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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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# The Royal Oak

In Shropshire, there stands a beautiful oak tree that the local rural population calls the "Royal Oak". They say that it is the great-grandson or perhaps the great-great-grandson of another beautiful old oak tree that stood in the same place over two hundred years ago. This oak tree once served as a hiding place for an English king. That king was Charles II, the son of the unfortunate Charles I whose head was chopped off by his subjects because he was a weak and selfish ruler. On the same day that the unfortunate king lost his head, Parliament passed a law that forbade anyone from making his son, Prince Charles of Wales, or anyone else, the king of England. But the Scottish people did not obey this law. They convinced the young prince to sign a paper and solemnly promise to rule the country as they wanted. Then they crowned him king. As soon as Parliament heard about it, they sent Cromwell and his Ironsides army to fight against the newly crowned king and his followers. After several battles, the Scottish army was finally broken up and divided at Worcester.

Charles fled and hid in a forest, where a few poor woodcutters took care of him and helped him. He put on some of their clothes, cut his hair short, and made his face and hands brown so that he looked like a sunburned laborer, just like them. But it took some time

for him to escape from the forest, because Cromwell's soldiers were searching the forest hoping to find a few men of the king. One day, Charles and two of his friends had to climb up into the high oak tree to avoid being caught.

They had some food with them, which turned out to be very useful because they were forced to stay in their strange hiding place for a whole day. The top of the oak tree had been cut off a few years before, making the lower branches thick and bushy, so that people walking underneath couldn't easily see through them. That was lucky for Charles, because while he was sitting in the



tree, he heard the soldiers beating the branches and bushes in the forest as they searched around. He even caught a glimpse of them through the leaves as they rode around below.

When they were gone, without even looking up into the high oak tree, he came down and rode out of the forest on an old mill horse, while his friends walked next to the woodcutters to guide him as

best they could. The saddle was bad and the horse's gait shook Charles so much that he finally exclaimed that he had never seen such a bad horse before. At this, the owner of the horse jokingly told him not to blame the poor animal, it had never before carried the weight of three kingdoms on its back. Of course, he

meant that Charles was the king of three kingdoms: England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Carried by the old horse and helped by the poor woodcutters, Charles finally reached the house of a friend. He hid there for a while and then tried to escape the country. This time, to avoid being discovered, he dressed as a servant and rode a horse with a lady on a cushion behind him, as was customary at the time. After facing several more dangers, he managed to board a ship and sailed away to France.