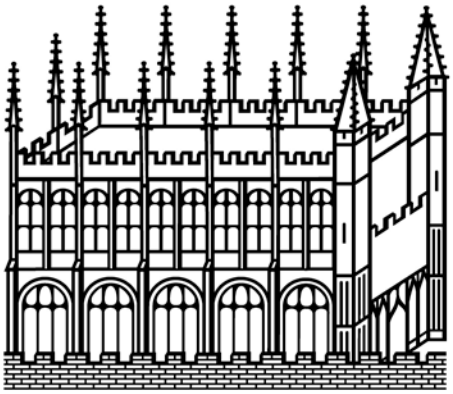
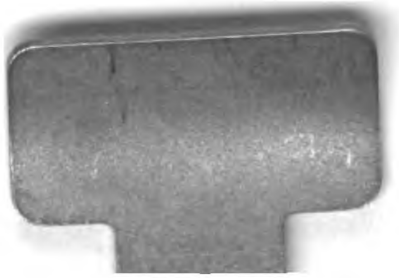


EXMOOR

CECIL ALDIN



EXMOOR

THE RIDING PLAYGROUND OF ENGLAND

THE STAG THE HARBOURER WANTS TO FIND

(*Frontispiece*)

EXMOOR

THE RIDING PLAYGROUND OF ENGLAND

By

CECIL ALDIN

AUTHOR OF "AN ARTIST'S MODELS," ETC.

With Sketches and Maps
BY THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

DURING the last two decades some parts of Exmoor have been taken under the protecting wing of the Society for the Preservation of Natural Beauty Spots, but her land can still be acclaimed the " Once upon a time " country of our childhood's imagination. Only during the holiday months of July, August and September are the villages invaded by visitors ; for the rest of the year the inhabitants lead the peaceful existence they did when Nicholas Snow lived at Oare and Blackmore's Robber Doones were supposed to inhabit Badgworthy.

One or two farm-houses are dotted here and there, but these are few and far between, with usually only a rough bridle- or cart-track leading to them. On the greater part of Exmoor not a house can be seen, even from the highest altitudes.

Exmoor is the land of the horseman and the walker. Almost everywhere it is unfenced and " rideable," with shady footpaths and tinkling streams in every coombe and valley ; the roughly defined tracks which wind across the high, rolling hill-tops often completely disappear in the heather and ling. When crossing the moor this scarcity of landmarks—most of which are only distinguishable to a " man of Exmoor "—make it very difficult for the traveller to keep his direction, and the compass often has to be his only guide ; for at every mile, or less, he has to dip down into deep, oak coombes carpeted with tall bracken, wade across tumbling streams and then

climb again to the high land of the heather. The only easily recognizable features from most places are Dunkery Beacon above Horner Woods, Lillycombe House above Oare, and behind it the telegraph posts which mark the Lynton-Porlock road.

Exmoor is the one place in England where the horse and pony are the popular conveyances and the motor car is but an " also ran." The butcher's boy still brings your dinner-joint in front of him as he sits in the saddle. The farmer hacks to market in the villages. Every inn has ostlers in its yard, stabling for your horse, and all the world rides across the moor to a meet on a staghunting morning. Riding, and the supply of hacks and hunters in the summer, is the prevailing industry, and the life, habits and the hunting of the wild red deer are the leading topics of conversation among Devon and Somerset people.

Wealthy agricultural " optimists " have long ago had their lesson ; we hope, therefore, that new arterial roads and development schemes will always be treated with contumely by the populace, landowners and farmers, and that our " Once upon a time country "—our pony-club paradise—will always remain the land of the Fortescues, Aclands, Snows, Ridlers and Rawles, its hills still carpeted with heather and its shady valleys echoing the music of the babbling streams.

But this is not to be a guide-book, or if it is it is to be a very unconventional one, for we all dislike guide-books.

Therefore, to show you that this is not going to be one, and before starting, we will travel together 2000 miles away from Exmoor to the little Costa d'Or Hotel high up on the hill-side above the Mediterranean Sea in the island of Majorca, and here, on its terrace in the glow of a warm

sunset, I will introduce myself to you and tell you of the view which we see below us, which is very much like that seen from the woods above the Anchor Hotel at Porlock Weir on the borders of Exmoor.

It is this view in Majorca which gave me inspiration for my short story of Exmoor in England.

Five hundred feet below us is the Mediterranean (perchance a little more ultramarine and pure in colour than the muddy Bristol Channel) but from our miniature terrace, half-way up the cliff-side, a winding path wends its way through fir and olive trees—in the same way that the paths wander down the hill-side at Porlock—until it reaches the bathing-pool below. So, sitting here with me on this still October evening we will imagine, as I did, that we can hear an amorous stag " belling " and see a group of hinds wandering through the trees below us to join him.

But here, alas, the simile ends abruptly, for the hinds turn out to be but nanny-goats and the stag an odoriferous and ancient " billy."

So, on this little Costa d'Or terrace, we will begin our travels together, and I can renew my acquaintance with old friends of the Devon and Somerset country, and recall the farms, villages and inhabitants of Exmoor that I know so well.

. . . . . .

For very many years I spent the spring and summer on one part or another of the moor—first at Dunster, then for some years at various inns and houses at Porlock Weir and finally at Cloutsham Farm above Horner Woods, always taking my horses, dogs and many of my goods and chattels with me. In this way I made many delight-

ful Somersetshire friends, and with my grandchildren got to know intimately most of the track-ways and bridle-paths of the surrounding hills and valleys.

In this book I am not going to take you long distances. It is to be an intimate affair, a hacker's and walker's handbook and not an Automobile Association guide. It will be of no use to motorists, for it will hardly notice the few high roads of mechanical traction, but only travel along the little-known paths of the few farms of Exmoor—the sort of tracks we come across when hunting with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.

. . . . . .

In the good old days, before the advent of the horrible arterial road, the first thing when setting out on a journey was to study a map. I have always been a lover of maps, but more especially of those of pre-railway days. Spread out before me now is one of Exmoor of 1828, and a comparison with the work of present-day cartographers does not show anything like so much difference as would be the case in any other part of England.

When we were very young (and we all want to keep so) any book of buried treasure, pirate islands or South Sea travel thrilled us, but more especially if accompanied by a rough map. So it is correct that any guide-book dealing with our exciting " once upon a time country " should contain one or two maps, clear maps, which help the story.

On our maps, then, we will accentuate the importance, from our point of view, of the tracks and by-ways out of all proportion to their real size and significance, and make the main roads dwindle down to the diminishing viewpoint at which we *wish* to see them. In fact we will

do what we like with our cartography, and go back, like Rip van Winkle, a hundred years in order to forget that we own such things as motor cars or motor cycles.

Any of the numerous guide-books will tell you all that you want to know about show places and how to get there in cars. I want to tell you about the quiet walks and rides, the villages and their inhabitants, and among other things the places where you must ride carefully for fear of bogs or peat-holes, and teach you to recognize nature's danger-signals for these.

Instead of being a county history I intend to introduce you to moorland farms and to the bridle-paths leading to them ; to lead you and your pony down the quiet tracks and over the ancient pack-horse bridges and fords. But a real author should not give away his plot at the beginning of his story ; a dramatist should wait until his last scene to give his big effect. Only a foolish artist or very amateur book-writer would think of doing such a thing, although this putting of the " cart before the horse " has one great advantage, for, if they wish to, " passengers may alight here " and leave the author to meander on alone over Exmoor to study the life and habits of the wild red deer ; to discuss without prejudice or heated argument the cruelty or otherwise of staghunting ; to give reasons why it should be done and the method of doing it and to look once more for the bold bad Doones of Badgworthy and know the venerable Snows of Oare.

C. A.

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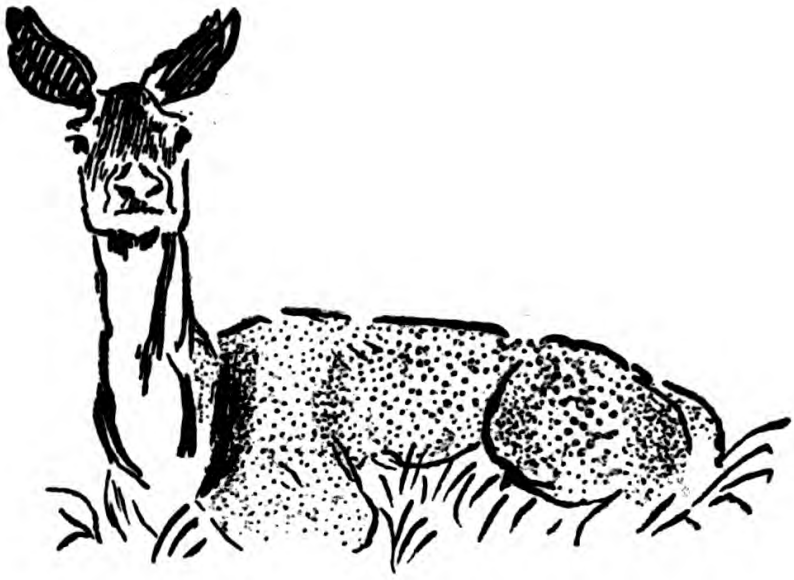

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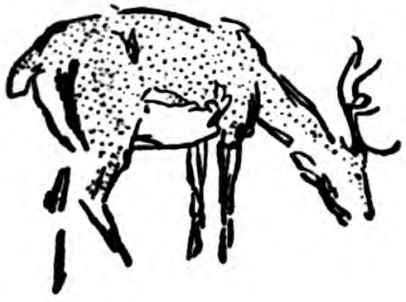


MAPS

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The author's untimely death in January of this year has created a gap it will be difficult to fill again in the ranks of sportsmen-artists, for Cecil Aldin's work possessed a strength, fidelity, and often a sense of delicate humour so rarely found in combination.

It was only during the last few years of his life that the pen supplemented the brush, and this, his last book—originally planned upon a much wider scale—will give some insight into an affection for this locality exceeding all others, and his keen desire that horsemen and walkers of all ages might share with him its natural beauties and elbow-room.

CHAPTER I

THE FOREST OF EXMOOR

I REGRET to have to record that Exmoor, as a forest, is a delusion and a fraud. Even in 1651, when the last perambulation of it was ordered to define and verify its limits, it had, according to evidence taken at a trial at the time, only one tree, known as Kite Oak. This tree stood on the hill which we see marked on our maps to-day as Kittuck, and one tree will never make a forest.

At that time the total area was said to be 18,927 acres, which, it was stated at this trial, consisted of "sedg-busshes, rushbusshyes, fearnes heath and such like." But whereas it seemed Exmoor Forest was then a dismal marsh, we now find oak woods in most of the coombes, and a few fir plantations.

A royal "forest," however, did not necessarily mean the possession of much timber, but signified simply land belonging to the Crown and capable of holding deer and other wild animals.

A cursory view across parts of Exmoor to-day will still fail to impress upon the visitor that it is a forest consisting of trees, for if, let us say, we look across the landscape from Hawkcombe Head towards Kittuck, Brendon Two Gates and Devonshire, not a tree or wood catches the eye, only a series of bare, rolling hills, and the same type of landscape confronts us on most parts of the moor unless we are able to look down into the coombes.

It is not until we dip down into these valleys, which so

constantly divide the hills, that we discover trees, dense vegetation and high bracken.

Were it not for these valleys, with their tinkling streams, Exmoor would be a bleak, bare place ; rather as it was described in 1651, and as already mentioned, a place of " sedgbusshes, rushbusshyes, fearnes heath and such like."

Leland tells us in the course of his *Itinerary*, and when riding across Exmoor in Tudor times, that he hacked from " Dunestorre to Exford, al hylly and rokky, full of Brokes in every hilles botom and meatly woddid " ; that there was a " litle Tymbre Bridge at Exforde " ; that at Simonsbath there was a " Bridge of Woodde," and that three miles before approaching " a poore Village caullid Brayforde, the soyle began to be sumwhat fruteful " and " the Hylles to be ful of Enclosures."

I am inclined to think that even in these times, and notwithstanding the evidence at the trial in 1651 which I have quoted, the forest of Exmoor was not even then such an entirely dismal place as it is described, and that most of the coombes were " meatly woddid," as Leland has told us, and as they are now.

Streams have always flowed down the coombes to fructify vegetation, and the Exmoor hills were always known as " depasture " grounds for " deer, horse beasts " (possibly the original Exmoor ponies) " and catelle," who would naturally shelter in these coombes during the winter seasons.

That there was not an enclosure in the time of their grandfathers between Porlock and Dulverton I have heard stated by " oldest inhabitants," but it is not correct, for although before our " wealthy optimists' " purchase of the moor in 1818, there were certainly not any farm-houses upon the greater part of the moor that

were not in ruins, there was, even in the earliest times, a manor-house at Oare, a cottage or two at Exford and Simonsbath, and certainly a manor-house at Picket Stones near Landacre Bridge, over the Barle.

The Knights built Larkbarrow, Honeymead and Warren Farms, and began a castle for themselves at Simonsbath which they never finished and which is now a ruin.

The Acland family improved and enlarged Cloutsham Farm to serve as a hunting-box, but a farm was there before 1818, because, notwithstanding that the older thatched roof building was burnt down some years ago, old doorways of the seventeenth century are to be found in the present building.

I am afraid I have been a little caustic about Mr Knight's efforts, for had he succeeded he would undoubtedly have spoilt Exmoor ; but he did make one good road across it which now helps us in our sense of direction if we become lost on the hills. For we know that at one end of this road we must find Exford, at the other Lynton, and that within the circle outlined by Porlock, Dunkery Gate, Wheddon Cross, Winsford, Dulverton, Exford and Simonsbath, it is the only main and macadamed road we *can* cross.

On the Bristol Channel side of the moor we have the Porlock-Lynton tarmac turnpike, but this is so easily distinguishable by its tall telegraph posts, showing clearly on the horizon between Hawkcombe Head and Countisbury Hill, that it can never be mistaken. Also, we have the lesser road-track which runs from Hawkcombe Head to Exford, again easily recognized by the high beech hedge which runs on one side only most of the way. On my map of the moor (facing this page) this minor road-track is marked as a large dotted road, which, in this

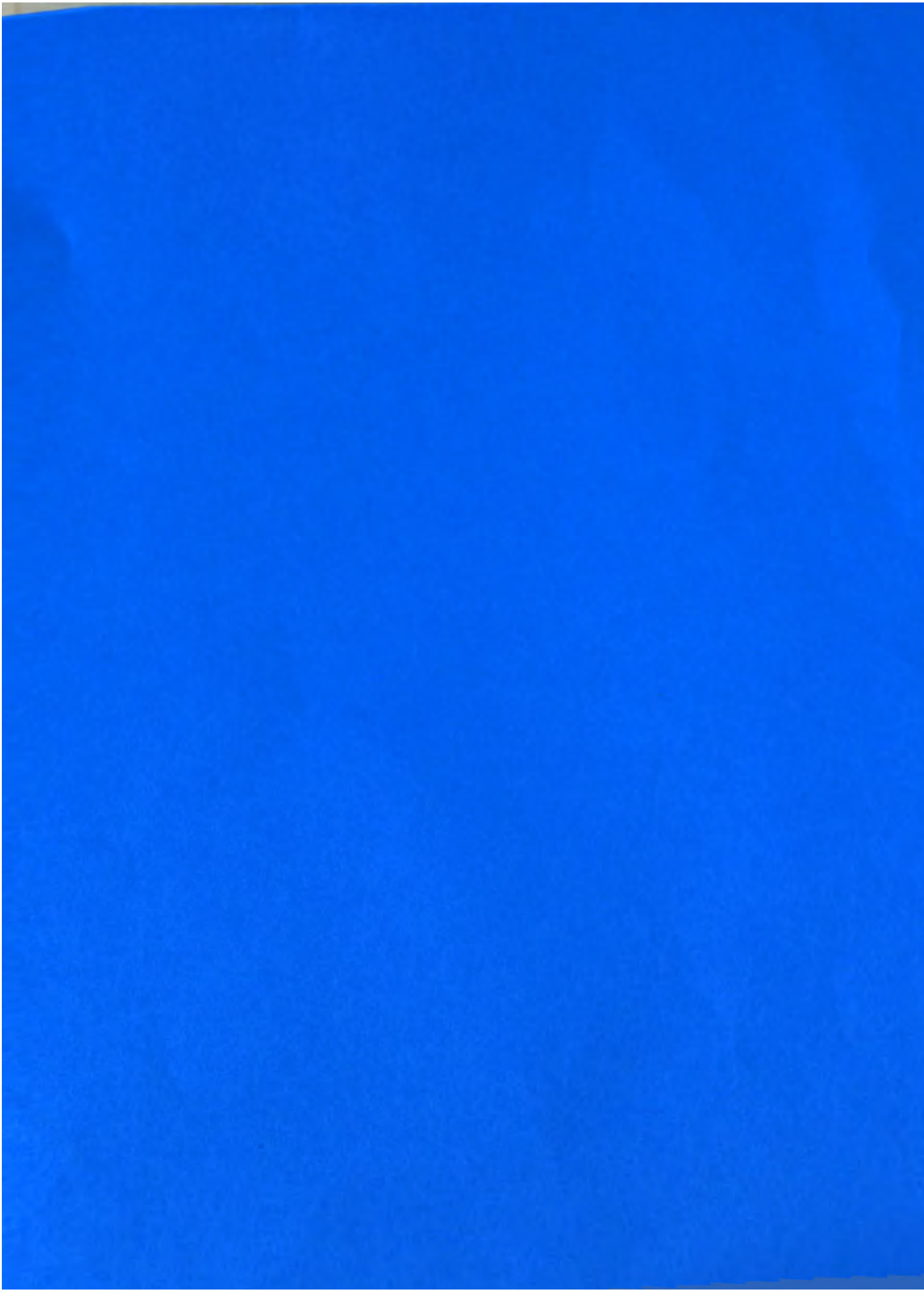
case, means a road, possible for a car but untarmaced, and, except on hunting days, used very little by wheeled traffic. It starts at White Stones and finishes at Exford.

From Exford also there are one or two minor roads running north and south-east towards Withypool and Winsford, and to Wheddon Cross; there is also the old pack-horse track to Porlock over Pool Bridge, and the broad, tarmac, main road which runs from Minehead through Wheddon Cross to Winsford or Dulverton, and which almost marks the boundary of the east side of the map.

Just these few words on the more important roads and tracks and we will begin to explore the footpaths and bridle-roads, hills and valleys on the Porlock side of the moor. But to do this we must again get in close touch with both maps.

On the large-scale one of the Porlock area (facing page 21) most of the bridle-paths are clearly shown. These, like all tracks, were originally started by the " wild things " of the forest, but all those converging on to Horner Green were much used by trains of pack-horses, and the two pack-horse bridges still remaining near Horner Farm show, by their extremely low parapets and narrow width, that the sagging packs had room to swing clear of the sides, and that it was impossible for any sort of cart to cross over them owing to their narrowness.

When I stayed at Cloutsham, the hack from Horner to Cloutsham Ball and farm was a never-ending joy to all my friends, as there were at least half a dozen bridle-paths, all equally beautiful, which took you from one farm to the other. At Cloutsham Farm Mrs Foster still lives, but a few years ago her husband was drowned when fording Horner Water one day in winter and whilst hind-hunting.



In summer the tumbling East Water and Horner Water are fordable anywhere, but when in winter spate they are a very different matter and should only be crossed carefully at recognized fords.

No one knew the woods and rivers round Cloutsham better than "Dick" Foster, yet he of all people met this tragic end soon after I left Somerset. His horse slipped on the stones, fell, and probably the rider, although no one saw it, hit his head on one and became unconscious.

When hacking in the Porlock district, the rides in Horner Woods and Valleys, with the top of Ley Hill for an occasional canter and then the drop down to the cool of Pool Bridge for the return by the side of Horner Water via Horner Farm, Hacketty Way and Doverhay to Porlock, makes one of the best short hacks for youthful riders.

This hack can be lengthened as much as one likes by taking any of my map-paths either to Pool Farm, Wilmersham Cottages, Stoke Bridge, Stoke Pero, Cloutsham, and then descending again, after a glass of milk or tea at Cloutsham Farm, over Cloutsham Ball, taking the right-hand-side track at 960 feet, which is the easier descent to East Water, and just above where it joins Horner Water.

Another enjoyable ride for young people is to go through the swing-gate on the right, a few yards past Horner Mill on the road to Chapel Cross and Luccombe. Any upward track here takes the rider to Webber's Post and Dunkery Hill, but care should be taken to keep on the Dunkery Beacon side of the road over the top leading to Dunkery Hill Gate, for on the Luccombe side of Robin Hood Beacon there is danger hidden under the heather. Here the earth is littered with large stones and rocks, and it is one of the most unpleasant places to cross on this side of the moor

when out hunting, although almost everywhere else on this heather and bracken-covered hill it is sound going.

There is a very nasty little, overgrown, rushy ditch just at about 800 by Webber's Post where tosses always occur, and it is wise to remember that the head of a coombe generally has a little stream rising near the top of it, as shown on my Porlock-area map above the **U** of Dunkery. There is one above Sweetworthy (pronounced Sweeterie, like Badgerie, etc.), and these stream-heads generally mean very " soft " going for a few yards, so that it is always best, when hacking or hunting, to keep *above* the coombe-heads.

Sometimes it is too windy on top to make hacking pleasant, and then it is that endless rides can be had in this district exploring footpaths and bridle-tracks up the East Water, Horner Water and Hawkcombe, all a constant delight to my grandchildren on their ponies. One can spend weeks exploring this varied district without ever going more than three or four miles from Porlock or Porlock Weir.

One of the chief of the longer bridle-tracks on this side, which everyone should learn, is that from Hawkcombe Head to Larkbarrow, Tom's Hill, Badgworthy (Badgerie), Crossing and Brendon Two Gates. It is an important one to know as it has to be used so often when hunting, and, incidentally, it is one of the best lines to ride over that a stag can take.

In parts the actual track is not very clearly defined, but after turning in at the gate on the Devonshire side of the Hawkcombe Head-Exford road—at the corner of Porlock Common—you cross the head of Weir Water and afterwards Chalk Water, both at clearly defined crossings, and then across the meads to Larkbarrow Farm, hidden

in the only group of trees seen on your half right. Here you pass in front of the farm-house. In the summer it was generally let to General Peck and his family, and was once used as a hunting-box by Henry Chaplin (Lord Chaplin) and known all over England as " The Squire " : a great sportsman and celebrated Lincolnshire Master of Foxhounds. He it was who built the large range of loose boxes and stabling that the visitor is so astonished to find here.

Larkbarrow is built, as General Peck once described it to me, in one of the world's great open spaces, with no good road to it and completely surrounded in every direction by open moor, the only habitation within sight being the little shepherd's cot of Tom's Hill.

When travelling any Exmoor track it is always wise to memorize landmarks for the outward or return journey. Badgworthy Crossing—the ford over Badgworthy Water —with its swinging gate on the Doone Valley side, is very awkward to open if your pony is stamping about in the cool water. It is reached soon after passing Tom's Hill, and the steep path on the other side up Hoccombe Hill is another guide-mark that can be clearly seen some distance away.

After the ford gate, you can either go " up over " the Hoccombe path to Badgworthy Water on the Two Gates road, or turn sharp right, following the water, past the Doone Valley to Malmesmead Farm. Here you can get tea, a stable for your pony, or even hire fresh ones if you wish to do so. From Malmesmead Farm you can hack back through the valley, over Robbers Bridge, and climb the steep hill to Oare Post, so reaching Hawkcombe Head once again.

When returning by Larkbarrow to Hawkcombe Head,

Lillycombe (White) House always shows up on your half left, and the tall telegraph posts of the Lynton-Porlock road appear in the skyline behind it soon after leaving Larkbarrow. Very often a track may disappear in the heather for a few hundred yards, or even more, so that landmarks of any sort are always worth remembering.

Stream or river crossings are usually clearly defined by hoof-marks, and it is safer to cross at these rather than to choose places for yourself, which are often very " soft " near the water.

The dotted lines on our two maps, however, give most of the footpaths and bridle-tracks. Written descriptions of them, even of the paths around Cloutsham Farm, Priest's Walk, Nun's Path, Gertrude Path, etc. (for many of them have definite names clearly marked on small unobtrusive boards by the late Sir C. D. Dyke-Acland who preserved the natural beauties of this side of the country) can never convey the charm and excitement of personal exploration on foot or pony-back.

In the oak woods some sort of track must always be followed, but when once outside these, riders can go almost anywhere with safety provided they keep on the heather. The definite paths over Dunkery I have marked, together with some of the heights which will help when reading my maps. I do, however, call to mind one very unpleasant experience when exploring on horseback, and this took place within a few hundred yards of Horner Farm.

Just above Horner Green the track crosses the water by a stone bridge, and my daughter and I, when hacking to Porlock, thought we would take a small path on the left side of the stream instead of crossing the bridge itself, and so cut up on to the higher path which goes to Hacketty

Way and Porlock. For a few hundred yards it was quite a sound path following the side of the stream, and then the left bank upon which we were riding became much steeper and the path suddenly rose ten, twenty, thirty feet above the rocky river-bed below us. Also it became narrower and narrower. I called to my daughter, who was riding in front, to go carefully, and just as she had come to a standstill a few yards ahead of me. Here the narrow track had broken away with recent rains, the sides were perpendicular, and, as far as I could see, there was not room enough for any horse to turn round to retrace his steps without being pushed over the edge with a consequent fall on to the rocks twenty or thirty feet below.

It was an awkward predicament, and we stood for a moment looking at the impasse and thinking how best to get out of it without serious damage to ourselves. I hurriedly told my companion to slip off her horse on the high-bank side, let go the reins, cling to a tree-root and see if her mare would turn round alone. It was the only thing to do. After a second or two the old mare performed the pivot cleverly, her head and neck outstretched over the drop, whilst, at the same time, tucking all her four feet together just as an elephant does when performing on a tub at the circus. She also pushed her quarters well into the bank behind her, so, in the end, getting safely round to face me. Just as I was about to follow my daughter's example—to jump off and see if my horse could turn round alone—I felt by the contraction of his back muscles that he had decided to try it on his own account. There was no time to fight him on so narrow a track, either by using my legs or hands, and we should certainly both have been precipitated to the bottom had I done so. So there I sat looking into the depths whilst

he proceeded to turn very slowly and carefully in the same way he had seen the mare do a second or two before. I, in the meantime, had slipped my feet out of the stirrups, fully prepared to throw myself off the moment I felt him falling, my heart thumping all the time at an unpleasant pace.

How it was safely accomplished I have never been able to understand, excepting that my horse's head was all the time free from control of any sort, and his instinct of self-preservation must have been just as strong as my own.

On looking at the place afterwards, we both came to the conclusion that it was a miraculous escape for all four of us, and, in addition, that only the cleverness and brains of our horses had saved us from what would probably have been a very serious accident.

These paths do sometimes get washed away, and there is one place on the little footpath which follows East Water near the wooden ford-bridge and road from Cloutsham to Webber's Post that, after heavy rains, is often in rather a dangerous state for riders, although for most of the way it is perfectly good going.

It is always wise, where these narrow footpaths follow streams, to look as far ahead as you can and make sure that a line of retreat is possible should the necessity arise from this or any other cause.

Horner Water, East Water, Hawkcombe Water are all worth exploring to their sources, but this is done more easily when on foot than when riding.

From Porlock to Porlock Weir is about two miles. The road passes through West Porlock, with its picturesque cottages, and continues on to Porlockford, which now has a bridge over it, and finishes, so far as motors are

concerned, at the Anchor Hotel. There is another and much more pleasant, although little known, bridle-path which saves the rider all the tarmac road-hack from Porlock to the Anchor.

To find this path it is necessary to pass the Old Ship Inn at Porlock, ride about 200 yards up the Toll Road, and then take the first track on the right. This track passes along the back of Coombe Corner, wanders through the woods, passes just behind Mr Blathwayt's house, West Porlock Manor, and continues—a shady ride on the hottest day—till it comes out by the side of the new Recreation Room at Porlockford, which was once my studio.

From here one has to ride a few yards along the tarmac road, but if the upper and left-hand lane is taken, leading past another old house of mine, Chapel Knapp, the Anchor Hotel can be reached without meeting any motor traffic, for the lane does not join the main road again until it reaches the Ship Inn. Behind the new Recreation Hall at Porlockford there are many delightful rides and free from traffic of any sort.

By going up the lane at the back of the Anchor and past Worthy Manor another series of rides is available. The walk to Culbone Church, perhaps the best known, goes below Ashley Coombe House—Lady Lovelace's—and along the side of the wooded cliffs, but it is not possible to *ride* this without permission from Lady Lovelace.

One day I was hacking along this path with my dogs. I had passed a badger-earth about half a mile before reaching Culbone Church, and was descending to the stone bridge which crosses Withycombe Water, just by the side of this the smallest church in England, when Cracker, my bull-terrier, took it into his head to rush

round me in a mad gallop. Whether it was the sound of the running water which he always loves plunging into, or just *joie-de-vivre*, I did not quite know, but after making two or three mad circles around my horse and in and out of the trees, he plunged down the footpath to the bridge just below me.

Now this bridge, I knew, had a deep drop to the water below, a matter of at least twenty or thirty feet, so I called to him as he neared it. I did this because whenever I see Cracker rushing around in the way he was then doing, ears back and tail in a *downward* semicircle out behind him, I know he intends to play some mad trick upon me.

This he immediately proceeded to do, for I saw him rush on to the bridge, leap on to the parapet and, to my horror, at once overbalance and disappear from my sight, apparently to fall with a crash on the rocks which I knew were below. I galloped to the bridge, expecting to hear a scream as he broke his leg or back, but instead there reigned a deathly silence, and I felt sure he must be dead. Jumping off my horse, I was about to clamber down the bank in order to bring up the body of my favourite when I saw him emerge upon the opposite bank, his tail held tightly between his legs and a very sheepish look on his ugly face; he was shaken, but apparently not damaged in any way.

Afterwards I had time to examine carefully the exact spot at which he had tried to commit suicide and saw at once the reason for the lucky escape he had had, for below me was a thick, overhanging bush which must have caught and held him until he rolled through it to slide gently to the rocks a few feet below it. It was only this bush that had saved him from being a cripple for life, or possibly

from a horrible death. Cracker has had a charmed life ever since this Culbone episode.

There is a second track, a little less known, starting to the left just before reaching Worthy Manor. It is the most enjoyable way by which to ride to Hawkcombe Head from Porlock Weir.

This bridle-path crosses the Worthy stream almost at once. There used to be rather a nasty, large and slippery stone just at this crossing on the Porlock side. With the tumbling water on the rider's left, the path climbs gradually up Worthy Coombe until it leaves the woods, passes through a gate *under* Yarnor Mill Bridge, straight on up Pitt Lane to Pitt Farmyard gate.

When a track takes the traveller to a farm gate on Exmoor it generally means that he can walk through, *shutting the gate* after him, and that he can pass out through another gate, once more on to the track, being careful also to shut this second gate. Careless riders so often forget to do this and cause endless trouble to farmers. Everyone riding over Exmoor should have this " shut all gates " maxim impressed upon them.

After passing through this farm there are two paths: the left one leads by a steep climb up the side of Pitt Plantation to Hawkcombe Head and the Lynton road, the other, straight on from the farm, climbs up Smallacombe and comes out also on the Lynton road, either at Yarnor Moor Stables—where the old Lynton coach had its first change of horses after leaving Porlock—or joins the main road almost at County Gate, two miles farther on.

Yarnor Moor Stables, or Culbone Stables as they are sometimes called, are where the Devon and Somerset pack is usually kennelled while the tufters are at work, and when the hounds meet at Hawkcombe Head.

Half a mile along the Lynton road is Lillycombe House where Mr Macdermot lives, but it cannot be seen from the road, being on the left and hidden by the trees, but this small house is, as I have already said, one of the chief landmarks when riding across the Exford side of the moor.

By crossing the main road at Yarnor Moor Stables any of the paths on the left of it will eventually bring the rider down to Robbers Bridge, Oare Manor, Malmesmead Farm and Badgworthy Water, and there is no more enjoyable ride than this for a picnic lunch, and then to come home across the moor by Badgworthy Crossing, Tom's Hill, Larkbarrow, Porlock Common, Hawkcombe and, as Samuel Pepys might have said, " so to Sparslock Town," which was the name by which Porlock was known in Domesday Book.

The rides, however, are endless. One could continue giving routes and rides to fill a long book, which was never my intention, because we all prefer exploring on our own to following a guide.

Branching almost anywhere from these tracks, the traveller can, if he has a sense of direction, ride anywhere between County Gate, Brendon, Simonsbath, Withypool, Dunkery, Webbers Post and Porlock, an area measuring nearly fifteen miles square, with only Lillycombe and Oare Manor, Malmesmead, Tippacott, Tom's Mill, Larkbarrow, Cloutsham and Warren Farm-houses for a glass of milk or cider, and a farm or two near Exford town.

Before I hunted in Leicestershire I used to think that it must be a flat county. But, on the contrary, the counties known as " the Shires " in the Midlands, and the best hunting counties in England, are very hilly and distinctly undulating. In the same way some people think

Exmoor is a high, bleak waste, forgetting entirely that, although a high table-land, it is the most undulating county in the world, with deep valleys covered with wild verdure, and rocky streams at almost every half-mile.

Besides the county which we call Exmoor, which is partly in Devon and partly in Somerset, we have those delightful people who were born, bred and live in it—the villagers, the farmers—the gentlemen of Exmoor. That is how I always like to describe and classify them. The *gentlemen* of Exmoor! One never meets an uncivil villager or farmer.

And the sporting doctors and parsons of Exmoor! Have not many of their names been household words? Names known and honoured by Somerset and Devonshire folk, and by those who have visited this county. Who has not heard of the Fortescues, Aclands and Luttrells among the big landowners; or of Parson Russell, Dr John Palk Collyns, or Nicholas Snow of Oare Manor—that great sportsman who, with Dr Collyns, the Fortescues and Aclands, at a critical time some sixty years ago, saved the wild red deer which had roamed Exmoor for centuries from being exterminated by trapping and poaching? Exmoor, where every man is Nature's gentleman.

To-day, with so many casual visitors coming and going in motor cars, modes and manners, even on Exmoor, have had to be adjusted to meet requirements. But when first I journeyed to Porlock by the four-horse Lynton coach from Minehead station, visitors were comparatively few. One four-horse coach-load and a few pair-horse flys took all the arrivals which daily came to this out-of-the-way spot during the summer months.

One never forgot the village welcome. After your first visit—and no one ever went to Porlock only once—you

received such a one that it always seemed more like the homecoming of the oldest resident after extensive travel than the return of a casual visitor to the country. Shopkeepers in Porlock would rush out of their shops to greet you. The boots, the chambermaids, and grooms from the stable-yard all bustled out to give you welcome, and the old salts on the quay at Porlock Weir, who seemed to have sat there from the time you had left the year before, hastened to come and greet you and tell you the news of the quayside. Even the village brass band from Porlock knew you had arrived and came to " play you in " on the green in front of the hotel at dinner-time that night!

How we all enjoyed ourselves in those days at the Anchor, and Ship Inn adjoining, with no sign of a char-à-bancs or motor car ever to mar the peacefulness of the Weir.

To Porlock my old friend Sir Frank Carruthers Gould had retired after being for years political cartoonist to the *Pall Mall Gazette* and other papers.

In those days there was no way to Lynton except over the formidable Porlock Hill by coach, and there were no " Ye Old Englisshe Tea Rooms " and very few shops in Porlock.

In the evening, in summer, the whole village forgathered to discuss the world's news on the open space outside the lich-gate of its twelfth-century church, just as their forefathers had done for centuries.

A few artists wandered about Doverhay or had studios up the coombe. Moorland farmers rode in occasionally and went out with saddle-bags loaded with groceries from the only grocer's shop.

Few of the female sex ever rode astride, except the late Mrs Green from Porlock Weir, and only very few of the

ladies of the neighbourhood hunted at all. Pamela Green was then almost the only child rider who hunted, and, instead of two or three hundred " hirelings " being stabled in every available shed and stable in the neighbourhood, Mr Collings of Exeter came every year with his little son, Tony, and brought over a dozen or two cobs and ponies, more for a holiday and to amuse himself than with the idea of starting one of the biggest hireling businesses in England.

It is always rather sad to see the development of a place we love—to see it become popularised ; to miss old faces and find new ones in their place, and old buildings pulled down to make way for " improvements," but we know that it is inevitable, and that the old order is always changing.

Dunster, Exford, Simonsbath, Withypool, Winsford and Dulverton have all had more and more visitors thrust upon them by the ubiquitous motor car, but perhaps Porlock, through being on the direct road to Lynton, has suffered most of all from the perpetual stream of cars and chars-à-bancs that in August flow through its narrow streets.

My very first holiday in this county was spent at an old farm-house at Alcombe Cross, then well outside Minehead, and from my sitting-room window I looked over fields to the sea, with not another house to be seen. Now Alcombe almost joins up with Minehead, whilst Dunster and my ancient farm, although still there, are surrounded by rows of modern houses with rooms to let and with a promenade of large shops facing them.

Minehead is now a flourishing seaside town with its main street thronged with cars and visitors, whereas, when I first went there, the only hotels were the Beach,

and Plume of Feathers, and no Hôtel de Luxe or Splendide had arisen to attract wealthy clients.

The seaside towns of Minehead and Lynton do not rightly come within my magic circle, because they are much like other seaside towns with Ritz Hotels, boarding-houses, bandstands, pierrots and shops.

So far as staghunting and the wild side of Exmoor are concerned they come under quite a different category to the little village-towns within my ring-fence.

It is at Minehead, however, that all travellers by rail for Porlock and Lynton arrive, the remainder of the journey—six miles to Porlock and eighteen to Lynton—which used to be accomplished by four-horse coach, being now finished by motor bus.

Dunster, two and a half miles from Minehead, I have included because the staghounds meet there every year.

Luckily Dunster itself has not been "improved" or built over. The old yarn market, built by the Luttrells in 1609 at the top of its broad street, is as it was three hundred years ago. The Luttrell Arms Inn, although modernized inside, still has its original walls, and Dunster Castle, the home of the Luttrells for centuries, still dominates the little town as it did in feudal times.

Much polo is now played on its meadows where the receding sea once washed over the land, and where I held the second and third of my All-Children's Pony Shows in 1928 and 1929.

But what a "guide-book" this is turning out to be! So we will gladly close this chapter and hope for better things to come.

CHAPTER II

SOME OF ITS VILLAGES AND FOLK

THE air of Exmoor is like a dry champagne ; to breathe it makes old men and women young and gives sparkle and " life " to all young people. No one can be listless or suffer from a liver on the high altitudes of Exmoor in summer. When we descend to the villages and coombes we may feel the heat, but after wading the cool stream and once again arriving on the tops our spirits rise with Exmoor's life-giving qualities.

Here, on a fine day, at a moorland meet or hacking party, everyone has that party spirit, which nowadays we are so fond of talking about ; not a party spirit gained by drinking numerous cocktails but by healthy exercise and an invigorating atmosphere.

In winter time travel on the hill-tops may be an over-rated amusement, for the north and east winds come across the Bristol Channel from Wales in a way that makes any-one journeying over the moor at that season long to reach the shelter of Exford or Porlock.

When it rains here it does it well and truly, and à propos of this, I once saw a rather comic scene at a staghound meet a few years ago, on the top of Hawkcombe Head. A lady from India had come out hunting in a tropical riding habit, and one of Exmoor's " showers " quickly converted this into a skin-tight covering for her rather too full-blown figure. In a few moments it left her looking very like a buxom Lady Godiva on her grey horse, but,

unfortunately for her, without that Coventry lady's flowing tresses. One can get wetter on Exmoor on a rainy day, or when a cold, drenching fog covers the hills, than in any other place in England.

Exmoor proper originally extended as far as Barnstaple and Taunton, so joining up with Dartmoor, but now much of this is cultivated land, and wild Exmoor only covers the area between Dulverton, Winsford, Simonsbath, Lynton and Porlock. Most of this area is still uncultivated and in its virgin state. It consists of great spherical hills covered with heather and coombes full of bracken and stunted oaks, the day-time home of the wild red deer.

A glance at the map will show us that its area measures roughly thirty-five by twenty-five miles. It is intersected by rivers and divided again by countless streamlets tinkling down nearly every coombe and hollow. Exmoor in early autumn is a wondrous land of purple heather and rippling streams.

The part of the original moor that has been least " reclaimed " by agriculture is that which lies within a circle bordered by Simonsbath, Lynton, County Gate, Porlock, Luccombe and Exford. Outside this division we have Winsford Common and Withypool. But, in fact, large tracts of moorland are still left anywhere where staghounds meet, with Exford as more or less a centre, where are the kennels of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.

If Exmoor had a capital town it would certainly be Exford, for it is in the hub of the Devon and Somerset hunting country. Minehead and Lynton may be hubs of the Somerset and Devon seaside resorts but Exford certainly represents the former.

Now, in most capital towns we have a certain number of shops where business of some kind is carried on, and

in Exford there is the general store of Mr and Mrs Batchelor where you can buy your trousers, groceries, tobacco, linens, ironmongery, hayrakes, rope, picture post-cards, hams and sardines; in fact everything that you want to buy. It is the business hub of the town, and this establishment is the " universal provider " of Exmoor.

Simonsbath, I believe, should be the " capital "—at least all guide-books say so—but as this is not a guide-book I am calling Exford *my* " capital," because I know Exford has this shop and I do not think the one in Simonsbath is as important an emporium. In any case Exford is in the most central position of the area on the map we propose exploring, and for that reason we will draw concentric one-mile circles on our map, making Mr Batchelor's general store the centre-point of them.

But how much better fun it is making a map of our own instead of following those already made by expert map-makers—which we know must be perfectly correct! As you have seen, therefore, I have invented my own " signs and characteristics," to indicate certain places. By making, for instance, a little sketch of a stag where the meets of the Staghounds are held; rushes close together to tell you to beware of boggy ground. The larger oak woods I have indicated with an oak-tree pattern. Main roads are only marked to guide us, not because they will interest us in the slightest degree, but our little bridle-tracks and footpaths will jump to the eye as drawn with a good, strong line made up of dots and dashes in order that we may keep to each one we are following without unnecessary difficulty.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, before railways were invented and when everyone had to travel by coach or on horseback, passengers used to purchase

little oblong maps of the road before setting out on a journey. When I was last at Cloutsham Farm one of the Aclands gave me one of these old coaching maps, and I have it before me now. It is encased in a leather cover with a band round it to keep the loose sheets it contains together. It measures 8 inches by 3 inches and shows both sides of a coach road with what are described as the " noblemen's and gentlemen's seats " situated on either side of it. This gave a coach traveller very useful information because, when he was riding high up on the top of the mail, at the furious rate of nine miles an hour, he had plenty of time to read his map and find out where his friends had houses in the neighbourhood.

To enter the town of Exford from any direction you must first descend a precipitous hill, for it lies in a cup at the bottom, and all the roads to it lead to Mr Batchelor's shop, the business centre of the town. In addition are two large hotels containing yards full of horses, stabling and ostlers. A few hundred yards up the hill, on the Simonsbath side, stand The Hunt kennels with more and more ranges of horse-boxes and hireling stables. Horses, hounds and hunting are the factors which produce the business that maintains the little township.

On one or two days of the year Exford holds *fiesta*. On these days its street becomes packed to repletion with motor cars and horses, bustling grooms and cheery moorland farmers.

The first *fiesta* day is the day of Exford Horse Show, which is always held in the second week of August, and the other is the meet of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds in the town on the next day. Often on this hunting day three or four hundred horses in charge of grooms begin to arrive at an early hour in the morning, and just

before eleven o'clock nearly half as many cars containing riders, dressed in every description of riding kit, descend the steep hills. Both inn-yards are then full of bustle and excitement ; horsemen and horsewomen are looking for their mounts, and the air is filled with the incessant hiss and slap of the strapper, the stamp of iron-shod hoofs on cobble-stones.

Many of us have seen this sort of thing happen in November in a quiet and peaceful Leicestershire village on a foxhunting morning, but in August on the wilds of Exmoor it always comes as a surprise ; it is so entirely unexpected.

On the day of days for all the moorland people, Exford Show, crowds of cars, foot people and farm conveyances of all sorts climb the steep ascent from Exford to the showground adjoining the Kennels. On this day also all the farmers are the guests of the Master for luncheon, and when this is over there is much keen competition and good-humoured chaff as each Exmoor pony receives his final touches from his master preparatory to entering the ring. Although there are always well-filled classes for hunters, children's ponies and jumping, the keenest competition of all takes place in the various Exmoor pony classes, for these, like their owners, have been born and bred on the moor.

The critics, with their sons, wives and daughters, go from group to group surrounding each of the competitors and give their outspoken opinions in mellow Devon and Somerset dialects.

Criticism on the exhibit, good or the reverse, is given not in your ear, in the subdued whisper of the horse-coper, but for all the world to hear and long before the ring is entered or judging has commenced. Much chaff and leg-

pulling is indulged in when the awards have been distributed and adverse critics have been proved wrong.

Visitors may go to Exford to see hunters and jumping, but our friends the moorland farmers travel many miles on that day to meet Exmoor folk and watch the judging of their home-bred Exmoor pony stock.

On any other day, except it be show day or a hunting morning, Exford is the village of " sleepy hollow." No trippers noisily invade its only street, and only the few hunting visitors staying there for the summer, or possibly a weary " hiker " or venturesome motor car, find their way down the steep hills that give entrance to it. Exford is no show place ; it is entirely supported by staghunting.

Twelve miles over the moor from Exford brings us to Porlock, and for us the next important Exmoor township, but in this picturesque village, with its narrow, winding street, many more visitors congregate in the holiday months.

Like Exford, Porlock is full of stables of the hunting, hack, or children's pony variety. Hissing men in baggy riding breeches abound everywhere, and notices of the various hunting and livery stables catch the eye at every corner. The village postmaster who finds you houses and the village tailor who sells sporting pictures and cuts jodhpurs are both men who give visitors information on every conceivable subject, from hotels and rooms to let to ponies and purveyors of food commodities. I have always liked that word " purveyor."

The village wiseacres congregate in the open space opposite the lich-gate of the ancient church and still continue to exhort motorists to slow down to walking pace, as they did twenty-five years ago. But then, in Porlock, everyone walks in the roadway of the narrow

street. When in the village the rider keeps to the centre of the highway, making the traffic follow him instead of squeezing his pony against the walls of the projecting houses. This is only for 200 yards, the length of Porlock's little winding street, yet there are still motorists who cannot " go slow " for even that distance. The wiseacres at the cross raise their hands up and down again in slow cadence, indicative of pace-reduction, and others do likewise, until, at last, it dawns upon the thick head of the chauffeur who has entered Porlock—Sparslock town—that this is a place inhabited by footpeople and horsemen and that the motor car and chars-à-bancs must give room and way for them.

Years ago, when the car was not so efficient as it is to-day, Porlock inhabitants would congregate after church, on an August Sunday morning, to see the attempt to climb the dread Porlock Hill. At that time, before the new Toll Road was completed, the grand-stand on Sunday morning for this hill-climbing exhibition was at the first sharp bend some 300 yards above the Ship Inn, and at the point where the motor driver first sees the 1 in 4 gradient he has in front of him before he can continue his journey to Lynton.

The bank on each side of the roadway used to be lined with the expectant faces of the " city fathers " as the hoot and honk of the arriving car was heard on its way to the corner. The best effects were produced when a car arrived loaded up with paterfamilias, wife and often uncles, aunts and children. The expression on the face of the driver as he came round the bend was always rewarded by a round of applause—certainly a " smile " —from the waiting audience, and the fun began when he immediately attempted to rush the hill with a radiator

often nearly boiling from a long journey. In most cases the man at the wheel would completely lose his head, muddle his gears, forget where his brake-handle was, and trickle backwards after only accomplishing a few yards. Luggage, wife, aunts, uncles and children would be left stranded with one wheel against the bank unless the active A.A. man jumped on the footboard and clasped the wheel, so steering the car backward into comparative safety. From daily practice he had become an expert at this on every type of car.

Sometimes a car would reach that bend 300 yards above without its bottom gear failing to accomplish the climb, but in very few cases, in the comparatively early days of the modern motor car, was Porlock Hill climbed without a pause and human power-help.

Since then I have always used the Toll Road, for on the first three occasions on which I saw a car on Porlock Hill number one was only a charred chassis burnt out at the top ; number two was upside down at the bottom through running backwards when out of control, and the third belonged to an American, and was gaily burning half-way down, the driver having attempted to come down on his brakes alone without changing down. After these incidents the Toll Road, which starts a few yards above the Old Ship Inn and comes out on the top of Hawkcombe Head on the Lynton road, was for me.

Latterly, however, there was another reason why I always went that way to the top ; it was to see and have a chat with a lonely Irish friend who lived high up on this hill-side. When first I met him in charge of the half-way toll-gate I thought that of all the uncouth and aggressive Irishmen he was the worst. But I discovered that this attitude was only assumed to tackle indignant motorists

who objected to paying a toll-fee when they had arrived at his gate, and when, if they were new to the road, they quite thought they had cheated the toll and would get to the top without paying. I must say it *was* rather an unpleasant surprise when, after sailing through the Porlock gate without anybody asking for the toll-money, and you had toiled up two miles or more of hairpin-bends, you suddenly arrived at a shut, white toll-gate and saw my aggressive Irish friend standing by it, ticket-book in hand. Moreover there were all sorts of vague rates for all sorts of car traffic, and every owner always thought that his car should come under the lowest.

Here, in a lonely gate-cottage, two and a half miles up the hill-side, with no other human being to quarrel with except these car occupants, my Irish friend might have been excused for his aggressiveness. He only left his post in winter and summer once a week to go into Porlock for provisions. It was, therefore, quite understandable, being an Irishman with a strong gift of the " gab," a powerful voice and accent, that he made the most of his opportunities for " discussion " whenever a car full of people made its appearance.

In the early days of the Toll Road it always took ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to get a car through the white gate because the keeper of it meant to have his pound of flesh in the way of talk before he resumed his lonely post of duty and let you resume your journey.

During the many years I was at Porlock we became great friends. Like all Irishmen, he had the greatest sense of humour, and whenever my car travelled the Toll Road I always allowed a certain amount of time to exchange the news of the world with him, and the Exmoor staghunting world in particular.

Two miles past the village of Porlock and along the sea road is what was once the little fishing village of Porlock Weir. I have always thought that there should be some sort of notice to visitors travelling this road in cars advising them that it leads to nowhere else, and that the Anchor Hotel must be their final halt and the *volte-face* for all traffic.

Watching these disappointed motorists used to be one of our recreations when staying at the Anchor—to see them rush past the hotel, come to a standstill in the stable-yard and then turn and ignominiously retrace their way back to Porlock. Why was it that motor drivers never seemed to study maps, but dashed in excited rushes from one point to another, and without any real sense of the beauties about them? At least that was what they seemed to be doing in those days.

One evening, after dinner, a party of Anchor stag-hunters was sitting smoking on the sea-wall on the opposite side of the road to the Inn, when a low-slung, venomous-looking car, travelling at a fast rate, came in sight. As it approached we noticed that both the occupants, whose heads we could just see above the small wind-screen, were Indians and were wearing turbans. We had a lot of our dogs and two hound-puppies playing in this backwater of a road, so we hastily called them in. At the same time we signed to the driver to slow down, for the occupants did not seem to know that it was a cul-de-sac. The driver took no notice of our warning and, like a flash, the car charged straight through the group of dogs, which we had not been able to get away in time, and came to a sudden halt in the stable-yard a few yards farther on. Our curses were long and deep, and when the car returned in a minute or so, as we knew it would have to do, we

called to the occupants that they should slow down when clear warnings were given them—that they might have seriously damaged some valuable dogs. At this rebuke the two nabobs roared with derisive laughter and, accelerating their racing car once more, charged through our dogs again, nearly killing a hound-puppy. Unfortunately we had nothing handy in which to give chase, and even if we had they had the legs of most cars ; but it was one of the most blatant attempts by car owners to kill dogs that I can remember, for as they flashed past us the second time, they shouted, " They're only dogs and should get out of the way." Which we should have known is often the Moslem's attitude to all dogs.

It is a mentality like that of the Spaniard who, when in his car and he sees a dog, or an animal of any sort, puts his foot on the accelerator and, with a laugh, goes as close to it as he possibly can. Since that incident I have always been very watchful of coloured gentlemen with racing cars when I have had any of my dogs with me.

This was not a question of a car being out of control or even of a nervous driver. The car was a racing model with an expert driver. It was just a purposeful attempt to kill a hound-puppy in the same way that a man might step on a black-beetle in the house.

I am afraid I have lingered rather a long time at Porlock Weir, but whenever I went there—and I spent many summers in many different houses in it—I always had difficulty in getting away. Even recently when it has chars-à-bancs and other unpleasant things arriving and leaving in the day-time, and is a very different spot to when I first stayed at the Anchor Inn and saw the golden harvest moon rise over Hurlston Point, it attracted in a marvellous manner.

From Porlock Weir my maps will tell us the direction to take for the various rides and walks. But the popular Horner Valley, starting from Horner Farm up to Cloutsham Farm—from time immemorial the opening meet-venue of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds—must be mentioned here.

Horner Farm the visitor may possibly now find too popular a place at which to linger long, except in the early forenoon and evening, but if he follows the track up the valley leading to Cloutsham Ball, and arrives at Cloutsham Farm, he will be well rewarded for the steep climb on to the Ball that he has had to undertake at the end of his tramp or ride. At Cloutsham there is always food and stabling for the pony and a welcome tea for himself. From this farm many of the most enjoyable trail-rides or walks on Exmoor have their inception.

A beauty spot known as Webber's Post, standing on Cloutsham Ball and looking across the Horner Valley towards Luccombe and Minehead, is only a mile or so away as the crow flies and looks down on to the Ball. But who Webber was, and why he put up a signpost, is not clear, though perhaps it may have been Tom Webber who died in 1845 and was a great loss to the hunt.

On staghunting days, when the Devon and Somerset meet at Cloutsham, this is where a large crowd of sight-seers always collects to watch the " tufters " at work in Sweetery or Horner Woods. Many acres here have been taken over by the Society I have mentioned in my preface. It has always been a great spot for picnic parties as the road over Dunkery passes quite close to it, and it is possible to drive on to the green sward.

The best way to reach this beauty spot by car from Porlock is to go past Horner Mill, to follow the *narrow* lane

to Luccombe, but some distance *before* you reach that village take the first sharp right-hand turning, for this leads by a very steep pitch up through woods directly to Webber's Post. If you are riding or on foot you can miss the narrow road by going through a gateway just on the right of Horner Mill and follow any of the *upward* tracks that lead from it ; all of these will take you eventually to Webber's Post.

Luccombe, like all of the Exmoor villages, snuggles down in a hollow, a village of thatched cottages, from which is another track leading up to Webber's Post. Here, more years ago than I like to name, and when I first wandered up this track, I had a very nasty shock. At the beginning of it there were a few thatched cottages always invitingly open. One day, when rudely peering into one of these doorways, I saw a very nice oak dresser with some pewter standing on it, and as I was at that time very interested in old furniture, I at once scented a find in this out-of-the-way village. After a little friendly conversation with the old man occupying the cottage I broached the subject of the dresser, asking him whether he knew its history. Rather to my astonishment he replied at once that it came from Taunton but that he knew nothing more about it. I then asked if he would care to sell it. On my making this inquiry he promptly rose from his chair, looked at a number marked on the inside of one of the drawers, a moment or two after referred to a note-book on another table, and answered that the price was so much, mentioning a figure quite up to its full value !

Even at that time the Taunton antique dealer had penetrated to the Exmoor village and my friend's thatched cottage on this little-used side-track was stocked with

antiques all inconspicuously labelled and priced. Even the salesman was in character with his surroundings! This incident must have occurred forty or fifty years ago, and, although it would cause me no astonishment to-day, for one often finds London antiques in such out-of-the-way places, as a young collector of old furniture I must confess it gave me pause at the time.

The road over Dunkery past Webber's Post is a big climb in summer and a very cold and unpleasant one at any time in winter, the beacon itself being over 1700 feet up.

The little village of Winsford, with its numerous bridges and picturesque "Royal Oak" Inn, is twelve miles from Dunster, Winsford Hill, a favourite place for stag-hunting, rising up from it. To-day there is a broad motor highway of two and a half miles to Winsford turning off right-handed from the main tarmac Dunster-Dulverton road just before Bridgetown is reached. Another six miles on we leave this road at Hele Bridge for Dulverton, some six miles from which is the well-known Tarr Steps. Hawkridge on the left of the Bagle, and Withypool five to six miles from Simonsbath, are both hunting fixtures; the latter being also a favourite haunt for anglers.

CHAPTER III

THE WILD RED DEER

A WARRANTABLE stag, with " all his rights," viewed on a heather-covered hill-side is a very different thing from the shabby-looking red deer we see in captivity. A stag behind bars gives us no thrill, but to view him as he comes out of the woods to wander across Dunkery hill-side late on a summer's evening, although of almost daily occurrence at Cloutsham Farm when I stayed there, never failed to thrill everyone.

Red deer, against such a background, with the low, golden sunlight full upon them, and as I used to see them nightly, look very different from the stag we see, in a sort of enlarged loose-box, in the London Zoo. Here one passes on to the next animal, or next range of animal-houses, as quickly as possible, if only to get away from the penetrating odour of the deer-pens. Kept in any railed-in enclosure the stag loses his good looks and noble bearing, and becomes, like most other wild animals in confinement, a rather dejected-looking specimen. I have watched him when kept in private parks and in zoological gardens, but, however large the enclosure, and however free he appears to be, he still never seems to get the crest and thickness below the neck, or retain the arrogant expression with which he will stare at strangers invading his wild domain. A warrantable stag is an arrogant animal.

Whenever deer were viewed in the evening from Cloutsham Farm, on the side of Dunkery, everyone

rushed out to the stable-yard wall to look at them. Many of the stags of Sweetworthy and Horner were known to us by sight, but whether a "big" stag, followed by his attendant younger male deer, or only a few timid hinds, they never failed to bring everyone from whatever job they were doing, to this stable wall to watch them as they strolled at leisure across the hill-side not 500 yards away on the opposite side of the valley.

A captive animal never thrills us like this, and would certainly never do so on four or five nights of the week, but on Exmoor the sight of a stag never fails to cause the greatest excitement to natives and visitors alike, and the sight never seems to pall.

Riding one day to a meet with old Sydney Tucker, the ex-huntsman of the Devon and Somerset—who, I suppose, has seen more deer than most people—he suddenly grasped me by the arm and pointed excitedly to the opposite side of the coombe. "See 'un, sir! All his rights and three and two a top!" After careful examination I could see nothing that suggested a stag or deer of any description, although, no doubt, he could see the antlers above the fern. A mile or so farther on he became equally excited over some hinds with calves at foot, so he informed me, and on almost every hill-side as we rode along he, with his trained eyesight, spotted deer lying in the heather or bracken, which the novice would only, if at all, have been able to pick up with the help of powerful glasses. These glimpses caused just as much excitement to Sydney Tucker, the ex-huntsman, as they would have done to anyone who had never before seen deer, the top of a stag's antlers, or the flapping ears of a hind in the fern.

It is because the hunted stag is such a noble-looking

animal that he has all our sympathy when he is being hunted. A hunted fox does not give us quite this same feeling of awe and silent sympathy. Some riders and foot people may " holloa " at the hunted stag (which, by the by, is one of the things we should never do), but the majority, when viewing a staghunt, are only thrilled with excitement mixed with a strong feeling of sympathy for the beautiful animal—if they are lucky enough to see him.

Everyone *wants* to see the stag. That is the reason why most foot people, at any rate, go to a meet. But although many of us know the reasons—which I will give fully in a subsequent chapter—why, in order to preserve deer on Exmoor, they must be hunted, we are all sorry for the stag when we catch sight of him.

I have hunted red deer for the last thirty years or more, yet I have always that feeling of sympathy when suddenly viewing a hunted stag. It is difficult of true explanation, like everything connected with the much-discussed question of staghunting, but I am convinced that if, for example, the hounds were giant-hounds, if they were twice the size and in twice the numbers, and the quarry was only an ugly, mangy-looking hyena, very few of us, to be perfectly honest, would feel the least sympathy with the latter, although the feelings of the hunted would be exactly the same.

A stag is a magnificent, arrogant-looking animal, we all agree upon that, but many of us do not know that in his home-life he is not anything like such a gallant gentleman as he looks. In fact, he is very much the opposite. Nature is often like that; for nothing can be more beautiful than a Bengal tiger and, for all I know, a hyena may have the manners of a Spanish grandee in his home-

town den. I have even known human beings belie their looks.

On the one hand, then—and I look down at my bull-terrier, Cracker, at my feet—" On the one hand," says he, raising his voice, " some of us look what we are not, and even ferocious and ugly faces like those of bull-terriers may belie their nature."

The stag of Exmoor is undoubtedly just the opposite in temperament to Cracker, whom no one could call a beautiful animal ; and yet his kindly nature has made everyone who knows him love him. Anna May Wong, when she met him for the first time in my Balearic Island studio, became his complete " fan."

A full-grown stag is at times quarrelsome, often cruel, and always wasteful and destructive, yet in outward appearance he is benign and benevolent-looking. His good lady, the hind, however, is as she looks—a gentle, unselfish, timid creature, thinking always of the care of her family ; in short, the perfect mother. Although a little destructive, she is not wasteful and eats what she pulls from orchard, root or corn fields. After she becomes a mother and when her baby appears each year, she " keeps herself to herself," and will endure any hardship or torment to protect her young, for she has the maternal instinct very highly developed.

A full-grown stag with " all his rights " on his antlers can be a very formidable antagonist, but a timid hind has nothing with which to defend her calf in case of attack except her forefeet and her cunning. Her lord never deigns to come to her help, even if he is near, but prefers to make some of his older male children take his place should he be unlucky enough to be the hunted stag of the day.

No one could call a stag the perfect father. His children do not interest him, and when they are two or three years old he is only interested in so far as they may be useful, as I have said, to take his place in front of hounds. He is just the big chief of his harem: a Mormon without a Mormon's love of family life; a sultan among his sultanas and for eleven months of the year living a life apart from them.

When first born, and until he is a year old, he is described as a calf, and for the first fourteen weeks of his life has a spotted coat like fallow deer. As soon as he gets his winter coat, usually at the end of September, these spots disappear and he becomes a russet colour without any dapple markings. Until he is about eight or ten months old he stays with his mother, and after a few weeks begins playing with calves belonging to other hinds.

Hinds have their first calf at about three years old and carry them for nine months, seldom failing to produce one every year. The " rutting " season is in October and the baby is dropped, so Dr Palk Collyns of Dulverton has affirmed, between the 15th and 24th of June.

When staghunting commences, in the second week in August, almost every hind of over three years has a young calf at foot, which, at that time, is not more than ten or twelve weeks old. How is it then that, with a pack of hounds hunting five-year-old stags all over Exmoor from the middle of August onward, calves are hardly ever hurt or killed by hounds ?

I have often seen hinds disturbed by hounds at this time of year, but it is not often that the calf is seen, although by the time staghunting commences he is a little fellow running and playing by his mother's side. In

August and September hounds are, of course, always stopped hunting if hinds should get up in front of them, but that cannot always be done in a few seconds, yet they are hardly ever known to kill or to injure a calf.

The reason for this is that the hind has the protective maternal instinct so highly developed that, immediately she hears huntsman and hounds, or scents danger of any sort, she pushes her calf with her head into a bush or thick bracken, where it remains quietly until danger is passed.

The little thing must realize its peril, in some way the mother must tell of it, for it makes no attempt to follow her when she goes off with other mother-hinds to draw away the pursuing pack from her young. Because the calf remains quite still and quiet there is no scent from it, and, unless one of the hounds happens actually to tread on it, the mother knows that it is as safe in its bush as if it were on the top of a tree.

The hounds are stopped in a short time should this change from stag to hind occur, and as soon as the pack has left the neighbourhood in pursuit of the right deer the mothers will return safely to collect their cached offspring.

Hinds, at such a time, can sometimes be seen returning, if the watcher is well-hidden and down-wind of them, but they do it very cautiously, so Fred Goss,[1] the late harbourer, tells us, first sniffing about for danger and not calling to their calves, nor going inside the covert until quite certain that all is quiet and that they are not drawing danger back towards their young. When they are sure of this, each hind gives a call rather like a sheep's baa-a, and the calves, knowing their voices, leave their beds and soon join their delighted mothers once more.

[1] *Memories of a Stag-harbourer.*

I have never seen this happen myself, but Goss, in his book, gives a good description of cases he has actually seen after hounds had gone on.

I am sure that this protective maternal instinct accounts for the fact that hardly any calves are accidentally killed by hounds, although many must often be in the near vicinity, if not actually on the line of the hunting pack.

The antlers of the stag are shed every year, towards the end of April ; this is done suddenly, either one at a time or both together, and a new set begins to grow at once from the short, permanent, horny pedicles, which are gradually growing until the calf is one year old. These pedicles are of horn, which the antlers—growing each year from them—are not. At the age of one year the pedicles are at their full height of an inch or two from the frontal bone.

A stag's age is roughly estimated by his antlers—they are not and must never be described as horns. It is during the early annual growth of the antlers, in May and June, that the once noble-looking stag has a miserable time, for when his old antlers fall the growing stumps of his new ones are the most tender things imaginable, and he is tormented almost to death by flies and other insects. Lucky for him it is that this bad time only lasts during the first weeks of this annual antler-growing process.

One of the most wonderful things in Nature is the rapidity with which she performs the operation. It is almost unbelievable that by the second week in August the " velvet," which covers all new antlers while growing, is almost all rubbed off. This means that the antlers have become hard, all tenderness gone, and that they are their full size for the year.

It is a little difficult to give exact dates for this process of antler-growth, but in most cases all antlers are clear of velvet by September at the latest. The stag, therefore, is now a fighting unit again and his purgatory is a thing of the past until the following April comes round.

In April of his second year a stag has two small uprights beginning to grow from the permanent pedicles, and in his third year besides these uprights two " tines " or forward branches make their appearance. These have names, and are called Brow and Tray. At four years old his new April growth develops once more, for, besides Brow and Tray points, he may have two small branching spires on the top of his new antlers.

At five years old he becomes, in hunting parlance, a " warrantable " or huntable stag, for he should now have " all his rights " in the shape of three forward branches on the main beam of his antlers, the last one appearing this year between Brow and Tray, and is known to Exmoor folk as the " Bay point." But this Bay point is the one we so often find appearing only on one side, or not at all, and no definite rule can be given, although a fully developed stag ought to have this coveted bay-antler on both sides to be described as having " *all his rights.*"

At this age also a stag has eight cutting teeth (a full mouth) and two tushes have appeared in the upper jaw.

The beam, or main stem, of the antlers should now be thick and the spread between them have a side curve. The beauty of the head is judged by this as well as the points.

The brow antler is the stag's fighting weapon. If a hound is struck it is usually with the one closest to the

brow in a well-developed stag, and is the longest and strongest " point."

To remember the points, and the order of them, is a very simple matter.

Brow is the first, longest and the one nearest the head.

Bay is the next point, the centre point and the one that appears last of all and sometimes not at all.

Tray, the point farthest in front of the stag's head.

" Brow, Bay and Tray." In this rhyming sequence one can memorize them in the correct order and as they eventually appear on the beam; it is therefore a very simple matter. Neither is it difficult to remember that Bay, the centre one, appears *last.*

The points at the top have no particular names and are always spoken of as one, two, three or even four " on top," as the case may be. That is the way a stag's head is described on Exmoor, and not in the way it is in Scotland, where we call it a ten- or twelve-pointer, and so on.

Even after six years a stag may develop more than the normal three points " on top," but it is difficult to tell his age between six and nine, after which time he begins to show signs of approaching old age. The short permanent pedicle or burr now begins to get closer to the head and the grooves or channels on the beam coarser and deeper. At great age the spread of the beam does not become less but shorter and stumpier, almost resembling the spread of a young male deer. When these signs are present, and the points blunted, the age is certainly twelve or even more. The head is then known as " going back."

The oldest known stag, which was earmarked as a calf and recognized by this mark as the same deer nineteen years afterwards when killed by hounds, is the only

proven record I can find of very great age in the Devon and Somerset country.

Like everything else in nature, development depends very much on the nourishment of the body. An under-nourished child is generally backward, and seldom grows into a healthy man. The better the food, the less severe the climate and surroundings of the red deer, the quicker and more normal are the antler developments. Stags, for instance, frequenting a neighbourhood where orchards, root crops and wheatfields abound, and where there is much warm woodland shelter in winter, will, in most cases, have better and earlier developed heads than those living the winter on the centre of Exmoor where there is practically no cultivation. Also, it must be borne in mind that an injury to the head when tender, or in "velvet," will remain, and that, in consequence, any point may be missing or deformed.

We may take it, then, that the average life of a stag on Exmoor is not as a rule more than twelve or fourteen years, and if he survives to the latter year he is bullied and ostracized by younger and stronger deer, and becomes more or less a pariah amongst his confrères of the moor. His death, during the first hard winter, as he gets weaker and weaker, will probably be a miserable and lingering one.

I expect, if I say that luckily for him such a lingering death does not often occur owing to the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, I shall have every anti-blood sport agitator calling me a "cowardly, cruel monster." I repeat the sentence looking at the bull-terrier, Cracker, who rests his head on my knee, and conveys to me that if he were a wild red deer, and were allowed to live unshot at and untrapped, feasting in orchards, on corn and root-fields; if he had a string of wives at his beck and call;

if he had all this to his full maturity, he would prefer to take his chance of being the one stag on each hunting day to be harboured and hunted out of the hundred or more of five-year-olds, and over that number may be on Exmoor, even if, at the end, he had to be killed in one of his favourite streams, fighting for his life.

His would surely be nearly a fifty-to-one chance, even if he knew that in the end the staghounds would finally bring him to bay and the huntsman kill him with the gun he now always carries. Every living thing has to die at some time ; we must never forget that.

All sport is cruel, but the end decreed by Nature is often the cruellest of all, and the lingering death of a wounded stag, or by starvation in old age, must be a far more agonizing one than by the gun of the huntsman of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.

I often wonder if the 500 men, women and children who come out on horseback at a meet of the staghounds are the cruel monsters they are represented to be by the Anti-Blood Sport Society, for I know that the majority of them are very fond of the horses and dogs they own—sometimes even more attached to the domestic animals than the very people who, some years ago, made desperate efforts to interfere with staghunting.

We are all very much affected by looks. A mean-looking, ugly thing gets little sympathy, and yet it may deserve it much more than one with a beautiful exterior. These are facts which all of us are very apt to forget. There is no doubt that all of those raising these protests from time to time feel deeply the cause they are advocating. Some might even go so far as the Indian sect who will not take life of any sort, and who may be seen walking down an insect-covered path, stepping very

carefully in order not to tread on ant, fly or beetle of any kind. They never kill a flea or bug, and have been known to arrange with a friend to sleep in their bed if they are called away from home in order to make sure that these home " pets " shall not die of starvation !

I think this is carrying a theory too far, but anti-blood sport advocates of the female sex *have* been seen wearing birds and aigrettes in their hats when birds and aigrettes were fashionable, and at a later period of fashion keeping themselves warm with beautiful furs and muffs ; even going so far as to attend a local point-to-point meeting wearing a boa of trapped fox fur.

The most difficult question of all is to define what is permissible and what is not when this question of cruelty in sport arises, for there are so many worse fates that await the inhabitants of the animal and bird-world than the uncertainty of the chase or the gun of the sportsman.

As soon as the young male deer leaves the hind-herd of his mother, which is generally when he is in his third year, he attaches himself to the company of some stag and becomes a sort of runner for him. It is not quite clear why a young male deer, as he is called until he is four years old, should do this except that stags do not, as a rule, actually herd with hinds until the rutting season commences and they collect their harem. A young male deer, perhaps, may feel that the time has arrived when he should see something more of the world and leave the society of the timid hind-herd.

Although the exact reason for his change of companionship is not quite known, we do know that more often than not, when a warrantable stag is first roused in covert, a young male deer will presently be also running with him. During a hunt a hard-pressed stag has constantly been

known to push up a younger one from his bed in the bracken to take his place, the older and hunted stag immediately dropping into the bed where the young one was lying.

My own opinion is that there is a sort of hero-worship existing, like the hero-worship of the schoolboy for the older man, and also, as our young friend is now growing up, he wishes to learn about life from the male point of view. I am sorry to say the old stag only uses him for his own benefit and comfort, bullying and kicking the youngster out whenever he feels he is better without him.

The only time at which the younger deer gets his own back is when the stag sheds his antlers in April, for this places him in the unenviable position of being minus his means of bullying or defence, for older deer always shed their antlers a few weeks before the younger ones. At this time, when the old stag tries and wants to be alone, he has no way of choking off his companion, who soon discovers this and perhaps may enjoy a little unpleasant horseplay with his suffering preceptor.

So, one day, during the three weeks of spring hunting, when three four-year-olds are hunted, the young male deer may find himself running before the pack instead of his older friend. Being often more active, and not loaded with such a heavy top lumber of antlers, he may sometimes beat the hounds and escape where an older and fatter stag would inevitably meet his Waterloo. But, if he does have the luck to survive, he knows that the staghounds mean the greatest danger he is ever likely to meet with in his life, and so does all he can in future to outwit them should he come under the ken of the harbourer and be roused by the tufters.

With his friend, the older stag, he learns wasteful habits.

When young with the hind he has eaten most of whatever he plucked, but his educator shows him that this is not necessary and is femininely economical.

" Just take one bite," says the old hand, as he pulls up a turnip, " and fling the rest over your shoulder. There are plenty more to be had in this field now we have once broken down the fence. Only the foolish hind takes the trouble to chew up each root until there is little left." If he should get into a cornfield it is even worse, for he teaches his admirer to wander about all over it, just pulling a head here and there and then rolling in the standing straw.

In an orchard, if he has the luck to get into one, he will break branches off in every direction, and a cottage-garden he makes into a rubbish-heap in a night. Long-suffering farmers would therefore rather have ten hinds in their fields to one stag.

The slot of a stag is known to every cottager and they look upon the staghounds belonging to the Devon and Somerset pack as their salvation. The only thing the cottage wife wants to know, if she meets you on your return from a hunt, is, " Did they kill ? "

Although the casual visitor thinks the noble stag a very fine animal, the farmers and cottage folk of Exmoor dislike him intensely on account of the damage he does, and they only tolerate his existence at all on account of the money he brings into the country through the stag-hounds, and who, at the same time, keep his numbers down to reasonable limits.

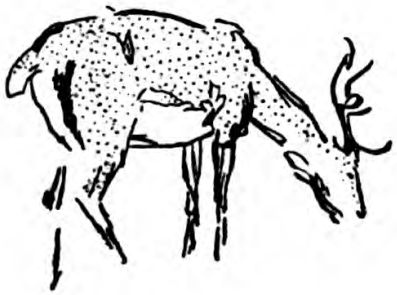
One thing is perfectly certain and it is that were there no staghunting on Exmoor there would be no wild red deer.

When a stag reaches the age of six he is in his prime,

and truly, at that age, he is a magnificent-looking beast. Provided, too, he has the luck to evade the lynx-eyes of the harbourer he may live in comparative luxury in such places as Haddon Woods or Winsford Hill for many years. But this only if he carefully hides himself by day. Once the harbourer has viewed his head he becomes a tabulated unit in the former's memory and is never forgotten, for no two stags are ever exactly alike. The fateful day on which he is harboured is probably his last, although, if he is not as fat as a stock bullock, he will take boldly to the moor and try every trick he knows to throw off his enemies, the hounds, before he finally stands at bay.

The mating, or rutting season as it is called, begins early in October and causes a considerable change in the outward appearance and temper of the stag. The ruff on his neck becomes darker, the neck itself swells and becomes bigger and thicker. He is ready to fight all other stags he meets, and is not averse to charging man or horse. Stags in October are certainly dangerous if interfered with in any way. At this time also he starts what is known as " belling " : a sound of defiance to other stags, and a call to hinds to join his harem. It is very like the roar we have all heard a lion give in the lion-house at the Zoo a little before feeding-time.

Now, therefore, is the time when he wishes to show his supremacy by fighting any other stag that may be about ; but he must be at least four years old before he attempts to do so.



CHAPTER IV

HUNTING THE DEER

FEW packs are able to say that their pedigree can be traced back to William the Conqueror. The Devon and Somerset Staghounds have that privilege.

In Victorian days people were terrible bores about this sort of thing, for those whose ancestry went back to that time would not think of acknowledging friendship with anyone whose recorded pedigree did not travel back at least a couple of centuries. Nowadays a long pedigree does not cut much ice unless the owner of it has brains or has " done things," and the staghounds have accomplished the latter, for they have made the preservation of wild red deer on Exmoor possible.

There is no institution less snobbish than a pack of hounds. Those who take part in the sport of hunting, whether tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, ploughboy, apothecary or (horse-coping) thief, are always popular in any hunting field. But I am, and always have been, snobbish over one thing connected with hunting, and it is that the more Masters it can inscribe on its shield whose ancestors were born and have lived their lives in its confines the better, and the better too, for the country; also the older the pack's history the more it attracts me.

Before the advent of railways and other rapid locomotion, Masters of Foxhounds were generally local landowners. This was also the case with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds. The Master was always a gentleman of

the country, whose name was familiar to everyone in it, and who hunted the country at his own expense.

In Somersetshire and Devon there are two such families standing out from others in this respect, the Aclands and the Fortescues; for these names have always been so intimately connected with red deer and Exmoor that it is impossible to think of the pedigree of the Devon and Somerset staghunting country without also thinking of Fortescues and Aclands.

From this fact it may be surmised that staghunting over Exmoor is one of our oldest hunting institutions, and when we hear that the first recorded Master of the Staghounds was a gentleman of the name of D'Auberville, who lived in the time of William the Conqueror, we begin to sympathize with many Somersetshire people who rather despise the comparatively mushroom-growth sport of foxhunting.

If any pack of hounds in England has a right to be proud of its ancestry that pack is the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, for, although the country it hunts over was a royal "forest" until 1814, and the gentlemen who had the right to hunt over it in most cases were the rangers of that forest, we know that from William I's day—1066, and the only date I have ever been able to remember—stag-hounds have hunted red deer over its rolling hills and wooded valleys.

In the days of "Good Queen Bess" the Ranger, Hugh Pollard, had hounds kennelled at Simonsbath. During the eighteenth century the Acland family took the reins of office, but in the first decade of the following century the pack first became a subscription pack and not one of which the Master paid all the expenses himself. This, however, only lasted a few years, for in 1812 Lord For-

tescue took command and once again hunted the entire country at his own expense.

But there are also two others whose names should be emblazoned in gold on the hunt-shield, Dr Palk Collyns and Mr Fenwick Bissett.

Dr Palk Collyns saved the herd of red deer by continuing the hunt at a most critical time.

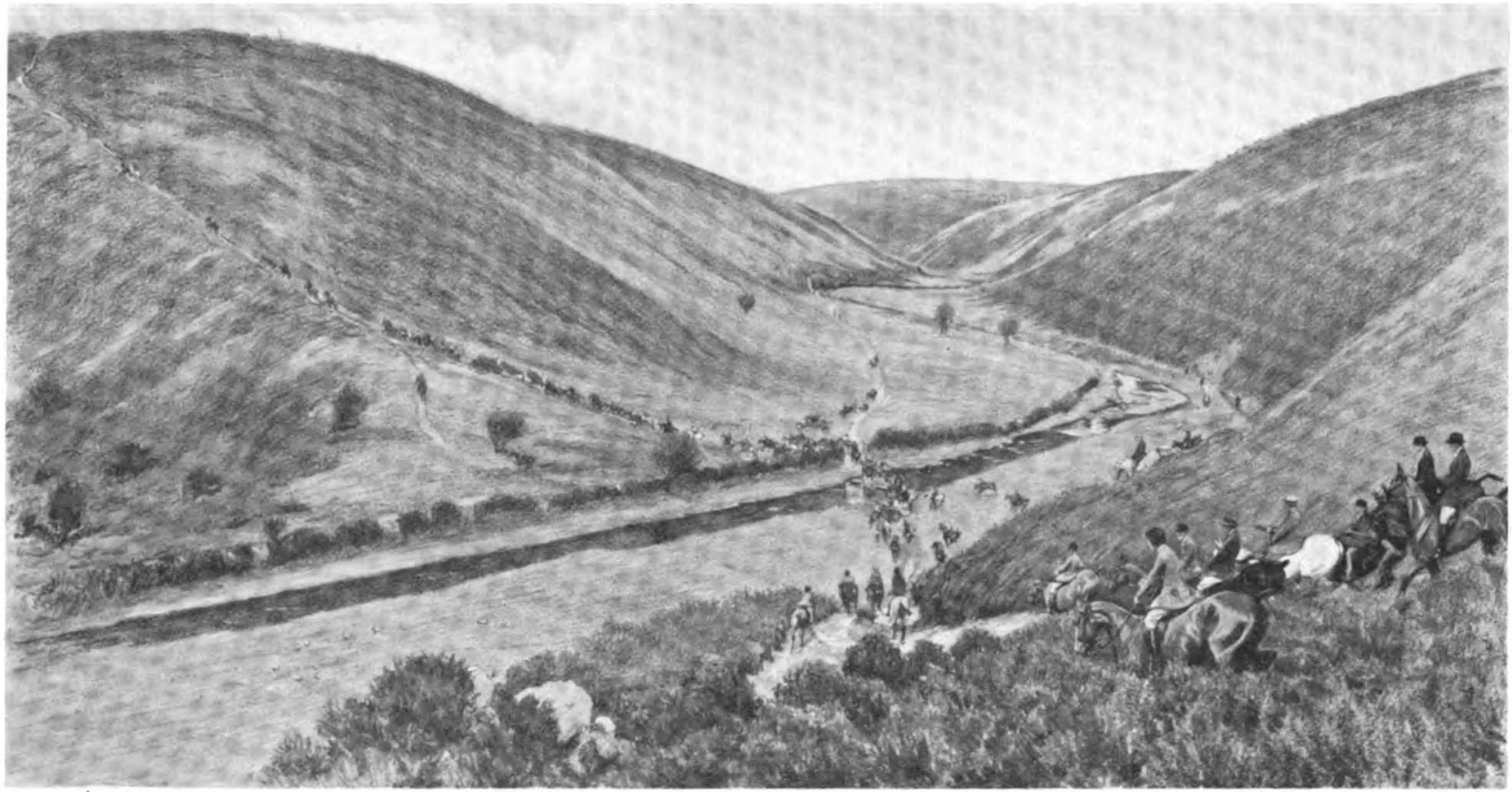
Mr Fenwick Bissett popularized staghunting, for it was during his long term of office of twenty-six years that it first gained its popularity with all classes of hunting folk all over England.

I think he and the late Lord Chaplin (" The Squire ") —who once kept a stud of horses at Larkbarrow—must have been very much alike, in figure at any rate, for Bissett rode about eighteen stone and, according to the many prints of him, had a considerable amount of " deck-lumber " above the saddle.

I read somewhere that his method of buying horses was to give them first a very drastic test himself. If a dealer showed him a horse he would mount it at ten o'clock in the morning, tell the man he need not return until late in the afternoon, and would then proceed to walk it round the field and paddock without a rest until four o'clock. If, at the end of that time, the horse would stand still with him without resting a leg, and had not broken out into a lather, he would buy it.

Unless the dealer knew of the test required, and could get the horse very fit for the trial, very few horses could ever have been passed. Certainly to-day no " dealer fat " horses would carry eighteen stone for that length of time and look fresh at the end of it !

In 1881 Bissett gave up the country, but it was during his Mastership that King Edward, when Prince of Wales,



A DEVON AND SOMERSET STAGHOUNDS' "FIELD"

(Reproduced by kind permission of Messrs. Eyre & Spottiswoode, Ltd.)

staghunted one day on Exmoor, when the guest of the celebrated parson Jack Russell.

Arthur Heal was Mr Bissett's huntsman and his name also is still a memory among Exmoor folk.

At the close of the Bissett Mastership it was obvious that only a Fortescue or Acland could step into the very difficult shoes of the previous Master with any success. Lord Ebrington, the eldest son, did this.

Afterwards there were some short periods of Masters until Mr Robert Sanders (Lord Bayford as he now is, and who married one of the Miss Hallidays of Glenthorn) had a popular spell of office from 1895 to 1901. He was followed by E. A. V. Stanley and Major Adkins, Major Greig and Mr Badco. Then came the War, with its sadness and difficulties for every hunting country, but at its close Colonel Wiggin, the present popular Master, took office.

That, very shortly and roughly sketched, is the pedigree of the Devon and Somerset country.

On all old prints and tapestries where early staghunting is depicted the method of hunting, and the type of hound for that hunting, are shown as being very different from those of the present day.

John D'Auberville and Hugh Pollard no doubt had "limners" and other hounds hunting "in leash," to be used for certain specific purposes. Also, it is probable that both had spearmen and bowmen on foot at strategic points in the chase.

Old-time hunting was probably a cross between shooting and hunting, the actual chasing of the deer being done by horsemen as much as by hounds. No doubt, also, there was a great deal of horn-blowing of the large, circular horn, and although Dame Juliana Berners (1486),

in her book, *Bokys of Haukying and Huntying*, tells the antiquary much he may like to know about the subject of the chase, she does not give me, as I am quite unable to decipher it, more than a passing note about the hounds themselves.

We do know, however, that the " limners " were a sort of cross between a bloodhound and a mastiff, with long, hanging ears and a great deal of dewlap ; fearsome-looking beasts and slow. Years ago, and for a season or two, I hunted a pack of Bassett-hounds for a friend. Some of these were large show-dogs, and I have always felt that the hounds of Dame Juliana Berners' day must, many of them, have been like a hound I had in my pack, a Champion Merryman. This prize-winner was so slow and heavy in body that I always had to depute one of my field to watch and lift him up any banks or out of any ditches from which he was unable to extricate himself.

Although the limner was longer on the leg than Merryman (I do not expect he was much " straighter ") in all old pictures we see of him he also seems to have had a helper at the other end of his leash.

In pace and " music " also the hounds of those days must certainly have resembled my champion Bassett-hound, for it often took the hunt a day or more to get up to a stag, and it certainly took Merryman fully that time to catch a hare. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that had it not been for bowmen and riders there would never have been much venison for Norman William, or even good Queen Bess ; and had it not been for the other hounds in my pack I should not have had hare-soup for dinner very often.

It was not quite sport as we understand it to-day ; hounds were certainly part of the entourage, but it was

not so much a case of riding after the " dogs " as one of catching the venison for royal stomachs.

The Ranger was the Master and his first job was to provide venison for the Court, or probably lose his office. It must have been a sort of cross between the work of a butcher and that of a forester.

In any case it is obvious that food has always been the primary reason for the hunting of wild things.

To-day the Court does not eat venison, or if it does the supply comes from Scotland. As already mentioned, since 1814 the forest of Exmoor has not been a royal demesne, but had it not been for the continuance of hunting none of us living to-day would ever have seen a stag in Devon and Somerset. I emphasize this point because it is one of the facts which those opposed to sport always fail to realize, or, if they do so, either ignore it or pretend the deer would prefer to be extinct.

If you live in Somerset or North Devon you find that the feeling of the natives about the deer is very forcibly brought to your notice. They love to watch and hear of the hunting, but the stag *must* always be killed. Every cottage housewife asks you about it as you ride home, but ends with the question, " Did ye kill un ? " and this is followed by expressions of disappointment if you have to own that the hounds have failed to do so.

The reason why deer must be killed and the herd kept down is because of the amount of damage they do to farms, orchards and gardens. It is not because the deer are wild animals that Somerset folk have this feeling of resentment, but because of damage done to their possessions and livelihood. If no one paid for the loss this feeling would be impossible to hold in check. Being such a large animal it is easy to see where the stag has been overnight. It is

also so easy to sit up with a gun or set a trap for future raids, and no Act of Parliament could enforce a law to-day forbidding the destruction of deer on private land if stag-hunting was given up on Exmoor.

It is only the good feeling towards hunting and the immense amount of money and work it brings into the staghound country in the summer months that counteracts this local animosity towards the deer. But this resentment undoubtedly exists, and is a feeling that has been handed down from father to son for generations in both counties.

It is the visitor who loves to see the deer and not the dweller on the land. For him red deer have always been, and always will be, a menace to cultivation.

With the staghounds hunting the " forest," as it is still often called, this menace is palliated. Compensation is paid for damage by the hunt and the herd of deer are kept within limits by it, so allowing the visitor on his perambulations to see them sometimes in their natural surroundings, and, if a follower of the hunt, to make reparation to the farmers for their losses at the same time.

Apart from all this, we have the indisputable fact that a hunt on Exmoor gives, in one day, healthy exercise and immense pleasure to often five hundred riders—men, women and children—to say nothing of the very large number of foot people, although to the latter, should they happen to see the stag, he may seem a cruelly oppressed animal.

To those who know the whole story of his life he is not so majestic a creature as he undoubtedly looks in the picture.

These are a few of the reasons why staghunting takes

place, and now that we know these we will see what happens during a hunt, and find out something of the method the Master and huntsman employ to hunt and kill a stag successfully.

The first hunt official I must introduce to you is the harbourer, because any red deer hunt, where " harbouring " is necessary, would be most unlikely to take place were it not for his previous work, and the invaluable knowledge of venery and slotting he has to display when carrying it out.

Unlike the other hunt officials, the harbourer does not wear the livery of the hunt. He is usually an unassuming, silent man with field-glasses slung over his shoulder, riding a stout cob at the meet, where he is generally to be seen in mysterious conversation with the Master or huntsman.

He knows all the farmers, many of whom give him inquiring glances or whisper in his ear, but he has little to say and nothing to tell to the waiting field. The harbourer's work is silent and secret work, and is almost finished when the huntsman's job begins.

He was up before daylight and has already walked round a wood a mile from the meet. This he has done to make sure that the warrantable five-year-old stag, which he saw come out of it at sundown the night before to go to feed, has returned to it again to take up his bed for the day.

Just before sunrise the harbourer was seated on the hill-side scanning the landscape through his powerful field-glasses, and a few moments later he saw four or five shadowy forms come walking over the skyline from the direction of Farmer Rawles's wheatfields in the valley below. The sun rises and, a few minutes later, he can

clearly distinguish a big stag walking ahead, followed by a young male deer or three-year-old. Some little distance behind these there are others: a small stag and a few hinds; but, as the light increases, he focuses his glasses on the leader and mutters to himself, "All his rights, three and two on top." This was the big stag he had slotted the evening before. Keeping very still he watches them winding their leisurely way towards the oak wood below him and plucking at bushes here and there, their leader, the big stag, some yards ahead.

After the harbourer has seen all the deer enter the wood he must begin a long vigil of sometimes an hour or two before he moves off. At the end of this time, if the deer have not appeared again, he must make sure that they have not left it at any side not within his viewpoint. To do this he must walk round those sides looking all the time for slot-marks or other signs. None being visible he knows his stag has not left. For the moment his work is finished and he returns to the farm where he has passed the night for a much-needed breakfast.

When once deer, after feeding at night, return to a wood in which they are in the habit of lying-up, they will not often move off that day, but remain until roused by the huntsman and tufters, or by some serious disturbance. They generally return soon after sunrise, but the harbourer does not go near the wood for some time afterwards, and does not do so at all if he can be sure the deer are still inside.

They usually take some time to settle down, and an hour or more should be allowed for them to do this or the watcher may disturb them, when they will, in all probability, move right away.

Old deer are very suspicious, but when once they have

settled down they seem to know that they are unseen and are consequently safer lying still. Once this has happened a stag takes a lot of rousing, and the harbourer or huntsman has often to go right up to him when either sees the tips of his antlers above the high fern. This often occurs even when the tufters are near and drawing the wood.

Now that I have mentioned the harbourer and his work I will enlarge a little more on the ways of deer and the harbourer's art of venery, for much knowledge of this is necessary for his work.

The places where deer usually feed, and the woods they lie-up in, are well known to him, for he has spent most of his life among them. He is always on the look-out for the " racks " in fences, where the deer enter fields to feed. Half a dozen deer will soon make a considerable hole in a fence, and it is astounding how strong any hedge must be to keep them out effectively. It is a case of " follow my leader " when the hole is made, and, in consequence, all slot-marks either in sandy or soft earth get very much mixed up.

If the harbourer enters such a field at all he is careful not to disturb the rack itself, but, when once inside, he may see undoubted evidence that big stags and not only hinds have been using it. The " droppings " give him some evidence, and the way the food has been pulled and eaten gives further information.

On roads or sandy places the harbourer knows that the hind-slot is small, long and narrow in comparison with the stag's for which he is in search, for the latter is broader and rather more square. Stags have the front slots larger than the hind ones, but in hinds they are of equal size.

There are many other indications known to the har-

bourer, but his art can only be told by himself, and for their study the student cannot do better than read that excellent book on the subject, *Memories of a Stag-harbourer*, by Fred Goss.

Nowadays, when the leading lights in almost every trade or profession take pupils, I am astonished that the harbourer has not done so. What a fascinating subject it would be for boys to study: to be able to tell the slot of a warrantable stag from hinds and young male deer, and to know all the other signs which help the harbourer in his work; to wander with him in the woods, before staghunting commences; to find out which woods big deer are using by noticing the trees where they have been rubbing off the "velvet" on their new antlers, and to view through his glasses the tips of antlers that can sometimes be seen in the fern and woods in the day-time. In fact, to learn all the signs he knows and that tell him in a few hours more easily than reading, and with almost as much certainty as actual vision, the sex, size, age, numbers and locality of deer in any given neighbourhood.

The harbourer is, or has, often been a head keeper. He can tell you the slots and pad-marks of every wild animal on Exmoor from fox, badger and otter to deer. Nothing escapes his keen eyes as he tramps the countryside or jogs along on his cob. Although he may add a head keeper or sub-agent's job to that of official harbourer to the staghounds, harbouring takes most of his time from the last day of February to the end of April, and again from July by-days to the middle of October.

During these months he travels many miles on horseback, for as soon as one stag has been roused he must be jogging on to "harbour" for the next meet. Sometimes he may follow the hunt for an hour or two, if it should

take him towards his new destination, but usually, when once the pack has been laid-on, he moves silently away on his " lawful occasions."

The worst possible harbourer would be a chatterbox !

During his busy months a harbourer's job is a whole-time one. Early to bed and certainly early to rise, with sometimes long distances to hack in the day-time. It is a lonely job, but he and his horse have much to ruminate upon as they follow the bypaths of Exmoor.

He is the worst enemy the deer of the forest have but he bears them no animosity ; they do not damage his crops. He studies them, learns their life and habits, and there are not many stags on Exmoor that he does not know by sight and recognize directly he sees them. In a way they are his children, personal friends, and although it is through his intimate acquaintance with them and their ways that in the end they come to their death, I have always thought that he feels he is losing a friend each time this happens.

The first staghunting meet of the season takes place in the second week in August, and is always at my one-time old summer home, Cloutsham Farm, near Porlock.

In the days when I first staghunted everyone walked, rode or drove to the meet in what a modern child friend of mine once described as " funny boxes on wheels dragged by horses." Instead of a string of cars and mammoth motor chars-à-bancs climbing from Horner Mill or from Dunkery Hill Gates to Webber's Post, there was a stream of carts and carriages. Then, as now, Webber's Post was the great coign of vantage from which the tufting and lay-on could be seen, and, as now, the opening meet was always a picnic for the whole country-side.

The char-à-bancs, at least a miniature copy of the present

motor monstrosity, had arrived, but it was a pair-horse-drawn conveyance and, in consequence, had its limitations. The notice at Webber's Post asking that no motor cars travel the narrow road to Cloutsham on hunting days was not then so necessary as it is to-day, and, as now, the narrow lane to Cloutsham Gate and Nutscale was always kept free from horsemen and carriages.

These two roads, the road up from the ford below the farm to Webber's Post, and the lane to Cloutsham Gate, are kept clear so that the pack may get quickly to the open moor on either side of the farm when the huntsman signals for the lay-on.

A little after eleven, when the pack have been on view to foot and horse people for a short time, they are moved from Cloutsham Ball—the field in which they always meet—and are shut up in one of the loose-boxes in the farm-yard near by. This does not mean that, at every meet, the pack will be kennelled during tufting as close to the meet itself as this. Sometimes they have to be moved a mile or two away and nearer to the spot where the harbourer has his stag. For a Hawkcombe Head meet, for instance, the pack would be kennelled at Lucott if a stag had been harboured in Hawkcombe, but if the harbourer reports one at Lillycombe they will be taken to Yarnor or Yearnor Moor Stables, sometimes called Culbone Stables, and kennelled there. The pack is always shut up at the nearest available place to where the harboured stag is reported to be lying.

Culbone Stables is a favourite place, and was the first coach-change for horses out of Porlock on the journey to Lynton.

The huntsman then draws out two couples of his wisest and steadiest old hounds to be used for the tufting, which

is the next step after the harbourer's work in the hunting of the stag.

" Tufting," however, needs some explanation and we must know some of the reasons why and when it is necessary.

We know, for instance, that the harbourer has a big stag safely in Sweetery just below the farm, so while he jogs down the lane with the huntsman and the " tufters," we will explain, as we all wait on Cloutsham Ball, some of the reasons why this second act in the hunting of the stag is necessary.

First of all, then, stags are constantly on the move. They do not live like foxes in known earths during the day-time, but are wandering creatures. They are naturally gregarious, but generally herd together, and hinds separately, until the rutting season.

These herds are not always easy to locate in so large an area as Exmoor, for when lying-up in their beds in the day-time deer are almost as well hidden as if they were underground. Even when found it would be impossible to separate one particular stag from the rest if the whole pack were employed. This can only be done with a few of the steadiest old hounds called " the tufters," who know the work they are expected to do. This is rather like that of the clever shepherd's dog who can separate one sheep from a herd.

If the complete pack were put into a wood where stags, young and old, were resting, the latter would soon be running in all directions and, in all probability, the pack would go away with some young male deer, too young to be hunted, and leave a five-year-old in covert.

The tufters separate the harboured stag, the five-year-old ; separate him after hunting him up and down the

covert, and are easily stopped on young deer, or possibly hinds which may be disturbed while this is being done. In the end they force the warrantable stag to leave the woods and take to the open moor.

That is why " tufters " must always be used in stag-hunting but are not necessary in the hind-hunting season during the winter months. This is because the age of the hind is not so important, cannot be told with any certainty, and because almost any hind is huntable.

When hinds are located it is almost always found that the female sex, as very nearly everywhere else, is numerically the stronger. The whole pack are then used to draw, and although they may divide, the huntsman goes with the pack having most of the hounds, whilst the whippers-in must stop the rest and bring them on to him as soon as they can.

Hinds, however, are very apt to join up again, to run at first in circles with others, so that, very often, both contingents of hounds are brought together and amalgamated on the line of one hind.

Tufting is a very tiring operation for huntsman, horse and hound. It is, however, the huntsman's work, whilst when the body of the pack comes fresh at the lay-on the huntsman can get on to a fresh horse, and has a few minutes' rest before the real hunt commences.

Cheering his hounds and climbing up and down deep coombe-sides under a hot sun, for the couple of hours it sometimes takes to get the right stag away, is not a job for an unfit man, and takes more out of his horse than a long gallop over the moor. But a huntsman of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds is never an unfit man, for he often has to ride from fifty to eighty miles a day ; from the time he leaves kennel until he gets home ; and this

he does three times a week for nine or ten months of the year.

The pack at Cloutsham has now reached the waiting tufters who, with sterns waving, watch " Ernest," their huntsman, change to his fresh horse. The Master, followed by an excited crowd of three hundred riders, is warning them to hold hard as they spread out in line on the heather behind him. The Secretary and some older members of the field are helping at opposite ends of this line to steady the excited field.

" All right, Ernest ! "

" Hold hard, gentlemen, please, and let them settle down," and the huntsman quietly cheers the pack on the line.

There is no great crash of hound " music " ; nothing like as much as we should expect from foxhounds under similar conditions, but, in a few minutes, they have glided away from the field and are streaming in single file up the far side of the first dip in the hills, leaving the field panting and struggling behind them.

" Ernest " is always with his hounds. He is generally the only one who can gallop fast enough up and down hill, through heather, woods and bracken, for it is astonishing how deceptive is the pace at which these big hounds travel. There is only one way to keep with them, and that is to gallop almost as fast down hill as you do on a racing gallop at Beckhampton. Very few have the nerve to do this and only a very small percentage are able to live with hounds for long.

A stag will as soon run up-wind as down-wind, and often makes for water and " sails," splashes and rolls in it, during a hunt, but the wet never makes much difference to the look of his coat. When he does this he will often

travel two or three hundred yards up and down the stream. While he is in the water he leaves no scent, and it is here that the struggling field have many opportunities of catching up again. Checks are inevitable at almost every stream in which the stag soils. He invariably runs either up or down stream before leaving, never crossing at the spot opposite which he entered the water.

A stag, notwithstanding his big antlers, will go through the thickest wood as quickly as any hound, for, by raising his chin, he can lay these right along his back, and almost any branches he can clear with his face he knows will also clear his antlers.

Sometimes he raps the overhanging twigs with the points and tines, and the sound given by this often gives the huntsman information he wishes to know when tufting.

Frequently a hunted stag will go through a herd of hinds or cattle in an attempt to shake off the following pack. He will even sink himself in water, only allowing his nostrils to show, or, as already mentioned, push up young deer from their beds in the bracken to make them take his place.

Although as a rule he runs straight, he will often double about and run short like a fox, with even more than a fox's cunning, but when the end approaches he usually makes his final stand at bay in water. Even here, if hounds are not too close to him, he will look for and choose some spot where he can get his back to a high bank or rock, and stand in deep water himself ; deep enough, at any rate, to make his adversaries swim round him as they bay him. At other times he may at the end take to the sea, swimming out long distances before being taken

THE STAG "AT BAY"

by a motor boat brought out by the fishermen of Porlock Weir, who are ready whenever they hear a hunted stag is in the neighbourhood.

One often hears complaints about this modern motor boat method of taking the stag, but when I first hunted on Exmoor the Pollards and Perkyns of the Weir went out on these occasions in a row-boat. It often took a very long time, first to get out to the swimming or floating stag—they float as easily as they swim—and then secure him, generally by tying the legs and somehow getting him into the boat, so bringing him in alive.

I never liked this method. A fast motor boat, notwithstanding the adverse criticisms I have heard from time to time, is a much more humane and quicker way of ending the life of a hunted deer—which we should never forget must end on the day he is harboured and hunted if it can possibly be accomplished—than by chasing a powerful swimmer with only a pair of oars.

Immediately the motor boat gets to him a rope is slipped over his antlers and the boat goes ahead at full speed for a minute or two. This pulls the stag's nostrils under water and he is drowned in a very short space of time, or, unable to struggle, one knife-thrust can be accurately made and so kill him instantly.

Tying the legs and getting a tired stag into a row-boat was not pleasant and a very spun-out operation, whereas the motor boat reaches him immediately and puts him out of action in a few seconds without any further struggling or fighting.

I fail to see the argument that to use a motor boat is " an unfair advantage " and that the old-fashioned row-boat was more sportsmanlike. It might look it but it certainly was not so, for it dragged out the hunted stag's

last moments for a much longer period of time. The quicker a huntsman can kill his quarry when once it is at the final bay the better, and the same action applies when a stag goes to sea.

Every hunting man or woman wants this done. Very few of us, anyhow, enjoy seeing a kill, and the people who seem to like most this necessary part of hunting are the foot people who always seem to collect from nowhere on such occasions, and who press on the hunted animal in his last moments, sometimes hindering the huntsman in his work much more than do the riders.

There are one or two things during a staghunt that all followers should remember.

The first is that they may not "go tufting" as it is called; that is, to follow the huntsman and harbourer when they go out to rouse the stag. Only old and knowledgeable staghunters may do this and, in any case, must have special permission to do so from the Master. As in foxhunting, they must always stand still when the huntsman is casting his hounds, and must not follow him round as he does so.

They should never press on hounds until they have settled down at the lay-on, and they should not start to ride in front of the pack to the waiting huntsman and his tufters, even if they know their hunted stag has gone away over the moor.

After the meet, and until the lay-on, the safest course is always to keep near the stable or shed where hounds are shut up while the tufters are at work. The lay-on may come very quickly and suddenly, and so long as you are near hounds you can never be left.

No time is wasted when once the lay-on is signalled. In a few seconds, with no noise or holloaing, the hounds

are cantering at the heels of the Master's horse, surrounded by the second horsemen. Members of the field coffee-housing and not on the look-out for this move may easily be left in a few moments to find themselves the only occupants, with the exception of foot people, of the field and hill-side which, a little while ago, had two or three hundred horse people waiting about on it.

When waiting always dismount, because you never know how long a hunt may be, and the less tired your horse is, especially if he has a fifteen- or twenty-mile hack to his stables, the more comfortable a ride he will be for yourself.

Even if you never carry sandwiches or biscuits with foxhounds it is always advisable to do so on Exmoor. A small packet of gruel for your horse is also very useful.

Second horses are useless. They are never used here because they would have to do just as much work as your first horse. The hunt staff know this and usually change directly after the tufting; otherwise, as I say, second horses are not used.

There are no public-houses on Exmoor; no sign-posts; very few definite tracks, and only two or three farm-houses in the central part of it.

When going home to the Porlock side take your bearings. Remember Larkbarrow, Badgworthy Water, Lillycombe and telegraph-posts on the Lynton and Porlock coast-road; the Exford-and-Brendon-Two Gates-Lynton road across the centre of Exmoor is without them, so jog off as soon as you can at the end of a hunt with these bearings in mind.

Staghounds do not draw twice. No one would want them to do so. After the kill the day is over.

Let your horse drink when he likes on his homeward journey, and if a long one take him slowly, trotting and walking. Walk by his side for a mile or so if he is very done, and slacken his girths when dismounting, but pull them up again before you remount.

If you hang about your horse will get stiff. Turn his head for home when all is over, but if this happens on the moor watch the landscape-skyline for landmarks you know.

And just a very short word as to kit.

On the hottest day thin flannel next the skin is safer than anything else, and a tweed coat better than a linen one.

Never have very thin strapping or too thin riding breeches, for otherwise you will soon get blistered with the creases on the parts you must use when riding.

Remember that when you are tired you soon get cold, and an Exmoor storm is often about the coldest thing I have known.

Jodhpurs are not suitable as the sweat from the horse soon makes the insides of their legs a pulp from knee to ankle, and water either from streams or storm does not improve your comfort.

Good, soft-legged polo boots, with blunt polo spurs and thin straps are the best footwear for Exmoor hunting. The best-fitting gaiters are apt to get rucked up by the stirrup-iron on a long day.

Straw hats or panamas get knocked off too easily. Light bowlers are therefore the best headgear.

A stock, if worn at all, should be of silk or the thinnest material possible.

A hunting-whip must always have a brown leather lash. The thicker this is the easier it is to carry properly. There

is no necessity for a small boy on a miniature pony to carry a twelve-foot stock whip-lash.

The length of your lash should be proportionate to your height when mounted; it is not to be used to correct hounds, and should not be allowed to trail along the ground as you ride.

CHAPTER V

THE NOVICE OUT HUNTING

EVERYONE who wants to try staghunting must at some time or other have his first day, but he will enjoy himself much more on this occasion if he has some preliminary knowledge of the why and wherefore of what happens, and has previously been instructed in some of the things he should or should not do.

Since the end of the nineteenth century no one, except the Master, Ex-Master, Secretary and Hunt servants, has hunted in the orthodox foxhunting kit.

When the pack arrives and if it should pass near you keep your horse's head towards it, and as hounds trot past in front of you let the point of your lash hang down over his shoulder. Make no attempt to flick at them. Never follow the tufters, and, as explained in the last chapter, the three or four couples of old hounds which the huntsman takes to rouse the stag from his bed in the bracken.

You may, however, follow the Master to some high point from which you can see the tufters do their work. Never on any account "holloa" if you see twenty stags.

If you are standing near others do not tell them, "There he goes." There is only one stag the huntsman is drawing for, a warrantable five-year-old, and being a novice you do not know the difference between a young male deer and a huntable stag. The fewer remarks you make the less will you show your ignorance. All you have to do is

to listen and watch. It is not necessary to sit on your horse's back all the time the tufters are at work, in fact it is better for him if you get off it.

No hunt begins for the " field " until tufting is finished and the warrantable stag has gone away.

If you do not want to miss a hunt there are only two places where you may safely wait. The first is within sight of the place where the pack has been kennelled, but from which you will probably be unable to see or hear any of the preliminaries of staghunting, and the second is to keep a watchful eye on the Master who himself will be watching the tufting.

It is astonishing how quickly four hundred horsemen can suddenly disappear as soon as the pack has started away for the lay-on. From that moment all is bustle and excitement. The Master trots briskly away down the lane with the pack clustered round him. The field form in behind. The novice must beware of sudden stops, and be careful not to let his eager hunter tread on the heels or bump into the quarters of horses ahead. The rider is presumed to be in control of his horse at all times. The novice, on his first day's hunting, often is not.

Everybody stops and stands still when the pack reaches the tufters, and while the huntsman changes his horse.

Do not be in a hurry even now. Never press on hounds at starting and when they are feeling for the line. If there is a scent you can be in as much hurry as you like in a minute or two's time, and then find yourself a long way behind them. When the hunt has really started take a line well behind someone you know is an old stag-hunter, and you will generally be able to see more of the sport by following a farmer than anyone else.

Always give as much room as you can to the man in

front of you on heather, though there is no need to follow exactly in his line. You may have selected your pilot but do not keep your eyes fixed on his horse's hind-quarters. There are other things to see in staghunting.

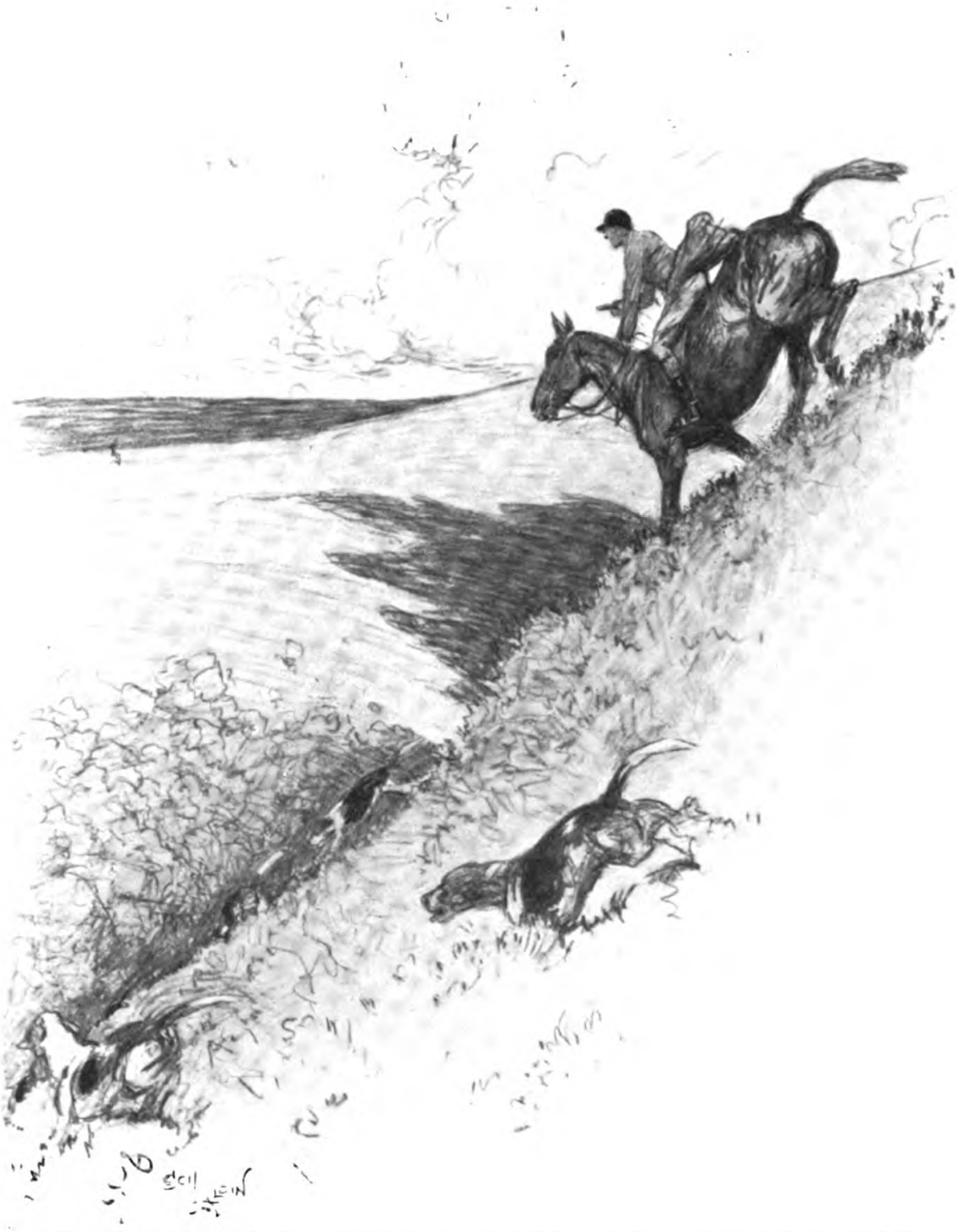
Look well ahead and you may often see what hounds are doing and be prepared for a sudden check.

Always scramble anywhere out of the huntsman's way if he should have to pass you.

If, when on a narrow path, you should hear called out behind you, " Huntsman ! " " Whip ! " or " Master ! " you must get to one side immediately to allow passage-room. If a tail hound crosses just in front of you, check your horse to let him pass.

There is nothing more likely to unseat the novice than to have to suddenly stop his horse when he is cantering down a steep footpath, and when riding uphill lean well forward. Never ride down steep inclines at an angle. Always keep your horse going straight down. Lean slightly *forward* when going down even the steepest hill. Check your horse as little as possible on these. Any sudden jab at the bit will make him sit down on his haunches and the rider probably on his tail. A horse never somersaults forward downhill, he sits down and slides. So " downhill straight, uphill zigzag." If you want to see the pace to ride down hills watch Ernest Bawden, the huntsman of the Devon and Somerset.

On any sudden change underfoot, such as from heather to coarse grass, ride carefully. Long, whitish sedge grass or grass tinged with red means danger. No bog on Exmoor is more than three feet deep but that will bring a galloping horse down. Should this happen keep hold of your reins, for in a yard or two he may be out of it. It may be a filled peat-hole, and there will probably be others



"THE HUNTSMAN NEVER LEANS BACK WHEN RIDING DOWN THE STEEPEST PLACES."

to follow. Bad or soft going is exceptional on Exmoor and all bogs are marked on the map. It is advisable, therefore, to study the locality of the Chains and Bradley Bog, but there is nothing like practical experience as an aid to memory.

No one has ever disappeared in a bog on Exmoor.

Don't crowd round the stag when he is standing at bay. Only stag hunters of long experience can then help the huntsman. Once the stag is killed keep your horse well away, and always get off his back at every opportunity during a check. You may have to ride twenty miles home.

A few swallows of water at streams you may cross never do your horse any harm, in fact the reverse on a long hack home. Walk by his side a mile or so when you can, and always let him walk the last one or two miles before reaching his stable.

Get him home and don't "coffee-house" on the way for more than a few minutes. Remember, your horse is an animal and not a motor car, even if he may be a hireling.

If hounds should get into hedged and cultivated fields use the gateways. Do not try to jump the fences, it is almost impossible, the farmer doesn't like it and on Exmoor it is not done.

You cannot jump banks with thick hedges in full leaf on top in August! If you want a toss you must take it on the moor. There are lots of people out who can show you how and where to get one. And if you can remember some of these pieces of advice your first day need not be a very harassing experience.

CHAPTER VI

MOORLAND HACKING

It is obvious that the first thing you have to do, if you want to ride on Exmoor, is to get something to ride on, and what kind of a horse or pony that is should depend very much upon your proficiency as a horseman.

Everybody rides hirelings, but hirelings have tricks and minor vices. They are almost all " quiet to ride " in the usually accepted sense of the term. A horseman or horsewoman can be a very elastic term. I have met people on Exmoor who, having had a few dozen lessons in Richmond Park, consider themselves fully qualified to be classed as " good riders " and to know all about horsemanship. A rider, however, is one thing, and a horseman quite another.

To hack on the moor a knowledge of saddles, bridles and tackle, where horses should walk and where canter and gallop, is as necessary as being able to sit on their backs properly up steep hill-paths or down slippery coombes. Hacking on Exmoor is definitely different from riding in Richmond Park or Rotten Row.

So, as novices, we will visit Messrs Collings, Smiths or one of the other stables in Porlock or Exford where, at any of these we shall probably be able to see fifty or sixty hunters and hacks for hire.

We want two quiet and comfortable hacks! But youthful riders have various ideas as to what a good hack should be. Some think that a hireling should be

kept at the canter or gallop most of the time it is hired, and that to sit on its back and walk is a waste of time and money. Even as novices we should know better than that.

The first pace wanted in a hack for comfort on Exmoor is a fast and sure-footed walk. Not an amble, and not a snail's crawl which requires constant contact between the rider's heels and the horse's ribs if he is to be kept moving along at all.

A good hack should answer to the heel and rein quickly and briskly, but, for novices like ourselves, should not be too excitable. Because we have been through a course of riding in a school or park we do not tell Mr Collings or Mr Smith that we know all about horses and riding.

Before we had time to say anything more, before even we had got on to one of their horses, either of these two gentlemen, or any other horse-dealing gentleman in the world, would know at once how little we knew about horses! So we had much better tell the truth and say that we have only had a few lessons, can sit on anything quiet and handy for hacking, and, above all, want a comfortable ride on the moor. In this way we shall quickly get what we want.

Before starting out on any horse there are a few things to look over and girths to be looked at in order to see that these are sufficiently tight to prevent the saddle slipping at all in either direction. This is most important in any hilly country, so the best way to do this is to mount and, as soon as we have sat down quietly in the saddle, feel to see whether the girths can come up a hole or two. The buckles for pulling up the saddle-girths are, as we no doubt know, generally under the leather flap of the saddle, so we must lift this flap in order to tighten them. There is a right and a wrong way of making this small adjust-

ment. We should not take our foot out of the stirrup-iron and let the leg hang *behind* the saddle, as I have often seen done.

Keep the foot *in the iron*, take it forward until the leg and back of the knee are clear of the flap, which can then be easily raised and the girth-buckles adjusted. Having adjusted these we put a finger between the top of the withers just in front of us and the pommel of the saddle, to see that there is plenty of room and that the pony will not get his withers sore.

These adjustments can only be tested when our weight is in the saddle. If our fingers are pinched hard between the front of the saddle and the horse we ask for a different one with more room above the withers—to save himself trouble a groom may have put a wrong one on the pony.

Next we adjust our stirrup-leathers to the right length for comfort; a length by which we can feel the iron giving us support, but not with our knees up under our chins!

We then look at the throat-latches and see that they are not too tight; all of which we should have been taught to do at our riding school before starting out.

Having mounted and noted all these things we walk quietly out of the yard and continue at a walk for some little distance, in the meantime seeing if our pony answers at once to the leg-aids and at the same time lightly feel its mouth. If after these preliminaries everything is satisfactory our first ride on the moor is likely to be a pleasant one.

The first thing to do when hacking is to get off the tarmac road, and in this country it can generally be done before we have walked 500 yards. For example, if riding from Porlock to Horner Water and Cloutsham we need

only ride the road for 200 yards in the village. There is a little passageway by the side of the church lich-gate in the main street which takes us in single file through to Hacketty Way, and from that point in any southerly or south-east direction, and for twelve or fifteen miles we need never see a motor car or yard of tarmac.

We shall only come across a few farm-houses with rough tracks leading up to them, while, all the time, we hack along bridle-paths in the heather, over rough grass hill-tops, or penetrate deep down to rippling streams at the bottom of each dwarf-oak covered valley. Every forded stream gives us a thrill and every steep hill we scramble up and down teaches us something more about riding and balance.

Taking them as a whole the hirelings of Exmoor are good hacks ; the best-looking, and the most sure-footed for hire in England, for they are supplied by three or four of our best livery-stable proprietors from London, Exeter and Sherborne, who specially select them for the work, and bring them down every year to the moor before the commencement of the holiday season.

They are mostly small horses, many of the old-fashioned " butty " cob type, whatever the dealer's expression " butty " may mean ; but they are always with short backs and good, clean action, points most suitable for riding on the moor.

No doubt, before we came to Exmoor, we had been told that no horse is safe to ride in that country unless he had been born and bred on the moor. This may be contradicted here and now, for it is a fallacy. Any sure-footed horse with good conformation and action will, in a week, be nearly as clever on Exmoor as any moorland-bred one.

There are in this world horses that, owing to their bad conformation or temperament, are liable to blunder and fall about anywhere, but I have always said, and always shall, that no horse *wants* to fall. He may be lazy or excitable and consequently more likely to trip in bad going, or be badly put together. But he dislikes falling, and provided his conformation, when seen from the front, is good—his two fore and two hind legs are not too close together—and his action straight and true, he is no more likely, with a few weeks on the moor, to blunder on steep ascents or descents than a moorland-bred pony.

Most of the hacks we ride on the moor in August are collected from every part of the country but Exmoor. So long as a horse is small—not more than 15.3 is best—not too excitable, can gallop, and has good conformation, he is suitable for Exmoor hunting and hacking. His jumping capabilities are of no importance; they are not wanted. In fact, on one occasion I found a good water-jumper an infernal nuisance.

A friend had come to Minehead for the first time to see the staghunting and had brought with him, from the Whaddon Chase country, two very expensive-looking hunters. He had tried one with the Minehead harriers, on the hills behind Minehead, the day before I met him, and had nearly finished up in the sea over North Lyne. He asked me if I would come for a quiet hack with him on one of his horses next day. I willingly agreed, but later, when we went around to have a look at them in their stables, I felt a " quiet hack " was not quite what *they* were expecting. Both were full of corn, mad fresh, stood about 16.3 or 17 hands and were up to 14 stone. I stand 5 foot-5 or 6 and ride probably at 11 stone!

The next morning we started, getting off the tarmac

and climbing Lyne Hill at once to get their " backs down a little."

All the while we were climbing upward my friend continued to explain to me the wonderful jumping powers of the horse I was riding, particularly over water. Presently we jogged down through Selworthy Woods to cross the stream in Allerford Village. The sound of water set my mount more than ever on his toes. He bounced and curveted, with ears cocked forward, as he approached the ford, for all the world as though he were an excitable, hackney-bred jumper approaching the water-jump in the show-ring !

I did all I could to show him that the stream was *not* to be jumped. It was about 2 feet deep and 20 feet across. But, when about 6 yards from the water's edge, he took hold of the bit, thinking, no doubt, what a fool he had on his back, took two great, half-rearing fly-jumps off his hocks and " lepped "—" lepped," mark you, not " jumped "—at least 18 of those 20 feet, landing on the usual collection of round rocks one finds in Somerset-shire fords. When he described his arc in the air he took me with him, but not in the position Colonel McTaggart advocates as " the forward seat ! "

I never quite knew where my seat was, but I did know by the loss of a good straw hat, last seen floating down-stream (which I never recovered) and a face streaming with blood from being suddenly thrust into the depth of overhanging branches, that a good water-jumper was not what I wanted to ride, anyhow on Exmoor ! So, for comfortable riding on the moor choose a small horse and not a water-jumper.

But let us get back to the patient hireling. One of the best-known characteristics of the hireling is his dislike of

his own society. Try to get him to leave the other horses and walk by himself and in nine cases out of ten he will show a strong objection to doing so. This is not so important when hacking on Exmoor as it is if the rider is out hunting ; for nothing is so annoying then as to have a heated altercation with your mount if you wish him to alter his direction and leave his comrades and friends. Many of those who go staghunting keep the same hireling the whole season. This is much the most pleasant plan, and in such cases it is worth taking the trouble, when hacking, to impress upon the horse that your wish in all matters is a command.

To do this turn him away from other horses, especially his stable companions, as often as possible, but you must never fail, when you do so, to accomplish your object. After a few lessons (you, of course, always being the winner) this minor vice of not wanting to leave other horses will completely disappear.

As long as you ride the horse he will answer to your aids of heel and hands, but with a new and weaker rider he may soon return to his bad ways again. That is why when riding hirelings out hunting it is always best to have one kept for your own use all the season instead of chopping and changing every time you either hack or hunt.

You must remember, however, that hacking is one thing and hunting quite another. A horse may be quite amenable to do what you want him to—to go in the direction you want him to take when being ridden quietly on the moor—but may strongly object to have to suddenly leave a line of galloping horses in the hunting-field.

Even when out hunting there are times when this should be done if the rider wishes to have a will of his

own, and wants to use his own wits and knowledge of the sport instead of blindly following the man in front.

When the field is on the open moor, and not when it is in narrow trackways, is the best time to test a hired horse's docility in this respect, but the test should be made first by turning away from horses at the walk and later when cantering. The last stage of all is being able to ride your horse at a quiet canter and quite close to a line of horses galloping the opposite way.

So often has one seen riders take a direction they never intended to do because their horses would not turn out of a galloping string of people who were not noticing what was happening to the pack in front of them. Practice when hacking makes perfect when hunting.

When you first hack your hired horse you may find him sluggish at answering the heel-aid, so you must put on a pair of spurs for a little while when next you ride him. It is a very good plan to put a pair in your pocket in case you should find it necessary on your first ride.

If the horse is very sluggish a pair of long-necked spurs with rowels—if worn for a few minutes—will make a great alteration in his quickness in the uptake of the leg-aids. These long-necked spurs should never be worn either when hunting or hacking unless the rider is horseman enough only to touch his horse when he intends and it is necessary to do so. Unmanageable spurs may make an unmanageable horse.

Other vices of the hunting-field are a refusal to stand still and kicking. The former few hirelings attempt, as most of them are only too thankful to be allowed to stand still, but occasionally one finds a horse that will kick at others if touched, or even at hounds. This is a very bad

fault as a hireling never wears a red ribbon on his tail. If he does kick he comes out without any rogue's badge ; you may be sure his owner will see to that.

The best advice I can give is to have nothing more to do with a hireling that has once kicked at other horses or hounds. You will always be assured he has never done it before, but it is wiser to give someone else the chance of finding out if he will ever do it again. A kicking horse will get you into more trouble in the hunting-field than anything else.

The saddlery of a hired horse should always be looked over carefully if the rider is going for a long hack or day's hunting. Stirrup-leathers should be sound and the irons big. Never ride in a tight iron, and, above all, the girths must be in good condition.

Very often hacking on Exmoor is along narrow paths, winding up or down a hill-side, which, when riding in company, must be taken in single file. Nothing is more unpleasant then than to have the pony behind you treading on your horse's hind fetlocks or biting his tail. If he does this it is always a sign that he has a bad rider on his back. In going up or down these places always give the man in front plenty of room ; a horse's length is a reasonable distance. Stop when he halts. There is nothing more exasperating than for a fool behind you to tell you that your horse is bleeding on his hind fetlocks when, all the time, you know his horse has just done it and the rider has no knowledge of his bad horsemanship.

Out hunting, the usual way to show anyone that he is riding too close to you is to place your hand behind your back, *palm outwards*, but this hint is not always realized or understood if the rider behind happens to be a novice. Unless he wants to have his horse lamed the rider in front

cannot be too particular about this matter of distance. If his horse is touched by the one following he can feel it by the movement of the one he is riding. That is the moment to complain, and so draw the other rider's attention to his fault.

CHAPTER VII

DOCTORS AND PARSONS

SOMEONE once suggested to me that the Devon and Somerset was the safest country in the world, for it contained more sporting doctors and parsons than any other; so that, if you broke a bone, there was always a doctor to put it right, and if you broke your back, a parson to see you through. To mention only a few we know, stag-hunting in its most critical period was saved by Dr Palk Collyns, and it was Parson Jack Russell who brought King Edward, when Prince of Wales, to take part in a hunt on Exmoor.

Old Dr Foster, when nearly eighty, hardly ever missed riding to a meet, and Parson Boyce in the eighteenth century kept a celebrated diary of the hunt's doings.

To be the owner of an expensive string of hunters means very little in this country. The man who owns them in any country is not always the man who leads the field, but on Exmoor valuable hunters are more of a nuisance than a blessing.

The farmers, the doctors and the parsons usually see more of the hunt than the man mounted on the best Leicestershire hunter.

To know the moor, to know the ways of the deer, to be able to foresee the probable point, to have intricate knowledge of the streams and minor bridle-tracks, is more useful on Exmoor than all the pace and quality of Leicestershire.

The visitor, until he has hunted here many years, is at a great disadvantage, for he must know something of the country before he can cut out a line of his own, and must have an " eye for a country " in that he must be able to recognize " soft " places and see at once the easiest way to negotiate coombe and stream. You cannot fly a coombe from hill-top to hill-top, nor can you jump a rocky stream.

It is to the farmers, parsons and doctors that the novice looks for guidance and advice. During a hunt you will generally see two or three distinct lines, often a mile apart, galloping across the moor, and if you look carefully you will be sure to see a thin little man in a rusty black coat and clerical, flat-topped bowler, black riding breeches, and riding a 15-hand cob—Parson Outhwaite of Ochard —leading one column.

Farmer Nettlecombe and his beard on even a smaller and thicker-set cob, guiding contingent number two ; and the doctor from your village will prescribe for you as he rides by your side, or tell you of the operations he has had to perform at an early hour that morning in order to get to the meet at all.

Number three column will probably be following him, for he knows every track and pathway from constant riding across the moor on pleasure or duty.

Through not believing in doctors—excepting in the hunting-field—I nearly ended my hunting days by being wafted from the saddle to heaven in the throes of what seemed internal combustion !

As a warning, and help, to the medical profession I tell the story here.

On few occasions in my hunting life have I suffered from acute indigestion, but once this did happen and for a

week I had to sit in agony doubled up on my horse—like a man with curvature of the spine. Although I " disbelieved in doctors," I had already taken all sorts of doctor's stuff without much relief. So, when I arrived at a meet with the tightest of cords drawn almost to breaking point across my chest, I felt desperate ; especially as the " rope " had been in the same position for a week.

I knew almost everyone out, for I was with a pack of foxhounds of which I had been Master. Also, that season, there seemed to have been an epidemic of indigestion among the field, the consequence being that everybody knew of some infallible remedy.

The first lady, who asked about the curvature of my spine, immediately offered me half a dozen of " those " —which she always carried—and I gulped them hopefully and thankfully. My oldest friend had a bottle of tabloids in his car, " always carried them." I took four. And two other people at the meet had sure cures. In desperation, and just to show the doctor what wonderful cures could be accomplished by patent medicines, I took them all.

As hounds moved off the twenty-three capsules, pillules and doses I had taken somehow got jolted together inside me, and the next thing I remember was the presence of my medical practitioner, who rode up and told me that he was glad to see that I was feeling so much better ! " Ye gods ! Better ! Better ! ! " I yelled at him. " I'm just about to explode with internal combustion."

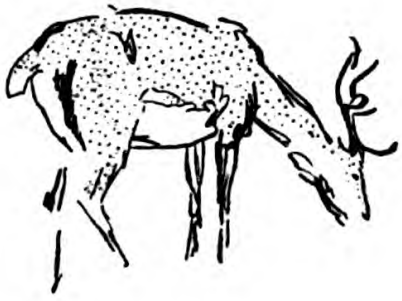
He had heard what I had done and roared with laughter. Notwithstanding that, I told him that I would continue to take patent medicines ; in fact preferred them to coloured water from his surgery. I was, in fact, definitely and aggressively rude, whilst he still continued to laugh.

The hunt went on, and I met more and more friends who all had cures in mysterious little bottles, or in round tins in their waistcoat-pockets. I took them all.

By this time my indigestion-chest-rope seemed to have slipped, to have fallen down to the abdominal region, so I warned the field to keep clear, as, at any moment, I might blow up! But, wonder of wonders! by the end of the day my indigestion was cured.

Where my doctor had failed with his "mixtures as before," my mixtures, collected in the hunting-field, had cured my illness. They would probably, on the basis of counter-irritation, have cured a broken neck, and the moral is, take all the variety of "cures" you can find if you take any!

The fight that ensues, around what you feel are the most intimate parts of your interior, is one that will probably cause the death of any disease of the heart, liver or stomach, arthritis, rheumatism, loss of appetite, the smoking habit, blood-pressure, corns and bunions, and even Wimbledon neck. Anyway, I have never since said "No" to a patent medicine!



CHAPTER VIII

SOME EXMOOR INNS

WHEN first I journeyed in search of Exmoor—in the far, far-off ages of my youth—Minehead, the town one was dumped out at chiefly because it was impossible to go farther by rail, was a sleepy little place.

Outside the station one or two dilapidated "flies" waited hopefully for visitors as each of the only two trains of the day arrived. At all other times the station was deserted. In the afternoons the station-master slept the sleep of the hard-worked official and the only porter strolled off to the tap-room of the Beach Hotel opposite. Even in August Minehead was a deserted place most of the day, and the only excitement for anyone was the arrival in the station-yard of the four-horse Lynmouth coach each morning and evening.

Few people arrived and fewer stayed in Minehead. Some went by a pair-horse bus, or the coach, as far as Porlock, and the remainder ended their journey at Lynmouth.

Lynton of to-day was only in the making. The journey to Exford, just beginning to be made the headquarters of a few enthusiastic staghunters, was viâ Dunster and Wheddon Cross; a long and tiring one, and one which took some hours to accomplish. There was not, of course, a yard of tarmac surface, every track for wheeled traffic being macadamized.

Outside Minehead station was the wide, empty street

that took one to the town, and between this and Dunster, at Alcombe Corner, there was only one farm-house, a row of ancient, tall houses and a few old cottages. Fields and marshes stretched from Dunster almost to where the Wellington Hotel in the town now stands.

The two chief hotels were the "Beach" and the "Plume of Feathers," but there were rumours of others.

The Beach Hotel, just outside the station, became my first rest-house on my travels to take a part in the hunting of the red deer.

It was then kept by two maiden ladies, and was served by an elderly waiter and a family of plain chambermaids, one of these being in charge of each floor. Even in those respectable, Victorian days it was a paragon of virtue and oozed respectability from every room. There was a smoke-room, the only place in which you *might* smoke, a drawing-room where you could silently sit, and a coffee-room where meals were served but only at very definite hours. It had large quantities of lace curtains, anti-macassars and colossal cruet-stands.

Its cook was celebrated for her Sunday-night tipsy-cake pudding!

It had a capacious yard at the back with a great quantity of horse-boxes and stalls, most of which had ponies and horses standing on the pillar-reins on a market day. The stabling is still there, but when I wished to use it a few years ago, for sending horses away at an early hour, it was full of the accumulated rubbish of years, and seemed to have entirely missed the tide of prosperity in hireling livery stables that has cropped up everywhere else in Minehead.

The whole atmosphere of the hotel in those days was one of "family." It was a family production. It be-

longed to one family ; its waiters were father and son, and its chambermaids all relations. There was nothing " company " about the management of the Beach Hotel. It was just a comfortable hostelry where, before going to rest each night, you wrote on the slate the time you wanted to be called in the morning. Cruet-stands and the three chambermaids were its predominating features.

Twenty years afterwards I stayed a night there, and when I went to my room I seemed to recognize the face of the rheumaticky old maid in charge of the floor. To my astonishment she remembered me, greeted me at once as an old friend and, as we grasped hands, told me that she was there when I had stayed before on the floor above. " Mother did Number One then." I asked sympathetically after " Mother " and was informed that she was very well, with the exception of " the rheumatics " in winter. The dear old lady added, " She does the second floor now, but Grannie is still up on the third. She can't get about much."

The Beach Hotel, even at that time—I do not like to say how long ago it was—still preserved its atmosphere of respectability, for the male guests appeared at dinner in the latest thing in dinner-wear : a short black jacket, known as a smoking-jacket, which had previously only been worn in billiard and smoking-rooms, and was not often seen in country hotel dining-rooms. Ladies sniffed suspiciously at these smoking-jackets when they first appeared in the Beach Hotel coffee-room, and occasionally made open complaints about the aroma of tobacco they exuded. If a cigarette had been lit in the coffee-room or drawing-room of those days I think the local police would have been called in, and certainly the delinquent would have been ejected forthwith. One laughs over things like

this now—other times, other manners—but on both my short visits to the Beach—many, many years apart—I enjoyed every moment of my stay, and should probably have done so again had I gone for a rest there.

It may now be full of lounges, with not a single monster cruet-stand to be seen, and have a constant flow of slim-figured young ladies in " just enough " and with sunburnt backs, coming and going from its busy beach and cocktail bar, or seated on their high stools surrounding it, standing drinks to all their young male friends. I cannot tell, I do not know, for it is years since I stayed at Minehead. The smoking-jacket may now be a thing of the past at the Beach Hotel & Co. Ltd., and dinner may be served at ten o'clock at night to youths and maidens in beach pyjamas and shorts.

Minehead is not, however, a good hunting centre, as can be seen from the map of the Meets. But in addition to the comparatively new Beach Hotel of my first visit in almost pre-bicycle days, another and older caravanserai was the " Plume of Feathers." This was partly residential, but chiefly the meeting-place of farmers coming in to Minehead town on market days. It had a few hunting visitors staying in August and September, and was right in the centre of life in the town where there were at least half a dozen shops, chiefly saddlers and ironmongers, who also sold sardines, trousers and groceries.

The " Plume of Feathers " had even larger cruet-stands than the " Beach " and many more " condiment pots " on its sideboard and tables. It was decorated with them, and I should think you would be able to get more mustard, salt and pepper, and have more oil and vinegar there, if the size of the bottles and stands were any criterion, than in any other hotel in England. Here again,

like the Beach Hotel, I expect the ubiquitous cocktail bar has pushed its way in, and the " condiment " contingent has, in consequence, been squeezed out.

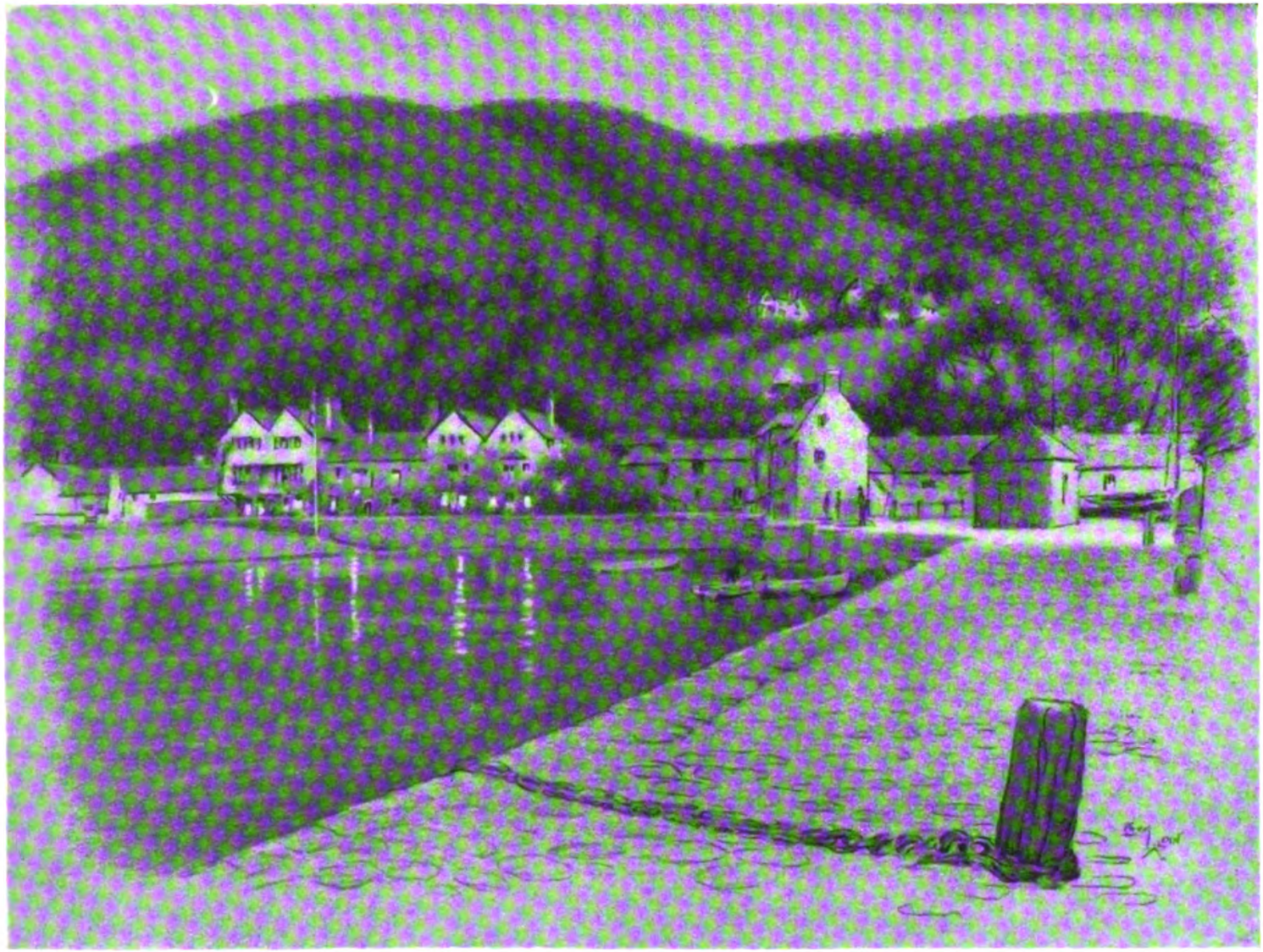
But what a rotten semi-guide-book this is, for, so far, we have had nothing serious about inns, nor have we even mentioned an inn of Exmoor, for those that have been are all seaside hotels. But if Minehead to-day is not a centre for staghunting, or the exploration of Exmoor, you may enjoy its pierrots, bandstands, tennis-courts, cocktail parties, Grand-Splendide-Ritz Hotels. That is for the visitor to decide.

The staghunter must travel on to Porlock, Exford, Winsford or Withypool, where, until a few years ago, he could still find inns with the cruet-and-condiment habit.

If Lynton and Minehead are the fashion leaders of seaside Somerset, Porlock and Porlock Weir are still enjoyable places to stay in, and the Anchor Hotel at Porlock Weir the most enjoyable of all.

I do hope that it still keeps the honoured remains of the pair-horse " Anchor Bus " in which so many of us first wearily travelled to the Weir from Minehead station. When I last stayed there it was holding itself bravely together under a hedge between Worthy Manor and the Inn. Here for twenty-five years it had stood waiting for burial. A year or two ago its inside upholstery had gone and its outside paint was weather-faded or completely washed away ; but it was still alive in the same spot.

" Anchor Hotel " could still be traced on each side of the conveyance that was once the pride of old John Goddard's heart ; the apple of his eye and the only pair-horse bus that journeyed from Porlock to Minehead ; the only private omnibus of a great hunting hotel of the period.



THE "ANCHOR" INN, PORLOCK WEIR, AT EVENING.

(Reproduced by kind permission of Messrs. Alfred Bell & Co., Ltd.)

I once painted a fox and hounds on coach panels for a friend. I wish, in the new days of his omnibus, I had known John Goddard better and had been allowed to paint a " warrantable " stag upon its door behind, for I think he would have liked to have seen it as his bus gaily drove away from the hotel porch to meet his hunting visitors.

A hotel-keeper he was, but first of all a great sportsman, a character and a staghunter. The exigencies of the hotel business he would never allow to interfere with his sporting fixtures or private likes or dislikes, and if he did not take to you, or the look of you, as a guest, he told you so very plainly.

John Fothergill of the " Spread Eagle " at Thame was a polished courtier compared to John Goddard of the Anchor Inn, Porlock Weir—if you were not to his taste !

There were two things I always loved about John and his house. The first was his one and only bathroom, and the rush home we all had to get in first on hunting days. The second his delightful habit (by which he could soon starve out an unpleasant visitor) of carving all the joints himself, and always, before doing so, asking exactly for whom he was carving, that he might give his guests the quantity and quality they fancied ; and what he lost on the roundabouts he could make up on the swings. If any of the guests did not run smoothly on his hotel-lines, they would always be served last and least, if it became necessary to remove them by fair means or foul.

I have called the Anchor a great hunting inn, and so it was, but not in size, for it only had about ten or twelve bedrooms, one bath, three private sitting-rooms and

enormous stabling. The visitors' book for the stag-hunting season showed the same names year after year. They seemed to continue coming until they left this world.

If you went once to the Anchor you went always, and from year to year the same bedroom and sitting-room were reserved for each honoured guest. You were just as much a part of the house as the proprietor or the boots and chambermaids.

The first article I ever wrote was about Anchor chambermaids. It was sent to a paper on horses and hunting, the editor of which I knew. We had hunted together. Why he agreed to publish it I cannot say, except that as his paper was, I presume, for grooms, he may have thought an article on chambermaids might possibly have some news value.

Anyhow it appeared—was never paid for—and ever since I have been trying to persuade editors without success to take articles on the same fascinating subject.

Here, therefore, at long last, I have squeezed in a few words without having to take an editor out to lunch.

Every year when I travelled to Porlock it seemed more like " going home " than anything else, although I had a house in Berkshire and many interests there.

That is the charm of one's favourite inn. That welcome of the staff on one's arrival. But at Porlock Weir in those days it was not only the staff of the Anchor, it was all the Perkyns and Pollards, Old " Villum " and his friends, the habitués of the sea-wall, who grasped you by the hand and gave you welcome. You felt that they had lived through the quiet winter solely for this reunion. They told you about staghunting sport, the fishing season, the conger-eels, the births, deaths and marriages—in fact,

all the thrilling news of Porlock town—as you sat on the quay wall, " Turkey," as it was called. The derivation of its name we discovered was from the sentence, " Come on ter quay." The seats on the quay were, therefore, always known by those in the hotels as Turkey, and there, after dinner, we smoked our evening cigars.

This same little band of sportsmen from all over England forgathered every year from August to October at the hospitable Anchor, and much talk there was on Turkey of fox, stag, otter and other kinds of sport.

It was when at the Weir that we had a plague of wasps and so discovered a sport new to most of us.

It was in the rather early days of the West Somerset Polo Club at Dunster and one of the players kept his ponies at the club, but lived at the Anchor most of the time when play was not possible. He did not hunt the stag, but was an enthusiastic wasp-hunter, and treated the destruction of a few nests as the serious business of each non-polo day. His method of hunting was based on his own scientifically worked-out theory and was most successful for, that season, he took over one hundred nests.

About four o'clock on each day he would take up a position on the low wall in front of the Anchor, a small bottle of some poisonous mixture sticking out of his jacket pocket. To anyone watching he seemed to be gazing vacantly into space, his eyes fixed on points a little above the height of the tallest man.

Suddenly his whole frame would stiffen—his hackles go up, so to speak—and he would rise like a man in a trance to follow a series of glistening yellow bodies and tinsel wings which converged on some wall, house or tree as a vanishing point twenty or thirty yards away.

In such cases he was on a screaming scent and, on reaching the spot where the wasps had vanished, he would again sit and gaze thoughtfully until he located another stage in the wasps' homeward journey, and so on until finally all the straight-flying insects came to one vanishing point, and there was the nest.

At midday and in the evening, as soon as he saw wasps flying in straight lines like city workers travelling home and not swooping about in all directions, he took up positions to draw for homeward-bound wasps. Sometimes he had a long hunt ; often he hit off many lines converging in one direction from places two or three hundred yards apart, but when once he could locate two or three lines he was able to discover points—through some building-wall or tree—where they came together in their direct route and would hit the trail again on the far side. In this way he would continue the hunt until the nest was discovered and exterminated.

A zigzagging wasp, when still feeding, had no interest for him. It was not a " warrantable " wasp until full, but the direct homeward-bound quarry never failed to start him on a hunt and we would presently hear, borne on the still evening air, his shrill " Who-whoop " of victory.

Anyone can, of course, spot wasps when they are buzzing round their nests, but his art was the trailing of them. By long practice he had become such an expert that he knew to a minute the various times of day when the wasp returned home.

I followed a hunt with him once or twice ; I also found it a most exciting pastime, and can thoroughly recommend it as exercise for old or young. The " Who-whoop " that my friend gave out when he finally marked to

ground, and produced his poison gas, could be heard all over Porlock Weir, and everyone would rush out to be in at the kill.

A funny combination this enthusiasm for the game of polo and the sport of wasp-hunting!

At Exford the biggest inn is the Crown Hotel next door to the Exmoor Woolworth, and over the bridge is the White Horse, another good house in which to stay when staghunting.

It was during the latter years of the long mastership —twenty-five seasons—of Mr Fenwick Bissett that staghunting first began to attract visitors in large numbers, and the visit of King Edward, when Prince of Wales, helped to make staghunting popular. At the present time every farm-house, hotel and apartment here are booked up months ahead by hunting people, and Exford trade flourishes.

At the beginning of staghunting's popularity hirelings were difficult to find if you were staying at any of the moorland villages, and as a rule the few visitors brought their own horses. To-day, at any of these villages, hunters and hacks can be hired at any time.

Porlock, Exford, Simonsbath, Winsford and Dulverton all have these hunting inns. The Ship at Porlock, like the Ship at Porlock Weir two miles away, is one of the oldest houses. I have never stayed at either of them but have had many friends who have done so, and who have been as enthusiastic about them as I have been about the Anchor.

I think the Oak at Winsford runs the two Ship Inns in the Porlock district very close as regards age. Originally it was a thatched house, having a very thick Somersetshire thatch which had been renewed every few years

layer over layer. There may even have been rye-straw on some of the bottom layers, which would go to prove its great age. Rye has not been grown much for some centuries, although at one time it was the chief crop cultivated on the farms.

Originally, of course, the Oak was just a small village public-house and only since the staghunting revival has it catered for holiday visitors. Now it has been taken over by a company who collects these houses, reorganizes and decorates them and gives the traveller every modern comfort.

I am afraid I have always been one of those few people who prefer an inn uncontrolled by directors and decoration managers. I like to feel that my host has a personal feeling for my comfort, that I am a guest, and that I am not purely a financial proposition to help create dividends. I hate to feel at breakfast that at any moment a travelling inspector may arrive and tell the manager that I cannot have six pats of butter with my breakfast egg and bacon when the tariff department of the company have fixed it at four, or even to say that I cannot have French mustard in my soup if I want it.

I know that this particular company does nothing of the sort, their slogan is comfort for the guests before all, but it is the sort of thing that happens with companies running chains of anything—cinemas, theatres, hotels, inns or shops—and I have always preferred the personal touch that can only be got with owner-control. In fact I *would* have mustard in my soup !

At Dulverton and Withypool there are one or two inns, and there is also one at Simonsbath and at Brendon, where staghunters can stay.

These are the only inns on or adjoining the moor. It

will be seen by consulting my map which places are the most convenient for riding on Exmoor itself.

All inns on Exmoor are comfortable and all have simple, wholesome fare. Don't expect a cocktail bar on every heather-covered hill or sunken, marble baths at an inn.

CHAPTER IX

RIVERS AND STREAMS

THE babbling rivers and the tumbling streams are ever-present features of red-deer land. We meet them in every coombe and valley. Many are the homes of the otter and well stocked with fish waiting for the angler's creel.

In the country hunted over by the Devon and Somerset there are three major rivers which rise on Exmoor—the Exe, the Barle, and the Lyn. At the south-west corner of the country we have the River Mole, and, off the moor on the south which is bounded by the Great Western Railway, the River Yeo meanders through the cultivated valley between South Moulton and East Anstey. The River Mole rises in the hills near Sandyway so it is an Exmoor river, but the Yeo is only a boundary-mark, for no part of it reaches the moor proper.

In addition to these major rivers the Avil rises near Dunkery Hill Gate and follows the road to Dunster and the sea.

The Quarme starts near Exmoor Common and becomes part of the Exe near Exton. Dane's Brook rises near Sandyway and merges in the Barle at the end of Hawkeridge Ridge.

Horner Water rises above Chetsford Bridge—the bridge with that awkward approach which we all know when motoring. It is Nutscale Water until nearly to Lucott, divides below Cloutsham Ball, where the stream known as East Water runs down from above Sweetery and comes

into it, and after the juncture babbles on broader and more gaily than ever to Horner Mill and the sea near Bossington. But Horner Water had for me, as already related, a terrible tragedy a year after I left Cloutsham.

Horner Water and in fact all these streams look very different at times. In winter, when they are in spate and a torrent is gushing to the sea, it is an easy matter for the cleverest horse to slip on the water-worn rocks which are washed down the bed of the stream and cover the summer fords.

Weir Water, Chalk Water and Badgworthy flow into the Lyn at Robbers' Bridge, Oareford and Malmsmead. Weir Water rises near Lucott Cross where we turn off the Exford-Hawkcombe Head road if we are going to Larkbarrow by car. Chalk Water takes its source from the north side of Larkbarrow and Badgworthy Water rises from those unpleasantly boggy hills east and west of Pinford; places we always try to avoid when stag-hunting. Farley Water and Hoaroak Water become one and run into the East Lyn, a mile above Waters Meet, and the West Lyn joins the East Lyn at Lynmouth town.

Besides these main rivers and streams there are minor brooks and streamlets in every deep depression in these Exmoor hills. In fact, the visitor riding over Exmoor is always crossing streams or fording rivers. On the moor you may go anywhere; there are no "Trespassers will be prosecuted" boards, no enclosures, and the inhabitants of the woods are the wild birds and animals in their natural haunts. The only thing you must not do is to fish or shoot without getting permission from the owner of the land or water.

An exciting game for the youngsters at Cloutsham used

to be to trace a stream from its source to its junction with a larger river. Only the better-known streams have footpaths running beside them, and to follow, or make a trail, down some deep coombe always meant meeting some unexpected denizen of the woods, often an old stag or hinds, and the finding of new bathing-pools and picnic-places.

The streams and rivers of Exmoor have endless possibilities for exploration on foot. Badgworthy Water is one of the most beautiful, and there is always the Doone Valley to explore on the way, with a climb up Hoecombe Coombe.

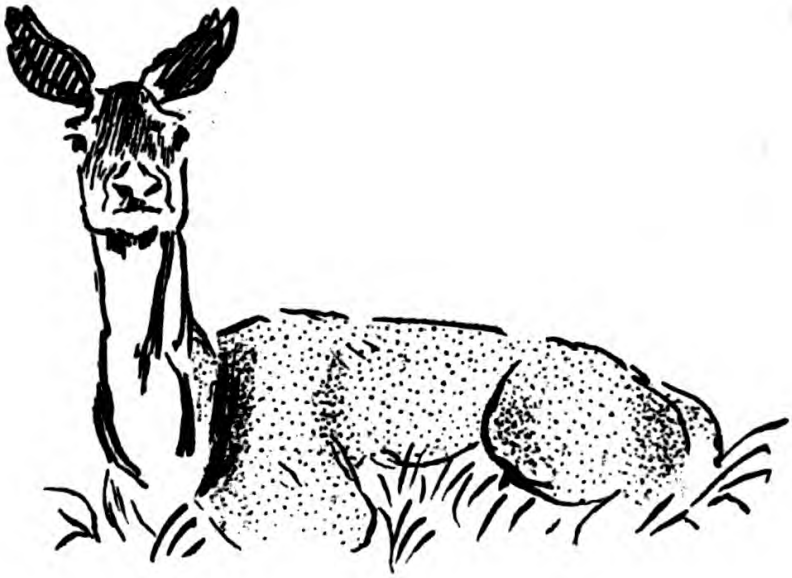
Chalk Water and Weir Water are not interesting in this way as their banks are not wooded, but Dane's Brook and the Barle from Dulverton or Withypool have many fisherman's paths along the river-side.

In July, August and September, Malmsmead Farm has many visitors who want to see Badgworthy and the place where the robber Doones of Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* novel were supposed to have had their stronghold. There is very little to see. Nothing in fact which in any way suggests their fortress or even the ruins of it. There is only a Scottish shepherd's hut, put up seventy years ago. Long before the time of the story there were, no doubt, some robbers infesting Exmoor and known as the Doones. Anyway, R. D. Blackmore made a thrilling story, using Hoecombe Coombe as his background, placing his fictional puppets on actual Exmoor soil, and at the same time bringing in one or two of the Exmoor family-names known then and now to every Exmoor man. The Doone Valley is certainly disappointing. At Malmsmead Farm ponies can always be hired upon which one can ride the length of Badgworthy Water, fording it just

at Badgworthy, crossing just below where Hoecombe Water joins it and returning by South Common and Oare Common to Oare Manor—by what was known as Nicholas Snow's Path.

The most nervous rider can feel quite safe on these hireling ponies, as not one of them would attempt to negotiate a hill or ford he did not know, or tackle any "soft going" he was not sure from experience was quite safe. Let your pony settle these matters if you are in any doubt. He knows his way home blindfold on this part of Exmoor.

From time to time I have had so much correspondence with little friends who ask about the ways and methods on Exmoor that I shall not apologize for having given this bit of my story a rather more guide-book flavour. I have not advertised any town or village, and have not been guilty of calling various places good hunting centres that are much more suitable for other amusements. For this book is intended solely for visitors to Exmoor, and not as propaganda for Somerset and Devon holiday-resorts.



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