

ON ENGLISH COURSING.

Without a doubt the British Islands are par excellence the home of hunting, and until recent years, the first place in horse racing was held by the English turf. But there is a sport known in this country which far exceeds horse racing in point of excitement, exercise for the spectators and in being free from any chance for "crooked" work. I allude to coursing.

Coursing means the hunting of a hare, not with a pack of hounds or harriers, but with a single greyhound, or, more generally, with two. Since public coursing became a recognized fact there have been three varieties of the sport: Private coursing, in which a person or party of friends "course" for their own pleasure, and open and inclosed coursing meetings.

Open coursing meetings consist in a series of "courses" or matches run in public in the open country, where the hares are in their native state. An "inclosed" meeting is one where the hares are, some time previous to the meeting, driven into a paddock at one end of a large inclosed field in which all of the courses are run. It is at these meetings that the trials of "saplings" or young dogs are always made in order that the dogs may not be overtaken in the open country.

The origin of this sport is uncertain; but we know that so early as 150 A.D., Arrian wrote a treatise on coursing. Besides this authority we have proofs of its antiquity from the reliefs which have been found in the excavations at Pompeii and in Egypt. In many of these a man is represented holding a brace of dogs in leash in precisely the same manner as they are now held by the "slipper" at coursing meetings. From time immemorial private coursing has been a favorite amusement in England, but it was not until the time of Charles I. that the first matches were decided in public. Since then public coursing has become more general, and in 1825 the first coursing club (the Alton and Ridgeway) was established on the grounds where the now famous Waterloo cup is annually run off. So the sport developed until 1836, when the Waterloo cup was inaugurated as the coursing Derby, and, although much larger stakes have since been established, this cup stands pre-eminently the prize of the coursing sport-men, and the dog that wins it is deservedly pointed to as the best dog of the season.

The coursing season opens in September either at Haydock Park in England, or picturesque Mourne Park in the county of Down, Ireland. Both of these are inclosed meetings, and at them a number of "sapling" trials are run off. (A sapling is a greyhound that has been whelped after January 1 of the year in which he is tried.) The season continues until the end of the following April, being somewhat interrupted if the winter frosts are too severe. Generally in midwinter coursing is almost at a standstill, except on some of the southern club grounds. A slight frost, however, is a great desideratum during or immediately before a meeting, for it hardens the ground and the horses are always in better running condition at such times.

The mode of procedure is as follows: On the evening before the meeting opens, a dinner is given in Liverpool, at which hundreds of the most famous coursing men in the United Kingdom attend. After the dinner comes the "draw"—that is, the names of the 64 dogs entered for the cup, are placed in a hat and drawn one by one. The first drawn runs against the second, the third against the fourth and so on until the "draw" is completed. The "Krecks" cards are immediately printed and circulated among those in the room, and

after a few minutes, allowed to study the draw, the chairman raps for order. There is silence; the secretary or chairman calls the names of the first brace of dogs, and in a moment pandemonium reigns. Book-makers have come in, and offering bets for or against the two dogs at "short odds."

Short odds means the betting upon the individual course of those two dogs. Another rap, from the chair; the books on this course are closed, and again there is silence, and again the uproar rebegins. The chairman has invited bets on the next couple of greyhounds, and so it proceeds until the card is called off. The excitement becomes more intense, for the betting at "long odds" has begun. This means taking odds against the chance of any one dog "running out" the entire six courses and winning the cup. At long odds it frequently happens that as much as 100 or even 200 to 1 is offered; but in the case of a favorite the betting often lies as close as 3 or 5 to 1. So it goes on until the 64 dogs are disposed of, and then everyone seeks his bed in order that he may "be up with the lark" to reach the famous Alton meadows in time for the first course.

And now we are on the battle ground. As a rule there are a succession of sharp frosts at this season, and the marshy ground crackles under our feet as we make our way towards where the greyhounds are waiting, with their trainers, for the beginning of the sport. Close by are the judge—who is she only one on horseback—the slip-steward and the slipper—the office of the latter being to slip the brace of dogs from the leash when a strong hare is driven by him. The betting that began in Liverpool is continued here on the field itself, and the babel of nearly 100,000 voices of those who have come to see the great cup run is only eclipsed by the "beaters"—the men who are beating in the brakes and tufts of marsh grass—as they drive the hares towards where the slipper, slip-steward and judge are standing, the former holding the first couple of dogs in anxious expectancy.

It is a gay scene and an inspiring one. Thousands of wreaths of blue smoke curl and swirl skyward from the cigars and pipes of the dark mass of spectators, who line the side of a dyke or bank in as orderly and soldierlike fashion as if they had been drilled. Everybody is warmly clad, and among them can be seen the bright head dresses and rosy cheeks of many a thousand fair lovers of the leash—some of those sport-loving ladies having traveled hundreds of miles to cheer the prowess of a favorite hound, or sympathize with him in his defeat.

The hum of the voices, the yielding of the dogs, the shouting of the beaters and the betting men—all of these sounds seem to cease suddenly. The slip-steward has raised a white flag signaling to the beaters that a hare is coming. In another moment and everybody is watching in the direction of the slipper, for a hare comes bounding along at full speed. Seeing the crowd in front the timid little creature turns from it and rushes wildly past the slipper. Now a thousand hearts are beating with suppressed excitement; the slipper has shown the brace of dogs the hare, and the graceful animals strain every nerve and muscle in their endeavor to escape from the leash and hunt their natural quarry. There is a sudden shout "They are off!" Yes, and off with a vengeance, too. The slipper has given the hare about 80 yards—or perhaps 40—start, he pulls the string and like arrows from a bow the hounds seem to fly rather than gallop after the hare—so smooth and graceful are their movements. And now the frantic yelling of the betting men rises above the suppressed murmuring of the onlookers, and every eye is strained to

watch the "draw up," i. e., the straight start to the hare.

See! the fawn dog draws out; he is full two lengths ahead—his long tail straightened out like a pennant in the breeze. And now they are getting closer and closer to the game little "pussy" and the excitement of the onlookers grows more intense. The fawn seems to be about to make a dash and kill, when—presto!—the cunning little hare turns sharply to the left and the black dog takes the lead. Again the hare turns—still in favor of the black—and now the racing points are equalized. Suddenly pussy makes a desperate spring. She has jumped across a drain, and the two dogs fly across it, landing upon the other side at the same instant, so great was the impetus of the fawn's rush. The hare turns again—slightly favoring the black. This dog is now "one point ahead"—but only by the accident of favor. Suddenly there is an approving shout from the spectators; the fawn has made a desperate drive and overtakes and passes his opponent (this is called a "go by" and scores a point). It is a glorious course and a "bang up" hare. But that fawn dog is full of fire and speed and intelligence; he determines to end the battle at once and makes a terrific drive to kill. He only "flecks" (bites a tuft of hair); there is a short, painful scream from Miss Pussy, who turns almost at an acute angle to escape her hunters, but at that instant the black dog "runs into her" and effects the kill.

Each dog wears a silken collar of red or white—according to his position on the card. In this case the fawn wore the red, and the judge, who has galloped beside the dogs to watch every point of the course, now takes a red handkerchief from his pocket and waves it on the breeze—which denotes that the fawn dog has won. Some uninitiated reader will probably ask: "How can the fawn dog have won when the black dog killed the hare?"

It is because the former greyhound "ran up" more points, and therefore showed greater speed and skill. In the course we have just described the actual killing of the hare counts but one point. Oftentimes, after a long "grueling" course the points of both dogs are equal, and in this case the judge signals "no course" by taking off his cap. In this event the course is run again after the next couple on the card have finished their match. And so it goes on until the 32 trials are finished. Then the dog who won the first course is put on the leash with the winner of the second, the third winner against the fourth, and so on until only two dogs are left, when the "final" is run off. This meeting occupies three days of exhilarating, exciting sport, and it is not an exaggeration to state that more money changes hands at Alton than at the famous Derby or any other horse race meeting in England.

And now it will be interesting to learn something of the beautiful dogs that are used in this sport. They are, as a rule, rather delicate, but they are so well cared for by their owners and trainers that they are enabled to undergo a very great amount of hard running and fatigue.

Racing greyhounds are fed once every day—about 8 p.m.—and mutton broth, toast, vegetables and similar foods are given them the dietery being varied from time to time according to the condition of the dog. For instance, when training for a meeting some trainers give their dogs port wine and sheephead stew with biscuits and vegetables; but each trainer has his own method, so that it would be impossible to enumerate all the menus here. The dogs are taken for a long walk every day—if possible along a hard road, in order to harden the pads of their toes, and are frequently allowed to "school" or romp in an inclosed field or lawn.