

# ENGLISH FIELD SPORTS OF THE OLDEN TIME<sup>2</sup>.

BY VALENTINE SLYBOOTS.

Waken, Lords and Ladies gay !  
On the mountain dawns the day,  
All the jolly chase is here,  
With hawk and horse, and hunting spear—  
Hounds are in their couples yelling,  
Hawks are whistling, horns are knelling—  
Merrily, merrily, mingle they—  
Waken Lords and Ladies gay !

Hunting Song.

THE sports of rude and semi-savage nations are confined to the exercise and display of mere bodily superiority. Wherever war has been the business of the popular life, racing, wrestling, and the chase, have proved the favorite pastimes. In all turbulent and troublous times, we find the accomplishments of the mind disregarded, and the education of the body, in strength, activity, and endurance of fatigue, pursued with emulous zeal. Thus was it in England under Saxon rule, when learning was considered, if not an ignoble, an utterly unsoldierly pursuit, adapted only to the gloom and quiet of the cloister. The Norman conquest affected the national sports in two ways—firstly, by the institution of tyrannical Game Laws, and consequent restriction of the pleasures of the chase to the favoured few—and secondly, by the introduction of the observances of Chivalry—its jousts and pageants, pumps and tournaments:—

In rough magnificence array'd,  
When ancient Chivalry display'd  
The pomp of her heroic games,  
And crested chiefs and tissued dames  
Assembled, at the clarion's call,  
In some proud castle's high-arch'd hall.

Wild and rude though the institution of Chivalry undoubtedly was, it cannot be denied that its influence was favorable to the progress of civilisation—tempering the mere courage of animal man with some share of generosity and mercy, heightening the tone of social and domestic intercourse, and requiring in every gallant and faithful knight, a familiarity not only with all warlike exercises, but with the chase and every stirring sport, and some knowledge of the lighter

accomplishments of dancing and of music. In the old Romance of "The Death of Arthur," a certain Sir Tristram is depicted as the very mirror of Chivalry, of whom it is said—"He learned to be a harper, passing all others, that there was none such in any country; and so in harping and on instruments of music he applied himself in his youth for to learne, and after as he grewed in might and strength, he laboured ever in hunting and hawking, so that we read of no gentleman who more used himself therein."

The tilts, tournaments, and displays of military prowess which had sprung from the romantic spirit of chivalry, though strongly countenanced by Royalty in the persons of the seventh and eighth Henries, died away very much towards the close of the fifteenth century; but the more peaceful sports, with which they were commingled, retained their popularity. Those diversions of a people, which are most deeply interwoven with the general feeling, and most in accordance with the bent of the national character, seem indeed to defy the power of time, and to be scarce sensible of change, even while kingdoms are convulsed, laws reversed, and institutions buried in oblivion.

The love of field sports in "Merrie England" had all the enthusiasm of a passion deep seated in the national mind. "It hath ever bene of old antiquitie," says Henry VII., in one of his Proclamations, "used in this realme of most noble fame, for all lustye gentlemen to passe the delectable season of summer, after divers manners and sundry fashions of disports—as in hunting the red and fallowe deer with hounds, grey hounds, and with the hore, also in hawking with hawks of the tower; and other pastimes of the field." Glance we then briefly at the three "fashions of disports" here indicated—Hunting, Hawking and Archery.

I. The northern nations of Europe—the Saxons, the Britons, and the Danes—were from the

<sup>2</sup> For not a few of the facts contained in this short notice, I am indebted to Strutt's valuable but somewhat rare Treatise on the "Sports and pastimes of the people of England"—on which, by the way, Horatio Smith has drawn very liberally, in his volume on "Festivals, Games and Amusements."—V.S.