

Galway Hounds & Jolly Boys

Bernard M. J. Fitzpatrick

1878

En Route to Galway.

“YOICK ! YOICK ! YOICK Get away, hark to Tell-tale !” shouts Will Freeman, in Punchestown covert. “This ought to be a good scenting-day—cloudy, and a southerly wind, too,” remarks my nearest neighbour. “They have found,” says Mr. Fleetwood Rynd, who, well mounted as usual, is standing in his stirrups looking over the covert-bank ; and in a moment afterwards we hear a whimper, the “music rose in snatches,” and after a few minutes more have elapsed, every hound joins in a chorus ; the spiny gorse is waving to and fro, as we all get as close as we can to the hunting-gate, and are on the *qui-vive*. Captain R. Mansfield is stationed in the gate, and says quietly : “He has stole away,” as he sees Lord Clonmel, mounted on his beautiful chocolate chestnut, at the lower end, on the race-course side, with his hat in the air. “Gone a-a-way, gone a-a-way !” shouts Will Freeman, and he cheers the hounds to their fox.

“Hold hard, hold hard !” cries Captain R. Mansfield, as he pulls across the pass-way (he goes well, but, like a good sportsman, he likes to give hounds a chance). The “field” is steady for a few moments, then we hear the horn and crush through the narrow gate, several in their haste gallop past Byrne’s house, and on to the Grand-stand, thinking that reynard, as is generally the case, has “skiddadled” in the direction of Eadestown before they perceive that the hounds are racing towards Elverstown. Across a few fields they are overridden : it is always so when they go this line, as there are but few fences, and the scent lies well. “Shame on you, gentlemen ; do hold hard, please, and give them a chance !” exclaims Mr. Edmund Mansfield, most courteous of masters, whose mild rebuke, never given except when necessary, has more good effect than the more emphatic language of another would have. We leave the Black Hill to our left, and soon meet a nasty thorn fence : we cannot see over, and can scarcely see through. Mr. H. E. Linde, mounted on his chaser, Christmas Gift, charges it, gets well over, and enjoys a lead for a time. Mr. Robert Kennedy can’t be stopped on his little gray mare, and sometimes negotiates the most intricate fences on her. On this occasion he gets up through the bushes in a place where few follow. However, after a brief delay all the first-flight men get over. “Who are those gentlemen who sit their horses so remarkably well ?” inquires my friend, Jack Gostraight, who is a stranger. “Colonel Forster and Captain Richard Moore of Killashee.” “Did you ever see men with better seats in a saddle ?” “I never did ; the Colonel is evidently master of the horse, in more than one sense of the word ; and the Lancer appears to be a perfect *ménage* horseman.” Just then I see several in front of me stopped at a very big bank, and one gentleman in scarlet, riding a very good-looking black horse, goes straight at it, and does it in brilliant style, just as I get near enough to recognise him—it is H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught, on Black Knight, late Captivator. The pace is “killing ;” for Elverstown we are bound ; the “weeds” are done now, and the “duffers” are furlongs behind. “Ware-wire,” exclaims Major Lawless, who is first on to the road, near the “Longhouse,” all right, and on we go up the opposite hill towards the next fence, when Baron de Robeck (who is as usual in the front rank) shouts : “This way, this way ! you will be ‘pounded’ there ; follow me.” So we do. The Baron has not a particle of jealousy in his composition, and is always anxious to see others with the hounds as well as himself. The next we meet is a nasty fence ; Mr. Alexander Graydon is the first up. “That is very big,” he says, turning round in his saddle, having got over with a struggle. “The bigger the better,” exclaims that good horseman, Mr. Joe Kilbee of Cannycourt, as he jumps it close in his wake. The next we meet is a regular “yawner,” and nearly all make for a gate which is

beside it. "Give place to the ladies, gentlemen," says a man beside me, as Miss Beauman, Miss Kilbee, and Miss O'Kelly, all come up together : they seldom look for gate or gap, and on this occasion all go at the ditch, and are landed safely into the next field. The "varmint" is headed near Elverstown, then makes back towards Punchestown for a short distance before he points his mask for Eadestown ; they hunt on by Hoystead's hook to the road. The fox then makes towards Athgarrett ; the field has become really select, and as they race up the hill, the only persons with the hounds are H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught, Lord Cloncurry on Polly, his brother. Major Lawless, on a favourite hunter, Mr. Percy La Touche on a gray, Mr. Fortescue Tynte on Sweet Pea, Mr. Wm. Blacker on Snowstorm, Mr. Wm. Kennedy on his chestnut, Baron de Robeck, Major Dent, Mr. E. Mansfield, Freeman, and the first whip.

My poor nag is completely "done," and I merely catch a glimpse of those in the distance—I wonder will I ever get him over this narrow bank ? "Come up, go on !—bump-bump-bum !—Oh, by Jove ! we're down—a "cropper !" I have him by the bridle, though—no, he's gone—fire in my eyes too—'twill be a case of concussion. "Get up, get up," says a voice beside me, and a hand is on my shoulder. "All right, all right—I'm not hurt—catch the d—d brute, catch him." "Tickets, please—show your ticket, sir. Athenry, Athenry, Athenry !" shouts a sleepy porter. I push back my travelling-cap, rub my eyes. What the deuce is this ? Oh ! I thought I was riding a run, and here I am at one o'clock in the morning at Athenry. The guard has been shaking me for the last five minutes, holding his lamp within a couple of inches of my face (this accounts for the fire in my eyes). "All right, guard ; I've been dreaming." "So I thought, sir, for you pulled at the chain of my whistle till you smashed it." "No matter ; get out my traps ; and here's half-a-crown to wet your whistle."

"I have the dog-cart outside, sir, and will have you at master's in forty minutes." "All right, John ; go on," In forty minutes afterwards I have an old friend (who has invited me down to spend a few days with him, and has promised to give me a mount with the Galway Hounds, yclept the "Blazers") by the hand, and soon afterwards am talking of the likelihood of a good run on the morrow, and enjoying his hospitality.

"I hope you had a pleasant journey from Dublin," he says.

"Oh ! yes. I fell asleep after passing Mullingar, and was soon dreaming that I was riding a grand run in Kildare. People will tell you dreams go by contraries ; don't believe it, though. I dreamed we were going over the line a Punchestown fox generally takes, and those who I thought I saw riding in the first flight were the very men who generally do. I could scarcely bring myself to believe that it was only a fancy."

"Oh ! you must have seen such a run recently, that accounts for it."

"Well, now, I remember I did see such a one the other day, and my dream was very like what actually occurred."

"We will have an early start for the meet, and the small hours have come already—so to bed."

After dinner next day we adjourned to my friend's "snuggery," and our conversation I may set down for the behoof of all who wish to know of the Galway Hounds.

The Galway Hounds.

"Now," says my host, "have a weed."

"Thank you. I must cross-examine you about the 'Blazers,' their history, &c. &c. You know all about my book. I paid a visit to a friend of mine in Kilkenny Christmas week, and

since then spent a few days with an old acquaintance in Waterford, and they gave me a great deal of information about their hounds ; and I am sure you know a good deal about the Galway pack. So I made up my mind the moment I received your invitation to accept it, although very busy, as I am sure you will tell me all you know.”

“ Certainly, with pleasure, and will not state anything except what I am certain is correct. In the first place, you must know that the present Master of the Galway Hounds, Mr. Burton R. P. Persse, can boast of a distinguished line of ancestors, all of whom were, as he is, decidedly ‘ men for Galway,’ and remarkable for their love of fox-hunting, their popularity, many estimable qualities, and sportsman-like conduct at all times. They were celebrated for their knowledge of hunting and good horsemanship. The grandfather of Burton Persse was so distinguished in this respect that he rejoiced in the *sobriquet* of “ the Irish Meynell.”

“ Yes, so I heard ; and Mr. Burton Persse told me some time ago that he had at one time records of the hunt which dated back to the early part of the last century ; he unfortunately lent them to a friend of his who lost them, and the oldest now in his possession is one of 1803.”

“ Yes, his grandfather had hounds for many years before that ; he used to turn them out in splendid style, and dress his hunt-servants in ‘ orange plush,’ but he himself always wore the scarlet.”

“ Did he reside at Moyode ?”

“ Yes, in Persse Lodge, which stood where Moyode Castle is now, and the kennels were, I think, near where they are at present. Of course they were far inferior to the present kennels.”

“ Were there other hounds kept in the county at that time ?”

“ There were a few small packs, I believe, but the late Colonel Giles Eyre, of Eyrecourt Castle, for several years kept a large pack and hunted the lower end of Galway, also part of King’s Co. and Tipperary, or Ormond. Of course you often heard of him; and you remember Lever’s song :—

“ The King of Oude
Is mighty proud,
And so were onst the Caysars ;
But ould Giles Eyre
Would make them stare,
Av he had them with the Blazers.
To the devil I’d fling ould Runjut Singh,
He’s only a prince in a small way,
And knows nothing at all of a six-foot wall.
Oh ! he’d never do for Galway.’

The Colonel was very wealthy, and spared no expense in improving the breed of his pack, and in mounting his servants, and all that, and spent his money like the Galway-men of his day. He expended a large sum on the hounds, too, but bred more for stoutness than speed ; he carried this too far by crossing with the blood-hound and mastiff. Their courage and temper became so high that they would hardly brook correction ; and the old huntsman, Nick Carolan, having indulged too freely in his ‘ beloved pooten,’ went into the kennel one night without his whip and they ate him.

“ In 1803, the late Robert Parsons Persse formed a pack, and it was principally from the kennel of the present master’s grandfather, ‘ the Irish Meynell,’ that he founded it, as he reduced his establishment then and gave all his large hounds to him (he was his nephew) ; but ‘ the Irish Meynell’ kept until within a few years of his death the small pack and the best blood in his kennel, which the present master’s father kept up until he handed them over to him. So that for considerably over one hundred years the best and purest foxhound blood has been kept in these kennels by the three generations.”

“ How long did R. P. Persse keep them, and did he continue the orange plush uniform ?”

“ He kept them till 1829. He resided at Castle-Boy ; and they were known as the ‘ Castle-Boy Hunt.’ A club, composed of the aristocracy of Galway, was formed ; and the uniform was scarlet, white collar, and ‘ Castle-Boy Hunt’ on the buttons.”

“ It was during Robert Parsons Persse’s mastership that the cognoman ‘ Blazers’ was invented, was it not ?”

“ It was ; two reasons are assigned for the alias which it has borne so long. One story is, that at a hunt dinner, it was proposed by Mr. Persse, and seconded by Robert French of Rahasane, that they should be called the ‘ Blazers,’ out of compliment to Mr. Robert D’Arcy of Woodville, and James Burke of St. Cleran’s, both of whom had *ruby* locks, and were consequently called the ‘ Blazers.’ Mr. D’Arcy was at that time treasurer of the hunt. Some say that it originated in this way : While Robert Parsons Persse was master the hounds used to go once a year to Birr, where they were met by the members of the Ormond Hunt. After the day’s hunting was over the men of both hunts dined together. Many queer stories are told of the extraordinary ‘ doings’ at these festive *reunions*. To cement good fellowship they assembled ; the loving cup passed quickly round, for the men of the period after worshipping at the shrine of Diana by day were wont to honour Bacchus at night, They were veritable ‘ umbrella nights ;’ and during one of those midnight orgies they set fire to the establishment of host Dooley, and it was burnt to the ground ; hence, according to many, the derivation of the title. But I believe the other story to be the correct one. Mr. Robert Parsons Persse died in 1829, and then the hounds returned to the kennels, where they have been ever since.”

“ Why, I thought Mr. Christopher St. George succeeded Robert Parsons Persse.”

“ Mr. St. George kept a private pack for a short time after Robert Parsons Persse’s death, but the ancestors of the one now in existence never left the Persse family ; and it was not until 1840 that the first subscription pack was established in Galway under the title of the ‘ County Galway Hunt.’ Mr. St. George lived in Tyrone House, and hunted the hounds himself ; he spared no expense, and was well supported by Willie Hall and two whips.”

“ What became of the hounds when he gave them up ?”

“ He handed them over to his relatives, Anthony Nugent, now the Earl of Westmeath, and Mr. Hyacinth Daly of Raford.”

“ Where were they kept then ?”

“ At Raford, and were managed by Mr. Hyacinth Daly, jun., who was a fine sportsman, and had a grand stud of hunters, as well as several steeplechase horses ; he had them only a short time, when he, poor fellow, died very young. However his father retained them for a few years afterwards—until his demise, I believe.”

“ Well, who succeeded to the mastership ?”

“ A Committee had them for a short time.”

“ Who were on the Committee ?”

“ Mr. St. George, Lord Westmeath, and Mr. Robert Bodkin of Annagh. They determined to make them a county pack, and Mr. R. Bodkin exerted himself to the utmost. The gentlemen of the county promised him their support, and subscribed liberally—this was in 1840—and they appointed Mr. John Dennis master. They handed over a good pack to him. I need scarcely tell you, that John Dennis was one of the best sportsmen that ever breathed, perhaps the best rider that ever sat in a saddle, and there were few better men to ride a steeplechase. To pilot a rough horse, there certainly was no better in the world ; he won many steeplechases, and for years used to ride in the principal races in this country ; he generally had a few chasers in his stable, and always a rare stud of hunters. A better display of horsemanship never was witnessed than his on Dan O’Connell, when he rode him for the Liverpool Grand National—I forget in what year—the horse then belonged to ‘ Sporting Mick Yourrell,’ as he was generally called ; he bolted when going well not far from home. Another of the many wonderful proofs afforded by Mr. John Dennis of his prowess in the pig-skin was his marvellous feat, accomplished thirty years ago, when riding Fra Diavolo in a four-mile steeplechase, over the Macroom Course, Roscommon walls, many of them over five feet high. The horse’s sight had been failing for some time, and during the race he lost it completely, yet he won.”

“ Oh ! nonsense.”

“ It is a fact, and I can get many men who will bear me out in what I say, and one of them is a gentleman residing at the Curragh : but to continue my story ; he had his opponents in difficulties a long way from home ; he was seen to blunder over the last three walls, and he actually rolled over the last one, yet Mr. Dennis kept in the saddle. All who knew the horse were amazed, as he never was known to fall over a wall ; he won, and when he returned to the enclosure it was found that the horse was STONE BLIND.

“ At Lismacrory racecourse, near Birr, when a comparatively old man, he accomplished one of his memorable feats. Mr. ‘ Charlie’ Lockwood once said of him, ‘ Jack manages a horse by Legerdemain.’ I suppose the description was not a pun on the derivation of the word, but Mr. Lockwood’s ignorance of French did not take from the point of his description. If ever light-hands did wonders, Mr. Dennis’s did, and so trained did his horses become that they worked as he willed. The feat I refer to was a proof of this. He had an old horse, a gray, called Monarch, which he was riding as a hack on the racecourse ! I think it was the year of the great struggle between Brunette and Sam Slick—*Eheu*, what horses ! The meeting was over, and some one complained of the height of a wall being raised for a match between two gentlemen hailing trans-shannonwards. ‘ Pshaw’ said Dennis, ‘ I’d ride Monarch over it without a bridle.’ A bet for some small sum resulted, and Mr. Dennis rode Monarch, at and over five feet of a well-built wall, his aids being his seat, his own and his good horse’s training, pluck, and confidence, and a pair of cabbage stumps, with which an admirer from the West armed him to guide ‘ the auld horse, and shame the blustering devils that didn’t know the baste.’ ”

“ I have heard that story before ; but he accomplished a still greater feat, as he rode a horse of his, I believe it was Monarch, over six six-foot walls with nothing to guide him but a halter and his whip.”

“ Yes, some say six, but there is no doubt about his having ridden him thus over four. Many years ago he rode a horse, I don’t remember his name, at a meeting held this side of the Shannon, when the country was in a disturbed state owing to an election or something of the sort. Mr. Dennis was a great favourite, but he displeased some of the Galwegians at this time, and they made an attack on him while he was riding the race. They pelted him with stones,

many of them hit him ; and when he was coming at the last fence, a wall over five feet high, some ruffians, in order to stop him, pulled an ass and car across it, so that he could not get over unless he jumped the vehicle or donkey and the wall together. The plucky sportsman was not to be baffled ; he sent his horse at it, and he flew the cart and wall in grand style : he must have cleared nearly thirty feet in the jump.”

“ He showed first-rate sport while he was master, you say ; and used to have large fields too.”

“ Capital sport ; a great many used to attend the meets, and hard riding fellows they were. The favourite covert was Castle Lambert, on the property of Walter Lambert, who was a thorough sportsman, and a capital rider to hounds. There was always a fox in his coverts ; there were double stone walls, five-and-half feet high, bounding each park, and Lambert had holes made in them just large enough to let the fox through, in order to ensure his taking the stiff line. He built the walls purposely to ‘ try the mettle of the boys,’ as he used to say ; and to see them charging them was indeed a sight calculated to bring the ‘ crimson to the forehead and the lustre to the eye.’

“ Mr. Dennis died rather suddenly, at Spadacinni’s Hotel, Dublin. He was a bachelor, and some years before his death inherited from his uncle a large property ; it was called the Birmingham Estate. I could tell you many stories of the wonderful feats of Hycie Dixon, Lord Clanricarde, and George Henry Moore (peace to their ashes, their like we seldom see). Dixon was a fine rider, and so was George Moore.”

“ The latter was as good a man to ride a race as a hunt, I am told.”

“ He was, and he won several races ; indeed, he was a sort of Admirable Crichton. In the early days of steeplechasing, when Mr. George Osbaldeston, Lord Waterford, Jem Mason, and Dick Christian were wont to ride their matches five miles, but taking them on line, and never to keep the road for more than one hundred yards, Mr. Moore shared with the late Mr. Val Maher of Ballinkeale, and Lord Waterford, the honour of upholding Irish horsemanship at Melton. Nimrod sung their praises, and he took part in the celebrated run—the article descriptive of which brought unwonted fame to the ‘ *Quarterly*’ A ripe scholar—indeed quite curiously erudite—an accomplished linguist, a connoisseur, an athlete, and a sportsman all round. Can we wonder that he was popular, especially when he added to all his other extraordinary accomplishments a melodious and commanding oratory, which made his hearers, on the platform and in the senate, hang lovingly on his ringing, heart-striking periods ?”

“ He was lucky on the turf, was he not.”

“ He was ; he won many races in Ireland, and was a confederate of the late Marquis of Waterford—Lord Henry I mean, for some time—and his horses won valuable stakes in England. He won the Northamptonshire Stakes with Wolfdog, and after that his intimate friends used to call him ‘ the Dog.’ He won no money over the race though, and was so disgusted at not having backed the right one, that he retired from the turf for some years ; however, he came on again, and won the Stewards’ Plate and Chesterfield Plate, at Goodwood, with Erin-go-Bragh. Some years before his death he gave up racing. He died in 1870.

“ In 1850, Mr. John Mahon of Ballydonnellan succeeded Mr. Dennis, and kept the hounds for three years, during which time the sport was good.”

“ What became of the pack at Moyode ? You said they returned there after Robert Parsons Persse died.”

“ They did, and the present master’s father hunted what we called the ‘ home circuit’ with them, and continued to do so till ’48, when his son became old enough to undertake the

management of them. He kept them on ; and when Mr. Mahon gave up, in '53, Mr. Persse undertook to hunt the whole country ; he has done so ever since in a manner which has reflected the highest credit on himself, and given the utmost satisfaction to every one."

" You have not yet told me about the hunt-servants."

" Any person who has heard of the ' Blazers,' has heard of the celebrated Sam Smith. When Mr. Robert Parsons Persse had the hounds he was whipper-in, and afterwards huntsman for a short time ; then when they came back to Moyode, he returned with them, and hunted them until the present master took them (he has always hunted the hounds himself), and Sam was first whip and kennel huntsman. For some seasons before his death, he was the recipient of a pension from Mr. Persse. He died in 1875. He was ninety years of age, and spent his whole life (with the exception of three years, during which time he was huntsman to the Stag-hounds kept by the late Lord Howth) in the service of the Persse family, and lived also as huntsman for one or two seasons with Mr. H. Daly of Raford. Richard Conroy whiped under Sam Smith, but you tell me you have heard all about him."

" Oh, yes ! I alluded to him in the history of the Ormond Hunt."

" Michael Boyle served as first whip, and kennel huntsman for about ten seasons, he then went to Mr. Longworth, and was his huntsman for some time. When Boyle left, eleven years ago, Joseph Turpin came from the Cottessmore Hounds, where he lived with Sir John Trollope (afterwards Lord Kesteven) as whip. He left last summer, and George Browne is promoted, and John Croft, from the Badsworth, acts as second whip. George Browne came to these hounds, four years ago, from Shropshire, where he learned his business, and learned it well too."

" Well, what about the stables and kennels ?"

" The stabling is excellent ; perfect, I might say, in every particular; and the kennels are large, airy, and kept as well as possible. The hounds are as good a pack as there is in Ireland. And no wonder. The ancestors of the hounds now in the Moyode kennel were celebrities in Castle-Boy more than seventy years ago ; and long before that, as I have already told you, the Persse's kept fox-hounds. And I have also told you that the present master, his grandsire, and father were judges of hounds, lovers of hunting, and spared neither time nor expense in endeavouring to make the pack perfect. There are fifty couple of hounds now in the kennels ; fourteen were entered last year, and they turned out very well—Mr. Burton Persse keeps a very good stud of hunters : there is no better judge of a horse. He has had a few good steeplechasers—Tophorne, Arab Maid, Zuleika, Abdalla, Sultana, The Huntsman, Stella, and many others previously. He is a very good man to ride, and has often sported silk."

" What is the extent of the hunting district, and where are the best parts of it ?"

" The country from Loughrea to Pallas, and from Loughrea to Fairfield is magnificent and almost entirely rich grassland—indeed nearly all the country is grass, and rides light. The kennels are within three miles of Athenry, where good accommodation can be had for man and horse at the Railway Hotel, or Kinsella's. The hunting days are Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The sum guaranteed to Mr. Persse is £1000 per annum, and I need scarcely tell you that it does not nearly cover the expenses."

" Will you mention the names of those who were first-flight men in days long gone by ?"

" I will. In no part of England or Ireland will you find better men to ride than in Conn-aught. I cannot remember all who were deserving of being included in the list of the ' leaders of the chase,' but I will mention a few who were wonderful riders. Lord Clanricarde and John

Dennis, were ‘clinkers’ in the hunting-field and between the flags. Burton Persse, father of the present M. F. H., was considered the best rider to hounds in his time, and had most perfect hands. Parsons Persse, his brother, was an accomplished rider and won a great many steeplechases, and owned several famous horses, among others, Economist, sire of the great Harkaway. John Lambert of Aggard, Walter Lambert of Castlelambert, and Robert French of Monivea Castle, were first-rate riders. Robert Bodkin of Annagh was a good man, too, on a horse he had called Kenilworth ; he was ‘a bad’un to beat.’ John Mahon of Weston, Nicholas Blake of Frenchfort, Martin Blake of Merlin Park, Parson D’Arcy, and Pierce Joyce of Mervue, were all good men in their day. I need scarcely tell you, as of course you often heard of many of his astounding feats in the saddle, that the late Lord Clanricarde was as accomplished and bold a horseman as rode over a stone wall in Connaught or anywhere else. Did you ever read the memoir of his Lordship which appeared in *Baily’s Magazine* eleven years ago ?”

“ I did not ?”

“ Well, I have it here ; it is about the best biography, in my opinion, that ever appeared in that excellent periodical ; and, I need not add, that it is well worth reading.”

“ It must be very interesting, indeed. Please read it for me. *Baily* says : —

“ ‘ The Marquis of Clanricarde, whose portrait we would have presented to our readers before this, but for his public and private engagements preventing him honouring our artist with a sitting, is the most fitting representative of the Sportsman of Ireland in the present age ; and it is only due to himself and ourselves that his deeds on the Steeplechase Course and in the Hunting Field should have some more enduring memorial than that conveyed by a local newspaper paragraph.

“ ‘ The family of De Burgh, from whence the subject of our memoir is sprung, ranks among the most distinguished in Ireland, and deduces an uninterrupted line of powerful nobles from the Conquest. The Marquis of Clanricarde, the present head of it, was born on the 20th of December, 1802, and succeeded his father as fourth Earl on the 27th of July, 1808, and in 1825 he was advanced by Letters Patent to the Irish Marquisate, and created a Baron of the United Kingdom. Eton and Oxford can claim him among their alumni ; but at this distance of time no anecdotes of his school or college career are current, but it may be taken for granted he was a young man of promise, or that great statesman, Mr. Canning, whose daughter he married, would not have selected him as his private secretary. Commencing life at a period when Irish wit, Irish society as it was of old, and Lever’s heroes were still flourishing, and the Galway Blazers were yet extant within his native county. Lord Clanricarde entered heart and soul into all the hilarity which surrounded the sporting circles of his immediate neighbourhood. At that time daring horsemanship and sporting accomplishments were considered as the high road to distinction, and, with the social advantages which he possessed, tutors were not wanting for so apt a pupil ; and after perfecting his education in the art of riding over high walls—and no better school can be found to attain to first-class horsemanship—his Lordship made his *début* on the Curragh in 1822, winning the first Corinthians ever ran in Ireland on Penguin, by Waxy Pope, beating six others. In the following year he repeated the victory with the same animal, beating the celebrated Roller. He also won a good race on the flat at Loughrea, in his native county, on a wretched-looking animal called Sarsaparilla, belonging to the parish priest, which so delighted the peasantry, that as they cheered his Lordship coming back to scale, they exclaimed : ‘ Sure if he was on an ass of Father Peter’s, wouldn’t he have a right to win !’ But to the turf Lord Clanricarde was never really partial, while to steeplechasing, on the other hand, he devoted himself with all the enthusiasm of Irish youth ; and he may be said to have won his spurs shortly after leaving Oxford, in 1822, over the Roxborough course in Galway, on Hawk, by Scherdone. The course was four miles over a stiff country, including four five-foot walls, and the last one measured five feet nine inches at the spot where the Hawk took

it. He won the same stake the next year on Mr. Persse's Rollo ; but nine inches had been taken off the last-mentioned wall. In 1830, at Luton Hoo, in what was called the first St. Albans' Steeplechase, got up by the well-known Tommy Coleman, and for which sixteen started, he ran second to Lord Ranelagh's gray gelding, Wonder, ridden by Captain M'Douall of the Life Guards, with a little Irish horse called Nailer, who had just only landed from Ireland in hunting condition. The course was an unflagged one, and that Lord Clanricarde's fame had reached Hertford-shire was clear when Captain M'Douall in asking how he was to ride the Wonder, was told simply to pay no attention to anybody, but to wait upon Lord Clanricarde. True to his orders. Captain M'Douall never deserted his pilot, and at one period in the race exclaimed, ' Halloa ! you're going wrong !' But the turn proved correct, as the first and second came in some minutes before the others appeared. Nailer having at the end to succumb to the superior turn of speed of Wonder. His two next appearances in the Metropolitan district were more succes-sful, as he won two Grand Steeplechases on Mr. Elmore's famous Moonraker, beating good fields of first-class horses. The last of these races finished over a very strong line at the Wind-mill, near Old Oak Farm, on the Edgeware-road ; and on this occasion, it was always reported that Moonraker, who was a hard puller and a very big jumper, cleared a lane. At the period to which we refer, Lord Clanricarde had been a frequent attendant with Mr. Grantley Berkeley's stag-hounds, which were then kept at Cranford, and having distinguished himself in several runs over the Harrow country, Mr. Berkeley, after he became the master of the Oakley Hounds, got up a steeplechase at Bedford, and asked Lord Clanricarde to ride for him. Parliament was sitting, and there were no railways in those days, but his Lordship was not to be denied, for he rode a couple of hacks down the road to Bedford, rode his friend's horse in the steeplechase, rode back again to town, and attended in his place in the House of Lords in the evening.

“ ‘ Having sketched, somewhat too briefly we fear, Lord Clanricarde's sporting exploits, we will now discuss his merits as a horseman, and we are not saying too much in stating he may be classed among the most remarkable men across country of the day. His forte lies in possessing the art of imparting confidence, or enforcing obedience to every horse he gets on. He can ride a brute with the vigour and determination of a Dick Christian, he can humour and encourage a timid or half-broken horse by patience and good temper, or he can guide a finished hunter like a gentleman. While gifted with the skill of a perfect *ménage* rider, he exemplifies, as he goes over a country, that horses, when let alone at their fences, seldom fall. Impressed with the necessity of having a full command over his horse, he generally rides with severe bridles, and is most particular about the fitting of his curb, which he may be seen altering several times during a day's hunting ; such tackle requires good hands, nor are they wanting. His seat is graceful, his style of riding simple, not a symptom of the more modern steeplechasing element being visible. Never flurried or in a hurry, whether the fence is a mere water-cut or a binder leaning towards him, or stiff timber with bad taking off : it seems a matter of perfect indifference as he holds on the even tenor of his way. Certain malpractices to secure a start, or to take any unfair advantage by overriding hounds, he never availed him-self of, nor was he over particular in selecting the weak spot in a fence, for with him the shortest way was the best way. It is a pleasant sensation to get away on a good horse abreast of the leading hound, but many a good man succumbs when he misses his start, having, per-haps, fifty men before him and fifty men around him ; and few have pluck and resolution to overcome difficulties—such as the certainty of being ridden on if your horse makes a mis-take, or the collisions threatened by bad and reckless riders. But a bad start never deterred Lord Clanricarde ; for he could tread his way with perfect ease through a crowd, and bide his time with patience until a check or lucky turn let him up to the front ; and when the pace had begun to tell, when horses' legs were dropping into the opposite ditches, when the timber rat-tled under their feet, or the sob of distress gave warning that induce most prudent men to look out for the nearest by-road or line of gates, he could assist a beaten horse over a country with consummate judgment and skill.

“ ‘ To him nought came amiss,

One horse or that, one country or this.
He through falls and bad starts undauntedly still
Rides to the motto : Be with them I-will.

“ ‘ Running such risks, he could scarce come off scathless, and although frequently knocked about, his activity, his presence of mind, and his spare figure often saved him from serious consequences. But no man ever received punishment more unflinchingly. Early in 1854, on a Saturday, in Leicestershire, a weedy Birdcatcher horse gave him an awkward fall at timber ; and he felt his collar-bone go crack. But, getting up again, he had not gone three fields when a piece of water appeared, and the horse never rising at it, he got under him, and was at once extricated half-drowned and much bruised, and, as it turned out, with his collar-bone broken in another place. On the following Tuesday, however, he was at his post in the House of Lords, and spoke for forty-five minutes without a check, on the impending Russian war. We should state, however, that the deep interest which the Marquis has ever taken in politics made hunting and the stud secondary considerations ; and the rapidity and seeming carelessness with which preparations were made for a visit to Melton or The Shires were quite appalling, and afforded a remarkable contrast to the practice of the present, when Mason, Newcombe, Darby, and Sheward require many weeks’ notice before collecting a Leicestershire stud for fastidious gentlemen. On one day the Marquis would appear on a plain, hunting-like horse, on the next on a weedy thoroughbred, on the third on an ancient far advanced in his teens, or very groggy on his legs, and perhaps a couple of awkward horses to ride completed the stud. From Melton they were then perhaps transported to do duty over the stone walls in Galway, or among the intricate fences in Kilkenny or Kildare.

“ ‘ It seemed a perfect matter of indifference to him what he rode, as the following anecdote will illustrate. Passing through Dublin, he called on a well-known friend of every sportsman. ‘ Hunt,’ he said, ‘ can you let me have a horse to ride with the Kildare Hounds. ‘ ‘ I am very sorry, my Lord, I have nothing to offer you just at present,’ was the reply, ‘ What ! not a horse in your stable ? ’ ‘ Nothing, my Lord, but a one-eyed horse I bought from a miller to carry a whip. I hear he has been hunted, but I know nothing about him, and he is in moderate trim.’ ‘ Never mind ; send him on. I will be at the meet.’

“ ‘ The well-known covert of Laragh was the first the hounds drew ; and the first fence was the brook (now bridged over), simply a ditch about fourteen feet in width, with a high bank on the opposite side. The field diverged to easy parts of the fence ; but the Marquis on the chestnut (afterwards called Nelson), came straight down at it, got well over, and went first in a gallop of seventeen minutes.

“ ‘ As might be anticipated in so long a career, Lord Clanricarde has from time to time been the owner of good horses : among the best in former days were Leatherhead, a gray horse that had the honour of being the last that Mr. Val Maher ever went in his old form on in Leicestershire. This horse hunted up to the age of twenty-seven, and at that age jumped an undeniably big fence on Barrow Hill. Angelo, ‘ a perfect fencer,’ carried the Marquis for ten years ; then Gehazi, ‘ a leper’ as white as snow ; and in later years Caustic, who in 1864 won the Irish Grand National within three weeks of his appearance at a Leicestershire covert-side. It would be hard to find a more awkward horse to ride hunting than Caustic, with his head all in the wrong place, a loose neck, a hard, unyielding mouth, and a desire to go as hard as he can at every fence. Mr. Long, who rode him in the National Race, to this day describes his ‘ sensations,’ as the horse rattled in and out of the lane at Punchestown with him.

“ ‘ In politics the Marquis of Clanricarde has ever been a decided Liberal, and has supported with earnest eloquence measures that have been introduced into Parliament to forward the interests of Ireland. He has also filled the offices of Ambassador to St. Petersburg and Postmaster-General. We may also conclude by remarking that Lord Dunkellin—whose

motion in the House of Commons on the Reform Bill led to the break-up of the Russell Administration—is the eldest son of the Marquis, and will succeed him in his titles and estates.’

“ Poor Lord Dunkellin did not long survive the date of this notice. He predeceased his father by some years, and Ireland lost in him a nobleman who in all the relations of his life did credit to an illustrious old race. As soldier, statesman, scholar, and gentleman he had few equals, and his early death was no less than a national misfortune.”

“ Who are the best men of the present day ?”

“ Messrs. Burton Persse, Frank Joyce of Mervue, John Eyre, jun., Acheson French, Lord Dunsandle, Thos. Tully, Pierce Joyce, jun., Robert Blake of Brooklodge ; the late Lord Clanmorris, who died suddenly last year, was a capital sportsman and devoted to hunting—he was a great loss to everyone, but especially to the hunt, as he was our best supporter ; John Blakeney of Abbert, John Comyn (who is the able and energetic secretary of the hunt), and Mr. Henry Persse. And no one goes harder or further than Mr. Andy Dolphin ; Major French and Mr. Christopher Usher go well too. I have told you all I know about the Galway ‘ Blazers,’ and now I will sing you a song which was written a few years ago by as good a fellow as I ever knew. He has gone to ‘ the land of to-morrow.’ Those who knew the author will recognise the style which pervaded all his happy compositions ; and if it recalls the memory of so cheery a good fellow, it will evoke some pleasant recollections such as the many friends of poor Charlie Kerr were indebted to him for.

“ The Galway ‘Blazers.’

“ I read in the papers of runs that, be japers,
Just sound to my ear in a small way ;
If yez want for real sport, faith ye’d better resort
To neglected but grand-goin’ Galway.

“ Your horse must have mettle, wid hounds in such fettle,
And walls that are terrible tazers ;
His condition the best, for he’s sure to be prest,
If yez mean to ride up wid the “ Blazers.”

“ If you go there a stranger, bedad there’s no danger,
They’ll trate ye to all o’ the best, boys ;
For lord, lout, an’ squire good ridin’ admire—
All sportsmen they welkim with zest, boys.

“ By the side of that gorse, on his stuffy blood horse,
Sits the master, whose hounds none surpass ;
And the man that would bate him might as well try to ate him—
He’ll soon make acquaintance wid grass.

“ And now for his hounds. To his fame it redounds
That he owns the best pack in the world ;
O’er the fields in a cluster they run such a ‘ buster,’
Like leaves by a hurricane ‘ whorled.’

“ Such loins and such shoulders skim walls built o’ bouldhers,
Tho’ Rinard may make bould resistance ;
They’ve dash, blood an’ strength, limbs, nose, too, an’ length.
So they care not for pace nor for distance.

“ No noise or disorder, the fields in good order,
All coming for sport, not for ‘ gaggin’ ;’
Yez must be pretty smart and try bould for a start,
For here there is really no ‘ laggin’ .’

“ Now of fair girls I sing, who, like birds on the wing,
Lead the first flight throughout the whole gallop ;
Yet sit graceful, an’ go when they hear ‘ Tallyho’—
‘ Och,’ the divil a man they can’t ‘ wallop.’

“ Thin ‘ Hurrah for the Blazers,’ an’ ‘ the ladies that plaze us,’
May Burton hunt fifty years more, shure ;
As thro’ luck an’ disaster, as huntsman an’ master,
He has hunted the country a score, shure.”

“ Very good ; I suppose I must respond to your call, so I’ll sing my favourite song :

“ The Irish Hunter.

“ I’ve as good an Irish hunter as ever trod the lea,
How neatly he picks up his foot, how well he bends his knee ;
And such a head and rein he’s got ! and such a depth of girth,
With hocks, and loins, and quarters, to bring him through the dirt.
Jolly boys, jolly boys !
Hurrah for the fox and the hounds.
Jolly boys !

“ He looks a little plain at first, but jump upon his back,
And in a moment you’ll find out he’s no common plain bred hack.
He feels as strong as any horse, yet airy as a feather.
Oh ! that’s the lad to carry you through plough, grass, or heather.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ To see him by the covert side, a snaffle bridle on,
While other horses prance and fret, how quietly he stands ;
But when the hounds their fox have found, and settled on him steady,
He champs his bit, and shakes his head, to let you know he’s ready.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ Now, I’ll tell you of a glorious run we had the other day,
When my good old Irish hunter he came through all the way ;
For he’s no weed or flashy one, no mere hunter in a stall—
But what good sportsmen like to style through steel, and whale-bone all.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ The place of meet was Punchestown, the hour eleven o’clock,
When Mansfield with his beauties came up quietly at a trot ;
The field being placed, the hounds thrown in we’re all on tippy toe.
When Freeman from the southern end, cries out : Yoick, tally ho !
Jolly boys, &c.

“ Now let the hounds get well away ! Hold hard ! a field or two —
And let the beauties hunt his line, and run him straight and true :
Pick up your reins—hold down your hands—now don’t be in a flurry ;

For a true-trained Irish hunter he wont leap it in a hurry.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ The first we meet’s a double bank, a grip both out and in,
He tops the ditch, he kicks the bank, and off he goes again ;
Some narrow-backed ones, a wall or two, aye, stiff ones on my word.
But my gallant Irish hunter, oh, he does them like a bird.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ The next we meet’s a nasty one, a deep drop with a lane.
Where if he makes the slightest mistake we’re to grief ’tis very
plain ;
But my gallant Irish hunter to defeat he ne’er would yield—
He goes at it forty miles an hour and trigs from field to field.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ Now up a hill I take a pull to give him time to breathe.
And as my friends go past me their jeering I don’t heed ;
For when they get unto the top, they’re blowing fit to die,
I take old ‘ Paudeen’ by the head, and say : Gentlemen, good-bye !
Jolly boys, &c.

“ And now the pace is mending, and the ‘ garrons’ spurt is done,
The field become select, and they drop off one by one ;
And when Freeman cries ‘ who-whoop !’ and sings the death
halloo!
There are none to join the chorus but myself and one or two.
Jolly boys, &c.

“ Here is to this gallant Irish hunter, may he never lose a shoe ;
May all his knocks and ills wear off like morning dew.
May his rider always lie in front, and ride him straight and true,
And remember that he’s ‘ Irish,’ and his nag is Irish too.
Jolly boys, &c.”

“ May Burton Persse hunt the ‘ Blazers’ for many-years to come in ‘grand-goin’ Galway.
A more devoted fox-hunter never lived, and there is no more popular sportsman in the king-
dom.”

Irish sport and sportsmen (1878)

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