

WOODSTOCK

OR THE CAVALIER.



EVENING SERVICE AT THE RANGER'S HUT.

EDINBURGH:
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK.

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W O O D S T O C K

OR

The Cavalier.

A

Tale of the Year

1651.

BY

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

He was a very perfect gentle Knight.

CHAUCER.

EDINBURGH

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1863

INTRODUCTION TO WOODSTOCK.

THE busy period of the great Civil War was one in which the character and genius of different parties were most brilliantly displayed, and, accordingly, the incidents which took place on either side were of a striking and extraordinary character, and afforded ample foundation for fictitious composition. The author had in some measure attempted such in Peveril of the Peak; but the scene was in a remote part of the kingdom, and mingled with other national differences, which left him still at liberty to glean another harvest out of so ample a store.

In these circumstances, some wonderful adventures which happened at Woodstock in the year 1649, occurred to him as something he had long ago read of, although he was unable to tell where, and of which the hint appeared sufficient, although, doubtless, it might have been much better handled if the author had not, in the lapse of time, lost everything like an accurate recollection of the real story.

It was not until about this period, namely, 1831, that the author, being called upon to write this Introduction, obtained a general account of what really happened upon the marvellous occasion in question, in a work termed "The Every-day Book," published by Mr Hone, and full of curious antiquarian research, the object being to give a variety of original information concerning manners illustrated by curious instances, rarely to be found elsewhere. Among other matter, Mr Hone quotes an article from the British Magazine for 1747, in the following words, and which is probably the document which the author of Woodstock had formerly perused, although he was unable to refer to the source of his information. The tract is entitled, "The Genuine History of the Good Devil of Woodstock, famous in the world, in the year 1649, and never accounted for, or at all understood to this time."

The teller of this "genuine history" proceeds verbatim as follows:—

"Some original papers having lately fallen into my hands, under the name of 'Authentic Memoirs of the Memorabile Joseph Collins of Oxford, commonly known by the name of Funny Joe, and now intended for the press,' I was extremely delighted to find in them a circumstantial and unquestionable account of the most famous of all invisible agents, so well known in the year 1649, under the name of the Good Devil of Woodstock, and even adored by the people of that place, for the vexation and distress it occasioned some people they were not much pleased with. As this famous story, though related by a thousand people, and attested in all its circumstances, beyond all possibility of doubt, by people of rank, learning, and reputation, of Oxford and the adjacent towns, has never yet been generally accounted for, or at all understood, and is perfectly explained, in a manner that can admit of no doubt, in these papers, I could not refuse my readers the pleasure it gave me in reading."

There is, therefore no doubt that, in the year 1649, a number of in-

cidents, supposed to be supernatural, took place at the King's palace of Woodstock, which the Commissioners of Parliament were then and there endeavouring to dilapidate and destroy. The account of this by the Commissioners themselves, or under their authority, was repeatedly published, and, in particular, is inserted as relation sixth of Satan's Invisible World Discovered, by George Sinclair, Professor of Philosophy in Glasgow, an approved collector of such tales.

It was the object of neither of the great political parties of that day to discredit this narrative, which gave great satisfaction both to the cavaliers and roundheads; the former conceiving that the license given to the demons, was in consequence of the impious desecration of the King's furniture and apartments, so that the citizens of Woodstock almost adored the supposed spirits, as avengers of the cause of royalty; while the friends of the Parliament, on the other hand, imputed to the malice of the fiend the obstruction of the pious work, as they judged that which they had in hand.

At the risk of prolonging a curious quotation, I include a page or two from Mr Hone's "Every-day Book."

"The honourable the Commissioners arrived at Woodstock manor-house, October 13th, and took up their residence in the King's own rooms. His Majesty's bed-chamber they made their kitchen, the council-hall their pantry, and the presence-chamber was the place where they sat for despatch of business. His majesty's dining-room they made their wood-yard, and stowed it with no other wood but that of the famous Royal Oak from the High Park, which, that nothing might be left with the name of the King about it, they had dug up by the roots, and bundled up into fagots for their firing.

"October 16th. This day they first sat for the despatch of business. In the midst of their first debate there entered a large black dog (as they thought), which made a terrible howling, overturned two or three of their chairs, and doing some other damage, went under the bed, and there gnawed the cords. The door this while continued constantly shut, when, after some two or three hours, Giles Sharp, their secretary, looking under the bed, perceived that the creature was vanished, and that a plate of meat that the servants had hid there was untouched, and showing them to their honours, they were all convinced there could be no real dog concerned in the case; they said Giles also deposed on oath, that, to his certain knowledge, there was not.

"October 17th. As they were this day sitting at dinner in a lower room, they heard plainly the noise of persons walking over head, though they well knew the doors were all locked, and there could be none there. Presently after they heard also all the wood of the King's Oak brought by parcels from the dining-room, and thrown with great violence into the presence-chamber, as also the chairs, stools, tables, and other furniture, forcibly hurled about the room, their own papers of the minutes of their transactions torn, and the ink-glass broken. When all this had some time ceased, the said Giles proposed to enter first into these rooms, and, in presence of the Commissioners, of whom he received the key, he opened the door and entered the room, their honours following him. He there found the wood strewed about the room, the chairs tossed about and broken, the papers torn, and the ink-glass broken over them all as they had heard, yet no footsteps appeared of any person whatever being there, nor had the doors ever been opened to admit or let out any persons since their honours were last there. It was therefore voted, *nem. con.*, that the person who did this mischief could have entered no other way than at the key-hole of the said doors.

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“ In the night following this same day, the said Giles, and two other of the Commissioners’ servants, as they were in bed in the same room with their honours, had their bed’s feet lifted up so much higher than their heads, that they expected to have their necks broken, and then they were let fall at once with such violence as shook them up from the bed to a good distance ; and this was repeated many times, their honours being amazed spectators of it. In the morning the bedsteads were found cracked and broken, and the said Giles and his fellows declared they were sore to the bones with the tossing and jolting of the beds.

“ October 19th. As they were all in bed together, the candles were all blown out together with a sulphurous smell, and instantly many trenchers of wood were hurled about the room ; and one of them putting his head above the clothes, had not less than six thrown at him, which wounded him very grievously. In the morning the trenchers were all found lying about the room, and were observed to be the same they had eaten on the day before, none being found remaining in the pantry.

“ October 20th. This night the candles were put out as before ; the curtains of the bed in which their honours lay, were drawn to and fro many times with great violence : their honours received many cruel blows, and were much bruised beside, with eight great pewter dishes, and three dozen wooden trenchers, which were thrown on the bed, and afterwards heard rolling about the room.

“ Many times also this night they heard the forcible falling of many fagots by their bedside, but in the morning no fagots were found there, no dishes or trenchers were there seen either ; and the aforesaid Giles attests, that by their different arranging in the pantry, they had assuredly been taken thence, and after put there again.

“ October 21st. The keeper of their ordinary and his bitch lay with them : This night they had no disturbance.

“ October 22. Candles put out as before. They had the said bitch with them again, but were not by that protected ; the bitch set up a very piteous cry ; the clothes of their beds were all pulled off, and the bricks, without any wind, were thrown off the chimney tops into the midst.

“ October 24. The candles put out as before. They thought all the wood of the King’s Oak was violently thrown down by their bedsides ; they counted sixty-four fagots that fell with great violence, and some hit and shook the bed,—but in the morning none were found there, nor the door of the room opened in which the said fagots were.

“ October 25. The candles put out as before. The curtains of the bed in the drawing-room were many times forcibly drawn ; the wood thrown out as before ; a terrible crack like thunder was heard ; and one of the servants, running to see if his master was not killed, found, at his return, three dozen trenchers laid smoothly upon his bed under the quilt.

“ October 26. The beds were shaken as before, the windows seemed all broken to pieces, and glass fell in vast quantities all about the room. In the morning they found the windows all whole, but the floor strewed with broken glass, which they gathered and laid by.

“ October 29. At midnight candles went out as before, something walked majestically through the room and opened and shut the windows ; great stones were thrown violently into the room, some whereof fell on the beds, others on the floor ; and about a quarter after one, a noise was heard as of forty cannon discharged together, and again repeated at about eight minutes’ distance. This alarmed and raised all the neighbourhood, who, coming into their honours’ room, gathered up the great stones, fourscore in number, many of them like common pebbles and boulders, and laid them by, where they are to be seen to this day, at a corner of the adjoining field.