

# The Fox's Prophecy

Tom Hill was in the saddle,  
One bright November morn,  
The echoing glades of Guiting Wood  
Were ringing with his horn.

The diamonds of the hoar-frost  
Were sparkling in the sun.  
Upon the falling leaves the drops  
Were shining one by one.

The hare lay on the fallow,  
The robin carolled free;  
The linnnet and yellow finch  
Twittered from tree to tree.

In stately march the sable rook  
Followed the clanking plough;  
Apart their watchful sentinel  
Cawed from the topmost bough.

Peeped from her hole the field-mouse  
Amid the fallen leaves.  
From twig to twig the spider  
Her filmy cable weaves.

The wavings of the pine boughs  
The squirrel's form disclose;  
And through the purple beech-tops  
The whirring pheasant rose.

The startled rabbit scuttered  
Across the grassy ride;  
High in mid-air the hovering hawk  
Wheeled round in circles wide.

The freshest wind was blowing  
O'er groves of beech and oak  
And through the boughs of larch and pine  
The struggling sunbeam broke.

The avried tints of autumn  
Still lingered on the wood,  
And on the leaves the morning sun  
Poured out a golden flood.

Soft, fleecy clouds were sailing  
Across the vault of blue.

A fairer hunting morning  
No huntsman ever knew.

All nature seemed rejoicing  
That glorious morn to see;  
All seemed to breathe a fresher life -  
Beast, insect, bird and tree.

But sound and sight of beauty  
Fell dull on eye and ear;  
The huntsman's heart was heavy  
His brow oppressed with care.

High in his stirrups raised he stood,  
And long he gazed around;  
And breathlessly and anxiously  
His listened for a sound.

But nought he heard save the song bird  
Or jay's discordant cry;  
Or when among the tree-tops  
The wind went murmuring by.

No voice of hound, no sound of horn  
The woods around were mute,  
As though the earth had swallowed up  
His comrades - man and brute.

He thought, "I must essay to find  
My hounds at any cost;  
A huntsman who has lost his hounds  
Is but a huntsman lost".

Then round he turned his horse's head  
And shook his bridle free,  
When he was struck by an aged fox  
That sat beneath a tree.

He raised his eye in glad surprise,  
That huntsman keen and bold;  
But there was in that fox's look  
That made his blood run cold.

He raised his hand to touch his horn,  
And shout a "Tally-ho"  
But mastered by that fox's eye,  
His lips refused to blow.

For he was grim and gaunt of limb,  
With age all silvered o'er;

He might have been an arctic fox  
Escaped from Greenland's shore.

But age his vigour had not tamed,  
Nor dimm'd his sparkling eye,  
Which shone with an unearthly fire -  
Fire that could never die.

And thus the huntsman he addressed,  
In tones distinct and clear,  
Who heard as they who in a dream  
The fairies' music hear.

"Huntsman" he said - a sudden thrill  
Through all the listeners ran,  
To hear a creature of the wood  
Speak like a Christian man -

"Last of my race, to me 'tis given  
The future to unfold,  
To speak the words which never yet  
Spake fox of mortal mould.

"Then print my words upon your heart  
And stamp them on your brain,  
That you to others may impart  
My prophecy again.

"Strong life is your's in manhood's prime,  
Your cheek with heat is red;  
Time has not laid his finger yet  
In earnest on your head.

"But ere your limbs are bent with age,  
And ere yours locks are grey,  
The sport that you have loved so well  
Shall long have passed away.

"In vain shall generous Colmore,  
Your hunt consent to keep;  
In vain the Rendcomb baronet  
With gold your stores shall heap.

"In vain Sir Alexander,  
And Watson Keen in vain,  
O'er the pleasant Cotswold hills  
The joyous sport maintain.

"Vain all their efforts: spite of all,  
Draws nigh the fatal morn,

When the last Cotswold fox shall hear  
The latest huntsman's horn.

"Yet think not, huntsman, I rejoice  
To see the end so near;  
Nor think the sound of horn and hound  
To me a sound of fear.

"In my strong youth, which numbers now  
Full many a winter back,  
How scornfully I shook my brush  
Before the Berkeley pack.

"How oft from Painswick hill I've seen  
The morning mist uncurl,  
When Harry Airis blew the horn  
Before the wrathful Earl.

"How oft I've heard the Cotswolds' cry  
As Turner cheered the pack,  
And laughed to see his baffled hounds  
Hang vainly on my track.

"Too well I know, by wisdom taught  
The existence of my race  
O'er all wide England's green domain  
Is bound up with the Chase.

"Better in early youth and strength  
The race for life to run,  
Than poisoned like the noxious rat,  
Or slain by felon gun.

"Better by wily sleight and turn  
The eager hound to foil,  
Than slaughtered by each baser churl  
Who yet shall till the soil.

"For not upon these hills alone  
The doom of sport shall fall;  
O'er the broad face of England creeps  
The shadow on the wall.

"The years roll on: old manors change,  
Old customs lose their sway;  
New fashions rule; the grandsire's garb  
Moves ridicule to-day.

"The woodlands where my race has bred  
Unto the axe shall yield;

Hedgerow and copse shall cease to shade  
The ever widening field.

"The manly sports of England  
Shall vanish one by one;  
The manly blood of England  
In weaker veins shall run.

"The furzy down, the moorland heath,  
The steam plough shall invade;  
Nor park nor manor shall escape -  
Common, nor forest glade.

"Degenerate sons of manlier sires  
To lower joys shall fall;  
The faithless lore of Germany,  
The gilded vice of Gaul.

"The sports of their forefathers  
To baser tastes shall yield;  
The vices of the town displace  
The pleasures of the field.

"For swiftly o'er the level shore  
The waves of progress ride;  
The ancient landmarks one by one  
Shall sink beneath the tide.

"Time honoured creeds and ancient faith,  
The Alter and the Crown,  
Lordship's hereditary right,  
Before that tide go down.

"Base churls shall mock the mighty names  
Writ on the roll of time;  
Religion shall be held a jest,  
And loyalty a crime.

"No word of prayer, no hymn of praise  
Sound in the village school;  
The people's education  
Utilitarians rule.

"In England's ancient pulpits  
Lay orators shall preach  
New creeds, and free religions  
Self made apostles teach.

"The peasants to their daily tasks  
In surly silence fall;

No kindly hospitalities  
In farmhouse nor in hall.

"Nor harvest feast nor Christmas tide  
Shall farm or manor hold;  
Science alone can plenty give,  
The only God is gold.

"The homes where love and peace should dwell  
Fierce politics shall vex,  
And unsexed woman strive to prove  
Herself the coarser sex.

"Mechanics in their workshops  
Affairs of state decide;  
Honour and truth - old fashioned words -  
The noisy mob deride.

"The statesman that should rule the realm  
Coarse demagogues displace;  
The glory of a thousand years  
Shall end in foul disgrace.

The honour of old England,  
Cotton shall buy and sell,  
And hardware manufacturers  
Cry "Peace - lo, all is well".

Trade shall be held the only good  
And gain the sole device;  
The statesman's maxim shall be peace,  
and peace at any price.

"Her army and her navy  
Britain shall cast aside;  
Soldiers and ships are costly things,  
Defence an empty pride.

"The German and the Muscovite  
Shall rule the narrow seas;  
Old England's flag shall cease to float  
In triumph on the breeze.

"The footsteps of th' invader,  
Then England's shore shall know,  
While home-bred traitors give the hand  
To England's every foe.

"Disarmed, before the foreigner,  
The knee shall humbly bend,

And yield the treasures that she lacked  
The wisdom to defend.

"But not for aye - yet once again,  
When purged by fire and sword,  
The land her freedom shall regain,  
To manlier thoughts restored.

"Taught wisdom by disaster,  
England shall learn to know,  
That trade is not the only gain  
Heaven gives to man below.

"The greed for gold departed  
The golden calf cast down,  
Old England's sons shall raise again  
The Alter and the Crown.

"Rejoicing seas shall welcome  
Their mistress once again;  
Once more the banner of St George  
Shall rule upon the main.

"The blood of the invader  
Her pastures shall manure,  
His bones unburied on her fields  
For monuments to endure.

"Again in hall and homestead,  
Shall joy and peace be seen,  
And smiling children raise again  
The maypole on the green.

"Again the hospitable board  
Shall groan with Christmas cheer,  
And mutual service bind again  
The peasant and the peer.

"Again the smiling hedgerow  
Shall field from field divide;  
Again among the woodlands  
The scarlet troop shall ride."

Again it seemed that aged fox,  
More prophecies would say,  
When sudden came upon the wind,  
"Hark forrard, gone away".

The listener started from his trance -  
He sat there all alone;

That well-known cry had burst the spell,  
The aged fox was gone.

The huntsman turned,  
He spurred his steed,  
And to the cry he sped;  
And when he thought upon that fox,  
Said naught, but shook his head.