

## The Bristol Mercury, Friday, February 28, 1890

### Sport at Saltford

A QUESTION was asked in the House of Commons last evening with regard to the practice of rabbit coursing, and with special reference to what is alleged to have occurred at the Crown inn, at Saltford, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the present month.

The noble form of sport in question appears to be under the protection of Mr J. W. Lowther, and thus it is the business of all critics to be humble-minded, and to be very careful as to what they say. For although Mr Lowther was once Chief Secretary for Ireland, he is principally famous as a patron of sport; in which department, indeed, few are bold enough to dispute his proficiency, whatever may be thought of him as a law giver. At the same time, notwithstanding that we are of the laity, so to speak, to venture to draw a distinction, as a matter of sport, between the hunting of the fox, and the killing of the hare or rabbit by means of dogs.

Fox hunting, as everyone knows, is a pastime which gives equal pleasure to all who participate. The fox, as an unusually intelligent creature, is well aware that his sole purpose in life is to be hunted. He ascertains, possibly by the usual channels of information, that my lord So-and-So's hounds propose "drawing" this or that cover, and he proceeds to ensconce himself in it, in order to secure the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood against any chance of disappointment.

On the approach of the hunt, he obligingly shows himself to the dogs, who immediately apprise the huntsman of their interesting discovery. He then dashes away across the open country, in order that the gentlemen and the dogs may have the exhilarating pleasure of following him. If they catch him they kill him, but it is not for the sake of killing him. They do it as a warning to other foxes to make haste, and so well is this understood that the fox who is caught cheerfully surrenders both his life and his tail, in behalf of a cause which dukes and curates alike uphold. There is, in fact, so much real gentlemanly feeling on the part, whether of the fox or of the hunt, that the former would often be invited to the hunt breakfast, if people were quite sure that he would come.

It cannot be said that hare or rabbit coursing is on the same footing as fox-hunting. In the first place, the nobility and gentry, who actually ride after the fox, content themselves with watching the dog run after the hare or the rabbit. Coursing is clearly a less aristocratic pursuit, as the humblest individual can arrange a "meeting" with the assistance of a cur, a rat and a "pal."

It would not, we opine, be really a coursing meeting, unless the rat was allowed a free run for his life, but unless we are much mistaken, we have heard the name of sport applied to the extermination of vermin by a terrier within the four walls of a public house cellar. From which fact we are led to assume that sport must have two sorts of patrons – those who pursue it for the sake of personal exercise and excitement, and those who do so for the sake of witnessing the excitement of the terrier and the pleasure of the rats. It would seem to be characteristic of the second class that any additional inconvenience to the quarry – which

must, of course, be somewhat annoyed at the proceedings – enhances the delight of the sport.

The vivisection of rabbits by terriers at Salford, if we are to believe the story told to the House of Commons, appears to have been productive of great pleasure, as a hundred of these creatures were maimed and subsequently worried to death before the spectators.

We hope that no sentimental reader will blaze out into passionate indignation, or rave about the low state of civilisation at Salford. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals might put its oar in – since it is not a far cry from the rabbit to the cat, if what we hear in commercial circles be true. All we have to say is that such a proceeding would be most improper, as Mr James Lowther has taken rabbit coursing under his special protection.

**Transcribed by  
Phil Harding for Salford Environment Group  
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#### NOTES

**DISCLAIMER:** The re-production of this press article from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Salford Environment Group to help illustrate Salford and Somerset's social history does not represent any support for the mistreatment or hunting of wild or other animals by dogs.

**James W Lowther, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Ullswater** (1855 - 1949), referred to in this article was a British Conservative politician. He served as Speaker of the House of Commons between 1905 and 1921. He had become a barrister in 1879 and at the time of this article, 1890, he was the MP for Penrith. As Speaker of the House of Commons he is famously quoted as having said in 1917 *"There are three golden rules for Parliamentary speakers: Stand up. Speak up. Shut up."*