



The Hunt at Clouds House, East Knoyle

### Cub Hunting with the South and North Wilts Hounds

That old institution, Knoyle Feast, would be imperfect indeed without the indispensable concomitant of foxhunting. For many years, even so far back as old 'Squire Farquharson's time, it has been the *lex non scripta* that hounds should meet where the old windmill on the hill, overhanging the green vale below, stands out so boldly on the sky line, below which some hundred or two of eager pedestrians, and maybe a couple of score of mounted spectators, assemble to watch the doings of the pack in the little coverts beneath them.

And a fine vantage point it is for a view of the fun, and every turn of the hounds, when for a few minutes they leave the leafy shelter of the woods to follow some alarmed young scion of the vulpine race, as he quits his birthplace, rudely disturbed by the unwanted sounds of the pursuing packs, either to learn how to fly on a future occasion, or to yield up his brush on the present one. Long has to-day a strong draft of some five and forty couple to rattle the Knoyle Vale, and bold indeed must be the fox that lingers with such a following at his heels.

Colonel Everett and his lady, with a couple of other fair equestrians, that fine old sportsman Mr J Ingram, and a lot of familiar faces, just come out to give their mounts, young and old, a peep at hounds, the nags, one and all, looking much too beefy to do more than a quiet jog from point to point; and indeed, the blind state of the fences forbids anything like an attempt to ride over the vale, nor do we wish for more.

Cub hunting must be enjoyed in a calm, sober fashion, and the thirsting ambition of the younger sportsmen must be controlled till the leaves have fallen, and regular hunting sets in. Still, now pleasant to the ear of the real lover of hunting is the music of the packs as they slowly thread their way through the deep undergrowth of the woods; the cheery note of the horn, and the shrill scream of the whip, as some affrighted cub crosses the ride as his horse's feet, telling us that the inaction of the summer is over, and our much-loved sport has again come to the fore.

See, too, the delight of the horses as they champ their bits, and look eagerly at the busy scene that they are as yet permitted to take no active share in. The bright blue sky overhead, the fair country spread out beneath – he must be a dull dog who cannot enjoy himself to the full on such a lovely morning in early autumn. Not arriving till late, they have already brought a fine cut to hand, and are on the line of another in Skidmarsh when we come up, which they get to ground, and, leaving Barney and a score of willing helpers to bring him to light again, move on to the little covert below Mr Godwin's warren. Here a chorus of deep sounds bespeaks a find, and they are at it for some 15 minutes hammer and tongs, finally killing in covert a fine badger. Back to the field above, to turn out a cub which has been dug out in Skidmarsh, they find he has succumbed to the process; still the way in which the hounds, young and old, break him up, speaks well for their breeding and keenness.

We then move off to Lugmarsh, down a fearfully heavy lane, which takes in the horses hock deep, going as heavy as it often does at Christmas after a thaw. A fine litter of cubs are soon on foot, and before long a fine old veteran breaks away with a whisk of his brush for Hang-wood. Leaving him for another day, they bustle the rest about, and finally kill in a hedgerow, a few fields from the covert, a very fine cub. Having rendered account of a leash of foxes, the Colonel decides to let them alone till next time, and we separate, all delighted with the pleasant morning's sport. The hounds are looking remarkably well, and I hope before the regular hunting begins to have a day on the flags with them. The youngsters are entering capitally, and matters look rosy for the coming season. Long and his men have summered well, and the worthy master keeps them in pretty good condition in the off season; both huntsman and first whip being by no means bad hands at wielding the willow for the Sutton Veny Cricket Club, which holds its own amongst the local clubs right well. I hope to have the good fortune to relate the doings of the pack in many a good run to come. E.S.M. (late the Craven "Man in the Cap") in the *Field*.

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