

earliest times more attached to the pleasures of the chase than the Romans and other races of the sunny South. It was indeed an occupation rather than a pastime. Kings rejoiced in it, and the hound became even the travelling companion of the noble. Alfred the Great, at the age of twelve, was "a most expert and active hunter, and excelled in all the branches of that most noble art"—Edward the Confessor, with all his monkish devotion, "took the greatest delight," says the old historian *Mahmsbury*, "to follow a pack of swift hounds in pursuit of game, and to cheer them with his voice."—On the accession of William the Norman, the people generally were prohibited from hunting, under cruel penalties, and that right monopolised by the King, and those of the nobility who were favoured with a license from him. To destroy any of the beasts of chase within the royal hunting grounds was reckoned a capital crime; and the life of a stag deemed far more precious than that of a peasant. The severity of these game-laws—which even modern advancement has not yet been able entirely to eradicate—was rather increased than diminished until the reign of King John, when a clause was inserted in the Forest Charter, providing that no man should forfeit life or limb for killing the King's deer, but should be subjected to a heavy fine.

Froissart relates of Edward III., that he took so much delight in hunting that even at the time he was engaged in war with France, and resident in that country, he had with him "sixty couples of stag hounds, and as many hare hounds, and every day amused himself with hunting or hawking." The same spirit animated almost all the crowned heads of England, down even to that intolerable pedant James I., who, treating of king-ly sports in his "*Basilikon Doreen*" remarks, "I cannot omit here the hunting, namely with running houndes, which is the most honourable and noblest sort thereof, for it is a thievish forme of hunting to shoote with gunnes and bowes."

The chase was the hereditary privilege of nobility, and well did the pastime suit the wild spirit of the old Slego Lords. "In our time," says a grumbling author of the twelfth century, quoted by *Strutt*, "hunting and hawking are esteemed the most honourable employments, and most excellent virtues by our nobility; and they think it the height of worldly felicity to spend the whole of their time in these diversions. By constantly following this way of life, they lose much of their humanity, and become as savage, nearly, as the very brutes they hunt—"

The nobles, however, were rivalled, perhaps surpassed in their attachment to the chase, by the proud and pampered clergy—the Bishops and

Abbots going out to hunt in great state, attended by a large retinue of followers, and some of them even becoming celebrated for their skill in this fashionable sport. The old English poets and other writers loudly exclaimed against these abuses in the Church. *Chaucer*, in his *Canterbury Tales*, repeatedly turned his keen pen against the excesses of the Priesthood, asserting "that many of them thought more upon hunting with their dogs, and blowing the horn, than of the service they owed to God."

"What?" says a plainstatist of the early part of the fifteenth century—

"What? Are these Bishops divines?
Yea, they can well skille of wines.
Better than of divinity.
As for preaching they know no care;
They would see a course at a hare,
Rather than make a sermon!
To follow the chase of the wild deer,
Passing the time with jolly cheer,
Among them all is common!"

Thomas à Becket, it is said, when sent by Henry II. as ambassador to the Court of France, took with him, for his diversion, hounds and hawks in great variety, "such as were used by Kings and Princes."

The clergy of rank had at all times the privilege of hunting in their own enclosures, and these were very extensive, and well stocked with game. At the period of the Reformation, the see of Norwich alone possessed no less than thirteen parks of immense extent, all abounding with deer, and other animals of the chase.

The ladies of the olden time were mighty hunters—sometimes accompanying the gentlemen to "the jolly chase," but often enjoying the sport by their own sweet selves. In the former case, we are informed by the erudite Mr. *Strutt*, "it was usual to draw the game into a small compass by means of enclosures; and temporary stands were made for them to be spectators of the sport, though in many instances they joined in it, and shot at the animals as they passed by them with arrows." In a very old Romance, entitled "*The Squire of Low Degree*,"* the King of Hungary is represented endeavouring to enliven the spirits of his daughter, drooping on account of her love for the Squire, by promising her, that on the morrow she should go out with him to hunt, in a chariot "cover'd with velvet red," and drawn by

"Jennets of Spain that ben so white
Trapp'd to the ground with velvet bright—
and that she would be supplied with
"A leash of greyhounds with you to strike
And hart and hind and other like—"

*See "Elli's early English Poets."