards," never applied better than to this year. Have you done your duty by the first part? The sharpest sport sometimes takes place in November; the longest runs in February—and why? because in these months you are likely to be running the old foxes. At other times, except occasionally, they are hidden up, and, likely enough, in the end meet their death at the mouth of lurcher, steel trap, or gun.

In the country what is there left for us? The daily paper, the morning stroll while shivering helpers circle the straw ride; the evening cigar and the midnight meditation; the conjuring up of old scenes, old faces, perhaps dead faces. Pack my portmanteau. Let me seek my fellow-men in the warm smoking-room of the club, and in London make a holiday of this leisure time.

Of the Pytchley. We are permitted to know the secret of ownership and origin of the rather plain but exceedingly clever couple of hounds that, in fair weather or foul, on a cold scent or a hot one, have been leading the Pytchley lady pack for the last few weeks. They belong, it appears, to Mr. Lort Philips, Master of the Pembrokeshire, and well remembered in the Rugby country as carrying the horn in many a merry gallop while Master of the North Warwickshire. And their breeding is a cross of the old Welsh hounds as retained in the Llangibby and Chepstow kennel. Thus, Dimple, the yellow hound that so continually caught the eye of the least informed of us, was by the Llangibby Danger—Taunton Vale Verity; while the other, Sportive, was by Llangibby Sultan—North Warwickshire Fairy. Some of you may have been present at the hound sale at Rugby the year before last, and may remember a strikingly good-looking couple of dog-hounds among the number disposed of by Mr. Lort Philips when reducing his pack. These were (if my worthless memory does not altogether fail me) Saracen and Saladin; and these I had the fortune subsequently to see running hard at the head of Mr. Merthyr Guest's pack in the Blackmore Vale. Critical

judges, I remembered, asserted at the time of sale that neither of them was quite straight on his legs. And I believe the critics were right. But they were a grand couple of foxhounds notwithstanding. And there is no question but that the old Welsh hunting blood (whether accounted in rough hair or smooth) is pre-eminent for power of nose and fulness of tongue.

The most ill piece of news during the frost and doubtless in a great measure caused by it—has been the accident to Mr. Tailby, the best known and best preserved of all our old school of hard riders. A score or more years ago the Squire of Skeffington was in his zenith as Master of the most notable hunt of the day, and foremost among a band of stalwart horsemen such as seldom, if ever, before mustered under one banner to tackle the strongest country in England, and day by day to throw down the friendly gauntlet to the Melton champions or the Pytchley thrusters. To be a "Tailbyite" in those days was in itself almost a guarantee of good sportsmanship and sterling capacity. The cream of the Cottesmore, together with all the country now hunted by Mr. Fernie, composed an arena, to secure the honour of an occasional day in which, I remember well in my young soldiering days, it was deemed well worth while to leave the mess-table and travel half the night, taking what rest one could in the waiting-room at St. Pancras, and journey to Leicester with the newspapers at 5.25 A.M. If "there were giants in those days," the biggest heart surely beat in the breast of the smallest of them, if thus I might put it in all respect and in present intense sympathy. Even during this winter, after fifty seasons of hunting, several recent and untoward accidents, and more bad falls than would have sufficed to knock the nerve out of a dozen ordinary men, Mr. Tailby was not to be left behind by "the boys," but, when hounds ran, was yet to the front with all his old ardour. And now Fate must decree him a miserable, unnecessary, and most serious breakage—that of his thigh! Monday of last week was the first day of pronounced frost. On this day he rode forth on a *three-year-old* to visit his farm. Opening a second gate on his way, the young

horse turned restive and reared, and a slip entailed this distressing fracture. For more than an hour—while Mr. Tailby supported himself against the gate-post—no one chanced to pass along the lonely road, nor could he by shouting bring even a labourer to his assistance. Happily this waiting in the intense cold does not appear to have produced any worse effect, and the honoured Master of the Billesden is said, at the moment of writing, to be progressing very favourably.¹

At least three changes of mastership are announced among the packs of the Midlands. Besides Mr. Colville Smith's resignation of the Bicester, we are told of Mr. Inge giving up the Atherstone and Mr. Fielden the Fitzwilliam. As to the two first-named countries, I have heard of no certain successor. With regard to the last-named, rumour has it that Lord Milton may continue it as a family pack, than which no other arrangement could possibly be more desirable and fitting. A great, good sporting country is the Fitzwilliam, in spite of its many acres of plough. This plough, separated field from field by strong thorn fences originally grown between pasture and pasture, calls for a better horse, and perhaps a better man, to live with hounds than any tillage country in England. Mr. Fielden, I am led to believe, possessed all the needed capacity for getting over it, and so must any other huntsman who essays to follow the footsteps of George Carter. A Master's sphere, in the other two countries more than the Fitzwilliam, is that of diplomacy. He has to combat and clear away not only the old difficulties, but that of the new style of fencing. The bed of roses has nowadays its thorns, and these thorns are too often barbed.

I meant to have said a few words more in humble tribute to the excellence of the Atherstone and Bicester countries this Thursday night. But my needless volubility is suddenly checked by mine host of the evening: "Look here, my dear fellow, scribble as long as you like; but hadn't you better move to another room? You happen to be writing on my old Chippendale escritoire, and as sure as

¹ In this year of 1903 Mr. Tailby is still riding as heartily—almost as hard—as ever.

you write anything heavy upon it it's bound to crack!" Upon this warning I retire to rest, reserving all ponderous thought for another occasion.

Stay, though. Do you know that we—the Pytchley again—nearly lost one of our leading landowners, leading fox-preservers, leading members during this recent spell of cold? The escape was so narrow, the experience so thrilling, that I must relieve my mind by telling you, even though no opportunity remains of asking his permission. Well, he being, I can say without fear of contradiction, an excellent and liberal landlord, had lately erected for a tenant on a lonely farm a new and solid hovel or barn. And one day during the frost he and madame, taking with them their dogs, walked forth to view it. A snowstorm came on, and they were glad to take shelter within the building, shutting the new oak door duly behind them. Horror of horrors, there was no means of unfastening it from the inside! There was not even a window through which the landlord could climb. In the dead darkness minute succeeded minute, and an hour ran into another. Not being a smoker, he had not even a match with which to break the gloom. He was as a man buried alive in a vault built by his own hands, and, worse than all, having led his own fair lady to such fearful doom. They would probably be frozen there this dreadful New Year's Eve. They might languish and die of starvation after many days; for no one, not even the shepherd, now the stock was cleared off the fields, was likely to come near this desolate hovel. The thought was maddening, and he flung himself with all his weight again and again against the unyielding wood, and in vain tried to reach the catch with his penknife. In view of the awful possibilities his mind turned for a minute to the dogs, sleek and fat, and doubtless tender. But, in the absence, as I have said, of matches or of fire-making material, how could these be made food for lord and lady?

The clock warns me of the postman's coming, and I will release you and them, by merely adding that under the inventive pressure of necessity the male prisoner at length got his walking-stick under the door, and with its hook and his own extended arm opened the way to daylight.

He is spared to us for many a year, I trust. And the hovel has already been pierced for windows.

Saturday, January 19, 11.15.—Advertisement, 10.45; law, thirty minutes; and the Master moved into Badby wood almost unaccompanied. Reynard was punctual, but played handsomely into the hands of the ball-goers. Not a minute before 11.30 would he budge; and then only because 18½ couple of ladies, who had gone to bed in good time, were screaming at him for an extra. With the music at double time he took the glassy floor of Arbury and Studborough Hill, kept just within the confines of the Pytchley Hunt, sheered away from the Bicester covert of Dane Hole, and circled round to Staverton, scent and mirth improving momentarily, though the easiest of fences were horribly jarring. I am often glad I am not a horse (all obvious and odious comparison barred hereby at pistol-point), but I think I would rather be driven in a hansom cab with blinkers on, with a fair freight behind me and all, than be asked to land down a drop on Studborough hillside, with seventeen stone losing his balance as I slipped, and me expected to recover us both. Yet it was done; and I expect that horse, fresh and ready on his feet as ever, to the far front in three days, an immediate dissolution of Parliament alone forbidding. Next moment (now this may lead me into trouble) I saw three fair dames—no, one was a damsel—exemplifying exactly the (how shall I express it?) below-medium of balance that ought to prevent their election to anything higher than, say, Poor Law Guardians. They took it in turn to pierce the very blackest and most disparaging of bullfinches that ever unfitted a woman for a ball-room. Not one of them had a veil when she came out. And they lit, after long interval, upon skating-ground half a foot deep in snow. Not satisfied with this, two-thirds of the party later in the day varied their mode of proceeding by sweeping downhill over a double post-and-rails to descend upon a similar carpet. Now, none of these belong to the order of New Women; but, by all that is fitting in life, they will want a very new order of men to follow them. Personally, I have sent in

my papers. I am not up to date. Nor do I see that the younger man can cope readily, either.



The blackest of bullfinches

I return to hounds. Goodall handled his fox handsomely at Staverton after an hour's work, all of which was hard, some of which was fast. And he, or this time

almost altogether his hounds, killed a second fox still more handsomely, after forty or forty-five minutes from Brock Hall. A quick, good fox discovered himself on the canal bank, as you enter Brock Hall Park. Immediately, and while all or most of us (there was a big field by this time) were irremediably mixed up in the attempt to disentangle ourselves from the park, fox and hounds had crossed the Weedon turnpike, and to my view there was a scramble to Dodford Holt, two miles away. The scramble continued—as gates were small, and jumping was, under circumstances, country, and inclination, almost impossible—across the railway to Newnham. Between that village and Daventry the ground rises and dips with a rugged severity that under to-day's conditions was worthy of the Pamirs. And over this did hounds now settle to run for a vigorous and final quarter of an hour, winding up their fox handsomely as he was on the threshold of Badby Park. I know many pleasanter sensations, by the way, than that afforded by a blown horse chancing his way through a straggling bullfinch to land on a six-foot lower level, and then to go off at the best speed left him down a steep slope of ice-bound turf, with another blind fence awaiting him at the bottom. You have just as much voice in the matter during these long moments as you would have in a balloon. Common prudence, too, denies you the luxury of revenge when the next ascent begins. For at the time I speak of, the locality being the region of the lofty "pepperbox hill" overlooking Daventry, every horse, be he second or single, had had nearly his fill of gallop and flounder, of mud and of jump, of hard ground and of hill.

Thus, this second fox being killed in forty-five minutes (tolerably straight), Goodall had the satisfaction of handling a brace fairly in the open, we of enjoying our first bustling day since the year began and its frost set in. I wish I could paint, for those who know it not, the delight of thus getting to work again, the joy of renewing our daily life, our daily society, our happy occupation. I cannot. And, indeed, personally I find even my own subsidiary employment so grateful that, loth to go to bed, I have already run the risk of wearying.

CHAPTER LXV

TAKING THE FLOOR

OUR week beginning Thursday, January 24, 1895, opened with the Rugby Hunt Ball. A pronounced success, they aver it was, and in every way worthy of better introduction and sequel at the hands of the weather clerk. For, had not the *grandes dames* of the neighbourhood for once exerted themselves to beautify the rooms and complete the arrangements? Had not a brand of champagne been chosen, out of which not a headache existed in a bottle and a half? Had not the floor been polished to falling-point? Did not the "Kitchen" Lancers evoke, in the most stately and the most matured, a longing to frisk? And did they not frisk? In testimony to such conditions were there not at least three bruised feet under lamentation to one sore head? Had not the walls a setting of diamonds that e'en the Gaiety could scarce have rivalled; and was there not a go about the *Pas de Quatre* that Sir Augustus Harris would have paid money to import? If here was no Augustus to conduct the show, the gate was to be found presided over with courteous ability, the Janus of the evening being Mr. Lawrence, Rugby schoolboy, librarian and dispenser of literature.

In the peopling of a Hunt Ball, as far as my opportunities of observation enable me to form an opinion, and sinking all minor differences, such as diamonds and tarlatan, at least three main divisions exist, viz.: (1) the young, who go there for their fling and have it more merrily and prettily than they can possibly achieve elsewhere; (2) the old, who go to court reminiscence and to sup conscientiously; and (3) the middle-aged, who, as it were, enact the part of filling up the chinks. The first named are the spirit of the ball. The last named are, or should be, extremely useful interpleaders; or, if I have used the wrong word, say adjuncts. Their vocation is to minister to age, to arm the dowagers in to repeated suppers,

and to come to relief of forlorn or deserted damsels as often as opportunity may offer and their knighthood's vows may demand. Some of them, it must be admitted, take up a more independent, self-abusing rôle; aim at elbowing out the younger men, and assume a right *à la carte*, as if approaching a bill of fare to which the first



The old who sup conscientiously

comer has first right. Against these, happily, it takes a very few ball-rooms to enable the fair *solicitée* to hold her own, and a few in hand. Even this assumption is, perhaps, better than standing in the doorway, a pastime once so popular, but that would appear practically to have dropped out of date. No, there was nothing but life about the Rugby Hunt Ball, from the youngest *débutante* in her broad-shouldered frock to the most respected

veteran who carried a pink coat. The last named was best typified in the grand personage of Colonel Anstruther-Thomson, looking little less stalwart, if somewhat more snowbeaten, than when, after the great Waterloo Run, he walked into the Market Harboro' ball-room, to be welcomed by the plaudits of three hundred.

Next morning there was to have been hunting by the Atherstone at Coton House at 11.45, by the Pytchley at 10.45; and at 4 A.M. it was thawing merrily, or seemed to be. But by ten o'clock the roads were as glass. The Atherstone looked at themselves in it, and turned back. The Pytchley, on high ground, went still higher, and hunted—where do you think for choice, Cold Ashby! It seems that, as you may know, the instinct of all hunted animals is to make their way upwards. Whether it be due to this natural prompting, or whether the attraction be Mr. Hazlehurst's guardian faculty, I am unable to say; but the fact remains that, in proportion to its extent of covert, Cold Ashby is now as fully foxed as was Misterton during his long tenancy. Foxes at any rate take little heed of the cold, nor for that matter does Will Goodall, one of their best friends. They have a way of mutually keeping each other warm. But, beyond cooling down the temperature of overnight, I fancy very few other people extracted much pleasure out of the blinding snowstorms, during which they roamed, occasionally at speed, round those awful hilltops. The fairest lips turned blue, and quivered piteously in the bitter cold; and strong men looked blanched and bloodless, as two days previous on the hills of Hemplow adjoining. Assuredly those twin occasions are frozen hard into many a memory.

Were you, by chance, brought up in an agricultural district, and so made familiar with the ordinary operations of tillage and root-growing? If so, you will appreciate a comment on the situation delivered by a worthy farmer who is in the habit of seeing a great deal of sport on a very tiny pony. "Well," said he, after looking on for some time at the exhilarating process of unearthing a fox from out a drain, "there isn't many days when fox-hunting is no better fun than turnip-cleaning; but, blame me, if

this ain't one on 'em!" Next time you view two gloveless individuals picking and preparing wet turnips in a north-east wind, think of this comparison, and tell me if this utterance was not tolerably well-timed.

What weather may have been going on, meanwhile, upon the plains I can only judge from the fact that the gallop home to Rugby was for the most part across fields



"We are getting on capitally"

tolerably soft and passably green; and that, looking back, the view was bounded by the bleak snow-mountains of Cold Ashby and Hemplow that we had left behind. Even here, it was not all grass or good going: *e.g.*, after a couple of miles' warm galloping, my companion turned in his saddle to close a gate that had let us into the high-road. "We are getting on capitally," quoth he, and the sentence was barely out of his mouth before the old horse flopped down on one side of the road, while the well-contented

speaker spun prone to the other. It was fully half a minute before I dare let forth the unseemly burst of laughter evoked by the *contretemps*; and even then was hardly justified, save by the cool comment with which he remounted, "It doesn't hurt so much as I thought to fall upon a road." No, my friend, you fell different ways, and with never a leg of yours under. Good luck to you.

If the present be a slack time 'tis only an accident, attributable to the vagaries of our climate. Were we permitted our daily hunting, we should find at each meet many welcome faces that appear only for a brief while, and at this particular period, to brighten our ball-rooms and enliven our covertsides. Prompted by what I learn with every Hunt in whose sport I have the privilege of occasionally sharing, I shall risk the impertinence of repeating that in the present day it is the Poultry Fund of each country that does most to clear the way, and to make the country safe riding for us and our friends. Thus, every penny contributed to this object may well be looked upon as personal insurance. I need not put it any plainer. He who rides may read. I still earnestly hope to see, with each pack, the opportunity given for every non-member of the Hunt to put his sovereign into the bag. This method would be far more gratifying to the donor, apparently much cheaper, and obviously less trouble to him than writing and posting a cheque.

You cannot say that of late weeks you have not had time to read the papers. If by any chance you missed, in the *Field* of January 19, the instructions of the Master of the Genesee Valley Hunt to his followers, pray look them up and digest them. They will repay the trouble, may do you some practical good, and are none the less palatable for being wrapped in genuine American humour.

And now, as I can no longer bear to look upon a stud of idle horses, I have taken passage for their proprietor by to-night's Irish Mail, and "am off to Tipperary in the morning." "A grand run on Tuesday," they telegraph to me, from that warm and hospitable country.

CHAPTER LXVI

AN IRISH FAIR

IF I was silent for a week, it was through no lack of courtesy or deficiency of duty towards my readers, nor yet of the wherewithal to be garrulous, had I been so minded. How could one trip it to Ireland and back ; partake of such hospitality as scarce any other country can mete, mingle in such joviality as certainly only Irishmen could evolve, and come back without memory merry as daylight, or (to use a more appropriate metaphor) lit up as a frosty sky ? The context is but a frame. The picture is set, not between gilding, but between twenty-four hours' rattling from Northamptonshire to county Tipperary, and the return purgatory, which latter is best expressed by—please let me have it—a visit of four hours to the region of lost souls, utter imbecility for a subsequent thirty-six.

The humblest of us are loth to proclaim a failure ; to acknowledge a sell. I should have interested nobody by giving out that I had broken the record by being in the Green Island for close upon two weeks, posing as a horseman, yet never crossing a horse. *Tempora mutantur nos et mutamur in illis.* So said our old copy-books ; but I never thought to reproduce the maxim in application to a country where the rule has ever been, to miss one day this week, to hunt two extra the next.

Beleaguered thus by frost and snow, my two chief experiences in Tipperary were not of hunting, though to some extent akin. The Hunt Ball, not a subject with which it behoves me at any length to deal, was a model of brightness and completeness. The flower of Tipperary were there, fresh, brilliant, and captivating, in spite of chilly winter and a spell of cold unexampled in the memory of the oldest native. Of no greenhouse growth, you may be assured, are the bright eyes and warm complexions of the Sister Isle, the product rather of outdoor life and a merry temperament.

Things are not done by halves in county Tipperary : and so, by dint of extra dances, extra liberality on the part

of stewards and caterers, extra indulgence at the hands of chaperones, and perhaps a breakdown during the drive home, few of the quality laid head upon pillow before six in the morning. Believe me, if you would see joyousness develop into a fine art, and love of life a national characteristic, you must go to Ireland, in spite of hard times, and even in the midst of such a county calamity as is a hard frost to genial Tipperary.

The other event—and this also narrowed and circumstanced by the “accursed cold”—was Clonmel’s February fair, attended by most of the cheery fellows who go to make up a Tipperary field, and nearly all of whom had assisted at the ball aforesaid. Of the two events the fair was much more under the weather than the festive gathering within doors overweek. There was something very melancholy in the spectacle of a snowclad regiment of horse-purveyors patrolling the main street, with no one to challenge their wares. These wares, if picturesque, were, it will be understood, not quite the cream of the fair. But they maintained its position, and served to uphold its popularity, whether through the medium of its quaintly clad salesmen or of their queerly cropped steeds, I can hardly venture to say. Both were funny and interesting ; at least to the Saxon eye. The former were frieze-clad and whisky-primed to the hilt. The majority of the latter were clipped and trimmed much on the same principle as the poodle dog ; such portions of their hairy coats being eliminated as in the opinion of their owners might best discover their proportions and least expose them to the biting blast. Thus some were scissored out as to legs and stomachs ; some, on the contrary, were privileged to retain a woolly mat on which to carry a saddle, their legs remained furnished like those of a grouse, and all the rest was bare. And so they paraded the livelong day, in most cases, I fear, to carry the same owners home at night, together with the extra weight of whisky that had accumulated during such hours of waiting. Trade, however, certainly appeared to improve a little towards the afternoon. There were at least three free fights under the window, within whose sanctuary and in jovial company we were sedately listening

to well-worded illustration of the fairs and customs of Tipperary. In each of the cases under notice, it seemed to me, the whole of one opposing party was promptly marching into the police office opposite, while the other walked away with the quadruped in dispute. It made me ache to think of the glorious eighteen hours in prospect for that happy roomful, while they waited judgment and release in the morning! I'faith, it must have been as exhilarating as a Channel passage.

But the centre of attraction for all the gentry folk was, of course, the yard of Mr. Bell, the popular veterinary surgeon and most kindly mediator in all that relates to horse buying and selling in county Tipperary. Here at all events we were privileged to see a few neat horses, about to be shipped to Austria by Mr. Schavel—even if the eccentricities of the weather had kept at home most else that was eligible for sale in the country round, Mr. Bell's premises being the recognised meeting-ground for traders amateur and professional.

It struck me after a time that if I was really to see "the fun of the fair" I had best go forth into the by-streets and corners. This accordingly I did in the driving snowstorm, and was rewarded. I despair of being able to reproduce it, unless you care to take one little instance as picturing the whole. The vendor had obviously smartened himself for the occasion and the day, with his beaver hat (two sides intact, the other two otherwise), his Sunday greatcoat slashed from shoulder to waist, to display a width of white shirt or what not; his trousers rucked to his knees to do honour to the good grey stockings beneath, a short white clay in his mouth; and his nose (weather-burnt, doubtless) fiercely afire. A big yellow saddle-cloth, evidently bought for ornament, had shifted its place till it attached itself as a mustard plaster beneath the single girth. One stirrup hung by a cord; and cord, too, connected the bit with the rider's hands. Thus accoutred, he kept his ashplant going in tune with his own quaint expletives and encomia, as he galloped fiercely up and down the road, and sought thus to charm a trio representing possible purchasers. These, as is in keeping with horse-

dealing in select, not necessarily aristocratic, circles in Ireland, were of one family, all having a voice, and a loud one, in the matter. Each of them shouted instructions of most opposite description to the well-primed seller; and his effort to fall in with their views was by no means the least amusing part of the show. "Dhrive him along, the



Three ashplants descended

old villain!" shouted one. "Wait now, take him at a nice trot!" yelled the second. "Hould, will ye, while I get on the baste myself!" commanded the third. And he got on, with as many instructions from the owner as would have sufficed for a jockey for the Cambridgeshire. But, bother it, one of those rope-hung stirrups had swung over the saddle. For the life of him he could find nothing of it. At that moment three separate ashplants or blackthorns

descended simultaneously on the subject under trial. Away he went up the street, the preponderance of balance all on the off side. At the corner the instinct of the beast pointed irresistibly to the near. There was no stirrup to hold the bold rider, who, next moment, was face downward in a sea of snow and slush. The deal was off, and so was the quad, owner after him. Whether ever again they came together I did not wait to see. But I fear that, but for the whisky, the Clonmel February Fair would have been an occasion devoid of life.

CHAPTER LXVII

AN INCIDENT OF ROUGH WEATHER ON THE ROCKIES

IT is difficult, nay, impossible, for the stay-at-home English mind to realise the extraordinary types of humanity occasionally to be met with on the Rocky Mountains. Restlessness and an undaunted desire to become rich are prevailing characteristics of the whole American nation. But nowhere are these so sturdily developed as in the Far West, where every man is fully assured that in his knapsack (*i.e.* in his hands and brain) he carries the *bâton*, not of a Field-Marshal, nor yet of a President of the United States, but, greater by far in his eyes, of a Jay Gould or a Vanderbilt. He only needs the opportunity; and this he is never tired of seeking, never down-hearted, however repeatedly he has failed to find it.

The cessation of purchase of silver by the Government, and the consequent depreciation of that metal, the chief product of the West, have led to the closing up of a great number of mining works, and to the letting loose upon the face of western earth of a large addition to the body of free-lances already roaming the country, *bâton* in knapsack. Two and a half to five dollars (10s. to £1) a day were very fair wages for a mining day of eight hours; and from it a man, boarding himself, or "*baching* it," could very well expect to carry over a monthly balance

of fifty to one hundred dollars for personal expenditure or saving.

Silver having proved a broken reed, numberless men are seeking high and low for the more precious and reliable metal; and as half the streams of the Rocky Mountains can be made to give out, through the medium of rock or sand, infinitesimal signs of gold-bearing, they are continually following up a will-o'-the-wisp that seldom leaves them without a crumb of comfort or hope. But besides these ex-miners and temporary adventurers, there is a whole regular army of wanderers, men whose entire life has been spent, or will be spent, in wandering round, seeking gold as they have hitherto sought silver, and occasionally even stooping ostensibly to seek work. That there is a charm about a prospector's life, as there is about that of a hunter or trapper, with which it often combines, is easy to understand.

The charm has to be acquired, but once acquired it takes such hold upon the individual that he seldom settles down to more restricted life, but is ever restless and eager to be off to the mountains, to his solitary camp-fire, his lonely delving, and the free air of heaven, in a region where God's creation is most grandly set forth in rock and woodland. This hermit is, as a rule, no holy man. He goes not there to meditate, save on the chances of striking ore, nor to renounce, save whisky, which he cannot for the present get. So you may see many strange men in these strange places.

It had been snowing that night, had rained all that morning, and was raining pitilessly still, when, 'twixt 4 and 5 P.M., it occurred to the cook of our party that the monotony of cowering over the fire might be varied by preparation for the evening meal, to be eaten standing, salt and sugar melting to hand, and the coffee chilled and diluted a few seconds after attaining the cup. Accordingly, he sallied forth from the clump of fir trees that by courtesy were supposed to shelter us by the creek bed, and set to work manfully with a blunt axe upon a dead tree. Now, the sound of a stubborn axe upon well-dried timber is as pronounced and far-reaching as the

smiling of a big drum. Surely the Salvation Army never noised abroad such glad summons as in this case.

A few minutes afterwards there appeared on the bank above us the most extraordinary and woebegone product that ever laid claim to humanity. From out of what



The gaunt visage of a man

might once have been a military greatcoat, and from under the remnant of a round and formerly white hat, of which only the brim now existed, was to be seen the gaunt visage of a man of sixty years or upwards—his glittering eyes, aquiline nose, high cheek-bones, and feathered ruffe of tangled whisker giving him the appearance of a bedraggled hawk. One hand was gloveless, but

the other clung still to a thumb and wrist of wet leather. The lean figure was upright as a dart, and the spirit was obviously unquenched, as he queried sharply, "Where might you fellows be working for?" In one hand he held the bridle-rein of a one-eyed saddle-horse, a fit charger for the Don Quixotic-looking master; to the tail of this was fastened a sorrel steed without flesh, and no other trappings but the hakamore or rope halter; in the other he held a long willow wand, with which he had been persuading no less than five loaded donkeys to carry their burden whither it might occur to him to go. Briefly, he had completely lost his way; and, after nearly a week of wandering on the creek ("he kept no account of days," he said) he was now pushing undauntedly up stream into this basin of country, this river head, from which the precipitous mountains barred all escape save by this one entrance. For two days and nights he had been wet to the skin—even his matches, the most vital treasure of a backwoodsman, were damp, and his Winchester rifle, hung on his saddle-bow, was rusted into uselessness. Of flour he had nearly 50 lbs., but nothing else to call food. But what struck me most of all was not the above-stated dire necessity into which the man had fallen, nor the imminent danger that awaited him of death by cold and wet and hunger, but the indomitable spirit with which he accepted his position, and had fully and confidently intended to go through.

"Come down to the camp fire!" I naturally hailed; but, as he seemed bent upon arguing the situation, we all scrambled up the snowy and slippery bank to our strange visitor. Soon he seemed to accept circumstances, and to consent not so much to accepting hospitality, as to throwing in his lot *pro tem*, with ours. The jackasses crowded down more readily than their master: willing hands untied their remnant ropes and let fall the packs, while, talking the while, so far as his chattering teeth would let him, our quaint visitor applied himself to his two saddle-horses. "Guess I've broken my nails," he explained as his half-frozen fingers refused to unknot the raw hide ropes; and he even submitted to my bringing a buttonhook into

play. Then he strolled, all negligently, to the fire ; and, while he bravely talked and bravely stood, opportunity was given me of marking the details of this queer man's accoutrement. He carried two pairs of blue-cotton overalls, and the strap which prevented their departing from his bony legs also served to bear his sheath-knife. His boots were worn through, and the first use he made of the fire was to remove them and his stockings from his feet and dry them in the blaze.

He had taken up, he said, a "pretty location" near Estes Park, and there he meant to return in the spring to work his placer mine by means of "the best stream of water in that country."

By next morning he was fresh as paint, scoffed at the idea of suffering any ill effects from these days of cold and starvation, still less that he had escaped from almost certain death, and with loan of one of our rods set himself to fish the stream very successfully—his basket for the morning amounting to forty-five shapely trout.

As time wore on, and occasional confidence was prompted—for he never left us for a week, his train of jackasses following our trail placidly, while he brought up the rear with shout and whoop—it came out that not only had he fought in the war but had filled the position of colonel of cavalry in the Confederate Army. After the war (but this period of his history he could only be persuaded to touch upon under the tongue-loosening influence of a glass of whisky) he and many others of the "rebels" had betaken themselves to the Indian Territory of that time. If freebooting was not a recognised occupation on the part of these fugitives, then was I considerably astray in the inferences I deduced from hints he threw out. This much, however, he constantly asserted and held to, viz. that he was descended from the first family of Campbells who assisted in colonising old Virginia. So much for Colonel Campbell, as an instance of how a Western man may be proof against weather and undaunted under disaster.

CHAPTER LXVIII

WELSH FOXHOUNDS

I CANNOT but be glad that some casual remarks of mine chanced to initiate correspondence upon the great merits of the old Welsh foxhound. I do not know, by the way, that the discussion would have come to much, but for having been, equally inadvertently, fanned into a friendly flame by my cordial fellow-worker, "Rusticus," who, throwing himself into the fray with all the outspoken ardour of an *enfant terrible*, elicited valuable comment from more than one good Welsh authority, besides rousing comparisons at home. If the result should be the calling attention to an old tap of the best working blood in the British Isles, fox-hunting may yet reap, say, a week's benefit out of this cruel frost. It may not be generally known that Colonel Anstruther-Thomson, when assuming mastership of the Atherstone many years ago, brought several couple of Welsh hounds. I only remember that he spoke of them afterwards as being "sharp as terriers in their work, and that in kennel they bit like vipers." It happens that this marplot weather, in addition to defrauding me of a halcyon time in southern Ireland, also debarred me from gaining practical experience in this subject on my way back, Mr. Lort Philips and his cross-bred Pembrokehire packs the exponents. I hope yet to avail myself of such friendly chance; and whatever one's prejudices may be as to shape and make, straight legs and round feet more particularly in point, I cannot but pin faith (especially after recent demonstration) that the best hounds to breed from are those that on a bad scenting day can best carry the line and drive on it. As Mr. Lort Philips rightly argues, "any cur can go like distraction on a hot scent." Is it not rather on this theory that, while carefully retaining orthodoxy of shape, *i.e.* working symmetry, the Brocklesby have been brought to perfection? (I confess I am acquainted with them by only the slightest personal experience in the field. But those who should

know give them credit for wonderful dash upon a cold and difficult country.) And the Fitzwilliam likewise. These also were for years at the top of the tree for power and beauty. No hounds ever ran harder, or with more devilry; in a plough country, too, when on most days every hound has to put his nose down.

Here is what Colonel Anstruther-Thomson in his courtesy writes:—

“NEWTON HOUSE, RUGBY, *March 6.*

“MY DEAR ———,—I have read some articles in the *Field* about Welsh hounds with much interest, and shall be glad to give you any information I can, which is not much, about Welsh hounds.

“The year after I gave up the Pytchley Hounds (1869), I became partner with Mr. Oakeley in the Atherstone Hounds, and we started the foundation of the present Atherstone pack. Among others, we bought the whole pack of Gogerddan Hounds from Colonel Pryse. I don't think many of them were pure-bred Welshmen. I think Colonel Pryse had at one time lived in the Heythrop country, and got drafts from Jim Hills, which he crossed with the Welsh hounds. I have no memoranda or lists here, so I can only speak from memory; but I think Mr. Oakeley has, if you want more particulars.

“I think we got about 25 couple; they were about 22½ or 23 inches, nice shaped, with good backs and fair for bone, rather sharp noses, and light in colour, mostly yellow and white. In work they would not draw a covert like a Midland pack, but smelt the smeuses till they found a place to please them, and would then creep through briars like ferrets; they were not steady, and would speak either to hares or rabbits, but they soon got better in that respect. They were capital hunters, ran hard, with plenty of tongue, and very diligent. I never found them shy or afraid of horses in the field.

“They had not been much handled in the kennel, and bit like vipers if necessary to look at their feet. The only plan was to sniggle them with a hunting-whip and tie their mouths up.

"The huntsman came to Witherby with them, a very dark, silent man, who had not much English. When asked any question about the hounds, his reply was, 'They will catch the fox.'

"We engaged the Welsh whipper-in, a decent man



She would cock her ears and listen

and a good sportsman, but no use in this country, as he never could get out of the crowd. That is all I can tell you.

"More than fifty years ago I was out with Lord Mostyn's Hounds in North Wales. I have seen Llangibby in the kennel, and also Lord Tredegar's, and there were some

beautiful rough hounds among them. I have read Mr. Foljambe's letter about the hounds going to the cry when he could not distinguish right or wrong.

"I had an old bitch, called Abbess, that never would draw, but followed my horse. If a hound spoke she would cock her ears and listen. If it was not good, she took no further notice; if it was good, she was off like a shot, and I was off after her.

"Just in time for post.—Yours very truly,

"J. ANSTRUTHER-THOMSON.

"There was a good deal of correspondence in the *Field* at the time, which I think I have at home.

"Do what you like with this."

Would you, though, learn how to raise your spirits and rectify your thermometer during the next frost (1896, I trust)? Then do as my young friend—hang the latter on the south side of the house. Expostulated with, he answered, "Oh, it makes one so much happier to look at it there in the middle of the day."

CHAPTER LXIX

A GREAT WEEK AFTER FROST

How can I sufficiently express the delight of once more riding to hounds over a fair grass country, in the best of company, and to a piping scent? Only by instance, and such instance you have all, I trust, by now experienced for yourselves.

Ours was with the Pytchley on Saturday, March 9, 1895, when in an hour hounds ran a point of seven and a half miles over the best, and strongest, of their country and Mr. Fernie's. The meet had been Harrington, this time on a dull but lovely hunting morning; but this time, unfortunately, without the little band of Quornites who have come hither so often in vain.

But I may hazard a note of some few others whom at this moment I can recall. The most difficult—nay, the

most impossible— of tasks is that of compiling an adequate list of names. I know well that when my slender catalogue is put in print, I shall find omitted those of many with whom I am best acquainted, and with whom, possibly, I came most in contact during the day. I offer the following with all apology, viz.: Mr. W. M. Wroughton, Lord Downe and Misses Dawnay, Sir H. and Miss Langham, Mr. and Mrs. Cazenove, Rev. C. and Miss Legard, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Cunard, Mr., Mrs., and Misses Fenwick, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Dawkins, Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, Mr. and Mrs. E. Kennard, Mr. and Mrs. S. Holland, Mr. P. and Mrs. Beatty, Captain and Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Burns, Miss Bevan, Miss Banbury, Miss Burchell, Lord Erskine, Count Larische, Rev. — Rokeby, Captains Pender, Soames, and Schofield, Messrs. Bishop, Boyle, Broom, Cholmley, Drage, Fife, Jameson, Lloyd, Foster, R. Loder, Logan, Mills *père et fils* (H. and C.), Moorhouse, Pownall, Straker, Summers, Wallis, Whateley, and I know not how many more.

Loatland Wood, a charming covert of, say, thirty or forty acres ; Mr. Cowley, as for many a year past, guarding its foxes, and personally welcoming us over his green acres near by. To the prescience of the Master, in clearing the whole of the outer circle before hounds were thrown in, our fox owed no little of the ease with which he was able to make his break, and we no little of the sport that befell. We were away in five minutes, an unusually brief waiting, as you will admit who may have often stood by or within this famous covert. No sooner away than it was obvious hounds could run. Nearly all were out together—at the top left-hand corner—in a body before the second great grass field was crossed, their heads pointing westward for Waterloo Gorse (some three miles away), and the road thither running parallel with the line of fox and hounds. Following the latter were ranged a cluster of those choice familiar spirits ever to be seen hanging to the skirts of the Pytchley pack when running its best, the readiest to point the present route being Mr. H. Mills. Remember, the great fences of the superb country traversed to-day were by no means to be taken haphazard, but, on the contrary,

called for a quick eye, a good horse, and a bold heart to find or to make practicable outlet. Happily these essentials were in plenty, in the moderate-sized but fairly representative field of the morning.

Presently the pack bent slightly to the road, then crossed it half-way to Waterloo Gorse, and bore downward for a moment towards Braybrooke, where a shepherd's presence had diverted our fox a trifle from his course. They drove hotly along the lower ground and over undulating side-hills, the Master in the only position which can ever avail for due control of a field of horsemen in the Shires, to wit, the head of affairs ; with him, Mr. P. Beatty getting, while he may, all pleasure in life out of the big blood bay that may at any time pass into other, fortunate, hands.

Fifteen minutes ; another shepherd, and another consequent temporary divergence on the part of this level-headed fox. Waterloo Gorse two fields on our left. On our right a long strip of plantation, and the railway (Northampton and Market Harboro') directly in front. We drew rein, by order, while Goodall made his forward cast ; then, as hounds feathered over the railway, we passed in file round a seedfield, facts I think worth mentioning in proof of how Northamptonshire yields readily and effusively to discipline—when hounds are not running.

A farmer had viewed fox beyond the railway. To his direction Goodall held northward towards Harboro' ; and we followed down the steep and still frozen slope, one of the few occasions during the run on which we had to complain of ground rattling under the jump or slipping under the gallop.

Settling to work again, hounds drove forward across the Oxendon and Market Harboro' turnpike, keeping to the area of great bullock pastures that bedeck Market Harboro', and that have made it a proverb for strength and grandeur since Osbaldeston, Asheton Smith, and Jim Mason, or Timber Powell of brave memory and Captain Carnegie of present time rode over—No, took their three falls a mile over them, in the attempt to ride straight. It wasn't

to be done then. Still less is it to be done now, when the dread presence of wire o'ershadows many a fence and haunts the whole. It may read like vulgar repetition on my part, but there is now only one among us dare attempt



The dread presence of wire

it ; and I say to myself, God speed him, every time I take advantage of his pilotage. A quick eye and a bold one avail much ; but you can't fight, *he* must not fight, against wire, any more than you and I have been able to fight against influenza in the recent dismal past, of early '95.

Where were we ? Under Oxendon village, and soon

under that of Farndon, making a *détour* that the gully here (many of us know it well) necessitates. To reach Lubenham calls for a pilot, and we had him. But I wish he had broken the ox-rails more deftly, though, like a torpedo-catcher, he demonstrated that the way was clear of iron and trap. I need hardly tell you that the demonstrator was Mr. T. Jameson. But for him, I believe we might be stranded still on the border-line 'twixt Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. Thanks to him, we were able really to ride with hounds up to Lubenham railway and river, where two white gates and a ford let us admirably through, to the astonishment of the dwellers of Lubenham, who galloped a mile round to escape the difficulties.

At this period and for some time previous and afterward we were riding, if I mistake not, much of the line of Colonel Thomson's Waterloo Run. And at this moment we crossed the very pastures upon which Mr. Angell's Alcibiade and Bridegroom were trained for their Grand National and Hunt engagements. Present pace was not racing but distinctly galloping. In the dull mist, and in the excitement of a newly recovered joy, one hardly realised locality or bearings; but I think we steered steadily for Bowden Inn, before turning leftward for Foxton.

To the stranger on the lengthy bay we owe release from a difficult corner, even if it brought grief to one of the most capable of our lady riders. Extraordinarily fraught with trouble in this direction was the gallop under notice. Not only was the line exceptionally strong, which of a certainty would never discourage them, but wire has to account for the worst fall of all. I am not sure, though I have no Irish faculty of speech, that any one should ride first nowadays in once Merry England, but sure am I that no woman—now to borrow an Americanism—has any right to "take chances."

A locked gate by Bowden was—the very devil. It cost three minutes—an unjumpable fence or a wired one on either side, while hounds ran their best, from under our noses, to the village of Foxton. Beyond Foxton and a road scamper of two miles—three fences and a check.

Run really over. One hour to the minute. To ground then near Debdale Wharf, on the canal side. A hearty run, a fine point, and a trying line.

Have you noticed how, on certain days—the best scenting days probably—bullocks and sheep have power to stain a line to the utter confusion of a pack, while on other, less happy scenting, hounds can readily make their way through herd or flock? Spring may have something to do with this, and the clean ground, after frost, quite as much. But the fact, I believe, remains; and it has been especially noticeable since the break-up of the recent long and diabolical frost.

Let me not omit mention of the admirable riding of the boy Sumners, who on his little grey thoroughbred accepted every big fence that was set him and rode near the leaders throughout.

Wednesday, March 13.—A fourth good day in succession. In no spirit of impiety say I, thank Heaven! for that such delight has come to us after many weary weeks.

Crick Gorse was the *fons et origo* of to-day's sport. You may remember that overnight the North Warwickshire left it just untouched on their way to Lilbourne. The near presence of the seething chase probably led the inmates of the covert to suppose that here was a real sanctuary. At any rate they had not moved. With one of them we darted to Hilmorton Gorse, one and a half miles away, in quicker time than I ever saw this common route effected. Twenty minutes then, and to ground in a rabbit warren by Kilsby Tunnel.

Back to Crick Covert—a level sixpence against another find—then a capital forty minutes by the left of Yelvertoft village to Elkington Covert (some five miles distant) to ground. And this happened across the best of Northamptonshire borderland. If you chance to know the Crick and Yelvertoft undulations, you know some of the sweetest ground in England. And I need tell you no further but ask you to imagine the galloping and jumping, and the chance hounds had when bullocks or sheep (heaps of them this winter, and with a demoralising scent of their own)

stood in the way. By-the-bye, I hope it will be understood that, whenever I commit the impertinence of saying who was on this occasion riding nearest to hounds, I refer only to such moments as may have found the pack to all purposes unapproachable, *i.e.* running harder than men, or the bulk of men, could ride the country. I then speak in a spirit of admiration and encomium. No such opportunity belongs to the case of hounds going slow, and all of us going a great deal faster. Then we are abominable, all of us in deadly fear of being crowded out, and comporting ourselves accordingly. At last the Master this afternoon very properly held us all up, and we drew in our reins and our horns, though the effect was for the moment rather spoiled by the chestnut hanging fire in a gap, and the next comer (a chief offender possibly) doing his utmost to support authority by pushing the same into the next field.

When bullocks and sheep and horsemen had ceased to interfere, the sturdy scent that belongs to a N.E. wind and a rising glass was able to assert itself; and hounds took us hotly by the left of Yelvertoft village, and of Yelvertoft hillside, to Elkington (Lord Spencer's) Covert. Forty minutes or thereabouts.

THE NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

The exigencies of the morrow admit of nothing further than is due from the local reporter and addressed to the local reader. Listen. Hilmorton Gorse, a quick find, and the old start towards Crick Gorse, over the border. A shepherd or some one with his dog did us service for once; he turned our fox away from Crick Gorse, and sent him northward over what I dare to term a heavenly country, to Lilbourne Gorse. I have ridden it again and again since early boyhood, a fact that matters nothing. But I don't think I ever saw so many men and women riding it abreast. It was free from wire—thanks endless to the good people who have brought this about. And a frost-maddened community rode it for their lives, yet could get none too close to hounds. Amid such a

cloud of hurrying pursuers, spread in a broad front upon the trail of hounds, it would be presumptuous of me to attempt to particularise. But had I to name one or two of the readiest exponents, I believe I should not be far wrong in taking the two Messrs. Craig from Warwickshire and Mr. H. Bentley from Northamptonshire. Lilbourne Gorse gave breathing time, and horses wanted it badly. "Dunsmore" gave us the rest of the run—a handsome kill in the open. How well the turf rode—most of it—and of course we crossed barely a ploughed field.

Nor did we in the afternoon after that quick find and quick start from Cook's Gorse. The valley of the Raund's Brook took us to Bunker's Hill; what fun it was over those steeplechase fences at flying pace! Our fox went on at once, while another went for Shuckburgh. Pace halted, and mended again as we struck the wide pastures northward, leftward of Dunchurch village, rightward of Leicester's Piece. I can hardly recall the exact geography. These delightful visions of fox-hunting (such as the last three days have given, and such as the week seems intent upon furnishing), give no time as they pass for reading the misty landscape. One may puzzle it out afterwards, and herein lies half the joy of the play.

I have carried you—dragged you on possibly—for half-an-hour; and now I bring you to Thurleston Grange on the upper flat of wide Dunsmoor. A lengthy check, a holloa across the railway, and hounds again stealing away on a rapturous scent. The next two miles were a chase over a chasing country, Mr. Wallis most of the time playing winner. So to Bourton, if I grasp the track aright; thence to Frankton village; thence to Birdingbury; thence fast again to Marton villages, with a hunt across much light plough to Princethorpe Wood. Time as stated—fully $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Point at least eight miles. Of a truth it was a charming run. If anything more came of it I have yet to learn, for, arrived at the big woods, with horses and selves well satisfied, we all, or nearly all, turned homeward, having enjoyed what we venture to term an old-fashioned North Warwickshire Tuesday—sport from end to end. You will understand

that this was a March day; an easterly wind upon a rime frost. Grass held a scent all day, and fortunately we crossed nothing else during the melting morning. In the afternoon the whole earth was scent-enticing.

It has long been said that "all comes to him who waits." The waiting has been anything but voluntary on our part. But the flush of sport we are now enjoying, brief as is the time left, will at least make us leave off with a sweet, sweet taste upon the palate. *Apropos*, I delight to find that the farmers—one and all with whom I converse—urge strongly "an extra fortnight." They have done no ploughing; the lambs are all safe; and this March weather, while preparing for the plough, does nothing towards hastening vegetation. By next week the turf may be almost hard.

In the haste and sleepiness of after-dinner writing I have doubtless missed half my salient points. I don't think I have even given credit to huntsmen. Yet what would have been Saturday's fate without a man to rescue hounds; still more on Wednesday—the Pytchley? How would the Grafton have caught their fox at Badby Wood but for the close perseverance of Bishopp? And on Tuesday how would the North Warwickshire have held on during their long afternoon run but for Carr's determination? I have remarked nothing upon the sweetness and invariable scent that ever succeeds a long period of frost and snow. I have said nothing about the curious firmness of the turf or of the persistency with which foxes have held to it, each halcyon day.

THE WARWICKSHIRE

Thursday, March 14.—A brilliant gallop. Only twenty-one minutes; but something sharper, more decisive, more exhilarating than I have seen for years, since such time as, I remember, the Belvoir used to burst up their foxes, say, a dozen years ago. It was close upon 3.30 when this fox jumped up in a fallow field near Welsh Road Gorse; and, over the same strong line that they have run twice before in the last year or

so, hounds raced him to Shuckburgh Hill, and (to use Parson Russell's figurative term) "unbuttoned his waist-coat" by the side of the farm buildings beyond. I think we all got away. I am sure we had to ride all we knew to keep hounds in sight or even, for a good while, Major Mackeson in touch. For the pace allowed no dwelling, and the slashing Warwickshire fences permitted no chancing. You remember the line, Meltonians, who came over to ride it one day in December, and went away appreciative.

I recall from the hubbub of to-day's jovial ride Lord Chesham and Mr. Joliffe making strong play at starting, then after the canal Major Mackeson singling himself out in pursuit of the big dogs (running their hardest noisily in close cluster). Before my eyes still is that close-cut fence into the first grass lane, and in my ears the crash with which it at once resounded from three different spots. I can still look down into that Curtian gulph which the leading men had flown as if it were six feet rather than an honest sixteen. And I shall long remember the heated struggle with which the last few fences were clambered over—the sun, the south wind, the holding turf, and the tremendous pace having all told their tale. And yet there were at least two ladies among the leading dozen that climbed Shuckburgh Hill, the two I mean being Mrs. Burn and Mrs. Everard Brown, the latter having learned her riding in Australia.

Arrived on the top, those in the van could see the body of the pack just breaking covert. Next moment they discerned some five couple who, dashing through with a lead, had snapped their fox by the farm buildings of Shuckburgh House. Gad! it was a hot and cheery experience. I am afraid I should hardly have been able to enter even this much in my diary, but that the young gentleman who is ambitious enough to style himself my "second-horseman" considered I must by now have had quite enough, and accordingly took my other horse off to the train. Thither I had meekly to follow, while hounds trotted back in the cool of the

evening to Welsh Road Gorse, and I reached home in time for post. Grateful, however, am I for five as merry days as ever fell consecutively to my lot.

CHAPTER LXX

MELTON AT HOME AND ON VISIT

ON Monday, March 18, 1895, nothing near me but woodland (which in all humility I am content for three weeks yet as far as possible to waive), I gave myself a holiday, a jaunt amid old battle-grounds. I took train to Melton.

By reason of drought, heat, and dry blue mist, Monday was a hopeless day, as far as the making of sport was concerned ; but at least it gave opportunity of appreciating in some degree how a Melton field is at present composed and managed. The metropolis of fox-hunting ever, it has never in this quarter-century been more distinctly so than now. "The glass of fashion and the mould of form" are more its own than ever, whatever comparison you may choose to make as to sterling sport. On the latter head the Quorn will certainly yield to none, in this capricious winter of 1894-1895. They made great use of their final months of 1894 ; and somebody will surely tell you of their great achievement of Saturday last. But to continue with generalisms, 'twould be well worth your while to see with what courteous firmness Lord Lonsdale rules his field (though that field be almost madly on the ride after a ten weeks' frost), to note how exceptionally, nay, grandly, his men are mounted ; still more, I take the liberty of saying, to mark Tom Firr yet in his prime, and, should you wish, to seize the opportunity of a few Leicestershire fences in his wake. These last are, or may not be, an improvement on what we may remember them, say, ten years ago. The ox-rails have decayed ; but happily, and thanks to his lordship and his brother, the foul fiend wire has not taken their place for winter use. The field has, perhaps, changed less in this decade than the fences. Fully three-fourths remain, "their hair just grizzled," possibly "as in a green old age,"

but ready and able to take their part as of yore, though the young bloods, men and women (if such horrid term be admissible, even in these equality days), are said to be "terrific" whenever country and occasion tempt. The hale veteran of Melton is still to the fore, and one was delighted to see Colonel Forester; while Captain Boyce (if I may presume on old acquaintance so to say) is still the youngest and best equipped of all. Having duly, perhaps unnecessarily, made my obeisance to the good Quorn country, I returned, gratefully bearing away its pleasant dust upon my shoulders; nay, further, I renewed acquaintance not only with Melton's talented hatter, who once again put my shattered beaver into shape, but by the accident of hospitality with the den of the dear old doctor deceased, recalling pleasant memories of a lip sewn up and of the first collar-bone that refused to knit e'en under the pressure of a snuff-laden thumb.

On Tuesday a wholesome shower refreshed the rapidly parching earth, and its effects were shown in a happy afternoon's sport with the Pytchley. Wednesday, also, began with two promising trifles, each too soon at an end, but the evening's was a sterling run of forty minutes, before a serious check. The meet had been at North Kilworth. I maintain that our fields of this broken season are by no means of monstrous proportion, albeit to-day we had visitors from every quarter, many of these, perhaps, on their way to the Rugby Hunt Steeplechases. I cannot but think that Melton has been in some degree acting the kindly part of safety-valve. Well, there were enough, of familiars and strangers, to spread the country in rushing force, when from Kilworth Sticks hounds drove a fox, whose brush was bare as a bell-rope, across the Kilworth demesne and territory to Stanford Hall. It boots not to dwell longer upon this pursuit, beyond mentioning that the first quarter-hour was pleasant, the first few minutes exciting, and that within the hour the mangy fox unfortunately escaped, possibly by lying down in one of the little brakes by South Kilworth.

But the second trifle was, in its brief career, as warm and exhilarating as might be, akin, indeed, to the Hunt Cup

competition in the Rugby Chases of this Thursday. At 3.30 we were loosed off of a sudden from Elkington (Lord Spencer's) Covert ; and ten minutes later some ten men, out of a competitive field, had drawn rein after as merry a ride as such few minutes could convey. The gully of Elkington Bottom is a gruesome place into which to race with a horse somewhat out of hand ; but twice, in and out of its grassy walls, there dashed a hundred men or more as the scurry began. "Don't go there ! it's an awful big 'un !" was no encouraging shout to fall upon ears already pricked and set for the delusive rails, three strides in front. The voice was that of the best of yeomen and friends, who justified his warning later in the day by asserting that he had since spent an hour rescuing some other essayist from the deep grave beneath the timber. But my friend upon whom the shout was directed declares it struck him like a cold douche upon his backbone.

To Winwick House is a grassy and genial ride, with hounds thus flying, and if so be that, on this occasion at any rate, you had the *voûs* to take Goodall's route, keeping yourself clear of the bottoms that interfered so seriously with many of the gallopers of the left division. Before reaching Thornby, and just when a grand burst seemed assured, the little band pulled up with hounds baying over a badger earth. And among these (besides, it goes almost without saying, the Master and his three men) were, I have reason to believe, Messrs. Jameson, Graham, Adamthwaite, F. Bellville, Craig, Foster, Underwood, and about two more, I forget who, completing the party awaiting our arrival.

The next event was the run of the day, though I do not propose to inflict it at any great length upon you. (Already I owe you, unfortunate readers, apologies many for unavoidable verbosity on my part with regard to last week, a flood of sport necessitating instant flow of words.) At four o'clock we were stationed above the pretty gorge of Winwick Warren. Five minutes later we were away to the same dashing scent, our direction diverted almost immediately afterwards by the following quaint cause. As we careered in hot haste over the second fence we landed almost into the waistcoat of a hard young sportsman, whose

flushed face and panting bosom at once told their own tale. He had lost his horse in the previous scurry, and was now making the best of his way across country on foot, hoping to find his runaway among the crowd, or at least that some one would tender him a lift behind a friendly saddle. The position was pathetic in the extreme, the more so that he failed to reach the covert-side in time, and thus met our fox face to face. No matter, he only turned him a hundred yards. (This is our selfish view of the situation. For him, poor man, my heart has been bleeding since the moment I could divest myself of that first selfish thrill. Anxious indeed am I to learn the *dénouement*, as regards his progress and his search for his horse.) Now we rode on across the pastures till half-way to Yelvertoft Fieldside; then bore up over a ridge of light arable to Cold Ashby village and Firetail Spinney; saw hounds thread the latter; then rose the hill gladly with a leftward turn to Thornby. A wide vista of fine grazing ground lay before us, with the wooded heights that surround Cottesbrooke looming in the near distance. And across this hounds led us gaily, at what I may term a fair riding pace, not a strand of wire, and scarce a fence un-jumpable. There was one that seemed to border upon the latter character, as far as I could judge, for, of five horses that flew the blackthorn, three failed to reappear on the other side, having been clasped half-way by the broad-dug streamlet beyond the hedge. I fail to remember the exact locality; but I know that Cottesbrooke was very near, and that the hardest of the white-collared ones, knowing what to expect, very properly preferred a bridge to the needless risk.

We barely escaped a change, as hounds again swung leftward and upward, for Hazelbeach, a fresh fox, woolly and fat, jumping up within a hundred yards of hounds. The latter, luckily, had their noses down; and the whippers-in keeping quiet, the chase moved steadily on without a break, though at more measured pace.

There *ought* not to have been that check at the gateway by Hazelbeach Hall. We had no business to have crowded through it when hounds were at fault. They

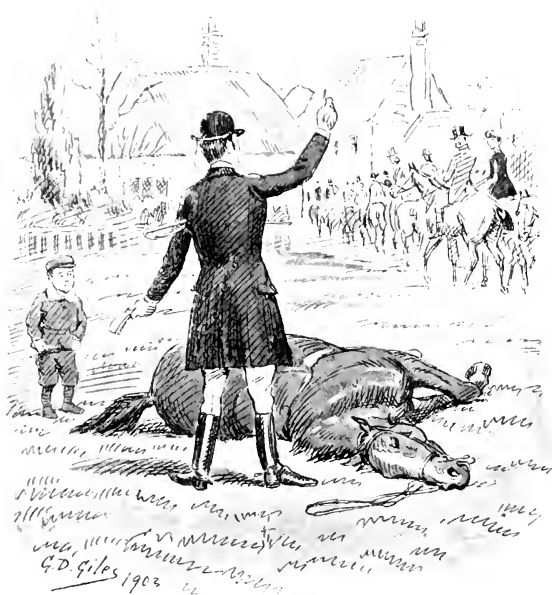
made their cast rightward ; but were never able to throw themselves leftward, till after a while their huntsman brought them back to where they would instinctively have turned but for our prohibitory presence. Their fox had turned alongside the fence as soon as he had cleared the gateway, and so he gained some five minutes, and, I think, his brush. For, though they followed him yet further along the glen yclept Maidwell Dale, nearly to Scotland Wood, they were hunting under difficulties that gradually put a stop to the game, in his favour.

A fine hunting-run was this, easy to ride, and none too severe upon horses, if only you kept moving on with hounds. Yet I hear of numerous tired horses, and I know of many very late dinners that night. The forty minutes to Hazel-beach contained nigh upon a five-mile point ; after which they certainly hunted on for fully two miles more.

As a postscript I give you the following, a perverted instance of "the ruling passion strong in death." It may have shocked, but it certainly served to amuse, the Pytchley field some few days ago. The chief baker of a certain little town and notable hunting centre of Northamptonshire has the wit to combine with the local business he carries on so creditably the occasional, and probably far more remunerative, *rôle* of penciller at adjacent race-meetings. At the end of a brief, hot gallop, on the very outskirts of the town in question, the baker's horse fell prone upon the road. The owner's first thought was to loosen the girths ; his next was as to how the breadcart was to be drawn about on the following morning ; his third was how to make possibly capital out of the occasion. As the dying animal eked out his last gasps, the enterprising proprietor stood on one side, whip in one hand, pocket-book in the other : "Two to one I'll lay he doesn't get up again ! Three to one !! Four to one !!! Five to one, I'll lay !!!! No takers ?" And with a sigh almost as loud as the poor steed's final breath, he returned his book to his pocket, and proceeded to carry off his saddle to the shop hard by.

Scraps of the week. Two facts, the one a merry frivol, the other gruesome and uninviting.

(1) Hounds had just killed a fox, happily in near neighbourhood of a hospitable house and stable. Visitor had wetted one eye; and with this he proceeded to claim his horse from the steaming stable. A steed was kicking and plunging, half wedged in the attempt to turn in a narrow stall. "My young horse! He knows me.



"Two to one he doesn't get up again"

Let me come!" Whereupon the young horse kicked him fiercely upon the thigh. Nothing discouraged, the would-be owner brought him out, mounted at the block, and discovered that the stirrup-leathers were half his proper length. "What's this? Take him back again!" And to clear his vision the horse-owner, a sedate and eminently sober member of our community, very pro-

perly re-entered the dining-room and proceeded to clear his vision by wetting the other eye.

(2) I had thought that our stricken landlords, such as remain in Northamptonshire, were terribly hurt by the recent gale, their parks disfigured, and their properties dismantled of the growth of centuries. But I little knew the commercial aspect of their latest misfortune, till one of them told me this day. It appears that, owing to influenza and its death-rate, and previous to the late destructive hurricane, the coffin-makers were at their wits' end for sufficient elm timber, and the price of this article of commerce and utility had gone up fifty per cent. People are fond of crediting Providence with all kinds of mean motives, pointing to escape from events which only Providence can decree. Think you that any one will be so impious as to suggest that Providence had ought to do with providing for the deficiency above named? At any rate elm-boarding has suddenly gone down twenty-five per cent. below its normal value; and the poor landowners, their estates disfigured and ungarnished, are now left practically without a market for their fallen treasures.

CHAPTER LXXI

WILL GOODALL'S LAST GALLOP

THE Pytchley brought their season to a happy climax on Saturday, April 6, 1895. A seven-mile point (I cannot make it more by the test of map and ruler) within the hour, over the classic pastures of Market Harboro', and with a clean kill at the end—are not these sufficient details wherewith to prove the excellence of the event of the day?

Saturday, you remember, came into being with a gale, so that almost with one accord we doffed the tall hat of deference and donned the low-class billycock, with which to weather the breeze. To all appearance, and in many respects undeniably, it was a dreadful morning. Your neighbour's greeting was indistinguishable, save for the

covertside smile with which our cheery field is wont to begin its day, whatever change of feature may be brought about by after-anxieties and little troubles. Each gate weighed a ton, and few knees and fewer tempers, I warrant, passed through that hour's ordeal altogether untouched, however little such mischances were counted



It was a dreadful morning

afterward. Worse than all, the glass was going downhill with no brake on, and the heavens were gloomy with rain clouds. Never again, as I have sworn many a time before, will I commit myself to forecasts of sport or prophecy of scent. At last I am quite safe in saying "I have never seen the weather in which hounds cannot run." Yet, two further conditions of the day must I give you, viz. a northerly wind and the ground full of moisture.

I jot down a few names that recur to me at the moment of writing, viz., in addition to the Master, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Dawkins, Mr. and Miss Czarnikov, Mr. and Mrs. E. Kennard, Mr. and Mrs. E. Cazenove, Rev. Cecil and Miss Legard, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Cunard, Mrs. and Misses Byass, Misses Bevan, Mr. and Miss D. Fenwick, Mr. and Miss Lloyd, Mrs. Simson, Mrs. S. Holland, Miss Banbury, Miss Liebhardt, Mrs. Drake, Captains Soames, Pender, Faber, Wheeler, Rev. — Devereux, Mr. Fernie and his huntsman, Count Larische and his huntsman (Peck), Messrs. Mills (3), Muntz (1), Foster, T. Jameson, Bishop, Craig, Broom, Pownall, Whateley, Phipps, Wartnaby, F. Underwood, Drage (2), Oldacre, Cowley, Harris, and I know not how many more; besides two more visitors from Melton, Messrs. Heneage and De Winton, who, like Count Larische, preferred to ride a hunt to looking on at the Army Point-to-Point, and were, I think, rewarded.

At about 12.40 we stood in the lane, up-wind and below Alford Thorns, a small hillside wood just south of Lubenham and of the border-line with Mr. Fernie. And in this position of course we could neither see nor hear anything, though on the other hand we were safely blocking the way against the rugged Hothorpe Hills that flanked our left. By Goodall's riding through the covert to us, with the well-known chuckle upon his lips, that as surely denotes a find as a hen's cackle proclaims an egg, we became aware that a fox was afoot, and by natural instinct we moved slowly down-wind towards the head of the covert. How we arrived at the necessity for galloping, I cannot tell. Somebody, I suppose, had scented it, and next moment we were dashing helter-skelter adown the slope in the direction of Lubenham. John's cap was to be seen bobbing ahead over the quick-recurring fences; at his heels Mr. Heneage's grey was plainly discernible, while Mr. Craig and two of our heavy weights came thundering after. These two first, flying, miles were not the least pleasant morsel of a thorough sterling hunt.

Directly our fox had crossed the road to the left of Farndon village, he was turned by man and dog, driven

round the outskirts of the village, and from that moment set his head for the Pytchley Woodlands. There were intricate little corner paddocks beneath the village, if you were foolish enough to follow hounds through them. But there was a clear open course, again, directly Goodall had his pack out upon the pastures beyond; and over these they ran hotly, the Master giving us a directing lead, till they dipped to the Market Harboro' and Northampton road, which they crossed barely half a mile from the former important city of the chase. A ploughed field hindered a moment (the astonishing scent of the day refusing to lend itself to the plebeian arable); but, once beyond this, hounds forged ahead upon the grass, leaving us first to unlock the white gates of the London and North-Western line of railway, next to pop under the Midland, without any great loss of time. "Follow Frank Underwood" was the word; and he led us through these intricacies rapidly, till in company with hounds we reached the Kettering road, behind Mr. Kennard's house The Barn, there to find progress for the moment stayed by a locked gate. Mr. De Winton was first to help us out of the difficulty, by boring through the dense bullfinch into the road; and was at Dingley (a mile further on) before a score of us had wriggled through in pursuit. Of these latter, by the way, one had scarcely ceased to wriggle even on reaching the valley beneath Dingley Wood. I don't fancy that his contortions caught the eye of any but myself, who happened to come struggling exactly in his wake, so I shall scarcely be betraying his identity if I venture to describe the very funniest fall I have seen during my years of experience in the hunting field. His horse was already on the farther side of the prickly and new-plashed hedge. But *he* was not quite—why, I know not, unless his steed had shot him first and jumped after at his leisure (not a wholly unknown experience in these parts). His coat-tails were over his head, and so were his arms, outstretched to grasp, with admirable pluck and tenacity, the reins of his struggling horse. To all appearance, as one rode up from behind, he was swimming for his life, his weight supported upon a sea of thorns; and nought but a pair of Mr.

Whiting's whitest to protect him in a position alike delicate and indelicate. For a moment I doubted the poor man might be impaled, and pulled up in that fever of hurried anxiety which makes our query to imply (1) Are you hurt, for your own sake? (2) Are you hurt, to my hindrance? No, he wasn't hurt; and he had got his horse. But wriggle as he would he could not complete his passage across the thorny channel, till, at last, eager to renew the chase, his captive steed gave a sudden powerful haul at the reins, pulling his master, minus every single button of his waistcoat, into the field beyond, there to set him going again, little the worse except for dishevelment and some loss of wind.

Another bleak fallow-field, meantime, had given another momentary halt, to which Goodall at once put an end by carrying hounds to the next fence. Through Dingley Wood they hunted over the next brow, regaining the grass by the help of a young hound (Solitude, I think, her name, but I know she is a daughter of Clasper), and thus pointed towards the valley of the Welland, the small woods of Brampton lying on the next ridge to the right, outlying forts, as it were, to the main chain of the Pytchley Woodlands. As Stoke Albany was reached, the sturdy scent that had favoured everywhere except on the odd strips of plough above mentioned, allowed hounds to drive hard by Major Pearson's house into, and through, Stoke Wood (another outlying fort). Goodall was quick as lightning in piercing the covert, caught a glimpse of his tired fox running the road beyond, and had hounds on his brush in a twinkling. For three fields they coursed him, and, two minutes under the hour, they nailed him as he entered a small plantation, a fine dog fox, stiff as a coursed hare.

Read it how you like, or as my indifferent tracing may have shown it, it was an exceptionally fine and satisfactory hunt, easy to see and readily to be enjoyed. The passage of the railways and their wired vicinity, on the outskirts of Market Harboro' of course put for a little while a bar on the riding, but in no way, fortunately, prevented our seeing hounds at work, or militated against the sterling

excellence of the run. A good woodland fox had been fairly done to death, over a straight course and to the tune of a holding scent and a sufficient pace. And thus, as I said before, a fitting climax was put to Mr. Wroughton's first and very successful season. May he be leader and organiser in many more, and without the fell interference of such arctic weather as that of young '95.

CHAPTER LXXII

SPRING WOODLANDS

OUR seven days to date, April 18, 1895, have been as of March, a month that in its characteristics of dust and dryness had so far been spared us. Well into April has winter brought us; and fox-hunting continued at its best; but, since my last notes, a chill east wind and a frequent hot sun have been incrusting the ground, wherever exposed, and, it may be added, have been bronzing every face within their reach, till womanhood now bears almost a manly look, and manhood looks as if it had been earning its living, by fox-hunting.

Livelihood or extravagance, the pursuit will soon be over; our happy winter society dispersed to other scenes; and middle England left asleep. There yet remains here a day or so with the Woodland Pytchley; and at the moment of writing the Atherstone have not quite concluded their programme. Saturday 13th, with the latter pack, gave us the pleasantest little item in open country. They had met at Brinklow; and the sun had beaten fiercely upon them while they commenced the day upon a good fox from the wood of All Oaks. With a knowledge of the conditions of the day that stood him in good stead, Reynard at once put several dusty cornfields between himself and the Atherstone dog-hounds (a striking pack in appearance, and vigorous in their work withal). So he had run them out of scent before they could reach Wilcox's Gorse, in the North Warwickshire country.

By the way—I did not mean to have penned it, the

more so that I had permitted myself the liberty of joining personally in the chaff over an old friend's vicissitudes, but I think I must tell you, if only as a hint how most effectually to re-enter public life. Now, there used to be among us one whose beaming face and twinkling eye were in themselves a welcome to the covert-side, and whose courage never failed when we turned to him to open a bullfinch or to shiver a top-rail. For the last season he had been missing from our midst, I should say, from our front. What had become of "Smasher," or, with the more customary and affectionate prefix, "little Smasher"? Many a time we looked for him in vain when the way was closed and the timber was strong. Given up hunting, probably. Waiting till the Stock Exchange is once again a Tom Tiddler's Ground. Such and such like conjectures were rife for a while; then, the nine days' memory which will attach to very few of us being exhausted, they were given up, and Smasher's place to a certain extent knew him no more. In the spring noontide of Saturday, however, it happened, while these few dry tillage-fields were being traversed by the huntsman and his baffled pack, we were all—a goodly company, and familiar with all who make it a business to hunt in the Grass Countries—drawn up in a road, to which at right angles ran a green lane. Over the green lane and slightly behind us (not an altogether unusual reversal of position in these bustling regions) Wilson and his first lieutenant had just appeared, popping neatly in and out of the two tolerably high fences, with the pack between them. Nothing more to come, was there? Yes, if you please, there was Smasher!—"little Smasher"—flying as if from the heavens, through the top twigs of the second hedge! On his back and alone he lit among the astonished hounds and before our still more astonished eyes; and it was only when he rose to his feet, to beam upon us with his well-remembered smile and with the same laughing glitter in his eyes, we fairly realised that this was our own, our long-lost Smasher. The welcome that greeted him, as he walked up to the crowd, and turned into the green lane to seek his horse (who had, you understand, stopped suddenly half-way), could not have been more cordial and

vociferous than if he had been one of Umra Khan's captives just liberated. He had come late to the meet; he had informed no one of his intended arrival; and this was the manner he chose in which to reappear with effect among his friends. (A fact you will please accept as being as unexaggerated as it was startling.)

In the early afternoon Mr. Inge drew Coombe Wood—a certainty, they said, and a certainty it proved. Hounds showed at once they could drive upon the grass. They ran hotly across the park; and then hunted through a small wood, Hill Park I fancy. To accompany the pack again upon the grass, the field were called upon to thread quite the eye of a needle, in the shape of a very narrow bridge, guileless of parapet, but having a rail that required jumping on the near side, a small hand-gate to open at the farther end, while a deep watercourse ran below. Happy for yourself and your nervous system if you arrived thereat in good time. I think it was a hateful place—a kind of Devil's Causeway. Beyond this the chase opened out westward, our fox having been headed from a northern course. Along the green valley hounds ran well, and we found ourselves upon the bank of a stream that, like the village akin to it, boasts, I believe, of the bucolic name of Sow. Its banks were deep and its bottom was vague; and the scene, as usual at such like watercourses in the Shires, was varied in the extreme, comedy and confusion being the reigning elements. Having for my part stood fully five seconds on my own feet, while my horse was collecting his four, one at a time, from underneath him and me, I considered I had done my fair share towards the entertainment; and, accordingly, was glad to ignore all else that I saw going on around me. After the village of Sow, a mile or two's hunting (the spires of Coventry within sight); then a stick-heap, from which hounds soon pulled their fox. Time of run, about forty-five minutes—prolific of fencing; with the turf in first-rate order for that admirable exercise, according to our notion of a fox-chase in Merry England.

Rightly enough boasting themselves "the most beautiful woodlands in England," that section of the Pytchley

country which nowadays not only serves as cub-hunting ground, but is fortunate enough also to have a separate pack royally maintained in its midst, is never, as I have already said and repeated, seen to such advantage as in the spring. If that spring be moist and exceptionally late in coming, so much the better. And it is in that guise we see it now, viz. so to put it, without mud and without dust. The woods and their admirably kept rides are sound and velvety within; the broad green acres separating wood from wood, to an extent that gives them a right to be termed the ground-work of this timber-tapestried piece; these are firm but springy, and offer no jar to the gallop, while, as for the occasional arable, that has been gently moistened night after night by timely showers.

It was said some years ago by a huntsman, to one who had undertaken on emergency to work these woodlands through the winter, "Beg your pardon, sir, but aren't there a many trees for your liking?" Perhaps, it might be owned, there *are* a good many trees beneath which to wander, almost unattended, in midwinter—for the Woodland Pytchley field is not at all times as well developed as at the present moment. Moreover, among these trees the pathways and glades—especially after frost and snow—at times hold a horse with appalling tenacity. But in sunny September or brilliant April the shade may be welcome, and the woodlands are in every respect at their brightest and best. Hounds can in April dash freely through the undercover and drive over the fresh springing grass, while horses fairly dance upon the turf, and go at speed down the green rides that two months ago would have held them like wax.

Do not suppose that the Brigstock vicinity and its so-called forests are wholly woodland. Far from it. But trees are the predominant feature, even of the open areas betwixt covert and covert. The Duke of Buccleuch's beautiful estate, with Boughton as its centre, is especially remarkable in this respect. I have often before described the wonderful mileage of elm-avenue which surrounds and intersects the property. Suffice it to repeat here that about 1740 "John the Planter," Duke of Montagu,

finding himself balked in his scheme of planting an avenue along which he might ride to London, proceeded to lay out the same number of miles (seventy-three) of elm-trees, in double rows, upon his own property. Of the 50,000 or upwards of these splendid trees, more than 2000 were levelled in the storm of last month, great stretches of avenue being uprooted, and the whole beautiful estate covered with desolation. Two or three years at least will be required to remove the mere wreckage, while the gaps can never, of course, be adequately filled. It has long been an impression that the ordinary lifetime of an elm is about 150 years. Never did we expect to be offered such proof of the theory as is now presented by these broken avenues upon the Duke of Buccleuch's Northamptonshire property.

For Saturday, April 20, Mr. Austin Mackenzie had advertised Brigstock as his meet. It was told that the Cottesmore were also out, and it was rumoured that fox-hunting still flickered elsewhere in the Midlands. But the woodlands of Pytchleydom were our present and appropriate ground; and were now, as I have said, to be seen at their best, though nothing like the number of visitors availed themselves of the opportunity that I had quite expected to see. Those who had come from the westward had for the most part sauntered thither through Geddington Chase, whose lawnlike rides and flower-decked coppices are now a sight of vernal and absolute beauty. Lord Spencer had taken advantage of his Easter recess again to look in once or twice upon country that in the past has afforded him so much enjoyment hunting hounds—I have heard him aver, justly occupying in his opinion first place among the joys of life. Besides him, there were at Brigstock Mr. Fernie and Mr. Dunlop, Rev. C. Legard and Mr. Bentley, Mr. Gordon, Mr. Crisp, and two others of the Fitzwilliam, Mr. Hugh Owen, Mr. and Mrs. Sharman, Rev. N. Nash, and perhaps two dozen others.

With these Mr. Mackenzie moved off northward, to a district wherein small woods dot a pleasant country of which the village of Benefield is approximately the centre.

From Banner Wood to Oundle Wood, and with a sharp twist back from Oundle Wood to that of Bearshank is no great journey, but it brought about some quick and pleasing hound-work.

On Monday, for a last occasion, Mr. Mackenzie took out over thirty couple of hounds, and made an excellent hunt. They ran for fifty minutes and a full six-mile point before bringing their fox to book, and ran surprisingly hard, both in covert and out. Not over a Leicestershire country, it is true. But what would you have? This was on the 22nd day of April. Besides, I am inclined now to doubt whether I have not all my life placed a false estimate upon Leicestershire. For, was it not said to me in all gravity during a recent trip to the Isle of Aylesbury, "Yes, I know Leicestershire, and it wouldn't be half a bad country if they hunted the stag over it twice a week, and ran a drag on two other days!" It was a woman who thus delivered herself, I must admit; but she spoke with an air of conviction that carried weight, even if it gave one a chill down the backbone; and, besides the fact of her being an undeniable rider, is it not granted nowadays that there are very few subjects indeed upon which the better sex are not quite as well informed as ourselves? I am told that even at Melton they are in the habit of discussing scientific fox-hunting with quite as much zest and acumen as the younger men-disciples.

But I am wandering into a sphere of speculation. Come back with me, I pray you, into Rockinghamshire, the centre of whose forest is marked by a white post (about half a mile from Rockingham Castle); and here Mr. Mackenzie threw off this morning.

To the friendly discursiveness of a bystander—not unlikely the keeper from the Castle—I am indebted for the following tale, new to me at all events. When George Osbaldeston was Master of the Pytchley, he bet a thousand guineas that he would meet at this white post at twelve o'clock, kill his fox, and sit down to dinner at his house in Carlton House Terrace at eight. To do this he had laid a string of thoroughbreds on the road, at five-mile intervals; and in the result he reached his destina-

tion with an hour to spare. Fortune befriended him, in so far that, finding his fox quickly, he ran him into the rocks on the hillside very shortly, dislodged him without difficulty, and did his eighty-mile gallop with plenty of time in hand.



Baffled by a collie dog

Well, Mr. Mackenzie had no thousand-guinea stake to win. But he was away on his fox soon after 12.30, and handled him before two o'clock. Corby Hill is, I think, the name of the first piece of woodland which goes to make the chain of covert-fringed avenue stretching to Dene. "A big dog-fox, with no hair on his brush" was the report

of whipper-in and of a visiting huntsman (the most enthusiastic of all holiday-makers, I have ever noticed, is a huntsman enjoying himself with another pack). Hounds were away on his very stump ; but were baffled in the first half-mile of the avenue by a collie dog, himself the very facsimile of a fox. How marvellously good was the scent was shown immediately afterwards by the way hounds took it up on a dusty road, and carried it at best pace over wheatfield and driest twitch-land, if I may coin a word to express the goose-to-the-acre ground that hereabouts occasionally takes the place of pasture. Leaving the appropriately named Geese Wood to their right, the pack dashed into the narrow chain of the Harringworth Woods, some two miles long, though less than one quarter broad. "Beautiful coverts for getting hold of a fox" I have heard them termed by our white-collared professor. Something occurred in covert to put off the body of the pack, for, as the Master reached the end by hard galloping, he found a single hound going on alone. Blowing his horn with vigour, he hurried on beyond the next wood, Spanhope, or Spanner, thinking there to overtake other hounds in front. But as he gained the farther side, out came the brushless one close to his horse's feet. Half-a-dozen couple appearing promptly to the horn, they were laid on at once and went forward vigorously through the Laxton Woods into the great jungles of Wakerley. Hunting right up to their fox, the pack now all well together, they met him as he turned back from a woodcutter, and chased him round and round through the underwood. Every moment it seemed they must snap him, as he scudded hither and thither under bare poles. From their very jaws he went below. But from a rabbit-hole hounds soon dragged and demolished him. A sporting run and a proper finish.

CHAPTER LXXIII

A WET, WILD GALLOP WITH THE FALLOW BUCK

WHEN the chase has died out nearly everywhere else, the New Forest rings daily still with note of horn and hound.

Exceptionally late, and exceptionally favourable is this spring of 1895, the vegetation nearly a month behind its time, and the ground, never as yet approaching hardness, now revived to perfection by recent downpour. The Forest, to be at its best for hunting and for riding, should be at its wettest. So say all who know it far more intimately than I can pretend to.



The dangers of bog and bough

That there belongs to all hunting in the New Forest—even the winter through—some special charm which, though not necessarily patent to the uninitiated, grows vastly with experience, is indisputable. Else would not so many good men find delight and content therein. I speak not of the visitors. To the latter are obvious enough the beauties of forest scenery and the excitement of galloping to hounds amid the milder dangers of bog and bough (the

rude cause already, I learn on arrival, of bruised limb and even discoloured eye to more than one fair novice). They come in autumn and they come in spring, between whiles going elsewhere to ride across Nature's face where its features are less closely set. But, believe me, the winter-*habitué* of the Forest is no discontented mortal. He takes his daily pleasures with avidity, hunting the fox four days a week, the deer twice, within an area considerably less, if I mistake not, than would suffice for the larger country of many of our single packs, and with a stud that elsewhere would carry him perhaps two days a week. To the casual, on the other hand, who like myself tramps gratefully hither in spring or fall, there is everything to show the Forest a happy playground.

Since my last visit Captain Lovell has relinquished management of the sport which he had originated, and had so long and so ably maintained. The present mastership is in the joint hands of Mr. St. L. Walker and Mr. Kelly, with Allen holding the post of huntsman with as much vigour and practical skill as ever. The majority of the pack, beyond a draft from Lord Portman, remain the same; but Moonstone, the old and invaluable tuffer, gave up his place, and the ghost, with the late frost.

On Thursday, April 26, I had the opportunity of joining in one of the merriest deer-hunts that it has ever been my luck to witness in the New Forest. My difficulty will now be at all duly to describe it. This I can only attempt by presupposing that you know even less than myself of the Forest and of the chase of the fallow buck. Admit this, and I run no risk of your pulling me up on a point of geography or technicality of woodcraft.

The hunt in question took place all in the north of the Forest, where heatherclad highlands alternate with wide-reaching woodlands of a primeval type; where the trees grow wide apart, with tall holly-bushes as the only undergrowth. To gallop and crouch, twist and turn at best pace for fifteen minutes through such wild covert, in eager endeavour to keep close to hounds; then to emerge and race onward for thirty more over the brushing heather, varying the latter with a dart through one well-rided wood

and another, is no unexciting experience. Nay, it was delightful, including as it did the most stirring phases of riding in chase of the wild fallow deer. The dash of the tufters, the separating of the buck from his herd, the laying-on of the pack, the fierce drive of the leading couples, and the ceaseless work of the huntsman to keep his pack together and upon one quarry, these go to make up the interest, the charm, the business, and the science of a form of wild sport that is to be seen only in the New Forest.

Thursday, April 25, came in with heavy rain, which, added to the downpour of Wednesday, brought the Forest to its happiest condition for riding; though, as I learn, such excessive overflow of water is apt to militate against the successful hunting of the buck. With water everywhere, he can, as soon as he gets blown, find endless opportunity of puzzling hounds by obliterating trail and scent.

At noon the rainclouds had drifted off; and we splashed the last mile to the meet in no worse discomfort than may be caused by the uplift of muddy water which your horse on such occasions often bestows freely on yourself and your comrades alongside.

The Royal Oak at Fritham was the fixture—one usually named for the occasional hunt of such red deer as still remain about the north of the Forest and its adjacent woods. But to-day was for the fallow buck, of which khubber had been brought that some were in the vicinity of Shultze's Powder Mills. And thither we wended our way; Allen having two couples of trusty tufters in leash.

At these Powder Mills is a small reservoir, of which it is related that during a lull in the last frost a fallow buck, while running before hounds, took to the ice and crossed in safety—a most unusual feat, I am told. The ice also being in a very shaky condition, it was fortunate that the executive were able to stop hounds: and, taking them round, they soon afterwards killed their buck.

On the present occasion the tufters, directly they were slipped, took up the line from the very slot; and, throwing their tongues loudly, led us at once into a network of holly bushes. Wriggling through this as best we could, we soon

found ourselves splashing through a sea of muddy spray, along the firm, wet rides of the great mass of wood known as Island Thorns. At best pace we rode blindly on, up hill and down, round and about, always in pursuit of Allen and his echoing horn, while the deep notes of the tufters were occasionally to be caught from right or left or front. This went on till, as we reached the farther end of the next great woodland (Sloden), we found ourselves emerging almost in company with four deer, a small antlered buck, two does, and a bigger buck whose horns had already been shed. At the same moment it was reported that the tufters had separated yet another buck from this band ; and him, after the well-trained hounds had been secured, we proceeded to hunt with the main pack. It has ever seemed to me that the hot, jolly scramble with the tufters while the bucks are being separated is by no means the least enjoyable part of the sport.

In laying-on to a deer there is never any of the hurry to "get away on his brush" that belongs to a start with a fox. Discussion and counsel, among the assembled heads of departments, is not only the customary prelude, rendered necessary by the desire to make sure of the best buck and his route, but is comfortably admissible inasmuch as, unlike the fox, the buck seldom travels on far till he finds himself pushed ; and, moreover, let him be gone, say, a quarter of an hour (whole hours, if you wish, sometimes), the degree of scent he leaves upon his trail is little less vivid than at first tread.

Some little confusion of deer continued during the next twenty minutes or so, our buck having apparently rejoined others. But all at once he crossed the road by the Powder Mills almost among us ; the hounds were laid on afresh on the best of terms, and off we set westward through a wilderness of holly-bush and timber—the wood of Anses, if I am correct—the pack now all together, and maintaining a capital chorus. With a horse well used to the Forest, it was pleasant and comparatively easy to maintain touch of hounds, swing round this tree, shaving that ; swishing between holly-bushes and earning their spur-marks

upon one's face. Open drains, too, frequently crossed the route; for the Forest, however primeval in its general character, is carefully tended in the interests of the public, superfluous water being directed off, the bogs all eliminated from its grassy ways, bridge or ford established wherever needed, and the timber tended in accordance with the best principles of forestry.

But we are running hard, now down the broad, sound rides, the waterplash enveloping some fifty people as with a wet cloud. They are all habited for a damp day; and it matters little that their features soon become almost indistinguishable beneath the black forest-mud. Now the trees disappear as we bear upward and leftward; and the giant holly-bushes remain the only hindrance to an open course. These again are cleared, and the hillside stands forth, heatherclad to girth-level. Over this the big hounds heartily fling, crossing the open at hot speed, till, passing above Broomy Lodge, they plunge into Broomy Wood. Another and a wider stretch of heather beyond, and, over this, five couple of hounds racing onward, headed conspicuously by one nearly white in colour. Mr. Heseltine and Mr. Soames were quickest in pursuit of these—if need be, to stop the light-coloured hound running singly ahead. But Mr. Lascelles had seen more. Against the sky-line in front he had caught sight of some three or four deer disappearing before hounds. The hunted buck could scarcely be with these. So with Mr. Walker and the huntsman he looked round for another line; and forth it came to the full tone of several couple of trusty throats, the two lines crossing the open hill almost parallel to each other, and entering the wooded enclosure of Milkham about half a mile apart. Leftward galloped the earlier couples, with Mr. Heseltine alongside, through Milkham over the plain again to the edge of Bratley and through the adjoining enclosure of Slufers, thence still more leftward again across the heath, till, no horn appearing, he stopped them on their way back to Anses Wood and the Powder Factory—forty-five minutes of the best of forest-going to the stoppage, not a bog, not a moment but with hounds close at hand and in sight.

The body meantime (of a pack of about sixteen couples) had swung rightward through Milkham, and westward through the neighbouring enclosures of Roe, Linford, and Red Shot. Now their deer, a young buck, was done, and, bar accident and change, already in their hand. Several times he was viewed as he clung to the water; and shortly they had him, almost as the cup seemed to be dashed from their lips. For in the last five minutes full half the remaining hounds were carried off by yet another deer.

This, as I read it, and as far as I could see it, is the story of the gallop; and thus, almost at the moment that the hard-driving couples were being checked and caught up on Ocknell Plain, was the original buck brought to hand on the border of Appleslade, the westernmost enclosure of the Forest.

The main difficulties of all in the chase of the fallow deer are, it would seem, to avoid a change, and to prevent the pack from splitting. So uniformly sweet is the scent of the deer, and so readily also do they come into view, that hounds are liable at any moment to be distracted from their proper quarry. It was on this account, I assume, that Captain Lovell used to keep his horn going freely with the leading couples throughout the run. Allen in the same way cheers hounds as much as possible to the head with voice and horn. For, take it where you will, from Aylesbury to Exmoor, from the New Forest to Dublin and The Ward, deerhounds will invariably string out to some extent in the open, and generally in covert. Also, you cannot depend upon every hound at all times throwing his tongue, especially when racing at the head. The richness and fulness of scent of deer is, I have learned to think, accountable for these deficiencies; the leading hounds being, as it were, intoxicated with its volume, the tail hounds well satisfied with the bounteous residue awaiting them. As a matter of fact, the New Forest deerhounds, chiefly of Bramham blood, are more honest and free with their tongues than any pack I have seen in chase of cloven foot. And this is specially noticeable in woodland.

I can pretend to give no list at all adequate of those who hunted on this day or the following. But I venture to suggest the few following names, besides those already mentioned above, viz.: Lord Howth, Admiral Acheson, Sir Reginald Graham, Colonel Martin Powell, Mr. H. Powell, Mr. Thursby, Lady Cantelupe, Misses Heseltine, Mr. and Miss Compton, Miss Glyn, Mrs. Osgood, Miss Rimmer, Miss Phipps, Mr. and Mrs. Miles, Misses Dobby, Mr. and Mrs. Austin, Major Talbot, Major Grant, Captain Standish, Captain Gurney, Captain Bald, Captain Torbin, Messrs Balthwaite, Cazenove, Gosling (2), Horsey, Hulse, Kelly, Kewley, Palk, Percival, Pierrepoint, Walker, Wallis, Wingrove.

Sporting rather than romantic, surely, have been the attributes of the New Forest during this cold and backward spring. Till within a day or two of the advent of May hardly a green leaf broke the brown monotony of wood and heath. The very gorse-bushes had all languished under the winter's cold; and, for the first time, I suppose, for many a year, proffered no flowery encouragement to young couples, whose advent is as regular about Eastertide as that of the stranger-sportsman. Indeed 'twas almost sad to mark these newly-joined wanderers in the melancholy forest, nought to cheer them, beyond themselves, save the echoing note of the cuckoo and the thristle.

In their misfortune we were the gainers. The cool heaven and the wet ground ministered to our requirements, if it brought a damping influence to bear upon their bliss. While they could no longer recline in absorbing idleness under the shade of the coupled beech-oak near by Rufus' Stone, and learn from the duplicate-tree a fittest moral of conjugal life, we were riding, daily and gaily, to hounds upon a ravishing scent. But while poetry and romance, rightly or wrongly, are not generally supposed to hold a leading place in the average sportsman's mind, few of them fail to welcome the blend apparent in the utterances of their best representative writers—such, for instance, as George Whyte-Melville, "poet, author, sportsman." I am led to this comment by the fact that

I took down with me to the Forest the new edition of the Druid's works, together with a well-written life of the Druid—whom Lord Rosebery aptly termed "half-sportsman half-poet—"Silk and Scarlet," "Post and Paddock," &c., you know them all. And in their present form, as issued from the office of *Baily's Magazine*, they are likely to decorate the table of every fox-hunter, of every sportsman, who likes his literature to be above the moderate.

CHAPTER LXXIV

THE LATE WILLIAM GOODALL

NOT only by Pytchley men, but by all who by practice or hearsay know something of the Shires of England, will the news of Will Goodall's untimely death be received with sorrow. When still to all appearance in the prime of health and strength, as he certainly was in the height of his fame and capacity, a sudden internal illness seized him, against which neither the best science of the day nor his own grand constitution availed anything. So at the age of forty-eight, after hunting the Pytchley for twenty-one seasons, Will Goodall, the second of a glorious name, died before his time, and was buried in Brington churchyard, in "that nice open spot," as he described it in his dying request to Lord Spencer. The latter, his friend and benefactor for many a year, had, with Mr. Wroughton, been unflinching and unsparing in anxious effort, if possible to save or prolong the life of a faithful and brilliant servant. Sir William Broadbent had been called in; but the whole tender treatment of a hopeless case had developed upon the shoulders of Dr. Bond, who stood by his patient as it were by his own near relative.

Of all distressing spectacles there can be none more painful to witness than that of a human being, in full vigour of strength and intellect, all at once beckoned by death—bidden, against his or her will, at short notice to surrender life and joy and friendship. What is known as "sudden death" may often be a merciful one. It may

come at a happy moment, in the turmoil of sport or strife. I am one of those who believe, for instance, that the fate of Major Whyte Melville and of Captain Middleton was one they would have preferred for themselves. But a hopeless, unlooked-for illness is welcome to none, and is bitter without qualification to those who hold dear the life and comradeship of the doomed one.

Think not that Will Goodall rebelled. He was too brave, too good a man for that, though even from his lips, while yet he remained ruddy of face and strong of grip, was forced once the sad plaint, "It's hard lines, it's hard lines! And to think of that beautiful testimonial of only last year, when I was so well and strong!"

Singularly like his father's death (some forty years ago), at the early age of forty-one, was that of *our* Will Goodall. I give you the Druid's words from "Silk and Scarlet," and you shall judge: "He was laid low at last, at daybreak on the third anniversary of that very May day on which the Hunt had presented him with its memorable tribute. They buried him just within the churchyard gate at Knip-ton, and under the shade of that bold chain of woodlands in which his cheery voice had been heard, early and late, for seventeen seasons. By all, from 'My kind Lord Duke,' as he called him when his Grace bent over him to bid him farewell, down to the humblest labourer, for whom he always had some pleasant greeting or other, his memory will ever be cherished. Those who knew more of his inner life, or saw him on his deathbed, could trace to its true source that consistently gentle firmness that made him all-powerful to hold in check a crowd of horsemen; and it would be well if many who love the sport as dearly as he did would ponder, now that he is gone, over the great and striking lesson which his life taught and his fame sealed."

Does not most, or all, of this apply to our Will, who lies now in "that nice open spot" of Brington churchyard, near the kennels of Althorp and opposite the heavy woodland of Nobottle, the gloomy depths of which he had for many a year brightened and enlivened? In his case, "My kind Lord Duke" was personified by his former and ever

kind master, Lord Spencer, whose almost brotherly kindness was happiness to him in his dying hour.

Twenty-one years huntsman to the Pytchley, hardly a year's indifferent sport, and not one enemy in all that record! If ever a man could fold his hands upon his deathbed thanking God he died in peace with all, it was Will Goodall. And thus at last he passed quietly away, just a year after his once bright and brilliant contemporary, Frank Beers, and only a few weeks after another famous and honoured professional, John Jones of Cheshire.

The gift of sympathy and kind-heartedness was the key to Will Goodall's wide popularity among men, as it was in a great measure to his success with hounds. The latter loved him, in kennel and out. He never deceived them, he never called upon them unnecessarily, and never went without them. On the contrary, like his father, he would rather fetch when he wanted them. And he hated to disappoint them. Many a time, when at the end of a long day he was forced to have them stopped in the failing light, have we seen him jump from his saddle to pet and caress them—as it were, to beg their pardon for the necessity. And often and often on his way home, while, ill-advisedly some of us thought, he declined “bite or sup” for himself, would he beg a loaf or two of bread, that his darlings might each have a crumb.

Apart from this finer feeling of natural kindliness, Will owed much of his success to his quickness, and to the fact that he never made a move without a distinct, well-calculated object; even more to his self-possession, a talent engrained by constant effort upon a disposition naturally excitable; and more than all, possibly, to the electric faculty which belongs to such men as are born to shine above their fellows. He loved his art with his whole soul. He was no great theorist; but he brought long and thoughtful practice carefully to bear upon the instinct within him.

His career began by the Honourable George Fitzwilliam setting him to ride second horse to George Carter, after which he became third whipper-in to the Pytchley. Thence he shortly went on to the Burton, of which

Mr. Henry Chaplin was then Master ; and in 1870 he was appointed first whipper-in to the Belvoir. After four seasons in this capacity he came as huntsman to the Pytchley ; and some ten months ago he was presented by a grateful, appreciative field with nearly £1300 in gold, and a silver salver, on which was inscribed : " Presented to Will Goodall in testimony of the high character, good conduct, and great ability he has shown during the twenty years he has been huntsman to the Pytchley, and of the respect and esteem in which he is held by all classes of the community."

As a rider he possessed in an extraordinary degree the knack of being with his hounds, whenever it was at all possible for any one so to be ; and this without laying himself out for competition with the over-ardent spirits among his field. In other words, he was more constantly near his hounds than any one else ; and yet he jumped few fences actually first. He appeared to realise that, as his part was to hunt the hounds, it was certainly not worth his while to get down oftener than necessary, and that first investigation and experiment might well be left to the younger and more hot-headed of his field. And thus, in spite of his riding full weight for his inches (his exact weight we never knew, but it could scarcely have been fourteen stone), and in spite of his seldom if ever losing place in a run, he generally got through a season in Northamptonshire with not more than two or three falls, some seasons without even one, a performance little less than wonderful. Yet we remember, when he whipped-in to the Belvoir, came we across the Melton Brook, or even the Whissendine wearing its ugliest aspect, and we all stood shivering on the brink and awaiting a lead, it has been uttered more than once, " Here, Will ! This is your place ! Give us a lead ! " And he gave it with the same merry chuckle with which afterwards he would point to the " little bitches " streaming out of harm's way, with a blazing scent upon the Pytchley pastures. Merriness and joy were with him the essence of the chase ; and from him it was infectious—a fact that in no small degree will account for the swollen popularity of some of the more attainable Pytchley fixtures.

It was an intense delight to him to hunt hounds ; and it was a happiness to go hunting with him. As was said a day or two ago in no sense of impiety, by one who appreciated him fitly and to whom his memory is dear, "Will Goodall never did a mean or an unkind thing in his life. If there be happy hunting-grounds in the next world, he surely will be found hunting hounds."

No more need be added here beyond expression of deep sympathy with the widow who mourns him and who tended him so unremittingly, so thoughtfully, and so bravely through his last, his only illness ; and of hope that the boys he has left (to the elder of whom he was proud to point as "Will Goodall the Third") may grow up to do credit to a name that has been honoured by hundreds of good sportsmen and is honoured by many hundreds still.

They buried him this summer afternoon (Wednesday, August 21) beneath the elm-tree of Brington churchyard, on the hilltop overlooking the green valley of Haddon and Buckby, each pasture and hedgerow in the distance a memo. of his happy career. The sturdy elm in prime of life has by curious coincidence itself been lopped during the present year, by stroke of storm. But its remainder branches stretch shelteringly above his grave ; and to-day o'erhung an assemblage doing fit honour to the dead.

Could the dead have looked down upon that cluster of stalwart men, dark-clad and sorrowing, the very opposite in aspect, but consistent in heart and sentiment, the same he had met many a score of times at covert-side, proud indeed might he have been, and almost welcomed his fate.

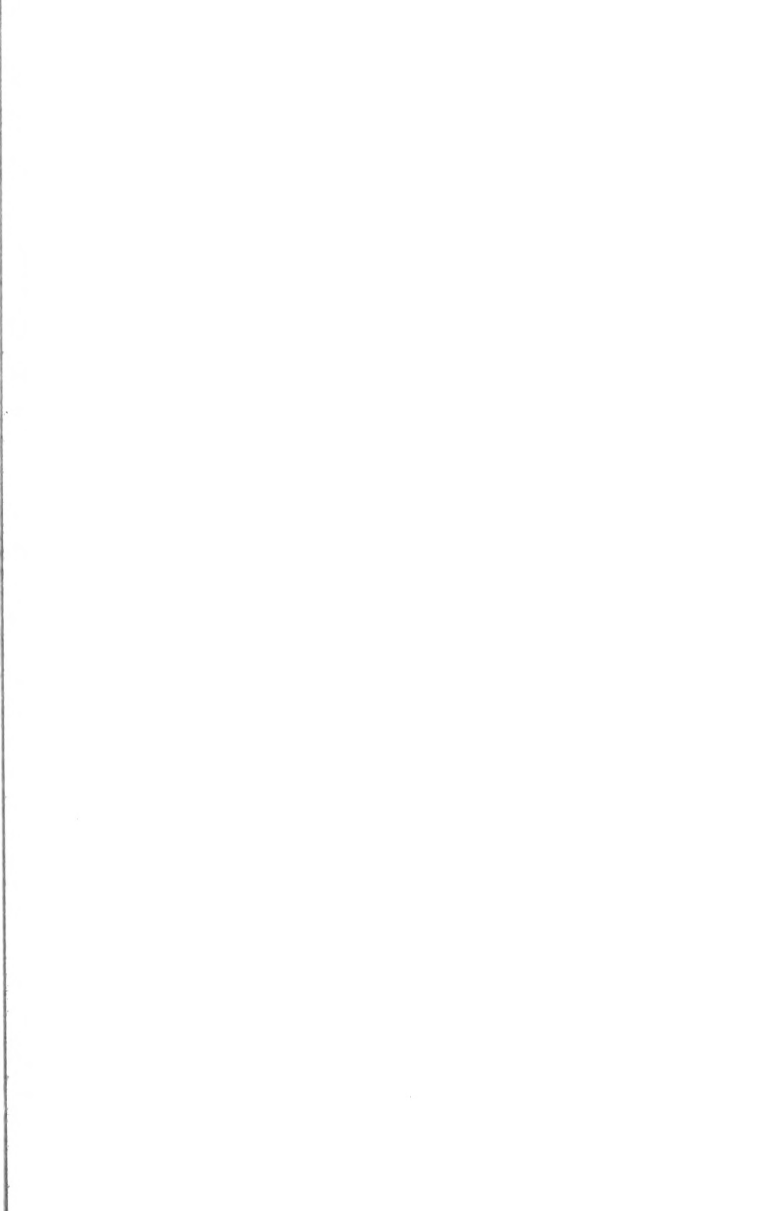
Brothers, themselves men of mark in similar spheres (Frank Goodall of the Kildare one of them), close followed his coffin. Every Pytchley man within reach, headed by the veteran Mr. R. Bevan, and scores of Pytchley yeomen led by Mr. Sanders of Brampton, were at the graveside. Lord Spencer and his countess (by whose thoughtful care his coffin had been made beautiful as his final illness had been eased) attended his burial. Frank Gillard and Tom

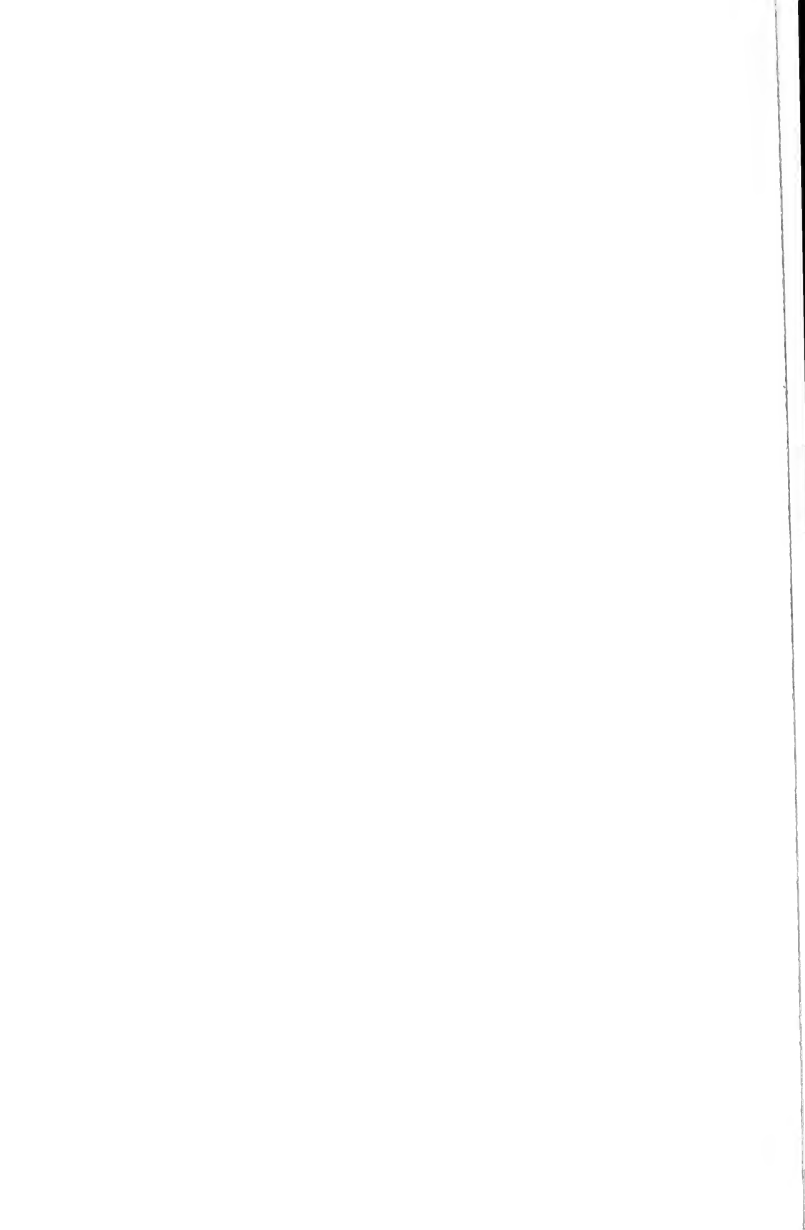
Firr had come to bid him God-speed ; and the same wish was embodied in many a lovely wreath and cross remitted from afar. He was lowered to the grave by his whippers-in, among whom Charles Isaacs for the sad occasion again enrolled himself ; and his earthly remains went to earth in the tearful presence of a body of men whom he would have loved to recognise.

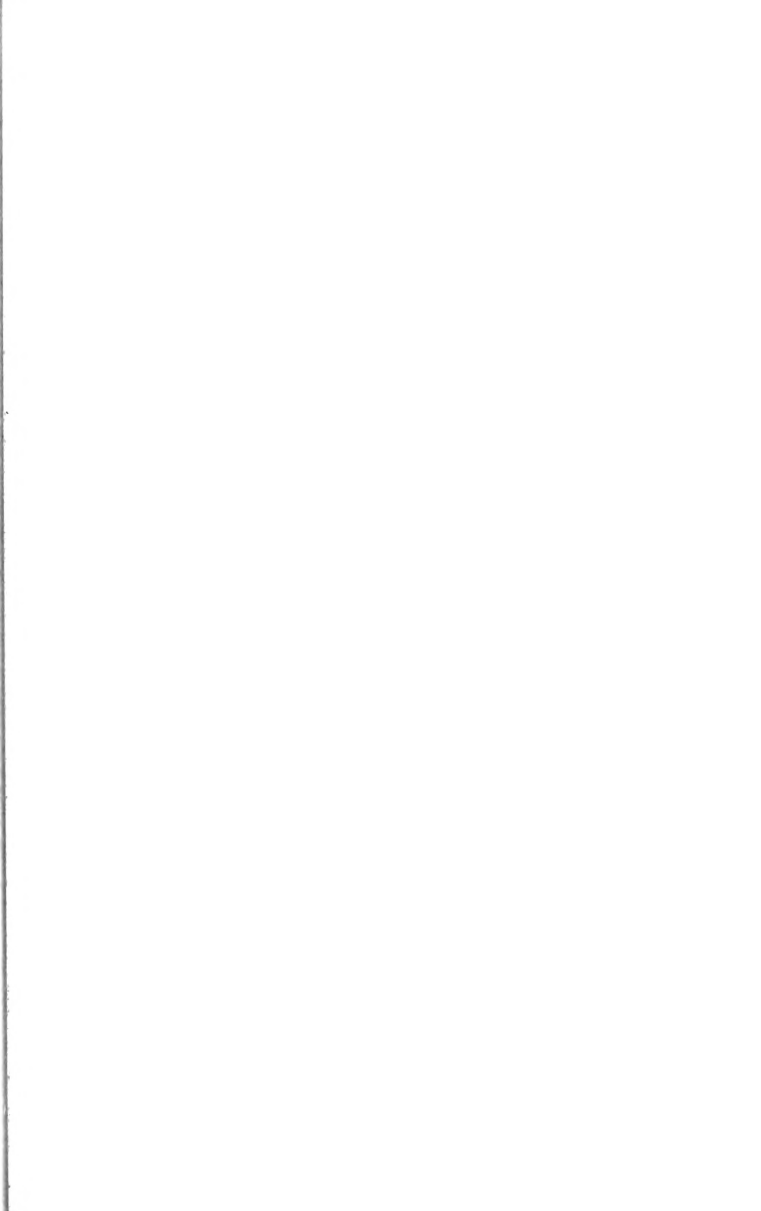
THE END











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