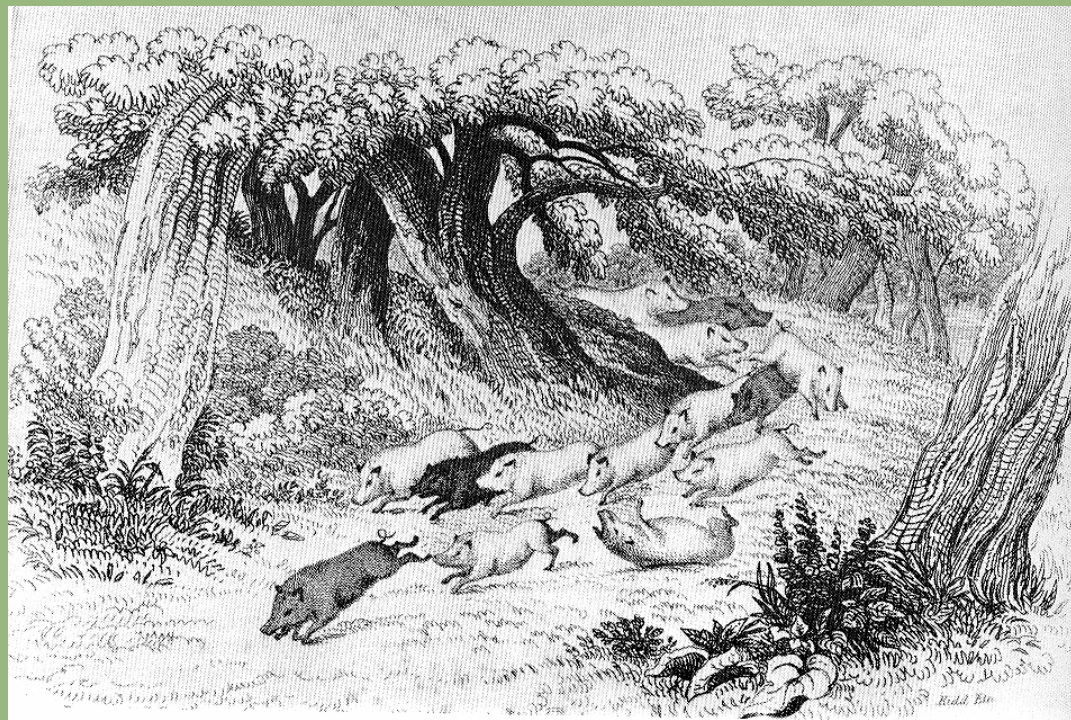


TALES OF THE NEW FOREST



PHILIP KLITZ

SKETCHES OF FOREST LIFE

CHAPTER I

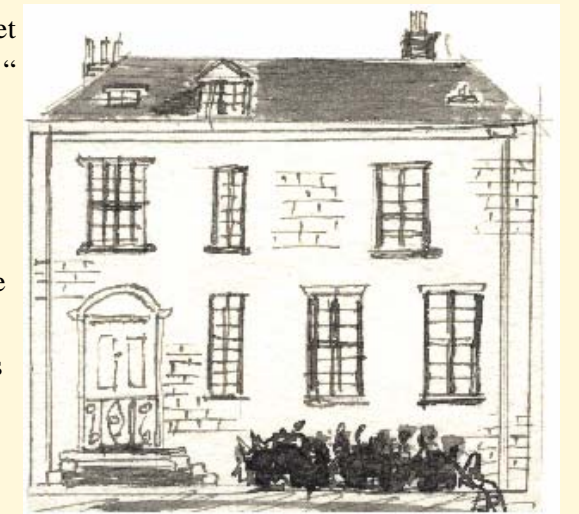
NEW FOREST LAWS AND NEW FOREST SCENERY.

IT has always been a matter of surprise and regret to me, that so little is said or thought of the beauties and peculiarities of the New Forest by persons residing in its immediate vicinity. The historical associations connected with it are highly interesting and their authenticity is proved by various records. That many tales and legends of great curiosity should appertain to it need not excite wonder and should any desire for such information exist in the minds of my readers, they have only to sojourn among some of the "oldest inhabitants"- descendants of the aborigines - to hear stories of the olden time that might afford materials for unnumbered pages of rich romance. Pass your eye over a map of the New Forest, and even the very names given to different parts at once call up recollections highly interesting to the historian, the antiquarian, or the mere idler.

How often have I been amused, during the summer months, at witnessing the number of "gipsy parties," as they are agreeably called, who rendezvous in the neighbourhood of Rufus's Stone, repairing thither with an ample store of the good things of this life, and with full purpose and intent to eat, drink, and be merry. Many also come from long distances for the gratification of viewing scenes identified with some of the most interesting events in English history. And agreeable indeed must be the intelligent traveller's emotions, in standing for the first time on this historic ground, in tracing with the mind's eye the vast tract whereon ere now have assembled all that was noble and great in the land and in carrying the imagination back to those feudal days, when the lord of the soil with his vassals were marshalled forth in all the rude pomp of that period.

But come, reader, let us take a jaunt together - for my own part a Forest Theme is a favourite hobby but I must premise that this same hobby is capricious, prone to fits and starts, and sometimes too perversely erratic to be governed. Well, it is a beautiful sunny morning, all nature seems joyous, the very trees appear to exult as conscious of the countenance and embrace of the mirth-enkindling sun. How motionless and yet how expressively they stand at intervals as the breeze goes by, murmuring their "soft applause!" Everything is still! Nothing can be heard but the song of birds and a distant echo from the woodman's axe. So now, gently "Hobby," and let us jog towards Lyndhurst on what may justly be called a "royal" road.

To be sure, this is a right royal Forest, as indeed forests in all ages seem to have been for even sacred history informs us that "when Nehemiah was in captivity and obtained leave to rebuild Jerusalem, Artaxerxes granted him a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, to supply him with timber for the same." As to roads, on such a glorious one as this we may bless our stars that Science at so late a day laid prostrate turnpike trusts before the mighty steam engine.

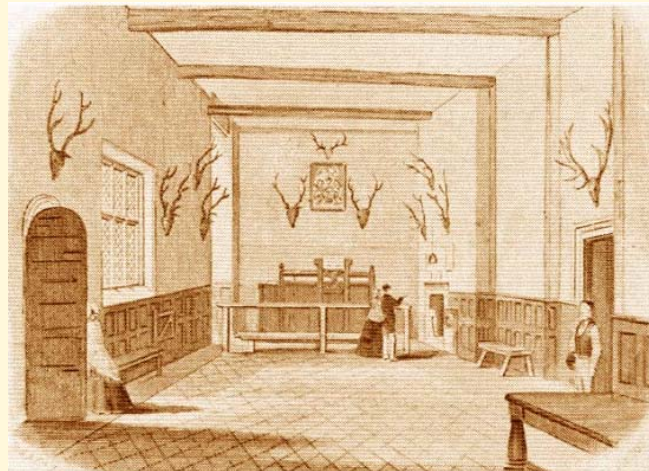


But we are now nearing the royal manor of Lyndhurst - the largest and most important township in the whole extent of the Forest. Here stands the royal residence, said to have been originally been built by William Rufus, and to this day called the King's House (Queen's House).

This village or township, which is situated in the centre of the Forest, has been from time immemorial the seat of justice, from which the laws peculiar to the forest have been administered. Here was held once or twice a year, what was called the "Swainmote," the festivities of the villagers making it appear more like a fair than a judicial court. On these occasions the Verderers acted as judges, assisted by the Steward of the Forest or his deputy and as the jury was formed out of the freehold tenants of the forest, who frequently took with them their wives and little ones, a joyous merry-making was the result, and that not out of place.

Certain other courts are also attached to the forest. For instance, the "Wardmote" or "Forty days court," held by the Verderers, as in the case of the Swainmote, for the purpose of inquiring into all offences committed in the woods, as well as against the vert and venison.

Another is called the "Court of Regard," or a survey of dogs and by the old forest-laws is appointed to be held every third year. This court was established for the purpose of cutting off the claws of the fore feet of mastiffs to prevent their running after deer! A grant of confirmation in the time of Henry the Seventh exempted the dogs of the Abbot and holy men of Beaulieu from this practice and at the time I speak of, no other dogs but mastiffs were allowed to be kept, unless by special grant and these only on the supposition that they were necessary for the defence of a man's house.



There is a popular tradition among the foresters that the large stirrup, which is preserved at the King's House, and is said to have belonged to William Rufus, is a relic of the extreme severity of the old forest laws respecting dogs. And in corroboration of this it is stated, that all dogs found within the boundaries of the forest that could pass through this stirrup without difficulty, were allowed to be kept while the larger animal, whose body the stirrup would not admit, was subject either to have the claws of its fore-feet cut off or be destroyed! This stirrup is associated with the name of Rufus, in Mr. W. Rose's "Red King":

**“ And still in merry Lyndhurst hall,
William’s stirrup decks the wall;
Who lists the sight may see;
And a fair stone in green Malwood
Informs the traveller where stood
The memorable tree.”**

George the Third occasionally halted at the King's House with his family, en route to Weymouth. Close by the building stands on an eminence, the village church, immediately opposite the principal inn and posting-house. The village itself is straggling but in the neighbourhood there are some very beautiful seats, and the views from the higher ground in the immediate vicinity are magnificent.

I cannot recall to mind a more exhilarating scene than was exhibited on a late occasion, when her Majesty's staghounds threw off near Bolton's Bench. It was a lovely morning early in the Spring and, however unfavourable for the day's sport, there had been during the night what the foresters call "a sharpish smart frost." About ten o'clock the field began to assemble. The sun shone out magnificently and here and there the thawing globules glistened on the furze and fresh budding foliage like sparkling diamonds whilst the assemblage of some hundreds of horsemen, in gay hunting attire, together with the splendid equipages of the neighbouring gentry, presented one of the most animating and brilliant scenes I ever witnessed.

Here, passing round by the corner of the "King's House," as we proceed we leave Foxleaze to the right and arrive at Hill Walk and when we get over the brow of the hill, we shall be able to look straight forward towards Brockenhurst bridge, a straight, level road, which is reputed in sporting circles as presenting the best mile of trotting ground in Hampshire. I have heard people say they do not like these straight level roads, that they are not picturesque, that there's a monotony, a tiresome effect produced on the eye by such extended lines. Bless their dear eyes! They don't know how to use them! There they peer, laboriously onwards and from the moment the road breaks on the view, they Look as far as they can see for the other end of it. Not like such roads! Show me anything like them elsewhere!



Look to the right! Look to the left! See in the far distance that wild, romantic, isolated mansion, high Hinchilsea Lodge. How the sun's brightness gleams from its windows, too dazzling to be surveyed were it not for the beautiful relief afforded by the shadows that are now just fleeting over the hanging wood at its back. Here again, look! Regard that row of stately elms - how gracefully they stand with their light spray and thickening foliage and the variety occasioned by the fading leaf of the frost-nipped tree. See yonder Patrician of the Forest Trees, rearing it's majestic head alone, and how gratefully that herd of cows luxuriate within its cooling shade. Lo, also,

**“The Oak, in stately pride, that rears
It's branches, strengthened by upholding years,”**

to which, as royallest of trees, history, poetry, naval glory, architecture, art, science, are all indebted. Long, here in its sylvan realm, long may its crown flourish here by the side of the aforesaid Forest Road, so straight and level, so monotonous and tiresome. Nay, nay, friend, there's not a leaf, a blade of grass, a furze-bush, a patch of fern - much less a royal Oak - but it relieves and enriches the prospect if its looked at with a cheerful spirit.



But this hobby of mine is getting into a dangerous country, for here I am amidst scenes dear to me from my earliest recollections. Here are yet many of the trees that in my youth I climbed, "what time my subtle limbs were pliant." So, kindly reader, let us rest a little and by-and-by, when we resume our jaunt, if I should get out of course, pray don't blame me but this same self-willed cob of mine.