

WRONGING REYNARD.

“**I**T can’t be stood any longer, I tell you, sir. I’ve lost over half a score o’ lambs within the last fortnight, and what ’twixt bothering the ewes and that, I won’t have it, nor will my neighbours either.”

“Well, Giles,” was the reply, “the first time you lose lambs in your place again, send over a messenger and I will draw your gorse. I’m as anxious as you are to kill off such mutton-eating foxes, for they are, as a rule, very little good for sport, while they swell the charges of the Covert Fund to a fearful amount.”

“That I’ll do, Squire,” was the answer. “And you won’t have long to wait either, I tell you. Good-morning, sir.”

The speakers were Squire Dovecote, the M.F.H., who hunted by subscription the county, and Farmer Giles, one of the most noted agriculturists and sheep-farmers in the district. For some time past great complaints had been made of lamb-worrying, a thing which had almost been unknown since the history of the hunt, for nearly all the yeomen were such good fellows, and so fond of the sport that they never grudged a lamb or two, and certainly never dreamt of charging for lost poultry, but this particular season the flocks had been so cut up and disturbed that they really could not avoid making known their grievances. It was curious, however, that all the complaints came from the district round Farmer Giles’, and so the Squire concluded that there must be really one very bad fox about, seeing that the gamekeepers and those who had not been out watching, had been able to prove that the damage was caused by dogs.

About a week after the conversation which had taken place, the Squire received a letter at breakfast-time, stating that on the previous night, Giles had had two fine twin lambs killed, his neighbour, also, a couple, and that things were getting serious. The Squire was a man of action, and at the meet that day, which was in a totally different part of the country, he informed all those

present that he meant to have an extra day with "the lamb-worrying fox," and that they would "assemble" next morning at Farmer Giles's, at Dimbleby.

Next morning the meet at Dimbleby was one of the largest that had ever been known in connection with the Turnipshire hounds. The turn-out of hunting farmers was especially noticeable, and the Squire heard no end of complaints as to lamb destruction. The gamekeepers, of whom there was also a large attendance, seemed pretty confident that the damage was done by dogs and not by foxes, but this the farmers did not at all seem inclined to believe, and two of them particularly swore to seeing a fox scampering off in the grey light, and leaving behind it one or two dead lambs.

"There can be no doubt whatever as to its being a fox," said the Squire. "But the worst of it is that I am only allowed now to draw certain coverts in the neighbourhood. This Mrs. Sprattcake, since she has come into Glenlockie, has sent orders that we must not on any account cross her lands."

"Yes," said one of the keepers, "and it's my opinion that that's the whole cause of the mischief, fox or no fox. She's a regular dog-fancier and goes out every day with about thirty curs, and pets of all kinds, and lets them run wherever they please, so that they are as often on our land as her own, and it's all but impossible for one to have game or foxes within a mile of her woods."

"Ahem!" said the Squire, "that is just one of the difficulties one has to put up with in hunting a country like Turnipshire. However, we must do the best we can. We'll draw Pickerton Wood first, seeing that two lambs were killed on the edge of it last night."

As the hounds moved off two of the young gamekeepers emerged from the barn grinning from ear to ear. "Now," said one, "there'll be the finest bit of fun that has ever been seen in Turnipshire. And sir," says another to the writer, "mind not how hounds may run, make as straight as thou can for Missus Sprattcake's, at Glenlockie. There thou'lt see some fun and no mistake."

With beating hearts the field followed the Squire and the hounds, and with beating hearts they awaited that signal dear to all sportsmen.

A SOUND FROM AN HONEST HOUND.

Come let the poet sing his loves,
And praise the lark at morn,
I will prefer the screaming cry
And note from hunting horn.
Of all the music ear can charm,
That rings the welkin round,
By far the dearest is to me,
That sound from honest hound.

A steadfast lass, a social glass,
A kindly friend and true,
Will break the back of worldly cares
And carry one life through.
The warming grasp of honest man,
With heart that's staunch and sound,
And oh, far dearer than them all
That sound from honest hound.

Let whimpering cowards whisper lies,
They dare not speak aloud,
And false-nosed curs as false proclaim
Falsettos to the crowd.
Give me the bell-note ringing clear,
By its note I'll be bound,
No truer voice makes heart rejoice
Than voice of honest hound.

Soon the voice of an honest hound proclaimed that the lamb-killing Reynard was at home, and everyone set himself down in the saddle to ride his hardest. A screeching view-halloo lets all know that he had broken covert, and out after him the hounds streamed so close together that a sheet could have covered them. Never had anyone seen hounds go such a pace before, and the "spills" at the first half-dozen fences were common. Close up galloped the Squire, determined to have "the villain" as he called him, and get rid of the farmer's complaints at once and for ever. A burning scent was all in his favour, but to his chagrin he saw that Reynard was making right for the Glenlockie woods.

Taking the advice of the young gamekeeper, we at once made our point Glenlockie also, and were rather astonished when pounding along the road to find them driving along with a third as furiously as a fire-engine after us.

"He do go well to have had his foot in a trap," said one.

"It was only a squeeze below the dew claw," said another who was standing up and holding on by the hind seat.

So this is not a regular running performance in the hunting-field, we thought; we must see the finish of it. Circling to the right the hounds jumped the boundary just as we rushed through Glenlockie Avenue gate, with the spring-cart just behind us. Here, right in front of us, was Mrs. Sprattcake, with a dog-whip in her hand, and round her a collection of the dogs of all nations. One moment more and there was a scream, and a howl and a noise as if a Pandemonium of dogs had been let loose, for the whole of the Turnipshire hounds, heads up, ran right into them. The Squire, the huntsmen, and the two whips were on the spot in a moment, but it was fully a quarter of an hour before anyone could make out the real cause of the commotion, save the three young keepers, who kept back in a shaded place among the laurels. Walking our horse back, we asked them to give us an explanation, and on promising not to "peach" or the Squire might kill them, the oldest said: "Well, you see, all these lambs were killed by an Exkimaux dog belonging to Missus Sprattcake, which is as like a fox as anything and which made the farmers swear to it. Bill and Jim and me here, trapped him last night and tied a couple of red herrings to his tail, and Bill slipped him out o' covert as soon as the hounds were thrown in. But mind, you won't blab, will you? for if you do we'll lose our places."

Promising faithfully not to do so, I rode down to the scene of the dog fracas, and found, naturally, the lady in a violent temper, saying that she would have a thousand pounds damages for her favourite Esquimaux dog, which was evidently in a dying condition, whilst Tom the huntsman was repairing some damages which had been done to one of his favourites by a hill dog.

"Well, ma'am," said the Squire, "I don't mean to be offensive, but if you urge this claim, I shall plead justification on account of sheep worrying which has now been fully proved to-



Frank Hamby

"Love me, love my dog."

day and, not only that, but an action of damages for the lost lambs." This settled the matter, and she bowed and walked off, followed by her curs, save the Esquimaux, which the gardener wheeled off in a barrow.

"Well, just think of that," said the Squire, "the best run we have had this season, and all after an Esquimaux dog. For goodness, sake don't let it get into the *Field* or we'll be the laughingstock of everybody ; but oh, what a scent they give off, don't they?"

"Yes," I said, "stronger than a fox's, though I could not, when I thought of the two red herrings under its tail, but think that we had been wronging Reynard."

