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Ivanhoe

Walter Scott · *1819 (dated 1820)* · *original English text*

In twelve days of Richard's England, a disinherited Saxon knight, a Norman king in disguise, a Jewish heiress of courage, and a Templar's lawless passion are brought together at tournament, siege and trial. Scott's romance asks what chivalry is worth when it is only display — and what honour looks like when it is mercy, loyalty and truth kept under cost.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is true chivalry — the tournament, or mercy, loyalty and honour kept toward God and the weak?

"Nay," answered Rebecca, "I will but pray of thee to believe henceforward that a Jew may do good service to a Christian, without desiring other guerdon than the blessing of the Great Father who made both Jew and Gentile."

Rebecca to Ivanhoe · Chapter XXVIII

Ivanhoe's courage is real, and so is Richard's. The book's sharper honour belongs also to Rebecca, who will not buy her life with apostasy or ease, and who asks to be believed as a neighbour. Bois-Guilbert's chivalry, detached from vow and mercy, destroys him. Rowena is wed; Rebecca departs — virtue is not always paid in prosperity.

KEY CHARACTERS

Wilfred of Ivanhoe
loyalty to Richard; courage in weakness

Rebecca
mercy, faith, unbought honour

Rowena
Saxon dignity; the appointed bride

Brian de Bois-Guilbert
vows broken by passion

Richard the Lion-Heart
the king in disguise; reckless valour

Cedric
Saxon pride, a father's stubbornness

Isaac of York
fear, love of his child, a hunted man

Prince John
usurping ambition

Locksley (Robin Hood)
outlaw loyalty to the king

Front-de-Bœuf
brute force and a bad death

REBECCA'S STANDARD

> *"you are a Christian—I am a Jewess. —Our union were contrary to the laws, alike of the church and the synagogue."*
>
> **Rebecca to the Templar** · Chapter XXIV

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
Saxons and Normans
CHAPTERS I–VI

A divided land, a palmer, and a door opened at some risk.

- England under Prince John's faction is at odds: Saxon houses slighted, Norman pride high, King Richard still far off
- At Rotherwood, Cedric the Saxon keeps old ways and has disinherited his son **Wilfred of Ivanhoe** for following Richard
- A palmer (Ivanhoe disguised) and the Jew **Isaac of York** are received, uneasily
- Rowena, Cedric's ward, is destined in Cedric's mind for Athelstane and a Saxon restoration

02
The Tournament at Ashby
CHAPTERS VII–XIV

The Disinherited Knight throws down a prince's field.

- At Ashby-de-la-Zouch a great tournament gathers John's party and the flower of Norman chivalry
- A masked **Disinherited Knight** (Ivanhoe) defeats Bois-Guilbert and the challengers, then names Rowena Queen of Love and Beauty
- With the Black Knight (Richard, unknown) he holds the field on the second day, and is badly wounded
- Isaac and **Rebecca** take the wounded knight to tend him — a mercy that will cost them

03
Torquilstone
CHAPTERS XIX–XXXII

A castle of predators, and a defence of the helpless.

- Cedric's party, Isaac, Rebecca and the wounded Ivanhoe are seized by Front-de-Bœuf, de Bracy and the Templar **Brian de Bois-Guilbert**
- De Bracy would force Rowena; Bois-Guilbert would have Rebecca; the castle is a den of violated hospitality
- Rebecca, in the turret, has the skill to treat Ivanhoe and the courage to refuse the Templar
- The Black Knight, Locksley (Robin Hood) and a Saxon force storm the castle; it burns
- Ulrica's revenge and Front-de-Bœuf's end are terrible; the prisoners are freed, but Rebecca is carried off by the Templar

> *"He will not die, my father," said Rebecca, gently extricating herself from the grasp of Isaac "he will not die unless we abandon him; and if so, we are indeed answerable for his blood to God and to man."*
>
> **Rebecca** · Chapter XXVIII

04
The Trial
CHAPTERS XXXIII–XLIII

A prejudiced court, and a champion at the last hour.

- At Templestowe, Rebecca is tried as a sorceress, her skill in medicine twisted into a charge
- She demands a champion; Bois-Guilbert, who desires her, is also bound to fight against her
- Ivanhoe, still weak, appears as her champion
- Bois-Guilbert falls dead, conquered less by the lance than by the passion and conflict in himself
- Richard is made known; Prince John's plot fails; Robin Hood is pardoned in the king's humour

05
Partings
CHAPTER XLIV

The Saxon and the Norman are partly reconciled; not every virtue is crowned.

- Ivanhoe and Rowena are married, with Richard's favour and Cedric's hard-won consent
- Athelstane, reported dead, has inconveniently lived, and relinquishes the heroic role with relief
- Rebecca comes to thank Rowena and will not remain; she and Isaac will go to Spain
- Scott will not "reward" Rebecca with Ivanhoe's hand: he says, in his own voice, that virtue is not always recompensed with earthly prosperity

True Chivalry · Loyalty · Mercy · Faith & Honour · Courage · Justice

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Ivanhoe is often off-stage or wounded. Scott's moral centre is as much Rebecca's as the knight's. Watch what she refuses, and why.
2. Hospitality and its breach run from Rotherwood to Torquilstone. Who keeps the old duty to the stranger?
3. Bois-Guilbert is a templar in name. Set his vows beside his conduct, and notice how he dies.
4. Richard is brave and not always wise. Valour is praised; reckless kingship is not held up as a complete model.
5. The closing marriage is Rowena's, not Rebecca's. Read Scott's own remark on virtue and earthly reward.
6. Saxon and Norman, Jew and Christian: the book is a romance of reconciliation, not of contempt. Hold it to that claim.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #82, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/ivanhoe/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.