A DEER HUNT IN THE NEW FOREST.

LET it be one of those glorious spring mornings that now and then gladden the hearts of the sons of men wearied with winter and longing for genial warmth and bright skies. It matters not where the meet may be; in this beautiful country it cannot but be a lovely spot, and the ride to it almost a dream of beauty. In a mile or so we leave the high road and branch off on to springy turf under an archway of grand old beech and oak such as would be the pride of any park in Europe. How green and velvety is the thick moss on the north side of every forest giant, and how bright and glossy are the numerous thickets of holly that clothe the base of almost every other spreading beech. The turf is soft and springy after last night's rain, and every little rill shows how the land is yet full of the rainfall of the sullen winter that is grudgingly retiring. Here we emerge on to a grand open glade; a clump or two of beech shows its vastness as they stand like islands in a sea of grass and heather. What an exquisite tint of pale green is over all that rolling volume of beech trees, and how well it is relieved by the golden tinge which is creeping over the adjacent masses of oak. Through a gate we pass into a vast plantation of fir, oak, and larch. What a beautiful colour has come on to the larch with the bursting of innumerable buds on every spray, and how exquisitely patches of it contrast with the more sombre green of the Scotch fir as we stand on the hill top and gaze over a huge sea of verdure rolling for hundreds of acres beneath us. And so down into the valley we plunge, where all is dark green, lighted up with the red stems of the fir-for it is too early yet for the young oaks to burst into leaf and clothe all with the dense mass of foliage that summer brings—and along the wide green rides we canter till we emerge at the crest of the opposite hill, and, passing out on to the heather, pause for a moment to take in the view before us. around, and as far as the eye can reach, is a rolling expanse of heath and gorse—the latter golden with blossom and redolent with perfume.

Very unlike fox hunting in its preliminary stages is the chase of the These animals, let it be remembered, naturally consort in herds. In this plantation or in that are, it may be, fifteen or twenty deer of which but one or two are huntable. It is the duty of the harbourer to observe these deer when on the feed, to watch or track them to the thicker covert, and to be able to point out to the huntsman the actual track of a warrantable deer-if possible alone, or in company with two or three deer only. Without information of this kind much time must be wasted. Deer after deer of the wrong sort may be found, only to stop hounds on their line; and it will be either by great good luck or by great perseverance on the huntsman's part that a warrantable deer will be found at all while there is light to hunt him by. But to-day all is couleur de rose. The report of the harbourer is as favourable as possible. The herd of the does, which comprises all the door of that for which forward this postibility district comprises all the deer of that sex which frequent this particular district, have moved over the hill into an immense plantation, which for to day we hope to avoid, and in the wood hard by are two noble bucks, both of warrantable size, but one is an especially fine one.

A note on the horn and the huntsman holds them [the hounds] back, and as they pass to the leeward of the thicket you see each head flung upwards; a pause of a moment, and the hounds drive into the thorns as if they "knew something." Tally ho! There he goes! and out over the tops of the bushes bounds a grand buck, with thorns as wide as the outspread palm of a man's hand, followed in a second by his friend, a deer even bigger than himself. Away go the tufters almost in view, away go master and whip; for, before anything can be done, these two deer must be separated. Nor does this take long; for both of them together plunge into the thickest part of the adjoining plantation.

Here then is one of the chief of the many difficulties encountered by the man who endeavours to hunt the wild deer. The object of every old deer is to substitute another for himself at the earliest possible opportunity, and no pains are spared by him to achieve this object. In fact it may be taken for granted that if once the hounds are laid on to an old and cunning buck there will be on foot, in front of the pack, a younger or smaller deer within twenty minutes. It is here that all the huntsman's skill is required in order to detect the moment that the change takes place, even though he may not view the deer, so that as soon as he can be assured that he is not hunting the warrantable deer he started with, he may go back and by a clever cast recover the line of him. However in this case all has gone well; one great difficulty is over and nothing remains but to call up the pack as quickly as possible, and to lay them on to the line of the best of the two bucks. Not much time is lost over this, and it is a heartiful color of the state of the two bucks. beautiful sight to see the huntsman bring up the eager well-trained pack clustering close round his horse's heels until he is within a few yards of the line of the deer. Then with one wave of his hand every hound is on the line, and a glorious chorus bursts from them as they drive to the front like a field of horses starting for the Derby. Riders must sit down in the saddle, and catch hold of their horse's heads, if they mean to live with them as they swing over the open heather and grass at a pace that will soon choke off the butcher boy out for a holiday, and the gentleman in livery who is trying to get the family carriage horse near enough to the front to see what mischief his young masters and mistresses are getting into. But it is too good to last—the deer is hardly yet aware that he is hunted, and has gone straight into the thickest part of one of the plantations, where he has again lain down. A check of a moment as the hounds flash over the line, and then a deafening burst of music as swinging round they wind him and rouse him in their midst. Away he goes, but only runs a short ring, dodging backwards and forwards till a stranger exclaims

that he is "beat already!" Not so; he is but exercising his craft, and, while he turns short enough to baffle the hounds, he searches every thicket in order to push out a younger comrade to take his place and relieve him from the very awkward position he finds himself in. No such luck is in store for him to-day, and ere long, fairly frightened, he sets his head straight and, abandoning for the present his wiles, he takes refuge in flight. Running the whole length of the covert, he is viewed over the fence and away over the open moorland. Not far behind him are the hounds, and they stream over the heather in what has been well described as "the mute ecstasy of a burning scent." Mile after mile is covered; one large plantation is entered, but the pressed deer threads his way through the rides almost without touching the covert, and hardly a check has occurred till after forty minutes of hard galloping the hounds fling up on the further bank of a small river. There our deer has "soiled," nor has he very quickly left the cooling shelter; but it is a beautiful sight to see the older hounds carry the scent down the very middle of the water: here questing the bubbles which float on the surface, there trying a rush or alder bough which, hanging over the water, has perchance scraped the deer's back and absorbed some of the scent particles—steadily, if not rapidly, they carry the line down the water with ever and anon a deep note or light whimper as some subtle indication brings to the mind of some veteran of the pack assurance doubly sure that he is on the line of his quarry. It is a curious faculty, that of hunting the water in this way, and it seems to be born with some hounds, while others never acquire it. Doubtless it is hereditary, like the power of owning a line upon hard roads and similar places which some hounds have possessed in so marked a degree and transmitted to their progeny. But to our chase. A chorus from the pack marks the spot where our deer has left the water, after travelling for over half a mile down it. Yet the hounds cannot at first hunt the line of the wet animal as they could before he entered the river. Ere long, however, the scent improves, and the pack is soon driving along the green mossy glades of a beautiful oak wood, mixed with thickets of holly and blackthorn. what is that that bounds out of one of these thickets right in front of the leading hound? A doe, as I live! followed, by all that is unlucky! by one, two, three others! Of course the hounds have got a view, and naturally are straining every nerve to catch the deer which fresh and not alarmed bound gaily in front of them. Here then is another of the manifold difficulties which the deer hunter has to contend with—that of a change on to fresh quarry at the end of a fine run. All seems lost; the hounds are running almost in view, and some of the more desponding of the field turn away for home.

Those who remain to see the end remark hopefully that the huntsman " is not beat yet "-nor luckily is his horse, or that of his whip, and aided by a turn of speed and a knowledge of the line of the deer, they have got to the heads of the pack before they penetrated into the fastnesses of the neighbouring plantation. A blast on the horn, a rate and a crack of a whip, has stopped the pack, well-trained to do so. And so it is essential they should be, at whatever cost, in a country where this manœuvre must be so often repeated. But now the huntsman has his pack in hand, and it is for him to recover the line of his hunted buck, or else go home. knows well how far they brought him, but all the ground forward of this point is foiled by fresh deer, and it will be no easy matter to keep clear of the lines which he knows to be wrong. Yet he has a strong opinion withal as to where his deer was making for, and very carefully and with judgment he holds his hounds forward on a wide swinging cast clear of foiled ground. See at the very end of his cast they hit a line, apparently a cold one, but those who know how the scent of a beaten deer fades away to nothing, become hopeful. The hounds too are very keen on the line, though they can hardly carry it on. At a soft place the master catches a glimpse of his slot, and is reassured to find that he is on the line of a single male deer at any rate. See, too, how the deer has followed every little watercourse and rill, however tortuous; none but a hunted deer would do this, and excitement becomes doubly keen after the late reverse, as the hounds' pace quickens and quickens, till the field is galloping again. Now they come down to the banks of a small stream, and carry the line down the water, to where the banks are covered with a dense growth of blackthorn. Suddenly all scent fails on the line, but every hound has flashed out, and on to the bank with his head and bristles up, "feeling for the wind." Look out! he is here! and ere the words are spoken the hunted buck bounds from the thicket and strides over the heath almost like a fresh deer. And indeed many, who see him think that he is a fresh found deer, but those who had a good view of him in the morning know well that their huntsman's skill and patience and his good pack of hounds have brought this excellent chase to a satisfactory finish, in spite of every difficulty. The buck runs gaily as long as he is in the open view of all, but as he gains the bushes his head droops, his tail drops flat, his stride contracts, and he shows that "tucked appearance which in all quadrupeds is the indication of extreme fatigue. The hounds are close on him, and he regains the stream only to plunge into the deepest pool, and with head erect, and noble mien, he "sets up" at bay. The first hound that dares to approach is instantly driven under water, and crawls yelping from the stream to dry land, but the pack is at hand. fallow deer can offer no resistance like that of his noble red congener, and in another moment the scene is a confused mass of muddy water, a dun carcase, a pair of antlers, and struggling hounds. Into this chaos descends the active whipper-in, an open knife in one hand and a hunting whip in the other. One rate and the coast is clear-a flash in the sun-a wave of crimson rolling down the stream, and then two or three men are hauling the dead body of a magnificent deer up the bank surrounded by the pack, whose deep baying is answered by the long blast of the horn and the thrilling who-whoop of the huntsman. -The Hon. Gerald Lascelles, in the Nineteenth Century.