

FOXES' TAILS

Minister.—Weel, Sandy, man, and how did ye like the sermon the day?

Precentor.—It was a gude sermon—'deed, it was the best I ever heard ye preach. I never saw sae few folk sleepin' afore. But, at the same time, it struck me that, every noo and then, there was, may be, jeest a wee bit o' exaggeration—I mean, jeest amplification—ye jeest stretched the pint a wee bit.

M.—Stretched the pint! D'ye mean to say, sir, that I tell lees?

P.—Well—a—but I didna gang sae far as that.

M.—Sandy, although I'm your minister, still I'm perfectly willing to admit that it's just possible that I may have slippit into a kind o' habit o' magnifying things; and it's a bad habit to get into, Sandy, and

it's a waur thing to be accused o't; and, therefore, Sandy, I call upon you, if ever you should hear me say another word out o' joint, to give me some sort o' signal. Ay. Ye're sittin' just down aneath me, ye ken, so ye might just put your heid up and give a bit whustle (whistles) like that.

P.—What, whustle on the Sawbbath?

M.—Hoots man; doesna the wind whustle on the Sawbbath? Weel, just a wee bit soughing whustle like the wind. (Whistles softly.)

P.—Weel, if ther's nae harm in't, I'll do my best.

So ultimately it was agreed between the minister and the precentor that the first word of exaggeration from the pulpit was to elicit the signal from the desk below.

Next Sunday came, and the parson entered the pulpit with a radiant smile. It was his habit, before the sermon, to read a chapter from the Bible, adding such explanation as he thought necessary. He generally selected such passages as contained a number of difficult points, so that his marvellous powers of "elocidation" might be called into play. On the present occasion he had chosen a passage that bristled with difficulties. It was that chapter which describes Samson as catching three hundred foxes, tying them tail to tail, setting firebrands in their midst, starting them among the standing corn of the Philistines, and burning it down. As he closed the description, he shut the book, and commenced the "elocidation" as follows:—

"My dear freends, I daresay you have been wondering in your minds how it is possible that Samson could catch three hundred foxes. You or me couldna catch one fox, let alone three hundred—the beasts run so fast. But lo and behold! here we have one single man, all by himself, catching three hundred of them! Now, how did he do it?—that's the pint; and at first sight it looks a gey an' kittle

pint. But it's not so kittle as it looks, my freends; and if you give me your undivided attention for a few minutes, I'll clear away the whole difficulty.

"Well, then, we are told in the Scriptures that Samson was the strongest man that ever lived. We are not told that he was a great runner. But if he caught these three hundred foxes, he must have been a great runner, an awfu' runner—in fact, the greatest runner that ever was born. But, my freends—and here's the cloocidation o' the matter—ye'll please bear this in mind, that although we are not told that he was the greatest runner that ever lived, still we're not told he wasna; and, therefore, I contend, that we have a perfect right to assume, by all the laws of logic, that he was the fastest runner that ever was born; and that was how he caught the three hundred foxes!

"But after we get rid of this difficulty, my freends, another crops up. After he has caught his three hundred foxes, how does he manage to keep them all together? This looks almost as kittle a pint as the other—to some it might look even kittler; but if you will only bring your common sense to bear on the question, the difficulty will disappear like the morning cloud and the early dew that withereth away. Well, then, please to mind, in the first place that it was foxes that Samson caught. Now, we do not catch foxes, as a general rule, in the streets of a toun—therefore it is more than probable that Samson caught them in the country. At farm-houses you have stables and barns, and, therefore, we may now consider it a settled pint that, as he caught his foxes one by one, he stapped them into a good-sized barn, and steekit the door, and locked it. Here we overcome the second stumbling-block. But after he has caught his foxes—after he has got them all snug in the barn under lock and key—how in the world did he tie their tails together? There's a tickler! You

or me could not tie two of their tails together, let alone three hundred of them; for the tails themselves are not long enough. How, then, was Samson able to tie them all? Ah! that's the question; and it's about the kittlest pint you or me has ever had to elocidate. Common sense is no good till't; no more is Latin, or Greek, or Hebrew either; no more is Logic or Metaphecsies; no more is Natural Philosophy or Moral Philosophy; no more is Rhetoric; and I've studied them all myself. But it is a great thing that there's been great and learned men—the same as mysel', ye ken—that, instead of going into the kirk like me, have gone travelling into foreign parts. Now, among other places, some o' those learned men have travelled into Canaan, and some into Palestine, and some few into the Holy Land, and these last-mentioned travellers tell us that, in these Eastern or Oriental climes, the foxes there are a totally different breed from our foxes; and what's the more astonishing thing about them, and what helps to explain this wonderful feat of Samson's is that they have all got most extraordinary long tails; in fact, these Eastern travellers tell us that these foxes' tails are actually forty feet long!" (*Sandy whistles.*)

"At the same time I ought to mention that there are other travellers, and later ones than the ones I have just been speaking to you about, and they say that this statement is rather an exaggeration, and that these foxes' tails are never more than twenty feet long!" (*Sandy whistles.*)

"Before I leave this subject altogether, my freends, I may just add that there has been a considerable diversity o' opeenion about the length of these animals' tails, so that the question has come to be regarded as a moot pint. One man, you see, says one thing, and another another; and I've spent a good lot o' learned research in the matter mysel'

and after examining one authority and another authority, and putting one against the other, I have come to the conclusion that these foxes' tails, on an average, are seldom more than ten feet long."
(*Sandy whistles.*)

"Sandy Macdonald! I'll no take another inch off thae beasties' tails, even gin ye should whustle every tooth out o' your heid."

ANON.