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Micah Clarke

Arthur Conan Doyle · *1889 · original English text*

In 1685 James, Duke of Monmouth, lands in the west of England and tries to take the throne from his uncle, King James II. Micah Clarke, a young Hampshire man brought up by an old Cromwellian soldier, joins him with his friend Reuben Lockarby. Doyle's historical novel follows the march, the siege of Taunton, the Battle of Sedgemoor, and the judges' revenge.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a young man owe to a cause that is brave but probably hopeless, and what does the cost of it look like when the cause is lost?

The novel treats Monmouth's rising with respect and some irony. Micah's religious conviction and his father's Puritan example lead him into the cause. The book also shows what he sees: the courage of the country people, the vanity of the leaders, and the cruelty that follows the defeat. Doyle is a storyteller first, and the fights and escapes carry the book, but the ending counts the price.

KEY CHARACTERS

Micah Clarke
The narrator, a young Hampshire man of strong principles.

Joseph Clarke
His father, a Cromwellian veteran.

Reuben Lockarby
His loyal and comic friend.

Decimus Saxon
A sinister schemer whom Micah meets early on.

Sir Gervas Jerome
A courageous knight who joins the rising.

Solomon Sprent
A fiery Puritan preacher.

Judge Jeffreys
The royal judge of the Bloody Assizes.

Grades 9–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Home and Schooling

CHAPTERS I–V

Micah's father, a Cromwellian trooper, raises him in the old faith. Micah goes to school, meets two friends, and is soon drawn into a strange meeting at Spithead.

- Joseph Clarke's stories of the Civil War shape Micah's ideals.
- The Spithead fishing party is an early sign of intrigue.
- The man with the drooping lids appears as a figure of menace.

02

The Call to the West

CHAPTERS VI–XII

A letter and a horseman bring news of Monmouth's landing. Micah and Reuben set off, meet a quarrelsome soldier at an inn, and have adventures on the road.

- The scene at the Blue Boar shows Doyle's ear for banter.
- The journey toward the rising is full of small dangers.
- They collect companions on the way.

03

Taunton

CHAPTERS XIII–XIX

They meet a knight and a stiff-legged parson, clash with the King's dragoons, and reach Taunton, where Monmouth's cause is welcomed.

- The market-square gathering is the high tide of the rising.
- The mayor, Master Timewell, is a stubborn Puritan.
- Micah is drawn into the work of the army.

04

The Campaign

CHAPTERS XX–XXXI

The army musters and moves through Somerset, with skirmishes, councils, and a fight in Wells Cathedral. Quarrels among the leaders sap the cause.

- Micah's set-to with the Brandenburger shows his skill.
- The council scenes show a divided leadership.
- The affair at Keynsham Bridge is an early setback.

05

Sedgemoor

CHAPTER XXXII

In a night attack on the royal camp, the rebels are routed at Sedgemoor.

- The night approach is built with care.
- The royal artillery and cavalry decide the field.
- The book's tone changes as the rising ends.

06

Judgment and the End

CHAPTERS XXXIII–XXXVI

Micah survives the field, is hunted, and comes face to face with the notorious Judge Jeffreys of the Bloody Assizes. The last chapter tells how it all ended.

- The coming of the Puritan Solomon Sprent adds a note of fanaticism.
- Jeffreys is presented as a monster of the law.
- Doyle's appendix gives his historical notes.

Faith and Cause · War · Loyalty · Justice

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Notice who Doyle admires: the common soldiers, the leaders, or both.
2. Micah's religious background is the engine of the story. Ask how Doyle treats it.
3. The book is told by Micah looking back. Watch for what he knows now that he did not know then.
4. The final chapters turn on law, not battle. Ask what Doyle wants you to feel about Judge Jeffreys.

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