ECHOES OF THE HUNTING HORN

By the same author :

RHYMES OF AN IRISH HUNTSMAN

Blowing on his Hounds

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ECHOES OF THE HUNTING HORN

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ECHOES OF THE
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The Glories of Cub-Hunting

It takes a deal of courage and rather an amount of mental effort for anyone living in an easy-going part of the country to deliberately set an alarm-clock to ring at 5.30 a.m. My reason for having committed just such an indiscretion was that I was going Cub-hunting in the morning.

After a light and hurried breakfast I donned a rain-coat, groped my way in the dim half-light to the stables, helped to complete the saddling-up and jogged off alone.

How lovely it was to be alone with the dawn; hearing the hoof-beats ringing their challenge to a drowsy world, feeling the rhythmic swing of a good young horse; seeing the mists rolling along the gorse-covered dome of Aughlion Mountain, while the glistening hedges still retained frail-looking wisps of gleaming gossamer. Morning! No wonder poetic rhapsodies have been woven around that word! Although this one was not quite the ideal, the light smur of rain was positively companionable when one seemed to be the only human being abroad to feel it sponge one's face.

Five miles pass quickly when Nature has so much to show and when one is, apparently, her solitary audience. Soon, my horse became restive, cocking his

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ears with instinctive anticipation; then, rounding a bend, became dangerously frivolous as he sighted hounds at the crossroads. How lovely they looked clustered around their Master! How glad I was to see them again after the long summer! Only a few other hunting enthusiasts had assembled in the early greyness, and when hounds and their small retinue moved off, everyone forgot the chances of cold chills in the knowledge that the damp murkiness would hold a good scent.

Scent, that uncanny but very essential adjunct to hunting, almost vanishes with the strengthening sun these autumn mornings and makes it imperative that cubbing be done in the early hours. Without scent one cannot do much foxhunting, since foxhounds, unlike greyhounds, who run by sight, depend solely on their noses and react accordingly. And what a delicious reaction when a pack, in the stillness of a deep woodland, find a whiff of reynard-tainted air tickling their sensitive nasal membranes! A hound whimpers doubtfully, huntsman cheers encouragement, "Hark to Ravager!" Others rush to investigate; an old seasoned bitch confirms matters, a horn twangs in support of her argument and, suddenly, the wood re-echoes to the crash of tongues. Deep-throated notes coming from the old hounds who are glad to be finished with summer's boredom and monotonous road exercise and welcome the elixir-like scent of a fox; sharp, higher-pitched notes from the seasoned bitches who are striving jealously for the lead; and frantic yaps from un-entered puppies

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who don't seem to know what is happening, but are nevertheless determined to join the excitement.

Full cry has been the subject of countless artistic sporting masterpieces and is, in reality, a very beautiful—and from the fox's viewpoint—a very terrible sight; but in a deep woodland, full cry is even more wonderful in its audible sense rather than in its visible.

Our fox population must be kept within limits. Foxhound puppies must be taught their work; they learn more quickly hunting cubs; and cubs must be taught to run first and dodge afterwards if they wish to live to old age.

Some people may imagine that one would need a great cross-country gallop after a racing pack, to compensate for such early rising. Great gallops are the exception at cubbing. A cub-hunting morning is a Master's morning. He has chosen it to train his young hounds. That is his primary object. Thinning-out litters of fox cubs is but his secondary consideration. A deep woodland serves his purpose best; his whole mind is occupied with his hounds, not with the entertainment he may provide for his followers: the latter should feel pleased enough to have been invited; or failing that, should feel equally pleased that he tolerates their presence. I was quite content to potter about the woods, render any practical assistance I could and refrain from hampering the movements of the hounds or the Hunt Staff. I was satisfied seeing fleeting glimpses of hounds and listening to their magnificent wood-hunt.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

When hounds went home how quiet the great woods were ! Even the blackbirds had grown silent ; their joyous matins, that turned to notes of warning with the advent of hounds, are ended. The clamouring wood-pigeons have long ago departed to search for breakfast in more peaceful surroundings. A tiny rabbit-cub ventures forth to investigate altered outdoor conditions ; soon he is joined by a second venturesome brother and they indulge in a whisker-stroking duet. A horse-chestnut rustles through the upper branches, bounds off a lower arm and splits open, launching its mahogany-coloured seed on its new life. Following its passing, but less noisily and more delicately, falls a lonely leaf. It bids good-bye to its still green companions, silently, stealthily almost ; as though it wished to refrain from reminding them that their days of greenness are drawing to a close, and when whirled away in the angry growl of winter their descent may not be so graceful as that of their forerunner.

Alone in the big woods at early morning one cannot help thinking how inexplicable are the ways of nature : man and the beasts in her fields wear additional protection against the biting cold of winter, whereas her trees discard their foliage and accept her lowered temperatures with courageous indifference.

Out beyond the woods the wool-pack clouds, precursors of further showers, hurry fretfully across the sky and vanish into hiding behind the brow of Mullaghmeen Mountain. Across the rugged mountain face sun rays sweep hurriedly, changing the landscape shadings as swiftly as fairies changing their minds. A creamery

The Glories of Cub-Hunting

cart rumbles along the road. Farm labourers are beginning their daily tasks in the fields. A cat trips daintily across the wet road, her patient hedge-vigil ended. She, too, is evidently pleased with her morning's hunting and is, like myself going home.

How a Huntsman Rides his Hunt

It's just eleven o'clock, Bill. Time to "move off" and settle our account with the widow's fox. You ride on ahead to the upper end of the wood and keep your eyes open. I'll try and make him leave it on your side; he'll probably do so, from the way the wind's blowing. Don't give him too much law when he breaks; tally him when he's clear of covert. I must get hounds out hard on his tracks as there's a big field riding and I don't want them crowding on top of my hounds. Go ahead, now; and good luck.

Hounds, gentlemen, please. Thank you very much. Come along lads, off we go. Resolute! leave it, you old rascal. Come along Galloper, old lazyboots; looking for a biscuit, I suppose? Hounds, please, thank you! Steady, Dairymaid, you frisky little witch. Between you and me, my dappled friends, we have a nice day's work laid out for us. That venerable member of the tribe Reynard, known as the widow's fox, who has hoodwinked us three times this season, is about to enter the fourth round. There are more poultry claims from this locality than all the rest of the country, so ladies and gentlemen of the canine jury, hark to my horn and I'll leave the verdict entirely to yourselves. Steady now,

There's Dairymaid Speaking,

How a Huntsman Rides his Hunt

my beauties, till I remove my cap and wave you into covert. All together now! Lew in! Lew in! Lew in!

That's the way a huntsman likes to see you leave his side: All together and charging covert like a cavalry squadron. There's a fox in that wood as sure as there's a horn in my hand. Try in there, my lads! T - r - y in there and push him out! T - R - Y!

There's Dairymaid speaking! Hark to her, my lads. Hark to Dairymaid. There's Resolute, Harmony, Melody. I like to hear you speak so convincingly: and there's Bill's Tally-Ho!

Ginger Dick, try and control yourself; because I cannot do it with a plain snaffle. I hate to fill your mouth with ironmongery, but if a plain bit will not restrain you, I'll have to use a curb in future in the woodlands. If you have patience until we are all clear of this wood, you can have all the head-freedom you want on the green fields. I'm blowing the horn to get my hounds together, not urging you to go crazy at its every note.

Clear at last! Are all hounds on, Bill? Except two-and-a-half couple. Splendid. There's Jessica and Dragon leaving covert now, better not wait for the others, Bill, they'll come. And you say it's our old friend the widow's fox again? That's excellent; and Dairymaid out behind him! She's a marvellous bitch. I told our over-wrought treasurer when he was collecting the cap-money this morning, that if he didn't hold up the field till hounds were well clear, I'd swear at him in fifteen languages. Be careful, Bill! This bank is trappy.

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Behind there is a thunder of hooves as the first flight sit down to ride. In front there is a chorus of ecstasy as the hounds settle down to their line. Onwards they drive, packing beautifully. Racing away into the very heart of Ireland's glorious countryside. Pouring over the sombre greyness of her meandering walls, boring through the winter tangle of her leafless hedges, flashing past the cheerful whitewash of her cosy farmsteads.

Hold hard, everybody, please! Bill turn hounds to me quickly. That collie coursed the fox. Lew over, lads, try over! Good old Dairymaid. Hold hard, please, till hounds are on. Come on, Bill. Dairymaid's a genius!

Two miles has knocked the nonsense out of most of the horses. Startled cattle scamper to a corner, wheel around, and form a guard of honour while hounds swing past.

Walls and banks, banks and hedges; soon they give place to the dull sullenness of treacherous bog drains. Crumbling footholds take toll of those squelching behind. Bill is in trouble at the black sallys. Ginger Dick dissolves our partnership at a mearing drain, but he scrambles out the easier when relieved of my weight. On again, squelching along a sodden bog-pass. Turf-savers call out that the fox is "only a few perches in front an' dead beat." Few can accurately estimate the condition of a running fox except an experienced judge; and the ambling type is invariably the most difficult to bring to hand.

Sheep foil the scent; when hounds are almost snatching victory. Dairymaid strives fruitlessly. Old Resolute

How a Huntsman Rides his Hunt

is brilliant. Bill's courage is at the ebb when he sights the circling magpies. Superstitions may have collected around magpies, but magpies collect around a running fox. Come on, Bill, get hounds going. For'ard! For'ard Away! Bill's "Get away on to him!" rings out behind. At the third field hounds hit the fox's line and crash into a frenzy of music.

At the third field I hit a ladder in a gap and crashed into a granite-like laneway. When I collected my horn, whip, horse and senses, Bill's victorious "Whoo-Whoop!" rang out. One would think he was trying to inform a far-away widow that retribution was complete.

With Hounds at Dawn

PRIOR to the Cub-Hunting season young hounds know nothing of the task before them or of what is expected of them henceforth in life. They have never seen a fox. His scent means nothing to them. If a young un-entered puppy encountered a fox who had never been hunted, their meeting might be as friendly as that of other creatures of the wood. Up to the present moment of their existence neither has any reason to expect molestation from the other. The less timorous of the two may withdraw quietly so as to avoid arousing any unnecessary suspicions in the other. If he bolts hurriedly the other may pursue him for the sheer excitement of doing so. If, however, one of the parties is an old seasoned fox, a fighter to his brush-tag, the young fox-hound puppy may be the first to think of bolting.

It is then that the example of an old hound gives the startled puppy his first lesson in fox-hound deportment. Puppies should not bolt; and as a flash of dappled fury crashes past him through the undergrowth, old "Resolute" shows his young kennel-mate how to behave on such occasions! With a growl of anger he charges the fox. His voice summons other hounds who behave similarly, and as they rush past the bewildered

With Hounds at Dawn

puppy he feels he ought to go with them. He has been taught to remain in their company when at road exercise and behave as a unit of the whole. Racing along with them he joins in the general furore. He may even give tongue without bothering to know why he should. He is content to run with the pack even though the mystery of scent is yet unknown to him. He has behaved excellently for his first outing, and the huntsman should be highly pleased.

Different hounds react in different ways on their first cub-hunting outing. Even puppies of the same litter and reared in the same environment display marked differences in behaviour. Although all have been carefully trained to behave as members of a pack, not as individuals, some may refuse to accompany the general body when drawing covert. Some show a marked tendency to remain with the huntsman, who may be unable to ride or walk through a thick covert and is compelled to ride on the outskirts. When he strives his utmost to convince them that they are supposed to be inside covert, not outside, they may slink sheepishly away in the desired direction, hide behind the first piece of undergrowth they encounter and sit there looking out at him.

To the uninitiated, this may seem a very tantalizing procedure. A huntsman, however, has a lifelong experience of hounds and knows that no animal, or human being for that matter, can acquire complete education in one day. He is prepared to wait, and experience has taught him that the puppies who are exceptionally shy

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at the beginning and are slow to enter to their work very often develop into excellent foxhounds.

It is an interesting and rather inexplicable fact that two puppies of the same litter, possessing pedigrees of outstanding brilliance, fed on the same foods, and brought up together under identical conditions can differ so much in their attitude towards actual fox-hunting. One of them on his very first morning may go into covert with the old hounds like a seasoned veteran. When he gets the first whiff of scent he puts his nose to the ground, runs the line as accurately as an old campaigner, throws his tongue joyously and is among those present when the pack account for their quarry. He is entered and now knows his work without giving any trouble whatever to his huntsman. On the other hand his comrade may be shy of entering covert. If he does go in he may be more interested in juicy young rabbits than in elusive fox cubs. He may or may not run with the pack. If he does, he may forget that he has a tongue in his head and run mute; or he may be too free with his voice and be a babbling nuisance who will tongue incessantly whether on the right scent or not, and never dream of using his nose to discover the difference. Most puppies will hasten instantly to the note of an old hound whose first whimper proclaims a find. The difficult type of puppy quite often ignores the opening note in covert and although he instantly obeys the huntsman's horn and hurries to the find, he takes no interest whatever in the behaviour of his kennel-mates and seems utterly lacking in anything approaching pack instinct. It may take several weeks of careful

With Hounds at Dawn

handling to arouse his dormant spirit, and then with amazing suddenness he puts his nose to the ground, throws his tongue exultantly, works his line accurately and hunts away like a demon.

During the Cub-Hunting season such puppies are given every chance of proving their mettle, but if they do not enter satisfactorily they cannot be retained in the pack as the hunting season proper is approaching. Hounds who will not hunt are useless; but they are given every chance of mending their ways before they are cast; and even people who are not lovers of hunting will agree that there must be some deep-rooted manliness in a sport that can induce men, voluntarily, to leave their beds, gobble a hasty breakfast, mount a horse and ride away into the dimness of the dawn so that they may teach a few recalcitrant puppies how to hunt a fox.

The Worst Hunt on Record

I KNEW by the wag of his head that he was a bit-of-a-lad. When I mounted him he flung his bit-bars in truculent resentment. When I jogged off, his jaws took a vice-like hold of the bit, his head poked sideways and, if horses wore hats, his would have been very definitely "on the Kildare side." I soon discovered that it was a waste of energy to attempt to alter his head-position. His jaws were rigid, his neck inflexible, in fact, everything in front of the saddle seemed to be set in reinforced concrete. Reins are ornamental accoutrements on hobby-horses: mine were just as effective.

I had been told he was the heart and soul of a rascal, but as I have ridden, and occasionally fallen off, every conceivable brand of rascal, I felt I could forestall any equine acrobatics which he might have under consideration. His owner had given me the animal's whole character; that is, of course, assuming that there was a shred of it left to give to anyone; and I had gladly accepted the offer of a day's hunting, character or no character! Two stable companions had had a hard hunt the previous day, a third was lame and a fourth had a cough; so it was ride this old reprobate or nothing.

He had an amazing history, but it will suffice to say that his owner had forsaken any hopes he might have

The Worst Hunt on Record

cherished of reforming him. I could understand the owner liking him at one time, as he was a great-looking animal with quality written all over him. At the present moment, however, the owner's daily prayer was that some foreign army buyer would see his horse and there would be very little difficulty in disposing of him as an outstanding officer's charger. What the unfortunate officer who would possess him eventually might think, is of course a different, and certainly unprintable, matter.

Had I arrived at the Meet in my pyjamas I couldn't have drawn much more attention. I was a visitor hunting for the first time with this pack of hounds. I was a complete stranger to everyone present, yet I wasn't long at the cross-roads till everyone seemed to know me. I soon discovered that it was not my own angelic countenance that held their interest; no, it was my conveyance: and when that same conveyance saw the hounds he seemed to look back sideways at me as much as to say: "I wonder what kind of a museum-piece is riding me to-day?" Everyone at the Meet seemed to be thinking somewhat similar thoughts: only they were too polite to put them so crudely. I sensed their sympathy, and that annoyed me slightly. I didn't want their sympathy. They could keep it. If the rascal under my saddle had a habit of dislodging the previous occupiers of that lofty position—well, he hadn't done so in my case; at least, not yet, and before he would do so I swore silently that he'd have to try very hard.

The wood held a fox. Hounds were away in a flash. Horses raced crazily for a flying start, but none of them

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half so crazily as the maniac I bestrode. In the first hundred yards the field seemed to be chasing me instead of the fox. The Master's astonishingly original vocabulary made me blush to the ears; but unfortunately it had no effect whatever on my pig-headed horse. Hounds were scrambling across a bank, in a few strides more I would jump clean into the midst of them, the bank loomed bigger and bigger, I was powerless and then the villain swerved. I forgave the knowing smiles of the field as they swept past, but I didn't forgive the cowardly culprit. I sent him at the bank again and was soon forging to the lead. The Master's horse jumped a bushed-up gap in front of me; the whipper-in looked aghast as he saw me thundering at it. I swore that there would be no swerving this time; it would be over it or through it. Through it we went like a tornado, and carried the withered whitethorns half-way up the next field. The next gap was decorated by a stout ladder, but as this ladder evidently objected to tornadoes, we fell over it instead.

Remounting, I was again forging to the lead when I saw the Master skim over a wide-looking river. My horse seemed anxious for a drink, but began to change his mind when he discovered it wasn't in a bucket. I drove him on all the harder when I sensed his indecision, and after futile efforts to swerve, he slithered into the middle of the swollen torrent. I think he was a great deal more surprised than I was, even though the water was lapping my knees, and I felt the biggest fool in Christendom. We scrambled out and galloped on and tried to pretend we didn't mind; even though I felt

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like frozen mutton from the hips down. We then met a big wall and he swerved : but I didn't. My brief solo flight ended in an abrupt, forced landing on the floodwaters of the adjoining field. The only difference between my past and present discomfort was that instead of my limbs and my ardour being only partially damp, both were now thoroughly sodden.

Doctors prescribe cross-country rambles for improved blood-circulation. I enjoyed my nice long walk home.

Barbed Wire Kills Hunting

BARBED wire is a curse. To a hunting man it is the bitterest curse imaginable. I refuse to mince my words about it, and anyone who has seen a farm-worker die from blood-poisoning, a cow's udder torn to shreds, or a valuable hunting horse mutilated by it will agree with me. This is primarily an agricultural country. We pride ourselves on the value of our export trade in livestock and livestock products. Why then should we expose our valuable livestock to the ever-present risk of blood-poisoning, tetanus and mutilation by allowing barbed wire to be used as fencing ?

There is a prevalent saying that "Money Talks," so I will let it do some talking to support my claim. A cow at present is worth anything from £35 to £65. Suppose that cow takes it into her head to do a bit of thieving. She scrambles over a mearing fence into some neighbour's grass and tears her udder on barbed wire. She may be hung up for half the night on the fence. She may be kicking and plunging in agony. She is bleeding profusely, and every movement inflicts additional lacerations. As may be imagined, the poor creature is all the while in intense pain and is probably semi-exhausted by the time she is released next morning. Now, a whole succession of "ifs" appear. If she

Barbed Wire Kills Hunting

doesn't die as a result of her injuries becoming septic, if she doesn't lose at least one quarter, if the vet. can work miracles, if—well, she may one far-off day still be worth from £35 to £65. But it's a hundred to one that at best she'll only fetch canning price, £8 to £14. Money is talking now. Talking very sensibly, too, and if it really went into the details of vet's. fees, medicines, time spent on nursing, labour, attendance, etc., a bullet would have been cheaper in the long run. Hundreds of such accidents are happening daily in this country, and all this waste of national wealth is the result of barbed wire.

When I sat down to write this chapter I intended to confine it to the subject of hunting. On second thoughts I decided that if I did so a narrow view might be taken. Some readers might, quite naturally, feel that my chief interest was to have more liberty when hunting and less risk of being thrown at my fences, and that any other reasons were of little consequence. That is not so. Actually, hunting horses can be trained to jump wire, and will jump a five or six-strand fence as easily as they will a wall, pole or gate. Quite a good deal of the hunting in Australia and New Zealand is over a wire-fenced country, and the horses take their fences at racing pace. So Irish horses could be trained similarly if we wished, but most people take the very sane view that wire is too merciless should an unfortunate horse make the least mistake. Neither I nor any horse under my saddle had ever any serious mishap due to wire, so I have no personal spleen against it, so far as the saving of my own skin is concerned. I have, however,

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seen far too many horses, while either at grass or riderless at a hunt, butchered unmercifully by barbed wire.

I remember a darling young filly of mine that broke bounds during the night. She had jumped several fences until she arrived at a small bank. It was scarcely four feet high and was only about a foot wide on top. A strand of barbed wire was concealed in the grass and briars on its top. Evidently the filly jumped on to it, but when jumping off, her hind legs slid under the wire as they slipped down the other side of the bank. The wire was firmly stapled to stout whitethorns on either side of her. She couldn't kick free, as the bank was behind her, so she spent the whole night hung up by her hocks, or rather by what was left of her hocks. Cut to the bone, she was a pitiable sight, and when we released her she slumped down exhausted into a pool of her own blood.

I remember another beautiful hunter that had shipped his pilot at a big double-wall. He was worth around £120, and would probably cross £200 to-day. We were galloping towards a new plantation that was fenced by a six-strand wire paling. A gate on the left led to a boreen, but the riderless horse thundered slap-bang into that wire paling. I never believed such a thing could happen, but five of those posts snapped across at the ground as if they had been match-sticks. He tumbled, he plunged, he rolled over, but all his efforts only served to entangle him the more. When, eventually, he struggled free, he looked as though he had rolled over and over on a dump of broken bottles. That magnificent

Barbed wire kills Hunting

Barbed Wire Kills Hunting

animal, a few moments before, looked a priceless cross-country conveyance; now he was a pitiable sight worth, well . . . a trip to the kennels.

I could fill books with the crimes committed by barbed wire on farm stock, but there is another valuable animal I have not mentioned yet, and that is the greyhound. Greyhounds have developed into a particularly lucrative export trade in this country. Have you ever seen one of them, while coursing a hare in open country, dash into a barbed wire fence? He is torn to ribbons in an instant and he'll never see a race-track at home or a cargo boat for export. If the pedigree warrants it the animal may be kept for breeding purposes, but at all events, its career is ruined and its value lowered to a minimum.

Admittedly, a barbed wire fence is a cheap fence to erect, provided one overlooks the accident ratio. But is it really cheap in the long run? It may cost the life not only of valuable beasts but it may cost the life of some unfortunate farm-worker. If wire must be used, why not use plain wire instead of barbed wire? Where four strands of barbed wire might suffice for a particular fence I admit it might take five or even six strands of plain wire to achieve the same results, so far as restraining trespassing animals is concerned. But all fencing wire is sold by weight and, bulk for bulk, plain wire weighs lighter than barbed, especially the variety that has the barbs at three-inch intervals. So, really a hundredweight of plain wire will stretch a much greater distance than a hundredweight of barbed wire. One great point in its favour is that no matter how badly a poor dumb

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animal becomes entangled in it, he or she will not be cut to jiblets.

There are circumstances, of course, where barbed wire is a necessity. Military camps need it. It also serves as a very necessary deterrent on the tops of orchard walls, garden walls, etc. In all such places, however, the only damage it may cause is to a human wrong-doer, and it is most unlikely ever to cause pain or disfigurement to ordinary livestock.

In such situations barbed wire is permissible, but as ordinary fencing it should be vehemently condemned. Since we got along very well without it while a war was on it shouldn't be very difficult for our representatives in the Dáil and Senate to ensure that no more of it be allowed into our farmsteads. Most of these men are practical farmers and know the damage it can inflict on livestock, and can easily estimate the aggregate loss it entails annually on our national wealth. That item alone should suffice, but there is another. Hunting brings hundreds of thousands of pounds to this country each season.

But barbed wire kills hunting.

Tetanus !

SHE was a great jumper. Few fences were too big for her. She had that stag-like method of negotiating obstacles for which our Irish horses are famous. If asked to "go on" she could skim over them like a swallow, never losing a stride. But often in a tight corner when wire or some such danger suddenly loomed ahead, necessitating a change of course, and she was hurriedly asked to tackle some other fence almost at a trot, then her courage and stag-like jumping would capture your heart.

I called her "Lipstick." The name was not the outcome of any romantic love-affair: but when she was a three-year-old she got a kick on the jaw from another horse. The nerves and muscles on the injured side were either severed or so badly damaged that they relaxed completely. With the entire muscles on one side uselessly limp, her nostrils and upper and lower lips were drawn to the other side giving her a strange distorted appearance. I blistered her on the injured facial nerve in the hope of making it contract, and after months of careful treatment her nostrils and lips returned to their normal position. It was as a result of this face-lifting beauty treatment that I christened her Lipstick.

When the hunting season was over her hind shoes

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were removed and she was turned-out to grass. About two months later she went lame on a hind leg: gravel in her hoof proved the cause. This is a fairly common complaint when horses are barefooted at grass; it seldom has very serious consequences, although it necessitates frequent dressings with antiseptics, and complete recovery is often very tedious. Her hoof was probed with a lance, poultices applied, and in about three weeks' time the opening was plugged with cotton-wool and iodine, and she was turned-out to grass again.

All went well for some days, and then one evening, when the flies had tired of their day-long pestering, and the other horses were grazing contentedly, I noticed Lipstick standing aloof by a hedge. Her attitude struck me as being unusual. Her fore-legs were well out of the perpendicular, being propped in front of her as though she were afraid of falling on top of her head. Her neck was outstretched, her coat staring, and her eyes held a fixed and rather extraordinary gleam. When I approached her she gave a startled tremor, but made no attempt to elude me. Handling her, her muscles were quite rigid, especially those about her neck, and I said from the depths of my heart: "My God, Lipstick, you're paralysed." Then another thought struck me; a thought too ghastly to put into words. Could it be possible? And yet, the drawn appearance of the mouth, the slight slavering and suckage of wind through the teeth lent confirmation to my suspicions. Even when I tried to open the jaws and failed to do so I prayed that my diagnosis might be wrong. But when

Tetanus !

I forced up the head and saw what horsemen term the haw, moving half-way across the iris of her eye, I knew she was in the grip of the most merciless curse of the equine world—tetanus—(more frequently termed lock-jaw).

Although the chances of recovery at such an advanced stage of the disease were almost negligible, nevertheless, while there is life there is always hope. If I could only get her into a loose-box, have her hung in slings and have tetanus-antitoxin serum injected, her life might still be saved. I put the belt of my rain-coat around her neck and with difficulty led her towards home. The journey was a tedious one. I had to lead her very slowly and very carefully; stopping frequently to let her recover from such exertion. The sweat was pouring out of her and the least stumble would have meant disaster, because had she happened to fall she would never rise. I got her home, slung her up, wired for one veterinary surgeon and raced away in the car for another. Tetanus-antitoxin serum was injected as soon as the vets. arrived. Both of them had little hope of her recovery, as the disease was too advanced. They left more serum to be administered at intervals and said that nothing more could be done except careful nursing.

How careful that nursing had to be may be gleaned from the fact that the least sound sent the patient into a frenzy. The muffled cough of an attendant could make her plunge madly in her slings. A match being struck made the sweat of fear break out all over her body. No one was allowed to visit her except to administer nourishment. This she sucked through her

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clenched teeth. Her subcutaneous serum injections were given while she fed, so as to curtail human interference and visits to a minimum. Despite her rigid muscles, the unrelenting paralysis and the appalling fire in her smouldering eyes, it was heartrending to hear her neigh of friendship at my every approach.

At a quarter to twelve on Saturday night she neighed to me and sucked-up her mash contentedly. She never lived to see Sunday. The paralysing poison in her muscles had crept to her heart.

We had made a good fight for her life and we could do no more. And looking at the poor inert body that had once been my courageous Lipstick, one could not help thinking how puny are man's efforts against the ravages of a tiny microbe. But as it takes six weeks or longer for the disease to develop, our only hope would have been to prevent its development by inoculating when the injury occurred.

It is a terrifying affliction, and one can scarcely credit that during World War Number One, some of the shrapnel was impregnated with the germs of tetanus.

Human demons seem still to exist in this twentieth century of our Christian era. One cannot help thinking, when remembering the agonies of Lipstick, that this world would be a more wholesome place if we had fewer war lords and more Louis Pasteurs.

A First Flight Position

FEW of the many pleasures of hunting can surpass, for sheer exhilaration, the ecstatic thrill of being in the First Flight.

The First Flighter may earn the angry criticism of those who uphold some cherished, and occasionally fantastic, hunting theory. He may be looked upon with disapproval by ardent enthusiasts of hound-work. He may even be rebuked by the Master.

Such criticism is either justified or unwarranted, according to the category to which he may belong. Generally speaking, he belongs to one or other of two; those who insist on hunting the fox themselves or those who allow the hounds to do so.

The first group is usually a distillation of equal parts of impetuous youth, good horseflesh and sheer bravado, highly flavoured with obstacle-luck, mixed to the consistency of thick varnish and applied as a blister to the backs of hard-working foxhounds. This blister not only removes the hair from the backs of hounds but it makes the hair bristle on the head of the Master of those hounds. Continued applications have been known to produce badger-like grey streaks in that most tolerant of human heads. One application has been known to break a foxhound's back; and even mild touches have

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spoilt innumerable hunts. The only known antidote is barbed wire. Invariably, foxes are immune to it. The blister, however, is perfectly harmless to all concerned if its dispenser wears racing silk instead of hunting scarlet.

The second category is composed of somewhat different ingredients. Good nerves, good horses, good craftsmanship in equal parts, a dash of genuine hound-respect, a copious flavouring of courtesy, all mixed carefully to make an exhilarating stimulant, to be used judiciously when hounds are running. Its tonic properties are enhanced enormously, when at the first few fences its qualities are displayed to an indecisive field. At these first fences, however, it is more courteous to enjoy its delights *behind* the Master's back. That good man will acquire no grey hairs as a result of its being used. Neither will hounds suffer any agonies. Being harmless, no barbed-wire antidotes or restrictions are necessary, and, most important, it bodes ill for foxes.

Foxes are wary animals. They have to be, or they would be extinct long ago. The hounds that hunt them do not run by sight; they depend solely on their noses. The smell of their quarry is their principal guidance. Nasal membranes are very delicate and very sensitive organs and are instantly susceptible to any alien taints. When hunting, hounds have to contend with the interfering smells of cattle, sheep, goats, rabbits, hares, weasels, farmyard manure, artificial fertilisers, motor-car-exhaust gases, soil varieties, and countless other pollutions of atmosphere. The task of being able to

A First Flight Position

distinguish the smell of a fox in such a conglomeration of odours calls for intense concentration.

The most brilliant pack in the world cannot concentrate if they are terrified of being mangled by thoughtless first flighters. Let us imagine a staff in a big city office, with every member working at high pressure in an endeavour to have the yearly balance completed to schedule. Every member is engrossed in his or her task, when suddenly an air raid interrupts their work. They race for safety. They are not going to wait until the walls of the office thunder down upon them. The balance is forgotten. In the same way, hounds who have come to realise the danger impending are forced to relinquish their task. As the thundering hooves press closer, hounds that have been hunting perfectly forsake the line of their fox for that of safety. They have been taught always to behave as units of a whole, and they run on—together. By the time an over-wrought Master swears his field into submission the harm has been done, and an otherwise excellent hunt has been spoilt.

It is noticeable that all this annoyance takes place in the beginning and thereby brings about the end of a good run. In a big woodland, if hounds can slip their field, or if wire or a swollen river delays molestation, there is usually precious little interference with them at the end of six or seven gruelling miles.

To attain a reputation of being in the first flight is a worthy ambition. That reputation is earned at the Kill not at the Gone-Away. At the start of a run, horses—and many riders—are crazy to race madly away.

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That very craziness brings about their downfall at the first ugly fence. In a Point-to-Point, for instance, or indeed in any other race, how many of the riders who lead from the beginning continue to do so past the winning post? Comparatively few. Indeed, most cross-country events are won by horses that were held in a comfortable position and ridden by cool cross-country craftsmen. When hunting, one must remember that a horse is not a motor-car that can be driven at top speed indefinitely. If he be raced along at top speed over a blind country he becomes exhausted in a comparatively short time and will take a rest in the bottom of the most convenient ditch. His energy must be conserved. He needs to be nursed. And the rider who nurses him intelligently in a long, gruelling run will be among those present—and they are usually few—when the pack account for their quarry.

There is, admittedly, an almost irresistible temptation at the beginning of a hunt to display one's prowess to a crowded field. That is but human frailty and as such may be forgiven, provided always that such demonstration does not interfere with the work of hounds. If it does there is no forgiveness forthcoming, and a Master is quite entitled to select his choice of language. There is no shortage of horse shows or race meetings which provide ample facilities for displays of jumping or speed. One's efforts will meet with more appreciation from the spectators in either of these branches of sport. The spectators in both forms of entertainment are merely spectators, whereas in hunting they are not only spectators but are actual participants.

A First Flight Position

Surely one owes these fellow-sportsmen some little consideration? They are members of the hunt, friends of members, visitors, or perhaps total strangers. No matter what their subscription may be, no matter what their position be in life, no matter who they are or what they are, they support hunting in some way or other, or they would not be at the meet. Neither is it essential that they are mounted. Many ardent sportsmen and sportswomen cannot indulge in riding, either through infirmity, an accident, or countless other causes. It seems criminal that all these enthusiasts should be deprived of the game of their hearts by the thoughtless riding of egotistical bravados who over-ride hounds.

It may appear unjustly humiliating for a debonair, dashing, but quite thoughtless grown-up, to be told by an irate Master, in the presence of a big disappointed field to "Go home and join a pony club." Nevertheless, it is a piece of excellent advice. In pony clubs the courtesies of hunting are inculcated into youngsters. The art of deriving the maximum of personal enjoyment without hampering the enjoyment of others is instilled into young minds. When one sees so many good runs spoiled nowadays one regrets that pony clubs were not in existence years earlier.

The old adage about being "never too late to mend" is still truthful: and unless this modern world has altered the old Latin texts, Cato mastered the Greek language when he was eighty. So there is still hope that offenders will mend their ways in the hunting field.

It may be repeated that reputations are earned by being present at the kill. It takes courage, coolness and

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cross-country craftsmanship to appear there regularly. Everyone may have been at the meet—but everyone will not be up at the end of a long run. Those who have been described—truthfully, even if somewhat harshly—as blisters, will not be present in overwhelming numbers. Most of these offenders will be in deep ditches or leading lame horses homewards.

Those of the other category, who have come out to hunt, not to impress, will be more noticeable, numerically. As they turn their horses' heads for home they have the thrilling satisfaction of knowing that they have ridden a good hunt well. Truly an ideal worthy of attainment. Few of the world's joys can equal it.

The Thrill of "Tally-Ho !"

THERE are some delightful occasions in outdoor life when immediate happenings are so engrossingly interesting that any misbehaviour of the elements is completely overlooked, and one forgets one is being slowly, but surely, soaked to the skin. A coat-collar may be turned up, the action being more mechanical than protective. The shelter of a high hedge may even be sought, but high hedges seldom exist on a bleak mountain-side, as the mountain wind rarely allows tall whitethorns to add syncopation to the weird monotony of its rhythm. One can only stay still, forget the down-pour, and watch hounds.

The Master has just put them in. The small hazel covert battles its way up the mountain-side until the wind and the impoverished soil thin it to scattered clusters of dwarfed saplings that are soon swallowed up in the more hardy greenness of the gorse. There are great big clumps of it, old and seasoned, struggling upwards, ever upwards, using grey rugged boulders as stepping-stones in their efforts to reach the summit; efforts that are futile, for the purple-brown heather appears and completes the final stage of the ascent. On the rain-swept dome, flung in clear-cut silhouette

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against the very heavens, a scarlet-clad rider sits motionless on his horse: the Whipper-in on outpost duty.

Hounds are working up through the hazels: the Master is with them, chatting to them playfully, praising them, encouraging them. A one-sided conversation undoubtedly, but its effects are so obvious, one cannot help thinking that a word of kindness, even to God's dumb creatures, is rarely effort wasted. A hare appears with startling suddenness, flits along a sheep track and vanishes in its windings. A newly-entered puppy, fascinated by the bobbing scut, throws his tongue, gives chase, stops, then slinks away ashamedly as the Master rates him angrily for his breach of foxhound etiquette.

Hounds are now up in the gorse. A few couple have even reached the heather. The Master turns right-handed, across the face of the mountain, hounds above, about, and below him, executing an intelligent combing movement and giving this big fox-sanctuary a perfect draw. Suddenly the Whipper-in on top lifts his cap in the air, but yet there is not a sound from him. The Master halts his horse, stands in his stirrups, watching intently. The cap moves in a right-handed arc. Two or three hounds feather keenly; none of them speak, scent is apparently somewhat stale: possibly the line left by a fox going into covert earlier in the morning. The quarry must have jumped up a long way in front of hounds, warned no doubt by the thoughtless note of the hare-hunting puppy, for the Whipper-in leaves his post, gallops, trots and slithers down a sheep track, pops over a low stone wall; on, down again, scrambles across a

A wave of dappled Fury

The Thrill of "Tally-Ho!"

gorse-covered bank into a sour-looking field, halts his horse and shatters the stillness of a rain-drenched countryside with a soul-stirring "Tally-Ho!"

Who bothers about the rain? Who cares about wet knees and soaking elbows? Who worries over forgotten raincoats and resultant chills? Who could feel cold having heard that blood-firing war-cry? There's the horn! Sharp, staccato, glorious notes. Hounds come streaking from all parts of the mountain-side in answer to its summons. Dashing headlong from the scattered rocks through the purple-brown carpet of the heather; on, downwards, flinging along with an utter disregard for gorse-bush thorn pricks; jumping the low whin-clumps, dashing through the taller growths. On, racing on, to the horn they know so well. The Master sends his horse full tilt along a rough pathway, his hoof-beats adding a merry rattle to the sharp twang of his "Gone Away" horn music. He is heading for that anaemic-looking field where the Whipper-in saw Reynard breaking covert and where that young member of the hunt staff in his anxiety to get hounds on, seems determined on breaking his own vocal chords.

Riders jam down their hats, slippery reins are gathered in a determined grip, restive horses are spoken to soothingly, foot-followers race to better vantage-points. With a bound, the Master is over a big bank and waits beside his Whipper-in. The barren-looking field is no longer uninviting. A wave of dappled fury comes surging over its boundary wall. The invasion swings

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left-handed, silently, towards the two huntsmen, bursts into full cry, and the bleak, rain-sodden mountain-side becomes a vivid landscape, changed from dreariness to loveliness by the glorious thrill of a huntsman's "Tally-Ho!"

Stung!

IT IS proverbial that the monetary side of horseflesh usually carries a sting. The sting I received recently, however, was somewhat different. I had no fault whatever to find with the horse; a great big raking four-year-old grey, and had I gone home immediately the deal was finished everything would have been all right.

It was a beautiful evening : and as beautiful evenings usually increase our national aptitude for dallying, I dallied contentedly with the horse's breeder talking about horses, past and present, that either of us had owned. Had the subject remained in that groove everything would have been delightful, but during a lull in the conversation my eye wandered towards some beehives at the bottom of the garden, and I had the misfortune to compliment my host on their number.

Equine subjects were banished forthwith and were replaced by a bee specialist's eulogistic monologue. I am not one of those impossible persons who pretend they know everything about almost every conceivable subject, so I freely admit that my knowledge of bee-keeping is extremely meagre. I was very interested, therefore, in hearing what an expert had to say on the subject. As we walked down the garden towards the

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hives he told me to behave as though there wasn't a bee within miles of me. Now, it's a very simple business listening to instructions but it's not quite so simple carrying them out, and when three bees came zooming towards me it was by a sheer effort of will-power that I restrained myself from striking-out at them.

"They're Dutch," said my host laconically.

"They're more like dive bombers," said I, trying to pretend I was joking.

"Don't be raving," he laughed. "Sure they're the friendliest creatures in the world."

"So I believe." But I didn't believe a word of it.

"Now this hive are all British. The next two are native. The third one down has an American Queen and the rest of them on this row are Dutch"

"League of nations," I muttered. The remark may not have been a very brilliant display of wit, but it's not so very easy being witty when you feel that a few hives of bees want to swarm on your head.

"I wonder," I enquired anxiously, "if I light a cigarette would it make them keep their distance?"

"You may if you like; but they won't touch you. Look!" and he held up the back of his hand, and there was a bee having a constitutional along the top of his knuckles.

"Perhaps the smoke might annoy them," I wailed piteously, as I forsook the cigarette suggestion. I did this for two reasons: the first being that I was afraid to take my hands out of my pockets and perhaps afford an exercising paddock for some bee: the second reason

Stung !

being that I was too terrified lest they deem such movement hostile and attack me forthwith.

"You know," my host was saying, "bee-culture is as interesting as electricity."

This may be so. But in the predicament in which I found myself I would have been as happy groping blindfold through an entanglement of uninsulated high-tension wires.

I was longing fervently for a diver's suit when the thing happened. It was inevitable : the law of averages; anything you wish to call it. We were almost clear of the danger-zone and I had been making my retreat as hastily unobtrusive as possible, when a particularly vicious buzz made a frontal attack.

"Don't strike him," warned my host, suspecting my intentions.

I stood paralysed; immovable, for I felt something crawling on my nose. "What'll I do?" I hissed through clenched teeth.

"Nothing," said my host airily.

"What'll *he* do?" I hissed again.

"Nothing," repeated my host.

"Is it a wasp?"

"No. It's a Dutch Worker."

"It's a damned nuisance."

"Don't get excited."

"Who's getting excited?"

"Don't strike him or he'll sting you."

"Hell's bells! He's done it," and as a white-hot knitting-needle plunged into my nose I could no longer restrain myself and I struck at the bee.

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"Are you sure he stung you?" asked my host with genuine concern.

"Well, unless he used a pneumatic drill he couldn't have done worse."

"Come up to the house immediately," he ordered "and I'll treat it. He'll die, of course, now that he's lost his sting. The other bees will drive him out."

I felt like murmuring "too bad about him" but I restrained myself. My nose now felt the size of a tomato. Before we were out of the garden it had blossomed into a Jaffa orange, and by the time we reached the house it was a full-grown turnip.

Endeavouring to look through or round a synthetic turnip held at close range, may, occasionally, provide an excellent piece of optic gymnastics, but when the fumes of methylated spirits join the festivities, no self-respecting eyes could be expected to refrain from weeping. My tears were those of neither joy nor sorrow, they were just—tears. And as they streamed down my cheeks to the accompaniment of fresh applications of methylated spirits, I felt what a prize fool I had been that didn't go home with the horse instead of waiting to provide a target for an apiarian Air-Raid!

The Opening Meet

PERSONAL emotions are very difficult things to describe accurately. Writers have attempted definitions by labelling them as quickening pulse, throbbing heart-beat, blood on fire, and so on; and it is with a mixture of all of them that a lover of hunting greets hounds at the Opening Meet. What is this extraordinary something that rouses the scarlet in one's blood? Hounds themselves cannot give the answer. Neither can the well-groomed horses. Hunt uniforms, though gay, are silent about it, and a panorama of country, be it ever so enticing, remains exceedingly uncommunicative! The answer seems to lie in one's own make-up. A deep-rooted love of a very ancient and manly sport; an admiration for those very important personages, Hounds, and for what their speed makes essential Good Horses; and a willingness to pit one's courage against any obstacle that a versatile Irish countryside may provide.

The Opening Meet is a reunion of old friends—canine, equine and human; if the rendezvous is the home of the Master or some member of the Hunt, hospitality is dispensed as one might imagine it to be in the long ago. If the meet be in a town or on one

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of the few village greens that have resisted the onslaught of tarmacadam, a big percentage of the townspeople gather to greet hounds. The ideal setting is a quiet country cross-roads. With no houses around, the architecture of which might lend a date, and provided vehicles are excluded for a similar reason, the period might be any time in the long history of the Chase. Generally speaking, the principals have changed little in the course of centuries. Admittedly, on closer scrutiny, one may observe the absence of docked-tailed horses (it was even fashionable at one time to have their ears rounded!); hounds are of more uniform type, with shorter pasterns and more bone than their predecessors; huntsmen still favour Scarlet cut and style may have altered, as has the display of side-whiskers, but only slightly; and most important of all, Mr. Fox, around whom is woven all this pageantry, has scarcely changed an iota.

What a wealth of cherished memories, some perhaps tinged with regrets, mingle with the carefree visualisations of the new-born season! How wonderful to see hounds again! How lovely to feel the confident swing of a good horse! There's sure to be a fox in the big gorse; it always holds. I hope he is a rambler from the hills. I am anxious to see how this young horse will take the big bank out of the Bottoms where the grey fell last March. He is not too fond of water yet, but he is a marvel at stone walls. Even if he is a bit green at timber sure the odd pole in a gap well,

The Opening Meet

someone else can try it first. He will be all right when he gets going in company.

It is glorious to be hunting again! But where is that familiar grey head with a bristling moustache that hid a kindly smile and a kindlier character? Everyone loved him; with his stout white cob that seemed to possess an invisible fifth leg at trappy fences, while owners of more expensive horseflesh went shamrock-gathering. Where too are "Melody" and "Chantress"? Rarely could one see better bitches in any pack. Relentless Time collects its dividend. Some day others will ask where is?

Oh! Splendid! Hounds are moving-off; the Second Whipper-in rides ahead to outpost duty beyond the wood; hound-couples, strapped to his saddle, clink merrily as he jogs away. It is then that:—

“ rider's hearts
Beat faster as the Master moves;
Hounds swarming round his horse's hooves,
A jaunty wave of piéd flame,
Prolongers of Life's Stoutest Game.”

Reaching the covert side the cavalcade halts. With a movement of his arm and an encouraging "Lew in! Try!" the Master puts hounds in. One marvels at their discipline as they leave his side instantly, to swarm across the high bank in a great flash of dapples and disappear into the silences of the big wood. Everything is quietness, save for the sound of hounds pressing on

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through the undergrowth, whose crackle is the Morse Code of Nature sending out her warning to the creatures of the wood. One can only hope that Mr. Fox will be obliging enough to be at home and take heed of such warning on the occasion of the Opening Meet.

The First Draw of the Season

EVERYONE at the meet is amazed that the Master is drawing this covert. It is a big low-lying wood, and for that reason is usually blank; as there are few dry places in it where a fox could kennel comfortably. The little gorse covert on the hill would have provided an instant find. It seems pointless, if not actually ominous, that the Master should open the season with a blank draw.

The odds seem all against him. The wood has a notorious reputation for being tenantless, even during dry weather : but after the recent heavy rains, with the country riding deep and every ditch brimming, it seems quite ludicrous even to think of finding a fox in such a place.

Riders' calculations and murmured criticisms are of little avail when weighed against the opinion of an old man on foot who is whispering to the Master. But more convincing than any human assurance, be it ever so dependable, is the behaviour of the pack. One need not be an authority on foxhound deportment to realise that the master is justified in drawing this wood.

Hounds leave his side like a flash; heads in the air, sterns waving jauntily, eyes smouldering resolutely, vanishing with a dash of confidence into the big wood.

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Not a solitary straggler on the outskirts, not a shirking puppy courting favour—and earning displeasure—at the Master's heels. Every single hound is in covert; swallowed up in the silence—a silence broken only by the snapping of twigs as the invaders push on; on, onwards they press until even the crackle of the undergrowth is hushed by distance and is soon lost in that vast silence.

Dairymaid whimpers. Resolute answers her. Vengeance confirms it. Dairymaid's note of conviction is drowned in a chorus: a chorus swelling to a crashing crescendo. A horn sounds; its merry echoes shattering the stillness of the tree-tops. Excitement reigns in the heart of the wood; excitement grows among the riders clustered on the narrow road, but neither excitement is half so intense as that which takes possession of a little old man on foot. He dances on a bank-top with sheer joy, calling to all and sundry: "I knew he was in it, I told 'himself', so I did. Oh! That he may get him! The robber! An' he with the best hen about the place for his breakfast, no less!"

There is a general scramble at the gate. The loose gravel of the boreen is scattered to the grass margin or crushed underfoot by the grind of restive hooves. Inside the gate the path is firm, though pitted and scarred by the tracks of the lumber-carts. Further on, great gnarled roots have burst their way through its surface, as though the mighty trees were showing their scorn of man and were rebellious of his desecrating intrusion. On in the dim half-light a majestic Scotch fir lies a victim to the woodman's saw. As one nears it

The First Draw of the Season

the light improves; it pours down upon it from a long gash in the ceiling of leaves which its downfall has created. A broken laurel droops across the mutilated stump in a friendly but futile effort to shield a wound that can never heal. The wood soon shows its anger in real earnest and, as though in reprisal, prohibits further penetration; its privacy being preserved by a pathway, sodden, waterlogged and utterly impassable.

A narrow track on the left, at right-angles to the main path, bears the imprint of hooves, the hooves of the Master's horse. The cavalcade follows them, riding in single file. With heads down and arms shielding eyes, they bore along through the dense undergrowth. Hats get an occasional tilt from an outstretched laurel. One sapling of silver birch, unaccustomed to so many visitors, seems to possess an unusual flair for facetiousness and pokes fun at every passer-by.

The cotton-wool on bandaged tendons that looked so elegant at the Meet is now filthy beyond recognition. The well-groomed hides are streaming with mud. Glossy top-hats and sombre bowlers are mud-pelted. Immaculate cravats bear designs that would horrify a Chinese laundry-man. Breeches look as though the family terrier after emerging from a muddy drain had been allowed to sleep on their owner's lap. The colourings in scarlet coats, black coats or grey coats, when viewed from the front, are nearly all the same. The apparel may be sodden, but the faces are happy.

All discomforts are forgotten in the scramble over the big bank out of the wood. There are the hounds in

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front, screaming across clean pasture. Young Bill, the whipper-in, stands in his stirrups beyond them, his cap in the air. The Master charges by their side, his horn summoning the tail hounds and brightening the hearts of his followers with a rousing "Gone—Away!"

A good omen.

'Twas the first draw of the season.

The Opening Run

HORSES buck light-heartedly as they land across the big bank. They are glad to be clear of the wood and glad to feel honest pasture beneath their hooves. They cock their ears to the notes of the horn and the chime of the racing pack. Their heads rake for freedom. They are given it; and then in a thunder of flying hoof-beats they streak away in the wake of the disappearing hounds.

A good start is essential, especially when a big wood has to be traversed and when a big field are out. When horses have to go in single file through narrow, muddy and twisting paths, progress is naturally slow. If a bank or stile has to be jumped at the outskirts of the wood, the delays which such negotiation entail can be positively distressing. The approach to such fences is usually treacherous underfoot and is invariably lined by trees which are so close to one another that the open space available is almost negligible. Should a horse refuse or misbehave himself at such a fence and in such narrow confines, the delay and annoyance caused to those behind him can be easily imagined. As there is no other outlet from the wood, hounds could be in the next parish before the unfortunate rider who happened to be last emerged into the open. A good start obviates the necessity for break-neck speed in overhauling hounds.

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Break-neck speed is not the best recipe for the big bank looming in front. It is an old acquaintance. A head-dress of tangled briars surmounts its grim old face. A face whose frowning sternness is but a warning of the dangers lurking behind its mask. The Master chooses a spot where the bank-top is clear of briars. Steadily he approaches it. His horse, though fresh and anxious, is well in hand: his stride is collected, he props an instant, hooks at the bank with all fours, changes feet and drops out of sight. The horse disappears, the scarlet coat vanishes, and even the top of the velvet cap succumbs to a fantastic conjuring trick. Hoof-beats soon echo in a sunken lane.

There is some interesting pandemonium in the lane. Riders with young horses dismount, take the reins over their animals' heads, add the thong of the hunting crop to the reins and lead the youngsters over. Their arrival in the narrow lane does not help traffic conditions, and an aerial observer of the proceedings would be treated to a scene of bedlam-like chaos where mounted riders try to disentangle themselves from dismounted riders and loose horses.

The lane leads to a farmhouse, and after frightening the chickens out of their wits and getting a smile and a hand-wave of encouragement from the household, the Master trots out through the opened gateway and settles down to his task of overhauling hounds.

The river lies in front. A sullen, swollen, meandering gash of brown treachery. Hounds take it at a run; but splashes of spray tell the story of those that jumped short: an appropriate warning to oncoming riders.

The Opening Run

The Master swings out to the left of hounds and choosing the spot where the sallys guarantee a firm take-off, he sends his horse full tilt at the river.

The fox is heading for the gorse on the hill, and on the firm upland one has no time to observe the toll taken by the river. The earth-stopper has checkmated the fox, who runs through covert, hounds gaining steadily, as the gorse holds every whiff of scent. He hurries on frantically, anxious to regain the green fields, the plough-land, sheep, cattle, manure-heaps, anything that might help to leave his scent less potent.

He needs to hurry, for his objective is two miles away. Stone walls rattle behind him as a fury of dapples flashes across them. A man in front lifts his hat on high as he passes, signalling to the oncoming Master. A collie dog views him; instantly he gives chase, coursing him relentlessly. The collie is fat from indolence, and has matted tufts of an unshed coat dangling about him. In a battle of wits he would fare badly against the superior fitness and stamina of an animal who has to hunt for his food. The latter, however, has quite enough diversions to cope with at the moment, and is in no way inclined to provide a slimming lesson for an over-fat collie. Nevertheless, the sheep-dog is gaining, and it seems a matter of seconds before he rolls him over. With a final burst of speed he reaches a bank-top, mouthing at the brush. Reynard side-steps; the collie hurtles into the next field, and a gallant old marauder races on alone.

Hound-music weakens behind the farmhouse. The pack are brought to their noses. Hither and thither

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they quest, striving to regain the polluted scent. The Master's most strenuous efforts are futile. It is obvious, from the brilliance of his vocabulary, that the Opening Run, which looked like culminating in a victory in the open, has been frustrated by a certain woolly dog. Few of those who had lived with hounds during that excellent run ever realised that there was such a variety of alternatives for describing a sheep-dog.

Introducing a Young Horse to Hounds

MOST Masters of Hounds possess astonishingly original vocabularies. If anyone doubts the accuracy of this statement let him ride a young horse into the middle of a clustered pack. When the shrapnel-like shower of well-earned and justifiable invectives ceases to fall on the sceptic's head and when badly-kicked hounds cease their howls of agony, he may awake sufficiently to ask himself what made his horse behave so appallingly. And the answer to his query is—Fear.

A young horse may be the most mannerly animal imaginable for riding purposes; he may have been carefully broken, been made accustomed to all road traffic, and altogether earned the rider's absolute confidence; yet, on the day of his first Meet, when he is introduced to a pack of hounds and a big field of horses, he needs to be handled as carefully as though it were his first day in the saddle. The horses of the Hunt Staff and those of the majority of the field are accustomed to hounds and the company of other horses, as well as the attendant horse-boxes, motor-cars and crowds of foot followers. The tyro is just a big equine infant who has never seen the like before, and although the fear of a collection of vehicles and horses will be quickly

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overcome, he is genuinely terrified at the sight of such a big number of hounds.

To allow him at any time to get into close proximity to hounds or to get into such a position that hounds may, in a narrow lane, get behind him or surround him, is sheer madness. Were a child in the country, on a flower-gathering expedition, to find himself surrounded by an audience of rather ferocious-looking but merely inquisitive bullocks, he would continue his flower-gathering quite undismayed. He knows they are his father's cattle; they are friendly big animals, and some of them would even allow him to scratch their ears. He knows they will not harm him, so he is not the least afraid. Were a juvenile botanist from the city, who had never seen a bullock in his life, suddenly to find himself in the same predicament, he would probably be so terrified that he would scream himself into a frenzy. A young horse does not scream when surrounded by hounds for the first time, but he displays his terror in a more deadly manner—he kicks them.

Half measures are seldom satisfactory and may lead to the development of a permanent vice. The source of the trouble must receive attention. The horse must be given an opportunity to convince himself that his fears are imaginary. To attack the problem intelligently the youngster should be introduced to as many canine friends as possible in his own home. Few houses but possess a terrier or two, a collie or a lovable mongrel of some sort. These are, invariably, only too delighted to be given an outing on the road or across country. When hacking a young horse in such company the rider

Introducing a Young Horse to Hounds

will be well repaid if he dismounts occasionally, calls the dog to hand and fondles him under the gaze of his nervous horse. Volumes have been written about the intelligence or stupidity of horses, and elaborate technicalities are impractical for the average horse-lover; as he has his own views on equine psychology. However, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a horse soon grasps the fact that as the dog is the master's friend, the master is the horse's friend, therefore the dog is the horse's friend. He may not argue in logical syllogisms, but one will be amazed at the change in his behaviour after a few days' treatment.

Gradually, the rider when mounted, can coax the dog to come to his stirrup for a tit-bit. If he is a big dog and can be induced to rest his fore-paws on the rider's boot, so much the better. Little touches like that give the horse confidence.

The ideal school-room is his loose-box. He is in familiar surroundings and free from all distracting influences. The dog should be taken in to him, on a lead preferably at first. A casual grooming helps to preserve normal conditions. Soon he can be given some oats in the dog's presence, and they become fast friends; later he will allow the dog to wander or doze in his loose-box at will.

Now that he has developed a strong canine friendship he still needs careful handling where a pack of hounds are concerned. He should be broken to them gradually. His introduction should not take place on a narrow road, where hounds and horses are closely packed together and space is too cramped if any unforeseen excitement

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occurs. When he is brought into close proximity to the pack he should be led, not ridden, so that should anything startle him suddenly he will have less chance of pivoting and lashing-out at hounds.

A little care at first will work wonders, and time and experience will do the rest. Real education cannot be imparted hurriedly and one cannot expect to transform a nervous young horse into a Leicestershire aristocrat in one day.

The running of a hunt is no easy matter, and a Master has quite enough to occupy his mind without having his hounds murdered. He is a pretty shrewd judge of his field, and if one realises that hounds are the most important personages at the Meet and acts accordingly one will earn his esteem. On the other hand, if one behaves stupidly when riding a young horse one is actually inviting the Master to lose his temper.

The Foot-Harriers' Opening Meet

Now that the turf is home, the potatoes are dug and the threshing is nearly finished, farmers who keep foot-hounds will have more leisure to sample the joys of good hare-hunting during the coming winter. Throughout Ireland there are numerous trencher-fed packs whose particulars are not to be found in Hunting Directories, who are comparatively unknown, except locally, and yet have been in existence for centuries and still continue to provide excellent sport. Although the Opening Meet of a big, well turned-out pack is a very lovely sight, there is no elaborate ritual about the first hunt of the foot-men. There is no gay flash of scarlet against the winter landscape: instead one sees hounds arriving at the Meet singly or in couples trotting at their owner's heels. The scene may lack colour and pageantry, but the spirit is the same—a love of the game.

Across the bogs they come, down from the hills and along the quiet roadways; sturdy farmers, light-footed youngsters and gallant old men. Proud owners of a tan dog or a badger-pied bitch which they hope will do them credit this first day of the season. At the cross-roads they are complimented or criticised according to the condition of the hounds in their charge. Different views are expressed as to the most likely place to beat

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for a hare. After some consultation it is decided to draw the bottoms under the road. Stretched along a two or three hundred yards front, hounds and men beat for their quarry. Although the hounds may not be beautiful according to Peterborough standards, they are workers, every one, and possess that priceless hound asset—keenness.

Suddenly, a hound's stern waves frantically. Later, he whimpers. Others hasten to make enquiries, a huntsman speaks to him as though to a praiseworthy child: "Gallop boy, steady on it!" Soon a startled hare makes her appearance, and the young man whose voice sounded so quiet a moment ago is transformed into a human tornado. With an avalanche of hunt cries he races bareheaded, cap in hand, after the hare, to induce hounds that are furthest away to reach her line with the shortest possible delay. When sufficient hounds are on properly, he stops, to enjoy the results of his labours.

Across the water-logged bottoms hounds go screaming away on a breast-high scent. Strung out, as yet, owing to their uneven start, closing up gradually, as the too-excited leaders overrun the hare's change of course. All together now, hunting steadily past the turf-ricks; showers of spray flung skywards as they tackle the big bog-drain, lost for a moment behind the black sallys, over a bank they come, pouring relentlessly. Startled cattle race for safety. Two goats, chained together, cannot agree as to which way to run and are enveloped in, and left behind by hounds before they have arrived at a decision. Beyond the bog, where grey walls stagger

The Foot-Harriers' Opening Meet

across a steep hillside, hounds drive along packing beautifully; on they go with never a pause, to flash across a high wall and vanish into the very horizon. It is only then one can fully appreciate the beauty of their glorious music.

The bog having served its purpose, everyone hastens towards that high wall on the hill, from the top of which one can command a panoramic view of the surrounding country. It is during the process of reaching it that a hunting horse's usefulness is brought home; and one cannot help thinking that foot-hunting would be an excellent apprenticeship for any young folk who intend riding to hounds. A day's foot-hunting, more than anything else, will implant in one an intelligent consideration for horses. Reaching the objective, and very much short of breath, one sees hounds a mile away, streaking across a field of gold-tinted oat stubbles, and one feels convinced that few horses could live with these light-framed, mile-eating hounds over this network of small fields and big fences.

They are silent now. Faintly one can see them, casting to and fro on the emerald after-grass of a tiny hillock. With no one to offer them assistance, one marvels at their indefatigable determination, working out every inch of the line, every twist and caper of a stout-running hare, with nothing to rely on only the accuracy of their noses. Soon a hound speaks, and his owner on the wall appraises him : " Good old Harper ! " This may seem incredible when one can barely see hounds, but every huntsman, young and old, can recognise the tongue of each hound. Their ability to do so

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endears these sturdy foot-men to anyone who is a lover of hounds and hound work. That there are other lovable traits in their character may be discovered when one sees them transformed into a group of dumb statuary, lest they should interfere with a hare, as she flits past them at a gap. If the hare escapes she is very welcome to her freedom, if she does not—well, one is quite safe in asserting that, not under any circumstances, is hare soup popular with these sportsmen.

Taking a Toss

HOUNDS are running hard for the past twenty minutes. Not a semblance of a check. The pace is terrific over a magnificent line of country with big sensible banks. One fairly-wide river, the honest variety, no slime or sponge-like edges; not a trace of wire anywhere. Horse never put a foot wrong since the Gone-away . . . blowing somewhat now, though; last big wall took some negotiating. It seems to have thinned the already select field to a mere dozen. Thank Heaven for the down-hill gallop after that last stiff hill; horse's wind feels easier now. Out on the left, riders are heading for a gate. It seems a long way off, and this wall does not seem such a terrifying rasper. Come on, old Challenger, the wall will save time. Steady now, not so fast. Slower still, slower I say—Hup!—Over! God bless us—oblivion.

Chill water soaking into one's shoulder-blade proves sufficiently uncomfortable to warrant investigation. Hazily one realises the ground is sodden with surface water, and it seems peculiar one should have chosen such a resting-place. Gloves drink vast quantities of icy liquid as one rises hurriedly. Portions of once-immaculate breeches feel and look like over-saturated blotting paper. Hoof-beats thunder far away on the left as late arrivals pour through the gateway in a long

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stream. Startlingly, one recognises a familiar horse. There he is, three fields away, charging up the opposite hill, running on, like the game creature he is, right behind hounds. Reins flapping with a careless rhythm round his shoulders and neck, stirrups bouncing with spasmodic treachery, eager to free themselves, and here, a long way behind, is the young fool who should be on his back controlling those rebellious leathers.

To catch the horse is the primary impulse, and although running after him is sheer mirage-chasing, still nothing can be gained by standing alone in the heart of the Irish countryside. Out on the left, the last of the riders are pounding along, and since the moving object on foot is evidently not a hospital case, they keep pounding along; pillion-riding being unheard of in the hunting field.

Trudging forlornly in the wake of the disappearing hunt one has ample opportunity for an agonizing analysis of past happenings and for appalling speculations in grim forebodings of the future. Vividly, one remembers that confident charge at the wall—horse going for his work so gallantly, even if a little too eagerly—not sure of what happened then. Must have hit the wall or something—then that horrible moment when he seemed to crumple up and everything went hazy: wet ground, horse gone. Heaven alone knows where he is now. Great old Challenger! He would have tried it had it been a house gable! Both knees are probably ruined. Stirrups have fought free of holders and are lost in some field. Reins are surely over his head by now and are trampled and torn to uselessness. If he went with

Taking a Toss

hounds through the Upper Wood he is sure to break his leg in some rabbit burrow; the first barbed wire fence he encounters will cut him to pieces, and there is tarred road somewhere near, with a ghastly drop. He has probably jumped on to it and broken his neck.

Sorry, Challenger, boy! Sympathy is a fine lot of good to a murdered horse! Compelled to jump a colossal wall when every sane person rode towards the gate. How people would talk later! Senseless, head-strong, foolish—oh, endless employment of bitter, but justified adjectives. And here is their overwrought recipient trudging achingly towards the nearest farmhouse; a stinging pain in the neck and shoulders, the loam of half a parish on his clothing. “God help you, sir, did you fall?” asks a labourer good-naturedly. In one’s present condition one feels like answering peevishly that one was run over by a bicycle. The seemingly stupid question does not merit such rude response, for its tone implies a sympathetic enquiry if one is hurt. “You may take things easy, sir. I think they have killed him behind the wood. I told my gossoon, Jamesy, to fetch your horse, an’ he should be back any minute.”

This was reassuring news which helped to dispel a nightmare that was rapidly running amok. Much to one’s astonishment and relief, Challenger’s only injury is a bleeding, but superficial over-reach, with its not unusual accompaniment, a missing foreshoe. “Sure there could be nothing wrong with his knees,” said Jamesy’s father, re-corking the bottle of disinfectant. “He never touched the wall. ’Twas the soft landing tumbled him: an old spring it is—had you taken the

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jump a few yards further up you had grand firm landing. But he's a great horse, sir—a great horse ! 'The third I ever knew to clear that wall—and I'm no youngster.'"

Having thanked these good people, one starts homewards lighthearted and proud. Yes, proud of mud-stained clothing. Proud of ruined head-gear. Proud of Challenger. The third horse to clear that wall in the biggest part of a century !

Drag-Hunting with the South County Dublin Harriers

I HAVE been riding horses and hunting foxes for as long as I can remember, but to-day was my first experience of riding—and, incidentally, writing about—a drag-hunt.

To be perfectly honest I used to look upon drag-hunting with a certain amount of scorn. I had a feeling that in a countryside where it was not feasible to hunt a live quarry, the drag would necessarily be laid over the same course frequently. The mounted followers would, therefore, become so familiar with the country that they could almost ride over the fences blindfolded. I had a feeling that hounds, and the real essence of good sport—honest hound-work—counted for very little if ninety per cent. of the riders knew the line of the drag, and were more intent on running it themselves instead of letting the hounds do it for them. Such behaviour has ruined more promising fox-hunts than all the wiles, authentic and imaginary, that have been attributed to that prince of wily customers, Master Reynard. With drag-hounds, I imagined, over-riding would be more or less the rule of the day.

All my beliefs on such matters were shattered when The South County Dublin Harriers met at Lucan on

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Saint Stephen's Day. The presence of about eighty horses at the Meet confirmed, at first, my worst forebodings for the fate of the hounds. When hounds were laid-on, however, and went screaming away on a breast-high scent, there didn't seem to be the least likelihood of anyone getting near enough to them to do any over-riding.

Unlike fox-hounds leaving covert in the wake of their quarry, they did not get the few moments' law that is customary in order to enable them to settle down properly to the line. No, these hounds went away in a flash, gave plenty of tongue and, so far as the horsemen were concerned, it was a question of ride hell for leather and the devil take the hindmost.

To a lover of fox-hunting, however, there was just one thing missing. Perhaps to most people it is a small item. Perhaps I am far too observant. Perhaps—oh, well perhaps I shouldn't mention it at all really, but I just can't help it. It was the huntsman's voice, or to be more correct, it was the lack of the huntsman's voice. There was no "Tally-Ho!" There was no "Gone Away!" I always feel that the voice of a huntsman encouraging his hounds in cover adds considerably to the pleasant atmosphere of tense anticipation, and when he or his whipper-in rips the silence of the countryside with a soul-stirring "Gone Away!" my heart feels about ten years younger.

With drag-hounds, since there is no quarry, I suppose "Tally-Ho!" and "Gone Away!" might be ridiculous, but at the same time I felt that had I been hunting these hounds and seen them strike their drag with such

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unerring accuracy and with such terrific gusto, and heard their opening whimper change into a crashing crescendo, I would have rent the elements with an honest-to-goodness hunting cheer. That game little pack deserved it.

I had been hitherto rather scornful of the fences. I imagined the course would have been laid over a succession of bushed-up gaps, small drains, insignificant banks and a sprinkling of rather childish obstacles. We hadn't gone three fields until I met a double bank that made me feel that through some unaccountable nightmare I had arrived in Punchestown.

A few fields further on hounds bored through a scowling black hedge that looked as impenetrable as the walls of Mountjoy Jail. How the drag-man rode through the exact spot where hounds were scrambling puzzled me greatly for a moment. A wren might manage it, but a horseman! Well, I have my own opinion. There are tricks in every trade, and the drag-man is welcome to his. He was leading us a merry dance, and my heart warmed to his ingenuity.

I rode along this thorny monstrosity until I saw a spot where daylight showed through. I sent my horse at it, shielded my eyes, closed them, and prayed that I wouldn't end up the guest of honour in a procession to Glasnevin Cemetery. My horse evidently disliked the stately pace associated with cemeteries, for he landed me safe, though ivy-begarlanded, on the headland of a turnip field.

The huntsman's grey horse and a black cob, with the red ribbon of danger on his tail, were going magnificently

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in the field on my left. Further beyond, the Lady Master's chestnut and the Master's grey were taking their own line.

I used to think that horses in a drag-hunt followed the line of the drag as obediently as railway waggons follow the engine! There wasn't much one-track business about this drag-hunt. People were taking their own line, carving their own destiny. A glance over my shoulder showed that the fences were having a word to say regarding the carving of some destinies. Three loose horses behind suggested that some of the fences had won their arguments.

Three wide drains, a hedge and then an up-bank landed me once more into another turnip field and I was as much alone as a certain famous film star ever wanted to be. I cursed myself for being all sorts of an *amadan*. Here I was, a stranger, alone, lost in the heart of an unknown countryside. If I fell into a ditch I could be there for weeks! The fact that the tongue of the hounds had been guiding me for the past few minutes was poor consolation now. I couldn't hear a sound! To the broad acres of County Dublin I broadcast the most impolite autobiography as I pounded along in my despair. Why the dickens hadn't I kept with the crowd? Why the mischief hadn't I kept near someone who knew the country? Why hadn't I circled away to the left with the others instead of belting away on my own behind hounds? I could hear them even after they crossed the hill, but now not a sound not a sound and then a hound spoke and I patted my horse's neck in a caress of exultation.

Drag-Hunting with the South Co. Dublin Harriers

We had been strangers, he and I, until very recently. This was our first hunt together, but now we were bosom friends. We understood each other perfectly and worked in ideal unison. All the honour is due to gallant "Rathdowney," for were it not for his stout heart and unbounded courage I would never have heard that far-off faint note of a hound and would have been tramping off alone and disconsolate, with half the clay of County Dublin on my back.

Two horsemen were coming to meet me. They were riding the length of a long wire fence. The black cob with the red ribbon and the Huntsman's grey led me through a hedge that was a worthy understudy for a jungle. In a moment we three were sitting behind hounds and were glorying in the ecstasy that is the thrilling music of full cry.

Now I had a rare chance to see these hounds really running. We were going all-out down a gentle slope. These drag-hounds were not carrying a head as fox-hounds do. They were not running closely as a fox-hound pack, each fighting for the lead. They were strung out . . . but they were travelling! The extraordinarily dense hedges may have been responsible for their stringing out. In a wall country they might run differently, but there was no doubt about their speed. They were travelling at a grand pace and found time to throw in plenty of tongue as a luckpenny.

For about two miles more we three had the show entirely to ourselves. Then near a cosy little cottage on a main road we had our first check. Here we three waited, thoroughly pleased with ourselves, while the

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remains of the original eighty members of the general body arrived. Wire had been responsible to a great extent for their hold-up.

We may have had all the luck in the first run, but in the ensuing four runs that same general body showed that they could hold their own over any country—wire excepted.

One young girl cut adrift from the general body when they were rounding a farmhouse. I presumed she was familiar with the locality and followed her as she took a short-cut to the racing pack. She led me over a miniature Suez Canal. When in mid-air, half-way over, I longed fervently to turn back. In fact I would have given a great deal indeed to have been able to do so. When I got over the monstrosity with a terrific scramble, and recovered my scattered senses, she called out, apologetically, over her shoulder: "Sorry, I had no idea it was so big!" Obviously, she too, was a stranger. This was surely the blind leading the blind, with a little light-hearted devilment thrown in.

But, sure if one stopped to take a nice good long look at every problem in life, one would never attempt anything.

With the South County Dublin Harriers the motto seems to be: "Have a crack at it anyway."

And, in the long run, it's the best.

Are Foxes Clever?

SINCE time immemorial foxes have had a reputation for cleverness bestowed upon them. In fairy-tales, fables, poetry and general literature, Reynard has been described as the possessor of super-intelligence. It takes courage to probe such long-established theories or beliefs. One feels timorous of even questioning such an array of learned, artistic and universally-cherished evidence. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether for the one occasion on which cleverness saves a fox's life there may not be ninety-nine others on which it is saved by the interference of favourable circumstances.

By placing the fox in a position of grave danger one may examine the more easily whether circumstances or cleverness plays the greater part in helping him to extricate himself. From the moment a huntsman cheers his pack of hounds into covert in search of a fox, that fox is in deadly peril. Every huntsman strives to draw his covert upwind, that is, with the wind blowing from the covert towards his advancing hounds, so that if there be a taint of fox in it, hounds will get the scent immediately. A moving fox carries a very strong scent, whereas the scent emitted by a sleeping fox is a weak variety. Most animals of the wilds choose the most comfortable sleeping quarters available. Not the least

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of their considerations in their selection of such is the natural shelter provided against the biting wind. A ground-wind when meeting any obstruction sweeps over and upwards, forming an upward air current, as has been demonstrated by the simplest principles of gliding. As there is but scant scent from a sleeping fox, and as there is no direct wind coming in contact with his body, it is often extremely difficult for hounds to locate him, especially in dense covert. Indeed, not infrequently, hounds over-draw their quarry; and foxes who have been disturbed by foot-followers or through some other reason, have been seen leaving covert after hounds had pronounced it blank. If those foxes had been really clever they would have remained in covert and not allowed anyone to know of their having outwitted hounds. A fox who wishes to display his cleverness in such manner is usually rewarded by a lusty "Tally-Ho, back."

He is in real trouble now. Hounds are quickly on his line and he is racing for his life. He is heading for the safety of his earth. He is running free and unhampered, whereas his pursuers must stoop their muzzles and suit their pace to the facility or difficulty of following his scent. When scenting conditions are good hounds can pursue him at top speed, the scent is lying breast-high and they have scarcely to stoop their noses for guidance. On the other hand, when conditions are unfavourable, their progress is accordingly slower; the scent is only coming to them in intermittent, catchy whiffs, and they must stoop their noses and puzzle out every yard of their quarry's line.

At such times a host of circumstances come to the

Are Foxes Clever ?

assistance of the fox and help him to retain his reputation for cleverness. A sudden change of wind to the dry, harsh, easterly variety, may leave his scent practically non-existent. Even without such atmospheric vagaries there are a host of other circumstances which come to his aid and puzzle his pursuers. Rabbits, hares, weasels and other creatures of the fields may cross his line. Normally, hounds will ignore such animals, but all of them possess scents of some sort, and if there be too much interference from such sources, especially if hounds are a long way behind their quarry, the fox's life is saved, not by his own cleverness, but by the interfering smells of these animals. Similarly, house-dogs, cattle, sheep and farm animals may unwittingly come to his assistance by polluting his line, making it impossible for hounds to unravel it. Even the steam from the sweating horses of those riding with hounds may transform a temporary check into a permanent defeat. The presence of manure on grassland or a recent application of artificial land fertilisers may obliterate his scent completely. Though the fox is probably quite unaware of it, modern transport is his best friend. Should a motor car travel along a road after he has crossed over he should feel grateful to its driver. If the vehicle has had a recent re-fill of new oil, the fox should go back and thank the driver personally. The pungent odour emitted by a motor exhaust plays havoc with the sensitive membranes of hounds' noses. If the interference is caused by some particularly foul-smelling motor-oil, a clever huntsman will have to cast his hounds forward, well clear of the contaminated area, and will be

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fortunate if he recovers the fox's line two or three fields ahead.

All this entails delay, during which Mr. Fox is probably well beyond the reach of his pursuers. Another victory for Reynard due, not so much to any marked cleverness on his part, as to the intervention of circumstances which were all in his favour.

With the Bray Harriers

THE country was growing more difficult, the fences more trappy: Dublin and all its signs of civilization was being left further behind as we thundered away into the heart of a glorious countryside. Hounds were a field ahead, going like fury. A horse crashed through a hedge on my right, misjudged the ditch and toppled over. There was no time to make enquiries, another fence seemed rushing to meet me, and the Master's grey was charging it. Five, six, seven were over it—and—Hip! Thank God, that's eight. This is something like a hunt!

I haven't an idea where I'm going. Landmarks mean nothing to me. I'm a complete stranger to the locality. But it's all glorious! Wherever those hounds go, I'm going.

Now they've swung left-handed and are racing along the brow of a hill, the sunlight dancing on their flashing dapples. Over a high bank they pour in colourful splashes of white, tan, black, and badgerpie. Up a long field of emerald green they race, past a snug white-washed farmstead. Cattle scamper in an adjoining field, race to the mearing fence, and stand like a guard of honour while the pack swing past in review.

The cry grows weaker as hounds are brought to their

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noses in the brown of the ploughland. Now one feels grateful for the generous white markings in the pack. Like wisps of wind-blown thistledown they flash across the rich brown earth. Heads are stooped to the ground endeavouring to snatch every whiff of a scent that has suddenly lost its potency on the ploughland.

In front, to my right and left, and behind me, horses are thundering along, striving to live in the same townland with that racing pack.

A river yawns in front. I used to think drag hunts steered clear of opportunities for rural aquatic displays. But the Master and his Huntsman were over before I had time to think of ferry-boats. On my right three horses were charging the wide and slow-flowing stream. Two got over, one went in. A louder splash sounded on my left as the greedy river claimed two more victims. "Here comes the makings of the quartette," I muttered, as I tried to collect my horse—and my courage—and send both together at that complacently sniggering river. The nearer I got the more it seemed to leer at me. It seemed positively smacking its lips in gleeful anticipation as I raced at it. My horse seemed determined that he at least wouldn't provide portion of its *hors d'oeuvre*. For my part I hoped I wouldn't, either.

He charged gallantly, fumbled the take-off, dropped his hind legs badly, and I landed with my arms round his neck. He scrambled to a firmer footing on dry ground, I scrambled to a firmer seat in the saddle, and as I looked over my shoulder, the jaws of that scowling

Who could blame any Whitehorn
Hedge for trying to kiss her

With the Bray Harriers

river were wide agape with frustration and disappointment.

The going was now uphill, towards that lovely white homestead. A few dozen horses were still on their feet. They were blowing a bit now, after their tussle with the river. Their necks were beginning to lather. Their riders were spattered with mud-splashes from flying hooves. A girl's lovely young face was streaming blood who could blame any whitethorn hedge for trying to kiss her ?

Her cravat was becoming crimson, but she was carrying on ! Yet one so frequently hears doleful noodles of quasi-philosophers bemoaning that this generation is becoming soft ! If some of these pessimistic fossils rode out with the Bray Harriers and saw this frail-looking wisp of youthful femininity charging the towering single-bank that is in front, they might reconsider their opinions.

Hounds are driving ahead relentlessly, climbing steadily, leading us up to a stone-wall country. They are skirting a pine wood on the sky-line. Passing the wood, they suddenly swing right-hand, flash across a wall and vanish into the very horizon.

Somehow, with their passing—although they are but a few fields away—there seems a strange emptiness : as though they had suddenly stolen some of the virility and pageantry from a gloriously-beautiful countryside.

With the Fox-Cubs at Dusk

YESTERDAY evening I visited a Fort. It was one of the many great, circular, centuries-old Danish structures that are so numerous in this eastern part of County Cavan. Its ramparts and fosses are still well-defined despite the ravages of ages. Its inhabitants used it as their home in times of peace, and as their stock-yard and stronghold when invasion threatened. In those far-off days when even crude artillery was unknown, and sheer man-power counted, the architect who designed it should be complimented on his choice of such a strategic position. The inhabitants evidently disliked isolation, and their fortress was erected on such a well-chosen eminence that they were in full view of their neighbours on some adjoining hill: indeed, it is a local belief in these parts that seven neighbouring forts are visible from any particular one.

Although their human inhabitants have long since departed, these forts are not untenanted. The dense trees that invariably crown their top ramparts act as local bird sanctuaries; the tangled bracken that drapes the sweep of their buttresses, choking their fosses, is a paradise for rabbits; and the deep-tunnelled, impregnable earths that can defy the stoutest terrier provide the safest of breeding-grounds for foxes.

With the Fox-Cubs at Dusk

It was to see a litter of fox-cubs that I visited this fort.

On an expedition of this nature one must approach as noiselessly as a shadow and be as inconspicuous as possible. Foxes have to live by their wits, and a nursing vixen knows only too well that the presence of a human being in the vicinity of her earth heralds trouble for herself and her family.

I was beginning to congratulate myself on the cleverness of my approach when a rabbit, startled from his evening feed, cocked his ears, poised a moment on hind legs, made a quick decision and acted on it instantly. Like a scout of old on outpost duty at the fort, he slipped away to inform the garrison of the presence of an intruder. Soon the slow double tap-tap, tap-tap throbbed underground, as his hocks beat the floor of his burrow and sent out their message of warning to the entire rabbit population in the vicinity. Now that my presence had been detected it was best to pass on, reach my objective, then lie still and wait. Up through an opening in the undergrowth I crawled, climbing to the top of the highest rampart, moving noiselessly all the while and hoping the foxes had not heard my approach. I argued that the young cubs might be so engrossed in their play that they might not have heard the rabbit's signals, or, hearing them from such a timorous neighbour, might have treated them with contemptuous scorn. Whether they had heard my approach or not I cannot say, but when I slowly raised my head above the rampart not a single cub was in sight.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

It was probably too early for their evening frolics. From my position I commanded an excellent view of the playground on the inside of the opposite rampart. The wind was in my favour, the light was still good, so making myself comfortable behind a sheltering blackthorn, I made a close-up examination of their haunt with field-glasses.

Inside the fort the ground was as bare as a badly-worn tennis court. Here and there were patches of brown earth, with not a blade of grass showing. These were connected by well-worn paths through the less-worn grass. One path ran directly towards me to a small brown mound in the centre of the fort. After a careful examination of the evidence of partly-consumed meals and their discarded offal, I came to the conclusion that the vixen must order her poultry in dozens. The ground was littered with wings, feathers and legs. They were not all the produce of the farmyard, either; the feet of a moor-hen were unmistakable, and I was delighted to see the wings of rascally magpies.

Soon a sharp-snouted brown head, with ears erect, poked suddenly through an opening in the undergrowth that rimmed the outer edge of the opposite rampart. It glanced to left and right, waited listening, then glided out on to the well-worn playground. Soon another brown shape appeared; then a third, then a fourth, but no sign of the vixen. When they satisfied themselves that there was no likelihood of their evening being interrupted they began to enjoy themselves. They chased one another up and down the well-worn paths, out and back to the brown mound in the centre of the

With the Fox-Cubs at Dusk

fort. Tumbled and tossed, frolicked and gambolled, hither and thither. Their antics were the acme of agility and would make the movements of the most playful kittens appear like the solemn actions of rheumatism-ridden old cats.

The sun had gone down long ago behind the distant hills leaving the fort shrouded in a purpling dusk that was gradually deepening into the shadows of the night. The cubs suddenly ceased their play, listened a moment, sniffed the air and glided away together to the top of the rampart. Like eager children anxiously awaiting the arrival of some relative from a train, they crowded together, all gazing in the one direction. The object of their interest soon became apparent. They were awaiting the arrival of the vixen with their supper. What that supper had been originally I am unable to say, but in the scrimmage that followed on the rim of the darkening rampart, table manners were flung to the wind; and with them floated off a cloud of gleaming black feathers.

With the Galway Blazers

THE trees nodded a friendly welcome to the wind-gusts that accompanied the dawn. Rain was badly needed in Galway, and these wise old trees welcomed its precursors. Soon the biting cold became less intense and the big soft raindrops arrived with the daylight.

Hounds were in covert. It was a long wood by the roadside. The western end was devoid of undergrowth, but further up the roadway the boles of the pines were completely smothered in laurels and brambles. A solitary horseman in scarlet stood sentinel at the upper corner.

From the wood came the voice of the Master encouraging hounds. The crackle of twigs became more audible as hounds pressed on resolutely through the undergrowth. A hound whimpered. Another spoke more confidently. A brown shape hopped on to a wall and surveyed the road. The Whipper-in sprang to life and galloped down towards it, calling "Hi! Charlie! Ger away back!"

Reynard junior obeyed promptly and vanished into the wood. The Whipper-in returned to his post. He had scarcely reached it when I heard him repeating his admonition to another cub and following it with a loud thong-crack from his hunting-crop.

With the Galway Blazers

Hounds were making the woods ring to their music. Scent seemed to be perfect, but the big number of cubs that were afoot complicated matters and made it very difficult for hounds to concentrate on one particular line.

I had heard that this part of Galway was over-stocked with foxes, and when two more members of the tribe appeared on either side of me I felt that the wood must be alive with them. I charged at the smaller one and headed him back into the wood. The bigger one ignored my efforts, loped across the road, hopped over a wall and slipped away across country. I watched this old gentleman admiringly. Hounds would have little business chasing that old campaigner at this stage of the season. The older members of the pack might have been fit enough, but the un-entered puppies and the hunt horses were not yet equal to a strenuous cross-country run.

There was a determined note in the music in the wood. The undergrowth crashed as hounds charged. The music weakened as they ran. They were coursing their quarry. Soon there was an angry growl, a rattle on the horn, and I knew there was one fox less in Galway.

In a few moments hounds were speaking again. This time the cry was redoubled. One could hear the young excited notes of the puppies. They may have been running silent before, but now they were beginning to hunt in deadly earnest. They may have had aristocratic blood in their veins, they might win prizes on the Show bench at Peterborough or Clonmel, but their primary

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

use was to catch foxes, and until this morning they had been unaware of that fact.

"If this fellow breaks, let him go," called the Master from the wood. The cry came nearer. A brown snout poked through the briars at a gap in the wall. I sat motionless.

He listened a moment, then scampered across the road, hopped over a wall, and raced for the open.

I felt convinced that this was the hunted cub but, nevertheless, I refrained from calling "Gone Away." With so many foxes afoot one could not be sure. However, when hounds came crashing towards me I had no further doubts about their pilot and gave vent to a rousing "Gone Away!" for the benefit of the Master, who was still in the wood.

He was nearer than I thought, for I hadn't long to wait. I was watching the last of the tail-hounds leaving the wood when I heard his horse jump on to the road-way behind me.

"Why didn't you go on with them?" he called, as he popped across the second wall. My answer was to pop across it also and loose my horse's head behind the racing pack.

My horse didn't seem particular as to what angle or at what place he met a wall. He skimmed them like a swallow.

I was beginning to appreciate the speed of the Blazers when I realized that our youthful pilot had been thinking

With the Galway Blazers

somewhat similar thoughts. Their speed had been rather disconcerting from his viewpoint, and an open gullet had clasped him to its bosom.

He was a good youngster who knew how to run, and he was left unmolested in his refuge.

The Homely Atmosphere of the Point-to-Point

“ RACE Cards a Shilling ! Race Cards ! ” The sooner one makes a purchase and displays it conspicuously the sooner will the running-boards of one’s car be relieved of a swarm of clamouring race-card vendors. After the past half-hour’s enquiries and anxieties in a maze of strange boreens, one need no longer have any doubts about being on the right road as one trickles into a stream of motor-cars, lorries, horse-drawn vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. Soon the first of the competitors heaves into sight. Evidently a local entry; well-shod hooves stepping daintily along on the grass margin, neatly-monogrammed rugs flapping to the rhythmic swing of powerful quarters, intelligence peeping through the red-bound eyeholes of his fawn hood and the art of the expert showing in the fastidious neatness of his plaited tail.

Nearing the entrance to the car-park one hands five shillings to a cheery steward and receives in return a parking-ticket and the giver’s good-humoured instructions that by keeping well to the left, inside the gate, there is less chance of having the car bogged. At the entrance, traffic conditions are prevented from becoming chaotic by the skilful manipulations of an over-wrought

The Homely Atmosphere of the Point-to-Point

Civic Guard. The presence of a fruiterer's cart with a broken wheel does not make his task anything easier, and when a huge brown-panelled horse-box—whose designers overlooked the existence of boreens—lumpers labouringly past him towards a gate further up the road, he eventually bids us enter. In low gear, with engine racing, one swings through the entrance, swerves left-handed, as directed, and churns onwards over gorse-strewn, straw-littered mud to the uneven but more solid firmness of old, well-grazed ridge-and-furrow.

The car-park is on the brow of a hill. From here one commands a splendid view of the course. Behind the cars bookmakers' umbrellas add a dash of colour to the scene. Dressing-tents, weighing-in-tent and luncheon-marquees give a fête effect. Glowing braziers serve the dual purpose of heating water for tea and warming a jolly circle of chubby little urchins. Elfín mites, with cheery cheeks, laughing eyes, and tweed caps several sizes too large for their tousled heads. Some hold one foot towards the brazier, then the other, changing foot positions as dexterously as geese on a frosty morning. One little fellow, determined on warming his hands at the risk of toasting his face, stood with palms outstretched, fingers upwards and head flung back, in an unconscious pose that would have done credit to a ballet-dancer.

Through a rush-littered gap in a hedge one enters the saddling enclosure, if that term could ever be applied to an unfenced portion of a sixty-acre field. It is just such little incongruities that lend the homely touch to Point-to-Points. They are the races of the local hunt,

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

and that fact seems to make the entire proceedings a very friendly affair. Here one never encounters stereotyped regulations; there are no reserved enclosures; no privileged vantage-points. Everyone is heartily welcome, and except for five shillings levied on motors entering the car-park, anyone can go anywhere one wishes around the course and enjoy a whole day's racing—absolutely free of charge. Though Point-to-Points have become highly-specialised undertakings—so far as horses and riders are concerned—and are no longer the grand finale of the hunting season, they still retain much of the old-world that is very lovely, and continue to provide the local farmers with a rollicking day's free entertainment.

The occupants of the huge brown-panelled horse-box are being unloaded; and while the last two await their removal, their well-chiselled heads look out with calm interest on a countryside which has been transformed overnight by the very advent of them and their kind. They seem to glory at the sight of the throng gathered in homage to horseflesh. One feels that heads so intelligent-looking are capable of enjoying the humour of the situation with absolute relish. This mechanical age dolefully predicts the passing of the horse, but these two representatives of the species think differently. Horses drew carriages long ago, but nowadays the situation is reversed!

Bookmakers are shouting the odds, as if endeavouring to interest investors in the next county. Jockeys are assisted into their saddles. How they can tackle natural country in such fragile-looking wisps of leather, with

The Homely Atmosphere of the Point-to-Point

child-length stirrups, makes one wonder. Crowds surge through the gap. Horses are led out. Riders are inundated with instructions which are invariably forgotten before the first fence is reached. People are everywhere : the main assembly on the hill, big gathering at the starting flags, banks are lined and fields studded with them; and further on, two knots of people are grouped, with the first fence between them like the chain of a cuff-link. Down by the first flags, the Starter, who is the local Master of Hounds, waits to receive his silk-clad charges. Eventually, he gets the plunging, rearing, impetuous handful into a fairly satisfying straight line and then sends them off on their cross-country journey, with the most appropriate note imaginable—a rousing “GONE AWAY!” on his hunting horn.

Riding a Point-to-Point

WE are all lined up at the starting-post in the nearest thing to a straight line that a troublesome bay horse will allow. His green-clad rider is fighting desperately to prevent the brute from savaging every other fairly-well-behaved entrant in the race. Soon "Away you go! And good luck to you!" is heard as the flag drops; and the Starter sends a further God-speed to our thundering hooves with the merry notes of a "Gone Away" on his hunting horn.

The first fence looks like a strip of dark green canvas stretched between two groups of people. With a railing of human beings lining its approach on left and right, horses seem distracted, and treat the fence rather carelessly. Luckily it is only a simple gorse-built affair; though the horse on the left refuses it. Flinging it behind, horses race away with renewed fury. The chestnut in front is setting a terrific pace. His rider endeavours to get him settled down, but with little success, and he leads over the first bank like a Derby winner. People are no longer crowding the fences and horses have less to distract them at their work. An open ditch yawns malevolently, but the pace affords scant opportunity for an examination of its width. A bank looms in front, and if that chestnut leads us to it

Riding a Point-to-Point

at this pace some of us will see the inside view of an ambulance. Every stride makes it grow bigger. The chestnut's at it—he's over; bay beside him crashes—went too close and hit his knees—two horses out of it already. "Hey! Don't ride me in on top of him! Pull over!"

A long stretch of uphill gallop draws one level with the green-clad rider, on the big difficult bay, who has earned a reprimand for swerving-in at the last fence: "Have you no reins?"

"Reins my Uncle! I never laid eyes on this horse till to-day. They told me I could hold him with a silk thread—should have said an anchor-chain! He's a good jumper, but a headstrong maniac. That fellow on the chestnut must be going for the doctor. Steer clear a bit, this horse may do anything at the wall."

I manoeuvre "Mimosa" well out of any danger zone that the troublesome bay may create. A backward glance shows me the grim-set, courageous face of his green-clad rider. He seems determined to ride his mount hard at this stonework, irrespective of whether it be loose-built or as solid as the Great Wall of China. The chestnut skims it like a swallow. A little grey, who has been going extremely well, treats it like a brush-through fence, and pays for his flippancy by a somersault. Three out of it, five left, and two miles to go.

The green-clad, swerving friend draws level again, going down towards the drop ditch. "They told me this horse was green at walls. His shins must be black and blue by now. He took a ton of stones with his

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

forelegs and never as much as lost a stride; must have iron legs as well as an iron mouth." I felt that there must have been some equally-durable substance in the speaker's make-up; he was having a gruelling ride on an impossible horse, and instead of showing any signs of distress, was gradually convincing the unmannerly animal that at last he had met his master. Conversation flowed from him as easily as if he had been in an arm-chair in his club. "Heaven look down on me at this drop ditch!" and Heaven looked down very kindly on him and all of us, and watched us, a tiring handful, squelch along a sweep of low-lying meadow towards the crowd of spectators that waited anxiously for an aquatic display at the sullen-looking river.

Shortness of breath seems an unknown complaint with my friend of the green silk, for he speaks at my stirrup: "Are you married? . . . well, you're lucky! and if you ever do, never let your wife see you ride at a river. She may think you're a regular Adonis in the saddle, but after a taste of bog-water a fellow looks like something the cat brought in. I suppose mine's in this crowd; and she has a camera, too." If that film is ever developed it should show five horses, almost together, clearing a water jump in gallant style.

Scarcely half a mile to go; horses are blowing, the chestnut has been overhauled and now lies third. From the corner of one's eye one can glance an added grimness in the faces of the riders alongside. All are concentrating on the Big Double. Are horses unduly fatigued by the terrific pace set by the now-tiring chestnut? Will someone fumble at the big bank and

Riding a Point-to-Point

bring grief? Better not have fallen horses interfering; better lead. How gamely Mimosa answers to the request! After three gruelling miles it is wonderful to feel her response. With an undemonstrative spurt she forges to the lead, props an instant, hooks the bank, changes feet, flicks over the yawning ditch and lands a good four lengths in advance of her nearest rival.

Up on the hill crowds are hurrying to the winning post; horses are asked for a supreme effort. Only one fence divides us from the flags that lie along that aisle of green in that sea of human beings. Mimosa still holds the lead; the crowds are frantic; cheers greet us. The swish of whalebone sounds behind—a bay head creeps up to her girth. “Come on, Mimosa!—I knew you would!—Don’t let him creep any further. He’s back to your quarter—keep him there, Mimosa, keep him there! One fence more and the race is ours!”

“Always ride the last fence as if it wasn’t there,” is the old saying.

But it was there.

“His eyelids are moving, doctor. Thanks be to God! I thought he was killed.”

“Oh, he’ll be all right in a few minutes. He got a devilish spill, but there’s nothing broken.”

“And Lord! he had the race in his pocket only for that last trick of a jump, doctor. And the favourite was beaten at the post by an outsider. I don’t know the name of the horse, but he had a green jockey.”

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

Somewhat dazed, one gazes upwards through a circle of anxious faces to the restful colourings of a February sky. Hazily one remembers a big, difficult horse, a green-clad rider and a hard-bitten courageous face and, somehow, one feels strangely pleased.

Running Commentary on a Point-to-Point

WILL yis stop pushing behind there or you'll land me into the ditch. Can you see the horses, Mary Ellen? They're down at the starting post; and I'll be down in this drain if yis don't quit shoving. Haven't you the whole country for a grand-stand, and why must you all crowd me off this one bit of a bank? There's lashings of room for all, if yis id have a bit of —. Oh, be the lord Harry! They're off! There's the hunting horn. Can you hear it, Mary Ellen? Great God, how the sound of it warms my old heart.

What a wonderful start! There's The Holy Terror lying third with our wee Jamesy riding him. Can you see his green jacket, Mary Ellen? They're coming to the first jump. God be with the day when I could show them boys how to ride a Point-to-Point: but these old rheumatics—these old rheumatics! Now they're at it. They're over. Wee Jamesy's there, Mary darling, and going like a Trojan. Now they're coming to the first bank. Jamesy's dropped back to fourth. That's what I like to see! Holding his horse together: just what his father would have done. Leave the pace-making to someone else.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

Now they're coming to the drop ditch—a dangerous kind of an ould blind contraption—but, thank God they're over it safely. Have you a good view, Mary Ellen? Do you know, that gossoon of ours is making wonderful great work! Dang! but they're after lepping two fences so quickly that I missed seeing them with the talking.

Now they're racing for the big up-bank, a ticklish class of jump. Purty high, too. God save us, the two leaders are down. They'll baffle the others. Jamesy, son, mind yourself. Steady avick, steady me jewel! Over! Good man! He's a great lad, Mary darling, a great lad; an' The Holy Terror's a tremendous great horse.

What's that you say, Miss? There's more room behind? God spare you. Step up here, Mary Ellen, and you can see better. Oh, that's grand. What's that, Miss? Did you say the green rider? You backed him? I hope he wins for you. He's my son, Jamesy; wee Jamesy: and he told me, and his mother here, to wait at this spot above the water-jump. I'm too stiff to fight my way through crowds, and he told us to stay here where it would be middling quiet. And 'twould give him more courage, too, for whisper, Miss, The Holy Terror is a bit green at water, but Jamesy told us that if he got over the river he'd give the best of them a run for their money.

Now they're racing at the wall; it's not too high, but it would be safer not to hit it, just the same. Over they come!—five, six, seven of them. Swooping towards us down the long slope to the river. Jamesy's moving

Running Commentary on a Point-to-Point

up. He's fifth, he's fourth, he's third, he's mad. Does he mean to lead with a green horse over the biggest leap in the country? The two leaders are abreast. He's using his whip, he's gaining, he's stark crazy. Now he's wedged between them . . . coming to the river . . . thundering at it together . . . he's into it . . . No, be the lord Harry! he's over!! Me bould man, Jamesy!

Mary Ellen, did you ever see the bate of that for cleverness? Wedged his young horse between two ould stagers so that he couldn't swerve at the water jump. That's what you may call a bit of classic riding—but sure it's not off the bushes he licked it.

Bedad, I didn't see the two jockeys in the water till now; but sure there's still five more in the race.

That's the big double, the second fence over on the hill; when they clear that they turn for home. I'd rather see Jamesy staying a bit closer to the leaders; himself and a grey are the last two in the race. Oh—Oh! someone's crashed at the double—that leaves four—if the loose horse doesn't knock The Holy Terror.

Me bould Holy Terror doesn't want to be knocked, sure he doesn't, Mary Ellen? See the way he tackled that double? The grey and himself are moving up now. Three fences more and they'll be into the straight. Be the lord Harry! Isn't he going great guns entirely? Two fences now and not a length between the four o' them: you could cover them all with your handkerchief.

The last fence. Mary, darling, the last fence! Lord bless me, if I hadn't rheumatics how I'd love to run over and cheer that gossoon in green. The grey and

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a chestnut are over first, but The Holy Terror's on their heels. Come on, Jamesy! Come on, Jamesy! Ride him, avick! Mary, darling, he's level with them—and twenty lengths to go. They're neck and neck at it. He's going to the front! Mary, he's going to the front! Come on, Jamesy! Great God, I can't see a stime . . . it's all misty . . . can't even see his green jacket. Mary, the sight's leaving my eyes! Is Jamesy coming in . . .?

What's that you say, Miss? You've won your bet? . . . The green jockey? . . . Do you hear that, Mary Ellen? The green jockey! Me bould son, Jamesy! me hardy fella!

Do you know, Miss, he's a great gossoon. Ach! but sure it's not off the bushes he licked it!

Aintree Memories

"HALF-PAST-SIX, sir " is a crisp accompaniment to a knock on your cabin door. "Thank you, steward," is your insincere reply for his having disturbed your only successful attempt at sleep after a night's futile efforts. The steward's cheery call and knuckle-tap keep repeating along the deck like the long-drawn-out echoes of reveille. Through the porthole one sees the lights of Birkenhead dispelling with their twinkling cheerfulness the grey mistiness of a Mersey dawn. Out on deck the chill, salty tang of March air banishes any remaining drowsiness. A ferry-boat, its decks aglow with myriad lights, looks like a glittering toy plucked from some fantastic Christmas-tree. Boats of all kinds, from tiny craft to mighty ocean liners, are going and coming in this hub of the world's shipping. They leave something more than smoke and brown-churned water in their wake. Yes, something in one's heart that even a land-lubber must feel; a sensation awakening a very deep respect for that which sailors endearingly term—The Call of the Sea.

Prince's Dock. Breakfast. Customs; suitcases hurriedly chalked with weird hieroglyphics; and Liverpool. One cannot help noticing the horse-drawn lorries—three horses, one before the other. Unusual in Ireland, save

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at lumber work in the woodlands. Another Liverpool memory that is unforgettable was my being informed once by a hotel porter that he had been there fourteen years and had never seen the Grand National.

Walking the course is a memorable pilgrimage performed by most people visiting the course for the first time. This ritual is gone through by countless annual patrons, so one needs to begin hours before the scheduled time of the race, especially if one takes time to examine the object of one's walk—the fences. One can hardly forget the first impressions of these. One feels strangely awed standing in front of these terrific obstacles that have made Aintree the greatest steeplechase in the world. How unlike Irish fences they are. Nothing on which a horse could "change feet," like our Punchestown banks. No walls. All huge, high and thick, built-up fences; the nearest thing to hedge solidity that that word will convey or one's imagination can conceive. Their centres are, probably, strong-growing whitethorn, completely hidden in a dense packing of evergreens. Gorse, mostly; others with spruce toppings; others with deal. There is one fence at Fairyhouse nearly like them, near—what used to be—the river. Further down the course some hedges have wide, open ditches in front of them, and still further on, at Becher's Brook and Valentine's Brook, wider, open graveyards behind them. Up in front of the stands there is a fifteen-foot-wide water jump and a nightmare called The Chair that are calculated to freeze one's circulation if Becher's and Valentine's have not already done so.

Aintree Memories

Having seen the course, one's admiration for the horses and riders is boundless. Here they come! Parading past the stands. A priceless single file of horseflesh. What an experience! Seeing the world's greatest steeplechasers and their riders in the flesh. Their names are household words. We have read about them in the papers—but this is different. And now they are down at the starting post. Bookmakers are in a frenzy, tipsters completely hysterical, owners and trainers developing temperatures, spectators rapidly growing crazy—and that handful of silk-clad riders, who should be more excited than all put together, are probably the coolest people within miles of Liverpool!

They need their wits. Participating in this terrific charge of half-a-hundred bloodstock to the first fence. What a sight! A wave of colour rising to it. Two are down; on they go, open ditch claims three. Loose horses causing havoc fence before Becher's—latter lives up to its reputation. On, onwards relentless. Canal Turn; refusals. Valentine's takes its toll . . . another open ditch coming towards the stands. On past them; terrific pace; over the water; more grief at The Chair; and on they sweep on their second circuit. Out to the country again, fancied candidates missing. Thank heaven there is no mist. Well strung out now . . . eyes riveted on the leaders at Becher's. Outsider leads over Valentine's. Rival down at last open ditch . . . seven still together . . . three forging to the front. Outsider leading at the last fence . . . someone's crashed . . . he's still in it. He's headed! He's coming up, coming up, fighting every inch, he'll win . . . a

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

neck, a length, away in front . . . he wins, the post. He's won! Won the Grand National!

What matter if one did not have him backed. He made a magnificent race. A terrific finish. A memorable Grand National. And as you unclench your fists off your once respectable but now ruined soft hat, an unmistakably Irish voice cries with hoarse but adorable emphasis: "Sure I knew he could do it! Sure the first day he threw a jump at Jamesy Mack's anyone could see he was the makings of a National horse!"

The Irish Grand National

ONE need never ask when are Fairyhouse Races. The actual date may not be on the tip of one's tongue, but the day of the fixture is always the same, the meeting being held every year on Easter Monday.

The Irish Grand National is, naturally, the principal event in the day's programme, and is a one thousand sovereigns steeplechase run over three-and-a-half miles of stiff Irish country. Although the fences have been made less difficult in recent years, they still command a reverent respect from all riders. Being the longest race on the card, competitors start well to the left of the stands and run past on a course almost parallel to them, clear four obstacles, each a bush-fence and ditch, before they swing round right-handed on to the racecourse proper. Three more such fences before reaching the long sweep of level going that brings them right past the stands to a hedge with a wide, deep ditch behind and a nasty drop; and away they swing, right-handed again, to the open country. Two open ditches, in quick succession, wait yawningly for some luckless competitor. A short distance ahead a ditch and up-bank, leading on to rising ground, makes horses use their hocks. A long sweep; over a drop ditch; gruelling up-hill gallop; a high bush-fence; still more up-hill

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work, and when one would think competitors should need a spell of easy going, they swing right-handed abruptly and are faced by a ditch and a towering up-bank.

This fence is at that point of the course which is furthest away from the stands, so on its negotiation those of the field who are still on their legs begin their return journey homewards. Two bush-fences with deep ditches behind . . . one of them with a nasty drop that has a flavour of Aintree about it . . . lead on to a long gallop on low-lying ground that can be very holding in wet weather. Then the Fairyhouse River. This used to cause considerable grief in its original guise, but it has been made less dangerous in recent years and seldom gives the horses any trouble. Still racing on low-lying ground, the well-thinned field make the acquaintance of a big, built-up bush fence (I think the ditch has been filled-in recently). For honest height and solidity this might compare favourably with some of the big Liverpool obstacles. Three more fences, and the entire countryside seems to take leave of its senses.

Here they come over the last fence. Five of them locked together. Two; three more . . . cannot wait to count the others. What a magnificent display of courage and stamina after three-and-a-half gruelling miles over twenty-one varied fences! Crowds have gone crazy. Everyone is cheering. The horse on the outside is moving up. The insult of whale-bone is unnecessary, he is doing his utmost, and his young owner-rider knows it. They are both keyed to the highest pitch; making a tremendous race . . . a terrific finish! and whether he was your fancy or not, you

The Irish Grand National

have seen the Irish Grand National—and that is something you ought to be glad about !

One need not imagine that the excitement of Fairyhouse ends with the finish of the Grand National. There are six other races over the same fences and the same course; the only difference being that they are shorter distances than the principal event. And lest there should linger a scintilla of doubt about the size of fields and the resultant quality of the entertainment provided, a glance at last meeting's entries will dispel it. The number of horses entered in the seven steeplechases were : twenty-six, nine, twenty, thirty-seven, fifty-six, fifteen, and thirty-four, respectively, making a total of one hundred and ninety-seven entries for the day's programme. Admittedly, there were several non-starters, and some horses were, at date of closing of entries, entered in two races, but, nevertheless, the actual number who faced the starter make a very imposing total and give a good idea of the high standard of sport which is provided by inimitable Fairyhouse.

NOTE.—The course here described is the old one ; the new one is described in " *Over the Fences at Fairyhouse* " (p. 110).

Galway and its Races

GALWAY, the City of The Tribes, has a decidedly tribal flavour during Race Week. Here one mingles with men whose ancestry goes back to the very dawn of history : men who are the direct descendants of the old Western Chieftains, and whose family names were household words long before the galleons of the Armada were shattered to matchwood on the rugged shores of their territory. They are not racing men in the modern meaning of the term, but they are sportsmen who would not, for worlds, miss the fun that Galway Week provides.

The high standard of the racing fare provided goes without saying, since the cream of Ireland's steeplechasers are participants; but the racing itself is not the essence of the meeting. It lies in the surrounding country and the types of people one meets.

It is interesting to watch a solemn-faced Aran Islander indulging in a little bit of excitement with a worried bookmaker. The bookmaker's worry is due to the investor's mode of expression, for the Aranman's native tongue is Gaelic; and although the bookmaker may possess an alarmingly florid vocabulary on other occasions, he is as docile as a lamb in the presence of this solemn-faced stoic. If the investments are lucky,

Galway and its Races

no one will have to tell the westerner how to enjoy himself. If he loses he won't whine. The angry seas of Aran teach one how to lose; they took his two boys and left him an upturned, oarless currach.

I think the finest view of Galway and south Connemara that one could wish to see can be seen from the top of the new concrete stand. Leaning on the back parapet and surveying the country from right to left, one sees a plain of stone walls stretching away to the hill of Castle Hackett at Tuam. Still further left, pilgrim-trodden Croagh Patrick towers in silent sanctity in the hazy distance. Then moving round, one's breath is taken away by the purple miles of bog that race away to meet the Corrib. The sun dances playfully on this river-lake, the waters of which look like some giant's broadsword half-buried in the foothills of the distant mountains. Out beyond, the lights play fancifully on the rugged majesty of The Twelve Pins, but their lofty domes are shrouded in cloudy reticence.

From the gable of the stand one sees Galway City nestling between two clusters of woodland: beyond it, the Atlantic and the dim outline of the Aran Islands. Still turning leftwards, and directly beneath, one sees the racecourse itself: a sweeping circuit of emerald green whose dark bush-fences make a striking contrast to the grey network of walls. In the centre of the course stands the ancient ruin of Ballybrit Castle. Away beyond, Galway Bay cleaves its way into the heart of the countryside, between the far-off mountains of Clare and the grey stone walls of Galway. Turning inland once more, the dim shadows of the Keeper Mountains

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

bring one's memories back to Tipperary : then hills of lesser grandeur merge in gentle gradient into the vast plain of Ireland's Midlands. That plain continues until one swings back once more to the hill of Castle Hackett, and one feels that, quite apart from the excellent racing, this panorama is worth seeing.

There are so many things to be seen in Galway that we should be grateful to our steeplechasers for luring us to it. The very streets are steeped in history. Ancient plaques, inscriptions and coats of arms adorn the house-fronts. Then there are the remains of the old city walls, the Spanish Arch, Lynch Castle and Saint Nicholas' Church. In the grounds of the latter stands the window from which a namesake of mine administered what is probably the world's most poignant piece of justice, creating thereby, the term Lynch Law. He was Mayor of the city and was held in such esteem that when his son murdered a Spaniard not even the most callous citizen would volunteer to execute the son of such a father. He insisted on justice. He hanged his own son with his own hands.

Probably the most curious inscriptions on the gates of any city were those on the Gates of Galway. The mottoes were alliterative and pregnant with meaning. The North Gate bore the inscription :

"From the Ferocious O'Flahertys, Good Lord Deliver Us."

On the West Gate was :

"From the Murderous O'Maddens, Good Lord Preserve Us."

The inscription on the South Gate read :

Galway and its Races

"From The Devilish O'Dalys, Good Lord Defend Us."

While that on the Eastern Gate was :

"From the Cut-Throat O'Kellys, Good Lord Save and Keep Us."

Obviously, the gentlemen living in the suburbs must have been rather playful fellows !

During Race Week, however, Galway forgets that it is one of the oldest cities of these islands : it flings tradition, ancient dignity and such-like restraining influences to the wind and behaves like a care-free youngster. Its heart must still be young, for its very heart, Eyre Square, retains the joyous thrills so cherished by youngsters : hobby-horses and the elaborate fun-fair that accompanies them.

During Race Week Eyre Square never sleeps : though several of its visitors manage to do so on its park seats. Enjoyment rules the night, and anyone who can play a musical instrument has only to strike up a tune to convert a streetful of strollers into a revelry of dancers.

In the park opposite, Padraic O'Conaire, the Con-naught Poet, sits pensively in sculptured limestone with pencil and paper in hand as though writing another poem to the Immortals, telling them that his light-hearted Galway is still being true to tradition.

Over the Fences at Fairyhouse

JUST throw your leg on this horse I have brought for you and we'll ride round the course together. We'll have a modest half-crown on the outcome, just to add spice to the affair. The rules about bumping and boring need not apply, as we'll have the whole course to ourselves. I suggest we introduce a new rule: if you fall I'll turn back and help you and if I fall—well, you can gather up my scattered remains and have them interred decently. Here we are now at the starting post. Make sure your girths are tight and your leathers a comfortable length. You may throw away that cigarette. We'll be sorry we ever learned to smoke before we're half-way round.

Are you ready? That grey of yours seems crazy to get going. He knows his job, so you needn't worry. This mare's a hot-tempered handful, but she'll cool down when she gets going. Are you ready? Right-o! Off we pop!

Don't rush this first fence too hard. Horses are often careless until they settle down a little. It's a bush-fence, but there's a ditch that's only too anxious to punish heedless footwork. Nice work! Still a little too hot, but nice work. Next fence is the same . . . In fact, the next three fences are almost the same. But

Over the Fences at Fairyhouse

they come in pretty quick succession. They don't give much time to indulge in a chatty commentary. Now, we're out on the racecourse proper. We swing right-handed here. These three fences in front are the only ones we have to jump twice in the whole course. That grey of yours is jumping like a stag. He came over that last fence on to the straight like a champion.

Hey, don't be admiring the desolation of the empty stands. Hold your grey together and send him like fury at this big drop. The take-off hedge looks innocent, but there's a regular ante-room to Glasnevin cemetery behind it, and a drop that will rattle the teeth in your head.

Until a few years ago there were honest-to-goodness open ditches in front of us now, but they have been replaced by bush fences. The going is level here for a bit, but then we start the uphill work, on to what used to be the Ballyhack Double. There it is, away above on the very horizon. It's a Double no longer. It's a Regulation now.

I wish to goodness it was still a Double; this mare is beginning to tire a little. At the end of a long uphill pull one could scramble across a Double—but one can't take such liberties with a Regulation. Go on ahead with your grey and give me a lead, this mare's getting nervous. Hang those cigarettes, anyway. I haven't as much wind as would blow out a candle. Candles, in the long ago used to be snuffed out. I have a feeling something else will be snuffed out at this Regulation. This mare will hit it at the roots. She's shortening her stride, five lengths, four, three . . . *crash!* The Grey's

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

come a cropper! Hup! and the mare's over! Clean as a whistle! Game little lady! The race is ours now. Nothing to stop us, bar we lose our way.

Hey, steady a minute, young fellow-me-lad, have you forgotten the new rule? The rule of the Good Samaritan? Whoa there, little mare, steady a minute! Right-about-turn and go back and succour the fallen.

I nearly forgot to come back to you. Are you hurt? Are you quite sure? That's better. Come on, then, and we'll catch your grey. This rest will do my mare all the good in the world. She hadn't a puff of wind left coming to that Regulation. Well, how do you like Fairyhouse? It looks all so delightfully simple when viewed from the stands on Easter Monday, doesn't it? But think of the sorry sight both of us would cut if we had to contend with a big field of horses thundering into those fences as if broken necks or limbs were only minor considerations.

Gently, Grey, that's the boy! He's not lame at any rate. He's slightly cut, but it's only a nick from an over-reach. He's eased off a bit now. So has the mare. If you mount now we'll go on and finish the course. This bit is downhill, but there's a big drop and ditch at the back of this first hedge.

Now we're out on the level going. In wet weather this portion can be very holding. The last of these three fences is a whopper. A regular Aintree rasper! It's a built-up hedge, but is about as yielding as a concrete wall: five feet high, three feet thick, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul. Your Grey is going a bit sticky at it. His argument with the Ballyhack Regula-

Over the Fences at Fairyhouse

tion shook him a bit. Steady him better and I'll give you a lead. Come on, little girl, a sharp spurt and we'll be over. Atta girl, atta girl, atta girl . . . Hip! God bless us! *Oblivion.*

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Hello! Is that you? Listen a moment, do you know anything about astronomy? I've seen every star in the firmament during the last five minutes. Doing sixteen-hand reels they were. My back feels a bit damp. Gosh! it's the grass. Give us your hand, avick, till I see where I am. Fairyhouse! Did the Wards . . . I mean the stag . . . What are you doing with two horses, anyway? Ugh! I'm frozen. Come on, let's get mounted. Now I remember. We'd better finish the course.

Gosh, if we'd been racing they'd have been leading in the winner by now. Folk cheering madly—aye, and never a thought for the unfortunate riders who crashed. That's life. The world has scant use for losers—no matter how gallantly they tried.

Two more fences bring us to the entrance to the straight. Now, you may let your Grey slip along and see if you can win your half-crown. We have only been travelling at little better than a fair hunting pace up to this, but the going's perfect round this right-hand bend and we may go slap-bang at the last three fences. We jumped these before, by the way, so you should remember them.

Bet you another half-crown I lick you! Done! Every man for himself from now on. Eh? You'll

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have an egg boiled before I pass the post? You will like

Come on, little mare, and we'll show this fellow a classic finish. "Always ride the last fence as though it wasn't there" is an old adage. Atta girl, atta girl, atta girl, Hup! Holy smokes! we seem to be in the next parish! Landed a clear length in front! Race away, my Lady. He's creeping up. Twenty lengths to go. His head is at your girth. Don't let him overhaul us. Ten lengths to go. He's levelling up! Come on, girl, a final spurt. Five lengths, four, three, two, he's won! . . . not the Irish Grand National, unfortunately, merely my modest five shillings.

Gosh, I haven't a gasp left! Hang those cigarettes, anyway! That reminds me, I'd love a smoke.

Over the Banks at Punchestown

THAT spin we had over Fairyhouse a few days before the National has aroused the steeplechasing spirit in your veins or you wouldn't have asked me to take you round the Punchestown course.

While we're jogging over to the starting post I'll give you a few tips that may prevent your arriving home in an ambulance. Now, although Fairyhouse and Punchestown have, apparently, a good deal in common, actually they are as different as chalk and cheese. Both are steeplechases of a very high order, both are honoured by the cream of Ireland's bloodstock, both are old-established racing carnivals that have no rivals in this country, but there the similarity ceases. Fairyhouse has modernised built-up fences and regulations. Punchestown adheres gallantly to nature in the raw: single banks, double banks, stone walls, drop ditches and brooks.

We'll begin our gallop at the starting post for the Bishops court Cup. There are really three separate courses and five starting points, but as our horses would drop from exhaustion if we went round all of them, I suggest we take the old course. Don't let your grey rush too madly at the first few single banks till he gets a taste of the type of fences in this part of the world.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

And don't go like hell's bells into the wall or this mare may think its a brush-through hedge and there'll be an inquest.

Are you ready? Right-o! Off we pop! Bet you the crown you won from me at Fairyhouse that I lick you? Done. Fire away, but I warn you if you lead me into the first fence at this speed we'll both go home in a hearse! Steady him, man! Steady him, I tell you. Steady, steady, Hup! Over nicely. The sight of the ditch sobered him a little. The next fence is the same. Now we're out on the straight proper. There's a fly fence here, the only brush-through in Punchestown. We jump these fences on our second circuit—and by the way, next time I'm coming along here I'll be five lengths, and shillings, the better of you.

Aren't the empty stands desolate and lonely-looking? As though they yearned for the pageantry of flashing silk, scarlet-clad hunt stewards and the tattoo of thundering hooves.

Next fence is an up-bank. Let your grey have his head. There's a ditch in front. But that will only make him stand back properly from his bank. Grand work. Next jump is a drop. Nothing to indicate a fence at all: this field simply ends, a wide deep ditch yawns, and the next field appears eight or ten feet below us. The simplest fence imaginable to a hunting horse, but one that can cause a tremendous amount of grief to young, impetuous steeplechasers. It's simple enough when you're over it. Aye, but in a mad onrush, with horses fighting for their heads, it's not quite so safe. Some of them never see it and do a somersault; others

Over the Banks at Punchestown

try to gallop over it carelessly, drop hind legs and jink their backs.

The next fence is a brook. There's a good birch hedge in front, so you may go full steam ahead. We jump a similar fence further along this stream after we clear that single bank out in front of us. Now we're finished with the brooks, though I was afraid we'd get a ducking at the last one. We swing sharply to the right here and turn for home. Take your time, man alive! and get your grey going on the right leg or you'll come a cropper at this single bank. Hang it, man, steady him or you'll fumble it! Holy smokes! That was a near thing.

Now, young-fellow-me-lad, if you know any prayers, say them, we're coming to the Big Double. That's it in front, rather like a mountain that lost its way. There are miniature Grand Canyons fore and aft, so you can't afford any careless footwork. Its most redeeming feature is that it is wide and well-cambered on top and gives a horse plenty of time to change his feet. It has respect for only one man, the fellow who tells it to go to blazes. So sit down in your saddle, clench your teeth to keep your heart from jumping out of your mouth, and ride as though all the blue devils in hell were after you!

Three lengths, two, one, prop a moment . . . Hup! Hook on it . . . Hup! Change feet . . . Hup! Spring clear . . . Cheers! Magnificent footwork. There is something tremendously satisfying about a double bank. Its successful negotiation smacks of really gratifying achievement.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

Do you know it's a pity we hadn't that grey and this mare entered on either day at Punchestown. Holy smokes, they could jump houses. There are two single banks in front now, but they're only like molehills compared to the rasper we've just crossed. Here's the wall now. We're back where we started. Let your grey slip along now, he jumped these single banks before, so he may remember them.

Now we're in on the straight. This is where I collect your five bob. Care to make it ten? Right-o! Every man for himself. Here's the last fence coming to meet us, the only built-up brush-through in Punchestown. Cheerio, my lad, I'll have the tea ready for you when you come home. Come on little mare; the grey licked us at Fairyhouse, but he won't do so to-day. After clearing all these big raspers don't let this birch affair worry you. Lash away, my lady. Blazes, Kate! pull over with that grey horse. Hang it man, where are you going? Pull over, I say! Pull oo . . . oo . . . over. *Crash!*

Now our goose is cooked properly. On foot in the plains of Kildare and our horses saying fare-ye-well to us up the straight. Wouldn't we look the right pair of prize fools if the stands were full of people? Cursing us like troopers they'd be. The bet still holds, you say? Whichever horse passes the post? Be better if we raced one another on Shanks's Mare. No wind? Neither have I. Let the horses finish it. They're level,

Over the Banks at Punchestown

but slowing up. Your grey has stopped. Looks as though he's going to eat grass. He's a cool customer. I win my bet? Nonsense, sure my mare's only dawdling past the post. All right, if you insist . . . but everything's on me when we reach the local oasis in Naas.

A Fox-Hunter's Paradise

FEW pursuits in life are so conducive to the preservation of one's sanity as a good day with hounds.

Politics, finance, and the daily ration of personal worries are forgotten when a game old horse cocks his ears to the opening note of a hound in an Irish woodland. All around, the faces of riders are tensely eager; aglow with the hope that they will soon see a brown shadow streak away from the woodside and point his mask for the far-off hills.

Quite a number of those present are visitors from overseas; lured by Ireland's hospitality and the unsurpassed excellence of her sporting fare.

Here, one has no Leicestershire cut-and-laid in endless succession, no Pennsylvanian flights of timber or Australian barbed-wire monstrosities; no, one meets an endless variety of natural obstacles. Variety is the keynote of Ireland's menu: stone-walls, single-banks, double-banks, hedges, bog-drains, rivers, and gaps filled with anything from a ladder to a rusty bed, ensure that the term, sameness, can never be applied to our Irish countryside.

Others of these visitors may be having their first sample of Irish sport, and they will be agreeably surprised to find that excellent hunting does not necessarily

A Fox-Hunter's Paradise

entail any very great expense. There are no three guinea Saturday Caps in Ireland. Indeed, the usual Cap-money collected at most Irish Meets is half-a-crown. With the more fashionable packs the Cap is accordingly higher, but the maximum for non-subscribing visitors is one pound. Subscriptions for the season are as low as three pounds, with several two-days-a-week packs; of course, with the bigger establishments, annual subscriptions range up to fifty pounds. There are several private packs and an endless array of foot-hound packs, where Cap-money and subscriptions do not exist or are merely optional.

If visitors wish to purchase their hunters here . . . well, who has not heard of Ballsbridge Bargains? The same applies to Ireland in general. Any farmer's son will be glad to sell his horse to a visitor, and although it is our Irish trait to ask plenty at the outset, we are easy to deal with eventually; and if there is still some difficulty towards the conclusion of the deal a good "luck-penny" soon overcomes it. If horses are to be hired, there are numerous reputable riding schools and livery establishments in the cities and bigger provincial towns which provide safe cross-country conveyances at very reasonable charges. If hunting with the smaller provincial packs, a farmer's son may lend you a horse that will do your heart good. Invariably, the honorarium will be left entirely to yourself, and you may have a day on his raw-looking four-year-old that will be, in the long years ahead, one of life's most pleasant and cherished Irish memories.

The difficulties of procuring personal accommodation

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

no longer exist. In addition to the number of country houses that provide for hunting visitors, there is ample hotel accommodation. The Irish Tourist Board have made exhaustive, up-to-date surveys of hotel conditions and will supply on request full details of existing services in hotels, even those situated in the most remote country districts.

The acid test that determines whether a holiday has or has not been enjoyed is: will the visitor return to his holiday haunt? The steadily-increasing figures of tourist statistics are the best answer to that question. Even a small pack of fox-hounds can be a very expensive item and, except in the case of private packs, they would cease to exist unless for the whole-hearted support of their followers. That hunting is flourishing is due, in no small way, to the steadily-increasing influx of overseas visitors. It is obvious that these visitors must have enjoyed themselves previously or they would not return and bring their friends along with them to sample another Irish Hunting Season.

What is this mysterious lure that captivates the visitor to our countryside? Poets, artists, musicians—all of them have tried to capture the spirit of Ireland. All of them have done their best, but an experience is a difficult matter to convey through the medium of art, and Ireland must be “experienced” individually before one can fully appreciate the combined efforts of all the exponents of the Fine Arts.

The spirit of Ireland is as elusive as a wisp of wind-blown thistledown, and thistledown is a very delicate but very beautiful sample of our Creator's art.

A soul stirring Tally-Ho!

A Fox-Hunter's Paradise

Yet, something of this indefinable spirit seems to hover in some mysterious way in the mighty silences that surround a big woodland: silences that are soon disturbed by the crackle of twigs, as hounds push onwards in search of their quarry. A blackbird's noisy proclamation informs the wood-inhabitants of the advent of these dappled invaders. The cheery voice of the huntsman echoes from the very heart of the wood as he encourages his charges.

On the outskirts, horses champ their bits impatiently. Forelegs paw the ground, as though their highly-strung owners are convinced that making mud-pies is the only obvious outlet for equine energy, while awaiting the head-freedom that Tally-ho will bring. A well-bred youngster, with the red ribbon of warning tied on his tail, is prancing about restively as though the ground was red-hot underfoot.

A hound whimpers: timorously almost. His next note is more confident. Another whimper; one can sense he is running. Soon he shatters the silence in real earnest with a deep-throated note of conviction. The huntsman's voice cheers encouragement to his charges: "Hark to Rallywood! Hark to him, my beauties!" The quiet snap of twigs gives place to a determined onslaught as hounds crash through the undergrowth, hurrying to Rallywood's assistance. The horn twangs merrily. As though in answer to its summons, a second hound speaks, a third, a fourth; soon the whole pack crash into an ecstasy of music.

Horses lose all interest in making mud-pies as they listen, with cocked ears, to the happenings in the wood.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

A brown shadow slips away at the upper corner, stops a moment, takes bearings, makes a decision, and acts upon it instantly. He glides deliberately past the whipper-in, who stands motionless on outpost duty. This is no startled, timorous cub who would scuttle-back to cover at the sight of a horseman. He is an old campaigner, a firm believer in making a good decision and sticking to it. He is an old hill-fox who, many times before, has found safety in his far-off mountain refuge and is determined to pay it another visit.

The whipper-in waits, immobile as a piece of statuary, until this venerable customer is well on his way. When he is satisfied that he has given sufficient law he stands erect in his stirrups, cups his hands like a megaphone and electrifies the countryside with a rousing Tally-Ho !

That soul-stirring war-cry is like the voice of Hunting Ireland challenging all and sundry to tackle the endless variety of her fences, the fences of a fox-hunter's paradise, and life holds no more glorious exhilaration than when one thunders forward to accept that challenge.

To Finish the Season

*" To finish the Season !
Lonesome words
That spell the end of your early jogs
Past waking woodlands and wind-swept bogs.
Through hedges snaring the morning mist
In nets of gossamer. One more tryst
To finish the Season ! "*

WHEN the Hunting Appointments Card and the list of meets in the newspapers announce the last hunt of the season I always feel a pang of regret. Regret for the kindling light frightening the shadows from the sleeping woodlands; regret for the swirling mist dragging its feet from the morass of brown bog; and most of all, regret for the soul-stirring reveille of the hunting horn.

Spring, the season of nature's rejuvenation, is beautiful in its very mysteriousness. All around one witnesses this mysterious renewal of life. Without asking any assistance from the pompous little busybody who still has the nerve to call himself civilised, spring begins her task, single-handed. The very atmosphere is filled with promise, promise of the things to come; but their advent heralds the death-knell of hunting.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

When I wrote the little poem, portion of which I have quoted above, I tried to recapture some of the quieter joys of Fox-hunting. Modern schools of thought exhort people to look to the future for everything. While there may be a vast amount of truth in such gospel, nevertheless, an occasional glance backwards is refreshing. The future, always so uncertain, despite our most cheerful optimism, has one great drawback: it has no memories. And memories, cherished memories, are a priceless possession.

One's daily annoyances soon vanish on an evening spent at the fireside with one's memories. While the March winds bite angrily at the gables and the flames dance merrily from the logs on the hearth, one can re-ride the hunts of the past.

How nervous the big grey was at the beginning of the season. He simply would not tolerate hounds! And then when they whimpered in the big wood, crashed into full-cry and raced screaming across a green hillside, he thundered to their call like a seasoned campaigner. That was the last day that the red ribbon of warning was tied to his tail. It was no longer necessary. His heels, thereafter, never objected to the proximity of hounds or strange horses. His terrors were ended. He had begun to love the game. So much so that now he dances with excitement if I toot the horn when going down the yard.

Then I remember the trouble I had with young "Furious." He had been a truculent and recalcitrant puppy. He had been reluctant to enter to his work, had been quite heedless to coaxings or commands, and

To Finish the Season

barely condescended to run with the pack. He never bothered stooping to the scent and seemed as though it didn't interest him whether hounds were chasing a fox or an aeroplane. The aeroplane seemed the more likely, judging by his head carriage. One day, last October, I had him under observation on the mountains and had decided to cast him as useless, when a venerable Aughlion fox met him on a cattle-track; then it was the fox's turn to think about aeroplanes—or some equally speedy mode of escape.

Aye, but there are quieter memories that are worth retaining. Memories of the hush of evening in the mountain solitudes. How lovely it was to ride home alone down the squelching dome of Aughlion! Miles away to the left the last rays of the sun splashed the Loughcrew Hills with tints of burnished copper. The hazels on the shaded slopes of Mullaghmeen were a deep purple. Out in front, the Moat of Granard was flung in clear-cut silhouette against the distant horizon, while Lough Sheelin reflected the last lights of a passing day. Far away, to the right, the sun was sinking behind the long shoulder of the Ballyconnell Mountains, leaving a vast stretch of countryside to snuggle peacefully into the creeping shadows of night.

But there were other evenings, too. Evenings of biting frost, swirling snowstorms, or soughing rain. Evenings when every yard of frozen road was treacherous as polished steel; when one led one's horse along the water-cutting, blowing hot breath into cupped hands that had, hours ago, grown insensible to the cold. There were evenings when a sudden snowstorm sent one

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hurrying home along white, deserted roadways. The muffled tap of hoof-beats was one's only company, for on the thickening white carpet the hound-pads fell as softly as the snowflakes themselves. Then there were evenings when the swirling rain attacked persistently in merciless gusts until elbows and knees were numb and sodden. Motorists drove past in cosy comfort, their lights throwing grotesque shadows on the dapples of the waddling pack. With their passing, one headed out once more, half-blinded, into the silent darkness. The soft patter-pat of the hounds sounded more audible than ever. They hugged the horse's legs, packing closely to me, as though they were afraid of the gloom. And then the twinkling lights appeared. One could sense a brightening vigour in hounds and horse, for those lights were the lights of home.

And now the Season is ended! No longer may we look forward to the thrill of to-morrow's hunt; but at least we *can* enjoy the memories of yesterday's.

The Knowledgeable Man

I HAD allowed myself to drift into the belief that that breed of human known to rural Ireland as "The Knowledgeable Man" had, long ago, been extinct. Such cherished dreams were completely shattered the other day at a quiet cross-roads.

"I beg your pardon," said I, bringing my car to a halt. "Which of these roads do I take to Newcastle?"

"It would be absurd to take either o' them because their cubic capacity couldn't find accommodation in your vehicle."

"Glory be to God," said I to myself, dazedly, "what's the man talking about!" And then, rubbing my eyes to make sure I was really awake, I made another effort: "Which of these roads will bring me to Newcastle?"

"Neither'll bring you if you're not wishful to go."

"I see," said I, lacking any retort more brilliant, for it was too early in the morning to have one's wits on the alert.

"On the other hand," continued my tormentor, "if you will give me a lift I will demonstrate the appropriate route, as I was proceeding to Newcastle personally."

I looked at the man and decided to give him a lift. He knew the road, and whether he was a normal or abnormal specimen I felt more than his match physically

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and at least his equal mentally, so I had no fears of travelling in his company.

He wasn't long in the car until I realized that my calculations regarding our respective mental ability needed readjustment. The man seemed to have consumed vast quantities of dictionaries and was determined to pour forth their contents at every available opportunity.

"It's more than munificent of you to give me travelling accommodation," said he, speaking like a B.B.C. announcer.

"Oh, not at all," said I, very humbly.

"This is a deplorably nice car," continued my passenger. "You know, since I possess a mechanical mind, it gives me very alacritive grief to see the delicate incentives of internal combustion engines being abused by ignorant cosmopolitans these days."

"I suppose so," said I, trying to recover from this onslaught.

"Great heavens!" he exploded, "to see the delicate incentives being conflagrated by curmudgeons who know nothing about the metaphysics of an engine!"

"I suppose so," I ventured again.

"You suppose so! Why, it's a conflagrating fact! Sure there's nothing in the universe of engines, gramophones or radio that I don't understand alacritively, because I have forty-five years' expenditure behind me!"

"Do you tell me so?" said I, trying to keep a straight face.

"I do indeed, but I wouldn't tell every Tom, Dick

The Knowledgeable Man

and Harry. Sure there's no use in a man boasting or having too much correspondence in his voice."

"Oh, not the slightest," I agreed.

"It's a deplorably remarkable fact that I could fix anything: clock, engine, bicycle, radio; anything. It's all from years of expenditure at such work. I could fix a watch the same as I'd fix a radio—by the incentive of the ear. Sure, what's a watch anyway only a combination of revolting cogs and metaphysical springs!"

I looked at my wristwatch to see if its face was contorted with agony.

"Do you see, no man can fix a watch unless he can summarise its articulation at a glance."

I looked at my watch again, expecting to see it wringing its hands in pain.

"You see, if you can't summarise its articulation instantly, you might as well be trying to get the time o' day from a wheelbarrow."

"I suppose so," was the only comment my flabbergasted brain could invent.

"Certainly! Sure a watch is as sensitive as a fiddle. Why, man alive! the minute I'd lift a fiddle I'd know whether the resonance was alacritive or not."

"Shades of Kreisler!" I murmured fervently.

"But sure nowadays people don't care whether the notes are relative to the musical execution or not. They all want jazz, which is only a primitive interspersal of the correct articulation of fingering."

"Henry Hall preserve us!" I whispered devoutly.

"Man alive! but it's me had the deplorably alacritive ear for music. I could know a false note before I'd

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hear it. It was most remarkable in one way and, still and all, most inoffensive in another. Of course, one must take into abject consideration the sensibility of circumstances and admit that I was munificently gifted above the average."

"Undoubtedly!" I answered courageously, knowing in my heart and soul that the only gift he inherited from his ancestors was a family dictionary. His forbears would probably wriggle in their graves if they learnt that the contents of their beloved dictionary had run amok and were at the moment gambolling uncontrollably in the brain of one of their male descendants.

The Knowledgeable Man gazed intently at the road ahead. I wondered what would be his next subject, for he seemed capable of tackling anything from atom-splitting to lion-taming, but I was disappointed, very disappointed. He got off at the next boreen.

As I watched his broad shoulders disappearing down an aisle of hawthorn blossoms I felt a pang of regret. Really, I did, for I felt that a rare character was going out of my life, and I would have given a lot to have heard him discuss the subject of horses.

Then as I drove away I brightened up a little . . . a character like this would be easily traceable in any locality. It would be worth meeting him again.

The Huntsman's Best Friend is the Farmer

It is only appropriate that a word of appreciation should be tendered, at the end of the Hunting Season, to the men who make hunting possible—the farmers. With the exception of the Master, the Secretary, and those intimately connected with the management of the hunt, comparatively few followers know anything of the farmer's contribution to the sport.

One must have foxes, hares, stag, or quarry of some sort to justify the existence of hunting. The quarry is most important. When it is available one can chase it, but as it has a habit of ignoring the orderliness of tarmacadam, and prefers to ramble at will over the countryside, it is this very liberty of conscience on the part of the quarry that makes the farmer such an important factor in hunting. Unless the farmer is willing to allow hounds to hunt over his land there would be no point in maintaining a pack of hounds. The quarry could be shot, trapped or killed by divers methods and possibly become extinct; or, if left unmolested, might develop into a widespread pest.

That foxes can be a most annoying and destructive pest in some districts is readily acknowledged, and the sight of hounds in such localities is a welcome one.

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But it is noticeable that foxes rarely do much damage in the vicinity of their earths; instinct warning them that if operations are too confined, instant reprisals are the result. Their nocturnal peregrinations make them conversant, not only with every fowl-house, but with every rabbit warren, and for variety of menu, every mountain and bog within a considerable radius of their earth. When hounds get on the line of such a marauder he has a very big area of country at his disposal, and in making for home he crosses the land of farmers who are praying for his destruction, and farmers who may be unaware of his existence. These latter may not have contributed one chicken to Reynard's menu—there was probably an abundance of delicacies available in the nearby bog—and yet they welcome the sight of hounds. These land-owners, especially, deserve a word of thanks from all hunting enthusiasts. As they have lost nothing by Reynard's existence, they will gain nothing by his downfall. They do not object to hounds—although it must be said that hounds, when hunting, rarely do any damage other than the occasional injury caused by frightening an in-calf cow, startling sheep in the yeaning season, or terrifying a recently-trained young horse. But most important point of all is that these farmers do not object to that which comes in the wake of hounds and which causes by far the more serious damage—the cavalcade of horsemen!

Like every other collection of human beings the field is composed of different types of people. One type realise that they are, primarily, trespassers on other men's property, and as they are tolerated as such, it

The Huntsman's Best Friend is the Farmer

is only ordinary courtesy and good manners to see that gates are closed to prevent stock from straying, crops are avoided, and as little damage done as possible. That hunting has existed and is to-day more flourishing than ever is in no small way due to the fact that this type of sportsmen predominate. Few farmers there are who will not, at the first sound of hounds, cease work and run to a bank-top to view the chase. With thoughts miles from any damage which may accrue, their primary interest is to see hounds running, horses negotiating big fences and, for a taste of variety, an occasional fall. That portion of the sport they thoroughly enjoy until with the passing of the spectacle, they are faced with the resultant havoc wrought on their farmstead by the thoughtless minority. One feels convinced that these thoughtless riders imagine that a farmer should feel honoured to have them gallop across his wheat; that his turnips should be pulped while still growing; that his field of new grass will benefit by having the tender hay-seeds buried six inches underground; and that he enjoys the exercise of having to tramp two miles up the road in search of his wandering stock. Lovers of hounds and good hound-work should be grateful that riders with such warped mentalities are in the minority. Otherwise who could blame a farmer, if subjected to such treatment, for locking his gates, erecting barbed-wire fences until his farm was a veritable bird-cage, and eventually stopping hunting altogether.

That farmers refrain from such drastic reprisals is a tribute to their tolerance and sportsmanship. And now,

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when hounds are lolling in kennel and hunters are lazing in the clover, what gesture can be more appropriate at the end of the Hunting Season than to tender a word of thanks to those who heartily deserve it—the farmers.

Summer Worries in the Kennels

MOST people are willing to admit that the staff in the kennels of a big pack of hounds have a busy time during the hunting season, but comparatively few people have any idea of the summer activities of these men.

When the old season passes away in a wisp of memories and summer is making her timorous advances, a huntsman is faced by the most loathsome undertaking imaginable, namely : Casting. It is an unenviable task to walk into kennels on a glorious morning when the world seems such a pleasant place, hear the clamorous welcome of hounds, wade knee-deep through that sea of dapples and then pass sentence on the old favourites who are to be cast. The most unserviceable hounds are chosen. Those who would be useless next season. Most of them are old, rather worn out, and being much too slow, would be altogether unable to run up with the pack for another season. Others have damaged knuckles, troublesome toe-nails, or foot ailments which are detrimental to their usefulness. Quite often total deafness is encountered and, as the note of a horn and the tone of a command are lost on such animals, they become mere liabilities.

Occasionally some of these hounds end their lives in luxurious idleness in the homes of people whose

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hunting days are long past but who keep their hunting memories refreshed by the very presence and companionship of an old foxhound. Drafts of such cast-off hounds are very often a welcome acquisition to a recently-organized hunt for breeding purposes or for training un-entered puppies. Any drafted hounds left over, after such wants as these have been attended to, are handed over to the kennel flesh-man, whose very trade makes him something of an expert, and they are "put down" as painlessly as possible.

Truly indeed be it said

*"The hardest work when the season ends
Is a Huntsman casting staunch old friends.
The world may sneer 'sentimental clown!'
But it breaks my heart to say 'Put them down'."*

Soon the kennel is a hive of activity where every variety of youthful, canine devilment is evident. The puppies are in from their walks; young rascals who have been reared by the local farmers. They have scant knowledge of discipline after months of care-free existence, lolling around lazily, chewing old slippers, mauling flower-beds, autographing kitchen tables with clumsy paws, chasing rabbits, and only obeying their name-call when food accompanies it or an indignant broomstick follows it. No longer are these the "great big lolloping, lovable things" that were the adoration of children and the scourge of kitchen authorities. From now on they are inhabitants of a kennel, members of a pack, in fact, foxhounds. They still have those big dreamy eyes and

Summer Worries in the Kennels

very puzzled expression, but before the cub-hunting season is over those eyes will have acquired a look of alert earnestness.

When from ten to twenty couple of puppies arrive in kennel it is certainly remarkable how the men can remember all the new names. When one realizes that modern foxhounds are all very much alike as regards markings, it is even more amazing how these men can know one from the other.

Feeding-time brings the kennel-men more trouble. A conceited puppy who was accustomed to bullying the pomeranian when at walk encounters a brother who was lord and master over a nervous collie and, in a flash, war is declared. This is but a signal for a general furore which seems more interesting than any thoughts of food. Then there is the problem of the shy youngster. One who has been bullied incessantly, and fears to eat with the others. And of course as the entire draft cannot be fed separately it takes time and the judicious administration of reprimand before the bullies cease to terrify the more timorous and good table-manners are instilled generally.

When puppies eat slowly, not necessarily as a result of any shyness on their part, it is obvious they will not thrive if compelled to compete at meal-time with their more ravenous brothers. The only solution is to allow slow-eaters a few minutes' grace at the trough before the others arrive. It is a delightful experience to see the feeder enter his kennel, when the appetising whiff of a prepared meal has every hound up on tip-toe, and call out his slow-eaters from the entire pack. This, I

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consider, is discipline brought to a fine art. Anyone who has had the experience of endeavouring to inculcate a sense of decency into an unmannerly family terrier may realize the amount of attention and patience which a kennel-man must devote to his task before he has his charges under such control. The hunt staff are therefore not idle during the summer, for discipline is a slowly-acquired virtue; and the roistering puppies of this season must emerge as the perfectly-mannered fox-hounds of the next.

Schooling for Dublin Horse Show

GIRTHS are tightened, stirrups adjusted, reins gathered; horse jogs off, settles into a hand-gallop, swings right-handed in an easy circle and then, shoots away for the first fence.

The ground is hoof-torn and slippery owing to constant schooling. The take-off is treacherous after the heavy rains. A horse being schooled regularly on the same course is inclined to grow careless and treat the fences he knows so well with flippant contempt. He must have no contempt for the Ballsbridge obstacles, so constant variety in the home fences is essential to keep him on the alert.

He is approaching the first fence, charging furiously for that same old gorse-built hedge that he knows he can brush through. He is fighting madly for head freedom; anxious to show this bit of artificial greenery what he thinks of it. A surprise awaits him. A heavy pole is concealed in the top of the gorse, loosely of course, and as his hind pasterns bang hard into it, toppling it to the ground, he alters his views about taking liberties with innocent-looking gorse fences.

On again, fighting against bit-pressure. His raking strides are altogether too nonchalant for the treacherous ground, and he is almost inside the side-wings before

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he slithers into the realization that there is a gate at his nose. With a terrific recovery he bucks clear of the four-feet-six of swinging timber, goaded, no doubt, by the memory of recent indignation to his hind pasterns.

His care-free strides confirm one's suspicions that he intends taking the big Double Bank with his old debonair recklessness. He does not seem to grasp why his onrush is being checked. It never dawns upon him that his technique needs polishing. He suddenly finds himself travelling more collectedly, his strides are more balanced, and as he approaches the Double he has some confident intuition that he is bound to take-off at the right place, neither too far back nor too near the obstacle. The sprinkling of dry lime in the ditch, added since yesterday in lieu of water, is a reminder that fore-leg carelessness is not recommended. Hup! He lands on top, changes feet with muscular rhythm, braces powerful quarters, swoops over the second ditch and lands as gracefully as a panther. If he can be taught to maintain such style he should do well at Ballsbridge, for the double bank can cause competitors to collect a surprising amount of faults.

He is settling nicely to his work now and going sensibly for the big Stone Wall. One would think he was born in Galway, he shows so much respect for the obstacle that typifies that county, but his respect for it was acquired three weeks ago—when it took all the hot water in the house to reduce a big knee. No, he was not bred in Galway; and yet it would do your heart good to ride him over that big wall!

Now he is welcome to all the head-freedom he

Schooling for Dublin Horse Show

desires . . . as hard as he can travel for the Water Jump ! There is a low hedge at the take-off, so he cannot slip into it, and the water is only a few inches deep, so he is unlikely to come down. He skims over it as if it were merely a potato furrow, although it is actually fifteen feet wide !

Again the bit-pressure induces him to slacken speed. His neck flexes, his stride shortens, he is travelling almost on his toes, with all the pent-up energy of his body concentrating about his powerful quarters and hocks; he is approaching an obstacle whose successful negotiation demands supreme effort and perfect timing—the Single Pole. With four or five feet of fresh air between the ground and a naked single bar, a horse's greatest difficulty is to know where to take off. His steady approach is ideal, the ground is slippery, but he is not slipping; he is inside the wings now, his hocks come well under him and with a magnificent stag-like bound he convincingly demonstrates that he is a worthy entrant for Dublin Horse Show.

With ordinary luck he should give a satisfactory display over the Ballsbridge course. He has a fortnight in which to improve. By then he should be as fit as judicious schooling, careful exercise and intelligent stable-management can make him.

All over Ireland hundreds of people are thinking those same thoughts. Hundreds of people wondering if they should put strengthening bandages on forelegs; wondering if they should use a standing or a running martingale, or neither; wondering if he has had too much schooling,

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or too little; wondering would he take his fences better going at speed, or going slowly.

Oh, there are a million-and-one things about which one can be undecided. And after doing one's best one can only hope for good luck on the day of reckoning in Ballsbridge.

Hounds Parade at the Horse Show

FEW of the many spectacular events at Dublin Horse Show can equal the glamorous pageantry of the Inter-Hunt Parade.

Even those who are not hunting enthusiasts, or whose sole idea of hunting may be derived from an obsolete decoration on some chocolate box, cannot fail to admire disciplined, business-like foxhounds, good-looking, well-groomed horses and immaculately-turned-out huntsmen.

All eyes in Ballsbridge are focused on the gates of the Jumping Enclosure as the hands of the clock crawl towards the appointed hour. A noticeable hush descends on crowded stands and tiered terraces; conversations lose their urgency for the time being; something is happening at the gate . . . then a toddling enthusiast who is lifted up on grown-up shoulders chirps joyously : " Oh ! daddy ! here they come ! "

What a wonderful spectacle as huntsman jogs into the Jumping Enclosure, hounds swarming eagerly round him, wondering where on earth Mr. Fox could be in such delightful surroundings. Two by two come the jumping teams from the various hunts : scarlet, green, black and grey costumes, velvet hunting caps, glossy toppers, sombre bowlers. Greys, bays, chestnuts . . . oh, a wealth of blending, prancing colours, dazzlingly

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pleasant, making a memorable picture that will long linger in the minds of those that witness it.

And the hounds! How lovely they look pouring along, a great wave of black, tan and white. A glow of healthy fitness in their glossy coats, a touch of resolute gameness in their waving sterns, a jauntiness about their head-carriage as if they knew they were the cynosure of friendly yet critical eyes. What a welcome they get! Yet in spite of their enthusiastic reception their perfect discipline is truly magnificent, and anyone who has had the annoying experience of fruitlessly endeavouring to prevent the family terrier chasing the neighbour's cat, may realise the enormous task of instilling rigorous obedience into twenty-odd couple of foxhounds. Similarly, if one has ever witnessed that same terrier transform himself into a howling coyote when one's young brother does his home-work on a mouth-organ, one may glean some idea of the discipline necessary to keep a pack under control and prevent any canine choral work when a brass band plays "John Peel"!

Few people, even those in the category of hunting enthusiasts, know anything of the hard work, ceaseless attention and endless patience of the men in kennels to ensure that every single hound—and especially those due to appear in the Hunt Parade in Ballsbridge—is trustworthy, answers to his name promptly and instantly obeys the huntsman's slightest word of command.

The appropriateness of having hounds in the parade is appreciated better when one realizes that most horses in the Show are destined for hunting. Hounds, there-

Hounds Parade at the Horse Show

fore, are important personages, and deserve a place of honour.

Incidentally, the parade gives people uninterested in hunting some idea of the object behind one of Ireland's great industries, the products of which can retain their prestige against world competition.

“ Bravo ! Ladies ”

CRITICS of women's claim for equality with men might benefit by a visit to Dublin Horse Show. Here they may see something that may change their views about the competence of our modern women.

The ordinary course at Ballsbridge comprises six fences, hedge-and-ditch, single bank, a five-feet-high stone wall, a towering double-bank, a gate, and lastly, a wide water-jump. To begin with, these supply a sufficient test of efficiency, so we will overlook the special competitions, which include level-crossing railway gates, perpendicular railway-sleeper fence, double rustic gates and a variety of other difficult fences. The ordinary course is surely a sufficiently gruelling test for competence, and one will see numerous ladies tackling it courageously, starting on level terms with men, in open competition against men, asking no privileges from men and invariably snatching the coveted rosette from men ! Aye ! sometimes from cracksmen !

The critic will invariably grumble, “ I hate mannish women who strut around in riding breeches and talk ‘ horse ’ all day.”

This type of biased argument is primarily due to the riding breeches. These, nevertheless are indispensable, and whether they are worn with a side-saddle habit or

Bravo Ladies!

“ Bravo ! Ladies ”

with a short astride coat is a matter for the wearer. All of them do not talk “horse” all day. There are women who could ride behind the fastest pack of hounds in Ireland and jocularly chide their grown-up sons or daughters for missing the run. There are women and young girls riding over the Champion Stone Wall who could make a French chef wonder if he had really learnt cooking ! Most of them can capably manage a household, and not a few of them are excellent business-women. All of them do not earn that much misconstrued and frequently ill-applied term “the idle rich.” When it is remembered that very few riding horses return home from Ballsbridge it will prove that most of these ladies are competent not only to ride and show their own horses, but to sell them. If there are a few who talk “horse” all day, well !—have you ever met a friend who plays golf ?

Then the critic, still determined to keep his heel on women generally, attacks what he considers to be the most vulnerable point : “They’d be better-looking if they followed their own pursuits and did not adopt those of men, especially riding.”

This type of remark is usually made in a confidential whisper. People don’t yell such opinions from the housetops. Nevertheless, one cannot allow this to go unchallenged and, perhaps, be taken for granted. Riding is one of the healthiest exercises, but the critic argues that the wind and the rain makes weather-beaten faces. Probably some of the women he has in mind carry their years better than those who have never experienced a shower of rain.

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

There are roughly twenty years in a woman's life during which her good looks are taken seriously; before that span is reached she is too young to take much notice of herself and after that span few outsiders will. If some of those years are spent in the open air, with modern cosmetics as protection against the ravages of the elements, she, certainly, will be all the more healthy for her outings. Chemists may be able to sell a certain amount of beauty, but they cannot sell good health. And, of course, if you stroll into the enclosure in Ballsbridge and are suddenly confronted with an apparition in immaculately-cut breeches, with a ravishingly-beautiful face, to which the chemist has added the delicate toning of his art, well, people will forgive your blushing, stammering, tongue-tied helplessness. I do not, by any means, claim that all women who ride horses are good-looking, but I do claim that horse-riding in moderation is one of life's healthiest occupations.

As a last resource the critic has recourse to that well-worn, venerable platitude: "A woman's place is in her home."

Quite so, but surely no man who would call himself such expects a woman to live twenty-four hours of every day in her home! Some relaxation is necessary. Outdoor amusement preferably. If horse-riding is the outlet adopted, so much the better, and if the horse is destined for Dublin Show it is another feather in the owner's cap. To be able to manage her house efficiently and at the same time prepare her horse or horses for Dublin Show, is no weak argument in favour of woman's

“ Bravo ! Ladies ”

competence. I wonder for what length of time would the carping critic run his own household ! He would probably be unable to balance the family budget for one week ! to say nothing of the tact necessary when dealing with servants and tradesmen. Before the end of a fortnight he would probably be crawling on his hands and knees to the nearest hotel for a decent meal.

If the parliaments of the world were run half so well as the average household, life might be different for many. If the voice of woman, of the mother, was heard a little more often in the government of nations, it might bring some stability to a crazy world. Men have had the handling of world affairs entirely to themselves and have succeeded in making a pretty bungle of their work, and personally, I would rather listen to a cosmetic-plastered face talking bread-and-butter common sense than to a clean-shaven, bemedalled-chested, bungling war-lord talking patriotic piffle.

As a further argument in favour of women's competence, it may be no harm to mention that ladies act as judges in several of the classes for hunters at Dublin Show.

Some of them are shrewd judges of horses, and most of them are shrewd judges of things that are far more important !

The Ballymacad Hounds at the Show

ONE parade of the Inter-Hunt teams at Dublin Horse Show possessed a distinctly individual flavour. It was headed by the hounds of the Ballymacad Hunt, and the traditional scarlet coats that we are so accustomed to associate with hunting gave pride of place, for the first time in the history of the Show, to coats of dark green.

Green is the age-old uniform of this hunt whose territory comprises the western extremity of County Meath, eastern borders of Cavan and portion of Westmeath. Variety is the key-note on the menu of this very sporting, two-days-a-week pack, and these hounds can serve up a delicious *hors-d'oeuvre* to whet the appetite of any diner who has his heart in the right place.

There is a dash of Galway in the grey walls around Crossdrum and Bolie's Cross, a tang of Tipperary in the banks around Drumlerry and the valley under Crossakiel, and might not the towering, heather-clad hills of historic Fore be the Kerry Hills of the Shropshire-Montgomeryshire border or the more rugged majesty of the English Fell country? And where in the whole wide world will one hear better hound-music than when the pack are driving their fox through the

The Ballymacad Hounds at the Show

big woodlands of Loughcrew? Often it takes terrific hound-work to convince Reynard that he would be safer elsewhere, and it is during the process that the beauty of Ogilvie's verse strikes so convincingly, as,

*" . . . the joy of the far-flung challenge sounds
Till it shivers against the blue."*

Then, of course, we have the nearest thing to an Irish jungle in a place called The Murrins; acres of tall, wild hazel, where the services of some local who is familiar with the intricate labyrinths is almost essential, and where a rider might be forgiven, if day-dreaming, he suddenly awoke, expecting a wild pig to charge past instead of a fox.

Ah! but there's plenty of grass country! Equal to the cream of famous Leicestershire! No double-oxer, cut-and-laid, post-and-rail fences, admittedly, but plenty of banks, single and double, bank-hedge-and-ditch, stone walls and bushed-up gaps, with occasionally a rusty bed or nasty ladder added to liven events and quicken the sales of iodine and sticking-plaster; and here and there a yawning drain equal to the biggest nightmare of open water in the Holderness or Devon and Somerset countries. The only recipe for negotiating this type of greedy monstrosity is the much-quoted but very sensible advice given by Adam Lindsay Gordon:

*" You must have it at speed or not at all,
'Twere better to halt than to ponder."*

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Visitors to Dublin Show, after witnessing numerous competitors soaring over the stone wall, may imagine that all Irish walls are negotiated with similar ease and gracefulness. There are walls in the Ballymacad country wide enough on top to accommodate a fair-sized motor car. These obstacles must be treated with veneration and respect. No gallivanting, devil-may-care methods of approach; quite the opposite; steady, collected pace, well-timed take-off, accurate footwork on top, and when the rider lands on the other side he feels, as Finn MacCool must have felt when he flung Rathlin Island from his hands.

So when the Ballymacads jogged into the Jumping Enclosure at Ballsbridge what pleasant memories they brought to countless hearts, young and old; not only of days with the Ballymacads, but happy thoughts of days in other parts of the earth where the cry of hounds is still "the sweetest music in all the world."

The Glamour of the Bloodstock Sales

"LOT 321. A thoroughbred yearling colt. Dam a winner on the flat and over hurdles. Sired by a famous winner of the big Classics. Now ladies and gentlemen, what shall I say for this handsome colt? 300 guineas? Anyone to start the bidding at three hundred? One-fifty! Thank you, sir. 150 guineas I'm bid. Sold with a clean veterinary certificate. One-sixty seventy . . . two hundred. His full brother has already made a name for himself. Two hundred and ten guineas . . . twenty . . . thirty. Thank you, Madam. Two-forty . . . fifty. And selling at two-fifty if I can't beat it. Oh! Sixty; two hundred and sixty guineas I'm bid. Are you all done? I'm selling at two-sixty. For the last time, two hundred and sixty guineas . . ."

Rap! The auctioneer's mallet falls. Lot 321 is led away and Lot 322 enters the ring.

And so it goes on for the entire duration of the Dublin Horse Show. Bloodstock hold the stage on the first days of the Ballsbridge equine festival. The last two days are devoted exclusively to hunters.

The present magnificent Bloodstock Sales Paddock is a living monument to the courage and initiative of the Horse Show authorities. Few of the multitude of continental buyers, equine experts, or casual visitors who

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enter the premises may realise that it has risen, in the strict meaning of the term, from the very ashes of a past history. During and after the first Great War it was used as a quarantine and a Blue Cross Depot for the sick animals of the military authorities. When the Society took it over it was in an appalling condition, and some time afterwards the authorities ordered that all the buildings, stabling, etc., that had been used for hospital purposes must be burnt. Even the railings and boundary fencings! To complete the wilderness, the scattered coke-breeze that would have saved expenditure on hundreds of tons of gravel, had to be dug up and carted away. It was on this ten acres of desolation that the Society laid the foundations of their present Sale yard.

In these premises, as we see them to-day, Ireland possesses a Bloodstock Sales Paddock which compares favourably with the most classical and fashionable equine sale yards in the world. Indeed, if comparisons be introduced, Ballsbridge leads in several instances. In few other sale yards is the purchaser provided with such a wealth of data concerning his intended purchase. Not only is the horse's pedigree and performance set down in detail in the catalogue, but the auctioneer actually reads aloud, when the horse comes under his hammer, the opinion offered in the veterinary certificate which accompanies that horse. Although it is clearly understood by purchasers that a veterinary certificate is in no way intended to be a guarantee of soundness, nevertheless a veterinary surgeon has his reputation to uphold, and the opinion of a qualified practitioner gives

The Glamour of the Bloodstock Sales

the bidder more confidence. In sale yards in other countries one sees added to the entries, as a mere after-thought almost, "V.S. certificate will be lodged in the office." If there be a big entry, with a resultant big crowd, and if one is interested in a number of horses, the difficulty of acquiring information in the chaotic conditions which can prevail in an auctioneer's overcrowded office, make one hand the palm, unreservedly, to Ballsbridge.

What must strike the visitor on entering the Bloodstock Sales Paddock for the first time is its spaciousness. Here there is no cramped-up tan-ride, no tennis-court-sized gallop, no lily-pond dimensioned cinder-track! There are long swards of grass and long, firm pathways where one can see horses jogged fairly. At the lower end there is a spacious trial-ground for riding, and if the purchaser wishes a trial over fences there is even more spacious ground available in the Veterinary Paddock in the Show Grounds proper.

When the Sales are in full swing the paddock presents a sight that will thrill the heart of a horse-lover. Hundreds of heads looking out of loose-boxes. Horses everywhere: out for exercise or inspection; circling the railed-in rings prior to or after their being dealt with by the auctioneer. Grooms busy as bees; hurrying with bran-mashes, water-buckets, bales of fodder; tack-cleaning, or hissing merrily as they add new lustre to an already shining coat. Men in tweeds or more sombre attire, and ladies adding a dash of colour to the busy scene.

Ballsbridge bargains have become almost an institu-

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tion : Shaun Goilin, Tipperary Tim, Brown Jack, Lovely Rosa, and a host of history-making personalities walked around these same rings, as unknown animals, while they awaited the auctioneer.

The sales go on. The voice calls again, "Without reserve ! Are you all done, Ladies and Gentlemen ? For the last time . . ."

Rap ! Another horse sold !

Perhaps a Grand National winner ?

Who knows ?

Training the Whipper-in's Horse

THESE long summer mornings give one an excellent opportunity for crop-swinging. This may sound like the most modern addition to physical jerks or a new exercise in Indian club drill, but it is nothing of the sort. A horse destined to carry a huntsman must be taught to ignore utterly the movements of his rider's whip, and it is towards the achievement of that end that crop-swinging exercises are practised.

Though the stock of a hunting-crop is sometimes used to make a refusing horse change his mind at a fence, the primary use of the whip is in connection with hounds. A Whipper-in may be sent ahead to crack his whip as warning to a sleeping fox, so that hounds will not pounce upon him unawares and chop him in covert. When hounds have found their fox this man's task is to see that they leave covert promptly to the summons of the huntsman's horn: a vicious whip-crack hastens the exit of slackers. When jogging on the roads a light flick of his whip gets hounds over to his side of the highway while traffic passes. On all these, and countless other occasions, when he is called upon to swing or crack his hunting-whip his horse must behave as unconcernedly as though he were eating his corn.

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It takes a surprisingly long time for a horse's nerves to become steeled against the movements and noise of a whip, and it is not advisable to leave off his education in such matters until the opening meet. If one is riding a nervous, highly-strung four-year-old and is foolhardy enough to commence operations on that day, one stands a sporting chance of spending the opening meet in hospital.

The primary object to remember with a nervous young horse who is destined to carry a huntsman is that he must never be given reason to connect the whip with pain. As soon as he realises that it is not meant to hurt him he will cease to be terrified by its movements. Riding along a quiet road the thong of the whip may be let swing gently to and fro out on the off side. His eye will be riveted on it perpetually, but with kind voice and gentle handling he will eventually allow its swinging to continue. Later on it can be dangled carelessly on the near side. Back at the yard of his home, where he is in familiar surroundings, with little chance of anything untoward startling him, he must be made to ignore the actual feel of the thong.

It may seem strange how any horse could be expected to stand still while the lash or thong of a heavy hunting whip strikes him. One can crack a hunting whip in several ways, but when it is swung correctly the crack or report of the whiplash will take place in mid-air, well above, beyond, and clear of the horse's head. What the thong strikes, after the actual whip-crack takes place, is of small account, as the viciousness has died in the lash. Prior to the whip-crack, a lash stroke can

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sting with all the venom imparted by its wielder, but after the report, its energy is completely spent and it will recoil harmlessly upon anything with which it may subsequently come in contact. This latter is the portion of the whip-stroke which is most likely to touch the horse and whose actual feel he must be taught to ignore.

His own stable-yard is the ideal place to begin his education. One should be dismounted to let him see the better what one is doing. The whip may be drawn slowly over his back, over his neck, over his head. Later the lash may be flicked gently against his ribs, his shoulders, his quarters. After a week or so he may even allow one to throw the lash lightly around his hind legs without trying to kill everyone about the yard. After some time one can jog along the roads swinging the whip, carelessly letting its thong fall harmlessly where it will, on his neck, his ears, under his belly, round his legs, anywhere, in fact: he is beginning to realise it does not hurt him!

Now that he ignores the swing of the whip and the feel of it, he must be taught to scorn the sound of it. When he is looking out over the half-door of his loose-box, one can begin a mild barrage of whip-cracks just to introduce the subject: but the first time he hears a resounding report he will cower in terror in the corner of his loose-box. Eventually he will munch his corn or gaze across the half-door with such an utterly bored look that nothing short of an air-raid would make him move an eyelid.

Such manners will endear him to the man who rides him next season.

There is an Art in knowing Hounds

PEOPLE have often said to me : " How do you know one hound from the other ; or how do you remember their names ? " In my particular instance both questions are easily answered. Being the possessor of only a small handful of foxhounds, the task of knowing each hound and remembering each name demands no great mental effort. With a big pack, however, it is quite a different matter.

When from twenty to fifty couples, and in some instances as many as eighty couples, are housed in the same establishment, it is truly remarkable how the kennel staff can know every individual hound. Nowadays, when the most popular type of hound is that seen at Peterborough Foxhound Show, differentiation is rather more difficult, as there is an almost universal similarity in their colour markings. If one looks at photographs in the newspapers of hounds clustered at an opening meet, one cannot fail to notice this. The ordinary observer, if asked to describe the colourings of the majority, would be fairly accurate if he compared them to white horses with rugs on. If he enlarged slightly on this theme, adding dark tail bandages and blinker-hoods to his steeds, he would convey a passably good generalization.

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To the ordinary observer all hounds appear as the products of the same mould and coloured with the same brand : but to the experienced eye of the huntsman every little fleck of white, shade of tan, daub of black; the cock of a head, the set of an ear, the carriage of a tail and individual deportment are as a wide open book displaying plainly the difference between every one of his charges. Were a competent judge, when visiting kennels, to voice the casual observer's opinion that hounds were apparently born in the same mould, he could confer no greater compliment on the huntsman : for in addition to having a trustworthy, competent pack of fox-catchers, most huntsmen strive to have their hounds level.

With a pack of foxhounds of the Scarteen Black-and-Tan type, the difficulty of knowing each inhabitant of the kennels is increased enormously. The huntsman, having only two colours from which to choose, needs to retain something akin to a mental photograph of each of his charges. Visiting the kennels of the Naas Harriers on the Curragh recently, I noticed that Scarteen Black-and-Tan blood has been introduced very extensively, and in a very short time, white will be non-existent.

With lighter coloured hounds the task of identification is easier. In the Fell districts of England, where hounds are hunted on foot owing to the rugged nature of the country, white is the predominating colour. In rough, mountainous districts where a pack are liable to run their fox a dizzy distance above, below, or in front of their followers, dark-coloured hounds would be altogether unsuitable against a background of grey haziness. Dark

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objects may be well within one's range of vision and moving objects are more easily seen than stationary ones, yet a dark-coloured hound can slip across a cleft in a mountainside quite unnoticed, even though one's sight is exceptionally keen. There is nothing to attract the eye.

With a light-coloured hound it is different; his slightest movement immediately focuses one's attention, and his white markings fling him in clear relief against even the haziest background. One might argue that the cry, plus the movement of dark-coloured hounds, should make the observer instantly locate them. Hound music is a very helpful, but not an infallible, guide to the whereabouts of the pack, especially on the mountains.

There are days when the mountain storms, wind direction and echo, all combine to nullify even the most expert huntsman's calculations. Hounds used to hunting in the hilly Fell country are lighter in frame and bone than the modern Peterborough foxhound. Their colours are mostly white, with lemon, black, tan, or badger-pied markings, and although some Fell packs are trencher-fed, those housed in kennel give their huntsman little trouble in distinguishing each hound; owing to the variety of the colourings.

The same remarks might be applied to Welsh hounds, except that they are invariably rough-coated. They are built rather like Fell hounds; hare-like feet, flexible pasterns and light bone; differing altogether from the massive, straight foreleg of the Peterborough hound. Like their Fell prototype they have splendid tongue and are reputed for their ability to hunt even the coldest

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scent. When comparisons are being made, the Welsh hound—only from my personal observation, of course—seems to have more white than the Fell hound, or it might be more accurate to describe him as having less distinguishing marks; and that introduces the subject of whole white hounds.

Such hounds constitute nearly half the strength of the North Cotswold Hunt. When visiting these kennels one marvels at the ease with which the huntsman distinguishes each and every one of his charges: and it is a moment that can thrill the heart of a hound-lover to hear that same huntsman cheer encouragement to a lily-white favourite as she leads the pack out of covert to flash across a Cotswold wall. The light-coloured hounds in this Hunt are bred from Lady Curre's famous pack.

These latter are the result of years of expert management and careful breeding, and Lady Curre is now the possessor of an entire pack of snow-white foxhounds. With coloured packs, identification difficulties may be legion, but one must admire the kennel-men who can identify every member in a lily-white pack!

The sceptic may argue that this is all part of these men's work; they are with hounds every day, have every hound's name on their finger-tips, and knowing one hound from another is therefore a simple matter. To test the simplicity of this task the sceptic should visit some kennels, not necessarily Lady Curre's or the Scarteen Black-and-Tans, ask to have, say, six hounds trotted out on the flags, hear their names, allow them return to the body of the pack, converse with the kennel-

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man while a cigarette is being smoked, re-enter kennels and then try to discover his chosen six. It takes roughly, ten minutes to smoke a cigarette, and during that time the six hounds have mingled with the pack. Even if his conversation with the kennel-man has not risen to anything more classical than a weather discussion, it has prevented his repeating six hound names to a tonic-solfa lilt. His mind is then ready for the memory test.

When he re-enters kennels if he can recognise and name two hounds he is to be congratulated. If he can identify three or four he deserves an illuminated address, and if he unhesitatingly recognises all six hounds he has wasted his vocation !

He should have been a huntsman !

A Ride on a Rearer

IF you have never met the devil himself and feel that you might enjoy the experience, the easiest way to make his acquaintance is to buy a rearing horse.

The usual method of approach is to decide that you require a sound, mannerly hunter to carry you with hounds next winter. There are possibly a number of promising young horses in your locality, and after visiting one or two of them it becomes public knowledge that your needs must be provided for instantly, and all your horse-loving friends inundate you with offers of the very horse you require.

You know exactly the type of hunter you need; you have a mental picture of him in your brain, and still determined to satisfy your fastidiousness, you decide to go to a famous horse-fair. Here you will have hundreds from which to pick and choose. There will be opposition and you may have to pay more, but you don't mind. You bring a hunting friend along, for his company, not for his opinion; you need none other than your own.

The streets of the big town are chock-full of horses. The majority of the well-bred type are unbroken and would be unsuitable as the hunting season is so near. You ride a few fairly-passable sorts and are nearly at

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your wits' end, when you hear tidings of a marvellous horse belonging to a young fellow who met with an accident and who lives only five miles from the town. By the description given, this is the horse of your dreams. You decide to see him and take the bearer of the tidings along in the car as guide. This little wizened-up blocker earns his living bargain-making in horse-fairs, and is all anxiety about the impending deal, and even if only five per cent. of his stories are truthful, the object of his praise must still be a wonder-horse.

Reaching the farmhouse, you get through the usual preliminaries as hastily as possible, and then see the horse. Yes, he looks the part! And the price is fairly reasonable. Six years old; did some hunting; should suit if he is sound. Better examine him thoroughly first; need not handle his limbs, he is flawless. He jogs magnificently! a perfect mover. Better test his sight before riding him, just in case . . . a darkened stable and a candle settles the matter. Put the saddle on. What a front and rein-length!

"You can jump those three leaps to the oatsfield," said the limping young owner, "but there's wire in the others." He shoots away from your heel-touch, eager for the first fence, a low bank; over like a swallow! Next is a high, narrow bank, going rather fast, but he changes feet like a cat and races on gloriously for a stone wall. Oh, marvellous! Dublin Horse Show would be only child's-play to him. This is your horse at last. You may haggle about the price, but you must buy him. The fact that he turns for the home journey quicker than you expected is swamped by your arguing

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A Ride on a Rearer

that he knows these fences. Similarly, had your infatuation not impaired your judgment, you might have discovered how the young owner had his leg shattered !

Back at the farmhouse you try to give the impression you are not very keen, and for that reason dissuade your friend from giving him another gallop. You become almost angry at your friend's whispered innuendo that " It's a wonder such a good-looking horse would be left to see six years old without someone buying him, unless . . . ! " You make the deal, test his wind in the stall, give him a more minute vetting, pay, and send the wizened blocker, leading him on a halter, to the nearest railway station. You feel intensely happy.

Two mornings later you tell a groom, who is going out riding exercise, that he cannot ride a donkey. You order him off your purchase with impolite language and mount yourself. You want the animal to go the road to the right; he intends going to the left, and before the argument develops, he scorns the compass and goes straight up to heaven, and I'm afraid your heart goes down to the lowest depths of another place.

You have paid good money for the worst type of rogue that could be " lapped in a hide." You may punish him for rearing skywards; you may break bottles of water over his head in your efforts to prevent him from toppling backwards and killing you; you may try fancy bits in his mouth, but it is all hopeless. Tying his head down may prevent his rearing, but he is useless for hunting, as the moment he finds his head free he begins his old tricks. Rearing horses look very effective on the Films, but these animals are trained and can

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balance themselves perfectly. There is no comparison between these and their demoniacal prototype who rears in sheer bad temper and scorns the principles of balance.

There was no warranty given or asked for. You were rather headstrong and conceited yourself. You fell in love with this horse and, of course, that condition affects one's mental and optical vision. You have met the devil in horseflesh, and experience teaches; although it is a pity that the fees per lesson are so high.

Getting the Horses Ready

THE hay is safe in the haggard. The fields of luscious green after-grass still retain circles of greyness where the haycocks scalded the meadows. Most of the oats is in the hand-stacks in the stubbles, though some of the late-cut fields have their crop still in little stooks. Blackberries are growing over-ripe. White fluffy seed-pods have replaced the golden flowers on the baugher-lawns. Above a field where potatoes have been dug a titlark hovers delicately, his reedy note lamenting the altering weather conditions. Bullocks, fat and glossy, waddle lumberingly through the pastures, grazing contentedly in the pale sunlight. No longer need they charge madly, with tongues extended, mouths slavering, sides heaving and tails upright, to seek shelter from the broiling sun and the annoying flies. On the brow of the hill the horses are grouped. Some stand, dozing contentedly; two are indulging in mutual neck-scratching, and one old veteran appears so satisfied with the world that he seems loth even to switch his tail lest he might disturb the peacefulness of his surroundings.

Bridle-bits clink. The horses are instantly on the alert. Sensitive ears cock forward. Soon their eyes confirm what their ears suspected. With nostrils flaired, they stand a moment: tense, as though they were

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making a decision, and suddenly, with freedom-loving snorts, they wheel and dash away. The wind plays frolics in their flowing manes, shoeless heels are kicked heavenwards, and tails swish an equine farewell as they streak away towards the gap on the hilltop.

The chance of such behaviour has been foreseen. A man appears in the gap and bars their progress. Swerving away left-handed in a movement that would be the envy of a cavalry squadron, they charge for a gateway lower down. The gate is normally wide open, but to-day it is not only closed but a man stands beside it. Gradually, the not very elaborate, but assuredly effective, cordon of four men closes-in, and the galloping animals soon find themselves hemmed-in in a corner between the gap and the gate. Kind words soon calm their fears and they no longer endeavour to put into practice any ideas of bolting. Three are bridled and led away; and until we get out of earshot, neighs of protest from the captured three keep replying to the neighs of farewell from their still free companions.

Down in the yard the stables are whitewashed and cheerful-looking, ready to receive their occupants. The fresh-smelling straw is bedded-down, as though inviting the new arrivals to make themselves comfortable. Clean-scented, well-saved hay in each manger-rack adds the final touch of cosiness to the loose-boxes.

The mud and the dandruff that has accumulated since April are disturbed by the application of brush and curry. Grooms hiss merrily as they try to prevent the clouds of dust-particles from entering their nostrils and throats. Manes and tails that have grown unkempt

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during the long summer demand attention. Some horses look the better by having their manes removed. The big chestnut is in that category. His mane was hogged last season and it has now grown into upright bristles and requires trimming with the clipping machine. The little bay mare and the big grey horse need to have theirs combed out carefully and the ends plucked to make them lie evenly: the retention of their manes being a distinct improvement to the general appearance of both animals. They can be combed flat or plaited tidily later on in the season.

Tails now need trimming, and this is not a task for the amateur. It is an art in itself, and five minutes' carelessness can ruin the appearance of a tail, giving it a butchered-looking effect. The application of machines or clippers of any description to a horse's tail is almost criminal. This is a task for deft fingers, and as horse-hairs are slippery, one's fingers should be dusted with resin to ensure gripping them and bringing more satisfactory results. Unless this operation is performed correctly, horse-hairs can peel the skin from between one's fingers, sometimes almost cutting to the bone.

When one horse is ready a tail bandage is put on to coax the remaining hairs into their proper position, the yard gate is opened and he is led away to the forge. He would depart more quietly, and would probably behave more mannerly in the forge had a companion accompanied him: but before the hunting season is ended he will have to go many places alone and ignore the lure of company, so he had better sample his first lesson in equine deportment.

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In the forge, kind words and gentle hands soon make him overcome his terror of the ringing hammer-strokes and the spraying sparks. Old slippers that had saved the front hooves from damage when galloping at grass, are removed; the feet dressed and the new shoes fitted. Hind legs are not so manageable, and resent the blacksmith's attention. Hind hooves have been allowed to go bare-footed, as a precaution against the risk of horses kicking at play when on the grass. Eventually, all hooves are dressed, shoes fitted and finally driven on. The blacksmith applies hoof-oil with a flourish, gives a last critical look at his workmanship, intimates his approval, and the horse is led away.

The cobble-stones of the stable-yard, that has been so empty and lonely-looking all summer, soon re-echo the merry rattle of his well-shod hooves. The very sound can transport one to a woodside in the greyness of the dawn: a flash of scarlet by a dim hedgerow; a doubtful whimper from a puppy, instant confirmation from an old hound; sharp, glorious notes on a horn, and the care-banishing, soul-stirring crash of tongues heralding the birth of a new Hunting Season.

Cubbing Again !

A POSTCARD arrives bearing the words : " Tuesday, 6th instant, The Beech Wood, 7 a.m." The signature initials are familiar. Income-tax assessments, bills and the pile of equally dull correspondence are instantly forgotten, and one gazes lovingly at that little card. Its rather cryptic message would probably perplex the postman, who might be forgiven for entertaining some curiosity about such an early-morning rendezvous. The brevity of its message does not puzzle its recipient. The Beech Wood is an old familiar trysting-place for the local hounds; the initials are those of their Master; and the approaching date and the early hour convey, as clearly as floodlit letterings, the magic words Cub-Hunting.

Cub-hunting appointments are not blazoned forth from every hilltop. They are very much in the nature of private affairs and, strictly speaking, concern only the Master, his Hunt staff and his hounds. In some hunting districts where there is the risk of a big field of followers turning out, and by their presence hindering the training of young hounds and unduly interfering with foxes, the Master is perforce compelled to preserve the greatest secrecy about his cubbing appointments. He may even be compelled by force of such circumstances to pass a

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polite but stern edict prohibiting the attendance of mounted followers at his early-morning meets.

Cub-hunting appeals to different people in different ways. Some enthusiasts, glad that the long inaction of summer is over, are delighted to renew their acquaintanceship with the pack, and are keenly anxious to see good hound-work. Others are desirous of introducing their young horses to hounds, and perhaps a few fences. An early-morning ride appeals to others, from purely a health viewpoint, perhaps. Indeed, the reasons that could be set forth in explanation of individual attendance are numerous; but no matter what these may be, there seems little doubt that a big crowd does more harm than good.

A few people who know how to act intelligently at a big woodside can undoubtedly be of very real assistance to the huntsman. With a small gathering he can convey his wishes very clearly and can do so quite casually, almost as part of a normal conversation. With a big crowd he is forced to give orders, which he probably dislikes doing, instructing them what to do and when to do it; and as big crowds are usually talkative, half his lecture is wasted before they even realise he is speaking.

The whole principle of cub-hunting may be nullified by the thoughtless chatter of those present. The huntsman wants to train his young hounds. They have never seen or smelt a fox before. The wood may hold several foxes; an old dog or vixen and a litter of cubs. Cubs are less wary than their parents, and young

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un-entered hounds stand a better chance of getting on terms with them.

The entry of hounds into covert may put several foxes afoot. If a vixen or an old dog-fox breaks covert they are allowed to slip away quietly while hounds are induced to concentrate on the cubs. To focus the attention of hounds to one particular line is very difficult, sometimes well-nigh impossible. But it is the huntsman's task, and he has quite enough to worry him without having his efforts frustrated by interference from thoughtless outsiders.

He may have spent the best part of his morning endeavouring to hold his pack to the line of one particular cub. Other foxes, old and young, may have complicated matters, but he has used all the artifices known to a good huntsman, and doggedly followed every twist and turn of a now-tiring cub. The complicated line is beginning to straighten out. The cub is realising the futility of using dodging tactics. He is running straight at last.

The volume of hound-music increases; no longer does it come in intermittent bursts as when hounds were compelled to unravel the line yard by yard. They are driving their quarry before them. Their hackles are up; puppies are behaving like veterans, racing jealously with the old hounds, the cry is reaching a crashing crescendo. The cub is going to break! . . . and the huntsman knows that no tiring cub could last for five minutes across country with hounds going so well.

By the tone of his voice, as he encourages his hounds, one can gather how delighted he is with his morning's

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work. He is already visualising a triumph in the open, when suddenly, his hopes are dashed to smithereens ! Some thoughtless rider at the covert-side, who may be feeling somewhat bored by the seemingly pointless wood hunt, sees a fox and excitedly yells "Tally-ho !" (The fact that it was an ancient and wise-looking dog-fox who had the cunning to lie low until hounds came too dangerously near, does not seem to matter an iota !) He continues to yell himself hoarse. Old Reynard seems doubtful as to whether the tonguing hounds or the howling human seem the more dangerous ; he decides that the latter is, and slinks back into the wood and almost into the teeth of the oncoming pack !

A few masterly wriggles save him from being torn to pieces. He has been in tight corners before ; and even with hounds snapping at his brush, his self-confidence does not forsake him. He knows he is fresh and, with any luck, could yet lead them a ten-mile-point. He whisks along the bank-top until well past the howling human, dives through the hedge, flits across the drain and streaks away to the open country. As his lissom body stretches out into a racing, rhythmical and seemingly effortless stride, one feels convinced that a ten-mile-point would not worry unduly this venerable gentleman.

The huntsman has two alternatives. He can allow hounds to hunt their fresh fox ; or stop them and endeavour to recapture the line of their original cub. To adopt the former course is sheer mirage-chasing. Horses and hounds, especially the puppies, are not yet fit enough for a strenuous cross-country run : scent will soon be

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non-existent on grass land owing to the strengthening sun; there is a further risk that an old fox may lead hounds to some far-off district where the oats and wheat are not yet cut, and the only results of the morning's work would be damage claims and general unpleasantness; and altogether, the chance of hounds catching that fox is too slim to warrant continued effort.

His other alternative, that of stopping hounds, is not a lovable business. Stopping old hounds may not interfere with their future behaviour, but whipping-off untrained, un-entered puppies is quite a different matter. They are not pursuing vermin or running riot. They are hunting that which they are supposed to hunt, and preventing their doing so not only puzzles them, but will do them no good. They cannot be blamed for changing foxes when the specimen they are pursuing at the moment was literally driven into their teeth. They have behaved excellently in covert; are obviously convinced that they are still chasing the same cub, and now when they are running like demons, it seems an injustice to whip them off.

No matter what course the huntsman decides upon, his morning's work will not be as good as it could have been. To go on seems futile; and by the time hounds are stopped and jogged back to covert, scenting conditions may have altered completely. Whichever decision he makes, one thing is highly probable, his temper will not be improved and, should he meet the culprit who yodelled "Tally-ho !" the conversation would not be about the weather.

Had the culprit been less hasty he would not have

Echoes of the Hunting Horn

incurred the wrath of the authorities. Waiting a moment to see whether the breaking fox was the hunted quarry or not, would have averted the disaster. If he would not be capable of recognising either, he should have stayed near some follower or member of the hunt staff who would, and not wandered around the covert-side alone. Had he let the old fox slip quietly away, he would soon have got proof from the oncoming hounds as to whether this was their pilot or not. Even without assistance from some expert he still could have saved the situation had he controlled his excitement.

All of which makes one feel that there are a wealth of educational values attached to cub-hunting. It teaches cubs to run straight if they want to live to see a ripe old age; for dodgery in life invariably pays as poor a dividend to foxes as it does to human beings. It teaches young fox-hounds their work. It gives horses a foretaste of the task before them in the approaching season. Finally, it gives the human tyro many lessons in foxhunting deportment: lessons that seem never to have been absorbed by some riders nowadays, if one takes as a criterion the standard of etiquette encountered at some hunts.

Foxhunting is not a furious egotistical steeplechase across country for one's sole enjoyment. One must have some consideration for others: for the hunt staff, the other riders, the foot followers, the farmers, the farm-workers; yes, and for the hounds and the principal character—the fox. Yes, most certainly, the fox.

Foxhunting is not a sadistic orgy in which the death of the fox is the chief consideration. If that were so

Cubbing Again !

a shot-gun, gin-traps or poison would achieve the result and exterminate the breed of Reynard in a very short time : in a much shorter time than hounds ever would; for actually, with the average packs, the ratio of kills to the number of runs leaves a big margin in Reynard's favour.

Foxhunting is almost one of the fine arts, and a good huntsman needs a rare dash of artistry for his task. He is pitting his wits against an opponent who, from time immemorial, has been recognised the world over as one of the cleverest and wiliest of animals. In this contest of wits lies the kernel of this manly sport that is as clean and as noble as our ageless hills.

Soon we will be entering on another foxhunting season. That little postcard reads :

"Tuesday, 6th instant, The Beech Wood, 7 a.m." Reading its simple message one can almost see the stately beeches slowly divesting themselves of their misty shrouds on a September morning: cheerful scarlet among the dew-drenched laurels; hound-dapples flashing through the tangled undergrowth; a brown shadow slipping away to his far-off hills. One can almost hear the clink of bit-bars, the crackle of twigs, the screech of a startled magpie and the opening note of a trusty hound.

But most of all I seem to hear the horn, the staccato twanging of the copper as it electrifies the countryside with a rousing "Gone Away!"

Truly, no fanfare of trumpets could herald more appropriately the arrival of a new hunting season.

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