

Chapter 31 HOW A HUNTER SHOULD QUEST IN CLEAR...

198 In the text of our MS. (the Vespasian) no break occurs here, but in the table of chapters at the beginning of the MS. the chapter as here given is enumerated, and this corresponds also with the Shirley and other MSS.

Also I will tell you how a hunter should go in quest among clear spires, and among high trees, and specially when it has rained the night before and in the morning. Eke in the time when the heads of the harts be tender, commonly they abide among clear spires and in high woods, for a thick country peradventure would do harm to their heads which be tender. If he meets rain as I before have said, or when their heads (are tender, and he meeteth¹⁹⁹) anything that pleaseth him, he should not follow it with his lymer, for they remain in such a country as I have said in that time, that is to say in rain and when their heads are tender, for he might make the deer void into some other place of the quests as it is before said. And whoso meets him in the wood in sight of his eyes, then he must set his lymer in his fues. And if it be a deer that enter-changeth,²⁰⁰ that is to say if a deer puts his hind feet in the trace of the forefeet without passing on, it is no good token, but if he sets his hinder feet far from the fore feet it is a good token, for when a hart entre-marcheth it is a token that he is a light deer and well running and of great flight, for if he had a side belly and great flanks he could not entre-marche, but the contrary would he do. ²⁰¹ And sometimes when the hart makes a long stride with the hind foot, commonly they cannot fly well, and have been little hunted. And if he has of the fumes, he should put them in his horn with grass, or in his lap²⁰² with grass, for a man should not bear them in his hand, for they would all break. And when he should meet in the fields anything that pleaseth him, he should draw towards his covert, for to make him draw the sooner to his stronghold, and when he findeth where he goeth in, then he should break a bough towards the place where the hart is gone, and take the scantilon, and follow him no further in the wood. Then he should make a long turn and cast round about by some ways or by-paths, and if he sees that he hath not passed out of his turn, he may return again to the gathering, and make them his report, and if it be so that he pass there

where he would umbicast (cast round) and make his turn, and his lymer before him, then he should look if it is the same hart he had umbicast (cast round), and if he cannot well see at his ease, then he should reconnoitre the country till he can see easily and plainly, but have a care that his lymer open not, and if his lymer be dislave²⁰³ (be wild), let him investigate it with his eye. And if he seeth that it is his first hart he should not follow him, but then he should take another turn and umbicast. He must look that he go not along the ways, for it is the worst sueing that is: for the lymer commonly overshoots. But he should go a little way off the paths on one side or the other, until he (the hart) be within his turn, for then he is most securely harboured and the search shall be shorter. But if he see that it be too late to run him with strength, and if he see that the hart goes but softly pacing towards his stronghold he need not do all these things. And I pray him where he hath met with the hart, or harboured him in his stronghold or in coppices or in other thickets, that he take all his blenches (tricks) and his ruses before said, to be more secure, and to make a shorter search, if he hath time to do as I have said. Thus I have rehearsed the readiness that belongs to the harbouring of the hart. And now will I devise where men will best find them in bellowing time. It is known that they begin to bellow fifteen days before grease time²⁰⁴ ends, especially old deer, and also if the end of August and the beginning of September be wet and rainy.

199 The scribe who copied the Vespasian MS. omitted the bracketed words.

200 See Appendix: Hart.

201 The explanation of this sentence is that a stag which entre-marched or sur-marched, or in other words placed the hind foot on the track or beyond the track made by the front foot, was a thin or light deer, and therefore not a fat stag, which latter was what the hunter would be looking for.

202 Lappet of his coat.

203 Shirley MS. Dislavee-obsolete word meaning going beyond bounds, immoderate.

204 After grease time. See Appendix: Grease Time.
