

THE FOX

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The fox by Thomas F. Dale

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THOMAS F. DALE

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GLEANING AFTER THE SHOOTERS

PREFACE

THE design of the *Fur, Feather, and Fin Series* is to present monographs, as complete as they can possibly be made, on the various English birds, beasts and fishes which are generally included under the head of Game.

Books on Natural History cover such a vast number of subjects that their writers necessarily find it impossible to deal with each in a really comprehensive manner; and it is not within the scope of such works exhaustively to discuss the animals described in the light of objects of sport. Books on sport, again, seldom treat at length of the Natural History of the creatures which are shot or otherwise taken; and, so far as the Editor is aware, in no book hitherto published on Natural History or Sport has information been given as to the best methods of turning the contents of the bag to account.

Each volume of the present Series is, therefore, devoted to a bird, beast, or fish. The creature's origin is traced, its birth and breeding described, and all the sportsman's methods of dealing with it are set forth. In previous books of the series the subjects have only been left when on the table in the most appetising forms which the delicate science of cookery has discovered, but the culinary chapter does not come into the scope of this book : the fox is devoured *au naturel*.

ALFRED E. T. WATSON.

PREFACE TO 'THE FOX'



MUCH has been written about the fox, but his varied history has never been told. A book on the fox might easily have been expanded into a history of foxhunting. But my plan has been to write the story of the animal from his own point of view. Even where foxhunting is touched upon, the object has been to illustrate the manners and intelligence of the creature rather than to dwell on the skill and courage of his pursuers.

It will be seen that the fox has been of importance to man, not only since the rise of foxhunting, but at all periods of history. The naturalist, the sportsman, the moralist, and the student of animal psychology have each and all found the beast an interesting subject of thought and study. But when we begin to study the

fox in life and literature we find that he is so surrounded by a cloud of myths and legends, ancient and modern, that, like other heroes, his true nature is obscured. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the real and the legendary fox. The latter is one of the objects of this book. The stories about the animal told here have been sifted and tested. I have tried not to include anything of which the truth was not probable. The anecdotes which have survived the winnowing process are nevertheless still notable enough to give the fox a high place among animals for his adaptability and intelligence. I have found, as all students of natural history must, the natural history columns of the 'Field' most instructive and suggestive. After searching through a long series of years of that paper, I desire to express once for all my obligations both to the facts recorded and to the editorial remarks on them. In disputed points, as that of the existence of the hybrid between the fox and the dog, I have found that my own observations and enquiries confirm the conclusions arrived at by the natural history editor of the 'Field.' So far as I know this book is the first which has collected together the facts

known about the natural history of the fox, his intelligence, and his place as a beast of chase. The standard natural history books always say that the 'habits of the fox are too well known to need description.' 'The Life of a Fox,' though full of interest and keen observation, deals chiefly with the creature from the point of view of the huntsman. Thus I am not without hope that both naturalists and sportsmen may find these pages worth reading.

The latter class cannot but find more interest in their sport when they have some idea of the habits and intelligence of the very remarkable little animal they are hunting. My own experience is that natural history and sport are allies, and that the naturalist and sportsman add to their pleasure by some knowledge of each other's pursuits. Besides the above sources of information I must acknowledge the sympathy and assistance I have received during the progress of this book from Miss Alys Serrell, of Haddon Lodge, Dorset. In her knowledge of hunting and in the keenness and accuracy of her observation she is equalled by few writers on sport.

It is perhaps needless to say that to write