

CELEBRITIES AT HOME. (1881)
Mr George Lane Fox at Bramham.

And pray why should she go abroad? I have never been abroad, Bramham, Yorkshire and England are quite good enough for me. This is the answer to an expression of astonishment that a lady has never travelled beyond the limits of the British islands and proceeds from that finest of old English gentlemen, Mr George Fox, known wherever good sportsmanship is known as the Bramham Moor Foxhounds. Standing when quite erect, some six feet two in height, he wears correctly tied neckcloth with black spots in it, fastened with a horseshoe pin, and a grey suit with short drab gaiters, instead of the breeches and leggings now so popular among country gentlemen. On one point Mr Fox is firm. As he has always worn a swallowtailed coat in London, so has he stuck to the stove pipe hat in the country. Hunting caps and bowlers he persistently ignored as Radical innovation, and in his beaver looks every inch the grand old broad-acred squire he really is, a superb specimen of a race of men now passing away, whose vision, if narrow, is yet clear as to their duty, and of curious acuteness where any question of personal truth and honour is concerned. It actually does one good to hear the Master of the Bramham Moor tell the story of that famous pack over which he has reigned with the common acclamation of the Country for three and thirty years.

Since Queen Anne visited Lord Bingley at Bramham Park, foxhounds have been kept either at Wothersome Warren close to the great house built by that nobleman with one interregnum Mr Fox's father not caring for foxhunting, the hounds and hunting establishment were taken over by the then Lord Lascelles the grandfather of the present Lord Harewood, on the verbal understanding that whenever he wished to give them up they should be offered to the representative of the Fox family. When this hard riding old Peer died suddenly on his way home from hunting, his son continued to hunt the Country for some half dozen years, but at last getting tired of the past of M.F.H., he offered the hounds to the late Mr. George Lane Fox who had no wish for them. But the present Master of Bramham, had a great wish to hunt the pack, and it was accordingly handed over to him as it had been given, horses and all to wit, ten hunters with new saddles and bridles. "All this transfer" Mr. Fox will say in his cheery voice, "was made without letter or line being exchanged," the word of gentlemen being enough to lend the spirit of the bargain, and its fulfilment to the utmost." This nice faith in the honour of others is one of his most characteristic features, it should however be noted that 'others' signifies other English gentlemen, those of other countries, those of other countries being by no means implicitly trusted by him. 'The Admiral' had a still greater dislike of all but English folk, remarking on one occasion of a solemn promise made by an Irish gentleman of good state, "he promised did he? then he wont perform, for d_____ him, he is an Irishman. Such prejudices existed, and to a certain extent still exist in Yorkshire, which after all allowance made for difference of area has been made, contains a bigger percentage of "Characters" than any County in England. Remoteness from London, the great wealth of landed Proprietors, and a love for their County which made them reside in it, has conduced to bring out individuality into the eccentricities depicted by Mr Digby Cayley in those incomparable stories with which he then and now delights his many friends.

A genuine type of sound manhood, Mr Fox is what Dr Johnson called 'a good hater,' to those whom he loves he gives his heart and confidence unreservedly, but those who are not so fortunate as to attract his regard are at to discover the estimation in which they are held, not that he ever fails, except in the hunting field when Leeds folk are riding his hounds, to observe the graceful forms of old-fashioned courtesy. On such occasions, indeed he is apt to make a remark that 'sticks' not from foxhunting roughness, but by virtue of a keen satirical humour, which has made his name redoubtable in the hunting field. He is far too thoroughbred to indulge in harsh invective, but those who have merited rebuke are apt to ride home thinking it over, It should be understood that Mr. Fox is essentially a foxhunter, caring little for shooting, and regarding rabbits and pheasants chiefly as food for foxes. His averions are Roman Catholics, Radical, and pheasant preservers, the latter being his especial abomination. To intimate that he would preserve pheasants would pick p----- is to convey a very faint impression of Mr Fox's ideas on this subject. Those who would preserve in this ----- ation are 'Leaden hall-market,' sportsmen entirely lost to that ----- conception of sport involved in foxhunting. It is King Fox who reigns supreme in the Bramham Moor Country. The idea of ----- g is so vivid that Mr Fox, on a quiet chatty evening, will tell the story of Will Danby, who was gazing side by side with a friend at a foxhound asleep by the

fire. The animal was evidently dreaming, and Will's friend asked "what is he dreaming about," The reply was simple: "Why, foxhunting, to be sure, What the devil else should he dream about.?" A peculiarity in the life of Mr Fox is that he does not quite live at home, but, as he calls it, in the village of Bramham, that is, he occupies one of those pleasant houses which have been gradually enlarged to suit the requirements of the owner and his family. Here he loved to entertain his old friend "Frank Grant," the late President of the Royal Academy, for whom he entertained the highest esteem, and who painted years ago a picture of the type with which the late P.R.O. familiarised the non-foxhunting public. As a work of art it is a failure, for Mr Fox is made to appear a short thickset man. This defect arises from the enormous size of the steed, whose master, standing by his side is completely dwarfed. Yet it is, Mr Fox assures his guest, "all according to measurement." The M.F.H. thought he looked cob like, and said so to Frank, who at once asked to be allowed to repaint the picture; but it struck Mr Fox that if his height were done justice to, the grandeur of the horse must suffer, and he preferred to look short and cobby himself to sacrificing the effect of his favourite hunter. His admiration for this immense animal has nowise diminished with time. His high and fighting action is tenderly remembered, as well as the remark of "CHESSY" that "a horse cannot have too much action, if it be only of the right sort" PT was a good animal to carry Mr. Fox's 16 stone, for to this weight he has kept his tall figure down, by the practise of severe moderation in food and drink. His 68 Leo ville is a seductive fluid. Poured out abundantly for his friends but he is extremely temperate in his own libations. The gallant grey painted by Sir Francis Grant must by no means be taken as a type of Mr Fox's se of hunter. He likes them less on a large scale and up to weight than quick, clever, well-bred, and a trifle skittish. The explanation of this peculiarity is that he really has hands of exceptional delicacy, and a well bred horse who "wants riding", to a powerful animal who is what is called a "made" horse. There are valuable pictures at Brarnham, including some good historic portraits, and there is a world of enjoyment in the squire's own room, and the little smoking room downstairs. These are literally lapissees with hunting pictures, portraits of ancient racers, and engravings of old English sport, as conducted at various periods. And there are holy relic such as the horn worn by poor Slingsby when he sank in the Mire, in the terrible accident at Newby Ferry. There is another relic of less sorrowful nature. It is the valuable service of plate presented to Mr Fox by the Bramham Moor Hunt in 1872. As he had then hunted the pack since 1848, it was considered that a service of plate, worth some three thousand pounds, would be an appropriate offering to the M.F.H. Everything was arranged, the plate was made, and a very pretty book filled with signatures and illuminations of the favourite meets of the Bramham Moor, such as Harewood Bridge and the Boot and Shoe Inn. All being ready a grand hunting breakfast was given by Lord Harewpod, and a brilliant company was assembled. When Mr Fox saw the beauty of the present. Given to him and heard Lord Harewoods speech, he was for the first time in his life a little taken aback. A fluent and forcible speaker at Conservative meetings, he almost hesitated with his speech in returning thanks. Once fairly underway however he made some admirable remarks, during which the horses were brought round to the door, seeing these he round a characteristic speech with "And now let us all go foxhunting."

It is difficult to understand the great personal influence of Mr Fox until one knows him, when it is not only easy to feel, but difficult to resist, the charm. Not only is the matter of his daily observations good, but the manner of the man has in it something indescribably genial, hearty and cheering. At Leeds the hard riding Radicals who dread him in the hunting field, but cannot resist their love of following the fox rather than the hounds, cheer him to the echo when he makes a political speech; and all who know him best regret that he should have given to sporting qualities which would have brought him to the front in politics, Such however are apt for the moment to forget that as a large landowner he had a heavy task set him on succeeding to the estate. Like an obedient son he, when he came of age, allowed his father to do as he liked, the result being that he found on his hands an estate mortgaged and encumbered "up to the masthead". It has been the serious work of his life to pay off a mountain of obligations, and at last he has a genuine estate to bequeath to his children. This task has involved the spending but one-third of his nominal income, living on the estate as a resident landlord, and dwelling in his house at Bramham instead of re-building the family mansion built by Lord Bingley at Bramham. Park. With all his sporting tastes, Mr Fox never in his life owned a recehorse, betted, played or spent a shilling out of his own country --- his only , fOurneys being to London, and to his Irish estates in Leitrim and Waterford.

It is pleasant to take an afternoons stroll with him on an off day up to the ruins of his burnt out Mansion, close to which the kennels and stables are situated. If asked why he does not rebuild, there is just a twitch of the bushy white eyebrows, and a laughing look in the bright blue eyes. "It would take thirty thousand of ready money to build a good house, And it must be done for cash: for how can a man who has to pay interest afford to live up to his house?". Mr Fox's talk is full of sagacity of this straight forward kind, among which no word of reproach is ever uttered against his father a worthy happy go lucky gentleman who, as neighbours say never exactly knew the value of money. As Mr. Fox strides across his statley park he will point out the track ridden in uprooted trees, of the singular whirlwind which preceded the great hurricane. In a few minutes more he is among the hounds, getting their afternoon exercise under the care of W. Smith late of the Brocklesby. Mr Fox has given as much attention to the reeding of hounds as Lord Falmouth to the breeding of recehorses. Visits to Belvoir and Brocklesby led to extensive crossing of the old Bramham Moor pack; and of late years their famous strains have been laid under contributions. "New Blood" appears to be Mr Fox's leading idea in keeping up his pack to the proper standard, provided always that the new blood be good, From squire FOLJAMBE'S the belvoer and the Brocklesby, he has gone successively to Badminton, Egglesford and Poltimore. As to horses he is very catholic in taste, always preferring one which gives his fine hands and quick brain something to do. A delightful hour may be spent in looking round the stables when Mr Fox is in good humour; for few men can sum up a horse in such few and graphic words. Quite untouched by a taste for fancy shorthorns, which he regards as generally bad milkers, he has a fine flock of Shropshire Downs, and entertains a lingering love for Leisters. Another love of his is for the gardens and grounds of Bramham Park. All these are kept in trim as if the big house were inhabited, and they are in fact "only a mile off for my daughters to walk" as Mr Fox puts it. There is a quaint story of a Yorkshire Lady, who, on being shown the gardens at St. Cloud exclaimed, "This is only Bramham vulgarised"! The grounds of Bramham are magnificent, enormous hedges of mingled beech and hornbeam, and sunerb avenues of beeches, were laid out by the grand old gardener probably the Notre, who worked for the Lord Bingley who entertained Queen Anne at Bramham. There are mazes and roundspoints, all shut in by high straight leafy walls deliciously decked in their Autumn dress. No idea could be formed at a distance of this pleasaunce where once was Bramham Moor. There are delicious woods and avenues, ponds and waterfalls, as well as a cultivated flower garden of large extent. Fronting the main lower garden is a building evidently intended for the discussion of pipes and punch in the intervals of the game of bowls going on in the rear, where is one of the finest bowling greens in England, whereon Lord Bingley and other Queen Anne men doubtless displayed their skill. There is no bowls playing now at Bramham Park, whence the portrait of Queen Anne, and one of Sarah Jennings have been removed to Mr. Fox's present residence. At Bramham the host, ever brimming with life and vigour, has plenty of good stories to tell of the old Harrogate doctor Scaife, who never would go hunting until he found that everybody at Harrogate, even to the barmaid at the hotel, followed the hounds. Then the cafe became an enthusiast, and scorned to spoil his run to attend to a casualty. The old laret-drinking feats at Kit Wilson's also came in for mention, as well as the "Long Tom" of strong ale that none of the simple sort was allowed to quit Bramham without quaffing honestly to the end. And in silky claret all present drink the good old toast, honoured the wild world over wherever Yorkshiremen have met, during the chills of the Crimea, or the heats of the War of the Mutiny, "Bramham Moor and five and twenty couple!