

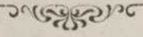
  

*The Fox's Prophecy.*

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BY  
D. W. N.

*The Fox's Prophecy.*

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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 fallen leaves, the drops  
Were shining one by one.

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

In stately march the sable rooks  
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 scattered  
 Across the grassy ride,  
 High in mid air the hovering hawk  
 Wheeled round in circles wide.

The fresh west wind was blowing  
 O'er groves of beech and oak,  
 And through the boughs of larch and pine  
 The struggling sunbeam broke ;

The varied 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  
 He listened for a sound.

But nought he heard, save song of bird,  
 Or jay's discordant cry,  
 Or when amid 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 aware of an aged fox  
 That sat beneath a tree.

" 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 or 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 Pinnock hill I've seen  
 The morning mist uncurl,  
 When Harry Ayris blew the horn  
 Before the wrathful Earl.

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

" Then deem not that I speak in fear,  
 Or prophecy in hate;—  
 Too well I know the doom reserved  
 For all my tribe by fate.

" 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 manners change,  
 Old customs lose their sway;  
 New fashion's rule; the grandsire's garb,  
 Moves ridicule to-day.

" The woodland's where my race has bred,  
 Unto the axe shall yield,  
 Hedgerows and Copse shall cease to shade  
 The ever-widening field.

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

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

"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 altar and the crown,  
Lordship, 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 farm-house or 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  
Fierce politics shall vex, [dwell  
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 mobs deride.

“ The statesmen 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 footstep of the invader,  
 Then England’s shores shall know ;  
 While home-bred traitors give the hand  
 To England’s every foe.

“ Disarmed, before the foreigner  
 The knee she’ll 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 abated,  
 The golden calf cast down,  
 Old England’s sons again shall raise  
 The altar and the crown.

“ Rejoicing seas shall welcome  
 Their mistress once again ;  
 Again the banner of Saint George  
 Shall rule upon the main.

" The blood of the invader  
Her pastures shall manure ;  
His bones unburied on her fields,  
For monuments 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 prophesies would say,  
When sudden came upon the wind,  
" Hark, forward ! 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 nought, but shook his head.

*Cheltenham, 1871.*



