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Ivanhoe

by Sir Walter Scott

CHAPTER I

Thus communed these; while to their lowly dome,  
The full-fed swine return'd with evening home;  
Compell'd, reluctant, to the several sties,  
With din obstreperous, and ungrateful cries.

Pope's *\_Odyssey\_*.

In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there extended in ancient times a large forest, covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and valleys which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster. The remains of this extensive wood are still to be seen at the noble seats of Wentworth, of Warncliffe Park, and around Rotherham. Here haunted of yore the fabulous Dragon of Wantley; here were fought many of the most desperate battles during the Civil Wars of the Roses; and here also flourished in ancient times those bands of gallant outlaws, whose deeds have been rendered so popular in English song.

Such being our chief scene, the date of our story refers to a period towards the end of the reign of Richard I., when his return from his long captivity

had become an event rather wished than hoped for by his despairing subjects, who were in the meantime subjected to every species of subordinate oppression. The nobles, whose power had become exorbitant during the reign of Stephen, and whom the prudence of Henry the Second had scarce reduced to some degree of subjection to the crown, had now resumed their ancient license in its utmost extent; despising the feeble interference of the English Council of State, fortifying their castles, increasing the number of their dependants, reducing all around them to a state of vassalage, and striving by every means in their power, to place themselves each at the head of such forces as might enable him to make a figure in the national convulsions which appeared to be impending.

The situation of the inferior gentry, or Franklins, as they were called, who, by the law and spirit of the English constitution, were entitled to hold themselves independent of feudal tyranny, became now unusually precarious. If, as was most generally the case, they placed themselves under the protection of any of the petty kings in their vicinity, accepted of feudal offices in his household, or bound themselves by mutual treaties of alliance and protection, to support him in his enterprises, they might indeed purchase temporary repose; but it must be with the sacrifice of that independence which was so dear to every English bosom, and at the certain hazard of being involved as a party in whatever rash expedition the ambition of their protector might lead him to undertake. On the other

hand, such and so multiplied were the means of vexation and oppression possessed by the great Barons, that they never wanted the pretext, and seldom the will, to harass and pursue, even to the very edge of destruction, any of their less powerful neighbours, who attempted to separate themselves from their authority, and to trust for their protection, during the dangers of the times, to their own inoffensive conduct, and to the laws of the land.

A circumstance which greatly tended to enhance the tyranny of the nobility, and the sufferings of the inferior classes, arose from the consequences of the Conquest by Duke William of Normandy. Four generations had not sufficed to blend the hostile blood of the Normans and Anglo-Saxons, or to unite, by common language and mutual interests, two hostile races, one of which still felt the elation of triumph, while the other groaned under all the consequences of defeat. The power had been completely placed in the hands of the Norman nobility, by the event of the battle of Hastings, and it had been used, as our histories assure us, with no moderate hand. The whole race of Saxon princes and nobles had been extirpated or disinherited, with few or no exceptions; nor were the numbers great who possessed land in the country of their fathers, even as proprietors of the second, or of yet inferior classes. The royal policy had long been to weaken, by every means, legal or illegal, the strength of a part of the population which was justly considered as nourishing the most inveterate antipathy to their victor. All the monarchs of the Norman race had

shown the most marked predilection for their Norman subjects; the laws of the chase, and many others equally unknown to the milder and more free spirit of the Saxon constitution, had been fixed upon the necks of the subjugated inhabitants, to add weight, as it were, to the feudal chains with which they were loaded. At court, and in the castles of the great nobles, where the pomp and state of a court was emulated, Norman-French was the only language employed; in courts of law, the pleadings and judgments were delivered in the same tongue. In short, French was the language of honour, of chivalry, and even of justice, while the far more manly and expressive Anglo-Saxon was abandoned to the use of rustics and hinds, who knew no other. Still, however, the necessary intercourse between the lords of the soil, and those oppressed inferior beings by whom that soil was cultivated, occasioned the gradual formation of a dialect, compounded betwixt the French and the Anglo-Saxon, in which they could render themselves mutually intelligible to each other; and from this necessity arose by degrees the structure of our present English language, in which the speech of the victors and the vanquished have been so happily blended together; and which has since been so richly improved by importations from the classical languages, and from those spoken by the southern nations of Europe.

This state of things I have thought it necessary to premise for the information of the general reader, who might be apt to forget, that, although no great historical events, such as war or insurrection, mark

the existence of the Anglo-Saxons as a separate people subsequent to the reign of William the Second; yet the great national distinctions betwixt them and their conquerors, the recollection of what they had formerly been, and to what they were now reduced, continued down to the reign of Edward the Third, to keep open the wounds which the Conquest had inflicted, and to maintain a line of separation betwixt the descendants of the victor Normans and the vanquished Saxons.

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The sun was setting upon one of the rich grassy glades of that forest, which we have mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. Hundreds of broad-headed, short-stemmed, wide-branched oaks, which had witnessed perhaps the stately march of the Roman soldiery, flung their gnarled arms over a thick carpet of the most delicious green sward; in some places they were intermingled with beeches, hollies, and copsewood of various descriptions, so closely as totally to intercept the level beams of the sinking sun; in others they receded from each other, forming those long sweeping vistas, in the intricacy of which the eye delights to lose itself, while imagination considers them as the paths to yet wilder scenes of silvan solitude. Here the red rays of the sun shot a broken and discoloured light, that partially hung upon the shattered boughs and mossy trunks of the trees, and there they illuminated in brilliant patches the portions of turf to which they made their way. A considerable open space, in the

midst of this glade, seemed formerly to have been dedicated to the rites of Druidical superstition; for, on the summit of a hillock, so regular as to seem artificial, there still remained part of a circle of rough unhewn stones, of large dimensions. Seven stood upright; the rest had been dislodged from their places, probably by the zeal of some convert to Christianity, and lay, some prostrate near their former site, and others on the side of the hill. One large stone only had found its way to the bottom, and in stopping the course of a small brook, which glided smoothly round the foot of the eminence, gave, by its opposition, a feeble voice of murmur to the placid and elsewhere silent streamlet.

The human figures which completed this landscape, were in number two, partaking, in their dress and appearance, of that wild and rustic character, which belonged to the woodlands of the West-Riding of Yorkshire at that early period. The eldest of these men had a stern, savage, and wild aspect. His garment was of the simplest form imaginable, being a close jacket with sleeves, composed of the tanned skin of some animal, on which the hair had been originally left, but which had been worn of in so many places, that it would have been difficult to distinguish from the patches that remained, to what creature the fur had belonged. This primeval vestment reached from the throat to the knees, and served at once all the usual purposes of body-clothing; there was no wider opening at the collar, than was necessary to admit the passage of the head, from which it may

be inferred, that it was put on by slipping it over the head and shoulders, in the manner of a modern shirt, or ancient hauberk. Sandals, bound with thongs made of boars' hide, protected the feet, and a roll of thin leather was twined artificially round the legs, and, ascending above the calf, left the knees bare, like those of a Scottish Highlander. To make the jacket sit yet more close to the body, it was gathered at the middle by a broad leathern belt, secured by a brass buckle; to one side of which was attached a sort of scrip, and to the other a ram's horn, accoutred with a mouthpiece, for the purpose of blowing. In the same belt was stuck one of those long, broad, sharp-pointed, and two-edged knives, with a buck's-horn handle, which were fabricated in the neighbourhood, and bore even at this early period the name of a Sheffield whittle. The man had no covering upon his head, which was only defended by his own thick hair, matted and twisted together, and scorched by the influence of the sun into a rusty dark-red colour, forming a contrast with the overgrown beard upon his cheeks, which was rather of a yellow or amber hue. One part of his dress only remains, but it is too remarkable to be suppressed; it was a brass ring, resembling a dog's collar, but without any opening, and soldered fast round his neck, so loose as to form no impediment to his breathing, yet so tight as to be incapable of being removed, excepting by the use of the file. On this singular gorget was engraved, in Saxon characters, an inscription of the following purport:---`Gurth, the son of Beowulph, is the born thrall of Cedric of Rotherwood.'

Beside the swine-herd, for such was Gurth's occupation, was seated, upon one of the fallen Druidical monuments, a person about ten years younger in appearance, and whose dress, though resembling his companion's in form, was of better materials, and of a more fantastic appearance. His jacket had been stained of a bright purple hue, upon which there had been some attempt to paint grotesque ornaments in different colours. To the jacket he added a short cloak, which scarcely reached half way down his thigh; it was of crimson cloth, though a good deal soiled, lined with bright yellow; and as he could transfer it from one shoulder to the other, or at his pleasure draw it all around him, its width, contrasted with its want of longitude, formed a fantastic piece of drapery. He had thin silver bracelets upon his arms, and on his neck a collar of the same metal bearing the inscription, ``Wamba, the son of Witless, is the thrall of Cedric of Rotherwood.' ' This personage had the same sort of sandals with his companion, but instead of the roll of leather thong, his legs were cased in a sort of gaiters, of which one was red and the other yellow. He was provided also with a cap, having around it more than one bell, about the size of those attached to hawks, which jingled as he turned his head to one side or other; and as he seldom remained a minute in the same posture, the sound might be considered as incessant. Around the edge of this cap was a stiff bandeau of leather, cut at the top into open work, resembling a coronet, while a prolonged bag arose from within it, and fell down on one shoulder like an old-fashioned

nightcap, or a jelly-bag, or the head-gear of a modern hussar. It was to this part of the cap that the bells were attached; which circumstance, as well as the shape of his head-dress, and his own half-crazed, half-cunning expression of countenance, sufficiently pointed him out as belonging to the race of domestic clowns or jesters, maintained in the houses of the wealthy, to help away the tedium of those lingering hours which they were obliged to spend within doors. He bore, like his companion, a scrip, attached to his belt, but had neither horn nor knife, being probably considered as belonging to a class whom it is esteemed dangerous to intrust with edge-tools. In place of these, he was equipped with a sword of lath, resembling that with which Harlequin operates his wonders upon the modern stage.

The outward appearance of these two men formed scarce a stronger contrast than their look and demeanour. That of the serf, or bondsman, was sad and sullen; his aspect was bent on the ground with an appearance of deep dejection, which might be almost construed into apathy, had not the fire which occasionally sparkled in his red eye manifested that there slumbered, under the appearance of sullen despondency, a sense of oppression, and a disposition to resistance. The looks of Wamba, on the other hand, indicated, as usual with his class, a sort of vacant curiosity, and fidgetty impatience of any posture of repose, together with the utmost self-satisfaction respecting his own situation, and the appearance which he made. The dialogue which

they maintained between them, was carried on in Anglo-Saxon, which, as we said before, was universally spoken by the inferior classes, excepting the Norman soldiers, and the immediate personal dependants of the great feudal nobles. But to give their conversation in the original would convey but little information to the modern reader, for whose benefit we beg to offer the following translation:

``The curse of St Withold upon these infernal porkers!'' said the swine-herd, after blowing his horn obstreperously, to collect together the scattered herd of swine, which, answering his call with notes equally melodious, made, however, no haste to remove themselves from the luxurious banquet of beech-mast and acorns on which they had fattened, or to forsake the marshy banks of the rivulet, where several of them, half plunged in mud, lay stretched at their ease, altogether regardless of the voice of their keeper. ``The curse of St Withold upon them and upon me!'' said Gurth; ``if the two-legged wolf snap not up some of them ere nightfall, I am no true man. Here, Fangs! Fangs!'' he ejaculated at the top of his voice to a ragged wolfish-looking dog, a sort of lurcher, half mastiff, half greyhound, which ran limping about as if with the purpose of seconding his master in collecting the refractory grunTERS; but which, in fact, from misapprehension of the swine-herd's signals, ignorance of his own duty, or malice prepense, only drove them hither and thither, and increased the evil which he seemed to design to remedy. ``A devil draw the teeth of him,'' said Gurth, ``and the mother of

mischief confound the Ranger of the forest, that cuts  
the foreclaws off our dogs, and makes them unfit  
for their trade!\* Wamba, up and help me an thou

\* Note A. The Ranger of the Forest, that cuts the fore-claws  
\* off our dogs.

beest a man; take a turn round the back o' the  
hill to gain the wind on them; and when thous't  
got the weather-gage, thou mayst drive them before  
thee as gently as so many innocent lambs.'

``Truly,' said Wamba, without stirring from the  
spot, ``I have consulted my legs upon this matter,  
and they are altogether of opinion, that to carry  
my gay garments through these sloughs, would be  
an act of unfriendship to my sovereign person and  
royal wardrobe; wherefore, Gurth, I advise thee  
to call off Fangs, and leave the herd to their destiny,  
which, whether they meet with bands of travelling  
soldiers, or of outlaws, or of wandering  
pilgrims, can be little else than to be converted into  
Normans before morning, to thy no small ease  
and comfort.'

``The swine turned Normans to my comfort!''  
quoth Gurth; ``expound that to me, Wamba, for  
my brain is too dull, and my mind too vexed, to  
read riddles.'

``Why, how call you those grunting brutes running  
about on their four legs?'' demanded Wamba.

``Swine, fool, swine,' ' said the herd, ``every fool knows that.' '

``And swine is good Saxon,' ' said the Jester;  
``but how call you the sow when she is flayed,  
and drawn, and quartered, and hung up by the heels,  
like a traitor?'

``Pork,' ' answered the swine-herd.

``I am very glad every fool knows that too,' ' said  
Wamba, ``and pork, I think, is good Norman-French;  
and so when the brute lives, and is in the charge  
of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name;  
but becomes a Norman, and is called pork,  
when she is carried to the Castle-hall to feast among  
the nobles what dost thou think of this, friend Gurth, ha?'

``It is but too true doctrine, friend Wamba,  
however it got into thy fool's pate.'

``Nay, I can tell you more,' ' said Wamba, in the  
same tone; ``there is old Alderman Ox continues  
to hold his Saxon epithet, while he is under the  
charge of serfs and bondsmen such as thou, but becomes  
Beef, a fiery French gallant, when he arrives  
before the worshipful jaws that are destined to  
consume him. Mynheer Calf, too, becomes Monsieur  
de Veau in the like manner; he is Saxon when  
he requires tendance, and takes a Norman name  
when he becomes matter of enjoyment.'

``By St Dunstan,' ' answered Gurth, ``thou speakest  
but sad truths; little is left to us but the air  
we breathe, and that appears to have been reserved

with much hesitation, solely for the purpose of enabling us to endure the tasks they lay upon our shoulders. The finest and the fattest is for their board; the loveliest is for their couch; the best and bravest supply their foreign masters with soldiers, and whiten distant lands with their bones, leaving few here who have either will or the power to protect the unfortunate Saxon. God's blessing on our master Cedric, he hath done the work of a man in standing in the gap; but Reginald Front-de-B<sup>o</sup>euf is coming down to this country in person, and we shall soon see how little Cedric's trouble will avail him.---Here, here,' he exclaimed again, raising his voice, ``So ho! so ho! well done, Fangs! thou hast them all before thee now, and bring'st them on bravely, lad.'

``Gurth,' said the Jester, ``I know thou thinkest me a fool, or thou wouldst not be so rash in putting thy head into my mouth. One word to Reginald Front-de-B<sup>o</sup>euf, or Philip de Malvoisin, that thou hast spoken treason against the Norman, ---and thou art but a cast-away swineherd,---thou wouldst waver on one of these trees as a terror to all evil speakers against dignities.'

``Dog, thou wouldst not betray me,' said Gurth, ``after having led me on to speak so much at disadvantage?''

``Betray thee!' answered the Jester; ``no, that were the trick of a wise man; a fool cannot half so well help himself---but soft, whom have we here?'' he said, listening to the trampling of several horses

which became then audible.

``Never mind whom,' ' answered Gurth, who had now got his herd before him, and, with the aid of Fangs, was driving them down one of the long dim vistas which we have endeavoured to describe.

``Nay, but I must see the riders,' ' answered Wamba; ``perhaps they are come from Fairy-land with a message from King Oberon.' '

``A murrain take thee,' ' rejoined the swine-herd; ``wilt thou talk of such things, while a terrible storm of thunder and lightning is raging within a few miles of us? Hark, how the thunder rumbles! and for summer rain, I never saw such broad downright flat drops fall out of the clouds; the oaks, too, notwithstanding the calm weather, sob and creak with their great boughs as if announcing a tempest. Thou canst play the rational if thou wilt; credit me for once, and let us home ere the storm begins to rage, for the night will be fearful.' '

Wamba seemed to feel the force of this appeal, and accompanied his companion, who began his journey after catching up a long quarter-staff which lay upon the grass beside him. This second Eum<ae>us strode hastily down the forest glade, driving before him, with the assistance of Fangs, the whole herd of his inharmonious charge.

A Monk there was, a fayre for the maistrie,  
An outrider that loved venerie;  
A manly man, to be an Abbot able,  
Full many a daintie horse had he in stable:  
And whan he rode, men might his bridle hear  
Gingeling in a whistling wind as clear,  
And eke as loud, as doth the chapell bell,  
There as this lord was keeper of the cell.

Chaucer.

Notwithstanding the occasional exhortation  
and chiding of his companion, the noise of the  
horsemen's feet continuing to approach, Wamba  
could not be prevented from lingering occasionally  
on the road, upon every pretence which occurred;  
now catching from the hazel a cluster of half-ripe  
nuts, and now turning his head to leer after a cottage  
maiden who crossed their path. The horsemen,  
therefore, soon overtook them on the road.

Their numbers amounted to ten men, of whom  
the two who rode foremost seemed to be persons  
of considerable importance, and the others their  
attendants. It was not difficult to ascertain the  
condition and character of one of these personages.  
He was obviously an ecclesiastic of high rank; his  
dress was that of a Cistercian Monk, but composed  
of materials much finer than those which the  
rule of that order admitted. His mantle and hood  
were of the best Flanders cloth, and fell in ample,  
and not ungraceful folds, around a handsome,