

LANG ANDREW

TALES OF
ROMANCE

Andrew Lang

Tales of Romance

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Tales of Romance

THE STORY OF ROBIN HOOD

PART I

Many hundreds of years ago, when the Plantagenets were kings, England was so covered with woods, that a squirrel was said to be able to hop from tree to tree from the Severn to the Humber.

It must have been very different to look at from the country we travel through now; but still there were roads that ran from north to south and from east to west, for the use of those who wished to leave their homes, and at certain times of the year these roads were thronged with people.

Pilgrims going to some holy shrine passed along, merchants taking their wares to Court, Abbots and Bishops ambling by on palfreys to bear their part in the King's Council, and, more frequently still, a solitary Knight, seeking adventures.

Besides the broad roads there were small tracks and little green paths, and these led to clumps of low huts, where dwelt the peasants, charcoal-burners, and ploughmen, and here and there some larger clearing than usual told that the house of a yeoman was near.

Now and then as you passed through the forest you might ride by a splendid abbey, and catch a glimpse of monks in long black or white gowns, fishing in the streams and rivers that abound in this part of England, or casting nets in the fish ponds which were in the midst of the abbey gardens. Or you might chance to see a castle with round turrets and high battlements, circled by strong walls, and protected by a moat full of water.

This was the sort of England into which the famous Robin Hood was born. We do not know anything about him, who he was, or where he lived, or what evil deed he had done to put him beyond the King's grace. For he was an outlaw, and any man might kill him and never pay penalty for it.

But, outlaw or not, the poor people loved him and looked on him as their friend, and many a stout fellow came to join him, and led a merry life in the greenwood, with moss and fern for bed, and for meat the King's deer, which it was death to slay.

Peasants of all sorts, tillers of the land, yeomen, and as some say Knights, went on their ways freely, for of them Robin took no toll; but lordly churchmen with money-bags well filled, or proud Bishops with their richly dressed followers, trembled as they drew near to Sherwood Forest – who was to know whether behind every tree there did not lurk Robin Hood or some of his men?

PART II

THE COMING OF LITTLE JOHN

One day Robin was walking alone in the wood, and reached a river which was spanned by a very narrow bridge, over which one man only could pass. In the midst stood a stranger, and Robin bade him go back and let him go over. "I am no man of yours," was all the answer Robin got, and in anger he drew his bow and fitted an arrow to it.

"Would you shoot a man who has no arms but a staff?" asked the stranger in scorn; and with shame Robin laid down his bow, and unbuckled an oaken stick at his side. "We will fight till one of us falls into the water," he said; and fight they did, till the stranger planted a blow so well that Robin rolled over into the river.

"You are a brave soul," said he, when he had waded to land, and he blew a blast with his horn which brought fifty good fellows, clad in green, to the little bridge.

"Have you fallen into the river that your clothes are wet?" asked one; and Robin made answer, "No, but this stranger, fighting on the bridge, got the better of me, and tumbled me into the stream."

At this the foresters seized the stranger, and would have ducked him had not their leader bade them stop, and begged the stranger to stay with them and make one of themselves. "Here is my hand," replied the stranger, "and my heart with it. My name, if you would know it, is John Little."

"That must be altered," cried Will Scarlett; "we will call a feast, and henceforth, because he is full seven feet tall and round the waist at least an ell, he shall be called Little John."

And thus it was done; but at the feast Little John, who always liked to know exactly what work he had to do, put some questions to Robin Hood. "Before I join hands with you, tell me first what sort of life is this you lead? How am I to know whose goods I shall take, and whose I shall leave? Whom I shall beat, and whom I shall refrain from beating?"

And Robin answered: "Look that you harm not any tiller of the ground, nor any yeoman of the greenwood – no, nor no Knight nor Squire, unless you have heard him ill spoken of. But if Bishops or Archbishops come your way, see that you spoil *them*, and mark that you always hold in your mind the High Sheriff of Nottingham."

This being settled, Robin Hood declared Little John to be second in command to himself among the brotherhood of the forest, and the new outlaw never forgot to "hold in his mind" the High Sheriff of Nottingham, who was the bitterest enemy the foresters had.

Robin Hood, however, had no liking for a company of idle men about him, and he at once sent off Little John and Will Scarlett to the great road known as Watling Street, with orders to hide among the trees and wait till some adventure might come to them; and if they took captive Earl or Baron, Abbot or Knight, he was to be brought unharmed back to Robin Hood.

But all along Watling Street the road was bare; white and hard it lay in the sun, without the tiniest cloud of dust to show that a rich company might be coming: east and west the land lay still.

PART III

LITTLE JOHN'S FIRST ADVENTURE

At length, just where a side path turned into the broad highway, there rode a Knight, and a sorrier man than he never sat a horse on summer day. One foot only was in the stirrup, the other hung carelessly by his side; his head was bowed, the reins dropped loose, and his horse went on as he would. At so sad a sight the hearts of the outlaws were filled with pity, and Little John fell on his knees and bade the Knight welcome in the name of his master.

"Who is your master?" asked the Knight.

"Robin Hood," answered Little John.

"I have heard much good of him," replied the Knight, "and will go with you gladly."

Then they all set off together, tears running down the Knight's cheeks as he rode, but he said nothing, neither was anything said to him. And in this wise they came to Robin Hood.

"Welcome, Sir Knight," cried he, "and thrice welcome, for I waited to break my fast till you or some other had come to me."

"God save you, good Robin," answered the Knight, and after they had washed themselves in the stream, they sat down to dine off bread and wine, with flesh of the King's deer, and swans and pheasants. "Such a dinner have I not had for three weeks and more," said the Knight. "And if I ever come again this way, good Robin, I will give you as fine a dinner as you have given me."

"I thank you," replied Robin, "my dinner is always welcome; still, I am none so greedy but I can wait for it. But before you go, pay me, I pray you, for the food which you have had. It was never the custom for a yeoman to pay for a Knight."

"My bag is empty," said the Knight, "save for ten shillings only."

"Go, Little John, and look in his wallet," said Robin, "and, Sir Knight, if in truth you have no more, not one penny will I take; nay, I will give you all that you shall need."

So Little John spread out the Knight's mantle, and opened the bag, and therein lay ten shillings and naught besides.

"What tidings, Little John?" cried his master.

"Sir, the Knight speaks truly," said Little John.

"Then fill a cup of the best wine and tell me, Sir Knight, whether it is your own ill doings which have brought you to this sorry pass."

"For an hundred years my fathers have dwelt in the forest," answered the Knight, "and four hundred pounds might they spend yearly. But within two years misfortune has befallen me, and my wife and children also."

"How did this evil come to pass?" asked Robin.

"Through my own folly," answered the Knight, "and because of the great love I bore my son, who would never be guided of my counsel, and slew, ere he was twenty years old, a Knight of Lancaster and his Squire. For their deaths I had to pay a large sum, which I could not raise without giving my lands in pledge to the rich Abbot of St. Mary's. If I cannot bring him the money by a certain day they will be lost to me for ever."

"What is the sum?" asked Robin. "Tell me truly."

"It is four hundred pounds," said the Knight.

"And what will you do if you lose your lands?" asked Robin again.

"Hide myself over the sea," said the Knight, "and bid farewell to my friends and country. There is no better way open to me."

At this tears fell from his eyes, and he turned him to depart. "Good day, my friend," he said to Robin, "I cannot pay you what I should – " But Robin held him fast. "Where *are* your friends?" asked he.

"Sir, they have all forsaken me since I became poor, and they turn away their heads if we meet upon the road, though when I was rich they were ever in my castle."

When Little John and Will Scarlett and the rest heard this, they wept for very shame and fury, and Robin bade them fill a cup of the best wine, and give it to the Knight.

"Have you no one who would stay surety for you?" said he.

"None," answered the Knight, "but only Our Lady, who has never yet failed to help me."

"You speak well," said Robin, "and you, Little John, go to my treasure chest, and bring me thence four hundred pounds. And be sure you count it truly."

So Little John went, and Will Scarlett, and they brought back the money.

"Sir," said Little John, when Robin had counted it and found it no more nor no less, "look at his clothes, how thin they are! You have stores of garments, green and scarlet, in your coffers – no merchant in England can boast the like. I will measure some out with my bow." And thus he did.

"Master," spoke Little John again, "there is still something else. You must give him a horse, that he may go as beseems his quality to the Abbey."

"Take the grey horse," said Robin, "and put a new saddle on it, and take likewise a good palfrey and a pair of boots, with gilt spurs on them. And as it would be a shame for a Knight to ride by himself on this errand, I will lend you Little John as Squire – perchance he may stand you in yeoman's stead."

"When shall we meet again?" asked the Knight.

"This day twelve months," said Robin, "under the greenwood tree."

Then the Knight rode on his way, with Little John behind him, and as he went he thought of Robin Hood and his men, and blessed them for the goodness they had shown towards him.

"To-morrow," he said to Little John, "I must be at the Abbey of St. Mary, which is in the city of York, for if I am but so much as a day late my lands are lost forever, and though I were to bring the money I should not be suffered to redeem them."

PART IV

Now the Abbot had been counting the days as well as the Knight, and the next morning he said to his monks: "This day year there came a Knight and borrowed of me four hundred pounds, giving his lands in surety. And if he come not to pay his debt ere midnight tolls they will be ours for ever."

"It is full early yet," answered the Prior, "he may still be coming."

"He is far beyond the sea," said the Abbot, "and suffers from hunger and cold. How is he to get here?"

"It were a shame," said the Prior, "for you to take his lands. And you do him much wrong if you drive such a hard bargain."

"He is dead or hanged," spake a fat-headed monk who was the cellarer, "and we shall have his four hundred pounds to spend on our gardens and our wines," and he went with the Abbot to attend the court of justice, wherein the Knight's lands would be declared forfeited by the High Justiciar.

"If he come not this day," cried the Abbot, rubbing his hands, "if he come not this day, they will be ours."

"He will not come yet," said the Justiciar, but he knew not that the Knight was already at the outer gate, and Little John with him.

"Welcome, Sir Knight," said the porter. "The horse that you ride is the noblest that ever I saw. Let me lead them both to the stable, that they may have food and rest."

"They shall not pass these gates," answered the Knight sternly, and he entered the hall alone, where the monks were sitting at meat, and knelt down and bowed to them.

"I have come back, my lord," he said to the Abbot, who had just returned from the court. "I have come back this day as I promised."

"Have you brought my money?" was all the Abbot said.

"Not a penny," answered the Knight, who wished to see how the Abbot would treat him.

"Then what do you here without it?" cried the Abbot in angry tones.

"I have come to pray you for a longer day," answered the Knight meekly.

"The day was fixed and cannot be gainsaid," replied the Justiciar; but the Knight only begged that he would stand his friend and help him in his strait. "I am with the Abbot," was all the Justiciar would answer.

"Good Sir Abbot, be my friend," prayed the Knight again, "and give me one chance more to get the money and free my lands. I will serve you day and night till I have four hundred pounds to redeem them."

But the Abbot only vowed that the money must be paid that day or the lands be forfeited.

The Knight stood up straight and tall: "It is well," said he, "to prove one's friends against the hour of need," and he looked the Abbot full in the face, and the Abbot felt uneasy, he did not know why, and hated the Knight more than ever. "Out of my hall, false Knight!" cried he, pretending to a courage which he did not feel. But the Knight stayed where he was, and answered him, "You lie, Abbot. Never was I false, and that I have shown in jousts and in tourneys."

"Give him two hundred pounds more," said the Justiciar to the Abbot, "and keep the lands yourself."

"No, by Heaven!" answered the Knight, "not if you offered me a thousand pounds would I do it! Neither Justiciar, Abbot, nor Monk shall be heir of mine." Then he strode up to a table and emptied out four hundred pounds. "Take your gold, Sir Abbot, which you lent to me a year ago. Had you but received me civilly, I would have paid you something more."

"Sir Abbot, and ye men of law,
Now have I kept my day!

Now shall I have my land again,
For aught that you may say."

So he passed out of the hall singing merrily, leaving the Abbot staring silently after him, and rode back to his house, where his wife met him at the gate.

"Welcome, my lord," said his lady,
"Sir, lost is all your good."
"Be merry, dame," said the Knight,
"And pray for Robin Hood.

"But for his kindness, we had been beggars."

PART V

After this the Knight dwelt at home, looking after his lands and saving his money carefully, till the four hundred pounds lay ready for Robin Hood. Then he bought a hundred bows and a hundred arrows, and every arrow was an ell long, and had a head of silver and peacock's feathers. And clothing himself in white and red, and with a hundred men in his train, he set off to Sherwood Forest.

On the way he passed an open space near a bridge where there was a wrestling, and the Knight stopped and looked, for he himself had taken many a prize in that sport. Here the prizes were such as to fill any man with envy; a fine horse, saddled and bridled, a great white bull, a pair of gloves, a ring of bright red gold, and a pipe of wine.

There was not a yeoman present who did not hope to win one of them. But when the wrestling was over, the yeoman who had beaten them all was a man who kept apart from his fellows, and was said to think much of himself.

Therefore the men grudged him his skill, and set upon him with blows, and would have killed him, had not the Knight, for love of Robin Hood, taken pity on him, while his followers fought with the crowd, and would not suffer them to touch the prizes a better man had won.

When the wrestling was finished the Knight rode on, and there under the greenwood tree, in the place appointed, he found Robin Hood and his merry men waiting for him, according to the tryst that they had fixed last year: —

"God save thee, Robin Hood,
And all this company."
"Welcome be thou, gentle Knight,
And right welcome to me.

"Hast thou thy land again?" said Robin,
"Truth then tell thou me."
"Yea, for God," said the Knight,
"And that thank I God and thee.

"Have here four hundred pounds," said the Knight,
"The which you lent to me;
And here are also twenty marks
For your courtesie."

But Robin would not take the money. A miracle had happened, he said, and Our Lady had paid it to him, and shame would it be for him to take it twice over.

Then he noticed for the first time the bows and arrows which the Knight had brought, and asked what they were. "A poor present to you," answered the Knight, and Robin, who would not be outdone, sent Little John once more to his treasury, and bade him bring forth four hundred pounds, which was given to the Knight.

After that they parted, in much love, and Robin prayed the Knight if he were in any strait "to let him know at the greenwood tree, and while there was any gold there he should have it".

PART VI

HOW LITTLE JOHN BECAME THE SHERIFF'S SERVANT

Meanwhile the High Sheriff of Nottingham proclaimed a great shooting-match in a broad open space, and Little John was minded to try his skill with the rest. He rode through the forest, whistling gaily to himself, for well he knew that not one of Robin Hood's men could send an arrow as straight as he, and he felt little fear of anyone else.

When he reached the trysting place he found a large company assembled, the Sheriff with them, and the rules of the match were read out: where they were to stand, how far the mark was to be, and how that three tries should be given to every man.

Some of the shooters shot near the mark, some of them even touched it, but none but Little John split the slender wand of willow with every arrow that flew from his bow.

At this sight the Sheriff of Nottingham swore that Little John was the best archer that ever he had seen, and asked him who he was and where he was born, and vowed that if he would enter his service he would give twenty marks a year to so good a bowman.

Little John, who did not wish to confess that he was one of Robin Hood's men and an outlaw, said his name was Reynold Greenleaf, and that he was in the service of a Knight, whose leave he must get before he became the servant of any man.

This was given heartily by the Knight, and Little John bound himself to the Sheriff for the space of twelve months, and was given a good white horse to ride on whenever he went abroad. But for all that he did not like his bargain, and made up his mind to do the Sheriff, who was hated of the outlaws, all the mischief he could.

His chance came on a Wednesday when the Sheriff always went hunting, and Little John lay in bed till noon, when he grew hungry. Then he got up, and told the steward that he wanted some dinner. The steward answered he should have nothing till the Sheriff came home, so Little John grumbled and left him, and sought out the butler.

Here he was no more successful than before; the butler just went to the buttery door and locked it, and told Little John that he would have to make himself happy till his lord returned.

Rude words mattered nothing to Little John, who was not accustomed to be baulked by trifles, so he gave a mighty kick which burst open the door, and then ate and drank as much as he would, and when he had finished all there was in the buttery, he went down into the kitchen.

Now the Sheriff's cook was a strong man and a bold one, and had no mind to let another man play the king in his kitchen; so he gave Little John three smart blows, which were returned heartily. "Thou art a brave man and hardy," said Little John, "and a good fighter withal. I have a sword, take you another, and let us see which is the better man of us twain."

The cook did as he was bid, and for two hours they fought, neither of them harming the other. "Fellow," said Little John at last, "you are one of the best swordsmen that I ever saw – and if you could shoot as well with the bow, I would take you back to the merry greenwood, and Robin Hood would give you twenty marks a year and two changes of clothing."

"Put up your sword," said the cook, "and I will go with you. But first we will have some food in my kitchen, and carry off a little of the gold that is in the Sheriff's treasure house."

They ate and drank till they wanted no more, then they broke the locks of the treasure house, and took of the silver as much as they could carry, three hundred pounds and more, and departed unseen by anyone to Robin in the forest.

PART VII

"Welcome! welcome!" cried Robin when he saw them, "welcome, too, to the fair yeoman you bring with you. What tidings from Nottingham, Little John?"

"The proud Sheriff greets you, and sends you by my hand his cook and his silver vessels, and three hundred pounds and three also."

Robin shook his head, for he knew better than to believe Little John's tale. "It was never by his good will that you brought such treasure to me," he answered, and Little John, fearing that he might be ordered to take it back again, slipped away into the forest to carry out a plan that had just come into his head.

He ran straight on for five miles, till he came up with the Sheriff, who was still hunting, and flung himself on his knees before him.

"Reynold Greenleaf," cried the Sheriff, "what are you doing here, and where have you been?"

"I have been in the forest, where I saw a fair hart of a green colour, and sevenscore deer feeding hard by."

"That sight would I see too," said the Sheriff.

"Then follow me," answered Little John, and he ran back the way he came, the Sheriff following on horseback, till they turned a corner of the forest, and found themselves in Robin Hood's presence. "Sir, here is the master-hart," said Little John.

Still stood the proud Sheriff,
A sorry man was he,
"Woe be to you, Reynold Greenleaf,
Thou hast betrayed me!"

"It was not my fault," answered Little John, "but the fault of your servants, master. For they would not give me my dinner," and he went away to see to the supper.

It was spread under the greenwood tree, and they sat down to it, hungry men all. But when the Sheriff saw himself served from his own vessels, his appetite went from him.

"Take heart, man," said Robin Hood, "and think not we will poison you. For charity's sake, and for the love of Little John, your life shall be granted you. Only for twelve months you shall dwell with me, and learn what it is to be an outlaw."

To the Sheriff this punishment was worse to bear than the loss of gold or silver dishes, and earnestly he begged Robin Hood to set him free, vowing he would prove himself the best friend that ever the foresters had.

Neither Robin nor any of his men believed him, but he swore that he would never seek to do them harm, and that if he found any of them in evil plight he would deliver them out of it. With that Robin let him go.

PART VIII

HOW ROBIN MET FRIAR TUCK

In many ways life in the forest was dull in the winter, and often the days passed slowly; but in summer, when the leaves were green, and flowers and ferns covered all the woodland, Robin Hood and his men would come out of their warm resting places, like the rabbits and the squirrels, and would play too. Races they ran to stretch their legs, or leaping matches were arranged, or they would shoot at a mark. Anything was pleasant when the grass was soft once more under their feet.

"Who can kill a hart of grace five hundred paces off?" So said Robin to his men in the bright May time; and they went into the wood and tried their skill, and in the end it was Little John who brought down the "hart of grace," to the great joy of Robin Hood.

"I would ride my horse a hundred miles to find one who could match with thee," he said to Little John, and Will Scarlett, who was perhaps rather jealous of this mighty deed, answered with a laugh, "There lives a friar in Fountains Abbey who would beat both him and you."

Now Robin Hood did not like to be told that any man could shoot better than himself or his foresters, so he swore lustily that he would neither eat nor drink till he had seen that friar. Leaving his men where they were, he put on a coat of mail and a steel cap, took his shield and sword, slung his bow over his shoulder, and filled his quiver with arrows. Thus armed, he set forth to Fountains Dale.

By the side of the river a friar was walking, armed like Robin, but without a bow. At this sight Robin jumped from his horse, which he tied to a thorn, and called to the friar to carry him over the water or it would cost him his life.

The friar said nothing, but hoisted Robin on his broad back and marched into the river. Not a word was spoken till they reached the other side, when Robin leaped lightly down, and was going on his way when the friar stopped him. "Not so fast, my fine fellow," said he. "It is my turn now, and you shall take me across the river, or woe will betide you."

So Robin carried him, and when they had reached the side from which they had started, he set down the friar and jumped for the second time on his back, and bade him take him whence he had come. The friar strode into the stream with his burden, but as soon as they got to the middle he bent his head and Robin fell into the water. "Now you can sink or swim as you like," said the friar, as he stood and laughed.

Robin Hood swam to a bush of golden broom, and pulled himself out of the water, and while the friar was scrambling out Robin fitted an arrow to his bow and let fly at him. But the friar quickly held up his shield, and the arrow fell harmless.

"Shoot on, my fine fellow, shoot on all day if you like," shouted the friar, and Robin shot till his arrows were gone, but always missed his mark. Then they took their swords, and at four of the afternoon they were still fighting.

By this time Robin's strength was wearing, and he felt he could not fight much more. "A boon, a boon!" cried he. "Let me but blow three blasts on my horn, and I will thank you on my bended knees for it."

The friar told him to blow as many blasts as he liked, and in an instant the forest echoed with his horn; it was but a few minutes before "half a hundred yeomen were racing over the lea". The friar stared when he saw them; then, turning to Robin, he begged of him a boon also, and leave being granted he gave three whistles, which were followed by the noise of a great crashing through the trees, as fifty great dogs bounded towards him.

"Here's a dog for each of your men," said the friar, "and I myself for you"; but the dogs did not listen to his words, for two of them rushed at Robin, and tore his mantle of Lincoln green from off

his back. His men were too busy defending themselves to take heed of their master's plight, for every arrow shot at a dog was caught and held in the creature's mouth.

Robin's men were not used to fight with dogs, and felt they were getting beaten. At last Little John bade the friar call off his dogs, and as he did not do so at once he let fly some arrows, which this time left half a dozen dead on the ground.

"Hold, hold, my good fellow," said the friar, "till your master and I can come to a bargain," and when the bargain was made this was how it ran. That the friar was to forswear Fountains Abbey and join Robin Hood, and that he should be paid a golden noble every Sunday throughout the year, besides a change of clothes on each holy day.

This Friar had kept Fountains Dale
Seven long years or more,
There was neither Knight, nor Lord, nor Earl
Could make him yield before.

But now he became one of the most famous members of Robin Hood's men under the name of Friar Tuck.

PART IX

HOW ROBIN HOOD AND LITTLE JOHN FELL OUT

One Whitsunday morning, when the sun was shining and the birds singing, Robin Hood called to Little John to come with him into Nottingham to hear Mass. As was their custom, they took their bows, and on the way Little John proposed that they should shoot a match with a penny for a wager.

Robin, who held that he himself shot better than any man living, laughed in scorn, and told Little John that he should have three tries to his master's one, which John without more ado accepted.

But Robin soon repented both of his offer and his scorn, for Little John speedily won five shillings, whereat Robin became angry and smote Little John with his hand.

Little John was not the man to bear being treated so, and he told Robin roundly that he would never more own him for master, and straightway turned back into the wood.

At this Robin was ashamed of what he had done, but his pride would not suffer him to say so, and he continued his way to Nottingham, and entered the Church of St. Mary, not without secret fears, for the Sheriff of the town was ever his enemy. However, there he was and there he meant to stay.

He knelt down before the great cross in the sight of all the people, but none knew him save one monk only, and he stole out of church and ran to the Sheriff, and bade him come quickly and take his foe.

The Sheriff was not slow to do the monk's bidding, and, calling his men to follow him, he marched to the church. The noise they made in entering caused Robin to look round. "Alas, alas," he said to himself, "now miss I Little John."

But he drew his two-handed sword and laid about him in such wise that twelve of the Sheriff's men lay dead before him. Then Robin found himself face to face with the Sheriff, and gave him a fierce blow; but his sword broke on the Sheriff's head, and he had shot away all his arrows. So the men closed round him, and bound his arms.

Ill news travels fast, and not many hours had passed before the foresters heard that their master was in prison. They wept and moaned and wrung their hands, and seemed to have gone suddenly mad, till Little John bade them pluck up their hearts and help him to deal with the monk.

PART X

The next morning Little John hid himself, and waited with a comrade, Much by name, till he saw the monk riding along the road, with a page behind him, carrying letters from the Sheriff to the King telling of Robin's capture.

"Whence come you?" asked Little John, going up to the monk, "and can you give us tidings of a false outlaw named Robin Hood, who was taken prisoner yesterday? He robbed both me and my fellow of twenty marks, and glad should we be to hear of his undoing."

"He robbed me, too," said the monk, "of a hundred pounds and more, but I have laid hands on him, and for that you may thank me."

"I thank you so much that, with your leave, I and my friend will bear you company," answered Little John; "for in this forest are many wild men who own Robin Hood for leader, and you ride along this road at the peril of your life."

They went on together, talking the while, when suddenly Little John seized the horse by the head and pulled down the monk by his hood.

"He was my master," said Little John,
"That you have brought to bale,
Never shall you come at the King
For to tell him that tale."

At these words the monk uttered loud cries, but Little John took no heed of him, and smote off his head, as Much had already smitten off that of the page, lest he should carry the news of what had happened back to the Sheriff. After this they buried the bodies, and, taking the letters, carried them themselves to the King.

When they arrived at the Palace, in the presence of the King, Little John fell on his knees and held the letter out. "God save you, my liege lord," he said; and the King unfolded the letters and read them.

"There never was yeoman in Merry England I longed so sore to see," he said. "But where is the monk that should have brought these letters?"

"He died by the way," answered Little John; and the King asked no more questions.

Twenty pounds each he ordered his treasurer to give to Much and to Little John, and made them yeomen of the crown. After which he handed his own seal to Little John and ordered him to bear it to the Sheriff, and bid him without delay bring Robin Hood unhurt into his presence.

Little John did as the King bade him, and the Sheriff, at sight of the seal, gave him and Much welcome, and set a feast before them, at which John led him to drink heavily. Soon he fell asleep, and then the two outlaws stole softly to the prison. Here John ran the porter through the body for trying to stop his entrance, and, taking the keys, hunted through the cells until he had found Robin. Thrusting a sword into his hand Little John whispered to his master to follow him, and they crept along till they reached the lowest part of the city wall, from which they jumped and were safe and free.

"Now, farewell," said Little John, "I have done you a good turn for an ill." "Not so," answered Robin Hood, "I make you master of my men and me," but Little John would hear nothing of it. "I only wish to be your comrade, and thus it shall be," he replied.

"Little John has beguiled us both," said the King, when he heard of the adventure.

PART XI

HOW THE KING VISITED ROBIN HOOD

Now the King had no mind that Robin Hood should do as he willed, and called his Knights to follow him to Nottingham, where they would lay plans how best to take captive the felon. Here they heard sad tales of Robin's misdoings, and how of the many herds of wild deer that had been wont to roam the forest in some places scarce one remained. This was the work of Robin Hood and his merry men, on whom the King swore vengeance with a great oath.

"I would I had this Robin Hood in my hands," cried he, "and an end should soon be put to his doings." So spake the King; but an old Knight, full of days and wisdom, answered him and warned him that the task of taking Robin Hood would be a sore one, and best let alone.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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