

each had finished, the two whipped round at each other and at the same instant, and met with lifted lips displaying glistening fangs, and with a snarl. For a moment they remained thus, apparently more than likely to fly at each other's throat, and then, pivoting about, the vixen trotted off.

It did not appear to be a case of love at first sight, anyhow, but the ways of the wild creatures are strange, and—one never knows!

The dog-fox, anyway, seemed of this view. He waited a minute or so to scratch his right ear, then jumped off at a gallop on the trail of the vixen.

In a few seconds he could see her dim, slim form crossing the white expanse of the field in front, and then he beheld her turn all at once right-handed, and begin to "work" the hedge that bounded the field. She hunted it along diligently, our friend following, and alertly watching and waiting for anything to bolt out. Nothing did, but the vixen persevered, and hunted the next hedgerow, and the next, and the next. Twice she gave chase to a hare, which is usually a fool's trick as far as foxes go, and once she lost a rabbit through over-eagerness by letting it see her too soon and get to its burrow. Once she turned, and glared at the dog-fox with eyes so fierce and so alight with blood-thirstiness that even he drew off a little.

And then, I think, it was that the truth dawned upon him. The vixen, this wild-eyed, gaunt beast, was starving; was nearly mad with hunger, in short, and would, I verily believe, have almost eaten *him* if she had at that moment got the chance. *He* took jolly good care not to let her get the chance, however, but he saw that it was *his* chance, and he took it. At least, one presumes from his subsequent actions that he did.

From that instant he ceased to follow, and took the lead. He trotted along rapidly, dog fashion, tongue hanging, his breath steaming up, passed the vixen rapidly, stopped about twenty yards in front of her,

looked round, swung off again with a wave of his brush, and hurried on. And the "King's English" itself could not have conveyed his meaning more plainly. The vixen watched him go, then followed. She would have followed anything in that hour, I think, that promised a meal.

Our fox, however, was no inexperienced wanderer of the wilds driven in to the haunts of man by stress of weather. He knew his work. His ancestors had played the game for hundreds of generations.

He moved, therefore, straight to the nearest farmyard, but neither you nor I would have seen him go. First of all, he nonchalantly sauntered into the nearest hedgerow, and from that time to the moment of his arrival at his destination, though it was over half a mile, vanished. The glimpse, only half guessed at, of a thick brush vanishing across a gateway, the momentary gleam of green eyes staring out from the pall-like blackness of some thicket, were the only indications of the possible existence of the two beasts at all.

Nevertheless, forty minutes later a careful examination of the snow round the farmhouse and yards would have revealed the fact that a fox and a vixen had encircled the place twice, making quite sure that all was safe.

The buildings lay deadly still in the snow and the cold moonlight and the biting wind. There had come no sound save the squeaking and scuffling of the rats and mice in the cornstacks and barn, yet the foxes were there, all right enough—two crouching, deeper shadows in the deep shadow of the cornstack.

At last they crept out. You saw them, like phantom shapes, gliding low over the snow—they would not have crossed the open if they could have helped it—to the fowlhouse. They were extraordinarily hard to see even then, and seemed to melt into every shadow they passed. Moreover, they were amazingly alert; the sharp, moist muzzles were all the time thrust round this way and that; the