

ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY MEN



RETOLD BY
SARA HAWKS STERLING

THE WASHINGTON SQUARE CLASSICS







ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY MEN

The Washington Square Classics

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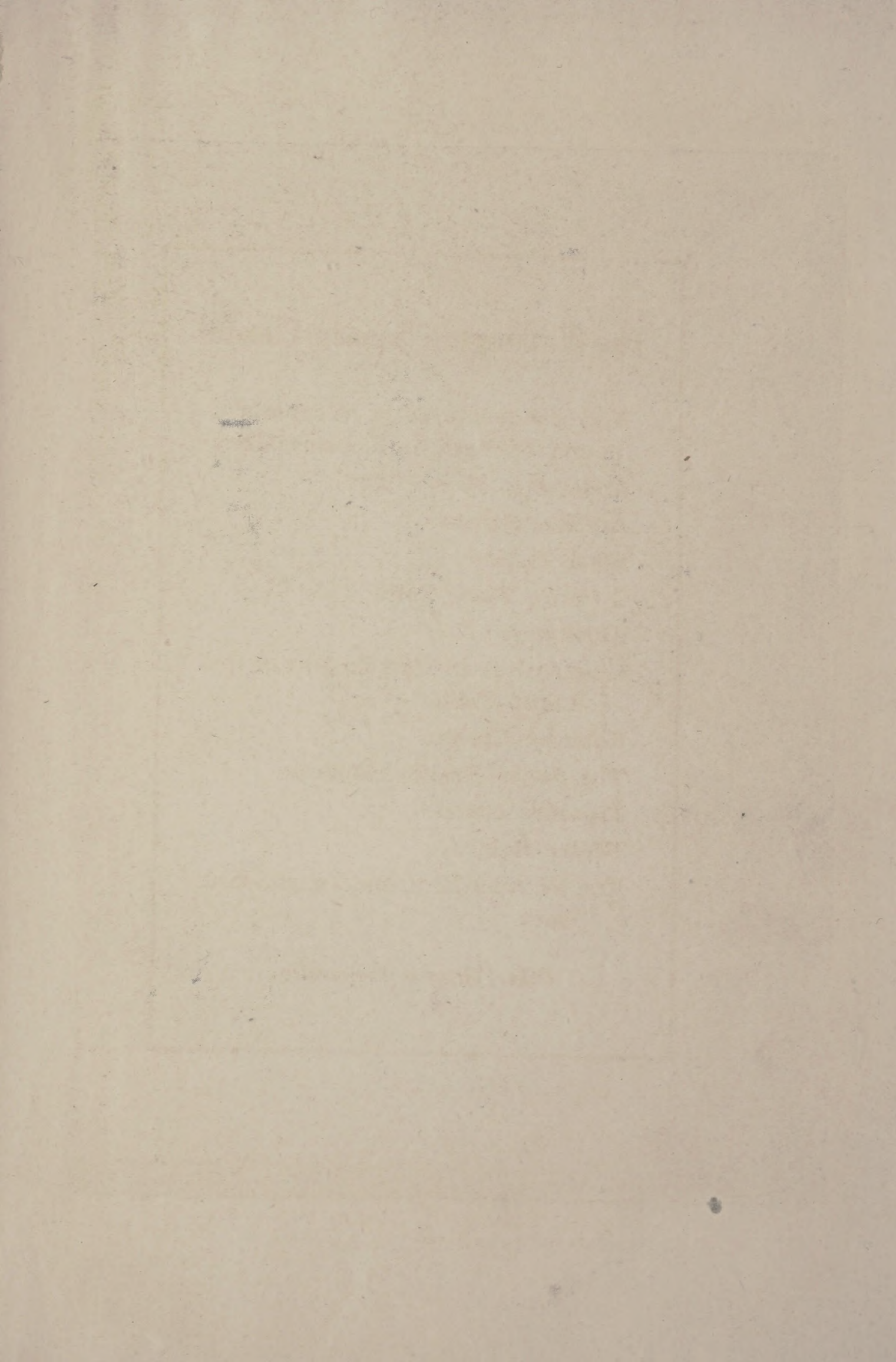
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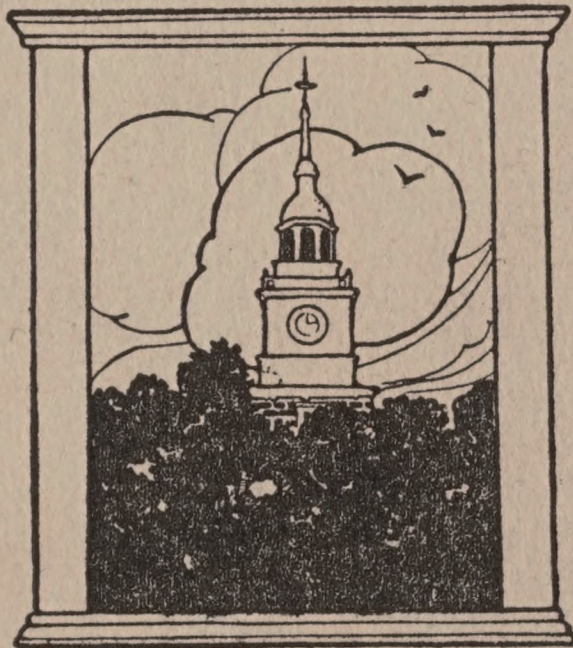




Little John seized the stranger's staff.

(See page 69)

ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY MEN



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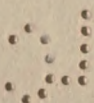
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To
Those Dear Children
MARGMAR and JANAD

*It is a tale of Robin Hood,
Which I to you will tell,
Which being rightly understood,
I know will please you well.*

OLD BALLAD.

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I

THE BIRTH OF ROBIN

*It wasna in the ha', the ha',
Nor in the painted bower,
But it was in the gude greenwood,
Amang the lily flower.*

I

THE BIRTH OF ROBIN

THE summer moon was rising above Earl Richard's castle. The waters of the moat shimmered in the soft radiance, and every turret and pinnacle of the castle was touched with silver. Not far away, Sherwood, the great forest, stretched to distances apparently unending in wealth of summer green. The Earl himself sat on a bench at the extreme edge of the great garden of the castle, gazing out towards the forest. Only a Squire and one or two retainers were with him; for the Earl's wife was dead, he had no son, and the daughter, whom he loved best of all things in the world, that night delayed her coming.

Presently the Earl stirred, and he spoke, half to his Squire, half to himself, with a sigh of pure content.

"It is a beauteous night indeed, Walter," he said. "Methinks at such a time as this the fairies might be seen in Sherwood, which 'tis said they haunt and love well. Nay of a truth, now I bethink me, 'tis Midsummer's Eve. At this time, if ever, the little folk would be there. I am half minded to go thither and see for myself; and I will take my Mary

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with me. Such a quest would like her well. Why tarries Mary so long, I wonder?"

He asked the question as if expecting no reply, and the Squire Walter merely murmured something respectful and non-committal.

The moon had fully risen now, and the June night seemed suddenly chill after the glaring warmth of the summer day. The Earl shivered.

"Nay," he exclaimed, rising with a sudden grimace as if one of his old wounds had given him a twinge, "nay, it is for younger folk than I to seek the fairies in the greenwood. Come, Walter, attend me. I'll within, and presently to bed."

He moved slowly across the gardens and the terraces, with a slight occasional halt in his gait, due to the sudden stiffness that the evening chill had brought him. His Squire and the servants followed him. Presently the great doors of the castle closed behind them.

Scarcely had they disappeared than a casement in one of the turrets fronting on the gardens opened cautiously, and a lovely girl's head appeared at the window. She looked out furtively, and presently uttered a low cry, like the call of a dove to its mate. A moment, and her call was answered in kind and as cautiously, and there appeared from the hedges bordering the terraces a tall, handsome young man, rather shabbily attired. He clasped his hands, and murmured in a voice which while suppressed was audible to the girl in the window:

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“Mary! My dear! My love!”

“Hist!” she whispered sharply, and the golden head suddenly vanished from the casement. The young man waited, trying very hard to look indifferent, lest some sudden surprise should come from the castle. It was only a moment, however, before the girl’s head appeared again. She whispered hurriedly:

“It was my father. He came to bid me good-night, and to ask why I had not joined him in the garden. He is going to bed now. We must wait a little. Go, Will, and in half an hour return. Hast the red cloak ready?”

“Ay, sweetheart, and my arms ache to catch and hold thee safe!” he answered.

“Soon, very soon!” she whispered. Then she blew him a light kiss from her finger-tips, and again she disappeared. He heaved a gusty sigh when she had vanished. He was a huge fellow, and simple and loving of heart, as such giants often are. He went back into the hedge and waited, as she had bidden him.

A half hour later he returned, carrying a large red cloak. The castle was silent. He looked anxiously in every direction, but saw no sign of life. He looked up at the casement, and again gave the low call of the dove to its mate. In reply, Lady Mary appeared at the window. This time, however, she climbed to the sill.

“Be ready, Will!” she said simply as he moved

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towards her. Then he held out the scarlet cloak, and she leaped into it without fear. She landed, however, not in the cloak, but in his strong arms.

He held her close for an instant.

“Oh, haste, oh, haste!” she panted, nestling to him. “If my father finds us out, I doubt me not he will hang thee on yonder wall. Quick, Will, quick, to the forest!”

“It is Midsummer’s Eve,” he murmured.

“The fairies will be good to us, I know,” she answered dauntlessly. “To Sherwood, Will, to Sherwood!”

Holding her carefully in his arms, he started obediently in the direction of the forest. Once she stirred, and made as if she would get down and go by his side instead of being carried in his arms; but he held her fast in a grip as strong as iron yet as tender as a woman’s. She gave a happy little laugh, and ceased the attempt.

“Oh, Will, how strong thou art!” she murmured contentedly. “How glad I am that after all these months since our wedding, we are at last away together! I trust Father Francis will not suffer when my father finds that he ——”

“Thy father loves thee well,” said Will simply. “Perchance he ——”

She shuddered in his arms.

“Me he might forgive,” she said in a low voice. “Thee he would never pardon. I know it! Death would be thy punishment, naught else. It is for

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thy sake I flee now with thee—ay, and for mine; for what were life without thee, beloved? Oh, faster, Will, faster, lest he overtake us!” she cried, looking back anxiously towards the castle.

Obediently he quickened his already rapid pace a little, never seeming to falter or grow weary; and presently into its cool moonlit depths, Sherwood at last received them. A little farther, and Will paused for the first time. At the foot of a giant oak tree he laid his dear burden gently down beneath the spreading branches.

Great was the hue and cry in the Earl’s castle when it was discovered that the Lady Mary had fled. Giant Will, the huge yeoman, who yet it was whispered came of gentle blood, had also disappeared. Almost every one in the castle except the Earl himself had known of the love between Lady Mary and the handsome retainer, but none save the Chaplain, Father Francis, knew of their marriage. When at last the priest told the Earl that the two were wedded, the latter became perfectly white with rage.

“By Our Lady, to whom my child was dedicated, and by all the Blessed Saints,” he said, bringing down his huge fist on the table by which he was sitting when Father Francis broke the tidings to him, “nay, by the Holy Trinity, thou shalt pay dearly for this, thou scurvy priest! Yon miscreant who hath so deceived my child shalt hang, when I have

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caught him, from the highest pinnacle of the castle.”

Father Francis looked fearlessly at the angry Earl.

“Nay,” he said, “now thou art ridden by the sin of pride. Will is of gentle blood, though his poverty caused him to serve thee as retainer. He is no unworthy husband for your daughter.”

“Husband!” shouted the Earl furiously. “Husband, quotha! He shall be no son of mine!”

“Thou talkest idly, proud man,” said the priest. “As I have told thee, they were wedded by me a twelvemonth since, here in the chapel of the castle.”

“And as I have told thee,” answered the Earl between his teeth, “thy frock shall not save thee.”

Father Francis bowed his head.

“As thou wilt,” he said quietly. “My body is at thy mercy. My soul is God’s, to Whom I commit it!”

“Bid a score of my men make ready!” said the Earl to one of his retainers who stood near. “Let the search be made in every direction until this fellow and my daughter be found. Harm her not, but bring him instantly before me. I myself will go with the men who search the forest.”

Then was there great racing and chasing throughout the castle, and presently in the country round about. Despite the apparent zeal of the pursuers, however, there was much secret sympathy with the lovers. The Lady Mary had always been

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held high in the affections of her people; and most of them were fond of big Will, with his great body and his gentle heart. Many felt that the Earl's daughter had chosen a man. Forth presently they rode, nevertheless, at the Earl's command, with a great jingling of spurs and glitter of armor, towards the four points of the compass, as he had bidden them. The Earl himself, as he had said, was with those who went towards the forest. The Lady Mary had always loved Sherwood, and he felt that there he would find her.

His instinct had led him aright. It was towards sunset one day when at last he found his daughter. Underneath a great oak tree he saw two figures, one lying on the moss, the other kneeling beside it. The Earl gave a great shout of triumph, and spurred his horse. He was trembling with rage as he reached the tree.

The cruel words he had been about to utter died upon his lips. Instead he bared his head and knelt beside Will's quiet figure. The two strong men wept bitterly together.

Lady Mary lay there dead at the foot of the oak tree, and not far away, amid a clump of forest lilies, a tiny baby kicked and crowed, and clenched its dimpled fists.

Presently the Earl rose from beside his daughter's body, and going over to the child, he lifted it in his arms.

"Thou art my only daughter's child," he said

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simply. "Father Francis shall christen thee, and thou shalt be heir to all my lands. As for thee," he went on, turning to Will, where he still knelt beside Lady Mary's body, "as for thee, if thou didst receive thy desert ——" for his anger was still hot against his daughter's husband.

Will lifted his head and looked at the Earl with such utter desolation in his eyes that the Earl's stern heart was softened in spite of himself.

"Thou shalt have the child, proud Earl," said Will slowly, "since thou canst do more for him than I. Me thou shalt see no more. Natheless rail not at me for her sake. I was her true love, and she was mine. Farewell!"

He knelt once more beside Lady Mary's body, and kissed the pale lips. Then he rose, and walked slowly away through the forest. The Earl, holding the child, made no effort to stop him. He disappeared in the light of the setting sun, and he held true to his promise. The Earl never saw him again.

So Robin was born in the greenwood, beneath the oak tree and among the lilies.

II

HOW ROBIN FLED TO SHERWOOD

*Robin Hood he was a tall young man,
And fifteen winters old,
And Robin Hood he was a proper young man,
Of courage stout and bold.*

II

HOW ROBIN FLED TO SHERWOOD

THE Earl of Huntingdon was true to his word. The child of his only daughter was brought up with every device of gentle breeding, and was made his heir. Little Robert had a happy life. He was taught by good Father Francis in the duties of his religion and a little book-learning; very little, because it was considered neither manly nor noble to be too well versed in such matters. His father's Squires instructed him in the use of the sword; and some of the retainers in handling the good old English weapons of the quarterstaff and the bow and arrows. Occasionally, wandering minstrels came to the castle, and little Robert, stretched at his grandfather's feet before the great open fire, would listen eagerly to the noble tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Table Round. Best of all things in his life, however, he loved to wander in Sherwood Forest, and to hear the whiz of the arrow as it cleft the air.

The Earl took great pride in his accomplishments, and in the child himself; for he was a handsome boy, with his father's sturdy build and much

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of his mother's beauty. He was told very little about his parents when he was old enough to wonder and to question. When it was said that both of them were dead, it was probably the truth. There were many wars waging in the world at that time, and a strong fellow like Will would have been welcome in any army. His fate was never known.

Little Robert was well beloved by the people both of the castle and of the courtyard. Not only was this because he was the grandson of the Earl, nor even because his father and mother had been general favorites. There was something about the lad himself that drew all hearts to him. He bore himself in the same fashion to high and low. He was as much interested in the poor hinds of cottage and hut as in the lords and ladies of high degree who sometimes came to the castle. He had been christened Robert; but Robin was the name by which he came to be called affectionately both by gentle and simple. Even the Earl used it, and the real one seemed likely to be forgotten altogether.

Robin was only thirteen when the Earl died, and the child, under guardianship, succeeded to his grandfather's vast estates. He mourned the old man's death bitterly; for the Earl, stern to others, had been gentle to him; but when the first shock of the loss was over, the young Earl could not but find life still a happy thing, with his great castle filled with devoted retainers, the joys of the chase in Sherwood Forest, and the daily pleasures of prac-

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tice with the sword and the homelier quarterstaff. He was just fourteen when the Earl of Fitzwalter, who had been a close friend of Robin's grandfather, came, accompanied by his wife and daughter, to visit the young heir of his old friend. Marian Fitzwalter was about two years younger than Robin, a gallant little lass, straight and slim as a handsome boy, and almost as devoted to the chase as the lad himself. They immediately became great friends. A happy fortnight passed for the two young people, spent in wandering through Sherwood together, and in trying their skill with the bow and arrow. Then they parted sorrowfully, not to meet again for several years.

It was just a twelvemonth later that Robin's whole life changed.

On his fifteenth birthday, a beautiful day in June, Robin left the castle unattended, and went walking gayly on his way to Nottingham, the town near by. It was in his mind to dine at the public inn at Nottingham, a thing he loved well to do, for he was fond of meeting people of every kind and condition. As he strode briskly through the forest, carolling a gay song, his bow slung across his back, his quiver of arrows by his side, he was a goodly sight to see. Muscular he was, and tall of a height beyond the ordinary. His eyes were frank and fearless, and his face was burnt from much exposure to wind and weather. Altogether he appeared as fine a specimen of sturdy English boyhood as might

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have been found throughout the length and breadth of the land that day.

As he approached the Saracen's Head, the inn at Nottingham, he saw a little group of the King's foresters seated around the table in the yard. They had been drinking rather heavily, judging from their appearance and from the many overturned, empty tankards near by. On the approach of the young Earl, they greeted him civilly enough; but with somewhat sour expressions. It was well known even then that Robin was no friend to the King's foresters. Often had his generous heart been touched by the want and anguish of the poor; and he could see no reason, with such herds of deer filling the vast forests, why one of the King's subjects should suffer hunger. It was the duty of the foresters to guard the royal game.

He nodded graciously in answer to their greeting, and seating himself at one of the tables, called for ale.

"What news, good men?" he asked idly.

"What news? Wouldst thou fain know?" said one of the men, in rather a surly fashion. "Well, I will tell thee. Our King hath provided a shooting match."

Robin's face flushed with delight.

"That is good news indeed!" he cried brightly. "I'm ready with my bow!" and he touched his beloved weapon caressingly where it lay on the bench beside him.

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The forester who had spoken of the match gave a short scornful laugh.

“Thou!” he said contemptuously. “A boy so young as thou draw a bow before our King! Thou art not able to draw one string!”

This was a trying taunt to a boy of fifteen who rather prided himself, and justly so, on his skill in archery. He opened his lips to retort sharply; but his good breeding prevailed. It was not for a gentleman to squabble with a servant. After an instant's pause, he said calmly:

“I'll wager twenty marks that, Our Lady willing, I'll hit a mark at a hundred rods; nay, more—I'll kill a hart as well.”

The foresters exchanged meaning glances with one another. There was a moment's silence after Robin's challenge. Then one of the men said with apparent coolness:

“Well, well, we shall see! Come, young sir, show us whether thine actions tally with thy words.”

“That will I gladly!” quoth Robin; and with that he started up and seized his bow. “Will one of ye place the target, or shall I?”

“Let it be yon beech tree,” said one of the foresters.

Robin laughed contemptuously.

“Too easy!” he said. “'Twere mere child's play! Nay, I'll show ye my mark, and if it like ye not, ye may choose another.”

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He walked towards a young willow tree that stood near the doorway of the inn, broke off a branch, peeled it with rapid, accustomed fingers, and stuck it into the ground. When the slender quivering target stood in its place, Robin ran gayly back and seized his bow.

“Now, as I promised, a hundred rods away!” he cried, and took his place.

“Are ye all satisfied with my mark?” he asked, and even as he spoke, aimed with apparent carelessness.

Straight flew the arrow and the willow wand was cleft in twain.

There was a low murmur of involuntary admiration at the boy's skill, and Robin stood smiling with pardonable pride. The next moment he turned and gazed in the direction of the forest.

“Now, dearest Lady and Virgin,” he prayed, “send me, I beseech thee, a hart, that I may show these scoffing hinds what I can do!”

It was a very boyish prayer, and perhaps for that reason was answered. Scarcely had the murmured words left his lips than Robin gave a shout of joy. A hart emerged from the forest, and began to run swiftly across the open space beyond, as if bewildered. Robin again raised his bow. The next moment, the hart gave a great leap into the air, and fell dead.

Robin turned to the foresters, smiling with boyish delight.

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“Some of you go pick it up!” he said, with a lordly wave of his hand. Then he chuckled in frank youthful conceit. “How say you?” he said. “Is not the wager mine—ay, even if it were for a thousand pounds?”

“Nay,” said one of the foresters sharply. “The wager is none of thine. Knowest thou not the penalty for slaying one of the King’s deer? Get thee hence in haste, thou young braggart, lest we baste thy sides for thee!”

Robin turned pale with dismay. The penalty for slaying one of the King’s deer was death or mutilation. He knew the law well, for he had seen many sad instances of its enforcement among the poor hinds about his own castle. He had shot the hart almost instinctively, never pausing to think whose it was. Moreover, he realized that the whole thing had been a trap, and that he was in the midst of enemies. He saw not a single friendly face in the group that surrounded him.

He picked up his bow and his quiver and turning, began to walk slowly away from the inn. As he reached the gate, there was a sudden guffaw of scornful laughter.

“Ho! ho!” roared the forester who had caused most of the trouble, “I thought the youngster would be cowed! No archer is he, despite his lucky shots!”

Robin stopped short, his face flushing with rage. He wheeled towards them.

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“No archer, am I?” he called out, his heart hot with anger, his clear young voice shaking with fury. “No archer, am I? Say so again!” and once more with apparent carelessness of aim, flew the unerring arrow.

The next instant, the boy gave a cry of horror, and turned, fleeing with stumbling steps towards the forest. It was an age when human life was held cheap; but Robin had never before killed a man. He groaned as he ran, and covered his eyes with his hands as if to shut out the sight he had seen of the forester reeling and sinking to his death with Robin’s arrow in his heart.

Robin had killed one of the King’s deer, and he had slain a King’s forester. Despite his noble birth and his wide lands, he was an outlaw by his own act. Henceforth, if captured, he was subject to maiming or death. With strangling sobs, he ran blindly towards the place he loved best, and reached at length the friendly shades of the forest. There finally he paused under the great oak tree where his grandfather had so often told him he had been born.

“Ah, woe worth the day!” he cried aloud, clutching his head in his hands in anguish, as he threw himself down on the soft moss. “Would now that here where I was born I might also die!”



Robin fled towards the forest.

III

HOW THE EARL OF HUNTINGDON
BECAME ROBIN HOOD

*Hearken, good yeomen,
Comely, courteous and good,
One of the best that ever bore arms,
His name was Robin Hood.*

III

HOW THE EARL OF HUNTINGDON BECAME ROBIN HOOD

ROBIN was young, but he was no coward. After his first outburst of tempestuous sobs when he found himself safe in the forest, he calmed down with a mighty effort, and sat upright, his chin propped in his hands, his brow knitted with thought. His bow lay beside him on the moss, his quiver still hung by his side. He sat there for a while, wondering what was best to do. Should he go home? His retainers would rally to his defence, he was certain, but at the risk of their own lives and freedom. Had he the right to demand the sacrifice? Now that he was an outlaw, should he return to the castle?

Presently a cautious rustling sound in a clump of trees near by startled him. His hand instinctively clutched at his bow. The next instant, he sprang upright, feeling for an arrow. A man's head appeared from among the bushes; and then a tall fellow whom he had never seen before had come from the trees towards him. Seeing Robin's defensive attitude, the stranger shook his head and smiled, stretching out his hands to show that he held no weapon. At this Robin lowered his bow, and stood

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waiting. The man was dressed in shabby forest green.

“Fear not, young sir!” he exclaimed in a gruff but kindly voice. “I do not seek your harm, but your good!”

Somewhat reassured, Robin looked at him questioningly.

The man came forward and sat down at Robin’s feet.

“Will you not sit here beside me, and listen to what I have to say?” he asked deferentially. “I would tell you that which I think you would find it well to hear.”

Robin dropped down on the moss beside him.

The stranger glanced cautiously about him; then leaned forward, and spoke in a low whisper.

“News travels fast in the forest,” he said. “Fear not! I know why you are here.”

Despite his utmost efforts, tears rose to Robin’s eyes. The stranger put his huge paw on the lad’s hand with a gesture that was almost a caress.

“It is no shame to kill what should be shared by all,” he said; “nay, nor even to have slain one who stands for such tyranny. I have come to you, lad, as a messenger.”

Robin looked at him in dismay. A messenger! From whom? Was he from the King? Had he come to lead Robin captive to mutilation or death?

“Nay, fear not!” repeated the man, perhaps reading Robin’s thoughts in his wide eyes and

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heightened color. "I am a messenger from some good comrades who invite you to become one of them. They are all men who have suffered from tyranny and injustice, even as you; men who like you are liable to punishment if captured. We live here in the forest, and we have often seen you although you have not seen us."

Robin looked at him wonderingly.

"Here in the forest!" he repeated. "Methought I knew all that is and all that lives in Sherwood."

The man shook his head and laughed.

"I will show you that you are wrong," he said. "Come with me."

"Ay, I will come," said Robin, rising. "Will you tell me your name?"

"My name," answered the stranger, "is Will Stutely."

"Will Stutely," repeated Robin. "Oh, ay, I have heard of thee! I have heard——" He bit his lips sharply and paused.

"If you have heard of me, you have heard a sad story," said Will simply. "My mother was a widow, and her farm was confiscated by my Lord, the Bishop of Hereford, because it happened to lie on the edge of his lands where he wanted an extra bit of ground. I stood up against the Lord Bishop's men, and I slew three of them, so was forced to flee. My mother died of fear and grief. I came here to the forest, and met those whom you shall shortly meet."

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Robin put his hand on the man's shoulder as they walked along together.

"Ay, that is what I heard," he said simply. "Thou hast suffered much."

It was nearly sunset now, and in the less thickly wooded parts of the forest, the dying day filled the greenwood with rosy light. Presently Will and Robin smelt the appetizing odor of broiling venison; and Robin realized that he had eaten nothing since morning and that he was ravenous. A moment, and they came into an open glade, with a fire roaring in the midst, around which sat or stood about a score of men, dressed like Will Stutely, in shabby forest green.

When they saw Will and Robin, they gave a shout of joy, and some ran forward to greet them.

"Welcome, young Robin," they cried, "welcome to Sherwood!"

"One of you give him to eat without delay," said Will Stutely. "He must be famished. After we have dined, we can talk together."

Obediently, they led Robin to a rudely set table on the greensward, and presently the venison was served, with plenty of good bread and ale. Then the fire was allowed to die down, and the men sat or lay about on the mossy ground, and told Robin why they had brought him to this meeting. One after another told the story of why he was now an outlaw; and in no case was the reason one of terrible crime or awful sin. They were tales of brave at-

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tempts to resist oppression from proud Churchmen or haughty knight; of valiant rising against injustice in law and man. Robin's generous young heart, always kindly and quick to protect the poor and the downtrodden, burned hot within him as he listened. He resolved that he would give the rest of his life to avenge their wrongs and those of others like them. Then his high mood sank. He remembered that he too was outlaw now, even as they.

After a time, there was a pause, and all eyes turned to Will Stutely.

Will said quietly:

“Thou seest, lad, what we are; outlaws, yet not truly criminal. One brought us word of what happened to thee this day, and we thought—We need a leader. Wilt fill that place to us? Thou art the youngest here; but also thou art the only one of gentle blood and breeding. Natheless, thou art, like us, outlaw. Now that thy castle is thine no more, wilt be one of us here in the greenwood?”

Robin looked around him at the score of kindly, weather-beaten faces, all turned towards him now in trust and hope. Again his heart rose in generous ardor; and this time also with joy and pride.

“Ay,” he answered, his face flushing, “I will be your leader, since you so desire, young as I am; but hark ye, men!” and he sprang to his feet, his face alight. “Remember, having been oppressed ourselves, we must aid those in like pass. Nay, more! Ye must hold all women sacred, for the

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sake"—he bared his head reverently—"for the sake of Our dear Lady, whom for my mother's sake as well as for her own, I love. Outlawed we are through misfortune, but criminal we must never be! If ye consent to these conditions, I will do what you desire."

Then there arose a mighty shout which made the darkening forest ring again; and Robin's health was drunk in good English ale, and since he was beginning a new life, it was proposed that he should choose a new name. So Robin shortened his title of Huntingdon into Hood, and henceforth he said he would be Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest.

Great was the anxiety at the castle when the dearly beloved young Earl did not return in the late afternoon, at the time he had expected. Greater still was the lamentation, the dismay, when tidings came of what had happened, and when the Sheriff of Nottingham rode up to the gates of the castle, and declared that Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, was outlaw in the King's name, and that his domains were now the property of the crown. Within a few days, the castle was deserted save for a few of the Sheriff's officers, who lingered to see whether by any chance the young Earl might be concealed in some secret room therein, or whether he might wander back from without. Neither event happened, however, and after a time even the Sheriff's officers departed, and the castle was left in empty desolation

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until the King's pleasure should be known in regard to it.

Some of Robin's retainers heard where he was, and joined him in the forest. Others went to Nottingham, yet others to London. The band in Sherwood Forest grew larger day by day. Not all that joined it were outlaw. Some were men who realized the injustice of the Crown and of the Church as they were at that time, and who chose to be among the ranks of the oppressed rather than of the oppressing.

Robin grew tall and strong in the healthful outdoor life. His skill with the bow became greater than ever; and despite his youth, his men rendered him both obedience and love. That inborn personal charm of his attracted to him nearly everyone with whom he came in contact. The Sheriff of Nottingham raged and stormed in vain. It was perfectly well known that Robin was in the forest, but it seemed impossible to capture him. The Sheriff's officers were afraid of Robin's archers; and the King in London seemed very far away in those days. The poor loved Robin and his men; for they held to the compact that Robin had proposed. Many a starving widow was provided with food, many a poor, pretty maid with a dowry taken from the coffers of some proud Bishop or overbearing Earl. The Church was corrupt in those days, and often a priest or Abbot unworthy of his sacred calling. Robin distinguished between the

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Church and its officers. He was very devout, and never failed to be present at a service on Sundays and holy days, despite the fact that he risked capture and death in doing so. The good clergymen who realized their sacred duties and who lived lives of simple piety came to love Robin as much as did their people; for they realized that he meant nothing but kindness to those who deserved it.

At last five years had passed, and Robin's score of followers had increased to five times that number. He had a special signal by which he always summoned his men when he needed their presence—a triple winding of his horn. They loved him well, and it was on the whole a happy life. Sometimes, however, in the forest, especially when the moonlight silvered the leaves and turned Sherwood into a magic land, Robin thought of sweet Marian, the Earl of Fitzwalter's daughter, and wondered whether she ever thought of him, and whether he would ever see her again in all the beauty of what he was sure would be her lovely young womanhood. He had heard that she was now in London, and lady-in-waiting to the Queen. What right had he even to think of her—the outlaw, Robin of Sherwood?

IV

HOW ROBIN HOOD MET LITTLE JOHN

*When Robin Hood was about twenty years old,
He happened to meet Little John,
A jolly, brisk blade, right fit for the trade,
For he was a lusty young man.*

IV

HOW ROBIN HOOD MET LITTLE JOHN

ROBIN HOOD was about twenty years old when he first met his best friend, Little John.

“We have had no sport these fourteen long days,” said Robin to his men one morning. “Tarry here, for I will go alone in search of adventure; but look you listen for my call, for I will blow my horn if I become hard-pressed.”

He shook hands with those nearest him as was his custom, and strode forward through the greenwood, whistling merrily, and swinging his bow as he went. On he walked, rejoicing in the beauty of the May morning, and at last on the outskirts of the forest, he came to a little brook, spanned by a very low and narrow bridge. As Robin neared the bridge, he saw that a stranger was crossing it towards him. An immense fellow he was. Robin was nearly six feet tall at this time; but the other man was more than a foot greater in height. His limbs were large and muscular, and he carried a huge quarterstaff.

Nothing daunted, however, Robin strode for-

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ward, and the two men met in the centre of the bridge. They stood a moment in silence, eyeing each other; and then Robin spoke.

“Let me pass, stranger!” he said. “If thou dost not, I’ll show thee right Nottingham play!” and he fingered his bow suggestively, and drew an arrow from his quiver, a broad one with a goose wing.

The stranger gave a roar of laughter.

“Ha, young one!” he said. “I’ll liquor thy hide if thou offerest but to touch the string!”

Robin was accustomed to much deference, and he was conscious of his own skill. He grew crimson with rage.

“Thou dost prate like an ass!” he said calmly. “If I were but to bend my bow, I could send an arrow through thy proud heart before thou couldst strike one blow!”

“Coward!” the stranger cried contemptuously. “There thou standest, well armed with a long bow, to shoot at my heart, while I have naught but this staff in my hand.”

Robin looked at him thoughtfully.

“I scorn the name of coward,” he answered presently. “Perchance thou art right. Wherefore I will e’en lay by my long bow, and take a staff to try the truth of thy manhood.”

So saying, he stepped to a thicket near by, and chose a ground-oak staff. Then he came back upon the bridge, and again faced the stranger.

“See my staff!” he said. “It is tough and lusty.

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Now play we here on the bridge. Whoever shall fall in, the other shall win the battle."

"With all my whole heart!" replied the stranger. "I scorn to give out even in the very least."

So they fell to without more words, and began to flourish their staves about. First Robin gave the stranger such a bang that it made his very bones ring.

"Thou must be repaid!" cried the stranger then. "I'll give you as good as you bring! So long as I am able to handle my staff, I scorn to die in your debt!"

Then heartily each went to it, and so fast and furious followed their blows, it seemed as if they were threshing corn.

At last the stranger gave Robin so hard a crack on the crown that blood came. The sight of his own blood enraged Robin, and his blows became even more fierce. So thick and fast did he lay on indeed that the stranger began to smoke with his exertions as if he were on fire. He gave Robin a mighty blow at last which tumbled him into the brook. Then the stranger stood back, his hands on his hips, and roared with laughter.

"I prithee, good fellow, and where art thou now?" he cried merrily.

Robin could not forbear laughing also, though somewhat ruefully, for he was a good sportsman, and knew how to take defeat.

"Good faith!" he answered, sputtering a little,

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for a good deal of the water of the brook had gotten into his mouth and eyes. "I'm e'en in the flood, and floating along with the tide!"

Then he shook the water out of his hair, and rubbed it out of his eyes, and presently made his way to the bank, and pulled himself up by a thorn-bush.

The stranger still stood on the bridge, gazing down at him.

"I needs must acknowledge thou art a brave soul!" said Robin, looking back at him admiringly. "I'll no longer contend with thee! I needs must acknowledge, too, that thou hast won the day, and so our battle is ended."

With that he blew a loud triple blast on his bugle.

Presently through the trees came running great numbers of men, all clad in Lincoln green, but no longer so shabby as they had been when Robin had become their leader. They came up swiftly and surrounded him.

"Oh, what is the matter?" quoth Will Stutely. "You are wet to the skin, good master!"

"No matter!" said Robin, laughing. He pointed to the tall stranger on the bridge. "Yon man in fighting tumbled me into the brook," he said with a chuckle at his own plight.

"Then indeed he shall not escape scot free!" cried Will, and two or three of the men made for the stranger with the evident intention of serving

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him as he had served their master. Robin, however, stayed them with a look.

“Nay,” he said, “forbear! He’s a stout fellow.” Then he spoke courteously to the stranger: “Be not afraid, good friend! No one shall harm thee! These bowmen wait upon me, and there are five times as many as are here. Wilt thou be one of us? If so, thou shalt straightway have my livery, and all other accoutrements that befit a brave man. Speak up, thou jolly blade, and never fear! I’ll teach you the use of the bow, and to shoot at the fallow deer.”

The stranger gave a great roar of good-natured laughter, and strode across the bridge to where Robin stood.

“Here’s my hand!” he cried, offering Robin a huge paw. “I’ll serve you with all my whole heart! My name is John Little. Doubt not that I shall play my part well.”

“John Little!” repeated Will Stutely meditatively, gazing at the man’s huge bulk. “John *Little!*” And at that Robin and all his men roared with laughter.

John Little looked slightly offended.

“Nay, now,” said Will Stutely in a tone of apology, laying his hand on the giant’s arm, “I will be thy godfather, and rebaptize thee. Thy name suits thee ill, and must needs be altered. Come, we will have a christening feast.”

Then gayly the outlaws turned back into the

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forest, and in one of their accustomed gathering places, a feast was prepared. A brace of fat does were roasted by the fire, and flagons of humming liquor were produced. They called it, as Will Stutely had proposed, a christening feast; and John Little was put in the place of honor at Robin's right hand.

After they had eaten and drunk their fill, Will cried:

“This infant here was called John Little; but that name shall be changed anon. The words we'll transpose, and wherever he shall go hereafter, he shall be called Little John!”

Then they all made the forest ring with a great shouting of “Little John! Little John!” and Robin presented his new follower with what he called his christening robes, a suit of Lincoln green. He gave Little John also a long bow and a quiver full of arrows.

“Thou shalt be as good an archer as the best,” Robin said to him; “and thou shalt range the greenwood with the rest of us. We live here like squires and lords although we have ne'er a foot of free land. We feast on good cheer, however, and have everything we desire.”

So the christening feast ended, and the men went back to their caves, for it was sunset. Ever after, despite the fact that he was seven feet tall and perhaps an ell in the waist, the newcomer was called Little John.

V

HOW ROBIN BECAME A BUTCHER

*Upon a time, it chancéd so,
Bold Robin in forest did spy
A jolly Butcher, with a bonny fine mare,
With his flesh to the market did hie.*

V

HOW ROBIN BECAME A BUTCHER

ROBIN and his men came to be a constant thorn in the flesh of the Sheriff of Nottingham. That worthy man considered himself the representative of the majesty of the law and of the Crown; as indeed he was at Nottingham; but it is doubtful whether the King's Majesty took himself quite so seriously as did the Sheriff. Time passed, and Robin's band grew in numbers and in strength. It seemed as if nothing could stay their progress.

As for Robin and his merry men, they knew right well the feelings of the Sheriff towards them; and, of course, they took delight in teasing him. It came to be no uncommon thing for one or more of them to venture disguised into Nottingham, and play some merry trick upon the Sheriff and his followers. What made it harder for the Sheriff to enforce the law was that practically all the people of the town and of the country round loved and protected Robin and his men.

At last, in desperation, the Sheriff set a reward on Robin's head. If the chief offender were caught, reasoned he, to capture the rest ought to be an easy matter. When the outlaws heard of this proclama-

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tion, they raised a great shout of laughter, Robin's voice loudest of all.

"So!" he said, with twinkling eyes. "The Sheriff will have my head! Well, who knows? Ere e'en a twelvemonth be passed, I may have his instead!"

It was a lovely summer morning. Robin stood under the spreading branches of his favorite oak tree. Some of his men sat or lay on the ground near by. Little John sprawled at his full mighty length at Robin's feet.

"Say but the word, master," said Little John in a lazy voice, "say but the word, and we two will go and bring back the Sheriff's head, so ending this foolish matter."

"Hark! What was that?" said Robin suddenly, instead of replying.

The sound he had heard was the loud, fierce barking of a dog. All the men scrambled to their feet; but scarcely had the words left Robin's lips than a cut-tailed dog came tearing through the trees, and made straight for Robin's face.

"Ha! An ungracious cur!" said Robin calmly, seizing the dog by the throat, and throwing him gasping into the bushes near by. "Is this thy master following?"

He gave a quick signal to his men to withdraw. When a glossy mare came trotting along the rough forest pathway, no one was in sight save Robin himself leaning against the great oak tree.

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The mare's rider was evidently a butcher. Numerous joints of meat were fastened neatly to the saddle, and others filled the baskets that were slung along the horse's back. The rider was a fat jolly man, with a red face and a shining skin.

"Good-morrow, friend!" quoth Robin, stepping suddenly into the man's way, and seizing the mare's bridle. "What food hast thou, tell me? Tell me also thy trade and where thou livest, for verily I like thy company well."

The butcher had grown red with rage at this sudden halt in his progress.

"No matter where I dwell!" he said curtly. "I am a butcher, and I am going into Nottingham to sell my meats."

At that moment, a forlorn yelp arose from the bushes. An instant later, the cur who had tried to attack Robin came limping from the bushes, evidently much chastened both in mind and body.

"Vice, my poor Vice!" cried the butcher caressingly. "Who hath gotten thee into this state?" and he glared suspiciously at Robin.

"Thy dog is well named," observed Robin coolly.

"Sooth I believe it was thou that didst bring him to this pass!" said the butcher angrily. "He did no ill to thee."

"If he did not, it was no fault of his," said Robin.

"Now by all the saints in heaven," cried the butcher, lumbering down from his mare, and seiz-

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ing his quarterstaff, "thou shalt have buffets three for what thou hast done!"

He looked so comical as he stood there, red and fuming, that Robin had much ado to restrain his laughter.

"Thy dog flew straight for my throat, good butcher," he said in a peaceable tone. "I could not but defend myself. Prithee tell me what is the price of this good flesh that thou hast here to sell, and what is the price of thy mare? Methinks I would fain be a butcher—for a while!" A sudden idea had occurred to him which made his eyes twinkle with merriment.

The butcher's angry brow smoothed itself out, and he let his staff fall to the ground.

"The price of my flesh," he answered, "with my bonny mare—well thou must give me four marks for them, and they are not dear at that. As for the dog ——"

"Nay, I want not the dog," said Robin hastily. "Methinks he doth not crave me as a master either. For thy meats and for thy mare, and for that fresh smock that thou wearest, I will give thee five marks. Is it agreed?"

The butcher agreed, very amicably now. A moment later he departed on foot, jingling his money in his pocket, and with his dog under his arm; and very shortly afterwards, a comely young butcher, wearing a smock several sizes too large for him, was trotting gayly on his mare towards Nottingham.

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It was market day in the town, and tradesmen of many kinds were entering Nottingham from all directions. There were other butchers, of course, besides Robin; and not to show how little he knew of how they plied their trade, he mingled among them, watching them observantly, and asking occasional questions. Finally he took up his place with a group of others, just before the Sheriff's house. Like those about him, Robin spread forth his meats, and began to call out their excellence. So far he had played his part well, and no one had suspected that he was other than he seemed; but now he did something that centred both interest and suspicion upon him.

“Buy my good fresh meat!” cried Robin gayly. “Here, gentle dames and pretty lasses! Who wants three pennyworth of meat for one?”

At first, everyone thought he was joking; but when the maids and matrons who were marketing discovered that he spoke the sober truth, and that he was indeed selling his meats for a third of their value, naturally everyone flocked to this new and handsome young butcher.

“Surely,” the other butchers whispered among themselves, “surely this is some prodigal who hath sold his father's lands.”

Word passed from one to another of the great bargains that the new butcher was offering; and presently, anxious to share in these, forth from the Sheriff's house came Mrs. Sheriff herself.

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“ Ah, Mistress Sheriff!” quoth Robin with a winning smile. “ Hast come to share in the good luck that I have brought to Nottingham this day? Nay, here is a fine tender bit of beef that I have saved especially for thee. I am a young butcher, Mistress Sheriff,” he continued with a diffident air that was very becoming to his handsome face; “ I am come in among these fine dames thou seest. I beseech thee, good Mistress Sheriff, look thou that none wrong me!” and he gazed at her appealingly.

“ Thou art very welcome to Nottingham!” said the Sheriff’s wife graciously, well pleased with the fine piece of beef Robin said he had saved for her. When she offered to pay for it, moreover, he refused to take a penny, and she retired, in better humor than ever; for although the Sheriff loved good eating, he liked not so well to pay for it.

In a few minutes more, Robin’s meats were all sold, and he turned gayly to his fellows.

“ It has been a good market day, friends!” he said.

Some of them shook their heads doubtfully at this mad butcher, more than ever convinced he was a prodigal.

“ Come hither,” said one of them, however, beckoning to him. “ We be all of one trade. Wilt go dine with us?”

“ Accurst be his heart that doth a butcher deny!” cried Robin cheerfully. “ I will indeed go with you, my brethren true, as fast as I can.”

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So presently they all sat down together at dinner in the Sheriff's house. There under the Sheriff's very nose sat Robin, and chuckled within himself to think what a fine tale he would have to tell his merry men when he got back to Sherwood.

"Let our new brother say grace!" said one of the butchers; and Robin very devoutly crossed himself and said:

"Pray God bless us all and our meat within this place. A good cup of sack will nourish our blood. So ends my grace. Amen!"

Then he cried:

"Come, fill us more wine, and let us be merry while we are here! No matter how dear is our reckoning, I swear I will pay it!"

Then were the butchers more than ever convinced that he was a prodigal; but they were nothing loth to accept his hospitality. So they ate and drank and made merry.

"This is a mad blade indeed!" thought the cautious butchers, all the while that they were enjoying Robin's generosity. After a time, the Sheriff noticed the newcomer, and the butcher sitting nearest him told him of what he called Robin's mad antics.

The Sheriff's shrewd eyes narrowed.

"He is some prodigal, no doubt," he said. "Mayhap he hath sold his lands, and is now trying to spend all the gold and silver he received for them."

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He leaned forward, and addressed the strange young butcher, seated midway down the table.

“Hast perchance any horned beasts to sell me, good fellow?” he asked in a would-be gracious manner.

“Ay, that I have, good Master Sheriff,” replied Robin, with great apparent eagerness. “I have two or three hundreds of them.”

“Ah!” said the Sheriff slowly. He looked at Robin searchingly. He did not for one moment recognize the outlaw; for he had never before met him. He was turning over in his grasping mind how he might best fleece this prodigal.

“A hundred acres of good free land I have also, if it please you to come see it, Master Sheriff,” continued Robin. “I’ll make you as good assurance of it as ever my father made me!”

“Hm!” said the Sheriff thoughtfully. “Well, good fellow, I will see these beasts and that land.”

“So please your worship, it will like me well to lead you thither,” answered Robin, all the while thinking what a tale, what a tale this would be for him and his merry men to laugh over!

“Dwell here overnight as my guest,” said the Sheriff graciously, his words adding immeasurably to Robin’s inward glee. “To-morrow morn I will then go with thee to see thy beasts and thy land.”

“I will do so, and I thank your worship heartily,” replied Robin.

So it chanced that Robin Hood, on whose head a

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price had been set, passed that night in the best room in the Sheriff's house. He slept, however, very little. He would awaken every once in a while to chuckle with delight at the thought of the joke he was playing on the Sheriff.

Early the next morning Robin and the Sheriff started off together. When the Sheriff noted that they were riding in the direction of Sherwood, he turned pale and halted his palfrey.

"God bless us this day," he ejaculated piously, "from a man they call Robin Hood!"

"Amen!" said Robin devoutly as they entered the forest.

They rode a little farther, and presently no less than a hundred head of good red deer went scampering past them.

"How like you my horned beasts, good Master Sheriff?" asked Robin demurely. "They be fat and fair to see, as I promised you."

The Sheriff looked at him with dawning suspicion.

"I tell thee, good fellow," he said uneasily, "I would I were gone. Somehow I like not thy company."

Then of a sudden Robin set his horn to his lips, and blew three blasts.

In an instant, as it seemed, the trees, the bushes, the very undergrowth, were all alive with archers.

"What is your will, good master?" cried Little

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John, who was nearest, and at the word he and all the others bent the knee to Robin.

“Faith!” quoth Robin merrily, glancing at the Sheriff who sat shivering and pale on his horse. “I have brought hither the Sheriff of Nottingham to dine with us!”

Then all the merry men raised a great shout of laughter, and doffed their caps mockingly to the Sheriff.

“He is welcome!” said Little John solemnly. “I hope, however, master, he will honestly pay for his dinner. I know he has gold enow.”

“Doubtless thou art right, Little John,” answered Robin. “Wilt see, my trusty friend? Take his mantle, and count into it what he hath in his purse.”

Thereat the Sheriff’s mantle was most courteously removed, and spread on the ground, and Robin’s bidding was done. Alas for the Sheriff! his purse was well lined that day; for he had gone forth expecting to drive a sharp bargain with the foolish prodigal whom he had taken Robin to be. After the three hundred pounds in his purse had been confiscated, Robin bade his men make dinner ready, for since he had dined with the Sheriff, the courtesy must be returned. So the Sheriff was well feasted in the forest, but he had little appetite for the good cheer, thinking of the jest that had been played upon him.

When dinner was over, Robin himself led the

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Sheriff through the forest, and set him on his palfrey of dapple gray.

“Commend me to your good wife, Master Sheriff!” cried Robin, laughing as he waved his cap at the Sheriff’s retreating back. “Tell her I will save another goodly piece of meat for her when again I go as butcher to Nottingham!”

VI

HOW ROBIN MET WILL SCARLET

*As Robin Hood walked the forest way—
It was in the mid of the day—
There was he met of a deft young man
As ever walked by the way.*

VI

HOW ROBIN MET WILL SCARLET

“WHAT time of the day is't, Little John?” quoth Robin Hood yawning.

“Methinks 'tis in the prime,” replied Little John.

“Time then 'tis for us to go through the greenwood, and hunt for our dinner,” said Robin rising and seizing his bow. “Methinks there are no victuals in our pantry.”

The two strode off together.

Presently, as they walked along through the forest, they saw a handsome young man coming towards them. His doublet was of silk, his hose of scarlet, and he was a goodly youth to behold that fine summer's day.

At the same moment, Little John and Robin saw something else—a herd of deer scampering a short distance away. Their hands flew to their bows, and each fitted an arrow to the string when they heard the stranger say:

“Now the best of ye I will have for my dinner, and that within a little space, too!”

Forthwith he bent his bow, and without more ado, he slew the best buck in the herd at a distance of forty yards.

“Well shot, well shot!” quoth Robin gayly, go-

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ing forward to the stranger. "That shot was shot in good time for thee, but ill for us, since we too thought to have that buck for our dinner. Thou art worthy, methinks, friend, to be one of my yeomen. Wilt accept the place?"

He spoke with his hand outstretched; but the stranger responded only by a contemptuous look.

"Run away, run away, thou foolish fellow!" he said. "Make haste and go quickly, or with my fist I'll give thee such store of buffets as thou hast never felt."

Robin felt his anger rising at the stranger's tone and manner.

"Thou hadst best not buffet me," he said quietly. "I may seem forlorn; but if I blow this," and he touched his bugle, "I can have those who will take my part."

The stranger gazed at him with a supercilious air.

"Thou wouldst best not wind thy horn, be thou never in such haste to do so," he said calmly. "If thou dost, I can quickly cut the blast with my good broadsword."

Then without further words, the two as if with one consent bent their bows. Then Robin lowered his bow.

"Oh, hold thy hand, hold thy hand!" quoth Robin, his good humor quite restored, for he loved a gallant foe. "To shoot further is vain indeed. If we shoot one at the other, one of us will surely

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be slain. Let us instead take our swords and shields, and go under yon tree."

"As I hope to be saved," said the stranger stubbornly, "I will not go one foot with thee."

His ungracious behavior angered Robin greatly. He dealt the stranger a sudden blow which took the latter by surprise, and made him reel. When he recovered himself, he was crimson with fury.

"Thou didst never deal a blow that shall be better paid!" he cried; and with that he took his staff and dealt Robin such a buffet that the blood ran trickling from every hair of his head.

It was Robin's turn to reel under the blow.

"God a mercy, good fellow!" he cried. "For this that thou hast done, prithee tell me who thou art and where thou dost dwell."

At that moment Little John, who had been standing watchfully by and letting Robin attend to his own affairs, thought it was time to interfere. He strode forward, and seized the stranger's staff in his iron grip.

"Who thou mayst be I know not," he said; "but sooth thou shalt not murder my master while I stand here."

The stranger answered Little John only by a contemptuous glance; but he spoke to Robin more mildly than he had yet done.

"Ay, I will tell thee," he said. "I was born and bred in Maxfield, and my name is Gamewell." He paused a moment, glanced around him cautiously,

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and continued in a lower voice. "By accident I killed my father's steward," he said, "and I am searching now for one—Robin Hood."

"And why for him?" asked Robin, and Little John wondered why his eyes were so bright.

"Because," answered the young man, "he is my cousin. 'Tis said he dwells here in the forest. Knowest thou where he is?"

"Methinks I can guide thee to him, if the aching head thou hast given me will let me. Art thou indeed Robin Hood's cousin?"

"So I have told thee," said the stranger, some of his impatience of manner showing again. "Robin Hood is really the Earl of Huntingdon had he his rights, as no doubt thou knowest," he said; "and I"—he spoke very simply, so that the words were not so haughty as they might otherwise have sounded—"I am the son of the Earl of Maxfield," he said.

"Then say no more!" cried Robin joyously, flinging his arms around the stranger's neck. "Thou art indeed Robin Hood's cousin, and I am Robin Hood! Welcome, kinsman, to the greenwood."

So they embraced each other, and accompanied by Little John, went along together through the forest.

"Kinsman or not," muttered Little John to himself, "it irks me sore that he should have so beaten our master and yet go unpunished. Perchance I

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may have a bout with him one day, and try whether he can beat me!”

Then Robin blew his horn and summoned his merry men, and told them that his kinsman had come to join them in the forest.

“He shall be bold yeoman of mine,” said Robin; “my chief man next to Little John, and we’ll be three of the bravest outlaws in the North Country. Now will we eat the fat buck that my cousin all unwittingly killed for our dinner as well as his.”

So they all began to get the dinner ready, and after a while sat down to the feast. Then Robin said, smiling as he looked at his cousin seated in the place of honor on his right:

“Thou must be newly christened as is our custom here in the greenwood, coz.” He paused, and looked the handsome fellow over from head to foot. “Those scarlet hose of thine become thee well,” he said. “Henceforth then thou shalt be no more Will Gamewell, but Will Scarlet.”

VII

HOW ROBIN WON THE GOLDEN
ARROW,

*Whenas the Sheriff of Nottingham
Was come, with mickle grief,
He talked no good of Robin Hood,
That strong and sturdy thief.*

VII

HOW ROBIN WON THE GOLDEN ARROW

“AND so,” said Robin, his eyes twinkling, “so my friend, the Sheriff of Nottingham, is uneasy again. Perchance he enjoyed his dinner with us, and would like another here in the forest.”

Robin was seated under his favorite oak tree; his bow, arrows and staff lying within reach. Little John was perched on a massive stump near by, busily engaged in mending an arrow. Will Scarlet lay on the ground, his hands clasped beneath his head, his eyes fixed dreamily on the sky seen through the network of branches overhead. Will Stutely was measuring off some yards of green cloth, as he kneeled under a tree near by; for it was almost time for the men to have new suits.

“Mayhap,” said Will Scarlet, in reply to Robin, “mayhap thou art right. What is the latest news of our dear Sheriff?”

“Why,” said Robin, “one of my men brought me word that the Sheriff hath announced an archery contest in Nottingham. Now it is as plain as the great nose on thy face, Little John, that he would not proclaim an archery contest did he not expect good archers to attend it. We are good

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archers. Therefore, the Sheriff doth signify by this announcement that he desires our company; not, I fear me, however, to do us good or to wish us well."

"Well, why should we not answer the invitation?" said Little John, dropping his arrow into his quiver, and rising with so mighty a yawn and stretch that he looked nearly twice his seven feet of height. "'Twere shame to disappoint our dear Sheriff. Mayhap he desires to return the hospitality we showed him. Is there a prize?"

"Ay, so I am told," said Robin; "a dainty toy enough. 'Tis an arrow with a golden head and a shaft of silver."

"'Twould look well in thy quiver, coz, methinks," said Will Scarlet. "Let us go to Nottingham, say I."

"What sayst thou, Will Stutely?" asked Robin, turning to his oldest follower.

Will Stutely raised his head from his measuring, and looked doubtful.

"'Twere pity," he said slowly, "to be caught in a trap. This match is but an evil wile on the Sheriff's part. Why be so easily deceived? Be ruled by me, master. Do not stir from the greenwood."

"Nay," answered Robin pleasantly, "much as I love thee, Will, methinks thy words smack of the craven. We are not deceived. We understand the Sheriff perfectly. 'Twill be the greater sport to outwit him. Come what will, I'll try my skill at this archery contest."

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“Ay, let us go thither,” said Little John, picking up his huge bow and beginning to test it; “but we need not be recognized for what we are, master. Let us leave behind us our mantles of Lincoln green, and one shall wear white, another red, another yellow, another blue. So shall we not be known, and our good friend the Sheriff will think his trap hath been set in vain.”

“Bravo, Little John!” cried Robin. “We’ll e’en do as thou sayst, and have a hearty bout with the Sheriff’s men. Moreover we will not go together, but will mix separately among the crowd.”

The day of the archery contest dawned bright and clear. Nottingham was gay with streamers and flags, and the streets were filled with people in holiday attire. The field for the archery contest swarmed with a crowd of eight hundred or more. In the place of honor, on a dais at one end of the field, sat the Sheriff and his wife. The targets were ready, and a great many archers were on hand to try their skill. Presently the Sheriff and his wife took their places, and the shooting began.

Robin and his men had done as they had planned. Not a man among the archers was in Lincoln green. The Sheriff cast a searching glance at the crowd of contestants as he took his place, and gave a sigh of disappointment. He could see neither Robin nor any that looked like a follower of his.

There were many good archers in the crowd other than the outlaws from Sherwood. It was speedily

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noted by the eager spectators, however, that there were certain men whose arrows always were in or near the centre. One of these archers especially, a tall fellow in red, performed several times the most difficult feat of all—slitting the willow wand. There were two or three others who met with the admiration of the onlookers—one in white, another in yellow, a third in blue.

“Blue Jacket! Blue Jacket!” cried the people, as a tall fellow seven feet in height pierced the very centre of the target. “Nay, nay, bravo, Yellow Coat!” shouted another group admiringly, as a second archer nicked the arrow which Blue Jacket had just sent home.

“Red hath no peer!” said one of the archers who were taking part. “The Sheriff will have no difficulty in awarding the prize. Yon fellow is methinks the finest archer that England can boast!”

“Soothly,” murmured another, “if Robin Hood and his men were here, none of them could pass this brave shooting.”

The Sheriff’s heart was as lead with disappointment. Successful as was the contest and great as were the feats that were performed, his object had not been attained. Robin and his men had not ventured from Sherwood.

“Ay, I thought he would be here,” he muttered to himself. “He is said to be brave, but ’tis plain he durst not appear.”

The tall victor in scarlet standing before him to

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receive the prize, caught the words, and a smile touched his lips.

“Take, good fellow,” said the Sheriff with a sigh, “this prize for thy noble archery—an arrow with a shaft of silver and a head of gold. Thou hast shot well this day, and I dare swear no archer in England can pass thee.”

As they had gone to Nottingham, so the merry men came back to Sherwood; not in a company, but by twos and threes. Robin was the last to arrive, bearing stuck through his belt the prize arrow. A great shout of welcome greeted him, and he saw that a feast had been prepared, and they were only waiting his coming to begin. Little John, still in blue, was already seated. Will Scarlet, in yellow, waved his hand to Robin merrily.

“Welcome to the archer whom none other in England can surpass!” quoth he merrily. “Our friend the Sheriff spoke better than he knew.”

“’Twas a brave day indeed!” said Little John placidly. “Only I would that we might have tried our aim on the Sheriff himself. We shall never be left in peace until we have rid ourselves of him.”

“’Twas noble shooting, master,” said Will Stutely, who had been present although he had taken no part in the contest. “Methinks both thy merry men and thou have done right well.”

“Ay,” said Robin, but he spoke rather listlessly, and his face was clouded. When his followers shouted lustily, “A health to our master, the winner

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of the golden arrow!" his expression did not change, although he bowed his thanks.

"I am glad, comrades, the bauble hath come to Sherwood," he said slowly. "Natheless ——" He sighed.

"What is it, master?" asked Little John anxiously; for the giant was devoted to Robin.

Robin answered rather petulantly. After all, he was still very young.

"Well," he said, "all my care is how the Sheriff may come to know certainly that it was I who bore away his arrow."

"Ha! ha! is that all?" cried Little John, with a great roar of relief. "Well, then, master, I will tell thee what to do, and thou didst find my counsel good before. Wilt allow me then to advise thee again?"

"Speak on, Little John," said Robin, smiling affectionately at his best-loved follower. "Thou art quick and sound. I know no man among us who hath so much wit."

"Well, then," said Little John gravely, "my advice is that a note be written to the Sheriff, and when it is finished that it shall be sent to him."

"That is well said," said Robin; but he looked a trifle puzzled. "When it is writ, however, in what manner shall it be sent?"

"Pish!" cried Little John airily, waving his huge paw. "Leave that to me. Write thou the

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message, for thou knowest I have no clerkly skill. Then I will deliver it to the Sheriff."

"But how?" persisted Robin. "I would not have thee risk thy life for this whim of mine."

"Why," said Little John, gazing at him reproachfully, "dost forget what archers we have proved ourselves to-day? When the letter is writ, I will e'en stick it on the point of my arrow, and shoot it into the Sheriff's house; ay, even on to his table while he sits at meat. Hurry, master! 'Twill be a rare jest!"

While the outlaws feasted in the forest, the Sheriff sat gloomily at his supper in Nottingham. He was very tired; for festive days are fatiguing, especially to the chief actors; and besides, he was disappointed. The aim of the archery contest had been to catch Robin Hood; and it had failed.

Suddenly as he sat waiting for the pasty to be brought in, he heard the quick whiz of an arrow. Then he saw one fly through the open casement and rest quivering on the table before him.

The point of the arrow had been thrust through a tiny note. He reached forward and took it, trembling as he did so.

When he read the note, however, he grew fairly purple with rage; yet it was very brief:

Robin Hood thanks the Sheriff of Nottingham for the prize of the Golden Arrow.

VIII

HOW ROBIN MET THE CURTAL FRIAR

*And coming unto Fountains Dale,
No further would he ride;
There was he aware of a Curtal Friar,
Walking by the waterside.*

VIII

HOW ROBIN MET THE CURTAL FRIAR

It was summer time. The leaves were green and the flowers fresh and gay. The spirit of the season had entered into Robin and his men, and they were making merry together. Some were having a leaping match. Others were testing their endurance in running. The greatest number, however, were engaged in their favorite sport, and were having an impromptu contest at archery.

“Come, come!” bellowed Little John, who was acting as Master of Ceremonies. “Now which of you is a good archer and can draw a good bow? Which of you can kill a deer? Who can kill a hart five hundred feet away? Come now, come now, ye merry men, and show your skill!”

So challenged, there followed such an exhibition as might well have made the Sheriff tremble, had he been there to see. Will Scarlet killed a buck, Will Stutely a doe, and Little John himself accepted the last part of his own challenge, and killed a hart five hundred feet away.

“God’s blessing on thy heart!” cried Robin, his admiration, always free and generous, aroused es-

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pecially by Little John's noble shot. "God's blessing on thy heart, I say, that hath shot such a shot for me! I would ride my horse a hundred miles to find thy match!"

Then Will Scarlet began to laugh heartily.

"There lies a Curtal Friar in Fountains Abbey, master," he said, "who will beat both him and thee. He can well draw a strong bow, and methinks if all of us were lined up together, he could with ease outdo every one of us."

Robin stared at him in wonder.

"I have just been thinking," he said, "that there were not such archers in all England, and good sooth, my heart was like to burst with joy and pride, but if what thou sayst be sooth, by Our Lady, Will, I will neither eat nor drink until I have seen this friar."

Without more ado, he put on his armor and his steel helmet, took his sword and shield and his bow with a quiverful of arrows, and so set out for Fountains Abbey.

When he reached the place, he saw a stout friar walking beside the water. He was strangely attired for a friar. As he walked to and fro, his gown swung back with the motion, and Robin saw that he was clad in complete armor. Like Robin, he wore a steel helmet and a sword and buckler hung by his side.

Robin approached nearer to him.

"Carry me over the water, thou Curtal Friar!"

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he said with seeming fierceness. "If thou dost not, thy life shall pay for thy refusal!"

The big fellow glanced him over coolly.

"Well," said the friar, heaving a gusty sigh, "the blessed St. Christopher refused not to ford the stream in kindness; and it would ill beseem a humble friar to do so." And without more words, he knelt, and offered his broad shoulders for Robin to bestride. Robin did so, chuckling inwardly, and the friar, gathering his frock about him, plunged into the stream. He trod through the deep waters right manfully, with a firm, even step, and not a word did he speak until Robin was safely on the other side, and had leaped lightly down from his shoulders.

"Tarry, friend!" said the friar, holding out a huge arresting hand. "'Tis thy turn now! Carry me back again over this stream to the spot where thou didst first find me, my fine fellow, and if thou dost refuse, I do assure thee it shall breed thee pain!"

Robin looked uncertain whether to laugh or to be angry at this turning of the tables.

"Nay ——" he began. Then his sense of fair play prevailed. "Thou'rt right," he said. "Mount thy steed, good fellow!" and in his turn, he knelt and let the friar mount on his shoulders.

Robin's task was a harder one, however, than the friar's had been. The latter was a much heavier burden, and besides Robin did not know the stream.

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When at length he landed the friar on the bank whence they had started, he heaved a sigh of relief.

“Thy turn again!” he panted with twinkling eyes, not really expecting that the friar would take him at his word.

The friar, however, again stooped obediently to act as Robin’s steed, and once more waded out into the water. This time he paused in the midst of the stream.

“Now sink or swim!” he cried, and with a sudden deft movement of his shoulders he heaved Robin into the water, and stood laughing with arms akimbo.

Robin was a good swimmer, and he reached the bank with little difficulty. The friar followed him, rumbling out a jolly laugh. Then he and Robin, their garments alike dripping, stood eyeing each other. Finally Robin lifted his bow, and let fly an arrow at the friar. The other stooped for his steel buckler, and from it the arrow glanced off harmlessly.

“Shoot on, shoot on, thou fine fellow!” he cried tauntingly. “Shoot on as thou hast begun! I will not shun thee if thou shoot here all day long!”

Robin realized that the friar spoke the truth. His coat of mail rendered him safe from any arrow. Nevertheless the outlaw was irritated by the way the friar had outwitted him and by his insolent manner. He lost his head, and foolishly continued to shoot. The friar caught all his arrows on his shield.

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When his arrows were all gone, Robin with a furious cry called to the friar to use his sword as well as his shield. With the words he drew his own. Then the two began to fight with might and main.

From ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon, it is said that Robin and the friar fought with swords, and at the end of that time it remained a drawn battle. At last Robin, much spent, fell to his knees.

"A boon!" he panted. "A boon, thou Curtal Friar! Give me leave to set my horn to my mouth, and blow three blasts!"

"That will I do!" said the friar contemptuously. "I hope thou wilt blow so well that both thine eyes shall fall out!"

With this encouraging wish, Robin set his horn to his lips and blew his usual signal to his men. As always it was speedily answered. In an instant, as it seemed, half a hundred men, with bows held ready, came speeding towards Robin and the friar.

The friar turned rather pale.

"What men are these who come so hastily?" he said.

"They are mine, Friar," said Robin. "What is that to thee?"

"A boon I crave in my turn!" said the friar quickly. "I gave thee the like. Give me now leave to set my fist to my mouth and whistle three times."

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“That boon will I grant thee,” said Robin; “or else I were to blame.”

Then the friar set his fist to his mouth, and whistled three times; and in answer to the summons came running towards him half a hundred fierce dogs.

“Here’s for every man of thine a dog of mine!” cried the friar. “And as for thee I will myself be the hound that lays thee low!”

“Nay, by my faith, Friar,” said Robin, “that may not be!”

As if to make his words vain, however, two of the fierce curs made for him at once, one behind, one before, and in a moment, his mantle of Lincoln green was torn from his back.

At this the good outlaws began shooting bravely, but whether they shot east, west, north or south, it did little good. The horrid curs were so well trained that as the arrows were aimed, the dogs caught them in their mouths, and carried them to the friar.

“Take up thy dogs!” cried Little John at length. He was shooting desperately even while he spoke. “Friar, heed my bidding, and take up thy dogs!”

“What man art thou,” retorted the friar impudently, “who hast come hither to prate with me?”

“My name is Little John,” replied the other, and his voice was stern. “I speak no lie. If thou take not up thy dogs now, I will take up both them and thee.”

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Little John was as good as his word. He kept on shooting with might and main, and presently ten of the fierce curs lay dead.

“Hold thy hand, good fellow!” said the friar then, with respect in his voice for the first time. “Thy master and I will agree. What wouldst thou?” he went on, looking at Robin.

Now gallant men like gallant foes, and Robin had become much interested in the fighting friar and his trained dogs.

“If thou wilt forsake Fountains Abbey,” he said, “and join my men, and say Mass for us, and be our Chaplain, thou shalt have a noble every Sunday through the year, and new garments for every holy day. Methinks a doughty friar like thee would be well suited to our band. What sayst thou?”

“Ay, by my troth!” cried the friar, seizing Robin’s hand in a mighty grip. “I will go with thee. Thy fellows and thou like me well. I will take along my dogs, and thou shalt see, they will be gentle as lambs towards ye all.”

So the friar and his dogs accompanied Robin and his men back to Sherwood.

“I know not thy name,” said Robin to the friar as they passed along, “and thou needest not to tell me, for we usually give new names to those who join us. Now because thou didst tuck up thy frock around thee when thou didst bear me through the stream, and afterwards when thou didst fight with me, thou shalt be known among us as Friar Tuck.”

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And so he was; and by that name he has come down to us in all the songs and stories about Robin and his men.

IX

HOW LITTLE JOHN TORMENTED THE
SHERIFF

*Lythe and listen, gentlemen,
All that now be here,
Of Little John that was the knight's man
Good mirth ye shall hear.*

IX

HOW LITTLE JOHN TORMENTED THE SHERIFF

“MASTER,” said Little John, one bright summer morning not long after Friar Tuck had joined the band of merry men in Sherwood, “master, me-thinks I should like to go shooting to-day. I hear that there is again to be a match in Nottingham.”

Robin looked at him sharply.

“As thou wilt, Little John,” he said after that instant’s pause of scrutiny. “Look well to thyself, however, for it would grieve me sore to lose thee out of my band.”

“I thank thee, master,” answered Little John calmly. “I will heed thy words. Be not alarmed, natheless, if I do not come back to-night. I have a little trick in mind that I would play on our sweet Sheriff, and it may take me several days to do so. Give me a fortnight ere thou send any in search of me.”

“A fortnight!” echoed Robin, somewhat dismayed. “Why, the Sheriff might have thee hanged by that time.”

“Fear not!” said Little John cheerfully. “The hemp hath not been woven with which the Sheriff shall hang me!”

“Well, go thy ways!” cried Robin, clapping him

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on the shoulder. "God send thee safe back to us, say I!"

"And I!" added Friar Tuck, the piety of his aspect somewhat marred by the fact that he was at the moment devouring a great chunk of venison, as he sat cross-legged on the turf.

Little John nodded gravely to them both in acknowledgment of their good wishes, and without more ado he strode off through the forest in the direction of Nottingham.

Again the town was in holiday attire, although the occasion was not so elaborate a merrymaking as the day when Robin had won the golden arrow. The same broad level meadow was the scene of the shooting-match, but there were not nearly so many present either among archers or audience, as on the other occasion. Little John's great height always made him conspicuous; so he had dressed as unobtrusively as possible in sober brown, and he went stoopingly in order to make himself look shorter. He joined the little band of contestants, and began to shoot. It was not long before his extraordinarily good marksmanship made him conspicuous.

"Prithee, what is the prize, friend, in this contest?" he asked courteously of the man next him in the line of those ranged to shoot.

"'Tis said the Sheriff wishes a good marksman as a retainer in his household," replied the other, and wondered why this tall, slouching fellow grinned so

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unaccountably in answer. "Ever since he had that trick played upon him by Robin Hood when the outlaw won the golden arrow, His Worship hath desired additional protection, 'tis said."

"Ah, is't so?" purred Little John softly. "Twill be a noble prize and one worth striving for; since no doubt he that serves the Sheriff will lie softly, eat good food, and quaff humming liquor. Is't not so?"

The other man had no time to reply, for he was called for his turn at the target. The archers were now slitting the willow wand, which was considered one of the most difficult feats of archery. It was, however, mere child's play to any of Robin Hood's men, since it was a shot they were constantly practising. Three times the archers were called on to slit the wand, and each time Little John did so, not only with ease, but even with apparent carelessness. The Sheriff, seated on the dais overlooking the field, noted approvingly the fine shooting of the stoop-shouldered fellow in brown.

"Him will I select as my servant," he thought to himself. "Robin Hood shoots not better. With this fellow as protector in my household I shall feel safe."

When for the third time Little John's arrow slit the willow wand exactly in twain, the Sheriff rose in his place.

"By Him that died on tree," quoth the Sheriff, "this is the best archer I ever saw—save one," he

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added under his breath, thinking of Robin Hood. "Come hither, fellow."

The large stoop-shouldered fellow slouched over to the dais, and pulled his forelock with loutish respect.

"Say now, thou sturdy fellow," said the Sheriff pompously, "what is thy name, and in what county wert thou born? Also where dost thou dwell now?"

"I was born in Holderness, sir," answered the hulking archer meekly. "Men call me Reynold Greenleaf."

"Well then, Reynold Greenleaf," said the Sheriff with condescension, "wilt come and dwell in my household? I will give thee twenty marks a year."

"So please you," quoth the man in brown, "I already have a master, a courteous knight. It might be better if thou wouldst get leave of him to let me be thy man."

"Well, let that be," said the Sheriff. "Stay thou with me for a month or so until we can get leave from thy master."

"As thou wilt, Master Sheriff," said the big archer meekly.

So Little John became the Sheriff's man, which was exactly the trick he had in mind when he left Sherwood, and his eyes twinkled as he followed his new master into the house.

"Now, so God help me," he said to himself,

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“and by my true faith to my master, I shall be the worst servant to the Sheriff that he ever had!”

So Little John lay under a roof that night, and for seven nights thereafter, and he thought his mossy bed in the greenwood ill exchanged for those stifling walls. One day the Sheriff arose early and went hunting, and Little John remained in bed until noon. Then, feeling hungry, he went down to the steward and asked for his dinner.

“Nay,” said the steward crossly in reply, “thou great hulking lazybones, why dost thou not rise with the rest of the household? Thou shalt neither eat nor drink until the Sheriff gets back from his hunting.”

“Nay, then,” quoth Little John cheerfully, “rather than wait so long, I make my vow to God I will crack thy crown.”

The butler gave an alarmed look at the huge fellow towering above him, and then beat a hasty retreat to the buttery, where he shut and bolted the door. Little John shattered the door with a single powerful kick, and then gave a playful box on the ear to the butler cowering within. Next he began to select deliberately of the best he could find to eat and drink.

While he sat eating and drinking comfortably, the butler slipped away and told the cook what had happened. The latter, Nick Much by name, a tall,

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powerful fellow almost as huge as Little John, came to the buttery door, and beheld Little John eating his breakfast-dinner.

“I make my vow to God,” said Much, surveying the giant, “I make my vow to God thou art a shrewd hind to dwell in any house and thus get thine own dinner.”

With that he lunged forward, and fetched Little John a sharp buffet on the head.

“By my troth,” said Little John, blinking a little as he went on with the meal which Much’s blow had interrupted, “that stroke of thine likes me well. Thou art a bold man and a hardy, methinks; and now that I have finished my dinner, I shall better assay thee.”

With that he rose to his huge height, and drew his sword. Much, the cook, nothing loth, did likewise, and they began to fight together there in the buttery.

At the end of an hour’s good fighting, Little John lowered his point.

“By my loyalty to my master,” he said to Much, “thou art one of the best swordsmen I ever saw.” He came closer to the cook and spoke very low: “Couldst thou shoot as well with the bow,” he said, “thou shouldst to the greenwood with me. Two times in the year thou shouldst have a change of clothing, and every year thou shouldst have twenty marks from—Robin Hood!”

Much started at the name.

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“Put up thy sword,” he answered. “We will be fellows truly.”

He nodded knowingly at Little John, and ran off to the kitchen. In a few moments he returned, bearing a dainty dish of stewed venison accompanied by bread and wine, and the two sat down together, and ate ravenously, for their combat had given them huge appetites. With their heads together they began to plan how they might join Robin Hood that very night.

“I will take with me,” quoth Much, “a gift for my new master.”

So they went to the Sheriff’s treasury, and Much helped himself to a good part of the Sheriff’s silver.

“God save thee, my dear master!” cried Little John gayly, as he and Much the cook burst in upon the merry men lying under the trees in the moonlight.

“Why welcome, Little John!” quoth Robin, his face brightening with relief at sight of his best loved man. “Welcome also to this good yeoman who is with thee!”

“Welcome, Little John!” shouted the merry men, in a huge chorus.

“Now tell me, what tidings from Nottingham?” asked Robin when Little John and the newcomer had settled down comfortably among the rest of the outlaws.

“The Sheriff greets thee,” said Little John

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gravely, "and sends thee here his cook for thy service, and likewise some of his silver vessels and three hundred pounds!"

Then a great shout of laughter arose from the merry men, for well they knew that the Sheriff would never willingly do any such thing.

"I make my vow to God and to the Holy Trinity," quoth Robin, "that it was never by the Sheriff's free will that this good is come to me."

"Wait, master," said Little John mysteriously, "wait! There is more to come! For the nonce, welcome this new man to the forest. His name is Much, and he is the son of a miller, and good sooth, but he is the dainty cook!"

Little John spent that night in the greenwood with his comrades. The next morning he went off alone at sunrise, and ran fleetly in the direction that he knew the Sheriff had taken. When he had gone about five miles, he met the Sheriff and his party. Little John knelt before the Sheriff.

"God save thee, my dear master!" he said sweetly.

"Reynold Greenleaf!" cried the Sheriff. "Where hast thou been?"

"I have been wandering through this forest, master," replied Little John, "and therein have I seen the fairest sight that ever I saw—a green hart!"

"A green hart!" echoed the Sheriff, his eyes nearly starting from his head with amazement.

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“Yes, master,” answered Little John, “a green hart; and what is more, some seven score of green deer with him.”

“That sight I would fain see!” quoth the Sheriff, who had his fair share of curiosity.

“Come then, dear master,” said Little John, “come with me, and thou shalt see them also.”

The Sheriff, burning to see this wonder, turned his horse, and rode in the direction that Little John led. The latter ran fleetly along, smiling to himself the while, and when they had gone about five miles, they saw a handsome man in Lincoln green standing under a great oak tree.

“Robin Hood!” gasped the Sheriff, and wheeled his horse sharply about; but Little John seized the bridle.

“Lo you!” he cried laughing. “Here is the green hart, the master hart!” Then he called to Robin, “I have brought a guest to dinner, to try the skill of our new cook!”

“Welcome, Master Sheriff!” exclaimed Robin. “Welcome for the second time to the forest!”

The Sheriff was pale and quaking with fear, for well he knew that he was helpless. He was treated, however, with the utmost courtesy. He was assisted from his horse, and seated beside Robin under the great oak tree. When at length dinner was served you may imagine the Sheriff’s feelings when he saw his own cook, Much, bearing the dishes to

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the table, and when he found himself eating from his own silver!

All the afternoon, a long one to the Sheriff, Robin entertained him with songs and with stories, and with archery contests. When night fell, the Sheriff hoped that Robin would let him go; but not so.

“Thou shalt lie under this oak tree to-night, Sheriff,” said Robin gayly. “Mayst find thy mossy bed a pleasant one! This is our Order of the Greenwood.”

“Methinks,” sighed the Sheriff, “’tis a harder Order than that of any anchorite or friar in Merry England!”

“Nay,” said Robin, his eyes twinkling, “perchance I’ll keep thee here a twelvemonth and make an outlaw of thee.”

“Nay, Robin, nay!” pleaded the Sheriff in terror. “I pray thee rather than keep me here another night that thou smite off my head to-morrow. Let me go and I will be friends with thee!”

“Then if I let thee go to-morrow,” said Robin, “thou must swear an oath on my bright sword that thou shalt never do me harm by water or by land; and if thou findest any of my men that thou wilt help them.”

“Anything, anything, so thou wilt let me go!” muttered the Sheriff.

“Swear then!” said Robin sternly, holding towards the Sheriff the cross hilt of his sword; and his

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teeth chattering, the Sheriff swore as Robin had bidden him.

So the next morning Robin let him go back to Nottingham: but he put no great faith in the Sheriff's oath, and it was well that he did not, as you shall hear later.

X

HOW MAID MARIAN CAME TO SHER-
WOOD

*A bonny fine maid of a noble degree,
Maid Marian called by name,
Did live in the north, of excellent worth,
For she was a gallant dame.*

X

HOW MAID MARIAN CAME TO SHERWOOD

It was spring in Sherwood. The love-calls of the mating birds echoed from tree to tree. Flowers were budding, and their fragrance filled the air. It was not often that the merry men of Sherwood thought of anything but the keen delights of the chase, the goodly joys of archery, the manly cheer of the quarterstaff play; but it was spring, and with one accord their minds turned towards other things and other days. Instead of stringing bows and testing arrows, they were prone to lie dreaming by the brook, or to carve initials on the bark of the great trees. Some dear lass was in the thought of every man; a wife, a daughter, a sweetheart. Even Friar Tuck was heard trolling lustily the ballad of *The Nut Brown Maid*:

*“For in my mind of all mankind
I love but you alone!”*

he roared cheerfully in a tone much more befitting a drinking catch than a love song.

“Thou art a scandal to thy cloth!” said Robin sternly, although with twinkling eyes. “For pun-

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ishment that thou putttest such thoughts into our heads, I sentence thee to a bout at quarterstaff with Little John."

"Put such thoughts into your heads!" repeated the friar. He looked at Robin shrewdly. "Faith!" he said, "I but echo the words in all your hearts, thine included, Robin. What were the initials I saw thee hacking out on the bark of that willow by the brook yesterday? Not thine own, by Our Lady! Who is she, Robin? Thou wouldst make a bonny bridegroom for some fair bride. Here," and he slapped his broad chest, "here is the priest! Find a bride, prithee, and let us have a wedding in Sherwood."

"A pox on thy prying eyes and thy foolish tongue!" cried Robin in a sudden fury; and without more ado, he turned on his heel and left the friar. The latter stood with arms akimbo gazing after him as he strolled along the brookside, a goodly figure in his suit of Lincoln green. When Robin was at last out of sight, the friar shook his head, and felt for his rosary.

"O Blessed Lady, send him a maid worthy of him!" he prayed, and then went off in search of Little John.

Meanwhile, Robin had thrown himself down on a mossy bed under a tree by the brook, and lay with arms clasped under his head, gazing out at the rippling water.

"Seven years!" he muttered to himself. "I

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have been in the forest seven years. I wonder whether she ever heard of my outlawry, or if she remembers me. We were but boy and girl, yet never since have I seen maid that touches her. Ah, Marian, Marian!”

Then he started at the sighing of his own voice.

“What!” he cried, starting up impatiently. “Am I then turned into a lovesick weakling? I will not have it so. I will summon my men, and have an archery contest, or ——” His bugle, half way to his lips, fell unwound. “How rarely would I like to see her again!” he murmured. “Tush! What a fool I am! By this time she is at court, and perchance hath wedded some fine gallant there. I’ll think no more of her, but take some disguise, and go in search of adventure.”

So saying, he sought the cave where he and his merry men kept costumes of various kinds used chiefly when they wished to go forth unknown. He chose now a cloak and hood of sober brown, but he wore his sword and carried his bow and quiver. He pulled the hood well over his brows and about his face, so that even one of his own men would have scarcely recognized him.

Thus disguised, he strode briskly through the forest, glancing keenly from side to side as he went, to see whether there were any traces of game. Presently he saw indications that a hart had passed that way, and he crept cautiously along, one hand grasping his bow, the other just ready to draw an

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arrow from his quiver. He saw the game at last, a noble animal grazing in an open space. Quick as a flash, Robin raised his bow, the arrow poised for flight. With his usual seemingly careless aim, he shot. At the same instant he was astonished to hear the twang of a second bowstring, the whiz of another arrow. As the hart fell dead, it was impossible to tell for a moment which arrow had caused the killing. Robin ran forward, and saw another lad bounding from the trees directly opposite.

“My game!” cried the boy in a high sweet voice.

“Nay, that thou must prove!” replied Robin, rather sharply, for he prided himself, and with good reason, upon his shooting, and it displeased him that this stripling should have had a better aim than he. He bent over the dying hart, and to his chagrin, he found that it was indeed the stranger’s arrow that was causing the animal’s death.

“Thou art right; ’tis thy game,” he began courteously if coldly, and then for the first time he looked the lad full in the eyes. There was something strangely familiar about the clear direct gaze.

“Pshaw! I am doting!” Robin muttered to himself, passing a hand across his forehead. “The spring air hath gotten into my blood indeed, when I see her eyes in this lad’s face!”

“Thou dost well to rub thy head, stranger!” cried the boy impudently. “The sun must have



• "My game!" cried the boy.

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dazzled thine eyes sadly since thou couldst not see at once that it was my arrow that reached its aim and not thine. Natheless thine was a fair shot, a very fair shot indeed!”

Robin flushed, and looked at the boy as if uncertain whether to laugh or to be angry.

“Thou malapert!” he said, but with good nature. “The hart is thine indeed; but remember that ’tis often an ill-aimed arrow finds its mark by chance or fate. Draw thy sword and let me see whether thou canst use that as well as thy bow.”

“Have at thee!” cried the lad cheerfully, and drew his sword.

Robin was a master Bowman, and a good swordsman, but his skill was not so great with the sword as with the bow. Much to his surprise, he soon found himself greatly put to it to defend himself against the lightning strokes of this slender stripling.

The first wound was Robin’s, and the blood ran freely from his cheek at the lad’s clever thrust. Angrily, he made a play in his turn which gave his opponent a slight flesh wound in the arm. Much to his surprise, he saw that the stripling had turned very pale.

“Nay,” the boy stammered, his sword dropping, “I—I——” He clapped his hand against the wound, and Robin thought for a moment that the lad would faint.

“Here’s a coil!” observed Robin, clapping his hand against his own bleeding face, and looking at

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the stripling in quizzical inquiry. "Thou fightest like a young tiger, yet at the sight of blood, like any girl ——" and with that he sprang forward, and caught the lad as he fell swooning.

With a muttered exclamation of surprise and concern, Robin ran to a little spring that bubbled near, and filled his hood with water. He dashed it sharply into the lad's face, and knelt beside him. Presently the boy's color came back, he stirred, and sat waveringly upright.

"Methinks," quoth Robin, supporting the stripling's shoulders as he knelt beside him, "methinks thou art worthy to be one of my men. Wouldst like to range the woods with me, and hear the lark and the nightingale?"

The boy turned and rested his cheek on Robin's shoulder.

"Ay, that is why I came," he murmured; "but I see thou knowest me not! Robin!"

Robin stared at him, some strange familiarity in the voice tugging at his heartstrings.

"Robin," the lad whispered again, "look well at me!"

He turned his face upward. Robin gazed searchingly into the wide gray eyes, then at the flushed cheeks, the clustering chestnut curls.

"Marian!" he gasped at last, still only half believing that it could be true. "Marian, is it really thou?"

She hid her face sharply on his shoulder again.

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“Well done, sir, after seven years!” she whispered. Then she raised her head and looked at him in the clear-eyed, gallant fashion he so well remembered in the little girl who had been his comrade. “I was a child, and so wast thou,” she said simply. “Perchance thou hast not remembered—as I have. I grew so weary of the court, and I longed to see thee again. If thou dost not—want me, I can go back.”

“Want thee!” he repeated. “Want thee! Have I not already asked thee to join my band?” Then he laughed joyously, and caught her in his arms. “Friar Tuck was right, sweetheart,” he said. “We shall shortly have a wedding in Sherwood.” Then he hesitated, and a cloud crossed his brow. “I am an outlaw,” he said, looking at her anxiously. “I have no roof to offer thee but the sky, no bed save the soft moss of the greenwood. Marian, is it enough?”

For answer, she held up her lips for their betrothal kiss.

“Come then,” said Robin rising. “I went in search of adventure this morn, and soothly I have found it. It hath been a forest wooing, indeed, and now a greenwood wedding shall follow hard upon. I know the very place where I shall make a bower for thee. Come, sweetheart; the priest is not far away.”

They went together through the forest, and now the love notes of the birds and the sweet smell of

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the flowers were no longer a torment to Robin but a joy. So at last they reached the great oak tree where Robin had been born.

Friar Tuck was standing there, and Robin greeted him merrily.

“I thought thy words good this morning, Friar,” quoth he, “and so I have found the maid. A slain hart awaits yonder in the forest for our wedding feast. Call hither my men and prithee marry us at once.”

The friar stared open-mouthed.

“A maid!” he repeated unbelievably, staring at the handsome stripling who apparently accompanied Robin. “A maid, quotha! What jest is this?”

“No jest, Friar,” replied Robin gayly. “This is my dear Maid Marian, and now will I summon my merry men, and bid them to be loyal to her as to me. Then shall she don her right attire from our store in the cave yonder, and thou shalt marry us.” And with that he set his horn to his lips, and blew the triple blast which always summoned his men.

They came running from glade and tree and hill as if by magic. There were seven score of them now, and they were a goodly company. Robin presented them to Maid Marian, and they raised a great shout of admiration and greeting. Marian slipped away to find what woman’s garments she could among the outlaws’ store, and then at last before the rustic altar which Friar Tuck had built

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soon after he had joined the band, Robin and Marian were wedded.

Merry was the marriage feast that followed, the chief dish being the hart that the bride had slain. So Robin wooed and wedded in the forest.

XI

HOW ROBIN MET SIR RICHARD OF
THE LEA

*As they looked into Bernysdale,
By a hidden street,
There came a knight a-riding, he;
Full soon they gan him mete.*

XI

HOW ROBIN MET SIR RICHARD OF THE LEA

MAID MARIAN'S coming to the forest gave the one thing to the joyous life there that it had lacked before—a woman's presence. It was not long before the outlaws adored her, not only for Robin's sake, but for her own. Surely was never such a honeymoon as theirs in Sherwood with all its beauty of pearly dawns and golden sunsets and magic moonlight, with the birds to sing madrigals from every bush and tree, and the wild flowers breathing mutely the sweet mystery in their hearts.

A special bower was made for Marian, a cave overhung with woodbine and roses, and there she passed long joyous days when she was not in her boy's attire hunting with the merry men. She seemed perfectly happy, and not for one moment did she regret the impulse and its fulfilment which had brought her to Sherwood and to be Robin's bride.

They were all seated one day under or near the oak tree resting after a chase, when Robin said:

“Truly I have no desire to dine to-day until I have some bold baron or some uncouth guest who may pay for the best. Some knight or some squire ——”

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“Well, master,” said Little John, “tell us where we shall go and what life we shall lead, where we shall rob, where we shall beat and bind ——”

Marian uttered a little cry of protest and looked at the giant reproachfully as he rolled off these alarming propositions cheerfully in his great rumbling voice.

“Surely, dear ——” she whispered to Robin, and laid her hand appealingly on his arm. Robin laughed and kissed her cheek.

“No force!” he said sternly to Little John. “We shall do well enough. Harm no good husbandman at his plough or any yeoman or squire or knight that is a good fellow; but”——and his fist clenched in menace as it lay on his knee——“these proud bishops and archbishops ye may beat and bind as ye will, my merry men. As for the Sheriff of Nottingham”——his brow cleared and he chuckled——“to him do as ye will, and the worse the better.”

The outlaws gave a great roar of laughter.

“Ay, master!” they cried. “We will hold him in mind.”

“Fear not, sweetheart!” Robin added in a lower voice to Marian as he turned to her. “We harm no good men and true.”

“But”——said Marian doubtfully——“the bishops and archbishops—are they not holy men?”

At that Friar Tuck burst into a shout of scornful amusement.

“Ah, sweet innocence!” he cried, looking at Mar-

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ian with a kind of tender derision. "They should be, lady, but alack the day! many of them are not. They are ill followers of our Blessed Lord, oppressors of the poor, winebibbers, gluttons, hypocrites. I, who am a lowly friar, confess it with sorrow and mourning ——"

"Is there aught in the cloth that leads to gluttony and winebibbing, I wonder?" observed Little John in a dreamy tone. "Methinks this morning, Friar, I saw thee with a huge pasty and a flagon or two of choice liquor ——"

At any other time Friar Tuck would have given the huge fellow a great buffet for his impudence, but now he was in sober mood.

"I am no saint," he said gravely, his round, jolly face very grave. "I have never claimed to be; but neither am I a hypocrite, robbing widows, wronging orphans, seeking naught but my own advantage ——"

Marian touched his brawny arm gently.

"Methinks thou art a good man, dear Friar," she said in her soft voice.

"Well, master," said Little John, "to return to thy first commands, God speedily send us a guest, for I am ready now for my dinner."

"Take thy good bow, Little John," said Robin. "Let Much and Scarlet go with thee, and see what guest ye can bring back."

The three men rose obediently, and set off through the trees.

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“Be it earl, baron, abbot, or knight, bring him to have dinner with me and lodgings afterwards,” Robin called to them.

Little John, Much and Scarlet went along the highway together after they had left the forest, and they looked east and west as they went, but could see no man. When they neared Bernysdale, in a small street on the outskirts of the town they saw a knight riding slowly towards them.

Dreary was his semblance and little his pride. He sat stooping in his saddle as if bent with care; one foot was thrust into the stirrup, the other hung free. His hood was pulled over his eyes, and his dress was shabby and unkempt. Surely a sorrier man than he never rode on a bright summer's day.

Little John, Will Scarlet and Much exchanged glances. Then Little John stepped forward, and courteously bent the knee to the knight.

“Welcome are ye, gentle knight,” he said; “and welcome are you to the greenwood, noble knight and free! My master waits fasting for your coming.”

The knight started from his revery.

“Who is your master?” he said, looking in astonishment at the three brawny men who stood in his pathway.

“So please you, his name is Robin Hood,” answered Little John.

“A good man and a true!” said the knight courteously. “I have heard many gentle things said

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about him. I will go with you as you desire, although my purpose was to have dined at Blythe or Doncaster."

He turned his horse's head, and followed whither they would. As they went on their way, however, he sank again into deep and evidently sombre thought. Once or twice tears rose to his eyes and ran down his face unheeded. Little John's kind heart was greatly touched.

"Surely," he thought, "this poor knight is in some woeful pass; and I know that Robin will deal well with him."

Robin saw his guest coming from afar, and strode forward to greet him.

"Welcome, sir knight," he said. "Right welcome art thou to me!" and courteously with the words he bared his head and knelt before his guest. "I have abided your coming fasting for three hours, gentle sir."

"God save thee, Robin, and all thy fair company!" the knight answered.

Then Marian also came forward to greet the stranger, and at sight of her the knight leaped from his horse and bent above her hand in courteous wise. So presently they were all set down at dinner, after burly Friar Tuck had pronounced the grace as expeditiously as possible.

It was a true greenwood feast; swans and pheasants and venison, with plenty of white bread and good wine.

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“Do well by my feast, sir knight!” said Robin hospitably.

“Gramercy!” answered the knight. “Such a feast have I not had for these three weeks. If I come again into this part of the country, Robin, I shall make as good a dinner for thee as thou hast here made for me.”

“Gramercy!” said Robin in his turn. Then after a short pause, he went on, his eyes twinkling. “Thou wilt agree with me, I am sure,” he said. “It is not the custom for a poor outlaw to pay for a knight’s dinner. Therefore I must trouble thee, since thou likest the cheer, to pay the reckoning.”

The knight flushed and his eyes fell.

“An I had it, I would gladly pay thee,” he said in a low voice; “but I have naught in my coffers to give thee. I am ashamed to say it, but ’tis the truth.”

Robin looked the knight straight in the eyes.

“Pardon me, sir knight,” he said courteously; “but we are often deceived. I must e’en have my man Little John test the truth of what thou sayest.”

“Thy man is welcome to do so,” answered the knight. “I have but ten shillings in the world.”

“If in good sooth thou hast only that,” said Robin gently, “I will not touch one penny of thy store, and if thou hast need of more I will lend it thee. Go, Little John, and examine the knight’s purse.”

The knight handed over his purse to the giant

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outlaw, and Little John spread his mantle on the ground, and shook out the contents of the purse upon the green cloak. Then he gathered up the pitiful sum, and handed the coins to Robin.

“The knight is true enough, master,” he said.

“Here is our best wine,” said Robin, pushing a flagon towards the knight. “Fill full thy horn, knight, and tell me then why thy purse is so light and thy clothing so thin. Hast been a sorry husbandman, or hast thou wasted thy living in sinful strife?”

“Nay,” said the knight simply. “For an hundred years my ancestors have been knights; and up until two years ago, I was master of four hundred pounds of good money. Now, God hath so shaped it that I have nothing save my dear wife and my children.”

“In what manner hast thou so lost thy riches?” asked Robin.

“By my folly and by my kindness,” answered the knight. “My name is Sir Richard of the Lea. I have a son that should have been my heir; but in fair joust he slew a knight of Lancaster, and to save him from punishment, I was obliged to sell all my goods and mortgage my lands to the Abbot of St. Mary’s.”

“Ah!” said Robin slowly. “What is the sum thou dost owe the Abbot?”

“Four hundred pounds,” answered Sir Richard sadly.

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“And if thou dost not pay, and thou shalt lose thy land, what shall befall?” Robin went on.

“In that case,” answered the knight, “I will be-take myself over the salt sea, and seek that land where Our Lord was quick and dead, to fight for the Holy Sepulchre. I doubt me not that is what shall befall, for I see naught better before me.”

He arose, tears in his eyes.

“Farewell!” he said to Robin. “I thank thee again, friend, for thy dinner. Would I might bet-ter pay thee!”

“Stay!” said Robin. “Hast no friend to stand thee in good stead now, and to help thee?”

“Ah!” answered the knight bitterly. “None knows me now. While I was rich, great boasts of friendship had I from many a one, but now they have all run away from me. They notice me no more than if they had never seen me.”

Robin glanced away from the knight, and looked down the table in deep thought. His eye fell on Little John and Much and Scarlet, the three huge fellows who had brought Sir Richard to him. Tears stood in the eyes of all of them and ran down their cheeks unchecked. Evidently the knight’s tale had touched them deeply.

“Be seated again, Sir Richard,” said Robin, touching lightly the knight’s shoulder. “Fill up thy horn once more with this good wine, and let us talk over thy affairs together. Hast no friend for thy surety, if thou couldst borrow the money?”

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“Nay,” answered the knight quietly, “I have no friend but God; and indeed Our dear Lady hath never failed me.”

Robin bent his head.

“That word was well spoken, knight,” he said. “My dear mother was named for Our sweet Lady, and for that reason I hold the Blessed Virgin high in my reverence and worship. She shall be thy surety. Go, Little John, and bring four hundred pounds from our treasury.”

With evident delight, Little John sprang to his feet, and went off with Will Scarlet and Much. The three sought the cave where Robin kept his treasure, and Little John counted out the four hundred pounds that Robin had told him to bring. Will Scarlet noticed, however, that he added eight pounds more.

“Is this well told?” he asked, pointing out the little extra heap of money.

“What grieves thee?” said Little John sharply. “’Tis to help a gentle knight fallen into poverty.”

He carried back the money to Robin, who handed it quietly to the knight. Sir Richard flushed and stammered as he tried to thank his benefactor.

“Master,” whispered Little John in Robin’s ear, “his clothing is very thin. Let us give him a suit also, for ye have many a rich array in gold and scarlet. No merchant in England hath a better store.”

“Give him three yards of every color, and look that thou measure it well,” said Robin in reply.

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So Little John strode off once more to their treasure cave, again accompanied by Much and Scarlet, and he measured off the cloth as Robin had bidden him. He used his huge bow to measure, and at every bow-length he threw in an extra yard.

Scarlet watched his lavish measuring, and laughed.

“No wonder thou art so generous, Little John,” he said teasingly. “It costeth thee naught.”

“Hold thy peace!” said Little John calmly. “I have helped to win these things for our master, as hast thou. They belong to us all.”

When he came back to Robin with the heaped-up cloth in his arms, Little John whispered again in his master’s ear:

“Thou must also give him a good horse, master, to bear home these goods.”

“Ay,” said Robin. “Give him a good gray courser and a new saddle. He is Our Lady’s messenger. God grant he be true!”

“Let him have a pair of boots also, master,” said Will Scarlet. “He is a gentle knight.”

“And what else wilt thou give him, Little John?” asked Robin, seeing a gleam in the giant’s eyes.

“Sooth, sir, a pair of good spurs,” answered Little John; “and then he may with reason pray for all our company.”

“As thou wilt,” said Robin; and Little John ran

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off again, and presently returned, bearing a fine pair of spurs.

“Sir,” said the knight, tears of gratitude in his eyes as he turned to Robin, “sir, name the day when I shall repay thee—I mean the money; for thy kindness and courtesy can I ne’er repay.”

“Let us say this day twelvemonth,” answered Robin, “under this same greenwood tree where we have dined together; and now, Sir Richard, it were great shame for a knight to ride alone without yeoman, squire or page to walk by his side. I will lend thee my best man, Little John, and he may stand thee in good stead.”

Little John was nothing loth to go with Sir Richard, for his good heart was filled with pity and kindness towards the knight.

It was a very different Sir Richard who left Sherwood from the dejected one who had entered the forest. With money in his purse to pay his debt, a good gray steed, fine cloth upon his saddle-bow, and newly clothed and booted and spurred, he bade farewell to Robin and Marian, Little John waiting in the background to accompany him on his way.

“God bless thee, bold Robin, and thy fair lady!” said the knight. “In a twelvemonth thou shalt see me here again in Sherwood.”

“Farewell then, for a twelvemonth!” answered Robin.

He stood, his arm around Marian, her cheek against his shoulder, looking after the knight as he

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rode down the sun-flecked forest path, Little John following closely after.

“Our Lady is his surety,” murmured Robin;
“and Our Lady hath never failed me!”

XII

HOW SIR RICHARD PAID HIS DEBT

*He did him straight to Bernysdale,
Under the greenwood tree,
And he found there Robin Hood,
And his merry company.*

XII

HOW SIR RICHARD PAID HIS DEBT

“Go we now to dinner, master?” hinted Little John.

“Nay,” said Robin, starting from a reverie. “I fear me, Little John, that Our Lady is wroth with me.”

Little John looked perplexed.

“And why, master?” he said. “Thou dost hear Mass whenever thou canst—ay, sometimes at great peril to thy skin; and thou hast never done harm to any woman, nor to any company where there is a woman, for Our Lady’s dear sake.”

“Ay, thou sayst true,” said Robin; “but look thou now, Our Lady was Sir Richard’s surety, and now his twelvemonth is past, and he is not come.”

Little John grew very red with earnestness.

“He will come, doubt it not, master,” he said. “I would stake my life on Sir Richard’s honor. The twelvemonth is up to-day, I know; but see! The sun hath not set. If thou couldst have heard him as I rode home with him that night after he had discharged his debt to the churlish Abbot, and how he blessed thee! His lady met him at the door of his castle—ah, a sweet lady she was, and nearly as

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beautiful as Mistress Marian!—‘Welcome, my lord!’ she said to him. ‘Sir, are all thy goods lost?’ And she smiled at him right bravely, master, although her cheek was pale. ‘Be merry, dame!’ quoth Sir Richard, and bussed her heartily. ‘Pray for Robin Hood that ever his soul be in bliss. He helped me in my trouble, and if it were not for his kindness, we should be beggars indeed. The Abbot is paid,’ said the knight, great tears in his eyes, ‘thanks to Robin Hood and Our Lady!’”

Marian, seated beside Robin, slipped her slender hand in his.

“I too have faith in the knight, Robin,” she whispered; but Robin shook his head.

“Men forget,” he said. Then he shrugged his broad shoulders as if dismissing the subject from his mind. “Take thy bow, Little John,” he cried; “let Much and Scarlet go with thee, and see what guest ye can find me for dinner.”

The three set forth obediently. When they reached the highway near Bernysdale, Little John gave a chuckle of delight; for whom should he see but the proud Abbot of St. Mary’s riding along with his Prior and his Cellarer? They were all three dressed as simple monks; but Little John recognized them because he had accompanied Sir Richard when he had paid his debt to the Abbot.

Then said Little John to Much:

“I dare swear these monks have brought us our pay for dinner. Make glad cheer, my comrades,

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and hold your bows ready. Be brave of heart, and may your strings be trusty and true! These simple monks travel well attended methinks. There are two hundred and fifty men with them and seven sumpter horses. No Bishop in the land rides more royally. Here are but three of us; but if we bring not these men to dinner we dare not look again upon our master. Bend your bows and make ready. The foremost monk's life and death are in my hand."

Then he spoke sternly to the first monk, who had by this time ridden up to where they were standing.

"Abide, churl monk!" he said. "No farther durst thou go! If thou dost, by our dear God, I swear thy death is in my hand;" and he aimed his arrow menacingly. "Evil be on thee," he continued reproachfully, "that thou hast kept our master so long waiting. He is wroth with fasting."

"Who is your master?" said the Abbot haughtily.

"Robin Hood," answered Little John softly, still holding his arrow ready.

The Abbot turned pale at the name, but he spoke blusteringly.

"He is a strong thief," he said, "of whom I have heard no good."

"Thou liest," answered Little John, promptly and cheerfully; "and moreover, thou shalt rue that lie. He is a sturdy yeoman of the forest, and he hath bidden thee to dinner."

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The Abbot looked scowlingly at the three giants who blocked his pathway.

“Send away thy men,” said Will Scarlet gently, “and come with us. If thou dost not——” he twitched his bowstring suggestively.

The Abbot hesitated still; but at length with an angry scowl, he did as Will had suggested. Little John, a page and a groom led the sumpter horses, laden with the Abbot’s goods. The Abbot, the Prior and the Cellarer followed the three merry men through the forest.

Robin came forward to greet them when he saw them coming, and spoke with the utmost courtesy.

“Welcome, monk,” he said; “welcome to merry Sherwood.”

The Abbot glanced at him disdainfully, but vouchsafed no reply.

“He is a churl, master,” said Little John.

“He knows no courtesy, surely,” said Robin coolly. “How many men had this monk whom thou hast brought hither, Little John?”

“Fifty and two when we met,” replied Little John; “but many of them be gone. I thought they were too many to invite to dinner, master.” Then he bent forward, and whispered in Robin’s ear. “’Tis no monk, but the Abbot of St. Mary’s,” he said. “I was with Sir Richard, thou knowest, when he paid his debt.”

“Ah!” said Robin musingly. Then he lifted his bugle. “Let us blow a horn that we may know

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fellowship!" he cried, and with that he blew his accustomed signal, and seven score men came flocking in answer.

"Welcome, my merry men!" said Robin ceremoniously. "Great is our honor to-day. The Abbot of St. Mary's dines with us."

Then the men raised a great shout of mocking welcome, which made the Abbot turn pale again; and then he was told to wash and wipe his hands and get ready for dinner.

So presently they were all seated at the kind of woodland dinner that Robin and his men loved well, venison and white bread, and much wine and ale. The Abbot seemed to lose a little of his sulkiness when he saw the good cheer; and when Robin inquired courteously:

"Where is your Abbey when you are at home, and who is your patron?" he answered almost graciously:

"Thou knowest, although I am puzzled that thou dost, that I am the Abbot of St. Mary's, and these two holy men who are with me are my Prior and my Cellarer."

"Well said!" quoth Robin. "I am glad thou dost come from St. Mary's, for Our sweet Lady is my special devotion. Natheless I fear me she is wroth with me this day!" and he shook his head sadly.

"Have no doubt of that, master," broke in Little John. "Since this monk is of Our Lady's abbey, I

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doubt me not she hath sent him to give thee thy pay."

The Abbot pricked up his ears suspiciously at the word "pay."

"Thou seest," Robin said to him in a tone of pleasant explanation, "Our Lady was surety in a little transaction between a certain knight and me, of money that I lent to him here in the greenwood. Mayhap she has sent thee with the silver. If so, tell me, I prithee."

The Abbot pulled a very long face, and swore a great oath.

"By the Holy Trinity," he said, "I have never even heard of this debt of which thou dost speak."

Robin shook his head.

"Then, I make my vow to God thou art to blame," he said; "for we know God is righteous, and so is Our Lady. Thou hast told me with thine own tongue—thou canst not deny it—that thou art her servant. Without doubt she has sent thee, her servant, to pay my money. I am the more thankful that thou art come at thy day. It is just a twelvemonth since I made the loan."

The Abbot looked at once furious and helpless.

"Tell me truly," continued Robin, "what hast thou in thy boxes borne by thy sumpter horses yonder?"

"I have but twenty marks," the Abbot replied, his face nearly purple with rage.

"If there be no more than that," said Robin, "I

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will not touch a penny; and if thou hast need of more, I will lend it to thee. Natheless, if I find thou hast more, thou shalt never see it again. Go, Little John, examine the Abbot's store."

Little John spread his mantle on the ground, as he had done for Sir Richard, and proceeded to go systematically through the burdens of the sumpter horses. When all were examined, more than eight hundred pounds in gold lay on the green cloak, and the Abbot was fairly gnawing his fingers in desperation.

Robin looked at him contemptuously.

"What told I thee?" he said. "Our Lady is the truest woman that e'er I found."

"Our Lady hath doubled thy venture, master," said Little John.

"I make my bow to God," said Robin piously, "no better surety could I have had. If ever Our Lady have need of Robin Hood, she shall find him a friend!"

"Natheless this is little courtesy thou hast shown," said the Abbot, finding his tongue at last. "'Tis ill done to bid a man to dinner, and then to rob him."

"Thou mayest go now," said Robin sweetly. "God send me such a monk to dinner every day!"

Then the merry men helped the Abbot and the Prior and the Cellarer to get ready for departure, and with them the seven sumpter horses, now considerably lightened of their burdens; and as they

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turned from watching the departure of the train, whom should they see but Sir Richard of the Lea, riding towards them in the sunset light?

The knight's face grew radiant as he saw Robin.

"God save thee, Robin, and all this company!" he cried, doffing his hood.

"Welcome be thou, gentle knight," answered Robin; "right welcome art thou to me."

"Take it not amiss that I have been so long coming," Sir Richard continued. "I thank God and thee I have my lands again, and I started out in good time to keep my day; but several things kept me back. I helped a poor yeoman to get justice in a wrestling match ——"

"For that I thank thee," interrupted Robin; "for whoever helps a good yeoman will have Robin for his friend."

"Have here then the four hundred pounds thou didst lend me," said the knight, "and twenty marks more for thy courtesy."

"Nay," said Robin, rejecting the purse the knight offered, "Our Lady hath already sent me payment. Thou rememberest she was thy surety."

Sir Richard looked puzzled.

"It were a shame to me were I to take the money twice," continued Robin. "Natheless thou art truly welcome, sir knight."

Then he gave orders that supper should be served, and when they were all making merry together, Robin explained to the knight how his debt

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had been paid. Sir Richard laughed, but he said doubtfully:

“By my truth, Robin, thy money is ready here,” and again he offered his purse.

“Enjoy it well, thou gentle knight,” said Robin, “and welcome be thou now and always to our trysting tree!”

“I have also brought with me a trifling gift for thee,” said Sir Richard. “I would offer to thee and to thy merry men a hundred bows and a hundred sheaves of arrows adorned with peacock feathers. Take them, I beseech thee, in poor acknowledgment of thy goodness.”

“I will do so, and gladly,” said Robin; “and now, Little John, go to my treasury, and bring me four hundred pounds from the Abbot’s store. Take this money, Sir Richard,” he went on, when Little John returned with the gold, “and buy horse and armor and spurs, and whatever thou dost need; and if ever thou fail to have money to spend, come again to Robin Hood, and by my troth, I shall not fail thee while I myself have goods to bestow.”

So in feasting and pleasant talk they passed the evening, and afterwards Sir Richard spent the night in the greenwood, and the next morning went rejoicing on his way.

XIII

THE WEDDING OF ALAN A DALE

*As Robin Hood in the forest stood,
All under the greenwood tree,
There was he ware of a brave young man,
As fine as fine might be.*

XIII

THE WEDDING OF ALAN A DALE

As Robin stood under his favorite oak tree one day, busily engaged in shaping an arrow, he heard suddenly a snatch of gay song, and glancing out towards the woodland path, he saw something that made him smile with pleasure, since every kindly heart rejoices in the sight of youth and happiness.

A stripling clad in vivid scarlet strode along the path. He went frisking along like some young lamb or colt, as if he were too happy to walk at a sober pace; and as he went he chanted a merry roundelay.

“A goodly sight to behold!” quoth Robin to himself as he watched the youth out of sight. “Heaven grant he may long keep his merry heart!”

The very next day, however, as Robin stood in the selfsame place, he saw the same young man pass by; and lo, what a change was there! The stripling walked slowly and with drooping head; his steps lagged, his gay attire was smirched with the mud of the wayside, and his gay little song was hushed. Instead he kept shaking his head, and sighing with nearly every step, “Alack, and well a day!”

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Presently Robin saw Little John and Much step out of a thicket and stand across the youngster's pathway. Evidently the boy did not lack courage, for at sight of these two rather formidable men, he instantly seized his bow and bent it threateningly.

"Stand off! stand off!" he cried almost petulantly. He hated to be disturbed in the midst of his fond hugging of his grief. "What is your will?" he asked defiantly.

"Thou must come at once to our master under yon greenwood tree," said Little John, obeying an almost imperceptible signal from Robin.

"Ah, well a day, so be it!" sighed the youth, shrugging his shoulders. "It matters little what becomes of me!" So Little John and Much led him to Robin, who was still standing under the great oak.

Robin said courteously:

"Hast any money to spare for my merry men and me?"

Tears rose to the young man's eyes.

"I have no money," he replied, his voice trembling, "save five shillings and a ring. The ring I have kept for seven long years to have it in readiness for my wedding; but—but"—he paused and swallowed hard—"Yesterday," he went on, almost sobbing as he spoke, "yesterday, I should have married a maid, but she is now taken from me, and is bride to an old knight."

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His voice broke on the last word, and he frankly wiped his eyes.

“My poor heart is slain!” he added tragically, clapping his hand on his chest with what sounded like entirely too healthy a thwack under the circumstances.

“What is thy name?” said Robin gently.

“Alan a Dale,” replied the youth. “I am a minstrel,” and he indicated proudly the little harp slung across his shoulders.

“And what wilt thou give me,” Robin continued, “if I help thee to thy true love again, and deliver her unto thee?”

The boy stared at him incredulously.

“What will I give thee?” he repeated at last. “Alack, sir, I have no money, no ready gold, nothing save the five shillings and the ring I told thee of; and the ring I should need if—ah, I can scarcely believe it! Canst thou indeed bring back my Ellen to me? If thou dost—I have no money for thee; but I will swear upon the Book to be thy true servant forever!”

“How many miles is it to thy true love?” asked Robin.

“By the faith of my body,” replied the boy eagerly, “’tis but five little miles. She is not wedded to the graybeard yet—only promised to him! Oh, sir, canst thou truly make her mine?” and he gazed at Robin with so much faith and hope in his imploring gaze as to touch a much harder heart.

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“When is the wedding of the graybeard and thy Ellen to take place?” Robin asked.

“To-day at noon,” Alan answered. His eyes filled again with tears as he spoke the sad words.

“Then no time is to be lost!” cried Robin briskly. “Take this green cloak of mine, young Alan, and wrap it so close about thee that none shall know thee until the proper time. Good sooth, thou must first don a clean doublet and wash away those stains of dirt and tears from thy face, or fair Ellen may refuse thee as a bridegroom too sorry looking for her taste! Little John, see what thou canst find for him among our store. Much, bid Friar Tuck come hither; and now will I summon my men, and take some five and twenty along on this sweet quest. Then will I bid my Marian make ready for a pretty bride who will be in the forest to-night.”

No sooner said than done. Robin set his horn to his lips and summoned his men according to his usual custom; then selected a small body to go with him. In half an hour they were on the way, leaving Marian in a twitter of expectancy, to adorn her bower, and to make ready a feast to greet their return. The five and twenty men moved forward briskly, Friar Tuck and Little John among them. Alan a Dale, now quite radiant, led the company. He was wrapped in Robin’s cloak of forest green, but beneath it he wore a beautiful suit of scarlet and gold, well befitting a bridegroom. All the outlaws

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were muffled closely in their cloaks, but Robin carried Alan's harp slung across his shoulders.

At length they came to the church where Alan had said the wedding was to take place. They found it all ready indeed, the altar gayly adorned with flowers, the guests gathering, and the Bishop waiting to perform the ceremony.

Into the church went the outlaws, quietly and with reverence; for although they had reason to hate many Churchmen, they loved the Church. The Bishop was awaiting the bridal party at the church door; and Robin, with Alan beside him, walked up the steps and greeted that dignitary.

"What dost thou here?" said the Bishop in reply, glaring suspiciously at Robin.

"I am a bold harper," quoth Robin jauntily, although in truth he did not know one string from another. "Without boasting I may say that I am the best in the North Countree."

"O welcome then," said the Bishop more graciously; "for the music of the harp pleaseth me best of all. Let me have a taste of thy skill while we wait the bridal party."

"Nay," said Robin, "you shall have no music until I see the bride and bridegroom."

"Well, hither they come," said the Bishop; "and 'tis full time, methinks."

There was a loud shout of welcome from the people in the churchyard as they saw the bridal party approaching. Robin heard poor Alan heave

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a deep sigh as the bride appeared; and indeed the kindly outlaw wondered little. A gayly dressed knight, old enough to be the bride's father, was hobbling along evidently trying to look young and debonair; and just after him on her father's arm walked a charming lass, her golden hair shining beneath her veil. She was fair and fresh as a rose, but just now she resembled a rose wet and heavy with dew; for her sweet face was downcast and her blue eyes were brimming with tears.

"This is no fit match that I see here, my Lord Bishop," quoth Robin boldly. "May and December are always ill at ease together; and right sure am I that the maid did not choose her own bridegroom. We are here at the church. Let the bride speak, and say whom she chooses for her dear husband."

At these words, Ellen looked up, and as she did so, her eyes met Alan's, and the color flooded her pale face.

Then Robin set his bugle to his lips, and out of the church door came flocking five and twenty men, clad in Lincoln green.

"Damsel," said Robin courteously, stripping the green cloak from Alan's shoulders and revealing the youth in all his bravery of scarlet and gold, "damsel, this is thy true love, so I hear, young Alan a Dale. You two shall now be married before we leave this place."

"Nay," said the Bishop angrily, while the gray-



At these words Ellen looked up.

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beard bridegroom sputtered and fumed like a turkey cock; "nay, that shall not be! Thy word in this matter shall not stand. Hast forgot that it is the law of the land that the banns shall be thrice cried in the church?"

"God forbid that I should break the laws of the land!" said Robin piously. "I must ask thee, Bishop, to lend my man Little John thy coat, that all may be done decently and in order. Array thyself in his vestments, Little John!" and without more ado, Little John did so, paying no attention to the Bishop's protests. "Now," continued Robin cheerfully, "enter the church, and be thou clerk; and that there may be no doubt, call the banns seven times instead of three."

All of which commands Little John exactly obeyed. A ripple of laughter passed over the congregation as the giant, clad in the vestments intended for the short and portly figure of the Bishop, went up to the choir steps, and solemnly called the banns.

"So that is done," said Robin cheerily. "Now, Friar Tuck, it is time for thy work. Enter again the church, my merry men, and thou shalt see our jolly friar wed a second couple who will dwell in our dear forest."

Then once more the outlaws filed decorously into the church, accompanied by Alan and Robin and the fair bride, now a happy one indeed, sweet as a dew-washed rose when the sunshine smiles again.

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The Bishop, the bride's father and the elderly bridegroom were left fussing and fuming outside the church. Then before they had time to collect their wits, the knot was fast tied. Robin gave the bride away, and Friar Tuck performed the ceremony, not forgetting to kiss her at its conclusion.

Ah, how different a bride it was who left the church from the one who had entered it! Fresh and happy as a queen she looked now, as she went down the aisle, leaning on her dear love's arm, and followed by Robin and Little John. Then off they started for merry Sherwood.

Marian stood smiling in the door of her bower to greet them, and merry was their wedding feast under the great oak tree. Then Alan took his harp and played such sweet beguiling music as the forest shades had never echoed before.

So Sherwood had a minstrel added to its band of merry men, and Marian had a sweet girl friend to bear her company in the greenwood.

XIV

HOW LITTLE JOHN WENT
A-BEGGING

*All you that delight to spend some time
A merry song for to sing,
Unto me draw near, and you shall hear
How Little John went a-begging.*

XIV

HOW LITTLE JOHN WENT A-BEGGING

“SOME of you must a-begging go,” said Robin suddenly, as he walked along one of the forest paths one morning, his arm thrown affectionately across Little John’s shoulders. “Our treasury is a trifle low because our guests at dinner of late have been worthy and needy, so we have given instead of gotten. Ay, some of you must go a-begging. Little John, it must be thou!” and he gave the good-natured giant a great blow on the back.

“As thou wilt, master,” answered Little John, never flinching under the blow which would have felled a lesser man to the earth. “Stay!” He stopped short, and his eyes grew bright as his imagination kindled. “If I must a-begging go,” he said with a slight swagger, “I shall be a palmer, methinks. A palmer’s weeds would well become me. I will have a staff, master, of course, and a coat, and bags”—he sighed rapturously—“bags of all sorts. Being a palmer, I must have a cross on my shoulder ——”

“Go to the treasure cave, thou great baby!” cried Robin, giving him another great buffet on the ear. “Take whatever thou wilt to wear and carry, and see what thou canst fetch back to us again.”

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“A bag for my bread,” murmured Little John happily, his eyes misty with his day-dream, “another for my cheese, and one for my pennies—nay, I shall get pounds, such a good beggar I shall be!” and with that he strolled merrily away in the direction of the cave.

Before he reached it, however, he paused, and stood a moment in deep thought; then turned and strode at a good pace in the direction of the highroad. His own suit of hunter's green was quite old and shabby, because it was nearing the time of year when Robin's men usually had new clothing. The prudent thought that had arrested him had been that instead of using one of the palmer's outfits in their store, he might exchange clothes with some one on the highroad, and so get rid of his old suit and assume a disguise at the same time. A palmer he had set his heart on being; so when he reached the road, he went gayly along, swinging his staff and whistling, quite sure that God would send him his desire.

His faith was rewarded. Presently he saw coming towards him just such a palmer as Little John dreamed of being. The newcomer had three bags, and in all respects was dressed exactly as the giant outlaw had described to his master a short time since. Little John measured the palmer narrowly with his eye. There was only one disadvantage. The newcomer was a much smaller man than he. “But,” said Little John to himself with a sigh, “I

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can chance to meet few men who are of my height. Methinks I would best not let this chance pass me."

So he hailed the palmer cheerily.

"Give ye good den," he said. "Wilt change thy garb with me?" Little John always believed in going directly to the point.

The palmer glared suspiciously at Little John towering above him.

"How now?" he said with a disagreeable snarl. "What silly jape is this?"

"No jape, by the rood!" answered Little John. "Come, I am in earnest! I will give thee this handsome suit of Lincoln green that I am wearing in exchange for that shabby old gown and those ancient bags of thine. Remember," he added, gazing lovingly at them the while, "remember, I must have the bags — oh, empty, of course!" as the palmer clutched them jealously. "I shall soon fill them again!"

The old man gave him another suspicious glare, and hesitated; but Little John's air of confident expectation, added to his great height and bulk, had its effect. The palmer removed his shabby gown, albeit with grudging slowness, and Little John in return whipped off his green mantle and doublet and hose, and handed them over in exchange. A moment or two, and they stood dressed in each other's clothes; but Little John was decidedly the worse off; for although his clothes hung on the palmer, the palmer's rags were far too small for

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him. The sleeves of the gown did not reach his wrist, and the shabby shoes had been patched at least nine times.

“Christ’s curse on his heart who thinks my gown amiss,” said Little John cheerfully, however, pulling in vain at his too-short sleeves. “Now thy bags, good fellow!” he added eagerly. “Ah!” and with a sigh of satisfaction, he adjusted them about his person. “Now am I a beggar indeed!” he murmured. “Tell me now, good fellow, some phrases of thy begging, so I may be as beggar-like as any in my company.”

“Thou must go two foot on a staff,” the palmer replied, “and the third on a tree; and thou must cry aloud when naught aileth thee.”

“I thank thee, and farewell,” said Little John; and with that off he went, trolling a merry song; for although he wore the beggar garb, he had not yet acquired the beggar spirit.

He had not walked many miles along the high-road before he met a group of beggars, and hastened at once to join them.

“God save you, my brothers all!” he cried cheerily. “God you save and me!”

They all looked at him sourly, even the one who was supposed to be blind.

“We had rather such a cankered churl were not in our company!” said one of them ungraciously.

“Good-morrow, my dear brothers!” Little John went on joyously, ignoring this crabbed speech.

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“Great is my fortune to see you. Which way do you go? Prithee tell me, for I want company.”

They growled and muttered among themselves, but they neither answered directly nor said anything to stop him from joining them; so he added himself to their number without more ado. They were near Nottingham now, and the bells of the town were ringing.

“Why, what is here to do?” said Little John gayly. “Why ring all these bells, my brothers? What dog is hanging? Let us go and see.”

“Here is no dog a-hanging,” said one of the beggars snappishly. “Here is one dead, and perchance we shall be given bread and cheese and alms at the house of mourning.” Then he paused and looked at Little John insolently. The giant indeed cut a comic figure in the palmer’s gown that was far too small for him, and with the patched clumsy shoes. “We have brethren in London and Coventry and Dover,” he said; “ay, all through the world; and never have I seen so crooked a churl as thou. Thou shalt go no farther with us. Stand back then, and take this knock on the crown!” He raised his fist threateningly.

“Nay,” quoth Little John calmly, “I’ll not yet be gone. I’ll have a bout with you all if ye will. Have at you, if you be so full of your blows! Fight on, all four of you, friends or foes, and never give up!”

With that he seized the “dumb” beggar who so

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far had talked the most, and nipped him by the arm in a mighty pinch of such exquisite agony that the "dumb" one roared again. Then Little John seized the shade which the "blind" beggar wore over his eyes, and gave him a punch between the eyes so that the blood ran down and for a moment he saw naught but stars. Next he fetched the "deaf" one a mighty box on the ear and his head rang as with the noise of many waters. Lastly he turned on the "cripple," and chased him in such a long, loping, purposeful fashion that the beggar nimbly unfastened his wooden leg, and showed that he had a pair of perfectly good ones which he turned to excellent account in outstripping Little John. In fact all four beggars began to run; but Little John continued to chase them, keeping within easy distance until they reached the walls of Nottingham. Then Little John rounded up his victims, and with a sturdy buffet apiece from his great fist, he flung them all against the wall, from which they rebounded and lay panting with fatigue and terror. As they struck the stones there was a ringing sound which made Little John prick up his ears and smile sweetly.

"Methinks," quoth he, "my begging is over for the day! Come, my good comrades, I am the victor, look you! Give me your bags as forfeit, I pray you."

They yielded them to him; sulkily, but they dared not refuse, for he stood over them, his great fists

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ready. Then in their full sight, while they lay baffled and helpless, he leisurely counted the contents of their bags and transferred the money to his own. There was a merry chink of gold and silver as he did so, and a broad smile of satisfaction overspread Little John's countenance.

"Here be your bags!" he exclaimed at last, flinging the empty pouches to their owners. "Now, dance again, lame man, sing for joy, dumb man, and hear thou his merry music, deaf man. See, blind man, this kiss of thanks which I waft to thee from my fingers for this treasure ye have given me. My fortune hath been so good that methinks I will not go to Nottingham but hie me home again to the forest."

So he turned and left them without more ado.

He found Robin and his merry men waiting for him under the oak tree. It was nearly supper time when he reached them. They raised a great shout of laughter when they saw Little John in his shabby ill-fitting palmer's garb.

"What news? what news?" said Robin merrily. "How hast thou sped with thy beggar's trade, Little John?"

"No news but good," replied Little John cheerfully. "I have sped well with my begging, master."

With that he thrust his hand into his beggar's bag, and held aloft a great handful of silver and gold.

"I have here for our treasury," he said, swagger-

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ing a little, and who could blame him? “ six hundred pounds and three.”

The outlaws raised a shout of astonishment and admiration, and Robin sprang up and seized Little John by the hand.

“ Well done, my master beggar! ” he cried. “ If we drink water while this treasure lasts, an ill death may we die! ”

XV.

HOW ROBIN TEASED THE TINKER

*As Robin came to Nottingham,
A Tinker he did meet,
And seeing him a lusty blade,
He did him kindly greet.*

XV

HOW ROBIN TEASED THE TINKER

ONE beautiful summer morning, when the leaves were green and the birds singing in the trees, Robin went striding along merrily towards Nottingham. As he drew near the town, he saw a Tinker, a round, rosy fellow, with a snub nose, tow-colored locks, and an air of great importance which sat oddly on his most unimpressive countenance. He carried in his hands and strung about his person pots and pans in various stages of repair which showed plainly his trade.

“Where dost thou live, Tinker?” asked Robin. “I hear there is sad news abroad,” he added with a sigh.

The Tinker looked alarmed.

“What is that news?” he asked curiously.

“Ah, I fear all is not well!” said Robin, groaning in apparent distress. “Why, Tinker, I hear—whether it be true or false I know not—I hear that two tinkers have been set in the stocks for drinking ale and beer.”

The Tinker flushed angrily.

“If that be all,” he said tartly, “all I can say is your news is worth nothing. I am a tinker, and I live at Banbury, and I have heard nothing of what

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you say. I dare swear you can do your part in drinking good ale and beer."

Robin laughed so good-naturedly that the Tinker's stern countenance relaxed.

"Nay, by my faith," he said, "I love them both with all my heart. Now tell me what news thou hast heard abroad as thou hast wandered up and down in thy trade."

"All the news I have heard is for good," said the Tinker, bristling importantly. "It is that the business at present of all true men in merry England is to capture that bold and sturdy outlaw, Robin Hood."

Robin glanced sharply at the Tinker, but the latter's expression was one of babe-like innocence. Robin could not decide whether the look was assumed or not. The next moment, however, his doubts were dissipated.

"I have a warrant here in my bosom from the King for his arrest," the Tinker continued importantly, tapping his doublet just above his heart. "It gives me power to take Robin Hood where I can. If thou canst tell me where he is, I will make a man of thee!" and he smiled condescendingly at Robin.

Robin was satisfied that the Tinker was ignorant of his identity. The latter would not so openly have announced his errand, and asked Robin's assistance had he thought that the man he wanted stood before him.

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“Let me see!” said Robin reflectively. “I give thee my good wishes, Tinker, that thou mayst take Robin where thou canst! As to where he is”—he paused, and shook his head—“I fear me thou must find him for thyself,” he concluded.

“The King will give a hundred pounds to see him,” the Tinker went on, his hand thrust within his doublet, and evidently clutching the precious warrant. “If we could but capture him, thou and I, it would serve us both well.”

“Mayhap!” said Robin, with entire truthfulness. “It would serve thee well, Tinker, doubtless. For me—I confess, there are other ways of getting money that would please me better.”

“Tut, man!” said the Tinker eagerly. “Think! Fifty pound between us!”

“Ay,” said Robin, with seeming indecision. He stretched out his hand to the Tinker. “Let me see that warrant, prithee,” he said. “I shall doubtless behold Robin ere the sun rise again. We are near his favorite haunts, thou knowest.”

“Ay,” said the Tinker, looking rather frightened as he glanced around him, and still clutching the hidden paper. “Nay,” he went on stubbornly, “I will trust the warrant into no hands but mine own. If thou canst not tell me where Robin is, and so share the reward with me, I must e’en alone seek him and take him by force!” and he flourished importantly the crab-tree staff he carried.

Robin’s eyes twinkled.

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“Let us e’en go together into Nottingham,” he said, laying a soothing hand upon the Tinker’s shoulder. “We may find him there—nay, I am sure he will be there by the time we are.”

“It is well said, and I am content to do so,” said the Tinker graciously; and much pleased, they went along together.

When at last they entered Nottingham Robin proposed going to the Saracen’s Head, an inn where he was well-known, where in fact the incident had taken place that led to his outlawry. He knew that he was perfectly safe from betrayal unless some of the Sheriff’s men recognized him; for so many were his kindly deeds towards the people in general by this time that any one of them would have risked life itself in his behalf. When they reached the inn, Robin ordered both ale and wine, and the Tinker and he began to drink together. The Tinker, however, drank far more than Robin, expecting that the latter would pay the reckoning; and presently his tongue became thick, and his eyes began to blink. Soon his head dropped on the table, and he was sound asleep, forgetting all about Robin Hood and the warrant for his arrest. Then Robin, watched by the grinning host, slipped out the paper from its hiding-place, examined the Tinker’s purse, and saw that he had enough to pay the reckoning. He handed the purse to the host, and himself went gayly back towards Sherwood, tearing the warrant for his own arrest into tiny fragments as he went,

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and strewing them along the roads and pathways.

Three hours later, the Tinker awoke and rubbed his eyes.

“Where am I?” he said stupidly, and almost instinctively, his hand sought the warrant within his doublet. When he found it gone, he was instantly sobered, and he gave a loud howl of anguish which brought the host and the servants running.

“Alack, the King’s warrant!” he cried, desperately clutching at his doublet with the wild hope that the paper might still be there. “I am robbed, I am robbed!” and he wrung his hands with another loud howl of anguish, and began to stamp up and down the room—somewhat waveringly, for his head was not yet perfectly clear.

The host seized and shook him in great apparent anger.

“What hurlyburly is this?” he thundered. “What aileth thee, thou silly Tinker?”

“I am robbed, I am robbed!” wept the Tinker, and howled again. “I had a warrant from the King for the arrest of that bold outlaw, Robin Hood; a warrant that meant much benefit to me; but now my warrant’s gone, and he that promised to be my friend and help me find that sturdy thief hath fled away!”

“That friend thou talkest of,” said the host. “Dost mean that man who was drinking with thee these three hours since?”

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“Ay,” said the Tinker, gazing at the host with hope in his expression.

“Why, thou zany,” said the host, “didst not know his name?”

“No, sooth I did not,” said the Tinker. “What is his name?”

“Why, that was Robin Hood himself!” cried the host, and he roared with laughter, which was echoed by all the inn servants.

The Tinker stared at them stupidly, his mouth fallen wide open.

“Robin Hood!” he repeated, gasping like a fish out of water.

“Ay, and methinks when he first met thee, he meant thee little good,” said the host of the Saracen’s Head.

The Tinker grew red with rage.

“Had I known it was he,” he muttered, “one of us should have tried our strength and paid full dear for that warrant. Meantime I must away. I’ll abide here no longer, but go seek him out.”

“Tarry a little!” said the host, laying a restraining hand on his shoulder. “First pay thy reckoning!”

The Tinker turned pale.

“What have I to pay?” he moaned, seeking frantically meanwhile in his pockets for the purse which was at that moment reposing safely in the host’s till.

“Just ten shillings,” said the host calmly.

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“Take but my working bag and my good hammer,” implored the Tinker, thrusting both into the host’s hands as he spoke. “Take them for surety. I swear I will come again and pay thee. Leave me, I pray thee, but my crabtree staff!” and he clutched it viciously as he spoke. “If I but light on the knave, I’ll pay thee without delay!”

The host hesitated; but he knew that the Tinker’s purse was already his; and he was curious to see what would happen next. Besides, the bag of tools was of considerable value.

“Be it so!” he answered, with apparent reluctance. “No doubt thou wilt find him in the greenwood, killing deer.”

So the Tinker went forth from the inn, flourishing his crabtree staff, and breathing forth threatenings and vengeance against Robin Hood. He had quite slept off his drunkenness, and he strode along at so rapid a pace that it was not long before he reached Sherwood. In a glade near the edge of the forest, he saw a familiar figure, with bow bent, ready to shoot a deer.

“Fie upon thee, thou naughty fellow!” cried the Tinker furiously; and with that, he strode up to Robin, flourishing his crabtree staff.

The noise of his approach startled the deer, and it bounded lightly away. Robin turned towards him frowning.

“What knave is this that doth come so near me to spoil my good hunting?” he said sternly.

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“No knave am I, no knave at all,” said the Tinker furiously. “That thou shalt soon know. My crabtree staff shall show thee speedily which of us hath done most wrong.”

“So be it!” said Robin shortly, for he was out of temper at the loss of his deer. He drew his sword without more ado.

Then the Tinker flourished his crabtree staff, and began to lay on so lustily that Robin at length reeled under his blows. He was furious that so stupid a knave should even so far overcome him, and he began to fight with his full strength. The Tinker, however, was vigorous and lusty, and Robin was not so skilful with either sword or staff as he was with the bow. At last the Tinker had thrashed him so sorely that Robin was perforce obliged to cry out:

“A boon, a boon!”

“Before I grant thee a boon,” replied the Tinker, who now had the best of the situation, and knew it, “before I grant thee a boon, I’ll hang thee on this tree!”

“Suffer me at least to blow my horn!” said Robin, quickly suiting the action to the words, and without more ado, he wound his bugle thrice, as was his custom in summoning his men. Presently there came striding towards them Little John and Will Scarlet. Robin, sorely wounded, had staggered to the bank and sunk down upon it.

“What is the matter,” cried Little John anx-

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iously, "that thou dost sit there so droopingly, master?"

Robin smiled ruefully.

"Yon Tinker," quoth he, "hath caused me to feel the weight of his arm."

"I'll see what he can do for me!" observed Little John baring his sword threateningly.

"Nay," said Robin. "I deserved all that he hath given me. I played a sorry jest on thee, poor fellow," he went on, addressing the Tinker. "Now that thou hast had satisfaction, dost think thou canst henceforth live at peace with me? Thou hast shown thy mettle, and hast caused Robin Hood to fear thee. If thou wilt be one of my merry men, we'll fare together, and whatsoever we do get, thou shalt have thy full share of. To thee, thou jovial Tinker, I'll give one hundred pounds a year, as long as thou dost live. Art content?"

The Tinker gasped and nodded. He looked very foolish with his snub nose and his open mouth, but he had proved himself a man well worthy to be one of Robin's men.

That night a messenger was sent to the inn at Nottingham to get the Tinker's bag of tools and to pay his reckoning. His purse was restored to him untouched. So all the pots and pans used by Nick Much the cook were kept in order thereafter, and Robin had turned an enemy into a friend.

XVI

HOW ROBIN OUTWITTED THE
BISHOP

*Come, gentlemen all, and listen awhile,
And a story to you I'll unfold;
I'll tell you how Robin Hood served the Bishop,
When he robbed him of his gold.*

XVI

HOW ROBIN OUTWITTED THE BISHOP

“SWEETHEART,” said Robin to Marian one morning, “we are to have noble company at dinner to-night. Do thou and Ellen prank yourselves in gay attire.”

Marian smiled at him a little anxiously.

“Who is it to be, Robin?” she said. “Oh, dearest, see that thou go not too far in thy noble scorn of the rich and the oppressor!”

Robin kissed her.

“Fear not, beloved,” he said. “’Tis the Bishop of Hereford is to dine with us to-day, although as yet he knows it not,” he added chuckling. “I hear he is to pass through Sherwood with all his fair company.”

Marian shook her head even while she smiled.

“Ah, Robin,” she said, “when thou dost so love the Church, I can never understand why thou art so harsh to the servants of the Church.”

“Nay,” answered Robin gently, “I am not harsh to all of them. Thou knowest well, Marian, that all the poor and lowly parish priests, those who live such a life as Our Lord commanded,—such men love me, and pray for my welfare. As for those

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whited sepulchres, the fat Bishops and pursy Abbots, who lead lives devoted only to oppressing the humble and indulging themselves,—them will I tease and harry until I shall have awakened them for a time at least from their sleek worldliness. Would that England were rid of them all! Ntheless their day will come, their day will come!”

Marian sighed, but said no more, for she knew that Robin spoke truly.

“We go now to kill venison for the Bishop’s dinner,” Robin continued. “Wilt come hunting with us, sweet, or rest in thy bower?”

“Nay, Ellen and I will make ready for our guest,” Marian answered smiling; “we must array us in our best since thou dost wish us to be so fine! Farewell, Robin, and good hunting!” and off she went in search of Alan a Dale’s pretty wife.

Then Robin called together some half dozen of his men, and they killed a fat buck in short order. Then they dressed themselves in shepherds’ smocks, and built a fire beside the road along which the Bishop and his train were expected.

When at length, with a great jingling of spurs and clattering of hoofs, the Bishop and his attendants came riding along the highway, they saw seven tall shepherds gathered around a roaring fire, near which lay a fat buck all ready for roasting.

“Oh, what is the matter,” the Bishop called to them rebukingly, “that ye make this ado? Why do ye kill the King’s venison, ye naughty men?”

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“We are shepherds, my Lord Bishop,” replied Robin, meekly pulling his forelock in token of respect. “We keep sheep all the year, and this is our holiday; so we have killed a deer. The King hath many deer, methinks, and can well spare one to us poor silly shepherds.”

“You are brave fellows!” said the Bishop sneeringly. “The King shall know of your doings, believe me! Make haste and go along with me, for at once ye shall go before the King.”

“Oh, pardon, I pray you, my Lord Bishop!” cried Robin, wringing his hands and apparently in great distress. “Have mercy upon us! It becomes not your Lordship’s coat to rob so many poor men of their lives!”

“No pardon!” said the Bishop sternly. “Come along with me, and before the King for judgment ye shall surely go.”

Then Robin set his back against a tree, and from underneath his shepherd’s cloak, he drew his horn. He blew a loud blast, and the Bishop, sitting on his steed, saw in a trice three score and ten men running towards him from among the trees and rising from the moss. He turned pale at the formidable array.

“What is the matter, master, that thou dost blow so hastily?” quoth one giant of seven feet, kneeling to the shepherd beside the tree, as did all the other merry men.

“Here is the Bishop of Hereford,” answered

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Robin; "and he says that we shall have no pardon for killing this deer."

"Oh, he!" said Little John casually, throwing a careless glance at the Bishop, and rising as he spoke. "Let us cut off his head, master, and throw him into his grave!"

The Bishop's teeth began to chatter.

"Oh, pardon, pardon!" he cried abjectly, his tone entirely changed. "If I had known you were here, Robin Hood, I would surely have gone some other way."

"Good sooth, I know that right well!" cried Robin, shaking with laughter. "No pardon, no pardon, my Lord Bishop!" and he mocked the Bishop's former manner. "Make haste and come along with me, for you are to dine with me to-day."

Then he sprang forward, helped the Bishop down from his horse, and began to lead him along the forest path. His followers went also, guarded by Robin's men, and like the Bishop shaking in their shoes.

When at length the Bishop came to the great oak tree, Robin's favorite trysting place, he grew calmer. Marian, dark and slender, and Ellen, fair and round, greeted him with gentle courtesy; and he could not help feeling that nothing very evil could happen to him in the presence of these two lovely women. He enjoyed in spite of himself the noble feast that followed on the fat deer that Robin and his men had killed. There was plenty of white

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bread, too, and wine and ale. Despite the excellence of the dinner, however, the Bishop was uneasy; for he had heard enough of Robin to know that he was unfriendly towards ecclesiastics of his Lordship's kind.

"Call in the reckoning," he said pompously at length, when the feast was nearly over. "Methinks it grows wondrous high."

"I must e'en trouble you for your purse, my Lord Bishop," said Little John cheerfully, "and then I can tell you better what the reckoning is." He held out his huge paw suggestively.

The Bishop glared at him, but he was afraid to refuse. He handed over, sulkily enough, the pouch that hung by his side.

Little John, whistling cheerfully the while, shook out its contents into the Bishop's cloak, which he had laid on the greensward for that purpose. A huge pile of gold and silver lay there when he had done so, and he began to count it systematically.

"Three hundred pounds!" he said at last, grinning at the Bishop. "Here is money enough, master," he continued, turning to Robin, "and a goodly sight to see. It makes me in sweet charity with the Bishop, although I know he loves me not."

The Bishop sat glaring hopelessly at the pile of money on the cloak, and clenching and unclenching his fists, as if he longed to use them on Robin Hood and Little John.

"I thank thee for thy reckoning, Lord Bishop!"

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cried Robin, seizing one of the Bishop's unwilling hands, and making him rise. "Now before we let thee go, thou seest we poor sinners are much in need of spiritual consolation. It has been some time since we have heard Mass. Thou shalt sleep in the greenwood to-night, and to-morrow morn thou shalt sing a Mass for us before we let thee go."

The Bishop gave him a look in reply that was simply venomous; but nothing could prevent Robin from doing his will. With great ceremony, he was presently escorted to one of the caves, where he was given a bed of soft moss and a green cloak to cover him. What kind of night he passed, furious and fearful as he was, it is not hard to guess; but very early next morning, he was aroused from his uneasy slumbers, and led with great ceremony to the rural altar, where Friar Tuck stood waiting to act as Server. He was given a cave near by in which to vest himself, and when he came out, he found a great congregation of outlaws waiting with Marian and Ellen in their midst. So, unwillingly he celebrated Mass, and then at last they let him go.

As a parting jest, they set him face backwards on his horse, and tied him into the saddle. In this fashion the Bishop rode back to Hereford, breathing out threatenings and vengeance against Robin Hood.

Turn about is fair play, however, and Robin himself would have been the first to agree to this. Not many days after, Robin was walking alone through

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the forest, and again he saw the Bishop and his train.

“What shall I do,” he said to himself, “if the Bishop takes me? No mercy he’ll show me, I know, and likely I shall be hanged. Since I am alone, I could ill defend myself if he chances to see me.”

Then he looked about him and saw a little brown house, wherein dwelt, he knew, an old wife to whom he had shown various kindnesses in the past.

“She will hide me, I am sure,” said Robin to himself; and he strode briskly up to the little house, and knocked on the door.

“Ho, good wife!” he cried. “Wilt save a poor fellow from death?”

The door opened cautiously, and a little old woman stood on the threshold.

“God have mercy!” she cried, blinking at him. “’Tis our own Robin, friend of the poor! Come in, master. What is your will?”

“The Bishop and all his men are near,” Robin whispered, bending down to her; “and if I am taken, I shall be surely hanged.”

“Nay, then, God forbid!” quoth the old dame. “I’ll provide for thee, dear Robin! Well do I remember one Saturday night, thou didst bring me shoes and hose that I might appear with the best of them at Mass on Sunday. Ay, I’ll hide thee from thy foes. What way is best?”

Robin stripped off his green mantle.

“Give me then thy gown of gray,” he whispered.

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“Take thou my arrows and give me thy spindle—thus. I thank thee. Farewell, good mother, until I see thee again;” and presently a bent little old woman in a brown cloak, her head bent over a spindle, passed directly by the Bishop and his train as they rode along, and she dropped a humble curtsey to his Lordship, as she went.

A few moments later, Little John saw the same old woman coming towards him.

“Ah, who is this?” he cried. “Methinks I’ll let fly an arrow at her, for she looks marvellously like a witch.”

“Prithee, hold thy hand, Little John,” said Robin’s well-known voice. He bared his head, and stood laughing in his follower’s amazed face. “Again,” he said, “I have outwitted the Bishop. “Come with me, and I will tell thee all.”

Meanwhile the Bishop and his train had ridden up to the door of the little cottage; for some of them had seen a man in a green cloak enter there, and he looked like one of the outlaws against whom the Bishop had sworn vengeance.

“Come, woman,” quoth the Bishop loudly, “hand over that traitor Robin Hood. He was seen to enter thy door!”

When he went in, however, he saw a figure in green with the hood pulled over the face, seated beside the fire. The Bishop’s eyes grew bright with triumph.

“Ha! At last!” he said. “Now, my fine fel-

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low, thou shalt meet with justice at last. Bring hither yon milk white steed."

So the green clad figure, not without resistance, was hoisted on to the white horse, and the Bishop rode through the forest, feasting his eyes on the outlaw who was now in his hands.

Presently, however, as they went along, the Bishop chanced to see a group of men in green standing under a tree near by; and one of them looked strangely familiar.

"How now?" quoth the Bishop, rubbing his eyes. "Who is that yonder?" and he glanced perplexedly from the figure under the tree to the one on the horse just before him.

The one on horseback spoke for the first time.

"Why," said a high, piping old woman's voice, "why, that is Robin Hood."

"Robin Hood!" echoed the Bishop, his jaw dropping. "Who then art thou?"

She gave a cackle of shrill laughter.

"Why," she said, "I'm a silly old woman. See!" and she threw back the green hood, and showed her wrinkled face and her gray hair.

"Woe is me that ever I saw this day!" cried the Bishop. "Let her go, my men, and look ye tell nobody what a fool she hath made of me! Curses on both thee and him!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist, first at the old woman and then at Robin's distant figure. "Curses on ye both! I'll have him yet!"

XVII

HOW ROBIN BECAME THE QUEEN'S
ARCHER

*Now list you, lythe you, gentlemen,
Awhile for a little space,
And I shall tell you how the Queen
Got Robin Hood his grace.*

XVII

HOW ROBIN BECAME THE QUEEN'S ARCHER

“HA! what fine sprig have we here?” quoth Robin, coming to a sudden pause in his rapid walk, and peering through the trees towards the path. “So! the boy is in danger, and he knows it not. That toy bow of his is useless, and the sword he clutches so valiantly is little better against that stag who lowers horns at him in such threatening guise.” And with that Robin dispatched an arrow from his own bow which pierced the stag through the heart. Then he parted the bushes and walked forward.

A boy gayly dressed, half sitting, half lying on the moss, looked up at Robin coolly.

“I thank thee,” he said in a tone that was almost condescending. “I am a page at court, and not skilled in woodland lore. The stag tossed me once. I fear that the second time ——”

“The second time, it would have mattered little to thee had he tossed thee a third,” said Robin, helping the boy to his feet. “What seekest thou here in the forest, sir page? Can I be of service?”

“Knowest thou Robin Hood?” asked the boy eagerly. “Methinks thou must be one of his band.” He bared his young head. “I am sent to seek him,”

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he said, "by no less a person than the Queen's Majesty."

Robin doffed his hood of forest green at mention of the Queen's name.

"Welcome then, young sir, whosoever thou mayest be," he said. "I am Robin Hood."

"Art thou indeed Robin Hood?" cried the boy eagerly. "Well, then, my errand is soon accomplished. The Queen sends thee this ring, and with it a royal message;" and falling on his knees he whipped a letter out of his pocket and presented it to Robin.

The letter was wrapped in scarlet cord, and sealed with the royal seal. Robin pressed it reverently to his lips before he opened it.

"She bids me here to come to court, as no doubt thou knowest, sir page," he said at length, thrusting the missive into his doublet. "She bids me although I am outlaw to fear nothing, and acknowledges graciously the little sum of money that we took from the King's harbingers, and sent to her ——"

He broke off and stood a moment in deep thought, pushing the Queen's ring absently up and down on his little finger—the only one that it would fit. Then he took off his mantle of Lincoln green, folded it neatly, and gave it to the page.

"Give this to Her Majesty," he said, "and tell her it is a token that I will not fail her. What is thy name, sir page?"

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“Richard Patrington,” answered the youngster.

“Welcome then to Sherwood, Richard Patrington,” said Robin. “Wilt stay and dine with me to-night?”

“Nay,” answered the page, “I may not tarry. I will bear back at once to the Queen thy token and thy answer.”

“I will give thee then safe conduct through the forest,” said Robin. “Those court weapons of thine were of little avail in real danger, as thou hast proved.”

Accordingly he escorted the little page to the end of the forest, and having seen him safely on the highway, went striding back to his trysting tree to summon his men and tell them of the Queen’s summons.

He found Marian seated under the tree, examining her arrows; and when she heard the news she turned pale.

“It may be a trick,” she said. “Oh, dear heart, I am uneasy when thou dost venture into Nottingham! What shall I feel when thou art gone to London?”

“Nay, if thou wilt,” answered Robin gayly, “thou shalt go with me as one of the Queen’s archers. Nay, fear not, dearest! The Queen gives me safe conduct, and it is to her interest that she should not play us false. Now will I summon my men, and tell them what journey lies before us.” He lifted his bugle to his lips.

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As usual the merry men came running in response to his summons, and when he had read them the Queen's letter there was a great shout of joy, and they began at once to get ready for their journey to London. Garments were freshened up and new ones made; swords and arrows were sharpened, and bows restrung. Robin himself chose a doublet and hose of scarlet; but his men wore their usual Lincoln green. So at last, one pleasant summer day, they all set out for London, Robin wearing the Queen's ring and carrying her letter in his bosom.

Their journey to London was a long one, for there were no fine roads as now to make travelling easy. When they arrived at last, Robin sent the ring to the Queen, and it was not long before he was summoned to her presence.

"God save thee, fair Queen, and all thy following!" he said, kneeling in knightly fashion to kiss her hand.

"Thou art welcome, Robin, with thy gallant yeomen," said the Queen; "and now I will tell thee why I have summoned thee hither. To-morrow, on St. George's Day, the King holds an archery contest on Finsbury Field ——"

The sun shone brightly on Finsbury Field, where the royal archery contest was to be held. It was a much larger field than the one at Nottingham, and of course, the dais on which the King and Queen sat

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was much handsomer and more beautifully decorated than the one that the Sheriff and his wife occupied on such occasions. The King's archers were grouped together near the royal seat, and another cluster of men in green with one in scarlet stood on the Queen's side of the dais.

"Come hither, Tepus, my good bow-bearer," said the King. "Now measure out for me how long our mark shall be."

"What is the wager on this shooting?" asked the Queen, as Tepus obediently took the line and began to measure the distance for the targets.

"Three hundred tuns of Rhenish wine and the same of beer," answered the King. "Three hundred of the fattest harts that run on Dallom Lea I add also to this princely wager; but I can afford to be generous, for I have no doubt that my archers will win for me."

Then spoke another of the King's archers, Clifton by name.

"Measure no mark at all for us, most sovereign liege," he said. "Let us shoot at sun and moon!"

The King smiled, well pleased at these brave words.

"Nay," said Tepus scornfully in reply to Clifton, for the two were rivals. "'Twill be sufficient to use fifteen score for our distance instead of shooting at sun and moon!"

"I'll lay my bow then," cried Clifton boastfully, "that I'll cleave the willow wand!"

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Then the shooting began, and it was good shooting indeed that was done by the King's archers. The King smiled proudly at their feats, and when at last all had taken a turn, he looked at the Queen.

"Is the wager mine without more ado, after this noble shooting, my Queen?" he said.

The Queen rose and fell on her knees before him.

"A boon!" she cried. "A boon, my liege! Thou didst promise me when thou didst plan this contest that I might select for myself against thine archers men from out all England. So have I done, and they await their turn to try their skill."

The King somewhat frowningly looked at the little group of men in green surrounding their scarlet-clad leader.

"Be it so," he said at length rather ungraciously. "Natheless I know that having chosen the best out of all England the wager will yet go to my archers."

"That is to be proved," answered the Queen gently; and with the words she went back to her place. "Ah!" she cried, looking around her at the courtiers on the dais. "Now who will be on my side? Sir Richard of the Lea, thou full good knight, thou wilt be of my party, I know. And the Bishop of Hereford ——"

"Nay," answered the Bishop hastily, for he had recognized the man in scarlet. "I am sorry, Your Majesty, but I will not bet one penny on yon men of thine ——"

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“What wilt thou bet against us, my Lord Bishop?” asked the man in scarlet, speaking for the first time.

“By my silver mitre,” said the Bishop, “I will wager all the money in my purse, and that is fifteen score nobles, nearly a hundred pounds.”

Then the man in scarlet and his followers in green began to shoot on the Queen’s side.

Robin Hood himself began. Clifton had carried out his boast, and had cleft the willow wand. His arrow was still quivering where he had left it in his noble shot. Robin aimed with his usual apparent carelessness, and cleft Clifton’s arrow. A mighty shout of admiration went up from those who looked on.

Then Nick Much did not much worse than his master, for his arrow came within a finger’s length of the wand. Will Scarlet cleft the wand as deftly as Clifton had done. So it chanced that Robin and his men surpassed the King’s archers.

“Now, Bishop, beware thy purse!” cried Robin, smiling; and then amidst the shouts of the people, the Queen rose and again knelt before the King.

“A boon! A boon!” she cried once more. “It is that you will be angry with none of these my archers, since the contest has been fairly carried on.”

The King was ill-pleased at his defeat, but he had his share of royal generosity.

“They shall have forty days to come, and forty

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to go," he replied to the Queen's petition; "ay, and three times forty to sport and play here at the court. Welcome are they, whether friend or foe."

"Then welcome, Robin Hood!" cried the Queen in a clear voice, rising and extending her hand to the man in scarlet. "Welcome, too, be thou, Little John; and Will Scarlet and Nick Much, ye are both welcome also! Ye have the King's word for it!"

"Is this indeed Robin Hood?" said the King, and he looked with eager curiosity at the man of whom he had heard so much, but had never seen.

"Ay, this is Robin Hood!" the Bishop muttered between his teeth. "I remember well that Mass thou didst force me to sing!" he continued, glaring at Robin savagely.

"Nay, now, my Lord Bishop," said Robin courteously, "methinks thou shouldst have been glad to give spiritual food to those poor outlaws who needed it so sorely. For me, I thank thee for that Mass; and for recompense, I give thee back half the gold that thou hast just lost on thy wager against us."

"I thank thee for no such thing!" cried the Bishop indignantly. "This is a pretty pass that a man should be paid out of his own money! Give me back that gold thou didst steal from me in the forest!"

"Nay, dear master," quoth Little John, laying a restraining hand on Robin's shoulder. "Be not

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so free to give the Bishop back his wager. We need that gold for gifts to the King's officers. 'Twill well serve both thee and me."

"Take the Bishop's wager, and put it in thy purse," said the King courteously to Robin. "He hath fairly lost, and so have I. If thou wouldst leave thy bold outlaws and come dwell with me, I would say welcome, Robin Hood; for good sooth thou art the flower of archery."

Robin shook his head.

"I would not leave my bold outlaws for all the gold in Christendom," he said. "I will live and die in merry Sherwood, if it be God's will, and have my end as I had my beginning, under the great oak tree that I love so well. Nay, Your Majesty, we cannot be your archers; but"—and turning to the Queen, he bent over the hand that she held out to him, and kissed it—"but when Her Grace lifts but her little finger, I shall be ever at her command!"

XVIII

ROBIN'S MERRY CHASE

*And when the game it ended was,
Bold Robin won it with a grace,
But after the King was angry with him,
And vowed he would him chase.*

XVIII

ROBIN'S MERRY CHASE

DESPITE the royal graciousness with which the King had treated Robin Hood, His Majesty suffered a reaction from his high and generous mood after the outlaw and his men had departed. The King had always prided himself on his archers and their skill, and when he had time to reflect upon the matter, it seemed an almost ludicrous thing that Robin Hood and his men should outwit the royal archers. The more the King thought about it, the angrier he became; and so at last he decided to go himself to see what he could do in person, since the Sheriff was apparently helpless. So one fine day the King and all his train appeared in Nottingham, and put the whole town in a flutter of excitement.

The morning after his arrival the King called together all the important men of the town with the Sheriff at their head, and said with a frown:

“Come now, let me see who can find me bold Robin Hood!”

“May it please Your Majesty,” quoth the Sheriff, “Robin Hood is in the forest.”

“How is it then,” said the King, “that he con-

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tinues to elude capture? Here be ye, good men and true. How is it ye let this man escape justice so long?"

The men of Nottingham sighed deeply, but made no reply.

"He must be captured!" quoth the King, bringing down the royal fist with a mighty bang on the table by which he sat. "Go about it forthwith, prithee."

Then the citizens of Nottingham looked glum indeed, but there was no disputing the royal command; so they left the King's presence, shaking their heads and murmuring sadly among themselves.

Somehow, in some way, word of this conference was brought to Robin where he sat under the oak tree with Little John. When the two merry men heard of the King's command, I regret to say that first of all they roared with laughter.

"'Tis time to be gone, master, and seek some other place," said Little John, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "Now where shall we go this time to escape our dear Sheriff?"

"Suppose we try Yorkshire," said Robin, looking like anything but a man under the King's displeasure, as he sat beneath the oak tree, leisurely stringing his bow. "Ay, Yorkshire let it be! We have been in Sherwood overlong, methinks, and travel is good for a man. We will to Yorkshire!" and with that he lifted his horn to his lips and blew

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three blasts to summon his merry men and tell them of the jaunt that lay before them.

Doubtless it would have infuriated both the Sheriff and the King to see how lightly the outlaws of Sherwood received the news of the chase that His Majesty was beginning against them. When they heard of it the forest rang with their merriment.

“So we are to hie us to Yorkshire!” observed Friar Tuck. “Well, I have never travelled much and I shall be pleased if we go even farther than Yorkshire.”

“Mayhap we shall,” said Robin. “I wonder whether the Queen’s gracious Majesty knoweth of this plot against us. I cannot think it, so sweet and kind was she to us in London.”

Then was there a great hurry and scurry in Sherwood as the men made ready for their journey. Maid Marian and Fair Ellen both dressed in boy’s attire since it was safer for travelling. The same day that word had been brought to Robin of the King’s intentions against him he and his merry men hied them away from the greenwood.

When the King and his followers with the Sheriff and his men arrived in the forest, there was no trace of the outlaws save the scattered embers of a great fire, and the dismantled ruins of Marian’s bower. The caves in which most of the outlaws dwelt were so cunningly hidden by clustering vines that the men from Nottingham did not discover them at all. This was well for Robin and his followers, for in

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these places most of the treasures of the band were hidden.

Scarcely had they returned to Nottingham when word was brought to the King whither Robin and his men had gone. So with a great noise and bustle, into Yorkshire the King went, only to learn that the outlaws had gone to Newcastle. Thither, too, went the King, breathing forth threatenings and vengeance, only to hear that after staying for two or three hours in Newcastle, Robin had gone to Berwick.

Then was the King sorely vexed; and if he had succeeded in laying hands on Robin, the outlaw would have fared ill indeed.

“I shall follow this saucy fellow,” roared the King, “and ne'er give o'er until I have taken him.”

Meanwhile, Robin and his men were in high glee at the way they were leading their pursuers so merry a chase.

“Come now, let's away!” cried Little John. “Let any man follow that dare! We'll go to Carlisle and then to Lancaster.”

So they did, the King following, and then to Chester. Here Robin was seized with a brilliant idea.

“Come,” he said, “let us go to London to see our noble Queen. It may be that she wants our company, and the King is jealous of us, and that is why he chases us so sore.”

So on a day it chanced that Robin came once

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more to London, and sought the Queen as she sat alone in her palace. When he reached the royal presence, he fell on his knees before her.

“If it please Your Grace,” quoth he, right impudently it must be confessed, “I am come here to speak with the King.”

The Queen looked at the goodly man kneeling before her in his suit of Lincoln green that so well became him, and she said:

“The King has gone to Sherwood, Robin, and when he went he said to me that he had gone to seek thee.”

“Then farewell, my gracious Queen,” quoth Robin with a twinkle in his eyes; “I will hie me apace to Sherwood, for fain would I see what he desires of me if I could but meet with His Majesty.”

Without more ado, he departed from London, and it chanced that the same day the King came home again, very weary and much vexed in mind. When the Queen told him that Robin had been at the court, he gnashed his teeth and cursed his fortune.

“You are welcome home, my sovereign liege,” said the Queen. “Bold Robin Hood, that good archer, hath been here to seek you.”

“He’s a cunning knave,” said the King between his teeth. “I have sought him these three weeks, and all in vain.”

The Queen was silent for a moment. Robin had

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been a good friend to her on more than one occasion, but it took courage to do what she had in mind in the King's present angry mood. At length, however, she rose, and bent her knee to her husband.

“A boon, a boon, Your Grace!” she cried. “It was through me he came to London first. Prithee pardon his life, and let there be no more turmoil regarding him.”

The King sighed, but he was very weary from his merry chase of Robin Hood and his men.

“So be it!” he said graciously, and his brow cleared as he spoke, for he realized that the Queen was making it much easier for him than if he had had to confess that he had failed in his best efforts to capture Robin. “For your sake, my Queen——”

If the Queen smiled to herself at his words as she bent to kiss his hand, no one was the wiser.

XIX

HOW ROBIN WON THE FORESTERS

*And as they walked the forest along,
Upon a midsummer day,
There were they aware of three keepers,
Clad all in green array.*

XIX

HOW ROBIN WON THE FORESTERS

THE sun had melted the icicles of winter, and likewise the mountains of snow, and once more Robin Hood and his men could frolic abroad. One day Robin and Will Scarlet and Little John went walking along to see some pastime; and as they walked they were aware of three of the King's keepers, all clad in green with long swords by their sides, coming towards them. It was the business of the King's keepers to guard the King's deer; and when they saw the three outlaws they called on them boldly to stand.

"Whither away so fast, friends?" they cried.

"We are going," quoth Robin, "to kill a fat buck for me and all my merry men. Besides, ere we depart, we shall have a fat doe also."

"You'd best have a care," said one of the other group threateningly.

"Why, who are you that speak so boldly here?" cried Robin.

"We belong to the King," answered one of the men, "and we are keepers of his deer. Before you shoot, we shall forbid it."

"Nay, I am sure that is not so," responded Robin solemnly. "These many long summers have we

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let fly our arrows here where freely we range. Why then should you have more power than have we? This forest I think is mine and so are the nimble deer. I swear we'll not be cowed by you. We three and not you are keepers of this forest, and now ye shall know it. Lay down your coats of green on the ground, and so will we, all three of us; then take your swords and bucklers, and we'll try who shall win the victory."

"We be content," answered one of the keepers. "We be three, and so be you, no less. Why should we be afraid of you since we have done no wrong?"

"Why, if you be three keepers in this forest," answered Robin, "we be three rangers; and we'll make you know shortly you have met with Robin Hood."

"We be content, thou bold outlaw," answered another of the keepers, "to try our valor. We will make you know we will fight before we will fly. Then draw your swords and stand there prating no longer. Let us try it out with blows, for we hate all cowards. One of us will fight Will Scarlet, and another, Little John. I myself am for you, Robin, because you are so stout and strong."

"Well said!" said Robin cheerily; and Little John and Will Scarlet echoed his words, for they all loved gallant foes. Then without more ado, they fell to it full hard and sore. The very first blow that Robin received from his forester, the fellow's broad weapon cried twang, and Robin fell down

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from the mighty whack as if he were dead. Presently, however, he recovered himself and bravely fell to it again.

From eight o'clock in the morning until past two they bore themselves right gallantly. By that time Robin and Will and Little John were thoroughly winded. Robin cried out pantingly:

“O hold, O hold, I see you be stout men! Let me blow one blast on my bugle ere I fight further with you.”

“Nay,” said one of the foresters, all of whom seemed as fresh as when the combat had begun. “Thy bugle blast was not in the bargain, and we deny it thee. Think not, nathless, that a blast on thy bugle can make us either fight or flee. Fall to once more, or else be gone, and yield us the day. It shall never be said that we were afraid of thee nor of thy gay yeomen.”

“If that be so,” cried Robin, “let me but know your names, and in Sherwood Forest they shall be extolled.”

“What hast thou to do with our names?” said another of the foresters scornfully. “Except ye will all fight it out, thou shalt not know our names.”

“We will fight no more,” said Robin in a decisive tone. “Ye be men of stout valor. It is enough. Ever after we shall be brethren, for I love with heart and hand those men who will fight and never flee. Thou art fit to be yeomen for me, and range

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in the merry greenwood. Come, I'll give you each a ring in token of love, for you've acted your parts right bravely. Now will I summon the rest of my men to welcome you."

With that he set his horn to his lips and blew a blast; and presently a hundred yeomen came running with their trusty bows. They were gloriously dressed in green and were a noble sight.

"Lo, here are my yeomen," quoth Robin to the foresters; "and ye shall be of them. A mantle, a bow and a quiver shall each of you receive."

The foresters listened right willingly and assented to Robin's proposal. Then they all went shooting together and secured a fine fat doe for their supper that night.

What singing and dancing was there in the greenwood then for joy that three good comrades were added to the merry band! They spent the night in mirth and merriment, with much to eat and drink, and the foresters thought they had never in all their lives been so merry. Then each received from Robin a green mantle, and broad arrows and a curious long bow; and the next day he made them stand all in a row before him, and looked at them with pride.

"My brave yeomen," he said, "be true to your trust while we range these wide woods!"

Then with one voice the King's late foresters swore that they would conquer or die by the side of Robin Hood.

XX

HOW ROBIN RESCUED THREE
SQUIRES

*What news, what news, thou silly old woman,
What news hast thou for me?
Said she, There's three squires in Nottingham town,
To-day is condemned to die.*

XX

HOW ROBIN RESCUED THREE SQUIRES

IT was in that merriest month of all, the merry month of May, that Robin, striding towards Nottingham, saw a sight which made him pause. A little bent old woman, clad in humble attire, was seated by the roadside, weeping bitterly.

Robin stooped over her, and gave her a comforting pat on the shoulder.

“What news, dame?” quoth he. “What news hast thou to tell me?”

“Alack, sir ——” she began, raising her head; then when she saw who it was that stood beside her, she looked much happier. “Ah!” she cried. “’Tis the poor man’s friend, Robin Hood.”

“I thank thee for that title, good dame,” Robin answered gravely. “Now tell me whether there is any way in which I may further deserve it.”

“Perchance,” she said, looking up at him with tear-filled eyes, her hands wringing themselves together the while. “Perchance thou canst help those poor souls who are condemned to die this day in Nottingham.”

Robin stood a moment in deep thought.

“I will indeed do my best to aid them if they are unjustly condemned,” he said at last. “Tell me,

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dame, what is their crime? Have they burnt parishes or slain priests, or led evil lives?"

"Nay, nay, none of these things!" cried the old woman shaking her head with emphasis. "They have borne long bows for thee, and have slain the King's deer."

"What! Three of mine own men in danger!" cried Robin, instinctively clapping his hand on his sword. "Old woman, why didst thou not say at once who they are? By the truth of my body, they shall be rescued, and that speedily."

He left the old woman where she sat by the way-side, and ran fleetly on towards Nottingham, forming a plan in his mind as he went. He could not enter Nottingham dressed as he was in his own forest garb of green. If he did so, it would be only to court capture, and if he were taken he could neither rescue his three men nor help himself. He must have a disguise; and as he neared the town, he walked more slowly, scanning the passers-by as he went.

Just as he entered the town, he saw a ragged palmer.

"What news?" Robin called out to him cheerily.

"Three squires are condemned to die in Nottingham to-day," replied the palmer sorrowfully.

"And wouldst like to help to save these gallant men?" asked Robin in a low voice, standing close beside him.

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The palmer stared in astonishment, but answered readily, "Ay."

"Come change thy apparel with me then," said Robin; "and I will give thee this good suit and cloak of mine, and forty shillings in silver here in my purse beside."

The palmer stared at him with open mouth.

"Thou canst not be in earnest," he said at last. "Thine apparel is good, and mine is ragged and bare. Shame on thee! Wherever thou dost go, wherever thou dost ride, laugh not an old man to scorn!"

"Nay, I jest not," said Robin, glancing about him apprehensively. "Bandy no further words with me, old man, but come change thy apparel with me. Here are twenty pieces of good broad gold. Go feast thy brethren with wine."

The sight of the gold made the palmer's eyes glisten. He made no further objections to the exchange, and it was speedily effected. Robin put on the old man's hat, which stood very high in the crown; his cloak, patched with black, blue and red; next his breeches, also much patched; and finally his hose, which were one mass of patches.

"By the truth of my body," said Robin, chuckling as he surveyed himself, "I'd laugh if I had my desire!"

Then he put on the palmer's shoes, also patched both above and below; and it is doubtful if Robin's own mother would have known the identity of the

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ragged, dirty figure that shuffled on through the streets of Nottingham. He went along, no one recognizing him, until he met the Sheriff, hurrying as fast as he could go.

“O God save you, Master Sheriff!” said Robin, in a high, tremulous voice. “What will you give a silly old man to be your hangman to-day?”

The Sheriff looked at him with condescension, not guessing for a moment that it was Robin Hood who stood before him.

“Some suits I’ll give thee,” he said. “Good sooth, thou dost need them badly enough, methinks. Ay, I will give some suits and thirteen pence to-day as a hangman’s fee.”

“It is well!” quoth Robin; and turning away, he hobbled along so rapidly that the Sheriff looked after him in astonishment.

“By the truth of my body,” quoth the Sheriff, puffing after him as fast as his bulky body would allow, “that’s well jumped, thou nimble old man!”

At length they reached the place of execution, and Robin and the Sheriff stood side by side.

Suddenly Robin spoke out loudly in his own voice.

“I was never a hangman in all my life,” he said, “nor do I intend to be. Curst be he, say I, who was first made a hangman! Listen, Sheriff,” he went on, turning to the latter, who stood staring at him almost petrified with astonishment, “I’ve bags here, seest thou,” and he fingered them over rapidly, “a

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bag for meal and a bag for malt, and a bag for barley and corn, a bag for bread and a bag for beef, and one," he held it up lovingly, "one for my little bugle. 'Tis a horn I got from Robin Hood, and for thee it blows little good, Sheriff. Shall I wind it?"

The Sheriff looked at him angry and apprehensive. He did not yet recognize Robin, but he felt that danger of some sort was brewing.

"O thou proud fellow, wind thy horn!" he answered defiantly. "Wind thy horn, and let happen what may! I wish that thou wouldst blow such a blast that both thine eyes fall out!"

Robin laughed lightly at this pleasant wish, and set his bugle to his lips. At the first blast, a hundred and fifty of his men came riding furiously over the hill towards Nottingham. He blew the second time, and sixty more came running over the plain.

"Now who are you," cried the Sheriff, fairly foaming with rage, "who are you that come tripping over the lea?"

"They are my attendants, come to pay thee a visit, Sheriff!" quoth Robin, smiling, as he took off his hood and showed his face to the Sheriff. "Take the gallows, my men, and set it over yonder."

No sooner said than done. Some score of the merry men took down the gallows much more quickly than it had gone up, and set it over in a glen not far from the place of execution.

The Sheriff saw he was at Robin's mercy, and he abjectly held up his hands.

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“Ask, good Robin, and thou shalt receive,” he said imploringly, “whether it be house or land.”

“Nay,” quoth Robin, “I will have neither house nor land. I wish neither gold nor fee. I will have these squires to go with me back to the greenwood.”

“Marry now, God forbid that this should be!” said the Sheriff. “They are the King’s felons, condemned to die.”

“Grant me my asking,” said Robin sternly, “or by the faith of my body, thou shalt be the first man that shall flower on yonder gallows tree!”

The Sheriff looked at the long lines of Robin’s men, and knew that he was helpless. Silent, but with a face like thunder, he watched the outlaws cut the bonds of the three squires, and set them on horses, each in front of a comrade. Then Robin, all in the palmer’s rags as he was, gayly mounted a horse that Little John had brought for him, and rode away at the head of his men to Sherwood.

XXI

**HOW GAMBLE GOLD CAME TO
SHERWOOD**

*I am Gamble Gold of the gay green woods,
And travelled far beyond the sea;
For killing a man in my father's land,
From my country I was forced to flee.*

XXI

HOW GAMBLE GOLD CAME TO SHERWOOD

THERE chanced to be a Pedlar bold who rolled his pack on his shoulder and came tripping down the lea towards Sherwood Forest. On the way he met two troublesome blades whose names he did not know; but they were Robin Hood and Little John.

“O Pedlar, Pedlar, what is in thy pack?” Little John inquired with a great show of interest. “Come speedily and tell me.”

“I’ve several suits of gay green silk,” the Pedlar replied rather sulkily; “and two or three silver bowstrings, if ye must know.”

“Nay, then,” cried Little John, “if thou hast several suits of gay green silk and two or three silver bowstrings, then by my body one-half of thy pack shall belong to me.”

“O nay, O nay,” began the Pedlar defensively, backing away from the two tall yeomen as he spoke. “That never can be. There is no man from fair Nottingham who can take one-half of my pack.”

With that he pulled off his pack and put it a little below his knee.

“If ye move me one perch from this,” he said, “my pack and all shall go with you.”

Little John drew his sword, the Pedlar still

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standing by his pack. Robin waited grinning. Then Little John and the Pedlar began to fight. Little John at first fought with small effort, expecting an easy victory; but so well did the Pedlar stand his ground that at last, much to Little John's chagrin, he was obliged to cry, "Pedlar, pray hold your hand!"

At that Robin threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"I could find a man of a smaller scale, methinks," he said, "who could thrash the Pedlar and thee also."

"Go thou and try then, master," quoth Little John furiously, holding his hand meanwhile to a bleeding cut on his head. "Go thou and try most speedily; or I am right sure thou wilt not know me this night."

Then Robin drew his sword, the Pedlar still standing by his pack, and they fought together till the blood flowed in streams, and Robin in his turn cried, "Pedlar, pray hold thine hand!"

Then Robin and Little John stanch'd each other's wounds, laughing somewhat ruefully; and all the while the Pedlar stood still by his pack.

"Pedlar," said Robin at last, turning to him, "Pedlar, what is thy name? Come speedily and tell me."

"My name!" repeated the Pedlar scornfully. "My name I never will tell until ye have both told me your names."

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“Well, that is speedily done,” quoth Robin cheerily. “I am Robin Hood, and this is my trusty man, Little John.”

“Now,” said the Pedlar, apparently unimpressed, “it lies within my will whether my name I choose to tell thee. Natheless I will do so. I am Gamble Gold of the gay greenwood, and I have travelled in many lands. Because I killed a man I was forced to flee.”

Robin looked at him in great astonishment.

“Gamble Gold!” he repeated. “Nay, then, if thou art Gamble Gold thou art no other than my own cousin. Often have I heard of thee and how thou wert forced to flee. Sherwood must henceforth be thy home.”

Gamble Gold gave a cry of joy and sheathed his sword. Leaving his pack unheeded on the ground, he ran forward and embraced Robin right heartily.

After that they all three went to Nottingham and at the inn there they ate and drank together until they became fast friends.

XXII

HOW ROBIN WAS BEATEN BY THE
BEGGAR

*And riding towards fair Nottingham,
Some pastime for to spy,
There was he aware of a jolly beggar
As e'er he beheld with his eye.*

XXII

HOW ROBIN WAS BEATEN BY THE BEGGAR

As Robin came from Bernysdale on a fair evening, he met a beggar striding sturdily along with a great pikestaff in his hand. A patched cloak wrapped him warmly, and around his neck hung his meal-bag, held by a leathern strap with a strong, broad buckle. He had three hats on his head, one inside the other, and he looked, as he strode along, as if he cared nothing for either wind or weather.

Robin accosted him courteously.

“Tarry, my friend,” he said, “tarry and speak with me.”

The Beggar paid no attention to him whatever.

“Nay, then, thou *must* tarry!” said Robin firmly, greatly irritated by the Beggar’s lack of manners; and he put out a detaining hand.

“By my troth,” said the Beggar impudently, “I have no will to tarry. It is far to my lodging-house, and it is growing late. I shall look a fool indeed if they have finished supper ere I come in.”

“Now by my troth,” said Robin in his turn, “thou thinkest much of thy supper, but little of mine. I want my dinner all day long, and know not where to lie. Should I go to the tavern, I shall

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need money. Give me, prithee, or lend me, some until we two meet again."

"I have no money either to give or to lend," answered the Beggar in a crabbed voice. "Thou art as young a man as I am, and seemest as reluctant to part with money. If thou fast until thou gettest alms from me, thou shalt eat none all this year."

Robin was perfectly furious by this time.

"If thou have but a small farthing about thee," he said between his teeth, "I'll have it ere thou go. Lay down thy clouted cloak, therefore, and loose the strings of all thy bags or I'll rip them with my hand. I make vow to thee that if thou dost make a noise, I'll see whether a broad arrow can pierce a beggar's skin."

The Beggar smiled tauntingly and answered:

"Far better let me be!" There was a hint of menace in his manner. "Think not I fear thy little crooked staff! Faith, 'tis about fit for a pudding-stick, no more! I defy thee to do me ill for all thy boisterous threats; but thou'lt get nothing from me but ill shouldst thou seek it forever!"

For answer, Robin bent his bow, and set in it a broad arrow. He was crimson with rage. Before he could shoot, however, the Beggar fetched him so round a blow with his great staff that bow and arrow alike flew to the winds in splintered fragments. Then Robin drew his sword, but that likewise proved vain, for the Beggar fetched him a blow on his right hand that rendered him helpless.

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Robin's heart was sore within him. His hand, now entirely useless, hung at his side. He could neither fight nor flee, and for a moment he found himself speechless. The Beggar laughed in mockery, and in most unsportsmanlike fashion, since it is always contemptible to strike a foe who cannot defend himself, began to cudgel the crippled Robin right lustily. At last, weak and helpless from the hailing blows, the outlaw fell in a swoon.

“Fie!” quoth the Beggar tauntingly. “Stand up, man! 'Tis a shame to go to bed so early! Stay till thou dost get the alms thou didst ask me for! Then take it to the tavern, and buy wine and ale, and make merry with thy friends!”

But poor Robin's ears were deaf now to his taunts. He lay as still as any stone, his cheeks white, his eyes closed. The Beggar grew a little frightened at last, thinking that perhaps he was dead; so the vagabond took to his heels and fled.

Scarcely was he out of sight when three of Robin's merry men happened to stroll that way; Will Stutely, David Doncaster, and Gilbert of the White Hand. Great was their amazement and horror to find their master lying on the ground, apparently either dead or near to death. In much alarm and with many lamentations, they raised him, and strove to recover him, wondering who or what had brought him to this state. They saw no foe in sight, and no wounds, only bruises. At length, after repeated dashes of cold water in his face,

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Robin began to revive. He opened his eyes, and spoke faintly.

“Welcome, dear comrades!” he said falteringly.

“Tell us, dear master, how it stands with you!” cried Will Stutely, tears of relief in his eyes to hear Robin’s voice again.

Robin gave a heavy sigh, and spoke sluggishly because of his weakness.

“Never have I been so hard bested in all the years I have lived in Sherwood!” he groaned. “A beggar with a patched cloak it was who hath so mauled me! He goes o’er yon hill with his hat upon his head. If e’er ye loved me, avenge this deed. Bring him back to me that I may see him punished ere I die!” And Robin groaned again; for he felt very weak and ill, and as if he were indeed near death.

“That will we do, master!” quoth Gilbert of the White Hand. “One of us will remain with thee, and care for thee, since thou art so ill at ease. The other two will bring him back for thee to use as it pleaseth thee best. Come, David, we will go, and let honest Will remain with our master.”

So it was settled, and Gilbert and David started off together.

“Now by my troth,” Robin called after them faintly, “if he get room to wield his staff, I fear me he’ll be too much for ye both.”

“Never fear, our good master!” they answered cheerily. “His staff shall stand him in no stead

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against two of us, as thou shalt see. We shall bring him back to thee bound, that thou mayst either slay him with a sword, or hang him on a tree, as thou wilt.”

“Capture him by strategy then,” said Robin, “and lay hands first on his pikestaff.”

Then he sank back into Will Stutely’s arms, and his eyes closed again from very weakness.

Meanwhile the two outlaws strode briskly along. They knew the country well, and they calculated shrewdly in what direction the Beggar would probably go; with such success that shortly after they had left Will and Robin they came upon him walking along the highway near a little wood.

They stood each by a tree, and as he attempted to pass them, they leaped upon him. David grasped his staff, and Gilbert held a drawn dagger threateningly against his heart.

“False churl, give up thy staff,” quoth David, “or I shall forthwith be thy priest!”

The Beggar with a grunt of anger perforce was obliged to yield. They took his staff from him and stuck it upright in the moss near by, at the foot of one of the trees.

The Beggar, like all bullies, was very much afraid when he found himself in their power. He could not use his staff, he did not know why they had taken him prisoner, nor how many more stout yeomen might be hidden among the trees. He

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thought death was staring him in the face; and so he began to whine.

“Grant me my life,” he whimpered, “and take away that ugly knife, good master, I pray you! Why have ye seized me thus? I never harmed you in all my life! Ye are great sinners if ye do kill a poor silly old beggar!”

“Thou liest, false loon,” said Gilbert sternly, “thou liest when thou dost say that thou hast never harmed us! Thou hast nearly slain our master, the gentlest man that ever was born!”

“And back again thou shalt be led to him,” added David sternly, “that he may do with thee as he will. Bound thou shalt go, and at his mercy. Whether he will slay thee by sword or hang thee, I know not.”

Then was the Beggar horribly frightened indeed, and his teeth chattered in his head.

“If I were but out of their hands,” he thought savagely, casting wishful eyes at the good staff but a short distance away, “if I had my stout tree again ——” And then he bethought him of a trick that he might play on the young men whereby he might regain his weapon.

“Brave gentlemen,” he whined, “be good, and let the poor man be! What shall it profit you to take a beggar’s blood? If your master hath come to harm, it was but in mine own defense. I will make recompense much better for both of you. If you will let me go, I will give you one hundred

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pounds, and much more good silver that I have here under this patched cloak of mine. 'Tis in the bottom of my bag."

The young men looked at each other doubtfully.

"One hundred pounds and more! 'Twould be a goodly sum to add to our treasury," quoth David.

"He cannot escape us. If he tried, we could either of us easily outstrip him," said Gilbert. "Let us take his offer."

"False churl," said David, addressing the Beggar, "have done thy whining, and tell forth thy money. For the ill turn thou hast done our master, 'tis but a trifling price to pay. If thou wilt give us the sum thou dost speak of, we will let thee go."

"So be it, good masters!" quoth the Beggar snuffling. Then with a great show of reluctance, and heaving many a sigh, he spread his patched cloak on the ground, and laid out his bags upon it. He was careful to place his cloak so that it was between them and the wind. Then he laid a bag of meal on his cloak, and with a sudden dexterous turn of his wrist, he opened the bag, seized a double handful of the meal, and flung it straight into the faces of the two young men.

While they stood blinded and coughing and spluttering, he grabbed his staff, and with a derisive laugh began to belabor them as he had belabored their master. They were perforce obliged to run, stumbling along, and trying savagely to clear their faces of the meal.

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“Why this haste?” said the Beggar tauntingly, drubbing them soundly the while. “Will ye not tarry until I pay ye the money? Ye must see it, that I do not cheat you! If in shaking my bag, some of my meal hath gotten into your eyes, I humbly crave your pardon! Let me wipe them clean with my good pikestaff!” And with that, fearing that they might indeed get their faces cleared before he made good his escape, the Beggar gave them one parting wallop, and ran away right lustily through the thick woods.

It was an abashed pair enough that came slowly walking back to Robin where he awaited them with Will Stutely.

“How have ye sped?” quoth Robin eagerly, but with a twinkle in his eyes, for their woebegone appearance told its own tale.

“Full ill!” they answered dolefully.

“That surely cannot be!” said Robin solemnly. Then he looked them up and down and laughed, albeit somewhat weakly, for his bruises were still very sore. “Have ye been at the mill?” he asked; for they were yet well covered with the telltale flour. “Your clothes look as if ye had been helping yourselves to the miller’s store.”

With drooping heads they made a clean breast of the whole story; for they were dreadfully ashamed of themselves to have been so outwitted by the rascally Beggar. When they had finished, Will Stutely’s broad shoulders were shaking with mirth, and

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even Robin, faint and ill as he still felt, was smiling uncontrollably.

“Yonder is a terrible beggar indeed!” he said. “Fie for shame!” and he heaved a long sigh. “I fear me we are disgraced forevermore!” he murmured sadly.

David and Gilbert also fetched long sighs, and they looked so ridiculous with their mealy faces and their sad expressions that Will and Robin began to chuckle again. At last, rather sheepishly, David and Gilbert joined in their laughter, and so after a little, the greenwood rang to the sound of their mirth.

“Out, alas!” cried Robin with a grimace, clutching at his side. “I feel still the remembrance of that vile fellow’s blows, and shall for many moons. Come, David; come, Gilbert, let us back to our comrades!” He laid a kindly hand on each man’s broad shoulder. “I would fain have been avenged,” he added; “but methinks the sight of your stripes make mine far easier to bear!”

XXIII

HOW THE JOLLY PINDER CAME TO
THE GREENWOOD

*He leaned his back fast unto a thorn,
And his foot unto a stone,
And there he fought a long summer's day,
A summer's day so long.*

XXIII

HOW THE JOLLY PINDER CAME TO THE GREENWOOD

IT happened on a day that Robin and Will Scarlet and Little John were walking near Wakefield, when they saw a Pinder sitting under a thorn bush. As they approached him more nearly they heard him talking to himself.

“There is neither knight nor squire, nay, nor bold baron dare trespass in the town of Wakefield but his pledge goes to the pinfold.”

You must know that a pinfold was what we call to-day a pound, in which stray animals were kept after their capture, and a Pinder was a man who had charge of a pound.

Robin and Little John and Will Scarlet looked at one another when they heard the Pinder give voice to this large speech, and forthwith they turned aside from the highway and began to run across the corn field.

“Come back, come back, ye naughty men!” bel-
lowed the Pinder. “Ye have forsaken the King’s
highway! What right have ye to make a path over
the corn?”

The three outlaws paused, and turning with one accord, surveyed the Pinder narrowly.

“O that were great shame for us,” quoth Robin,

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“to heed thy word since we are three and thou but one!”

The Pinder turned red with anger, for Robin's tone had been purposely insolent.

“Come and see!” he bellowed. “Come and see!” And with that he gave a mighty leap backward of thirty feet and more, and stood leaning against the thorn.

“Come, cowards!” he cried. “I will show ye what one honest Pinder can do against three rogues.”

“Needs must!” quoth Robin cheerfully; “but we'll try thee one at a time. Who'll go first? Thou, Will Scarlet!”

“Ay,” drawled Will lazily, and stepping back on the highroad, drew his sword, and began to fight the Pinder.

He found it, however, not so easy a task as he had expected. The Pinder stood, his back against the thorn, his foot against a stone and fought grimly and determinedly until Will was at last obliged to cry “Halt!” Much chagrined, he retired; and Little John swaggered up confidently to take his place. Even he was worsted, however, although with greater difficulty, and it was nearing the end of the afternoon when Robin himself at last began to fight. He found to his amazement that greatly tired as the Pinder was by this time, he was able nevertheless to put up a gallant showing.

“Hold thy hand, hold thy hand!” Robin cried at

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last. "Thou art one of the best Pinders that ever I've tried with sword. Tell me, wilt thou forsake thy Pinder his craft and live in the greenwood with me?"

The Pinder looked at Robin reflectively. He was in a very good humor by this time, as well he might be after having conquered three such goodly men.

"At Michaelmas next my covenant comes out," he answered. "I can then leave my work here, and take my blue blade in my hand, and plod to the greenwood with thee."

"Well said!" quoth Robin. "And now tell me, jolly Pinder, hast any meat and drink for my merry men and me?"

"I have bread and beef," answered the Pinder; "and good ale and cheese."

"And that is good enough for such unbidden guests as we be," quoth Robin courteously. "Gladly will we eat and drink with thee, Pinder, and when thou art my man and shalt come and dwell with me, thy clothing shall be changed twice a year."

"I will come," answered the Pinder. Then he took them all three to his house, and they ate and drank very happily together, for so good foemen can always do when their fight is over.

The Pinder kept his word. At Michaelmas he came to the greenwood, and so Robin added another stout follower to the merry men of Sherwood.

XXIV

HOW ROBIN BECAME A POTTER

*Robin went to Nottingham
These pots for to sell;
The potter abode with Robin's men;
There he fared not ill.*

XXIV.

HOW ROBIN BECAME A POTTER

IN summer when the leaves spring, the blossoms are on every bough; and merrily sing the birds in the merry woods.

As Robin stood one day among his followers, he saw a proud Potter wandering over the lea. His head was held high, and there was a conscious look of superiority in his aspect.

“Yonder comes a proud Potter,” said Robin to Little John, who stood nearest. “He has long haunted these ways but he has never been courteous enough to pay a penny of tax for the privilege.”

“I met him once before, evil may he thrive!” said Little John. “He gave me such three strokes that I can feel them yet!” and he rubbed his huge sides ruefully. “I would lay forty shillings that there is not a man among us all who can defeat him.”

“Well, here is forty shillings,” quoth Robin, taking the money out of his pouch, and jingling the coins together. “I wager that I shall make this proud Potter lay a wager with me.”

With that he strode across the highway, and with a hand upon the bridle of the Potter's horse, brought it to a standstill.

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“Tell me what is thy will?” quoth the Potter, frowning at this unexpected delay.

“All these three years and more, Potter,” quoth Robin sternly, “thou hast haunted this way; yet hast thou never been so courteous a man as to pay one penny of tax for the privilege.”

“And what is thy name,” asked the Potter insolently, “that thou darest to ask a tax of me?”

“Robin Hood is my name,” replied the outlaw pleasantly; “and I am minded this day to have thee lay a wager with me.”

“Nay, that will I not!” cried the Potter, growing very red in the face at Robin’s calm self-assurance. “Take thy hand away from my horse, or by my faith, I will punish thee sore for thy impudence!”

With that he turned and rummaged in his cart, and presently brought forth a huge staff. With this in his hand, he leaped down on the ground before Robin.

Robin had his sword and buckler, and he still stood holding the Potter’s horse.

“Fellow, let my horse go!” cried the Potter furiously. Then without more ado, Robin and the Potter began to fight, and Robin’s men stood by under the trees and watched them.

“Yon Potter will stiffly stand!” quoth Little John to his fellow; and even as he spoke, the Potter smote the buckler out of Robin’s hand. As he stooped to pick it up where it lay at his feet, the

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Potter struck him on the neck so that he fell to the ground. All this Robin's men saw as they stood under the trees.

“Let us help our master!” cried Little John in sudden alarm; “for if we do not, good sooth this Potter will slay him!”

The yeomen went with a rush to rescue their master.

“Who has won the wager, master?” cried Little John. “Shall I have thy forty shillings or shalt thou have mine?”

“If they were a hundred,” quoth Robin ruefully, “in faith they are all thine.”

“It is very little courtesy,” quoth the Potter furiously, “so I have heard wise men say, if a poor yeoman come driving along, for others to prevent him from going forward on his journey.”

“By my troth, thou sayst sooth,” said Robin. “So all good yeomen think; and henceforth, even if thou drive forth every day, thou shalt never be hindered by me. I pray thee, good Potter, wilt thou do something in good fellowship? Give me thy clothing, and thou shalt have mine in exchange. I would go to Nottingham.”

“I grant it,” replied the Potter graciously. “Thou shalt find me a good fellow. If thou canst sell well my pots, come again as thou didst go.”

“Nay, by my troth,” said Robin, “I shall deserve thy curse if I bring back any pots to thee again. Every good wife will find them cheap.”

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Then spoke Little John and all his fellows:

“Master, be thou ware of the Sheriff at Nottingham, for he is little our friend!”

“Beshrew you all!” cried Robin good-naturedly. “Let me alone, fellows. Through the help of Our Lady”—and he bared his head reverently—“I will to Nottingham.”

So Robin exchanged clothes with the Potter, and hied him forth gayly to Nottingham to sell pots. Meanwhile the real Potter stayed in Sherwood with Robin’s men.

Robin drove on his way right merrily, and when he came to Nottingham he set up his horse and gave him oats and hay. Then he showed his wares to the town, crying gayly:

“Pots, pots! A present for whoever buys first!”

Right against the Sheriff’s gate he showed his wares. Wives and widows alike began to gather around him and to buy.

“Pots! Very cheap!” cried Robin; and cheap they were indeed; for all that saw him sell said that surely he had not been a potter very long. The pots that were worth five pence he sold for three pence.

“Yonder Potter shall never thrive!” quoth the good men and their wives to one another; but Robin sold his wares very fast indeed until at last he had only five pots left. These he took up, and knocking on the Sheriff’s door asked to see the Sheriff’s

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wife. When she came, he presented the pots to her as a gift.

The Sheriff's wife was much flattered at this courtesy.

"Gramercy!" said she graciously to Robin, who stood bowing and scraping before her. "When ye come to this country again, I shall buy pots of thee, so may I thrive!"

"Ye shall of the best, fair dame," said Robin softly. "By the Holy Trinity I swear it!"

"Come," she said, looking very gently upon the handsome Potter, "come, dine with the Sheriff and me!"

"Your bidding shall be done," said Robin courteously. Then a little serving maid bore away the pots that Robin had brought, and Robin followed the Sheriff's wife into the house.

When Robin came into the hall, he met the Sheriff, and greeted him courteously.

"Lo, sir, see what the Potter hath given you and me!" quoth the Sheriff's wife in great delight. "Five pots, both great and small! I have bidden him to dinner for his courtesy!"

"He is full welcome!" quoth the Sheriff. "Let us wash and go to table!"

As they sat at their meat in noble cheer, two of the Sheriff's men began to speak of a great wager on a good shooting that had been made the other day. It was a wager of forty shillings.

The pretended Potter sat very still listening to

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all this; but he thought within himself: "As I am a true Christian man I will see this shooting!"

When the dinner was ended, and they had fared on the best in bread and ale and wine, the Sheriff and all the company went forth to the place of shooting with their bows and arrows ready.

The Sheriff's men shot very well and proved themselves good archers; but they did not come near the mark by half the length of a good archer's bow.

Then up stood the proud Potter, and he said: "If I had a bow, by the Rood, you should see one shot!"

"Thou shalt have a bow," said the Sheriff. "Thou shalt choose the best among three. Thou seemst a strong and stalwart fellow, and thou shalt have thy trial!"

Then the Sheriff commanded a yeoman standing near by to go after some bows. Three were brought to Robin, and he chose the best and tested it carefully.

"Now shall I try if thou be good!" he muttered to the bow. "Now, God me help, but thou art a weak affair enough!"

Then from a quiverful of arrows, Robin carefully selected a good bolt, and when he tried the mark, he hit it squarely in the centre.

Then everyone there shot all over again, the Sheriff's men and Robin, and three times Robin hit the prick, or centre, of the wand set up as a target.

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The Sheriff's men thought it great shame that the Potter had won the mastery in the shooting; but the Sheriff was highly amused, and said, "Potter, thou art a man! Thou art worthy to bear a bow wherever thou goest! Knowest thou one Robin Hood?" And a heavy frown came on the Sheriff's face at the hated name. "He is said to be a good marksman."

"Ay, I know him well," answered Robin quietly. "A hundred times I have shot with him under his trysting tree."

"I had rather than a hundred pounds," said the Sheriff between his teeth, "that the false outlaw stood here by me now."

The Potter looked at him reflectively.

"Is it so?" he said slowly. "Well, go boldly along with me, and to-morrow ere we eat bread, we shall see Robin Hood!"

"If thou doest that for me," quoth the Sheriff, "I swear by the God of Might, I shall well requite thee."

So side by side, Robin and the Sheriff went back to the latter's house, and supper was made ready for them. Then Robin spent the night with the Sheriff; and the next morning, while it was yet early, the Sheriff arose and began to prepare for his journey. The Potter got his cart ready. When they were about to go Robin took leave of the Sheriff's wife with touching politeness.

"Dame, for my love," he observed, "I give thee here a gold ring."

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“Gramercy!” said the Sheriff’s wife. “God shield thee, sir,” and she dropped him a deep curtsey for his kindness.

Never was the Sheriff’s heart so blithe to see the fair forest. He sat by the Potter’s side in his little cart and carolled a merry song from sheer joy of spirit. When at last they reached the greenwood it was great delight to hear the merry birds singing on the boughs.

“Here it is merry to be,” quoth Robin, “for a man who has aught to spend. I shall see by my horn whether Robin Hood be near.”

With that he set his horn to his lips and blew a full good blast. His men heard the summons where they stood far away in the forest.

“I hear my master blow!” said Little John listening. Forthwith all the merry men ran like mad in the direction of the bugle sound. When they came to their master, they saw him still in the Potter’s cart, clothed in the Potter’s dress, with the Sheriff sitting beside him. Then all the yeomen roared with laughter at this goodly sight and the Sheriff turned very pale. Little John said:

“Master, how have ye fared in Nottingham? How have ye sold your wares?”

“By my troth, Little John,” replied Robin, “look thou take no care! I have brought the Sheriff of Nottingham in exchange for all my wares.”

“He is full welcome,” said Little John gravely. “This tidings is very good.”

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The Sheriff had rather than a hundred pounds he had never seen Robin Hood.

“Had I known before in Nottingham,” he muttered with chattering teeth, “had I but known this, thou shouldst never have come back again to this fair forest.”

“That knew I well,” said Robin cheerfully. “I thank God that we have thee here instead of thy having me in Nottingham. Therefore, ye shall leave here with us your horse and all the rest of your belongings.”

“God forbid,” said the Sheriff tearfully, “that I should so lose my gold!”

“Hither ye came on horse,” continued Robin mercilessly, “but hence ye shall go on foot. Greet well for me when thou reachest thy home thy dear good wife. Thou shalt take her for me a white palfrey; nor for love of her shall ye see more sorrow.”

Then Robin and the Sheriff parted, and the latter went home again to Nottingham. It was a weary journey he had, but when he reached home, his wife said:

“Say, how hast thou fared in the green forest? Hast thou seen Robin Hood?”

“The devil speed him, both body and bone!” quoth the Sheriff feelingly. “I have been greatly humbled by him. All the money that I had with me in the greenwood he took from me, but he sent thee this fair palfrey.”

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Then the Sheriff's wife began to laugh so that he thought she would never stop.

"What aileth thee?" he asked in a crabbed voice.

"Why," she gasped, wiping her eyes, "I am thinking that thou hast paid well for all the pots he gave me."

"Thou speakest sooth," said the Sheriff sourly. "Here is thy palfrey. That at least he had the grace to send."

Meanwhile in Sherwood Robin and the real Potter were talking together.

"Potter," asked Robin courteously, "what is the worth of the pots that I took with me into Nottingham?"

"Sooth," replied the Potter, "they were worth two nobles. That I could have had for my pots had I myself sold them in Nottingham."

"Nay then," said Robin, "thou shalt have ten pounds of money fair and free; and ever when thou comest again to the greenwood, Potter, thou shalt be welcome."

XXV

HOW ROBIN TESTED THE TANNER

*In Nottingham there lives a jolly Tanner;
His name is Arthur a Bland;
There is never a squire in Nottinghamshire
Dare bid bold Arthur stand.*

XXV

HOW ROBIN TESTED THE TANNER

As Robin was standing on the edge of the forest one day, he saw a brawny fellow approaching him, bearing a long pikestaff on his shoulder.

“What art thou, thou bold fellow that rangest so boldly?” Robin called to him. “In sooth, thou lookest to me like a thief come to steal the King’s deer.”

The big fellow looked at Robin scornfully.

“And what art thou?” he asked coolly in his turn.

“I am—a keeper in this forest,” Robin answered, smiling to himself at his own words. “The King puts me in trust to look to his deer. Therefore I must stay thee.”

“If thou art keeper in this forest,” the fellow answered impudently, “and hast such great command as thou sayest, yet will it take more than that to make me stand.”

Robin began to grow angry at the man’s assurance.

“I have no more and I need no more,” he answered sharply. “I have a staff of another kind than thine which I know will do the deed!” and he touched his bow significantly.

“I care not a straw for thy bow and thy sword,

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nor for all thine arrows!" the other said airily. "Let me get but a crack on thy pate with this trusty staff of mine, and then we shall see how much thou canst shoot."

"Nay, then, I see I must correct thine ill manners and teach thee a lesson," said Robin, now thoroughly angry.

"Marry, art thou then such a goodly man?" sneered the stranger. "I care not a fig for thy large looks and thy boasting words. Mend thou thyself where thou canst!"

Then Robin unbuckled his belt and laid down his bow. He kept only his oak staff.

"I'll yield to thy weapon," said Robin, "since thou wilt not yield to mine. I have a staff not half a foot bigger than thine. Let us measure before we begin our fray; for it would be unfair that my staff should be the longer."

"I care not for length," said the stranger carelessly. "My staff is of good oak. It is eight and a half feet long, quite long enough to knock down a calf; and so I have hopes that it will knock down thee!"

"My hope is better," replied Robin briefly; and with that he gave the other man such a crack that the blood streamed down his face.

Presently, however, the stranger recovered himself, and fetched Robin so hard a knock on the crown that it seemed as if blood trickled from every separate hair on his head.

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The sight of his own blood enraged Robin, and he began to roar with fury like a wild boar. His opponent saw his dangerous mood and began to lay on blows thick and fast, before Robin had a chance to recover himself.

About and about and about they went like two wild boars in a chase, striving to reach each other on leg, arm or whatever place was nearest. Their quarrel had begun at about ten o'clock; and for two hours or more they dealt lustily knock for knock. They plied their work so sorely that the woods rang with their sounding blows.

At length, much against his will, Robin cried out:

“Hold thy hand, hold thy hand, and let our quarrel fall! Here we might thresh our bones into a jelly, and without reward! In the forest of merry Sherwood hereafter thou shalt be free.”

“God a mercy for naught!” retorted the other ungraciously. “For my freedom I may thank my good staff, and not thee.”

“What tradesman art thou?” asked Robin curiously, as he seated himself rather waveringly on the ground, and looked up at the other man. “Good fellow, I prithee tell me this, and also in what place thou dost dwell, for I would fain know.”

“I am a tanner,” the stranger answered; “and I ply my trade in Nottingham. If thou’lt come there, I promise thee I will tan thy hide for naught.”

“God a mercy!” quoth Robin somewhat ruefully. “Methinks thou hast already done so. At

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least I have done about the same for thee. If thou wilt forsake thy tanner's trade, and live here in the greenwood with me, I will give thee both gold and fee. I swear it by the holy cross. My name is Robin Hood."

"If thou art indeed Robin Hood," replied the tanner, "and I think well thou art, here's my hand! Henceforth we two will never part company."

"And what is thy name, good fellow?" asked Robin, grasping the huge hand that the other offered him.

"Arthur a Bland," replied the tanner.

So the two sat down together under a tree, and began very amicably to bind up the wounds that they had just been giving each other.

"Tell me," said Arthur eagerly, "where is Little John? I would fain hear of him, for he is my near kinsman on my mother's side."

"He hath just returned to the greenwood from a journey on which I sent him to accompany a knight," Robin answered. "Thou shalt see him straightway."

With that he set his horn to his lips and blew; and quickly Little John appeared coming down over the brow of a hill.

"O what is the matter?" Little John asked Robin, seeing the latter's many cuts and bruises. "I fear all is not well."

"Blame yon tanner for the state I am in," Robin answered. "He is a bonny blade indeed, and as-

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surely a master workman; for sorely he hath tanned me!”

Then Little John scowled fiercely at the tanner.

“He is to be commended if such a feat he can do,” he observed coolly. “If he be so stout as thou sayest, master, I also will have a bout with him, and see whether he can tan my hide too!”

“Hold thy hand, hold thy hand!” quoth Robin laughing. “I am told he is a good yeoman, and indeed thy kinsman. His name is Arthur a Bland.”

Then Little John flung his huge staff away as far as he could send it, and he ran to Arthur a Bland and threw his great arms around his kinsman’s neck.

Then after they had done embracing each other, Robin took them both by the hand, and they all began to dance gayly round about the oak tree which had been the scene of Robin’s tanning. While they danced they sang lustily:

*“For three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men we be.”*

XXVI

HOW ROBIN WENT TO CHURCH IN
NOTTINGHAM

*He goes into St. Mary's church,
And kneeled down before the rood;
All that were the church within
Beheld well Robin Hood.*

XXVI

HOW ROBIN WENT TO CHURCH IN NOTTINGHAM

IN summer time, when the woods are beautiful, and the leaves are large and long on the trees, it is merry to wander in the forests and hear the birds singing; to see the deer drawing to the dale, and leaving the high hills, to take refuge in the shadow of the leaves under the greenwood tree.

It befel one Whitsuntide, early on a May morning, the sun was shining fair and the merry birds were singing.

“By Him that died on tree,” quoth Little John, “this is a merry morning; and a merrier man than I lives not in Christendom!” And he squared his broad shoulders and threw out his chest.

He looked at Robin for sympathy, but Robin did not respond to his mood. He stood, his arms folded, leaning against a tree. Little John gazed at him anxiously.

“Pluck up heart, my dear master,” he said. “Think how fair a time it is and how fair a May morning!”

“Yea, but one thing grieves me, and does my heart much woe,” quoth Robin sighing. “’Tis Whitsunday, and I may not on this solemn Feast go

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either to Mass or Matins. It is a fortnight since I have been to church. To-day, with the help of Mary mild, I will to Nottingham."

Nick Much was bustling about getting breakfast ready. When he heard Robin say this, he paused and looked at his chief anxiously.

"Ever well betide thee, master!" he exclaimed. "Take along with thee twelve good men with their weapons by their sides. None will then dare to harm thee."

"Nay," answered Robin stubbornly. "Of all my merry men, by my faith I will have none go with me save Little John; and he shall bear my bow for me until I choose to draw it."

"I thank thee, master," answered Little John; "but bear thou thine own bow, and I will bear mine, and we will shoot together as we go."

So it was agreed; and Robin Hood and Little John started off together through the forest towards Nottingham. Robin, however, must have been in a peevish mood that morning; for as they shot with each other, it came to pass that Robin Hood accused Little John of cheating, and these two good comrades fell to quarrelling with each other. Finally, Robin knocked down Little John, and fetched him a cuff over the ears. Little John scrambled to his feet in a fury.

"Wert thou not my master," quoth Little John, "thou shouldst be hit full sore for that blow. Get ye a man where ye will, you get me no more!" And

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with that he turned on his heel and strode back towards Sherwood.

As for Robin, he went towards Nottingham all alone, and truth to tell he missed his good comrade sorely; but in his sulky mood, he would not admit that he did, even to himself. When at last he reached St. Mary's Church, in Nottingham, he knelt down very devoutly, and prayed to God and to Mary mild to bring him home safe again. The church was crowded, since it was the great Feast of Whitsunday, and many saw and recognized Robin in his suit of Lincoln green, kneeling devoutly before the holy rood.

Just beside Robin stood a fat monk with a great ill-shaped head. He was of the type that Robin especially despised. The monk recognized Robin as soon as the outlaw knelt beside him, and his beady eyes twinkled maliciously. Presently he left Robin's side and went out of the church, but Robin, absorbed in his prayers, never noticed the monk's departure. As soon as the latter had left the church, he ran at full speed, and ordered that all the gates of the city should be closed. In those days, for the sake of protection, towns and cities were usually enclosed by walls with gates at certain intervals. After this the monk ran and knocked loudly at the Sheriff's door.

“ Rise up, you proud Sheriff! ” he cried. “ Rise up and make ready! I have seen the King's felon, for truly so he is, in this town. Yea, I have spied

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him as he stood at Mass. Once he robbed me of a hundred pounds. I have never forgotten nor forgiven him. His traitor name is Robin Hood."

"Robin Hood!" cried the Sheriff eagerly. "One moment, holy father, and I will be with thee."

Hastily he summoned his men, and presently the monk and the Sheriff and a score of the Sheriff's men were on their way to the church. When they reached there, they rushed in at the door with their staves all ready; a score of men to capture one.

Robin looked up and saw them; for naturally their entrance made a great commotion in the church.

"Alas!" said Robin to himself. "Now miss I Little John."

Nevertheless he rose from his knees, drew his sword, and charged bravely towards the Sheriff and his men.

Just outside the church door Robin began his brave and unequal fight, and the congregation streamed out of the church, and stood by looking on. Many a man Robin wounded, and twelve he slew, but it was uneven work. Once he attacked the Sheriff, and his sword broke in two upon the Sheriff's head.

"I pray God work woe to the smith who made thee!" quoth Robin ruefully, casting away the useless sword. "Now am I weaponless, alas! against my will, and I fear these traitors. I must run or

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they will kill me!" And with that he turned, and flinging open the doors, took refuge in the church; for he knew that none would dare to shed blood there. The Sheriff's men speedily followed and captured him, and he was borne away to prison amidst the loud rejoicings of the Sheriff.

XXVII

HOW LITTLE JOHN SAVED ROBIN
FROM PRISON

*“Now will I be porter,” said Little John,
“And take the keys in hand;”
He took his way to Robin Hood,
And soon he him unbound.*

XXVII

HOW LITTLE JOHN SAVED ROBIN FROM PRISON

MEANWHILE, when time passed in Sherwood, and Robin did not return, all his men were worried, but especially Little John.

“He has served Our Lady many years,” he muttered to himself; “and I trust to her that no wicked death shall he die. Come, Much,” he called to his comrade, “let us go in search of our master.”

So they strode forth together, and as they went, they saw a monk come riding along, and with him a little page. It was the same monk who had betrayed Robin to the Sheriff, but that, of course, Much and Little John did not know.

“Here comes one from Nottingham,” said Little John aside to Much. “I know him by that wide ill-shaped head of his.” Then they came to the monk, and greeted him in apparently friendly fashion.

“Whence come ye?” asked Little John. “Tell us tidings, I pray you, of a false outlaw named Robin Hood who we hear has been taken captive. He robbed me and my fellows of twenty marks. If he be taken we shall be glad to know it.”

“Ay,” said the monk, “he robbed me of an hun-

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dred pounds. It was I who first laid hands upon him in Nottingham, so ye may thank me for his capture."

"I pray God thank you," said Little John very sweetly, "and we will when we may. We will go with you now, and bring you on your way in gratitude. Robin Hood has many a wild fellow in the forest, and if they knew you were riding here, they would certainly slay you in vengeance for their master's death."

The monk turned pale, and glanced about him fearfully.

"I thank you," he said. "I will go with you, good sirs."

So they went on together, the monk and his page riding, and Little John and Much walking, the first at the head of the monk's horse and the other at the page's. Suddenly Little John turned on the monk, and seizing him by the throat, dragged him down from his horse.

"Robin Hood was my master," said Little John almost sobbing; "and it is thou false monk, who hast brought about his capture. Never shalt thou tell thy tale again!" And with that he smote off the monk's head with a single blow. Then they let the little page go, and they went through the monk's effects, and found among them a letter to the King.

"This letter will I bear myself to my liege King," quoth Little John. "Come, Much, we will not waste time on the Sheriff. I will take the

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monk's horse, and do thou take the page's, and we will hie us to the King in London."

So off went Nick Much and Little John to London. When, after many days, they reached the city, they sought at once the King's presence. Then fell Little John down on his knees before his sovereign and he said:

"God save you, my liege lord!" and he presented the King with the letters that he had taken from the monk's body.

The King unfolded the letters and scanned them rapidly.

"So might I thrive," said His Majesty, as he refolded the letters, "there was never a yeoman in merry England that I longed so sorely to see. Where is the monk that should have brought these letters?"

"So please Your Majesty," replied Little John innocently, "he died on the way."

The King sat an instant in deep thought.

"Take to the Sheriff of Nottingham," he said, rousing himself at length, "the royal seal of England, and bid him bring Robin Hood to me."

So Little John, rejoicing, took his leave of the King, and went back to Nottingham. When he reached the town, the gates were closed. With a mighty noise and halloaing, Little John summoned the porter.

"What is the cause they have the gates bound so fast, fellow?" quoth Little John importantly.

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“Because Robin Hood is cast in deep prison,” answered the porter. “Little John and Nick Much, truly you have slain our men on our walls, and attacked us every day.”

“Well, be that as it may,” said Little John, “summon me here the Sheriff.”

“Summon the Sheriff to you!” replied the porter trembling. “Nay, I should not dare! Rather must ye seek him.” And to this decision he held, despite Little John’s urging to the contrary. Little John was much disappointed, for he had taken rather a fancy to the idea of the Sheriff’s being called before him. At length, however, seeing that the porter was not to be persuaded, he shrugged his shoulders and yielded. He strode to the Sheriff’s house, and knocking loudly on the door, demanded to see him.

When the Sheriff appeared:

“Here,” said Little John magnificently, drawing forth the King’s seal from his bosom and flourishing it in the Sheriff’s face, “here is the royal seal. Tremble and attend!”

When the Sheriff saw the King’s seal, he trembled indeed, and doffed his hood.

“Where is the monk that bore these letters?” he said to Little John. He spoke much more respectfully than he usually did either to Robin or to his men.

“Sooth to say,” replied Little John cheerfully, “he liked the King so much that His Majesty has

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made him Abbot of Westminster and lord of that Abbey.”

“I pray you stay with me as the King’s messenger, good sir,” said the Sheriff abjectly.

Then he made good cheer for Little John, and gave him his best wine, and Little John spent the night in the Sheriff’s best room. Now, before retiring they had eaten and drunk very heartily, and the Sheriff was heavy with sleep and wine. So that night he was so sound asleep that he did not hear Little John and Much rise and steal softly out to the gaol.

When they reached the prison, they knocked loudly for the gaoler, and when sleepy and swearing he appeared, Little John had his sword ready and forced him trembling to the wall.

“Now will I be porter,” said Little John very politely, “and take those keys thou bearest;” and leaving the porter shaking with fear in care of Nick Much, he went in search of his master.

“Master, Master Robin!” he called aloud as he went; and much was his heart rejoiced when he heard at last Robin’s beloved voice in reply.

“Is it thou, Little John?” he said.

“Master, master,” cried Little John, his voice breaking with joy, “have I found thee at last?” Then he slashed Robin’s bonds into ribbons with his dagger, and gave him a sword, and the two joined Nick Much and went merrily off to Sherwood.

Next morning, at the crowing of the cock, the

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Sheriff found Little John and Nick Much gone; and when he hurried to the gaol he found that his most precious bird had flown. Then the town bell rang clamorously, and when the citizens came running they found the Sheriff fuming and fussing, and heard the news, many of them with secret gladness, that Robin Hood was free.

“I dare never come before our King again,” cried the Sheriff lamentably, “since Robin Hood has escaped!”

Meanwhile, during the hue and cry in Nottingham, Robin sat under the oak tree in Sherwood, with Marian beside him, and Little John at his right hand.

Presently, in the midst of the feasting, Little John looked at Robin with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Say what thou wilt, master,” he observed, “I have done thee a good turn for an evil. I have brought thee back again to the greenwood. Now farewell, and good-day.”

“Nay, by my troth,” said Robin, “that shall never be!” He clapped Little John on the shoulder. “I make thee master of all my merry men and me,” he said. “I can do no more.”

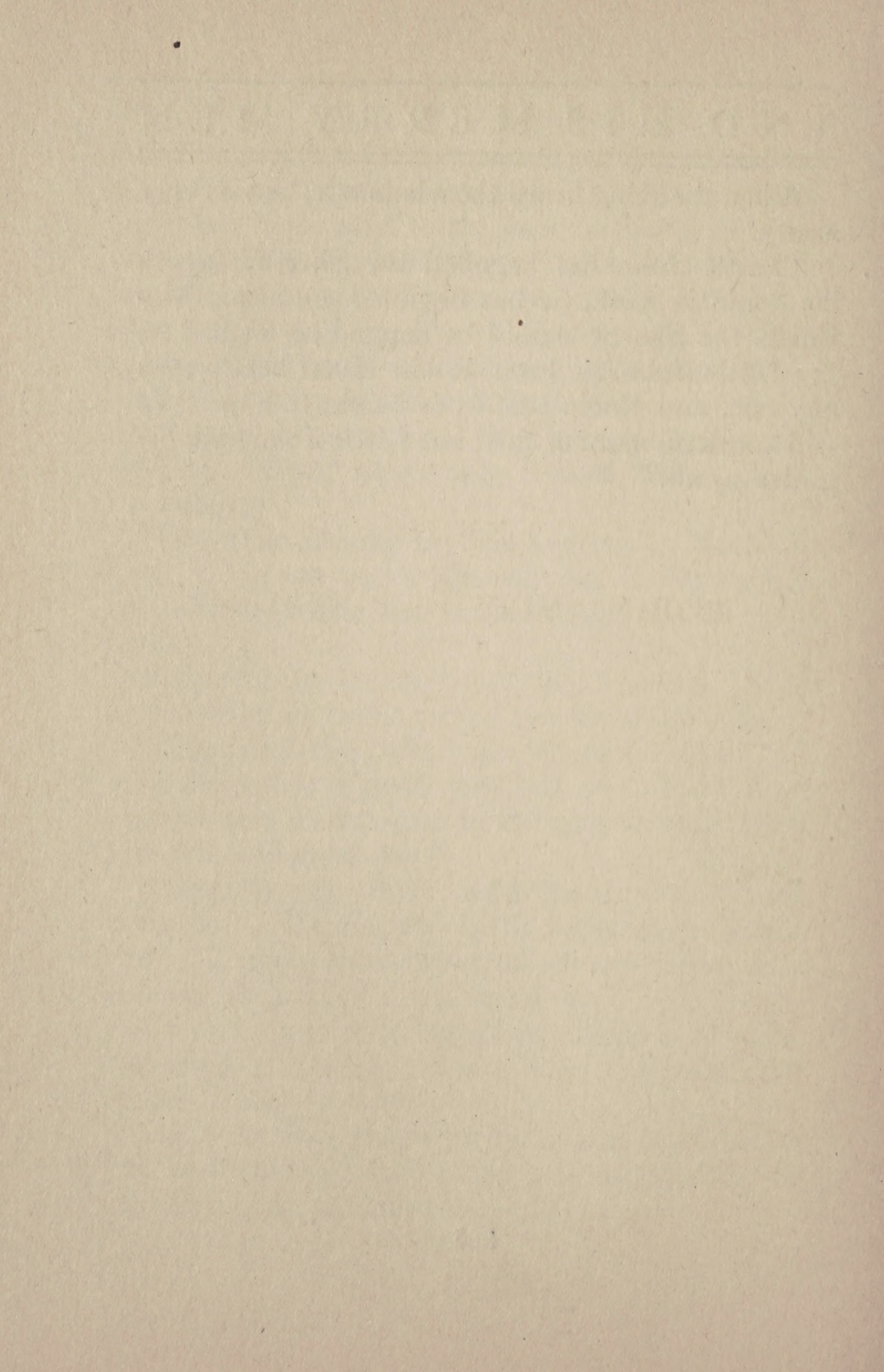
“Nay, by my troth,” said Little John in his turn, “so shall it never be. Let me be thy man, dear master. I ask no more.”

Then the two clasped hands, and were better friends than ever; and merry was the feasting on venison and ale in Sherwood.

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When the King heard the whole tale, he was very angry.

“Little John has beguiled the Sheriff,” quoth he, “and in faith, he has beguiled me also. Me-thinks the Sheriff should be hanged on high. As for Little John, he loves Robin Hood better than any one, and Robin soothly is bound to him. We will speak no more of this; but Little John hath beguiled us all.”



XXVIII

ROBIN AND THE PEDLARS

“Yonder I see bold Pedlars three,”
Said Robin to Scarlet and John;
“We’ll search their packs upon their backs
Before that they be gone.”

XXVIII

ROBIN AND THE PEDLARS

ONE summer's day, as Robin Hood, Will Scarlet and Little John took their way through the green forest of Sherwood to kill the King's deer, it befell that they saw three pedlars on the road. Each of the pedlars had his pack full for the country fairs, and the plump bags were trussed up on their backs. Each one had in his hand, too, a staff fully a yard and a half long. They were all bound to Nottingham town.

"Yonder I see three bold pedlars," said Robin to Will and Little John. "We'll search those fat packs of theirs before they go any farther."

"Halloa, good fellows!" he went on, addressing the three pedlars. "Whither is it ye go? Now stay and rest a while, for that shall be well."

"No rest we need," replied one of the pedlars; "we are going to Nottingham."

"Nay, now, that is a lie," quoth Robin cheerfully. He said this merely to provoke them, because in reality he thought they were telling the truth. They said nothing in reply or in defence, however, but went on over the lea.

"I charge you, tarry!" Robin called after them.

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“ You must know this is by right mine own land. This is my manor and my park, good sooth; and I see, since ye are in such a hurry to be gone, ye can be nothing more than bold outlaws.”

The three pedlars turned around to look at him scornfully, but they said nothing, and merely continued on their way.

This irritated Robin, for he was not accustomed to be treated so cavalierly; he took an arrow from his quiver and drew his bow. The swift arrow went through the pack of the pedlar who walked last. It was well for him that it fell on his pack; but if it had not, his life would have ended then and there. Even as it was, the arrow grazed the skin of his back.

Then were the three pedlars greatly incensed; and they all flung down their packs and waited until Robin and his men came up to them.

“ I said ye had better stand,” quoth Robin coolly, as he reached the pedlars. “ Good sooth, ye were to blame!”

“ And who art thou?” asked the pedlar with the wounded back. His tone was furious. “ By St. Crispin, I vow I’ll quickly crack thine head!”

“ Come on, all three or one!” cried Robin cheerfully. “ That is not so soon done as said. My name is Robin Hood, and these merry men of mine are Will Scarlet, and Little John. Here we are, three to three; so now, brave fellows, lay on!”

Without more words they began to fight. The

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first pedlar's staff broke Robin's bow. As for Will Scarlet and Little John, they each were given so hard a crack that he could scarcely stand up under it.

"Now hold your hands!" cried Robin. "Ye have oaken staves. Tarry until we can get the like for ourselves, and then a fig for you all!"

"We are all content!" said one of the pedlars, whose name was Kit o' Thirske.

So each of the outlaws took a staff for his weapon to make the pedlars repent the stiff blows they had given them; and to it they fell, and their blows fell ringing upon the others' backs. In fact, the pedlars began to wish they still had their packs as protection.

The pedlars, however, held their own. Robin began to rue the hour he had stopped them, and to Will Scarlet and Little John the sun looked actually blue, so many blows had they received.

At last Kit's staff gave Robin a stroke that made the latter's head ring again. Robin staggered and reeled, and the trees seemed to dance merrily around him as he fell heavily on the grass.

"Now hold your hands, pedlars!" cried Little John; and so said Will Scarlet also. "Our master is slain!" cried Little John, almost sobbing as he knelt beside Robin and felt his heart. "I tell you plainly he will never speak again."

"Heaven forbend!" said Kit o' Thirske. "I love him well enough; but let him learn to be wise,

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and not meddle with poor pedlars. In my pack here I have a balsam which will heal his wounds anon;" and with that he whipped out from his pack two or three small boxes; and while Little John put the soothing salve on Robin's wounds, Kit popped a powder into his mouth.

"Now, fare ye well!" cried Kit, rising and picking up his pack. "'Twere best for ye not to tell how ye all met three pedlars; or if you do, tell also how they made you work and sweat!"

With that, the three pedlars laughed tauntingly, shouldered their packs, and strode off again towards Nottingham.

Meanwhile, with heavy hearts, Will Scarlet and Little John tended their dear master, until at length he sighed and stirred and came back to himself; but he was very weak and sick. They were three much chastened men who slowly made their way home to their comrades in Sherwood.

"Next time we challenge a foe, master," quoth Little John dolefully, "we shall look well they are not too stout, or else we may again have the worst of the bargain!"

XXIX

HOW ROBIN PLAYED THE
FISHERMAN

*The fishermen brave more money have
Than any merchant, two or three;
Therefore I will to Scarborough go,
That I a fisherman brave may be.*

XXIX

HOW ROBIN PLAYED THE FISHERMAN

ONE lovely summer day, when the leaves were green and long upon the trees, Robin Hood, strange to say, grew weary of the woods and of chasing the fallow deer, and longed, as all men occasionally long, for something different from what he already knew.

“The fishermen have more money than any merchant,” he said, although why he thought of fishermen when he was so many miles from the sea he could not have told. “I will go to Scarborough and be a fisherman brave.”

No sooner said than done. He called together his merry men as they sat under the greenwood tree, and said:

“Now go I to Scarborough, and if any of you have gold to spend, I pray you heartily spend it with me. I am going to Scarborough on this fair day to be a fisherman.”

Then they all looked at one another in amazement, and not even Little John found a word to say. Before they had recovered themselves Robin Hood waved them farewell, and ran gayly off, taking with him his bow and arrows.

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When he reached Scarborough, he took up his abode at a widow woman's just beside the gray water.

"Where wert thou born?" she asked him curiously when he came and inquired for lodgings. "Where dost thou fare?"

"I am a poor fisherman," answered Robin. "This day am I weighed down with care," and he pulled a long face and sighed dolefully.

The widow looked at him softly enough, for he was a fine fellow in his green doublet and hose, and his scarlet cloak.

"What is thy name, thou fine fellow? I pray thee heartily tell it to me," she asked him gently.

"In mine own country, where I was born," Robin answered, "men call me Simon over the Lea."

"Simon, Simon!" repeated the good widow. "I wish thou mayst well fit thy name, since Simon Peter was a fisherman."

The outlaw bowed his thanks for her courtesy, rejoicing inwardly that he had selected so pleasant and handsome a landlady.

"Simon, wilt thou be my man?" she asked him softly. "Good round wages I'll give thee. I have as good a ship of mine own as any that sails on the sea. Thou shalt want neither anchors nor planks nor long masts and ropes."

"If thou furnish me thus," answered Robin airily, "nothing shall go wrong."

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The widow was as good as her word. It was not long before Robin was sailing away as a sailor on her ship. They plucked up anchor and sailed for two or three days. Then they began to fish. When the other sailors cast baited lines into the sea, Robin knew no better than to cast in bare hooks. When the other men discovered this, they roared with boisterous glee. The master looked at him contemptuously.

“It will be long,” he said, “ere this great lubber do thrive on the sea. I’ll assure you he shall have no part of our fish, for in truth he is not worthy to have them.”

“O woe is me,” said Robin to himself, “the day that ever I came here! I wish I were in Sherwood chasing the fallow deer! Everyone here laughs me to scorn, and sets me at naught. If I had them in Sherwood, how little would I set by them!” And then he groaned and held his head in his hands, for in addition to the men’s unfriendliness, he felt rather seasick.

After they had done fishing they plucked up anchor again, and once more sailed away; and this time Robin was the first to spy a ship of war sailing valorously towards them.

“O woe is me!” quoth the master of the ship, quaking and wringing his hands. “Woe the day that ever I was born! All the fish we have got to-day are now lost. Yon French robbers on the sea will not spare a man of us, but

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carry us to the court of France, and throw us into prison."

Robin lifted his head, and rose from the place near the sail where he had been miserably crouching.

"Do not fear them!" he said jauntily. "Take you no care, master. Give me my bent bow in my hand, and never a Frenchman will I spare."

"Hold thy peace, thou lazy lubber!" replied the master testily. "Thou art naught but brag and bluster. If I should cast thee overboard there would be one less lazy ninny on the sea."

Robin flushed angrily at these words, and clapped his hand on the place where his sword should have been; but alas! there was none there. He remembered, however, his precious bow and arrows, which were hidden in his cabin. He ran thither, and presently came back, carrying his bow and a quiverful of arrows by his side. He found the crew on the deck in abject terror, some swearing, some praying, with the war ship getting nearer and nearer every moment.

He went to the ship hatch, bow in hand.

"Master, tie me to the mast," he said, "that at my mark I may stand fair, and give me my bent bow in my hand, and I will spare no Frenchman of them all!"

Then with might and main he drew his arrow to the very head, and straightway, in the twinkling of an eye, it found a Frenchman's heart. He fell

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down in the ship's hatch and then to its very bottom; and the crew of Robin's boat saw another Frenchman throw the corpse into the sea.

“O master, loose me from the mast,” called Robin then, “and take you no care at all. Give me my bent bow in my hand and never a Frenchman will I spare.”

Nor did he; and presently all the Frenchmen were lying dead, and the crew of Robin's boat bounded on the ship and found there twelve thousand pounds in money.

“One-half of the ship,” said Robin, “I will give unto my sweet wife, the other I'll bestow on you, my fellows.”

“Nay,” said the master of the ship, who was a just man despite the rudeness of his manner, “it shall not so be, Simon. You have won the boat with your own broad arrows, and you shall be the owner of it.”

“Nay,” said Robin stubbornly, “it shall be as I have said; and with this gold I will build a house for the poor and the oppressed where they may live out their days in comfort and in peace.”

And so it was; and so were the tables turned; and Robin Hood the fisherman became the hero of them all.

XXX

HOW WILL SCARLET WON A
PRINCESS

*Then did the Princess view all three,
With a comely, lovely grace,
Who took Will Scarlet by the hand,
Quoth, Here I make my choice.*

XXX

HOW WILL SCARLET WON A PRINCESS

ROBIN HOOD, Will Scarlet and Little John were walking over the plain one day, carrying among them a good fat buck that Will Scarlet had just killed.

“Jog on! jog on!” cried Robin cheerily. “The day runs full fast, and here we have a dinner ready, which Will Scarlet hath made for us.”

Little John laid a hand on his arm and pointed towards the highroad.

“Look, master!” he said.

They saw a beautiful damsel, riding on a black palfrey. As she came nearer, they noted that she was dressed in black, and that a crepe veil was partly drawn over her face. Her head was bent dejectedly, and she seemed to be in deep sorrow.

Robin started towards her, Will Scarlet and Little John following close at hand.

“Come tell me the cause of thy sad ’havior, fair one!” quoth Robin, doffing his hood as he reached her. “Tell me truly whence thou comest and whither thou goest, and why thou art in so sorrowful a plight. Perchance I can assist thee in thy quest.”

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The damsel put back her veil, and looked at him imploringly.

“From London I come,” she answered, “which now is circled with foreign arms.”

Robin clapped his hand on his sword.

“If that be so,” he said, “it is the duty of every good Englishman to haste to London town. Who besieges the city?”

“The proud Prince of Aragon,” replied the damsel, and as she spoke she wrung her hands. “He swears he must have the Princess for his bride, or he will lay waste the whole land. Unless champions be found who will dare to fight three to three against the Prince and the two giants who accompany him, it looks as if he must e’en have his will.”

“Two giants!” repeated Robin slowly, his eyes kindling. He squared his powerful shoulders, and threw back his head. “I am not a dwarf,” he said; “and tell me, damsel, are the Prince’s giants any taller than this one of ours?” and he clapped affectionately Little John’s brawny back.

“Oh, sir, I have never seen them,” the damsel answered, tears standing in her eyes; “but rumor hath it they are most horrid things to behold! Their looks are grisly, and ’tis said their eyes are like swords and strike terror to one’s heart. Instead of plumes, it is rumored that they wear hissing serpents!”

“Ah!” sighed Little John longingly, “they are

AND HIS MERRY MEN

goodly giants, master! Methinks I would like to have a look at them!"

"Well," said Robin slowly, "serpents on helmets would not be hard to seize and strangle; and eyes, however fierce, draw no blood."

The damsel looked hopefully at the three goodly men before her.

"The King hath sworn," she said, "that the Princess shall be the bride of the champion who is victor over the proud Aragon and his men. Four damsels, of whom I am one, have been sent north, south, east and west, to see whose fortune is so good as to find a champion; but all in vain so far has been our seeking. None is so bold as to adventure his life to rescue a fair lady."

The three outlaws exchanged glances.

"When is the day appointed for the combat?" asked Robin. "Tell me this and no more."

"On Midsummer Day," replied the damsel. Then the tears trickled down her cheeks and she was silent, except to bid them good-morrow. She left them, and the palfrey went on along the highway.

Robin, frowning perplexedly, threw himself down on the ground.

"The thought of this poor distressed Princess wounds me to the heart," he said. "Let us go fight the giants all, my merry men! What say ye?"

"Tell me but where this giant lies!" said Will Scarlet; and Little John gave a great sigh of joy at Robin's words.

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“Free she shall be also to choose her own bridegroom between you!” continued Robin, looking from one to the other, with a twinkle in his eyes. “I am already a happy, married man and my dear lady is sweeter to me than any princess.” Whereat Will Scarlet grinned consciously, but Little John said cheerfully:

“The devil take my soul if I part company with thee!”

“And must I stay behind?” quoth Will Scarlet. “No, that must not be! I’ll make the third one in the fight. So shall we be three to three as the damsel said.”

Robin, well pleased at the gallant words of his dear comrades, threw an arm across each pair of broad shoulders; and they started to walk back to the trysting tree.

“We’ll put on moth gray cloaks,” said Robin, “and each carry a long staff and a scrip and bottle, as if we had come from the Holy Land. So we may pass along the highway and all will take us for pilgrims.”

Midsummer Day was not far off; so in a few days Robin and Will and Little John, dressed as Robin had proposed, were on their way to London. They reached the city on the very day of the tournament, and they found everyone streaming towards the lists. When the three pilgrims reached the field, they saw the Princess standing all forlorn in the very front of the royal dais, dressed in white, her

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head downcast, and great tears streaming. The Prince of Aragon, with an air of bravado, was swaggering about the lists, accompanied by two men, who overtopped Little John by perhaps two inches.

“Bring forth your champions!” the Prince was crying mockingly. “Else bring me forth my bride! It is Midsummer Day. Bring forth my bride, or London burns to the ground! I swear it!”

The King and Queen sat on their thrones, and gazed anxiously across the lists, hoping against hope that some champions would appear. Like the Princess, they looked very woebegone, and their eyes were dim with tears.

“Lo, we have brought here our daughter, thou haughty Prince!” cried the King, almost sobbing. “If we must sacrifice her for our city, we must; but are there no bold Englishmen to champion her cause?”

With that, Robin Hood stepped forward, still in his palmer’s cloak of gray.

“My liege,” he cried in a clear, ringing voice, “this must not be! Such beauty as that of the fair Princess is not for a tyrant!”

The Prince of Aragon looked daggers at him, and hissed out:

“Thou fool, thou baboon, how darest thou stop the prize of my valor from me? I will kill thee with a frown!” and he scowled at Robin most horribly.

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For answer, Robin threw back his head and roared with laughter.

“Thou tyrant!” he answered calmly. “I scorn thy foolish frown! Lo, here’s my gage!” and he dashed his glove with unerring aim directly in the Prince’s face.

The Prince nearly foamed with rage. While he was spluttering helplessly and trying to think of an adequate reply, Robin went on:

“As for those two Goliaths beside thee, I have here with me two Davids who can soon tame them;” and he beckoned to Will and Little John, who strode up and stood beside him, appearing very formidable, despite their palmer’s garb.

The King and Queen looked much more hopeful; and as for the Princess, she raised her drooping head, and gazed so imploringly at her three sturdy champions that her face would have melted a much harder heart than any of theirs.

“Bring hither armor for these champions!” cried the King. “Let each have a lance, a sword and a shield!”

A few minutes later the three merry men came on the field, dressed in the armor provided by the King. The people applauded them wildly, the trumpets sounded the charge, and the combat began.

Of all the men of Sherwood, these were the choicest, and they fought the Prince and his giants so bravely and so furiously that soon blood streamed from the foreigners’ faces, and then from their

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bodies, and their swords were hacked into fragments. The Prince with might and main struck Robin a blow which forced the latter to reel again; but he came back with added fury.

“God a mercy!” quoth Robin fiercely. “For that blow the quarrel shall soon be tried! Behold with this stroke I divorce thy bride and thee!” And with a clean cut, he struck the Prince’s head from his shoulders and it rolled away down the field.

Then the giants, seeing their master’s fate, began to rage indeed with fear and fury, and to redouble their strokes.

“Have at thee!” quoth Little John cheerfully to the giant he was opposing. “Thou’lt be the next unless thou well guard thy head!”

With that he whirled his sword about, and clove the giant through clean down to his waist, so that his very heart was cut in twain.

Meanwhile Will Scarlet had brought his giant to his knees.

“The devil, methinks, cannot break his fast unless he have all three of you!” remarked Will sweetly; and he ran the giant through with his sword. Foaming and cursing, the latter fell dead.

Greatly rejoiced the people when they saw the three enemies who had so threatened them lying dead on the field. The very skies resounded with cheers and cries of blessing for the strangers who had won the day. While the combat on which her fate depended was going on, the poor Princess had

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fallen to the ground in a swoon; but the shouts of the people aroused her and she staggered to her feet, and stood smiling at her three champions.

Then were Robin and Will and Little John summoned before the royal throne, whereon sat the King and Queen; and the Princess sat on the steps at their feet, and smiled and blushed by turns. She looked like a white rose faintly touched with the glow of sunrise, and she appeared most sweet and adorable.

“Tell me,” quoth the King, “who you are that came thus disguised to our rescue, and to fight for the honor of England. Your valor speaks of noble blood running in the veins of all three.”

They all fell on their knees before the King.

“A boon, a boon, my liege!” said Robin. “We beg and crave it on our knees!”

“By my crown,” said the King, “I grant it without more words. Ask what you will, and it is yours.”

“Then,” said Robin, “pardon, I pray you, for my merry men and me. I am Robin Hood and these are Will Scarlet and Little John!”

The Queen started as the three put up their helmets and showed their faces.

“Ay, my lord,” she said, “these are of the men who fought as my archers.”

“I remember them well,” said the King graciously. “Art thou indeed Robin Hood?” he went on, looking curiously at the famous outlaw.

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“For the valor you three have shown, your pardon I freely grant. I welcome every one of you to the court for as long as you please to stay.” Then he smiled down at the Princess seated at his feet. “I have promised my daughter as prize to the victor,” he said. “Natheless she cannot wed you all three.”

“Nay, my liege,” said Robin. “I am already a married man, and my dear lady is as a Princess to me. Let Her Highness choose, if it please you, between the other two.”

“It shall be so,” said the King.

“Then little share falls to me!” muttered Little John ruefully; for Will Scarlet was far more handsome and debonair than he, although both were tall and well-built.

With lovely, blushing grace, the Princess looked first at Will Scarlet and then at Little John, and back again at Will, where her glance lingered. There could be small doubt of her choice, for Will Scarlet was the comeliest of all the men of Sherwood, not excepting Robin himself.

“Here I make my choice!” she said at last shyly, and extended her hand to Will.

“Thou hast well chosen, dear Princess!” quoth Robin, bending in his turn above her hand. “Will Scarlet is of noble blood. He is my own cousin, and the Earl of Maxfield is his father.”

Then the people gave another great shout of rejoicing, and at last they began to disperse. The

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King and Queen and the Princess went back to the palace, accompanied by the three merry men; and at once preparations began for the wedding.

“I am well satisfied, master,” quoth Little John in a low voice to Robin, as they went, “that things have so fallen out. I am a simple yeoman, I, and I know naught of courtly ways. Sweet as is the Princess, I have ne’er yet seen the woman who would make up to me for leaving Sherwood and thee.”

“When thou dost marry, Little John,” quoth Robin, clapping him merrily on the shoulder, “thou must find a bride like my Marian who will love to roam the woods by thy side.”

“Mayhap,” replied Little John doubtfully. He looked at Robin with a doglike fidelity shining in his eyes. “Methinks I shall ne’er find any woman whom I love better than I do thee,” he said simply.

The wedding took place within a week. There was great feasting and pomp and ceremony, and so at last Will Scarlet was married to his lovely Princess, and became a man of the court. Robin and Little John went back to the forest after it was all over; but Sherwood knew Will Scarlet no more.

XXXI

HOW ROBIN RESCUED WILL
STUTELY

*Will Stutely surpriséd was,
And eke in prison lay;
Three varlets that the Sheriff had hired
Did likely him betray.*

XXXI

HOW ROBIN RESCUED WILL STUTELY

FOR a long time after the rescue of the Princess, the men of Sherwood roamed the woods unmolested. The King was true to his word, and the Sheriff dared not harm those whom the King had pardoned. Then the King died, and the King's sons were at enmity, and England was plunged into strife and discord for many years. Richard, the son whom the people loved best, was fighting in the Crusades when he succeeded to the throne. He was far away in the Holy Land, and his brother John ruled in his stead. It was during his control of England that the merry men of Sherwood began to be harassed again.

Robin stood under his favorite place beneath the oak tree one afternoon, when he saw approaching him a palmer in a brown cloak with his face muffled in his hood.

"I bring thee news, Robin," said the palmer, speaking in a husky voice, as if he suffered from a heavy cold; "news that will grieve thee sore."

"And what news is that?" asked Robin, wondering why the palmer had sought him out.

"Three varlets hired by the Sheriff set upon Will

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Stutely this morning as he went through the streets of Nottingham," replied the palmer, "and honest Will is betrayed into the Sheriff's hands. Two of them he slew, but the third overpowered him, and he lies now in prison, condemned to be hanged to-morrow at daybreak."

Robin gave a long whistle of dismay, and looked searchingly at the palmer.

"Will did indeed go to Nottingham this morning," he said. "Who art thou that brings me this heavy tidings?"

"Thy friend," answered the palmer huskily. "Seek to learn no more, for time presses. Summon thy merry men, and go to Will's rescue. I swear by Our Blessed Lady that I speak sooth."

"On that oath I believe thee," said Robin, setting his horn to his lips. "Stay with me, palmer, and thou shalt go with us to Nottingham. I swear thou shalt be safe, and we shall welcome thy company, unless thy path lies elsewhere."

With that he blew his bugle thrice, and as usual at the summons, his merry men gathered around him.

"My comrades," cried Robin, as he stood slightly elevated above the rest, "this palmer brings me word that honest Will Stutely lies at the mercy of the Sheriff in Nottingham. He is under sentence to be hanged to-morrow morn!"

In answer, a great shout burst from seven score throats:

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“Save him! Bring him back to the forest! Robin Hood to the rescue!”

“So say I!” cried Robin. “Arm yourselves then at once, and make ready that we may leave the forest early to-morrow morning, and reach Nottingham ere dawn. Meanwhile entertain well this gentle palmer, who ——” He turned towards the place where the palmer had been standing, and found him gone.

“Whither hath he vanished?” quoth Robin staring. “Is this some trick, I wonder? Natheless we must not risk the life of honest Will. Make ready, comrades, as I have said, and we shall all go forth together. Mayhap the gentle palmer was alarmed by your size and numbers.”

While it was yet dusk the next morning, a goodly company set out for Nottingham. Robin himself was in scarlet, his men in forest green, and they had made no attempt this time to disguise themselves. Each man carried a sword beside his huge bow.

It was nearly dawn when they reached the place of Will Stutely’s imprisonment, and as they neared it in the dim light of the approaching day, Robin saw rising from the shadows the selfsame palmer who had brought him warning.

“I think it good,” said Robin in a low voice to his nearest men, at the same time nodding a greeting to the palmer, “I think it good to wait here in ambush until the time of the execution draws near. Pass the word along!” Then he turned to the

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palmer. "Greetings, pilgrim," he said. "Thou didst leave me strangely sudden yestereve. Dost know what time Will Stutely is sentenced to die?"

"Alack and alas!" replied the palmer, "I hear Will is to be hanged at dawn, as I told thee, but I know not the exact moment."

"We are in time then," said Robin. "Me-thinks Will is not to die to-day, but if he doth, good sooth, his death shall be avenged."

Scarcely had he spoken the words than it was dawn indeed, and in the pale light a gallows was visible in the courtyard, just outside of which they were standing. Then with a great clatter, the gates were presently opened, and out came Will Stutely, well guarded by the Sheriff's men.

"Be ready, comrades!" muttered Robin. There were very few town's people present. It was likely that the Sheriff had arranged the execution at so early an hour that the audience might be small; for he knew well that popular sympathy would not be with him. Will walked slowly up the steps to the gallows, and looked around him, but saw no friendly face. The outlaws were crouched under convenient trees, and within kindly shadows, and not one of them was visible. Will sighed, and raised his eyes to heaven. Robin had not heard of his plight, he thought, so he must die. Then he turned and spoke to the Sheriff by his side.

"Seeing that I must needs die," he said, "grant me one boon. Never hath one of my noble master's

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men been hanged. Unbind me, and give a sword into my hand, and let me fight with thee and thy men until I lie dead.”

The Sheriff shook his head and scowled fiercely.

“ ’Tis not for a rogue and a traitor to choose the manner of his death,” he answered. “ Here is the gallows ready, and hanged thou shalt surely be! ”

“ Nay then, do but unbind my hands and let me fight without weapons,” pleaded Will. “ I will use but my bare hands. Only I pray thee, good Sheriff, let me not be hanged.”

“ Oh, no; oh, no!” said the Sheriff tauntingly. “ Cease thy whining, fellow! Thou shalt surely die on the gallows; ay, and so shalt thy master, if e’er he comes within my power.”

“ Thou dastard coward!” cried Will Stutely. “ Thou faint-hearted peasant slave! If ever my master meet thee, thou shalt have thy payment for this! He scorns thee and all cravens like thee! Such a silly fool as thou will never subdue bold Robin! ”

Even with the words, out of a bush near by suddenly leapt Little John. He strode up to Will, regardless of the Sheriff’s gasp of amazement and horror.

“ Take leave of thy dear friends before thou dost die, Will,” said Little John. “ I needs must borrow him a while. How say you to that, Master Sheriff? ”

The Sheriff was chalk white, for he recognized

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Little John, and he knew that Robin must have been warned of Will's danger.

"Now as I live," cried the Sheriff, trembling, "I know thee well, varlet, and I like not the color of thy coat. Seize him, my men!"

Then Little John, grinning cheerfully, and paying not the slightest attention to the Sheriff, drew forth his sword, cut Will Stutely's bonds, and twitched another sword away from one of the Sheriff's guards.

"Here, Will, take thou this," he said. "Thou art better able to swing it than its owner. Defend thyself a while—for aid is coming straightway," he whispered in Will Stutely's ear.

Then they turned their backs to each other, and began fighting. It was scarcely a moment before there was a shout of cheer, and Robin and his men rose from their hiding-places.

"Make haste away!" cried the Sheriff to his men, his teeth chattering with fear; and with that he took to his heels and ran with his men after him. Of course, there was no more fighting to be done, since the enemy had disappeared, and some of the outlaws heaved great sighs of disappointment in consequence.

"Oh, stay! Oh, stay!" called Will tauntingly after the Sheriff's retreating back. "Take leave ere you depart! Ye will ne'er capture brave Robin Hood when ye dare not meet him face to face!"

"Ill betide you that ye go so soon," quoth Robin,



Tell me what this means!

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gazing after the fleeing backs with disappointment. "My sword may rest in its scabbard, for here our work is done."

Then Will Stutely turned to Little John, and threw his arms around his comrade.

"I little thought when I came to this place that I should e'er meet Little John or see my dear master again!" he cried, tears of joy and gratitude standing in his eyes.

"Nay," said Robin, clapping him on the shoulder, "surely thou didst not think thy comrades would desert thee in thy need? Now I bethink me," he went on, "'tis to this good palmer that thou dost owe thy freedom. Come hither, gentle pilgrim, and let Will Stutely thank thee for the warning that brought about his rescue."

The palmer came forward slowly. His hood was still pulled close about his face.

"May not Will see the countenance of his deliverer!" asked Robin, and gently he pushed back the hood from the palmer's face. Then he gasped in astonishment.

"Marian!" he cried; and without more ado he kissed the lovely, mischievous face that his hand had disclosed. "Tell me what this means!" he added, shaking his finger at her in mock rebuke. "Thou didst dine with us last night—but now I bethink me it was after the palmer had disappeared."

She blushed and laughed and hid her face on his shoulder.

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“ I wore the disguise to go into Nottingham to Mass yestermorn,” she said; “ and while I knelt in church, I heard a great hue and cry, and I ran out with the rest of the congregation, and beheld honest Will taken captive. Then I ran home to the greenwood to tell thee ——”

“ But why the disguise for me?” asked Robin, putting his arm around her. He looked much bewildered. “ Why didst thou not in thine own person ——”

Marian hung her head, and replied in true womanly fashion.

“ Because!” she murmured. Then she reached up to his ear and whispered childishly: “ I just wanted to see whether thou wouldst know me; and thou didst not. Robin, thou didst not know me for one moment!”

Robin laughed and kissed her again.

“ Sooth I did not,” he said; “ but why it gives thee such strange satisfaction that I did not is more than I can fathom! Wear thy cloak still, thou pretty palmer, and come back with us to rejoice in Sherwood. Thou art a true daughter of the forest, and my very dear lady! Let us go, my men, and once more hear the twang of our bowstrings in the greenwood, that music which is sweetest to us all!”

XXXII

HOW ROBIN FOUGHT GUY OF
GISBORNE

*“I dwell by dale and down,” quoth Guy;
“And I have done many a curst turn;
And he that calls me by my right name,
Calls me Guy of good Gisborne.”*

XXXII

HOW ROBIN FOUGHT GUY OF GISBORNE

ROBIN woke with a great cry and sat upright. It was the dawn of a fair day in the forest. Seeing naught save the familiar walls of his bower rising about him, and hearing nothing but the drowsy twittering of birds in the awakening morning, his brow cleared with relief.

“What a dream! Ah, what a dream!” he muttered, brushing his hand across his forehead as if to clear away an unpleasant memory.

Marian opened her eyes sleepily at the sound of his voice.

“What is it, Robin?” she said.

“Only a dream, sweetheart,” he answered soothingly. “It is over! Be at rest!” Quite satisfied, she closed her eyes again; but Robin still sat on, holding his head between his hands.

“They did beat me and take my bow from me!” he murmured. “’Twas but a dream; and yet—when it is fully day, Little John and I will go in search of these two strangers to see whether they be real or only creatures of a dream.”

When at last it was morning, and the merry men were all astir, Robin Hood took Little John aside

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and told him of his dream. Men put great faith in dreams at that time as omens of good or ill.

“Dost think it meant anything, Little John?” Robin asked anxiously.

Little John looked thoughtful.

“Dreams are swift, master!” quoth he. “They be swift as the wind that blows yonder on the hill. It may be never so loud to-night, and to-morrow we may be unable to hear it.”

“Well, busk thyself and take thy bow, and come along with me, Little John,” said Robin. “We’ll see what we shall find.”

They put on their suits of Lincoln green, and took both swords and bows, and went together through the greenwood. Presently they saw a man leaning against a tree. He had a sword and a dagger, and he was clad in the strangest garb that either of them had ever seen. Little John frankly gaped at him with open mouth, and Robin looked much astonished.

The stranger was dressed from top to toe in a horse’s hide. His face was surrounded by what had been the horse’s head, and the mane hung down behind like the plume on a helmet. The horse’s tail had been left on the hide, too; and altogether the man had a repulsive look, like a monster rather than a human being.

“Stand thou still, master, under this tree,” quoth Little John; “and I will go to yon yeoman to ask the meaning of this strange attire.”

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Robin's nerves were apparently still a trifle unstrung from his unpleasant dream; for he answered Little John rather querulously.

"Ah, Little John!" he said. "Thou settest no store by me; and that's a strange thing. How often hast thou seen me send my men before and tarry behind myself? It is nothing to know a man if one can but hear him speak. If it were not for breaking my bow, I would break open thy head!"

Little John looked very much hurt.

"I have not deserved this of thee, master," he said; and with that he parted the bushes, and strode away, leaving Robin by himself until his temper should cool. Little John felt greatly ruffled at his master's tone and manner; but as he walked along towards Bernysdale, the sweet air and the pleasant songs of the birds soothed his angry spirit. When he came at last to the town, he found three of his comrades running, and the Sheriff, with some seven score of men, in hot pursuit.

"Yet one shot I'll shoot," quoth Little John, bending his bow, "and make Gilbert of the White Hand who flees so fast before yon Sheriff's man to be both glad and joyous." And with that he bent his bow, but alas! the bow was made of wood that was too tender, and it fell useless at Little John's feet.

"Woe worth thee, wicked wood!" said Little John. He was greatly dismayed. "This day

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thou art my bane when thou shouldst be my salvation.”

The arrow had fled from the bow, however; and it chanced to kill one of the Sheriff's men, William a Trent. Then, seeing that Little John was weaponless, the rest of the Sheriff's men surrounded him with a great shout, and captured him, and bound him to a tree.

The Sheriff came up and shook his fist in Little John's face.

“Thou shalt be drawn over dale and down,” he said, chuckling with glee that Robin Hood's most famous man was really in his power; “and lastly, thou shalt be hanged high on a hill.”

Little John gazed back at him disdainfully.

“Thou mayest yet fail in thy intent, Master Sheriff,” he said, “if it be the will of God.”

Meanwhile, back in the forest, Robin had walked slowly towards the queer looking stranger, dressed in the horse's hide.

“Good morrow, good fellow!” quoth the stranger haughtily. “Methinks by this bow thou dost bear in thy hand, thou seemest to be a good archer. I have lost my way, and I do not even know what hour it is.”

“I'll lead thee through this wood, if thou wilt,” quoth Robin courteously. “I'll gladly be thy guide.”

The stranger looked at him sharply.

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“I seek an outlaw in this forest,” he said. “Men call him Robin Hood. Knowest thou aught of him? I’d rather meet with him to-day than have forty pounds of gold.”

“If you two meet,” observed Robin coolly, “it would soon be seen which is the better. Let us find some other pastime, prithee, as we go through the woods. We may perchance meet with Robin Hood. Meanwhile what if we try a little shooting together?”

“Agreed!” cried he of the horse’s hide; and then very amicably, they began to cut down some slender wands to serve as targets.

“Lead on, good fellow!” quoth the stranger, when the wands were in place, “lead on, I bid thee!”

“Nay, by my faith!” said Robin. “Thou shalt shoot first.”

The stranger shot, but his arrow landed a good six inches from the wand. Robin’s came within an inch. The stranger’s second shot was within the garland that they had hung upon the wand; but Robin cleft the wand itself.

“God’s blessing on thy heart,” quoth the stranger warmly, “thy shooting is good. If thy heart be as good as thy hand, thou art better than Robin Hood himself. Tell me thy name, under these leaves by the brookside.”

“Nay, by my faith,” said Robin, “I will not tell thee my name until thou hast told me thine.”

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“ I dwell by dale and down,” answered the other. “ I have done much evil in my time. My name is Guy of Gisborne.”

“ My dwelling is in the greenwood,” said Robin. “ The tale of thy wicked deeds frights me not. I am he whom thou dost seek. My name is Robin Hood.”

“ Robin Hood!” repeated Guy of Gisborne in a tone of mingled surprise and rage. “ Robin Hood! Then have at thee, fellow!” and he drew his sword.

Robin, nothing loth, drew his own; and at once a furious fight began.

They were well matched; and at the end of two hours, neither had the advantage. Finally, however, possibly because he was a little tired, Robin stumbled on a root, and Guy hit him on the left side.

“ Ah, dear Lady,” cried Robin, “ who art both Mother and Maid, it was never a man’s destiny to die before his day. Methinks my day hath not come!” And with that he leaped up and with a mighty stroke he thrust Sir Guy through the heart, and he fell dead at Robin’s feet.

“ Lie there,” said Robin gravely, looking down at the body of his late antagonist. “ Be not wroth with me that I have killed thee. If thou hast had the worst stroke at my hand, thou shalt now have the better clothes.”

So saying, he doffed his suit of Lincoln green, and put it on the dead man; and he dressed him-

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self in Sir Guy's curious array, the horse's hide, with its flowing mane and tail.

"Now my bow and arrow, my little horn I'll bear with me to Bernysdale," said Robin; "and I'll see how my men fare."

So he went on through the forest; and after a while, as he came near the town, he began to blow Sir Guy's horn.

The Sheriff heard it as he stood near Little John, still bound fast to a tree.

"Hearken!" said the Sheriff, listening. "I hear good tidings. There is Sir Guy's horn blowing, and that can mean only that he hath slain Robin Hood!" and he glanced maliciously at Little John, to see how he would take the news.

Little John moved never a muscle, but his heart was heavy within him.

"And yonder," went on the Sheriff, peering eagerly through the trees, "yonder comes Sir Guy himself, clad in his horse's hide."

Then bounding gayly through the trees came Robin Hood with Sir Guy's horse's hide drawn closely about his face. When he saw Little John bound and helpless, he gave a great start of surprise; but Little John's eyes were on the ground, and he did not realize that Robin was there.

"Come hither, thou good Sir Guy!" cried the Sheriff joyously, not for a moment recognizing Robin. "Hast thou indeed killed that scurvy outlaw?"

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“Ay, but I’ll none of thy gold,” answered Robin gruffly, imitating Sir Guy’s harsh voice. “Now I’ve slain the master, let me in reward go strike yon knave, his follower. That is all the reward I ask, and no other will I have.”

“Thou art a madman,” said the Sheriff. “For slaying Robin Hood thou shouldst have had a knight’s fee. Since thou dost ask no more, however, thy boon is granted.”

Little John had lifted his head quickly at the sound of his master’s voice; for he had recognized it instantly through all Robin’s disguise of gruffness.

“Now shall I be loosed if Christ lend us His might!” thought Little John.

Robin went over to him, and immediately the Sheriff’s men followed.

“Stand back!” quoth Robin, glaring at them fiercely from under the shadow of the horse’s mane. “Why draw ye so near? I will hear this villain’s shrift, see you!” And even while the Sheriff and his men roared at the jest, he whipped out his knife, and cutting Little John’s bonds, handed him Sir Guy’s bow.

Little John took the bow in his hands, and fitted one of Sir Guy’s arrows to the string. He pointed it at the Sheriff, who immediately started to run. Sir Guy’s bow did not fail Little John as his own had done; and his aim was true. Steadily he sighted the Sheriff’s fleeing figure, and let the arrow go.

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The Sheriff fell, shot through the heart by Sir Guy's arrow.

So perished Robin Hood's worst enemy, the Sheriff of Nottingham.

XXXIII

HOW SIR WILLIAM FOUGHT WITH
ROBIN HOOD

*Therefore a true and trusty knight
The King was pleased to call,
Sir William by name; when to him he came,
He told him his pleasure all.*

XXXIII

HOW SIR WILLIAM FOUGHT WITH ROBIN HOOD

FOR many years Robin Hood and his merry men had reigned in the greenwood. Prince John was only too willing to listen to tales against the bold outlaw, and the jokes and pranks and more serious punishments that Robin had inflicted on the unworthy monks and friars were brought before the Prince as the chief grievance against him. Nothing was said of his devout love for the Church, or of his practical kindness to the poor; of his respect for the good priests and the cloistered men and women who lived according to their profession. Prince John called a council of state to decide what was best to be done to quell the pride of Robin and his merry men.

They consulted together for a whole summer's day. Then it was agreed that one knight should be sent to try to capture Robin. Prince John selected a trusty and worthy knight called Sir William. The Prince said to him:

“Go you from hence to bold Robin Hood, and bid him without more ado to surrender himself, or he shall suffer along with all his followers. Take with you one hundred brave archers, all chosen men of might, in armor, ready to take thy part.”

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“My sovereign liege,” then said Sir William, “they shall be led by me. I’ll venture my blood against bold Robin, and bring him alive or dead.”

Straightway then one hundred archers were chosen and at Midsummer they marched away together to conquer the bold outlaw, Robin Hood. With long yew bows and shining spears, they marched with much pride, and never delayed or halted until they came to Sherwood.

Then said Sir William to his archers:

“Tarry here, and make ready your bows that if need should arise, you may follow me. See you observe my call. I’ll go in person first with the letters of my good Prince. If Robin Hood will yield at sight of these, all signed and sealed as they are, we need not draw our bows at all.”

So Sir William wandered about in search of Robin, and at length he reached the outlaw’s cave, and showed him the Prince’s letter. On reading it, Robin arose and stood on his guard.

“They’ll have me surrender, and lie at their mercy,” he said; “but tell them that shall never be while I have seven score men.”

Sir William was very angry at these words, and made as if he would seize Robin; but Little John stepped forward and caught the knight’s wrist in a mighty grip.

Then Robin set his horn to his mouth and blew three blasts. Sir William did the like, and great scores of men came running through the trees

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Then Sir William drew up his men with care, and placed them in battle array, and bold Robin did the same. Forthwith began a bloody fray.

On both sides the archers bent their bows, and the clouds of arrows flew. At the very first flight Sir William was slain. Nevertheless, the fight went on from early in the morning until almost noon. Both parties were stout and loath to yield. All this happened on the last day of June.

Although the battle was over some of the men went back to London, and with right good will they went. Robin himself, sorely wounded, returned to his cave in the greenwood, as did most of his men. Some of the archers crossed the seas to Flanders, France and Spain, and others even as far as Rome.

Alas! Robin Hood was not to die in battle, but through treachery, as you shall later hear.

XXXIV

HOW THE KING CAME TO SHERWOOD

*King Richard, hearing of the pranks
Of Robin Hood and his men,
He much admired and more desired
To see both him and them.*

XXXIV

HOW THE KING CAME TO SHERWOOD

Now King Richard was a gallant king; but his brother John, who was reigning in his stead during Richard's absence in the Holy Land, was of a very different type. Great tales were brought to Prince John of the outrageous doings of Robin and his men; and especially of the death of the Sheriff of Nottingham. One of the first things that King Richard heard when he came back to England was this last occurrence; but strange to say, even that did not have quite the effect on His Majesty that was intended. Richard and Robin, although they had never met, were not unlike in temperament; and when the King heard of some of Robin's doings, he roared with laughter, and slapped his knees in keen enjoyment.

"Methinks," he said, on one of these occasions, "methinks I should like to meet this outlaw. I will hie me to Nottingham."

No sooner said than done; for King Richard was a man of action; and he set out for Nottingham forthwith. When he arrived there, he found the people all agog over the Sheriff's death. So jubilant were they that the King was ill-pleased.

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“The Sheriff, it is said, was a faithful servant of the Crown,” he said. “This outlaw must be punished. How can I best find Robin Hood?”

“Marry, sir,” replied one of the townsmen to whom he had addressed this question, “if ye will see good Robin, take five of your best knights, and go down to yon Abbey and borrow monkish weeds. So disguised, I will lead you on the way whereby ye may come to Robin.”

“Well said!” cried the King. “We will straight to the Abbey, and borrow some of their robes.”

So without more ado the King and five of his men went down to the Abbey near at hand, and soon six monks were to be seen riding towards Sherwood, led by one of the men of Nottingham. The King was dressed as an Abbot, with a gray gown, broad hat and stiff boots.

They had ridden about a mile into the forest when Robin Hood himself stepped out and stood in their way.

Robin thought, of course, that he was stopping an Abbot and his monks. He laid his hand on the bridle of the King’s horse.

“Sir Abbot,” he said cheerfully, “by your leave you must abide a while. We be yeomen of this forest under the greenwood tree. We live by our King’s deer. You have both churches and rents, and plenty of gold. Give us some of your spending for sweet Charity’s sake!”

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Then said the King:

“ I brought only forty pounds to the greenwood with me. I have lain at Nottingham this fortnight with our King; and much have I spent. That is the reason that I have only forty pounds. If I had an hundred pounds,” he added graciously, for he was a courtly King, and besides liked Robin’s looks and manner, “ if I had an hundred pounds, I would gladly give it thee.”

This was not at all the usual way of speaking on the part of the monks that Robin waylaid, and the outlaw looked astonished. Moreover, the King handed over his purse without being compelled. Robin took the purse, and found that it had in it truly but forty pounds. He divided the sum into halves. Then he put back twenty pounds into the King’s purse, and returned it to him.

“ Sir,” he said courteously, “ have this for your spending. We shall meet another day.”

“ Gramercy!” said the King. “ Now I have a message for thee from His Majesty that thou must come to Nottingham to answer to him for certain matters, notably the murder of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Behold his seal!” and he showed Robin his own ring.

At sight of the King’s seal, Robin knelt on the greensward.

“ I love no man in all the world so well as I do my King!” he said. “ Welcome is his seal to me; and, Sir Abbot, because of thy tidings, and for love

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of our King, thou shalt dine with me to-day under my trysting tree.”

Now these words pleased the King right well; for it was chiefly to see Robin and his men that he had come to the forest. He dismounted from his horse, as did his attendants; and then Robin set his horn to his lips, and blew his accustomed signal.

In answer to the summons came his seven score of goodly men all dressed in green, and straightway they bent the knee to Robin, and did him homage.

“By the blessed St. Augustine,” the King muttered to himself, “here is a wondrous seemly sight! Methinks his men are more at his bidding than mine are at my command.”

Then the King was led off to dinner, and was made welcome by Marian and fair Ellen; and they sat down to a goodly feast of venison with plenty of wine and ale. Friar Tuck asked the blessing, and while the meal progressed, Alan a Dale played softly on his harp.

“Make good cheer, Abbot, for charity!” cried Robin hospitably. “For these same tidings that thou hast brought me from our gallant King, thou art right welcome! Now,” he added, as at last the meal was over, “now shalt thou see what life we lead ere thou dost leave us. Then mayst thou tell the King thereof when next thou seest him.”

At a word from Robin all the men started up in haste, and bent their bows as one man. The King, brave as he was, looked startled for a moment; but

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they did not shoot. Instead, with merry talk and laughter, they trooped to a little space not far from the tree where they had dined,—a spot evidently used as a field for shooting matches. Two willow wands were placed there as targets, each with a garland of roses hung upon it.

“By Our Lady,” the King exclaimed, as he saw these preparations, “that mark is too long by fifty paces. Their arrows will never hit.”

“Thou shalt see, Sir Abbot,” replied Robin courteously. Then he rose in his place, and raised his hand for silence.

“Whoever fails to hit within the garland,” said Robin, “shall lose his bow and arrows, and yield them to his master, be they never so fine. No man will I spare this penalty; and also he shall have a buffet on his head for his ill shooting!” and his eyes twinkled as he bared his strong right arm.

Then the shooting began, and the King watched it breathless with admiration. Nearly all the archers hit the wand, or at least came within the garland; if any failed to do the latter, he went gravely over to Robin without more ado, and took his punishment. At last Robin himself shot; and as always he cleft the wand. So indeed did Gilbert of the White Hand, and Little John, and Will Stutely. Finally, however, even Robin grew a little tired; and lo! his last shot failed of the garland by at least three fingers' lengths.

There was a great good-natured shout of laugh-

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ter from the outlaws at their master's poor aim.

“Now,” quoth Gilbert, grinning, “thy bow and arrows are forfeit also; and thou too must stand forth and take thy pay.”

Robin had joined in the laugh against himself.

“If it be so, it may no better be,” he answered Gilbert cheerily. “Sir Abbot, I deliver my bow and arrows to you, and do you give me my buffet.”

“Nay, it becometh not my order,” said the King, with seeming reluctance, “to smite a good yeoman lest I should sorely hurt him.”

“Nay, smite boldly, good Abbot!” cried Robin. “I give thee leave to do thy worst.”

With that the King rolled up his sleeve, and showed an arm strangely stout and muscular for an abbot. The next instant he gave Robin such a buffet that the latter nearly measured his length on the ground.

“I make my vow to God,” quoth Robin admiringly, even while he rubbed his aching head, “I make my vow to God thou art a stalwart brother. There is pith in thy arm. I trow thou canst shoot well also.”

Then the King removed his broad abbot's hat, and Robin at last saw his face distinctly; and there was something in his smile and in his kingly bearing that told Robin who it was that stood before him. The gallant outlaw fell on his knees.

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“My lord, the King of England,” said Robin, “now I know you well!”

“Mercy, then, Robin, under this trysting tree of yours,” said the King, smiling, “for my men and me.”

“Yea, before God!” said Robin solemnly. “So God save me! I too ask mercy, my lord the King, for my men and me!”

“Yea, before God!” replied the King, no less gravely; “for to see thee came I hither. Now indeed thou art a noble after my own heart, and noble by birth I know thee to be. Rise, Robert, Earl of Huntingdon! I restore to thee thy title and thy lands, on condition that thou wilt come back to court and be my true servant.”

“So shall it be!” said Robin. “I will indeed come to your court and be your true servant; and my merry men shall go with me; but,” he added, gazing about him at the great forest trees with a certain wistfulness in his eyes, “but if I like not thy service, I will leave the court and come back again to the greenwood.”

Then Robin brought forth coats of green for the King and his men; and they doffed their monkish garb, and appeared as foresters. The King spent the night with Robin; and the next morning, Robin and Marian, and all their followers left Sherwood, and rode back with the King to Nottingham.

The townspeople thought at first that Robin and his men had slain the King, because Richard was

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dressed in forest green like all the rest. They began to run away, fearing that the outlaws had come to take possession of the town; but when the King spoke to them they were satisfied that all was well.

So it was that Robin and his men left Sherwood Forest, and Robert, Earl of Huntingdon, came into his own again.

XXXV

THE DEATH OF ROBIN HOOD

*Lay me a green sod under my head,
And another at my feet;
And lay my bent bow by my side,
Which was my music sweet;
And make my grave of gravel and green,
Which is most right and meet.*

XXXV

THE DEATH OF ROBIN HOOD

ROBIN lived at the court for more than a year, and, as he had promised, he was a good servant to the King. It was not, however, a happy year for him. The ceremony of the court was a constant irritation to him, for he had known from boyhood nothing save the free life of the greenwood. For various reasons, too, the merry men whom he had brought with him from the forest gradually fell away. Some married, and settled down to the commonplace joys of the city. A few died, because the indoor life did not agree with them; and others were unhappy at the court and made their way back to Sherwood. Will Scarlet and his princess were still in London, but at last, of the men who had come with Robin himself to the city, only Will Stutely and Little John were left. Worst of all, during that twelvemonth, the great grief of his life came to Robin; for his dear Marian died.

In regard to her death, Robin tormented himself with quite unnecessary reproaches. He wondered whether he would have had her still if they had continued their old free life in the greenwood. He

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thought over again all the incidents that had led to her final illness, and tried to discover whether there was any way in which he might have prevented this or that or the other thing. They had never had any children, so Robin was bereft of that comfort. One day, not long after Marian was buried, Robin stood by a casement in the palace, looking sadly out into the courtyard; and he happened to see a group of young men shooting at a target.

“Alas!” quoth Robin gloomily. “My wealth is all gone! Sometime I was an archer good, both stiff and strong, the best in merry England, it was said. If I dwell here longer with the King, I shall be slain with sorrow!” and heaving a great sigh, he went in search of King Richard.

“My lord, the King of England,” he said, bending the knee to His Majesty when he found him, “give me my asking, I pray you! I made a chapel in Bernysdale where my sweet Marian lies buried, as you know. Thither would I, and pray for seven days and nights at her tomb. I pray you let me go.”

The King looked at him very gently.

“If it be so it may no better be,” he said. “Go for the seven nights, dear Robin, but prithee let it be no longer. I go shortly to Jerusalem again, and I had hoped for thy company thither.”

Robin looked at him yearningly.

“It would like me well,” he said slowly, “to see the Holy Sepulchre, and to tread the land where

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Our dear Lord did go His earthly ways; but—I know not, Your Majesty, whether I shall ever do so. I know only that now I must seek my Marian’s last resting-place. Gramercy, dear Majesty, for thy leave to fulfill my desire.” And he kissed the King’s hand, and left him.

Then he went in search of Little John and Will Stutely, and together the three faithful comrades left the court, and travelled to the chapel where Marian lay buried. When the week was over, however, they did not go back to the court. One merry morning they sought the greenwood together; and when Robin saw the sweet forest, and caught the old-time odors of the trees and the flowers, and heard the birds’ clear singing, his sorrowful eyes lighted for the first time since Marian’s death.

“It is passing long since I was last here,” he said to his two faithful comrades. “Methinks I will e’en shoot a little, and try whether all my skill be gone!” And with the words, as if to give him opportunity, a great hart came bounding through the trees. Robin seized his bow, and with his old unerring aim brought the hart down with a single shot.

Then, half smiling, he set his horn to his lips and blew it as of old; and lo! at the familiar summons, there came running through the trees great numbers of men dressed in forest green. How their faces lighted with joy when they saw their old-time leader; and with one accord, they bent the knee be-

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fore him as he stood between Little John and Will Stutely.

“Welcome, dear master,” they cried, “welcome to the greenwood!”

So no more of the court for Robin. He went back once to make his final farewell to the King; but by that time Richard had gone to the Holy Land again, and Robin received scant welcome from Prince John. He returned to his old life in the greenwood, and during King Richard's time he was never molested. At last, however, the King died, far away from England, and his successor, King John, was a very different man. He swore that he would rid England of that bold outlaw, Robin Hood; and while Robin and his men escaped capture and death for many years, they were nevertheless much harassed. Besides, Robin was no longer a young man, and it went hard with him to elude his captors, and play tricks upon them, as he had done so merrily in the past.

The day came at last when Robin fell very ill. At that time little was known about medicine, and it was the custom when people needed bodily treatment to go to a leech. A leech was a man or a woman who would let out a certain amount of the patient's blood, usually by cutting a vein; and it was supposed that most human ills could be cured in this way.

Accordingly, when he felt very weak and miserable one day, Robin said to Little John:

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“I am not able to shoot one shot more. My broad arrows will no longer flee whither I wish. I will to Kirkly Abbey, and get the Prioress there to bleed me; for she is a famous leech.”

It was the first time Little John had ever heard his master complain of illness, and he was consequently very much worried; but he said only:

“As thou wilt, master. I will go with thee thither.”

“Good sooth I were not able to go alone even if I would!” said Robin smiling somewhat ruefully; for he had never in his life been ill before.

So the two went to Kirkly Abbey, and knocked at the door, and the Prioress let them in. When she saw Robin, she looked at him with a smile on her lips but with evil in her heart, for it chanced that one of Robin’s good deeds had been to see justice done to a poor widow, who had been wronged by a man called Roger of Doncaster. Roger and the Prioress were great friends; and when she saw Robin, she realized that it was in her power to avenge what she considered Roger’s wrongs. She smiled on Robin, however, and spoke with smooth courtesy.

“Will it please thee, bold Robin,” she said, “to sit down and eat and drink with me?”

“Nay,” answered Robin, and his voice was faint; “I have come to be bled by thee, good Prioress, for I have heard thou art a famous leech.”

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“Gladly will I bleed thee,” she answered. “Come then to a retired room in one of the turrets, where thou canst be undisturbed. Thy man may wait for thee outside.”

Little John looked ill-pleased at this; for he had intended to stay with his master; but Robin Hood said:

“Ay, let it be so. Go, Little John, and when it is over, the Prioress will call thee.”

“As thou wilt, dear master,” said Little John submissively; “but I shall not be far away.”

So he left Robin with the Prioress, and went and stretched his huge length just outside the Abbey door. The Prioress took Robin by the hand, and led him to a remote room, high up in one of the turrets. There she bled him indeed; for instead of merely opening a small vein, as was the custom in such cases, she severed one of the great arteries. Then as he lay, weaker than ever and very faint from loss of blood, she placed a dish to catch the heavy flow, and went off and left him, as she thought, to die alone.

At first, Robin suspected nothing. He lay, nearly unconscious, feeling worse than he had in the beginning, but hoping every moment that he would improve. Then, as time passed, and the blood kept flowing, he began to fear that something must be wrong. All night long he lay there, and the next morning he was scarcely able to stagger to his feet. He wavered to the door, and found it locked. Then

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he managed to reach the open window; but he saw that it was too high up from the ground for him to leap from it, even if he had been strong enough to do so. He realized that he was caught in a trap by the false Prioress.

Nevertheless Little John the faithful had promised that he would not be far away. Robin's whirling brain remembered that. He managed to stagger back to the couch, and falling upon it, fumbled for his trusty horn.

Three weak and wavering blasts indeed were those last notes that Robin blew; but love's ear is quick, and Little John heard them where he had lain sleepless all night without the Abbey door.

"Alas!" said Little John, springing to his feet. "I fear my master is near death, so weakly doth he blow!"

He ran up the Abbey steps, and knocked furiously upon the door. He waited a moment, but there was no response.

"Here is some evil coil indeed!" quoth Little John, and with that he lunged heavily against the door with all his giant bulk and mighty strength. It gave, and he fell into the hall at full length; then scrambled to his feet and ran towards the staircase. At its foot the Prioress faced him, very white and defiant.

"Out of my way, woman!" cried Little John furiously. "Tell me where is my master?"

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“He sleeps after his bleeding,” answered the Prioress. “I charge you, disturb him not.”

“Ay,” shouted Little John, almost sobbing with rage and grief, “ay, I fear me he sleeps indeed and will never wake. Lead me at once where he is, or, Prioress as thou art, thy habit shall not save thee!” and he drew his sword and looked so threatening as he towered above her that the Prioress trembled and yielded, although much against her will. At the point of Little John’s sword, she led him up to the turret room and unlocked the door at his stern command; then fled before he could harm her.

Little John thought no more of her at the moment. He saw before him his dear master, lying so white and still that the giant feared him dead.

“O master, master!” cried Little John sobbing, falling on his knees beside the couch.

The sound of that dearly loved voice aroused Robin from his death-like stupor. He put his hand feebly on Little John’s and faintly spoke his name.

“A boon, a boon, master!” sobbed Little John, as he kissed the beloved hand.

“And what is thy boon, Little John?” asked Robin in his sighing thread of a voice.

“It is to burn this accursed place and all the nuns within it!” answered Little John, sobbing still as he spoke, and grinding his teeth in impotent rage.

Robin stirred and spoke more naturally.

“Nay, now, Little John,” he said. “I’ll not grant thee that boon. I never hurt woman in all



Robin drew his bow and shot his last arrow.

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my life, nor woman in man's company; so it would ill beseem me now at my end to do so. Thou hast never loved a woman, Little John, or thou wouldst love all women for her sake." Then his eyes closed, and for a moment Little John thought him gone; but he roused himself again by a mighty effort.

"Give me my bow and a broad arrow, Little John," he said, almost in his natural voice; and swiftly Little John did so. "Now," said Robin, his eyes dim with approaching death, "where this arrow is taken up, let them dig my grave." Then he murmured, his thoughts wandering to Sherwood, "Lay me a green sod under my head, and another at my feet. At my side put my bent bow which hath ever made sweet music for me; and let my grave be of gravel and of green. Give me length and breadth enough therein, dear Little John, and forget not the green sod for my head. I would lie at the last upon the soft bosom of the forest."

Then waveringly he sat upright, aided by Little John, and for the last time Robin drew his bow, and shot his last arrow. Then his arms fell limp, his eyes closed, and he sank heavily against Little John's broad breast.

So Robin died; and he was buried as he had wished where his arrow had fallen. Over his grave was placed this epitaph:

*Robert, Earl of Huntingdon
Lies under this little stone.*

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*No archer was like him so good;
His wildness named him Robin Hood.
Full thirteen years and something more
These northern parts he vexed sore.
Such outlaws as he and his men
May England never know again!*

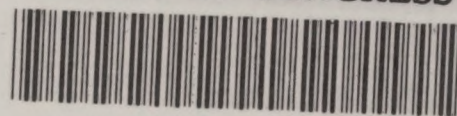
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