

## VARNO THE BRAVE:

A TALE OF THE  
PICTS AND SCOTS.

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## INTRODUCTION.

HAVING long meditated a visit to N——, a small town in Fife, Scotland, for the purpose of seeing a near relative, I resolved at length, and after a good day's journey reached my destination just as twilight was settling into night. I found my relative in the enjoyment of good health. We had never seen each other before, but were friends on the instant. He was a tall, thin man, with a smack of the soldier in his appearance, although it had never been his hap to "fight in famous battles." But not only was his appearance soldier-like, his manner of speech likewise and general topics of conversation pointed him out as an ancient bearer of the bayonet. The whole of the particulars of the latest war were at his finger ends, and not of it only, but I found he could give, on the moment, the when and whereabout of every renowned military movement for the past ten centuries. He was a wit, too, and abounded in all the fine sayings and anecdotes of his locality, and, moreover, had a tale for every grey cairn, running stream and ivied ruin for miles round.

The forenoon of the day after my arrival being fine, I proposed a ramble among the hills that overhung the town. The hint was enough. We sallied forth, and with little toil and in a much shorter time than I anticipated, gained their airy summits. If I conceived my gloamin' view of N—— and its localities fine, I now thought the prospect doubly so. Beneath was the broad, majestic Tay, and stretching along its silvery margin for twenty long miles the Carse of Gowrie lay before me, with its castles, cots, corn fields and forests, lovely and dream-like as the rich yellow pencilings of a picture—the lofty range of the Sidlaws, commencing with Dundee "Law" and ending with the romantic fir-crested hill of Kinnoul—forming a splendid background. Opposite Kinnoul, and with the Tay and the Earn encircling and seemingly pressing round its broad base in very fondness, rose Morden, with higher top, black with trees, and its shelving sides studded with farm-houses. On the west, and extending onward till blue hills bound the view, lay the lovely vale of Strath-earn, beautifully wooded, and gorgeously decked in all the variegated agricultural drapery of summer, while its river, glittering like a silvery serpent, now seen, now hid, winded its onward course till its sparkling brightness was lost in the misty distance. On the east rose the hills of Fife, blest with fewer beauties, but giving ample promise of an abundant harvest, broad and bold, and cultured to their summits, save where patches of rock, just crusting the surface, arrests the plough and permits the broom and the furze to blossom. Their appearance from where I stood presented little variety, but at their feet, in wave-

less grandeur, flowed the noble Tay, bearing on its broad, sunlit expanse the stately bark and craft of lighter sail, whose onward prow scarcely produced a ripple on its glassy surface.

We gained at length the utmost height of a rock whose peculiar characteristics at once fix the attention. All around its sides rise abrupt and craggy. Its top is about an acre in extent, its form the segment of a circle, with the chord to the north. There perpendicular cliffs sink to a depth of 200 feet, where the goss-hawk, the corbie and the owl have had settlements for hundreds of generations. The eastern side breaks the Ochill chain, and so effectually that the bottom of the valley seems only a few feet above the surface of the Tay, thus affording a level road, and the only one, I was told, from Strathearn into the interior of Fife. Having made a halt, the beauty of the surroundings at length compelled me to break our mutual silence.

"This is a noble rock," I observed; "has it a name?"

"A name, lad, a name? A rock like this without a name?" he exclaimed. "Know, sir, that you have the honor to stand where the proud halls of the maomer\* of Fife once rose. See you these mounds there, stretching from the dizzy edge of the precipice south and around? These are the remaining vestiges of walls that defied alike Saxon art and Scottish broadsword."

"Scottish broadsword? Was it a Roman or a Danish fortress at one time?" I asked.

"No, no, neither of them," he replied; "Castle Clatchart was a Pictish stronghold. The name of the rock is Clatchart Craig still. Do you think, now, you could listen to a tale of the times of old?"

I nodded assent.

"Tis dry, with little love in it, and refers to an age so far back that these corn fields below, and the place, too, where the town stands, were then covered with a dense old forest called Blackearn Wood."

"No matter; let me hear it."

We seated ourselves on the rock, and, with a preparatory cough, my acquaintance launched into the following "tale of the olden times":

## CHAPTER I.

History tells us that Scotland at one time was divided between two rival powers, the Scots and Picts, and that, after a long and bloody contest, the latter were finally overthrown and made subject to the rule of the former. This consummation was effected by Kenneth, the son of Alpin, and in the fifth year of his reign, which makes the famous battle of Scone to have been fought A.D. 838.

Varno, the hero of my narrative, was the only scion of a long line of illustrious ancestors, and hereditary maomer of Fifeshire, then named Ross. His father, the first always in the battle field, fell bravely avenging his country's wrongs when Hungus so signally chastised Athel-

\*Maomer, the Pictish title for thane, governor of a province or county.