

AFTER CUNNING REYNARD

MEET OF THE ESSEX COUNTY HUNT AT NORTHFIELD.

A THRILLING CHASE FOR FIFTEEN MILES WITH THE SUNSET AT ITS CLOSE—MR. HECKSHER GETS THE BRUSH.

The gay costumes of the Essex County huntsmen were yesterday surpassed in brilliancy only by the gorgeous raiment of the Orange Mountains. Where one coat of cloth flashed red in the October sunshine a million trees bore aloft a covering of the most wonderful colors. Old gold and green of every shade and the delicate gray tints of moss were woven and interwoven with brightest orange and flaming scarlet, royal purple, and the dull russet of the dying leaf. There were blending shades that have never known a name, and the whole formed a mantle so glorious that it seemed as though the rainbow had been robbed to furnish these Orange Mountains with their Autumnal hues. The air was keen and bracing, the sky was cloudless, and the earth was dry and firm. It was all in all a day that huntsmen pray for and hold themselves blessed in finding so perfect.

It was the second meet this Fall of the Essex County Hounds, and the place was by the old church, near Northfield, some half dozen miles from the Orange station and five or more from the picturesque clubhouse in Hutton Park. No railroad runs to Northfield, and it can be reached only by traveling over one of the roughest mountain ways in the State of New-Jersey.

Still, in spite of these difficulties, a large number of fashionable folk congregated at Northfield and awaited the arrival of the hounds. There were Mrs. O. D. Munn, the Misses Hecksher, Mrs. John Fair, Mrs. Stuart, Mrs. Robinson, and many more. They had braved the wretched roads in their love for the sport, and they made a pretty picture as their smart traps were grouped in the open by the old church. All was impatience until the hounds arrived, and then all was excitement as the huntsman loosed the yelping, quivering pack on the trail of a fox that had been given his freedom a quarter of an hour before. For a few moments the splendid dogs circled, and then one powerful fellow threw up his head, gave tongue to a bell-like note, and darted away with the others in deep-mouthed chorus at his heels.

The sound was music that stirred the hearts of the hunters and warmed the blood of the few farmers who had sufficiently overcome their antipathy to the sport to be present. In an instant there was a gleam of red across the background of varicolored foliage, and the members of the Essex County Hunt were dashing in pursuit of the swiftly-vanishing hounds. Nor were the occupants of the carriages less moved. They whipped up their teams and scampered away to places that promised to give a glimpse of the chase. Alas, for their hopes! the country was so rough that they had to remain in the roads, and Reynard rushed across the fields and through the woods in his search for safety. In a moment more hounds and huntsmen were out of sight, and the ladies bemoaned their misfortune as each chorused bay grew fainter and fainter until it was lost altogether in the passage of the Autumn breeze.

Meantime the fox was making desperate efforts for life and liberty. He had run away to the north for several miles, crossing plowed ground and cornstalk fields, and rushing along under the cover of hedges and skulking in the thick undergrowth. Then as the far-away cries of his pursuers reached him he doubled and broke off to the west, where the mountain seemed to promise a haven. But those hounds were not to be deceived. They never hesitated an instant, and rushed after him with a scent as unerring as fate. The chase grew hotter, and the hard-pressed fugitive made one last effort. Off to the south was a rocky gulch and he made for it, hot and panting with fright. But the Essex County hounds were too quick for him and, with red eyes, lolling tongues, and yelps of fury, they sweep down on the ill-starred creature and dismember him before the huntsman can beat them off.

But he had made a gallant fight. He had led the hunters a hot chase of fully 15 miles and over a country that had tried their pluck and tested the metal of their horses. Then came the awarding of honors. The brush went to Mr. Charles Hecksher and the mask to Mr. Freeman. The other participants in the sport were Mr. E. P. Thebaud, master of the hunt; Mr. Douglass Robinson, Mr. John Farr, Mr. Stuart of Short Hills, Mr. Pfizer, Mr. Charles Lee, Mr. John Dallas, Mr. F. M. Wheeler, and Mr. Charles Munn. No ladies took active part in the sport. There was a time when the gentler sex rode to hounds with the members of the Essex County Hunt, but that was in the early days when they made believe with the senseless aniseed, as Mr. Thebaud expressed it. Now the fox is too cunning, the going too rough, and the hounds too swift for any but the strongest and most experienced riders to indulge in the sport. Even yesterday Mr. Robinson caught a nasty cropper and one or two others managed to lame their horses severely. Mr. Thebaud, as master of the hunt, is very proud of his pack of hounds. They are all imported from England, are young, and each of them stands fully 24 inches high. They are, indeed, superb dogs, and so swift that it is only with the utmost perseverance that the horsemen can keep up with them. As the season progresses they will become still swifter, a fact that fills the hearts of the Essex Hunt members with a constantly increasing fear. They are individually and collectively very proud in the belief that they have the finest pack in America, but they are beginning to tremble lest they should prove too fine for the quality of the horses. The next meet of these hounds will be at Maplewood next Saturday, and then will follow semi-weekly meets at Upper Montclair, Summit, Roseland, Whippany, and Caldwell. All of these meets will start at 3:45 P. M., as did that of yesterday. The lateness of this hour is due to the fact that many of the members are in business and cannot get to the rendezvous sooner. It is regarded as a pity that the meets could not occur earlier in the day, for when the hounds were whipped in at the kennels yesterday the crests of the Orange Mountains were fading in the deepening twilight.