

Chapter 1 THE PROLOGUE

To the honour and reverence of you my right worshipful and dread Lord Henry by the grace of God eldest son and heir unto the high excellent and Christian Prince Henry IV. by the aforesaid grace King of England and of France, Prince of Wales, Duke of Guienne of Lancaster and of Cornwall, and Earl of Chester.

I your own in every humble wise have me ventured to make this little simple book which I recommend and submit to your noble and wise correction, which book if it pleaseth your aforesaid Lordship shall be named and called MASTER OF GAME. And for this cause: for the matter that this book treateth of what in every season of the year is most durable, and to my thinking to every gentle heart most disportful of all games, that is to say hunting. For though it be that hawking with gentle hounds and hawks for the heron and the river be noble and commendable, it lasteth seldom at the most more than half a year. For though men find from May unto Lammas (August 1st) game enough to hawk at, no one will find hawks to hawk with.¹ But as of hunting there is no season of all the year, that game may not be found in every good country, also hounds ready to chase it. And since this book shall be all of hunting, which is so noble a game, and lasting through all the year of divers beasts that grow according to the season for the gladdening of man, I think I may well call it MASTER OF GAME.

¹ As the hawks would be mewing and unfit to fly.

And though it be so my dear Lord, that many could better have meddled with this matter and also more ably than I, yet there be two things that have principally emboldened and caused me to take this work in hand. The first is trust of your noble correction, to which as before is said, I submit this little and simple book. The second is that though I be unworthy, I am Master of this Game with that noble prince your Father our all dear sovereign and liege Lord aforesaid. And as I would not that his hunters nor yours that now be or that should come hereafter did not know the perfection of this art, I shall leave for these this simple memorial, for as Chaucer saith in his prologue of "The 252 Good Women": "By writing have men mind of things passed, for writing is the key of all good remembrance."

2 The Shirley MS. in the British Museum has "XV."

And first I will begin by describing the nature of the hare,³ secondly of the nature of the hart, thirdly of the buck and of his nature, fourthly of the roe and of his nature, fifthly of the wild boar and of his nature, sixthly of the wolf and of his nature, seventhly of the fox and of his nature, eighthly of the badger and of his nature, ninthly of the cat and of his nature, tenthly of the marten and his nature, eleventhly of the otter and of his nature. Now have I rehearsed how I will in this little book describe the nature of these aforesaid beasts of venery and of chace, and therefore will I name the hounds the which I will describe hereafter, both of their nature and conditions. And first I will begin with raches (running hounds)⁴ and their nature, and then greyhounds and their nature, and then alaunts and their nature, and then spaniels and their nature, and then mastiffs that men call curs and their nature, and then of small curs that come to be terriers and their nature, and then I shall devise and tell the sicknesses of hounds and their diseases. And furthermore I will describe what qualities and manners a good hunter should have, and of what parts he should be, and after that I will describe the manner and shape of the kennel, and how it should be environed and arrayed. Also I will describe of what fashion a hunter's horn should be driven, and how the couplings should be made for the raches and of what length. Furthermore I will prove by sundry reasons in this little prologue, that the life of no man that useth gentle game and disport be less displeasable unto God than the life of a perfect and skilful hunter, or from which more good cometh. The first reason is that hunting causeth a man to eschew the seven deadly sins. Secondly men are better when riding, more just and more understanding, and more alert and more at ease and more undertaking, and better knowing of all countries and all passages; in short and long all good customs and manners cometh thereof, and the health of man and of his soul. For he that fleeth the seven deadly sins as we believe, he shall be saved, therefore a good hunter shall be saved, and in this world have joy enough and of gladness and of solace, so that he keep himself from two things. One is that he leave not the knowledge nor the service of God, from whom all good cometh, for his hunting. The second that he lose not the service of his master for his hunting, nor his own duties which might profit him most. Now shall I prove how a hunter may not fall into any of the seven deadly sins. When a man is idle and reckless without work, and be not occupied in doing some thing, he abides in his bed or in his chamber, a thing which draweth men to imaginations of fleshly lust and pleasure. For such men have no wish but always to abide in one place, and think in pride, or in avarice, or in wrath, or in sloth, or in gluttony, or in

lechery, or in envy. For the imagination of men rather turns to evil than to good, for the three enemies which mankind hath, are the devil, the world and the flesh, and this is proved enough.

Nevertheless there be many other reasons which are too long to tell, and also every man that hath good reason knoweth well that idleness is the foundation of all evil imaginations. Now shall I prove how imagination is lord and master of all works, good or evil, that man's body or his limbs do. You know well, good or evil works small or great never were done but that beforehand they were imagined or thought of. Now shall you prove how imagination is the mistress of all deeds, for imagination biddeth a man do good or evil works, whichever it be, as before is said. And if a man notwithstanding that he were wise should imagine always that he were a fool, or that he hath other sickness, it would be so, for since he would think steadfastly that he were a fool, he would do foolish deeds as his imagination would command, and he would believe it steadfastly. Wherefore methinks I have proved enough of imagination, notwithstanding that there be many other reasons the which I leave to avoid long writing. Every man that hath good sense knoweth well that this is the truth.

Now I will prove how a good hunter may not be idle, and in dreaming may not have any evil imaginations nor afterwards any evil works. For the day before he goes out to his office, the night before he shall lay him down in his bed, and shall not think but for to sleep, and do his office well and busily, as a good hunter should. And he shall have nothing to do, but think about all that which he has been ordered to do. And he is not idle, for he has enough to do to think about rising early and to do his office without thinking of sins or of evil deeds. And early in the dawning of the day he must be up for to go unto his quest, that in English is called searching, well and busily, for as I shall say more explicitly hereafter, when I shall speak of how men shall quest and search to harbour the hart. And in so doing he shall not be idle, for he is always busy. And when he shall come again to the assembly or meet, then he hath most to do, for he must order his finders and relays for to move the hart, and uncouple his hounds. With that he cannot be idle, for he need think of nothing but to do his office, and when he hath uncoupled, yet is he less idle, and he should think less of any sins, for he hath enough to do to ride or to foot it well with his hounds and to be always near them and to hue or rout well, and blow well, and to look whereafter he hunteth, and which hounds are vanchasers and parfifers,⁵ and redress and bring his hounds on the right line again when they are at fault⁶ or hunting rascal.⁷ And when the hart is dead or what other chase he was hunting, then is he less idle, for he

hath enough to do to think how to undo the hart in his manner and to raise that which appertaineth⁸ to him, and well to do his curée.⁹ And he should look how many of his hounds are missing of those that he brought to the wood in the morning, and he should search for them, and couple them up. And when he has come home, should he less think to do evil, for he hath enough to do to think of his supper, and to ease himself and his horse, and to sleep, and to take his rest, for he is weary, and to dry himself of the dew or peradventure of the rain. And therefore I say that all the time of the hunter is without idleness and without evil thoughts, and without evil works of sin, for as I have said idleness is the foundation of all vices and sins. And the hunter may not be idle if he would fill his office aright, and also he can have no other thoughts, for he has enough to do to think and imagine of his office, the which is no little charge, for whoso will do it well and busily, especially if they love hounds and their office.

3 Gaston de Foix has a different sequence, putting the hart first and the hare sixth, and having four animals more, namely, the reindeer, the chamois (including ibex), the bear and the rabbit, while the "Master of Game" has one animal, the Marten, of which Gaston de Foix does not speak.

4 Gaston de Foix follows a different sequence, commencing with alaunts, then greyhounds, raches, spaniels, and says "fifthly I will speak of all kinds of mongrel dogs, such as come from mastiffs and alaunts, from greyhounds and running hounds, and other such."

5 The hounds that came in the first relay (van) and those in the subsequent relays. See Appendix: Relays.

6 Diverted or off the line.

7 Chasing small or lean deer. See Appendix: Hart.

8 To take those parts of the deer which fell to him by custom.

9 Curée: The ceremony of giving the hounds their reward on the skin of the animal they have chased. See Appendix: Curée.

Wherefore I say that such an hunter is not idle, he can have no evil thoughts, nor can he do evil works, wherefore he must go into paradise.

10 For by many other reasons which are too long to write can I prove these things, but it sufficeth that every man that hath good sense

knoweth well that I speak the real truth.

10 Gaston de Foix in the French parent work puts it even more forcefully; he says: "tout droit en paradis." See Lavallée's ed. 1854.

Now shall I prove how hunters live in this world more joyfully than any other men. For when the hunter riseth in the morning, and he sees a sweet and fair morn and clear weather and bright, and he heareth the song of the small birds, the which sing so sweetly with great melody and full of love, each in it's own language in the best wise that it can according that it learneth of it's own kind. And when the sun is arisen, he shall see fresh dew upon the small twigs and grasses, and the sun by his virtue shall make them shine. And that is great joy and liking to the hunter's heart. After when he shall go to his quest or searching, he shall see or meet anon with the hart without great seeking, and shall harbour¹¹ him well and readily within a little compass. It is great joy and liking to the hunter. And after when he shall come to the assembly or gathering, and he shall report before the Lord and his company that which he hath seen with his eyes, or by scantilon (measure) of the trace (slot) which he ought always of right to take, or by the fumes¹² (excrements) that he shall put in his horn or in his lap. And every man shall say: Lo, here is a great hart and a deer of high meating or pasturing; go we and move him; the which things I shall declare hereafter, then can one say that the hunter has great joy. When he beginneth to hunt and he hath hunted but a little and he shall hear or see the hart start before him and shall well know that it is the right one, and his hounds that shall this day be finders, shall come to the lair (bed), or to the fues (track), and shall there be uncoupled without any be left coupled, and they shall all run well and hunt, then hath the hunter great joy and great pleasure. Afterwards he leapeth on horseback, if he be of that estate, and else on foot with great haste to follow his hounds. And in case peradventure the hounds shall have gone far from where he uncoupled, he seeketh some advantage to get in front of his hounds. And then shall he see the hart pass before him, and shall holloa and rout mightily, and he shall see which hound come in the van-chase, and in the middle, and which are parfitours,¹³ according to the order in which they shall come. And when all the hounds have passed before him then shall he ride after them and shall rout and blow as loud as he may with great joy and great pleasure, and I assure you he thinketh of no other sin or of no other evil. And when the hart be overcome and shall be at bay he shall have pleasure. And after, when the hart is spayed¹⁴ and dead, he undoeth him and maketh his curée and enquireth or rewardeth his hounds, and so he shall have great pleasure, and when he cometh home he cometh joyfully, for his lord

hath given him to drink of his good wine at the curée, and when he has come home he shall doff his clothes and his shoes and his hose, and he shall wash his thighs and his legs, and peradventure all his body. And in the meanwhile he shall order well his supper, with wortes (roots) and of the neck of the hart and of other good meats, and good wine or ale. And when he hath well eaten and drunk he shall be glad and well, and well at his ease. And then shall he take the air in the evening of the night, for the great heat that he hath had. And then he shall go and drink and lie in his bed in fair fresh clothes, and shall sleep well and steadfastly all the night without any evil thoughts of any sins, wherefore I say that hunters go into Paradise when they die, and live in this world more joyfully than any other men. Yet I will prove to you how hunters live longer than any other men, for as Hippocras the doctor telleth: "full repletion of meat slayeth more men than any sword or knife." They eat and drink less than any other men of this world, for in the morning at the assembly they eat a little, and if they eat well at supper, they will by the morning have corrected their nature, for then they have eaten but little, and their nature will not be prevented from doing her digestion, whereby no wicked humours or superfluities may be engendered. And always, when a man is sick, men diet him and give him to drink water made of sugar and tysane and of such things for two or three days to put down evil humours and his superfluities, and also make him void (purge). But for a hunter one need not do so, for he may have no repletion on account of the little meat, and by the travail that he hath. And, supposing that which can not be, and that he were full of wicked humours, yet men know well that the best way to terminate sickness that can be is to sweat. And when the hunters do their office on horseback or on foot they sweat often, then if they have any evil in them, it must (come) away in the sweating; so that he keep from cold after the heat. Therefore it seemeth to me I have proved enough. Leeches ordain for a sick man little meat and sweating for the terminating and healing of all things. And since hunters eat little and sweat always, they should live long and in health. Men desire in this world to live long in health and in joy, and after death the health of the soul. And hunters have all these things. Therefore be ye all hunters and ye shall do as wise men. Wherefore I counsel to all manner of folk of what estate or condition that they be, that they love hounds and hunting and the pleasure of hunting beasts of one kind or another, or hawking. For to be idle and to have no pleasure in either hounds or hawks is no good token. For as saith in his book Ph?bus the Earl of Foix that noble hunter, he saw never a good man that had not pleasure in some of these things, were he ever so great and rich. For if he had need to go to war he would not know what war is, for he would not be accustomed to travail,

and so another man would have to do that which he should. For men say in old saws: "The lord is worth what his lands are worth."¹⁵ And also he saith in the aforesaid book, that he never saw a man that loved the work and pleasure of hounds and hawks, that had not many good qualities in him; for that comes to him of great nobleness and gentleness of heart of whatever estate the man may be, whether he be a great lord, or a little one, or a poor man or a rich one.

11 Trace the deer to its lair.


12 See Appendix: Excrements.

13 See Appendix: Relays.

14 Despatched with a sword or knife. See Appendix: Spay.

15 Gaston de Foix says: "Tant vaut seigneur tant vaut sa gent et sa terre," p. 9.



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