



Ivanhoe: A Romance

Walter Scott

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Ivanhoe is a historical novel by Sir Walter Scott published in 1820 and set in 12th-century England. *Ivanhoe* is sometimes credited for increasing interest in romance and medievalism; John Henry Newman claimed Scott “had first turned men’s minds in the direction of the middle ages,” while Carlyle and Ruskin made similar assertions of Scott’s overwhelming influence over the revival based primarily on the publication of this novel.

Ivanhoe is the story of one of the remaining Saxon noble families at a time when the nobility in England was overwhelmingly Norman. It follows the Saxon protagonist, Wilfred of Ivanhoe, who is out of favour with his father for his allegiance to the Norman king, Richard I. The story is set in 1194, after the failure of the Third Crusade, when many of the Crusaders were still returning to their homes in Europe. King Richard, who had been captured by Leopold of Austria on his return journey to England, was believed to be still in captivity.

The legendary Robin Hood, initially under the name of Locksley, is also a character in the story, as are his “merry men”. The character that Scott gave to Robin Hood in *Ivanhoe* helped shape the modern notion of this figure as a cheery noble outlaw.

Other major characters include *Ivanhoe*’s intractable father, Cedric, one of the few remaining Saxon lords; various Knights Templar, most notable of which is Brian de Bois-Guilbert, *Ivanhoe*’s main rival; a number of clergymen; the loyal serfs Gurth the swineherd and the jester Wamba, whose observations punctuate much of the action; and the Jewish moneylender, Isaac of York, who is equally passionate about his people and his beautiful (Jewish) daughter, Rebecca. The book was written and published during a period of increasing struggle for the emancipation of the Jews in England, and there are frequent references to injustices against them.

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