

The First Part of the Contention

4.9

Enter Jack Cade

CADE Fie on ambitions; fie on myself that have a sword
and yet am ready to famish. These five days have I hid
me in these woods and durst not peep out, for all the
country is laid for me. But now am I so hungry that if
I might have a lease of my life for a thousand years, I 5
could stay no longer. Wherefore o'er a brick wall have
I climbed into this garden to see if I can eat grass or
pick a sallet another while, which is not amiss to cool
a man's stomach this hot weather. And I think this
word `sallet' was born to do me good; for many a time, 10
but for a sallet, my brain-pan had been cleft with a
brown bill; and many a time, when I have been dry,
and bravely marching, it hath served me instead of a
quart pot to drink in; and now the word `sallet' must
serve me to feed on. 15

[He lies down picking of herbs and eating them.]

Enter Sir Alexander Iden [and five of his men]

IDEN

Lord, who would live turmoileÁd in the court
And may enjoy such quiet walks as these?
This small inheritance my father left me
Contenteth me, and worth a monarchy.
I seek not to wax great by others' waning, 20
Or gather wealth I care not with what envy;
Sufficeth that I have maintains my state,
And sends the poor well pleaseÁd from my gate.

[Cade rises to his knees]

CADE *(aside)* Zounds, here's the lord of the soil come to
seize me for a stray for entering his fee-simple without 25
leave. *(To Iden)* A villain, thou wilt betray me and get
a thousand crowns of the king by carrying my head
to him; but I'll make thee eat iron like an ostrich and
swallow my sword like a great pin, ere thou and I part.

IDEN

Why, rude companion, whatsoe'er thou be, 30

I know thee not. Why then should I betray thee?
Is't not enough to break into my garden,
And, like a thief, to come to rob my grounds,
Climbing my walls in spite of me the owner,
But thou wilt brave me with these saucy terms? 35

CADE Brave thee? Ay, by the best blood that ever was
broached±±and beard thee too! Look on me well±±I
have eat no meat these five days, yet come thou and
thy five men, an if I do not leave you all as dead as a
doornail I pray God I may never eat grass more. 40

IDEN
Nay, it shall ne'er be said while England stands
That Alexander Iden, an esquire of Kent,
Took odds to combat a poor famished man.
Oppose thy steadfast gazing eyes to mine±±
See if thou canst outface me with thy looks. 45
Set limb to limb, and thou art far the lesser±±
Thy hand is but a finger to my fist,
Thy leg a stick compareÁd with this truncheon.
My foot shall fight with all the strength thou hast,
And if mine arm be heaveÁd in the air, 50
Thy grave is digged already in the earth.
As for words, whose greatness answers words,
Let this my sword report what speech forbears.
(*To his men*) Stand you all aside.

CADE By my valour, the most complete champion that 55
ever I heard. (*To his sword*) Steel, if thou turn the edge
or cut not out the burly-boned clown in chins of beef
ere thou sleep in thy sheath, I beseech God on my
knees thou mayst be turned to hobnails.

[Cade stands.] Here they fight, and Cade falls down
O, I am slain! Famine and no other hath slain me! Let 60
ten thousand devils come against me, and give me but
the ten meals I have lost, and I'd defy them all. Wither,
garden, and be henceforth a burying place to all that
do dwell in this house, because the unconquered soul
of Cade is fled. 65

IDEN
Is't Cade that I have slain, that monstrous traitor?
Sword, I will hallow thee for this thy deed

And hang thee o'er my tomb when I am dead.
Ne'er shall this blood be wipeÁd from thy point
But thou shalt wear it as a herald's coat 70
To emblaze the honour that thy master got.

CADE Iden, farewell, and be proud of thy victory. Tell
Kent from me she hath lost her best man, and exhort
all the world to be cowards. For I, that never feared
any, am vanquished by famine, not by valour. 75

He dies

IDEN
How much thou wrong'st me, heaven be my judge.
Die, damneÁd wretch, the curse of her that bore thee!
And *[stabbing him again]* as I thrust thy body in with
my sword,
So wish I I might thrust thy soul to hell.
Hence will I drag thee headlong by the heels 80
Unto a dunghill, which shall be thy grave,
And there cut off thy most ungracious head,
Which I will bear in triumph to the King,
Leaving thy trunk for crows to feed upon.

Exeunt with the body