

AT the beginning of the nineteenth century, few counties in England produced such a crop of hunting parsons as did Devonshire. They were in force for the first fifty years. In 1831 Henry Phillpotts was consecrated Bishop of Exeter. Shortly after, as he was driving with his chaplain on the way to a Confirmation, a fox-hunt passed by in full halloo.

"Dear me!" exclaimed his lordship; "what a number of black coats among the hunters. Has there been some great bereavement in the neighbourhood?"

"My lord," replied the chaplain, "the only bereavement these black-coated sportsmen suffer from is not being able to appear in pink."

There were, it was computed, in the diocese of Exeter a score of incumbents who kept their packs; there must have been over a hundred parsons who hunted regularly two or three days in the week, and as many more who would have done so had their means allowed them to keep hunters.

There is no objection to be made to a parson following the hounds occasionally; the sport is more manly than that which engrosses so many young clerics nowadays, dawdling about with ladies on lawn-tennis grounds or at croquet. But those early days of last century hunting was with many the main pursuit of their life, and clerical duties were neglected or perfunctorily performed.

There was no high standard of clerical life prevalent, but what standard there was was not lived up to. These parsonic sportsmen were as profoundly ignorant of the doctrines of the Faith they were commissioned to teach, as any child in a low form in a National School. As was sung of one—typical—

This parson little loveth prayer  
And *Pater* night and morn, Sir!  
For bell and book hath little care,  
But dearly loves the horn, Sir!  
Sing tally-ho! sing tally-ho!  
Sing tally-ho! Why, Zounds, Sir!  
I mounts my mare to hunt the hare!  
Sing tally-ho! the hounds, Sir!

In pulpit Parson Hogg was strong,  
He preached without a book, Sir!  
And to the point, but never long,  
And this the text he took, Sir!  
O tally-ho! O tally-ho!  
Dearly Beloved—Zounds, Sir!  
I mounts my mare to hunt the hare!  
Sing tally-ho! the hounds, Sir!

There is but one patch of false colour in this song, that which represents the hunting parson as strong in the pulpit.

Society—hunting society especially—in North Devon was coarse to an exceptional degree. One who knew it intimately wrote to me: "It was a strange ungodly company, parsons included, and that not so very long ago. North Devon society in Jack Russell's day was peculiar—so peculiar that no one now would believe readily that half a century ago such life could be—but I was in the thick of it. It was not creditable to any one, but it was so general that the rascality of it was mitigated by consent."

The hunting parson was, as said, not strong in the pulpit except in voice. But Jack Russell, of Swymbridge, was an exception.



Rev. John Russell

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He had a fine, sonorous voice, good delivery, and some eloquence. The Bishop of Exeter, Dr. Phillpotts, heard him on one occasion, and said to a lady, a connexion of Mr. Russell, "That was really a capital sermon." "Ah! my lord," she replied, "you have only heard him in the wood—you should hear him in pig-skin giving the view-halloo!"

Bishop Phillpotts came to the diocese resolved to suppress the hunting and sporting of his clergy, but found it impossible to do so. His efforts were wrongly directed; the hunting put down would not have altered the propensities of his clergy. He could not convert them to earnest and devoted parish priests. Thus hearts could not be reached. It was only as this class of men died out that a better type could be introduced. The Bishop sent for Mr. Russell, of Swymbridge.

"I understand that you keep hounds, and that your curate hunts with you. Will you give up your hounds?"

"No, my lord, I decline to do so."

He then turned to the curate, Sleeman, and said, "Your licence, sir, I revoke; and I only regret that the law does not enable me to deal with the graver offender of the two."

"I am very happy to find you can't, my lord," said Russell. "And may I ask, if you revoke Mr. Sleeman's licence, who is to take the duty at Landkey, my other parish, next Sunday?"

"Mr. Sleeman may do it."

"And who the following Sunday?"

"Mr. Sleeman again," replied the Bishop, "if by that time you have not secured another curate."

"I shall take no steps to do so, my lord; and, moreover, shall be very cautious as to whom I admit into my charges," replied Russell.

Finally Mr. Sleeman removed to Whitchurch, a family living, to which he succeeded on the death of his father, and Bishop Phillpotts had to swallow the bitter pill of instituting him to it. I remember Mr. Sleeman as rector, hunting, shooting, dancing at every ball, and differing from a layman by his white tie, a capital judge of horses, and possessor of an excellent cellar.

When Parson Jack Russell was over eighty he started keeping a pack of harriers. The then Bishop of Exeter sent for him.

"Mr. Russell, I hear you have got a pack of hounds. Is it so?"

"It is. I won't deny it, my lord."

"Well, Mr. Russell, it seems to me rather unsuitable for a clergyman to keep a pack. I do not ask you to give up hunting, for I know it would not be possible for you to exist without *that*. But will you, to oblige me, give up the pack?"

"Do y' ask it as a personal favour, my lord?"

"Yes, Mr. Russell, as a personal favour."

"Very well, then, my lord, I will."

"Thank you, thank you." The Bishop, moved by his readiness, held out his hand. "Give me your hand, Mr. Russell; you are—you really are—a good fellow."

Jack Russell gave his great fist to the Bishop, who pressed it warmly. As they thus stood hand in hand, Jack said—

"I won't deceive you—not for the world, my lord. I'll give up the pack sure enough—but Mrs. Russell will keep it instead of me."

The Bishop dropped his hand.

On one occasion Bishop Phillpotts met Froude, vicar of Knowstone. "I hear, Mr. Froude, that you keep a pack of harriers."

"Then you've heard wrong, my lord. It is the pack that keeps me."

"I do not understand."

"They stock my larder with hares. You don't suppose I should have hares on my table unless they were caught for me? There's no butcher for miles and miles, and I can't get a joint but once in a fortnight. Forced to eat hares; and they must be caught to be eaten."

The Bishop then said to Froude: "I hear, sir, but I can hardly credit it, that you invite men to your house and keep them drinking and then fighting in your parlour."

"My lord, you are misinformed. Don't believe a word of it. When they begin to fight and takes off their coats, I turns 'em out into the churchyard."

John Boyce, rector of Sherwell, wishing to have a day's hunting with the staghounds on the Porlock side of Exmoor, told his clerk to give notice in the morning that there would be no service in the afternoon in the church, as he was going off to hunt with Sir Thomas Acland over the moor on the following day. The mandate was obeyed to the letter, the clerk making the announcement in the following terms:—

"This is to give notiss—there be no sarvice to this church this arternoon; cos maester be a-going over the moor a stag-hunting wi' Sir Thomas."

At Stockleigh Pomeroy parish, the rector, Roupe Ilbert, desired his clerk to inform the congregation that there would be one service only on the Sunday in that church for a month, as he was going to take duty at Stockleigh English *alternately* with his own. The clerk did so in these words: "This is vor to give notiss—there'll be no sarvice to thes church but wance a wick, as maester's a-going to sarve t'other Stockleigh and this church to all etarnity."

On one occasion, as the congregation were assembling for divine service in a church where Mr. Russell was ministering, a man stood on the churchyard hedge, with the band of his hat stuck round with silver spoons, bawling out, "Plaize to tak' notiss—Thaise zix zilver spunes to be wrastled vor next Thursday, at Poughill, and all ginlemen wrastlers will receive vair play." The man, with the spoons in his hat, then entered the church, went up to the singing gallery, and hung it on a peg, from which it was perfectly visible to the parson and the greater part of the congregation during service.

It was customary in those portions of Devon which were not regularly hunted, for the church bell to be rung when a fox had been discovered, so as to assemble all hands to kill it.

On one occasion, at Welcombe, snow lying deep on the ground, the clergyman was reading the second lesson, when a man opened the church door and shouted in, "I've a got un!" and immediately withdrew. At once up rose all the men in the congregation and followed him, and within a couple of hours brought into the village inn a fine old fox, dug out and murdered in cold blood.

Of the whole tribe of fox-hunting, hare-hunting, otter-hunting, dancing parsons, Jack Russell was the best in every way.

I was travelling outside the coach one day to Exeter, and two farmers were by me on the seat behind the driver. Their talk was on this occasion, not of bullocks, but of parsons. One of them came from Swymbridge, the other from a certain parish that I shall not name, and whose rector we will call Rattenbury. The latter told a story of Rattenbury that cannot be repeated, indicating incredible grossness in an Englishman,

impossible in a gentleman. "Aye there!" retorted the sheep of Parson Jack's flock. "Our man b'aint like that at all. He be main fond o' dogs, I allows; he likes his bottle o' port, I grant you that; but he's a proper gentleman and a Christian; and I reckon your passon be neither one nor t'other."

John Russell was born in December, 1796. His father was rector of Iddesleigh, in North Devon, and at the same time of Southill, near Callington, in Cornwall, one of the fattest livings in that county, the rectory and church distant three miles from the town of Callington, that is in the parish. A curate on a small stipend was sent to serve Iddesleigh, Mr. Russell settling into the spacious rectory of Southill, large as a manor-house, and with extensive grounds and gardens.

Young John was sent to school at Blundell's, at Tiverton, under Dr. Richards, a good teacher, but a very severe disciplinarian. At Blundell's, Russell and another boy, named Bovey, kept a scratch pack of hounds. Having received a hint that this had reached the ears of Dr. Richards, he collected his share of the pack and sent them off to his father. Next day he was summoned to the master's desk.

"Russell," said the Doctor, "I hear that you have some hounds. Is it true?"

"No, sir," answered Russell; "I have not a dog in the neighbourhood."

"You never told me a lie, so I believe you. Bovey, come here. You have some hounds, I understand?"

"Well, sir, a few—but they are little ones."

"Oh! you have, have you? Then I shall expel you the school."

And expelled he was, Russell coming off scatheless.

John Russell was ordained deacon in 1819, on nomination to the curacy of Georgenympton, near Southmolton, and there he kept otter hounds. In 1830 he married Penelope, daughter of Admiral Bury, a lady with a good deal of money, all of which, or nearly all, Parson Jack managed in process of years to get rid of—£50,000, which went, not in giving her pleasure, but on his own sporting amusements.

Russell thought that in horse-dealing, as in love and war, all things are lawful. It so happened that Parson Froude wanted a horse, and he asked his dear friend, Russell, if he knew where he could find one that was suitable. "Would my brown horse do?" asked Russell. "I want to sell him, because the hunting season is over, and I have too many horses. Come into town on Saturday and dine with me in the middle of the day, and see the horse. If you like him, you can have him, and if you do not, there is no harm done."

On Saturday, into Southmolton came Froude. Russell lived there, as he was curate of Georgenympton, near by. Froude stabled his horse at the lower end of the town. He was suspicious even of a friend, so, instead of going to Russell's lodging, he went to his stable and found the door locked. This circumstance made him more suspicious than ever, and, looking round, he saw a man on a ladder, from which he was thatching a cottage. He called to him for assistance, shifted the ladder to the stable, ascended, and went by the "tallet" door into the loft. He got down the steps inside, opened the window, and carefully inspected the horse, which he found to be suffering in both eyes from incipient cataract. He climbed back, got down the ladder, and shutting the window, went into a shop to have his coat brushed before he rang his friend's door-

bell. The door was opened by Russell himself, who saluted him with: "You are early, Froude. Come across to the bank with me for a moment, if you do not mind."

In the street was standing a Combmartin cart laden with early vegetables, and between the shafts was an old pony, stone blind, with glassy eyeballs. Froude paused, lifted the pony's head, turned its face to the light, looked at the white eyeballs, and remarked: "How blessed plenty blind horses are in this town just now, Jack."

Not another word was said. The dinner was eaten, the bottle of port wine was consumed, and Froude rode home without having been asked to see the brown horse. Russell knew that the game was up, and that his little plan for making his friend view the horse *after* he had dined, and not before, had lamentably failed.

But that was the way with them. Froude would have dealt with his best friend in the same manner over horses.

One who knew him intimately writes: "Russell was an iron man. I have known other specimens, but Russell was the hardest of all in constitution. He was kindly enough and liberal in his dealings with his people; but if it came to selling him, or even to lending him, a horse, or buying what he was pleased to call his famous terriers, the case was different it was after the morality of North Devon. He was a wonderful courtier where ladies were concerned, and with them he was very popular. He was no fool, but very capable, only a man who was too much given to outdoor sports to read, or even to keep himself currently informed.

"His voice was not unmusical, but tremendous. He was far too shrewd to be ever foolish in church. I was in the county somewhere about 1848-9, and there was a Bishop's Visitation at Southmolton, and Russell was asked to preach. Then the clergy, churchwardens, etc., dined together at the 'George,' and after dinner the Bishop rose, and, with his silvery voice, thanked the preacher of the day, and, in the name of all those present, begged him to publish his admirable discourse for their benefit.

"Bishop Phillpotts, I may say, was diabolically astute and well-informed, and dangerous to match.

"Then up rose Russell, with head thrown back, and said: 'My lord, I rejoice that so good a judge should pronounce my performance profitable. But I cannot oblige your lordship and publish, because that discourse is already in print. My lord, when I was requested to preach to-day I naturally turned to see what others before me had thought it advisable to say on similar occasions; and, chancing on a discourse by an Irish clergyman of long ago, I shared your lordship's sentiments of admiration, and feeling myself incapable of doing better than the author, I was determined, my lord, that if, to-day, I could give no better fare, at least my audience should have no worse. My lord, the sermon is not original.'

"There was not a man in the room but knew that the Bishop had endeavoured to trap *their* man. And that he had extricated himself gave vast delight, manifested by the way in which the glasses leaped from the tables, as the churchwardens banged the boards."

Russell was not a heavy drinker. No one ever saw him drunk. Usually he only brought out a bottle of port after he had killed his fox. On all other occasions gin and water was produced before going to bed. But if not intemperate in that way, he could and did use strong language in the hunting-field—as strong as any of the yeomen and farmers.

He was ubiquitous. Whenever there was a wrestling match, distance was nothing to him, or a horse fair, or a stag-hunt. Mentioning stag-hunts recalls the story of a parson on the fringe of Exmoor, who had been out with the hounds, and had the hunters in his church on Sunday morning. The Psalm given out was "As pants the hart for cooling streams," and his text was "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah, and we found it in the wood."

From Southmolton John Russell moved to Iddesleigh, appointed there by his father, who surrendered to him the income of the living.

He was now somewhat out of the ring of his former associates, and had to make, and contrived to make, fresh friends in the neighbourhood of Hatherleigh. But it was not one where there were many squires, and the clergy were too poor to keep packs. Moreover, that tract of country was rarely hunted at all, and Russell determined to make it his own special happy hunting ground. There were, however, difficulties in the way. The people did not sympathize. The farmers were indisposed to favour his scheme, and of resident sporting squires there were none at all.

It had long been the practice of the natives to kill a fox whenever and however they could catch him; and Russell had not been long at Iddesleigh when one day his ear caught the sound of a church bell, rung in a jangling fashion and with more than usual clamour. It was the signal that a fox had been tracked to ground or balled into a brake; and the bell summoned every man who possessed a pickaxe, a gun, or a terrier to hasten to the spot and lend a hand in destroying the noxious animal. This practice he had to interrupt and put an end to.

A letter of Russell's thus describes his first adventure with a party bent on murdering a fox in his new country:—

"During the winter of the first year I was at Iddesleigh, the snow at the time lying deep on the ground, a native—Bartholomew, *alias* Bat, Anstey—came to me and said, 'Hatherleigh bell is a-ringing, sir.' 'Ringing for what?' I asked, with a strong misgiving as to the cause of it. 'Well, sir, they've a-tracked a fox in somewhere; and they've a-sot the bell a-going to collect the people to shoot un.' 'Come, Bat, speak out like a man,' I replied, 'and tell me where it is.' 'In Middlecot Earths, sir; just over the Ockment.'

"I was soon on the spot with about ten couple of my little hounds, and found standing around the earths about a hundred fellows, headed, I am almost ashamed to say, by two gentlemen—Mr. Veale, of Passaford, and Mr. Morris, of Fishley. I remonstrated with these gentlemen, and told them plainly that if they would leave the earths, and preserve foxes for me, I would show them more sport with my little pack in one day than they would see in a whole year by destroying the gallant animal in so un-English a way.

"Impressed, apparently, by what I had said, both gentlemen instantly bade me good morning, turned on their heels, and left the place; while a few shillings distributed among the rest, by way of compensation for the disappointment I had caused them, induced them to disperse and leave me almost the sole occupant of the situation.

"Then, after waiting half an hour near the spot, I turned my head towards home; but before I arrived there I met a man open-mouthed, bawling out, 'They've a-tracked a fox into Brimblecombe, for I hear the Dowland bell a-going.'

"So off I went to Dowland in post-haste; found out where the fox was lying, turned him out of a furzebush, ran him one hour and forty minutes—a blaze of scent all the way—and took him up alive before the hounds on the very earths I had so lately

quitted; where, unfortunately for him, a couple of scoundrels had remained on the watch, and had consequently headed him short back from that stronghold."

But Russell had not yet finished with the fox-killers, for he says: "The very next day after the run from Brimblecombe, a man came to Iddesleigh on purpose to inform me that the bell was going at Beaford, and that a fox had been traced into a brake near that hamlet. The brake, in reality, though not far from Iddesleigh, was in Mr. Glubb's country; but feeling sure that the necessity of the case would justify the encroachment, I let out the hounds at once, and hurried to the spot with all speed.

"On arriving at the brake I found only one man near it; and he, placed there as sentinel, was guarding it from disturbance with a watchful eye. I asked him to tell me where the fox was, but he gave me a very impertinent answer. Pulling out half a crown, I said, 'There, my man, I'd have given you that if you had told me where he was.' The fellow's eye positively sparkled at sight of the silver. 'Let me have it, then,' he replied, 'and I will show you where he is to a yard.'

"I ran that fox an hour, and lost him near where he was found. Then, just as I was calling the hounds away to go home, down came a crowd of men, women, and children to see this fox murdered. Many of them had brought their loaded guns, were full of beer, and eager for the fray. And when they discovered that I had disturbed *their* fox, as they were pleased to designate him, their language was anything but choice.

"A strapping young fellow, one of the principal farmers in the parish, came up to me and said, 'Who are you, sir, to come here and spoil our sport?' 'You would have spoiled mine,' I replied, 'if you could.' 'We'll shoot them foxes whenever we can that I'll promise you,' he said in an angry tone. At that moment one of the hounds began to howl. I looked round, saw she was in pain, and asked in a threatening manner, 'Who kicked that hound?'

"No one spoke for half a minute, when a little boy said, pointing to another, 'That boy kicked her.' 'Did he?' I exclaimed. 'Then 'tis lucky for him that he is a *little boy*.' 'Why?' said the farmer with whom I had been previously talking. 'Because,' I replied, 'if a *man* had kicked her I would have horse-whipped him on the spot.' 'You would find that a difficult job if you tried it,' was his curt answer. I jumped off my horse, threw down my whip, and said, 'Who's the man to prevent me?'

"Not a word was spoken. I stood my ground, and one by one the crowd retired, the young farmer amongst the number; and from that day forward I secured for myself not only the goodwill and co-operation but the friendship of some of the best fox-preservers that the county of Devon has ever seen."

I have thought it as well to let Mr. Russell tell his own story. If the reader considers this a dignified scene for a clergyman to be engaged in I beg to differ from him. In 1832, after he had been six years at Iddesleigh, Mr. Russell moved to Tordown, a lone country house in the parish of Swymbridge, and in 1833, the perpetual curacy of Swymbridge and Landkey becoming vacant, he was appointed to the benefice by the Dean of Exeter, and there he remained almost till his death.

"When I was inducted," wrote he, "to this incumbency there was only one service here every Sunday— morning and evening alternately with Landkey—whereas now, I am thankful to say, we have four services every Sunday in Swymbridge alone."



This shows that Parson Jack was not a mere mighty hunter before the Lord. He was a sincerely good man up to his lights, and never neglected a duty for the sake of a gallop after his hounds.

When he lost Mr. Sleeman he advertised for another curate in the *North Devon Journal*. "Wanted a curate for Swymbridge; must be a gentleman of moderate and orthodox views."

Mr. Hooker, vicar of Buckerell, was standing in a shop door in Barnstaple shortly after the appearance of this advertisement, when he was accosted by Will Chappie, the parish clerk of Swymbridge, who entered the grocer's shop. "Hav'ee got a coorate yet for Swymbridge, Mr. Chappie?" inquired the grocer in Mr. Hooker's hearing. "No, not yet, sir," replied the sexton, "Master's 'nation particler, and the man must be orthodox."

"What does that mean?" inquired the grocer.

"Well, I reckon it means he must be a purty good rider."

And Mr. Chappie was not far out. A curate did apply and breakfasted with Russell. The meal over, two likely-looking hunters were brought round ready to be mounted. "I'm going to take 'ee to Landkey," explained Russell. Off they rode. The young cleric presently remarked, "How bare of trees your estate is," as they crossed the lands belonging to Russell.

"Ah!" responded the sportsman, "the hounds eat 'em." Coming to a stiff gate, Russell, with his hand in his pocket, cleared it like a bird, but looking round, saw the curate on the other side crawling over the gate, and crying out, "It won't open."

"Not it," was the reply; "and if you can't leap a five-barred gate like that, I'm sure you can't preach a sermon. Good-bye."

It is not my intention to give a detailed life of the Rev. John Russell. His memoirs by the author of *Old Dartmoor Days*, published in 1878, are very full. They are very laudatory, written as they were whilst Russell was alive. Cromwell when being painted was asked by the artist about his mole. "Paint the mole and all," was the Protector's reply. But others are not so strong-minded and do not care to have portraits too realistic. In 1880, Russell was appointed to Black Torrington.

When he was over eighty he rode a poor hack from Black Torrington to Mr. Williams, at Scorrier, to judge puppies, and Mrs. Williams was alarmed, as the old man was not well on arriving. She proposed to send him back by rail, fearing lest he should be seriously—fatally, perhaps—ill in her house. But although very poorly, he refused, and with one day between, rode home, something like seventy miles each journey.

He died in 1883, 3 May, in the arms of his medical attendant, Dr. Linnington Ash, at Black Torrington, and was buried at Swymbridge.

After the best type of the hunting parson we come to one of the worst, who exercised a good deal of influence over Russell, when he was young, at Southmolton. This was John Froude, vicar of Knowstone, who had succeeded his father, the elder John Froude, in September, 1803, and who held the incumbency, a veritable incubus to it, for forty-nine years till his death, on 9 September, 1852.

Russell himself says: "My head-quarters (after having been ordained) were at Southmolton; and I hunted as many days in every week as my duties would permit

with John Froude, with whom I was on very intimate terms. His hounds were something out of the common; bred from old staghounds—light in colour and sharp as needles, plenty of tongue, but would drive like furies. He couldn't bear to see a hound put his nose on the ground and 'twiddle his tail.' 'Hang the brute,' he would say to the owner of the hounds, 'get me those who can wind their game when they are thrown off.'

"Froude was himself a first-rate sportsman, but always acted on the principle of 'kill un, if you can; you'll never see un again.'

"He had an old liver-coloured spaniel, a wide ranger, and under perfect command. He used to say he could hunt the parish with that dog from the top of the church tower. You could hear his view-halloo for miles, and his hounds absolutely flew to him when they heard it. Let me add, his hospitality knew no bounds."

John Froude belonged to a clever family, that produced Archdeacon Froude, rector of Dartington and father of Hurrell and James Anthony, the historian. He had been well educated, and was a graduate of Oxford University. It is said that he had met with great disappointment in love, and early in life retired into what was, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the great retirement from the world of culture and intellectual activity, Knowstone-cum-Molland.

Knowstone stands high on a bleak and wind-swept hill, reached even at this day by a narrow and arduous and often a rough road, when torn up by a descending torrent after a storm. Molland lies distant three and a half miles on a brook flowing down from bleak moors into the Yeo. A sheltered and pleasant spot, with an interesting church, containing Courtenay monuments.

Froude's church preferment was at the time valuable, and he was, moreover, in possession of some considerable private fortune in addition to his professional income. He had few educated people residing in his neighbourhood. With the quiet, inoffensive clergy about he would not associate; with others he could not, as they held themselves aloof from him. He soon came to associate almost entirely with the rough farmers who inhabited the Exmoor district, and he grew to resemble them in mind, language, habits of life and dress. From them he was principally differentiated by his native wit, his superior education, and his exceeding wickedness.

I have said that there were some with whom he could not associate. Such was the Hon. Newton Fellowes, afterwards Earl of Portsmouth, but at that time a young man with a love of sport, which he maintained to the last, and then without much token of brains, but he developed later. Him Froude detested, mainly because Newton Fellowes busied himself to improve the roads, so that, when at Eggesford, he could drive about the country in his four-in-hand; partly, also, because he was never invited to cross the threshold of Eggesford. He revenged himself with his tongue.

One day he was dining at the ordinary at the George Hotel in Southmolton when Newton Fellowes was there as well. The latter was telling the assembled farmers how he had fallen over a hurdle in a race a few days earlier. "And as the mare rolled," added he, "I thought I had broken my neck," and he put his hands to his throat to emphasize the remark. Whereupon Froude, speaking loud enough to command attention, exclaimed: "No, no, Newton, you will never break *your* neck; we have scriptural warrant for that."

"How so?"

"The Lord preserveth them that are *simple*."

The story stuck to Lord Portsmouth for life. Nor did Prebendary Karslake fare much better. Karslake was a scholar, a good speaker, rector of two parishes, and Prebendary of Exeter Cathedral. He took pupils, and prepared them for Oxford. He was rural dean and inspector of schools, and also chairman of the quarter sessions, farmed largely, and was a keen, all-round sportsman, and very intimate with Newton Fellowes, wherefore Froude hated him.

It was at another farmers' dinner at the "George" that Froude left his mark upon him. Karslake was not present at this dinner.

Two farmers were engaged in dispute, and one said to the other: "I don't care for your opinion, for Mr. Karslake says otherwise, and he knows."

"What!" shouted Froude; "do 'ee quote that little Billy Karslake? He is no better than another—a stone jackass."

Then a dozen voices together asked: "Why is Parson Karslake like a stone jackass?"

"Well," said Froude, "'tis plain enough, surely. He ain't handsome, he ain't useful, he's main stupid, but he's gallow mischievous."

The nickname of the "stone jackass" stuck to the Prebendary for life. But worse treatment was in store for him.

He was a most active magistrate, and the date of the occurrence I am about to mention was somewhere between 1835 and 1840, before the railways penetrated into the West Country.

It must be understood that Froude fascinated his neighbours, overawing them as a snake is said to fascinate a mouse. If he told them to do a thing, or to keep silent, he was obeyed. They dared not do otherwise.

One evening a young farmer arrived at Mr. Karslake's door, at Meshaw, and entreated an interview on urgent business. On being admitted he told the magistrate that an atrocious crime had been undoubtedly perpetrated at Knowstone that very day. A little girl of eleven years of age had left the village in the afternoon to return to her parents, who occupied a small farm-house a mile or two distant, and had not been seen since. When search was made for her, on the roadside were found a child's shoe and a bonnet stained with blood, but no body could be discovered. Karslake took the matter up. He was in the saddle from morning till night, the local constables were stirred up, but all in vain. No further traces of the child were to be found, no clue to the mystery discovered. Karslake then, at his own expense, went up to London, and returned with a first-class detective from Bow Street. But in vain. He was as unable to unriddle the mystery as were the local constables.

About ten days later the baffled magistrate was sitting hearing cases in the court-house at Southmolton, wearied and dejected at his failure, when Mr. Froude walked in, accompanied by a child. "Good morning, Mr. Karslake. I am told you've been looking for a little maid lately, and I've brought this one for you to see, in case her's the one you be wanting."

The child had been kept secreted at the rectory, and the parents had lent themselves to the deception, they being tenants and allies of the rector. What the cost was to Mr. Karslake in money, vexation, wear and tear, and ridicule to which he was particularly sensitive nobody knows; but one can conceive his annoyance when the whole court-

house—bench and audience—broke out into a roar of laughter at his expense, he being chairman.

Froude had a nicely adjusted scale of punishments for all who offended him, and he had ready assistants to administer them.

From his first arrival at Knowstone he encouraged about him a lawless company of vagabonds who, when they were not in prison, lived roughly at free quarters at the rectory, and from thence carried on their business of petty larceny; and who were, moreover, ready to execute vengeance upon the rector's enemies, and these enemies, although they lived in continual terror, were numerous.

His satellites ran errands, beat covers, broke in horses, did light farm-work, and found hares for the hounds, which were kept at the rectory.

Blackmore has described him and his gang in *The Maid of Sker*, in which he calls Froude Parson Chowne. If Froude desired to damage an obnoxious farmer who did not pay his tithes punctually, or who had otherwise offended him, he gave a hint, and the man's ricks were burnt, or his horses houghed.

As Henry II did not order the murder of Becket, but threw out a hint that it would be an acceptable thing to him to be rid of the proud prelate, so was it with Parson Froude. He never ordered the commission of a crime, but he suggested the commission. For instance, if a farmer had offended him, he would say to one of these men subject to his influence, "As I've been standing in the church porch, Harry, I thought what a terrible thing it would be if the rick over yonder of Farmer G—— were to burn. 'Twould come home to him pretty sharp, I reckon."

Next night the rick would be on fire.

Or he would say to his groom, "Tom, it's my tithe day, and we shall sit on purty late. There's Farmer Q—— behindhand again: this is the second half-year. You'll be in the room: if I scratch my nose with my fork you'll know that he has not paid up. Dear me! what a shocking thing were his linch-pin to be gone, and he going down Knowstone Hill, and in such a dark night—and the wheel were to come off."

And certainly if Tom saw the vicar put his silver fork to his nose, so certainly would Farmer Q—— be thrown out of his trap by the wheel coming off, to be found by the next passer along the road with dislocated thigh, or broken arm and collarbone.

A gentleman near had offended him. This person had a plantation of larch near his house. Froude said to Tom, "Bad job for Squire——, if his larch lost their leaders!" Next morning every larch in the plantation had been mutilated.

The Rev. W. H. Thornton says in his delightful book, *Reminiscences of an Old West-country Clergyman*: "He always had around him a tribe of vagabonds, whom he harboured. They beat the covers when he shot, they found hares for his hounds to hunt, they ran on his errands, they were the terror of the countryside, and were reputed to commit crimes at their master's instigation. He never paid them anything, or spared or sheltered them from punishment. Sometimes they were in gaol, and sometimes out. They could always have as much bacon, potatoes, bread and cheese, and cider at his house as they pleased, as well as a fire to sit by, and a rough bed to lie down upon.

"Plantations were burned, horses mutilated, chimneys choked, and Chowne's men had the credit of these misdeeds, which were generally committed to the injury of some person with whom Chowne had quarrelled.

"I have known him say to a young farmer: 'John, I like that colt of yours. I will give you twenty-five pounds for him.' The owner had replied that it was not money enough, and Chowne had retorted, 'You had better let me have him, Jack. I have noticed that when a man refuses an offer for a horse from me, something goes wrong with the animal. It is very curious really that it should be so, but so it is.' And the horse would be sent to him for twenty-five pounds.

"He was frequently engaged in litigation, and one day Mr. Cockburn (afterwards Lord Chief Justice of England, but then a wild young fellow enough) was engaged against him, and Chowne lost his case. Cockburn then, or so it is said, left the court in the Castle of Exeter in order to have some luncheon.

"In the castle yard he saw an old countryman in yellow leggings and a long blue coat, who had an ash sapling in his hand. As the great lawyer passed him, whack! down came the stick across the silk gown upon his shoulders.

"'Be you the young rascal who spoke up against me in court just now?' 'I suppose that you are Parson Chowne,' said Cockburn. 'I was against you, and I am very glad that I succeeded; and now I am inclined to have you up for striking me.'

"'No you won't,' was the reply, 'you shall come and have luncheon with me instead. You are a deuced clever young chap, and I am hanged if ever I have a case on again without employing you. So come along, you little beggar, and I will stand you a bottle of port.' Cockburn went, and frequently afterwards he would stay with Chowne."

The following story shall be told as near as may be in the words of the farmer who was present when occurred the incident he related.

"On Saturday last Mr. Froude drove a fox from Molland to ground in Parson Jekyll's Wood at Tar Steps. He was going to dig him out, and the men had commenced to work, when down came Mr. Jekyll in a thundering passion. Mr. Froude and he bean't over friendly, best of times; and the earth is used by the vixens. There was a litter of cubs there only last season. Mr. Jekyll, hearing the hounds stop, came out at once to us, in a tear; I was there myself and I heard him. 'Mr. Froude,' says he, 'I thought you knew better than to go digging in another man's country without special permission to do so, and late in the season too, with cubs already about. If you don't desist and take yourself off, I'll summons you; so blow your horn, sir, and leave.' 'I have a terrier to ground, sir,' replied Froude, 'and I mean to dig him out.' 'If you go away,' said the other, 'the terrier will come out. In no case will I allow you to continue to dig.' With that the old man, Parson Froude, grew white with passion, and says, 'And do you dare risk a quarrel with me, Mr. Jekyll? Do you not know that to-night on my return I have only to say at Knowstone, *Bones, bones at Hawkridge!* and, mind you, name no names, and your carcase will be stinking in a ditch within the week?'

"Then he got on his horse and rode down to Winsford and obtained a search warrant from S. Mitchell to search Tar Steps Rectory for his terrier, which he took oath he believed to be there, stolen by Mr. Jekyll and concealed on the premises. And he brought back Floyd, the Winsford constable, with him to Tar Steps; and we all thought Mr. Jekyll would have had a fit, he was that furious, while they searched the house down to the very cellars, and shook up the rector's old port wine, on suspicion that he might have hidden the terrier in the back of the bin. But the best of the joke was that there had been no terrier out with the hounds that day, and of course none had been put into the hole. So Parson Froude had sworn to what he knew well was a lie."

Froude had a horse to sell, and one cold morning a gentleman named Houlditch, of Wellington, drove over in a gig from Tiverton to Knowstone, and requested to be shown the horse without delay. Froude, loud in protestations of hospitality, refused his request. "I dine at one o'clock, you've had a cold drive, and no man knows better than do I what them hills is like that you've come over. So, if you can put up with roast ribs of beef, sir, and a mouldy Stilton cheese to follow, us will top up with a drop of something hot, and then Jack Babbage, my huntsman, shall show 'ee the horse."

After hearing from Mr. Houlditch that he was looking for a hunter, they sat down together to dinner, and the parson firmly but politely pressed his ale upon the guest. This ale was of Froude's own brewing. When new it did not readily proclaim its potency, and the rector never gave warning nor spoke of its strength. It was excellent, soft as milk. The day had been cold, and the drive had been long.

When a strange and unaccustomed glare had come into Mr. Houlditch's eyes, Froude ordered Jack Babbage to bring out the horse, and giving his guest a hand to steady him, the two went into a field near the rectory. In this field some hurdles "feathered" with gorse bushes were set up, and Babbage, always shouting as he neared a jump, rode the horse repeatedly over the obstacles, and galloped him round. Then Froude invited Mr. Houlditch to try the horse himself, but he was too fuddled to mount, and he bought the beast for £50, a long price in those days, and was driven back by the post-boy to the "Angel" at Tiverton. The horse, at his charges, was sent to Wellington at once.

A week later came a letter with the Wellington postmark, which Froude threw into the fire unopened. A few days later came a second letter, then a third, and all shared the same fate.

Finally, one day an angry man drove up from Tiverton—it was Houlditch himself. "You don't seem to care to reply to my letters, Mr. Froude," said he, "so I have come in person to ask you whether or not you will take back your horse which you sold me ten days ago, for he is blind."

"Sir," said Froude, "you asked me for a hunter, and one that could jump, and I sold you a hunter that could jump. You saw the horse, and it was a bargain. You did not ask me if it could see. Jump he can, as you observed. When you ride him, carry a knife with you, and when you come to a fence you just jump off his back and cut a furze-bush. Put that down before the fence and canter the old horse up and speak sharp to him, same as Babbage did, and so soon as he feels the prickles about his legs he will jump."

"Will you take the horse back? " roared Houlditch.

"Certainly I will."

"And repay me my £50?"

"Certainly not. I cashed your cheque, sir, last week, and with the money paid my butcher. A deal is a deal."

The story comes with the authority of Jack Babbage, confirmed by Mrs. Froude, after her husband's death. The incident occurred late in the rector's life, after he was married.

Froude's shamelessness was phenomenal. On one occasion he sold some keep on the glebe at Knowstone by auction, and a neighbouring farmer purchased a field of swede turnips under condition that he should remove them before a stated day.

The time limit was nearly expired, when Froude found the purchaser and the men in the field carting away the roots. The rain was falling in torrents, the crop was heavy, and it was a dirty job.

Froude rode into the field and shouted to the farmer (with the usual expletives with which he garnished his discourse), bidding him desist.

"But, sir," said the man, "the time is nearly up, and I am bound to go on, or I shall forfeit my purchase."

Froude then called him a—— fool, reminded him that he had known him from his cradle and his father before him, and bade him go home and wait for finer weather to pull his turnips and take them away.

The appointed day soon came and passed, and the following morning the farmer, feeling a little uneasy, rose early and rode off to his turnips. The field was full of sheep when he arrived, and they were all marked J.F. Calling his dog, the farmer opened the gate and proceeded to turn them out.

Then Froude, on horseback, came from an ambush, and cracking his whip and swearing horribly, rode at him, and dared him to remove the sheep. The man was terrified and went home, fearing lest worse should befall him. Next day was Saturday, and Southmolton Market, and the young man, bursting with his sense of wrong, rode into the town to proclaim his woes. As he entered from the bottom of the long street he saw Mr. Froude in the midst of a cluster of sporting farmers, the allies of the rector, and as the injured man approached, Froude stretched out the finger of scorn, and cried, "Look there! See to un! See to the biggest fule in Devonshire as buys a vield of swedes and leaves 'em to another man to stock—a gurt natural ass!" This sally was answered by a peal of laughter, and the victim, turning his head down street, galloped away.

In *The Maid of Sker*, Blackmore tells the story of Parson Chowne (Froude) having driven a horse mad by putting a hemp-seed into its eye. This story, I was informed by one who had every occasion to know the circumstances, is true. Froude had set his heart on buying a horse at Southmolton Fair, but Sir Walter Carew out-bid him and secured the beast. Froude shortly after was again in Southmolton, and ascertained that Sir Walter was in the inn, at the ordinary, taking his lunch. He went into the stable, and saw that the baronet had ridden in on the coveted horse. Froude gave the ostler a shilling to do him some trifling errand, and during his absence so treated the unfortunate animal that it went almost mad with pain, and on the way home threw its rider.

Henry Phillpotts was consecrated Bishop of Exeter in the year 1831, and he soon came into collision with Froude; but the Bishop was a formidable antagonist, and Froude shunned him, and would not attend his visitations.

The following story has been frequently told; but the version here given is as related half a century ago by Jack Russell and by Babbage, and confirmed by Prebendary Matthews, who succeeded Froude at Knowstone.

The Bishop held a visitation at Southmolton, and Froude sent a note to say that he could not attend, as he was indisposed.

The Bishop remained the night at Southmolton, and next morning early started for Tiverton in a carriage, and as Knowstone was not much out of the way, he ordered the driver to turn up the hill to the village. Mr. Froude was in the dining-room talking to Babbage, and the hounds on the lawn, when one of his rascally retainers ran in to inform the rector that the Bishop was in the village inquiring for the rectory. Babbage hurried the hounds into kennel, and Froude went to bed.

A good-looking housekeeper (for Froude married very late in life) met his lordship at the door, and answering his inquiry after the rector, said that Mr. Froude was unwell in bed.

"May I trouble you to tell him that his bishop wishes to see him, and will visit him in his bedroom?"

The woman went upstairs, and the Bishop, waiting in the hall, overheard the conversation which ensued.

"Bishop says, sir, as, he must come upstairs if you can't come down."

"Tell his lordship, Mary, that I don't know what's the matter with me, but it's something infectious—scarlet fever, I reckon—and maybe he'll catch it if he comes up here."

However, Henry Phillpotts was not to be dissuaded, and he mounted the stairs and seated himself by the bed.

"What will your lordship take?" asked Froude, showing his head only above the clothes. "It's cruel cold; a drop of brandy hot will help to keep off the infection."

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Froude. I take this opportunity to tell you that strange stories concerning you meet my ears."

"Perhaps your lordship prefers whisky," said Froude, "with a slice of lemon in your grog."

"Mr. Froude, I beg you to desist. I am here to inquire into the truth of the stories repeated concerning you."

"My lord, I've also heard strange tales about your lordship. But among gentlemen, us don't give heed to all thickey tittle-tattle. Perhaps you'd prefer gin— London or Plymouth, my lord? You'll excuse me, my lord; I be terrible bad, and I be afraid you'll catch the infection—pleased to have seen you—good-bye"; and he ducked his head under the bedclothes.

"I knawed he'd come," said Froude to Russell after the visit; "but I reckon he'll never come again: the air of Knowstone be too keen for he."

One day his lordship ran against Froude in Fore Street of Exeter. The vicar had with him a greyhound, commonly known in Devonshire as a "long dog." It was on this occasion that the Bishop tackled him for keeping a pack of harriers, as already related. After that said Henry of Exeter, "And pray, Mr. Froude, what manner of dog do you call that?"

"Oh, that's what volks do call a long dog, my lord, and ef you will just shak your appern to un, he'll go like a dart."



The *Weekly Times* of Exeter kept an eye on Froude's doings and misdoings, and published them under the heading of "Knowstone Again." But Froude was too sly to enable the Bishop to find an occasion to proceed against him; the people of Knowstone were too much afraid of his vengeance to dare to give evidence.

Froude married a Miss Halse, the pretty sister of two well-known yeomen of Anstey. She was quite young enough to have been his daughter, and they had no children perhaps fortunately. The circumstances of the marriage are said to have been these. Froude had paid Miss Halse some of his insolent attentions, that meant, if they meant anything, a certain contemptuous admiration. The brothers were angry. They invited him to their house, made him drunk, and when drunk sign a paper promising to marry their sister before three months were up or to forfeit £20,000. They took care to have this document well attested, and next



THE REV. JOHN RUSSELL'S PORT-WINE GLASS, CHAMBERLAIN  
WORCESTER  
BREAKFAST SERVICE AND BAROMETER

*Purchased at the sale of his effects in 1883 by Mrs. Arnull and presented by her  
to Mr. John Lane, in whose possession they now are*

morning presented it to Mr. Froude, who had forgotten all about it. He was very angry, blustered, cajoled, tried to laugh it off—all to no purpose. He was constrained to marry her. And he seems to have been really fond of her. Certain it is that she was

warmly attached to him, and after his death would speak of him as her "dear departed saint," which implies a singular misappropriation of terms, and confusion of ideas.

The following story is on the authority of Jack Russell. He had called one day at Knowstone Parsonage, and found Froude sitting over his fire smoking and Mrs. Froude sitting in the corner of the room against the wall. Her husband had his back towards her. Russell was uneasy, and asked if Mrs. Froude was unwell. Froude turned his head over his shoulder, and asked: "Mrs. Froude, be you satisfied or be you not? You know the terms of agreement come to between us when we married, that I were never to be contradicted and disagreed with. If you are not satisfied you can go back to your friends; I don't care a hang myself whether you stay or whether you go."

"I am content," said the lady faintly.

"Very well," said Froude; "then we'll have a drop of ale, Jack. Go and fetch us a jug and mugs, madam."

His harriers were kept in such a wretched, rattle-trap set of kennels that they occasionally broke loose. This occurred on a certain Sunday, and just as Froude was going up into the pulpit the pack went by. He halted with his hand on the rail, turned to the clerk, and said: "That's Towler giving tongue. Run—he's got the lead, and will tear the hare to bits."

Accordingly the clerk left his desk and went forth, and succeeded in securing the hare from the hounds, hunting on their own head. He brought the hare into the church and threw it under his seat till the sermon was done, the blessing given, and the congregation dismissed.

When Froude got old he was forced by the Bishop to have a curate. "I don't care to keep dogs to do the barking for me, no fye," said he, "but I can't help it. You see, I just maintains a rough boy to do the work now, and I sits in the vestry and hears un tell."

Between services one Sunday, Froude gave his young curate, who was dining with him and some of his farmer friends, too much of his soft but strong ale. He disliked the young fellow, who was a bit of a clown and uncouth, and did it out of malice. The curate, quite ignorant of the headiness of the ale, inadvertently got fuddled.

The conversation turned on a monstrous pig that Froude had killed, and which was hung up in his outhouse, and he invited his guests to accompany him and view the carcase, and estimate the weight. One thought it weighed so many stone, others thought differently. Froude said that it weighed just the same as his curate, who was fat. The rough farmers demurred to the rector's estimate, and, finding an empty corn-sack, they thrust the intoxicated ecclesiastic into it, and, hanging him up to the end of the beam, shouted with delight as the curate brought the weight down. Meantime the bells were ringing for evensong, but they left the curate hung up in the sack, where he slept uncomfortably. The congregation assembled for service, and waited. Froude would not officiate, and the curate was incapable of doing so.

Mr. Matthews, afterwards Prebendary of Exeter, had been dining at Southmolton in Froude's company, and Froude undertook to drive him back to Knowstone in his gig, where Mr. Matthews was to sleep the night. Froude had drunk too much, but insisted on driving home himself. At the bottom of the long street the road crosses the river, and the bridge is set on at an angle to the road. The horse was a spirited animal, and was going home. So down the street they went at a spanking pace, and over the bridge

with a whir. Froude had fallen asleep already, but Matthews seized the reins and guided the animal, and thus they narrowly escaped destruction.

Froude slept on, and, arriving at Knowstone, Matthews went in to prepare the young wife to get the rector to bed.

"Oh, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Froude, when she was informed that her husband was not very well, and had better be put to bed. "Oh! dear lamb"—Mrs. Froude was not happy in her choice of descriptive epithets—"dear lamb, are you ill? Oh dear! dear!" "Nonsense," retorted Froude, "I bain't ill. I'm only drunk, my dear, that's all."

One day he was riding on the quay at Barnstaple, and asked some question of a bargeman in his boat. The fellow gave him a rude answer. Thereupon Froude leaped his horse down into the barge, and thrashed the man.

In the end, Froude gave up doing duty, and retired into a small house in Molland, as more sheltered than Knowstone. In *The Maid of Sker*, Blackmore represents him as torn to pieces by his hounds. Actually this was not the occasion of his death. Before his parlour window grew a peculiarly handsome trimmed box-tree. Now Froude had done a mean and cruel act to a young farmer near, tricking him out of a considerable sum of money. One night the box-tree was pulled up by the roots and carried away, no one knew whither, or for certain by whom, though the young farmer was suspected of the deed.

Froude raged over the insult; but as he was unable to bring it home, and as his powers were failing, his rage was impotent.

The uprooting of the box-tree apparently precipitated his death. He felt that the awe of him was gone, his control over the neighbourhood was lost. This thought, even more than mortification at not being able to revenge the uprooting of his box-tree, broke him down, and he rapidly sank, intellectually and physically, and died 9 December, 1852.

A little before his death, Jack Babbage, his huntsman, visited him. "Oh, Jack!" said he, "it's all over with me. I'm going to glory, Jack"—which shows what is the value of assurance on a death-bed.

"Well," said Babbage, "if the old master be so cock-sure that he's on that way, I reckon there be a good chance of a snug corner for me."

There was another parson, if possible, more evil than Froude, whom Blackmore has called Parson Hannaford, but we have had enough specimens of a type of clergy that is, we trust, for ever passed away; but it has gone not without leaving its mark on the present, for it was this sort of parson who drove all the God-fearing people in the parish into dissent. Happily these men were exceptions even in their day, and were not the rule. The bulk of the clergy were worthy men, doing their duty up to their light, the services in the churches not a little dreary; but then, at that time, it was exceptional to find that the country people could read, and therefore sing out a hymn or psalm with one accord as they can now. They preached dull sermons, because their own minds were not clear. But they were kind, they visited their flock, they were charitable, and their families set a good example in the parish, and had immense influence in purifying the moral tone, and they taught in Sunday-schools. I can recall those old days, and I know that men like Froude and Russell were but spots widely scattered over an otherwise white reputation such as the general body of the clergy bore. But that there were such spots none could deny, and in almost every case the Bishop was powerless to eradicate them.

To a farmer said a vicar of Holsworthy, himself one of the disreputable, who thought fit to reprimand him for his conduct, "Go by the light, man, not by the lantern." To which the farmer replied, "When the lantern is covered with muck, none can see the light."

For the account I have given of Parson Froude I am indebted partly to the late Prebendary Matthews, rector of Knowstone after Froude, and also to Rev. W. H. Thornton's *Reminiscences of an Old Westcountry Clergyman*, as well to a *Froudiana*, a collection made by one who intimately knew the neighbourhood and the individuals, and who most kindly placed his collection of anecdotes at my disposal.

The accompanying illustration represents Jack Russell's port-wine glass with a fox beautifully cut in it, his barometer, which he probably tapped with his knuckles many a time before he started on a day's hunting, as well as a Chamberlain Worcester tea service, formerly in his possession. All these were bought after his death at Black Torrington at a sale of his effects, by Miss Bernasconi, now Mrs. Arnall, and presented to the publisher, Mr. John Lane, in whose possession they are. Dr. Linnington Ash on the same occasion purchased several mementoes for his Majesty the King—then Prince of Wales—as well as for himself and other friends.