

## "HARK FOR'ARD!"

### What the Queen's Huntsman Told Me.

WHEN I ran down to the Royal Kennels the other day, I hoped to gather some of those real yet thrilling experiences which the readers of "CHUMS" never fail to welcome and appreciate. Indeed, the duties of a professional huntsman—one specially chosen for his skill and daring as a horseman, together with his intimate practical acquaintance with all the intricate mysteries pertaining to sport with horn and hound—cannot fail to interest all those who love a life of adventure, of hardihood, and of all manly qualities.

Arrived at the huntsman's snug and pretty house, beautifully situated upon Ascot Heath, I found Mr. Comins at home. His hounds, he informed me, having had their morning's gallop, were then out taking walking exercise on the Heath, in charge of the first and second whippers-in. Awaiting the return of his charges, we settled down to a chat.

"Now, Mr. Comins," I commenced, as we sat in his little study, where I found him engaged in literary work (he was busy preparing the annual list of the hounds for the Noble Master of the Buckhounds and the press); "I want you to give me a little sketch of your life and career."

He settled himself bolt upright in his chair—much as though he were going to submit to the ordeal of being photographed—and reeled off the following:—

"I was born in the kennel, so to speak. My father was huntsman to the Craven Harriers, in Yorkshire. As early as I can remember, I was a Turk to ride. When I was a little boy of seven or eight, I used to pull down the stone walls with which so many Yorkshire fields are enclosed, and let out ponies—anybody's pony, it was all the same to me—and jump up bare-backed. Three or four other urchins would jump up behind or before me. Then we would have a bit of a scrambling gallop. The other boys would soon tumble off in the middle of the hard road; eventually I would come off, generally picking myself up black and blue. But that was a small matter. I got my ride."

As soon as I had done laughing at this recital (I wish you could realise how simply and quaintly it was told), I said: "You began betimes; you are evidently a born horseman."

"Well, yes," he returned; "I was 'entered' early (as we should say in speaking of hounds). When I could not get hold of a pony, I was not particular so long as I obtained a four-legged mount. As a small boy I was very radical as regards donkeys; when I could get at one by hook or by crook, I was sure to have a ride. In those days, long before I was promoted to a legitimate mount, I used to catch and ride the knackers, or old, worn-out horses that were sent to my father's kennels to be killed as required for meat for the harriers."

He continued by stating that he got his foot on the first rung of the ladder at the early age of fourteen, when he went as second-horseman to Lord Rendlesham. A second-horseman, I may remind you, is a very light, skilful, and trustworthy groom, who quietly rides a second hunter for the use of a hunting gentleman, to be mounted, upon favourable opportunity, when the first horse is getting tired. Many whippers-in are "entered" in this way.

"Lord Rendlesham," said Comins, "kept a pack of harriers at his place in Suffolk. Despite my youthful exuberance and occasional larks (for which I was duly admonished by my master) I kept this,

my first place, for five years, when his lordship transferred me to Sir Richard Glyn, whose second-horseman I was in the famous Blackmore Vale. After that I went for a year to the Rufford, and then back again to Sir Richard Glyn, as second whip, under the noted huntsman, John Press. By this time I had got older and steadier, though I admit I was as wild as a hawk when with Lord Rendlesham. Here I remained for three years, going at the end of that time to the Heythrop, which, as you know, is a great stone wall country."

"You didn't pull the walls down, as you used to do in your pony and donkey-borrowing days?"

"No," said he, laughing; "I hadn't time to dismount, even had I so wished; so I rode over the walls in the usual way. However, to get on. After five years with Mr. Albert Brassey, I came to Ascot as first whip to her Majesty's Buckhounds, where I



MR. JOHN COMINS, THE QUEEN'S HUNTSMAN.  
(From a Photograph by Elliott & Fry, Baker Street, W.)

have stuck, being successively under Frank Goodall and J. Harvey, the royal huntsmen. I have now been with the Queen's fourteen years, having refused four or five good appointments as huntsman to packs of foxhounds; I thought it better to stick to stag-hunting and the royal pack."

"And you have got your well-deserved reward," I said.

Whilst the preceding remarks were issuing calmly from the lips of Mr. Comins, but in the loud, resolute tones of a voice by nature adapted for cheering hounds (you should hear his tuneful tones), I made a little mental photograph of the royal huntsman. I told you that he sat on his chair as though anticipating some such trial. He is small, of course; active, neat, and rides ten stone. As you will see by the accompanying illustration, he looks a horseman all over. His manner is frank and pleasant, suggestive of a resolute, self-possessed, cool, yet capable, wide-awake huntsman. That he is a thorough houndsman, I had subsequent opportunities of observing.

"Well, what about falls, Mr. Comins? I queried, after awhile; "a horseman of your daring and determination does not ride to hounds some thousands of times without a certain amount of 'grief'!"

"Grief! falls!" he responded. "Oh, yes, I can tell you of one bad fall in particular, when I had three ribs broken, and sustained concussion of the brain besides. I was riding Hickory; there he is, up there (pointing to a picture, of which the illustration here is a copy); an uncommon nice horse, but the best of horses make a mistake sometimes. We galloped into a bog at a slapping pace, and turned head over heels, horse and man considerably mixed up. This was near Loddon Bridge, a place well known to followers of the staghounds. The horse got up, and I was dragged for a considerable distance, when at last the stirrup-leather came away from the bar, but for which I should have been banged and battered to death. I only laid up for a month; had to sleep out two nights—couldn't be moved—was surgically treated at Loddon Bridge. This was on the Friday before Christmas. Four

weeks later I hunted the pack for Harvey. Oh, yes, I have frequently hunted the hounds, both for Harvey, and, before his time, for Goodall."

Next I asked him about the young sportsmen who turn out with her Majesty's hounds. He said that "the young chaps were forming well"; that, though himself too well in front to see very much of the great proportion of his field, he was aware that many boys went well with the Queen's, particularly the Eton boys, when they got leave—and sometimes when not. These Etonians rode in the most spirited and promising manner, and were calculated to keep up the national standard as regards horsemanship in the next generation. "His Lordship's son," he continued, "goes remarkably well" (he referred to the Hon. Mr. Lester, son of Lord Ribblesdale, the Master of the Buckhounds), "and so did Colonel Hornby's boys in their boyish days."

Further, I elicited these facts: that H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught occasionally came over from Aldershot, whilst the officers from that camp were regular followers of the hunt; that the fields often amounted to 500 or 600 horsemen and horsewomen; that in a good banking country it was "capital fun"; that the London division was not so black as it was sometimes painted; and that the field consisted of all ranks and classes—just as in fox-hunting—local residents, county people, officers, nobility, and the London division aforesaid.

After this we went outside and visited the kennels, where I saw the young entry (big puppies coming on), amounting to eleven and a half

couples in all. Some of these were bred on the premises; others came from such celebrated kennels (or were of the blood of) the Belvoir, the Goodwood, the Vale of the White Horse, and other famous packs.

Then a couple of the hunters Comins was riding at the time for forest hunting being looked at, the pack was seen returning from exercise—the two whips looking very smart in their long white coats; such a mass of white and brown and tan and various shades of pied colour! Such a forest of waving tails!

The Royal huntsman picked out some half-dozen couples for my inspection—not the worst, you may be sure—asking me how they would do for a certain region wherein I am in the habit of hunting the wild stag. I replied that they would do very well indeed; that they were very nearly perfection.

"But the Master of your pack," chuckled Comins, glancing proudly at his favourites, "won't have them!"

From the hounds my thoughts naturally turned to the deer. I learned that the herd in the paddocks at Swinley consisted of over twenty deer, of which more than half were stags. These animals, each of which is hunted about three times in the season, live



on the fat of the land. Their food consists of the sweetest second cut of clover hay (the first cut being too tough for deer's teeth), the best and brightest old beans, and the most succulent carrots. Thus, you see, the quarry is fed and trained to travel at great speed. If hounds didn't run fast and without tailing, Comins told me, they would be liable to be ridden over by the "thrusting" fields that habitually turn out with her Majesty's. So it is evident that with a stag or hind in front that can "go like a deer," with hounds bred and prepared up to the highest pitch of perfection, it is necessary that the huntsman should be an exceedingly fine and bold horseman—as he is.

I was not able to get any evidence from Mr. Comins as to his ability in the saddle, but I gathered plenty from other sources. Indeed, as I have just indicated, no man can fill his post for a single day who is not superexcellent as a horseman. Were any proof necessary, it is furnished by some words which Lord Ribblesdale, M.B.H., wrote concerning Comins more than a year ago: "To say that there is no uncertainty in hunting with the Queen's hounds is to say that you have never ridden over Berkshire, stick for stick with Comins."

As a specimen of the arduous nature of the business, I will conclude with a very brief outline of a particularly big run that took place early last year. The celebrated deer Bartlett was enlarged near Hawthorn Hill in the Berkshire country, running to Stratford Dingley, ten miles from Reading. The point, measured in a bee-line, is twenty miles, and, as Bartlett ran, between thirty and forty miles, over a difficult expanse of deep and holding land. They never saw Bartlett until the very end of the run, when he ran into some farm-buildings, and was housed in a comfortable loose-box, up to his knees in sweet straw, for the night. Now, as this chase entailed something like four hours' hard riding, in addition to the going to the meet and coming home, it is apparent that our friend Comins, in his capacity of whipper-in (or "Yeoman pricker"), had a good long and fatiguing day in the country.

This is his first season as huntsman, after, as I have said, fourteen years' honourable and efficient service as first whip. He made his formal *début* on Saturday, November 3rd last, the opening meet in connection with her Majesty's Buckhounds being at Salthill, in what our subject calls "a grand banking country."

CLIFFORD CORDLEY.

### Wonders of a Watch.

VERY few of the many who carry watches ever think of the complexity of its delicate mechanism, or of the extraordinary and unceasing labour it performs, and how astonishingly well it bears up and does its duty under what would be considered very shabby treatment in almost any other machinery.

There are many who think a watch ought to run and keep good time for years, without even a drop of oil, who would not think of running a day without oiling a common piece of machinery, the wheels of which do but a fraction of the service.

By way of gratifying his curiosity, a correspondent has made a calculation of the revolutions which the wheels of the watch make in a day and a year.

The result is as suggestive as it is interesting. For example:

The main wheel makes 4 revolutions in 24 hours, 1,460 in a year; the second or centre, 24 revolutions in 24 hours, or 8,760 in a year; the third wheel, 192 in 24 hours, or 70,080 in a year; the fourth wheel—which carries the second hand—1,440 in 24 hours, or 525,600 in a year; the fifth, or 'escape-wheel, 12,964 in 24 hours, or 4,731,860 revolutions in a year; while the beats or vibrations made in 24 hours are 388,800, or 141,912,000 in a year.

### At a Finch.

A FRENCHMAN, knowing but little English, by some means which he could never clearly comprehend, got into difficulties with a burly drayman; and he found that he must fight, and that, too, at rough-and-tumble.

It was a gloomy, repulsive prospect to the poor Frenchman, who was not at all used to such rough ways; but he had no choice. His adversary was bound to whip him, in any case.

Before commencing the fight, the Frenchman asked what he should do when he could stand no more whipping, for his bellicose antagonist looked dangerous.

He was told that when ready to give in he had only to cry out "Enough!" and then the fight would be stopped at once.

And then the battle commenced.

The drayman was confident and merciless, and very soon the Frenchman was being knocked about mercilessly. At length, feeling that he had enjoyed the sport sufficiently, he began to cry out lustily; but in the excitement of the occasion he had forgotten the word given him, and bawled out the only English interjection he could call to mind—"Hurrah! hurrah!"

To his great astonishment, his antagonist only pounded away the harder at this, and finally, finding his hallooing of no avail, he gathered his energies so completely, and went in with such will and determination, that ere long the battered drayman sang out loudly and appealingly—

"Enough! enough!"

"Aha!" cried the Frenchman, stepping back. "What you call him?—say zat again."

"Enough! enough!" repeated the drayman.

"Aha! zat is 'e vera word I was try to speak un long time ago!" And so ended the fight.

## FROM THE JAWS OF A WOLF.

### A Tale of a Dog's Bravery.



was playing with the animal's ears, while the other children were jumping and tumbling about over the body.

"Yes," answered Mr. Knowles; "and he is as noble as he looks. He has justified his claim to all the kindness we can bestow on him. Part of his history is sad enough, poor fellow."

"I suppose you have had him for some time?"

"No," he replied, "only since last winter. The story of his life before then is a complete blank, so far as we are concerned."

"What?" I asked in astonishment. "Do you mean to say that such a splendid animal as this is a stray dog? What a pity it is that you can't talk, and tell us where you come from, old fellow," I continued, patting the huge head.

Thereupon Lion solemnly hit the floor one or two sounding thumps with his tail, and then stood up and pushed his nose into my lap.

"He is quick to recognise his friends," said Mr. Knowles, "and has already included you among them. He is very affectionate, and will allow our youngsters to do what they like with him. But let him who rouses Lion's anger beware! For he is then a lion indeed."

"I conclude from what you say, then, that you have seen him thus tested?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Mr. Knowles, with emphasis. "I have indeed. And it was at a moment when my own life depended upon his strength and courage."

"Please tell me how it happened," I begged; "I'm sure the story must be most interesting."

"All right," said Mr. Knowles, as he settled himself for the narrative, while I listened eagerly for what was to come.

Until last winter (said he) I, like most others hereabouts, cared very little for our Western wolves. I had never seen any large ones, and I was convinced that a big Newfoundland dog, such as I then possessed, was a match for the fiercest of them.

One cold winter morning I had to go to the village of L—, three miles away from here. I was obliged to walk, as heavy snowdrifts in the way prevented me from riding. I was not alone, however, for my dog accompanied me. He was, as I told you, a Newfoundland—a big fellow, and full of pluck.

We had done about two-thirds of the distance when I noticed a movement in some bushes near by, and in a moment the head and shoulders of a great wolf appeared among them.

I saw at once that he was far above the average size, but I did not mind him, since, besides my dog, I had my double-barrelled gun with me. I'm a bad shot, it's true, but having the gun reassured me.

Poor Tige, my-dog, made straight for the wolf,

and they clinched at the edge of the thicket. Such a fight as that I hope I never may see again.

I knew that Tige would never give in while he lived; but as the furious animals rolled over and over each other, I soon perceived that he was getting the worst of it.

You can imagine my feelings at that moment. I ran towards them at once, with my gun levelled; but they kept on changing their positions so quickly that I was afraid to fire for fear of injuring Tige.

At last I fired, but my shot seemed to have missed. In any case, however, I should have been too late to save my dog's life.

In an instant the wolf left his dying victim and rushed upon me. I discharged my other barrel, but it had no effect. As he approached, I could see his eyes gleaming like coals of fire, and the open mouth disclosing the grim rows of teeth. He was very long and gaunt, while his bristling hairs and the blood with which he was covered added to the ferociousness of his appearance.

At such a moment one's brain acts quickly. Short as was the time occupied by the wolf's advance, I recognised at once the hopelessness of my position and the horror of my impending fate. Then my thoughts flew back to home, and I wondered how my wife and children would get on without me.

But I was determined to die fighting, at any rate. Just as my foe was upon me, I sprang aside, and, grasping my gun by the barrels, struck at him with all the strength of despair. Where I hit him I do not know, but the force of the blow was sufficient to break my weapon short off at the breech.

The effect of the blow gave me a little breathing time, and when the wolf renewed his attack I was able to meet him once more with the part of the gun still left in my hand. Again and again I showered down my blows upon him, until at last the strong steel barrels actually began to bend.

But all my efforts were in vain, and at last, utterly exhausted, I realised that the end could no longer be delayed.

Just then something dark flashed past me, and to my surprise and thankfulness, I perceived that help had arrived.

The biggest dog I had ever seen had fastened upon the wolf, and not all the latter's efforts were able to shake him off.

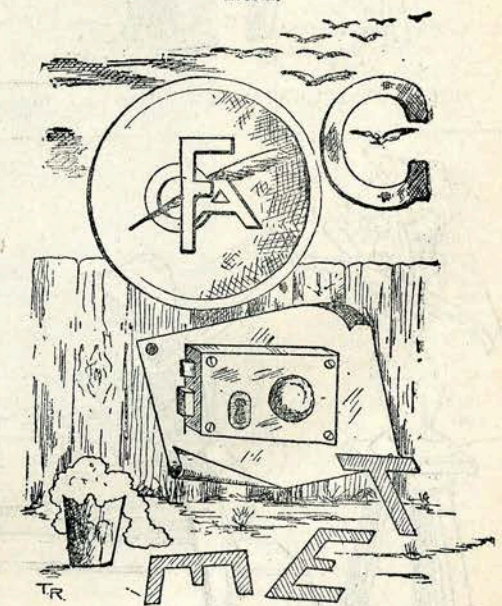
Much as I should have liked to assist my rescuer,

## OUR PUZZLES.

No. 1.

My whole can never be as big as my first, which is always closely related to my third. My second is the centre of my third.

No. 2.



What well-known proverb is represented in the above?

[Drawn by T. H. REECE, Hatton House Gardens, Westgate-on-Sea, to whom a Solid Silver Pencil-Case has been forwarded.]

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES IN No. 124.

No. 1.—Levi; Evil—Live—Vile—Veil.

No. 2.—The Sea-Wolves; Swan—Eagle—Ass  
Whale—Owl—Lion—Vulture—Elephant—Shark.