

On a Criminal's Trail.

THE MUCH MALIGNED BLOODHOUND NEVER INJURES A FUGITIVE UNLESS ATTACKED BY HIM.

The bloodhound has become the most important member of the police and detective force in many parts of this country. Man hunts are more common than they were in slavery days, and the terror which the dogs have inspired among criminals in the south is very great. The very name of these dogs conjures horrible pictures of relentless beasts pursuing a victim until fatigue weighs him down, and then springing at his throat and tearing him to pieces. It is a very wrong impression, with little fact upon which to base it, but it will take several decades to remove it. Still there is something dreadful in the mere thought of men being tracked by dogs. There are a peculiar grandeur and an intensely sage severity in the head of the aristocratic bloodhound. There is a suggestion of latent power and suppressed ferocity about him. His calm dignity and majestic, thoughtful air show his ancient breeding and lordly associations. His wrinkled brow, his weary, mournful gaze from deep set, bloodshot eyes, bespeak years and centuries of meditation. He is as noble and as wonderful as he looks. You cannot imagine a bloodhound of high breeding attacking a living creature without provocation. And this is true of him. The true bloodhound never wantonly attacks a man he has run down. If the man remains perfectly quiet, the bloodhound will let him alone, but if the man attempts to run on there is bound to be trouble. Even then the bloodhound prefers to frighten rather than injure the object of the chase. He will make a deal of threatening before he will bite. Very often it happens that the bloodhound is attacked by the trailed men, and then the animal becomes savage and dreadful. His very mein inspires terror, and his sharp fangs, his powerful jaws, and his red and angry eyes make him appear one of the most formidable of beasts.

A man hunt is a very exciting thing. It is called sport in some places. Very often it is dangerous, for the criminal may be an armed and desperate man. Directly the crime is discovered the nearest pack of hounds is sent for. A sheriff or his deputy or some other officer becomes the master of the hunt, so to speak. Three or four others, or possibly a dozen, may accompany him on horseback, although in mountainous regions they may be compelled to abandon their horses at any moment. In each pack of hounds there is one wise old dog, who is the leader. Sometimes his scent is not the keenest, but his sagacity exceeds that of the others. If the pursued has left anything behind, that is given to the dogs, and the tracks are pointed out as well. Directly they strike the trail they give tongue. The bay or bark of the bloodhound is deeper, more musical, more significant than that of the foxhound. There is something very portentous about it. Sometimes the dogs circle about for many minutes before they are off in full cry; then, swiftly or slowly, as the trail is warm or cold, they gallop along, their noses close to the ground, giving tongue as they run to show that they are full of confidence. The dogs do not run so fast that it is difficult for a man on horseback to keep up with them, and if the trail is cold one on foot can keep their pace. The men can see no sign of the fugitive. They cannot even see the tracks that retain a faint odor that leads the dogs. As they follow, they wonder when they shall reach a stream and if the hounds will be at fault. Men who know that they will be chased with dogs always make for water, because they know that it will throw them off the trail. It succeeds more often with a beagle or foxhound than it does with a bloodhound. Directly a stream is reached the dogs stop. Then the leader seems to direct the movements of the pack. Some cross to the other side. They run up and down the banks of the stream like a shuttle, gradually increasing the distance covered. Others make wide circles. The interest of the dogs is intense. They seem to feel that it will be a disgrace to lose the trail. They whine querulously and show their anger at times. Suddenly one gives tongue. The others may be far away, but directly they start for the common point, rushing pellmell after the dog that has found the trail. If the trail is hot, the dogs can tell whether the fugitive has passed up or down stream and thereby save much time. As the trail grows warmer the speed and enthusiasm of the dogs increase. They will outstrip the pursuers and rush on quickly to the victim. Usually the fugitive climbs a tree or sits on the top of a fence if there is one, but this is not necessary. If he will remain perfectly still, no harm will come to him, but the spectacle of half a dozen frothing, red-eyed bloodhounds, with hanging jaws, rushing toward a fugitive while they give voice is likely to make him desperate, and if he fights he will suffer.

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