

JUVENILE ENTERTAINER.

"Torquet ab obscenis jam nunc sermonibus aurem."

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THE JUVENILE ENTERTAINER

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MISCELLANEOUS.

OAK OF THE FOREST;

3, SOME PASSAGES IN THE HISTORY OF A ROUND TABLE.

It is common, I believe, for the autobiographer, in commencing his memoir, to relate the circumstances of his birth and parentage; and it would, perhaps, be proper for me to do the same. As the language of my species is not, and cannot be made easily intelligible to the reader, may just say, that all which I remember to have heard of my early history, is the following anecdote related to me by my venerable parent. Sometime, that one autumnal evening, some years after the union of the red rose and the white, when the king had been hunting in our forest, one of the yeoman of the guard, separated from his company while pursuing a weary stag, dashed hastily under the boughs of my parent stock, and shook thence a shower of acorns.—I who was one of them, fell into the spot reached by his horse's hoof, & nourished by rains and dews, sprung up first in the two delicate seed-aves of my genus; then became a sparkling acorn, and in the course of half a century, at last spread my wide branches over the beautiful pasture grounds of an open part of the forest of Hants.

The forest of Hants consisted at that time of certain woody grounds and fruitful pastures privileged for wild fowls of forest, chase, and barren; and was kept for the princely delight of the king. The hart, the hind the buck, and the doe, there had ample range and covert undisurbed. The boar and the wolf, as well as the mid hair and cunning fox, were also seen within its dingles, and often of a dewy morning the huntsman's horn used to wake the echoes of its hills and caves, and gallant knights and noble lords sought their pastime in its shades. There also the humble peasant spent his happier life in honest labor, & uncomplaining toil, and there the woodman led his little ones abroad at early dawn, and saw his forest boys return at night to cheer their clay-built cottage with the blaze of the gathered faggots bundled on their backs.

The ash, the elm, the maple, and the beech, there spread their arms, and waved their boughs;

but chief the oak of every age and size threw their umbrageous shadows and knarled branches over the thickets and copsewood with which the spot abounded. For more than a century did I exist in this green retreat, and many a princely group have I seen pass through its covert by day; and many a bandit culk beneath its shades by night. But every thing that lives and grows, also fades and dies; and many a noble tree had been borne off from the forest before it became my lot also to receive the woodman's stroke, to wither, to fall, and to die.

No sooner were my leafy honours laid in the dust, than stripped of my outward coat, I was dragged to the neighbouring hamlet, where those who had often rested under my shadow, or whom I had sheltered from the blast, relentlessly hacked and hewed my disjointed limbs, and saved my body asunder. But not to dwell on this excruciating process, suffice it to say, that in course of time I was transplanted to a great city, where being smoothed and polished by my intercourse with its inhabitants, I was once more set upon my feet, and there I would have been content to dwell, seeing so many of my fallen compatriots in the same sad circumstances. But alas! I was cruelly separated from this last source of comfort in my broken fortunes, and severed from their company, was sent down into one of the western counties, where, after a somewhat tedious and jolting journey, I was again put upon my legs, and found myself in the ample hall a baronial castle, among antlers of the deer and tusks of the wild boar and portraits of armed men, who frowned upon me from the wall. And here, though I often heard the sound of the horn blow for the chase, and the wardnote from the tower, I never experienced any more the fructifying influence of rain, or dews, or sunny skies, but neither did I suffer the soaking of the tempest, nor the pelting of the pitiless storm, and therefore I felt content. Stationary, solitary, and unvisited, I remained month after month, and altogether unnoticed, save when the house maid occasionally smoothed my russet face with oil, or polished my sturdy limbs with the strength of her unwearying arms.

It was in the year 1555, at that season when clouds and driving storms make men forsake the woodlands, and lounge about the hearth, that one day I was overspread with a piece of damask, as white as the snow which covered all the lawn. When the ample chimney in the hall was piled with logs of wood, and a note of preparation sounded through the castle, of some extraordinary event about to be developed. In addition to my mantle of white, I found myself obliged to sustain the weight of many a massy goblet and wassail bowl; and as it drew towards dusk, the antique lamp which had depended so long over my head, was lighted up with lambent flames, and presently the steward of the household entered, bearing a boar's under a silver cover, which being placed upon my ample surface, was followed by sirloins of beef, gammons of bacon and pasties of the doe; besides flagons of wine, and every

thing that tends to make good cheer, and warm a winter's day.

No sooner had this ceremony taken place, than my young master, that day of age, led in his widowed mother to the hall, and placing her in the seat of honour, they were followed by gentles and ladies fair who each took a seat by my side. On this occasion many a cup was drunk to the health and prosperity of the young baron; and the hilarity and cheerfulness of the company continued unabated till towards the end of the banquet, when a sharp blast from the horn of the warder announced the arrival of a stranger, but whether a guest, a courier, or an enemy, could not at first be ascertained. A solemn silence took place around me, during which the drawbridge was heard to creak up its chains, the portcullis was raised up, and a gentleman urged his jaded steed into the courtyard, and quickly dismounting, presented himself in haste as he arrived, in the blaze of the lights, and sparkling billets which illuminated the hall.

"Sir Edmund! Sir Edmund," said my young master, "why so late, and yet so speedy? We looked for you at noon, and now 'tis almost night."

Late, yet early for what I have seen and suffered this day," replied the stranger, "but that," said he, "were long and sad to tell."

As Sir Edmund said this, my master desired he might first receive refreshments after his journey, and then reply to the inquiries which were anxiously addressed to him. When this was done, and the stranger found himself revived, he spoke as follows:

"My Lord," said he, "it was my intention to have been with you betimes this day, and to have hailed you with a kinsman's kind regards. But stopping to bait my steed, at Gloucester, I found myself entangled in a crowd, and witness to a scene it was impossible to escape. You all know the state of the times too well to make it necessary for me to tell you, however carefully concealed, what was transacted there this day. Our holy bishop has won the crown of martyrdom, and could I do less than stay to see him put it on!"

Here there was a deed groan from all around me; and I thought within myself, what foolish thoughts will not an oak of the forest think? Some one has been struck down with an axe this day, or sawn asunder, or flayed alive, or burned in the fire! And in some respects my conjectures were not far distant from the truth.

"Ah! Gloucester!" exclaimed every one present, "Ah! Gloucester! Has he then gained his crown! Blessed man! How glorious! But yet in his persecutors how cruel!"

"Ah!" said the aged chaplain, who was seated next my Lord, "I wist not he was to be so soon in glory. Many a time have I seen him in his common hall, where was a table spread for all his poor, and many a blessing has been poured upon his head, as he fed the hungry, and to the weary pilgrim pointed the path to heaven. But let us hear it all."