

# THE ETON HARE-HUNT

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LITTLE has been heard of late about the Eton College Beagles. The War caused the hare-hunt to be suspended for several years, and it was hoped that when the hunting was resumed the headmaster, Dr. Alington, to whom a most influentially signed memorial had been presented by the Humanitarian League, and who cannot be unaware of the disgust which is felt in many quarters at the "breaking up" of hares as a schoolboy recreation, would at least insist on the substitution of a drag-hunt, a form of sport which was once successful and indeed popular at Eton. This hope was disappointed.

It is not necessary here to repeat the arguments against hare-hunting. That it is a cruel practice cannot be denied, owing to the extreme timidity of the hare, and her habit of running in circles; and it is difficult to see on what possible grounds a school-pack can be defended. Here is an extract from a letter written in January, 1905, by Mr. F. C. Selous, the famous lion-hunter, to a member of the Humanitarian League: "After reading your pamphlet, I certainly think it would be better to substitute drag-hunting for the pursuit and killing of a hare. To see one of these animals worried and torn by a pack of dogs is not an edifying sight for a young boy."

That the reader may judge for himself, we subjoin a few extracts from the boys' own account of their sport, as printed in the *Eton College Chronicle* in 1917:—

"Saturday, March 17, Dorney Village. . . . Here we put up a hare, not a very strong one, which crossed the road and ran for the gravel pit, where she turned right-handed towards the nurseries, but was headed and ran on to the line. When

she was trying to cross the line she was headed back, and making for the wire of the nurseries, where she would have got caught up, she was cut in half by an express train."

"Saturday, March 24. On Butts Field we put up a hare, which ran left-handed across the stream, over Dorney road to Easy Bridge, where she squatted. Here she was soon put up again and ran to arches and the Pumping Station; she then ran up the middle of Butts Field and turned left-handed at the end, taking the same circle once more, up to Easy Bridge, to arches, the Pumping Station, and up the middle to Butts Field. Reaching the other end of the field, she doubled back and squatted in a ditch sixty yards from the railway. She was once more put up, and ran left-handed over the wireless field to the farm. Here she squatted, absolutely beat, and the hounds ran over her; getting into the farmyard, she got up and ran very slowly to the allotments; reaching the stream, she fell in, was nearly drowned, and dropped down on the other side dead beat, till the hounds came up and killed her. We did no more that day, but had the run of the season, 1 hr. 12 min.; a wonderful day for the last day of the season."

Especially disgusting in these descriptions are the many references to hares "dead beat," "quite stiff," "too done to move," etc.; and to hounds "thoroughly deserving blood," and "breaking her up."

The reports now printed in the *Eton College Chronicle* are not quite so outspoken as those of earlier years; but it is evident from recent issues that the sport itself is carried on in the same old barbarous manner, and, as is usual in the annals of hunting, the lack of humour is as conspicuous as the lack of humanity. Stupid and revolting as the whole business is, a reader cannot but smile at some of the obstacles of which the young beaglers complain. On a recent occasion (February 14th, 1924) when the hounds had chased the hare into a private garden, "the Master was severely rated by

the lady owner, and told to take them out." Another time "hounds could not be taken across, on account of a very violent farmer." Still more reprehensible was the behaviour of "a certain sportsman," who, "seeing our hare crawling up the ditch, jumped off his bicycle and tried to collar her." That, from a fellow sportsman, was the bitterest of all; a case emphatically of *Et tu, Brute!* But the incident ended all right; for the interloper was baffled "in his hopes of a cheap dinner," as the hounds killed "their well-deserved hare" and "broke her up" in the road after a run of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours. A pretty picture of what may be witnessed on a public thoroughfare in an age which considers itself civilised!

The surprising thing is not that the owner of a garden should have "severely rated" these young savages, but that the headmaster of Eton should give his sanction to a sport which consists in pursuing a small panic-stricken animal over a country which is largely intersected by paths, roads, railway-lines, allotment-gardens, nursery-grounds, and wire-fences, and where the quarry is in continual risk of being headed back or hung up. It is difficult to see how those who are responsible for such a pastime are justified in condemning the less aristocratic rabbit-coursing.

Very significant of the growth of public opinion is the fact that among the many well-known men who, at one time or another, have lent their support to protests against the Eton Beagles, we find such diverse names as those of Mr. Herbert Spencer, Archbishop Temple, Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. Frederic Harrison, Lord Wolseley, Sir Frederick Treves, General Bramwell Booth, Dr. John Clifford, Lord Courtney of Penwith, Lord Morley, Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. Edward Carpenter, Mr. John Galsworthy, Lord Olivier, and Mr. W. H. Hudson; also a number of bishops, heads of Colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, and masters of grammar schools and training colleges. Headmasters of public schools have naturally felt themselves unable to criticise an Eton

institution; but a number of them signed a memorial to the Admiralty in 1907 (against the continuance of the Dartmouth Beagles), which was worded in the same terms as those addressed to the authorities at Eton.

One cannot doubt that the example set by Dr. Arnold in discontinuing the hare-hunt at Rugby will have to be followed, sooner or later, at Eton itself.

N.B.—Humanitarians would greatly help the work of the League by notifying the Secretary of anyone interested, so that leaflets may be sent to them; by purchasing and distributing our leaflets; by organising a Group of those interested in their district, and by sending Press cuttings (with name and date of paper) of cruel sporting incidents, so that these may be followed up promptly.

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