

THE
MERRY TALES
OF THE
WISE MEN
OF
GOTHAM.

Of merry Books this is the chief,
'Twill make you laugh your fill.



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THE
MERRY TALES

OF THE
WISE MEN OF GOTHAM.

TALE I.

THERE were two men of Gotham; and one of them was going to Nottingham market to buy sheep, and both met together on Nottingham bridge. Well met, said one to the other; whither are you going? said he that came from Nottingham. Marry, said he that was going thither, I am going to the market to buy sheep. Buy sheep! said the other, which way will you bring them home? Marry, said the other, I will bring them over this bridge. By Robin

Hood, said he that came from Nottingham, but thou shalt not. By my maid Margery, said the other, but I will. You shall not, said the one. I will, said the other. Then they beat their staves one against the other, and then against the ground, as if a hundred sheep had been betwixt them. Hold there, said the one. Beware of my sheep leaping over the bridge, said the other. I care not, said the one. They shall all come this way, said the other. But they shall not, said the one. Then said the other, if thou makest much ado, I will put my finger in thy mouth. A turd thou wilt, said the other. And as they were in contention, another wise man that belonged to Gotham, came from the market with a sack of meal on his horse; and seeing his neighbours at strife about sheep and none betwixt them, said he, Ah fools! will you never learn wit! Then help me, continued he, to lay this sack upon my shoulder; they did so, and he went to the side of the bridge and shook out the meal into the river, saying, How

much meal is there in my sack, neighbour? Marry, said one, there is none. Indeed, replied this wise man, even so much wit is there in your two heads to strive for that you have not. Now which was the wisest of these three; I leave thee to judge.

TALE II.

THERE was a man of Gotham that rode to the market with two bushels of wheat, and lest his horse should be damaged by carrying too great a burden he was determined to carry the corn himself, upon his own neck, and still kept riding upon his horse till he arrived at the end of his journey. I will leave you to judge which was the wisest, his horse or himself.

TALE III.

ON a time the men of Gotham fain would have pinned in the cuckoo that she might sing all the year; and in the midst of the town they had a hedge

made round in compass, and got a cuckoo and put her into it, and said, Sing here, and thou shalt lack neither meat nor drink all the year. The cuckoo, when she found herself encompassed by the hedge, flew away. A vengeance on her, said these wise men, we did not make our hedge high enough.

TALE IV.

THERE was a man of Gotham who went to Nottingham market to sell cheese; and going down the hill to Nottingham bridge, one of his cheeses fell out of his wallet and ran down the hill. Whoreson, said the man, can you run to the market alone? I'll now send one after another. Then laying his wallet down, and taking out the cheeses, he tumbled them down the hill one after another. Some ran into one bush and some into another. He charged them, however, to meet him at the market place. The man went to the market to meet the cheeses, and staying till the market was almost over, then went and

his neighbours if they saw his cheeses come to the market? Why, who should bring them? says one; Marry, themselves, said the fellow, they knew the way very well. A vengeance on them, they ran so fast, I was afraid they would run beyond the market; I am sure they are by this time as far as York. So he immediately rode to York, but was much disappointed. And to add to it, he never found nor heard of one of his cheeses.

TALE V.

A MAN of Gotham bought, at Nottingham market, a trevet of bar iron; and going home with it, his feet grew weary with the carriage. He set it down, and seeing it had three feet, said, Whoreson, thou hast three feet and I but two; thou shalt bear me home if thou wilt, so he set himself down upon it, and said to it, bear me as long as I have done thee, for if thou dost not thou shalt stand still for me. The man of Gotham saw his trevet would not move. Stand still

said he, in the Mayor's name, and follow me if thou wilt, and I can shew you the right way. When he went home, his wife asked where the trevet was? He said it had three legs, and he had but two, and he had taught him the ready way to his house, therefore he might come himself if he would. Where did you leave the trevet? said the woman. At Gotham bridge, said he. So she immediately ran and fetched the trevet herself; otherwise she must have lost it on account of her husband's want of wit.

TALE VI.

A CERTAIN smith of Gotham had a large wasp's nest in the straw at the end of the forge, and there coming one of his neighbours to have his horse shod, and the wasps being exceeding busy, the man was stung by one of them. The man, being grievously affronted, said, Are you worthy to keep a forge or not, to have men stung with these wasps? O neighbour, said the

smith, be content, and I will put them from their nest presently. Immediately he took a coulter, and heated it red hot, and thrust it into the straw at the end of his forge, and set it on fire, and burnt it up. Then, said the smith, I told thee I'd fire them out of their nest.

TALE VII.

On Good Friday the men of Gotham consulted together what to do with their white herrings, sprats, and salt fish, and agreed, that all such fish should be cast into a pond or pool, in the midst of the town, that the number of them might increase the next year. Therefore every one that had any fish left, did cast them immediately into the pond. Then said one, I have gotten left so many red herrings. Well, said another, and I have left so many whittings. Another cried out, I have as yet gotten so many sprats left. And, said the last, I have gotten so many salt fishes, let them go together

in the great pond, without any distinction, and we may be sure to fare like lords the next year. At the beginning of the next Lent, they immediately went about drawing the pond, imagining they should have the fish, but were much surprised to find nothing but a great eel. Ah! said they, a mischief on this eel, for he hath eaten up our fish. What must we do with him? said one; chop him in pieces, said another. Nay, not so, said another, but let us drown him. Be it accordingly so, replied they all. So they went immediately to another pond, and cast the eel into the water. Lay there, said these wise men, and shift for thyself, since you may not expect help from us. So they left the eel to be drowned.

TALE VIII.

ON a time the men of Gotham had forgotten to pay their rents to their landlord; so one said the other, to-morrow must be pay-day, by whom can we send our money? So one said, I

have this day taken a hare, and she may carry it, for she is very quick footed ; be it so, replied the rest ; she shall have a letter, and a purse to put our money in, and we can direct her the way. When the letter was written and the money put into a purse, they tied them about the hare's neck, saying, You must first go to Loughborough, and then to Leicester, and at Newark is our landlord ; then commend us to him, and there is his due. The hare, as soon as she got out of their hands, ran quite a contrary way. ---Some said, Thou must first go to Loughborough ; others said, Let the hare alone, for she can tell a nearer way than the best of us ; let her go.

TALE IX.

A man of Gotham, that went mowing in the meadow, found a large grasshopper. He instantly threw down his scythe, and ran home to his neighbour, and said that the devil was at work in the field, and was hopping among the

grass. Then was every man ready with their clubs, staves, halberts, and other weapons, to kill the grasshopper. When they came to the place where the grasshopper was, said one to the other, let every man cross himself from the devil, for we will not meddle with him. So they returned again, and said, We are blest this day that we went no farther. O ye cowards ! said he that left the scythe in the meadow, help me to fetch my scythe. No, answered they, it is good to sleep in a whole skin. It is much better for thee to lose thy scythe than to mar us all.

TALE X.

ON a certain time there were twelve men of Gotham that went to fish ; some waded in the water, and some stood on dry land. In going home, one said to the other, we have ventured wonderfully in wading, I pray God that none of us did come from home to be drowned. Nay, marry, said one to the other, let us see that, for there

did twelve of us come out. Then they told themselves, and every one told eleven. Said the one to the other, there is one of us drowned. They then went back to the brook, where they'd been fishing, and sought up and down for him that was drowned, making great lamentation. A courtier coming by, asked what it was they sought for, and why they were sorrowful. Oh, said they, this day we went to fish in the brook; twelve of us came out together, and one is drowned. The courtier said, tell how many there be of you. One of them told eleven, but he did not tell himself. Well, said the courtier, what will you give me, and I will find the twelfth man? All the money we have got, said they. Give me the money, said he. He began with the first, and gave him a stroke over the shoulders with his whip, that made him groan, saying, here is one, and so he served them all, and they groaned at the matter. When he came to the last, he paid him well, saying, here is the

welfth man. God's blessings on thee, said they, for finding our brother.

TALE XI.

A MAN of Gotham, riding along the highway, saw a cheese, so drew his sword and pricked it with the point, in order to pick it up. Another man who came by, alighted, picked it up, and rode away with it. The man of Gotham rides to Nottingham to buy a long sword to pick up the cheese, and returning to the place where it did lie, he pulled out his sword, pricked the ground, and said, if I had had but this sword I should have had the cheese myself, but now another has come before me and got it.

TALE XII.

A MAN in Gotham, that did not love his wife, and she having fair hair, he said divers times he would cut it off, but durst not do it when she was awake, so he resolved to do it wher:

she was asleep ; therefore, one night he took a pair of shears and put them under his pillow, which his wife perceiving, said to her maid, go to bed to my husband, to-night, for he intends to cut off my hair ; let him cut off thy hair, and I will give thee as good a kirtle as ever thou didst see. The maid did so, and feigned herself asleep, which the man perceiving, cut off her hair, wrapped it about the shears, and, laying them under the pillow, fell asleep. The maid arose, and the wife took the hair and shears, and went to the hall and burnt the hair. The man had a fine horse that he loved, and the goodwife went into the stable, cut off the hair of the horse's tail, wrapped the shears up in it, and laid them under the pillow again.---Her husband, seeing her combing her head in the morning, marvelled thereat. The girl, seeing her master in a deep study, said, What ails the horse in the stable, he has lost his tail ? The man ran into the stable, and found the horse's tail was cut off ; then going to the bed,

he found the shears wrapped up in his horse's tail. He then went to his wife, saying, I crave thy mercy, for I intended to cut off thy hair, but I have cut off my own horse's tail. Yea, said she, self do self have. Many men think to do a bad turn, but it turneth oft times to themselves.

TALE XIII.

A MAN of Gotham laid his wife a wager that she could not make him a cuckold. No! said she, but I can. Do not spare me, said he, but do what you can. On a time she had hid all the spigots and faucets, and going into the buttery, set a barrel of broach, and cried to her spouse, Pray, bring me a spigot and faucet, or else the ale will all run out. He sought up and down, but could not find one. Come here then, said she, and put thy finger in the tap-hole. Then she called a tailor with whom she made a bargain. Soon after she came to her hus-

band, and brought a spigot and a faucet, saying, Pull thy finger out of the tap-hole, good cuckold. Beshrew your heart for your trouble, said she, make no such bargain with me again.

TALE XIV.

A MAN of Gotham took a young buzzard, and invited four or five gentlemen's servants to the eating of it; but the wife killed an old goose, and she and two of her gossips ate up the buzzard, and the old goose was laid to the fire for the gentlemen's servants. So when they came the goose was set before them. What is this? said one of them. The goodman said, a curious buzzard. A buzzard! why, it is an old goose, and thou art a knave to mock us, and so departed in great anger. The fellow was sorry that he had affronted them, and took a bag and put the buzzard's feathers in it; but his wife desired him, before he went, to fetch a block of wood, and in the interim she pulled out the buzzard's

feathers, and put in the goose's. The man, taking the bag, went to the gentlemen's servants, and said, Pray, be not angry with me, you shall see I had a buzzard, for here be the feathers. Then he opened the bag, and took out the goose's feathers; upon which one of them took a cudgel, and gave him a dozen of stripes, saying, Why, you knave, could you not be content to mock us at home, but you are come here to mock us also.

TALE XV.

A MAN'S wife of Gotham was brought to bed of a male child, and the father invited the gossips, who were children of eight or ten years of age. The eldest child's name was Gilbert, the second's name was Humphrey, and the godmother was called Christabel. Their relations admonished them divers times, that they must all say after the parson. And when they were come to church, the priest said, Be you all agreed of the name? Gilbert, Hum-

phrey, and Christabel, said the same. The priest then said, Wherefore came you hither ? They immediately said the same. The priest being amazed, could not tell what to say, but whistled and said Whey, and so did they. The priest being angry, said, Go home, you fools, go home. Then Gilbert, Humphrey, and Christabel, did the same. The priest then provided god-fathers and god-mothers himself.

TALE XVI.

A YOUNG man of Gotham went a wooing a fair maid : his mother warned him before-hand, saying, whenever you look at her, cast a sheep's eye at her, and say, How dost thou my sweet Pigmy ? The fellow went to a butcher and bought seven or eight sheep eyes. And when this lusty wooer was at dinner, he would look upon the fair wench, and cast in her face a sheep's eye, saying, How dost thou do, my sweet Pigmy ? How I do, said the wench ; Swine's face, what do you mean by casting a

sheep's eye at me? O! sweet Pigmy, have at thee with another. I defy thee Swine's face, said the wench. What my sweet old Pigmy, be content, for if you live till next year you will be a foul sow. Walk, knave, walk, said she, for if you live till next year you will be a fool.

TALE XVII.

THERE was a man of Gotham who would be married, and when the day of marriage was come, they went to church. The priest said, Do you say after me. The man said, Do you say after me. The priest said Say not after me such like, but say what I shall tell you; thou dost play the fool to mock the holy Scriptures concerning matrimony, The fellow said, Thou dost play the fool to mock the holy Scriptures concerning matrimony. The priest wist not what to say, but answered, What shall I do with this fool? and the man said, What shall I do with this fool? So the priest took his leave, and

would not marry them. The man was instructed by others how to do, and was afterwards married. And thus the breed of the Gothamites has been perpetuated even unto this day.

TALE XVIII.

THERE was a Scotsman who dwelt at Gotham, and he took a house a little distance from London, and turned it into an inn, and for his sign he would have a boar's head accordingly he went to a carver, and said, Can you make me a bare head? Yes, said the carver. Then said he, make me a bare head, and thou'se hae twenty shillings for thy hire I will do it, said the carver, on St Andrew's day, before Christmas, (called Yule in Scotland,) the Scot came to London for his boar's head. I say, speak, said the Scotsman, hast thou made me a bare head? Yes, said the carver. He went and brought a man's head of wood that was bare, and said, Sir, there is your bare head. Ay, said the Scot the meikle de'il! is this

bare head! Yes, said the carver. I
 say, said the Scotsman, I will have a
 bare head like the head that follows a
 sow with gryces. What, whoreson,
 know you not a sow that will greet and
 groan and cry a-week, a-week. What,
 said the carver, do you mean a pig!
 Yes, said the Scotsman, let me have
 her head made of timber, and set on
 her a scalp, and let her sing---Whip
 whire. The carver said he could not.
 You whoreson, said he, gar her as she'd
 sing whip whire.

TALE XIX.

IN old times, during these tales, the
 wives of Gotham were got into an ale-
 house, and said they were all profitable
 to their husbands. Which way, good
 gossips! said the ale-wife. The first
 said, I will tell you all, good gossips
 I cannot brew nor bake, therefore I
 am every day alike, and go to the ale-
 house because I cannot go to church;
 and in the alehouse I pray to God to
 speed my husband, and I am sure my

prayers will do him more good than my labour. Then said the second, I am profitable to my husband in saving of candle in winter, for I cause my husband and all my people to go to bed by day-light and rise by day-light. The third said, I am profitable in sparing bread, for I drink a gallon of ale, and I care not much for meat. The fourth said, I am loath to spend meat and drink at home, so I go to the tavern at Nottingham and drink wine, and such other things as God sends me there. The fifth said, A man will ever have more company in another's house than his own, and most commonly in the ale-house. The sixth said, My husband has flax and wool to spare, if I go to other folk's houses to do their work. The seventh said, I spare my husband's wood and clothes, and sit all day talking at other folks' fires. The eighth said, Beef, mutton, and pork are dear, I therefore take pigs, chickens, conies, and capons, being of a lesser price. The ninth said, I spare my husband's soap, for instead of washing

once a week, I wash but once a quarter. Then said the ale-wife, I keep all my husband's ale from souring; for as I was wont to drink it almost up, now I never leave a drop.

TALE XX.

ON Ash Wednesday, the minister of Gotham would have a collection from his parishioners, and said unto them, My friends, the time is come that you must use prayer, fasting, and alms, but come ye to shrift, I will tell you more of my mind. But as for prayer, I don't think that two men in the parish can say their Paternoster. As for fasting, ye fast still, for ye have not a good meal's meat in the year. As for alms-deeds, what should they give that have nothing? In Lent you must refrain from drunkenness and abstain from drink. No not so, said one fellow, for it is an old proverb, that fish should swim. Yes, said the priest, they must swim in the water. I crave thy mercy, quoth the fellow, I thought it should

have swam in fine ale, for I have been told so. Soon after the men of Gotham came to shrift and being seven, the priest knew not what penance to give. He said, if I enjoin you to pray, you cannot say your Paternoster. And it is but folly to make you fast, because you never eat a meal's meat. Labour hard and get a dinner on Sunday, and I will partake of it. Another man he enjoined to fare well on Monday, and another on Tuesday, and another on Wednesday, and so on one after another, that one or other should fare well once in the week that he might have part of their meat. on every day during the week. And as for your alm-deeds, the priest said, ye be but beggars all, except one or two, therefore bestow your alms on yourselves.