

A CHRISTMAS EVE MEET.

It ever there was in this world an irascible individual it was Squire Ashton, owner and master of the Dilbury Hounds. "The Now and Sures," as a factious individual once called them, when the M.F.H., who liked to see his hounds work, was allowing them to puzzle it out for themselves instead of lifting them. When they did hit off the line again, they ran their fox close on seven miles as the crow flies, and the aforesaid individual afterwards said—but

that is another story.

Even the greatest amongst us has his weak spot somewhere, and in Squire Ashton's case, it was a kindly regard for young people—boys and girls alike—sex made no difference to him.

The only time when he ever really lost his temper with a boy or girl was at Christmas, of all times of the year! And then only in the hunting field.

No sure as the Christmas holidays drew near his manner underwent a change, and he was on a pony, or a girl on a cob with a stark looking groom in attendance, at one or other of the meets, was like the proverbial rod rag to a bull.

When it was only one or two of each (as it was at first) it did not matter so much, for he could keep his eyes upon them, and prevent them from being all over the place when his hounds were engaged in drawing covert, and as likely as not head up the fox back, but when in course of time the original one or two had grown into a round dozen, his temper got the better of him, and his language at times decidedly calculated to cause the mounting blush to rise to maiden's cheek, and to make the usually irresponsible schoolboy wished he had stayed at home.

Despite the juvenile division, with their talking and laughing, a fox would now and then manage to break away and give a good run even during the holiday time, and if there happened to be a check any one near the Squire would be almost sure to hear him talking to himself something after this fashion:

"Dear, dear, now, how disappointed those young folks will be to be sure, and that little girl on the hog-nosed pony, nice child that; what a pity foxes don't run a ring, like a hare, and then they would see me! As it is, unless I'm mistaken, this one will make for the big earths at One Oak Hill, so there'll be no chance for the youngsters to cut in later. I must see what I can do to show 'em sport next time. Hallo!"—as a hunt and gave tongue. "Harmony's out of the line; good hitch, Harmony; come up, horse." And with his cheery old face beaming all over, off he'd go, and in the excitement of the run the young folks left behind would be forgotten for the while.

Occasionally it would happen that after going a certain distance a fox would, either from being turned, or from some reason best known to himself, change his point, and by running back he would get in the same snaffle where he had been found originally.

In such case, as likely as not, some of the pony or small cob brigade would unexpectedly, and to their intense delight, find themselves in something like close proximity to the hounds again, and by dint of good luck, a youthful Nimrod was occasionally up to the dash.

To see the old Squire at such a time was a sight to be remembered. Any iniquities that might have been committed at the covert side were instantly forgotten, and the youngster having been duly blessed was made the proud possessor of the hounds, and as often as not a bright new sovereign was shipped into his hand

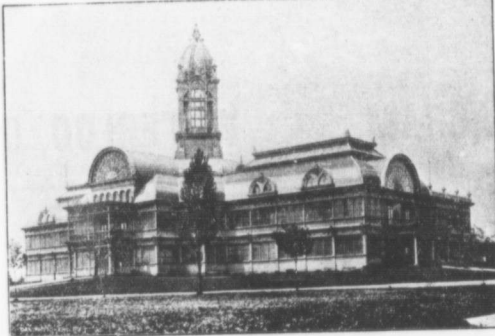
with an injunction to "buy a good serviceable crop."

Then on their way to draw the next covert the small boy or girl on cob or pony would be encouraged to travel alongside the Squire's big grey hunter, and the favour of the latter would in the kindest manner possible impart valuable information about hounds and hunting.

It was just the same if on the way home, or after a kill one of the young division was fallen in with, who had seen none of the fun, the Squire always seemed to say just the right thing to encourage and not dishearten the boy or girl, as his case was. In fact it was only at the covert side and when things went wrong that a cross word ever escaped him to other than the grown-up members of his field, and they, as he used to say, knew him and his ways, and if he didn't like it they could stay away.

All this was excellent in its way, but still the old Squire was not content. "Oh, course, we were all boys and girls—boys at least, I mean I was, once, and we had to learn and they must too, but how to do it, I don't see quite. Dick!" This to the whipper-in, an old servant who everybody spoke of as Dick, and he had so seldom been addressed by his surname that he had probably almost forgotten he had one.

"Dick!"



Main Building, Toronto Exhibition.

Where the New York Hotelkeepers' Association were Bined, September, 1894.

"Yes, sir."

"There were a lot of 'em out to-day, were there?"

"There was so many; nearly a score I should say, and I do hope, sir, as how you'll put a stop to it; it's no heartily use a trying to show sport when—"

"Quite so, Dick; but didn't you see that lad of Doctor Archer's, he's a well, didn't he? devilish well I consider, for a boy."

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Ah, yes, and there was the rector's daughter on that old pony I sold her father, ever so many years ago; what a wonderful pony that is to be sure; and then there was Charlie Cross and another boy with him."

"Beg pardon, sir, he headed the fox back if you remember."

"No more do I, Dick, but you see everything must have a beginning, and I was wondering if we couldn't—now what do you think, eh?—here followed something in an undertone.

"He did that, sir, but I don't hold no-how with it."

"No more do I, Dick, but you see everything must have a beginning, and I was wondering if we couldn't—now what do you think, eh?—here followed something in an undertone.

"It ain't for the likes of me to say,

sir, but I call it debasing of 'em, if you axes me."

"But we needn't do it above once you know. Now there's old Renter, it wouldn't hurt him and—of course we needn't take all of 'em you know, just five or six couples, and I really do think it would do 'em a lot of good, I do really, Dick. Now you just think it over and let me know to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, that would do capital—plenty of time to send out the incitations—capital idea of mine, don't you think so, eh?"

"Well, sir, you've asked my opinion and I've given it."

"Ah, well, you think it over, Dick, think it over, you'll think better of it in the morning."

Whatever was the scheme the old Squire had in his mind from the way he chuckled to himself on his way home, it was evidently very entertaining. And here it may be remarked that on the following day Dick's scruples had been so far overcome that he had admitted that it might perhaps be done after all. And now a strange thing happened, as Mr. Rothery Kipling would say. Old Squire Ashton on the very next day actually made a round of calls in the neighborhood, a thing he had never been known to do before, and the very houses he

ing thus taken into the great man's consideration that not one of the field allowed any signed riot, all sitting as still and unobtrusive as could be.

"Capital," said the Squire to himself. "Couldn't be better."

Presently a homed gale came on; the Squire lost a bit of the field, and his homed, which had a magical effect.

Then a burst of music proclaimed a find, and almost immediately a view of the fox from old Dick at the far end of the fox announced that he had viewed a fox away.

"Come along, now; this way; don't jostle; ladies first;" and opening a gate leading into a ride, the whole lot were speedily in motion. A short cut took them out at the other end just in time to see old Dick a couple of fields ahead, close up with his hounds.

"There's an easy fence there for you boys, I'm going for the gate, who's coming with me?"

Two or three young sportsmen bade, and their hearts went for the fence and got over somehow—no actual slips—the rest, preceded by the Squire, taking advantage of the open air, my boy!"

"Bravo!" the pony, my boy!" a one youngster whose right hand stumbled a bit at landing, saved himself from a cropper, and having got back into the saddle again, was soon pounding along with the rest.

The field they were now in was a big one, and by the time they got across it, the hounds had increased their distance. Suddenly they threw up, and the Squire, casting the pace of his horse, the other did the same.

"Now then,"—as they heard the pick—"don't go too near 'em, let 'em work a bit out for themselves."

"Scent seems very bad to-day, Dick." "It's that, sir; they don't seem able to own it. Anyhow, I doubt if we shall kill him, sir. Old Butler's hit it of, though."

The old homed certainly gave tongue at the same moment, and the pack swung round to the left, were quickly off again.

"He'll make for the vale, depend upon it," said the old Squire, excitedly. "Come along down this lane, and so shall cut a corner off, and save a lot of ground."

The Squire's prognostications were fulfilled to the letter, so much so that when he and his following reached the end of the lane hounds were still some distance away on their right, but running almost immediately towards them.

"That check must have given him a good start, I'm afraid, otherwise we ought to have viewed him hours."

Meanwhile the hounds are rapidly approaching, and presently pass within the yards.

"Now then, come along, all of you!" Had that fox deliberately chosen the easiest possible line in the world he could not have done so better. His idea seemed to be a line of gates—open one of them, too!—and when he did deviate from his course it was only by a through a gap.

Hounds have been running now for some time, however, without a check, and are become almost specks in the distance. Suddenly the Squire's sharp eye noted that they have borne somewhat to the right and almost immediately appeared to be at a halt again.

"Come along, I know a short cut, as if lucky we shall cut in with them again."

Never was such a man as the Squire knowing which was to go when hounds were running. One or two of his followers had begun to lag behind, but he quite a goodly muster with him was after dodging down a lane, and across field or two, they once more found themselves on terms again with the pack. The remainder of this wonderful run is not well for much comment—seem simply wretched, and at last old Dick had to declare himself fairly beaten.

(Continued on page 1118.)