

“Let us go out and kill something”

Such, according to a French observer, is what every Englishman says after he has had his breakfast. The satire is not undeserved. Not a bird or an animal that adds a charm to the landscape would be allowed to live another day if certain classes of “sportsmen” had their will. No sooner is a strange creature known to be about than it is ruthlessly hunted down and killed.

An illustration of the truth of this remark reaches us this week from Tisbury. On Tuesday, a fawn was seen by some platelayers on the railway, between the station and Chicks Grove, and a hunt was, of course, organised forthwith. The pretty, harmless creature was quickly out manoeuvred and shot. There is no honour, and no great amount of meat, to be got out of such an exploit as this, and the majority of our readers will probably agree with us in regretting that the old savage instinct which impels to bloodshed should still be extant. It is a pity that the noble “sportsmen” of Tisbury have no opportunity of trying their hands at a tiger or a grizzly bear.

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The Hunting of the Fawn

We little thought, when we poked fun at the gallant huntsmen who ran down a killed a poor little fawn, that our innocent paragraph would prove the cause of bloodshed and of proceedings at the Shaftesbury County Court. Lest anyone else in the parish should be suspected of the authorship of the paragraph, and should have his head punched or his blood drawn by way of penalty for the imaginary offence, we may, perhaps as well announce the fact that the writer was not a Tisbury man, nor, for the matter of that, a Tisbury woman, or a Tisbury child. If the offended “sportsmen” intend to punch all the heads they see, in the hope of at least hitting “the right nail on the head”, they have, we assure them, a bit business on hand, and so has the County Court Judge.

Western Gazette Friday 12 September 1884



Assault on a Farmer 1884 County Court Shaftesbury

G B Turner v Tom Evans

The plaintiff, who is a farmer living at Tisbury, sought to recover from the defendant, of the Prince of Wales's Inn, the sum of £10 as damages for an assault. Mr Nodder appeared in support of the claim, which was opposed by Mr Powning. A jury was empanelled to hear the case.

In his remarks, Mr Nodder expressed an opinion that the only possible reason that could be assigned for the conduct of the defendant towards his client was the appearance of a paragraph in the Salisbury Journal announcing that a stag, seen on the railway, was shot by Messrs Evans & Bracher, and of one in the Western Gazette, on the preceding day, on the same subject.

He was not going to deny that Mr Turner was the author of those paragraphs. It seemed to him that a more innocent paragraph than that which appeared in the Salisbury Journal could not be inserted in a newspaper. That in the Western Gazette was satirical, but no names were mentioned in it. The article was not the slightest justification for the assault committed and, moreover, the defendant had no right to go behind this newspaper to see whether the paragraph was penned by the plaintiff or not. If Mr Evans or Mr Bracher had wanted to explain anything with regard to the stag, the proprietors would, he had no doubt, have inserted any explanation he chose to give.

The plaintiff was called. He said that at about quarter to seven on the evening of the 12th of August, he was in his garden at Tisbury. He heard a noise, and in consequence of that went to a lane leading to Mr Coombs' house. When he got there he saw the defendant and Mr Dan Coombs.

Defendant was wringing his fists in Mr Coombs's face. He threw his cap down between himself and witness, and said, “Here's the pair of now and I will fight you one at a time”. Witness made no answer. Defendant said “You called me a liar”. Witness replied “I did not”. Defendant said “You ” and struck him on the left jaw with his fist, the blow being a severe one, knocking him down. Whilst witness was falling, defendant hit him in the side with his fist. Witness felt faint. Mr Coombs helped him up, and then defendant knocked Mr Coombs down. He took hold of witness by the wrist, said “Come over the other side of the bridge” and hit him behind the ear. Witness resisted, and defendant pulled the wristband of his shirt clean off and also tore the body of the garment.

Samuel Baker told him not to be a fool, and pulled him away. Defendant made use of vile language. Witness had done nothing whatever to irritate him.

By the Judge: Witness did not think that defendant was sober at the time. Cross-examined: Witness lived in the same house as Mr Dan Coombs. Mr Coombs was in his shirt sleeves and he was often so. Witness also was in his shirt sleeves. He was working in the garden. He did not make use of any bad language to Evans, and did not challenge him to fight. He did not make use of any bad language to Evans, and did not challenge him to fight. He neither struck Evans nor put his fist in his face. Witness and Coombs had no tussle with Evans. Mr Coombs had a walking stick up. He often had one so. He did not strike Evans with it. He did not tell Mr Northover the next day that he had not much the matter with him.

Mr D Coombs, a farmer living at Tisbury, said that he was in the lane which had been spoken of, and saw Evans a little way in front. Evans spoke, saying he believed something disagreeable, and witness said “You had better come round and talk to me”. He came, and in a very funny manner. Mr Turner also came, and Evans said that he was the person who made all the disturbance. His (Evans's) language was very bad indeed. He hit at Mr Turner two or three times and struck him very heavily on the jaw, knocking him down.

Witness thought that he was senseless for a time. He went and got him up. Evans then came at witness, but before that he had taken a stick from him and thrown it away. He struck witness two or three times. When witness had got up Mr Turner up, Evans pulled him (Mr Turner) by the arm. He did not recollect that Evans did anything else to him. Mr Turner did not do or say anything to provoke Evans to assault him.

Cross-examined: witness did not challenge Evans to fight. He had a stick, but did not strike Evans with it. He always carried a stick. Re-examined: Witness was on his own premises. By the Judge: Defendant knocked witness down.

Charles Coombs, a labourer, living at Tisbury and in the employ of Mr D Coombs, stated that defendant twice knocked the plaintiff down. About ten minutes after the disturbance, witness saw Evans and the latter said the disturbance was about the deer; also that he was paid to kill the deer, and that if he was summoned it would not cost him a farthing.

Henry William Yates, blacksmith, of Tisbury; Frederick Rixon, mason, of Tisbury; and John Shook, dairyman, of Tisbury, also gave evidence, and Mr Powning afterwards addressed the jury, remarking that he should call three independent witnesses who would tell them that Turner was the aggressor.

A great deal had been said about the fawn. He (Mr Powning) did not care a bit about the paper. He did not think that it had anything to do with it. He took it that if Evans did shoot the fawn, he had a right to do so, but he submitted that that had nothing to do with the case.

The defendant said that he was in his house between six and seven on the day in question, and in consequence of what he was told, he went outside into the road, where he saw Mr Daniel Coombs, who was about 40 yards from witness's house. Witness said to Mr Baker, "Do you know what they are annoyed about? It is because they did not have the fawn". Mr Coombs said "You come down I will give you something". He went, and they had some words. Whilst that was going on, Mr Turner came up and called him a liar several times. Turner put his fists up in witness's face and said that he did not care for the witness. He struck witness a violent blow with his fist on the chin, and the mark made remained for three or four days. As soon as Turner struck that blow, witness knocked him down. Turner got up.

Coombs struck witness across the head with a stick and witness took the stick from him and threw it away. Witness and Turner and Mr Coombs struggled together. After witness hit Coombs, Coombs hit him on the eye and witness was also struck on the back. There was no mark on Turner in consequence of the blow dealt him by the witness. Witness struck him only once.

Cross-examined: The witness who had been called for the plaintiff were not there more than half the time. Witness did not say that he had been paid for killing the fawn. He never had been paid. He did not say that if he was summoned, he should have nothing to pay.

Samuel Baker, dairyman, of Fonthill Gifford, said that he had business with defendant on the evening in question. He heard Mr Coombs tell Mr Evans to come to him if he had anything to say. He went down and witness went about 15 yards behind him. Mr Evans and Mr Coombs were quarrelling when he got there. Mr Turner was there. Turner struck Evans on the chin. At that time, Evans had not struck Turner. When Turner struck Evans, the latter knocked the former down. Evans did not strike Turner afterwards. Two days later, witness saw a mark three eighths of an inch long on Evans' chin.

Cross-examined: Witness said to Evans, "Don't be a fool, Tom, come away". Witness heard Turner call Evans a liar. Witness should think that Turner's shirt was torn in the bushes.

Sidney Blandford, a blacksmith, who is related to the defendant, said that Turner called Evans a liar, put his fists up in his face, and hit him on the chin. Evans then knocked him down. Turner struck the first blow. Witness did not see Evans strike Turner more than once. In the course of the struggle that afterwards took place, Coombs hit Evans across the head with a stick, and Evans took the stick away.

Cross-examined: Defendant said that he did not care if he got summoned, he should not have to pay for anything. He also said that he had been paid for striking Mr Turner.

John Trowbridge, baker and grocer, Fonthill Gifford, said that he saw Coombs and Evans quarrelling. Turner came up almost directing afterwards. He wrung his fists in Evans's face, and Evans did the same to him. Witness did not see Turner strike Evans. Afterwards, he saw Turner fall down. Witness was 40 or 50 yards off. Cross-examined: Witness was having a glass of beer at Evans's.

Mr Henry Northover, a draper carrying on business at Tisbury, said that he saw the defendant on the morning after this "bit of a shindy". He said to him, "George, I thought you were taken to the Salisbury Infirmary". Mr Turner made some remark, but did not complain.

James Pullman, labourer, was called to speak of a statement made by Charles Coombs on the evening after the assault, but Mr Nodder objected that such evidence was not admissible, and His Honour took this view. At the request of the jury, Mr P J Baronoff, of Tisbury House, a medical gentleman by whom the plaintiff was seen after the assault, gave evidence, but it seems that the examination made by him was not a very minute one. He gave the plaintiff some lotion.

The jury retired to consult, and eventually they found for the plaintiff for £5.

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