

George Templer of Stover

Born 1781; died 1843

IN a memoir of the Rev. John Russell (Parson Jack) in *Baily's Magazine*, 1877, we find mention of the Teignbridge Club, the members referred to in particular being the Rev. Henry Taylor of West Ogwell, the Rev. John Templer and his elder brother, Mr. George Templer of Stover. This latter gentleman, who, we are told, "was of brilliant intellect and charming manner," always appears to me quite unique among foxhunters. His methods were so unorthodox, and his own personality such that it seems a pity so little about him and his singular establishment has come down to us. Even after most patient search, such as I know was carried out by Mr. Tozer when writing his history of the South Devon Hunt, there emerges remarkably little from which to reconstruct the Stover of those days. That Mr. Templer was worthy of more than the few references that appear about him in Nimrod's works has evidently struck others, for Mr. Tozer found out that an old Miss Templer, last surviving daughter, who died some sixteen years ago in Exeter, had some papers of her father's; but her confidential maid or companion said that the old lady had lent these papers relating to her father to someone who was writing a book. So far that book has not appeared, and no one seems to know where the papers are at the present moment.

Mr. Templer's foxhunting was without parallel. It has been an axiom among huntsmen that "blood" is necessary to keep a pack of foxhounds up to concert pitch; yet Mr. Templer, in my opinion, destroyed this theory. To show his hounds could kill foxes, let me quote, before describing his methods, the fact that when he was invited to Exmoor, "in four days they killed three brace." Mr. Templer established at Stover a pack of dwarf foxhounds (19-inch) known as the "Let 'em alones." With these he hunted wild foxes, but "when a blank day was anticipated, a 'bagman,' which was always at hand, was turned down, invariably in view, in lieu of the real article."

In those days, curiously enough, foxes were far scarcer than to-day in the hunting countries of England,—at any rate two people who should know have told me so. In pre-war days there was in Worcester a charming old horse-dealer of the name of Smith, who cannot, I fear, be still alive.

One day out with the Croome, when we had had a long draw before finding, he told me that such was invariably the case in his youth, and that he considered sport was far better then because there were so few foxes, and therefore hounds seldom "changed." An old M.F.H. told me not so long ago that he considered there were now five foxes to every fox in his boyhood, and he had hunted all his life in the Eastern Midlands.

Probably the fox population is far greater in the Midlands and the north-eastern counties, but I rather doubt if there are as many in the southern counties, owing to syndicate shoots having so largely taken the place of privately-owned shooting, whilst in the West the farmers' custom of letting their rabbits to professional trappers has in some places caused the principal partner in the chase not to be present when required.

To return to Mr. Templer and his system,—a novel one unpractised before or since in this country. A score of foxes were kept in two spacious yards, each with a separate coop, and each on a long chain and swivel to enable it to take exercise,—though possibly this does not sound quite as good a method for keeping them fit as that of

"The noble Earl of an ancient name
Who hunted the fox, but preferred him tame."

His foxes, according to tradition, were kept in a pit, where they were daily exercised by a man with a broom! It is a curious fact that bag foxes were hunted quite seriously in the West Country. Yet such notable Masters as Parson Jack Russell and Sir Walter Carew must only have followed this practice because there was a serious shortage of the real article.

One of these foxes of Mr. Stover's, called "The Bold Dragoon," was turned down no less than thirty-six times "and never failed to enjoy his freshly-killed rabbit on his return from hunting, or rather from being hunted." These bagmen, as has just been mentioned, were always turned out in view, yet such was Mr. Templer's control over hounds that, standing among them watch in hand, he would, when ready, say, "One, two, away!" and not a hound moved until the last word,—except one. This was "Guardsman," who used to watch Mr. Templer closely, and at the very moment when the latter snapped his watch, that hound was off! By hard, nay, desperate riding Mr. Templer and his field almost invariably saved the fox, wild or tame, alive. The pack must have been under wonderful discipline, and of marvellous obedience to a "rate." "Blood" they were never allowed, except in the circumstances of an invitation meet, "yet a

more hard-driving lot never entered a cover." That they could kill foxes handsomely, the Exmoor incident testifies. Some of these "Let 'em alones" were bought by the Belvoir, and are recorded incorrectly in Dale's "History of the Belvoir Hunt" as ten couple of hounds bought by Mr. Templer,—a mistake for *of* Mr. Templer.* This was corrected by Lord Robert Manners in a letter to Mr. Tozer, author of the History of the South Devon Hunt, to which I am also indebted for the following:

"Gentleman Shaw (huntsman, Belvoir) was well satisfied with this draft and under October 10th, 'Operations of the Belvoir Hunt,' says, 'I do not dislike your Grace's new hounds. I observed some of them come first with the scent, and hunting in good style.' He then mentions by name six couple out of the nine couple of Templer's draft that he had out that day.

Mr. Templer gave up his pack in 1826. His larger hounds went to the Rev. H. F. Yeatman, of Stockhouse, Dorset, and were later bought for the Portman pack, with the exception of the famous "Let 'em alones," which were bought by Mr. Hammitt Drake. Mr. Worth of Worth, Mr. Hole of Georgeham, the Rev. Jack Russell and Mr. Arthur Harris of Hayne,— "these latter formed the nucleus of that famous pack which showed such unexampled sport over the Tetcott and Pencarrow countries in 1828-30, that wild country extending from Torrington to Bodmin." Mr. Templer's blood presumably survives to-day in the Tiverton pack, some of which were, I believe, originally bought from Mr. Worth. The stamp of hound in the Stover kennel was an indication of the tastes and habits of the Master. "They were handsome, beautifully proportioned, with great roundness of loin, and with heads and necks and countenances that would have satisfied Osbaldeston himself, and all these qualities were enhanced by a brilliancy of condition that gave their coats a bloom soft and lucent as silk. There was always a strong Beaufort strain, and admiration of the Badminton hounds has been expressed in many of the liveliest poems of Mr. Templer."†

In concluding I might mention other curious things that were done by the owner of Stover. It is said he used to shoot rabbits over foxes, and course hares with a combined pack of terriers and foxes. He also trained a monkey to ride a very quiet old hunter, and the monkey, *en tenue rouge*,

* Thrice, and thrice only, in the long history of the Belvoir Hunt have drafts been sought from other packs, viz.:

In 1798, 15 couple from Lord Carlisle.

In 1810, 10 couple from Mr. Templer of Stover, Devon.

In 1817, 7 couple from Mr. Pelham.

(From "Kings of the Hunting Field," by Thormanby, published 1899.)

† From "Letters by the Devonian" (1828) from *Foxhounds of Devon*.

was occasionally taken out hunting, to amuse his friends. The unfortunate monkey's death is recorded as having taken place through the swinging-to of a gate. Nimrod mentions that he also had a tame jackal among the features of Stover. In "A Biography of Mr. Farquharson" (Baily, 1866) we find it stated that "when Mr. Templer's horses went into Dorsetshire a stable cat was perched comfortably on the clothing of one led horse, and 'Latitat,' his favourite fox, on another."

Mr. Templer died in 1843, aged sixty-two (as the result of a hunting accident), at Sandford Orleigh, where he was removed after having previously been taken to the hospital in Newton Abbot. With him ended a unique sport, if hunting bagmen can be called sport,* for modern ideas are against the use of "the bag," which, to quote Lord Willoughby de Broke, "destroys all the romance and spirit of foxhunting." These were not the views of our ancestors, and Mr. Templer's methods, his marvellous control over animals, his hard riding, and his lavish hospitality and kindness to his neighbours have long outlived the memory of many Masters of Hounds of more commonplace and orthodox views.

I am indebted to Mrs. Hebe J. Dammers (*née* Templer) for the following extract from *The Illustrated Bridport News* (about 1868):

"Of George Templer it may be said, as indeed of Bulteel, that he was sportsman, scholar, wit and poet. He was alike the pet of the field and of the social circle. It is recorded of him that he taught his splendid pack of hounds so perfectly that each dog comprehended every inflection of his voice. Every note of his horn was intelligible to them and conveyed a full meaning, and to the wave of his hand an instant obedience was given."

* With reference to hunting bagged foxes, this practice, or malpractice, was not confined to the West Country. In the "Annals of Sporting," Vol. III, 1823, we find: "Sporting occurrences in December. (Rutlandshire) Foxes unearthed. The Cottesmore hounds one day at Ayston, near Uppingham, proceeded to a neighbouring cover (Beaumont Chase) and immediately found a fox, which they ran for an hour and a half. He escaped the vigilance of his pursuers by entering a drain, and on the drain being opened three foxes were discovered. . . . They were bagged and kept for future sport."

In the same volume we find, under Norfolk: "(Foxchase). Sir Jacob Astley's foxhounds threw off at Ringstead covers on Friday, Dec. 17 . . . Reynard was secured in safety and taken home in a sack for another day's sport."

Mr. George Osbaldeston was also a great bag foxhunter (see "Hunting in the Olden Days"). He writes to Mr. Budd, the cricketer, Nov. 19, 1822: "Let me know what Hopkins says about foxes. Recollect they must be old English foxes, no — French dunghills. About three brace per month will do." He bought old and young; even putting the season at only five months, it seems a pretty generous order. I hope he bought some of his own Quorn foxes for the Hambledon, which country, according to Baily, he was hunting in 1821-22. It would be poetic justice!



GEORGE TEMPLER OF STOVER

(His favourite fox "Latitat.")

(From the Water-Colour Drawing by Lionel Edwards, R.I.)



Lionel Edwards.

GEORGE TEMPLER OF STOVER, M.F.H.

"Not a hound moved until the last word."