THE CUNNING FOX—AFFECTION OF THE FEMALE FOX TO HER YOUNG.

THE FOX.

"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."—Luke ix., 58.

The fox (Plate XIII, 6) is an animal of the dog tribe. It is found in many varieties, almost every part of the world having its own species, excepting the hottest latitudes. Among the many varieties may be mentioned the arctic fox of the northern regions, the black fox of Siberia, whose fur is exceedingly valuable, and the grey and silvery fox of the warmer parts of North America. All these, and many other species, possess the main features of the fox, namely, the sharp muzzle, long fur, short legs, and bushy tail. The arctic fox is a far less sagacious animal than its relations who dwell in warmer climates.

In England the fox is well known, alike as a favourite animal of the chase, and a very mischievous neighbour to the farmer, for whose poultry he has an especial liking. Indeed, he is such a cunning thief, that were it not for the amusement he affords to the hunter, he would probably have been long ago exterminated. There are three varieties in England, differing in size, but all of the same reddish colour: the cur fox, the smallest of these, is the most common. The fox possesses many qualities of the dog. For his size he is decidedly courageous; he will bite his enemy fiercely, and when once he fixes his teeth in a foe, can hardly be made to let go his hold. The sharpest pain will hardly force a cry from him. He can be tamed without much difficulty, and will attach himself strongly to those who are kind to him; but his temper is always uncertain, and he will often snap spitefully at the hand that caresses him. His food is very various. He will eat small birds and frogs, snails and insects; mice and rats do not come amiss to him; to berries and fruits he is very partial, and his fondness for grapes especially has been proverbial since the days when Aesop wrote the fable of the "Fox and the Grapes." Even in the Bible we find reference to this fact, in the verse of Solomon's Song: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that destroy the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." On the sea shore he preys upon the crabs and shell-fish, and is said to entrap the unsuspecting oyster by thrusting a pebble into its open shell, and thus preventing the valves from closing. Frequently hunted himself, he is in his turn a great hunter, destroying young pheasants, partridges, leverets, rabbits, and all small animals that are not strong enough to resist him. Honey also has such charms for him, that he will risk the anger of the bees in his attempt to steal it; but it is in attacking the poultry that he displays all his cunning.

The fox makes for himself a hole or burrow in the earth, generally in a bank, or under the roots of a tree. He takes care to have more than one entrance to this retreat, so that, if danger approaches through one door, he may escape by another. Accordingly the huntsman is careful to stop up the holes, that the fox, who, when first started, generally makes for his hole, may be compelled to flee across the country, finding his usual retreat cut off. Not unfrequently he takes wrongful possession of the hole dug by a badger, and establishes himself and his family therein. He chooses the night-time for his depredations; and thus the poet, in describing the evening operations on a farm, rightly enumerates among the other precautions taken against danger and loss, that "The snare for master fox is set."

The female fox is remarkable for the care and affection with which she brings up her young. Instances are known, in which foxes have carried their cubs considerable distances from their former abode, when they suspected the approach of danger; and sometimes they have even been known to climb trees, that they might deposit the cubs in the forks of the branches, out of the reach of the eager hounds.